Chalara

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Summary

She was supposed to only fulfill one expectation. To grow up and be the monster they all knew she was. Just like her siblings had been, just like her father was. But Nor really preferred frog hunting.

Notes

so,,, i decided to edit chapter one and it ended up as about 22,000 sum words, so i split it into two chapters! but hopefully its a lot more enjoyable to read! thank you <3

See the end of the work for more notes
Nor realized two things as she stared at the dress laid out on her bed.

One, she was too big for the lovely gown. Two, she didn’t know her vows which meant she’d never be worthy of it.

She knew she had exactly fifty years, three months, and six days until she needed to know her vows. Which wasn’t a lot of time to prepare for such an event but realistically she’d have them memorized by then. So there was no need to continue losing sleep. But she’d been practicing for months and she still stuttered over the lines no matter how much she rehearsed. Would five decades really be enough time for the lyrics to flow from her with all the emotion she imagined? She had spent many nights lying awake with a dream where the whole kingdom cried at her wedding, and she would be sorely disappointed if she couldn’t move the real audience to tears.

None of it mattered anyway if she couldn’t even fit in the damn dress. The dress had belonged to Lady Sif herself, a gift that was worn at her own wedding to Prince Thor. It was long and hand stitched with beautiful white wild flowers, and had sleeves that dropped to her waist at the cuffs. The material of the dress was a fine silk covered with more lace roses across the chest. The skirt puffed out like a white cloud, it was adorned with vines that crawled along the skirt in a winding pattern that made Nor lose sight of where they started and ended. Like Lady Sif it was tall and elegant, no match to her short and wide stature.

She had tried it on as soon as she was in the safety of her room. She shucked off her training clothes, a simple tunic and loose pants tucked into her boots. The dress was too alluring not to try on, but when she pulled it over her head and smoothed out the body she had wanted to cry. The chest was too loose and the waist too tight. The once puffed skirt that made Lady Sif seem as she was floating only puddled at the floor for her while the long cuffs reached her ankles. It looked awful. She practically tore it off as soon as she glanced at herself in the mirror. The very image was too painful to remember. Putting her casual dress on felt like covering a broken piece of furniture with a blanket and hoping no one would notice.

Now, she stared longingly at the dress and sighed. Maybe if she looked long enough it would magically shape to fit her. Or her body would shift into something more beautiful and tall.

“You’d look much better in red.” A small voice hissed. Nor huffed a laugh and began folding the gown carefully. She didn’t blink an eye at the sudden intrusion, only one being in the whole kingdom would be foolish enough to sneak up on a princess.
“Red haired girls can’t wear red, dear brother. I’d simply die if I was caught in a red dress. I’d look like a blown up cherry.” She gave her older sibling a pointed glare. He chuckled, a soft breathy noise that made her shoulders drop in ease.

“Maybe gold? You actually like gold.” He offered, moving from his place at the open door to be beside her. She sat on her knees and slid the packaged dress back under her bed. As she watched it disappear under the wooden frame into the safety of the darkness, her bottom lip began to quiver. She would look rather lovely in a gold gown, possibly adorned with just a little blue detailing around the hem. The colors of the Odinson clan. Her heart leapt at the beautiful vision of her wearing the imaginary dress. Truly she would bring tears to the eyes of all if she wore something so symbolic.

“It has to be this one,” she reassured them both to pull herself from her daydream, “It has to be her dress.”

Her brother sighed and nodded. He opened his mouth to comfort her, to say something profound and wise, but nothing came out. He had hundreds of stories tucked away about brides who ran from their husbands to find something more. Tales of children defying their parents plans to be something better but realized that would only offend her. Nor wanted the dress to work. She wanted to get married. She wanted all of this. The very thought of the whole ordeal of the two royal families finally coming together under one name made him want to vomit. It had made her jump with joy, and if it made her happy he couldn’t make her doubt that happiness.

He shook his head, and instead opted for a bright smile to raise her spirits. Nor returned the gesture and wrapped an arm around his slender body.

“I heard a rumor that Father and the others will be back soon, probably before lunch,” he said, hoping the topic would distract her. Nor couldn’t help the disgruntled look that crossed her face. He chuckled and pulled away from the hug.

“Hopefully Uncle Thor wasn’t satisfied with the hunt and extended it. Or the dragon ate him!” Nor offered. This time it was Nor’s turn to laugh as her brother glared at her. They’d never meet eye to eye when it came to appreciating their father. Her brother would sing his praises all over Asgard and the rest of the realms if he could. Nor would rather her father make a home for himself in a troll’s belly.

“You could try to be civil when you see him. You’ll understand the reason he is the way he is when you are older. He’s been gone for so long, just try it. For me?” He asked. He rested his head on her shoulder and she sighed. Normally she would feel some sort of excitement at the thought of her father returning home. Though normally it was a nuisance, his presence often brought her some small form of comfort. It always made her feel better when she could say she was going home to her father like the rest of the children, instead of having to admit she would be returning to just her
brother. She wanted his approval like any other child, but she had learned at an early age that his love wasn’t easily earned. With Jormungandr, he and their father, were as thick as thieves, you couldn’t see one without the other. It hurt her more than she would admit when anyone made remarks on their bond.

This time all she felt was a gnawing dread in the pit of her stomach. Stuck there like a stone since his departure. Normally before he left on any mission or spontaneous vacation he gave them a treat and a small goodbye. It had been a tradition to line up at their door and wait for their father with his bag slung over his shoulders too address them. Sometimes it hurt Nor to see him go, but lately it was becoming a less solemn affair. All until his latest trip. Often her brother received books while she received sweets of some kind. The gifts got smaller as they got older but they always came. No matter what the feelings about his departure were there would always be a gift waiting for them.

He had called them to the door where he had given her brother a new book he had found on his last visit to Midgaard that was all about modern languages. It was new, with bright white pages and an unbroken spine. She hated reading but had awed at it with him, most books on languages were old with molded pages and seeing something so new was amazing. When he turned she saw something different flash in his eyes when he looked at her. They lost their light and became glazed over, in a blink it was gone and it was like he was looking as if some beggar woman had approached him on the street. In the end, he had simply nodded at her. He didn’t even address her, he had just bobbed his head like it was something they’d always done. Then he was out the door,shouldering his pack of supplies as he started the walk to the Travel Room across the city.

Her brother insisted that the gift had been for both of them. It was a sign that she needed extra language lessons since she was still so far behind. That was what he tried to convince her, but she knew it must have meant something worse. She had felt a wave of nausea wash over her every time someone brought up the return of the hunting party, and even now it was making her stomach churn. But her brother was staring at her with wide hopeful eyes and she couldn’t tell how him no.

“I’ll try. If they even come back today,” Nor knew how unreliable rumors spread around the castle were. She only heard a million a day about her siblings and father. She just hoped these ones were just as true.

“We’re okay, Nor.” He assured her, trying to pull her from her sadness.

As if on cue a crack of thunder sounded far outside the castle, shaking the stone floor beneath them. Nor fell hard on her butt as she lost her footing and her brother barely had enough time to brace himself on the bed frame. The tremors slowed to a halt and she could already hear the roar of a crowd growing outside the castle. The siblings rose from their spot on the ground and approached the large window next to the bed that overlooked the city. Nor could make out the massive beast that was being carried through the crowd almost a mile away. Now she could see why the hunt had taken so long. The beast that size must have put up an epic fight.
As they drew closer they could see Thor walking with his arms raised high, the gigantic dragon’s head held above his own. The scales looked like black rock and the soft skin between glowed like flowing lava. She could see the large divot in its head, and wondered briefly if it was Modi’s mace or Thor’s hammer that had bludgeon it. Baldur was on his left, holding up one of the arms. Nor could see her father, Loki, carrying the other massive limb. She couldn’t see Magni nor Modi, but she knew they must be in the back holding up the legs.

They’d deposit their hunt at Odin’s feet once they arrived through the golden arched doors. The whole castle would prepare for a feast that would be open to all citizens, and Nor knew it would be an absolute riot at the dining hall that night. The roar of the crowd and the amount of drunks were enough to stave away most, and she suspected many of the royal court would find themselves in their rooms tonight. But the real warriors in the castle would be there for the hunting stories. She loved stories, not so much reading, but hearing someone recount a tale was possibly one of her most favorite things in the whole world.

Especially when it came from her brother or her Uncle Thor, they always told them with such passion that anyone would stop to listen. She’d even admit that she loved her father’s stories. Loki always accompanied his stories with magic displays, like visuals made of colorful lights. They’d blow out the candles in the hall then he’d stand on his chair and with a wave of his hand he could create an entire landscape out of colorful, swirling lights. As he went on with the story the lights would shape into humans and great beasts. It was her favorite part of dinner. It was the only part she liked about her father.

“We should go down to greet them,” her brother mused. Nor rolled her eyes and crossed her arms. All the families of the royal hunting party would be waiting on their husbands and fathers to finally come home after a month away in Muspelheim. Nor couldn’t stand waiting with the other families. Each of the royal party members had dozens of family members and friends awaiting their return in the courtyard, but at the far edge of the garden Nor and her brother would be waiting by themselves. No mothers or siblings or friends to speak of. It was a humiliating ordeal to have all of the royal court actively talking about her family, or lack thereof, within earshot.

But her brother was right, it would be expected of her, and her absence would lead to talking around the castle. They had enough gossip surrounding their family already and she certainly didn’t want it to be herself that added to it.

“Alright, fine. Hitching a ride?” She pulled away from the window and extended her arm to her brother. He smiled a wide, pointy toothed grin and snaked his way up her arm where he then looped himself once around her neck. His scales were dry and peeling, and she couldn’t help the slight giggle as the rough texture touched her neck. Once she was sure he was secured around her she darted from her room, through the living area below, before throwing open the door. She made sure to take the sharpest left at the end of the corridor. The clicking of her boots softened as the stone floor turned into a lavish red rug trimmed with gold leaves along the sides.
“Stop running!” Her brother begged, shielding his face in her neck. Nor laughed louder and leaped in the air. She landed and twirled despite his constant threats streaming in her ear.

“Nor! So help me I’ll tell father!”

“I’d like to see you try!” She could already smell the wild gold roses that climbed up the brick walls of the court yard. She did another twirl which made him gag as a wave of nausea washed over him.

Their living quarters were the closest to the west courtyard, right next to the throne room. Often she spotted her grandfather taking a walk among the golden roses with his assistants and guards. She didn’t understand his preference for the miniature garden. The actual Royal Garden was far behind the castle with rolling hills and so many flowers Nor lost track of how many different kinds their were. If she were King she’d prefer to take all her meetings and work there.

She jumped over the stairs landing with a hard thud. The yard before them was filled with over a hundred people, some turned to look at her abrupt entrance but most ignored her. Normally there’d only be a few dozen waiting on the return of the hunters but they’d been gone so long that everyone and their mother was trying to get a glimpse as to why. They lounged on benches, leaning against the cobblestone walls, and around the center fountain, gossiping and waiting. Nor would have stopped to join with the other girls lingering in groups at the back of the courtyard but they’d be upset to see her brother so she’d avoid them for now. She’d see her friends during dinner.

She could see Lady Sif in the center, surrounded by her group of maidens and servants. They all kept their eyes to the door, waiting as still and stiff as a tree. Nor couldn’t help but imagine the day that it would be her, waiting anxiously for her husband’s arrival. She’d imagine herself running to his arms and letting him sweep her off her feet and he’d hold her close. The image of herself in the white dress flashed in her mind. She couldn’t resist the wave of sickness that hit her. She could see so visibly how tight the waist of the dress had been, how it had squeezed so tightly.

Lady Sif had seemed so proud to give it to her, and it made Nor feel like a stone had switched places with her heart. Lady Sif had always given Nor presents from her own past. Hair ribbons from when she was a girl, perfumes that were courting gifts from gentlemen before she met Thor, and constantly she gave Nor dresses that would never fit. She had to have hundreds of dressed tucked away in the storage room, short sleeved, tall collars, ball gowns. So many it made her dizzy when she had to look at them. Once her father had commented on the amount of space being taken up by useless fabric, but he never complained directly to her when she brought a new one home. But she couldn’t tell Lady Sif no! Especially when the young girl had convinced herself that someday she would be able to fit in them and be as beautiful as her aunt.

The future queen had actually come to the training yards by herself to get retrieve her niece. By
herself! To the dirt filled practice yard! That should have tipped Nor off that today was special. The woman had practically been glowing when she saw Nor. Everyday a golden light seemed to bathe her but this time it was almost blinding. She grimaced slightly when the girl had run up to her, covered and sweat in dirt, panting like a dog. Her equally as dirty friends following close behind her to get a chance to talk to the Lady of Asgard. Lady Sif had been polite about it though, ushering them off with the promises of talking next time.

Nor hadn’t noticed the urgency in her tone. She had just been happy to how excited her friends got to be when standing in the presence of her aunt. Her happiness had waned when the embarrassment began to settle on her flushed cheeks. Walking next to such a lovely well dressed woman through the halls of their palace, when she herself was covered in grime. On a normal day Lady Sif would have chided her for letting the whole kingdom see her in such a state.

“It’s no way for a young lady to behave. A princess should not be rolling in the dirt like a pig.” She might say.

“Your father has no business raising a girl, let alone a future leader of Asgard. You’re filthy, he should have never let you take fighting lessons.” She would add on. But today there had been almost zero comments on her state of being, except for the odd glance or two when Nor would pick at scratches and bruises from her lessons.

The plates full of cookies and pastries should have definitely been a warning sign that Nor was in for a delight because Lady Sif always made sure to have small snacks prepared for Nor. She was always worried about the little girl’s weight, constantly pinching and squeezing the rolls of skin that were always more prominent through the tight dresses she was gifted. Nor got a stern scolding about her size every time she saw her aunt.

“You move to much to be that size! Have you been drinking the tea I gave you? Did you even talk to your father about any kind of magic remedies? Honestly, Nor, it’s like you’re not trying.” She’d rant, taking delicate sips of tea between admonishments.

Such a lavish display of sweets should really have tipped her off that this tea session would be one for the books. The conversation had been light, filled with brief talk of gossip from foreign kingdoms and questions about her studies. Then Lady Sif had seemed to tire of it, all too eager to get to the gifts. She had presented it in a beautiful white wooden box wrapped in a light pink cloth. As soon as she opened it, she hummed a slow song to herself, as if humming a spell to summon the contents. She so carefully picked it up by the shoulders and held it up in the soft morning light, cooing gently to it like a child.

“Such a beauty,” she murmured, draping the material across her arm to smooth out non existent wrinkles. “Such a pretty thing.”
Nor had stared at it slacked jawed. Lady Sif couldn’t have been serious, there was no way. She couldn’t have been giving Nor her prized wedding dress that had inspired hymns, songs, paintings, poems, and even full length novels! It was so beautiful she had actually forgot that it was made for a full grown woman that was as tall as her father and as thin as paper. Nor cried when she was permitted to hold it, after scrubbing herself head to toe in the bath of course. She sobbed like a baby when she was told she could take it home. Lady Sif would be disappointed if she knew how horrible Nor had looked in her dress. How ugly she had been. How absolutely awful she was to disgrace her fami-

“Nor?” Her brothers voice shook her from her thoughts. She hadn’t realized she had stopped moving. With a quick shake of her head she walked hurriedly to their reserved corner to the courtyard. It was the only vacant square in the crowded garden. There was a tree with gnarled branches that stretched over the entirety of their section. While everyone socialized in the sun with their family, Nor and her brother got to wait alone in the shadows for their father’s return.

“Think we’ll be out here till dinner?” Nor asked, but the word dinner left an odd taste in her mouth. Again the dress came to mind and her stomach didn’t feel up to the thought of eating. She wished she had ate more cookies at brunch with Lady Sif.

“I don’t even think they’ve made it through the streets just yet. Did you see the size of that thing?” He asked incredulously. Nor had known the dragon had been plaguing the blacksmiths working in Muspelheim, but she had heard that from her Grandfather Odin. He didn’t include the damages and lives the dragon had taken. She knew he couldn’t tell the truth or there would be a panic but she knew father would tell the death toll to her brother who would tell her after their father went to bed.

And as always her brother was right. The sun was high in the sky by the time the doors opened. She had been picking at the roots absentmindedly as her brother explained the history of dragons too her. He was well into a story about a Niflheim dragon that glowed in the dark when the cheers drew their attention. People had rushed the arch doors and were screaming the names of the hunting party. Nor saw Thor, dirtied and bloodied from the fight, strolling to the front of the crowd, his arms wrapped around Loki and Baldur. He stopped and a large grin split his face. Nor held her breath as she followed his gaze and saw that he was staring at Lady Sif. All noise stopped as they ran to each other. Thor picked her up and kissed her as if it would be the last time he’d ever have the chance too. Nor couldn’t help her smile that grew as she watched the two. It was so romantic.

She felt a tug on her neck as Jormungandr curled himself tighter. She looked in time to see her father approaching them. He had snuck through the crowd unnoticed despite his state, not that anyone would have pulled him aside anyways. She bit her lip to contain the disgusted look she had been practicing to give him when he returned. She’d been practicing it in her vanity mirror so he knew how absolutely upset she was with him, but she’d do her best to keep her word with her
brother. His clothes were torn and singed in some places, the grey fur vest he normally wore had three giant slashes in the fabric that ran diagonal down his torso. His hair stuck up in every direction, colored completely black from soot and ashes. The grey smudges made his under eyes darker than normal and completely hid his freckles. He looked frightening, and she didn’t realize that she had taken a step back.

“Father!” Her brother cried, smiling so big Nor thought his face might split in two.

“Hello, Jormungandr.” He called back. Despite his tragic state, his voice was still as warm as ever. Such a nice voice for such a cold person. He stretched out his hand and the snake unraveled himself from his sister’s neck and twisted his way up his father’s arm. Loki leaned in to touch his forehead to his son’s. They grinned at each other, as if sharing a secret just by simply being in the other’s presence.

Nor was always jealous of their teeth. Her brother had perfectly white fangs and her father’s teeth were in neat rows. Nor has a gap in between her front teeth that was always noticeable when she smiled. She always thought it a horrible twist of fate that she looks so much like her father but failed to get any of his desirable traits. Her brother got beautiful scales while she got ugly brown spots that covered her from head to toe. Lady Sif’s maids always praised her freckles, but Nor wasn’t convinced on the sincerity of the compliments. They had to say stuff like that. It was their job, but she thought their thoughts on her eyes were true. She was one of the few outside the Odinson clan that actually had blue eyes, and many complimented them. The only one of her siblings to have them.

But they were his eyes, another unwanted trait. They just didn’t work with her face! Big eyes and his stupid dark circles under them, only called attention to her puffy cheeks and the damn spots on her face and the space in between her front teeth. It wasn’t fair that her brother wasn’t cursed with ugly red curls like she was. She practically walked around with it wasn’t fair she couldn’t look more like her siblings!

She resisted the urge to make an exaggerated gagging noise and throw insults at him about being such a father’s boy. She didn’t completely understand what was wrong with that, but she had overheard servants making fun of Jormungandr for it and she hadn’t dropped the insult since. He must have caught the look in her eye and he gave her a pointed glare, a silent warning to keep her act together. Loki pulled away and followed his gaze until his cold blue eyes landed on her. She chill crept up her spine as he looked at her.

“Nor.” He regarded her, nodding. His face had fallen, his eyes distant. Nor frowned and tried to do her best to not show the hurt on her face, but she was sure he could see tears building in her eyes. His words had physically stung. Why didn’t he hold her? Why didn’t he press himself close like with her brother? Where was his warm voice from just moments ago?! She was glad he had such a distant attitude towards her. It made hating him all that much easier, but it didn’t mean it hurt any
less when he talked to her like he didn’t even want to be near her. It made her heart drop to her stomach and a rage boil in her.

“You’re back so soon.” She hissed, voice breaking slightly, and shouldered his arm as she walked passed him. She wouldn’t even give him a proper greeting. Screw being civil, he didn’t deserve it. Her brother gasped and she could hear him already starting to apologize for her. Despite herself she looked back, feeling another wave of disappointment when she saw that her father was still gazing at the empty space where she had been, his arms now crossed. He couldn’t even spare her a glance. She fled faster towards the center of the court yard.

“Nor!” Jormungandr called out to her, but she was already disappearing among the crowd of people surrounding the royal family. She pushed her way to the front of the gathering, feeling her heart ease with every person she put between herself and her father. He would never chase after her or cause an unnecessary scene, but if he wanted to cast a particularly nasty spell her way it would be harder to do with the more bodies she put between them.

Once she could finally see her relatives she stopped and tried to regain her breathing. She hadn’t even realized she was holding her breath as she ran. In front of her, Modi was bragging about his newest scars to Lady Sif’s group of maidens. They ooed and awed as the man flexed his arms to show them how it stretched across his muscles. Thor, with Lady Sif hanging onto this arm, gently cuff ed his son on the head causing the girls to erupt into laughter. Modi did too, and slugged his father’s arm before greeting his step mother with a bow. The couple moved on, talking to guests and being as polite as possible with those who were trying to get the hunting story before the feast. Nor enjoyed watching them as they talked with friends and shook hands with family.

She felt someone brush against her, and for a moment she thought her father had actually followed her. It was as if someone had dropped her into an ice bath. She laughed nervously realizing that she was fine, a stranger had just misstepped, but it was enough to tear her attention away and force her to make her way back to the entrance. She would have time to talk later at dinner. Now she wanted to retreat to get as far from the courtyard as she could.

Though it took a fair amount of pushing and apologies, she made her way through the crowd and back to the arched entrance. She had just taken her first step up the stone stairs when a large hand gripped her arm. She gasped and whipped around. She faced a giant, blonde haired man.

He was built like a brick wall, and a long blonde braid trailed over his shoulder just barely touching his waist. He stared down at her with deep blue eyes so dark they looked like an ocean graced by the moonlight. When he looked at her she felt as if she were a bug or a scuff on his boot. His hand was almost as large as her entire forearm and his grip was beginning to hurt. The whimper that escaped her made his grip loosen.
“Magni,” She managed in between sips of air. Her heart was beating a mile a minute, but she tried her best not to let it show.

“Sorry, dear. I guess I’ve grown used to roughing it with boys, didn’t mean to grab you so hard.” He gave her a wide grin and ruffled her unruly red curls. He let his hand drop to gently brush his large knuckles against her arm, and she gave him a smile to show him it was alright. She straightened her back, and let the anxious look melt from her face. Magni was a good friend of the family, especially since her marriage had been announced. Besides, he had always been nice to her. He treated her like his own daughter, and always introduced her as such. It was easy to relax around her loving cousin. Though she never thought the word cousin gave him much authority, calling him uncle made her feel so much closer to him.

“How are you, Uncle? Has the other realms treated you well?” She asked with a slight bow. Magni bowed his head back. As his head was lowered she saw blood matted into his long braid but most of it was on his clothes. There was a red splotch creeping over the shoulder of his dark blue cloak turning the material violet. His horse shoe shaped necklace was splintered and chipped in some places.

“I am fine, dear girl, no need to worry. Muspelheim is unforgiving as always, but nothing we couldn’t handle.” He seemed to raise his head at his own praise and Nor almost rolled her eyes at him. Boys were always so full of themselves!

“But thank you for checking in on me.” He put a heavy hand on her shoulder and leaned in close, “Have you seen Amira and Amaan, little one? I can’t seem to find them.” He cast his eyes across the heads of the crowd once more, lingering over the group surrounding his family. He still couldn’t see their tell tale dark hair among the sea of asgardians swarming his parents and brother. He looked nervous, anxious almost.

“They’re at the Tree.” Nor said, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. She was oblivious to the concern etched into his face.

Every third of the month, the mother and son could be found at the farthest east corner of the palace, knelt down in front of dimly glowing branches. Magni had been married to Amira for over thirteen hundred years and how he could forget something as important as that, Nor would never know.

“Of course! The days have blurred together, slipped from my mind.” He said with a shrug, a lazy grin on his face. It looked forced. He put a hand between her shoulder blades and nudged for her to move up the stairs.

“Is that where you’re heading?” He asked her as they walked together. She had wanted to go to her room, to hide from her father, but going to find her best friend sounded much more inviting. Amaan, much like his father, made her feel a million times better just by being in his presence. She
nodded happily at him and they continued to walk into the castle and through the maze like halls together. He made small talk with her, telling her about some of the new scars he would likely have from battle. She shared with him stories of her training, and some of the knicks and bruises she had gotten from their practice fights. He praised her, ruffling her unruly curls as she told of her accomplishments in the arena.

Fighting was the easiest topic to talk about among any Asgardian. It was a universal constant in all their lives. Women, children, and men no matter their status, were subjected to the military training that was held in the center of their large city. For Nor and the other royal children, they took their training in the Royal Garden just a walk away from the stables. Whenever she or the other children brought up her training her uncles always jumped at a chance to brag about their accomplishments and demonstrate their skills. Normally on each other.

The walk went by fast as Magni tried to explain how to properly sight an opponent's weakness amidst a fight. He had been deep into a story about a troll that always lead with his left foot before throwing a punch and Nor had been hanging onto every word, deeply interested. They were so engrossed they were able to ignore the servants and kitchen staff rushing through the halls trying to prepare for the spontaneous feast. There was an unmistakable buzz around the castle that had more than excitement stirring it. However, the stories of battle always got her distracted, and by the time they reached the blue doors they had barely noticed they’d arrive.

Magni paused his story, and motioned for her to be quiet before slowing pushing the heavy doors open. They were now on the east wing of the castle, the most recent addition compared to the rest of the ancient palace. Nor could see the prayer building from her room if she leaned out her window far enough, she could see the glass covered walkway that lead to the large prayer room. Often times, if she was confined to her room and she knew it was time for her friend to make his way to the prayer room, she’d brave dangling her upper half out of the window to wave at him. Depending on how many guards were surrounding him, he’d either stop to give her a gentle wave or he’d make a complete fool of himself. It was hard to stifle the giggles that rose as she thought back to the time no guards had accompanied them and Amaan had done a very elaborate, very chaotic, dance to make Nor laugh until she almost fell out of the window. She couldn’t really describe to her brother the movements her friend had done that almost lead her to falling to her death, but she’d say it had a lot to do with hips.

Nor pressed a hand to her mouth to keep the snickering back, and crept behind her uncle. The room was round, with a stained glass ceiling that let in bright blue light when the sun was at its peak. In the center surrounded by green mosaic tiles were a series of woven branches tangled into an almost perfect sphere. Through the gaps in the branches a dim blue light shimmered from within. The light illuminated the pews arranged in a circle around the room and the two people kneeling on the green tiles inches away from the wooden limbs. Their heads were bowed, hands up humming softly as the light in the branches pulsed. Nor smiled at the familiar songs.

The woman had long hair the color of a starless sky that was tied in a neat bun secured by red ribbon. Her skin was a glowing umber, outshining the the blue lights around her. Just like Lady Sif
she was graceful with every movement, every sound she made commanding yet soft at the same
time. Yet she was softer than Lady Sif, with kinder smiles and gentle honey eyes. Even though Nor
saw this woman everyday, her heart still leapt everytime they greeted each other. The boy next to
her took after his mother with the same dark hair cropped short and bright, warm eyes. Though he
was handsome like his father with his strong jaw and his father’s height. He was already beginning
to tower over the woman as they sat side by side. He smiled as he hummed, his smooth skin
bathing in the light. He seemed so tranquil here in there sanctuary. As Nor and her uncle crept,
Magni purposely whistled lowly at the two. The mother and son opened their eyes and were
quickly on their feet.

“Dad!” The boy cried, and Magni crouched low as the boy ran to him. He swept his son into a tight
hug and spun him in a circle before releasing him. Once his feet was safely on the ground the boy
swung a fist aimed at his father’s head. Magni caught it and yanked his son forward to ruffle his
hair. The older man let go with a pat on the back, and then stepped away to look at his wife. He
gave another low whistle as she stepped forward and he slowly walked around her.

Amaan smiled brightly at Nor as he came to stand by her side. He ruffled her curls, making them
fall right in front of her eyes and she pinched the underside of his arm in retaliation. The boy hissed
and gave a slight tug on a strand of her hair. Nor would take their game farther, but not in front of
his parents. They were always jumpy when Aman participated in any play fighting and always
berated Nor when she tried to rile him up. She didn’t completely understand why he couldn’t fight
with her like the rest of the children, but with Magni and Amira being back he didn’t want to He
stuck his tongue out at her when she did. Nor giggled at scrunched up face and turned her attention
back to the reuniting lovers.

“Hello, darling.” He greeted calmly, a tad out of character for the boisterous prince.

“Hello my love!” Amira chuckled and embraced her husband. He dipped her suddenly and brought
his lips to hers. Nor sighed happily at the scene, and couldn’t help but cast a look at Amaan. He
better act like that when they got older, if he knew what was good for him. Everyone always talked
about the love Amira and Magni had for each other, and praised them for marrying for it. While
she and Amaan weren’t exactly getting married out of love, she liked the praise her family received
and hoped Amaan could perform such public displays. He raised an eyebrow at her as if it was
absurd that she was seriously enjoying the display of affection. She grinned back at him and tried
to contain the squeal of excitement when he rolled his eyes and laced his hand with hers.

“It’s good to be back.” Magni smiled at the two of them when he returned his wife to her feet with
his arms still wrapped tight around her. The smile on his face faltered and Amira’s eyebrows
furrowed in concern. Magni pressed a large hand against the side of her face to comfort her.

“You two should come back with me and get ready for the feast tonight. Everyone will be there.
And we have so much to talk about,” He looked to Amaan who nodded eagerly at his father.
Magni sounded unsure about the last sentence but if Amira noticed she didn’t seem to care. She
clicked her tongue at her husband and pulled away from him.
“The sun hasn’t set yet. We have to be here from dawn to dusk, you know this.” Though she was scolding him, she still had a slight smile on her face.

“Ah, what’s the harm in leaving early? The tree will forgive you.” He pulled her close again and ran his hands along her sides. She smiled slyly at him.

“You are a devil you know that?” Her smile widening when he furrowed his brows at her. Nor couldn’t wrap her mind completely around her fiancé’s thing with the tree, but she had an understanding of the basics. She knew that the Yggdrasil had been the first living thing to ever exist, and three days after its birth it gave part of its life force to create the giants and then the gods. That’s why they prayed to it. The complete opposite of what Nor had been taught by her royal tutors. Everyone knew Odin created the Yggdrasil and it grew to connect all the realms together, that’s why he was the allfather! Yet, every third day of the month Amira and Amaan prayed to the tree to thank it for giving them a life and home.

Nor thought it was inconvenient, putting so much time into a tree that probably wasn’t even sentient. Odin was real, and he was much more powerful than some stick. She couldn’t understand why they’d put so much faith into the Yggdrasil when they could just pledge their loyalty to Odin like the rest of them. She’d tried to ask her father once in hopes of understanding her friend better. Amaan got upset when she asked him about it, and Amira went silently whenever anyone mentioned the Yggdrasil and Odin in the same sentence. Nor tried talking to Jormungandr when their father had left for another trip. Her brother hadn’t known much about it, the only stories concerning the tree coming before Odin came from those who had been around during the dark ages. Back when there was no peace in any land, so the stories couldn’t be trusted. There was no text he had read, no such books existed.

The only person left to ask was her father. She had been almost thirty years younger at the time, not as afraid of her father as she was now. The day he returned and had settled himself back into his room, Nor had practically barged in. He glared at her abrupt entrance and nodded to his bed. She climbed onto the large bed and stared at the ceiling. A long time ago, someone had painted the star pattern from Midgard on the ceiling of his room. As she waited she contemplated if her strict father had painted something so wonderful or if their home in the castle used to belong to something. The paint was old, flaking, some of constellation had faded. When she was little and she used to crawl into her father’s bed after a nightmare, she’d spend late hours of the night tracing the lines with her little finger.

Finally he addressed her, and she leapt from the bed to his side. All thoughts of Midgardian stars behind her.

“Father! How come people like the Tree more than Odin?” She asked excitedly, pulling herself up
on his desk. He rested his head on his hand, raising an eyebrow at her curiously.

“What tree? The Yggdrasil?”

“Eggdrasil!” Nor confirmed for him. She could never pronounce the name right. Her ninety year old tongue always struggled to form the words.

“Yggdrasil, Nor. And it’s because the tree came first. They think the tree created the giants and the giants gave birth to the gods.” He explained as if this was all so simple. Her face scrunched in confusion.

“But, my tutors said-“

“You never cared to listen to them before so why have you started now?” He said, a sudden bite in his tone. She frowned and looked down at her lap. She had more questions and wasn’t ready to leave despite his sudden aggression. He sighed and nudged her thigh gently with his elbow.

“Hey, it’s a sensitive topic for everyone okay? Odin doesn’t like people talking about it. Let alone them creating religions over it.” He explained slowly. Nor shrugged at him, at a loss for words. He spoke up for her.

“Why the questions?”

“If Odin doesn’t like it then why does he let them do it?” Nor pulled herself all the way up onto the desk, careful of the vials of strange potions, and crossed her legs. Her father’s face turned grave, and Nor mirrored him, realizing something serious was going to be said.

“Nor you’ll come to find many people will put up with anything if it gives them power. Even if it scares them. He allows them to put up their prayer rooms and congregate because it keeps them satisfied.” Nor didn’t understand a thing he had just said but she nodded grimly. She hopped off his desk, hoping Amaan would be free to go to the garden and play.

Now that she was older, almost a hundred and twenty, she understood her father’s words a lot better. There weren’t very many in the castle who participated in the prayer, Amira and Amaan where the only two in the castle brave enough to come to the prayer room. Nor had always admired the room, the building was beautiful. Magni had it built for Amira as a wedding gift and according
to the servants who were there, Amira pretty much tackled him in a flurry of kisses and bites to the neck. Nor had wondered if she had to bite Amaan at their wedding. She wasn’t sure if she’d be up to the task but she’d try if that’s what she’d have to do.

“But if it matters so much to you,” Amira spoke, “I think it will be okay if we leave early. Right, Amaan?” She looked to her son and he beamed back at her. Nor guessed that maybe kneeling and praying all day wasn’t as fun as he tried to make it seem when he explained it to her. Though most obligation weren’t as fun as much as they were important.

“Then we’re wasting time! Go on son, walk Nor back to her room and come straight home.” Magni took his wife’s hand like Amaan had done to Nor and they left. Amaan watched them go and turned to her once the doors shut with a loud click. He punched her arm gently to get her attention, and she dragged her eyes away from the door.

“How was your father? Did he say anything.” He asked hurriedly. Nor frowned at him, and crossed her arms. Wow! They’d been apart all day and that’s the first thing he wanted to say to her?

“He didn’t say, well, anything.” She shrugged and began heading for the door. He should know not to bring up such a sensitive topic! Amaan scoffed, in a few strides he was close on her heels. Damn his long legs. She’d kick him right in the shin under the table at dinner.

“Hey come on! You’re the one who’s been panicking this whole month I had to know! How was Grandfather, and Uncle Modi?” He nudged her with his elbow before making a big show of opening the door for her and bowing. She couldn’t help but giving him a small smile and an overzealous curtsy. He always knew how to put a smile on her face.

“Same as always, a little more beat up than usual but still the same Odinsons.” She noticed even more now that the servants and maids were running faster. They were muttering about table decor and what plates they needed to place. Nor and Amaan had to dance around them in fear of breaking their concentration.

“So,” Amaan narrowly avoided a kitchen made carrying stacks of cutting boards, “Did you see it?”

“See what?” Nor shouted back as she ducked under a bench two guards were carrying.

“The dragon!” He grabbed her arm and pulled her out of the way of another maid dressed in a bloody apron sharpening a butchers knife as she ran.
“You don’t see that everyday!”

“The dragon, Nor.”

“Right, right!” She launched into her description of the mighty beast and Amaan clung to every word. He wasn’t invited to the hunts yet, not until he was of age and finally considered a man. Nor could see the longing in his eyes as she told him of her view from her bedroom window. They’d see it at dinner when its head would be paraded around the dining room. Amaan wanted to go on the royal hunts since his father took him on his first miniature one in the garden.

Magni had taken him out with a bow and let him shoot his own rabbits, and he allowed Nor to tag along which she enjoyed. Amaan wasn’t permitted to do anything that would cause extreme stress, but Magni had promised Amira and Loki that the children would be fine. He let them practice firing the bow at trees before they were even let out into the forest. Nor had some training from her father, but her aim wasn’t as good as Amaan’s. With Magni guiding their every move, Amaan and Nor took home five rabbits that Magni proudly carried through the halls. When they brought the little animals home Amira had taken Nor into their kitchen to teach her to skin and cook her own meat. It was a good day for them all. Amaan had been hooked ever since, insisting his father take him farther out in the garden where they could track bigger game, and Nor still got to tag along when she promised not to distract Amaan. She wouldn’t be surprised if he wanted his father to take him hunting that night.

By the time she was finished describing the beast and Thor’s grand entrance they had arrived at her door.

“What happened after Grandpa let go of Lady Sif?” Nor wasn’t sure what he was expecting for her to say. It was the same as the last time, and the time before that.

“I don’t know, my father came over by then.” She leaned on her shoulder on the cold stone walls. Amaan did the same with his shoulder on the creaking door, and crossed his arms. He mimicked her pout and her slumped posture. She couldn’t help but muster a small smile at his mocking. She also mustered up a light kick to his knee.

“Did he,” he sighed before continuing, “Did he really say nothing to you?”

“He just kind of, nodded at me? I mean he said my name. But no ‘Hi, daughter.’ Or ‘Nice to see you again I completely ignored you when I left, do you want an apology?’” She mocked with an
exaggerated nasally voice. Amaan laughed.

“Maybe he’s waiting for you to say something. Sometimes my mom waits for my dad to say something about an issue before she makes a big deal about it.” He offered. He gave her shoulder a reassuring squeeze. Amaan was always so kind.

Amaan was always the gentler one between them. If Nor had a problem he’d do his best to soothe and aid his friend, to make her smile. If it were her, she’d threaten whoever made him upset, even if it were something completely out of their control. He was the peace maker among their friend group, and oftentimes was the one dishing out advice. He was so diplomatic at times Nor couldn’t help but tease him until she broke through his princely facade and the real Amaan showed. The kind, excitement-seeking boy that she’d become best friends with. When they were younger and their nannies looked away long enough, they’d go tearing through the halls together laughing and pushing.

Making messes, causing problems for the staff. But Amaan’s training started so much earlier than hers, and she could remember teasing him as he walked impossibly straight and stiffly, as Thor has been trying to teach him. Thor had said that princes should walk with pride. Nor had copied him with as much pride as she could muster, walking as proper as Amaan until he burst into a fit of giggles. He slouched immediately and since then, he claimed that she and her other friends were the only ones who got to see him in such a manner.

“I can’t believe I’m gonna marry an idiot.” She muttered, but the grin was there so he knew she didn’t mean it. She rested her hand on top of his. Her grin turned to a shy smile.

“Thanks for walking me. I know you didn’t have too.” She looked away, ducking her head and looking up at him from her lashes like she had seen Amira do to Magni.

“Well yeah I did have too, dad said so.” He rolled his eyes at her forgetful nature. He didn’t react when Nor gave him an exaggerated sigh.

“Hurry up and go home, I’ll see you later. And don’t be late!” She lightly punched his arm making him stick his tongue out at her before walking away.

“I never am!” He called as he walked home. She snorted and slowly made her way inside.

Their part of the castle reminded her of the farm houses they often saw along the countryside when
they went out on longer hunting trips. If they made their way across the vast forest they’d eventually be near the farm lands. Their home consisted of two floors and like how the houses were shrouded behind trees and crops they were tucked away inside the rest of the castle. Jormungandr told her it was much more like the homes in the city where multiple families lived in one building, most of the times even in one room. Nor thought that absolutely barbaric. She didn’t think she could stand it if her whole family were shoved into a single room. The thought of it ruined her day dream, but she had never seen it in person so she’d keep her fantasies of country homes.

She opened the door to their living area, the fireplace was lit despite the warm air already filtering in through the open windows. There dining room was to the left, and she could feel another fire going on in there as well. She suspected her father had warmed the whole house for her brother. Jormungandr never complained of the cold, and never made Nor light a thing when it was the two of them, but Loki always managed the house to his comfort level. Her father had scolded her once when she doused out the fires, something about how her brother was cold blooded, but she blocked most of it out. It was easy when he was scolding her to just shut him out. But it was still annoying, so she kept her complaints to herself and tolerated their horridly warm home.

Nor thought it slightly inconsiderate that he never considered how she might feel when their house was a sweltering, humid mess. Already she felt her skin become sticky with sweat and her face grow red from the heat. She moved to shut the door to the dining room but as she got closer she could hear voices. With no hesitation she turned back around and headed towards the staircase across the room. Her room was the best place to hide for the moment, just until it was time for dinner. She still couldn’t stand to see him, the thought of his return still made tears fill her eyes.

At the foot of the stairs she paused. The wood was old, turned soft by years of use but her boots would make it creak and signal her return. She really didn’t want her father to know where she was, so she unlaced the ropes wrapped around the leather of her shoes and pried them off. At least the fires had warmed the stone floor, she had to at least be thankful that she wouldn’t freeze her toes off. She began to tip toe up the stairs, wincing everytime the slightest noise was made. Her feet hit the first landing and she could already see her door, still wide open, just beyond the second set of stairs.

“You should wear shoes.” Nor jumped as she felt something cold coil around her leg. She had to cover her mouth to muffle the gasp that escaped her. Jormungandr blinked up at her with warm golden eyes.

“You’re the worst!” She growled as she swatted at her brother’s head. He laughed and dodged her hand and moved up her body until he looped himself around her neck.

“At least I don’t sneak around my own home. Father doesn’t know you’re here if it makes you feel any better.” Nor felt some relief at the words. Her brother didn’t seem upset about the incident
from earlier, and that was more of a mercy than warm floors. She kissed the side of his head, just to make sure things were truly okay between them. Though she knew they were fine, there was something off with the look in his eyes. Something sad. She didn’t want to bring it up, just incase it had anything to do with their father.

“How’d you know I was here?”

“I could smell you. You’re really sweaty you know that?” Jormungandr gave her an affectionate nuzzle. He seemed to be trying to cheer her up but she didn’t understand. She wasn’t sad! She finally reached her door, and stared curiously at her brother as he unwound himself from her neck and began to move towards his own room.

“What are you doing anyways?” She asked.

“I’m getting the book father left us. I want to talk over some of the words with him while he’s here.” He stopped moving and turned to look at her. There was a mixture of emotions in his eyes all at once. Fear, anxiety, anger, pity. Nor blanched at the sudden change in demeanor. In a blink it was gone.

“He’ll want to see your progress soon. You know he’s gonna find out you’ve been missing your tutoring.” There was actual concern in his voice. She didn’t understand why he was suddenly throwing this at her. There must have been a conversation about her while she was gone.

“Nor, I know it’s hard but father said tha-“

“He won’t know as long as nobody tells him.” She cast him a sharp glare that made him scoff. She felt bad as soon as she did it, she didn’t like arguing with him. Definitely didn’t like trying to intimidate him.

They normally never had a reason to but when they did, their father was usually the center of it. He always told their father everything, and in a way, wasn’t it Jormungandr’s fault? He never reminded her of the lessons. He never demanded her presence, so what was she supposed to do! He was her teacher and he was doing a terrible job at it.

Jormungandr just shook his head at her and slithered back to his room. Nor slammed her door, shutting it so loud it had even shook her father’s. She no longer cared about her father, if her brother wanted to betray her than so be it, than she just wouldn’t talk to him. Problem solved. At
the very thought of ignoring her brother her heart ached, and a rage boiled in her. She flexed the muscles in her fingers, trying to stave off the sudden anger. Her father had turned her brother against her, and he was more than willing to do it. Her family were the worst, they were horribly inconsiderate! They did even care about how she felt!

She angrily tossed clothes from her drawers, and tore open the doors to her wardrobe adding to the growing pile on the floor. Her eyes watered as the frustration built but she shut them tight till the burn faded. Shoes and pieces of jewelry were added to the mess and she couldn’t bring herself to care about the clutter. The servants would clean it up later. Creating the mess made her feel a bit better, enough so that she was able to refocus on getting ready. When she was just able to toddle and couldn’t get her way or was throwing a tantrum, she’d break something. Her brother had told her in a fond tone that when she was younger her anger was a whirlwind of shattered glass and torn fabrics. Her father had put a stop to it, she couldn’t remember that far back but she could remember when she realized that her father could care less if she made a mess. Ever since, to work her rage out she’d trash her room. Sometimes her father would come in after they’d gotten into a fight, rarely to make amends but often to finish his lecture now that she had calmed, and he’d simply roll his eyes at her mess and step over it.

She gave a final, weak punch to her wardrobe door, and sighed. Her entire floor was covered in clothes and she slumped against the door. The regret began to seep in. Now all her clothes were dirty expect for the few tucked in the back. Guilt came next, draped on her shoulders like a shawl as she realized the work the servants would have to do. A long sigh filled the air and she had barely registered it had come from herself. She flexed her finger again, like she had seen her father do after a similar fit.

One, two, three. She counted the number of times she did it until all that was left was a slight sense of dread that she might have just dirtied her party dress. Turning back to the closet she sought out the dress she wanted tucked far back in the wardrobe, a simple long sleeved navy gown that flared at the waist. Amira has actually made it for her a few months ago. She was always using her background as a seamstress, to create clothes for her family. She always made her clothes to fit the preference of the wearer, and Nor loved this about her. How she always thought of others when she made her beautiful gowns. The material didn’t cling to her like the other dresses Lady Sif gave her, meaning less skin to be poked and prodded. She smiled lightly, glad that it had avoided her tantrum.

Turning back to the pile, she began digging through the middle. There was a light grey apron buried somewhere amongst the rest of her clothes that she would need to wear with the dress. Blue and silver were the colors that represented her family. When she stood next to her uncles or her aunts she always thought she was looking at a reflection in a lake. They stood proudly, glowing, wearing their blue and gold clothes. Her family was like the other side being projected on the murky waters with their blue and silver. A slight reminder to the asgardians that they weren’t truly royals, but were apart of the family all the same. Nor found great pride in these colors, great pride in even being considered a reflection of the family that she was raised in.
The apron was hiding between an old pull over and her summer dress. She refused to dwell on the thoughts any longer. It was just going to get her mad all over again and she'd be stuck in an endless loop of destroying her room and getting upset about it. She couldn’t risk another tantrum lest her dress be thrown to the dirty floor in a blind rage.

Being mindful that the maids wouldn’t be able to assist her anytime soon with the rush going on, Nor drew her own bath.
“Nor! We will leave without you!” Jormungandr called. It had been the fifth time he had called out to her in the past hour. Nor huffed a sigh and sped up the braiding process. Her hair was still slightly wet and the braid on her shoulder didn’t look neat enough.

“I said I’m coming!” She shouted back. She pushed objects haphazardly around her vanity, searching for her grey ribbon.

“Father’s losing his patience!” Jormungandr yelled. Ugh, that wouldn’t bode well for her. If she didn’t hurry her father might opt out of going and make them all stay behind. There was no way she was going to miss this.

“Father never had any to begin with!” Her throat was getting raw from the screaming. She settled with her blue ribbon, and tied it at the end of her braid as she fled down the stairs. Her brother was wrapped around her father’s neck and they were both giving her the same glare. There was something off about them both. An urgency that had nothing to do with getting to the party.

“I said I was coming!” She narrowed her eyes back at them, shoving her boots on as she got to the end of the stairs. Hopping on one foot, she bounced her way towards them as she pulled her other boot on.

“We’re already late.” Her father said with malice in every word. What hurt the most about it was that he wasn’t even talking to her, he had directed all his impatience at her brother who flinched when his father spoke. Nor tried to bite back her words but she had been biting back her anger all day. She wouldn’t let him win again.

“If you’re mad at me than be mad at me. Don’t be mean to him!” She growled with as much ferocity as a little girl could muster. Jormungandr shot her a panicked look and he shook his head.

“Nor, don’t-“

“Don’t you dare-“

“Oh so now he speaks!”
“Father just sto-“

“You are a spoiled brat!”

“I’m the brat?! I don’t take my anger out on other people!”

“No, you just destroy everything and leave it for somebody else to clean up. If I go up to your room right now I bet-”

“At least I don’t-“

“Quiet!” Nor mouth shut with a loud click. Her father’s jaw was clenched so tight she thought his teeth might shatter under the force. Her teeth ached from the force but nothing felt loose.

Her brother had enchanted them both.

“You two haven’t even been in the same room together for five minutes before you’re at each other’s throats. It’s been like this for months now.” Jormungandr started. Nor couldn’t believe it. He had enchanted her. Her! His little sister of all people! She had been trying to defend him, trying to put their father in his place! Something must have been horribly wrong for him to be as upset as he was.

“I’m not sure what happened between you guys but I’m tired of refereeing fights. Father, you’re hurting Nor’s feelings when you ignore her like you’ve been doing. You’ve got to consider how she feels.” Her father tried to argue but no sound made it passed his lips. He looked like a petulant child as he stomped his foot, his eyes glaring daggers at his son. Steam might as well have shot out of his ears as his face grew more red. But he began to simmer down enough for Jormungandr to continue.

“Nor you need to be more respectful to father. He has feelings just like you do.” She tried to defend that her father never showed any other emotions but anger but she couldn’t force it out. She mirrored her father, stomped her foot and crossing her arms. Jormungandr sighed. He swore he was surrounded by children.
“You two are just alike, I think that’s the real problem.” He said with a slight sigh, “We are going to go to dinner. We are going to have a great time and celebrate the fact that father’s home. We are going to be happy that we are all together. We’re going to be okay.” He put extra emphasis on the last word. Nor nodded with her head bowed like the scolded child she was. Her father followed suit, stiffly moving his head as he turned away to face the door.

“Speak.”

Their mouths unclenched and immediately she rubbed at her sore jaw. Her eyes were filled to the brim with waiting tears, her father and brother turning into blurry shapes in front of her. She couldn’t even bring herself to be upset. She just wanted to cry until her brother felt bad enough to soothe away the tears that he caused.

“I’m sorry, Nor.” Her brother said in such a caring tone that she thought she might burst into sobs at that moment. This day seemed to be a series of one bad thing after the other. Vaguely she could see his blurry shape unwind from her father’s neck and make his way to hers. She blinked and let the tears flow, finally letting the room come back into view. Jormungandr pressed his head against her cheeks and caught the tears before they could fall to her chin.

“We’re okay.” He assured her. She nodded again and wiped at her face. When she finally looked up her father had his eyes trained on the door as if it were the most interesting thing in the realm. Jormungandr shook his head, he own eyes soft as he stared between the two. With a resigned sigh he pull himself away slightly to look down at Nor.

“We all need to talk. Nor, tonight at the party, Odin, he migh—” Mid way through his sentence the door burst open. Nor jerked back, wincing as her brother involuntarily tightened his grip on her neck. Loki whipped around with his arms raised to shield his children from the sudden intruders, but relaxed immediately as he saw the man waiting in the entrance.

“Baldur.” Loki let his shoulders and his fists drop.

“I’ve been sent to retrieve you! Per our brother’s orders.” He strolled into the room, sounding rather unimpressed with the task he’d been given, and turned to face Nor and Jormungand. Baldur didn’t look as disheveled as he normally was. He had on a light blue tunic tied at the waist with a golden belt. His normally messily braided hair pulled back into a bun. It was rare to see him dressed so modestly, but he had still opted out of wearing his shoes. The only thing covering his feet were bandages that stopped right before his toes to show off the gold paint on his nails.

“Hello kids.” His voice warm, friendly. He seemed genuinely happy to see them.
They gave him an uneasy look, the tension still lingering in the room. Baldur frowned at the three of them, sensing the distress he had just interrupted. His demeanor changed entirely, his relaxed posture straightening as he glanced at them.

“Nor. You’ve been crying.” He said quietly. He walked up to her and brushed the back of his hand down her cheek, catching another tear. She sniffled pitifully as he used his other hand to give Jormungandr an affectionate pat. He pinched Nor’s cheek tugging her lips up into a faux smile. He was always trying to get them to laugh. She batted his hand away with a bad attempt at a grin.

“Come on, now. We need to go to the dining hall and we need to be happy before we get back. Right?” Baldur rested his hand on Loki’s shoulder, shaking him slightly. The shaking grew increasingly harder until Loki was getting pulled like a ragdoll. Baldur let him go with a laugh as their father struggled to gain his footing. He gave a smile, but there was a far away look in his eyes that not even Baldur could pull him from. He left through the door. Their uncle started to follow but realized they had yet to follow, he stopped with his hand on the door frame.

“Come on. We need to get going. Father wouldn’t be too happy if you all missed the dinner.” The siblings glanced at each other nervously before moving forward. Never before had they been demanded to dinner.

Something was wrong.

Nor hesitantly carried herself and her brother forward. Things still weren't right, the argument still hadn’t been settled. And now hearing that her grandfather was upset made her stomach twist in knots. She wondered if there was another reason her family had been so late to the courtyard. It could be possible this wasn’t her father’s first argument of the day. Why would their grandfather be upset if they missed dinner? Knowing how her father and her siblings were so easily looked down upon by the others in the court, their presence wasn’t exactly missed by the others.

Baldur sighed from his place at the door and jerked his head towards the direction of the hallway. She nodded slowly, sharing a glance with her brother.

She could see her father waiting for them a few meters away, already the cheers and screams from the dining hall reached their home and it made her quicken her pace. She was eager to finally get away from the tension filled room. Her uncle stayed a few paces behind, her father keeping the lead. She thought that was odd. Her father and her uncle were always such great friends, she would think they’d at least walk side by side. Maybe they just didn’t have anything to talk about, she thought. But even that didn’t seem right.
“Jormun, is something wrong?” She whispered, meeting eyes with him. He carried the same worried expression, but he gave her a smile nonetheless.

“I’m not sure, don’t dwell on it. Try to have fun tonight. After the party, everything will be okay. We’re okay.” He told her as confidently as possible, but his tone still held so much uncertainty. She risked a glance at the man behind her. He was staring at the back of her father’s head but quickly met her gaze and raised a brow. She looked back ahead and tried to ignore the eyes that were now focused on her.

When they arrived at the hall doors guests were still filtering in, trying to find a space in the pact room. Upon seeing the royal family they quickly made a path for them. There were hundreds of tables spread out across the room. It was packed wall to wall with bodies and the noise of chatter alone made everyone’s ears ring. At the very back of the room where large looming windows let in moonlight there was a table raised on the platform.

Her uncles and cousins were sat at the table talking amongst themselves. Odin sat in the middle with Lady Sif and Amira at the other side of him. They were huddled close together, talking as if whispering secrets. Both their faces were solemn, and they seemed to talk even faster as Nor and her family made their way through the room. Amira’s eyes were rimmed red as she clasped Lady Sid’s hands tight in her own. Nor tried to inquire why she was upset using her eyes but Amira looked away. Had she been crying?

Loki was first to approach the table and bowed deeply. He didn’t seemed phased by any of their looks Or attitudes.

“Good evening, my son.” Odin smiled kindly down at the crouched man, but Nor couldn’t see any of the kindness reach his eyes.

“Good evening, Allfather.” Loki rose to his feet, brushing off dirt from his pants. He took his place alongside his oath brothers. Nor stepped forward after her father and curtsied with her head hanging low.

“Good evening, my daughter.” He said, his tone slightly softer than when he addressed her father. She gave him her brightest smile.

“Good evening, Allfather.”
Jormungandr unraveled himself from her neck and bowed his head toward the man. After they made their greetings Jormungandr made his way of the platform to coil himself around his father. He knew Nor’s friends wouldn’t appreciate his presence. She waved a small good bye at him as she disappeared through the crowd. Yet, a strange pull in her chest made her stop and look back. Her father leaned in close to his son and muttered something into his ear. Immediately Jormungandr’s face fell into a look of sheer panic and he whipped his head around to face his father. Nor rushed forward to see what could possibly make her brother so terrified but immediately she was pulled back into the crowd by an iron tight grip on her arm.

“Nor! We’ve been waiting forever!” A voice yelled as they pulled Nor through the crowd. Nor held up an arm to shield herself from the bodies she was being bumped into. Nor managed to catch a glimpse of the person holding her wrist and saw beautiful golden curls that bounced like springs in the air.

“Eira!” Nor yelled, trying to dig her heels in to stop the lanky girl but she just giggled and raced faster through the crowd. Her voice was light like a bell, her giggles were like chimes being blown in the wind. Eira was tall, easily two heads taller than Nor. She had gotten a lot of her slightly pointed ears and height from an elven relative on her mother’s side. She was like a pixie Jormungandr had shown her in one of his story books.

“Jormungandr-“ Nor started, already tugging away to see if her distressed brother was alright. Eira clicked her tongue disapprovingly but used her height to look over the head of the swarming asgardians.

“He’s fine, he’s eating with your father. We got you a plate waiting, come on! We missed you today.” She tugged harder and Nor let herself disappear completely in the sea of bodies. She hadn’t seen a party this big since Modi celebrated his four thousandth birthday. That had lasted well into the next day and so many people were packed into the palace that the party carried on throughout the hallways and gardens. Her father had enchanted a group of soldiers, that were crooning drinking songs in front of their home, to sleep.

Eira finally slowed down as the approached a table in the center of the room. Nor couldn’t help but wonder if her friends had been waiting all evening at this table so no one could take it. It was a great spot! The royal family was in clear view and every food carrying servant had to pass right by them to deliver food to the royal family. Luckily with Nor and Amaan as their friends, the children got a free pass at snatching food from the passing plates. Though Nor didn’t think much food stealing would be happening tonight. The table was piled with food, mostly sweets. There wasn’t a place on the round table that wasn’t covered by a platter or crumbs. On the left was a girl, pushing herself out of her seat to reach a cookie placed on top of a mountain of sugary foods.
Nor couldn’t help but laugh at the small girl, and was instantly met with glare. Her eyes were greener than the pastures just behind their castle. Silvia was the defensive sort and held the evil look until Nor gave an apologetic smile. Silvi patted the seat next to her, and Eira moved forward to take it. Often Nor saw her small friend during their shared dancing and sparring lesson. Nor was overjoyed to see her, having missed said lesson earlier in the day, and was excited to see what she might have missed during their dance lesson.

A boy poked his head from behind the mountain of cakes and grinned at the approaching girls. He had the same blonde, bordering white, hair as the girl next to him and had the same tan skinned. His eyes were blue like sea glass, but were still just as stunning as his sisters. Dag was Silvi’s slightly older brother. Nine months were the only thing keeping them from being twins, despite them constantly telling others that they were.

Nor had befriended him during their shared music class. He was talented when it came to string instruments but they truly bonded together over their love for animals. Often they went frog hunting together in the gardens and marveled at the creatures they found. His sister had a dislike for anything with scales so she normally watched them from afar when they ventured out. But Dag and Nor had an awful habit of picking up their findings and rushing towards the small girl to show her their newest amphibious friend.

“Kari and Ivar are missing. I doubt they can even get in, they were at the city’s training grounds this afternoon.” Eira told her, finally let Nor’s arm go as they approached the table. Eira squeezed her way between Dag and Silvi. Nor sat across from them eyeing the food wearily. She would have already started helping herself but everytime she saw anything that made her stomach rumble, it reminded her of Lady Sif’s hopeful eyes and the beautiful white box.

“How did they go all the way out there?” Nor nudged her plate to the side and sat her elbows on the table.

“The gate to the grounds were closed after they arrived.” Silvi pointed in the direction of the raised stage. “You know how bad she is and Ivar follows her wherever she goes.”

“The poor guy.” Dag lamented, dramatically bringing his clasped hands to his chest.

“The woes of unrequited love. Whatever shall our poor Ivar do?” He threw an arm dramatically across his head, earning a smack from his sister. They all knew what he meant. Kari was beautiful. Strong arms, doe eyes, beautiful black curly hair. Ivar would be stupid to have a crush on anyone else. He liked the fierceness she carried and was constantly on her heels like a lost puppy. Yet, Kari had no interest in boys unless they were trying to fight her so she spent most of their time together ignoring his attempts at flirting.
Ivar followed her anyways, as he had been for the past six months since his crush developed. Kari often complained about how annoying it was when they were alone and changing into their sparring clothes, but Nor had a sneaking suspicion she liked it.

Ivar and Nor shared their writing lessons with the rest of the children from the court. Ivar was a good reader, and always had great passion in his voice. He wrote a lot of his own stories. Stories of beasts and adventure. She liked it when Jormungandr read to her, but he didn’t have the same passion as Ivar did. He never gave the character voices or acted them out for all to see. Ivar even told stories aloud if the group decided to venture into the woods. It was good background noise as they hunted for frogs and other creatures, even if it scared them away when Ivar would impression a dragon.

“Be nice!” Silvi scolded, but then turned her gaze to Nor. “But on the subject of the local love birds, where is Amaan at? We haven’t seen him all day. Is he still doing that tree thing?”

Nor felt her face get hot at her friend’s teasing tone, but now that she thought about it. Amaan hadn’t been with his parents, and he hadn’t even made an appearance yet. She looked around searching for the mop of dark hair but she couldn’t seem to find him. Her face scrunched in concern again.

“Well, maybe he’ll be here later. Or he found the other two and is walking with them right now.” Nor said hopefully turning back to face her friends. They nodded, mostly to reassure her. Amaan was always as time, as the future king he took timeliness very seriously. Something had to be wrong for him to be so late. They met the conversation drop and turned to the food in front of them. Nor watched her friends eat and tried to ignore the dread pooling in her gut. Why would her grandfather seem upset with her father? Why was everyone acting so weird?

“They’re you guys are! We were looking everywhere for you.” The four looked up in time to see their missing friends take a seat. Kari was still in her training clothes that were stuck to her dark skin with sweat. Ivar looked just as soaked, his lanky frame was shining in the candle light, and was still panting slightly as he collapsed into his chair. The arrows in his quiver clattered together as he leaned forward to rest his head on an empty plate. His long reddish blonde hair was falling out of the braids they were tied in.

“Do we normally smell this bad after training?” Silvi asked, squeezing her nose. Kari chuckled and grabbed a pastry from the platter in the center of the table.

“You all missed out on a perfectly good session. You should have came with us! The city kids have a very different style of fighting than we do. You should have seen this one kid, he swept Ivar
right off his feet and disarmed his bow all in one move.” Kari tried to convince the exhausted boy to let her try it on him herself, but he just gave her a shaky smile.

“I have to take a minute to breathe. We had to fight just to get to the palace. We couldn’t even get to our homes to change! It’s insane in here.” Kari gave him a sympathetic pat on the back. Nor would have asked more about the city’s training grounds. She was forbidden to leave without an escort. But to get an escort she’d need her father’s permission, who would also need to get it from his own father. It was too grueling of a process for her to ever ask. Nor’s title of princess and future queen meant she was confined to the castle and it’s gardens, the same for Silvi, Dag, and Eira whose parents were ambassadors. They were all at risk if they were caught off palace grounds.

Kari and Ivar’s parents were royal messengers, they had traveled all across the realms to deliver messages for the crown. Kari, ever the proud one, often remarked how rude it was that they were treated like less of importance than the other children. Yet, she never complained when she had the freedom to leave the palace grounds whenever she pleased! But this time Nor couldn’t bring herself to chat when there were more pressing issues. Amaan wasn’t with them. He wasn’t anywhere to be seen.

“Did you see Amaan on your way in?” Kari and Ivar shared a glance with the rest of the table, as if confirming if this was a joke or not. When they were met with grave eyes, they shook their heads.

Was something wrong with Amaan? Was he in trouble? Maybe that was why everyone seemed so upset, but that wouldn’t explain why the Allfather would be mad at her father. Could it possibly be because of something her father had don-

“Look! Modi’s getting up.” Dag remarked, and her thoughts were swept away. The whole table turned around. The bodies around quickly seated themselves, giving Nor and her friends a perfect view of the stage. A hush fell over the room, and Nor felt her voice die along with it.

Modi was wearing heavy armor that clinked together with every step, his foot falls echoed through the room. He had a gold chainmail skirt that stood out amongst his blue armor, and like the rest of his family, he seemed to glow in the spotlight of the castle’s attention. He raised his glass high in the air.

“Hello everyone! It’s good to be back!” In an instant the crowd was roaring, people were shouting greetings at the top of their lungs as if Modi had just performed the best magic trick.

They had been dying for a month to have them return, and now they were finally getting what they asked for. He began talking up the crowd, telling them the basics of the mission. How long it took, how big the beast was, how they tracked it. Magni and Baldur followed up behind him, giving their voice to tell some of the more comedic stories. Something about her father almost falling into
lava, and her Uncle Thor setting his tunic on fire. Baldur teased them mercilessly, and more than once Thor shook his hammer at his younger brother, making the crowd erupt into laughter.

Nor was only half paying attention, she was just as interested as the others, this was what she’d been waiting for, but there were too many things wrong for her to wrap her head around the words. She glanced at her father, and all at once everything seemed to stop.

He was still seated next to the Allfather with his hands shaking slightly. But the look of pure rage made her want to run. Jormungandr has his face hidden in their father’s neck, and he was curled so tight he looked like a scaly scarf. Her father’s eyes were glowing a fierce red, something she had only seen twice in her entire life. Once when a letter had been sent to the castle threatening the end of her and Jormungandr's life. A random threat that had seemingly come from nowhere. And the second time had been during a dinner party with a visiting kingdom. She had never learned the details of that story, but she could remember seeing her Uncles pick her father up and carry him kicking and screaming out of the room as she and Amaan played with the visiting princes. She couldn’t express the fear that those eyes made her feel.

Midway through a story when Magni’s tone began to shift, her father’s face snapped up.

“I hadn’t even felt the eyes on me till I laced my trousers up,” his expression darkened, his voice dropping low, “I saw the nostrils first. Wide and flaring, smoke was coming out of them so thick I could barely see. The next was the eyes, bigger than my whole body, glowing like a lantern in the dark. If Loki hadn’t shown when he did, I don’t think I’d be alive.”

The anger instantly left her father’s face as he stood up, gone in the blink of an eye, a calmed neutral expression took its place and Jormungandr came out from hiding, the same look on his own features. Kitchen maids and servants rushed around the room, blowing out lights and lanterns until the only flames left were the candles on the stage itself. With a quick wave of his hand and his mouth silently moving, streams of colors began to drift around the room. They appeared from nowhere and everywhere. They weaved and moved with each other, sea foams and magentas swirled around until the scene magically appeared in front of them. A mountain peak with jagged edges and flat valley beneath.

The floor itself had turned into a red glowing lava pit. Some pulled their legs up in surprise resulting in laughter from their friends. At the base of the stage the lights gathered together in the vague shape of people. The Odinsons were varying levels of gold and yellow based on their age, Thor being the most bold colors and Modi being a dull burnt orange. Nor could make out her father’s figure as the dark blue character with its bow string drawn back with an arrow waiting to be released. Thor got up from his side of the table and joined his brother, placing a hand on Loki’s shoulder as he began to take over the story. Loki was too busy concentrating on weaving the spells to talk.
“We came to realize the mighty beast had been hunting us, not the other way around.” Her brother began to flick his tail, his lips silently as he weaved another spell into existence. A violet dragon, taller and wider than Thor himself towered over the miniature gods and roared. The huge claws dug into the magenta mountains and its mouth grew onto a sinister grin. The dragon spread its giant wings and leapt from the stage to do a lap around the room. Its wings spanned over entire groups of people, some screamed.

Jormungandr made it sweep low as it passed over Nor and her friends, making them squeal in excitement. It breathed dark green fire over the crowd as the audience gasped when imaginary flames passed through their skin. The dragon finally settled itself back in front of the light figures. The battle between gods and beasts began.

The yellow figure that resembled Baldur leapt at the dragon as the others moved to surround the beast. Arrows flew from the blue man’s bow, one pierced it in the side and it swatted at the tiny men. They went flying over the crowd but quickly got back on their feet and charged the beast. Nor was finally engrossed and was watching so intently she barely noticed the hand on her thigh. Nails dug into her skin and she jumped at the sudden contact but a finger was pressed to her lips to keep her from shouting.

“Hush!” Amaan hissed. He looked, and she meant this in the kindest way possible, absolutely horrible.

“Are you alright?” She whispered frantically. He nodded at her, squeezing her fingers so hard it almost hurt. He pressed a finger to his lips. With a quick glance to their friends who were still focused on the display of lights, he tugged her off the chair into a crouch. She hated to leave just as it was getting good, but the state he was in caused her more concern. Amaan began to move towards the door and Nor followed close on his heels.

They crept through the open doors where those who couldn’t get in had gathered. After an outrageous amount of fighting and pushing, they had made it into an empty hallway. She was close to her home, and in the distance she could hear the roar of the courtyard fountain. Nor looked almost as bad as he did.


“Breathe!” He chuckled with slight exasperation. He dusted off his golden cloak and the blue clothes now covered in dirt from his time near the floor. When he looked up at her, she got to see the full extent of the damage. He had clearly been pulling at his hair. The stuck up in random
groups of spikes from where he had grabbed and tugged. His nails were jagged from biting, his eyes were bloodshot as though he had been crying.

“I-I um, I didn’t- I wasn’t ready to-“ He stammered. He sighed and ran a nervous hand through his hair. He winced as he brushed across patches of freshly balder areas. When he pulled back there were sparks of electricity at his fingertips. He yelped and shook his hand as though he had been burned. Nor jumped as he tried to wave away the bright blue energy. She hadn’t seen him involuntarily spark in a long time.

“I just, felt like I should talk to you first. It only seems right. Then we’ll tell the others together, okay?” He sighed, rubbing his hand gently. Amaan stood up straighter and looked to her as if she should know exactly what he was talking about. Nor was ready to pull her own hair out.

“Amaan, please. Tell me what’s going on!”

“Nor- I, Grandfather has…” He took a deep breath, “For twenty years time I will be going to Niflheim to spend time furthering my education on diplomacy to strengthen the alliance between our two realms.” He said it as if he was reading it straight out of a book. His voice cracked, as if he were seconds away from crying his eyes out. The sparks were back, creeping from the tips of his fingers just past his knuckles. Nor’s face immediately fell.

“You’re leaving?” She said breathlessly. Going to the land of the elves to study? Who would agree to such a thing? He was the future King of Asgard! He would become the Allfather, he had no business traveling to other realms. It was too dangerous! She stumbled back, running straight into the wall.

“It’s to show that we trust them. Dad said the last trade deal fell through and they’re getting worried that we are going back on our treaty.” He reached out to touch her, seeking her comfort but Nor jerked away. She was shaking, there was an ache in her fingers to break something.

“I need you here, Amaan. You’re my best friend. You don’t even wanna go! Look at yourself!” And he did. His eyes traveled from his scuffed boots to his dirt caked cloak. He let out a choked sob and tried to dust more of the dust out of his clothes. Then he fell into a crouch, tears racing down his face as he clutched his knees. The sparks were to his elbow. Nor knew from experience that if they spread any farther, he just might summon a storm big enough to destroy the entire dining hall. She moved forward numbly, and wrapped an arm around him. He curled into her side, whimpering as he tried to bite back his sobs.

They stayed close, eventually moving to the wall where they sat together with Nor’s head on his
shoulder and him crying softly into her hair. He sniffled pitifully, wiping at his running nose with his sleeve. She normally would have huffed a fit that he had gotten snot in her hair, but she couldn’t conjure anything to say, she could only cry along. Eventually the tears had to stop, and they sat together. Friends faced with the reality that they’d be separated.

“I’m gonna miss you.” She said quietly. He wrapped and arm around her shoulder. His long fingers began to fiddle with her braid laying across her shoulder.

“You have dancing with Eira and Silvi. And training with Ivar and Dag, and Kari. You’ll be so busy with them you won’t even know I’m gone.” His voice was uneven. Oh how badly she wanted to punch him. His words didn’t comfort her at all.

“Yeah but they’re not you. They’re not gonna take me hunting with them. They won’t read to me, or- or make sure their mom makes me really great cookies when they know I’m coming over.” The tears were back and it was her turn to sob like a child.

“They won’t walk with me when I need it or help me calm down. They won’t be you!” She huffed and threw her hands in the air. His cloak smelled like burnt toast but it still felt like the safest place to hide her crying. His face flushed at her words and he wiped a stray tear from his cheek.

“You really think that highly of me? How sweet.” His tone was slightly teasing, but he still sounded so tired. Yet it still made her laugh. They shared shakey smiles.

“What kind of question is that!” He laughed as she groaned at his incompetence. Amaan caught her hand as she went to slap his arm and tugged them both to stand. They laced their hands together so tight it borderline hurt.

“Fifty years.” He said simply, smirking proudly at her. He nudged her elbow in faux excitement, drawing a slight smile from her.

She scoffed but turned her head to hide her red cheeks, “You’re just saying that to soften me up. I’m still upset your leaving.” He laughed softly but his face turned solemn. How many times would they cry tonight? Nor couldn’t help but wonder as Amaan rubbed at his red eyes.

“Mom is upset too but dad said we are going to be alright.” He stopped and looked at her with his eyebrows upturned.
“Nor, you really didn’t know I was leaving?” He asked softly. She shook her head more confused than ever. Was she supposed to know? Was her father supposed to tell her? Maybe that’s why her grandfather was mad, because her father had withheld such important information.

“Do you-“ he paused, internally debating with whether or not he should continue. He finally looked up at her, a storm brewing just behind his eyes.

“You do know I’m not going alone right?”

They were at the entrance to the courtyard. She stopped, “Who’s going with you?”

He scratched at the back of his neck and walked further into the yard. Even though she called his name, he kept walking. She ran after him.

“I didn’t- I couldn’t have known you didn’t- Nor, I’m not sure if-” he could even get a full sentence out. The sparks were back at his fingertips like the dancing blue lights her father had conjured.

“Amaan!” She yelled, grabbing his shoulders.

“Jormungandr is leaving.” He said quickly, taking a step out of her reach. He didn’t fear her, Nor would never hurt him. But he still couldn’t run the risk of being near the upcoming tantrum that was sure to happen.

“As- uh, um- as a translator but, he’s gonna stay longer. He’s supposed to learn magic from the elves. That’s what dad said at least.” He sat down at the edge of the fountain. He reached out and took her hand, seeing the panic crossing her face. Her mouth had dropped to her chest, her eyes searching around the yard for, anything. For her father and brother to come out of hiding to announce it was a joke, for something to break, for a sign of hope.

“Nor I-, how do you not know? Grandfather told them when everyone got home. That was hours ago.” She didn’t hear the question. She didn’t hear anything except her inner voice repeating the mantra ‘Jormungandr is leaving.’

Her heeled boots clicked on the stone floor as she raced back to her home. She shoved those who crossed her path and didn’t stop to apologize. Home. She had to get home. She shouldn’t have left
Amaan. She shouldn’t be crying. She had to get home.

Jormungandr was leaving.

Snot smeared on her cheek when she tried to wipe away the tears. She couldn’t bring herself to worry about it. The corridor leading to her home seemed miles long. Her body convulsed with violent sobs as she practically broke the wooden door open. She slammed it behind her finding no comfort in the loud noise it made.

In the living area Nor kicked over the end tables on either sides of the sofa. She swept the vases off the top of the fireplace. She ripped the painting from the walls, pulled the curtain from their rods, took books from their respective shelves and ripped out the pages. She was vaguely aware she was screaming, but only because her throat began to ache.

The room was destroyed in minutes and she still couldn’t breathe. How could he leave her? How could he leave her all alone? She laid down among the papers and glass and cried until exhaustion took over.

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“He told her.”

“What was he supposed to do, he’s her friend.”

“It wasn’t his business. Look at this room, I told you to keep an eye on her. I should have told Magni to keep his son away from her.”

“Father, what was I supposed to do? Interrupt the performance so you can chase after her?”

Nor opened her eyes. Loki stood with his arms crossed above her, his features weren’t soft but they weren’t as angry as she expected them to be. Jormungandr wound himself around his leg, and was inches away from her face.

“You’re leaving.” She said immediately, her voice hoarse. He looked down at her, guilt plastered
on his face.

“Let’s go sit and talk.” She pushed herself up wordlessly at the command and wandered to the dining room. Behind her she could hear her father muttering a spell under his breath and the shards she was walking on lifted from the ground and into the air. She entered the room and threw herself into a chair. The moon was high in the sky, the light filtered in through the large windows on her left.

Her father lit the candles with a wave of his hand as he entered and Jormungandr coiled himself on the table in front of her. Loki sat behind him, his expression unreadable. Nor was already crying again, her family’s presence failing to comfort her.

“You’re leaving! For how long? When are you coming back?”

“Nor, listen. I have to. I’m going there to translate for Amaan-“

“That’s bullshit! We have hundreds of translators!”

“Watch your tongue.” Loki warned. Nor cried a little harder at the scolding. Jormungandr glared at him, eyes narrowed and mouth forming into a snarl, but the look fell when he turned back to her.

“Alright,” he paused. “You deserve to know the truth, I don’t want to lie to you.” He said quietly. Loki shook his head at his son, as if he were doing something foolish. Nor wanted to rip his head off.

“Nor, you know how people feel about me. The prophecies say-“

“You’re not the world serpent! They don’t know what they’re talking about!” She snapped. They had this conversation a million times and yet the very words still made her heart drop in fear. She didn’t want to hear it.

“Let me finish!” He snapped, he seemed exasperated. It made Nor jolt in her chair at his loud tone. He waited for her sobs to die down before continuing.
“Nor I’ve grown two feet in the last year. Odin’s, well, he’s concerned for the safety of the people. He thinks it’s more appropriate if I spend my time in Niflheim until we are sure this growth spurt doesn’t continue. The elves are worried that Odin is trying to stick the beast of the prophecies on them. So, if Amaan goes with me they can’t think we are trying to trick them.” Jormungandr explained calmly and slowly, like he was explaining it to a child. Nor fought to understand the words as they were spoken to her but everything was so hard to process. It was as if she were underwater, listening to every word from under the surface.

“We weren’t sure if the plan was official or not, Father and the rest had to leave for the hunt when Odin announced it. He confirmed it when they got home. Father, he, well he tried to argue. But Odin confirmed it again at the party.”

“But when are you coming back? Amaan is going away for two years! I’m going to be alone without you!” She slammed her palms on the table, pleading desperately.

“Nor- I…” Her heart dropped into her stomach, “I’m going to stay for a few hundred years. Three hundred or four at most. That’s not long at all.”

“No!” She wailed. It felt like the weight of the world was crashing on her shoulders. She was sure she was going to faint.

“Now, now. It’s not all bad! You and father can come visit me at any time and I’ll show you the grand light they have there and- Oh please don’t cry.”

“Nor.” It was her father. They both looked at him in surprise. He had been quiet during the whole explanation and Nor wasn’t sure if he’d talk at all. His face was stern, but now his eyes were gentle, pleading almost.

“He has to go. It’s his duty. You aren’t making this easy on him, you need to consider how he feels.” His voice was waveriing, as if he was restraining himself.

“It’s not fair!”

“Life isn’t fair. Especially not for us. Life will never be fair to you, it has never been to any of us.” He said sharply. He paused and his stern tone softened the slighted bit. “We have more to discuss with you.”
Jormungandr let out a heavy sigh, staring at his father for a long moment before speaking out once more, “We are leaving for a trip before I go.”

“Where are we going?” Nor asked, blowing her nose into her apron. Her tone grew slightly more hopeful at the thought of traveling with her brother.

“You- uh, You’re not going, Nor. Father has this trip planned in Midgard, and I must go. I know it’s hard to understand but listen, it’s only three months and I’ll be home the day before I have to leave and we can spend time together then. You’re older, and you can handle things at home while we’re gone. I already told father you won’t need a nanny. Amira and Lady Sif already said that they’d come and check on you! It’ll be like you’re all grown up!” He said as if that should make everything easier.

Nor couldn’t cry hard enough.

Three months was a long time. But Nor was kept busy. Her days consisted of training at the grounds. She fought with a new vigor, a new rage. It came so easy to her. The training masters liked it and complimented her change in demeanor. She attacked hard and mercilessly. Whether it was Ivar or Silvi on the other end of their wooden practice swords, she didn’t care, they would be flat on their backs by the end of the match. She always met her match with Karl however. Kari was pure muscle, her strokes methodical against Nor’s blind rage. When she did lose, she demanded rematches until she was blue in the face. She’d stomp and pout if she lost again, like a bratty child who hadn’t gotten their way, but it only made her fight harder the next time.

Her dancing lessons with Amira went smoother. Amira had been a dancer before she had even learned to sew. Lady Sif had used to teach the class, leading the girls in traditional dances from the dark times, before the realms were united. Amira had changed the class for the better, Nor thought. She taught them more modern dances, dances from all over the nine realms. Nor appreciated the strictness of dancing and Amira’s teaching. She was told where to put her feet and how to move her hips. The other girls new their cues and when to turn, what to do with their arms. It was organized and it wasn’t a problem if they misstepped or tripped on their own feet. Accidents were forgiven and Amira was always so kind when giving instructions. She felt comforted to be in a room where she could do what she loved without judgement.

Lady Sif lead her singing lessons. Nor took great pride in her voice, and when she could reach notes the other girls couldn’t dream of, she felt a smug satisfaction rise. Lady Sif only fed into it, praising her in front of the other girls. When she did trips over words or her voice cracked, Lady Sif also had no problem making an example out of her. Nor hated her constantly fluctuating mood. Moments she’d be kind, stroking her wild curls while providing thousands of lyrics of praise. But if
she stuttered over the words, the kind hands would be tugging at the tips of her ears and she’d be scolded in front of everyone she knew.

She labored through the rest of her lessons. Writing and reading were torture. Her eyes hurt from the small words written on the pages. Her tutors droned on and on but she couldn’t bring herself to pay attention to their words. The books were boring, nothing like the ones about gods and battles Jormungandr read to her. She couldn’t care less about treaties made hundreds of years ago, or boring speeches her grandfather gave. The grammar lessons fell upon deaf ears, she could barely stay awake as she was forced to practice sentence structures. If she did slip into a brief sleep her teachers had no problem making her stand in front of her fellow peers and scold her as loudly as they could. But Silvi, Dag, Kari, Ivar and Eira always waited for her after the lessons when the tutors would attempt a more personal approach, and their comfort made that part of the day so much more bearable.

Her father knew of her inept ability to learn. Knew how much she loathed written word. Jormungandr had tried with her, fought with her, but she was incapable of listening, of keeping her focus. The almost constant fights of just teaching her the basics of their language and the alphabet that came along with it was enough for her father to decide that learning would never be her strong suit. He didn’t have the time to constantly worry over her studies and made it Jormungandr’s problem. Without him hear to constantly study with her or pressure her to listen to her tutors, she let the work pile up. It’s not like she’d need to know any of it anyway.

But when she wasn’t learning her time was consumed by Amaan. They fled to the back garden together everyday after their lessons were over. Running from the castle with the sun on their back, shouting and whooping as the patrolling guards shook their head.

Amaan would tell her all the princely things he was learning under his grandfather Thor and the things he was learning about Niflheim with his tutors. Nor would sing for him when they rested, and taught him all the dances she was learning. She would chase him through the trees and collapse next him when they finally got tired of running.

Nor told him all the stories she could think of. Everyone of them had come from Jormungandr, but Amaan didn’t notice and clung to every word. They’d find a patch of soft grass and watch the clouds over head slowly drift away as she talked. Sometimes they napped together right there on the ground from how content they were. As the sun began its descent and Magni discovered them and dragged them back inside, he would let Nor come home with them and eat the food Amira prepared.

There were always cookies waiting for them to snack on while they waited for dinner to arrive but Nor still couldn’t keep her wedding dress out of her mind. So she’s refuse and they’d sit cross legged on the floor in the sitting area and play card games that would be continued after dinner was over. Amira always offered her a place to sleep, telling her that she didn’t have to be alone.
Sometimes Nor declined, but more often than not she found herself in the guest room nestled under hand knit blankets. Those were the nights she cherished most because when Amira and Magni were fast asleep on the other side of the floor, Amaan would creep into the guest room and take his place beside her. They told each other more stories, sometimes Amaan repeated the ones she told him but she didn’t mind. They’d repeat the story telling for hours, sometimes until the sun rose. Some nights they cried, sobbing over a world that wouldn’t allow best friends to stay together. Most times they just cuddled close under the blankets, wishing and hoping that tomorrow wouldn’t come. There wasn’t another soul in the kingdom that could understand the pressure the royal children were under. They truly only had each other.

When there were days where she did retreat home she curled up in her brother’s bed and slept in bursts. She hated those nights, but she often had a yearning to be home. To be in a place that was solely hers and she could relax. She feared the absence of her friend, but the constant depressing reminder that he was leaving was becoming too much. She needs to be somewhere where she wasn’t performing. Those nights the only company was her brother’s books. She didn’t read them, her head would hurt after a page. Instead she pressed it close to her chest and tried to count down the days until her brother would be back in her arms.

As the number of days dwindled the harder she fought, the faster she danced, the higher she sung, the less she ate, and the more she prayed to the allfather to keep Amaan by her side.

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She was surrounded by a troop of guards. All standing in a half circle behind her. After requesting an audience with her grandfather he readily agreed to send the troop with her so she could retrieve her father and brother herself. Nor had waited three months for this day and she was overjoyed. She wore the newest dress Amira had given to her that morning. It was a dark navy blue that reminded Nor of Magni’s eyes and around the hem of the skirt was a silver vine that sprouted tiny flowers that caught the sun as she walked. The light grey apron had the same detailing in dark blue all around the perimeter of the stitching. Nor had practically tackled her in a hug at the gift. Amaan told her she look absolutely stunning. But Nor was sure he had only said that because his father had told Amira the exact same thing that morning at breakfast.

She had been waiting an hour, fiddling with her apron, braiding and untangling her hair. Then she heard a noise from inside the travel room. It was circular building made of gold with millions of tiny lines of runes carved into it. For protection, her brother had told her. Finally she heard the large beam of light surge forward onto their plane of existence and the gate to that e realm being locked into place. She was bouncing on her toes with excitement.

Her movement made the world spin and she was forced to remember that she hadn’t eaten since
she had dinner at Amaan’s almost two days ago. The restricting had been worth it in Nor’s eyes. Amira had to change her measurements for the dress twice and Lady Sif had even congratulated her for losing her baby fat before any of the other girls her age. She took it as the highest of compliments. Though sparring had gotten harder from her weak spells and she was paler than ever. Sparring would never give her the same satisfaction as fitting into the wedding dress. It was still too small, but she would get there.

The grand doors opened and slowly her father made his way through the entrance. The dissipating blue light behind him, made them glow. He looked the same as always. Auburn hair laying everywhere and the sides were recently shaved she noted. His skin held more of a tan to it but the only thing Nor cared about was the pale silver serpent that was draped across her father’s shoulders. Nor rushed forward before the guards could grab her and held her arms out. Jormungandr laughed, breathy and soft, and launched himself from his father’s shoulders. He caught Nor around the neck and it threw her off balance enough that she fell hard on her butt.

“The forest is beautiful,” Nor cried. She couldn’t believe she still had any tears left after so many days of crying but there she was again, sobbing so hard she could scarcely breathe.

“Nor! I- Nor, you look sickly, are you well?” Jormungandr asked, wrapping himself twice around her neck and pulling back to look her in the eyes. Her father walked over to the two, a concerned look mirrored on his face. Nor finally got to get a good look at her brother. She knew he had been gone only a few months but he looked changed. His eyes gleamed differently and, he looked, sad. He looked so sad and it made her want to cry more. Something about him had just changed so much but she couldn’t place her finger on it.

“You’ve lost weight.” Her father commented, pressing the back of his hand against her forehead. She immediately stiffened. Her father didn’t often give out such gentle touches, he must’ve really been worried. It gave Nor some sort of pride to see her father so concerned for her wellbeing.

“I’m fine! I can’t believe your home! You’re really home!” She squeezed her brother tightly, making him grunt. Jormungandr was back in her arms and they were all safe. Her father grunted, staring down at the expectantly.

“Let’s go home.” He said, tugging her arm up. She brushed off her dress excitedly. They were all here together and they were going home.

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“There are so many cities Nor, but the forests are beautiful. There’s snow everywhere! On the
trees, the ground, the houses. I was lucky father knew spells to keep us warm or I would have froze to death!” Jormungandr laughed slightly, but it sounded forced. His tone had a false cheerfulness that had Nor wincing when he looked away from her. It left a sick feeling in her stomach to see her brother in such a state. She couldn’t figure out why he was sad, couldn’t figure out why he couldn’t be more happy to see her.

They had decided against a party, instead had a dinner for Amaan in the grand hall and invited the council and rest of the gods to join them. Her father had decided against going. He said it would only lead to trouble and Jormungandr agreed mostly because he didn’t like parties. Nor had been upset, close to crying in front of everyone when he denied their invitation. Jormungandr had muttered promises of stories and sweets in her ears to get her to pull herself together. The mention of food had made her so sick that it kept her quiet. Her father ordered an extravagant feast to their kitchen, and they all gathered around and tried to hide their melancholy expressions.

“They’re fine. Dancing and music are great. Sometimes Amaan joins and we finally have a guy in the room. My friends are fine, we meet everyday and we have fun so that’s good.” Nor said with a shrug. Jormungandr mustered a small smile at that. He didn’t seem just upset at leaving, he seemed troubled. Like when she had an impossible to reach itch and there was no one around to scratch it. He shifted uncomfortably in the seat and resumed eating.

Even father noticed. He glanced up mid bite at his son and Nor would never say her father was scared because she knew he wasn’t afraid of anything, but his face held a hint of concern that truly made her heart race. He blinked and turned his gaze to her and she visibly bristled like a cat under his watchful eyes.

“Nor, eat.” He said simply, tiredly.

“I have, Father.” She said, pointing her fork to the half empty side of her plate.

“That’s hardly enough. Eat your food. I won’t repeat myself.”
“I already ate!” She growled.

“Don’t!” Jormungandr shouted. It made them both jump.

“Don’t argue. Not tonight please. I just, just, please.” He said it like he was pleading. Nor looked down guiltily and nodded.

“Maybe, we’re done with dinner. It’s late out don’t you think? Maybe father can tell us a story and-“

“Jormun, I’m not in the story telling mood.” He sounded tired, but apologetic.

“We should,” Jormungandr paused looking at the table then out the window. “We should go to bed. Nor, I’ll tell you a story after you get settled.”

He encouraged her with a nod and she pushed herself from the table. She practically fled from the room to get ready. She shut her door quietly and went searching for her night gown.

The gown had slipped under her bed when she had gotten dressed that morning. The soft pink material just barely brushed against her ankles and the long sleeves puffed at the arms. Lady Sif had gotten it for her shortly after she noticed the weight loss. It was almost as nice as Amira’s gift, but anything Lady Sif gave her would ever amount to the love and time Amira put into her gifts. Nor quickly undressed and pulled it over her head, barely noticing it when her brother slipped in quietly as she buried herself under the covers.

He coiled up and smiled down at her. She still couldn’t get over how sad he looked.

“I missed you a lot. I missed your stories too.” She said, resting her head against the pillow.

“I’m sorry I had to go. I’m sorry that I have to go.” He went quiet and he stared at her hard. She coughed uncomfortably and he shook himself out of his stupor. His face grew darker.
“I want to talk with you.” He said quietly. Nor furrowed her brow at him. She had a feeling no stories would be told tonight.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nor, I-,” he looked around the room searching for words, “Nor will you be upset if I leave?”

“Well, yeah. But,” it was her turn to look away as she shifted onto her side, “I know you have too. I thought about what father said, about it being hard for you too. I won’t be mad if you leave, but I’ll be mad that you have to leave. But it won’t matter because you’ll still write to me, won’t you? And father and I can visit?” Just mentioning the thought that she’d be stuck with her father all alone made her feel nauseous. Jormungandr nodded slowly. She knew he couldn’t cry but he looked destroyed, crumbling.

His golden eyes were heavy. Grey scales once shiny and beautiful were flaking off and dry. He couldn’t even smile.

“Nor I have to go.” He said, with a slight determination in his voice.

“And I’m not sure when I’ll see you again. But father will take care of you.” His voice was cracking. He moved forward and nestled against her cheek.

“You’ll be safe with father, and- and you’ll be okay. You’ll be okay, Nor.” He used his head to catch a tear trailing down her cheek. She hadn’t realized she was crying.

“But we’ll come visit you. Don’t worry! I love you, Jormun.” She said with false cheer. There was a lack luster grin at that.

“I love you too, Nor. I-I have to go now, buh-but, just know father will take care of you. And I love you. And things will get better and you’ll be okay.”

“We’ll be okay.” She corrected him with her own wide smile. The sad look returned to his face.

“We’re okay.” He leaned forward and pressed his mouth to her forehead. She closed her eyes, not
wanting to see him leave her room for the last time. She didn’t know how she was going to compose herself when she watched him go through the travel room doors the next day. It would be impossible.

The only sign that told her he left was the soft click of the door. She was wide awake but still refused to open her eyes. Eventually she drifted off to sleep, her heart weighing her down on the bed like a rock sinking into water.

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She fell from the bed. The ground beneath her was rumbling so hard it was violently shaking all the furniture in her room. Nor tried to get her bearings but couldn’t make it to her feet. She forced herself onto her hands and knees and crawled. The room was dark but suddenly it was illuminated by a flash of lightning. Thunder cracked so hard it shattered her window.

She crawled across the broken shards of glass to catch a glimpse of the outside. Her palms were bleeding. Was the whole castle falling apart?

There was another flash of lightning and this time a strong force almost threw her from the window. Shakily she pulled herself up using the sill and the end of her bed frame. Outside the sky was glowing red above the dark grey storm clouds. There was no rain but lightning strikes were occurring so fast she knew this was no natural thunderstorm.

Her eyes strained to see into the sky but finally she caught a glimpse of something in the clouds. She could make out a figure amidst the chaos, floating high above the city, lightning cracklings from the tool in its hand. It was her Uncle Thor. He looked as small as the light figure her father made of him when he crafted his stories.

She squinted hard, shielding her eyes from the blinding flashes comes from the sky. Another lightning strike illuminated the clouds and Nor could just barely make out another object not far from the god. It was long and the light glinted off its silver body.

“Jormungandr!” She cried. She couldn’t even hear herself over the storm or the rumbling. Thor swung Mjolnir charging his way at her brother. Jormungandr dodged to the side, he seemed awkward in the air, obviously not as used to the ability of flight as their uncle.

In another flash of lightning she saw her brother lunge forward and latch onto her uncles throat.
She screamed so hard her voice gave out, but she still couldn’t hear herself. The furniture in her room began tipping over, her vanity crashed with a loud bang and the mirror shattered all over the floor. Nor clung to the window sill like her life depended on it.

From the right side of the castle she could see a glowing blue light. Thunder crashed and she continued to scream. Then all at once, there was a deafening silence amid the chaos before a loud explosion rocked the castle and she was tossed onto her back. Her vision was consumed by a bright blue light then everything stopped. The shaking, the storm, the wind all came to a halt.

When Nor got herself back to the window, all she could see was her Uncle floating above the while the clouds began to disappear revealing a beautiful dark blue sky littered with brilliant stars.

Jormungandr was gone.

End Notes

Wow!!! That was a lot of writing! Please tell me what you think, I'd love to know what you're feeling!
Special thanks to my girl, feedittothefish! She's a cutie patootie and shes the nicest person in the world!!!
Check out my blog you-were-always-ready-son for other fics and god of war content!!!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!