

MACMILLAN READERS

ELEMENTARY LEVEL

Viking Tales

Retold by Chris Rose

 **MACMILLAN**

Contents

<i>The World of the Vikings' Tales</i>	4
<i>A Picture Dictionary</i>	8
<i>The People In The Stories</i>	9
1 Fenrir's Chain	10
2 The Story of Thrym	15
3 The Brisingamen Necklace	23
4 Sigurd and Sigdrifa	32
5 The Story of Alvis	37
6 Thor and the Giants	43
<i>Points For Understanding</i>	58
<i>Exercises</i>	62

Fenrir's Chain

This is the story of Loki's children, and what happened to them. The god Loki had three children, but these were not ordinary children.

Loki's children were a snake whose name was Jormungand, a scary woman whose name was Hel, and a wolf whose name was Fenrir. At first they lived in Jotunheim, the country of the giants, but then they all came to Asgard, where the gods lived, and the gods were very worried.

'I don't like Loki's children!' said Odin, the most important of the gods. 'Loki is a dangerous man. He's always playing tricks. His children will be as dangerous as he is!'

The goddess Freyja did not think the same thing. 'But sometimes Loki is good,' she said. 'He has helped us lots of times. I think his children can live here in Asgard, with us.'

'But they're a snake, a strange-looking, scary woman and a wolf!' shouted Odin. 'They can't live here!'

Thor thought the same thing.

So first they took Jormungand the snake. Jormungand was so big the gods needed all the strength of Odin and Thor and two other gods, Tyr and Balder, to pick him up. Then, they threw him out of Asgard, which was at the top of the world, all the way down to Midgard. With a big, loud noise, the snake fell into the world of the humans. In Midgard, Jormungand started to grow and grow and grow. In the end, there was no space left for him there, so he went into the sea which was all around Midgard. When he was in the sea, he grew and grew until he made a circle around the entire world. His tail went into his mouth.

'Now then,' said Odin, 'What about Loki's daughter, Hel?'

The gods all looked at Hel, and even they were frightened. Her head was the head of a normal woman, but the rest of her body was like a skeleton, only bones and dead skin.

‘I know what do with her,’ said Odin, who was very clever. ‘This woman is half-alive and half-dead. She can’t live with us, because we’re gods, and she can’t live with the humans in Midgard, because she isn’t human. We’ll send her to Niflheim!’

‘To Niflheim!’ shouted Freyja. ‘But that’s a terrible place! That is the place where people go when they have died!’

‘Exactly!’ said Odin. ‘Hel will be the best queen for Niflheim. I’ll give her a city there, and the name of that city will be Hel, too!’

Because Odin was the most important god he always got what he wanted. So Hel was sent down to Niflheim where she became the queen of all the people who have died.

‘So, then,’ asked Thor, ‘What are we going to do with this wolf?’

All of the gods – Odin and Thor and Freyja and Tyr and Balder looked at the wolf.

‘A wolf is only a type of dog,’ said Freyja.

‘That’s true,’ said Thor. ‘And if you’re kind to a dog, the dog will grow up to be a good dog.’

‘Perhaps that’s true for wolves, as well,’ said Freyja.

Again, all the gods looked at the wolf. It was only a baby wolf. It was beautiful, grey and white in colour, with blue eyes. He was quite a handsome wolf.

‘You know what I think?’ asked Thor.

‘No – and I’m not sure I really *want* to know what you think!’ said Odin slowly. Thor’s father did not think his son was very intelligent.

‘Tell us Thor!’ said Tyr.

‘I think he can live here,’ said Thor. ‘We’ve given homes

to Loki's other two children, and this one will be no trouble to us, the gods, here in our home.'

'Thor is right!' said Freyja.

'Very well then,' said Odin, 'The wolf can stay here!'

'Thank you!' said Fenrir – and the gods were all surprised that a wolf could talk! Everybody was very pleased. The gods played with the wolf like a dog. The god Tyr was his best friend, and they played together all the time.

At first, everything was fine. Fenrir the wolf lived in Asgard with the gods, and played in the big fields and gardens like an ordinary dog. But Fenrir was always very hungry. He ate and ate and ate and as he ate he got bigger and bigger and bigger. Often, when he was hungry, he started to get very angry.

The gods started to worry about this very big, hungry, angry wolf that lived with them.

'We need to tie him up!' said Thor.

'I think you're right!' said Odin.

So the gods found the biggest, strongest, thickest piece of rope they could find.

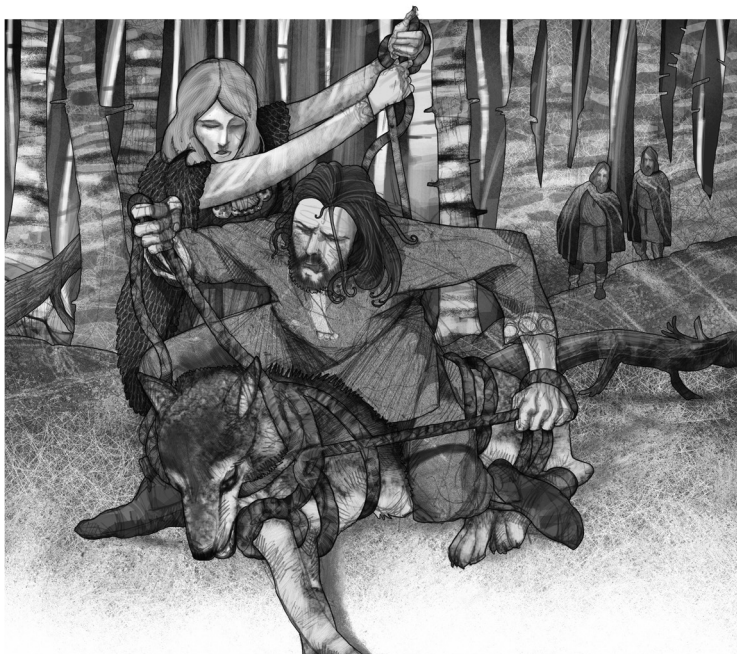
'Here, Fenrir!' they shouted to the wolf. 'We're going to tie you up so you can stay near us all the time!'

Fenrir did not like this. But he thought that if he was close to the gods, they would not leave him. He thought they would give him lots of food to eat. So he came closer to them.

When he was very close, Thor pulled out the rope and tied Fenrir up with it. But Fenrir only laughed.

'Ha!' he said. 'Do you think you can tie me up with that? I'm Fenrir, the strongest and biggest of all the wolves!' Then – very easily – he broke the big, thick rope.

Now the gods were very worried. Every day, Fenrir ate more and more, and he got bigger and bigger.



‘We need to tie him up, but with a metal chain and not a rope!’ said Odin, and everybody agreed with him. So the gods made the biggest, strongest chain they could.

‘Come here!’ they said to Fenrir. ‘Let us tie you with this chain, so you can always be close to us.’

Again, Fenrir did not like this, but he let the gods put the chain around him. The gods tied the chain as tightly as they could, but again, Fenrir only laughed.

‘Ha!’ he said. ‘Do you think you can tie me up with this little chain? I’m Fenrir, the strongest and biggest of all the wolves!’ He pushed his front legs, and then he pushed his back legs and he growled, and then – *snap!* The chain broke.

Now the gods were very worried.

‘We have a very dangerous animal living in Asgard with us!’ said Tyr.

‘That wolf is dangerous for all of us,’ said Freyja.

‘You’re right,’ said Odin. ‘We must tie him up. And this time we’ll make the strongest chain of all!’

‘What is that going to be?’ asked Thor. ‘Fenrir can break rope and metal chains easily!’

‘What is the biggest and strongest thing of all?’ asked Odin. ‘What can never be broken?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Thor.

‘A mountain?’ said Balder.

‘Exactly!’ said Odin. ‘We’ll make a big, strong chain from a mountain!’

So the gods made a chain out of a mountain, a chain of stone. When the chain was ready, the gods asked Fenrir to come to them, but Fenrir would not.

‘You’re going to try to tie me up again, aren’t you?’ he said. ‘I know what you’re like!’

‘No!’ said Odin. ‘We know you’re the strongest and biggest of all the wolves. So we have made a chain out of a mountain, because we want to see how strong you are!’

‘Yes!’ said Freyja. ‘We want to see you break this chain!’

Fenrir did not like this, but he wanted the gods to see how strong he was. ‘How do I know this isn’t a trick?’ he asked them.

This was a good question, and the gods thought hard.

‘I know what we’ll do,’ said Odin. ‘To show you this isn’t a trick, we’ll put the chain on you, and one of the gods will put his hand in your mouth. If you can’t break the chain, then you can bite off the hand of the god!’ This was a dangerous thing to say. If a god only had one hand, he could not hold a sword. If a god could not hold a sword, he would not be a strong god.

‘Very well, then,’ said Fenrir. ‘Which god will put his hand in my mouth?’ Then he laughed, because he knew this was a difficult thing for a god to do.

The gods all looked at each other. None of the gods wanted to lose a hand. The gods all looked at the big, strong teeth of the wolf.

Only Tyr came forward. Tyr was the bravest of the gods.

'I will!' he said. 'I'll put my hand in your mouth, and if you can't break this chain, you can bite off my hand!'

'Very well!' said Fenrir. 'Then let's start right now!' He laughed again.

Fenrir opened his mouth, and Tyr put his hand between the wolf's strong teeth. The gods took the big chain, made out of mountain, and tied it around the wolf.

Fenrir pushed. Fenrir pulled. Fenrir growled, then pushed and pulled again, trying to move his legs as hard as he could. He became more and more angry, and tried harder and harder. But it was no good – the wolf could not break the chain.

After an hour of trying to break the chain, his long teeth closed on Tyr's hand. Tyr did not even cry out in pain – but he knew he had lost his hand. From now on, he would never be as strong again.

Fenrir the wolf still lives in Asgard, tied up with a chain made out of stone. He is still a very, very angry wolf, waiting for a chance to escape.

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