

## THE FIRST POEM OF HELGI HUNDINGSBANI

The two poems about Helgi Hundingsbani—the slayer of Hunding—and his namesake Helgi Hiorvardsson mark the beginning of the heroic poems in the Codex Regius manuscript. The relationship between the two Helgi Hundingsbani poems is unclear; it is quite likely that they represent much the same poem orally produced in different versions. All three Helgi poems centre on the meeting and battle adventures of the hero and his valkyrie lover. Valkyries were depicted as semi-divine figures, living in Valhall, serving mead to the warriors there, and hovering over battle choosing those who were going to die (hence the meaning of their name ‘Choosers of the Slain’). But some valkyries were envisaged rather as human or superhuman. They were royal princesses who chose the valkyrie way of life in preference to that of a normal woman. The valkyrie would choose a hero, bring him good luck in battle while flying overhead with her companions, and eventually would become his bride. This would bring him into usually fateful collision with the valkyrie’s kindred or with her thwarted suitors. The name ‘Helgi’ means ‘Sacred One’; the Helgi heroes are archetypal in their relation to the valkyrie bride and may even be reincarnated, as is suggested at the end of the poem of Helgi Hiorvardsson. Central to this poem—and to the other Helgi poems—is the ‘flyting’, here between Sinfiotli and Gudmund. The opponents accuse each other of unnatural behaviour, sexual deviancy, or taboo acts, as a prelude to battle. It is not always clear who is speaking, and I have punctuated the dialogue to reflect my understanding of who is speaking when. This poem ends with Helgi’s successfully winning his bride; the other Helgi poems continue after this point. The events of the poem are summarized in *Volsunga saga*, chs. 8–9.

- 1 It was at the start of time that the eagles shrieked,  
the sacred waters poured down from Himinfell;  
then Helgi, the strong-minded man,  
was born to Borghild in Bralund.
- 2 Night fell on the estate, then came norns,\*  
those who shaped fate for the prince;  
they said the war-leader should be most famous  
and that he’d appear the best of princes.

- 3 They plied very strongly the strand of fate,  
as strongholds were breaking in Bralund;\*  
they prepared the golden threads  
and fastened it in the middle under the moon's hall.\*
- 4 East and west they concealed its ends,  
the prince possessed all the land between;  
Neri's kinswoman to the north\*  
threw one fastening; she said it would hold for ever.
- 5 Just one thing concerned the kinsman of the Ylfings\*  
and that girl who'd given birth to the dear boy:  
one raven said to another—he sat on a high tree,  
lacking for food: 'I know something.
- 6 'The son of Sigmund stands in his mail-coat,  
one day old; now day has dawned!  
sharp his eyes like fighters;  
he's the friend of wolves, we should be cheerful.\*
- 7 To the men it seemed that he was a prince,  
they said to one another that good years had come;  
the noble leader himself came from the tumult of battle  
to bring a splendid leek to the young lord.\*
- 8 He gave Helgi a name, gave him Hringstadir,  
Sunfell, Snowfell, and Sigarvoll,  
Hringstod, Highmeadow, and Himinvangi,  
a tested blood-snake to Sinfiotli's brother.\*
- 9 Then he began to grow in the bosom of his friends,  
the splendidly-born elm in radiant delight;\*  
he paid out and gave gold to the retinue,  
the prince did not spare blood-stained treasure.
- 10 For a short time the prince waited for war,  
then the leader was fifteen years old;  
he brought about the killing of Hunding the hard,  
long he'd ruled lands and men.

- 11 Afterwards they demanded, the sons of Hunding,  
riches and rings from Sigmund's son,  
for they intended to repay the prince  
for his great ravaging and their father's death.
- 12 The prince did not let compensation be in question,  
nor did the kinsmen get a head-price at all;  
he said they should expect an excessive storm  
of grey spears and Odin's wrath.
- 13 The chieftains go to the sword-meeting  
which they'd set up at Logafell;  
the peace of Frodi was torn between the enemies;\*  
corpse-eager on the island ran Odin's hounds.\*
- 14 The prince sat down, when he'd killed  
Alf and Eyiolf, beneath Arastein,  
Hiorvard and Havard, the sons of Hunding;  
he'd brought down all of spear-Mimir's clan.\*
- 15 Then a light shone from Logafell,  
and from that light came lightning-bolts;  
wearing helmets at Himinvangi [came the valkyries].  
Their byrnies were drenched in blood;  
and beams blazed from their spears.
- 16 Immediately he asked from the wolf-lair,  
the prince asked if the southern ladies  
wished to go home with the warriors  
when night fell; the elm bows were shrilling.
- 17 But from her horse, Hogni's daughter,  
—the shield-din was over—said to the prince:  
'I think we ought to have other business  
than drinking beer with the breaker of rings.\*

- 18 'My father has promised his girl  
to Granmar's fierce son;  
but, Helgi, I call Hodbrodd  
a king as impressive as the kitten of a cat.\*
- 19 'The prince will come in a few nights  
unless you challenge him to battle  
or seize the girl from the warrior.'
- 20 'Don't be afraid of the slayer of Isung!  
first there'll be noise of battle, or else I'll be dead.'
- 21 The all-powerful one sent messengers from there,  
through air and sea, to assemble his army,  
ample river-fire he offered\*  
the warriors and their sons.
- 22 'Tell them quickly to go to their ships  
and to be ready to sail from Brand-island!  
There the prince waited until there came  
huge numbers of men from Hedins-island.
- 23 And there from the beaches at Stafnsness  
they pushed out the ships graven with gold;  
Helgi asked Hiorleif this:  
'Have you inspected the impressive young men?'
- 24 The young king spoke to the others—  
it would take time to count off Crane-bank  
the long-necked ships beneath the sailors,  
journeying outwards on the Orvasund:
- 25 'Twelve hundred trusty men;  
though in Highmeadow there's twice as many,  
the king's war-troop; we may expect battle din.'

- 26 So the leader ordered the prow-tents dismantled,  
roused the crowd of warriors,  
and the fighters see the day-break;  
and the noble men hoisted up  
the well-sewn sail in Varinsfjord.
- 27 There was the splash of oars and the clash of iron,  
shield smashed against shield, the vikings rowed on;  
hurtling beneath the heroes  
surged the leader's ship far from the land.
- 28 Then it could be heard: they'd met together,  
the sister of Kolga and the longships,\*  
as mountains or surf might break asunder.
- 29 Helgi ordered the high sail to be set,  
his crew did not cringe at the meeting of the waves,  
when Ægir's terrible daughter  
wanted to capsize the stay-bridled wave-horse.
- 30 And Sigrun above, brave in battle,  
protected them and their vessel;  
the king's sea-beast twisted powerfully  
out of Ran's hand near Gnipalund.\*
- 31 So in Una-bay in the evening  
the splendid ships were floating;  
and the others in person from Svarinshaug\*  
with troubled minds came to look at the army.
- 32 Gudmund asked, divinely-descended,  
'Who is that lord who leads the troop,  
who's brought the dangerous men to shore?'
- 33 Sinfiotli said—he'd slung on the yard-arm  
his red shield, the rim was all of gold;  
he was a sea-lookout who knew how to answer  
and how to debate with the princes:

- 34 'Say this evening, when you're feeding pigs  
and calling your bitches to their slops,\*  
that the Ylfings have come from the east,  
eager for fighting to Gnipalund.
- 35 'Hodbrodd will find Helgi there,  
the prince who never flees, amid his fleet,  
a man who's often sated eagles,  
while you were kissing slave-women at the grindstone.'
- 36 'Little must you recall, lord, the old stories,  
when you taunt the princes with untruths;  
you have eaten wolves' corpse-leavings  
and were the slayer of your brother,  
often you've sucked wounds with a cold snout;  
hated everywhere, you've slunk into a stone-tip.'\*

[*Sinfjotli said:*]

- 37 'You were a sorceress on Varins-island,  
a deceitful woman, you made up slander;  
you said that you did not want to have  
any warrior in his armour except Sinfjotli.\*
- 38 'You were a harmful creature,  
a witch, a valkyrie, horrible, unnatural, with All-Father;  
all the Einheriar had to fight,  
headstrong woman, on your account.\*
- 39 'Nine wolves on Saga's headland  
we engendered; I alone was their father.'

[*Gudmund said:*]

- 40 'You were not the father of Fenrir-wolves,  
older than them all, as far as I remember,  
after the giant girls castrated you  
on Thorsness by Gnipalund.

- 41 'You were Siggeir's stepson, you made your home under  
haystacks,\*  
used to wolves' howling, out in the woods;  
you turned your hand to hateful deeds,  
when you tore your brother's breast.  
You made yourself infamous for abominable acts.
- 42 'You were Grani's bride on Bravoll plain,\*  
a gold bit in your mouth, you were ready to leap;  
I've ridden you to exhaustion over many a stretch of road,  
a jaded hack under my saddle, down the mountain.'

[*Sinfíotli said:*]

- 43 'You seemed to be a lad without morals,  
when you milked Gullnir's goats,  
and another time as Imd's daughter\*  
in tattered clothes. Do you want to keep talking?'

[*Gudmund said:*]

- 44 'Rather I'd like to sate ravens  
on your corpse, at Frekastein,  
than call your bitches to their slops  
or be feeding your pigs; may the trolls take you!'

[*Helgi said:*]\*

- 45 'It would be much more fitting for you two, Sinfíotli,  
to go to battle and make the eagle happy,  
than to be bandying useless words,  
though the generous princes may have a quarrel to resolve.
- 46 'I don't like the look of Granmar's sons,  
though it befits princes to tell the truth;  
they have proved at Moinsheim,  
that they have the temperament for wielding swords.'

- 47 They allowed Svipud and Sveggiud\*  
to run powerfully to Solheim,  
over the dew-sprinkled dales, the dark slopes,  
the valkyrie's airy sea trembled where the kinsmen passed.
- 48 They met the excellent prince at the courtyard-door,  
they said with excitement that the lord had come;  
Hodbrodd stepped forward, wearing his helmet,  
he pondered his kinsmen riding towards him:  
'Why do the Niflungs look so troubled?'
- 49 'They've beached on the sand swift ships,  
harts of mast-rings, long rowlocks,  
many shields, smooth-planed oars,  
the king's splendid troop, the cheerful Ylfings.
- 50 'Fifteen companies came on shore;  
yet out in Sogn there are seven thousand,  
pulled up by the palisade before Gnipalund,  
dark-coloured surf-beasts all decked with gold.  
By far the most of their mighty host is there.  
Helgi will not delay the meeting of swords.'
- 51 'Let the bridled horses gallop to the main assembly-places;  
Spurwolf ride to Sparins-heath,  
Melnir and Mylnir to Myrkwood,  
let no man linger behind,  
those who know how to brandish wound-flames.\*
- 52 'Summon Hogni and the sons of Hring,  
Atli and Yngvi, Alf the old;  
they are eager to advance to war,  
let's offer the Volsungs some resistance!'
- 53 There was only the flickering—as they came together—  
of pale spear-points at Frekastein;  
always was Helgi, slayer of Hunding,  
foremost in the host, where men were fighting,  
eager in the battle, extremely averse to flight;  
that prince had a hard acorn of a heart.



- 54    Helmeted valkyries came down from the sky  
      —the noise of spears grew loud—those who protected the  
      prince;  
      then said Sigrun—the wound-giving valkyries flew,  
      the troll-woman's mount was feasting on raven-fodder:\*
- 55    'Unscathed, prince, you'll unleash men,  
      upholder of Yngvi's line, and enjoy your life,  
      since you have brought low the king who scorns flight,  
      the one who dealt death to the dread-bringing man.
- 56    'And it's fitting, lord, that you should have  
      both red-gold rings and the powerful girl;  
      unscathed, lord, you'll enjoy both  
      Hogni's daughter and Hringstadir,  
      lands and victory; now the battle is over.'

## THE POEM OF HELGI HIORVARDSSON

Helgi Hiorvardsson is a kind of doublet of Helgi Hundingsbani whose two poems surround his in the manuscript. The *Poem of Helgi Hiorvardsson* (*Helgakvida Hiorvardssonar*) follows the basic plot of the other Helgi poems, with an added prelude telling of the winning of Helgi's mother. This sets up Helgi's first adventure, killing his mother's disgruntled former wooer; then comes a 'flying' between the hero's lieutenant, Atli, and a troll-woman, Hrimgerd, the marriage with the valkyrie, and death at the hands of the son of his former enemy. Compared with the other two Helgi poems, the plot in this poem is less coherent. The flying between Atli and Hrimgerd parallels that in the previous poem, and Hedin's vow has no clear tragic consequences—he simply acquires his brother's bride after his death. The poem ends before we know whether Hedin dies avenging Helgi or whether he and Svava find love together.

About Hiorvard and Sigrlinn *Hiorvard was the name of a king. He had four wives. One was called Alfild, their son was Hedin; the second was called Scereid, their son was called Humlung; the third was called Sinriod, their son was Hymling. King Hiorvard had sworn an oath to marry the woman whom he knew to be the most beautiful. He heard that King Svafnir had a daughter who was loveliest of all, who was called Sigrlinn.*

*Idmund was the name of his earl. Atli was his son and he went to ask for Sigrlinn on the king's behalf. He spent the whole winter with King Svafnir. There was an earl called Franmar, Sigrlinn's foster-father; his daughter was called Alof. The earl advised that the girl not be betrothed and Atli went home.*

*Atli, the earl's son, was standing one day in a certain grove; there was a bird sitting in the branches up above him and it had heard that his men were saying that the most beautiful women were those married to Hiorvard. The bird squawked; Atli listened to what it said. It said:*

- I 'Have you seen Sigrlinn, daughter of Svafnir,  
the loveliest girl in Munarheim?  
even if the wives of Hiorvard seem pleasing  
to men in Glasilund.'

*Atli said:*

- 2 'Will you speak further, bird so wise-minded,  
to Atli, Idmund's son?'

*The bird said:*

'I will, if the chieftain will sacrifice to me,  
and I may choose what I wish from the king's court.'

*Atli said:*

- 3 'Don't choose Hiorvard, nor his sons,\*  
nor the lovely brides of the king,  
nor the brides who belong to the ruler;  
let's make a good bargain, that's the hallmark of friends.'

*The bird said:*

- 4 'I'll choose a temple with many sanctuaries,  
gold-horned cattle from the prince's farm,  
if Sigrinn sleeps in his arms  
and willingly goes with the prince.'

*This was before Atli set off, and when he got home and the king asked him  
for news, he said:*

- 5 'We've had difficulties, not achieved our mission,  
exhausted our horses on mighty mountains,  
then we had to ford the Sæmorn;  
Svafnir's daughter was refused us,  
the ring-adorned girl whom we wished to have.'

*The king commanded them to go a second time and he himself went. And  
when they came up on top of the mountain, in Svavaland they saw the  
country all on fire and dust-clouds from horses' hoofs. The king rode on  
down the mountain and encamped for the night by a river. Atli kept watch  
and went over the river. He found a house. A great bird was sitting on the  
house, keeping watch, but it had fallen asleep. Atli hurled a spear at the*

*bird and killed it, and in the house he found Sigrlinn, the king's daughter, and Alof, the earl's daughter, and took them away with him. Earl Franmar had changed himself into an eagle and had been keeping them safe from the army by magic. Hrodmar was the name of a king who was Sigrlinn's suitor. He had killed the king of Svavaland and was raiding and burning the land. King Hiorvard married Sigrlinn, and Atli married Alof.*

*Hiorvard and Sigrlinn had a tall and handsome son. He did not speak and no name would stick to him.\* He sat on a burial-mound\* and saw nine valkyries ride past. One was the most striking of all. She said:*

6 'It'll be a long time, Helgi, before you dispose of rings,  
apple-tree of strife, or rule over Rodulsvoll\*  
—an eagle shrieked early—if you are always silent,  
even if, helmeted prince, you have a stern temperament.'

7 'What will you give me with the name Helgi,\*  
bright-faced lady, since you have bestowed it?  
Consider well before you answer!  
I won't accept it unless I can have you also.'

8 'I know of swords lying on Sigarsholm,  
four less than fifty;  
one is better than all the rest,  
baleful among battle-needles, inlaid with gold.

9 'There's a ring on the hilt, there's courage in the middle,  
and terror in its point, for him who can own it;  
a blood-dyed snake lies along the edge,  
on the boss an adder chases its tail.'

*Eylimi was the name of a king. His daughter was Svava. She was a valkyrie and rode through the air and over the sea. She gave Helgi that name and often protected him in battles. Helgi said:*

10 'You aren't, Hiorvard, a well-advised king,  
war-band leader, though you are famous;  
you let fire consume the princes' settlements,  
though they have done you no harm.

- 11 'But Hrodmar will distribute rings,  
those which our kinsmen used to own;  
that king is little anxious about his life,  
he expects to dispose of the dead men's inheritance.'

*Hiorvard answered that he would give Helgi a troop of men if he wanted to avenge his maternal grandfather. Then Helgi went to look for the sword to which Svava had directed him. Then he and Atli set off and killed Hrodmar and did many brave deeds. He killed the giant Hati, who was sitting on a certain cliff. Helgi and Atli moored their ships in Hatafjord. Atli kept watch for the first part of the night. Hrimgerd, Hati's daughter, said:*

- 12 'Who are those men in Hatafjord?  
Shields are hanging outside your ships;  
you're acting rather boldly, I don't think you're afraid of much;  
tell me the name of the king!'

*Atli said:*

- 13 'Helgi is his name, and you can never\*  
bring harm to the prince;  
iron plates protect the prince's ships,  
no troll-women can attack us.'
- 14 'What is your name (said Hrimgerd), terrifying warrior,  
what do men call you?  
The prince trusts you, since he lets you take your stand  
in the ship's pleasant prow.'
- 15 'Atli I'm called, atrocious I shall be to you,\*  
I am most hostile to ogresses;  
I've often stayed at the dew-washed prow  
and tormented night-riding witches.
- 16 'What is your name, corpse-greedy hag?  
Troll-woman, name your father!  
You ought to be nine leagues underground  
with fir-trees growing from your breast!'

- 17 'Hrimgerd I'm called, Hati is my father,  
the most all-powerful giant I know of;  
many brides he's had taken from their dwellings,  
until Helgi hacked him down.'
- 18 'Ogress, you stood before the prince's ships  
and lurked in the fjord's mouth;  
the king's men you were going to give to Ran,\*  
if a spear hadn't quite thwarted you.'
- 19 'Deluded are you now, Atli, I reckon you're dreaming,  
you're scowling with drooping brow;  
my mother lurked ahead of the prince's ships,  
I drowned Hlodvard's sons in the ocean.
- 20 'You'd neigh, Atli, if you hadn't been gelded,\*  
Hrimgerd's raising up her tail;  
I think your heart, Atli, is in your hindquarters,  
though you have a stallion's voice.'
- 21 'I'd seem like a stallion to you if you wanted to try it,  
if I came on land from this ship;  
I'd lame every part of you if I were in earnest,  
you'd drop your tail, Hrimgerd!'
- 22 'Atli, come on land, if you trust in your strength,  
and let's meet at Varins-bay!  
Warrior, you'd get your ribs straightened out,  
if you came into my clutches.'
- 23 'I can't come before the warriors awake  
and keep watch for the king;  
nor should I be surprised if a witch came close,  
and bobbed up under our ship.'

*[Hrimgerd said:]*

- 24 'Wake up, Helgi, and give Hrimgerd compensation,  
since you struck down Hati;  
if for one night she can sleep with the prince,  
then she'll have redress for her wrongs.'
- 25 'Shaggy is the name of the one who'll have you, you're hideous  
to humankind;  
that monster lives on Tholley;  
a very wise giant, but the worst of lava-dwelling ogres,  
he's a fitting mate for you.'
- 26 'You'd rather have her, Helgi, the one who was spying out the  
harbours  
the other night with the men;  
the sea-golden girl seemed to surpass me in strength;  
here she landed from the sea  
and secured your ships so.  
She alone prevents me from destroying  
the prince's men.'
- 27 'Listen now, Hrimgerd, if I give redress for your grief,  
answer the prince directly:  
was it just one creature who protected the lord's fleet,  
or many journeying together?'
- 28 'Three times nine girls, but one girl rode ahead,  
white-skinned under her helmet;  
the horses shook themselves, from their manes  
dew fell into the deep valleys,  
hail in the high woods;  
good harvest comes to men from there;  
all that I saw was hateful to me.'
- 29 'Look east now, Hrimgerd! See if Helgi has struck you with  
fatal runes!  
on land and sea the prince's ships are safe  
and so are the prince's men.'

- 30 'It's day now, Hrimgerd, Atli has kept you talking  
until you laid down your life;  
as a harbour-mark you look hilarious,  
standing there transformed into stone.'

*King Helgi was a great fighter. He came to King Eylimi and asked for his daughter, Svava. Helgi and Svava exchanged vows and loved one another very much. Svava stayed at home with her father, and Helgi went raiding. Svava was a valkyrie just as before.*

*Hedin was at home with his father, King Hiorvard, in Norway. Hedin was going home alone from the woods one Yule evening and he met a troll-woman; she was riding a wolf and had serpents as reins. She offered Hedin her company. 'No', he said. She said: 'You'll pay for this when it comes to drinking to pledges.' In the evening pledges were made. The sacred boar was led out, men put their hands on it and then they made their vows with the pledging-cup. Hedin vowed to have Svava, daughter of Eylimi, Helgi, his brother's beloved, and he repented so much of this that he went wandering away to the southern lands and encountered his brother Helgi. Helgi said:*

- 31 'Welcome, Hedin! What news  
do you bring from Norway?  
Why, prince, have you been driven from your country  
and come alone to meet us?'
- 32 'A more terrible crime has come upon me:  
I have chosen that royally born  
bride of yours with the pledging-cup.'
- 33 'Don't reproach yourself! For both of us, Hedin,  
what's said over ale must come true;  
a prince has challenged me to an island duel;\*  
in three nights' time, I shall go there,  
I have my doubts as to whether I'll return;  
it may turn out well if I don't.'
- 34 'You're saying, Helgi, that Hedin deserves from you  
good will and great gifts;  
it would be more fitting to bloody your sword on me  
than to grant peace to your enemies.'



*Then Helgi said that he suspected that he was doomed and those were his fetches\* who had come to Hedin when he met the woman riding on the wolf.*

*Alf, son of Hrodmar, was the king who had staked out the duelling-ground with hazel-poles for Helgi three nights later. Then Helgi said:*

- 35 'She rode on a wolf, as it grew dark,  
that lady who offered him company;  
she knew that Sigrlinn's son  
would be killed at Sigarsvellir.'

*There was a great fight and Helgi received a death-wound.*

- 36 Helgi sent Sigr to ride  
for Eylimi's only daughter;  
told her to get ready quickly  
if she wanted to find the prince alive.

- 37 'Helgi has sent me here to you, Svava,  
to speak to you in person;  
the helmet-wearing lord says he wants to see you  
before the splendidly born man draws his last breath.'

- 38 'What has happened to Helgi, Hiorvard's son?  
A grievous sorrow has been brought upon me;  
if the sea has played cruelly with him, or the sword has bitten  
into him,  
I shall wreak vengeance on that man.'

- 39 'He fell here in the morning at Frekastein,  
the prince who was best under the sun;  
Alf has achieved total victory,  
though there was no need for it to have happened.'

- 40 'Greetings, Svava! You must steady your feelings,  
this will be our last meeting in the world;  
wounds begin to bleed for the prince,  
a sword has pierced very close to my heart.

- 41 'I beg you, Svava—bride, do not weep!—  
that you will listen to what I say,  
that you will share a bed with Hedin  
and live in love with the young prince.'
- 42 'I declared this in Munarheim,  
when Helgi chose me, gave me rings,  
that I would not willingly, if my lord were gone,  
hold a prince of no reputation in my arms.'

[*Hedin said:*]

- 43 'Kiss me, Svava! Never will I come  
to see Rogheim or Rodulsfiell,  
until I've avenged Hiorvard's son;  
he was best of princes under the sun.'

*Helgi and Svava are said to have been reincarnated.*

## A SECOND POEM OF HELGI HUNDINGSBANI

The second poem about Helgi Hundingsbani has several elements in common with the first: the hero's gaining of his nickname, his love for the valkyrie, and a very reduced form of the flyting found in the *First Poem of Helgi Hundingsbani*. It is quite likely that the scribe of the manuscript intended readers and reciters to leaf back to the first poem and read the flyting there, rather than recopying it. This poem is notable for the sense of conflict Sigrun feels between her love for Helgi and her loyalty to her family, and for the extravagantly Gothic ending in which Sigrun and Helgi spend a final night together in the burial-mound.

*King Sigmund, son of Volsung, married Borghild of Bralund. They called their son Helgi after Helgi Hiorvardsson. Hagal fostered Helgi.*

*Hunding was a powerful king. Hundland is named after him. He was a great warrior and had many sons who went raiding. There was hostility and enmity between King Hunding and King Sigmund; each killed the other's kinsmen. Sigmund and his clan were known as Volsungs and Ylfings.*

*Helgi went in disguise to reconnoitre King Hunding's court. Hæming, son of King Hunding, was at home. And when Helgi went away, he met a shepherd boy and said:*

- 1 'Tell Hæming that Helgi remembers  
whom the warriors struck down in his coat-of-mail.  
You've had a grey wolf within your court,  
he whom King Hunding thought was Hamal.'

*Hamal was Hagal's son. King Hunding sent men to Hagal to search for Helgi. And since Helgi couldn't escape any other way he put on a serving-woman's clothes and went to grind at the mill. They searched and couldn't find him. Then Blind the malevolent said:*

- 2 'Piercing are the eyes of Hagal's maidservant,\*  
that's not a low-born person standing at the grindstone;  
the stones are breaking, the wooden frame is splitting.

- 3 'Now the prince has got a harsh sentence,  
the noble has to grind foreign barley.  
It would be more fitting to have in that hand  
a sword hilt than a grinding-handle.'

*Hagal answered and said:*

- 4 'It's not so distressing that the frame should be juddering,  
as the king's daughter turns the handle;  
she sped above the clouds  
and dared to fight like vikings do,  
before Helgi captured her;  
she's Sigar and Hogni's sister,  
that's why the Ylfing girl has terrifying eyes.'

*Helgi got away onto a warship. He killed King Hunding and after that  
was called Helgi Hundings-killer. With his army he lay in Bruna-bay  
and there they butchered cattle on the beach and ate them up raw. Hogni  
was the name of a king. His daughter was Sigrun; she was a valkyrie  
and rode through air and over the sea; she was Svava reincarnated.  
Sigrun rode to Helgi's ships and said:*

- 5 'Who has brought these ships to anchor by the steep shore,  
where, warriors, do you come from?  
What are you waiting for in Bruna-bay,  
which way do you set your course?'
- 6 'Hamal has brought these ships to anchor by the steep shore;  
we come from Hlesey;  
we're waiting for a breeze in Bruna-bay,  
to the east we wish to set our course.'
- 7 'Where have you, prince, stirred up war  
or fed the goslings of Gunn's sisters?\*'
 

Why is your corslet spattered with blood,  
why must you eat raw meat, men wearing helmets?'
- 8 'The Ylfings' descendant fought most recently  
west of the sea, if you wish to know,  
where I was hunting bears in Bragalund\*  
and sated with sword-points the eagle's race.

- 9 'Now I've told you, girl, where battle came about;  
and so by the sea we're eating meat scarcely roasted.'
- 10 'A killing you declare; King Hunding  
fell on the field before Helgi;  
it came to battle, in revenge for a relative,  
blood streamed along the sword-edges.'
- 11 'How could you know, wise lady,  
that we avenged our relative on them?  
There are many keen prince's sons,  
who look like us kinsmen.'
- 12 'I was not far away, battle-leader,  
yesterday morning, when the prince lost his life;  
though I reckon that Sigmund's clever son  
gives battle-news in secret slaughter-runes.
- 13 'I glimpsed you once before on the longships,  
where you were at the ship's bloody bow;  
cold and wet the waves were playing.  
Now the prince wants to hide himself from me  
but Hogni's girl recognizes Helgi.'

*Granmar was the name of a powerful king who lived at Svarinshaug. He had many sons: Hodbrodd, the second, Gudmund, the third, Starkad. Hodbrodd was at a meeting of kings; he betrothed himself to Sigrun, Hogni's daughter. But when she heard that, she rode with her valkyries through air and over sea to find Helgi.*

*Helgi was at Logafell and had fought with the sons of Hunding. There he struck down Alf and Eyiolf, Hiorvard and Hervard; he was exhausted from battle and he was resting below Arastein. There Sigrun found him and flung her arms around his neck and kissed him and told him what her errand was, as it says in the 'Old Poem of the Volsungs':.\**

- 14 Sigrun went to see the cheerful prince,  
she caught Helgi by the hand;  
she kissed and greeted the king in his helmet,  
then the king began to love the woman.
- 15 She said she'd already loved with all her heart  
Sigmund's son before she'd seen him.
- 16 'I have been betrothed to Hodbrodd among the fighters,  
but another prince I wished to have;  
though, lord, I fear the anger of kinsmen,  
I've destroyed my father's favoured design.'
- 17 Hogni's girl did not dissemble,  
she said she wanted Helgi's protection.
- 18 'Don't worry about Hogni's anger,  
nor the wrath of your kinsmen.  
Young girl, you will live with me;  
I've no fear, good lady, of your family.'

*Helgi assembled a great fleet and went to Frekastein, and on the ocean they ran into a terribly dangerous storm. Lightning flashed above them and the ships were struck. They saw nine valkyries riding up in the air, and recognized Sigrun among them. Then the storm abated and they got safely to land. The sons of Granmar were sitting up on a cliff, when the ships sailed to land. Gudmund leapt on his horse and rode down to a cliff near the harbour to reconnoitre. The Volsungs lowered their sails. Then Gudmund Granmarsson said, as is written above in the 'Poem of Helgi':*

'Who is that lord who leads the troop,  
who's brought the dangerous men to shore?'

- 19 'Who is the prince who steers the ships,  
and has a golden war banner at his prow?  
Peace, it seems to me, is not at the forefront of your journey;  
a red battle-glow hangs over the vikings.'

*Sinfíotli said:*

- 20 'Here Hodbrodd may recognize Helgi,  
the fighter who does not flee, in the midst of the fleet;  
the homeland of your kin,  
the Fíorsungs' inheritance, he has conquered.'

[*Gudmund said:*]

- 21 'Thus we should at Frekastein  
meet together, settle the matter;  
Hodbrodd, it's a case for taking revenge,  
where we have long had to take the lower part.'

[*Sinfíotli said:*]

- 22 'Rather, Gudmund, you'll be herding goats  
and clambering down the rocky clefts,  
in your hand you'll have a hazel switch;  
for you that's jollier than the judgement of swords.'

[*Helgi said:*]

- 23 'For you, Sinfíotli, it would be more fitting  
to draw up for battle and make the eagles glad,  
than to be bandying useless words,  
even if chieftains have strife to settle.
- 24 'I don't like the look of Granmar's sons,  
though it befits princes to tell the truth;  
they have proved at Moinsheim,  
that they have the temperament for wielding swords;  
the princes are far too bold.'

*Sinfíotli, Sigmund's son, answered, as is also written. Gudmund rode home with the news of invasion. Then Granmar's sons assembled an army. Many kings came to join them. There was Hogni, Sigrun's father, and his sons, Bragi and Dag. There was a great battle and all of Granmar's sons were killed and all of the princes, except for Dag,*

*Hogni's son, who obtained a truce and swore oaths to the Volsungs.  
Sigrun went among the slaughtered and found Hodbrodd on the point of  
death. She said:*

- 25 'Sigrun from Sefafell  
will not sink into your arms, King Hodbrodd;  
ebbing is the life—often the troll-woman's grey horse-herd\*  
gets the corpses—of Granmar's sons.'

*Then she met Helgi and was extremely joyful. He said:*

- 26 'It was not all good fortune for you, strange creature,\*  
though I reckon the norns had some part in it;\*  
this morning at Frekastein  
Bragi and Hogni were killed, I was their slayer.

- 27 'And at Styr-cleft King Starkad,  
and at Hlebiorg the sons of Hrollaug;  
I saw that fiercest-minded of kings  
defending his trunk—his head was gone.

- 28 'All the rest of your kinsmen  
were lying on the ground, corpses they'd become;  
you did not stop the battle, it was fated for you  
that you'd be cause of strife among powerful men.'

*Then Sigrun wept. He said:*

- 29 'Be comforted Sigrun! You've been our battle-goddess;  
the princes could not struggle against fate.'  
'I'd choose now that those who are gone might live again  
and that I could still hold you in my arms.'

*Helgi married Sigrun and they had sons. Helgi did not live to old age.  
Dag, Hogni's son, sacrificed to Odin for revenge for his father. Odin lent  
Dag his spear. Dag encountered Helgi, his brother-in-law, at a place  
called Fetter-grove. He pierced Helgi with the spear and Helgi fell there.  
And Dag rode to the mountains and told this news to Sigrun:*



- 30 'Sister, I am reluctant to tell you of grief,  
for I am forced to make my kinswoman weep:  
there fell this morning below Fetter-grove  
the lord who was the best in the world  
and who stood on the necks of chieftains.'
- 31 'May all the oaths which you swore  
to Helgi rebound upon you,  
by the bright water of Leift  
and the cold, wet stone of Unn.
- 32 'May the ship you sail on not go forward,\*  
though the wind you need has sprung up behind;  
may the horse you ride on not go forward,  
though you need to escape your enemies.
- 33 'May the sword that you wield never bite for you,  
unless it's whistling above your own head.  
Helgi's death would be avenged on you,  
if you were a wolf out in the forest  
deprived of wealth and all well-being  
and of food, except when you gluttoned yourself on corpses.'

*Dag said:*

- 34 'You're mad, sister! you're out of your wits,  
that you wish this evil fate on your brother;  
Odin alone caused all the misfortune,  
for he cast hostile runes between kinsmen.
- 35 'Your brother offers you red-gold rings,  
all Vandilsve and Vigdal;  
take half of our homeland to pay for your loss,  
ring-adorned woman, you and your sons.'
- 36 'I shall not sit so happily at Sefafell,  
neither early nor at night-time, that I'll desire to live on;  
unless light should shine on the prince's company,  
unless Vigblær should gallop here under the chieftain,  
tamed to his gold bridle, and I could welcome the warrior.

- 37 'Helgi so terrified  
all his enemies and their kin,  
just as panicking goats run before the wolf  
down from the mountain filled with fear.
- 38 'So Helgi surpassed the soldiers  
like the bright-growing ash beside the thorn-bush  
and the young stag, drenched in dew,  
who towers above all other animals  
and whose horns glow right up to the sky.'

*A burial-mound was made for Helgi. And when he came to Valhall Odin asked him to rule over everything with him. Helgi said:*

- 39 'Hunding, you shall fetch the foot-bath\*  
for every man and kindle the fire,  
tie up the dogs, watch the horses,  
give the pigs slops before you go to sleep.'

*One evening Sigrun's maid went past Helgi's mound and saw Helgi riding into the mound with a large number of men. The maid said:*

- 40 'Are these just delusions, that I think I can see  
dead men riding, or is it Ragnarok?  
where do you spur your horses onward,  
or are the fighters allowed to come home?'

*Helgi said:*

- 41 'These are not delusions that you think you see,  
nor the end of mankind, though you gaze upon us,  
though we spur our horses onwards,  
nor are the fighters allowed to come home.'

*The maid went home and told Sigrun:*

- 42 'Go outside, Sigrun from Sefafell,  
if you want to meet the army-leader;  
the mound has opened, Helgi has come!  
his wounds are bleeding, the prince asks you  
to staunch his injuries.'

*Sigrun went into the mound to Helgi and said:*

- 43 'Now I am so glad, at our meeting,  
as are the greedy hawks of Odin\*  
when they know of slaughter, steaming flesh,  
or, dew-gleaming, they see the dawn.
- 44 'First I want to kiss the lifeless king,  
before you throw off your bloody mail-coat;  
your hair, Helgi, is thick with hoar-frost,  
the prince is all soaked in slaughter-dew,\*  
Hogni's son-in-law has clammy hands.  
How, ruler, can I find a remedy for this?'
- 45 'You alone, Sigrun from Sefafell,  
cause Helgi to be soaked in sorrow-dew;  
you weep, gold-adorned lady, bitter tears,  
sun-bright southern girl, before you go to sleep;  
each falls bloody on the breast of the prince,  
cold and wet, burning into me, thick with grief.
- 46 'We ought to drink precious liquors,\*  
though we have lost our love and our lands;  
no man should sing a lament for me,  
though on my breast wounds can be seen;  
now the lady is enclosed in the mound,  
a human woman with us, the departed.'

*Sigrun made up a bed in the mound.*

- 47 'Here I've made you, Helgi, a bed all ready;  
descendant of the Ylfings, now free from care  
in your arms, lord, I'll sleep,  
as I would with the prince, when he was living.'
- 48 'I declare nothing else could be less expected,  
neither early nor late at Sefafell,  
that you should sleep in the dead man's arms,  
white lady, in the tomb, Hogni's daughter,  
and you alive, and royally born.

- 49 'It is time for me to ride along the blood-red roads,  
to set the pale horse treading the path through the sky;  
I must cross the wind-vault's bridge in the west,  
before Salgofnir awakens the victorious people.'\*

*Helgi and his men rode away, and the women went back to the house.  
The next evening Sigrun had the maid keep watch by the mound. And at  
dusk, when Sigrun came to the mound, she said:*

- 50 'He would have come by now, if he meant to come,  
Sigmund's son, from Odin's halls;  
I declare that hopes of the prince coming here are fading,  
now the eagles roost on the ash-branches  
and all the household head for the dream-assembly.'\*

- 51 'Do not be so mad as to go alone,  
high-born lady, into the home of ghosts;  
much more powerful at night, lady, are all  
dangerous dead creatures, than by the light of day.'

*Sigrun did not live long from sorrow and grief. There was a belief in  
pagan times, which we now reckon an old wives' tale, that people could  
be reincarnated. Helgi and Sigrun were thought to have been reborn.  
He was called Helgi Haddingia-damager, and she was Kara, Halfdan's  
daughter, as is told in the 'Song of Kara',\* and she was a valkyrie.*