UNE ✦ SACRA

Norse Mythology

Helgakviða Hundingsbana II — The Second Lay of Helgi Hundingsbane

✦ ✦ ✦

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:

Takes up the story of Helgi and Sigrun again in verse and prose: their marriage, Helgi's death at the hands of Dag, Sigrun's brother, and the curse she lays upon him.

It ends with one of the most moving scenes in the Edda: Helgi returns from his grave-mound for one night, and Sigrun spends the night with the dead man before he rides back to Valhall.

Here the compiler joined stanzas from several poems about the same hero, stitched together with prose. The visit of the dead Helgi, who returns from the grave with his wounds still bleeding, is one of the most remembered scenes in Norse poetry.

A closing note says that Helgi and Sigrun were reborn as Helgi Haddingjaskati and the valkyrie Kára.

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 V

Chapter VI

Chapter VII

Chapter VIII

CHAPTER I

✦

1 King Sigmund, the son of Volsung, had as wife Borghild, from Bralund. They named their son Helgi, after Helgi Hjorvarthsson; Hagal was Helgi's foster-father. Hunding was the name of a powerful king, and Hundland is named from him. He was a mighty warrior, and had many sons with him on his campaigns. There was enmity and strife between these two, King Hunding and King Sigmund, and each slew the other's kinsmen. King Sigmund and his family were called Volsungs and Ylfings.

Helgi went as a spy to the home of King Hunding in disguise. Hæming, a son of King Hunding's, was at home. When Helgi went forth, then he met a young herdsman, and said:

"Say to Hæming that Helgi knows
Whom the heroes in armor hid;
A gray wolf had they within their hall,
Whom King Hunding Hamal thought."

2 Hamal was the name of Hagal's son. King Hunding sent men to Hagal to seek Helgi, and Helgi could not save himself in any other way, so he put on the clothes of a bond-woman and set to work at the mill. They sought Helgi but found him not.

Then Blind spake out, the evil-minded:

"Of Hagal's bond-woman bright are the eyes;
Yon comes not of churls who stands at the quern;
The millstones break, the boards are shattered.

3 "The hero has a doom full hard,
That barley now he needs must grind;
Better befits his hand to feel
The hilt of the sword than the millstone's handle."

4 Hagal answered and said:

"Small is the wonder if boards are splintered;
By a monarch's daughter the mill is turned;
Once through clouds she was wont to ride,
And battles fought like fighting men,
(Till Helgi a captive held her fast;
Sister she is of Sigar and Hogni,
Thus bright are the eyes of the Ylfings' maid.)"

Helgi escaped and went to a fighting ship. He slew King Hunding, and thenceforth was called Helgi Hundingsbane.

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

CHAPTER II

✦

5 He lay with his host in Brunavagar, and they had there a strand-slaughtering, and ate the flesh raw. Hogni was the name of a king. His daughter was Sigrun; she was a Valkyrie and rode air and water; she was Svava reborn. Sigrun rode to Helgi's ship and said:

"Who rules the ship by the shore so steep?
Where is the home ye warriors have?
Why do ye bide in Brunavagar,
Or what the way that ye wish to try?"

6 Helgi spake:

"Hamal's the ship by the shore so steep,
Our home in Hlesey do we have;
For fair wind bide we in Brunavagar,
Eastward the way that we wish to try."

7 Sigrun spake:

"Where hast thou, warrior, battle wakened,
Or gorged the birds of the sisters of Guth?
Why is thy byrnie spattered with blood,
Why helmed dost feast on food uncooked?"

8 Helgi spake:

"Latest of all, the Ylfings' son
On the western sea, if know thou wilt,
Captured bears in Bragalund,
And fed the eagles with edge of sword.
Now is it shown why our shirts are bloody,
And little our food with fire is cooked."

9 Sigrun spake:

"Of battle thou tellest, and there was bent
Hunding the king before Helgi down;
There was carnage when thou didst avenge thy kin,
And blood flowed fast on the blade of the sword."

10 Helgi spake:

"How didst thou know that now our kin,
Maiden wise, we have well avenged?
Many there are of the sons of the mighty
Who share alike our lofty race."

11 Sigrun spake:

"Not far was I from the lord of the folk,
Yester morn, when the monarch was slain;
Though crafty the son of Sigmund, methinks,
When he speaks of the fight in slaughter-runes.

12 “On the long-ship once I saw thee well,
When in the blood-stained bow thou wast,
(And round thee icy waves were raging;)
Now would the hero hide from me,
But to Hogni’s daughter is Helgi known.”

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

CHAPTER III

✦

13 Granmar was the name of a mighty king, who dwelt at Svarin's hill. He had many sons; one was named Hothbrodd, another Gothmund, a third Starkath. Hothbrodd was in a kings' meeting, and he won the promise of having Sigrun, Hogni's daughter, for his wife. But when she heard this, she rode with the Valkyries over air and sea to seek Helgi. Helgi was then at Logafjoll, and had fought with Hunding's sons; there he killed Alf and Eyolf, Hjorvarth and Hervarth. He was all weary with battle, and sat under the eagle-stone. There Sigrun found him, and ran to throw her arms about his neck, and kissed him, and told him her tidings, as is set forth in the old Volsung lay:

Sigrun the joyful chieftain sought,
Forthwith Helgi's hand she took;
She greeted the hero helmed and kissed him,
The warrior's heart to the woman turned.

14 From her heart the daughter of Hogni spake,
Dear was Helgi, she said, to her;
"Long with all my heart I loved
Sigmund's son ere ever I saw him.

15 "At the meeting to Hothbrodd mated I was,
But another hero I fain would have;
Though, king, the wrath of my kin I fear,
Since I broke my father's fairest wish."

16 Helgi spake:

"Fear not ever Hogni's anger,
Nor yet thy kinsmen's cruel wrath;
Maiden, thou with me shalt live,
Thy kindred, fair one, I shall not fear."

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

CHAPTER IV

✦

17 Helgi then assembled a great sea-host and went to Frekastein. On the sea he met a perilous storm; lightning flashed overhead and the bolts struck the ship. They saw in the air that nine Valkyries were riding, and recognized Sigrun among them. Then the storm abated, and they came safe and sound to land. Granmar's sons sat on a certain mountain as the ships sailed toward the land. Gothmund leaped on a horse and rode for news to a promontory near the harbor; the Volsungs were even then lowering their sails. Then Gothmund said, as is written before in the Helgi lay:

"Who is the king who captains the fleet,
And to the land the warriors leads?"

Sinfjotli, Sigmund's son, answered him, and that too is written.

Gothmund rode home with his tidings of the host; then Granmar's sons summoned an army. Many kings came there; there were Hogni, Sigrun's father, and his sons Bragi and Dag. There was a great battle, and all Granmar's sons were slain and all their allies; only Dag, Hogni's son, was spared, and he swore loyalty to the Volsungs. Sigrun went among the dead and found Hothbrodd at the coming of death. She said:

"Never shall Sigrun from Sevafjoll,

Hothbrodd king, be held in thine arms;
Granmar's sons full cold have grown,
And the giant-steeds gray on corpses gorge."

18 Then she sought out Helgi, and was full of joy. He said:

"Maid, not fair is all thy fortune,
The Norns I blame that this should be;
This morn there fell at Frekastein
Bragi and Hogni beneath my hand.

19 "At Hlebjorg fell the sons of Hrollaug,
Starkath the king at Styrkleifar;
Fighters more noble saw I never,
The body fought when the head had fallen.

20 "On the ground full low the slain are lying,
Most are there of the men of thy race;
Nought hast thou won, for thy fate it was
Brave men to bring to the battle-field."

21 Then Sigrun wept. Helgi said:

"Grieve not, Sigrun, the battle is gained,
The fighter can shun not his fate."

Sigrun spake:

"To life would I call them who slaughtered lie,
If safe on thy breast I might be."

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

CHAPTER V

✦

22 This Gothmund the son of Granmar spoke:

"What hero great is guiding the ships?
A golden flag on the stem he flies;
I find not peace in the van of your faring,
And round the fighters is battle-light red."

23 Sinfjotli spake:

"Here may Hothbrodd Helgi find,
The hater of flight, in the midst of the fleet;
The home of all thy race he has,
And over the realm of the fishes he rules."

24 Gothmund spake:

"First shall swords at Frekastein
Prove our worth in place of words;
Time is it, Hothbrodd, vengeance to have,
If in battle worsted once we were."

25 Sinfjotli spake:

"Better, Gothmund, to tend the goats,

And climb the rocks of the mountain cliffs;
A hazel switch to hold in thy hand
More seemly were than the hilt of a sword."

26 Helgi spake:

"Better, Sinfjotli, thee 'twould beseem
Battles to give, and eagles to gladden,
Than vain and empty speech to utter,
Though warriors oft with words do strive.

27 "Good I find not the sons of Granmar,
But for heroes 'tis seemly the truth to speak;
At Moinsheimar proved the men
That hearts for the wielding of swords they had,
(And ever brave the warriors are.)"

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

CHAPTER VI

✦

28 Helgi took Sigrun to wife, and they had sons. Helgi did not reach old age. Dag, the son of Hogni, offered sacrifice to Othin to be avenged for his father's death; Othin gave Dag his spear. Dag found Helgi, his brother-in-law, at a place which is called Fjoturlund. He thrust the spear through Helgi's body. Then Helgi fell, and Dag rode to Sevafjoll and told Sigrun the tidings:

"Sad am I, sister, sorrow to tell thee,
Woe to my kin unwilling I worked;
In the morn there fell at Fjoturlund
The noblest prince the world has known,
(And his heel he set on the heroes' necks.)"

29 Sigrun spake:

"Now may every oath thee bite
That with Helgi sworn thou hast,
By the water bright of Leipt,
And the ice-cold stone of Uth.

30 "The ship shall sail not in which thou sailest,
Though a favoring wind shall follow after;
The horse shall run not whereon thou ridest,
Though fain thou art thy foe to flee.

31 …

…
“The sword shall bite not which thou bearest,
Till thy head itself it sings about.

32 “Vengeance were mine for Helgi’s murder,
Wert thou a wolf in the woods without,
Possessing nought and knowing no joy,
Having no food save corpses to feed on.”

33 Dag spake:

“Mad art thou, sister, and wild of mind,
Such a curse on thy brother to cast;
Othin is ruler of every ill,
Who sunders kin with runes of spite.

34 “Thy brother rings so red will give thee,
All Vandilsve and Vigdalir;
Take half my land to pay the harm,
Ring-decked maid, and as meed for thy sons.”

35 Sigrun spake:

“I shall sit not happy at Sevafjoll,
Early or late, my life to love,
If the light cannot show, in the leader’s band,
Vigblær bearing him back to his home,
(The golden-bitted; I shall greet him never.)

36 “Such the fear that Helgi’s foes
Ever felt, and all their kin,
As makes the goats with terror mad
Run from the wolf among the rocks.

37 “Helgi rose above heroes all
Like the lofty ash above lowly thorns,
Or the noble stag, with dew besprinkled,
Bearing his head above all beasts,
(And his horns gleam bright to heaven itself.)”

A hill was made in Helgi’s memory. And when he came to Valhall, then Othin bade him rule over everything with himself.

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

CHAPTER VII

✦

38 Helgi said:

"Thou shalt, Hunding, of every hero
Wash the feet, and kindle the fire,
Tie up dogs, and tend the horses,
And feed the swine ere to sleep thou goest."

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

CHAPTER VIII

39 One of Sigrun's maidens went one evening to Helgi's hill, and saw that Helgi rode to the hill with many men. The maiden said:

"Is this a dream that methinks I see,
Or the doom of the gods, that dead men ride,
And hither spurring urge your steeds,
Or is home-coming now to the heroes granted?"

40 Helgi spake:

"No dream is this that thou thinkest to see,
Nor the end of the world, though us thou beholdest,
And hither spurring we urge our steeds,
Nor is home-coming now to the heroes granted."

41 The maiden went home and said to Sigrun:

"Go forth, Sigrun, from Sevafjoll,
If fain the lord of the folk wouldst find;
(The hill is open, Helgi is come;)
The sword-tracks bleed; the monarch bade
That thou his wounds shouldst now make well."

42 Sigrun went in the hill to Helgi, and said:

"Now am I glad of our meeting together,
As Othin's hawks, so eager for prey,
When slaughter and flesh all warm they scent,
Or dew-wet see the red of day.

43 "First will I kiss the lifeless king,
Ere off the bloody byrnie thou cast;
With frost thy hair is heavy, Helgi,
And damp thou art with the dew of death;
(Ice-cold hands has Hogni's kinsman,
What, prince, can I to bring thee ease?)"

44 Helgi spake:

"Thou alone, Sigrun of Sevafjoll,
Art cause that Helgi with dew is heavy;
Gold-decked maid, thy tears are grievous,
(Sun-bright south-maid, ere thou sleepest;)
Each falls like blood on the hero's breast,
(Burned-out, cold, and crushed with care.)

45 "Well shall we drink a noble draught,
Though love and lands are lost to me;
No man a song of sorrow shall sing,
Though bleeding wounds are on my breast;
Now in the hill our brides we hold,
The heroes' loves, by their husbands dead."

46 Sigrun made ready a bed in the hill.

"Here a bed I have made for thee, Helgi,
To rest thee from care, thou kin of the Ylfings;
I will make thee sink to sleep in my arms,
As once I lay with the living king."

47 Helgi spake:

"Now do I say that in Sevafjoll
Aught may happen, early or late,
Since thou sleepest clasped in a corpse's arms,
So fair in the hill, the daughter of Hogni!
(Living thou comest, a daughter of kings.)

48 "Now must I ride the reddened ways,
And my bay steed set to tread the sky;
Westward I go to wind-helm's bridges,
Ere Salgofnir wakes the warrior throng."

49 Then Helgi and his followers rode on their way, and the women went home to the dwelling. Another evening Sigrun bade the maiden keep watch at the hill. And at sunset when Sigrun came to the hill she said:

"Now were he come, if come he might,
Sigmund's son, from Othin's seat;
Hope grows dim of the hero's return
When eagles sit on the ash-tree boughs,
And men are seeking the meeting of dreams."

50 The Maiden said:

"Mad thou wouldst seem alone to seek,
Daughter of heroes, the house of the dead;
For mightier now at night are all
The ghosts of the dead than when day is bright."

Sigrun was early dead of sorrow and grief. It was believed in olden times that people were born again, but that is now called old wives' folly. Of Helgi and Sigrun it is said that they were born again; he became Helgi Haddingjaskati, and she Kara the daughter of Halfdan, as is told in the Lay of Kara, and she was a Valkyrie.

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