

All the Sins

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All the Sins

by [LadyLoki710](#)

Summary

As the youngest child of a family of minor Asgardian nobility, you have had the freedom to dedicate your life to your passion, the history of the Nine Realms. But a chance encounter in the palace library leads to you being forced into an arranged marriage with Prince Loki, the God of Mischief himself. What begins as a public relations campaign to rehabilitate Loki's image pulls you into a complicated web of family rivalries and secrets, politics, and a nascent uprising.

And amidst all the turmoil is your new husband, who may not be the cold, cruel manipulator you believed you had married.

Notes

Although I have been writing fanfiction since before I knew there was a name for it, this is the first fanfic I have written in a few years, and my first foray into writing for the Marvel fandom. I'm trying my best to do my research, but please excuse any errors.

This could very well change as I continue to develop the plot, but I anticipate that much of this story will occur before the first Thor movie, with some of the events from the movies appearing in later chapters. Then it will become more of an AU as I adjust the movie universe to fit with mine.

Feedback, suggestions, and constructive criticism would be much appreciated. I hope you'll enjoy it! Thanks so much for reading.

Madness

“You will always be fond of me. I represent to you all the sins you never had the courage to commit.”

— Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Although the vast library in the Asgardian palace is warm and comfortable, a sudden chill corkscrews down my spine and I slowly lift my gaze from my studies, meeting a pair of mesmerizing blue-green eyes. They seem to darken into a piercing emerald as their owner brazenly stares at me, silently daring me to look away. But I’m too spellbound to break the connection until a low, seductive voice echoes through my skull.

“Are you afraid of me, little one? Or merely entranced?”

I look frantically around me to see who had spoken, but the activity around me continues unabated. Servants dust bookshelves and archivists hunch over their work, but all are silent, their attention directed only at their tasks. The only thing that’s out of the ordinary is the slender man with porcelain skin and raven hair sitting in a reading nook by the windows, a book on his lap, still staring at me with one eyebrow arched.

I know who he is; how could I not? Every citizen of Asgard is aware of Prince Loki, second son of King Odin and a notorious trickster. The God of Mischief and Lies. And now, I’m all too aware, the most alluring man I’ve ever laid eyes on. Surely he cannot be speaking to me telepathically. And yet, it’s well within the realm of possibility. After all, his skill at sorcery is legendary; he’s been trained by the All-Mother herself.

“Don’t keep me waiting. I won’t ask again.”

This must be how it feels to descend into madness. To waver on a tightrope between sanity and the loss of all reason, always questioning whether you can trust what is happening in your own head.

My mouth is suddenly as dry as dust. Can I communicate with the prince simply by thinking? I close my eyes, considering my answer. *Afraid? No, though given all I have heard about you, perhaps I should be. Awestruck, maybe. Intrigued, certainly.*

I open my eyes in time to see a pleased smirk emerge on the god’s lips.

“You’re not like all the others. Those fools who cower when they see me, believing I am a serpent in the court, waiting to strike and usurp my brother’s place as heir. But you... You are enticed by my sinfulness, are you not?”

Normally, I would expect such a brazen question to make me blush furiously, but if anything I feel even more chilled. I look resolutely back down at the Midgardian history tome on the

desk, but it's utterly impossible to concentrate on it now. I'm furious at the disruption to my precious time in the palace library. The royal family has been kind enough to grant me access to the library and archives to aid me in my studies of the history of the Nine Realms, but I know the privilege could be revoked if I'm discovered spending my time ogling Prince Loki.

I take a deep, calming breath and reach for my pen to resume taking notes. This is just one more obstacle to overcome on my quest to become a respected historian. Something sharp pricks my finger when I touch the pen and I gasp, dropping it back onto the desk. The pen has transformed into a yellow rose, my favorite flower. It is pristine and beautiful but the stem is teeming with thorns. A bead of blood seeps from my index finger and I hastily rummage in my pocket for a handkerchief lest I bleed all over the priceless volume before me.

My eyes involuntarily return to my tormentor and I am incensed to find him openly snickering at me. *"Just a harmless little trick, my dear. It must be tedious, studying history when you are simply a tiny speck that will be obscured by time and the noble deeds of our heroes. Such a tiresome pursuit."*

"You are very cruel," I retort silently, humiliated by the sudden tears prickling my eyes. How dare he insult my life's work, my greatest passion? Based on the gossip I've heard, one day he'll merely be a footnote to the glorious reigns of his parents and brother, remembered only for his lies and deceit. I abruptly close the book, causing dust to billow from its pages, and stand up to leave. Prince or not, Loki has ruined my cherished time in my precious sanctuary and I won't allow him the satisfaction of riling my anger and hurt any further.

Unbidden, I am overwhelmed by a vision of Loki striding over to me, his well-fitted green and black clothing showcasing his lean yet muscular body. He gently puts a finger to my chin and angles my face up toward him, then suddenly his mouth crashes into mine and I find myself parting my lips for him despite my determination to keep them closed as tightly as possible. The prince's tongue flicks against mine, igniting an ache of lust that spreads throughout my entire body. It's almost too much to bear...

The image disappears as quickly as it had arrived, leaving only a green wisp behind. His mind games are intolerable. I know I need to put some distance between us as soon as possible.

I make it through the library's heavy wooden doors and into the hallway when Loki suddenly materializes in front of me, causing me to back up into the cold stone wall. Spoken out loud, his voice is even more velvety and sensual than it sounded in my head.

"Ah, you have a healthy dose of fear after all, though your defiance is also quite pleasing. You haven't seen the last of me, my pet. I've looked into your mind and what I saw fascinates me. Of course, the rest of you is lovely to behold as well. Ethereal as an elf maiden of Alfheim. Yes, you shall do nicely."

With that, he evaporates, leaving me in utter bewilderment over his cryptic words.

Proposal

Chapter Summary

As he promised, you haven't seen the last of Prince Loki. He and the royal family present you with a proposal you are powerless to refuse.

Chapter Notes

Thank you to all the lovely readers who have taken the time to check out my story and left kudos and/or comments! I'm honored by the response so far. This story is a lot of fun to write and I hope you'll enjoy the latest chapter. Life is changing fast for our little historian.

Several days have passed since the encounter in the library, though Prince Loki has seldom left my thoughts for more than a moment. I have avoided the palace altogether, opting to study books from my family's small library and those I can procure from other sources in Asgard. I'm hunting for a particular book of maps when my parents receive a summons from King Odin and Queen Frigga and my blood seems to run cold. Someone must have seen what transpired with the God of Mischief; I've been expecting a response from the royal family, though I can't quite name what I did wrong.

To be fair, my parents are no strangers to the royal court. We are only of minor nobility, but my mother served as one of the All-Mother's ladies in waiting before she married Father. Mother and the queen still maintain a warm friendship. However, she has kept my siblings and me away from the court, except for the most vital functions, not wanting us to grow up amongst the treachery and machinations of the royal household. This has always been agreeable to me; I lack my sister's desire for upward mobility and my brother's dreams of glory on the battlefield. Being the third-born has blessed me with the freedom to pursue my own path. Even so, I know my parents hope I will enter into an advantageous marriage in the future.

My parents bustle out of the house in their best clothing and I settle into a chair in the garden with a stack of books. The weather is lovely, the flowers fragrant and lush, and soon I drift off into sleep with the sun caressing my skin.

I awaken abruptly when my mother bursts into the garden, Father hot on her heels. "Darling," she trills, "we've received a most unexpected offer for your hand!"

This is so far removed from the punishment I've been imagining that all I can do is rub my eyes and ask stupidly, "What?"

"A marriage proposal! From Prince Loki himself. I understand you two met at the palace? Queen Frigga says her son is quite taken with you."

This must be some kind of prank. "*You haven't seen the last of me, my pet.*" I cannot take a marriage proposal seriously when it comes from that smug, smirking prince with the silver tongue. And yet, when my father kneels by my side and takes my hand, he is all seriousness.

"This is an incredible honor. It's been a long time since our family has been elevated to such a position."

Why is everyone speaking as though this marriage is a definite thing? No one has asked my opinion. "Trust me, the prince is merely toying with me. Besides, I have a comprehensive history of the Nine Realms to write."

A disquieting look passes between my parents. "The royal family has requested your presence this evening," Mother says. "Please, I ask that you hear what they have to say before you dismiss this so lightly. We are not in a position to refuse a request from one of the crown princes."

"You always told me I could devote my life to history, without marriage and childbearing to get in the way." I know I sound like a petulant child, but I can almost see my life's work slipping from my grasp and Norns, is it ever painful. "Am I to be forced to abandon my passion on the whim of the trickster prince? I did see him in the library, that is true, but he knows nothing of me. I must admit that I did spy him staring at me in a most unsettling way." The mere memory makes my cheeks flush.

The pain in my mother's eyes is palpable, and I know that while she's honored by this proposal, she is fully aware that she is condemning me to my own personal Hel. "Please, my dearest, I know you have been placed in an impossible position and I would take your place in a heartbeat if I could. Your brother has made sacrifices for the realm, and now it appears it is your turn."

"Enar chose his path; becoming a warrior was his calling." I avoid her gaze, tracing the pattern carved into the arm of my chair. "But I take your meaning. I will do my best to face the royal family with an open mind."

I fight back tears as both Mother and Father embrace me, murmuring their gratitude and appreciation of my noble acquiescence. A gown must be chosen for tonight, my hair styled, and there is no time to weep.

Up close, Queen Frigga is every bit as stunning as she had appeared from a distance at the court events I've attended. King Odin had greeted me perfunctorily but cordially, yet it is the All-Mother who inspires awe and perhaps a twinge of anxiety as we sit sipping tea while she politely questions me about my family and studies. Her queries are innocuous; at the same

time, her azure eyes seem to probe my very soul. In this, I can finally see a resemblance to her younger son.

We are seated in a breathtaking solarium, an area of the palace I have never seen. On a normal day, I would take in the stunning windows and carved marble arches supporting the ceiling, mentally reciting facts about their construction and the meaning of the adornments. Today is anything but ordinary. I am here as a prospective bride, not a scholar, and I seem to have lost all equilibrium.

The queen sees my attention wander to the lush gardens outside the windows and straightens, her manner becoming brisk. "My dear, I know your parents have spoken to you of the reason you're here, and I am terribly sorry to have put you in such an impossible position." She closes her eyes briefly and I fiddle nervously with my hands.

"My younger son and I share a special bond, and I have always hoped that teaching him magic would help instill discipline and tame some of his more... disruptive traits. Mischief and chaos are integral parts of his nature, and our people spread terrible rumors, saying he spends his nights practicing black magic and plots to overthrow his family."

Frigga pauses and seems to wait for a response. I can only nod, unsure of what I am affirming - that I have heard the rumors about Prince Loki? That I believe her beloved child is dangerous?

She continues, "Some months ago, my husband and I agreed that it is time for Loki to marry, to show the citizens of Asgard that he has matured and accepted his role in our court and family. My king sees a betrothal as merely an effort to rehabilitate Loki's image and secure his brother's place as heir. Yet I confess, I have not forced him into an arranged marriage because I know such an imposition would only make him more incorrigible."

I am now more confused than ever if that's possible. What are we discussing, if not an arranged marriage? The All-Mother takes my hand and I steel myself for more revelations.

"And so, we have tried to be patient and allow Loki to choose a bride, but he has not shown any interest in a woman until he met you."

Clearly, the god and I have very different definitions of what it means to meet someone. "You're telling me the prince has chosen me for his wife," I say dumbly.

"Indeed he has, and I see he has made a wise choice. You could have quite a gentling influence on my restless son, and it is rare to find a woman who can challenge him intellectually. What do you think of him?"

She speaks as if Loki is a horse I must tame. "I hardly know him, Your Highness, but from what I have seen, it is clear that he is a brilliant man, as well as charming and accomplished. Any maiden would be honored by his attention." The lies trip blithely off my tongue. Perhaps the God of Mischief left a wisp of himself behind in my brain after all.

The queen presses her lips together as if suppressing a smile, and I know my honeyed words have not fooled her. "Well," she begins, "you are very kind to say so. Now, I know in making

this proposal we are plucking you from the life you have chosen. We are not unaware of your studies and have no wish to force you to abandon your work. And so my son and I have devised a contract I wish to propose.”

I give a terrified nod, and she continues. “First, you will support your husband and appear by his side at all public court functions and family events. The same goes for his personal initiatives and princely duties, such as visits to the other realms. You will take the lead in convincing the public that Loki is worthy of their trust and admiration. As long as you fulfill your promises, you may spend your free time as you wish, in your studies and other pursuits. We hope you will make us proud of your efforts to preserve our history. Secondly, for now, at least, this can be a marriage in name only. You will have your own chambers and staff, and you will not be required to consummate the marriage, though it will be necessary for you to spend some nights in Loki’s rooms to keep up appearances. I will leave it up to you two to devise a satisfactory arrangement. Is this amenable to you?”

Deep down, I know that I could ask for no better terms; any other royal marriage would condemn me to a life of bearing and raising children, with no time or freedom for any intellectual pursuits. And so I give my word.

Frigga stands and I do the same, standing limp and defeated as she embraces me and urges me to call her Mother from now on. Then she takes my hands in hers and speaks more earnestly and, I sense, honestly than she has been. “My dear girl, it is my most fervent hope that an affection will develop between you and Loki in time, and that you will be as content together as his father and I have been. Perhaps you will even want to give him an heir.”

I have never been fond of children, and the thought of bearing the child of the man who belittled me in the library is enough to make me gag. Somehow, I find myself nodding politely once again. It seems that mute agreement is a skill I must master quickly if I am to survive life as a princess.

King Odin wishes to announce the engagement this very day, so I am whisked off into a suite of guest rooms and dressed in a stunning emerald gown that shimmers with gold threads woven into the silky fabric. My waist-length hair is curled into soft ringlets. I have never worried too much over my appearance, and I feel flustered by the small army of maids fussing over me. When the transformation is complete, I have never felt so beautiful or so wretched.

Prince Thor himself is dispatched to put me at ease and escort me to the throne room. Though I find my betrothed more attractive, I must admit that the heir is stunningly handsome with his glorious golden hair and a wide grin. When Frigga introduces us, I curtsy as low as I can, and he surprises me by gently raising me up and embracing me so enthusiastically that my feet leave the floor. “My sweet new sister! My brother has truly chosen a rare jewel to join our family.”

This would have been shameless flattery if it came from any other lips, but I see nothing but sincerity in Thor’s blue eyes. It will be easy to get used to the brotherly affection of this

gentle giant. I take his offered arm, my hand appearing impossibly tiny in the crook of his elbow, and he sweeps me away to what feels more like my execution than my engagement.

King Odin and his younger son are already in place. Somehow Loki seems even more alluring than he had in the library, dressed in immaculately gleaming armor with a horned golden battle helm on his head. Seeing him for the first time since our bizarre encounter nearly stops me in my tracks, but Thor smoothly tugs me along, giving me a peck on the cheek before depositing me beside his brother. Loki gives him a look of unabashed loathing (or was it envy?) and turns back to face the court without acknowledging me in any way. My heart sinks; hadn't he chosen me for his partner? I would almost prefer his merciless teasing to this cool indifference.

The king makes a brief but grand speech congratulating his son on his good judgment in choosing a mate. I can practically feel Loki seething beside me as the All-Father speaks as if he decided it was time to marry all on his own. Without thinking, I reach out and grasp Loki's cool hand, giving it a reassuring squeeze. He hesitates for a moment, then entwines my fingers with his own. This steadies me for some reason and I try to stand straighter, projecting the confidence of a princess-to-be.

Once our betrothal is made official, the crowd of courtiers and nobility applauds politely and cheers, and I am aware that their response would likely shake the walls if it were Thor's engagement being announced. My cheeks burn, but Loki seems unaffected as he turns to me with a cheeky glint in his eyes. "Shall we give them a little show?" Without waiting for an answer, he twines his fingers in my hair and pulls me in for a kiss that is every bit as overwhelming as the kiss he'd shown me in the library. It is relatively chaste, yet holds the promise of pleasures beyond my imagination.

I feel breathless and weak as we part and begin to accept congratulations from the royal family and the court. This bewitching man will become my husband in one month's time and I know I will need to keep my wits about me at all times lest I fall completely, irrevocably under his spell.

Princess Lessons

Chapter Summary

Wedding preparations are anything but joyful for the bride-to-be.

There is no time to waste. With wedding plans already well underway, the royal family must rapidly transform me from a graceless, bookish nobody into a princess worthy of becoming Prince Loki's consort. My days are now spent at the palace learning the etiquette of the royal court and being fitted for a new wardrobe. The king and queen are satisfied with my knowledge of Asgardian history, but there is still much to learn about politics, diplomacy, and the many noble families of the realm.

The days are tedious and exhausting, yet even I must admit that the royals are making every effort to break the monotony and welcome me into their fold. Frigga and Thor pull me away for pleasant luncheons or afternoon tea, and Thor and the formidable shield maiden Lady Sif accompany me on walks in the gardens whenever they have a break from their training. I try not to dwell on the fact that my fiancé is largely absent from my daily routine unless his mother wrangles him into joining us for stilted conversation. Late at night, I lie awake wondering whether Loki chose me at random to placate his parents and if his comment about my intriguing mind was just another of his effortless lies.

I suspect that the queen and her elder son introduced me to Lady Sif in hopes that the warrior will become a confidante who can help ease my way into my new reality. Indeed, we become fast friends, at least once I overcome my initial awe of the beautiful woman who can match any man's prowess in combat.

We are strolling arm-in-arm through the gardens one cloudy afternoon when Sif turns to me abruptly. "I apologize for my boldness, but I must speak my mind. It has been a joy getting to know you and I do not wish to risk your friendship. Yet Thor and I find ourselves concerned about your welfare and we cannot in good conscience stand by and allow you to make a mistake. Do you truly know anything about the man with whom you will spend the rest of your days?"

I can only blink at her for a moment, swallowing hard. "I want to," I say slowly, "but he has shown no interest in me since our betrothal was announced."

Sif sighs and pulls me over to a wrought iron bench, where she sits hunched over, forgoing her usual regal bearing. It's clear that she's as reluctant to have this conversation as I am. "He's not a kind man, Loki. He can be quite charming, but typically that means he wants to use you in one of his twisted games. You are so innocent, so eager to believe that everyone's motives are pure, and I fear he will take advantage of those traits to manipulate you and mold you into his little plaything."

Stung, I protest, "There is more to me than meets the eye, and I have no intention of allowing that to happen. Besides, Queen Frigga and Thor are quite protective of me."

I can hardly bear the pity in Sif's eyes. "I know, and we are all looking out for you. It's just that I don't know how to make you understand what you're up against. If you do not bend to his will, he will have no qualms about using all the magic at his disposal, and mind games, and..."

"Why Lady Sif, how lovely to find you filling my beloved's head with all sorts of nonsense about me."

Both Sif and I freeze at the caustic voice of my fiancé, though she recovers more quickly and swivels around to face him. I can only fiddle with the end of my braid as panic sets in.

"Someone has to tell her the truth," Sif retorts evenly, "since none but the Norns can know the last time anything but a lie slipped from your silver tongue."

Loki cocks his head at her impertinence, glaring icy daggers, but makes a visible effort to control himself. "As much as it entertains me to listen to you list all my alleged faults, may I steal a moment alone with my little princess?"

Sif stands obligingly but before she leaves, she faces the prince with her hands on her hips. "I will go, but before I do, know this: If you lay a finger on her in any way that is not gentle and loving, you will have to contend with me."

Loki joins me on the bench, purring "Oh my, I seem to be quaking." Then he takes my hand and presses his lips to my knuckle, lingering for an indecorous amount of time. "My beautiful betrothed, I trust you know better than to heed the accusations of that jealous shrew."

His touch causes my breath to hitch in my throat, but he is not going to charm me as if I am one of the simpering ladies of the court. "Eavesdropping is very rude," I reply sullenly. I know I'm walking on thin ice by speaking so boldly to a prince - especially this prince - but I am beyond caring about the consequences. "Our conversation is none of your concern."

"Oh, but it is when your friend is trying to poison your mind against me. And what was that other thing you mentioned? Ah, yes, my fiancée is wounded because I haven't shown enough interest in her."

I begin to shrink away, but Loki snakes an arm around my shoulder, drawing me nearer. "Do tell, little one. How have I displeased you?"

"I only thought we would spend time together and become better acquainted before our wedding," I whisper. "When we met, you said I would do nicely. Did you truly only mean that I will make a convenient wife so you can fulfill your parents' wishes?"

Prince Loki chuckles dryly and I feel my last bit of hope that this marriage could evolve into a love match evaporate, leaving only an empty pit in my belly. "Foolish girl, what else could I have meant? You are no great beauty, no royal princess... you are a lowly scholar, and you ought to be grateful that I have chosen to honor you in this way. Don't delude yourself; I find you more tolerable than the other women of my acquaintance, and no more."

More tolerable. All bravado long gone, I bow my head and watch a teardrop splash onto my skirt. But my cruel fiance lifts my chin, forcing me to face him, and I think I see a glitter of pleasure in his eyes as he continues to destroy my illusions about our arrangement.

“As for spending time with you, has it not occurred to you that I have many duties, some very important to the realm, and I cannot spend my days attending to your every whim. It seems you already have Mother and my idiotic brother wrapped around your little finger for that purpose. Do I make myself clear?”

I nod, not trusting my voice as humiliated tears cascade down my cheeks.

“I want to hear you say it.”

“Yes,” I hiss. “Yes! I shall never trouble you again, highness.”

“Good girl.” With that, Loki briefly touches my hair before striding away in the direction of the palace.

I have no idea how much time passes before a maid comes to fetch me for a dance lesson and finds me a weeping, disheveled mess. I assure the concerned servant that I’m simply overwhelmed with emotion as my wedding day approaches. She is dubious but well-trained enough to accept my explanation without pressing me further. She trails after me as I return to the palace to practice dancing gracefully with the monster I have consented to marry.

No Turning Back

Chapter Summary

The royal wedding day has arrived.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

By the time my mother, sister, and my new battalion of personal maids are through with me, I barely recognize myself in the mirror.

My wedding gown is a frothy concoction of light, airy fabrics in green and gold, my husband-to-be's favored colors. I must admit that they accentuate my eyes and hair rather well; normally I consider myself plain. A modest gold circlet studded with emeralds adorns my head, a gift from Queen Frigga. My pale complexion has been brightened with rouge. Only the grim set of my mouth reveals that this is not a joyous occasion.

My buoyant sister Astrid interrupts my somber contemplation, grabbing hold of my hands and twirling me around my spacious new chambers. "My own little sister, marrying a prince!" Her blue eyes sparkle with giddy excitement. "Smile, my little bookworm! I would take your place in an instant, just say the word."

I laugh in spite of myself. "If only I could! But your husband and little ones would never forgive me for tearing you away from them."

Astrid holds me at arm's length so she can peer into my eyes. "Don't tell me you still believe that this is a marriage of convenience. The prince selected you himself."

"Prince Loki told me quite bluntly that I am merely a tolerable choice for his consort." We both fall silent as a pair of maids hurries over to tidy an errant curl that has escaped from my elaborate coiffure.

While the servants work, I take in my still-unfamiliar surroundings. My personal rooms are exquisite, decorated in more feminine shades of Loki's colors - mint and buttery yellow. The bookshelves that line the walls were already well-stocked before I added my own volumes, and my new family has given me a beautiful desk where I can study and write to my heart's content. I can only hope my work will be enough to sustain me through the coming years of my false marriage.

As soon as the maids withdraw, Astrid draws me urgently into the bathing chamber and closes the door behind us. "Sister... is he really as horrible as everyone says? Just say the word, and I will take you far from here where you'll be safe."

My resolve to go through with this sham marriage wavers at her distress. My sister and I haven't always been close companions, but I have never doubted that she would do anything to protect me. "I have made a commitment and I shall stand by it," I say gently. "The royal family has been wonderfully supportive, and I know they'll make every effort to ensure that my life here is pleasant."

A chorus of voices outside the door calls out our names, and Mother announces that it is time to leave for the wedding ceremony. I try to avoid looking at Astrid's anguished eyes as we're ushered out the door and Mother gathers us together to offer up a prayer for a blessed union before we depart.

~*~*~*~

And then there is nothing to do but make my grand entrance into the throne room for the ceremony. Sobbing, my mother tells me she has never been more proud of me, then she and Father must take their places and I am alone except for the two small girls who have been tasked with carrying my train and their nurse. The blonde cherubs are the children of one of Frigga's relations and I give them a tremulous smile.

"The princess looks so sad," one of the girls says. She is shushed by the nurse and up ahead I spy an almost imperceptible nod from the All-Mother, my cue to proceed. I manage what I hope is a demure smile and take my first steps toward my destiny, repeating in my head the instructions I have been given all too frequently over the past month. *Chin up. Back straight. Small, graceful steps. You should appear to float across the floor. No, do not lose the smile!*

My path to the royal family has been edged with flowers, a new variety of rose that the queen cultivated especially for this occasion. The petals are a vivid gold with a blush of spring green. The blooms glitter as if they are sprinkled with gemstones as I pass and I know the All-Mother has created an enchantment to put on such a beautiful display for the audience packing the hall. It feels as though all of Asgard is in attendance, desperate for a glimpse of the woman who has supposedly tamed the God of Mischief. Surely I must be a disappointment.

Eventually, I find some sort of rhythm and am able to focus on the sight that awaits me at the end of my promenade. Loki looks magnificent in his ceremonial armor; Queen Frigga and Prince Thor are beaming at me and King Odin wears a solemn but pleased expression on his normally stern face. My betrothed catches my eye at last, a stricken look briefly contorting his noble features before he rearranges them into a neutral mask. My stomach churns, but I know there's no point in trying to make any sense of his reaction. Loki and I have barely spoken since he confronted me in the garden, though our interactions have been cordial and reserved. I've long since abandoned any expectations that the spark I felt during our first encounter in the library can be recaptured.

My solitary walk seems to last an eternity. Finally, I reach the throne and curtsy before each member of my soon-to-be-family in turn. Thor gives me a wink and I lower my eyes respectfully but smile genuinely for the first time on my wedding day. His teasing strongly reminds me of my own brother and I find myself relaxing a bit.

The All-Father begins to drone on about the momentous occasion and I try to be attentive, but my own wedding ceremony seems to fade into the background when I look up to find Loki watching me intently. Our eyes meet; despite his proud posture, I see in his gaze the same hesitance that must be reflected on my face. My resolve to remain cool and removed in his presence falters at the almost boyish vulnerability in the prince's gaze. He has been incredibly harsh to me, but I remind myself that he is not an entirely willing participant in this charade either.

I am attempting to somehow silently convey my sympathy and solidarity to my groom when the moment arrives to exchange rings. Loki solemnly presents his family's ornate ancestral sword to me with my ring on its hilt, and I do the same with my family's much simpler blade. Once we slip the bands onto each other's finger, we turn back to Odin so he can perform the ritual handfasting. Tears are flowing down Frigga's cheeks, though she smiles at us warmly as her husband blesses our union.

My hand trembles slightly as the king binds it with Loki's, tying the cord into an intricate knot as he intones, "My children, may you know and remember always that together in this marriage, you are each deeply known and deeply loved. Now, with great joy and hope for the future of Asgard, I pronounce you husband and wife."

The hall erupts into cheers while we watch the cord evaporate until only a tiny cloud of lavender mist remains, and a strange warmth seems to pulsate from my new wedding ring. Loki grasps my hand and raises it in victory as if I am some prize he's won in battle. I feel as though I need a moment to catch my breath, but we are soon smothered in good wishes from the king, queen, and Thor, and before I know it our guests have swept us along to the great feast and ball in our honor.

~*~*~*~

The feast is sumptuous, of course, the tables laden with both familiar and exotic dishes, but I find myself struggling to swallow even a morsel. My misery is compounded when Thor and the Warriors Three pile huge slabs of meat and other delicacies on my plate, admonishing that I will need my strength for the wedding night and to bear Loki's heirs. Blushing furiously, I down a cup of wine that does little to settle my jangled nerves. Lady Sif gives me a concerned look but otherwise keeps her own counsel, drinking as many goblets of mead as her fellow warriors yet remaining composed and seemingly unaffected.

Thor delivers a boisterous toast, praising his brother's decision to take a wife and graciously welcoming me into the family. The moment he is done, my husband slinks off to speak with his mother, leaving me feeling like a melancholy island amongst the laughter and carousing of my tablemates. Perhaps this is how I will survive this strange new life as a princess consort; I can simply fade into the background until I am forgotten, a specter haunting the royal court.

Loki appears at my side, interrupting my reverie, and nudges my shoulder. "Mother says we should start off the dancing."

I nod, resigned once again to an existence in which I will never again be anonymous. The prince takes my hand and leads me to the ballroom floor, signaling to the orchestra to begin

the song that has been selected for our first dance. Before we can begin, though, Loki waves a hand gracefully and my dress transforms into a sage green silk ballgown with an extremely full skirt supported by some sort of hooped contraption. It is exquisite. "There, that suits you much better," my new husband says, and draws me closer to his body as the stately music begins.

I have practiced this dance until even someone as stiff and graceless as I can perform it adequately, but never with a partner as utterly imposing as Loki. However, his strong arm around my waist is strangely reassuring, and he leads with total confidence. My skirt swishes and sways in the most delightful way when he twirls me, and I know at that moment we are the envy of everyone watching. It no longer seems to matter that he is the much-disparaged God of Mischief and I a plain little scholar. Right now, we are everything a newly-wedded prince and princess should be, and not even Thor can compete with his brother.

"Well done, little one," Loki says softly as the song draws to a close, his cool breath tickling my ear pleasantly. "You looked quite regal today."

He tries to leave the dance floor, his duty completed, but it is time for others to join in the dancing and Astrid makes a beeline for him. I cannot help but laugh at his wary look as my sister sweeps him away, already talking his ear off. Astrid may be disarmingly beautiful, but she is also ruthless, and I know she's likely giving Loki a pointed lecture on how she expects him to treat me.

I start to walk back to my seat but do not make it far before Thor looms in front of me. "It is good to see you smile, my new sister. May I have this dance?"

I give my consent and am surprised to learn that Thor is a competent dancer despite his size. My head barely reaches his chest, but he holds me gently and I find I feel quite safe and content in his arms. Lady Sif does not fare so well; she whirls by with the warrior Fandral, who frequently trods on her toes, and Thor bursts out laughing at the pained look she gives us.

"He is hopeless," the God of Thunder chuckles. "But you and Loki make a fine couple. I am heartened by the way he looks at you. You are good for my brother."

I stare at him in disbelief. Loki has not shown any sign of fondness on our wedding day, or any other day for that matter. What has Thor seen that I have missed? Or is he merely misinterpreting the disdainful looks his brother gives me when he deigns to look at me at all?

There is no opportunity to question Thor any further. Astrid snatches me from him the moment the song ends, dragging me to a quiet corner. "Good news! Your prince has promised to name Enar as one of your personal guards. I will feel much better about your safety knowing that he'll be here to look after you."

I gape at my bold sister. One dance with Loki and he has already granted her a favor? She only winks in response to my unspoken question. "You may be his princess now, but we were your family first and we shall never abandon you. Your husband is well aware of that now," she says smugly, and I throw myself into her arms.

The revelry will likely last until daylight, but I am growing weary and Loki and I will be expected to steal off on our own anyway. After a few more dances, Queen Frigga comes to tell me that she and Odin are retiring and I may do the same if I wish. I want to weep in gratitude. Knowing I will soon be relieved of the burden of socializing and keeping my false smile in place, I make the rounds of the hall to say my goodbyes and thank my loved ones for their support on this most trying day.

I am surreptitiously creeping toward the doors, hoping to escape to my rooms, when Loki appears with two of his guards. He instructs them to escort me to his rooms, then gives me an inscrutable look. “Make yourself comfortable, pet. I’ll be along to join you shortly.”

I swallow thickly, acutely aware all of a sudden that I have married a master liar and there is nothing but his dubious word to assure me that he will honor our agreement that I need not consummate our union.

Chapter End Notes

I am seriously blown away by the response to this so far. Thanks again for all the kudos and encouraging comments. They never fail to make my day.

For the wedding ceremony, I combined some Norse wedding traditions with a handfasting ceremony, along with a few original ideas. I hope it rings true as an Asgardian wedding. Writing this chapter was a bit of a struggle for some reason. It was getting pretty lengthy so I decided to wrap it up and carry some of the scenes over to the next chapter. Stay tuned for further angst, drama, and even some fluff for a change!

The Trickster's Wife

Chapter Summary

Married life gets off to a more promising start than expected.

Chapter Notes

A chapter of newlywed fluff, as promised! I hope this is as much fun to read as it was to write. Most of this was written under the influence of cold medicine but I think it makes sense. Thank you, my dear readers, for your continued encouragement! <3

Once the Einherjar leave me to my own devices in Loki's chambers, I take advantage of my time alone to explore the rooms and hopefully glean some insight into my enigmatic husband that might help me connect with him. The green and black decor is striking, but all the gleaming black marble and dark wood surfaces feel cold and sterile, devoid of the comfort one would expect from someone's living quarters. I am awed by the bookshelves lining the walls, which stand several feet taller than me and are packed with books. A canopied bed covered with luxurious-looking emerald satin bedding stands at the far end of the room. I try to avoid looking at it as I peruse Loki's book collection, wondering if he's actually read all of these hundreds of volumes.

There is a soft knock on the door and I jump as if caught doing something wrong, but it is only my handmaid, a sweet girl named Magna, bringing me my nightclothes. She asks if I need help undressing, but I find I want to wear my lovely ball gown for a little while longer. I admire the delicate gold embroidery along the neckline and hem as Magna pulls endless pins from my hair and then gently brushes my long, fine locks. How did Loki manage to conjure such a gown?

My servant stokes the fire and then leaves me alone with my musings after I reassure her that I need no further assistance. I try to return to scanning book titles but soon realize I'm just pacing in front of the shelves. Suddenly bawdy shouting echoes down the corridor, growing in volume before stopping in front of the door. It seems that an intoxicated Thor and his equally drunken friends are lewdly cheering on my husband as he begins his wedding night, along with complimenting my beauty and innocence. *Well, this is humiliating.*

The door opens and Loki slams it shut behind him, pausing to close his eyes and let out an audible sigh. He does not appear to be affected by alcohol and it occurs to me that we seemed to be the only ones not drinking heavily at the banquet in our honor. "Well, little wife," he

says slowly as if trying out the feel of the words on his tongue, “here we are. Are you satisfied with my library?”

The prince crosses the room to stand by the fire and begins removing his armor. I avert my eyes and turn back to the bookshelves. “Oh, yes, my lord. It’s impressive! Perhaps you will be kind enough to recommend some titles I should read.”

“Mm,” he says noncommittally. “There is no need to be so formal. We are husband and wife now. Will you share a cup of wine with me?”

I hesitate, but if my husband is making an effort to be more pleasant, I will do the same. “Yes... Loki.” There is something quite pleasing about the feel of the syllables of his name tripping off my tongue. I peek over my shoulder to make sure he’s decent. He’s now wearing a comfortable-looking tunic and looser trousers and his eyes seem to soften when he hears me speak his name for the first time.

I join him on the black leather settee in front of the fire and he hands me a glass of red wine. Before he sits beside me Loki picks up a book from a side table, placing it on my lap. “A wedding gift,” he says simply.

It is a copy of the Midgardian history book I’d been reading in the library on the day we met. Delighted, I run my hand over the embossed leather cover, feeling strangely emotional, almost teary. “Thank you! This is incredible. How did you manage to find this? It’s quite rare.”

“It took some searching, but rare items tend to be more available to a prince of Asgard. I hope you find it useful, though I will never understand your fascination with the Midgardians. Their brief lives seem so unrewarding. Even those who are accomplished often die before they can enjoy the fruits of their labor.”

“Oh, but there are many Midgardians who accomplished great things in a short lifetime, more than I could hope to do no matter how long I live,” I enthuse. “Immense changes can come about in a generation. I am still astounded that the colonists of the United States of America freed themselves from a king’s tyranny and founded a new democratic nation, and less than a century later, that national was nearly torn apart by a terrible civil war. The Americans prevailed despite desperate circumstances in both conflicts.” I realize I am monopolizing the conversation and bite my lip; this is the first time I’ve spoken freely about my interests to Loki.

“You enjoy studying battles? Wars? This is an unexpected side of you,” Loki replies, idly swirling the wine in his cup.

“I must admit that military matters fascinate me, though some refuse to believe that a woman can fully understand such a subject.” I flip through my book to occupy my hands and land on a map depicting the Battle of Gettysburg. “This is a particularly interesting battle.” I use the tip of my finger to trace landmarks such as Little Round Top and Devil’s Den.

“Such a captivating mind you have, little one.” Loki leans over and kisses my forehead, lingering for a moment, breathing deeply as if he’s smelling my hair while I sit frozen in

place as if afraid to break an enchantment. Is this really the same man who accosted me in the gardens? He gently touches the fine lace on the sleeve of my dress. “Are you pleased with the gown?”

“It’s the most lovely gown I’ve ever seen. How did you ever come up with such a design? This is something Midgardian women would have worn at the time of the American Civil War. Yet I’d never spoken of it or my fondness of these fashions to you before.”

“It’s difficult to explain,” he says, almost shyly. “Some of it came to me when I looked into your mind in the library, but the rest was simply intuition. I was correct in imagining you would look glorious wearing this.”

Taken aback, I look down at the book in my lap, absurdly moved by the compliment. My husband smiles a bit smugly, but even I have to acknowledge that he’s earned his satisfaction in this instance. “But perhaps you’re ready to change into something less restrictive.” He appears to ponder for a moment, then moves his slender fingers in front of me and the gown transforms into a soft ivory nightgown with lace trimming the sleeves and neckline. It is beautiful but also happens to be rather sheer, and when I cross my arms over my chest in embarrassment, Loki waves a hand again and adds a plush lavender robe.

I am at a loss for words, and Loki chuckles at my astonishment. “Just a small taste of what I can do, my dear. You must be fatigued after such a long day. Tomorrow we shall discuss an arrangement for when you will spend the night here, but for now, you should rest. As my oafish brother said, you’ll need your strength for childbearing and other princessly duties.”

His eyes twinkle, but I move further away from him in alarm and clutch the armrest, unsure of his intentions, and he frowns. “You have nothing to fear from me, little one. I made a promise to you and Mother and I will honor it.”

“Thank you,” I whisper, reaching out hesitantly to caress his face. “I pray I can be a worthy companion.”

Loki stands and strides over to the bed, nodding for me to follow him. I truly feel like a princess when I sink into his cushiony bed, though I try to lay as close to the edge as I can to discourage any contact. The prince turns out the lights with a click of his fingers and climbs in beside me. He leans over me and I hold my breath.

“I can be an incredibly patient man when there is a worthy reward,” he says in a low voice that’s almost a growl. “You may shy away from me now, but I am willing to wait until you beg for my touch, for the feel of my skin against yours as you scream my name in ecstasy. Sleep well, little wife.”

With that, Loki rolls away from me and soon I hear his breathing become slow and even. However, sleep eludes me as my mind conjures up improper images inspired by his comments.

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Loki and I have been excused from breakfast the following morning due to the late revels but we are expected for luncheon with the royal family. It is late morning when I awaken to find Loki gone and radiant sunlight illuminating the heavy forest green curtains covering the windows. When I stir, Magna appears with a light breakfast and tea. She approaches the bed rather cautiously as if expecting to find me laying there shattered and defeated after a night at Loki's mercy, then brightens when she sees me in the same condition she'd left me.

"Good morning, my lady! I've saved some porridge and fruit for your breakfast."

I thank the girl and sit up blearily to sip some tea, which she has sweetened exactly to my taste; she is a swift learner. Magna goes back into the sitting area and returns with my riding habit and a pair of sturdy boots. "His Highness has requested that you wear this. I am to bring you to the stables once you've eaten and dressed. You'll have time to bathe before luncheon."

Puzzled, I eat my breakfast and allow the handmaid to help me dress and braid my hair. We leave Loki's chambers and I am ecstatic to find myself face-to-face with my brother Enar, who is guarding the doors along with another of the Einherjar. "Brother!" I shriek, throwing myself into his arms with no regard for propriety. I had not expected him to be placed in my security detail so soon.

"Princess!" Enar shouts with a cheeky grin. Both Magda and the other soldier look alarmed at his failure to address me properly, but I will take that up with him later. For now, I'm thrilled to have my brother by my side and we chatter incessantly as we walk to the stables. He squeezes my hand before withdrawing, leaving my outside the stable doors, instructing me to wait there.

I fidget for a moment, drawing patterns in the dust with my foot, and then my husband strides out from inside the stables, leading a sleek chestnut mare with white stockings. "There you are! Meet Saga."

A groom appears at my side and hands me an apple to feed the horse. I giggle as her lips tickle my hand. "Saga! A noble name for a noble lady," I say, gently stroking her neck and mane.

"You may give her a new name if you wish, for she is yours. I suppose I never asked you if you enjoy riding," Loki says sheepishly.

"I love to ride, but I'm afraid I do not have much experience," I admit.

"Then you will improve. Saga is sweet-tempered and should be just the right size for you. Shall we take a brief ride before luncheon?"

I eagerly agree and the groom brings over a mounting block. Loki helps to settle me into the saddle and adjusts the stirrups, then straightens and gives me a satisfied nod. His imposing black charger has been brought out in the meantime, and the prince gracefully mounts and takes the lead. I pull on Saga's reins and give her a squeeze with my legs, following my husband off the palace grounds at a stately walk. He urges his horse into a trot once we reach a trail leading into a wooded area, a pair of guards following at a distance to give us at least the illusion of privacy.

I am apprehensive at first, but Saga is steady and responsive to my commands, so I am soon able to simply enjoy the ride and the time away from the constraints of the palace. Loki pauses at the crest of a hill and waits for me to catch up; the green in his eyes is even more striking than usual in the dappled light filtering through the trees and my heartbeat seems to flutter as I approach. The corners of his lips slowly turn up and I know he has spotted me admiring him.

“You two make a fine pair,” my prince compliments as I stop beside him. “What do you think of Saga?”

“She’s a wonder,” I say, patting the mare’s head fondly. “So easy to ride. But I’m afraid you’re spoiling me with all these gifts.”

“This is nothing,” Loki scoffs. “You’re a princess now. Anything you desire can be yours.” Judging by the softness in his eyes, though, he is pleased by my reaction.

“All I desire at this moment is to be right here with you and my beautiful horse,” I respond, and before I can even consider what I’m doing I find myself boldly leaning over to give my husband a kiss on the cheek.

His eyebrows shoot up at my abrupt display of affection, but he does not move away. His fair skin is soft and cool; I withdraw a bit reluctantly, wondering what had possessed me. We’ve barely been married for a day and already I’m allowing this most untrustworthy of gods to charm me.

Loki fixes his probing gaze on me and I think he’s going to scold me, but instead, he smirks, “Race you to the stables” and takes off down the path.

Oh, dear. Norns, don’t fail me now! I haven’t ridden at a canter in many years, but I swallow my fear and fly after the enormous black horse, bouncing uncomfortably in the saddle until I remember to post and become accustomed to the rhythm. For the first time since before our betrothal, I feel exhilarated and I whoop out of sheer joy. I think I hear Loki laughing at my exuberance up ahead.

Of course, Loki easily wins the race with his superior equestrian skills, but I arrive in the stable yard sweaty, laughing, and buzzing with glee. “That was such fun!”

Thor and Sif are walking back from their morning sparring and hurry over to see what all the fuss is about. “Loki, are you trying to humiliate your bride?” Thor demands gruffly, reaching up to lift me from the saddle. His blue eyes sweep up and down my body, not in a lecherous way, but out of concern for my well-being. “She should not be riding as recklessly as you do, brother.”

Loki glares as he nimbly hops down from his horse. He snakes an arm around my waist possessively. “Actually, she held her own, you simpleton.”

I roll my eyes but glow at his praise. “My horse did most of the work,” I say modestly.

“At least the girl is humble, unlike you,” Lady Sif teases my husband.

I stare at my boots, waiting for a scathing retort, but Loki only tenses for a moment before saying mildly, “Quite unlike you two braggarts as well. It’s refreshing, is it not?”

Both Thor and Sif agree as we make our way back to the palace to dress for our meal with the All-Mother and All-Father. Loki keeps his arm snugly around me as we walk; I feel rather cozy and cosseted and I dare to hope that maybe, somehow, I will one day earn his affection.

Rumors

Chapter Summary

After a series of missteps, your marriage becomes the hot topic in the palace.

Loki was correct when he told me a princess can have anything her heart desires, at least when it comes to material things. Wedding gifts have been pouring into the palace and much of my time during our first few weeks of marriage is dedicated to writing letters of thanks. My desk has been well-stocked with writing supplies, and I never seem to tire of pulling creamy sheets of fine stationery from the drawers and dipping my pen into a fresh pot of ink.

I have been provided with paper printed with a heading depicting my husband's sigil, a double-headed serpent, and my new symbol, an ivy leaf bisected by a delicate quill pen. I'm not sure whether Loki or Frigga designed my beautiful sigil, which symbolizes fidelity, wisdom, and knowledge, but it is fitting. Unfortunately, the slippery serpent is also proving to be quite an appropriate symbol for the prince, who has largely managed to avoid me since he'd seemed to thaw slightly on our first day as a married couple.

Granted, the king and queen have gradually been increasing Loki's duties and making him more visible to the people of Asgard. But despite Frigga's encouragement to include me in his appearances, my husband tends to take care of his responsibilities on his own, only rarely asking me to accompany him. I know I am already failing to keep my promise to visibly support him, but I struggle to honor my word when Loki barely communicates with me.

So I spend my days in my chambers or in the library, though even that ceases to be a place of solace once I begin to notice the curious stares and whispers that follow me wherever I go. Thor and Sif show me a few of their favorite hiding places around the palace, but I find myself spending more and more time isolating myself in my rooms. Loki and I have tentatively agreed that I will spend three nights a week in his chambers. My hope that his sangfroid was merely a public persona rapidly evaporates when we are alone and he remains withdrawn.

My faithful friend Lady Sif draws me out of my solitude for walks or horseback rides, sometimes joined by Thor or even Queen Frigga when she can steal away from her many responsibilities. One day, the All-Mother, Sif, and I bring a picnic and have afternoon tea in a tranquil meadow while our horses graze contentedly nearby.

We are chattering about nothing of importance when Frigga refills my cup of tea and asks lightly, "How are you finding life with my son, my dear?"

Sif looks sharply at me with raised brows as I grasp for a diplomatic answer. A perceptive woman, she is well aware of my failure to connect with Loki even though I have never

voiced my unhappiness to her. Unfortunately, lying to the All-Mother would be an exercise in futility. “Fine, fine,” I say breezily. “But I fear I have not been honoring our agreement as I should. I know I’ve been absent from Loki’s side all too often, and spending more time with Prince Thor and Lady Sif than with my husband, and...”

Frigga shakes her head firmly, silencing me mid-sentence, and takes my hands in hers. “Dear child, I see now that I’ve left you quite alone to navigate your duties. My son has always been fiercely independent and I have tried not to meddle in his affairs. I’m afraid he may need to be reminded that you must be apprised of his activities. Can we start anew? From now on, we’ll meet at the beginning of each week to discuss your obligations.”

I agree, grateful as always that the queen is so compassionate. Frigga taps a slender finger against her lips thoughtfully. “There will be a play and a feast in eight days’ time in honor of my husband’s name day. That will be a good opportunity for you and Loki to appear together. We’ll have a new gown made for you and you’ll dazzle my son as you did at your wedding.”

Frigga’s eyes glitter merrily at the prospect, and she and Sif eagerly begin to discuss what I should wear to the festivities. I’m not so sure that a beautiful gown and a forced public appearance are the keys to a successful (albeit deceitful) marriage, particularly when the event in question is the All-Father’s name day. Loki’s relationship with his father is fraught with tension and resentment. However, I’m willing to give the plan a try.

~*~*~*~

The celebration starts out on a promising enough foot. Loki holds my hand as the royal family leads a procession through the city to the theater where a new play about Odin’s greatest achievements will be presented. My husband politely asks about what I’ve been reading and even tells me about a new spell he’s been trying to master. I feel light and suddenly carefree as we stroll down the street to the cheers of hundreds of Asgardians who line the sidewalks. Of course, most of the acclaim is for the king, but several young children present me with flowers as Loki smiles benevolently as if this is the most precious thing he’s ever seen. He’s a talented actor, I muse inwardly.

I receive many compliments on the gown Queen Frigga and her seamstress designed for me. Initially, I balked at their choice of a rich burgundy fabric, a color I never would have chosen for myself. But they convinced me that the hue looked quite flattering on me and paired the frock with gold jewelry studded with rubies, a gift from the king and queen of Vanaheim. It is only when we are following Thor in the procession, his crimson cloak fluttering in the breeze, that I realize my clothing coordinates with his rather than my husband’s. I offer up a quick prayer that I’m the only one who has noticed this.

Truth be told, the play is not very good; Loki and I exchange amused looks at the worst instances of overacting and melodrama, suppressing snickers. Thor attempts to give us a stern look, but Loki transforms the program in his brother’s lap into a book of erotic paintings and the three of us can only sit shaking in silent mirth after that, earning a reproving frown from Frigga.

“Brother, I promise you shall pay for that one!” Thor vows after the performance has concluded, stashing the scandalous book under his seat for some unsuspecting theatergoer to

discover.

“It was worth it just to see you blush,” smirks the mischief maker.

Carriages await us for the return journey to the palace, where an extravagant feast is being laid out. Thor, Loki, and I accept goblets of mead before Frigga shoos us away to mingle and greet our guests. I endeavor to do my best impression of a doting wife as Loki makes his rounds, following him with a kind word for everyone I encounter and a serene smile on my face all the while. Maintaining this facade is exhausting and I am relieved when I can drop into my chair at the head table and have some dinner. The All-Mother leans over to compliment me on my efforts and I allow myself to be lulled into the illusion that I have the situation under control.

That was my fatal mistake.

As we wait for dessert to be served, Loki announces that he’s going to the gardens for a breath of fresh air. I am feeling rather lethargic due to the heavy food and the heat of the crowded great hall; a walk in the cool night air sounds delightful and so I jump up to follow my husband. We have only traveled several paces when he rounds on me, venom in his eyes. “Must you follow me everywhere like a pathetic lost pet?” He hisses. “And wearing my brother’s colors? You should be ashamed.”

I am vaguely aware that the conversation around us has decreased in volume, but it feels as if the entire city has gone silent at that moment. “S-sorry. I’m sorry, my lord,” I stammer as Loki whirls around and stalks off. Trying to save face, I turn and walk stiffly back to my seat as if nothing has happened, my face burning with humiliation. Thor is engaged in an animated conversation with Fandral but asks his friend if we might have a moment alone as soon as he sees my face. Fandral graciously bows and melts into the crowd.

“You look as if you could use a stronger drink,” Thor says gently, pushing his goblet of liquor over to me. I have no idea what he’s drinking, but I take a generous swig, relishing the way I can feel the liquor burning all the way from my throat to my stomach.

“That’s better,” I croak, trying not to cough. “Burning is nicer than having feelings, isn’t it?”

“Perhaps,” Thor answers, allowing me another couple of sips before reclaiming his drink. “That may depend on the feelings. What’s troubling you, sister?”

I’m feeling a bit hazy from the spirits, but I am still fully aware that I should eat, drink, and be merry - and forget that my husband has just insulted me in front of half the kingdom. Instead, I hear myself say in a wavery voice, “Why doesn’t your brother love me?”

Thor slides his arm around my slumped shoulders. “What are you talking about? Loki adores you. He thinks you’re brilliant, and he chose you for his wife. I’m afraid my brother sees showing affection as a sign of weakness, but you can’t... what?” He asks, finally responding to my vehement head shaking.

“It’s true that he did choose me,” I say quietly, wondering how much Thor knows about the true nature of our relationship. This is neither the time nor the place to have this discussion,

but after weeks of solitude and self-doubt, it seems a few sips of liquor have irreparably loosened my tongue. “Truthfully, we are not husband and wife in any real sense, and I have no right to complain when I agreed to this arrangement and thought I could be satisfied living this way. I am not worthy of Loki in any way, yet now I find myself longing for a touch, a kind word, any sign that I might mean something to him...”

The compassion in Thor’s eyes is almost unbearable. He draws me closer so I can rest my head on his broad shoulder. “I’m sorry, I’m making such a scene,” I murmur.

“Do not worry, everyone is too far into their cups to notice,” Thor soothes. “My sweet sister, though I did not know the truth of your marriage, I am sorry for what you’ve had to endure. Would you like me to speak with Loki on your behalf?”

“No, I’m afraid that would only make him more resentful. I am not ignorant of what is being whispered in the court, that I spend my days with you and Lady Sif because marriage to Loki is intolerable, or worse. He cannot know that I’ve confided in you.” I exhale slowly. “I’m not sure anything can be done. I consented to this false marriage; perhaps I must simply accept the consequences.”

Thor is frowning and I know he hates being told that for once, he can’t just barge in with Mjolnir and save the day. I place a hand on his arm and give him a comforting squeeze. “I appreciate your willingness to be my hero, brother, truly. For now, I think it’s best that I retire and allow you to enjoy the celebration while I consider the best course of action.”

I disentangle myself from Thor, who grasps my hand and kisses it. “Be careful, dear sister.”

“I will,” I promise, and hurry out of the great hall, cursing myself for indulging in such an unwise moment of weakness. In a royal court, there is always someone waiting to take advantage the moment you let down your guard, and I have just displayed my vulnerability to the entire court, a performance that rivaled the play we’d watched earlier in the evening.

~*~*~*~

The following afternoon, Magda and I are returning to my chambers from the library with armloads of books when we hear voices ahead in the corridor. I think nothing of it until we are close enough to make out some of the conversation, and I pause, holding up a hand to stop my handmaid as well.

“My lady...?” I put a finger to my lips and understanding dawns in her eyes.

“...and who could blame her? What woman would not prefer the hammer of Thor to... *that*?” Delighted giggles follow and I cringe. *Surely they’re not talking about me...*

“She and Prince Thor were looking awfully cozy at the banquet last night... surprised Loki... ought to keep his wife on a tighter leash.”

Of course, they’re gossiping about me. I opened myself up to this.

Magda is staring at me with wide eyes, a flush spreading across her cheeks. I stare at my dainty slippers in shame. If I were stronger, bolder, I could sweep down the hall and put an end to this nonsense. But this is exactly what I deserve.

The voices are now moving in the opposite direction, but we can still hear some humiliating snippets before they fade away altogether. “I’m sure her husband will have her barefoot, pregnant, and hidden away somewhere once he learns she’s sweet on his brother.”

I slump against the wall and close my eyes, a groan escaping from my lips. Magda eyes me anxiously. “Oh, your highness, this is terrible. What will you do? How can I help?”

Her devotion is so endearing, I nearly forego protocol and embrace her right there in the corridor. “There’s nothing you can do, my dear. Your support is enough. I’ve allowed this to go on long enough.”

As I say the words out loud, I realize there’s only one true option for taking control of this situation; I cannot take on an entire treacherous court, but I can show my husband that I’m not some shrinking violet he can menace and control. If Loki shows me respect, perhaps it will silence at least some of the gossip and rumors. I lift my chin defiantly and resume walking to my chambers, feeling invigorated now that I have a plan in mind. It seems the time has arrived for a reckoning.

“Magda, I’ll take my dinner in my rooms tonight. I need some time to think, and then I’ll speak with my husband this evening. There is little that goes on in the palace that escapes his notice, and I’m certain he’s aware of the way the court has been talking. I must confront him before this spirals out of control.”

Reckoning

Chapter Summary

A confrontation with Loki proves pivotal for your marriage.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Smut ahead! If that's not your cup of tea, reading the conversation at the beginning of the chapter will get you caught up on the plot.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Enter,” comes Loki’s frosty voice from within his chambers, and the doors swing open on their own before his guards can touch them. The warriors give me pitying looks as they part so I can pass by, but I hold my head high even though my hands are trembling and my mouth is dry. The doors snap shut behind me with finality as I step into my husband’s dimly-lit quarters.

I pause to allow my eyes to adjust to my shadowy surroundings, steeling myself and adopting an icy, detached tone. “May I have a word, my lord?”

Loki rises swiftly from his chair by the fire, crossing the room in several long strides to stand uncomfortably close to me. “Oh look, my wayward wife has returned to me,” he drawls. “Have you tired of the golden god so soon, darling? He can be such a bore.”

He’s unable to hide the fact that he’s taken aback when I stand my ground and maintain eye contact. Empowered by my unwillingness to allow him to intimidate me, I retort, “I would think that you, of all the Aesir, should know better than to give credence to a malicious rumor.”

“Is it, though?” the prince sneers. “I’m told you put on quite a display last night, sniveling into your mead with my brother. Not a bad plan, actually; the fool never can resist rescuing a damsel in distress, and the choice of gown was an inspired touch.”

“Actually, your lady mother designed the gown,” I say evenly, aware even as I say it that this sounds like a feeble excuse, true though it may be. There is no reason for him to believe me and the gown is the least of my concerns at the moment, in spite of the hostility it had inspired.

Loki's brow furrows in bewilderment. "Mother chose the gown? Interesting," he muses. His thought process escapes me until I hear Frigga's words in my mind: *My son has always been fiercely independent and I have tried not to meddle in his affairs.* Could the gown have been some subtle means of meddling from a distance? But if so, what did the All-Mother intend to accomplish? It makes little sense, yet I have learned that no one in the Asgardian court is above scheming.

We stare at each other in bemused silence, considering the possibilities. My husband recovers his wits first. "Clearly we'll need to revisit that little conundrum, but moving on to the heart of the issue... how could you be so stupid? You underwent a month of training on how to behave in court only to weep in Thor's arms at a banquet?"

"My behavior was incredibly foolish and I beg your forgiveness, but the fact remains that I was crying because my husband scolded and humiliated me in view of the entire court. Is it so much to ask that you show me the respect due to me as your wife, if not affection?"

Loki's eyes flash dangerously and he advances on me and I'm forced to retreat until my back hits the wall. *So this is it, then. All those whispers were true; he's going to kill me.* I close my eyes and await his wrath but the god merely moves a stray lock of hair off of my face.

"You want me to be affectionate after you readily agreed to Mother's contract, indeed, only consented to the marriage on the condition that I cannot touch you?" he asks incredulously. "Is the thought of my touch so repulsive? I once believed I saw interest, even passion, in you, and I hoped it might grow in time. I asked for your hand because I wanted you to be my wife, not an ornament at my side for court functions. You think I'm angry because you might prefer Thor over me. No, I'm well accustomed to living in my brother's shadow. What pains me is being forced to pretend to be your husband when I'm forbidden to caress your velvety skin, to memorize every inch of your body, to claim you as my own in every possible way. Can you possibly understand how torturous this is?"

It's not until Loki reaches the end of his bitter, impassioned speech that I realize he's holding my chin, forcing me to witness the hunger and hurt in his eyes. My dry laugh is obviously not the reaction he'd expected. "But I do understand. Oh Loki, we've both been utterly oblivious."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Loki, stop trying to make sense of this mess and kiss me."

After a sharp intake of breath, he tilts my face upwards and presses his lips to mine. At first, the kiss is tentative and I know Loki does not believe that I truly desire his touch, so I thread my fingers through his hair and part my lips in encouragement. I never imagined I could be so forward, but somehow this feels right - and like it could be the last chance to mend my marriage. My husband responds by pulling me closer and exploring my tongue with his; I can feel him smile when I give a little sigh of contentment.

"You are delicious, little wife," he says before moving to brush his lips against my neck. When his teeth graze my sensitive skin, I moan, pleasure traveling all the way to my core.

Loki grins wickedly. "I believe she likes that. Shall I continue?"

"Please," I breathe. He nibbles his way down my neck and collarbone until I find myself bracing against the wall with one hand, weak in the knees. Loki's skin feels delectably cool against my body, which seems feverish in comparison. His nimble fingers untie the ribbons on the bodice of my dress and he eases the fabric down to expose my corset and chemise. Impatiently, he unhooks the busk of the corset, peeling it off and tossing it aside. I close my eyes, suddenly feeling vulnerable, but my lids fly open when Loki cups my breasts in his hands, teasing the nipples with his thumbs. I gasp and arch my back against the wall, drawing a growl from his lips.

Just as I am losing myself in his caresses, my husband draws back and seizes me by the shoulders. "What is it that you want, pet?" he demands, those piercing eyes dark with lust.

Is he really going to make me voice the unspeakable desires he has kindled in me? "I... I want..."

"I want to hear you say it. I need to know that you're not acting out of some misplaced sense of duty or guilt."

"I want you to claim me as your own," I declare shakily. "Take me to bed, Loki."

This time, there is no hesitation. He sweeps me up in his arms as if I weigh no more than a child and carries me to his bed, then makes quick work of removing the rest of my clothing before laying me down. Still fully clothed, he lowers the length of his body onto mine, pressing his hardness between my legs, and I feel a little thrill of both anticipation and trepidation. How rapidly I'd progressed from accepting a platonic relationship to craving the god's touch.

"This is hardly fair," I protest teasingly. Loki stills and gives me a quizzical look. "I am to lay here bare and exposed but I can see nothing of you?"

"What a naughty little minx you are turning out to be," he says approvingly. "Patience, my darling. All in good time." With that, he slips a hand between us to part my folds and lightly touches my most intimate parts. "Already so wet for me," he groans.

Never had I imagined someone could awaken such a fire in me; it threatens to consume me as Loki rubs circles on my clitoris. I cry out when he slips a finger inside me, a new and slightly uncomfortable sensation, but a pleasurable one. I am truly lost when he slowly adds another long finger, curling them against my inner walls, whispering, "Let go for me, little one."

My body instinctively responds to his command; my climax crashes over me and I hear myself crying out Loki's name as I spasm, seeing sparks behind my eyelids. When my writhing finally ceases and I regain some semblance of alertness, the mischief maker's clothes have vanished and he is kneeling between my legs, watching me in delight.

I cannot help but stare at his flawless alabaster skin, the finely toned muscles, and, well... it's impossible to pretend I do not notice his erect manhood, which he is lightly stroking as he waits for me to regain my senses. Loki gently takes my hand and guides it to his cock,

moving my fingers up and down the shaft in demonstration before allowing me to continue on my own.

“You are even more fun to teach than I anticipated,” he sighs, his eyelids fluttering closed as he relaxes. “Quite the quick study.” Blushing, I experiment and twist my hand as I continue my ministrations, thoroughly enjoying the moan this elicits from the god. He allows me to continue for a while, then places a hand over mine, stilling it.

“Did I do something wrong?” I feel an urge to burrow under the covers, mortified by my inexperience.

My question appears to be incredibly amusing to him. “No, no, you’re doing that a little too well. Any more of that and I won’t last. Corrupting you is sinfully pleasurable.”

“Oh...” I’m flushing again as Loki positions himself over my body again, leaning on his elbows so he can arrest me with his gaze.

“Now. Do you remember when I told you I was willing to wait for you to beg me to take you?” He’s grinning ferally.

How could I possibly forget? Those words have been haunting me for weeks. “Yes...?”

“If this is what you truly want, then beg me.”

How is being commanded by the God of Mischief so incredibly arousing? “Please, my prince, I need to feel you inside me,” I plead, squirming with need as his erection throbs against my thigh. “I want to be yours and yours alone.”

“Well, if that is what my princess desires, she shall have it,” Loki purrs and slowly begins to slide into me, pausing once to ask if I want him to stop. I grit my teeth against the burning sensation, urging him to continue while wondering if this will only be pleasurable for him. Once his entire substantial length is buried inside me, my husband moves gently in and out, his eyes searching mine. At first, I am only conscious of the pain, but as he accelerates his pace, he hits some intensely sensitive place inside me and I whimper and clutch at his shoulders.

Loki takes this as a cue to thrust harder, his hips slapping against mine; I am mesmerized by his enlarged pupils and the look of devilish wonder that appears on his face every time I moan. Before I have time to question what he’s doing, he abruptly rolls off of me and lifts me on top to ride him. “Take control of me, little one, as you already have bewitched my heart and mind,” he growls. I want to savor his words, but Loki rubs my clitoris and the combination of his touch and the new position send me precariously close to the edge again. My walls clench around him, and he soon follows me into oblivion, filling me with spurt after spurt of warm liquid, calling out my name like a desperate prayer.

My legs weak, I collapse onto Loki’s sweat-dampened chest. He tangles his long fingers in my hair, asking teasingly, “How does it feel to be the property of a god?”

“Mm, blissful.” I lay still, catching my breath and listening to his racing heartbeat.

“Will you stay here tonight?” He actually sounds a bit anxious, as if I might suddenly leap up and scurry back to my chambers like a frightened rabbit. Magda will surely be concerned about my whereabouts but I will placate her in the morning.

“Do you want me to?” I ask coyly.

“I believe I made it quite clear that I want you here,” Loki smirks.

“Then there’s nowhere in the Nine Realms I’d rather be.”

His smile is as incandescent as I feel in this, my moment of triumph.

Chapter End Notes

I had originally planned for the sex scene to appear much later, but somehow it just felt right at this emotionally-charged moment in the story.

I must confess that this is the first smut I've ever written; I've been a little nervous about posting this chapter and I hope it was at least somewhat entertaining.

Many thanks to my loyal readers who continue to read and comment. The response to this story has been humbling and I'm just over the moon knowing that so many are enjoying it.

Gathering Storm

Chapter Summary

A diplomatic mission interrupts your brief honeymoon period.

When I first begin to awaken the next morning, I am disoriented, briefly under the illusion that I am back in my bed at my parents' home. My eyes finally manage to focus on Loki; he's sprawled out lazily beside me with a cup of tea in one hand and a book in the other. Memories of the previous night come flooding back, startling me as I recall my wanton behavior.

Loki's eyes flick over to me as he turns a page and he graces me with perhaps the warmest smile I've ever seen on his face. "Good morning, darling. I trust you slept well after last night's... exertions?" He snickers as I flush.

I notice the quantity of daylight flooding into the room while scrambling for something more mundane - and less embarrassing - to discuss. "Why did no one awaken me? I should have risen hours ago!"

"Not to worry," the god assures me. "I have informed Mother and Father that you're feverish and I will spend the day caring for you. They wanted to send in a healer, but I told them it wouldn't be necessary. I took the liberty of having your handmaid bring a change of clothes and some books. She appeared concerned that I may have murdered you in some dreadfully gruesome manner but perked up when she saw you sleeping unharmed."

"Such a liar," I tease fondly, propping myself up on one elbow.

"Thank you," Loki responds cheekily. He reaches for a plate of food sitting on his small bedside table and places a morsel of pastry onto my tongue. "I thought you might enjoy a bath after you eat your breakfast." He places the plate between us on the bed.

"That does sound lovely."

The bath has already been prepared by the time I finish eating. The warm water, scented with oils, feels almost sinfully luxurious on my slightly sore body. My husband comes into the bathing chamber once I've been soaking for a few minutes and kisses the crown of my head before kneeling beside the tub and beginning to wash my hair. A contented hum escapes my lips as he massages my scalp. I can picture the smug smirk on his face even though my eyes remain closed.

"I do so love to make you moan." Loki's voice is like honey; just the sound of it is arousing. "Awakening your desire was delightful, but there is still so much for you to learn. I hope you'll be an obedient student, little one."

“I may not have many qualities that are worthy of a god and a prince, but I believe you will find me a very satisfactory student, my lord.”

His eyes darken at that and he bites his lip but continues sedately rinsing suds from my locks. Once the water becomes tepid, I climb out of the large bathtub and allow Loki to wrap me in a warm towel. He appears to be frowning at a spot on my neck, and I examine myself in the mirror; several small bruises dot my skin like a constellation. Heat rises in my cheeks, and not just from the bath.

“As much as I’d enjoy leaving you marked as belonging to me, I suppose I should remove those for propriety’s sake,” Loki muses, placing his hand on my neck. There is a brief glimmer of green light followed by a rush of warmth. He lifts his hand to reveal flawless skin, then takes his leave while I dress and comb my hair.

When I return, Loki is sitting on a sofa, paging through one of my books that Magda had delivered. He motions for me to join him. “I thought maybe you could read to me from one of your books,” he suggests. “I am rather curious to know what you appreciate about Midgardian literature.”

I settle into a seat beside him and he hands me my well-loved copy of *Little Women*. “Ah, this is a classic,” I smile. “My mother first read it to me when I was a little girl. It’s a lovely story.” I open to the first page and Loki gently maneuvers me so I’m lying down with my head in his lap. I begin to read as my husband stares pensively into the fire, idly playing with my hair.

I make it through several chapters before I need to pause for a drink of water. “Well? What do you think?”

“It is rather charming,” Loki admits, “but these March girls are so silly. The family is struggling with the father away, yet many of their concerns are frivolous and shallow.”

“Even Jo?” I tease. “I always fancied myself a kindred spirit to Jo, dedicating my life to writing in my garret, never feeling the need for a husband or family to hold me back.”

“Jo is certainly the most interesting of the brood,” he concedes. “But sweetling, what would you do without a husband to...”

He is cut off by a loud knocking at the door and hisses in frustration, becoming even more annoyed when he learns that Thor is behind the interruption. The God of Thunder sweeps in, coming to an abrupt halt when he sees us on the sofa. For a moment I think his eyes might actually pop out of his head, but Thor recovers quickly. “Loki! Should you not be the one reading to your ailing wife?”

“She has made a miraculous recovery under my care,” Loki says loftily, causing me to emit a most unladylike snort of laughter.

“Wonderful! I am pleased to see you faring better, sister. Now, brother, Father requests our presence in half an hour to discuss an important matter,” Thor says.

“Requests”? Demands, you mean,” Loki sighs. “I am sorry to cut our time short, darling. Duty calls, but I’ll see you later after we meet with Father.”

“Of course. I understand,” I say graciously, though I am reluctant to end our idyllic time together. But I, too, know my duties as a royal bride, so I kiss Loki’s cheek and withdraw to my own chambers to catch up on my correspondence.

~*~*~*~

I am bent over my desk responding to one of my sister’s verbose missives and Magda is putting away clean laundry when my guards announce that Prince Loki is at the door. This gives me pause; my husband has never visited my chambers in all the weeks since our wedding. My handmaid looks alarmed and scurries off to busy herself folding sheets in the bedroom.

Once Loki is admitted, he stands just inside the door, gazing at his surroundings as if absorbing this strange new feminine domain. I rise politely and raise my brows questioningly. He huffs out a forceful sigh. “I must speak with you in private.”

“Of course,” I say, though my heartbeat flutters anxiously. I lead him to the sitting area and dismiss Magda. “Did the meeting with your father not go well? You seem troubled.”

Loki leans back and rests his chin in his hand, seemingly nonchalant. I know his mind is working at an alarming speed behind his furrowed brow. “It seems the Light Elves have uncovered a treasonous plot, an underground alliance of Dark and Light Elves that has been carrying out attacks and raids in Alfheim. Father initially wished to leave the matter to the Elves, but an informant has been arrested here in the palace. The spy was interrogated and let it slip that the traitors wish to consolidate power and conquer Asgard one region at a time.”

“Gods, how awful. How will the All-Father respond?” I realize my hands are trembling slightly and fold them tightly on my lap. If a spy could infiltrate the Asgardian court, surely this alliance has eyes and ears in every realm.

Loki’s jaw twitches. “Thor and I urged him to send an army to root out the insurgents but our advice fell on deaf ears, as always. Father says we must consult with the leaders of Alfheim since blood is being spilled on their soil. We are to waste time in diplomacy while the enemy grows stronger and more lives will perhaps be lost. And with Father preparing to enter the Odinsleep, Asgard will be vulnerable at the worst possible time.”

I do not entirely disagree with the king, but now is not the time to inform Loki of that. I am well aware that Thor is always eager for action and fighting his way through any obstacle, but it is decidedly odd for Loki to support this approach. “You and Thor are to travel to Alfheim, then?”

“Yes, along with a host of others,” he rolls his eyes. “Mother convinced him that an entire delegation should go lest Thor and I act like the proverbial bull in the china closet, as the Midgardians say. The Elves are inclined to believe we are nothing but brutes. She has selected you and Sif to accompany us and ensure that we behave in a civilized manner.”

“Even though Lady Sif could surely defeat their fiercest warrior,” I grin before properly absorbing his entire statement. “Wait. I am to go? I’ve always wanted to see Alfheim, but... why?”

“Mother believes your extensive knowledge of the political history of the realms may be useful, and a state visit to a foreign court will be a valuable experience. It was also mentioned that you might be able to charm the Elves.” The god’s eyes are gleaming with mischief. “I am inclined to agree.”

“Oh...” I am stunned and a bit flustered at this development. “I am honored that your mother has such faith in me. I will do my best to, um, represent our family and Asgard in...”

Loki snickers and I trail off, stung until I see the kindness in his eyes. “My darling, relax. Mother chose you for a reason and I’ll be at your side. Those smug Elves may even rethink their mistrust of me when they see the brilliant wife I’ve chosen.” He squeezes my hand reassuringly.

“Thank you.” I attempt to regulate my breathing to ease the tightness in my chest. Of course, I’m well aware that my new status would eventually require much more than raiding the library and being Loki’s occasional companion, but this endeavor could have a far-reaching impact. The mere thought of having a hand in steering Asgard’s future petrifies me. *You’re a scholar. What can you do but learn all the available facts and prepare as best you can?* “I’ll need you to fill me in on everything you know about the situation.”

My husband pouts, “I thought tonight we’d have a lesson of a different sort.” He traces the outline of my cheekbone with his fingertip, sending a delightful chill spiraling down my spine. “You did promise to be a dutiful student, little one.”

I want nothing more than to surrender to his touch, but resolutely sit up straighter. “And I shall be one soon enough, but this is important Loki. When do we leave?”

“In three days,” he says reluctantly.

“There’s no time to waste, then. Perhaps if you’re an efficient teacher, we can arrange a study break.” I look down shyly, but when I gaze up through my lashes I see that Loki is inordinately pleased with this suggestion.

“In that case, class is now in session.” He smirks flirtatiously and I settle in for a crash course in the Elvish conflict and Asgardian diplomacy.

Alfheim

Chapter Summary

The diplomatic visit to Alfheim gets underway.

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry I've been updating so sporadically recently. One of my cats died last week, so it's been a pretty difficult time. However, I'm still excited about this story and I'm glad my readers are too! This is a shorter chapter that's a bridge between the previous chapter and the next, but hopefully, it's still entertaining. Thanks for all the awesome feedback and kudos! You guys are the best.

The following days pass in such a whirlwind of preparations for our journey to Alfheim that I barely have time to fret about any of the specifics - including how, exactly, we'll travel to that realm. On our day of departure, Odin, Frigga, and the court have already seen the delegation off and we are approaching Heimdall's Observatory on horseback when I suddenly freeze, anxiety radiating throughout my body. Until now I had been chattering away with Sif; when I trail off mid-sentence, she looks at me in bewilderment. "Is something the matter?"

"I... well... I have never traveled to any of the other realms. I don't know what to expect." Ashamed, I stare down at Saga's silky mane. What kind of princess has only left the city in which she grew up to visit the nearby mountains or countryside?

Understanding dawns in Sif's dark eyes. "There's nothing to worry about, I assure you. My first time through the Bifrost was a bit dizzying, but it was over in a heartbeat."

Up ahead, Thor slows his mount, allowing Sif and I to catch up and ride alongside him and Loki. Thor reaches out a hand and I take it, finding the gentle way his huge hand envelops mine reassuring as always. "My lady, we will be at your side for the entire journey. Soon you will wish only to travel via the Bifrost, as my brother once did." He grins at Loki, who shoots him a murderous look.

"No, brother, I will be the one to comfort my wife, though I thank you for your concern." I exchange a dismayed glance with Thor and Sif at my husband's frosty tone. Thor withdraws his hand with a strained, apologetic smile at his younger brother.

A tense silence has settled over the group, but it is broken when Heimdall grants us entrance into the observatory, graciously greeting each member of our party and wishes us a safe and

productive visit. As the gatekeeper prepares to open the bridge, I steal a glance at Loki, concerned that his sharp words to Thor were a harbinger of the return of his previous hostility toward me. However, his emerald eyes meet mine and he laces his fingers through mine, squeezing my hand reassuringly. "I am here, little one," he soothes as the dazzling multi-colored bridge appears before us.

I clutch Loki's hand, watching Thor disappear into the portal with trepidation. "Come along, dearest, it's our turn," Loki says. We ride side-by-side into the abyss, still holding hands, and I gasp as we are swept away into a kaleidoscope of light and color. I close my eyes tightly when vertigo hits me and the next thing I know, our horses' hooves have touched down onto a moss-carpeted forest floor, a babbling brook to our left.

The first thing that strikes me about Alfheim is the ethereal quality of the light. The foliage is similar to what I'm accustomed to at home, but somehow the way the sunlight filters through the leaves is entirely different; even the ferns and wildflowers seem to glow from within. I look around in wonder as Sif and the rest of the delegation appear.

Once the final horse and rider have arrived, Thor leads the way to the capital, which is only a brief ride away. We emerge from the treeline to the dazzling sight of the palace of the Light Elves looming ahead. Set against a backdrop of cliffs and waterfalls, the white stone structure is nearly blinding. Our horses cross a stone bridge and as we approach, the royal court of Alfheim comes into focus, awaiting our arrival.

The royal family proves to be just as awe-inspiring as the rest of the realm. The Light Elves are extremely tall, with long, graceful limbs and fair coloring. I manage to make a low curtsy to the king and queen without tripping over the hem of my skirt or otherwise disgracing myself. To my surprise, the queen clasps both of my hands in hers, her bright blue eyes scrutinizing mine. "Our ambassadors have spoken of your accomplishments and poise," she says in a low, melodious voice. "Prince Loki must be quite proud of his chosen bride."

Beside me, Loki smiles stiffly, apparently unused to receiving this sort of praise. With his silver tongue seemingly tied for a change, I fumble for a gracious response. "Your Highness, thank you for your kind words. I am humbled by my marriage and the honor of being in your presence."

This sounds overly effusive to my ears, but the queen merely smiles and nods her appreciation. As we continue along the receiving line, Loki whispers, "You are a natural at this." I beam at him, feeling as radiant as the elves and their silvery clothing.

Once the entire delegation has paid their respects to the royal family, servants usher us to our accommodations so we can prepare for the dinner being held in our honor that evening. Loki and I have been provided with a suite of airy, spacious rooms overlooking a garden and hedge maze. I change into the lilac silk gown Frigga had helped me choose and my husband, who has already used magic to change his clothing, glides over and presents me with a set of delicate amethyst jewelry to compliment my dress.

Loki has already informed me that little of import will be discussed at the banquet, which I find distressing when there is a rebellion underway and lives have been lost. He reminds me that court etiquette must be followed and such matters must be handled with utmost care. The

dinner is delightful after my nerves settle and I can enjoy the fresh greens, meat pies, and assorted wines and cordials. Lady Sif and I share a laugh at the Asgardian men as they frown at their plates, used to the heartier fare served at home.

There is dancing after dessert is cleared away. I am content to sit and enjoy the festivities from afar while sipping wine, but Sif and I are quickly snapped up as dance partners for two of the elf princes. I barely reach my partner's chest, which amuses him greatly. "The God of Mischief has been captured by such a tiny creature," he teases as he leads me smoothly through an unfamiliar dance. "An impressive feat, princess."

"I'm not certain 'captured' is the correct word," I demur.

"No? Are you sure?" The prince turns us so we're facing Loki, who has been talking with a group of diplomats. His eyes are narrowed as he glowers in my direction.

"Oh," I say weakly. "He's protective of me, that's all."

The elf gives me a knowing smirk but our conversation is cut short when the cue to change partners arrives. Loki appears at my side and draws me closer than is strictly necessary or proper. "Are you enjoying yourself, pet?"

"Yes, but you seem to be perturbed by the fact that I am," I retort.

"Darling, can you blame me for hating the sight of a vapid elf prince's hands on what is mine?" My husband dips me abruptly, claiming my lips in a possessive kiss that sends desire shooting straight to my core in spite of my annoyance.

"Stop it!" I hiss. "Must you always make a scene?"

"Only when it suits me."

Loki's smug smile is infuriating, but I have a few tricks up my sleeve as well. "The All-Mother sent me to charm the royal family, did she not? I must obey my queen," I say sweetly.

I know I've come out on top in this round when the trickster's jaw twitches. "The perils of marrying a clever woman," he sighs at length.

"Now, can I continue to do my part to make this visit a success without your jealousy interfering?" I cup his cool cheek with my hand to soften the blow of these words, silently pleading with my eyes.

"Very well, continue with your charm campaign," Loki says resignedly. "We will need the elves' goodwill when we begin negotiations tomorrow. Off you go, my little secret weapon."

I reluctantly let go of the god when the song ends. "Remember, we're a team. Now go and find some lovely elfish ladies to charm," I say with a wink.

One of Alfheim's diplomats asks me for a dance and though I want nothing more than to collapse into bed, I allow him to lead me back onto the floor. It's going to be a long night, but I have no intention to disappoint Frigga, Loki, or the rest of the delegation.

Diplomacy

Chapter Summary

The Light Elves prove difficult to please, but an alliance is not impossible.

“How surprising. Once again, the Asgardians want to swoop in and solve our problems by starting a war that will lay waste to a realm not their own, and emerge the victors. No. Never again.”

Sif and I share a look of dismay at the Elven king’s caustic words. The Light Elves and our delegation have been bickering for hours, rehashing the same points and making no progress, as far as I can tell. Thor’s voice is calm when he replies, but I have noticed him clenching his jaw and I know he’s barely keeping his temper in check. “Your Majesty, with all due respect, this threat is not limited to Alfheim. If one spy was able to infiltrate the Asgardian court, there are likely other traitors in our midst. This is a matter of coming together to protect our people, not of Asgard invading foreign soil for selfish reasons.”

Thor’s statement elicits murmurs from both sides gathered around the enormous table that normally accommodates the Elven king’s council. I timidly raise a finger, attempting to voice my thoughts, I am ignored, not for the first time that day. Defeated, I slump into my chair, rubbing my eyes. A throbbing headache threatens to split my skull in two and I take a sip of the lukewarm tisane sitting in front of me, hoping to clear my mind.

“If I may interject...” Sif’s confident voice slices through the rumble of voices. “I believe the princess has been trying to speak.”

The others lapse into silence and I give my friend a grateful smile. “Perhaps we should consider that historically, combating revolutionaries with a full-scale military campaign has often proven not to be the wisest course.” I bite my lip so hard I taste blood, wondering if I’m mad for voicing an opinion that diverges from that of Thor and Loki. “In some cases, the loss of life and property has caused the people to sympathize more with the rebellion than those trying to protect them. I’m reminded of an incident during the Russian Revolution on Midgard, where...”

I trail off as the Elven king fixes me with a cold stare that could slice through glass. “Princess, we are not discussing the petty spats of mortals. Is this tale of Midgard truly relevant to the situation at hand?”

Humiliated tears sting my eyes at his sharp words and I lower my gaze to hide them. “Perhaps not, Your Majesty. I apologize for the intrusion.”

The uncomfortable silence is broken when Loki abruptly stands, nearly toppling his chair. Recognizing the rage in his eyes, I shake my head at him as imperceptibly as possible, but I am too late. "Could you not show my wife the courtesy of allowing her to finish speaking before you dismiss her?" my husband demands. Thor places a cautioning hand on his brother's forearm, but Loki shakes him off. "Maybe the study of history is not valued here, but in Asgard the princess is well-respected and we strive to learn from the past lest the same mistakes are repeated. Please continue, darling. What are you proposing?" He sits back down casually as if nothing were amiss, seemingly unaware of the stony glares on the faces of the contingent from Alfheim.

In any other situation, I would have laughed out loud at Loki's sudden reverence of my knowledge of the history of silly mortals, as he might call them. In this case, however, I wish I could be absolutely anywhere else in the Nine Realms, but if Loki's outburst means this will be both my first and final attempt at diplomacy, I may as well make my best effort. "King Odin spoke of the need for the utmost discretion," I say slowly. "Could Asgard provide a small force of warriors whose skills are best-suited to a stealth operation? It would be much easier to root out the insurgents without them receiving word about an army on the move, and to attempt to capture some of the leaders alive so they can be interrogated."

Silence. I risk a brief glance around the table, trying to gauge what this reaction means. Is it really this difficult to devise a polite way to reject my idea?

Finally, one of the Elven diplomats speaks. "That is actually... quite reasonable." He sounds stunned that one of the war-mongering Asgardians could possibly propose such a thing.

"'Reasonable'? It's brilliant," retorts one of his Asgardian counterparts. "It combines the best of King Odin's and the princes' proposals."

Suddenly it seems as if everyone is speaking at once, eagerly tossing out ideas while I sit there dumbfounded. Sif looks slightly dazed as well. "I think you just saved these discussions from becoming a total disaster. The Elves have kept their kingdom isolated for centuries, yet you arrive and convince them to cooperate with Asgard."

"You may be overstating it a bit..." I begin modestly, but Loki catches my eye and somehow his irrepressible smirk tells me that he's truly proud to have married me, perhaps for the first time. He gives me a sly wink before turning back to listen to whatever Thor is saying.

By the time the two parties have formulated and agreed to a preliminary version of the plan, dusk has fallen. We arrange to reconvene the following day and return to our rooms to rest before a late dinner is served. As soon as the door to our chamber closes behind us, Loki's arms slide around my waist and he pulls my body flush against him, his lips finding mine in the near-darkness, kissing me hungrily as if he wishes to devour me. "I had no idea I'd married a sorceress," he says playfully when we finally pause to catch our breath. "That is, until I saw you enchant a room full of obstinate Elves."

I glow under his touch and his praise, but my headache has been growing steadily worse throughout the day and I stagger back as a wave of pain sears my skull. "I'm sorry, I have a dreadful headache," I mumble, closing my eyes tightly.

“You should have said something, little one.” Loki presses a cool palm to my forehead and cups the back of my head with his other hand, whispering some unfamiliar words. Gradually, the pain begins to recede and I can almost feel the muscles in my neck and head unclenching. “Better?”

“Yes,” I say wonderingly, sagging against him in relief.

Loki holds me for a few moments, gently pulling pins from my hair until my tresses are free of the heavy coiled style that probably contributed to my headache. “Now, where were we?” he murmurs, easing my dress down around my shoulders and pressing his lips to the newly-exposed skin.

“We don’t have much time before dinner,” I chide, though my body has been aching with desire since he first kissed me.

“I don’t need much time to make you scream my name.” My husband’s eyes are glinting with mischief as he picks me up and presses me against the wall, his nimble fingers already pushing my skirts up my legs. He kisses my neck as he holds me up with one hand, the other seeking out the wetness between my legs. The groan that escapes my lips sounds feral and desperate. Loki moans against my neck in response; the vibration is nearly enough to send me over the edge already.

“I thought your accomplishments today were deserving of a reward,” he coos, “wouldn’t you agree?” He strokes between my folds with slow, deliberate movements, the pace maddening.

“Yes!” My hips thrust forward involuntarily, much to the god’s amusement.

“Very well. You have earned this, my dazzling wife.” Loki uses a spell to keep me pinned to the wall while he fumbles with his clothing. I barely have time to register the surreal feeling of being suspended in midair before his arms snake around me again and I wrap my legs around his waist, relishing the feel of his arousal against me.

Loki’s eyes seem to probe my very soul as he holds my gaze and thrusts into me in one fluid motion, then stilling briefly with his hands clutching my backside, a self-satisfied grin spreading across his face. “You feel like Valhalla itself,” he sighs, moving at a slow pace so that I can feel every inch of him penetrating me. The sensation is glorious, yet somehow I simultaneously crave more friction and Loki seems to sense this. He increases his speed until I am being slammed into the wall with each thrust, eliciting moans and embarrassing little squeaks of pleasure from me.

I am utterly lost when Loki begins to rub the extremely sensitive nub of my clitoris. “Loki...” I whine, feeling heat and pressure pooling quickly in my core.

“You’re going to have to do better than that, little one,” he says playfully. “Remember what I told you? I want to hear you scream it.” He buries his face in my neck, lightly biting my skin as he continues his feverish pace. “Scream my name.”

He buries himself in me once more and waves of bliss crash over my body, the pleasure radiating even to my fingertips and toes. I hear myself screaming Loki’s name as if from a

distance as he thrusts several more times before I feel him pulsing inside me, my walls clenching around his cock as he spills his seed inside me.

When I finally come back to myself, I am grateful that Loki is still clutching me in his arms; otherwise, I would surely collapse into a formless mess. When his breathing has steadied, he picks me up and deposits me on the bed. “Was your reward satisfactory?”

“Most satisfactory,” I confirm.

“Excellent.” With a click of his fingers, Loki changes into fresh clothing and the droplets of sweat on his brow and in his hair disappear. “Darling, I am sorry to leave you like this, but I must speak with Thor before dinner and arrange to have word sent to my father about today’s developments. I’ll return shortly to escort you to dinner. Rest for a bit if you can.” He presses a kiss to my forehead and leaves, closing the door softly behind him. I am already drifting off, sated and happy.

It could be minutes or hours later when I am awakened by a noise that appears to be coming from the direction of the balcony outside. Unsure of whether I’m dreaming or awake, I squint into the darkness until the figure of an unfamiliar Elf emerges from the shadows, moonlight illuminating his eyes, sharp cheekbones, and long fair hair. “Who... who are you?” I manage to ask, my brain too fuzzy to formulate any other words.

“There’s no need for you to know that, princess. All that matters is that I know who you are and that you come without any trouble.” He glances back toward the balcony, where I think I can make out a second figure, then smiles humorlessly and presses his large hand over my nose and mouth.

I have always feared being unable to breathe, and the sensation is every bit as terrifying as I’d imagined. I put up a struggle, thrashing and trying to bite my attacker, but he is strong and my muscles seem to weaken as black spots flood my vision.

For a fleeting moment, I have the wherewithal to wonder if Loki will mourn me, and then blackness mercifully envelops me and my lungs burn no more.

Taken

Chapter Summary

You find yourself a pawn in the hands of the rebelling elves.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I regain consciousness with an audible gasp, feeling as though I've emerged from a horrible dream that lingers just on the unreachable fringe of memory. I gulp in lungfuls of air as I take in my surroundings, trying to steady my ragged breathing and racing heart. I'm laying on a narrow bed in what appears to be a rustic cabin. The dim room contains little except a fireplace and a wooden table and chairs. As my vision adjusts to the flickering firelight, I make out a shadowy figure leaning over the table in the corner. Hearing me stir, the figure turns around and approaches the bed; his features resolve into those of the elf who had attacked me at the palace.

My captor places a cool metal cup to my lips and my throat is so parched that I drink deeply, against my better judgment. I've downed half of the water before I register the bitter aftertaste. "This is poison, isn't it?"

The elf laughs humorlessly. "Simply a potion to keep you compliant. You are of no use to us dead. As it is, you're merely bait to lure the trickster and his brother here. An Asgardian princess without a drop of royal blood who's not married to the heir? Well, no matter. You've served our purposes nicely and we'll soon have Odin groveling at our feet."

The idea of the All-Father groveling seems extremely unlikely, even if his sons are held hostage, but I hold my tongue. Beyond my own predicament, my more immediate concern is how Loki will react to my kidnapping. Even if he feels nothing for me, I know my husband well enough by now to be certain he's going to fly into an irrational rage at the very idea that the elves have taken something that belongs to him. Yet there is absolutely nothing I can do to alert him to the trap he'll be walking into.

Think, you dull girl, think!

But it seems the potion is already taking effect; my thoughts grow fuzzy and a heaviness descends on my body, making the prospect of moving daunting. The warm, languid feeling would almost be pleasant if it weren't so alarming. I'm sorry, dear Loki, that you married a helpless girl who has spent her life with her nose in a book but never learned to defend herself. And I am ever so sorry that even if you manage to find me, you'll become a pawn for the rebellion.

My thoughts drift incoherently and I begin to feel feverish. In one hallucination, I manage to send word to Loki and Thor to stay far away from this place; in the next moment, I am nestled in Loki's bed back home and the whole ordeal has been a dream. A menacing creature that I instinctively know to be a Dark Elf enters the room and speaks with the other elf, but I cannot say whether the scene is real or imagined.

Just before I fall into a fitful sleep, I implore any god who might be listening to guide me and provide a path to escape without endangering the princes.

~*~*~*~

In my delirium, it is impossible to know how much time has passed. When I awaken feeling slightly more clear-headed, the muted light coming in through the small, dingy window above the bed suggests it is evening. No one else is in the room, so with great effort I corral my wobbly limbs enough to kneel on the bed and peer through the glass, desperate for a clue as to where I've been taken and how heavily the cabin is guarded. The scenery outside is nondescript: A scattering of trees and long grasses with mountains in the distance.

A hulking beast suddenly enters my vision, perhaps the Dark Elf I thought I had seen earlier, and I hastily drop below the window sill with my heart hammering in my chest. There is no hope of slipping out on my own, then. The door swings open just as I crouch down and the light-haired elf from earlier strides in.

"Looking to escape, princess?" The way he spits out my title makes it sound more like an insult. "I think you'll find yourself a pitiful match for the warriors posted outside."

As if for emphasis, he swiftly crosses the room and backhands me across the face. I fall back onto the bed, tears stinging my eyes. He walks over to the fire and stares into the flames thoughtfully. "I had expected your saviors to arrive by now. Strange. Perhaps we've misjudged your value."

Deep down, I know he's likely just toying with my emotions, but despair washes over me and I curl up into the fetal position. I nibble on some bread the elf offers and even allow him to coax me to have another sip of the potion, hoping I can sleep again and forget about the fact that at least a day has passed with no sign that my rescue is imminent.

But then a shout and the thud of something heavy hitting the ground breaks the silence, and hope and dread rise in equal measure. My keeper runs outside to see what's happening, so I risk another look out the window. What I see astounds me; Loki is perched on the back of an enormous Dark Elf, using one of his daggers to slit the elf's throat while pulling the other from his back. The sight is nauseating, but I am mesmerised and can't tear my eyes away as my husband nimbly leaps from the falling body and waves his hand, surrounding two more advancing opponents with several illusions of himself.

Loki is certainly holding his own, but where are Thor and Sif and the warriors of Alfheim who are supposedly our allies? Surely they haven't sent Loki to fend for himself?

I have watched my husband spar with his brother on the palace training grounds, but seeing him in action in a real fight is truly astonishing. He moves with as much grace as power,

leaping and dodging and striking with his daggers with glowing blue handles as if executing a seamlessly choreographed sequence. His opponents swing their swords wildly, trying to determine which of the Lokis surrounding them is the actual God of Mischief. Loki swiftly takes advantage of their confusion, eviscerating one elf, then rolling on the ground to retrieve a discarded sword. He roars like an enraged bilgesnipe as he jumps to his feet, evading a thrust from the other elf's blade before swinging the sword, which slices cleanly through his enemy's throat.

I begin to swoon as the elf's head hits the ground. The last thing I see before collapsing onto the bed is Loki tossing the sword aside, his daggers appearing back in his hands as if out of nowhere. I choke back a sob; I have no idea how many guards were posted at the cabin and it's impossible to know whether Loki is still in peril or not.

The door swings open and devastation settles over my body like a heavy cloak when the elf who had been watching over me limps inside, bleeding from a gash on his forehead. "It seems your champion has more pressing responsibilities than coming to your rescue. He slaughtered the guards and then vanished like a coward," he sneers, pressing a cloth to his wound. His smug expression becomes one of shock when Loki materializes in front of him, thrusting a dagger deep into his chest.

Loki lifts the dagger and the elf's entire body is jerked up off the floor along with it. Someone is screaming hysterically; I am so dazed that I only vaguely recognize that the sound is coming from me. Loki lifts the dying elf until their faces are nearly touching, then snarls, "I want nothing more than to tear you apart limb by limb until you wish you'd never been born. Fortunately for you, I must attend to my wife, you elvish-mark'd, abortive, rooting hog."

With that parting insult, Loki yanks his dagger free with a revolting tearing sound and turns away from his limp victim, his eyes intense as he focuses on me. He crosses the room in three long strides, crouching beside the bed and gently touching my face. "You're burning up. What have they done to you, little one?"

"I'm fine," I lie. "They only gave me a potion to sedate me. Are you hurt? Where are Thor and the others?"

He shakes his head impatiently. "Not a scratch. Thor and the elves... well, they wished to spend hours talking and planning, strategizing. I could not bear to dawdle any longer so I set off on my own. You would have been here for weeks if those dullards had their way."

"Oh, Loki." Despite the effects of the potion, I somehow know that my husband has likely sabotaged all the progress we made in our negotiations with the elves. And yet, how can I be anything but grateful for his impulsive act? "Thank you for coming to my aid. I was afraid you would be better off if you were rid of me," I sob.

He awkwardly wraps his arms around me, cradling my head against his chest. There is blood spattered on his armor but I'm feeling too disoriented and emotionally overwrought to care. "My darling, how could you possibly believe that?" His voice is strained. He takes a deep breath and brushes my hair off of my damp forehead. "On this journey, I've been reminded time and time again that I married an exceptional woman. I'm ashamed that it took having

you snatched away from me, and not knowing whether you were alive or dead, to come to the realization..." He swallows and presses his forehead to mine.

I barely allow myself to breathe as I wait for him to compose himself. Tentatively, I reach up to thread my fingers through his hair. "Loki?" I whisper.

"Look at me, little one." I obediently lift my head and meet his eyes. Loki cups my face in trembling hands. I have never seen my husband so rattled. "I love you," he says hoarsely. "I should have known it from the beginning. *I love you.*"

This astonishing revelation only makes me cry harder; I had never truly believed Loki could fall in love with me or that I would hear those precious words spoken in his velvety voice. Months of tension, insecurity, and angst seem to lift from me, leaving behind a light, warm feeling in my chest. "... " I am sobbing too forcefully to tell him I feel the same way, my chest heaving as I struggle for breath.

"I know, love, I know," Loki soothes. "Just breathe. We must get you to a healer. I'm concerned about what was in that potion."

I nod, feeling like a child as he stands and picks me up, cradling me in his arms. "Hold on tight, little wife."

I close my eyes as we are enveloped by green mist. When I open them again, we are once again in the elvish palace, surrounded by the outraged, accusatory faces of Thor, Sif, and assorted other Asgardian and elvish dignitaries.

Chapter End Notes

I have almost no experience writing fight scenes, as you could probably tell. Hopefully, this one wasn't too terrible.

"Thou elvish-mark'd, abortive, rooting hog" is a Shakespearean insult that appears in Richard III. It seemed to be perfect for this situation and the insults of that time period sound so wonderful in Loki's voice.

The kudos, comments, and subscriptions for this story have really multiplied recently, and I'm just bursting with happiness! Thank you from the bottom of my heart! I am full of ideas for this story and I can't wait to continue sharing it with all of you.

Recovery

Chapter Summary

Picking up the pieces after Loki comes to your rescue.

Faced with a cacophony of voices shouting questions and reproaching Loki for his reckless behavior, all I can do is squeeze my eyes shut and hide my face against Loki's chest. I have been feeling progressively weaker and am now perilously close to fainting. Unconsciousness might be a blessing in this situation.

Thor is bellowing something about Loki disrespecting our hosts and putting all of us in danger, but his tirade abruptly ends when he sees me shudder against Loki and the other voices soon cease as well. A tense silence envelops the great hall.

"Is she well?" Thor ventures hesitantly.

"She is alive, no thanks to you," Loki says coolly. "You may berate me at a later time, but I have more pressing matters I must attend to. Could someone direct me to the infirmary?"

I drift into a light sleep, awakening a short time later as an elf with shimmering auburn hair is placing cold compresses on my feverish skin. I'm reclining on fluffy feather pillows on a bed that takes up most of the small chamber. My husband is seated a few feet away, his arms crossed and his brow furrowed as he watches the healer work.

"Welcome to the Houses of Healing, highness," the healer says in one of the most soothing voices I've ever heard. "I am Elora and I will be caring for you. Prince Loki has told me some of your symptoms, but we must also address their source. Can you describe the potion you ingested?"

I recite all the details I can recall about the drink and its effects, with Elora coaxing me to pause periodically to sip water. After asking several questions and considering my responses, the healer says she believes the potion was concocted from common plants and herbs which won't cause any long-term harm. She glides away to brew a tea that will bring my fever down and help flush the potion from my body.

As soon as Elora disappears from sight, Loki comes to sit on the edge of the bed, his mouth set in a grim line and his posture tense. "How kind of the elves to be concerned for your welfare now after they allow you to be snatched from your bed under their noses. I should never let you out of my sight again."

At first, I think he is joking, but his almost painful grip on my hand suggests otherwise. *What's that Midgardian expression about a gilded cage?* I wonder idly. "My dear, you cannot keep me from living my life because of one unfortunate incident."

“Can’t I?” He asks petulantly. “I am your husband and your prince. You are mine to command.”

I want to give him a good shake but I have neither the strength nor the courage to do so at the moment. “As you wish,” I say in the frostiest tone I can muster. Inwardly, I resolve to continue this discussion once I’m feeling better.

Sensing my hostility, Loki stands abruptly; the lamplight reveals the strain on his finely chiseled features, his skin even more pallid than usual, and I instantly regret my resentment. “I’m sorry,” I say in a timid, uncertain voice, the voice I’d used so often in the earliest days of our marriage when I could never be sure of my footing around him. “I’m not myself. I truly am grateful for everything you’ve done for me, and for your concern.”

Loki presses a finger to my lips and shakes his head, a tender look in his eyes, and I know all is forgiven. “At one time I thought you would be a pleasant diversion. It would be much easier if that’s all you were, little one, but I had not the foresight to predict that I would one day be in your thrall, worrying over you and desperate to protect you from harm.”

Overcome, I clasp my husband’s hand and he lifts mine to his lips, kissing each knuckle slowly and reverently. “I suppose I should return downstairs to face the wrath of my brother and those horrid elves,” he says reluctantly. “Will you be alright here on your own?”

“Of course; I’ve been well cared for. But, Loki... please try to be reasonable. I’m certain they were only doing what they thought best for me and everyone involved in this situation.”

His sly smirk tells me he will be anything but reasonable, but I can only watch helplessly as the god confidently walks off to face the consequences of his rashness.

~*~*~*~

I awaken the next morning to find Thor occupying Loki’s chair, looking uncharacteristically glum. I know then that Loki had not managed to make amends the previous night. “Please tell me they don’t have him locked up in a dungeon,” I say wryly, almost afraid of the answer.

“No, but I am afraid Loki has been sent home lest he does any more damage to our cause,” Thor says, dragging the chair closer to the bed.

Though I believe that was a wise decision, I feel a twinge of irritation that we were not given time to say our goodbyes. “Dare I ask what happened last night?” I struggle to sit up until Thor arranges the pillows to prop me up.

“Well, my brother began his atonement by berating the elven king about failing to keep the Asgardian delegation safe in his own palace.” Thor rubs his forehead as if even the memory pains him. “As you can imagine, his theatrics were not well-received. The king then tried to banish all of us from his kingdom but he was persuaded to continue talks today, provided that Loki is nowhere near this realm. I’m sorry, sister; this is the only way I could try to salvage the progress you’ve made.”

“There’s no need to apologize for doing what was necessary. If only I hadn’t come, this entire disaster could have been avoided...” I swipe uselessly at the tears welling in my eyes with my sleeve.

“If you hadn’t come, we would likely be returning to Asgard with nothing to show for our efforts,” Thor says, taking my hand. “Mother knew what she was doing when she sent you here. You have done our family proud. It distresses me that Loki may have irreparably damaged our accord.”

“It breaks my heart as well,” I admit. “But, brother, I know the All-Father will want to harshly punish Loki. Do you think you could try to make him understand that Loki acted out of love and concern? I believe he has grown since we were wed, but the king is more likely to heed your words than mine.”

“I shall try, though my father once said he believes that Loki is incapable of truly loving anyone but himself.”

We fall silent as Elora comes in with a servant girl, bearing my breakfast and medications. The healer pronounces that my fever is down and I am on the mend, though she orders several more days of bed rest, to my dismay.

Thor waits patiently until I manage to swallow a few mouthfuls of food before speaking again. “My sweet sister, I’ve been thinking...”

“Be careful not to overexert yourself, Thor,” I retort with a smirk, eliciting a hearty laugh from him.

“You sounded disturbingly like Loki just now,” he grins. “As I was saying, once you have recovered, would you like to train so you’re better able to defend yourself? This probably should have been a part of your lessons from the time of your betrothal. That is not to say what happened was in any way your fault. Loki, Sif, and I will help you if you like.”

“I would be delighted to learn from such accomplished teachers. To be honest, this is a part of my education that has long been neglected. Even my sister was quite skilled at sparring before she was married, but I always had my nose in a book and my parents saw fit to encourage that. Loki could not have chosen someone more woefully unprepared to be a princess,” I say wryly.

A servant appears in the doorway, anxiously wringing her hands. “Excuse me, your highnesses, but you have a visitor,” she announces.

When Frigga enters the chamber, I could not have been more stunned if the Norns themselves had graced us with their presence. Thor and I exchange an uneasy look as if we were children caught doing something forbidden. He stands politely to greet his mother, who touches his arm distractedly and continues on to my side. “I have been so concerned about you, child,” she says, leaning over to peer into my eyes and placing her cool hand on my forehead. “Elora is renowned for her healing skills but I hated to think of you so far from home after your ordeal.”

The queen's presence is so soothing, I almost feel as if I were in my bed in my childhood home with my mother hovering over me. Yet I know I am not the sole reason she has traveled to Alfheim. "Mother, what brings you here?" Thor asks, speaking for both of us.

Frigga sighs, gently arranging my hair on the pillow. "Your father sent me to placate the elves and finalize the terms you agreed to, now that we've lost our best diplomat." Her eyes twinkle as she beams at me. "I told him you and the others are perfectly capable of doing so, my son, but he was adamant. The Light Elves and I have greatly respected one another for many centuries."

Thor seems rather dejected at his mother arriving to bail us out and I cannot fault him for that. "How is Loki?" I ask cautiously.

"Seething, but that shall pass soon enough. I was able to convince Odin to hold his judgment until we finish our work here. I was taken aback, though not displeased, at how distraught my son has been over what happened to you."

"Yes, well, he recently confessed that he cares about me quite a bit, with help from a certain red gown," I say nonchalantly, seizing the first opportunity I've had to broach the subject with the All-Mother.

"Is that so?" Frigga asks guilelessly, arching a delicate eyebrow. "How interesting. I suspected that Loki might need a little push in the right direction. How funny that a red gown could accomplish so much."

I smile both at her craftiness and Thor's bewildered expression. I should probably be irate over her meddling but I am too satisfied with the result to complain.

Frigga and Thor soon depart for their meeting with the elves; before she leaves, the queen presses a book into my hands. "A gift," she says simply, and bids me to rest until they return.

As soon as I am alone, I eagerly examine the volume, a beautiful leather-bound copy of William Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream." A scrap of paper is tucked inside. I pull it free and find a note written in green ink in immaculate handwriting.

A favorite of mine. There is mischief aplenty to remind you of your husband until we are reunited. You constantly invade my thoughts, little one. Must you leave me in such exquisite torment?

- L.

A Return and a Departure

Chapter Summary

The delegation returns to Asgard, Frigga continues to fuss over you, and the warriors depart.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The delegation that returns to Asgard two days later arrives in sullen, dejected silence, in sharp contrast to the high spirits in which we'd departed. Frigga and the others had managed to salvage our accord with the elves, albeit with some stipulations; the most significant - and contentious - granted elvish leaders full authority over all Asgardian warriors deployed to assist in putting down the rebellion. Thor and Sif are outraged and the news will surely not go over well in the barracks once it becomes common knowledge.

I make the return journey seated behind Thor on his enormous warhorse. By the time we are approaching the palace, I've been overtaken by fatigue once again and doze off with my head resting on the prince's back. Awakening with a start, I realize I've been drooling on his cloak and straighten my posture just in time for Odin, the healer Lady Eir, and several other members of the court to greet us. My heart sinks when I see that Loki is not among them.

Lady Eir appears at my side even before Thor lifts me down from the saddle. "Welcome back, your highness. Queen Frigga has asked me to examine you as soon as possible." She is already scrutinizing me, no doubt taking note of my bleary eyes and ashen pallor. I have spent the past few days reassuring everyone that I'm quite well, but when I looked in the mirror this morning I realized why no one has seemed convinced.

"I had hoped to visit with my husband," I say, dismayed and wondering how many examinations could possibly be necessary. All I want at the moment is to rest in Loki's arms.

Frigga turns to me from where she'd been conversing with Odin. Her smile is sympathetic, but she says firmly, "Go and get settled into bed in your chambers, dear one. Lady Eir will see to you there and then we will send for Loki."

Magda and several other handmaids have been hard at work preparing my chambers for my arrival; a pleasant fire warms the air and the bed is already turned down and the curtains closed though it is afternoon. Magda is nearly trembling with excitement and relief as she helps me into a soft, lacy nightdress. "My lady, I was afraid I would never see you again! The rumors were just horrible! One of the kitchen girls said the kidnapping was actually a plot for your husband to poison you, but I told her 'That's absurd, Prince Loki is in love with my mistress' and she..."

My head swims as she prattles on until I finally shush her as one would a child. “Shh, as you can see, I’m fine. You mustn’t concern yourself with rumors, though I do appreciate you defending me.”

The queen and Lady Eir enter my chambers as Magda is plaiting my hair into a loose braid. Once I am tucked into bed, the two healers hover over me, poking and prodding and talking about me as if I’m not in the room.

Finally, Frigga addresses me. “Lady Eir does not find it necessary to examine you with the Soul Forge at this time, but that will change if you do not fully recover in a few days’ time.” She gently turns over my wrist, peering at a faint rash that has appeared on my arms.

Eir nods, brushing a stray lock of chestnut hair from her forehead. “I believe the potion given to you by the elves was meant to be a mild sedative, but they likely prepared a dose appropriate for a full-grown elf, much too potent for you. Rest is the best medicine for you, and I will prepare a remedy to help your body detoxify.”

“I’ve spent the past few days resting,” I protest, fighting against the weights that seem to have appeared on my eyelids.

Frigga fixes me with the steely gaze she normally reserves for her sons when they are at their most obstinate. “I know, darling, but you’ll have to endure it for a few days more. Please do not force me to resort to a spell to keep you in your chambers, or worse, confined to your bed.”

Suddenly I am grateful that I was raised by a mother who was not a sorceress. “Yes, All-Mother,” I say meekly.

She clasps my hand, the customary warmth back in her eyes. “Thank you. Now, I will send Loki in if you wish; my son has been pacing outside your room for quite some time.”

Loki gives his mother and the healer the most cursory of greetings as they depart, then sits on the side of the bed to remove his boots. “My love, I am so relieved that you are back home where you belong.” He lays down beside me, gathering me into his arms and brushing his lips against my cheek. “Mother tells me you are still unwell.”

“I’m feeling somewhat better, but I’ve been ordered to rest for a few days more. It’s rather dull being an invalid.”

“Trust me when I say I speak from experience: When Mother orders you to do something, you do it without complaint. Otherwise, she has her ways of making you comply.”

“So I was warned,” I sigh.

My husband laughs. “I’ll find ways to keep you occupied, my impatient little wife. Did you enjoy the play I sent you?”

“Oh yes, it was delightful,” I enthuse. “It’s so strange though, Puck reminded me of someone but I can’t seem to place who it could be...” I feign deep thought, tapping a finger against my

chin.

“Oh, but darling, Puck can only dream of the mischief I have wrought.” He sounds incredibly smug at this reminder of his accomplishments.

I chuckle, surprised at Loki’s pleasant and flirtatious disposition. I had been somewhat apprehensive about what kind of mood I would find him in following his banishment from Alfheim. “Has your father spoken to you about... er... what happened?” I ask tentatively, fearful of unleashing the resentment that always seems to be simmering below the surface in regards to Odin.

“Oh, he has plenty of ideas for how I should be disciplined.” Loki sounds utterly disinterested, even bored, at the prospect. “The only one he’s decreed for certain is that I won’t be accompanying Thor and his friends on their little excursion to end the rebellion in Alfheim, which is no great disappointment. In my brother’s absence, he wishes me to take you riding and to the marketplace to show the people of Asgard what dutiful royal children we are. It seems he still believes that squiring you around the city is a punishment for me.”

Though it is selfish of me, I am relieved that Loki will not be returning to Alfheim, both because I won’t have to worry about his welfare and because he’ll remain at my side while his affection for me is still such a revelation. “That sounds as though it will be very painful for you.”

“Yes, well, not half as painful as waiting for you to get well so I can thoroughly ravish you,” he growls, nipping at my ear and laughing when I squeal and hide my burning face in a pillow. Loki responds by tugging on my braid as if we were schoolchildren, an act so juvenile and yet so perfectly *Loki* that I giggle until I can barely breathe.

“That is the best enticement for recovering that I’ve heard yet,” I respond once I catch my breath.

“I promise to make it worth your while,” Loki pledges, his voice so seductive that I wish I could claim a miraculous total recovery right this minute. Instead, I cuddle up against him while he reads to me, rapidly lulling me into a deep and dreamless slumber.

~*~*~*~

After several days of rest, I am feeling well enough that even Frigga and Eir agree that fresh air and light exercise would be beneficial for me. I am ecstatic to be freed from the confinement of my chambers, though I am only going as far as the training grounds to learn some self-defense skills.

The palace grounds are bustling with activity; Thor’s hand-picked band of warriors is preparing to depart, packing supplies and ensuring their weapons are in top condition. Loki appears to be unaffected by his exclusion from the endeavor, patiently instructing me even when it becomes painfully apparent that I am not a natural fighter or athlete.

“Try it again,” he says, handing me a knife. “This one is lighter and should be easier for you to handle.” I focus on the target and he makes a few small adjustments to my stance. But

when I throw the knife, it bounces harmlessly off the target, just as it had the first dozen or so times I'd attempted this.

Frustrated, I kick at the ground. "I don't understand what I'm doing wrong! You make it look so easy!"

Loki is biting his lip, barely suppressing his mirth. "It's only your first day of training, dearest. We haven't even discovered the right weapon for you yet. Let's see..." He disappears into the armory and soon returns with two swords in hand. "Shall we try these?"

I brighten considerably. "Oh! I can be a shieldmaiden like Eowyn in *The Lord of the Rings*!"

Loki raises an eyebrow. "Another heroine of Midgardian literature, I presume?"

"She could beat you in a fight," I pout, though my husband's skill with seidr would almost certainly give him the upper hand.

He simply smirks and pulls me in for a kiss. "It's just such fun to rile you up, and you expect the God of Mischief to resist such temptation?" He hands me a sword, then promptly vanishes.

I huff at his antics, testing out the feel of the sword in my hands. I am walking over to a target when three identical Lokis materialize in front of me, casually swinging their swords and laughing at my consternation. I lash out at the god on my right, clumsily swinging my sword and slicing through his abdomen, causing the illusion to flicker and then disappear. It's a small victory, but I'll take it. I turn my attention to the other two, who are now circling me. I jab the sword at one and gasp when it strikes solid metal; the real Loki has blocked the blow and I drop my sword in shock. Refusing to surrender, I pick up one of the knives I'd tried to throw earlier and hurl it at the remaining illusion. The throw is no more effective than my other attempts but the knife does the trick, doing away with the Loki copy.

"Well done, little one!" Loki praises me. "That may not have been pretty, but you got the job done. Nice improvisation with the knife."

"That was hardly a fair fight," I say, but his eyes are shining with mischief and it's impossible for me to truly be angry.

We are putting the weapons away when a servant comes to inform us that Thor and the other warriors will soon depart and the court is gathering to see them off. I had not expected them to leave so soon. We join Odin, Frigga, and the court in wishing the warriors a safe journey and a successful mission.

"I will miss you," I tell Sif tearfully, admiring how noble she looks in full armor, sitting with perfect posture in the saddle, her horse's coat brushed to a lustrous shine.

"You'll hardly know we're gone," she smiles. "A little uprising like this? Practically child's play." She squeezes my hand and moves on to bid her family farewell.

“Sister! It is good to see you returned to health,” Thor booms, dismounting so he can embrace me. He moves to do the same to his brother, but Loki takes a step back and shakes his head, so Thor merely slaps him on the back, nearly knocking Loki off his feet.

“Be safe,” I tell Thor. “I don’t want to hear of any stupid heroics from you.”

His delighted laughter is somehow comforting. “You need not worry. Take care of each other.” Thor kisses my hand, winks, and mounts his horse, riding off to gather the rest of the riders for the journey through the Bifrost.

I ask the Norns to protect our warriors as they depart, a splendid sight with their banners waving proudly in the breeze and their armor gleaming in the sunlight. Loki pulls me against his side as I wipe away tears, and we are pensive as we watch the horses and riders fade into the distance.

Chapter End Notes

Every time I log onto Ao3 and am reminded that this story now has more than 4,000 hits and 250+ kudos, I am once again amazed at the response. Thank you to each and every one of you who has taken the time to read, comment, and/or leave kudos. <3 You are truly awesome and you have helped to boost my confidence as a writer.

I hope you enjoyed this somewhat fluffy chapter. Originally, it was supposed to be mostly about the princess being annoyed at being forced to stay in bed and recover, but that ended up being really boring and I just love her playful relationship with Loki, so those scenes kind of wrote themselves. I regret nothing! XD

Joy and Despair

Chapter Summary

A joyous announcement garners a bewildering response.

The several days Thor had expected to need to root out the leaders of the uprising turns into several weeks; more than a month has now passed with little result. The latest word we received from Thor indicates that the rebels may have gone into hiding on Svartalfheim and the warriors will soon travel to the realm of the Dark Elves if their work on Alfheim continues to be fruitless. Yet, though I miss Sif and Thor's companionship, their prolonged absence allows me the joy of watching Loki blossom once he is free of the considerable shadow cast by his brother.

In the early days after the warriors' departure, the All-Father caused a stir with his reluctance to enter the Odinsleep with his elder son and heir away from Asgard, despite Frigga and Loki's protestations that they were perfectly capable of handling the affairs of the realm. Loki raged about his father's lack of trust for days until one morning at breakfast, Frigga asked for his advice on an issue and his thoughtful, shrewd response impressed even Odin. Since then, the three of them can often be found discussing policy and politics at mealtimes, and though I am usually a quiet observer, it is entertaining and gratifying to see Loki in the role of advisor.

I also feel we are making progress in our effort to change Loki's image among the Asgardians. As instructed by Odin, we spend our days riding out to various points of interest in the capital, wandering through the marketplace, and visiting Asgard's wealth of museums and theaters. I particularly enjoy our excursions to the market, where we sample the food and drink for sale and my husband indulges me with gifts of jewelry and a beautiful fur-lined cloak. I gently prod him to take an interest in the work of the artisans we encounter; soon, we are greeting them by name and they are always ready to present us with handmade trinkets. Children flock to me when we appear in public, a phenomenon that has always amused Loki, and he enthralls them with illusions and other tricks. It is perhaps the happiest time of my life.

We are due to venture to the marketplace and then visit my parents one crisp morning when I awaken feeling nauseated and lightheaded. I've been looking forward to our outing, so I drink tea as I dress, hoping to calm my roiling stomach. This only makes me feel worse. When Loki arrives at my chambers to fetch me, he finds me hunched over in one of the chairs by the fire, barely breathing and sitting as still as possible as I concentrate on not vomiting.

Loki peers at me anxiously, pushing my hair aside so he can see my face. "What's the matter, little one? You look quite pale."

“I’ll be fine. I’m just feeling a bit ill.” Unsteadily, I try to rise, swaying on my feet. Loki’s cat-like reflexes spring into action and he catches me before I swoon.

“Clearly, you are not fine, and if this has anything to do with that elvish poison, I’ll have all of Alfheim on their knees, begging me for mercy. We must consult Lady Eir without delay.” He hoists me in his arms, striding purposefully out of my rooms. My guards give us uneasy looks as we pass but Loki silences their questions with a fierce scowl.

Lady Eir is with a patient when we arrive at the infirmary and I manage to convince the slightly frantic Loki that my condition is not dire and we can wait until the healer completes her work. In fact, I begin to feel better as we sit quietly, my head resting on Loki’s shoulder. “I think something I ate must have upset my stomach. There’s really no reason to waste Lady Eir’s time,” I declare, looking hopefully up at my husband’s face, which is pinched with worry.

Loki rolls his eyes. “A nice try, but no. This may turn out to be nothing; Lady Eir will be the judge of that, not you.”

A short time later, I watch in fascination as Lady Eir operates the Soul Forge, trying to discern what exactly the healer is seeing as she examines the field above me, but the process is beyond my comprehension. Loki’s eyes also follow Eir’s hands. If he understands what he’s seeing, he keeps the knowledge to himself. I clasp my hands together tightly to keep them from trembling; what if Loki’s suspicions are correct and there is something terribly wrong with me?

The atmosphere in the infirmary is so hushed that the healer’s surprised intake of breath is as shocking as a sudden shattering of glass. The nervous fluttering in my stomach increases and I swallow back the bile rising in my throat. Lady Eir’s face is now animated as she concentrates on her work. Loki shifts in his chair impatiently. “Lady Eir, clearly you see something amiss. Please tell me what is wrong with my wife.”

“Wrong?” Eir raises her eyebrows, a slow smile lighting up her face. “Why, there’s nothing *wrong* with her at all, your highness. The princess is expecting a child.”

I stare stupidly at the healer, my mind refusing to absorb her words. Surely she is mistaken. Loki, on the other hand, regards me with a look of wonder on his face. “A child? Truly?” he whispers.

“Yes, and both mother and baby are strong and healthy. It has been much too long since we’ve had a royal child running about the palace.” Eir’s eyes twinkle as she beckons my husband over to show him... well, whatever it is that has allowed her to give this diagnosis.

I can only lie stunned on the table, feeling like a stranger in my own body. I had conjured up plenty of alarming possibilities for the cause of my illness, but pregnancy never occurred to me, unless I had conveniently ignored the mere thought. Truth be told, I had never longed for children like many of the women I grew up with; yet now, the idea that I am carrying Loki’s son or daughter is not unappealing.

Lady Eir shuts down the Soul Forge and respectfully withdraws to an outer chamber, leaving my husband and me alone with this monumental discovery. “Well, little one,” Loki says, his voice husky with emotion, “this is unexpected. But not, I trust, unwelcome news?” He kneels down beside me and rests his head on my abdomen.

“It’s wonderful,” I assure him, smoothing his hair. “I just need some time to become accustomed to the idea.”

“Take all the time you need, darling. We’ll announce it to Mother and Father once you’re ready. In fact, I like the idea of this being our little secret for a few days.” Loki cocks his head as if listening to something in my womb. “*Our daughter* will be our little secret,” he corrects himself.

“Our daughter? You can tell it’s a girl?” An image comes to mind of a little girl with Loki’s raven hair and green eyes; I am suddenly overcome by awe and love for this new life and her father. A sob hitches in my throat.

“Yes. I could feel her presence as soon as I touched you. She is as lovely as her mother.”

“You can’t know that,” I scold mildly, smiling through my tears all the same.

“Oh, but I do,” Loki says, moving up my body to give me a tender kiss. “Just as I know that she’ll be extraordinary.”

I cannot argue with that.

~*~*~*~

We swear Lady Eir to secrecy, but it is no secret among my servants that I am often ill in the morning as of late, and so the fun of my conspiracy with Loki must come to an end before my condition becomes common knowledge. I had taken great pleasure in exchanging furtive glances and smiles while in public, which made me feel as though we were involved in a forbidden love affair. I almost wish we could go on concealing our news for as long as possible, but imagining Frigga’s reaction to learning of the upcoming birth of her first grandchild is incentive enough.

One week after we learn that I’m expecting, we request a private dinner with the king and queen. Loki had suggested a grand announcement in the throne room, the idea of which makes me feel even more queasy. In the end, we compromise on a private meeting with his parents followed by a public announcement at a later date. I regret that Thor cannot be present, knowing how ecstatic he will be at becoming an uncle, but I resolve to write him with the news as soon as we speak to Odin and Frigga.

Loki has ordered a sumptuous feast for the occasion, complete with several varieties of wine. He makes sure we have all eaten our fill before he raises his goblet; I have never seen him so proud. “Father, Mother, may I propose a toast?”

The king, queen, and I raise our goblets in response, Frigga’s eyes searching her son’s face for some clue as to what he’s up to this time. “To my brilliant wife and our already beloved

daughter, who will join our family in just a few months' time."

I beam at my prince, my eyes misting with tears (I seem to be forever on the verge of crying these days) and realize something is not right. Odin and Frigga have not said a word. Loki's expression is expectant, then bewildered, as he waits for his parents to react to what should be joyous news.

The absolute silence might have lasted for seconds or for hours; time seems to have lost all meaning in this excruciating span. The king and queen sit frozen as if under a spell, identical looks of shock and uncertainty on their faces. And then the spell is broken and Loki's parents are rising to congratulate us with forced enthusiasm.

"I had hoped for this, of course, but I never thought... I'm just stunned!" Frigga is saying, embracing me. I try to smile as I meet Loki's eyes but I am wounded and puzzled by the response to his announcement. There is a dangerous glint in his eyes. I can hardly breathe, I am so anxious.

"By the Norns, what was that?!" Loki lashes out. Frigga flinches beside me. "I tell you some of the happiest news of my life and you look at me like I've brought on Ragnarok. Should I have had the grace to wait until Thor marries and fathers an heir before having children of my own? Are you sick at the thought of bringing another disappointment like me into the world?"

I want nothing more than to silence him, to tell him that our daughter could never be a disappointment, but I cannot seem to form words. Odin takes Loki's hands in his, his pain palpable. "My son, you do not understand..."

Before he can continue, Odin collapses at Loki's feet. Frigga and I rush to the All-Father's side, screaming for the guards, who stream into the dining room as soon as the sound of our distress reaches their ears. Frigga asks them to carry her husband to his bed, frantically declaring that he has waited too long to enter into the Odinsleep and has little strength left.

In the midst of the chaos, Loki steps disdainfully over his father and leaves the room, striding down the corridor as if nothing were amiss and vanishing into the depths of the palace.

Worship

Chapter Summary

Though you are no closer to solving the mystery of Loki's parents' dismay at your pregnancy, you and your husband share an interlude that helps you forget your troubles.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I see and hear nothing of Loki for three seemingly interminable days.

On the first day, I venture to my husband's chambers but am refused entry by his guards. When I hear screaming and what sounds like objects being thrown against the wall, I cannot help but feel relieved at being turned away. I return to pacing helplessly in my rooms, occasionally joining Frigga in her vigil at Odin's bedside. I long to ask her about the reason for the All-Father's distress but somehow I cannot find the right words, my voice deserting me whenever I feel courageous enough to broach the subject. And so we sit in silence, clutching each other's hand as if the physical contact could reduce the ever-widening emotional gulf between us.

When I am alone, I torture myself by obsessing over what could possibly explain Odin and Frigga's alarm. When none of my hypotheses hold up to my own scrutiny, I go to the library and read about ancient prophecies. As ridiculous as this task may be, it does occupy my mind for a few hours. I learn quite a bit about Ragnarok but fail to find any information that might explain my current dilemma.

By the third mostly sleepless night, I feel so highly strung that I think I might jump out of my own skin. I give up on my book after reading the same sentence about five times and put on my cloak, pulling the hood over my face so I can walk anonymously in the gardens. My brother follows at a respectful distance. I know he longs to question me about what's amiss but he takes his duty seriously and allows me to brood, the only sound the crunching of our boots in the snow. The bracing air and exercise soothe me enough that I think I may be able to take some rest, if not fall asleep.

I am walking through the hushed halls of the palace en route to my chambers when a movement in the dimly-lit throne room catches my eye. Pausing in the entryway, I am startled to find Loki seated on his father's throne, staring pensively into the distance, his posture exhausted and vulnerable. His eyes still fixed straight ahead, he asks, "Little one? What are you doing up?"

"I could ask the same of you," I say softly, feeling as though I'm speaking to a spooked horse that may bolt at any time. Is he really going to behave as if he didn't just disappear for days,

refusing to speak to me when I desperately needed comfort and reassurance? I realize I am squeezing my hands into fists, tensing at the sight of my husband even though I ache for reconciliation.

I tell Enar to return to his post and I will follow along shortly, then I tentatively approach the throne, uncertain as to why Loki has chosen to sit here, of all places. He extends a hand to me but I remain just out of reach, anxiously biting my lip. “So, you’ve decided to speak to me again, just like that?” I intend to sound stern but my voice wavers traitorously.

“I never *stopped* speaking to you, per se,” Loki replies smoothly. “What was there to say after that debacle with my parents?”

“I’m not sure, but the past few days have been awful. I don’t want to do this alone. I’m your wife, Loki. You can’t just shut me out when troubles arise. We’re supposed to be in this together.”

Loki had been studying his hands but he meets my eyes upon hearing my plaintive words, his eyes a rich emerald hue in the shadows of the great hall. “Well spoken, little one. It was wrong of me to abandon you at such a time. Can you forgive me?”

I fold my arms, unimpressed. “I didn’t hear an apology. And you did more than just abandon me when I was in pain. You walked out on your father when he was lying on the floor and your mother was frantic. How could you be so cruel?”

“I was cruel?” he asks coldly. “What of the way they made me feel?”

In spite of my fury and disappointment, my heart aches for him; he sounds like a young boy who is eager for his parents’ approval. “I know; they hurt me too, but that does not excuse your behavior. Please speak with Frigga and offer her your support. I’ve been trying to be strong for her but she needs her son. And I want our daughter to have a good relationship with her grandmother. Let’s not punish her for our resentments.”

Loki’s Adam’s apple bobs as he swallows, then nods resignedly. “As loathe as I am to admit it, you’re right. I will speak with Mother and see if I can make amends and learn what’s troubling her and Father.” He sighs, pressing his mouth into a grim line. “And, darling?”

“Yes?” I raise my brows, wondering if he’s actually going to apologize properly.

“I am sorry, truly.”

“And this is my husband being truthful with me, not Loki Liesmith?”

He smirks briefly, amused, but becomes serious once again when he sees that I’m in earnest. “Yes. Will you forgive me?”

“I forgive you.” I am not completely satisfied that he is truly contrite about his behavior toward his parents but I will accept his apology for now and see that he keeps his promise to make things right with Frigga. The emotional highs and lows of the past few days have left me weary. I move closer to Loki to embrace him but he grasps my arms and pulls me down to

sit on his knee. I am incredibly uncomfortable seated here like this on Odin's throne while the king is ailing, yet Loki seems to be completely at ease. "Loki, should we be...?"

"Of course we shouldn't be sitting here. That's what makes it fun, dearest wife." His mouth contorts into a humorless smile. "Tell me, how are you and our daughter? Are you well?"

"As well as I can be, I suppose," I shrug. "I've had trouble sleeping so I thought a walk in the gardens would do me some good."

"Alone? You should not be wandering outside by yourself at this hour."

"No, my brother was with me. He doesn't like to let me out of his sight after what happened in Alfheim. I can only imagine how protective he'll become once he learns I'm with child." I bite my lip. "Speaking of my family, my sister and her husband have a cottage in the mountains that they rarely use. I've been thinking, perhaps it would be best if I stayed there for a time... since my condition seems to have caused such an uproar."

Loki is shaking his head before I can finish the sentence. "No, I won't exile my wife for giving me a child. Mother owes me an explanation. I promise you, I will get to the bottom of this, though I cannot imagine any plausible justification."

"Nor can I, but please be careful. Your father is resting peacefully but your mother has been badly shaken. I've never seen her so withdrawn. If only Thor were here..."

"And how would he help, exactly? This does not concern him."

I shrug helplessly, not entirely certain myself. Thor would likely be just as adrift in a sea of confusion as Loki and I are. "Why don't we move on to somewhere more private? I shudder to think what will be said if someone happens along and sees you on your father's throne," I say somewhat desperately, ever mindful of the fact that marrying me was somehow supposed to help keep Loki out of trouble. My efforts seem to be a constant failure, but what match am I for this most notorious of tricksters?

"No need to fret. I'm just borrowing the throne while Father isn't using it. Truth be told, being king sounds terribly dull, but why not see how it feels? Just imagine..." he waves his hands expansively as if addressing an invisible audience, "our adoring subjects kneeling before their king, my queen, and our heir."

"You know I have no desire to be queen," I chide gently.

"I'm well aware of that, love." Loki's eyes are dancing with mirth. "Kneel before your king, darling."

I am in no mood to play this game and want nothing more right now than to be held and get some sleep. Yet, it is a relief to see my husband's playful side reappear, so I will indulge him. I hop down from his knee and kneel gamely on the cold floor, trying not to let it show on my face that this is more than a little humiliating.

“Ah, you look quite lovely like this, worshipping me,” Loki purrs, his mere voice so sensuous that I am startled to feel heat pooling between my legs. “It’s incredibly arousing. Take me in your mouth, little one.”

I know exactly what he is asking. I am a bit disturbed by how quickly Loki has gone from groveling for forgiveness to demanding that I kneel before him and pleasure him. What would happen if I refused? I’m not sure I want to find out, and I am surprised to realize that this game excites me more than I would like to admit.

My cheeks burn but I see no point in acting coy. “As you wish, my king,” I play along, “but anyone could happen along and see...”

“And see you pleasuring your king?” I know by the amusement in Loki’s voice that this idea is pleasing to him, but he waves a hand languidly and murmurs an incantation. “There, I’ve shielded us from view,” he says, his long fingers loosening the ties of his trousers.

I am briefly distracted by a translucent, shimmering green curtain that appears to descend over us before dissipating. I reach out and try to touch the mirage, which eludes my grasp. “You’re incredible,” I say in wonder.

“I know,” Loki responds matter-of-factly, causing me to snort with laughter. “Why not show me how you feel about me, my queen?”

Shaking my head fondly, I lean forward to take his already erect manhood in my hand, trailing a line of kisses up the velvety soft skin of the shaft, which is quite a bit warmer to the touch than Loki’s normally cool skin. He sighs appreciatively, his lithe body relaxing into the throne. I hesitate for a moment; though being intimate with my husband is nothing new, this certainly is. Tentatively, I swirl my tongue around the tip of his penis, lapping up the bead of moisture I find there. The taste is not unpleasant and Loki’s hard length twitches in my hand, encouraging me to continue.

Taking a deep breath, I slowly wrap my mouth around his cock, sucking and licking my way down his considerable length. I am afraid that he is too large for me to take completely into my mouth without gagging, so I wrap my fingers around the base, moving my hand in rhythm with my mouth. Loki twines his fingers in my hair, moaning, “That’s good, worship your king.” His thigh muscles tense; I take that as a cue to continue what I’m doing, reaching out with my free hand to gently trace along his hip bone.

Although I am painfully aware of my inexperience, I cannot help but enjoy the effect my ministrations are having on Loki, who possesses the power to turn me into a quivering mess with a single word or touch. I am pleased to finally be able to return the favor. I flick my gaze up to his face; his eyes are closed, his long, dark lashes contrasting starkly with his porcelain complexion. The corners of his lips tilt up in something like a smirk as his breathing accelerates.

“Please, little one, I’m so close...” Loki groans above me, tugging slightly at my hair now as his fingers flex against my scalp. The sensation is strangely pleasurable. I moan involuntarily and Loki bucks his hips, thrusting himself into my throat. I steady myself, swallowing back

my gag reflex, and quicken my pace, hollowing my cheeks as I suck on his hardness. “Yes, just like that...”

Loki’s manhood pulses against my tongue and he throws back his head and lets out a guttural groan as he climaxes, sending spurts of thick liquid down my throat and filling my mouth. I swallow it down, amazed at how it just keeps coming until Loki’s entire body goes limp and he withdraws his cock from my mouth with an obscene pop. Red-faced, I remain on my knees, unsure of what to do with myself until Loki’s breathing steadies and he reaches down to pull me back onto his lap.

“Goodness, you were correct about being a quick learner, my little scholar,” he smiles, his eyes still dazed, and presses a kiss to my temple.

“I hope I have pleased His Majesty,” I say coyly, looking at him flirtatiously through my lashes.

“Oh, you certainly have, but I believe there is still much more pleasing to be done tonight. You deserve to be worshipped, my love, especially after being so kind as to forgive me earlier.” To my amazement, Loki’s green eyes are once again darkening with desire. “Shall we retire to someplace more comfortable, little wife?”

Without waiting for an answer, he rises and slings me over his shoulder as if I’m a sack of vegetables from the market. I giggle and playfully hammer his muscular back with my fists as he carries me to his chambers. For tonight, at least, we will forget our consternation over Odin and Frigga and pretend we are any ordinary newlywed couple, basking in our adoration for each other and our anticipation of the birth of our first child.

If only our lives could be so simple.

Chapter End Notes

Update 12/14/18: I felt like something was missing from this chapter when I first posted it. Thank you to my friend Saiansha for helping me to realize that I needed to include the reader's reaction to Loki shutting her out and then acting as if nothing had happened. I've edited and added more to the chapter and I'm much more satisfied with it now.

~*~*~*~

I'm sorry for the delay in posting this chapter. I've been dealing with some health issues and a medication switch that really threw me off kilter for a few weeks. I was a little hesitant about posting this update because it adds very little to the plot, and I don't think it's some of my best work, but I found the idea of Loki and his wife having some, um, fun on the throne very sexy so I just went with it. So, consider this chapter a little holiday gift (if you consider smut a gift, haha) and we'll return to our regularly scheduled plot and angst in the next chapter.

Revelations

Chapter Summary

Frigga tells all, and in doing so places a terrible burden on you.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Sigrid,” I read aloud. “It means ‘beautiful victory.’”

Loki shakes his head slowly, considering. “No, Sigrid was a girl who trailed after my brother for weeks in our youth with the most disgusting lovelorn look in her eyes. Just the mention of the name turns my stomach to this day. What else do you like?”

We are ensconced in a cozy nook in the palace library, paging through a book of names and their meanings. I am growing discouraged; Loki has dismissed every potential name I’ve suggested for our daughter. “Birget?”

He trails a slender finger down the page, searching for the name. “‘A protecting woman.’ Hmm. Perhaps. Add it to the list.”

I write the name on a sheet of parchment we’ve been using to keep track of the names we favor. Half of the ideas on the list have already been scratched out after being vetoed by one of us. I’m beginning to wonder if any name could possibly be suitable for the daughter of the God of Mischief, but it is difficult to feel too frustrated when I’ve spent the afternoon curled up against Loki, cups of tea on a table in front of us and a nearby fire giving off a pleasant warmth. This is the most content I’ve felt since our ill-fated dinner with Odin and Frigga, though an uneasiness has been gnawing at my stomach since then. It’s impossible to know whether to attribute this to anxiety or pregnancy.

“Naming a princess of Asgard is rather daunting,” I muse, absentmindedly turning pages without absorbing any of the content.

“Perhaps we’re overthinking this. I imagine her name will come to us when we least expect it,” Loki says, kissing my temple. I find myself staring as he stands and stretches, cat-like, looking every bit a god as sunshine illuminates his slim, graceful form. “See something you like, darling?”

Flustered, I return my gaze to the book on my lap, embarrassed to have been caught ogling him like a schoolgirl. Loki’s expression is positively gleeful but I studiously ignore his smugness with all the dignity I can muster. I am saved from further torture when one of Frigga’s younger handmaids approaches us.

The girl curtsies and greets us formally before saying, “My lady, Queen Frigga requests your presence in her chambers after luncheon.”

I nod my assent as Loki responds, “Tell my mother that we shall be there.”

The maid flushes, clearly not relishing the prospect of correcting the prince. “The... the queen only wishes to speak with the princess at this time, your highness.”

Loki quirks an eyebrow. “I see. Very well.”

I give the girl an encouraging nod and smile, and she withdraws from our little reading nook, which is apparently not as secluded as I had thought. “I’m sure your mother just wants to ask after my health and the baby’s,” I say feebly, reaching for my husband’s hand. Intuition tells me this is more than simply a casual visit with my child’s grandmother. “You know, all that... womanly... chatter.”

Loki clasps my hand in his but his tight smile does not reach his eyes and I know he’s unconvinced by my pathetic attempt to reassure him. “We shall see, little one.”

~*~*~*~

My heartbeat is already hammering in my chest when Loki escorts me to Frigga’s chambers after luncheon, during which I’d hardly been able to swallow a bite of food around the dread that seemed to constrict my throat. We linger outside the doors, reluctant to part, Loki eyeing me with his brow furrowed in concern. “Are you sure you’re all right?” he asks quietly.

“Yes, I’m fine. Just perfect.” I try and fail to project confidence.

Loki just shakes his head. “You can’t trick the trickster, little one. I’ll be at the training grounds should you have need of me.” He briefly lays a hand on my shoulder, then turns and saunters away down the empty corridor.

I rap on the door and steel myself for the coming conversation while waiting for one of the queen’s ladies-in-waiting to grant me entrance. I find Frigga bustling about her chambers, tending to the assortment of potted plants she uses for spells and healing. She greets me as warmly as ever but her beautiful face is drawn and pale, her forehead creased with worry. “Please sit, my dear,” she says, leading me to a table that has been set with a silver tea service and dismissing her ladies before taking a seat across from me. “How are you feeling?” she asks, pouring two cups of tea, and a flicker of hope rises inside me. Perhaps this is just a friendly visit after all.

“I’m well, thank you. I don’t have much appetite these days but Lady Eir has assured me that will change.” I take a sip of tea, the clink of the cup sharp in the hushed room when I replace it on the saucer.

“It certainly will,” Frigga agrees with a ghost of a smile. “I know you’ve been troubled by what happened when you and Loki announced that you’re with child and I’m sorry for keeping silent on the matter for so long. It has taken some time to contemplate how this should be handled, especially without my husband’s advice.” She wraps her hands around her

teacup, appearing lost in her own thoughts for a moment before continuing, “Do you remember the first time we sat together like this?”

“Of course I do. That was the day you told me that Loki had chosen me for his bride. I’d never been so stunned in my life.”

“I must confess that although I fervently hoped that you could one day be happy together, I never dared to imagine that you would be so well-suited for one another, or that there would be a child so soon. As eager as I am to see my son become a father, it has forced me to confront certain secrets that have long been buried.” The queen closes her eyes while I wait in silence, sensing that she needs to gather her strength before speaking further. A part of me wishes to remain suspended in this moment forever, blissfully ignorant of the coming revelation.

“As our family historian, I am sure you are well aware of the great war we fought against Jotunheim in which Odin defeated Laufey and the Frost Giants.”

“Oh yes, that was one of the very first history lessons we learned in school. I once won a prize for reciting an epic poem about the war when I was a young girl.”

This brings a genuine, though fleeting, smile to Frigga’s lips. “I can picture that quite clearly. Well, after the final battle was fought, my husband discovered a tiny Jotunn baby who had been hidden away and left for dead, apparently because of his small size. The child was the son of Laufey. Odin brought him to Asgard, where we raised him as our own and as a prince of the realm. Odin believed the prince might one day help unite Jotunheim and Asgard in peace but I never saw him as anything but my precious son, just as much as Thor.”

Frigga is watching expectantly for my reaction; at first, I dumbly wonder what this story has to do with me but the reality of the situation crashes over me all too soon. I feel as though I’ve been swept up in a wave and am fighting helplessly against the undertow. “You’re telling me that Loki is... but... he doesn’t look like a Frost Giant.” I try to conjure up the images of the Jotunn that I’ve seen in books but can only summon a vague idea of terrifying creatures with blue skin and red eyes. I am ashamed at the revulsion that washes over me.

“We devised an enchantment to make Loki appear to be Asgardian so as not to subject him to the fear and hatred our people feel toward the Jotunn. It is difficult to predict how your daughter will look as she will not be a full-blooded Jotunn. I felt I should give you time to adjust to the idea that your child will not truly be Asgardian. However, we will be able to alter her appearance so she can be raised here at court.”

I swallow back the bile that threatens to rise in my throat. *I am married to a Jotunn. I am going to give birth to a child who is part Jotunn. And the king and queen of Asgard saw fit to allow me to blindly enter into this arrangement?* I want to rail at Frigga for leaving me in the dark, to curse and shout and stamp my foot like an indignant child. Yet, true to form, I do none of these things. All I can manage to ask is, “When do you plan to tell Loki?”

She appears to be stricken, her regal brow furrowing at my question. “My dear, Loki is already so resentful of Thor. He’s always felt he lives in his brother’s shadow. He’s starting to

come into his own now, particularly since your marriage, but I fear it would destroy him to learn of his true parentage. Surely you can see this.”

She is not incorrect. However, I am incredulous that she is asking me to carry the burden of keeping this knowledge from my husband, who happens to be a notoriously accomplished liar. One look at my face and I’m certain that Loki will know I’m concealing a secret. “Please don’t force me to hide this from him,” I whisper, fighting to hold back the tears that are suddenly prickling my eyes.

“I know I’m placing a terrible burden on you, my child.” I have never seen Frigga’s eyes appear so stormy; they clearly reflect her pain and regret. “There were times when Loki was growing up when I felt we should tell him. It was easier to sweep the truth under a rug and spare him the pain. Now, I wish I’d had the courage to defy Odin and do so rather than pass along the misery of keeping secrets to you and the next generation.”

“Does Thor know?”

“No, only Odin and I, and now you. I am so sorry, dear one. I deluded myself into thinking that you and Loki might have a child in the distant future and we would have handled this predicament before then. I do not wish to keep this from him forever but with Odin resting and Thor away, this seems a very... inopportune time to discuss this with Loki.”

But I should suffer alone? I bite my tongue before the sharp words can escape my lips. Though I feel betrayed, Frigga is still the queen of Asgard and Loki’s beloved mother, and I cannot bring myself to speak to her disrespectfully. Besides, when Loki finally learns the truth, I know he’ll have enough venomous words for both of us.

Neither of us can find much to say, so Frigga dismisses me a short time later. I feel as though I’ve lived an entire lifetime since I last saw Loki. Indescribably weary, I dismiss my servants as soon as I enter my chambers, requesting a few hours of privacy, then I take to my bed. I need time to digest what I’ve just learned and to contemplate how to hide my emotions from Loki, who has learned to read my moods like a book.

All the while, I am plagued by a troubling refrain: *I am married to a Frost Giant. My daughter is part Jotunn. We are building our family on a foundation of lies.*

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for sticking with me through a bit of an unplanned hiatus! I had a bout of writer's block that coincided with the busyness of the holidays and I needed to take some time to plot out where the story is going next. I hope the new year is off to a great start for all my lovely readers.

A Poisonous Secret

Chapter Summary

Keeping a secret from your husband begins to take its toll.

Loki appears at my door after I remain in bed through dinner, sending word that I am unwell and need to rest. I briefly consider having my guards turn him away, perhaps telling him that I'm asleep, but I cannot avoid him forever. Facing my husband will only become more difficult if I push him away. I draw in a deep breath, no easy task considering the tightness in my chest, and set aside the book I've been attempting to read.

Loki sweeps into my bedchamber with his usual aplomb and sets a plate of food on the bed beside me. "You must try to eat something, darling, for your sake and for the sake of our daughter." I nod my acceptance, poking an unappetizing slice of meat with my fork. "What's ailing you?"

"Oh, just a headache and I'm easily fatigued these days. Nothing to be concerned about." I begin cutting my dinner into small, manageable pieces, surreptitiously glancing up at Loki; I search in vain for some hint of the Jotunn people in his finely chiseled features, the sharp planes of his cheekbones. There is nothing to indicate he is anything but Asgardian. Did I truly expect to see something I'd missed during months of marriage? If anyone is equal to the task of disguising Loki's heritage, it would be Odin and Frigga.

"I imagine that is to be expected, in your condition. Here, let us see if I can help." He sits down on the edge of the bed and reaches out to take my head in his hands as he has in the past when I've suffered from headaches. I flinch away from his touch involuntarily and am immediately overwhelmed by profound shame.

Loki freezes, drawing his hands away from me. "You behave as if you are afraid of me, little one. Are we to return to the days when you could not bear the thought of my touch?" He sounds bewildered but his eyes flash dangerously. I think I see a gleam of red in my husband's eyes before his gaze returns to me but his eyes are their normal deep emerald when I focus on them. Surely I had only imagined they were any other color?

Steady, I counsel myself. He is still the same Loki you married. This should not change how you feel about him and you must never give yourself away by behaving differently around him.

"I'm so sorry," I say plaintively. "I have been on edge as of late."

Loki regards me with his chin resting on his hand, appearing somewhat unconvinced. "If you say so, little one." He reaches out to touch me again and this time I manage to keep still.

He gently cups my head in his cool hands, massaging my scalp, and it is as if I'm instantly transported back to our first encounters. I recall him brushing cold lips against mine, the slight chill his hands left behind after he held my hand or, later, caressed my skin. It had never occurred to me to question that chill; indeed, I enjoyed the sensation and had accepted it as an integral part of this god I have grown to love. Now the reason behind his cool skin floods my mind. It takes every bit of willpower I possess to refrain from pulling away from his touch, even as the throbbing in my temples eases from Loki's ministrations.

Loki must have somehow felt my tension because he asks abruptly, "What did Mother say to you?"

Startled, I stutter, "I...uh...nothing of importance. Why do you ask?"

"Why? Because you have been acting like a skittish colt. Clearly, something has upset you. Tell me what's bothering you."

I can hardly believe he has divined the reason for my discomfort so swiftly. "My dearest, I cannot. Your mother has taken me into her confidence and I will not betray her trust in me." I slide my trembling hands under the blankets. "Surely you understand."

I fully expect Loki to lash out at me. Instead, he raises his eyebrows, his expression one of delight. "Ah, I see. You and Mother think you can keep secrets from me. How charming. But I have my ways of discovering even the most well-kept secrets, dearest wife."

I am disturbed by his cunning smile and the mischievous sparkle in his eyes. "Loki, this is not a game."

"Perhaps not to you but it will be such fun. Life has been rather dull around here as of late."

"Are your wife and child not enough to keep you content?" I ask evenly.

"Of course you are, little one, but you must understand that I am always studying and investigating new things, and that includes any intrigue within the palace. There is seldom a secret that evades me for long. I find it quite useful to know the weaknesses and hidden desires of everyone at court. Your dear friend Lady Sif, for example. Did you know that she and my oafish brother had a dalliance long ago? Thor grew tired of her but she still pines for him to this day. And the lady knows very well that I will inform him of her secret shame should she ever cross me. Or inform our parents, who would be all too eager to campaign for Thor to take her as his bride," Loki says smugly.

"That's horrible. Besides, Sif would have told me if that were true," I say petulantly.

"Oh, would she? Sif is skilled at playing the noble warrior and keeping her emotions hidden, something she has been taught since childhood. She has her role to fulfill, and I have mine."

"I suppose I thought your role might evolve, now that you're going to be a father," I say coolly. "But no, it seems everything is still just a game to you."

“You and mother should have known better than to try to conceal something from me,” Loki says with a crafty little smile. “Well, no matter. It will all become clear to me soon enough.” He leans in and gives me a chaste kiss. “Unless you want to avoid all this fuss and tell me now.”

I am clenching my jaw in frustration; all I can do is shake my head stubbornly, pressing my lips together as if opening them would cause secrets to begin spilling out in a deluge.

“Then, as the Midgardian Shakespeare once wrote, ‘The game is afoot.’ I shall leave you to rest, my love.” Loki strokes my hair one more time before taking his leave.

I bury my face in my soft down pillows and sob, feeling powerless and furious at Frigga for putting me in this position.

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“I cannot find a single thing wrong with you physically. You’re strong and healthy, and so is your child,” Lady Eir says thoughtfully. “Which leads me to believe you are making yourself ill. Is something troubling you, child?”

“I’ve had many things on my mind lately, to be sure,” I reply diplomatically, realizing I’ve been wringing my hands for some time, derailing my attempt to appear calm and collected.

“Hmm.” The healer fiddles with some of her medical instruments, not meeting my eyes.

My health has declined over the past several days; I am wracked by stomach pains, plagued by a constant dull headache, and find it difficult to eat and sleep. I also suffer from sudden attacks of panic and dread, terrified that Loki will discover that he is a Jotunn or, perhaps worse, that I will be forced to carry this secret for many years while it slowly devours me from inside.

Magda and my other maids watched over me with ever-increasing concern until they finally insisted on sending me to see Lady Eir, a demand I had little energy to resist. Loki has been consumed by his quest to learn what Frigga said to me but even he has commented on my sickly appearance.

Lady Eir purses her lips in disapproval. “If the mind is the source of your illness, there is little I can do except to prescribe three nourishing meals a day and plenty of rest. But it would be best if you speak to someone about your troubles. You know you can confide in Queen Frigga and me, and I’m certain Prince Loki would do anything to ease your suffering.”

She is correct; however, this is the one instance in which I cannot allow Loki to share my burden and I do not need to be a witch to foresee how easily this could destroy our marriage. Tears of utter despair and frustration begin to well in my eyes and I blink rapidly but am unable to staunch the flow. The healer wordlessly hands me a handkerchief. I dab at my eyes, my shoulders shaking with the effort to stop my useless weeping.

A soft knock sounds at the infirmary door and Frigga asks if she may enter. Lady Eir gives me a questioning look and I resignedly nod my assent. The queen of Asgard glides in, halting

in alarm when she sees the tears cascading down my face. “What is it, daughter? Is something amiss with the little one?”

I shake my head helplessly, choking back a sob. Eir comes to stand behind my chair, laying her hands on my shoulders. “The child is fine, which is more than I can say about the princess. Some worry is weighing on her mind and making her ill. I do not know how to help her but I fear the effect it will have on her and the child if she continues to decline.”

Frigga regards me with anguish in her eyes. “Oh, my sweet, it has been terribly unfair of me to place such a burden on you. Lady Eir, would you kindly allow us a moment alone?”

“Of course,” says Eir, though her interest in our conversation is palpable. She bustles out of the room and Frigga approaches me a bit tentatively, as if I am a frightened animal, and takes my hands in hers.

“This cannot go on,” I tell her beseechingly, a tremble in my voice. “I know Loki can be unpredictable but he deserves to know the truth. I’m afraid that keeping this secret from him will poison our marriage as it is already poisoning my mind and body. I do not wish to sound melodramatic.”

“You are only speaking the truth,” Frigga says quietly. Tears shimmer in her clear blue eyes. “I have put you in harm’s way simply because I fear Loki’s reaction and, possibly, his retaliation. I hope in time he will realize that I have always loved him every bit as much as his brother and that I only ever wanted him to feel he is truly part of this family.” She bows her head, closing her eyes for a moment as if in silent atonement. “Can you ever forgive me?”

“I can, though it may take some time,” I say. “I know you were trying to look out for Loki’s best interests. I only want to do the same for him and in this case, I think telling the truth is what’s best for him.”

“You are wise beyond your years. I’m proud to call you my daughter,” Frigga praises, helping me up and slipping a supportive arm around my waist. A begrudging smile appears on my lips; I am pleased with the compliment even as residual anger lingers against her. “Come now, and we shall lift this burden from your shoulders. It’s time Loki learned the truth.”

All is Revealed

Chapter Summary

Loki learns the truth about his heritage. Fury and angst ensue.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Asgardian children grow up believing the Jotunn are the monsters that lurk beneath their beds at night, terrifying creatures that are consumed by the desire to destroy our civilization and everyone we hold dear. At the same time, we are taught that King Odin has made it impossible for the Frost Giants to ever invade Asgard again, so our greatest enemies sometimes seem to be more like mythical creatures from a fairy tale than an actual threat to the kingdom. Needless to say, I am still finding it difficult to come to terms with learning that I am married to a Frost Giant and will give birth to a half-Jotunn child in several months' time. I shudder and my stomach clenches as I envision Loki being told that he is the monster that appears in children's nightmares.

Frigga, as always, is attuned to my emotional state. "Is something wrong?" We pause our progress through the corridor.

"I just... ache for Loki, having to learn that he is not who he thought he was all his life. And I fear how he will react to these revelations. I could not bear to lose his trust in me. Perhaps I should have been truthful with him all along." I am surprised to find I am not at all dismayed at my boldness in stating that it might have been better to disobey the All-Mother's instructions.

Frigga sighs wistfully and gathers me into her arms. "You have been the perfect complement to my son, perhaps a better wife to him than I could have chosen myself. He has been more content these past few months than I ever thought possible. I am confident that the sun will shine on the two of you again once this particular storm passes. And I shall make it clear to Loki that I directed you to keep this secret from him. His father and I are the ones who violated his trust."

I feel I should offer comforting words but none come to mind. She has spoken the truth, after all. I merely return her embrace, hoping to silently convey my support for what she is about to do if not the tragic decision to conceal Loki's heritage.

"He will need you now more than ever, my dear daughter," Frigga says softly.

I manage a smile at that thought. "Loki hardly needs me, or anyone else for that matter."

“One day, you will learn how wrong you are.” The queen takes my hand and we continue on to Loki’s chambers in silence.

My husband is sprawled on one of the comfortable chairs by the fire, a book of spells in hand when we are admitted. He rises to greet us, languidly stretching his spine. “Mother, little one. To what do I owe the pleasure?” He raises his brows questioningly.

Frigga squeezes my hand reassuringly. “Loki, may I have a word with you in private?”

Loki’s eyes dart to me in apparent confusion before he returns his attention to his mother. “Certainly.” He cocks his head toward his bedchamber and Frigga follows him inside.

“We will rejoin you in a moment,” the All-Mother tells me before closing the door behind them.

I am both relieved and bewildered at being left out of their conversation. I suppose it is natural that Frigga would want to be alone with her son for this troubling discussion. I try to imagine keeping such a monumental secret from my daughter but the mere thought makes me feel sick at heart. I rest a hand on my belly as if to comfort my child and take a seat in front of the fireplace, staring down at my hands, which are tightly folded in my lap. Would Loki prefer me to be at his side when all is revealed, or would he rather I not see him in such a vulnerable moment? Part of me desperately longs to charge through the door. Yet I remain frozen with indecision, silently cursing myself for lacking the courage to take decisive action as Loki surely would.

I had expected Loki to explode in anger at his mother but there is still no sound from beyond the closed door as I sit rooted to the sofa for what could be minutes or hours (I honestly cannot tell). Panic begins to gnaw at my chest, making it difficult to breathe.

Finally, I hear Loki’s raised voice; it is with an icy calm rather than anger that he orders, “Get out.”

The bedchamber door opens and Frigga appears, sobbing, “Loki, please be reasonable. I should have told you from the very beginning but you must know that I have always loved you as my own and I only wanted to protect you...”

“But you are not my mother,” Loki says, his voice strangely detached. I hear a gasp and realize belatedly that it came from me. “And I cannot stand to look at you.”

Frigga nods and takes her leave without another word. Stunned, I stare into the fire and try to focus on regulating my breathing. Though I had anticipated his fury, I never imagined Loki could speak so cruelly to Frigga, knowing the special bond the two share. I wonder if their relationship can ever recover from such a blow.

Loki walks over to stand in front of the flames, his back to me, for what feels like an eternity before he intones, “I will release you from this marriage if you wish. You were deceived and could not know you were pledging your troth to a monster. I only ask that I may be allowed to know my daughter.”

“*Our* daughter,” I remind him. “I love you and I have no desire to leave. Loki, please look at me.”

Slowly, he turns to face me. I am startled to see unshed tears glimmering in his anguished eyes. “Your pretty words mean nothing, little wife. You may think you care for me, but can you love...this?”

I watch in both horror and fascination as Loki draws in a deep breath and closes his eyes, his alabaster skin gradually transitioning into an icy blue. Strange markings appear in patterns on his face and when my husband opens his eyes they are a vivid blood red. We regard each other wordlessly, beings of two different species encountering each other for the first time. And yet, despite his foreign appearance, this is still the Loki I have come to love deeply, my partner and the father of my unborn child. It dawns on me that I am intrigued, but not afraid

“But...you’re beautiful,” I whisper, standing and reaching out to touch his face.

Loki leaps away from me. “Don’t touch me! I don’t want to hurt you!”

I draw back in shock, uncertain of his meaning. “What? You touch me all the time.”

“Surely you remember that an Asgardian cannot withstand the touch of a Frost Giant.”

With so much to ponder following Frigga’s revelation, I had somehow forgotten that. “Oh. Of course,” I say weakly.

“I was able to touch you while in the form my so-called parents contrived to make me palatable to them and the people of Asgard,” Loki says bitterly. “There is much to consider before you so blithely choose...this...as your lot in life. Our daughter, for instance. I do not want her life to be a lie as mine has been, yet in knowing her ancestry she faces living with the knowledge that most Asgardians consider her and her people no more than bloodthirsty monsters.”

“I know there will be many difficult decisions ahead, Loki, and that there will be unique challenges in raising our daughter. But I knew this life would not be easy when I agreed to marry you and became a princess instead of an anonymous scholar. I never thought I wanted to be a wife or a mother but falling in love with you has changed me, and I loved our child from the moment I learned of her existence. Please, I cannot pretend to know how you feel. I only know that I want to be the one to support you and prove to you that you are deserving of love. Please, don’t shut me out.” I only realize that I’m crying when a tear drips from my chin, splashing onto my skirt. Am I to lose my husband as a result of urging Frigga to be truthful with him?

Some of the hardness in Loki’s eyes softens; as he contemplates me, he slowly transforms back into his familiar Asgardian form, though I think I see a glint of red remaining in his eyes. Hesitantly, he reaches out a hand, trailing his fingertips tenderly over the outline of my cheekbone and jaw. “I do not deserve you and your loyalty,” he says brokenly. “However, I am willing to spend my life working to make myself worthy of you, a much more rewarding pursuit than trying to win the approval of Odin and Frigga. It’s curious how obvious it all seems now, their preference for Thor, Odin’s constant disappointment...”

“I’m certain they consider you a true son,” I protest, but Loki just shakes his head, holding up a hand to silence me.

“I can’t bear to listen to you trying to placate me, darling. Not now. My world is crumbling around me and you are the one solid thing I can cling to.”

“Then tell me what I can do to help you.”

“Other than staying and lying through your teeth to tell me I am beautiful as a Jotunn?” Loki smiles grimly in spite of himself.

“That was no lie, but go on,” I reply.

He rolls his eyes but his sardonic smile lingers. “Will you read to me? It’s been a while. Your voice soothes me.”

I want nothing more than to fold him into my arms and rock him as my mother did during my childhood heartbreaks but I know simply asking me to read to him is as vulnerable as Loki is likely to allow himself to become. “Of course. What shall I read?”

He wanders over to his bookshelves and pulls a hefty volume out, handing it to me. “The Lord of the Rings?” I say in surprise. “I thought you referred to this as one of my ‘silly Midgardian fantasies.’”

“Your comments about the powerful wizards and the shieldmaiden intrigued me,” he says, a bit sheepishly.

“I think you’ll enjoy it. It’s been a most welcome escape during some difficult times in my life.” I open the book as Loki settles in beside me, gently placing my head on his shoulder.

Before I can begin to read, Loki whispers, “Will you stay with me tonight? If you can stomach sharing a bed with the rightful heir to the throne of Jotunheim...”

“Yes. Tonight, and every night that follows, if you wish.” I brush a stray lock of hair off his face. “I’m not going anywhere.”

We remain together on the sofa for hours, until darkness settles over the palace, our own little island fortress in the midst of a turbulent sea.

Chapter End Notes

Writing this chapter was quite an emotional rollercoaster ride. I've had this scene in my head since I first started writing this story, though the events leading up to it have changed a few times. I hope Loki's reaction rings true for his character. He's so complex and has so much depth; I studied him a lot in preparation for writing this (such a hardship, I know).

I seem to have picked up a lot of new readers with the last couple of chapters. I'm thrilled to have you along for the ride! Thank you for all the comments, kudos, and subscriptions. Of course, thank you as always to my loyal readers who've been with me all along for your continued support. <3

Homecoming

Chapter Summary

Loki has an interesting dream. Meanwhile, Thor and the other warriors return to Asgard.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Little one?”

The voice comes to me as if from a very great distance. Someone is nudging my shoulder and I groan, turning my face into my pillow. “I’m so tired,” I protest, my voice rough with sleep, already drifting back into the blissful abyss of slumber.

“I know, darling. Please, stay with me, just for a moment.”

How Loki can sound so alert is a mystery. Reluctantly, I fight my way back to the surface of wakefulness. “What is it? Is something wrong?”

He waves a hand, creating a low, ambient light. Once my eyes stop struggling to focus I see his blue-green eyes shining. He’s propped up on one elbow, gazing down at me tenderly. “I saw her in a dream...our daughter,” he clarifies, seeing my bewilderment. “She was beautiful. She has dark ringlets and green eyes and her face was the same shape of yours. I was teaching her seidr. She had so much potential, and...”

“And?” I prompt gently, wide awake now and utterly enthralled. Somehow the prospect of raising a daughter had never seemed completely real until now, but hearing Loki’s description, I can almost see her in front of me.

“And her name was Brynja.” My husband watches me expectantly and I notice for the first time that his eyes are damp.

“Brynja,” I whisper, sounding it out. “Bryn-ja. Oh, Loki, it’s perfect.”

“Truly?” he asks, sounding uncharacteristically anxious. “You need not agree just to placate me.”

“I’m not,” I assure him. “It feels right. I feel as though I’ve always known her name is Brynja but I couldn’t quite express it.”

I am heartened by what may be Loki’s first genuine smile in days. Although we have spent most of our time together in the two weeks since Frigga informed him of his true parentage, he has been loving yet distant, more reserved and unfocused than usual. He has not spoken to

his mother, taking his meals in his chambers and carefully plotting his daily routine to avoid crossing paths with her. I have made a few feeble attempts to reunite mother and son but lacking Loki's craftiness, I've failed abysmally.

I must admit, having Loki's attention focused almost entirely on me has been lovely. We've taken leisurely horseback rides nearly every day and made slow but steady progress at reading *The Lord of the Rings* together. I might want to remain in this idyllic world forever if not for my ever-growing unease over Loki's estrangement from his family. I long to speak with Frigga; however, I must content myself with our brief encounters when I see her about the palace. I sense that my husband would think me disloyal if I sought the All-Mother's company.

"It's settled then," Loki says contentedly, taking me into his arms and placing a hand on my slightly rounded abdomen. "You can go back to sleep, little one. I'm sorry I disturbed you; I simply had to tell you what I'd seen."

"I'm glad you did," I murmur, already fading out.

"Good night, love." Loki kisses me on the forehead. "Good night, my little Brynja."

~*~*~*~

Frigga comes to see me the next morning as my handmaids are helping me dress and styling my hair. She seems to be in better spirits than she has been since her talk with Loki, though I think some new fine lines have appeared on her face as of late. "I wanted to give you the good news myself," she says, seating herself in a chair my maids have set up across from me as Magda weaves my hair into an elaborate braid. "I've received word that Thor and the other warriors are due to arrive home this afternoon. The court will gather on the bridge to welcome them. I hope you will join us, and if you could manage to convince Loki to come as well..." the queen trails off uncertainly at the mention of her younger son.

"I will do my best," I promise, not feeling very optimistic about the outcome. "That is wonderful news indeed. It has been so quiet without Thor and Sif and the others. Does this mean the rebellion is over?"

"I assume so, but Thor will provide a full report once he arrives. He seemed confident that they had ferreted out the roots of the uprising," Frigga replies. "I must begin preparations for a feast tonight. Thor has given me little notice, as always. I will see you this afternoon?"

I give my consent and once my maids have respectfully curtsied to the queen, I turn to Magda. "I think this occasion will require a finer gown, especially if I am to persuade Loki to come along." I pick out one of Loki's favorite dresses, a gorgeous green velvet gown that has a matching gold cloak with green trim. It's a bit ostentatious for my taste but my husband has been unable to take his eyes off me when I've worn it. Paired with my emerald jewelry and circlet, it will be perfect.

Despite the task ahead of me, there is a spring in my step as I walk to Loki's suite. I have sorely missed Thor and Sif's company. I had written many letters to them during their time

away but being warriors and not scribes, their responses had left something to be desired. I am certain we will be regaled with many tales of their great exploits at tonight's feast.

I find Loki sitting at his desk, writing in a journal in which he keeps track of the spells he has mastered. I wait patiently until he finishes writing and sets down his pen, turning to face me with his arms crossed over his chest. "Good morning, dearest wife. You're looking especially lovely today. What is the occasion? Celebrating finding a name for our daughter?"

"Well, yes..." I hedge, irritated that he's inferred something is going on just from my choice of clothing. "But I've also just learned that Thor, Sif, and the others will return today and the court will be gathering to greet them. I would like it if you would come with me." I choose my words carefully in order to express my feelings, not Frigga's.

"I thought I made it clear to you that Thor is not my brother," Loki says coldly, scowling. "Furthermore, I will not pretend to cheer his great accomplishments after I was forbidden from joining his little expedition even though Thor is well aware I would have been an asset."

"You have made it quite clear that the king and queen are not your parents and your anger at their deception is understandable. But when has Thor ever treated you as anything but a brother, and a well-loved brother at that?" Frustrated tears burn my eyes and I realize my legs are shaking with fury. Somehow, perhaps foolishly, I had not understood that Loki's estrangement from his parents would also extend to Thor. I am sickened by the thought of Loki further isolating the two of us. "Thor had no part in their concealment of your heritage and unless your mother has written him about it, he remains unaware of the truth."

This seems to give him pause for a moment. "Perhaps, but he's enjoyed all the benefits of life as the favored son for centuries. He'll be in his glory, returning victorious from battle, and will scarcely notice my absence. And I'm sure you'll do a fine job representing us. You've always been much more adept at charming my supposed family and the court than I am."

This is utter nonsense and he knows it. I resist the urge to stamp my foot like a child. "I suppose I'll see you at dinner, then. There will be a banquet tonight for the warriors. I assume we'll be dining alone here, as usual."

Loki presses his lips together disapprovingly but only says nonchalantly, "Contrary to popular belief, I am not a tyrant and I will not force you to miss the feast if you wish to attend."

My husband turns back to his journal as if my presence or lack thereof at dinner means nothing to him. I want nothing more than to return to the intimacy we'd shared last night when he told me about his dream of our child; however, I am too irritated to be more than frostily civil right now. "Very well. Thank you for your generosity in allowing me to exercise my own free will, your highness," I say sarcastically. "I hope one day soon you will realize that more than just blood relations make a family."

I sail out the door with my head held high.

I spend some time in the gardens, cutting flowers for a bouquet for Lady Sif and calming my turbulent thoughts, then just to spite Loki, I join Frigga for luncheon. I am sorry to tell her that Loki won't be joining us for Thor's homecoming, yet she takes it all in stride, thanking me for my effort, buoyed by the prospect of being reunited with her elder son.

I freshen up after eating and walk to where the court is gathering on the bridge to watch the warriors emerge from the Bifrost. I am astounded to find Odin standing next to Frigga in the front of the crowd, looking refreshed and much healthier than the last time I'd seen him. Quickly recovering my wits, I dip into a low curtsy, stammering something about how good it is to see the king restored to health while wondering frantically whether he has come to terms with having a grandchild who is part Jotunn.

Odin raises me up and, to my surprise, gently takes hold of my hand. "Thank you, daughter. I am pleased to see you looking so well," he says earnestly. I shyly meet his eye, taken aback by the acceptance and tenderness I see there. "My wife tells me the child is healthy. I must apologize for the way I reacted upon learning of your condition, my dear. Frigga and I are delighted. I trust you now understand our alarm at hearing such an announcement."

"All is forgiven," I lie. What else can one say when offered an apology from the All-Father? I am painfully aware that Loki's absence exposes my words as a lie. Still, I cannot deny that it is gratifying to hear these words from the king of Asgard himself. I very much want Odin, Frigga, and Thor to play a major role in Brynja's life, whether Loki agrees or not.

Frigga is positively beaming at our reconciliation. "Come, stand with my husband and me," she invites, seeing me hanging back from the royal couple. She takes my arm and positions me to her left, where I can feel the eyes of the court boring into my back, curious about Loki's failure to appear and my place in the royal hierarchy.

The brilliant light of the Bifrost appears in the distance, heralding Thor's return. The court is hushed until the warriors come galloping out of Heimdall's Observatory, at which point the crowd erupts in cheers at the magnificent sight of the warriors with their armor gleaming in the sunlight. Some of the courtiers wave pennants or banners; others, mostly the young ladies among them, stare enraptured at the glorious scene. A man lifts up a small boy who triumphantly hoists a small wooden replica of Thor's hammer into the air.

Thor himself is holding Mjolnir aloft in triumph, basking in the adoration of the court. He slows his steed to a trot as he approaches the welcoming crowd, dismounting and bowing graciously to his parents. Frigga nearly throws herself into his arms as I find myself nearly suffocating in the hearty embrace of my dear friend Sif, who is glowing.

"I've missed you so much! You must tell me everything!" I cry.

"We had such fun, didn't we, Lady Sif?" Thor enthuses, gathering me into his arms. "Sweet sister, I was overjoyed to read of your news. Are you feeling well? But where is Loki?"

I feel a twinge, recalling Loki's prediction that Thor would likely never notice his absence. How wrong he was. "I am quite well, thank you. Loki is...unhappy with your parents right now. I'm afraid I couldn't convince him to join us."

“Ah.” Thor does not seem surprised or overly concerned. Behind him, Sif rolls her eyes dramatically. “What is it this time?”

I swallow hard. “Your father and mother should probably be the ones to explain. I don’t think now is the time to discuss it.”

Thor raises his eyebrows but I am saved from further questioning when his parents reappear at his side. “We will want to hear all the stories from your travels tonight at the banquet,” Frigga tells him, wrapping an arm around her son’s waist. “We are so proud.”

Thor sighs, suddenly appearing deflated. “Father, Mother...I am afraid I have not made you as proud as I wished. You see, I returned not because we have wiped out the rebellion, but for your advice. A few days ago we captured one of the rebel leaders and interrogated him. We thought we had put an end to all of the leaders of the uprising. And yet...”

Odin, Frigga, and I wait in silent trepidation for Thor to continue. “If he can be believed, this elf said our efforts have only been a drop in the bucket. That this is only the beginning because they’ve forged an alliance with Jotunheim.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry for the long delay between updates. I was sick for most of February and I've been dealing with frequent migraines and a broken tooth on top of that so it has been difficult to get much writing done. I haven't abandoned this story, though. Thank you for sticking with me and helping me get to 500+ kudos. Much love to you all.

Odin's Pawn

Chapter Summary

Loki learns of his supposed purpose in Asgard.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Later that evening, I cannot find Loki anywhere in the palace or the grounds. He had been called to meet with Thor and his parents after his brother returned, a meeting he'd attended dutifully but with bad grace due to his ongoing dissatisfaction with Odin and Frigga. We had arranged to meet for a walk in the gardens but Loki had not appeared. Growing restless after waiting for him for half an hour, I went off to search for him. It was quite unusual for my husband to fail to be punctual.

Finally, desperate for news and a bit miffed that I'd been excluded from the family briefing, I track down my brother and question him. Enar reports that Loki had been seen going into Odin's Vault a few minutes ago.

"The Vault? What reason could he possibly have for going there?" I ask, mystified. I cannot think of a legitimate reason, which must mean he's looking to cause some mischief, true to form.

Enar shrugs, a wry smile on his face. "You would know better than I would. You're the one who's married to the prince, little sister."

Somehow, I manage to avoid a very un-princess-like eye roll and set off toward the Vault with some trepidation. Truth be told, I'm not sure if I'm even allowed access to the chamber with its priceless treasures. However, the guards bow courteously to me and part so I can descend into the Vault. Having never been inside before, I enter cautiously, pausing on a landing before continuing down the stairs.

Once my eyes adjust to the dim lighting, I see that Loki is standing before some kind of blue glowing object, staring intently into it as if in deep contemplation. Though I know he has most likely sensed my presence, he makes no indication that he's aware I'm watching. Then Loki sighs and grasps the luminescent box, lifting it from its pedestal, still mesmerized. I realize I'm holding my breath as my husband's skin begins to take on a blue tinge and slowly, his Jotunn features become apparent. It is then that I realize this strange object must be the fabled Casket of Ancient Winters, the source of the Frost Giants' power, which had been brought to Asgard by Odin after he defeated the Jotunn. I had read that the Casket was capable of producing the frigid conditions of a Jotunheim winter, throwing entire realms into a deadly ice age.

“Loki?” I whisper tentatively, letting out the breath I’d been holding in. “What are you doing?”

“Little one?” Perhaps Loki had been too absorbed in whatever he was doing to sense me after all.

I begin to descend the stairs toward him, my footsteps echoing in the vast chamber. “It’s me. I went looking for you after you did not appear for our walk.”

“I’m sorry, darling.” Loki gently replaces the Casket on the pedestal and his features and coloring rearrange themselves into the fair skin and green eyes I’m accustomed to. “I was unaware of the hour. My meeting with my parents and Thor was...shall we say, less than pleasant.”

“What happened?” I ask, alarmed. Thor’s announcement of the rebels’ alliance with the Jotunn had been horrifying, to be sure, but it was not something that would normally faze Loki.

“I am nothing but a pawn to them,” he says in a hollow voice. “I am not a prince of Asgard and my birthright on Jotunheim was denied to me. Odin has never seen me as anything but a tool with which to forge peace with the Jotunn.”

I bite my lip, desperately wanting to soothe him but not quite grasping what has happened. “I’m sure your parents did not mean for you to believe that. They only-”

“Odin told me outright that he took me from Jotunheim in hopes that I could be used to negotiate a lasting peace with the Frost Giants someday,” Loki interrupts bitterly. “There’s no sugar-coating it. It has never been more apparent that I am not their son.”

I attempt to conceal the “O” of surprise that appears on my lips at this statement. Could Odin really have been so cruel as to say such a thing? “How are you supposed to do such a thing?”

“I’m not certain, now that I’ve already been married to an Asgardian and cannot be wed to a Jotunn princess,” he says thoughtfully. “Odin is probably cooking up some scheme as we speak.”

I know I’ve read too much Midgardian royal history for my own good but England’s King Henry VIII comes to mind. “You don’t think they would try to have our marriage declared invalid, do you? What will become of me and Brynja if you must set me aside?”

Loki crosses the space separating us in two strides and wraps me in his arms. “I will not let anyone take you from me. We were legitimately wedded and bedded and now we have an heir on the way. It may not fit in with their plans for me but our marriage is good for Asgard and its future..” He brushes his lips over the crown of my head and I find I am trembling despite his reassurances. I long for the composure Loki shows in situations such as this.

“I promise you, I will do everything in my power to protect you and our daughter,” he continues. “Darling, I have known more happiness in these few short months with you than I had in my entire lifetime.”

I smile tremulously against his chest. “But...what will you do? If King Odin commands you...”

“I am not Odin’s pawn,” Loki says coldly. I am taken aback by the ice in his tone. “He has admitted that he stole me from my birthplace for his own selfish purposes, and thus he cannot command me. The prisoner Thor and the warriors brought back is being interrogated as we speak. Odin will have to learn what he can from the elf and formulate his own plan. I will not be a part of it.”

“And...you told him this?” I am almost afraid to hear the answer.

“Of course I did. I am not afraid of him and refuse to cower before him any longer.” There is cold steel in Loki’s beautiful emerald eyes. He brushes a lock of hair out of my eyes. “And you should not either, little one,” he adds affectionately.

“I am worried for you, dear husband. You may not consider Odin your father but he is still your king and you must obey his and Queen Frigga’s commands. There will be a price to pay for your resistance.”

“You need not worry about me, dearest. I don’t want you to be troubled while carrying our little one. If worst comes to worst...perhaps it would be better if we leave Asgard for a time, until things settle down. You could rest in a peaceful place and just concentrate on bringing a healthy daughter into the world. What do you think? Just the two of us, someplace quiet and solitary?”

This is his solution? Running away? Yet, the thought of spending time together somewhere far from the concerns and politics of the palace is quite tempting. We’d never had what the Midgardians call a “honeymoon” and some days I ache to be a private citizen once again instead of a princess who is the source of much gossip and speculation. I am prepared to decline the suggestion until I hear myself say, “Perhaps. I have found life at court somewhat exhausting as of late.” I had not realized the truth of those words until they left my lips. “At the same time, I would be loathe to leave our families and our life here behind.”

“Just think about it, and I will search for a place where we would not be bothered for a time. You need not give me your answer now,” Loki says. “And I will see what Odin has in mind for bringing peace with Jotunheim.” He draws back to look at me at arm’s length. “You do look tired, little wife.” He traces the dark circles under my eyes with the gentlest of touches. “I would do anything to ease the burden of being married to such a conflicted prince.”

“You cannot be blamed for Odin’s actions.” I lay a hand on his cheek. “And worrying about you is part of being your wife.”

This, at last, brings a small, tentative smile to his face. “I do love you, little one.”

“And I love you.” I stand on my tiptoes to kiss him and for just a moment, all my cares and troubles seem to melt away.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to all of you who have stuck with me through twenty chapters! This is the longest multi-chapter fic I've ever written and I'm pretty proud of how it's progressing. I used to struggle not to lose interest and abandon my stories but I'm still thoroughly enjoying writing this one and having so many awesome readers following along is a major bonus. I appreciate every one of your kudos, bookmarks, subscriptions, and comments.

Idyll

Chapter Summary

You and Loki retreat from court, but palace life beckons.

I awaken slowly, languidly stretching out my legs and wiggling my toes, luxuriating in the feel of cool sheets against my skin. Birds are twittering merrily outside and a warm breeze stirs the curtains in the open window. A beam of sunlight peeking through the curtains promises another lovely day. My first coherent thought upon awakening is *If only we could live this way forever, far from the pressures and judgment of the court.*

Loki and I have stolen away to a seaside cottage owned by a relative of Frigga's, spending two months in blissful solitude, enjoying the honeymoon period we never had. Truth be told, we spend our days in much the same way we did in the palace; I read and write, working my way through books that Frigga graciously sends from the palace library, and Loki trains, reads, and practices his seidr. I greatly miss the company of his family and Sif, but to compensate there are leisurely walks along the beach, candlelit dinners, and lazy mornings spent sleeping late and making love. There is something intoxicating about being the center of Loki's universe.

I am not severed from all contact with my husband's family, however. I am able to see Frigga for brief reunions when I visit Lady Eir so she can be sure that all is progressing as it should with my pregnancy. Sometimes I can steal a moment to gossip with Sif while Loki is at the library or on the training grounds, but it's not quite the same as living in close proximity and I can sense some of the intimacy between us slipping away. Still, I cherish these brief encounters with my loved ones at the palace as well as periodic visits to my family's home.

I believe Frigga senses how good the time away from the palace has been for Loki. Although she has made it quite clear how much she misses us and worries for her son, she has rarely tried to persuade us to return before we are ready, and I'm grateful for that. It is my most fervent hope that life can return to the way it was before Loki learned of his parentage but I know he'll only become more intractable if he feels he is being forced to return to his family.

I turn over in bed to face the still slumbering Loki, who rarely slept late before we retreated to our seaside idyll. Even while asleep, his brow is furrowed. I reach out and caress his pale forehead with my fingertips as if I could smooth away his tension with a single touch. Loki stirs and I quickly withdraw my hand. He seems unbothered. "Good morning, little one," he rumbles in the gruff voice I've become accustomed to when he first awakens. "And how are my girls today?" He gently brushes his fingertips over my abdomen, which is now quite prominent, his customary morning greeting for Brynja.

"We are well," I respond, enjoying his caresses. "And you, my love?"

“Fine, fine,” he says absently, trailing his fingers down my inner thighs, which makes me shiver with pleasure. I sigh and close my eyes as he continues to move upward, almost holding my breath in anticipation...

...and then there is a great flash and a crash of thunder outside, startling me enough that I jump visibly, and not because of my husband's ministrations. “What could that be? It's a beautiful day, not a cloud in the sky,” I say in confusion.

“Damnation!” Loki swears, leaping out of bed and dressing with a single wave of his hand. “That can only mean one thing: My brother is here, with impeccable timing as always. Excuse me, my darling, while I see what the giant oaf wants.”

Of course, I am disappointed in the interruption of our activities, but I brighten at the thought of seeing Thor. We have not had many opportunities to conveniently bump into each other during my visits to the palace. Sif has told me that rumor has it that Odin has been instructing Thor on his kingly duties in anticipation of Thor's coronation, which may be announced any day.

I decide to allow the estranged brothers some time together to discuss whatever Thor has come to talk about, taking my time choosing an airy summer gown in a buttery yellow and neatly braiding my hair. Not for the first time, I find myself longing for Magda's sunny presence and her chatter while she helped me dress and arranged my hair. I have always found all my servants rather unnecessary but I have come to enjoy their companionship.

I descend the stairs and find Thor and Loki talking quietly in the parlor, Loki eyeing his brother with characteristic disdain. “Brother! It is so good to see you!” I exclaim, mindless of the fact that I'm interrupting their conversation. Thor swiftly rises from his chair to embrace me, though not as heartily as he did before I was with child. His newfound gentleness around me never fails to touch me.

“And you, dear sister,” he responds. “Are you and the babe well?”

“We could not be better. Lady Eir says everything is progressing as it should.” I take a seat next to Loki on the settee and he snakes an arm protectively around my shoulders. “What brings you here, Thor?”

“And did Mother send you?” Loki inquires.

“No,” Thor frowns, brushing a lock of golden hair off his face. “Though Mother is part of the reason I've come here, I took it upon myself. Frankly, Loki, I am concerned about Mother. She has not been herself since you left. She misses you intensely and would like to have both of you near as you prepare for the birth of your child. It is a rather momentous occasion, the birth of the first prince or princess of Asgard in many centuries.”

“And why should this concern me? She's *your mother*,” Loki says flippantly. “*Shouldn't her precious golden son be the one to console her? Surely she is not truly distressed at being kept from her future Jotunn granddaughter.*”

“Loki!” Thor and I burst out sharply at the exact same time. I think I have never been so disappointed in him as I am at that moment. “If you ever speak of Brynja that way again, I will give birth at my parents’ home and you will never have the privilege of knowing her,” I say vehemently.

Loki raises his eyebrows in shock at my venom but Thor saves us from an all-out argument when he shouts exuberantly, “Brynja? It’s a girl, then?”

Neither Loki nor I can keep the smile from our face, effectively dissolving the tension from the room. “Brynja Lokisdottir,” he confirms proudly. “Our little princess.”

Thor comes over to give me another hug but comes to a halt when he tries to embrace Loki, who spits, “Touch me and you’ll find a dagger in your side just as you have many times before.”

Thor backs away, holding his hands up in front of him in surrender. Though I am horrified at Loki’s threat, I cannot help but giggle at the humbled expression on his handsome face. “No need for that, brother,” he soothes. “I am just overjoyed at this news. And I have more great news to share with you both.”

“I am not your brother,” Loki mutters sullenly, but both Thor and I ignore him.

“Father has decided it is time to celebrate my coronation in six months’ time and there will be many festivities leading up to it, including a grand tournament. What do you say, Loki? Shall we fight side-by-side like old times and give a good show for all of Asgard?” I can hardly bear to see the hope that brightens Thor’s eyes, knowing what Loki’s answer will likely be.

Loki crosses his arms over his chest like a petulant child. “I see. You want to trot out the Jotunn Prince like a trained bear to entertain your future subjects. Well, I won’t allow it.”

Thor heaves an exasperated sigh. “The people of Asgard have no idea you’re a Jotunn, and frankly, I don’t care since it changes nothing. You are still my little brother, as you have always been. Besides, seeing as Brynja will be born not long before the coronation ceremony, I was thinking this could also be a celebration of our new princess. What do you think?”

“I think it’s a wonderful idea,” I enthuse. “Loki, you fight magnificently. This is a chance to show our people what you’re capable of. And don’t say ‘They are not my people.’”

“Do you not have larger things to be concerned with, such as the rebellion you failed to put down? I am surprised that Father wants to make you king while such a threat still exists,” Loki narrows his eyes at Thor, whose blue eyes darken at this accusation.

“We have interrogated the Elven prisoner and believe the Jotunn threat is not credible,” Thor retorts, nonplussed. “Heimdall has not seen any suspicious activity in Jotunheim and we are keeping a close watch on that realm. The situation is well in hand. I will go put an end to the uprising myself if I must. And you have no right to question Father’s judgment about when I am ready to be king. After several thousand years of rule, who would know better than he?”

We are all silent; I feel a deep pang of regret that Thor's visit has taken such a turn. "Thor, forgive my terrible manners. Can I offer you some tea? I suppose it is rather early for mead," I finally say feebly.

"Thank you sister, but I really must be going." Thor gives me his customary carefree grin, though I know he must have quite a lot weighing on his mind as he prepares to take the throne. Still, he has been groomed for this from birth and he seems to be taking it in stride. "I knew it would take more than one short visit to convince Loki to return and participate in the celebrations. I will return, or else I will speak to you when you come to consult with Lady Eir."

"You know you are welcome any time," I say. Beside me, Loki opens his mouth to interject and then closes it without a word. "Please give your mother my best wishes. I regret that our arrangement has caused her such pain but we must return only when we are ready. I think she knows that deep down."

Thor reaches out to clasp my hand, giving it a squeeze that is surprisingly gentle, given the size of his hand compared to mine. "You are very perceptive, dear sister. I will do my best to reassure Mother that this is not a permanent separation. And brother; I shall return with more details about the tournament and other festivities! I will convince you to join us yet." With that, Thor goes on his merry way, departing with another rumble of thunder.

Loki watches him go silently, glowering yet somehow also managing to look quite dismayed. I hold my breath, awaiting some sort of outburst, but he merely says, "Well, that was bold of him."

"He does not know how to go about life any other way."

"Can you imagine, Thor as king? What a disaster that will be."

"Give him a chance. His entire life has been leading up to this coronation."

Loki glowers for a moment, then rubs his forehead. "We shall see."

"Well, for now, shall we see about breakfast?" I stand up and stretch my slightly sore back, my stomach rumbling.

"Hmm. I believe we were in the middle of something before we were so rudely interrupted." Loki rises and abruptly pushes me up against the wall, claiming my lips and pressing the length of his body up against mine urgently. I gasp and return the kiss, moaning as his tongue traces the seam of my lips, parting them so our tongues can dance together. My husband suddenly picks me up as if carrying his new bride over the threshold and sweeps up the stairs to return to our bedroom. All thoughts of his family, Thor's coronation, and the threat of an attack from Jotunheim fly from my head as he gently lays me down on the bed and continues to ravish me.

Even during our lovemaking, though, I cannot forget that Loki had referred to our daughter disparagingly as Jotunn, and I tuck that fact away for further discussion at a later time. I am determined that Brynja will never have reason to feel inferior.

A Realization

Chapter Summary

A chance encounter at the marketplace leads to a major decision.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

As blissful as our time at the seaside cottage has been, after several weeks I find myself chafing at the solitude, eager to go out into the world and once again be in the presence of others. Even a scholar can only spend so many hours alone with her books. Loki obliges by taking me on a ride in his skiff to spend an afternoon at the marketplace. Once I recover from my initial apprehension I discover that it is incredible to view Asgard from such a vantage point. My husband appears to be quite amused by my enchantment.

“I suppose I became accustomed to this view when I was younger and used to take this out more often,” he muses, deftly steering the craft around Asgard’s tallest buildings and monuments. “It is delightful to see things anew through your eyes, darling.” He snakes an arm around my waist, pulling me into his side and kissing my cheek. “I had thought to take you out for a ride when we were first betrothed, but...”

“That would have been an awkward ride,” I finish for him. I close my eyes, snuggling into his side and enjoying the cool breeze on my face. “Did you ever imagine we’d be so content?”

Loki is silent for a moment, considering this. “I felt glimmers of happiness and passion when I first saw you and looked into your mind, but I could not have imagined ever feeling so settled and fulfilled.”

“The God of Mischief, settled?” I tease, smiling up at him and marveling at how handsome he is in profile. Sometimes it is difficult to believe that a plain, bookish woman such as me could have captured his heart.

“It is rather unprecedented,” Loki says wryly. “Years ago, I would have looked at this view, thinking, ‘All of this could be mine.’ Contentment is not in my nature. Now, everything I need is right here beside me.”

I nearly cry, thinking back to the rocky early days of our relationship and how much we’ve been through since then. “I love you.”

“And I love you, my precious wife.”

Once we reach the bustling marketplace, we stroll through the stalls arm-in-arm while I choose fresh bread, fruit, and vegetables for our dinner. The afternoon sunshine is pleasantly warm and there is hardly a cloud in the vast blue sky. The vendors are eager to sell their goods to a prince and princess of Asgard; they show us flowers, baked goods, jewelry, and all manner of trinkets. Loki's attention is only diverted when a jeweler shows us a particularly stunning necklace, a light green jewel in a simple gold setting. The multifaceted gem shines brilliantly in the sunlight and even I, not usually one for finery, must pause to admire it.

"May the princess try it on? This would complement her eyes beautifully," Loki says, and the man agrees enthusiastically, handing the necklace to my husband.

Loki moves my hair out of the way and slowly clasps the chain around my neck, his cool breath tickling my ear and sending a shiver all the way down my spine to my toes. The simple act of putting on jewelry had never been so sensual.

"Stunning," Loki pronounces, taking in the sight of me with keen eyes before pressing his lips to my neck. "We'll take it."

"Loki, this is much too expensive," I hiss. The price is appalling, but at the same time, I long to keep the necklace. I have many lovely and priceless jewels in the palace vault but none so meaningful as one chosen for me by Loki.

"Nonsense. You deserve to be spoiled." Before I can react further, he has paid for the jewelry and is leading me away from the stall.

For once, I am speechless. All I can manage to do is squeeze his hand, repeating, "Thank you, thank you!"

"A jewel worthy of my bride," he says, straightening the gem at my collarbone.

Soon we reach my favorite stall, which sells old books, and Loki drifts away to look at a display of knives and swords. I lose myself in perusing the many volumes, trying to choose just one or two to purchase, when a trio of women I recognize from court pause at the next stall, selecting fresh flowers for a bouquet. I duck my head, hoping they haven't seen me, my ears perking up at their conversation.

"I hear Prince Loki has removed himself from court because he's planning to cause all manner of chaos at his brother's coronation," says a tall woman with chestnut hair swept into an elaborate updo. "Or worse, try to usurp his place on the throne."

"He does seem to have some leverage though, being married with an heir on the way," muses one of her companions, who is short and stout, with raven hair. "Meanwhile, Prince Thor continues to show no interest in marrying."

"Well, don't forget that his parents had to pluck some poor girl from obscurity in order for him to be married," says the first woman. "It seems no one at court could bear the thought of becoming his wife."

My cheeks burn at their sharp words and I stare at the book I'm holding without seeing a single word on the page. I had thought removing ourselves from court would quell some of the malicious gossip, but it only seems to have gotten worse.

"Everyone knows that Thor is King Odin's favorite," pipes up the third woman, a lovely, slim blonde. "How could Loki possibly think he has a chance at the throne?"

"He thinks he can trick his way into anything," scoffs the brunette, examining a periwinkle bloom. "But the people of Asgard would never accept that snake as their king. Surely he is delusional." Then she giggles, "If Thor is having trouble finding a consort, though, I'll gladly volunteer my services."

Laughter and teasing follow this pronouncement. I grit my teeth and pay for the books I've chosen, then I school my features into what I hope is a pleasant expression and approach the flower vendor. "Ladies! How lovely to see you here. I trust you're enjoying this beautiful day."

Stricken, the women stare at me in various degrees of shock and shame. I find myself enjoying their discomfort and briefly wonder if that's a product of Loki's influence.

The black-haired woman recovers first, gracefully curtsying. "It is so good to see you, my lady. We have missed you at our card games. Will you return to court soon?"

I am a terrible card player and I'm well aware that the ladies of the court find me dull company because I don't indulge in their gossip and intrigues. I bite back a smirk at her flattery. "I'm not certain. It has been such a relief to be away from all the gossip and backstabbing."

This silences them once again; I'm having such fun, though I feel a bit guilty at enjoying acting so spitefully petty. "I trust the preparations for the coronation are going well?" I ask, inwardly chiding myself that I should be above such behavior.

"Oh, yes," enthuses the blonde. "The court is planning many celebrations. I hope you and Prince Loki will be joining in the festivities. Will you join us for a stroll around the market?"

"Thank you, but it's time I found my husband. I hope to see you again soon, ladies." I leave them with bemused expressions on their faces. I know better than to hope I've put a stop to their gossiping and spreading rumors about Loki, but perhaps they will be more discreet in the future.

When I find Loki, we decide to order tea at a small café. I tell him about my encounter with the court ladies while we wait for the tea to brew and he laughs with childlike delight. "Well done, my darling. You're learning how to navigate the court as if you were born to it."

I bask in his praise but grow serious, watching him pour the brew into small, delicate cups. "Still, I'm concerned that our absence from court is causing harm. They were saying terrible things, that you are planning to sabotage Thor's coronation or even try to wrest the throne from him."

He laughs humorlessly. “As if there is anything in this realm that could convince Odin to put me on the throne. Can you imagine, an abandoned Jotunn ruling Asgard?”

I reach across the table and take his hand. “Obviously, I don’t think that you’re actually going to do these awful things. It’s just that your parents had you marry me in hopes of putting an end to such rumors and suspicion. Now it seems we are just feeding into it by retreating from court life.”

“I’m not worried about the ludicrous talk of some dimwitted courtiers,” Loki replies. “There will always be talk and I have learned to live with it, little one.”

I sigh, knowing what must be done but regretful that it will require giving up our idyllic days at the cottage. “I would not be doing my duty as your wife if I allow this to continue. I think it’s time we return to the palace. We should support your family as they prepare for Thor’s coronation, and I’d like to be close to your mother and Lady Eir as my time approaches.”

“This is what you truly think best?” he asks.

I blink in surprise, having expected him to put up a fight. Instead, he sounds resigned. “Yes. These have been some of the most wonderful weeks of my life, but I feel we’ve run away from our responsibilities long enough. We are about to become parents. I’d like to see you reconcile with yours before then.”

Loki rubs his forehead wearily. “Why must you always be right? I suppose I deserve this for marrying such a wise and sensible woman.”

“The mischief-maker needs someone to balance out his nature,” I smile, hope blossoming inside me. I want nothing more than for him to reconcile with Odin and Frigga before Brynja is born. I am under no illusion that it will be easy; still, this is a step in the right direction.

“Very well.” Loki heaves a sigh, clearly not completely happy about this. “I will meet with Mother and discuss our return to court.”

“Thank you, Loki.” I squeeze his hand. “Trust me, I wish I could spend the rest of my days ensconced in the cottage with you. But I have come to accept that being royalty, we do not have the luxury of making such a choice. We must support Thor as he ascends to the throne and pledge our loyalty.”

My husband nods slowly. “You are correct. Though I have often been envious of him, I love my brother and have looked forward to the day when he would become Asgard’s ruler.”

It warms my heart to hear Loki once again refer to Thor as his brother. “I am proud of you and proud to call you my husband.”

“I will do anything in my power to make you happy, little one.”

Once again, I am the worst at updating. I finally got over some writer's block by writing a somewhat fluffy chapter. Hope you enjoyed the Loki fluff. Thank you all for your continued support!

Soul Bond

Chapter Summary

Thor endeavors to bring you and Loki back into the family fold. Meanwhile, Loki surprises you with a significant gift.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Returning to live at the palace strongly reminds me of the early days of my betrothal and marriage when I often became overwhelmed by the constant presence of the court, family members, and servants. Craving solitude, I'd sought out hidden nooks in the library, where I could read and write away from prying eyes and mindless chatter. Now, after growing accustomed to the quiet rhythm of life at the cottage, I find myself often back in my hiding spots, stealing a few moments of serenity in between my obligations.

Loki seems to have softened a bit toward Frigga and Thor, though he remains distant and standoffish in the presence of his father. I have managed to remain silent on the subject of their reconciliation, hoping Loki will soon come to terms with his parentage and the love of his adopted family without my interference. Still, keeping my mouth firmly shut on the matter is no easy feat.

One morning after a particularly tense family breakfast, Thor asks if he may speak with me in private. Odin and Frigga have already left the table and Loki kisses my cheek before departing for his usual morning training. Thor moves to a seat across from me, then reaches out and takes my hands in his.

"How are you, sister? You have seemed a bit...flustered since returning to the palace."

"I am well, dear brother. Living here again has been rather trying after living on our own, and Loki is still struggling to accept the truth of his heritage. I am uncertain about how to help him," I admit.

"Your support and love may be all he requires," Thor says thoughtfully. "I have been contemplating how to help you and Loki feel more a part of our family. As my coronation nears, in particular, I want you to know how much you are valued."

"You have never done anything to alienate me in the slightest," I assure him. "In fact, you've had no part in any of this. I'm ashamed that Loki has been insisting that you're not his brother when you've never treated him as anything but your brother."

Thor sighs, wrapping his hands around his mug. "I do wish he could recognize how much I care for him whether we share the same blood or not. All the same, my parents have deeply

wounded Loki and I sense he is concerned about bringing a daughter who is not fully Asgardian into the world. I'd like to ask your permission to sponsor a ball in honor of you and Loki, to celebrate the imminent birth of your child."

Though I am touched by his thoughtfulness and generosity, my head begins shaking even before I can fully process his proposal. "I am honored, but this is not necessary. You know how I hate being fussed over and Loki has hardly been in the mood to be in the public eye as of late."

Thor is nothing if not persistent. "Please consider it, sister. Your wedding was planned so quickly that you were not given all the balls, feasts, and other festivities that would normally accompany the wedding of a Prince of Asgard. You deserve to be feted like a princess."

I can feel a flush creeping up my neck and cheeks. "In truth, I was all too happy to avoid being a spectacle. Being a part of the royal family does not come naturally to me."

Thor smirks. "So you will not allow your future king to honor you in this way?"

"Are you threatening me, brother?" I raise an eyebrow.

"I would never resort to such vile tactics," he responds with a cheeky grin. I cannot help but smile back, recognizing Frigga's crafty side in him at the moment.

"Fine. I am amenable but I cannot promise that Loki will agree to this. I know he still has not given you an answer as to whether he'll participate in your coronation celebrations."

"I am certain that you can persuade him, but let me know if you'd like me to speak to him. I can flatter him with a reminder that he has managed to produce an heir before me and deserves to be recognized for such an accomplishment."

I laugh, sure that this is exactly the right way to go about gaining my husband's approval. "Your kindness truly means everything to me. Some days I am not certain how your mother and father really feel about our child, but you have never been anything but enthusiastic and supportive." I walk around the enormous table to embrace Thor, reveling in the now-familiar feeling of my feet leaving the floor when he wraps his arms around me. "Thank you. I could never repay you for your loyalty."

Thor shakes his head emphatically. "Mother and Father will fall in love with your daughter once she is born. They are eagerly anticipating her arrival but I suspect they have not made it clear in the midst of so much turmoil. You must know that your child is already welcomed and loved."

Tears sting my eyes when he releases me from his embrace. "She is already so blessed with a wonderful uncle."

Thor is beaming to rival the sun. "I look forward to spoiling her rotten. Have a word with Loki and let me know what he says, and we can start planning the ball right away. Thank you for allowing me to do this, sweet sister. I think it will be good for all of us." He presses a kiss to my forehead and gives my shoulder a gentle squeeze.

I can only hope he is correct. As I walk back to my chambers, I thank the Norns for blessing me with such a thoughtful and affectionate brother, an unexpected marriage gift.

~*~*~*~

Loki joins me for luncheon in my chambers that afternoon once he is done training. At first, we merely make small talk about our days as we eat. Then he casually asks, as if the answer does not matter in the slightest to him, “So, what did Thor wish to speak to you about?”

I hide a smile, knowing he has restrained himself from eagerly inquiring about Thor from the start. He can never countenance being left in the dark about any happening in the palace, no matter how inconsequential. “He would like to sponsor a ball in our honor, to celebrate the upcoming birth of our daughter. He also hopes to include us in the events leading up to his coronation. It’s really quite thoughtful of him.”

Loki raises his brows but does not look up from cutting his meat. “Of course, he thinks he can spend some money on a lavish ball and buy our love and loyalty.”

“That’s not true at all,” I object. “He is ecstatic about becoming an uncle and wishes to honor us. I cannot understand why you refuse to accept his love, Loki. Learning about your adoption has not changed the way he feels about you in the slightest.”

He fixes me with a steely stare but I maintain eye contact, refusing to be cowed. “Little one, you cannot expect me to smile and pretend to have any interest in revelry when I have just been told that my entire existence is a lie. Is it not enough that I’ve been suffering through family meals and court appearances without complaint when the very sight of Odin makes me ill?”

Having lost my appetite, I push my plate away and lean my elbows on the table, resting my chin on my hands and fixing Loki with my best doe-eyed gaze. “That’s a shame. I would have thought you’d bask in the opportunity to celebrate an accomplishment that Thor has yet to complete.”

A corner of Loki’s mouth quirks up. He takes a bite of food, chews, and swallows before saying, “You are so adorably transparent, darling.”

“You cannot tell me you’re not tempted by an opportunity to lord something over Thor,” I smirk. “I know you too well to think otherwise. Besides, don’t you think Brynja deserves to be celebrated? The first Princess of Asgard to be born in centuries?”

“Brynja is safe in her mother’s womb and cares nothing about such things,” he retorts wryly, but somehow I know I have won him over. His facial features are softening, seeming to become less sharp and pinched.

I feel a flutter in my womb and put my hands on my belly just in time to feel a hearty kick. “I’m not so sure about that. She seems to be dancing right at this moment.”

Loki slowly rises from his seat, asking almost shyly, “May I feel...?”

I nod and he kneels in front of me, gingerly placing his hands where mine had rested as if afraid he might cause harm to me or the child. Brynja kicks again and a look of wonder spreads across his face. "Our daughter is already a warrior," he proclaims, with such pride that I cannot laugh at the absurd idea. Loki has never been so endearing as he is now, with his head cocked toward our child as if waiting for her to speak.

"Our tiny Valkyrie," I say teasingly. "So...you'll escort me to the ball?"

He heaves a theatrical sigh. "I suppose it would be a tremendous scandal, were you to appear unescorted in your condition. Very well, dearest wife, I will accompany you."

"Thank you, Loki. I know this is the last thing you want to do and I am grateful." I lean down to kiss the top of his head but he lifts his face up and captures my lips instead. I rest a hand on his cool cheek and breathe in his familiar scent, which reminds me of snow-covered evergreens and something intangible and uniquely *Loki* that I have yet to identify.

Servants arrive to clear away the remains of our meal and I drift over to the window to admire the view of Asgard and the Bifrost beyond, settling into the plush cushions that line the window seat. I had expected Loki to depart but he glides over to join me. "I have a surprise for you, little one. Perhaps you'd like to wear it to the ball."

"Oh?" Every day with Loki as my husband is so full of surprises that I'm taken aback that he's actually presenting me with one.

He reaches into a hidden pocket and retrieves the necklace he'd recently bought for me at the marketplace. He lays the green jewel in my hand and I stare at it in fascination, lifting it up to eye level for a better look; a tiny green flame appears to be flickering inside the stone, illuminating it from within. "I've never seen anything like this. It's incredible."

"It's one-of-a-kind...an enchantment I devised, actually." Color rises in Loki's cheeks and he averts his gaze from me, abashedly addressing a point somewhere across the room. I'm puzzled by this sudden loss of his customary confidence. "I was thinking of the stories I grew up hearing about lovers who forge a soul bond, which binds them together forever and is symbolized by a flame that burns in their heart as long as their beloved lives. This flame is a symbol of my eternal devotion to you. It will never go out during my lifetime."

I don't realize that I'm crying until a tear splashes onto the gem. I carefully wipe it on my skirt, turning it back over so I can continue to admire it. Loki appears to be alarmed at my tears, gently brushing them away with his fingertips and peering into my eyes. "What's the matter? I thought you'd be pleased."

"I'm just overwhelmed," I assure him, "and not in a bad way. I've often feared that I'm just a passing fancy until you find someone more worthy of your love. I am not sure I can find the words to properly express what this means to me."

"No words are necessary," he says, laying a hand over my heart. "I can feel your emotions."

Embarrassed, I hide my face against his chest. "Don't do that," I protest, my voice muffled.

“Do what? Sense your feelings? There’s no need to be ashamed. Your inner beauty is every bit as radiant as your outer beauty. Look at me.”

I do, and Loki takes my head in his hands, his brow furrowed. “Darling, how can you think you’re not worthy of my love? I chose you because I saw in you all the qualities that have made me fall in love with you and I am still finding new reasons to adore you all the time. You astound me every day with your kindness and your intellect, and you’re going to be a wonderful mother. You’ve never wavered, even when you learned you had married a Jotunn. I cannot imagine finding a partner who compliments me better in any of the Nine Realms.”

I gaze into his eyes, which are shining with conviction. His infamous silver tongue is nowhere in evidence. “Nor I. I shall always cherish this gift and wear it with pride.”

I close my hand around the jewel as if by doing so I could protect the love that binds us. I imagine the tiny flame remaining a constant through decades and centuries, as our children grow up and Thor reigns as King of Asgard. Once, I never could have so much as imagined living out my days as the wife of a Prince of Asgard, particularly the trickster about whom I’d grown up hearing so many sordid tales. Now, it is difficult to picture choosing any other path in life, despite the turmoil that has often intruded upon our marriage. I lean into Loki and we remain ensconced on the window seat for the better part of the afternoon, blissfully lost in each other.

Chapter End Notes

I hope this chapter wasn't too disgustingly cheesy. The necklace will come into play later in the story. I have been indulging in writing some romance and fluff before we move on to the angst and drama of the events of the MCU. Needless to say, it's going to be a bumpy ride and I keep wondering why I'm doing this to myself.

By the way, feel free to follow me @elle_wells on Twitter if you'd like to join me in some Marvel fangirling and other shenanigans on there.

I'm just thrilled that so many of you have stuck with me through 23 chapters. <3

Revels

Chapter Summary

Thor hosts a ball for you and Loki.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Frigga helps me to design a gown for the ball, a stunning creation consisting of a mint green underskirt overlaid with a sumptuous, velvety forest green fabric. It pairs perfectly with the necklace Loki had given me, along with earrings and a tiara featuring matching green jewels. Originally, my maids had swept my hair into an elaborate arrangement of curls on top of my head, but Frigga decreed that a “more youthful” style would suit me better. The queen has left to prepare for the event herself and the servants are now arranging my hair partially in a crown braid, with the rest of my locks hanging in loose curls. If I didn’t feel so enormous, now in the final stages of pregnancy, I would feel more beautiful than I ever had. Frigga’s taste is impeccable and she always knows just the styles to best flatter my figure and coloring.

Once my hair is styled and my jewelry put in place, my maids leave me in peace to wait for Loki to come to my chambers to escort me to the great hall. A frisson of anxiety seems to pulse beneath my skin, as is customary before these large events. This time, I have the added concern of whether my husband will be able to set aside his resentments and allow Thor to host an incident-free night of revelry. Taking a deep breath that does little to steady my nerves, I pour myself a glass of water and walk into my bedroom in search of the book I’ve been reading. I hope Loki will appear on schedule so I can soon plunge into the social event rather than fretting alone with little else to occupy my uneasy mind.

I halt abruptly as soon as I cross the threshold into the bedchamber, emitting a startled gasp. A sleek black cat with vibrant green eyes is curled up contentedly on the bed, staring at me without concern, its head resting on its paws.

“How did you get here?” I ask, as if the animal might have a reasonable explanation for its presence. I approach the feline cautiously, slowly reaching out a hand to stroke its silky fur. The cat lifts its head, rubbing it affectionately against my hand as if we’re already acquainted. Could this be one of the barn cats? But how would a barn cat make its way into the palace?

Completely puzzled, I call out, “Magda? Did one of you girls bring a cat in here?”

Silence. My maids, no doubt, have gone off to enjoy an evening of leisure after preparing me for the ball. I realize I’m on my own and will need to make some accommodations for the cat before leaving for the ball, which may last most of the night.

I lower myself onto the edge of the bed, thinking aloud. The cat purrs and nuzzles against my side. “Well, I suppose I should find you something to eat and drink. Loki seems to be taking his time, anyway. I’ll return in a moment.” Again, I wonder why I’m talking to a cat as if it can understand me.

I go into my wardrobe in search of my shoes and slip them on. When I turn around, there is a flash of green light and the black cat transforms into Loki before my eyes, resplendent in his ceremonial armor. I am so startled that I let out an ear-splitting shriek. Loki strides over to me and claps his hand over my mouth. “Shh, darling, I thought you would know it was me. There’s no reason to be alarmed.”

“How was I supposed to know my husband was a cat...or, the cat was my husband?” I demand, giving him what I hope is my fiercest glare. “I’ve never seen you do that before.”

“But you are well aware that I can take any shape I desire.”

“So I must always be suspicious that any person or animal I encounter could be you?”

“Come now, little one, I was only having a bit of fun before I must be on my best behavior. I meant no harm,” he pleads.

I know he is telling the truth, but I cannot help but feel annoyed; being startled had only heightened my anxiety, though he couldn’t have known that. “Brynja will love that little trick,” I say begrudgingly, hoping to smooth things over.

Loki offers me his arm. “Shall we? Ah, perhaps when she is older. The little ones tend to want to pull on my tail or grab my fur.” I tuck my hand into the crook of his arm as we proceed out of my chambers. “There will be so much to show her and teach her,” he muses, his face lighting up at the thought.

“What was it like being taught seidr by your mother?” I ask.

For once, he does not clench his jaw at the mention of his adoptive family. “She was quite patient. I was a quick study, always eager to move onto the next lesson before mastering the last. She showed me the value of perfecting the craft. While working with her, I could forget about languishing in Thor’s shadow. I cherished our time together.” His voice catches, though he quickly recovers. “I have neglected to tell you how stunning you look tonight.”

I smile and thank him, but my heart is warmed by more than just the compliment. His remarks give me hope that he will one day be able to reconcile with his family, or at least Frigga.

Odin, Frigga, and Thor are already waiting for us outside the great hall, where we will line up to proceed into the hall. “Brother! I was afraid you were going to miss your own ball,” Thor says, seizing my hand and kissing it. “Sister, you will outshine every lady tonight.”

“That’s enough flattery, Thor,” Loki scowls. I give his arm a sharp squeeze to remind him to be polite and he forces his lips into the shape of a pleasant smile. “Shall we move along?”

Odin raises his eyebrows but does not speak. The tension in the air is so palpable that it nearly crackles. He offers his arm to Frigga and Thor takes his place behind his parents for their grand entrance, glancing behind him to see if we're following. "Last in line, as is tradition," Loki grumbles under his breath.

I give him a reproving look. "Try to enjoy yourself," I murmur. "It's not often your brother hosts a ball in your honor."

"As a matter of fact, this has never happened before. I wonder what he's up to?"

"Dearest husband," I say with just a twinge of sarcasm, "if it were you throwing the ball, I'd be certain that some mischief was afoot. Believe it or not, some of us possess the ability to do something without an ulterior motive. There is no doubt in my mind that Thor genuinely wishes to honor us and hopes to return to your good graces, such as they may be."

Guards throw open the enormous doors to the great hall, the cue for the royal family to be announced. After living anonymously for so long, it is still disconcerting to observe many members of the court openly staring at me, particularly the ladies, some with hostile expressions and others starkly envious. I do my best to smile graciously as we pass on our way to the head table, which is set up on a dais overlooking the cavernous hall. Normally Odin would speak to kick off the celebration, but today that responsibility falls to Thor. He is beaming as we take our seats, graciously waiting until we are settled before he begins his speech.

"My friends, I welcome you to my family's home as we honor my brother Loki and his dear wife on the eve of the birth of their first child. As my mother has sometimes not-so-subtly reminded me, it has been many centuries since there has been a child gracing the palace nursery." He meets Frigga's eye with a wink and she shakes her head at him, though she cannot help but smile warmly at her eldest son's teasing. The crowd roars its approval. I spot my sister Astrid sitting at a table with my family and she gives me a discreet little wave.

Thor continues, "Somehow Loki, cunning as always, has managed in just a few months to gift our family with his delightful wife and now, a child who carries the promise of the future of Asgard."

I'm not sure if he is intentionally flattering Loki or not, but my husband appears to be dazed at this high praise from his brother. I seek his hand under the table, clasping it tightly in mine, trying to telegraph my reassurance that he deserves this.

"So please, eat, drink, and be merry, and be sure to offer your best wishes to Prince Loki and his princess as they embark on this new adventure, though I wouldn't expect to see Loki completely trading in mischief for changing diapers." More laughter from the audience, which is hanging on to Thor's every word. "A toast to the happy couple and Asgard's newest royal!" He concludes, raising a tankard of mead. The crowd responds in kind and servants enter the hall with platters of food, which they begin to distribute. I can feel my face flaming and am tremendously relieved that Loki and I are no longer the center of attention.

Thor ensures that the choicest cuts of meat make their way to our plates and urges me to eat, though my nervous state has stolen my appetite. As always, it is difficult to say no to the big-

hearted God of Thunder, and I even find myself beginning to enjoy the sumptuous food. Thor nods approvingly as I transition from picking at my food to enthusiastically cleaning my plate. It is somewhat odd to feel mothered by my husband's brother, though not unpleasant.

There is little time to linger over dessert; once sweets and fruit have been served, Frigga urges Loki and me to open up the dancing. Loki smiles rather grimly and takes my hand to lead me onto the dance floor, all too conscious that all eyes are upon us. I feel extremely ungraceful in my current state, while Loki is as lithe and elegant as always. The musicians strike up a tune and he takes me into his arms, an awkward proposition with my belly intruding between us.

"You are the envy of every woman here tonight, looking ravishing in the arms of a prince, a royal heir in your womb," Loki murmurs in my ear as we begin to move. "I must admit, it is quite pleasing to show you off like this, brimming with our child, leaving no doubt that you belong entirely to me."

I hide my face against his shoulder, feeling painfully shy, yet also pleased and all too aware of the spark his words have ignited in my loins. Loki's lips turn up at the corners at my reaction and he tenderly kisses the top of my head.

"There are so many contradictions within you, it is delightful." Loki spins me away from him and then nimbly pulls me back up against him, looking down upon me as if I'm the single most fascinating thing in the universe. For a moment, the activity surrounding us seems to fall away, leaving only the two of us in the vast ballroom, going through the motions of the dance while lost in each other's eyes.

It is with great reluctance that I part from Loki once the song ends, our guests applauding politely. How simple life would be if we could leave all this pomp and circumstance behind. And yet, it is impossible to imagine my regal husband as anything but a prince.

Speaking of princes, Thor takes Loki's place as my partner just as Frigga arrives to claim her younger son. I watch them out of the corner of my eye as the next dance begins, wary of hostility toward his family.

"You've come a long way since the first time we danced at your wedding, sister," Thor smiles.

"Have I? I seem to remember you being the one who stepped on my feet then," I say innocently. Thor roars with laughter.

I surreptitiously glance at Loki and Frigga to see how they're faring and feel a weight lift from my chest as Frigga throws back her head and laughs at something Loki says. He flashes his teeth in a smug grin in response, apparently quite pleased with himself.

Thor follows my gaze and smiles fondly at the pair. "It is good to see Mother and Loki enjoying each other's company again."

I nod in agreement. "Brother, I do not know how to thank you for your generosity. This has been a special night."

He bows his head graciously. "I hope you know I'm going to spoil my niece rotten."

"I would expect nothing less. Thor, has Loki, um, spoken to you at all tonight... aside from being rude before we came in?"

"No, but there hasn't been much time for that," Thor says cheerfully. "Never fear, sister, I'll win him over in the end."

I make a mental note to conspire to bring the two brothers together at some point in the evening. I, too, am capable of a bit of mischief. By now my back is aching and I hope to take a break from the dance floor, but Fandral taps Thor on the shoulder and asks if he can cut in. Thor looks briefly annoyed but relinquishes his place and I resign myself to another dance. The warrior is swaying slightly on his feet and smells strongly of mead. Thor's friends having too much to drink at an event such as this is nothing new, but usually, I manage to stay well away from their debauchery.

"You are looking lovely tonight, dear princess," Fandral praises, leading me confidently through the steps of a dance I'm not very familiar with. "I've heard of ladies in your, er, condition glowing, but this is the first I've seen this phenomenon with my own eyes."

"Thank you," I reply, gritting my teeth. Is it my imagination, or is his hand moving ever so slowly down my back? I eye my partner with suspicion but his expression remains guileless. "You're very kind."

"You know, the warriors and I had a bit of a wager amongst ourselves, and none of us thought your marriage to Loki would last this long, or be so...productive." Fandral winks; his hand dips down to rest on my backside. "You are an extraordinary woman indeed."

I am mute with rage, uncertain about how to best deal with the situation. I cast about wildly for a rescuer. The couples surrounding us are too enthralled with one another to notice this violation. Not seeing Loki or Thor anywhere, instinct takes over and without considering the consequences, I stamp on Fandral's foot with as much strength as I can muster.

The music does not actually stop, but it might as well have; the dancers around us come to a halt, transfixed by the drama unfolding in front of them. A couple of ladies audibly gasp. Humiliated tears sting my eyes and I mumble, "Excuse me," before fleeing from the hall, choking on a repressed sob as I push through the doors and out into the dim, deserted hallway.

"What have I done?" I moan, utterly distraught.

The heavy doors open again and Lady Sif emerges along with a burst of light, music, and chatter. "Are you all right? I saw what happened," she says gently, wrapping her arms around me. The shieldmaiden is stunningly beautiful in a crimson gown, her customary armor discarded for the occasion.

"No. I've made a mess of everything." Breathing is becoming more and more difficult as my chest seems to restrict. My hands are clammy and shaking. I wipe them on my skirt with no regard for the effect on the expensive fabric.

“Fandral deserved that, and I’m fairly sure he will not remember any of this in the morning,” my friend soothes. “He’ll be fortunate if Loki doesn’t come for his head.”

“He might not remember it, but everyone else will,” I say miserably. “With one faux pas, I’ve confirmed that the prince’s wife is an uncouth commoner who does not know how to behave at court. My family is here! I’m supposed to be intelligent, and then I go ahead and do things like this without thinking.”

Sif rubs my back. “When we were younger, Loki chopped off my hair when I was sleeping and I had to appear at court looking as if I’d cut my hair with a butcher knife. I was inconsolable. But several days later, I realized everyone had already moved on to the next scandal and had completely forgotten about me. Queen Frigga had a lovely wig made for me and soon it was as if nothing had ever happened.”

This story, at least, distracts me momentarily from my panic. “Loki cut your hair? That little snake!”

She laughs. “An apt description. I think you’ll find that the court has a short memory. They’re always on the hunt for the next morsel of gossip.”

I sniffle and nod, trying my best to take her words to heart. Meanwhile, my body is rebelling against me, making me feel as if I’ve committed the worst sin imaginable. The doors behind us fly open and Loki storms out, arms akimbo. His face softens when he sees Sif comforting me. “Thank you, Lady Sif, for your loyalty to my wife,” he says, briefly touching her arm. “I can take it from here.”

Sif looks uncertain but she squeezes my arm and nods at Loki. “I won’t be far away if you need me,” she says before vanishing back into the crowded hall.

Loki regards me silently, his brows knitted together. “I must admit that was quite entertaining, little one, as inappropriate as it might have been. That weasel is fortunate I didn’t slit his throat right then and there.”

“I can never show my face in court again,” I tell him morosely.

He slips an arm around my shoulders. “Only if you care what those dullards think.”

“Even if I could forget about them, I will never forgive myself.”

My husband looks thoughtful. “Perhaps you could achieve absolution if punishment is administered.”

His eyes are gleaming but I’m not entirely sure what he means. “What kind of punishment?”

“The fun kind,” Loki says, with a devilish grin. He conjures a length of silky green fabric out of thin air and uses it to bind my wrists together, then leans in and kisses my neck, playfully nibbling at my skin. Warmth pools between my legs; there is no doubting his meaning now.

“We can’t just disappear during our own ball. Everyone will be wondering where we are.” It takes every ounce of willpower to argue this; Loki’s fingers are now trailing lazily down my

sides, leaving my skin tingling everywhere he's touched.

"Nonsense. I'll leave an illusion of myself behind and we can say you were feeling unwell. Off we go." There is a flash of green light and a second later, we appear in his bedchamber. Loki is grinning wolfishly down at me as if he might devour me.

"Now, where were we?"

Chapter End Notes

I've been struggling to finish this chapter all week and finally decided to split it into two, but that means you'll have to wait until next chapter for the smut. Try not to hate me too much. ;)

Absolution

Chapter Summary

Loki's punishment for your transgression at the ball turns out to be more pleasurable than you anticipated.

Chapter Notes

Here it is, the smut you've all been waiting for! ;) This is a bit of a shorter chapter but I wanted to get this posted before I go to Gettysburg over the July 4th weekend since I left you hanging last chapter. I hope you enjoy it!

“Loki, I’m serious,” I insist. “I cannot just disappear. Take me back to the ball.”

The smirk remains on his face, his eyes darkening as he takes me in. “All in good time, my darling. Once you have been absolved of that little scene you created back there, you may return. I must admit, it was a delight to see Fandral rebuffed in such a fashion, but as a princess of Asgard you must resort to more...shall we say, discreet methods.”

I flush with shame as Loki trails his fingertips from my décolletage, brushing over my breasts before he lifts me onto the bed; just the feel of his hands on my sides is enough to spark my arousal. He kneels down and begins to oh-so-slowly inch my skirt up my legs, trailing a line of light kisses on my calf and thigh, setting an almost painful pace as he approaches the heat between my legs. His breath tickles my exposed skin, causing me to squirm slightly, eliciting a slight chuckle from my husband. Just as his lips are about to move beyond my thigh, Loki flicks his tongue against my skin before drawing back, covering me with my skirt once more.

I groan in frustration. “Not so fast, little one,” he chides. “This is supposed to be a punishment, after all.”

I begin to understand the gist of this game; a wave of both apprehension and desire ripples through me. Loki has never pushed me beyond the activities I’m comfortable with in the bedchamber, yet this is thrillingly new.

“Get on your hands and knees,” he orders, and I obey. He delivers a firm slap to my backside, causing me to let out a tiny squeak of both shock and pleasure. “Ah, yes, this will teach you to misbehave in front of half of Asgard,” Loki purrs, clearly relishing every moment of this. With a wave of his hand, he makes most of my clothing disappear, leaving me in only a

nearly transparent chemise. I give a little involuntary shiver as the cool air hits my damp, flushed skin.

I arch my back as he spansks me again and again, slightly ashamed to realize I am literally dripping with desire. "I believe ten more slaps should be a sufficient deterrent against that sort of misstep. Count them for me."

I grit my teeth and count as he administers my punishment, inwardly musing that this is more likely to encourage rather than deter future misbehavior. "One...two...three..."

Once the final smack has been delivered, Loki moans and presses up against me, his arousal straining against the confines of his trousers. "You have no idea what you do to me, do you?" he asks with a kind of wonder in his voice, nipping at my earlobe.

Meanwhile, his hand has finally ventured between my legs, taking very little time to bring me to a frenzy of need as he strokes between my wet folds before sliding a finger into me. I hear myself whimper and gasp as heat builds, my walls tightening around his slim digit, eager to reach my release-

-and then, just as I am about to fall over the edge into total bliss, he stops, slowly sucking my wetness from his fingers. I crane my neck to give him an outraged look, struggling to balance with my hands still tied together. Loki just grins, looking all too satisfied with himself. "I haven't given you permission for that, have I, dearest? When I finally allow you to come, you're going to feel unable to move for about a week."

"Can I at least touch you?" I beg, desperate for more contact.

"Hmm...I think not." He hikes my chemise up around my waist and grasps my hips, removing his own clothing with a snap of his fingers so that his hardness presses deliciously against my aching clitoris. I involuntarily try to grind up against him, but Loki uses his seidr to hold me firmly in place. Keeping with the theme of the night, he enters me at a leisurely pace so that I can feel my inner walls stretching to accommodate every inch of him.

I hear myself moan as if from a distance once he's fully hilted inside of me. He withdraws completely before repeating the same, agonizingly slow process, penetrating me as if we have all the time in the world. "Oh, Loki, please!" I plead. My hands and arms are losing feeling from propping myself up, yet I barely notice. I am too focused on my need for motion, some sort of friction.

"Please what?" he asks innocently, his tone almost indifferent. "What is it that you desire, little one? You'll need to be more specific than that."

"Please *move*!"

"Why didn't you say so?" he responds teasingly, increasing his pace until his hips are slamming into me with each thrust. He's hitting all the right spots, causing me to cry out every time he buries himself in me. Once again, I find myself teetering dangerously close to the edge. Loki must somehow sense this; he abruptly flips me over so that I'm lying on my back and uses his magic to manipulate my arms so that they're now tied to the bedposts. All I

can do is lay there panting, my chest heaving as I silently beseech him to resume thoroughly ravaging my quivering body.

“You are so beautiful, perhaps even more so now that you are with child,” Loki praises, kneeling between my legs, breathing only a bit more rapidly than usual. That and his tousled hair are the only indications that he’s exerting himself in the slightest. I, on the other hand, must look an absolute mess. His eyes roam hungrily over my body. He takes a deep breath before easing into me again, this time setting a punishing pace right away.

Freed now from his seidr, I meet Loki’s thrusts, shuddering as we come crashing together time and time again. I am certain that I can no longer hold back my orgasm after being denied twice before. When I begin to feel the telltale tendrils of pleasure radiate from my core, I swallow my pride and gasp, “May I have permission to come?”

Shrewd eyes that glitter like polished emeralds regard me thoughtfully. “I’m not sure that’s wise. Are you sure you’ve been thoroughly punished?” Loki maintains his composure until he lets out of little moan of his own while he waits for my answer.

“You’ve been quite thorough,” I insist.

“Have I? I can still imagine a few methods of punishment I might enjoy administering.”

“Please!” I plead, my voice strained from the effort of holding back the dam of bliss. “I have learned my lesson!”

His grin is nearly feral. “Very well. You have permission to come.”

The sensation that washes over me once I let go is so powerful and overwhelming that tiny fireworks burst behind my closed eyelids. A keening sound reaches my ears and it takes a moment to realize it’s coming from me. Loki continues to pound into me with irregular thrusts as I orgasm, then I am vaguely aware that he, too, has lost control with a growl. I lay limp and satiated, moaning quietly as I feel a wet warmth coating my insides.

My husband regards me silently, his eyes piercingly bright, before carefully lowering himself to rest his head on my chest. I brush his raven hair from his sweaty brow. “How was your punishment, little one? Was it adequate?” he asks in a dazed voice.

Speaking seems to require a tremendous effort and my limbs feel almost liquid. “It was much more enjoyable than I anticipated,” I answer, downplaying the fact that I have never experienced a release quite like that before. Clearly, I still have many things to learn about lovemaking, and I suspect that Loki will be only too pleased to be my guide.

He presses a kiss to my damp forehead. “I love you, little one. Rest for a moment and then we’ll return to the ball as promised.”

“And I love you,” I respond drowsily. Sleep beckons, but I know we must do our courtly duty and attend the ball until its conclusion, particularly after this little stolen interlude.

Once we have both caught our breath, Loki uses seidr to restore us to a proper appearance, restoring my gown and jewelry and even returning my hair to its earlier style. We re-enter the great hall arm-in-arm, giddy with our secret, and I spy Frigga watching us with a knowing look on her face. I will have to live with the uncomfortable knowledge that the All-Mother knows exactly what we have been doing while the ball proceeded in my absence.

Brynja

Chapter Summary

Your daughter makes her long-awaited appearance.

Chapter Notes

I must apologize for what is most likely the worst description of labor and childbirth ever. Having never experienced it myself, I somewhat glossed over those aspects of this chapter, assuming that all the gory details were unnecessary. Other than that, this chapter has been a long time coming and I hope you enjoy it! Love you all! <3

"There is nothing to discuss! You will take your rightful place on the throne of Jotunheim and forge an eternal alliance with Asgard!" Odin roars, more terrifyingly unhinged than I ever could have imagined the stoic king.

Standing before the immense golden throne, Loki flinches at his father's vehemence but does not falter. "And what of my beloved wife? She cannot survive in that cursed wasteland! I shall not leave her." He searches me with wild, frantic eyes.

"She has done her duty and given you an heir to help you secure your place as king of the Jotunn. You may return for conjugal visits when your duties permit," Odin proclaims, decisively rapping Gungnir on the floor.

Each boom of the fabled spear echoes painfully through my skull. "Conjugal visits?" Are we to be nothing but prisoners of the throne now? I reach for Loki's hands but just as I touch him, the Bifrost appears to whisk him away to his new realm. Dazzled by the rainbow light and utterly distraught, I fall to my knees before the throne, ready to wretchedly beg the All-Father that my husband and daughter be allowed to stay with me.

"Loki!" is the only word that manages to leave my lips before I am seized by a band of pain that contracts in a ring of pressure around my abdomen, leaving me breathless. And then Loki is gone but the pain remains.

I awaken with a gasp, relieved to see Loki sleeping peacefully beside me as I sit up in bed, my skin damp with a cold sweat. My breathing sounds loud and harsh in the still, moonlit chamber, with the palace sleeping all around us. I take a deep breath to try to ease the tightness in my belly but when I find no relief in this calming ritual, I let out a little half-sob, half-moan of alarm. Does this mean our daughter is on her way?

“What is it?” Loki mumbles, barely stirring.

“I’m not sure. I- I think the baby may be coming.”

This rouses him instantly. He lurches up and studies my face anxiously. I know I should be regulating my breathing and relaxing as much as possible, but the concern on my husband’s face only makes my heart pound harder and my stomach twists with fear.

“We must get you to Lady Eir immediately. I will wake Mother as well. I know she will want to be present at the birth, and...after, I suppose,” Loki says reluctantly, skirting around the fact that Frigga will need to charm the baby to make her appear Asgardian soon after the birth. Lady Eir is the only person outside the immediate family who has been informed about Brynja’s ancestry and she has been sworn to secrecy.

“Perhaps it’s just a false alarm. We should wait and see if the pains continue before waking anyone up,” I caution. Indeed, the discomfort has ebbed, leading me to wonder if I only imagined it as part of that distressing nightmare. Looking uncharacteristically helpless, Loki reaches over to rub my back.

I concentrate on regulating my breathing, closing my eyes until the next contraction hits. I instinctively climb down from the bed and begin to pace, feeling some relief as long as I am moving. And then suddenly there is a great gush of liquid and I stare in dismay at the puddle on the floor, my blissful uncertainty about whether I would soon be giving birth suddenly very much a thing of the past. Tears well up in my eyes and panic begins to overtake my body. “I can’t do this!” I say desperately. “I don’t know how to be a mother! I only just left my parents’ home for the first time!”

Loki regards me with troubled eyes, clearly uneasy about his impending fatherhood as well. Then, seeming to come to a decision, he leaps from the bed, coming to put an arm around me and giving me a tremulous smile. “Shh, darling, you’re allowing your thoughts to overwhelm you. Right now all you must do is focus on the task at hand. Let’s worry about bringing Brynja into the world before you panic about how to mother her. I suspect we’ll be learning how to be parents together. Come now, little one, it’s time to go to the infirmary.”

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“What do you mean, I’m not supposed to be present for my child’s birth?” Loki thunders.

Lady Eir purses her lips, utterly unmoved. “Your highness, it is not customary for a Prince of Asgard to attend the delivery of his child. You will be summoned once your daughter has been born, as we have done for centuries.”

I can only look on helplessly from my bed in the healing wing; while I had been informed of this royal protocol, clearly, my husband had not. I suppose this should not be surprising, considering the tumult that arose after we announced my pregnancy. Frigga briefly touches Lady Eir’s arm in a conciliatory manner, then clasps Loki’s hands in hers.

“Perhaps it is time to change the old ways. Some traditions are dated and make little sense these days. If the princess has no objection, you may stay, my son.” She rises on her tiptoes to

kiss Loki's forehead. "I am so proud to see you becoming a father."

Loki actually flushes and Lady Eir inclines her head in agreement, her steely eyes indicating her displeasure with this decree; but how can she quibble with the All-Mother? "Very well," she says stonily. "But if we order you to leave at any point, there will be no arguing."

Loki nods mutely. The healer seems satisfied and goes back to her work, mixing various ingredients together in a vial which she hands to me. "A tincture to help you relax and lessen the pain."

I eye the cloudy, lavender concoction warily before downing it, willing to try anything that will help make labor easier. Loki returns to his chair by my bedside and takes my hand, clenching it so tightly that it hurts. I wiggle my fingers to alert him to lessen his grip.

"Sorry, little one," he says sheepishly. "I suppose I'm a bit more nervous than I realized."

I try to think of something clever or comforting in reply but I find my mind seems to be drifting, making it difficult to focus on any one thought. The next contraction hits then, making me cry out, and then I fall into a void where there is no pain.

~~*~*~*

Eight grueling hours later, I am not so sure I still want Loki to see me in my sweat-drenched, miserable state. Frigga and Lady Eir are urging me to push, yet I'm more exhausted than I have ever felt in my life and am seriously questioning whether I can take any more pain. "I can't," I sob wretchedly. "I don't have the strength."

I am humiliated by my lack of fortitude, but I am somewhat steadied by the understanding in Frigga's eyes. "I said the same thing with my firstborn," she says, gently wiping sweat from my brow with a soft cloth. "Thor took an inordinately long time to arrive." Lady Eir smiles slightly at the memory. "I was at my wit's end. All the pain and effort was rewarded when I first held him in my arms."

Until now, Brynja has seemed to be an abstract idea rather than a living, breathing child. However, listening to Frigga, I suddenly long to hold her and examine whether she resembles Loki or me. "Let's do this, then." I pant, sounding much more confident than I feel. "I'm ready to meet our daughter." I give Loki's cool hand a squeeze and he turns those incredibly expressive green eyes to meet mine, alternating between looks of fascination and horror. It would all be rather amusing if I weren't so terrified myself.

I push and I scream and I push some more. Every time I'm on the verge of giving up, Loki and his mother and the healer encourage me to endure for just a little bit longer. This has felt like the longest day of my entire life. And then, miraculously, Lady Eir announces that she can see my daughter's head and I once again have a reason to fight, to bear down and strain with every last bit of strength I possess, and Brynja Lokisdottir makes her first appearance in the realm of Asgard. I sob anew with both joy and fatigue as I watch Frigga tenderly take her granddaughter in her arms, expertly cleaning her and wrapping her in a blanket as her blue eyes roam over the child as if absorbing every last inch of her. The baby lets out a piercing

cry that seems to constrict my heart and her grandmother briskly soothes her, rocking her in her arms while humming softly.

“You did so well, little one,” Loki praises, though he looks somewhat stricken after witnessing the birth.

“Thank you,” I whisper, giving him a wan smile, and then Frigga places a swaddled bundle into my arms and my entire world changes in that instant. *She’s so perfect*, is my first thought as I take in Brynja’s pearlescent light blue skin and wispy black hair. It occurs to me that she looks just like Loki, somehow, even as a newborn. Something about the shape of her face and delicate curve of her brow is already regal. I use my fingertips to smooth her wild hair, marveling at her soft skin and the fact that I can safely touch her, though of course, she is not a full-blooded Jotunn.

“She is so beautiful.” Loki sounds awed that the two of us have produced such a flawless creature.

“Of course she is. She looks exactly like you,” I say, my breath hitching.

This causes him to frown, which confuses me. “I was thinking that she resembles you!”

I stare at him in consternation. “You must be joking. This is just how I imagine you looked as a baby.”

“Why have you been imagining how I looked as a baby?”

“I think that is a normal thing to contemplate when one is about to give birth to a child of their own,” I scoff. *Are we really arguing over who our daughter most resembles when she’s just come into our lives?*

“Dearest, I think it would be best if we put the charm on her as soon as possible, to avoid anyone seeing...” Frigga falters, ending our stalemate, tears making her eyes an even more vibrant blue than usual.

Instinctively, my grip on my daughter tightens and Loki leans over to wrap his arms around both of us. “Mother...please, may we have just a few minutes with her...as she is?” His voice is anguished, and my heart aches for both him and our little girl. Until now, I could never have imagined feeling so protective; the merest hint that Brynja is not perfect just as she was born raises my hackles. I know Brynja’s ancestry must be concealed, but I long for a world in which she and Loki could reveal who they truly are and be at peace with their heritage.

Frigga nods resignedly, exchanging a glance with Lady Eir, who gives a subtle nod. I close my eyes to block the intrusion of the outside world and bask in the presence of our newly-expanded little family, listening to Loki’s even breathing and the little mewling sounds Brynja occasionally makes.

“I truly wish it did not have to be this way,” I murmur to my husband, hoping to convey even a tiny fraction of what I’m feeling for him and our daughter.

“I know,” Loki responds, his voice cracking slightly. “Darling, everything you are feeling right now, I feel it too. Your emotions are radiating off you like light.”

All too soon, the time comes for Brynja to be taken away from us and I am left to weep at the injustice of bringing her into a realm where her true identity can never be known.

Enchanted

Chapter Summary

Being the mother of a one-week-old proves to be more of an adventure than you ever anticipated.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

When Frigga returns Brynja to my arms, she looks even more like Loki in her new Asgardian form. I silently marvel over the way her dark hair contrasts with her now alabaster skin, and when my daughter opens her eyes, they're a lovely blue-green. I stroke her soft cheek while I memorize all of her tiny features. Loki watches us quietly from his chair next to my bed as if mesmerized by the scene before him. His eyes brim with wonder and adoration.

"Would you like to hold her?" I ask him, suddenly aware that he hasn't held his daughter yet.

Loki's breath hitches as he hesitantly reaches out his arms. "She's so tiny. I'm afraid I'm going to break her," he admits as I place the baby in the cradle of his arms. He leans down to place a feather-light kiss on her forehead, pausing a moment to inhale her scent.

"I feel the same way. I never imagined becoming a mother would be part of my future, yet all feels right with the world when I hold her."

"Welcome to our realm, little daughter," Loki says. Brynja coos in response, waving her arms, and his entire face lights up. "I think she knows I'm her father," he says in awe.

"Of course she does," I say, resting my hand on his muscular arm. Overwhelmed, I find tears are leaking from my eyes again and I brush them away with my free hand. I never knew I could feel such love as I do now, watching my husband greet our daughter, telling her all the things he's going to teach her when she's older. And yet, some hidden part of me longs to see Loki holding our little girl in her true form; will I ever lay eyes upon that beautiful blue skin again?

Somehow, as always, Loki knows exactly what I am thinking. "Oh, darling, this is for the best," he says, his voice betraying his uncertainty. "We're giving her a life free of being ostracized and feared. She may even be in line for the throne someday. You know Asgard would never grant her her rightful place as a Jotunn."

He's right, of course, and I would do anything to spare my daughter a life of being shunned for her heritage. And yet... "Do you ever wish to appear in your true aspect, free from this deception?"

Loki cocks his head, considering, as he fusses with the downy blanket cocooning Brynja. “I suppose sometimes I think it would be freeing to simply let Asgard see who I truly am, to confirm the people’s suspicion that I am a villain and a serpent in the heart of the royal family. I imagine the horror and judgment on their faces when they learn a Frost Giant has been walking among them, undetected, for centuries. But it is easier to continue to be who I was raised to be, with the truth of my birth a trump card up my sleeve.”

I nod, once again observing my child in her Asgardian form. This must be how Loki looked after Odin and Frigga enchanted him. Am I doing the right thing in continuing this tradition of concealing the true identities of the royal family? I wonder if I will ever know the answer to that question.

~*~*~*~*~

Being the mother of a royal baby comes with its own unique set of challenges and advantages. I have to fight for my right to nurse my own child, which apparently violates thousands of years of royal protocol and shocks the nursery staff, who treat me with kid gloves as if I’m some sort of rebellious child. On the other hand, Brynja spends her nights in the nursery and is fed by a wet nurse during those hours, which allows me to properly rest after giving birth rather than waking up at all hours to a crying baby. I sometimes miss my daughter overnight, but I decide that I will propose adding a cradle in Loki’s and my chambers at a later time, once I’ve completely regained my strength. Though I’ve made great strides in asserting myself since becoming Loki’s wife, my timid nature still makes me quake at the prospect of demanding that things be done my way.

A week after Brynja’s birth, I’ve settled into a routine of reading in the nursery while she takes her afternoon naps. I’m contentedly turning pages and rocking her cradle with my foot when I come to the end of my book. I had planned to do some research in the library but I am so enraptured with my drowsing daughter that I decide to fetch another book and return to the nursery. I gingerly slow my rocking of the cradle before removing my foot from it. I freeze when Brynja emits a little grunt of protest, but she immediately quiets and I hurry off to my chambers to retrieve more reading material.

I return to the nursery to find an empty cradle and none of the ladies who care for my daughter are in sight. Bewildered, I pause to consider who might have taken the baby. Loki quite enjoys taking her for walks through the gardens so I begin my search there. The gardens are deserted and I’m beginning to feel the first tightening of panic in my chest when I spot Loki on the training grounds with Thor. I attempt to remain calm as I trot across the palace grounds toward the sparring brothers, to no avail.

“Loki!” The wail has left my mouth before I even realize I’ve been spoken.

Alarmed, Loki carelessly tosses aside the knives he’d been fighting with when he sees me running, hair and gown disheveled. “What’s wrong, little one?” Thor stands holding Mjolnir at his side, his brow knitted in concern. I’ve never interrupted their daily training.

“She’s gone!” I pant. “Someone must have taken her!”

“Who’s gone?” My husband sounds utterly lost.

“Brynja! I left the nursery for a moment and when I came back, she’d disappeared!” I sob.

“Darling, Mother must have her,” Loki soothes.

“But why would she take her from the nursery while she was napping?”

“Mother cannot resist her first grandchild,” Thor says. “Come now, sister, there’s no need to fret. We’ll help you find her.”

Neither of the brothers seem to be concerned in the slightest; in fact, they’re probably exasperated with my hysterics. I force myself to take deep breaths. “Thank you. I should have checked with Queen Frigga before jumping to conclusions. I’m sorry for bothering you.”

Loki slides a comforting arm around my waist as we walk back to the palace. “I suspect all new mothers are a little on edge.”

“Brynja is already quite precious to us,” Thor agrees. “Uncle Thor would never allow anyone to lay a finger on her.”

I have to smile at that. Indeed, Brynja has already brought our family closer together. Even Odin seems to be enchanted with her.

One of Frigga’s handmaidens lets us into the queen’s chambers. Frigga is crumbling dried flower petals into some sort of potion or tincture and appears to be surprised to see us. Brynja is nowhere to be seen.

“To what do I owe this honor, my dears?” Frigga raises her delicate brows expectantly, clearly mystified at the three of us appearing in her chambers together.

“Er, Brynja isn’t here with you, is she?” Loki asks, glancing furtively around the room as if his mother might have hidden the baby away somewhere.

“No, I thought she generally napped during this time and I wouldn’t want to disturb her sleep,” Frigga replies. “Why?”

I swallow hard, now feeling frantic rather than simply panicked. “I can’t find her,” I admit, feeling like a total failure at motherhood. What kind of mother loses her newborn baby?! “She was asleep in the nursery and I left briefly. She was gone when I returned.”

“Hmm.” To her credit, Frigga retains her customary aura of calm. “Well, it seems that all the likely suspects are in this room, and Odin is busy hearing petitions this afternoon. Perhaps one of her ladies took her for a walk? Sometimes they walk the corridors with her when she fusses.”

See? There must be a logical explanation, I tell myself sternly. Panic will not help matters in the slightest. “Why don’t we spread out so we can cover the corridors more efficiently?”

Frigga divides the palace into several sections for each of us to search, though Loki insists on remaining with me, eyeing me as if concerned that I’ve become mentally unbalanced.

Perhaps he's correct. "We will meet in the nursery," the queen says. "I'm certain there is a simple explanation for this."

Loki grasps my hand a bit too tightly as we set off and I know he too is feeling nervous, though he would never admit it. We round up two of the ladies assigned to care for Brynja during our journey through the palace, but the baby is not with them and the alarm on their faces does nothing to settle my nerves. I am quickly becoming frantic, a cold sweat breaking out on my brow and my hands trembling.

Once we've covered our appointed ground, we turn to retrace our steps to the nursery. I try to visualize Thor or Frigga waiting there with my child safely in their arms. But there is still no infant in sight and even Frigga looks a bit stricken.

"First my wife is taken from me, and now my daughter?" Loki bursts out, cold fury in his voice. "Who could have done this? I vow I will tear them apart, limb from limb."

A sob escapes my throat. Frigga hurries to my side, encircling me with her arms. "I suppose we should inform Odin. Dearest, I cannot imagine how someone could have snatched Brynja. The palace is extremely well secured and there are guards at every exit. There is one other possibility, though I doubt - "

Frigga stops speaking abruptly as Brynja suddenly appears in her cradle with a brief flash of green light. We are all silent with astonishment. My knees buckle but Frigga and Loki support me on either side; meantime, I think Thor's eyes might bug out of his head.

"Astonishing," Frigga finally says, taking a few steps forward to tentatively peer into the cradle. Brynja appears just as she always does, kicking her little legs and watching as if wondering what all the fuss is about. "I've never seen powers manifest in one so young. Loki was walking before there was any indication of his abilities."

Frigga bends over to retrieve the infant from her cradle, cuddling her to her chest. "Already so talented!" she enthuses. She offers the baby to me but I am trembling so hard that I'm afraid I might drop her. I shake my head wordlessly, though I am eager to feel the solidity of my daughter in my arms and assure myself that she is unharmed after her misadventure.

"When Loki was a toddler, he once managed to become invisible and I had to turn to using seidr to find him," Frigga says, fondly smoothing Brynja's hair.

"And yet you never thought to say anything about that incident as we searched, Mother?" Loki asks teasingly, sliding an arm around her waist and drawing her into his side.

"I had no idea powers could manifest in one so young!" Frigga retorts good-naturedly. "I never imagined a child could cause such trouble at only a week old. Just think of her potential! You're going to have your hands full with this one."

As if in response, Brynja looks adoringly up at her grandmother and her hair changes color to match Frigga's lovely golden locks, gurgling as if quite pleased with herself. Thor roars with delighted laughter and Frigga appears delighted. Unsure if I can handle any further surprises today, I sink into the rocking chair where I customarily nurse the baby.

“If this is how she behaves at one week old, I’m not sure I have the fortitude for what she’ll have up her sleeve in the future,” I say weakly.

Loki leans over to kiss the crown of my head as Frigga places the baby in my arms.

“Mischievous daughter, as entertaining as your antics are, please refrain from any use of seidr for the time being for your mother’s sake. There is plenty of time for me to teach you to control your powers.” He is clearly as pleased as can be with his precocious child. I am less certain that this is a positive thing.

“I can at least put an enchantment to make the nursery a safe space where she is unable to teleport anywhere else,” Frigga offers, a smile twitching at her lips.

“May I humbly beg that you do so as soon as possible?” I ask, causing laughter to erupt from Loki, Thor, and Frigga. Even Brynja makes a sound that may be a giggle.

Clearly, motherhood is going to be more of an adventure than I ever imagined.

Chapter End Notes

Special thanks to my husband, who helped me with the idea for this chapter after I'd been completely stuck for a while. This weekend I will be going to see Tom Hiddleston perform in *Betrayal* in New York, so hopefully, he will provide some inspiration. ;-)

Thanks for reading and for all the lovely, thoughtful comments!

Schemes

Chapter Summary

You and Frigga conspire to make Thor's coronation less painful for Loki.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Now that the weather is growing warmer, Frigga and I establish a routine of taking Brynja out for a walk after breakfast on clear days. On this day, there is not a cloud in the sky as I push the perambulator through the tentatively budding gardens. Spots of bright color dot the landscaping where a few brave early flowers have opened their faces to the sun. The queen strolls by my side, admiring both the gardens and her granddaughter, while several of her ladies trail behind, idly gossiping.

“You seem to have taken to motherhood quite naturally,” Frigga compliments, lifting her face up to the sun and closing her eyes as if absorbing its warmth. “I was so anxious when Thor was a newborn that I was always making excuses to go and check on him. His nursemaids probably thought I didn’t trust them with my precious son.” She smiles softly at the memory.

“It’s difficult to imagine you as anything but capable and confident,” I admit. “It has been an adjustment after growing up believing motherhood would not be a part of my life’s path. But now that Brynja is here, I can hardly fathom that I ever lived without her.”

Frigga nods thoughtfully. “She is a blessing, and does not cry nearly as much as her father did at that age.”

I have to chuckle at the idea of Loki being one of those infants who seem to be nearly constantly hysterical and inconsolable. “Well, he’s always been known for being dramatic,” I say dryly, and the queen laughs in delight even as I bite my lip, afraid I may sound critical of her beloved son. “Truth be told, having the nursemaids at my disposal has made this transition much simpler. Left to my own devices, I would hardly know how to care for her. Marrying into royalty certainly has its advantages.”

“I’m glad to hear that, and you know you may always come to me with any questions or concerns, day or night.” Frigga puts her hand over mine on the handle of the carriage. “Mothering Thor and Loki has never once been dull and I like to think I’ve learned quite a bit along the way.”

As we continue to walk, I marvel at how comfortable I’ve grown around this regal woman who once intimidated me so when she came to me with Loki’s marriage proposal. My time spent with her and my daughter has become one of my most treasured parts of the day. I try

to absorb some of her serenity each day before I dive into my duties as a new mother and wife of the God of Mischief. Some days I am more successful than others.

The path takes us out of the gardens and onto a hillside that overlooks the training grounds. Frigga gracefully seats herself on a stone bench and gestures for me to join her. I oblige, parking Brynja's carriage in front of us so we can keep an eye on her, though she's currently sleeping deeply. "Ladies, would you leave us alone for a little while? Perhaps you can continue to work on those potions we began this morning."

We sit in silence for a few moments, watching Loki and Thor spar in the training ring. The brothers have only recently resumed training together and every time I see them in action it feels as though I'm holding my breath, waiting for Loki to balk at some perceived slight. So far, though, all appears to be well between them. They are fascinating to observe in combat, Thor's brute strength and agility matched up against Loki's grace, cunning, and skill with *seidr*. Thor pauses to wave enthusiastically at his mother and me while Loki remains intensely focused, seemingly unaware of our presence.

I would be content to sit here all day and watch the show but I have the uncomfortable feeling that Frigga did not bring me here and send her ladies away simply to be entertained by her sons. My heartbeat quickens when I see her hands are knitted together anxiously and her gaze appears distant. She normally has the gift of making me feel like the only other person in the realm when we spend time together; now, however, she seems distracted.

"Is something troubling you?" I venture.

Frigga lets out the ghost of a sigh. "It's a blessing to have a daughter I can confide in, though I do hate that you have been burdened with so much in such a short time, dear one." Brynja stirs and begins to fuss and Frigga reaches out to gently move her carriage back and forth until she quiets. "As you know, Odin and I have been working to plan the festivities surrounding Thor's coronation. I've been trying to persuade Loki to take part in the events, particularly the tournament. But it has come to my attention that it is tradition for the heir to battle his siblings. The fight is well-rehearsed so the new king is victorious in a show of his strength and power. I fear I cannot subject Loki to this, not when he's so vulnerable and has only just begun to return to the family fold."

It takes me some time to absorb this, and when I finally do, the first thought that comes to mind is, *Are all Asgardian traditions designed to humiliate and belittle the prince who is not the heir?* Next, I wonder why I let myself be coerced into marrying into the royal family. I refrain from voicing this, however, opting to plead, "Oh, please do not force him to do this. He would never forgive any of you."

Frigga nods in agreement. "I know, child. I knew you would understand. There is so much that is unknowable about Loki, yet I feel you know more of him than any of us." She reaches over to clasp my hand in hers. "Will you accompany me to discuss this with my husband?"

My mouth is suddenly as dry as dust. "I can't imagine that I would be any help in convincing the All-Father to change court tradition."

Frigga cocks her head. "I seem to recall you moving the leaders of Alfheim with little effort." She winks, a gesture that always reminds me of Loki as she reveals her seldom seen mischievous side. "We won't go into this unprepared. I suspect we should offer an alternative to Thor fighting Loki, something that would still thrill the crowd and allow Thor to showcase his skills, and perhaps Loki as well. In fact, I think it would be beneficial for the people to see him in his element, combining his seidr and fighting prowess. Will you think about it?"

"Of course I will."

Truthfully, I feel quite helpless in the face of thousands of years of Asgardian tradition and Odin's obstinacy. Yet I am willing to make an effort if it means maintaining our fragile family bond and refraining from wounding Loki any further. I lean forward to stroke Brynja's downy cheek and ponder how unlikely a happy marriage and parenthood had once seemed. Perhaps, with Frigga as my ally, I can see to it that Loki is subjected to one less indignity as his brother inherits the crown.

~*~*~*~

I sing Asgardian folk songs my mother once sang to my siblings and me when we were children as I put Brynja to bed that evening. Then I settle into a rocking chair and watch with amusement as my daughter fights sleep, yawning and trying to force her eyes open every time her eyelids flutter close. Much like Loki, I'm discovering that Brynja is endlessly fascinating to me.

Loki enters the nursery as I'm rocking and humming softly, nearly holding my breath as I wait to see whether the baby has finally fallen asleep. He leans over the crib, observing Brynja with the customary expression of wonder he sports whenever he looks at his daughter. Turning to me, Loki places a kiss on my forehead and regards me with bemusement. "Hello, darling. You and Mother looked to be quite absorbed in conversation earlier. What were you discussing so avidly?"

How is it that Loki always seems to know when we've had a conversation concerning him? I put a finger to my lips, having ascertained that Brynja truly has lost her battle against sleep. "Let's talk in my chambers," I whisper, my mind frantically casting about for some story with which to placate him. Why should I even bother, though? He can always see right through my lies.

I rise and Loki slides an arm around my waist as we walk to my chambers and make ourselves comfortable on the settee. "Would you like some wine? Or tea?"

"I would enjoy a glass of wine."

I pour him a glass of honey-sweet wine from the carafe my handmaids have left me. Loki takes a sip and swirls the glass pensively. "So, how has your day been?" I ask brightly before he can inquire further about my talk with Frigga.

"Fine." He arches an eyebrow. "Why do I suspect you're evading my question, little one?"

I shift uncomfortably, tucking my feet under myself. "I'm not! I was just trying to make conversation." Having decided that I can at least tell the partial truth, I say, "I probably should not be telling you this, but we were discussing Thor's coronation events and how much we wish that you'll take part in them."

"Oh. That," Loki says flatly. "No need to fret. I'm slowly warming to the idea of showing my face. Perhaps we'll even have a little fun of our own." His eyes glitter deviously and my heart sinks, the meaning of his words all too clear to me.

"Loki, do not ruin this for Thor," I say sternly.

"You really are fond of the oaf, aren't you?" Loki gives me his most unpleasant grin, like a predator showing its fangs. "I wouldn't dream of *ruining* Thor's glorious moment. I'm simply saying that a few...shall we say, unexpected and amusing occurrences may brighten the celebration."

"You do realize your mother and I have been talking about this because we're concerned about you and want you to feel included at family events. It's very difficult to advocate for you when you insist on acting childish." I cross my arms, feeling rather petulant myself.

"Please," Loki sneers. Odin would like nothing better than for his adopted Jotunn son to remain hidden away like the disgrace he is. I'll face his displeasure either way, so why not entertain myself at the same time?"

As anxious as I am about approaching Odin and pleading for a reprieve for Loki, I cannot listen to this any longer. Hot tears well up in my eyes and spill over onto my cheeks as I turn to face him fully, unable to hold my tongue any longer. "Listen to me, Loki. I cannot tell you everything now, but Frigga and I are conspiring to ask your father to change the coronation traditions so that you can also shine during the festivities instead of remaining in Thor's shadow, being made to feel inferior. I do not know what more we can do to prove how much we love and value you. Perhaps I should just give up and allow you to wallow in self-pity if you're so keen to do so."

Silence follows my outburst and I study my hands immediately regretting my temerity. Who am I to speak to a prince of Asgard in this manner? I could destroy everything Frigga and I are working for before we even form a plan. "I-, I'm sorry..." I begin, raising my eyes to meet Loki's. I am not entirely sure what I expected to see, but I certainly did not expect him to look so utterly stricken and remorseful. His forehead furrows and his eyes darken as he regards me as if I've just announced a revelation.

"My darling. Are you serious? You and Mother have been plotting on my behalf?"

I nod in assent. "Yes," I say in a small voice. "I am not sure if we can move Odin, but we'll give it our best. I shouldn't have told you."

Loki seizes my hand, grasping it so tightly that I nearly cry out. "You're becoming rather fierce, aren't you? I see less and less of the meek woman I married every day. And I am humbled that you are standing up for me with Father, whether or not you are successful. Please forgive me for taking this so lightly. I had no idea you would do such a thing for me."

It tears at my heart that he is so taken aback by someone supporting him and showing their love in such a way. “We’ve been doing so for some time now. Even Thor has made an effort to make you feel valued and included in his own way. I only wish you could see it. I’m not sure what else I can do to show you that you and Brynja are my entire world.”

He leans forward until his forehead is resting against mine and closes his eyes; I study his dark eyelashes against his fair skin, struck by his beauty and his vulnerability. “There is no need to do more. Your feelings are impossible to overlook.” Loki softly brushes his lips against mine. “What have I done to deserve such a wife?”

“Everything,” I say, taking his face in my hands and gazing into his eyes. “Your mother and I are in your corner, always. Give us some time to work on this and no more talk of mischief during the coronation, promise?”

“I promise,” he says, but his eyes flicker to the side as he vows it, and I know that in addition to my current worries, I must also be wary of what he is planning for the coronation.

You did marry the God of Mischief says an obnoxious little voice in my head. I close my eyes and try to concentrate on kissing my beloved, all the while wondering whether I’ll ever be able to truly trust him.

Chapter End Notes

I'm so sorry for the unintended hiatus. I've been dealing with a bad case of writer's block along with a number of distractions (not going to lie, I think I was useless for about two weeks after I saw Tom Hiddleston in *Betrayal* last month and met him). It feels good to return to working on this story and I'm looking forward to the madness that's still to come once we reach Thor's coronation and the events of the MCU. Thanks to everyone who's stuck with me during this break. You guys are the best and I appreciate you so much.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!