

HAMTHESMOL

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THE BALLAD OF HAMTHER

1. Great the evils | once that grew, With the dawning sad | of the sorrow of elves; In early morn | awake for men The evils that grief | to each shall bring.
2. Not now, nor yet | of yesterday was it, Long the time | that since hath lapsed, So that little there is | that is half as old, Since Guthrun, daughter | of Gjuki, whetted Her sons so young | to Svanhild's vengeance.
3. "The sister ye had | was Svanhild called, And her did Jormunrek | trample with horses, White and black | on the battle-way, Gray, road-wonted, | the steeds of the Goths.
4. "Little the kings | of the folk are ye like, For now ye are living | alone of my race.
5. "Lonely am I | as the forest aspen, Of kindred bare | as the fir of its boughs, My joys are all lost | as the leaves of the tree When the scather of twigs | from the warm day turns."
6. Then Hamther spake forth, | the high of heart: "Small praise didst thou, Guthrun, | to Hogni's deed give When they wakened thy Sigurth | from out of his sleep, Thou didst sit on the bed | while his slayers laughed.
7. "Thy bed-covers white | with blood were red From his wounds, and with gore | of thy husband were wet; So Sigurth was slain, | by his corpse didst thou sit, And of gladness didst think not: | 'twas Gunnar's doing.
8. "Thou wouldst strike at Atli | by the slaying of Erp And the killing of Eitil; | thine own grief was worse; So should each one wield | the wound-biting sword That another it slays | but smites not himself."
9. Then did Sorli speak out, | for wise was he ever: "With my mother I never | a quarrel will make; Full little in speaking | methinks ye both lack; What askest thou, Guthrun, | that will give thee no tears?
10. "For thy brothers dost weep, | and thy boys so sweet, Thy kinsmen in birth | on the battlefield slain; Now, Guthrun, as well | for us both shalt thou weep, We sit doomed on our steeds, | and far hence shall we die."
11. Then the fame-glad one— | on the steps she was— The slender-fingered, | spake with her son: "Ye shall danger have | if counsel ye heed not; | By two heroes alone | shall two hundred of Goths Be bound or be slain | in the lofty-walled burg."
12. From the courtyard they fared, | and fury they breathed; The youths swiftly went | o'er the mountain wet, On their Hunnish steeds, | death's vengeance to have.
13. On the way they found | the man so wise; | "What help from the weakling | brown may we have?"
14. So answered them | their half-brother then: "So well may I | my kinsmen aid As help one foot | from the other has."
15. "How may a foot | its fellow aid, Or a flesh-grown hand | another help?"

16. Then Erp spake forth, | his words were few, As haughty he sat | on his horse's back: "To the timid 'tis ill | the way to tell." A bastard they | the bold one called.
17. From their sheaths they drew | their shining swords, Their blades, to the giantess | joy to give; By a third they lessened | the might that was theirs, The fighter young | to earth they felled.
18. Their cloaks they shook, | their swords they sheathed, The high-born men | wrapped their mantles close.
19. On their road they fared | and an ill way found, And their sister's son | on a tree they saw, On the wind-cold wolf-tree | west of the hall, And cranes'-bait crawled; | none would care to linger.
20. In the hall was din, | the men drank deep, And the horses' hoofs | could no one hear, Till the warrior hardy | sounded his horn.
21. Men came and the tale | to Jormunrek told How warriors helmed | without they beheld: "Take counsel wise, | for brave ones are come, Of mighty men | thou the sister didst murder."
22. Then Jormunrek laughed, | his hand laid on his beard, His arms, for with wine | he was warlike, he called for; He shook his brown locks, | on his white shield he looked, And raised high the cup | of gold in his hand.
23. "Happy, methinks, | were I to behold Hamther and Sorli | here in my hall; The men would I bind | with strings of bows, And Gjuki's heirs | on the gallows hang."
24. In the hall was clamor, | the cups were shattered, Men stood in blood | from the breasts of the Goths.
25. Then did Hamther speak forth, | the haughty of heart: "Thou soughtest, Jormunrek, | us to see, Sons of one mother | seeking thy dwelling; Thou seest thy hands, | thy feet thou beholdest, Jormunrek, flung | in the fire so hot."
26. Then roared the king, | of the race of the gods, Bold in his armor, | as roars a bear: "Stone ye the men | that steel will bite not, Sword nor spear, | the sons of Jonak."

Sorli spake:

27. "Ill didst win, brother, | when the bag thou didst open, Oft from that bag | came baleful counsel; Heart hast thou, Hamther, | if knowledge thou hadst! A man without wisdom | is lacking in much."

Hamther spake:

28. "His head were now off | if Erp were living, The brother so keen | whom we killed on our road, The warrior noble,— | 'twas the Norns that drove me The hero to slay | who in fight should be holy.
29. "In fashion of wolves | it befits us not Amongst ourselves to strive, Like the hounds of the Norns, | that nourished were In greed mid wastes so grim.
30. "We have greatly fought, | o'er the Goths do we stand By our blades laid low, | like eagles on branches; Great our fame though we die | today or tomorrow; None outlives the night | when the Norns have spoken."
31. Then Sorli beside | the gable sank, And Hamther fell | at the back of the house.

This is called the old ballad of Hamther.

Revision #1

Created 2025-10-17 13:02:34 UTC by Ekospirit

Updated 2025-10-17 13:02:34 UTC by Ekospirit