

The
HEROES OF ASGARD



“Cease, strange Vanir.....
cease your rough play”





The
HEROES OF ASGARD

TALES FROM SCANDINAVIAN MYTHOLOGY

BY

A. & E. KEARY



ILLUSTRATED
WITH DRAWINGS
BY C. E. BROCK



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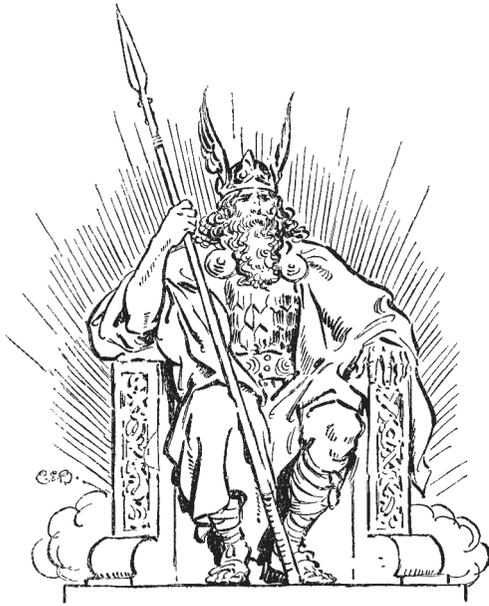
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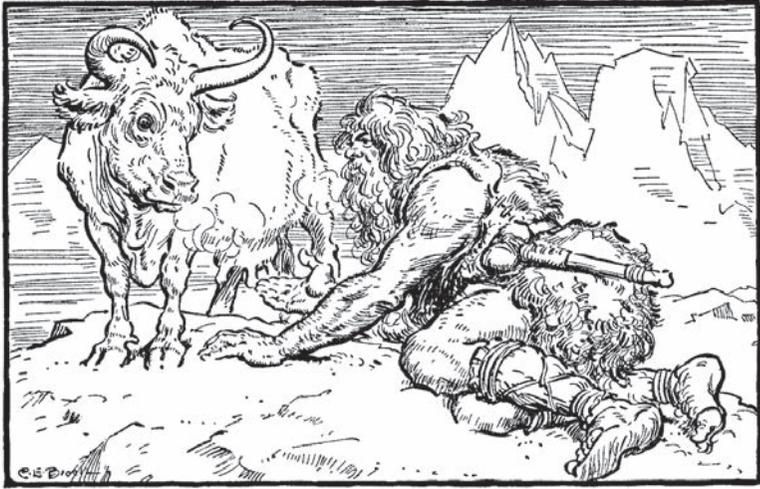
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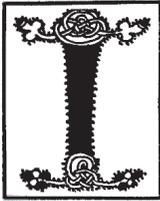
STORY I

THE AESIR





PART I . A Giant - A Cow - and a Hero



IN the beginning of ages there lived a cow, whose breath was sweet, and whose milk was bitter. This cow was called Audhumla, and she lived all by herself on a frosty, misty plain, where there was nothing to be seen but heaps of snow and ice piled strangely over one another. Far away to the north it was night, far away to the south it was day; but all around where Audhumla lay a cold, grey twilight reigned. By and by a giant came out of the dark north, and lay down upon the ice near Audhumla. "You must let me drink of your milk," said the giant to the cow; and though her milk was bitter, he liked it well, and for him it was certainly good enough.

After a little while the cow looked all round her for something to eat, and she saw a very few grains of salt sprinkled over the ice; so she licked the salt, and

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breathed with her sweet breath, and then long golden locks rose out of the ice, and the southern day shone upon them, which made them look bright and glittering.

The giant frowned when he saw the glitter of the golden hair; but Audhumla licked the pure salt again, and a head of a man rose out of the ice. The head was more handsome than could be described, and a wonderful light beamed out of its clear blue eyes. The giant frowned still more when he saw the head; but Audhumla licked the salt a third time, and then an entire man arose—a hero majestic in strength and marvellous in beauty.

Now, it happened that when the giant looked full in the face of that beautiful man, he hated him with his whole heart, and, what was still worse, he took a terrible oath, by all the snows of Ginnungagap, that he would never cease fighting until either he or Buri, the hero, should lie dead upon the ground. And he kept his vow; he did not cease fighting until Buri had fallen beneath his cruel blows. I cannot tell how it could be that one so wicked should be able to conquer one so majestic and so beautiful; but so it was, and afterwards, when the sons of the hero began to grow up, the giant and his sons fought against them too, and were very near conquering them many times.

But there was of the sons of the heroes one of very great strength and wisdom, called Odin, who, after many combats, did at last slay the great old giant, and pierced his body through with his keen spear, so that the blood swelled forth in a mighty torrent, broad and

A GIANT — A COW — AND A HERO

deep, and all the hideous giant brood were drowned in it excepting one, who ran away panting and afraid.

After this Odin called round him his sons, brothers, and cousins, and spoke to them thus: "Heroes, we have won a great victory; our enemies are dead, or have run away from us. We cannot stay any longer here, where there is nothing evil for us to fight against."

The heroes looked round them at the words of Odin. North, south, east, and west there was no one to fight against them anywhere, and they called out with one voice, "It is well spoken, Odin; we follow you."

"Southward," answered Odin, "heat lies, and northward night. From the dim east the sun begins his journey westward home."

"Westward home!" shouted they all; and westward they went.

Odin rode in the midst of them, and they all paid to him reverence and homage as to a king and father. On his right hand rode Thor, Odin's strong, warlike, eldest son. On his left hand rode Baldur, the most beautiful and exalted of his children; for the very light of the sun itself shone forth from his pure and noble brow. After him came Tyr the Brave; the Silent Vidar; Hödur, who, alas! was born blind; Hermod, the Flying Word; Bragi, Hœnir, and many more mighty lords and heroes; and then came a shell chariot, in which sat Frigga, the wife of Odin, with all her daughters, friends, and tirewomen.

Eleven months they journeyed westward, enlivening the way with cheerful songs and conversation, and at

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the twelfth new moon they pitched their tents upon a range of hills which stood near the borders of an inland sea. The greater part of one night they were disturbed by mysterious whisperings, which appeared to proceed from the sea-coast, and creep up the mountain side; but as Tyr, who got up half a dozen times, and ran furiously about among the gorse and bushes, always returned saying that he could see no one, Frigga and her maidens at length resigned themselves to sleep, though they certainly trembled and started a good deal at intervals. Odin lay awake all night, however; for he felt certain that something unusual was going to happen. And such proved to be the case; for in the morning, before the tents were struck, a most terrific hurricane levelled the poles, and tore in pieces the damask coverings, swept from over the water furiously up the mountain gorges, round the base of the hills, and up again all along their steep sides right in the faces of the heroes.

Thor swung himself backwards and forwards, and threw stones in every possible direction. Tyr sat down on the top of a precipice, and defied the winds to displace him; whilst Baldur vainly endeavoured to comfort his poor mother, Frigga. But Odin stepped forth calm and unruffled, spread his arms towards the sky, and called out to the spirits of the wind, "Cease, strange under weigh (for that was the name by which they were called), cease your rough play, and tell us in what manner we have offended you that you serve us thus."

The winds laughed in a whispered chorus at the

A GIANT — A COW — AND A HERO

words of the brave king, and, after a few low titterings, sank into silence. But each sound in dying grew into a shape: one by one the strange, loose-limbed, uncertain forms stepped forth from caves, from gorges, dropped from the tree-tops, or rose out of the grass—each wind-gust a separate Van.

Then Niörd, their leader, stood forward from the rest of them, and said, “We know, O mighty Odin, how you and your company are truly the Æsir—that is to say, the lords of the whole earth—since you slew the huge, wicked giant. We, too, are lords, not of the earth, but of the sea and air, and we thought to have had glorious sport in fighting one against another; but if such be not your pleasure, let us, instead of that, shake hands.” And, as he spoke, Niörd held out his long, cold hand, which was like a windbag to the touch. Odin grasped it heartily, as did all the Æsir; for they liked the appearance of the good-natured, gusty chief, whom they begged to become one of their company, and live henceforth with them.

To this Niörd consented, whistled good-bye to his kinsfolk, and strode cheerfully along amongst his new friends. After this they journeyed on and on steadily westward until they reached the summit of a lofty mountain, called the Meeting Hill. There they all sat round in a circle, and took a general survey of the surrounding neighbourhood.

As they sat talking together Baldur looked up suddenly, and said, “Is it not strange, Father Odin, that we do not find any traces of that giant who fled from

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us, and who escaped drowning in his father's blood?"

"Perhaps he has fallen into Niflheim, and so perished," remarked Thor.

But Niörd pointed northward, where the troubled ocean rolled, and said, "Yonder, beyond that sea, lies the snowy region of Jötunheim. It is there the giant lives, and builds cities and castles, and brings up his children—a more hideous brood even than the old one."

"How do you know that, Niörd?" asked Odin.

"I have seen him many times," answered Niörd, "both before I came to live with you, and also since then, at night, when I have not been able to sleep, and have made little journeys to Jötunheim, to pass the time away."

"This is indeed terrible news," said Frigga; "for the giants will come again out of Jötunheim and devastate the earth."

"Not so," answered Odin, "not so, my dear Frigga; for here, upon this very hill, we will build for ourselves a city, from which we will keep guard over the poor earth, with its weak men and women, and from whence we will go forth to make war upon Jötunheim."

"That is remarkably well said, Father Odin," observed Thor, laughing amidst his red beard.

Tyr shouted, and Vidar smiled, but said nothing; and then all the Æsir set to work with their whole strength and industry to build for themselves a glorious city on the summit of the mountain. For days, and weeks, and months, and years they worked, and never wearied;

A GIANT — A COW — AND A HERO

so strong a purpose was in them, so determined and powerful were they to fulfil it. Even Frigga and her ladies did not disdain to fetch stones in their marble wheel-barrows, or to draw water from the well in golden buckets, and then, with delicate hands, to mix the mortar upon silver plates. And so that city rose by beautiful degrees, stone above stone, tower above tower, height above height, until it crowned the hill.

Then all the Æsir stood at a little distance, and looked at it, and sighed from their great happiness. Towering at a giddy height in the centre of the city rose Odin's seat, called Air Throne, from whence he could see over the whole earth. On one side of Air Throne stood the Palace of Friends, where Frigga was to live; on the other rose the glittering Gladsheim, a palace roofed entirely with golden shields, and whose great hall, Valhalla, had a ceiling covered with spears, benches spread with coats of mail, and five hundred and forty entrance-gates, through each of which eight hundred men might ride abreast. There was also a large iron smithy, situated on the eastern side of the city, where the Æsir might forge their arms and shape their armour. That night they all supped in Valhalla, and drank to the health of their strong, new home, "The City of Asgard," as Bragi, their chief orator, said it ought to be called.



PART II ✧ Air Throne, the Dwarfs and the light Elves ✧



N the morning Odin mounted Air Throne, and looked over the whole earth, whilst the Æsir stood all round waiting to hear what he thought about it.

“The earth is very beautiful,” said Odin, from the top of his throne, “very beautiful in every part, even to the shores of the dark North Sea; but, alas! the men of the earth are puny and fearful. At this moment I see a three-headed giant striding out of Jötunheim. He throws a shepherd-boy into the sea, and puts the whole of the flock into his pocket. Now he takes them out again one by one, and cracks their bones as if they were hazelnuts, whilst, all the time, men look on, and do nothing.”

“Father,” cried Thor in a rage, “last night I forged for myself a belt, a glove, and a hammer, with which three things I will go forth alone to Jötunheim.”

Thor went, and Odin looked again.

“The men of the earth are idle and stupid,” said Odin. “There are dwarfs and elves, who live amongst them, and play tricks which they cannot understand, and do not know how to prevent. At this moment I see a husbandman sowing grains of wheat in the furrows, whilst a dwarf runs after him, and changes them into stones. Again, I see two hideous little beings, who are holding under water the head of one, the wisest of men, until he dies; they mix his blood with honey; they have put it into three stone jars, and hidden it away.”

Then Odin was very angry with the dwarfs, for he saw that they were bent on mischief; so he called to him Hermod, his Flying Word, and despatched him with a message to the dwarfs and light elves, to say that Odin sent his compliments, and would be glad to speak with them, in his palace of Gladsheim, upon a matter of some importance.

When they received Hermod’s summons the dwarfs and light elves were very much surprised, not quite knowing whether to feel honoured or afraid. However, they put on their pertest manners, and went clustering after Hermod like a swarm of ladybirds.

When they were arrived in the great city they found Odin descended from his throne, and sitting with the rest of the Æsir in the Judgment Hall of Gladsheim. Hermod flew in, saluted his master, and pointed to the dwarfs and elves hanging like a cloud in the doorway to show that he had fulfilled his mission. Then Odin beckoned the little people to come forward. Cowering

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and whispering they peeped over one another's shoulders; now running on a little way into the hall, now back again, half curious, half afraid; and it was not until Odin had beckoned three times that they finally reached his footstool. Then Odin spoke to them in calm, low, serious tones about the wickedness of their mischievous propensities. Some, the very worst of them, only laughed in a forward, hardened manner; but a great many looked up surprised and a little pleased at the novelty of serious words; whilst the light elves all wept, for they were tender-hearted little things. At length Odin spoke to the two dwarfs by name whom he had seen drowning the wise man. "Whose blood was it," he asked, "that you mixed with honey and put into jars?"

"Oh," said the dwarfs, jumping up into the air, and clapping their hands, "that was Kvasir's blood. Don't you know who Kvasir was? He sprang up out of the peace made between the Vanir and yourselves, and has been wandering about these seven years or more; so wise he was that men thought he must be a god. Well, just now we found him lying in a meadow drowned in his own wisdom; so we mixed his blood with honey, and put it into three great jars to keep. Was not that well done, Odin?"

"Well done!" answered Odin. "Well done! You cruel, cowardly, lying dwarfs! I myself saw you kill him. For shame! for shame!" and then Odin proceeded to pass sentence upon them all. Those who had been the most wicked, he said, were to live, henceforth, a long way underground, and were to spend their time in throwing fuel upon the great earth's central fire; whilst those who

had only been mischievous were to work in the gold and diamond mines, fashioning precious stones and metals. They might all come up at night, Odin said; but must vanish at the dawn. Then he waved his hand, and the dwarfs turned round, shrilly chattering, scampered down the palace-steps, out of the city, over the green fields, to their unknown, deep-buried earth-homes. But the light elves still lingered, with upturned, tearful, smiling faces, like sunshiny morning dew.

“And you,” said Odin, looking them through and through with his serious eyes, “and you——”

“Oh! indeed, Odin,” interrupted they, speaking all together in quick, uncertain tones; “Oh! indeed, Odin, we are not so very wicked. We have never done anybody any harm.”

“Have you ever done anybody any good?” asked Odin.

“Oh! no, indeed,” answered the light elves, “we have never done anything at all.”

“You may go, then,” said Odin, “to live amongst the flowers, and play with the wild bees and summer insects. You must, however, find something to do, or you will get to be mischievous like the dwarfs.”

“If only we had any one to teach us,” said the light elves, “for we are such foolish little people.”

Odin looked round inquiringly upon the Æsir; but amongst them there was no teacher found for the silly little elves. Then he turned to Niörd, who nodded his head good-naturedly, and said, “Yes, yes, I will see about

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it;” and then he strode out of the Judgment Hall, right away through the city gates, and sat down upon the mountain’s edge.

After awhile he began to whistle in a most alarming manner, louder and louder, in strong wild gusts, now advancing, now retreating; then he dropped his voice a little, lower and lower, until it became a bird-like whistle—low, soft, enticing music, like a spirit’s call; and far away from the south a little fluttering answer came, sweet as the invitation itself, nearer and nearer until the two sounds dropped into one another. Then through the clear sky two forms came floating, wonderfully fair—a brother and sister—their beautiful arms twined round one another, their golden hair bathed in sunlight, and supported by the wind.

“My son and daughter,” said Niörd, proudly, to the surrounding Æsir, “Frey and Freyja, Summer and Beauty, hand in hand.”

When Frey and Freyja dropped upon the hill Niörd took his son by the hand, led him gracefully to the foot of the throne, and said, “Look here, dear brother Lord, what a fair young instructor I have brought for your pretty little elves.”

Odin was very much pleased with the appearance of Frey; but, before constituting him king and school-master of the light elves, he desired to know what his accomplishments were, and what he considered himself competent to teach.

“I am the genius of clouds and sunshine,” answered Frey; and as he spoke, the essences of a hundred



When through the clear sky two forms
came floating



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perfumes were exhaled from his breath. "I am the genius of clouds and sunshine, and if the light elves will have me for their king I can teach them how to burst the folded buds, to set the blossoms, to pour sweetness into the swelling fruit, to lead the bees through the honey-passages of the flowers, to make the single ear a stalk of wheat, to hatch birds' eggs, and teach the little ones to sing—all this, and much more," said Frey, "I know, and will teach them."

Then answered Odin, "It is well;" and Frey took his scholars away with him to Alfheim, which is in every beautiful place under the sun.



PART III * * Niflheim



OW, in the city of Asgard dwelt one called Loki, who, though amongst the Æsir, was not of the Æsir, but utterly unlike to them; for to do the wrong, and leave the right undone, was, night and day, this wicked Loki's one unwearied aim. How he came amongst the Æsir no one knew, nor even whence he came. Once, when Odin questioned him on the subject, Loki stoutly declared that there had been a time when he was innocent and noble-purposed like the Æsir themselves; but that, after many wanderings up and down the earth, it had been his misfortune, Loki said, to discover the half-burnt heart of a woman; "since when," continued he, "I became what you now see me, Odin." As this was too fearful a story for any one to wish to hear twice over Odin never questioned him again.

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Whilst the Æsir were building their city, Loki, instead of helping them, had been continually running over to Jötunheim to make friends amongst the giants and wicked witches of the place. Now, amongst the witches there was one so fearful to behold in her sin and her cruelty, that one would have thought it impossible even for such an one as Loki to find any pleasure in her companionship: nevertheless, so it was that he married her, and they lived together a long time, making each other worse and worse out of the abundance of their own wicked hearts, and bringing up their three children to be the plague, dread, and misery of mankind. These three children were just what they might have been expected to be from their parentage and education. The eldest was Jörmungand, a monstrous serpent; the second Fenrir, most ferocious of wolves; the third was Hela, half corpse, half queen. When Loki and his witch-wife looked at their fearful progeny they thought within themselves, "What would the Æsir say if they could see?" "But they cannot see," said Loki; "and, lest they should suspect, Witch-wife, I will go back to Asgard for a little while, and salute old Father Odin bravely, as if I had no secret here." So saying, Loki wished his wife good-morning, bade her hide the children securely indoors, and set forth on the road to Asgard.

But all the time he was travelling Loki's children went on growing, and long before he had reached the lofty city Jörmungand had become so large that his mother was obliged to open the door to let his tail out. At first it hung only a little way across the road; but he grew, Oh, how fearfully Jörmungand grew! Whether

NIFLHEIM

it was from sudden exposure to the air, I do not know; but, in a single day he grew from one end of Jötunheim to the other, and early next morning began to shoot out in the direction of Asgard. Luckily, however, just at that moment Odin caught sight of him, when, from the top of Air Throne, the eyes of this vigilant ruler were taking their morning walk. "Now," said Odin, "it is quite clear, Frigga, that I must remain in idleness no longer at Asgard, for monsters are bred up in Jötunheim, and the earth has need of me." So saying, descending instantly from Air Throne, Odin went forth from Asgard's golden gates to tread the earth of common men, fighting to pierce through Jötunheim, and slay its monstrous sins.

In his journeyings Odin mixed freely with the people of the countries through which he passed; shared with them toil and pleasure, war and grief; taught them out of his own large experience, inspired them with his noble thoughts, and exalted them by his example. Even to the oldest he could teach much; and in the evening, when the labours of the day were ended, and the sun cast slanting rays upon the village green, it was pleasant to see the sturdy village youths grouped round that noble chief, hanging open-mouthed upon his words, as he told them of his great fight with the giant of long ago, and then pointing towards Jötunheim, explained to them how that fight was not yet over, for that giants and monsters grew round them on every side, and they, too, might do battle bravely, and be heroes and Æsir of the earth.

One evening, after thus drinking in his burning words they all trooped together to the village smithy,

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and Odin forged for them, all night, arms and armour, instructing them, at the same time, in their use. In the morning he said, "Farewell, children; I have further to go than you can come; but do not forget me when I am gone, nor how to fight as I have taught you. Never cease to be true and brave; never turn your arms against one another; and never turn them away from the giant and the oppressor."

Then the villagers returned to their homes and their field-labour, and Odin pressed on, through trackless uninhabited woods, up silent mountains, over the lonely ocean, until he reached that strange, mysterious meeting-place of sea and sky. There, brooding over the waters like a grey sea fog, sat Mimer, guardian of the well where wit and wisdom lie hidden.

"Mimer," said Odin, going up to him boldly, "let me drink of the waters of wisdom."

"Truly, Odin," answered Mimer, "it is a great treasure that you seek, and one which many have sought before, but who, when they knew the price of it, turned back."

Then replied Odin, "I would give my right hand for wisdom willingly."

"Nay," rejoined the remorseless Mimer, "it is not your right hand, but your right eye you must give."

Odin was very sorry when he heard the words of Mimer, and yet he did not deem the price too great; for plucking out his right eye, and casting it from him, he received in return a draught of the fathomless deep. As Odin gave back the horn into Mimer's hand he felt as

NIFLHEIM

if there were a fountain of wisdom springing up within him—an inward light; for which you may be sure he never grudged having given his perishable eye. Now, also, he knew what it was necessary for him to do in order to become a really noble Asa, and that was to push on to the extreme edge of the earth itself, and peep over into Niflheim. Odin knew it was precisely that he must do; and precisely that he did. Onward and northward he went over ice-bound seas, through twilight, fog, and snow, right onward in the face of winds that were like swords; until he came into the unknown land, where sobs, and sighs, and sad unfinished shapes were drifting up and down. “Then,” said Odin, thoughtfully, “I have come to the end of all creation, and a little further on Niflheim must lie.”

Accordingly he pushed on further and further until he reached the earth’s extremest edge, where, lying down and leaning over from its last cold peak, he looked into the gulf below. It was Niflheim. At first Odin imagined that it was only empty darkness; but, after hanging there three nights and days, his eye fell on one of Yggdrasil’s mighty stems. Yggdrasil was the old earth-tree, whose roots sprang far and wide, from Jötunheim, from above, and this, the oldest of the three, out of Niflheim. Odin looked long upon its time-worn, knotted fibres, and watched how they were for ever gnawed by Nidhögg the envious serpent, and his brood of poisonous diseases. Then he wondered what he should see next; and, one by one, spectres arose from Naströnd, the Shore of Corpses—arose and wandered pale, naked, nameless, and without a

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home. Then Odin looked down deeper into the abyss of abysses, and saw all its shapeless, nameless ills; whilst far below him, deeper than Naströnd, Yggdrasil, and Nidhögg, roared Hvergelmir, the boiling cauldron of evil. Nine nights and days this brave wise Asa hung over Niflheim pondering. More brave and more wise he turned away from it than when he came. It is true that he sighed often on his road thence to Jötunheim; but is it not always thus that wisdom and strength come to us weeping?



PART IV ♫ The Children of Loki



WHEN, at length, Odin found himself in the land of giants—frost giants, mountain giants, three-headed and wolf-headed giants, monsters and iron witches of every kind—he walked straight on, without stopping to fight with any one of them, until he came to the middle of Jörmungand's body. Then he seized the monster, growing fearfully as he was all the time, and threw him headlong into the deep ocean. There Jörmungand still grew, until, encircling the whole earth, he found that his tail was growing down his throat, after which he lay quite still, binding himself together; and neither Odin nor any one else has been able to move him thence. When Odin had thus disposed of Jörmungand, henceforth called the Midgard Serpent, he went on to the house of Loki's wife. The door was thrown open, and the wicked Witch-mother sat in the

THE HEROES OF ASGARD

entrance, whilst on one side crouched Fenrir, her ferocious wolf-son, and on the other stood Hela, most terrible of monsters and women. A crowd of giants strode after Odin, curious to obtain a glance of Loki's strange children before they should be sent away. At Fenrir and the Witch-mother they stared with great eyes, joyfully and savagely glittering; but when he looked at Hela each giant became as pale as new snow, and cold with terror as a mountain of ice. Pale, cold, frozen, they never moved again; but a rugged chain of rocks stood behind Odin, and he looked on fearless and unchilled.

“Strange daughter of Loki,” he said, speaking to Hela, “you have the head of a queen, proud forehead, and large, imperial eyes; but your heart is pulseless, and your cruel arms kill what they embrace. Without doubt you have somewhere a kingdom; not where the sun shines, and men breathe the free air, but down below in infinite depths, where bodiless spirits wander, and the cast-off corpses are cold.”

Then Odin pointed downwards towards Niflheim, and Hela sank right through the earth, downward, downward, to that abyss of abysses, where she ruled over spectres, and made for herself a home called Helheim, nine lengthy kingdoms wide and deep.

After this, Odin desired Fenrir to follow him, promising that if he became tractable and obedient, and exchanged his ferocity for courage, he should not be banished as his brother and sister had been. So Fenrir followed, and Odin led the way out of Jötunheim, across

THE CHILDREN OF LOKI

the ocean, over the earth, until he came to the heavenly hills, which held up the southern sky tenderly in their glittering arms. There, half on the mountain-top and half in air, sat Heimdall, guardian of the tremulous bridge Bifröst, that arches from earth to heaven.

Heimdall was a tall, white Van, with golden teeth, and a wonderful horn, called the Giallar Horn, which he generally kept hidden under the tree Yggdrasil; but when he blew it the sound went out into all worlds.

Now, Odin had never been introduced to Heimdall—had never even seen him before; but he did not pass him by without speaking on that account. On the contrary, being altogether much struck by his appearance, he could not refrain from asking him a few questions. First, he requested to know whom he had the pleasure of addressing; secondly, who his parents were, and what his education had been; and thirdly, how he explained his present circumstances and occupation.

“My name is Heimdall,” answered the guardian of Bifröst, “and the son of nine sisters am I. Born in the beginning of time, at the boundaries of the earth, I was fed on the strength of the earth and the cold sea. My training, moreover, was so perfect, that I now need no more sleep than a bird. I can see for a hundred miles around me as well by night as by day; I can hear the grass growing and the wool on the backs of sheep. I can blow mightily my horn Giallar, and I for ever guard the tremulous bridge-head against monsters, giants, iron witches, and dwarfs.”

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Then asked Odin, gravely, "Is it also forbidden to the Æsir to pass this way, Heimdall? Must you guard Bifröst, also, against them?"

"Assuredly not," answered Heimdall. "All Æsir and heroes are free to tread its trembling, many-coloured pavement, and they will do well to tread it, for above the arch's summit I know that the Urda fountain springs; rises, and falls, in a perpetual glitter, and by its sacred waters the Nornir dwell—those three mysterious, mighty maidens, through whose cold fingers run the golden threads of Time."

"Enough, Heimdall," answered Odin. "Tomorrow we will come."



PART V † Bifrost, Urda & the Norns



DIN departed from Heimdall, and went on his way, Fenrir obediently following, though not now much noticed by his captor, who pondered over the new wonders of which he had heard. “Bifröst, Urda, and the Norns—what can they mean?”

Thus pondering and wondering he went, ascended Asgard’s Hill, walked through the golden gates of the City into the palace of Gladsheim, and into the hall Valhalla, where, just then, the Æsir and Asyniur were assembled at their evening meal. Odin sat down to the table without speaking, and, still absent and meditative, proceeded to carve the great boar, Sæhrimnir, which every evening eaten, was every morning whole again. No one thought of disturbing him by asking any questions, for they saw that something was on his mind, and the Æsir were well-bred. It is probable, therefore, that the

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supper would have been concluded in perfect silence if Fenrir had not poked his nose in at the doorway, just opposite to the seat of the lovely Freyja. She, genius of beauty as she was, and who had never in her whole life seen even the shadow of a wolf, covered her face with her hands, and screamed a little, which caused all the Æsir to start and turn round, in order to see what was the matter. But Odin directed a reproving glance at the ill-mannered Fenrir, and then gave orders that the wolf should be fed; “after which,” concluded he, “I will relate my adventures to the assembled Æsir.”

“That is all very well, Asa Odin,” answered Frey; “but who, let me ask, is to undertake the office of feeding yon hideous and unmannerly animal?”

“That will I, joyfully,” cried Tyr, who liked nothing better than an adventure; and then, seizing a plate of meat from the table, he ran out of the hall, followed by Fenrir, who howled, and sniffed, and jumped up at him in a most impatient, unÆsir-like manner.

After the wolf was gone Freyja looked up again, and when Tyr was seated once more, Odin began. He told them of everything that he had seen, and done, and suffered; and, at last, of Heimdall, that strange white Van, who sat upon the heavenly hills, and spoke of Bifröst, and Urda, and the Norns. The Æsir were very silent whilst Odin spoke to them, and were deeply and strangely moved by this conclusion to his discourse.

“The Norns,” repeated Frigga, “the Fountain of Urda, the golden threads of Time! Let us go, my children,”

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she said, rising from the table, "let us go and look at these things."

But Odin advised that they should wait until the next day, as the journey to Bifröst and back again could easily be accomplished in a single morning.

Accordingly, the next day the Æsir and Asyniur all rose with the sun, and prepared to set forth. Niörd came from Noatun, the mild sea-coast, which he had made his home, and with continual gentle puffings out of his wide, breezy mouth, he made their journey to Bifröst so easy and pleasant, that they all felt a little sorry when they caught the first glitter of Heimdall's golden teeth. But Heimdall was glad to see them; glad, at least, for their sakes. He thought it would be so good for them to go and see the Norns. As far as he himself was concerned he never felt dull alone. On the top of those bright hills how many meditations he had! Looking far and wide over the earth how much he saw and heard!

"Come already!" said Heimdall to the Æsir, stretching out his long, white hands to welcome them; "come already! Ah! this is Niörd's doing. How do you do, cousin," said he; for Niörd and Heimdall were related.

"How sweet and fresh it is up here!" remarked Frigga, looking all round, and feeling that it would be polite to say something. "You are very happy, Sir," continued she, "in having always such fine scenery about you, and in being the guardian of such a bridge."

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And in truth Frigga might well say “such a bridge;” for the like of it was never seen on the ground. Trembling and glittering it swung across the sky, up from the top of the mountain to the clouds, and down again into the distant sea.

“Bifröst! Bifröst!” exclaimed the Æsir, wonderingly; and Heimdall was pleased at their surprise.

“At the arch’s highest point,” said he, pointing upward, “rises that fountain of which I spoke. Do you wish to see it to-day?”

“That do we, indeed,” cried all the Æsir in a breath. “Quick, Heimdall, and unlock the bridge’s golden gate.”

Then Heimdall took all his keys out, and fitted them into the diamond lock till he found the right one, and the gate flew open with a sound at the same time sad and cheerful, like the dripping of leaves after a thunder-shower.

The Æsir pressed in; but, as they passed him, Heimdall laid his hand upon Thor’s shoulder, and said, “I am very sorry, Thor; but it cannot be helped. You must go to the fountain alone by another way; for you are so strong and heavy, that if you were to put your foot on Bifröst, either it would tremble in pieces beneath your weight, or take fire from the friction of your iron heels. Yonder, however, are two river-clouds, called Körmt and Ermt, through which you can wade to the Sacred Urda, and you will assuredly reach it in time, though the waters of the clouds are strong and deep.”

At the words of Heimdall Thor fell back from the

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bridge's head, vexed and sorrowful. "Am I to be sent away, then, and have to do disagreeable things," said he, "just because I am so strong? After all, what are Urda and the Norns to me, and Körmt and Ermt? I will go back to Asgard again."

"Nay, Thor," said Odin, "I pray you, do not anything so foolish. Think again, I beseech you, what it is that we are going to see and hear. Körmt and Ermt lie before you, as Bifröst before us. It is yonder, above both, that we go. Neither can it much matter, Thor, whether we reach the Fountain of Urda over Bifröst or through the cloud."

Then Thor blushed with shame at his own weakness, which had made him regret his strength; and, without any more grumbling or hanging back, he plunged into the dreadful river-clouds, whose dark vapours closed around him and covered him. He was hidden from sight, and the Æsir went on their way over the glittering bridge.

Daintily and airily they trod over it; they swung themselves up the swinging arch; they reached its summit on a pale, bright cloud. Thor was there already waiting for them, drenched and weary, but cheerful and bold. Then, all together, they knocked at the door of the pale, bright cloud; it blew open, and they passed in. Oh! then what did they see! Looking up to an infinite height through the purple air, they saw towering above them Yggdrasil's fairest branches, leafy and of a tender green, which also stretched far and wide; but, though they looked long, the Æsir could distinguish no topmost

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bough, and it almost seemed to them that, from somewhere up above, this mighty earth-tree must draw another root, so firmly and so tall it grew. On one side stood the Palace of the Norns, which was so bright that it almost blinded them to look at it, and on the other the Urda fountain plashed its cool waters—rising, falling, glittering, as nothing ever glitters on this side the clouds. Two ancient swans swam under the fount, and around it sat Three. Ah! how shall I describe them—Urda, Verdandi, Skuld. They were mighty, they were wilful, and one was veiled. Sitting upon the Doomstead, they watched the water as it rose and fell, and passed golden threads from one to another. Verdandi plucked them with busy fingers from Skuld's reluctant hand, and wove them in and out quickly, almost carelessly; for some she tore and blemished, and some she cruelly spoiled. Then Urda took the woof away from her, smoothed its rough places, and covered up some of the torn, gaping holes; but she hid away many of the bright parts, too, and then rolled it all round her great roller, Oblivion, which grew thicker and heavier every moment. And so they went on, Verdandi drawing from Skuld, and Urda from Verdandi; but whence Skuld drew her separate bright threads no one could see. She never seemed to reach the end of them, and neither of the sisters ever stopped or grew weary of her work.

The Æsir stood apart watching, and it was a great sight. They looked in the face of Urda, and fed on wisdom; they studied the countenance of Verdandi, and drank bitter strength; they glanced through the veil of Skuld, and tasted hope. At length, with full hearts, they



Neither of the sisters ever stopped or grew weary of her work.



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stole away silently, one by one, out by the pale, open door, re-crossed the bridge, and stood once more by the side of Heimdall on the heavenly hills; then they went home again. Nobody spoke as they went; but ever afterwards it was an understood thing that the Æsir should fare to the Doomstead of the Nornir once in every day.



PART VI ∙ ∙ ∙ Odhærir

NOW upon a day it happened that Odin sat silent by the Well of Urda, and in the evening he mounted Air Throne with a troubled mind. All-Father could see into Dwarf Home from his high place, as well as over man's world; his keen eye pierced, also, the mountains and darkness of Jötunheim.

On this evening, a tear, the fate-sister's gift, swam across his vision, and—behold, is that an answering tear which he sees down there in Dwarf Home, large, luminous, golden, in the dark heart of the earth? “Can dwarfs weep?” exclaimed All-Father, surprised as he looked a second and a third time, and went on looking. Fialar and Galar, the cunning dwarfs who had killed Kvasir, were kneeling beside the tear. “Is it theirs?” said All-Father again, “and do they repent?” No; it was not a tear; Odin knew it at last. More precious still, it was

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Kvasir's blood—golden mead now, because of the honey-drops from Earth's thousand bees and flowers which these thoughtless mischief-schemers, but wonder workers, had poured into it. "It is three," said Odin, "three precious draughts!—Odhærir is its name—and now the dwarfs will drink it, and the life and the light, and the sweetness of the world will be spilt, and the heart of the world will die!" But the dwarfs did not drink it; they could only sip it a little, just a drop or two at a time. The Father of Hosts watched how they were amusing themselves.

Fialar and Galar, and a whole army of the little blackfaced, crooked-limbed creatures, were tilting the big jars over to one side, whilst first one, and then another, sucked the skim of their golden sweetness, smacking their lips after it, grinning horribly, leaping up into the air with strange gestures; falling backwards with shut eyes some of them, as if asleep; tearing at the earth and the stones of their cavern homes others, like wild beasts; rolling forth beautiful, senseless, terrible words.

It was Fialar and Galar who did that; and behold, in a little while, one after another, the dwarfs gathered round them as they spoke, and listened, open-mouthed, with clenched fists, stamping, and roaring applause until at last they seized the weapons that lay near, cocked their earth caps, each alit with a coloured star, and marched in warlike fashion, led on by Fialar and Galar, straight up through their cavernous ways, to Manheim, and across it into the Frozen Land.

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Giant Vafthrüd'nir, that "Ancient Talker," he who sits ever in his Hall weaving new and intricate questions for the gods, saw them; and looking up towards the brooding heavens, he exchanged glances with the Father of Hosts. But the dwarfs did not come near Vafthrüd'nir's Halls; they never looked aside at him, nor up to the Air Throne of the Asa; only rushed heedlessly on till they stumbled over the Giant Gilling, who was taking a nap upon the green bank of Ifing. Ifing looks a lazy stream; one can hardly see at first sight that it flows at all; but it flows, and flows quietly, unceasingly, and is so deep that neither god nor giant has ever yet been able to fathom it. It is, in fact, that stream which divides for ever the Jötuns from the Gods, and of it Odin himself once said:—

"Open shall it run
Throughout all time,
On that stream no ice shall be."

So the dwarfs found Gilling asleep; they knew how deep Ifing was, they knew that if they could once roll the giant Gilling in there he would never get out again, and then they should have done something worth speaking about.

"I have killed a giant," each dwarf might say, and, who knows, even the Æsir might begin to feel a little afraid of them.

"It all comes from drinking Kvasir's blood," they said, and then with their thousand little swords and spears, and sticks and stones, they worked away, until they had plunged the sleeping giant into the stream. All-Father's



“There you are.....and there you shall
stay until the hungry grey wave comes”



piercing eye saw it all, and how the silly dwarfs jumped and danced about afterwards, and praised themselves, and defied the whole world, gods, giants, and men.

“It is not for us,” they said, “any more to run away before Skinfaxi the shining horse that draws day over humankind, whose mane sheds light instead of dew; we will dance before him and crown ourselves with gold, as the gods and as men do every morning.”

But, in the midst of all their gleeful folly, the ground they stood upon began to shake under them, and an enormous darkness grew between them and the sky. Then the dwarfs stopped their rejoicing as if a spell had fallen upon them, dropping their weapons, huddling close to one another, cowering, whispering. Giant Suttung, son of that Gilling whom they had just slain, was coming upon them in great fury to avenge his father’s death. They were dreadfully frightened; Giant Gilling asleep had been easy to manage, but a giant awake, a giant angry—they were not the same dwarfs that they had seemed half an hour ago—and so it happened that they quite easily let Suttung carry them all off to a low rock in the sea which was dry just then, but would be washed over by the morning tide. “There you are,” said Suttung as he threw them all down upon the rock, “and there you shall stay until the hungry grey wave comes.” “But then we shall be drowned,” they all screeched at once, and the seamews started from their nests ashore and swooped round the lonely rock, and screeched as well. Suttung strode back to the shore and sat on the high rocks over the seamews’ nests, and poked his fingers into the nests and played with the

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grey-winged birds, and paddled his feet in the breakers, and laughed and echoed the dwarfs and the seamews. "Drowned, drowned, yes, then you will be drowned." Then the dwarfs whispered together and consulted, they all talked at once, and every one of them said a different thing, for they were in fact a little intoxicated still by the sips they brooded over the scene. "The sweetness, and the life, and the light of the world, then," he said, "are to satiate a giant's greediness of food and blood—" and it was for mankind that he became Terror in the trembling Height. All-Father feared nothing for the gods at that time: could he not pierce into Jötunheim, and Svarthheim, and Manheim alike? Suttung heard also from the Rock.—"And what may this Odhærir be worth that you boast of so much?" he shouted to the dwarfs. "Wisdom, and labour, and fire, and life, and love," said the dwarfs. "Tut, tut, tut!" answered Suttung. "Does it taste well?" "Honey and wine; like the blood of a God and the milk of the Earth." Then Suttung got up slowly from the rock, pressing it down with his hands into two little dells as he rose, and strode to the island, from which he took up all the dwarfs at a grasp—they clinging to his fists and wrists like needles to a magnet; and, with one swoop, threw them ashore just as the hungry waves began to lap and wash about the dwarf's-peril. So the dwarfs jumped, and leaped, and laughed, and sang, and chattered again, and ran on before Suttung, to fetch him the golden mead, Odhærir. Three big stone jars, all full. The Spirit-mover, the Peace-offer, the Peace-kiss. Suttung lifted the lids, and looked into the jars. "It doesn't look much," he said; "and, after

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all, I don't know that I shall care to taste it; but I'll take the jars home to my daughter Gunnlöd, and they will make a pretty treasure for her to keep."

Odin brooded over the scene. It was a grey winter's morning in Jötunheim—ice over all the rivers, snow upon the mountains, rime-writing across the woods, weird hoar letters straggling over the bare branches of the trees, writing such as giants and gods can read, but men see it only as pearl-drops of the cold. Suttung could read it well enough as he trudged along to his Mountain Home—better than he had ever read it before; for was he not bearing upon his shoulders the wondrous Kvasir's life-giving blood, Odhærir. Odin read it, "This is ominous, Odin; this is dark. Shall the gold mead be made captive in frozen halls?" For behold, the life-tear becomes dark in the dark land, as Suttung's huge door opened to let him in, him and his treasure, and then closed upon them both. Suttung gave the mead to his daughter Gunnlöd to keep, to guard it well, and—the heart of Manheim trembled, it was empty and cold. Then Odin looked north and south and east and west, over the whole world. "Come to me," he said, and two swift-winged ravens flew towards him. It seemed as if they came out of nothing; for in a moment they were not there and they were there. Their names were Hugin and Munin, and they came from the ends of the earth, where Odin sent them every morning. Every evening he was wont to say of them,—

"I fear me for Hugin,
Lest he come not back,
But much more for Munin."

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Yet they never failed to come back, both of them, at the dim hour in which they recounted to the Father of Hosts the history of the day that was past, and the hope of the day that was to come. On this evening, Munin's song was so terrible that only the strength of a god could possibly have endured to its end. Hugin struck another note, profounder and sweet. Then said Odin, when cadence after cadence had filled his ears, and he had descended from Air Throne, "Night is the time for new counsels; let each one reflect until the morrow who is able to give advice helpful to the Æsir."

But when the jewelled horse ran up along the sky, from whence his mane shed light over the whole world, when giants and giantesses, and ghosts and dwarfs crouched beneath Yggdrasil's outer Root, when Heimdall ran up Bifröst and blew mightily his horn in Heaven's height, there was only one found who gave counsel to Odin, and that was Odin himself. "Odhærir," he said, "which is a god-gift, must come up to men's earthly dwellings. Go forth, Hugin, go forth, Munin," said the Asa, and he also went forth alone, none knowing where he went, nor how.

So Odin journeyed for a long, long while towards Suttung's Hall, across the windy, wintry ways of Jötunheim, seeing well before him the yellow mead as he went, through rocks, and woods, and rivers, and through night itself, until at last it happened that Odin came into a meadow upon a summer morning in Giant Land. Nine slaves were mowing in the meadow, whetting some old rusty scythes which they had, working heavily, for they were senseless fellows, and

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the summer day grew faster upon them than their labour grew to completion. "You seem heavy-hearted," said Odin to the thralls; and they began to explain to him how rusty and old their scythes were, and that they had no whetstone to sharpen them with. Upon this Odin offered to whet their scythes for them with his whetstone: and no sooner had he done so than the scythes became so sharp that they could have cut stones as easily as grass. Instead of mowing, however, the thralls began to clamour round Odin, beseeching him to give his whetstone to them. "Give it to me! give it to me: give it to me!" cried one and another; and all the time Odin stood quietly amongst them, throwing his whetstone up in the air, and catching it as it fell. Then the thralls tried if they could catch it, leaning stupidly across one another, with their scythes in their hands. Was Odin surprised at what happened next? He could hardly have been that; but he was sorry when, looking down as the whetstone fell, he saw all the thralls lying dead at his feet, killed by each other's sharpened weapons. "This is an Evil Land," said Odin, as he looked down on the dead thralls, "and I am a bringer of evil into it."

So he journeyed on till he came to the house of Suttung's brother, Baugi. Odin asked Baugi to give him a night's lodging, and Baugi, who knew no more than the thralls had done who this traveller was, consented, and began to talk to Odin of the trouble he was in. "This is hay harvest," he said, "as you must have seen, walking here through the meadows; and I have a mighty field to gather in, but how to do it puzzles me, because my nine

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slaves whom I sent out sound and well this morning, all fell dead about the middle of the day. How they managed it, I can't imagine, and it puts me out sadly, for summer days don't last long in Jötunheim." "Well," said Odin, "I'm not a bad hand at mowing, and I don't mind undertaking to do the work of nine thralls for you, Baugi, for a certain reward you may give me, if you will." "What is that?" inquired Baugi, eagerly. "A draught of that golden mead, Odhærir, which Suttung obtained from the dwarfs, and which his daughter Gunnlöd keeps for him." "Oh! that," said Baugi, "isn't so good as my homebrewed for a thirsty mower; but you shall have it. It is a bargain between us." So Odin worked for Baugi the whole summer through with the labour of nine instead of with the labour of one; and when the last field was reaped, and wintry mists were gathering, the god and the giant began to talk over their bargain again. "We will come together to Suttung's house," said Baugi, "and my brother shall give you the draught which you desire so much." But when the two came to Suttung's house, and asked him for the mead, Suttung was exceedingly angry, and would not hear a word about it from either of them. "You don't drink it yourself, brother," pleaded Baugi, "although you might do so every day if you liked, without asking anybody's leave, or doing one stroke of work for it, whilst this man has toiled night and day for nine months that he might taste it only once." "Odhærir is for us giants, nevertheless," answered Suttung, "and well does my daughter Gunnlöd guard it from dwarfs and from men, from spectres, from Asyniur, and from Æsir. Have I

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not sworn that so it shall be guarded by all the snows of Jötunheim, and by the stormy waves, and by the yawning chasm of the abyss?" Then Baugi knew that nothing more was to be said, and he advised Odin to go back with him at once, and drink beer. But Odin was not to be turned from his purpose so easily. "You promised me a draught of the gold mead, Baugi," he said, "and I can see it through the rock in its three treasure jars; sit down by me and look through the rock till you can see it too." So Odin and Baugi sat down together, and pierced the rock with their glances all that day until they had made a small hole in it; and at night, when Suttung was asleep, and when Gunnlöd was asleep, and whilst the gold mead shone steadily in the heart of the cave, Odin looked up towards Asgard, and said,—

"Little get I here by silence:
Of a well-assumed form I will make good use;
For few things fail the wise."

And then this strong wise Asa picked up from the ground the little, mean, wriggling form of a worm and put it on and crept noiselessly into the hole which he and Baugi had made,—

"The giant's ways are under me,
The giant's ways are over me,"

said Odin as he wriggled through the stone, but when he had got quite through to the inner side, to Gunnlöd's room, Odin took his proper form again.

"I see her upon her golden seat," he said as he looked upon the sleeping Gunnlöd where she lay, and

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Odin was surprised to see a giant-maid so beautiful. Surprised and sorry. "For I must leave her weeping," he mused. "How shall she not weep, defrauded of her treasure in an Evil Land." And Odin loved and pitied the beautiful maiden so much, that he would have returned to Asgard without the mead had that been possible. Alas for Gunnlöd, it was less possible than ever since All-Father had seen her. For Gunnlöd awoke in the light of Odin's glance and trembled, she did not know why, she did not know at first that he was an Asa, but, when he asked her for her treasure she could not keep it from him, she could not have kept anything from him. She rose from her golden couch, her blue eyes melted into the tenderness of a summer sky, she undid the bars and bolts and coverings of Odhærir, which she had guarded so faithfully till then, and knelt before Odin and stretched her hands towards him and said, "Drink, for I think you are a god."

A draught, a draught, a long, deep draught, and the spirit of the Asa was shaken through its height and through its depth, and again a draught of love flowing forth to the outermost, to the abysses, and one draught again—peace—in rushing, still.

Why are you weeping so, Gunnlöd? Oh! Why do you weep? Did you not give him your whole treasure, "your fervent love, your whole soul;" you kept nothing back, and Odhærir is for ever the inheritance of the gods. The dwarfs sold it for their lives, the giantess lost it of her love, gods win it for the world.

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“It is for the Æsir, it is for men,” said Odin. “It is Odin’s booty, it is Odin’s gift;” and immediately, in haste to share it, the Asa spread eagle’s wings, and flew far up, away from the barren rock, and the black, cold halls of Suttung, towards his heavenly home. Alas for Gunnlöd! she has lost her treasure and her Asa too. How cold the cavern is now in which she sits! her light is gone out; she is left alone; she is left weeping upon her golden throne. But Odin soared upwards—flew on toward Asgard, and the Æsir came crowding upon the city’s jewelled walls to watch his approach. And soon they perceived that two eagles were flying towards the city, the second pursuing the first. The pursuing eagle was Suttung, who, as soon as he found that his mead was gone, and that Odin eagle-wise had escaped his vengeance, spread also *his* eagle’s wings, very strong and very swift, in pursuit. Suttung appeared to gain upon Odin. Frigga feared for her beloved. The Asyniur and the Æsir watched breathlessly. Frost giants and Storm giants came crowding up from the deeps to see. “Does Odin return amongst the gods?” they asked, “or will Suttung destroy him?” It was not possible, however, that the struggle should end in any way but one. The Divine bird dropped from the height upon his Hall—the High One’s Hall—and then there burst from him such a flood of song that the widest limits of Æsir Land were overflowed—some sounds even split themselves upon the common earth. “It is Poetry herself, it is Odin’s booty, it is Odin’s gift. It is for the Æsir, it is for the Æsir,” said a thousand and a thousand songs. “And for men,”

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answered All-Father, with his million ringing, changing voices; "it is for men." "Such as have sufficient wit to make a right use of it," said Loki. And this was the first discordant note that troubled Asgard after Odin's return.