

Political Marriage

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Author's Note

Another of my 'what if' stories. Loki finally has his true mother from Norse mythology (where Laufey is his mother and Farbauti is his father ... life can be complicated for a race that is both male and female at the same time). He also does have two brothers who hate him and so his mother tries to find a safe place for him - which doesn't feel safe at all at first. Any changes from mythology (Norse or Marvel) are still Loki's fault. Fenrir is a very nice pet, as long as you can afford the tons of meat he feeds on.

Chapter 1

Laufey looked out over the palace grounds, spotting his sons as blue flecks in the white snow. Three flecks, two large and one small. Byleistr, Helbindi, and Loki. The small fleck was far ahead of the bigger ones, moving quickly, running through evasive manoeuvres with ease, always at least three steps ahead of the two men trying to catch him. Laufey sighed.

He still didn't know how it had happened or why. Jotun all had the same gender, they were neither male nor female - or both, depending on the way people looked at it. After his own consort Farbauti had borne him two strong sons, Laufey had offered to carry their third child, partially because the birth of Helbindi had been hard on his mate and partially because he wanted to know what it felt like to bring life into the world. It hadn't been a thrilling experience, after the morning sicknesses, the swellings, and the overall pain and misery, Laufey had been almost happy for the contractions. He had given birth to their third son relatively fast and easy and soon known why: from birth, Loki had been far smaller than any other Jotun ever born. He'd not had the strain on his body which the births of their normal-sized sons had taken on his mate. His first thought had been to discard the baby, for he surely wouldn't survive the first year, but Farbauti had intervened, argued it would be early enough to bury their son once he was dead, which might not happen at all. Perhaps his mate just was more suited for childcare. Perhaps two pregnancies and births had just prepared him better for judging their child. Whatever it had been, Farbauti had been proven right soon enough. Loki was small for a Jotun, but he wasn't weak in any way. Physically, he could almost match his much bigger brothers. Mentally, he was far ahead of both. Loki enjoyed reading, learning, thinking, tinkering. He had a natural affinity for magic that was rare among the Jotun. The old sorcerer who had taught him had told Laufey his son was by far more powerful than the old man was himself, that the youngest prince was destined for great deeds.

Byleistr and Helbindi had not taken well to their younger brother. Loki was calm, calculating, and quite laid back at most times, but he did stand his ground when he felt he had to. He might come off second in a fight, but he never backed down or ran away, once he had decided something was worth standing up for. It had always angered his brothers that he, the small one, did not submit. It was unusual among the Jotun, where size equalled strength for most parts and strength determined the social position. The equitation didn't always work that clearly. Laufey himself, despite being killed mostly because of his strength, was slightly smaller than his consort, but Farbauti was the one Loki had inherited his calm and calculating character from and his mate could be a terrible adversary, properly angered. Farbauti was a consort by choice, not because he had no other option. He preferred nurturing and caring to ruling and fighting, a viable choice in Jotun society.

His older sons' attitude towards Loki was what worried Laufey. He knew they wouldn't do anything to harm Loki - above their usually doomed attempts to scare him into submission - as long as the fathers were still alive. Loki also was very capable of keeping them at bay most of the time by himself. In fact, Farbauti had outright forbidden Laufey to intervene with their fights for supremacy, arguing that Loki's position would be stronger, if he reached and kept it by himself and not by Laufey's or Farbauti's support. Laufey had to admit his mate had been right about that. He was sure, however, Loki's life would take a turn for the worse once they were both gone. Especially Byleistr

their firstborn, hated Loki, hated his brother's intelligence and magic he could never hope to match. He could not grasp the fact that Loki had no interest at all in destroying him and taking his place. Most likely because Byleistr would have done that in seconds, had it been the other way around. And that was what Byleistr wanted and did, Helbindi wanted and did as well. On the whole, Laufey was glad there was no rivalry between his older sons, since that would have meant a new civil war in Jotunheim after his death. Sometimes, though, he wished intelligence had been spread more evenly between his children. He knew Byleistr would take over and, on the whole, not be the worst king Jotunheim had ever had. He knew Helbindi would be at his brother's side, supporting him and being happy to be in his service to Byleistr. But there would not be a place for Loki anywhere in the realm. So Laufey had been talking with Farbauti about the situation at great length. He had been plotting and planning more than at any other point of his career - to find a safe place for Loki. To make sure his youngest had a future after his own life had ended. He had found a possible option and hoped he would be able to make it work, for the sake of his peace of mind as much as for Loki's sake and, perhaps, the sake of Jotunheim as well.

Outside in the snow, the small blue fleck had disappeared. Again, Loki had managed to evade his brothers successfully and claim another victory for himself.

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Laufey didn't much cherish the regular visits to Asgard. They helped strengthen the relationship between the realms - important, especially after the lost battle centuries ago - and they kept the peace. But for a Jotun of Laufey's height and build, Asgard was uncomfortably warm, bright - and small. Laufey often wondered how people could live in such small dwellings, even if they were a good deal shorter than the average Jotun. The palace, admittedly, was big enough, the rooms high enough for a Jotun to feel comfortable in. Laufey walked into the throne room and ignored the guards, as he usually did. He didn't mind stopping in front of the steps that led up to the throne, since the raised dais meant he and Odin were at eye height. Laufey harboured no hard feelings for the king of Asgard. He had started the battle, he had underestimated the forces of Asgard, he should have known they would come to help the mortals, Asgard had a great interest in things on Midgard, for whatever reason.

"Laufey." The All-Father nodded.

"All-Father." Laufey nodded back. "I have been thinking lately."

"About what?"

"About a way to strengthen the relationship between Asgard and Jotunheim."

"Now I'm intrigued." Odin leaned forward on his throne. "Go ahead."

"A political marriage."

The All-Father coughed politely. "You are aware I have two sons and no daughters?"

"Indeed I am. You are aware all Jotun can bear children?"

"I wasn't." The Asgardian shook his head, he looked honestly surprised.

"We all can. As a matter of fact, my mate bore two of our children and I bore the third ... but I don't recommend it. My dear Farbauti is far more suited for bearing children and raising them than I am. Still, I don't regret it, it was an experience."

"There is still the difference in height. I will not let one of my sons being dwarfed by his bride . . . or bridegroom."

"As a matter of fact, I would guess my youngest son, the one I bore, to be around the average height of an Asgardian."

"Wouldn't he be very small for a Jotun, then?"

Laufey sighed and nodded. "That is why I want him married here in Asgard. In a place where I

will not always be seen as ‘too short.’”

“I certainly can understand that. I wish to meet this son of yours, however, before I decide on it.”

“Of course. I shall bring Loki along the next time I come here. It will be educating for him, so I will love it either way.”

“He is interested in learning?”

“He’s a talented mage and a scholar, yes. Very much unlike his brothers or the majority in Jotunheim. Another reason why I want him married in another realm.”

“I can certainly see how he would have it difficult back home.”

“He is not as submissive and meek as his brothers want him to be, which is more reason to make sure he has a place outside Jotunheim by the time my oldest son will take the throne.”

“I do prefer the mates of my sons to be strong and self-reliant, it paints a better picture of Asgard, the royal family is strong. And a mage and scholar certainly will be welcome.”

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Loki was thrilled when his father told him he’d be accompanying him to Asgard. He had never seen any place outside Jotunheim and he knew his older brothers had never left the realm, either. Anything he could use to cut back Byleistr with and make his life more bearable was very welcome. He followed Laufey to the Bifrost site, studying the complicated pattern etched into the everlasting ice. He felt the magic gathered at the site, a side effect of the Bifrost travel. Loki’s magical knowledge was limited to ice magic and healing, due to the knowledge available to him. He had mastered both a long time ago and was longing for new knowledge, for control over more elements, for a chance to specialize in other areas.

The multicoloured lights were beautiful. They pulled him and his father off the surface of Jotunheim, shot them through space, and finally released them inside a domed structure glittering with gold. *The Realm Eternal*, Loki thought. *The name is truly justified.* His eyes jumped from place to place, taking in all the new things he could see. He barely registered the tall man standing in the middle of the structure, pulling a large sword from a socket. *He’s taller than me, nothing new there.* They walked along the Rainbow Bridge, a structure, as Loki realized soon, that fed energy to the Bifrost and made the travelling between the realms possible. In front of him, large buildings loomed, getting higher the closer they came to the largest building of all. *That must be the palace.* They reached the first houses. Loki saw the way the inhabitants looked at them, a mixture of fear and disdain. Some were muttering soft curses, thinking the Jotun couldn’t hear them. Loki couldn’t understand them well and knew his father could, too. All Jotun had sharp senses, sharper ones, it seemed, than the Asgardians. He heard words like ‘monsters,’ ‘beasts,’ and ‘animals’ quite clearly. *They have not forgotten the battle in Midgard yet.* He lowered his head slightly and looked ahead. *Back here, I wouldn’t be extraordinary small. Here I would just be normal-sized. Blue-skinned, crimson-eyed, but normal-sized.* He sighed. The lights were unusually bright, the air warmer than he was used to, but on the whole the realm was quite pleasant, he liked the way it looked and wondered whether he would ever have the chance to come back and see more of it.

Finally, they reached the palace and stepped inside. The rooms and hallways they walked through were high enough for a normal-sized Jotun to feel comfortable in, yet Loki quickly realized everything of importance was within reach for someone of his height. A Jotun would have made more use of the higher areas. The guards in their gleaming armour and the other people in their colourful clothes, however, made him very aware of his own attire, which was nothing more or less than a simple tunic and loincloth. Loki didn’t wear any jewellery, since he didn’t need to make his brothers any more jealous and angry. Since he was no warrior, he bore no armour, since he was the youngest son and had done

nothing noteworthy so far, so he didn't wear any jewellery, either. He merely covered his nether regions, as was considered proper in Jotunheim, nothing else. He wore his markings with pride though, since they told everyone in his realm of his parentage, being a combination of the markings of his fathers.

They reached a large throne room, larger even than his father's. It seemed completely covered in gold, like the hallways he had seen so far. The smooth marble floor underneath his feet felt comfortably cool. The columns to his left and right were taller than any ice columns he'd ever seen back home, even in the really old caves. He kept a step behind his father and he kept his eyes to the floor most of the time, as not to insult anyone by accident. He was very aware of how brittle the peace between Jotunheim and Asgard was - and of how likely it was Asgard would completely destroy Jotunheim in a full-fledged war. The All-Father and his father merely nodded to each other, but Loki found it wiser to bow deeply, just in case. The two rulers exchanged a short greeting.

"So this is your youngest, then?"

"Indeed, this is Loki." He felt his father's hand come to rest on his left shoulder. It made him feel a little more secure and eased some of his nervousness. His father had introduced him before bringing him along, so he was welcome for the time being.

"Your father told me you were quite interested in knowledge, Loki. Is that so?"

Loki lifted his head and met the eye of the ruler of Asgard. "Yes, All-Father, that is true."

Odin seemed to muster him for quite a while and Loki wondered what the All-Father, who was said to possess second sight, saw in him. He could sense magic around the Asgardian, gathered around his golden spear, but also emanating from his body. The king of Asgard, it seemed, was a mage as much as he was a warrior. If that was true, he would be able to sense the magic in Loki as well. He just had to hope Odin wouldn't suspect his father of any underhanded tactics because he had brought a mage along for the meeting.

The All-Father leant back on his throne. "You have quite some talent for magic and an amazing amount of power at your disposal, Loki. How far have you come in your training?"

At first, Loki tensed at the question, but then he realized the Asgardian wasn't angry about him being a mage. He relaxed slightly. "I have a solid knowledge of ice magic and healing, All-Father. That was everything an old sorcerer in Jotunheim could teach me."

"Two important schools of magic, indeed. Healing magic is of great importance and ice magic is hardly known or practiced outside Jotunheim."

"Well, we have a lot of ice." Loki was glad his father took over the conversation again.

"We will discuss your proposition in our next meeting, Laufey. I think it is promising."

Proposition? Loki glanced at his father. *What is that proposition about?*

"I'm glad to hear this and will happily discuss it next time."

Loki couldn't shake off the feeling that he, in one way or another, was part of the proposition they were talking about. He knew it wouldn't be a good idea to ask about it in the throne room of Asgard, so he decided to keep quiet. It would be early enough to ask once they were back home.

Chapter 2

Loki waited until they had arrived back in Jotunheim, then he turned to face his father. “What kind of proposition was the All-Father talking about?”

“A political marriage, Loki.”

It didn’t take a genius to put two and two together, even though Loki had seen his brothers fail that - repeatedly. “And I am involved?”

“Yes, you will be involved. That was why I took you along, since the All-Father wanted to meet you first.”

Unusual anger welled up inside Loki. “So that is the worth I have, isn’t it? I’m of no use to bring any alliance here in Jotunheim, because I’m so small! You’d rather marry me off to an Asgardian prince instead! And I thought at least you knew me better!”

“Loki...”

But Loki turned around and ran. He made it back to the palace in short time, passed his brothers as they sparred in the courtyard, ran up the stairs to his own room, and dived into his bed, burying himself under the furs covering it. He didn’t do the latter for warmth, Loki had no problems with the cold, like every other Jotun, he didn’t even feel it. He did it to hide from the stark reality of his future.

Loki wasn’t sure how much time passed before someone knocked on his door. It was too long for his father to just have come back, that much he was sure of. “Go away!”

He heard the door open and knew it wasn’t one of his brothers. It had taken several well-designed traps, but they had learned not to come into his room when he sent them off. He pushed his head out from under the furs and saw Farbauti standing in front of the bed. His sire sat down on the edge of the bed, but he didn’t speak. With a sigh, Loki slipped out from under the covers and sat down beside him. His father had done well to send his mate instead of coming himself.

“Why is father doing this to me?” Knowing he couldn’t out-wait his sire, Loki decided to start the conversation they were going to have anyway.

“We spoke about it, for quite some time. Loki, this is not just because it will strengthen our alliance with Asgard. This is also to keep you safe.”

“Safe?” Loki felt a bitter taste in his mouth. “How will I be safe in the hands of people who detest everyone of my race?” He remembered the whispered insults trailing after them through Asgard all too well.

“They will learn to accept you. You must know, though, that your life will be in permanent danger once Byleistr takes the throne, once your father and I are gone.”

Loki sighed. “I know.” *And I don’t really like to think about it.*

“In Asgard, as consort of a prince, you will be safe. Your brother might not be very bright, but he will be bright enough not to challenge the Realm Eternal, just for the pleasure of seeing you dead.”

Another sigh. “Yes, even he is not that stupid. But why should the All-Father agree to such a marriage? It’s not usual in Asgard for two men to marry, is it?”

“No, but he knows you will be able to bear children for your husband. My dear Laufey told him last time they met. You will be considered the ‘woman’ in the relationship.”

Loki knew that all races in the nine realms safe for the Jotun came in two different genders, but he

still found it hard to grasp the concept. The idea that there was more than one kind of body necessary to reproduce was completely alien to him. If one gender had been good enough for the oldest race created by Ymir himself, why wasn't it good enough for the others?

"You think my life will be bearable? It won't be a love marriage, after all."

"Laufey and I originally didn't marry out of love, either, Loki. Our marriage was arranged to bring my clan into his alliance."

"But you love each other, don't you?"

"Yes, we definitely love each other." Farbauti put one arm around Loki's shoulders, pulling his son closer. "There are many different kinds of love. There is the fire of pleasure and passion, burning high and fast. There is the love that grows slowly, out of respect and shared experience. Sometimes the passion will turn into this kind of love, instead of just burning out and leaving only ashes behind. There is the love between parents and children and the love between siblings."

Loki snorted at that. "Love between siblings, really?"

"Not between you and your brothers, but most certainly between Byleistr and Helbindi."

"So there is a chance that prince and I will one day love each other?"

"You are easy to love, my son. As long as you respect your husband and do what it takes to be a good consort, I don't see how he cannot come to love you over time. It might take a while, but both Jotun and Asgardians are long-living races. You have a long time to fall in love with each other."

"What does it take to be a good consort?"

"That depends on your husband. Mine needs someone to tell him when he's being stupid ... not that he will ever admit that. As you get to know your husband, you will know what it takes to support him and be at his side. I know you will, being as clever as you are."

Loki closed his eyes and snuggled a little closer to his sire. "Yes, I know I'm clever."

"Alas, you have not yet grasped the principle of humility, my clever son." There was definite laughter in Farbauti's voice.

"Humility is overrated."

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Loki accompanied his father on another trip to Asgard soon after. He knew it was to meet his future husband, so he was nervous. He knew feelings could neither be explained nor controlled through logic. His intelligence alone could not make it all work. They entered the throne room and Loki wished, for the first time in his life, he could be as tall as his father, instead of being so short. He kept his eyes on the floor, not really wanting to see the future. Again, the two rulers exchanged a short greeting.

"So this is him?" The voice wasn't Odin's, it was much younger and a lot harsher. "I still don't see how you can want me to marry a man. Why not Balder?"

"Because I say so, Thor." By the sound of it, Odin and his son weren't having this discussion for the first time. *Nice to know I'm not the only one weary of the marriage.*

Loki dared to look up and saw a muscled young man with blond hair and almost glowing blue eyes. *So this is my future husband? Obviously, he's a warrior, but that is fitting for a prince, far more fitting than my interest in knowledge. I'm sure he is attractive by the standards of Asgard, even though I don't know them. His stance says he has a great amount of self-esteem, he wouldn't have that, if he were considered ugly.* The stance also told Loki it would be wiser not to address the other one at that moment.

There was a flicker in the blue eyes, like electricity. "Don't stare at me like that, don't you have any manners?"

Loki was about to apologize, but he didn't have to.

“That is a bit rich, coming from you, my son.” Odin shot his son a warning glare. “Your mother has rightfully remarked more than once that you severely lack manners. You can hardly deny your future consort to look at you.”

The younger Asgardian sneered. “You know I love someone else.”

“And you know I don’t approve of her.”

I shouldn’t be here. Loki cast his eyes down again. *All of this should not be discussed with me and my father around. It’s far too personal.*

“And that ... that ... thing is better?”

“Thor!” Odin rose while roaring his son’s name. The younger man involuntarily ducked his head. “You will not call your consort a thing. And you will come to terms with the marriage, the wedding will take place in a few days, after all.”

“Days?!” It was Thor who yelled it, but Loki was close to doing the same.

“There is no need to wait, you will have ample time to get to know each other, once you are properly married.”

Days... Loki swallowed hard. He had hoped for a long engagement, for being allowed to ease into the new situation. And, deep inside, he had hoped for a husband he would at least find pleasant. The man he was going to be wed to, on the other hand, obviously was arrogant, aggressive, and ill-mannered. Loki wasn’t overly worried about the aggressiveness, since he knew he was stronger than the average Asgardian. But he had so far lived a life of fighting with and defending himself against his brothers, he’d hoped for something better in the future. He had a suspicion the person Thor loved was the main reason for the short engagement. It seemed Odin was prepared to go very far to keep them apart. Loki wondered about the reason.

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On the early morning of his wedding day, Loki sat in his room, stared at himself in the mirror, and just let the misery flow through him. There had been no more meetings between him and his future husband, which probably was for the best. Loki had learned that Thor, despite being the younger son, was the crown prince, since his older brother Balder didn’t qualify for the position. He didn’t know the reason for that, but thought he didn’t have to, anyway. Loki would one day be the ‘queen’ of Asgard, the consort of the ruler. He wasn’t very happy about that. He was sure most people living in Asgard didn’t like that thought, either. A knock on the door made him look up. He almost smiled when his sire stepped inside.

“Don’t look so sad, Loki, it’s your wedding day, after all.”

“Yes...” Loki sighed and looked down again. “And I wish it weren’t. Time was so short.”

“I know and neither Laufey nor I really approve of it. But Odin insisted and he seems to have his reasons for it. That is not why I have come, though, I have something for you.” He stretched out his hands and Loki gasped.

“Your bracelets?” *I can’t remember ever having seen him without them.*

“My bearer gave them to me when I left for the marriage with Laufey. They have been handed down for generations in my family. I had them made a little smaller by a sorcerer, he shrank them for me. They should fit you now.”

“But ... but my children will be Asgardian, their blood is stronger than ours.”

“It doesn’t matter, they will still have Jotun blood.” Swiftly, Farbauti put the bracelets around Loki’s wrists. “There, they fit perfectly.”

Loki looked down at the bracelets. He remembered the intricate patterns on the broad golden bands very well, a mixture of old Jotun runes hardly anybody could still read and wonderful decorative

shapes. Even though they were smaller now, they didn't look any less beautiful. For a moment, he stroked the left one with his right hand, then the right one with his left hand.

"Have faith in the future, my son. You are strong and you can outlast any trouble, I know it. I was sure what would become of me, either, when I left home, but it turned out well."

"But you married father ... I will marry..." He sighed again.

"It took me a long time to train your father properly ... even though he would not agree with me there." Farbauti smiled. "Now come, we have to leave for Asgard."

Loki nodded and got up. He followed his sire out of his room, not looking back. Everything he cared for, which wasn't much, had already been removed. Only the memories remained behind. He was glad his brothers would not come along, since neither of his parents trusted them not to put a foot wrong during the wedding ceremony or the feast afterwards. He trailed along behind his parents on the way to the Bifrost. Once they had reached Asgard, he trailed along behind them again. The angry stares of the citizens didn't make it any better for him. *They all despise and hate me. I'm sure whoever Thor is in love with, they would be more prepared to accept this person than me.* He hung his head.

The hall in which the ceremony was to take place turned out to be huge, even by Jotun standards. Loki stood at the doors, painfully aware of how different he looked from the rest. It wasn't just about the blue skin and the crimson eyes. Jotun didn't wear clothes for warmth or to cover themselves, they merely wore a loincloth, because it was deemed proper. Compared to the colourful clothing of all the other people present, Loki felt even more singled out. He didn't have his parents' height or the knowledge that he would return back home after all this to comfort him.

Laufey led him to the middle of the hall, where Odin and Thor were waiting already, the former smiling, the latter scowling. Loki didn't miss the warning glare the king of Asgard shot his son. *seems missing one eye can make the other one far more powerful. And it seems the whole situation still isn't resolved.* He lifted his head, looking straight at Odin.

"Do you, Thor Odinson, swear to honour and protect your consort, Loki Laufeyson, in good and bad times? To keep him safe and defend him from all evil?"

Thor's eyes were glowing with the same flickering, blue light Loki had seen in them before. "I swear." It came out as a growl from between tightly clasped teeth.

"Do you, Loki Laufeyson, swear to obey and serve your husband, Thor Odinson, in good and bad times? To stay at his side and support him always?"

Why is it he is to honour me, while I'm supposed to serve him? It's not fair. But Loki knew he had come too far already to back out now. "I swear."

"Then I hereby proclaim you husband and consort."

For a fleeting moment, Loki wondered how often Odin had rehearsed the lines, so he wouldn't say the wrong words. As far as he knew from his studies, they words usually would be husband and wife, not husband and consort. He lowered his head again and closed his eyes.

Loki stayed silent during the feast that began after the ceremony. He tasted the first cooked meat of his life and he was not delighted. *Jotunheim isn't missing a thing there, because we don't have anything to burn and no desire to warm up. Our tenderized meat is much better than this.* During the following courses, he didn't eat much and tried to avoid more meat. He was already sure he would stay hungry by the time the last course came up. The many fruits served there made him sag in relief. While most people around him seemed to go for the other sweets, he helped himself to a large amount of the fruits, cherishing their fresh taste. He also stayed clear of most of the drinks afterwards. He didn't mind the taste of ale, mead, or wine, but he didn't find any of it overly thrilling, either. On the whole, he couldn't remember a worse feast he'd been to, even with his brothers around.

Chapter 3

Loki didn't outright fear the moment they were supposed to retreat to their rooms together. He and his husband and he were of similar height and Loki knew he would be able to hold himself against an Asgardian of his height, if need be. Nevertheless, he didn't feel ready to leave his family behind. Yet he knew there was no going back and no avoiding it, either, so he just trailed after the Asgardian, not really caring where they went.

They entered a large, airy living room together and Thor turned to him, his eyes still hard, cold, and slightly flickering. "You sleep out here, I'm not sharing my bed with the likes of you."

Loki could have countered, but he didn't feel like putting up a fight in their first night. It wasn't about if he minded not sharing the bed with his husband. Thor went through the next door, slamming it closed behind himself, and Loki took a closer look around. He found the couches rather narrow, but he also spied a large fur in front of the fireplace. There was no fire burning, since it was summer in Asgard and even the nights were warm enough. And even if it had been winter, Loki wouldn't have minded it much, he was a frost giant, after all. He took a large pillow from one of the couches and settled down on the fur. Without even bothering to look for a blanket, he lay down, curled up with the pillow underneath his head, and went to sleep.

He woke early the next morning and quickly put the pillow back. Then he straightened the fur to make sure the servants wouldn't know where he had slept. He already knew he would have a hard time to earn any respect, he didn't need people talking about how he slept on the floor in the living room instead of sharing the bed with his husband as every normal person would. He didn't need to give them more reasons to call him a beast or an animal, either. Loki was sure his husband would not appreciate it if he just walked into their bedroom, where his few clothes and other utensils were stored, so he just sat down on one of the couches and waited for Thor to leave the bedroom. The other one finally came out and ignored him outright. Loki refused to be hurt by it, walked through the bedroom into the bathroom and cleaned himself up, before changing his clothes. By the time he came out again, Thor was walking out of the door, leaving the remainders of a breakfast behind. Loki took an inventory of it. *Seems like my husband likes lots of meats, but has no interest in fruits. That suits me fine.* He sat down and ate the remains with great appetite. Afterwards, he left the suite of rooms, to be searching for and eventually finding the library.

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Over the next couple of weeks, Loki developed a certain routine for his days. He still slept in the living room, on the fur in front of the fireplace, and he was very careful to always be up before the servants would come in, so they didn't find out. He was stashing most of his belongings in the living room now, so he had access to them at any time he desired, and he had added quite some books to the stash as well. Like this, he didn't find it hard to wait for his husband, who was an early riser as well, to leave their bedroom. He would then take care of his own need for cleanliness and this way avoid having to share the breakfast table with Thor. Once he was done with washing. Thor usually was either gone already or in the process of leaving. Loki would take his own breakfast from the remains of the

dishes served and leave as well. Most of the days, he went directly to the library to read and learn, but he also spent some time exploring the palace and getting his bearings there.

Whispered insults followed him everywhere. The guards, the servants, and the nobles alike were talking behind his back and calling him names, whenever they thought he couldn't hear them. And even though he heard them, he feigned ignorance. Inside the library, the whispers were silent, since those who insulted him behind his back never went there. The few scholars he had to share the books with soon enough came to accept him, once they realized he cherished the books and the knowledge as much as they did.

Loki usually didn't take lunch at all, but kept reading in the library during noontime. He didn't mind missing one meal a day. Like all Jotun, he could go without food for days, if necessary. The icy wastes of Jotunheim didn't offer food freely, his people had often been forced to live on little or no food for extended periods. Whenever possible, he cut his time for dinner short as well, since dinner meant going to the dining hall and meeting several of those people who would call him a monster, a beast, or an animal behind his back. Afterwards, he would return to the library or enjoy evening air in an early night in the gardens, before going back to the suite and getting ready for another night. It was not what he had wished for, but it wasn't as bad as it could have been, either.

This afternoon, he had other plans. He'd learned about a tree in the gardens that was going to be cut. Loki wasn't sure why the tree was going to be cut, since he was sure the palace did not rely on the few trees on the grounds for the wood necessary for heating and cooking, but he assumed they knew what they were doing. He stood under another tree nearby and watched two woodcutters get to work. To his surprise, he saw Queen Frigga arrive as well. She stood closer to the tree herself.

At first, Loki wasn't sure why he felt like there was something wrong, then it dawned on him. While most people tended to think magic was merely waving one's hands and saying a few strange words, in reality, every kind of magic required quite some calculations to work, especially if matter was manipulated in any way. Therefore, Loki was very capable of judging mass and calculating angles, even in his head. The angle of the cut the woodcutters had set was completely wrong, providing the tree would fall on the area carefully cleared of all watchers. Before Loki could say something, a loud crack echoed through the area and the tree broke and fell. Loki saw it was falling in the direction of his mother-in-law and he shot forward, catching the tree before it could hit her. Frigga stared at him with wide-open eyes, still in shock, but one of the servants reacted and pulled her away from the tree. Loki let it fall to the ground and sighed in relief. It hadn't been heavy enough to injure him, but heavy enough to make keeping it hoisted up for long a little difficult. He saw the servants looking at him and for the first time there was something else than hate or disgust in their eyes. He saw respect and relief instead.

Frigga slowly came out of her shock and looked at him for quite a while, silently studying him. Then she took his arm and pulled him with her. "It's time we have a nice talk."

Loki wondered why he followed his mother-in-law, since he could easily have broken free from her grip. However, Frigga had never looked at him with disdain, not during the ceremony, not during the wedding feast, not during any of the dinners he'd more or less endured.

"You aren't injured, are you?"

"No, I might not be quite as strong as a regular-sized Jotun, but strong enough to hold such a tree without getting injured."

"You must be a lot stronger than you look, then."

"I am."

They passed by the door to the suite of rooms Loki shared with Thor and entered the royal suite that was occupied by Odin and Frigga. The airy sitting room was much like the living room in his suite and Loki felt quite comfortable in it. He allowed himself to be pulled over to a couch and sat down on

with his mother-in-law.

“I should have insisted on a talk earlier, but I thought you would like to get acclimatized here first. The wedding was arranged too quickly, but sometimes Odin can be terribly hard-headed. Now, you already know you have magic.”

“Yes, that’s true. I know ice magic and healing, the only things a sorcerer back home could teach me.” He realized a little too late what he was saying.

“You have not acclimatized here so far, have you?” She touched his arm softly.

“No.” Loki shook his head.

“Have you at least become more familiar with my son?”

“No.” He sighed.

“That boy is just as stubborn as his father, I swear. You must be aware that it’s not because of you though. It’s because of that little bitch Amora.”

“Who?”

“Amora, the woman my son fancies himself in love with.” Frigga heaved a sigh. “I do have my reservations, as does Odin. She doesn’t have a good reputation and I doubt she is at least faithful to Thor, which I would consider the minimum for anyone having a relationship with him ... or Balder, but Balder is much more considerate in his relationships.”

“I don’t think it’s her, to be honest. He is not happy about having been forced to marry ... to marry a man and a Jotun, like me.”

“You were forced as much as he was, but you are not playing the spoiled, little child.” Frigga pursed her lips for a moment. “I may not have spoken to you before, but there is little happening in the palace I don’t know about.” She shook her head and patted his arm. “Including the rather disrespectful way quite some inhabitants treat you. I wish I could just give them all a dressing down, but it wouldn’t help. They hang on very tightly to their prejudices and are too blind to see. You have done your best to become familiar with the place and fit in, that is more than quite some people are ready to do when they arrive.”

Loki sighed. “I know why my father decided to make sure I married someone from another realm. I know how important this marriage is for the peace, for the future of both our realms, but I had hoped for a longer engagement and more time to get used to the idea.”

“Why did he decide to make sure you marry someone from another realm?”

“I am much smaller than the other Jotun ... including my brothers. My oldest brother, Byleistr, hates me outright. As long as my parents are still alive, he won’t harm me, but afterwards, there will be no safe place for me in Jotunheim and I know it.”

“So your father made sure to send you to another realm, where you would be protected.”

“Yes. Byleistr is not exceptionally bright, but even he knows better than to attack Asgard merely for the joy of striking me dead.”

“Tell me more of your family. You have one brother?”

“Two brothers, Byleistr and Helbindi. Both are older than me.”

“And how does Helbindi feel about you?”

“I don’t know.” Loki shrugged. “Helbindi does and thinks what Byleistr does and thinks, he had no opinion of his own. And since Byleistr hates me, so does Helbindi.”

“And Laufey is the father of all three of you, then?”

“It’s a little more complicated. Laufey is the sire of Byleistr and Helbindi, but my bearer. And his consort, Farbauti, is the bearer of my brothers, but my sire.”

“I think I don’t understand it fully.”

Loki took a deep breath. “My father Farbauti gave birth to my two older brothers, while my father Laufey sired them. But after the birth of Helbindi which, as far as I have heard, was very hard, the

both decided to switch roles for the next child, so Laufey gave birth to me and Farbauti sired me.”

“That is possible in Jotunheim?” She seemed genuinely impressed.

“Yes, every Jotun can father and conceive, but some tend more towards fathering and some more towards conceiving. Consorts usually are the ones to bear a child, they are more interested in raising children and caring. That does not mean, however, that they are weak. I know my father Farbauti is very strong and can be a fearsome enemy when angered.”

That moment, Loki realized why he felt so safe with Frigga. She was much smaller than Farbauti and a different gender, too, but she had the same air around herself. She was as much caregiver and child bearer as his sire was. And Loki didn’t doubt for a moment she had as much control over her family as his sire had over his.

“That is fascinating, I never knew about that part of the Jotun race. I always thought there were two genders, just not visibly so.”

“No, we really all are one gender. I still have a few problems to fully grasp the principle of two genders.”

She laughed. “You will learn, I’m sure.”

“In time, I certainly will.”

“And unlike my two sons, you have magic.” Frigga beamed. “Have you ever done any Seidr magic?”

“No, I haven’t. But I found a book on it in the library, it sounds interesting.”

“Most Asgardians consider it unfitting for men, but I don’t think you will care about that ... I know my dear husband doesn’t care the least.”

Loki suddenly remembered the book and realized Seidr magic could be the reason for the magic around Odin’s spear. The book had spoken of the necessity of a staff or suchlike for the correct use of this type of magic. “I don’t care about that at all.”

“Those were almost precisely Odin’s words when his own father told him he should reconsider his choice of magic. As I said, my dear husband can be hard-headed. You will like this kind of magic, it has a very special feeling, interweaving the tendrils of magic. You will need a staff, of course. Sometimes manage it without, but in the beginning, it is much easier with a staff to concentrate and guide the power.”

“It will be interesting to learn it.” Loki paused for a moment. “I hope I’m not overstepping my bounds, but there’s one question I have about the family.”

“Yes?”

“I know Balder is older than Thor, so why is Thor the crown prince?”

Frigga sighed. “When he was a mere infant, Balder was cursed. He is unable to father children and because of this not fit to ascend to the throne.”

“I’m sorry for this. It’s a terrible fate.”

“You don’t have to be, you didn’t curse him, after all. Balder has learned to live with it, even though it’s sometimes hard for him to see his friends founding families.”

“I imagine it would be, yes.” *Should my husband and I ever have children, I will make sure to include Balder in their care.*

Chapter 4

A few days later, Loki went out to explore the meadows behind the stables. He saw several of the stable boys gathered at the fence of one of them, where some other men seemed to be set on putting a large bag on the saddle a black horse was wearing. Loki still didn't know much about horses, since there weren't any in Jotunheim. He found himself a shady tree nearby and sat down beneath it, watching the men do whatever it was they did. From the occasional shouts of the boys at the fence, he gathered they were trying to train the horse to accept someone on its back. The large bag filled in for a rider, since it wouldn't sustain injury when being thrown off. Loki had partially tamed some of the ice beasts back home, only far enough so they would accept him on their backs and would humour him by carrying him wherever he wanted to go. A large ice beast could easily make up for the shorter legs that came with his missing height. But ice beasts were predators, horses, as far as Loki could tell, were prey. They would be especially nervous with something heavy on their backs, expecting teeth to be buried in their necks. Without him really wanting to, his mind started to turn the problem over and over. Obviously, the horse was not willing to accept a rider. It also was quite strong and managed to throw the bag off only seconds after it had been put into the saddle. Things wouldn't be that easy with a rider, of course, since a rider could actively work on staying in the saddle. Still, by the look of it, the men were fighting a lost cause, at least this way. Loki was sure there would be another.

Suddenly, shouts went up and the horse pushed two of the men aside and raced towards the fence. Loki realized it would probably crash into it, getting itself severely injured. He jumped up, vaulted the fence, and faced the creature off. The horse managed to stop in time, which was a relief, even though Loki had not been overly worried - the horse seemed to have about as much mass as a fully-grown Jotun. He knew it wouldn't have injured him too much. Instead of running into him, the horse reared up, kicking out. Loki avoided the hooves, but he didn't step aside. Instead, he grabbed the reins and just waited. The horse seemed to calm down slowly, soon all four hooves touched the ground again. Loki mustered it and realized the creature was not furious or aggressive - it was out of its wits because of fear. It was deadly afraid of those men. Loki took a closer look at the bridle and saddle. *I wouldn't like it, either, if they put a piece of metal between my teeth.* His hand went to the belt of his loincloth, then he remembered he wasn't at home any longer, where he had been in the habit of carrying a length of rope around to create a makeshift bridle for an ice beast whenever necessary. He looked around and spotted a suitable piece of rope not too far away. Slowly, he led the horse over to it. Under Loki's experienced hands, the rope quickly turned into a simple, loose bridle. He removed the saddle and the bridle made from leather and replaced the latter with the one he'd made. While it would allow him to hold on to the horse, it didn't restrict the animal in any way. The horse, calmed down by his calm demeanour, relaxed visibly.

One of the men came over to him. "I don't believe it, this one has never allowed anyone that close. To merely take care of its coat, we needed to tie it down with several ropes and have several men hold on to it."

"It's afraid, that's why it fights so much. And the more pressure you use, the more you scare it."

"What else were we supposed to do? That's how you tame a horse, by showing it who is stronger in the long run. Or do you think you could tame it? We've had it for years, ever since Prince Thor

received his warhorse, but we never were able to make it accept a rider.”

Loki mustered the black horse. “I can’t promise anything, but I will try.” *I can’t fail worse than you all already have.*

* * *

Loki started to spend more time on the meadow than in the library. Taming the horse was more important than reading, at least for the time being. And he didn’t just spend time with the black stallion, he also studied the other horses, those not worried by a person on their back. At first, he merely came to the meadow, sat down somewhere in the grass, and ignored the horse. It grew used to him, to his scent, realized he was not a predator out to kill it. He allowed the horse to come to him instead of doing it the other way around. Soon enough, the black stallion would peacefully graze beside him, not troubled by the blue being in the grass any longer. Loki didn’t smell like a predator he knew and had made no effort to attack the horse.

Loki then started to lean on the stallion, only for a short time, mostly to make physical contact. The fact that he didn’t have to worry about being pushed or kicked, since that wouldn’t injure him much, made it easier for him to stay calm. This also made the horse stay more calm. After a little while, the horse, trusting him, allowed the contact and he expanded it slowly, leaning on the horse longer, using more of his weight, until he could lean against it completely. The first time he slipped on the horse’s back was critical and he knew it. He didn’t worry too much about being thrown off, but he did worry about undoing all of his work so far. The horse tensed, but it didn’t immediately try to throw him off and Loki slid off its back after few seconds. He considered a saddle, but decided against it. He’d never used one before, since the ice beasts had never been tamed completely and he wouldn’t even have known whom to ask to make a saddle for one of them. Patiently, he lengthened his time on the back of the horse until it had fully accepted him and knew he was no danger to it.

Instead of adding reins to the bridle, Loki decided to teach the horse to respond to the pressure of his thighs, his knees, his calves, and his heels. He was careful, working with slight touches, minimizing pressure, just enough for the horse to feel. And the stallion reacted perfectly to them, understanding the principle very fast. Loki considered the horse to be much more intelligent than both of his brothers - perhaps even both of his brothers together.

A month passed before Loki dared to leave the meadow with the stallion for the first time, going for a ride. He steadied himself by holding on to the mane of the horse, and manoeuvred them with the pressure signals he had taught the stallion. He came back to the unbelieving faces of the stable personnel. None of them, it seemed, had expected him to succeed in taming the horse. He slipped off the horse’s still bare back and took hold of the rope bridle to lead it into the stables.

“It has been a long time since I last saw a horse tamed that way.”

Loki turned and found himself facing Odin. He bowed quickly, as far as he could while still holding on to the horse. “All-Father.”

The other one smiled. “It is an art I never mastered. My father was right, I think, I just don’t have the necessary patience for it.”

“Then who was the last to tame a horse like I did?”

“My father Bor. He had the necessary patience and empathy for it. I remember sitting by the meadow as a young boy, watching him as he spent hours just sitting inside, letting the horse grow used to him. I remembered him allowing the horse to get used to a bridle and a saddle, since he most certainly couldn’t ride bareback the way you do. I remember him getting the horse used to his weight in the saddle, too, very much the way you did.”

“How do you know what I did?” Loki was surprised. *People say he knows everything, but people say*

a lot of stupid things.

~~“The stable master told me they had challenged you to try and tame the black stallion. I asked him to keep me informed and I watched you myself, when I could make the time. It reminded me so much of my own youth and of my father. Few in Asgard still remember that time, of course.”~~ He laughed. “I’m growing old, it seems.”

“I’m not sure whether you can consider this horse tamed, though.”

“I’m rather sure it can be considered tamed. It has fully accepted you, unlike anyone who tried before. My father’s horse ... it carried him out of battle several times after he’d been severely injured or fallen unconscious. It was always loyal to him, in the end it sacrificed its own life, so he could live. I rarely saw him cry, but when he saw it fall ... tears streamed down his cheeks and his beard turned dark from them.”

Loki felt touched by the story. “He was very lucky to find a horse that loyal.”

“Yes. And you have been as lucky, for this stallion now most certainly is yours. All that is left for you to do, is to give it a name.”

The horse, as if understanding the conversation, stepped closer to him, resting its head on his shoulder. He smiled. “Sleipnir.”

“A very good name for a horse as strong and proud as this one.” Odin rested one hand on Loki’s other shoulder. “I’m very proud of what you did, Loki. You proven there is far more to you than just the Jotun most people here see. Not that I didn’t know it before, but it’s good to have it displayed for all to see.”

“Thank you, All-Father.”

“You are my son’s consort, my own son-in-law. If you like, call me father from now on.”

Loki smiled. “Thank you, father.”

* * *

Loki continued to spend time with Sleipnir, visiting his horse often, on the meadows and in the stables. He grew accustomed to the other horses there, as they grew accustomed to him. Visiting them became a reprieve from his otherwise still quite miserable life. Sure, the stable personnel and those who had watched him save Frigga saw him differently, but the rest, the very large rest, still detested him. Loki didn’t have an idea how to change their perception of him, so he just endured the whispers and glares. He fled to the library or to Frigga, who started to teach him about Seidr magic, whenever the feeling of being in the wrong place became too strong. Soon he started to call her mother, a word he had not used before, but was growing accustomed to.

His relationship with his husband still was as it had been from the beginning: non-existent. Thor barely tolerated him and the less time they spent in the same room, the better. Loki continued to sleep in front of the fireplace, he continued to work around Thor’s own daily routine, being content with the remainders of breakfast and his limited access to the bathroom on some days. He still cut the time for dinner as short as possible, since this was the only other time of the day when he usually met with Thor, albeit in public.

That night, he was asleep already, curled up on the fur, as comfortable as was possible on the ground. But his senses had always been sharp and his instincts had been honed by centuries in the company of two older brothers out to always scare and sometimes hurt him. The moment the door to the suite clicked open, he woke up. He stayed on the ground, pretending to still be asleep, and listened. Soft steps approached him and he felt magic gathering. Dark, dangerous, damaging magic. Silently, Loki put up a protection spell that destroyed the deadly curse sent at him. He sat up, curious to find out who would go that far to get rid of him. His eyes would have spotted the intruder even in the dark.

but the woman had brought along a lightened candle. Loki mustered her as she mustered him, taking in her long, blonde hair, curvaceous body, and the pure, unadulterated hatred in her eyes. This was far beyond the usual hatred of a Jotun, he immediately realized. This was personal.

“It’s not very polite to try and kill someone before you’ve even introduced yourself to them.”

“I’m not introducing myself to a monster that is trying to take my love from me.”

Loki’s mind worked quickly. “So you are Amora, then.”

“Thor would never tell you my name!”

“No, we don’t speak to each other. His mother told me who you are.” Loki rose, unfolding his long limbs. “And now I suggest you leave ... or I will call the guards. You have no reason at all to be in this suite in the middle of the night.” He was bluffing, since most guards probably would just ignore his calls, but she didn’t have to know that.

“Oh no, my spell might have misfired, but I will still get rid of you tonight.”

Loki didn’t like the sudden gleam in the woman’s green eyes. He liked it even less when bruises and small injuries appeared on her fair skin. She shot him a malicious smile, then she started screaming Thor’s name from the top of her lungs. The door to the bedroom banged against the wall and the man she had called shot through it. Thor saw the woman, saw her injuries, and immediately turned toward Loki.

“That’s it, now you’ve gone too far! It’s time you learn your lesson, beast!”

Thor advanced and lifted his fists. He had just left the bed and was, as Loki witnessed for the first time, obviously in the habit of sleeping with a bare chest, only wearing a pair of simple, wide pants. He started to hit Loki while he continued to call him a monster, a beast, an animal, a useless creature, and much more. Loki could have fought back, but he didn’t. He merely covered his head and his stomach whenever hits threatened to land there. Apart from that he just took the beating, as he had been forced to just wait for attacks from his brothers to be over when he’d been younger and less experienced at avoiding being caught. Once Thor was satisfied with the damage he had dealt, the other man wrapped a protective arm around the woman and led her towards their bedroom. Loki didn’t miss the very satisfied smirk on the woman’s lips. He sighed and went back to the fur, but he couldn’t sleep for the rest of the night, not while knowing the witch who had tried to kill him was just next door.

Chapter 5

The next morning, Loki faced a dilemma. He could easily enough have healed all the bruises Thor's attack in the night had left, since he was a very competent healer. He wasn't sure, however, if that would serve to anger his husband even more. The man obviously had thought him properly injured and punished the night before, learning it had been next to nothing, wouldn't make the other one happy that much was for sure. In the end, he decided to bear, but not explain the bruises. The walls and door of the suite were thick, none of the guards outside would have heard Thor. It wouldn't be known to the gossiping servants or the sneering nobles, either.

He visited Sleipnir right after breakfast and went to the library afterwards, working through noon as he usually did. His body had grown accustomed to two meals a day and wasn't complaining. It had also accepted to be mostly fed fruits and vegetables. Until the late afternoon, his day was more or less like every other day. Then his path crossed with Frigga's by accident. She immediately spotted the bruises, not hard, considering he still only wore his loincloth.

"Loki! What happened to you?"

He kept silent. He didn't want to tell her what her son had done the night before.

"Loki, please tell me this wasn't Thor's doing."

He didn't answer. Frigga grabbed his arm and pulled him along, into her own sitting room, which he knew very well already. He sat down on the couch with her.

"This was Thor's doing, wasn't it?"

Loki sighed, knowing perfectly well he wouldn't be able to outright lie to her. "Yes."

"Let me heal this first..."

"No, please. I could have healed the bruises already easily enough, but I thought it might anger him even more."

"You are pandering to him much more than you should, Loki. This is far beyond anything that could be considered appropriate. Now, heal yourself and tell me what happened."

Loki obeyed, healed himself, told her about Amora's late-night visit, her attempt to murder him, his trick with the injuries, and Thor's fury.

"Why were you out there in the living room in the first place?"

"Because I sleep there."

"You sleep there? Why?"

"Because he refuses to share the bed with me." Perhaps he had accepted all of it for too long. Now that he listened to himself, he realized just how wrong it all sounded.

"So instead you sleep on the couch."

Loki coughed.

"Not on the couch?"

"I find those too narrow and I'm afraid I might roll off them in my sleep, so I take a pillow from one of them and sleep on the fur in front of the fireplace."

"On the floor." It wasn't a question.

"It's not as bad as it sounds. I find it comfortable enough."

"Loki, I can't even begin to say where this all is wrong, but I can definitely see what needs to be fixed."

done.” She rose from the couch. “Come with me, by this time, Thor should be back in his rooms. His daily training doesn’t last that long.”

This was new to Loki, who preferred to avoid the suite until late in the evening. He followed Frigga to the suite and was not surprised to find her just walking in, without knocking first. After all, she was both the queen of Asgard and Thor’s mother. Thor just walked through the door to the bedroom and they entered the room.

“Mother?”

Without a word, Frigga approached him. Then she slapped him hard and he took a surprised step back, holding a hand to his cheek. “You deserve that, Thor.”

“What is all that about?” Then his husband looked at Loki. “Have you told lies about last night, just to get my mother on your side, beast?”

For this, she slapped him again on the other cheek. “You will never again call your consort a beast, Thor. I thought I had taught you better than that, but I obviously am wrong.”

“You and father insist on this farce of a marriage, only to keep me from my love. And you wonder why I hate the ... the ...” He eyed his mother and obviously decided on a different word. “... man.”

“Listen to me, Thor, listen very closely. The fact that you cheat on your consort and have an affair might be something you inherited from your father. He had several affairs when he was younger and Bor knows there were times I would have liked to kill him for it. But at least he kept it as secret as was possible. He would never have slept with any of those hussies in our suite, in our bed.”

“He hurt Amora! Surely you do not expect me to just accept that!”

“Honestly? Had I ever caught one of your father’s sordid little affairs in my suite, she would have been lucky to still be able to crawl out of it after I was done with her. And he didn’t hurt the little bitch.”

“How can you call her that?”

“By keeping a very strong control over my feelings, since I long to call her something much worse.” Frigga glared at her son. “You will not see Amora again ... ever. You will write her a letter and tell her never to come to the palace again, because if she does, she will spend the rest of her life in the dungeons. I will immediately notify the guards of it.”

“But mother!” Thor flushed a very unbecoming red.

“Write the letter, Thor, so she will not run into her doom tonight or tomorrow night or whenever she decides to come back. That is my last word on this affair, so consider it not the plea of your beloved mother, but an order from your queen.”

The crown prince bowed his head. “Yes, mother.”

“And Loki will no longer sleep in the living room. If you find the thought of sharing a bed with him so repulsive, have the servants bring a second bed into the bedroom.”

Loki was grateful she had not mentioned he had slept on the floor so far.

“You can’t demand that of me!”

“You swore to honour and protect your consort, Thor. I don’t see where you did one of those things, not to mention both.”

“And what has he done?”

“As far as I can tell, he kept his wedding vow ... as much as you let him.”

Thor visibly ran out of steam. Loki wasn’t surprised, even his brothers found it hard to argue with Frigga. There was something about the person giving you life that gave them everlasting control over it.

“Write the letter, organize the second bed.”

“Yes, mother.”

Frigga left the room, leaving Thor and Loki alone.

The moment the door closed behind Frigga, Thor turned to Loki. “You are so weak you have to let my mother fight for you? So cowardly you can’t even say something yourself?”

Something inside Loki snapped at those words. He had endured everything Asgard had thrown him so far. The insulting whispers, the glares, the treatment by his own husband. His personal limit hadn’t just been reached, he was well past it already. He took a quick step forward, grabbed Thor by the throat and hoisted the other man up. Thor stared at him in utter disbelief, his legs dangling in the air.

“I have never spoken against your treatment of me, that is true. I honoured my vow, husband, I obeyed you. I did as you told me, I accepted what you decided to leave to me, what you allowed me to do by not outright telling me not to. Perhaps that was a mistake, perhaps I should have given you a taste of my true strength earlier. I never wanted this marriage any more than you did. Do you think I enjoy being the only one of my kind in an entire realm? Do you think I enjoy the condescending glances, the insulting whispers behind my back? I left everything behind I held dear. The world I’ve known since I was a child. My family ... well, those parts not out for my blood. My personal freedom as a prince, as grudgingly as some people in Jotunheim might have called me that. Your parents live three doors down from here, mine are a realm away. But I accepted my father’s choice. I accepted the decision of both my father and yours. Do you think I was happy about being married to you days after our first meeting you? Do you think I was glad to learn my husband was an arrogant boy who thought of himself a man? But I did not complain. I lived with it and made the best of it.”

He let Thor down and turned around, surprised at the “Wait!” the other one called after him. He faced his husband again, surprised to see no trace of anger left in the other one’s face. *He is rather attractive like that.*

“You didn’t injure Amora last night, did you?”

“No, I didn’t. She attacked me with magic, tried to hit me with a death curse, but I didn’t retaliate. I just told her to leave and threatened her with calling the guards. Not that they would have come. How come you suddenly believe it?”

“Your strength. Had you attacked her, she would have been injured much worse.”

“A few broken bones at least, perhaps even a broken neck. I’m no warrior, but I grew up with two brothers always prepared to injure me. I can fend for myself, if need be.”

“Then why did she...” Suddenly, Thor doubled over.

“Thor?”

The other one let out a pained groan. *It can’t be the throat, he wouldn’t have been able to talk to me if I had crushed it.* Loki hurried to his husband’s side. Thor had paled considerably.

“What is it?”

“My ... heart ... it hurts ...”

“You might be under a spell, we need to get you to a healer.”

“No ... no healer ... mother.” Thor’s breathing had turned laboured. “She ... knows much ... more about ... magic.”

Loki couldn’t argue with that. He bowed down and wrapped Thor’s left arm around his neck. He pulled the other one up and more or less carried him out of the door and down the hallway. There he knocked on the door of the royal suite. To his surprise, it was Odin who opened. He looked at the other both and immediately grabbed Thor’s right arm to help Loki carry him.

“What happened?”

“I don’t know, but I suspect that woman, Amora, put some sort of spell on him. He doubted her and

it reacted.”

“Put him on the divan over there.”

“Yes.”

Frigga hurried forward the moment Thor was resting on the divan. Both Loki and Odin stepped back.

“Let her work alone, three mages working at cross-purpose are only going to make things worse. She has much more experience with enchantments than I have ... or you do.”

“Yes, father.” Loki took a seat beside his father-in-law, watching the tendrils of magic that dripped from Frigga’s fingers and found their way into Thor’s body.

“I heard about the things that happened between you and Thor. I never thought it would come to something like that. He can be volatile and arrogant, but he is not a bad man.”

“He was beginning to believe me, after I demonstrated my strength. Perhaps I should have done that earlier. Then, all in a sudden, his heart started to hurt. At first I thought it might have been my doing, but I grabbed his throat and had I crushed it, he wouldn’t have been able to talk at all.”

“You grabbed his throat?”

“He called me weak and a coward, so I grabbed him by the throat, hoisted him off ground, and gave him a sound dressing down.”

“I would have loved to see that.” Odin’s eye sparkled. “I think that is precisely what he needed.”

“Perhaps it was... I just hope he will be alright.”

“I hope so, too. I want to properly yell at him.”

Despite the grim situation, Loki couldn’t help smiling. “I think part of the way he treated me was the spell. Amora wants him under her control, she can’t allow him to accept the marriage.”

“You think that is her goal? Destroying your marriage?”

“It’s part of her goal, I think. I saw her eyes, she is not smitten with Thor, it’s not a spell made to make him love her back. She wants control. She came to the suite last night to remove me, remove an obstacle between her and her goal. When her magic failed her and she realized she could not dispose of me that way, she tried to use Thor, but he couldn’t injure me as severely as he thought he had ... or she wanted him to. She pretended I had attacked her and thought it would be enough to make him kill me. He valiantly tried, but he underestimated the damage a Jotun’s body can take.”

“And this is what became of the spell she used to control him when he started doubting her, perhaps also doubting his feelings for her.”

“It punishes him.”

Thor’s groans stopped and Loki saw his husband’s body relax. Frigga looked up, tired and drained. “We need to call in a healer, I’m almost completely spent.”

“I will heal him, I’m fully trained for it.” Loki rose.

She smiled at him and nodded. “That’s true. Come, take my place and see to him. The enchantment, as powerful and dangerous as it was, is broken now.”

Loki exchanged places with her, sat down in a chair beside the divan, put his right hand on Thor’s forehead, feeling the cold sweat on the warm skin, then his left hand on the heart. Slowly, he pulsed healing energy into the other one’s body.

“How serious was the enchantment?” Odin mustered his wife with worry in his eyes. Loki didn’t doubt he could see just how drained Frigga was.

“It could have killed him.” Frigga growled. “I swear, if I ever get my hands on that little bitch, I will teach her a few lessons about doing something like that to my child. It was draining his life energy, not just making his heart hurt. That, I think, was more of an added bonus.”

“But without that bonus, it might have done a lot more damage.” Loki made sure to keep the flow of energy up. “The drain on his life energy alone could have stayed unseen for quite a while, given he

young and strong.”

Frigga nodded. “True. Like this, we were able to prevent serious damage.”

Thor moved and opened his eyes. “What happened to me? Where...?”

“Lie still, Thor, you’re far from over the worst.”

“Yes, mother.”

“You should be very grateful right now your consort is strong, can keep his head in a crisis, and knows healing magic. Otherwise terrible things might have happened to you.”

The blue eyes searched Loki. “Why are you healing me?”

“You are my husband.”

“I didn’t behave like one so far.” *He can be much more friendly, when he’s not under that woman’s control and prepared to at least give me a chance.*

“That’s true. But we haven’t been married that long.”

“Well, if you can talk, you can listen. So listen well...” Odin rose, obviously all set to begin the proper yelling.

“Perhaps he will be more suited to listen tomorrow, after his energy has been replenished, father.”

“You are right, Loki. I will yell at him tomorrow.”

Loki grinned.

“He has recovered enough to get up, I think.” Frigga mustered them both. “Take him back to your suite and make sure he rests.”

“Yes, mother.” Loki smirked at his husband’s surprised face. He realized Thor had never heard him call the other one’s parents father and mother before.

Chapter 6

Loki discreetly supported Thor on the way back to their suite. They walked inside and Thor dropped down on a couch. “I still feel like a horse has run me over.”

“Don’t worry, we stopped the drain on your life energy and you should soon be feeling better.”

“How come you call my parents ‘mother’ and ‘father,’ too?”

“They offered it to me.”

Thor shook his head softly. “You’re getting on well with all of the family, safe for me, aren’t you? I’m the only one treating you badly.”

“I’d like to say ‘no’ and make you feel better, but unfortunately you are right.”

“I still don’t understand all of it ... especially how I could beat you up like that last night.”

“Amora’s spell.”

“Not all of it ... I also hated the thought of just being married off.” Thor looked up. “But it must have been worse for you.”

“It wasn’t nice, but I’ve accepted it.” Loki sat down beside his husband.

“You have accepted much more than I would have. Why?”

“I know why my father arranged this marriage, it’s not just about peace between our realms.”

“What is it about as well?”

“My safety.”

“Why, did you do something terrible back home?”

Loki smirked. “Yes. I was born.”

“What?”

“I’m the youngest of three brothers and my oldest brother, Byleistr, hates me with a vengeance. He will not try to kill me as long as my parents are alive, but I wouldn’t have a safe place to go to Jotunheim once my parents are dead and he takes the throne.”

“And your other brother? Won’t he defend you?”

“Helbindi thinks what Byleistr thinks and does what Byleistr does. But as much as my oldest brother hates me, he is not stupid enough to attack Asgard, just so he has the joy of killing me.”

“I can’t imagine that ... I don’t want to imagine that. Balder was always good to me, he still is. We are so close, I can’t imagine him being after my life.”

“Yes, Balder is too good a person to ever act like my brothers do. But my family isn’t all bad, my parents are wonderful.” Involuntarily, Loki ran his hands over the bracelets and smiled.

“They are more than just jewellery, aren’t they?”

“Yes. My sire gave them to me on my wedding day, before we left for Asgard. He has worn them for as long as I can remember ... ever since he got married as well. He had them shrunk for me, so they would fit.”

“They are beautiful, but I can’t remember Laufey wearing them.”

“Laufey is not my sire, he is my bearer. My sire is Farbauti.”

“Huh?”

Loki grinned. “All Jotun are capable of both fathering and bearing. Usually, in a relationship the husband will father children and the consort will bear them, but there are exceptions. Farbauti bore me

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