Name: _____ Date: _____

Loki and the Golden Hair

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 917 words

The old Norse storytellers said that the gods lived in a high fortress called Asgard. Thor, strongest of the gods, carried thunder in his voice. His wife, Sif, was famous for her hair. It fell to her waist in a golden wave, like ripe wheat in the sun.

Loki lived there too. He was quick, sly and clever, and a good joke meant more to him than good sense. That night, as Sif slept, he tiptoed in with a pair of shears. Snip, snip, snip! By the time he slipped away, her golden hair lay all over the floor.

When Sif woke, she felt her head and gasped. Her lovely hair was gone, and she wept. Thor arrived at a run. His cheeks burned red, and the sky began to rumble. No one else in Asgard played such tricks, so Thor went looking, seized Loki and lifted him off the ground.

"Make it right, or you will be very sorry!" Thor roared. Loki, dangling, thought fast. "I cannot stick it back," he squeaked, "but the dwarfs can make hair out of true gold, and it will grow like any other. They are the cleverest smiths in the world." Then he lowered Loki to the floor. "Go," he said, "and come back with it."

Down in the dark earth, where furnaces glowed and anvils rang, the dwarfs called the sons of Ivaldi were hard at work. Loki flattered them, and they got busy. They made gold hair for Sif, as fine as thread. They made a ship that sailed itself and folded small enough for a pocket. And they made a spear that always hit its mark.

Loki should have rushed home. But a trickster seldom leaves well enough alone. He strolled into the workshop of two dwarf brothers, Brokk and Sindri, and held up his three gifts. "You will never match these," he said with a grin. "I would wager my head that you cannot." Brokk narrowed his eyes. "Agreed," he said.

Sindri set a pigskin in the furnace and gave his brother an order. "Work the bellows, and do not let up, not for a second." Then he walked out. Brokk pumped, and the fire roared. A big black fly dropped onto his wrist and stung it sharply. Brokk winced but never stopped. When Sindri came back, he took out a boar with golden bristles.

For the second round, Sindri laid gold in the fire and repeated his order. The fly came back and stung Brokk's neck even harder, and still the dwarf held on. This time the fire gave up a heavy gold ring. The fly, as you may have guessed, was Loki in disguise. He wanted to spoil the work so that he would not lose his bet.

Now came the third round. Sindri put in a bar of iron. "This one matters most," he warned. "If the fire dips even once, the whole thing is ruined." Brokk pumped as hard as his arms would go, and the fire glowed bright.

The fly settled on his forehead and stung him just above the eyes, until they watered so much that he could hardly see. At last, for the barest moment, he let go of the bellows to brush it away. The fire dipped, just for a moment.

Sindri rushed in with a frown. "That was close," he said, and he pulled out an iron hammer, heavy and gleaming. It was strong and splendid, but since the fire had dipped for that one instant, its handle was stubby. Sindri named it Mjolnir. Then Brokk and Loki set off together, carrying all six treasures up to Asgard to be judged.

The gods met in the great hall to choose a winner. Odin, wisest of them, sat in the center, and Thor and Frey took the seats beside him. Loki went first. He handed the spear to Odin and the ship to Frey. Then he gave the golden hair to Thor, and Sif pressed it onto her head, where it took root and grew at once.

Brokk went next. He gave Odin the ring and said that every ninth night it would drip eight more just like it. To Frey he gave the golden boar, which could dash through the sky and over the waves faster than any horse. Last, he put the iron hammer into Thor's big hands, and Thor's eyes lit up.

"It cannot be broken, and it flies back to you every time you throw it," said Brokk. "There is one small flaw, though. The handle came out short." Thor lifted the hammer high, and thunder boomed. "That hardly matters," he said, laughing. "With this, the frost giants will never get past the gates." The judges named the hammer the best gift, so Brokk had won.

"I will take that head now," Brokk told Loki. Loki shot away in his magic shoes, but Thor reached out one long arm and brought him back. "You won my head, not my neck," he said. "So how will you take the one without the other?" Brokk blinked, and then the whole hall roared with laughter.

So Brokk let him keep his head, and the gods agreed on a fair price instead. Loki had to hold his tongue for a long while, and Asgard enjoyed some peace. Sif's hair grew long again, and Thor never went anywhere without Mjolnir. A silly joke had ended with gifts for every god, even if the hammer's handle stayed a little short.

Questions

1. Why did Thor send Loki to the dwarfs?

A. To get a ship for Frey
B. To get new hair for Sif
C. To get a spear for Odin

2. What did Loki bet?

A. His own head
B. His shoes

C. His ship

3. What did the fly keep doing?

A. Stealing the gold
B. Blowing out the fire
C. Stinging Brokk while he worked

4. Why was the hammer's handle short?

A. Brokk let go of the bellows for a moment
B. Sindri did not have enough iron
C. Thor wanted it short

5. Loki flattered the dwarfs. What does "flattered" mean?

A. Shouted at them
B. Praised to please them
C. Hid from them

6. How did Loki keep his head?

A. He said Brokk had won his head but not his neck
B. He ran away for good
C. He gave Brokk the ring

Words to know

sly: tricky
workshop: a smith's room
bellows: fire blower
disguise: a changed look
flattered: praised

Answer key: Loki and the Golden Hair

1. B. To get new hair for Sif
2. A. His own head
3. C. Stinging Brokk while he worked
4. A. Brokk let go of the bellows for a moment
5. B. Praised to please them
6. A. He said Brokk had won his head but not his neck