Born Again

by Nvos

Summary

Thanos the Mad Titan has been defeated, the Snap undone. The Avengers are celebrated as the greatest heroes of their time. But their victory rings hollow for the newly coronated King of Asgard, for his kingdom is one of ghosts. A mysterious magpie sent from another world seeks to help him, and in doing so, may have damned as much as he has saved.

Notes

Main setting is in the MCU, ostensibly after Infinity War (and Avengers 4, although will obviously not be compliant on its release). Characters that died in the Snap are back, and there is still much cleaning up to do. Will end up blending elements of the events in comics Thor (2007) and Journey into Mystery (2011).

You were a king of one.

“And a toast to the Avengers!”

A shepherd with no flock.

“May their heroism be remembered through the ages!”

A god without his people.

“The Avengers! The Avengers! Saviors of us all!”
As for me, little more than the narrator. And a watcher, and sometimes a magpie, but let’s not get ahead of ourselves, shall we? Good stories to those who read. This was the full list of who you were that night:

Thor,
Son of Odin,
The God of Thunder,
Slayer of the Mad Titan,
And last Aesir alive.

Contextually, I would also have added “not a sordid drinker”.

I’m going to drop the pretenses, before the rest of the story gets tangled up with them. You are Thor, and Thor is you. And what our Thor was doing was rather a lot of yard-long staring, some drinking (as above), a bit of swearing (good for the soul, so I’ve heard) and a great deal of silent reminiscing. The sort of nostalgia that tinged his girdle with sorrow and kept him miles away from the feasting though he might be center at the table, for this hall was no Aegir’s hall, this food would be no impediment to Volstagg longer than a blink, and this sugar water was an offense to call itself mead.

Were I there to tell him, I would’ve said to beware victory, for victors are the survivors, and surviving makes bastards of us all. I couldn’t attend, though, so my tongue remained held then and stays so now. I’m sure he understands. What I was doing, of course, was watching. What caught my eye was how they gathered around him and clunk their glasses with him, yet no-one seemed to care that he was not smiling, or dancing, or anything so much as resembling that fare. He was, putting it succinctly, solitary midst a crowd. It was this image that started my interest in this whole tale, as you might imagine. That he who bested Death herself and Death himself found no pleasure in what came after.

Well, not no-one. Someone saw what I saw.

“What’s the matter, thunder god?” He no longer called him Point Break. “I thought your kind were the drinking and be merry type.”

“I define what ‘type’ my people are, now,” replied our Thor. “While I may drink, I am far from merry.”

Tony Stark looked at him, the feast, then reached a hand for his shoulder. “Chin up. It gets better from here. We’ve done short of the impossible. That’s worth celebrating, isn’t it?”

“Perhaps. But no titan’s head on my mantle will bring my honor back. I have protected Midgard. I have failed Asgard.”

“There’s talk of anointing you land in Broxton, Oklahoma,” said Stark, who was swirling around a glass of his own. “As you’ve told me—Asgard not a place, but a people.”

Thor did not seem kinder to that.

“I have no people.”

At the time, I thought him not lying, but being willfully inconclusive. No people? Not a soul? Now that I doubted, and I considered the true meaning of what he could have meant. I sat there wondering
and thinking as most narrators do in a place most narrators are, tapping my chin and flitting fingers through my hair. I knew what had happened leading up to this point, of course. Nasty business even for my standards—but those were the dire state of wars where the Infinity Stones are to be involved. One snap and half on the whole of everything dies. Another and they return, but the causalities after or before remain. His lied squarely with the latter.

There was more drinking that night, and more reminiscing. Thor recalled myths and legends told to him as a boy, the lot of which I remember being told to me his age, too. Ones of oversized otters who were shapechangers and of greedy men who would one day transform into Fafnir the dragon. Giants who were cunning and giants who were cunning as their clubs. Eventually the banquet dried up and the crowd thinned. There would be more celebrating on the morrow, Thor knew, and Stark would try raising his spirits again. (And he would fail, again.)

At once he felt so tired. Tired of this, tired of that. Tired of how empty the days. They had won. Thanos was dead. His gruesome legacy undone—and Thor, the final blow. Life would return to normal in Midgard, themselves hailed as the heroes of their age, defeating Death not once but twice. But Thor was tired, and he figured that this tiredness would stay for all the years that followed.

I suppose you could say that in my own way, this was not how I envisioned for this particular story to end.

I should clarify that I am no enemy of the bittersweet, mind you. And I admit I may have had some personal stake in what happened next. It’s difficult to stay only the narrator and not among a story’s players when you have a talent for meddling quite like mine. But I do everything for the sake of intrigue. Hopefully you may find it within yourself to forgive me.

This was what I did:

I breathed out across my fingertips, green dust sent wafting into a shape, and that shape flew from the place where we narrators live, across the bridge of time and universes and a great many other things and into his space, preening and tapping at a window, flapping its wings and letting itself be generally noisy. It was a detestable bird, and it was mine.

“Begone, foul magpie,” Thor told my bird, but my bird had none of it. It continued its tapping and its flapping. It was furious. It would not leave if you shot it.

Eventually, Thor could stand this terrible bird and its terrible noise no longer and opened the window so it might come in. He was planning on crushing it in his hand. Instead it flew inside at a speed he couldn’t quite catch and perched in a spot high enough that he couldn’t quite reach, and in the shrill tone of avian-tongue announced this:

“RAWK! O NOBLY BORN! IF YOU WISH FOR CHANGE, MARCH TO THE HIGHEST PEAK UNDER YOUR OWN POWER AND SUMMON NAUGHT BUT YOUR NAMESAKE! SINCERELY, AN INTERESTED PARTY.”

Then it scoured outside whence it came, again too fast for him to palm, and away my bird left. I am petting it right now. (It is a great deal less noisy with me.)

Thor knew not what to make of what he’d been informed. It could have been some misbegotten trick, or an ill hallucination of his own mind, or just something to ignore in its entirety. But the alternative to what he was told to do would be to endure another day of feasting, and there he decided to listen. Even if nothing came of it, it was something new to pursue. Heavy handed on my part, I agree, but I fashioned it to succeed, and succeed it did. Thor was gone by sunrise. He hadn’t even left a note.
The bird, of course, reminded him of someone.

Not me, though. He didn’t know me a whit. Before I started watching his story, I didn’t know him a whit, so that’s no offense of mine. True, we should have never interceded at all, but staying where I was to be was never my way. It wasn’t the way of who he was thinking of, either. We’re related for more than only that, but I’ll let that become apparent on its own.

Magpies are devious birds. They’re corvids, among the most intelligent of creatures found on Midgard. They are capable of fashioning tools and of predicting the future, even expressing emotions thought to be limited to humans and the great apes such as grief. Despite their virtues, they’re considered bad luck. Worse, thieves. Thus when I sent my bird down to him, I painted a picture of someone once dear to our Thor.

Once dear, like:

Someone who reminded him of fighting,
Someone who reminded him of arguing,
Someone who reminded him of misunderstanding,
And ultimately, someone who reminded him of the love that exists between brothers.

It would not be overstating to say that Thor scurried off to this peak at a ferocious speed.

The Himalayas were cold, but they were no Jotunheim. They were high, but they were no Svarftelheim. The terrain was rough, but they were no Vanaheim. Thor marched and climbed though they might be a winding staircase instead of the sheerest spire Midgard had on offer. Wind blew in his face. Ice set in his hair. His determination, unmarred in the least, kept on blazing. When he reached the top, he stood, towering, and raised his ax to the sky.

Another one of my birds was waiting for him.

“RAWK! O NOBLY BORN,” it tilled. “IF CHANGE BE WHAT YOU DESIRE, STRIKE THIS EARTH WITH WHAT BE THINE NAMESAKE NOW AND FOREVERMORE! SINCERELY, AN INTERESTED PARTY.”

Thor stared at the bird, which had no right of being here for the altitude or for the storm that started to brew.

“Whose?” he asked, his voice demanding and insistent. “Who do you represent, terrible magpie?”

“RAWK! IT BECOMES CLEAR WITH TIME. IS CHANGE WHAT YOU WISH, O NOBLY BORN?”

“Yes.” His ax thrummed.

“RAWK! YOU ARE PREPARED FOR WHAT COMES NEXT?”

“Yes.” Sparks began to fly.

“RAWK! THEN DO AS SHALL BE.”

It was thunder to rock the world. It was lighting to make gasp and witness. It scattered aurora from London to Manhattan and Oklahoma to Shanghai, wrapping the skies with the colors of the Bifrost, colors of the Aesir, colors of the fallen save for their last, save for their king. It was a display equal
parts mesmerizing as terrifying. Some thought it was an attack. Some thought that their nightmares had returned. It was neither.

It was a call.

A call, when over, had Thor fall to the peak, face set with tears.

None answered.

My bird flew to him, pecking until he swatted, cursing the creature for what it had told him to do and for what little it had done. It was a beast sent to him from great evil, he yelled! Great infamy! A person so vile as to prove to him that his deepest desire was for naught! You beast! You ill omen!

To this my bird said, “RAWK! O NOBLY BORN, IF YOU THINK ME EVIL, THEN I WOULD SUGGEST YOU START LOOKING UP.”

Thor, without option, listened. And those frozen tears were no more.

“They are alive. But in mortal bodies. Their souls bound on Midgard.”

“RAWK! BORN AGAIN AFTER THE FALL OF ASGARD. NEW AND DIFFERENT BUT OLD AND FAMILIAR. YOU SEE, O NOBLY BORN? THEY DID NOT ANSWER FOR THEY DO NOT KNOW WHAT THEY WERE. YOU MAY CHANGE THAT. THEY CAN BE AWOKEN. ONLY IF YOU WILL IT. SINCERELY, AN INTERESTED PARTY.”

“Then you are no misbegotten, tiresome magpie of mine.”

My bird simply crowed.

Thor took his ax anew and began his descent from the peak, a whole new hope blossoming in his veins. If they be reborn, then they were closer than he had ever imagined, able to be reunited. He would have to find them, and show them, but he would not be the last Aesir for any longer. This he swore. Asgard would see its next chapter, its new beginning. Thor saw light at the end of this tunnel. There would be a kingdom for this king. He would do everything necessary to see it through. There was no obstacle sound enough to stop him.

The magpie of mine flew back to me, and whispered knowledge that Thor couldn’t have known. I frowned.

For where there is a future, there is a history. And history—

—History has a way with repeating.

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