There was a man named Audun, from the Westfjords, and of little means. He boarded with and worked for a man named Thorstein who was his kinsman. One summer a ship from Norway put into Vadil.1 The captain, Thorir, lodged with Thorstein because that was the best place to stay. Audun provided the captain with good advice and sold his wares for him to people whom he knew to have good credit. The captain offered to repay him for his assistance, and Audun chose to go abroad with him. Thorir said he was entitled to passage on his ship.

Audun told Thorstein his plans, saying that he would have nearly exactly enough—once he sold his sheep to provide for his mother’s support—to have three marks of silver left over. Audun intended her to be maintained at Thorstein’s for three years.

Thorstein said he was likely to have good luck.

Audun went abroad with Thorir toward the end of summer, and after they crossed the sea Thorir invited him to lodge with him in More2 where he owned a farm, a fine place. Thorir asked Audun what plans he had, “but first I’ll let you know what I’m going to do. I’m heading for Greenland and you are more than entitled to come with me.” Audun said he would.

The next summer they voyaged to Greenland and put into Eiriks-fjord. The wealthier passengers took lodging there, but the others sailed further on to the Western Settlement. That’s what Audun did and he found a place to stay there.

A Greenlandic hunter named Eirik had caught a polar bear, exceptionally beautiful, with red cheeks. When Audun found out, he offered to buy the animal. The hunter told him it wasn’t prudent for him to give everything he had for the bear: “I know that you’ve just exactly enough.”

Audun said he didn’t care and bought the animal giving everything he had for it.

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1 At Bardarstrand in the Westfjords of Iceland.
2 A region on the west coast of Norway to the north of Hordaland.
He then returned to Norway with Thorir, who invited him to stay with him again. But Audun said he would take passage on a cargo ship south to Denmark to meet King Svein Ulfsson and give him the animal.

Thorir said that it was very risky traveling with such a treasure given the great war between King Harald and King Svein.³

Audun headed south to Hordaland.⁴ King Harald happened to be there at a feast. The king was informed that a bear, a real treasure, had just arrived. He sent for its owner.

Audun went to meet the king and greeted him. The king accepted his greeting and said, “Have you a great treasure?”

Audun answered that he did have a treasure, a bear.

“Will you sell it to me for the same price you bought it for?”

He said he wouldn’t.

The king said, “That wasn’t a proper offer. Will you sell it for twice the price you bought it for? Then you’d make a profit, which is fitting since, as you say, you gave everything you had for it.”

Audun said he wouldn’t.

The king said, “Will you give it to me then?”

Audun said that he was not going to.

The king asked what he wanted to do with the bear.

Audun said, “I am planning to go south to Denmark to give it to King Svein.”

King Harald said, “Can you be so stupid a man that you know nothing about the war going on between our countries? Or do you think that your luck is so much greater than anyone else’s that you can travel with such a treasure where others who’ve done no harm can scarcely travel empty-handed?”

Audun said, “My journey is now in your control. Yes, I have often heard about the strife between you and King Svein, but maybe I won’t be harmed.”

The king said, “I think it makes sense to let you continue on your way. Maybe you’ll be a lucky man. But I want your commitment to give me an account of your journey.”

Audun promised to do so.

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³ On the identity of the kings, see p. 15.
⁴ A region on the west coast of Norway in which Bergen is located.