



The Story of Siegfried

adventure 15: In Nibelungen Land Again

by James Baldwin

When the folk of Isenland learned that their queen had been outwitted and won by a strange chief from a far-off and unknown land, great was their sorrow and dismay; for they loved the fair maiden-queen, and they feared to exchange her mild reign for that of an untried foreigner. Nor was the queen herself at all pleased with the issue of the late contest. She felt no wish to leave her loved people, and her pleasant home, and the fair island which was her kingdom, to take up her abode in a strange land, as the queen of one for whom she could feel no respect. And every one wondered how it was that a man like Gunther, so commonplace, and so feeble in his every look and act, could have done such deeds, and won the wary warrior-maiden.

“If it had only been Siegfried!” whispered the maidens among themselves.

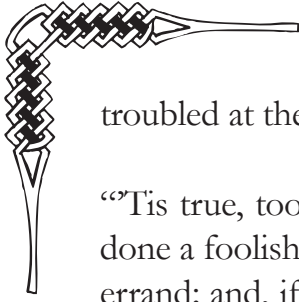
“If it had only been Siegfried!” murmured the knights and the fighting-men.

“If it had only been Siegfried!” thought the queen, away down in the most secret corner of her heart. And she shut herself up in her room, and gave wild vent to her feelings of grief and disappointment.

Then heralds mounted the swiftest horses, and hurried to every village and farm, and to every high-towered castle, in the land. And they carried word to all of Brunhild’s kinsmen and liegemen, bidding them to come without delay to Isenstein. And every man arose as with one accord, and hastened to obey the call of their queen. And the whole land was filled with the notes of busy preparation for war. And day by day to the castle the warriors came and went, and the sound of echoing horse-hoofs, and the rattling of ready swords, and the ringing of the war-shields, were heard on every hand.

“What means this treason?” cried Gunther in dismay. “The coy warrior-maiden would fain break her plighted word; and we, here in our weakness, shall perish from her wrath.” And even old Hagen, who had never felt a fear when meeting a host in open battle, was





troubled at the thought of the mischief which was brewing.

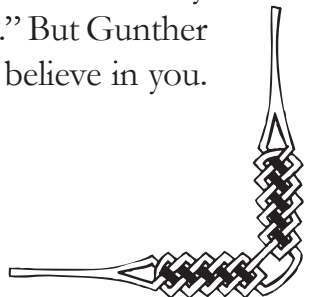
“’Tis true, too true,” he said, and the dark frown deepened on his face, “that we have done a foolish thing. For we four men have come to this cheerless land upon a hopeless errand; and, if we await the gathering of the storm, our ruin will be wrought.” And he grasped his sword-hilt with such force, that his knuckles grew white as he paced fiercely up and down the hall.

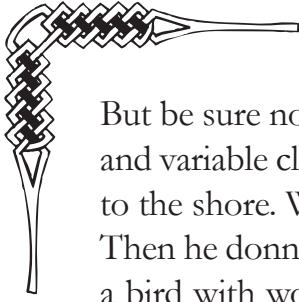
Dankwart, too, bewailed the fate that had driven them into this net, from which he saw no way of escape. And both the warriors besought King Gunther to take ship at once, and to sail for Rhineland before it was too late. But Siegfried said,—

“What account will you give to the folk at home, if you thus go back beaten, outwitted, and ashamed? Brave warriors, indeed! we should be called. Wait a few days, and trust all to me. When Brunhild’s warriors shall be outnumbered by our own, she will no longer hesitate, and our return to Rhineland shall be a triumphant one; for we shall carry the glorious warrior-queen home with us.” “Yes,” answered Hagen, mocking, “we will wait until her warriors are outnumbered by our own. But how long shall that be? Will the lightning carry the word to Burgundy? and will the storm-clouds bring our brave men from across the sea? Had you allowed King Gunther’s plans to be followed, they would have been here with us now, and we might have quelled this treason at the first.”

And Dankwart said, “By this time the fields of the South-land are green with young corn, and the meadows are full of sweet-smelling flowers, and the summer comes on apace. Why should we stay longer in this chilly and fog-ridden land, waiting upon the whims of a fickle maiden,—as fickle as the winds themselves? Better face the smiles and the jeers of the folk at home than suffer shameful shipwreck in this cold Isenland.” But Siegfried would not be moved by the weak and wavering words of his once valiant comrades.

“Trust me,” he said, “and all will yet be well. Wait here but a few days longer in quietness, while I go aboard ship, and fare away. Within three days I will bring to Isenstein a host of warriors such as you have never seen. And then the fickle fancies of Brunhild will flee, and she will no longer refuse to sail with us to the now sunny South-land.” Hagen frowned still more deeply; and as he strode away he muttered, “He only wants to betray us, and leave us to die in this trap which he himself has doubtless set for us.” But Gunther anxiously grasped the hand of Siegfried, and said, “Go! I trust you, and believe in you.





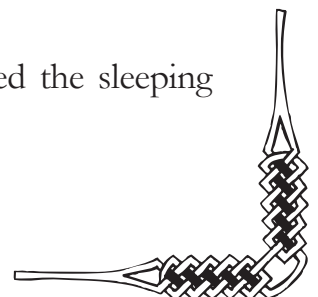
But be sure not to linger, for no one knows what a day may bring forth in this uncertain and variable clime.” Without saying a word in reply, Siegfried turned, and hastened down to the shore. Without any loss of time he unmoored the little ship, and stepped aboard. Then he donned his Tarnkappe, spread the sails, and seized the helm; and the vessel, like a bird with woven wings, sped swiftly out of the bay, and Isenstein, with its wide halls and glass-green towers, was soon lost to the sight of the invisible helmsman. For four and twenty hours did Siegfried guide the flying vessel as it leaped from wave to wave, and sent the white foam dashing to left and right like flakes of snow. And late on the morrow he came to a rock-bound coast, where steep cliffs and white mountain-peaks rose up, as it were, straight out of the blue sea. Having found a safe and narrow inlet, he moored his little bark; and, keeping the Tarnkappe well wrapped around him, he stepped ashore. Briskly he walked along the rough shore, and through a dark mountain-pass, until he came to a place well known to him,—a place where, years before, he had seen a cavern’s yawning mouth, and a great heap of shining treasures, and two princes dying of hunger. But now, upon the selfsame spot there stood a frowning fortress, dark and gloomy and strong, which Siegfried himself had built in after-years; and the iron gates were barred and bolted fast, and no living being was anywhere to be seen.

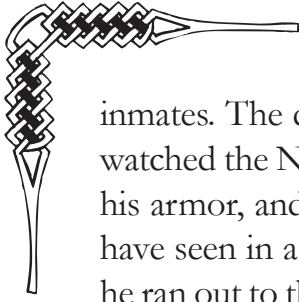
Loud and long did Siegfried, wrapped in his cloak of darkness, knock and call outside. At last a grim old giant, who sat within, and kept watch and ward of the gate, cried out,—

“Who knocks there?”

Siegfried, angrily and in threatening tones, answered,— “Open the gate at once, lazy lag-gard, and ask no questions. A stranger, who has lost his way among the mountains, seeks shelter from the storm which is coming. Open the gate without delay, or I will break it down upon your dull head.” Then the giant in hot anger seized a heavy iron beam, and flung the gate wide open, and leaped quickly out to throttle the insolent stranger. Warily he glanced around on every side; but Siegfried was clad in the magic Tarnkappe, and the giant could see no one. Amazed and ashamed, he turned to shut the gate, and to go again to his place; for he began to believe that a foolish dream had awakened and deceived him. Then the unseen Siegfried seized him from behind; and though he struggled hard, and fought with furious strength, our hero threw him upon the ground, and bound him with cords of sevenfold strength.

The unwonted noise at the gate rang through the castle, and awakened the sleeping





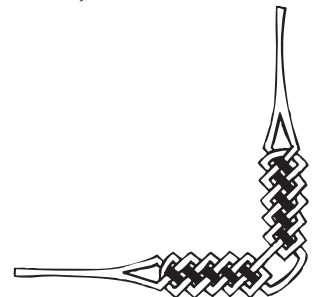
inmates. The dwarf Alberich, who kept the fortress against Siegfried's return, and who watched the Nibelungen treasure, which was stored in the hollow hill, arose, and donned his armor, and hurried to the giant's help. A right stout dwarf was Alberich; and, as we have seen in a former adventure, he was as bold as stout. Armed in a war-coat of steel, he ran out to the gate, flourishing a seven-thonged whip, on each thong of which a heavy golden ball was hung. Great was his amazement and his wrath when he saw the giant lying bound and helpless upon the ground; and with sharp, eager eyes he peered warily around to see if, perchance, he might espy his hidden foe. But, when he could find no one, his anger grew hotter than before, and he swung his golden scourge fiercely about his head. Well was it for Siegfried then, that the Tarnkappe hid him from sight; for the dwarf kept pounding about in air so sturdily and strong, that, even as it was, he split the hero's shield from the centre to the rim. Then Siegfried rushed quickly upon the doughty little fellow, and seized him by his long gray beard, and threw him so roughly upon the ground, that Alberich shrieked with pain.

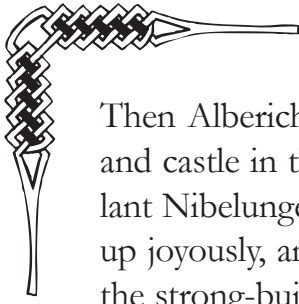
"Spare me, I pray you," he cried. "I know that you are no mean knight; and, if I had not promised to serve my master Siegfried until death, I fain would acknowledge you as my lord."

But Siegfried bound the writhing dwarf, and placed him, struggling and helpless, by the side of the giant. "Tell me, now, your name, I pray," said the dwarf; "for I must give an account of this adventure to my master when he comes."

"Who is your master?"

"His name is Siegfried; and he is king of the Nibelungens, and lord, by right, of the great Nibelungen Hoard. To me and to my fellows he long ago intrusted the keeping of this castle and of the Hoard that lies deep hidden in the hollow hill; and I have sworn to keep it safe until his return." Then Siegfried threw off his Tarnkappe, and stood in his own proper person before the wonder-stricken dwarf. "Noble Siegfried," cried the delighted Alberich, "right glad I am that you have come again to claim your own. Spare my life, and pardon me, I pray, and let me know what is your will. Your bidding shall be done at once." "Hasten, then," said Siegfried, loosing him from his bonds,— "hasten, and arouse my Nibelungen hosts. Tell them that their chief has come again to Mist Land, and that he has work for them to do."

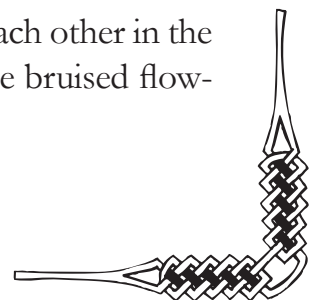


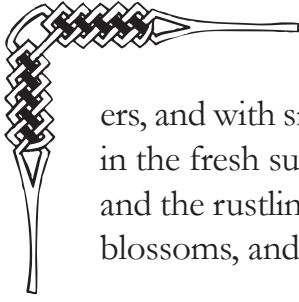


Then Alberich, when he had set the giant gatekeeper free, sent heralds to every town and castle in the land to make known the words and wishes of Siegfried. And the gallant Nibelungen warriors, when they heard that their liege lord had come again, sprang up joyously, and girded on their armor, and hastened to obey his summons. And soon the strong-built castle was full of noble men,—of earls, and the faithful liegemen who had known Siegfried of old. And joyful and happy were the words of greeting. In the mean while, Alberich had busied himself in preparing a great feast for his master and his master's chieftains. In the long low hall that the dwarfs had hollowed out within the mountain's heart, the table was spread, and on it was placed every delicacy that could be wished. There were fruits and wines from the sunny South-land, and snow-white loaves made from the wheat of Gothland, and fish from Old AEgir's kingdom, and venison from the king's wild-wood, and the flesh of many a fowl most delicately baked, and, near the head of the board, a huge wild boar roasted whole. And the hall was lighted by a thousand tapers, each held in the hands of a swarthy elf; and the guests were served by the elf-women, who ran hither and thither, obedient to every call. But Alberich, at Siegfried's desire, sat upon the dais at his lord's right hand. Merriment ruled the hour, and happy greetings were heard on every side. And, when the feast was at its height, a troop of hill-folk came dancing into the hall; and a hundred little fiddlers, perched in the niches of the wall, made merry music, and kept time for the busy, clattering little feet. And when the guests had tired of music and laughter, and the dancers had gone away, and the tables no longer groaned under the weight of good cheer Siegfried and his earls still sat at their places, and beguiled the hours with pleasant talk and with stories of the earlier days. And Alberich, as the master of the feast, told a tale of the dwarf-folk, and how once they were visited in their hill-home by Loki the Mischief-maker. Alberich's Story.

My story begins with the Asa-folk, and has as much to do with the gods as with my kinsmen the dwarfs. It happened long ago, when the world was young, and the elf-folk had not yet lost all their ancient glory.

Sif, as you all know, is Thor's young wife, and she is very fair. It is said, too, that she is as gentle and lovable as her husband is rude and strong; and that while he rides noisily through storm and wind, furiously fighting the foes of the mid-world, she goes quietly about, lifting up the down-trodden, and healing the broken-hearted. In the summer season, when the Thunderer has driven the Storm-giants back to their mist-hidden mountain homes, and the black clouds have been rolled away, and piled upon each other in the far east, Sif comes gleefully tripping through the meadows, raising up the bruised flow-



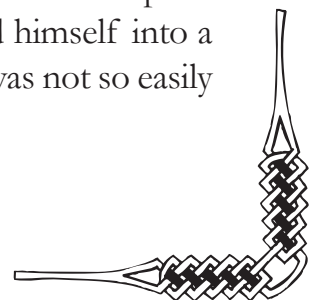


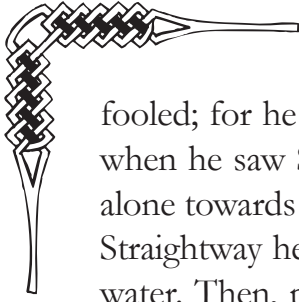
ers, and with smiles calling the frightened birds from their hiding-places to frolic and sing in the fresh sunshine again. The growing fields and the grassy mountain slopes are hers; and the rustling green leaves, and the sparkling dewdrops, and the sweet odors of spring blossoms, and the glad songs of the summer-time, follow in her footsteps.

Sif, as I have said, is very fair; and, at the time of my story, there was one thing of which she was a trifle vain. That was her long silken hair, which fell in glossy waves almost to her feet. On calm, warm days, she liked to sit by the side of some still pool, and gaze at her own beauty pictured in the water below, while, like the sea-maidens of old AEGir's kingdom, she combed and braided her rich, flowing tresses. And in all the mid-world nothing has ever been seen so like the golden sunbeams as was Sif's silken hair.

At that time the cunning Mischief-maker, Loki, was still living with the Asa-folk. And, as you well know, this evil worker was never pleased save when he was plotting trouble for those who were better than himself. He liked to meddle with business which was not his own, and was always trying to mar the pleasures of others. His tricks and jokes were seldom of the harmless kind, and yet great good sometimes grew out of them.

When Loki saw how proud Sif was of her long hair, and how much time she spent in combing and arranging it, he planned a very cruel piece of mischief. He hid himself in a little rocky cavern, near the pool where Sif was wont to sit, and slyly watched her all the morning as she braided and unbraided her flowing silken locks. At last, overcome by the heat of the mid-day sun, she fell asleep upon the grassy bank. Then the Mischief-maker quietly crept near, and with his sharp shears cut off all that wealth of hair, and shaved her head until it was as smooth as her snow-white hand. Then he hid himself again in the little cave, and chuckled with great glee at the wicked thing he had done. By and by Sif awoke, and looked into the stream; but she started quickly back with horror and affright at the image which she saw. She felt of her shorn head; and, when she learned that those rich waving tresses which had been her joy and pride were no longer there, she knew not what to do. Hot, burning tears ran down her cheeks, and with sobs and shrieks she began to call aloud for Thor. Forthwith there was a terrible uproar. The lightning flashed, and the thunder rolled, and an earthquake shook the rocks and trees. Loki, looking out from his hiding-place, saw that Thor was coming, and he trembled with fear; for he knew, that, should the Thunderer catch him, he would have to pay dearly for his wicked sport. He ran quickly out of the cavern, and leaped into the river, and changed himself into a salmon, and swam as swiftly as he could away from the shore. But Thor was not so easily





fooled; for he had long known Loki, and was acquainted with all his cunning ways. So when he saw Sif bewailing her stolen hair, and beheld the frightened salmon hurrying alone towards the deep water, he was at no loss to know whose work this mischief was. Straightway he took upon himself the form of a sea-gull, and soared high up over the water. Then, poising a moment in the air, he darted, swift as an arrow, down into the river. When he arose from the water, he held the struggling salmon tightly grasped in his strong talons.

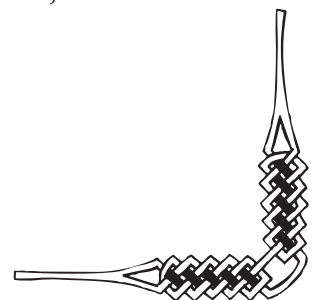
“Vile Mischief-maker!” cried Thor, as he alighted upon the top of a neighboring crag: “I know thee who thou art; and I will make thee bitterly rue the work of this day. Limb from limb will I tear thee, and thy bones will I grind into powder.”

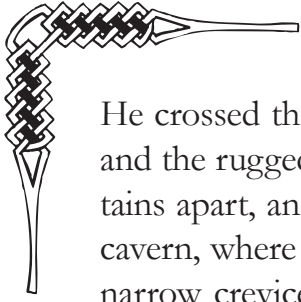
Loki, when he saw that he could not by any means get away from the angry Thunderer, changed himself back to his own form, and humbly said to Thor,—

“What if you do your worst with me? Will that give back a single hair to Sif’s shorn head? What I did was only a thoughtless joke, and I really meant no harm. Do but spare my life, and I will more than make good the mischief I have done.”

“How can that be?” asked Thor. “I will hie me straight to the secret smithies of dwarfs,” answered Loki; “and those cunning little kinsmen of mine shall make golden tresses for fair Sif, which will grow upon her head like other hair, and cause her to be an hundred-fold more beautiful than before.” Thor knew that Loki was a slippery fellow, and that he did not always do what he promised, and hence he would not let him go. He called to Frey, who had just come up, and said,— “Come, cousin Frey, help me to rid the world of this sly thief. While I hold fast to his raven hair, and his long slim arms, do you seize him by the heels, and we will give his limbs to the fishes, and his body to the birds, for food.”

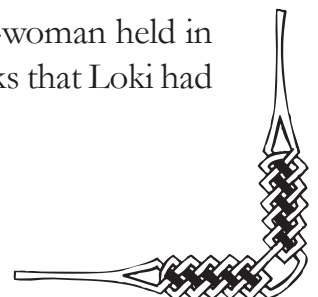
Loki, now thoroughly frightened, wept, and kissed Frey’s feet, and humbly begged for mercy. And he promised that he would bring from the dwarf’s smithy, not only the golden hair for Sif, but also a mighty hammer for Thor, and a swift steed for Frey. So earnest were his words, and so pitiful was his plea, that Thor at last set the trembling Mischief-maker free, and bade him hasten away on his errand. Quickly, then, he went in search of the smithy of the dwarfs.

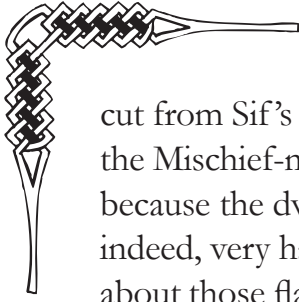




He crossed the desert moorlands, and came, after three days, to the bleak hill-country, and the rugged mountain-land of the South. There the earthquake had split the mountains apart, and dug dark and bottomless gorges, and hollowed out many a low-walled cavern, where the light of day was never seen. Through deep, winding ways, and along narrow crevices, Loki crept; and he glided under huge rocks, and downward through slanting, crooked clefts, until at last he came to a great underground hall, where his eyes were dazzled by a light which was stronger and brighter than day; for on every side were glowing fires, roaring in wonderful little forges, and blown by wonderful little bellows. And the vaulted roof above was thickly set with diamonds and precious stones, that sparkled and shone like thousands of bright stars in the blue sky. And the little dwarfs, with comical brown faces, and wearing strange leathern aprons, and carrying heavy hammers, were hurrying here and there, each busy at his task. Some were smelting pure gold from the coarse rough rocks; others were making precious gems, and rich rare jewels, such as the proudest king would be glad to wear. Here, one was shaping pure, round pearls from dewdrops and maidens' tears; there, another wrought green emeralds from the first leaves of spring. So busy were they all, that they neither stopped nor looked up when Loki came into their hall, but all kept hammering and blowing and working, as if their lives depended upon their being always busy. After Loki had curiously watched their movements for some time, he spoke to the dwarf whose forge was nearest to him, and made known his errand. But the little fellow was fashioning a flashing diamond, which he called the Mountain of Light; and he scarcely looked up as he answered,— "I do not work in gold. Go to Ivald's sons: they will make whatever you wish."

To Ivald's sons, then, in the farthest and brightest corner of the hall, Loki went. They very readily agreed to make the golden hair for Sif, and they began the work at once. A lump of purest gold was brought, and thrown into the glowing furnace; and it was melted and drawn, and melted and drawn, seven times. Then it was given to a little brown elf with merry, twinkling eyes, who carried it with all speed to another part of the great hall, where the dwarfs' pretty wives were spinning. One of the little women took the yellow lump from the elf's hands, and laid it, like flax, upon her spinning-wheel. Then she sat down and began to spin; and, as she span, the dwarf-wives sang a strange, sweet song of the old, old days when the dwarf-folk ruled the world. And the tiny brown elves danced gleefully around the spinner, and the thousand little anvils rang out a merry chorus to the music of the singers. And the yellow gold was twisted into threads, and the threads ran into hair softer than silk, and finer than gossamer. And at last the dwarf-woman held in her hand long golden tresses ten times more beautiful than the amber locks that Loki had

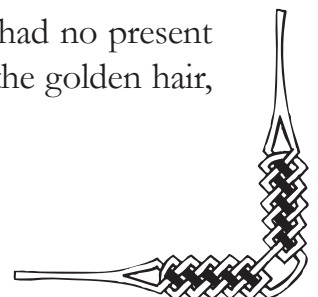


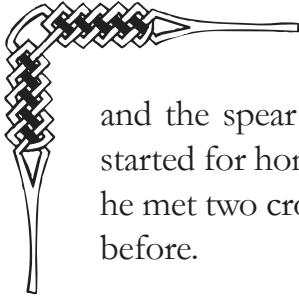


cut from Sif's fair head. When Ivald's sons, proud of their skill, gave the rare treasure to the Mischief-maker, Loki smiled as if he were well pleased; but in his heart he was angry because the dwarfs had made so fair a piece of workmanship. Then he said,— "This is, indeed, very handsome, and will be very becoming to Sif. Oh, what an uproar was made about those flaxen tresses that she loved so well! And that reminds me that her husband, the gruff old Giant-killer, wants a hammer. I promised to get him one; and, if I fail, he will doubtless be rude with me. I pray you make such a hammer as will be of most use to him in fighting the Jotuns, and you may win favor both for yourselves and me." "Not now," said the elder of Ivald's sons. "We cannot make it now; for who would dare to send a present to Thor before he has offered one to Odin, the great All-Father?" "Make me, then, a gift for Odin," cried Loki; "and he will shelter me from the Thunderer's wrath." So the dwarfs put iron into their furnace, and heated it to a glowing white-heat; and then they drew it out, and rolled it upon their anvils, and pounded it with heavy hammers, until they had wrought a wondrous spear, such as no man had ever seen. Then they inlaid it with priceless jewels, and plated the point with gold seven times tried. "This is the spear Gungner," said they. "Take it to the great All-Father as the best gift of his humble earth-workers."

"Make me now a present for Frey the gentle," said Loki. "I owe my life to him; and I have promised to take him a swift steed that will bear him everywhere." Then Ivald's sons threw gold into the furnace, and blew with their bellows until the very roof of the great cave-hall seemed to tremble, and the smoke rolled up the wide chimney, and escaped in dense fumes from the mountain-top. When they left off working, and the fire died away, a fairy ship, with masts and sails, and two banks of long oars, and a golden dragon stem, rose out of the glowing coals; and it grew in size until it filled a great part of the hall, and might have furnished room for a thousand warriors with their arms and steeds. Then, at a word from the dwarfs, it began to shrink, and it became smaller and smaller until it was no broader than an oak-leaf. And the younger of Ivald's sons folded it up like a napkin, and gave it to Loki, saying,— "Take this to Frey the gentle. It is the ship Skidbladner. When it is wanted for a voyage, it will carry all the Asa-folk and their weapons and stores; and, no matter where they wish to go, the wind will always drive it straight to the desired port. But, when it is not needed, the good Frey may fold it up, as I have done, and carry it safely in his pocket."

Loki was much pleased; and, although he felt disappointed because he had no present for Thor, he heartily thanked the dwarfs for their kindness; and taking the golden hair,





and the spear Gungner, and the ship Skidbladner, he bade Ivald's sons good-by, and started for home. But, before he reached the narrow doorway which led out of the cave, he met two crooked-backed dwarfs, much smaller and much uglier than any he had seen before.

"What have you there?" asked one of them, whose name was Brok.

"Hair for Sif, a spear for Odin, and a ship for Frey," answered Loki.

"Let us see them," said Brok. Loki kindly showed them the strange gifts, and told them, that, in his belief, no dwarfs in all the world had ever before wrought such wonderful things.

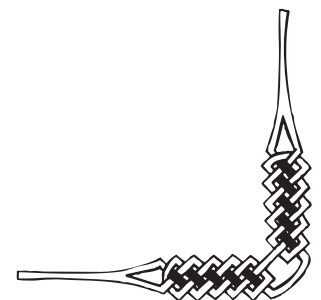
"Who made them?" inquired Brok. "Ivald's sons."

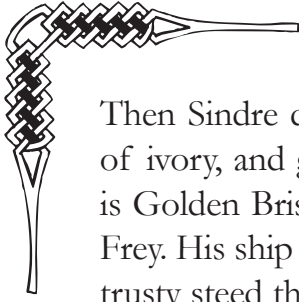
"Ah! Ivald's sons sometimes do good work, but there are many other dwarfs who can do better. For instance, my brother Sindre, who stands here, can make three other treasures altogether as good as those you have." "It cannot be!" cried Loki.

"I tell you the truth," said the dwarf. "And, to show you that I mean just what I say, I will wager against your head all the diamonds in the ceiling above us, that he will make not only as good treasures, but those which the Asas will esteem much higher."

"Agreed!" cried Loki,— "agreed! I take the wager. Let your brother try his skill at once."

The three went straightway to Sindre's forge, and the brothers began their task. When the fire was roaring hot, and the sparks flew from the chimney like showers of shooting-stars, Sindre put a pig-skin into the furnace, and bade Brok blow the bellows with all his might, and never stop until he should speak the word. The flames leaped up white and hot, and the furnace glowed with a dazzling light, while Brok plied the bellows, and Sindre, with unblinking eyes, watched the slowly changing colors that played around the melted and shapeless mass within. While the brothers were thus intent upon their work, Loki changed himself to a great horse-fly, and settled upon Brok's hand, and bit him without mercy. But the dwarf kept on blowing the bellows, and stopped not until his brother cried out,— "Enough!"





Then Sindre drew out of the flickering blue flames a huge wild boar with long tusks of ivory, and golden bristles that glittered and shone like the beams of the sun. "This is Golden Bristle," said the dwarf. "It is the gift of Brok and his brother to the gentle Frey. His ship Skidbladner can carry him only over the sea; but Golden Bristle shall be a trusty steed that will bear him with the speed of the wind over the land or through the air." Next the dwarfs threw gold into the furnace, and Brok plied the bellows, and Sindre gazed into the flames, as before. And the great horse-fly buzzed in Brok's face, and darted at his eyes, and at last settled upon his neck, and stung him until the pain caused big drops of sweat to roll off of his forehead. But the dwarf stopped not nor faltered, until his brother again cried out,—

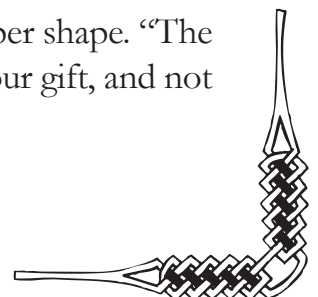
"Enough!"

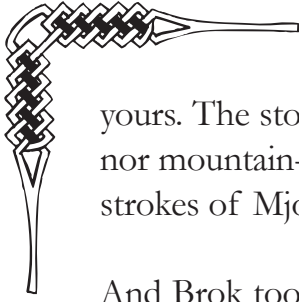
This time Sindre drew out a wondrous ring of solid gold, sparkling all over with the rarest and most costly jewels. "This is the ring Draupner," said he. "It is well worthy to be worn on Odin's finger. Every ninth day eight other rings, equal to it in every way, shall drop from it. It shall enrich the earth, and make the desert blossom as the rose; and it shall bring plentiful harvests, and fill the farmers' barns with grain, and their houses with glad good cheer. Take it to the All-Father as the best gift of the earth-folk to him and to mankind."

After this the dwarfs took iron which had been brought from the mountains of Norse Land; and, after beating it upon their bellows until it glowed white and hot, Sindre threw it into the furnace.

"This shall be the gift of gifts," said he to Brok. "Ply the bellows as before, and do not, for your life, stop or falter until the work is done."

But as Brok blew the bellows, and his brother gazed into the glowing fire, the horse-fly came again. This time he settled between the dwarf's eyes, and stung his eyelids until the blood filled his eyes, and ran down his cheeks, and blinded him so that he could not see. At last, in sore distress, and wild with pain, Brok let go of the bellows, and lifted his hand to drive the fly away. Then Sindre drew his work out of the furnace. It was a blue steel hammer, well made in every way, save that the handle was half an inch too short. "This is the mighty Mjolner," said Sindre to Loki, who had again taken his proper shape. "The Thunderer may have the hammer that you promised him; although it is our gift, and not





yours. The stoutest giant will not be able now to cope with Thor. No shield nor armor, nor mountain-wall, nor, indeed, any thing on earth, shall be proof against the lightning-strokes of Mjolner.”

And Brok took the three treasures which Sindre had fashioned, and went with Loki to Asgard, the home of the Asa-folk. And they chose Odin and Thor and Frey to examine and judge which was best,—Loki’s three gifts, the work of Ivald’s sons; or Brok’s three gifts, the work of Sindre. When the judges were seated, and all were in readiness, Loki went forward and gave to Odin the spear Gungner, that would always hit the mark; and to Frey he gave the ship Skidbladner, that would sail whithersoever he wished. Then he gave the golden hair to Thor, who placed it upon the head of fair Sif; and it grew there, and was a thousand-fold more beautiful than the silken tresses she had worn before. After the Asas had carefully looked at these treasures, and talked of their merits, little Brok came humbly forward and offered his gifts. To Odin he gave the precious ring Draupner, already dropping richness. To Frey he gave the boar Golden Bristle, telling him that wherever he chose to go this steed would serve him well, and would carry him faster than any horse, while his shining bristles would light the way on the darkest night or in the gloomiest path. At last he gave to Thor the hammer Mjolner, and said that it, like Odin’s spear, would never miss the mark, and that whatever it struck, it would crush in pieces, and whithersoever it might be hurled, it would come back to his hand again.

Then the Asas declared at once that Thor’s hammer was the best of all the gifts, and that the dwarf had fairly won the wager. But, when Brok demanded Loki’s head as the price of the wager, the cunning Mischief-maker said,— “My head is, by the terms of our agreement, yours; but my neck is my own, and you shall not on any account touch or harm it.”

So Brok went back to his brother and his smithy without the head of Loki, but he was loaded with rich and rare presents from the Asa-folk.

