



The duo descended into the ravine, passing huge boulders in the middle of the valley as if dropped there by supernatural creatures. After several kilometers in this dry fissure, the atmosphere began to feel heavy, and Alberto could hear a soft murmur gradually growing louder until it rose up through the ground into his boots. Suddenly they found themselves facing Ófærufoss: a massive seething spout of water falling from the top of the tephra cliffs. After a few minutes gazing at the waterfall, completely mesmerized, they started to follow the course of the widening river. The boulders gained a tenuous clothing of green moss as they walked. After every cataclysmic battle of the old gods, nature found its way again.

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“Only 15 kilometers!” Monica shouted over the blowing wind. The rain had been intense from the moment they had stepped outside the hut.

Plummeting temperatures the night before had frozen the valley sides, and they tried to thread a route between firmer areas, desperately trying to avoid sinking into the mud. Gale-force winds continually pushed them off course, and they were so soaked that it seemed pointless to take their boots off before fording rivers. Splash, squelch, splash was the soundtrack to their hike—heads down, hoods turned against the storm, eyes focused on the little patch of ground right at their feet.

Hard hours later, Alberto finally caught sight of the hut: a tenuous ghost of a building. As they neared, the mirage solidified and he dared to believe that they had reached shelter. Monica, still just ahead of him, was shaking as she staggered forward, but Alberto heard her let out a happy sigh of relief. He could not even feel his hands, and every layer of clothing was soaked to the skin. Raindrops dripped from his beard. But he felt something unknot within himself as he realized that they had reached safety. They had come through the fires. □