

# THE MAKING OF THE HAMMER

## BY HAMILTON WRIGHT MABIE

ONE day as Sif, Thor's beautiful wife, was sitting in the palace Bilskirner in Thrudvang, or thunder-world, she fell asleep, with her long hair falling about her shoulders like a shower of gold. She made a very pretty picture as she sat there in the sunlight; at least Loki thought so as he passed by and saw her motionless, like the statue of a goddess in a great temple, instead of a living goddess in her own palace. Loki never saw anything beautiful without the wish that somehow he might spoil it; and when he noticed that Sif was asleep he thought it was a good time to carry off her golden hair, and so rob her of that of which Thor was most proud. As noiselessly as he could, and more like a thief than a god, he stole into the palace, cut off the golden locks and carried them away, without leaving one behind as a trace of his evil deed. When Sif awoke and found her beautiful hair gone, she went and hid herself, lest Thor coming home should miss the beauty which had always been like a light to his eyes.

And presently Thor came; but no Sif was there to meet him, making him forget with one proud look from her tender eyes the dangers and labours of his life. She never failed to greet him at the threshold before; and the strong god's heart, which had never beat a second quicker at sight of the greatest giant in the world, grew faint with fear that in his absence some mishap had befallen her. He ran quickly from room to room in the palace, and at last he came upon Sif, hidden behind a pillar, her shorn head in her hands, weeping bitterly. In a few broken words she told Thor what had happened, and as she went on, Thor's wrath grew hotter and hotter until he was terrible to behold. Lightnings flashed out of his deep-set eyes, the palace trembled under his angry strides, and it seemed as if his fury would burst forth like some awful tempest uprooting and destroying everything in its path.

"I know who did it," he shouted, when Sif had ended her story. "It was that rascally Loki, and I'll break every bone in his thievish body;" and without as much as saying good-bye to his sobbing wife, he strode off like a thunder-cloud to Asgard, and there, coming suddenly upon Loki, he seized him by the neck and would have killed him on the spot had not Loki confessed his deed and promised to restore the golden hair.

"I'll get the swarthy elves to make a crown of golden hair for Sif more beautiful than she used to wear," gasped Loki, in the iron grasp of the angry Thor; and Thor, who cared more for Sif's beauty than for Loki's punishment, let the thief go, having bound him by solemn pledges to fulfill his promise without delay.

Loki lost no time, but went far underground to the gloomy smithy of the dwarfs, who were called Ivald's sons, and who were wonderful workers in gold and brass.

"Make me a crown of golden hair," said Loki, "that will grow like any other hair, and I will give you whatever you want for your work."

The bargain was quickly made, and the busy little dwarfs were soon at their task, and in a little time they had done all that Loki asked, and more too; for in addition to the shining hair they gave Loki the spear Gungner and the famous ship Skidbladner.

With these treasures in his arms Loki came into Asgard and began boasting of the wonderful things he had brought from the smithy of Ivald's sons.

"Nobody like the sons of Ivald to work in metal!" he said. "The other dwarfs are all stupid little knaves compared with them."

Now it happened that the dwarf Brok was standing by and heard Loki's boasting; his brother Sindre was so cunning a workman that most of the dwarfs thought him by far the best in the world. It made Brok angry, therefore, to hear the sons of Ivald called the best workmen, and he spoke up and said, "My brother Sindre can make more wonderful things of gold and iron and brass than ever the sons of Ivald thought of."

"Your brother Sindre," repeated Loki scornfully. "Who is your brother Sindre?"

"The best workman in the world," answered Brok.

Loki laughed loud and long. "Go to your wonderful brother Sindre," said he, "and tell him if he can make three such precious things as the spear, the ship, and the golden hair, he shall have my head for his trouble." And Loki laughed longer and louder than before.

Brok was off to the underworld before the laugh died out of his ears, determined to have Loki's head if magic and hard work could do it. He went straight to Sindre and told him of the wager he had laid with Loki, and in a little while Sindre was hard at work in his smithy. It was a queer place for such wonderful work as was done in it, for it was nothing but a great cavern underground, with tools piled up in little heaps around its sides, and thick darkness everywhere when the furnace fire was not sending its glow out into the blackness. If you had looked in now, you would have seen a broad glare of light streaming out from

the furnace, for Brok was blowing the bellows with all his might, and the coals were fairly blazing with heat. When all was ready, Sindre took a swine-skin, put it into the furnace, and telling Brok to blow the bellows until his return, went out of the smithy. Brok kept steadily at work, although a gad-fly flew in, buzzed noisily about, and finally settling on his hand, stung him so that he could hardly bear it. After a while Sindre came back and took out of the furnace a wonderful boar with bristles of pure gold.

Then Sindre took some gold, and placing it in the furnace bade Brok blow as if his life depended on it, and went out a second time. Brok had no sooner begun blowing than the troublesome gad-fly came back, and fastening upon his neck stung him so fiercely that he could hardly keep his hands away from his neck; but Brok was a faithful dwarf, who meant to do his work thoroughly if he died for it, and so he blew away as if it were the easiest thing in the world, until Sindre came back and took a shining ring from the fire. The third time Sindre put iron into the fire, and bidding Brok blow without ceasing, went out again. No sooner had he gone than the gad-fly flew in, and settling between Brok's eyes stung him so sharply that drops of blood ran down into eyes, and he could not see what he was doing. He blew away as bravely as he could for some time, but the pain was so keen, and he was so blind, that at last he raised his hand quickly to brush the fly away. That very instant Sindre returned.

"You have almost spoiled it," he said, as he took out of the glowing furnace the wonderful hammer Mjolner. "See how short you have made the handle! But you can't lengthen it now. So carry the gifts to Asgard, and bring me Loki's head." Brok started off with the golden boar, the shining ring, and the terrible hammer.

When he came through the great gate of Asgard the gods were very anxious to see the end of this strange contest, and taking their seats on their shining thrones they appointed Odin, Thor, and Frey to judge between Loki and Brok, as to which had the most wonderful things. Then Loki brought out the spear Gungner, which never misses its mark, and gave it to Odin; and the golden hair he gave to Thor, who placed it on Sif's head, and straightway it began to grow like any other hair, and Sif was as beautiful as on the day when Loke saw her in Thor's palace, and robbed her of her tresses; and to Frey he gave the marvellous ship Skidbladner, which always found a breeze to drive it wherever its master would go, no matter how the sea was running, nor from what quarter the wind was blowing, and which could be folded up and carried in one's pocket. Then Loki laughed scornfully.

"Bring out the trinkets which that wonderful brother of yours has made," he said.

Brok came forward, and stood before the wondering gods with his treasures.

"This ring," said he, handing it to Odin, "will cast off, every ninth night, eight other rings as pure and heavy as itself. This boar," giving it to Frey, "will run more swiftly in the air, and on the sea, by night or by day, than the swiftest horse, and no night will be so dark, no world so gloomy, that the shining of these bristles shall not make it light as noon-day. And this hammer," placing Mjolner in Thor's strong hands, "shall never fail, no matter how big nor how hard that which it smites may be; no matter how far it is thrown, it will always return to your hand; you may make it so small that it can be hidden in your bosom, and its only fault is the shortness of its handle."

Thor swung it round his head, and lightning flashed and flamed through Asgard, deep peals of thunder rolled through the sky, and mighty masses of cloud piled quickly up about him. The gods gathered around, and passed the hammer from one to the other, saying that it would be their greatest protection against their enemies, the frost-giants, who were always trying to force their way into Asgard, and they declared that Brok had won the wager. Brok's swarthy little face was as bright as his brother's furnace fire, so delighted was he to have beaten the boastful Loki. But how was he to get his wager, now he had won it? It was no easy matter to take the head off a god's shoulders. Brok thought a moment. "I will take Loki's head," he said finally, thinking some of the other gods might help him.

"I will give you whatever you want in place of my head," growled Loki, angry that he was beaten, and having no idea of paying his wager by losing his head.

"I will have your head or I will have nothing," answered the plucky little dwarf, determined not to be cheated out of his victory.

"Well, then, take it," shouted Loki; but by the time Brok reached the place where he had been standing, Loki was far away, for he wore shoes with which he could run through the air or over the water. Then Brok asked Thor to find Loki and bring him back, which Thor did promptly, for the gods always saw to it that people kept their promises. When Loki was brought back Brok wanted to cut his head off at once.

You may cut off my head, but you have no right to touch my neck," said Loki, who was cunning, as well as wicked. That was true, and of course the head could not be taken off without touching the neck, so Brok had to give it up.

But he determined to do something to make Loki feel that he had won his

wager, so he took an awl and a thong and sewed his lips together so tightly that he could make no more boastings.