

ATLAMOL EN GRÖNLENZKU

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THE GREENLAND BALLAD OF ATLI

1. There are many who know | how of old did men In counsel gather; | little good did they get; In secret they plotted, | it was sore for them later, And for Gjuki's sons, | whose trust they deceived.
2. Fate grew for the princes, | to death they were given; Ill counsel was Atli's, | though keenness he had; He felled his staunch bulwark, | his own sorrow fashioned, Soon a message he sent | that his kinsmen should seek him.
3. Wise was the woman, | she fain would use wisdom, She saw well what meant | all they said in secret; From her heart it was hid | how help she might render, The sea they should sail, | while herself she should go not.
4. Runes did she fashion, | but false Vingi made them, The speeder of hatred, | ere to give them he sought; Then soon fared the warriors | whom Atli had sent, And to Limafjord came, | to the home of the kings.
5. They were kindly with ale, | and fires they kindled, They thought not of craft | from the guests who had come; The gifts did they take | that the noble one gave them, On the pillars they hung them, | no fear did they harbor.
6. Forth did Kostbera, wife | of Hogni, then come, Full kindly she was, | and she welcomed them both; And glad too was Glaumvor, | the wife of Gunnar, She knew well to care | for the needs of the guests.
7. Then Hogni they asked | if more eager he were, Full clear was the guile, | if on guard they had been; Then Gunnar made promise, | if Hogni would go, And Hogni made answer | as the other counseled.
8. Then the famed ones brought mead, | and fair was the feast, Full many were the horns, | till the men had drunk deep; | Then the mates made ready | their beds for resting.
9. Wise was Kostbera, | and cunning in rune-craft, The letters would she read | by the light of the fire; But full quickly her tongue | to her palate clave, So strange did they seem | that their meaning she saw not.
10. Full soon then his bed | came Hogni to seek, ... | The clear-souled one dreamed, | and her dream she kept not, To the warrior the wise one | spake when she awakened:
11. "Thou wouldst go hence, Hogni, | but heed my counsel,— Known to few are the runes,— | and put off thy faring; I have read now the runes | that thy sister wrote, And this time the bright one | did not bid thee to come.
12. "Full much do I wonder, | nor well can I see, Why the woman wise | so wildly hath written; But to me it seems | that the meaning beneath Is that both shall be slain | if soon ye shall go. But one rune she missed, | or else others have marred it."

Hogni spake:

13. "All women are fearful; | not so do I feel, Ill I seek not to find | till I soon must avenge it;
The king now will give us | the glow-ruddy gold; I never shall fear, | though of dangers I
know."

Kostbera spake:

14. "In danger ye fare, | if forth ye go thither, No welcoming friendly | this time shall ye find;
For I dreamed now, Hogni, | and nought will I hide, Full evil thy faring, | if rightly I fear.
15. "Thy bed-covering saw I | in the flames burning, And the fire burst high | through the walls
of my home."

Hogni spake:

"Yon garment of linen | lies little of worth,
It will soon be burned, | so thou sawest the bed-cover."

Kostbera spake:

16. "A bear saw I enter, | the pillars he broke, And he brandished his claws | so that craven we
were; With his mouth seized he many, | and nought was our might, And loud was the
tumult, | not little it was."

Hogni spake:

17. "Now a storm is brewing, | and wild it grows swiftly, A dream of an ice-bear | means a gale
from the east."

Kostbera spake:

18. "An eagle I saw flying | from the end through the house, Our fate must be bad, | for with
blood he sprinkled us; | From the evil I fear | that 'twas Atli's spirit."

Hogni spake:

19. "They will slaughter soon, | and so blood do we see, Oft oxen it means | when of eagles
one dreams; True is Atli's heart, | whatever thou dreamest." Then silent they were, | and
nought further they said.
20. The high-born ones wakened, | and like speech they had, Then did Glaumvor tell | how in
terror she dreamed, ... | Gunnar | two roads they should go.

Glaumvor spake:

21. "A gallows saw I ready, | thou didst go to thy hanging, Thy flesh serpents ate, | and yet
living I found thee; | The gods' doom descended; | now say what it

boded.”

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22. “A sword drawn bloody | from thy garments I saw,— Such a dream is hard | to a husband to tell,— A spear stood, methought, | through thy body thrust, And at head and feet | the wolves were howling.”

Gunnar spake:

23. “The hounds are running, | loud their barking is heard, Oft hounds’ clamor follows | the flying of spears.”

Glaumvor spake:

24. “A river the length | of the hall saw I run, Full swiftly it roared, | o’er the benches it swept; O’er the feet did it break | of ye brothers twain, The water would yield not; | some meaning there was.”

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25. “I dreamed that by night | came dead women hither, Sad were their garments, | and thee were they seeking; They bade thee come swiftly | forth to their benches, And nothing, methinks, | could the Norns avail thee.”

Gunnar spake:

26. “Too late is thy speaking, | for so is it settled; From the faring I turn not, | the going is fixed, Though likely it is | that our lives shall be short.”
27. Then bright shone the morning, | the men all were ready, They said, and yet each | would the other hold back; Five were the warriors, | and their followers all But twice as many,— | their minds knew not wisdom.
28. Snævar and Solar, | they were sons of Hogni, Orkning was he called | who came with the others, Blithe was the shield-tree, | the brother of Kostbera; The fair-decked ones followed, | till the fjord divided them, Full hard did they plead, | but the others would hear not.
29. Then did Glaumvor speak forth, | the wife of Gunnar, To Vingi she said | that which wise to her seemed: “I know not if well | thou requitest our welcome, Full ill was thy coming | if evil shall follow.”
30. Then did Vingi swear, | and full glib was his speech, ... | “May giants now take me | if lies I have told ye, And the gallows if hostile | thought did I have.”
31. Then did Bera speak forth, | and fair was her thought, ... | “May ye sail now happy, | and victory have, To fare as I bid ye, | may nought your way bar.”
32. Then Hogni made answer,— | dear held he his kin,— courage, ye wise ones, | whatsoever may come; Though many may speak, | yet is evil oft mighty, And words avail little | to lead one homeward.
33. They tenderly looked | till each turned on his way, Then with changing fate | were their farings divided.

34. Full stoutly they rowed, | and the keel clove asunder, Their backs strained at the oars, |
and their strength was fierce; The oar-loops were burst, | the thole-pins were broken, Nor
the ship made they fast | ere from her they fared.
35. Not long was it after— | the end must I tell— That the home they beheld | that Buthli once
had; Loud the gates resounded | when Hogni smote them; Vingi spake then a word | that
were better unsaid:
36. “Go ye far from the house, | for false is its entrance, Soon shall I burn you, | ye are swiftly
smitten; I bade ye come fairly, | but falseness was under, Now bide ye afar | while your
gallows I fashion.”
37. Then Hogni made answer, | his heart yielded little, And nought did he fear | that his fate
held in store: “Seek not to affright us, | thou shalt seldom succeed; If thy words are more,
| then the worse grows thy fate.”
38. Then Vingi did they smite, | and they sent him to hell, With their axes they clove him |
while the death-rattle came.
39. Atli summoned his men, | in mail-coats they hastened, All ready they came, | and between
was the courtyard.

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40. Then came they to words, | and full wrathful they were: “Long since did we plan | how
soon we might slay you.”

Hogni spake:

41. “Little it matters | if long ye have planned it; For unarmed do ye wait, | and one have we
felled, We smote him to hell, | of your host was he once.”
42. Then wild was their anger | when all heard his words; Their fingers were swift | on their
bowstrings to seize, Full sharply they shot, | by their shields were they guarded.
43. In the house came the word | how the heroes without Fought in front of the hall; | they
heard a thrall tell it; Grim then was Guthrun, | the grief when she heard, With necklaces
fair, | and she flung them all from her, (The silver she hurled | so the rings burst asunder.)
44. Then out did she go, | she flung open the doors, All fearless she went, | and the guests did
she welcome; To the Niflungs she went— | her last greeting it was,— In her speech truth
was clear, | and much would she speak.
45. “For your safety I sought | that at home ye should stay; None escapes his fate, | so ye
hither must fare.” Full wisely she spake, | if yet peace they might win, But to nought
would they hearken, | and “No” said they all.
46. Then the high-born one saw | that hard was their battle, In fierceness of heart | she flung
off her mantle; Her naked sword grasped she | her kin’s lives to guard, Not gentle her
hands | in the hewing of battle.
47. Then the daughter of Gjuki | two warriors smote down, Atli’s brother she slew, | and forth
then they bore him; (So fiercely she fought | that his feet she clove off;) Another she
smote | so that never he stood, To hell did she send him,— | her hands trembled never.
48. Full wide was the fame | of the battle they fought, ’Twas the greatest of deeds | of the
sons of Gjuki; Men say that the Niflungs, | while themselves they were living, With their
swords fought mightily, | mail-coats they sundered, And helms did they hew, | as their

hearts were fearless.

49. All the morning they fought | until midday shone, (All the dusk as well | and the dawning of day,) When the battle was ended, | the field flowed with blood; Ere they fell, eighteen | of their foemen were slain, By the two sons of Bera | and her brother as well.
50. Then the warrior spake, | and wild was his anger: "This is evil to see, | and thy doing is all; Once we were thirty, | we thanes keen for battle, Now eleven are left, | and great is our lack.
51. "There were five of us brothers | when Buthli we lost, Now Hel has the half, | and two smitten lie here; A great kinship had I,— | the truth may I hide not,— From a wife bringing slaughter | small joy could I win.
52. We lay seldom together | since to me thou wast given, Now my kin all are gone, | of my gold am I robbed; Nay, and worst, thou didst send | my sister to hell."

Guthrun spake:

53. "Hear me now, Atli! | the first evil was thine; My mother didst thou take, | and for gold didst murder her, My sister's daughter | thou didst starve in a prison. A jest does it seem | that thy sorrow thou tellest, And good do I find it | that grief to thee comes."

Atli spake:

54. "Go now, ye warriors, | and make greater the grief Of the woman so fair, | for fain would I see it; So fierce be thy warring | that Guthrun shall weep, I would gladly behold | her happiness lost.
55. "Seize ye now Hogni, | and with knives shall ye hew him, His heart shall ye cut out, | this haste ye to do; And grim-hearted Gunnar | shall ye bind on the gallows, Swift shall ye do it, | to serpents now cast him."

Hogni spake:

56. "Do now as thou wilt, | for glad I await it, Brave shalt thou find me, | I have faced worse before; We held thee at bay | while whole we were fighting, Now with wounds are we spent, | so thy will canst thou work."
57. Then did Beiti speak, | he was Atli's steward: "Let us seize now Hjalli, | and Hogni spare we! Let us fell the sluggard, | he is fit for death, He has lived too long, | and lazy men call him."
58. Afraid was the pot-watcher, | he fled here and yon, And crazed with his terror | he climbed in the corners: "Ill for me is this fighting, | if I pay for your fierceness, And sad is the day | to die leaving my swine And all the fair victuals | that of old did I have."
59. They seized Buthli's cook, | and they came with the knife, The frightened thrall howled | ere the edge did he feel; He was willing, he cried, | to dung well the courtyard, Do the basest of work, | if spare him they would; Full happy were Hjalli | if his life he might have.
60. Then fain was Hogni— | there are few would do thus— To beg for the slave | that safe hence he should go; "I would find it far better | this knife-play to feel, Why must we all hark | to this howling longer?"

61. Then the brave one they seized; | to the warriors bold No chance was there left | to delay his fate longer; Loud did Hogni laugh, | all the sons of day heard him, So valiant he was | that well he could suffer.

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62. A harp Gunnar seized, | with his toes he smote it; So well did he strike | that the women all wept, And the men, when clear | they heard it, lamented; Full noble was his song, | the rafters burst asunder.
63. Then the heroes died | ere the day was yet come; Their fame did they leave | ever lofty to live. |
64. Full mighty seemed Atli | as o'er them he stood, The wise one he blamed, | and his words reproached her: "It is morning, Guthrun; | now thy dear ones dost miss, But the blame is part thine | that thus it has chanced."

Guthrun spake:

65. "Thou art joyous, Atli, | for of evil thou tellest, But sorrow is thine | if thou mightest all see; Thy heritage heavy | here can I tell thee, Sorrow never thou lovest | unless I shall die."

Atli spake:

66. "Not free of guilt am I; | a way shall I find That is better by far,— | oft the fairest we shunned;— With slaves I console thee, | with gems fair to see, And with silver snow-white, | as thyself thou shalt choose."

Guthrun spake:

67. "No hope shall this give thee, | thy gifts I shall take not, Requitall I spurned | when my sorrows were smaller; Once grim did I seem, | but now greater my grimness, There was nought seemed too hard | while Hogni was living.
68. "Our childhood did we have | in a single house, We played many a game, | in the grove did we grow; Then did Grimhild give us | gold and necklaces; Thou shalt ne'er make amends | for my brother's murder, Nor ever shalt win me | to think it was well.
69. "But the fierceness of men | rules the fate of women, The tree-top bows low | if bereft of its leaves, The tree bends over | if the roots are cleft under it; Now mayest thou, Atli, | o'er all things here rule."
70. Full heedless the warrior | was that he trusted her, So clear was her guile | if on guard he had been; But crafty was Guthrun, | with cunning she spake, Her glance she made pleasant, | with two shields she played.
71. The beer then she brought | for her brothers' death-feast, And a feast Atli made | for his followers dead; No more did they speak, | the mead was made ready, Soon the men were gathered | with mighty uproar.
72. Thus bitterly planned she, | and Buthli's race threatened, And terrible vengeance | on her husband would take; The little ones called she, | on a block she laid them; Afraid were the proud ones, | but their tears did not fall; To their mother's arms went they, | and asked what she would.

Guthrun spake:

73. "Nay, ask me no more! | You both shall I murder, For long have I wished | your lives to steal from you."

The boys spake:

"Slay thy boys as thou wilt, | for no one may bar it,
Short the angry one's peace | if all thou shalt do."

74. Then the grim one slew both | of the brothers young, Full hard was her deed | when their heads she smote off; Fain was Atli to know | whither now they were gone, The boys from their sport, | for nowhere he spied them.

Guthrun spake:

75. "My fate shall I seek, | all to Atli saying, The daughter of Grimhild | the deed from thee hides not; No joy thou hast, Atli, | if all thou shalt hear, Great sorrow didst wake | when my brothers thou slewest.
76. "I have seldom slept | since the hour they were slain, Baleful were my threats, | now I bid thee recall them; Thou didst say it was morning,— | too well I remember,— Now is evening come, | and this question thou askest.
77. "Now both of thy sons | thou hast lost | as thou never shouldst do; The skulls of thy boys | thou as beer-cups didst have, And the draught that I made thee | was mixed with their blood.
78. "I cut out their hearts, | on a spit I cooked them, I came to thee with them, | and calf's flesh I called them; Alone didst thou eat them, | nor any didst leave, Thou didst greedily bite, | and thy teeth were busy.
79. "Of thy sons now thou knowest; | few suffer more sorrow; My guilt have I told, | fame it never shall give me."

Atli spake:

80. "Grim wast thou, Guthrun, | in so grievous a deed, My draught with the blood | of thy boys to mingle; Thou hast slain thine own kin, | most ill it beseemed thee, And little for me | twixt my sorrows thou leavest."

Guthrun spake:

81. "Still more would I seek | to slay thee thyself, Enough ill comes seldom | to such as thou art; Thou didst folly of old, | such that no one shall find In the whole world of men | a match for such madness. Now this that of late | we learned hast thou added, Great evil hast grasped, | and thine own death-feast made."

Atli spake:

82. "With fire shall they burn thee, | and first shall they stone thee, So then hast thou earned | what thou ever hast sought for."

Guthrun spake:

"Such woes for thyself | shalt thou say in the morning,
From a finer death I | to another light fare."

83. Together they sat | and full grim were their thoughts, Unfriendly their words, | and no joy either found; In Hniflung grew hatred, | great plans did he have, To Guthrun his anger | against Atli was told.
84. To her heart came ever | the fate of Hogni, She told him 'twere well | if he vengeance should win; So was Atli slain,— | 'twas not slow to await,— Hogni's son slew him, | and Guthrun herself.
85. Then the warrior spake, | as from slumber he wakened, Soon he knew for his wounds | would the bandage do nought: "Now the truth shalt thou say: | who has slain Buthli's son? Full sore am I smitten, | nor hope can I see."

Guthrun spake:

86. "Ne'er her deed from thee hides | the daughter of Grimhild, I own to the guilt | that is ending thy life, And the son of Hogni; | 'tis so thy wounds bleed."

Atli spake:

"To murder hast thou fared, | though foul it must seem;
Ill thy friend to betray | who trusted thee well.

87. "Not glad went I hence | thy hand to seek, Guthrun, In thy widowhood famed, | but haughty men found thee; My belief did not lie, | as now we have learned; I brought thee home hither, | and a host of men with us.
88. "Most noble was all | when of old we journeyed, Great honor did we have | of heroes full worthy; Of cattle had we plenty, | and greatly we prospered, Mighty was our wealth, | and many received it.
89. "To the famed one as bride-gift | I gave jewels fair, I gave thirty slaves, | and handmaidens seven; There was honor in such gifts, | yet the silver was greater.
90. "But all to thee was | as if nought it were worth, While the land lay before thee | that Buthli had left me; Thou in secret didst work | so the treasure I won not; My mother full oft | to sit weeping didst make, No wedded joy found I | in fullness of heart."

Guthrun spake:

91. "Thou liest now, Atli, | though little I heed it; If I seldom was kindly, | full cruel wast thou; Ye brothers fought young, | quarrels brought you to battle, And half went to hell | of the sons of thy house, And all was destroyed | that should e'er have done good.

92. "My two brothers and I | were bold in our thoughts, From the land we went forth, | with
Sigurth we fared; Full swiftly we sailed, | each one steering his ship, So our fate sought we
e'er | till we came to the East.
93. "First the king did we slay, | and the land we seized, The princes did us service, | for such
was their fear; From the forest we called | them we fain would have guiltless, And rich
made we many | who of all were bereft.
94. "Slain was the Hun-king, | soon happiness vanished, In her grief the widow | so young sat
weeping; Yet worse seemed the sorrow | to seek Atli's house, A hero was my husband, |
and hard was his loss.
95. "From the Thing thou camst never, | for thus have we heard, Having won in thy quarrels, |
or warriors smitten; Full yielding thou wast, | never firm was thy will, In silence didst
suffer, |"

Atli spake:

96. "Thou liest now, Guthrun, | but little of good Will it bring to either, | for all have we lost;
But, Guthrun, yet once | be thou kindly of will, For the honor of both, | when forth I am
borne."

Guthrun spake:

97. "A ship will I buy, | and a bright-hued coffin, I will wax well the shroud | to wind round thy
body, For all will I care | as if dear were we ever."
98. Then did Atli die, | and his heirs' grief doubled; The high-born one did | as to him she had
promised; Then sought Guthrun the wise | to go to her death, But for days did she wait, |
and 'twas long ere she died.
99. Full happy shall he be | who such offspring has, Or children so gallant, | as Gjuki begot;
Forever shall live, | and in lands far and wide, Their valor heroic | wherever men hear it.

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