

THE SUNSTONE

by

Curt Butler

Original Story

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FADE IN:

The year is 928 AD, towards the end of days of the Norwegian King Harald Halfdansson, known as "Harald Fairhair."

TWO RIVERS FLOW WEST TO THE FJORDS; THE SURNADAL (NORTH) AND TINGVOLL (SOUTH), THAT SURROUND THE SURNADAL PLATEAU.

On a bluff overlooking Tingvoll Fjord, the Thorgaard family farm longhouse rests, a blacksmith shed stands nearby.

EXT. TINGVOLL FJORD - A ROCKY BEACH - DAY

BJORN THORGAARD (38), a Brut of a man, with unruly red hair and matching beard, wears the woolen cobalt blue overtunic of the clan and baggy trousers tucked into his furry boots.

Unmistakably, a Viking Chieftain a man to be revered. It was told twelve men fell at his heel on campaigns in the Isles.

- Three longboats are being prepared by several men, b.g.

Björn enters the rocky beach from the bluff above, waives at his younger brother Magnús.

BJÖRN

Magnús pass the word; we'll sail on the morning tide in three days.

MAGNÚS

Ja, the counsel has at last spoken. Have you been watching the skies?

BJÖRN

Ja!

MAGNÚS

What do you make of it?

BJÖRN

Thor will visit tonight. The cloud formations remind me of the great storm from my youth.

MAGNÚS

Tell me again about that day?

BJÖRN

Thor was angry, casting spears of fire on the earth. The winds howled like a pack of wolves and the water flooded the lands, and many died.

MAGNÚS

Grandfather Olaf, carved runes onto stones telling of that event.

BJÖRN

Olaf was a great Chieftain. When he returned from campaign he found his wife had died. He never recovered.

MAGNÚS

Should we move the boats up higher?

BJÖRN

Higher ground is safer ground.

MAGNÚS

We're almost done here for the day. I'll see to the boats before I go.

BJÖRN

Good! And see to your longhouse and family. Pray that Odin stops Thor.

Björn heads up the footpath for home -

EXT. BJÖRN THORGAARD FARM - OPEN PASTURELAND - DAY

He views his longhouse on a higher bluff to the south. See's his wife DOROTHEA and daughter ARNPORA, herding cattle into the barn. A CLAP of lightning is followed by a cloudburst.

Arnpora spots her father and begins running toward him.

ARNPORA

Father... father...

BJÖRN

Arnpora, my lovely, run to papa.

She leaps into Björn's arms, swinging her round 'n round.

ARNPORA

Mama say's the God Thor threatens.

ARNPORA (15), an athletic build with golden hair braided in tails. Her dimpled cheeks the color of pale roses, gifting others with her endearing smile.

A chieftain's daughter, she trains for title of shieldmaiden at age 16; and, ultimately, Viking warrior at age 18.

BJÖRN  
Mama's right, Thor visits tonight.

They enter the barn side of the longhouse, as Björn's woman has just finishing herding the cattle blocking them inside.

BJÖRN  
I was hopeful of returning from the Althingi, to save you this labor.

DOROTHEA (32), her once blonde hair now graying, making her appear older than her years, for once had many suitors.

DOROTHEA  
It's done now, with Arnpora's help.

Smiling broadly, she looks at her father for his approval.

DOROTHEA (CONT'D)  
Did the counsel come to decision on the campaign this year?

BJÖRN  
That can wait until dinner is over.

DOROTHEA  
It's ready soon. Arnpora come with me, your father can finish-up here.

INT. BJÖRN THORGAARD LONGHOUSE - NIGHT

The evening meal finished, Björn begins to speak...

BJÖRN  
The Althingi counsel voted to sail in three days. A fleet will gather at the Shetland's.

DOROTHEA  
Will all your boats take part?

BJÖRN  
Magnús and the men are now working to make all three seaworthy.

DOROTHEA  
Who will command the other boats?

BJÖRN  
Magnús man's one, Gunnar the other.

Dorothea frowns, as Arnpora quietly listens.

DOROTHEA  
Why Gunnar?

Björn flashes a stern look at Dorothea.

BJÖRN  
Because he is capable, woman!

Dinner over, table cleared, a mug of grog set before Björn.

BJORN (CONT'D)  
Remember the Viking code? "A Viking warrior in peril aids another at risk of his own life."

ARNPORA  
You've told me that one many times.

BJÖRN  
So you won't forget.

Reaches in his pocket, removes and unfolds a reindeer skin.

ARNPORA  
The SUNSTONE! It's beautiful. Show me father, show me how it works.

DOROTHEA  
Arnpora, these are not things women need to know.

BJÖRN  
Ja, so you want to learn the magic of the sunstone?

ARNPORA  
Please father, teach me.

Björn glances toward Dorothea, ignoring, she turns her back. He peers through the crystal at the candle on the table.

BJÖRN  
Look through the crystal Arnpora, what do you see?

She holds the crystal to her eye peering at the candle.

ARNPORA  
Double! The candle burns double.

BJÖRN  
Yes, two beams of light. Now watch.

He lays the stone on the table, placing his knife behind it. The candle reflects light beams on the knife's shiny blade.

BJÖRN (CONT'D)

How many light beams do you see?

ARNPORA

Two.

Björn slowly rotate the stone until the candle beams align.

BJÖRN (CONT'D)

How many do you see now?

ARNPORA

One.

BJÖRN

Right. Pretend this candle were the sun, but can't see it because the sky is covered by thick clouds, or heavy fog. Could you still find it?

ARNPORA

I don't know?

Björn picks-up the crystal turning his back to the room.

BJÖRN

Place the candle out of my view.

She walks several paces hiding the candle from view. The dim glow faintly lights-up walls, beams, and thatched roof.

Turning to face a dimly lit interior; at arms length rotates it, back and forth, to locate the exact point of the flame. Content he sticks his knife into the table beyond the stone.

Hands a twine ending to Arnpora, with the twine ball in-hand he unravels it standing over the candle's flame at his feet.

BJÖRN

Now, pull it tight over the stone.

She does as instructed while Björn stands directly over the candle's flame pulling the twine taut.

BJÖRN (CONT'D)

Where are the twine and the knife?

ARNPORA

Touching!

BJÖRN

Magic! Even if the sun had already moved below the horizon, with only faint light, its position not lost.

Dorothea returns having finishes her after dinner chores.

DOROTHEA

Arnpora, it is beyond your bedtime.

ARNPORA

Father, may I take the sunstone to bed with me, please.

Björn looks at Dorothea who approvingly nods.

ARNPORA

Yes!

DOROTHEA

Now give your father a kiss, and off you go.

Outside the winds howl like a pack of wolves, ripping at the thatched roof like flesh torn from a carcass. There's a clap of lightning, waiting on the thunder the downpour continues.

INT. LONGHOUSE - NIGHT

The cattle are stirring in the barn, lowing and bellowing. A CREAKING is heard, as beams start to SWAY, a RUMBLING begins VIBRATING the floors, ground shifts. Arnpora sits upright...

SCREAMS -

SMASH CUT:

EXT. LONGHOUSE - NIGHT

The bluff that supports the longhouse suddenly collapses, as the landmass slides toward the fjord below.

EXT. TINGVOLL FJORD - COLLAPSED LANDMASS - DAY

Crowds of Surnadalfolk are searching through mud and debris from the collapsed bluff.

Magnús steps around a dead bovine, as many animals struggle with entrapment. He calls out...

MAGNUS

Björn... Dorothea... hej Björn!

The men are spread out across the loosened mass of displaced earth. They call out, then stop and listen for any sounds.

HALLGRIM, a searcher listens, hearing something he waives...

HALLGRIM

Over here... quickly... over here!

Several men rush to Halgrim's side where he points...

HALLGRIM (CONT'D)

There, there is someone there. Help me move this beam.

Magnús and the others wrestle with a broken support beam, as Hallgrim reaches into the earth pulling on the ankle of...

Arnpora MOANING -

Covered head to toe with blackened earth she's alive.

The search continues all day, as nightfall nears the bodies of Björn and Dorothea are found still clutching one another.

EXT. TINGVOLL FJORD - ROCKY BEACH - DAY

**TWO DAYS TO VOYAGE -**

The Surnadalfolk watch the bodies of their Chieftain Bjorn and wife Dorothea, placed side-by-side atop his longboat.

Arnpora stands aside her uncle Magnús clutching her Dalahäst (carved wooden horse) under one arm, her other hand tightly grips the sunstone in her pocket.

Words of praise are spoken -

NÓRI

Why has Gunnar not spoken of Bjorn?

MAGNÚS

Gunnar begrudges him since Dorothea chose Bjorn to wed.

The fjord's waters begin to ebb, as Bjorn's longboat slowly drifts toward the mouth of the fjord.



MAGNÚS (CONT'D)

Ignore him! Honor your uncle, Nóri.

Nóri dips an arrow point in pitch then into flame, lighting it. Slowly draws his bow, adjusts height, and let's it fly.

The burning longboat is swept by the outflow of tides toward the open sea, as the sun slowly sinks into the ocean beyond.

EXT. SURNADAL MARKETPLACE - MENFOLKS ARENA - DAY

**ONE DAY TO VOYAGE -**

A meeting of the Surnadal Counsel is taking place, presided over by DANELÍUS (50), a Chieftain of the Althingi Counsel.

DANELÍUS

Magnús Thorgaard stands before you, brother of Björn; their father and grandfather were both Chieftains.

Assuming a quick decision raises a hand to quiet the crowd.

DANELÍUS (CONT'D)

Now let there be heard from any man opposed to Magnús Thorgaard, as the chosen Surnadal Chieftain?

GUNNAR ÁSKETILL (35), a large man with blond hair, flashing blue eyes, who moves with a swagger in his gait.

GUNNAR

Nej! The strength and courage of a Chieftain does not favor Magnús.

A GRUMBLING is heard of menfolk surrounding Magnús, staring in anger at Gunnar, surrounded by family and friends.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Magnús is a cleaver one, but lacks leadership. The Surnadalfolk would best be served by his counsel.

The grumbling becomes louder, a RATTLING of metal is heard, as both camps stare across a bonfire at each other.

DANELÍUS

Who speaks for Gunar's challenge to Magnús, as your Chieftain?

A roar of approval rises from the men who surround Gunnar, as some weapons are unsheathed.

A chant of disapproval begins from those men who surround Magnús, as swords are drawn.

DANELÍUS

Are there any others here, who need to be heard?

The Chieftain glances around the bonfire. No one speaks.

DANELÍUS (CONT'D)

Then we shall put it to a vote. The winner must exceed the other by ten heads to be declared Chieftain.

He waves a hand at men standing apart from opposing camps.

DANELÍUS (CONT'D)

Cast your vote by standing with the man you favor.

The uncommitted stir about, uncertain and adrift; speaking to one another, before moving to stand with their choice.

The heads tallied and numbers given Danelíus by his second.

DANELÍUS (CONT'D)

The headcount has Magnús eight more than Gunnar. Two heads shy! Gunnar, will have his choice of weapons.

Sizing-up Magnús across the bonfire, his sword held at his side, raising it above his head, as his clan loudly cheers.

All eyes are on Magnús -

MAGNÚS

Hear me brothers! Björn Thorgaard, was your Chieftain, our father Nils and Grandfather Olaf, before him were Chieftains.

Magnús draws and raises his sword above his head, followed by a huge cheer from the crowd gathered around him.

He looks across the bonfire at Gunnar, then at Danelíus, and back at Gunnar... tossing his sword on the ground.

The crowd stunned -

MAGNÚS (CONT'D)

No blood shall be shed here today! My honor is not at stake; security of the Surnadalfolk is... I accept Gunnar Ásketill, as my Chieftain.

Silence has turned to GRUMBLING, the word coward is heard.  
Magnús unarmed embraces Gunnar, as a show of his loyalty.

EXT. TINGVOLL FJORD - ROCKY BEACHFRONT - DAY

The two rival bands now joined under their chieftain Gunnar,  
board the two remaining boats, now the property of Arnpora.

TWENTY-SEVER WARRIORS ARE ASSIGNED EACH LONGBOAT, CONSISTING  
OF: 24-OARSMAN, 2-TILLERMAN, AND THE CAPTAIN -

Both, Gunnar and Magnús supervise loading of their boats, as  
each warrior boards his shield is hung from the gunwale.

Arnpora, helps her uncle with boarding assignments. Gunnar's  
boat is nearly loaded, when he exclaims...

GUNNAR

We're missing an oarsman?

Gunnar looks about at those who've gathered along the shore.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Are there any among you that would  
volunteer to pull an oar?

No one speaks -

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Surely, there must be one among you  
who has dreams of becoming wealthy?

A voice speaks-up, it's...

ARNPORA

Ja! I volunteer to pull your oar.

MAGNÚS

Arnpora Nej! You gain nothing, but  
risk everything by joining. You are  
already a 50% benefactor!

GUNNAR

How old are you lass?

ARNPORA

Fifteen!

MAGNÚS

That solves it, Arnpora is not yet  
of "shieldmaiden" age!

GUNNAR

She's a chieftain's daughter, who  
it's said, had a brave heart.

MAGNÚS

If she goes, she sails aboard with  
me. Pick one of ours to join you.

ARNPORA

Nej Uncle! I will voyage under the  
command of Gunnar.

GUNNAR

Then it is done. Get aboard lass.

Grabbing her weapons and gear, she climbs aboard placing her  
shield on the gunwale and takes up her oar.

The boats launch and the rowers synchronize their oars, as a  
rhythmic CHANTING is heard across the fjord.

EXT. NORTH SEA - DAY

The boats proceed across Open Ocean staying within shouting  
range. Gunnar leads navigating a length ahead while half the  
oarsmen complete their 1000 strokes, the other half rests.

As they proceed southeast, the skies begin to cloud over.

Seated in the last row during her rest period, Arnpora takes  
sightings with the sunstone, unbeknown to the others aboard.

Arnpora and Magnús are retaining intermittent eye contact.

ARNPORA

(\*shaking\*, her head)

She takes a final sighting after sunset, confirming that if  
they stay the course, they'll miss the Shetland Isles.

ARNPORA

(\*shaking\*, her head; signals  
with her hand, bare more left)

Arnpora's hand signals understood, Magnús shouts...

MAGNÚS

GUNNAR! Adjust your heading, you're  
too far right.

GUNNAR

What?

MAGNÚS

Too far right... you're off course,  
too far right.

At arms length Gunnar places a thumb on a bright star on the horizon, spreads his fingers noting his boats bow position.

GUNNAR

Nej! Steady Magnús... we're on the  
right course.

Arnpora, SHAKES her head -

The wind begins increasing, swells rise to 12'. In complete darkness, sails down, 48 oarsmen fight to steer the course.

By daybreak the winds near hurricane strength the 20' waves, whitecap. Running dangerously close to the wind, Arnpora is attempting another sighting.

ARNPORA

(\*yelling\*)

Gunnar, you're on the wrong course!

Gunnar's head spins around, staring at...

ARNPORA (CONT'D)

We've missed the Shetlands! Use the  
following sea... head for Iceland!

Water pours into the boat, as half the crew bails the other oarsman try holding course.

GUNNAR

Be quiet woman, you know nothing of  
these things. Pull an oar, or bail.

ARNPORA

You're running close to the wind,  
and could capsize.

Gunnar yells back at Arnpora seated next to the tillerman.

GUNNAR

Shut-up lass or you will dine with  
the GOD AEGIR, on the ocean bottom.

Throws down her pail, removes the sunstone from a pocket to take another sighting, the crew witnessing her disobedience.

Confirming her sightings, as the boat quickly rises to face a 25' wave, cresting it and tossing two men overboard. At a steep angle the boat heads down into a deep trough. SCREAMS!

ARNPORA

Change course! You'll drown us all.

Gunnar angered by her defiance to his orders, staggers back to the stern to confront his obstinate crewmen.

GUNNAR

Give me the stone.

ARNPORA

Nej! The stone belongs to Bjorn.

GUNNAR

(\*pulling\*, his sword)

Bjorn's dead... give it to me!

Placing his sword at her throat, as the boat crests a rogue wave taking on water, tossing another man overboard.

ARNPORA

(\*murder\*, in her eyes)

Here, take it!

Magnús and his crew watch the confrontation from their boat, as Gunnar peers into the stone, unknowing of how it works.

GUNNAR

The sunstone's a fable. Týr the God of courage is my navigator.

ARNPORA

Týr, like you, are both fools!

Enraged by Arnpora's obstinance, Gunnar rears his arm back preparing to toss the sunstone into the sea.

His arm cocked, Arnpora snatches the stone from his hand.

GUNNAR

You little... now you shall die!

Arnpora looks at Magnús, fighting to keep his boat afloat.

Evading Gunnar, Arnpora dives overboard into the angry sea.

Nóri dives in to save his cousin. Aided by Nóri they battle the raging surf, finally clambering aboard Magnús's boat.

Gunnar's boat, turned sideways, is swept up by a giant wave that breaks entirely over the boat crushing it into pieces.

MAGNÚS

Men overboard! ... Survivors?

They fight the surf to keep from the same fate while most of Gunnar's crew has vanished from sight.

MAGNÚS

There! Six heads above water.

Nóri helps a man aboard, another grasps the hull. Arnpora, about to offer a hand looks down into the face of...

ARNPORA

You!

Grasps a sword close by, raising it to strike a fatal blow.

GUNNAR

Go ahead... do it!

Arnpora hesitates remembering the words of her father Bjorn.

FLASHBACK:

BJORN (V.O.)

*"A Viking warrior in peril aids  
another at risk of his own life."*

Arnpora tosses the sword aside, offering her hand to Gunnar.

ARNPORA

Magnús, swing the boat around head  
to the northwest... Iceland!

EXT. NORTH SEA - NEARING LAND - DAY

The storm has passed and the winds blow fair. The following sea helps progress. Nóri mans the tiller, in the distance...

MAGNÚS

Land ahead! The Smoke peninsula and  
Smoke Cove lies just beyond.

The ragtag ship, sails in tatters, slowly enters the shelter of Smoke Cove (Reykjavik). Ashore mixing with settlers, they rejoice proclaiming Magnús and Arnpora heroes, chanting...

CREWMEN

Magnús... Magnús... our chieftain,  
our chieftain... Magnús... Magnús!

MAGNÚS

Nej! Gunnar is Chieftain! Arnpora,  
is your hero. Where is Gunnar?

A woman SCREAMS -

Silence falls over the celebration, Gunnar staggers into the arms of Magnús, bleeding profusely from his juggler.

GUNNAR

Magnús!

Gunnar collapses. He's laid on the ground, as he utters...

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Magnús, you are the rightful Chief,  
forgive... arughh... me...

EXT. ICELAND - ONE MONTH LATER - DAY

The boat repaired a new sail flaps gently, being raised into position, as the boat and crew head toward the morning sun.

NÓRI

Father, do you know the way back to  
Surnadal?

MAGNÚS

I don't need to know... our captain  
knows the way.

Turning to Arnpora -

MAGNÚS (CONT'D)

The men would be honored if you'd  
command our boat safely home.

Arnpora holds the sunstone out toward the horizon refracting beams of sunlight over the crew.

ARNPORA

Yes, but I won't be commanding this  
voyage alone, Bjorn's spirit lives  
inside the SUNSTONE!

FADE OUT:

THE END