

Upon The Brink

Written by

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EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Ominous gray skies.

Cold.

Bitterly cold.

Made all the worse by a stiff breeze that blows from the sea to the small medieval settlement nestled in the hills higher up.

It's a circuit of longhouses, barns, buildings and fences, crudely fashioned of timber, stone and sod. Unimpressive. The work of simple, but hardy folk.

Folk who have fared harsh winters, built, and rebuilt from ruins.

They'll need to do so again.

Wisps of black smoke rise from several buildings, their exteriors scorched and cracked. Beams splintered, buildings crumpled in a heap, including the largest building, a BARN.

Sheep BLEAT and trudge aimlessly through the snow. A splattering of crimson across the white canvas.

Blood.

Animal.

Several sheep carcasses crushed underneath fallen beams.

The wind blows and flecks of snow are whipped up into the air, stinging the cheeks of SIEGHARDT (late 20s).

He takes in the destruction for a moment and turns his steely gaze to the horizon.

Looming large is a mountain range, a dagger of rock and ice, jutting up to the sky.

Sieghardt wraps his cloak tighter around himself and heads for the center of town.

He's built like a man who survives from manual labor. Thin, but broad in frame. Calloused hands and well-worn clothes. The only hint of refinement is his beard, which he keeps trimmed.

He passes by other VILLAGERS who busy themselves, sifting through the wreckage, and rounding up livestock, until he arrives at a WRECKED TOWER.

Charred wooden beams are strewn along the ground. The tower's stone foundation lies in a heap, and beneath the ruins is the JAVELIN -- a large iron weapon, like a giant crossbow.

It's in pieces.

HALGARD, Seighardt's Uncle, (40s) a sizable man with a sizable beard, sifts through the wrecked pieces of iron. From under the snow he unearths an iron spear, about two inches thick.

It's broken. Hewn in two.

Halgard's eyes meet Sieghardt's. They share a knowing look.

Halgard spits and tosses the broken spear away. He looks around the village, squinting his eyes against the wind.

There's intelligence in his eyes. Experience. A man you'd want in your corner when the world goes wrong.

HALGARD

How many?

SIEGHARDT

Don't know yet.

(beat)

Mostly sheep.

HALGARD

Mostly?

SIEGHARDT

A cow.

Halgard shakes his head, dismayed.

HALGARD

Put the remaining in the homes.

SIEGHARDT

Like the old days.

HALGARD

Aye.

SIEGHARDT

Maybe the old ways were better.

HALGARD

No.
 (beat)
 Just smaller.

Beat.

SIEGHARDT

Some of the men are already starting
 to talk.

HALGARD

Mmm.

Halgard stares off into the distance.

SIEGHARDT

She's getting worse.

Halgard doesn't respond, seems lost in his thoughts.

SIEGHARDT (cont'd)

Uncle?

Halgard snaps out of his daze. He pats Sieghardt on the
 shoulder.

HALGARD

We'll talk... after we mourn the
 dead.

Halgard walks off.

The wind picks up and Sieghardt turns back to the mountain.

EXT. LONGHOUSE - DAY

AADA (late 20s) a no-nonsense woman, with plain features,
 steps out of the house, with her THREE DAUGHTERS (ages 8-11)
 in tow.

Sieghardt spots her, gives a slight smile, then frowns. He
 crosses over to her.

SIEGHARDT

Where's Freyr?

AADA

Inside.

He looks to the home, gives a perplexed look.

AADA (cont'd)
He's refusing to come out.

Sieghardt shoots her a look.

AADA (cont'd)
Don't look at me like that, he's been
whimpering like a babe all morn. I've
lost my patience with that one, you
deal with him.

Sieghardt sighs and then gives Aada a peck on the forehead.

SIEGHARDT
I'll fetch'em.

He heads for the home.

INT. LONGHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Sieghardt enters the house.

It's dark, no windows, illumination comes from the fire in
the center, and a small hole for the smoke ventilation.

The house is long and narrow, a central corridor runs the
length of it, with wooden benches for sitting along the
side.

Sieghardt walks down the corridor. He notices sunlight
coming through where it shouldn't. A portion of the roof is
BROKEN, -- COLLAPSED in.

Sieghardt frowns.

SIEGHARDT
(calling out)
Freyr.

No answer, no movement.

SIEGHARDT (cont'd)
(annoyed)
Freyr!

Slowly, FREYR, a young boy, no older than seven, emerges
from the shadows in the corner. Looks like Sieghardt, just
smaller.

Sieghardt eyes him.

SIEGHARDT (cont'd)
What's this about then?

Freyr, eyes to the floor, shrugs his shoulders.

SIEGHARDT (cont'd)
Answer me boy.

Beat.

FREYR
(softly)
I... I don't want to go.

SIEGHARDT
You don't want to go?

Freyr shakes his head.

SIEGHARDT (cont'd)
You want to shame our family?

Freyr doesn't respond.

Sieghardt grabs Freyr's face in his hand, and forces him to look up at him.

SIEGHARDT (cont'd)
You will go.
(beat)
You will pay your respect, and you
will be counted.
(beat)
Understood?

Freyr gives a nod.

Sieghardt releases his grip.

SIEGHARDT (cont'd)
No more of this.

He heads for the door.

FREYR
(quietly)
I saw it.

Sieghardt stops.

He looks back to Freyr, and then to the hole in the roof.
Eyes it for a moment, then glances back to Freyr.

SIEGHARDT
Grab your coat.

Sieghardt exits.

EXT. VILLAGE COASTLINE - DAY

The VILLAGERS stand along the edge of the water. Solemn faces, but no tears.

Three PYRES have been set up, and wrapped dead bodies are carried in by FAMILY MEMBERS and placed on each of the pyres.

Sieghardt stands with Aada, his daughters, and Freyr, watching the funeral.

The pyres are lit and flames burst forth. The wood CRACKLES and thick black smoke rises up to the sky.

INT. LARGE LONGHOUSE - NIGHT

A sort of townhall meeting has been called. A group of nearly 50 MEN are huddled around the fire. Halgard sits at a place of honor near the center. Opposite him is GRIMKIL, an elderly man of stature.

Sieghardt sits near the end, far from the fire, almost in shadow. He listens to the CROSS TALK as the men ARGUE.

The door CLANGS open. The talking ceases.

Stepping inside is a large burly man, called OTLEIV (40s). Room is made for him, and he takes a seat.

Silence for a moment.

Halgard gives a nod to Otleiv.

HALGARD
How's your boy?

OTLEIV
Alive... for now.

Beat.

HALGARD
You should be with him.

OTLEIV
(indignant)
Why?

Halgard eyes Otleiv for a moment and then turns his attention back to the center.

He stares at the fire, the men wait for him to speak. They wait a while, then...

HALGARD
Our best defense now lies in a heap.
(beat)
We all know something must be done,
we've already heard some talk. Flee
you say. Head south, and hope the
passage is clear.
(beat)
It won't be. Not with this winter.
(beat)
Others say set sail. Abandon our
livestock, our homes, and take our
chances on the waters.

Halgard shakes his head.

HALGARD (cont'd)
Long have our fathers lived under the
shadow of the dragon, and endured.
Long shall we.

BARTAL, a young man with soft features leans in.

BARTAL
The attacks are getting worse. More
frequent.

PAY, Bartal's twin brother highlights the point.

PAY
Twice in a month.

HALGARD
We can hunker down. Wait out the
winter.

BARTAL
She's getting more bold.

OTLEIV
More *desperate*. The winters have
grown harsh for Ragnarr too. No
mountain goats to eat.

GRIMKIL
Desperate... maybe, but...

They all look to the old man. He speaks softly with an unsteady voice, lacking in strength, but it carries a lot of weight.

GRIMKIL (cont'd)
... it's not the winter that drives her here.
(long beat)
She's pregnant.

Long beat.

Halgard eyes the old man.

HALGARD
You don't know that.

GRIMKIL
This is no ordinary hunger. It's grown far too great, and there's only one reason for that.

Grimkil looks to Halgard.

GRIMKIL (cont'd)
We can endure a lone wyvern.
(beat)
We can't survive a horde.

Halgard runs his fingers through his beard. Thinks Grimkil is right.

GRIMKIL (cont'd)
We have little time.

INGOLF (30s) a stern man with burn scars and a patchy beard, speaks up.

INGOLF
The javelin is in pieces. We have no weapon.

OTLEIV
So we charge up the mountain and plunge our swords in her belly while she sleeps.

INGOLF
That's certain death.

OTLEIV
Never took you for a coward.

Ingolf eyes him.

INGOLF
Nor should you.

HALGARD
Death is no more certain on the
mountain, than fleeing in this
winter.

SIEGHARDT
There might be another way.

All eyes turn to Sieghardt. The stares linger.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Bartal and Pay follow behind Halgard as he walks with horse
in tow. He's giving them their final instructions.

HALGARD
Sleep in shifts, do not take your
eyes off the mountain for a moment.

The brothers secure their packs to the horse.

HALGARD (cont'd)
Make absolutely certain she is
heading our way, before lighting the
signal.
(beat)
With any luck, she'll come soon.

Halgard gives them both a parting embrace, and the brothers
climb aboard the single horse.

HALGARD (cont'd)
Do your best to reach the post by
nightfall.

He gives the horse a smack on the rear, and the brothers
trot away.

INT. GRIMKIL'S HOUSE - DAY

A smaller house, and even darker with only candles
illuminating the room.

Grimkil holds out a jar of liquid to Halgard and Sieghardt.

GRIMKIL
Sufficiently strong, I imagine.

HALGARD
How quick?

GRIMKIL
Quick. And dragons are not scavengers. We'd have only little time.

SIEGHARDT
We could stagger the feedings. Different groups. Give us more chances.

GRIMKIL
That would require more livestock. More risk if we fail.

Halgard weighs the options.

EXT. VILLAGE TOWER - NIGHT

A new tower stands at the center of the town. A bell erected near the top.

Sieghardt stands watch, gazing out in the distance toward the mountain. Nothing but blackness out there. The sky is overcast, the stars are veiled, hard to see anything.

Halgard climbs up the tower.

HALGARD
Anything?

SIEGHARDT
Same as the other nights.

He shakes his head.

Halgard takes his place next to Sieghardt, staring out at the blackness.

HALGARD
Come on Ragnarr, come to us.

SIEGHARDT
Grimkil is worried that she's already
laid her eggs.

HALGARD
He might be right.

That hangs in the air for a moment.

HALGARD (cont'd)
Go. Go to bed. I'll take the watch.

Sieghardt shakes his head.

SIEGHARDT
It's my watch. I can't sleep anyway.

HALGARD
Oh? Troubled mind?

Sieghardt shrugs.

Halgard eyes him a moment.

HALGARD (cont'd)
A troubled mind is the burden of men.

He glances down at the homes around them.

HALGARD (cont'd)
Our minds are troubled, so theirs can
be at ease. Our restless nights, for
their rest. That's the burden we
bear, the price we pay for their
trust.
(long beat)
Do you trust me?

Sieghardt furrows his brow at the question, but doesn't
answer.

HALGARD (cont'd)
Men do foolish things when strangled
with fear. They'd take the path of
certain death, so long as it came
gently. Quietly.
(long beat)
Do you trust me?

SIEGHARDT
Yes.

And on.

And on.

Feels like forever.

Halgard scans the darkness, searching... then, there's a sound in the distance. Faint at first, but growing... building... rising... WHUMP! WHUMP! WHUMP!-- the FLAPPING of MASSIVE WINGS.

A SHEEP BLEATS, STAGGERS, and then COLLAPSES upon the hay it was eating.

Sieghardt sees it, so does Halgard.

The FLAPPING WINGS are still in the distance, but closing in.

 HALGARD (cont'd)
Hold!
 (sotto)
Too damn quick.

Waits... WHUMP! WHUMP! Closer. WHUMP! Closer. WHUMP! WHUMP!

 HALGARD (cont'd)
Now!

Sieghardt rushes with the OTHER MEN, to another pen of SHEEP. They dump a vast amount of CLEAR LIQUID onto the hay and drop it off for the starving sheep.

WHUMP! WHUMP! The FLAPPING WINGS are nearly upon them.

 HALGARD (cont'd)
DOWN!

The VILLAGERS hunker, as the BEAST soars over them. They duck, run, and hide for safety.

The faint outline of a dark SHADOWY MASS can be seen in the black sky.

Then... suddenly, it's gone. The FLAPPING WINGS grow fainter and fainter, until... they're heard no more.

The dragon is gone.

Halgard stares up in disbelief.

EXT. VILLAGE - MORNING

Snow slowly falls to the ground. The air is thick.
Confining. Muffling all sounds.

Halgard stands, the hood of his cloak pulled up, a layer of
snow collecting on top.

He's been standing for a while. Sieghardt next to him. They
stare.

On the ground before them, are a dozen DEAD SHEEP. POISONED,
and untouched by the dragon.

Halgard's jaw tightens.

INT. LARGE LONGHOUSE - NIGHT

Another night, another meeting.

No arguing this time. They all sit in silence.

Halgard rises to his feet.

HALGARD

We have no more options.

(beat)

We risked much. If we suffer another
attack we will not last the winter.

(long beat)

Fleeing is death, but you're welcome
to it. You want life, then we have
but one choice.

(beat)

We scale that mountain and slay the
beast in her den.

That hangs in the air for a long moment.

HALGARD (cont'd)

What say you?

Halgard looks around the room. His eyes find Sieghardt.

But Sieghardt, looks away.

It doesn't go unnoticed by Halgard.

INT. LONGHOUSE - EARLY MORNING

It's dark inside, the sun has not risen.

Sieghardt stuffs a PACK with various items.

Aada watches him, concern on her face.

AADA
It's early.

He nods.

SIEGHARDT
There's something that needs done
first.

Sieghardt straps on his pack and crosses to Aada. He gently kisses her.

SIEGHARDT (cont'd)
I'll be back soon.

Sieghardt moves to a bunk where Freyr is sleeping. He rubs the boy's head.

Freyr stirs. Blinks awake.

SIEGHARDT (cont'd)
Get up.
(beat)
You're coming with me.

Freyr looks at him, perplexed.

EXT. ROLLING HILLS - EARLY MORNING

Sieghardt carries Freyr on his shoulders trudging through thick powdery snow that's nearly waist deep.

Freyr holds a lantern in hand, helping illuminate the path.

EXT. HILLTOP - EARLY MORNING

Sieghardt and Freyr arrive at the top of the hill. A valley lies below them.

SIEGHARDT
Hold the light out.

Freyr complies.

SIEGHARDT (cont'd)
There. Look down there.