SIGURD AND Sigrdrifa

There was a big mountain. And around the top of the mountain there was a ring of fire. The fire burned strongly. It was impossible to see the top of the mountain, because of the ring of fire around it.

One day, a warrior called Sigurd was out riding. He was a long way from home, and did not know where he was. He saw the mountain, and the strong light at the top.

'What's that light at the top of the mountain?' he thought. So, with his horse, he went up the mountain to find out.

When he got near the top of the mountain he found the big fire burning. It was very hot, and difficult to see. His horse was afraid, but he was not. He went as near as he could to the fire, to see what was behind it. The fire was very strong, but through it he could see a great hall on top of the mountain. He was very interested.

'What's that hall on top of the mountain, behind this big fire?' he thought. There was only one way to find out. 'I'll have to pass through the fire,' he thought.

He talked to his horse, telling it not to be afraid. Then they ran as fast as they could into the fire. The fire was so hot it started to bum Sigurd's helmet, and his horse's feet. His horse began to stop - it could not continue. But Sigurd would not stop. He pushed his horse through the fire, running as fast as they could. It was very difficult. But Sigurd was a brave man, so brave he could pass through the fire. On and on they ran, until they came to the end of the fire.

Sigurd and his horse stopped and Sigurd looked up. He could now see the great hall at the top of the mountain clearly. It looked like a palace.

'I must find out what is in that hall, and why this ring of fire is around it,' he thought. He continued to walk to the top of the mountain until he reached the hall.

The doors of the hall were very big, and Sigurd had to push hard to open them. 'Nobody has opened these doors for a long time,' he thought as he pushed.

Inside, the hall was nearly empty. There was only one thing in the hall: a bed. And on the bed lay a warrior, wearing armour and a helmet. Sigurd looked at the warrior carefully. He could not see a face, because the helmet covered the warrior's head.

'Who's this warrior?' thought Sigurd. 'Is he dead or only sleeping? And why is he here in this great hall, circled by fire?' He pulled the helmet from the warrior and was surprised to find no man there, but a woman asleep. She was a very beautiful woman.

'She looks like the goddess Freyja,' thought Sigurd.

As Sigurd thought this, the woman opened her eyes and woke up. Sigurd was very surprised. 'Who are you?' he asked. 'Why are you here in this great hall? And why are you dressed like a warrior and circled by a ring of fire?'

'My name is Sigrdrifa,' she said, 'I'm a valkyrie. The valkyries are women warriors. We work for Odin, chief of the gods. When a warrior dies in battle, we take them to Valhalla, where they will live with Odin.'

'But why are you here?' said Sigurd again.

'Let me tell you the story,' she said. 'Because Freyja took the Brisingamen necklace from the dark elves, Odin made her start a war in Midgard. This war went on for a long time.

Many people thought it would go on forever. After some time, men in Midgard were tired of the war, and Odin knew it had to finish. He promised one of the kings that he would win. But that king was a bad king. I didn't want him to win. So I stopped helping Odin, and helped the other king to win a great battle. Odin was very angry with me.'

'What did he do?' asked Sigurd.

'He told me I could no longer be a valkyrie,' said Sigrdrifa, 'And that from now on I would be an ordinary woman. "You will live and die like any other woman," he said to me. "And you must marry.'"

'Did you get married?' asked Sigurd.

'No,' she said. 'I didn't. I told Odin that I would only marry a man who knows no fear. So Odin was even more angry. He sent me to this place, and made me sleep. Then he put a circle of fire around the mountain so no one would find me.'

'But I found you,' said Sigurd.

'Yes,' said Sigrdrifa. 'You did. What's your name?'

'My name is Sigurd.'

'And you came through the ring of fire?' asked Sigrdrifa.

'Yes, I did,' replied Sigurd.

'Then you're a brave man,' she said.

'Thank you,' he said.

'But you're more than just a brave man,' she continued. 'You're a man who knows no fear. Is that true?'

'Yes, it's true,' said Sigurd. 'I'm afraid of nothing.'

'Then you're the man,' said Sigrdrifa. 'Marry me, and then we can leave this place.'

Sigurd and Sigrdrifa walked out of the hall, and the ring of fire was gone.