



Oh Loki Night

A SHORT STORY



ALAN EARLY

THE FATHER OF LIES CHRONICLES

Intro

This story takes place a couple of months after the events of 'Arthur Quinn and the World Serpent' and just before the events of 'Arthur Quinn and the Fenris Wolf'. I hope you enjoy it!

Merry Christmas!

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'K. E.' with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Loki was dead tired: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that.

He'd been travelling for weeks now, ever since the defeat back in Dublin. (Although he didn't like the word "defeat". "Hiccup" seemed more apt.) Travelling and searching and hunting. But at this moment, the Norse god of mischief was weary and cold. In a word, irritable. His breaths puffed in front of his face and, as he crossed an icy field in the Irish country side – the grass crunching under his feet – he looked up at the clear skies. From the position of the stars and the rotation of the moon he could tell that it was near the Winter Solstice. The darkest days of the year, when man and god alike took a break from work; to be with family, to eat heavily and to be merry.

Loki could see a large house two fields over. Smoke was rising from a pair of chimneys and orange light flickering in one of the downstairs windows. The perfect place to rest up for a few hours. Not too long as he still had his mission to complete; but enough to warm his bones and fill his stomach. And so it was, on this 24th night of the 12th month, that the Father of Lies headed in the direction of a large, lone house.



Getting into the house was easy. The front doors swung inwards by themselves as Loki strode toward them. Once he was inside, they were even kind enough to shut softly behind him.

It was just as he'd hoped and expected inside. Even in the hallway, he could feel the warmth coming through a door at the end of the passageway. A set of stairs led to the second floor; to darkness and the sound of pair of snores. Loki ignored them and went straight for the warm door down the hall.

He found himself in a living room, with thick red carpeting and a matching sofa set. The coal embers in the hearth were still glowing orange, giving off a cosy warmth that flushed his cheeks almost instantly. Loki rushed to the fireplace, rubbed his numb fingers together vigorously over the heat and took in the rest of his new surroundings. The only other light source in the room confused him. There were little electric lights blinking and winking from where they were strung around a fir tree as tall as him. The red and green flashes were a pretty sight certainly, but an unusual one to Loki's eyes. Round ornaments and sparkly rope were also hanging from the branches and he was just starting to wonder what kind of person would erect a tree in their living room when he noticed something else weird.

There were lots of photographs of the same family hanging all around the room. Nothing strange there. Loki knew that humans liked to display pictures of their loved ones wherever they got a chance. But alongside those pictures were paintings, drawings and a few photos of the same man. These images were usually on rectangles of card, folded in half, and they depicted him in snowy scenes or with elves or in reindeer-drawn sleighs. He was an old man, grotesquely overweight, in a suit and hat as red as blood and with a beard as white as bone.

Whoever this man was, it was clear that the family must have loved him greatly. Or feared him terribly.

The yawn cut through Loki's thought process. It was a long and shuddering noise, the sound of someone waking up. And it was coming from behind the sofa.

A figure started crawling out from the space between the couch and the wall. As quick as he could, and with a flash of green light, Loki transformed into what he believed would be a familiar face for anyone living in that house.

'Santa?' said the boy who emerged from the crawl-space, blearily rubbing his eyes up at Loki.

'... Yes,' the god replied hesitantly. 'Yes, I'm... Santa. Who else would I be?!'

Loki guessed that the boy was about four years old. He was wearing stripy pyjamas, a pair of teddy-bear shaped slippers and a blue dressing gown. His blonde hair was all out of place; sticking up in tufts here, ironed flat there. The left side of his face was momentarily mottled red, where he'd been sleeping on the carpet and there were gaps in his smile where he'd recently lost some teeth.

'SANTA!' he exclaimed, racing forward and wrapping his arms around Loki's legs. The god tripped backwards on a rug and flumped heavily into one of the armchairs.

'Get off me!' Loki barked. The boy leaped away at the sound, his face reddening shamefully. He looked away from Loki-Claus, studying the rumpled rug at his feet.

'I'm sowwy, Santy,' he mumbled.

‘Yeah... Well, don’t do it again.’ Just then, Loki’s stomach growled loudly. The boy stared at the fat belly and his eyes lit up suddenly. He turned to the opposite armchair, picked something up and carefully carried it back to the god. Balancing the tray in his small fingers proved difficult and the glass of milk was sloshing over by the time Loki took it off him. Along with the drink was a plate with two slices of fruit cake, both topped with a generous layer of red marzipan.

The boy watched all the while – mouth half-open in awe – as Loki greedily wolfed down the cake. It was both sweet and aromatic and it left a pleasing spicy aftertaste as he licked his lips and picked at the crumbs on his red costume. He downed what had survived of the glass of milk in one go before slouching back in the armchair. He shut his eyes, sighed contentedly and patted his full belly. Just a few minutes, Loki told himself. And I’ll be on my way again. Back to my mission to find-

‘Santy...?’

Loki forced one eye open. The boy took another tentative step forward, fingers fidgeting before him.

‘What?’

‘I’ve been a good boy all year.’

‘Mmm-hmm.’ The god shut his eye again and turned around, snuggling deeper into the chair. After a moment; ‘Uh... Santy?’

‘What?!’ He shot up in the seat in frustration, eyelids flying open. ‘What is it now?’

‘Uh... I just...’

‘Spit it out, will you!’

‘I just wanted my pweasants.’

‘Pweasants?’

‘For being a good boy.’

‘I have to give you presents because you were good?’

The boy nodded bashfully.

Loki’s mouth slowly turned up in a pointed grin behind the white beard.

‘So the presents are a reward? For being a good boy?’

He nodded again.

‘Okay...’ Loki said slowly, getting to his feet. ‘I’ll give you exactly what you deserve for being good.’

‘YAY!’ The boy leaped up to give Loki a hug but the god managed to side-step any further unwanted contact. ‘I asked for twee pweasants. Is that alright, Santy?’

Loki examined a bauble on the tree that had an image of this Santa character on it. He turned back to the boy and gave him the cheeriest smile he could muster. ‘Of course it’s alright. What did you want first?’

‘A Mega CarTwax,’ said the boy, defiantly. When he noticed Loki’s confused expression, he picked up a toy catalogue from the coffee table next to the couch. He expertly flicked to the correct page and showed a mini race track to the god. The CarTrax was essentially a length of black track with two remote controlled cars that would speed around it. ‘I always wanted a Mega CarTwax, even before I was borned when I was in my Mammy’s tummy, I wanted one.’ He spoke in one constant, excited stream; barely giving pause to breathe. When he was done, Loki smiled wider and clicked his finger.

There was a puff of green smoke. When it dissipated, the CarTrax had appeared out of nowhere, arranged in one wide circuit around the base of the Christmas tree. The boy yelped in delight, collapsed to his knees and took up one of the remotes. As his car sped off around the track, he beamed up at Loki.

‘Thank you so much, Santy!’

‘You’re welcome,’ said Loki, spotting his chance for mischief. ‘Would you like it to go faster?’

‘Yes pwease!’

When he looked back at the track, the car was visibly quicker, hurtling around the track at such a rapid pace that the boy could feel the wind of it on his face. He eased his grip on the remote but the car didn’t slow down. In fact, it was getting faster.

The boy glanced up at the man in the red suit then back to the out-of-control race car. He couldn't see it anymore; it was just a greenish-blue blur circling and circling. The Christmas tree was trembling with the gusts from the car; baubles and lights were shook from their branches.

'Can you stop it?' the boy shuffled away from the track, looking to Loki for help. The god simply watched and smiled.

The tree was off the floor when the boy looked back, held aloft in a mini-tornado created by the hurtling car. The fairy lights had been yanked from the plug socket and were spinning in the vortex, along with the tree and a few smashed baubles. The whole lot tottered over and back in the air and the star on top of the tree scraped off the ceiling.

'Please!' begged the boy, pulling at Loki-Claus' coat. 'Please just stop it!' But the god kept watching the chaos gleefully.

Magazines and newspapers from the coffee table were being pulled into the tornado now and a few cushions were following suit. At this rate, the whole room would be sucked into the vortex in a couple of minutes.

But then, just as abruptly as it had begun, the car came to a complete stop. The tree and decorations clattered to the floor, the whole thing ruined.

Finally, Loki looked down at the boy calmly. 'What else did you want?'

'Huh?'

'What did you want for being good?'

'...Snow. I wanted it to snow for Chwistmas. But-'

He was cut off by the snowflake landing on his nose. A second drifted down in front of his vision, and a third, and a fourth. He stepped back from Loki and looked up at the ceiling. There were yellow-grey clouds there, dropping snow all over the room. It wasn't exactly what he'd imagined when he'd asked Santa for snow but it was so much better, so much more magical, so much more Christmassy.

The boy put out his arms, catching the light and powdery snowflakes in his hands. Most of them melted as soon as they touched his skin. But after a minute, the snowfall was getting heavier and there was a thin layer of white on the floor as well as every surface and every piece of furniture.

He giggled, fell to the carpet and splayed out his arms and legs to make a snow angel in his living room. In another minute, there'd probably be enough to make a snowman or to have a snowball fight. It was all so perfect and so beautiful that he barely noticed when it turned into a blizzard.

The wind started to rage first, sending chilling gusts around the whole room. This was followed by a heavier snowfall; some of the flakes were as large as two euro coins and they fell in such thick drifts that he could barely see a metre in front of his face. The snow on the floor was up to the boy's shins now, soaking into his slippers and freezing him to the core.

He pulled his dressing gown around him tighter to keep out the cold and stumbled around the living room blizzard, trying to spot Loki's red suit.

'Santy? Are you there? Santa!' He could barely hear his own voice over the sound of the gale so he didn't expect Santa Claus to but he kept calling out nonetheless. He had to fight against the gusts and drifts to make headway with every step. He was trembling by now, both with the cold and the fear that he would be lost here, in the living room.

And then, just like the car, as suddenly as the blizzard had begun, it stopped. The last flakes drifted to the ground like leaves in autumn and the red suited man loomed into his vision once more.

'What was the third thing you wanted?' Loki asked.

The shivering boy looked around him, at the wrecked Christmas tree, at the huge snow drifts that were already melting in the heat of the fire and leaving slushy puddles behind them. He turned back to Santa and said, 'I-I-I d-d-don't think I want a-a-anything else.'

'You've been so good all year though. You deserve a third present.'

'Weally?'

'Of course weally.' He leaned down so his face was in line with the boy's. 'Would I lie to you? Now, what would you like.'

The boy, still mildly trembling with the cold, stepped through the slush to retrieve his now-sodden toy catalogue. He turned to another page and handed it to Loki, pointing out what he wanted. It was an army action figure called Captain Pavlov, complete with M16 rifle, three grenades, twelve phrases and a parachute. (*Pavlov-Mobile sold separately*, the advert proclaimed).

Loki let the catalogue drop from his fingers. At the exact millisecond it touched the soaking floor, the window burst inward. Shards of glass flew everywhere as the man rolled through the air and landed in an awkward angle in front of the fireplace.

The new-comer stood up. He was as tall as Loki, but with a physique too muscular to exist in the real world. His shoulders were too broad, his arms too bulbous, his waist too small. He was wearing army fatigues, had grenades strapped to his chest and he held an M16 rifle between two veiny hands. He was also made entirely of plastic, with Philips-head screws the size of the boy's fist acting as joints at the knees, elbows and so on.

'Captain Pavlov...' the boy uttered at the toy-made-real.

Pavlov turned his head slightly and rotated his painted eyes downward so that they were looking at the boy. He slammed a button on his chest and a voice played out of a speaker grill underneath.

'EVERYONE HIT THE DECKS!'

The boy just stared back at the soldier, too awe-stuck to budge. Pavlov pressed the button again.

'I SAID "HIT THE DECKS", LIEUTENANT!'

Without giving a third warning, Captain Pavlov opened fire. Plastic bullets shot out of the M16s barrel as the boy ducked down behind the sofa. Some of the bullets embedded in the wall, others shattered framed photos of him and his parents while even more of them just ricocheted off the fireplace.

Loki was enjoying himself more than he had in quite a while. As the army toy continued to shoot up the living room – and the boy kept on whimpering behind the couch – he surveyed all that he'd done. The fir tree and decorations, that had seemed so precious to the houses occupants, now lay in ruin. The carpet and furniture were soaked and flooded with rapidly melting snow. And, of course, the walls were getting pummelled with a few thousand plastic bullets.

Quite a nice, relaxing night over all. He felt invigorated.

Just then, a smell drifted in the open window. Was it-? Yes! The wild aroma that he'd been wanting to track down for all these weeks. Finally!

With one last kick of the tree on the ground, Loki ran straight out of the house, leaving the boy cowering and the soldier firing. He paused outside the front door, sniffed the air then bounded off in the direction of the smell.



In the morning, the boy's parents came down to find that their living room had been turned into a warzone overnight. They looked at each other in confusion; neither one had seen nor heard a thing during the night. And yet, there was water everywhere, someone had destroyed their Christmas tree and a life-size toy soldier was lying on the ground, his batteries and bullets long spent. They eventually found their son behind the couch, where he'd managed to fall asleep after the first couple of hours of Captain Pavlov's onslaught.

'Son?' they asked when he woke up and gazed at them blearily. 'Are you alright?'

He looked around the room once, then back to his parents and answered simply, 'I'll never be a good boy again.'

Loki will return 2012 in...

ARTHUR QUINN

AND THE
FENRIS WOLF

[For more info: www.arthurquinn.ie](http://www.arthurquinn.ie)

© Alan Early 2011