

HUM 125 – World Mythology

Section #3 – Tricksters

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer – Chapter II

By Mark Twain (1876)

Characters: Tom Sawyer, Ben. Scene: At Aunt Polly's house. Painting the fence.

Tom went on whitewashing -- paid no attention to the steamboat. Ben stared a moment and then said: "Hi-yi! *You're* up a stump, ain't you!"

No answer. Tom surveyed his last touch with the eye of an artist, then he gave his brush another gentle sweep and surveyed the result, as before. Ben ranged up alongside of him. Tom's mouth watered for the apple, but he stuck to his work. Ben said:

"Hello, old chap, you got to work, hey?"

Tom wheeled suddenly and said: "Why, it's you, Ben! I warn't noticing."

"Say -- I'm going in a-swimming, I am. Don't you wish you could? But of course you'd druther *work* -- wouldn't you? Course you would!"

Tom contemplated the boy a bit, and said: "What do you call work?"

"Why, ain't *that* work?"

Tom resumed his whitewashing, and answered carelessly: "Well, maybe it is, and maybe it ain't. All I know, is, it suits Tom Sawyer."

"Oh come, now, you don't mean to let on that you *like* it?"

The brush continued to move. "Like it? Well, I don't see why I oughtn't to like it. Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?"

That put the thing in a new light. Ben stopped nibbling his apple. Tom swept his brush daintily back and forth -- stepped back to note the effect -- added a touch here and there -- criticised the effect again -- Ben watching every move and getting more and more interested, more and more absorbed. Presently he said:

"Say, Tom, let *me* whitewash a little."

Tom considered, was about to consent; but he altered his mind:

"No -- no -- I reckon it wouldn't hardly do, Ben. You see, Aunt Polly's awful particular about this fence -- right here on the street, you know -- but if it was the back fence I wouldn't mind and *she* wouldn't. Yes, she's awful particular about this fence; it's got to be done very careful; I reckon there ain't one boy in a thousand, maybe two thousand, that can do it the way it's got to be done."

"No -- is that so? Oh come, now -- lemme just try. Only just a little -- I'd let *you*, if you was me, Tom."

"Ben, I'd like to, honest injun; but Aunt Polly -- well, Jim wanted to do it, but she wouldn't let him; Sid wanted to do it, and she wouldn't let Sid. Now don't you see how I'm fixed? If you was to tackle this fence and anything was to happen to it --"

"Oh, shucks, I'll be just as careful. Now lemme try. Say -- I'll give you the core of my apple."

"Well, here -- No, Ben, now don't. I'm afeard --"

"I'll give you *all* of it!"

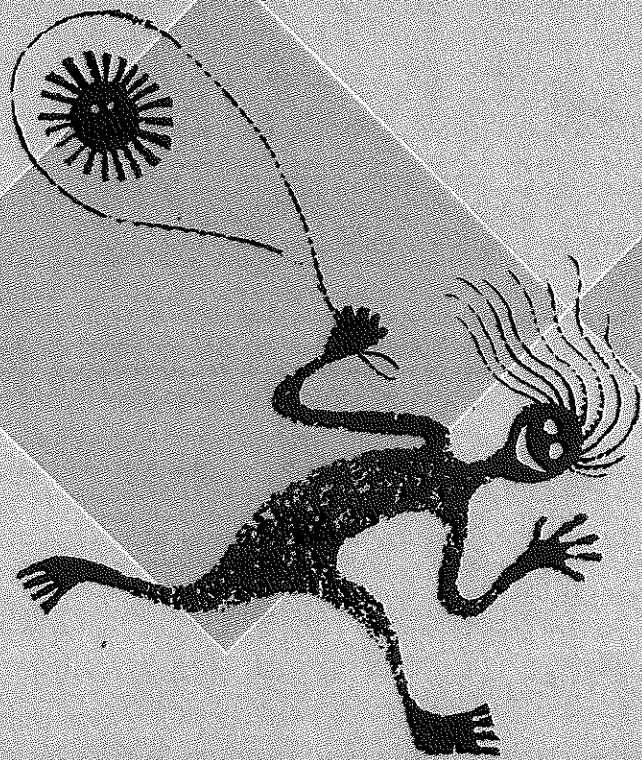
Tom gave up the brush with reluctance in his face, but alacrity in his heart. And while the late steamer Big Missouri worked and sweated in the sun, the retired artist sat on a barrel in the shade close by, dangled his legs, munched his apple, and planned the slaughter of more innocents. There was no lack of material; boys happened along every little while; they came to jeer, but remained to whitewash. By the time Ben was fagged out, Tom had traded the next chance to Billy Fisher for a kite, in good repair; and when he played out, Johnny Miller bought in for a dead rat and a string to swing it with -- and so on, and so on, hour after hour. And when the middle of the afternoon came, from being a poor poverty-stricken boy in the morning, Tom was literally rolling in wealth. He had besides the things before mentioned, twelve marbles, part of a jews-harp, a piece of blue bottle-glass to look through, a spool cannon, a key that wouldn't unlock anything, a fragment of chalk, a glass stopper of a decanter, a tin soldier, a couple of tadpoles, six fire-crackers, a kitten with only one eye, a brass doorknob, a dog-collar -- but no dog -- the handle of a knife, four pieces of orange-peel, and a dilapidated old window sash.

He had had a nice, good, idle time all the while -- plenty of company -- and the fence had three coats of whitewash on it! If he hadn't run out of whitewash he would have bankrupted every boy in the village.

Tom said to himself that it was not such a hollow world, after all. He had discovered a great law of human action, without knowing it -- namely, that in order to make a man or a boy covet a thing, it is only necessary to make the thing difficult to attain. If he had been a great and wise philosopher, like the writer of this book, he would now have comprehended that Work consists of whatever a body is *obliged* to do, and that Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do. And this would help him to understand why constructing artificial flowers or performing on a tread-mill is work, while rolling ten-pins or climbing Mont Blanc is only amusement. There are wealthy gentlemen in England who drive four-horse passenger-coaches twenty or thirty miles on a daily line, in the summer, because the privilege costs them considerable money; but if they were offered wages for the service, that would turn it into work and then they would resign.

The boy mused awhile over the substantial change which had taken place in his worldly circumstances

AMERICAN INDIAN TRICKSTER TALES



Selected and Edited by
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AMERICAN INDIAN MYTHS AND LEGENDS

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So he opened the basket. The people took their spirit forms and, moving like the wind, went back to the island of the dead.

Eagle scolded at first, but soon he remembered Coyote's earlier thought. "It's now autumn. The leaves are falling, just as people die. Let us wait until spring. When the buds open and the flowers bloom, let us return to the land of the dead and try again."

"No," replied Coyote, "I am tired. Let the dead stay in the land of the dead forever."

So Coyote made the law that after people have died they shall never come to life again. If he had not opened the basket and let the spirits out, the dead would have come to life every spring as the grass and flowers and trees do.



COYOTE STEALS FIRE



{Klamath}



There was a time when people had no fire. In winter they could not warm themselves. They had to eat their food raw. Fire was kept inside a huge white rock that belonged to Thunder, who was its caretaker. Thunder was a fearful being. Everybody was afraid of him. Even Bear and Mountain Lion trembled when they heard Thunder's rumbling voice.

Coyote was not afraid of Thunder. He was afraid of nothing. One day, Thunder was in an angry mood and roared and rumbled his loudest, so that the earth trembled and all animals went into hiding. Coyote decided that this was the time to get the fire away from Thunder. Coyote climbed the highest mountain on which Thunder lived. Thunder was at home. "Uncle," said Coyote, "let us play a game of dice. If you win, you can kill me. If I win, you have to give me fire."

"Let us play," said Thunder.

They played with dice made from the gnawing teeth of beavers and woodchucks. The beaver teeth were male dice. The woodchuck teeth were female dice. A design was carved on one side of these teeth. The

teeth were thrown on a flat rock. If the male teeth came up with the carved sides, they counted two points. If the female teeth came up with the carved sides, they counted one. If the dice came up uneven, they did not count. There was a bundle of sticks for counting, for keeping track of the points scored.

Now, Coyote is the trickiest fellow alive. He is the master at cheating at all kinds of games. He continuously distracted Thunder so that he could not watch what Coyote was up to. Thunder was no match for Coyote when it came to gambling. Whenever Thunder took his eyes off Coyote's hands, even for just the tiniest part of a moment, Coyote turned his dice up so that they showed the carved sides. He turned Thunder's dice up so that they showed the blank sides. He distracted Thunder and made him blink. Then, quick as a flash, he took a counting stick away from Thunder's pile and added it to his own. In the end, Thunder was completely confused. Coyote had all the counting sticks, Thunder had none. "Uncle, I won," said Coyote. "Hand over the fire." Thunder knew that Coyote had cheated but could not prove it.

Coyote called upon all the animals to come up to the mountaintop to help him carry the big rock that contained the fire. That rock was huge and looked solid, but it was very fragile, as fragile as a seashell. So all the animals prepared to carry the rock away. "Not so fast," growled Thunder. "Coyote won the game and so I give him the fire. But he cheated, and for that I shall take his life. Where is he so that I can kill him?"

Now, Coyote had read Thunder's mind. He had anticipated what Thunder was up to. Coyote could pull the outer part of his body off, as if it were a blanket, so he put his skin, his pelt, his tail, his ears—all of his outside—close by Thunder, and with the inside of his body, his vitals, moved a distance away. Then he changed his voice so that it sounded as if it were coming not from a distance, but like from just a few feet away. "Here I am, Uncle," he cried. "Kill me if you can." Thunder picked up the huge rock containing fire and hurled it at what he thought was Coyote. But he hit only the skin and fur. The rock splintered into numberless pieces. Every animal took a little piece of the fire and put it under its armpit or under its wing, and they hurried all over the world, bringing fire to every tribe on earth. Coyote calmly put on his outer skin and fur again. "Good-bye, Uncle," he said to Thunder. "Don't gamble. It is not what you do best." Then he ran off.

boys. Iktomi sings a song. He says: "*Hau*, the spirit is here." He pretends to speak to the spirit, but he is faking. There is no spirit.

"Ask the spirit," says the chief. Ikto mumbles like he is talking spirit language. He pretends to listen. He tells the chief and the boys: "They'll do what I ask them. The spirits are stopping Iya. I can do everything. Now get me a lot of good meat. And two fine buffalo hides. And a piece of the Morning Star while you are about it."



IKTOMI AND THE MAN-EATING MONSTER



{*Lakota*}



Iktomi, the tricky Spider-Man, was walking along. He saw a vine dangling down from a huge rock. Iktomi cannot resist dangling vines. He has to climb them. So also that time, he crawled up this vine. At once he was sorry for having done so, because on top of the rock Man-Eating Monster was lying in wait. He was fearful to behold. Iktomi was very scared.

Iktomi said to the Monster: "Younger brother, I have been looking for you. I am glad I found you."

The Monster looked at Iktomi, saying: "I have not had much to eat."

"Is that so?" said Iktomi. "It is much too early for dinner."

"I have not eaten breakfast," said Monster. "I could do with a bit of food. You look good enough to eat." Man-Eating Monster was smacking his lips.

"Younger brother," said Iktomi, "I could not even fill a cavity in one of your teeth—I am not worthwhile eating."

"Since when am I your younger brother?" said Monster. "To call me younger brother is an insult."

"When were you born?" asked Iktomi.

"I was born when the earth was made," replied Monster.

"Hah, it was I who made the earth," said Iktomi, "and I also made

the Sun, the Moon, and the Stars. Come to think of it, I made you. You were then only a little itzy-bitsy dirty thing, and I threw you away."

"Well, all right," said Man-Eating Monster, "I will call you older brother. Then I will eat you, though you are very small."

"Hold on, younger brother," said Iktomi, "I have something better for you than just little me. I know where there is a large camp with many people. I'll eat half of them, and I'll let you eat the other half."

"Well, yes, that is good," said Man-Eating Monster. "Let's go." Monster came down so fast from the rock that he panted. When he caught his breath he almost sucked Iktomi down his throat.

"Please breathe in some other direction."

"Let's go to that camp, older brother," said Monster, whose mouth was watering. "I am hungry."

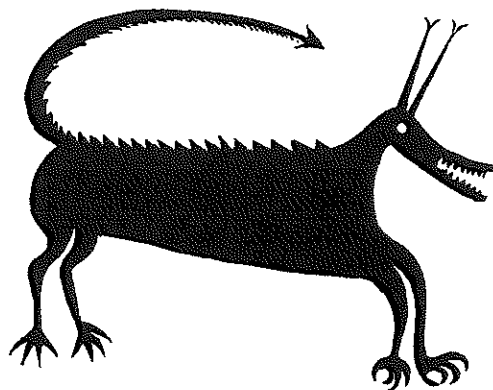
"Why, yes, let's hurry, younger brother, but first tell me what you are afraid of," Iktomi asked.

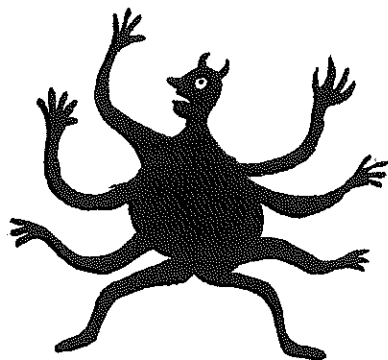
"Why do you want to know?" asked Man-Eating Monster.

"So that I can make sure there is no such thing where we are going."

"Well, all right. There are only three things that I am afraid of—a rattle, a whistle, and a woman who is on her moon, a menstruating woman."

They went on. When they got near to the camp Iktomi told Man-Eating Monster: "Younger brother, wait here. I want to make sure that we don't come across the things you are afraid of."





"Well, all right, but hurry!"

Iktomi went ahead to the camp. He called the people together. "Big Man-Eating Monster is coming! He wants to eat you up. If there is a woman among you who, just now, is on her moon, let her come forth. Let her shake a rattle and blow a whistle when Man-Eating Monster arrives. That will scare him off."

Iktomi hurried back to where Man-Eating Monster was waiting. "Everything is in order," he said. "There is no woman on her moon, no whistle, and no rattle."

"Good," said Man-Eating Monster. "But it is unfair that you want half of all the people to eat. You are small. I'll let you have one or two. Don't be greedy."

"Well, all right," said Iktomi. "Just let me have one."

When they came to the camp, the woman on her moon greeted them, blowing a whistle and shaking a rattle. It so frightened Man-Eating Monster that he dropped down dead.

Anansi: How Stories Came to Earth

<http://www.anansi.org/webwalker/story1.htm>

Origin - West Africa (Ghana)

An Ashanti Legend

It was long ago in Africa, child, when there was First Spider, Kwaku Anansi. He went everywhere, throughout the world, travelling on his strong web strings - sometimes looking more like a wise old man than a spider.

In that long-ago time, child, there were no stories on Earth for anyone to tell. The sky-god kept all stories to himself, up high in the sky, and locked away in a wooden box.

These the spider wanted, as many creatures had before him, so that he could know the beginnings and endings of things. Yet all who had tried for the stories had returned empty-handed.

Now Anansi climbed up his web to the sky-god, Nyame, to ask for the sky-god's stories.

Child, when the powerful sky-god saw the thin, spidery, old man crawling up to his throne, he laughed at him, "What makes you think that you, of all creatures, can pay the price I ask for my stories?"

Spider only wanted to know, "What is the price of the stories?"

"My stories have a great price, four fearsome, elusive creatures: Onini, the python that swallows men whole; Osebo, the leopard with teeth like spears; Mmoboro, the hornets that swarm and sting; and Mmoatia, the fairy who is never seen. Bring these to me."

Bowing, the spider quietly turned and crept back down through the clouds. He went to capture the four creatures he needed as price for the stories. He first asked his wife, Aso, how he might capture Onini, the python that swallows men whole.

She told him a plan, saying, "Go and cut off a branch of the palm tree and cut some string-creeper as well. Take these to the stream where python lives."

As Anansi went to the swampy stream, carrying these things, he began arguing aloud, "This is longer than he; You lie, no; it is true; this branch is longer and he is shorter, much shorter."

The python was listening, and asked what spider was talking about, "What are you muttering, Anansi?"

"I tell you that my wife, Aso, is a liar, for she says that you are longer than this palm branch and I say that you are not."

Onini, the python, said, "Come and place the branch next to me and we will see if she is a liar."

Anansi stopped up the mouth of the gourd, and spinning a thick web around it, said, "Fools, I'm taking you to the sky-god as price for his stories."

The sky-god, Nyame, accepted Mmoboro, the hornets that swarm and sting, and said, "What remains, still remains."

Anansi knew very well what remained - it was the fairy, Mmoatia, who is never seen. When the spider came back to Earth, he asked Aso what to do. And so, he carved an Akua's child, a wooden doll with a black, flat face, and covered it with sticky fluid from a tree.

Walking through the bush, he found the odum tree, where the fairies like to play. He then made eto, pounded yams, and put some in the doll's hand and even more of the yams into a brass basin at her feet - there by the odum tree. Anansi next hid in the bushes, with a vine creeper in his hands that was also tied to the doll's neck.

It wasn't long before the fairies came, two sisters, to play. They saw the doll with the eto and asked if they could have some. Anansi made the doll's head nod, "Yes", by pulling on the string-creeper. Soon the fairies had eaten all the eto and so, thanked the doll, but the doll did not reply. The fairies became angry.

One sister said, "When I thank her, she says nothing."

The other sister replied, "Then slap her in her crying place."

This the fairy did, she slapped it's cheek - "pa!" - but her hand stuck there. She slapped it with her other hand - "pa!" - and that hand stuck, too. She kicked it with both one foot, then the other, and both feet stuck to the sticky wooden doll. Finally, she pushed her stomach to it and that stuck.

Then Anansi came from his hiding place, and said, "Fool, I have got you, and now I will take you to the sky-god to buy his stories once and for all."

Anansi spun a web around the last of the four creatures and brought Mmoatia up to Nyame in the sky kingdom. The sky-god, seeing this last catch, called together all his nobles. He put it before them and told them that the spider-man had done what no-one else had been able to do. He said in a loud voice that rang in the sky,

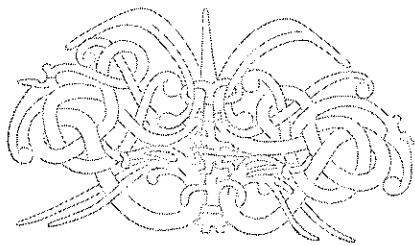
"From now and forever, my sky-god stories belong to you - kose! kose! kose! - my blessing, my blessing, my blessing. We will now call these "Spider Stories"."

And so, child, stories came to Earth because of the great cunning of Kwaku Anansi, and his wife, Aso. When Anansi brought the wooden box of stories to his home, he and his wife eagerly learned each one of them. And you can still see today that Aku and Aso tell their stories. Everywhere you look, they spin their webs for all to see.

Norse Mythology

by
Neil Gaiman

THE LAST DAYS
OF LOKI



Published: 2017

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I

Balder was dead, and the gods were still mourning his loss. They were sad, and the gray rains fell unceasingly, and there was no joy in the land.

Loki, when he returned from one of his journeys to distant parts, was unrepentant.

It was the time of autumn feast in Aegir's hall, where the gods and elves were gathered to drink the sea giant's fresh-brewed ale, brewed in the cauldron Thor had brought back from the land of the giants so long ago.

Loki was there. He drank too much of Aegir's ale, drank himself beyond joy and laughter and trickery and into a brooding darkness. When Loki heard the gods praise Aegir's servant, Fimafeng, for his swiftness and diligence, he sprang up from the table and stabbed Fimafeng with his knife, killing him instantly.

The horrified gods drove Loki out of the feast hall, into the darkness.

Time passed. The feasting continued, but now it was subdued.

There was a commotion at the doorway, and when the gods and goddesses turned to find out what was happening, they saw that Loki had returned. He stood in the entry to the hall staring at them, with a sardonic smile on his face.

"You are not welcome here," said the gods.

Loki ignored them. He walked up to where Odin was sitting. "All-father. You and I mixed our blood long, long ago, did we not?"

Odin nodded. "We did."

Loki smiled even more widely. "Did you not swear back then, great Odin, that you would drink at a banqueting table only if Loki, your sworn blood brother, drank with you?"

Odin's good gray eye stared into Loki's green eyes, and it was Odin who looked away.

"Let the wolf's father feast with us," said Odin gruffly, and he made his son Vidar move over to make room for Loki to sit down beside him.

Loki grinned with malice and delight. He called for more of Aegir's ale and gulped it down.

One by one that night Loki insulted the gods and the goddesses. He told the gods that they were cowards, told the goddesses that they were gullible and unchaste. Each insult was woven with just enough truth to make it wound. He told them that they were fools, reminded them of things they thought were safely forgotten. He sneered and jeered and raised old scandals, and would not stop

making everyone there miserable until Thor arrived at the feast.

Thor ended the conversation very simply: he threatened to use Mjollnir to shut Loki's evil mouth for good and send him to Hel, all the way to the hall of the dead.

Loki left the feast then, but before he swaggered out, he turned to Aegir. "You brewed fine ale," said Loki to the sea giant. "But there will never be another autumn feast here. Flames will take this hall; your skin will be burned from your back by the fire. Everything you love will be taken from you. This I swear."

And he walked away from the gods of Asgard, into the dark.

II

Loki sobered up the next morning and thought about what he had done the night before. He felt no shame, for shame was not Loki's way, but he knew that he had pushed the gods too far.

Loki had a home on a mountain near the sea, and decided to wait there until the gods had forgotten him. He had a house on the top of the mountain with four doors, one on each side, allowing him to see danger coming toward him from any direction.

During the day Loki would transform himself into a salmon, and he would hide in the pool at the bottom of Franang's Falls, a high waterfall that tumbled down

the mountainside. A stream connected the pool to a little river, and the river led directly to the sea.

Loki liked plans and counterplans. As a salmon he was fairly safe, he knew. The gods themselves could not catch salmon as they swam.

But then he began to doubt himself. He wondered, *Could there be a way of catching a fish in the deep waters of the pool beneath the waterfall?*

How would he, the craftiest of all, the most cunning planner, catch a salmon?

Loki took a ball of nettle yarn, and he began to knot and weave it into a fishing net, the first such net ever to be made. *Yes*, he thought. *If I used this net, I could catch a salmon.*

Now, he thought, *to work out a counterplan: what will I do if the gods weave a net like this one?*

He examined the net he had made.

Salmon can jump, he thought. *They can swim upstream, even travel up waterfalls. I could jump over the net.*

Something drew his attention. He peered out from first one door and then another. He was startled: the gods were coming up the mountainside, and they had almost reached his house.

Loki flung the net into the fire and watched it burn with satisfaction. Then he stepped into Franang's Falls. In the shape of a silver salmon, Loki was swept over the waterfall, and he vanished into the depths of the deep pool at the base of the mountain.

The Aesir reached Loki's house on the mountain. They waited by each door, cutting off Loki's escape, if he was still inside.

Kvasir, wisest of the gods, walked in through the first door. Once he had been dead, and mead had been brewed from his blood, but now he was alive once more. He could tell from the fire and from the half-drunk cup of wine beside it that Loki had been there only moments before he arrived.

There was no clue to where Loki could have gone, though. Kvasir scanned the sky. Then he looked down at the floor and at the fireplace.

"He's gone, the sniveling little weasel," said Thor, coming in through another of the four doors. "He could have transformed himself into anything. We'll never find him."

"Do not be so hasty," said Kvasir. "Look."

"It's only ashes," said Thor.

"But look at the pattern of it," said Kvasir. He bent down, touched the ash on the floor beside the fire, sniffed it, then touched it to his tongue. "It is the ash of a cord that has been thrown into the fire and burned. Cord just like that ball of nettle twine in the corner."

Thor rolled his eyes. "I do not think that the ashes of a burned cord are going to tell us where Loki is."

"You think not? But look at the pattern—a criss-cross diamond shape. And the squares are perfectly regular."

"Kvasir, you are wasting all our time admiring the shapes that the ash makes. This is foolishness. Every

moment we spend staring at the ash is time in which Loki is getting farther and farther away."

"Perhaps you are right, Thor. But to make the squares in the cord that regular, you would need something to space them with, like that piece of scrap wood on the floor by your foot. You would need to tie one end of the cord to something as you wove it—something like that stick jutting from the floor over there. Then you would knot and thread your rope, weaving it, so that one piece of cord would form a . . . Hmm. I wonder what Loki called it. I will call it a *net*."

"Why are you still jabbering?" said Thor. "Why are you staring at ash and at sticks and scraps of wood when we could be chasing Loki? Kvasir! As you ponder and talk your nonsense he is getting away from us!"

"I think that such a net as this would be best used to trap fish," said Kvasir.

"I am done with you and your foolishness," sighed Thor. "So it's to be used to trap fish? Well, bully for you. Loki would have been hungry, and so he must have wanted to catch fish to eat. Loki invents things. That's what he does. He always was clever. That's why we used to keep him around."

"You are correct. But ask yourself, why would you, if you were Loki, invent something to trap fish with, and then throw the net you made onto the fire when you knew we were coming?"

"Because . . ." said Thor, creasing his brow and pon-

dering so hard that distant thunder could be heard in the mountaintops. "Er . . ."

"Exactly. Because you would not want us to find it when we arrived. And the only reason for not wanting us to find it is to stop us, the gods of Asgard, from using it to trap you."

Thor nodded slowly. "I see," he said. Then, "Yes, I suppose so," he said. And finally, "So Loki . . ."

" . . . is hiding in the deepwater pool at the foot of the waterfall, in the shape of a fish. Yes, exactly! I knew you would get there in the end, Thor."

Thor nodded with enthusiasm, not entirely certain how he had come to this conclusion from ashes on the floor but happy to know where Loki was hiding.

"I will go down there, to the pool, with my hammer," said Thor. "And I will . . . I will . . ."

"We will need to go down there with a net," said Kvasir, the wise god.

Kvasir took the remaining nettle twine and the piece of spacing wood. He tied the end of the twine to the stick, and he began to wrap the twine around the stick, to weave it in and around and through. He showed the other gods what he was doing, and soon each of them was weaving and knotting. He attached the nets they made one to the other until they had a net as long as the pool, and they made their way down the side of the waterfall to the base of the mountain.

There was a stream that ran out of the pool where it overflowed. That stream ran down toward the sea.

When they reached the base of Franang's Falls, the gods unrolled the net they had made. The net was huge and heavy, and long enough to go from one end of the pool to the other. It took all the warriors of the Aesir to hold up one end of it and Thor to hold up the other end.

The gods started from one end of the pool, beginning immediately underneath the falls and wading until they reached the other side. They caught nothing.

"There's definitely something living down there," said Thor. "I felt it push against the net. But it swam down deeper, into the mud, and the net went over it."

Kvasir scratched his chin thoughtfully. "Not a problem. We need to do it again, but this time we will weigh down the bottom of the net," he said. "So nothing can get underneath it."

The gods gathered heavy stones with holes in them and tied each stone to the bottom of the net as a weight.

The gods waded into the pool again.

Loki had been pleased with himself the first time the gods had entered his pool. He had simply swum down to the muddy bottom of the pool, slipped between two flat stones, and waited while the net had gone above him.

Now he was worried. Down in the dark and the cold, he thought about this.

He could not transform himself into something else until he left the water, and even if he did, the gods would be after him. No, it was safer to remain in salmon shape. But as a salmon he was trapped. He would have to do

what the gods would not be expecting. They would expect him to head for the open sea—he would be safe there, if he got to the sea, even if he would be easy to spot and catch in the river that led from the pool to the bay.

The gods would not expect him to swim back the way he had come. Up the waterfall.

The gods hauled their net along the bottom of the pool. They were intent upon what was happening in the depths, and so were taken by surprise when a huge silver fish, bigger than any salmon they had ever seen before, leapt over the net with a twist of its tail and began swimming upstream. The huge salmon swam up the falls, springing up and defying gravity as if it had been thrown upward into the air.

Kvasir shouted at the Aesir, ordering them to form into two groups, one on one end of the net, one on the other.

"He will not stay in the waterfall for long. It's too exposed. His only chance is still to make it to the sea. So you two groups will walk along, dragging the net between you. Meanwhile, Thor," said Kvasir, who was wise, "you will wade in the middle, and when Loki tries that jumping-over-the-net trick again, you must snatch him from the air, like a bear catching a salmon. Do not let him go, though. He is tricky."

Thor said, "I have seen bears pluck leaping salmon from the air. I am strong, and I am as fast as any bear. I will hold on."

The gods began to drag the net upstream, toward the

place where the huge silver salmon was biding its time. Loki planned and plotted.

As the net came closer, Loki knew that this was the critical moment. He had to leap the net as he had done before, and this time he would race toward the sea. He tensed, like a spring about to whip back, and then he shot into the air.

Thor was fast. He saw the silver salmon glitter in the sun, and he grabbed it with his huge hands, just as a hungry bear snatches a salmon from the air. Salmon are slippery fish, and Loki was the slipperiest of salmon; he wriggled and tried to slip through Thor's fingers, but Thor simply gripped the fish harder and squeezed it tightly, down by the tail.

They say that salmon have been narrower near the tail ever since.

The gods brought their net, and they wrapped it tightly around the fish and carried it between them. The salmon began to drown in the air, gasping for water, and then it thrashed and twitched, and now they were carrying a panting Loki.

"What are you doing?" he asked. "Where are you taking me?"

Thor just shook his head and grunted, and did not reply. Loki asked the other gods, but none of them would tell him what was happening, and none of them would meet his eye.

III

The gods entered the mouth of a cave, and with Loki slung between them, they went down deep into the earth. Stalactites hung from the ceiling of the cave, and bats fluttered and flickered. They went down lower. Soon the way was too narrow to carry Loki, and now they let him walk between them. Thor walked immediately behind Loki, his hand on Loki's shoulder.

They went down a long, long way.

In the deepest of the caves there were brands burning, and three people stood there, waiting for them. Loki recognized them before he saw their faces, and his heart sank. "No," he said. "Do not hurt them. They did nothing wrong."

Thor said, "They are your sons and your wife, Loki Lie-Smith."

There were three huge flat stones in that cave. The Aesir set each stone on its side, and Thor took his hammer. He broke a hole through the middle of each stone.

"Please! Let our father go," said Narfi, Loki's son.

"He is our father," said Vali, Loki's other son. "You have sworn oaths that you will not kill him. He is a blood brother and an oath brother to Odin, highest of the gods."

"We will not kill him," said Kvasir. "Tell me, Vali, what is the worst thing that one brother could do to another?"

"For a brother to betray his brother," said Vali, without hesitating. "For a brother to murder a brother, as Hod killed Balder. This is abominable."

Kvasir said, "It is true that Loki is a blood brother to the gods, and we cannot kill him. But we are bound by no such oaths to you, his sons."

Kvasir spoke words to Vali, words of change, words of power.

Vali's human shape fell from him, and where Vali had stood was a wolf, foam flecking its muzzle. The intelligence of Vali was fading from its yellow eyes, to be replaced by hunger, by anger, by madness. It looked at the gods, at Sigyn, who had been its mother, and finally it saw Narfi. It growled low and long in the back of its throat, and its hackles rose.

Narfi took a step back, only a step, and then the wolf was on him.

Narfi was brave. He did not scream, not even when the wolf that had been his brother tore him apart, ripping open his throat and spilling his guts onto the rock floor. The wolf that had been Vali howled once, long and loudly, through blood-soaked jaws. Then it sprang high, over the heads of the gods, and it ran off into the cave-darkness and would not be seen in Asgard again, not until the end of everything.

The gods forced Loki onto the three great stones: they put one of the stones beneath his shoulders, one under his loins, and one beneath his knees. The gods took Narfi's spilled entrails, and they pushed them through the holes they had made in the stones, binding Loki's neck and shoulders tightly. They wound the entrails of his son

around his loins and his hips, tied his knees and legs so tightly he could barely move. Then the gods transformed the intestines of Loki's murdered son into fetters so tight and so hard that they might have been iron.

Sigyn, Loki's wife, had watched as her husband was bound in the entrails of their son, and she said nothing. She wept silently to herself for the pain of her husband, for the death and the dishonor of their sons. She held a bowl, although she did not yet know why. Before the gods had brought her there, they had told her to go to her kitchen and bring the biggest bowl she had.

Skadi, giant daughter of dead Thiazi, wife of Njord of the beautiful feet, came into the cave then. She carried something huge in her hands, something that writhed and twisted. She bent over Loki and placed the thing she carried above him, winding it about the stalactites that hung from the ceiling of the cave, so that its head was just above Loki's own.

It was a snake, cold of eye, its tongue flickering, its fangs dripping with poison. It hissed, and a drop of poison from its mouth dripped onto Loki's face, making his eyes burn.

Loki screamed and contorted, writhing and twisting in pain. He tried to get out of the way, to move his head from beneath the poison. The bonds that had once been the entrails of his own son held him tightly.

One by one the gods left that place, with grimly satisfied looks on their faces. Soon only Kvasir was left. Sigyn

looked at her bound husband and at the disemboweled corpse of her wolf-murdered son.

"What are you going to do to me?" she asked.

"Nothing," said Kvasir. "You are not being punished. You may do whatever you wish." And then even he left that place.

Another drop of the serpent's venom dripped onto Loki's face, and he screamed and threw himself about, writhing in his bonds. The earth itself shook at Loki's threshing.

Sigyn took her bowl and went to her husband. She said nothing—what was there to say?—but she stood beside Loki's head, with tears in her eyes, and caught each drop of poison as it fell from the snake's fangs into her bowl.

This all happened long, long ago, in time out of mind, in the days when the gods still walked the earth. So long ago that the mountains of those days have worn away and the deepest lakes have become dry land.

Sigyn still waits beside Loki's head as she did then, staring at his beautiful, twisted face.

The bowl she holds fills slowly, one drop at a time, but eventually the poison fills the bowl to the brim. It is then and only then that Sigyn turns away from Loki. She takes the bowl and pours the venom away, and while she is gone, the snake's poison falls onto Loki's face and into his eyes. He convulses then, jerks and judders, jolts and twists and writhes, so much that the whole earth shakes.

When that happens, we here in Midgard call it an earthquake.

They say that Loki will be bound there in the darkness beneath the earth, and Sigyn will be with him, holding the bowl to catch the poison above his face and whispering that she loves him, until Ragnarok comes and brings the end of days.