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Deor

Wayland learned suffering from snares¹—
that strong-minded earl endured misery,
with care and sorrow as companions,
and ice-cold exile; he found ample woe
after Nithhad laid hard restraints on him,
supple sinew-bonds on the better man.² 5

That passed away; so can this.³

To Beadohild, her brother's death was not
so sore in her heart as her own situation,
once she came clearly to see 10
that she carried a child; she could never
think through how that might turn out.⁴

That passed away; so can this.

We have heard many things of Mæthhild—
her desire for Geat was so deep, boundless, 15
that her sorrowful love stole all sleep.⁵

That passed away; so can this.

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- 1 *from snares* Old English *be wurman* means either "by sorrow" or "by worms"—the latter does not make much sense, though many critics have tried; the emendation *be wearnum* "by hindrances" is translated here.
- 2 *on the better man* Wayland (Old English *Weland*, ON *Volundr*) was the famous smith of Northern legend; his story is told in the Old Norse *Volundarkviða* in the *Poetic Edda* and, in a somewhat different form, in the twelfth- or thirteenth-century Norse *Thidrekssaga*. King Nithhad (ON *Niðuðr*) is so greedy for Wayland's work that he cuts the smith's hamstring to prevent his escape. In revenge (as we read in the next stanza) Wayland kills the king's sons—he fashions bowls out of their skulls, gems from their eyeballs, and brooches from their teeth, and presents these to the king; he then rapes and impregnates the king's daughter Beadohild and escapes by means of a flying coat made of feathers.
- 3 *That passed away; so can this* The Old English line *þæs ofereode; þisses swa mæg* is almost passive: "it passed away with respect to that; so may it with respect to this."
- 4 *how that might turn out* In the world of legend, at least, it turned out better than you might expect; Beadohild and Wayland were reconciled, and their child Widia (Old English *Wudga*, ON *Viðga*) became famous as one of Dietrich von Berne's warripts (see the note to line 19, below) in the Norse *Thidrekssaga*.
- 5 *stole all sleep* In fact nothing is known of Mæthhild, or the story to which this stanza alludes, and the translation is conjectural.

For thirty winters Theodoric held
the Mæring's stronghold; many knew that.¹
That passed away; so can this.

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We have heard of Eormanaric's
wolfish wit; he ruled far and wide
in the Gothic kingdom—a grim king.
Many a warrior sat wrapped in sorrow,
expecting woe, often wished
that his kingdom would be overcome.²
That passed away; so can this.

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If a man sits sorrowing, bereft of joy,
his spirit darkens, and it seems to him
that his share of troubles is endless.
He may then think that throughout this world
the Lord in his wisdom often works changes,
to many a man He shows mercy
and certain fame, and to some a share of woe.

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Concerning myself I will say this:
that once I was the Heodenings' scop,³
dear to my lord, and Deor was my name.⁴

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¹ *many knew that* Theodoric (ON *Thidrek*), king of the Ostrogoths who ruled from 493-526, became the legendary Dietrich of Berne; he is said to have lived in exile at the court of Attila the Hun for thirty years. The identity of "the Mæring's stronghold" (Old English *Mæringa burg*) is unknown, and it is not clear whether we are supposed to sympathize with Theodoric or the city he ruled/oppressed.

² *would be overcome* Eormanaric, king of the Goths (died around 375), is, in legend, the uncle of Theodoric, and the one who drove him out of Berne and into exile. He had a widespread reputation for outrageous cruelty.

³ *scop* Singer/poet.

⁴ *Deor was my name* A *scop* is a singer/poet. The character Deor (the name means either "beloved" or "wild beast") is otherwise unknown. The *Heodenings* would be a tribe founded by Heoden. The Norse *Skáldskaparmál* (*Prose Edda* ch. 49) tells how king Hedinn (ON *Hedinn*) of the Hjaðnings (equivalent to the Old English *Heodenings*) kidnaps Hild, daughter of Högni. The Middle High German heroic epic *Kudrun* tells a somewhat different version of this tale, in which King Hettel (MHG *Hetele*) plans to steal the beautiful Hild from her father Hagen. Among his helpers in this adventure is a minstrel named Horant (equivalent to the Old English *Heorrenda*). Somewhere behind or among these tales may lie the story implied here.

Many winters I held this high-ranking post,
with a noble lord, until now Heorrenda,
a man skilled in song, has snatched the estate
that the protector of warriors had once given to me.
That passed away; so can this.

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