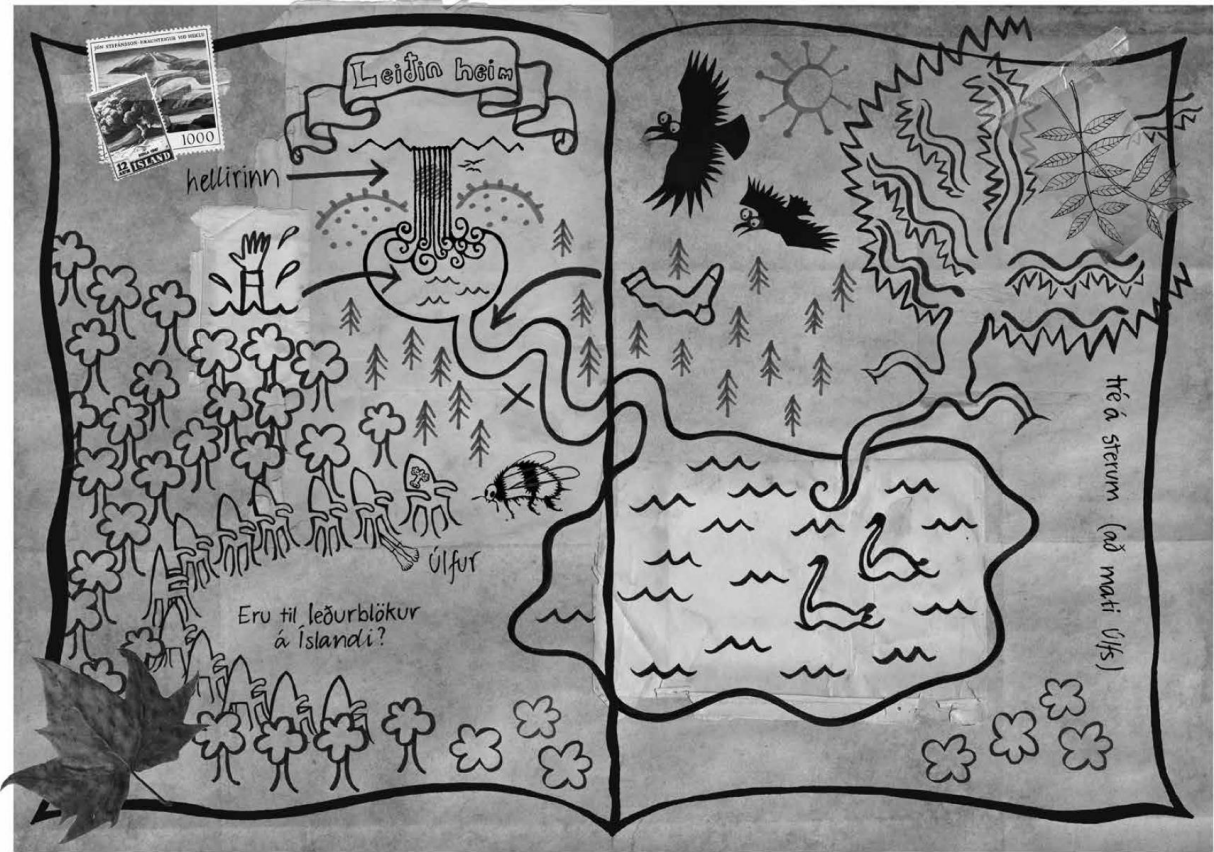


Wolf, Edda and the Stolen Relic

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Prologue

1954

The late summer sun hung high in the sky over Skálholt. Several men were shovelling dirt away from a sarcophagus and people dressed in their Sunday best had gathered around to watch. Four stocky horses were led toward the coffin, pulling a wagon behind them.

Edda climbed on top of a tall mound of dirt. Under no circumstances could she get into the grave next to the mound – she was absolutely sure of that. There could be centuries-old artefacts hiding down there. Archaeologists were excavating the earth with toothbrushes, sieves and spoons. Earlier that summer, they'd found several glass beads and a fragment of a headstone with lettering on it. Then they'd gotten down to this grey-coloured coffin. Edda didn't think it was anything special. She was hunting for glittering treasure.

She didn't seem to be alone in that, though. A young man wearing a hood was skulking around with his head bowed, stopping every now and then to paw through the dirt. Suddenly, a black cloud appeared in the sky, pulling a dark curtain over the sun.

"Go back to the tent, Edda, sweetheart," her pabbi called to her. "It might start raining."

He stuck a long crowbar under the lid of the sarcophagus. At that very moment, lightning flashed, the excavation site was illuminated, and there was a clap thunder. The horses shied and bolted off with the empty wagon.

The boy in the hood looked up. "Curse you, Thunder God," he said, shaking his fist at the sky. The heavy hem of the cloud ripped and it began to rain heavily. Then he was gone, as if the earth had swallowed him whole.

Edda was soaked to the bone and rainwater dripped from her raven-black hair into her eyes. Something glittered in the dirt. What was it? She hesitated, looking around her. People were trying to calm the horses and the smartly dressed crowd was standing in a knot some distance away. Edda jumped into the grave, landing in the middle of a puddle and sending a spray of water

in all directions. The mud puddle tried to suck down her rubber boots. A circular object poked halfway out of the sludge. Edda bent down and pulled it out. It was a golden ring about the size of her palm. She cleaned it off with her sleeve. What could it be? There was a needle sticking out of the circle. It was broken on one end, but on the other was a white stone that shone like the North Star.

All of a sudden, there was a loud cry. Had someone seen her? She stuck the ring in the pocket of her skirt and climbed out of the hole as fast as she could. But no one seemed to be paying any attention to her because the archaeologists had apparently found something, too. Edda strode in their direction and squeezed through the crowd so she could get a better look. Her pabbi stood next to the gaping sarcophagus. The lid was lying to one side and had cracked in two. In the bottom of the coffin, there was a yellowed human skeleton. Mesmerized, Edda stared at the bare skull before she took to her heels, running back to the tent as fast as she could.



Chapter 1

Nearly Fifty Years Later

In the corrugated iron house on Brattagata Street in downtown Reykjavík, everything was in shambles. Cabinets stood open and containers of all shapes and sizes were strewn about the floor. Edda was struggling to drag a heavy cardboard box through the kitchen door. She was wearing ripped jeans, a wool *lopapeysa* sweater that was much too big for her, and a striped, knitted scarf. Her long black hair hung in her eyes.

“Pabbi, why do I have to pack up all my stuff? I thought we were only going to be gone for two months.”

“You’re sure you took those jars of yours out of the window, right?” asked her dad. He arranged cookbooks and spice jars in a box marked *Skálholt Dormitory – Kitchen*. “We don’t want some green thing crawling out of one of them while our guests are here.”

“And what am I supposed to do with them?” Edda stormed into the hallway. “I’ve been collecting these specimens for weeks, examining the leaves on every bush in the yard, digging

through the flowerbeds and turning over rocks on the beach.” She bent down for a pile of books with the titles: *Sharks and Other Species of Fish*, *Poisonous Snakes and Spiders*, and *Volcanoes: Fire-Breathing Mountains*. “Why are we renting our house to foreigners, anyway?”

“Look, cut it out with all the non-stop questions,” said her pabbi, taking off his glasses and cleaning them with his shirt. “This is going to be a real adventure.”

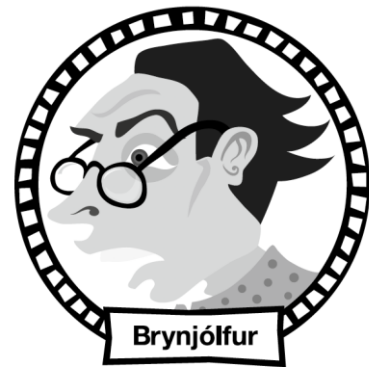
“I’m sure. Is there definitely gonna be Wi-Fi?” Edda dropped her science books in the middle of the kitchen floor with a thunk.

“Brynjólfur, have you or Edda seen my silver compass?” Unnur, Edda’s stepmamma, came in with a knitted cap on her head and her arms full of woollen socks. She glanced around, almost falling over the stack of books. “It was on the kitchen table.”

“No, I don’t think so,” said Edda’s dad from inside the open refrigerator.

“I won’t be able to find my way out of a paper bag without it,” said Unnur.

“Wait a sec,” said Edda. “Aren’t you supposed to be the tour guide?”



“You bet your britches. I’ve been preparing all winter. I’m as ready as I’ll ever be,” said Unnur, stumbling over a skateboard on her way out of the kitchen.

“Gotcha,” said Edda. She sealed the cardboard box with a wide strip of tape and then wrote *Edda’s Research Equipment – Fragile* on it with a red marker.

“You can’t take all that stuff with you,” her pabbi said, stowing pots and pans in a large plastic tub. “That box has to go down to the storage unit. But do remember a hairbrush and take off your mamma’s *lopapeysa*. That sweater’s full of holes.”

“You’re joking, right? Just how am I supposed to conduct my scientific research without a computer, microscope, dissection tools, telescope and a scale?”

"We're going to be in two small bedrooms." Her pabbi stuck his nose into a plastic container filled with some kind of green goo. He made a face, but then put a sticker on it that said *The Foodie Physicist's Secret Weapon*.

"You're not planning to engage in chemical warfare, are you?"

"No, no, no. This blend of mine makes everything taste better. Just a dash in the sauce and...*voila!*" he said, waving his hands like a magician.

Edda sighed. "If you can take your whole laboratory with you, then I should get to have my equipment."

"There's simply no room and anyway, it's some sort of pastoral paradise out there. There'll be plenty of other things for you and Wolf to do."

"Me and Wolf what? I'm not doing anything with Wolf. No way. He's obnoxious and ruins everything."

"What nonsense," said her dad. "Your stepbrother has settled down a lot since he turned seven."



"Settled down? He dropped my magnifying glass from the balcony, sledded down the front steps and wrecked three flower pots, called the radio station telling them he wanted a free pet, and then told people to contact my phone number. Then he squeezed a garden hose through the window of the house next door. And that's just what he did yesterday."

"Yes, yes, but he didn't manage to turn the hose *on*," said Unnur, stumbling in with more empty boxes.

There was a clatter from the stairs next to the kitchen. Wolf appeared in the doorway in a red and blue Spider-Man costume. He had an armful of glass jars, all of which vibrated with life.

"What are you doing with my jars?"

"I'm going to set the wormies and the buggies free," said Wolf.

“Those aren’t worms, they’re larvae, you moron!”

Her father wrinkled his brow. “Don’t talk like that, Edda.”

“Typical! It’s always me who gets scolded,” shouted Edda as Wolf headed determinedly toward the kitchen door with his booty.

“Hey now, hold it right there,” said Edda’s pabbi, looking desperately at Unnur.

“He’s just teasing the both of you,” said Unnur.

Wolf stopped and waggled his eyebrows at Edda. She held her breath, feeling rage swelling in her stomach.

“Will you please do something?” Edda’s pabbi said to Unnur. “This has gone far enough.”

“Wolfie, honey, put Edda’s things down,” she said in a soft voice. “You’re always such a good boy.”

Wolf smiled broadly, his brand-new, oversized, grown-up teeth glinting in the light. Then he let go of the jars and they fell to the floor with a loud crash.

Skálholt Cathedral appeared on a grass-green hilltop. It waved to them with flags fluttering, as if it were receiving the president, but then Edda’s pabbi took a left turn down a bumpy lane filled with potholes. The pots and pans clanged on the roof of the car. Edda sat, half-buried under a sack of vegetables, and daydreamed about becoming a famous scholar like Amma Edda, her grandmother, who she was named after. She had her red journal and a thick encyclopaedia about insects in her lap. Her phone had rung five times since they left Reykjavík, and she’d been offered a free puppy, a toad, guppies and some chickens.

Meanwhile, Wolf was loudly chanting ‘*Krummavísur*’, a thrumming Icelandic folk song about ravens, over and over and shouting “Are we there yet?” in between rounds. He’d done this for over an hour, all the way from Reykjavík. Edda couldn’t understand why her pabbi and Unnur had sold their roomy station wagon last week and bought this lemon instead. The car coughed up every incline and smelled like liverwurst and rotten fish.

Unnur had said goodbye to them with the words: “And if you lose Wolf, look for him in the highest spot you can find.” Then she’d disappeared into a mud-spattered bus full of Gore-Tex-clad tourists with their noses pressed to the windows. Unnur was supposed to lead the tour group up through the central highlands and tell them Icelandic sagas and folk tales about the sweaty outlaws and loathsome ghosts who’d dwelled there at one time or another. But Edda was having a hard time imagining that, since Unnur could get lost in the mall and was a total klutz. Edda couldn’t figure out why she, too, had a tendency to fall on her face at the most inopportune moments. She wasn’t related to Unnur. Edda’s own mamma had died of cancer when she was five years old. Maybe clumsiness was contagious?

“*Jæjá*. Well, now. We finally made it,” announced Edda’s pabbi as they drove into the courtyard in front of a peak-roofed building with a long row of windows.

“This isn’t the place, is it?” asked Edda.

“It certainly is,” said her pabbi. “This is the dormitory where musicians stay during the summer music festival and where we’re going to live, too, for the next few months.”

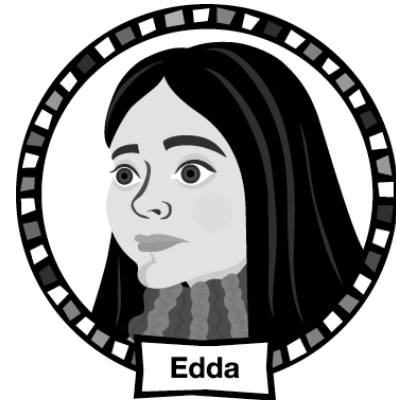
“Whoa, have you guys seen all the trees?” Wolf leapt out of the car and ran across the drive toward a grassy slope.

The rectangular building appeared to be empty. Edda’s pabbi breathed deep in the country air, while she tumbled out of the car with her arms full of vegetables.

“Hold on, now – where’d Wolf get off to?” her pabbi asked.

Edda stood up and pointed to a sign on the front door: IN CASE OF EMERGENCY, DIAL 112. “Is that maybe a bad omen, like Unnur’s always talking about? Like there always are in the sagas.”

“This isn’t a joke. I promised Unnur that I’d keep a close eye on him.” Edda’s pabbi pulled a key out of his pocket and opened the door. *BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP*. “Damn it all to heck! Of course, there’s a security system,” he said, spilling into the entry way toward the little box on the wall, only to then throw his hands up in surrender.



A piercingly loud siren wail broke the peace and quiet of the countryside, and a countless number of sparrows flew out of the trees. Edda’s pabbi pulled out his phone just as a white car came barrelling down the lane. The sedan skidded all the way up to the wall of the building and Edda just managed to avoid a spray of gravel. It said *ÍSLAND* on the license plate – *ICELAND*.

“What’s going on here?” A pair of long legs stretched out of the car, followed by a particularly bulbous belly and a striped tie. The man wore a chequered suit and a pair of dark sunglasses, and had blue-black hair. He was carrying a folder under one arm.

“*Sæll*,” crowed Edda’s pabbi. “Hello, there. Are you the caretaker?”

“Yes and no. Gudbrandur’s the name. And you are?” Gudbrandur spun toward the box and pushed four numbers with a dramatic sweep of the hand.

“Brynjólfur – the new chef,” Edda’s pabbi started to shout, right as the alarm fell silent.

“Why does it say ‘Thorláksbúd’ on your folder there?” asked Edda.

“An inquisitive, impertinent and impudent adolescent – just super,” said Gudbrandur, who strode back out to his car before getting in and rolling down the window. “Good that you’re here, ol’ Whosie Whatsit. I’m holding a very important fundraising meeting here tonight. Have coffee in the pot and some kind of goodie to go with it. I’ve got to sweep these guys off their feet.”

“My name’s Brynjólfur, actually... and I’m only supposed to handle dinner for the musicians staying at the lodge.”

“Yeah, yeah, sure. The reception’ll be in an hour.”

“An hour? But... I’m not ready,” said Edda’s pabbi, all agog.

Edda’s eyes widened, too, as she pointed to the hillside behind the dormitory. There was something red and blue swinging from the very top of a tall spruce tree.

“*Sjáumst*,” called Gudbrandur through his open window, before tearing out of the yard. “See ya.” Gravel rained on father and daughter as the car disappeared in a cloud of dust.

“Did he say an hour?” asked Edda’s pabbi. “Find the container with my secret weapon as quick as you can.” Then he went scuttling up the hill to get Wolf out of the tree.

Edda slouched toward the car and tried to open the dusty trunk. It was stuck tight. Then she saw something pink lying in the dirt. A little sticky note. She picked it up and shook off the dust. There was a long string of numbers on it: 70702121. Strange – she recognized the numbers. 7 July was her birthday: 07/07. And 12 December was Wolf’s birthday: 12/12. Crazy! It was their birthdays, backwards. She turned the note over and saw the number 9 written there.



Chapter 2

The Irritable Oboist

Edda and Wolf dragged their bags into a long hallway filled with bedrooms. Edda's pabbi stopped at a door at very end of the hall.

"Here's where you two are sleeping," he said, opening the door, pleased with himself.

The room was no bigger than a closet. There was just enough space for two beds, the walls were bare, and the little window faced out to the car park.

"Dibs – this is my bed," sang Wolf, jumping straight onto one of the cots and starting to hop.

Edda dropped her suitcase to the floor, took off her *lopapeysa* and went back out to the dining hall. Musicians were coming into the building with their instruments. A lethargic man pulled a cello out of a case that looked like a coffin. A red-headed woman sat down at an old organ and started to play, while a bald man with an oboe sat in a corner by himself and opened a little leather case. His back hunched, he started to whittle a wooden rod with a razor-sharp knife. Edda drew closer, but the oboist slammed the lid shut.



“Don’t be nosy,” he said sharply.

Edda quickly ran into the kitchen. A strange odour hung in the air and her pabbi was almost invisible in all the steam.

“Can I visit Amma after dinner?” she asked.

“Don’t bother me now. This demands my full attention,” said her father, taking off his glasses. “I mustn’t over-boil the vegetables.”

He squinted at his watch. “You’ll see your grandma tomorrow. She had to run into town.”

“What exactly are we having for dinner?”

“Broccoli casserole and veggies *á la* yours truly.”

“What have you got on your head?”

“This is the new chef’s hat that Unnur gave me.”

Strutting out into the dining hall as proud as a barnyard rooster, Brynjólfur announced that dinner was served. The musicians ploughed over to the buffet, but their enthusiasm lost a lot of steam as soon as they saw the spread. A weird-looking green stew sat in a pot in the middle of the table. There was an audible *plop* when the sticky mush was ladled onto their plates and they didn’t fare any better with the sides. The mashed potatoes were clumpy as old oatmeal. Next to them was a bowl of slimy peas.

The chef stood to one side with a concerned look on his face and took off his hat. “It should really look different. Just put some shredded parmesan on top.”

As soon as Edda’s pabbi went back into the kitchen, people started whispering at the far end of the table.

“Cutting corners once again?”

“It’s like swamp mud.”

“Is it some kind of crocodile stew?”

“They say he’s actually a physicist. He’s definitely not a chef, that’s for sure.”

“Maybe he should really poison us instead.”

“This reeks of nepotism.”

“Yeah, his mother works at the school here. She’s an archaeologist.”

Edda felt the caustic gaze of the oboist on her. She looked down and fiddled with the food on her plate to show support for her father. He had so looked forward to making a splash at his summer job. He hunched over cookbooks and practiced making sauces. Maybe his ideas about wholesome food were just a bit out there.

A chubby flautist stared at his plate. “Maybe this is the latest fad diet.”

Wolf put a pea on his spoon and took aim. The pea smacked into the glistening forehead of the oboist, who dropped his fork and scanned the room. Another pea hit him in the ear. When the third pea struck him between the eyes, he leapt to his feet, knocking his chair to the floor.



“What in thearnation is going on? Who hired this halfwit?

It isn’t enough that his food is completely inedible, now his devil’s spawn is taking shots at us. I’ll not endure this. He doesn’t know the first thing about cooking.”

“My pabbi does *too* know how to cook,” said Edda. “He makes the all-time best omelettes in the world. This meal just fell a little short.”

Then silence descended on the dining hall. The oboist kicked away his chair and stalked toward the door, but bumped right into Gudbrandur, who’d showed up still sporting his sunglasses.

“Now, now, slow down, Oddur, old pal. You’re not leaving, are you? I’ve come just to talk with you about an important fundraising matter.” He smiled widely at the silent gathering, ran his fingers through his glistening hair and then gripped the oboist’s shoulders and led him into the hallway.

The musicians seized the opportunity and began to clear the table. Edda shovelled the food off her plate and into the bin.

“What does that guy Gudbrandur do?” she asked the red-headed woman who was waiting to get to the trash, her plate still piled high with food.

“He’s got a finger in every pie around here. It’s like he’s from another world, he does so much.” She scraped her plate off into the bin with a frown on her face. “He’s on all the committees and boards: the Parish council, the Summer Concert Council, the Academic Society, the Ethics Committee, the Environmental Protection Committee, the Tourist Board, the Society of Hog Farmers, the Air Quality Council, the Skálholt Committee, the Archaeological Committee and the Construction Committee.”

“Not the Building Heritage Board,” interjected the cellist. “He just stirs up trouble there.”

“But he’s part of the Cultural Heritage Agency... and the Council of the Church of Iceland,” said the organist. “And then, of course, he’s taken it upon himself to rebuild Thorlákshólmur, the turf roof chapel that’s right next to Skálholt Cathedral.”

“Thorlákshólmur? Do they have food there?” asked Edda, trying to lighten the mood.

The woman turned around and strode away. Edda escaped into the hallway. There was a trail of muddy footsteps on the floor and the smell of spiced cologne hung in the air. Gudbrandur and Oddur were nowhere to be seen. A tall stack of mattresses leaned against the wall. Two familiar feet poked out between two of the mattresses.

“Come on out, Wolf. That could fall over.”

The feet disappeared into the stack.

“I’m not coming to your rescue when you’re pinned down under that heap.”

The stack of mattresses mumbled.

Edda wandered into their bedroom and sat on her bed. By now, a strange family had holed up in their house and there was probably some kid, cut from the same cloth as Wolf, messing with

her research equipment. She unwound the leather band from her red diary, opened her pencil case, chose a pen and started writing.



(The note reads: Dear Mamma, Our first day at Skálholt will probably be our last.)



Chapter 3

Night Owl

The bedroom was narrow and too bright in the sun, which never went down during the summer – not even at night. The curtains were paper-thin, and Edda had outgrown her sleeping bag. She rolled over and tried to get comfortable, but there was a loose bedspring sticking into her back. Wolf was sleeping like a stone after all the country air that day. “He’s at his best when he’s asleep,” Unnur always said with a sigh. But if he was such a good boy, why hadn’t she taken him up to the highlands with her? It was so unfair.

She could hear someone scurrying down the hall and then the front door closing. It was probably a musician, sneaking out for *eina með öllu*, a hot dog with all the toppings, at the nearest gas station. A lot of the musicians had complained that they were starving when they went to bed. Her poor pabbi. More than anything, he was a school physics teacher, but what he really wanted was to make a name for himself as The Foodie Physicist, start a blog and put out a shiny new cookbook every Christmas.

Edda turned onto her side once more. She could hear the crunch of gravel outside – definitely some night owl on the prowl. The footsteps faded in the distance and Edda sailed into dreamland. She was in a dark broccoli forest, where kids were shooting peas with teaspoons and using their dinner plates as shields. A figure hid itself in the shadows and watched. The creature looked like the oboist and crept closer and closer, holding a knife in the air and laughing. But instead of laughter, she heard the croak of a raven.

Edda bolted awake and looked at her phone. It was eight o'clock in the morning. Voices echoed in the hallway and someone mentioned the police. She thought of the sign on the building outside: 112. Was it a bad omen? She jumped up and looked in Wolf's bed. His curly head stirred and her stepbrother muttered something about a bird's nest. Edda slipped her *lopapeysa* over her pyjamas and went out into the hallway. A few musicians were standing tightly together and speaking talking to one another. Red in the face, Edda's pabbi carried a large coffee thermos out of the kitchen and set it on the table.

"What's going on?" she asked.

"Someone broke into your grandma's office in the school. The thief – or thieves – were clearly looking for something, because the whole place has been turned inside out."

"I don't believe it!"

Her pabbi arranged the coffee cups on a tray with shaking hands. "The police are investigating."

"But Amma Edda – where is she?"

"Amma went into town yesterday afternoon to see a doctor and didn't come back until last night. Thank goodness she didn't go to her office then. She may have run into them."

A cup rolled off the tray, crashed onto the floor and burst into pieces.

"Is she okay? Why was she at the doctor?" asked Edda.

"There's nothing to be worried about. She says she's forgetting everything lately."

"Amma, who remembers everything?"

“I’m afraid she won’t want to remember the sight of her office. The lock on the door was forced open and the burglars threw all her books off the shelves and scattered all her notes all over the floor.”

“All her research?” asked Edda, a knot in her stomach. She knew that Amma Edda had spent many years collecting information for a scholarly text she was writing.

“Yes, I’m always telling her that she should get a computer, but she doesn’t listen to me.”

Edda wound her way along the gravel path that ran from the dormitory up to the cathedral. Her long knitted scarf fluttered in the wind. Best to try and make the most of this trip to the countryside. Maybe she could find a new specimen for her collection of Icelandic plants. For example, she still needed cockscomb, northern firmoss and adder’s tongue fern. She had equipment for this first research expedition in her backpack: her journal, a pair of woollen socks, a freshly sharpened pencil and extra pens in her pencil case, her cracked magnifying glass, a package of chocolate raisins, a tape measure, a toothbrush, a bent spoon, a science kit with all sorts of gear and lidded glass jars for specimens.



Her pabbi had packed a lunch for her to take to Amma Edda and said goodbye to her with the words: “Now you’re just like Little Red Riding Hood.” But she wouldn’t let the wolf get the best of her, no siree. No sooner did she have the thought then lo and behold, who should be lying there, totally not hidden in the tall reeds along the path?

Edda pretended that she didn’t see Wolf and strolled up to the footbridge that arched over a burbling brook. She paused. There was something faintly visible in the murky water. She clambered down the grassy riverbank. A ripped piece of paper was stuck to a stone in the brook.

She pulled the paper out of the water and let the water drip off it in the breeze. It looked like a map of the area around Skálholt. Skálholt Cathedral was where it should be, but then there

was other stuff that wasn't there in real life, like roads that ran away from it in all directions, and, instead of the school, a bunch of other buildings nestled on the hill where the school should be.

Wolf came running up in his Spider-Man costume and his trainers that had blinking lights in the soles.

"Whad'ya find?" he asked.

"Leave me alone," said Edda.

"Wow, that map looks just like a spider web." Wolf stuck his hand in his pocket and fished out a silver compass.

"I don't believe it. You've stolen your mamma's compass." Edda carefully placed the paper into her journal, which she then put back into her backpack.

"I didn't steal it. It was on the kitchen table."

"You've sure got some sticky fingers!" said Edda, storming off in the direction of the cathedral.

"Wait up," said Wolf, chasing after her. "We can show Amma Edda the map."

"We won't be showing *my* amma anything. Someone broke into her office and she has more than enough to do right now."

"Whoa! A real break-in!"

Edda ran up the steps of the cathedral, but as she opened the door, Wolf shot in front of her and dove down the steep circular staircase by the entrance. Edda was going to follow him when someone grabbed her backpack.

"You two can't go down there. You have to pay," chirruped a woman in a patchwork dress before throwing Edda out.

Edda rambled idly along the side of the cathedral. Wolf would have to come out sooner or later. Standing right in the shadow of the cathedral was a low-slung house with stone walls and grass on the roof. The turf house looked old, but clearly wasn't, because the grass sod on the roof still hadn't grown together. She grabbed the iron ring on the front door and pulled hard. It was

locked. She could hear footsteps inside. There was another door on the side, but it was also locked tight. High up under the roof beams was a small window. She would have to climb the tall stone wall to look through it, and that wouldn't work. Edda's knees shook just standing on a stool. So she went back over to the cathedral, which seemed to stare at her like a preacher from his pulpit. Suddenly, she saw Wolf's curly head stick up out of the grassy hillside. He came running up to her with an excited look on his face.

"Guess what? There's a tunnel under the cathedral. A secret tunnel, just like on the map. Maybe your amma knows something about it," he said. "She knows everything, right?" Then he raced off again in the direction of the school building.

Edda caught up with him at the glass-enclosed sun room that stuck out from the building and they shoved through the door, both trying to be the first one in. They were met by the scent of toast in the air. The people in the café looked up from their coffee cups indignantly. The flautist, who they'd seen the night before, had a mouth full of food and was trying to hide behind his newspaper. The kids put on their most solemn expressions and walked calmly past the linoleum tables. Then, without warning, Wolf grabbed a few sugar cubes out of a dish and ran as fast as he could into the school. Edda followed him up the stairs and into a long hall of offices. Wolf skidded to a stop in front of an open door and Edda nearly ran into him.

Amma Edda knelt on the floor in the office collecting loose pages. There were books all around her, but all the bookshelves were empty.

"Good morning, my dears." She got up and dusted herself off. "Splendid welcome this is, don't you think?"

Edda kissed her grandma, while Wolf squirmed next to her.

"Edda, show her the map you found in the stream," he said, tugging on her backpack.

She opened her bag, pulled the wet page out of her journal and passed it to her grandma.

“What in the world? This ought to be in my safe,” said Amma Edda, her face turning white.

“Is that your map?” asked Wolf.

“Yes, but it’s been torn in half.”

“Why was it thrown in the river?” asked Edda.

“What we have here is clearly a couple of unscrupulous antiquities thieves on the prowl. They must have realized that this is just a copy of the old map and therefore isn’t worth anything. I drew this picture from the original map, which is kept in a museum. The drawing is supposed to be published in my book.”



“Are there really tunnels, then?” asked Wolf.

“There certainly *were* real tunnels, yes. They ran underneath everything here at Skálholt in the olden days. Skálholt used to be a great manor and the episcopal see, where the bishop lived, and the most prestigious school in the country was here, too. When the weather was bad, people would go between the buildings in underground tunnels. But they were undoubtedly also used to hide people’s movements.”

“Cool,” said Wolf.

Amma Edda put the map on the table and looked in the direction of a painting of a grey, eight-legged horse. “It couldn’t be,” she said, closing the door, walking to the painting and taking it down.

There was a little safe in the wall. Its door was closed.

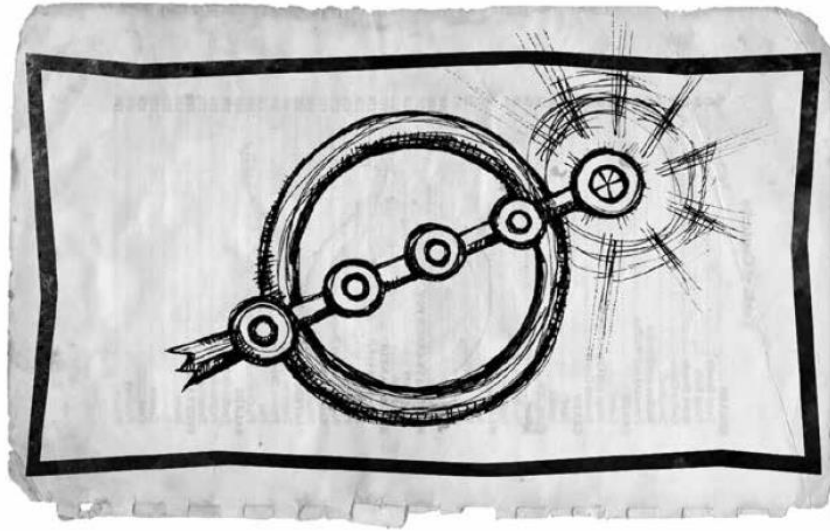
Amma Edda’s shoulders dropped. “That’s a relief. The map ought to be in here. I must have left it on the table, like I did with my phone. I lost it last week. It’s terrible how forgetful I’m getting.”

“Yes, but you remember everything,” said Edda.

“Not any more,” said her grandma, scowling. “Better make sure.” She turned the dial on the safe a few times until they heard a low click.

Amma Edda pulled the door wide open.

The safe was completely empty.



Chapter 4

The Missing Treasure

Amma Edda stared into the empty safe, transfixed. Edda held her breath, while Wolf gaped like a goldfish.

“How did they know about it?” Amma Edda fell back into her desk chair.

“What exactly was in the safe?” asked Wolf.

“A very important artefact,” she said. “What a fool I was. They planned this and stole my phone. And here I thought I’d lost it.”

“Phone thieves – I’ve heard about things like that, yeah,” said Wolf.

“Why your phone?” asked Edda.

“In order to get the secret combination to my safe.”

“Whoa! No way! A break-in, a stolen phone *and* a secret combination number? Country life is so exciting,” said Wolf, talking a mile a minute. “Can I maybe have the map?”

Edda elbowed him, but Amma Edda just nodded and rummaged in her desk drawer until she found a pen and a piece of paper.

“Now what do we have here?” she said, pulling a little leather patch out of the drawer. A peculiar symbol had been carved into the leather. Amma Edda put the scrap on her desk with a thoughtful expression on her face. Then she took up her pen and sketched a circular form on the paper. Her hand skated about. “This is what the thieves were looking for.” She handed the drawing to Edda.

“Shouldn’t you tell the police?” asked Edda.

“No, the police won’t be any help. I have to figure this out on my own, because I have to get the artefact back. No matter what it takes!”

“Is it like, really, really valuable?” asked Wolf.

“Yes, it’s an artefact of incredible importance. It’s the reason I became an archaeologist,” she said. “But ever since I realized that...”

There was a rustle out in the hallway and Amma Edda hastily put the patch of leather into the open desk drawer. The door opened and in walked a policeman with a moustache.

“I’m going to have to ask you a few more questions,” he said awkwardly.

“But Amma, I need to tell you something,” said Edda.

“We’ll talk more later, children. Come and meet me in the café in the sun room at one o’clock. I’ll have waffles with rhubarb and whipped cream for you,” said Amma Edda, closing the door behind them.

The number six hung on the office door. Edda placed the picture of the artefact in her journal, and then remembered the pink slip of paper with the number nine on it. Nine looked exactly like six, just upside down.

“Look – I found this paper in the car park next to the dormitory,” she whispered to Wolf. “Do you think it’s somehow connected to the break-in?”

Wolf didn’t answer, but stared determinedly at the ripped map. “Crazy, man. Maybe it’s an ancient treasure map. Let’s check out the tunnel,” he said and took off out of the school building.

Edda ran after him to the cathedral. The children peeked in before running down the spiral staircase that ended in a crypt. In the middle of the floor stood a giant sarcophagus. Wolf pressed his nose up to the glass partition that surrounded it, but Edda made her way along the walls, on which hung broken and engraved stone tablets.

There was a studded door in one corner, which Wolf began beating with his fists.

“This was open last time,” he said.

Suddenly, the door flew open and an underground tunnel appeared in front of them, its walls made of hewn stone and clods of dirt, just like the turf house’s. Wolf held the map in the air. It showed long and winding passageways running in all directions under the cathedral. But here, there was only a flagstone path leading straight to the outer door. Edda ran her fingers along the rough wall to see if there was a door to a side passage concealed somewhere, but she found nothing to indicate this. She was blinded by the bright sunlight when they got outside. The tunnels on Amma Edda’s map were clearly no longer there.

The kids walked towards the cathedral with their heads bowed. Two blue-black ravens sailed overhead, croaking.

“Aren’t ravens in a church tower a warning or a bad omen or unlucky or something?” asked Wolf. “That’s what Mamma says.”

“No, ravens are just big passerines – the same as starlings or sparrows – but they’re scavengers and can imitate human speech.” All of sudden, she saw Gudbrandur, who disappeared into Thorláksbúd. She broke into a run and Wolf chased after her.

“What are you doing?” he asked when they reached the door of the turf house.

“I have some questions for that Gudbrandur guy. He definitely has something to do with the break-in.” Edda grabbed the ring on the door and pulled hard, but the door was locked.

“How do you know? Do you have some sort of super power or something?”

“The pink slip of paper fell out of Gudbrandur’s folder, which said ‘Thorláksbúd’ on it,” said Edda.

“Eh, that’s nothing. I heard him whispering to the bald guy yesterday,” said Wolf. “When I was hiding in the mattresses and playing Princess and the Pea. Gudbrandur said he’d meet the oboe guy tomorrow night next to the ruins of the old watchtower.”

“Tomorrow night! That’s tonight,” said Edda. “We have to figure out what they’re up to.”

“Surre,” said Wolf. “But where exactly is this watchtower thing?”

“You keep an eye on the turf house and make sure that Gudbrandur doesn’t sneak out and I’ll check a map,” said Edda.

Wolf nodded and stuck a sugar cube in his mouth as Edda raced down the grassy slope toward the gift shop for tourists. She was in such a hurry that her feet got tangled and she very nearly did a belly-flop right next to the building.

Inside, it was swarming with sweater-clad tourists. A strange smell hung in the air. Maybe they were like the sweaty outlaws, the ones Unnur was always telling stories about. Edda held her breath and pushed her way through the crowd. She found a table that had maps in different languages. But none of them were in Icelandic.

There were big placards spanning one wall and Edda wriggled her way up to them, looking for a clue about the watchtower. There were photographs of beautifully inscribed vellum, which was a kind of smooth animal skin that people wrote on like paper in the olden days. Next to the photos was a text that read:

The Codex Regius and the Snorri’s Edda

Nothing about the history of this manuscript is known prior to 1640, when Brynjólfur Sveinsson, the bishop of Skálholt, came into possession of it. A page is missing from the beginning of the book.

This vellum book was written by an unknown scribe in the early 14th century, but Snorri Sturluson is thought to have composed the original work around 1220. Snorri’s Edda, also sometimes known as the Prose Edda, was chiefly an instruction manual for medieval Icelandic

poets, who were known as skálds. It also tells the adventure-filled stories of the Norse gods, such as Ódinn, Frigg, Thór, Sif, Freyja, Heimdallur and Loki the Trickster.

Edda got sucked in reading about this old book. This was as good as the chapter about spiders in her insect encyclopaedia. The next placard was a diagram of Skálholt. Finally! Edda peered at the drawing. High at the top of the image was a little stone wall that said *Skólavarda – The Watchtower* next to it:

This square tower was built out of stone. It's thought that Skólavarda was first built as a watchtower in the 13th or 14th century and later became a meeting place for schoolboys studying at the school at Skálholt. Initiation rites for new students took place here. Today, only the ruins of the original watchtower remain.

This was something for Wolf. He had Harry Potter and Hogwarts on the brain. He'd even run straight into a wall trying to find Platform Nine and Three-Quarters so that he could get to the famous wizarding school.

In the middle of the map, next to the cathedral, there was a drawing of a turf house:

Thorláksbúd was first built in 1530. The turf house has since been reconstructed.

So that was the house that Gudbrandur was having rebuilt.

The new building was constructed on top of graves.

Ew!

Edda turned to face a big black-and-white photograph. It was of the sarcophagus in the basement. The coffin was open, and in it lay an open-mouthed skeleton. Edda was so startled that she took a step backwards and ran into the old church bell. The rust-brown bell fell to the floor and it rang out through the whole shop.

"Oh! *Afsakið!* Sorry! That was an accident, I swear!"

All eyes turned to her. Edda manoeuvred her way towards the door with her head down and then ran back up the hill as fast as her feet would carry her. She had so much to tell Wolf, but he'd disappeared.

Where could he be? The main entrance of Thorláksbúd was still locked up tight. Edda hurried back to the front of the turf house, which is when she saw Spider-Man on the roof. He was hanging over the edge and looking through the little window under the roof beams.



Chapter 5

Waffles with Rhubarb Jam and Whipped Cream

Wolf climbed down from Thorláksbúd, breathing so heavily in his excitement that he could hardly get a word out.

“He was in there. And then he disappeared. I swear!”

“What do you mean, he disappeared?” asked Edda.

“Into the floor.”

“Stop messing around, Wolf. That’s not possible.”

“Yeah-huh. He’s gone. There’s no one in there anymore.”

“Are you sure? You were hanging upside down when you were looking in.”

Wolf hopped from one foot to the other. “Look for yourself, then.”

They went up to the house, pulled on the iron ring and banged on the door, but nothing happened. Obviously, there wasn’t a soul in the house.

“Gudbrandur’s car is over there,” said Edda, pointing to the car park below the cathedral.

“So what exactly’s become of him?”

“I’m hungry,” said Wolf. “Wasn’t your amma going to give us waffles?”

Edda told Wolf about her run-in with the stinky tourists and what she'd found out about the watchtower on their way to the café. The friendly scent of waffles greeted them at the door and Amma Edda was sitting at a table under flowering vines.

"There you two are, my pets," said Amma. "I was starting to think you weren't coming."

A delicious-looking stack of waffles was ready for them, along with whipped cream and rhubarb jam.

"Won't you take off your scarf, Edda, dear? It's so warm and cosy in here."

"She gets cold so easy – she's a real wimp," said Wolf. He plonked three waffles onto his plate. "And a scaredy-cat, and a klutz."

"What nonsense," said Amma Edda, spooning out some cream. "You wanted to tell me something, Edda, dear. Back in my office before."

"Yeah – I heard someone sneaking out of the dormitory on the night you had the break-in."

"Oh, well, mustn't that have been one of the musicians, looking for a breath of fresh air, rather than an antiquities thief?"

"I also found a sticky note with numbers on it, and Wolf heard the bald man talking about the watchtower."

"Wait a minute now, slow down. One thing at a time," said Amma. "Have a bite of your waffle and start over. A sticky note, you say?"

Edda took a huge bite of waffle.

"We know who stole the artefact," said Wolf, spluttering jam and whipped cream all over the table.

Amma laughed so hard she got tears in her eyes, but Edda didn't think it was funny.

"This much I'm sure of," said Amma Edda. "You can solve any problem with waffles and whipped cream."

"I found a sticky note that that man over there... uh, Mister Tubby... lost," said Edda.

“Mister Tubby,” mumbled Wolf. Then he snorted with laughter and whipped cream foam sprayed the tablecloth all over again.

“Wolf, chill out,” said Edda. “This is a real restaurant, not our kitchen at home.”

“Sometimes, it’s absolutely vital to be just a little bit naughty,” said Amma Edda, smiling so wide that the wrinkles danced on her face.

“Mister Tubby, Gudbrandur Chubby,” sang Wolf, twice as loud.

Amma looked at Edda with an incredulous expression on her face. “Gudbrandur? He couldn’t have anything to do with the break-in. Why, he’s got a finger in every pie around here.”

“Yeah, I know,” said Edda. “He arranged for that turf house, Thorláksbúd, to be rebuilt and is on a hundred committees and smells like a cologne bottle. But he...”

“And what’s that about the sticky note?” asked her amma.

Edda pulled out her journal and handed her the pink paper.

“Your office is number six, isn’t it?”

“That’s right,” said Amma Edda, turning the paper over. She gasped. “My secret combination.”



“But that’s my birthday and Wolf’s birthday backwards,” said Edda.

“Exactly,” said Amma.

“But how could Gudbrandur know that?” asked Wolf with wide eyes.

Amma Edda furrowed her brow. "He hung around me all last week. Wanted me to go to some committee meeting. I said I had no desire to waste my valuable time on such nattering. What a fool I was," she said, seeming to shrink in her chair. "This number is the combination to my safe, and it was in my contacts on my phone, under the name Sleipnir."

"Ódinn's eight-legged horse! Like the picture hanging in your office!" said Wolf.

Amma nodded.

"You didn't really think that you could forget our birthdays, did you?" asked Edda.

"Uff, I feel like my memory's drying up. It's fading like old newspaper print. Now, you two: tell me everything that you know."

Edda told her about the night owl leaving the dormitory on the night the burglary was committed, the irritable oboist and what Wolf had heard while he was smushed between the mattresses. She also retold what she'd read about the Skólavarda watchtower and Thorláksbúd in the tourist shop.

"Then there was also a picture of a super pretty handbook for skálds that's called *Snorri's Edda*. It tells all about the ancient Norse gods who live in Ásgard and Loki the Trickster. But did you know that Thorláksbúd was built on top of tons of dead people?"

"Ewww, gross!" yelped Wolf.

Edda poked him and then told them shamefacedly about how she had knocked the old church bell over because of the skeleton in the sarcophagus. Amma smiled.

"I was shocked, too, when I saw that skull staring up at me."

"What?" the kids said in chorus.

"There was a great archaeological dig here at Skálholt in 1954. My pabbi was working on the excavation and I got to watch. The two of us lived in a tent and cooked all our food on a camp stove. Then one sunny day, thunder and lightning just came out of nowhere and it started raining cats and dogs. I was treasure-hunting and got soaking wet. But then I saw something glittering in the sludge. It was the ring that that I drew for you, with a stone on it that sparkled as though it had

magic powers. Or else, it was a treasure the like of which I'd never seen. But then my father opened the sarcophagus with a crowbar and I saw the skeleton. I was gripped by fear and ran as fast as I could back to our tent. So I missed out on seeing the remarkable artefact that they found in the sarcophagus. Resting on the left shoulder of the skeleton was the carved crook of the kind of staff that a bishop carries, called a crozier. It was the subject of so much interest the next day that I completely forgot to tell pabbi what I'd found."

"Wow, so you didn't ever tell your pabbi about the ring?" asked Wolf.

"No," said Amma Edda, sighing. "But the book I'm writing is supposed to divulge the findings of my research on this remarkable artefact. But if I don't get it back, I'll have to forgo publishing the book."

Edda took the drawing out of her journal and studied it closely while Wolf noisily ate the last waffle.

"Then all of my work will have been for nothing. That's why I have to go to the watchtower tonight and get the artefact back. No matter what!"

"Yeah, but won't it be dangerous?" asked Wolf.

"No risk, no reward," said Amma Edda. "No one will believe me if I don't have the ring. In the book, I put forth some new theories. I've based them on my in-depth research. I think the artefact explains the origins of many other artefacts that have been found in Iceland, but have been misdated. Without it, though, people will think I've made everything up. Every man is the architect of his own fortune, as the saying goes."

Edda stared at her grandma with open-mouthed admiration and Wolf started licking his plate.

"How old are you, really?" he asked.

"Wolf!" Edda shouted as Oddur the oboist's head peeked up over his paper at a nearby table.



Chapter 6

A Secret Meeting

The children ran past the cathedral. Oddur hadn't turned up to sample Chef Brynjólfur's vegetarian lasagne, and the musicians quickly made themselves scarce after Edda's father served his slimy dessert. Amma Edda had said that she would take care of recovering the artefact, but Edda intended to help if she could. Two ravens sat on the roof of Thorlákshúsið and croaked in turn. On the hill behind the turf house there was a stone wall. That must be Skólavörðungur, the watchtower, or what was left of it, at least. It was made of large boulders, but it wasn't very tall. The two men, Oddur and Gudbrandur, were there. Edda wasn't entirely sure what she should do. Her grandma hadn't arrived yet. Maybe she wasn't coming after all. She and Wolf snuck up to the stone wall and hid themselves alongside it.

"We already agreed upon your recompense," said Gudbrandur roughly.

"Aye, but the situation is different now. I know that this ring is far more valuable," said Oddur the oboist.

"That has nothing to do with the matter. You're reneging on our agreement."

"I shan't allow myself to be cheated," said Oddur. "You'll pay more, or I'll sell the artefact on the black market myself."

"Breaking an oath is a serious transgression," said Gudbrandur.

"Are you threatening me?"

While they continued fighting, Amma Edda strode combatively up the hillside.

"Gudbrandur, my friend," she said, walking into the enclosure. "Is it you after all? I didn't want to believe it of you."

Edda peeped over the stone wall. Gudbrandur held on to Oddur's shoulder as they tugged back and forth.

"Let me have it," said Gudbrandur, trying to get the artefact out of the oboist's hands.

"Return the ring to me. I swear I won't mix the police up in the matter," said Amma Edda in a gentle voice.

"Be gone with you, you old hag," shouted Oddur.

"I'll pay you for it," she said. "It's far more important to me than money."

"Let me have it," shouted Gudbrandur. "You know not who you provoke, you wretch."

The children snuck along the side of the hill toward the mouth of the watchtower. Gudbrandur was holding Oddur's sweater tight, while the oboist flung out his hand so that the shining artefact sparkled in the air before hitting Amma Edda on the head.

She collapsed to the ground. Edda yelped in fear and Oddur jumped. Gudbrandur pulled the ring out of his hand, pushed Edda abruptly out of the way and ran down the slope. The oboist came to his senses and also took to his heels.

Amma Edda lay on the ground, bleeding from a wound on her forehead. Edda knelt down and held her in her arms.

"People do stupid things when they're angry. But the rin... it's from another worl... You have to find the ri..." she whispered, but her voice trailed off.

“I promise,” said Edda. Then Amma Edda’s head drooped to one side and she lost consciousness.

Wolf sat in the grass next to them and Edda picked up her phone and called 112.

The children sat in the police car with their heads bowed as Edda’s pabbi spoke loudly to Unnur on his phone.

“Yes – she was flown to the hospital in Reykjavík. No, they’re alright. They say it was Oddur. No, he’s an oboist. We’re on the way there now. I just don’t understand it. Edda says that Gudbrandur took the artefact that my mother owned. Gudbrandur – no, he’s got a finger in every pie around here... Yes, they’re hoping she’ll regain consciousness as soon as possible. I’m going directly to the hospital once we’ve spoken to this Oddur. What? I can’t hear you. What did you say? I was watching them... But I can’t... No, you’re on your way here? I can absolutely take care of this myself. Yes, I know... two days.”

Then he ended the call and they hurried down the hill by the dormitory.

But Oddur wasn’t there. And it seemed that no one knew where Gudbrandur could be found, either. The musicians didn’t know where he lived and as it turned out, no one actually knew a single thing about that go-getter. His white car was still sitting in the cathedral car park.

“We’ll try to locate Gudbrandur and the oboist,” said the police officer with the moustache. “Maybe they’re connected to the underworld in some way. Shall I give you a ride to the hospital, Brynjólfur?”

The kids watched as Edda’s father drove away with the policeman, then snuck into Oddur’s bedroom. His oboe and the leather case lay on the bed. Edda opened the case. There turned out to be more than reeds and whittled accessories for his oboe. Instead, in a secret compartment, there were all sorts of pliers and wires. Wolf and Edda looked at one another. Thorláksbúd! They grabbed the leather case and took off running.



Chapter 7

Into the Underworld

The children stood in front of Thorláksbúd. They didn't see anyone around outside and the door to the turf house was locked. Edda opened Oddur's leather case, took out a narrow pair of pliers, stuck it into the lock and turned. But nothing happened. Wolf grabbed a wire, bent it and rattled it in the keyhole. Then he yanked on the wire and they heard a click.

"How'd you learn how to do that?" asked Edda.

"I saw it in a movie," said Wolf, but he seemed to be just as surprised as Edda when the door opened.

The window under the roof beams let a band of light into the house.

"Where did you see Gudbrandur disappear?"

"There," said Wolf, pointing next to a little altar that stood at the end of the room.

The children examined the floorboards next to it. The floor was curiously dirty, considering that the house was new and always locked. Wolf jumped on the boards and Edda examined all the gaps between them.

“Are you sure it was here?”

“Totally sure,” said Wolf. He stuck his head between his feet so he could see upside down. “He just disappeared down into the floor next to this box.”

“It’s an altar,” said Edda. A white cloth lay on top of it and hung down over the sides. She groped along the edge underneath it. It was uneven in one spot. “There’s a gap here,” she said, her heart skipping a beat.

She turned on her phone’s torch and passed it to Wolf. He pointed the beam of light at the hole. At first, it looked like a knot in the wood, but there was a little iron ring concealed in the hole. Edda took some pliers with a hook on one end out of Oddur’s bag and used them to pull on the ring. There was a click and the altar swung to one side. Where it once stood, there was now a square opening down into the floor.

Wolf pointed the light at a wooden ladder going downwards. “Dibs on not going first.”

“You, who’s always got to be in front,” said Edda, staring down into the void. Her knees started shaking and she felt sweat beading on her brow.

“Okay, then.” Wolf handed Edda her phone. “You have to show me the way. I can’t stand the dark,” he said, climbing into the black hole. After a moment, she heard him calling.

Edda put her phone in Oddur’s leather bag, which she tied to one end of her scarf and lowered down to Wolf. When he shone the light on the ladder, Edda began inch over the edge. She felt for the first step, hung on to the ladder for dear life and climbed down carefully. On her way down, she remembered that Thorláksbúd was built on top of old graves. She expected to see bones and teeth protruding from the dirt walls. Maybe they should turn around. Perhaps Gudbrandur hadn’t come this way at all. But then, before she knew it, she’d made it down and her feet sank into mud. *So this is where Gudbrandur’s muddy footsteps came from.*

The moment she dared to take a shallow breath, they heard a heavy bang above. The altar had swung back into place. They were locked in.

“Is this the underworld they were talking about?” asked Wolf.

Edda smelled the spicy scent of cologne mixed with the smell of soil. “Gudbrandur was here,” she said, emptying Oddur’s case into her backpack. Then she took her phone from Wolf. “Come on. Let’s find him.”

This dirt tunnel wasn’t as well-packed as the one under the cathedral and there was no door at the end leading out to the light of day. The underground tunnel stretched past the cone of light and the children walked along in silence. They took one turn after another, but the winding passageway seemed endless.

“This must be the underground tunnel on Amma Edda’s map,” said Wolf. He pulled the paper out of the pocket of his Spider-Man costume, along with the silver compass.

“Yeah, but you don’t know how to use a compass.”

“Yeah-huh. We’re heading due north,” he announced.

“Better than heading south, I guess,” mumbled Edda, grabbing the map from him.

The blinking lights on Wolf’s shoes shone brightly in the darkness. Edda walked behind him and let the light from her phone show them the way. She looked more closely at the map, which looked like a labyrinth. Long and winding passageways ran in all directions. The map was ripped, but it seemed like there were some exit routes out of the tunnels. They should have already come upon one of these, since it wasn’t very far between the buildings on the drawing. Wolf stopped quickly and looked at the compass, dumbfounded. He spun rapidly in a circle.

“We’re totally lost,” said Edda. “I’m going to call for help.” She called her father on her phone, but nothing happened. Then she tried calling 112. “We must be outside of the service area. What do we do now?”

“You always know best,” said Wolf, brusquely handing Edda the compass. “You must be able to answer that.”

But Edda didn’t know what they should do. What would Amma Edda do in this situation? Her amma didn’t give up, that much was certain.

“Let’s keep going. We’re sure to find a way out,” said Edda, trying to sound hopeful, though her voice trembled.

They walked a long way without saying anything. The walls changed colour, going from sandy brown to grey-speckled, and then, gradually, to a flintier grey.

“I hear something,” said Wolf suddenly. Edda strained to hear. The muted gurgle of water seemed to be coming from the tunnel in front of them.

“Thank goodness your phone hasn’t run out of battery,” said Wolf. He’d hardly gotten the words out when the light started blinking.

“I don’t believe this,” said Edda.

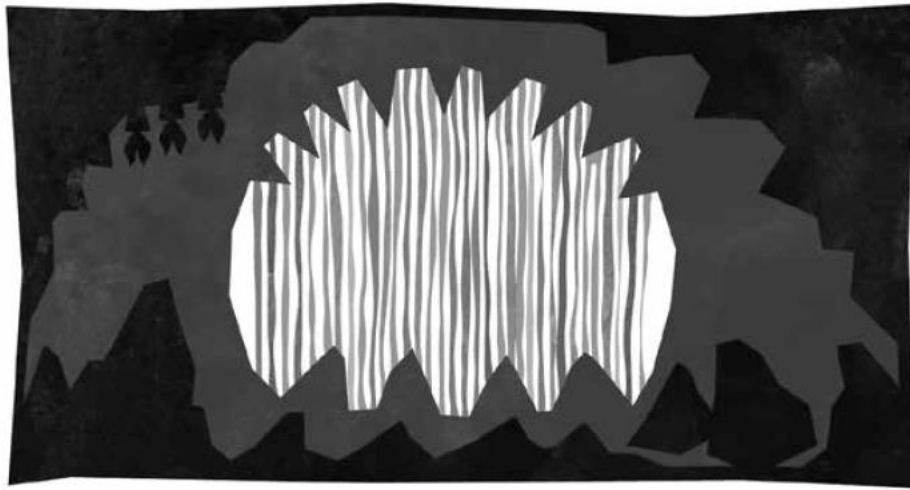
The kids broke into a run, taking one turn after another in the flickering light. The sound of water was getting closer, but then the faint light went out and the darkness swallowed them.

“What do we do now?” Wolf asked in a high-pitched voice.

“We have to get to the water,” said Edda. “If we follow it, we’ll definitely find a way out.”

“Mama’s always saying that all roads lead to Rome,” said Wolf. “Maybe we’ll end up there.”

Wolf and Edda held on to each other and moved forward through the inky tunnel one step at a time. Now it was just the blinking lights on Wolf’s shoes that were illuminating their way. Suddenly, a cone of light appeared, shining in their eyes. They ran as fast as their feet would carry them toward the light, and ended up at the mouth of a stone cave, a thundering waterfall falling in front of it.



Chapter 8

Vampires!

The vaulted ceiling of the cave was pretty high up. Spiky rocks protruded from the cave mouth, like the teeth of a savage beast.

“Maybe this is Sturtshellir,” said Wolf. “That’s a lava cave in West Iceland that was named after Sturtur the fire giant, who set the world on fire with his flaming sword. He’s definitely somehow related to the Balrog in *Lord of the Rings*. That’s the thing that dragged Gandalf into the depths of Moria.” Wolf clambered over loose rocks toward the edge of the cave.

“Don’t go so close,” shouted Edda, trying to grab him.

“I’m not a chicken like you,” said Wolf, settling on top of a large boulder on the ledge. “Whoa, it’s a long way down.” He took a stone and threw it through the spluttering torrent. “Look – there are steps.”

Edda braced herself against the wall of the cave and edged closer to the opening. Spray from the waterfall tickled her cheeks, and there were butterflies in her stomach. Her knees had started to shake. Steep stairs were cut into the black cliff beyond the waterfall. The steps ran all

the way down to a grassy bank, below which there was a large pool. The waterfall crashed down there, creating a bubbling whirlpool in the water.

“Let’s turn around,” said Edda. “Gudbrandur didn’t come this way.” She cocked an eye in the direction of the tunnel, but then noticed a shapeless mass. “What’s that?”

Wolf scrambled over the uneven cave floor and poked at the mass with one of his feet. Nothing happened. Then he rifled through it and stood up quickly.

“Woooooooooooooooooooo.” A white shirt floated through the air like a ghost.

Edda jumped so high she almost fell backwards. Wolf let the shirt fall and tossed a familiar pair of checked trousers into the air. Then he threw himself onto a pillow that was lying among the clothes.

“Gudbrandur *was* here,” said Edda. “That’s his suit.”

“He must have needed to take a nap,” said Wolf. “But where’d he go in just his underpants?”

“It’s not like he turned into a fish or a bird,” said Edda.

“Or bat,” said Wolf. “What was that?”

“What?”

“Don’t you hear that sound?”

“No, I just hear the rush of the waterfall. You’ve started imagining things again.”

“It was flapping wings,” said Wolf. “Haven’t you heard stories about bats? They’re blood-suckers that transform into...”

“You can’t believe everything you hear,” said Edda. “Most kinds of bats just live on insects and anyway, there aren’t any bats in Iceland. Come on, let’s find Gudbrandur before he vanishes into thin air.”

“Chubby Dubby, Mister Tubby,” sang Wolf, putting a shirt that was way too big on over his Spider-Man outfit. Then he fished a striped tie out of the pile of clothes.

“Quit messing around and let’s hurry up,” said Edda, but then her knees went out from under her. The steps were steep and the waterfall thundered below. So she couldn’t look all the way down, could only stare stiffly down at the first step. It was slippery from the spray of the waterfall and she gripped the cliff ledge so that she wouldn’t lose her balance. Amma Edda’s words echoed in her head: “No risk, no reward.” Maybe this was just such a moment.

Suddenly, they heard a whirring noise coming out of the tunnel. Edda looked behind her. Tittering black-brown bats were zooming out of the cave.

Wolf had a petrified look on this face. “Vampires!” he shrieked. He lost his balance and fell backwards, the white shirt puffing out like wings.

One of Edda’s feet slipped off the step, but she grabbed onto a vine and regained her footing. Wolf plummeted through the surface of the pool below. Water gushed in all directions and he vanished in the whirlpool. Edda didn’t hesitate now, rather jumped down the slippery steps as fast as she could and into the grassy hollow, sliding all the way to the edge of the water as if she were on skis.

“Wolf, where are you?” shouted Edda.

The top of Wolf’s head popped out of the water, but then disappeared once again. Edda flung off her backpack, ripped off her scarf and threw one end of it into the churning water. Wolf appeared again, but he’d been pulled closer to the vortex. The whirlpool was sucking him down, until suddenly, Edda felt something on the line. She clutched the scarf, dug in her heels and started dragging Wolf to shore. The scarf stretched tight, but Wolf hung on for dear life.

Finally, Wolf reached dry land. Edda pulled him as far up out of the water as she could and turned him onto his back. He lay there, prostrate on the bank. His eyes were clenched tight and his cheeks were puffed out like a frog’s.

“Wolf, Wolf – wake up. Are you okay?” Edda put her hands together in a cross like she had seen in a first aid book and pressed hard on his chest.

All of a sudden, his eyes opened and he spewed a jet of water right into Edda's face. She threw herself backwards into the grass as Wolf rolled over on the bank, writhing with laughter.

"Wow, was that fun," he said, gasping for breath.

"Are you crazy? You nearly drowned."

"I wasn't drowning. I was just practicing my underwater swimming," said Wolf. He stood up and shook himself off like a dog.

Edda simmered with anger as she pulled away. Next time he could save himself, that was for sure. Wolf took off one of his shoes and poured the water out of it. Then he took off his red sock and slung it over a tree branch.

"What are you doing?"

"Hanging the laundry out to dry. Shouldn't guys do that, too?" Wolf kicked off his other shoe and repeated the move. The wet sock flew all the way up to the top of the spruce tree.

"You're unbelievable," said Edda, scrounging through her backpack. "Here – warm woollen socks so you don't get pneumonia."

"I'm starving," said Wolf.

Edda reached back into her backpack and found the packed lunch she'd forgotten to give Amma Edda yesterday. Or was it today? She tossed a ham and cheese sandwich to Wolf, sighed, and looked back up the cliff. The cave was completely hidden behind the white spray of the waterfall and she couldn't see the steps from where she was sitting. Alongside the cliff grew a tall, serpentine tree, out of which the pool was pouring. She memorized the surroundings because they'd need to find their way back to Skálholt later. But they couldn't go home until she'd found Gudbrandur and got the ring back. She'd managed to come to Wolf's rescue, but now she had to save Amma Edda's life's work. The book clearly meant the world to her amma.

"What's for dessert?" asked Wolf.

Edda threw the plastic package of chocolate raisins to him, swung on her backpack and stood up. Wolf shoved his feet into his wet shoes and thumped off along the river. There was a

squishing sound every time he took a step. He made a game of throwing a chocolate raisin into his mouth and then spitting the raisin back out with great force. He did this again and again with great gusto.

“Stop spitting, Wolf. It’s disgusting.”

“I’m leaving a trail, like Hansel and Gretel. So your pabbi will be able to find us.”

“Don’t you remember what happened to the breadcrumbs in the story?”

Wolf mumbled and kept shooting raisin missiles into the air.

And indeed, his trail was gobbled up, just like in the Grimm’s fairy tale. For two black ravens were hopping after the kids, filling their bellies as they went.