

Fiction Excerpt 1: Thor and His Hammer

Thor was one of the most famous and best loved of all the Norse gods. He was the god of thunder and lightning, and he was very strong. The only god more powerful was Odin, Thor's father. Thor's bright red hair and bushy beard made him easily recognizable. Unlike the other gods, he traveled from place to place in a chariot pulled by two goats. Although Thor was naturally strong, he wore a special belt, called a girdle, that doubled his strength. But the most important of all of Thor's tools was his hammer.

Thor's hammer was no ordinary hammer—it was a special iron hammer made especially for Thor by a dwarf. Dwarves were very skilled craftsmen, and they could make many magical things. That is why Thor's hammer was impossible to break, and why no matter how far he threw it, the hammer always returned to him. The dwarf had also made the hammer so it could shrink if Thor needed to hide it inside his shirt. Thor used his hammer to defend the other gods from their enemies, the giants. The giants knew that they were no match for Thor and his hammer, so they became very nervous whenever he was near. Together, Thor and his hammer could beat any giant. They were the only reason that the giants didn't try to conquer Asgard, the gods' home.

It was therefore very surprising and worrisome for the gods when Thor woke up one morning to find that his hammer was missing. No one in Asgard would have dared to take it, so the gods asked their crafty god Loki for help. Loki guessed that the giants had something to do with the missing hammer, so he flew straight to Thrym, the king of the giants.

"Why, yes, I know what happened to Thor's hammer," said the giant, laughing. "I buried it in a secret place eight miles into the earth. And I will give it back only if the goddess Freyja becomes my wife."

Loki returned to Asgard and told the gods what he had heard. Freyja, the goddess of beauty and love, was very sad and angry at the idea that she might have to become the wife of a terrible giant. No one wanted Freyja to go, so they came up with a plan to fool the giant. They decided to dress up Thor in a wedding dress so that he looked like Freyja. At first, Thor was very upset by this idea. He didn't want to wear a dress, and he was worried that the other gods would make fun of him. Eventually, the gods were able to convince him that it was the only thing to do. Grumbling, Thor allowed himself to be dressed in Freyja's wedding dress and veil. Then he put on the golden necklace that only Freyja herself wore. Once he was

covered from head to toe, and no part of his body could be seen, Thor and Loki set off for Thrym's house.

When they arrived at Thrym's, Loki and Thor saw piles of jewelry and gold piled up all over his hall. Thrym had also prepared a great feast in honor of his bride, with huge amounts of every kind of food imaginable. When they sat down at the table and began to eat, Thor realized he was very hungry. Before he knew it, he quickly ate an entire ox and at least eight whole fish. He couldn't control himself! Next, he drank glass after glass without stopping. Thrym and the other giants watched with amazement as the bride continued to eat. They were surprised to see what a great appetite she had.

"I have never seen a bride who could eat and drink so much," Thrym said, looking closely at the veiled woman next to him.

Loki, worried that the king was becoming suspicious, thought quickly and said, "The goddess hasn't eaten for eight days because she has been so excited about her wedding."

The giant-king was flattered, and he leaned over to kiss his bride. Thor pulled away but managed to keep his face hidden with the veil. Unfortunately, Thrym caught a glimpse of Thor's burning red eyes.

"What red eyes Freyja has," said Thrym, looking worriedly at Loki. The god thought quickly once again. "Your bride hasn't slept in eight nights because she has been so excited about her wedding," he replied.

Again the giant-king was satisfied with Loki's explanation, and the feast continued.

Finally, after all had eaten their fill, the king asked that the hammer be brought from its hiding place. The giants placed the hammer on Freyja's lap. Then, with the hammer in his hand, Thor stood up and tore the veil from his face. The giants recognized Thor immediately and panicked. They tried to get away, but Thor and his mighty hammer were too quick. In almost no time, all the giants were defeated, and Thor and Loki returned to Asgard, having outwitted the giants once again.