***IDUN****Goddess of Youth*

Idun, "She Who Renews" is the Goddess of spring, immortal youth and eternal life. According to some, Idun, who had no birth and is never to taste death, was also warmly welcomed by the Gods when she made her appearance in Asgard with Bragi. To win their affections she promised them a daily taste of the marvelous apples which she bore in her casket, which had the power of conferring immortal youth and loveliness upon all who partook of them.

*“The golden apples
Out of her garden
Have yielded you dower of youth,
Ate you them every day.”
              -WAGNER (Forman’s tr.)*

Thanks to this magic fruit, the Gods, who are not all immortal, ward off the approach of old age and disease, and remain vigorous, beautiful, and young throughout the countless ages. These apples are therefore considered very precious indeed, and Idun carefully treasures them in her magic casket. But no matter how many she draws out, the same number always remain for distribution at the Feast of the Gods, to whom alone she offers a taste, although dwarfs and giants are eager to obtain possession of this fruit.

*“Bright Iduna, Maid immortal!
Standing at Valhalla’s portal,
In her casket has rich store
Of rare apples, gilded o’er;
Those rare apples, not of Earth,
Ageing Æsir give fresh birth.”
              -VALHALLA (J. C. Jones)*

**Thiassi, the Storm Giant**

One day, Odin, Hoenir, and Loki started out upon one of their usual excursions to earth, and, after wandering for a long while, found themselves in a deserted region, where they could discover no hospitable dwelling. Weary and very hungry, the Gods perceiving a herd of oxen, slew one, kindled a fire, and sat down beside it to rest while waiting for their meat to cook.

To their surprise, however, in spite of the roaring flames the meat remained quite raw. Realizing that some magic must be at work, they looked about them to discover what could hinder their cookery. They finally perceived an eagle perched upon a tree above them. The bird addressed them and declared that the spell would be removed and the meat done to a turn in a very short time if they would only give him as much food as he could eat. The Gods agreed to do this, and the eagle, swooping downwards, fanned the flames with his huge wings, and soon the meat was cooked. But as he was about to carry off three quarters of the ox as his share, Loki seized a great stake lying near at hand, and began to belabor the voracious bird, forgetting that it was versed in magic arts. To his great dismay one end of the stake stuck fast to the eagle’s back, the other to his hands, and he found himself dragged over stones and through briers, flying through the air, his arms almost torn out of their sockets. In vain he cried for mercy and implored the eagle to let him go; the bird flew on, until he promised any ransom his ravisher could ask in exchange for his release.

The bird, who was the storm giant Thiassi in eagle guise, let him go only upon one condition. He made him promise upon the most solemn of oaths that he would lure Idun out of Asgard, so that the giant might obtain possession of her and of her magic fruit.

Released at last, Loki returned to join Odin and Hoenir, to whom, however, he was very careful not to confide the condition upon which he had obtained his freedom; and when they had returned to Asgard he began to plan how he might entice Idun outside of the Gods’ abode. A few days later, Bragi being absent on one of his minstrel tours, Loki sought Idun in the groves of Brunnaker, where she had taken up her abode, and by artfully describing some apples which grew at a short distance from there, and which he mendaciously declared were exactly like hers, he lured her away from home with a crystal dish full of fruit, which she intended to compare with that which he extolled. No sooner had Idun left Asgard, however, than the deceiver Loki forsook her, and ere she could return home the storm giant Thiassi swept down from the north on his eagle wings, caught her up in his cruel talons, and bore her swiftly away to his barren and desolate home of Thrymheim.

*“Thrymheirn the sixth is named,
Where Thiassi dwelt,
That all-powerful Jötun.”
              -LAY OF GRIMNIR (Thorpe’s tr.)*

There she pined, grew pale and sad, but persistently refused to give him the smallest bite of her magic fruit, which, as he well knew, would make him beautiful and renew his strength and youth.

*“All woes that fall
On Odin’s hall
Can be traced to Loki base.
From out Valhalla’s portal
’Twas he who pure Iduna lured, —
Whose casket fair
Held apples rare
That render gods immortal, —
And in Thiassi’s tower immured.”
              -VALHALLA (J. C. Jones)*

Time passed. The Gods, thinking that Idun had accompanied her husband and would soon return, at first paid no heed to her departure, but little by little the beneficial effect of their last apple feast passed away. They gradually felt themselves grow old and stiff, and saw their youth and beauty disappear; so they became alarmed and began to search for the missing Goddess of perpetual youth.
Close investigation very soon revealed the fact that she had last been seen in Loki’s company, and when Odin sternly called him to account, this God was forced to reveal that he had betrayed her into the storm giant’s power.

*“By his mocking, scornful mien,
Soon in Valhal it was seen
’Twas the traitor Loki’s art
Which had led Idun apart
To gloomy tower
And Jotun power.”
              -VALHALLA (J. C. Jones)*

The Gods now indignantly bade Loki undo the harm he had done and immediately bring the goddess back, warning him that unless he complied with this command he would forfeit his life.

Thus adjured, Loki promised to do all he could, and, borrowing Freya’s falcon plumage, flew off to Thrymheim, where he found Idun alone, sadly mourning her exile from Asgard and her beloved Bragi. Changing the fair Goddess into a nut according to some accounts, or according to others, into a swallow, Loki held her tightly between his claws, and rapidly winged his way back to Asgard, hoping he would reach the shelter of its high walls ere Thiassi returned from his fishing excursion in the Northern seas.

The Gods, assembled on the ramparts of the heavenly city, were watching for his return with far more anxiety than they had for Odin when he went in search of Odhroerir, and, remembering the success of their ruse on that occasion, they had gathered great piles of fuel, which they were ready to set on fire at any moment.

**The Return of Idun**

Suddenly they saw Loki coming, but descried in his wake the giant Thiassi, who, in eagle plumes, was striving to overtake him and claim his prey. Loki, knowing his life depended upon the success of his venture, made such great efforts to reach the goal ere Thiassi overtook him that he cleared the wall and sank exhausted in the midst of the gods, who, setting fire to the accumulated fuel, singed Thiassi’s wings, blinded him with smoke, and, when he dropped stunned in their midst, ruthlessly fell upon and slew him.

The Æsir were overjoyed at the recovery of Idun, — who hastened to deal out her apples to them all. Feeling their wonted strength and good looks return with every mouthful they ate, they good-naturedly declared that it was no wonder even the giants longed to taste the apples of perpetual youth. They therefore vowed they would place Thiassi’s eyes as constellations in the heavens, in order to soften any feeling of anger which his relatives might experience upon learning how he had been slain.

*“Up I cast the eyes
Of Allvaldi’s son
Into the heaven serene
They are signs the greatest
Of my deeds.”
              -LAY OF HARBARD (Thorpe’s tr.)*

**The Goddess of Spring**

The physical explanation of this tale is obvious. Idun, the emblem of vegetation, is forcibly carried away in autumn, when Bragi is absent and the singing of the birds has ceased. The cold wintry wind, Thiassi, detains her in the frozen, barren north, where she cannot thrive, until Loki, the south wind, brings back the seed or the swallow, which are both precursors of the returning spring. The youth, beauty, and strength conferred by Idun are symbolical of Nature’s resurrection in spring after winter’s sleep, when color and vigor return to the earth, which has grown wrinkled and gray.

As the disappearance of Idun (vegetation) was a yearly occurrence, the old scalds were not content with this one tale, but also invented another, which, unfortunately, has come down to us only in a fragmentary and very incomplete form. According to this account, Idun was once sitting upon the branches of the sacred ash Yggdrasil, when, growing suddenly faint, she loosed her hold and dropped down on the ground beneath, to the lowest depths of Niflheim. There she lay, pale and motionless, gazing with fixed and horror-struck eyes upon the grewsome sights of Hels realm, trembling violently all the while, as if overcome by the penetrating cold.

*“In the dales dwells
The prescient Dîs,
From Yggdrasil’s
Ash sunk down,
Of alfen race,
Idun by name,
The youngest of Ivaldi’s
Elder children.
She ill brooked
Her descent
Under the hoar tree’s
Trunk confined.
She would not happy be
With Norvi’s daughter,
Accustomed to a pleasanter
Abode at home.”
              -ODIN’S RAVENS’ SONG (Thorpe’s tr.)*

Seeing that she did not rouse herself and return, Odin finally bade Bragi, Heimdall, and another of the Gods go in search of her, giving them a white wolfskin to envelop her in, so that she should not suffer from the cold, and bidding them make every effort to rouse her from her stupor.

*“A wolf’s skin they gave her,
In which herself she clad.”
              -ODIN’S RAVENS’ SONG (Thorpe’s tr.)*

But although Idun passively allowed them to wrap her up in the warm wolfskin, she persistently refused to speak or move, and the Gods sadly suspected she foresaw great ills, for the tears continually rolled down her pallid cheeks. Bragi, seeing her unhappiness, bade the other Gods return to Asgard without him, vowing that he would remain beside her until she was ready to leave Hel’s dismal realm. But the sight of her woe oppressed him so sorely that he had no heart for his usual merry songs, and the strings of his harp remained entirely mute.

*“That voice-like zephyr o’er flow’r meads creeping,
Like Bragi’s music his harp strings sweeping.”
              -VIKING TALES OF THE NORTH (R. B. Anderson)*

In this tale Idun’s fall from Yggdrasil is symbolical of the autumnal falling of the leaves, which lie limp and helpless on the cold bare ground until they are hidden from sight under the snow, represented by the wolfskin, which Odin, the sky, sends down to keep them warm; and the cessation of the birds’ songs is further typified by Bragi’s silent harp.