

Borrow George

Young Swaigder: or, The Force of Runes, and Other Ballads



George Borrow
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of Runes, and Other Ballads**

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YOUNG SWAIGDER or THE FORCE OF RUNES

It was the young Swaigder,
With the little ball he played;
The ball flew into the Damsel's lap,
And pale her cheeks it made.

The ball flew into the Damsel's bower.
He went of it in quest;
Before he out of the bower came,
Much care had filled his breast!

“The ball, the ball thou shouldst not fling,
Shouldst cast it not at me;
There sits a maid in a foreign land,
She sighs and weeps for thee.

“Thou never more shalt peace obtain,
Or close in sleep thine eyes,
Till thou has freed the lovely maid,
In thrall for thee that lies.”

It was the young Swaigder,
Placed his cap upon his head,
And into the high chamber
Unto his knights he sped.

“Here, quaffing mead from out the shell
Sit ye, my Courtmen bold,
Whilst I go to the mountain drear,
Speech with the Dead to hold!

“Here, quaffing mead and ruddy wine,
Sit ye my men so brave,
Whilst I go to the mountain drear,
With my mother speech to have!”

It was the young Swaigder,
And he began to call —
Riven were wall and marble stone,
And the hill began to fall.

“Who is it breaks my sleep,
And works me such annoy?
Deep, deep below the earth so swart

Can I not peace enjoy?"

"O, it is the young Swaigder,
The son thou lovest dear;
He fain would good advice from thee,
His darling mother, hear.

"For I have now a step-mother,
So harsh she is of mood,
And she upon me Runes has cast
For a maid I ne'er have view'd."

"I will give thee a noble horse,
Shall bear thee at thy need,
And he will run upon the sea
As on the verdant mead.

"And I will to thee a napkin give,
'Tis of Ager wool entire,
Before thee on the board shall stand,
What meat thou shalt desire.

"I will to thee a deer's horn give,
Mark well its golden gleam;
All the drink thou wishest for,
From the golden horn shall stream.

"And I will give to thee a sword,
Hardened in Dragon's blood;

It will glitter like a beam
When thou ridest through the wood.

“I will give to thee a barque,
Its white sails silk shall be;
Shall move as well on the verdant earth
As on the foaming sea.”

Their silken sails on the gilded yard
So wide, so wide they spread;
Away they sailed to the distant land,
Where dwelt the lovely maid.

And they have cast their anchors
Upon the yellow sand;
It was the young Swaigder
Who stepped the first to land.

It was the young Swaigder,
His ship to the shore he steers;
And the first man there that met him,
Was a man of many years.

It was then the ancient man
Was the first to make enquire:
“O, what is the name of the young swain
With the sword, and the look of fire?”

“O, he is hight young Swaigder,

So wide his fame doth fly;
And he for a maid is pining sore
On whom he ne'er set eye."

"There is within this land a maid,
Who pining long hath been
For a swain that hight is Swaigder,
And him she ne'er has seen."

"If longs she after a young swain
On whom she ne'er set eye,
And he is hight young Swaigder,
He is here in verity.

"Now do thou hear, thou ancient man,
If it as thou sayest be,
Become I King upon this land,
I'll make a Count of thee."

"Midst of yonder verdant wood
Stands the castle of the maid;
The house is of gray marble stone,
The court with steel belaid.

"The house is of grey marble stone
The court with steel is floored,
The portal is of ruddy gold,
Twelve bears before it guard.

“In middle of the maiden’s court
A linden spreads its shade,
If truly thou art Swaigder,
Hie forward unafraid.”

Away then rode young Swaigder,
Cast towards the gate his eye;
And all the locks that before it hung,
Down fell they instantly.

Then withered the leaf, then withered the linden,
And the grass at the linden’s root;
And the twelve bears who the portal guard
They fell at the hero’s foot.

When he came into the castle-court,
He smoothed his array,
Then proudly up to the high, high hall
To the King he took his way.

“Hail to thee, hail to thee, heathen King,
Who dost at the wide board sit,
Wilt thou give me thy daughter fair?
Return me an answer fit.”

“I have no daughter, I have no daughter,
No daughter but one have I;
And she so sorely longing
For a young swain doth lie.

“For a young swain whom she has never seen
My daughter longing lies;
The swain he hight is Swaigder,
So far his fame it hies.”

In went the little serving boy,
Wore a kirtle white to see:
“If thou dost long for Swaigder,
Know that hither come is he.”

In then came the lovely maid,
In white silk clad was she:
“Now welcome, welcome my dearest heart,
Young Swaigder, welcome be!”

“Wilt thou consent baptized to be,
And the Christian faith receive,
And follow me to Denmark
With young Swaigder to live?”

“Willingly I baptized will be,
Will the Christian faith receive;
And will follow thee to Denmark,
Young Swaigder, with thee to live.”

On a Thursday she baptizèd was,
She the Christian faith received;
On a Sunday they their bridal held,

And ever in peace they lived.

They kept their bridal feast for a day,
They kept the same for nine;
And there sat waiting the ancient man,
And through all of them did pine.

Be thanks to brave young Swaigder,
He kept so well his word;
A Knight he made of that ancient man,
Set him highest at the board.

Now joyful is young Swaigder,
His trouble all has fled;
He King became upon that land,
She Queen, when her sire was dead.

THE HAIL STORM¹

As in Horunga haven
We fed the crow and raven,
I heard the tempest breaking
Of demon Thorgerd's waking;
Sent by the fiend in anger,
With din and stunning clangor;
To crush our might intended,
Gigantic hail descended.

A pound the smallest pebble
Did weigh, and others treble;
It drifted, dealing slaughter,
And blood ran out like water,
Ran recking, red and horrid,
From battered cheek and forehead;
But, though so rudely greeted,
No Jornsberg man retreated.

With anger ever sharper,
Thorgerda fierce, and Yrpr,
Shot lightning from each finger,

¹ This is a much later, and greatly improved, version of the ballad which first appeared in *Romantic Ballads*, 1826, pp. 136–138, and afterwards in *Targum*, 1835, pp. 42–43

Which sped and did not linger.
Then sank our brave in numbers
To cold, eternal slumbers;
There lay the good and gallant,
Renowned for warlike talent.

To bide the storm unable
Our chieftain hewed his cable,
And with his ship departed —
We follow, broken-hearted;
For in Horunga haven
Our bravest feed the raven;
We did our best, but no men
Can stand 'gainst hail and foemen.

ROSMER MEREMAN²

In Denmark once a lady dwelt,
Hellelil the name she bore;
A castle new that lady built,
It shone all Denmark o'er.

Her daughter dear was stolen away,
She sought for her far and near;
The more she sought the less she found,
To her great distress and care.

She bid a noble ship be built,
Therein gilt masts did stand;
With valiant knights and courtmen bold
She caused it to be manned.

Her sons she followed to the strand,
With many a fond caress;
For eight long years they sailed away,
Enduring much distress.

For eight years had they sailed away,
So long they thought the tide,

² This ballad should be read in conjunction with *Rosmer*, printed in *The Mermaid's Prophecy, and other Songs relating to Queen Dagmar*, 1913, pp. 25–30.

When they sailed before a lofty hill,
And straight to land they hied.

Then peeped the Damsel Swanelil
Forth from the mountain brow:
“O whence can be these stranger swains,
As guests that seek us now?”

The youngest brother then replied,
So ready of speech was he:
“A widow’s three poor sons we are,
So long we’ve sailed the sea.

“Dame Hellelil our mother is,
We were born on Denmark’s ground;
From us our sister stolen was,
And her we have yet not found.”

“If thou wert born on Danish ground,
And Dame Hellelil be thy mother
Then I thy beloved sister am
And thou art my youngest brother.

“Now do thou hear, my youngest brother,
Why didst not at home remain?
If thou hadst a thousand thousand lives
Thou none of them couldst retain.”

She placed him in the smallest nook

She could in the house espy:
She bade him for sake of the highest God,
Neither to laugh nor cry.

Rosmer came from the ocean home,
And straight he fell to bann:
“O I can smell by my right hand
That here is a Christian man.”

“A Bird with a dead man’s shank in its mouth,
Chanced over our house to fly;
He cast it in, I cast it out,
And that full speedily.”

A noble meal she then prepared,
And she gave him many a kiss:
“O here is come my sister’s son,
It would grieve me him to miss.

“My sister’s son is here arrived
From the land where I first drew breath;
Now give him, my lord, thy firm, firm oath,
Thou’lt do unto him no scathe.”

“If here has come thy sister’s son
From the native land of both,
To do him ne’er any kind of hurt,
I swear by my highest oath.”

It was the lofty Rosmer King
To two serving swains did call:
“Bid ye proud Swanelil’s sister’s son
Attend me in the hall.”

It was Swanelil’s sister’s son,
Before Rosmer should appear;
His heart it fluttered, his body it shivered,
He stood in such mighty fear.

Then took Rosmer her sister’s son,
Placed him upon his knee;
He stroked him so tenderly on the face
That ’twas yellow and blue to see.

Then answered proud Dame Swanelil:
“Thou forget’st, Sir Rosmer, mayhap,
Thou hast not fingers small enough
To stroke so little a chap.”

And he was there till the years were five,
Then he longed for his native land:
“Now cause, O sister Swanelil,
That I’m set on the yellow strand.”

It was proud Dame Swanelil
’Fore Rosmer goes to stand;
“The swain so long has been by the sea,
That he sighs for his native land.”

“If the swain has been so long by the sea
That he sighs for his native land,
I will give him a chest of gold,
To be subject to his hand.”

“Wilt thou give him a chest of gold,
To be subject to his hand?
Hear thou now, my noble heart’s dear,
Take him to his native land.”

It was proud Dame Swanelil,
So cunning a trick she played;
She took thereout the ruddy gold all,
And herself in the chest she laid.

He took the man upon his back,
And the chest in his mouth he’s ta’en;
And so he went the long, long way
Across the land and the main.

“Now have I borne thee to thy land,
Thou seest both sun and moon;
I conjure thee by the highest God
Name Swanelil to none.”

Rosmer sprang into the sea amain,
The water splashed to the sky;
And when he came to the mountain home

No Swanelil could he spy,

When he came to the mountain home
Gone was the belov'd of his heart;
He sprang so wild about the hill,
And changed to a flint rock swart.

There was rejoicing in Hellelil's court,
They rejoiced in many a way;
Back to their friends her children are come,
Who had been so long away.

THE WICKED-STEPMOTHER

No. II.³

Sir Peter o'er to the island strayed —
All underneath a linden wide.
He weds Mettelil, so fair a maid —
In such peril with her through the forest ride.

Bracelets of gold he given her hath,
That fills his mother's breast with wrath.

“If thou wed a maid against my desire,
With her first babe she shall expire!”

He weds her and home he her has ta'en,
To meet her his mother will not deign.

When they together a year had dwelt,
Herself with child proud Mettelil felt.

Out and in they Mettelil bear,

³ This ballad should be compared with *The Wicked Stepmother*, printed in *The Dalby Bear and Other Ballads*, 1913, pp. 14–20.

Death has to her approached so near.

“Since neither live nor die I may,
Take me whence a maid ye brought me away.”

Thereto the Stepmother made reply,
She was tow’rds her disposed maliciously:

“The horses graze upon the mead,
And the coach swains heavy they sleep in bed.”

Sir Peter he stood a little apart,
Mettelil has so grieved his heart.

The coach to her country was turned in haste,
And the horses before it were quickly placed.

And when they came to the verdant moor,
Her chariot broke into pieces four.

“What mighty crime can I have done,
That my own coach ’neath me will not run?”

Sir Peter at no great distance hied,
He was so near he all espied.

“We forthwith will find a remedy,
Thou shalt ride and walk will I.”

“Each noble Dame will know how fit,
I am in this plight in the saddle to sit.”

Proud Mettelil came to her father’s abode,
Her father abroad to receive her strode.

“Welcome, Mettelil, daughter mine,
How speedest thou with that burden of thine?”

“So speeding am I, such plight I am in,
That upon this earth no rest can I win.”

Little Kirsten a may was of goodness rife,
Dearly she loved her brother’s wife.

She to her brother was true of heart,
Of wax two babes she formed with art.

She wrapt them up in the linen fair,
And took them beneath her cloak with care.

She took them beneath her cloak with care,
And them to her mother she straightway bare.

“My dearest mother, no longer grieve,
The babes of your son in your arms receive.”

“Has Mettelil forth these little sons brought?
Then my dark Runes have availed nought.

“Air and earth I have spelled, save the spot alone,
The little spot, my chest stood upon.

“Oh I enchanted have as wide
As she could either walk or ride.

“I have enchanted both earth and wood,
Save the spot whereon my chest it stood.”

No sooner she the words had said,
Than proud Mettelil on the place was laid.

And when she had come where stood the chest,
Straight of two sons was she released.

That Sir Peter's mother so mortified,
Full quickly of rage and spite she died.

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