

LOKI AND HIS EVIL CHILDREN

There lived among the Æsir a mischief maker called Loki. In face and form he was bewitchingly handsome, except for his shifty eyes - they gave him away. His soul looked out from his eyes and that was black, fickle and full of spite with a talent for slyness and for knowing a cunning trick for all occasions.

You might wonder how he came to be in Asgard at all, and it has to be admitted that Odin found it attractive, exciting to play with evil just as some children find excitement in playing with fire. Loki was like fire in many ways - beautiful to look at but if you put your finger to it, it burns you. In the early days of Asgard, Loki was the gods' fire: they played with him for a long time but in the end they got burned.

Loki was another one of those from giant stock. His father was a giant called Farbauti who controlled dangerous lightning, the blazing ball-lightning. They say Loki's mother was Laufey which means Bushy Tree Top and they think that she gave birth to Loki when Farbauti's ball-lightning struck her. The fireball probably burned her to a charred and smoking ember; at least nothing is heard of her again. This must have taken place in one of the forests in a remote part of Asgard, for when Loki arrived at Odin's hall, the father of the Æsir welcomed him as he would any long distance traveler. Loki was so handsome and his ways so winning that Odin in time actually became his blood-brother. It was believed that when blood was mixed from wrist to wrist the tie was stronger than that of brotherhood by birth.

The exploits of Loki in Asgard and Jotunheim gained him many nicknames by which he is always remembered with disgust. They include Thief of Sif's Hair, Thief of Idunn's Apples, The Mischief Maker, the Trickster and many more. All these names came from one or other of his exploits, and all of them were disgraceful. But occasionally he got into a situation which could only make people laugh.

Loki's children were even more terrible than he was himself. His wife in Asgard was Sigyn, but he had three children by an ogress from Jotunheim called Angrbode.

The gods eventually banished Angrbode to the Ironwood, that dark and dismal forest far to the east of Midgard where few would know of her existence. There Angrbode gave birth to Loki's first monstrous son, the wolf Fenrir. In the beginning, because Loki was his father, the Æsir allowed the wolf cub to be brought up in Asgard. Later on they discovered their mistake.

Soon the surprising news reached Asgard from Ironwood that Angrbode had littered a second monstrous son, this time a mighty serpent, a dragon so colossal that his coils split the trees apart and before long he had encircled the whole of Midgard. Odin quickly called up all his reserves of divine power and cast the serpent into the sea, condemning him to wallow forever with his tail gripped between his jaws. That stopped him from growing. They do say that sailors blown far out of sight of land by contrary winds have sometimes clapped eyes on the World Serpent or Jormungander; and some, thinking one of his huge coils was an uncharted island, have cast anchor into his hide, scrambled 'ashore' and even lit a fire on the monster's back. It was only when the island suddenly disappeared from under their feet, leaving them astonished and struggling in the waves that the sailors understood that they had run into the World Serpent and been lucky enough to live to tell the tale.

Yet a third time Angrbode gave birth, on this occasion to a female child whom Odin cast down into the Underworld to become queen of Hel. She was given the name of Hel and made absolute ruler over any people of the nine worlds who came into her power.