“The Wife’s Lament” – (author unknown)

I tell this story about me, in my sorrow,

I sing the fate of my voyaging self. I may say that

whatever hardship I lived through since I grew up—

new griefs and old—in those days it was not worse than now.

Always I grieve in the pain of my torment.

First my lord went away from his people

over the tossing waves. I felt cold care in the dark before dawn,1

wondering where my lord of the lands might be.

Then I left on a journey to seek and serve him—

a friendless wanderer in my terrible need.

That man’s kinsmen began to plot

with secret scheming to split us both apart,

so that we two—widely asunder in the world—

lived most wretchedly. And longing smote me.

My lord called to me to take up my hard dwelling here.

I had few loved ones in this country,

few devoted friends. For this my mind mourns.

Then I found myself a most husbandly man,

but a man with hard luck, brooding in his heart;

he hid his moods, his murderous thoughts,

yet seemed blithe in his bearing. Very often we boasted that

none but death alone would drive us apart—

not anything else! All that is whorled backward, changed;

now it’s as if it never had been,

the loving friendship the both of us had. Far and near I must

suffer the feud2 of my dearly loved man.

They forced me to live in a grove of wood

under an oak tree in an earth hovel.

Old is this den of earth. I am stabbed with longing.

The valleys are dark, the hills rise high,

bitterly sharp is my garrison3 overgrown with brambles,

a joyless stronghold. Here very often what seizes me fiercely

is the want of my husband! There are friends on earth,

lovers living who lie clasped in their bed,

while I walk alone in the hours before daybreak

under the oak tree, throughout this earth cave

where I must remain the summerlong day,

where I can weep the sorrows

of my many hardships, because I never can

find sweet rest for that heart’s grief of mine—

not for all of that longing laid on me in this life.

Always must the young be troubled in mood,

with thoughts harsh in their hearts, yet at the same time

seem blithe in bearing despite a care-burdened breast

and a swarm of sorrows. The young man must rely on himself

for all he gets of the world’s joy. He must be a far-flung outlaw

in a distant country.

So my loved friend sits

under a stone cliff crusted with frost in the storm—

my lover dreary in spirit. Water flows all around him

in his bleak dwelling. That friend of mine suffers

great sorrow of heart. Too often he remembers

a more blissful house. Unhappy is anyone

who must longingly wait for a lover.