

RAGNARS SAGA LÖDBROKAR

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LOÐBROKAR



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IN HLYMDALIR, HEIMIR HEARD THE TIDINGS of the death of Sigurð and Brynhild. Áslaug, their daughter and his foster child, was then three winters old. He knew that there would be an attempt to destroy the girl and end her line. So great was his grief for Brynhild, his fosterling, that he did not care for either his kingdom or his goods. When he realized that he could not keep the girl hidden there, he had a harp made which was so large that he could place the maiden Áslaug within it along with many treasures of gold and silver, and then he went abroad throughout the lands and afterwards through the regions of the North-lands. His harp was so skillfully made that it could be taken apart and put together at the joints, and, on the days when he came beside a waterfall that was nowhere near a farm, he would take the harp apart and bathe the little girl.

He had one *vinlauk*, which he gave to her to eat. It was the nature of this leek that a man could live long though he had no other food. And when the girl wept, he played the harp and then she would fall silent, since Heimir was well versed in the *iðrottir* that were customary at the time. He had many glorious clothes with her in the harp, and much gold. Then he went from there out until he came to Noreg,* and he came

* Noreg - modern day Norway.

to a small farm, which was called Spangarheið, and there lived a poor man called Áki. He had a wife and she was called Gríma. There were no others than themselves.

One day, the poor man had gone into the woods and the poor woman was at home. She greeted Heimir and asked what kind of man he might be. He said he was a beggar, and asked the poor woman to give him lodgings. She said that not many came there, so she could easily take him in, if he thought it was necessary. Then it came about that he said it seemed to him the greatest comfort would be if a fire might be lit before him, and therefore he was accompanied to the sleeping hall where he might sleep. And then when the poor woman had kindled the fire, he sat the harp beside himself, and the poor woman was not very talkative. Often her eyes were drawn to the harp, since the fringes of one of the glorious dresses stuck out of the harp. And when he rubbed his limbs before the fire, she saw one glorious gold ring showing from under his rags, since he was badly clothed. And when he had warmed himself as much as he thought was needed, then he had supper. After that he told the poor woman to guide him to where he should sleep during the night. The poor woman said that it might be better for him to be outside than inside, "since my husband and I often talk when he comes home."

He told her to make the decision. Then he went out along with her. He took the harp and kept it with him. The poor woman went out until she came to a barn and accompanied him into it, and said that he should stay there, and said that he might expect to enjoy his

sleep there. And then the poor woman went on her way and busied herself with her daily tasks, and he himself went to sleep.

The poor man came home when evening had fallen, but the poor woman had done little of what she needed to do. And he was weary when he came home, and difficult to deal with when all was not done which she should have done. The poor man said that there must be a great difference in their happiness when he worked each day more than he could, but she did not get on with those things which needed to be done.

"Do not be angry, husband," she said, "because it may be that you might, with a short while's work, insure that we will be happy for all time."

"What is this?" said the poor man.

The poor woman answered: "A man came here to our farm, and I think that he has much wealth with him for traveling—he is bowed by old age, but he must have been a great hero, though now he is very weary. I do not think I have seen his equal, but I think he is tired and sleepy."

The poor man said, "It seems inadvisable to me to betray one of those few who have come here."

She answered: "This is why you will for a long time be a little man, for all grows large in your eyes; you must now do one of two things—either you kill him, or I will take him as my husband, and we will drive you away. And I can tell you of how it happened when he spoke with me earlier this evening, and it will seem unpleasant to you. He spoke lustfully with me, and it is my plan to take him as my husband and drive you away or kill you, if you will not do what I want."

And it is said that the poor man had a domineering wife, and she went on until he gave into her goading, took up his axe, and whetted it keenly. And when he was done, his wife led him there to where Heimir slept and was then snoring greatly. Then the poor woman told the poor man that he should make an attack as best he could, "and then leap away quickly, since you will not be able to withstand it if he gets his hands on you." She then took the harp and went away with it.

Then the poor man went to where Heimir slept. He struck at him, and gave him a great wound, but he dropped his axe. He at once leapt away as quickly as he could. Then Heimir woke at the blow, which was his bane. And it is said that so great a din arose in his death-throes that the pillars of the house collapsed and all the house fell down and a great earthquake occurred, and there his life ended.

Then the poor man went to where the poor woman was, and said that he had killed him—"but nevertheless, for a while I was not certain how it would go, as this man was terribly powerful, but I expect that he might now be in Hel!"

The poor woman said that he should have thanks for the deed, "and it gives me hope, that now we will have sufficient money, and we shall see whether what I said was true." Then they lit a fire, and the poor woman took the harp and wanted to open it up, but was not able to do it any other way than breaking it, since she had no skill in the craft. And then she went and opened up the harp, and there she saw a girl-child, such as she thought she had not seen before, along with much money in the harp.

Then the poor man spoke: "Now it must happen as it often does, that it will turn out badly for those who betray one who trusts them. It seems to me that a dependant has come into our hands."

The poor woman said: "This is not as I expected, but no harm will come about." And then she asked what the girl's family-line might be. But the young girl did not answer, as if she had not yet begun to talk.

"Now it has come about as I expected, that our plan goes badly," said the poor man. "We have committed a great crime. How shall we provide for this child?"

"That is clear," said Gríma. "She shall be called Kráka*, after my mother."

Then the poor man said: "How shall we provide for this child?"

The poor woman answered: "I see a good plan: we shall call her our daughter, and raise her up."

"No one will believe that," said her husband, "as this child is much more pleasing than we are. We are both born very ugly, and people will not think it likely that we would have a child like this, as uncommonly ugly as we both are."

Then the poor woman spoke: "You do not know that I have a cunning plan, so that this might not seem unlikely. I will shave her head, and rub in tar and other things when it is expected that her hair will come back in. She shall then have a hat. She shall not be well clothed. We will all look alike then. It may be that men will believe that I had great beauty when I was young. And she shall do all the worst work." And

* Kráka - crow.

the poor man and poor woman thought that she was unable to speak, because she never answered them. Then it came about as the woman had first suggested. She grew up there, and was very poor.



THERE WAS AN EARL CALLED HERRUÐ, who was mighty and famous in Gautland.* He was married. His daughter was called Þóra, and she was the most beautiful of all women in appearance, and was most courteous in all things which were better to have than not to have. It was her nickname that she was called Borgarhjört,† since she stood out from all women in beauty as the hart does from all other animals. The earl loved his daughter very much. He had a bower made for her a short ways from the king's hall, and about the bower was a wooden fence. The earl made it his custom to send his daughter something every day for her amusement, and he said that he would go on with this custom. This is said about

* The land of the Gautar, a people who lived in what would now be southern Sweden.

† Borgarhjört - "Hart-of-the-village."

that, that he had his daughter sent a little heather-snake one day, which was excessively beautiful; the snake seemed good to her, and she kept it in an ashen box and placed gold under it.

It was there but a short while before it grew large, as did the gold under it. It came about that the snake did not have room in the ashen box, and then lay outside of it in a ring about the box. And it afterwards came about that it did not have room in the bower, and the gold grew beneath it precisely as the snake itself did. Then it lay outside around the bower, so that its head and tail could touch together, and it became hard to deal with. No man dared to come to the bower on account of this snake save one, who brought it food, and it needed an ox as its meal. To the earl this seemed a great harm and he spoke this vow: that he would give his daughter to that man, whoever he might be, who killed the snake, and that gold which was under him would be her dowry.

These tidings became known throughout the land, but nevertheless no one trusted himself to overpower the great snake.



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."

And then he went on his way and did not speak more with her. And the spear-head stood in the wound afterwards, but he had the shaft with him. When she had heard this verse, she understood what he had said to her about his errand and thus how old he was. And then she wondered to herself who he might be, and she thought she did not know whether he was a human being or not, since it seemed to her that his growth was as large as it said about monsters at the age that he was. Then she turned into the bower and went to sleep. And when men came out in the morning, they became aware that the snake was dead, and it was stabbed with a large spear, and the spearhead stood fast in the wound.

Then the earl had the spearhead removed, and it was so large that few could have used it as a weapon. Then the earl considered what he had said about that man who killed the snake, and he thought he didn't know whether a human being had done this or not, and he then discussed with his friends and daughter how he should search after him; it seemed likely, that that man who had won it would afterwards seek to have the reward. She advised him to have a large *þing* summoned—"and command those who do not want to have the earl's anger and are in any way able to attend the *þing* to come here. If any is the man who gave the snake its death wound, he shall then have the spear-shaft which goes with the spearhead."

That seemed promising to the earl, and then he had a *þing* called. And when the day came, when the *þing* was to take place, the earl came and many other chieftains. Many men came.

IV

IT BECAME KNOWN AT RAGNAR'S SHIP that there was a *þing* to be held shortly. Then Ragnar went from his ship with nearly all his men to the *þing*. And when they came there, they stood somewhat away from other men, since Ragnar saw that very many more men had come than was customary. Then the earl stood up and asked for their silence and spoke—first he asked those men who had responded well to his summons to accept his thanks; then he spoke of what had occurred; then he spoke about what he had sworn regarding the man who would kill the snake. Then afterwards he said, "The snake is now dead, and the man who did this famous deed left the spear standing in the wound. And if anyone who came here to the *þing* is he who has the shaft which held the spearhead and which was borne away and thus may prove his claim, then I shall fulfill that which I have sworn, whoever he is, of either great or lowly rank."

And when he ended his speech, he had the spearhead brought before each man who was at the *þing*, and commanded him who would claim the deed, or who had the spear-shaft which fitted the spearhead, to speak. It was so done. None was found to be the one who had the shaft. When the spearhead came to where Ragnar was and was shown to him, then he acknowledged that it was his; each fitted the other,

the spear and shaft. Then men then thought that they knew that he must have killed the snake, and he became very famous in all the northern lands on account of this deed, and he then asked for Þóra, the earl's daughter, and the earl received this offer gladly. Then she was given to him, and it happened that they had the largest feast with the best provisions in the kingdom. At this feast Ragnar was married. And when the feast was over, Ragnar went to his kingdom and ruled over it and he loved Þóra greatly. They had two sons: the elder was called Eirek, and the younger was called Agnar. They grew large and were handsome in appearance. They were very strong and were taller than the other men who were around. They knew all the kinds of *iðrottir*. It happened one time that Þóra fell ill, and she died from this illness. To Ragnar this seemed so grave that he would not rule his kingdom, and gave other men the ruling of his lands along with his sons. And then he took to performing his same deeds as he had before; he set out on a raiding expedition, and wherever he went he gained victory.



IT WAS DURING THE SUMMER that he turned his ships to Noreg, because he had many kinsmen and friends there and he wanted to visit them. He came in his ships during the evening into a little harbor; there was a farm a short distance from there which was called Spangarheið, and they lay there in the harbor that night. And when morning came, the cooks went to land to bake bread. They saw that a farm that was not far off, and it seemed to them that it would suit them better to go to the house and be there and do their work there. And when they came to this one little farm, they found someone to speak to—it was a poor woman, and they asked whether she was a housewife and what she was called. She said that she was a housewife, “and you will not lack my name. I am called Gríma, but who are you?” They said that they were the liege-men of Ragnar Loðbrok, and they wanted to carry out their work, “and we want that you work with us.”

The poor woman answered that her hands were very stiff. “But in the past I have been able to do my own work very well; but I have myself a daughter, who can work with you and who will come home soon and is called Kráka. But it has now come about that I scarcely have control over her.” And Kráka had gone out with the animals in the morning and had seen that many

large ships had come to land, and then she went and washed herself. But the poor woman had forbidden her to do that, because she did not want men to see her beauty, because she was the most beautiful of all women, and her hair was so long that it went down to the ground, and as beautiful as the most beautiful silk. And then Kráka came home. The cooks had started a fire, and Kráka saw that men had come there, whom she had not seen before. She looked at them and they at her. And then they asked Gríma: "Is this your daughter we see, this beautiful maiden?"

"It is not a lie," said Gríma. "That is my daughter you see."

"You two must be very unlike," they said, "since you are so monstrous. We have not seen a girl as beautiful, and we see that she in no way has your looks, because you are most hideous."

Gríma said, "You can't notice it in me now. My appearance is now changed from how it was."

Then they agreed that she would work with them. She asked: "What shall I do?" They said they wanted her to roll out the bread, and they would afterwards bake it. And she then went to work, and she worked well. But they all kept looking at her constantly, so they did not mind their work and the bread was burned. And when they had finished their work they went back to the ships. And there, when they brought out the meal, everyone said that they had never been given anything so terrible, and the cooks deserved to be punished for it. Then Ragnar asked why they had done the cooking thus. They said that they had seen a woman so beautiful that they did not mind their work,

and they thought that there was not a more beautiful woman in the entire world.

And when they had said so much of her beauty, then Ragnar spoke and said that he thought that there could not be one equal to the beauty which Þóra had possessed. They said she was no uglier. Then Ragnar spoke: "Now I must send men there, who know how to look well. If it is thus as you have said, then your heedlessness will be forgiven of you. But if the woman is in any way uglier than you said, then you shall take a great punishment upon yourselves."

And then he sent his men to find this beautiful maiden, but the headwind was so strong that they could not leave that day, and Ragnar spoke with his messengers: "If this young maiden seems to you as beautiful as has been told, tell her to come to meet with me as I want to speak to her; I want her to be mine. I want her to be neither dressed nor undressed, neither fed nor unfed, and moreover she must not be all alone, but nevertheless no man may accompany her."

Then they traveled until they came to the house, and they looked closely at Kráka, and it seemed to them they saw such a beautiful woman that they thought they had never before seen one as beautiful. And then they told her the words of their lord, Ragnar, and thus how she should be prepared. Kráka thought about that, how the king had spoken and how she should prepare herself, but Gríma thought that it could not be done, and said that she thought such a king would not be wise.

Kráka said: "He must have spoken thus because it can be done if we have the skill to discover what he

was thinking. However, I know that I cannot go with you today, but I will come early in the morning to your ship.”

Then they went away and told Ragnar what had happened, and that she would come to the meeting. And she was at home that night. And in the early morning, Kráka told the poor man that she would go to meet with Ragnar. “But I want to alter my dress somewhat: you have a trout-net, and I want to wrap that around me, and I shall let my hair hang down over it, and I will thus be bare in no place. And I will taste of one leek—that is little food, but it will be known that I have eaten. And I will have your dog accompany me—I will thus not go all alone, even though no man accompanies me.” And when the poor woman heard her plan, she thought that she had great cunning.

And when Kráka had made herself ready, she went on her way, until she came to the ship, and she was fair to see, as her hair was bright and looked like gold. And then Ragnar called to her and asked who she was and whom she wanted to find. She answered and spoke this verse:

*I have not dared to violate your bidding,
Ragnar, when you bade me come
to your meeting, nor have I
broken the king's order.
No man is with myself,
my flesh is not clearly revealed,
I have quite fully a following,
but I come all alone.*

Then he sent men to meet her, and had them accompany her to his ship. But she said she did not wish to

go, unless a promise of peace might be given to her and her companion. Then she was led to the king's ship, and when she came to the foredeck he reached towards her and the dog bit him on the hand. His men leapt at it and struck the dog and tied a bowstring around its neck and it died from this—no better did those men hold with the promise of peace for her! Then Ragnar set her on the deck near himself, and spoke with her, and she answered him well and he was pleased and happy with her. He spoke this verse:

*If the precious lady was merciful
to the ward of the father land,*
she might take me
to stay in her arms.*

She said:

*If you will honor our treaty,
king, you shall let me go
hence, spotless, to my home,
though the helmsman† has pain.*

* *vöðr föður jarða*—“ward of the father land lord,” a kenning for “king.”
† *hilmir*, helmsman, i.e. Ragnar.

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.

now declare that each day will be worse for you than the one that came before it, but the last will be the worst of all—and now I will depart.” Then she went and proceeded to the ship, and there she was well received. They were given good weather. Then in the same evening, when men prepared their beds, Ragnar said that he wanted Kráka and him to sleep together. She said it could not be thus, “and I want you to drink a wedding feast for me, when you come to your kingdom; for that seems more fitting to my honor and to you and our offspring, if we have any.”

He granted her request, and they traveled well. Ragnar then came home to his land, and a glorious feast was prepared for his return; then there was joyful drinking for both his return and his wedding. And the first evening, when they came to one bed, Ragnar wished to consummate their marriage, but she asked to avoid that, because she said that some evil might afterwards be born out of it if her advice was ignored. Ragnar said that could not be true, and he said that the poor man and women were not prophetic. He asked how long it should be so. Then she said:

*Three nights shall thus pass,
apart in the evening, although
settled together in one hall,
before our sacrifice to the holy gods;
thus shall this denial
prevent a lasting harm to my son—
he whom you are hasty to beget
will have no bones.*

And although she said that, Ragnar gave it no heed, and followed his own advice.

VII

A LITTLE WHILE PASSED, and their marriage was good, and full of love. Then Kráka knew herself to be pregnant, and it progressed until she gave birth to a boy-child, and the boy was sprinkled with water and given a name and called Ívar. The boy was boneless and there was cartilage where his bones should have been, but when he was young, he grew so strong that none was his match. He was of all men most handsome in appearance and so wise that none was known who was a wiser councilor than he. It happened that more children were granted them. Another son they called Björn,* the third Hvítserk,† the fourth Rögnvald. They were all great men, very valiant, and as soon as they could learn them, they became well versed in all the *íðrottir*. And wherever they went, Ívar had himself borne on staves, as he could not walk, and he had advice for them in whatever they did.

Eirek and Agnar, Ragnar’s sons, were such great men themselves that their like could hardly be found, and they went in their war-ships every summer and were renowned for their harrying. And then it happened one day that Ívar asked his brothers, Hvítserk and Björn, how long might pass by while they sat at

* Björn - A common name, meaning “the bear.”

† Hvítserk - “white-shirt”

home rather than having their renown increased. And they said that they would act on his advice in that as in other things.

Ívar said, "Now I want us to ask to have ships prepared for us, and troops enough to man them, and then I want us to gain gold and glory for ourselves, if it is possible." And when they had decided upon that plan amongst themselves, they told Ragnar that they wanted him to get them ships and veteran troops who were experienced in the seizing of treasure, and well prepared for anything. And he gave this to them as they asked. And then, when their troops were prepared, they traveled from that land. And wherever they fought with men, they got the best of them and got for themselves both many troops and much treasure. And then Ívar said that he wanted them to continue on until a more powerful force was before them, and thus they might test their prowess. And then they asked where he knew to find such a force. And then he named a place, which was called Hvitabær, where pagan sacrifices were held—"and many have sought to win it, but have not been victorious," and Ragnar had come there but had to fall back without having achieved his goal.

"Are the forces there so great," they asked, "and so hardy, or are there other difficulties?" Ívar said both that the thronging troops were great and the place of sacrifice was powerful, so all that had gone against it had not been victorious. And then they said that he should advise whether they should set a course for there or not. And he said that he desired greatly to discover what might be the greater: their own hardiness, or the magical powers of the people there.

VIII

THEY SET A COURSE FOR THAT PLACE, and when they came to that land they prepared to disembark. And they thought it necessary that some of the troops keep guard over the ships. And Rögnvald, their brother, was so young that they thought him to be unready for such great peril as there would likely be, and they had him guard the ships with some of the troops. And after they went from the ships, Ívar said that the garrison had two cattle, which were young geldings, and men turned and fled before them, as they could not stand their bellowing and their troll-like form.

Then Ívar said: "Bear yourselves as best you can, although you feel some fear, because nothing will harm you." Then they departed with their troops. And when they drew near the fortress, it happened that they who lived in that place became aware of them, and they loosed the cattle that they had great faith in. And when the geldings were let loose, they leapt forward fiercely and roared terribly. Then Ívar saw them from where he was borne upon a shield, and he told his men to bring his bow, and it was done. Then he shot at the evil geldings, so that they both received their deaths, and then the battle that the men had most feared was ended.

Then Rögnvald began to speak back at the ships, and he said to the troops that those men were fortunate who

should have such entertainment as his brothers had. "And there is no other reason that I should remain behind except that they wished to have all the glory. But now we shall all go ashore."

And then they did so. And when they came upon the troops, Rögnvald went fiercely into the fray, and it happened thus that he fell. And the brothers came to the fortress, and they took to the fray anew. It happened then that the men of the fortress took to flight, and the brothers pursued the fleeing host. And when they returned afterwards to the fortress, Björn spoke this verse:

*We fell with a cry
upon Gnifafirð, our swords
biting fiercer than theirs,
I may truly say.
Each who wished to could become
a killer of men out before Hvitabær;
let young men
spare not their swords!*

Then when they came back to the fort, they took all the treasure and burned what houses were in the fortress, and broke down all the battlements. And then they sailed their ships thence.

IX

THERE WAS A KING CALLED EYSTEIN, who ruled over Svíþjóð.* He was married and had one daughter. She was called Ingibjörg. She was the prettiest of all women and beautiful to behold. King Eystein was powerful and had many followers. He was ill-tempered, though wise. He had settled himself at Uppsala. He was a great sponsor of sacrifices, and there were so many sacrifices at Uppsala at that time that nowhere in the Northlands were there more. They had great faith in one cow, and they called her Síbilja. She had been sacrificed to so much that men could not stand before her bellowing. The king was wont, when an overwhelming army was expected, to send this cow in front of the host; such great devilish power filled her that all his foes became so maddened as soon as they heard her that they fought among themselves and cared not for their own safety. Because of this, Svíþjóð was unharried by assaults, for men dared not contend against such power.

King Eystein had friendship with many men and chieftains, and it is said that at that time there was a great friendship between the Kings Eystein and Ragnar, and this was their custom—that they should, alternating each summer, prepare a feast for the other.

* Svíþjóð—modern day Sweden.

Then it came about that Ragnar was to go to a feast of King Eystein's. And when he came to Uppsala, there was a good welcome for him and his men. And when they drank together on the first evening, the king had his daughter fill the cups for himself and Ragnar. And Ragnar's men said amongst themselves that it would not be otherwise than that he would ask for King Eystein's daughter, if only he no longer was married to the poor man's daughter. And then it happened that one of his men brought this to his attention; and thus in the end it happened that the princess was promised to the king, but she would stay as his betrothed for a long time.

And then when their feast was ended, Ragnar journeyed homeward, and it went well for him—but nothing is said of his journey before he came a short distance from his fortress, and his path lay through a wood. They came to a clearing in the forest. Then Ragnar brought his troops to a halt and asked for their silence and told all his men, who had been with him on his journey to Svíþjóð, that they should say nothing of his intent to enter into marriage with King Eystein's daughter. Then he laid so strict a penalty on this that whosoever spoke of that would receive nothing less than the loss of his life. And when he had spoken what he had wanted, he went home to the town. And then it happened that men rejoiced when he came back, and there was drinking and a joyous banquet in his honor.

And then he came to the high-sea. He had not been sitting there long when Kráka came into the hall before Ragnar and sat on his knee and laid her arms about his neck and asked: "What are your tidings?" But he

said he knew of nothing to tell her. And when the evening came, men took to drinking, and afterwards men went to sleep. And when Ragnar and Kráka came into the same bed, she asked him yet again for tidings, and he said he did not know any. Then she wished to converse more, but he said he was very sleepy and weary from traveling.

"Now I can tell you tidings," she said, "if you will not tell them to me."

He asked what they might be.

"I call it tidings," she said, "if a woman is promised to a king, although some men say that he already has another."

"Who told you this?" asked Ragnar.

"Your men will keep their lives and limbs, since none of those men told this to me," she said. "You remember how three birds sat in a tree near you. They told me these tidings. I ask this of you—that you not stay fixed on this course of action as you intend. Now I shall tell you that I am the daughter of a king and not of a poor man, and my father was such a great man that none have proved themselves his equal, and my mother was the most beautiful of all women and the wisest. Her name shall be lifted up as long as the world is standing."

Then he asked who her father was, if she was not the daughter of the poor man who was living at Spangarheið. She said that she was the daughter of Sigurð Fáfnisbana and Brynhild Buðladóttur.

"It seems to me very unlikely that their daughter would be called Kráka and their child might wind up in such poverty as there was at Spangarheið."

She answered thus: “This is the story,” and then she spoke and brought forth the tale of Sigurð and Brynhild meeting on the mountain and how she was begotten. “And when Brynhild was delivered, a name was given me, and I was called Áslaug.” And then she spoke of everything that had happened until she met the poor man.

Then Ragnar answered: “I am surprised by these mad-ramblings about Áslaug which you speak.”

She answered: “You know that I am with child. It will be a male child that I have, and this mark will be on the boy: that it will seem that a snake lies within the boy’s eyes. And if this comes about, I ask this—that you do not go to Svíþjóð at the time that you would receive the daughter of King Eystein. But if this fails to come about, go if you want. But I want the boy to be called after my father if in his eyes is that mark of glory, as I think there will be.”

Then it came to the time when she knew herself to be in labor, and she delivered a boy-child. Then the serving women took the boy and sprinkled him with water. Then she said that they should bear him to Ragnar and let him see him. And then this was done, and thus the young man was borne unto the hall and laid in the lap of Ragnar’s cloak. And when he saw the boy, he was asked what he should be called. He spoke a verse:

*Sigurð will the boy be called—
he will thus conduct himself in battle
much like the father of his mother,
after whom he is called.
Thus will the greatest of*

*Oðin’s race be named,
the snake eyed one,
and he will bring much death!*

Then he pulled a ring from off his hand and gave it to the boy as a *nafnfestr*. But as he reached forth his hand with the gold, it touched the back of the boy, and Ragnar deemed that to mean that he would hate gold. And then he spoke a verse:

He will be pleasing to heroes,
the dear son of Brunhild’s daughter,
who has gleaming brow-stones†
and a most faithful heart.
Thus the sword’s messenger‡
bears himself better than all vikings;
Buðli’s descendent, who quickly
disdains the red rings.*

And again he spoke:

*I have never seen
bridles§ in the brow-stones¶
of the beard-slopes of the brow,**
save in Sigurð alone.
This vigorous beast chaser††*

* pleasing because of his generosity with gold.

† *brunsteinn* – “brow-stones,” a kenning for “eyes.”

‡ *undleygs boði* – “the messenger of the sword,” a kenning for warrior, i.e. Sigurð.

§ *tuama* – “bridles,” a kenning for “snakes.”

¶ *brunsteinn* – same as above, “eyes.”

** *barðhjarls bruna* – “beard-slopes of the brow.” “Beard-slopes” is a kenning for cheeks, and “cheeks of the brow” means “eye sockets.” Thus the first helming (the first four line section) literally translates: “I have never seen snakes in the eyes of an eye-socket, save in Sigurð alone.”

†† i.e. a hunter, i.e. Sigurð.

has taken mirkwood-rings
into the field of his eyelids – †
thus by this sign is he known.*

Then Ragnar said that they should bear the boy out to the bower. And that was the end of his going to Svíþjóð. And then the family-line of Áslaug came out, and every man knew that she was the daughter of Sigurð Fáfnisbana and Brynhild Buðladóttur.



WHEN THAT TIME HAD PASSED when it had been agreed that Ragnar would go to the wedding at Uppsala and he had not come, it seemed to King Eystein that it brought dishonor upon himself and his daughter; and then the friendship between the kings was ended. And when Eirek and Agnar, Ragnar's sons, heard that, they then plotted between themselves to go with as many troops as they might muster, that they might harry in Svíþjóð. And then they gathered together many troops and read-

* *hring myrkviðar* – “the rings of the murky-wood,” a kenning for “dragon.”

† *hvarmatúni* – “the field of the eyelids,” a kenning for “eyes.”

ied their ships, and it seemed to them very important that all went well when the ships set forth. Then it happened, that Agnar's ship shot off the launch rollers, and a man was in the way, and received thus death: and they called that “the reddening of the rollers.” This seemed to them not to be a good beginning, but they would not let that stand in the way of their journey. And when their troops were prepared, they traveled with their troops to Svíþjóð, and there, when they came quickly to King Eystein's kingdom, they traveled across it with war-shields.

But the men of that land became aware of them and went to Uppsala and told King Eystein that they had come to the land. And the king had a message send in the form of an arrow throughout his kingdom and thus gathered so many men together that it was wondrous. And then he traveled with them until he came to a forest, and they there set up their camp. He then had with him the cow Síbilja, and many were the sacrifices to her before she would travel.

And when they were in the forest, King Eystein spoke: “I have news,” he said, “that Ragnar's sons are on the field beside this forest, and it was said to me truly that they do not have a third of our troops. Now we shall arrange our host for battle, and a third of our troops shall go to meet them first, and they are so unflinching that they will think they have us in their power. Immediately afterwards we shall come at them with all our might, and the cow shall go before our troops, and it seems to me that they will not hold before her bellowing.”

And then it was so done. And as soon as the brothers saw King Eystein's troops they thought that their foes

did not have power greater than theirs, and it did not occur to them that there might be more troops. And soon after all the troops came from the forest and the cow was set loose, and she leapt before the troops and went about fiercely. So great a din arose that the warriors who heard it fought among themselves, except for the two brothers holding their ground. But the evil creature struck many a man with her horns that day. But Ragnar's sons, though they were powerful in themselves, thought they might not stand against both the great crowd and the pagan sacrificial-magic. However, they faced it unflinchingly and guarded themselves well and bravely and with great renown. They, Eirek and Agnar, were at the front of the host that day, and often they went against the host of King Eystein.

But then Agnar fell. Eirek saw that and then bore himself most boldly and did not care whether he came away or not. Then he was overborne by the great force and seized. And then Eystein declared that the battle should stop, and offered Eirek peace. "And I will lay this offer before you," he said, "that I will give you my daughter." Eirek replied, and spoke this verse:

*I will not hear an offer for my brother,
nor buy the maid with rings
from Eystein, who spoke the words
of Agnar's death.
My mother will not weep;
set me up to stand
pierced through by a forest of spears –
at the last, I choose to die.*

Then he said that he wanted the men who had followed them to have peace to go wherever they wished.

"And I wish to have as many spears as possible taken up, then have the spears set up in the ground, and I wish myself to be lifted up upon them—there I want to leave life." Then King Eystein said that that would be done thus, as he asked, though he chose that which went worse with them both. Then the spears were set up, and Eirek spoke a verse:

*I think that no king's son
shall die on so dear a bed:
a day-meal to ravens,
as I know my fate to be.
The livid blood-flies*
shall break both brother's bodies
and soon shriek over us,
though that be a bad reward.*

And then he went to where the spears were set up and he took a ring off his hand and cast it to those who had followed him and who had been given peace, and he commended it to Áslaug and spoke a verse:

*Bear you my last words,
you east-faring troops,
that the slender maid, Áslaug
is to have my rings.
Then to the greatest of mothers,
my mild stepmother, you may
speak of me, her son,
and of my glorious spear-death.*

And then he was heaved up on the spears. Then he saw where the raven flew, and again he spoke:

* *blár bloði* – literally "livid, those of the blood." "Those of the blood" is a kenning for "flies," and "livid flies" is a kenning for "ravens."

The sea-mew rejoices over the head
of my now wounded corpse;
the wound-hawk† craves
my unseeing eyes.
I think if the raven
strikes out my eyes,
the wound-hawk ill rewards the many times
Ekkil‡ has given him his fill.*

Then he gave up his life with great valor. And his messengers went home and did not let up until they came to where Ragnar had residence. And then Ragnar's sons had not come home from raiding. They were there for three nights before they went to meet with Áslaug. And when they came before Áslaug in her high-seat, they greeted her worthily; she received their greeting. She had one linen handkerchief upon her knee, and she had unloosed her hair, and she intended to comb it. Then she asked who they were, since she had not seen them before. He who had spoke on their behalf said that they had been among the troops of Eirek and Agnar, the sons of Ragnar. Then she spoke a verse:

*What is said by you,
friends of the king, what news?
Are the Swedes still in their land,
or otherwise driven out?
I have heard that the
Danes went from the south;*

* *Már* – “sea-mew,” used as “raven” in battle poetry.

† *Unda valr* – “wound hawk,” a kenning for “raven.”

‡ *Ekkil* – The name of a famous *sækonungur* (sea-king), here taken as “the sea-king,” i.e. Eirek.

*the chiefs had bloody rollers.
But since then, I know nothing.*
He spoke a verse in reply:
*There is need, woman,
that we tell you
that Þóra's sons are dead;
cruel are the fates to your man!
I know no other tale as heavy as this;
now we have come from
hearing the news: the eagle flies
over the corpse of the dead man.*

Then she asked how that had happened. And then he spoke the verse, which Eirek had spoken, when he had sent her the ring. They say that she then let a tear fall, and it had the appearance of blood, but it was as hard as a hailstone. No man had seen that—that she had let fall a tear—either before or after. Then she said that she might not pursue vengeance before they came back home: that is, Ragnar or his sons. “And you shall be here until then; I shall not hold off spurring on vengeance as if they had been my own sons.” Then they stayed there.

And it so happened that Ívar and the brothers came home before Ragnar, and they were not home long before Áslaug went to find her sons. Sigurð was then three winters old. He went with his mother. And then when she came into the hall, where the brothers were discussing, they received her well. Each asked the other for tidings, and they spoke first of the fall of Rögnvald, her son, and of the circumstances, and how it had happened. But that did not seem grave to her, and she said:

*My sons leave me by myself
to gaze over the sea-mews;
you do not travel from
house to house, begging.
Rögnvald took up the shield,
red with men's blood;
youngest of all my sons
he came to Óðin.*

“And I cannot see,” she said, “that he could have lived to a greater honor.” Then they asked her what tidings she had. She answered: “The fall of Eirek and Agnar, your brothers, my stepsons. I think, that out of all men, they had the best courage. And it will not be odd if you do not bear such an injury, but take great vengeance. I will be of great assistance to you in all of this, so that this deed should be more than commonly avenged.”

Then Ívar said, “This is true—I will never come to Svíþjóð eagerly to battle with King Eystein and the pagan sacrificial-magic which is there.” She pressed him greatly, but Ívar spoke for all of them, and he refused outright to make the journey. And then she spoke this verse:

*You would not be
unavenged by your brothers
one season later
if you had died first;
I would prefer
that Eirek and Agnar
had lived in your stead,
though as sons they were not born to me.*

“It is not certain,” Ívar said, “whether the matter will stand differently, even if you speak one verse after

another. However, do you know clearly what strongholds there are before us?”

“I do not know for certain.” she said. “However, what can you say of the difficulties there might be?”

Ívar said that there was very great pagan sacrificial-magic, and he said that no man has ever heard of its like. “And the king is both powerful and ill-natured.”

“What does he have the most faith in when making sacrifices?”

He said: “That is a great cow, and she is called Síbilja. She is so great in might that as soon as men hear her bellowing his foes are unable to stand, it is scarcely as if the battle is fought with men at all. It rather seems that they must face beings of troll-like form before they face the king, and I will risk neither myself or my troops there.”

She said: “One might think that you can not both be called a great man and not strive to be one.”

And when it then seemed to her that matters were beyond hope, she decided to leave, she thought they did not value her words. Then Sigurð Ormr í Auga* spoke: “I will tell you, mother,” he said, “how it seems to me, though I might not affect their answers.”

“I wish to hear that,” she said. Then he spoke a verse:

*If you grieve, mother,
the household shall become
ready in three nights;
the road we have is long.
King Eystein shall not*

* Ormr í Auga - “Snake in Eyes.”

*rule in Uppsala
even if he offers us treasure,
if you aid and push us on.*

And when he had spoken that verse, the brothers rethought their plans somewhat. And then Áslaug said: "You now declare rightly, my son, that you shall do my will. And yet I cannot see how we might make this to come to pass if we do not have your brothers' assistance. It may happen as it seems best to me—that this vengeance of yours will come about—and it seems to me that you proceed rightly my son." And then Björn spoke a verse:

*Though little is said in speech,
a man may turn over
vengeance in his heart,
in his hawk-swift chest.
We do not have a serpent
nor a shining snake in our eyes,
but my brothers gladdened me:
I will remember your stepsons.*

And then Hvítserk spoke a verse:

*Let Agnar's bane
now rejoice little;
but we must think before
we say that there might be vengeance.
We must push out a ship onto the waves,
Break up the ice before the stern;
We must see which
ships might be swiftly prepared.*

And Hvítserk spoke of this, that the ice must be broken, for the frost was then great, and their ships were in ice. And then Ívar began to speak and said

that it had come to the point when he must take some part in it, and then he spoke a verse:

*You have both honor and
courage in this vengeance,
but you might lack this—
a strong, obstinate following.
You shall bear me
before the heroes;
I will take the path to vengeance,
though I may use neither boneless hand.*

"And now," said Ívar, "we must devise the best plans we may for gathering warships and warriors, as we must not spare in this if we are to conquer." Then Áslaug went away.

XI

SIGURÐ HAD A FOSTER-FATHER, and he gathered for his foster-son both ships and troops which were well prepared. And then that was done so quickly that the troops which Sigurð was to have prepared were readied when three nights had passed; he also had five ships, all well prepared. And then when five nights had passed, Hvítserk and Björn

had prepared fourteen ships. When seven nights were passed from that time when they had conceived and declared their voyage, Ívar had ten ships and Áslaug another ten. Then they all spoke together, and told each other how many troops they had gathered. And then Ívar said that he had sent mounted troops by land.*

Áslaug said: "If I had known for certain that troops which went by land might have been useful, I might have sent some troops as well."

"We shall not delay for that," said Ívar. "We shall now go with those troops which we have gathered together."

Then Áslaug said that she would go with them, "for I know best what pains must be taken to bring about vengeance for brothers."

"This is certain," said Ívar, "that you will not come in our ships. If you so desire, you may command the troops which go by land." She said it would be thus. Then her name was changed, and she was called Randalín.

Then the troops both left, but before they did Ívar told them where they should meet. Then both parties fared well, and they met as they had decided. And when they had thus come to Svíþjóð and the kingdom of King Eystein, they traveled across the land with war-shields. Thus they burned all that was before them, killed every man's son, and moreover killed all those who were living.

* *riddaralið* – "riding troops," often translated as "a band of knights." This is another term borrowed from continental romances, as it is the term *riddar* (rider), the term used to denote a knight. However, I have not translated it as "knight," simply because the connotations are not the same at all.

XII

AND THEN IT HAPPENED that men escaped and found King Eystein and told him that to his kingdom had come an army which was powerful and thus difficult to deal with, and which would not leave anything unharmed. They had pilaged all which they had come across so that no house was still standing. When King Eystein heard these tidings, he thought he knew who these vikings might be. And then he had a summons sent by arrow throughout his entire kingdom, and he summoned all those who were his men and who wished to give him troops and might bear shields.

"We shall have with us our cow Síbilja, who is a god, and let her leap before the troops. It seems to me that it will go as before, that they will not be able to stand before her bellowing. I will encourage all my troops to do their best, and thus drive off the large and evil force."

And then it was thus done, that Síbilja was let loose. And then Ívar saw her charge and heard the hideous bellowing which was coming out of her. He thought that all the troops should make a great noise, both with weapons and war-cry, so that they would barely hear the voice of that evil creature when she charged towards them. Ívar spoke with his carriers, telling them that they should bear him forward so that he might be closer to the front.

“And when you see the cow come at us, cast me at her, and it shall go one way or the other—that I shall lose my life, or she shall have her bane. Now you must take one mighty elm-tree and carve it into the shape of a bow, along with arrows.” And when this strong bow was brought to him along with the great arrows that they had made, they did not seem to them usable as weapons to anyone. Then Ívar encouraged his men to do their best. Then the troops went with great impetuosity and noise, and Ívar was borne before their battle array.

Such a great din arose when Sibilja bellowed that they heard it just as well as if they had been silent and standing still. Then that caused it to happen that the troops fought amongst themselves, all save the brothers. And when this wonder took place, those who bore Ívar saw that he drew his bow as if he held a weak elm branch, and it seemed as if he drew the arrow point back past his bow. Then they heard a louder twang from his bow than they had ever heard before. And then they saw that his arrows flew as swift as if he had shot a strong crossbow and they saw it happen that the arrows came to sit in each of Sibilja’s eyes. And then she fell, but after that she went on headfirst, and her bellowings were much worse than before.

And when she came at them, he commanded them to cast him at her, and he became to them as light as if they cast a little child, because they were not very near the cow when they cast him. And then he came down heavily upon the cow Sibilja, and he became then as heavy as a boulder when he fell on her, and every bone in her was broken, and she received her

death. Then he commanded his men to take him up quickly. And then he was taken up, and his voice was ringing so that all heard when he spoke, and it seemed to all the army as if he was standing near each man, though he was far off. It became perfectly silent as he gave his orders. And he spoke to this end—that the warring, which they had come for, was soon to be all finished, and no harm was done when the troops had skirmished briefly amongst themselves.

Then Ívar encouraged them to wreak great harm upon those they had fought. “And now it seems to me that the most violent of them is gone, since the cow is slain.” And then both armies had their troops drawn up, and together they clashed in battle, and the battle was so difficult that all the Swedes said that they never had had such a trial of their manhood. And then both brothers, Hvítserk and Björn, went at them so hard that no battle-array could stand against them. And then so many of King Eystein’s troops fell that a scant few remained standing, and some decided to flee.

And their battle concluded thus—that King Eystein fell, and the brothers had the victory. And then they gave quarter to those that lived after the battle. And then Ívar said that he did not wish to harry in that land, because that land was now lacking a leader. “And I would that we hold course until a greater opposition is before us.” But Randalín journeyed home with some troops.

XIII

WHEN THEY DECIDED AMONG THEMSELVES that they should harry in the Southern Kingdom. And Sigurð Ormr í Auga, Randalín's son, went with his brothers on every raid after that. In these raids they strove against every town which was strong, and they fought so that none could prevail against them.

And then they heard that there was one town that was both strong and full of hardy men. And then Ívar said that he wanted to head for there. And this is said of what the town was called and who ruled over it: the chieftain was called Vífil*, and his namesake was a town called Vífilsborg. Then they traveled with war-shields so that they desolated all the towns that they happened upon, until they came to Vífilsborg. The chief was not at home in his town, and many of his troops were away with him.

Then they set up their tents on the plains that were about the town. They were peaceful during the day when they came to the town, and they held a talk with the townsmen. Ragnar's sons asked the townsmen whether they would rather give up the town, and in return they would all be granted peace, or rather test their forces and their hardihood, and their men would then receive no quarter.

* Vífil – "beetle." A name common amongst freedmen and slaves.

But they responded quickly and said that the town would never be so overcome. "But before that happens, you must try us and show us your valor and zeal." Then the night passed. And the very next day they went to strive against the town but could not overcome it. They sat around the town for half a moon and they strove every day with different strategies, that they might get the town.

But it happened that they were no nearer victory after a long while, and they then decided to turn away from there. And when the townsmen became aware that they were planning to turn away from there, then they went out to the town walls and spread out their valuable cloth and all those clothes, which were the finest in the town, over the town walls and they laid out their gold and their valuables, which were the most expensive in the town. And then one of their troop took to words and spoke:

"We thought that these men, the sons of Ragnar, and their troops were hardy men, but we can see that they have not come nearer to victory than others." Then after that they shouted at them and beat upon their shields and egged them on the best they could. And when Ívar heard that, he was so greatly startled that he fell into a great sickness, so that he might not stir, and they had to wait until it came about that he either recovered or he died. He lay there all that day until evening, and spoke not a word. And then he spoke with those men who were with him, saying that they should tell Björn, Hvítserk and Sigurð and all the wisest men that he wanted to hold a talk with them.

And when they all came and were in one place, those who were the greatest leaders among the troops, then Ívar asked if they had devised any tactic which was likely to succeed more than those which they had tried before. But they all answered that they did not have such wit in these matters that they might devise a tactic which would be successful. "Now, as often, you are the one whose advice might be useful."

Ívar answered thus: "One plan has come to me in my mind, which we have not tried. There is a large forest not far from here, and now, when night falls, we shall travel from our tents secretly to the forest, but we will leave our war-tents standing here, and when we come to the forest, each man shall bind branches for himself. And when that is done, we shall attack the town from all sides and strike fire in the wood, and there will then be a great blaze, and the town-walls will then lose their lime because of the fire. And we shall then bring up our war-slings and see how hardy they are."

And thus it was done: they traveled to the forest, and they were there as long as Ívar deemed necessary. Then they attacked to the town in accordance with his arrangements, and then when they had struck fire in the large pile of wood there was so great a blaze that the walls could not stand it and they lost their lime. Then Ívar's troops brought their war-slings up to the town and broke a large gap in the walls, and a battle began. And as soon as the two forces stood evenly opposed in battle, then the troops of townsmen fell, and some fled before them, and some, in the end, fled

to their ships. They killed every man's child who was in the town, and they took all the goods and burnt the town before they went on their way.

XIV

NOW THEY HELD COURSE FROM THERE until they came to the town called Lúna. By then they had broken nearly every town and every castle in all the Southern Kingdom, and they were then so famous in all that region that there was no child, however young, that did not know their name. Then they planned not to let up until they had come to Rómaborg,* because that town was then both very mighty and full of men, and famous and rich. But they did not quite know how long a distance it was to that town, and they had such a large troop that they could not supply provisions for them.

And when they were at the town of Lúna they discussed the journey amongst themselves. Then there came a man, who was old and cunning. They asked what sort of man he was, and he said that he was

* Rómaborg - "Town of the Romans," i.e. Rome.

a poor beggar and had, for all his life, journeyed across the land.

“You must then know many things you can tell us, which we want to know.”

The old man answered: “I do not know of anything that I will be unable to tell you, whatever land you want to ask of.”

“We want you to tell us how far it is to Rómaborg from here.”

He answered: “I can show you something to indicate that. You may see here these ancient iron shoes, which I have on my feet, and these others, which I carry on my back, which are now worn out. But when I set out from there, I bound these worn-out ones on my feet, which I now have on by back, and at that time both sets were new. I have been on the road ever since.”

And when the old man had said that, they thought that they could not continue on the way to Rome, as they had intended amongst themselves. And then they turned away with their warriors and captured many towns which had never been captured before, and proof of this can be seen to this day.

XV

NOW THE STORY TELLS US THAT RAGNAR was sitting at home in his kingdom and he did not know where his sons were, or Randalín, his wife. But he heard tales from all his men that said that none might be equal to his sons, and it seemed to him that none were as famous as they.

Then he wondered how he might gain fame that would not be any less long lived. Then he thought about this to himself, and then he sent for his craftsmen and had them fell wood for two large ships, and men heard that these two merchant vessels were so large that such ships had never been made in the North-lands. Then he gathered from all his kingdom a large mass of arms. And from these actions, men discerned that he had decided on some war-expedition away from his land. This became known across all of the lands that were near by. And then all the men and the kings who ruled those lands feared that they might not be able to remain in their lands. And they all had watches set up across their lands, in case he might attack them.

One day Randalín asked Ragnar where he was intending on journeying. He told her that he intended to go to England* with no more ships than two merchant

* England, the land of the Englar. One of the few proper place names to need no translation.

vessels, and as many troops as they might ferry. Then Randalín said: “This journey which you are planning seems very imprudent to me. I have a mind to advise you to have more boats, and smaller ones.”

“There is no glory,” he said, “if men conquer a land with many ships. But there is no tale of any that have conquered such a land as England with two ships. And if I suffer defeat, it is better that I have taken few ships from this land.”

Then Randalín answered: “It seems to me no less expensive to build these two ships than to have more long-ships for this journey. And you know that it is difficult for ships to hold course to England, and if it happens that your ships are lost, then even if your men make it to land they will then be lost if the lord of the land comes. It is better to hold course to harbors in long-ships than in merchant vessels!”

Then Ragnar spoke this verse:

*No bold man may spare the
amber of the Rhine* if he desire warriors;
but many rings help a wise chieftain
worse than warrior-men.
It is bad to defend
the town-gates with brand-red rings;
I know very many dead boars†
whose treasure lives on.*

* *röf Rínar* – “amber of the Rhine,” a kenning for gold.

† *jöfra* – “boars,” used poetically to mean chieftains. The term comes from the old practice of chieftains wearing helms adorned with the head of a boar. Normally I would simply translate this as “chieftain” – it is not really a kenning – but Ragnar’s use of the terms “boar” and “young-boar” to refer to himself and his sons seems to justify such literalism, and even adds a hint of foreshadowed irony...

Then he had his ships readied and his men gathered, so that the merchant vessels were fully loaded. There was much discussion about his plans. But he spoke this one verse:

What is it that I, the breaker of rings,
hear roaring from the rocks:
that the distributor of the fire of the hand‡
should abandon the difficult serpents of the sea?‡
I, the scatterer of the
fore-arm layings,§ shall, Lady Bil,¶
follow my plan, unwavering,
if the gods are willing.*

And when his ships and those troops that would accompany him were ready, and when it seemed as if good weather would come, Ragnar said that he

* *bauga... brjótr* – “breaker of rings.” This phrase refers to the king’s role as provider of wealth to his champions, signified by the “breaking,” i.e. distributing, of rings. It is a kenning for “king,” which here refers to Ragnar.

‡ *mundelds meidr* – “distributor of the fire of the hand.” *Mundelds* means “fire (*eldr*) of the hand (*mund*),” a kenning for “gold.” Once again, the phrase “distributor of gold” is a kenning for “king,” and again denotes Ragnar.

‡ *mars sviðr ófni* – “the difficult serpents of the sea.” *Ófni* is the name of a serpent from the poetic Edda, here used as a kenning for simply “serpent.” *Ófni mars* (serpents of the sea) is a kenning for “ships.”

§ *ægir alnar leygjar* – “scatterer of the fore-arm layings.” The “fore-arm layings” are bracelets of gold which adorn the fore-arm, and thus “the scatterer of gold” is once again a kenning for Ragnar.

¶ *þorn-Bil* – “lady Bil.” *þorn* means ‘thorn,’ ‘pin,’ or ‘brooch.’ The latter usage is often combined into a kenning for “woman:” *þorn-leið* (brooch-field), *þorn-grund* (brooch-ground), etc. Here it is apparently used as a kenning for “woman” in its own right. Bil is the name of a goddess, and the entire construction, *þorn-Bil*, is a kenning which refers to Randalín.

would go to the ships. And when he was ready, Randalín accompanied him to the ships. But before they parted, she said that she would reward him for that shirt which he had given her. He asked what manner of reward it would be, and she spoke a verse:

*I sewed for you
a shirt with no seams;
with hale heart I wove it
out of grayed woolen-hair;
wounds will not bleed,
nor will edges bite
through this invincible shroud
which is blessed by the gods.*

He said that he would accept this aid. And then when they parted, it was evident that their parting seemed very difficult for her.

Then Ragnar held course in his ships to England, as he had planned. He received a bitter wind, so that he broke both his merchant-vessels against England, but all his troops came to land and they kept their clothes and weapons. And there, whenever he came to farms and towns and castles, he conquered them. And there was a king called Ella, who then ruled England. He had heard reports when Ragnar had left his own land. Ella had sent forth men, so that he might know as soon as Ragnar came to land. Then these men journeyed to meet with King Ella, and told him war-tidings. Then he had a summons sent throughout all his land and commanded every man come to him who could wield a shield and ride a horse and who dared to fight. He gathered so many together there that it was a wondrous thing.

Then King Ella and his men prepared for battle. Then King Ella spoke with his troops: "If we gain victory in this battle, and it happens that you know that it is Ragnar who has come against us, then you shall not bear weapons against him, because he has sons who would never again leave us be if he fell."

At the same time, Ragnar prepared for battle, and he had that piece of clothing which Randalín had given him at their parting on over his mail, and in his hand was that spear with which he had vanquished the snake which lay about Þóra's bower and which no one else had dared to face, and he had no protection save his helm.

And when they met, the battle began. Ragnar had many fewer troops. The battle had not been going long before most of Ragnar's troops fell. But wherever he went that day, the army cleared away before him. He struck at their shields or mail or helms, and so great were his hewings that none could stand before them. It happened with all who shot or hewed at him that not one weapon did him any harm, and he never received a wound—but he killed a great multitude of King Ella's troops. However, the battle ended so that all of Ragnar's troops fell, and he was overborne with shields and seized.

Then he was asked who he was, but he was silent and did not answer. Then King Ella spoke: "This man may thus come to a greater trial if he will not tell us who he is. Now he shall be cast into a snake pit, and let him sit there a very long while. But if he says anything by which we might know he is Ragnar, then he shall be taken out as quickly as possible."

Then he was led from there and he sat in the pit a very long while, but no snakes fastened onto him. Then the men said: "This man is very strong: he was not bitten by a weapon all day, and now no snakes harm him." Then King Ella said that he was to be stripped of the outermost clothing that he had on; thus it was done, and all the snakes hung on him on all sides. Then Ragnar said: "The young pigs would now squeal if they knew what the older one suffered." And though he spoke thus, they did not know for certain that it was Ragnar who was held rather than another king. Then he spoke a verse:

*I have had fifty
and one battles
which were thought glorious:
I made much harm.
I did not look to
a snake to be my bane;
things happen very often to one
that one thinks of the least.*

And he spoke another:

*The young pigs would squeal
if they knew the state of the boar;
of the injury done to me.
Snakes dig in my flesh,
stab at me harshly,
and have sucked on me;
soon now will my body
die among the beasts.*

Then he gave up his life, and he was taken out of there. And King Ella thought he knew that it was Ragnar who had given up his life. Then he thought to

himself how he could come to know this, and how he could hold his kingdom and how he could know in what way the Ragnarssons would react when they learned of it. He decided on a plan: he then readied a ship and chose a man to carry out that plan, who was both wise and hardy. Then he chose men, so that the ship was well manned, and said that he wanted to send a message to Ívar and the others to tell them of the fall of their father. But the journey seemed most hopeless, so that few wanted to go.

Then the king spoke: "And you must attend closely to how each of the brothers reacts to these tidings. Then travel away afterwards, when you are given fair winds." So he had the journey prepared so that they wanted nothing. And then they journeyed, and they traveled well.

And the sons of Ragnar had been harrying in the Southern Kingdom. Then they turned their course to the Northern-Lands and planned to visit their kingdom, where Ragnar ruled. But they did not know of his battle-journey or how it had had turned out, but they were very curious to know how it had turned out. Then they journeyed across the south of the land. And everywhere, when men heard of the journey of the brothers, men deserted their towns and ferried their belongings off and fled away before them, so that the brothers could scarcely find food for their troops. One morning Björn Járnsíða woke and spoke a verse:

The heath-falcon flies here
each morning over these hearty towns;*

* *heiðir vals* - "heath-falcon," a kenning for "raven," as it flies over the fields of battle.

*with lack of luck
he might die of hunger.
He should fare south o'er the sand
where we let the dew from great blows*
flow from wounds,
there where is the flowing of men's deaths.†*
And he spoke another:
*It was first that we journeyed
to begin to hold Frey's play
in Romaveldi,‡
where we had scant few troops.
There I let my sword be drawn
for the murder and manslaughter
of those grey-beards;
the eagle shrieks o'er the fallen slain.*

* *dögg ór skýlihöggum* – “dew from damaging blows.” A kenning for “blood.”

† *dauðs manns dreyra* – “the flowings/oozings from man's deaths.” A kenning for “blood.”

‡ *Romaveldi* – the kingdom of the Romans.

XVI

THEY WENT ON SO THAT THEY CAME TO Danmörk before the messengers of King Ella, and then they sat quietly with their troops. And when the messengers came with their troops to the town where the sons of Ragnar were being given a feast, they went into the hall where they were drinking, and went before the high-seat where Ívar was lying. Sigurð Ormr í Auga and Hvítserk sat playing *hneftafl*, and Björn Járnsiðr was carving a spear-shaft on the floor of the hall. And when the messengers of King Ella came before Ívar, they spoke to him respectfully. He received their greeting, and asked where they were from, and what tidings they bore. And the one, who was their leader, said that they were Englishmen, and that King Ella had sent them thither with tiding which spoke the fall of Ragnar, their father. Hvítserk and Sigurð quickly let the *tafl*-pieces fall from their hands, and they attended closely to the tiding-tale. Björn stood on the floor of the hall and leaned on his spear-shaft. But Ívar asked them exactly what the circumstances of Ragnar's life-leaving had been.

And they told it all as it had happened, from the time he came to England until the time he gave up his life. And then when the tale came to when he had said “the young boars might grumble,” Björn squeezed

the spear-shaft with his hand, and he squeezed so strongly that the print of his hand was seen on it afterwards. When the messengers ended the recounting, Björn shook the spear asunder, so that it broke into two pieces. And Hvítserk held a *tafl*-piece that he had been moving, and he crushed it so strongly that blood spurted out from under each fingernail. And Sigurð Ormr í Auga had been holding a knife and paring his nails when the tidings were being told, and he listened so closely to the tidings that he did not notice until the knife stood in the bone, and he did not flinch at that. But Ívar asked how it all had happened, and his color was now red, now livid, and he would suddenly become very pale, and he was so swollen that his flesh was all mortified from the anger that was in his breast. Then Hvítserk began to speak and said that vengeance could be most quickly taken by killing the messengers of King Ella.

Ívar said: "That shall not be. They shall go in peace wherever they wish, and anything which they lack, they need only ask me for, and I shall secure it for them."

And when they ended their errand, they turned back out of the hall and to their ships. And when they were given wind, they put out to sea, and they traveled well until they came to a meeting with King Ella, and they told him how each of the brothers had reacted to the tiding-signs. And when King Ella heard that he spoke: "It is certain that we will need fear either Ívar or else no one, because of what you say of him: thoughts of revenge do not run very deep in them, and we will manage to hold our kingdom

against them." Then he had watchmen sent throughout all his kingdom, so that no army might come at him unknown.

And when the messengers of King Ella had gone away, the brothers began to discuss how they should go about revenging Ragnar, their father. Then Ívar spoke: "I will have no part in this—I shall not muster troops, for it happened with Ragnar as I had thought it would. He prepared badly for his action from the beginning. He had no grievance with King Ella, and it often happens that if a man stubbornly decides to act unjustly, he is brought down contemptibly in such a way. And I will accept compensation from King Ella, if he will give it to me."

But when the brothers heard that, they became very angry and said that they would never become so cowardly, although he wished to be.

"Many might say that we wrongly rest our hands upon our knees, if we do not seek father-vengeance when before we have fared widely across the land with war-shields and killed many a guiltless man. But it shall not be so; rather every ship in Danmörk that is seaworthy shall be readied. The most skilled troops shall be gathered, so that every man who may bear a shield against King Ella shall travel with us."

But Ívar said that he would leave behind all those ships that he commanded,—“except for that one, which I will be upon myself.” And when it was heard that Ívar would not take any part in the action, they received many fewer troops, but they went none the less. And when they came to England, King Ella became aware of it and quickly had his trumpets sounded and called

to him all the men who wished to assist him. And then he went with so many troops that no one could say how many had come, and he went to meet the brothers.

Then the armies met with each other, and Ívar was not there when they clashed in battle. And when the battle ended, it came about that the sons of Ragnar fled, and King Ella had the victory. And while the king was pursuing the fleeing host, Ívar told his brothers that he did not intend to turn back to his land—"and I desire to find out whether King Ella will do me any honor or not; it seems to me better to thus receive compensation from him than to fare often again as we have now fared."

Hvitserk said that he would not have dealings with him, and he could go about his affairs as he wished,— "but we shall never take payment for our father."

Ívar said that he would part with them, and told them to rule the kingdom that they had all held together, "and you should send me my things, when I ask for them." And when he had spoken, he bade them farewell. Then he turned away to meet with King Ella. And when he came before him, he greeted the king worthily, and spoke to him thus: "I have come to meet with you, and I want to come to an agreement with you on such compensation as you will prepare for me. And now I see that I have nothing compared to you, and it seems to me better to accept such compensation from you as you will grant me, rather than to lose my men or myself to you."

Then King Ella answered: "Some men claim that it is not safe to trust you, and that you speak most fairly

when you are thinking deceitfully. It would be difficult to defend against you and your brothers."

"I will ask little of you. If you will grant it, I will swear to you in this manner: that I shall never be against you." Then the king asked him to say what compensation he wanted. Ívar said, "I want you to give me as much of your land as an ox-hide covers, and outside of that shall be the outer boundary. I will not ask more from you, and I think that you wish me little honor, if you will not grant me this."

"I do not know," said the king, "whether it might harm us if you have that much of my land, but I think I will give it to you, if you will swear not to bear arms against me. If you are true to me, I shall not fear your brothers."

XVII

WHEN THEY DISCUSSED THE MATTER between the two of them, and Ívar swore him an oath that he would not strike against him and not conspire to cause him harm, and he should have as much of England as an ox-hide could cover, the largest he might find.

Then Ívar took a hide from an old bull and he had it softened, and then he had it stretched three times. Then he cut it all asunder into strips, as narrowly as possible, and then he let them be split in half, between the hair and the flesh. And when this was done, the thong was so long that it was marveled at, as it had not been thought that it might become so large. And then he had it laid around a field, and there was as much space as was within a large town, and there he had the foundation marked for a large town-wall. And then he gathered to him many craftsmen and had many houses raised on the field, and there he had a large town built, and it was called Lundúnaborg.* It is the largest and most famous of all towns in the Northern-Lands.

And when he had this town made, he had his movable property sent over. And he was so liberal that he gave with two hands, and people thought so much of his wisdom that all sought him to assist their councils and difficult cases. He so arranged all the cases so that each party though he got the best of it, and he became popular, so that he had many friends about him. The king took much advice from him, and he arranged the cases so that they did not come before the King. When Ívar had proceeded with his plan until it seemed that peace was guaranteed him, he sent men to find his brothers and tell them that they should send him as much gold and silver as he asked for. And when these men came to find the brothers, they told their errand and also what had come of Ívar's plan—

* Lundúnaborg—"London-town."

namely, that men thought they did not know what cunning he was preparing.

And therefore the brothers thought that he did not have the same disposition that he was wont to have. Then they sent such goods as he had asked for. And when the goods came to Ívar, he gave all the goods to the strongest men in the land and stole the troops out from under King Ella. They all said that they would sit quiet, though he might later prepare for a war-going. And when Ívar had thus stolen the troops out from under the king, then he sent men to find his brothers and to say to them that he wanted them to send a levy throughout all the lands which their rule stretched over, and they should demand however many men they could get. And when this word-sending came to the bothers, they quickly figured out that he most likely thought it very promising that they might now gain victory. Then they summoned troops from all Danmörk and Gautland and all the kingdoms which they had power over, and an innumerable amount was gathered together when the assemblage was complete.

They then held course in their ships toward England both night and day, for they wanted to let as little forewarning of their coming to travel before them as possible. Then war-tidings were told to King Ella. He summoned his troops but he gathered few men, because Ívar had stolen many troops out from under him. Then Ívar went and met King Ella and said that he wished to carry through on that which he had sworn. "But I cannot influence my brothers' doings. However, I can plan to find them and know if they

will stop their army and do no more ill than they have already done.”

Then Ívar went to meet his brothers and encouraged them greatly to go forth as best they could and let a battle come about as soon as possible, “because the king has very few troops.” And they answered that he did not need to encourage them, as their intent was the same as before. Then Ívar went and met King Ella and told him that they were too eager and enraged to listen to his words. “And when I wanted to bring peace between you, they shouted against it. Now I will carry through on my vow, that I would not war against you: I will be quiet along with my troops, and the battle with you may go as it will.”

Then King Ella saw the troops of the brothers, and they came so fiercely that it was wondrous. Then Ívar spoke: “Now is the time that you should prepare your troops, King Ella, and I think that they will press against you with a strong onslaught for a while.” And as soon as the troops met each other there was a great battle, and the sons of Ragnar came hard upon the army of King Ella. Their vehemence was so great that their only thoughts were how they might work the most damage, and the war was both long and hard. And the battle ended thus—King Ella and his troops took to flight, but he was seized.

Ívar was then nearby, and he said that they should now bring about his life-leaving. “Now is the time,” he said, “to remember the manner of death which he inflicted on our father. Now a man who is most skilled in woodcarving shall mark an eagle on his back so precisely that the eagle shall redden with his blood.”

And that man, when he was called to this task, did as Ívar commanded him, and King Ella was in great agony before the task was ended. Then he gave up his life, and it seemed to them that they then had vengeance for their father, Ragnar. Ívar said that he wanted to give them the kingdom that they all held together, and he wished to rule over England.

XVIII

AFTER THAT, HVÍTSEK AND BJÖRN journeyed home to their kingdom along with Sigurð, but Ívar stayed behind and ruled England. From then on they kept their troops together less, and harried in various lands. And Randalín, their mother, became an old woman. And Hvítsek, her son, had gone raiding on his own in the Eastern Ways, but great powers came to meet him, that he could not raise his shield against, and he was seized. And he then chose his manner of death: that a pyre should be made of the heads of men, and there he would burn and thus give up his life. And when Randalín heard that, she spoke a verse:

*One son which I had
endured death in Eastern Ways;
he was called Hvítserk,
who was never eager to flee.
He was heated on heads
hewed from those chosen at battle—
brave prince chose that
death before he fell.*

Then she spoke another:

The tree of the people
had himself destroyed
with countless heads under the king†;
fingers of fire sang out his fate.
What better bed should
a battle-striker lay himself upon?
The high all-ruling chieftain
chose to fall with renown.*

A great family-line has come from Sigurð Ormr í Auga. His daughter was called Ragnhild, the mother of Harald Hárfagra,‡ the first to rule over all of Noreg alone.

And Ívar ruled over England until his dying day, when he became deathly sick. And when he lay with that killing-illness, he said that he should be moved to that place which was most exposed to raiding, and he said that he expected that any who would land there would not gain victory. And when he breathed

* *bör folka* – “the tree of the people.” “Tree” is a common kenning for “warrior” in skaldic poetry; the “tree of the people” is a king or leader, i.e. Hvítserk.

† i.e. under himself.

‡ Harald Hárfagra – “Harold of the Fair-Hair.”

his last, it was done as he had said, and he was then laid in a how.* And many men say that when King Harold Sígurðarson† arrived in England he arrived where Ívar was, and he fell on that expedition. And when Vilhjálmm Bastarð‡ came to land, he went to and broke open Ívar’s how and saw Ívar unrotten. Then he had a great fire made and had Ívar burned in the fire, and after that he battled across the land and had victory.

And from Björn Járnsíð have come many men. From him has come a great family: Þórð, who farmed at Hófða in Hófðaströnd,§ was a great leader at the þings.

And then when the sons of Ragnar had all given up their lives, their troops who had assisted them were dispersed far and wide, and all of them who had been with the sons of Ragnar thought that there was no worth in other princes. There were two men who traveled widely across the land to discover if they could find any prince whom they thought it would not be disgraceful for them to serve, but they did not travel together.

* how, i.e. a cairn. I use this more archaic English term as it is a direct cognate of the Old Icelandic *haug*.

† Harald Sígurðarson – “King Harold the son of Sígurð”

‡ Vilhjálmm Bastarð – “William the Bastard,” better known to history as William the Conqueror.

§ Hófðaströnd – “Hófða’s strand”

XIX

IT CAME TO PASS THAT IN THIS ONE LAND a certain king had two sons. He took sick and breathed his last, and his sons wished to drink a funeral feast for him. They decreed that all men could come there to the feast that had heard of it in the next three winters. Now this was heard widely throughout the land. And in these three winters they prepared the feast. And when the summer came when they would drink the funeral feast and the time which was appointed arrived, the feast turned out to be so very filled with men that none knew of its precedent it was so large, and many great halls were prepared and many tents set up outside.

And when the first evening was far on its way, a man came into the hall. This man was large that none were as large, and from his attire it could be seen that he had been with noble men. And when he came into the hall, he went before the brothers and spoke to them and asked where they would direct him to sit. He pleased them well and they told him to sit on the upper bench. He needed the space of two men. And as soon as he had sat down, drink was brought to him as to other men, but there was not a horn so large that he might not drink it off in one drink, and all thought they could discern that they were all as nothing compared to him.

Then it happened that another man came to the feast. He was rather larger than the one before. Both men had low-hanging hoods. And when this man came before the high-seat of the young kings, he spoke handsomely and asked them to direct him to a seat. They said that this man should sit farther in than the other on the bench. Now he went to his seat, and together they took up so much room that five men had to rise up for them. And he who came first was the smaller drinker. And the second one drank so quickly that he poured nearly every horn into himself, and men did not find that he became drunk, and it seemed he held his seat-mates in contempt, and he turned his back to them. He who came first said that they should have a game together—"and I will go first." He shoved the other with his hand and spoke a verse:

*Speak of your great achievements,
educate us, I ask you –
have you seen the ravens shudder
on the branch, bloated with blood?
You have more often been otherwise:
found in the high-seat
rather than gathering bloody carrion
for birds of war in the dale!*

Now it seemed to him who sat on the outside that he was challenged by such a direct verse, and he spoke a verse in reply:

*Be silent at once, you called a stay-at-home;
you are content with very little,
you have never done
what I may boast of!
You have not fattened*

the sun-seeking-bitch with the drink
of sword's play†, but gave up the harbor horses;‡
what is troubling you?*

Now he who came first answered:

*We let the strong cheek
of the horses of the sea§
run to the waves, the sides of
our bright mail splattered with blood.
The she-wolf feasted, the hunger
of the eagles was sated on the
blood from men's reddened necks,
while we seized the hard meal of the fish's land.¶*

Now he who came second spoke:

*Very little I saw of you
when the swift
wading horses** found the
brewing white plain†† before them;
and with weak courage
you hid from the ravens, near the mast,*

* *sólar sækítik* – “the sun-seeking bitch,” a kenning for “wolf,” referring to the mythological wolf Skoll, who chases after the sun and will, at the time of Ragnarok, catch its prey.

† *drykkju sverðs leiki* – “drink of swords’ play,” a kenning for “blood.”

‡ *hálu hesti* – “horses of the harbor,” a kenning for “ships.”

§ *hlýr stinn hafs hesta* – “strong cheek of the horses of the sea.” The “horses of the sea” is a kenning for “ships,” and thus the “strong cheek of ships” is the prow of a ship.

¶ *harð meldr hveðnu* – “the hard meal/flour of the ‘of the fishes.’” I am not quite sure, but I take the “of the fishes” to mean the sea, which makes sense, and then renders the phrase “the hard meal of the sea,” which is a kenning for “gold.”

** *hesti máva rastar* – “swift wading horses,” a kenning for “ships.”

†† *heitavang hvítum* – “brewing white field,” a kenning for “the sea.”

*when we turned our red-prows
again to the land.**

And then the one who came first spoke:

*It does us no honor
to quarrel about what we have done
greater than the other,
over ale in the high-seat.
You stood upon the sword-stag†
as waves bore it through the sound,
and I sat in the birth as the
red prow rode into harbor.*

Now he who came second answered:

*We were both companions
of Björn at the sword-din,‡
we were proven warriors
when we strove for Ragnar;
I bear the wound in my side
from the heroes’ beaks§
in the land of the Bolgars –
neighbor, sit further in beside me!*

In the end they knew each other and were together there at the feast.

* The second strophe is nearly incoherent—all commentators are unanimous in their puzzlement as to what it means, and I was forced to try to piece something together from the intelligible pieces.

† *brandahjort* – “sword-stag,” or “the stag of swords,” a kenning for “ship.” It is unclear why it should denote a ship—perhaps the warriors brandishing swords comprise its antlers?

‡ *brandagný* – “din of swords,” a kenning for “battle.”

§ *bragnar börðust* – “the beaks of heroes,” a kenning for “swords.”

XX

THERE WAS A MAN NAMED ÖGMUND, who was called Ögmund Inn Danski.* He journeyed one day along with five ships, and lay anchor at Sámsey in Munarvág. Then it is said that the cooks went to land to prepare the meat, and other men went into the woods to entertain themselves. There they found an ancient tree-man, and it was forty feet in height and covered with moss, but they could still make out all of him, and they discussed among themselves who might have sacrificed to this great god. And then the tree-man spoke:

*It was long ago
when the offspring
of the sea-king journeyed
on the way here
in the tongues of landings†
across the bright salty trail;‡
since then, I have been responsible
for guarding this place.
And thus the warriors,
sons of Loðbrók,*

* Ögmund inn Danski - "Ögmund the Dane."

† *hlunnatungum* - "roller's tongues?" a kenning for "ship." The modern Icelandic glosses this phrase as meaning "ships," I can't actually find the compound anywhere.

‡ *salta slóð birtinga* - "the bright trail of salt," a kenning for "the sea."

*set me thus
near the southern salt-sea;
in the southern parts
of Sámsey they sacrificed
to me, prayed for
the deaths of men.
They bade the man*
stand near the thorn-bush,
covered in moss,
as long as the strand endured.
Clouds weep upon
each of my cheeks,
for now neither flesh
nor clothing shelters me.*

And that seemed wondrous to them, and afterwards they spoke of it to other men.



* i.e. the *tréman* who is speaking.

GLOSSARY OF PROPER NAMES

All entries are in alphabetical order by first name, with the genealogical surname second (if they have one), followed by any nickname(s) they might possess. Many characters are not given a genealogy at all; therefore only their first names are given. I have supplied a hypothetical genealogical surname when the saga failed to mention one and when there would be some confusion between two characters with the same name. However, due to the comparatively diminutive size of *Ragnars Saga*, there are few characters whose first names overlap, thus alleviating such confusions as arise in *Brenu Njála Saga* when Þorgeir goes to speak to Þorgeir, etc.

In regards to the alphabetizing of Norse characters, I have followed the example of the compilers of the Icelandic-English Dictionary. 'Ð' and 'ð' follows 'D' and 'd'; 'P' and 'p', 'Æ' and 'æ', 'Ö-Ø' and 'ö-ø', (in that order) are placed after 'Z'. Long vowels, marked with the acute (´), come after their short, unmarked equivalent, with the exception of 'É' and 'é', which are treated equally with the short 'E' and 'e'.

AGNAR – Brother to Eirek. Born of Ragnar and Þóra, Ragnar's first wife, IV; Harries in Sweden with his brother Eirek against King Eystein, and is slain, X.

ÁKI – A woodsman/herder living at Spangarheið.

Husband to Gríma, and 'adopted' father to Áslaug. Kills Heimir, Áslaug's foster-father, I.

ÁSLAUG – The second wife of Ragnar. As an infant, is carried in a harp by Heimir, her foster-father. After his death, she is raised by the peasants Áki and Gríma, and renamed Kráka, I; Discovered by Ragnar's men and brought to him, V; Leaves with Ragnar and marries him, VI; gives birth to her sons Ívar, Björn, Hvítserk, and Rögnvald, VII; Gives birth to Sigurð Ormr í Auga, and is proven to be the daughter of Sigurð Fáfnisbana and Brynhild. Now goes by her original name, Áslaug, IX; Urges her sons to avenge the death of their step-brothers, Eirek and Agnar, X; Changes her name to Randalín and travels with troops by land to Sweden, XI; Takes part in the battle against King Eystein of Sweden, return home with her troops, XII; Attempts to dissuade Ragnar from raiding England with only two ships, XV.

BIL – One of the Asynia. She is mentioned as a keening for 'women' in line of verse, XV.

BJÖRN called JÁRNSIÐA – Brother to Ívar, Hvítserk, Rögnvald, and Sigurð Ormr í Auga. Born of Áslaug and Ragnar, goes raiding with brothers at Hvitabær, VII; Fights in the battle of Hvitabær, composes a verse about the battle, VIII; Agrees to join his mother and brothers in harrying in Sweden, X; Gathers troops and travels to Sweden for the battle, XI; Takes part in the battle against King Eystein of Sweden, XII; Harries in Suðrriki with his brothers, sacks Vífilsborg XIII; Joins the other Ragnarssons in a failed attack on King Ella, XVI; Joins the other Ragnarssons in overthrowing King Ella, XVII; his descendents are mentioned, XVIII.

BRABELLA – The location of the battle in which Sigurð Hring defeated Harold Hilditön. Mentioned by the narrator, III.

BRYNHILD BUÐLADOTTUR – The legendary valkyrie/princess from the Sigurð tales in ‘The Poetic Edda’ and ‘The Volsunga Saga.’ According to the author of ‘Ragnar’s Saga,’ Áslaug is her daughter by Sigurð Fáfnisbana. Her death is mentioned, I; Áslaug claims her as her mother, IX.

DANMÖRK – The land of the Danir, modern day Denmark. Ruled by Ragnar and, after his death, his sons Hvítserk and Björn.

EIREK – Brother to Agnar. Born of Þóra, Ragnar’s first wife, IV; Harries in Sweden with his brother Agnar against King Eystein, composes a series of death verses, and dies upon a bed of spears, X.

ELLA – King of England. Defeats Ragnar in battle, XV; defeats the Ragnarssons when they come seeking vengeance for their father, agrees to give Ívar some of his land, XVI; is defeated by the Ragnarssons and has the ‘blood-eagle’ carved into his back, dies, XVII.

EYSTEIN – The King of Sweden, situated at Uppsala, the father of Ingibjörg. Invites Ragnar to a feast, betroths his daughter, Ingibjörg, to him, IX; Ends his friendship with Ragnar after the latter breaks off his engagement to Ingibjörg, defeats the troops of Eirek and Agnar, X; Falls in battle against the forces of the remaining Ragnarssons and Randalín, XII.

GAUTLAND – The land of the Gautar, a Scandinavian people in southern Sweden.

GRÍMA – The husband of Áki, ‘foster’ mother to

Áslaug. Persuades her husband to kill Heimir, Áslaug’s foster-father, I; meets Ragnar’s cooks, V.

HAROLD called HÁRFAGRA – The son of Ragnhild. He is mentioned, XVIII.

HAROLD called HILDITÖN – The king of Denmark, defeated by Ragnar’s father, Sigurð Hring. Mentioned by the narrator, II.

HAROLD SÍGURÐARSON – A king who launched a failed attempt to conquer England, XVIII.

HEIMIR – Brynhild and Áslaug’s foster father. After the deaths of Sigurð and Brynhild, Heimir hides Áslaug in a harp. He is killed by Áki at Spangarheið, I.

HERRUÐ – An earl in Gautland, father of Þóra, Ragnar’s first wife. Places Þóra in a bower, gives her a snake which later grows into a dragon, II; Holds a þing in order to find who slew the dragon, III; Gives his daughter in marriage to Ragnar, IV.

HLYMDÖLIR – The home of Heimir. He is there when he hears the tidings of the deaths of Sigurð Fáfnisbana and Brynhild, I.

HVÍTSEK – Brother to Ívar, Björn, Rögnvald, and Sigurð Ormr í Auga. Born of Áslaug and Ragnar. Through Chapter XVII his adventures are identical to those of his brothers. See Björn. He goes raiding in the east, and dies upon a pyre of human heads, XVIII.

HVITABÆR – A place with a great fortress and a site of many sacrifices, defended by an army and two magical cows. Conquered by the Ragnarssons, the place of Rögnvald’s death, VII.

INGIBJÖRG – The daughter of Eystein, king of Sweden. She was temporarily engaged to Ragnar, IX.

ÍVAR – Brother to Björn, Hvítserk, Rögnvald, and

Sigurð Ormr í Auga. Born of Áslaug and Ragnar. Through Chapter XV his adventures are identical to those of his brothers. See Björn. He refuses to join the Ragnarssons in their raid against King Ella, and receives land in payment for his father's death, XVI; steals King Ella's troops, and encourages his brothers to overthrow the king, stays on to rule England, XVII; dies of sickness, and gives instructions for his burial, XVIII.

KRÁKA – see ÁSLAUG SIGURÐSDÓTTUR

LUNDÚNABORG – Modern day London. Founded by Ívar, XVII.

LÚNA – A town in Suðrríki. The Ragnarssons stop there on their way to Römaborg, and meet an old man who dissuades them from continuing on, XIV.

NOREG – Modern day Norway. Heimir flees there but is slain at Spangarheið, where Áki and Gríma raise Áslaug as their own daughter, I.

RAGNAR called LOÐBRÓKAR – The King of Danmörk, son of Sigurð Hring. He kills the giant snake surrounding Pora's bower and receives her in return, III-IV; Finds Kráka at Spangarheið, and takes her off as his bride, V-VI; Visits Eystein in Svipjoð, and becomes engaged to his daughter Ingibjörg, IX; Attacks King Ella of England, is defeated, and dies in a snake pit, XV.

RAGNARSSONS – A collective title for the sons of Ragnar: Eirek and Agnar by Póra, and Björn, Hvítserk, Ívar, Rögnvald, and Sigurð Ormr í Auga by Áslaug.

RAGNHILD – The daughter of Sigurð Ormr í Auga and the mother of Harold Hárfagra. Her birth is mentioned, XVIII.

RANDALÍN – see ÁSLAUG

RÖGNVALD – Brother to Björn, Hvítserk, Ívar, and Sigurð Ormr í Auga. Born of Áslaug and Ragnar. Goes raiding with brothers at Hvitabær and dies there, VII.

RÖMABORG – The Icelandic name for Rome, literally 'Rome-Town.' The Ragnarssons plan to conquer it, XIV.

SÁMSEY – An island off the coast of Denmark which is frequently mentioned in the *fornaldarsögur*.

SÍBILJA – A cow whose magical bellowing causes enemy troops to fight amongst themselves, and is worshiped by Eystein and his followers as a god. First mentioned, IX; confuses the troops of Eirek and Agnar, causing their defeat, X; is slain by Ívar, XII.

SIGURÐ FÁFNISBANA – The legendary warrior from the 'The Poetic Edda' and 'The Volsunga Saga.' According to the author of 'Ragnar's Saga,' Áslaug is his daughter by Brynhild. Áslaug claims him as her father, IX.

SIGURÐ HRING – The king of Denmark, and the father of Ragnar. His victory over Harold Hilditön is mentioned by the narrator, III.

SIGURÐ called ORMR Í AUGA – Brother to Björn, Ívar, Hvítserk and Rögnvald. Born of Áslaug and Ragnar. Born, IX; at the age of three, overturns his brother Ívar's advice not to go raiding against Eystein, X; Then through Chapter XVII his adventures are identical to those of his brothers. See Björn. A list of his descendants is given, XVIII.

SPANGARHEIÐ – A farm in Norway, where Áki and Gríma live. Heimir arrives with Áslaug, and is killed by Áki, I; Ragnar spends the night in a nearby harbor, and his men find Áslaug, called Kráka, V;

Ragnar returns after raiding, and takes Kráka with him, VI.

SVIPJOÐ – Modern day Sweden. Ragnar travels there to visit king Eystein, IX. Eirek and Agnar harry there and are defeated by Eystein, X. Randalín and the Ragnarssons travel there to defeat Eystein, XI-XII.

UPPSALA – A town in Sweden, where Eystein resides. First mentioned, IX. Men flee there to warn Eystein of the army of Eirek and Agnar, X.

VÍFIL – The ruler of Vífilsborg. His name means ‘beetle.’ He is not home with the Ragnarssons attack and destroy his town, XIII.

VÍFILSBORG – A town in the Southern-Kingdom, ruled by a man named Vífil. It is besieged and then burned by the Ragnarssons, XIII.

VILHJÁLM, called BASTARÐ – William the Conqueror. According to the saga, he had to burn Ívar’s body before he could conquer England, XVIII.

PÓRA called BORGARHJÖRT – The first wife of Ragnar, and mother to his two sons, Eirek and Agnar. The daughter of Herruð, the king of Gautland. She is placed by her father in a bower, and given a snake which later becomes a dragon, II; she hears Ragnar recite a verse after he slays the dragon, and suggests that her father hold a *þing* in order to find who slew the dragon, III; marries Ragnar, gives birth to her two sons, and dies of a disease, IV.



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