



The Sword Gram and the Dragon Fafnir

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Intermediate
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Mounted upon Grani, his proud horse, Sigurd rode to the Hall and showed himself to Alv, the King, and to Hiordis, his mother. Before the Hall he shouted out the Volsung name, and King Alv felt as he watched him that this youth was a match for a score of men, and Hiordis, his mother, saw the blue flame of his eyes and thought to herself that his way through the world would be as the way of the eagle through the air.

Having shown himself before the Hall, Sigurd dismounted from Grani, and stroked and caressed him with his hands and told him that now he might go back and take pasture with the herd. The proud horse breathed fondly over Sigurd and bounded away.

Then Sigurd strode on until he came to the hut in the forest where he worked with the cunning smith Regin. No one was in the hut when he entered. But over the anvil, in the smoke of the smithy fire, there was a work of Regin's hands. Sigurd looked upon it, and a hatred for the thing that was shown rose up in him.

The work of Regin's hands was a shield, a great shield of iron. Hammered out on that shield and colored with red and brown colors was the image of a Dragon, a Dragon lengthening himself out of a cave. Sigurd thought it was the image of the most hateful thing in the world, and the light of the smithy fire falling on it, and the smoke of the smithy fire rising round it, made it seem verily a Dragon living in his own element of fire and

reek.

While he was still gazing on the loathly image, Regin, the cunning smith, came into the smithy. He stood by the wall and he watched Sigurd. His back was bent; his hair fell over his eyes that were all fiery, and he looked like a beast that runs behind the hedges.

“Aye, thou dost look on Fafnir the Dragon, son of the Volsungs,” he said to Sigurd. “Mayhap it is thou who wilt slay him.”

“I would not strive with such a beast. He is all horrible to me,” Sigurd said.

“With a good sword thou mightst slay him and win for thyself more renown than ever thy fathers had,” Regin whispered.

“I shall win renown as my fathers won renown, in battle with men and in conquest of kingdoms,” Sigurd said.

“Thou art not a true Volsung or thou wouldst gladly go where most danger and dread is,” said Regin. “Thou hast heard of Fafnir the Dragon, whose image I have wrought here. If thou dost ride to the crest of the hills thou mayst look across to the desolate land where Fafnir has his haunt. Know that once it was fair land where men had peace and prosperity, but Fafnir came and made his den in a cave near by, and his breathings as he went to and came from the River withered up the land and made it the barren waste that men called Gnita Heath. Now, if thou art a true Volsung, thou wilt slay the Dragon, and let that land become fair again, and bring the people back to it and so add to King Alv’s domain.”

“I have nought to do with the slaying of Dragons,” Sigurd said. “I have to make war on King Lygni, and avenge upon him the slaying of Sigmund, my father.”

“What is the slaying of Lygni and the conquest of his kingdom to the slaying of Fafnir the Dragon?” Regin cried.

“I will tell thee what no one else knows of Fafnir the Dragon. He guards a hoard of gold and jewels the like of which was never seen in the world. All this hoard you can make yours by slaying him.”

“I do not covet riches,” Sigurd said.

“No riches is like to the riches that Fafnir guards. His hoard is the hoard that the Dwarf Andvari had from the world’s early days. Once the Gods themselves paid it over as a ransom. And if thou wilt win this hoard thou wilt be as one of the Gods.”

“How dost thou know that of which thou speakst, Regin?” Sigurd said.

“I know, and one day I may tell thee how I know.”

“And one day I may harken to thee. But speak to me no more of this Dragon. I would have thee make a sword, a sword that will be mightier and better shapen than any sword in the world. Thou canst do this, Regin, for thou art accounted the best swordsmith amongst men.”

Regin looked at Sigurd out of his small and cunning eyes and he thought it was best to make himself active. So he took the weightiest pieces of iron and put them into his furnace and he brought out the secret tools that he used when a masterwork was claimed from his hands.

All day Sigurd worked beside him keeping the fire at its best glow and bringing water to cool the blade as it was fashioned and refashioned. And as he worked he thought only about the blade and about how he would make war upon King Lygni, and avenge the man who was slain before he himself was born.

All day he thought only of war and of the beaten blade. But at night his dreams were not upon wars nor shapen blades but upon Fafnir the Dragon. He saw the heath that was left barren by his breath, and he saw the cave where he had his den, and he saw him crawling down from his cave, his scales glittering like rings of mail, and his length the length of a company of men on the march.

The next day he worked with Regin to shape the great sword. When it was shapen with all the cunning Regin knew it looked indeed a mighty sword. Then Regin sharpened it and Sigurd polished it. And at last he held the great sword by its iron hilt.

Then Sigurd took the shield that had the image of Fafnir the Dragon upon it and he put the shield over the anvil of the smithy. Raising the great sword in both his hands he struck full on the iron shield.

The stroke of the sword sheared away some of the shield, but the blade broke in Sigurd's hands. Then in anger he turned on Regin, crying out, "Thou hast made a knave's sword for me. To work with thee again! Thou must make me a Volsung's sword."

Then he went out and called to Grani, his horse, and mounted him and rode to the river bank like the sweep of the wind.

Regin took more pieces of iron and began to forge a new sword, uttering as he worked runes that were about the hoard that Fafnir the Dragon guarded. And Sigurd that night dreamt of glittering treasure that he coveted not, masses of gold and heaps of glistening jewels.

He was Regin's help the next day and they both worked to make a sword that would be mightier than the first. For three days they worked upon it, and then Regin put into Sigurd's hands a sword, sharpened and polished, that was mightier and more splendid looking than the one that had been forged before. And again Sigurd took the shield that had the image of the Dragon upon it and he put it upon the anvil. Then he raised his arms and struck his full blow. The sword cut through the shield, but when it struck the anvil it shivered in his hands.

He left the smithy angrily and called to Grani, his proud horse. He mounted and rode on like the sweep of the wind.

Later he came to his mother's bower and stood before Hiordis. "A greater sword must I have," said he, "than one that is made of metal dug out of the earth. The time has come, mother, when thou must put into my hands the broken pieces of Gram, the sword of Sigmund and the Volsungs."

Hiordis measured him with the glance of her eyes, and she saw that her son was a mighty youth and one fit to use the sword of Sigmund and the Volsungs. She bade him go with her to the King's Hall. Out of the great stone chest that was in her chamber she took the beast's skin and the broken blade that was wrapped in it. She gave the pieces into the hands of her son. "Behold the halves of Gram," she said, "of Gram, the mighty sword that in the far-off days Odin left in the Branstock, in the tree of the house of Volsung. I would see Gram new-shapen in thy hands, my son."

Then she embraced him as she had never embraced him before, and standing there with her ruddy hair about her she told him of the glory of Gram and of the deeds of his fathers in whose hands the sword had shone.

Then Sigurd went to the smithy, and he wakened Regin out of his sleep, and he made him look on the shining halves of Sigmund's sword. He commanded him to make out of these halves a sword for his hand.

Regin worked for days in his smithy and Sigurd never left his side. At last the blade was forged, and when Sigurd held it in his hand fire ran along the edge of it.

Again he laid the shield that had the image of the Dragon upon it on the anvil of the smithy. Again, with his hands on its iron hilt, he raised the sword for a full stroke. He struck, and the sword cut through the shield and sheared through the anvil, cutting away its iron horn. Then did Sigurd know that he had in his hands the Volsungs' sword. He went without and called to Grani, and like the sweep of the wind rode down to the River's bank. Shreds of wool were floating down the water. Sigurd struck at them with his sword, and the fine wool was divided against the water's edge. Hardness and fineness, Gram could cut through both.

That night Gram, the Volsungs' sword, was under his head when he slept, but still his dreams were filled with images that he had not regarded in the day time; the shine of a hoard that he coveted not, and the gleam of the scales of a Dragon that was too loathly for him to battle with.

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