

OLD STORY OF MISTLETOE

How It Came to Be Invitation to Man to Do His Primate Duty.

HAS TROUBLESOME DREAMS

Custom of Kissing Under the Mistletoe Dates Back to the Days When Thor and Odin Ruled.

The custom of kissing under the mistletoe goes back to the days when Thor and Odin and all the other gods of the north-land walked and talked with men.

Baldur, the son of Odin and Frigga, the Apollo of Scandinavian mythology, the flaxen haired goddess of sunshine and its attendant blessings, was loved by all earthly and heavenly beings save one—Loki, the god of early fire and its attendant evils.

Naturally Loki would hate him, for in the spring when Baldur came forth with his bright and warm sunlight the world's people deserted Loki's hearth fires and did not return to them until the golden faced god chose to depart in the fall. But Baldur with his happy nature cared little for the other's jealousy and in the love of his wife, Nanna (blossom), lived for years a joyous existence.

At length, however, says a writer in Uncle Remus' Magazine, he began to have troublesome dreams—visions of disaster and of death. What could it mean? It was all so new to him, this love of light and pleasure. He consulted the mother, Frigga, and she in her distress sent word to Odin.

Long Frigga thought and then she devised a plan; she sent messengers far and wide through the universe and had every creature, animate or inanimate, swear to do her son no harm. Willingly all promised, for did not all love the sunlight god? All? No, the surly mistletoe refused to swear, and that was the cause of great future sorrow. But what injury could a bit of mistletoe do? Frigga was all joy; her darling was safe from anything sprung from earth, air, fire or water!

Promised No Harm.
Now as the years passed and the gods learned how absolutely safe Baldur was from any wound whatever they frequently amused themselves by using him for a target for all sorts of missiles—stones, clubs and weapons. One day as they were playing thus and shouting with laughter at their failures Frigga, sitting at her spinning wheel, asked an old woman who was passing what was the cause of all the merriment.

"The gods," answered the old woman, "are amusing themselves trying to hurt your son."

"Ah," said Frigga, with a boastful smile, "they can never do it, for all things have promised not to harm him."

"All things?" inquired the old woman. "Yes, all things, except the mistletoe, who, of course, is too significant to trouble any one." The old woman was Loki in disguise.

Hastening away, the evil god went straight to the mistletoe that grew on the oak outside the gates of Valhalla and breaking off a piece turned it by magic art into a hard, sharp dart. Then hurrying back he found the gods still playing the game—all except Baldur's blind brother, Hodur, who, leaning gloomily against a tree and listened in silence to the laughter.

"Why do you not play, Hodur?" said Loki.

"How can I?" answered Hodur. "Am I not blind?"

"Ah," laughed Loki, "I will show you how. Stand thus and throw this dart with all your strength."

The mistletoe shaft hissed through the air, and Baldur, the god of life giving light, fell dead.

Tenderly the gods placed his body upon his favorite ship, the Ringhorn, and prepared to give both to the sea. Then all the heavenly ones came to gaze upon the beloved face; but Nanna, bending over him, could not bear the sight, and her heart broke, and she was laid beside him on the vessel. Then the great ship was set afloat and floated, a sheet of flame, out on the distant waters. And even yet we may see at sunset the burning vessel of Baldur far in the west.

Now the gods felt that some show of justice must be made, and in consultation, hoping to soothe the passionate sorrow of the mother, Frigga, they dedicated the mistletoe to her; and to this day it is under her care and control. And now sin and sorrow had hallowed it; for henceforth it was to grow, not as a symbol of bitterness and hatred, but as a sign of tenderness and love.

But the gods decreed that it was to stand for these things only so long as it touched not Loki's kingdom, the soil, and for this reason it is never seen growing on the ground and we ourselves always hang it high on the rafters or chandeliers. And now that it was the plant of love, the custom arose for enemies to become friends under the mistletoe, for lovers to pledge their truth beneath it, and for those who met there to kiss as a sign of affectionate fellowship.

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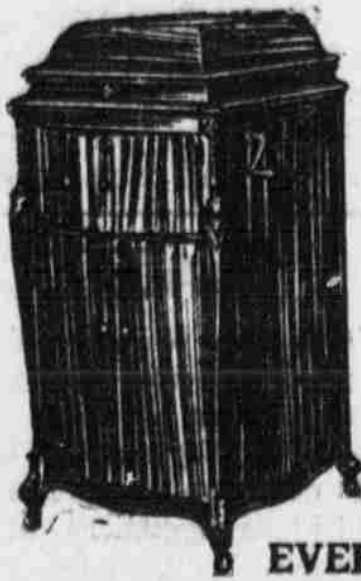
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