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The Midwife's Tale

by TheRubyStorm

Summary

Written for a prompt and inspired by 'Call of the Midwife.' The midwives of Asgard and Loki have a bit of a special bond considering how often they're called secretly in the night to his bedside... A retelling of the births of Váli and Narfi told from the viewpoint of the midwife.
Chapter 1

The sharp rapping on the door was what woke me from my deep sleep. Rubbing my eyes, my vision worked to adjust to the darkness as I tried to rise from the couch. Judging from the position of the moon, I couldn't have been asleep for more than an hour or so. I couldn't help but get some sleep after all we had been through this day. Normally, I wouldn't even be up at this time of night. But it isn't my place to decide when babies come into this world; they choose when they're good and ready. And judging from the increasingly persistent knocking, I had a good idea of what was about to happen. Opening the door, I wasn't surprised to find Thor waiting for me, a worried expression on his face.

“Mistress Rania...” he started.

“Please Thor, there's no need for such formality with me. Your brother doesn't use them.”

“He's actually the reason I'm here. He says it's getting closer.”

“Yes. Tell him I'll be there shortly.”

And with a slight nod, he was off. I, meanwhile, quickly started grabbing several herbs and
supplies off the shelves; hardly able to contain my excitement. Bringing new life into the world is truly a miracle in itself and one that I never tire of; but the births of the children of Loki were things of legend among the midwives of Asgard. And while I had been there for every one, this time this one would be born onto my own hands.

I was only 12 when I witnessed the birth of his first child, Sleipnir; just starting as the apprentice of Mistress Quina who felt that this should be the first delivery I should see. Naturally, I was rather miffed that I was coming to assist, while a royal horse, a horse nonetheless.

“Mistress, is this really necessary? I was always told horses prefer to to deliver alone, not in the company of several people.”

“Please child...”

“And what about Madam Zara? I would think she would be in more need of your help in delivering her child than a mare...”

“Lady Zara will be well cared for by one of the assistants. Now please be silent.” she whispered to me as she opened the door to the stables.

Stepping inside, I was little taken aback by the sight of the mare that greeted us; one completely black with shining green eyes that I did not remember being here days before. At the sound of our entering, the mare eyed us up and down and regarded us with a nod before lying down in the stable with an audible thump. Before I could question Quina about it, she had already opened the stable door.

“Madam, are you sure we should?” I asked, hesitant to follow.

“Quite sure.” she nodded. “Hurry; it won't be long now.

Walking over to the mare, I couldn't believe the calm it showed as I took a seat next to her, even letting me rub her muzzle before resting her head in my lap, her breath heaving as I could see muscles tighten.

“What do I do?”

“Stay over by her head; do your best to keep her calm. It won't be long now...”

So I did. I watched in fascination as within minutes of our arrival, we promptly saw feet beginning to appear, followed by more, and four more feet as the rest of the foal emerged. I was more than a little concerned at the appearance of the eight-legged foal and thought it surely wouldn't survive;
Quina seeming much less uncertain as she busied themselves with rubbing down and investigating
the sex of the foal while the mare nurtured it with motherly licks. It wasn't until some hours later
when we were leaving that I inquired of Mistress Quina again as to why we had been there at all
when surely we were needed by a mother elsewhere. She looked at me with a mischievous twinkle
in her eye and simply said...

“The children of an Asgardian prince must come under the midwife's care first.”

And then I understood.

Loki...

I only scarcely heard her calling after me as I raced back toward the stables in the dark, needing to
prove to myself that it couldn't have been what I thought. As I reached the familiar stall, my eyes
widened as I realized that the black mare was gone. In its place instead was a pale, black haired
young man who looked as if he had been through the ringer several times over while the foal's
head rested in his lap as his fingers ran through its mane.

A gasp escaped from my mouth before I could stop it and as slight as it was, it caught his
attention. His head quickly snapped in my direction while I tried to get out of his line of sight and
hoped that he'd think he was mistaken.

‘He wasn't...’

“You there. Come into the light.” he said with a chilling calmness.

Nervously, I stepped into view; suddenly regretting returning to the stables and fearful that he'd
accuse me of coming to gawk (which wasn't entirely untrue.)

Recognizing me, his features slowly relaxed. “You can come closer.” he said rather calmly.
“Sleipnir won't bite.”

‘He's not the one I'm worried about...' I thought, but did as he said. Sleipnir, noting my presence,
slowly got to his feet and after taking a few wobbly steps, nuzzled his head against my arm for a
scratch. Kneeling down to the foal's level, I happily obliged as he leaned in closer and brushed his
face against mine. The soft fur tickled against my skin and I couldn't help but laugh at the feeling.
Hearing a chuckle, I looked to see the slightest trace of a smile on Loki's face.

“I remember you.” he said after a while. “The midwife's apprentice...”

“Yes sire.” I replied with a slight nod, surprised that he had even registered my presence then.

“And what is your name?”
“Rania, your grace.”

Tired from the evening’s events, Sleipnir plopped down next to me with a snort; his eyes closing as he eventually fell asleep.

“He really is precious...” I said with a smile as I kept stroking the soft fur.

Looking up at Loki, his eyes were soft as if he were touched that I had accepted his son.

“I think he likes you Rani...”

And that was how it began for me as I trained to become a future midwife. There were only two rules that were made perfectly clear soon after, for his sake and the sake of his children, the deliveries of Loki’s children would be kept only between the order of the midwives and that the parentage of his children would never be questioned. Within the next few years, Loki had brought forth two more children; Fenrir, a wolf pup who still takes great pleasure in nipping at my gown, and Jörmungandr, a serpent who enjoys curling up on my lap for a rest as I do my studies.

It had taken nearly two days for him to deliver Hel, his only daughter born three years ago. There was an uncertainty for a time if they both would survive the delivery and when she did arrive, with all the appearances of a Asgardian newborn yet half of her body gray as death, I feared for a moment that Quina would faint dead away from the sight. But to Loki’s great credit, it was obvious how much he cared for each of his precious children; handling each of them with the utmost care and insistent that we do the same. For some of the other midwives who came through, this proved to be difficult. More than once, I heard the term of ‘monster children’ whispered of his offspring. To me though, each one was incredible to see with a beauty and uniqueness all their own and because of that, Loki and I grew to be rather close.

It was soon after Hel was born that Loki took a wife, a beautiful girl named Sigyn. So needless to say, we thought that our midwiving would shift to her and were correct for a time when she announced her pregnancy to the court. However when Loki came to me a few days later and revealed he was expecting as well, the entire dynamic changed. For 9 months, we watched Sigyn grow ever larger with child while Loki didn't change at all; no doubt concealing the pregnancy with his magic. As their due dates grew closer, the anticipation among the midwives grew as we tried to figure who would bring forth their child first.

Sigyn was the first to send for us.

The scene was one that I remembered well; the room warm with the glow from the fireplace, the various smells and aromas that Quina had brought to keep her calm through her labor, a new cradle waiting for the coming babe. What I remember most was Loki and Sigyn together in the middle of
the room, her arms wrapped about his neck as he sways along with her, her head pressed against his chest as she lets out a low moan at the height of the contractions. Somewhere I hear him humming along with her and I realize that I'm doing it too, willing their child to come all the sooner. As the contraction ends, she raises her head to look at him, both their smiles completely euphoric as he gives her a tender kiss.

“I love you.”

She smiles at him and lets out a sigh. “I love you too...” she whispers as she kisses him again and I smile at the display of affection between the two of them.

It's a sharp hiss from Loki that breaks the moment.

Sigyn asks what's wrong but he doesn't answer; his hands rubbing his stomach as he struggles to breathe through the sudden pain.

“No... Not now...” he moans. He casts a look at me and we both know it at once.

*His time had come...*
Once it was determined that Loki was indeed in labor, there was a mad reshuffling as we worked to decide what to do now. Up until now, Quina had delivered all of Loki's children, but the birth of the first child of Loki and Sigyn was a highly anticipated event. It would be unlikely that she'd be able to attend both. So after much consideration (or arguing if you asked Quina) it was decided that since this was Loki's fifth child and only Sigyn's first, she would stay under Quina's care while Loki came under my charge. This would mean though that they'd be separated to leave both of us to our work to which they reluctantly agreed.

Being up for over a day now was starting to take its toll on me so it was insisted that while he was still in early labor that I'd get some rest while I still could. As much as I didn't want to leave, I knew they were right so I managed to stumble into one of the rooms where Thor found me a little while later. With the news that he was getting closer to requiring my care, I quickly gathered my supplies and after checking in with Quina, and made my way to Loki's chamber.

Lightly rapping on the door and hearing no response, I opened the door to find him sitting in a large chair next to the fireplace. All cover of his magic completely gone, his hands gently rubbed the now rather large mass of his stomach, the familiar humming barely legible as he breathed through the latest contraction. Not wanting to interrupt his concentration, I silently stood in the doorway, Only when I cleared my throat did he finally note my presence.

"Rani..." he smiled.

I grinned back as I shut the door; he was the only one who would call me that and I much preferred it to 'Mistress.'

"Well here we are again." I said matter-of-factly.

"It would seem so..." he agreed. "How's Sigyn?"

"Resting. Quina has given her a dram to help her rest up before delivery. It's been a long day for her."

"For all of us." he added, giving a pained grin as another pang started.

Instinctively, I clasped his hands in mine, letting him squeeze as the pains reached their height. He never wanted me to speak during these times and this was no different. Instead, his eyes would focus on mine, a intense stare that would go deep into my soul while he'd attempt to slow his breathing and try to match it with mine. It's those moments that I'm in awe of the fact that he's done this four times before and handling it better than several mothers I've assisted.

"That was rough..." he said as the grip on my hands gradually relaxed.

"You're doing brilliantly." I smiled as I gave his hand a gentle squeeze back. "Did you manage to get some sleep yourself?"
“Only just. He gives me no rest.”

“Starting early, isn't he?” I joshed. “You're still quite sure it's a boy?”

“Considering the others, I'd say the odds are in their favor.”

The smile he gave me made a warm blush start on my cheeks. “I spoke to your lady mother.” I said quickly, desperate to change the subject.

His face showed the slightest trace of distress at the mention of that. “You didn't...”

“Of course I didn't tell her.” I reassured him.

Despite his marriage to Sigyn, the notice of his pregnancy, as had the others, had been kept secret to everyone except this time to Thor.

“Four children; do you really think I'd start now? No, she inquired after Sigyn, asked if she could be of assistance to which I firmly refused but thanked her for the offer. Thankfully your brother was able to pull her away before the conversation went any further.”

“I knew there was some use of letting Thor know...” His sentence stopped short as a hand flew to his stomach followed by a visible wince of pain.

“Contraction?”

“No. He's kicking again.”

Curious, I sat at his feet, watching as his hands rubbed the sore spot.

“I think he's getting his last bit of bruising done to my ribs before he's born.” he grinned. “Give me your hand.”

His offer took me back slightly; he had never allowed anyone to feel the movement of his growing children before, not even to Quina. It was an opportunity I couldn't pass up. Shyly nodding, I let him take my hand and place it against where he had felt movement just moments before. It wasn't long before I felt the solid sensation of a foot press firmly against my palm. The feeling was nothing new to me, having done this with several expectant mothers, but still it managed to catch my breath every time I could feel life growing inside another.

“He'll be a strong one.” I said as Loki shook his head.

“He's stubborn like me...” he growled as his stomach went hard under my touch with another contraction. He may have felt like his son was taking his time, but I could sense otherwise. Judging from the movements of the child, and the rate his contractions were coming, he may very well deliver before Sigyn does.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the shortness of this chapter but there really wasn't a good space to split it so I kept it as is.
Next chapter: The Main Event!

Thanks for the kudos so far! You're all awesome! ^-^
Chapter 3

The next hour found us doing everything possible to keep things moving; changing position, laying down, sitting up, back down and walking the circumference of the room several times over to where I felt we had walked the distance to Migard and back. By this point, we had opted to standing in the middle of the room; Loki's arms wrapped about my neck as we sway in a dance no one would call that but us. What has only been an hour has felt like several as with each contraction, his moans would turn into muffled screams from burying his face in my shoulder. Transition is one of the hardest parts of labor and judging on how hard he's breathing now, it's taking its toll. I can sense the retching of his stomach and manage to grab a nearby basin before he empties the last contents of his stomach into it.

“I can't...take anymore...” he manages to choke out as the need to vomit fades away only to have another contraction in its place.

“Yes you can.” I say as I force him to look me in the eye. “Just look at me and do what I do.”

I take a deep breath in and out and he struggles to do the same. After a few long moments, the tension slowly calms and I can feel him relax back against me.

“I can't...I can't do this anymore...” he breathes.

“Yes you can. You've already made it this far. It won't be much longer ’til you have your children in your arms. Both of them.”

He says nothing, only moans as he rests his head back on my shoulder and digs his slender fingers further into my back. He's dealing with the hardest part of labor and it kills me to see him in so much pain.

The soft rapt on the door a moment later sets me on high alert and I fear that someone has heard us despite our precautions. I think of trying to lock the door but Thor's face appearing in the doorway quickly sets my mind at ease.

“I brought what you asked for.” he said, holding up a large container of water for the tub and I curse myself for forgetting that I had sent him for it in the first place.

Slowly I nod him in and motion for him to lock the door before setting the water to warm; Loki too far gone within a contraction to notice his presence.

“How is my brother?” Thor asked as he set the container of water on the floor next to us. I can sense the nervousness in his voice as he speaks and it sounds no different then other fathers-to-be that I've come across. Most fear to see the ones they care for in such a state, one would almost call insanity. Although, I had to admire him for offering his assistance this long; most men retreated to other rooms during the births of children, and I needed his help desperately.

“It won't be much longer now. Could you take him for a moment?”

He seemed rather uncomfortable at my request, but nodded as I gently transferred Loki from my arms to his, letting him take on his full weight while I soaked another cloth in cool water. He
hardly seems to notice the change of partners; his hands clenching and relaxing at Thor's neck as the pains hit their peak.

"Thor..." he breathes.

"I'm here brother."

Every so often, we hear moans matching his coming from the next room where his wife works just as hard as he to bring forth their first child. More often now, the moans turn to shrieks and when they do, his gaze turns in their direction and I can see how much he wants to be there with her, to take the pain away if he only could.

"Sigyn...she's in pain..."

"She'll be alright." I say as I take the cloth from his face to cool it again. "You know better than anyone what she's going through."

As his grip relaxes again, I hold a small vile of liquid to his lips, which he quickly accepts. "What was that?"

"Something to settle your stomach." I reply as I then press the cold cloth to his forehead.

"Hopefully that will give you some relief."

Within a few minutes, the dram takes effect and I hear him let out a calm breath.

"Thank you..." he mumbles and I smile, grateful that I can give him some relief.

"All this time...and we never knew."

"Hmm?"

It had been nearly half an hour since Thor had joined us in Loki's chambers, quick to retrieve anything we required which had mainly been more water for the tub that Loki was currently resting in, managing to doze slightly between contractions.

"I just can't believe he's done this 4 times before." Thor says, frowning as Loki lets out a moan. "Does it usually take this long?"

"Sometimes longer." I smirk and try not to laugh at Thor's reaction nor Loki's as he gives me a look of death at the mention of this possibly going on any longer than it has so far. "For your brother though, usually they've gone rather quickly. But..."

"But?"

"Well, you may not be able to tell, but I can. He's struggling to keep from fighting labor and the more he fights it, the harder it'll be for him."
“So what do we do?”

“There's not much we can do. We can try to reassure him, help him not to fight it. But this is
something he'll have to work through on his own. But trust me, your brother is a lot stronger than
you give him credit for.”

“It's coming...”

“You have to breathe through it.”

“I...I can't!”

"Loki...”

“I...have to...”

He starts to say something else but it's replaced with a yelp as the full force of the contraction rips
through him, dropping him to his knees in the tub as his hands tightly grip the rim. As he struggles
to breathe, my eyes widen as the metal under his grasp bends under the force and I'm suddenly
thankful of the control he had earlier.

“What wrong? What is it?” Thor asks nervously as he tries to get him to release his grip, having
never seen his brother in such a state. I hurry to examine him and try not to feel like a complete
bastard as he holds back a shriek. Thankfully, it doesn't take long to realize what's happening.

“He's complete.”

“But what does that mean?”

“He's ready to deliver.” I explain quickly before turning my attention back to Loki. “Can you get
up out of the tub?” His only response is a quick shake of his head. There'd be no moving him now.
By this time, he's no longer holding back and pushing hard, his pale face flushing red from the
effort. Thor, in comparison, was undoubtedly white and tried to make a motion to excuse himself
from the room. But before he could, Loki grabbed hold of his tunic.

“Brother please...” he manages to choke out; his eyes pleading that he not leave him to do this on
his own.

Thor looked to me as to what he should do and I'm as unsure and in shock as he is. There had
never been anyone besides the midwife in attendance for the births of Loki's previous children; the
family had never been allowed to know, much less be here for this moment. But to have him ask
for this now was the last thing I would have ever expected out of him. And Thor seems to be just as
torn; on one hand wanting to escape from the madness of it all but on the other, needing to see this
through to the end. And I suspect that's what keeps him here as he kneels down next to him and
says simply, “I'm not going anywhere.”

The relief is clear on Loki's face as his hands entwine with Thor's and I nod my approval. Not
everyone is brave enough to witness childbirth.
“8, 9, 10. You're doing great Loki. Try to build your strength for the next one.”

For the next hour, the three of us are working as one; each completely focused on the task at hand. Loki almost seems to be in his own world and Thor and I are just managing to circle around it, spurring him on to keep going. His first three children had been born rather quickly so I assume that this one will as well and I’m soon proven right as a pound's worth of dark hair is making its presence known. I motion for Thor to bring a cold cloth or cup of water for Loki when he's parched and let him take the credit when he expresses the sincerest of thanks.

“You're doing so well brother.” Thor said as he clasped his shoulder. “I couldn't imagine trying to do what you're doing.”

Loki managed a smile at the sentiment. “You think this is something? Try giving birth to an eight-legged horse and then we'll talk.”

“Eight-legged horse? You mean Father's horse is your...”

But before he could get an answer, Loki's gone again; a low moan escaping as he tries to bring his child closer to being born. Again I can hear Sigyn let out a cry in the next room. I can tell she's close to bringing her child forth as well and try to picture her and Quina doing exactly what we are.

“It's burning...” Loki moans when he stops for a breath.

“Your body's just making room for his head. Breath nice and easy.” Looking over to Thor, I smile and motion to him to come see if he wants and after a moment of hesitation, rises to his feet to peer over Loki's rounded stomach.

“Brother!” he exclaimed, his voice choked with emotion as his eyes widen. “I can see the crown of his head!”

He says nothing in response, only reaching his hands around his stomach to caress the growing orb of his son's head and I smile at the sentiment. He had been in animal form for his first three children and by the time he had reached this point with Hela, he had been too far out of it to even acknowledge half of what was going on. So to see him experience this with what may be his last child, to have the first hands that touch this babe be his father's... I find the whole thing rather moving.

“I can feel him...He's coming...” he breathes and I catch the ghost of a smile forming on his face.

“You're getting him out through your breath. Just keep taking slow, deep breaths. I don't want you tear if I can help it.”

“That makes two of us...” he adds dryly before his breathing picks up as the babe's head fully crowns. I think to interfere for a moment but hold back; Quina's voice in my head telling me to just let it come on its own time. Both father and child are fine on their own and he's preferred it that way so far this time; far be it from me to tell him otherwise. Each breath reveals a little more of the babe's features until finally with a grunt, the head emerges fully into his hands, leaving him taking
deep breaths as his hands rest on the tiny head.

“Head's out.” I grin and let out a chuckle as Thor cranes his neck to see, all earlier hesitation gone. “He already looks like you, brother.” Thor laughs.

“The poor thing...” he smirks, but I frown as it soon changes to a grimace. “Another contraction?”

Slowly, he shakes his head no. “I can feel him moving...”

“He's shifting to make room for his shoulders. It won't be long now.”

And then I hear it.

From the next room, a newborn's cry, the familiar tired moans of a new mother, and the triumphant shout from Quina that it's a boy. His first child with Sigyn has just been born.

My eyes turn to Loki and from the look on his face, I can tell he's heard it too.

“Congratulations sire.”

But the words are lost as I see him tense up once more, shifting his legs further apart before giving another push.

Quickly, I motion for Thor to grab some nearby cloths before turning my attention back to Loki.

“Do you want me to catch?” I asked to which he hurriedly shakes his head.

“I...I've got him...” he manages between breaths and with a pained whimper, as he curls in on himself again, shoulders smoothly shift free into his hands and the newborn is quickly pulled to his father's chest screaming in protest. The first thing he managed to do was pee on my dress...

“Just like his father... Already a troublemaker.” I smirk. But I quickly realize that he's no longer listening to a word I say; his eyes only for his son as he speaks to him in hushed tones, tears streaming down his face in relief and admiration. Thor's mystified as well at the squalling infant in his brother's arms and I catch the mistiness growing in his eyes.

“I saw that.”

His smile is warm as he wipes his eyes with the back of his hand. “One does not hold back when he has witnessed a miracle.”

And I can't deny that fact as I sense the unshed tears in my eyes as well.
A few hours later, Loki and Sigyn are settled in his large bed, the two of them bonding with their newborn sons, now named Váli and Narfi while the family is under Thor's watchful eyes. I pack the last of my herbs and tonics and I smile. Both parents and sons are healthy; you couldn't ask for a better result. I look over at Quina, pleased but more than a little tired as she walks over to me.

"You've done well." she smiled.

"Thank you madam. But I had a good patient."

Her eyes turn to the sight of the young family in the bed, smiling as they do as all new parents; counting fingers and toes and happy to just stare at what they've brought forth in this world together.

"The children of an Asgardian prince must come under the midwife's care first..." Quina says quietly, more to herself than to me.

"Ma'am?"

She turned to me and smiled. "Do you remember when I said those words?"

"Very well. That was the night when Sleipnir was born; Loki's first child."

"Yes. And you have grown so much since that time, in form and in skills. Several have come and gone but you are the only one who has stayed with me"

"What are you saying?"

She lets out a breath. "Rania, I have grown too old for this."

"No." I protest. "The children of Asgard were never in better hands."

She softly smiled. "And I've helped many children come into this world, even our own Thor." she says as she casts a wry glance to Thor who suddenly seems embarrassed. "I've taught you everything you know and you have proven your abilities far greater than I ever could have hoped. That is why I have decided to retire and name you the head midwife of Asgard."

"Madam...I..." The announcement leaves me utterly speechless. I had always known that this day would come; now that it's here, I'm suddenly overwhelmed. Looking back at Loki, I'm once again in that stable, watching Sleipnir come into the world; I can see the mothers I've assisted, the newborns that have taken their first breath in my hands and I realize that there's nothing else I'd rather do than this.

"I...I would be honored. Thank you." I say as I give a bow to the applause of Loki and Thor.

Later on, as Quina heads to her home, Thor and I head to Odin and Frigga's chambers to inform them of the 'surprise twins' that have just been born. The two of us walk in silence down the hallway, both of us deep in thought at the events of the evening.
“You really do work a magic Rania. It's a real miracle.” Thor says finally as we walk together.

I shrug. “An ordinary one. It happens every day. I just help them along.”

An ordinary miracle, true. But a miracle nonetheless and one that I wouldn't trade for anything.

-The End-

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