UNE ✦ SACRA

Norse Mythology

# Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar — The Lay of Helgi the Son of Hjorvarth

✦ ✦ ✦

*Anonymous (Eddic poetry)*

*Translation by Henry Adams Bellows (1923)*

# Credits

| | |
|---|---|
| Author | Anonymous (Eddic poetry) |
| Date | 9th–13th century; Codex Regius, c. 1270 |
| Original language | Old Norse |
| Version | Translation by Henry Adams Bellows (1923) |
| Edition | 1.5 |
| Translation | Henry Adams Bellows |
| Source | Project Gutenberg 73533 |
| License | CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · original: Public domain |

About:

*A poem in verse and prose about Helgi, son of King Hjorvarth, who receives a name only when the Valkyrie Svava gives it to him and shields him in battle.*

*Helgi kills giants and his father's foes, and his brother Hethin, through a rash vow, swears to wed Helgi's beloved; Helgi falls in fight and asks Svava to accept Hethin.*

*It mixes verses of several origins linked by the compiler's prose, including an insult duel with the giantess Hrimgerd, who turns to stone at dawn.*

*A closing note says that Helgi and Svava were reborn — one of the few mentions of rebirth in Norse tradition, linking this Helgi to the other heroes of the same name.*

Source: https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/73533

See the source listed above for the terms of use of this version. The design of this file belongs to Une Sacra (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0); the text keeps the license listed above.

*Digital edition generated on November 26, 2026 by Une Sacra, an open library of sacred texts. · UneSacra.com*

# Contents

Chapter I

Chapter II

Chapter III

Chapter IV

## CHAPTER I

✦

1 Hjorvarth was the name of a king, who had four wives: one was called Alfhild, and their son was named Hethin; the second was called Særeith, and their son was named Humlung; the third was called Sinrjoth, and their son was named Hymling. King Hjorvarth had made a great vow to have as wife whatsoever woman he knew was fairest. He learned that King Svafnir had a daughter fairer than all others, whose name was Sigrlin. Ithmund was the name of one of his jarls; he had a son called Atli, who went to woo Sigrlin on behalf of the king. He dwelt the winter long with King Svafnir. There was a jarl called Franmar, Sigrlin's foster-father; his daughter was named Alof. The jarl told him that the maiden's hand was denied, and Atli went home. Atli, the jarl's son, stood one day in a certain wood; a bird sat in the branches up over him, and it had heard that his men called Hjorvarth's wives the fairest of women. The bird twittered, and Atli hearkened to what it spoke. It said:

"Sawest thou Sigrlin, Svafnir's daughter,
The fairest maid in her home-land found?
Though Hjorvarth's wives by men are held
Goodly to see in Glasir's wood."

2 Atli spake:

"Now with Atli, Ithmund's son,
Wilt thou say more, thou bird so wise?"

The bird spake:

"I may if the prince an offering makes,
And I have what I will from the house of the king."

3 Atli spake:

"Choose not Hjorvarth, nor sons of his,
Nor the wives so fair of the famous chief;
Ask not the brides that the prince's are;
Fair let us deal in friendly wise."

4 The bird spake:

"A fane will I ask, and altars many,
Gold-horned cattle the prince shall give me,
If Sigrlin yet shall sleep in his arms,
Or free of will the hero shall follow."

5 This was before Atli went on his journey; but when he came home, and the king asked his tidings, he said:

"Trouble we had, but tidings none,
Our horses failed in the mountains high,
The waters of Sæmorn we needs must wade;
Svafnir's daughter, with rings bedecked,
She whom we sought, was still denied us."

The king bade that they should go another time, and he went with them himself. But when they came up on the mountain, they saw Svavaland burning and mighty dust-clouds from many steeds. The king rode from the mountain forward into the land, and made a night's stay hard by a stream. Atli kept watch and went over the stream; he found there a house. A great bird sat on the housetop to guard it, but he was asleep. Atli hurled his spear at the bird and slew it, and in the house he found Sigrlin the king's daughter and Alof the jarl's daughter, and he brought them both thence with him. Jarl Franmar had changed himself into the likeness of an eagle, and guarded them from the enemy host by magic. Hrothmar was the name of a king, a wooer of Sigrlin; he slew the king of Svavaland and had plundered and burned his land. King Hjorvarth took Sigrlin, and Atli took Alof.

Une Sacra · edition 1.5 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

## CHAPTER II

✦

6 Hjorvarth and Sigrlin had a son, mighty and of noble stature; he was a silent man, and no name stuck fast to him. He sat on a hill, and saw nine Valkyries riding; one of them was the fairest of all. She spake:

"Late wilt thou, Helgi, have hoard of rings,
Thou battle-tree fierce, or of shining fields,—
The eagle screams soon,— if never thou speakest,
Though, hero, hard thy heart may cry."

7 Helgi spake:

"What gift shall I have with Helgi's name,
Glorious maid, for the giving is thine?
All thy words shall I think on well,
But I want them not if I win not thee."

8 The Valkyrie spake:

"Swords I know lying in Sigarsholm,
Fifty there are save only four;
One there is that is best of all,
The shield-destroyer, with gold it shines.

9 "In the hilt is fame, in the haft is courage,
In the point is fear, for its owner's foes;
On the blade there lies a blood-flecked snake,
And a serpent's tail round the flat is twisted."

10 Eylimi was the name of a king, whose daughter was Svava; she was a Valkyrie, and rode air and sea. She gave Helgi this name, and shielded him oft thereafter in battle. Helgi spake:

"Hjorvarth, king, unwholesome thy counsels,
Though famed thou art in leading the folk,
Letting fire the homes of heroes eat,
Who evil deed had never done thee.

11 "Yet Hrothmar still the hoard doth hold,
The wealth that once our kinsmen wielded;
Full seldom care the king disturbs,
Heir to dead men he deems himself."

Hjorvarth answered that he would give Helgi a following if he fain would avenge his mother's father. Then Helgi got the sword that Svava had told him of. So he went, and Atli with him, and they slew Hrothmar, and they did many great deeds.

Une Sacra · edition 1.5 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

## CHAPTER III

✦

12 He slew the giant Hati, whom he found sitting on a certain mountain. Helgi and Atli lay with their ships in Hatafjord. Atli kept watch during the first part of the night. Hrimgerth, Hati's daughter, spake:

"Who are the heroes in Hatafjord?
The ships are covered with shields;
Bravely ye look, and little ye fear,
The name of the king would I know."

13 Atli spake:

"Helgi his name, and never thou mayst
Harm to the hero bring;
With iron is fitted the prince's fleet,
Nor can witches work us ill."

14 Hrimgerth spake:

"Who now, thou mighty man, art thou?
By what name art thou known to men?
He trusts thee well, the prince who wills
That thou stand at the stem of his ship."

15 Atli spake:

"Atli am I, and ill shalt thou find me,
Great hate for witches I have;
Oft have I been in the dripping bows,
And to dusk-riders death have brought.

16 "Corpse-hungry giantess, how art thou called?
Say, witch, who thy father was!
Nine miles deeper down mayst thou sink,
And a tree grow tall on thy bosom."

17 Hrimgerth spake:

"Hrimgerth am I, my father was Hati,
Of giants the most in might;
Many a woman he won from her home,
Ere Helgi hewed him down."

18 Atli spake:

"Witch, in front of the ship thou wast,
And lay before the fjord;
To Ron wouldst have given the ruler's men,
If a spear had not stuck in thy flesh."

19 Hrimgerth spake:

"Dull art thou, Atli, thou dreamest, methinks,

The lids lie over thine eyes;
By the leader's ships my mother lay,
Hlothvarth's sons on the sea I slew.

20 "Thou wouldst neigh, Atli, but gelded thou art,
See, Hrimgerth hoists her tail;
In thy hinder end is thy heart, methinks,
Though thy speech is a stallion's cry."

21 Atli spake:

"A stallion I seem if thou seekest to try me,
And I leap to land from the sea;
I shall smite thee to bits, if so I will,
And heavy sinks Hrimgerth's tail."

22 Hrimgerth spake:

"Go ashore then, Atli, if sure of thy might,
Let us come to Varin's cove;
Straight shall thy rounded ribs be made
If thou comest within my claws."

23 Atli spake:

"I will not go till the warriors wake,
Again their chief to guard;
I should wonder not, foul witch, if up
From beneath our keel thou shouldst come."

24 Hrimgerth spake:

"Awake now, Helgi, and Hrimgerth requite,
That Hati to death thou didst hew;
If a single night she can sleep by the prince,
Then requited are all her ills."

25 Helgi spake:

"'Tis Lothin shall have thee,— thou'rt loathsome to men,—
His home in Tholley he has;
Of the wild-dwellers worst is the giant wise,
He is meet as a mate for thee."

26 Hrimgerth spake:

"More thou lovest her who scanned the harbor,
Last night among the men;
(The gold-decked maid bore magic, methinks,
When the land from the sea she sought,
And fast she kept your fleet;)
She alone is to blame that I may not bring
Death to the monarch's men."

27 Helgi spake:

"Hrimgerth, mark, if thy hurts I requite,

Tell now the truth to the king;
Was there one who the ships of the warrior warded,
Or did many together go?”

28 Hrimgerth spake:

“Thrice nine there were, but one rode first,
A helmed maid white of hue;
Their horses quivered, there came from their manes
Dew in the dales so deep,
(Hail on the woods so high,
Thence men their harvest have,
But ill was the sight I saw.)”

29 Atli spake:

“Look eastward, Hrimgerth, for Helgi has struck thee
Down with the runes of death;
Safe in harbor floats the prince’s fleet,
And safe are the monarch’s men.”

30 Helgi spake:

“It is day, Hrimgerth, for Atli held thee
Till now thy life thou must lose;
As a harbor mark men shall mock at thee,
Where in stone thou shalt ever stand.”

Une Sacra · edition 1.5 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

## CHAPTER IV

✦

31 King Helgi was a mighty warrior. He came to King Eylimi and sought the hand of his daughter, Svava. Then Helgi and Svava exchanged vows, and greatly they loved each other. Svava was at home with her father, while Helgi was in the field; Svava was still a Valkyrie as before.

Hethin was at home with his father, King Hjorvarth, in Norway. Hethin was coming home alone from the forest one Yule-eve, and found a troll-woman; she rode on a wolf, and had snakes in place of a bridle. She asked Hethin for his company. "Nay," said he. She said, "Thou shalt pay for this at the king's toast." That evening the great vows were taken; the sacred boar was brought in, the men laid their hands thereon, and took their vows at the king's toast. Hethin vowed that he would have Svava, Eylimi's daughter, the beloved of his brother Helgi; then such great grief seized him that he went forth on wild paths southward over the land, and found Helgi, his brother. Helgi said:

"Welcome, Hethin! what hast thou to tell
Of tidings new that from Norway come?
Wherefore didst leave thy land, O prince,
And fared alone to find us here?"

32 Hethin spake:

"A deed more evil I have done

Than, brother mine, thou e'er canst mend;
For I have chosen the child of the king,
Thy bride, for mine at the monarch's toast."

33 Helgi spake:

"Grieve not, Hethin, for true shall hold
The words we both by the beer have sworn;
To the isle a warrior wills that I go,
(There shall I come the third night hence;)
And doubtful must be my coming back,
(So may all be well, if fate so wills.)"

34 Hethin spake:

"Thou saidst once, Helgi, that Hethin was
A friend full good, and gifts didst give him;
More seemly it were thy sword to redden,
Than friendship thus to thy foe to give."

35 Helgi spoke thus because he foresaw his death, for his following-spirits had met Hethin when he saw the woman riding on the wolf. Alf was the name of a king, the son of Hrothmar, who had marked out a battle-place with Helgi at Sigarsvoll after a stay of three nights. Then Helgi spake:

"On a wolf there rode, when dusk it was,
A woman who fain would have him follow;
Well she knew that now would fall
Sigrlin's son at Sigarsvoll."

36 There was a great battle, and there Helgi got a mortal wound.

Sigar riding did Helgi send
To seek out Eylimi's only daughter:
"Bid her swiftly ready to be,
If her lover alive she would find."

37 Sigar spake:

"Hither now has Helgi sent me,
With thee, Svava, thyself to speak;
The hero said he fain would see thee
Ere life the nobly born should leave."

38 Svava spake:

"What chanced with Helgi, Hjorvarth's son?
Hard to me is harm now come;
If the sea smote him, or sword bit him,
Ill shall I bring to all his foes."

39 Sigar spake:

"In the morn he fell at Frekastein,
The king who was noblest beneath the sun;
Alf has the joy of victory all,
Though need therefor is never his."

40 Helgi spake:

"Hail to thee, Svava! thy sorrow rule,
Our meeting last in life is this;
Hard the wounds of the hero bleed,
And close to my heart the sword has come.

41 "I bid thee, Svava,— weep not, bride,—
If thou wilt hearken to these my words,
The bed for Hethin have thou ready,
And yield thy love to the hero young."

42 Svava spake:

"A vow I had in my dear-loved home,
When Helgi sought with rings to have me,
That not of my will, if the warrior died,
Would I fold in my arms a man unfamed."

43 Hethin spake:

"Kiss me, Svava, I come not back,
Rogheim to see, or Rothulsfjoll,
Till vengeance I have for the son of Hjorvarth,
The king who was noblest beneath the sun."

Of Helgi and Svava it is said that they were born again.

Une Sacra · edition 1.5 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0