The Myth of Utgarda-Loki (part 2)

CHARACTERS

THOR

LOKI

THJALFI

ROSKVA

SKRYMIR/UTGARDA-LOKI

LOGI

HUGI

ELLI

GOAT 1 (TANNGNJOSTR)

GOAT 2 (TANNGRISNIR)

PEASANT MAN

NARRATOR

So, the merry band of sexiness epitomized, unadulterated trickster, meat shield, and goat-lover were on their way to Jotunheim, the land of the giants, for a purpose yet to be divined. Their journey took them across the tumultuous, froth-spewing sea and through a vast, tangled maze of trees. Finally emerging from the forest's bowels, they could see that night had just begun to conquer the sky, so they looked for a place of repose. At the foot of a mountain in the distance, Thor discerned what appeared to be a shelter.

THOR: Come, my devoted followers, we shall take shelter in that cavern yonder for the night.

LOKI: Don’t tell me what to do, prick.

THOR: You are free to sleep amongst the wolves and wind tonight, you maggot. In fact, I urge you to do so, for your gnawed corpse would assuredly make far better company.

THJALFI: Do gods taste like goat?

LOKI: A fine point, lad. Indeed, the flesh of some gods—like yours truly—makes goat meat taste like excrement. However, in Thor’s tough tendons even the maggots wouldn’t partake.

THOR: Is the implication here that you’re plump and fat, Loki?

LOKI: What can I say? I’m just that well-endowed.

THOR: Even compared to that horse you experienced firsthand?

LOKI: (laughing suspiciously) Again with this horse, Thor! You won’t admit it, but you love to joke around just as much as I do. As if I’d ever do *that* with a horse! (winks)

Thor rolled his eyes and led the way towards the cavern, which seemed to merge with the base of the mountains behind it. Once inside, Thor lit a campfire simply by exposing his smoking hot abs, and the group gathered around, exhausted from their journey.

ROSKVA: I miss the goats.

THJALFI: (groaning) We know, Roskva. That’s like the…um…whatever comes after ten a bunch of times that you’ve said that.

LOKI: Well, if it’s any comfort, I am sure that the goats don’t miss you.

ROSKVA: Hey, that’s so mean!

THOR: I would prefer it if I didn’t have to watch over *three* children this trip, Loki.

LOKI: Aren’t we all children at heart? Although, you’re a child in a certain other respect.

THOR: May a serpent piss venom on your face.

Without another word, Thor rolled over and soon greeted sweet sleep. Most of the night departed in peace; however, terrible tremors preceded the rising sun and shook the earth, startling the travelers awake. A few suspenseful moments passed when naught but the whistling wind could be heard, and then the earth groaned in agony once again. Enraged, Thor leapt to his feet with Mjolnir in hand, the others groggily following him outside. The sight that met their eyes was astonishing. It was not a mountain before which they had taken their rest; rather, it was a sleeping giant whose undulating chest smote the earth with awful snores. Thor's grip tightened around the hilt of his hammer, the stirring clouds above him reflecting his brewing fury.

THOR: You little…

LOKI: Do you have eyes? In what world is that thing little?

ROSKVA: AAAAAAHHHH, THE MOUNTAIN IS ALIVE!

THJALFI: D-don't worry, if it's made of meat, I'll protect you.

THOR: I'm going to kill it.

LOKI: Of course you are.

ROSKVA: KILL THE MOUNTAIN!!

Thor's hammer was poised to strike, but right before he could execute the crushing blow, the snores stopped. At the far end of the mountainous figure, a circular gleam resembling an eye reflected the cusp of daylight brimming over the horizon. Then, to the horror of Thjalfi and Roskva, the titan groggily sat up, his head practically scraping the clouds.

SKRYMIR: Oh, hello little creatures. I almost didn't see you all down there.

THOR: All I hear is you begging for your death.

SKRYMIR: Golly, I'm sorry if I offended you in any way. I promise I don't mean any harm.

ROSKVA: (timidly) Does that mean you're a nice mountain?

SKRYMIR: Ho-ho, I suppose you could say that. They call me Skrymir. Nice to meet you.

ROSKVA: You *are* nice! Hi, Mr. Mountain! I'm—

SKRYMIR: Oh yes, I know. In fact, I already know who all of you are. Ah, I see you were enjoying the warmth of my glove for shelter. I'm glad it was of some service to you.

Skrymir daintily picked up an enormous glove from the ground, which the travelers had previously mistaken for a cave. Fleeces, blankets, and leftover ashes fell out of the opening, hardly passing for particles of dust next to the giant, who now stood at full height.

THJALFI: I can't believe that cave was his glove.

LOKI: Did this giant just casually brush over the fact that he's been stalking us?

THOR: I…must apologize, giant. Had I known that cave was in fact your glove, I would have asked before intruding.

SKRYMIR: No worries. Although, if you're keen to make it up to me in any way, would you mind if I accompanied you for part of your journey?

THOR: Very well. I would not like to feel indebted to you in any way, so you may join us.

SKRYMIR: Well, isn't that just honey and berries!

THJALFI: Aw, now I'm hungry.

With the addition of a new party member, Thor and company traveled over the rolling hills to the north, the sexy man of thunder carrying a mortal child in each arm so that they might match the

giant's pace. The sun traced its arc across the heavens before diving into the distance, heralding night once more. This time, the group took shelter underneath a massive oak. Skrymir fell asleep almost immediately, leaving the others gathered around a campfire.

THJALFI: (moaning) Why couldn't we stop to eat just once?!

ROSKVA: Stop being a crybaby, Thjalfi.

THJALFI: Why don't I just eat you?

ROSKVA: Eeek!

THOR: Do not fret, young one. How about we indulge in some choice goat jerky tonight?

THJALFI: (magically cured) Ooh, yes please!

Thor rose to fetch his pack, not realizing that Skrymir had stored all their possessions in his own giant knapsack out of courtesy. Approaching the knot, Thor attempted to wrench it apart with both hands, but the thread would not budge. Irritated, Thor summoned his Mjolnir and struck the bag, but not even a scratch marked the hide.

THOR: (furious) That's it. This giant is dead.

LOKI: Will you pause for just a moment and consider the repercussions of killing the only creature capable of accessing our belongings?

Heeding not a single word of Loki's, Thor concentrated his godly power and supreme sexiness into the tip of his hammer. With a single leap, Thor cleared the sleeping Skrymir's forehead and slammed it with his Mjolnir, the impact sending a shockwave that sent the two mortal children tumbling a hundred feet.

GOAT 2: OH MY GOAT!!!!!!!

Even back at the humble farmer's home across the sea could Thor's rage be felt. Tanngrisnir and the still-crippled Tanngnjostr, who had just been enjoying a nice evening drink, were now drenched in spilt mead. The old farmer trembled in fear, anxiously looking around as if he would spot the culprit of such a tremendous quake.

PEASANT MAN: Oh gods, what have my children done this time?

GOAT 2: I like how you just naturally assume your children are responsible.

GOAT 1: Bad to the bone.

GOAT 2: I mean, I cannot rightfully disagree, especially when that Thjalfi brat is considered. That marrow-sucking fiend could be up to all manners of evil right now.

PEASANT MAN: Damn it, Thjalfi, I didn't sell you into servitude so you could evoke the wrath of the go-aahh!

Another tremor of even greater force rattled the flimsy walls of the farmer's home.

GOAT 2: Okay, this has GOAT to stop! I will not abide such crude, barbarous behaviour. The earth herself is screaming in agony. Alright, show me the fellow. He has the gall to disrupt my merry evening mead? Ho-ho, I'll show him a thing or two. Come on!

GOAT 1: I'm bad to the bone.

PEASANT MAN: It's alright, goat, I think it's stopped. Thjalfi was probably eaten by whoever he offended. It's a hard loss, but I believe it was necessary and unavoidable.

GOAT 2: Are you sure you're that child's father?

GOAT 1: Bone the bad to I'm.

GOAT 2: And Tanngnjostr is already floored. In service of my better sensibilities, I shall take the liberty of calling this a night. Mr. Peasant, you have our gratitude for receiving us in your abode once more. Allow myself and Tanngnjostr to take our leave as we attempt to enjoy the bliss of sweet sleep outside in the freezing cold. Oh, isn't life as a goat just perfect.

PEASANT MAN: (mumbling to himself) I only hope my poor, dear Roskva is okay.

Across an ocean and a great forest, three times that night did Thor attempt to smite the giant into oblivion. Each time, the giant awoke as if gently prodded, questioning first if a leaf had landed on his head, then an acorn, then a branch. After the third attempt, Thor gave up in bitter defeat, doing his best to plug his ears and silence the overwhelming snores of the giant until morning finally arrived.

SKRYMIR: (yawning) I slept like a log. Did you have a nice night, little ones?

THOR: (muttering with sunken eyes) I will kill him. I will kill him. I will kill him.

LOKI: No matter how sweet my dreams may be, nothing is sweeter than seeing you like this, Thor my dear.

THOR: I will kill them both. I will kill them both.

ROSKVA: You snore a lot, Mr. Mountain.

SKRYMIR: I do? Well gee, I didn't even notice.

THJALFI: So…hungry…

SKRYMIR: Anyway, I believe this is where we shall part ways. If you head due north, you'll reach Utgardr, the castle of the magnanimous Loki. However, I must advise you to be humble, gracious guests, lest something undesirable happens.

LOKI: Hold on. There can only be one Loki in this world, and that is I.

SKRYMIR: I don't know what to tell you, then. The giant's name is Loki.

LOKI: Then he is a pathetic fraud unworthy of my great name!

THOR: If this giant is unworthy of your name, then he must be a fine gentleman indeed.

LOKI: Oh, I see you're no longer throwing a fit.

THOR: Your feeble mind could never hope to grasp the machinations of my psyche. I was simply plotting my next move.

LOKI: Sure you were.

SKRYMIR: Well, I really must be off now. Here's your stuff. I enjoyed traveling with you, however brief it may have been.

THOR: That makes one of us.

Skrymir undid the knot on his knapsack with ease and emptied its contents on the ground, causing Thor to visibly tremble in rage.

THJALFI: MEAT!!!!!!!

As Thjalfi pounced on the pile of provisions like a feral wolf, tearing through packages and wrapping to uncover the salty gems of goat flesh buried somewhere within, Skrymir bade farewell, heading south. Once Thjalfi had sufficiently glutted himself, the four travelers went north for another day, eventually arriving at the threshold of a fortress that would be considered large even by Skrymir's standards. A locked gate blocked the path to the central keep.

THOR: (banging on the bars) Hello! You who inhabits this castle, come forth and greet the most esteemed of guests. It is I, Thor!

LOKI: Stop yapping and hurry up.

Loki and the children had already slipped through one of the large gaps between the bars of the gate. Thor, too manly to feel self-conscious, followed quickly behind. Guided by ever-growing sounds of mirth, the group soon found themselves in a banquet hall, in which two long tables held rows of laughing, feasting giants. At the head of the room, sitting on a massive throne, was the giant presumed to be their king. Upon meeting Thor's gaze, the giant's lips curled into a smile, and he eagerly beckoned at them to come forth.

UTGARDA-LOKI: Well met, tiny travelers. I am known here as Loki. What brings you to my castle this fine evening?

LOKI: Yeah…no.

UTGARDA-LOKI: I'm sorry?

LOKI: See, this isn't going to work. I'm the only Loki here and anywhere. You're going to have to pick a new name, I'm afraid.

UTGARDA-LOKI: I am aware of your heritage, trickster god, but do you not find this world big enough to hold two of those with the same moniker? Especially so for one of your diminutive size, little god.

THOR: I'd like to see you talk about our height when your head is detached from your body.

LOKI: Stop comparing sizes, Thor. We have a far more pressing issue to which we must attend. There can be no two Lokis!

UTGARDA-LOKI: In that case, might I recommend you choose a different name, miniature-and-therefore-inferior Loki?

LOKI: Ho! You're a feisty one, *Utgarda*-Loki.

UTGARDA-LOKI: I'm surprised you still included Loki in that nickname.

LOKI: Out of the goodness of my heart. However, the very fact that you require a separate designation indicates that you are merely a cheap imitation—a knockoff, if you would.

UTGARDA-LOKI: My, those are some fighting words. Care to put your claim to the test? How will you demonstrate to me that you are indeed a Loki worthy of his name?

THOR: Well he's the only one who's been impregnated by a hors—

LOKI: I propose a contest! Utgarda-Loki, dare you attempt to out-eat me? Even with your stature, I am certain I can consume more than you or anyone else in this castle! You're all just compensating for a lack of size elsewhere anyway.

THJALFI: Ooh, pick me! I wanna eat giant food. Some of this meat is the size of my house, it's amazing! I wish I could live in a piece of meat.

ROSKVA: You'd just eat it all, and then you wouldn't have a house anymore.

THJALFI: Worth it.

UTGARDA-LOKI: You are an amusing lot. Very well, tiny Loki, I accept your challenge. However, one of my subjects will be competing in my stead. If you defeat him, then I will acknowledge you as the better Loki. However, if he defeats you, then wallow in shame, for you could not even best one who bows to me as king.

With a snap of his fingers, Utgarda-Loki summoned his attendants, who conveniently had with them a trough of meat the size of a stretch of river. It took both long tables in the hall to match its

length. The feasting guests eagerly formed a circle around Loki, who seemed a guppy in size, and his competitor: a fidgeting giant with eyebrows of fire.

UTGARDA-LOKI: This is Logi, your challenger.

LOKI: Oh, you've got to be kidding me.

LOGI: What?

LOKI: What do you mean, what? Logi is one letter away from Loki, which is too close!

THOR: I can't wait for the contest to begin so you can stuff your face with food and shut up.

THJALFI: It's…a river…of meat. Ohhhh, I wanna go swimming in that!

LOGI: Hey, tiny Loki. No hard feelings, right?

LOKI: You better not have any when I devour you.

LOGI: That's probably not a good idea. I doubt I'd taste any good.

LOKI: It's a taunt. Gods you're dull.

THOR: Like peas in a pod.

UTGARDA-LOKI: The game is simple. Eat from your end forward. Whoever reaches the middle first is the winner. Logi and Logi, are you ready?

LOKI: Did you just purposefully slur the *k* in my name to a *g?*

LOGI: Ready.

UTGARDA-LOKI: Begin!

Without hesitation, Loki literally dove into the meat, shoveling bites into his mouth with such frenzied speed that the entire hall's attention was fixated on him. Not a single morsel was spared, bones picked sparkling clean as Loki plowed through his portion at an alarming rate. Thjalfi

was awed, in that moment deciding that his one goal in life was to be able to eat like Loki. Roskva was thinking of goats. Only when Loki finally reached the center of the meat did everyone's gaze even consider his competitor—such was the magnificence with which Loki consumed the meat that on any other occasion would crush him under its weight. Yet, to everyone's shock, Loki and Logi met in the middle at the exact same time.

THOR: Does…that mean it's a tie?

UTGARDA-LOKI: No. Take a closer look.

Indeed, it was clear that Loki had performed miraculously, cleanly devouring every shred of meat from his end to the middle. However, Logi had swallowed not only the meat, but every bone and even the trough itself. It was as if a wildfire has blazed across his end of the table, disintegrating everything in its path. Thor was not one to be easily surprised, but even the delicious mountain of muscle that was he couldn't help but stare in amazement.

LOKI: (bloated and delirious) D-did I win? Yeah, take that. I think I'm going to hurl.

UTGARDA-LOKI: While you performed admirably, tiny Loki, I believe the winner is clear.

The giants applauded while Logi humbly took his place back amidst the crowd. Thor managed to roll Loki off the table, who probably would not be getting up for a while.

UTGARDA-LOKI: I must say, your friend was thoroughly entertaining, little god. However, it seems my subject has proven without a doubt our superiority. Unless you think that you can perform better than your friend.

THOR: First, you can stop calling that beast-philanderer my friend. Second, I would never lower myself to the likes of sport with you, giant filth.

UTGARDA-LOKI: Bitter words, but understandable from the losing side.

THOR: Enough! Thjalfi, you've been useless ever since you came along. Why don't you do something for once?

THJALFI: Hey, I've been acting as your meat shield this whole time! I mean, nobody's thrown any meat at us yet, but that doesn't mean I'm not working my butt off.

THOR: Be useful before I throw you!

ROSKVA: Why don't you race them? You're a really fast runner, remember? Whenever it's dinner time, you go from the field to home in a flash.

THJALFI: Yeah, but that's only when there's food.

UTGARDA-LOKI: Colour me curious. How about this? If you win a race against one of my subjects, you'll get an entire trough of meat to yourself.

THJALFI: I'm in! Who am I racing? I'll do it now. Come on, give me the meat.

LOKI: Ugh, I never want to hear the word meat again…

Utgarda-Loki gestured for everyone to follow him out of the hall. They soon emerged onto the grounds behind the castle, where a makeshift racetrack was burned into a large field. Thjalfi eagerly lined up next to his competitor: a shadowy figure with the name of Hugi who wasn't much taller than the child—oddly enough for a castle full of giants. Thor and Roskva sat down on Loki's inflated belly, waiting to see what Thjalfi could accomplish.

THJALFI: Think of the meat. Do it for the—

HUGI: Meat. Ha, see what I did there?

THJALFI: Huh?

HUGI: I completed your sentence. That's right: I know what you're thinking.

THJALFI: Oh yeah? Well…what am I thinking about right now?

HUGI: Meat.

THJALFI: Whoa.

UTGARDA-LOKI: The race is simple: two laps around the track. The first to reach the start line again is the winner. Runners, on your marks.

THJALFI: What's a marks?

UTGARDA-LOKI: GO!

Thjalfi immediately broke into a frantic sprint, propelling himself at a speed that seemed to stretch the limit of mortal capability. However, Hugi was faster—far faster. It seemed that every time Thjalfi thought about the need for more speed, Hugi would beat him to the punch and create even more distance between them. In fact, Hugi crossed the finish line before Thjalfi had even completed his first lap, not even a drop of sweat on his brow. The poor child collapsed when he finally caught up with the superior racer.

THJALFI: (heaving and mumbling deliriously) Gotta go fast. Gotta go fast. Gotta go—

HUGI: Faster, faster, faster faster faster. You did well, child. Just not well enough.

THJALFI: (still delirious) One meat, two meat…red meat, blue meat.

UTGARDA-LOKI: It would seem that, once again, I have bested you small folk.

Thor, after having draped Thjalfi's body over Loki's gut, turned to face Utgarda-Loki, his brow knotted in indignation.

THOR: You have no right to talk. All you've done is watch. Why don't *you* compete for once?

UTGARDA-LOKI: Very well. Let's head back inside. Somebody fetch us my drinking horn.

Thor dragged Loki and Thjalfi back into the hall, Roskva riding them like a sleigh. Utgarda-Loki took his place on his throne once more. An attendant brought him a filled drinking horn about the size of his torso. Without taking a sip, Utgarda-Loki passed the horn to Thor.

THOR: What, do you want me to drink first?

UTGARDA-LOKI: I can finish that entire horn in a single gulp and the smallest of sips afterward. Even if you manage to finish it in two gulps, I will consider you a formidable drinker. However, none here are so feeble as to need more than three.

THOR: I see. So, when I finish this in no more than a single gulp, I shall win.

UTGARDA-LOKI: I look forward to watching you attempt to live up to that claim.

Grinning, Thor took hold of the horn's rim and started drinking from it. Only the manliest of gods could ever hope to conquer a horn full of drink whose volume was several times their own body mass. He drank and drank and continued to drink until his breath failed him. Gasping, Thor inspected the inside of the horn, appalled to see that the drink level had hardly lowered.

UTGARDA-LOKI: So, it seems a single gulp will not suffice. Still, two would be respectable.

THOR: *BUUUUUURRRRRRRRRRPPPPPPP* I will concede to your fortitude if you can truly finish this horn in just over a gulp, but I will not be made a fool. My second gulp!

Thor's next gulp was even mightier and manlier than the first, such so that all the giants were in awe. Still, despite considerably more of the drink disappearing after Thor finally paused for breath, the better part of the horn remained filled.

UTGARDA-LOKI: That's two.

THOR: This horn is undoubtedly rigged with some devious magic, but no matter. I shall show you just how superior I am. My third gulp shall overcome your magic, and you will swallow your words.

Thor's third gulp was undoubtedly the most masculine display of will on which the denizens of Utgardr had ever laid eyes. It was inconceivable where the oceanic volume of drink could have possibly gone, but such trifles needed not concern a god. Yet, despite his stunning effort, Thor's final gulp could not even bring the drink down to the halfway point. Nauseous and waterlogged, Thor fell onto the floor, gasping and attempting to quell his disbelief.

UTGARDA-LOKI: That's three. It seems that despite all your machismo, you could not even finish my horn in a measly three gulps.

THOR: Do not think you can deceive me with your vile trickery. I challenge you to finish that horn in just over a gulp right now, as you said you could. Well?

Without a word, Utgarda-Loki beckoned an attendant to refill the horn until the liquid practically spilled over the brim. Smirking knowingly, Utgarda-Loki began drinking, and Thor watched the fluid level plummet with a dumbstruck expression. Eventually, Utgarda-Loki paused for breath, tipping the horn to allow a few stray droplets fall onto his tongue.

THOR: I-impossible…

UTGARDA-LOKI: It seems we giants are made from an entirely different stock than you puny gods. I'd wager that you couldn't even pick up Purrfect Meowma.

THOR: Whose perfect mama?

UTGARDA-LOKI: No, my cat, Purrfect Meowma.

The giant gestured to a fuzzy ginger feline lounging on the floor next to his throne. Even lying down, the cat was many bodies taller than Thor.

ROSKVA: Hi Purrfect Meowma! You're a cute cat.

LOKI: (deliriously) The only one who could think of such a stupid name for that cat is someone with an equally stupid name himself.

ROSKVA: Aren't you both called Loki?

LOKI: NO!

THJALFI: Need…meat…

THOR: You will not be forgiven for your mockery. A cat? Do you honestly think I, the unbelievably manly Thor, would have trouble lifting a cat?

UTGARDA-LOKI: Find out for yourself.

Thor pompously—nay, masculinely—approached the cat, prepared to lift it with hardly the effort of a single finger. However, the plump clump of flesh and fur did not budge, as if it had the weight of an entire mountain range. With a desperate growl, Thor engaged all his bulging, shapely muscles and put the strength of the manliest of gods into lifting the cat; yet, despite such awesome efforts, he could lift but a single paw. Still, the giants gasped in shock, trembling in their seats until Thor finally gave up with an exasperated sigh.

UTGARDA-LOKI: J-just as expected, even the cat proved too much for you.

THOR: ENOUGH! I shall not be likened to a pussy. Come, bring out your strongest, and I shall wrestle him into submission. No tricks—only vigour.

THJALFI: Let me…wrestle…meat…

LOKI: …one time…tied a goat to my…

UTGARDA-LOKI: Why must you struggle so, small one? Can you not accept that you are simply physically inferior?

THOR: NEVER! There is none who is a greater man than I!

UTGARDA-LOKI: (sighing) Very well. Elli, come forth and satisfy this man.

Out from the crowd, a spindly old woman slowly hobbled forth. She was no giant.

THOR: (scoffing) Do your jokes have no end? Even the other Loki has more taste than this.

ELLI: Now, now, don't judge a book by its cover, sweet cheeks. I bet I can rock your world.

THOR: You are the one about to be rocked, old woman, if you think you can wrestle me.

LOKI: Rock is…a euphemism…

ELLI: Ooh, you're a feisty one, sweet cheeks. Good. I like my men with a bit of spunk.

THOR: If you were a fraction of your current age, I'm certain you would have been a fine woman indeed. Still, know your place. I am Thor; that's right, *the* Thor. You have no hope of lasting even a second against me.

ELLI: Really? From my experience, men who talk like that are the ones who finish early.

UTGARDA-LOKI: First one whose knee or above touches the ground is the loser. I trust these rules are acceptable?

THOR: I apologize in advance, woman. Know that it is not too late to back down.

ELLI: Before the fun has even begun? Please, I need you at the very least to entertain me.

UTGARDA-LOKI: The floor is yours.

ELLI: HYYYYAAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!

THOR: What?!

In an instant, Ellie had a stunned Thor in a headlock, suppressing his struggles and inching him towards the ground. Thor viciously thrashed in an attempt to shake her, but to no avail. As a stone weighs down a newly baked loaf of bread, so Elli's strength gradually forced Thor closer and closer to the ground, until he finally crumbled, letting his left knee slam into the floor. The giants laughed and cheered, while Thor bowed his head in humiliation. Elli leaned down and whispered in his ear.

ELLI: My door's open if you're looking for some more fun. (wink)

UTGARDA-LOKI: A wonderful show. Now, for the sake of your dignity and mine as host, I encourage you to retire for the night. My servants shall show you to your quarters. Rest, and we shall speak in the morning.

Questioning his manliness, Thor allowed himself to be led to his chambers, along with the incapacitated Loki and Thjalfi, Roskva following last. While none were there who could reliably relate the tale, it is said that Thor for the first time let tears fall from his masculine eyes as sleep slowly overtook his weary body.

Morning arrived, lifting Loki and Thjalfi out of their stupors, but unable to brighten Thor's mood. The group somberly meandered into the hall at the servants' behest, unable to look Utgarda-Loki in the eye as he towered over them in his throne. Seeing that bitter wounds still throbbed, Utgarda-Loki offered to escort the small ones out of his castle. Those who could fit through the bars of the gate did so, while Utgarda-Loki regarded them from within the grounds.

UTGARDA-LOKI: May I be so bold as to ask what you all thought of the contests last evening?

THOR: May you be strangled by your own son's intestines.

LOKI: Hey, that punishment is reserved for the superior Loki.

THOR: Exactly.

LOKI: Remind me who got his arse handed to him by a granny?

THOR: Remind me who I had to literally roll onto a field?

UTGARDA-LOKI: It would appear the contests were not to your liking. That is unsurprising, for not all was as it seemed.

THOR: What do you mean?

UTGARDA-LOKI: As you have now left my castle, I suppose I can tell you the truth, in the hopes that you do not return. For, if I had known the depth of your fearsome ability, I never would have allowed you to cross my threshold. See, you were all victims of illusions from the very beginning. The giant Skrymir you met in the forest was none other than yours truly, wishing to play around with you before you inevitably arrived at my castle. Furthermore, the bag that held your provisions was sealed with a magic thread which not even Odin would be capable of breaking. You thought your mighty hammer bounced off my forehead, but the reality is that you completely flattened three massive mountains with your strength. As you depart, you shall see the square valleys your blows created.

THJALFI: Does that mean…the meat was an illusion, too?

UTGARDA-LOKI: No, the meat was real, but the contest was certainly a delusion. I must give little Loki my commendations for possessing the most voracious appetite of any living creature.

However, you competed against Fire, which devours all in its wake. And you, boy, could outrun even the wind; however, you could never hope to outrun Thought itself, who was your opponent. However, most frightening of all was you, Thor, for each of your exploits were miracles in themselves. The horn from which you drank was actually connected to the ocean, and I thought for a moment that you might drain it dry. When you reach the coast, you shall see a vast line of shore where there used to be water and know what kind of gulps you drank. The cat, Purrfect Meowma, was no cat, but rather Jormungandr, the serpent that binds the world. You thought you lifted Purrfect Meowma's paw, but you really raised Jormungandr all the way to the sky; any further, and he would have surely released his tail, signaling the end. Finally, you performed well against Elli, but without Idunn not even a god could hope to conquer Old Age. All this to say, I believe it would be best for all of us if you never stepped foot in my castle again. Cheerio.

THOR: I'LL KILL YOU A THOUSAND TIMES!!!!

Barely able to process what had truly occurred during their stay at Utgardr, Thor manically swung Mjolnir at Utgarda-Loki's head. However, to everyone's shock, he simply vanished. Not only the giant, but the entire castle disappeared in an instant, leaving a vast plain that appeared as if it had never known the imprint of a footstep.

THOR: What? Ingrate. That's right, run like the feral beast you are! If I ever lay eyes on you again, my awesome fury shall be the last thing you see.

LOKI: Did that bastard…just trick the trickster?

ROSKVA: Wait, I wanted to say goodbye to Purrfect Meowma.

Thjalfi collapsed onto the lush grass with a moan.

THJALFI: Ugh, I’m so hungry I could eat a goat raw…

Meanwhile…

GOAT 2: Brrr, I seem to have a terrible sense of foreboding about a distant threat. Tanngnjostr, do you feel it too?

GOAT 1: I’m bad to the bone.

GOAT 2: Yes, that is exactly the sensation! A chill that strikes even your succulent marrow.

GOAT 1: I’m bad to the bone.

GOAT 2: I bet it’s that ungrateful, bone-splitting whippersnapper of a peasant’s son. Oh, do I feel sorry for any goat who has had to cross paths with him since.

GOAT 1: I’m bad to the bone.

GOAT 2: Can’t you say anything different for a change?

GOAT 1: …okay.

GOAT 2: Thank you, that’s much bette—*whaaaaaaaaaaaa?!*

THE END