

BÚKOLLA



Once upon a time there lived a man and a woman in a cottage. They had one son but cared little for him. There were no other people in the cottage, and their only livestock was one cow. She was called Búkolla.

Once the cow gave birth a calf, and the woman attended her herself. When the calf was born and the cow had recovered, the woman went back to the farmhouse for a brief moment. Upon her return, the cow had disappeared. The man and the woman both went out to look for the cow. They searched far and wide but came home empty-handed. This made them angry, and they ordered the boy to go looking and not show his face again until he had found the cow. They supplied him with provisions and new shoes, and he walked off into the blue.

The boy had been walking a long time when he sat down to eat. Then he said, "make yourself heard, Búkolla my dear, if you are alive anywhere." Then he heard the cow lowing, far away. The boy began his march again and walked for long hours. Then he sat down for another bite to eat and said "Make yourself heard, Búkolla my dear, if you are alive anywhere." Then he heard Búkolla lowing, a little bit closer than the first time.

Once again the boy walked for a long while, until he reached a staggeringly high cliff. He sat down to eat there and said, "Make yourself heard, Búkolla my dear, if you are alive anywhere." Then he heard the cow lowing directly beneath his feet. He climbed down the cliff and soon reached an enormous cave. He entered it and saw búkolla tied beneath a platform in the cave. He untied her at once and headed home.

When the cow and the boy had made some progress, he saw a great giantess chasing him and another, smaller one with her. He observed that the large one had such a great stride that she would soon catch up to them. Then he said,

"What should we do now búkolla?"

She responded, "Take a hair from my tail and lay it on the ground."

He did as he was told. Then the cow said, "I command you to become a river so wide that nothing can cross it but a bird in flight." At once the hair was transformed into a vast river. When the giantess reached the river she said, "This won't be enough to save you, boy. Go home, girl," she said to the smaller giantess, "and fetch my father's great bull." The girl left and soon returned with an enormous bull. It soon drank all the water from the river. The boy could see that the giantess would soon catch him with her great strides. He said, "What should we do now, Búkolla?" "Take a hair from my tail and lay it on the ground," she said. He did as she was told. Then Búkolla said to the hair, "I command you to become a fire so vast that nothing can cross it but a bird in flight."

At once the hair was transformed into a raging inferno. When the giantess reached the fire she said, "this won't be enough to save you, boy. Go fetch my father's great bull, girl," she said to the smaller giantess. The little giantess wet and returned with the bull. It urinated on the fire, returning all the water it had drunk from the river, and quenched the flames. The boy could see that the giantess would catch at once with her enormous strides, so he said, "What should we do now, búkolla?" She responded, "Take a hair from my tail and lay it on the ground." He did as he was told.

Then she said to the hair, "I command you to become a mountain so high that nothing can cross it but a bird in flight." The hair instantly transformed into a mountain so high that the boy couldn't see anything but the sky above him. When the giantess reached the mountain she said, "This won't be enough to save you, boy, Fetch my father's great drill, girl"" she said to the smaller giantess. The girl went and returned with the drill. The giantess drilled a hole through the mountain, but she was too hasty and forced her way into the hole

while it was too tight for her. There she was stuck and eventually turned to stone and she remains in the hole to this day. But she made it home with his beloved Búkolla, to his parents great relief.

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MOTHER IN THE PEN, PEN

(Móðir mín í kví kví)



Once upon a time there was a woman who worked as a farmhand. She was unmarried but had become pregnant, given birth to the child and exposed it, or left it out to die. This was not uncommon in Iceland but often carried heavy penalties, including fines and even capital punishment. Sometime later, a dance of the kind known as vikivaki was to be held, as was common in those days. The girl was invited to the vikivaki. She was a vain woman but didn't own suitable finery for such an occasion, and so she felt that she must stay at home and miss all the fun. This made her quite upset. Shortly before the event, the woman was milking sheep in pens

with another woman. She complained to the other woman about her lack of suitable clothing for the vikivaki. As soon as she had spoken, they heard the following verse chanted from under the pen wall;

Mother in the pen, pen, don't you worry then, then,

I'll gladly give my rag to you to dance in, dance in.

The woman who had exposed her child realized the message was meant for her. She was so shocked by the verse that she lost her mind and was mad for the rest of her days.

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THE DEACON OF DARK RIVER

(Djárnin á Myrká)



In days of yore, there was a deacon at myrká in Eyjafjörður. The farm's name means Dark River, but the deacon's name is long forgotten. He was courting with a woman by the name of Guðrún, who was in service to the priest at Bægisá, across the river Hörgá. The deacon had a graymaned horse he liked to ride, which he called Faxi.

Shortly before one Christmas, the deacon went to Bægisá to invite Guðrún to the Christmas festivities at myrká, promising to fetch her at a certain time on Christmas Eve and accompany her. In the days before the deacon went to invite Guðrún to the party, it had snowed heavily and the river had frozen, but on the day when he went to Bægisá a thaw began. By late afternoon, the river was impassable due to ice floes and rough water. This change occurred while the deacon stopped at Bægisá.

When he returned home, he didn't notice what had happened and thought the ice on the river would still support him. He was able to cross the river Yxnadalsá by bridge, but when he reached Hörgá, the ice had broken on the river. He rode

along the river until he reached the bridge to Saurbær, the next farm over from Myrká. The deacon rode out onto the bridge, but when he was halfway across, the bridge broke beneath him and he was plunged into the river.

The following morning when the farmer at Púfnaveilir rose, he saw a saddled horse at the edge of his fields and thought he recognized Faxi, the deacon of Myrká's horse. He was taken aback, having observed the deacon come down the valley the day before but not having seen him return. He began to suspect what had happened. He crossed the field and confirmed his suspicions. It was Faxi, soaking wet and in a sorry state. The farmer walked down to the river and found the deacon washed up on the banks, dead. The farmer went straight to Myrká and delivered the news. The deacon was found with a severe wound on the back of his head from where it had struck the ice. He was taken home to Myrká and buried the week before Christmas. Due to the thaw, no news traveled between Bægisá until Christmas Eve. But when Christmas Eve arrived, the weather had calmed. The river had settled into a more placid state in the night, so Guðrún began to look forward to the Christmas feast at Myrká. As the time drew near she began to prepare, and when she was nearly ready she heard a knock at the door. Another woman went to answer it but saw no one outside. This was at twilight. The moon was in the sky, but clouds covered and revealed it by turns.

When the girl who had answered the door returned and said she hadn't seen anyone, Guðrún said, "This game must be meant for me, and I will go outside." She was ready by then, except for her coat. She grabbed it and put on one sleeve, but tossed the other side over her shoulder and held it.

When Guðrún stepped outside, she saw Faxi by the door, together with a man who she thought was the deacon. There is no indication that they said anything to each other. He took Guðrún in his arms, lifted her onto the horse and mounted it in front of her. They rode in silence for a while. Then they reached the river Hörgá, which was framed by steep walls of ice. As the horse leapt over the edge, the deacon's hat rose up in the back and Guðrún could see his naked skull. At that very moment, the moon emerged from the clouds. Then he spoke:

Moon glides,
death rides,
can't you see a white spot
on my head,
garún, garún?

She was shocked into silence. Nothing more is known of their travels until they arrived at myrká and dismounted in front of the lychgate. He then said to Guðrún:

Wait for me here, Garún, Garún,
while I take Faxi, Faxi
across the yard, yard.

He then took the horse away. She glance into the cemetery saw an open grave and was terrified. She seized the bell-rope in the lychgate. At that very moment, she was grabbed from behind. She was saved by the fact that she hadn't had time to put on both sleeves of her coat; she was seized with such force that the coat was rent asunder on the shoulder seam of the sleeve she had put on. As she glanced behind her, the deacon tumbled into the open grave with the torn coat, and the dirt was swept in after him from both sides. Guðrún continued to ring the bell until the people at Myrká came out to fetch her. She was so petrified by all that had happened that she didn't dare to move or stop ringing. She was certain she had been dealing with the deacon's ghost, even though she hadn't had news of his death. Her suspicion was confirmed when she spoke to the people of Myrká, who told her of the deacon's death, and whom she in turn told the story of her travels.

After lights-out that very night, the deacon came and haunted Guðrún so violently that the entire household was roused. No one got any rest that night. For a fortnight thereafter, she could never be left alone and had to be guarded as she slept. Then a sorcerer was summoned from Skagafjörður. When he arrived, he had a great stone dug up above the fields and rolled down to the front gable of the house. That evening, as dusk fell, the deacon came and attempted to enter the farmhouse. The sorcerer backed him into a corner to the south of the front gable and put the ghost down there with powerful spells. He then rolled the stone on top of him, and there the deacon is believed to rest to this day.

Thenceforth all haunting of Myrká was brought to a halt and Guðrún began to recuperate. A short while later she returned home to Bægisá. As for the ghost, he said Garún instead of Guðrún because ghosts are loath to speak God's name 'guð', or any word that contains it.

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THE ELF CHURCH OF TUNGUSTAPI

ÁLFARNIR Í TUNGUSTAPA



Many centuries ago a wealthy farmer lived at Sælingsdalstunga. His children included two sons, Arnór and Sveinn, both fine men, though in different ways. Arnór was gregarious and often amused himself with other youngsters. They would often meet up at the rock by the river known as Tungustapi. In the winter they slid on the hard snow down off the rock, with shouting and merriment. Sveinn rarely took part in this; he generally went to church while the others were at play. He was also solitary and often went to the rock alone. It was the general opinion that he mixed with the elves; on every New Year's Eve he disappeared and no one knew where he went. Sveinn often asked his brother not to make so much noise by the rock, but Arnór mocked him and said he had no sympathy for the elves just because of a little noise.

One New Year's Eve Sveinn vanished as usual. People started to wonder what had become of him and Arnór volunteered to go looking for him. He walked off

in overcast weather to the rock. Suddenly, the rock opened up on the side that faced the farm, revealing innumerable lights within. He heard the most wonderful singing and he realized that the elves were celebrating Mass. Approaching, he looked through the door and saw the church filled with people. A priest in splendid vestments stood at the altar and there were many rows of light on both sides. He walked into the church doorway and saw his brother, Sveinn kneeling at the altar, while a priest laid a hand on his head. Arnór concluded that he was being ordained and called out loudly: "Sveinn, come, for your life is at stake." Sveinn was startled and made as if to go to his brother. At that moment, the man at the altar called out:

"Lock the church doors, and punish the human who has disturbed our peace. But you, Sveinn, must leave us, and that is your brother's doing. And because you placed more value on his call than on your ordination to the priesthood, you shall fall down dead the next time you see me here in these vestments." The men in their canonicals lifted Arnór, and Sveinn saw him vanish up into stone vault over the church. At that moment, bells began to ring loudly and all those within rushed to the doors. Arnór ran home as fast as he could, hearing elves riding behind him with clattering of hooves. He heard one of the leading riders chant:

Ride, ride, dark is the mountainside,
Cavort, transport the wretch away,
Never more to behold the light of day,
The light of tomorrow's day.

The riders swept by, between Arnór and the farmhouse, and he had to retreat. On the slope below the farm the elves rode over him and he was left lying more dead than alive.

Sveinn arrived home late at night. He was withdrawn and did not speak much, but he felt that a search must be made for Arnór. They searched for him all night, until finally the farmer of Laugar, on his way to matins, came across him on the slope, very weak. He told the farmer all that had happened that night, but he was too weak to be moved and he expired in that place, which has been known since then as Banabrekka (Death Slope). After these events, Sveinn was never the same again, growing ever more grave and melancholy. He soon abandoned all worldly things and became a monk at the Helgafell monastery. He was the most learned of men and sang Mass more beautifully than anyone else.

When Sveinn's father grew old, he fell gravely ill. And when he felt that he had only a short time left to live, he sent for Sveinn to come from Helgafell. Sveinn did as he was asked but said that he might not return alive. He arrived at Tunga on the Saturday before Easter, to find his father close to death. Sveinn's father asked him to celebrate Mass on Easter Sunday and gave orders that he should be carried into church, so that he might die there. Sveinn was reluctant but agreed, on condition that the church doors should not be opened during the Mass, as his life was at stake. This was regarded as a strange request but people concluded that he did not wish to see the rock; in those days the church stood on a low hill in the homefield and the church doors faced the rock.

The farmer was carried into the church and Sveinn donned his vestments and began to sing Mass. Those who were present said they had never heard such sweet singing or such excellent intoning, and they were as struck dumb. But when the pastor turned from the altar and began to pronounce the Blessing, suddenly a westerly gale struck, blowing open the church doors. The congregation were startled and turned to look. They saw what appeared to be an open doorway into the rock, from which shone innumerable lights. And when the congregation turned back towards the pastor, he had collapsed and expired. At the same moment, his father too had fallen from the pew and was also dead. The weather was calm both before and after this event, so it was clear to all that the storm from the rock was not a natural occurrence.

Among those who witnessed these events was the farmer of Laugar, he who had found Arnór at the point of death many years before, and he recounted the whole story. Then they understood that what the elf bishop had said to Sveinn - that he would fall down dead the next time he saw him - had come to pass. When the rock stood open and the church doors flew open, the doors faced each other, so Sveinn and the elf bishop saw each other - for the doors of elf churches face in the opposite direction to human ones. After this event, a regional meeting was held and a decision was made to move the church from the hillock down into a hollow closer to the farmhouse. This meant that the farmhouse stood between the rock and the church doors. Never again has the pastor been able to see through the church doorway to Álfastapi (Elf Rock) - and no such extraordinary events have happened since.

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THE NIGHT TROLL

(NÁTTTRÖLLIÐ Á GLUGGANUM)



Year after year, the person left to mind a certain farm on Christmas Eve when the household went to church was found either dead or mad the following morning. This troubled the household members, and they were loath to stay home this night.

On one such occasion, a girl volunteered to stay at home. Relieved, the others were soon on their way. The girl sat on a platform in the long hall and recited rhymes to a child she held in her arms. In the night, there was a knock at the window and a voice spoke:

Fair does your hand seem to me,
my swift sweetling, diddle-dum.

Then she said:

It has never dealt with dung,
oh my ogre, hiddle-hum.

The one at the window replied:

Fair does your eye seem to me,
my swift sweetling, diddle-dum.

The girl responded:

Evil it has never seen,
oh my ogre, hiddle-hum.

The voice at the window said:

Fair does your foot seem to me,
my swift sweetling, diddle-dum.

The girl replied

It has never stepped in slime,
oh my ogre, hiddle-hum.

The voice at the window said:

Dawn is in the east,
my swift sweetling, diddle-dum.

The girl responded:

Stand and turn to stone,
a danger to none,
oh my ogre, hiddle-hum.

The spirit then vanished from the window. The following morning when the people returned home, a great stone had materialized by the farmhouse. The girl recounted the whole tale of what had transpired in the night. The presence at the window had been a night troll. The stone has been there ever since.

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UNA, THE ELF MAID OF RAUÐAFELL

UNA ÁLFKONA



Geir

was a man who lived at rauðafell. He was young and energetic, and he had recently lost his wife. One summer at haymaking time, much of the grass had been mown but the women were making slow work of raking the hay. The farmer saw that a tall young woman came and joined the raking women. In the evening she vanished, but returned in the morning and raked all day. This continued all summer; nobody knew where the woman came from or where she went.

On the last day of haymaking, the farmer went to the girl, greeted her and thanked her for her work. She took his thanks well and they talked for a long time. In the end, the farmer engaged her to be his housekeeper. The following morning she arrived at Geir's home, bringing nothing but a big chest, which was placed in farmer's storeroom. The woman took over the housekeeping tasks and she was hardworking and efficient. She said her name was Una but she would not tell Geir where she was from. She never went to church, although the farmer urged her, for he was a churchgoing man.

Now Christmas came and everybody went to evening Mass except Una, who chose to stay home and watch over the farm. When the people returned in the morning, Una had finished all the household task. Thus she stayed with the farmer for three years and she grew very dear to him. But he was discouraged from marrying her by the fact that she never went to church. There was speculation about Una, who was regarded as the most outstanding woman in the region. Now Christmas approached in the third winter, and again Una stayed home while the rest of the household went to church. When the churchgoers had travelled a little way, the farmhand was suddenly taken ill. He lay down and said he would wait until he felt better. He stayed behind, while the farmer and the other went on. When they were out of sight, farmhand stood up and went back to the farmhouse-for he had been feigning illness.

Back home he saw Una hurriedly sweeping the floors but he hid so she did not see him. When she had finished. Una went out to the storeroom and opened her chest. She took a red cloth and went outside. She went down to the fields, followed by the farmhand. Finally, she stopped on to it. The farmhand seized the chance and grabbed one corner of the cloth. They sank down into the earth, as if passing through smoke< she did not notice the farmhand.

Soon they came to green fields, and the farmhand saw a big and splendid farmhouse. Una went there and he followed her. There were many people there who welcomed Una. They sat down to a feast and many dishes and wines were served. The farmhand grabbed rib of smoked mutton and put it inside his clothes< he had never seen such juicy meat before. After the feast, games were played and all was done with skill and art. As dawn drew near, Una said she had to go, for the farmer would soon be back from church. She bade a solemn farewell and departed on her cloth, along with the farmhand, they went back the way had come and came up through the earth at the marsh. Una took the cloth home and put it away, along with her best clothes, in the chest in the storeroom.

The farmhand returned to the place where he had feigned illness and was lying there when farmer returned from church with the others. He said he was fully recovered and went with them. Una welcomed them and soon they sat down to a meal, which included smoked mutton. The farmer took up a great side of mutton and asked: „Has anyone ever seen such a big side of mutton as this?“ „perhaps,“

Said the farmhand and produced the rib he had taken from the feast. When Una saw it she changed colour and walked away without saying a word. She was never seen again.

No claim will be made about the truth of this folktale of the Eyjafjöll region, but below the homefield at Rauðafell there is a place known as Unudý(Una's Marsh).

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