

Chapter 1.

LONG, LONG AGO

She was the most beautiful woman in the Universe.

He had just grown a moustache.

Once upon a time, and at the *same* time, they were both in the very same field. A craggy sort of place, but green. It smelled like decomposing. Not a bad smell, not a rotting smell. A decomposing smell like growing things. Like plucky little sticky things clawing their way up through the ground, through the roots of trees. A ratty smell, like goats had rubbed hard against it.

Many, many years later even, neither one could imagine why they would have gone there. 'I hadn't even brought a book

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with me' she would ponder to herself.

Not that it was a bad place, but why on earth had she gone?

He at least had some excuse. He was a goat herder. He loved his work. You may think that goat herding would be dull, but not to him. He was the sort of man who regarded the extraordinary as being commonplace. And the other way around.

Like this.

He had met any number of gods. At this time, of course, most of them were Greek. A lot of them hadn't been created yet. But there were Norse gods and Egyptian gods and Aboriginal gods. Pagan. You know, the long, long ago type of god, when they would still hang out on earth. Classic vintage. Well, he'd be talking to a god, and the god would usually end up talking about something pretty extraordinary. Thor might start

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chatting about how he was ‘*the storm.*’ Or how he killed Thriazi the mind-reading giant and tore out the eyes of Allvaldi’s son and ground them into the black heavens.

One time Thor even announced that someday he’d have a day of the week named after him. Just like that, ‘*someday I’ll be a day of the week,*’ and he sipped his mead. What makes *that* extraordinary is that they didn’t even have ‘weeks’ yet, that’s how long ago this was. But he was right, as gods *always* prefer to be:

Thor’s-day.¹

At any rate, when a god says extraordinary things like that, you can’t really *do* anything about it, which is pretty commonplace.

But if someone says something like, ‘we’re out of milk, would you remind me

¹ True, from the Old English, Thunresdæg.

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to get some?’ or, ‘why the hell won’t this damn thing work? I followed the directions *exactly* goddamn it!’ or, ‘could I borrow your finger while I tie this knot?’ well *those* are things you can really *do* something about, which is pretty extraordinary.

You can really herd goats.

Even so, there was no special reason why he was in that field. He might have herded his goats anywhere, but there he was. It was so quiet, he imagined he was the only one there (and so did she). He was stretched across the ground on a checkered picnic blanket. He was a long, thin man – so long that he couldn’t fit on the blanket all at once. He was just about to enjoy his sandwiches.

She had just finished eating one before she came round that little scarp,

And he saw her.

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And she saw him.

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And they were perfectly still.

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And the whole world was silent.

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Then she said, 'I like your moustache.'

And he stood and he said, 'Thanks.'

Because what do you say at a time like that? What can you possibly say? There she was, the most beautiful woman in the Universe, a billowing, immaculate gown, standing there just steps from him, admiring his moustache...

Everything about this was extraordinary as he had never known it could be. She was Extraordinariness herself. And he'd like to do something about it.

So he said, 'Would you care for a sandwich?'

And she said, 'I just had one.'

So he said, 'Oh?', and she nodded, 'But one should never turn down a sandwich,' he said.

She smiled the dearest smile in the Universe.

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She took a step towards him....

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Then the ground beneath her exploded.