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Thor's Fear

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*It was also a great marvel concerning the wrestling-match, when thou
didst withstand so long, and didst not fall more than on one knee,
wrestling with Elli; since none such has ever been and none shall be,
if he became so old as to abide "Old Age," that she shall not cause him to fall.
Snorri Sturlson, Prose Edda, Gylfaginning XLVII*



A gigantic kettle brimming with ale was brought again and again to the long tables and dispensed to the gods and elves attending the sea god Ægir's feast. Fueled by the liquor, the guests were drinking convivially and sharing each other's company in good cheer. Outside the hall, however, stood an uninvited deity: Loki, the god of mischief and discord.

Loki stopped one of Ægir's serving men and questioned him: "Eldir, what are they saying inside about me while sipping their ale?"

"Nothing. They only talk about their weapons and their might in war; nobody mentions you at all."

"I shall change that. They must not forget me. I will go in and bring some venom to mix with the ale, and spice up the party that way."

"Beware, for the gods would likely punish you for such an evil deed," warned the serving man.

"Your words bring joy to my heart. Watch me!" Loki shoved the servant aside and strode into the hall, where he was met by an immediate wall of silence.

"Will you give me mead to quench my thirst?" he demanded.

Nobody answered, and Loki insisted: "Come on! Either offer me drink and a seat at your table, or have the ill grace to send me away!"

The gods were still reluctant to seat Loki, but at last he invoked his blood kinship with Odin, who directed that Loki be given a seat and ale to drink. No sooner had he been seated than did Loki start to insult, one by one, each of the gods and goddesses in attendance, casting aspersions on the gods' courage and the goddesses' chastity and faithfulness.

But Loki's tirade was soon interrupted by the arrival of the god Thor, coming home from a trip abroad. Thor was Odin's son and a powerful deity himself. He was associated with lightning, thunder, and fertility. Thor wielded Mjöltnir, a magical hammer that allowed him to strike without fail, as heavily as he liked, whatever the target, and never flew so far that it would not find its way back to his hand.

Thor chided Loki for his abuse of the other gods:

"Loki, cease your ill-mannered words, seeking to demean your betters, or Mjöltnir



shall close thy mouth; I shall hurl you up and out into Jötunheim, where neither gods nor me shall see thee e'er again."

At the mention of Jötunheim, the realm of the frost giants, Loki quickly retorted: "You should make no mention of Jötunheim, lest you be asked how you fared there. For I was with you and witnessed how you cowered and forgot yourself."

Loki did not mention that in Jötunheim they had come to the domain of the sorcerer Skrymir, who had subjected Thor and his companions to enchantments destined to frighten the travelers and cause them to flee back to the world of the humans.

Thor refused to engage Loki in an argument. Instead, he repeated in a dangerous tone:

"Loki, cease your ill-mannered speech, or the mighty hammer Mjölfnir shall close thy mouth; with it, I shall send you to hell, and down to the gate of death."

This new threat, accompanied by Thor's start in his direction, caused Loki to rise: "Before you alone I yield, for you fight well, I suppose." Loki then fled the hall precipitously.

Later, after leaving Ægir's feast, Thor and his wife Sif mounted their goat-driven chariot and returned to Bilskirnir, their hall in the heart of Asgard. Thor's mood always lightened when he returned to his prized palace, a building said to be the largest ever erected. Not this time, however. He was still sullen when Sif led him to their chamber, caressed him, and sought to entice him into making love. Finding him unresponsive, Sif asked: "Husband, what dark cloud hovers over your spirit? It is not like you to fail to rise to the allure of the flesh."

Thor sighed and responded: "My encounter with that rascal Loki has left me in no mood for love."

Sif laughed. "It makes little sense for you to pay attention to anything that deceiving scoundrel says. Do you remember how once, he stole my hair and you forced him, under threat of death, to go down to Svartalfheim, find the dark elves' master craftsmen, and have them construct a new head of hair for me? Loki is but a rat, deathly afraid of you. You should ignore him."

"It was not what Loki said, but the memories his speech brought back," replied Thor. "In Skrymir's evil domain, the sorcerer put me through three trials. I had to drink from a horn whose contents I could never finish (for, in reality, I was drinking from the ocean); then I was made, and was barely able, to lift a large cat (in reality, it was the World Serpent Jörmungandr, the supreme monster I am fated to engage in the final battle of Ragnarök); and finally, I had to wrestle with a frail-looking old woman, who nonetheless defeated me and made me drop one knee to the ground – as it turned out, it was Old Age I fought, an invincible opponent."

"But those were just enchantments, and their outcome should not have troubled you."

"They did not, in themselves. I was never going to be able to drink away an entire ocean, though as it turned out I caused its level to drop noticeably. Nor could I overpower Jörmungandr, for we are fated to have a decisive encounter much later, at



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the end of time. However, when Skrymir revealed that the crone who forced me to bend my knee was *old age*, I became quite disturbed. Unlike humans, I thought we gods were immune from the pains and indignities of growing old. I accept the inevitability of perishing at Ragnarök, but who knows how much farther into the future that accursed day will be? What if I have gotten old and infirm, my limbs weakened and pained by age and disease, long before the end arrives? I can accept dying like a hero, but I fear limping through season after season like a helpless human."

Sif laughed again. "I thought manly heroes like yourself were made of sterner stuff. We females must endure the disappointment of losing our looks, the pains of childbirth, the anxiety over the possible loss of our consorts in battle. Cast your fears aside, for you males have it easy. When old age comes, you will most likely be facing opponents who are as diminished as you are. Yours is the luckier sex, so you should enjoy your privileges until the end of days! And, speaking of enjoyment, let us pleasure each other and forget the distant future!"

Thor's misgivings were not allayed, yet he forced himself to cast a rueful smile. "Females are not only the stronger sex, but also the wiser one," he conceded, and kissed her.

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About the Author



Born in Cuba, Matias Travieso-Diaz migrated to the United States as a young man. He became an engineer and lawyer and practiced for nearly fifty years. After retirement, he took up creative writing. Well over one hundred of his short stories have been published or accepted for publication in anthologies and paying magazines, blogs, audio books and podcasts. A first collection of his stories, "The Satchel and Other Terrors" is available [on Amazon](#) and other book outlets; additional anthologies of his work are scheduled for publication in 2025. Visit him

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