



# The Story of Siegfried

## Adventure 4: Fafnir, the Dragon

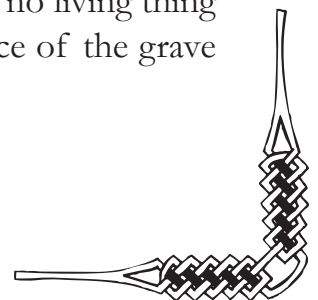
by James Baldwin

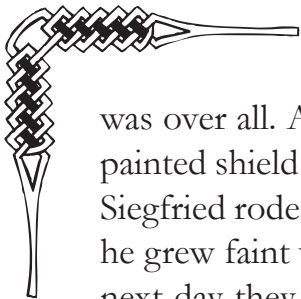
Regin took up his harp, and his fingers smote the strings; and the music which came forth sounded like the wail of the winter's wind through the dead treetops of the forest. And the song which he sang was full of grief and wild hopeless yearning for the things which were not to be. When he had ceased, Siegfried said,—

“That was indeed a sorrowful song for one to sing who sees his hopes so nearly realized. Why are you so sad? Is it because you fear the curse which you have taken upon yourself? or is it because you know not what you will do with so vast a treasure, and its possession begins already to trouble you?”

“Oh, many are the things I will do with that treasure!” answered Regin; and his eyes flashed wildly, and his face grew red and pale. “I will turn winter into summer; I will make the desert-places glad; I will bring back the golden age; I will make myself a god: for mine shall be the wisdom and the gathered wealth of the world. And yet I fear”— “What do you fear?”

“The ring, the ring—it is accursed! The Norns, too, have spoken, and my doom is known. I cannot escape it.” “The Norns have woven the woof of every man's life,” answered Siegfried. “To-morrow we fare to the Glittering Heath, and the end shall be as the Norns have spoken.” And so, early the next morning, Siegfried mounted Greyfell, and rode out towards the desert-land that lay beyond the forest and the barren mountain-range; and Regin, his eyes flashing with desire, and his feet never tiring, trudged by his side. For seven days they wended their way through the thick greenwood, sleeping at night on the bare ground beneath the trees, while the wolves and other wild beasts of the forest filled the air with their hideous howlings. But no evil creature dared come near them, for fear of the shining beams of light which fell from Greyfell's gleaming mane. On the eighth day they came to the open country and to the hills, where the land was covered with black boulders and broken by yawning chasms. And no living thing was seen there, not even an insect, nor a blade of grass; and the silence of the grave



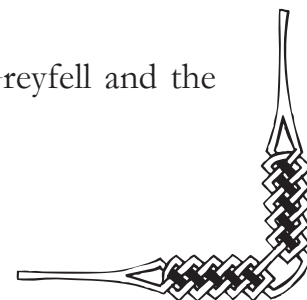


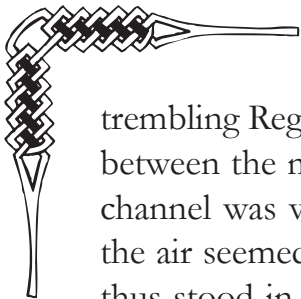
was over all. And the earth was dry and parched, and the sun hung above them like a painted shield in a blue-black sky, and there was neither shade nor water anywhere. But Siegfried rode onwards in the way which Regin pointed out, and faltered not, although he grew faint with thirst and with the overpowering heat. Towards the evening of the next day they came to a dark mountain-wall which stretched far out on either hand, and rose high above them, so steep that it seemed to close up the way, and to forbid them going farther.

“This is the wall!” cried Regin. “Beyond this mountain is the Glittering Heath, and the goal of all my hopes.” And the little old man ran forwards, and scaled the rough side of the mountain, and reached its summit, while Siegfried and Greyfell were yet toiling among the rocks at its foot. Slowly and painfully they climbed the steep ascent, sometimes following a narrow path which wound along the edge of a precipice, sometimes leaping, from rock to rock, or over some deep gorge, and sometimes picking their way among the crags and cliffs. The sun at last went down, and one by one the stars came out; and the moon was rising, round and red, when Siegfried stood by Regin’s side, and gazed from the mountain-top down upon the Glittering Heath which lay beyond. And a strange, weird scene it was that met his sight. At the foot of the mountain was a river, white and cold and still; and beyond it was a smooth and barren plain, lying silent and lonely in the pale moonlight. But in the distance was seen a circle of flickering flames, ever changing,—now growing brighter, now fading away, and now shining with a dull, cold light, like the glimmer of the glow-worm or the fox-fire. And as Siegfried gazed upon the scene, he saw the dim outline of some hideous monster moving hither and thither, and seeming all the more terrible in the uncertain light.

“It is he!” whispered Regin, and his lips were ashy pale, and his knees trembled beneath him. “It is Fafnir, and he wears the Helmet of Terror! Shall we not go back to the smithy by the great forest, and to the life of ease and safety that may be ours there? Or will you rather dare to go forwards, and meet the Terror in its abode?” “None but cowards give up an undertaking once begun,” answered Siegfried. “Go back to Rhineland yourself, if you are afraid; but you must go alone. You have brought me thus far to meet the dragon of the heath, to win the hoard of the swarthy elves, and to rid the world of a terrible evil. Before the setting of another sun, the deed which you have urged me to do will be done.”

Then he dashed down the eastern slope of the mountain, leaving Greyfell and the





trembling Regin behind him. Soon he stood on the banks of the white river, which lay between the mountain and the heath; but the stream was deep and sluggish, and the channel was very wide. He paused a moment, wondering how he should cross; and the air seemed heavy with deadly vapors, and the water was thick and cold. While he thus stood in thought, a boat came silently out of the mists, and drew near; and the boatman stood up and called to him, and said,—

“What man are you who dares come into this land of loneliness and fear?”

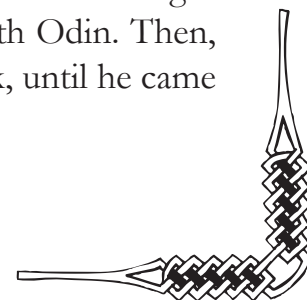
“I am Siegfried,” answered the lad; “and I have come to slay Fafnir, the Terror.”

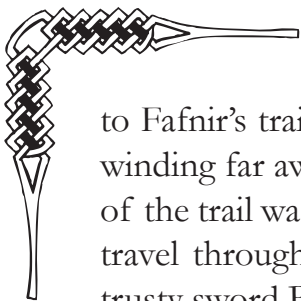
“Sit in my boat,” said the boatman, “and I will carry you across the river.”

And Siegfried sat by the boatman’s side; and without the use of an oar, and without a breath of air to drive it forwards, the little vessel turned, and moved silently towards the farther shore.

“In what way will you fight the dragon?” asked the boatman. “With my trusty sword Balmung I shall slay him,” answered Siegfried.

“But he wears the Helmet of Terror, and he breathes deathly poisons, and his eyes dart forth lightning, and no man can withstand his strength,” said the boatman. “I will find some way by which to overcome him.” “Then be wise, and listen to me,” said the boatman. “As you go up from the river you will find a road, worn deep and smooth, starting from the water’s edge, and winding over the moor. It is the trail of Fafnir, adown which he comes at dawn of every day to slake his thirst at the river. Do you dig a pit in this roadway,—a pit narrow and deep,—and hide yourself within it. In the morning, when Fafnir passes over it, let him feel the edge of Balmung.” As the man ceased speaking, the boat touched the shore, and Siegfried leaped out. He looked back to thank his unknown friend, but neither boat nor boatman was to be seen. Only a thin white mist rose slowly from the cold surface of the stream, and floated upwards and away towards the mountain-tops. Then the lad remembered that the strange boatman had worn a blue hood bespangled with golden stars, and that a gray kirtle was thrown over his shoulders, and that his one eye glistened and sparkled with a light that was more than human. And he knew that he had again talked with Odin. Then, with a braver heart than before, he went forwards, along the river-bank, until he came





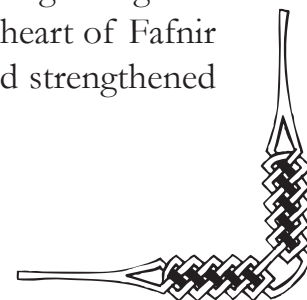
to Fafnir's trail,—a deep, wide furrow in the earth, beginning at the river's bank, and winding far away over the heath, until it was lost to sight in the darkness. The bottom of the trail was soft and slimy, and its sides had been worn smooth by Fafnir's frequent travel through it. In this road, at a point not far from the river, Siegfried, with his trusty sword Balmung, scooped out a deep and narrow pit, as Odin had directed. And when the gray dawn began to appear in the east he hid himself within this trench, and

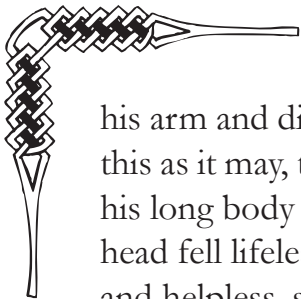
waited for the coming of the monster. He had not long to wait; for no sooner had the sky begun to redden in the light than the dragon was himself. Siegfried peeped warily from his hiding-place, and saw him coming far down the road, hurrying with all speed, that he might quench his thirst at the sluggish river, and hasten back to his gold; he made the sound which was like the trampling of many of many chains. With his flaming nostrils, and his sharp, curved claws dug deep into the soft earth; and his bat-like wings, half flapping in the air, made a sound like that which is heard when Thor rides in his goat-drawn chariot over the dark thunder-clouds. It was a terrible moment for Siegfried, but still he was not afraid. He



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in his hiding-place, and the bare blade of the trusty Balmung glittered in the morning light. On came the hastening feet and the flapping wings: the red gleam from the monster's flaming nostrils lighted up the trench where Siegfried lay. He heard a roaring and a rushing like the sound of a whirlwind in the forest; then a black, inky mass rolled above him, and all was dark. Now was Siegfried's opportunity. The bright edge of Balmung gleamed in the darkness one moment, and then it smote the heart of Fafnir as he passed. Some men say that Odin sat in the pit with Siegfried, and strengthened





his arm and directed his sword, or else he could not thus have slain the Terror. But, be this as it may, the victory was soon won. The monster stopped short, while but half of his long body had glided over the pit; for sudden death had overtaken him. His horrid head fell lifeless upon the ground; his cold wings flapped once, and then lay, quivering and helpless, spread out on either side; and streams of thick black blood flowed from his heart, through the wound beneath, and filled the trench in which Siegfried was hidden, and ran like a mountain-torrent down the road towards the river. Siegfried was covered from head to foot with the slimy liquid, and, had he not quickly leaped from his hiding-place, he would have been drowned in the swift-rushing, stream.[EN#11] The bright sun rose in the east, and gilded the mountain-tops, and fell upon the still waters of the river, and lighted up the treeless plains around. The south wind played gently against Siegfried's cheeks and in his long hair, as he stood gazing on his fallen foe. And the sound of singing birds, and rippling waters, and gay insects,—such as had not broken the silence of the Glittering Heath for ages,—came to his ears. The Terror was dead, and Nature had awakened from her sleep of dread. And as the lad leaned upon his sword, and thought of the deed he had done, behold! the shining Greyfell, with the beaming, hopeful mane, having crossed the now bright river, stood by his side. And Regin, his face grown wondrous cold, came trudging over the meadows; and his heart was full of guile. Then the mountain vultures came wheeling downwards to look upon the dead dragon; and with them were two ravens, black as midnight. And when Siegfried saw these ravens he knew them to be Odin's birds,—Hugin, thought, and Munin, memory. And they alighted on the ground near by; and the lad listened to hear what they would say. Then Hugin flapped his wings, and said,—

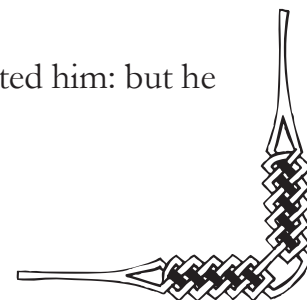
“The deed is done. Why tarries the hero?” And Munin said,—

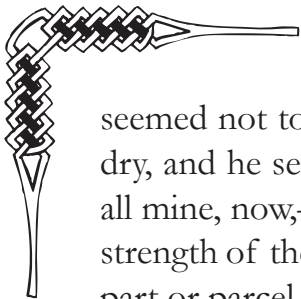
“The world is wide. Fame waits for the hero.” And Hugin answered,—

“What if he win the Hoard of the Elves? That is not honor. Let him seek fame by nobler deeds.” Then Munin flew past his ear, and whispered,— “Beware of Regin, the master! His heart is poisoned. He would be thy bane.”

And the two birds flew away to carry the news to Odin in the happy halls of Glad-sheim.

When Regin drew near to look upon the dragon, Siegfried kindly accosted him: but he





seemed not to hear; and a snaky glitter lurked in his eyes, and his mouth was set and dry, and he seemed as one walking in a dream. “It is mine now,” he murmured: “it is all mine, now,—the Hoard of the swarthy elf-folk, the garnered wisdom of ages. The strength of the world is mine. I will keep, I will save, I will heap up; and none shall have part or parcel of the treasure which is mine alone.”

Then his eyes fell upon Siegfried; and his cheeks grew dark with wrath, and he cried out,—

“Why are you here in my way? I am the lord of the Glittering Heath: I am the master of the Hoard. I am the master, and you are my thrall.”

Siegfried wondered at the change which had taken place in his old master; but he only smiled at his strange words, and made no answer.

“You have slain my brother!” Regin cried; and his face grew fearfully black, and his mouth foamed with rage. “It was my deed and yours,” calmly answered Siegfried. “I have rid the world of a Terror: I have righted a grievous wrong.”

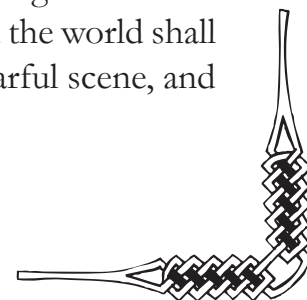
“You have slain my brother,” said Regin; “and a murderer’s ransom you shall pay!”

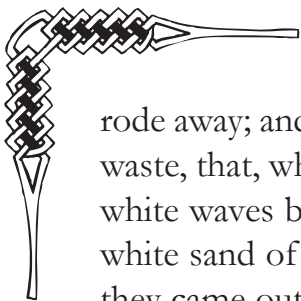
“Take the Hoard for your ransom, and let us each wend his way,” said the lad.

“The Hoard is mine by rights,” answered Regin still more wrathfully. “I am the master, and you are my thrall. Why stand you in my way?”

Then, blinded with madness, he rushed at Siegfried as if to strike him down; but his foot slipped in a puddle of gore, and he pitched headlong against the sharp edge of Balmung. So sudden was this movement, and so unlooked for, that the sword was twitched out of Siegfried’s hand, and fell with a dull splash into the blood-filled pit before him; while Regin, slain by his own rashness, sank dead upon the ground. Full of horror, Siegfried turned away, and mounted Greyfell.

“This is a place of blood,” said he, “and the way to glory leads not through it. Let the Hoard still lie on the Glittering Heath: I will go my way from hence; and the world shall know me for better deeds than this.” And he turned his back on the fearful scene, and





rode away; and so swiftly did Greyfell carry him over the desert land and the mountain waste, that, when night came, they stood on the shore of the great North Sea, and the white waves broke at their feet. And the lad sat for a long time silent upon the warm white sand of the beach, and Greyfell waited at his side. And he watched the stars as they came out one by one, and the moon, as it rose round and pale, and moved like a queen across the sky. And the night wore away, and the stars grew pale, and the moon sank to rest in the wilderness of waters. And at day-dawn Siegfried looked towards the west, and midway between sky and sea he thought he saw dark mountain-tops hanging above a land of mists that seemed to float upon the edge of the sea.

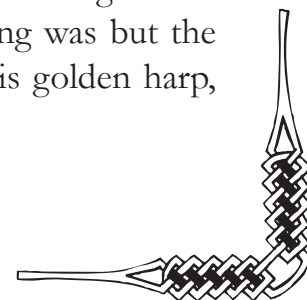
While he looked, a white ship, with sails all set, came speeding over the waters towards him. It came nearer and nearer, and the sailors rested upon their oars as it glided into the quiet harbor. A minstrel, with long white beard floating in the wind, sat at the prow; and the sweet music from his harp was wafted like incense to the shore. The vessel touched the sands: its white sails were reefed as if by magic, and the crew leaped out upon the beach. "Hail, Siegfried the Golden!" cried the harper. "Whither do you fare this summer day?"

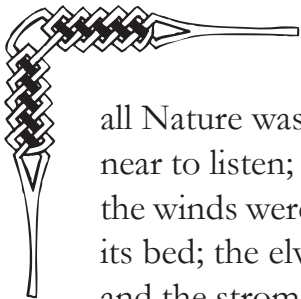
"I have come from a land of horror and dread," answered the lad; "and I would fain fare to a brighter." "Then go with me to awaken the earth from its slumber, and to robe the fields in their garbs of beauty," said the harper. And he touched the strings of his harp, and strains of the softest music arose in the still morning air. And Siegfried stood entranced, for never before had he heard such music.

"Tell me who you are!" he cried, when the sounds died away. "Tell me who you are, and I will go to the ends of the earth with you."

"I am Bragi," answered the harper, smiling. And Siegfried noticed then that the ship was laden with flowers of every hue, and that thousands of singing birds circled around and above it, filling the air with the sound of their glad twitterings.

Now, Bragi was the sweetest musician in all the world. It was said by some that his home was with the song-birds, and that he had learned his skill from them. But this was only part of the truth: for wherever there was loveliness or beauty, or things noble and pure, there was Bragi; and his wondrous power in music and song was but the outward sign of a blameless soul. When he touched the strings of his golden harp,





all Nature was charmed with the sweet harmony: the savage beasts of the wood crept near to listen; the birds paused in their flight; the waves of the sea were becalmed, and the winds were hushed; the leaping waterfall was still, and the rushing torrent tarried in its bed; the elves forgot their hidden treasures, and joined in silent dance around him; and the strom-karls and the musicians of the wood vainly tried to imitate him. And he was as fair of speech as he was skilful in song. His words were so persuasive that he had been known to call the fishes from the sea, to move great lifeless rocks, and, what is harder, the hearts of kings. He understood the voice of the birds, and the whispering of the breeze, the murmur of the waves, and the roar of the waterfalls. He knew the length and breadth of the earth, and the secrets of the sea, and the language of the stars. And every day he talked with Odin the All-Father, and with the wise and good in the sunlit halls of Gladsheim. And once every year he went to the North-lands, and woke the earth from its long winter's sleep, and scattered music and smiles and beauty everywhere.

Right gladly did Siegfried agree to sail with Bragi over the sea; for he wot that the bright Asa-god would be a very different guide from the cunning, evil-eyed Regin. So he went on board with Bragi, and the gleaming Greyfell followed them, and the sailors sat at their oars. And Bragi stood in the prow, and touched the strings of his harp. And, as the music arose, the white sails leaped up the masts, and a warm south breeze began to blow; and the little vessel, wafted by sweet sounds and the incense of spring, sped gladly away over the sea.

“And also the curse,” echoed Regin.

