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THE POETIC EDDA

Alvíssmál

The Lay of Alvis

Old Norse · English – H. A. Bellows (1923)

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The all-wise dwarf Alvis rises out of the rock to carry off Thor's daughter: she was promised to him as his bride while the god was away from home. Thor refuses to honour the betrothal, yet rather than reject the suitor outright he sets him a trap – the dwarf may have the maiden if he can answer everything the god asks him. So begins a contest of knowledge about the names of things – how earth, heaven, moon, sun, cloud, wind, calm, sea, fire, wood, night, seed and ale are called among men, gods (Æsir), Wanes (Vanir), giants, elves, dwarfs and in Hel. The dwarf has a clever answer to every question, but with each stanza the night slips away. When the last name has been spoken the day breaks: struck by the sunlight, the light-shunning Alvis is turned to stone. Sources: the Old Norse text follows the Codex Regius in the edition of Guðni Jónsson, and the English rendering is by Henry Adams Bellows (1923) – both public domain.

Old Norse	English – H. A. Bellows (1923)
1 <i>Bekki breiða, nú skal brúðr með mér heim í sinni snúask; hratat um mægi mun hverjum þykkja, heima skal-at hvíld nema.</i>	Now shall the bride my benches adorn, And homeward haste forthwith; Eager for wedlock to all shall I seem, Nor at home shall they rob me of rest.
2 <i>Hvat er þat fira? Hví ertu svá fölr um nasar? Vartu í nótt með ná? Þursa líki þykki mér á þér vera; ert-at-tu til brúðar borinn.</i>	What, pray, art thou? Why so pale round the nose? By the dead hast thou lain of late? To a giant like dost thou look, methinks; Thou wast not born for the bride.
3 <i>Alvíss ek heiti, bý ek fyr jörð neðan, á ek undir steini stað; vagna vers ek em á vit kominn; bregði engi föstu heiti fira.</i>	Alvis am I, and under the earth My home 'neath the rocks I have; With the wagon-guider a word do I seek, Let the gods their bond not break.
4 <i>Ek mun bregða því at ek brúðar á flest of ráð sem faðir; vark-a ek heima, þá er þér heitit var, at sá einn, er gjöf er, með goðum.</i>	Break it shall I, for over the bride Her father has foremost right; At home was I not when the promise thou hadst, And I give her alone of the gods.
5 <i>Hvat er þat rekka, er í ráðum telsk fljóðs ins fagrlóa? Fjarrafleina þik munu fáir kunna; hverr hefr þik baugum borit?</i>	What hero claims such right to hold O'er the bride that shines so bright? Not many will know thee, thou wandering man! Who was bought with rings to bear thee?
6 <i>Vingþórr ek heiti, ek hef víða ratat, sonr em ek Síðgrana; at ósátt minni skal-at-tu þat it unga man hafa ok þat gjaforð geta.</i>	Vingthor, the wanderer wide, am I, And I am Sithgrani's son; Against my will shalt thou get the maid, And win the marriage word.

- 7 Sáttir þínar
er ek vil snemma hafa
ok þat gjaforð geta;
eiga vilja
heldr en án vera
þat it mjallhvíta man.
- 8 Meyjar ástum
mun-a þér verða,
vísi gestr, of varit,
ef þú ór heimi kannst
hverjum at segja
allt þat, er ek vil vita.
- 9 Segðu mér þat, Alvíss,
öll of rök fira
vörumk, dvergr, at vitir:
hvé sú jörð heitir,
er liggr fyr alda sonum
heimi hverjum í?
- 10 Jörð heitir með mönnum,
en með ásum fold,
kalla vega vanir,
ígræn jötnar,
alfar gróandi,
kalla aur uppregin.
- 11 Segðu mér þat, Alvíss,
öll of rök fira
vörumk, dvergr, at vitir:
hvé sá himinn heitir,
erakendi,
heimi hverjum í?
- 12 Himinn heitir með mönnum,
en hlýrnir með goðum,
kalla vindófnir vanir,
uppheim jötnar,
alfar fagaræfr,
dvergar drjúpansal.
- 13 Segðu mér þat, Alvíss,
öll of rök fira
vörumk, dvergr, at vitir:
hversu máni heitir,
sá er menn séa,
heimi hverjum í?
- Thy good-will now shall I quickly get,
And win the marriage word;
I long to have, and I would not lack,
This snow-white maid for mine.
- The love of the maid I may not keep thee
From winning, thou guest so wise,
If of every world thou canst tell me all
That now I wish to know.
- Answer me, Alvis! thou knowest all,
Dwarf, of the doom of men:
What call they the earth, that lies before all,
In each and every world?
- 'Earth' to men, 'Field' to the gods it is,
'The Ways' is it called by the Wanes;
'Ever Green' by the giants, 'The Grower' by elves,
'The Moist' by the holy ones high.
- Answer me, Alvis! thou knowest all,
Dwarf, of the doom of men:
What call they the heaven, beheld of the high one,
In each and every world?
- 'Heaven' men call it, 'The Height' the gods,
The Wanes 'The Weaver of Winds';
Giants 'The Up-World,' elves 'The Fair-Roof,'
The dwarfs 'The Dripping Hall.'
- Answer me, Alvis! thou knowest all,
Dwarf, of the doom of men:
What call they the moon, that men behold,
In each and every world?

14 Máni heitir með mönnum,
en mylinn með goðum,
kalla hverfanda hvél helju í,
skyndi jötnar,
en skin dvergar,
kalla alfar ártala.

'Moon' with men, 'Flame' the gods among,
'The Wheel' in the house of hell;
'The Goer' the giants, 'The Gleamer' the dwarfs,
The elves 'The Teller of Time.'

15 Segðu mér þat, Alvíss,
öll of rök fira
vörumk, dvergr, at vitir:
hvé sú sól heitir,
er séa alda synir,
heimi hverjum í?

Answer me, Alvis! thou knowest all,
Dwarf, of the doom of men:
What call they the sun, that all men see,
In each and every world?

16 Sól heitir með mönnum,
en sunna með goðum,
kalla dvergar Dvalins leika,
eygló jötnar,
alfar fagrahvél,
alskír ása synir.

Men call it 'Sun,' gods 'Orb of the Sun,'
'The Deceiver of Dvalin' the dwarfs;
The giants 'The Ever-Bright,' elves 'Fair Wheel,'
'All-Glowing' the sons of the gods.

17 Segðu mér þat, Alvíss,
öll of rök fira
vörumk, dvergr, at vitir:
hvé þau ský heita,
er skúrum blandask,
heimi hverjum í?

Answer me, Alvis! thou knowest all,
Dwarf, of the doom of men:
What call they the clouds, that keep the rains,
In each and every world?

18 Ský heita með mönnum,
en skúrván með goðum,
kalla vindflot vanir,
úrván jötnar,
alfar veðrmegin,
kalla í helju hjalm huliðs.

'Clouds' men name them, 'Rain-Hope' gods call
them,
The Wanes call them 'Kites of the Wind';
'Water-Hope' giants, 'Weather-Might' elves,
'The Helmet of Secrets' in hell.

19 Segðu mér þat, Alvíss,
öll of rök fira
vörumk, dvergr, at vitir:
hvé sá vindr heitir,
er víðast ferr,
heimi hverjum í?

Answer me, Alvis! thou knowest all,
Dwarf, of the doom of men:
What call they the wind, that widest fares,
In each and every world?

20 Vindr heitir með mönnum,
en váfuðr með goðum,
kalla gneggjuð ginnregin,
æpi jötnar,
alfar dynfara,
kalla í helju hviðuð.

'Wind' do men call it, the gods 'The Waverer,'
'The Neigher' the holy ones high;
'The Wailer' the giants, 'Roaring Wender' the elves,
In hell 'The Blustering Blast.'

21 *Segðu mér þat, Alvíss,
öll of rök fira
vörumk, dvergr, at vitir:
hvé þat logn heitir,
er liggja skal,
heimi hverjum í?*

Answer me, Alvis! thou knowest all,
Dwarf, of the doom of men:
What call they the calm, that quiet lies,
In each and every world?

22 *Logn heitir með mönnum,
en lægi með goðum,
kalla vindlot vanir,
ofhlý jötnar,
alfar dagsefa,
kalla dvergar dags veru.*

'Calm' men call it, 'The Quiet' the gods,
The Wanes 'The Hush of the Winds';
'The Sultry' the giants, elves 'Day's Stillness,'
The dwarfs 'The Shelter of Day.'

23 *Segðu mér þat, Alvíss,
öll of rök fira
vörumk, dvergr, at vitir:
hvé sá marr heitir,
er menn róa,
heimi hverjum í?*

Answer me, Alvis! thou knowest all,
Dwarf, of the doom of men:
What call they the sea, whereon men sail,
In each and every world?

24 *Sær heitir með mönnum,
en slægja með goðum,
kalla vág vanir,
álheim jötnar,
alfar lagastaf,
kalla dvergar djúpan mar.*

'Sea' men call it, gods 'The Smooth-Lying,'
'The Wave' is it called by the Wanes;
'Eel-Home' the giants, 'Drink-Stuff' the elves,
For the dwarfs its name is 'The Deep.'

25 *Segðu mér þat, Alvíss,
öll of rök fira
vörumk, dvergr, at vitir:
hvé sá eldr heitir,
er brennr fyr alda sonum,
heimi hverjum í?*

Answer me, Alvis! thou knowest all,
Dwarf, of the doom of men:
What call they the fire, that flames for men,
In each of all the worlds?

26 *Eldr heitir með mönnum,
en með ásum funi,
kalla vág vanir,
frekan jötnar,
en forbrenni dvergar,
kalla í helju hröðuð.*

'Fire' men call it, and 'Flame' the gods,
By the Wanes is it 'Wildfire' called;
'The Biter' by giants, 'The Burner' by dwarfs,
'The Swift' in the house of hell.

27 *Segðu mér þat, Alvíss,
öll of rök fira
vörumk, dvergr, at vitir:
hvé viðr heitir,
er vex fyr alda sonum,
heimi hverjum í?*

Answer me, Alvis! thou knowest all,
Dwarf, of the doom of men:
What call they the wood, that grows for mankind,
In each and every world?

28 Viðr heitir með mönnum,
en vallarfax með goðum,
kalla hlíðþang halir,
eldi jötnar
alfar fagrlima,
kalla vönd vanir.

Men call it 'The Wood,' gods 'The Mane of the Field,'
'Seaweed of Hills' in hell;
'Flame-Food' the giants, 'Fair-Limbed' the elves,
'The Wand' is it called by the Wanes.

29 Segðu mér þat, Alvíss,
öll of rök fira
vörumk, dvergr, at vitir,
hvé sú nótt heitir,
in Nörvi kennda,
heimi hverjum í?

Answer me, Alvis! thou knowest all,
Dwarf, of the doom of men:
What call they the night, the daughter of Nor,
In each and every world?

30 Nótt heitir með mönnum,
en njól með goðum,
kalla grímu ginnregin,
óljós jötnar,
alfar svefngaman,
kalla dvergar draumnjörun.

'Night' men call it, 'Darkness' gods name it,
'The Hood' the holy ones high;
The giants 'The Lightless,' the elves 'Sleep's joy'
The dwarfs 'The Weaver of Dreams.'

31 Segðu mér þat, Alvíss,
öll of rök fira
vörumk, dvergr, at vitir:
hvé þat sáð heitir,
er sá alda synir,
heimi hverjum í?

Answer me, Alvis! thou knowest all,
Dwarf, of the doom of men:
What call they the seed, that is sown by men,
In each and every world?

32 Bygg heitir með mönnum,
en barr með goðum,
kalla vöxt vanir,
æti jötnar,
alfar lagastaf,
kalla í helju hnipin.

Men call it 'Grain,' and 'Corn' the gods,
'Growth' in the world of the Wanes;
'The Eaten' by giants, 'Drink-Stuff' by elves,
In hell 'The Slender Stem.'

33 Segðu mér þat, Alvíss,
öll of rök fira
vörumk, dvergr, at vitir:
hvé þat öl heitir,
er drekka alda synir,
heimi hverjum í?

Answer me, Alvis! thou knowest all,
Dwarf, of the doom of men:
What call they the ale, that is quaffed of men,
In each and every world?

34 Öl heitir með mönnum,
en með ásum bjórr,
kalla veig vanir,
hreinalög jötnar,
en í helju mjöð,
kalla sumbl Suttungs synir.

'Ale' among men, 'Beer' the gods among,
In the world of the Wanes 'The Foaming';
'Bright Draught' with giants, 'Mead' with dwellers in
hell,
'The Feast-Draught' with Suttung's sons.

35 Í einu brjósti
ek sák aldri
fleiri forna stafi;
miklum tálum
kveð ek tældan þik:
Uppi ertu, dvergr, of dagaðr,
nú skínn sól í sali.

In a single breast I never have seen
More wealth of wisdom old;
But with treacherous wiles must I now betray thee:
The day has caught thee, dwarf!
(Now the sun shines here in the hall.)

Source & public domain: Old Norse after the Codex Regius (ed. Guðni Jónsson); English after Henry Adams Bellows (1923). Both public domain. Compiled by Glanz & Gravur.