Apple of My Eye

by blueflowers

Summary


Notes

I only saw this movie once, yesterday, so I might make mistakes. Mea culpa. Also, this is an OC-centric story. You have been warned. :)

Apple of My Eye

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Consciousness returned in a rush. Thor sat up with a shout--and immediately wished he hadn't. Not because of the startled girls who ran screaming at his sudden resurrection, but because of the intense pain that exploded through him. He flopped back down with a deep groan--and again, wished he hadn't. At least there was a mattress of some kind under him.

"Easy, there," a soothing voice said, and there was a cool hand on his arm. He looked up through the haze of pain to see a lovely face and long, red-gold hair pulled back in a utilitarian braid.

"Who are you?" he asked, his voice rough. "Where am I?"

"CHAMPION'S ROOM," a familiar voice boomed, and he looked past the girl to see the Hulk, lounging in what appeared to be a hot tub.

"My name's Eden," the girl answered his first question. "I'm the medic. You're remarkably resilient--I've never seen anybody heal like this."

Thor shut his eyes. He wished he'd heal a bit faster: his side and his head both felt like they were on fire.

He heard some movement, and a moment later there was something cool at his lips and a hand under his head. It still felt so strange with the short hair... "Drink this," Eden said, and he drank the cool water gratefully. "What's wrong with me?" he asked, eyes still shut. He hadn't hurt like this in a while.

"Internal bleeding, judging from how dark your bruising is," she answered matter-of-factly. "Broken ribs. A hell of a concussion. But seeing as how you *should* be nothing more than a bloody pulp, I think you'll be fine." She began sponging some sort of herbal-scented liquid over his ribs, and slowly the burning pain began to ease. Thor mumbled something that might have been thanks--even he wasn't sure--and slid away again.

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The next time, he woke a little more slowly. He was warm, comfortable. Something smelled good. He cracked open his eyes.

It was still daylight--or daylight again?--and the large room, decorated in an unsettling red and white pattern, appeared to be empty. Thor sat up slowly. His ribs ground in protest and he winced, but carefully climbed to his feet and made his way over to the large window. It looked down on--what else?--more junk. At least this wasn't actual piles of garbage.

Maybe this was a way out? He glanced around once more to see if there was anyone there, drew back his arm, and punched the glass.

He fist rebounded off of it, jerking him backward, and he gave a cry as his ribs protested. He caught himself on the wall.

There was a clattering noise, and Eden ran over. "Careful! It's unbreakable," she said, taking his arm. There was no way she would be able to support his weight, but he let her think she was helping as she guided him over to a chair. "There's no way out--you'll only hurt yourself trying. Here," she added, going to fetch the tray of food she had left by the door when she entered.
"What, you've never tried to escape?" he grumbled.

"Absolutely. That's how I know it can't be done."

He looked at her a little more closely as she set the tray in front of him, taking a yellow apple off of it and biting in as she dropped into the chair opposite. She didn't look cocky, or defeated, just matter-of-fact. She was young--Darcy's age? Thor was always bad at judging ages; came with being from a race of immortals. After adulthood it was kind of anybody's guess. A pretty face, with a square jaw, red lips, and blue eyes. Not as fit as the Valkyrie--nowhere near. "You're not ME."

"Every fighter in here has tried it at some point. Do you know how many champions the Master's had?" He shook his head. "Nine. Guess how many escaped?"

"...Three?" he guess optimistically.

"None." She continued to eat her apple.

He digested that, by no means discouraged, and took a bite of whatever the thing was in front of him. Not bad--tasted like mac and cheese. An Earth dish he actually missed.

"I didn't get your name yet. Besides Lord of Thunder," she smiled amicably.

"Thor Odinsson."

"Really? Like the Norse mythology?" She laughed. "That's great!"

"Norse mythology?" He frowned. "Are you--human?"

"Yep. I'm guessing you're not. Where'd you learn the mythology?"

"Uh..." He glanced around as if the terrible decor would give him a good way to explain this. "I--didn't? I'm actually Thor."

"Get out of town." She took another bite of apple.

"No, really. You didn't see the lightning? In the fight?"

She frowned. "There's no way you're a god."

"Well... kind of a god AND an alien," he admitted.

"No."

"Yes!"

She narrowed her eyes. "Prove it."

"The lightning in the fight!"

"High tech gizmos. Do it NOW. Without them." She gestured to his shirtless state, no "gizmos" in sight.

He concentrated hard, gathered his rage, his pain, and gave a roar--as blue sparks flew from his hands.

Nonetheless, Eden looked surprised.
"Ow," Thor added, dropping his forehead into his hand.

"Okay, no more parlor tricks until you're back to one hundred percent," Eden said, standing up and pressing cool fingers to the back of his neck, massaging in slow circles up from the nape of his neck.

"Mm." It really did feel good. He could feel the muscles in his neck and scalp relaxing. "You have healing hands."

"That's what they say!" she answered cheerily.

He sat and enjoyed the scalp massage for a minute. "How are you so cheerful?" he grunted.

"Practice." She paused, her cool fingers rubbing very gently at his temples. "My situation is miserable, but I have the choice to be miserable or not." She paused as if she were shrugging--he couldn't see. "So I'm doing the best I can with what I've got."

"I'd be angry. I AM angry."

"I can feel that." She walked over to the wall and opened a cupboard that hadn't previously been visible, and pulled out a wide roll of bandages. "Totally understandable. I've had plenty of time to suppress it."

"How long have you been here?" he asked.

"Stand up." She lifted his arms so she could wrap the bandage around his broken ribs. "About ten years."

"Ten YEARS?!" He didn't know whether he was more shocked or affronted. "They took you as a CHILD?!"

She looked confused. "No? I'm almost forty."

"What?" Forty was about Tony's age, wasn't it? Eden did NOT look Tony's age. She looked younger than Jane. "You don't look forty."

"Good genes," she grinned. "I've got one of those faces. Don't seem to age past like, twenty-five." The bandage she was wrapping was snug, but he DID feel more comfortable. "There. Think you can sleep?"

"Sleep? No! I've been sleeping for--" She reached way up and touched the back of his neck. "Mmm. Yeah, I could sleep," he said drowsily. Eden took his arm and pulled him, unresisting, toward his bed. "How do you do that?" he mumbled.

"Chi points." She pushed him down on the mattress and pulled up his blanket. "Go to sleep, Lord of Thunder."

"*God* of Thunder," he mumbled, and fell asleep.
Hulk didn’t want to leave.

And that was fine, that was okay, but Thor DID want to leave, and he would probably need the Hulk’s help to do it.

Hulk left with the Valkyrie to do some training. Thor punched a wall. “Ow,” he added angrily.

“What did that wall ever do to you?” Eden asked, walking in. She was dressed as she had been the day before, in trousers, long blouse, soft shoes, her bright hair back in a braid. One of the few people in this place that actually LOOKED human in her fashion choices, he realized.

Didn't distract him from his annoyance, though. “Doesn’t anybody ever knock around here?”

“Not really, no. Hulk doesn’t care--sadly. He's a bit of an exhibitionist.”

“So I noticed.” Thor winced. He had hoped to never think of that image again...

“Here, let me see your ribs.” He lifted his arms so Eden could unwrap the bandages. “Huh.” The bruising was all gone, and he didn't wince at all when she pressed on the previously injured areas. “Good as new. How’s the head?”

“Great.”

“Awesome. Well, I think you’re healed. Congratulations. They’ll probably have you slaughtering your fellow captives in no time.”

Her voice had an unusually sour ring to it. He frowned. “What’s wrong?”

She shrugged, rolling up the bandage. “It gets to me sometimes.” She shook herself and forced a smile. “How are you?”

“I need to get out of here.”

He half expected another lecture on the futility of escape attempts, but her eyes showed sympathy. She didn’t say anything—and didn’t try to dissuade him. He added, “Asgard is under attack.”

She looked surprised, confused. “Asgard’s real, too?”

“Yes. And my brother Loki’s real. And my sister Hela, apparently.” He was getting angry again, now. "Goddess of Death, my older sister, heir to—” He had to pause for a moment before he could finish that thought. “Heir to my father’s throne, and absolute MANIAC. Whatever she’s doing in Asgard right now--doing to our PEOPLE--it can’t be good.”

“Heir to—? But Odin will stop her, won’t he? Isn’t he King of Asgard?”

Thor had to turn away toward the window, swallowing hard so he could speak around the lump in his throat. “Not anymore. He died. A few days ago.”

“Oh—God, I’m so sorry.” She put her hand on his shoulder and he reached up to grip it for a moment as he watched the busy scramble amid the junkyard below, seeing nothing but his father's form as it disintegrated into the air.

“No kidding.”

“They even cut off my hair!”

“No!” Her expression was sympathetic, but she began to laugh. “Did they? I’m sorry. But it DOES look good on you.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

He smiled, a little flattered in spite of himself. Loki would have called him a puppy-dog; easily pleased. “Thank you.”

There was an awkward pause. “Hey, I’m the last person to suggest drinking your feelings, but—want a drink?” She gestured to the shelves of bottles nearby.

“Yes. Please.”

They sat down over a bottle of something that was tinted a poisonous-looking blue, but actually tasted pretty good. Rather like mead. “So—Eden. How did an Earthling end up on—” He couldn’t remember the name of the world. “Trash Planet?”

She laughed and almost choked on her drink. “Trash Planet! I like it. …Well, it’s a long story, but it begins with an alien abduction in a literal cornfield. Got picked up by an irresponsible partier from—God, some planet, I don’t remember, it was all very Hitchhiker’s Guide. And then HE got attacked by this… Space pirate crew? And a bunch of other stuff, and then I got dumped here. Luckily, I was picked up by Scrapper 142. She found out I was good with medical stuff, and she got me a place here. Pretty cushy compared to—Well, compared to where I could have ended up.”

“And you weren’t mad about the—abduction, the getting dumped?”

“Oh, I was fucking pissed,” she said calmly. “Still am. But it’s not going to do me any good, is it?”

“Mm.” He had learned a lot more self-control in the last several years, but he couldn’t have managed this. He would have done something hot-headed long before—and probably gotten himself killed, especially if he had been as fragile as a human. Just as well she wasn’t as hotheaded as him, he supposed.

They drank in silence for a few minutes. “Hulk said something about training—where is that?”

“Oh—there’s a training area down the hall.” She pointed. “Want to take a walk?”

“YES.” He was getting very sick of this room and its horrible paint job.

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Turned out, the training area wasn’t much better. “What is WITH these people and the—” He gestured toward the walls, which were done in geometric patterns of green and red.

“Offense to the senses and all that is holy? No idea. Maybe it’s supposed to be a distraction from the
stench of garbage,” Eden shrugged.

They could hear a lot of thumping and joyful shouting coming from the next room: clearly Hulk and the Valkyrie were having fun with their sparring session. “Want to train?” Thor asked.

“ME?” Eden looked at him like he was crazy. “Um, no.”

“Come on, why not?” Thor grinned. A little exercise: it sounded good. He needed to burn the cobwebs out of his head.

“Uh—I’ve seen you fight. One punch, and I’d be toast. I’m human, remember?”

“I’m not saying we FIGHT each other. Just—you know—train!” Humans did this, didn’t they? What did Steve call it? “Like at the gym.”

“I’m... not big on the gym. Never really played sports.” Eden shrugged.

“You must have done SOMETHING. You played games or something as a child?”

“Yeah, like kickball in gym class. And I was in ballet…”

“Ballet?”

“It’s a really precise dance form.”

“There! That.” In Asgard, they used dance to train warriors. The Valkyries were always famed for their grace, a grace born entirely of precise control and strength. “Show me some ballet.”

“Nah. I’ll just—”

“Come on, Eden—please?” He gave her what Loki had once called his one persuasive strength: sad eyes. “I mean, Hulk’s having fun without me, and—”


“Yes!” Thor grinned. “Let’s do some warm-ups first.”

Eden did some leg warmups and increasingly fast and high kicks and Thor did some pushups, alternate-knee crunches, and pull-ups. It felt great. Eden looked self-conscious, though.

“Okay. Show me some ballet.”

She looked at him helplessly. “Like, a choreographed dance? I’m not sure I remember any.”

“Well—what was your favorite thing in ballet?”

“Oh.” She tried to hide it, but he could see how her eyes lit up. “The jumps.”

“Okay. Show me some jumps.”

She started off with some that went side-to-side across the floor: glissade and assemblé. He tried to imitate her, which made her laugh. She stopped and gave him some pointers to improve his technique, but he could tell from her amused expression that nothing was going to give him her grace in just one lesson. the movements were totally different from what he was used to—different muscles, different muscle memory. Besides, skilled dancers took years to learn the kind of precision of movement she was exhibiting. He was sure he looked very clumsy in comparison, but he enjoyed
watching her laughing, even if it was at his expense.

“Alright—something a little bigger. *Grand jeté,*” she declared, and demonstrated the flying leap. She might not have had very strong arms, but her leg muscles were first-rate: she could jump as high as Natasha.

“I’m impressed,” he said freely, and she blushed with pleasure. “You like—hang in the air.”

“That’s called *ballon,*” she explained. “It’s something ballet dancers really train for.”

“How long did you train in ballet?”

“Oh, from the age of four right up until I was abducted. Twenty-four years?”

He nodded. “You’ve done well.”

“Thank you.”

She was pleased, and he smiled. “Show me something challenging.”

“Hm… How about the *grand jeté en tournant*?” She explained how the dancer jumped from one foot to the other, doing a sort of scissor-kick in midair while turning a hundred and eighty degrees.

“I think I’ve got it—show me how it’s supposed to look.”

“Alright—here, move, I’ll do them across the floor.”

He stepped aside and she prepared herself, lifting one leg behind her to balance in *arabesque* for a moment, and then *chasseing* into the leap.

It was astonishing: each jump grew higher and higher. Eden seeming to pause in midair as the scissoring movement pulled her around to face him once more, landing lightly and precisely on one foot before *chasseing* into the next leap. At last, on the far side of the room, she did a final leap—and jumped an incredible height. Even Natasha and Clint didn’t jump that high. She not only seemed to hang in the air, she almost floated down, like a slow-motion replay on those football games Erik Selvig and he used to watch.

She was flushed with exertion and pleasure as she jogged back, and Thor applauded, smiling at her obvious happiness. She curtsied delicately and he bowed—-that was one movement he DID know how to do. But when she turned away, he frowned. She SAID she was human—but what was she, really?
Growth

The Hulk had another fight the next day, and Eden came in afterward to give him a massage.

“Can you even FEEL that?” she asked him as she stood on the edge of the hot tub, leaning hard on his shoulder with one elbow.

“HEH. TICKLES.”

“Oh my God, why am I bothering,” she chuckled, giving up. “How about you?” she asked Thor as she climbed down. “How are you feeling.”

“Fine, thanks.” He gave her a smile. “So were you a doctor back on earth?” Maybe he could learn something more about her and solve this mystery.

“A doctor? No.” Eden chuckled. “I used to work for a chiropractor. She sold herbal supplements, too, so I learned a bunch of useful skills.”

“What’s a chiropractor?”

“They straighten people’s backs.”

Thor frowned. “Like—?” He sat up very straight.

Eden laughed. “No, not exactly. Here, I’ll give you an adjustment if you want. You’ll have to take off that padded vest, though.”

Thor obediently removed it and laid down on his stomach on the bed, as she advised, and she felt down his spine. “So—where on Earth are you from?” he asked, voice muffled by the mattress.

“Iowa.”

“Iowa, huh? Th—”

“Okay, this one’s a little tight,” she interrupted. “Breathe in… and out…” He did as she said, and she leaned hard on his back. There was a *CLICK*. “There—how’s that feel?”

“Mmmmmm.”

She laughed and kept checking his vertebrae. “Were you from a big family?” A big family of non-humans? he did NOT clarify.

“Nope, just mom and me. Mom was in college when she got pregnant with me—she said my dad was a poet,” she chuckled. “Okay, roll up on your side.”

“What is your mother like?” Any superhuman abilities?

“A little scatter-brained, sometimes. A true romantic. Thus the poet.” She pushed his upper body one way and his hips another, then did it on his other side, each movement eliciting a loud click as his vertebrae realigned. “Want me to do your neck? Seems pretty tight.” Giving up on this interrogation, he agreed. Eden made him lie on his back, then pulled at his neck and the skin around it, turning his head to an awkward angle, and—

For one moment Thor thought she was trying to snap his head off, but there was a *CRACK!* and
then she did it the other direction. *CRACK!* 

“Okay, stand up and walk a bit,” she commanded. He did as she said. “How do you feel?”

“Taller,” he answered with surprise.

That made her laugh. “Then I’ve done my job well! But honestly, you don’t NEED to be any taller. You’re already huge.”

“PUNY,” Hulk scoffed. “PUNY GOD.”

“Thanks, Buddy.” Thor gave him an ironic thumbs-up. Hulk grinned and returned the gesture.

“I’ve got it!” someone crowed.

They turned to find the Valkyrie marching in, triumphantly carrying a large clay pot.

“YES!” Eden rushed over. “Five free full-body massages are YOURS!”

“Hey! You haven’t offered ME any full-body massages!” Thor complained.

“You didn’t bring me a jar of dirt!” Eden returned, setting it on the ground and digging into her pocket.

“Jar of dirt? What do you want with that?” he asked, coming over to look. Sure enough, the pot was full of a dark, rich-looking dirt.

Eden pulled an apple seed out of her pocket. “I’ve been wanting to try this for *ages*,” she answered, and poked the seed down into the soil. “Thanks, Scrapper.”

“No problem,” the Valkyrie grinned. “Can I get one of those massages right now?”

“Absolutely! See you later Thor—Hulk. Make sure nobody messes with my apple tree!” She followed the Valkyrie from the room.

Thor and the Hulk both looked at the pot for a long moment. Nothing happened.

Hulk snorted and Thor shrugged and strolled away, swinging his arms to enjoy the results of Eden’s adjustment.

The next day, the pot was home to a sprout with a single leaf.

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Thor sat in a chair, balanced carefully on its back legs, and tossed the heavy ball Hulk liked to mess with. It was the size of Thor’s head, but he threw it easily with one arm: bounce off the ceiling, bounce off the window, back to his hand. Bounce off the ceiling, bounce off the window, back to his hand.

Boring. Booooooooring. …Maybe he could balance on the two legs without help? Slowly, he lifted his feet from the floor, where they steadied him. The chair held steady. Holding his core still, Thor tossed the ball. Bounce off the ceiling, bounce off the window, back to his hand. Bounce off the ceiling—
There was a crash. Thor almost fell over backward and had to drop the chair back to all four legs, the ball striking him in the chest. Just around the corner, he could hear raised voice.

“No—I said no!” It was Eden, her voice rising with panic.

A man’s voice replied, sounding slightly amused, though too quiet for Thor to hear the words. He stood up.

“NO!” Eden shrieked. There was the sound flesh striking flesh, a thud as someone fell on the floor, a moan.

Thor was out of the room, around the corner, and almost on top of the man before he had time to blink, drawing back his fist—

“SHIT!” Eden’s attacker yelped, and then—

Thor dropped to the ground, opening his mouth in a wordless scream. Every bone, every vein was on fire. The man had activated his pain chip. Thor convulsed, gasping for breath, reaching for God-knew-what, for some sort of help—

And through he all he could see the man advancing on Eden where she lay crumpled on the floor, half-stunned by his fist, scrambling backward, opening her mouth to scream while he lunged for her throat—

Someone yanked the attacker up into a standing position by the back of his collar. He whirled around, fists up, and there was a solid *THUD* as fist collided with face. The man dropped, senseless to the floor, and Thor, through the haze of his agony, saw Valkyrie’s face, contorted with fury. “Toss him to the scavengers,” she ordered someone behind him, and knelt beside Eden.

Thor writhed, struggled for breath. “I’m—I’m okay,” he heard Eden say, on something that sounded like a sob. “He—Scrapper, can you—?”

The agony ended suddenly and Thor collapsed, boneless, onto the floor, the edges of his vision going black.

“Come on, Your Majesty,” he heard the Valkyrie say, and strong arms hauled him to his feet. He gave a groan as she propelled him toward his bed. Eden’s hand was on his other arm—cold, shaking.

“Are you okay?” he managed to slur.

“Yeah. I’m—I’m fine—” It ended on a sob, and he was pretty sure she was crying.

The mattress came up under him and he struggled to look up. The Valkyrie was pulling a sobbing, shaking Eden into her arms. Then darkness rose and the world faded away.

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“Remember this place,” Odin said, standing before them on the edge of the green cliff, the cold northern sea far below. “Home.” He lifted his arms, and disintegrated into a shower of golden sparks.

“No—Father!” Thor awoke weeping to find himself still imprisoned, still enslaved, still in that room full of—“GODDAMNED AWFUL INTERIOR DECORATING!” Thor roared aloud, picking up the nearest chair and hurling it against the wall. He dropped his face into his hands. He had lost everything. He lost Loki—only to find out his brother had only let him BELIEVE he was dead, and
had driven their father to the edge. He had lost his father—and found that he had been lying to him his entire life. He had lost his throne, to a sister who wanted nothing but to murder and dominate and war upon the universe. He had lost Mjolnir, had lost the thing that had given him his ability to fight for the things he loved. He had lost Asgard, his home, and possibly his people to his murderous sister.

Everything. He had lost everything.

Thor sank onto the floor, far more crushed, more beaten than he had been in the arena. “Father,” he whispered. “I’m so sorry. Please—” He wasn’t sure what he was asking.

After awhile, he became aware that there was someone beside him. A hand touched his back—warm, comforting.

He sat up, wiped at his face. “I’m sorry,” Eden said quietly. “About your father.”

Thor cleared his throat. “Thank you.”

There was a long pause. “Don’t give up.”

“What?” He looked down at her.

Her cheeks were pink. “Don’t give up. Find a way out of here.”

“I thought you said there was no point? No champion has ever escaped.”

“No champion has ever been a god.” She gave him a small smile.

He smiled back, slowly, then pulled her into a hug. She relaxed into his embrace.

“Are you alright?” he asked. “After--?”

She nodded against his chest. “Yeah. Thank God for Scrapper. She’s rescued me a few times.” She sat up again. “Thanks for trying to defend me.”

“Didn’t do a lot of good.”

“Those chips are a bitch,” she nodded. “That’d be the first thing you’d have to get rid of if you escaped.”

“If WE escaped.”

“No.” She shook her head, and thought he saw tears in her eyes as she climbed to her feet. “If you find a way to get out— Just take it, Thor. Don’t waste your chance trying to save everybody else. You can’t. Just get yourself out.” She hurried away, past the miniature apple tree that had sprouted from the pot of dirt, already bearing little green apples.

The chip. Thor sat in thought. How could it be removed? Probably through the control remotes. How could he get one? Who had one?

The Valkyrie.

“THOR AWAKE,” the Hulk boomed, returning from training.

“Yeah—yeah, I am. Hey, can you help me out?” Thor said, standing up. “I need to talk to the Valkyrie.”
“Eden, I want you to wait over here,” Thor told her urgently, shoving her into the corner by the hot tub.

“What? Why?”

“Trust me! Stay there, and don’t come out till I call you!” He pulled a curtain across the corner to hide her, and scurried away to his own hiding place.

In a minute, the Valkyrie walked in, and Thor, taking a deep breath, put his plan into action.

It worked like magic. The Valkyrie, thinking that his idea was to persuade her, didn’t even notice his Cunning Plan to pick her pocket. At last he held up the remote control with a smile. “Didn’t see that, did you?” To her credit, the Valkyrie didn’t try to stop him as he pressed the button to remove the hellish device from his flesh. “Eden!” he called.

She came out of her hiding place. “What’s going on?”

“We’re escaping,” he grinned, threw the medicine ball against the glass to chip it, and then punched it open. “Come on—and don’t scream.” Without waiting for her response, her picked her up with one arm, tossed her easily over his shoulder, and leapt out the window.

After her first yelp of terror Eden, hanging upside-down over his back, squeezed her eyes shut, grabbed onto the only part of him she could get hold of—his waist—and held on for dear life. In a few short moments they were on the ground, and he peeled her off of him, setting her on her feet again. “You alright?”

She was panting, looking greenish. “No!”

“Great. Come on.”

He led her to the Quinjet and tried in vain to make it recognize him while Eden stared around at the interior. He finally got the ship’s computer to identify him—he would have to have a stern talk with Tony about the importance of names in vital technological access—and turned to smile at Eden.

“Ready to go?”

“NO!” a familiar voice thundered behind them. “THOR, DON’T GO.”

In a moment Eden was diving behind Thor to avoid the Hulk, who was doing his best impression of a bull in a china shop. “Hulk! Hulk, stop!” He was destroying their one chance to get off of this godforsaken planet.

At that moment, a video of Nat was triggered, and even more chaos ensued. Eden peeked out over Thor’s shoulder as the Hulk bellowed, staggered—and transformed back into Bruce Banner.

Thor went to talk him down, finally managing to convince him to put on some of Tony’s clothes. It was only then that he glanced back up to see Eden still staring at Bruce, eyes wide as saucers.

“Eden? You alright?” he asked for the second time that morning.

“Did—that just happen?” she squeaked, gesturing to encompass the entire Area of Bruce.

“Yeah. Eden, meet Bruce. Bruce, Eden. She’s from Iowa.”
“Hi,” Bruce said weakly. “How’d you get roped into this shitshow?”

“Alien cow-tipping party,” she answered in much the same tone.

Bruce looked down at the pair of pants he was holding, and back up at her. “Do you mind—uh—?”

“Oh—right. Sorry.” She scurried out of the damaged jet to give him some privacy.

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Soon they were scurrying through the marketplace, Thor trying to “disguise” himself with a piece of sacking over his head, Bruce tugging at his tight jeans, and only Eden looking anything like normal among her surroundings.

“Sun’s getting low, sun’s going down, sun’s getting real low,” Thor chanted over and over again.

“WOULD YOU STOP SAYING THAT!” Bruce hissed in a furious whisper as they took shelter in a doorway.

“I’m trying to keep you calm!”

“WELL IT’S NOT KEEPING ME CALM!”

“Wait.” Eden tapped on Thor’s arm. “WHAT are you doing?”

“If he freaks out, he could turn into the Hulk again. And we’d be in big trouble,” Thor answered succinctly.

“And I’m about *THIS CLOSE*,” Bruce shout-whispered, holding up his finger and his thumb, “to punching your lights out! Then we’ll SEE if the ‘sun’s getting real low’!”

“Well, okay.” Eden moved over between them and put her hand on the back of Bruce’s neck. His shoulders, which had been tensed up around his ears, began to droop a little in relief, and his rapid breathing slowed. “There are better ways to calm somebody down, Thor.”

“Well, not all of us have your—magic fingers!” Thor wiggled his in demonstration.


Thor caught Bruce up on the past two years, Eden looking back and forth between them with increasing bewilderment. “Okay,” she said at last to Bruce, “so you’re like, Dr. Jekyll.”

“Basically, y—”

“He’s Dr. Banner—weren’t you listening?” Thor answered in surprise. “Seven PhDs?”

“Hey!” She elbowed him in the side and pointed. The Valkyrie was standing a short distance away with an amused look on her face. She gestured for them to follow her.

---

The Valkyrie led them back inside the Grandmaster’s tower and up toward her quarters. “I thought we just escaped this building?” Bruce whispered urgently to Thor. “Why are we going back in?”

“I’ve got a surprise for you,” the Valkyrie announced and opened the door.
Loki sat chained on the floor. “Hellooo.”

Bruce stared. “Oh, shit.”

“Uh—” Eden looked confused. “Who’s this?”

“I’m Thor’s brother, Loki.”

“Adopted,” Thor muttered.

“The—trickster god?” Eden asked.

“If by trickster god you mean genocidal maniac, then yes,” Bruce answered.

“Oh, come on.” Loki rolled his eyes. “Homicidal, yes. Not really *genocidal*.”

Bruce’s nostrils flared.

Thor crossed his arms and regarded Loki. “What are you planning to do with him?” he asked the Valkyrie.

“He says he can help.”

“I have the Grandmaster’s security codes,” Loki told them, though he was speaking mostly to Thor. “You can use them to get into any of his ships—into his armory.”

“And what do you want in return?”

“Get me off this miserable planet,” Loki growled. “The interior decorating is hideous.”

Thor nodded slowly. “Alright. You give us the access codes—and one more thing.”

“What?”

“Tell us what she is.” He indicated Eden.

Eden glanced at him and did a double-take. “Ex-CUSE me?”

“Well, I mean, you’re clearly not human.”

She looked scandalized. “What the hell do you mean by that?”

“Well, you don’t seem to age,” Thor explained, “and the way you can JUMP! Have you seen her jump?” he asked the Valkyrie. She shook her head, as confused as Eden. “She can really jump.”

“This is ridiculous.” Eden crossed her arms, fuming.

“Thor, are you sure—?” Bruce began.

“Yeah! You’ve felt her—” He wiggled his fingers. Everyone just stared at him. “Just—okay, look,” he said, trying to pacify Eden. “If my brother doesn’t find anything, he doesn’t find anything. No harm done, and I’ll apologize. And if he does—well, then we’ll know.”

“What do you mean find anything?”

“He’s a master sorcerer. I’m sure he’s got a spell for that.”
“I don’t think it’s like Google,” Bruce muttered.

Thor and Eden stared at one another for a long moment. “Okay, fine,” she said at last, throwing her hands up in the air.

“I DO have a spell for that,” Loki interjected. “In case anyone’s interested. You’ll have to unchain me, though.”

“Do we have to?” Bruce asked Thor.

He nodded, and the Valkyrie unlocked the chains. Loki stood up and stretched. “Ah—that’s better. Come here,” he added to Eden. She held back. He sighed. “I’m not going to murder you.”

“That’s exactly what a murderer would say,” Bruce said under his breath. Thor elbowed him.

Eden approached cautiously, and Loki reached out and put his hand on her forehead, closing his eyes. “Oh—my,” he smiled.

“What?” she asked. “What is it? I’m human, right?”

“Half right.” He let go and looked at Thor, still more interested in his brother than anybody else in the room.


“Her mother was human. But her father…”

“What? He was a poet!” she insisted.

He gave a small laugh. “Not just a poet. THE poet.”

“What?”


She scoffed. “Impossible. Those were composed by different people hundreds of years apart.”

“Different names. Same person.”

She looked at Thor for help. “You’re saying her father was immortal?” he asked Loki.

“He was Asgardian. His name was Bragi.”

“Bragi!” The Valkyrie took a step forward. “The God of Poetry—I knew him! He disappeared after the conquest of Midgard.”

“He stayed,” Loki told her, and glanced back at Eden. “And apparently, has fathered children.”

Eden was wide-eyed.

Thor was thrilled. “You’re Asgardian, Eden! Isn’t that great?”

She wavered on her feet and he caught her arm. “I want to sit down,” she said faintly, and Thor propelled her into a seat. “Can I get a drink?” she added in the same tone to Valkyrie.

“That’s actually not all,” Loki informed them, crossing his arms.
Eden whimpered.

“She’s also Idun, the Goddess of Life.”

Eden went white to the lips, and the Valkyrie, just coming back with a drink, pushed the girl’s head between her knees.

“Thanks,” Eden mumbled.
“Look,” Loki explained as Eden practiced deep breathing. “It’s not very complicated. The former Goddess of Life and Youth, Idun, was killed in the Sacking of Asgard.”

Thor nodded. He had known her slightly, though she didn’t spend much time in Asgard. She and Odin hadn’t gotten along. Now, he supposed, that made sense, considering Odin’s past: waging war on other so many other realms with his daughter, the Goddess of Death. Yeah, he could see how the Goddess of Life wouldn’t have liked that very much.

“When she died, our—” Loki paused only for a moment, his eyes flicking to Thor’s face. “Our father Odin transferred the spark of her deity to another Asgardian—and he chose her.”

Eden came up for air. “But why me?” she asked, overwhelmed. She took a swig of the drink the Valkyrie had brought her.

“No idea. Well, shall we go?” Loki suggested.

---

Thor came to with her cool, refreshing hand on his shoulder. He shifted, groaned. “How much did I have to drink?”

“That’s exactly what Scrapper said!”

Thor squinted up into Eden’s face. “Oh. You. Five more minutes--?”

“Nope, nope. Wake up.” Her hand warmed and he remembered what had happened. A cross, a double-cross, the inciting of a revolution, the theft of a “party-ship”—Thor didn’t want to know—and an aerial battle, and the Valkyrie, Bruce, Eden, and Thor were speeding away, the wormhole poetically known as the Devil’s Anus in their rearview mirror. If the ship had HAD rear-view mirrors, that was.

He sat up straight. “Are the others okay?”

“Yeah—I woke Bruce up first, since he’s human.” She gestured.

Bruce was playing with some of the buttons on the walls. There was a *sproing!* and a Murphy bed popped out of the wall. “Gold,” Bruce whispered and hopped into bed.

“I hope those sheets have been washed…” Thor muttered.

The Valkyrie was looking at the navigational display. “This ship’s resilient, but slow. It’ll be several hours until we reach Asgard.” She glanced back. “Looks like Bruce is taking a nap. *I* want a drink. Care to join?” She grinned at the other two.

“Just a small one,” Eden suggested, and Thor agreed.

Turned out the Valkyrie’s idea of a small one and Eden’s didn’t exactly match, but that was okay: Valkyrie drank what Eden didn’t, and then took her bottle back to the front of the ship.

“Driving drunk,” Eden grinned and leaned back in her chair.

“Are you okay?” Thor asked her after a moment. “With the whole…” he gestured at her—“goddess
thing?"

She bit her lip. "Yeah," she said at last. "I mean—it’s like, it really explains some things, you know?"

He nodded, paused. "What did you think of your first airfight?"

"Well, I don’t like violence, but…” Eden grinned. "It was kinda cool, actually.” He chuckled. "Thank you.” She covered his hand. "For getting me out. For—everything.”

He took it. "I should be thanking you. I’m not sure I would have found the strength to escape without your—your healing touch, your friendship.”

She blushed. "I’m sure you would have.”

He shook his head. Something about her—just being near her—made him feel better. Calmer, more rational—less hot-headed, less foolish. When he thought about how she had suffered ten years of captivity and still had that patience, that serenity—that kindness… It was an astounding inner strength.

Eden slowly slid her hand out of his, and he realized he had been staring at her, a soft smile on his face. “Um… I’m pretty tired, so… I’m gonna try to get a little sleep.” She pressed a button on the wall opposite Bruce’s bed, and another one unfolded. “Unless—you want the bed?”

“No. Um—well—”

“We can share, if you want,” she offered, her face going red.

“Yeah—okay.”

Awkwardly, they got into bed and pulled up the blankets. It was a large bed, and Eden didn’t touch him as the Valkyrie kindly turned off the lights in the back of the ship. Thor realized that he wanted to put his arms around Eden.

He was falling for her.

Why hadn’t he seen it before? First chance he’d really been able to think about the future, he supposed. But it had been coming on for some time, he realized. She had been so kind, so sympathetic—not embarrassing him with pity, but supporting him with her friendship.

It was similar to the dynamic he’d had with Jane. Neither of them were fighters—neither of them needed to be. They had their own gifts. Like his first crush, Ranveig, the daughter of one of his father’s minstrels. She wouldn’t have hurt a fly, but she played a mean harp.

Eden was smart; she was resilient. He felt less hotheaded with her—less foolish. He felt—right.

He needed to tell her so. But he would have to find the right time. With that thought, he fell asleep.

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“Almost there, guys,” the Valkyrie announced. All three nappers groaned as she turned on the lights.

Thor discovered something warm and soft in his arms: Eden. In his sleep he had pulled her to him like a teddy bear.

He sat up. “Sorry,” he rumbled, feeling awkward.
“Mm. 'Sokay,’” she answered with a sleepy smile.

“Eden, I—’”

“Asgard straight ahead,” the Valkyrie interrupted them.

Fascinated, Eden climbed out of bed and scrambled up to the windscreen. “Wow,” she whispered. “So that’s--?”

“Home,” Thor replied.
The Valkyrie was examining the heat sensors on the dashboard. “There are people hiding in the mountains,” she announced.

“Heimdall is with them. And Hela’s heading straight toward them,” Thor said grimly. He paused and examined the situation. This was a time for careful planning—not hotheaded thinking. “I’ll go to the palace and draw her away—you help get the people across the Bifrost,” he announced.

“Are you crazy?” the Valkyrie exclaimed. “She’ll kill you!”

“It’s the people that matter,” he answered, though he felt sick to his stomach. “If you get them across the Bifrost, Heimdall can send them to safety.”

The Valkyrie muttered something under her breath, but set a course for the Royal Armory. “We need some guns for this ship.”

Thor turned and looked at Eden. Her eyes were wide, and her fair-skinned face was more than usually pale. Thor looked away. He wanted to give her a goodbye kiss—but it was better, if he was going to die, not to attach her to him any more than he already had.

In a short time, they had acquired a gun for the party ship—and a uniform for the Valkyrie. “Don’t die,” she told him. He gave her a small smile and turned away.

“Thor!” Eden scrambled out of the ship and stood up on tiptoe to kiss his cheek. “Please,” she added in a whisper.

He couldn’t help it. He cupped her cheek and kissed her, breaking contact far too soon—and also far too late. He hurried away.

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Bruce took over the controls of the ship and lifted them high in the air to look for the refugees. A fog was growing on the ground, but at last they spotted them on the heat sensors: they had escaped from the mountain stronghold and were working their way down the mountain and onto the Bifrost.

“Look!” Eden suddenly exclaimed, pointing toward the palace. “What are those?”

“Can’t be people,” the Valkyrie said: “they have no heat signature.”

“Oh, they’re people alright,” Bruce answered. “A whole army of them.”

“They’re—” Eden swallowed. “Didn’t Thor say Hela was the Goddess of Death?”

“Yeah?”

“I think—they’re undead.”

Bruce said some non-PG-rated words.

The refugees had gotten onto the bridge—but now they stopped. “What’s ahead of them? Get lower,
Bruce—I can’t see,” the Valkyrie ordered. Bruce brought the ship in closer.

“Shit,” Eden whispered. “Is that…?”

“Fenrir,” the Valkyrie answered grimly. “EAT LEAD, MUTT!” She began to fire the automatic cannon out the side of the ship.

There was a great deal of snarling and confusion for a time. Finally the Valkyrie gave up. “This dumb dog won’t die!”

“Maybe it doesn’t have to,” Eden said slowly.

“What?”

Eden took a deep breath… and jumped out of the ship.

She had had the distinct impression that she could survive a landing from that height, but she was still pleasantly surprised when it worked—and then terrified as Fenrir turned his preternaturally glowing green eyes on her and growled, lowering himself for the charge.

She was the Goddess of Life, right? That included the apple tree, which had sprouted so dramatically. So it probably included animals, too.

At least, she hoped so. Otherwise she was about to be kibble.

Fenrir snarled, revealing T-Rex-like teeth. Eden straightened her shoulders…

And patted her knees. “Come here!” she called in her cutest—and loudest—voice. “Come here, pupper! Who’s a good Fenrir? Who’s a good boy?”

Fenrir looked taken aback for a moment. And then… his eyes turned from green to gold. He panted, and his tail wagged.

“That’s it! C’mere!”

Fenrir charged.

“Oh, shit,” Eden whispered.

He DID knock her over in his enthusiasm—and he DID try to make up for it by licking her. And Eden had thought REGULAR dog breath was bad. Undead dog breath was far, far worse.

She picked herself up and tried to slough off the slobber. “I cannot believe I just Disney-princessed my way out of that shit,” she murmured under her breath.

“Aru?” Fenrir cocked his head.

“I said, Who’s the best little zombified, half-mummy, monstrous pupper on the planet?” she cooed. “You are!” He thumped his tail on the Bifrost.

Eden looked back to the refugees, who were fighting Hela’s army. “C’mere, buddy. Let me up your back,” she ordered, and he laid down on the Bifrost. She scrambled up his side, using his fur for hand-holds, and sat down astride his neck. “Come on, ya fuzzy little instrument of destruction. Let’s go help.”

Fenrir obediently stood up and trotted off toward the crowd, Eden jouncing along and trying
desperately to hold herself on by his fur.

---

In the event, she wasn’t much help in the actual fight. The refugees tended to flee screaming from Fenrir rather than letting him through to fight the undead army, so Eden eventually backed off to allow them onto Loki’s unexpectedly helpful vessel.

There was a sudden booming noise that made her ears ring. Fenrir cowered back in terror, and she barely managed to hang on as a massive bolt of lightning struck the palace. Masonry crumbled.

“THOR!” She couldn’t hear herself shout his name. There was a sickening pause—and then a figure flew from the ruins, crackling with energy, destroying undead soldiers left and right.

It was Thor.

Eden didn’t even realize she had slid from Fenrir’s back and was running toward him, shoving through the crowd to reach him. He looked strong, able, putting all their foes to rout—until she reached him. It was then that she realized that Hela had put out his eye, and that he was bleeding profusely from wounds in his side and back.

The last of the undead vanquished, he turned back toward his friends, the lightning dying out of his eyes. He was himself again—and then he crumpled.

Eden ran to him. He was trying to get up again. “Hela,” he managed.

“She’s coming,” Loki pointed, and they all looked up to see a menacing figure striding toward them.

“Hit her with lightning!” the Valkyrie insisted. Thor was breathing too hard to answer.

“He just did! It didn’t work!” Loki pointed out.

The Valkyrie lifted her chin. “I’ll do it,” she said, and charged the Goddess of Death.

“NO!” Eden cried, but it was too late to stop her. They engaged only once, and the Valkyrie was thrown back, wounded. Not badly enough to actually stop her from trying again, but certainly badly enough to convince her of the folly of doing so.

“She draws her power from Asgard,” Thor managed. “We have to destroy it.” They all stared at him. “Loki—get Surtur’s helmet.”

Loki nodded slowly. “We bring Ragnarok—we destroy Hela. I’m on it.” He ran for the party ship.

“Get Thor onto the ship,” Eden suddenly ordered those standing nearby. “I’ll keep Hela busy.”

“How? She’s the GODDESS of DEATH!” the Valkyrie reminded her.

“And I’m the Goddess of Life,” Eden smiled, and strode down the Bifrost toward her foe.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay. Couldn't figure out how to do the fight scene! Then I saw the movie again with friends and took some notes, so now we're good. :P
The Goddess of Death was imposing, but Eden was determined not to be imposed upon. This wasn’t going to be like that man hitting her on Sakaar. She was the Goddess of Life, and she would be able to protect herself. She was sure of it.

“Model walk, LED catsuit, antlers like Imogen, and far too much black eyeshadow,” she whispered to herself. “I can take her.”

For her part, Hela seemed equally amused. “When the Valkyrie fails you send… a human in loungewear?”

Eden lifted her chin. “I’m not a human.” Well, not entirely. “I’m Asgardian.”

“Like those useless courtiers who are currently abandoning you on this planet?” Hela intoned, gesturing toward the ship. She shrugged. “Child’s play.” She carelessly flicked her hand. Quicker than thought, black blades flew from her—

And bounced harmlessly aside. There was a golden aura growing, glowing around Eden. She began to smile.

Hela frowned and tried again, throwing the deadly spears with far more force.

They clattered aside or shattered on impact.

“Who ARE you?” Hela snarled.

“I’m Idun,” Eden answered.

For the first time, Hela seemed afraid.

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“Come ON,” the Valkyrie growled, dragging the wounded Thor toward the ship.

“No—EDEN!”

“She’ll be alright!” the Valkyrie insisted. “She tamed Fenrir—she knows what she’s doing!”

“She—?” But now he could see Hela and Eden facing off on the bridge—Hela’s spears bouncing casually aside.

“Now come on!” The Valkyrie dragged him up the gangplank, and the ship began to rise into the air.

They were abandoning her.

Thor scrambled back toward the gangplank, tried to climb out as the ship left the Bifrost behind, but
he collapsed again onto the floor, his vision growing dark from pain and blood loss.

“Get him to a side room!” the Valkyrie ordered.

“No!” he panted. He couldn’t make them go back for her, but at least he would watch her until the end.

---

Hela grew more furious, more wild in her attacks. But no matter how thick, how sharp her blades, no matter whether she attacked Eden from in front or behind, nothing seemed to land.


Hela glanced up at the sky. “It seems your friends are abandoning you,” she pointed out. “Leaving you locked in an eternal battle with Death. Perhaps I should persuade them to stay?” She threw one hand out toward the ship, but Eden raised her hand as well, and a golden flash stopped the huge black blade that had sprung out of the water to impale the ship.

“I won’t be locked in an eternal battle,” Eden answered.

“You can’t kill me,” Hela snarled. “You are Life, not Death! Your powers are all defensive—you cannot attack.”

“Death, be not proud,” Eden recited with a grin. “I don’t have to kill you. We have someone else for that.”

“What?”

Loki sped past in the party ship and nodded at her. There was a crash, a roar, and Hela turned toward the palace. Surtur, grown nearly as tall as the mountains behind him, raised his flaming head above the streets, above the palace, swinging his sword of fire, destroying everything in his path.

“No—” Hela murmured…

Eden gave a whistle that made the Goddess of Death jump. “Fenrir!” The huge black wolf cocked his head. “Sic.”

Fenrir leapt forward, snatching Hela’s headdress in his mouth and racing toward the palace, toward Surtur. Hela shouted in fury, but Fenrir plunged on, straight into the fires of Asgard.

“Death, thou shalt die,” Eden murmured, and turned back toward the ship. It was so high, so far away, but… If there was one thing she could do, Eden thought, it was jump.

She braced her feet, took a short run down the Bifrost, and *leapt*—

—landing neatly beside Thor. They closed the doors, and they were away—while Asgard burned below them.

---

A couple of Asgardians half-supported, half-carried Thor to a side room, Eden hurrying after them. “You’re not hurt?” he asked hoarsely as they deposited him on a bed and removed his bloody cuirass.

“No, I’m fine,” she answered swiftly, placing her hand over the jagged rent between his shoulder
blades.

He cried out, his back arching as pain coursed through him.

“Sorry—I’m sorry,” Eden was saying, her other hand gentle on his shoulder. “I have to stop the bleeding quickly.

“It’s alright,” he managed breathlessly as the pain lessened. Cool relief came after, as she healed the stab wounds in his back and forearm, the slash in his side. Very few weapons could so wound an Asgardian, but his sister’s blades had nearly killed him. Death no longer seemed quite so close, though he was still exhausted and sore.

She touched his right cheek, her hand beginning to glow as it had over his other wounds. “I don’t know that I can—” She bit her lip. “I don’t think I can restore your eye.”

“Don’t worry about it.” He was alive; that was enough.

She covered it with her hand, and he saw a faint golden glow through his good eye. “There,” she said at last. Now—"

There was a flash, and they both looked toward the observation window—as Asgard exploded in a cloud of light.

In a moment, Thor saw it all. The throne where his father had sat, where he and Loki and Hela had all sat, deciding the fate of their people. The room where his mother had died. The courtyard with the pear tree, where he and Loki had played together so many times…

His home—gone. All of it, gone forever.

He was sobbing, shaking with grief. Eden’s arms were around him, holding him, rocking him. “What have I done?” he gasped.

“What you had to do,” she answered, her voice unsteady, and he realized she was crying too—whether for him or for the home she had never known, he didn’t know. “You did it to save your people. You saved us all.”

It was a long time before he could do anything but weep, but at last he had cried all his tears. “Come on,” Eden said gently, “you need to rest—and I need to see to the others.”

She helped him pull off his boots and the rest of his grimy and blood-stained clothing and pulled the blankets up over him. He closed his one good eye as he felt her place her warm hand on his brow. “Rest,” she whispered, and then, as the darkness closed over him, he thought he felt a soft kiss on his forehead. “Rest, my love.”

---

There were many injuries to see to, but luckily, none of them was as serious as Thor’s had been, and at last Eden sat down—on the floor, with her back to the wall. She rolled her shoulders and sighed wearily.

“Long day?” a voice said, and she craned her neck to see Loki standing over her.

“No shit.” She closed her eyes tiredly. “I’m hungry. Do we have anything to eat on this ship?”

“I’m not sure. But I don’t think it’ll be a problem.”
She opened her eyes again and frowned up at him. “What do you mean? We’ve got hundreds of people to feed!”

“I found something while I was in Odin—” He paused, and went on, “—our father’s treasure chambers. I think it belongs to you.” He held out a small, carved wooden box.

Eden took it gingerly and opened it up. It was full of what looked like tiny drops of gold, glowing slightly in the dim light. They were thrumming with some kind of energy, some—life. It seemed to call to something deep inside of her. She picked one out and held it up to get a better look.

It was an apple seed.

A broad smile spread across her face as she looked up at Loki again. “I think you may be right. It isn’t going to be a problem.”
Thor awoke slowly. He was a little sore, but warm and comfortable. His head was pillowed on something soft, something that rose and fell rhythmically, and had a familiar scent.

He was in the large bed in the side room of the ship, his arms around Eden, his head resting on her stomach.

He moved and she shifted and sighed, touching his hair. “You awake?” she murmured.

“Mnhm.” He lifted his head to look at her and smiled. She smiled back, and glanced at his ruined eye just as his sleepy mind processed the fact that half his visual field was gone. Feeling his face heat, he covered his eye with one hand. “Sorry,” he mumbled in embarrassment, dropping his gaze. “It must look disgusting.”

Eden pulled his hand away from his face and kissed him.

He was frozen in surprise for only moment, then returned her kiss with ardor. “It doesn’t bother you?” he murmured roughly when at last they broke apart.

“Of course not,” she answered firmly. “It’s a sign of your love for your people. And—” She cupped his cheek. “I love you, Thor Odinsson.”

“I love you too,” he answered softly, and kissed her again. “My goddess.”

---

A couple of hours later, Eden had left him to get dressed and prepare to be officially presented to his people. Some Asgardian who was good with his hands had created an eyepatch for him and sent it in with his cleaned clothes. The sight of his ruined eye in the mirror had been startling and disturbing, and now Thor was looking at the eyepatch, having a drink, and trying to work up the courage to leave the room.

He hadn’t had much leisure to think about it yesterday, but now that he did, he was ashamed. Ashamed of his lost eye, ashamed of his shorn head. Long, thick hair was a sign of virility among the Asgardians. To have it cut at all was embarrassing—to have it forcefully cut by a captor was absolutely humiliating. What kind of King of Asgard would he be—a king who still bore the marks of enslavement, a King of Asgard when Asgard was gone forever?

The door behind him opened. “It suits you,” a familiar voice said. Thor looked up in the mirror to see Loki, smiling softly.

He turned, glad to see his brother. Glad—for the second time in two days! Might almost be a new record. “Loki.” He put down his drink and picked up the stopper for the bottle. “I might even hug you if you were here.” He tossed the stopper.

And Loki caught it. “Oh, I’m here.”

There was a short pause, a dozen emotions boiling in Thor’s heart. But one came up on top: He had believed his brother—his beloved little brother, his childhood playmate, the ally of his adulthood—
had been dead. And he was back. And he had proven himself capable of good.

Loki dropped his gaze in the awkward silence. “Thor, I—”

Thor strode forward and pulled Loki into a hug, cradling the back of his head. “I love you, Loki,” he rasped out. “And I’m—I’m so proud of you, Brother.”

He thought for one moment that Loki would pull back, but his little brother dropped the stopper on the floor and returned his hug tightly with a sound that might have been a stifled sob. They held each other for a long minute.

At last Loki broke the hug, chuckling in a way that was clearly meant to cover up the sound of tears in his throat. “I’m glad to see you too, Brother. But I think the people have waited long enough, don’t you?”

Thor dashed away a tear and straightened up, clearing his throat. “How do I look?” he asked anxiously.

“Like a King,” Loki said quietly, and opened the door.

Thor took a deep breath and stepped out into the main room, almost afraid to look up and meet the eyes of his people. There was a ripple of excitement in the room, the sound of movement as many who were seated rose to their feet, and then an expectant hush.

“I present King Thor of the Asgardians,” Loki declared loudly. The people nearby moved back to create a path for him, bowing as he passed.

Thor gathered his courage and looked up—into shining faces, shining eyes. Among the crowd, he saw a number of people with shorn hair: captives of Hela’s who had escaped, men and women who had been humiliated, abused—just as he had.

His chest swelled with fellow-feeling, his shame melting away. His experiences hadn’t made him weak and despised—they had made him one of them. He clasped the forearm of a man nearby with hair as short as his own, reached out to a woman with her hair cut off who hesitated to give him her hand: it was missing two fingers. He lifted it to his lips and gave it a reverent kiss. Murmurs filled the hall, and he saw eyes that were as full of tears as his own were becoming.

It was an indication of his focus on his people that it was only then that he noticed the golden tree, glowing with a warm light of its own, that was growing from the floor of the spaceship. Underneath it stood Eden, beaming from ear to ear.

He smiled back and approached, looking up at the tree in wonder. “What’s this?”

“Loki gave me Idun’s apple seeds, and it turns out they’ll grow without dirt!”

“It’s incredible,” Bruce murmured, and it was only then that Thor noticed him, practically lying on the ground in order to look at the tree’s roots. “Go straight into the metal—and yet the thing’s growing!”

“The best part is, it’ll provide all the food we need until we get where we’re going.” Eden was excited. “Try an apple!”

Thor reached up to pluck one, but pull as he might, it wouldn’t budge.

Eden chuckled and picked it for him, easily. “Try it!”
He bit into it. It was full of flavor—juicy and firm, as an apple should be, but with a swirl of tastes, some of which were nothing like an apple. “It’s like—a whole meal!”

“Yeah, like that chewing gum in Willy Wonka,” Bruce agreed, standing up. “Just nobody turning into a blueberry at the end. Hopefully.”

Thor slapped him cheerfully on the back. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Your Majesty,” someone said, and they all looked up. The Valkyrie stood beside a chair. She gave a half-smile. “Your throne.”

Thor climbed the steps to the observation platform and took the captain’s chair, Eden coming to stand beside him.

“How many do we have on board?” he asked.

“About five hundred,” Loki answered, following them up. “Men, women, and children.”

“We’ve found sleeping space for everyone,” Eden added, “and have been finding foster families for the orphans.”

Thor nodded. “Good. Are there many?”

“Not really. I’m afraid that the few children who survived mostly did so with the help of their families—they survived together, or died together.” Her tone was somber. Thor reached out and silently took her hand.

“Your Majesty,” Heimdall interrupted, “Where are we headed?”

For a moment, Thor had no idea how to answer. What planet would open their doors to the Asgardians? Where could this band of refugees go?

He glanced up at Loki and remembered his father’s final words: Remember this place. Home.

“Earth,” he answered, and Loki nodded. “Norway. With a little stop in Iowa,” he added, smiling up at Eden. She smiled back.

“Norway?” Heimdall seemed surprised.


Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
BTW, my mental image of the hug is from AndLatitude’s depiction.

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