

"HEROES OF THE VALLEY" BY JONATHAN STROUD  
CHAPTER 12: THE ASSASSINATION OF OLAF HAKONSSON

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CUT TO

**INT. HALL OF HAKON -- NIGHT**

Halli walks slowly across the large hall, trailing a long black shadow. It slips over the fiery reflections on the floor. Phantom-like.

The knife glints in his hand.

Up the staircase, slowly, steadily. Not hurried nor dawdling.

His feet make no sound. Eyes fixed on the balcony above.

Hunting.

Halli reaches the balcony, crosses to the door. He hesitates and listens.

Nothing stirs in House Hakon.

With murder in his heart, Halli unlatches the door, steps inside, and closes it behind him.

CUT TO BLACK

CUT TO

**INT. OLAF'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS**

Halli stands in darkness.

Ahead of him a single light burns brightly. A candle.

Halli closes his eyes, takes a breath. Attempts to adjust to the light. He wrinkles his nose at the damp air of sickness.

He opens his eyes, looking to the candle once more. It is bright at the middle, fading to a halo.

The light is catching on an object, illuminating it.

A face, disembodied in the dark.

Olaf Hakonsson.

Halli flinches at the creepy sight.

Olaf's eyes are closed. Mouth slightly agape. His thin nose juts at the ceiling. His translucent skin stretches over his features, a skeleton just contained. His beard is sparse on his chin.

Halli is nervous, his resolve shaken. He is less angry and more nauseous at this climactic moment.

He steps forward, hesitant, heavy motions like a sleepwalker.

The light reflects off the knife, down at his side. Not ready for action.

He passes the fireplace, other contents of a royal's room.

Olaf's slender body lays beneath a half-discarded fur quilt. His palms face up. His pulse is barely detectable.

Halli's mind is stuck. This man does not seem a threat.

He squeezes his eyes shut, maybe a tear surfacing. Trying to muster the anger he needs for this revenge.

His hand grips around the knife, slightly shaking. This is the moment of decision.

He shifts the knife, so the point faces down. Grasps it in both hands. Steps close. Lifts the knife, high over the naked throat.

He takes a deep breath, pauses.

Shakes.

He can't.

Tears well up and blind him. Halli stumbles back a pace, covering a snuffle. The knife drops to his side, the other hand wiping his face.

A beat passes, Halli collects himself. He looks up.

Olaf Hakonsson's eyes are open, watching him.

OLAF  
(hoarse, barest whisper)  
Couldn't do it, eh?

Halli is frozen. He cannot answer. This is terror.

OLAF  
Why not?

Halli shakes his head.

OLAF  
What? Speak up.

A moment to build up the will to reply.

HALLI  
I don't know. It isn't a lack of hatred.

Faint hissing of open lips. A laugh, as much as a sick man could muster.

OLAF  
I'm sure! I'm sure! Your presence makes  
*that* clear enough.

The sick man closes his eyes, settling.

OLAF  
Tell me, are the House gates locked, the  
doors to the hall barred?

HALLI  
Yes.

OLAF  
And the men of Hakon's House gathered in  
their rooms below?

HALLI  
Yes.

OLAF  
Does my brother sleep beyond this very  
wall?

HALLI

I imagine he does.

Olaf's eyes remain closed. His tone is contemplative.  
Almost respectful.

OLAF

Yet, despite all these obstacles you have  
reached me- like a diminutive, dark-eyed  
ghost risen from it's cairn. I'm  
impressed. You're a brave and resourceful  
youth.

Beat.

I only have one question.

HALLI

Which is?

OLAF

Who the devil are you?

Halli steps back in shock.

HALLI

*What?* You don't recognize me?

They focus on each other. Studying.

OLAF

Should I?

HALLI

Of course!

OLAF

Sorry.

HALLI

But- but you *must!*

A considered pause.

OLAF

No.

Halli steps close.

HALLI

Just a few short weeks ago you killed my uncle before my eyes and you don't know who I am! I don't believe this.

OLAF

Say no more - I have it.

HALLI

Good.

OLAF

You're the nephew of that cheating farmer we hung out on Far Shingle. You share his physique. Shortest gallows I ever built.

Halli sputters, disbelief. This is not how it should be going.

HALLI

No. No- you're wrong.

OLAF

He was a cheat, giving no tithe to Hakon House. You're not even his son; you have no purpose in honoring a dead man.

Halli steps forward with his knife more clearly in hand.

HALLI

Enough! I am not one of your shameful tenants, but a man of noble blood!

Olaf's voice is quiet but mocking. A hiss.

OLAF

Close. In fact you are but a child who attacks an invalid in his sleep. It isn't quite the same thing.

HALLI

Well- I didn't *know* you were ill when...

He sighs. Collects himself. Reclaims the energy that has been fueling him through his quest.

Halli pulls the knife up to point close to Olaf's throat.

(CONT.)

Clearly the fever has destroyed your memory. Let me make things plain for you.

I am Halli Sveinsson, son of Arnkel, nephew of brave Brodir, whom you murdered not four weeks past. I watched you kill him like an animal to the block, when he had only spoken out against your arrogance.

He presses the point into yellow skin.

You are the worst of murderers, to slay a man for a few drunken words. I suggest you do not dare speak to me again of nobility, since it is a subject you know nothing of.

Olaf settles back. His eyes closed, lets out a breath.

OLAF

Ah.

HALLI

You recognize me now?

OLAF

I do. You have traveled a long way to fail at the last, Halli Sveinsson.

#### CHARACTERS:

HALLI SVEINSSON - youngest child of the small but strong Svein House. Short and stocky, he's been looked down on as the black sheep of the family. He has the spirit of adventure with a side of snark.

OLAF HAKONSSON - the royal brother of the lord of Hakon House, Hord Hakonsson. Their province is far richer than the rest, and desire power over the other houses. Olaf is more reserved than his brother, but killed Brodir Sveinsson during a drunken, grudge-driven conflict.

#### PLOT:

After days of travelling cross country by foot, Halli Sveinsson has snuck into his destination, the House of Hakon. He steels himself to take the life of Olaf Hakonsson, the man who killed his uncle Brodir in cold blood. In a world where weaponry has been outlawed, Halli wields only a small knife handed down from his ancestors.

Olaf has been stricken with illness, and rests in his room, in bad shape. Can Halli muster the will to avenge his uncle, even with his target dying in bed?