



The Story of Siegfried

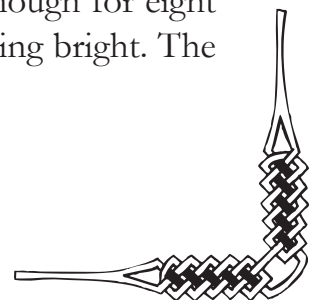
Adventure 6: **Brunhild**
by James Baldwin

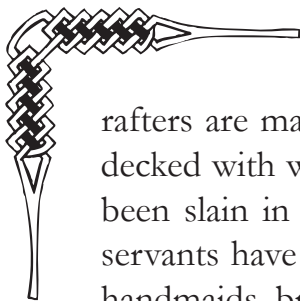
Siegfried and the harper sat together in the little ship as it lay moored to the sandy shore; and their eyes were turned towards the sea-green castle and its glowing walls, and they looked in vain for any movement, or any sign of wakeful life. Every thing was still. Not a breath of air was stirring. The leaves of the trees hung motionless, as if they, too, were asleep. The great green banner on the tower's top clung around the flagstaff as if it had never fluttered to the breeze. No song of birds, nor hum of insects, came to their ears. There was neither sound nor motion anywhere.

“Play your harp, good Bragi, and awaken all these sleepers,” said Siegfried.

Then the harper touched the magic strings, and strains of music, loud and clear, but sweet as a baby's breath, rose up in the still air, and floated over the quiet bay, and across the green meadows which lay around the castle-walls; and it was borne upward over the battlements, and among the shining turrets and towers, and was carried far out over the hills, and among the silent trees of the plain. And Bragi sung of the beginning of all things, and of whatsoever is beautiful on the land, or in the sea, or in the sky. And Siegfried looked to see every thing awakened, and quickened into life, as had oft been done before by Bragi's music; but nothing stirred. The sun went down, and the gray twilight hung over sea and land, and the red glow in the castle-moat grew redder still; and yet every thing slept. Then Bragi ended his song, and the strings of his harp were mute. “Music has no charms to waken from sleep like that,” he said.

And then he told Siegfried what it all meant; and, to make the story plain, he began by telling of Odin's bright home at Gladsheim and of the many great halls that were there. One of the halls in Gladsheim is called Valhal. This hall is so large and wide, that all the armies of the earth might move within it. Outside, it is covered with gold and with sun-bright shields. A fierce wolf stands guard before it, and a mountain-eagle hovers over it. It has five hundred and forty doors, each large enough for eight hundred heroes to march through abreast. Inside, every thing is glittering bright. The





rafters are made of spears, and the ceiling is covered with shields, and the walls are decked with war-coats. In this hall Odin sets daily a feast for all the heroes that have been slain in battle. These sit at the great table, and eat of the food which Odin's servants have prepared, and drink of the heavenly mead which the Valkyries, Odin's handmaids, bring them. But the Valkyries have a greater duty. When the battle rages, and swords clash, and shields ring, and the air is filled with shouts and groans and all the din of war, then these maidens hover over the field of blood and death, and carry the slain heroes home to Valhal. One of Odin's Valkyries was named Brunhild, and she was the most beautiful of all the maidens that chose heroes for his war-host. But she was wilful too, and did not always obey the All-Father's behests. And when Odin knew that she had sometimes snatched the doomed from death, and sometimes helped her chosen friends to victory, he was very angry. And he drove her away from Gladsheim, and sent her, friendless and poor, to live among the children of men, and to be in all ways like them. But, as she wandered weary and alone over the earth, the good old King of Isenland saw her beauty and her distress, and pity and love moved his heart; and, as he had no children of his own, he took her for his daughter, and made her his heir. And not long afterward he died, and the matchless Brunhild became queen of all the fair lands of Isenland and the hall of Isenstein. When Odin heard of this, he was more angry still; and he sent to Isenstein, and caused Brunhild to be stung with the thorn of Sleep. And he said,—

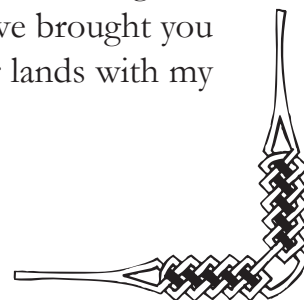
“She shall sleep until one shall come who is brave enough to ride through fire to awaken her.”

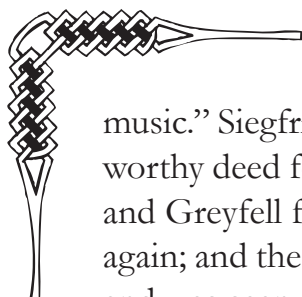
And all Isenland slept too, because Brunhild, the Maiden of Spring, lay wounded with the Sleepful thorn.

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When Siegfried heard this story, he knew that the land which lay before them was Isenland, and that the castle was Isenstein, and that Brunhild was sleeping within that circle of fire.

“My songs have no power to awaken such a sleeper,” said Bragi. “A hero strong and brave must ride through the flame to arouse her. It is for this that I have brought you hither; and here I will leave you, while I sail onwards to brighten other lands with my



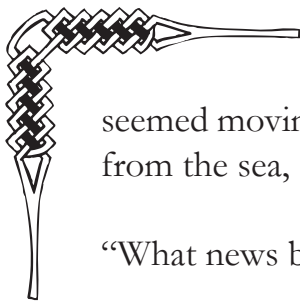


music.” Siegfried’s heart leaped up with gladness; for he thought that here, at last, was a worthy deed for him to do. And he bade his friend Bragi good-by, and stepped ashore; and Greyfell followed him. And Bragi sat at the prow of the ship, and played his harp again; and the sailors plied their oars; and the little vessel moved swiftly out of the bay, and was seen no more. And Siegfried stood alone on the silent, sandy beach.

As he thus stood, the full moon rose white and dripping from the sea; and its light fell on the quiet water, and the sloping meadows, and the green turrets of the castle. And the last notes of Bragi’s harp came floating to him over the sea.



Then a troop of fairies came down to dance upon the sands. It was the first sign of life that Siegfried had seen. As the little creatures drew near, he hid himself among the tall reeds which grew close to the shore; for he wished to see them at their gambols, and to listen to their songs. At first, as if half afraid of their own tiny shadows, they danced in silence; but, as the moon rose higher, they grew bolder, and began to sing. And their music was so sweet and soft, that Siegfried forgot almost every thing, else for the time: they sang of the pleasant summer days, and of cooling shades, and still fountains, and silent birds, and peaceful slumber. And a strange longing for sleep took hold of Siegfried; and his eyes grew heavy, and the sound of the singing seemed dim and far away. But just as he was losing all knowledge of outward things, and his senses



seemed moving in a dream, the fairies stopped dancing, and a little brown elf came up from the sea, and saluted the queen of the tiny folk.

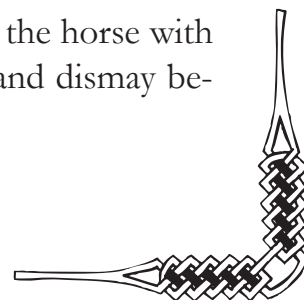
“What news bring you from the great world beyond the water?” asked the queen.

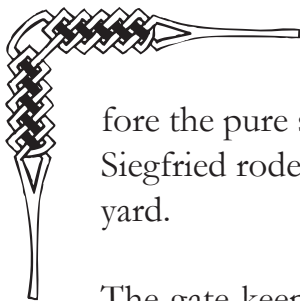
“The prince is on his way hither,” answered the elf. “And what will he do?”

“If he is brave enough, he will awaken the princess, and arouse the drowsy people of Isenstein; for the Norns have said that such a prince shall surely come.” “But he must be the bravest of men ere he can enter the enchanted castle,” said the queen; “for the wide moat is filled with flames, and no faint heart will ever dare battle with them.”

“But I will dare!” cried Siegfried; and he sprang from his hiding-place, forgetful of the little folk, who suddenly flitted away, and left him alone upon the beach. He glanced across the meadows at the green turrets glistening in the mellow moonlight, and then at the flickering flames around the castle walls, and he resolved that on the morrow he would at all hazards perform the perilous feat. In the morning, as soon as the gray dawn appeared, he began to make ready for his difficult undertaking. But, when he looked again at the red flames, he began to hesitate. He paused, uncertain whether to wait for a sign and for help from the All-Father, or whether to go straightway to the castle, and, trusting in his good armor alone, try to pass through the burning moat. While he thus stood in doubt, his eyes were dazzled by a sudden flash of light. He looked up. Greyfell came dashing across the sands; and from his long mane a thousand sunbeams gleamed and sparkled in the morning light. Siegfried had never seen the wondrous creature so radiant; and as the steed stood by him in all his strength and beauty he felt new hope and courage, as if Odin himself had spoken to him. He hesitated no longer, but mounted the noble horse; and Greyfell bore him swiftly over the plain, and paused not until he had reached the brink of the burning moat.

Now, indeed, would Siegfried’s heart have failed him, had he not been cheered by the sunbeam presence of Greyfell. For filling the wide, deep ditch, were angry, hissing flames, which, like a thousand serpent-tongues, reached out, and felt here and there, for what they might devour; and ever and anon they took new forms, and twisted and writhed like fiery snakes, and then they swirled in burning coils high over the castle-walls. Siegfried stopped not a moment. He spoke the word, and boldly the horse with his rider dashed into the fiery lake; and the vile flames fled in shame and dismay be-





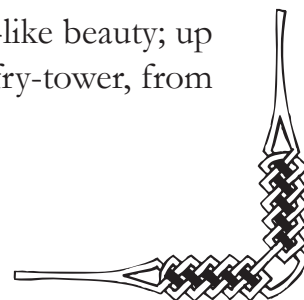
fore the pure sunbeam flashes from Greyfell's mane. And, unscorched and unscathed, Siegfried rode through the moat, and through the wide-open gate, and into the castle-yard.

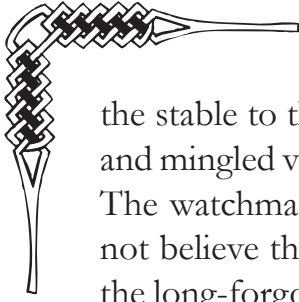
The gate-keeper sat fast asleep in his lodge, while the chains and the heavy key with which, when awake, he was wont to make the great gate fast, lay rusting at his feet; and neither he, nor the sentinels on the ramparts above, stirred or awoke at the sound of Greyfell's clattering hoofs. As Siegfried passed from one part of the castle to another, many strange sights met his eyes. In the stables the horses slumbered in their stalls, and the grooms lay snoring by their sides. The birds sat sound asleep on their nests beneath the eaves. The watch-dogs, with fast-closed eyes, lay stretched at full-length before the open doors. In the garden the fountain no longer played, the half-laden bees had gone to sleep among the blossoms of the apple-trees, and the flowers themselves had forgotten to open their petals to the sun. In the kitchen the cook was dozing over the half-baked meats in front of the smouldering fire; the butler was snoring in the pantry; the dairy-maid was quietly napping among the milk-pans; and even the house-flies had gone to sleep over the crumbs of sugar on the table. In the great banquet-room a thousand knights, overcome with slumber, sat silent at the festal board; and their chief, sitting on the dais, slept, with his half-emptied goblet at his lips.

Siegfried passed hurriedly from room to room and from hall to hall, and cast but one hasty glance at the strange sights which met him at every turn; for he knew that none of the drowsy ones in that spacious castle could be awakened until he had aroused the Princess Brunhild. In the grandest hall of the palace he found her. The peerless maiden, most richly dight, reclined upon a couch beneath a gold-hung canopy; and her attendants, the ladies of the court, sat near and around her. Sleep held fast her eyelids, and her breathing was so gentle, that, but for the blush upon her cheeks, Siegfried would have thought her dead. For long, long years had her head thus lightly rested on that gold-fringed pillow; and in all that time neither her youth had faded, nor her wondrous beauty waned.

Siegfried stood beside her. Gently he touched his lips to that matchless forehead; softly he named her name,— “Brunhild!”

The charm was broken. Up rose the peerless princess in all her queen-like beauty; up rose the courtly ladies round her. All over the castle, from cellar to belfry-tower, from





the stable to the banquet hall, there was a sudden awakening, a noise of hurrying feet and mingled voices, and sounds which had long been strangers to the halls of Isenstein. The watchman on the tower, and the sentinels on the ramparts, yawned, and would not believe they had been asleep; the porter picked up his keys, and hastened to lock the long-forgotten gates; the horses neighed in their stalls; the watchdogs barked at the sudden hubbub; the birds, ashamed at having allowed the sun to find them napping, hastened to seek their food in the meadows; the servants hurried here and there, each intent upon his duty; the warriors in the banquet-hall clattered their knives and plates, and began again their feast; and their chief dropped his goblet, and rubbed his eyes, and wondered that sleep should have overtaken him in the midst of such a meal.

And Siegfried, standing at an upper window, looked out over the castle-walls; and he saw that the flames no longer raged in the moat, but that it was filled with clear sparkling water from the fountain which played in the garden. And the south wind blew gently from the sea, bringing from afar the sweetest strains of music from Bragi's golden harp; and the breezes whispered among the trees, and the flowers opened their petals to the sun, and birds and insects made the air melodious with their glad voices. Then Brunhild, radiant with smiles, stood by the hero's side, and welcomed him kindly to Isenland and to her green-towered castle of Isenstein.

