**The Jostedal Grouse**

When the black death ravaged the land here, many of the best families in Sogn moved up to Jostedal in order to avoid the plague. They settled down here, cleared fields, and built houses. The had made an agreement with people down by the fjord that they were not to visit them until the plague was over. If anyone wanted to write to them, he was to put the letters under a certain stone, and this stone is called the Letter Stone to this very day. The ones remaining down by the fjord could then fetch an answer from under the same stone. It lies beside the road from Jostedal to Luster.

But no matter how careful and foresighted these people were the plague came to Jostedal too, and it came so hard that everyone died except a little girl on Bjørkhaug farm. Some say that seven cows without, with the bell-cow in front, came straying over the mountains to the neighbouring parish in Gudbrandsdal. When no one came to look for the animals, it occurred to someone that they must have come from Jostedal, and people went over there to see what had happened. If this was the case, then things must really have been in a bad way. Houses stood empy everywhere, and many of the dead had not been buried. They went all through the valley but saw no smoke from a single house, and no sign of life was to be found anywhere.

When they came to Mjelvesdalen, the saw footprints in the new snow. They followed the tracks and at Bjørkhaug they saw a little girl. As soon as she caught sight of them, she ran into the birch forest, but at last they caught her. They questioned her about various things, but she did not understand them nor they her, sxcept for these words: “Mother, little grouse.”

It is told that when her mother was dying, she left food on the table, put the girl in a feather bed, and put food near the bed so the girl would not starve to death. When she was found, some of the feathers had grown fast to her.

The men took her home with them, and she grew into a fine and clever young woman. Some say she married and settled down at Bjørkhaug, but most people think she settled down an Runnøy, all the way out in Gaupnefjord, where people from Jostedal drive down to the sea. They called her the “Jostedal Grouse,” after the words her mother had spoken to her. Her descendants are called “the Grouse Family,” and they are known as generous and influential people. Characteristics of this family was “bird skin”; that is to say, they had big holes in their skin as if from the feathers that had grown fast to the girl.

