

THE HUSBAND'S MESSAGE

This poem and Riddle 58 are sometimes taken to be one poem since the speaker in each case may be a rune-staff bearing a message; most editors, however, treat them as separate poems. The solution to Riddle 58 is more likely to be a reed-pen. The speaker in *The Husband's Message* is an inanimate object, as in many riddles. The theme of lovers or spouses separated by feud is similar to that of *The Wife's Lament*, though formally this poem is less an elegy than an invitation. Klinck, in her edition, argues that the poem is more of a formal love letter “designed to evoke, not the feelings of the speaker, but those of the lord towards his lady: his fidelity, his confidence in the strength of the vows they made together, his urgent desire for her, all mediated by the messenger’s ceremonious deference” (58). The bold capital letters at the end of the poem are runes in the original; they stand for their runic names so that the *S*- and *R*-runes, *sigel-rad* or *segl-rad* (Niles, 2006, 239), probably refer to the “sun-road” or “sail-road”; the *EA* and *W* to *ear-wynn*, “sea-joy”; and *M* to *mon*, “man.” Together they appear to extend a heartfelt invitation to the woman or wife who receives the message to board a ship and set sail homeward toward her waiting husband or lover.

The Husband's Message

Now I can speak secretly to you,
Pass on my message, sing of my lineage,
Tell you what kind of childhood I had,
What kind of tree I was taken from,
How I was shaped into silent song.

* * *

Over the salt-seas I was forced to sail
 At my lord's pleasure from foreign lands
 On ship's plank or prow, visiting towns,
 Seeking the loved one to read my runes.

* * *

A stave of words, I am quietly yours. 10
 I bear you the carved thoughts of my lord's love,
 So you may know in your heart of his deep devotion.
 I pledge and promise his love is true,
 His trust holds, his faith is fixed.
 My lord and shaper sends his greeting, 15
 Begs you to recall in your rich array
 The vows you shared when you held a home,
 Trading talk, waking as one,
 Walking the land, in the sweet trust of love.

A feud drove him away from his victory-proud 20
 People, sent him sailing into exile.
 Your loving lord sends you this message:
 Go down to the cliff's edge, the sea-wall,
 And listen for the spring-sad cuckoo's song
 Wafting from the woods, plaintive, persistent. 25
 When you hear that sweet, mournful melody,
 Let no one hinder your heart. Go down to the sea,
 Set sail south over the gull's ground.
 Let the whale-road take you to where
 Your lord lies, waiting, wanting, 30
 Expectant in exile. His sole wish,
 As he said to me, is to have you home
 With God's grace so your love may thrive,
 And both together can share the hall,
 Giving out treasure, a reward of rings, 35
 To warriors and thanes, a prince's pleasure.
 He has a store of hammered gold,
 A great estate, enough for all,
 A place of power in a foreign land.

* * *

Long ago he fled the feud, launched his ship, 40
 Escaped into exile, bound by necessity,
 To sail the whale-road into foreign lands.
 Now he has vanquished woe, won over strangers,
 Wrestled down fate. He can lack no joy,
 Want no treasure, no fine horses, 45
 No meadhall pleasures, no great possessions,
 If he has you, a prince's daughter.
 Let my runes remind you of your vows together:
 I hear **S** and **R**, *Sigel-Rad*, the Sun-Road,
 The sail's pathway; **EA** and **W**, *Ear-Wynn*, 50
 The Sea-Joy; and **M** for *Mon*, Man—
 All of them inviting you to set sail
 Under the sun, across the sea to your lord,
 Who has kept his oath of love alive
 And cherishes the vows you voiced together. 55
 Let my runes recall and reveal his love.