

Baldur's Dream

W H Auden & P B Taylor Translation

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The gods hurried to their hall of council,
Gathered together, goddesses with them,
All-powerful, eager to unriddle
Baldur's dream that such dread portended.

Up rose Odhinn, unaging magician,
Harnesses Sleipnir, the eight-legged,
Sped down from Asgard to Hel's Deep.

The blood-dabbled hound of Hel faced him,
Howling in frenzy at the father of runes.
The High One halted at the eastern gate,
Where loomed a tumulus, tomb of a witch.
Runes he chanted, charms of power:
Her spectre rose whom his spell commanded
To enlighten the god with the lore of the dead.

Who is he that on Hel intrudes?
Who calls me up, increasing my grief?
Drenched by hail, driven by storm,
Dew-frozen, I am dead long.

I am Struggler's Son, Strider, Way-Tamer,
Your secrets I ask: all earth's I know.
Why are Hel's halls hung with jewels,
Her chambers rivers of red gold?

For Baldur our mead is brewed strong
In a shining cauldron, a shield over it.
Odhinn on high in heart despairs.
Unwilling my words: I would no more.

Far-seeing witch, your words unriddle.
More will I ask: all will I know.
Who shall slay Baldur, best of the gods,
Who suck the life from the son of Odhinn?

Hodur the blind the branch shall throw,
From his brother's body the blood to drain,
Sucking the life from the son of Odhinn.
Unwilling my words: I would no more.

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Far-seeing witch, your words unriddle.
More will I ask: all will I know.
By whose hand shall Hodur fall
And Baldur's bane be burned with fire?

Rindur the blessed shall bring forth Vali.
Though but a night old, he shall be the avenger,
His hands he shall wash not nor his hair comb
Till Baldur's bane is borne to the pyre:
Unwilling my words: I would no more.

Far-seeing witch, your words unriddle.
More will I ask: all will I know.
Who are the maidens who shall mourn then,
Toss up to Asgard their trailing scarves?

Way-Tamer you are not, nor are you Strider:
You are Odhinn the wily, unaging magician.
Witch you are not, nor woman either:
Womb of monsters, you have mothered three.

Go home, Odhinn: air your triumph.
No guest shall again my grave visit,
Till wild Loki tear loose from his bonds
And the World – Wasters on the war-path come.