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## **Truth and Daring**

*By Buddy Goodboy*

*Dedicated to Lupine, who inspired me to get off my butt and write.*

High above the clouds, the Celestial Temple oversaw the heavens and the earth, and all was good, but the gods were restless.

Thund clapped his massive flippers together in the way only elephant seals can. “A game!” he announced.

Eyes rolled but bodies slithered, flapped, padded, and clambered towards the center of the Celestial Temple’s white marble amphitheatre.

Thund flexed, his corded muscles somewhat visible under his majestic coating of seal blubber. “A game, everyone. The game most worthy of the gods—a game embodying the noblest of virtues—courage of spirit and body.”

Duckra quacked, “It’s to be Truth or Dare, then?”

“It is to be Truth or Dare!” bellowed Thund. “Bring forth the Nectar of the Brave!”

Lesser and demi-gods brought forth a massive amphora, sized truly for the gods, emblazoned with the great deeds of Thund, as dictated by Thund. The amphora contained a golden liquid that glowed with an inner light.

“As is tradition, we begin by quaffing of the Nectar of the Brave! As well you know, the Nectar rewards bravery! Crippling pain shall befall liars and cowards! Bliss shall come upon the bold!”

The gods passed around the amphora, drinking deep of its contents.

Troublesome Snekk, God of Uncomfortable Revelations, having no arms, tried to lick his share of Nectar from the amphora.

“Oops.”

The amphora rolled, spilling its contents, all the way to the edge of the Celestial Temple.

Thund grabbed Snekk by the neck. “You did that on purpose!”

“How, precisssely, are you grabbing me with flipperssss?”

“Hush. You just did not want to play.”

“Sssso you ssssay!”

On the earth below, a similar scene began to play out.

Far below the clouds, the barbecuers oversaw the backyard. The party had started and all was good, but clouds hung overhead. The barbecuers were restless. They passed around their red plastic cups and formed a loose circle. “Truth or dare,” someone called.

Buddy wagged his tail. He was lucky to get invited. The Labrador retriever had met his emotional support extrovert, Atlas, at a rare outing to the gym. The black horse and dog had bonded over little jokes about shedding on his white gym clothes, and Atlas had helped Buddy correct his stance for squats. He had invited Buddy to meet some of his friends at the barbecue, which was so far turning out to be a bust. Buddy hated eating in front of people, anyway—he was aware of how chubby he was, and didn’t want to invite the commentary.

A few people went, uneventfully. A raccoon stood on her head, a bear revealed his middle name was Alice.

“C’mon, Atlas, it’s your turn.”

The thickly-built black horse flicked his mane. “Truth.”

Buddy rolled his eyes. “You sure you don’t want a dare?”

Atlas smiled, his square white teeth glinting against his dark hide. “I said what I wanted.”

A drop plopped into Atlas’ cup, sizzling amidst the diet cola therein. It shone briefly, unnoticed by the barbecuers.

Atlas flexed a beefy arm. “You know I can lift any of you. You know I’d do any dare. Come on, take a chance on Truth!”

Buddy smirked, and asked, “Do you think anyone here is hot?”

Atlas took a mighty swig of his diet cola and wiped his mouth with the back of his forearm. He thought a moment, and said:

“You, if you’d put on forty or fifty pounds.”

Buddy immediately blushed. His paws clapped to his stomach, a pooch of a belly that wobbled on the train and strained his shirt buttons just a little too much.

Atlas shook his head to clear it. “Hope I didn’t embarrass you. You really would look great, though.”

More drops began to fall on the barbecuers. Buddy chugged his drink to avoid answering.

Something inside Buddy electrified. Was he fat? He was certainly starting to be. Atlas liked it, though. Buddy liked Atlas. Maybe Atlas was right.

Atlas ruffled Buddy’s headfur. “Your turn, little dog.”

“Dare.”

Atlas blinked. “You sure?”

Buddy wagged his tail with a smile the barbecuers hadn't seen before. "Dare."

On the other side of the yard, the griller called, "Burgers and dogs! Get your burgers and dogs!"

The strapping black horse looked from the Labrador to the mound of meat and back. He laughed until he whinnied. "I dare you to eat as much as you *really* want to."

Buddy's stomach growled. He shouldered past the other barbecuers with a sense of purpose. He plopped down on the picnic bench in front of the stack of burgers and dogs.

"Hey, those are for everybody—"

"—We got a Dare going here!" interrupted Atlas. "Let the little dog eat first."

*Little dog.* Buddy was going to make Atlas eat, those words specifically. He took a meaningful big bite out of his first burger, not even bothering to chew, instead swallowing the mass of meat like a duck glutting on bread. Two more giant bites and his mouth was full of burger, and he was licking his paws clean.

"That's one," he tried to say around a mouth of burger, and instead said something like, "Ashhh wah."

Atlas shook out his mane. "One out of how many?"

Buddy stopped for a moment.

He didn't eat like this in public. Maybe in private, maybe alone. Could Buddy really do it? He knew, deep down, he could glut himself on barbecue food till he popped, if he could just let himself. He took a moment to collect himself and swallow some of his cola. Cola, unbeknownst to him, infused with falling Nectar of the Brave.

*Courage, dog!* something deep within said. *Be bold! Live your truth, and truly live!*

What could Buddy say to that? Emboldened, he grabbed at a second burger and began to chow down. This one went easier than the first, Buddy's false modesty falling away like a veil from his face. Buddy's purple eyes sharpened into a predator's glare as he scoped out the table for his next target. Hot dogs! He stuffed three in his maw and began to suck them down his gullet.

Sure, this was a lot of food, but this was merely greedy for a mortal. Today, Buddy was after *gluttony*.

He swallowed heavily.

Buddy chomped his way through three cobs of street corn, four barbecued chicken breasts, a plate of green beans, and two more plastic cola cups before anyone saw him take a breath.

Atlas began rubbing Buddy's shoulders and coaching him through it. "Another bite of burger, mutt. Swallow, take a drink. Don't forget your greens, get some more beans down there."

Buddy's stomach, perhaps inspired by its owner's heroic display of gluttony, started working overtime to process everything that was being stuffed into it. Buddy began to plump out, all his

cheeks getting more pinchable, a couple of chins starting to form around his muzzle. His taut stomach started to billow out from a tight ball into a blubbery set of rolling curves. All over, Buddy visibly thickened.

Buddy didn't slow down. Chips, dip, queso by the bowl, all fell to the insatiable dog's unleashed appetite. Atlas began feeding him directly, plopping whole burgers and hot dogs directly into his mouth.

All around, barbecuers watched in shock and amazement as Buddy ate, and ate, and ate, and grew fatter before their eyes. The griller took off his "kiss the cook" apron and dropped it on the grass to mourn his fallen feast.

Buddy lost himself in a haze of eating. More cola. More burgers. Trays of banana pudding. This was it, what he wanted—it wasn't about the food as such, he wanted the freedom! To say, this is mine, I want this! I answer to no one! My body is my trophy celebrating my conquest!

Finally, he snapped greedily at empty air.

Buddy had eaten everything.

His fat butt had long ago broken the picnic table bench, and plumped up to restore him basically to his former sitting height. All his shirt buttons were somewhere on the lawn. His belly rolled out under the table, lifting it from underneath. He could feel cool grass and his toes wiggling somewhere around the middle of his vast expanse of gut.

Buddy belched, and groped his stomach, trying to give it a good rub. He strained to say, "Who's... a little dog?"

Atlas shrugged and scratched the lab under his chins. "I was wrong. You aren't a little dog at all. You're my Big Buddy."

The gods looked down upon this display.

"Heavens," said Thund.

"You would know," quacked Duckra.

"I think we can make thissss more interessssting," hissed Snekk.

A porky silver dragon poked his head into the backyard. "Hey, there! I'm Callum Reiner. I was making a bakery delivery to a triple wedding, and wouldn't you know it, everyone got cold feet. My van happened to break down right here, and, well, since you're all here, would anyone like three wedding cakes?"

Atlas smiled. "I double dare you."

Buddy's stomach growled.