

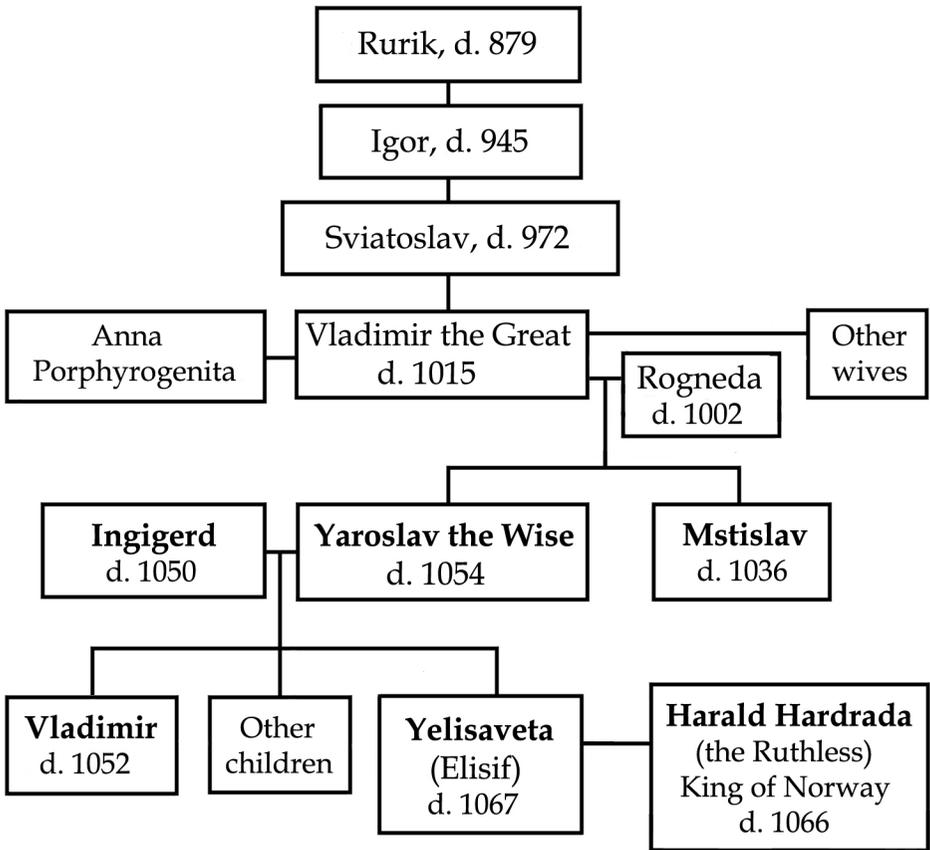
the
ice queen



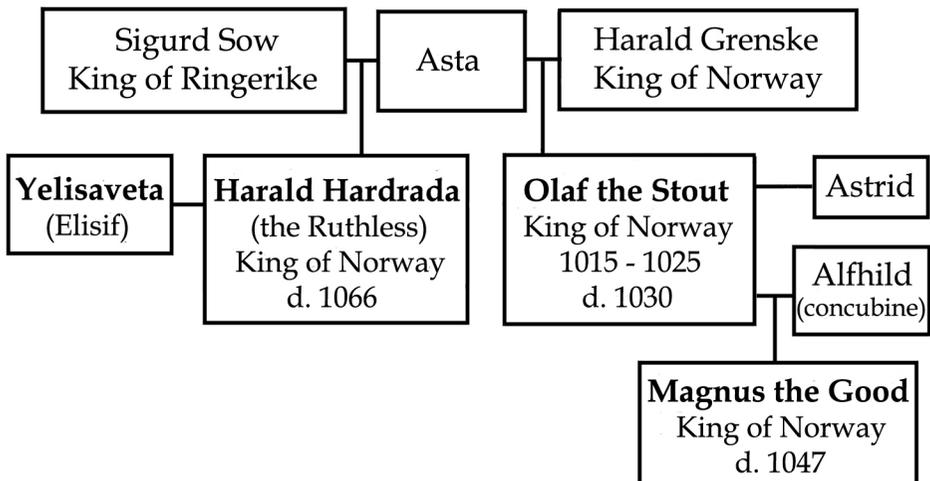
The Viking World



Genealogy of the House of Rurik (simplified)



Royal Family of Norway (simplified)



Cast of Characters

Churillo Igorevich: Putscha's dead father

Dag Ringsson: a Norwegian noble, Harald's mentor

Dmitri: priest, chaplain and tutor in Yaroslav's household

Dyuk Osipovich: mayor of Novgorod

Eilif: Jarl Ragnvald's son, commander of Yaroslav's *druzhina*

Einar Tree-Foot: an old Jomsviking, Odd's companion

Eustaxi: Mstislav's son Feodosy: abbot of the Caves Monastery

Harald Sigurdsson (later called "Hardrada/ The Ruthless"): a
prince of Norway, half-brother of Saint Olaf

Ingigerd: Yaroslav's wife

Kalv Arnesson: a Norwegian jarl

Kuchug: Mstislav's bodyguard

Leonidas: a Greek sea captain enslaved with Odd

Lyudmila: Putscha's mother

Magnus (later called "The Good"): a prince of Norway, the son
of Saint Olaf and a concubine and foster son of Yaroslav

Mstislav Vladimirovich: Prince of Chernigov, Yaroslav's brother

Murad: a Turkish slave dealer

Nenilushka: Putscha's daughter

Olaf "The Stout": King of Norway, later canonized

Putscha: Ingigerd's dwarf

Ragnvald: jarl of Aldeigjuborg, cousin of Ingigerd

Stavko Ulanovich: a Rus slave dealer

Teit Isleifsson: deacon, later priest, of the cathedral at Skalholt
in Iceland

Thordis: nursemaid to Yaroslav's children

Tyrakh: khan of the Pechenegs

Ulf Ospaksson: a Varangian Guardsman

Vladimir (Volodya) Yaroslavich: son of Yaroslav and Ingigerd

Vorobey: a holy man in Yaroslav's household

Vyshata Ostromirovich: a Rus boyar

Yaroslav Vladimirovich "The Wise": Prince of Novgorod, later
Grand Prince of Kievan Rus.

Yefrem: bishop of Novgorod

Yelisaveta Yaroslavna (Elisif in Norse): daughter of Yaroslav
and Ingigerd

Yngvar: a Swedish adventurer, Ingigerd's nephew

PROLOGUE

Here begins the second book in the saga of Odd Tangle-Hair.

A year ago, Bishop Isleif, my father, brought me to the old heathen's tumbledown farmhouse to record his reminiscences of young Prince Harald, who, as all the world knows, became king of Norway and has been dead now for over a decade. Odd, so he says, served the prince as his skald in Gardariki and in Golden Miklagard when they were both young men. But, of course, the fellow is boastful. How much of anything he says can be believed? What is certain is that he returned to Iceland after an absence of forty-some years—old, ragged and emaciated. Since then he has spoken to no one, though his neighbors whisper that he has a fortune buried under his floor and that he worships demons, as his father once did.

The result of this visit was that I, who recoiled even from the heathen's shadow, was forced to spend seventeen days and nights alone with him, scribbling madly to record the details of his bloody and godless life. At last, fearing for my sanity, I fled the house while Odd lay sick and delirious with fever. But by then he had worked his deviltry on me. I fell prey to dreams of battle and lust, and to deadly curiosity about forbidden things. I saw myself caught in the web of that man's life, with all its carnage, lewdness, and idolatry—at once repulsive and alluring.

Now, once again, I am ordered by my kindly, unsuspecting father (who is about to depart for Rome) to return and, if the old hermit is still alive, to hear more of his saga.

I am sorry to say that he seems to have recovered his health. This

morning he took my arm and drew me into his dusky hall. The man resembles his house: weather-beaten, un-cared for, squat, broad-shouldered, ruinous in places but still solidly founded.

Without preamble, he has sat me down firmly on the bench and has begun a great bustle of unrolling my bundle of second-quality parchment on the table, mixing my ink, and trimming my quill for me—all done with a practiced hand. While he is thus occupied, I recall to mind the events which have brought us to this point in his saga.

In the year A. D. 1029, Odd was a youth of sixteen. His father, Black Thorvald, a gloomy, soul-sick man, had filled the boy's head full of ancient poetry, rune-lore, and tales of Odin, Thor and the other demons of old. As the result of a brawl at a stallion fight, Odd's family found themselves at feud. Their enemies attacked and only Odd escaped from their flaming house—the very one in whose ruins we sit now—and fled Iceland in a stolen ship to seek his fortune as a viking. His chief companions were young Kalf Slender-Leg (a good Christian boy who nevertheless was devoted to Odd) and Stig No-One's Son, a rootless vagabond who taught Odd the art of seamanship and became something of a father to him.

But this Odd Thorvaldsson is, by his own admission, a man of dark moods and uncontroable rages, who cannot keep friends for long.

Arriving in Norway, they found themselves in the midst of civil war. Blessed King Olaf was fighting to regain his throne and convert the heathens, who were still thick in the land. Kalf chose the better side, Odd the worse, and there was a painful break between them.

The following Spring, Odd and Stig and their shipmates sailed out to go a-viking in the Varangian Sea. Along the way, they were joined by a bloody old heathen, Einar Tree-Foot—a man who had lost a leg, an eye, and a hand in the wars of his viking youth. He promised to guide Odd and his crew to riches; instead, they were captured and enslaved by the barbarous Finns. At last, Odd was able to rescue his men and escape with a casket of stolen silver—oh, he is clever and brave—that must be admitted. Well, he's an Icelander, isn't he? But again, as so often before, his wild temper threw away what his shrewd head had won.

Their ship was dismasted by a storm and their hard-won silver washed overboard. On Einar's advice they decided to make for Aldeigjuborg on the shore of Lake Ladoga where they could lay over for the winter. As they toiled at the oars, rowing slowly up the Neva, they were overtaken

by a large and splendid dragon ship, which bore down on them as if to sink them if they didn't steer out of its path. Standing in its prow was none other than Prince Harald, Saint Olaf's brother—the very man whose story I was sent here to collect from Odd's lips. A wise captain would have given way. Not Odd. Stubbornly, he held his course steady, despite Stig's countermanding order. At the last moment, the men obeyed Stig and a collision was averted. In a fury Odd flung himself on his old mentor and Stig knocked him down. When his anger had cooled, Odd knew he had been in the wrong—for he isn't a stupid man, far from it, and somewhere in his shaggy chest there lurks a good heart, if he would only listen to it more often. But now there was a wall of hate between these two old friends, which neither seemed able to cross. It was a pitiful and divided crew that finally docked in Aldeigjuborg's harbor.

That day Odd encountered Harald and his men in the street and a fight was narrowly averted by the smooth-tongued courtier, Dag Hringsson. He invited Odd to dine with them that night in the hall of Jarl Ragnvald, governor of the town. There, Odd learned that Harald was on his way to Novgorod to enlist in the retinue of Prince Yaroslav the Wise and his consort Princess Ingigerd. The princess, however, dreaded his arrival and would do anything in her power to prevent it. Odd and Harald discovered a mutual love of poetry, and Harald ended by enrolling Odd in his band as his personal skald.

The next day, however, Odd was approached by the slave dealer, Stavko Ulanovich, who handed him a purse of gold—a bribe from Jarl Ragnvald, on behalf of his cousin Princess Ingigerd, to spy on Harald and, if possible, to assassinate him. Both sides, Odd tells us, thought that they owned his allegiance. In fact, neither did.

Odd has arranged my writing materials on the table, with candles all around to ease my eyes. He has tossed off two or three horns of ale. (I have brought a barrel of it with me.) He has begun to pace to and fro as the words pour out. I am his prisoner again, or, to speak more truly, his prisoner still, for the intervening six months have vanished. I know he will mock my Faith. I know he will stir and tempt me into seeing the world through his eyes. I know all this and yet I cannot resist him. Again he wraps me in the web of his life, making me go where he leads, while my quill scratches furiously on the page as though Satan himself were guiding my hand.

With these words Odd Tangle-Hair takes up his saga...



1

A TOUCHING FAMILY SCENE

The fever that I had felt coming on struck me with full force around evening on the day that I parted from my crew. First I was burning hot and soaked with floods of perspiration. On the fourth day came an ague in which my limbs trembled and my teeth chattered with cold. Following this, the fever returned and continued to alternate with chills every fourth day. All in all, I was desperately sick with this quartan fever for nearly a month. My nineteenth birthday came and went while I tossed in delirium.

Unluckily for me, Jarl Ragnvald owned a Greek physician of whom he was very proud—one of those frauds whose entire art consists in draining a man of his blood just when he needs it most. The leeching alone would soon have killed me if I had not finally thrown off the fever by myself.

When at last my sight cleared, it was to behold the Jarl's face--cold-eyed and wry-mouthed.

He was vexed. I was not earning my twelve golden ounces lying sick abed in Aldeigjuborg. He informed me that Harald and Dag, despairing of my life, had gone on to Novgorod weeks ago. "Your man here, the cripple, will feed you and clean you up. He hasn't left your side these twenty days. I swear he has a stronger stomach than I."

I lay naked on a bed of rotting straw in a tiny, airless cell in the loft of his hall. A stench of sweat and urine invaded my nostrils; it was coming from me.

"He isn't my `man'," I answered weakly, "he's a warrior of the olden time and a shipmate of mine."

"If you had a ship," Ragnvald sneered.

"You've had rough weather, Captain, but you're topside-up again now." Einar Tree-Foot's face swam within my view. "I told that leech if you was to die I'd have a bucket of his own blood from him; he left in a hurry," the Jomsviking chuckled. "Will you drink some broth and beer?"

"With thanks, Tree-Foot. Then I want a bath and my clothes--the new ones Dag gave me--and I'll feel fit enough to travel. I'm as eager to leave this place as the Jarl is to see me go."

"As to your clothes," said Ragnvald drily, "my physician advised burning them--contaminated by the miasmatic vapors, he feared."

"By the what?"

"Hard to explain to the ordinary man."

"Yes, well just send someone to market to buy me others."

"No time for that, I'm afraid. The boat I've hired for you has already delayed as long as it can and there may not be another going up before next spring. We'll be icebound here before the month is out."

He called for a servant, who hurried in, flung a bundle of threadbare rags on the floor, and rushed out again holding his nose.

"You'll find these adequate."

How he was enjoying this! He could barely keep from smiling. He had purchased my honor, as he thought, and so could afford to humiliate me in this petty way, and, through me, Harald.

When I had eaten a little, dressed, and crept on shaking legs down the ladder to the hall, he took me aside and gave me my orders:

"You understand, it is not that infantile braggart, Harald, whom we have to fear nearly so much as Dag Hringsson, his advisor. The man was born a plotter. Likely he intends to murder Magnus and hire soldiers for a march on Norway--exactly as King Olaf himself once did. This or any other schemes that you become aware of you must instantly report either to Stavko Ulanovich or to my son, Eilif, who has the honor to be Captain of the Prince's druzhina--his hird, as we would call it in Norse; you'll pick up the lingo soon enough.

"You will also use your powers of persuasion to turn Dag and Harald aside from any such acts. And if persuasion fails--well, a skald stands closest to his lord in battle, and in the hunt, and when he sleeps, or bathes,

or dines. There are a hundred ways that death can come to a man--you wouldn't stick at that would you? Naturally, there will be more money from time to time, as long as we are satisfied with your performance. And, my friend, don't try to play a double game with us--not if you want to grow old in the enjoyment of your ill-gotten wealth."

I smiled evilly and nodded, for I imagined there was little chance of my leaving this place alive unless the jarl was perfectly sure of my obedience.

Soon afterwards, standing on Aldeigjuborg's wharf, I scanned the waterfront, searching for the Viper. But she was gone.

With a sore heart I saw her in my mind's eye plowing the white-maned sea with Stig at her helm. Einar read my thoughts and was silent for a change. Then we jumped down into the waiting boat.

The vessel was what they call a *strug* in the Slavonic tongue—a dugout, carved from a single gigantic tree trunk. This one measured some forty-five feet long and eight abeam, with room for forty rowers and much cargo. Her crew were all Slavs and only their skipper could speak a few words of bad Norse.

They were going up to Novgorod, he told me, to deliver, in addition to myself, some books and a packet of letters to Yaroslav and his consort.

For the next seven days the oarsmen toiled against the swift current of the muddy Volkhov, which links Aldeigjuborg with Novgorod, a hundred miles to the south. Lulled by the monotony of the scenery and the drone of the rowers' song, I passed most of my time asleep; though whenever I awakened, Einar was always beside me, ready with a portion of cold porridge and warm beer.

By the time we came in sight of Novgorod I was nearly my old self again and itching to use my legs.

We reached the city around dusk on a gusty late autumn day. The wind blew an icy chill off the river, but, wrapped in a fur, I stood up in the prow, eager for my first sight of the place. On my right hand, the lofty onion-domed spires of a church; on my left, five long jetties running out from the shore with ships of every size and description tied up to them. And dead ahead of us a wooden bridge, decorated, like all things in this wooden city, with fantastic carving and bright splashes of paint.

Gliding beneath the bridge, we docked beside the last of the five piers, from which a path led up to the gateway of a high stockade, built almost

on the water's edge. The skipper, gesturing, shouted: "Dvor Yaroslavl"; and seeing that I didn't comprehend, added "Knyaz!" and louder still, "knyaz, is 'prince', yes?"

Shouldering the bundle of books and letters, he scrambled onto the dock and, followed by Einar and me, marched through the gate and up a log-paved road to the house.

The Rus use the word 'dvor' for any dwelling, great or small, set within its own fenced yard. This particular yard was very big, a miniature farm really, where cattle, horses, and goats cropped the last yellowing stalks of summer grass. The house itself, set well back from the palisade, sprawled over a wide area. It was two stories high and built all of logs, except at one end where it adjoined a tall stone tower. Like most Rus houses, the ground floor was reserved for the animals and slaves. Around its second story ran a porch with ornate posts and railings, which was approached by a steep stairway.

To be truthful, these were the very first stairs I had ever encountered. Not wanting to appear a fool, I approached them with a show of confidence, determined not to look at my feet—and stumbled on the topmost step with some injury to my shin, my palms, and my pride.

Not a good omen, I thought ruefully, and covered my embarrassment with cursing.

At the top of the stairs we entered a vestibule where closed doors faced us on every side. As we stood uncertain which way to go, there reached our ears the shrill cry of young voices. Next instant, one of the side doors banged open and through it tumbled a rowdy gang of half a dozen children of both sexes and of every size from a very small boy to a willowy girl of about thirteen, who was taller by a head than all the rest. With her pointed nose and chin, and a single thick plait of yellow hair hanging to her waist, she reminded me with a sudden pang of my murdered sister, Gudrun Night-Sun—except that Gudrun was only an Iceland farm girl, while this one was nobly born, and she knew it.

"Nenilushka," said the girl, "we shall be the warriors of Rus, but you must be a Pecheneg horseman from the steppe because they are squat and ugly just like you."

The one addressed laughed idiotically, showing a jumble of teeth. I had thought her at first to be a child like the others, but at second glance saw that she was a dwarf; easily in her twenties, to judge by her face, yet

whooping and galloping about on her stumpy legs as though there were no difference at all between herself and the children.

“And you can have Magnus on your side too—he’s also a squat ugly thing.”

The others giggled.

I was curious about this Magnus Olafsson, of whom I had heard so much. I saw a pale, lank-haired boy of about eight, with arms and legs as thin as straws, who stood apart from the others, smiling hopefully. I would never in five lifetimes have guessed him to be the offspring of that blood-soaked, broad-chested, square-headed king. I recalled what Jarl Ragnvald had told me: King Olaf had visited Novgorod more than a year ago to beg money and arms for his ill-fated bid to regain the throne of Norway. He had brought with him little Magnus, his son by a concubine, and then left the child behind to be fostered by the prince and princess. Ingigerd loved the boy fiercely, excessively—as she had (perhaps?) loved his father—and she was determined to place him on the throne of Norway. Thus he stood in the path of Harald’s ambition—and, knowing Harald, I didn’t give much for the boy’s chances.

The girl went on assigning to all the children their parts, calling each by name: Volodya, a very handsome boy of ten or eleven, who even in play looked serious; and Anna, a waif of eight or nine, and the two littlest boys, both sturdy, grinning imps. They all, even Volodya, obeyed her without hesitation.

Just then, bustling through the open door, came a little, quick old woman, clutching to her bosom a very dirty baby. The baby howled and struggled to get free until she crammed a piece of honeycomb in its mouth. Still holding it, she made a lunge at one of the smaller children, then at another, and another, while they laughed and danced out of her way, singing, “Thordis, here, catch me—old Thordis, over here—!”

The laughter stopped abruptly when a pair of double doors at the farther end of the vestibule swung open. Through them strode a woman, tall and richly dressed in a wide-sleeved gown of red brocade trimmed with marten. Behind her I glimpsed part of a room and a number of men in it, all be-furred and be-jeweled, and all standing.

Old Thordis began at once to wheeze apologies: “Forgive me, Princess, they’re too much for me, they’ll kill me soon, see if they don’t.”

“Dear thing,” the other replied, “we’ve a houseful of strong young

servant girls for that—it's just your own stubbornness that keeps you at it. Here, put Vesevolod down and catch your breath."

The infant so named had by this time covered itself entirely with honey and, as it crawled about on the rush-strewn floor, picked up so much of the straw that it soon resembled a scarecrow more than a human child.

"That's better," said the princess. "And now, you—" She turned on the children and all warmth deserted her voice. "Why aren't you at your lessons?"

The others, with sheepish looks, drew closer to the girl. Except for Magnus: he crept to Ingigerd's side (for it was certainly she) and put a shy hand in hers.

"Do you know that you have interrupted a meeting of my council with your racket? So much that I and my boyars cannot hear ourselves think! You will apologize now to Nurse, and to these men"—she beckoned the grandees out of the room behind her—"and to me. Then you—Yelisaveta, Volodya, and Anna—will return to Father Dmitri and ask him to give you extra lessons tonight for a penance. And you, Nenilushka,"—addressing the dwarf girl—"go at once to your father and tell him to give you three hard blows across the back with a rod—and I will ask him later if he did."

While Yelisaveta pouted, Volodya, serious and handsome, took a step forward, bowed to the boyars, to his mother, and to Thordis, the nurse, and said in a voice that had neither pleading nor defiance in it that they should consider him alone to be the cause of the mischief and on no account blame his brothers and sisters nor, especially, the dwarf, who only did what she was told. He gave this speech first in Norse and then in Slavonic.

"Princely spoke," murmured Einar beside me.

"Aye, Tree-Foot, he'll make a king, one day."

The boyars beamed and could hardly leave off kissing the lad; and old Thordis kissed him too, though he tried to fend her off.

But Yelisaveta's eyes flashed with anger. "First of all, mother, they aren't your boyars, their father's. And second, I'll do no extra penance—living here at all is penance enough for me!"

"Little bitch!" cried Ingigerd. "You think so? I could send you somewhere to live that would be far less pleasant than this! Don't tempt me."

"You don't frighten me with that, mother. I'm already condemned to

be married—that’s all decided, isn’t it?—and so I can’t be stuck away in a convent, though I shouldn’t mind it at all if it meant never seeing you again!”

Without warning, Ingigerd struck her daughter a cracking blow across the face, then another and another, and the girl hit back wildly with her fists until young Vladimir forced himself between them. Yelisaveta was crying hysterically by now; he took her by the arm and pulled her away. The little ‘uns and the dwarf, all sniffing, followed them out, Magnus last of all.

The old nurse sighed and shook her grey head as if to convey that this strife between mother and daughter was nothing rare.

The princess, white-lipped with anger, noticed us at last, and, before I could speak, snapped, “Why d’you stand there like gaping fools! Does it take three men to carry a parcel? Put it down and get out. Here, boatman, for your trouble.”

At a sign from her, one of the boyars took a coin from his purse and tossed it at us. With that, Ingigerd turned back to the council chamber, the boyars following at her heels, and the last in line pulling the doors shut after him.

The skipper, his flat Slavic face breaking into a wide grin, exclaimed, “Wooman”, followed by the word, “knyaz!” and then a booming laugh. Pocketing the coin and still laughing and shaking his head, he sauntered out the door, leaving Einar and me alone in the empty vestibule.

“Saucy bit o’ stuff ain’t she?” remarked Einar with a twinkle in his one eye.

“What, the daughter or the mother?”

“Not them—the nurse! Did you not see her eye on me all the time? And her old enough to be a granny! Women love Einar Tree-Foot, I don’t know what it is.”

“I’m sure I don’t either. Let’s find Harald.”



After much wandering through empty rooms and corridors and inquiring of the few souls we met, only one of whom could speak intelligible Norse, we managed at last to understand that the Giant was nowhere about; that, in fact, the dvor was empty save for women and

children and the servants. Prince Yaroslav and his Swedish druzhina, five-hundred strong, plus Harald with his hundred and twenty Norwegians had marched west three weeks ago to collect tribute from the Chudian tribes. They weren't expected back before the first hard frost, in about a month.

It became obvious at the same time that no one had the least idea who we were. However, we made ourselves at home, scavenging for food in the kitchen and stowing our few belongings in an empty room.

Presently we heard the boyars bid a noisy farewell to their princess and gallop off to their own dvors. We saw no more that night of the High and Mighty Ingigerd or her affectionate daughter.