

Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775-1818)

25 *The Sword of Angantyr*

RUNIC.

The original is to be found in Hick's Thesau. Ling. Septen. I have taken great liberties with it, and the catastrophe is my own invention. Several versions of this Poem have already appeared, particularly one by Miss Seward.

HERVOR.

Angantyr, awake! awake!

Hervor bids thy slumber's fly!

Magic thunders round thee break,

Angantyr, reply! reply!

Reach me, warrior, from thy grave

5

Schwafurlama's magic blade;

Fatal weapon, dreaded glaive,

By the dwarfs at midnight made.

Hervardur, obey my charms,

Hanri too, and Angantyr:

10

Hither, clad in bloody arms,

Haste with helmet, sword, and spear!

Hasten, heroes, hasten all;

Sadly pace the spell-bound sod;

Dread my anger, hear my call,

15

Tremble at the charmer's rod!

Are the sons of Angrym's race,

They whose breasts with glory burn'd,

All deprived of manhood's grace,

All to dust and ashes turn'd?

20

Where the blasted yew-tree grows,

Where the bones of heroes lie,

What, will none his grave uncloze,

None to Hervor's voice reply?

Shades of warriors cold and dead, 25
Fear my wrath, nor longer stay!
Mighty souls to Hela fled,
Come! my powerful spells obey.

Either instant to my hand
Give the sword of mystic power, 30
Which the dwarf and spectre-band
Bathed in blood at midnight hour;

Or, in Odin's hall of cheer,
Never shall ye more repose,
Never more drink mead and beer 35
From the skulls of slaughter'd foes!

ANGANTYR.

Hervor! Hervor! cease thy cries,
Nor oblige, by impious spell,
Ghosts of slaughter'd chiefs to rise;
Sport not with the laws of hell! 40

Know, nor friend's, nor parent's hand
Laid in earth's embrace my bones:
Natives of a distant land
Raised yon monumental stones:

I the Tyrfing gave to these; 45
'Twas but justice; 'twas their due.
Hervor! Hervor! rest in peace,
Angantyr has told thee true.

HERVOR.

Dar'st thou still my anger brave?
Thus deceitful dar'st thou speak? 50
Sure as Odin dug thy grave,
Lies by thee the sword I seek.

I alone may call thee sire,
I alone thine heir can be;
Give me then the sword of fire, 55
Angantyr, oh! give it me!

ANGANTYR.

Hervor! Hervor! cease, and know,
It endures no female hand;
Flames around her feet shall glow,
Who presumes to touch the brand: 60

But from thee a son shall spring,
(So the Valkyries declare)
Who shall reign a mighty king;
He the magic blade shall wear.

HERVOR.

Hela! Hela! thrice around 65
This enchanted spot I pace:
Hela! Hela! thrice the ground
Thus with mystic signs I trace.

While I swear by Odin's might,
Balder's locks, and Sculda's wing, 70
By the god renown'd in fight,
By the rhymes the sisters sing,

Still the dead unrest shall know,
Still shall wave my magic rod,
Still the shivering ghosts shall go 75
Round and round this spell-bound sod,

Till the sword, the death of shields,
Shall my sire to me resign,
Till my hand the Tyrfing wields,
As in *his* grasp, fear'd in mine! 80

ANGANTYR.

Bold enchantress, since no prayers
Can this impious zeal abate,
Since thy haughty bosom dare
To dispute the will of Fate,

I no more retard thy doom: 85
Arm'd with magic helm and spear

Seek the Tyrfing, seek my tomb,
When the midnight hour is near.

HERVOR.

Stormy clouds around me lour!
All is silent, mortals sleep! 90
'Tis the solemn midnight hour!
Angantyr, thy promise keep.

'Tis the time, and here the grave:
Lo! the grate with pain I lift:
Father, reach me forth the glaive, 95
Reach the dwarf's enchanted gift.

ANGANTYR.

Know, beneath my head it lies,
Deep embrown'd with hostile gore.
Hervor, daughter, cease thy cries,
Hervor, daughter, ask no more. 100

Flames curl round in many a spire,
Flames from Hilda's mystic hand;
Ne'er may woman touch the fire,
Ne'er may woman wield the brand!

HERVOR.

Wherefore, father, this delay, 105
Wherefore break the word you gave?
Coldly burn the flames which play
In a breathless warrior's grave.

Give me straight the spell-fraught sword,
Then my potent charms shall cease: 110
Be the dead to sleep restored,
Rest, sad spirit, rest in peace!

ANGANTYR.

Oh! what dæmon's direful power
Hapless Hervor, fires thy brain?
Fain would I retard the hour, 115
Destined for my daughter's pain!

Yet be wise, the sword forego:
It endures no female hand;
Flames around her feet shall glow,
Who presumes to touch the brand. 120

HERVOR.

Wilt thou still the brand conceal?
I must haste my friends to join,
Where Hidalvar, clad in steel,
Leads his troops, and waits for mine:

Father, now the sword bestow; 125
Soon 'twill hew my path to fame;
Soon 'twill make each trembling foe
Shrink with fear at Hervor's name!

ANGANTYR.

Hark! what horrid voices ring
Through the mansions of the dead! 130
'Tis the Valkyries who sing,
While they spin thy vital thread.

– “Angantyr!” I hear them say,
Sitting by their magic loom,
– “Yield the sword, no more delay, 135
“Let the sorceress meet her doom!

“Soon the proud one shall perceive,
“Anguish ends what crimes begin:
“Lo! her web of life we weave,
“Lo! the final thread we spin!” – 140

I obey the voice of hell,
It ensures repose to me:
Hervor, now unbind the spell,
And the Tyrfing thine shall be.

HERVOR.

Since thy dread commands, my sire, 145
Force the Tyrfing to forego,
On thine altars, sisters dire,

Thrice twelve heroes' blood shall flow.

With respect the mandate hear;
Angantyr, the sword resign: 150
Valued gift, to me more dear,
Than were Norway's sceptre mine.

ANGANTYR.

I obey! the magic glaive
Thirty warriors' blood hath spilt;
Lo! I reach it from my grave, 155
Death is in the sheath and hilt!

Now 'tis thine: that daring arm
Wields at length the flaming sword;
Hervor, now unbind the charm,
Be my ghost to sleep restored. 160

HERVOR.

Rest in peace, lamented shade!
Be thy slumbers soft and sweet,
While obtain'd the wond'rous blade,
Home I bend my gladsome feet.

But from out the gory steel 165
Streams of fire their radiance dart!
Mercy! mercy! oh! I feel
Burning pangs invade my heart!

Flames amid my ringlets play,
Blazing torrents dim my sight! 170
Fatal weapon, hence away!
Woe be to thy blasting might!

Woe be to the night and time,
When the magic sword was given!
Woe be to the Runic rhyme, 175
Which reversed the laws of Heaven!

Curst be cruel Hilda's fire,
Which around the weapon curl'd!

Curst the Tyrfing's vengeful ire,
Curst myself, and curst the world! 180

What! can nothing cool my brain?
Nothing calm my anguish wild?
Angantyr, oh, speak again!
Father! father! aid your child!

ANGANTYR.

'Tis in vain your shrieks resound, 185
Hapless prey of strange despair!
'Tis in vain you beat the ground,
While you rend your raven hair!

They, who dare the dead to wake,
Still too late the crime deplore: 190
None shall now my silence break,
Now I sleep to wake no more!

HERVOR.

Curses! curses! oh! what pain!
How my melting eye-balls glow!
Curses! curses! through each vein 195
How do boiling torrents flow!

Scorching flames my heart devour!
Nought can cool them but the grave!
Hela! I obey thy power,
Hela! take thy willing slave! 200

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