

EINAR'S RAGNAROK

by Nora Louise Syran

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SYNOPSIS:

In the year 1000 AD, Iceland stands on the brink of change. The old gods—Thor, Odin, and Loki—still thunder through the hearts of the people, but the distant King Olav of Norway demands their conversion to Christianity. To force their compliance, he holds Icelandic men and boys captive—including the father of young Einar, an aspiring skald.

Einar wants to learn to write the frightening, sorrowful and hilarious stories of old and to find hope in what feels like the end of the world. Through the power of stories, he'll learn that what feels like the end of the world, may in fact be the beginning.

Suggested casting for 12 players: 5 Males, 7 Females
for a total of 36 speaking parts. Extras possible.

Player 1 (M) Einar, Eagle,
Player 2 (F) Astrid, Skadi
Player 3 (F) Ragnhild, Eagle
Player 4 (F) Tova, Frigg, Sindri
Player 5 (M) Erik, Heimdall, Baldr*, Thrym, Tyr, Giant,
Njord, Hodr*
Player 6 (M) Harald (Erik's Father), Odin
Player 7 (M) Berserker, Thor
Player 8 (M) The Law-Speaker, Loki+
Player 9 (F) Norn, Ran, Servant, Brokr, Idunn, Hel
Player 10 (F) Christian, Hlin, Sigyn
Player 11 (F) Norn, Fulla, Sif
Player 12 (F) Norn, Gudrid, Freyja, Volva

Created by the Ensemble: Fenrir, Midgard Serpent, Eagle
*non speaking +male or female

The MYTHOLOGICAL FIGURES

Three Norns-- The "Fates"

Urd-- "What Once Was"

Verdandi-- "What Is Coming in Being"

Skuld-- "What Shall Be"

Heimdall --Guardian of the Rainbow bridge

Odin-- The All-Father

Rán-- Goddess of the Ocean

Freyja-- Odin's Wife

Fulla-- Freyja's handmaiden

Hlin--Freyja's handmaiden

Thor--God of Protection, with his hammer Mjolnir

Tyr--God of war, justice, law and oaths

Loki--The Trickster God/Giant

Idunn--Goddess of the Apples of Youth

The Builder--A Giant in Disguise

Skadi--Giantess of the Hunt and Skiing

Njord--God of the Wind and of the Sea

Baldr--Odin's beautiful son

Hodr--Odin's blind son

Sif--Thor's wife with the golden hair

Brokkr & Sindri --skilled craftsmen, dwarves

Sigyn--Loki's devoted wife

PROLOGUE

*Three Wisewomen --NORNS--
tend to the World Tree,
Yggdrasil and then vanish.*

*The half-god LOKI and his
wife the goddess SIGYN sit
at the base of the tree.*

*Loki is in chains and Sigyn
holds a bowl to catch the
dripping venom from a snake
which hangs above Loki's
head. To empty the ever
filling bowl, Sigyn slowly
turns away and when she
does, the earth rumbles
into the next scene...*

*1000AD Iceland, a meeting
at the Thing where the
Ensemble breaks into rival
factions: followers of
Thor, Odin and Christ. They
struggle to stand as the
ground moves beneath them.*

*EINAR observes it all from
a distance. His older
sister, RAGNHILD, stands
with their mother TORA.*

SCENE ONE - THE ALTHING

*Midsummer's Eve. The
Althing, Iceland. 1000 AD.*

*Thor followers: Tora,
Harald and Erik*

*Odin followers: Ragnhild
and Berserker (with a spear)*

*Christians: Christian,
Gudrid and Astrid*

TORA

Oh no! Loki struggles and the earth moves!

BERSERKER

Great Odin, hold tight the bonds of Loki!

CHRISTIAN

Pagans! I knew this would never work.

GUDRID THE FAR TRAVELER

Give it time, give it time. It's the only way to bring the men and boys home.

CHRISTIAN

How long will it take the Law-Speaker to make up his mind to vote for Christ!?

BERSERKER

Or Odin, the All-Father, who sees everything in all the nine worlds!

TORA

Or Thor/

(The earth rumbles under them.)

TORA

Help us! Loki struggles beneath the earth! It's a sign! Ragnarok is coming!

HARALD

If Ragnarok is to come, then let it come! We'll fight fate! Thor is not hiding away from it in fear! He has his hammer (Mjolnir) ready!

BERSERKER

Odin isn't hiding away either!

RAGNHILD

Fight fate? You can't change what's going to happen? Fate is fate.

TORA

Ragnhild! Stay out of this! This is no place for you!

RAGNHILD

But father says everyone *should* speak their mind at the Althing!

TORA

(More in grief than anger) Well, your father's not here, is he? I'm in charge. Do as I say, Ragnhild! (Ragnhild stays put) You're just a girl. Go home! Go home, now!

CHRISTIAN

Save your men! Turn away from your slavery and your barbarism, your viking raids/

BERSERKER

Barbarism? Viking raids? We're farmers and traders now! But it suits me just fine to battle it out with King Olaf and meet the Raven God in person! Join my friends feasting and drinking in Valhalla! Who's with me!? Where's the honor of living to an old age?

(Applause from Thor followers.
"Thor, Thor..." "Odin...Odin")

CHRISTIAN

You all talk in fairytales! Iceland is a laughing stock. Christianity is the future. We're years behind the rest of Europe! We'd be better off a part of Christian Europe!

RAGNHILD

Christians don't own slaves?

BERSERKER

Your sister may be a Christian now, Ragnhild, but we are not!

RAGNHILD

Not yet...

HARALD

Tora! Tora? Are you with us or against this new religion?

BERSERKER

Yeah! Make up your mind! You carry Odin in one pocket and Thor in the other! *And* your daughter is a Christian!

TORA

My daughter can worship who she likes! And when on land, I worship Odin...but at sea, I will always put my faith in Thor!

(Applause from Thor followers.
"Thor, Thor...")

RAGNHILD

It's Midsummer's Eve! Can't we all just get along and have fun tonight, like we always do?

ERIK

Our men are being held hostage in Norway and all you can think about is a party!? If we could just stop fighting amongst ourselves, we might have a chance to resist this new religion!

(Astrid enters. Ragnhild stays.)

HARALD

(Warning) Erik...

Erik is embarrassed as he's spoken against Astrid's new faith. Astrid has heard.

ERIK

Astrid...I...

ASTRID

Mother? What's happening?

TORA

Loki is breaking free from his bonds underground!

ASTRID

Loki?! Mother...that's ridiculous. Gudrid, what?/

GUDRID THE FAR TRAVELER

They think voting for Christ will bring on Loki's wrath and the end of the world.

ASTRID

But Ragnarok?! It's just an old story...

GUDRID

Astrid. You try talking some sense into your mother. The others will listen to her! If we don't vote to become Christian -- all of us-- King Olaf ... our men --your father-- may never come home!

ASTRID

Mother. You can bring Father home!

TORA

Astrid. We can't lose our slaves! I'm having trouble enough as it is keeping the farm going with your father gone.

ASTRID

But if you do as King Olaf demands, he'll send Father and the men and boys home!

TORA

(Cautiously, to the others) If we do have the chance to bring our men home, then perhaps we must at least ... consider it? What say you Gudrid, the Far Traveler?

GUDRID

(Cautiously) I say it's time we pull down our temples and throw away our idols!

ERIK

Oh, they've gotten to her already!

BERSERKER

She's even planning a voyage to Rome to meet the Pope/

RAGNHILD

Rome? I thought you're sailing to Greenland? You said I could come with you!?

GUDRID

All in good time, Ragnhild. It's the here, the now we need to focus on. And bring your father home. Right? Stop, listen, everyone! (Emphatically) If we don't convert, King Olaf will send his forces from Norway -- sword in hand-- to force us all to convert! (pause) The Law-speaker is wise/

TORA

Yes! He'll have thought of a compromise.

BERSERKER

Everyone loses in a compromise, Tora!

GUDRID

(Hushing the crowd)

I know you seek peace. A compromise, Tora. The people listen to you just as they do your husband. You must not let your worry for him muddle your thinking. (Clearly to all) Our men and boys' very lives depend upon us voting for the Christian God. And the Christian God only! There can be no compromise.

(The volcano erupts. Everyone runs off except Astrid.)

BERSERKER

Well, there you are, the very top of the mountain has blown itself off!

ASTRID

What if we *have* upset the gods!? Blasphemed and now they're angry!

ERIK

Astrid! Astrid! Quickly! This way!

(They run off together. The rumbling subsides.)

SCENE TWO - THE BEGINNING

Einar has been quietly observing the Althing from a distance.

EINAR

It's not always like this here at the Althing. The fighting. The Althing is the place where we come to work through our differences. To stop the fighting.

But the world is changing. Iceland is changing. (Resignedly) And it looks like we'll have to change along with it.

The Law-Speaker will know what to do. My father hopes I will be the Law-Speaker someday. That's all I've ever wanted to be: a skald, a poet. To immerse myself in the magical power of words.

Trouble is, I can't write. Well, not the Latin that Gudrid the Far Traveler is trying to teach me. She says that if I'm to be a poet now, in this new age, and keep

(MORE)

EINAR (cont'd)
our history and old stories alive, I have to learn to write with ink as she does, as the monks do.

(Ensemble enter holding large books held open reverently in their hands.)

ENSEMBLE
"In the beginning was the word."

EINAR
The monks love words too. Gudrid tells me the monks lock their books up in monasteries, they are so precious. She told me the beginning of the Christian world is much like our own.

ENSEMBLE
"In the beginning there was a darkness upon the face of the deep"...

EINAR
An ocean. (pause) For us, norsemen, too, the universe is an enormous ocean which began with a big wave. And inside the big wave, a big sound was building.

(The ensemble closes their books simultaneously. HEIMDALL enters and holds his Gjallar horn to his lips ready to blow. The ensemble forms Yggdrassil.)

HEIMDALL
Has Loki broken free from his bonds? Do the giants descend upon Asgard? I've not heard a thing?!

EINAR
No, no Heimdall! Careful! Not the Gjallar horn yet!

(Heimdall retreats, puzzled.)

EINAR
We may need it later to drink from the Well of Memory at the foot of the World Tree, Yggdrassil.

(The Norns enter and, like the Greek Fates, sit weaving at the base of the World tree)

But I'm getting ahead of myself. It's difficult. The stories have no clear start or finish and finding the right thread must be nearly as difficult a task as the Norns have in weaving together the threads of each of our lives. Our stories. (pause) But if I'm to be a poet, I'll need to try.

EINAR

(pause, reflecting) Weaving together stories, our stories. (pause) I'll start again.

(HEIMDALL re-enters, on guard.)

EINAR

Heimdall guards the Rainbow Bridge between Asgard, the home of the gods, and Midgard, where men live--

HEIMDALL

Shh! I can hear the wool growing on the sheep and grass growing on the earth. The Gjallar horn will be sounded at the end of days. The end of days which also mark a beginning.

(HEIMDALL exits.)

EINAR

In the beginning there was Ymir, The Scream.

(As the NORNS speak their first line. A sound grows.)

NORNS

From a wave of sound deep in the dark emptiness of Ginnungagap a new universe came into being. (pause)

NORN 1 (URD "WHAT ONCE WAS")

I was there. I saw it.

NORN 2 (VERDANDI "WHAT IS COMING INTO BEING")

I see it and--

NORN 3 (SKULD "WHAT SHALL BE")

I will see it all.

SCENE THREE - READING RUNES

Ragnhild, Einar's sister, comes looking for him. He is lost in thought.

The Norns exit as she enters, calling for him. Einar hides his wax tablet and stylus from her view.

RAGNHILD

Einar? Where are you? Lost in your thoughts again? Einar? What are you doing?

EINAR

Nothing.

RAGNHILD

Einar? Are you on your tablet again? (pause) Haven't you mastered the letters yet? Gudrid taught them to you ages ago!

EINAR

I can't read as quickly as you and Astrid. (pause) And I can't write. Gudrid says it happens. Sometimes. Especially with boys. But I'm not a half-wit or anything, I just can't make sense of the letters let alone write anything with them.

RAGNHILD

All letters?

EINAR

The Latin ones Gudrid is trying to teach me. I want to be a Law-Speaker someday as well as a skald. But Gudrid says it's not good enough anymore just to memorize the old tales, poems, laws and such. I have to be able to write them. In ink. Like the monks do.

RAGNHILD

No one knows the old poetry like you do, not even Father tells the stories as well. (She sighs, missing him) You keep winters-- and our wait for him-- from being awfully long. Your kennings are intricate and playful and beautiful...you are a skald. Einar, you are a poet.

(She takes his hands to comfort him and then sees the ink stains covering his fingertips.)

RAGNHILD

Oh Einar! Your hands! They're covered in ink!?

EINAR

I know. I'm a mess. But Gudrid says there's no shame in *practicing* on a wax one. She told me the Christian King Charlemagne kept a wax tablet under his pillow at night and would practice writing whenever he could so/

(TORA calls from within.)

TORA

Einar!? Have you brought in the wood yet? And *who* is going to milk the cows *now*!? The slaves have all run off!

EINAR

Don't tell mother I keep the wax tablet under my pillow! She thinks writing is a waste of time. It's not my fault I prefer Odin and his poetry over her beloved Thor and his hammer. Father wouldn't think I'm wasting my time trying to learn to write...

RAGNHILD

What about runes...?

EINAR

Ragnhild, I have to learn to read and write as the learned Brothers do (pause) in Latin!

RAGNHILD

I found something buried in the forest I want you to see.

EINAR

(unimpressed)

It's a old rune stick.

RAGNHILD

But can you read it?

EINAR

Of course, I can. Everyone can read runes.

RAGNHILD

But...?

EINAR

Easy, it's like pictures....

RAGNHILD

Not everyone can read runes, Einar. Well, not these. These are very, very old. (pause) What does it say?

EINAR

It's about Odin, the father of the gods... and the death of his son, Baldr.

RAGNHILD

Oh, poor Baldr...

EINAR

It's a riddle where the past, the present and the future all whirl together...like a maelstrom.

RAGNHILD

A what?

EINAR

A whirlpool. Disorder. The world out of balance and needing to be restored.

RAGNHILD

Like this one.

EINAR

Yes.

RAGNHILD

Tell me the story. How does it start?

EINAR

(Pauses for a moment) Odin foresaw his son Baldr's death in a dream.

SCENE FOUR - BALDR'S DREAMS

*Asgard. Frigg sits
comforting Baldr who sits
at her feet, his face
hidden from view. Odin
enters, puts down his staff
and cloak. The ensemble
creates two ravens.*

ODIN

I worry about you, Hunin...(stroking the first bird) my thoughts. I can think of nothing else but my son Baldr. Fly, Hunin! Come back soon with news of my son. (pause) Munin, my memory, (stroking the second bird, near tears) Oh, my poor boy...he was such a lovely child! How could anything in the universe wish him harm? Oh, Memory. I cherish you most of all. Don't abandon me! But fly, ravens, fly! Bring news. I must stop my son's death from happening...!

(Odin greets his wife, Frigg.)

FRIGG

Odin, what news? You've traveled far... What have you learned? Have you traveled the nine worlds over? Why do you and Baldr have these horrible dreams? What do they portend for our son?

ODIN

Yes, I've traveled far. The nine worlds over. When I reached the cold depths of the watery underworld, I found Ran and her nine daughters of the sea readying the halls for a magnificent feast...

(Ran fixes a giant net. Her nine daughters of the sea (waves) prepare an enormous banquet, they carry trays of food/cloth and tidy up/collect pieces of plastic--an anachronistic glimpse of the future and indeed, the present)

ODIN

For whom do you ready your net Ran, goddess of the sea? Which poor sailors do you plan to catch today?

RAN (GODDESS OF THE OCEAN)

Shhh! If I tell you, grey-bearded wanderer, my secret must stay down here with me! (pause) Hel (pause), in Hell, tells me a guest of honor above all guests will be joining us soon. (Indicates the hall and the preparations) But I don't know whether she meant here with us beneath the sea or in Hell beneath the earth, with Hel herself. So, I'm readying my net for the catch, just in case...(laughing) You're wondering who this guest
(MORE)

RAN (GODDESS OF THE OCEAN) (cont'd)
could be? Why, the most loved, the kindest of the Aesir,
indeed the noblest of all the gods, is to dine with us or
with Hel (wickedly delighted) Baldr!

ODIN

No!

RAN (GODDESS OF THE OCEAN)
(suspicious) Who are you, grey-beared wanderer?
(recognizing Odin) Why, All-Father! Odin! Up to your
tricks again!? I'll say no more! You've seen your son's
fate with your one all-seeing eye and think by coming
down here you can stop it!? But you cannot stop his
death. Send your ravens into the world if you must...but
you know, nothing you learn, nothing can stop this!

(The scene returns to Valhalla.)

FRIGG

That's all she told you? (urgently) We must try, Odin!
Send your ravens out to gather news!

ODIN

I have already sent Hunin and Munin into the world to
learn all we can my dearest Freyja...

FRIGG

Fulla! Hlin! My handmaidens, do come...

(The two handmaidens arrive.
Fulla with a small shoe-sized
box. Hlin is ready for battle.)

FULLA

Oh, my dear Lady Freyja. Your heart is heavy. Share your
burden with me who keeps your secrets safe.

HLIN

Dry your tears, my Lady. Who do you wish me to save from
harm?

FRIGG

My son, Baldr is in danger! Go to every corner of the
earth to beg that no harm will ever come to my precious
boy! Help me, Fulla, Hlin...

FULLA

We'll ask everything in the cosmos...

HLIN

living and nonliving...

HANDMAIDENS

To swear they'll never harm your son, Baldr.

(Fulla and Hlin address the
audience. Ask a few objects:

speakers, chairs, lighting instruments etc and people: audience members, director etc to swear an oath. "Do you swear?" Say, "I will never harm Baldr..." etc. Hlin checks them off her scroll. Ends in applause and improvised gratitude from the Handmaidens. Then, turning away from the audience, quietly with a sense of foreboding...)

FULLA

Have we asked everything living and non-living thing in all the nine worlds?

HLIN

I think so. Everything except the mistletoe.

FULLA

Oh, mistletoe. What possible harm could *it* do...

SCENE FIVE

Ragnild has been listening to Einar's tales.

RAGNHILD

Einar, I've an idea. You carry on practicing your letters on your tablet. Don't worry, you'll learn them soon enough and be writing in ink -- without making a mess. Father will be so proud of you when he comes home/

Einar's oldest Sister, Astrid, enters looking for her siblings.

ASTRID

Better get a move on, Ragnild! Mother's looking for you everywhere! She's in a terrible mood. The slaves have heard rumors they'll be freed soon and have all run off!

RAGNHILD

Okay, okay Astrid. I'm coming. Einar. For now, practice *telling* your stories and I'll write them down for you. And then you can copy them out and practice on your own.

ASTRID

What stories?

RAGNHILD

Einar's been telling me some of the old stories and I'm going to write them down for him.

ASTRID

You, shield-maiden want-to-be Ragnhild Gudbrandsdotter, are going to write down stories?

RAGNHILD

Yes! And you could help! (teasing) Astrid the newly converted Christian who is charitable and good!

ASTRID

Help you write down that old fashioned, out of date, so yesterday pagan mythology!? No thank you. Father did not teach us to read and write to write down nonsense. Count me out! The tales are barbaric!

EINAR

Not *all* of the tales are barbaric; some of them are funny. Like when Loki cut off Sif's hair or when Thor lost his hammer!

RAGNHILD

(Excitedly) His hammer, Mjolnir! The giant killer!?

ASTRID

How do you lose a hammer?!

EINAR

One morning....

SCENE SIX - MISSING MJOLNIR

Thor is looking for his hammer. Sounds of warriors fighting in the halls of Valhalla. Sif admires her golden hair in a mirror.

THOR

Sif?! Where is my hammer!? Sif??!

SIF

Yes, Thor...

THOR

Have you seen my hammer?

SIF

(absent mindedly)

Which one?

THOR

My hammer, Mjolnir, Sif! The one that never misses its mark and always returns to the hand that throws it. (pause) The *magical* one!?

SIF

Oh, yes. The one that matches your belt so nicely?

THOR

Yes, that one.

SIF

Um, let me think. (pause) No. But I did see that scoundrel Loki lurking about...

(Loki and Sigyn enter.)

THOR

Loki? Have you seen my hammer!? (pause) Are you up to something?

LOKI

Me? Loki? No... I swear Thor, I don't know where your hammer is. Sigyn, be my darling, as always, and tell him.

(Sigyn, Loki's long suffering wife is accustomed to Loki's antics and lies for him.)

SIGYN

Uh, oh yes... Loki has been with me, his wife.

THOR

When?

SIGYN

Um...whenever the hammer went missing, of course. (laughs awkwardly) He is not to blame for you misplacing your hammer, Thor. Perhaps you shrank it and lost it yourself?

LOKI

Good one, my dear.

SIGYN

Freyja was out again early this morning, she may have seen something...

(Freyja enters in furs, removing riding gloves.)

SIF

Lady Freyja, have you seen Thor's hammer?

FREYJA

No, I've been out all morning.

SIGYN

Lady Freyja has been driving that cat-chariot of hers again! And a bit too fast inside the limits of Asgard, too. Really! Odin ought to have a talk with her before she and her cats run someone over!

FREYJA

(Ignoring her) You're welcome to use my falcon feathers to find them, Loki. I know how fond you are of dressing up and they need a good airing out.

(Freyja gives Loki a coat of feathers with which he searches the nine worlds for Mjolnir.)

LOKI

(searching)

Not in Asgard... Not in Midgard...Where in the nine worlds could Mjolnir be? Ah, of course, Jotunheim. Home sweet home for the Giants! (pause, flapping of wings) Ah, there you are... (realization) Oh, no...

(Loki rejoins the gods. Heimdall joins them as well.)

LOKI

I have good news... and I have bad news.

THOR

What's the good news?

LOKI

I found your hammer, Thor...

SIGYN

Bravo Loki!

LOKI

...but the Jotun Thrym, the Giant, won't return the hammer until he has Freyja in return.

SIF

What is it with Frost Giants wanting to carry off Freyja?

THOR

What say you, Heimdall?

HEIMDALL

Giving a Jotun our precious Freyja would jeopardize the peace we've established between the Vanir and the gods of Asgard. I suggest you, Thor, go to Jotunheim yourself.

THOR

And bash the giant's skull in!

HEIMDALL

Yes, but hold your goats, Thor. You must go to see Thrym dressed as Freyja. (He exits, amused with the idea.)

THOR

What? Me? God of Thunder? Dress as a *woman*?

FREYJA

(Amused) It's not all bad, you should try it! Much more variety than you fellows ever have.

SIF

Especially for shoes!

FREYJA

And jewelry!

THOR

I'll be mocked until Ragnarok!

FREYJA

If you don't go as Heimdall suggests, Asgard will be ruled (pause) by giants!

SIF

Only you Thor can protect us!

THOR

(Growling) *If I get my hammer back...*

LOKI

I'll go with you, Thor! I'll dress up as your maid-servant!

THOR

Fine.

SIF

We'll need to coach you a bit on etiquette first. Your table manners are atrocious!

FREYJA

I know exactly what you can wear...

(The gods exit as the Giant Thrym enters for a great feast and greets his guests. Thor attempts a clumsy curtsy.)

THRYM

Welcome, ladies of Asgard! The gods have finally been good to me.

(Loki, dressed as a handmaid, places himself between the Giant Thrym and Thor - as Freyja.)

THRYM

Come in, come in and let's toast to our nuptials!

(A servant brings Thor a drink. Instead of taking a glass, he lifts an entire barrel to his

lips and drains it. And then
wipes his mouth on his sleeve.)

THOR
(burping)

Why, thank you!

(Servants bring in dish after
dish to Thor who eats them all.
Loki tries his best to slow the
Thunder god down.)

LOKI
Easy now, my Lady!

THRYM
Does she always put so much away? She's eaten an entire
cow and a school of salmon...not to mention the mead,
straight from the barrel!? I've never seen a woman with
such an appetite.

LOKI
Well, Freyja is no ordinary woman. She's been so excited
to marry you, she hasn't eaten in days!

THRYM
And what... piercing, red eyes you have, my dear!

LOKI
They're (pause) bloodshot! She hasn't slept well in days,
either.

THRYM
Well, then, let's hurry up and get on with it! Bring
Mjollnir to bless this union!

(The hammer is brought in and
placed in Thor's lap. Thor grabs
it and just as he's about to hit
the giant over the head...)

SCENE SEVEN

ASTRID
Stop, stop, stop!

RAGNHILD
Wait, wait, wait! I'm confused. I understand how Thor got
his hammer *back*, but how did Thor get Mjollnir in the
first place?

EINAR
That's a good story too! Hmmm...we'll have to go back.

(Everyone reverses the actions of the previous scene, moving quickly back in time.)

SCENE EIGHT

Thor and Sif are sleeping. Thor snores loudly. Loki enters giggling, holding large shiny scissors with which he cuts off Sif's hair. Loki starts to sneak off. A rooster crows. Thor wakes, sees Sif and...

THOR

Get back, you hag!

SIF

Thor! It's *me*, your wife, Sif! (realizing) My...my.... hair... Someone's cut it all off!?

THOR

Loki! I'm going to break every bone in your body!

LOKI

P..p..ple...please, let me ...breathe...talk. Let me go to Svartalfheim and I'll see if I can get those nimble-fingered dwarves, those clever dwarves, to create a new head of hair for your...ahem, lovely...Sif. (calling) Freyja, I need to borrow your falcon feathers!

(Loki flies off. The gods assemble and marvel at the gifts Loki returns with. Sif looks radiant in new golden hair. Odin holds a small paper ship in his hand and a spear in the other.)

ODIN

This is marvelous! I've never seen a spear the like, forged from sunlight. Thank you, Loki. You've done...(surprised) well. The sons of the dwarf Ivaldi have surpassed themselves with their gifts: My spear, Gungnir, new golden hair for Sif and a ship that fits in my hand!

GODS

Hear, hear. Wonderful treasures! Lovely. Golden! Ship. Beautiful etc

LOKI

But there are more...

BROKKR

You bet there are more! Loki made a bet on them!

SIGYN

Loki, what have you done now?

SINDRI

Loki said we couldn't fashion finer gifts for the gods than the brothers Ivaldi could!

BROKKR

So we took his bet!

(The dwarves work in a forge.
Brokkkr works the bellows. Sindri
lights the fire and hammers.)

SIGYN

Loki *what* did you bet the dwarves *with*!?

LOKI

(nonchalantly)

My head.

SIGYN

Your head?!

BROKKR

For our first treasure, we created a golden boar...

SIF

Pff! A golden pig?!

FREYJA

Gullenbursti! He gives off light in the dark and can run faster than any horse! How marvelous! My brother Freyr will love it!

(The gods marvel at the boar.
Loki, as a horse-fly, slinks in
and out between the dwarves.)

SINDRI

After creating the golden boar, I set *more* gold on the fire.

(Sound of the bellows. Brokkkr swats the air)

BROKKR

I worked the bellows. Ah! Get that fly out of here!

SIF

I didn't know Loki could transform himself into a fly!?

SIGYN

I think I see where this is going...oh Loki...

SINDRI

And I drew out a magical ring...

SIF

Draupnir. From this ring, every ninth night, drip eight new identical golden rings.

(The gods pass the ring around, marveling at it. Brokkr slaps his neck and shouts in pain.)

SINDRI

Careful, now, Brokkr, we must tread carefully with this last treasure. It's tricky, very, tricky. Easy does it...

BROKKR

Ah! That pesky fly! It's stung my eyelid!

(Brokkr stops working the bellows.)

SINDRI

Ah! No, keep it steady... Oh, no Brokkr....it's ruined.

BROKKR

Oh, Sindri. It's marvelous! It's just that...

DWARVES

The handle is too short!

SINDRI

It looks like the treasures the Ivaldi brothers made will please the gods more than our gifts. We've been tricked by Loki (pause) again.

SIF

Yes, well it looks like you lost the bet, boys! The hair the Ivaldi brothers made for me is much nicer than your hammer! Just look at that ridiculous handle!

THOR

Yes, the handle is a bit short, but it's...it's the most marvelous of all the gifts! I will make great use of it against the giants, trolls and ogres who threaten the peace and order of Asgard.

ODIN

Nothing is more important than our safety. It's decided! Brokkr and Sindri, you've won the bet with Mjolnir! Thor's new hammer! Loki? Give them what you promised.

SIGYN

So, Loki, it looks like you owe them your head!

LOKI

I said they could have my head, but nothing else. (To the dwarves) How are you going to have my head without touching my neck!?

THOR

Most days I'd like to bash his head in, but he does have a point...

ODIN

Loki made a bet he shouldn't have, but as a result of his scheming, Sif's hair is now even more beautiful than it was before and Thor has the most powerful weapon in the cosmos!

(Loki is pleased with himself.
The dwarves exit grumbling.)

DWARVES

Scoundrel! Loki...trickster...

THOR

Hey, wait, a minute... I didn't get to kill that giant! Where's my veil!?

SCENE NINE (A) -- MONSTERS

ASTRID

No, no, no...there's no need to go back to the missing hammer story. I know the ending. What did I say!? Barbaric! Thor killing everyone at the wedding! And men dressing up as women!

RAGNHILD

Oh, come on Astrid! It's only a bit of fun...

ASTRID

Well, I certainly hope there won't be any of *that* at my wedding.

RAGNHILD

Your wedding! I forgot all about it! I can't believe Mother is going to marry you off to (pause) Erik Haraldson. He's so mean to me!

ASTRID

Oh, just teasing you, Ragnhild. Erik's not that bad, really, for a Pagan.

RAGNHILD

I knew it! You like him! But are you sure? Mother can't force you. Father wouldn't.

ASTRID

Father will be pleased to bring our families together. We're stronger together than apart.

EINAR

Will the King really release Father if we vote for your new religion, Astrid? And the other men ...and the boys?

ASTRID

Let's hope so, Einar.

TORA

(from within)

Ragnhild! Astrid! Einar!

ASTRID

Mother wants me married off before Erik's father changes his mind about the match. He's not too keen on a Christian in the family, but both our farms depend on our union. We'll bring our lands together. They'll announce the news, tonight.

RAGNHILD

Before or after we hear from the Law-Speaker?

(The volcano rumbles. Loki and Sigyn form the tableau with the bowl and snake dripping poison.)

TORA

Inside, quickly, you three! The poison drips and Loki struggles. The earth won't stop shaking! This doesn't bode well! This is the hottest Midsummer's Eve I can ever remember. This year has already been far too warm. The glaciers are melting! I fear the end is near...

EINAR

Calm yourself, mother. The mountain's letting off some pressure that's all. Loki's not really tied up under the earth. There is no snake dripping poison on him! We're not meant to take the stories *literally*; they're (pause) *poetry*.

TORA

Einar, I don't know where you young people get these strange ideas from!? You're spending far too much time with Gudrid. And now you say Loki's *not* to blame for the earth shaking!? What will your father say when he returns!? The whole world is turning upside down!

RAGNHILD

You have to admit, Einar, it does make a better story: the dripping poison from the snake suspended for eternity above the fettered half god, half giant Loki! His obedient wife Sigyn at his side, holding a bowl to catch the poison till, uh the bowl is full... leaves his side for just one moment and ...drip! Aaaagony and the earth moves!

(The volcano rumbles again and the tableau fades.)

TORA

Well Sigyn needs to hurry back with her bowl to Loki; the earth won't stop shaking! The slaves have run off and
(MORE)

TORA (cont'd)

we've a party to prepare for tonight. I can't do it alone. (pause) Midsummer's Eve...the first your father has ever missed...

ASTRID

Oh mother. Please don't worry. The rumbling will stop soon. It always does. And Father *is* coming home... right?

RAGNHILD

Come on, Mother. Not every day can be Ragnarok!

THE THREE SIBLINGS

(Teasing Tora)

It's the end of the world!

TORA

(Laughing) Monsters! All three of you! Move! Inside!

EINAR

It could be worse, mother. Think about Loki's children.

RAGNHILD

Who were they?

TORA

Three horrible monsters: Fenrir, the wolf, the giantess Hel and the Midgard serpent.

(She exits.)

EINAR

The gods, like Mother, fear these monsters will bring on Ragnarok, the end of the world. Number 1: the Midgard Serpent.

SCENE NINE (B) -- MONSTERS CONT.

Tyr and Thor are in a boat with a giant cauldron. Tyr is doing all the rowing.

THOR

I had him, I tell you!

TYR

The Midgard serpent? You caught the Midgard serpent?! I don't believe you, Thor.

THOR

Yes! Well I caught him...nearly!

TYR

Next you'll be telling me you managed to charm Hel herself!

EINAR

Hel -- Loki's horrible monster child number #2 who reigns over, (it's obvious) Hell.

TYR

(laughing) Hope you were on her good side! (no reaction) Oh, come on! That was funny, Thor. Where's your sense of humor? Hel. The goddess of the underworld... half beautiful woman, half rotting corpse... Hope you were on her good side?!

THOR

I'm not making this up, Tyr! Not this time. I nearly had him! But that fool giant of a father of yours let him go! (dramatically, looking out to the audience) There we were, far out at sea, fishing...

TYR

Fishing? That was your plan? To get my stepfather to give you his giant cauldron? To brew mead. Fishing?

THOR

Well, yes. It's a long story...

TYR

Using me to get his cauldron!?

THOR

Well, how else were we going to brew enough mead for all the gods of Asgard? Not much of party without mead.

TYR

Did you *have* to kill him? My stepfather, remember --the Giant Hymir?

THOR

Sorry about that Tyr. (pause) But at least we got the cauldron...and I could have gotten the Midgard serpent too...!

(Ensemble forms the Serpent)

THOR

There I was, pulling with all my might. Here (pulls on his hood) you play your stepfather! There I was, pulling with all my might! The Midgard serpent pulled so hard, my feet went through the bottom of the boat and just when I was about to reel the beast in, Hymir --that's you! Your silly stepfather!-- cut the line and....I lost him!

(Sigyn is searching for Loki)

TYR

So, you lost the Midgard serpent *and*, as usual, completely lost your temper!

(Thor moves in slow motion but freezes just as he is to strike Tyr playing his stepfather. Tyr then breaks the freeze and lifts up the barrel of mead.)

TYR

So all three of Loki's monstrous children are still alive and well...

SIGYN

(Defensively) Those *three monsters* of Loki's are offspring from an earlier...arrangement. Speaking of Loki where is he? He's been in such a bad mood ever since Odin had Tyr bring his other son, that wolf Fenrir, to Valhalla! (calling) Loki!

EINAR

So, yes, the story goes that all three of Loki's *monstrous* children are still alive and well. But while Odin does his best to stop Loki's monstrous children from the part they will play against the gods of Asgard at end of the world, Ragnarok, the end of the world *will come*. One day. (pause) But for now, Child Number One: the giant world serpent still encircles the oceans of our world. He's so long he bites his own tail. Child Number Two: Hel, half beauty and half...yuck... Well, Hel is confined -thankfully- to the dark depths of the underworld and Child Number Three, Fenrir, the Wolf, who was once only a pup, was raised, by Tyr, in Asgard...

SCENE TEN - FENRIR

The gods sit about feasting and watching the giant wolf, Fenrir, break himself free each time the gods try to contain him. Heimdall stands guard. Thor and Tyr carry in the cauldron.

FRIGG

More mead everyone! Thor and Tyr have returned with the cauldron big enough to brew enough mead for one and all in Asgard!

FREYJA

It's about time, Thor, the mead was running out. (pause) Stop looking so glum Loki. Time works most things out.

LOKI

That's what I'm worried about...

ODIN

To Tyr and Thor! Let's name two days of the week after them. What do you say? Tyrsdag and Torsdag? Tuesday and Thursday!? Hip-hip--

GODS

Hurrah!

ODIN

Hip-hip--

GODS

Hurrah!

LOKI

(halfheartedly)

Skol!

IDUNN

Apples first, everyone! We cannot live on mead alone! Freshly picked this morning, they're still covered in dew.

FRIGG

Oh, yes, we mustn't forget them. Thank you, darling Idunn. What would we do without you?

IDUNN

Shrivel up and eventually die.

FREYJA

She's a barrel of laughs, that one!

(Tyr approaches the wolf, Fenrir, with a rope or chain. Fenrir struggles at his bonds as they discuss the wolf)

TYR

Fenrir's growing awfully fast, All-Father, I really think it's time...we...contain him.

(Fenrir struggles.)

ODIN

Yes, if the prophecy of Ragnarok is true... this wolf will bring about my end.

THOR

(Sighing heavily) But which bonds have we not yet tried? He's broken every one of them!

ODIN

Fenris Wolf is certainly growing bigger by the day. But there's hope yet. There's always hope...

FRIGG

Go, Fenrir! Yeah! (To the others) How long can we keep this charade going?

IDUNN

He's sure to catch on...

FREYJA

He's just a dumb beast, quit your worrying, Idunn! Have a drink!

IDUNN

No thank you. (She bites into her apple)

(Fenrir breaks free of the chain put upon him. And the gods feign enthusiasm to keep Fenrir calm.)

IDUNN

FRIGG

FREYJA

Bravo! Well done! Clever you, Fenrir! Cheers, Big ears!

(Odin joins Frigg.)

FRIGG

I've sent my handmaidens to consult with the dwarves. Surely the most skilled craftsmen of the cosmos will be able to forge a chain strong enough to hold him?!

(Hlin and Fulla return)

FREYJA

Here they come!

HLIN

(Pulling a ribbon from Fulla's box)

Lady Frigg, we've returned with what you asked for.

IDUNN

You expect that ribbon to hold the wolf? To hold off the end of the world?!

FULLA

It's no ordinary ribbon. It's name is Gleipnir.

LOKI

Don't you just love how all our magical things have proper names!? Gleipnir, Sleipnir, Draupnir/

HLIN

It was wrought from the sound of a cat's footsteps, the beard of a woman--

FREYJA

Charming--

HLIN

...the roots of mountains, the breath of a fish, and the spittle of a bird.

LOKI

I had no idea any of those things existed. Interesting...

FULLA

Against it, it is useless to struggle.

(Tyr approaches Fenrir with Gleipnir. The wolf sniffs at it)

TYR

(comprehending)

He suspects something...(listens) and refuses to be bound with it unless one of us puts his or her hand (pause) in his jaws. As a ransom. If there is no treachery, and it is still a game to him, he'll consent to being bound with Gleipnir. But if we deceive him...

(Loki laughs scornfully. No one steps forward to volunteer.)

TYR

Fine, I'll do it. I've raised him since he was a pup. He trusts me. (pause) Easy now, Fenrir...

(He ties Fenrir up with Gleipnir. Fenrir struggles but the "ribbon" holds fast. Fenrir becomes furious and bites down on Tyr's hand. Loki laughs.)

TYR

(Cradling his arm)

And this is funny, how??

(The joyous mood is broken.)

ODIN

Bring Fenris Wolf to some far away place where he'll remain until...

GODS

(menacingly)

Ragnarok.

SCENE ELEVEN

ASTRID

See! The stories are cruel, barbaric, uncivilized...

EINAR

Maybe, sometimes. But they're a reflection of the world we live in.

(Loud, chaotic Midsummer Eve singing, dancing, shouting)

EINAR

See, the stories are a reflection of the world we live in. It's chaotic, loud, and fu--

RAGNHILD

(Placing a crown on her head)

Full of Midsummer magic! Everyone's excited for tonight, Astrid! Come on! Stop being so serious. You're already a Christian! You've nothing to worry about. You used to love Midsummer's Eve!?

ASTRID

Pagan nonsense...

(Tora, their mother, looks for them again. Ragnhild runs off.)

TORA

Come along you three! The Volva, the Fortune-Teller, is coming any moment! Imagine, being blessed with her presence on Midsummer's eve.

ASTRID

Blessed with her presence (She scoffs) She's just an old witch!

TORA

Astrid! The Norse rules of hospitality will still be respected regardless of what the Law-Speaker decides. We may be Christians tomorrow, but we will still have some sense of Northern decorum, is that clear?

(The children nod their heads.)

TORA

The wise woman is welcome tonight. Do you hear me?

ASTRID

Yes, mother.

RAGNHILD

Here, Astrid. Your crown. (Places it on her head) You look beautiful. I'm sure Erik will think so! And I've got my flowers all ready for my pillow!! Don't you just love Midsummer's Eve?! You wait all night for something stupendous to happen. Have the feeling something wonderful, something truly magical has to happen/

ASTRID

...and it almost never does. Ragnhild, it's the longest day in the year. The sun stops moving northward in the sky, and then begins tracking southward again as summer turns to back into winter. That's all it is. There's no magic. It's all superstitious nonsense! (She removes her

crown) And putting flowers under your pillow on Midsummer's night is *not* going to show you the man of your dreams!

RAGNHILD

Says she who already has the man of her dreams.

ASTRID

I never said Erik was the man of my dreams!

EINAR

It could be worse, you could be married off to a giant, or worse, a troll!

ASTRID

Not another story of a Frost Giant wanting to marry Freyja again!

RAGNHILD

Ok, ready. Go.

SCENE TWELVE

A Giant disguised as a Builder arrives in the court of Asgard, Valhalla.

EINAR

A handsome builder arrived in Asgard one day and offered to build the gods a high wall around their home to protect them from Giants.

THOR

This is a great idea. I like it. I'm the best Giant Killer there is. Very, very good with my hammer. The best. But (pause) when I am away fighting giants, you'll be safe in Valhalla from all harm...

A GIANT (BUILDER)

I should be able to complete the wall by Midsummer. With the help of my horse, Svadilfari.

ODIN

And in payment you ask....?

A GIANT (BUILDER)

I ask only for the goddess Freyja. (pause) Oh, and I'll take the sun and the moon as well.

(The gods look to Freyja)

FREYJA

Oh, not again! Absolutely not. I am taking my cats out for a spin! I'll be back shortly and I don't want any more talk of sending me off with any Man, Dwarf, Giant or
(MORE)

FREYJA (cont'd)

Troll who walks into Asgard and asks to have me! Is that clear, everyone?

GODS

Yes, Freyja...

(Freyja exits.)

LOKI

I've an idea!

SIF

(Adjusting her hair)

Oh, dear...you *know* what trouble those usually lead to...

LOKI

Listen. I suggest we have the Builder build the wall *and* have the Builder pay for it!

SIF

The Builder will build the wall *and* have the Builder pay for it!??

LOKI

I suggest he must finish the wall *before* the *start* of *summer*, not midsummer, with *only* his horse to help him.

ODIN

It's impossible! Even with his horse, he'll never complete it before the summer. *And* he'll have finished at least half the work for us. We lose nothing! And we'll be *that* much closer to having a wall around Asgard to protect us from those giants!

THOR

(working it out)

The Builder will build the wall and the builder will pay for it?!

ODIN

How clever! Well done, Loki. (To the Giant) Okay, builder, you've got a deal. You can set to work immediately but *only* with the help of your horse, Svadilfari.

(The gods watch the Builder work.)

LOKI

Why, that's a fine horse you have there, Builder. So very strong...(Sounds of labor, horse whinnying) working so fast...

(Time passes. Idunn joins Freyja who stands worriedly watching the Builder-Giant work.)

IDUNN

(innocently)

My, how fast that Builder and his horse are working! At this rate he'll be finished by the start of the summer... The wall is nearly complete...

FREYJA

Loki!

LOKI

I, I... can fix this! I've got an idea...

SIF

Oh, not again!

SIGYN

Loki, where are you off to... disguised as a horse?!

(Sound of a horse galloping.)

IDUNN

Look there, a mare! What a beautiful horse she is!

FREYJA

Oh, yes, *she's* a beauty alright...hmmm...where's Loki...?

(Sound of Svadilfari, the horse
neighing. And then another horse
galloping.)

IDUNN

Oh, look, Freyja, the Builder's horse is running with the mare! What a lovely pair they make!

FREYJA

Oh, yes! I see now. A-ha! Bravo Loki! Well done! Run like the wind!

IDUNN

Loki?

FREYJA

The beautiful mare!

IDUNN

Look, the Builder's horse has stopped its work and is chasing after her, I mean he's chasing after Loki!

(Builder calls for his horse)

A GIANT (BUILDER)

Svadilfari! Come back! I'll never finish the wall in time without you! Ahhh! That female horse has led my stallion astray! Svadilfari! (Sniffs the air) Ah, I smell trickery... (His voice changes) You've tricked me you deceitful gods of Asgard!

(Growing in anger he reveals himself to be a Giant.)

THE GODS

Ah, a Jotun! Thor! A Giant! Hide everyone! Thor! We need you and your hammer!

THOR

Look at this. Here I am, with the best hammer ever. And let me tell you, no matter how I throw it, it always comes back – always. It's incredible, absolutely incredible. Nobody does it better, nobody.

(He gets ready to throw it and freezes mid-action as the story is brought to a halt. All the gods freeze.)

RAGNHILD

(She stops writing)

I don't like this part.

ASTRID

No, I agree. It's not fair. The gods break their promise to the giant AND kill him!?

EINAR

Would you rather the Giant be *allowed* to carry off the goddess Freyja?

ASTRID

An agreement is an agreement. They've broken their oath. For the peace of Asgard/

RAGNHILD

Astrid...what is wrong?

ASTRID

Nothing. (pause) It's just a story, isn't it!? Go on, Einar.

(The gods unfreeze and gather round Thor in congratulations.)

SIGYN

Loki? Where has he disappeared to this time? *I* would never leave his side, but he's always running off!

EINAR

Indeed, Loki stayed away for more than a year and returned to Asgard with a beautiful young horse, an eight-legged grey-white colt called (pause) Sleipnir.

(Loki returns. Sigyn is relieved to see him again.)

LOKI

I've brought you a gift, All-Father. (A horse whinnies in the distance.) Sleipnir. The swiftest horse in the cosmos.

SIF

He has eight legs!

LOKI

Just don't ask me to tell you where he comes from....

(The gods gossip and laugh.)

SIF

So, I don't get it. Loki turned himself into that beautiful *female* horse? Ran off into the woods! Svadilfari, the stallion, ran behind him? Or her? And then Loki returns a year later with an eight legged horse. What's so funny about that?

(Freyja whispers into Sif's ear)

SIF

Oh! So Loki's a... Congratulations! You're a mommy!

(The gods fall about laughing and Loki storms off in shame.)

SCENE THIRTEEN

RAGNHILD

Astrid. Are you *only* marrying Erik because you think you should?

ASTRID

There are worse boys to marry. And I can still divorce him if things don't work out.

RAGNHILD

For now, Astrid. If the Law-Speaker decides we're to be Christian now, who knows how the laws will change in the future.

ASTRID

I'd not thought of that.

EINAR

It's not like you can just test each other out for nine nights like the god Njord and giantess Skadi did.

ASTRID

(shocked at the impropriety)

Test each other out? The gods tested each other out? No, I think not. Alright. Another story. The god Njord and giantess Skadi? How did *that* marriage work out?

EINAR

Well, find out for yourself.

(Another party. Astrid dresses up as Skadi, giantess and goddess of skiing, enters in full ski gear.)

ASTRID/SKADI

Ahem... Ahem! (to Einar) What am I supposed to ask again?

EINAR

You've come to Asgard for compensation, payment for their killing your father.

ASTRID/SKADI

They kill my father!?

EINAR

It's just a story, Astrid. You're going to get the chance to marry Baldr.

SKADI

I demand compensation for the murder of my father.

ODIN

Who was her father again?

FREYJA

The giant, Thiazzi. The one who kidnapped Idunn.

SIF

She's the daughter of a giant?

ODIN

Oh, yes, Thiazzi. We're very sorry about that...uh?

ASTRID/SKADI

What's my name again?

ODIN

Skadi. But you see, your father, the Giant Thiazzi *did* kidnap our most precious Idunn and deprive us of her golden apples of youth.

IDUNN

It was the most exciting day of my life!

SKADI

But why did he kidnap Idunn? Why would he do such a thing?

SIGYN

Well, Loki told me, one evening, when Odin and Loki were traveling far from Asgard...

SCENE FOURTEEN

*Loki and Odin are camping.
A giant eagle above them.*

ODIN

Has your meat cooked yet, Loki? Hurry up! It will soon be dark, we're far from the safety of Asgard. Let's get going.

LOKI

I don't understand why it's not cooking. The fire is hot!?

EAGLE

If you will give me some of that meat, I will release my magical charm and allow you to cook it.

ODIN

It would seem if you want to eat, Loki, you'll need to give the eagle what he's asking for.

(Loki offers up some meat but
the eagle takes the best piece.)

LOKI

(Loki strikes at the eagle)
He's taken the best part! Get off, back off, you mangy...!

(The eagle grabs Loki and pulls
him off the ground, flapping its
wings. Odin follows along
behind, looking up in distress.)

LOKI

Okay, okay, let me go!

EAGLE

Only if you swear to bring me Idunn and her magical apples.

LOKI

Okay, okay, look she's there, just there! Put me down!!

(Idunn is picking apples.)

IDUNN

Hello Loki. You've not had your apple today. (reciting the proverb) An apple a day...

LOKI

(impatiently)

You know, Idunn, there is an even lovelier apple orchard growing *outside* the walls of Asgard. You should come with me and see them for yourself. But *do* bring some apples from Asgard...so we can...compare them. What do you say?

IDUNN

Apples *more* beautiful than these? It's not possible. Surely the gods would know of such an orchard and would have told me?!

(The eagle carries her away. The Gods enter, aging rapidly.)

FULLA

What's happening? My back is aching all of a sudden.

HLIN

My lady, I feel so weak. I cannot pull my bow...

THOR

Your hair, Sif! It's gone grey.

SIF

And look at that belly you've got all of a sudden.

HEIMDALL

My hearing is not quite what it should be. I used to be able to hear everyone chew, it was horribly annoying.

FREYJA

And your golden teeth are looking a bit tarnished, there, Heimdall...(yawning) I think I need a nap.

SIF

What's happening? (dramatically) Freyja, you've a wrinkle!!

(Odin enters, slowly)

FREYJA

Odin! We are (pause) aging!

ODIN

It would seem someone has kidnapped Idunn!

(They look around and know.)

GODS

Loki?! What have you done *now*?!

LOKI

I...I had to! The eagle took me and then kidnapped Idunn!

FREYJA

After her, Loki! Hurry! My falcon feathers!

(Loki flies after Idunn)

IDUNN

Here! Loki Hurry! The Giant Thiazzi has gone out to sea, to fish! Take me home to Asgard before it's too late.

(Loki returns Idunn to the gods.
She quickly gives them apples
and they are young again.)

IDUNN

Thank you for rescuing me, Loki.

SCENE FIFTEEN

(The scene returns to Asgard)

SKADI

I'm sorry. I can't believe my father would do such a
thing: kidnap your precious Idunn.

ODIN

Well, the past is the past. Usually.

IDUNN

Don't worry, Skadi. It was the most exciting day of my
life. I spend every day in the orchard of Asgard
collecting apples for everyone. The same thing. Every
single day. And then I'm kidnapped by a giant! I finally
got out and saw the world!

ODIN

Well, Skadi. You're just in time. We're having a contest!
You shall receive compensation, for the death of your
father and join us here in Asgard.

FREYJA

Okay, everyone! Last week we decided that I have the
loveliest hair...

SIF

I didn't vote for Freyja...

THOR

(patting her head)

There, there, Sif.

FREYJA

This week we're playing: Who has the most beautiful feet
in Asgard!?

ASTRID

What idiots these gods are!

RAGNHILD

That's the whole point. They're just like us. Just as
funny, jealous, wicked (pause) and beautiful!

EINAR

Okay, please read back to me what we have so far... I got
lost, it went so fast!

(MORE)

EINAR (cont'd)
(Ragnhild reads, recaps the scene)

RAGNHILD

Okay, Skadi arrives in Jotunheim to ask compensation for the death of her father, the giant Thiazzi who kidnapped the goddess Idunn along with her magic life-giving apples. In compensation for killing the giant, the gods let the giant's daughter, Skadi, choose a husband from among them, but only by looking at their feet.

(The gods reveal their feet.)

ODIN

Come along and choose your husband, Skadi...

ASTRID/SKADI

By looking at his feet?

ODIN

Yes, feet only.

(Skadi inspects their feet.)

SKADI

Ah! Surely, these beautiful toes must belong to the most beautiful of the gods. Baldr. I wish above all else to marry Baldr!

(She has chosen Njord, a god of the Sea, and is disappointed.)

NJORD

Sorry, Skadi. I'm Njord. God of the Sea. I hope you're not too disappointed you didn't choose Baldr and that you'll take me instead.

SIGYN

Their marriage didn't last long. I heard they tried and tried, but they couldn't agree on where to live.

SIF

I heard they spent nine nights in Njord's home on the sea-coast where the men build their long ships...

(The sound of men hammering boats together and seagulls squawking incessantly. Njord sleeps; Skadi is wide awake.)

SKADI

I can't stand this racket! Bang, bang, bang... And the incessant sound of the seagulls is driving me mad!

(Skadi and Njord shift sleeping locations. This time Njord is unable to sleep while Skadi sleeps deeply at his side.)

IDUNN

And I heard they then spent the next nine nights in Skadi's home deep in the mountains of Jotunheim. With the wind and the wolves...

(Sound of the winter wind and wolves. They sit together, Njord shivering with cold and fright.)

NJORD

I miss the sea. The sound of the waves. I can't sleep with the wolves howling all night and the wind! It whips through the valleys. I'm freezing to the bone.

ASTRID/SKADI

The marriage didn't last long. And they parted company.

(They go their separate ways.)

ASTRID

Sounds like mother and father. They're so different.

RAGNHILD

But they love us. That's what holds them together. (pause) Can you imagine the pain Odin and Frigg must have felt at losing their son Baldr? It really was Ragnarok, the end of the world.

SCENE SIXTEEN

Frigg waits for her handmaidens.

FULLA

My lady. We've scoured the universe and we've asked every living...

HLIN

And non-living thing, to swear an oath not to harm our beloved--

HLIN AND FULLA

Baldr.

HLIN

Except the mistletoe.

FULLA

Yes, that one we forgot.

FRIGG

Well, mistletoe, what possible harm could it do? Odin, good news! Everything in the cosmos, living and non living, has sworn not to harm our son, Baldr!

ODIN

I declare our son, Baldr, free from all harm!

GODS

Let's play another game! Let's throw things at Baldr since he's invincible. Yeah! What fun! Hey, Baldr! So, you're Iron man now are you? Nothing can harm you? Let's see.

(They throw rocks, sticks etc at Baldr - either on stage or 4th wall- Nothing hurts him. Loki enters shape-shifted as Fulla.)

LOKI/FULLA

My dear Lady, did *everything* in the cosmos swear an oath to protect Baldr from harm? I don't recall...

FRIGG

Yes, everything!

HLIN

(suspiciously)

Everything but the mistletoe, my Lady! We just said so... Fulla? But we agreed, what harm could mistletoe do to Baldr?

(Loki barges his way bitterly through the joyful gods' game.)

LOKI

What harm indeed...?

(Loki whittles a branch of mistletoe into a fine point.)

LOKI

Baldr this and Baldr that and Baldr is so meek, and mild and marvelous (pause) but Odin's most precious son won't withstand an arrow made of mistletoe!

(Loki approaches Hodr, the blind brother of Baldr.)

LOKI

Hey, Hodr! How can you *not* be jealous of your twin brother? The most loved of all the Aesir? Look at all the attention he's getting. And you, poor blind Hodr, are missing all the fun. (pause) Want to have some fun too?! Here. I'll point you in the right direction and you pull. Nothing can harm your brother, right? (Points) There.

(The mistletoe arrow is launched and hits Baldr. Baldr falls. The gods are in shock.)

GODS

He's dead! But how? Baldr, he's fallen. He's dead!

FRIGG

Baldr! Oh my son....!!

ODIN

Loki is no longer welcome here in Asgard. Like his monstrous son Fenrir the wolf, he is to be bound deep beneath the earth!

(The gods restrain Loki. Sigyn joins him, holds up a bowl.)

EINAR

And there, deep beneath the earth, the gods hung a snake above Loki's head -- which will drip, drip, drip its poisonous venom until the end of days! His ever faithful wife, Sigyn, by his side.

SIGYN

I'll hold a bowl to catch the drops of venom to spare you some pain, Loki. But when the bowl is full, I'll need to leave you, to empty it, for just a moment. But I'll always return. It's not the end of the world. Not Ragnarok. Not yet.

(The earth rumbles once again.)

SCENE SEVENTEEN

Two families gather to celebrate Midsummer's Eve. The girls wear flower crowns; everyone is merry but anxious too for the return of the Law-Speaker and the occasional rumble of the earth beneath them.

TORA

Dear Guests, you are welcome to our home. Let us celebrate the longest day of the year and the bonds that bind our families together (nods to Erik's father) -- with a toast!

(She lifts her drinking horn, the others follow suit.)

HARALD

Thank you, Tora Svendsdotter. I drink to the return of your husband, Gudbrand, and the men and our sons with him (pause) -- To a good year and peace!

ENSEMBLE

Til árs ok friðar!

HARALD

And to Erik and...

(Ragnhild enters with news.)

RAGNHILD

She's here! She's here. The old woman is here!

CHRISTIAN

What about the Law-Speaker? It's been twenty-four hours?
How long could it take him to make up his mind?

(A woman, a volva enters--
dressed as described in Erik the
Red's Saga--in a cloak with a
staff. She is a wise woman.)

TORA

Make way, please! There, could you move there. I'm so
sorry. We've set a place of honor for her...ah, there.
(Presenting everyone) My family, my friends... my
husband, sadly, is --

VOLVA

Coming home soon.

TORA

Can you know this for sure? Please tell us it is so!

VOLVA

First, I must know if there are any women present who
know the old songs?

TORA

The old songs? My mother used to sing them. I never paid
much attention. Perhaps Astrid remembers, she sings like
a lark. She'll remember! She's old enough.

VOLVA

Astrid. "Peace, Beauty and Strength of the gods..."

CHRISTIAN

Astrid? The Christian? Sing pagan songs?

VOLVA

The old songs.

ASTRID

You want me to sing the old Pagan songs? But I'm a
Christian now (pause) I can't...

HARALD

Is this how things run without your husband here, Tora?
I'm not sure Erik is ready for such a strong-willed wife.

ERIK

I am ready for a strong-willed wife, Father. And I will let *her* decide for *herself* whether she will sing or not.

ASTRID

I...I... Gudrid?

GUDRID THE FAR TRAVELER

Singing and helping the others to see past the chaos of this world will not make any less a Christian of you, Astrid Gudbrandsdotter/

VOLVA

Soon to be wife to Erik Haraldson.

(Gasps of surprise, joy)

TORA

It's true! Erik and Astrid are betrothed!

HARALD

The bride price already paid. This may be the last time we're gathered together like this. I can think of no better time than to hear one of the old songs.

ASTRID

It's been many years...

ERIK

Oh, please try.

RAGNHILD

We might remember it, too...if we hear it.

TORA

Astrid. Please. I need to hear what she has to tell us...

BERSERKER

It may be the last time! Just one last song!?

ASTRID

I do remember one. But I don't see how it will help?!

VOLVA

(Closing her eyes)

You must begin (pause) now.

(Hesitantly, Astrid begins her song "Drømte mig en drøm i nat" which grows more and more confident. Offers of peace are extended between the Pagans and Christians)

I DREAMED A DREAM..

LAST NIGHT I DREAMED OF SILK AND OF FINE FURS
ON A PILLOW SOFT AND DEEP

I COULD NOT BE DISTURBED
I SLEPT UNTIL THE MORNING

AND IN MY DREAM I DREAMED LAST NIGHT
I DREAMT I JOINED A DANCE
TOOK THE HAND 'T WAS OFFERED ME
AND SO IT WAS MY CHANCE
TO DANCE UNTIL THE MORNING

AND AS THE DANCE WENT ROUND AND ROUND
IT STOPPED SO SUDDENLY
I FOUND MYSELF UPON THE GROUND
WITH NO ONE TO HEAR ME
TO HOPE FOR A CLEAR BRIGHT MORNING

AS MY DREAM LIKE ALL DREAMS FADE
THE MEMORY STAYS WITH ME
OF SILKEN GOWNS, OF FACES, HANDS
AND ONE WHO CALLED TO ME
TO AWAKE TO A CLEAR BRIGHT MORNING

I DREAMED A DREAM..
LAST NIGHT I DREAMED OF SILK AND OF FINE FURS
ON A PILLOW SOFT AND DEEP
I COULD NOT BE DISTURBED
I SLEPT UNTIL THE MORNING

SCENE EIGHTEEN

*Erik joins Astrid to become
Ask and Embla standing at
the foot of Yggdrasil.*

*The Norns gather at its
roots, carving runes.*

Einar returns to reciting.

EINAR

One day in this new universe Odin was walking along the seashore and found two pieces of driftwood. He breathed life and spirit into the wood -- driftwood from Yggdrasil-- and formed Ask and Embla, the first humans.

(Ragnhild stops writing. Ask and Embla vanish.)

RAGNHILD

But the end of the story, Einar!? What happens to Baldr? You've skipped it! You've gone back to the beginning! You can't just leave it like this!? (pause) Didn't you say we should understand the stories as poetry? Not literally! We human beings have not literally been carved out of wood, out of an ash tree or an elm tree or any kind of tree! (pause) If this is all poetry you've been telling, then I have to believe the end of the world is not

literal either! But you've skipped it, Einar! (pause)
Will there be a Ragnarok? Tell me there will be no end to
the world, that it's just poetry, a story? Right? I don't
want to write that part!

NORNS

Can you carve them? Can you read them? Can you stop them?

RAGNHILD

No! Of course not, whatever you're carving ...fate is
fate! But if the stories of our lives are already
written, what's the point? (pause) Will there be an end?
A Ragnarok? I wish to know, I want to see! Einar! How
does the story end?

(The Death of Baldr scene picks
up where it left off.)

FRIGG

Baldr! Oh my son....!!

ODIN

Find Loki and bind him deep beneath the earth!

(The ensemble gathers to look
out as if watching Baldr's ship
sail out into the ocean.)

EINAR

All the beings from throughout the Nine Worlds gathered
for Baldr's funeral: gods, giants, elves, dwarves,
valkyries, and others -- all came together to mourn as
they watched Baldr placed upon a burning ship. And then
disappear over the ocean, sailing out of sight as he made
the journey to the World of Darkness reigned over by the
half beautiful, half hideous child of Loki -- The Goddess
Hel.

(Hel waits for Baldr.)

FRIGG

(Calling to the gods) Everything in the nine worlds
grieves for my son. Surely Hel will release Baldr if
everything in the cosmos weeps for him!?

HEL

Let me see every thing in the cosmos weep for him, and
then I will send him back to you. But if any refuse to
weep for him, Baldr will remain in my presence - forever.

(The Ensemble weeps for Baldr
but Loki steps forward.)

LOKI

Let. Hel. Have him! (He laughs and exits.)

ODIN

Tremble and fear, the end is soon near.

NORN 1 (URD "WHAT ONCE WAS")

I was there. I saw it.

NORN 2 (VERDANDI "WHAT IS COMING")

I see it and--

NORN 3 (SKULD "WHAT SHALL BE")

I will see it all.

NORNS

After three great winters with no summer in between, it will be an age of desperation. Brother will kill brother. The wolves Skoll and Hati will swallow up the sun and the moon and the stars too will disappear. Yggdrasill will tremble and the nine worlds it holds together will fall into the sea.

(Yggdrasil breaks apart.
Heimdall enters with his horn)

NORNS

Heimdall will blast his Gjallarhorn and the Twilight of the gods will begin.

(Heimdall blows the horn.)

RAGNHILD

(to the Norns)

But there *will* be a new beginning, right? Right? Stay! Tell me!

(The Norns and Heimdall vanish.
The noise of the Midsummer
festivities resume and the Law-
Speaker enters.)

BERSERKER

Here comes the Law-Speaker!

TORA

Quiet, quiet everyone! Let's hear what he has to say.

LAW-SPEAKER

Give me some mead. I'm parched. I've been under my cloak all night and all day.

CHRISTIAN

Pagan rituals! Sitting under a cloak?! Utterly backward, I tell you!

ASTRID

He was ...meditating, seeking wisdom... inspiration.

Erik looks approvingly at Astrid
who seeks to keep the peace.

LAW-SPEAKER

I want you all to make a pledge. We should have one law
and one faith, because if we shatter the law, we shatter
the peace. Well? Do you promise to stand by my decision?
Will you pledge an unbreakable oath?

BERSERKER

Swear an oath? On Odin's spear?

LAW-SPEAKER

Yes. An *unbreakable* oath.

(Grumbling "I swear"..."yes"...)

LAW-SPEAKER

I have decided that it is in the best interests of all of
Iceland to turn away from our old gods/

RAGNHILD

Ah! I knew it!

HARALD

King Olaf forced us into this!

BERSERKER

Corruption, I tell you! Corruption!

CHRISTIAN

Hallelujah!

TORA

Shh! Quiet.

HARALD

What, Tora?

TORA

Nothing. The mountain. It's quiet. What felt like the end
of the world, could in fact be the beginning.

They join in celebration,
relief, but with uncertainty of
what the future holds for them.

ERIK

So, I'm a Christian now, too.

ASTRID

So you are.

ERIK

How do we ... start?

As if overhearing.

CHRISTIAN

How are we going to baptize everyone? In the river?

BERSERKER

The river is freezing!

HARALD

Getting soft now are you, Berserker?

BERSERKER

Yeah, well...like I said, we're traders and farmers now.

RAGNHILD

But I've never even gone a-viking!

ERIK

(Teasing) That's because no one ever invited you along "home-bound"!

RAGNHILD

"Home-bound"?! Oh, you wait and see, Erik! I'll go a-viking one day, you'll see! To Greenland with Gudrid, the Far Traveler and maybe even farther west, to Vinland! Someday, I'm going to sail far away from here!

GUDRID

Well, yes. One day. Ragnhild, but for now, let's be here to welcome your father home...huh?

Ragnhild nods in agreement and holds her family tight.

HARALD

When was the last time *any* of us went a-viking, anyway?

BERSERKER

Oh Odin, do I miss those days! Man, were they fun!

CHRISTIAN

You had so much fun "going berserk" you lost all your teeth biting down too hard on your shield!

ERIK

And now he can eat nothing but porridge!

BERSERKER

You know, the hot springs are really pretty good this time of year...

CHRISTIAN

And there's room for everyone!

BERSERKER

Can I bring my spear?

CHRISTIAN

I don't see why not.

They exit all together, off to be baptized in the hot springs.

Einar takes up paper and ink and begins to write. Astrid sees.

ASTRID

Ragnhild, look. Einar is writing. (pause) You are right. There is some Midsummer magic left after all.

The ensemble joins together.

ENSEMBLE

"In the beginning out of the depths of the sea emerged a new earth, green and fair..."

(Raising drinking horns for the curtain call.)

ENSEMBLE

Til árs ok friðar! (*Till-Oars-Auk-Free-Dahr*) Here's to a good year and peace!

END OF PLAY.