

RAGNARS SAGA LÖDBROKAR

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LOÐBROKAR



translated by
Chris Van Dyke



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AT THAT TIME SIGURÐ HRING had power over Danmörk. He was a powerful king, and was famous from that one war, when he battled with Harold Hilditön* at Brávella and Harold fell before him, as has become known throughout all of the northern regions. Sigurð had one son, who was called Ragnar. He was a large man, fair in appearance and with good intelligence, generous with his men, but stern with his foes. Soon after he had come of age, he got himself troops and warships, and he became one of the greatest warriors, so that hardly anyone was his match. He heard what Earl Herruð had spoken, but he gave it no heed and let on as if he did not know about it. He had made for himself garments in a wondrous fashion: they were shaggy-breeches and a fur-coat, and when they were done, he had them boiled in pitch. Afterwards he kept them stored away.

One summer he took his war host to Gautland, and he anchored his ships in a hidden creek, which was a short distance from where the earl ruled. And when Ragnar had been there one night, he woke early in the morning, rose up and took the same armor which was mentioned before, put on the armor and took a great spear in his hand and went off the ship

* Harold Hilditön - "Harold Battle-Tooth."

alone. And there, where the sand was, he rolled in the sand. And before he went on his way, he took the nail holding the spear-head to the shaft out of his spear and then went from the ship to the earl's gate and came there early in the day, so that when he came, all the men were still asleep. Then he turned towards the bower.

And when he came to the wooden fence where the snake was, he attacked it with his spear; he thrust the spear at it and then pulled it back to himself, and then he attacked again. That thrust struck the snake's spine, and then he twisted the spear so that the spearhead came off the shaft; there was such a great din at the snake's death-throes that all the bower shook.

And then Ragnar turned away. Then a jet of blood came and struck him between his shoulders, but that did not harm him, since his clothes that he had made protected him. And those who were in the bower woke with the din and went out of the bower. Then Þóra saw a great man going from the bower and asked him his name and whom he wanted to find. He stopped and he spoke this verse:

*I have risked my famous life, beautiful woman;
fifteen winters old
And I vanquished the earth fish.*
Near misfortune, a swift
Death for me – save
I have pierced well to the heart
The ringed salmon-of-the-heath.†*

* *foldar fiski* - "fish of the land," a kenning for "dragon."

† *Hringleginn heiðar lax* - "ringed salmon-of-the-heath," another kenning for "dragon."

VI

THEN HE SAID THAT HE LIKED HER WELL and that he thought for certain that she should come with him. But she said it could not be thus. Then he said he wanted her to stay there during the night on the ship. She said that would not happen before he had come home from the journey as he had planned,—“and it may be, that the matter will seem different to you.” Then Ragnar called for his treasurer and told him take that shirt, which Þóra had owned and which was all embroidered with gold, and bring it to him. Then Ragnar offered it to Kráka in this manner:

*Will you receive this shirt
Which Þóra Hjört had?
Marked with silver, this cloth
becomes you very well.
Her white hands worked
this garment; she was dear
to the king of heroes*
until her death.*

Kráka spoke in reply:

*I dare not accept the shirt
Which Þóra Hjört had,
Marked with silver; wretched cloth*

* *bliður buðlungur bragna*—“king of heroes,” a kenning referring to Ragnar.

*is more fitting for me.
I am called Kráka,*
for in soot-black clothes
I have driven the goats
along the stony paths near the waves.*

“And I will certainly not take this shirt,” she said. “I will not be arrayed in fine clothes while I am with the poor man. It may be that you would consider me fairer if I were adorned more fairly, but I will now go home. And then you may send men after me, if the matter is the same in your mind and you want me to go with you.” Ragnar said that he would not change his mind, and she went home. And they went, as they had intended, as soon as they had wind, and he set about his errand after the fashion he had intended. And when he came back he came into the same harbor as he had before when Kráka had come to him. And that same evening he sent men to find her and speak Ragnar’s words—that she then prepare to depart for good. But she said that she could not leave before the morning. Kráka rose up early and went to the bed of the poor man and woman and asked whether they were awake. They said they were awake and asked what she wanted. She said that she wished to leave and be there no longer.

“And I know that you killed Heimir, my foster-father, and I have no one to reward with more ill than you. But I have been with you a long time, and for this reason I will not let evil be done to you; but I will

* Kráka—crow. Wretched clothes (*ælig klæði*) are appropriate as their coloring of soot-black (*kolsvörtum*) matches the color of the crow, from which her name is derived.