A Fork In the Road

by burning_nova

Summary

Thor must come to terms with his heritage. He's not certain he can.
Thor grunted as the carriage unexpectedly rolled over another bump in the road. He glanced at his uncle, who seemed unconcerned but the jostling motion. As they slowly made their way up the mountains to the nearest town he grew more nervous. He felt restless and wanted to get out of the carriage to pace.

“If you run you will only prove your own doubts.” Thor looked at him in surprise. They had been quite for most of the trip.

“I know I must, but I fear—I feel apprehensive. “ He said after a moment.

“That is only natural. You know the reason your father thought it best that you come here.”

“He fears I will hurt my brother.”

“Is he right?”

“No! At least I do not think so.”

“That doubt is the reason you must come even if you do not want to, even if it frightens you, and even if your judgment tells you not to come.”

“And then there is audit,” he sighed. He hated paperwork and tediousness.

“Yes, we are here for more than your journey of self-discovery. Remember, we must conduct ourselves with discretion while investigating.”

“Is that the reason for the disguise?” He tugged at the dark locks now on his head. His reflection still startled him.

“Yes. Unfortunately, in order to reach the truth we must be dishonest ourselves.”

“It is almost dark. We're we going to be staying?”

“It does not matter where, as long as it's secured or can be secured.”

“We should have brought guards.”

“That would have drawn attention to us and put us in danger. As it stands we are conducting an audit but it will appear that we do not care. It is only during this time that we are safe. This game will only last a little while but that will serve us long enough to ascertain what kind of falseness to look for.”

“So I am disguised as my errors. Loki would be in tears from laughter if he could see me now.” A silence descended upon them.

“Have you spoken to him?” Vil asked after a moment.

“Only at court, he has avoided me. I will not lie, I have not sought about either.”

“You will need to speak with him. He is your brother. It saddens me to see you drift apart after you grew so close.”

“I must wait uncle. If I cannot be at the brother he deserves that perhaps it is best.”
The driver of the carriage knocked on their compartment. They would soon be in the village and stopping for the night. When he exited the carriage outside of the inn, he quickly realized he would need to reign in his responses. All around him were Jotnar. By contrast his uncle seemed at ease, even happy.

Thor watch a little girl walk down the street, she was dressed as any other that he had seen the capital. To his left a group of boys played. He recognized the game. He had played it with his brother when they were boys.

His stomach twisted. What he would've done…what he had said…and yet he could still feel the revulsion. He went to sleep without eating dinner.

In the morning they set off again. Vil was occupied reading from several books, logs and records. Thor tried to preoccupy himself with the task but could not concentrate. Instead he looked out the window.

“That is a city.” He uttered with surprise as the carriage entered the city limits. He had not expected to encounter the towering spires that looked back at him and bustling streets. He had imagined poorly constructed villages and unrest.

“What did you expect?” Vil asked in amusement though his own expression was awed.

“I think it is best if I say nothing. If I’m wrong with one thing, I’ll be wrong on more. It is best if I first learn and address any preconceptions that I have.” Vil looked pleased at his response.

“That is a good strategy. I hope that you learn much and that things become clear to you shortly. This is more than simply addressing your misconceptions. You and these people share a common heritage. You do yourself a disservice if you simply cast it aside.”

“Where will we be starting?” He craned his neck up as one of the towers appeared to go on for miles. Logically he knew the palace was taller and more impressive. It had been quite some time since he had felt small.

“We are headed to the municipal offices. There we will request a meeting with the city’s leader. Your father has provided several letters that will allow us to begin the audit. Do not think that you will only be going over paperwork for the foreseeable future.

“I need you to venture out into the city. There will be places they do not want us to see. They will put restrictions around us and you must work your way around. This is a twofold effort.”

“Do you expect for me to have any help? I saw the look on these people’s faces.”

“Don’t worry about that. Odin can be ruthless but he also can be quick to gain friends. You are here is your father’s son or at least the man he disguised himself as. You will need to find certain people. It is not crucial to do this -“

“But it will make things easier.”

“Exactly.”

“Uncle Vil, why don’t you serve at court like Uncle Ve does?” Vil smiled.

“I had no grand ambitions. I am the youngest son. As I grew older I decided a life at court is not something that interested me. I still wish to serve Asgard but without the pomp and circumstance that my rank would merit if I had served at a high court. I have the luxury of choice and anonymity
because of my age and name.

“By the time I grew up there was no need for me to prove myself. Odin and Ve had shown that they were more than capable of ruling. I did not have the entire court or country’s interest in my actions. I was freer to do as I wished. So I chose to serve at a lower court. Few people know I am noble, much less the son of the former king.”

“A worthy ambition.” He said and his hand drifted to his belt. Mjolnir did not reside there. Vil’s expression softened.

“You will gain it back.”

“Father did not trust me with her.” He said. “Mother did not protest it.”

“Perhaps it is for the best. Even if you do address these…views you are still prone to anger quickly, Thor.” Thor ducked his head. “We do not need you destroying the buildings here in a fit of pique with Mjolnir even if you did not mean it.”

“Are you not afraid I will murder someone?”

“I have a higher estimation for you than that Thor.”

“I do not.” Thor uttered miserably. He gave his uncle a rueful smile. “Do you know that I would have slaughtered all the Jotnar? I would have done it as my first act as king. I would have rid the Realms of their stain.” Vil hid his reaction, and for that Thor was grateful.

“I did not. That is why we are here. To address those kinds of thoughts and remarks.” He cleared his throat. “You may not find you have much in common with them but that can be said to be true with any people.” The carriage dipped in a pothole in the road.

“There is much wanting here.” Thor grumbled as the carriage steadied itself. “There would never be such holes in the capital.” He glanced at the passing scenery. The buildings were well cared for but not immaculate, he could see various attempts at repairs on buildings from average wear and tear. “The coffers are more than plump enough to address a hole in a road, to address the fact that the road is unpaved at all.”

“That is exactly what we are seeking to address. You must be ready to act on these concerns. You will be their king. The question is are you ready to serve them as they deserve?”

Thor looked at him fiercely. “I will.”

“In time.” Vil added. Thor slumped. It was true. If he uttered the phrase a thousand times over it would be meaningless without change.

Vil nodded at him. “We are not royalty here; we are barely more than well entrenched in the bureaucracy of Asgard. You are starting to work with me, as my nephew.”

“Nepotism.” He muttered with distaste.

“Yes.” He grinned. “There will always be nepotism in our Realm, Thor. You know this.”

“Our ranks are almost always blood based.”

“Yes, lineage will determine who is the governor of a province. It will be bound to one or two families.”
“However that is not excuse for incompetence and unworthiness. The majority of our positions are not inherited. There was a time where even the ruling families could be displaced if there was no suitable heir.”

“Grandfather?” Thor asked.

“Yes. Father was a harsh man; he did not play favorites often. He was soft in only one regard, Mother.”

“Loki said that he did not think he was a nice man or fair to you all from Grandmother’s journals.”

“He is correct.” Vil replied. “Father would have been happier without children. He would have provided them to Mother because she wanted them. I do not think he would have lived an unhappy life if we had not been born. Father only had children because it was required of him as King.”

Thor frowned. He did not like the idea. Father and Mother had wanted children, or so they said. In reality had he been conceived because Father required an heir?

“I know that look. You were wanted Thor-“

“Mother did not.”

“Your parents always wanted children. Their childlessness haunted them at every turn when they tried. You are wanted and loved. Your mother-“

“Mother has addressed it.” he said. “I am still hurt but I do not doubt her love for me.”

Vil nodded. “That is good. Never forget that.” His expression turned vacant. “You would know if you were unwanted or born as we were. Father loved us; do not think that he did not. He never showed much affection for us. It was clear he did not want us though he tried not to show it for all his harshness.

“If he had been the same way with Mother then I could have accepted it easier. When Father was with Mother, and only her, he was a different man.”

Thor nodded. He had never felt like that. His mood felt somewhat lighter. They arrived to the municipal offices; he exited. The guards, all of the Aesir, he realized, glanced at him with suspicion. Uncle Vil entered without preamble, Thor followed. The carriage went off. The driver, trusted and vetted by Uncle Vil, would stay with them for the majority of the journey.

The building looked like many others in the kingdom he had been to, save for the fact that its doors permitted entry to taller individuals. He remained silent as Vil gained them an audience with the city’s leader. It was a slow process, his uncle showed absolutely no annoyance at the wait.

It took over two hours to meet with the local lord, a minor nobleman. When he spoke Thor had the urge to punch him. He exuded arrogance. When he spoke to them, in a condescending and patronizing manner, Thor knew this would not be an easy task for them. He let his uncle speak, and tried to control his temper.

The preliminary audit proceeded slowly. Uncle Vil sent out a message to the capital with his initial findings. He had sent out a decoy meant for interception as well. When the security measures had shown it had been read an hour after it had been sent out.

Thor spent his first week drowned in paperwork. After they had decided how to approach and analyze the information, Thor began venturing into the city gathering information that his uncle
deemed necessary. On the eighth day Vil worked a few hours in the morning, urging Thor enjoy the
day of relaxation.

“I am done with paperwork!” Vil announced as he entered their suites. Thor looked up from where
he had been reading.

“Done, uncle?” Vil sighed.

“At least for today and the better part of tomorrow.” He grumbled.

“This is quite tedious.” Thor agreed and stood. He stretched. “We have not even started.” He
complained. “It will take ages.”

“Yes.” He yawned. “Come, let us enjoy the fine weather today. It feels like I have not seen sunlight
for a century.” Thor nodded. “Are you ready for to eat?”

“Certainly. I am getting peckish.” They ventured into the streets. Thor saw the Jotnar and said
nothing. They simply moved across the streets as any Aesir. He almost startled when he saw the
mixed couples.

They found a crowded shop. Thor wanted to head elsewhere but Vil went in with an oblivious air
about him as he talked about a ridiculous case he had encountered. Thor grumbled and entered after
him. Thor felt uncomfortable. The Jotnar did not even glance at him.

Vil took care of acquiring them a seat. Thor allowed him to order for him. The content and casual
environment around them eventually relaxed him. Thor laughed at Vil’s next tale. It seemed court
was still a ridiculous affair regardless of where it was held.

When their food arrived Thor was surprised by its taste. Vil laughed at his expression. “You have
been neglecting part of your heritage, nephew.” He grinned. “Enjoy the taste of our heritage.”

Thor swallowed. “This is very good.” he agreed. “Why have we not had it at home?”

“Unfortunately not all food is compatible with the Aesir palate.”

“The sweets.” Thor murmured.

“Yes. Your mother was not taken with them for a reason.” Thor nodded. Wondering what other
differences he had never noticed. He wondered to how much he was blind to and thought normal for
Aesir.

“Now, you must try my dish. It is exquisite.” Thor agreed; it was delicious. He looked at the Jotnar;
no one paid them heed. He was the odd one out here.

He wondered if this is how Loki felt at times. Loki…
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

So, like, I apologize for any big errors. I'm a bit over tipsy due to the new year. I wrote this before but I'm not sure my proofreading was worth much!

Anyways, if you see any thing major or just wrong, please let me know.

Happy new year!

Thor exited with office; he glanced behind him. The head of the guards entered after him. The woman sent him a vicious glare. Thor resisted the urge to return it. It would do not good to sour their relations further.

He grasped the envelope firmly. A ‘thief’ had stolen a series of original documents from his very hand as he exited the last city hall. Thor had barely caught him. He knew the thief had not been punished, a chicanery of prosecution had occurred during the remainder of their stays and no doubt dismissed upon their departure.

His stomach rumbled. The inn had good food at least. He thought as he approached the building. A passing tavern caught his attention. The sight of several friends made him long for home, for the warriors three and Sif.

Of Loki, when he would join and truly relax.

He kept moving past the tavern. He would have that again, once the audits ended. He would return to his friends and his brother. A brother he would be worthy of returning to. He startled when a cloaked woman bumped into him. His grip tightened on his package.

“Apologies, madam.” Thor said at once. The woman glanced at him from under her hood.

“Thank you, good sir. It was my clumsiness that caused our incident.” She straightened and said softly: “If you wish for more information on the lords, meet me at the library near your inn before sunset.” She smiled. “As you see, no harm done.” She said meekly.

Thor blinked. “Madam, who are you?”

“A maid, sir, no need to be concerned!” She replied as if reassuring him of her station. Thor nodded and continued forward the inn. When he entered he glanced at his package. Uncle would not appreciate the wrinkles.

A small celebration was taking place in the main room. The barkeep smiled at him, mixed man who had taken to Thor during the first night while he waited for his food, when he entered the dining hall. It was a relationship Thor was thankful when the man stopped several men from trying to enter their rooms, men who tried to act as if they were guests.

“Gautrson!” He was greeted. Thor smiled. “Back again, I see. What will you be having today?”

“You know me well!” Thor replied with equal gusto. “The usual please. Has my uncle come down
at all today?"

"Nay, he has not even called for food since you left early this morn."

"Then please double his meal." The man nodded.

"Of course. I understand the work you are doing requires secrecy but a man must still eat. If I recall you have only bought food yourself." Thor nodded. "It will take longer than normal. The guests in the other room have taken over the kitchen with their orders."

Thor nodded and wondered by the entryway to have a quick look in. One of the celebrants invited him in with glee. Thor entered, careful to keep his presence to a minimum. The participants were cordial and enthusiastic in greeting him. It seemed he had been invited to take part in celebrating in a betrothal.

The time passed quickly despite his unfamiliarity with the guests. Soon he found himself cheering with the crowd with passing little games and announcements. Their excitement was infectious. "Dance, little one, dance!" Thor cheered as a child swayed to the music.

The other adults around him roared in laughter and cheered in agreement. The little Jotun swayed ridiculously, as any toddler would to music. Thor moved away when the server brought his food.

He took it to the suites. The music faded as he climbed the stairs. His uncle nodded at him as he entered, he was pouring over paperwork. Yet again.

"Uncle, I have food." Vil waved him away. "Uncle Vil, you must eat."

"What do you make of this?" He pointed at the parchment. "How many of these records do you think are sealed in their systems?"

"Uncle."

"There is a great deal of money missing here. These figures make no sense. The money spent on food alone would suggest a large base yet the civil records depict only fifteen. This is only taxing office as well."

"Uncle."

"If we can access the more elaborate records we can learn more information as to who had access over the years. There have to be contributions to certain household regardless of-"

"Uncle!" Vil stopped and stared at him. "Please eat. You have not eaten in a days."

"We can last centuries if needed without eating."

"And we grow weaker for it and eventually will die. We cannot act without energy."

"As you wish. I will eat." He took the food and began to eat. "Thor, this is simply a waste of time. We have to press forward." He said through a mouthful of food.

"I know, uncle." Thor replied. He grinned. "I may have something later, uncle. A woman wishes to speak with me privately later this eve."

"What have you found?" He demanded.

"Nothing yet, Uncle. I must first meet with her. She is a maid. Of course I will confirm this."
“Excellent!” Vil exclaimed and proceeded to eat his meal in a hurry. “I am feeling worn but this is just the news I needed to lift my spirits.” Thor smiled.

“All the more reason to eat!” He replied. “To look at things with a fresh eye.” Vil nodded and returned to his paper. Thor sighed. His uncle had taken on the audits with an almost obsessive eye and passion that made Thor feeling wanting.

Tomorrow he would investigate, hope to get enough to satisfy his uncle for the preliminary audit. Then they would move to the next town and the next until his father was satisfied. Finally the college would come.

The music was a distant thing. Thor rose, his uncle did not even glanced at him as he exited the room. Thor walked past the crowd. The little Jotun no longer danced, his mother held him as he slept in her arms. Thor caught his reflection on one of the mirrors on the wall.

Dark hair, dark eyes, he did not look like himself. He looked away. He exited the inn and walked down the road. He could feel several guards eye him as he passed, several of the Aesir guards. This city had fewer Jotnar guards patrolling the streets than the others. It made him nervous. These guards were mostly full Aesir but unworthy of the role.

He walked into the library. The librarian ignored him. The older man seemed more interested looking at his wife or partner across the room. His was enamored. He walked past the modern section into the more remote regions of the small buildings. The woman was nowhere to be found.

He almost roared in frustration until he reached the back. A slight figure sat hidden in a dark corner. She looked nervous.

“Madam?” She jumped and looked at him wild eyed. She relaxed when she saw him.

“I am glad you came.” She tugged nervously at her dress. Thor could tell it was of poor quality for Asgard. The hem was dirty from a long walk. She bowed. “Sir, I am Sága Solsdottir. I work as a maid in the city hall and alderman’s home.”

“Alderman?” He said excited. She nodded. She looked nervous and looked around.

“Please not so loud. I, I am frightened to the alderman. He is not a nice man.” She tugged at her dress. She shrunk and a myriad of emotions crossed her face in the matter of seconds. Thor recognized anger and shame in the array.

“Did he dishonor you?” Thor asked seriously as pulled away from her. She looked away. Then after a moment, nodded.

“Aye. When I first began and many times before your arrival.” She looked at her hands. “He frequents in the leisure houses. He is not an honorable, sir. His home is lavish and his salary should not provide for it.” She reached for her cloak on the seat next to her, beneath it she pulled out a book. “He keeps record of many activities. I took it last week when I realized you and your partner were not-you were acting truly.” She said with enthusiasm.

“There will be justice!” She said with a breathy sigh of hope. “I could not permit him to destroy this.”

“My lady, surely your safety is at stake.”

“I care not. He must be punished. I am tired of being frightened.” She whispered.
“Madam,” Thor reached beneath his cloak and pulled out his money. “Pray, take this for your troubles.”

“I cannot.” She muttered. “If I leave he will know.”

“Then for the turmoil that will follow. I do not wish for you to go wanting.” She hesitated then took it.

“Pray, madam, what is your heritage? Why do you not seek justice?”

“I think you know my heritage, sir. I am barely Aesir despite my appearance. I do not risk work as I doubt I would find another position if I accused the alderman, even with the Jotnar. They do not want trouble.” Thor nodded.

“I know you have doubts.” She pulled back her sleeve. “Does this not provide proof?” They continued speaking and with every question, Thor believed her. When they parted, he waited to follow her. She was nervous and her path long. She ventured into home that was in ill repairs. He waited until the son rose in the morn. She left, dressed as a maid.

She went to the alderman’s home. He watched and knew her words true when the guards did not treat her well. She entered through the servant’s entrance. Carefully, he began his journey back to the inn. He entered the suite. He did not read it, much of the history was too old to be of any use and he already knew the generalities. No, he stared at the portrait of his own grandfather and grandmother – young and recently wed. Both were imposing and fierce in the portrait.

He would stare and try to see himself in her. Try to see himself in his grandfather. These were his father’s parents. He sat and thought of his past and his future. Vil was sleeping over his latest round of paperwork. Thor roused him.

“Hm?”

“Uncle, time for bed.”

“Of course.” Vil replied, sounding exhausted. Luckily he did not discuss any more politics and simply went to bed. His uncle had not slept much either once he had started seeing the extent of the corruption in the sector. Thor was quick to follow; he kept his grasp on the records the maid had provided.

When he awoke his uncle still slept. He secured the journal to their weapons locker and enchanted the case closed. He set out in search of more information on the alderman and following up on concerns his uncle had discussed that he had not been able to seek the day before. When he arrived at the leisure house, he was not allowed in but escorted out. Thor pushed forward and found nothing but angry faces and threats. When nightfall came all Thor had to show for it was wasted time. He returned to the inn, wishing they could just leave this city. Leave and be able to stop seeing failures at every turn.

“Uncle, I cannot get anywhere.” Thor snarled as he entered their suite. Vil looked up Thor “I was escorted out of everyplace I sought. Escorted out!”

Vil rubbed his face. “It is getting harder to complete even the most preliminary audit. Word has gotten out that we are investigating in more depth than we had originally indicated. Now it will be
difficult without force.” He sighed. “We barely even covered the region. Four out of six cities. One town.”

“It hardly was extensive too.” Thor began. He was not prepared for the flash of anger that crossed his uncle’s face. “

“An extensive audit would take months, even years. We were to establish the groundwork for that. There is corruption here, Thor! Do you not care?”

Thor reared back in surprise before his own anger surged through him. “Do not accuse me of being uncaring. I am trying. I cannot use rank or force. I am trying as any other citizen might.” He snapped.

“Then act like it! We have been here for months and I have seen naught a change in you.” Vil said. “Do you not care? For your people? For your own lineage? Does it matter that these people are being unjustly treated in our kingdom? You are to be king, the heir to the throne, and you act as if it does not matter.”

“Do not accuse me again of being thoughtless to such a degree again, Uncle.” Thor said coldly. “Or else I will fight you, elder or not.” Vil rose and hissed:

“Such behavior is unbecoming of a prince. Your entire conduct has not befitted your station. I am starting to understand why Odin has had his doubts about you.” Vil said furiously. “You are not worthy to be king. Your actions are not worthy of your house.”

“Do you believe accusations are?” Thor retorted. He felt his face heat to his embarrassment. “You call me uncaring but I have done everything you have asked, uncle! Everything and I tried fore more. I have tried. I went out and searched. Tell me what you would have me do if not by force?

“Is that not what everyone is afraid of? That Thor is a half-wit brute who can act only in violence? That I will slay my brother because he is not my brother?” His voice trembled and hot tears spill down his face.

“I have tried. I do not need acknowledgments or praises for trying to do what is right. Yet Uncle, why should I bother if I am expected to fail?”

Vil froze. He bowed his head. “Forgive me. I had no right to accuse you as I had. I am tired and short in my temper. That is no excuse, but the cause.” He rose and went to him. Thor did not expect the embrace. “I did not mean it. You are a good man.”

“Am I?”

“Yes. You are my nephew. I would never have come with you if I doubted it.”

“Thank you, uncle.” Vil pulled back.

“We will leave in a few days. There is nothing else we can do. No, any further searches would be pointless.” He rubbed his face. “We should head toward the college. We will inform Odin, then send out the troops and auditors to reclaim the region. In due time.”

Thor nodded. “Believe me, uncle. I understand the strain.”

“Now, I have been a bad uncle. Very bad if I place thought into my actions these past few months. We came here to help you and I tossed that aim aside without realizing.” He sat back down. “Tell me, have you reached any new perceptions?”
“Few uncle, few. I have tried.”

“If there are realizations change will come. This is never a quick process, Thor.” Vil sighed. Thor headed to their weapons locker and pulled out the log.

“True uncle, now I hope this will aid us.” Vil frowned.

“What is this?”

“Do you recall the maid I described?”

“You have proof?” Vil sounded excited. “Oh, Thor. I am unworthy to be your uncle.” He breathed as he glanced through the journal. “Unworthy.”

“Then we both must search for betterment, uncle.” Vil glanced at him.

“Aye.” He said softly. Thor felt the tension slip from him. Forward. He would need to look forward. As his uncle said, it would be a difficult path.

Riddled with obstacles, even from his family.

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