

HOW THE FENRIS WOLF WAS CHAINED

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FAIR as were the meads of Asgard, we have seen that the Asa folk were fond of wandering far afield in other regions. Most restless of all was Red Loki, that cunning fellow who was always bringing trouble upon himself or upon his kindred. And because he loved evil, he would often betake himself to the gloomy halls of Giantland and mingle with the wicked folk of that region.

Now one day he met a hideous giantess named Angur-Boda. This creature had a heart of ice, and because he loved ugliness and evil she had a great attraction for him, and in the end he married her and they lived together in a horrible cave in Giantland.

Three children were born to Loki and Angur-Boda in this dread abode, and they were even more terrible in appearance than their mother. The first was an immense wolf called Fenris, with a huge mouth filled with long white teeth which he was constantly gnashing together. The second was a wicked-looking serpent with a fiery-red tongue lolling from its mouth. The third was a hideous giantess, partly blue and partly flesh-color, whose name was Hela.

No sooner were these three terrible children born than all the wise men of the earth began to foretell the misery they would bring upon the Asa folk. In vain did Loki try to keep them hidden within the cave wherein their mother dwelt. They soon grew so immense in size that no dwelling would contain them, and all the world began to talk of their frightful appearance.

It was not long before All-Father Odin, from his high seat in Asgard, heard of the children of Loki. He said to the Asas:

"Much evil will come upon us, O my children, from this giant brood if we defend not ourselves against them. For their mother will teach them wickedness and still more quickly will they learn the cunning wiles of their father. Fetch me them here, therefore, that I may deal with them forthwith."

So, after somewhat of a struggle, the Asas captured the three giant children and brought them before Odin's judgment seat.

Then Odin looked first at Hela, and when he saw her gloomy eyes full of misery and despair he was sorry, and dealt kindly with her, saying: "Thou art the bringer of Pain to man and Asgard is no place for such as thou. But I will make thee ruler of the Mist Home, and there shalt thou rule over that unlighted world, the Region of the Dead."

Forthwith he sent her away over rough roads to the cold, dark region of the North called the Mist Home. And there did Hela rule over a grim crew, for all those who had done wickedness in the world above were imprisoned by her in those gloomy regions. To her came also all those who had died not on the battlefield but of old age or disease. And though these were treated kindly enough, theirs was a joyless life in comparison with that of the dead warriors who were feasting and fighting in the halls of Valhalla, under the kindly rule of All-Father Odin.

Having thus disposed of Hela, Odin next turned his attention to the serpent. And when he saw his evil tongue and cunning, wicked eyes, he said: "Thou art he who bringest Sin into the world of men therefore the ocean shall be thy home forever."

Then he threw that horrid serpent into the deep sea which surrounds all lands, and there the creature grew so fast that when he stretched himself one day he encircled all the earth and held his own tail fast in his mouth. And sometimes he grew angry to think that he, the son of a god, had thus been cast out; and at those times he would writhe with his huge body and lash his tail till the sea spouted up to the sky. And when that happened the men of the North said that a great tempest was raging. But it was only the Serpent-son of Loki writhing in his wrath.

Then Odin turned to the third child. And behold! the Fenris Wolf was so appalling to look upon that Odin feared to cast him forth, and he decided to endeavor to tame him by kindness so that he should not wish them ill.

But when he bade them carry food to the Fenris Wolf, not one of the Asas would do so for they feared a snap from his great jaws. Only the brave Tyr had courage enough to feed him, and the wolf ate so much and so fast that the business took him all his time. Mean time, too, the Fenris grew so rapidly and became so fierce that the gods were compelled to take counsel and consider how they should get rid of him. They remembered that it would make their peaceful halls unholy if they were to slay him, and so they resolved instead to bind him fast that he should be unable to do them harm.

So those of the Asa folk who were clever smiths set to work and made a very strong, thick chain; and when it was finished they carried it out to the yard where the wolf dwelt, and said to him as though in jest: "Here is a fine proof of thy boasted strength, O Fenris. Let us bind this chain about thee, that we may see if thou canst break it asunder."

Then the wolf gave a great grin with his wide jaws, and came and stood still that they might bind the chain about him; for he knew what he could do. And it came to pass that directly they had fastened the chain, and had slipped aside from him, the great beast gave himself a shake and the chain fell about him in little bits.

At this the Asas were much annoyed, but they tried not to show it and praised him for his strength.

Then they set to work again upon a chain much stronger than the last, and brought it to the Fenris Wolf, saying:

"Great will be thy renown, O Fenris, if thou canst break this chain as thou didst the last."

But the wolf looked at them askance, for the chain they brought was very much thicker than the one he had already broken. He reflected, however, that he himself had grown stronger and bigger and moreover that one must risk something in order to win renown.

So he let them put the chain upon him, and when the Asas said that all was ready he gave a good shake and stretched himself a few times, and again the fetters lay in fragments on the ground

Then the gods began to fear that they would never hold the wolf in bonds; and it was All-Father Odin who persuaded them to make one more attempt.

So they sent a messenger to Dwarfland bidding him ask the Little Men to make a chain which nothing could possibly destroy.

Setting at once to work, the clever little smiths soon fashioned a slender silken rope, and gave it to the messenger, saying that no strength could break it and that the more it was strained the stronger it would become.

It was made of the most mysterious things-the sound of a cat's footsteps, the roots of a mountain, the sinews of a bear, the breath of fishes, and other such strange materials which only the dwarfs knew how to use.

With this chain the messenger hastened back over the Rainbow Bridge to Asgard.

By this time the Fenris Wolf had grown too big for his yard, so he lived on a rocky island in the middle of the lake that lies in the midst of Asgard. And here the Asas now betook themselves with their chain, and began to play their part with wily words.

"See," they cried, "O Fenris! Here is a cord so soft and thin that none would think of it binding such strength as shine."

And they laughed great laughs, and handed it to one another, and tried its strength by pulling at it with all their might, but it did not break. Then they came nearer and used more wiles, saying:

"We cannot break the cord, for 'tis stronger than it looks, but thou, O mighty one, wilt be able to snap it in a moment."

But the wolf tossed his head in scorn, and said: "Small renown would there be to me, O Asa folk, if I were to break yon slender string. Save therefore your breath, and leave me now alone."

"Aha!" cried the Asas. "Thou fearest the might of the silken cord, thou false one, and that is why thou wilt not let us bind thee!"

"Not I," said the Fenris Wolf, growing rather suspicious, "but if it is made with craft and guile it shall never come near my feet."

"But," said the Asas, "thou wilt surely be able to break this silken cord with ease, since that hast already broken the great iron fetters."

To this the wolf made no answer, pretending not to hear.

"Come!" said the Asas again, "why shouldst thou fear? For even if thou couldst not break the cord we would immediately let thee free again. To refuse is a coward's piece of work."

Then the wolf gnashed his teeth at them in anger and said:

"Well I know you, Asas! For if you bind me so fast that I can not get loose you will skulk away, and it will be long before I get any help from you; and therefore am I loath to let this band be laid upon me."

But still the Asas continued to persuade him and to twit him with cowardice, until at length the Fenris Wolf said with a sullen growl:

"Have it your own way then. But, as a pledge that this is done without deceit, let one of you lay his hand in my mouth while you are binding me and afterwards while I try to break the bonds."

Then the Asa folk looked at one another in dismay, for they knew very well what this would mean. And while they consulted together the wolf stood gnashing his teeth at them with a horrid grin.

At length Tyr the Brave hesitated no longer. Boldly he stalked up to the wolf and thrust his arm into his enormous mouth, bidding the Asas bind fast the beast. Scarce had they done so when the wolf began to strain and pull, but the more he did so the tighter and stiffer the rope became.

The gods shouted and laughed with glee when they saw how all his efforts were in vain. But Tyr did not join them in their mirth, for the wolf in his rage snapped his great teeth together and bit off his hand at the wrist.

Now when the Asas discovered that the animal was fast bound they took the chain which was fixed to the rope and drew it through a huge rock, and fastened this rope deep down in the earth so that it could never be moved. And this they fastened to another great rock which was driven still deeper into the ground.

When the Fenris Wolf found that he had been thus secured he opened his mouth terribly wide, and twisted himself right and left and tried his best to bite the Asa folk. He uttered, moreover, such terrible howls that at length the gods could bear it no longer. So they took a sword and thrust it into his mouth so that the hilt rested on his lower, and the point against his upper jaw. And there he was doomed to remain until the end of All Things shall come, when he

"Freed from the Chain
Shall range the Earth."