LANG ANDREW

THE RED ROMANCE BOOK

Andrew Lang

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Содержание

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PREFACE

WHAT ROMANCES ARE

(To Children and Others)

I once read a book about a poor little lonely boy in a great house with a large library. This boy was pale, dull, and moping. Nobody knew what was the matter with him. But somebody tracked him into the library and saw him take a huge thick black book, half as tall as himself, out of a bookcase, and sit down and read it. The name of the book was *Polexander*. So he sat and sobbed over *Polexander*, because it was so very dull and so very long. There were 800 pages, and he had only read sixty-seven. But some very stupid grown-up person had told him that he must always begin a book at the beginning, and, if he once began, he must read every word of it, and read nothing else till he had finished every word of it.

The boy saw that he would die of weariness long before he reached the end of *Polexander*, but he stuck to it like the other boy who stood by the burning deck long after it was 'time for him to go.' So *Polexander* was taken away from him and locked up, and so his life was saved.

Now, in the first place *Polexander* was a romance, but it was not like the romances in this book, for it was dreadfully long, and mainly about the sorrows of lovers who cannot get married. That could not amuse a small boy. In the second place, every boy should stop reading a book as soon as he finds that he does not like it, just as you are not expected to eat more mutton than you want to eat. Lesson books are another thing; you have to read them, and if you do not you will get into trouble. They are not meant to be amusing, but to teach Latin grammar, or geography, or arithmetic, which are not gay. As to this book of Romances, if you do not like one story, give it up and try another. If you do not like any of them, read something else that you do like.

Now what are romances? They are grown-up people's fairy tales or story-books, but they are the kind of story-books that grown-up people read long ago, when there were castles and knights, and tournaments, and the chief business of gentlemen was to ride about in full armour, fighting, while ladies sat at home doing embroidery work, or going to see the men tilt at tournaments, just as they go to see cricket matches now. But they liked tournaments better, because they understood the rules of the game. Anybody could see when one knight knocked another down, horse and all, but many ladies do not understand leg before wicket, or stumping.

The stories that they read were called 'romances,' but were in prose. Before people could read they were not in prose but in poetry, and were recited by minstrels. Mrs. Lang, who did the stories in this book, says: 'Many hundreds of years ago, when most of these stories were told in the halls of great castles, the lives of children were very different from what they are now. The little girls were taught by their mothers' maidens to spin and embroider, or make simple medicines from the common herbs, and the boys learnt to ride and tilt, and shoot with bows and arrows; but their tasks done, no one paid any further heed to them. They had very few games, and in the long winter evenings the man who went from house to house, telling or singing the tales of brave deeds, must have been welcome indeed. From him the children, who early became men and women, heard of the evil fate

that awaited cowardice and treachery, and grew to understand that it was their duty through life to help those that were weaker than themselves.' That was long, long ago, when nobody but priests and a very few gentlemen could read and write. They just listened to stories in rhyme, which the minstrels sang, striking their harps at the end of each verse.

The stories were really fairy tales, dressed up and spun out, and instead of 'a boy' or 'a king' or 'a princess' with no name, the old fairy adventures were said to have happened to people with names: King Arthur, or Charlemagne, or Bertha Broadfoot. A little real history came in, but altered, and mixed up with fairy tales, and done into rhyme.

Later, more and more people learned to read, and now the long poems were done into prose, and written in books, not printed but written books; and these were the Romances, very long indeed, all about fighting, and love-making, and giants, and dwarfs, and magicians, and enchanted castles, and dragons and flying horses. These romances were the novels of the people of the Middle Ages, about whom you can read in the History Books of Mrs. Markham. They were not much like the novels which come from the library for your dear mothers and aunts. There is not much fighting in them, though there is any amount of love-making, and there are no giants; and if there is a knight, he is usually a grocer or a doctor, quite the wrong sort of knight.

Here is the beginning of a celebrated novel: 'Comedy is a game played to throw reflections upon social life, and it deals with human nature in the drawing-rooms of civilised men and women.' You do not want to read any more of that novel. It is not at all like a good old romance of knights and dragons and enchanted princesses and strong wars. The knights and ladies would not have looked at such a book, all about drawing-rooms.

Now, in this book, we have made the old romances much shorter, keeping the liveliest parts, in which curious things happen. Some of the tales were first told in Iceland eight hundred years ago, and are mostly true and about real people. Some are from the ancient French romances of the adventures of Charlemagne, and his peers and paladins. Some are from later Italian poems of the same kind. 'Cupid and Psyche' is older, and so is the story of the man who was changed into a donkey. These are from an old Latin romance, written when people were still heathens, most of them. Some are about the Danes in England (of whom you may have heard), but there is not much history in them.

Mrs. Lang says: 'In this book you will read of men who, like Don Quixote, were often mistaken but never mean, and of women, such as Una and Bradamante, who kept patient and true, in spite of fierce trials and temptations. I have only related a few of their adventures, but when you grow older you can read them for yourselves, in the languages in which they were written.'

'Don Quixote' was written by a Spaniard, Cervantes, in the time of James I. of England, to show what would happen if a man tried to behave like a knight of old, after people had become more civilised and less interesting. Don Quixote was laughed at, because he came too late into too old a world. But he was as brave and good a knight as the best paladin of them all. So about the knights and ladies and dwarfs and giants, I hope you will think like Sir Walter Scott, when he was a boy, and read the old romances. He says: 'Heaven only knows how glad I was to find myself in such company.'

If you like the kind of company, then read 'Ivanhoe,' by Sir Walter Scott, for that is the best romance in the world.

All the stories in this book were done by Mrs. Lang, out of the old romances.

Andrew Lang.

HOW WILLIAM OF PALERMO WAS CARRIED OFF BY THE WERWOLF

Many hundreds of years ago there lived in the beautiful city of Palermo a little prince who was thought, not only by his parents but by everyone who saw him, to be the handsomest child in the whole world. When he was four years old, his mother, the queen, made up her mind that it was time to take him away from his nurses, so she chose out two ladies of the court who had been friends of her own youth, and to them she entrusted her little son. He was to be taught to read and write, and to talk Greek, the language of his mother's country, and Latin, which all princes ought to know, while the Great Chamberlain would see that he learned to ride and shoot, and, when he grew bigger, how to wield a sword.

For a while everything went on as well as the king and queen could wish. Prince William was quick, and, besides, he could not bear to be beaten in anything he tried to do, whether it was making out the sense of a roll of parchment written in strange black letters, which was his reading-book, or mastering a pony which wanted to kick him off. And the people of Palermo looked on, and whispered to each other:

'Ah! what a king he will make!'

But soon a terrible end came to all these hopes!

William's father, king Embrons, had a brother who would have been the heir to the throne but for the little prince. He was a wicked man, and hated his nephew, but when the boy was born he was away at the wars, and did not return till five years later. Then he lost no time in making friends with the two ladies who took care of William, and slowly managed to gain their confidence. By-and-by he worked upon them with his promises and gifts, till they became as wicked as he was, and even agreed to kill not only the child, but the king his father.

Now adjoining the palace at Palermo was a large park, planted with flowering trees and filled with wild beasts. The royal family loved to roam about the park, and often held jousts and sports on the green grass, while William played with his dogs or picked flowers.

One day – it was a festival – the whole court went into the park at noon, after they had finished dining, and the queen and her ladies busied themselves with embroidering a quilt for the royal bed, while the king and his courtiers shot at a mark. Suddenly there leapt from a bush a huge grey wolf with his mouth open and his tongue hanging out. Before anyone had time to recover from his surprise, the great beast had caught up the child, and was bounding with him through the park, and over the wall into the plain by the sea. When the courtiers had regained their senses, both the wolf and boy were out of sight.

Oh! what weeping and wailing burst forth from the king and queen when they understood that their little son was gone from them for ever, only, as they supposed, to die a cruel death! For of course they did not know that one far worse had awaited him at home.

After the first shock, William did not very much mind what was happening to him. The wolf jerked him on to his back, and told him to hold fast by his ears, and the boy sat comfortably among the thick hair, and did not even get his feet wet as they swam across the Straits of Messina. On the other side, not far from Rome, was a forest of tall trees, and as by this time it was getting dark, the wolf placed William on a bed of soft fern, and broke off a branch of delicious fruits, which he gave him for supper. Then he scooped out a deep pit with his paws, and lined it with moss and feathery grasses, and there they both lay down and slept till morning; in spite of missing his mother, in all his life William had never been so happy.

For eight days they stayed in the forest, and it seemed to the boy as if he had never dwelt anywhere else. There was so much to see and to do, and when he was tired of playing the wolf told him stories.

But one morning, before he was properly awake, he felt himself gently shaken by a paw, and he sat up, and looked about him. 'Listen to me,' said the wolf. 'I have to go right over to the other side of the wood, on some business of a friend's, and I shall not be back till sunset. Be careful not to stray out of sight of this pit, for you may easily lose yourself. You will find plenty of fruit and nuts piled up under that cherry tree.'

So the wolf went away, and the child curled himself up for another sleep, and when the sun was high and its beams awakened him, he got up and had his breakfast. While he was eating, birds with blue and green feathers came and hopped on his shoulder and pecked at the fruit he was putting into his mouth, and William made friends with them all, and they suffered him to stroke their heads.

Now there dwelt in the forest an old cowherd, who happened that morning to have work to do not far from the pit where William lived with the wolf. He took with him a big dog, which helped him to collect the cows when they wandered, and to keep off any strange beasts that threatened to attack them. On this particular morning there were no cows, so the dog ran hither and thither as he would, enjoying himself mightily, when suddenly he set up a loud barking, as if he had found a prey, and the noise caused the old man to hasten his steps.

When he reached the spot from which the noise came, the dog was standing at the edge of a pit, out of which came a frightened cry. The old man looked in, and there he saw a child clad in garments that shone like gold, shrinking timidly into the farthest corner.

'Fear nothing, my boy,' said the cowherd; 'he will never hurt you, and even if he wished I would not let him;' and as he spoke he held out his hand. At this William took courage. He was not really a coward, but he felt lonely and it seemed a long time since the wolf had gone away. Would he *really* ever come back? This old man looked kind, and there could be no harm in speaking to him. So he took the outstretched hand and scrambled out of the pit, and the cowherd gathered apples for him, and other fruits that grew on the tops of trees too high for the wolf to reach. And all the day they wandered on and on, till they came to the cowherd's cottage, before which an old woman was standing.

'I have brought you a little boy,' he said, 'whom I found in the forest.'

'Ah, a lucky star was shining when you got up to-day,' answered she. 'And what is your name, my little man? And will you stay and live with me?'

'My name is William, and you look kind like my grandmother, and I will stay with you,' said the boy; and the old people were very glad, and they milked a cow, and gave him warm milk for his supper.

When the wolf returned – he was not a wolf at all, but the son of the king of Spain, who had been enchanted by his stepmother – he was very unhappy at finding the pit empty. Indeed, his first thought was that a lion must have carried off the boy and eaten him, or that an eagle must have pounced on him from the sky, and borne him away to his young ones for supper. But after he had cried till he could cry no more, it occurred to him that before he gave up the boy for dead it would be well to make a search, as perchance there might be some sign of his whereabouts. So he dried his eyes with his tail and jumped up quite cheerfully.

He began by looking to see if the bushes round about were broken and torn as if some great beast had crashed through them. But they were all just as he had left them in the morning, with the creepers still knotting tree to tree. No, it was clear that no lion had been near the spot. Then he examined the ground carefully for a bird's feather or a shred of a child's dress; he did not find these either, but the marks of a man's foot were quite plain, and these he followed.

The track turned and twisted for about two miles, and then stopped at a little cottage with roses climbing up the walls. The wolf did not want to show himself, so he crept quietly round to the back, where there was a hole in the door just big enough for the cats to come in and out of. The wolf peeped

through this hole and saw William eating his supper, and chattering away to the old woman as if he had known her all his life, for he was a friendly little boy, and purred like a pussy-cat when he was pleased. And when the wolf saw that all was well with the child, he was glad and went his way.

'William will be safer with them than with me,' he said to himself.

Many years went by, and William had grown a big boy, and was very useful to the cowherd and his wife. He could shoot now with his bow and arrow in a manner which would have pleased his first teacher, and he and his playfellows – the sons of charcoal-burners and woodmen – were wont to keep the pots supplied at home with the game they found in the forest. Besides this, he filled the pails full of water from the stream, and chopped wood for the fire, and, sometimes, was even trusted to cook the dinner. And when *this* happened William was a very proud boy indeed.

One day the emperor planned a great hunt to take place in the forest, and, while following a wild boar, he outstripped all his courtiers and lost his way. Turning first down one path and then the other, he came upon a boy gathering fruit, and so beautiful was he that the emperor thought that he must be of a fairy race.

'What is your name, my child?' asked the emperor; 'and where do you live?'

The boy looked round at the sound of his voice, and, taking off his cap, bowed low.

'I am called William, noble sir,' he answered, 'and I live with a cowherd, my father, in a cottage near by. Other kindred have I none that ever I heard of;' for the gardens of Palermo and the life of the palace had now faded into dreams in the memory of the child.

'Bid your father come hither and speak to me,' said the emperor, but William did not move.

'I fear lest harm should befall him through me,' he answered, 'and that shall never be.' But the emperor smiled as he heard him.

'Not harm, but good,' he said; and William took courage and hastened down the path to the cottage.

'I am the emperor,' said the stranger, when the boy and the cowherd returned together. 'Tell me truly, is this your son?'

Then the cowherd, trembling all over, told the whole story, and when he had finished the emperor said quietly:

'You have done well, but from to-day the boy shall be mine, and shall grow up with my daughter.'

The heart of the cowherd sank as he thought how sorely he and his wife would miss William, but he kept silence. Not so William, who broke into sobs and wails.

'I should have fared ill if this good man and his wife had not taken me and nourished me. I know not whence I came or whither I shall go! None can be so kind as they have been.'

'Cease weeping, fair child,' said the emperor, 'some day you shall be able to reward the good that they have done you;' and then the cowherd spoke and gave him wise counsel how to behave himself at court.

'Be no teller of tales, and let your words be few. Be true to your lord, and fair of speech to all men; and seek to help the poor when you may.'

'Set him on my horse,' said the emperor, and, though William wept still as he bade farewell to the cowherd, and sent a sorrowful greeting to his wife and to his playfellows Hugonet, and Abelot, and Akarin, yet he was pleased to be riding in such royal fashion, and soon dried his tears.

They reached the palace at last, and the emperor led William into the hall, and sent a messenger for Melior, his daughter.

'I have brought home a present for you,' he cried, as she entered; 'and be sure to treat him as you would your brother, for he has come of goodly kindred, though now he does not know where he was born, or who was his father.' And with that he told her the tale of how he had found the boy in the wood.

‘I shall care for him willingly,’ answered Melior, and she took him away, and saw that supper was set before him, and clothes provided for him, and made him ready for his duties as page to the emperor.

So the boy and girl grew up together, and everyone loved William, who was gentle and pleasant to all, and was skilled in what a gentleman should know. Wise he was too, beyond his years, and the emperor kept him ever at his side, and took counsel with him on many subjects touching his honour and the welfare of his people.

And if the people loved him, how much more Melior, who saw him about the court all day long, and knew the store her father set on him? Yet she remembered with sadness certain whispers she had heard of a match between herself and a foreign prince, and if her father had promised her hand nought would make him break his word.

So she sighed and bewailed herself in secret, till her cousin Alexandrine marked that something was amiss.

‘Tell me all your sickness,’ said Alexandrine one day, ‘and what grieves you so sorely. You know that you can trust me, for I have served you truly, and perhaps I may be able to help you in this strait!’

Then Melior told her, and Alexandrine listened in amaze. From his childhood William and the two girls had played together, and well Alexandrine knew that the emperor had cast his eyes upon another son-in-law. Still, she loved her cousin, and she loved William too, so she said.

‘Mourn no longer, madam; I am skilled in magic, and can heal you. So weep no more.’ And Melior took heart and was comforted.

That night Alexandrine caused William to dream a dream in which the whole world vanished away, and only he and Melior were left. In a moment he felt that as long as she was there the rest might go, and that she was the princess that was waiting for every prince. But who was he that he should dare to ask for the emperor’s daughter? and what chance had he amongst the noble suitors who now began to throng the palace? These thoughts made him very sad, and he went about his duties with a face as long as Melior’s was now.

Alexandrine paid no heed to his gloomy looks. She was very wise, and for some days left her magic to work. At last one morning she thought the time had come to heal the wounds she had caused, and planned a meeting between them. After this they had no more need of her, neither did Melior weep any longer.

For a while they were content, and asked nothing more than to see each other every day, as they had always done. But soon a fresh source of grief came. A war broke out, in which William, now a knight, had to follow the emperor, and more than once saved the life of his master. On their return, when the enemy was put to flight, the expected ambassadors from Greece arrived at court, to seek the hand of Melior, which was readily granted by her father. This news made William sick almost unto death, and Melior, who was resolved not to marry the stranger, hastened to Alexandrine in order to implore her help.

But Alexandrine only shook her head.

‘It is true,’ said she, ‘that, unless you manage to escape, you will be forced to wed the prince; but how are you to get away when there are guards before every door of the palace, except by the little gate, and to reach that you will have first to pass by the sentries, who know you?’

‘O dear Alexandrine,’ cried Melior, clasping her hands in despair. ‘Do try to think of some way to save us! I am sure you can; you are always clever, and there is nobody else.’

And Alexandrine did think of a way, but what it was must be told in the next chapter.

THE DISENCHANTMENT OF THE WERWOLF

(William of Palermo)

Everybody will remember that William and Melior trusted to Alexandrine to help them to escape from the palace, before Melior was forced into marriage by her father with the prince of Greece. At first Alexandrine declared that it was quite impossible to get them away unseen, but at length she thought of something which might succeed, though, if it failed, all three would pay a heavy penalty.

And this was her plan, and a very good one too.

She would borrow some boy's clothes, and put them on, hiding her hair under one of those tight caps that kitchen varlets wore covering all their heads; she would then go down into the big kitchens underneath the palace, where the wild beasts shot by the emperor were skinned and made into coats for the winter. Here she would have a chance of slipping out unnoticed with the skins of two white bears, and in these she would sew up William and Melior, and would let them through the little back gate, from which they could easily escape into the forest.

'Oh, I knew you would find a way!' said Melior, throwing her arms joyfully round her cousin's neck. 'I am quite sure it will all go right, only let us make haste, for my father may find us out, or perhaps I may lose my courage.'

'I will set about it at once,' said Alexandrine, 'and you and William must be ready to-night.'

So she got her boy's clothes, which her maid stole for her out of the room of one of the scullions, and dressed herself in them, smearing her face and hands with walnut-juice, that their whiteness might not betray her. She slipped down by some dark stairs into the kitchen, and joined a company of men who were hard at work on a pile of dead animals. The sun had set, and in the corner of the great hall where the flaying was going on, there was very little light, but Alexandrine marked that close to an open door was a heap of bearskins, and she took up her position as near them as she could. But the girl was careful not to stand too long in one place; she moved about from one group of men to another, lending a hand here and there and passing a merry jest, and as she did so she gave the topmost skins a little shove with her foot, getting them each time closer to the open door, and always watching her chance to pick them up and run off with them.

It came at last. The torch which lighted that end of the hall flared up and went out, leaving the men in darkness. One of them rose to fetch another, and, quick as thought, Alexandrine caught up the bearskins and was outside in the garden. From that it was easy to make her way upstairs unseen.

'See how I have sped!' she said, throwing the skins on the floor. 'But night is coming on apace, and we have no time to lose; I must sew you up in them at once.'

The skins were both so large that Melior and William wore all their own clothes beneath, and did not feel at all hot, as they expected to do.

'Am I not a bold beast?' asked Melior in glee, as she caught sight of herself in a polished shield on the wall. 'Methinks no handsomer bear was ever seen!'

'Yes, verily, madam,' answered her maiden, 'you are indeed a grisly ghost, and no man will dare to come near you. But now stand aside, for it is William's turn.'

'How do you like me, sweetheart?' asked he, when the last stitches had been put in.

'You have so fierce an air, and are so hideous a sight, that I fear to look on you!' said she. And William laughed and begged Alexandrine to guide them through the garden, as they were not yet used to going on all fours, and might stumble.

As they passed through the bushes, galloping madly – for in spite of the danger they felt as though they were children again – a Greek who was walking up to the palace saw them afar, and, seized with dread, took shelter in the nearest hut, where he told his tale. The men who heard it paid but little heed at the time, though they remembered it after; but bears were common in that country, and often came out of the forest at night.

Not knowing what a narrow escape they had had, the two runaways travelled till sunrise, when they hid themselves in a cave on the side of a hill. They had nothing to eat, but were too tired to think of that till they had had a good sleep, though when they woke up they began to wonder how they should get any food.

'Oh, it will be all right!' said Melior; 'there are blackberries in plenty and acorns and hazel-nuts, and there is a stream just below the cave – do you not hear it? It will all be much nicer than anything in the palace.'

But William did not seem to agree with her, and wished to seek out some man who would give him something he liked better than nuts and acorns. This, however, Melior would not hear of; they would certainly be followed and betrayed, she said, and, to please her, William ate the fruit and stayed in the cave, wondering what would happen on the morrow.

Luckily for themselves, they did not have to wait so long before they got a good supper. Their friend the werwolf had spied them from afar, and was ready to come to their rescue. During that day he had hidden himself under a clump of bushes close to the highway, and by-and-by he saw a man approaching, carrying a very fat wallet over his shoulder. The wolf bounded out of his cover, growling fiercely, which so frightened the man that he dropped the wallet and ran into the wood. Then the wolf picked up the wallet, which contained a loaf of bread and some meat ready cooked, and galloped away with it to William.

They felt quite strong and hearty again when they had finished their supper, and quite ready to continue their journey. As it was night, and the country was very lonely, they walked on two feet, but when morning came, or they saw signs that men were about, they speedily dropped on all fours. And all the way the werwolf followed them, and saw that they never lacked for food.

Meanwhile the preparations for Melior's marriage to the prince of Greece were going on blithely in the palace, and none thought of asking for the bride. At last, when everything was finished, the emperor bade the high chamberlain fetch the princess.

'She is not in her room, your Majesty,' said the chamberlain, when he re-entered the hall; but the emperor only thought that his daughter was timid, and answered that he would go and bring her himself.

Like the chamberlain, he found the outer room empty and passed on to the door of the inner one, which was locked. He shook and thumped and yelled with anger, till Alexandrine heard him from her distant turret, and, terrified though she was, hastened to find out what was the matter.

'My daughter! Where is my daughter?' he cried, stammering with rage.

'Asleep, sire,' answered Alexandrine.

'Asleep still!' said the emperor; 'then wake her instantly, for the bridegroom is ready and I am waiting to lead her to him.'

'Alas! sire, Melior has heard that in Greece royal brides pass their lives shut in a tower, and she has sworn that she will never wed one of that race. But, indeed, for my part, I think that is not her true reason, and that she has pledged her faith to another, whom you also know and love.'

'And who may that be?' asked the emperor.

'The man who saved your life in battle, William himself,' answered Alexandrine boldly, though her limbs shook with fear.

At this news the emperor was half beside himself with grief and rage.

'Where is she?' he cried; 'speak, girl, or I will shut you up in the tower.'

‘Where is William?’ asked Alexandrine. ‘If Melior is not here, and William is not here, then of a surety they have gone away together.’

The emperor looked at her in silence for a moment.

‘The Greeks will make war on me for this insult,’ he said; ‘and, as for William, a body of soldiers shall go in search of him this moment, and when he is found I will have his head cut off, and stuck on my palace gate as a warning to traitors.’

But the soldiers could not find him. Perhaps they did not look very carefully, for, like everyone else, they loved William. Party after party was sent out by the emperor, but they all returned without finding a trace of the runaways. Then at last the Greek who had seen the two white bears galloping through the garden came to the high chamberlain and told his tale.

‘Send to the kitchen at once and ask if any bearskins are missing,’ ordered the chamberlain; and the page returned with the tidings that the skins of two white bears could not be found.

Now the werwolf had been lurking round the palace seeking for news, and as soon as he heard that the emperor had ordered out his dogs to hunt the white bears, he made a plan in his head to save William and Melior. He hid in some bushes that lay in the path of the hounds, and let them get quite near him. As soon as they were close, he sprang out in front of their noses and they gave chase at once. And a fine dance he led them! – over mountains and through swamps, under ferns that were thickly matted together, and past wide lakes. And every step they took brought them further away from the bears, who were lying snugly in their den.

At last even the patience of the emperor was exhausted. He gave up the hunt, and bade his men call off the dogs and go home.

‘They have escaped me this time,’ said he, ‘but I will have them by-and-by. Let a reward be offered, and posted up on the gate of every city. After all, that is the surest way of capturing them.’

And the emperor was right: the shepherds and goatherds were told that if they could bring the two white bears to the gates of the palace they would not need to work for the rest of their lives, and they kept a sharp look-out as they followed their flocks. Once a man actually saw them, and gave notice to one of the royal officials, who brought a company of spearmen and surrounded the cave. Another moment, and they would have been seized, had not the wolf again come to their rescue. He leapt out from behind a rock, and snatched up the officer’s son, who had followed his father. The poor man shrieked in horror, and cried out to save the boy, so they all turned and went after the wolf as before.

‘We are safer now in our own clothes,’ said William; and they hastily stripped off the bearskins, and stole away, but they would not leave the skins behind, for they had learnt to love them.

For a long while they wandered through the forest, the werwolf ever watching over them, and bringing them food. At length the news spread abroad, no one knew how, that William and Melior were running about as bears no more, but in the garments they always wore. So men began to look out for them, and once they were very nearly caught by some charcoal-burners. Then the wolf killed a hart and a hind, and sewed them in their skins and guided them across the Straits of Messina into the kingdom of Sicily.

Very dimly, and one by one, little things that had happened in his childhood began to come back to William; but he wondered greatly how he seemed to know this land, where he had never been before. The king his father had been long dead, but the queen (his mother) and his sister were besieged in the city of Palermo by the king of Spain, who was full of wrath because the princess had refused to marry his son. The queen was in great straits, when one night she dreamed that a wolf and two harts had come to help her, and one bore the face of her son, while both had crowns on their heads.

She could sleep no more that night, so she rose and looked out of the window on the park which lay below, and there, under the trees, were the hart and the hind! Panting for joy, the queen summoned a priest, and told him her dream, and, as she told it, behold the skins cracked, and shining clothes appeared beneath.

‘Your dream has been fulfilled,’ said the priest. ‘The hind is the daughter of the emperor of Rome, who fled away with yonder knight dressed in a hart skin!’

Joyfully the queen made herself ready, and she soon joined the animals, who had wandered off to a part of the park that was full of rocks and caves. She greeted them with fair words, and begged William to take service under her, which he did gladly.

‘Sweet sir, what token will you wear on your shield?’ asked she; and William answered, ‘Good madam, I will have a werwolf on a shield of gold, and let him be made hideous and huge.’

‘That shall be done,’ said she.

When the shield was painted, William prayed her to give him a horse, and she led him into the stable, and bade him choose one for himself. And he chose one that had been ridden by the late king his father. And the horse knew him, though his mother did not, and it neighed from pure delight. After that William called to the soldiers to rally round him, and there was fought a great battle, and the Spaniards were put to flight, and throughout Palermo the people rejoiced mightily.

When the enemy had retreated far away, and William returned to the palace, where the queen and Melior were awaiting him; suddenly, from the window, they beheld the werwolf go by, and as he passed he held up his foot as if he craved mercy.

‘What does he mean by that?’ asked the queen.

‘It betokens great good to us,’ answered William.

‘That is well,’ said the queen; ‘but the sight of that beast causes me much sorrow. For my fair son was stolen away from me by such a one, when he was four years old, and never more have I heard of him.’ But in her heart she felt, though she said nothing, that she had found him again.

By-and-by the king of Spain came back with another army, and there was more fighting. In the end the Spanish king was forced to yield up his sword to William, who carried him captor to his mother Felice. The queen received him with great courtesy, and placed him next her at dinner, and the peers who had likewise been taken prisoners sat down to feast.

The next day a council was held in the hall of the palace to consider the terms of peace. The king of Spain and his son were present also, and everyone said in turn what penalty the enemy should pay for having besieged their city and laid waste their cornfields. In the midst of this grave discussion a werwolf entered through the open door, and, trotting up to the Spanish king, he kissed his feet. Then he bowed to the queen and to William, and went away as he came.

The sight of his tail disappearing through the door restored to the guards their courage, which had vanished in the presence of anything so unexpected. They sprang up to pursue him, but like a flash of lightning William flung himself in their path, crying, ‘If any man dare to hurt that beast, I will do him to death with my own hands;’ and, as they all knew that William meant what he said, they slunk back to their places.

‘Tell me, gracious king,’ asked William when they were all seated afresh round the council table, ‘why did the wolf bow to you more than to other men?’

Then the king made answer that long ago his first wife had died, leaving him with a son, and that in a little while he had married again, and that his second wife had had a son also. One day when he came back from the wars she told him that his eldest son had been drowned, but he found out afterwards that she had changed him into a werwolf, so that her own child might succeed to the crown.

‘And I think,’ he added, ‘that this werwolf may be indeed the son I lost.’

‘It may right well be thus,’ cried William, ‘for he has the mind of a man, and of a wise man too. Often has he succoured me in my great need, and if your wife had skill to turn him into a werwolf her charms can make him a man again. Therefore, sire, neither you nor your people shall go hence out of prison till he has left his beast’s shape behind him. So bid your queen come hither, and if she says you nay I will fetch her myself!’

Then the king called one of his great lords, and he bade him haste to Spain and tell the queen what had befallen him, and to bring her with all speed to Palermo. Little as she liked the summons, the

Spanish queen dared not refuse, and on her arrival she was led at once into the great hall, which was filled with a vast company, both of Spaniards and Sicilians. When all were assembled William fetched the werwolf from his chamber, where he had lain for nights and days, waiting till his stepmother should come.

Together they entered the hall, but at the sight of the wicked woman who had done him such ill the wolf's bristles stood up on his back, and with a snarl that chilled the blood of all that heard it he sprang towards the dais. But, luckily, William was on the watch, and, flinging his arms round the wolf's neck, he held him back, saying in a whisper:

'My dear, sweet beast, trust to me as truly as to your own brother. I sent for her for your sake, and if she does not undo her evil spells I will have her body burned to coals, and her ashes scattered to the winds.'

The wicked queen knew well what doom awaited her, and that she could resist no longer. Sinking on her knees before the wolf, she confessed the ill she had wrought, and added:

'Sweet Alfonso, soon shall the people see your seemly face, and your body as it would have been but for me!' At that she led the wolf into a private chamber, and, drawing from her wallet a thread of red silk, she bound it round a ring she wore, which no witchcraft could prevail against. This ring she hung round the wolf's neck, and afterwards read him some rhymes out of a book. Then the werwolf looked at his body, and, behold, he was a man again!

There were great rejoicings at the court of Palermo when prince Alfonso came among them once more. He forgave the queen for her wickedness, and rebuked his father for having stirred up such a wanton and bloody war.

'Plague and famine would have preyed upon this land,' he said, 'had not this knight, whose real name is unknown to you, come to your aid. He is the rightful lord of this country, for he is the son of king Embrons and queen Felice, and I am the werwolf who carried him away, to save him from a cruel death that was planned for him by his own uncle!'

So the tale ends and everyone was made happy. The werwolf, now prince Alfonso, married William's sister, and in due time ruled the kingdom of Spain, and William and Melior lived at Palermo till the emperor her father died, when the Romans offered him the crown in his stead.

And if you want to know any more about them, you must read the story for yourselves.

(Old Romance of *William of Palermo*.)

THE SLAYING OF HALLGERDA'S HUSBANDS

If any traveller had visited Iceland nearly a thousand years ago, he would have found the island full of busy, industrious people, who made the most of their short summer, and tilled the ground so well that they generally reaped a golden harvest. Many of the families were akin, and had fled some sixty years earlier from Norway and the islands of the sea because the king, Harald Fairhair, had introduced new laws, which displeased them. They were soon joined, for one reason and another, by dwellers in Orkney and Shetland and the Faroe Islands and the Hebrides, and, being men of one race, they easily adopted the same customs and obeyed the same laws.

Now the Northmen had many good qualities and many very troublesome ones. The father of every household had absolute power over all his children; he fixed the amount of money that should be paid in exchange for his daughter at her marriage, and the sum that was due for the wounded slave or 'thrall' as he was called, or even for his murdered son; or, if he thought better, he could refuse to take any money at all as the price of his injuries, and could then avenge blood by blood.

But once he had declared his purpose he was bound to abide by his word.

Fond though they were of fighting, the Northmen had their own notions of fair dealing. If you had killed a man, you had to confess it; if you slew him at night, or when he was sleeping, you were guilty of murder, and if you refused to throw gravel or sand over his body, thus denying your enemy the rights of burial, you were considered a dastard even by your friends.

Now in the valley or dale of the river Laxa dwelt two brothers, each in his own house. One was named Hauskuld, and the other Hrut. This Hrut was much younger than Hauskuld, and was handsome, brave, and, like so many of the Northmen, very gentle when not engaged in war. Like many of them also, the gift was given him of reading the future.

One day Hauskuld made a feast, and Hrut came with many of his kinsmen, and took his place next his brother Hauskuld. They were all seated in the great hall of the house and near the fire Hauskuld's little daughter, Hallgerda, was playing with some other children. Fair and blue eyed were they all, but Hallgerda was taller and more beautiful than any, and her hair fell in long bright curls far below her waist. 'Come hither,' said Hauskuld, holding out his hand, and, taking her by the chin, he kissed her and bade her go back to her companions. Then, turning to his brother he asked:

'Well, is she not fair to look upon?' but Hrut held his peace. Again Hauskuld would know what was in the thoughts of Hrut concerning the maiden, and this time Hrut made answer:

'Of a truth fair is the maid, and great will be the havoc wrought by her among men. But one thing I would know, which of our race has given her those thief's eyes?'

At that Hauskuld waxed wroth, and bade Hrut begone to his own house.

After this some years went by. Hrut left Iceland and spent some time at the Court of Norway, and then he came back and married, and had much trouble with his wife, Unna. But after they had parted and she had gone back to her father, Hrut was a free man again, and he went to visit his brother Hauskuld, whose daughter Hallgerda had now become a woman. Tall and stately she was, and fair, but sly and greedy of gain, as in the days of her childhood, and more she loved Thiostolf, whose wife had brought her up, than Hauskuld her father, or Hrut her uncle.

When Hallgerda went back to Hauskuld her father, he saw that he must be looking out for a husband for her, as the fame of her beauty would go far. It was indeed not long before one came to her, Thorwald, son of Oswif, who, besides the broad lands which he possessed on the island, owned the Bear Isles out in the sea, where fish were to be had in abundance.

Oswif, Thorwald's father, knew more about the maiden than did Thorwald, who had been on a journey, and he tried to turn his son's thought to some other damsel, but Thorwald only answered, 'Whatever you may say, she is the only woman I will marry;' and Oswif made reply, 'Well, after all, the risk is yours and not mine.'

So they two set out for Hauskuld's house and he bade them welcome heartily. They wasted no time before telling him their business, and Hauskuld answered that for his part he could desire no more honourable match for his daughter, but he would not hide from them that her temper was hard and cruel.

'That shall not stand between us,' said Thorwald, 'so tell me what I shall pay for her.'

And the bargain was made, and Thorwald rode home with his father, but Hallgerda was never asked if she wished to wed Thorwald or not.

When Hauskuld told his daughter that she was to be married to Thorwald, she was not pleased, and said that if her father had loved her as much as he pretended to do he would have consulted her in such a matter. Besides, she did not think that the match was in any way worthy of her.

But, grumble as she might, there was no getting out of it, and, as Hauskuld would listen to nothing, she sought for her foster-father, Thiostolf, who never had been known to say her nay. When she had told her story, he bade her be of good cheer, prophesying that Thorwald should not be her only husband, and that if she was not happy she had only to come to him and he would do her bidding, be it what it might, save as regarded Hauskuld and Hrut.

Then Hallgerda was comforted, and went home to prepare the bridal feast, to which all their friends and kinsfolk were bidden. And when the marriage was over, she rode home with her husband Thorwald, and Thiostolf her foster-father was ever at her side, and she talked more to him than to Thorwald. And there he stayed all the winter.

Now, as time went on, Thorwald began to repent that he had not hearkened to the words of his father. His wife paid him scant attention, and she wasted his goods, and was noted among all the women of the dales for her skill in driving a hard bargain. And, beyond all that, folk whispered that she was not careful to ask whether the things she took were her own or someone else's. This irked Thorwald sore; but worse was to follow. The spring came late that year, and Hallgerda told Thorwald that the storehouse was empty of meat and fish, and he must go out to the Bear Isles and fetch some more. At this Thorwald reproached her, saying that it was her fault if garners were not yet full, and on Hallgerda's taunting him with being a miser, struck her such a blow in the face that blood spouted, and when he left her to row with his men to the islands, Hallgerda sat still, vowing vengeance.

It was not long in coming. Soon after, Thiostolf chanced to pass that way, and, seeing the blood on her face, asked whence it sprang.

'From the hand of my husband Thorwald,' answered she, and reproached Thiostolf for suffering such dealings.

'I knew not of it,' said Thiostolf, 'but I will avenge it speedily;' and he went to the shore, and put off in a boat, taking nothing but a great axe with him. He found Thorwald and his men on the beach of the biggest island, loading his vessel with meat and fish from the storehouses. Then he began to pick a quarrel with Thorwald and spoke words that vexed him more and more, till Thorwald bent forward to seize a knife which lay near him. This was the moment for which the other had been waiting. He lifted his axe and gave a blow at Hallgerda's husband, and, though Thorwald tried to defend himself, a second stroke clove his skull.

'Your axe is bloody,' said Hallgerda, who was standing outside the door.

'Yes; and *this* time you can choose your own husband,' answered Thiostolf; but Hallgerda only asked calmly:

'So Thorwald is dead?' and as Thiostolf nodded she went on: 'You must go northward, to Swan my kinsman; he will hide you from your enemies.'

After that she unlocked her chests and dismissed her maidens with gifts; then she mounted her horse and rode home to her father.

'Where is Thorwald?' asked Hrut, who had heard nothing.

'He is dead,' answered Hallgerda.

'By the hand of Thiostolf?' said her father.

'By his hand, and by that of no other;' and Hallgerda passed by them and entered the house.

As soon as Oswif, Thorwald's father, had heard the tidings, he guessed that Thiostolf must have gone northward to Swan, and calling his men round him they all rode to the Bearfirth. But before they were in sight Swan cried to Thiostolf, 'Oswif is coming, but we need fear nothing, they will never see us,' and he took a goatskin and wrapped it round his head, and said to it: 'Be thou darkness and fog, and fright and wonder, to those who seek us.' And immediately a thick fog and black darkness fell over all things, and Oswif and his men lost their way, and tumbled off their horses and tripped over large stones, till Oswif resolved to give up seeking Thiostolf and Swan, and to go himself to Hauskuld.

Now Hauskuld was abiding at home, and with him was Hrut his brother. Oswif got off his horse, and, throwing its bridle over a stake driven into the ground, he said to Hauskuld: 'I have come to ask atonement for my son's life.'

'It was not I who slew your son,' answered Hauskuld; 'but as he is slain, it is just that you should seek atonement from somebody.'

'You have much need to give him what he asks,' said Hrut, 'for it is not well that evil tongues should be busy with your daughter's name.'

'Then give the judgment yourself,' replied Hauskuld.

'That will I do, in truth,' said Hrut; 'and be sure that I will not spare you, as I know it was Hallgerda wrought his death;' so he offered his hand to Oswif, as a token that his award would be accepted, and that at the Great Council of the nation he would not summon Hauskuld for Thorwald's murder. And Oswif took his hand, and Hauskuld's, and Hrut bade his brother pay down two hundred pounds in silver to Oswif, while he himself gave him a stout cloak. And Oswif went away well pleased with the award.

For some time Hallgerda dwelt in her father's house, and she brought with her a share of Thorwald's goods, and was very rich. But men kept away from her, having heard tales of her evil ways. At length Glum, the youngest son of Olaf the Lame, told his brother that he would go no more trading in strange lands, but would remain at home, and meant to take to himself a wife, if the one on whom he had set his heart would come to him.

So one day a company of the men, with Glum and Thorarin his brother at their head, rode into the Dales to the door of Hauskuld's dwelling. Hauskuld greeted them heartily and begged them to stay all night, sending secretly for Hrut, whose counsel he always asked when any matter of importance was talked over.

'Do you know what they want?' said Hrut next morning, when his brother met him on the road.

'No,' replied Hauskuld, 'they have not spoken to me of any business.'

'Then I will tell you,' answered Hrut. 'They have come to ask Hallgerda in marriage.'

'And what shall I do?' said Hauskuld.

'Tell them you would like the match,' replied Hrut, 'but hide nothing. Let them know all there is of good and evil concerning her.'

They reached the house as he spoke, and the guests came out, and Thorarin opened his business by entreating Hauskuld to give his daughter Hallgerda to Glum his brother. 'You know,' he added, 'that he is rich and strong, and thought well of by all men.'

'Yes, I know that,' answered Hauskuld; 'but once before I chose a husband for my daughter, and matters turned out ill for all of us.'

'That will be no hindrance,' replied Thorarin, 'for the lot of one man is not the lot of all men. And things might have fared better had it not been for the meddling of Thiostolf.'

'You speak truth,' said Hrut, who had listened to their talk in silence; 'and the marriage may yet turn out well if you will do as I tell you. See that you suffer not Thiostolf to ride with her to Glum's house, and that he never sleeps in the house for more than three nights running, without Glum's leave, on pain of outlawry and death by Glum himself. And if Glum will hearken to my counsel, leave to

stay he will never give. But it is time to let Hallgerda know of the matter, and she shall say whether Glum is to her mind.'

And Thorarin agreed, and Hauskuld sent to summon his daughter.

Now, though nothing had been said to Hallgerda as to the business which brought all these men to her father's house, perhaps she may have guessed something, for when she appeared she was attended by her two women, and clad in her festal garments. She wore a dress of scarlet, girdled by a silver belt, and over it a mantle of soft dark blue, while her thick yellow hair was unbound, and fell almost to her knees. She smiled and spoke kindly to the visitors, then sat herself down between her father and uncle. After that Glum spoke.

'Your father and Thorarin my brother have had talk about a marriage betwixt you and me, Hallgerda. Is it your will, as it is theirs? Tell me all that is in your heart. For, if you like me not, I will straightway ride back again.'

'The match is to my liking,' answered Hallgerda, 'and better suited to my condition than what my father made for me before. And you are to my liking also, if our tempers do not fall out.'

'Let Hallgerda betroth herself,' said Hrut, when they had told her what terms had been arranged, and that Glum should bring goods or money to an equal value to Hallgerda's, and that they two should divide the whole.

After that the betrothal ceremony took place, and Glum went away, and returned no more till his wedding.

There was a great company in Hauskuld's hall to witness Hallgerda's marriage, and when the feast began Thiostolf might have been seen stalking about holding his axe aloft; but, as the guests pretended not to know he was there, no harm came of it.

For some time Glum and his wife lived happily together, though Hallgerda proved herself the same greedy yet wasteful woman she had been before. At the end of a year a daughter was born to her, whom she named Thorgerda, and the child grew up to be as beautiful as her mother. But by-and-by trouble came to them through Thiostolf, who had been driven away by Hauskuld for beating one of his thralls. Thiostolf vowed vengeance in his heart, and rode south to Glum's house.

Hallgerda was pleased to see him, but when she heard his tale she said she could not give him shelter without the consent of Glum. So when her husband came in she ran quickly to greet him, and, putting her arms round his neck, she asked if he would agree to something she wished very much.

'If it is anything I can do in honour,' answered Glum, 'do it I will of a surety.'

Then she told him how her father had cast out Thiostolf, and that he had come to her for shelter, and she wished him to remain, if it was Glum's will. And Glum answered that, if she wished it greatly, Thiostolf should remain, unless he betook himself to evil courses.

For a while Thiostolf went warily, and no fault did Glum find with him; then he fell to marring everything, as he had done in Thorwald's time, and to no one would he listen save to Hallgerda only. In vain Thorarin warned Glum that things would have an ill ending, but Glum only smiled, and let Hallgerda have her way.

When autumn came, and the days grew short and cold, the men went to bring their flocks home from the pastures where they had been feeding all the summer. It was hard work, for the sheep often strayed far, and, besides, the flocks got mixed up, and needed to be separated one from the other. One day, when the shepherds had brought tidings that many of Glum's sheep were missing, Glum bade Thiostolf go into the hills and see if he could find those that were lost.

But Thiostolf grew angry, and answered rudely:

'I am not your slave, and it is not my work to bring in sheep. If you mean to go yourself, perhaps I will consent to go with you.'

At this Glum was greatly angered, and, seeking Hallgerda, he told her what had happened, adding as he did so:

'I will not have Thiostolf here any longer.'

Then Hallgerda waxed very wrathful, and she upheld Thiostolf in his ill doing.

At last the patience of Glum gave way, and he struck her a blow in the face, and crying, 'Words are wasted on you,' went off to his own business. Hallgerda, who loved him much in spite of her unruly tongue, wept bitterly at the thought of what had happened, and, as evil fate would have it, Thiostolf heard her, and saw the red mark across her cheek.

'It shall not be there again,' he said, but Hallgerda answered:

'It is not for you to come between Glum and me.'

When he heard this, Thiostolf only smiled and said nothing, but got ready to go with Glum and his men, to seek after the sheep. After long searchings they found many of those that were missing, and he sent some of his men one way and some another, till at length by chance he and Thiostolf were left alone. They soon came upon a flock of wild sheep, and tried to drive them down the steep side of a hill towards Glum's house, but it was of no use, and as fast as the sheep were collected together they all scattered again. Very soon, Glum and Thiostolf grew tired and ill-tempered, and each told the other he was stupid and lazy. At length, Glum taunted Thiostolf with being a thrall, and from that blows quickly followed. Both men drew their axes, but Thiostolf struck so hard at Glum that he rolled dead upon the ground.

At the sight of Glum lying dead at his feet, Thiostolf's wrath cooled somewhat. He stooped and covered Glum's body with stones, and took a gold ring from his finger. After that he took the road back to Varmalek, and found Hallgerda sitting in front of the door. Her eyes fell instantly on the bloody axe, and Thiostolf saw this and said hastily:

'Glum, your husband, is slain.'

'Then it is by your hand,' she answered.

'Yes, it is,' said Thiostolf, and added after a moment's pause: 'What is best to be done now?'

'Go to Hrut, and ask him,' replied Hallgerda, and Thiostolf went.

'Glum is slain' said Thiostolf to Hrut, who had come down to the door in answer to Thiostolf's knock.

'Who slew him?' asked Hrut.

'I slew him,' answered Thiostolf.

'Why did you come here?' asked Hrut again.

'Because Hallgerda sent me,' answered Thiostolf.

'Then Hallgerda had no part in his slaying,' said Hrut, with a sound of relief in his voice; but as he spoke he drew his sword, which Thiostolf saw, and thrust at Hrut with his axe. Hrut, too, saw, and sprang quickly aside, knocking up as he did so the handle of the axe, so that it fell full on the ground. Turning himself swiftly, Hrut dealt Thiostolf a blow which brought him to his knees, and a stab in the heart finished the work.

After that Hrut's house-carles laid stones on Thiostolf's body, while he himself rode away to tell Hauskuld all that had befallen. And soon after Thorarin, Glum's brother, came there too, with eleven men at his back. He asked Hauskuld what atonement he would make for Glum, but Hauskuld answered that it was neither he nor his daughter who had slain Glum, and that Hrut had avenged himself on Thiostolf. To this Thorarin said nothing, but Hrut offered to give him gifts, and so peace lay between them.

Now, Hrut's wife, Unna, was of kin to two brothers, Gunnar and Kolskegg. Both were tall, brave men, but there was not Gunnar's like in all the country round for beauty, and for skill in shooting, jumping, and swimming. And, besides this, he was beautiful and gentle, faithful to the friends he made, but not making them readily. His chief friend was Njal, from whom he ever sought counsel, for Njal was a wise man and could see far into the future.

Having a mind to see something of the world, Gunnar set sail for Norway, where he stayed some time, and had many adventures. It was early in the summer when he and Kolskegg sailed home to Iceland, where men were assembling for the great Council, or Thing.

Gunnar's first act was to ride off to Njal's house, and Gunnar asked if he would be present at the Thing. 'No, truly,' answered Njal; 'stay you at home or bad will come of it.'

And Gunnar! What evil was likely to befall him, who wished to live at peace with everyone? But Njal only shook his head and said slowly:

'I remain in my own house, and if I had my way you should do so also.'

But Gunnar would not listen, and rode straight off to the Thing.

What happened to him when he got there will be told in another story.

(Saga)

THE DEATH OF GUNNAR

Now of all the men gathered together at the Thing of the year 974, no man was handsomer or more splendidly clad than Gunnar. He was arrayed in the scarlet raiment given him by King Harald, and he bore on his arm a gold ring, given him by Hacon the Earl, and the horse he rode had a shining black skin.

A brave figure he made one morning as he left the Hill of Laws and passed out beyond the tents of the men of Mossfell. And as he went there came to meet him a woman whose dress was no less rich than his. She stopped as he drew near, and told him that she was Hallgerda, Hauskuld's daughter, and that she knew well that he was Gunnar the traveller, and she wished to hear some of the wonders of the lands beyond the seas. So he sat down, and they two talked together for long, and they agreed well, and became friends. After a while he asked her if she had a husband.

'No,' she replied; men feared her, for they held that she brought them ill-luck; but at that Gunnar laughed, and said, 'What would you answer if I asked you to marry me?'

'Are you jesting?' said Hallgerda.

'No, of a sooth,' replied Gunnar.

'Then go and see what my father has to say to it,' answered Hallgerda, and Gunnar went.

Hauskuld was inside his booth when Gunnar arrived. Hrut was there likewise, and bade him welcome. For a while the talk ran upon the business of the Thing, and then Gunnar turned and asked what answer Hauskuld would give if he offered to lay down money for Hallgerda.

'What do you say, Hrut?' inquired Hauskuld.

'It ought not to be,' replied Hrut. 'No man has aught but good to say of you; no man has aught but ill to say of her. And this I must not hide from you.'

'I thank you for your plain speech,' said Gunnar; 'but my soul is still set on wedding Hallgerda. And we have spoken together, and are agreed in this matter.'

But though Hrut knew that his words were vain, he told Gunnar all that had happened in respect of Hallgerda and her two husbands. And Gunnar weighed it for a while, and then he said, 'You know the saying, "Forewarned is forearmed." Doubtless it is true, all that you have told of Hallgerda, but I am strong, and have travelled far, and if we can make a bargain, so shall it be.'

So a messenger was sent for Hallgerda, and she betrothed herself, as she had done to Glum, and after that Gunnar rode over to Njal, and told him what things had happened.

'Evil will come of it betwixt you and me,' said Njal sadly.

'No woman, or man either, shall ever work ill between us,' answered Gunnar, who loved Njal more than his own father.

'She works ill wherever she goes,' replied Njal, 'and you will never cease making atonements for her;' but he said no more, for he was a wise man and wasted no words, and when Gunnar asked him to come to the wedding feast he gave his promise that he would be there.

The winter after Gunnar's wedding, he and Hallgerda were bidden to a great feast at Njal's house. Njal and his wife greeted them heartily, and by-and-by Helgi, Njal's son, came, and with him Thorhalla his wife. Then Bergthora, Njal's wife, went up to Hallgerda, and said, 'Give place to Thorhalla,' but Hallgerda would not, and she fell to quarrelling with Bergthora, and at last Bergthora taunted Hallgerda with having plotted to do Thorwald her husband to death. At that Hallgerda turned and said to Gunnar: 'It is nothing to be married to the strongest man in Iceland, if you avenge not these insults, Gunnar.'

But Gunnar cried that he would take no part in women's quarrels, least of all in Njal's house, and bade Hallgerda come home with him.

'We shall meet again, Bergthora,' said Hallgerda as she mounted the sleigh. Then they rode back to Lithend and spent the rest of the winter there.

When the spring came, Gunnar went to the Thing, bidding Hallgerda take heed, and to give no cause of offence to his friends. But she would give no promise, and he set forth with a heavy heart.

By ill-fortune, Njal and Gunnar owned a wood between them, and when Njal and his sons departed to the Thing, Bergthora, Njal's wife, ordered Swart her servant to cut her some branches for kindling fires from this very forest. These tidings reached the ears of Hallgerda, and she muttered with a grim face, 'It is the last time that Swart shall steal my wood,' and bade Kol, her bailiff, start early next morning and seek Swart.

'And when I find him?' asked Kol; but Hallgerda only turned away angrily.

'You, the worst of men, ask that?' said she. 'Why, you shall kill him, of course.'

So Kol took his axe, though he was ill at ease, for he knew that evil would come of it, and he mounted one of Gunnar's horses and fared to the wood.

He soon saw Swart and his men piling up bundles of firewood, so he left his horse in a hollow, and crouched down behind some bushes, till he heard Swart bid the men carry the wood to Njal's house, as he himself had more work to do. He began to look about for a tall straight young stem with which to make himself a bow, when Kol sprang out of the bushes and dealt Swart such a stroke with his axe that he fell dead without a word. After that Kol went back and told Hallgerda.

And Hallgerda spoke cheering words, and said he need have no fear, for that she would protect him; but Kol's heart was heavy.

Now Hallgerda had forced Kol to slay Swart, to bring about a quarrel between her husband and Njal, so she straightway sent a messenger to seek Gunnar at the Thing, and tell him what had befallen Swart. Gunnar listened in silence to the messenger's tale; then he called his men around him, and they all went to Njal's tent, and begged him to come out and speak to Gunnar.

'Swart, your house servant has been killed by Hallgerda and Kol her man,' said Gunnar gravely when Njal stood before him; and he told the tale as he had heard it from the messenger.

'It is for you, Njal, to fix the atonement,' he said at the end.

'You will have work to atone for all Hallgerda's misdoings,' answered Njal, 'and it will take all our old friendship to keep us from quarrelling now. But I have it in mind that at the last you shall win through, but after hard fighting. As to the atonement, as you are my friend and have no hand in this, I will fix it at twelve ounces of silver. And if it should come to be your turn to settle an award, I shall not expect to pay more than that.'

So Gunnar laid down the money and gave it to Bergthora his wife when he came home with his sons from the Thing. And Bergthora was content, but said to her husband that it should not be spent, as it would some day do to make atonement for Kol.

Although Hallgerda met her husband bravely and answered him boldly, in secret she trembled a little at his stern face and sharp words, as he told her that she was to remember that whatever quarrels she might choose to begin, the ending of them would always lie with him. But she pretended not to care, and went out among her neighbours as usual, telling all who would listen the tale of the killing of Swart. At length this reached the ears of Bergthora, and she was sore angered, but bided her time in silence.

When Njal and his sons went up to the pastures to see after the cattle, and the thralls were busy working in the fields, Bergthora the mistress was left alone in the house. On this day a man mounted on a black horse and armed with a spear and a short sword rode up to the door and asked her if she could find something for him to do. He was skilled in many things, he said, but his temper was hot, and had oftentimes been his bane.

'I will give you work,' answered Bergthora, 'but you must do whatever I bid you, even though it should be to slay a man.'

'You have plenty of other men whom you can better trust on such business,' replied the man, as if he repented of his bargain; but Bergthora only told him that she expected her servants to do as they were bid, and sent the man to put his horse in the stable.

During that summer another Thing was held and Njal and his sons went to it, and likewise Gunnar. But Bergthora was left alone in the house with her servants.

Then she called Atli, the new man, and bade him seek out Kol, that he might slay him, so Atli took his horse and his sword and spear and departed.

He found Kol in the place where some men had shown him, and he spoke to Kol civilly, but only received rude tones in answer. So, without more ado, Atli thrust at him, and Kol, though wounded, swung his axe above his head; but his eyes had grown dim, and he could not see to aim, and he fell to the ground and rolled over.

Atli left the body where it was, and rode on till he came to some of Gunnar's men, and bade them go and tell Hallgerda that Kol was dead.

'Did you kill him?' asked the man.

'Well, I don't expect Hallgerda will think that he dealt his own death-blow,' answered Atli; and with that he rode back to Bergthora, who praised him for the swiftness with which he had done her bidding. But Atli did not seem content, and at last he said:

'What will Njal think?'

'Oh, never fear him,' replied Bergthora, 'for he took with him the money of the atonement for the slaying of Swart, and now he can pay it over for Kol. But in spite of the atonement, beware of Hallgerda, who knows nought of promises.'

When Hallgerda heard of Kol's slaying, she bade a messenger ride to Gunnar at the Thing, and Gunnar sent to seek out Njal and Skarphedinn his son. They came to his tent, and he greeted them, and then Njal said that Bergthora his wife had done great wrong in breaking the atonement, and that Gunnar must now fix the award for Kol.

'Let it be the same as that which I paid for Swart,' said Gunnar; and Njal laid down the money and they parted, and no ill blood was between them, though their wives were still resolved to do each other all the ill they could.

Njal was too wise a man not to know that Hallgerda would seek revenge on Atli for the slaying of Kol, and he begged Atli would take service far away to the east, so that Hallgerda might not reach him. But Atli told Njal that he would sooner be slain in his service than live free in the service of another master, and he would gladly stay where he was if Njal would grant him the atonement due to a free man.

This Njal granted, and Atli remained in his house.

Hallgerda soon came to know what had happened, and she sent messengers both to Bergthora and to Gunnar at the Thing to tell them about it.

'Hallgerda my wife has caused Atli to be slain!' said Gunnar to Njal and to Skarphedinn his son. 'What atonement must I make for him?'

'The atonement will be heavy, for he was no thrall, but a freeman, and I fear it may cause strife between us,' replied Njal; but Gunnar stretched out his hand and said that no woman should sow strife betwixt him and Njal. Then Njal fixed a hundred ounces of silver, and Gunnar laid it down before him.

'Hallgerda does not let our servants die of old age,' said Skarphedinn, as they rode home from the Thing.

Now the words came true, that Gunnar had spoken, and 'blow for blow' grew to be the rule between Hallgerda and Bergthora; but for all that there was no quarrel between Njal and Gunnar.

So the years went by, and many Things had been held, and much blood-money had been paid, when one spring there was a great dearth of hay throughout all Iceland, and much cattle died. Gunnar, who was wise as well as rich, had seen what was coming and had laid up stores of both dried meat and of hay. As long as they lasted, he shared them with his neighbours, but when his barns were empty he called Kolskegg his brother and two of his friends, and they all fared to Kirkby, where dwelt Otkell the son of Skarf.

This Otkell owned many flocks and herds and wide pastures, and Gunnar hoped that his barns might yet be full.

'I have come to buy meat and hay, if there is any in your storehouses, for mine are empty!' said Gunnar.

'I have yet many storehouses untouched,' answered Otkell, 'but I will sell you nothing.'

'Will you give me them, then?' asked Gunnar, 'and I will pay you back some time in what you will.'

'I will neither give nor sell,' said Otkell.

'Let us take what we want and leave the money,' said Thrain, who had come with Gunnar, but Gunnar answered: 'I am no robber!' and was turning to go when Otkell stopped him.

'Will you buy a thrall from me? He is a good thrall,' said Otkell, 'but I have no need of him.'

And Gunnar bought the thrall, and they all went home to Lithend together.

When Njal heard that Otkell would not sell to Gunnar, he was very wroth and rode up into the hills with all his sons, and took meat from his storehouses and bound it upon five horses, and hay from his barns and bound it upon ten horses, and they drove them all to Lithend, which was Gunnar's house.

'Never ask another man for aught when you can ask me,' said Njal, and Gunnar answered:

'Your gifts are great, but truly your love is greater.'

In a few weeks the summer began, and, as was his custom, Gunnar rode to the Thing, leaving Hallgerda in the house at Lithend.

The day after he had ridden away with his men Hallgerda sent for Malcolm the thrall, and said to him:

'I have somewhat for you to do! Take with you two horses besides the one you ride, and go to Kirkby and steal meat enough to load the two horses, and butter and cheese as well. But take heed, when all is done, to set the storehouses on fire, so that none can trace that the goods have vanished.'

Malcolm the thrall lifted his head and looked at her.

'I have never been a thief, in spite of all my ill-deeds,' said he.

But Hallgerda only laughed and made sport of him.

'Do you think men have kept silent about your misdeeds?' she asked. 'Hie hence when I bid you, or you shall not see the new moon rise!'

And Malcolm the thrall knew that she spoke no jesting words, and he did her bidding; and none would have known of the thing had he not dropped his knife when he was trying to mend the thong of his shoe, and his belt also.

A few days after that Gunnar and his men returned home, and many guests with him. The table was set by Hallgerda herself, and besides meat there were also great cheeses and jars of butter. Well Gunnar knew that Njal had not sent these, and he asked Hallgerda whence they came.

'It beseems a man to eat what is before him and not to trouble himself further,' answered Hallgerda; but Gunnar cried out:

'I will have no part in food that is ill come by,' and with that he gave her a buffet on the cheek.

'I shall remember that,' said Hallgerda, and she got up and went out.

The next morning, Skamkell, Otkell's friend, was riding to bring in some sheep, when he saw something bright on the side of the path. He got off his horse to see what it was, and found the belt and knife which Malcolm had dropped, and he took them straight to Kirkby.

'Did you ever see these things before?' asked Skamkell.

'Yes, often,' answered Otkell; 'they are the knife and belt of Malcolm the thrall. And they asked many men the same question, and they all knew them likewise. Then they went toward Mord the son of Valgard and took counsel with him, how to charge Gunnar's thrall with the theft and the burning; for they feared Gunnar, the mighty man of war. At last, for three silver marks Mord agreed to give them his help, and bade them follow out his plan.

It was this. That they should send women over the country with goods of housekeeping use, and mark what was given them in exchange. 'Take heed that you note carefully,' said Mord, 'because no man will keep in his house the things that he has stolen, if he has a chance of getting rid of them. Set therefore apart whatever you get from each house, and bring it to me.'

And it was done exactly as Mord commanded, and in fourteen days the women came back, all bearing large bundles.

'Who gave you the most?' asked Mord, and one woman answered:

'Hallgerda, the wife of Gunnar; she gave us a cheese cut into great slices.'

'I will keep that cheese,' said Mord.

When the women had gone, Mord rode away to Otkell's farm, and bade him fetch the cheese-mould of Thorgerda his wife. And when it was brought, Mord took the slices and laid them in it, and they filled up the mould.

After this they all saw that Hallgerda had stolen the cheese, and, now that Mord had found the thief, he went back to his own house.

The tidings soon spread far and wide, and reached the ears of Kolskegg, who rode over to Lithend, so that he might speak with Gunnar.

'Know you that it is said by every man that it was Hallgerda who caused the fire at Kirkby, that she might steal the cheese and butter?' asked he.

'I have thought before that it must be so, but how can I set it right?' answered Gunnar.

'You must make atonement to Otkell, and it is better there should be no delay,' replied Kolskegg.

'I will do your bidding,' said Gunnar; and, mounting his horse, he took eleven with him, beside Thrain and Lambi his friends, and they all fared to Kirkby. There, Otkell came out to greet them, and with him were Skamkell and two other men, Hallkell and Hallbjorm.

'I am here,' said Gunnar, 'to offer atonement for the misdeed of my wife and the thrall you sold me, for it was they who caused the fire and stole the cheeses. And, if it pleases you, let the award be fixed by the best of the men round!'

'That sounds fairer than it is, Gunnar,' put in Skamkell, 'for you are a man of many things, whereas Otkell has few.'

'Well,' said Gunnar, 'then I will offer atonement of twice the value of all that Otkell lost;' but again it was Skamkell and not Otkell who replied:

'Beware, Otkell, of giving him the right of making the award when it belongs to you.'

And Otkell answered: 'I will fix the award myself, Gunnar.'

'Then fix it,' said Gunnar, who was waxing wroth at this delay; but once more Otkell turned to Skamkell, and asked what he should answer.

'Let the award be made by Gizur the white and Geir the priest,' and this saying pleased Otkell.

'Do you as you will,' replied Gunnar, 'but do not think that men will speak well of your refusing the choices that I gave you.'

And after that he rode home with his men.

Then Hallbjorm spoke to Otkell, saying: 'Ill was it to refuse the offers of Gunnar, which were good offers, as you know well. Can it be that you think yourself a match for Gunnar in fight, when he has proved himself better than any man in the island? But go and see Gizur the white and Geir the priest at once, and see if the offers of Gunnar do not seem good to them! For he is a just and gentle-hearted man, and perchance he will still hearken to you, if you accept them.'

So Otkell, who ever listened to the last speaker, bade, them bring out his horse and set forth, Skamkell walking by his side. In a little while, when they had gone a mile or two, Skamkell said: 'You have much to look to at Kirkby, and no one but yourself can see after the men. Get home, therefore, and let me ride to Gizur the white and Geir the priest instead of you.

'Go, then,' answered Otkell, who was lazy and never took the trouble to think for himself; 'but see you do not tell them lies, as you are wont to do.'

'I will lie no more than I can help, master,' answered Skamkell, jumping on Otkell's horse.

Otkell fared home and found Hallbjorm in front of the house.

'Has anything befallen you that you have returned on foot?' asked he; and Otkell, who feared him, said hurriedly:

'I had many men to look over, and much work to do, so I sent Skamkell in my stead,' But Hallbjorm held his peace and eyed him scornfully.

'He who makes a thrall his friend rues it ever more,' he answered at last. 'And it is ill done when men's lives are at stake to send the biggest liar in Iceland on such an errand.'

'If you are afraid now, what would you be if Gunnar's bill were singing,' asked Otkell, who was always brave when there were none to slay, and whose courage always waxed great when there were none to fight.

Hallbjorm laughed as he heard him.

'Who can tell who will fear most at the sound of that singing? But this you know well, that when the fight has begun Gunnar does not give his bill much time to sing!'

Now when Skamkell reached Mossfell, he told truly to Gizur the white the offers Gunnar had made.

'Why did not Otkell accept them?' asked Gizur, 'they were generous and noble, as Gunnar's offers are.'

'Otkell wished to do you honour,' replied Skamkell; but Gizur for all answer bade Geir the priest be sent for, and next morning, as soon as he arrived, Gizur told him the story, and after he had finished he said:

'Let Skamkell tell it again, for I misdoubt him greatly.'

So Skamkell was called in, but he was wary, and he told his tale the second time as he had done the first, and though Gizur still misdoubted him he could find no fault.

'Mayhap you speak the truth,' he said; 'but I know the wickedness of your deeds, and if you die in your bed your face belies you.'

And after a little more talking Skamkell rode home to Kirkby.

'Gizur and Geir greet you,' said Skamkell, 'and they wish that this matter should have a peaceful ending. They will that Gunnar shall be summoned as having received and eaten the goods, likewise Hallgerda for stealing them!'

So Otkell followed this counsel, and five days before the opening of the Althing he rode with his brother and Skamkell and a great following to Lithend.

When Gunnar heard what errand they were on, he was very wroth, and after Otkell had read the summons, and departed with his men, he went away to seek Njal.

But Njal told him not to trouble, as before the Thing was over he should be held in greater honour than before.

Gizur the white rode to the Thing also, and he spoke to Otkell, and asked why he had summoned Gunnar to the Thing. Otkell listened in amaze and then answered that he had done so because of the counsel that Gizur himself and Geir the priest had told Skamkell.

'He lied, then,' replied Gizur; 'we gave no such counsel;' and Gunnar and his friends were called, and Gizur stood forth and bade Gunnar make his own award. At first Gunnar refused, but at length, after Gizur and Geir the priest swore that what Skamkell had said was false, he agreed to do it. And his award was this: that atonement in full should be made for the burnt storehouses and for the stolen food. 'But for the thrall,' said Gunnar, 'I will give nothing, for you knew what he was when you sold him to me. Therefore I will restore him to you. On the other hand, the ill-words which you have spoken of me, and the way in which you sought to put me to shame, I count to be worth full as great an atonement as the burning of a few sheds, of the stealing of a few cheeses. So that for money we stand equal. One thing more I would say, Beware lest you seek again to do me evil.'

So spake Gunnar, and no man said him nay. But after a little Gizur asked that Gunnar might forgive the wrongs Otkell had done him, and hold him his friend. At this Gunnar laughed out in scorn and answered:

'Let Skamkell be his friend. It is to him Otkell looks for counsel. They are fitting mates. But one piece of counsel I will give him, and that is to take shelter with his kinsfolk, for if he stays in this country his end will be speedy.'

For a while Gunnar rested in peace at home and there was no more quarrelling. He gathered in his harvest and tended his cattle, ploughed his fields, and so the autumn and winter passed away and the spring came.

One day when the sun was shining Gunnar took his small axe, and a bag of corn, and set out to sow seed. And while he was stooping to do this, Otkell galloped past, on a wild horse that carried him faster than he would, and he did not see Gunnar. As ill-chance would have it, Gunnar raised himself at that moment from stooping over the furrow, and Otkell's spur tore his ear, and he was very wroth.

'You summon me first, and then you ride over me,' he said, and, as was his wont, Skamkell made answer:

'The wound might have been far sorer, but your anger was greater at the Thing, when you judged the atonement and clenched your bill in your fist.'

'When we next meet my bill shall have something to say to you,' said Gunnar, and went on sowing his corn.

The corn was all sown, and Gunnar was beginning to think of other work, when one morning his shepherd came riding fast.

'I passed eight men in Markfleet,' said he; 'their faces were set this way, and Skamkell was with them. He ever speaks ill of you, and I have heard him tell how you shed tears when Otkell rode over you.'

'It does not do to mind words,' answered Gunnar; 'but for the warning you have given me you shall henceforth do the work that pleases you. Now go to sleep.'

So the shepherd slept, and Gunnar took the saddle off his horse, and laid his own saddle on it; he fetched his shield, and buckled on his sword, and then he took his bill, and as his hand touched it it sang loudly. Rannveig his mother heard the sound, and came out from the door to the place where Gunnar was fastening on his helmet.

'Never have I seen you so full of wrath,' said she. But Gunnar answered her nothing and rode quickly away.

Rannveig went back to the sitting-room, where many men were talking, and, looking at them, she said:

'Loud is your talk, but the bill sang louder when Gunnar rode away.'

When Kolskegg heard that, he saddled his horse and hasted after Gunnar.

Gunnar's horse was swift and steady, and he never drew rein till he reached the ford which he knew Otkell's men must pass. There he tied up his horse, and awaited them on foot. When Otkell's men came up, they, too, sprang to the ground, and Hallbjorm strode towards Gunnar.

'Keep back,' said Gunnar, 'I have no quarrel with brave men like you,' but Hallbjorm answered:

'I cannot for shame stand by while you kill my brother;' and he smote with his spear at Gunnar. While they were fighting, Skamkell struck at Gunnar's back with his axe, but Gunnar turned round, and, with his bill caught the axe from beneath, so that it fell out of Skamkell's hands. A second thrust with the bill stretched Skamkell on the ground, and after him Otkell and three others. They slew eight men in all, Kolskegg aiding.

After that they rode home, and as they went Gunnar said: 'I wonder if I am less base than others because I kill men less willingly than they.'

The first thing Gunnar did was to seek counsel of Njal, who bid him take care never to break the peace which was made between him and his foes, and never to slay more than one man of the same race, 'else your life will be but short.'

'Do you know the death you yourself will die?' he asked.

'Yes, I know it,' answered Njal.

'And what is it?' asked Gunnar once more.

'One that none could guess,' replied Njal, and Gunnar went away.

Now at the next Thing there was great dispute over this suit, but in the end it was settled to Gunnar's honour, and Gizur the white and Geir the priest gave pledges that they would keep the peace. But there were other men who thought they had been wronged by Gunnar, and laid plots to anger him, so that he might be outlawed and forced to leave the country.

By ill-fortune the words which Njal had spoken when he bade Gunnar never to slay more than one man of the same race were noised abroad, and his enemies made a plan by which Gunnar should be forced to fight Thorgeir, son of Otkell, so that his doom might come upon him.

Thus matters stood for a while, and then Gunnar rode down to the isles to see what his thralls were doing, and his foes heard of it, and resolved to lie in wait for him at the Rang river.

But when Gunnar returned he was not alone, as they expected he would be, for Kolskegg his brother was at his side, and carried the short sword which some of them knew well, while Gunnar was armed with his sword and his bill.

The two were yet far from the Rang river when the bill which Gunnar bore in his hand sweated with blood, and Kolskegg, who had not yet seen this sight, grew cold with terror.

'This has some dreadful meaning,' said he; and Gunnar nodded.

'It only happens before a great fight,' he answered, 'and they are called "wound drops" in other lands. So beware. Let us not be taken unawares;' and they looked well about them, till they saw some men lying hidden on the banks on the other side of the ford.

Long it were to tell of that fierce fight, and of the men that were slain by Kolskegg and Gunnar. At last Thorgeir, Otkell's son, forced his way to the front and swung his sword at Gunnar. The blow would have been deadly had it fallen, but, leaping aside, he thrust his bill through Thorgeir's body, and flung him far into the river.

At that the other men turned and fled away.

'Our money-chests will be emptied for atonement for these men,' said Gunnar as they drew near Lithend, and when they told their mother, Rannveig shook her head.

'I fear lest ill should come of it,' said she.

And ill *did* come of it.

Njal's heart was sore when Gunnar told him of the fight by the Rang river, for he said:

'You have gone against my counsel, and have slain two men of the same race. So take heed, if you break the award, your life will pay forfeit. But whatever befalls I am always your friend.'

Soon the Thing was held, and upon the Hill of Laws Gizur the white summoned Gunnar, for manslaughter of Thorgeir, Otkell's son, and demanded that his goods should be forfeited and his body outlawed, and that no man should help or harbour him.

After this there was much talking, but at last the award was given by twelve men.

And this was it.

Money was to be paid down for the men slain, and Gunnar and Kolskegg were to depart from Iceland and not return for three winters. But if Gunnar should break the settlement and stay at home, any man might slay him as he would.

Gunnar promised to keep the award, but he did not hold it a just one.

Then Kolskegg began to inquire of the vessels that were sailing that summer, and he settled that he would go on board the ship of Armfin of the Bay, and Gunnar his brother would go with him.

They sent down to the shore those things that they might need in foreign lands, and then Gunnar bade farewell to Njal and his men, and thanked his friends for the help they had given him.

At the last he took leave of the thralls at Lithend, and of his mother, and told them that, since his own country had outlawed him, he would never return to it. Then he threw his arms round every man, and without looking back sprang into the saddle.

As they rode along the Mark fleet, his horse stumbled, and Gunnar fell to the ground. When he got up he did not mount at once, but stood and looked round him for a while. Suddenly he turned and said to Kolskegg: 'Never has my home seemed to me so fair as now when the corn is ripe and ready for cutting. Come what may, I will not leave it.'

'Do not let your foes triumph over you,' answered Kolskegg. 'For if you should break your atonement, any man may deal with you as he will.'

'I will go no whither,' repeated Gunnar, 'and I would that you would stay with me.'

'I cannot do this thing,' answered Kolskegg; 'but if you go back, tell my mother and my kindred that I bid them farewell for ever, for you will soon be dead, and I shall have naught to bind me to Iceland.'

Hallgerda's heart was filled with joy when Gunnar came under the doorway, but Rannveig said nothing, for her heart was sad.

All that winter Gunnar sat fast at Lithend and would not be prevailed on to leave it, and when the winter had gone and the Thing had met, Gizur the white proclaimed Gunnar an outlaw for having broken his atonement. Then he called together all his foes, and they planned together how that they should ride to Lithend and slay him. But Njal heard what they had been saying, and he warned Gunnar.

'You have always dealt truly and kindly with me,' said Gunnar, when Njal had finished speaking, 'and if ill befall me, take heed, I pray you, of my son and Hogni. As for Grani, he has an evil nature, and there is no turning him from bad deeds.'

It was in the autumn that Mord, the son of Valgard, sent word to Gunnar's foes that the time had come to make the attack upon Lithend, as all his men had gone to the haymaking on the isles of the sea. So they set forth secretly, but stopped first at the farm nearest to Lithend, where they seized the farmer, and warned him that unless he came with them and put to death the hound Sam which had guarded Gunnar ever since Olaf the Peacock had bestowed him as a gift, his own life should be forfeit. Thorkell the farmer was sore at heart when he heard what was required of him, but he took his axe and went with the rest. It was easy to entice Sam the hound into a hollow dell; but when he saw the crowd of men behind Thorkell he knew that evil was afoot, and sprang on Thorkell and tore open his throat. Then Aumond of Witchwood smote him on the head with his axe, and Sam gave a howl which was not the utterance of any mortal dog, and rolled over.

Gunnar, who was sleeping in the narrow space above his great wooden hall, heard the awful sound, and said to himself: 'So they have killed thee, Sam, my fosterling. Well, I will follow thee soon;' and, taking his bill in his hand, he went up into the roof of the hall, where among the beams were little slits for windows. In the winter there were shutters fastened over these little slits, but now they were left open.

From the beam on which he was crouching Gunnar saw a red tunic slipping by the window, and he thrust swiftly out his bill. In a moment a man's body fell upon the ground below.

'Well, is Gunnar at home?' said Gizur, and Thorgrim the Easterling answered: 'Go and see for yourselves; but if Gunnar is not at home, his bill is,' and those were his last words, for the thrust had been mortal.

It hardly seemed possible that one man could keep such a force at bay, but wherever they went Gunnar's arrows followed them. Three times they came on, and three times they fell back, and Gunnar's heart beat high, for he thought that perchance their courage might fail, and that they would return whither they had come.

‘One of their own arrows sticks outside the window,’ he said, laughing loud in his glee; ‘I will send it to kill its master.’ But his mother answered: ‘It is ill to waken a sleeping dog, my son.’

Her words were wise, but Gunnar would not listen to them. He shot the arrow into the midst of the men gathered beneath him, and knew not that it had dealt a death-blow, or that Gizur the white had been watching its course.

‘The arm that drew in that shaft had a ring on it – a gold ring such as Gunnar wears,’ said he, ‘and if they had not shot away their own arrows they would not be needing ours;’ and with that he urged them to make a fresh attack.

‘Let us set the house on fire,’ said Mord, but Gizur answered him hotly, and bade him find out some other plan.

Now Mord was a man of many thoughts, and great skill in planning, so he looked about him to see if there was aught else he could do. Lying near were some ropes, and as soon as he saw them he cried out, ‘If we can twist one end of the ropes round the beams, and the other round this rock, we can twist them tight, and pull the roof off the hall.’

And this was done; and when the roof fell down they beheld Gunnar standing on the beam, shooting arrows at his enemies.

At this Mord cried once more that the house should be burned, but the rest called shame on him, and then Thorbrand crept up on one side and cut Gunnar’s bowstring with his axe. But before he could reach the ground again Gunnar had seized his bill, and driven it through his body.

Then, without looking round, Gunnar said swiftly to Hallgerda his wife: ‘Let you and my mother cut off two locks of hair from your heads, and twist them into my bowstring, so that I may shoot at them once more.’

‘Does aught depend on it?’ she asked. ‘My life,’ he said; and Hallgerda made answer: ‘Do you remember that time when you struck me in the face?’ said she; ‘well, now you shall die for it.’

For many a day men sang of the fight which Gunnar made for his life and the numbers that he slew before he himself was struck down and slain.

‘We have laid low a great chief,’ said Gizur, ‘and many hearts will be sore because of his slaying. But, though his body is dead, his name shall live for ever.’

(Saga)

NJAL'S BURNING

Now, Valgard the Cunning was dying. And he sent for his son Mord and bade him stir up strife between Njal's sons and their brother Hauskuld the priest, for he ever hated Njal, and longed to be avenged on him. So Mord fared to Hauskuld, and told him tales of what his brothers had said of him, but Hauskuld bade him begone, for he would listen to none of his stories. Then Mord left Hauskuld the priest, and had ready a long tale, how that Hauskuld had meant to burn them while they sat at a feast in Whiteness, had not Hogni, Gunnar's son, come by. And as this plan had failed, he set about gathering his men together to slay his brothers as they rode home, but neither Grani, son of Gunnar, nor Gunnar, son of Lambi, had the heart to do it.

At first, neither Njal's sons, nor Kari, who had married their sister, would give ear to Mord's false words, but in spite of themselves ill-feelings began to spring up in their breasts towards Hauskuld.

Thus things went on for many months, and whenever Mord met one of Njal's sons, or Kari, who had married their sister, he had new stories to tell them, till at length their hearts grew hot, and they determined that they would slay Hauskuld, lest perchance he might first slay them.

Hauskuld was sowing his corn when his brothers, and with them Mord, Valgard's son, came up to kill him. Skarphedinn, Njal's son, was their leader, and had bidden the rest each to give Hauskuld a wound. But the first blow dealt by Skarphedinn brought him on his knees, and he died praying that they might be forgiven for the ill they had brought on him, guiltless.

When he was dead they went home and told Njal what they had done.

'It had been well if two of you had died and Hauskuld had lived,' said Njal after he had heard the tidings, 'for I know better than you what will be the end of this.'

'And what will be the end?' asked Skarphedinn.

'My death, and yours, and your mother's,' answered Njal.

'Shall I die also?' he asked; but Njal shook his head.

'Good fortune will ever be with you!' he answered, and turned away and wept.

Now all men knew that at the next Thing a suit would be brought for the slaying of Hauskuld, and Njal and his sons made ready to fare to it, and to hear the award which should be given. But first sundry of Njal's friends came to see him and offered to stand by him, and to set up their tents beside his, and among them were Gizur the white and Asgrim. And at the Thing an award was made, but was made void by a quarrel between Flosi, the friend of Hauskuld the slain, and Skarphedinn, and Njal and his sons returned home, and Njal's heart was heavy.

'Are you riding back to your wife?' asked he of Kari, his son-in-law; and Kari made answer, 'Whatever happens to you, happens to me!' and they all stayed at Bergthorasknoll.

In the house dwelt an old, old woman, so old that she had nursed Bergthora, Njal's wife, and she was wise and could see into the future. Njal's sons laughed at her warnings, and took no heed to them, but for all that they knew well that it was often the truth she told them. One day Skarphedinn was standing outside the door, and the old woman came out with a stick in her hand, and she passed silently by him, and walked up the path to where a pile of dried shrubs lay above the house.

'May a curse be upon you!' she cried, shaking her stick over it; and Skarphedinn, who had followed after her, asked wherefore she was wroth with the pile.

'Because with the fire lighted from this pile there will be a great burning,' said she. 'And Njal and his sons will be burnt, and Bergthora, my foster-child. So carry it away and scatter it in the water, or else set fire to it before your enemies can get here!'

'What is the use of doing anything?' answered Skarphedinn, 'for if it is written that we should be burned, our foes will find some other fuel, though I were to scatter this stack to the four winds;' and he went away laughing.

All through the summer the old nurse was ever begging Njal to do away with the stack of vetch, but the harvest was plentiful in the pastures and the men never came home save to sleep.

'We can bring in that vetch stack any time,' they said.

The harvest was stored in the barns, and a good harvest it was. There had been none such since the day that Gunnar had fared from Lithend with Kolskegg, and had returned to his ruin. One day, when Grim and Helgi, Njal's sons, had ridden away to Holar to see their children, who were at nurse there, they heard strange tidings from some poor woman, that the country side was stirring and that bands of men were gathering together, and were seen riding along the same road.

At this news Grim and Helgi looked at each other.

'Let us go home to Bergthorasknoll,' said they.

Now they had told their mother they would sleep that night at Holar, with their children, so she gave no thought to them; but in the evening, when the hour had come to prepare supper, Bergthora bade every man choose whatever dish he liked best, 'for,' said she, 'this is the last food you will eat in this house!'

'Of a truth you must be ill to speak such words,' cried they.

'They are true words,' she said again; 'and that you may know them to be true, I will give you a sign. Before the meat that is on the board to-night is eaten, Grim and Helgi will be in the house!' and she held her peace and went out.

When the food was prepared, Bergthora called to them, and all sat down but Njal, who lingered in the doorway.

'What hinders you eating with the rest?' asked Bergthora; and Njal, as he answered, put his hand before his eyes.

'A vision has come to me,' he said slowly – 'the wall is thrown down, and the board is wet with blood.'

At this the men's faces grew pale, and a strange look came into their eyes, but Skarphedinn bade them be of good cheer, and to remember that, whatever might befall, all men would look to them to bear themselves bravely.

Then Grim and Helgi entered with their tidings, and every one had in his mind what Bergthora had said, and knew that ill was in store.

'Let no man sleep to-night,' said Njal, 'but take heed to his arms.'

The band of Njal's foes, headed by Flosi, had ridden to a valley behind the house, and had fastened their horses there. After that they walked slowly up the path, to the front of the house, where Njal and his sons, and Kari, his-son-in-law, and his thralls, thirty in all, stood up to meet them.

Then both sides halted and spoke together. Flosi's counsel was to fall on them where they stood, though he knew that few would there be left to tell the tale to their children.

Njal, for his part, desired that his men might return inside the hall, for the house was strong; 'and if Gunnar alone could keep them at bay they will never prevail against us,' he said.

'Ah, but these chiefs are not of the kind that slew Gunnar,' answered Skarphedinn, 'for they turned a deaf ear to Mord's evil counsel to set fire to Lithend, so that Gunnar and his wife and mother should be burnt up in it. But this band care nothing for what is fair and honourable, so long as we leave our bones behind us.'

Then Helgi spoke:

'Let us do as our father wills. He knows best,' and Skarphedinn said:

'If he wishes us to enter the hall, and all to be burnt together, I am ready to do it. I care little what death I shall die, and if the time of my doom is come, it matters nothing that we try to escape.' And so saying he turned to Kari, and bade him stand by his side.

'They are all mad,' cried Flosi, as he saw Njal and his sons and Kari, his son-in-law, take their place on the inside of the door. 'Surely none of them can escape us now;' and the fight began with a spear which was thrown at Skarphedinn.

But victory was not so near as Flosi thought. Man after man fell back wounded or dead, yet Skarphedinn and his brethren remained without a wound.

'We shall never put them to flight with our spears,' said Flosi, 'and there are only two ways open. Either we give up our vengeance, and await the death that will surely befall us at their hands; or else we must set fire to the house, and burn them in it. And I know not what else we can do; yet that is a mean and cowardly deed, which will lie heavily on our souls.'

So they gathered wood and made a great stack before the door, and Skarphedinn laughed, and asked if they were turning cooks.

It was Grani, the son of Gunnar, whose soul was black like his mother Hallgerda's, who answered him.

'You will not wish better cooking when *you* are put on the spit;' but he had better have left Skarphedinn alone, for the men around heard his reply, and looked curiously on Grani.

'Your deeds become your mother's son,' said Skarphedinn. 'It was I who avenged your father, therefore it is natural to one of your kind that you should wish to slay me,' and he stepped back to pick up some fresh arrows.

In spite of Grani's boastful words, the pile of wood was slow in catching, for the women threw whey and water upon it from the little windows in the roof, so that the flames were quenched as fast as they sprang up. The men grew angry and impatient, and at last Kol, Thorstein's son, said to Flosi:

'It avails nought to kindle the fire here; but there is a pile of dry vetch at the back, just above the house, and we can light it, and put the burning wood on the beams under the roof.'

So he crept round unseen, and did as he had said, and the other men heaped up wood before the doors of the house, so that none could escape, and those within the hall knew nothing that was doing, till a great light filled the place, and they saw that the roof was burning.

Then horrible dread overwhelmed the souls of the women, and they broke forth into weeping and wailing, till Njal spoke words of comfort to them, and bade them keep up their hearts, for God would not suffer them to burn both in this world and in the next. And when he had stilled their fears he went near the door, and asked:

'Is Flosi nigh at hand?'

'Yes,' answered Flosi.

'Will you suffer my sons to atone?' asked Njal once more, 'or let them leave the house?' but Flosi said:

'The women and children and thralls may go out, but, as for your sons, the time for atonement is past, and I will not leave this spot as long as one of them remains alive.'

When Njal heard that, he went back into the house and called the women and children and thralls round him, and bade Thorhalla, the wife of Helgi, go out first, for she was a brave woman. And Thorhalla went, after bidding farewell to Helgi her husband.

But Astrid whispered softly to Helgi:

'I will tie a woman's kerchief about your head, and wrap you in a cloak, and the women folk will stand about you, and none shall know that you are not a woman also.'

Helgi did not like this plan, for he thought it shame to steal away in his sister's garments; but they prayed him not to be stiff-necked, and at length he suffered the cloak to be put round him.

Now the children of Njal were all tall, but Helgi was tallest of all, except his brother Skarphedinn. And Flosi marked him, and said to his men:

'I like not the height of the woman who went yonder, nor the breadth of her shoulders. Seize her and hold her fast.'

As soon as Helgi heard that he threw his cloak aside and thrust at a man with his sword, and cut off his leg. But Flosi was close behind, and stretched Helgi dead in front of him.

After that he went back to the house, and offered Njal that he should come outside, but Njal answered that he was too old to avenge his sons, and that he would not outlive them, for that would be a shame and disgrace to him.

'Come out, then, Bergthora,' said Flosi, 'for I will not suffer you to burn inside.'

But Bergthora made answer:

'Long years from my youth have I lived with Njal, and I vowed on the day of betrothal that his death should be mine;' and without more words they went into the house.

'I am weary,' said Njal to his wife, 'let us lay down on our bed and rest;' and Bergthora bowed her head, and spoke to the boy Thord, the son of Kari:

'Come to the door with me and go forth with your kinsmen. I will not have you stay here to burn.' But the boy shook off the hand she had laid on his shoulder.

'You promised me when I was little, grandmother, that I should never go from you till I wished it of myself. And I would rather die with you than live after you.'

Bergthora was silent, but she led the boy to the bed, and he climbed in, and laid himself down. Then Njal said to his head man:

'Bring hither the oxhide and put it on the bed, and watch how we lay ourselves down, so that you may know where to find our bones. For not one inch will we stir, whatever befall.'

And he laid himself down, and bade the boy lie between himself and Bergthora.

So they waited.

At the doors and in the windows of the roof Skarphedinn and Grim were casting away burning brands, and hurling spears as if they had had twenty hands instead of two. At last Flosi called to his men to let be, till the fire had its way, for many had been killed and wounded already.

And now a beam which held up the oak fell in, and then another and another. 'Surely my father must be dead,' said Skarphedinn, 'that he makes no sound,' and, followed by Grim and Kari, he went to the end of the hall where a cross beam had fallen.

'The smoke is thick here,' said Kari, 'thick enough to hide a man; let us leap out one by one, and we shall be away before they have seen us. Skarphedinn, you jump first!'

'No!' answered Skarphedinn, 'you go first and I will follow; or, if I follow not, you will avenge me.'

'I have a chance of my life,' said Kari, 'and I will take it. We must each do as seems best to him, but I fear me that we see each other no more;' and catching up a huge blazing beam, he threw it over the edge of the roof, among the men who were gathered below.

They scattered at once like leaves in a storm, and at that instant Kari, with his tunic and hair already burning, leaped from the roof and crept away in the smoke. The man who stood nearest on the ground thought he saw something dark moving, and he asked his neighbour:

'Think you that was one of them jumping from the beam?' but the man answered: 'Nay, but it may have been Skarphedinn hurling a firebrand;' and then they went to their own work, and paid no more heed to the figure on the roof.

So Kari was left free to escape, and he put out the fire that was burning him, and rested in a safe place till he could seek shelter with his friends.

Thrice Skarphedinn tried to leap after Kari, and thrice the beam broke under his weight, and he was forced to climb back again. Then part of the wall fell in, and Skarphedinn fell down with it on to the floor of the hall.

In a moment the face of Gunnar, son of Lambi, was seen on top of the wall, and he cried out, 'Are those tears on your cheeks, Skarphedinn?' and Skarphedinn made answer:

'Now am I finding out in truth how smoke can force tears from one's eyes. But methinks I see laughter in yours, Gunnar.'

'Of a surety,' said Gunnar, 'never have I laughed so much since the day you slew Thrain in Markfleet.'

'Here is a remembrance of that day for you,' said Skarphedinn, and he took from his pouch Thrain's tooth, and flung it at Gunnar. And it knocked out Gunnar's eye, and he fell from the roof.

Then Skarphedinn went to Grim, and hand in hand they two tried to stamp out the burning beams, but before they had crossed the hall Grim dropped dead, and the roof fell in, and shut Skarphedinn in a corner, so that he could not move.

At daylight a man rode up who had met Kari, and had learned from him that when he had jumped from the roof both Skarphedinn and Grim were still alive, but that was many hours before, and both must long since be dead.

Then Flosi and some of his men drew nearer and climbed up the gable, for the fire had burned low, and only threw out a flame here and there. And as they looked into the hall beneath them, which was a mass of charred and fallen wood, there seemed to rise up from the red ashes a song of triumph, and they held their breath and looked into each other's faces.

'Is it Skarphedinn's song?' asked Glum, 'and is it a token that he is dead? or a sign that he is alive? Let us look for him.'

'That shall not be,' said Flosi quickly. 'Fool that you are, do you not know that even now Kari is gathering together a band to avenge his kinsmen? Therefore let every man take his horse and ride up to the Three-corner Fell, and there we can hide and take counsel how we can escape from our enemies.'

So it was done, and not a whit too soon, for a very great company scattered over the country, seeking Flosi and his Band of Burners – for by this ill name men knew them.

As for Kari himself, he begged Hjallti, Njal's cousin, to go with him to Bergthorasknoll and find Njal's bones and bury them. And, as they went, men joined them, till they numbered nigh on a hundred when they reached Bergthorasknoll.

Kari entered the hall first and led them up to the spot where the bed had stood, and where a great heap of ashes now covered it. The ashes took long to clear away, and underneath was the oxhide, charred and shrivelled. But when the oxhide was pulled away they saw the three bodies fresh and whole, as they had laid them down. Only one finger of the boy was burned, where he had thrust it outside the hide.

When they saw this a great joy fell on the hearts of all, and Hjallti said:

'Never have I seen a dead man with a face as bright as this!' And the other men said likewise.

After that they sought for Skarphedinn, and then found him, fastened by the beam into the corner, and he had driven his axe into the wall of the gable, so that it had to be broken out. And they sought the bones of Grim, and found them lying in the middle of the hall, where he had dropped down dead. And they sought the bones of other men, and found them, and nine bodies in all were carried into the church and buried there.

And that is Burnt Njal's story.

[The *Saga of Burnt Njal*.]

THE LADY OF SOLACE

There was once an emperor who had two things that he loved more than all the world – his daughter and his garden. The finest linen and the richest silks of India or China decked the princess from the moment she was old enough to run alone, and the ships that brought them brought also the fairest flowers and sweetest fruits that grew in distant lands. All the time that he was not presiding over his council, or hearing the petitions of his people, the emperor passed in his garden, watching the flowers open and the fruits ripen, and by-and-by he planted trees and shrubs and made walks and alleys, till altogether the garden was the most beautiful as well as the largest that had ever been seen.

The years passed, and the princess reached the age of fourteen; quite old enough to be married, thought the kings and princes who were looking out for a bride for their sons. The emperor's heart sank when he heard rumours of embassies that were coming to rob him of his daughter, and he shut himself up in his room to try to invent a plan by which he might keep the princess, without giving offence to the powerful monarchs who had asked for her hand.

For a long while he sat with his head on his hands, thinking steadily, but every scheme had some drawback. At length his face brightened and he sprang up from his seat.

'Yes! that will do,' he cried, and went down to attend his council, looking quite a different man from what he had been a few hours before.

The embassies and the princes continued to arrive, and they all got the same answer. 'The emperor was proud of the honour done to himself and his daughter, and would give her in marriage to any man who would pass through the garden and bring him a branch of the tree which stood at the further end.' Nothing could surely be more easy, and every prince in turn as he heard the conditions felt that the fairest damsel on the whole earth was already his wife.

But though each man went gaily in, none ever came out, nor was it ever known what had befallen them. At last so many had entered that fatal gate that it seemed as if there could be no more princes or nobles left, and the emperor began to breathe again at the thought that he would be able after all to keep his daughter.

But one day a knight of great renown, named Tirius, arrived from beyond the seas and knocked at the gate of the castle. Like the others, he was welcomed and feasted, and when the feast was ended he craved that the emperor would grant him the hand of the princess on whatever condition he might choose.

'Right willingly,' answered the emperor; 'there is only one condition I have laid down, and that is an easy one, though for some strange reason no one as yet has been able to fulfil it. You have merely to walk through the garden that you see below, and bring me back a branch from a tree bearing golden fruit, which stands on the opposite side. If fame speaks true, this is child's play to the adventures in which you have borne so noble a part.'

'In good sooth,' said the knight, who saw clearly that there was more in the matter than appeared – 'in good sooth your condition likes me well. Still, as fortune is ever inconstant, and may be tired of dealing me favours, I would first ask as a boon a sight of your fair daughter and leave to hearken to her voice. After that I will delay no longer, but proceed on my quest.'

'I will take you to her myself,' answered the emperor, who thought that he might show this small mercy to a man who was going to his death, and he led his guest down long passages and through lofty halls, till they reached the princess's apartments.

'In five minutes my chamberlain shall come for you, and he shall show you the way to the garden,' said the emperor, 'and meanwhile I bid you farewell;' and, leaving Tirius to enter alone, he went to seek his ministers.

It would be hard to say whether the knight or the princess was most amazed as they stood gazing at each other – he at her beauty and she at his boldness, for never before had any man crossed

her threshold. For a moment both were silent; then the knight, remembering how short a time was allowed him, aroused himself from his dream and spoke:

'Gentle damsel, help me now in my need, for I have been drawn hither by love. Full well I know that many have had this adventure before me, and have entered that garden and never returned from it. Without your aid my fate will be such as theirs, and therefore, I pray you, tell me what I should do so that I may win through without harm.'

Now the knight was a goodly man and tall, and perhaps the princess may have bewailed in secret the noble youths who had fallen victims to her father's pleasure. But, however that might be, she smiled and made reply:

'I am ready to marry any man on whom my father wishes to bestow me, and you say you have come hither for love of me. Still, you have asked of me a hard thing, for it beseems not a daughter to betray her father's confidence. Yet, as I am loth that any more fair youths should lose their lives for my sake, I will give you this counsel. You must first pass through a forest, which is the home of a lady who is known to all as the "Lady of Solace." Go to her, and she will give you the help you need to journey safely through the garden.'

The princess had scarcely finished these words when the voice of the chamberlain was heard without, bidding him withdraw, and, glancing gratefully at her, the knight bowed low and took his leave.

In the great hall the chamberlain quitted him, telling him to take his ease and rest till the emperor should return, but instead the knight waited till he was alone and then plunged straight into the forest.

He walked on for a little way till he reached a green space, and there he stopped and cried, 'Where is the Lady of Solace?' Then he sat down on a stone and waited. In a short time he saw coming towards him two ladies, one bearing a basin and the other a cloth.

'We give you greeting, sir,' they said; 'the Lady of Solace has sent us to you, and she bids you first wash your feet in this basin, and then go with us to her palace.' So the knight washed his feet, and dried them in the white cloth, and rose up and went with the ladies to the palace, which was built of blue marble, and the fairest that ever he saw. The Lady of Solace was fair likewise and of a marvellous sweet countenance, and her voice was soft like the voice of a thrush as she asked him what he wanted with her. At that the knight told his errand, and how the princess had bade him come to her, for she alone could help him to win through the enchanted garden.

'I am called the Lady of Solace,' said she, with a smile which seemed made up of all the beautiful things in the world, 'and I give succour to all those who need it. Here is a ball of thread; take it and bind it round the post of the gate of the garden, and hold fast the thread in your hand, unwinding it as you go. For if you lose the clue, you will perish like those before you. And more. A lion dwells in the garden, who will spring out and devour you, as he has devoured the rest. Therefore, arm yourself with armour, and see that the armour be anointed thickly with ointment. When the lion sees you, he will take your arm or your leg into his mouth, and his teeth shall stick fast in the ointment, and when you sunder yourself from him his teeth shall be drawn out, and you shall kill him easily. But during the fight beware lest you let go the clue.'

And after the lion shall come four men, who will set on you and seek to turn you from their path; but beware of them also, and if you are in peril call to me, and I will succour you. And now return to the palace and put on your armour, and so, farewell.'

When the knight heard this he was right glad, and stole back to the palace, where he found that the emperor was still sitting at his council. He sat down in the great hall to await him, but the time seemed very long before his host entered.

'How have you sped?' asked he.

'My lord, now that through your goodness I have seen the princess,' said the knight, 'there can be but one ending to my journey. I go at once in quest of the tree, and I am content whatever fate may befall me.'

'May fortune be with you!' answered the emperor, who never failed to give good wishes to his daughter's suitors, as he felt quite sure that they would be of no use.

So the knight bowed low and left the hall, going straight to the gatekeeper's house, where he had put off his armour on arriving. On pretence of sharpening his sword, he borrowed a pot of ointment from the man, and, unseen by him, rubbed the paste thickly over his armour. After this he looked about to see that no one was watching him, and took the path that led to the garden.

A large iron gate supported by two posts stood at the entrance, and round one of these he firmly bound one end of the thread which the Lady of Solace had given him. Holding the other end in his hand, he advanced for a long while without seeing or hearing any strange thing, till a roar close to him caused him to start. The knight had just time to draw his sword and hold up his shield before the lion was upon him; but, as he had been forewarned, the great beast dashed aside the shield, and fastened his teeth in the arm that held it. The pain was such that the knight leaped backwards, but the lion's teeth were fixed fast in the ointment, and they all came out of his mouth, so that he could bite no more. And when he rushed at his enemy with his claws they stuck also, so that the knight with a blow of his sword was able to kill him with ease.

Mightily he rejoiced at seeing his foe dead before him, and by ill fortune he forgot that, had it not been for the counsel of the Lady of Solace, it was *he* who would have been slain, and not the lion. He swelled with pride and conceit at the ease with which he had won the victory, and never noted that the clue of thread was no longer in his hands.

'Ah, lovely princess, I come to seek my reward,' cried he to himself, and turned his face towards the palace. But a little way on he spied seven trees, very fair to view, all covered with fruit that shone temptingly in the sun. He gathered a cluster that hung just above his head, and when he had eaten that, he thought that it tasted so delicious he really must have another, and another also.

He was still eating when three men passed by, and asked him what he was doing there. The knight was so puffed up that he did not answer them civilly after his manner, but gave them rude words, for which in return he received buffets. In the end, the men dragged him away from the tree and flung him into a ditch that was full of water, and his armour weighed him down, so that he could not get out. Then at last he remembered his clue, and felt for it, but it was not there, and his pride broke down, and he saw that he had brought his ruin on himself. And in despair he lifted up his voice and cried, 'O Lady of Solace, help me, I beseech you, in my great need, for I am nigh dead.' He shut his eyes for very misery, but opened them again in a moment, for a lady stood by him, and she said:

'Did not I tell you that if you lost the clue you could never more find your way out of the garden? I will lift you out of the ditch, but, for the clue, you must seek for it yourself till you find it.' And with that she vanished.

Not that day did the knight find the clue, nor the next, nor the next. Faint and weary was he, but he dared not eat of the fruit that was around him, some hanging from the boughs of trees and some growing on the ground. At length he wandered back to the spot where he had fought with the lion, and there, covered with blood, lay the clue he had so long sought. By its help he was led to the tree with the golden fruit, which stood at the far end of the garden, and plucking one of the boughs he turned to retrace his steps, wondering, now that he held the thread, at the shortness of the way.

'Here is the branch, O Emperor! and now give me the princess,' he said, kneeling and laying the bough down on the steps of the throne. And the emperor could not gainsay him, but bade his officers fetch his daughter, and after they had been married she went with her husband into his own country, where they lived happily till they died.

[From the *Gesia Romanorum*.]

UNA AND THE LION

Once upon a time there lived a king and queen who had only one child, a little girl, whom they named Una, and they all lived happily at home for many years till Una had grown into a woman.

It seemed as if they were some of the fortunate people to whom nothing ever happens, when suddenly, just as everything appeared going well and peacefully with them, a fearful dragon, larger and more horrible than any dragon which had yet been heard of, arrived one night, seized the king and queen as they were walking in the garden after the heat of the day, and carried them prisoners to a strong castle. Luckily, Una was at that moment sitting among her maidens on the top of a high tower embroidering a kirtle, or she would have shared the same fate.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.