No Chains On Me

by Spade_Storm

Summary

One day, she dies...but is reborn as part of someone else.

Someone familiar. Loki Laufeyson.

Not that he knows that. But she knows and she sees even more. She doesn't know why she's here or how this happened.

But if this is real she's not going to let this universe ruin her or Loki.
Chapter 1

Her name was Alice.

She isn't expecting to die. Its several days after her high school graduation and she's coming back from the shore with friends. The drive back is a bit longer because of traffic and its sundown when they get into their neighborhood. Her friend parks her car in the driveway and she gets her things.

She lives right across the street.

She never makes it home.

A car is careening down the street at twice the speed limit. It doesn't slow or stop. The impact is instant and devastating.

She feels pain for a split second before its gone.

*That's how I died. By a fucking drunk driver.*

Loki doesn't remember when he noticed the presence inside of him. He just knows it protects him. It is protective of him. It reminds him of a cat. Not like his mother's handmaiden which is dull and lazy. No. It reminds him of the wild feral cats that slink along the shadows of his mother's garden. They do not hesitate to tear into anyone who ventures to close, even Thor, bright and wild, is weary of them.

It makes him feel safe.

It also makes him feel afraid.

He is not yet a man but it shows him things. Flashes of terrible deeds and of dishonorable warriors. Are these the actions of asgard? Or are these the actions he will one day commit?

He doesn't know. Has he gained the sight like his mother? Is this why she never speaks of what she sees? If so, he cannot blame her. These visions plague him and invade his dreams. But there are other things, good things, that make him squirm in excitement. Those are the visions he most wants to see because they are impossible but beautiful. Who has ever heard of Midgardians having such magic to conjure dragons? Or perhaps one day they will?

Loki hopes they are visions from the Norns and that the being he can feel watching him, sharing moments with him as he studies is just an overly curious Norn. Even if he knows better, he doesn't say anything. Not even when it starts to whisper to him. It is indistinct for a time, like too many words carried by the wind, but over time he picks up a word or two.

They are always warnings.

To be wary of this servant or this guard. To not be alone with this noble or that teacher. He doesn't understand why, not at first, but he listens and tries to learn why. Loki has always been a quick study and an even faster learner. He notes the difference between the actions of the servants,
between those who like, are indifferent, or dislike him. He discovers the dark glance some guard or noble turn his way is either contempt or greed or lust. Sometimes all at once.

Loki learns to be wary.

Although he is not sure if he shouldn't be wary of the voice as well. Is he seeing what the voice wants him to? Is he seeing what is really there? He doesn't know. He doubts the being. He doubts himself... until he doesn't.

He makes his way to his teacher in the library and stops just outside the doors. There is a guard on each side but his brother, Thor, is not there. This is one teacher he is told to be especially cautious of and the man does make him nervous for reasons he not sure of. Father has brushed aside his worries every time he brings it before him. Still, Thor had promised to come with him when his one personal guard was ordered not to attend. He turns to one of the guards.

"Where is my brother?"

"Prince Thor was ordered away by the King." The guard says nothing but his eyes are cold. Uncaring almost.

Thor is father's favorite and so he is Asgard's favorite. Loki doesn't understand it. Doesn't understand why. Is he not his brother's equal? Is he not a prince of Asgard?

(Brace yourself)

The being's voice, clear for the first time in years, startles him out of his thoughts. But it is not just how clear it is but its intent. He can feel this being, strong and hot. A raging fire contained and ready to be unleashed. Something was going to happen.

He raises his chin and walks in.

When the doors close behind him, he quickly learns what it means to fear.

The Queen of Asgard worried. Despite her best attempts Loki becomes more and more distant.

That day, when she held the Jotunn babe in her arms, she felt his strength, and knew he would become a mage of unparalleled power. He would be without equal.

But as he grew so did her visions of the future grow ever more dire. She tried to curb any rumors that his presence was an ill omen to the realms and soon found it beyond her control to stop. Still, she is Queen and the maiden who broke her Queen's confidence found herself equally shunned by all the nobility in the realms.

That does not excuse her failure to protect her son. She sees the way he looks at all who come to him. The fear and mistrust. The actions of her husband have not helped matters. Now, he has become secretive and even Thor and the All-Father he has grown distrustful of. A chasm is forming in the House of Odin and it will not be long before this too becomes the talk of all the realms. As both a mother and as Queen she must do what she can to repair the damage.

When she arrives at the library she knows something is wrong. There is a barrier on the doors which have remained closed. The guards salute her and stand at attention.
"Why are the doors closed?" She demands.

"The All-Father-"

She hears nothing else. She refuses to. After this matter is settled there will be words exchanged with her husband. She cuts her hand across the air and the barrier breaks. The moment it does her ears and the entire hall is filled with her son's screams.

Frigga rushed inside, seidr rising to her call and ready for battle. But she knows down to her very bones, she is too late. She arrives to see Loki, his shirt missing and a rune carved into his belly, struggling to crawl out of the ritual circle. The tutor, stabbed in the gut, struggles to finish his chantation. Frigga does not hesitate to end his life and purging his foul magic from the ritual.

Loki stops screaming but the harsh wheezing sounds he makes, frightens her more. Loki had smudged several of the runes so regardless of the mage's intent, his spell would have failed with no means to enforce its purpose.

The one on his belly is a different matter.

Frigga is already casting a counter before she consciously is aware she is at his side, on her knees, blood and dirt staining her dress. He doesn't acknowledge her or that she is even there. She pulls him into her arms and turns his head so that his eyes meet her own.

There is no recognition.

Blank green eyes stare back at her, unresponsive. Dull. Was he gone? Was all that was left an empty husk, a shell to remind her of yet another failure?

The rune is a cruel and abominable creation. Its purpose twisted from those shared in the bedroom and in the birthing chamber. It would have first made him susceptible to those who sought his bed and made those encounters painful no matter the partner. The second would have ensured that his very bedding ensured pregnancy and at the birth, prove nearly fatal and each child twisted beyond comprehension.

With the ritual mangled, the castor dying, and the spell interrupted, there is little chance that the spell would have taken. That does not mean someone else would not notice and attempt to finish what was started. Even if it seems like Loki is unaffected, Frigga takes no chance.

She unwinds the spell, the rune, and purges that putrid seidr from her son. Only then does she call to her son.

"Loki? My son you are safe now. Speak to me."

Never has he looked so small and fragile, not even as an infant. He was so bright and curious. Loki does not move in her arms.

So still. Listless.

"The Healing Halls await you and the prince, my Queen."

She had forgotten the guards were there. She had forgotten there was anyone besides her son. Slowly, she rises to her feet, Loki cradled in her arms. Another presence comes to her. It is familiar.

"My Queen." She turns to him, coldly she stares him down.
"All-Father."

Before she can say anything. Before she can cut into him with words sharper than all the daggers in the Nine Realms, Loki moves. She turns to him, hopeful and guilty.

When her eyes meet her son's she feels her heart seize. For his gaze was not the bright green she is so used to. No. They were a vibrant gold. And his voice when he spoke, was his voice and another, one feminine, judging and knowing.

Her son is not alone. Not unlike when she is visited by a vision from the Norns.

The words they speak echo, ominous and unforgiving.

"I have heard the languages of apocalypse and now I shall embrace the silence."

Frigga does not dare breath until those eyes close and her Loki falls into a deep sleep. Only than does she dare let her legs give out and weep over the injustice they have wrought upon her son.

Chapter End Notes

End quote is from Neil Gaiman, The Sandman: Endless Nights
Friends

Chapter Summary

In which Loki makes a friend.

Asgard makes assumptions. Loki doesn't correct them because he's a possessive little jerk.

"Real Friends tell you the Ugly Truth. Not Pretty Lies."

It is days later that Loki wakes to much fanfare. His mother crying and father pale. His brother loud and happy. Like a bull. They ask him what happened but all he remembers is being trapped as the mage started to carve into his belly. After is a blank slate. Frigga cries harder but smiles, glad he is well. Father is grim but wishes him a quick recovery and Thor proclaims his first kill will be much grander than "some weakling mage".

Loki isn't sure what he feels. Everything is numb. His emotions mute. He sees the world as if through a glass window and far away. The world seems fake, a construct imitating what once was there. Colors are faded and sounds are forced.

The healers, even lady Eir, are afraid to touch him. They treat him as if he were the most delicate of spun glass. Or a feral beast moments away from rampaging. What has happened? Staying in the healing chambers, the memory comes to him, and he finds himself at ease for the first time in days. When the mage started his chant, used the knife to cut into him, Loki feared and trembled but could not move.

He tried to scream but found his voice silenced.

But not to the being inside of him. Loki called out to it, begged with all his will for it to save him...and it answered.

With all the mercy of a Jotunheim winter storm and the scorn of Muspelheim's deepest, hottest fires, she came. She invaded his every limb, her very being burned and yet soothed his soul. Aches he didn't know were there, brushed and eased with delicate care. She was everywhere within him. She was him and she put the mage on his back. She sought to gut him like the swine he was.

Only the ritual circle stopped her. Its magic bringing her to her knees through sheer force. Still she persisted, dragging their body to the edge of the circle and all the while they screamed in unison, in fear and defiance. He feared they would die, that this is how they would die and had no idea how to stop it. She dared to defy the odds against them, uncaring if they lived or died.

For a single glorious moment they were one and the same.

Loki remembers that moment clearly. All the world was understood and everything made sense. He was mad with knowledge of the future, of every future there ever could be and still hungry for
more. But not for the futures that could be. No he hungered for the future he wanted. For he had the knowledge that he could change his fate. He could! If he only had to will to try and did he ever have the will! No more would he care for the whispers that speak of the end of Asgard because of him. No more would he care for a throne where the people did not want him.

But he didn't know how. How does one change their path? How does one carve a new future among the limitless possibilities of doom? Loki needed an answer and already he knew who he needed to go to.

Loki does not tell his mother.

Later, alone in his room, he turns to his mirror, determined and a little scared. Loki starts the motions to mediation his mother has started him on and enters a trance. It is as private as he can make to avoid Heimdall's sight. Its original use, according to his mother, is allow one to better reach their seidr. He takes it a step further and calls out.

"Hello?"

"Hey kid, about time you got here."

"Who? Who?" He struggles to focus, to keep his nerves and wits about him. The being, the woman, is...amused but chatters on.

"My name is Alice. I like games, books, and days at the beach. Some drunk jackass killed me and I think I was supposed to be reincarnated as you. Something obviously went wrong but its cool. I only woke up about two weeks ago so I'm a bit social starved. What about you? How are you?"

"Um. I. Hello?"

Damn his tongue! He has never had someone so open with him or show such obvious concern besides his mother. Thor cared in his own way, undoubtedly, but always took after father. A warrior in training through and through. While Loki, though no less a prince than his brother, is considered...lesser. Lesser in a way he doesn't understand.

"Too much? Right. Sorry. It been way too long since I've talked to someone and your just a kid."

"I am Loki son of Odin." He manages to find his voice before she can retreat. He came here to talk after all. "I had just started my training in magic when...when..."

"Yes. I know. When that asshole tried to fuck with you. No worries I took care of him."

"Yes. Thank you." he says sincerely. "Mother has started teaching me and says she will be my teacher from now on."

"Lets hope she's a better teacher than a mother then."

"You don't like her."

"I don't like or have respect for anyone who hasn't earned it. Especially a woman who ignores her child's fear, real or imagined. That's just callous and cruel. You don't deserve to be treated like that, like you're lesser or something. That's just wrong and if I had my way, I'd make sure they knew it."

"Do you know why?" this woman obviously knew more than he did. But would she answer him?
"I do." she pauses and Loki can feel her thinking, assessing her next words. "I want to say its not important but it is. I want to say it won't change anything but it will. It will change so much for you. In ways I can't even begin to understand or guess."

"Will you tell me?" Loki could feel his heart begin to race and a familiar fear worm its way to the surface of his thoughts.

"Not everything and not right now." Loki almost lost his focus, his connection with her wavered, and he thought he could feel his heart break. "You need to get stronger and smarter first."

"I don't understand." He didn't. He could feel her words both hurt and mend his doubt. "I-surely knowing now would help me?"

"It would and it would not. If you accidently slip up, would you be able to escape punishment or retaliation? Would you be able to see the backstabbers as they came to you offering support or sympathy? Make no mistake little prince, Asgard is a den of vipers and they won't hesitate to swallow you whole if it benefits them. Its like a game to them and Odin always raises the stakes."

Suddenly, he understood her. She wasn't keeping information to bait him but because she wasn't sure he could defend himself in the event the worse should come to pass. She wanted to tell him but was unsure if doing so while he was so vulnerable is a wise action. Alice didn't want him to remain ignorant but neither did she want to jeopardize his life. Yet, despite this uncertainty, she was willing to compromise. Something he has seen happen only between people of equal standing.

It was...nice, to be treated as someone's equal.

"Than I will do so." he vows. "I will become stronger and wiser. I will earn the right to know what you tell me and to guard the knowledge you share with me Lady Alice."

Suddenly he can see her. Her soul, bright and luminous like a star, smiles at him. Pride and joy wrapping around him in a fierce hug. This is her. This is him, what he is supposed to be but is for some reason separated from.

"I accept your vow Loki Sky Traveler."

The little prince's heart skips a beat but also burst with joy and ambition. For that was a name to aspire to and an existence that was greater than any kingship.

"And I shall start with this. You are Loki the Sly One, the Trickster, the Shape Changer, the Sky Traveler and..."

Here she takes a deep breath, bracing herself for her next words and so Loki follows her example. For what she has spoken thus far are said with pride and glee, awe and a fierce protective depth he can hardly begin to comprehend, he can tell what follows will not be. But she will speak them because she believes he deserves to know. Loki has never appreciated someone as much as he does her.

"...you are the adopted son of Odin."

That does not make the words hurt any less.
Loki gains the support to move on.

He's still a possessive little jerk.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Loki feels his focus stagger. Feels it breaking as the world changes around him forever.

He opens his eyes to his bedroom, tears in his eyes. He falls back onto his bed. Except it isn't, is it? Not his that is. Nothing here is his because he is not a son of Odin All-Father. What was he than? Who was he for the King of Asgard to take him in?

"Hey, now. None of that thinking you're worthless! I didn't tell you so you can spiral into a pool of self-pity.' Her voice softens, 'You are not who the world tells you to become. You are who you want to be. Do you want to be this person?'

"I don't know." He didn't know anything anymore. What did he know about himself? What did he know at all? Nothing.

"Do you want to be the person who breaks if all of Asgard hates you? Even if it means they can't see your worth?' There was the sensation of reproach. He could feel what she felt about that and it made him feel a bit better. 'If they can't or refuse to see your worth than go out find it for your self. Conformity is the jailor of freedom and the enemy of growth*. You have the potential to be anything you want. Anything at all but you only have this one life to get it. Are you going to let it stop right here? Right now?"

Her indignation churns his stomach and burns his throat. He had been ungrateful hadn't he? He wanted the truth and when she gave it, he thought terrible things about himself and his worth. After the glimpse of the future he could have, he spurned her attempt to lead him there.

"No."

He still wanted that glimpse she showed him. He wanted that future to be his. Something he could gain without the influence of Thor or Asgard. It called to him the moment the words passed her lips and he wanted it. But if he let every little thing stand in his way than would he be worthy of the future that he desires? Would he have earned it? No. It would have slipped through his fingers.

"Will you surrender to them? To this life without a fight? You are The Trickster. Rebel!' she snarls at him, angry at his complacency. He didn't mean to but...

"What about family?"

He didn't want to be alone. He didn't want to wonder why he was here instead of with his birth family. Was he not wanted? Was he abandoned? Stolen?
'Your family is who ever you choose. It can be the House of Odin,' her disdain cuts him before suddenly its gone, 'or the House of which you were born. It can even be no House at all but a group of people who accept you for who you really are. All of who you are.'

Loki thinks on her word. In runs over each letter and stews on them. On the meaning of them before he understands and the world doesn't seem so dark. He could make his own family couldn't he? Maybe not now but years later.

"I would like that."

'Than I shall set before you a near impossible task.'

Loki sits up, curious and eager for something to focus on.

'You're task is to learn to grow to be the best that you can be. Whether Asgard accepts you or not. For you to accept and love yourself. To find peace with yourself. Do you accept?'

What she asked was indeed a near impossible task. It is a form of magic that even the most skilled at magic had difficulty achieving. But those that have achieved it are capable of the most profound feats of magic in all the Nine Realms. Not even Odin or his mother Frigga can brag of such skill.

"I'll...I will try." To accomplish such a thing will be incredibly difficult but the reward? It will be worth every struggle.

'Then I'll be here to help you every step of the way. Now,' Suddenly he can feel just as easily as he can hear the mischief in her voice, 'lets see if we cant speed up your studies in magic.'

It has been some time since Loki was fully healed and started to practice magic from her.

Frigga finds herself deeply disturbed.

Loki has always been an introspective child. Always in deep thought. His focus on his studies is to be commended. He simply absorbs everything she teaches. Unnaturally so. To her knowledge, no mage has ever accelerated so much in so little time. It is as if he knows the theory before she even present it and is simply humoring her or that he made his own assumptions and is waiting for her to prove or deny them.

Perhaps he is simply a prodigy?

His magic is also strange to her. It is a bright star to her senses. But like all users, it will eventually, focus down. As the studies progress, the magic will lean toward a specific specialization. She assumed it would lean more toward ice magic or even illusions. It does not. He does dabble in such branches of course but it does not seem to call to him. Concepts that the most skilled apprentice struggle with are easy to him. Spells that were meant for one thing are twisted until they are new spells entirely.

Loki does it all with a smile.

It worries her. Did the mage do something else before she got there? Or was this how her son has always been? If so, it is no wonder the mage tried to ruin him. Prodigal mages are beings of immense power and are often credited with shaping the Nine Realms. If Loki is destined for such a thing it is no surprise that another might feel threatened by him and seek to cripple him before his full potential was ever realized.
At least he still acted like a boy.

His pranks on Thor and the other boy can be heard all throughout the palace. The 'daggers' that Loki 'stabbed' everyone with are his favorite. They did not cause any actual wounds but they held a particularly potent toxin that made the victims break out in blue colored hives and forcefully eject anything within their bowels. It was quite the sight seeing so many guards, even General Tyr, and some of the nobles incapacitated by the young prince.

She sighs while sitting in her sun room.

Children grew up so fast.

Frigga still worries for her son. She did not birth him but she loves him all the same. Already there is gossip about how different Loki is to his brother and his father. Already there is gossip that he is clever but not honorable. He is strange because he prefers the use seidr instead of a sword. Odin will not quell the rumors, will not crush them like he should for fear that some secret of Loki's true family, which he would not tell her, would be revealed. Better he be subject to baseless rumors for whatever reason.

Frigga, rightfully, did not agree. Alas, there is not much she can do but what can do is better than nothing.

"Mother." Loki enters and several of her handmaidens glance at him.

He is not yet a man but not quite a little boy who will sit in his mother's lap. He is already showing signs of growing into long limbs and his green eyes are sure to break many maiden's hearts.

"My son." seeing one arm behind him, she smiles. "What have you there?"

Being caught, the little prince grins and shows his prize. A flower made from parchment and colored with magic, sparkling in the sunlight.

"For you, mother."

"Its beautiful, my Loki." It truly is.

The seidr was woven intricately and with care. She recognized a few to keep from catching fire and being crushed. Another was to change color with the seasons and one she vaguely recalled meant to create a soothing smell in times of duress.

"Loki wanted to give you an early birthday gift." Frigga snaps her gaze to the new voice, one she did not hear enter but found her eyes locked with gold. "I suggested something small but meaningful."

"I..." she swallows carefully. "Loki?"

It was her son's face, his body but not his voice. Not her son. It was someone else. Something else, speaking through him. She caught a glimpse once before and hoped to never see it again but here...

"No," the entity raises one of Loki's eyebrows mockingly and it is so wrong to see such a thing from her son's face, "but for some reason he wanted us to meet."

"May I ask who you are?"
The voice is feminine but not shy. It is not kind but hostile either. Who is this that has taken residence within her son's body and that her son would allow to do so. Why did he not say anything?!

"You may."

Gold eyes bore into her, judging her. Like before. These are those same eyes. Is this a Norn? Did the ritual somehow trap one within her Loki? She shivers at the implication and the complication it would have on Asgard.

"Who are you?"

She does not know if she has to the right to command but she is the Queen of Asgard. She must try.

"Oh?" A cold smile stretches its way across her son's lips. "And who are you to command me to answer?"

Frigga doubts her title of Queen means anything here so she discards it quickly.

"I am Loki's mother-"

"Are you?" The entity cuts her off. The questions startles her and for a second too long she is silent. "What have you done that would allow you to lay such a claim, hmm?"

"I nursed him and have cared for him. I love him. Loki is my son."

Frigga struggles not to stand, to tower over the being sharing Loki's body but her voice cracks at the end.

"But neither you or your husband," Gold eyes darken and its voice drips with disdain, "have done anything about the rumors he hears. You have done nothing to comfort him in the face of Asgard's judgement or prejudice. You have made many mistakes Frigga Fjorgydottir..."

The mention of her father stills the very air in her lungs. Her control slips and it is clear the entity approved of her horror and her fear. It is amused by it.

"...not as much as Odin of Asgard, Son of Bestla. He who will instigate and will Ragnarok upon the realm. I supposed you should glad for that. But what will you do now, I wonder."

It pauses, expecting something from her but she cannot find it within her to speak, to act. No one moves for fear of bringing attention to themselves but there can be no question that this entity must be a Norn. It must be and it is trapped in the body of a child. After another second passes, the Norn becomes obviously annoyed with the Queen.

"Inaction is perhaps the greatest mistake of all**." the Norn glares at her, unimpressed and unapologetic. "I suggest you remember that."

It turns, still in command of her son's body, and walks out. Frigga starts to gasp for air once the being is out of sight and tumbles from her seat. The flower in her hand suddenly lights up and a relaxing aroma fills the area around her.

But try as she might Frigga can find no peace in its soothing warmth.
*quote by John F. Kennedy
** Quote by Chuck Schumer
The training of both Thor and Loki started up in earnest. Thor showed all the characteristics of an Asgardian warrior and it made many proud. Loki is of a slighter build and while shows impressive skill, is seen with suspicion and fear. Some see his preference for seidr as a sign of his weakness and that he should pursue other...avenues. No one would dare insinuate anything about the second prince but there have been substantial whispers since the incident within Frigga's sunroom.

A prince with a connection to a Norn. A Norn trapped with the second prince. It makes the people nervous to have a being so close and yet so far. Her scorn of the King and Queen of Asgard is also fact. It makes the other realms weary of treating with the All-Father.

However, since she has not appeared again, people are willing to believe to take it for a blessing.

That doesn't make the apprehension go away. So they are torn between believing him to be a voice of the Norn and thus should be made into a priestess of the Norns. A position of great honor for a maiden but unheard of for a prince or for any male sorcerer. Most of Odin's court, however, sided with the thought that as a prince of Asgard he must uphold the honor of the House of Odin.

Thus, his weapons training was accelerated alongside Thor.

Loki didn't mind it. The physical training wasn't so bad even though Alice critiqued the instructor's every word. The things said about General Tyr are also best left unrepeated. However, part of the training included a survival course. It meant three weeks with only the basic necessities or until both princes made their first "true" kill. Their instructions were clear. Only a beast would count as a kill and it had to be a beast worthy of being presented to the All-Father.

Alice did not approve of the competition for the All-Father's approval almost as much as she thought hunting an animal for sport was stupid. Her disdain for Odin, however, trumps her contempt for Asgard's practices.

'This is boring.' She starts after two days.

'This is what our instructors want.'

'No. They said they wanted us to make our first kill and bring it back. It was implied that they wanted a boar or whatever you call it.'

'Well yes. They are an impressive first kill for boys our age.'

'A boar is not impressive. A basilisk however certainly is.'
"A what?!"

Images of a boy with glasses stabbing a snake, a monster of truly terrifying power through the mouth with a sword. Its eyes can kill with a glance and its sword length teeth can no doubt tear through the best of Asgard's armor.

'Okay, yes I know what a basilisk is. A fully grown basilisk is very impressive. If there are any here that I could claim as my first kill without dying that would certainly be just as amazing.'

'Well use that pretty head of yours. It's not there just for show.'

Loki huffs but thinks things through as Alice is always encouraging. He would need to do something about the eyes. Either remove them from the equation or somehow take it down without using his eyes so that he can harvest the basilisk's eyes later. Loki would also need to subdue it quickly to save its organs and hide. Basilisk parts are rare and it would be a waste to maul the creature when it can still have use after death.

He would need to practice quick killing on other snakes first.

Tracking any basilisk, if they lived in the forest he and Thor have been left in, would also be important. No point in preparing only for there to be no target for him to hunt. Another way to hunt in a forest would be incredibly beneficial. Perhaps he could parkour? It would prove to be an interesting challenge and a surprise for his prey.

'Oh, I can help with that.'

Loki's curiosity and interest immediately perks up at Alice's tone. Its the same tone she's used before just before she introduced him to other forms and theories regarding magic. Each one is similar yet different from what he knows. The words are different but the basic principal is still the same. And to think that Midgard will one day in the future have such teachings!

They've had plenty of practice sharing their headspace and intermingling together so what follows is as easy as breathing.

'Let me introduce you to 'Naruto'. I think you'll find it very useful.'

Loki resolutely ignore her demented cackling and the brief image of her rubbing her hands together, whispered rambling about corrupting him.

The juvenile mischief maker balanced carefully on a branch using his magic as he's seen. Loki had no idea how amazing shinobi are. He didn't get very far in the series but he soaked enough to try some of the techniques. The tree walking and water walking primarily. It is trickier than he'd thought it would be but so worth the time to learn. Truly, Kakashi's words while accurate are also loathingly understated.

Too much magic and he propels himself off his perch. Too little and he won't stick, falling to the ground.

He loved it.

It took several days before he felt he had mastered the technique. Which is good because his time was running out for making his first kill. The other day he saw fireworks in the sky, proof that Thor had returned with his own prize and was celebrated. Loki tried not to feel crushed at how alone he felt. How abandoned and ignored at how obvious it is that Thor is loved.
That Odin preferred Thor over Loki, even now when they all thought Alice was a Norn. Instead, he secures his camp for the night in the biggest tree, dives into his mindscape and cries within Alice's warm embrace.

Today is different.

He had traveled well outside of the "garden" zone, Alice calls it the "comfort" zone, and into the truly dark and foreboding area beyond, in search of his target. Its only because he has taken to traveling by treetop that he manages to avoid several unfortunate near deaths. The ground below is hardly a straight path and there are numerous fallen trees. But it also allows him a wider range of vision, including an unfamiliar snake trail. Its bigger than any he's previously come across so he's hoping its his target and even if it were not, it is still larger than a boar.

He closes his eyes and sends his seidr out like an echo. This allows him to see like a bat without anything seeing him. A terrified scream startles him and nearly forces him to open his eyes. Several meters away, a large serpentine form is swallowing a fully adult horse. There is a foal trapped by a fallen tree and the serpent consuming it's mother. He's moving through the trees even as the horse's legs twitch one more time and finally, stops struggling.

Loki manages to stop himself from flying off his branch just above the serpent head but its already swallowed the mare. It was too late to save her but not her foal. He can't make any distinguishing features besides a mouth with incredibly large serrated teeth. Loki readies his dagger and drops.

His aim is true and his blade sinks into the muscle severing the bone between the neck and the skull. The creature lets out a monsterous roar before falling silent and still. Loki doesn't move for several long seconds, breathing heavy. He doesn't want to open his eyes, part in fear and part in disappointment. But he has to.

The apprentice mage opens one eye and than another. The giant serpent doesn't move, its jaw is open and its tongue is lolled out. There is a strange thin film over it's eyes but Loki recognizes this as something snakes have that work like eyelids. But the teeth and its snout are deformed from any snake he's ever seen! The size of its head is almost as big as the boars Loki had passed by in his quest.

It truly is a monster creature. One that Loki killed using his seidr and his dagger. Loki decides he's going to be a ninja mage. Right there.

Even if his breathing is more than a little labored and his vision becomes increasingly blurry.

He stumbles to the side and doesn't understand what's wrong with him. Alice is crying and trying to hold him. He is numb to her. The beast is dead. The Beast is dead. The Beast is Dead!

It is dead and it should fill him with pride but all he can feel is a numb type of horror. It was a terrible beast to eat a mother and he was right to kill it. Wasn't he? He doesn't know. He doesn't know and he doesn't know if not knowing terrifies him more than the beast.

It was a beast.

And now, with it dead, what does that make Loki?

Something wet presses against his face, startling him. It is the foal. It trembles just as much as Loki but it is far braver, the prince decides, than he. Loki does not believe he would have reached out but he is grateful for its kindness. Looking pass the nose, the prince takes in the creature and finds that it is a beauty, a lush white coat and a mane of shining gold to make any Aesir green with
envy, even Thor.

Alice nudges Loki, ever so gently and he offers his palm to the scared foal. The other hand pulls out a ration of bread as a sign of truce and peace. To his surprise it reaches out with its seidr, not threateningly, but to taste his intent and Loki finds himself copying her. He had never realized magic could be used in such a way although he should have with the many teachings and techniques available to him through Alice.

They spend some time like that, tasting the other's magic with their own until the filly, whose eyes were once a soft brown, morph into an emerald green to match Loki's own. Loki in turn feels something between them 'click' and a burst of warmth connects to him and Alice. It takes a second for him to realize what has happened. He's created a familiar bond with the filly.

'She needs a name. You can't keep calling her 'the filly', you know.' Alice's voice is rough and exhausted. Despite the turbulent killing and the strange bonding moment, she's still there.

"Gullfaxi." Loki declares and he runs his hand down her side. As he stands he sees she's his exact height. It gives him a good idea of how big she will be once fully grown. "It means golden-mane. Will you help me take this home?"

He is bombarded with impressions of determination and trepidation. It isn't Alice and he doesn't know how he can tell the difference. But that's for studying another time, when they aren't somewhere so unsafe. So he gets to work with making rope with vines and sets a preservation spell on the now cooling carcass. It will take them some time to make it back to the palace. If the guards don't come running out to meet him.

After several failed tries, he manages to wrap the large, not quite adult now that he notices, basilisk corpse and tie it to both Gullfaxi and himself. Together they make their way back. Fortunately, the basilisk left a very prominent and easy trail to follow.

Thor had enjoyed the attention of the entire court as well as his parents, both of whom embraced him on his return. It would be better with his brother at his side where he belonged.

It has been some time since anyone had last heard from him and Helmdall could not see him since he entered the forest. Thor didn't know Loki could even cloak himself from the gatekeeper's sight! Still, his brother's behavior was unacceptable. Thor didn't care for his brother's magic but his prolonged disappearance made their mother worry. Thor made his kill with honor within the first week but that was no excuse for Loki to sulk about outside in the dirt.

Suddenly, an alarm was raised and the guards were rushing about. Thor quickly followed his parents to the garden's edge, as far as he was allowed to go. But he didn't need to go any farther because he could see his brother with his own kill. A long serpent, held together by ropy vines and pulled by Loki and a large foal. The only reason Thor even knew it was his brother was because of his bright green eyes.

Both Loki and the foal were covered in mud. It sat dried on their skin, caked their hair twisted with twigs. Loki's face and arms are covered in scratches. The foal was a little better with the bottom of its legs also covered in mud and cuts. Some of the foal's feathers, the hairs at the bottom of its legs, were also cut or tangled and knotted with dried mud.

What little that can be seen of the foal, Thor could tell it used to be white but that's all. There are two guards on either side of them but they don't touch the kill which is proper. Loki stops just before father and unlatches himself and the foal. After a gentle pat on the foal's side, Loki unwraps
part of the net of vines and exposes a large serpent monster head.

"This is my kill."

He gives a small proud smile. Father steps forward, a strange look on his face, and uses Gungnir to turn the creature's head and stares.

"A juvenile basilisk. Well done, my son, you shall make a fine warrior yet." He turns to the foal. "And this creature?"

Thor doesn't notice the long look Frigga gives her husband or the dim power of Loki's smile. He's curious about the foal. Where did it come from? Will father let Loki keep it? If not, maybe Thor can ask for it!

"This is my new familiar. I've named her Gullfaxi. She's very nice."

"I'm sure she is my son and I'm even more sure that you are prepared to take responsibility for her."

Frigga responds quickly, which Thor finds odd but thinks no more of it, disappointed he can't have it for himself. Perhaps now that Loki has one, father will let him have his own horse? A horse is much more honorable than a foal for a warrior anyway. *Whoever heard of a foal being a familiar?*

"Oh!" Loki's smile is brighter than before. "Yes. Very much so."

"I'm glad." Frigga smiles at the crowd. "Then let us feast."

"Yes." Odin turns his stare back at the carcass. "A more...appropriate setting for this creature would not be the dining hall. I can infer than that you know what is to become of this kill?"

"Yes, Your Majesty. Many of the organs even the eyes will go to the healing halls. I wish to keep the hide to make armor."

"That is good."

The All-Father says nothing else and the guards take the kill away. As the King turns away, the rest of the crowd, Odin's court, following after the him. Another odd habit that Thor's brother has taken is referring to their father as he would a foreigner. Which is preposterous since Asgard is the strongest realm in all the Nine and its not as if Loki is a strange visitor. Thor will make him stop after the feast is done. It just not done with family.

"Well done, Brother!" He shouts merrily, waving at Loki. He may be disappointed that he only brought back a boar for a kill but he is proud of his brother for his accomplishments. Shooting one more forlorn look at the foal, Thor follows after his parents as his brother and his familiar are escorted away to get cleaned up.
Slepnir

Chapter Summary

Loki proves his mettle.
He does nothing.
Slepnir is still born.

Chapter Notes

Not much Alice this chapter.
Next Chapter you'll see more of her.

Since his first kill many things have changed for the trickster.

He's grown in skill, in magic, and in reputation. Although neither of the two princes were allowed to leave Asgard just yet that did not mean that Loki obeyed that edict. He learned a long time ago how to conceal himself from the Gate Keeper and with his skills from Alice's mass reserves of knowledge, he learned how to conceal himself from everyone else.

Loki learned to hide his magic.
A skill thought impossible and yet, he did so. He became invisible. He ceased to exist. Loki became a dagger, hidden but sharp.

This reputation was not looked upon with favor. The mistrust that would have lead to the people of Asgard scorning Loki was only belayed by the fact they still believed that Alice was a Norn. This falsehood is his only saving grace. It is his only defense against those who would physically seek to harm or threaten him.

Loki cannot let that happen. Its not just his life in the balance. It is theirs. His and Alice.

And she's started to worry him. She has not turned against him. No. He is certain she will never do that. But there are days where she is almost catatonic. She is unresponsive and within their mindscape, he sees her flicker in and out of existence. When she comes to she has no memory of her lapse.

Loki calls to her relentlessly each time it happens and each morning when he wakes he calls to her. Even if all he gets is a noncommittal reply, it is enough for him to know she's still there. It leads him to a short jaunt in the healing halls to learn under the healers. His studies were vast and diverse to keep his interest unassuming. After several years, he's come to the understanding that Alice's initial guess was right.

She was meant to be him or at the very least a part of him. Whatever is keeping them separated must be wearing off or having a diminished impact.
Its only a matter of time until she becomes apart of him.

But Loki is selfish and afraid. He doesn't want her to leave. He doesn't want to be alone. So he fight it every time it happens which is thankfully not a common occurrence. Thus far it has only happened twice since his first kill several hundred years ago. That gives him some time. To do what, he doesn't know, but she is *his*.

He needed her and he has no intention of letting her go.

Unfortunately, the same could not be said for the rest of Asgard. *Everyone* has worked to progressively hit his last nerves especially Thor and his followers. The blonde prince meet three boys and a girl some time after his first kill. He spent the week with them while Loki was still in the wilds feasting and glorifying himself. The boys turned out to be Fandral, Hogun, and Volstagg. The girl was the daughter of a noble family named Sif.

Loki hated them all.

He hated Sif most of all.

Alice had started to share many more things she knew from myths and hearsay from her world. One of which was that Loki had pulled some prank on her hair. Which he can see why. She was vain and arrogant. Her bright Blonde hair, not unlike his horse, was seen as her best and distinguished feature. Sif used it relentlessly to get her way. If her aim were not to be seen as an equal to other warriors than she would not be out of place among the other fluttering noble daughters at court.

Originally, he cut off her hair and had been forced to get her another head of locks. Loki has no intention of having to do such work.

Loki asks some of the servants, who actually don't mind his company, for assistance. A fact, Loki attributes entirely to Alice, and her insistence that he knows how to care for himself. This lead to a comical year spent learning to do what the servants do such as cooking and cleaning. He learned how to cook his own food and clean his own cloths. Loki drew the line at sewing which Alice didn't push.

But her reasoning was sound.

When he leaves there will be no one to do those things for him. There will be no servants to change his sheets or cook his favorite meals. Surviving off of tavern food would be both unbecoming and ill advised.

Still, that year certainly endeared him to the servants and they are the only ones not adding to his stress and resentment.

In a surprising twist, on occasion they'll aid him in playing a prank here and there. Loki has had no problem taking full blame for any consequences or helpfully get a few servants out of trouble by making up some story or causing some mischief to distraction.

The servants give him dye. Loki recognizes the dye as the kind used for clothes and knows it won't be permanent. With a quick use of stealth and some slight of hand, the dye is in place. Strangely, no one sees her for several weeks. According to the servants, her parents snuck her out of Asgard under the cover of dark and for the past several weeks rumors started to crop up that the girl consorted with demons in the dark forests.

It baffled the trickster. It truly did.
Seeing his obvious confusion, the servants whispered it must be a ruse to gain sympathy from the court and the House of Odin. Maybe even a marriage to Prince Thor. But they did wonder why she was hidden. Her family could not believe that the All-Father would fall for such a play.

When next anyone sees Sif, in Odin's throne room no less, the girl still has a head full of dark hair.

Both of her parents were also present and were glancing at him. To make a long story short, the brat child and her family went to a hedge mage to fix her hair. Which is the stupidest thing he's ever heard of. He makes their foolishness known.

"The dye used is fabric dye. Easily procured and easily removed with pig fat."

Seeing the mother's complexion turn pale, Loki went for the kill.

"Unless mixed with magic which I refused to do. It would have given me away, you see."

Had they put their pride and arrogance to the side, it would have been simple for a servant or even a healer to remove the dye. The humiliation endured with Sif's dark hair for years after the fact. Her family's standing is damaged due their seeking out a hedge mage and Sif's standing suffered in the eyes of the other court ladies. Of which, he knew many can be incredibly vicious.

Sif has not forgiven him and Loki has never trusted her.

On the plus side, her determination to prove she makes a better warrior propelled her forward. On the down side, she constantly challenges him to a duel and he's forced to put her on her back. He dislikes showing so much skill to potential enemies. A shinobi's greatest weapon is his secrets and how he can use those secrets against his enemies. Loki has to make sure each take down is done as swiftly as possible.

It's presses the notion to Loki that Sif is someone more trouble than she's worth.

He never did find out if the marriage bit was true. Shame. If it was he would have had to find some way out of Asgard sooner rather than latter.

Loki decides he needs to get out of Asgard.

No, he needs to have done so, Yesterday.

A builder, a Light Elf, came to Asgard proposing a trade. He would build fortifications to keep out invaders in exchange for Freyja as his bride, the Sun and the Moon. It is a familiar tale to Loki. One which ends in his rape by the stallion Svadilfari and the birth of Slepnir. As negotiations continue, Loki keeps his peace, and remains quiet.

In another surprising twist, many of Odin's council ask his advise. It irritates him because he has no wish to be involved in these talks.

"What will be done will be done."

He pulls the Norn card and regrets nothing. It makes him seem mysterious but it also makes many of the Aesir stop asking him. Its considered taboo to force a seer to share what the Norns have shown against their will. Its actually considered a precursor to ruin to do so and Loki abuses such assumptions without mercy.

Loki's silence does not help negotiations.
He understands their concerns. Freyja, a hostage from Vanir with incredible influence, holds the allegiance of several Valkyries, with the rest of the female warriors mysteriously gone or a glimpse here or there on the out skirts of society. Losing her to a foreign entity would be a large blow to Asgard's standing among the Nine Realms and the loss would be felt if she took all of her influence with her.

For Alfheim, it would be a massive boon in power, economy, and influence.

The Sun and the Moon, are likewise powerful artifacts. Separately, they have power comparable to half that of a single infinity stone. Together? They could jumpstart any of the Nine Realms into equal or as close to equal as that of Asgard. To have such power in the hands of an unknown as well as one of the most powerful woman of Vanir would put Asgard's position at the top of the Nine Realms into jeopardy.

Loki has no care for that.

That is not his primary concern right now. Right now, he wants to run far, far away. Odin and his Council have come to an agreement with the builder. The builder shall work alone, for three seasons, and is allowed only the use of his horse.

Just like the damn story.

No.

Nope.

Nuh-huh.

Loki will not be blamed for this cluster fuck. He pointedly does not throw himself off of the Bifrost. Although it is a close thing. Very. Inches. Centimeters. The impulse to stab Odin in his other eyes is incredibly high though.

The damned All-Father keeps him close, sending him loaded glances which Loki pointedly ignores. Can Loki shapeshift? Yes, of course. He learned from the best. Freyja is a lovely woman once you get past the bitterness and quiet fury. Will he shapeshift? Absolutely not. Loki will not willingly offer himself up as a sacrifice for Asgard. Toward the end of the third season, the Aesir become nervous.

The builder and his horse are nearly complete.

A powerful and elaborate dome shield can now be erected around the palace. The physical walls around Asgard are bright and seamless crafted. It shines as beautiful as anything else in Asgard. The builder will accomplish his task. Loki does not relax. He cannot.

Loki makes a plan.

When the anxiety of Odin's court becomes too much he tells his mother where he will be and that he's taking Gullfaxi with him. With his horse, he sets out to the forest away on the far side from the builder and Svadilfari. There can be no accidental meetings with the pair with him so far away. Alas, his plan has one major flaw.

Thor.

"Come now, brother, I've apologized countless time." Thor grumbles to Loki. "It was for the good
of Asgard as well. You should be proud. Your mare is the most magnificent in all of Asgard. Nay, in all the realms!"

"Tell me," Loki tugs gently, on her reigns, "does this look magnificent to you?"

His fury is palatable. His magic crackling visibly in the very air. Loki had managed just fine until Thor and his friends came looking for him. He didn't know for what or why. But any mention of Asgard or the builder he cut off quickly. Once, he even mounted Gullfaxi barebacked, putting all of his supplies into his dimensional pocket, and rode off.

Now, she stands before Loki neck, ears, and flank covered in scratches and bite marks, some still bleeding. Her rump and hind legs were also a mess of sweat and horse seed.

Apparently, Odin had came up with a solution that involved distracting Svadilfari with a mare. An idea sparked when Frigga told the All-Father that Loki had gone off with Gullfaxi. Thor ever eager to keep his father's approval agreed to retrieve Gullfaxi from his brother. After Loki had gone off and lost the others, Thor became desperate or just stupid.

Sif and the Warriors Three ambushed Loki.

It is instinctive for him to fight back and he didn't hold back. He was on high alert. Loki's vigilance and paranoia made it so that his fight with the others was absolutely brutal.

He held nothing back. Loki went to hurt, to kill. He assumed they were there to kill him or for him to copulate with the horse. He would fight and die before he let that happen. Loki more than proved himself a match against them. He moved like a shadow against the Aesir warriors. Loki aimed for ligaments and other weak spots.

Loki sought only to cause as much harm as possible.

Hogun almost lost an arm, the limb barely hanging on by the thinnest of flesh. Fandral's elbow was smashed. The ligaments within Volstagg's legs were cut, causing the big warrior to crash to the ground. He was lucky Loki didn't aim for the major arteries. Even an Aesir can bleed out.

Sif was the most skilled of the others but even she goes down eventually. The only reason she was not the first is because she was somewhat familiar with his fighting style. Loki breaks both of her wrists and leaves a dagger in her gut.

It is then that Loki realizes Thor is nowhere to be seen. The brute herded Loki's horse and familiar into Svadilfari's path. It does not take much of Loki's imagination to know what happens next. There were also enough witnesses who speak of the event. Svadilfari is taken with Gullfaxi enough to break his tack and "seduce" her.

"Ahh..." The blonde grimaces at the sight of the mare. "I am sorry brother. Truly, I am but father..."

Loki tunes out Thor's excuses and platitudes. All he can see is Gullfaxi's battered and exhausted body. His seidr can already feel the new life forming within her belly. Loki knows this life will be Slepnir, the eight legged horse. He does not despise the foal, the new life for its creation. The only consolation, if it can be considered that, is twofold. Gullfaxi was receptive to Svadilfari's "courtship" and the actual mating didn't take more than a few days.

The builder and his horse still managed to complete their task.

Loki will take great pleasure in seeing their reaction to discovering the builder is in fact not an elf.
The Power of Loki

Chapter Summary

Loki doesn't need his lips sewn shut.

His response is still incredibly profound.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

"Silence is the most perfect expression of scorn." -George Bernard Shaw

Loki is furious.

That is all Alice can feel from him. His fury. His hate. She can feel his hunger for violence, for
desolation and destruction. If he were like Thor, the entirety of Asgard would be eclipsed in a
thunderstorm of epic proportions. But over the years Alice has shared many aspects of herself and
her culture with him. Politics, art, and entertainment are but a few things that have impacted Loki’s
outlook on the world around him.

So, his fury cannot be like Thor.

Because Loki is not Thor and he doesn't want to be.

That does not make his anger any less important. It just means he has to channel and express that
anger differently. Alice is incredibly helpful in this regard. Her running commentary just enough
to allow Loki to focus his fury.

And she finds it hilariously ironic how he choses to do so. Looks like her anti anti-gay protests
have made an impression.

Asgard feels Loki's scorn in a way no one ever expected. Everyone notices how silent the second
prince has become since the Aesir lost the bet and Freyja was lost to them. Of course, everyone
knows the Trickster had done his level best to avoid trying to impact the event. As expected of
someone who shared both mind and body with a Norn.

That does not mean that the All-Father did not attempt to use all resources at his disposal.
Including the beautiful mare, Gullfasci.

Some disapproved of this method of...subterfuge. These are those who see Loki as an extension of
the Norns and who go out of their way not to aggravate the prince. Others thought it Loki's fault
for refusing to use his connection to better Asgard.

Regardless, Asgard lost face.

It starts right after Loki finishes getting Gullfasci cleaned and looked over. Thor tries to apologize.
Frigga tries to mediate between the second prince and the All-Father. The King tries to justify himself.

Loki remains silent.

At first, they took this as compliance. Acceptance and forgiveness. Frigga knows better and relents, choosing to force the King to give all rights to Gullfaxi and her foal solely to Loki.

It got her a grateful nod in turn but nothing else. She knows her compliance, though unintentional, still hurt him and Loki will make sure he gets even. His pride will accept nothing less. Thor feels his brother’s scorn but dismisses it and from there it ripples.

Thor, whose always seen his brother's magic as something for women, whose seen his brother as both his brother and as the second prince, learns the hard way that the Trickster is not forgiving. After the failure with the builder, Thor, Loki, Sif and the Warriors Three are sent to Alfheim to gain favor with the Royal Family to find who the mystery builder really is.

There are a number of ways this can be done including completing some task the Royal family needs done like killing a beast terrorizing the common people or gaining favor through diplomacy.

Trouble starts the moment they touch down on Alfheim.

"I am Thor, Son of Odin! I demand to see the Builder!"

The elves are not impressed. In fact, they are so unimpressed that Sif jumps to his brother's defense while the Trickster remains silent. Loki pointed steps away from his brother and crosses his arms. He can make himself look petulant, every inch the offended prince throwing a tantrum and who does not want to be here or near his brother.

"An elf builder came to Asgard and made way with treasures of the realm."

Silly woman. Giving away things for free.

"King Odin has sent his sons to retrieve what was taken."

"A deal was struck was it not?"

"Aye." Thor rumbles. "But it was a deal made dishonorably."

"How so?" Loki notes it's the princess speaking. He cannot remember her name. "They offered a service and a price. Did they complete the task?"

"Aye, they did so-"

"And so Asgard gave the price that was due. That does not sound like theft."

The elf woman narrows her eyes at the group and lets her eyes roam. She undresses them, inspects them, as if they were commodities at the market. It takes everything Loki has not to flinch when that gaze falls on him and the familiar light, that of desire and hunger, flash within their depths.

"There were additional circumstance you do not know."

"Oh? Perhaps you could share what those are."
"No. It is a matter that concerns Asgard and Asgard alone. Now, where is the Builder?"

Thunder roars in the distance. A testament to Thor's increasing temper. But the princess and several others merely smile benignly. No doubt aware they will get no more information from the blonde prince and drop the charade.

"I would tell you, Prince Thor, except that no builder from Alfheim has journeyed to your Golden Realm."

"WHAT?!"

The chaos that followed would have made Loki laugh if he were not so bitter. At least the elves thought this was funny.

Later, Thor and his companions are invited to stay. Both as a way to prove their innocence and wheedle more information out of them by the elves.

"My prince, would you care to join us?"

Loki shakes his head smiling politely at the elf woman and her companion, another woman with just as many sensual curves slinks up to his other side with a smile and a caress of his arm. He gestures to a glaring Thor and shrugs his shoulders, amused. He makes sure everything about him is non-threatening, almost lazy in comparison to his brother.

"Can't take him anywhere can you, my prince?" The elf woman smiles with her teeth.

He wants her. He wants what she's offering and Alice is curious enough. But its not Thor that stops him. It's the terrifying truths that Alice has started sharing with him. It is the awful stories told about him, about what happens to him. The nightmarish stories that trivialize his torture.

*Raped by a horse.*

*Spawning monstrous children.*

*Lips sewn shut.*

*Initiating Ragnarok.*

Loki trembles slightly and he knows the elf sees it. But he runs his eyes over her body as if in desire and she turns just slightly, spinning on her heel and sauntering away. Her companion smiles, coy and sharp, follows her.

"We'll be available when ever you are free my prince."

"I look forward to it."

Loki projects to their thoughts and watches as they shiver at the small display of power. He lies easily. So easily its no wonder he's called the Liesmith and the Silver Tongue. The lies protect him. They build an invisible armor around him. He is curious. But that curiosity is tempered by knowledge. It makes him afraid of the prospects. Is it safe to dally with such an unknown?

And if he did what would be asked for in return?

Dangerous.
The more he saw of the other realms the more dangerous it all looked to him. Suddenly, all the bright wondrous things he dreamed of didn't seem so wonderful. It makes him grateful for the warnings Alice has given him and that he listened. He can see it. The type of dangers she hinted.

'I'm going mad.'

'Are you? It's not paranoia if they really are out to get you.'

'So, I'm not...'

'Crazy?' Alice buffs. 'Only if you ignore the warning signs...and there's nothing wrong with waiting until you feel safe for sex.'

Loki doesn't respond to the last statement. He doesn't need to. Alice was a virgin when she died but that didn't mean she was ignorant. She's shown him a vast amount of Midgard porn. She was very curious and with a healthy sex drive, very engaged with herself. However, her mother was both liberal and cautionary about it. Open to talking about what "normal" and what to do with certain situations.

There was no pressure to be a virgin or to not be one. Her mother was a firm believer in having more information before committing to anything. Still...He had no idea Midgardians could be so...kinky. No doubt the people of Asgard would be appalled at some of the more creative minds. Although if the rumors are to be believed, they'd fit in right here with the elves.

But they give him ideas on how to humiliate his brother. Later.

Right now, Alice's recent share has...put him off any desires to explore for some time.

He will wait and if anyone asks, he is taking precautions against those that would try to force a prophecy from him while intimate. Yes, that is perfect. No one can refute such a reason without seeming to want to do the same.

When they return to Asgard without rewards for their efforts, the King is not pleased. The court even more so. For only a Master of magic could do as the Builder had done and hold his form for such a long time and under such circumstances. They are sent out again and their mission is clear. Return with the builder by any means necessary.

Thus, their journey continues, realm to realm, seeking the Builder who wore the face of a light elf. The Builder who made away with three treasures of Asgard and who disappeared like a spirit.

The entire time, Loki says not a word, and the story of his fury grows. With each retelling, Asgard looks more and more the desperate fool and Loki, the silent condemner. It is a strange place the Trickster finds himself in. Elves, Dwarves, and more make note of the distance between the Trickster and his party. Is this a weakness? Is this a sign of Asgard's waning power? Has Odin lost his wisdom? His cunning?

It matters not how great Thor's prowess or how skilled and fierce Sif is in battle. It matters not how many monsters and beasts are slain. The maidens and servants saved are only awed for a short time and it is only through Thor's charm that they stay enraptured with him. Loki stays well out of his brother's way when he's feeling in the mood for a woman's company.

His fear not abating even as the years wore on.

But his silence is damning. Because he is an extension of a Norn and his neutrality has been
subverted. A gross taboo to those of the Nine Realms. But one the King of Asgard has disregarded and that Loki makes no excuses or defense for.

[Even when the All-Father pressures him to speak. Belittling the Trickster and striking his pride, his self-esteem. It hurts. Oh, does it hurt but he keeps his silence. He bites his cheek hard enough to draw blood but he. Does. Not. Speak.]

Their mission grows ever longer and Thor's temper grew ever shorter. With every quest, every slain child and bandit, Loki grows ever more disenchanted with Asgard, with Thor. He is his brother but he is not blind to his faults and flaws. Loki is not blind to the people around him and how they enable him.

Loki can See.

Without Alice having to point them out to him and it feeds his anger, his hate. But such anger can only burn for so long before giving way to a gasping void of nothingness. Apathy. Loki carefully cultivates his feelings of indignation and isolation, using them like kindle to keep his fury stoked and alive. What then is the point of his silence if he breaks it before a lesson can be learned?

And make no mistake.

They will Learn.

It has been some time since the shapeshifter made away with his prize. Alice buzzes, hyper and eager, with attention. She knows it is almost time for the grand finale.

For the Truth.

Loki is no less eager. Oh, the look of sweet desolation and horror that will surely cross the face of those in court will be sweet, sweet revenge.

Until then, their travels have led them to Midgard, and Loki isn't surprised that they worship them. He isn't surprised at how primitive they are. He isn't surprised at how they treat each other or how taken they are with his brother's tales of battle and valor. Loki isn't surprised when he's belittled or looked down on for his use of seidr or his trickery.

Loki knows this is how its starts. How Midgard, the only realm shaped from the corpse of Ymir-the First Being born from the World Tree-is also the key to all the others, potentially powerful beyond measure and yet, left woefully vulnerable. Like a babe left to fend for itself, to live or die by its own merits, regardless of the sabotage incurred by others.

Much like himself, Loki notes.

So, he teaches instead. Oh, its an easy feat to sneak away, unheard and unseen, to the orphans and the outcast. He teaches them how to hide in plain sight, how to lie without lying. Loki shows them how to wield words as well as any weapon.

He teaches them how to survive.

Loki does it all with a smile and a prank ready at hand. He uses magic for everything, to make tasks harder for some and easier for others. If his pranks against Thor and his friends are just slightly more vicious than usual that's no ones business but his. Loki needs to vent, somehow, at least until they head back to Asgard to report another failure and come to the final conclusion.
"Midgard was a waste of time!"

Thor snarls like an angry bull but its a look that is quickly wiped from his face with a single look from the All-Father.

"I mean no disrespect Father but the mortals know nothing of magic." The Thunderer gives a short look to Loki, who stands silent at their Mother's side. But Loki has been silent for so long...

"Except for the magic of Loki. My brother awed many with his tricks and shows."

Loki looks at him with something in his eyes. It is gone before Thor can see it properly.

"It does tell us where the Builder is not." Uncle Ve turns to his brother. "And where the Builder is most likely now that the Princes of the Realm have searched so far."

There is a tension in the Thing that Thor has long become familiar with since the Builder's escape. It is thick and suffocating. He doesn't understand how Loki has not said anything to ease this burden from them all. Thor may have forgotten the sound of his brother's voice but he remembers how easily words came to him. If Thor was half as good with words as Loki, there are many blunders he could have avoided but he wasn't.

And Loki refuses to speak, to help and it frustrates him.

More than once Thor and Loki have come to blows. However, with each fight, Thor becomes ever more aware of how little he knows his brother. The skills and tactics he shows are impressive...and disheartening. There were more than a few times Thor had to be carried to a healer or risk being permanently crippled.

He doesn't know how to fix this. Whatever this is, Thor needs it to change.

"This means the Builder can belong to only one realm." Vili is grim faced.

A heaviness grips the Thing as comprehension and apprehension dawns on everyone. Odin, the All-Father, tightens his grip on Gungnir and although he glances at Loki, his gaze does not linger. General Tyr places his hand on his sword but otherwise doesn't flinch or twitch.

Everyone seemed to be aware of the answer except Thor. It annoyed him but he couldn't focus enough to put to the pieces together, not when there is a gaping chasum between he and his brother. Loki doesn't even speak! He hasn't spoken a word in years! Will be damned to never hear his brother speak again? While the Thing squabbles over petty relics!

It is then that Thor notices the slow grin spreading across Loki's face. Its one he hasn't seen in some time. Not since Loki's last prank back on Midgard.

Thor stands abruptly, startling some of the court but he ignores them. He ignores them because Loki is opening his mouth as if to speak...

"Jotunheim."
Realization dawns. Loki's first word in years and it must be a lie! Of all things for his brother to say! Thor takes a step toward his brother. His Trickster brother with a mad grin on his face and a dark gleam in his eyes.

Except his mother, the Queen of Asgard, stiffens beside him and pales dramatically. Because those green eyes turn a blazing gold.

Gold like the All-Father's spear, a star burning, the cosmos standing on the edge just out of view.

Loki's form shift and melts, less muscular and fine. He grows curves and softens his jawlines. The cloths follow swiftly after with not even of a hint of spell being cast. Loki becomes changed. A pressure, thick and intangible, presses down onto them all. It is the feeling of a blade pressed against the back of your neck despite it being with the lightest touch.

This...this is the Norn that lives inside his brother?

*Her* grins becomes something sharp and mocking.

"Jotunheim." *She* repeats.

Then they laugh. They, Loki and the Norn, together laugh at all those present in the Thing. And Thor realizes that they knew the entire time. They knew and said nothing because Asgard dared to command-to *manipulate*- a Norn.

This is their punishment.

...And there is nothing they can do about it.

Chapter End Notes

The Jotuns will show up soon!

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