### Fire and/or Ice

Roger Zelazny

“Mommy! Mommy!”

“Yes?”

“Yes?”

“Tell me again what you did in the war.”

“Nothing much. Go play with your sisters.”

“I’ve been doing that all afternoon. They play too hard. I want to hear about the bad winter and the monsters and all.”

“That’s what it was, a bad winter.”

“How cold was it, Mommy?”

“It was so cold that brass monkeys were singing soprano on every corner. It was so cold that it lasted for three years and the sun and the moon grew pale, and sister killed sister and daughters knocked off mommies for a Zippo lighter and a handful of pencil shavings.”

“Then what happened?”

“Another winter came along, of course. A lot worse than the first.”

“How bad was *it?”*

“Well, the two giant wolves who had been chasing the sun and the moon across the sky finally caught them and ate them. Damned dark then, but the blood that kept raining down gave a little light to watch the earthquakes and hurricanes by, when you could see through the blizzards.”

“How come we don’t have winters like that anymore?”

“Used them all up for a while, I suppose.”

“How come there’s a sun up in the sky now, if it got eaten?”

“Oh, that’s the new one. It didn’t happen till after the fires and the boiling oceans and all.”

“Were you scared?”

“What scared me was what came later, when a giant snake crawled out of the sea and started fighting with this big person with the hammer. Then gangs of giants and monsters came from all directions and got to fighting with each other. And then there was a big, old, one-eyed person with a spear, stabbing away at a giant wolf which finally ate him, beard and all. Then another person came along and killed the wolf. All of a sudden, it looked familiar and I went outside and caught one of the troops by the sleeve.

“ ‘Hey, this is Götterdämmerung,’ I said, ‘isn’t it?’

“A nearby TV crew moved in on us as the person paused in hacking away at an amorphous mass with lots of eyes and nodded.

“ ‘Sure is,’ he said. ‘Say, you must be—’ and then the amorphous mass ate him.

“I crossed the street to where another one in a horned helmet was performing atrocities on a fallen foeperson.

“ ‘Pardon me,’ I asked him, ‘but who are you?’

“ ‘Loki’s the name,’ was the reply. ‘What is your part in all of this?’

” `I don’t know that I have a part,’ I said. `But that other person started to say something like I might and then the amorphous mass which was just stepped on by the giant with the arrow in his throat sucked him in.’

“Loki dispatched his victim with a look of regret and studied my torn garment.

“ ‘You’re dressed like a man,’ he said, ‘but—’

“I drew my shirt together.

“ ‘I am—’ I began.

“ ‘Sure. Here’s a safety pin. What a fine idea you’ve just given me! Come this way. There’ve got to be two human survivors,’ he explained, pushing a path through a pack of werewolves. ‘The gods will give their lives to defend you, once I’ve delivered you to Hoddmimir’s Holt—that’s the designated fallout shelter.’ He snatched up an unconscious woman and slung her over his shoulder. ‘You’ll live through all this. A new day will dawn, a glorious new world will be revealed requiring a new first couple. Seeing you waiting, the gods will die believing that all is well.. .’ He broke into a fit of laughter. ‘They think that all the deaths will bring a new regime, of love, peace and happiness—and a new race.. .’ The tears streamed down his face. ‘All tragedies require liberal doses of irony,’ he concluded, as he bore us in a psychedelic chariot through rivers of blood and fields of bones.

“He deposited us here, amid warmth, trees, fountains, singing birds—all those little things that make life pleasant and trite: plenty of food, gentle breezes, an attractive house with indoor plumbing. Then still laughing, he returned to the front.

“Later, my companion awoke—blond and lithe and lovely—and her eyes flashed when she turned my way.

“ ‘So,’ she snapped, ‘you drag me from this horrible masculine conflict that I may serve your lusts in a secret pleasure haven! I’ll have none of it, after all you’ve done to me!’

“I moved to comfort her, but she dropped into a karate stance.

“ ‘Tell me,’ I said then, ‘what you mean. Nothing has been done to you...

“ ‘You call leaving a girl pregnant nothing?’ she cried. ‘With all the abortionists busy treating frostbite? No! I want no part of men, never again!’

“ ‘Be of good cheer, sister,’ I replied, unpinning my shirt. ‘I found myself too attractive to men, not to mention weak-willed—this long night being what it is—and suffering with a similar medical quandary, I resolved in a fit of remorse to lead the life of a simple transvestite.’

“ ‘Sappho be praised!’ she replied.

“And we both had twins, and lived happily ever after. Winter faded, and the Twilight of the Gods passed. The world is a new place, of love, peace and happiness, for so long as it lasts this time. That is the story. Go play nicely with your sisters now.”

“But they won’t play nicely. They keep tiring me out doing the thing you told me not to.”

“How did you even learn to do such a thing in the first place?” the other mommy asked.

“A shining person with a golden staff showed me how. She also said that the gods move in mysterious and not terribly efficient ways.”

“This could be the beginning of philosophy,” said the first mommy. “You might call it that,” said the other.