
Introducing **The Theft of Thor's Hammer**

The first written record of "The Theft of Thor's Hammer" is in the *Elder Edda*, where it is called "The Lay of Thym." Dating from about A.D. 900, it is one of the oldest Norse poems. As a work of literature, it is the best of the short Norse myths.

"The Theft of Thor's Hammer" is a wonderfully appealing myth because of its great humor. The idea that Thor, the "superman" of Norse myth,

should have to pretend to be a female must have brought smiles to listeners and readers throughout the centuries. Loki's role is also amusing. It is a pleasure to meet Loki, whose mischief is all too often evil, as a good-hearted conspirator, similar to Hermes among the Greek gods. Freya is a beautiful fertility goddess, and her sexual appeal is apparent in other Norse myths also.

The Theft of Thor's Hammer

One morning when Thor the Hammer-Hurler awoke, he could not find Mjollnir, his hammer. His heart flooded with a violent rage. He angrily shook his red hair and tore his fingers through his beard as he looked first in one place and then in another, without success.

Finally, in desperation, he found Loki and said, "Someone has stolen my hammer. The gods in Asgard have not seen him. No one in Midgard has seen him. Whoever the culprit is, he is a crafty one!"

Loki replied, "Come with me to Freya's palace, Thor, and we will see what we can do about it."

Upon finding Freya, Loki said, "Will you lend me your falcon-feathered cloak so I can fly to Jotunheim to search for Thor's sacred hammer? Surely it is there somewhere, for no one but a giant would have taken it!"

"Of course, Loki," Freya replied. "I would give you my cloak even if it were made of pure silver or gold. Take it, and may it bring you what you are looking for!"

The falcon feathers whistled in the wind as Loki flew to Jotunheim. He found the Frost Giant Thrym sitting in the Hall of Giants, twisting strands of gold into collars for the hounds in his pen and combing the manes of the horses that he loved.

Hearing someone enter, Thrym looked up from his work and said, "Hello there, Loki! How are the gods? How are the elves? Why have you come to Jotunheim?"

Loki replied, "The gods and the elves are beset with grave trouble! Have you stolen and hidden the hammer of thunder?"

"Why, yes, indeed I have!" Thrym confessed. "I buried it eight miles deep in the earth. I shall not give it to any god until Freya agrees to be my bride!"

The feathers of Freya's falcon-coat whistled in the wind as Loki flew back to Asgard. Thor was waiting when he landed.

"I hope you have returned with a message and are not up to some mischief!" the Hammer-Hurler exclaimed. "Stay right where you are and tell me what news you bring."

"I do bring news and not mischief," Loki replied. "The giant Thrym has stolen your hammer and hidden it. He will not return it until we bring Freya to become his bride."

"Then let us see Freya immediately!" Thor replied.

Loki said to the goddess, "Place a bridal veil upon your head, Freya, for you must come with me to Jotunheim."

"What do you mean, Loki?" Freya asked angrily. Her palace quivered and quaked with her rage, and her Brising necklace, that glorious dwarf-crafted ring of twisted gold, split into pieces and fell to the floor. "The gods would think me a disloyal wife to Odr if I went to Jotunheim to marry another, and I certainly would never marry a Frost Giant!"

Thor, realizing the justice of Freya's attitude, asked Odin to call the gods and goddesses together in order to consider their next step. The hammer of thunder was a mighty weapon; its theft was no minor matter.

Heimdall, the wisest of the gods, devised the solution. "Thor himself is the answer to the problem!" Heimdall exclaimed. "We must dress him as Thrym's bride. We can repair Freya's Brising necklace and place it upon his neck. We can pin large brooches upon his chest, hide his legs behind a long dress, hang a bunch of women's keys at his waist, put a neat cap upon his red hair, and hide his face behind a bridal veil."

"Seeing me dressed as a bride will give all of you a mighty laugh!" Thor replied. "I am not certain it will accomplish anything else."

Loki replied, "Hold your tongue, Thunderer! We must capture your hammer if we are to defend Asgard against the giants. They would be all too glad to occupy our palaces."

So it came to pass that the gods placed Freya's necklace around Thor's neck, pinned brooches upon his chest, hid his legs behind a long dress, hung a bunch of keys at his waist, covered his hair with a neat cap, and arranged a bridal veil over his face.

When the disguise was complete, Loki announced, "I shall accompany you on your journey, Thor. I shall disguise myself as your handmaid, and together we will go to Jotunheim and make fools of the giants."

Thor drove his goats from their pasture and harnessed them to his chariot. The mountains echoed with the roar of thunder, and fires from mighty lightning bolts scorched the earth as Thor's chariot sped through the sky.

Meanwhile, in Jotunheim, Thrym eagerly prepared to receive his new wife. "Arise, Frost Giants, and place straw upon my benches. The gods may arrive at any time with my bride! I am happy that I have beautiful, gold-horned cattle grazing in my fields. I am happy that I possess a great treasure of gold and many gems. I am happy that I have much to delight my eyes. I lack only Freya for my heart's content!"

Evening arrived, and with it Thrym's beloved. The giants set a feast of food and ale before the bride. She quickly consumed all the sweet dainties that had been reserved for the women, plus a whole ox and eight large salmon. She drank more than three horns of mead.

Thrym could not take his eyes off his beloved, and he could not help but wonder at what he saw. "Has any other bride ever had such a great appetite?" he asked. "Has any other bride ever taken such big mouthfuls of food or drunk as much mead?"

Loki, the handmaid, craftily replied, "Freya has so longed for her wedding day that she has not eaten for eight long days!"

Thrym, overcome with love for his bride, lifted her veil and leaned forward to kiss her. One look at her face sent him leaping backward the full length of his hall. "How fierce my beloved's eyes are!" the giant exclaimed. "Dangerous fires blaze forth beneath her brows!"

Loki craftily replied, "Freya has so longed for her wedding day that she has not slept for eight long nights!"

The unfortunate sister of the unfortunate giant then dared to command the

bride, "Give me your golden rings! In return, I will give you my favor, my goodwill, and my blessing!"

Then Thrym said, "Bring forth Thor's mighty hammer in order to bless the bride. Lay Mjollnir upon her lap, and wish us joy as we join hands and make our marriage vows."

Thor's heart leapt with joy when his mighty hammer was placed in his lap. Quickly he grabbed Mjollnir and smashed Thrym to the ground. Then, one by one, Thor killed all the Frost Giant's kin. The sister who had dared to demand bridal gifts received a deathly blow on her head instead of gold rings on her fingers. And Thor recovered his hammer of thunder.