

Thor and Loki in the Giants'

City

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Nordic

Easy

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All but a few of the Dwellers of Asgard had come to the feast offered by Ægir the Old, the Giant King of the Sea. Frigga, the queenly wife of Odin, was there, and Frey and Freya; Iduna, who guarded the Apples of Youth, and Bragi, her husband; Tyr, the great swordsman, and Niörd, the God of the Sea, Skadi, who wedded Niörd and whose hatred for Loki was fierce, and Sif, whose golden hair was once shorn off by Loki the mischievous. Thor and Loki were there. The Dwellers of Asgard, gathered together in the hall of Ægir, waited for Odin.

Before Odin came Loki made the company merry by the tales that he told in mockery of Thor. Loki long since had his lips unloosed from the thong that the Dwarf Brock had sewn them with. And Thor had forgotten the wrong that he had done to Sif. Loki had been with Thor in his wanderings through Jötunheim, and about these wanderings he now told mocking tales.

He told how he had seen Thor in his chariot of brass drawn by two goats go across Bifröst, the Rainbow Bridge. None of the Æsir or the Vanir knew on what adventure Thor was bent. But Loki followed him and Thor kept him in his company.

As they traveled on in the brass chariot drawn by the two goats, Thor told Loki of the adventure on which he was bent. He would go into Jötunheim, even into Utgard, the Giants' City, and he would try his strength

against the Giants. He was not afraid of aught that might happen, for he carried Miölnir, his hammer, with him.

Their way was through Midgard, the World of Men. Once, as they were traveling on, night came upon them as they were hungry and in need of shelter. They saw a peasant's hut and they drove the chariot toward it. Unyoking the goats and leaving them standing in a hollow beside the chariot, the two, looking not like Dwellers in Asgard, but like men traveling through the country, knocked at the door of the hut and asked for food and shelter.

They could have shelter, the peasant and his wife told them, but they could not have food. There was little in that place, and what little there had been they had eaten for supper. The peasant showed them the inside of the hut: it was poor and bare, and there was nothing there to give anyone. In the morning, the peasant said, he would go down to the river and catch some fish for a meal.

"We can't wait until morning, we must eat now," said Thor, "and I think I can provide a good meal for us all." He went over to where his goats stood in the hollow beside the chariot of brass, and, striking them with his hammer, he left them lifeless on the ground. He skinned the goats then, and taking up the bones very carefully, he left them down on the skins. Skins and bones he lifted up and bringing them into the house he left them in a hole above the peasant's fireplace. "No one," said he in a commanding voice, "must touch the bones that I leave here."

Then he brought the meat into the house. Soon it was cooked and laid smoking on the table. The peasant and his wife and his son sat round the board with Thor and Loki. They had not eaten plentifully for many days, and now the man and the woman fed themselves well.

Thialfi was the name of the peasant's son. He was a growing lad and had an appetite that had not been satisfied for long. While the meat was on the table his father and mother had kept him going here and there, carrying water, putting fagots on the fire, and holding a blazing stick so that those at the table might see to eat. There was not much left for him when he was able to sit down, for Thor and Loki had great appetites, and the lad's father and mother had eaten to make up for days of want. So Thialfi got little out of that plentiful feast.

When the meal was finished they lay down on the benches. Thor, because he had made a long journey that day, slept very soundly. Thialfi lay down on a bench, too, but his thoughts were still upon the food. When all were asleep, he thought, he would take one of the bones that were in the skins above him, and break and gnaw it.

So in the dead of the night the lad stood up on the bench and took down the goatskins that Thor had left so carefully there. He took out a bone, broke it, and gnawed it for the marrow. Loki was awake and saw him do this, but he, relishing mischief as much as ever, did nothing to stay the lad.

He put the bone he had broken back in the skins and he left the skins back in the hole above the fireplace. Then he went to sleep on the bench.

In the morning, as soon as they were up, the first thing Thor did was to take the skins out of the hole. He carried them carefully out to the hollow where he had left the goats standing. He put each goatskin down with the bones in it. He struck each with his hammer, and the goats sprang up alive, horns and hoofs and all.

But one was not as he had been before. He limped badly. Thor examined the leg and found out that one bone was broken. In terrible anger he turned on the peasant, his wife, and his son. "A bone of this goat has been broken under your roof," he shouted. "For that I shall destroy your house and leave you all dead under it." Thialfi wept. Then he came forward and touched the knees of Thor. "I did not know what harm I did," he said. "I broke the bone."

Thor had his hammer lifted up to crush him into the earth. But he could not bring it down on the weeping boy. He let his hammer rest on the ground again. "You will have to do much service for me for having lamed my goat," he said. "Come with me."

And so the lad Thialfi went off with Thor and Loki. Thor took in his powerful hands the shafts of the chariot of brass and he dragged it into a lonely mountain hollow where neither men nor Giants came. And they left the goats in a great, empty forest to stay resting there until Thor called to them again.

Thor and Loki and the lad Thialfi went across from Midgard into Jötunheim. Because of Miölnir, the great hammer that he carried, Thor felt safe in the Realm of the Giants. And Loki, who trusted in his own cunning, felt safe, too. The lad Thialfi trusted in Thor so much that he had no fear. They were long in making the journey, and while they were traveling Thor and Loki trained Thialfi to be a quick and a strong lad.

One day they came out on a moor. All day they crossed it, and at night it still stretched far before them. A great wind was blowing, night was falling, and they saw no shelter near. In the dusk they saw a shape that looked to be a mountain and they went toward it, hoping to find some shelter in a cave.

Then Loki saw a lower shape that looked as if it might be a shelter. They walked around it, Loki and Thor and the lad Thialfi. It was a house, but a house most oddly shaped. The entrance was a long, wide hall that had no doorway. When they entered this hall they found five long and narrow chambers running off it. "It is an odd place, but it is the best shelter we can get," Loki said. "You and I, Thor, will take the two longest rooms, and the lad Thialfi can take one of the little rooms."

They entered their chambers and they lay down to sleep. But from the mountain outside there came a noise that was like moaning forests and falling cataracts. The chamber where each one slept was shaken by the noise. Neither Thor nor Loki nor the lad Thialfi slept that night.

In the morning they left the five-chambered house and turned their faces toward the mountain. It was not a mountain at all, but a Giant. He was lying on the ground when they saw him, but just then he rolled over and sat up. "Little men, little men," he shouted to them, "have you passed by a glove of mine on your way?" He stood up and looked all around him. "Ho, I see my glove now," he said. Thor and Loki and the lad Thialfi stood still as the Giant came toward them. He leaned over and picked up the five-roomed shelter they had slept in. He put it on his hand. It was really his glove!

Thor gripped his hammer, and Loki and the lad Thialfi stood behind him. But the Giant seemed good-humored enough. "Where might ye be bound for, little men?" said he.

"To Utgard in Jötunheim," Thor replied boldly.

"Oh, to that place," said the Giant. "Come, then, I shall be with ye so far. You can call me Skrymir."

"Can you give us breakfast?" said Thor. He spoke crossly, for he did not want it to appear that there was any reason to be afraid of the Giant.

"I can give you breakfast," said Skrymir, "but I don't want to stop to eat now. We'll sit down as soon as I have an appetite. Come along now. Here is my wallet to carry. It has my provisions in it."

He gave Thor his wallet. Thor put it on his back and put Thialfi sitting upon it. On and on the Giant strode and

Thor and Loki were barely able to keep up with him. It was midday before he showed any signs of halting to take breakfast.

They came to an enormous tree. Under it Skrymir sat down. "I'll sleep before I eat," he said, "but you can open my wallet, my little men, and make your meal out of it." Saying this, he stretched himself out, and in a few minutes Thor and Loki and the lad Thialfi heard the same sounds as kept them awake the night before, sounds that were like forests moaning and cataracts falling. It was Skrymir's snoring.

Thor and Loki and the lad Thialfi were too hungry now to be disturbed by these tremendous noises. Thor tried to open the wallet, but he found it was not easy to undo the knots. Then Loki tried to open it. In spite of all Loki's cunning he could not undo the knots. Then Thor took the wallet from him and tried to break the knots by main strength. Not even Thor's strength could break them. He threw the wallet down in his rage.

The snoring of Skrymir became louder and louder. Thor stood up in his rage. He grasped Miölnir and flung it at the head of the sleeping Giant.

The hammer struck him on the head. But Skrymir only stirred in his sleep. "Did a leaf fall on my head?" he said.

He turned round on the other side and went to sleep again. The hammer came back to Thor's hand. As soon as Skrymir snored he flung it again, aiming at the Giant's forehead. It struck there. The Giant opened his eyes. "Has an acorn fallen on my forehead?" he said.

Again he went to sleep. But now Thor, terribly roused, stood over his head with the hammer held in his hands. He struck him on the forehead. It was the greatest blow that Thor had ever dealt.

"A bird is pecking at my forehead—there is no chance to sleep here," said Skrymir, sitting up. "And you, little men, did you have breakfast yet? Toss over my wallet to me and I shall give you some provision." The lad Thialfi brought him the wallet. Skrymir opened it, took out his provisions, and gave a share to Thor and Loki and the lad Thialfi. Thor would not take provision from him, but Loki and the lad Thialfi took it and ate. When the meal was finished Skrymir rose up and said, "Time for us to be going toward Utgard."

As they went on their way Skrymir talked to Loki. "I always feel very small when I go into Utgard," he said. "You see, I'm such a small and a weak fellow and the folk who live there are so big and powerful. But you and your friends will be welcomed in Utgard. They will be sure to make little pets of you."

And then he left them and they went into Utgard, the City of the Giants. Giants were going up and down in the streets. They were not so huge as Skrymir would have them believe, Loki noticed.

Utgard was the Asgard of the Giants. But in its buildings there was not a line of the beauty that there was in the palaces of the Gods, Gladsheim and Breidablik or Fensalir. Huge but shapeless the buildings arose, like mountains or icebergs. O beautiful Asgard with the dome above it of the deepest blue! Asgard with the clouds around it heaped up like mountains of diamonds! Asgard with its Rainbow Bridge and its glittering gates! O beautiful Asgard, could it be indeed that these Giants would one day overthrow you?

Thor and Loki with the lad Thialfi went to the palace of the King. The hammer that Thor gripped would, they knew, make them safe even there. They passed between rows of Giant guards and came to the King's seat. "We know you, Thor and Loki," said the Giant King, "and we know that Thor has come to Utgard to try his strength against the Giants. We shall have a contest tomorrow. Today there are sports for our boys. If your young servant should like to try his swiftness against our youths, let him enter the race today."

Now Thialfi was the best runner in Midgard and all the time he had been with them Loki and Thor had trained him in quickness. And so Thialfi was not fearful of racing against the Giants' youths.

The King called on one named Hugi and placed him against Thialfi. The pair started together. Thialfi sped off. Loki and Thor watched the race anxiously, for they thought it would be well for them if they had a triumph over the dwellers in Utgard in the first contest. But they saw Hugi leave Thialfi behind. They saw the Giant youth reach the winning post, circle round it, and come back to the starting place before Thialfi had reached the end of the course.

Thialfi, who did not know how it was that he had been beaten, asked that he be let run the race with Hugi again. The pair started off once more, and this time it did not seem to Thor and Loki that Hugi had left the starting place at all—he was back there almost as soon as the race had started.

They came back from the racing ground to the palace. The Giant King and his friends with Thor and Loki sat down to the supper table. "Tomorrow," said the King, "we shall have our great contest when Asa Thor will show us his power. Have you of Asgard ever heard of one who would enter a contest in eating? We might have a contest in eating at this supper board if we could get one who would match himself with Logi here. He can eat more than anyone in Jötunheim."

"And I," said Loki, "can eat more than any two in Jötunheim. I will match myself against your Logi."

"Good!" said the Giant King. And all the Giants present said, "Good! This will be a sight worth seeing."

Then they put scores of plates along one side of the table, each plate filled with meat. Loki began at one end and Logi began at the other. They started to eat, moving toward each other as each cleared a plate. Plate after plate was emptied, and Thor standing by with the Giants was amazed to see how much Loki ate. But Logi on the other side was leaving plate after plate emptied. At last the two stood together with scores of plates on each side of them. "He has not defeated me," cried Loki. "I have cleared as many plates as your champion, O King of the Giants."

"But you have not cleared them so well," said the King.

"Loki has eaten all the meat that was upon them," said Thor.

"But Logi has eaten the bones with the meat," said the Giant King. "Look and see if it be not so."

Thor went to the plates. Where Loki had eaten, the bones were left on the plates. Where Logi had eaten, nothing was left: bones as well as meat were consumed, and all the plates were left bare.

"We are beaten," said Thor to Loki.

"Tomorrow, Thor," said Loki, "you must show all your strength or the Giants will cease to dread the might of the Dwellers in Asgard."

"Be not afraid," said Thor. "No one in Jötunheim will triumph over me."

The next day Thor and Loki came into the great hall of Utgard. The Giant King was there with a throng of his friends. Thor marched into the hall with Miölnir, his great hammer, in his hands. "Our young men have been drinking out of this horn," said the King, "and they want to know if you, Asa Thor, would drink out of it a

morning draught. But I must tell you that they think that no one of the Æsir could empty the horn at one draught.”

“Give it to me,” said Thor. “There is no horn you can hand me that I cannot empty at a draught.”

A great horn, brimmed and flowing, was brought over to him. Handing Miölnir to Loki and bidding him stand so that he might keep the hammer in sight, Thor raised the horn to his mouth. He drank and drank. He felt sure there was not a drop left in the horn as he laid it on the ground. “There,” he gasped, “your Giant horn is drained.”

The Giants looked within the horn and laughed. “Drained, Asa Thor!” said the Giant King. “Look into the horn again. You have hardly drunk below the brim.”

And Thor looked into it and saw that the horn was not half emptied. In a mighty rage he lifted it to his lips again. He drank and drank and drank. Then, satisfied that he had emptied it to the bottom, he left the horn on the ground and walked over to the other side of the hall.

“Thor thinks he has drained the horn,” said one of the Giants, lifting it up. “But see, friends, what remains in it.”

Thor strode back and looked again into the horn. It was still half filled. He turned round to see that all the Giants were laughing at him.

“Asa Thor, Asa Thor,” said the Giant King, “we know not how you are going to deal with us in the next feat, but you certainly are not able to drink against the Giants.”

Said Thor: “I can lift up and set down any being in your hall.”

As he said this a great iron-colored cat bounded into the hall and stood before Thor, her back arched and her fur bristling.

“Then lift the cat off the ground,” said the Giant King.

Thor strode to the cat, determined to lift her up and fling her amongst the mocking Giants. He put his hands to the cat, but he could not raise her. Up, up went Thor’s arms, up, up, as high as they could go. The cat’s arched back went up to the roof, but her feet were never taken off the ground. And as he heaved and heaved with all

his might he heard the laughter of the Giants all round him.

He turned away, his eyes flaming with anger. "I am not wont to try to lift cats," he said. "Bring me one to wrestle with, and I swear you shall see me overthrow him."

"Here is one for you to wrestle with, Asa Thor," said the King. Thor looked round and saw an old woman hobbling toward him. She was blear-eyed and toothless. "This is Ellie, my ancient nurse," said the Giant King. "She is the one we would have you wrestle with."

"Thor does not wrestle with old women. I will lay my hands on your tallest Giants instead."

"Ellie has come where you are," said the Giant King. "Now it is she who will lay hands upon you."

The old woman hobbled toward Thor, her eyes gleaming under her falling fringes of gray hair. Thor stood, unable to move as the hag came toward him. She laid her hands upon his arms. Her feet began to trip at his. He tried to cast her from him. Then he found that her feet and her hands were as strong against his as bands and stakes of iron.

Then began a wrestling match in earnest between Thor and the ancient crone Ellie. Round and round the hall they wrestled, and Thor was not able to bend the old woman backward nor sideways. Instead he became less and less able under her terrible grasp. She forced him down, down, and at last he could only save himself from being left prone on the ground by throwing himself down on one knee and holding the hag by the shoulders. She tried to force him down on the ground, but she could not do that. Then she broke from him, hobbled to the door and went out of the hall.

Thor rose up and took the hammer from Loki's hands. Without a word he went out of the hall and along the ways and toward the gate of the Giants' City. He spoke no word to Loki nor to the lad Thialfi who went with him for the seven weeks that they journeyed through Jötunheim.

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