

SIGURTHARKVITHA EN SKAMMA

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THE SHORT LAY OF SIGURTH

1. Of old did Sigurth | Gjuki seek, The Volsung young, | in battles victor; Well he trusted | the brothers twain, With mighty oaths | among them sworn.
2. A maid they gave him, | and jewels many, Guthrun the young, | the daughter of Gjuki; They drank and spake | full many a day, Sigurth the young | and Gjuki's sons.
3. Thereafter went they | Brynhild to woo, And so with them | did Sigurth ride, The Volsung young, | in battle valiant,— Himself would have had her | if all he had seen.
4. The southern hero | his naked sword, Fair-flashing, let | between them lie; (Nor would he come | the maid to kiss;) The Hunnish king | in his arms ne'er held The maiden he gave | to Gjuki's sons.
5. Ill she had known not | in all her life, And nought of the sorrows | of men she knew; Blame she had not, | nor dreamed she should bear it, But cruel the fates | that among them came.
6. By herself at the end | of day she sat, And in open words | her heart she uttered: "I shall Sigurth have, | the hero young, E'en though within | my arms he die.
7. "The word I have spoken; | soon shall I rue it, His wife is Guthrun, | and Gunnar's am I; Ill Norns set for me | long desire."
8. Oft did she go | with grieving heart On the glacier's ice | at even-tide, When Guthrun then | to her bed was gone, And the bedclothes Sigurth | about her laid.
9. "(Now Gjuki's child | to her lover goes,) And the Hunnish king | with his wife is happy; Joyless I am | and mateless ever, Till cries from my heavy | heart burst forth."
10. In her wrath to battle | she roused herself: "Gunnar, now | thou needs must lose Lands of mine | and me myself, No joy shall I have | with the hero ever.
11. "Back shall I fare | where first I dwelt, Among the kin | that come of my race, To wait there, sleeping | my life away, If Sigurth's death | thou shalt not dare, (And best of heroes | thou shalt not be.)
12. "The son shall fare | with his father hence, And let not long | the wolf-cub live; Lighter to pay | is the vengeance-price After the deed | if the son is dead."
13. Sad was Gunnar, | and bowed with grief, Deep in thought | the whole day through; Yet from his heart | it was ever hid What deed most fitting | he should find, (Or what thing best | for him should be, Or if he should seek | the Volsung to slay, For with mighty longing | Sigurth he loved.)
14. Much he pondered | for many an hour; Never before | was the wonder known That a queen should thus | her kingdom leave; In counsel then | did he Hogni call, (For him in

truest | trust he held.)

15. "More than all | to me is Brynhild, Buthli's child, | the best of women; My very life | would I
sooner lose Than yield the love | of yonder maid.
16. "Wilt thou the hero | for wealth betray? 'Twere good to have | the gold of the Rhine, And
all the hoard | in peace to hold, And waiting fortune | thus to win."
17. Few the words | of Hogni were: "Us it beseems not | so to do, To cleave with swords | the
oaths we swore, The oaths we swore | and all our vows.
18. "We know no mightier | men on earth The while we four | o'er the folk hold sway, And
while the Hunnish | hero lives, Nor higher kinship | the world doth hold.
19. "If sons we five | shall soon beget, Great, methinks, | our race shall grow; Well I see |
whence lead the ways; Too bitter far | is Brynhild's hate."

Gunnar spake:

20. "Gotthorm to wrath | we needs must rouse, Our younger brother, | in rashness blind; He
entered not | in the oaths we swore, The oaths we swore | and all our vows."
21. It was easy to rouse | the reckless one. The sword in the heart | of
Sigurth stood.
22. In vengeance the hero | rose in the hall, And hurled his sword | at the slayer bold; At
Gotthorm flew | the glittering steel Of Gram full hard | from the hand of the king.
23. The foeman cleft | asunder fell, Forward hands | and head did sink, And legs and feet | did
backward fall.
24. Guthrun soft | in her bed had slept, Safe from care | at Sigurth's side; She woke to find |
her joy had fled, In the blood of the friend | of Freyr she lay.
25. So hard she smote | her hands together That the hero rose up, | iron-hearted: "Weep not,
Guthrun, | grievous tears, Bride so young, | for thy brothers live.
26. "Too young, methinks, | is my son as yet, He cannot flee | from the home of his foes;
Fearful and deadly | the plan they found, The counsel new | that now they have heeded.
27. "No son will ride, | though seven thou hast, To the Thing as the son | of their sister rides;
Well I see | who the ill has worked, On Brynhild alone | lies the blame for all.
28. "Above all men | the maiden loved me, Yet false to Gunnar | I ne'er was found; I kept the
oaths | and the kinship I swore; Of his queen the lover | none may call me."
29. In a swoon she sank | when Sigurth died; So hard she smote | her hands together That all
the cups | in the cupboard rang, And loud in the courtyard | cried the geese.
30. Then Brynhild, daughter | of Buthli, laughed, Only once, | with all her heart, When as she
lay | full loud she heard The grievous wail | of Gjuki's daughter.
31. Then Gunnar, monarch | of men, spake forth: "Thou dost not laugh, | thou lover of hate, In
gladness there, | or for aught of good; Why has thy face | so white a hue, Mother of ill? |
Foredoomed thou art.
32. "A worthier woman | wouldst thou have been If before thine eyes | we had Atli slain; If thy
brother's bleeding | body hadst seen And the bloody wounds | that thou shouldst bind."

Brynhild spake:

33. "None mock thee, Gunnar! | thou hast mightily fought, But thy hatred little | doth Atli
heed; Longer than thou, | methinks, shall he live, And greater in might | shall he ever
remain.

34. "To thee I say, | and thyself thou knowest, That all these ills | thou didst early shape; No bonds I knew, | nor sorrow bore, And wealth I had | in my brother's home.
35. "Never a husband | sought I to have, Before the Gjukungs | fared to our land; Three were the kings | on steeds that came,— Need of their journey | never there was.
36. "To the hero great | my troth I gave Who gold-decked sat | on Grani's back; Not like to thine | was the light of his eyes, (Nor like in form | and face are ye,) Though kingly both | ye seemed to be.
37. "And so to me | did Atli say That share in our wealth | I should not have, Of gold or lands, | if my hand I gave not; (More evil yet, | the wealth I should yield,) The gold that he | in my childhood gave me, (The wealth from him | in my youth I had.)
38. "Oft in my mind | I pondered much If still I should fight, | and warriors fell, Brave in my byrnie, | my brother defying; That would wide | in the world be known, And sorrow for many | a man would make.
39. "But the bond at last | I let be made, For more the hoard | I longed to have, The rings that the son | of Sigmund won; No other's treasure | e'er I sought.
40. "One alone | of all I loved, Nor changing heart | I ever had; All in the end | shall Atli know, When he hears I have gone | on the death-road hence."

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41. "Never a wife | of fickle will Yet to another | man should yield. So vengeance for all | my ills shall come."
42. Up rose Gunnar, | the people's ruler, And flung his arms | round her neck so fair; And all who came, | of every kind, Sought to hold her | with all their hearts.
43. But back she cast | all those who came, Nor from the long road | let them hold her; In counsel then | did he Hogni call: "Of wisdom now | full great is our need.
44. "Let the warriors here | in the hall come forth, Thine and mine, | for the need is mighty, If haply the queen | from death they may hold, Till her fearful thoughts | with time shall fade."
45. (Few the words | of Hogni were:) "From the long road now | shall ye hold her not, That born again | she may never be! Foul she came | from her mother forth, And born she was | for wicked deeds, (Sorrow to many | a man to bring.)"
46. From the speaker gloomily | Gunnar turned, For the jewel-bearer | her gems was dividing; On all her wealth | her eyes were gazing, On the bond-women slain | and the slaughtered slaves.
47. Her byrnie of gold | she donned, and grim Was her heart ere the point | of her sword had pierced it; On the pillow at last | her head she laid, And, wounded, her plan | she pondered o'er.
48. "Hither I will | that my women come Who gold are fain | from me to get; Necklaces fashioned | fair to each Shall I give, and cloth, | and garments bright."
49. Silent were all | as so she spake, And all together | answer made: "Slain are enough; | we seek to live, Not thus thy women | shall honor win."
50. Long the woman, | linen-decked, pondered,— —Young she was,— | and weighed her words: "For my sake now | shall none unwilling Or loath to die | her life lay down.
51. "But little of gems | to gleam on your limbs Ye then shall find | when forth ye fare To follow me, | or of Menja's wealth.

52. "Sit now, Gunnar! | for I shall speak Of thy bride so fair | and so fain to die; Thy ship in harbor | home thou hast not, Although my life | I now have lost.
53. "Thou shalt Guthrun requite | more quick than thou thinkest, | Though sadly mourns | the maiden wise Who dwells with the king, | o'er her husband dead.
54. "A maid shall then | the mother bear; Brighter far | than the fairest day Svanhild shall be, | or the beams of the sun.
55. "Guthrun a noble | husband thou givest, Yet to many a warrior | woe will she bring, Not happily wedded | she holds herself; Her shall Atli | hither seek, (Buthli's son, | and brother of mine.)
56. "Well I remember | how me ye treated When ye betrayed me | with treacherous wiles; | Lost was my joy | as long as I lived.
57. "Oddrun as wife | thou fain wouldst win, But Atli this | from thee withholds; Yet in secret tryst | ye twain shall love; She shall hold thee dear, | as I had done If kindly fate | to us had fallen.
58. "Ill to thee | shall Atli bring, When he casts thee down | in the den of snakes.
59. "But soon thereafter | Atli too His life, methinks, | as thou shalt lose, (His fortune lose | and the lives of his sons;) Him shall Guthrun, | grim of heart, With the biting blade | in his bed destroy.
60. "It would better beseem | thy sister fair To follow her husband | first in death, If counsel good | to her were given, Or a heart akin | to mine she had.
61. "Slowly I speak,— | but for my sake Her life, methinks, | she shall not lose; She shall wander over | the tossing waves, To where Jonak rules | his father's realm.
62. "Sons to him | she soon shall bear, Heirs therewith | of Jonak's wealth; But Svanhild far | away is sent, The child she bore | to Sigurth brave.
63. "Bikki's word | her death shall be, For dreadful the wrath | of Jormunrek; So slain is all | of Sigurth's race, And greater the woe | of Guthrun grows.
64. "Yet one boon | I beg of thee, The last of boons | in my life it is: Let the pyre be built | so broad in the field That room for us all | will ample be, (For us who slain | with Sigurth are.)
65. "With shields and carpets | cover the pyre, | Shrouds full fair, | and fallen slaves, And besides the Hunnish | hero burn me.
66. "Besides the Hunnish | hero there Slaves shall burn, | full bravely decked, Two at his head | and two at his feet, A brace of hounds | and a pair of hawks, For so shall all | be seemly done.
67. "Let between us | lie once more The steel so keen, | as so it lay When both within | one bed we were, And wedded mates | by men were called.
68. "The door of the hall | shall strike not the heel Of the hero fair | with flashing rings, If hence my following | goes with him; Not mean our faring | forth shall be.
69. "Bond-women five | shall follow him, And eight of my thralls, | well-born are they, Children with me, | and mine they were As gifts that Buthli | his daughter gave.
70. "Much have I told thee, | and more would say If fate more space | for speech had given; My voice grows weak, | my wounds are swelling; Truth I have said, | and so I die."