

Baldur

Foster & Cummings

NordicScandinavian

Intermediate
5 min read

I.

Baldur was the best beloved of all the gods. Odin was their father and king; to him they turned for help and wise advice, but it was to Baldur they went for loving words and bright smiles. The sight of his kind face was a joy to the Æsir, and to all the people of Midgard. They sometimes called him the god of light, a good name for him, because he truly gave to the world light and strength.

Baldur was the son of Odin and Frigga; he was the most gentle and lovely of all the gods. His beautiful palace in Asgard was bright and spotless; no evil creature could enter there; no one who had wrong thoughts could stay in that palace of love and truth.

At last, after the bright summer was over, for many days Baldur had looked sad and troubled. Some of the Æsir saw it, but most of all, his loving, watchful mother, Frigga. Baldur could not bear to worry his mother, so he kept his sorrow to himself, saying nothing about it; but at last Frigga drew his secret from him, and then his friends knew that Baldur had had dreams which told of coming trouble, dreams of his leaving all his friends and going away from Asgard, to dwell in another land.

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Odin and Frigga, fearing the dreams might come true and they must lose their beloved son, began to think what they could do to prevent it.

Then the loving mother said, "I will make all things in the world promise not to hurt our son." And so Queen Frigga sent out for everything in the whole world, and everything came trooping to Asgard, to her palace. All living creatures came from the land, from the water, and from the air. All plants and trees came; all rocks, stones, and even the metals under the earth, where the busy dwarfs worked. Fire came, and water, as well as all poisons, and sickness. Everything promised not to harm the good Baldur, except one little plant called mistletoe, which was so small that Frigga did not send for it, feeling sure it could not do any harm.

"Now I am happy once more," said the queen, "for our Baldur is safe!" And she sat at peace in her beautiful palace, rejoicing that her dear son was free from all danger.

But Odin, the wise Allfather, still felt uneasy, even after all these promises, fearing what might happen. So he took his eight-footed steed, Sleipnir, and rode forth from Asgard to the underworld to find Hela, the wise woman who ruled over that far-off land. She could tell everything that was going to happen, and she knew the names of all those who were coming to dwell with her. Odin was the only one wise enough to speak with Hela, for no one else knew the words that would call her forth from her dwelling; but when Odin called, she came to answer.

"Tell me," said he, "for whom are you making ready this costly room?"

"We make ready for Baldur, the god of light," replied Hela.

"Who, then, will slay Baldur, and bring such darkness and sorrow to Asgard?"

Again said the wise woman, "It is Hodur, Baldur's twin brother, who will slay the sun-god." And with these words she vanished.

Sadly Father Odin returned to Asgard, and told his wife the words of Hela; but Frigga was not troubled in her heart, for she felt sure that nothing would hurt her dear son.

II.

One beautiful sunny day at the end of summer the gods had all gone out to an open field beyond Asgard to have

some sports. As they all knew that nothing could hurt Baldur, they placed him at the end of the field for a target, and then took turns throwing their darts at him, just for the fun of seeing them fall off without hurting him. They thought this was showing great honor to Baldur, and he was pleased to join in the sport.

Loki happened to be away when they began to play, and when he came was angry in his heart that nothing could hurt Baldur.

“Why should he be so favored? I hate him!” said Loki to himself, and began at once to plan some evil.

All this while Queen Frigga sat in her palace, thinking of all her dear sons, and of how much good they did to men. As she sat thus, thinking, and spinning with her hands, there came a knock at the door. The queen called, “Come in!” and an old woman stood before her.

Frigga spoke kindly to her, and soon the old woman said she had passed by the field where the gods were playing, and throwing sharp weapons at Baldur.

“Oh, yes,” said Frigga; “neither metal nor wood can hurt him, for all things in the world have given me their promise.”

“What!” said the old woman; “do you mean that all things have really vowed to spare Baldur?”

“All,” replied the queen, “except one little plant that grows on the eastern side of Asgard; it is called mistletoe, and I thought it too small and soft to do any harm.”

Before long the old woman went away, and when she was quite out of sight of Frigga’s palace, threw off her woman’s clothes, and who do you suppose it was? Why, no woman at all, but that wicked Loki, of course, who hurried away out of Asgard, to find the poor little plant that did not know about Baldur’s danger. When he came to the place where the plant grew, Loki cutting off a branch, quickly made a sharp arrow, which he carried back to the playground, where the Æsir were still at their game, all but one, Hodur, the god of darkness, Baldur’s blind twin brother.

Then Loki went up to Hodur, and said to him in a low voice, “Why do you not join with the others in doing honor to Baldur?”

“I cannot see to take aim, you know, and besides, I have no weapon,” said Hodur.

“Come, then, here is a fine new dart for you, and I will guide your hand,” whispered wicked Loki; then he slipped the arrow of mistletoe wood into Hodur’s hand and aimed it himself at Baldur, who stood there so bright and smiling.

Then poor blind Hodur heard a dreadful cry from all the gods: Baldur the Beautiful had fallen, struck by the arrow; he would now be taken away from them, to live with Hela in the underworld.

Every heart was filled with sorrow for this dreadful loss; but no one tried to punish him who had done the wicked deed, for they stood upon sacred ground, and the field was named the Peace-stead, or Place of Peace, where no one might hurt another. Besides, the gods did not know it was the false Loki who hated Baldur, that had struck him down.

When Frigga heard the sad news, she asked who would win her love by going to the underworld and begging Hela to let Baldur come back to them.

Hermod, the swift messenger-god, ready to do his mother’s bidding, set forth at once on the long journey. Nine days and nights he traveled without resting, until he came to Hela’s underworld. There he found Baldur, who was glad to see him, and sent messages to his friends in Asgard. Hela said Baldur might return to them on one condition: that every living creature, and everything in the world must weep for him.

So Hermod hastened back to Asgard, and when the Æsir heard Hela’s answer, they sent out messengers over the world to bid all things weep for Baldur, their bright sun-god. Then did the beasts, the birds, the fishes, the flowers and trees, even stones and metals weep; as indeed we can see the teardrops come to all things when they are changed from heat to cold.

As the messengers were coming back to Asgard they met an old woman, whom they bade weep, but she replied, “Let Hela keep Baldur down below; why should I care?” When the Æsir heard of this, they thought it must have been the same old woman who went before to Frigga’s palace, and we know who that was.

And so Baldur the beautiful, Baldur the bright, did not come back, and all the dwellers in Asgard were sad and sorrowful without him.

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