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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Dwarves and the Elves

"The earth is very beautiful," said Odin from the top of his throne, "every part is truly beautiful, even to the shores of the dark North Sea. But the people of the earth are unfortunately foolish and fearful. At this moment, I see a three-headed giant from Jötunheim coming. He throws a shepherd boy into the sea and puts the entire flock of sheep in his sack. Now he takes them out one by one and breaks their bones as if they were hazelnuts, while men watch and do nothing."



"Father," shouted Thor angrily, "last night I forged a belt, a glove, and a hammer for myself. I will go to Jötunheim with these three things."

Thor went and Odin watched again.

"The people of the earth are lazy and stupid," said Odin. "There are Dwarves and Elves who live among them and play tricks they cannot understand and do not know how to prevent. At this moment, I see a farmer sowing wheat grains in the furrows, while a dwarf runs after him and turns them into stones. And then this, I see two dreadful little creatures holding the head of a man, the wisest of all men, under water until he dies. They mix his blood with honey. They have put it in three stone jars and hidden it."

Then Odin became very angry with the Dwarves, for he saw that they wanted to play pranks. So he called Hermod, his Flying Word, and sent him a message to the Dwarves and the Light Elves. He was to say that Odin sent his compliments to them and would like to speak with them in his palace of Gladsheim about an important matter.

When they received Hermod's call, the Dwarves and Light Elves were very surprised. But they did not know whether to feel honored or afraid. However,

they put on their cocky clothes and followed Hermod like a swarm of ladybugs.

When they arrived in the great city, they found Odin, who had descended from his throne, sitting with the rest of the Aesir in the Hall of Justice at Gladsheim. Hermod flew in, greeted his master and pointed, to show that he had completed his mission, to the Dwarves and Elves, who hung in the doorway like a cloud. Then Odin beckoned the little creatures to come forward. Huddled and whispering, they peered over each other's shoulders. And now running down the hallway for a while, then back again, half curious, half scared, they finally reached his footstool, only after Odin had beckoned three times.

Then Odin spoke to them in a calm, low, serious tone about the wickedness of their mischievous tendencies. Some of the worst of them just laughed in a bold, harsh way. But a great many looked surprised and a little pleased at the novelty of these serious words. The Light Elves, however, all wept, for these were tender little creatures. Finally, Odin named two dwarves by name. He had seen that

these dwarves had drowned the man. "Whose blood was it?" he asked, "that you mixed with honey and put in jars?"

"Oh," said the Dwarfs, jumping in the air and clapping their hands, "that was Kvasir's blood. Don't you know who Kvasir was? He came from the peace made between the Vanir and you. He wandered for seven years or more. He was so wise that people thought he must be a god. Well, just now we found him lying in a meadow, drowned in his own wisdom. So we mixed his blood with honey and put it in three large jars to keep. Wasn't that well done, Odin?"

"Well done?" replied Odin. "Well done? You are cruel, lying Dwarfs! I saw for myself that you killed him. You should be ashamed." Then Odin went on to pronounce judgment on all of them. Those who had been most godless, he said, should henceforth live far underground and spend their time making the great central fire of the earth burn. Those who had only been mischievous should work in the gold and diamond mines and make gems and metals. They could all come out at night, said Odin, but they must

disappear at dawn. Then he waved his hand, and the Dwarfs turned, chattering loudly, and ran down the palace steps, out of the city, over the green fields, to their unknown, deeply buried earth houses. But the Light Elves hung around, with uplifted, tearful, laughing faces, like morning dew lit by the sun.

"And you," said Odin, looking through the Light Elves with his serious eyes, "and you and you..."

"Oh! indeed, Odin," they interrupted him, all speaking at once in a quick, uncertain tone, "Oh! indeed, Odin, we're not as bad as you think. We've never hurt anyone."

"Have you ever done anyone any good?" asked Odin.

"Oh! no, indeed," replied the Light Elves, "we've never done anything at all."

"Then you may go," said Odin, "to live among the flowers and play with the wild bees and summer insects. But you must find something to do, or you will become as mischievous as the Dwarfs."

"If only we had someone to teach us something," said the Light Elves, "for we are such foolish little people."

Odin looked around among the Aesir; but there was no teacher among them suitable for the foolish Elves. Then he turned to Niörd, who nodded benevolently and said, "Yes, yes, I'll think about it." Then he immediately left the courtroom, straight through the city gates, and sat on the edge of the mountain.

After a while, he began to whistle in a very insistent way, louder and louder, in strong wild gusts, now advancing, then receding. Then he lowered his voice a bit, lower and lower, until it became bird-like chirping. It sounded like low, soft, enticing music, like the call of a spirit. And far away, from the south, came a small fluttering response, as sweet as the invitation itself, getting closer and closer until the two sounds merged. Then, through the bright sky, two figures floated, wondrously beautiful - a brother and sister - their lovely arms entwined, their golden hair bathed in sunlight and supported by the wind.

"My son and daughter," said Niörd proudly to the surrounding Aesir, "Frey and Freya, summer and beauty, hand in hand."

When Frey and Freya descended from the hill, Niörd took his son by the hand, gracefully led him to the foot of the throne and said, "Look, Lord Odin, what a beautiful young instructor I have brought for your beautiful Elves."

Odin was very pleased with the appearance of Frey, but before making him king and schoolmaster of the Light Elves, he wanted to know what his achievements were and if he found himself capable enough to teach.



"I am the genius of the clouds and sunshine," replied Frey. As he spoke, the scent of a hundred perfumes came from his breath.

"If the Light Elves want me as their King, then I can teach them:

- * how to open folded buds

- * how to make blossoms bloom

- * how to pour sweetness into a swelling fruit

- * how to lead the bees through the honey passages of the flowers

- * how to make a whole wheat stalk from a single ear

- * how to hatch bird eggs and teach the little ones to sing

All this and much more. I know everything about these things, and I will teach it all to the Light Elves."

Then Odin replied, "That is good." And Frey took his students to Alfheim, which you can see in any beautiful place under the sun.