

Borrow George

**The Verner Raven, The Count  
of Vendel's Daughter, and Other  
Ballads**



**George Borrow**  
**The Verner Raven,**  
**The Count of Vendel's**  
**Daughter, and Other Ballads**

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# George Borrow

## The Verner Raven, The Count of Vendel's Daughter, and Other Ballads

### THE VERNER RAVEN

The Raven he flies in the evening tide,  
He in day dares not intrude;  
Whoever is born to have evil luck  
In vain may seek for good.

Lustily flies the Verner Raven,  
High o'er the wall he's flown,  
For he was aware that Irmindlin fair  
Sate in her bower alone.

He southward flew, and he northward flew,  
He flew high up in the cloud;  
And he beheld May Irmindlin  
Who sorrowing sate and sew'd.

“Now hear me, little Irmindlin,

Why weep in this piteous way?  
For father or mother, or is it for brother,  
That adown thy cheek tears stray?"

It was Damsel Irmindlin,  
Swift out of the window looked she:  
"O who is he that will comfort me,  
And list to my misery?"

"Hear thou, wild Raven, bird of Death,  
Fly thou hither down to me;  
And all my trouble and all my care  
I'll straight relate to thee.

"My father gave me the son of a king,  
We were fitted the one for the other,  
But he was into the Austrian land  
Dispatched by my cruel step-mother.

"So happily we should together have lived,  
For he my whole love won;  
But she wished to give me her sister's son,  
Who was liker a fiend than a man.

"I had a gallant brother once,  
Sir Verner by name was he,  
But he was transformed by my cruel step-dame  
And driven to a strange countrie."

“Hear thou, Damsel Irmindlin,  
What wilt thou give me, say?  
I’ll carry thee straight to thy plighted youth,  
If with me thou wilt fly away.”

“Thou shalt from me the ruddy gold,  
And the silver white receive;  
If thou bear me to my Bridegroom bold,  
And me from my woe relieve.”

“Keep thou thyself thy silver and gold,  
Such gifts I do not crave;  
The first son thou conceivest of him,  
That, that from thee I’ll have.”

Then straight she took the Raven’s foot,  
Laid that her white hand upon;  
She swore to him by her Christian faith,  
That he should have the son.

Then took he Damsel Irmindlin,  
He placed her on his back;  
Then flew he over the wild sea waves  
As fast as he could track.

It was the Verner Raven wild,  
On the turret he alighted:  
“Now sit we, Damsel, upon the house,  
Where dwells thy Bridegroom plighted.”

Out came bold Sir Nilaus,  
A silver cup in his hand:  
“Be welcome, Damsel Irmindlin,  
Here to this foreign land!

“What shall I give to thee, Raven wild,  
That hast brought to me my Bride?  
No better tidings I have heard,  
Since from Denmark forth I hied.”

Thanks be to brave Sir Nilaus,  
He kept his faith so well;  
The Monday next that followed,  
His bridal it befell.

They their bridal solemnised  
With glee and utmost joy;  
When forty weeks away had flown  
She brought into the world a boy.

It was the Verner Raven,  
Perched on the turret tall:  
“What thou did'st promise me, Irmindlin,  
To thy mind I'd have thee call.”

So sorely she wept, and her hands she smote,  
Because it a girl was not:  
“Thee shall the wild Death Raven have,

That will cost thee thy life, I wot!"

There came flying over the house  
The Raven, with looks to scare;  
So sorely then wept both Maidens and Dames,  
And their hands wrung in despair.

Sir Nilaus went, and proffered the bird  
Proud castles many a one;  
He proffered him even the half of his land  
If he only might keep his son.

"If I get not the little babe,  
Thou sorely shall rue it straight,  
Thee I limb from limb will tear  
And thy kingdom devastate."

She has taken the babe, and in linen white  
Hath wrapped it tenderly;  
"Farewell, farewell, my dearest son,  
Thou owest thy death to me."

Then bore they out the little babe,  
On its mother's breast that lay;  
O'er the cheeks of all did big tears fall,  
Such woe was and wail that day.

The Raven took the child in his claw,  
He croaked in joyous guise;



Sir Nilaus stood and looked thereon,  
Pouring forth bitter sighs.

Then tore he amain its right eye out,  
Drank the half of its heart's red blood;  
Then he became the handsomest knight  
That upon earth e'er stood.

He changed into the loveliest knight  
That with eye man ever had seen:  
It was Irmindlin's brother himself,  
Who had long enchanted been.

All the folk that stood thereby,  
They fell upon their knees bare;  
And the child it was to life restored  
When to God they had made their prayer.

Now sitteth Dame Irmindlin so glad,  
All her grief has from her hied;  
For she has now both brother and son,  
And sleeps by Sir Nilaus' side.

# THE COUNT OF VENDEL'S DAUGHTER

Within a bower the womb I left,  
    'Midst dames and maids who stood to aid;  
They wrapped me first in silken weft,  
    And next in scarlet red array'd.

But a stepdame soon 'twas my lot to get,  
    And fierce and wild she proved to me;  
Within a coffer me she set,  
    And pushed it out upon the sea.

By one wave I was borne to land,  
    And by the next away was ta'en;  
But God on High, it seems, had plann'd,  
    That I should footing there obtain.

The tide it drove me to the shore,  
    And in its backward course retook;  
Sure ne'er had child of king before  
    Such buffeting on sea to brook.

But God He help'd me, so that I  
    Was cast above the billows' reach;  
And soon a savage wolf drew nigh,

Was prowling on the sandy beach.

Soon prowling came a wolf so gray,  
And me up-taking in his jaws,  
He carried me with care away  
Deep, deep into the forest shaws.

That self-same wolf he was so kind  
That me beneath a tree he laid;  
And then came running a nimble hind,  
And me unto its lair convey'd.

There me for winter one she nurs'd —  
She nursed me for two winters' space.  
To creep, to creep, I learnt at first,  
And next I learnt to pace, to pace.

And I was full eight years, I wot,  
Within the quiet, green retreat.  
Close couched beside the hind I got  
Full many a slumber calm and sweet.

I had clothes and shelter of no kind,  
Except the linden green alone;  
And, save the gentle forest hind,  
Had nurse and foster-mother none.

But forth on courser reeking hot  
There rushed a knight of bearing bold,

And he my foster-mother shot  
With arrow on the verdant wold.

He pierced the hind with mortal wound,  
And all our fond connection cut;  
Then wrapped his cloak my frame around,  
And me within his buckler put.

That self-same knight, so bold and strong,  
Within his bower the foundling bred;  
He tended me both well and long,  
And finally his bride he made.

He had by long inquiry found  
My father was a noble count  
In Vendel's land, who castles own'd,  
And rul'd o'er many a plain and mount.

The first night we together slept  
Was fraught with woe of darkest hue;  
Foes, whom he long at bay had kept,  
Broke in on us, and him they slew.

The night we lay together first  
A deed of horror was fulfill'd;  
The bride-house door his foemen burst,  
And in my arms my husband kill'd.

Soon, soon, my friends to counsel go,

A husband new they chose for me;  
The cloister's prior of mitred brow —  
The good Sir Nilaus styl'd was he.

But soon as I the threshold cross'd,  
The nuns could not their fury smother;  
They vow'd by God and all His Host,  
The Prior Nilaus was my brother.

Forth from the cloister him they drew,  
They pelted him to death with stones;  
I stood close by, and all could view,  
I scarce could hear his piteous moans.

Once more my friends to counsel hied,  
For me another spouse they get —  
Son of the King of England wide  
Was he, and hight Sir Engelbret.

Nine winters with that princely youth  
I lived; of joy we had no dearth,  
I tell to ye, for sooth and truth,  
To ten fair sons that I gave birth.

But pirate crews the land beset,  
No one, no one, my grief could tell;  
They slew with sword Sir Engelbret,  
And nine of my fair sons as well.

My husband and my sons with brand  
They slew. How I bewail their case!  
My tenth son here they from the land —  
I never more shall see his face.

Now is my care as complicate  
As golden threads which maidens spin;  
God crown with bliss Sir Engelbret,  
He ever was so free from sin.

But now I'll take the holy vows,  
Within the cloister under Ey;  
I'll ne'er become another's spouse,  
But in religion I will die.

But first to all the country side  
I will declare my bosom's grief;  
I find, the more my grief I hide,  
The less, the less, is my relief.

# THE CRUEL MOTHER-IN-LAW

From his home and his country Sir Volmor should fare,  
His wife he commends to his mother's best care.

Proud Lyborg she sang, as the dancers she watched,  
Behind stood Dame Ingeborg, malice she hatched.

“To live to the Fall if the luck I enjoy  
Fair lady, thy beautiful voice I'll destroy.”

Proud Lyborg's fair maidens upon the floor sprang,  
And all through the evening she unto them sang.

But alack two short summer days scarcely had pass'd,  
When in desperate sickness proud Lyborg lay fast.

Proud Lyborg fell sick, and lay stretched on her bed,  
Then backwards and forwards Dame Ingeborg sped.

“Now hear me, Dame Ingeborg, dear mother mine,  
Do bring me, I pray, either water or wine.”

“The water is frozen, and frozen the wine,  
And frozen the tap in each barrel of mine.

“The door it is locked, and the keys are away,  
But where, daughter dear, by the Saints I can’t say.”

“If I can nor water nor wine from thee win,  
Then open the door that the dew may rush in.

“Cause the door to the North to be wide open set,  
Then my feverish frame cool refreshment shall get.”

“The door to the South I’ll have straightway undone,  
That the hot sun may flash in thy visage upon.”

“O would there were one that for sweet pity’s sake,  
To my mother a message in secret would take.”

Then answer’d proud Lyborg’s own little foot-boy:  
“Your message in secret I’ll carry with joy.”

That they were alone they with confidence thought;  
Dame Ingeborg stood nigh, and every word caught.

The lad he upsprang on his courser so high,  
He galloped as fast as the wingèd birds fly.

In, in came the lad, in a kirtle red drest:  
“Your daughter, Dame Lyborg, in death will soon rest.

“She bids you to come with all possible quickness,  
To live through this night she can’t hope from her sickness.”



Straight unto her servants proud Mettelil says:  
“My horses go fetch from the meads where they graze.”

The horses they galloped, the chariot wheels turned,  
Throughout the long day whilst the summer heat burned.

The midsummer’s sun with such fury it glows  
Proud Lyborg swoons ’neath it in terrible throes.

A purse takes Dame Ingeborg fraught with gold treasure,  
And she speeds to the hall, her heart bounding with pleasure.

“Whosoever will gold and will bounty derive,  
Let him help me to bury proud Lyborg alive.”

Soon as she of the gold distribution had made,  
Below the black earth the fair lily they laid.

To the gate of the castle proud Mettelil came,  
Dame Ingeborg stood there, and leaned on the same.

“Proud Ingeborg, hear what I say unto thee:  
What hast done with my daughter? declare that to me!”

“But yesterday ’twas that with sorrowful mind,  
Her corse to the arms of the grave we consign’d.”

“Proud Ingeborg, hush thee, nor talk in this guise,

But show me the grave where my dear daughter lies.”

As soon as Dame Mettelil o’er the place trod,  
Proud Lyborg she screamed underneath the green sod.

“Whoever will gold and will silver obtain,  
Let him help me to dig now with might and with main.”

They took up proud Lyborg, all there as she lay,  
Her mother flung o’er her the scarlet array.

“Now tell to me, Lyborg, thou child of my heart,  
Since restored to the arms of thy mother thou art,

“What death to thy thinking should Ingeborg thole,  
For placing thee living in horrid grave-hole?”

“To destroy my young life it is true, she was bent,  
But let her live, mother, and let her repent.”

“That she go unpunished I cannot permit,  
I’ll teach her what ’tis on a fire to sit.”

To two of her servants proud Mettelil spake:  
“Do ye quickly a fire on the open field make.

“Do ye cut down the oak and the bonny ash-tree,  
That the fire by them fed may burn brilliant and free.”

Dame Ingeborg forth from the house they convey'd,  
And they burnt her to dust on the fire they had made.

Sir Volmor came home from the red field of strife,  
Then tidings assailed him, with dolour so rife.

Then tidings assailed him, with dolour so rife,  
Burnt, burnt was his mother, and flown was his wife.

He bade for proud Lyborg of red gold a store,  
But he could the lily obtain nevermore.

# THE FAITHFUL KING OF THULE

A king so true and steady  
In Thule lived of old;  
To him his dying lady  
A goblet gave of gold.

He drank thereout so often,  
For all his love it gained;  
To tears his eyes would soften  
Whene'er its juice he drained.

When death drew nigh, his spirit  
His riches o'er he told  
To him who should inherit —  
But not that cup of gold.

By all his knights surrounded  
One day he sat at dine,  
In hall of fortress, founded  
By ocean's roaring brine.

The ancient hero rallies  
With one more draught his blood,  
Then casts the sacred chalice  
Below him in the flood.

Deep, deep within the billows  
He watched it as it sank;  
Then, sinking on his pillows,  
No drop more e'er he drank.

# THE FAIRIES' SONG

Balmy the evening air,  
Nature, how bright the hue!  
But, though the bloom is fair  
The sense with sweets to woo,  
Love, Music, Mirth, Oh give!  
On these we Fairies live!

The glow-worm's amorous lamp  
Recalls her wandering mate;  
Their revel in the swamp  
Outshines the halls of State.  
Then, Spirits, hither fly,  
And match their revelry!

The Bat is on the wing,  
And Gnats, what reels they run!  
In wide or narrow ring,  
An atmosphere of fun.  
Then let us to the dance,  
And feet like midges glance!