



Loki's Punishment

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Intermediate

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The crow went flying toward the North, croaking as she flew, “Let Hela keep what she holds. Let Hela keep what she holds.” That crow was the hag Thaukt transformed, and the hag Thaukt was Loki.

He flew to the North and came into the wastes of Jötunheim. As a crow he lived there, hiding himself from the wrath of the Gods. He told the Giants that the time had come for them to build the ship Naglfar, the ship that was to be built out of the nails of dead men, and that was to sail to Asgard on the day of Ragnarök with the Giant Hrymer steering it. And harkening to what he said the Giants then and there began to build Naglfar, the ship that Gods and men wished to remain unbuilt for long.

Then Loki, tiring of the wastes of Jötunheim, flew to the burning South. As a lizard he lived amongst the rocks of Muspelheim, and he made the Fire Giants rejoice when he told them of the loss of Frey’s sword and of Tyr’s right hand.

But still in Asgard there was one who wept for Loki—Siguna, his wife. Although he had left her and had shown his hatred for her, Siguna wept for her evil husband.

He left Muspelheim as he had left Jötunheim and he came to live in the World of Men. He knew that he had now come into a place where the wrath of the Gods might find him, and so he made plans to be ever ready for escape. He had come to the River where, ages before, he had slain the otter that was the son of the Enchanter, and on the very rock where the otter had eaten the salmon on the day of his killing, Loki built his house. He

made four doors to it so that he might see in every direction. And the power that he kept for himself was the power of transforming himself into a salmon.

Often as a salmon he swam in the River. But even for the fishes that swam beside him Loki had hatred. Out of flax and yarn he wove a net that men might have the means of taking them out of the water.

The wrath that the Gods had against Loki did not pass away. It was he who, as Thaukt, the Hag, had given Hela the power to keep Baldur unransomed. It was he who had put into Hödur's hand the sprig of Mistletoe that had bereft Baldur of life. Empty was Asgard now that Baldur lived no more in the Peace Stead, and stern and gloomy grew the minds of the Æsir and the Vanir with thinking on the direful things that were arrayed against them. Odin in his hall of Valhalla thought only of the ways by which he could bring heroes to him to be his help in defending Asgard.

The Gods searched through the world and they found at last the place where Loki had made his dwelling. He was weaving the net to take fishes when he saw them coming from four directions. He threw the net into the fire so that it was burnt, and he sprang into the River and transformed himself into a salmon. When the Gods entered his dwelling they found only the burnt-out fire.

But there was one amongst them who could understand all that he saw. In the ashes were the marks of the burnt net and he knew that these were the tracing of something to catch fishes. And from the marks left in the ashes he made a net that was the same as the one Loki had burnt.

With it in their hands the Gods went down the River, dragging the net through the water. Loki was affrighted to find the thing of his own weaving brought against him. He lay between two stones at the bottom of the River, and the net passed over him.

But the Gods knew that the net had touched something at the bottom. They fastened weights to it and they dragged the net through the River again. Loki knew that he might not escape it this time and he rose in the water and swam toward the sea. The Gods caught sight of him as he leaped over a waterfall. They followed him, dragging the net. Thor waded behind, ready to seize him should he turn back.

Loki came out at the mouth of the River and behold! There was a great eagle hovering over the waves of the sea and ready to swoop down on fishes. He turned back in the River. He made a leap that took him over the net that the Gods were dragging. But Thor was behind the net and he caught the salmon in his powerful hands and

he held him for all the struggle that Loki made. No fish had ever struggled so before. Loki got himself free all but his tail, but Thor held to the tail and brought him amongst the rocks and forced him to take on his proper form.

He was in the hands of those whose wrath was strong against him. They brought him to a cavern and they bound him to three sharp-pointed rocks. With cords that were made of the sinews of wolves they bound him, and they transformed the cords into iron bands. There they would have left Loki bound and helpless. But Skadi, with her fierce Giant blood, was not content that he should be left untormented. She found a serpent that had deadly venom and she hung this serpent above Loki's head. The drops of venom fell upon him, bringing him anguish drop by drop, minute by minute. So Loki's torture went on.

But Siguna with the pitying heart came to his relief. She exiled herself from Asgard, and endured the darkness and the cold of the cavern, that she might take some of the torment away from him who was her husband. Over Loki Siguna stood, holding in her hands a cup into which fell the serpent's venom, thus sparing him from the full measure of anguish. Now and then Siguna had to turn aside to spill out the flowing cup, and then the drops of venom fell upon Loki and he screamed in agony, twisting in his bonds. It was then that men felt the earth quake. There in his bonds Loki stayed until the coming of Ragnarök, the Twilight of the Gods.

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