

How Brynhild Was Won for Gunnar

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Intermediate
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Now that Sigurd had wed Gudrun he was one with the Nibelungs. The hoard that was in Fafnir's cave he brought away and he left it in their treasure house. He went into his fosterfather's kingdom again, and he saw King Alv and Hiordis, his mother. But he had no memory now of the House of Flame, nor of Brynhild, who waited there for him.

King Giuki died, and Gunnar, Sigurd's sworn brother, became King in his stead. His mother would have him wed, but Gunnar told her he had seen no maiden whom he would choose for his wife.

But when Sigurd and he were together Gunnar would speak of a maiden far away, one whom he often thought on. And one day when Sigurd pressed him to tell who this maiden was, he spoke of one whom the wisest of the poets told of, a maiden in a Hall with a flame around it, a maiden named Brynhild who was guarded by a ring of fire.

Sigurd laughed to think that his shrewd brother was beguiled by one whom he had only heard of. But if he was beguiled by the tale of her, why should he not come to her and wed her? So Sigurd said. Then Gunnar bent to him and asked Sigurd would he aid him to win her? And Sigurd took Gunnar's hand and swore that he would.

So they started off for Hindfell, Gunnar and Högni and Sigurd. They rode on until they came in sight of the black walls with the mounting and circling fire around them. No memory had Sigurd of the place. With the flame of eagerness upon his stolid face Gunnar went forward to ride through the ring of fire. He brought Goti, his horse, near the flame, but the horse, for no urging, would go through it. Then Gunnar thought that, mounted on Grani, Sigurd's horse, he could ride through the ring of fire. He mounted Grani and came near to the flaring wall. But Grani, knowing that the one who rode him had fear of the fire, reared up and would not go through it. Only with Sigurd on his back would Grani go through the flame.

Then were the three sworn brethren greatly discomfited. But after they had considered it for long Högni the Wise said: "There is a way to win Brynhild, and that is for Sigurd to change shapes, by the magic of his helmet, with Gunnar. Then Sigurd could ride Grani through the wall of flame and come to Brynhild in Gunnar's shape."

So spoke Högni the Wise, and when he saw his sworn brother's gaze fixed on him in pleading, Sigurd could not but agree to ride through the flame and come to Brynhild in the way he said. And so by the magic of his helmet he changed shapes with Gunnar. Then he mounted Grani and rode to the wall of flame. And Grani, knowing that the one he bore was without fear, rode through the flaring fire. Then Sigurd came into the courtyard of the House of Flame. He dismounted from Grani, and he bade his horse be still.

He went within the Hall and he saw one with a bow in her hands shooting at a mark. She turned to him, and he saw a beautiful and stern face, with coils of wondrous, bright-gleaming hair and eyes that were like stars in an unventured-in sea. He thought that the arrow in her hands had been shot through him. But it was not so. Brynhild threw down the bow and came to him with that walk of hers that was as of one moving above the earth. And when she came near and looked upon him she uttered a strange cry.

"Who art thou?" she said. "Who art thou who hast come to me through the wall of flaring fire?"

"Gunnar, son of Giuki, of the race of the Nibelungs," Sigurd said.

"Art thou the bravest one in the world?" she asked.

"I have ridden through the wall of flaring fire to come to thee," Sigurd answered.

"He who has come through that wall of flaring fire may claim me," Brynhild said. "It is written in the runes, and it must be so. But I thought there was only one who would come to me through it." She looked at him, and

her eyes had a flame of anger. "Oh, I would strive with thee with warrior-weapons," she cried. Then Sigurd felt her strong hands upon him, and he knew that she was striving to throw him.

They wrestled, and each was so strong that none could move the other. They wrestled, Sigurd the first of heroes, and Brynhild, the Valkyrie. Sigurd got her hand in his in the wrestle. On that hand was a ring, and Sigurd bent back the finger and drew it off.

It was Andvari's ring, the ring he had placed on her finger. And when the ring was taken off it, Brynhild sank down on her knees like one that was strengthless.

Then Sigurd lifted her in his arms and carried her to where Grani, his horse, was waiting. He lifted her across his horse, and he mounted behind her and again he rode through the wall of flame. Högni and Gunnar were waiting, Gunnar in Sigurd's shape. Brynhild did not look upon them, but covered her face with her hands. Then Sigurd took back his own shape, and he rode before Gunnar and Högni to the hall of the Nibelungs.

He went within, and he found Gudrun, his wife, playing with Sigmund, his little son, and he sat beside her and he told her of all that had befallen: how, for the sake of the sworn brotherhood, he had won Brynhild the Valkyrie for Gunnar, and how he had striven with her and had overcome her, and had taken off her finger the ring that he now wore upon his own.

And even as he spoke to his wife the fume of the potion that Gudrun's mother had given him was wearing off, and he had memories of going to the House of Flame on a day that was not this day, and of riding through the wall of fire in his own shape. And again, as on the night when he drank the potion that Queen Grimhild brewed, he became as one whose wits are astray. He stood watching his child as he played, and his wife as she worked at her embroidery, and he was as a man in a dream.

While he was standing there Gunnar and Högni came into the hall of the Nibelungs bringing Brynhild with them. Gudrun rose up to welcome her who came as her brother's bride. Then did Sigurd look on Brynhild and then did he remember all. And when he remembered all such a mighty sigh rose from his heart as burst the links of the mail that was across his breast.

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