INTRODUCTION BY STEINGRIMUR J. PORSTEINSSON

ANONYMOUS (13TH CENTURY)
THE STORY OF AUDUNN AND THE BEAR
TRANSLATED BY G. TURVILLE-PEIRE

EINAR H. KVARAN
A DRY SPELL (1905)
TRANSLATED BY JAKOBINA JOHNSON

GUÐMUNDUR FRIDJÓNSS
ON THE OLD HAY (1909)
TRANSLATED BY MEKKIN SVEINSON PERKINS

JON TRAUSTI
WHEN I WAS ON THE FRIGATE (1910) TRANSLATED BY
ARNOLD R. TAYLOR

GUNNAR GUNNARSSON
FATHER AND SON (1916)
TRANSLATED BY PETER FOOTE

GUÐMUNDUR G. HAGALIN T
HE FOX SKIN (1923)
TRANSLATED BY MEKKIN SVEINSON PERKINS

HALLDÓR KILJAN LAXNESS
NEW ICELAND (1927) TRANSLATED BY AXEL EYBERG AND
JOHN WATKINS
There was a man called Audunn; he came of a family of the Western Firths, and was not well off. Audunn left Iceland from the Western Firths with the assistance of Thorsteinn, a substantial farmer, and of Thorir, a ship's captain, who had stayed with Thorsteinn during the winter. Audunn had been on the same farm, working for Thorir, and as his reward he got his passage to Norway under Thorir's care.

Audunn had set aside the greater part of his property, such as it was, for his mother, before he took ship, and it was determined that this should support her for three years.

Now they sailed to Norway and had a prosperous voyage, and Audunn spent the following winter with the skipper Thorir, who had a farm in Moérr. The summer after that, they sailed out to Greenland, where they stayed for the winter.

It is told that in Greenland, Audunn bought a white bear, a magnificent beast, and paid for him all he had. Next summer they returned to Norway, and their voyage was without mishap. Audunn brought his bear with him, intending to go south to Denmark to visit King Sveinn, and to present the beast to him. When he reached the south of Norway and came to the place where the King was in residence, Audunn went ashore, leading his bear, and hired lodgings.

King Haraldr was soon told that a bear had been brought to the place, a magnificent creature, belonging to an Icelander. The King immediately sent men to fetch Audunn, and when he entered the King's presence,
Audunn saluted him as was proper. The King acknowledged the salute suitably and then asked:

Is it true that you have a great treasure, a white bear?

Audunn answered and said that he had got a bear of some sort.

The King said: Will you sell him to us for the price you paid for him?

Audunn answered: I would not care to do that, my Lord.

Will you then, said the King, have me pay twice the price? That would be fairer if you gave all you had for him.

I would not care to do that, my Lord, answered Audunn, but the King said:

Will you give him to me then?

No, my Lord, answered Audunn.

The King asked: What do you mean to do with him then?--and Audunn answered: I mean to go south to Denmark and give him to King Sveinn.

Can it be that you are such a fool, said King Haraldr, that you have not heard about the war between these two countries? Or do you think your luck so good that you will be able to bring valuable possessions to Denmark, while others cannot get there unmolested, even though they have pressing business?

Audunn answered: My Lord, that is for you to decide, but I shall agree to nothing other than that which I had already planned.

Then the King said: Why should we not have it like this, that you go your own way, just as you choose, and then visit me on your way back, and tell me how King Sveinn rewards you for the bear? It may be that luck will go with you.
I will promise you to do that, said Audunn.

Audunn now followed the coast southward and eastward into the Vik, and from there to Denmark, and by that time every penny of his money had been spent, and he had to beg food for himself as well as for the bear. He called on one of King Sveinn's stewards, a man named Aki, and asked him for some provisions, both for himself and for his bear. --I intend, said he, to give the bear to King Sveinn.

Aki said that he would sell him some provisions if he liked, but Audunn answered that he had nothing to pay for them, --but yet, said he, I would like to carry out my plan, and to take the beast to the King.

Aki answered: I will supply such provisions as the two of you need until you go before the King, but in exchange I will have half the bear. You can look at it in this way: the beast will die on your hands, since you need a lot of provisions and your money is spent, and it will come to this, that you will have nothing out of the bear.

When Audunn considered this, it seemed to him that there was some truth in what the steward had said, and they agreed on these terms: he gave Aki half the bear, and the King was then to set a value on the whole.

Now they were both to visit the King, and so they did. They went into his presence and stood before his table. The King wondered who this man could be, whom he did not recognize, and then said to Audunn: Who are you?

Audunn answered: I am an Icelander, my Lord, and I came lately from Greenland, and now from Norway, intending to bring you this white bear. I gave all I had for him, but I have had a serious setback, so now I only own half of the beast. --Then Audunn told the King what had happened between him and the steward, Aki.
The King asked: Is that true, what he says, Aki?

True it is, said Aki.

The King said: And did you think it proper, seeing that I had placed you in a high position, to let and hinder a man who had taken it on himself to bring me a precious gift, for which he had given all he had? King Haraldr saw fit to let him go his way in peace, and he is no friend of ours. Think, then, how far this was honest on your part. It would be just to have you put to death, but I will not do that now; you must rather leave this land at once, and never come into my sight again. But to you, Audunn, I owe the same gratitude as if you were giving me the whole of the bear, so now stay here with me.

Audunn accepted the invitation and stayed with King Sveinn for a while.

II

After some time had passed Audunn said to the King: I desire to go away now, my Lord.

The King answered rather coldly: What do you want to do then, since you do not wish to stay with us?

Audunn answered: I wish to go south on a pilgrimage.

If you had not such a good end before you, said the King, I should be vexed at your desire to go away.

Now the King gave Audunn a large sum of silver, and he travelled south with pilgrims bound for Rome. The King arranged for his journey, asking him to visit him when he came
Audunn went on his way until he reached the city of Rome in the south. When he had stayed there as long as he wished, he turned back, and a severe illness attacked him, and he grew terribly emaciated. All the money which the King had given him for his pilgrimage was now spent, and so he took up his staff and begged his food. By now his hair had fallen out and he looked in a bad way. He got back to Denmark at Easter, and went to the place where the King was stationed. He dared not let the King see him, but stayed in a side-aisle of the church, intending to approach the King when he went to church for Nones. But when Audunn beheld the King and his courtiers splendidly arrayed, he did not dare to show himself.

When the King went to drink in his hall, Audunn ate his meal out of doors, as is the custom of Rome pilgrims, so long as they have not laid aside their staff and scrip. In the evening, when the King went to Vespers, Audunn intended to meet him, but shy as he was before, he was much more so now that the courtiers were merry with drink. As they were going back, the King noticed a man, and thought he could see that he had not the confidence to come forward and meet him. But as the courtiers walked in, the King turned back and said:

Let the man who wants to meet me come forward; I think there must be someone who does.

Then Audunn came forward and fell at the feet of the King, but the King hardly recognized him. As soon as he knew who he was, he took Audunn by the hand and welcomed him:--You have changed a lot since we met last,--he said, and then he led Audunn into the hall after him. When the courtiers saw Audunn they laughed at him, but the King said:

There is no need for you to laugh at this man, for he has provided better for his soul than you have.
The King had a bath prepared for Audunn and then gave him clothes, and now he stayed with the King.

III

It is told that one day in the spring the King invited Audunn to stay with him for good, and said he would make him his cup-bearer, and do him great honour.

Audunn answered: May God reward you, my Lord, for all the favours you would show me, but my heart is set on sailing out to Iceland.

The King said: This seems a strange choice to me,--but Audunn answered: My Lord, I cannot bear to think that I should be enjoying high honour here with you, while my mother is living the life of a beggar out in Iceland. For by now, all that I contributed for her subsistence before I left Iceland, has been used up.

The King answered: That is well spoken and like a man, and good fortune will go with you. This was the one reason for your departure which would not have offended me. So stay with me until the ships are made ready for sea.--And this Audunn did.

One day towards the end of spring King Sveinn walked down to the quay, where men were getting ships ready to sail to various lands, to the Baltic lands and Germany, to Sweden and Norway. The King and Audunn came to a fine vessel, and there were some men busy fitting her out. The King asked:

How do you like this ship, Audunn?

Audunn answered: I like her well, my Lord.

The King said: I will give you this ship and reward you for the white bear.
Audunn thanked the King for his gift as well as he knew how.

After a time, when the ship was quite ready to sail, King Sveinn said to Audunn:

If you wish to go now, I shall not hinder you, but I have heard that you are badly off for harbours in your country, and that there are many shelterless coasts, dangerous to shipping. Now, supposing you are wrecked, and lose your ship and your goods, there will be little to show that you have visited King Sveinn and brought him a precious gift.

Then the King handed him a leather purse full of silver: You will not be altogether penniless, said he, even if you wreck your ship, so long as you can hold on to this. But yet it may be, said the King, that you will lose this money, and then it will be of little use to you that you have been to see King Sveinn and given him a precious gift.

Then the King drew a ring from his arm and gave it to Audunn, saying: Even if it turns out so badly that you wreck your ship and lose your money, you will still not be a pauper if you reach land, for many men have gold about them in a shipwreck, and if you keep this ring there will be something to show that you have been to see King Sveinn. But I will give you this advice, said the King, do not give this ring away, unless you should feel yourself so much indebted to some distinguished man--then give the ring to him, for it is a fitting gift for a man of rank. And now farewell.

IV

After this Audunn put to sea and made Norway, and had his merchandise brought ashore, and that was a more laborious task than it had been last time he was in Norway. Then he went into the presence of King Haraldr,
wishing to fulfil the promise he had given him before he went to Denmark. Audunn gave the King a friendly greeting, which he accepted warmly.

Sit down, said the King, and drink with us, and so Audunn did. Then King Haraldr asked: What reward did King Sveinn give you for the bear?

Audunn answered: This, my Lord, that he accepted him from me.

I would have given you that, said the King, but what else did he give you?

Audunn said: He gave me silver to make a pilgrimage to Rome, but King Haraldr said:

King Sveinn gives many people silver for pilgrimages and for other things, even if they do not bring him valuable gifts. What more did he do for you?

He offered to make me his cup-bearer and to give me great honours.

That was a good offer, said the King, but he must have given you still more.

Audunn said: He gave me a merchantman with a cargo of wares most profitable for the Norway trade.

That was generous, said the King, but I would have rewarded you as well as that. Did he give you anything else?

Audunn said: He gave me a leather purse full of silver, and said that I would still not be penniless if I kept it, even if my ship were wrecked off Iceland.

The King said: That was magnificent, and more than I should have done. I would have thought my debt discharged if I had given you the ship. Did he give you anything else?
Certainly he gave me something else, my Lord, said Audunn; he gave me this ring which I am wearing on my arm, and said that I might chance to lose all my property, and yet not be destitute if I had this ring. But he advised me not to part with it unless I were under such an obligation to some noble man that I wished to give it to him. And now I have come to the right man, for it was in your power to take from me both my bear and my life, but you allowed me to go to Denmark in peace when others could not go there.

The King received the gift graciously and gave Audunn fine presents in exchange before they parted. Audunn laid out his merchandise on his voyage to Iceland, and sailed out that same summer, and people thought him the luckiest of men.

From this man Audunn was descended Thorsteinn Gyduson. [Footnote: Thorsteinn Gyduson was drowned in the year 1190. Unless interpolated, the allusion to him shows that the story was written after that date.]