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Ririro

IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

The spring fairy and the frost giants

In their glittering palace of icebergs the Frost Giants were planning to capture Iduna, the Spring Fairy, and the rare treasure which she guarded. Hoar-Frost, North-Wind, Sleet, Hail, and Blizzard were growing restless, locked in their frozen waste-land of the North. They longed to enter the valley of Spring and bring desolation to the fruitful fields.

"We are helpless unless we capture the Spring Fairy and steal from her the basket of golden apples," said Giant Hoar-Frost. "As long as she guards this life-giving fruit all nature will rejoice; the birds will sing their foolish jubilees; blossoms will flaunt in the meadows; robes of green will deck the trees, and the people will enjoy everlasting youth and vigour."

"What you say is true," said Giant North-Wind. "If only I could enter the groves of the Spring Fairy's valley, I'd howl so long and loud that those tiresome birds would stop their endless singing."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Giant Blizzard. "You would need my help, I believe. One of my early morning calls would turn the trembling dew-drops into icicles, and change the smiling faces of the brooks into frozen images!"

"Especially if I went with you," added Giant Sleet slyly.

"Oh, I do want you and your twin brother Hail to join," nodded Blizzard. "I know how easily you can lock the grass and flowers in a casement of ice which they can't break, and Hail has a very clever, quick way of cutting off all the leaves. But the question now is how will we capture the Spring Fairy whose apples keep the valley fresh and fair and the people forever young!"

For a few moments the Frost Giants were silent. Many times before they had tried to capture the fairy Iduna and her treasure, but they always failed.

"I know," said Hoar-Frost. "We must get help from Loki, the Prince of Mischief. He lives in Asgard near the Spring Fairy's groves, and people say he often visits Iduna in order to refresh himself with one of her life-giving apples. Let us capture him first and then force him to help us. We giants are fast growing old! The magic apples would renew our strength for years to come!"

"Agreed!" said North-Wind, Blizzard, Sleet, and Hail in one voice. "Loki first and then Iduna!"

After much discussion it was decided that Blizzard would try to capture Loki.

A short time after the council of the Frost-Giants, Loki, the Prince of Mischief, was amusing himself with a great fire which he had built on one of the hills just beyond the city of Asgard. Several times he stopped and peered into the sky to see what caused the huge shadow which seemed to hover near him. He could see nothing but a gigantic eagle whirling around the summit of the hill. Suddenly the great bird swooped down near him. He grabbed a stick and hit the intruder across the

back. To Loki's amazement one end of the stick stuck to the eagle and the Prince of Mischief could not loosen his hands from the end which he held. The eagle spread its huge dark wings and flew away over rocks and hills far to the North.

"Help! help!" screamed the terrified Loki, but although he struggled with all his might he could not escape from his captor.

When they reached a very lonely spot the eagle sat down on a mountain and from its feathers stepped the Storm Giant, Blizzard, who said: "Loki, you are in my power and you will not escape until you promise to help the Frost Giants in a very difficult task!"

"What is it?" gasped the terrified Loki.

"You must help us capture Iduna, the Spring Fairy, and the treasure which she guards. We cannot enter the valley of Spring until Iduna is made our captive."

"Help you to capture the treasure!" said Loki.

"Impossible!"

"Then away to the North we will go," declared the Storm Giant, putting on his eagle plumage again.

"Stop! Stop!" cried Loki in terror. "Let me think a moment!"

After a short consideration Loki took an oath that he would betray Iduna and her treasure into the hands of the Frost Giants. Then the Prince of Mischief was freed, and back to the North sped Blizzard.

The next day late in the afternoon, Iduna, was walking through one of her loveliest groves. The leaves were dancing to the music of a gentle breeze. A delicious fragrance of hyacinths and roses scented the valley. She

sat down near a cool fountain and placed her treasure basket of apples on the ground.

A long shadow darkened the path near her, and looking up the Spring Fairy saw Loki standing there.

"I have come for the refreshing gift of one of your apples, Iduna," he said. "A long journey has wearied my limbs and broken my spirit."

"You are very welcome to one of them," said Iduna, opening her box. "It has been some time since you tasted a

golden apple."

Loki began to

eat the

precious gift,

and Iduna

watched him

closely. She

was very

proud of her

refreshing

fruit.



After a while he put the half-eaten apple on the basin of the fountain and said, "I am going to tell you a secret, Iduna. Not far away from here I discovered a grove where a marvellous tree grows. It bears fruit shaped like yours but larger and of a deep golden colour."

"Oh!" laughed the Spring Fairy, "the fruit may be larger and more beautiful than mine, but I'm sure it has not the power to put youth and life into those who eat it."

"I am afraid you are mistaken," said Loki. "People who have eaten the fruit of this tree say that its refreshing power is wonderful. If you wish, I will guide you to the grove—it is not far away—and then you can compare this fruit, which is attracting much attention, with yours. Will you go?"

"Yes, I will," said Iduna, who could not believe that any other apples were comparable with hers.

Loki led the way and Iduna, carrying her treasure, followed him. She was a little surprised to find the grove Loki described so far away from Asgard, but her desire to find fruit more wonderful than the magic apples urged her on. Finally they reached a meadow bordered by a dense forest.

"Look," said Loki, pointing forward, "we're almost there." Suddenly a dark shadow fell across Iduna's path. The Storm Giant, disguised in eagle's plumage, swooped down, caught the Spring Fairy and her golden apples, and sped away to the frozen North. There the Frost Giants imprisoned the captive in one of their ice-palaces.



It was not long before the joyous valley of Spring felt the absence of Iduna. The flowers drooped and faded; the grass became parched and brown, and the tender green foliage turned to burnt orange.

"What has become of Iduna?" cried the people. "See how the valley is changing!"

Slowly but surely the Frost Giants were working their way toward the valley of Spring. One night Hoar-Frost stalked along the outskirts of the groves and withered the leaves and flowers with his icy breath. The next morning the people heard the howl of North-Wind. "We must find the Spring Fairy or we will die," they cried. In their distress they begged Odin, the wise hero who governed Asgard, to call a special council in order to determine how the secret of Iduna's disappearance could be discovered.

Odin called together his hero council and after earnest thought they decided to question Loki, the Prince of Mischief. He had seldom been seen in Asgard since the Spring Fairy had left the valley. One of the heroes declared that the last time he saw Iduna she was walking with Loki.

The Prince of Mischief was summoned to appear in the council of heroes.

"Tell us the truth," said Thor, in a voice which shook like the roar of distant thunder.

Then the cowardly Loki confessed the plot which robbed the valley of the Spring Fairy and her magic apples.

"Loki," said Odin sternly, "I command you to bring back Iduna. Let there be no delay, for even the heroes of Asgard are suffering in her absence!"

Loki knew he could not disobey this final command. He disguised himself in falcon's plumage and sped away to the desolate North. In circling about the icebergs he

spied the Storm-Giant, fishing from the top of a large rock. Loki descended quickly, flew into one of the openings of the Giant's ice-palace, and made his way to the place where Iduna lay sleeping on a couch. The Prince of Mischief stepped out of his disguise and woke up the Spring Fairy.

"Loki," she cried. "Have you come to do more mischief?"

"I have been sent by Odin to rescue you," said he. "You can escape only by the help of my magic."

Then he transformed Iduna and the precious basket of apples, placed them in a magic nutshell, put on his falcon plumage, and flew away toward Asgard.

As he sped across the dull sky the Storm-Giant looked up and saw him.

"It is Loki disguised as a falcon," he said. "He is taking the Spring Fairy back to Asgard. But he will not escape me!" Instantly the Storm-Giant put on his eagle plumage and flew after Loki.

How anxiously the people of Asgard watched for the return of Loki with Iduna.

On the third day after Loki's departure from Asgard, the people saw two great birds flying with lightning speed toward the city.

"It is the Storm Giant following Loki," they cried. "Light the fires as soon as Loki passes over! Ready! The fires!"

Another moment of breathless suspense! The falcon swept over the walls of Asgard. Instantly a blaze burst all around the city. The falcon had won the mighty race. The eagle whirled far above the flames and looked down into the city. With a cry of despair he sped back to the ice-bound Northland.

“The Spring Fairy is back again,” cried the happy people as they gathered around Iduna. “Her presence fills us with life and hope. The basket of golden apples is safe in her hands! Soon all nature will be fair and beautiful. The Spring Fairy is our joy.”