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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The story of the Norse about how everything began

Once, before this world was made, there was no earth, no sea, no air, no light, but only a great gaping dim gap full of waves.

North of it lay the House of Mist, a dark and somber land. A river of water flowed from it, from a source that never dried up. As the water met the bitter gusts of wind from the gaping gulf further on, it solidified into large blocks of ice, which thundered into the abyss. They piled up until they formed mountains of glistening ice.

South of this gulf lay the House of Fire, a land of burning heat, guarded by a giant with a flaming sword that gave sparks as he flashed it back and forth in front of the entrance. And these sparks fell on the ice blocks and partially melted them, causing clouds of steam. These froze again into frost, filling all the space left in the middle of the icebergs.

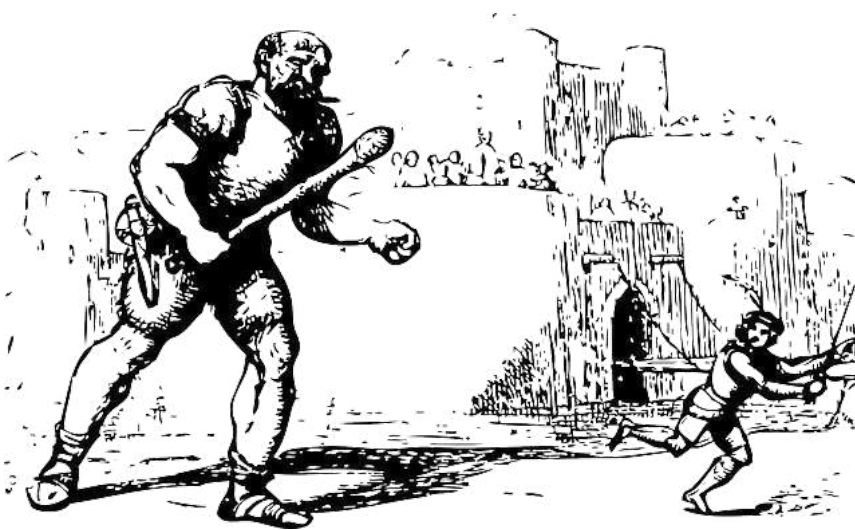
One day, when the gulf was full to the brim, this great mass of icy frost, warmed by the flames of the House of Fire and frozen by the cold air of the House of Mist, came to life, and the giant Ymir was born. He had a living, moving body and a cruel heart of ice.

Now, there was no tree, no grass, or anything that served as food. But when the giant Ymir began to

groped for something to satisfy his hunger, he heard a sound like that of a chewing animal. And there, between the ice hills, he saw a gigantic cow, from whose udders large streams of milk flowed. This easily satisfied his hunger and thirst.

But the cow was also hungry and began to lick the salt from the ice blocks. And soon, as she continued to lick with her strong, rough tongue, a hair pushed itself up through the melting ice. Still the cow continued to lick, until finally all the icy covering was gone. Thus the body of a mighty man was revealed.

Ymir looked with hatred in his eyes at this being, born of snow and ice, for somehow he knew that his heart was warm and kind, and that he and his sons would always be the enemies of the evil race of the Giant-Kings.



And so it happened. For from the sons of Ymir came a race of giants whose pleasure it was to do evil on the earth. From the Sons of the Ice-

Man came the race of the Gods, of whom Odin was the most important. He was the father of all things ever made; and Odin and his brothers immediately began to

wage war against the evil Giant-Kings, and especially against the cold-blooded Ymir.

Then, after a hard fight, the giant Ymir was killed, and such a river of blood flowed from his wounds that the rest of the Giant-Kings drowned, except one. He escaped in his boat, with only his wife aboard, and sailed away to the edge of the world. And from him arose a whole new race of Giant-Kings, who, whenever they could, emerged from their land of twilight and desolation to do evil to the Gods, who were then very happy.

When the giants had thus been driven out, Allfather Odin and his brothers set to work to make the earth, the sea, and the sky; and these they made from the great body of the giant Ymir.

From his flesh they fashioned Midgard, the earth, which lay in the middle of the gulf. They planted his eyebrows all around it to make a high fence to protect the earth from the race of giants.

With his bones they made the high hills, with his teeth the cliffs, and his thick curly hair took root and trees, bushes and green grass grew out of it.

With his blood they made the ocean, and his great skull, facing upward, became the arched sky. Just below it they spread his brains and made the heavy gray clouds that lie between earth and sky.

The sky itself was held in place by four strong dwarves, who supported it on their broad shoulders as they stood facing east and west, south and north.

The next thing to do was to give light to the newly made world. So the Gods caught sparks from the House

of Fire and placed them in the sky as stars. Then they took a living flame and made the sun and moon from it, which they placed in golden chariots. They harnessed magnificent horses with flowing manes of gold and silver. For the horses of the sun they placed a powerful shield to protect them from its hot rays. The swift moon horses did not need such protection against the gentle moon heat.

And now everything was ready, except that there was no one to drive the horses of the sun and moon. This task was given to Mani and Sol, the beautiful son and daughter of a giant. These handsome charioteers drove their horses along the paths laid out by the Gods, giving light not only to the earth, but also marking the months and days for the sons of men.

Then All-father Odin called Night to him, the somber daughter of the cool-blooded giant folk, and let her drive the dark chariot that was pulled by the black horse, Frost-mane. Drops of dew and frost fell from his long, wavy hair onto the earth. After her rode her radiant son, Day, with his white horse Shining-mane, whose bright rays of daylight shine to gladden the hearts of men.

But the wicked giants were very angry when they saw all these good things; and they placed two hungry wolves in the sky, so that these fierce, gray creatures could forever chase the sun and the moon. They would devour them completely, and thus bring an end to all things. Sometimes, say the men of the north, the gray wolves do indeed almost manage to swallow the sun or the moon. But then the earthly children make such a

noise that the wild beasts drop their prey out of fear. And the sun and moon then flee away, faster than before, still pursued by the hungry monsters.

One day, so the story goes, when Mani, the Man in the Moon, was hurrying, he looked down upon the earth and saw two beautiful little children. They were a boy and a girl, with a bucket of water. They looked very tired and sleepy, and they were, for a cruel giant had made them carry water all night when they should have been in bed. So Mani reached out a very long arm and caught the children and put them in the moon, bucket and all; and you can still see them there on every moonlight night.

But that was long after the beginning of things; for there was no man or woman or child on earth.

And now that pleasant Midgard was made, the Gods were determined to fulfill their desire for a home. A home where they could rest at ease.

They chose a suitable place far above the earth, on the other side of the great river that flowed from the House of Mist where the giants lived. Here they found Asgard, where they lived in peace and happiness, and from where they could look down upon the sons of men.

From Asgard to Midgard, they built a magnificent bridge in many colors, which people called the Rainbow Bridge, that the Gods could use on their travels to and from the earth.

In Asgard, there also stood the powerful forge where the Gods made their weapons with which they fought

against the giants, and the tools with which they built their palaces of gold and silver.

Meanwhile, no human beings lived on the earth, and the giants did not dare to cross the borders out of fear of the Gods. But one of them, dressed in eagle feathers, always sat on the north side of Midgard, and every time he raised and lowered his arms, an icy explosion came out of the Misthouse. The explosion cut away all the pleasant things of the earth with its cruel breath. After a while, the earth brought forth thousands of little creatures, who crawled around and showed signs of great intelligence. And when the Gods examined these little people closely, they discovered that there were two kinds.

Some were ugly, misshapen, and sly of face, with large heads, small bodies, long arms, and feet. These they called trolls or dwarves or gnomes, and they sent them away to live underground. They threatened to turn them into stone if they appeared during the day. And so the trolls spend all their time in the hidden parts of the earth, and digging for gold and silver and gems, they hide their loot in secret holes and corners.

Sometimes they blow their little fires and get to work making all kinds of beautiful things from these buried treasures. You can hear them doing this if you listen very carefully to the mountains and hills of the Northland. You'll hear a sound of tick-tick-ticking, far below the ground.

The other little earthly creatures were very beautiful and light and slim, friendly of heart and full of goodwill. The Gods called them Fairies or Elves, and

they gave them a charming place to live called Elf Land. Elf Land is located between Asgard and Midgard, and since all Fairies have wings, they can easily fly to the earth to play with butterflies, teach young birds to sing, water the flowers or dance in the moonlight.

Lastly, the Gods made a man and a woman to live in the beautiful Midgard; and this is how their creation took place:

Allfather Odin walked with his brothers in Midgard, where they saw two trees growing on the coast, an ash and an elm. Odin took the trees and breathed on them, and they turned into a living man and woman. But they were dull, pale, and could not speak until Hunir, the God of light, touched their foreheads and gave them their understanding and wisdom. Loki, the Fire God, smoothed their faces, gave them a bright color and warm blood, and the power to speak, see and hear.

The only thing left was for them to be given a name.

They were named Ask and Embla, after the trees from which they were formed. From these two people came the entire human race that lives on this earth.

And then Allfather Odin completed his work by planting the Tree of Life.

This immense tree had its roots in Asgard and Midgard and the Mistland. The tree grew to such a miraculous height that the highest branch, the Peace Branch, hung over Odin's Hall on the heights of Asgard; and the other branches overshadowed both Midgard and the Mistland. On top of this peace tree sat a powerful eagle, and there was also always a falcon with sharp eyes. He kept

an eye on everything that happened in the world below, so that he could tell Odin what he saw.

Heidrun, Odin's goat that provided heavenly milk, browsed through the leaves of this beautiful tree and also fed the four mighty stags whose horns dripped honeydew onto the earth below and provided water for all the rivers of Midgard.

The leaves of the Tree of Life were always green and beautiful, despite the dragon who, aided by countless snakes, constantly gnawed at its roots. They wanted to kill the Tree of Life and thus try to bring about the destruction of the Gods.

The squirrel, Ratatosk, a malevolent creature, ran up and down the branches of the tree. His only pleasure was to sow discord by repeating the dragon's rude remarks to the eagle, and the eagle's to the dragon, hoping they would eventually have a real fight.

Near the roots of the Tree of Life is a sacred spring of sweet water from which the three strange sisters, who always know what will happen, sprinkle the tree and keep it fresh and green. And the water that drips down from the leaves falls as drops of honey on the earth, and the bees take it as food.

Close to this sacred spring is the Council Hall of the Gods, where they ride every morning over the Rainbow Bridge to talk together.

And this is the end of the story of how everything began.