

BEADOHILDE THE BOLD IN POETRY AND PROSE:

A SECOND LOOK AT *WULF AND EADWACER*

By

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to add to the conversation surrounding the Anglo-Saxon poem “Wulf and Eadwacer”, written circa 960 A.D. It is divided into two distinct parts. The first of these is a critical essay, which begins by examining the ambiguities of language and rigidities of structure that make “Wulf and Eadwacer” so difficult to translate. Following this initial literal translation, I have provided evidence suggesting that a narrative context for the poem can be found in the Scandinavian myth of Weland the smith and his lover Beadohilde. This interpretation is based on a reading of the poem as an example of Anglo-Saxon *frauenlied*, or “woman’s song”. The result of this reading is a new lyrical edition of the poem in modern English. The second part of the thesis contains excerpts from a prose re-imagining of the poem which focuses on the life of Beadohilde. The novella, tentatively titled Thorndale, is too long to be included in its totality, but each excerpt is prefaced with enough information to contribute to an understanding of the general narrative arc. In structuring this thesis as I have, I hope to make “Wulf and Eadwacer” accessible to an audience of students and scholars alike.

Statement of Purpose

I was first introduced to *Wulf and Eadwacer* in Professor Carl Berkhout's Introduction to Old English Language and Literature class, which I took in the fall of 2009. As I turned in my first shaky translation of the poem (given as a pop quiz), I confessed to Professor Berkhout that I wasn't entirely sure what the poem was about. He nodded sympathetically and told me that no one was. In the nearly one thousand years since *Wulf and Eadwacer* was written, he said, no scholar had yet produced a universally satisfying interpretation, because no one seemed to be able to provide a context for the poem. He pointed me in the direction of a few helpful essays, and as soon as I started reading, I knew I'd found my Honors Thesis topic.

I've spent the past two semesters researching *Wulf and Eadwacer*, and struggling to find a narrative context that would allow me to produce a reasonable interpretation. The first part of my thesis, a critical essay entitled "Beyond *Wulf and Eadwacer*", is the product of that struggle. The essay seeks primarily to translate and interpret the poem within the context of the Scandinavian legend of Weland the smith and his wounded lover, Beadohilde. As a result of this interpretation, two new translations of *Wulf and Eadwacer* are introduced. This section should be read first.

Despite all the hard work I'd poured into the critical essay, I felt largely unsatisfied as I finished research. I found myself asking unanswerable questions about the poem's young female narrator, and the various men in her life. I'd become obsessed with *Wulf and Eadwacer*, and felt compelled to continue to tell Beadohilde's story in a modern prose interpretation. I found support for my project in the annals of English history. Some of the greatest writers of the Medieval and Early Modern eras were, for the most part, unabashed plagiarists. The Early Modern desire to create a uniquely English canon led, in many cases, to the appropriation and manipulation of foreign or existing texts: Chaucer and Shakespeare stole from Boccaccio; Sidney hijacked the

Petrarchan sonnet form; and perhaps most dramatically, Milton rewrote the Book of Genesis. I do not seek, as Milton did, “to justify the ways of God to men,” but I certainly appreciated his example. My prose interpretation, inspired in part by Milton’s work on *Paradise Lost*, drawn directly from the texts and my research. I allowed myself a certain degree of creative license, but I did not add details not found in the original texts.

The resulting prose piece is over 100 pages long, and probably more detailed than is absolutely necessary. I’m incredibly enthusiastic about the finished project, but I am sensitive to the fact that my passion is not universal. The second half of my thesis, then, is a series of excerpts from the prose piece I’ve tentatively titled Thorndale. Each of these excerpts has been selected for its importance to the narrative as a whole, and to the development of the character of Beadohilde. Brief synopses and relevant information are found at the beginning of each excerpt.

My primary goal in structuring my thesis as I have is to demonstrate the wide variety of skills I’ve acquired in my three years at the University of Arizona. As an English major, I’ve learned how to read Old English poetry, interpret a cryptic poem, and conduct textual research. As a Creative Writing major, I’ve learned how to bring characters and settings to life, and how to construct a compelling narrative arc. Even my Spanish minor helped – translating poetry is difficult in any language, and my work translating poems in my Spanish classes was good practice for the work required to finish my critical essay. This thesis is the longest, most complex piece of scholarship I’ve ever completed, and I’m quite proud of it. I hope you enjoy the finished product as much as I enjoyed the process.

Beyond *Wulf and Eadwacer*

Leodum is minum swylce him mon lāc gife;
willað hy hine āþecgan gif he on þrēat cymeð.
Ungelic is us.

5 Wulf is on iege, ic on oþerre.
Fæst is þæt eglond, fenne biworpen.
Sindon wælreowe weras þær on igē;
willað hy hine āþecgan gif he on þreat cymeð.
Ungelice is us.

10 Wulfes ic mines widlastum wenum dogode,
þonne hit wæs renig weder ond ic reotugu sæt,
þonne mec se beaducafa bogum bilegde,
wæs me wyn to þon, wæs me hwæpre eac lað.

15 Wulf, min Wulf! wena me þine
seoce gedydon, þine seldcymas,
murnende mod, nales meteliste.

Gehyrest þu, Eadwacer? Uncerne earne hwelp
bireð wulf to wuda.
þæt mon eaþe tosliteð þætte næfre gesomnad wæs,
uncer giedd geador.

Of all the texts in the Old English corpus, perhaps none is as infamously difficult to interpret as the 19-line poem now known popularly as *Wulf and Eadwacer*. In his seminal 1842 edition of the Exeter Book, Anglo-Saxon scholar Benjamin Thorpe flat-out refused to translate the poem, saying simply: “Of this I can make no sense, nor am I able to arrange the verses.”¹ His confusion is understandable. The poem uses a largely ambiguous vocabulary and boasts several difficult syntactical constructions, which make for a complicated translation. And even if the poem were to be easily translated, there is no guarantee that that translation would make sense, for *Wulf* is presented largely without context. The vast majority of Early Medieval poetry comes

¹ Thorpe, Benjamin. *Codex Exoniensis: A Collection of Anglo Saxon Poetry, from a Manuscript in the Library of the Dean and Chapter of Exeter*. London: The Society of Antiquaries of London, 1842. Print.

out of the English oral tradition, and there is no reason to suspect that the same is not true of *Wulf*; the problem, of course, is that no one is quite sure which legend the poem recalls.

Despite the confusion surrounding in the poem, since Thorpe's timid beginnings there have been a number of scholarly attempts at interpretation. In the past few decades alone, *Wulf and Eadwacer* has been read as the first of the Exeter riddles, as a lyrical monologue of a woman torn between two lovers, as a mother's lament for her dying son, as a charm against warts, and as the anthropomorphic musings of a love-struck canine².

The truth is that we will most likely never be able to say with certainty what the poet who composed *Wulf and Eadwacer* intended. However, there are a number of clues hidden in the structure and language of the poem that lead to a new and radically different reading. I believe that *Wulf and Eadwacer* is a lyrical retelling of the legend of the Norse hero Weland through the eyes of his betrayed lover, Beadohilde. This interpretation, like most, is based largely on conjecture; nevertheless, I believe that this reading is both accurate and satisfying, for it gives voice to a new heroine in the Medieval world of men. In order to fully explain this new reading, I will first provide a literal translation of *Wulf*, and then use the story of Beadohilde as a lens through which to interpret the poem and produce a new, modern translation.

The complexity of diction found in this poem is almost instantly apparent; the word *āþecgan* in line 2a³ means either "to devour" or "to feed". In the next half-line, *on þreat* can be glossed as "upon a group of men", "in a group of men," or "in violence". The ambiguity of the language forces us to choose between two very different translations for line 2. If we add a question mark to the first line (which we can do, since Old English manuscripts did not include

² These are the five most commonly cited interpretations. For concise summaries of these readings, see Krapp, Malone, Tasioulas, Damico, and Baker, respectively.

³ All line numbers and text citations are taken from Krapp, George P., and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie. *The Exeter Book*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1936.

punctuation), it could read “Will they feed him if he comes upon/in a group of men?” The second possible translation, without added punctuation, is decidedly darker: “They intend to kill him if he comes in violence”. The two translations are equally likely, and since the phrase is used twice (in line 2 and again in line 7), we don’t actually have to choose between them. Both can be used.

The refrain *ungelic is us* in line 3, repeated as *ungelice is us* in line 8, is similarly confusing, at least at first. *Ungelic* is a strong singular neuter adjective; *ungelice*, on the other hand, is a strong plural masculine adverb. The former can be glossed as “different”, and the latter as “differently”. For the purposes of my interpretation, this distinction is insignificant. The basic meaning of *ungelic[e] is us* is the same in both lines: “It is different with us”. Lines 4 through 7 use relatively straightforward vocabulary, and do not require glossing. Working with these initial translations of the most ambiguous words, the first eight lines of the poem read:

It is to my people as if someone gave them a gift:
 Will they feed him if he comes upon a group of men?
 It is different with us.
 Wulf is on one island; I on another.
 Fast is that island, surrounded by fens.
 Bloodthirsty men are there on that island -
 They intend to kill him if he comes in violence.
 It is different with us.

After line 8, the vocabulary becomes slightly simpler. *Dogode* (line 9) is unattested, but is most likely a clerical misspelling of *hogode* (“to think”). Significantly, line 10 informs the reader that the speaker is a woman; *reotugu* is the feminine singular nominative inflectional form of the adjective *reotig* (“wailing”). The narrator then goes on to describe her treatment at the hands of the *beaducafa* – the “battle-strong” – and the effects of her worrying over Wulf, whoever he may be. The use of the word *seldcymas* – “seldom comings” – is an excellent example of the litotes frequently found in Old English poetry. The phrase isn’t a criticism of the

relative infrequency of Wulf's visits; rather, it is an intimation to the reader that Wulf isn't visiting at all, an important clue in interpreting the poem's true meaning.

Lines 16 through 19 are spoken directly to the *beaducafa*, who we learn is named Eadwacer. These lines add a dramatic twist to the narrative when the speaker refers to *uncerne earne hwelp*. The possessive adjective *uncerne* (our, meaning born to the speaker and Eadwacer) modifies *hwelp* (cub), as does *earne*, unattested, but most likely an error for *eargne* (wretched).

The last eleven lines of the poem can therefore be translated as follows:

I thought of my Wulf with long-journeying hope.
When it was rainy weather and I weeping sat,
When the battle-strong in his arms afflicted me,
There was joy to me then; there was pain then too.

Wulf, my Wulf! My hopes of you
Sickness caused, your seldom-coming,
My anxious spirit, a complete lack of food.

Do you hear, Eadwacer? Our wretched child
A beast drags to the forest.
That one easily tears apart what never was united –
Our song together.

Significantly, these last two lines echo the marital blessing found in Matthew 19:6: "Therefore what God has joined together let no man tear asunder". This suggests that the speaker and Eadwacer were joined in a union of some kind, although it appears to have not ended well.

Having thus translated the poem (a full literal translation is found on page 11), we are left with several questions. The speaker, a woman, is obviously in mourning for a man named Wulf. But who exactly is the speaker, and what is her relationship to Wulf? Why was she separated from him? Who is Eadwacer? What is his relationship to the speaker? What circumstances surrounded the conception of the "wretched cub" and why is that cub now being taken away? These questions cannot be answered without putting the poem in its proper context; that is,

without identifying the legend to which this poem refers. In order to do so, we must continue to search *Wulf* for clues. The next significant set of clues lie in the structure of the poem.

It is important to note that *Wulf and Eadwacer* is one of only two poems in the entirety of the Exeter Book with both a stanzaic structure and a refrain. Such rigid structures are not conventional to Old English poetry, and this uniqueness of form is significant for two reasons. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, the use of stanzas and refrains suggests that *Wulf* might be a translation or adaptation of an existing foreign work, which allows us to place the origins of the poem outside of the Anglo-Saxon oral tradition. Secondly, the formulaic composition allows us to tie *Wulf* to the only other poem in the Exeter Book which also utilizes stanzas and refrains: *Deor*, the poem which, somewhat conveniently, precedes *Wulf* in the manuscript.

First, a word on *Deor*. The poem is, at its core, a meditation on the transience of human agony. Each of the poem's six stanzas deals with a separate story of loss, with the final stanza delving into the poet's own suffering. The poem's refrain - *þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg!* – is translated as “That passed over, this too may pass”. For our purposes, the most significant stanzas are the first two, which, when translated, read:

Weland knew suffering among arrows.
 The stout-hearted hero endured troubles,
 Had sorrow and longing as his companions,
 And cruelty cold as winter. He often found woe
 Once Niðhad laid restraints on him,
 Supple sinew-bonds on the better man.
 That passed over; this too may pass.

For Beadohilde, her brother's death was not so grievous
 In her mind as her own condition;
 For she had clearly seen
 That she was filled with a child
 Her bold mind fled; she saw the future with fear.
 That passed over; this too may pass⁴.

⁴ Krapp, George P., and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie. *The Exeter Book*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1936.

The legend to which these stanzas refer is familiar to modern scholars, and was certainly well known the time of *Wulf*'s composition. Weland, known as Volundr in Old Norse, is a primarily Scandinavian hero. He worked as a blacksmith, and in Old English references, is most famous for his skills in crafting weaponry – Beowulf's chain mail, for example, and the eponymous hero's sword in *Waldere*. Weland appears in several Old Norse sources, most significantly the *Völundarkviða* ("Volundr's poem"), which appears in the Poetic Edda.

In this particular version of the legend, Weland is captured in his sleep by the evil king Niðhad and crippled so that he cannot escape. He is forced to work in the King's forge, and his most prized possession – his dead wife's ring – is given to the King's daughter, the young Beadohilde. When Weland finally manages to escape (by crafting a pair of mechanical wings), he takes revenge on Niðhad by killing his two sons and seducing – or perhaps raping – Beadohilde when she comes to him asking him to repair his wife's broken ring⁵. Beadohilde becomes pregnant with an illegitimate son, and Weland disappears forever. When confronted by her father, the wounded Beadohilde cries:

True is it, Niðhad, that which was told thee,
Once in the isle with Völund was I,
An hour of lust, alas it should be!⁶

The similarities to the narrative of *Wulf and Eadwacer* are instantly recognizable. If we imagine that the anonymous female speaker is Beadohilde, then Eadwacer, who fathered the "wretched cub", is Weland. The complexities of their relationship are now slightly easier to understand. Beadohilde's relationship with Weland, her father's prisoner, is in a very real sense a betrayal of her people, and it is easy to recognize how a sexual connection would bring her both

⁵ None of the poems in which Beadohilde is mentioned seem to agree on the specifics of this encounter. In the *Völundarkviða*, quoted below, Beadohilde seems to intimate that Weland's advances were not entirely uninvited. However, other Norse sources, such as the *Thiðrekssaga*, actually use the word "rape". These ambiguities, in my opinion, only add to the poem's appeal.

⁶ Hollander, Lee M., trans. *The Poetic Edda*. Austin: University of Texas, 2004. 167. Print.

wyn and *lað*, joy and pain. Furthermore, Weland's disappearance immediately following their "hour of lust" would be utterly devastating, and justify her subsequent disdain for Weland, their child, and their relationship as a whole. The *wulf* which carries her bastard child into the wilderness may be real or metaphorical – in any case, it acts as a representation of her contempt for her former lover. The death of this child reflects the death of their brief and tumultuous relationship. It is said that hell hath no fury like a woman scorned; Beadohilde has been badly scorned, and the intensity of emotion in the last four lines of *Wulf and Eadwacer* is fearlessly crafted example of the power of feminine rage.

If this angry speaker is Beadohilde, and Eadwacer is Weland, then who is Wulf? The speaker's obvious anguish, especially in line 13 (*Wulf, min wulf!*), leads me to believe that Wulf is dead, or if not dead, then at least far separated from the mourning narrator. In either case, the word *seldcymas*, as suggested above, informs us that he has not come to visit her. My proposal is that Wulf is one (or perhaps, a manifestation of the spirits of both) of Beadohilde's brothers. As a single woman in the Medieval period, Beadohilde would have two significant male relationships: those with her brothers and with her father. Her brothers' deaths would therefore be traumatic enough to justify the agony of loss apparent in the first part of the poem. The narrator's reaction to her brother's death – her sickness and inability to eat – can be read as an expression of her guilt over her relationship with Weland/Eadwacer, his murderer. She would not feel such guilt if her brother had died of old age. Furthermore, her description of his death as "a sacrifice" corresponds to the circumstances surrounding his murder. His life was taken in revenge for the cruelty shown towards Weland – it is, quite literally, a sacrifice.

The assumption that Wulf is dead obviously complicates the first nine lines of the poem significantly. If Beadohilde's brother (Wulf) is dead, how can he possibly be *on iege*? There are

two possible interpretations, and the descriptions of Wulf's islands as impenetrable and filled with violent warriors provide a clue to the first. It is possible that lines 4-7 describe in highly poetic terms the Scandinavian *Valhalla* – the hall of the dead. As far as Beadohilde, a living woman, is concerned, the legendary refuge for fallen warriors is utterly an impenetrable island. She quite literally will never be able to reach him there. Furthermore, Wulf's journey to Valhalla – where warriors are first fed and welcomed then sent out to die in the world's final battle – explains the complexities of the repetition in lines 2 and 7. Beadohilde is quite clearly aware of the fact that her brother is dead; her choice to describe him as being *on iege* is, therefore, either a poetic euphemism or some sort of coping mechanism.

The second, and perhaps slightly darker, possibility, is that it is Wulf's body – and not his soul – that is *on iege*. Perhaps Wulf was killed in the attempt to kidnap Weland. If we allow ourselves to imagine that Weland's home is on a far-removed island (and we have no way of knowing that it isn't), then we can see how it would be difficult to preserve and transport the body of a fallen soldier – even if that soldier was the King's son. It is entirely possible that when the speaker says that Wulf is *on iege*, she is really lamenting the fact his body has been left behind, and that she cannot properly mourn him. I personally find this explanation more dramatically satisfying, but both interpretations are supported by the text.

In any case, the narrative of *Wulf and Eadwacer* can be summarized as follows: the speaker, Beadohilde, is in mourning for Wulf, her murdered brother. She laments the fact that she can no longer see him, either because he has reached Valhalla, or because his body has been left on the island where he died. In describing the intensity of her grief, the speaker says that she thought of Wulf constantly, even, or perhaps especially, when she's in the arms of the "battle-strong" Eadwacer, her one-time lover, and the man responsible for Wulf's death. The speaker

and is so wracked with guilt over her relationship with her brother's murderer that she feels physically ill, and cannot bring herself to eat. Her contempt for Eadwacer is outmatched only by the disgust she feels for their illegitimate child, and her distaste for their relationship as a whole.

This reading of *Wulf and Eadwacer* as a retelling of the legend of Beadohilde may seem complete, but it leaves one important question unanswered. If the poet composing *Wulf* had Beadohilde and Weland in mind, why would he chose to change their names entirely? Wouldn't it be easier to keep the characters' original names, making the thematic connection easier to recognize? The simple answer is yes; that would have been much easier, and it would have saved modern scholars the task of struggling through countless interpretations. However, I believe that the choice to create new names for these old characters was a deliberate attempt by the poet to separate *Wulf* from its narrative source, and in doing so, honor the speaker's emotions.

Wulf and Eadwacer is, at its core, a *frauenlied* - a woman's song. The drama and tragedy of the poem are born not out of narrative action, but out of the depths of a woman's emotional turmoil. Using the names Weland and Niðhad would only serve to diminish the effect of these emotions. Readers of a poem using these names would recall Weland's skills in the forge, or King Niðhad's evil deeds, and forget for a moment the emotions of the female narrator, the infinitely wronged Beadohilde. The very fact that modern editors have titled the poem *Wulf and Eadwacer* shows how quick we are to define the narrator through the men in her life⁷. In order to fully express the truth of Beadohilde's suffering, the poet was forced to remove her from the familiar narrative context, freeing her from the grasps of her decidedly destructive male relationships, and allowing the intensity of her emotions to take center stage.

⁷ Suggestions that the poem's editorial title stems from the fact that "Wulf" and "Eadwacer" are the only names explicitly given are meritless. Consider, for example, the title of another Old English *frauenlied* featuring an anonymous female narrator – *The Wife's Lament*.

In accordance with what I believe was the poet's original intention, I would like to suggest a new title for the poem: *Beadohilde the Bold*. This title is both a more accurate reflection of the source of the poem's emotion core and a reminder of what I believe to be the poem's thematic context. The poet who composed *Wulf and Eadwacer* did so with great care and respect for his female narrator, and I don't think it's possible that he intended his readers to focus on the lives of Wulf and Eadwacer. My revised title allows Beadohilde to take her place as a true heroine in the world of Old English poetry – and feminine voices are desperately needed.

The goal of literary criticism isn't to prove the validity of one interpretation over another, but rather to bring new insight to the critical conversation. This reading, then, is simply the most recent addition to an ever-expanding collection of competing and contradictory views. My primary goal in producing these new translations is to make the text accessible to a wider audience, so that future generations of readers can decide for themselves how best to interpret the poem. This simple 19-line poem is one of the earliest masterpieces of English literature, and Beadohilde is by far the most compelling character I've encountered in my undergraduate career. It is my hope that neither the poem nor the heroine will be soon forgotten.

Wulf and Eadwacer (Literal translation)

It is to my people as if someone gave them a gift:
 Will they receive him if he comes upon a group of men?
 It is different with us.

5 Wulf is on one island; I on another.
 Fast is that island, surrounded by fens.
 There are bloodthirsty men there on that island –
 They intend to kill him if he comes in violence
 It is different with us.

10 I thought of my Wulf with long-journeying hope,
 When it was rainy weather and I weeping sat.
 When the battle-strong in his arms afflicted me,
 There was joy to me then; there was pain then too.

15 Wulf, my Wulf! My hopes of you
 Sickness caused, your seldom-coming,
 My anxious spirit, not at all a lack of food.

Do you hear, Eadwacer? Our wretched child
 A beast drags to the forest.
 That one easily tears apart what never was united –
 Our song together.

Beadohilde (modern translation)

His death is a sacrifice to my people.
 Will they receive him when he comes into their midst?
 Our fates are different

5 Wulf is on one island; I am on another
 His island is impenetrable, surrounded by fens.
 There are bloodthirsty men on that island –
 They intend to kill him if he comes into their midst.
 Our fates are different.

10 I thought of my Wulf's struggles with hope.
 When the weather was rainy and I sat wailing,
 When the battle-strong warrior seized me in his arms,
 I felt joy then, but there was pain there too.

15 Wulf, my Wulf! My hopes for you
 Caused me to be sick, your seldom comings
 caused my anxious spirit, my refusal to eat.

Do you hear me, Eadwacer? A beast bears our
 Wretched child to the forest.
 And in that easily tears apart that which was never united –
 Our story together.

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[NOTE: Each of the following excerpts will begin with a chapter number. These numbers correspond with each chapter's place in the novella. This excerpt, for example, is the complete text of the first chapter.]

When I first read "Wulf and Eadwacer", I was struck by the poem's emotional intensity. The speaker's grief and guilt following her brother's death is the poem's dramatic center. In writing my prose translation, I wanted to be clear from the very beginning that Beadohilde loves her brothers very much, and that she feels duty bound to serve them in any way necessary.

One.

It began, I suppose, on the day of my mother's funeral.

She was sent off in the traditional way – a glowing pyre with lilacs at the base, and the slow mournful song our people have sung for centuries. My father did not cry. No one expected him to. At the age of twelve I didn't yet know what was expected of me, and I cried shamelessly. If my tears bothered my father, he didn't show it. He stood still and silent throughout the ceremony, gazing passively into the flames as they caressed and then consumed his dead wife's body.

After the feast, he called my brothers Eamonn and Ademar into his main chambers. I had not been asked to join them, but the thought of being alone so soon after my mother's death was unbearable.

"Can I come with you?" I asked Eamonn, the older of the two.

He glanced at the dark wooden door that led to our father's chambers. "Beadohilde," he muttered, "I don't think..."

"Please?" I couldn't stand to be alone.

"Fine," he whispered. "But stay quiet." He turned towards the door and pushed it open. Ademar grabbed my hand, squeezed it once, and pulled me through.

I'd never seen my father's chambers before. The walls were thick dark stone, as in the rest of the castle, but without any of the brightly colored tapestries that covered my walls, or our

mother's. Three long tapers in each of the room's four corners and a single massive window provided light, but no heat. In the middle of the room was a low wooden table, and crowded around it, my father and his men. The men stood muttering to one another, pointing at maps and moving small iron horses back and forth across the table. My father sat at the head of the table, shaking his head at certain suggestions, grunting in approval at others. His eyes were fixed on the map.

Eamonn cleared his throat. "You wanted to see us, father?"

He looked up, and for a moment I thought he would send us out again. His eyebrows narrowed slightly, and his lips tightened to a thin, harsh line. He looked first at Eamonn, then Ademar before finally setting his gaze on me.

"Gentlemen," he said, looking back at the map. "Leave us a moment."

The men seemed to move as one. Silently they left the room, eyes ahead, as if they couldn't see us. Only Waldere, my father's oldest friend and closest advisor stopped briefly before us. He laid one massive hand on Eamonn's shoulder and squeezed it gently.

"Courage," he said, and then, with a wink in my direction, he was gone.

My father stood and walked over to the window. In the dim twilight I could see the smoldering remnants of the funeral pyre. I wondered if he was watching the wind scatter his wife's ashes across the lilac fields, or maybe looking out at the darkening sky, towards heaven where he hoped she would be. With a dull throb in my heart I suspected he was looking past all of that, past the pyre and the fields out to the ocean, and the unconquered islands beyond. He was an entirely unsentimental man, and I hated him for it.

Ademar squeezed my hand again. I looked up, and he nodded his head towards the door. I knew he wanted me to leave. Would father speak then, to an audience of his sons only? I

doubted it, but Ademar seemed anxious, and that was troubling. I squeezed his hand and turned to leave when father spoke suddenly.

“Stay, Beadohilde,” he said without moving. “What I have to say you also need to hear.”

My brothers and I exchanged glances. Our father had always had the somewhat disconcerting ability to sense movement without seeing it, and in the darkened cold of his chamber, it seemed especially sinister.

“Your mother is dead,” he said, still gazing out the window. His voice was low and flat. “Your mother is dead and now we must all take on her many roles.” He turned finally and looked at us. “Ademar, you will continue your work in the village infirmary. Ready or not, your mother’s death puts you fully in charge. I need my soldiers fit, and my workers healthy. That is your responsibility now, and yours alone. Understood?”

Ademar, barely fifteen, straightened his shoulders and puffed out his chest. “Yes, father.” His voice shook slightly, but his eyes were solid steel.

Father turned next to Eamonn. “You’re eighteen now, Eamonn. A man by law, if not in nature. It’s time for you to join the company.”

Eamonn stiffened slightly, but said nothing.

“I know your mother allowed you to entertain the idea of scholarship,” our father continued, his voice tinged with a hint of disgust. “You had hoped to join the brothers at the monastery, is that correct?”

My brother nodded, his jaw locked.

“You will leave your studies behind,” Father said, “And ride out with the company Sunday.”

My heart sank. Sunday? Impossible. The process of mourning our mother's death would take weeks at least. Father couldn't possibly expect Eamonn to leave Thorndale so soon. And to become a soldier? Eamonn's passion was learning, and always had been. Every morning for as long as I could remember, my brothers would leave the castle on their horses before dawn, Ademar riding South to the village infirmary and Eamonn riding West to study with the Gallic brothers. In the brightly lit hallways and silent libraries of the monastery Eamonn learned things other men his age could only dream of. He learned to read and write in languages foreign to most in this part of the Isles. He learned the history of our people and of the surrounding tribes, and how to coax foliage out of even the most sterile land. Eamonn was a scholar, a philosopher – not a soldier. Never a soldier.

“I can't,” he said quietly, eyes glued to the wall just above our father's head.

“I'm sorry?”

“I can't leave Thorndale,” Eamonn repeated. “I'm not coming with you on Sunday.”

“I'm afraid you don't have a choice,” Father said. He turned to face me. “And now, Beadohilde...”

“I'm sorry,” Eamonn interrupted, his voice still soft. “But I'm not coming with you. I'm not leaving the monastery and I'm not joining the company.”

“You are my son,” Father said. “And I am your father. Those are the only two things worthy of discussion at this point. You will ride out on Sunday.”

“No!” Eamonn shouted. His voice echoed against the cold stone walls, shocking us all. “I am, as you said, a man now. I make my own decisions, and I am deciding to stay.”

“What possible reason could you have to stay here?” Father asked, moving towards him.

Eamonn looked incredulous. “Thorndale is my home,” he said. “This castle, this land. The monastery. The brothers have already made arrangements for me to stay with them. I have a life here. I have a future. If I leave with you on Sunday, all of that will disappear. I’ll join the company and either die in battle or die miserable and scarred like you. I’m sorry Father, but I’m not going to let you force that life upon me.”

Father’s eyes flashed menacingly as he took another step forward. His face was now inches from Eamonn’s. “Ride on Sunday,” he said, “or leave this place forever.”

Eamonn hesitated, but I knew he didn’t really have a choice. Banishment from Thorndale and the surrounding lands meant banishment from the monastery, and would force Eamonn to the sea, or worse, to the uncharted North. Joining the company would be difficult, yes, but exile was a death sentence. Eamonn looked down at the floor, then back up at Father. “I can’t...”

“I’ll go,” Ademar said suddenly.

Father shook his head slightly, his eyes glued to Eamonn’s. “You’re too young.”

“I’m a better rider than he is,” Ademar insisted. “And twice as good with a sword.”

“Is this true?” Father asked Eamonn. Eamonn remained silent.

“He’s never been much of a fighter,” Ademar said, the faintest hint of a sneer in his voice. “Let him stay here, and I’ll ride out with you on Sunday.”

Father laughed. “Do you hear that Eamonn? Your brother grows bold.” He turned to Ademar. “What was it your mother used to call you?”

“Little wolf,” Ademar muttered with a grimace. “But that was years ago.”

“Well, little wolf,” Father said, glancing back at Eamonn, “If your brother cannot fulfill the duties required of him as my oldest son, you may take his place among the men of Thorngale.” He turned back to the open window, and for a moment, nobody spoke. I looked from

one brother to the other and back again, unsure of exactly what was happening. Ademar couldn't possibly join the company – Eamonn wouldn't let him. And yet there Eamonn stood, staring at Father's back as if willing him to turn around and declare the whole thing a joke.

He turned to Ademar. "You don't have to do this," he whispered, low enough so that only we three could hear. "You can stay, if you want."

"I know," Ademar said, his eyes flashing.

"Ademar, listen..."

"I'm not afraid," Ademar hissed, interrupting. "This is what it means to be a man."

Eamonn stepped back, as if Ademar had slapped him across the face. He looked at Father, then at the floor, and then after a moment, back at Ademar. As my brothers stared at each other, I realized that Eamonn was going to let Ademar take his place after all. The idea was absurd. Eamonn was the older brother; Ademar was still a child, barely older than myself.

"Ademar," I cried, moving towards him. "You can't leave. Father, tell him he can't..."

Eamonn grabbed my shoulder and pulled me back. "This is his decision, Beadohilde. If he wants to sacrifice himself in the name of masculinity, let him. I'll stay here. Someone will have to take control of the infirmary. Mother wouldn't want it to fall apart."

Ademar winced, but said nothing. Eamonn smiled grimly, but I know that he took no real pleasure in hurting our brother. Without another word, he turned on his heel and left.

"Well," Father said as the door slammed behind him, "That settles it. You will go with Waldere to the smith tomorrow. We'll find you proper armor."

"You can't leave," I repeated. "Father, don't let him leave. It isn't fair."

"Life isn't fair," Father said, turning back to the table and staring absentmindedly at the maps. "One day you will learn that. For now, know this – you are mistress of Thorndale,

Beadohilde. Married to this land. Your duty lies with your brothers, with myself, and with no one else.” He looked up and met my stare. There was no affection in his eyes. “Any chance you may have had for your own life is gone, at least for now. Do you understand?”

I didn’t, not really, but only one answer was possible. “Yes, Father.”

“Good,” he said. “You may leave.” He grabbed one of the maps and pulled it across the table. “Now, Ademar – come and look at this.”

Ademar grinned broadly for a moment, then caught himself and made a face to match our father’s. As he walked to Father’s side of the table he threw his shoulders back and seemed to grow immensely. He leaned over the table and nodded as Father pointed to various points on the map. It seemed as if he would burst from excitement. After a moment he looked up and caught my eye. I willed him to smile again, or wink, or do something to convince me that things would be okay.

“Beadohilde,” he said, his voice harsher than I’d ever heard it. “Father told you to leave.”

Chapter Two summarizes the years immediately following Beadohilde's mother's death, and explains how the family has changed since the day of the funeral. It reveals the fact that Ademar has led to a small group of soldiers to an Island off of the coast. The men had hoped to capture an as-yet unnamed blacksmith, who is rumored to forge unbreakable armor. As Beadohilde and Eamonn discuss Ademar's possible motivations, Waldere, their father's closest advisor, runs in and announces that the men have returned, and that Ademar is dead. Eamonn leaves to help plan a retaliatory attack, while Beadohilde is sent to the armory, where the captured blacksmith is being held.

I believe that this first interaction between Beadohilde and Weland is very important. Their relationship changes dramatically over the course of the novella, but I wanted to show that, in the beginning at least, Weland inspires both fear and desire in Beadohilde's heart.

Three.

The armory was housed in a long stone building at Thorndale's eastern edge. It was a half hour ride from the castle gates, and by the time I reached the armory, my eyes were nearly dry. I tied my horse to a tree in the courtyard and went inside. Two tall, muscular boys I recognized from the village sat cross-legged in the entranceway, polishing their gleaming silver swords. They stood and snapped to attention as I approached.

"Where is the prisoner?" I asked the older of the two.

He pointed down the hallway and handed me a large iron key. "We've got him in the last room on the end," he said with a hint of pride. "It's not very big, but it's the only one that can be locked from the outside. Sir Waldere said to always keep it locked, unless you're in there with him."

I nodded, and silently hoped that that wouldn't be very often. "You'll stay close when I'm with him, won't you?" I asked. The boys nodded vigorously. "Good," I said. "Thank you."

I walked to the end of the hallway and put my ear against the heavy wooden door. Silence. With a quick glance back at the entranceway guards, I unlocked and pulled it open. The prisoner lay sleeping on the armory floor, his massive head against one wall and his bare feet

nearly touching the other. I'd never seen a man so big. I stood in the doorway for a minute or two, watching his chest rise and fall as he slept. He'd been badly beaten, that much was clear. Thick, freshly stained bandages were wrapped haphazardly around his lower torso and both of his knees. His wrists and ankles were bound with thickly knotted ropes, but thin lines of dried blood running down his fingers and toes suggested that he had been trying to break their hold. In the flickering candlelight, I couldn't see his face clearly, but it seemed to be badly bruised. I wondered who was responsible.

A voice in the hallway pulled me from my thoughts. "Beadohilde."

I turned to see my brother Eamonn standing in the entranceway, holding a large basket full of bandages and salves. His face was pale, and even from a distance I could tell his hands were shaking. I ran towards him, letting the door to the armory slam shut behind me. He set the basket on the ground and pulled me into his arms. "Are you okay?" he asked.

I didn't know how to respond. "Ademar's dead," I whispered. He nodded silently and pulled me closer. For a moment we stood there without speaking, Eamonn's smooth, broad hand moving back and forth across my upper back as if he was trying to wipe away an invisible stain. He leaned forward to kiss the top of my head, then stepped back and held my shoulders.

"I have to leave," he said.

My heart sank. "No. Do you know what they've asked me to do? Eamonn, I..."

"Father's gone mad," he interrupted. "And Waldere's not strong enough to lead a campaign on his own. He's asked me to take a small group of men back to the Island, and I can't say no."

"Have the already planned the attack?" I asked, confused.

His hands fell from my shoulders. "No," he said, "Not yet. We need new armor first."

“Then why are you going?”

He shifted his weight from one foot to the other, clearly uncomfortable. “They left Ademar’s body on the Island,” he said after a moment. “I’m going to retrieve it.”

I felt sick to my stomach. Eamonn’s departure would be difficult to bear, but for Ademar’s body to be anywhere but Thorndale was utterly unthinkable. “When?”

“Tomorrow,” he said. “We’ll be gone for a fortnight – maybe less, if we’re lucky.” He looked down the hallway towards the prisoner’s room. “In the mean time, I need you to do your best to heal the prisoner. Do you understand?”

I thought back to our conversation in the Great Hall. “You want him to work in the forge.”

“It’s the only way,” Eamonn said. “Waldere brought back an Island shield – my sword barely left a scratch. We can’t beat the Islanders without this man’s armor or weaponry. As soon as he’s healed we’ll move him down to the smithy.” He pointed to the opposite end of the hallway. “If he agrees to forge the armor, we’ll allow him to stay in Thorndale as a free man. If he doesn’t, we’ll kill him, and attack the Island some other way.” His voice was hard, and his eyes flashed darkly as he spoke. “Regardless, we need him to trust you. I don’t think he’ll work unless he really believes that we’ll let him live. We can’t send him back to the Island, of course, and in any case there’s nothing left for him there – Father’s made sure of that. We need him to *want* to stay in Thorndale, Beadohilde. Do you understand?”

“Why would he want to stay here?” I asked. “After everything we’ve done?”

Eamonn’s ears turned scarlet. “You’re a grown woman,” he said simply.

“You can’t be serious,” I hissed, grabbing his arm and pulling him away from the guards, who were eavesdropping shamelessly. “You want me to seduce the man who killed our brother?”

“I want you to earn his trust,” Eamonn corrected. “And Weland didn’t kill Ademar.”

“You know his name?” I cried, my voice shaking in anger. “Why don’t you convince him to stay, seeing as you’re such good friends already?” I picked the basket up off the ground and shoved it roughly in his arms. “Go on, then.”

He took the basket and held my angry stare. “I know this is difficult,” he said. “And I know you must be scared. But this is the only way.”

I knew in my heart he was right, but I couldn’t bring myself to admit it right away. “That man,” I spat, refusing to use his name, “is three times my size. He could kill me with his bare hands, Eamonn, you know that.”

Eamonn shook his head. “We’ve cut the tendons behind his knees,” he said with a hint of grim satisfaction. “He can barely stand on his own. Keep a fair distance and you’ll be safe.”

“A fair distance,” I repeated. “Well that complicates things a bit. How will I seduce him if he can’t see my eyes up close?” I batted my eyelids coquettishly.

“You don’t need to seduce him,” Eamonn said with a laugh. “He just needs to trust you.”

I couldn’t see the difference, but it felt good to make my brother smile. “Be careful,” I said, squeezing his hand gently.

“And you.” He turned, and with a quick nod to the guards in the entranceway, he was gone. The sound of his horse’s hooves pounding into the distance seemed to resonate through the armory walls. I felt suddenly, horribly alone.

I looked back at the door at the end of the hall. Weland the blacksmith – my prisoner, my patient – waited within. Eamonn and Waldere had both stressed the importance of gaining his trust. After the beating they’d given him, I wasn’t sure it could be done. Even so, I knew I had no choice but to try. I took a deep breath and pulled the door open, silently praying for strength.

The prisoner was awake. He had somehow managed to sit up, and was leaning against the wall in the corner farthest from the door. His eyes widened as I walked in, but he said nothing. I moved closer, my heart pounding, and set the basket down on the floor in front of him. He looked at the basket, then back up at me. I met his eyes for a split second, then looked down at the rest of his body. His tunic would need to be removed, and fresh bandages applied before the wounds began to fester. Taking off the tunic would be difficult. The prisoner's arms were nearly as thick as my waist, and I wouldn't be able to work unless I could move them away from his chest. I could feel him watching me, but forced my self to concentrate. The ropes holding his wrists together would have to be cut. I crouched on the ground beside him and lifted his hands out of his lap.

"I'm going to cut these ropes," I said. "Hold still." He stared back blankly, and I wondered if he could understand what I was saying. I pulled a knife out of the basket and pointed at his wrists. "I'm going to cut these," I said again. "Do you understand?"

Still he said nothing, but kept his eyes – which in the darkness seemed almost impossibly blue – glued to mine. We stared at each other in silence for what seemed like an eternity, until I felt my cheeks flush red, and I looked quickly away. I began to cut at the ropes, trying desperately to ignore the intensity of his gaze. The knots were impeccably tied – most likely by Eamonn's hand – and it took me several minutes to sever them completely. As I finished pulling away the last bits of rope, I couldn't help but meet his eyes again. He was smiling.

"Who are you?" he asked. His voice was deep and heavily accented, almost musical in its lilting slowness. It was entirely unsettling.

I did not return his smile. "You speak English?"

"A few words," he admitted, turning his wrists in tight circles.

“How many?” I asked, pushing the knife into my waistband. Gaining his trust would be difficult if we couldn’t speak the same language.

“All of them,” he replied, the smile widening. “Tell me your name, little girl.”

“I’m not here to take orders,” I said curtly. “And I’m not going to hurt you.”

“Well,” he said with a dramatically feigned sigh of relief. “Thank the Gods for that.”

His attitude was infuriating, but I knew better than to let him see my anger. I sat back on my heels, and took the out the knife. “You don’t think I could hurt you if I wanted to?”

He looked me up and down slowly, and I felt my cheeks burn again. “No,” he said finally. “Although you’re certainly welcome to try.”

“Your right ankle is swollen,” I said, pointing with the knife. “I’m guessing it’s broken. And if I know the men of this castle like I think I do, those bandages mean that the muscles behind your knees have been cut. You can’t stand on your own, let alone walk.” I leaned forward and cut his tunic and bandages open, making sure that the tip of the knife brushed his skin as I did. His smile faded slightly. I ran my finger lightly down the side of his now exposed torso, and he winced. “This bruising here suggests at least one broken rib – maybe more, if you really put up a fight. That means you’re having trouble breathing, and it probably hurts to move your upper body.” I pushed away the remnants of his shirt and forced myself to meet his eyes. “I don’t think you could hurt me either.”

The smile returned, and he leaned back against the wall. “So you aren’t afraid of me.”

“Not really,” I lied, certain he could hear my heart beating furiously against my ribs.

“And that’s why you untied me?”

“I can tie you up again if you’d like,” I said, reaching for the rope. He shook his head. “I untied you because if I didn’t your arms would get in the way of my work.”

“Your work?”

“I’ve been asked to help you heal,” I said.

“You’re a healer?” he asked with a look of genuine surprise.

I took a cloth from the basket and dipped it in a bucket of cold water. “I’m not trained as a healer, but I’ve spent a great deal of time working in the infirmary.” I drew the wet cloth gently across his chest, wiping away the layers of dried blood and sweat. He inhaled sharply, and I smiled as I felt his muscles tense under my touch. “The King thought you might enjoy my company.”

The prisoner’s eyebrows narrowed. “King Niðhad sent you?” he asked. I’d never heard my father’s name spoken with such disdain. I nodded, and his smile fell. “Why would he do that?”

“I’m not sure,” I said, confused by this sudden change in tone, and thankful I hadn’t admitted to being the King’s daughter. “His son Eamonn gave the orders.”

“Prince Eamonn is dead,” the prisoner spat. “I watched him die.”

The contempt in his voice revived my anger. I wanted desperately to hurt him. “The King has two sons,” I said, dragging the cloth roughly down his side. “Your men killed Ademar, the younger of the two. He was barely twenty. Eamonn is here, and very much alive. In fact, he’s planning his return to your Island as we speak. I expect he’ll sail out in the morning.”

For the first time since I’d entered the armory, the prisoner seemed genuinely afraid. “He’s going back already?” he asked. “Why so soon?”

“Your people kept Prince Ademar’s body,” I said. “Eamonn’s gone to take it back.”

“You’re lying,” he said. “Niðhad wouldn’t allow the loss of his son to go unanswered, even if he does have a spare. They’ll launch a full scale attack or they won’t go at all.”

“You’re right,” I said. “They are planning an attack. But they can’t leave Thorndale quiet yet. You see, your people were able to massacre our company and murder the King’s son because they had a special sort of armor, armor you forged for them years ago. Our wounded are taking time to heal, and new men are already being trained, but we can’t expect to beat an army of your indestructible shields unless we also have swords that can’t be broken.” I reached out to wipe the last bit of blood off of his neck. “That’s why you’re alive.”

He pushed my arm away irritably. “You can’t possibly expect me to rebuild Niðhad’s army,” he said. “Not after everything you’ve done.”

“I’ve done nothing,” I said, throwing the cloth onto the floor. “You and your people...”

“My people were provoked,” he interrupted angrily. “Your King attacked the Island without warning. He burnt my village to the ground. And as for your princeling...” He trailed off, staring angrily at the ground. After a moment he looked back up. “The death of a young soldier is always unfortunate, but the Gods punish wicked men.”

I felt my heart swell with rage. “Lift up your arms,” I said, desperate to finish my work and escape the stifling hostility of his presence.

“Leave,” he said, ignoring my command. “Tell your King I’ll choose death before dishonor.”

I grabbed one of his massive wrists and stood, jerking his arm up. His shoulder cracked and he swore loudly. “I’m not the King’s messenger,” I hissed, “and you’re in no position to refuse my help. Lift your arms, Weland, or I swear to the Gods you’ll lose them.”

He flinched as I said his name, but did as he was told. I let go of his wrist and walked over to the basket of supplies. My heart was pounding with an intoxicating mixture of fear and rage, and I struggled to concentrate on the task at hand. Wrapping the prisoner’s chest in clean

dressings would be like wrapping the base of a tree. Eamonn had packed several tightly wound rolls of bandages. I thanked him silently, and turned back to the prisoner. His face was twisted in pain.

“I can’t keep my arms up,” he panted. “There’s too much pressure on my side.”

“Your arms have to be up,” I replied. “Or I can’t wrap your chest properly. We’ll go slowly.” He clenched his jaw and nodded. I kneeled onto the floor in front of him, my face inches away from his. I held one end of the bandage against his side and pulled it around his back and across his stomach. The movement pulled us into an awkward sort of hug, and I couldn’t avoid pressing my cheek against his. I leaned back quickly, and tucked the open end of the bandage into this first loop.

“I need to put my arms down,” he said hoarsely. I nodded reluctantly, and dropped the roll of bandages into his lap. His arms fell instantly down to his sides, and he gasped for air. As his chest expanded, the looped bandage slackened. I reached out to hold it in place.

“Try not to hold your breath,” I told him quietly. “Your arms will hurt less if you breathe.”

He took in a long, ragged breath and twisted his lips into a grim half smile. “I think you were right about that rib,” he said.

“It’s going to hurt for a while, but wrapping your chest will help.”

He nodded, and lifted his arms back over his head. I tightened the first loop and pulled the second into place, then the third and the fourth and so on, winding tightly up his chest. We stopped every few minutes as his arms gave out, and although he tried to hide it, it was clear the prisoner was in a great deal of pain. He swore quietly to himself as I pulled the bandages around his bruised ribs, and again more loudly as I covered the long gash on his upper chest. It took over

an hour to wrap his chest completely, and as I tied off the end of the bandages, he grabbed my hand.

“Thank you,” he said sincerely, his eyes fixed on mine. “I’m sorry that took so long.”

I couldn’t help but smile. “It isn’t easy work, healing a man your size.”

He smiled back, and held my eyes for a second longer than was absolutely necessary before looking away and letting go of my hand. “I suppose my knees are next,” he said, eyeing them warily. “I’m not sure you can fix those.”

“No,” I said. “And I’m not sure I want to. If you can walk, you can leave, and then we’d both be at the mercy of the King.”

He laughed darkly. “I’m already at his mercy,” he said, staring up at the ceiling. “And yours, if it comes to that. That knife in your waistband could slit my throat easily enough. Or you could leave me here without food or drink, and watch me waste away.”

“I’m not going to kill you,” I said. “Not unless you absolutely deserve it. And I am going to feed you. I’m here to help you heal.”

“Yes, but you see Niðhad *is* going to kill me. Why waste your time healing me first?”

I reached out and tilted his face down towards mine. His tensed slightly, but didn’t push my hand away. “Rebuild the army,” I told him, “and they’ll let you live. You won’t be able to return to the Island, but there won’t *be* an Island left after Prince Eamonn’s finished. You know that as well as I do. If you refuse to help, they’ll kill you without thinking twice, and they’ll attack the Island anyways. Your death will mean *nothing*. But if you work in the smithy, if you do as they ask, you can spend the rest of your life as a free man in Thorndale.”

“You’re asking me to betray my people,” he said, “so that I can die as Niðhad’s slave.”

“I’m asking you to consider it. You’re tired and in pain, and right now death doesn’t seem so far away. In a week or two when you’re feeling better, Thorndale won’t look so bad.” I stood and picked up the basket of supplies. “Don’t be a martyr, Weland. You’re worth much more than that.”

As I pushed the door open, I heard his reply. “There are things worse than death.”

This last short excerpt is the last chapter in the novella, and was extremely difficult to write. Beadohilde's pain following Eadwacer/Weland's betrayal is perfectly crafted in the poem, and I struggled to replicate that level of emotion. Weland has built a pair of mechanical wings, and prepares to escape, but not before revealing to Beadohilde that he had a wife and child on the Island, and that the ring Eamonn gave her had belonged to the wife. Overwhelmed with anger and despair, she tries to kill him with a smoldering poker. He overpowers her easily, and is prepared to let her go when she takes his dead wife's ring and throws it in to the forge. Incensed with rage, he throws her onto the ground and rapes her violently. The last chapter of the novella begins after the fact.

Ten.

I woke up several hours later on a low cot in the village infirmary, unsure of how I had gotten there. An old wrinkled healer sat asleep in front of the fire, and I tried to speak to her, but no words came out when I moved my lips. I swallowed a few times, trying to bring moisture into the back of my throat. It felt dry and as raw, and I desperately wanted a glass of water. I opened my mouth again, but again I could say nothing. I began to panic. Something was wrong with me. My whole body was sore. I felt as if I'd been in a fight.

In an instant, the memory of Weland's confession returned, and I cried out involuntarily. My low, ragged sobs woke the healer, who came quickly over and pulled me into her arms. She held my head against her chest and allowed me to cry. I barely had the energy. As I leaned into the healer, I struggled to remember what exactly had happened. Weland had told me he had a wife, and I'd tried to fight him. Then what? I remembered throwing his ring into the forge, but nothing after that. I pulled away and looked at the healer.

"What happened?" I asked in a raspy voice.

"Gods above," she sad, looking uncomfortable. "You don't remember?" I shook my head, and she pulled me back to her chest. "We found you alone in the armory. Gods only know how he managed to escape, or how he found your brother. Two stable boys said they saw him fly off with great mechanical wings, but I don't think that's true."

With a pang of regret I remembered the thin, curved sheets of metal he'd been hammering on when I brought him the ring. Could those have served as wings? How long had he been planning his escape? I felt sick to my stomach.

"In any case," the healer continued, "he was gone when we found you. You were lying in the middle of the armory floor, and you were so still that at first we thought you were dead. There was blood everywhere. We could tell..." her voice trailed off. "It seems as if he had his way with you."

I closed my eyes, and knew that she was right. The dull throbbing pain between my legs was quickly becoming impossible to ignore. The healer's embrace was suddenly suffocating, and I wanted desperately to be alone. "I'd like to sleep," I said.

She nodded, and pulled a small vial of liquid out of the pocket of her skirt. "Drink this. You'll wake up in the morning feeling good as new."

I doubted that very much, but I drank it anyways. Within a few minutes my eyelids began to droop, and my arms and legs felt heavy. I fell into a deep sleep.

The next morning was dark and rainy, and when I woke the old healer was gone. I was surprised by how little my body ached. The medicine had served its purpose. Only a faint throbbing on my lower stomach remained. I pressed both hands hard against the muscles below my belly button, and a wave of nausea hit me. I could feel a flicker of life stirring beneath my skin. There was no way to be certain, at least not yet, but I knew as I held my stomach that Weland had left me with one last wretched surprise. I climbed out of bed and walked over to sit in a chair by the window. As I watched the rain fall outside, I thought of my brothers, and the man who had killed them both. I cursed silently, and began to cry. There was nothing else to do.

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