

THE WARRIOR'S BARROW

Henrik Ibsen

1850

Translated by Anders Orbeck

A Dramatic Poem in One Act

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

RODERIK An old recluse.

BLANKA His foster-daughter.

GANDALF A sea-king from Norway.

ASGAUT An old viking.

HROLLOUG

JOSTEJN

Several VIKINGS

HEMMING A young scald in Gandalf's service.

SETTING

The action takes place on a small island off the coast of Sicily shortly before the introduction of Christianity into Norway.

An open place surrounded by trees near the shore. To the left in the background the ruins of an old temple. In the center of the scene a huge barrow upon which is a monument decked with flower wreaths.

SCENE I

[At the right of the stage sits RODERIK writing. To the left BLANKA in a half reclining position.]

BLANKA. Lo! the sky in dying glory
Surges like a sea ablaze, —
It is all so still before me,
Still as in a sylvan maze.
Summer evening's mellow power
Settles round us like a dove,
Hovers like a swan above
Ocean wave and forest flower.
In the orange thicket slumber
Gods and goddesses of yore,
Stone reminders in great number
Of a world that is no more.
Virtue, valor, trust are gone,
Rich in memory alone;
Could there be a more complete
Picture of the South effete?

[Rises.]

BLANKA. But my father has related
Stories of a distant land,
Of a life, fresh, unabated,
Neither carved nor wrought by hand!
Here the spirit has forever
Vanished into stone and wave, —
There it breathes as free as ever,
Like a warrior strong and brave!
When the evening's crystallizing
Vapors settle on my breast,
Lo! I see before me rising
Norway's snow-illumined crest!
Here is life decayed and dying,
Sunk in torpor, still, forlorn, —
There go avalanches flying,
Life anew in death is born!
If I had the white swan's coat —

RODERIK. [After a pause writing.] "Then, it is said, will Ragnarök have stilled The wilder powers, brought forth a chastened life; All-Father, Balder, and the gentle Freya Will rule again the race of man in peace!" —

[After having watched her for a moment.]

RODERIK. But, Blanka, now you dream away again; You stare through space completely lost in thought, — What is it that you seek?

BLANKA. [Draws near.] Forgive me, father! I merely followed for a space the swan, That sailed on snowy wings across the sea.

RODERIK. And if I had not stopped you in your flight, My young and pretty little swan! who knows How far you might have flown away from me, — Perchance to Thule?

BLANKA. And indeed why not? To Thule flies the swan in early spring, If only to return again each fall.

[Seats herself at his feet.]

BLANKA. Yet I — I am no swan, — no, call me rather A captured falcon, sitting tame and true, A golden ring about his foot.

RODERIK. Well, — and the ring?

BLANKA. The ring? That is my love for you, dear father! With that you have your youthful falcon bound, I cannot fly, — not even though I wished to.

[Rises.]

BLANKA. But when I see the swan sail o'er the wave, Light as a cloud before the summer wind, Then I remember all that you have told Of the heroic life in distant Thule; Then, as it seems, the bird is like a bark With dragon head and wings of burnished gold; I see the youthful hero in the prow, A copper helmet on his yellow locks, With eyes of blue, a manly, heaving breast, His sword held firmly in his mighty hand. I follow him upon his rapid course, And all my dreams run riot round his bark, And frolic sportively like merry dolphins In fancy's deep and cooling sea!

RODERIK. O you, — You are an ardent dreamer, my good child, — I almost fear your thoughts too often dwell Upon the people in the rugged North.

BLANKA. And, father, whose the fault, if it were so?

RODERIK. You mean that I — ?

BLANKA. Yes, what else could I mean; You live yourself but in the memory Of early days among these mighty Norsemen; Do not deny that often as you speak Of warlike forays, combats, fights, Your cheek begins to flush, your eye to glow; It seems to me that you grow young again.

RODERIK. Yes, yes, but I have reason so to do; For I have lived among them in the North, And every bit that memory calls to mind Is like a page to me from my own saga. But you, however, fostered in the South, Who never saw the silver-tinted mountains, Who never heard the trumpet's echoing song,— Ah, how could you be moved by what I tell?

BLANKA. Oh, must a human being see and hear All things but with his outer senses then? Has not the inner soul, too, eye and ear, With which it can both see and hearken well? 'Tis true it is with eyes of flesh I see The richly glowing color of the rose; But with the spirit's eye I see within A lovely elf, a fairy butterfly, Who archly hides behind the crimson leaves, And singeth of a secret power from heaven That gave the flower brightness and perfume.

RODERIK. True, true, my child!

BLANKA. I almost do believe That just because I do not really see, The whole looms up more beautiful in thought; That, father, is the way with you at least! The ancient sagas and heroic lays,— These you remember, speak of with delight, And scratch in runic script upon your parchment; But if I ask about your youthful life In Norway's distant realm, your eyes grow dark, Your lips are silent, and it seems at times Your bosom houses gloomy memories.

RODERIK. [Rises.] Come, speak no more, good child, about the past. Who is there then whose youthful memories Are altogether free from self-reproach; You know, the Norsemen are a savage lot.

BLANKA. But are the warriors of the South less fierce? Have you forgot that night, now ten years past, The time the strangers landed on the coast, And plundered—?

RODERIK. [Visibly ill at ease.] Say no more now,—let us hence; The sundown soon will be upon us;—come!

BLANKA. [As they go.] Give me your hand!

[Stops.]

BLANKA. No, wait!

RODERIK. What is the matter?

BLANKA. I have today for the first time forgot—

RODERIK. And what have you forgot?

BLANKA. [Points to the barrow.] Behold the wreath!

RODERIK. It is—

BLANKA. The withered one of yesterday; I have forgot today to make the change; Yet, let me take you to the cabin first, Then shall I venture out in search of flowers; The violet never is so sweet and rare As when the dew has bathed its silver lining; The budding rose is never quite so fair As when 'tis plucked in child-like sleep reclining!

[They go out at the back to the right.]

SCENE II

[GANDALF and the VIKINGS enter from the right.]

ASGAUT. Now we shall soon be there.

GANDALF. Point out the place!

ASGAUT. No, wait till we have gone beyond the wood. There was still standing on the rocky cliff Against the sea a remnant of the wall,— I dare say it is standing there to-day.

JOSTEJN. But tell us, king, what can it profit us To tramp about here on the isle like fools?

HROLLOUG. Yes, tell us what shall—

GANDALF. You shall hold your tongues! And blindly follow where your king commands!

GANDALF. [To ASGAUT.] It seems to me, however, you cleaned house Too well when you were last here on the isle; You might have left a little, I should think, For me and my revenge!

HROLLOUG. You are the king, And loyalty we pledged you at the thing, But when we followed you upon the war path, It was to win our share of fame and glory.

JOSTEJN. And golden treasures, Hrolloug, golden treasures.

SEVERAL. That, Gandalf, is the law, and heed it well!

GANDALF. I know the law perhaps as well as you; But is there not since days of old a law And covenant with us that when a kinsman Falls slain before the enemy and his corpse Unburied lies a prey unto the raven, Blood vengeance must be had?

SOME. Yes, so it is!

GANDALF. Then stand you ready with your sword and shield, — You have a king to avenge and I a father!

[Commotion among the VIKINGS.]

JOSTEJN. A king?

HROLLOUG. A father?

GANDALF. Wait, — I shall relate How all this stands. You know, my father was A mighty viking. Twelve years gone it is Since he the last time sallied forth one spring With Asgaut there and all his old time warriors. Two years he roamed about from strand to strand, Visiting Bratland, Valland, even Blaaland; At length he went and harried Sicily, And there heard stories of a wealthy chief, Who lived upon this island in a castle With sturdy walls built on a rocky base, And in it there were costly treasures hid. At night he took his men and went ashore, And razed the castle walls with fire and sword. Himself went foremost like an angry bear, And in the fury of the fight saw not How all his warriors fell about him dead; And when the morning sun rose in the east, There lay the castle smouldering in ruin. Asgaut alone survived with one or two, — My father and the hundred others there Had ridden to Valhalla through the flames.

ASGAUT. I hoisted every sail upon the bark, And turned the prow straight homeward to the North; There sought I all in vain for Gandalf king; The youthful eagle, I was told, had flown Across the sea to Iceland or the Faroes. I hastened after him but found no trace, — Yet everywhere I went his name was known; For though his bark sped cloud-like in the storm, Yet flew his fame on even swifter wings. At last this spring I found him, as you know; It was in Italy; I told him then What things had happened, how his father died, And Gandalf swore by all Valhalla's gods Blood-vengeance he would take with fire and sword.

JOSTEJN. It is an ancient law and should be honored! But had I been in your place, Gandalf king, I should have lingered on in Italy, — For there was gold to win.

HROLLOUG. And honor too.

GANDALF. That is your loyalty to your dead king.

JOSTEJN. Come, come now; no offence; I merely meant The dead could wait perhaps.

ASGAUT. [With suppressed rage.] You paltry race!

JOSTEJN. But now that we are here—

HROLLOUG. Yes; let us raise Unto the king a worthy monument!

SOME. Yes, yes!

OTHERS. With bloodshed and with fire!

ASGAUT. Now that I like!

GANDALF. And now away to spy around the island; For even tonight blood-vengeance shall be mine; If not, I must myself fall.

ASGAUT. So he swore.

GANDALF. I swore it solemnly by all the gods! And once again I swear it—

HEMMING. [With a harp on his shoulder has during the preceding emerged from among the WARRIORS and cries out imploringly.] Swear not, Gandalf!

GANDALF. What troubles you?

HEMMING. Swear not here in this wood! Here in the South our gods can never hear; Out on your bark, up North among the hills, There they still hearken to you, but not here!

ASGAUT. Have you too breathed the poison of the South?

HEMMING. In Italy I heard the pious monks Tell lovely stories of the holy Christ, And what they told still lingers in my mind Through night and day and will no more be gone.

GANDALF. I had you brought with me because in youth You showed great promise of poetic gifts. You were to see my bold and warlike deeds, So that when I, King Gandalf, old and gray, Sat with my warriors round the oaken table, The king's young scald might while away Long winter evenings with heroic lays, And sing at last a saga of my deeds; The hero's fame voiced in the poet's song Outlives the monument upon his grave. But now, be off, and if you choose go cast Your harp aside and don the monkish cowl. Aha! King Gandalf has a mighty scald!

[The VIKINGS go into the forest to the left; HEMMING follows them.]

ASGAUT. It is a mouldy time we live in now; Our faith and customs from the olden days Are everywhere upon the downward path. Lucky it is that I am growing old; My eyes shall never see the North decay. But you, King Gandalf, you are young and strong; And wheresoe'er you roam in distant lands, Remember that it is a royal task To guard the people and defend the gods!

[He follows the rest.]

GANDALF. [After a pause.] Hm, he has no great confidence in me. 'Tis well he went! Whenever he is near, It is as if a burden weighed me down. The grim old viking with his rugged face, — He looks like Asathor, who with his belt Of strength and Mjölfnir stood within the grove, Carved out in marble, near my father's home. My father's home! Who knows, alas! how things Around the ancient landmarks now may look! — Mountains and fields are doubtless still the same; The people — ? Have they still the same old heart? No, there is fallen mildew o'er the age, And it is that which saps the Northern life And eats away like poison what is best. Well, I will homeward, — save what still is left To save before it falls to utter ruin.

GANDALF. [After a pause during which he looks around.] How lovely in these Southern groves it is; My pine groves can not boast such sweet perfume.

[He perceives the mound.]

GANDALF. What now? A warrior's grave? No doubt it hides A countryman from those more stirring days. A warrior's barrow in the South! — 'Tis only just; It was the South gave us our mortal wound. How lovely it is here! It brings to mind One winter night when as a lad I sat Upon my father's knee before the hearth, The while he told me stories of the gods, Of Odin, Balder, and the mighty Thor; And when I mentioned Freya's grove to him, He pictured it exactly like this grove, — But when I asked him something more of Freya, What she herself was like, the old man laughed And answered as he placed me on my feet, "A woman will in due time tell you that!"

GANDALF. [Listening.] Hush! Footsteps in the forest! Quiet, Gandalf, — They bring the first fruits of your blood-revenge!

[He steps aside so that he is half concealed among the bushes to the right.]

SCENE III

[GANDALF. BLANKA with oak leaves in her hair and a basket of flowers enters from the left.]

BLANKA. [Seated at the left busily weaving a flower wreath.] Fountains may murmur in the sunny vales, Resplendent billows roll beneath the shore; Nor fountain's murmur, nor the billow's song Has half the magic of those flowers there, That stand in clusters round the barrow's edge And nod at one another lovingly; They draw me hither during night and day,— And it is here I long to come and dream. The wreath is done. The hero's monument, So hard and cold, shall under it be hid. Yes, it is beautiful!

[Pointing to the mound.]

BLANKA. A vanished life, Of giant strength, lies mouldering in the ground,— And the memorial which should speak to men,— A cold unyielding stone like yonder one! But then comes art, and with a friendly hand She gathers flowers from the breast of nature And hides the ugly, unresponsive stone With snow-white lilies, sweet forget-me-nots.

[She ascends the barrow, hangs the wreath over the monument, and speaks after a pause.]

BLANKA. Again my dreams go sailing to the North Like birds of passage o'er the ocean waves; I feel an urging where I long to go, And willingly I heed the secret power, Which has its royal seat within the soul. I stand in Norway, am a hero's bride, And from the mountain peak watch eagle-like. O'er shining waves the vessel heaves in sight.— Oh, like the gull fly to your fatherland! I am a Southern child, I cannot wait; I tear the oaken wreath out of my hair,— Take this, my hero! 'Tis the second message I greet you with,— my yearning was the first.

[She throws the wreath. GANDALF steps forth and seizes it.]

BLANKA. What's this? There stands a—

[She rubs her eyes and stares amazed at him.]

No, it is no dream. Who are you, stranger? What is it you seek Here on the shore?

GANDALF. Step first from off the mound,— Then we can talk at ease.

BLANKA. [Comes down.] Well, here I am!

BLANKA. [Aside as she looks him over.] The chain mail o'er his breast,
the copper helmet, — Exactly as my father has related.

BLANKA. [Aloud.] Take off your helmet!

GANDALF. Why?

BLANKA. Well, take it off!

BLANKA. [Aside.] Two sparkling eyes, locks like a field of grain, —
Exactly as I saw him in my dream.

GANDALF. Who are you, woman?

BLANKA. I? A poor, poor child!

GANDALF. Yet certainly the fairest on the isle.

BLANKA. The fairest? That indeed is possible, For here there's no one
else.

GANDALF. What, — no one else?

BLANKA. Unless my father be, — but he is old And has a silver beard, as
long as this; No, after all I think I win the prize.

GANDALF. You have a merry spirit.

BLANKA. Not always now!

GANDALF. But tell me, pray, how this is possible; You say you live alone
here with your father, Yet I have heard men say most certainly The island
here is thickly populated?

BLANKA. It was so once, three years ago or more; But, — well, it is a sad
and mournful tale— Yet you shall hear it if you wish.

GANDALF. Yes, certainly!

BLANKA. You see, three years ago—

[Seats herself.]

BLANKA. Come, seat yourself!

GANDALF. [Steps back a pace.] No, sit you down, I'll stand.

BLANKA. Three years ago there came, God knows from whence, A
warlike band of robbers to the isle; They plundered madly as they went
about, And murdered everything they found alive. A few escaped as best
they could by flight And sought protection in my father's castle, Which
stood upon the cliff right near the sea.

GANDALF. Your father's, did you say?

BLANKA. My father's, yes. — It was a cloudy evening when they burst
Upon the castle gate, tore through the wall, Rushed in the court, and
murdered right and left. I fled into the darkness terrified, And sought a
place of refuge in the forest. I saw our home go whirling up in flames, I
heard the clang of shields, the cries of death. — Then everything grew still;
for all were dead. — The savage band proceeded to the shore And sailed
away. — I sat upon the cliff The morning after, near the smouldering ruins. I
was the only one whom they had spared.

GANDALF. But you just told me that your father lives.

BLANKA. My foster-father; wait, and you shall hear! I sat upon the cliff
oppressed and sad, And listened to the awful stillness round; There issued
forth a faint and feeble cry, As from beneath the rocky cleft beneath my
feet; I listened full of fear, then went below, And found a stranger, pale
with loss of blood. I ventured nearer, frightened as I was, Bound up his
wounds and tended him, —

GANDALF. And he?

BLANKA. Told me as he recovered from his wounds, That he had come
aboard a merchantman, Had reached the island on the very day The castle
was destroyed, — took refuge there And fought the robber band with all his
might Until he fell, faint with the loss of blood, Into the rocky cleft wherein I
found him. And ever since we two have lived together; He built for us a
cabin in the wood, I grew to love him more than any one. But you must
see him, — come!

GANDALF. No, wait, — not now! We meet in ample time, I have no doubt.

BLANKA. Well, all right, as you please; but rest assured He would be
glad to greet you 'neath his roof; For you must know that hospitality Is
found not only in the North.

GANDALF. The North? You know then —

BLANKA. Whence you come, you mean? Oh, yes! My father has so
often told of you That I the moment that I saw you —

GANDALF. Yet you Were not afraid!

BLANKA. Afraid? And why afraid?

GANDALF. Has he not told you then, — of course if not —

BLANKA. Told me that you were fearless heroes? Yes! But pray, why
should that frighten me? I know you seek your fame on distant shores, In

manly combat with all doughty warriors; But I have neither sword nor coat of mail, Then why should I fear—

GANDALF. No, of course, of course! But still, those strangers who destroyed the castle?

BLANKA. And what of them?

GANDALF. Only,—has not your father Told you from whence they came?

BLANKA. Never! How could he! Strangers they were alike to him and us. But if you wish I'll ask him right away.

GANDALF. [Quickly.] No, let it be.

BLANKA. Ah, now I understand! You wish to know where you can seek them now, And take blood-vengeance, as you call it.

GANDALF. Ah, Blood-vengeance! Thanks! The word I had forgot; You bring me back—

BLANKA. But do you know, it is An ugly practice.

GANDALF. [Going toward the background.] Farewell!

BLANKA. O, you are going?

GANDALF. We meet in time.

[Stops.]

GANDALF. Tell me this one thing more: What warrior is it rests beneath the mound?

BLANKA. I do not know.

GANDALF. You do not know, and still You scatter flowers on the hero's grave.

BLANKA. My father led me here one morning early And pointed out to me the fresh-made mound, Which I had never seen upon the strand. He bade me say my morning prayers out here, And in my supplications to remember Those who had harried us with sword and fire.

GANDALF. And you?

BLANKA. Each morning from that day to this I sent a prayer to heaven for their salvation; And every evening flowers afresh I wove Into a garland for the grave.

GANDALF. Yes, strange! How can you pray thus for your enemy?

BLANKA. My faith commands me.

GANDALF. [Vehemently.] Such a faith is craven; It is the faith which saps the hero's strength; 'Twas therefore that the great, heroic life Died feebly in the South!

BLANKA. But now suppose My craven faith, as you see fit to call it, Could be transplanted to your virgin soil, — I know full well, there would spring forth a mass Of flowers so luxuriant as to hide The naked mountain.

GANDALF. Let the mountain stand In nakedness until the end of time!

BLANKA. O! Take me with you!

GANDALF. What do you mean? I sail for home —

BLANKA. Well, I shall sail with you; For I have often traveled in my dreams To far-off Norway, where you live mid snow And ice and sombre woods of towering pines. There should come mirth and laughter in the hall, If I could have my say, I promise you; For I am merry; — have you any scald?

GANDALF. I had one, but the sultry Southern air Has loosened all the strings upon his harp, — They sing no longer —

BLANKA. Good! Then shall I be Your scald.

GANDALF. And you? — You could go with us there, And leave your father and your home?

BLANKA. [Laughing.] Aha! You think I meant it seriously?

GANDALF. Was it Only a jest?

BLANKA. Alas! a foolish dream I often used to dream before we met, — Which often I no doubt shall dream again, When you —

[Suddenly breaking off.]

BLANKA. You stare so fixedly.

GANDALF. Do I?

BLANKA. Why, yes! What are you thinking of?

GANDALF. I? Nothing!

BLANKA. Nothing?

GANDALF. That is, I scarcely know myself; And yet I do—and you shall hear it now: I thought of you and how you would transplant Your flowers in the North, when suddenly My own faith came as if by chance to mind. One word therein I never understood Before; now have you taught me what it means.

BLANKA. And that is what?

GANDALF. Valfader, it is said, Receives but half the warriors slain in battle; The other half to Freya goes by right. That I could never fully comprehend; But—now I understand,—I am myself A fallen warrior, and to Freya goes The better part of me.

BLANKA. [Amazed.] What does this mean?

GANDALF. Well, in a word, then know—

BLANKA. [Quickly.] No, say it not! I dare not tarry longer here to-night,— My father waits, and I must go; farewell!

GANDALF. O, you are going?

BLANKA. [Takes the wreath of oak leaves which he has let fall and throws it around his helmet.] You can keep it now. Lo, what I hitherto bestowed on you In dreams, I grant you now awake.

GANDALF. Farewell!

[He goes quickly out to the right.]

SCENE IV

BLANKA. [Alone.]

He is gone! Ah, perfect stillness
Rules upon the barren strand.
Perfect stillness, grave-like stillness
Rules my heart with heavy hand.
Came he then to vanish only
Through the mist, a ray of light?
Soon he flies, a sea-gull lonely,
Far away into the night!
What is left me of this lover?
But a flower in the dark:

In my loneliness to hover
Like a petrel round his bark!

[The war trumpet of the Vikings is heard from the left.]

BLANKA. Ah! What was that! A trumpet from the wood!

SCENE V

[BLANKA, GANDALF from the right.]

GANDALF. [Aside.] It is too late!

BLANKA. O, there he is again! What do you want?

GANDALF. Quick, — quick, away from here!

BLANKA. What do you mean?

GANDALF. Away! There's danger here!

BLANKA. What danger?

GANDALF. Death!

BLANKA. I do not understand you.

GANDALF. I thought to hide it from you, — hence I went
To call my people to the ship again
And sail away; you never should have known, —
The trumpet warns me that it is too late, — That they are coming.

BLANKA. Who are coming?

GANDALF. Then know, — The strangers who once harried on the isle
Were vikings like myself.

BLANKA. From Norway?

GANDALF. Yes. My father, who was chief among them, fell, — Hence
must he be avenged.

BLANKA. Avenged?

GANDALF. Such is The custom.

BLANKA. Ah, I see now!

GANDALF. Here they come! Stand close behind me!

BLANKA. Man of blood, — away!

SCENE VI

[The Preceding.]

[ASGAUT, HEMMING and the VIKINGS, who lead RODERIK between them.]

ASGAUT. [To GANDALF.] A meagre find, yet something, to be sure.

BLANKA. My father!

[She throws herself in his arms.]

RODERIK. Blanka! O, my child!

JOSTEJN. A woman! He will have company.

ASGAUT. Yes, straight to Hell!

BLANKA. O father, wherefore have you never told me—

RODERIK. Hush! Hush! my child!

[Points to GANDALF.]

RODERIK. Is this your chieftain?

ASGAUT. Yes.

ASGAUT. [To GANDALF.] This man can tell you how your father died; For he was in the thick of it, he says, The only one to get away alive.

GANDALF. Hush! I will nothing hear.

ASGAUT. Good; let us then Begin the task.

BLANKA. O God! what will they do?

GANDALF. [In an undertone.] I cannot, Asgaut!

ASGAUT. [Likewise.] Is our king afraid? Has woman's flattering tongue beguiled his mind?

GANDALF. No matter, — I have said—

ASGAUT. Bethink yourself, — Your standing with your warriors is at stake. Your word you pledged Valhalla's mighty gods, And if you fail a dastard you'll be judged. Do not forget our faith is insecure— And wavering; one blow can strike its root, And if the blow comes from the king above, It will have had a mortal wound.

GANDALF. Ah me! That was a most unhappy oath I swore.

ASGAUT. [To the VIKINGS.] Now ready, warriors!

BLANKA. Will you murder him, An old, defenseless man?

ASGAUT. Down with them both!

BLANKA. O God!

HROLLOUG. The woman is too fair! Let her Return with us.

JOSTEJN. [Laughing.] Yes, as a warrior maid.

GANDALF. Stand back!

RODERIK. O spare, — O spare at least my child! The slayer of your chieftain I will bring you, If you will only spare her!

GANDALF. [Quickly.] Bring him here, And she is free. What say you?

THE VIKINGS. She is free!

BLANKA. [To RODERIK.] You promise that?

ASGAUT. Then fetch him!

RODERIK. Here he stands!

SOME. Ha, that old man!

GANDALF. O woe!

BLANKA. No, no, you shall not—

RODERIK. Struck by this hand the viking found his death, Now rests he peacefully in yonder mound!

GANDALF. My father's barrow!

RODERIK. He was strong and brave; Wherefore I laid him here in viking style.

GANDALF. Since he is buried, then, —

ASGAUT. Though he be buried, The fallen king cries for revenge, — strike, strike!

BLANKA. He is deceiving you!

BLANKA. [To GANDALF.] Do you not see It is alone his daughter he would save? Yet, how should your kind understand a soul That sacrifices all—

GANDALF. I do not understand? You do not think I can?

GANDALF. [To the VIKINGS.] He shall not die!

ASGAUT. How so?

BLANKA. O father! He is good like you.

ASGAUT. You mean to break your oath?

GANDALF. No, I shall keep it!

JOSTEJN. Then what have you in mind?

HROLLOUG. Explain!

GANDALF. I swore To take revenge or else to die myself. Well, he is free,—I to Valhalla go.

BLANKA. [To RODERIK.] What does he mean?

ASGAUT. Your honor you would save?—

GANDALF. Go,—hold a ship in readiness for me, With hoisted sail, the pyre light in the prow; In ancient fashion I shall go aboard! Behold, the evening breeze blows from the strand,— On crimson wings I sail into Valhalla!

[JOSTEJN goes out to the right.]

ASGAUT. Ah, 'tis the woman who has cast her spell on you!

BLANKA. No, you must live!

GANDALF. I live? No, to the gods I must be true, I cannot break with them.

BLANKA. Your oath is bloody, Balder hates it.

GANDALF. Yes, But Balder lives no longer with us now!

BLANKA. For you he lives; your soul is gentleness.

GANDALF. Yes, to my ruin! It became my task As king to keep intact our great ideal,— But I lack strength enough! Come, Asgaut, you Shall take the kingly sceptre from my hand; You are a warrior of the truest steel; On

me the Southern plague has been at work. But if I cannot for my people live, I now can die for them.

ASGAUT. Well said, King Gandalf!

BLANKA. Then need no more be said! Die like a hero, Faithful and true unto the very end! But now that we must part forever,—know, That when you die yourself to keep your oath You are then likewise marking me for death!

GANDALF. What! You for death?

BLANKA. My life was like a flower, Transplanted in an unfamiliar soil, Which therefore slumbered in its prison folds: Then came a sunbeam from the distant home,— O, that was you, my Gandalf! Opened then The flower its calyx. In another hour, Alas! the sunbeam paled,—the flower died!

GANDALF. O, have I understood you right? You could? Then is my promise thrice unfortunate!

BLANKA. But we shall meet again!

GANDALF. O, nevermore! You go to heaven and the holy Christ, I to Valhalla; silent I shall take My place among the rest,—but near the door; Valhalla's merriment is not for me.

JOSTEJN. [Returns with a banner in his hand.] See, now the bark is ready, as you bade.

ASGAUT. O, what a glorious end! Many a man Will envy you, indeed.

GANDALF. [To BLANKA.] Farewell!

BLANKA. Farewell! Farewell for life and for eternity!

RODERIK. [Struggling with himself.] Wait! Wait!

[Prostrates himself before BLANKA.]

RODERIK. Mercy, I cry! Forgive, forgive me!

BLANKA. O God!

GANDALF. What means he?

RODERIK. All will I confess: My whole life here with you has been deceit!

BLANKA. Ah, terror has unhinged his mind!

RODERIK. No, no!

RODERIK. [To GANDALF, after he has risen.] You are released forever from your vow; Your father's shadow needs no blood revenge!

GANDALF. Ah, then explain!

BLANKA. Oh, speak!

RODERIK. Here stands King Rorek!

SOME. The fallen king?

BLANKA. O heavens!

GANDALF. [In doubt.] You, — my father?

RODERIK. See, Asgaut! Do you still recall the scratch You gave me on our earliest viking trip, The time we fought about the booty?

[He uncovers his arm and shows it to ASGAUT.]

ASGAUT. Yes, By Thor, it is King Rorek!

GANDALF. [Throws himself in his arms.] Father! Father! A second time now have you given me life. My humble thanks!

RODERIK. [Downcast; to BLANKA.] And you now — what will you Grant the old robber?

BLANKA. Love as hitherto! I am your daughter! Has not three years' care Wiped off each spot of blood upon your shield?

ASGAUT. Yet now explain, — how comes it that you live!

GANDALF. She saved his life.

RODERIK. Yes, like a friendly elf She healed my wounds and cared for me, And all the while she told me of the faith These quiet people in the South believe, Until my rugged heart itself was moved. And day by day I kept the truth from her; I did not dare to tell her —

GANDALF. But the mound there?

RODERIK. I laid therein my armor and my sword, It seemed to me the grim old savage viking Was buried then and there. Each day my child Sent up a prayer for him beside the mound.

ASGAUT. Farewell!

GANDALF. Where do you go?

ASGAUT. Northward again! I now see clearly that my time is past— So likewise is the viking life. I go To Iceland; there the plague has not yet come.

ASGAUT. [To BLANKA.] You, woman, take my place beside the king! For Thor is gone—and Mjölfnir out of gear; Through you now Balder rules.— Farewell!

[He goes.]

GANDALF. Yes, Balder ruleth now, through you, my Blanka! I see the meaning of my viking life! 'Twas not alone desire for fame and wealth That drove me hence from my forefathers' home; No, that which called me was a secret longing, A quiet yearning after Balder. See, Now is the longing stilled, now go we home; There will I live in peace among my people.

GANDALF. [To the VIKINGS.] And will you follow?

ALL. We will follow you!

GANDALF. And you, my Blanka?

BLANKA. I? I too am born A Northern child; for on your mountain sides The choicest flowers of my heart took root. To you it was I journeyed in my dreams, From you it was that I received my love.

RODERIK. And now away!

GANDALF. But you?

BLANKA. He comes with us!

RODERIK. I shall remain.

[He points to the mound.]

RODERIK. My barrow waits for me.

BLANKA. And should I leave you here alone?

HEMMING. No, no! Be not afraid! For I shall close his eyes And sing to him a saga from the mound; My last song it will be.

HEMMING. [Moved as he seizes GANDALF's hand.] Farewell, my king! Now have you found a better scald than I.

RODERIK. [With firmness.] It must be so, my Gandalf; you are king, And you have sacred duties to discharge.

[He puts their hands together.]

RODERIK. You are the children of the coming dawn,— Go yonder where the royal throne awaits you; I am the last one of the by-gone age, My throne—it is the barrow—grant me that!

[GANDALF and BLANKA throw themselves silently into his arms. RODERIK ascends the burial mound.—HEMMING with his harp seats himself at his feet.]

GANDALF. [With resolution.] And now to Norway!

HROLLOUG. Home!

ALL. To Norway! Home!

BLANKA. [Fired as she seizes the banner from JOSTEJN's hand.] Yes, now away! Our course shall northward run O'er ocean billow on through storm and sun. Soon fades the daylight o'er the glacier's peak, Soon is the viking life a memory bleak! Already sits the hero on his mound; The time is past when he could sail around With sword and battle cry from strand to strand. Thor's hammer will no longer rule the land, The North will be itself a giant grave. But bear in mind the pledge All-Fader gave: When moss and flowers shall the barrow hide, To Idavold the hero's ghost shall ride,— Then Norway too shall from the grave be brought To chastened deeds within the realm of thought!

THE END

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