

A&U

Story Collectors & Bounty Hunters

Story #2

Agnes and Ulfur began the trek to the next farm with an alleged elf encounter. Usually they would return to their home realm and re-enter Midgard closer to their destination, but the woman in Bakkagerði had hinted there was an interesting story of a creature along the scree of Njarðvík. Both Agnes and Ulfur enjoyed a good story of a supposed supernatural creature. Most of the time the stories were nothing more than the fanciful imagination of humans, but occasionally they encountered something truly fascinating or horrifying, depending on the perspective.

The route was challenging, even for a seelie and an elf. They'd managed to convince a young human boy on his way from the village of Bakkagerði to the other side of Njarðvík to guide them through the treacherous scree along the way.

The mountains towered high above them, casting a great shadow as they carefully picked their path through the slope of loose rock fragments. Agnes had refused to leave his horse behind, adding the danger of guiding the animal safely through the scree to their journey.

When they reached a particularly wide spot as the path curved around the mountain, the boy bade them to stop. There, staked into the ground was a wooden cross.

"Why are we stopping?" Ulfur asked.

Agnes walked up to the cross and examined it closely. "What's this?" he asked the boy.

"All who travel this path must stop and pray to God at this point, or risk the return of Naddi."

"What's a naddi?" Agnes asked.

"A terrible monster, sir."

“How terrible?”

“He was very large, and was half animal, half man in body.” The boy said, shivering at the thought.

“Which half was human?” Agnes asked.

“The top half.”

“Hmm, that does sound terrifying.”

Ulfur shook his head. Agnes was trying to poke some fun, but the boy was so terrified by the stories that he did not notice the teasing.

“The days are still long, so we’re safe to make travel, but Naddi killed many men along this route.”

“What happened?”

“They’d be beaten, captured, or thrown over the ledge.” The boy’s eyes darted nervously between the mountain and the ledge that dropped to the sea below.

“No, I mean what happened to the monster?” Agnes corrected himself.

“A very brave farmer defeated him, many years ago. My great grandfather said he knew of this man. He travelled in the dark, even though the locals warned him not to. He met Naddi face to face and fought him. The man won, eventually, sending the monster over the ledge and into the sea where the monster crawled away, into the water. Folks think that must be where he came from. The man barely made it to the next farmhouse having struggled with bruises all over his body. He told his story to the people there and it was decided to erect a cross, at this point where Naddi fell. It was blessed and inscribed with a prayer to prevent the monster from ever returning. Each traveller who says the prayer makes the defense stronger.”

“And Naddi was never seen again?”

“Nope.”

“Has anyone else died or gone missing here since then?”

“Occasionally. Rock slides still happen.”

As Agnes and the boy talked, Ulfur peered over the ledge of the path. His foot pushed a few stones over the precipice. He watched as they fell down and down, bouncing off the cliff as they became smaller and smaller and then disappeared.

He imagined the monstrous creature, Naddi, falling in the same way as the stone did. His hulking form tumbling and bouncing to the ocean below. Could a monster survive the fall? Did Naddi really crawl into the ocean? Ulfur shivered as he eyed up the wooden cross, staked into the ground. Could a mere cross keep such a creature down?

His instincts usually made him doubt the tales of monsters that the humans spun, but there was something about the name “Naddi”. It rang a bell of familiarity somewhere in his memory. Had he encountered this creature in his home realm? It was possible. But he was not sure.

“Well, tell us this prayer so we can move on.” Agnes suggested.

Ulfur watched as the boy fell to his knees and recited his Lord’s prayer. A Christian tradition that served many purposes. To his surprise, Ulfur felt himself fall to his own knees. While he did not join in the prayer, he whispered words to himself and his own gods for protection.

Agnes was looking at him as if he’d gone mad, but he slowly knelt on the ground too and bowed his head.

“What’s gotten into you? You’ve never been the superstitious type.” Agnes whispered to him as they stood again.

“I don’t really know. There’s something familiar about this beast, as if he comes from our world. I can’t quite put my finger on it.” Ulfur whispered back.

Agnes considered him for a moment. “Maybe. But I’m convinced these humans have been plagued by falling rocks for centuries. Probably the man who supposedly defeated the monster. If it was dark and he took a dangerous tumble with a boulder, he’d have the impression he wrestled a monster. It all makes sense.”

Ulfur merely grunted in reply.

It was usually Agnes who got caught up in the fanciful tales alongside the human lore, not Ulfur. But this was different. He had a foggy memory of Naddi. Was it an encounter in the halls of Valhalla before the Great Revolution? Or was it more recently at a Midsummer feast in the Seelie Court? Ulfur couldn’t say.

“Let’s get a move on.” The boy said to them.

Ulfur waited until Agnes and his horse were steadily following the boy, before bringing up the rear once again. Perhaps when they returned to their home realm he could ask someone else who would remember. Until then, he knew it would plague him until he remembered.