Name: _____ Date: _____

Loki and the Falcon

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 732 words

The Norse gods had a secret that kept them young. It was a box of golden apples, and it belonged to a goddess called Idun. She lived in Asgard, the gods' city in the sky. Whenever a god felt his years growing heavy, he ate one apple. Then he was strong and fresh again.

Three of the gods went wandering over the mountains one day. They were Odin, Loki and Hoenir. Hungry at nightfall, they found some cattle in a valley, built a fire and set a pot of meat to cook. But the water would not boil. They waited and waited, and the meat stayed raw.

A voice called from the tree above. "Share the meal with me and your pot will work," it said. The gods looked up and saw an enormous eagle. They agreed, and the pot began to bubble at once. Then the eagle flew down and snatched most of the meat. Loki lost his temper and grabbed a long stick.

The stick clung to the eagle's back, and Loki's hands clung to the stick. The bird rose and towed him just above the ground. "Release me!" Loki shouted. "Only if you promise to bring me Idun, with her apples," said the eagle. Loki, scared, gave his word.

The eagle turned out to be a giant, Thjasse, in a coat of feathers. He let Loki go, and Loki limped home and told his friends nothing. On the day they had settled, Loki found Idun. In his sweetest voice, he said that he had found some apples in the woods. She must see them. "Bring yours, to compare," he added.

Idun believed him, since everyone in Asgard trusted Loki then. She lifted her box and walked into the forest by his side. As soon as they were among the trees, Thjasse swept down in his eagle coat. He grasped her and carried her off to his cold stone house in the snowy north.

With Idun and her apples gone, the gods of Asgard began to change. Gray hairs appeared. Their backs curved, their knees creaked and their eyes lost their shine. They gathered to talk it over. Odin asked who had seen Idun last, and a voice replied that she had gone into the woods with Loki.

Odin turned to Loki. "Fetch her back," he said, "or the gods will never trust you again." Loki lowered his eyes, for he knew he was to blame. "If Freyja will lend me her falcon coat," he said, "I will fly north and bring Idun home." Freyja gladly brought the coat.

Wearing the falcon's feathers, Loki rose into the air and sped north across the mountains and the sea. At the rim of the world, he spotted a lonely house, cold and gray. Thjasse had gone out in a boat to fish. Idun was inside alone, with nobody to speak to.

She was so happy to see Loki that tears came to her eyes. Yet he had no time to chat. With a spell, he turned her into a small nut. He grasped the nut in his talons. Then he beat his wings

as hard as he could and headed for home.

When Thjasse rowed back and found the house empty, he flew into a rage. He put on his eagle coat and chased after the falcon. Eagles are bigger and stronger than falcons. Loki, burdened by the nut, could not outfly him. Behind him, the sound of wings grew louder.

Back in Asgard, the aged gods kept watching the sky. They spotted a falcon with an eagle close behind. Then they hobbled to the top of their city's wall. They lined up shoulder to shoulder. "Fly over us!" they cried to Loki. All of them stood firm, tired as they were.

Loki shot above their heads and tumbled onto the grass inside the wall, holding the nut tight. The giant was almost upon him. But Thjasse saw the whole line of gods waiting on the wall. He pulled up, wheeled around and flew back toward the north. He was not seen again.

Loki shed the falcon coat, and Idun stood before them once more. She opened her box. Each god took an apple, and every gray head shone gold, every bent back straightened and the dull eyes brightened. From then on, the story says, the gods guarded Idun with great care.

Questions

1. What did Loki promise the eagle?

A. To bring a pot of food
B. To bring Odin
C. To bring Idun and her apples

2. How did Loki trick Idun?

A. He said she had won a prize
B. He said he had found apples to compare
C. He said Odin wanted her

3. How did Loki carry Idun home?

A. In a boat
B. As a nut in his talons
C. On the eagle's back

4. Why did the giant turn back at the wall?

A. He ran out of breath
B. He forgot the way
C. He saw the gods waiting for him

5. Loki was burdened by the nut. What does burdened mean?

A. Weighed down
B. Made happy
C. Very angry

Words to know

falcon: fast bird
talons: bird's claws
hobbled: walked stiffly
towed: pulled along
burdened: weighed down

Answer key: Loki and the Falcon

1. C. To bring Idun and her apples
2. B. He said he had found apples to compare
3. B. As a nut in his talons
4. C. He saw the gods waiting for him
5. A. Weighed down