**XIX**

Northwards, the outline of the island was easing into view. The small fleet had to get close enough before the crew might realize the unusual shape of the land mass. Observers from the tiny tugboat only now observed that the western side of the island was walled off by vertical cliffs, a hundred and dozens more meters high. The other end, in contrast, was evenly descending, a broad meadow sloping into a coastal funnel down at the bay. Almost right in the middle stood a red wooden cottage with a grassy roof, surrounded by huge blocks of stone. Through its white windows, the view of the bay and the sea must be really amazing. The fleet landed by the pier sheltered by more chunks of rock, a natural jetty against the icy waves. An elderly woman in strange motley garb was already waiting there.

"Amma Brrrinhilder, Amma Brrrinhilder …!" A guttural, croaking voice escaped Hrafn's throat, as if a big bird's, a crow's or the like. How horrifying it might have sounded had it not belonged to a boy excitedly calling for grandma. As the boats landed he swiftly leaped to the pier, running towards her. Rather than embracing, the boy grabbed the old lady by the hand and dragged her away from the people, to the start of the path leading up to the house. They stood there a while as if talking, huddling heads together before returning to the shore. Hrafn was no more sociable now than during the entire course of the voyage. He untied his fishing boat, moving it by the pier.

"My name is Brinhilder. Hrafn calls me amma[[1]](#footnote-2) Brinhilder since I'm his grandmother. Where on earth have you been?! I was expecting you yesterday!"

Well, at least there wasn't going to be any trouble with the language, grandma Brinhilder spoke English. Rather unwelcoming English at that.

"Oh no, we're late again!" Constantly being late at island landings was starting to gnaw on Meho, honestly. "I'm sorry, but why were you expecting us yesterday?"

"Yesterday was the day you were supposed to bring Hrafn back. Today's the day I'm saying goodbye to him!" By now all the members of the Committee for Lost Opportunities clambered onto the pier. A bit bamboozled, they stared at the combative grandma Brinhilder. Why is she mad about them saving her grandchild? The Zwarteburens were expecting a kind word, an invitation to a warm cup of tea perhaps, and were rather taken aback by the fierce posture of the old islander. Maybe she's just batty ... That might explain the weird welcome.

The age of the uncanny woman was difficult to tell. Her white hair was braided like a young girl's, and her gait was certainly youthful, too. In her dark ancient skirt and colorful vest, slid over grey shirt with red trimmings, she appeared as if taking a break from acting in a noir social drama about early-past-century Icelanders. Most unusual, though, was her face. Countless tattoos in the shape of strange letters disappeared among the wrinkles, streaming across her wide, slightly stumped nose, vanishing somewhere behind deep-set eyes. Amma Brinhilder said nothing more. There was no need, her body language was telling the story. Standing astride, she blocked their way landward, gently swaying her hips as if she was about to draw a Viking sword, chopping off their limbs and finally heads right away. Her hostile, starkly decisive gaze implied what would happen should the crew decide to disembark.

Johann grabbed Jannice under the arm and quietly whispered: "Let's go." The rest were already backpedalling to their ships, abandoning the idea of grappling with the outlandish madam. After all, their goal was to sink Iceland to the sea bottom not conquer some green rock in the ocean. Jannice and Johann were already on the tugboat, the others untying the vessels when Hrafn ran back among them. While amma Brinhilder was chasing the Committee for Lost Opportunities from the island, the boy was far more interested in the lifeboat. Now, he stood before grandma, trying to tell her something by nervously flapping his arms. "Stop," ordered amma Brinhilder. "What's under the canvas on that lifeboat over there!?"

Lormar, Lenart and Meho were still on land. They froze, docile as if commanded by an infernal corporal whose barking left no doubt regarding the order of things on Earth and in Heavens. Demoralized, Lenart climbed onto the lifeboat, unfurling the canvas protecting *Lolita, my best fish ever* from unwanted eyes. "Torpedo! That's a World War Two torpedo."

It is what it is now. Who could have foreseen they'd be butting heads with a sorceress on some random rock sticking from the ocean.

Hrafn wasn't swayed by the uncovered torpedo at all. Excitedly, he kept pointing his finger somewhere underneath the missile, dragging his grandma by the arm. Now, everyone was confused. Even amma Brinhilder shifted her war face into a more exploratory one, looking for the thing her grandson was obsessing about. Hrafn realized nobody understood what he was trying to tell them, promptly scampering onto the lifeboat and crawling under the tarpaulin. He was pulling out a pair of jumping skis. That was it! Those that had been designated as the launch pad for the *Lolita, my best fish ever*, until Meho and Boleslav announced they weren't fit to handle the load. They replaced them with the stiffer race skis, shoving the jumping ones under the torpedo mount.

Lenart, still in the lifeboat, cast questioning glances at Meho and Lormar. They also had no idea why the sudden conundrum over a pair of jumping skis. Not like there was any snow here.

"Come! We're dining together." Grandma Brinhilder patted her grandson's jet-black hair. Without looking back she departed for the house. Hrafn stayed at the pier. The unsociable boy who had never looked anyone in the eye was now clutching at Jannice's hand, his perpetually restless motion turning almost gentle. He helped her off the boat and gestured at the others to follow. "I'm not sure everyone in this family has their marbles together. Apparently, they're not too interested in *Lolita, my best fish ever*. Can someone tell me what's going on?" "I've no idea, Lormar, but for one Hrafn is pretty excited about the skis. Grandma Brinhilder seems like a rather unusual woman, with the painted face and all, she looks kind of scary in fact. As if we stumbled back into a barbaric age. Allow me, Jannice." Johann gallantly offered his hand to Jannice so that no more unpleasant things should happen on the way to the house. "Those letters are runes, Johann, spelling out legends, or powerful spells, or even terrible curses. It was the part of archeology I was most interested in while studying. Alas, the rest was boring and ever so muddy." Jannice invoked experiences during her brief foray into archaeology, which ended in the excavation of a sunken transport boat in a grimy canal near Amsterdam. The ever-so-slightly clumsy, momentarily inattentive student slipped on that dank slope, ending up in a deep sloshing mud pit, with even deeper resentment towards undiscovered antiquities and the blasted archeologists digging those dirty holes.

"A kind of living book, then. If she were more amicable I'd ask her about what's written in there. Well, I guess we're at least slightly welcome on the island now. No harm in stretching our legs." Everyone more or less agreed with Johann. Even Lormar and Lenart couldn't find particular proof they'd be exposing themselves to unacceptable risk.

"I think we can kindly respond to the invitation. After all, there was talk about fish am I right? Fresh fish can't be too much of a problem in these parts, I reckon. Actually, I adore exotic food, North Indian or the spicier Madras. I can say I'm a great lover of Surinamese cuisine, and of course that of the Balkans as well. You know, when a man's culinary horizon is broad enough it becomes entirely irrelevant if the side being served is potatoes, polenta or chapatti. Let me add that fish soup is best made using several types of fresh fish, simmered over gentle fire so that the fragile aromas don't all evaporate ..."

"Quit it Lenart please, we're getting real hungry here, if you keep going on about recipes our stomachs will ..." Jannice paused short of detailing the sounds of sailors' ravenous stomachs.

Invitation to lunch made Lenart's mood rise a little too high. He felt like his friends had forgot to remind him about narrating some or another magnificent fact about his person. He couldn't just leave them stumbling in the dark: "Just a small matter, if you'll allow me dear company, let me mention I am also an expert in local spirits, so to say. Cognac, cointreau, our mild genever, and dearest Mehmed my friend, the slivovitz I also hold close to my heart. All these noble brandies have their place on the shelves of my home bar. And there's more! In fact, one might characterize our visit with madam grandmother here as one of an educational nature." Lormar of course couldn't stand by Lenart's grandstanding on account of liquor, but they made it to their destination before he could present his own counter-hedonist missive of the Zwarteburen aspiration.

The little red house with the white windows and grassy roof seemed friendlier than its owner, despite the skull of a once no doubt very proud ram hung over the doorway; a massive male not too long ago still chasing and inseminating sheep, scaring competitors off with those enormous twin-spiraling prongs, you bet. Grandma Brinhilder sat the Zwarteburens around the table, huddled tightly as there was barely enough room for everyone. She and Hrafn weren't sitting with them, grandma was leaning against the windowpane, grandchild sitting on and off on the bench under the window in rare moments of stillness while constantly fidgeting around the room.

The guests were slowly getting used to grandma Brinhilder's manners. Her mouth ejected brusque, commanding sentences without a hint of social etiquette. It made the crew feel like she'd just leapt off a drakon, heading on foot to raid the south with her clan.

"Where are you tugging that lifeboat with the bomb?"

It struck Meho sensible to be straightforward. No use hiding the truth, it would be difficult to convince grandma Brinhilder they were headed to the Venice Carnival but, alas, missed the right exit. "We are sailing for Iceland. We will fire the torpedo and sink the island. The Icelandic bankers stole our city's money, all of it." They raised their eyebrows in unison, in expectation of grandma's riposte.

"Good. That's very good! I thought it was something like that." Apparently grandma was pleased. "I wouldn't mind sinking that cursed island myself. Along with frænka Ráðhildur, that good-for-nothing hag! Better yet, let her sit on top of the Geysir and fry up her bottom. Birthing parts, entrails and all." She raised her fist, pumping it at Icelanders. Till now they'd lived in the false conviction all they had to worry about was the volcano erupting.

The atmosphere had acquired some common spirit, some battle camaraderie. Grandma set a bottle and glasses on the table, followed by old-fashioned aluminum plates and matching forks. "Hrafn has been with me nearly all his life. Ever since he could walk he's been watching ski jumping on the Norwegian television. That's all he was ever interested in." With her elbow she pointed at the small TV, apparently fed by a satellite dish when the generator could supply the power. "Ever since, he's been dreaming of his own jumping skis." While speaking she was dicing a piece of dried shark meat. "I heard some foreigners don't like hákarl!" She stabbed a small cube with the fork, presenting it to the table so everyone might know what was being discussed, and promptly gobbled it whole. "It's because they haven't washed it down with good brandy. And, because they're asses."

Lenart promptly poured himself a glass. He had already announced his place at the top of the hierarchy, after all, with regard to exotic foods and liquor. "Indeed, dried fish is best enjoyed with a shot of spirits, a digestif if you will. Never do without! Nor would I recommend swapping around the tasting order."

"All his life, Hrafn has been waiting to fly on a pair of skis."

Lenart checked if everyone at the table had their brandy. Despite the fork, he found it apt to just eat with his fingers, reaching for a chunk of the fermented shark, setting it in his mouth and chewing with great jouissance. Had the others not been busy with the same mission, they might have noticed Lenart's eyes widening, his nostrils getting moist. In accordance with recently provided instructions, the poor man was swatting at the brandy glass to purge the abominable aroma of stale-piss ammonium that kept successfully looking for, and finding ways back from his gullet to the palate and nasal cavity.

The Icelanders don't call their brennivín the black death for nothing, though. It goes back to primordial times when Iceland was still as poor as a church mouse. Then, anything one might squeeze alcohol from was put to use. The ancient recipe of fermented potato leftovers, grain and cumin must have began as a punishment for irreverent villagers, fishermen coming back with no catch and soldiers asleep at the post. Binge-drinking brennivín was a way to sacrifice village elders, in lieu of the maidens they were supposed to cast in the volcano. The miserable Lenart realized all this far beyond the boundary supported by his bowels, though no strangers to abuse. On his way to the door he elbowed past Meho, nearly knocking him to the ground. Pardon, but a man in his death throes, realizing that the expulsion of his stomach might be followed by his liver, perhaps even kidneys, truly has no time to spare. The door nearly flew off its hinges as our exotic foods and liquor expert ran outside, vomiting up the contents of his tummy in a majestic arc.

"Ass!" Grandma Brinhilder calmly opined.

Luckily for them, the rest were more careful with their snack. By European regulation standards, it is listed as a hazardous chemical. Jannice, Johann, Lormar and Meho discreetly spat out the half-chewed remnants of their mouthfuls, shoving them under the table. Only Meho dared challenge the brennivín. "Old Meho has seen worse!" He thought back at the moonshine concocted by devious foes, depriving man of his vision and reason, summing up his judgment in the spirit of Lenart's foodie lectures: "Curious aroma, with unmistakable streaks of the local terroir!"

For the second course grandma Brinhilder set on the table an aspic of sorts, covering thin slices of nearly ink-black bread. "You'll be needing hrútspungar where you're headed." The guests were now a lot more careful with their appetites.

Lenart wobbled back in through the door, pale as a ghost, digestive juices sprinkling his sweater. Meho moved aside, letting him sit last on the bench. Just in case his stomach decided to break up with some more exotic food.

"Hrafn was born as a raven. Now he's about to fly, as any young crow must, on its own wings. My grandson, though, was gutted by frænka Ráðhildur. She murdered his parents and took his speech and his hearing. She'd destroy her own blood, but I won't let her! Ha!"

Surely the expedition of the Committee for Lost Opportunities must have sailed into a time portal, emerging in a heroic age where amma Brinhilder, great witch of light, is waging terrible war with some frænka Ráðhildur, sorceress of dread and eternal darkness.

Nobody was eating. It wasn't the unpalatable flavor now, though the sliced aspic, too, offered a rather unusual consistency and pungent aftertaste. They were all engrossed in the old grandmother's story, in her gruff tongue narrating the strange tragic fate of her grandson. "When he was still little, I told Hrafn that people would come, bringing his jumping skis. That's why he hasn't succumbed to the sorrow. Two years ago he was strong enough to start building the flying hill. He'll be soaring from it, shedding his crippled childhood like so many fish scales. Ha! Returning to earth as a young man. For the first time, Hrafn will see life from above. Frænka Ráðhildur will chew on her own ass in anger …, ssssst, as her dirty rotten soul slithers into the slimy sewage!" Grandma Brinhilder demonstrated what would happen as the soul escapes frænka Ráðhildur's obviously over-ballooned bottom.

Lormar fished for confirmation he was correctly interpreting the old lady's wrath, but was scared to ask. "Hmm, I reckon this is some relative the grandma is beefing with" he whispered to a nodding Jannice and Johann. Quietly they replied: "True, sounds like a family feud."

Grandma Brinhilder motioned the guests to follow her in front of the little house. The members of the Committee for Lost Opportunities dutifully obliged, gathering there. Being utterly astonished.

Grandma Brinhilder slowly traced her hand along the magnificent structure sprawled along the entire incline. What she said was all true, only that no one could ever dream of imagining a flying hill of such leviathan proportions. It was simply too big to be even perceived as a separate object as they were sailing around the island, landing, even while walking the grass-covered slope to the little house. The inrun began at least a hundred meters higher, at the very top of the island where the cliffs met the shoreline. That entire steep meadow was actually an enormous ramp, all the way down to the takeoff point about halfway. Beyond was the slope and finally the landing strip somewhere in the bay, out of sight for those standing at the house.

"Incredible!" The expedition members were speechless, staring at the bank. How on earth did the boy manage this architectural marvel? What inner drive, what necessity guided the growing child to create this enormous ski-flying structure? And how deeply he had to believe the impossible would happen! Meho took a couple steps forward, hoping to spot the landing strip. All he could see was that the proportions of the hill were indeed gargantuan. It seemed as if the inrun began up in the clouds. "In my ex country, we had the biggest flying hill in the world! I always thought ski jumpers were awesome. They soar over two hundred meters far, without wings or a parachute! They fly on their skis and nothing else."

"Lormar's peace of mind was disturbed by a pesky detail: "Excuse me, but if I remember correctly you need snow for skiing and the like. Or am I mistaken?"

Grandma Brinhilder was a little annoyed by insinuations around the success of the ski flight: "Snow? Don't be silly. Wet grass works great, or frozen grass even better, goes even faster." These people were obviously clueless: "Naturally, one has to be crazy. But you're crazy, too, or I wouldn't have let you on the island. Alive at least. Or off of it! Let me tell you, when a man's insane they're safe. But if they start coming around, they sometimes need to be gutted."

Simple! People only need proper explanation, a mental map of the issue.

"Madam grandmother, I think we can easily gift your grandchild a pair of jumping skis and matching jumping boots." Everyone nodded, Jannice even clapped. "Oh, how happy I am we can do some good for the promising young ski jumpers along our way. In this part of the Atlantic."

"Good. Eat up, and then it's time to work." The Zwarteburens sat back at the table. Instead of the deadly shark, what was in store was, how to say, fit for human consumption though not particularly enjoyable.

"A strong man's hand and good cooking will solve all your problems." Grandma Brinhilder was pleased. The Zwarteburens nodded out of politeness, though no one was safe from another surprise course, or perhaps a lurking desert. Relieved, they were allowed to stand up. "Good, off you go. The boat needs a new propeller and rudder!"

Before their descent to the pier at the bay, Jannice used the opportunity to find out more about the last dish. Lenart had, after all, established they were practically on a training course. "Madam grandma, pardon my curiosity, what was it that we just ate? A fascinating snack, perhaps a tad too aromatic for my taste. You know, I'm practically vegan though I do keep an open mind with regard to cuisine. I might go for a vegetarian plate. Even fish or seafood."

You're good, then. Hrútspungar are bollocks. His bollocks." She faced the house, poking her chin at the not-quite-polished skull of the old ram, warden of the entrance door. Lenart was close enough to have heard both the question and the answer. His eyes were once again expanding, his nostril sweating. In a whiff he sprinted away from the group, not wishing upon them to witness the second bout of his roaring vomit.

Meho was glad to offer a "strong man's hand", always happily opening the lids of old engines, bringing them back to life. It mattered not if the cogs were part of cars, tractors or simply transferring power between a motor and a propeller. He kindly refused the help the others were threatening, shooing them off the pier. Hrafn, on the other hand, showed himself a handy lad. He guided Meho to the stone slipway, pointing out how to get settled, where to grab the rope and where to tie it. They needed just about ten minutes to move the damaged fishing boat, fasten it with a wire rope and pull its rear out the water. Now, Meho was looking at the boat like it was a patient on his operating table.

In the meanwhile, the rest of the Committee for Lost Opportunities fiddled around, glancing across the small bay, too lazy to climb back up the hill. They got bored of the bay pretty fast, too, sitting around the blocks of rock, wasting time, waiting. Poor Lenart was the busiest, forced to remove the remnants of his stomach's disagreement with the Icelandic culinary specialties and digestifs from all over his clothing.

Only Jannice found time passing too quickly. How else! Tomorrow at this time, they'll probably be close to Iceland already. The journey will end without the northern lights. Her northern lights. How utterly disappointing! A great expectation turning into yet another great disappointment. As if she hadn't had enough of them.

Grandma Brinhilder stood at the top of the slipway, managing her "strong man's hand". "Madam grandma, amma, allow me to seek your precious advice. I know we're a little late for the polar lights. But is there still any chance we might see them this time of the year?"

Jannice's question made amma raise her eyebrows. "Come, woman!" they stepped a few paces away, as if unwanted ears were listening from the rock and concrete. "There's something you need to know. The aurora shows itself every eleven years. It's a time when the sky celebrates the earth. Then, you can see it on any winter night". Hrafn's grandmother spoke in a deep, even voice, swaying gently at the hips, acting almost hypnotically on Jannice. "People, these rotten butts, like celebrating, too, lighting up the sky with their fireworks. Tiny little worms streaming from their grubby holes! What's there for people to celebrate these days? Nothing, no way! Nobody remembers the feats of bravery, nowadays heroes are considered fools! As if we no longer needed them!" Amma was mighty upset at the injustice, unable to grab it and smother it with her veiny hands, nor banish it with ancient curses written in her face. "Once in a blue moon, it'll show up outside its time. But only when it's celebrating something extraordinary. Then, you can hear it, too."

Jannice couldn't decide if she should be thrilled by grandma's answer or give up on the northern lights.

Amma Brinhilder said nothing more, she spun around and bounced back to her overseeing position.

In a pile of washed-up wood, Hrafn found some suitable boards. They had once already been guiding a ship and so shouldn't be too far out of their comfort zone. In the meanwhile Meho straightened out the protective metal rim, placed the axis on top and fastened the steering handles. These will transfer Hrafn's steering wheel commands, guiding his boat. They even found a replacement propeller amid the junk. The broken propulsion element with only two surviving blades was replaced by a fancy new brass one. The stern of Hrafn's fishing boat was again trustworthy enough to sail the open seas.

A solid hour before sunset, the works were drawing to a close. Though the sun was still high in the crystal-clear sky, the temperature dropped unusually fast. Despite the lull, cold was creeping in at the collar, dragging itself under sleeves and pant bottoms, aggravating anyone who was not a seagull and thus averse to having their feet freezing wet. "Ugh, this cold, if the weather sucks we at least could have an extra degree or so. Luckily the boat looks fixed." Meho put away his tools, jumping over to the pier. The rest of the expedition were happy to finally be leaving. They quickly hobbled to the tugboat, except for Jannice who hesitated a little. Oh, how she needed an encouraging word! Sadly though, the veins of amma Brinhilder were populated only by swaying blood cells of frost-hearted Norse sailors with broad, wooly chests and ragged hands. Those fierce men might have known how to sail torrential seas, wage merciless battle with towering waves and handle monstrous deep-sea decapods, sure. But if you were to ask them for motivational words in support of romantic pining for the northern lights, they'd just shrug you off and go drinking.

The expedition departed the pier. Amma honored the crew with her raised fist for a moment, and that was it. As the convoy was floating away, Jannice watched amma climb back to her little house. "Oh, what a woman! No fear, and everything's clear to her." The jaded Jannice stayed on the stern, pensively gazing at the island getting smaller. Suddenly she jumped up as if having just sat on the Geysir in frænka Ráðhildur's stead.

"Where is it? Where's the binoculars? The biggest ones!" Jannice stormed the cabin like a valkyrie running very, very late for her meeting at the Valhalla.

Lenart and Lormar followed with smaller field glasses, only Johann was left with no option but to rely on sharp sight and accurate information. Meho, in the meanwhile, eased the gas pedal so that only the crew's iron resolve and inertia propelled the boat across the surface. Interesting things were there to see. He finally shut off the motor so he, too, could watch the small dot on the island making its way up the slope: "Hrafn is ascending the flying hill, carrying the skis on his shoulder!" The admiral's binoculars turned out too heavy for Jannice, who passed them on to Johann. He had to reorient himself first, searching for the boy who had already made it to the summit of the island-ramp. "A-ha, I can see him now, I think he's just fastened his skis!" Silence followed, tensions growing. Meho joined the others on the aft deck. Now they remembered they can share the binoculars, too. "No! Don't tell me the kid is serious about it! He's getting killed on that slope!" Lormar said out loud what everyone was terrified of. "He is! He's serious about it, he's going down the inrun as we speak. Oh my, how horrible! I can't watch." Jannice pulled her eyes away from the oculars, letting Meho see. Even if she wanted to witness the young raven's first flight, and especially his first fateful landing, it was no longer possible. The takeoff cliff, landing slope and outrun were all concealed by the massive rock slab protecting the island port. It was all over, as far as the crew were concerned, but they stood there a while on the deck, silently staring at the island.

"Hello, can you hear me dear Marike? Oh, how happy I am to be talking to you, though I must be brief. Yes, we've just been to some small island, we're likely reaching Iceland tomorrow morning. You can't imagine the adventures we've had! I'll tell you all about it when I get back. Sure, I'll call you as soon as I see land. Where? I don't know the island's name, only that there's a grandma there living with her grandson. The kid built a giant ski-jumping hill. A ski-jumping hill, yes! We left him those skis donated by Patrick Brock, if you remember. Enough about me, how about you?!" Jannice was still a little apprehensive of the satellite phone though it didn't look much different than those old bricks making mobile telephony possible in the nineties.

In the evening, it kept getting colder. The party retreated into the cabin, made warm but also quite noisy by the engine. Nobody was talking about the recent events, the crew was simply too tired. Meho was the last man standing, half-asleep he held course for as long as he could. Then, no other choice but to power off the engine and jump outside for just long enough to drop the floating anchor. Rolling into his sleeping bag he was looking forward to an hour or two of sleep. After all, it was indecent to be sinking an island the size of Iceland wearing raccoon eyes while constantly yawning. It was also the case that Iceland wasn't really going anywhere, say into hiding between Canada and Greenland.

"Mehmed, Mehmed!" Meho was awakened from the oblivion of exhausted sleep by a whispering Johann gently shaking his shoulders. "Come, come see this!" Jannice was already on the deck. After Meho and Johann, Lenart and Lormar joined in as well. Johann walked over to Jannice, grabbing her hand. She wordlessly glanced at him, and then they were all staring into the gorgeous green, blue and purple colorful waves cascading across the sky. The motor of the tugboat was still asleep, the deaf silence of night disturbed only by the gently sloshing waves.

"The sky is celebrating the earth. It's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen."

Lormar flinched: "Can you hear that sound? Quiet one, like a metallic ringing?"

"Can't say, really, my hearing isn't the best. What is it, Lormar?"

"It's singing, Lenart! The sound is coming from above." Indeed, millions of metallic plates were chiming, jingling from the sky. The sound swayed then subsided, as if there was a colossal stratospheric xylophone suspended over those green, blue and pink sky curtains, right at the edge of Earth's orbit. Now there was no doubt of what Lormar was saying. Jannice, standing as still as a statue, immersed herself in the marvelous canvas. "The aurora is singing, the sky is celebrating the earth below! The aurora almost never shows up at this time. And it sings even less often, grandma Brinhilder said the aurora appears in full force only when something truly extraordinary has happened."

Everyone was gazing at the stellar play of the universe, the skyline arcade in its most glorious colors. Despite the cold, the air was unusually serene and pleasant.

"The little raven has flown." Meho whispered into the raised collar of his windbreaker, draped over a thick sweater. "Hrafn is flying, that's why the aurora is singing! Ha, that's it!" The sudden realization overjoyed the crew. Jannice was melting with enthusiasm. "How nice, how beautiful! I never would have dreamed witnessing such a magnificent moment in the fate of some youth. He took off as a boy, and landed as a young man." Lenart, too, was euphoric: "I also believe that we are seeing the northern lights because of that boy's heroic feat! Maybe now, he can even hear and speak again. It will be just as grandma Brinhilder foretold. Surreal!"

"Incredible! He jumped from that terrifying flying hill and managed to land alive. Imagine the work it took that kid to fashion the immense structure. And on the other hand, let's not forget how the grandmother allowed a minor to play at highly hazardous sports. Certainly irresponsible!" There was little support for Lormar's chastising of grandma Brinhilder. "Fortunately, everything has ended well."

"I think it's just wonderful." Johann paid no mind to Lormar's nebulous droning. "*Aurora borealis* for the heroism of little Hrafn. You think a tiny bit of the celebration might be for us, too, Jannice?" Jannice said nothing, tightly squeezing his hand.

Who could have doubted it? The celebration in the sky was meant for the Committee for Lost Opportunities, too. Why else would they be granted a honorary spot on the tribune?

1. Icelandic for grandmother. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)