



# The Story of Siegfried

## Adventure 18: How the Mischief Began to Brew

by James Baldwin

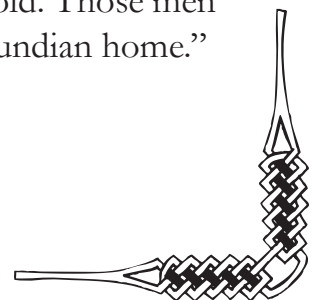
One day a party of strangers came to Siegfried's Nibelungen dwelling, and asked to speak with the king. "Who are you? and what is your errand?" asked the porter at the gate.

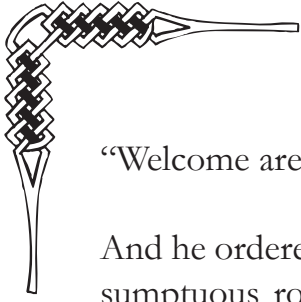
"Our errand is to the king, and he will know who we are when he sees us," was the answer.

When Siegfried was told of the strange men who waited below, and of the strange way in which they had answered the porter's question, he asked,— "From what country seem they to have come? For surely their dress and manners will betray something of that matter to you. Are they South-land folk, or East-land folk? Are they from the mountains, or from the sea?" "They belong to none of the neighbor-lands," answered the earl who had brought the word to the king. "No such men live upon our borders. They seem to have come from a far-off land; for they are travel-worn, and their sea-stained clothing betokens a people from the south. They are tall and dark, and their hair is black, and they look much like those Rhineland warriors who came hither with our lady the queen. And they carry a blood-red banner with a golden dragon painted upon it."

"Oh, they must be from Burgundy!" cried the queen, who had overheard these words. And she went at once to the window to see the strangers, who were waiting in the courtyard below. There, indeed, she saw thirty tall Burgundians, clad in the gay costume of Rhineland, now faded and worn with long travel. But all save one were young, and strangers to Kriemhild. That one was their leader,—an old man with a kind face, and a right noble bearing.

"See!" said the queen to Siegfried: "there is our brave captain Gere, who, ever since my childhood, has been the trustiest man in my brother Gunther's household. Those men are from the fatherland, and they bring tidings from the dear old Burgundian home."





“Welcome are they to our Nibelungen Land!” cried the delighted king.

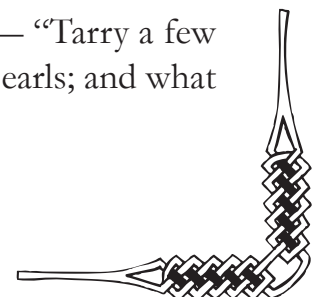
And he ordered that the strangers should be brought into the castle, and that the most sumptuous rooms should be allotted to them, and a plenteous meal prepared, and every thing done to entertain them in a style befitting messengers from Kriemhild’s fatherland. Then Gere, the trusty captain, was led into the presence of the king and queen. Right gladly did they welcome him, and many were the questions they asked about their kin-folk, and the old Rhineland home. “Tell us, good Gere,” said Siegfried, “what is thy message from our friends; for we are anxious to know whether they are well and happy, or whether some ill luck has overtaken them. If any harm threatens them, they have but to speak, and I, with my sword and my treasures, will hasten to their help.”

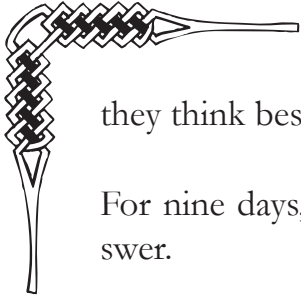
“They are all well,” answered the captain. “No ill has befallen them, and no harm threatens them. Peace rules all the land; and fair weather and sunshine have filled the people’s barns, and made their hearts glad. And thus it has been ever since Gunther brought to his dwelling the warrior-maiden Brunhild to be his queen. And this is my errand and the message that I bring: King Gunther, blessed with happiness, intends to hold a grand high-tide of joy and thanksgiving at the time of the harvest-moon. And nothing is wanting to complete the gladness of that time, but the sight of you and the peerless Kriemhild in your old places at the feast. And it is to invite you to this festival of rejoicing that I have come, at the king’s command, to Nibelungen Land.”

Siegfried sat a moment in silence, and then thoughtfully answered,—

“It is a long, long journey from this land to Burgundy, and many dangers beset the road; and my own people would sadly miss me while away, and I know not what mis-haps might befall.”

Then Gere spoke of the queen-mother Ute, now grown old and feeble, who wished once more, ere death called her hence, to see her daughter Kriemhild. And he told how all the people, both high and low, yearned for another sight of the radiant hero who in former days had blessed their land with his presence and his noble deeds. And his persuasive words had much weight with Siegfried, who said at length,— “Tarry a few days yet for my answer. I will talk with my friends and the Nibelungen earls; and what





they think best, that will I do.”

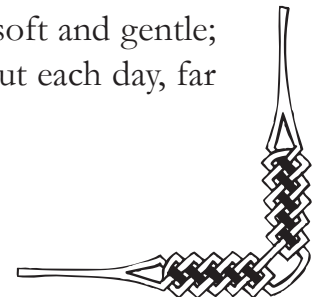
For nine days, then, waited Gere at Siegfried’s hall; but still the king put off his answer.

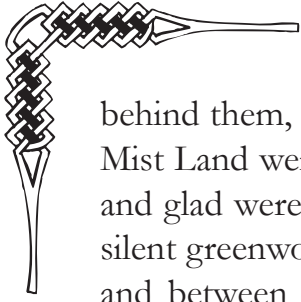
“Wait until to-morrow,” he said each day, for his heart whispered dim forebodings.

At length, as midsummer was fast drawing near, the impatient captain could stay no longer; and he bade his followers make ready to go back forthwith to Burgundy. When the queen saw that they were ready to take their leave, and that Gere could wait no longer upon the king’s pleasure, she urged her husband to say to Gunther that they would come to his harvest festival. And the lords and noble earl-folk added their persuasions to hers.

“Send word back to the Burgundian king,” said they, “that you will go, as he desires. We will see to it that no harm comes to your kingdom while you are away.” So Siegfried called Gere and his comrades into the hall, and loaded them with costly gifts such as they had never before seen, and bade them say to their master that he gladly accepted the kind invitation he had sent, and that, ere the harvest high-tide began, he and Kriemhild would be with him in Burgundy.

And the messengers went back with all speed, and told what wondrous things they had seen in Nibelungen Land, and in what great splendor Siegfried lived. And, when they showed the rare presents which had been given them, all joined in praising the goodness and greatness of the hero-king. But old chief Hagen frowned darkly as he said,—“It is little wonder that he can do such things, for the Shining Hoard of Andvari is his. If we had such a treasure, we, too, might live in more than kingly grandeur.” Early in the month of roses, Siegfried and his peerless queen, with a retinue of more than a thousand warriors and many fair ladies, started on their long and toilsome journey to the South-land. And the folk who went with them to the city gates bade them many tearful farewells, and returned to their homes, feeling that the sunshine had gone forever from the Nibelungen Land. But the sky was blue and cloudless, and the breezes warm and mild, and glad was the song of the reapers as adown the seaward highway the kingly company rode. Two days they rode through Mist Land, to the shore of the peaceful sea. Ten days they sailed on the waters. And the winds were soft and gentle; and the waves slept in the sunlight, or merrily danced in their wake. But each day, far

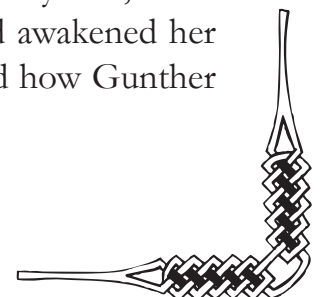


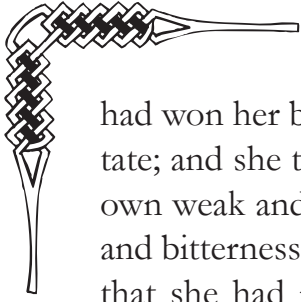


behind them, there followed a storm-cloud, dark as night, and the pleasant shores of Mist Land were hidden forever behind it. Five days they rode through the Lowlands, and glad were the Lowland folk with sight of their hero-king. Two days through the silent greenwood, and one o'er the barren moor, and three amid vineyards and fields, and between orchards fruitful and fair, they rode. And on the four and twentieth day they came in sight of the quiet town, and the tall gray towers, where dwelt the Burgundian kings. And a great company on horseback, with flashing shields and fine-wrought garments and nodding plumes, came out to meet them. It was King Gernot and a thousand of the best men and fairest women in Burgundy; and they welcomed Siegfried and Kriemhild and their Nibelungen-folk to the fair land of the Rhine. And then they turned, and rode back with them to the castle. And, as the company passed through the pleasant streets of the town, the people stood by the wayside, anxious to catch sight of the radiant Siegfried on his sunbright steed, and of the peerless Kriemhild, riding on a palfrey by his side. And young girls strewed roses in their pathway, and hung garlands upon their horses; and every one shouted, "Hail to the conquering hero! Hail to the matchless queen!"

When they reached the castle, King Gunther and Giselher met them, and ushered them into the old familiar halls, where a right hearty welcome greeted them from all the kingly household. And none seemed more glad in this happy hour than Brunhild the warrior-queen, now more gloriously beautiful than even in the days of yore.

When the harvest-moon began to shine full and bright, lighting up the whole world from evening till morn with its soft radiance, the gay festival so long looked forward to began. And care and anxiety, and the fatigues of the long journey, were forgotten amid the endless round of pleasure which for twelve days enlivened the whole of Burgundy. And the chiefest honors were everywhere paid to Siegfried the hero-king, and to Kriemhild the peerless queen of beauty. Then Queen Brunhild called to mind, how, on a time, it had been told her in Isenland that Siegfried was but the liegeman and vassal of King Gunther; and she wondered why such honor should be paid to an underling, and why the king himself should treat him with so much respect. And as she thought of this, and of the high praises with which every one spoke of Kriemhild, her mind became filled with jealous broodings. And soon her bitter jealousy was turned to deadly hate; for she remembered then, how, in the days long past, a noble youth, more beautiful and more glorious than the world would ever see again, had awakened her from the deep sleep that Odin's thorn had given; and she remembered how Gunther





had won her by deeds of strength and skill which he never afterwards could even imitate; and she thought how grand indeed was Kriemhild's husband compared with her own weak and wavering and commonplace lord. And her soul was filled with sorrow and bitterness and deepest misery, when, putting these thoughts together, she believed that she had in some way been duped and cheated into becoming Gunther's wife. When at last the gay feast was ended, and most of the guests had gone to their homes, she sought her husband, and thus broached the matter to him.

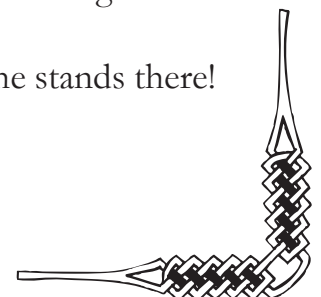
"Often have I asked you," said she, "why your sister Kriemhild was given in marriage to a vassal, and as often have you put me off with vague excuses. Often, too, have I wondered why your vassal, Siegfried, has never paid you tribute for the lands which he holds from you, and why he has never come to render you homage. Now he is here in your castle; but he sets himself up, not as your vassal, but as your peer. I pray you, tell me what such strange things mean. Was an underling and a vassal ever known before to put himself upon a level with his liege lord?" Gunther was greatly troubled, and he knew not what to say; for he feared to tell the queen how they had deceived her when he had won the games at Isenstein, and how the truth had ever since been kept hidden from her. "Ask me not to explain this matter further than I have already done," he answered. "It is enough that Siegfried is the greatest of all my vassals, and that his lands are broader even than my own. He has helped me out of many straits, and has added much to the greatness and strength of my kingdom: for this reason he has never been asked to pay us tribute, and for this reason we grant him highest honors."

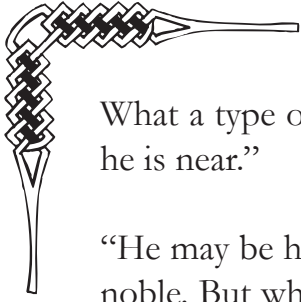
But this answer failed to satisfy the queen. "Is it not the first duty of a vassal," she asked, "to help his liege lord in every undertaking? If so, Siegfried has but done his duty, and you owe him nothing. But you have not told me all. You have deceived me, and you would fain deceive me again. You have a secret, and I will find it out."

The king made no answer, but walked silently and thoughtfully away.

It happened one evening, not long thereafter, that the two queens sat together at an upper window, and looked down upon a company of men in the courtyard below. Among them were the noblest earl-folk of Burgundy, and Gunther the king, and Siegfried. But Siegfried towered above all the rest; and he moved like a god among men.

"See my noble Siegfried!" cried Kriemhild in her pride. "How grandly he stands there!





What a type of manly beauty and strength! No one cares to look at other men when he is near.”

“He may be handsome,” answered Brunhild sadly; “and, for aught I know, he may be noble. But what is all that by the side of kingly power? Were he but the peer of your brother Gunther, then you might well boast.” “He is the peer of Gunther,” returned Kriemhild. “And not only his peer, but more; for he stands as high above him in kingly power and worth as in bodily stature.” “How can that be?” asked Brunhild, growing angry. “For, when Gunther so gallantly won me at Isenstein, he told me that Siegfried was his vassal; and often since that time I have heard the same. And even your husband told me that Gunther was his liege lord.”

Queen Kriemhild laughed at these words, and answered, “I tell you again that Siegfried is a king far nobler and richer and higher than any other king on earth. Think you that my brothers would have given me to a mere vassal to be his wife?”

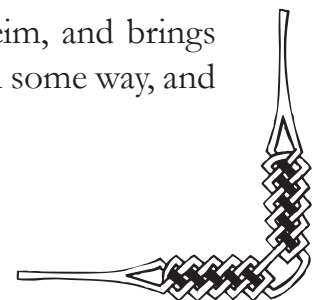
Then Brunhild, full of wrath, replied, “Your husband is Gunther’s vassal and my own, and he shall do homage to us as the humblest and meanest of our underlings. He shall not go from this place until he has paid all the tribute that has so long been due from him. Then we shall see who is the vassal, and who is the lord.”

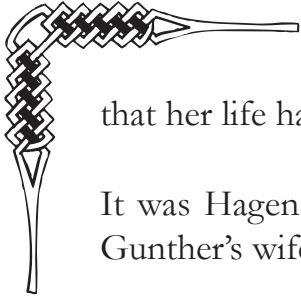
“Nay,” answered Kriemhild. “It shall not be. No tribute was ever due; and, if homage is to be paid, it is rather Gunther who must pay it.”

“It shall be settled once for all!” cried Brunhild, now boiling over with rage. “I will know the truth. If Siegfried is not our vassal, then I have been duped; and I will have revenge.”

“It is well,” was the mild answer. “Let it be settled, once for all; and then, mayhap, we shall know who it was who really won the games at Isenstein, and you for Gunther’s wife.”

And the two queens parted in wrath. Kriemhild’s anger was as fleeting as an April cloud, which does but threaten, and then passes away in tears and sunshine. But Brunhild’s was like the dread winter storm that sweeps down from Niflheim, and brings ruin and death in its wake. She felt that she had been cruelly wronged in some way, and





that her life had been wrecked, and she rested not until she had learned the truth.

It was Hagen who at last told her the story of the cruel deceit that had made her Gunther's wife; and then her wrath and her shame knew no bounds.

"Woe betide the day!" she cried,— "woe betide the day that brought me to Rhineland, and made me the wife of a weakling and coward, and the jest of him who might have done nobler things!"

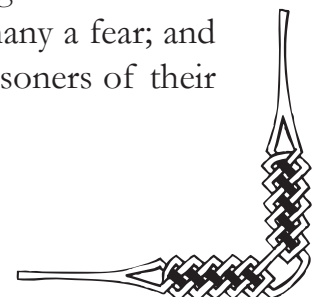
Hagen smiled. He had long waited for this day. "It was Siegfried, and Siegfried alone, who plotted to deceive you," he said. "Had it not been for him, you might still have been the happy maiden-queen of Isenland. And now he laughs at you, and urges his queen, Kriemhild, to scorn you as she would an underling."

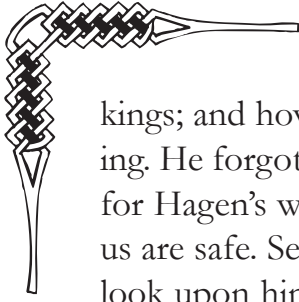
"I know it, I know it," returned the queen in distress. "And yet how grandly noble is the man! How he rushed through the flames to awaken me, when no one else could save! How brave, how handsome,—and yet he has been my bane. I can have no peace while he lives."

Hagen smiled again, and a strange light gleamed from his dark eye. Then he said, "Truly handsome and brave is he, but a viler traitor was never born. He even now plots to seize this kingdom, and to add it to his domain. Why else should he bring so great a retinue of Nibelungen warriors to Burgundy? I will see King Gunther at once, and we will put an end to his wicked projects."

"Do even so, good Hagen," said Brunhild. "Take him from my path, and bring low the haughty pride of his wife, and I shall be content."

"That I will do!" cried Hagen. "That I will do! Gunther is and shall be the king without a peer; and no one shall dare dispute the worth and the queenly beauty of his wife." Then the wily chief sought Gunther, and with cunning words poisoned his weak mind. The feeble old king was easily made to believe that Siegfried was plotting against his life, and seeking to wrest the kingdom from him. And he forgot the many kind favors he had received at the hero's hand. He no longer remembered how Siegfried had slain the terror of the Glittering Heath, and freed the Burgundians from many a fear; and how he had routed the warlike hosts of the North-land, and made prisoners of their





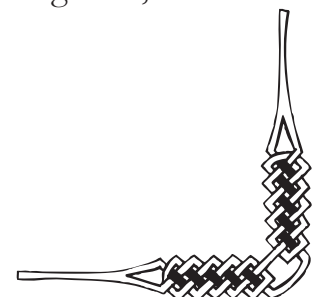
kings; and how he had brought his voyage to Isenland to a happy and successful ending. He forgot, also, that Siegfried was his sister's husband. He had ears and mind only for Hagen's wily words. "While this man lives," said the dark-browed chief, "none of us are safe. See how the people follow him! Hear how they shout at his coming! They look upon him as a god, and upon Gunther as a nobody. If we are wise, we shall rid ourselves of so dangerous a man."

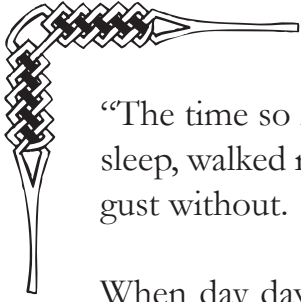
"It is but a week until he takes his leave of us, and goes back to his own home in Nibelungen Land. Watch him carefully until that time, but do him no harm. When he is once gone, he shall never come back again," said the king. But he spoke thus, not because of any kind feelings towards Siegfried, but rather because he feared the Nibelungen hero. "He has no thought of going at that time," answered Hagen. "He speaks of it, only to hide his wicked and traitorous plots. Instead of going home, his plans will then be ready for action, and it will be too late for us to save ourselves. Still, if you will not believe me, take your own course. You have been warned."

The cunning chief arose to leave the room; but Gunther, now thoroughly frightened, stopped him.

"Hagen," he said, "you have always been my friend, and the words which you say are wise. Save us and our kingdom now, in whatsoever way you may deem best. I know not what to do." Then the weak king and the warrior-chief talked long together in low, hoarse whispers. And, when they parted, shame and guilt were stamped in plain lines on Gunther's face, from which they were nevermore erased; and he dared not lift his gaze from the floor, fearing that his eyes would betray him, if seen by any more pure-hearted than he. But a smile of triumph played under the lurking gleams of Hagen's eye; and he walked erect and bold, as if he had done a praiseworthy deed.

That night a storm came sweeping down from the North, and the cold rain fell in torrents; and great hailstones pattered on the roofs and towers of the castle, and cruelly pelted the cattle in the fields, and the birds in the friendly shelter of the trees. And old Thor fought bravely with the Storm-giants; and all night long the rattle of his chariot-wheels, and the heavy strokes of his dread hammer, were heard resounding through the heavens. In his lonely chamber Hagen sat and rubbed his hands together, and grimly smiled.





“The time so long waited for has come at last,” he said. But the guilty king, unable to sleep, walked restlessly to and fro, and trembled with fear at every sound of the storm-gust without.

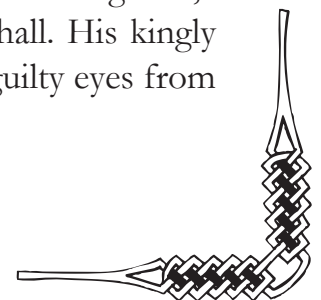
When day dawned at last, a sad scene met the eyes of all beholders. The earth was covered with the broken branches of leafy trees; the flowers and shrubs were beaten pitilessly to the ground; and here and there lay the dead bodies of little feathered songsters, who, the day before, had made the woods glad with their music.

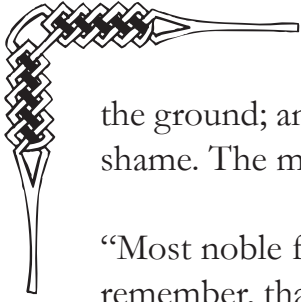
The sun had scarcely risen above this sorrowful scene, gilding the gray towers and turrets and the drooping trees with the promise of better things, than a strange confusion was noticed outside of the castle-gates. Thirty and two horsemen wearing the livery of the North-lands stood there, and asked to be led to the Burgundian kings. “Who are you? and what is your errand?” asked the gate-keeper.

“We come as heralds and messengers from Leudiger and Leudigast, the mighty kings of the North,” they answered. “But our errand we can tell to no man save to Gunther your king, or to his brothers Gernot and Giselher.” Then they were led by the king’s command into the council-hall, where sat Gunther, Gernot, and the noble Giselher; and behind them stood their uncle and chief, brave old Hagen.

“What message bring you from our old friends Leudiger and Leudigast?” asked Gunther of the strangers. “Call them not your friends,” answered the chief of the company. “We bring you this message from our liege lords, whom you may well count as enemies. Many years ago they were sorely beaten in battle, and suffered much hurt at your hands. And they vowed then to avenge the injury, and to wipe out the disgrace you had caused them, just so soon as they were strong enough to do so. Now they are ready, with fifty thousand men, to march into your country. And they swear to lay waste your lands, and to burn your towns and villages and all your castles, unless you at once acknowledge yourselves their vassals, and agree to pay them tribute. This is the kings’ message. And we were further ordered not to wait for an answer, but to carry back to them without delay your reply, whether you will agree to their terms or no.”

King Gunther, as was his wont, turned to Hagen for advice. “Send for Siegfried,” whispered the chief. It was done. And soon the hero came into the hall. His kingly grace and warlike bearing were such that Gunther dared not raise his guilty eyes from





the ground; and Hagen's furtive glances were, for the moment, freighted with fear and shame. The message of the heralds was repeated to Siegfried; and Gunther said,—

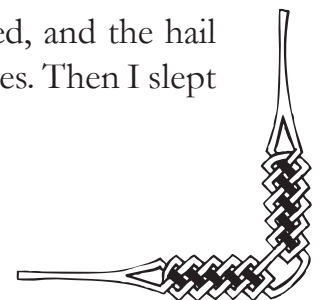
“Most noble friend, you hear what word these traitorous kings dare send us. Now, we remember, that, long years ago, you led us against them, and gave us a glorious victory. We remember, too, how, by your counsel, their lives were spared, and they were sent home with costly gifts. It is thus they repay our kindness. What answer shall we send them?”

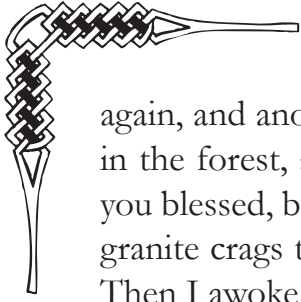
“Say that we will fight,” answered Siegfried at once. “I will lead my brave Nibelungens against them, and they shall learn how serious a thing it is to break an oath, or to return treason for kindness.”

The news soon spread through all the town and through the country-side, that Leudiger and Leudigast, with fifty thousand men, were marching into Burgundy, and destroying every thing in their way. And great flight and confusion prevailed. Men and women hurried hither and thither in dismay. Soldiers busily sharpened their weapons, and burnished their armor, ready for the fray. Little children were seen cowering at every sound, and anxious faces were found everywhere.

When Queen Kriemhild saw the busy tumult, and heard the shouts and cries in the street and the courtyard, and learned the cause of it all, she was greatly troubled, and went at once to seek Siegfried. When she found him, she drew him aside, and besought him not to take part in the war which threatened, but to hasten with all speed back to their own loved Nibelungen Land.

“And why would my noble queen wish me thus to play the part of a coward, and to leave my friends when they most need my help?” asked Siegfried in surprise. “I would not have you play the coward,” answered Kriemhild, and hot tears stood in her eyes. “But some unseen danger overhangs. There are other traitors than Leudiger and Leudigast, and men to be more feared than they. Last night I dreamed a fearful dream, and it follows me still. I dreamed that you hunted in the forest, and that two wild boars attacked you. The grass and the flowers were stained with your gore, and the cruel tusks of the beasts tore you in pieces, and no one came to your help. And I cried out in my distress, and awoke; and the storm-clouds roared and threatened, and the hail pattered on the roof, and the wind and rain beat against the windowpanes. Then I slept





again, and another dream, as fearful as the first, came to me. I dreamed that you rode in the forest, and that music sprang up in your footsteps, and all things living called you blessed, but that suddenly two mountains rose up from the ground, and their high granite crags toppled over, and fell upon you, and buried you from my sight forever. Then I awoke again, and my heart has ever since been heavy with fearful forebodings. I know that some dread evil threatens us; yet, what it is, I cannot tell. But go not out against the North-kings. Our Nibelungen-folk wait too long for your coming.”

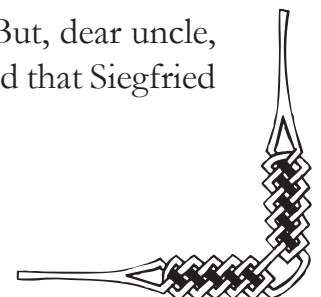
Siegfried gayly laughed at his queen’s fears, and said, “The woof of every man’s fate has been woven by the Norns, and neither he nor his foes can change it. When his hour comes, then he must go to meet his destiny.” Then he led her gently back to her room in the castle, and bade her a loving farewell, saying, “When the foes of our Burgundian hosts are put to flight, and there is no longer need for us here, then will we hasten back to Nibelungen Land. Have patience and hope for a few days only, and all will yet be well. Forget your foolish dreams, and think only of my glad return.”

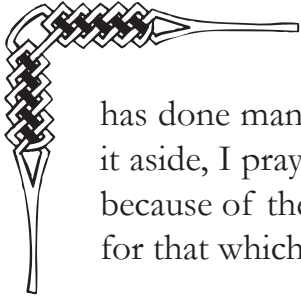
It was arranged, that, in the march against the North-kings, Siegfried with his Nibelungens should take the lead; while Hagen, with a picked company of fighting-men, should bring up the rear. Every one was eager to join in the undertaking; and no one, save King Gunther and his cunning counsellor, and Ortwin and Dankwart, knew that the pretended heralds from the North-kings were not heralds at all, but merely the false tools of wicked Hagen. For the whole was but a well-planned plot, as we shall see, to entrap unwary, trusting Siegfried.

Soon all things were in readiness for the march; but, as the day was now well spent, it was agreed, that, at early dawn of the morrow, the little army should set out. And every one went home to put his affairs in order, and to rest for the night.

Late that evening old Hagen went to bid Siegfried’s queen good-by. Kriemhild had tried hard to drown her gloomy fears, and to forget her sad, foreboding dreams; but it was all in vain, for deep anxiety still rested heavily upon her mind. Yet she welcomed her dark-browed uncle with the kindest words.

“How glad I am,” she said, “that my husband is here to help my kinsfolk in this their time of need! I know right well, that, with him to lead, you shall win. But, dear uncle, remember, when you are in the battle, that we have always loved you, and that Siegfried





has done many kindnesses to the Burgundians; and, if any danger threaten him, turn it aside, I pray you, for Kriemhild's sake. I know that I merit Queen Brunhild's anger, because of the sharp words I lately spoke to her; but let not my husband suffer blame for that which is my fault alone."

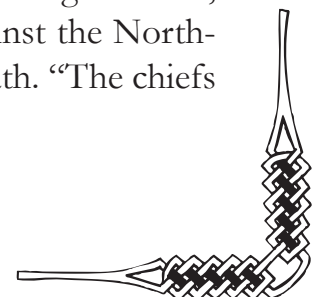
"Kriemhild," answered Hagen, "no one shall suffer blame,—neither Siegfried nor yourself. We are all forgetful, and sometimes speak hasty words; but that which we say in angry thoughtlessness should not be cherished up against us. There is no one who thinks more highly of Siegfried than I, and there is nothing I would not do to serve him."

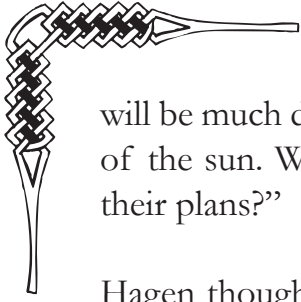
"I should not fear for him," said she, "if he were not so bold and reckless. When he is in the battle, he never thinks of his own safety. And I tremble lest at some time he may dare too much, and meet his death. If you knew every thing, as I do, you would fear for him too." "What is it?" asked Hagen, trying to hide his eagerness,— "what is it that gives you cause for fear? Tell me all about it, and then I will know the better how to shield him from danger. I will lay down my life for his sake."

Then Kriemhild, trusting in her uncle's word, and forgetful of every caution, told him the secret of the dragon's blood, and of Siegfried's strange bath, and of the mischief-working lime-leaf.

"And now," she added, "since I know that there is one spot which a deadly weapon might reach, I am in constant fear that the spear of an enemy may, perchance, strike him there. Is there not some way of shielding that spot?" "There is," answered Hagen. "Make some mark, or put some sign, upon his coat, that I may know where that spot is. And, when the battle rages, I will ride close behind him, and ward off every threatened stroke." And Kriemhild joyfully promised that she would at once embroider a silken lime-leaf on the hero's coat, just over the fatal spot. And Hagen, well pleased, bade her farewell, and went away.

Without delay the chief sought the weak-minded Gunther, and to him he related all that the trustful Kriemhild had told him. And, until the midnight hour, the two plotters sat in the king's bed-chamber, and laid their cunning plans. Both thought it best, now they had learned the fatal secret, to give up the sham march against the North-kings, and to seek by other and easier means to lure Siegfried to his death. "The chiefs





will be much displeased,” said Gunther. “For all will come, ready to march at the rising of the sun. What shall we do to please them, and make them more ready to change their plans?”

Hagen thought a moment, and then the grim smile that was wont to break the dark lines of his face when he was pleased spread over his features.

“We will have a grand hunt in the Odenwald to-morrow,” he hoarsely whispered.

