

ÓLÖF THE FARMER'S DAUGHTER



Lundarbrekka in Bárðardalur



PHOTOS: STEFAN JONASSON

A folktale from the collection of Jón Árnason (1819-1888), Íslenskar Þjóðsögur og ævintýri (Icelandic Folk Tales and Legends), adapted from the translation by George E.J. Powell and Eiríkur Magnússon. This version has been revised by Stefan Jonasson.

In former times, it is said that there was a married priest in Eyjafjörður, who had several children, and who had taken a poor farmer's daughter as his foster child. Her name was Ólöf, a maiden fair of look and very courteous. The priest loved her quite as much as his own children and had her taught all sorts of handiwork and such other things as were deemed becoming for a woman to know. At the time of this story, Ólöf was grown-up.

Now the priest, her foster

father, secured a living in the East at Móðrudalur and moved there with all his goods – along with his wife, children, and servants – in the early summer. It is said that he went the shortest way, through the wilderness. He left the innermost farm in a valley called Bárðardalur and intended to rest in the midst of the great lava district called Ódáðahraun. At night, the priest reached the resting place with all his company and pitched his tent. But when he had rested there a little while, there came forth from the lava a band of nine armed men. There was no exchange of greetings, for the outlaws fell upon the priest and his company, who were all weaponless, and killed every man's child, but Ólöf. They carried her away to their dwelling, which was not very far off.

Ólöf soon saw that these fellows were outlaws, living by robbery and theft, and she wailed and lamented her position, which it was not within her power to change for the better. They did her no harm, but would make her sojourn as pleasant as they possibly could. They told her that, when winter should approach, they would draw lots to determine whose she should be, but that in the meantime she should make their meals and wait on them. Ólöf liked one of them the best; he was the youngest and mildest looking of them all.

Now the summer passed until a fortnight before the autumn roundup. The men prepared themselves to go away for a week to gather sheep from the commons. But a few days before they left, the youngest fell ill and kept to his bed. When the day came for their departure,

he was a little better, but still not up to the journey with them, so it was agreed that he should follow them, if he got better.

Now the men started off and, when they had got fairly out of sight, the young man spoke to Ólöf in the following way: "I do not wonder that you are unhappy in our company and I should have helped you long ago to get away, if I had seen the slightest possibility of doing so. I must tell you that I, too, have been kidnapped by these fellows, but do not whip it, unless your life is at stake. Beware of leaving before the time I have told you. If you should get to the populated district, I beg you to do all in your power to ensure that this lot of wrongdoers is destroyed. But this will not be easy, for they are watchful and wary.

"You must not think of it before next autumn. When the men go sheep-gathering in the autumn, they are wont to rest in a little dale near Skjálfafljótt on the night when people go on their first search for sheep. That is the time when it is easy to attack these robbers. But, if you value my advice, try to arrange that the man who lies apart from the others in the dale be pardoned and granted his life and freedom. Do now as I have bidden you and, if you do not stray from my advice, luck and happiness will go with you."

Ólöf thanked him for all this and said she would follow his advice. He went his way, but she sat alone, left behind and impatient. She found the life more irksome than ever before and the next day she found longer than a whole year. When she could contain herself no longer, she went out in search of the dappled horse. She found it, not far from the house, and, as

mine – the best and speediest of horses. No other horse belongs to the robbers. Mount the horse and let it find its own way, but do not whip it, unless your life is at stake. Beware of leaving before the time I have told you. If you should get to the populated district, I beg you to do all in your power to ensure that this lot of wrongdoers is destroyed. But this will not be easy, for they are watchful and wary.

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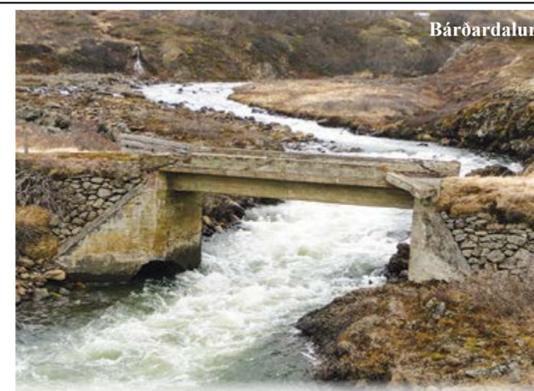
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she could not understand how it would make any difference if she went one day before the fixed time, she ventured to start off. All went smoothly until, all of a sudden, she heard a shout not far from her and guessed that it was the voice of one of the outlaws. Sure enough, it was, for one of them had seen her passing and recognized the horse she rode. He cried in a mighty voice to his companions, who, after a short while, came together and got so near to her that only a short space was left between them and her. The men ran as swiftly as birds fly and, although her horse was a fleet one, she saw that they would soon overtake her. She determined to give him a stroke with her whip and, when she did, the beast took so mightily to his feet that she nearly fell off. The horse, going half again as swiftly as before, soon left the outlaws far behind and sped to the farm of Mjóidalur, where the young man's father was still alive. Ólöf told him all about her travels, and also where his son was staying, and the advice he had given her for duly overcoming the robbers.

Now the next winter and summer passed away.

In the autumn, the neighbours gathered together in order to destroy the outlaws at the right time and Ólöf was to lead the expedition. And, to cut a long story short, the men were all killed except the one who was farthest from the group, the farmer's son from Mjóidalur. He went home with the expedition to his father, but, because he had partaken in the outlaw's misdeeds, he was judged at the next Alþingi and sentenced to death, although it was left to the king's mercy to determine his fate. Arrangements were made for him to sail on a vessel from Akureyri the next autumn. Many lamented his fate, Ólöf not least among them, for people affirmed that they were secretly very good friends. Before the young man embarked, he turned to Ólöf and begged her not to marry for five years, if she received no news about him during that time. But she gave him no answer, nor did she seem to pay any heed to his words.

Now time passed and Ólöf stayed with her kin in Eyjafjörður. Many hopeful youths wooed her, as she was deemed to be above all the women in those parts of the country, but she refused to marry anyone, saying that marriage was not her intention. People attributed his strange conduct to her melancholy and to a sort of madness that her stay in the company of the skálabúar might have brought upon her. So men ceased courting her. Five years passed and, in the sixth, there came a vessel from foreign lands to



Bárðardalur

Eyjafjörður. On board was a fine-looking man who spoke Icelandic. He was appointed by the king to the open seat of *sýslumaður* (magistrate) in Vaðlaþing. This young man soon became popular and beloved throughout the district. When he had been there for a short time, he wanted to secure a farm and a housekeeper – even a wife – to take care of his domestic affairs.

All pointed to Ólöf as the fittest of women in those parts, but they told him, at the same time, about her strange and stubborn determination not to marry. The magistrate said he would try to see if her determination remained the same when he was the man concerned. He asked Ólöf to be his wife and she gave him a decisive denial. But by the assiduous entreaties of the magistrate and the influence of many good people, she yielded at last and gave a rather unwilling consent.

Now a grand wedding feast was prepared and, in the midst of the company gathered at the table, the magistrate rose and said: "I hereby make it known

to all that I am the son of the farmer at Mjóidalur, who was taken prisoner by the outlaws of Ódáðahraun and later given up to the king's mercy, after the sentence of death had been passed upon me by the court of Alþingi. When the king heard the story of my life, along with my answers to all questions on the matter, he not only pardoned me, but aided me in finishing my schooling. In three years, I acquired so much knowledge in law and the legal affairs of the country that I was found fit to be entrusted with my present office. It gives me no little pleasure that the woman sitting at my side should be the same one who formerly saved my life when the other men were killed and that a chance has been afforded to me to reward her virtue and constancy."

All marvelled at these words, for they thought the farmer's son had long since died.

The feast was a gay one and the young couple began a happy life together at a fine and good farm in Eyjafjörður. They lived in joy and contentment to an old age.

Outlaws by Einar Jónasson (Akureyri)



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Citrus Pickeral Kebabs

1 lb Freshwater Fish pickeral fillets, cut into 3/4 inch cubes (24 pieces)	
1 each lemon and orange, zested and juiced	1 tbsp honey
2 limes, 1 zested and juiced	1 tsp soy sauce
1 tbsp + 1 tsp olive oil, divided	1 tsp fresh grated ginger
2 garlic cloves, minced	1 green pepper, cut into 3/4 inch wedges
1 tbsp brown sugar	1/4 red onion, cut into 3/4 inch wedges

In a plastic food storage bag with a re-sealable top, combine lemon, orange and lime zests, 1 tbsp olive oil and minced garlic. Season with salt and pepper. Add pickeral, seal and chill for 30 minutes.

Make the citrus glaze. In a small saucepan over high heat, bring orange, lemon and lime juices, brown sugar, honey, soy sauce and ginger to a boil. Cook for 8 minutes, or until thickened into a syrup.

Remove from heat and set aside. Remove walleye from marinade. Cut remaining lime in half lengthwise, then cut each half crosswise into 4 slices.

Thread eight metal skewers with pickeral, pepper, red onion and lime slices. Brush each kebab with citrus glaze.

Coat grill with cooking spray. Heat to medium high for direct heat. Grill kebabs for 5 to 8 minutes, turning occasionally and brushing with remaining glaze.

Serves 4

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