“Out with you!” roared Odin the All-father. He pounded on the door and the stout oak shook its hinges.

The goddess of moonlight floated across the floor and said, “He will not.”

Odin growled and stomped away.

Later, another knock sounded on the door. Again the wood strained against the iron hinges.

“What is Balder the Brilliant?” boomed the voice of Thor.

“Balder the Beautiful? Balder the Good? Is he too fair to show his face?” teased the god of thunder.

Again Nanna approached the portal, placed a delicate, pale hand to the frame, and spoke gently:
““He will not come out.”

“Then I shall hunt by myself.” Thor’s chariot’s wheels echoed across the sky as he departed.

As night fell, a light tap came upon the door. A firm but fair voice spoke, “Nanna? A word with you, please?”

Balder’s wife drifted once more towards the door. After a few whispers, she returned to her husband’s side and said: “Twas your mother. She was concerned.”

Three days of solitude filled the home until finally broken by yet another call.

“Open,” commanded Lady Frigg. Before Balder could object, Nanna opened the door. The mother goddess lowered the hood of her traveling cloak as she approached her son’s cot.

“You had a dream of your death. Yes?” Her voice was steady and certain. Her pale grey eyes fixed on her son’s pupils.

“Yes, Mother.”

“It shall not be. Get up. It is Midsummer’s Eve and you shall join the feast.”

Balder could not refuse. Leaning on Nanna until he was firmly on both feet, he made his way to the firepit. He ran his fingers through his hair, washed his face in a bowl, and appared himself in a fresh tunic and breeches. In this manner he met the sunlight for the first time in nearly a week.

The Aesir had gathered at Asgard’s festival ground, overlooking the great Bilfrost Bridge that stretched its colors to Midgard below. Thor, Tyr, and Odin were already amusing themselves with games of strength and marksmanship. One of Balder’s brothers, blind Hod, sat to the side listening to the sounds of the holiday.

“Aye, come to join us?” huffed Tyr, wiping the sweat from his brow.

Balder smiled, knowing he wasn’t as strong as the others, but joined the wrestling none-the-less.

“Is it true all things promised not to hurt you?” inquired Thor, stalking off to the side of the clearing and retrieving his warhammer, Mjollnir. He swung the weapon high above his head and hurled it at the handsome god. Balder flinched, but the hammer bounced off his spine and returned to the thundergod’s hand. Balder brushed off his tunic and held his hands aloft.

“No harm,” he declared. “The dream of my death shall remain but a shadow of my sleep.”

Tyr, consequently, ripped a stone from the soil and pitched it at Balder’s head. It shattered harmlessly off his skull, leaving only a fine powder to disturb his golden hair.

“That is my boy,” boasted Odin. He thumped his chest and looked upon his favored offspring with even greater pride. He strode to his massive table, balanced Draupnir in his meaty hand, and hurled the spear. Balder flinched, but the lance struck him and fell to the ground.

A new game was born. As the gods of Asgard gathered, they found great amusement in watching dangerous things rendered toothless against Balder. Word spread of Frigg and her agents who traveled the world over to secure promises from all things to spare the life of Balder the Beautiful.

“All things?” asked one skeptical woman who was filling goblets.

“All things,” replied the proud goddess. Yet, as she grinned, a nagging thought crept back into her mind. “Well…all things but some tiny, young weed growing just west of Valhalla. It looked harmless
enough and there were so many other harsh things to attend to. Still…” Frigg was talking more to herself than to the servant. The servant, however, had disappeared.

As it was, the servant was not really a servant at all. “She” was, in fact, the malicious god Loki in disguise. Loki sped away and began searching amongst the greenery for the oathless plant. When he found it, he tore a twig loose, kissed it, and held it high above his head. With his long knife, he whittled a dart from its wood. He then slipped back into his disguise and returned to the festivities.

Hod still sat along the fringe of the feast, his head resting heavily on his hands. The laughter of the gods and the singing of Balder echoed in his ears.

“You do not honor your mother’s powers?” intruded a voice into Hod’s loneliness.

“Who are you?” the blind god muttered, turning his shaggy head towards the speaker.

“Do you think so little of promises?” Loki-in-disguise asked again.

“There is no one to guide my hand and I--without a guide--I have little hope of doing anything but embarrass myself.” Hod let his head hang loosely from his neck, his hands helplessly open and sagging between his knees.

“I will guide you,” hissed Loki. He placed the dart of mistletoe in Hod’s hand and led him forward through the crowd. Everyone hushed as the forgotten brother made his way closer. No one paid any attention to the servant who held his arm.

“Take your shot,” Balder invited, stepping forward.

Loki released Hod’s sleeve and slipped into the crowd, peering between the other gods to witness what he had set in motion. The sightless Hod tossed the dart with a flick of his wrist and it pierced Balder’s chest. A look of shock and horror swept over Balder’s face as his blood began to seep from his wound. Falling to the ground, he went pale, and died as the crowd closed in.

An outcry erupted from the on-looking gods and a bewildered Hod stood in the middle of the tempest. When he figured out what happened, he knelt by his brother’s body and wept tremendously.

Seeing Hod’s sorrow, the gods realized he was a victim of treachery; they realized the servant was to blame, but that neither the servant nor Loki were anywhere to be seen.

The poets tell how Balder was given a magnificent funeral, accompanied by his wife who died of sorrow. The burial ship was set aflame and Odin sacrificed his great spear in honor of his beautiful son. Frigg proposed a quest to the underworld in an attempt to retrieve her lost offspring and a brave brother ventured to Niflheim. It is said that the goddess of the dead offered to return Balder to the living if everything of the world would cry for the loss of Balder the Beautiful. The brother returned happily and reported the deal, and promptly tears flowed around the world. Everything in the world wept except one lone giantess. Since the bargain was unfulfilled, Balder was doomed to remain in the land of the dead.

Later it was discovered that the giantess was, in fact, Loki. The hunt for him intensified until he was cornered in a pond. Odin pronounced his sentence: to be chained at the foot of the Tree of Life with poison from the Midgard Serpent ever dripping into his eyes. His wife attends him to this very day, catching in a goblet as much poison as she can. However, when she turns to empty the chalice, the pain is so great that the world quakes. Here, Loki is to remain until the time when the last battle between the gods and the giants is fought and the present world is destroyed.

Retold by C. Martinus