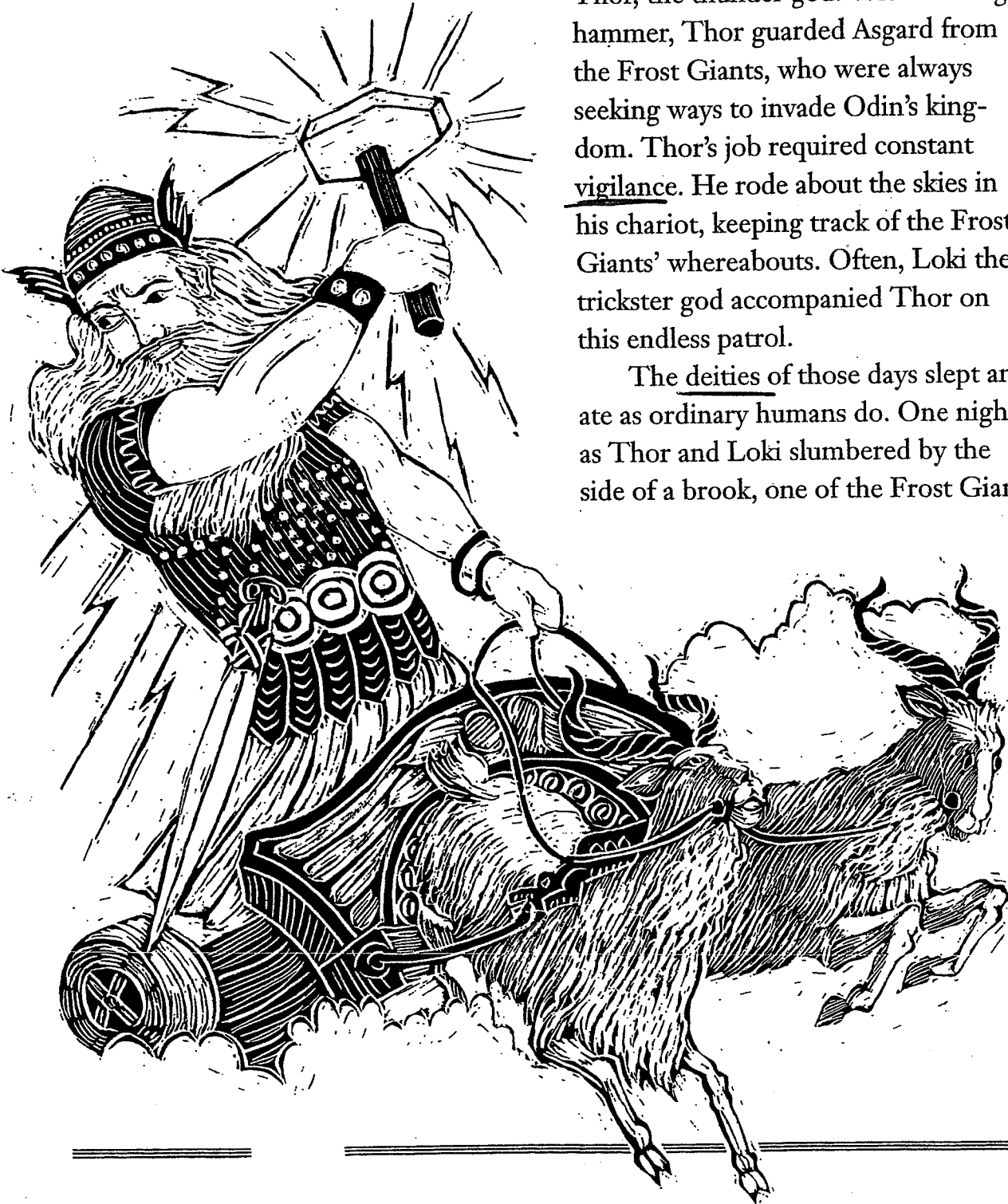


THOR AND HIS HAMMER

SCANDINAVIA

High in the heavens above the northern lands lay Asgard, the home of the gods and goddesses. Odin was their ruler, but their chief protector was Thor, the thunder god. With his magic hammer, Thor guarded Asgard from the Frost Giants, who were always seeking ways to invade Odin's kingdom. Thor's job required constant vigilance. He rode about the skies in his chariot, keeping track of the Frost Giants' whereabouts. Often, Loki the trickster god accompanied Thor on this endless patrol.

The deities of those days slept and ate as ordinary humans do. One night, as Thor and Loki slumbered by the side of a brook, one of the Frost Giants



stole Thor's hammer and carried it to the Frost King. When Thor and Loki awoke and saw that the hammer was missing, they were filled with alarm.

"How shall I defend Asgard now?" cried Thor. "Surely the Frost Giants will come to Asgard and take our stronghold!"

"We must get the hammer back," said Loki, "and I think I know the way to do this. Let us go to the goddess Freyja and borrow her falcon garment."

Now, Freyja was the goddess of love and beauty, and since love and beauty have many forms, Freyja often went about in disguises. The falcon garment, made of strong and shining feathers, was one of these, and whoever put it on looked just like a bird.

In Thor's chariot, the thunder god and Loki rode to Freyja's palace. "Asgard is in great danger," Thor said to the goddess, "for the Frost Giants now have my hammer, and without it I am helpless to protect our kingdom. Pray lend us your falcon garment, Freyja."

"I shall put it on and fly to the land of the Frost Giants," said Loki. "I shall try to trick them into giving the hammer back."

"For this great purpose," answered Freyja, "I would lend you my garment even if it were made of gold and silver."

So, donning the winged garment, Loki flew to Utgard, the icy caves of the Frost Giants, where he found their king making golden collars for his dogs and silver bridles for his horses. The king was not fooled by Loki's disguise. "Ah, Loki," he said, "how goes it in Asgard?"

"As if you did not know!" said Loki. "I am here to fetch the hammer of Thor, which one of your people has stolen from us."

"And do you think I would be so foolish as to return the hammer," laughed the Frost King, "after I have gone to all this trouble to get it? I have buried the hammer deep in the ice, where you will never find it. There is only one from Asgard to whom I will give the hammer, and that is the goddess Freyja, if she will come to me and be my wife!"

Now, Loki did not know what to say to this. He turned and flew away from Utgard and went back to Thor and Freyja, who were waiting anxiously outside her palace. "Did you bring it?" asked Thor. "Did you get my hammer?"



Loki explained the bargain the Frost King wished to make. Then bowing to Freyja, Loki said, "It is up to you to marry the Frost King, my lady. Otherwise, all Asgard is doomed."

"Marry the Frost King!" sputtered Freyja. "That I will never do! I will never leave Asgard to marry that cruel, hideous giant and live in his ice-covered, bitter cold kingdom."

"But then what should we do?" pleaded Thor.

"I do not know," said Freyja, turning away from him. "It is your fault the hammer is gone, and thus it is your responsibility to get it back." And sternly she left him and went into her palace.

Swiftly Thor and Loki went to the court of Odin and told him what had happened to the hammer and how

Freyja had refused to marry the Frost King.

"This calls for a council of all the gods and goddesses of Asgard," said Odin. He summoned them to him, and for hours the deities pondered the situation without coming up with a solution.

At last Heimdall, who was the watchman of the rainbow, said, "Let us dress Thor in Freyja's garments, braid his long golden hair, and give him a bridal veil. Disguised in this way, he can go to Utgard as the Frost King's bride. Once the wedding ceremony is over, the Frost King will give his bride the hammer, as he promised he would do."

Thor protested, but Loki said, "Listen, this is a good plan of Heimdall's. And you need not go to Utgard alone. I will dress as your bridesmaid and attend you."

And so the gods and goddesses of Asgard braided Thor's golden hair and dressed him as a bride, with a long, heavy veil to cover his face. And Loki was true to his promise and decked himself out as the bride's attendant. Clothed in this way, the two gods descended to Utgard.

The Frost King was overjoyed to think he had actually won the fair Freyja as a wife. He ordered a huge wedding feast to be prepared and called all his subjects to attend. But the King looked astounded as he watched his bride eat, lifting huge portions of food to her mouth under her heavy veil. For Thor was always a good eater, and this time he ate a whole ox, eight salmon, and three casks of mead.

"Never have I seen a woman eat so much!" exclaimed the King.

But Loki whispered into the King's ear, "Freyja has been so excited and happy about this wedding that she has not been able to eat for eight days, your majesty."

This answer pleased the Frost King. "Come," he said, "Let me lift your veil, my bride, so that I may give you a kiss."

But when the King lifted the veil, such beams of light shot from Thor's

eyes that the King stepped back in alarm. "Why does my bride have such sharp eyes?" he exclaimed.

Again Loki whispered to him. "Her eyes shine from fatigue," he said, "for she has been unable to sleep for eight nights, so excited and happy she has been as she thought of her wedding."

This answer, too, pleased the Frost King. "Let the hammer be brought forth as my gift to my bride!" he commanded. As the king's servants left to retrieve the hammer from its icy grave, Thor could scarcely maintain his composure. And when the hammer was finally laid in his lap, he took it in his hands, threw off his disguise and stood in all his mighty splendor as the thunder god.

Wielding his mighty hammer, Thor swept down upon the Frost Giants and killed many of them. Then he and Loki returned triumphant to Asgard, which now once again was saved. Thor was careful to never again let his hammer leave his fist. And his strength became even greater, for Odin gave him a magic belt, which doubled his power when he tightened it, and an iron glove to use when he threw thunderbolts. ♦

THE STORY OF OISIN

.....
I R E L A N D

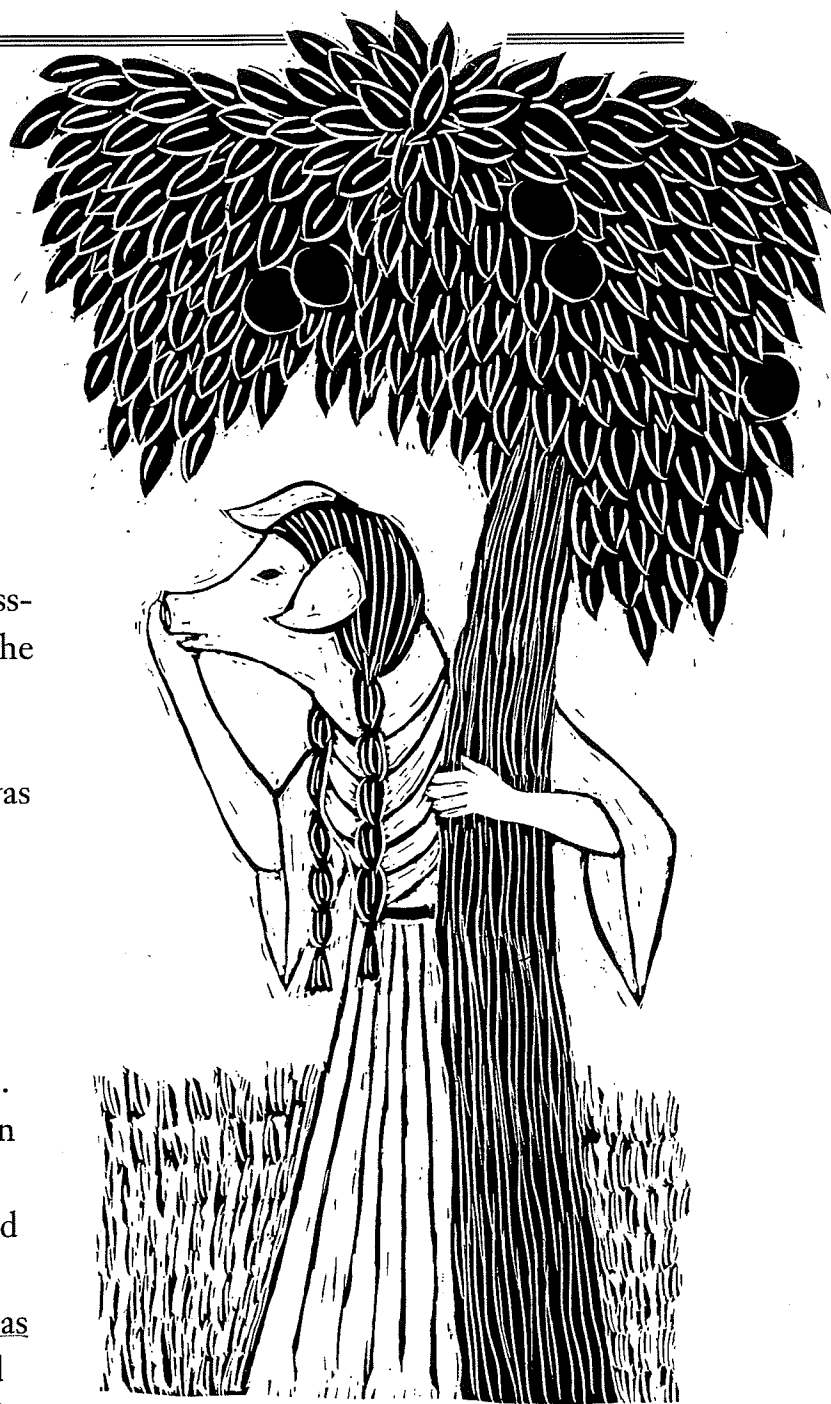
There was a mystic land called Tir Na N-og, or the Land of the Blessed. It was in the clouds and beyond the Western Sea, and no one ever grew old there. The King of Tir Na N-og had ruled there forever, and yet he was afraid that someone might take his throne from him.

The king called his Druid, or wiseman, to him and asked, "Will I always rule in Tir Na N-og?"

"That you shall," said the Druid. "Unless your daughter marries. Then her husband will rule in your place."

Now, the Princess was a kind and beautiful woman, and the king loved her. But he did not love her as much as he loved his own power. So he called his daughter to him and said, "I shall make sure that no man ever wants to marry you!" And with that, the king changed the girl's head into the head of a pig.

The girl wept bitterly, and the Druid was filled with remorse that he had given such information to the king.



"Listen to me, my dear," said the Druid. "You need not have this pig's head forever. If you go back to Erin and find Oisin, the son of Finn MacCumhail, and if you can convince him to marry you, then your own lovely face will be restored. Furthermore,

you will have for yourself one of the finest young men on Earth as a husband, for Oisín is as wise and kind as he is brave and strong. Bring him back here to Tír Na N-óg, and he shall be King."

The Princess stopped her weeping just a bit. She said, "And how am I going to convince a man to marry a woman with a pig's head?"

"Ah, that I truly do not know," said the Druid, scratching his head. "You will have to use your ingenuity."

The Princess was filled with doubt, but there seemed no other path to take. Descending through the clouds from Tír Na N-óg to Erin, she found herself in a thick forest. The sound of axes felling trees sounded not far away, and all about her feet lay piles of cut wood. Soon the sound of chopping stopped, and the Princess heard the laughter of young men coming closer and closer. Quickly she hid behind a tree.

Four handsome lads appeared. "Now that we've got a good supply of firewood here," said one of them, "we must carry it back to our father's home."

"Not I!" said another lad. "I am too tired."

"We'll cut wood but not carry it!" said the other two.

"Then who is to do it, brothers?" asked the first young man.

"Do it yourself, Oisín," the three laughed. And they left him and went away.

Oisín sat down, quite discouraged. "I can't carry all this wood!" he muttered to himself.

The Princess, trembling with fear but determined to conquer it, stepped out from behind the tree. "Perhaps I can help you," she said shyly to Oisín.

Oisín leapt to his feet, thoroughly startled. "Upon my word!" he exclaimed. "Never have I seen such an ugly woman!"

"I was not always thus," said the Princess, beginning to weep again. "My face was once as fair as any woman's in Erin. Will you listen to my story?"

"Most willingly," said Oisín, sitting down again.

And so the Princess told him of the cruel enchantment, and of how she would regain her own face only if he, Oisín, would consent to marry her, and of how Oisín would then become King of Tír Na N-óg.

"If that's the situation," said Oisín, "why, I'll marry you immediately!"

And he did, and immediately the Princess's pig head was replaced with her own beautiful one.

"Now, my dear husband," said the princess, "I cannot stay here in Erin any longer. Come, follow me back to the Land of the Blessed." She took Oisín's hand and led him through clouds and mist to Tir Na N-og.

In that mystical place, the old King welcomed his daughter, for he was deeply sorry for what he had done to her. Gladly he handed over his throne to his new son-in-law. Now Oisín was King, and his bride was the Queen of this land of youth and beauty.

The time passed swiftly because it was a time of happy days. In Tir Na N-og, there was always feasting and games and music and laughter. Oisín felt blessed indeed to be ruler of such a pleasant kingdom. But after a while, he began to think about his father and his brothers and his friends and his home in Erin. He was curious to see how they were faring and sad to think that he might never see his aging father again. Oisín shared these thoughts with his wife.

"Ah, dear husband," said the Queen. "How long do you think you have been here?"

"About three years," said Oisín.

"No, you have been here for three *hundred* years," said his wife. "All the people you long to see in Erin have long since died. Even the land itself is different. You would recognize very little there. Be content here. Stay with me."

But Oisín grew insistent. "Just once," he said. "I want to go back to Erin just once. Then I shall return to you."

"There is only one way you can do that," said the Queen. "You must ride my white horse through the mist to your homeland. But you must never get off the horse. If your foot so much as touches the ground, you will be lost to me forever."

"Then my foot shall never touch the ground," promised Oisín. "Have the white horse brought to me."

The horse was a marvel of strength and beauty, with soft, intelligent eyes, and swift as the wind. Mounting this steed, Oisín bade farewell to the Queen, assuring her again that he would return quickly. The Queen watched as the horse galloped into the clouds, bearing her beloved husband. Then she turned away.

In no time at all, Oisín was in Erin. He rode through the countryside toward his father's home. How strange the land looked. The forests were almost gone. "My brothers have been busy at their woodcutting, I see!" thought Oisín. Stranger still, nearing his father's land, he saw no barns or cottages, only heaps of stone.

And when he reached the place where his father's house had stood, there was only a mass of rocks and weeds.

Oisín began to weep. "It is as my wife told me," he cried. Everything I once knew is now gone! I shall return to Tir Na N-og."

As he turned the reins to head back, he spied an old man coming along the road.

"I say there, my good man," called Oisín. "What has become of the great family of Finn MacCumhail, the family that once dwelled here? Are there none of them left?"

The old man looked at him quizzically. "Ah, sir," he said. "They all died long, long ago. Long before I was born. Indeed, long before my grandmother was born! See," he said, kicking away with his boot a tuft of grass. "There is the old, mouldering

tombstone of Finn MacCumhail himself."

"Please hand it up to me," said Oisín. "I wish to read what it says."

"Get down from your horse and do it yourself!" said the old man. "I am an old, weak fellow, and you are young and strong!" And with that the old man went on his way.

Oisín leaned from his saddle, reaching down for the tombstone. Farther and farther over he leaned, as the horse whinnied in alarm.

Just as his hand was almost touching the tip of the stone, Oisín's foot slipped from the stirrup, his toe touched the ground, and he fell from the saddle. The great white horse bolted away and stood mournfully at a distance, staring at the man who had been his rider. Just a moment ago so strong and young, Oisín was now withered and ancient.

"Come, White Horse," said Oisín, his voice crackled with age. "Carry me back to Tir Na N-og!"

But this of course, could not be done. The horse bowed its head in farewell, and then disappeared into the mists, returning to the Land of the Blessed where the Queen stood sadly waiting. ♦

PROMETHEUS AND PANDORA

.....
G R E E C E



In the Days Before Time, it is said that the gods and goddesses quarreled a great deal. Zeus, the king of them all, along with many other deities argued that all heavenly powers should be kept for the gods and goddesses alone. Other deities, like Prometheus, argued that some of these powers should be shared with humans so that they could better their lives. ★

In sadness, Prometheus watched men and women crawling about the Earth, with no way to keep warm in winter's blast, no way to make tools. "It is fire they need," thought Prometheus, "fire, until now the possession of Zeus alone. But I shall bring fire from the heavens to Earth, though Zeus forbids it."

To carry out his plan, Prometheus had to be stealthy. With a single branch of wood, he lit a fire from the

flaming wheels of the chariot that carried the sun across the skies. Prometheus carried this flaming torch to Earth and thus delivered fire to humans.

With Prometheus's gift, human life underwent a remarkable change. Now humans could cook their food or smoke and preserve it for later use. With the warmth of fire, people could survive the bitterest winters. With the heat of fire, humans could smelt metals and turn them into tools to use for agriculture. With fire, people could also form metals into art objects and make coins to use in commerce with distant groups of humans. All human life became better as a result of Prometheus's daring deed.

★ But Zeus was furious at what Prometheus had done and racked his mind for a way to punish this upstart and return humans to a life of hardship.

Finally, Zeus hit upon a solution. In concert with the other gods and goddesses, he made a woman who was exemplary in every way, and he named her Pandora. She was designed to appeal to Prometheus, for she had beauty, wisdom, and wit. Zeus gave this lovely woman an exquisite lidded jar and sent her to Earth.

"Prometheus," announced Zeus, "Pandora is the perfect wife for you, for she has all the qualities you admire."

Now, Prometheus was too wise not to suspect a gift from Zeus, and so he suggested to his brother Epimetheus that he marry Pandora instead. Epimetheus was more than willing, and he and Pandora were wed.

"But what is it that you carry in that lidded jar?" asked Epimetheus of his bride.

"I don't know," said Pandora. "I know only that Zeus told me never to open it."

What more could one say to arouse curiosity? One night, when Pandora was sleeping, Epimetheus quietly removed the jar's lid. Immediately the room, and all the World, was filled with a furious buzzing and humming and stinging. Dreadful things were released from the jar: war and sickness and despair and anger; suspicion and hunger and feuds and doubt. These torments went flying over the world of humans, changing their peaceful life into discord. ★

But unbeknownst to Zeus, Athena had put something into the jar that could help to allay all these



✧ miseries, and this thing was Hope. And Hope flew out all over the world to serve as a balance to the woes that had escaped from Pandora's jar.

Zeus's anger at Prometheus was not allayed. After all, this young god had not only dared to argue with him but had also defied him and stolen fire from him. He had given a gift to humans that Zeus never intended them to have.

To punish Prometheus for his rebellion, Zeus hit upon a terrible revenge. He ordered some of the minor gods to capture Prometheus and chain him with unbreakable links to the top of Mount Caucasus. "There among the rocks and wind you shall stay until

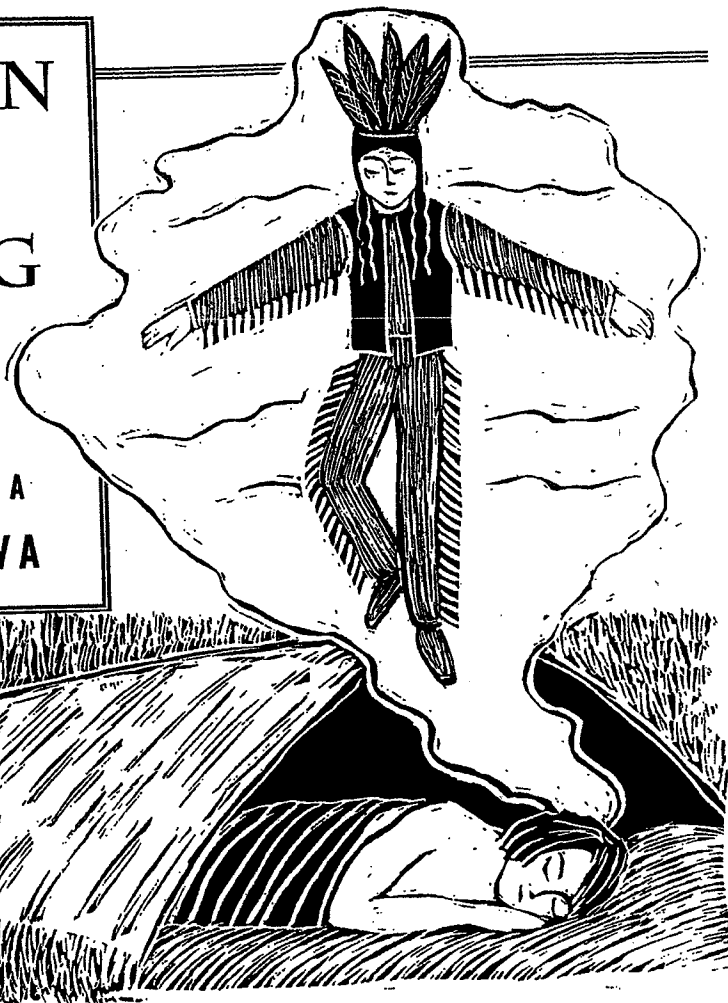
the end of time," thundered Zeus. "And to add to your miseries, I shall send my eagle to pluck away at your eyes and your body for eternity. You will never be released until you beg my forgiveness and swear to me your eternal allegiance and obedience."

Prometheus laughed bitterly. "That I shall never do, Mighty Zeus," he said defiantly. And so he remained chained and tortured for many centuries, some say for thirty thousand years. But never in all this time was Prometheus forgotten by humans. Indeed, he was honored by them for the gift of fire, and many gifts and prayers were offered to him.

In time, Zeus, worried that Prometheus was so loved by humans, and understanding that he would never relent, decided to free him. But who could break the unbreakable chains? There was only one being strong enough, and that was Hercules. And so it was this mighty giant who broke Prometheus's bonds and slew the eagle who had caused him such agony. The young god strode down from the mountaintop, as strong and defiant as he had ever been and went about the world of humans to find still more ways to help them. ♦

ELDEST SON AND THE WRESTLING MATCH

NORTH AMERICA
CHIPPEWA-OJIBWA



In the time before people counted time, there was a good man who had several children. The father had difficulty feeding them all, for this was in the days when people only got food by hunting animals or gathering berries and nuts. Game was not always plentiful, and the land was not always fruitful. Eldest Son grieved when his young brothers and sisters had to go hungry.

Now, one spring Eldest Son reached the age when he was to go away to pursue his Guardian Spirit Quest. All young boys looked forward to this time, for the boy would find his special name and discover the special

power that would be given to him by his Guardian Spirit. The Quest was never easy. The boy had to go off into an isolated place, build a shelter, and go without food for seven days.

Eldest Son went on his Quest with a serious, happy heart. He walked through the forest for two days, observing everything around him with great respect, and thinking to himself, "I wish I could find a way for my people to get enough food without hunting animals every day to eat."

On the third day, weak with hunger, Eldest Son built himself a shelter and lay down to rest. "Perhaps in my

dreams," he thought, "I will come upon a way to help my people."

And in his dream, it happened that way. Eldest Son saw a man coming down from the sky, dressed in green and yellow colors and wearing a plume of waving feathers on his head.

"I am your Guardian Spirit," said the sky-visitor. "I have been sent to you by the Sky Chief. The Sky Chief knows the kind and worthy wish in your secret heart and is pleased that you do not seek to use your strength to make war. He has given you the spirit name Wunzh. And I am sent to test you and to show you how to obtain your wish."

Then the sky-visitor ordered Wunzh to wrestle with him. This was a great challenge for a boy weak from lack of food. But Wunzh did as he was told and wrestled with his Guardian Spirit. Just as the boy was about to give up in exhaustion, the sky-visitor stopped and rose.

"This is enough for today," he said. "I shall come back tomorrow to test you again."

The next day at the same time Wunzh's Guardian Spirit appeared, and the wrestling match began again. Wunzh felt his courage increasing, and he put all his mind and heart into the

task. Still, he could feel himself weakening. But just before he fell to the ground, the Guardian Spirit stopped the match.

"Tomorrow will be your last chance," said the spirit. "I urge you to be strong, for this is the only way you will achieve your secret wish."

Wunzh dropped exhausted to his bed. He had only enough strength left to pray to the Sky Chief for the courage to endure the next wrestling match. And when the Guardian Spirit reappeared the next day, the boy drove forward with endurance and determination. Though his legs felt like rubber and his arms were weak, Wunzh wrestled on. Again the Guardian Spirit stopped the match. But this time he declared himself conquered by Wunzh.

"Listen to me, Wunzh," said the spirit. "Because you have wrestled manfully and courageously, the Great Sky Chief has granted your secret desire. Now listen well to my final instructions to you. Tomorrow is your seventh day of fasting. We will wrestle again, and you will prevail over me. When I fall to the ground, clean the earth of roots and weeds and make the ground soft. Then bury me in the very spot where I have fallen and cover the

spot with my yellow and green clothes and then with soil.

"When you have done this, leave my body in the earth and do not disturb it. Come back once a month to see that no weeds or grass cover my grave. Cover me with fresh soil. If you follow my instructions, you will succeed in your Guardian Spirit Quest. You will help your family and all your people by teaching them what I have taught you."

When the Guardian Spirit returned the next day, Wunzh felt himself filled with superhuman strength and easily threw his opponent to the ground. He then followed in every detail the burial instructions his Guardian had given him and finally returned weary and exhausted and starving to his parents' lodge.

All that spring and summer, Wunzh returned faithfully to the grave of his Guardian Spirit, tending and cleaning it and keeping the ground soft and pliable as he had been instructed. In midsummer, the boy noticed the tops of green plumes emerging through the earth. He noticed, too, that the more care he gave the plants the faster the plumes grew. By summer's end, the plumes were topped with silken hair,

and gold clusters clung to each side of each stalk. It was only then that Wunzh understood how his Quest had been rewarded and how his secret wish had been granted. It was only then that Wunzh felt free to bring his father to this secret place where his Guardian Spirit lay buried.

"Father," said Wunzh, "these are the plants from my Guardian Spirit, whose name is Mon daw-min, or 'corn for all people.' This is the answer to my Quest! No longer will we have to depend solely on animals and berries for our food! As long as we care for the earth, the earth will give us this food!"

Then Wunzh showed his father how the husks should be pulled from the stalks and how some of the seeds must be saved for planting for the next season. He showed how to hold the corn in the fire just long enough for the outer leaves to turn brown, while the kernels remained sweet and juicy.

Wunzh's family and his people held a Feast of Corn and thanked the Great Sky Spirit for this gift. As for Wunzh, he thanked his Guardian Spirit, too, and was grateful that his wish had been granted and that his Spirit Quest had been successfully completed. ♦