Audun is unthreatening to the kings and no small portion of his luck seems to be owing to that. His luck can thus be counted a virtue by the kings and by himself as well. His luck makes him rich, which remember, is what the word *auð*, the first element of his name, also meant. Under other circumstances, his wealth, his good luck that is, could have, with the slightest twist in the eye of a Harald, been the cause of bad luck. He might not have been as ignorable if he had stuck around, rich. It might have been a good thing he headed back to Iceland, hearing his mother calling, when he did.

When a king makes someone rich or raises someone from low to high estate he may expect loyalty but get rather more than he bargained for. The upstart might become so wealthy as to show the king up; he might be able to afford a body of retainers more numerous than the king can afford, as did Thorolf Kveldulfsson in *Egils saga* to his ultimate misfortune, or he might press his luck in smaller ways, as Aki did, and get dismissed into the darkness after having been raised up into the light. Raising up a poor Icelander is a pretty low-risk way to show your generosity and obviously, as we will discuss under a different heading below, princes cannot repay everyone as richly as they paid Audun or they would soon be paupers. To give well to an occasional Audun, they have also to know how to receive; more precisely, they have to know how to *take* better than they know how to give, or they will not have the wherewithal to put on occasional large shows of magnanimity that will generate good stories and engender a reputation for generosity, if not the virtue itself.

Would Audun’s luck have continued to serve him had he stayed in Norway, rich, right under Harald’s nose? Would Harald have been able to resist plucking him bare? Consider this rather grim object les-

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1 Much of *Sturlunga saga* shows chieftains and powerful men fleeing poorly defended wealthy farmers, especially by a strategy of supporting doubtful inheritance claims to their estates (e.g., *Sturlu saga*, chs 15–19, 28, 30ff; *Guðmundar saga dýra*, chs 1–3 *Helgastaðmál; Islendinga saga*, chs 16, 34, in *Sturlunga saga*, 1:229–534, trans. McGrew and Thomas, 1:115–447); but also by forced marriage, by selling protection and other strong-arm tactics (e.g., *Laxdæla saga*, ch. 16; *Guðmundar saga dýra*, ch. 9).
son about the risks of being of low standing and acquiring substantial wealth; it merits a fairly circumstantial account to show what allowances were extended Audun because of his charm, and because he did not stay long enough for his charm to grow stale.\(^2\)

King Harald was paying various visits to feasts in the Upplond region, in effect collecting rents by eating them \textit{in situ}. Attending feasts, visiting people with a hundred armed friends, was one of the ways early medieval kings, and clearly Norwegian kings, collected what we might call rents and taxes, but these rents and taxes were subsumed under the norms of hospitality, using the idiom of gift-exchange that figures as the central theme of our story. The king showed up and ate his host nearly out of house and home and moved on. This way he could keep tabs on the rich and drain their resources.\(^3\) He did not give much advance warning because his visits were also meant moderately to terrorize the big men of the provinces into not getting too many ideas of independence; there was thus an advantage to be had in making visits somewhat randomly. Feasts usually went off as what they purported to be: feasts. But the expense was substantial and there was often a touch of intimidation lurking in them.

The story takes up with Harald making his gastronomical rounds:

There was a man named Ulf the Wealthy. He owned fourteen or fifteen farms. His wife asked him to invite the king to a feast and said that it would be a more appealing prospect than to be plundered by the king.\(^4\)

Ulf’s wife has no illusions that some of Ulf’s wealth will have to be shared with the king, especially given his unfortunate nickname; she just thinks it best to have it shared cloaked in the forms of conviviality. The king is going to get his cut in any event. So why not euphemize the transfer of wealth as hospitality, vaguely making it look less involuntary and more gracious than it may in fact be, rather than suffering a transfer that is openly confiscatory with nothing voluntary about it,