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**Murder at Sons of Norway Lodge III**

**The Ambassadors Come to Dinner**

**A Mystery Night Play in Three Acts**

**By**

**Ted Birkedal**

**Background Summary:**

This unhappy Lodge has been the scene of three murders in only four years. No other Lodge in the history of the Sons of Norway has experienced this level of violence. In all the prior instances it was members killing fellow members; fratricide in a fraternal order—it’s unheard of! Tonight, important guests have been invited to a Lodge dinner to honor the Norwegian and Swedish Ambassadors. What mayhem and murderous goings on will take place? At last, we bring the trilogy of Mystery Night plays to a final conclusion.

**Cast of Main Characters**

**Guests:**

1. Benny Berglund-Swedish Ambassador to the United Statest
2. Annamarie Berglund-Wife of the Swedish Ambassador
3. Lisbeth Hetland-Norwegian Ambassador to the United States
4. Lars Fortsykkel-Husband of the Norwegian Ambassador to the United States

**Sons of Norway and Lodge Officers:**

1. Thor Hammar-Viking hall President and Foundation Director
2. Anna Lise Lefse-Lodge Counselor
3. Agnar Mildost-Lodge Cultural Director
4. Thorvald Olsen-Lodge President
5. Sigrun Slanders-Publicity Director
6. Marit Stordame-President, Sons of Norway
7. Martha Slanders-President of District 2 of Sons of Norway (who frequently attends the local Board meetings since she lives in our city)

**Detective:**

1. **Nils Skarpnese**-Master Detective, Police Department

**Extras** – Optional roles that could be visible in the background of the scenes. These are nonspeaking roles:

Additional police officers, attendants from the Coroner’s Office (to remove the body) and the unnamed Viking Hall Office Manager. **Character Backgrounds for the Main Characters in *Murder at Sons of Norway Lodge III: The Ambassadors Come to Dinner* Mystery Night Event**

**Cast of Main Characters**

***Guests:***

**Benny Berglund, Swedish Ambassador to the United States**

The Swedish Ambassador is from a wealthy and powerful Swedish family in Gothenburg, Sweden. The family money comes from the iron mines of western Sweden. Much of this wealth was realized during World War II when the family firm did a brisk business with Germany. He is a charming man on the outside and exudes confidence and good humor. Women find him very appealing and he takes full advantage of this attraction. With women he has mastered the art of attentive listening and this talent often wins their hearts. Once when accused of infidelity by one of Stockholm’s major newspapers, the *Aftonblatet* , he just openly smiled and simply said “I like the ladies.” In Stockholm’s gossip circles he is sometimes called the “Bill Clinton” of Sweden.

The Swedish Ambassador and the Norwegian Ambassador often travel in the same circles because they attend the same conferences and meetings that concern northern nations. The Norwegian Ambassador fell victim to the same charms as other women. She had an indifferent husband and nothing but work to give her satisfaction in life. This enchanting and robust “Swedish Lion,” as he has been nicknamed, was too hard to resist. And so there have been many nightly encounters, if not morning ones, around the world between the two. Never have Norwegians and Swedes been closer.

**Annamarie Berglund, Wife of the Swedish Ambassador**

The Swedish Ambassador’s wife is also a well-known author of crime mysteries in Sweden. She wrote two Swedish best sellers, *The Woman with Pierced Eyebrows* and *The Gloomy Detective.* However, as yet, Annamarie Berglund’s books have not been picked up by international publishing houses. Her work is unknown outside of Sweden.

She is a strong and independent woman, but she remains hopelessly in love with her womanizing husband. When they are alone Benny Berglund, her husband, gives her full attention as if she is the only woman in the world for him. Yet his frequent dalliances increasingly annoy, frustrate, and yes, anger her, especially his current affair with the Norwegian Ambassador. This is an affront she can hardly bear. Sometimes she fantasizes about killing him as if he was a character in one of her crime novels. She sometimes thinks, “If I can’t have him, why should anyone else?”

**Lisbeth Hetland, Norwegian Ambassador to the United States**

Since graduating from the University of Oslo she has enjoyed a meteoritic career in Norway’s Royal Foreign Service. She hails from a well-known wealthy shipping family based in Oslo and has considerable assets both in beauty and in money.

She is married to Lars Fortsykkel, a former champion Norwegian bicycle racer, who fell to disgrace once his use of performance enhancement substances was made known. As his career plummeted, hers rose and she eventually was awarded with Norway’s most important ambassadorship, Ambassador to the United States of America. At the same time her marriage turned sour. Her success rubbed salt in the wound of Lars’ own bruised ego and the marriage became one of convenience, not companionship. Like many Norwegians, she is good at hiding her true feelings and puts a “good face” on the marriage. Lars goes along, for Lisbeth has inherited a large fortune from her family. He hopes to get his hands on at least part of it to continue his expensive lifestyle.

**Lars Fortsykkel, Husband of the Norwegian Ambassador to the United States**

Lars Fortsykkel, the husband of the Norwegian Ambassador to the United States was once the “Lance Armstrong” of Norway. He placed high up in the Tour de France and many other European bicycle events. His fame in Norway was not only for his success in the world arena of bicycle racing but his ability to repeatedly win the grueling “Troll Runner Race” that crosses the mountains from Bergen to Oslo. Unfortunately, when he was in Sweden racing in the “Stockholm Leap” his use of doping to enhance his athletic prowess was discovered by the Swedish Bicycle Racing Commission. He had to retire from racing in disgrace.

Lars married the future Norwegian Ambassador, Lisbeth Hetland, when he was still a national hero in Norway and she was but a lowly student of international affairs at the University of Oslo. Today, Lars devotes most of his day to running his upscale bicycle shop in Oslo, also named *Fortsykkel.* At night he is known for his clubbing with Oslo’s fast crowd and he has been seen with a Norwegian starlet or two. Though his wife, the Ambassador, is based in Washington D.C. he only visits rarely when she needs an official escort or traveling partner. Their marriage is a sham of convenience for both of them.

Lars also has a problem traveling in the company of the Swedish Ambassador, Benny Berglund. Benny was then head of the very commission that accused Lars of doping during the “Stockholm Leap” race. It is awkward to make small talk with someone you hate. (Lars’ last name translates as “Fast Bicycle.”)

***Sons of Norway and Lodge Officers:***

**Thor Hammar, Viking hall President and Foundation Director**

Thor is both the Viking Hall President and the Foundation Charity Director. As Viking Hall President he handles the contracts for fixing up Viking Hall or finds and convinces skilled members to do the work for free. He is normally quiet on the outside, but like Anna Lisa Lefse and Martha Slanders (see below) he harbors and nourishes secret resentments. He is particularly incensed that more people of Swedish descent are joining the Lodge every year. At one board meeting he blurted out, “If this Swedish recruitment continues we will need to take down King Harald’s picture from the mantle and replace it with a photo of King Carl Gustav. And while we are at it we might as well change the Lutefisk Dinner (fish preserved in lye) to the Surströmming Dinner (Swedish fermented fish).”

Some say his rabid and pathological hatred of everything Swedish is the artifact of his unhappy childhood on the plains of North Dakota. Some say his father was a Swedish Bible-thumping alcoholic who also gave thumps to his Norwegian wife and the kids. One story has his drunken father stomping on Little Thor’s beloved toy cars while yelling out “Here comes the troll.” In the end, Thor’s father abandoned the family and founded the popular “Honky Tonk Church” in Fargo, North Dakota.

**Anna Lisa Lefse, Lodge Counselor**

Former President of the Lodge and now Counselor, Anna Lisa Lefse’s primary passion lies with Sons of Norway and its activities. Sons of Norway is her life. Thus she takes any threat to the peace and harmony of the Lodge to be a personal threat to that life. She immediately seethes with hidden anger at anyone or anything that she believes to be harmful to the Lodge. And she sees the imperial ways of Marit Stordame, President of Sons of Norway (see below) as destructive to both Sons of Norway and the Lodge. She especially resents the fact that Marit Stordame is continually interfering in local Lodge business, as if she was still in charge. Marit is particularly adept in getting her way by citing chapter and verse from obscure Sons of Norway by-laws that are over 100 years old and Robert’s Rules of Order. For this reason, Anna Lise Lefse nurses an intense hatred of Marit Stordame.

Openly, she shows nothing of this hatred. As with most Norwegians, she keeps her emotions stoked deep inside where they churn and burn holes in her soul. Another threat to her vision of the “good of the order” is Thorvald Olsen, the new President of Sons of Norway. In her mind he is ignorant of the mission of Sons of Norway and she believes he doesn’t care, because he has not asked her one question in her role as Counselor about his duties. Anna Lisa believes he is out for himself and not the Lodge. Perhaps he sees the Lodge presidency as just a launching pad for political office? Thorvald has given her cause for sleepless nights and her hopes for his future are not kind.

**Agnar Mildost, Cultural Director**

Agnar is the Lodge’s Cultural Director. Agnar believes he is the protector of all things Norwegian and has an awful habit of occasionally speaking halting Norwegian with the same irritating Midwestern accent as the former Minnesota radio star Garrison Keilor. Luckily, unlike Garrison, he knows he cannot sing a note. Agnar only sings when he is alone and drunk.

Agnar is unassuming and quiet. Many see him as a bit of a “milktoast,” including Thorvald Olsen, who often teases him for his dedication to the details of Norwegian heritage and culture. Thorvald will say, “Who cares whether it is right or wrong, as long as it is fun!” Agnar resents Thorvald’s rough camaraderie and flip manner. He believes Thorvald is just using the Lodge presidency to add to his political resume. His major ally at the Lodge is Marit Stordame, the President of Sons of Norway. She appreciates his dedication to the Lodge and he worships her. (His last name translates as “Mild Cheese.”)

**Thorvald Olsen, Lodge President**

Thorvald Olsen is the newly-elected President of the Lodge. Since joining the Lodge only two years ago, he has risen quickly in the Lodge hierarchy. He is ambitious and always has his eye on the next chance to enhance his standing in the world. When the Vice President of the Lodge chose not to run for the office of President, Thorvald jumped at the opportunity and put his name in as a willing candidate. Because no one else wanted the job, he was elected without opposition. Thorvald Olsen is the kind of man that feels entitled to whatever he wants. He has no qualms about taking on the job of President, though he knows nothing about it and doesn’t want to know. In his mind he deserves the Lodge presidency and he already has set his greedy eye on the presidency of the whole Sons of Norway. The only obstacle to achieving that lofty goal, from his narcissistic point of view, is that the post is currently occupied by Marit Stordame. If she were gone it would certainly be his. Thorvald entertains political ambitions and one day hopes to win a Congressional seat in the House of Representatives.

Thorvald Olsen is the kind of person that will park in a handicapped zone and feel good about it. In Thorvald’s world it is always about what is good for Thorvald. Though he is clever in a conniving way and thinks of himself as very smart, he has not read a book in twelve years and is so dumb that he is openly proud of that fact. He is fond of saying, “Why read a book; the world around me is my teacher.” Some people believe he is deaf for he often appears not to hear what you say. He isn’t deaf, he simply doesn’t listen to what other people say.

**Martha Slanders, President of District 2 of Sons of Norway**

Like Marit Stordame, Martha has been climbing the ladder of success in Sons of Norway for some time now. After putting in years as the hard-working the District Secretary she was finally rewarded by her election as District President. Her hidden sin is the Norwegian national secret pastime—“envy.” Despite the fact she is now District President, she still feels passed over by what she calls the “Big Wigs” in the organization. In her view she has done much for Sons of Norway but she has never been given the recognition by Sons of Norway she feels she deserves for all her work for “the good of the order.”

Martha passionately covets the post of President of Sons of Norway; a position for which she campaigned hard. Yet, she lost the election to another Lodge member, her nemesis Marit Stordame. Marit is treated like royalty in Sons of Norway and acts the part. On the other hand, Martha feels thwarted and deeply resents Marit Stordame’s success. Still she does her best to hide these emotions from others.

**Sigrun Slanders, Publicity Director**

Sigrun Slanders is the Lodge’s Publicity Director. She is zealously loyal to her mother, Martha Slanders, and is the epitome of the “mamma’s girl.” Her older brother, Sven Slanders, held the same post before she was appointed to the job by the Lodge president. She has never married. Her mother and the Lodge are her life. Martha’s defeats are her defeats; her wins are her wins. There is little in her life other than her devotion for her mother, fine food, and the Lodge. Her only independent passion is a love of cooking and she often helps with the Lodge dinners. She is pleasant enough to others but somewhat distant and distracted at times. Tonight, besides being the chief chef, she is the primary server at the Ambassadors’ table.

**Marit Stordame, President, Sons of Norway**

Marit Stordame has reached her lifelong goal—she has been elected President of all of Sons of Norway. There is no more prestigious post in the Sons of Norway; it is the pinnacle of achievement within the organization. Her now dead sister, Hedwig Høypåpæra, was brutally murdered at the Lodge four years ago. Equally arrogant as her murdered sister, Hedwig Høypåpæra, Marit Stordame lives in high elegance with her husband, Knute Stordame, in a large home overlooking the city. She and her husband are members of the city’s high society. They are also among America’s Norwegian-American elite and, as a consequence, eat more caviar than pickled herring in the average year.

Marit and her husband are treated as royalty when they visit other Sons of Norway Lodges around the country. They have even enjoyed a private dinner and audience at the King’s Castle in Norway with King Harald and his wife Sonja (it looks like a palace but Norwegians call it a castle because they believe Norwegian Kings can only live in castles—so it is a castle). She was immensely flattered when King Harald observed that she and Sonja looked so alike they could be mistaken for sisters. Lodge members have surreptitiously nick-named Marit the “Queen of the Sons of Norway”, but never use the term in her presence. (Her last name translates as “Big Lady”.)

*The Detective*

**Nils Skarpnese, Master Detective**

Nils Skarpnese is said to have a sharp nose for crime and serves as an able senior detective with the Anchorage Police Department. Though relatively young, he exudes confidence and authority. Four years ago he successfully concluded the investigation of the first two murders at the Lodge. Then two years later he took the lead in the investigation of the next murder that cast a dark shadow on this unlucky and unfortunate Lodge. As a member of Sons of Norway he has more insight into the dysfunctional doings at the Lodge than other members of the Police Force. He has an uncanny ability to see what other people miss—a word here, a gesture there, eyes full of fear, and the like. (His last name translates as “Sharp Nose.”)

*And now a food and not a character, but an important player in Norwegian life . . . . .*

*Lefse*

There are many kinds of lefse, but potato lefse is perhaps the most important food in the world to Norwegian Americans. It is frequently made from riced potatoes mixed with some flour and salt, although some cooks add other ingredients beyond the basics. After the dough is rolled out in a thin, round sheet it is cooked quickly on a very hot griddle. Done properly, lefse is soft and pliant and resembles a Mexican tortilla. It can be eaten with everything from butter, cinnamon, and sugar to pølse. It should never be cooked until it is hard or burnt.

**List of Props Necessary to Putting on *Murder at Sons of Norway Lodge III***

1. Banquet table with table clothes (put together three eight-foot portable tables with the two outer tables angled slightly outwards).
2. You may also display large name tags on the table in front of each officer or guest to make it easier for the audience to keep track of their names and position.
3. Small serving table to go behind banquet table (also with table cloth).
4. Framed photograph of His Majesty, King Harald to go on the wall behind banquet table.
5. Coffee urn or carafe along with 10 coffee cups and saucers plus cream and sugar service.
6. Burnt lefse (three). Put lefse in oven and heat till it is hard and slightly burnt. To make the “hockey puck” lefse served to the Swedish Ambassador, cut out the interior of a normal lefse and heat it in the oven till it looks burnt. Also, you can use a small pancake and burn it in the oven. Another alternative is to purchase some hard Vestlandslefse and burn it in the oven.
7. Lodge Banner on pole for Sigrun to carry and place in a stand.
8. American, Norwegian, Canadian and Swedish flags in stands (and if you have it your state flag)
9. Two “silver” trays (that look like silver) for the lefse presentation. The tray used to present “King Harald’s” lefse (placed near Thorvald) should be oblong if possible (or at least longer than its width) and very stiff and sturdy (to flip correctly in the air when Thorvald hits it). Have the character Agnar Mildost place it on the table so that it a good portion sticks out over the table’s front edge. Have the person who plays Thorvald practice hitting its outer edge with his fist several times before the performance. Find the best placement so it is easy to hit the portion of the tray that sits beyond the table. Thorvald can stand up when he hits it. You want the tray and lefse to shoot out beyond the table and the tray to clatter loudly and the burnt lefse to break into pieces. The other tray is to serve the “Hockey Puck” lefse and the remaining burnt lefse to the ambassadors.
10. Two trays are needed for the serving of the aquavit and beer.
11. Ten aquavit or shot glasses. Put four in the freezer before the performance
12. Five beer bottles or cans. Four are props for Thorvald, Benny, Lars, and Thor at the banquet. One is for use of Thorvald at the end of the play.
13. Three empty Linie Aquavit bottles with screw tops; fill with iced tea to look like real aquavit.
14. Fake handcuffs (usually available at costume and/or party stores).
15. Light trench coat that can be worn by Detective Nil Skarpnese.
16. Apron with a Norwegian flag design for Sigrun to wear as she serves dessert.
17. You may also display large name tags on the table in front of each person and officer to make it easier for the audience to keep track of their names and position.

**Script**

**Description of the Physical Scene:**

A long, large banquet table covered by a white table cloth sits below the fireplace in Viking Hall, the home of this Sons of Norway Lodge. Above the mantle of the fireplace (or prominently displayed) hangs a framed photograph of His Majesty, the King of Norway. Beside, and slightly to the front of the banquet table is a speaker’s podium. On either side of the long table are arranged the flags of the United States, Norway, Canada Sweden, and the State flag. There are ten chairs set behind a nicely decorated long banquet table complete with a white table cloth. Following dessert, the guests are in the process of being served coffee from a small serving table to the rear of the banquet table.

In the far center of the banquet table sits the President of the Sons of Norway, to her left sits the Norwegian Ambassador to the United States and her husband, to her right is the Swedish Ambassador to the United States and his wife. Further out, beside the Norwegian Ambassador’s husband is the District President. To the left of the District President is the Lodge Counselor. On the other end of the table, seated to the right of the Swedish ambassador’s wife is the Lodge President, to the right of the President is the Lodge Cultural Director, and next to him is the President of Viking Hall. Their server is Sigrun Slanders the Publicity Director and daughter of the District President. She wears an apron decorated with the Norwegian flag. A speaker’s podium sits slightly forward and to the left of the banquet table.

Clues for *Murder at* ***Sons of Norway*** *Lodge III*

(You are welcome to use these question clues when you make your choice of the culprit/culprits, but one or more may be red herrings.)

**Clue 1:** Was Ambassador Benny Berglund the intended victim of the poisoning or was there a mistake made?

**Clue 2:** If you think that Benny Berglund was not the intended victim, then who?

**Clue 3:** What substance been poisoned, the aquavit, the beer, the coffee, the sugar, what had been served for dinner, or something else?

**Clue 4:** Who among the suspects is lying?

**Clue 5:** Was there more than one failed murderer? Would it take two to tango, so to speak?

**Clue 6:** Is there someone who might have more expertise with poison than the other suspects?

**Clue 7:** Who among the potential suspects would have the most to gain from murder?

**Clue 8:** Was this a crime of passion or cold calculation or both?

**Opening Introduction By the Master of Ceremonies**

**(The Master of Ceremonies, who wears a formal suit or dress, comes in and addresses the audience. He or she will guide the audience through the play. You may also choose to modify the script and assign two people to this speaking part, to share the lengthy narration. If you are providing dinner with the play, this is when to serve. If not, begin with the actors in their seats at table as the MC introduces the scene.)**

I am the Master of Ceremonies and your guide to Mystery Night at Viking Hall tonight. Welcome to *Murder at Sons of Norway Lodge III: The Ambassadors Come to Dinner*. This is the third in a trilogy of Mystery Nights. In this third play the mayhem that began in the first two plays is hopefully concluded.

First a disclaimer—what are you about to see is all nonsense. None of it is real and none of it is based on real people. It is entirely made up. There is a Sons of Norway Lodge with an actual Viking Hall. That is true. Also, officers and members characters are fictional and cannot be found in any Lodge, *at least we hope not*. Nonetheless, we ask you to suspend your critical faculties for the next hour or so and pretend that what you are seeing is real.

Also, nobody here is a professional actor. The cast will be reading their lines and do the best they can to move the play forward. After the second act you will be given a chance to correctly guess the guilty party or parties in the play. If you get it right you will be eligible for prizes that will be awarded at the play’s end. So pay attention to what is done and said, for there may be clues that can help you pick the culprit or culprits. Also, we ask that you remain quiet and turn off your cell phones during the play so that everyone can enjoy Mystery Night.

*And so with that done, our Mystery Night play begins…*

**Master of Ceremonies (MC continues):** Welcome to the Sons of Norway. This unhappy Lodge has been the scene of three murders in only four years. No other Lodge in the history of the Sons of Norway has experienced this level of violence. In all the prior instances it was members killing fellow members; fratricide in a fraternal order—it’s unheard of!

The only recorded case of violence in another Sons of Norway Lodge was the “Great Cake Fight” at the Duluth Lodge in 1953. Here, Ole “The Bull” Haraldsen and “Tiny” Petersen fought a bloody brawl over whose wife deserved first prize in the Lodge’s cream cakecompetition. Thetwo wives brought a quick end to the fight by slamming their contending cakes along with the cake pans into their respective husbands’ faces. Blood pudding is a Norwegian delicacy, but “Blood Cake” is not.

And there is no common theme to the three prior murders at the Lodge, other than they were allegedly committed by women. Because of the egalitarian ideals of Norwegians both women and men are considered Sons of Norway, irrespective of their actual gender. So every daughter is a Son, so to speak when it comes to Sons of Norway, but a son is never a daughter.

Also, it is well to remember that the women of the Lodge are the descendants of Vikings. Viking women were not retiring, sweet things. In fact, a Viking woman, Freydís Eriksdóttir, was behind the first recorded murder of Europeans by other Europeans in the New World. She ordered her husband and his followers to kill all the men in a rival group and then personally took an axe to the women who had been spared against her orders.

As in the old Viking days, greed, jealously, and envy to varying degrees all played a role in each of the previous murders. Now two former Lodge members, Berta Travelt and Astrid Galen, are serving life sentences in prison for their crimes. Are we going to see more trouble brewing; what more could happen here? We shall see what the night brings.

Perhaps it is fitting to recall one of the sayings of Odin, written down in the *Hávámal* nearly 800 years ago:

*Greetings to the host*

*The guest has arrived*

*In which seat shall he sit?*

*Rash is he who when at unknown doors*

*Relies on his good luck*

*Act I*

*Aquavit for All*

**(Play action—Our Lodge hosts and their guests are just finishing their dinner. The Master of Ceremonies introduces the characters and sets the scene. As the Master of Ceremonies introduces each person, he or she gestures to them or stands behind each guest so the audience knows who is who. The guests and officers sit quietly looking at the audience)**.

**Master of Ceremonies:** We open at a festive gathering at the Sons of Norway Viking Hall. The Norwegian and Swedish Ambassadors to the United States have come to our city for a conference on northern minerals. They, along with their spouses, have been invited to a special dinner at Viking Hall, put on in their honor by the Lodge officers, the general membership, and the President of all of Sons of Norway.

Here, before us, we see officers of Sons of Norway glorying in the presence of these two illustrious Scandinavian ambassadors. The dinner proper is nearly over, coffee has been served, and the time has come for aquavit. Aquavit is a strong Scandinavian drink resembling vodka made of fermented potatoes with an herbal flavoring of caraway.

Seated at the table is the Swedish Ambassador, Benny Berglund, along with his young wife, Annamarie Berglund, a noted mystery writer in her native Sweden Also, at the table, is the Norwegian Ambassador, Lisbeth Hetland, and her husband, Lars Fortsykkel, the “Lance Armstrong” of Norway. Sitting between the two ambassadors is the President of Sons of Norway, Marit Stordame. She is the highest official in all Sons of Norway and just happens to be a member of the Lodge. To the left of Lars Fortsykkel is Martha Slanders, the District President. She, like Marit, is a member of the Lodge, but she is the highest official in Sons of Norway for the District. Beside her is Anna Lisa Lefse, Counselor the Lodge. To the right of the Swedish Ambassador’s wife, Annamarie Berglund, is Thorvald Olsen, President of the Lodge. Beside him is Agnar Mildost, Lodge Cultural Director. Finally, sitting next to Agnar is Thor Hammar, the Foundation Charity Director and President of the Viking Hall Board, the board which oversees the care and maintenance of Viking Hall proper. Their table is being served coffee by Martha Slander’s daughter, Sigrun Slanders, who is also the Lodge Publicity Director*.*

**(Play action—Agnar Mildost gets up from the table and without fanfare goes to the foyer; Sigrun Slanders follows him out. At this point the characters begin to speak.)**

**Anna Lisa Lefse (Addresses Annamarie and Benny Berglund, the other guests listen** **attentively):** Did you know that His Majesty, King Harald V of Norway was here several years ago? He even honored the Lodge by coming in during one of our lefse making sessions and made a lefse. I wonder, Mr. Ambassador and Annamarie, whether or not you make lefse in Sweden too? Norwegians love lefse, especially potato lefse which resembles large Norwegian tortillas.

**Annamarie:** We are not so much devoted lefse makers as the Norwegians, but we do make a thin flatbread called tunnbrød which is similar and also very good.

**Anna Lisa:** That is interesting. Well, we have kept the lefse made by King Harald. It is one of the most prized possessions held by the Lodge. Some jokingly call it the “Sacred Lefse” and we bring it out on specialoccasions like this one so that the members can marvel at the kings own lefse. It gives me goose bumps when I think about the fact that the king actually made it. We officially named it “King Harald’s Lefse” and we keep it under lock and key when it is not on special display.

**Benny, Annamarie, Lisbeth, and Lars** **(all at once and enthusiastic)**: Please bring “King Harald’s Lefse” out, we would all like to see it.

**Anna Lisa:** Agnar Mildost, our Cultural Director, is ready to bring it out at our request. Agnar, bring forth “King Harald’s Lefse”.

(**Play action—Agnar, from the foyer, walks solemnly and slowly carrying the lefse on a silver tray through the hall, showing the special lefse to the membership (the audience) and then taking it ceremoniously to the main table with the ambassadors. He is preceded by Sigrun Slanders who carries the official banner of the Lodge on its pole).**

**Agnar Mildost:**  **(He holds up the lefse for the Norwegian and Swedish ambassadors and others at the table to admire. He then places the lefse on the tray in front of Thorvald and sits down.)** Behold King Harald’s Lefse

(**Sigrun places the banner in its proper place beside the Swedish flag. Sigrun then goes back to the kitchen.)**

**Benny Berglund: (After looking at it intently he blurts out.)** But it looks burnt!

**Annamarie:** **(Quickly elbows Benny and says.)** Be quiet!

**(All the others at the table appear to ignore the remark and continue to admire the lefse as if it were a relic of Saint Olaf.)**

**Anna Lisa:** Unfortunately we cannot eat King Harald’s Lefse itself, but we would like to present your excellencies with lefse made from the same dough that was mixed by King Harald’s own hand. Sigrun, could you serve both the Norwegian and Swedish ambassadors with the honorary lefse?

**(Play action—Sigrun comes from the kitchen door, again walking slowly and solemnly, carrying two lefses on a silver tray. She stops in front of the table showing the lefses to all to admire. )**

**Benny Berglund:** **(remarks to his wife)** One looks like a hockey puck!

**Annamarie:** **(Annamarie elbows Benny again)** Keep quiet!

**(Play action—Sigrun then serves the ambassadors. Benny gets the hockey puck and stares at his like it is a bug. Lisbeth, looking at her stiff, burned lefse does the same.)**

**Benny:** This is a great honor to be served such a wonderful lefse, but I am so full from that magnificent meal that it would not be right to for me to eat my lefse now. I would not be able to enjoy it properly. I would rather save it for a midnight snack and truly relish it.

**Lisbeth Hetland:** **(Also, looking at her stiff, burned lefse. She pulls out two bottles from under the table and holds them up proudly for everyone to admire.)** My sentiments exactly, for I am also near bursting from dinner. Instead let us have some aquavit. I have brought some Linie Aquavit direct from Norway for this special occasion. Let us have a little glass to help our digestion.

**Lisbeth Hetland:** But before we drink I would like to make some remarks to the Lodge officers and the general membership.

**Lisbeth Hetland:** **(She stands up, goes to the podium and** **addresses the audience, bringing both bottles of aquavit with her to the podium.)** First, I wish to thank the members and officers of Sons of Norway for their hospitality. My husband Lars and I have enjoyed our visit very much so far. However, I have heard some bad things about your drinking habits at the Lodge.

What I have heard is that many members drink their Linie Aquavit ice cold in a frozen glass and then chase it with beer. As the Ambassador from Norway to the United States, I think it my duty to correct this abuse of Norway’s finest national drink. You may and should drink the Danish Aalborg Aquavit that way, but never Linie Aquavit!

For those that do not know, Linie Aquavit is distilled from fermented potatoes and then mixed with herbals, mainly caraway seed. It is then lovingly poured into large oaken sherry casks. Next, and this is the special part, the casks are loaded on a ship that is scheduled to cross the equator and then return to Norway. “Linie” means “line” in Norwegian and the line referred to is the equator. “Aquavit”, by the way, means “water of life.” It is illegal to sell Linie Aquavit that has not crossed the equator twice in sherry casks. Each bottle of Linie Aquavit has the name of the very ship that carried it on the back of the label as proof of its crossing. Sloshing around in the casks mellows and enriches the flavor of the aquavit until it becomes Norway’s ambrosia. When you drink it your eyes want to roll back in your head with the pleasure of it all.

The proper way to drink Linie Aquavit is at room temperature in an unfrozen glass. And one sips and savors the beauty of its complex flavor and texture. A good Norwegian does not just throw it down all at once and then dilute its subtle taste with a follow-up beer. They may do that in Minnesota and Iowa, but they do not know any better. Those Midwestern Norwegians have been away from Norway’s shores so long that they believe lutefisk is a “holiday food.”

So, now that you are properly schooled on the right way to drink Linie Aquavit, let us now enjoy some together in celebration of this fine dinner

**(Play action—Lisbeth now hands both gift bottles of aquavit to Marit Stordame who in turn gives them to Anna Lise Lefse. Anna then places the bottles on the serving table behind the banquet table**.**)**

**Thorvald Olsen**: **(Speaking loudly with suppressed outrage and anger while Anna Lise is putting the bottles on the serving table)** With all due respect Mrs. Ambassador I think I have the right to drink my aquavit anyway I want to. If I want to drink it warm or cold is my business. It is my American right to drink it as I see fit! I want mine fresh from the freezer and in a frozen glass with a beer for a chaser. Nobody is going to tell me otherwise. You can call me unschooled, but I like my aquavit ice cold, not hot.

**Lisbeth Hetland:** **(From the podium where she is still standing she is surprised by Thorvald’s outburst, but her diplomatic skills immediately kick in)** Thorvald, you can drink Linie Aquavit anyway you want to. I was simply letting the Lodge members know the way we now drink and appreciate high quality aquavit in today’s Norway. I was not trying to tell you what is right and wrong. I would never presume to do that. I just wanted to let people know how best to enjoy and savor Linie Aquavit.

**Anna Lisa:** **(Speaking from the serving table)** Thorvald, Thorvald, Thorvald! Can you just button it for once! Must you embarrass the whole Lodge with your petty concerns? If it is not one thing it’s another with you.

**Thorvald:** **(With growing anger in his voice.)** Don’t you tell me what to do! I am the duly elected President, you’re not! You’re just the Counselor, and I don’t want your counsel right now. You button it up! It’s my time to swing the axe!

**(Play action—Thorvald makes a sudden, violent chopping motion with his hand to give emphasis to his words and inadvertently hits the edge of the tray containing King Harald’s Lefse. The tray and the lefse fly in the air and then land on the floor in front of the banquet table. The lefse smashes to pieces. Everyone at the table but Thorvald jumps up in astonishment; they are aghast, particularly Agnar Mildost, who carefully runs down and picks up the tray and the pieces of the lefse and sorrowfully takes them from the hall. Agnar is so upset he does not return.)**

**Marit Stordame:**  Herlig Gud! King Harald’s Lefse is ruined. What have you done Thorvald?

**(The other officers roll their eyes and stare in astonishment at Thorvald. The ambassadors and their spouses appear equally astonished.)**

**Thorvald:**  I am sorry that I accidently broke King Harald’s Lefse, but what the heck, it was only an old hard, burnt lefse. It was not worth eating, whether King Harald made it or not.

**Marit Stordame:** Thorvald, I don’t know how you became the President of this Lodge. You seem to have no respect for its traditions.

**Thorvald:**  I was elected by the membership while you were narrowly anointed by a few select folks at the very top of Sons of Norway. As to traditions, sometimes they need to be dropped or ignored, like the stupid business about King Harald’s Lefse

(**Everyone at the table looks disconcerted except for Thorvald who sits smug and contented, if not proud after his outburst.)**

**Marit:** **(trying to be light hearted and shift attention from the chaos of the previous moment.)**  Enough Thorvald! We can have this discussion later! Right now we do not want to further disturb our illustrious guests with our squabbles. I would say it is now time for a round of aquavit in memory of King Harald’s Lefse, to send it on its way to lefse heaven

(**Play action—Meanwhile, a clearly dumbfounded Lisbeth Hetland, still at the podium, returns to her seat at the banquet table.)**

**Benny:** I too, believe it is time to serve the aquavit and to serve it anyway it is wanted. In fact, I personally would like my aquavit served ice cold if it is possible.

**(Play action—Thorvald beams at the Swedish Ambassador.)**

**Thor Hammar:** All who want it frozen raise your hands **(He raises his hand**. **Surprisingly, Lars Fortsykkel also raises his hand together with Benny and Thorvald. Lisa Hetland gives Lars a nasty, quick stare at his request for cold aquavit.)**

**Lars:** **(to Lisbeth as an aside)** You know I hate the stuff. It tastes like crap. Anything that helps me to get it down is good.

**Lisbeth**: Keep a civil tongue Lars. I have a job to do.

**Lars:** Yah, Yah, Yah! You bet, my job is to act like your pet.

**Sigrun: (Sigrun returns from the kitchen with a tray of ice-cold small glasses, a bottle of Linie Acquavit, and several beers and stops before the banquet table.)** In light of different people’s preferences for how they like to drink their aquavit, I have brought a bottle of Linie Aquavit fresh from the freezer along with ice-cold glasses and beer.

**Marit:** Thank you Sigrun for your thoughtfulness. Could you and Anna Lisa, please serve the aquavit as people would have it.

**(Play action—Sigrun then joins Anna Lisa at the small serving table behind the banquet table. Sigrun now carefully serves the “gifted” room temperature aquavit to everyone a glass at a time. Meanwhile, Anna Lisa Lefse pours the ice cold aquavit. She then brings four glasses of aquavit, plus four cold beers on a separate tray. She sets down the tray in front of Lars Fortsykkel and serves a glass of aquavit and a beer to him. However, just after Lars is served his aquavit and beer by Anna Lisa, Thorvald, impatient as ever, gets up suddenly and races behind the banquet table and grabs the tray with the remaining aquavit and beers that were being served by Anna Lisa. Carrying the tray with the frozen bottle of aquavit, he gives one glass of aquavit and beer to the Swedish Ambassador and takes one each for himself and Thor Hammar. Sigrun and Anna Lisa give him startled stares for breaking the protocol, but nobody else pays much mind to Thorvald’s bad manners, which are clearly his habit.)**

**Marit:** **(Marit holds her glass at eye level and nods at each of the guests in turn, looking them in the eye.)** To the Ambassadors, Skål!

**(Play action—Everyone at the table stands and drinks or sips the aquavit holding the glass up at eye level. Thorvald throws his aquavit back and in sync with Benny and they both take big slurps of beer as a chaser. Lars follows suit. Thorvald then grabs the bottle of cold aquavit and pours another which he also downs quickly with beer. He then pours a third glass of aquavit and raises his glass to Lisbeth in a toast.)**

**Thorvald:** Here’s to you Lisbeth. It was a great lesson, but I am a poor student. I always have been. I never listen. Skål! **(Again, he chases the aquavit with a gulp of beer.)**

**Marit:** **(Watching Thorwald with concern)** I would say it is now time for more coffee. Please, Sigrun, could you make sure that everyone has coffee all around?

**(Play action—Everyone at the banquet table sits down. Sigrun nods to Marit’s request and pours coffee for everyone and offers cream and sugar. Benny puts cream in his cup and drinks some coffee and sits back relaxed).**

**Thorvald:** **(as Sigrun pours, Thorvald takes another shot of aquavit followed by beer)** And Skål! To you Ambassador Berglund and Annamarie for your good company and cheer!

**Benny:** **(Addressing Marit and the other officers)** I wish to thank you, on behalf of my beautiful wife and I. We have had a most wonderful evening at Viking Hall. And again, I have enjoyed being in the company of my most esteemed colleague Lisbeth Hetland, my favorite ambassador **(He now takes another large sip of coffee).**

**Annamarie:** I wish to second the words of my husband. I too feel so welcome even though I am a Swede in a Norwegian Lodge. As they say in Norway, “Tusen Takk!”

**(At this point Benny first grabs his throat and starts looking very uncomfortable and then holds his stomach).**

**Benny:** I am sorry, but I do not feel well. Perhaps it is the jet lag catching up with me, but I am afraid I must go. So please, excuse me. Annamarie, I need to go now!

**(Helped by Annamarie he stumbles slowly out of the hall into the foyer out of sight of the audience. We then hear Annamarie from the foyer.)**

**Annamarie:** Benny, Benny! What is wrong? What is wrong? I need help! Help me, my husband is dying!

**(Play action—At this point all the officers seated at the table get up and run out to the foyer, including Sigrun, with the exception of Thorvald, who seems stunned or drunk, and moves only slowly and unhappily from his chair. He is the last to exit the hall and he seems reluctant to go. Before he leaves the table, he takes one more swig of aquavit; this time directly from the bottle.)**

Act 2

Everybody Talks

**MC:** The Swedish Ambassador, Benny Berglund, after collapsing in the foyer was transported by ambulance to emergency care at the Hospital. Luckily, the doctors were able to determine that he had ingested poison, and they quickly identified the poison. They then administered a suitable antidote. His doctors believe he will pull through, but he is still gravely ill. Because of the Lodge’s recent criminal history, the police are working on the suspicion that the Swedish Ambassador was the target of a yet unknown murderer. Everyone present has been requested by the authorities to stay in put in Viking Hall. Though the poison has been identified, its type and nature are not being revealed to anyone as yet in order to protect the integrity of the investigation.

Because of his prior experience with two other investigations at the Lodge, Detective Nils Skarpnese, has been assigned to be the detective of record. He will lead the investigation into the attempted to murder of Benny Berglund. He will be conducting interviews with anyone he thinks can help him solve this unfortunate case. Nils has asked everyone who attended the banquet to stay put until he has completed his investigation.

**(Play action—Detective Nils Skarpnese and Annamarie Berglund sit at the end of the banquet table. A spotlight covers the table, Nils, and Annamarie. The other lights in the hall are turned down.)**

We now see him talking with the grieving wife, Annamarie Berglund, who has been asked to come back to the Lodge for some questions by Detective Skarpnese.

**Interview 1**

**Nils:** My deepest apologies Mrs. Berglund. I am so sorry that you had to experience an attempt on your husband’s life during your visit. I know you must be more than distraught at this time, but perhaps because you are his wife you could shed some light as to why he may have been a target of what appears to be a purposeful poisoning.

**Annamarie:** **(looking deeply sad and forlorn)** I understand that you must do your duty. Go ahead and ask what you will.

**Nils:** Did he have any enemies among the group of people that sat down to dinner tonight?

**Annamarie:** Well, just one that I should mention. Lars Fortsykkel might be seen as an enemy of Benny. He is not openly hostile, but it is because of Benny that he was exposed as a doper during the “Stockholm Leap,” Sweden’s most important international bicycle race. Benny was the head of the Swedish Bicycle Racing Commission at the time of the race. He led the investigation that disgraced Lars, who was then Norway’s most famous bicycle racer. Lars’ career was destroyed and he was no longer Norway’s darling athlete. I know Lars hates Benny for what he did and bears a deep grudge.

**Nils:**  How do you know that?

**Annamarie:** Because Lisbeth has told me that Lars hates Benny. I noticed that Lars gets sullen when around Benny. Lisbeth let me know how things stood, so we could avoid bringing Benny and Lars together, except when it was absolutely necessary at official diplomatic functions or events like the one at Viking Hall tonight. But there is something else that may have rubbed salt in the wound.

**Nils:** What is that?

**Annamarie:**  Benny has been having an affair with Lisbeth, Lars’ wife. They had plenty of times to get together on the international diplomatic circuit. Benny is a charming man and he likes the ladies, and they like him. With a sullen husband back in Norway, Lisbeth found solace in Benny’s big arms when chance allowed. Benny has a way of making you feel like the most beautiful and interesting woman in the room. The problems come when he finds another woman in another room. Then she becomes the new queen of the moment.

**Nils:** Does Lars know?

**Annamarie:** I do not know for certain, but I suspect he picked up on it. I did. I saw how Lisbeth would look at Benny and laugh at all his jokes. If a woman laughs loudly and often at what a man says, she is in love or wants to be, or she is simply stupid.

**Nils:** Are you angry with Benny for betraying you with Lisbeth?

**Annamarie:** No, I do not hate Benny. I love him despite his failings.

**Nils:** He is a very wealthy Swede of noble heritage, but you are a struggling mystery novelist in a country of no more than nine million potential readers. Perhaps you were tired of his philandering, but not of his money?

**Annamarie:(Both angry and hurt)** Detective, I cannot believe you would say such a thing to someone who just nearly lost her husband.

**Nils:** I am sorry, but it is my job to ask difficult questions. Please forgive me. You may go now. I am sure you wish to get back to your husband

**(Annamarie gets up to go and leaves the hall.)**

**Interview 2**

**Nils:** **(Loudly)** Please send in Ambassador Lisbeth Hetland.

**Lisbeth: (Lisbeth comes in the hall and walks to Detective Nils Skarpnese.)** Good evening Detective Skarpnese. I hear you have a sharp nose for crime. I hope you can solve this one.

**Nils:** **(Getting up to greet her)** Madame Ambassador, thank you for staying for an interview. I know this is a difficult moment for you. As you know, you have diplomatic immunity from being charged with a crime, but we have the right to detain you in order to conduct our investigation.

**Lisbeth:**  I am not here against my will. I am here to help you in any way I can so you can solve this despicable attempted murder of my colleague.

**Nils:** Please sit down Madame Ambassador. Look, I am not going to pussy foot around about this. I know you and Benny are lovers. If he was a target, you may also be in danger. I would suggest that you call the Norwegian Security Services for assistance as soon as possible. In the meantime, the Police Department will have an officer outside your room at your hotel 24/7.

So, who are Benny’s enemies in this bunch of Norwegians?

**Lisbeth:** I have never met the officers of Sons of Norway and the Lodge before today. I would not know who among them would want to kill Benny. I cannot believe someone tried to kill him. I have traveled the world to many dangerous places and I have never experienced something like this—Benny, of all people, almost dying of intentional poisoning at a Sons of Norway Lodge. The Norwegian Embassy urged me not to attend this dinner; they said that this Sons of Norway Lodge had an odd reputation. Now, I can understand why. This place and the people in it are odd in the extreme.

**Nils:** I agree. Of all the Lodges in Sons of Norway, this is the one I would stay away from. Did you know that three people have been murdered at Viking Hall over the past four years? It is the only Lodge in Sons of Norway to experience a single murder, much less three, in the entire history of Sons of Norway. Now we have almost had a fourth, it is unbelievable to me, and I am a detective who has seen a lot of things in my day!

**Lisbeth:** How could I have known? We have heard only good things about Sons of Norway in the United States. Yes, we know they are a little backward about drinking aquavit and eating lutefisk, but we did not know some of the Lodges of Sons of Norway were steeped in murder and craziness.

**Nils:** There are dozens of Sons of Norway Lodges in the United States and Canada, but you were invited to the one that has been troubled for years. The place is cursed. Most people in Sons of Norway are the nicest people you would ever meet. That even goes for most of the members of this Lodge, but there have been simmering tensions here among some officers and members that tend to erupt in the most extreme violence I have ever experienced in my career. Some here nurse their grievances like others nurse their beers. They are never finished until it is “closing time” for some other member of the Lodge.

Now, I need to eliminate your husband, Lars Fortsykkel, from the list of potential murderers. I know that you and your husband have a strained relationship. Further, I know he had reason to hate Benny because Benny busted him for doping during the “Stockholm Leap” bicycle race. And I also know that you and Benny are involved in an affair of one type or another.

**Lisbeth:** You are correct on all three points. I found Benny a comfort when my marriage with Lars fell apart. Whatever his faults, Benny loves women and knows how to pay proper attention to them. The trouble is, he loves too many women. The man has a charisma that is hard to resist. You know that he has the nick-name the “Swedish Lion.” You always know when he is in the room, he dominates it. He knows how to excite and please women and we forgive him his trespasses, every time. I can honestly say that a short time with Benny is better than a lifetime with most men.

**Nils:** I would presume, based on what you just said, that you did not poison Benny. What about Lars?

**Lisbeth:** Lars is a narcissistic jerk, but I don’t think he is a potential killer. He has shown little interest in me over the last few years. Why would he be jealous over Benny’s attentions? Lars is pretty much just interested in himself and the young things of Oslo that flit about the clubs. I can’t see him killing Benny over me. He’d have to care about me to do that, and I don’t think he cares what I do or with whom.

**Nils:** Yes, but what about Benny playing a big role in exposing Lars’ involvement in doping and ruining his racing career? Perhaps, as a narcissist, as you said yourself, he harbored a hatred that eventually was played out tonight?

Why tonight? Why not? Perhaps he thought that the hick cops here would never figure it out. Perhaps his knowledge of doping with steroids was easily converted to knowledge of poison.

**Lisbeth:** Well, in that light, maybe it is possible, but I still think it is highly unlikely?

**Nils:** Thank you for your time Ambassador. You may go.

**(Lisbeth leaves the hall.)**

**Interview 3**

**Nils:** **(Shouts)** Could someone send in Lars Fortsykkel.

**Lars: (Lars walks in and aggressively sits down opposite Nils; he is clearly aggravated about having to be interviewed. He begins talking immediately without letting Nils greet him and plunks down in a chair that Nils gestures toward.)** Detective, I must protest! Am I not covered by diplomatic immunity in view of the fact that my wife is the Norwegian Ambassador to the United States? What happened here tonight has nothing to do with me.

**Nils:** You are her spouse and have no official diplomatic status. Nonetheless, even if you did, you could still be detained for the purposes of the investigation. Please note that your wife, who does have diplomatic immunity from arrest, spoke freely and openly to me.

**Lars:** What did she tell you?

**Nils:** You would have to ask her. Her conversation with me is confidential and I am not at liberty to share what she said to me in the course of her interview. I am in the midst of a serious investigation of an attempted murder of the Swedish Ambassador. For all I know, the perpetrator may also be after your wife, the Norwegian Ambassador. We have assigned a special guard to keep her safe.

**Lars:** Well, then you won’t need me. I have nothing to do with this messy business. I can’t believe the things I have to do to keep my wife happy.

**Nils:** Let me get right to the point. Are you friendly with Benny Berglund?

**Lars:** **(In a flip sarcastic tone)** Sure, he is a great guy! Everybody loves him; especially women. Because of his huge personality he got the nickname, the “Swedish Lion.” I think he is in line to become the Prime Minister of Sweden one day.

**Nils:** But wasn’t he the guy who busted you for doping during the “Stockholm Leap”? Were you OK with that?

**Lars:** Well, I guess you know the story. I believe he was heavy handed and I protested my expulsion from the race. I have never admitted to the charges because they were false. Yet, everyone believed the racing commission and Benny. It ruined my racing career. So, yes, in truth I don’t like him. It is hard to be around him. Given my wife’s job, I have had to spend time with him more often than is comfortable for me. Despite what I said earlier about him, I actually have no liking or respect for him. He throws his weight around using his money and touting his noble lineage. He went for me on the doping charge because busting me, a Norwegian top athlete, in Sweden, would put another feather in his political hat.

**Lars:** **(Lars now peevishly and angrily mimics Benny)** “Oh, look at me, I caught the Norwegian champion cheating in a Swedish race? Aren’t I special! I am the Swedish Lion.” Then on top of it, he seduces my wife during some conference or other. So, now he says, “I ruined your career, now I am ruining your marriage. How do you like that?” Do I like Benny? What do you think? I hate the yellow and blue bastard! My life is troll piss because of him!

**Nils:** Did you hate him enough to try to kill him?

**Lars:** Well, I won’t miss him if he dies. But I didn’t poison him. Why would I jeopardize my miserable life further by risking murder and being locked up forever? I would have to be crazy to do that. If I was going to kill him I would do it in Norway or Sweden; they have only a maximum lock-up of 18 to 21 years for murder and enjoy a fairly nice prison system. Here, in the U.S., I would rot in sub-rate prison the rest of my life or even face execution.

**Nils:** Well thank you for your candor Lars. I have no further questions at this time. However, please remain here in Viking Hall for the time being. I may have additional questions for you.

**(Lars gets up and huffily stalks out of the hall.)**

**Interview 4**

**Nils:** **(Calls out)** Could Marit Stordame please come see me for an interview?

**(Marit comes in with dignity and grace.)**

**Nils:**  **(Nils rises and greets her and gestures for her to sit.)** Thank you for staying for the interview Madame President. I am sure all this has been most unpleasant for you and Sons of Norway.

**Marit:** That is an understatement. This Lodge has turned out to be an international embarrassment for Sons of Norway. To have local members die in prior incidents is bad enough; now the Swedish Ambassador has apparently been poisoned in Viking Hall. This is international news! And it is bad news for Sons of Norway. I can’t believe it is happening.

**Nils:** I am trying to get to the bottom of this matter. Madame President, do you have any knowledge of anyone at the dinner who would have wished to harm the Swedish Ambassador?

**Marit:** I know of no one in the Lodge that would have any reason to harm him. And I certainly do not suspect our honored guests, Lisbeth or Lars, would harbor any ill will against him. She is the Norwegian Ambassador for God’s sake and he, her husband. In fact, it is my understanding that Lisbeth is very fond of Benny, very fond indeed. They cooperate constantly on the international scene and often attend meetings together.

Wait—there *is* something I should mention! It is silly perhaps, but I will mention it anyway. Thor Hammar has fussed about admitting Swedes in the Lodge over the years and has been a vocal opponent of our celebration of St. Lucia, the Swedish saint, at Christmastime. He has some visceral hatred of Swedes and things Swedish that goes back to his childhood. If I remember rightly, he had a Swedish stepfather that treated him quite badly when he was a small child. I imagine that he was not happy having dinner at the Lodge with the Swedish Ambassador, but it is impossible for me to believe that he would actually harm the Swedish Ambassador and risk bringing ruin on the Lodge. That would be crazy!

**Nils:**  Well, crazy people do crazy things. But before you go, I would like to ask you some other questions. You see, I have to explore all possibilities and one possibility is that the target of the poisoning was not the Swedish Ambassador, but someone else at the table. Do you have any insights about anyone who might have wanted to kill a fellow Lodge member at the table tonight?

**Marit:** To tell you confidentially, there are some strong feelings in the Lodge about our new President, Thorvald Olsen. A number of members do not like him one bit. They are quite concerned he will lead our Lodge down the wrong path. I personally believe that he is bad for the order. He combines high ambition, stupidity, and illusions of grandeur in one big package. He has told many in the Lodge that he would be a perfect candidate for my own position, President of Sons of Norway. He actually has labeled me to some folks as a sort of usurper who is in the way of his destiny. He has already launched a campaign for the Presidency among many of the officers in our regional District.

**Nils:** Would you like him out of the way?

**Marit:** Yes, I honestly would. But, I would certainly not attempt to murder him. I intend to deal with him as best I can within the political sphere of Sons of Norway.

**Nils:** Well, thank you Madame President for your honesty in answering my questions. You may go now, but please remain in the Lodge in case I have some follow-up questions.

**(Marit Stordame now leaves the interview and the main hall.).**

**Interview 5**

**Nils:** **(Shouts)** Please call in Thor Hammar.

**(Thor Hammar walks to the interview table tentatively, looking nervous. Then he sits down.)**

**Thor:** **(Blurts out)** I know you think I tried to kill the Swedish Ambassador, because I have a reputation for hating Swedes. The other Lodge members are probably blabbing their heads off to you about it.

**Nils:** Well, do you hate Swedes?

**Thor:**  Yeah, they are no good! They betrayed Norway to the Germans in World War II, they eat funny foods like fermented fish, and they are mean to their kids. Well, they got no Lodge of their own, so they are sneaking into Sons of Norway and bringing in strange customs like the St. Lucia Day Festival. If we Norwegians don’t stand our ground they will take over the Lodge. They will be flying the yellow and blue over Viking Hall. I hate Swedes and their meatballs too—too round and too spicy. And their movies are gloomy and full of sex. They make me sick.

**Nils:** Seems to me, you don’t have a high opinion of Swedes.

**Thor:** Why would I? Hey, did you ever hear about the Norwegian cab driver that lost half his brain in a car accident. Well, he was in intensive care when he suddenly disappeared. They finally found him years later in Sweden. Guess what he was doing? He was a professor at one of their universities **(laughs at his own joke)**. That’s how dumb they are!

**Nils:** **(Smiles despite himself)** I have heard others say some of the stuff you accuse the Swedes of, but what is this about Swedes being mean to their kids? I have never heard that before.

**Thor:** Yeah, they get drunk and do bad things to their kids like jump on their toys, yelling things like “Here comes the troll.” I feel sorry for all those Swedish kids with their drunken parents.

**Nils:** Where did you learn these things about Swedes and their kids?

**Thor:** From experience. My step dad was a Swede, and a mean son-of-bitch like all of them. They use these long switches on their little kids. Horrible people.

**Nils:** What do you think of the Swedish Ambassador who was here tonight?

**Thor:** Probably the same as the rest of them, but I didn’t talk to him or his wife much. As I said, I don’t like Swedes, so why talk to them? They just talk nonsense and do mean things.

**Nils:** Do you hate Swedes enough to try to kill the Ambassador?

**Thor:** No, why would I try to kill the Swedish Ambassador? He didn’t want to join the Lodge. He was going to be gone by the end of the evening. If I had tried to kill him and the police found out, I would go to prison and there would probably be Swedes in prison—and then I would be stuck living with them. Do you think I am that crazy?

**Nils:** I am a detective, not a psychiatrist, so I wouldn’t know. How about other people at the dinner? Is there anyone among them you don’t like?

**Thor:**  Nope, they are Norwegian aren’t they, except for Annamarie, the Swedish Ambassador’s wife? Most of them are OK, but that Marit Stordame can be a pain at times. She thinks so highly of herself. As you probably noticed yourself that I am kind of prickly; people don’t bother me, because they know I can stand up for myself. I am good with my hands and I keep Viking Hall standing so they leave me alone. They keep me at arm’s length so to speak and that is OK by me.

**Nils:** Thank you, Thor. That will be all. However, please stick around Viking Hall. I may have additional questions.

**(Thor leaves the main hall with a swagger following the interview.)**

**Interview 6**

**Nils:** **(Calls out)** Could I please see Anna Lisa Lefse?

**(Anna walks in hesitantly and sits down, looking very grim.)**

**Nils:** Anna Lisa, this is the third time in 4 years I have had to interview you about something bad happening at Viking Hall. I would hope that you are not offended that I wish to get your perspective on what has happened.

**Anna Lisa:** As long as you do not imply, as you have done in previous interviews, that I could be a cold-blooded killer. I get very angry when you do that.

**Nils:** Well I’ll try to avoid getting you angry and upset this time. But I can’t promise anything. My job is to ask the tough questions.

**Anna Lisa:** OK, ask away.

**Nils:** First, what do you think of Benny Berglund?

**Anna Lisa:** I only first met him tonight. He is very charming, but I have heard that he is very popular with the ladies. I have read much about his diplomatic successes around the world. He seems very capable in his role as the Swedish Ambassador to the United States. I am so upset that someone tried to harm him at Viking Hall. This Lodge will certainly become the pariah Lodge in Sons of Norway after this horrible event. I can’t believe our luck over the last several years. It was such a lovely event and it was an honor for the Lodge to host two of Scandinavia’s most prominent diplomats.

**Nils:** Do you have any opinion about Swedes in general?

**Anna Lisa:** As you know we have many people of Swedish descent in the Lodge and I have many close friends among them. I do not share the views of Thor Hammar who is not right in the head when it comes to Swedes.

**Nils:** Do you think that Thor is capable of the attempted murder of the Swedish Ambassador?

**Anna Lisa:** I think it is all bluster and smoke, though it is annoying, and causes some Swedes to quit our Lodge when he gets in their faces. He is a cranky guy, but I don’t think he is a potential murderer. Do you?

**Nils:** I don’t know, that is why I am asking you. And I would like your opinion on another possibility I am giving consideration. What if someone else other than the Swedish Ambassador was the real target and somehow the Ambassador’s poisoning was a mistake?

**Anna Lisa:** If you don’t know, why would I?

**Nils:** Well, were there any other people in the dinner group that could have been targets other than the Swedish Ambassador? You know, more than anybody, that in the past the killers at the Lodge were other members killing their own. Where are the tension points today among today’s Lodge members?

**Anna Lisa:** As you know from your previous interview with me two years ago, I can’t stand Marit Stordame. She continues to interfere with Lodge business even though she is now the President of all of Sons of Norway. If it isn’t one thing that displeases her, it is another **(She gets** **more worked up as she talks)**. I am tired of it after all these years! I sometimes wish that Berta Travelhet had killed Marit in addition to her equally annoying sister Hedwig!

**Nils:** Looks like your relationship with Marit is the same or worse as it was two years ago. Anybody else that you have little truck for?

**Anna:** Our new President, Thorvald Olsen, is not always the brightest bulb in Viking Hall, but I get along with him alright. I am his official Lodge Counselor for the time being. Some folks do not like him, but nobody can be perfect.

**Nils:** Interesting, I did not expect you to get along so well with Thorvald. I heard you and he had some hot words earlier tonight.

**Anna:** Yes that’s true, but it is just rough Lodge banter. You have to know how to handle Thorvald, and he requires rough handling. Still, I get along much better with Thorvald than I do with Marit, that’s for sure.

**Nils:** Thank you Anna for your time. Please remain in Viking Hall until I give you permission to leave.

**(Anna leaves the hall looking upset and worried.)**

**Interview 7**

**Nils:** **(Shouts)** Could Thorvald Olsen now come for an interview?

**(Thorvald strides in haughtily and sits down heavily in the chair offered by Nils.)**

**Nils:** Good Evening, Thorvald.

**Thorvald**: **(Somewhat irritated in mood)** Good evening? It is the worst evening I have ever experienced! Here I am the newly elected Lodge President and the Swedish Ambassador gets poisoned during a Sons of Norway dinner held in honor of both the Norwegian and Swedish ambassadors. Now that is a bad evening in my book. So you know where you can stick your “Good Evening” Detective Nils!

**Nils:** It is understandable that you are upset, but I didn’t try to poison the Swedish Ambassador. Someone else did and I am trying to figure out who it is. Will you try to help me figure it out Thorvald?

**Thorvald:** Well, it isn’t me.

**Nils:** Why wasn’t it you?

**Thorvald:** Why would I try to poison the Swedish Ambassador at a Sons of Norway function and do so right in front of the Norwegian Ambassador? What purpose would I have in doing that? Would killing the Swedish Ambassador and creating an international incident really help get new members to join our Lodge? Why would I humiliate the Lodge on my watch as President? I may not be a learned man, but I am not that out of touch with the real world.

**Nils:** You make a good point. What if the actual target was somebody else in the dinner group and somehow things went wrong and the Swedish Ambassador became unintended collateral damage?

**Thorvald:** Well, Marit was sitting immediately to Benny’s left during the dinner; perhaps she was the object of the poisoning. A lot of folks, including me, don’t like her very much. She is now the Big Kahuna in Sons of Norway but she won’t get out of the everyday business of the Lodge. She uses Robert’s Rules of Order to block everything she doesn’t like, and get her way in everything she does like. Well, I have never opened Robert’s Rules of Order and I don’t intend to. As President I hope to drop the whole Robert’s Rules of Order business. That way her command of that tool will be meaningless.

**Nils:** So, you clearly don’t like her?

**Thorvald:**  Duh! Nils you’re slow for a Detective. Not only is she messing with the Lodge business she is probably going to plunk her butt down in the Sons of Norway Presidency for a decade. That’s a job I would like some day. I am the kind of hard-driving, innovative leader that Sons of Norway needs today, to keep itself vital in the Twenty-First Century. Plus, I would like to run for Congress one day. That would be a good fit. The Presidency of Sons of Norway would give me a good platform from which to launch my political career and Marit is in the way.

**Nils:**  From what you just told me you have good reason to get rid of Marit. Maybe you tried to poison her and then messed up and got the Swedish Ambassador instead?

**Thorvald:** **(Offended)** Nils, you are again implying that I am dumb as a post. Why would I poison the President of Sons of Norway in Viking Hall, the home of our Lodge? That would be a great campaign asset. “The President of Sons of Norway died while eating at my Lodge and my table, so elect me to serve in her place.” I don’t know how you made Detective, Nils, I just don’t.

**Nils:**  **(Irritated )** Thorvald, a lot of criminals do dumb things; especially when they are under the illusion that they are smarter than everybody else. But I am done with you for now. You may go, but don’t leave Viking Hall. I may have follow-up questions.

**(Thorvald angrily stomps out.)**

**Interview 8**

**Nils:** **(Shouts**) Please, could I now see Martha Slanders.

**(Martha comes in to sit down with Nils Skarpnese)**

**Nils:** Martha, here we are again for the third time in four years. By now you must be used to my questions.

**Martha:** **(Clearly distraught)** I can’t believe what has happened tonight. The shame of it all! The Swedish Ambassador poisoned at a Sons of Norway event. The whole world will put its eyeballs on us. And I am sure the news people will link up the previous murders with the attempted murder of the Swedish Ambassador. I do not know how I can face the officers of our District as their President. I am mortified by what has happened!

**Nils:** I am sure you are, but who do your think could have done such a thing and why? Other than, cranky Thor Hammar, I am aware of no one in the Lodge who bears a grudge against Swedes. I have a suspicion that Benny Berglund was poisoned by mistake and the real target of the crime escaped harm. I am actually worried that there will be a follow-up attempt on the person who was the actual focus of the murderer or murderers.

**Martha:** I don’t have a clue who would have wanted to harm anyone present at the dinner.

**Nils:** What about Marit? She was sitting next to Benny, on his left I believe.

**Martha:** **(Excited and upset)** Are you accusing me of attempting to murder Marit?

**Nils:** Calm down Martha. No, I was simply asking your opinion about what might have happened tonight.

**Martha:** A number of Lodge members do not like Marit. She thinks she is so special now that she is President of Sons of Norway. Some call her the “Queen of Sons of Norway” behind her back because she thinks so highly of herself. She has even had the gall to compare herself in looks to Queen Sonja, King Harald’s wife. Her ego is out of control!

With regards to the Lodge, she won’t give up any power. She has her tentacles wrapped around the running of both our District and the Lodge. She cannot let go, she just takes more and more control. She even tells us what brand of coffee we should buy for Lodge events. We have had to drink Butternut Coffee for years because of her and it tastes like warm dish water.

**Nils:** What about Thorvald? It seems some Lodge members are not so happy with their new president.

**Martha:** **(She hesitates at the question and looks to either side)** Thorvald may be dumb as a rutabaga about some things, but he often shows his street smarts when it is about what’s good for Thorvald. Like me, he thinks that Marit wields too much power at the Lodge level and won’t let the Lodge officers run things on our own. Thorvald’s ego is pretty big, but I was hoping that same big ego would help weaken Marit’s hold over the Lodge. Anything he can do to pry Marit’s fingers from the daily operation of this Lodge would be welcome from my point of view.

But Thorvald is at best a mixed blessing. He might be able to pry Marit’s fingers from the daily operation of the Lodge, but my concern is how to then pry his own fingers from the power he would then wield as our President of our Lodge. It is my expectation that he will run the Lodge into the ground. I once encountered him and his cronies playing poker down in the library for money. He also wants to open the bar all Saturday and serve anyone who wants to have a drink, members or not, to improve our finances. That would get us fined and shut down by both the municipality and the state. I just don’t trust him.

Plus the guy is ambitious. He wants to have my job as District President and then he has his eager eyes on Marit’s position as President of Sons of Norway. That’s not going to happen now. Who wants the guy whose Lodge nearly killed the Swedish Ambassador? He will be as popular as last year’s lutefisk.

**Nils:** Do you think that the murder attempt was directed at Marit or Thorvald? They were both sitting close to Benny Berglund during the dinner.

**Martha: (Distracted and angry)** What do I know? You are the detective! I have said all I wish to say for the moment.

**Nils:**  You may go for now, but please do not leave Viking Hall. I may have more questions later.

**(Looking sad but determined Martha leaves the room.)**

**Interview 9**

**Nils:** **(Shouts)** Call in Agnar Mildost please.

**(Agnar Mildost enters the room. He looks crushed and despondent)**

**Nils:** Please sit down Agnar and tell me what you know about what happened tonight.

**Agnar:** As the Cultural Director of the Lodge I was so happy that the Norwegian and Swedish ambassadors had agreed to come to dinner. Everything started on such a good note and I was so delighted when the Norwegian Ambassador gave a talk on how to properly drink Linie Aquavit. I have been trying to teach the Lodge members the proper way to drink quality aquavit for the past two years, and I had gotten nowhere with them.

Then disaster struck. Thorvald Olsen started arguing with the Norwegian Ambassador and next broke King Harald’s Lefse into a hundred pieces. My heart was crushed. But what followed was beyond my wildest fears. Someone actually tried to poison the Swedish Ambassador. This will be the end of the Lodge.

**Nils:** Who do you suspect would do such a thing?

**Agnar:** Based on his anti-Swedish ravings, suspicion naturally should point to Thor Hammar. But, I do not think he would do such a thing. He seems all talk to me and no action.

**Nils:** What if the Swedish Ambassador was not the intended victim and he was poisoned by accident? If that were the case, who would you think was the actual target of the perpetrator?

**Agnar:** Goodness, I don’t know. But there were two people there who some members and officers dislike, Marit and Thorvald. If the Swedish Ambassador was not the object of the poisoning then I would think one of those two.

**Nils:**  Why?

**Agnar:** Because Marit is hated by some members and officers for acting like such a big shot and never giving up her power over the Lodge. She is like a Black Widow who keeps the Lodge like a fly in her web to play with when she wants.

Thorvald, is a new problem, but a bad one. He is a very stupid man with very high ambitions and little ability. It is rumored he is simply climbing the rungs of Sons of Norway hierarchy to build his candidacy for a congressional seat. That is how dumb and clueless he is. If the Sons of Norway was truly a path to high political office, then Norwegian-Americans would dominate Congress.

It has been my view that Thorvald will bring the destruction of this Lodge and leave it an empty husk. Stupid men with big ambitions bring a lot of bad things to this world. (**Sighing)** But what happened here tonight has already probably put an end to our Lodge. After tonight, who in their right mind would want to be associated with us now anyway? At least Thorvald can’t destroy what is already destroyed.

**Nils:** So, who might have done the poisoning Agnar?

**Agmar:** Most anyone of us, including me, would be logical suspects. I did not do it though. I, as you know from your previous investigations, am a milktoast of a man. I might develop the hatred to act, but never the courage to carry out the act.

**Nils:** Many murders are done by people who are thought to be milktoasts, Agnar. Sometimes built-up hatred, anger, and resentment give uncommon courage to even the weakest of men.

Thank you, Agnar for your time. Please stay in the hall. I might want to get back to you.

**(Agnar leaves the hall looking resigned and forlorn.)**

**Interview 10**

**Nils: (Calls out)** Please call in Sigrun Slanders

**(Sigrun, comes in slowly; sits down and looks at the floor.)**

**Sigrun:** What happened tonight was terrible. The Swedish Ambassador nearly lost his life. I cannot believe someone would want to kill him.

**Nils:** Nor do I.

**Sigrun:** (**Looks up surprised.)** What do you mean? Do you think that the wrong person was poisoned? Who should have gotten the poison?

**Nils:** I don’t know; that is why I am talking to you. Somebody slipped or added poison in something the Swedish Ambassador ate or drank tonight. But I do not believe that Benny Berglund was the intended victim. Another person at the table was the intended target and they escaped the “bullet” so to speak. Do you have any thoughts as to who might have been a more likely target of the poisoning?

**Sigrun:** **(Looking nervous and down at her shoes)** No, I do not.

**Nils:** Thorvald and Marit were sitting near Benny; perhaps they were the intended victims?

**Sigrun:** I wouldn’t know. How would I?

**Nils:** Well, you were the main server for the banquet tonight. It was you who brought most their plates, coffee, and aquavit. In fact, you served everyone individually. Whether you knew it or not, you may have been involved in initially serving whatever food or drink that contained the poison which nearly killed Benny Berglund.

**Sigrun:** **(Distraught)** Are you accusing me of being the poisoner? Why would I want to poison somebody at that table?

**Nils:** Do you think that Thorvald could have been the intended recipient of the poison? I have heard talk that he is not well liked by a number of Lodge members.

**Sigrun:**  **(Sigrun waits a while before answering; looking at the floor; then answers with an** **irritated voice.)** Thorvald is Thorvald, he is a big dumb ox, but he is too stupid to do real harm. Some people are riled up about him being President, but not me. Presidents come and go around here. This Lodge is about old people and their constant fussing and bickering; what about young people—have you seen any tonight?

**Nils:** What about Marit Stordame? I know your mother has little liking for Marit.

**Sigrun:** You are right. She hates Marit with all her heart, but I don’t. As I just said, I don’t care about what the old people care about. It’s their business, not my business. I want a life outside of Viking Hall.

**Nils:** But you do your mother’s bidding. You are her little helper. You do what she says because you can’t get a job in this economy. You have been out of work for over two years. You are still her dependent. That means she has a strong hold over you and what you do.

**Sigrun:** **(Sigrun is distraught and protests loudly.)** Why are you saying these things? I didn’t do anything to anyone!

**Nils:** I am sorry to have upset you, but sometimes I must ask hard questions to get the right answers to my questions. You may go now, but please do not leave Viking Hall for now. I may have additional questions.

**(Sigrun, clearly upset, leaves the hall).**

**(Play action—Nils sits contemplatively and the lights go out. The Master of Ceremonies comes in again and speaks to the audience.)**

**MC: (While the Master of Ceremonies is speaking, have clue sheets and ballots passed out to the audience.)** We have now seen with our own eyes what can happen at the Lodge. A festive dinner in honor of two of Scandinavia’s greatest living diplomats leaves one of them at death’s door, from what appears to be deliberate poisoning. Luckily, our city’s most able detective, Nils Skarpnese, is immediately assigned to the case. He has carefully interviewed everyone who might shed some light on the attempted murder. In those interviews Nils Skarpnese found there is neither peace nor harmony in the Lodge. Nothing has changed over the years. Bitterness, hatred, envy, and twisted ambition all quickly rise to the surface in the course of his investigation. He also found that not all is well in the Scandinavian diplomatic world. Here, what bubbles forth is a frothy brew of lust, love, disappointment, and a nursed resentment for past wrongs.

Before Nils Skarpnese proceeds further with his investigation, you too can try your hand at being the detective. Please take the next few minutes to recall the interviews by Nils Skarpnese. Review the Clue Sheets. Also, think back to who and what you observed at the end of the fateful dinner party. It is time for you to decide who was involved in the attempted murder (and there could be more than one perpetrator) and who really was the intended victim (or victims). A paper ballot has been passed out to each of you. Print your name at the top of the ballot and then please write the name or names of the both the intended victim (or victims) and the person (or persons) you believe committed the crime. When you are done fold your ballot once and place it in the containers that will be passed around the room. These ballots might turn out to be proof of your attentive skills and insights into human nature. If you correctly pick the intended victim of the poisoning (or victims) and the correct perpetrator (or perpetrators), you will be eligible for a prize at the end of this Mystery Night. Your ballots must be turned in prior to the start of Act III of *The Ambassadors Come to Din*ner in order to be eligible for consideration. Please complete your ballots while we take a 15 minute intermission.

**(15-20 minute intermission for passing out the ballots and clue sheets. If you’ve served a dinner, you may pass out a dessert now or offer a dessert buffet, coffee & tea to your guests.)**

**(Intermission 15 minutes)**

Act 3

Twilight of the Lodge

(**Play action—The Master of Ceremonies introduces the scene. Everyone has been sent home; with two exceptions. Nils Skarpnese sits at one end of the banquet table. A spotlight shines down on Nils, the rest of the hall is dark.)**

**Master of Ceremonies:** The end is near. Nils Skarpnese will now conclude his investigation and reveal who was behind tonight’s attempted murder at Viking Hall. Will this be the twilight of the Lodge, like the Ragnarok of Viking legend that saw the destruction of the gods and the end of the world? The wise ones of old said that Ragnarok would be preceded by a period of strife and hatred among men. Over the past four years the Lodge has been the scene of appalling violence and bitter animosities. Does all this portend the end of the Lodge? And if so, will a new one arise from the ashes of the old, guided by a new generation of wise and steadfast leaders? Only time will tell.

For now, let us see what Nils Skarpnese is up to. Everyone has been sent home by Nils with the exception of Marit Stordame and Anna Lisa Lefse.

**Nils Skarpnese: (Shouts)** I would like to see Marit Stordame one last time. Please send her in.

**(Marit comes in nervously; Nils offers her a seat.)**

**Nils:** Please sit down Madame President. I have something to say.

**Marit:** Oh, my, am I accused?

**Nils:** Well, I can tell you that you were high on my list of suspects. I didn’t think you had any reason to kill the Swedish Ambassador, but you do appear to have a very strong dislike of Thorvald Olsen, the President of the Lodge. However, the one thing that threw me was that you openly admitted to your hatred of Thorvald Olsen. You did not hide your feelings of disgust for him in our interview. If you had tried to poison Thorvald Olsen, I would have assumed you would have kept your true opinion of Thorvald quiet so as not to give me the idea you might have a motive to kill him. So, you dropped down several notches in my list of potential suspects. New information now confirms my hunch about you. You are free to go. Thank you for your time Madame President.

**Marit:** Thank you Nils. This has been a very difficult evening for Sons of Norway and the Lodge. I am so worried what will become of the Lodge. As President of Sons of Norway, I may be put in the peculiar position of revoking the charter of my very own home Lodge.

May I ask, who is the poisoner? Do you have a prime suspect?

**Nils:** We do, but I am not at liberty to tell you more at this time. I have more work to do before I can conclude this investigation.

**Marit:** Thank you again.

**(Marit gets up and leaves.)**

**Nils: (Shouts)** Please call in Anna Lisa Lefse.

**(Anna Lisa, looking despondent and worried, comes in and stands, wringing her hands, and stands in front of Nils.)**

**Nils:** Anna Lisa, please sit down. How are you doing?

**Anna Lisa: (Anna Lisa sits down.)** As well as could be expected Nils. I am quite upset at this turn of events. I have devoted most of my recent life to keeping peace and harmony within the Lodge and tonight has revealed we have nothing to offer people but trouble and chaos. I cannot believe our luck. The poisoning of the Swedish Ambassador is the last straw. We are finished as a Lodge. By the way, how is the Ambassador doing?

**Nils:** He is stable and will pull through. He has a strong constitution and he received medical care in time.

**Anna Lisa:** I am glad to hear that he is recovering.

**Nils:** I am sure you are. Now I need to ask you some more questions that are pertinent to what happened tonight. Anna Lisa you have a reputation as a great expert on potato lefse and moreover as an expert on the cultivation and cooking of potatoes.

**Anna Lisa:** What does my expertise in potatoes have to do with tonight?

**Nils:** A great deal. Do you know what potato fruits are?

**Anna Lisa: (Looks from side to side, nervously.)** Yes, I do. They are little green tomato-like fruits that grow on potato plants. What do potato fruits have to do with anything?

**Nils:** I think you know? We do not eat potato fruits, do we? Why not?

**Anna Lisa:** Because they contain poison.

**Nils:** Exactly, a deadly glycoalkaloid poison known as solanine. And did you know that solanine, when properly distilled and concentrated from potato fruits, is nearly as potent a poison as ricin, one of the most deadly poisons known to man? Ricin is twice as deadly as cobra venom.

**Anna Lisa: (Becoming more agitated)** Why are you talking about cobra venom? What does that have to do with anything? We are not in Egypt!

**Nils:** I was talking about the poison solanine and its level of potency. It is the very poison that nearly killed the Swedish Ambassador. The symptoms begin with a burning sensation in the throat that is followed by nausea, stomach cramps, and difficulties in breathing. Eventually, if the dosage is sufficient, the victim succumbs to paralysis and fatal cardiac arrest.

**Anna Lisa:** Why are you talking about such a terrible poison to me? What has all this poison talk got to do with me?

**Nils:** It has everything to do with you.

**Anna Lisa:** What do you mean by that?

**Nils:** I know you made and administered the poison that almost killed the Swedish Ambassador.

**Anna Lisa: (Clearly upset)** That is ridiculous, why would I try to kill the Swedish Ambassador! It is the last thing I would want to do and you know it! I would have no reason to do such a thing!

**Nils:** I know you intended the Swedish Ambassador no harm; your intended target was Thorvald Olsen, the Lodge President.

**Anna Lisa:** I never said anything against Thorvald in my interview with you other than I thought he was not the smartest coconut in the tree.

**Nils: (With emphasis.)** That’s just the point! Thorvald is clearly a big stupid jerk who could steer the Lodge to the brink of disaster, and you said not a bad word about him except that you thought he was stupid. That caught my attention, for I know you have your life invested in the success of the Lodge. And when people, in your mind, threaten the viability of this Lodge you usually do not hold back. You had scathing words for Marit Stordame, but nothing much negative to say about Thorvald. As I said earlier, it struck me as odd.

**Anna Lisa: (Angry and defiant)** So, what I did not say now condemns me. What is this world coming to?

**Nils:** When are you going to give it up? You were one of only two people that had close access to the Linie Aquavit and we believe the poison was administered through the aquavit. You helped Sigrun Slanders pour the aquavit and she and other witnesses noted that it was you who poured the frozen aquavit that was requested by Thorvald, Benny, and Lars. You were able to surreptitiously add a healthy dose of solanine to what you thought would be Thorvald’s aquavit. However, ever the bull in the china closet, he reached out unexpectedly and picked up the tray with last two chilled glasses of aquavit and beer before you could properly serve them. The glass you intended for Thorvald inadvertently ended up in front of the Swedish Ambassador, who drank it neat just as Thorvald had encouraged him to do.

**Anna Lisa: (Still defiant)** Saying nothing bad about Thorvald and pouring aquavit does not make a case? Marit Stordame was sitting next to both Thorvald and Benny. She could have put solanine or whatever poison was used into one of their aquavits and got it wrong.

**Nils:** But Marit did not have a basement full of potato plants that were growing under ultraviolet light. Blue ultraviolet light, as you know, increases the amount of solanine produced in the potato plant fruits.

**Anna Lisa:** What makes you think I have such a basement?

**Nils: (Said with an emphasis that startles Anna Lisa) *Because we looked!*** After I realized you had ready access to the aquavit, which we believed delivered the poison, and that you had a credible motive to get rid of Thorvald Olsen, I requested and received a warrant to search your house. Not only did we find the potato plants and fruits, we also found the little pot and camp stove you used in the basement to cook down the potato fruits in order to create a really potent concentration of nearly pure solanine. We also found several vials of the stuff in your freezer. I assume you had to experiment before you got the formula just right. Practice makes perfect.

**Anna Lisa: (Stares hard and defiantly at Nils, then crumples)** Yes, you are right I did it! I did it! Thorvald is worse than Marit. Marit is terrible, but she still cares about Sons of Norway and the Lodge. Thorvald is different. He is just awful and is only out for himself. He would have no problem destroying the Lodge to serve his stupid, petty ambitions. I could not stand by and let it happen. Thorvald had to go!

I thought I had it all figured out. I thought that if I used a natural poison like solanine no one would think Thorvald’s death was intentional. It was my belief that everyone would assume it would be seen as bad case of food poisoning. We have had some bad cases of food poisoning in the past, especially at the lutefisk dinners in the fall—so I assumed that one more would not appear that unusual. I underestimated the doctors at the hospital and I underestimated the Police Department; and I sure underestimated you Nils.

I regret the pain and the suffering I caused Benny Berglund, the Swedish Ambassador. Of course, I never meant him any harm. I am so sorry. I am also crushed by the fact that I probably added the last nail to the coffin of our Lodge. It is truly ironic that in my zeal to save the Lodge I might have brought it to its end.

**Nils:** Well there is some truth, Anna Lisa, to the time-worn saying that “Crime never pays.” The Lodge has paid a very high price for the crimes committed under the roof of Viking Hall over the past four years. I don’t know if it will survive this last scandal, which thanks to an accident of chance, will be international rather than local in scope. Perhaps a new Lodge will arise out of the ashes of the old, but under a new and vigorous leadership free of the bitterness and rancor that has marked the Lodge for the past several years.

And despite your ill-conceived efforts to bring him down, Thorvald Olsen still walks the world making it a worse place for any who might oppose or thwart him in fulfilling his blind and small-minded ambitions.

Please stand up Anna Lisa, it is time for us to go.

**Anna Lisa: (Anna Lisa stands)** I am not sure Thorvald will be walking around this world much longer. I am a good lefse roller and if I make a mistake now and again I know how to correct it. I had an opportunity to give Thorvald a heart-felt gift before he left Viking Hall tonight—and it was not the gift of life **(she then turns compliantly so that Nils can hand cuff her).**

**Nils: (Nils begins to cuff Anna Lisa)** What was it you gave him?

**Anna Lisa**: **(Said with a smile.)** You will know soon enough Nils, don’t worry.

**(Nils cuffs her and they leave the hall with her in hand cuffs.)**

**Epilogue**

**Ragarnok**

**(Play action—The Master of Ceremonies introduces a new scene, in Thorvald Olsen’s home. A chair and small table with a floor lamp are seen, with Thorvald seated. A full bottle of Linie Aquavit, a small glass, and a beer sit beside him on a small table--a spotlight or the floor lamp shines on him, the rest of the stage is dark.)**

**MC:** Now we turn the scene to Thorvald Olsen alone in his den, after having been allowed to return home by Detective Nils Skarpnese. Here, he sits gloating to himself over the events of the evening.

**Thorvald: (Talking aloud to himself)** By now Marit Stordame is sure to have been arrested for poisoning the Swedish Ambassador. Too bad for Benny that things got mixed up and he ended up nearly dying. But that was good for me. I know Marit meant for me to drink the poisoned aquavit and die. Well, too bad for her. With Marit out of the way, the presidency of all of Sons of Norway will be open to me and then it is on to the Halls of Congress.

It is time to drink a skål to me and my future. I have a full bottle of Linie Aquavit, frozen as I like it, along with a nice cold beer. I will drink to my good fortune thanks to that nit wit of a Counselor, Anna Lisa Lefse. She is a fool, but I depend on fools to clear my path in life. There are always enough of them to help me along. And she gave me this fine bottle of aquavit before I left tonight. “For my troubles,” she said. Hah! I won’t have any troubles if Marit is already in jail.

**(Play action—Thorvald pours himself a full glass of aquavit and throws it down followed by a big gulp of beer. He sits smiling and self-satisfied. He then gets a funny look. He eyes begin to bulge. He grabs his throat and then grabs his stomach.)**

**Thorvald: (Frightened he yells out, then slumps back and is still.)** Oh, my God no! Not me! Please no . . . . . !

**(The spotlight on Thorvald is turned off or the MC may walk over and turn off the floor lamp, while hall lights are turned back on.)**

**MC:** It appears that the end has come for Thorvald Olsen, much sooner than he thought. His death will be most unpleasant, so we will not show you his last moments alone with his frozen Linie Aquavit. But you can imagine it was not a festive occasion.

**MC:** Please keep to your seats, for although the play has concluded, Mystery Night has not. It is time to acknowledge those who correctly identified the culprit or culprits. We have several prizes. If more than one of you correctly identified poisoner, we will have a drawing from the number of successful sleuths.

**MC: (After announcing drawing winners and cast members have taken a bow.)** Ladies and Gentlemen, now with the conclusion of this business, and with Thorvald’s end, so too, does this Mystery Night end.

*Thank you and goodnight!*

**The End**