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# PROUD SIGNILD AND OTHER BALLADS

BY  
GEORGE BORROW

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## PROUD SIGNILD.

p. 5

Proud Signild's bold brothers have taken her hand,  
They've wedded her into a far distant land.

They've wedded her far from her own native land,  
To her father's foul murderer gave they her hand.

And so for eight winters the matter it stood,  
Their face for eight winters she never once view'd.

Proud Signild she brews, and the ruddy wine blends;  
To her brothers so courteous a bidding she sends.

Sir Loumor then laughed to his heart's very core—  
Not once had he laughed for eight winters before.

p. 6

To the top of the castle proud Signild she goes,  
And thence she so many a wistful look throws.

And now she perceives down the green hillock's side  
Her seven bold brothers so furiously ride.

Proud Signild she stands on the castle's high peak,  
She hears in the courtyard her seven brothers speak.

Proud Signild she hastes her array to put on,  
And unto the hall to Sir Loumor she's gone.

"Now hear thou, Sir Loumor, thou lord, great and fine,  
"Wilt welcome these seven bold brothers of mine?"

"I'll welcome these seven bold brothers of thine,  
Proud Signild, as if they were brothers of mine."

p. 7

Sir Loumor again a wild laughter outsent,  
And the hard marble wall by that laughter was rent.

Then outspake the child in the cradle that lay,  
No word had the child ever spoke till that day:

"It shows that no good is about to take place,  
When my father he laughs in my dear mother's face."

With his foot he the cradle has spurned with such force  
That out rolled the baby, a blood-besprent corse.

So matters passed on 'till of evening the fall,  
To the evening repast the relations went all.

Sir Loumor her lord she placed at the board's head,  
To the stools at the bottom her brothers she led.

To Sir Loumor she handed the stout ruddy wine,  
To her brothers she only sweet milk will assign.

p. 8

Sir Loumor pretended to drink deep and fast,  
But in secret the wine down beneath him he cast.

Proud Signild now to the bed chamber wends,  
And the bed she prepares for her dear-beloved friends.

The bed she outspreads on the hard rugged stone,  
And that to prevent them from sleeping was done.

And under their sides she placed slyly their knives,  
Which well they might trust in defence of their lives.

She also has placed underneath their bed heads  
Their actons of steel, and their keen naked blades.

'Twas late, late at night, and the lights were burnt low,  
And away to their couches it lists them to go.

p. 9

No sooner proud Signild had sunk to repose,  
Than from her white side dread Sir Loumor arose.

To the hall, the dark hall, took Sir Loumor his way,  
Proud Signild's seven brothers intending to slay.

To the side of the bed upon tip toe he drew,  
And the seven bold brothers he traitorously slew.

In his fell hand uptakes he both faulchion and knife,  
And each of the sleepers deprived he of life.

In a bowl he collects of the murdered the gore,  
And that he brings in the proud Signild before.

In, in at the door-way Sir Loumor he sped,  
From Signild's cheek faded the beautiful red.

"Sir Loumor, my lord, thy looks fill me with fright,  
Say where hast thou been in the midst of the night?"

p. 10

"I've been to the hall, if the truth I must tell,  
I heard my two hunting hawks screech there, and yell."

"O why of thy hawks art thou talking, my lord?  
May God in his mercy my dears brothers guard."

Sir Loumor produced of her brothers the gore,  
And that by her foot he has placed on the floor.

"Now drink thou, proud Signild, my much beloved Dame,  
This blood from the veins of thy brothers that came."

"With a terrible thirst I must needs be distrest,  
When I, O Sir Loumor, obey thy behest.

"But to bed and to sleep, my dear lord, now repair,  
Full little, be sure for my brothers I care.

"I care not although all my kindred are slain,

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Since thee, my heart's dearest, alive I retain."

So things in this fashion for eight winters stood,  
And Sir Loumor his brothers and sisters ne'er view'd.

Sir Loumor he brews, and the ruddy wine blends,  
To his brothers and sisters a bidding he sends.

Then laughed the proud Signild, that dame fair of face,  
And the first time it was for full eight winters space.

Sir Loumor's relations she placed at the board,  
And she handed them mead with so many a fair word.

Of the wine, the clear wine, drank Sir Loumor so free,  
For his life not the slightest precaution took he.

On the soft down she spread their beds high from the ground,  
She wished to procure for them slumbers so sound.

p. 12

She spread out their beds on the bolsters of blue,  
Thereon with her fingers the sleep runes she drew.

No sooner Sir Loumor had sunk to repose,  
Than from his embrace the proud Signild arose.

From out of a corner she took a keen sword,  
She'll awake with its point the dear kin of her lord.

To the sleeping apartment proud Signild then sped,  
And straightway his five belov'd brothers slew dead.

Though her heart it was sad, and the tears in her eyes,  
His three belov'd sisters she slew in like guise.

Then swift in a bowl she collects the red gore,  
And that she brought in good Sir Loumor before.

p. 13

She took off the chaplet her brow from around,  
And firmly the hands of Sir Loumor she bound.

"Now wake thou, Sir Loumor, and speak to thy wife,  
I'll not, whilst thou sleepest, deprive thee of life.

"Now drink, O Sir Loumor, the kind and the good,  
Drink, drink thy dear brothers' and sisters' heart's blood."

"O sore would the thirst be, O Signild, full sore,  
That ever could tempt me to drink of that gore.

"Thyself to thy bed, my sweet Signild, betake,  
For the death of my kindred my heart will not break."

p. 14

Sir Loumor sought after his trusty brown brand,  
And found to his fear he was bound foot and hand.

"O Signild, proud Signild, I pray thee now spare,  
And aye to be kind to thee, Signild, I swear."

"Methinks that thou didst little kindness display,  
The time thou my father didst murderously slay!

"Thou slewest my father with treacherous glaive,  
And then my dear brothers, so beauteous and brave.

"Then hope not for mercy, on vengeance I'm bent,  
Because all I cherished from me thou hast rent."

p. 15

Then she drew forth the knife from her sleeve bloody red,  
And Sir Loumor she stabbed till the life from him fled.

Then out from its cradle the little child spake:  
"That deed, if I live, I will some day ywrake."

"I know that thou art of the very same blood,  
And I never expect thou to me wilt be good."

The child by the small of the leg she has ta'en,  
And against the bed side she has beat out its brain.

"Now I, the proud Signild, have slain man for man,  
And I'll hie me away to my land and my clan."

The Knight takes hawk, and the man takes hound,  
 And away to the good green-wood they rambled;  
 There beasts both great and small they found,  
 Amid the forest glades that gambol'd.

A hind 'neath a linden tree he spied,  
 A maid beneath the willows sitting;  
 The Knight outspread his mantle wide,  
 Within that spot for love so fitting.

And there throughout the night they lie,  
 And no one sought their rest to trouble;  
 The linden tree so charmingly  
 Conceals them with its foliage noble.

No sooner dawned the morning light,  
 And early cocks commenced their crowing,  
 The Damsel pats on his breast the knight:  
 "Sweet love, you must be up and going.

p. 17

"Ride o'er the brig at full career,  
 And o'er the verdant meadows hurry;  
 My brothers seven you'll meet I fear,  
 So full of courage, strength, and fury."

"If seven or ten thy brothers be,  
 Each full of courage, strength, and beauty,  
 If a comrade good they seek in me  
 I trust I know a comrade's duty.

"And if me they'll have as a brother dear,  
 Their brother straight to be I'm willing;  
 But they shall win the victory ne'er  
 If bent my youthful blood on spilling."

"O dearest heart, with tears I pray  
 That thou wilt not go lightly nigh them,  
 But ride about another way,  
 Far distant off thou may'st descry them."

"O ne'er at court shall it be said  
 That I, a knight, for warriors seven,  
 Or ten times seven, the straight road fled,  
 To match them all I trust in heaven."

p. 18

His sword to his side the warrior tied,  
 And then himself in his acton casing,  
 A fond adieu to the Damsel cried,  
 Who sadly stood behind him gazing.

The youth despising all alarms  
 With spur so keen his courser urges,  
 Seven knights he meets in burnished arms  
 From out the wood as he emerges.

"Ha, early met, thou warrior good,  
 Pray tell us what thou hast been doing!"  
 "O I have been to the good green-wood,  
 With hound and hawk the deer pursuing."

"Where is thy hawk and greyhound, say?  
 Thy silvan spoil, we pray thee show it."  
 "A good friend came across my way,  
 And on that friend I did bestow it."

"No knight will part with his prey so light  
 For which in wood he's toiled and panted;  
 With a maiden bright you slept last night,  
 Her brothers' leave nor sought nor granted."

p. 19

"To chase the dun deer, Sirs, I rode,  
 Full little of your sister knowing,  
 The first fair deer itself that showed  
 I chased with heart and bosom glowing.

"It crouched beneath my scarlet cloak,

It pleased me, Sirs, beyond all measure;  
With thanks to heaven the gift I took,  
And made me happy with my treasure.

"I let my hounds the wild deer chase,  
I thought but little of their capture;  
But I took the hind to my embrace,  
What moments then of bliss and rapture.

"Of all the world's fair maids was she  
The fairest both in face and carriage;  
If she, Sir Knights, your sister be,  
I beg your sister's hand in marriage.

"A faithful brother I will be,  
And in your cause I death will suffer;  
And her I'll hold in respect and love,  
And nothing more a knight can proffer."

"Thou shalt not get the maid for mate,  
But thou shalt die, thou knight enamour'd;  
So make thy shrift 'neath the linden straight,  
The little birds shall hear it stammer'd.

"Now wilt thou stand, or wilt thou fly  
Into the deep wood for protection;  
Or guard thy young life valiantly,  
To prove thy courage and affection?"

"O I will stand, nor craven fly  
Unto the murky wood for cover,  
I'll guard my life right valiantly,  
And thus I'll prove me worthy of her."

First one he slew, then quickly two,  
His knightly courage well display'd he;  
But, though his seven foes he slew,  
With his own life full dearly paid he.

When the tidings reached the maiden's ear  
She let fall briny tears in plenty;  
But if for her kin she shed one tear,  
She shed I ween for the bold knight twenty.

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## **DAMSEL METTIE.**

**p. 22**

Knights Peter and Olaf they sat o'er the board,  
Betwixt them in jesting passed many a word.

"Now hear thou, Sir Olaf my comrade, do tell  
Why thou hast ne'er wedded some fair demoiselle?"

"What need with a housewife myself to distress,  
So long as my little gold horn I possess?"

"So long as my little gold horn I possess,  
I lure every maid I may wish to caress.

"The Damsel is not in the world to be found,  
But what I can lure with that little horn's sound."

"I know a proud damsel that dwells by the rill,  
On her thou couldst never accomplish thy will.

"I'll gage my war courser, the steady and tried,  
Thou never canst lure the fair Mettie, my bride."

"Against him I'll gage my grey courser of power,  
That she shall this evening repair to my bower.

"My courser so proud, and my neck bone so white  
I'll gage that I lure the fair Mettie this night."

"Twas late in the evening, mist fell from the skies,  
Sir Olaf he plays in his very best guise.

Sir Olaf he plays on his gold harp a strain,  
That heard the proud Mettie far over the plain.

p. 23

Sir Olaf a tune on his golden horn blew,  
To the house of fair Mettie the thrilling sounds flew.

Long stood the fair Mettie and listened thereto:  
"Now shall I or not to that horn-player go?"

Long stood damsel Mettie in doubt and in care:  
"No one of my maidens take with me I dare."

The maid and the little brown messan her friend,  
Through the paths of the forest so lonely they wend.

p. 24

Her mantle of blue the fair Mettie puts on,  
And unto the bower of Sir Olaf she's gone.

On the door of the chamber she gave a low knock:  
"Sir Olaf, I pray thee, arise and unlock."

"O none have I summoned to me at this hour,  
And unto no one will I open my door."

"Sir Olaf, arise, let me in I request,  
At what I have heard I'm so sorely distrest."

"At what thou hast heard, be thou glad or distrest,  
Thou comest not into my bower of rest.

"But soon should the door to thee open I wot,  
Provided Sir Peter thy sweetheart were not.

"Although in my heart I may love thee full dear,  
Sir Peter for me to admit thee's too near."

"Sir Olaf, arise, let me in I implore,  
The night-dew falls chilly my scarlet dress o'er."

p. 25

"Though chill fall the night-dew thy scarlet dress o'er,  
I dare not, O Mettie, fling open my door."

"Since into thy bower thou lett'st me not come,  
O let thy swains guide me, dear heart, to my home."

"The night it is bright, and the moon sheds her ray,  
Fair maid, thou wilt find without trouble thy way.

"The moon's in the sky, and shines clear o'er the mead,  
So back by thyself to thy chamber proceed."

The maid, and the little brown messan her friend,  
They home through the forest so lonely must wend.

And when to the gate of the castle she came,  
Sir Peter was leaning against it his frame.

p. 26

"Thrice welcome, thrice welcome, thou proud Mettelil,  
Say where hast thou been in the night season still?"

"I walked out, my lord, by no mortal eye seen,  
And I gathered the herbs both the blue and the green.

"The herbs I collected with diligent hand,  
Which just at this season in fullest bloom stand.

"I stood in the meadows throughout the long night,  
And harked to the nightingale's song with delight."

"No! not to the song from the nightingale's throat,  
But unto Sir Olaf his gilded horn's note.

"This night's walk, and others of similar sort,  
Will make thee the subject of common report.

p. 27

"The walk of this night, and perhaps many more,  
By the Saints, my fair Mettie, this walking give o'er.

"Now hear thou proud Mettie, to bed hie away,  
And 'neath the white linen thy fair body lay.

"Depart to thy bed, that I rede thee to do,  
Would'st have me remain to thee tender and true.

"I've lost now my courser, the steady and tried,  
Because thou hast proved thee a false, fickle bride."

And what became of her no man ever knew,

Nor whither her ashes before the wind flew.

But as soon as her bower in ruddy flame blazed  
In the breast of Sir Peter such anguish was raised.

Sir Peter he grieved to his very death day,  
Sir Olaf ne'er ventured to cross his friend's way.

I counsel each swain, in affectionate part,  
To tempt not too hardly the maid of his heart.

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