Silent Lies

by CsillaRising

Summary

The realm of Asgard has been forbidden to all of Jotunheim for eons. Unfortunately this doesn't stop Loki, armed with his powerful magic and even more powerful curiosity, from going there. But the prince of Asgard is nothing like Loki expected, and soon he is wrapped up in a whirlwind of quests and adventures that he never asked for. Chaos ensues.
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! I'm new to both the fandom (as far as writing fanfiction goes) and AO3 (this will be my first story on here), so hopefully it turns out okay! Enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter One

Loki readjusted the hood of his cloak to further cover his features, cautious despite his new Asgardian appearance. If anyone caught the youngest prince of Jotunheim in Asgard, he reminded himself, there would be Hel to pay. But unfortunately his caution was strongly overruled by his growing impatience and curiosity.

There were so many new things to see; the streets teemed with dirty, hairy commoners haggling over prices and drunken soldiers (equally as hairy, he noted) telling seemingly uproariously funny tales—most of which were also suggestive, if their raunchy motions were any indication. Loki thrilled at his chance to move among them undetected.

He had oft heard stories of the notorious Asgardian swine—how they butchered the old and infirmed, tortured innocents, and ate the flesh of children who misbehaved. So naturally he had been repulsed, upset, and confused upon discovering (quite by accident) that he had Asgardian blood. There had been many rumors about the witch queen Farbauti, of course, but the fact that he had been half Asgardian had been a closely kept secret.

“I loved your bearer very much, child,” Laufey, his sire, had explained the night Loki had stumbled upon the royal lineage records, “and you equally so. Much you hear of Asgard is nonsense, filth drudged up and spread by angry soldiers and townspeople affected by the war. But an era of peace is upon us now, and it’s past time to lay the lies to rest.”

Loki grimaced, “They’re not lies! Byleistr showed me those pictures of Thrym defending the city from the Asgardian barbarians!”

Laufey looked fondly down at his youngest son, who stared defiantly back at him. “Paintings, rendered by a biased artist.”

Loki ‘hmphed’ in disbelief and folded his arms into a familiar sulk. Laufey’s lip twitched up in amusement. He had, perhaps, been too lenient with the child. It was no secret that he favored his tiny son, who at six feet stood at least three feet shorter than the average Jotun. But Loki’s beauty was also no secret, and now that he had come of age Laufey was beginning to fear for his own sanity. For Loki, who was vain, proud, willful, and more than a little spoiled, took great delight in parading himself in front of what seemed like an unending line of hopeful suitors.

Laufey carefully smoothed back a lock of his child’s lovely black hair, upsetting one of the carefully entwined strands of gold and emerald braided into it. Loki immediately aimed a glare at his sire and caught the braid before it could unravel completely. “Loki-child, what am I to do with you?
Helblindi tells me you have been terrorizing the servants again.”

Loki smirked, “Helblindi talks too much. But you’re changing the subject. Why did you not tell me of my monstrous heritage?” His crimson eyes swam with barely concealed loathing.

Laufey sighed resignedly, “Because there was nothing to tell. You are Loki, you are my son, and that is all that matters. Besides,” he raised a brow, “It is likely your Asgardian blood that gave you the hair you’re so fond of.” Jotun hair, while confined to their heads, was typically unruly. Many—particularly soldiers—chose to shave it completely.

Loki toyed with a lock of his hair and considered his words. “I suppose they can’t be entirely bad then,” he conceded at last. Laufey hid his exasperation at his child’s vanity, and allowed Loki to chatter on about the laziness of the servants, taking note of his more relaxed posture. His son would be fine.

It wasn’t until nearly two weeks later that Loki, armed with all of the knowledge of the library of Jotunheim on the subject of Asgard (which admittedly, wasn’t much), began to consider the unthinkable.

Asgard was off limits to all Jotnar unless by direct invitation of one of the royal family. But limitations and laws had never stopped Loki before, and he saw no reason why they should now. Gifted with unusually strong seidr, Loki was able to traverse the pathways of Yggdrasill as he pleased. The first time he had gone to Svartalfheim, a tingling sensation had overcome him as—to his horror—his skin began to bleach from blue to pale, creamy beige. He had used his magic to halt the progress and retain his Jotun form, but until now he’d had no explanation for what had happened to him.

Now he reasoned that his body was able to adapt to warmer climates by taking on Asgardian properties. He decided to experiment with it.

Loki stood before the floor to ceiling sheet of smooth ice in his room that reflected his appearance perfectly. He began to heat the air around him, careful to contain the temperature change to several centimeters around his skin so that he did not melt the ice. Loki watched, fascinated, as his appearance began to alter.

First his skin turned to a smooth cream, obscuring the silvery markings that proclaimed his heritage. Then his ebony horns disappeared, the gold rings and chains that had adorned them clattering to the ground beside him. His hair remained unchanged.

Breathless, Loki approached his reflection, examining his features. They, too, were similar, barring one notable exception—startlingly emerald eyes gleamed back at him from the ice, surrounded by thick black lashes.

Loki grinned and stepped back, satisfied that he was still every bit as beautiful in Aesir form.

And so within the next week, he had cloaked himself in his magic and left for Asgard.

---------

Loki jumped back in alarm as a wagon full of some sort of foliage rumbled past him, causing him to stumble in an uncharacteristic moment of clumsiness. He fell backwards into a warm body, and before he could register what was happening, arms encircled his waist, stopping his fall. Loki’s eyes blew open wide and he hissed at the contact, quickly untangling himself and regaining his footing.
“Hey, hey, no need for that—it’s not like I was trying to cop a fee…” the cheerful voice trailed off as Loki spun around to glare at him. The slender, brightly dressed Aesir, who had pale yellow hair with matching hair on his face around his mouth slowly began to smile. His dancing blue eyes slowly worked their way down and then back up again. Loki blanched as he realized that the hood of his cloak had fallen back. Feeling exposed but not wanting to show weakness or fear, he stared impassively back at the man.

“Well now, you must be new to town,” the Asgardian practically purred at him, “I’m sure I’d remember a face like yours.” He smiled another dashing smile and, before Loki could react, he grabbed one of his hands and lifted it to his lips. Loki recoiled in horror and disgust. The man seemed amused by his reaction. “And your name is…?”


“Luke,” the Aesir grinned, “It’s truly a pleasure to meet you. I’m Fandral. But don’t worry… not all of the stories they tell of me are true.” He winked. Loki just stared back at him, lost.

When he didn’t respond, Fandral blinked. “You have heard of me, yes?” The name sounded vaguely familiar. Likely Loki had read it somewhere in one of the tomes, but as he couldn’t recall where, he remained silent. Fandral clutched his chest in mock horror, eyes wide. “You wound me! For one as beautiful as you not to recognize my name is, well, a disaster of unmentionable proportions! I shall have to rectify that immediately.”

Confidence bolstered by the compliment, Loki finally gave him a thin smile. “I believe you already have.”

Before Fandral could respond, another Aesir approached them and cut him off. “Norns, not another one Fandral. It is not even midday yet.” The newcomer had stern, commanding features and shoulder-length dark hair. His equally dark eyes assessed Loki before moving back to his friend. “You are late again. Everyone is waiting. Come.”

With that, he nodded a greeting to Loki and then turned and walked back the way he’d come.

Fandral turned back to Loki, smiling brilliantly again. “That’s Hogun. Forgive him, he’s not good with words.” He paused, eyes flickering between Loki and the direction his friend had gone. “Say, would you like to join us? I’m certain no one would mind such lovely company.”

Loki frowned slightly and tilted his chin upwards. “What makes you think I do not have better things to do?”

An eyebrow shot up. “The fact that you were wondering the streets looking lost before you fell into me gave me a clue.”

Loki flushed. “Perhaps I was merely unsure of where I was supposed to meet a friend,” he snapped.

Fandral grinned again, “Okay, where at? I can point you in the right direction. The tavern, perhaps?”

Loki breathed a quiet sigh of relief at the chance to get away, despite the fact that he didn’t find this particular Asgardian… completely disgusting. He didn’t want to get to know anyone too well, or it would become clear he was unfamiliar with Aesir customs. “Yes. My friend is at the tavern.”

Fandral’s smile took on a mischievous glint. “Fantastic. That’s where I’m going. Come on.”

Before Loki could protest Fandral took his arm and began leading him through the crowded streets. Despite the fact that the sights and scents weren’t completely new to him—Asgard wasn’t entirely
different from several of the other realms—Loki was overwhelmed. The mere fact that he was in Asgard and that if he were found he would put the peace of their two realms in serious peril made everything feel dangerous. But the more Loki thought about it, the more he was warming to the feeling. Soon he was keeping pace with Fandral of his own accord. When the man gave him a curious look, Loki shot him a half-smile. He was beginning to feel more like himself.

“Here we are,” Fandral stopped in front of a building that seemed to be a focal point in the city. He bowed and gestured to the entrance. “After you.”

Loki swept past him.

The building’s interior was dark and noisy with flames flickering merrily in the giant hearth at its heart. As Loki entered a brawl broke out to his left, sending one of the burly men crashing backwards into the support beam directly next to him. The building shook as its denizens cheered and raised their glasses. Loki remained frozen to the spot.

Fandral appeared next to him, a wicked grin on his lips. Loki decided to drop the pretense of having a friend to meet in this place. He did not particularly want to be left on his own here, even if it meant suffering Fandral’s presence for an extended period of time. There was pressure on Loki’s back and it took him a moment to realize that Fandral had placed his hand there, steering the stunned man towards a table in the back corner.

It was slightly quieter there, Loki noted with relief, and the people seemed better behaved. The dark-haired man from outside sat furthest away, giving the two newcomers a brooding stare over his mead. The closest was an attractive female, her shining dark hair pulled back into a tail. She perked up at their arrival, giving Loki a look that was one-third amused and two-thirds exasperated. “Hogun mentioned that was why you were late,” according to her gesture, “that” apparently meant Loki. “Did you have to bring it with you?”

Loki scowled. “Well, it certainly wasn’t my idea,” he snapped, acid in his voice.

The woman raised a brow, seeming more entertained than insulted. The large, red-headed, bearded man across the table let out a loud guffaw. “Fandral, you’re losing your touch!” he bellowed at the slender man by Loki’s side. Fandral wrapped his arm around Loki’s waist, pulling him close. Loki promptly stamped on his foot and gave him an elbow to the gut. This caused him to double over and the woman with the dark hair to burst out laughing.

Far from seeming angry, however, Fandral just beamed up at him. “He just hasn’t gotten to know me yet. He’ll warm up.”

Loki scowled. “Well, it certainly wasn’t my idea,” he snapped, acid in his voice.

Fandral, however, didn’t stop smiling. It was beginning to get irritating. “Ah, but not impossible. I like those odds.” Before Loki could correct him, Fandral grabbed his shoulder and pushed him towards the bench. The woman slid over to make room for them. Loki attempted to avoid sitting entirely, but after almost getting pulled into Fandral’s lap he settled for a seat between him and the woman. At least they didn’t smell quite as horrible as he’d imagined they would.

“So everyone, this is Luke. Luke, this is Volstagg,” Fandral pointed across the table to the red-head, “you already met Hogun,” Hogun grunted and went back to his mead, “And of course the lovely Lady Sif,” the woman next to Loki smiled slightly. Loki cocked his head a bit, considering. Sif. He’d definitely heard that name before somewhere, but it had been a while ago.
“So I thought you said everyone was here!” Fandral said accusingly to Hogun, “You made me feel guilty for nothing.”

“Oh please, I’m not sure you know what guilt is.” Sif rolled her eyes. “He’s busy, might not make it today.”

“I thought we were making final plans! So are we pushing it off then?” When Sif shrugged, Fandral sighed. “Ah well. At least I won’t have any competition, anyway!” he aimed a roguish wink at Loki, who studiously ignored him.

As they continued their inane jabbering, Loki assessed them in turn. Volstagg was a filthy pig, stuffing his face and spitting food when he got excited, Hogun was barely articulate, speaking almost entirely in grunts and nods, and Fandral was a disgusting degenerate, making suggestive comments nearly as often as he opened his mouth. The only semi-intelligent one was Sif. At least she seemed to be the leader. Loki sat quietly stubborn in their midst, wishing he hadn’t decided to make this journey. Clearly Asgardians were not worth his time.

Finally Sif removed some sort of scroll from the pack on the floor next to her. Loki perked up as she smoothed it across the table and revealed it to be a map. It took him all of five seconds to identify it as a map of southern Svartalfheim, despite its inaccuracies.

“So despite the fact that we were previously going to start here, I thought it might be better to begin at this point over here.” Sif tapped a clearing in a forested area. “That way, we can sneak into this entrance here and take Jæghar by surprise—”

Loki snorted. He met her responding glower with a level stare and smiled in mock apology. Sif’s look darkened. “Do you have something to say?”

The corner of Loki’s mouth twitched. “No, of course not, not if you have a death wish. Please, do go on.”

Sif crossed her arms and sat back, waiting for him.

Loki reached over and pulled the map towards him. “There are multiple problems with your plan. But first, I must ask—have you ever encountered a dragon before?”

Volstagg sputtered indignantly. “Of course! We slew the vicious drake that was terrorizing Winelhal!”

Loki scoffed. “I heard of that. That beast could barely be classified as a true dragon. Jæghar will hear you coming a mile off. Besides, he is no fool. Do you think he does not guard the back entrance to his caverns? That he has taken no precautions against thoughtless intruders? You will set off at least twenty magical alarms even before you make it to the entrance… if you make it there.”

Sif’s eyes were coldly analytic. “We are not novices. Of course we realize there are tricks and traps. But we have ways of detecting them.”

“Such as?” Loki asked, genuinely curious.

Sif shifted uncomfortably and looked over to Fandral, who shrugged. “Some sort of magic, enchanted rock. Glows when it detects magic.”

Loki’s lip twitched in irritation. “That’s very well and good, if you were playing hide-and-find with a child mage. But you’re talking about a dragon that has seen several millennia. Such artifacts only have a certain level of ability, and all of them can be tricked if you’re skilled enough. And Jæghar
The hostility had gone from Sif’s face as she now looked him over, considering. “What would you suggest?”

Loki blinked at her. “Well, you must have a mage in your party. Several, if possible. Otherwise you have no chance of taking Jæghar by surprise. Dragons are innately magical beings.”

Silence fell over the table as they all appeared to reflect on his words. Loki glanced back down at the map and couldn’t resist making one more correction. “And the entrance is not encompassed by the Avridral Forest. It is several kilometers to the west, falling within the boundaries of the Darken Wood instead.”

Volstagg leaned over the table in triumph. “I told you I couldn’t find it! I didn’t get lost—the map was wrong!”

Fandral grinned and held his hands up in a defensive position, “To be fair, friend, we didn’t think you were lost—we just thought you may have gotten tired, stopped for a lunch break, and then decided to turn around and cover it up by saying you were lost.”

Loki snickered as this began a full out argument. He thought back over something Volstagg had said earlier while they bickered and frowned slightly. “You said you slew the dragon of Winelhal, but I thought that it was defeated by some of Asgard’s great heroes.”

The argument halted into a stunned silence. Hogun placed his drink down on the table and leaned forward. “And who exactly do you think we are?”

Loki looked at each of them in turn. They stared back. Certainly they didn’t expect him to believe that they were some of Asgard’s finest?

“You have truly never heard of Lady Sif and the Warriors Three?” Fandral asked finally.

Loki stilled. Yes, he had. No wonder he had thought their names sounded familiar. How had he forgotten? True, he hadn’t paid much attention to Asgardian battles, focusing rather on their culture and lifestyle, but… Loki wet his lips and tried to come up with a response.

Before he could think of one, however, the door to the tavern banged open.

“Friends!” a great, booming voice rang enthusiastically across the room. “Good news! Father has cancelled the council meeting this afternoon. Let us attend to our plans!”

Loki swung himself around to look at the newcomer and froze. All of the blood drained from his face. For while it was easy to mistake most Aesir warriors for each other or to forget which ones were which, there was no mistaking this one.

And the crown prince’s striking blue eyes had fallen on Loki.

Chapter End Notes

So as far as sexuality in this fic goes, there are preferences but no prejudices. Hopefully it was pretty clear that Jotun are all one gender in this story, but just in case it wasn’t I’m putting that here.
I hope you all liked it! Fair warning, my stories tend to be rather lengthy. And by judging everything I want to happen, this one looks like it is assuredly not going to be an exception.

Let me know what you think! :)
Chapter Two

Loki sat paralyzed for a moment, caught between the urge to simply teleport away or slouch down and hope for Prince Thor’s attention to wander elsewhere. In the seconds that he debated, however, Thor had crossed the tavern in great strides.

“Who is this, then?” The Prince of Asgard asked, smiling as he took a seat at the head of the table.

Fandral sighed dramatically and looked at Loki with mournful eyes. “This always happens when I find a pretty one.” He turned back to Thor, “I saw him first, so I get first call.”

Thor just grinned back at his friend, “Not if he likes me more,” he teased, winking at Loki.

“No!” Loki blurted quickly, before realizing how insulting he sounded as the smile slipped from Thor’s face. “I just meant, uhm, I must be going anyway. It was truly a pleasure to meet all of you—”

He stood up so abruptly he caught his heel on the bench and would have fallen over backwards if it weren’t for Fandral’s quick reflexes. Yanking himself out of the man’s grip, Loki tried to compose himself. He felt oddly hot and off-kilter, his thoughts in an uncharacteristic jumble. He usually was able to keep his cool in stressful situations, so what was wrong with him? It didn’t help that Thor’s gaze hadn’t left him, and that those truly stunning blue eyes were perhaps even bluer than the azure sky outside. His hair was lovely, too, like molten gold spilling down over broad, muscled shoulders, and that skin… Loki could see why the Aesir had been nicknamed the Golden Prince.

It wasn’t until Fandral let out a truly pathetic groan that Loki realized he was staring. Thor was grinning again, and the arrogant, smug, self-confident look on his face made Loki want to hit him. Which, he quickly reminded himself, would be a very bad idea. It was time to go.

“As I was saying, my family is expecting visitors today, and I must be there to greet them. If you’ll excuse me,” he stepped over the bench and turned towards the door.

“Wait!” Sif shot to her feet as well, “Surely you can stay just a moment longer? I’m certain that Thor would love to hear your opinion on Jæghar’s abilities—“
Loki stopped short. “It’s not my opinion,” he told her exasperatedly, irritated with her seeming inability to comprehend. “It’s fact. It’s also a fact that Jæghar is going to wipe the countryside with your pathetic little party if you don’t include a mage. But by all means, do try.”

Thor was on his feet now, too, and he was frowning. “Is that so?” he rumbled, and Loki swore that somehow his eyes had clouded over and turned grey. *Clouded* seemed an accurate analogy, as Loki thought he heard the sky give a distant growl in response to the prince’s darkened mood.

He hesitated and might have amended that statement had Thor not continued. “Pathetic, are we? What’s truly pathetic is those mages who hide behind *seidr* to keep themselves safe. We have no need of such tricks to accomplish our goals.”

“No?” Loki snapped, “Well then, please go right ahead and plow your way through Jæghar’s lair. I can’t wait to hear about how the crown prince of Asgard died valiantly twenty yards outside of the dragon’s cave, face down in the grass.”

Thor flushed, and this time Loki definitely heard the sky grumble. The tavern had gone mostly quiet as the parties at the surrounding tables had turned to watch the showdown.

A showdown which, a distant panicked voice inside of Loki was reminding him, should absolutely not be taking place. His pride overruled it however, and he met Thor’s steely gaze with his own. Through the rushing sound in his ears he thought he heard Sif murmur something to Thor about Loki himself being a mage, and Thor’s expression softened just the slightest bit around the edges as it turned from hostile to determined.

“Very well then,” the Asgardian prince growled, “You will simply come with us tomorrow and prove that your magic is as useful as you say. We will make a bet of it. If you get to the sword that we search for inside of Jæghar’s lair first, I will concede that *seidr* has some use in battle, but if we make it to the sword first, you must admit that physical force is superior.”

Loki huffed and crossed his arms, “Fine. That shouldn’t be a problem.”

“We have an agreement then. We’ll meet at the stables tomorrow at first light. Be there, or I will assume you admit defeat.”

Loki scowled, “Why would I, when it will be so easy to crush you?” Before Thor could give his indignant response, Loki transported himself back to Jotunheim. He wished he could see Thor’s face as he was left staring at empty air.

It wasn’t until he had cooled down several moments later that he realized what he had agreed to.

*****

Thor blinked several times, staring at the space that up until a moment ago had housed the beautiful but irritating man. He glanced over to see that his friends were just as surprised, and he scowled. “A neat trick,” he grumbled begrudgingly as he reclaimed his seat at the table.

Sif and Fandral followed his lead, exchanging a glance.

“So, uh, that was Luke,” Fandral continued brightly, “Just in case you were at all interested in his name.”

Thor hid his grimace in the mug of ale that one of the servers had delivered and pretended as though he hadn’t failed to acquire that basic information earlier. Something about that man—*Luke*—had gotten under his skin. Maybe it was the dismissive tone in his voice when he spoke of their (his)
abilities when he should have been admiring, or perhaps just the arrogant look on his face as he announced that they needed a mage to defeat the dragon. Honestly, a mage. Thor thought of all of the magi that he had met and couldn’t think of a single one who would be helpful in a dangerous situation.

Not that mages didn’t have their place in society. After all, his own mother was a renowned healer and seer, and she was greatly respected. But those gentle arts were certainly not fit for a battle. No, Thor thought, they would outdo the mage with no real effort. He placed the mug down on the table and stared at it thoughtfully. He would let the man down easily, of course. Thor was certain that once Luke saw his fighting abilities in action, those pretty green eyes would look at him with admiration instead of disdain. He could already imagine that lovely gaze upon him, that expression softened in awe. Luke would, perhaps, place one of those soft, pale hands on Thor’s arm as he leaned forward to breathlessly exclaim over Thor’s power, that silky black hair sweeping forward to brush against him.

He would like that. Thor shifted slightly on the bench and smiled. He would like that a lot.

******

Loki paced his room, furious with himself. Why had he agreed to such an idiotic thing? Challenging the crown prince of Asgard, honestly, it was like he had regressed several hundred years of age. True, the man was infuriating, but that was no excuse to lose self control. It would still be satisfying to hear Thor admit Loki’s superiority though.

Perhaps just this one time wouldn’t hurt anything. After his victory, he would never return to Asgard. This was only to prove a point, after all.

Satisfied with this conclusion, Loki called the servants in to ready him for bed. He would need to go to sleep early if he were to rise before dawn the next day.

*****

The next morning as the sun broke over the rolling hills of Asgard, Thor paced the stables while Sif, Fandral, Volstagg and Hogun watched.

The mage was late. Despite his taunt that the man would be too cowardly to show his face, Thor found himself disappointed when he didn’t appear. He paced for several more seconds before suddenly Sif sucked in a breath.

“Thor,” she said slowly, “You did let the guards know we were expecting a visitor, didn’t you?”

*****

Loki was angry.

Angry, in fact, didn’t quite sum up his feelings at the moment. After a stressful morning (although he was reluctant to acknowledge anything as ‘morning’ when the sun had yet to rise) of trying to find something to wear that was both suitably Asgardian-looking as well as function for battle, he had realized he had no idea where the palace stables were in Asgard. This moment of realization had struck as one of his servants was in the middle of styling his hair (a sensible braid comprised of several smaller braids which were wound with golden accents) and he had to sit and stew in his panic lest he messed it up.

The only places he could teleport to were ones he had already visited, or ones that had been painted accurately enough to envision. This meant that the places he could go in Asgard were limited to the courtyard outside of the palace gates, which he had used the day before, the tavern, or the throne
room. *That* certainly wasn’t an option, which explained why Loki was now arguing heatedly with the idiot guards on duty outside of the gates.

“I told you, Prince Thor himself asked me to meet him at the stables! If you do not let me pass, I will be forced to report you.” Loki was bluffing, of course, and the guards seemed to know it. If Loki didn’t show, Thor would just assume he had backed out. This thought frustrated him even further.

“Fine!” Loki snapped, sliding between the guards to catch a glimpse of the castle beyond. He would just have to do this the less-than-legal way and hope that he found Thor before the guards caught up with him. Just as one of them reached to grab him he ripped through the palace’s magical defenses and transported himself into the courtyard beyond the wall.

He could hear the guards shouting out an alarm as, wasting no time, he picked a direction and darted off. The moment Loki was out of their sight he paused to catch his breath and shifted his features. The men running by gave no passing glance to the young blonde man who slipped out from beneath a tree.

Loki caught his breath for several seconds—it wouldn’t due to appear to be running from something—and then casually strode over to what looked like the training grounds to get directions to the stable. He was just about to ask one of the men eagerly watching a sparring match when the crown prince barreled past on the opposite side of the ring, followed by his lackeys. It looked as though they were headed for the palace gates.

Loki glowered. It was about time the fool remembered he had a visitor.

Turning on his heel, Loki stalked off after them.

*****

Thor arrived at the gates to find that the guards on duty had sounded the alarm. “What’s going on?” he demanded of the flustered low-ranking captain.

“There was a man at the gates who forced entry. My apologies, your highness, my best men are on it now. We will have him apprehended in no time.”

“Really? Your best men?” a blonde that had appeared while the man spoke sneered over Thor’s shoulder. “Well, that’s rather disappointing. I thought the palace would be better manned.”

Thor frowned at him, “To insult the guards to their faces is a fool’s move,” he reprimanded.

“Says the fool who forgot to tell his guards he was expecting a guest,” the blonde retorted.

Thor could feel himself turning red, “That was—I was distracted with—I didn’t—“ he stopped himself short as he realized something. “How did you know about that?”

The grin on the man’s face grew slightly devious as his features rearranged themselves before their eyes. A second later, it was Luke who stood looking defiantly up at him. Immediately all of the guards surrounding them drew their weapons. Luke’s grin only grew. “Oh yes, I see now,” his condescending tone belied his innocent smile, “They *are* good.”

*****

Nearly a quarter hour and a sheepish explanation later, Thor led the party of six back to the stables. Several times Loki thought he saw the Aesir prince glance back at him, as if trying to puzzle him out. Loki was sure he was imagining Thor’s too-blue gaze flitting down to his leather-clad legs and
lingering on his hair. Especially since every other look from him seemed to be frustrated and disapproving.

“You know, antics like that aren’t going to make you many friends,” Fandral teased Loki lightly, falling in step beside him.

“I’m not here to make friends,” Loki corrected him, “I’m here to prove a point. Which, I might add,” he said, raising his voice so that Thor would hear him, “I believe I’ve already done rather well, considering I broke into the palace without getting caught.”

Thor scowled, “A fine trick, yes, but the challenge was to prove that your magic was useful in battle, not useful for sneaking or lurking about.” Loki gave him a poisoned look, but he didn’t respond. He would just have to show Thor up later.

As they neared the stables, the musky smell of horses overcame them and Loki began to get nervous. He had ridden many beasts on many worlds, but horses were only bred on Asgard, Vanaheim, Midgard, and Alfheim. Of the ones he had been able to visit, there had never been an occasion to ride.

“You realize, of course, there’s no need for all of this,” Loki waved his hand dismissively at the stables. “I can just transport us there with my magic.”

Thor stopped short and for just the briefest moment Loki thought he saw interest and respect in his eyes. “Truly? You can take us with you?” He sounded skeptical.

“Of course I can,” Loki said irritably.

“That would save us a lot of time and energy,” Sif admitted, curious. “But I’ve never heard of anyone with that ability before. How is it done?”

“You must be touching me or touching someone who is in contact with me. I will take care of everything else.” Loki held out his hand towards her and tried not to flinch as Thor grasped his arm. Fandral placed a hand on Loki’s other soldier, though it quickly crept towards the nape of his neck until Loki was forced to give him a warning glare. Fandral just responded with a merry grin and a shrug, though he returned his hand to a less intimate position.

Hogun seemed more reluctant to join in, his dark gaze distrustful, until Volstagg threw an arm around him and dragged him forward, joyously exclaiming that they would be home in time to have dinner with his family.

Loki breathed out slowly, trying to push his mind away from the place where Thor touched him and focus on the forests of Svartalfheim. As he channeled his energy through the void to open up their pathway, he heard Thor suck in a breath as simultaneously Sif gasped. A moment later his magic rushed through them all, whisking their energy through the paths that Loki had opened to Svartalfheim.

Chapter End Notes

So I'm not sure how I feel about this chapter, but I just needed to get it out so that I can
get to the next part. Hopefully it is better than I believe it to be, and I guess I can always go back and tweak it later. I also certainly don't intend to make Thor a complete idiot, so hopefully he didn't come across that way. Sorry to those of you who may have been hoping that they'd hit it off right away! They'll get there.

And don't worry! You won't have to wait another 2 years for Chapter Three. ;)

Next Up: Loki may have been a bit liberal while boasting of his experience.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Loki, Thor, Sif, and the Warriors Three encounter the dragon, and their adventures begin.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter Three

Thor’s stomach lurched unpleasantly as he hit the ground and staggered to remain standing. He swallowed a few times and looked around to find that his friends seemed to be having similar problems. Of the six of them, only Thor himself, Luke, and Hogun had remained on their feet. Hogun had his eyes closed and was slowly taking deep breaths. Sif was seated with her head between her knees and looked a bit green. Volstagg was heaving behind some bushes, and a moment later Fandral went to join him after trying to regain his footing too quickly.

Thor glared over at Luke, who seemed to be watching the whole scene with some amusement. When he caught Thor looking at him he just shrugged apologetically. “I forgot, it takes some getting used to.”

Thor opened his mouth to retort, but then quickly thought better of it as his light breakfast threatened to make a reappearance. Instead he gritted his teeth and waited for the discomfort to pass.

It was at least ten minutes later before everyone felt up to moving on. It wasn’t until this point that Thor suddenly realized something. “Where are we? We were supposed to go to Jæghar’s lair, not the middle of some forest.”

“What, did you want me to transport us right in on top of the dragon?” Luke sighed in exasperation and proceeded to talk to Thor as though he were a youngling. “Not that I think you throwing up all over Jæghar wouldn’t impress him, but I thought it might be a good idea to not immediately alert him to our plan until we had some sort of strategy.”

Thor fumed inwardly but resolved himself to keeping a (relatively) straight face. “Of course I didn’t expect you to put us right in front of the dragon. But where is the lair from here? Is it just beyond those trees there? Because to me, it looks as though we are quite deep in the forest, and I can’t see any clearing or mountainous area where a dragon might reside.”

Was he imagining it, or did Luke look uneasy? But the look passed so quickly Thor thought he must have imagined it, because seconds later Luke was imperiously waving them forwards and marching off into the thickening trees. Sif cast a concerned look over at Thor, though, so he thought it probably wasn’t just in his own mind.

*****

In all of the books he had read, Loki was pretty certain that Jæghar’s lair was right about here somewhere. He knew it was supposed to be near the southern tree line, and close to the village of
Annaeth, and he was fairly certain that was about where he had taken them. The last time he had been in this area was several years ago, however, and his party had stopped and turned around before going all of the way to the village. Loki was well aware that the others seemed to be under the impression that he’d been here before, and as he had no desire to shatter that delusion, he decided to keep that information to himself.

Unfortunately it seemed as though he wasn’t as close as he thought he’d been.

“So, uh, Loki darling,” Fandral sidled up next to him and gave him a charming smile, “Do you know where we’re going exactly? I mean, not to be blunt or anything, but it’s been a little while and we seem kind of lost.”

Loki frowned and glanced back at Thor, who had stopped and was giving him a suspicious look. He turned back to Fandral and used his most haughty voice, “Of course I know where we’re going. It won’t be long now.”

“At this rate it would have been faster to use the Bifrost and ride the horses,” Thor said disapprovingly.

“Really?” Loki whirled about to address the prince this time, “It’s been all of a quarter mark, and you think that’s comparable to days of travel on filthy beasts? Your precious Bifrost, as you well know, connects to Svartalfheim in only two places, neither of which are anywhere nearby, so—”

“They may not be nearby, but at this rate I’m questioning whether or not Jæghar’s lair is anywhere near here either. For all I can tell, we may not even be on Svartalfheim. Do you actually have any idea where we are?”

“Of course I know where we are, you fool, or I wouldn’t have been able to bring us here.” Loki crossed his arms defiantly. Something about this idiot set him off.

“Then where are we? Why didn’t you just take us to right outside the lair? Why this far away? Do you even see anything that would suggest a dragon lives nearby?” Thor gestured wildly at the surrounding trees.

“Actually—“ Sif broke in, but Thor barreled right over her.

“No, the truth is you have no idea what you’re doing, but you’re too proud to admit it! You think that somehow this ability makes you better than us, when in reality it’s no help at all because you’re just lost. Take us back to Asgard now.”

“Oh, and why should I do that?” Loki sneered at him. Thor growled and grabbed his hammer as the sky overhead reacted accordingly.

“Oh wonderful,” Loki couldn’t help but add as he readied his magic in response, “Rain on us. That will make this entire experience better.”

Thor paused and frowned. “That wasn’t me.”
He looked upwards, a puzzled expression on his face, just as Sif threw herself at him and knocked him to the ground. Simultaneously Fandral grabbed Loki and pulled him down behind an outcropping of rock as the world above them was suddenly awash in yellow-green flame. Loki lay panting on the ground for a moment, trying to regain the breath that the oxygen depriving fire had stolen from him. When he pushed himself up he saw Thor had already risen and Sif was yelling something at them. It took him a moment to register what she was saying.

“—ahead! Saw it when you were arguing, maybe we’ll be able to figure something out from there. Move!” She shoved Thor who, to Loki’s surprise, didn’t hesitate to follow her direction. Loki looked in the direction they were moving and saw that Hogun and Volstagg were already making their way towards what looked like more scorch marks.

Loki and Fandral took off after them. The trees were so dense that they didn’t see the ravine until they were upon it. Fandral skidded to a halt in time, but Loki had no such luck. His feet slipped on loose rock, and as he gasped and twisted to find something to stop his fall, Thor grabbed onto him from behind and hauled him back. Loki let him hold him for a moment as he willed his legs to support his weight. That was two close calls already, and they hadn’t even gotten to the lair yet. Perhaps, he admitted to himself, this hadn’t been such a good idea after all.

Loki pushed himself away and prepared to reluctantly thank the Asgardian, but the smug look on Thor’s face turned the words on his lips into a scowl. “It could just have easily been you,” he muttered petulantly.

Sif snorted. “It was him, just a moment ago. He’s lucky Volstagg saved his sorry ass from tumbling right over the edge. Now the two of you need to shut up. We need a plan before the damn dragon finds us again. So let’s figure something out—quietly.”

Loki mourned the loss of the opportunity to shove Thor’s smugness back in his face before he turned to give the ravine a thoughtful look. On the far side of it the trees rose until they fell away to reveal the sharp peaks of a mountain. “I guess you did know where we were going,” Thor admitted quietly. Loki took that for an apology and decided not to correct him.

The ravine was deep, but not as deep as he had originally thought. It looked as though it had likely been caused by the shifting of the planet’s crust, and he could see several possible caves below. Since the peoples of Svartalfheim were largely subterranean this didn’t surprise him. However…

“Do you see those caves down there?” Loki said softly, gesturing to the openings. “From what I recall, there are no major underground civilizations around here anymore, probably due to the dragon. My guess is these were created by an ancient society before the dragon moved in and that they lead to the center of the mountain. It’s likely that’s where Jæghar’s lair is.”

“Likely?” Sif hissed at him incredulously, “I thought you’ve been here before!”

“I never said that,” Loki corrected.

“Have you ever even encountered a dragon?” Hogun asked grimly.

Loki glanced at all of them, chewing his lip a moment before finally admitting, “No.” They made noises of exasperation, and Loki protested, “But that doesn’t mean I don’t know what I’m doing! Those tunnels are probably our best bet on getting inside. You can be sure that Jæghar knows about them and has taken precautions, but we’d have to deal with that at any entrance.” When they looked skeptical, he glared. “Does anyone else have a plan?”

“How are we all going to get down there?” Thor, at least, seemed to be considering his suggestion,
his eyes mapping the distance between them and the other side of the ravine.

“You can fly, can’t you?” Loki asked. “Everyone else can go with me. I’ll transport them all over.”

“Absolutely not,” Sif replied quickly.

“No,” Hogun inserted.

“No,” Fandral whined.

“Actually,” Thor hesitated before continuing, “Perhaps you should take all of us. The dragon already knows someone is here. It may think it got us in that blast, but if it’s as smart as you say it will check to be sure. And if it flies over just as I do and happens to see me…”

“Then he’ll know where we are and where we’re going,” Loki nodded, “True. Good idea.” He turned and examined one of the openings carefully, memorizing every detail that he could make out.

By the time that he turned back everyone had gathered together and they were looking at him with grim acceptance. They had the air of those going to the execution block, and Loki couldn’t help but crack a smile.

This time no one had as severe a reaction as they had to the first transference. They only had to wait several minutes to get over bouts of dizziness before they seemed ready to move on.

The cave was dreary and dank with the bitter smell of mildew, but even the surroundings couldn’t dampen Volstagg’s exuberance. “Wonderful! We’ve been gone less than a mark still, and we’re already in one of the tunnels to the dragon’s cave! At this rate, we will be home in time for lunch, let alone dinner!”

Loki gave him a wry look and muttered, “Not that I had anything to do with that.”

Thor laughed and clapped him on the back. “Indeed! Perhaps you aren’t entirely useless, then.” Loki bristled until Thor gave him a cheery wink and moved past into the darkness of the passageway.

“Who has the torches?”

Before anyone could respond, Loki summoned six small balls of light to hover by each of them. “I hope you didn’t truly waste space packing torches.”

Fandral’s toothy smile was illuminated by the soft green light. “Who needs to pack anything when we have Luke? You’re full of all sorts of useful tricks.”

Loki grimaced. “You didn’t seriously just liken me to one of your bags, did you? Because if you mean to suggest that I’m not any more useful than a horse, a light, and some rope, you’re going to –“

“Enough,” Sif sighed, “I’m sick of all of this bickering. Be quiet, or the dragon won’t have to off any of you. I’ll do it first.” She shoved past Thor, who grinned and shrugged apologetically before following her. Luke went next, trailed closely by Fandral and Volstagg with Hogun bringing up the rear.

They walked in relative silence as the passageway twisted and turned through the mountain, some parts getting dangerously narrow for Volstagg, before opening up into a sort of grand hallway. It was dilapidated and filthy, but obvious signs of former wealth shown through the crust of mold and dirt coating the place.

Fandral let out a low whistle. “This must have been some palace or grand meeting place a long time a—“ his feet crunched ominously on something as he stepped back to look at the cave’s ceiling
overhead, and everyone looked down.

“Well,” Sif murmured as they gazed down at the old brittle bones and skulls mapping the floor, “At least we know we’re getting close. Weapons ready?”

Thor nodded in agreement. Loki slipped past both of them to examine the floor and walls ahead, sending slivers of his magic out to feel for any traps. “Jæghar has a magical trigger lining the periphery of his lair,” Loki said softly, eyes closed in concentration. “I should be able to make a small hole in his defenses. Tread carefully and walk only where I do.”

“How far?” Sif asked quietly.

Loki cocked his head, “Perhaps two hundred and fifty feet, no more than three hundred. This direction,” he pointed slightly to the left, where the passageway branched off.

As they moved in the direction he had pointed, a soft golden glow became visible in the passageway ahead. “What’s that?” Fandral murmured in Loki’s ear, “It’s not a fire, is it?”

Loki shook his head as Sif answered for him, “The light isn’t flickering. I think that might be the hoard up ahead.”

“This is too easy,” Loki added warily. There was, indeed, a magical alarm ahead. He carefully unwove the tendrils of seidr with his own magic as the others waited, breaking a hole about twice the size of Volstagg just in case. He hesitated a moment before nodding to them and stepping forward tentatively. When nothing happened, he willed himself to relax.

They moved in silence down the hallway until they reached another fork in the passageway. Loki chose the left corridor, the one that the glow was shining from. After a right turn further on, the source of the glow was finally visible. Sif had been right—it was the hoard, full of gems, gold, and ancient artifacts, and it was breathtaking. He frowned and stopped, but the others rushed past him even as he hissed “Wait!”

Either they hadn’t heard him or they’d chosen to ignore him, but as nothing happened after several moments and he couldn’t sense any more magical barriers, Loki followed unhappily. He had been sure it was going to be harder than this. Not that he was displeased, but he couldn’t shake the feeling that something was wrong.

He strode into the room, intent on telling them to quiet down since the dragon had more than enough time to return by now, when a large stone portcullis slammed down behind him. Suddenly the room filled with the echoes of the other entrances being sealed off.

“I thought you said that you took care of the magical defenses!” Sif yelled to Loki.

“I did!” Loki hissed, “This wasn’t triggered by a magical alarm!”

Sif looked as though she were about to reply when abruptly the floor began to shake. The mound of gold in the center of the room that everyone had taken to be a huge pile of polished coins moved, its tail whipping about and striking Hogun, sending him flying across the room. Everyone dived away and took cover behind whatever was available. Loki and Fandral darted behind the same pillar.

“Those were coins!” Fandral yelped as the dragon rapidly uncoiled, “I even picked one up!” He held out an empty hand, and then gave it a confused look.

Loki understood immediately. “Illusion magic. I told you, dragons have powerful seidr.” He chanced a glance out beyond the main room, trying to judge Jæghar’s size and strength, when his eyes fell
upon a massive mirror and widened. “An ancient scrying mirror,” he breathed, “It’s beautiful.”

Fandral didn’t look interested, but Loki continued anyway, “That’s how it must have known where we were, what we were doing. Scrying is possible to anyone with decent seidr, of course, but typically you need a focus—"

“No is really not the time, Luke!” Fandral had drawn his sword, and Loki looked doubtfully between him and the colossal creature they were up against.

“Quickly, if we get everyone together I can get us out of here,” He tried to reason, but Fandral just gave him an amused look as the area around them was bathed in the familiar yellow-green flame.

“Why would we want to get out of here, darling? We’re right where we want to be. This is what we came for, after all!”

Loki blinked at him. “What do you mean? I thought we were here for the sword!”

Fandral laughed, and with his skin tinged with the hues of the flames around them, Loki thought he looked quite mad. ‘The sword is just the bonus prize. We came for the dragon!”

“You’re insane!” Loki snapped as all around them the sound of the dragon’s laughter echoed about the chamber.

‘Puny creaturresss, trying to stseal my treasuresss from the heart of my lair.’ Loki winced and placed a hand to his forehead as the steely voice of the dragon echoed in his mind rather than his ears. ‘I should bursn you to a crisssp, but I sseek no quarrel with your worldssss. You wisssh for something I possesessss, and I offer a trade. Give me ssomething of equal value in return, and you may leave with what you ssearch for.’

Loki craned his head around to try to catch a glimpse of Thor, but couldn’t see the Aesir prince anywhere. “That sounds reasonable, we should trade something for the sword and go.”

It was Fandral’s turn to look at Loki as though he were crazy. “Didn’t you hear me a moment ago, Luke? We’re here for the battle, not the trophy. Deal with the dragon if you wish, but Thor won’t admire your cowardice.”

Loki blanched. “Cowardice? For not being a complete fool and risking my life in a battle I know I can’t win?”

Fandral grinned, “See, that’s the difference between you and us,” he boasted, “We know we can win!” Before Loki could reply, Fandral spun away and sprinted across the room. At the same time, Volstagg rushed the dragon from the opposite direction while arrows whistled in from two different points. Loki presumed these two must be Sif and Hogun, because at that moment Thor descended from above, Mjolnir crackling with energy and washing everything with a pale blue light.

Loki was torn for a moment between admiration at the way the five worked smoothly together, as though they were one unit with multiple parts, and frustration that he was going to die with the most bull-headed idiots he had ever had the displeasure of meeting.

Loki leaned back against the safety of the pillar for a moment, considering his options as the battle raged behind him. The dragon was making furious noises, but several Asgardian-sounding yelps and cries suggested that the damage wasn’t one-sided. He seriously considered just leaving them there for a moment, before realizing with a sinking feeling that he would be angry with himself afterwards for not proving that he was better than they were. Loki cursed his luck once more before his hands slid to his sides, summoning the set of swords he kept in the Void for times such as these.
Growing up Helblindi and Byleistr had always had an ongoing competition to see who the better warrior was. They were strong and disciplined, and as Laufey had always proudly acknowledged, two of the best warriors on Jotunheim. Loki, with his slight build and comparatively fragile bones, had never been expected to join in. They respected him for the power of his seidr, and thought that that was enough. It wasn’t. Though Loki was proud of his magic, he detested being considered poor at anything. He had been determined to gain their respect for his knowledge of arms as well. So every day for two miserable hours in the morning he had practiced with Thrym, the commander of their armies, with dual swords. They were light and thin and sharp, and Thrym taught him to use speed, precision, and wits to bring down his opponents. Though he hated much of the training, it had been worth it in the end when Loki had brought both of his brothers down in the training grounds. True, it had mostly been due to them underestimating him and he had never been able to do it again, but it had established him as an able warrior, and that was good enough.

Now, Loki turned to assess the situation, swords in hands.

The golden scales on the dragon’s left shoulder had been charred black in a three foot radius reaching across his back, though large as the wound was, it looked small when actually taking into account the dragon’s size. The chamber itself was so large that it had been deceiving. Sif and Hogun had given up their bows in favor for their melee weapons, as the arrows had been roughly the size of the dragon’s scales. The few that had lodged themselves inside looked like splinters—irritating, but by no means debilitating.

It looked as though Fandral had managed to make a nasty gouge in the dragon’s flank, but he now lay bonelessly over a heap of ancient weaponry and shields and Loki couldn’t tell if he was breathing. He found himself hoping that he was still alive. The man was irritating, Loki thought, but he realized that he didn’t hate him. He couldn’t see Volstagg or Hogun—he assumed they were on the other side of the dragon—but Sif was trying to get inside the dragon’s guard to the soft belly underneath. Loki wanted to tell her to stop wasting her time—the dragon knew it was his most vulnerable area, and likely focused some kind of magical shielding there.

Thor was having the most success. Not that Loki was particularly surprised. He used the hammer to move about and escape the dragon’s teeth and claws, reaching areas that the others would have difficulty getting to. Well, everyone else except Loki, that is.

As he watched, however, Jághar caught the golden prince by surprise. Thor had been so busy trying to distract Jághar from Sif’s movements that the dragon was able to whip its tail around and catch Thor clear across his abdomen. Thor crashed to the ground, stunned by the sudden impact. Sif cried out as the dragon unfurled like an overly large feline preying on an absurdly small mouse.

Trying not to think too much for once, Loki transported himself onto the dragon’s back. Events were a blur from there as the Jotun prince scrambled up the boney ridges that lined Jághar’s neck and found the weak spot beneath his jaw. One of his hands clung on with white-knuckles as the dragon swooped down over Thor while the other smoothly inserted one of his swords into the fleshy area where the neck met the head.

Jághar screeched in fury and tossed his head back, but Loki had already transferred himself down to the ground beside Thor. A moment later they would have been encased in wickedly hot flames, but Loki managed to contain his innate terror at the fire and hold his shields strong. The flames harmlessly parted to the sides as Thor regained his feet and nodded his thanks.

Loki reached forward and ripped away some of the magical shielding around the dragon’s belly and yelled, “Sif, now!”

She darted forward, but Volstagg got there first, landing a wicked blow with his axe that caused the
dragon to cry out in pain again. Then, just like that, the dragon was gone.

It was as though the room was suddenly a vacuum, the air and sound sucked out along with the massive creature that had inhabited it.

“What happened?” Thor breathed as they all staggered for a moment, adjusting to the sudden change.

“Jæghar transported himself away,” Loki answered. “Let’s get out of here quickly, before he comes back.”

Thor scowled, the blood from a wound on his forehead making him look almost savage for a moment. “Leave now? We were winning!”

Loki laughed, “I’d hardly say that! And what do you suggest we do when it returns with reinforcements?” Thor was about to protest when Loki quickly added, “And what about Fandral? He needs medical attention. We need to leave now.”

The Asgardian prince reluctantly agreed this time, to Loki’s relief. “Go back the way we came, we need to leave the dragon’s shielding before I can transport. I’ll get Fandral.”

Loki nimbly climbed over the scattered jewelry and gold to where the blonde Aesir lay sprawled. He checked for a pulse first, then levitated him up and moved to follow the others. Just as he was about to leave he saw something that made him smile.

A moment later, Loki met up with everyone else, and channeled their energy back to Asgard.

*****

“And just as the great ugly beast reared back to strike, the valiant Volstagg rushed in and delivered a fatal blow to the dragon’s heart!” Fandral staggered with his hands clasped to his breast before his captive audience, who cheered enthusiastically. Loki rolled his eyes at Sif, who laughed light-heartedly and shrugged. To hear it from him, you’d never know that Fandral had been unconscious for most of the battle.

His wounds had quickly been judged by the healers to be superficial, though he insisted they place a bandage on him for heroic effect. To Loki’s surprise, they had complied. Apparently they were well used to Fandral’s shenanigans.

Hogun had managed to nab one of the dragon’s shedded golden scales, which the warriors presented to the denizens of the local tavern proudly. “Honestly,” Loki murmured to Sif, “You’d think we’d killed the damn thing.”

Sif giggled and Loki gave her a suspicious look. He was now fairly certain she had drunk far more than he’d realized, as Sif didn’t strike him as the giggling type. The whole situation reminded him of something Byleistr had told him once—the only thing Asgardians do better than kill things is drink. Privately Loki thought that they told tall tales just as well as either.

“And we never could have done it without Luke, here!” Fandral slung an arm around Loki, who flinched back in surprise. “If only you all could have seen the way he teleported right onto the back of the beast and plunged a sword deep in its throat!”

“Yes, and what a pity you didn’t see it either,” Loki muttered. Thor let out a booming laugh next to him, and Loki smiled a little.
“And we wouldn’t be back in Asgard so quickly to tell the tale if it weren’t for our new friend!” Thor added enthusiastically, raising a mug of ale, “To Luke!” The crowd cheered and toasted him as well. Loki just sighed. He was fairly certain that was the fifth time tonight he’d been toasted. Or was it six now?

As the crowd laughed and drank and listened to Fandral tell the story again—this time even more embellished than the last—Thor leaned over and swung an arm around Loki, pulling him flush against his side. “You didn’t tell me you knew how to use a sword. You’ll have to give me a demonstration.”

Judging by the way Thor was looking down at him, Loki was certain that the double entendre was intended. Trying not to laugh at the golden prince’s drunken flirting, Loki pretended he hadn’t noticed it. It was more difficult than he thought it would be to pull away. “Yes, I can hold my own fairly well. But now, we have to address our bet.”

Thor gave him a confused look for a moment, and then nodded, suddenly serious. “Even though our bet wasn’t completed, I admit that having you along was helpful. You saved my life when you blocked the dragon fire, I haven’t forgotten. Therefore you have convinced me, and I confess that some magic may have a place in battle. Of course, you could just be the exception.”

That was probably as much as he could hope for. “Thank you,” Loki acknowledged, before raising his voice slightly and adding, “But there is one thing I wish to correct. You seem to be under the impression that our bet was not completed. In truth,” Loki flashed Thor a dazzling smile and reached behind him for the bundle of cloth he had bound to his back. He let the cloth unwind, and the gorgeous, heavily engraved sword clanged as it hit the table.

It was greeted by a surprised silence, immediately followed by a roar of cheering accompanied by thumping mugs.

“How?” Sif yelled happily at Loki over the clamoring, and he was only too pleased to answer.

“Fandral fell on it!” he leveled a sharp grin at Fandral, who smiled sheepishly before laughing.

“So,” Loki leaned back in towards Thor, who watched him with slightly blown-out eyes. “I suppose this means that I am the better warrior, and that seidr is superior after all! Though I admit,” Loki reveled at his chance to throw Thor’s words back in his face, however playfully, “You weren’t completely useless.”

Chapter End Notes

I know this chapter didn’t have too much between Loki and Thor yet, but I should probably warn everyone that despite their attraction this is definitely going to be a slow-build type of story.

Anyway, it’s 4:24 in the morning here, so I’m off to bed! Please let me know what you enjoyed or what you think could use work, or just anything you feel like saying/commenting on! Goodnight everyone, and thank you so much for reading!
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Loki talks with his brother, Thor talks with his father.

Chapter Notes

Just so everyone knows... in the alternate dimension in which I live, it's definitely still Monday, and thus my post is not at all late ;)

Thanks to all of you for your support! I hope you enjoy the chapter. <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Four

Loki paced his brother’s outer chamber restlessly, the golden beads and chains decorating his hair and horns clinking every once in a while as he looked at the main door, irritated. Where was Byleistr when he needed him? Surely he should have been back from sparring practice by now.

Loki groaned and collapsed dramatically on top of the small seating area just as someone passed by the outer door and did a double take. Loki perked up as the heavily carved ice door, which he had left cracked open, swung the rest of the way forwards. To his disappointment, it was not Byleistr who entered.

“Hello ‘Blindi. Do you know where Byleistr is?” Loki tried unsuccessfully to keep the pout out of his voice. His oldest brother looked much like their father, with the same large muscled build and strong features. He kept his hair cropped close to his skull when he didn’t shave it off completely.

Helblindi frowned down at him for a moment before responding. “This is Byleistr’s heat cycle. He’s visiting Aggar down south for the duration of it, and then might stay there for several weeks afterwards.”

Loki wrinkled his nose in distaste. “Why is Byleistr is still seeing that traitor? You know he hates him.”

Helblindi looked at Loki sadly, but before he could reply, Loki replied for him. “I know, I know, Jotunheim can’t withstand a war right now and this helps keep the peace. Did Father protest again?”

“Oh course,” Helblindi pushed Loki’s feet off of the divan and sat next to him, “He always does. But this was Byleistr’s decision, and even though Father hates it, he knows it’s for the good of our world.” He sighed slightly as Loki flipped over and sprawled himself across his lap. “Where have you been lately, little one? Usually you’d remember when our heat cycles are due; it’s not like you to forget.”

Loki shrugged. As much as he wanted to talk to someone about his recent trips--plural, now, despite
his best intentions—to Asgard, he knew that Helblindi was not the one to go to. His oldest brother hated Asgard with a passion, particularly the royal family. Particularly, Thor. Loki didn’t know the whole story behind his brother’s hatred of the golden prince, but he knew enough to not bring it up. “Just around. You know I get bored.”

Helblindi looked somewhat hurt. “Is this what you were going to talk to Byleistr about? You know you could tell me anything you’d tell him, Loki. Is there something wrong? This is about Prince Neyir, isn’t it? Were you on Svartalfheim? I swear, if he’s hurting you——“

Loki groaned. “Really, ‘Blindi, I’m fine. And no this isn’t about Neyir, I was just looking for someone to talk to.” He stretched himself upwards and gently flicked one of Heblindi’s horns. “You really overreact sometimes, you know that?”

His oldest brother gave him one more searching glance before smiling guiltily. “I just worry about you and Byleistr. I want you to be happy.” He looked as though he were going to say something else for a moment, but then remained silent.

Loki fidgeted, discomforted by the forlorn look on his brother’s face. “Well, I don’t know about you, but I’m feeling restless. Did you know they’re making Anglock for dinner?” he named Helblindi’s favorite meal, “I hate Anglock. I think I’ll go create havoc in the kitchens.” He sprung off of his brother’s lap before Helblindi could stop him.

“Loki, no!”

Loki ran grinning down the hallway, having successfully distracted his older brother. Every once in a while he teleported to keep out of Helblindi’s reach as he led him on a merry chase through the castle, probably causing more chaos than he would have in the kitchens anyway.

He reminded himself that now he was going to have to ask the cook to make Anglock for dinner.

*****

Thor drummed his fingers on the table, earning a disapproving look from his mother. He hated council meetings, maybe even more than he hated etiquette lessons. Maybe. All council meetings were, really, was a bunch of old people bickering over inconsequential matters that could be settled elsewhere but were settled here so that they could seem important. When Thor was king, he was going to abolish council meetings.

Thor yawned and stretched and sighed loudly before resting his head heavily on his hand. He swore his father was purposely avoiding looking at him. Most likely he was embarrassed of his son, but that was nothing new. Thor would be bothered if he had enough energy to care, but at the moment all he could think about was that they still had at least another hour to go. He wondered what they were going to have for dinner.

He wondered what his friends were up to. They were probably down at the sparring grounds right now, having a great time. Maybe Luke was with them. Probably not, though, since he only ever seemed to show up when they specifically said to meet at any given time. Thor thought he should say something—maybe Luke thought he had to be invited in order to visit. At least they would see him tonight. Maybe he would talk to him about it then.

“…right, Prince Thor?”

Thor looked up to find that the entire table was watching him. He cleared his throat. “Uh, yes, of course.”
Lord Hagen looked satisfied, like a predator that just caught its prey. “There, you see? The prince agrees with me.”

Odin frowned. “If my son had been paying attention to the proceedings, he would not have. Even if he did the fact is insignificant. It is my opinion on the matter that counts, and I have said no.”

Thor scowled. This was exactly why there was no point in him being here anyway. Sometimes he thought all that his father wanted was for him to nod like a puppet whenever the Allfather agreed with anything. Thor looked back over to his mother’s sad, knowing gaze, and then quickly looked away again. If he could be good at any of this, it would be for her.

Thor sighed again and stared down at the table. When he was king he was going to abolish the council altogether.

*****

Thor was in a mood that night, Loki could tell. Not that it took a genius to figure it out.

He arrived on Asgard to a steady grey rain, and he quickly stepped into the tavern to avoid it. The usual patrons were still rowdier than Loki was used to, but more subdued than normal. He noticed more than one of them casting wary glances towards Thor’s corner, and for a moment he considered turning back the way he came and going home to Jotunheim. He paused for just a little bit too long, however, because Volstagg, who had gotten up to retrieve food for the table, spotted him.

“Luke!” The large man’s voice carried across the tavern, and Loki knew there was no backing out now. He approached their table with caution. Sure enough, Thor was slumped over his mug of ale, glaring at the table as though it had personally offended him.

Loki met Sif’s exasperated gaze. She rolled her eyes and shrugged as Fandral quickly slid over to make a place for him… right next to Thor, of course. Fandral smiled innocently as Loki gave him a withering look before taking the seat.

“So, what—“

Sif shook her head frantically and Hogun coughed. Thor slammed down his mug. “You don’t have to dance around me, you know,” he growled, “I’m fine.”

The crack of thunder outside at that moment suggested that he was, in fact, not fine. Loki took a moment to give thanks that he did not live in a city whose weather was subject to the whims of a spoiled prince. “Do the crops ever drown?” he couldn’t stop himself from asking.

Thor gave him a confused look, so he elaborated despite the warning bells going off, “When you have one too many sulky fits, do the crops ever drown?”

Hogun froze, Sif and Fandral gave him looks full of disbelief and horror, and Volstagg, who was just setting the food down on the table, looked as though he was considering going back for more. Thor, on the other hand, stared at him as though stunned for a moment. Several emotions flitted across his features, and Loki had just enough time to wonder whether or not he should move before finally the Asgardian prince grinned, and then laughed.

“Actually, my mother banished me to Vanaheim for a month once,” he chuckled into his mug as the rain pattered to a stop outside. “She tried to pretend that it was so I could study under one of her old tutors, but everyone knew better. That was right after the month my favorite horse had broken a leg and it rained for a solid three weeks. And that’s nothing compared to when I was a child.”
“I imagine you were a terror,” Loki muttered as he accepted a glass of his favorite new wine from a relieved barmaid.

Thor’s grin went up several watts. “Aye, that I was! One time the entire castle spent the day searching for me when I disappeared from my nursery. Eventually they found me curled up with the hunting hounds. They never did figure out how I’d made it outside,” he chuckled, “But you can’t tell me you were a well-behaved child, Luke.”

Sif made a face, “Ugh, can you imagine? Having a kid as bratty as Luke is bad enough, but just think—you’re not sure if he’s in the next room or on the next planet!”

They laughed, and Loki smirked into his wine glass. She wasn’t far from the truth.

After that Thor’s mood lightened significantly and the rest of the tavern reflected it. Three rounds of drinks later (the last of which Loki had politely declined), and his new companions were laughing uproariously and telling stories of their brave conquests. Loki found himself wondering just how much they had been embellished, but also found himself not caring. It was amusing, in a way.

“Well, I’m out for the night,” Fandral said at last, a busty woman on one arm and a handsome young man on the other. “Unless, of course, you give me a reason to stay,” he raised an eyebrow suggestively at Loki, who snorted and suggested various unlikely things that would happen before he entertained Fandral’s bed.

Fandral just grinned and promised, “One day!” before heading out. Volstagg was next to leave, mentioning that his wife was waiting for him, and Hogun left shortly after. Loki watched as Thor’s mood sunk lower with each person’s departure, and so finally he murmured to Sif, “What exactly happened before I got here?”

Sif frowned, “Just another fight with his father,” she told him in a low tone, just as Thor rose to greet someone at another table. “Nothing new unfortunately. This time the Allfather apparently suggested that Thor was going to make a terrible king, and that he’d rather disown him that see the throne fall into his hands.”

Loki blanched, “That’s awful. What kind of father cares more for duty than his own son?”

Sif gave him a thoughtful look. “Most, really, I guess.” She shrugged, “It’s kind of the Asgardian way. You must be Vanir, then. I thought maybe, with your exotic appearance. Anyway, he doesn’t really mean it right now, I’m sure. Still,” she hesitated before continuing, “Thor has got to take everything more seriously soon. If he doesn’t, the Allfather just might name another heir.”

Loki shook his head, sickened. “Doesn’t he see how much everyone loves Thor? If nothing else, he genuinely cares for the people. I think he’s far from terrible, as far as potential heirs go. He’s compassionate, he’s generous, and he’s brave. I’ve seen worse.”

Sif just looked at him with an amused gleam in her eye for a moment before Loki snapped, “What?”

“Nothing,” she replied lightly, “It’s just sweet, that’s all.”

“I’m just pointing out what everyone thinks,” Loki snarled, “There’s no need to read into it.”

“Read into what?” Thor had returned before Sif could reply. Loki started to respond but Sif spoke quickly over top of him.

“Nothing. Luke here was just saying what a wonderful ruler he thinks you’ll make, weren’t you Luke darling?” Her smile was razor sharp as she delighted in the position she had put him in. He
couldn’t very well say no, not when Thor was looking at him like that. For goodness sake, he was fairly sure the prince had tears in his eyes.


Thor’s smile was brighter than the midday sun as he scooped a protesting Loki up into his arms and buried his face in his neck. Loki could hear Sif snickering as she yelled out a farewell, and a suggestive comment about seeing the two of them tomorrow.

“Thor, enough, really!” Loki hissed, squirming against the Asgardian prince’s powerful arms. If anything, Thor just clung onto him more tightly, and Loki went limp for a moment, resigned. It was almost endearing how happy that one comment had made him. Almost. Not nearly as endearing as it was annoying. Gods the man was strong.

Several seconds later Thor relaxed his tight grip and took a step back, still holding Loki’s arms. His warm hands and fond gaze made Loki distinctly uncomfortable, and he tried to tell himself that Thor was just being friendly. He also didn’t like how he was reacting to the attention. Loki forced himself to pull away. “Well, I should probably be going as well.”

“No, wait, don’t—” Thor cut himself off, and then looked away.

Loki hesitated a moment before asking, “What is it?”

Thor made a noncommittal sound and continued looking away. Loki waited for several moments, getting increasingly annoyed as the Asgardian failed to say anything. “Then I’ll be going. Same time and place tomorrow?”

This finally got Thor’s attention, and he turned back to face Loki. “You can come by whenever you like, you know,” he said gently, “In fact, we all would like it if you wanted to join us for sparring practice. I would like to see how you handle your swords—actually.” Thor hurried to add the actually to the end, flushing slightly.

Loki grinned as he remembered Thor’s clumsy, drunken attempt at flirtation. “I’m not sure. I am busy tomorrow afternoon and sparring isn’t exactly my favorite—” Loki found himself trailing off at Thor’s disappointed look. He sighed heavily. “Fine, I’ll try.”

The moment the words escaped his lips Thor perked back up, and Loki’s eyes narrowed suspiciously. He had a feeling that Thor had known exactly how he was going to react to the forlorn face he had pulled. Perhaps Loki didn’t give him enough credit. The next instant Thor grinned guiltily, however, breaking all illusion that he hadn’t been trying to manipulate Loki into coming to practice. “I really would like you to come, if you can.”

“As I said, I’ll try. Will I be allowed in this time?”

“Will you even bother with the gate?”

Loki smirked. It looked as though Thor was getting the hang of him after all. “Of course not.”

Thor smiled, but then appeared distracted. This time Loki waited for him to speak. “Will you walk back with me?” he asked quietly after a brief silence. “To the palace. Tonight, I mean. I just… I don’t want to be alone quite yet.”

Loki could tell that this admission was difficult for Thor, so he decided to take pity on him. “I don’t see why not. No one is expecting me.” He was on the verge of telling Thor that they could just transport there, but figured this probably wasn’t what the Asgardian prince wanted. Instead, he
trailed quietly after Thor as he exited the tavern.

The sun had gone down, and the now dry air meeting the cool moist ground had caused a thick fog to roll in over the houses of Asgard. Loki took a moment to appreciate that in the flickering nighttime shadows with the thick cloak of fog coating the ground, Asgard appeared much more like Jotunheim, losing its foreignness.

Loki hurried to catch up with Thor, who cut an impressive figure in the mist. His red cloak kicked up swirls of fog that entwined themselves around him like a lover’s arms, and the moon bleached his hair paler than normal. The way his body moved was fascinating, too, his frame large and muscled but still managing to be graceful as well as powerful. After that thought, Loki reflected that he had perhaps had a bit too much wine.

*****

Thor’s thoughts were pensive as he walked quietly beside his newest companion. This had been a rough day, and he had no desire to return to the palace at all. In fact, had Luke not agreed to walk back with him, he was pretty sure he would have bought a room at the inn for the night. He was still angry with his father, and disappointed in his mother for not standing up for him. She had done so in the past, many a time, but he supposed he had worn her thin as well.

This thought more than any other upset him. He knew he wasn’t the ideal heir. He wasn’t obedient or studious or political. But he did care, and until today he had thought that was enough.

“Thor?” Luke’s quiet voice was a welcome interruption of his thoughts. “We’ve reached the gate.”

Thor blinked. So they had. He turned towards Luke, who was giving him an almost concerned look. The pale moonlight highlighted his soft skin and glossy dark hair, and the fog swathed them in a cocoon, making the moment almost intimate. Thor cleared his throat. “Thank you.” He wanted to say something else, but he wasn’t sure what. He took a step closer, but misjudged the distance and ended up practically right against him. Thor went still for a second before reflexively reaching out to brush a strand of Luke’s hair back behind his ear.

Luke’s eyes widened, but he didn’t step back. Thor took this as encouragement and closed the space between them, leaning down to capture Luke’s lips with his own.

Before he could do so, however, Luke vanished.

*****

Shit. Shitshitshitshitshit.

Loki collapsed on his bed, heart racing with fear, adrenaline, and something else.

He had almost let Thor kiss him. What had gotten into him, why hadn’t he stepped away when the other prince had gotten too close? He could tell Thor had been feeling emotionally vulnerable and was looking for a distraction, and perhaps that was all it had been. Yes, that was likely it. But he couldn’t explain his own reaction, which worried him.

He couldn’t go back to Asgard tomorrow.

He knew he would anyway.
Thanks for reading! Please let me know what you think, and I will update as soon as possible.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Loki meets someone new. The group arranges another adventure.

Chapter Notes

Happy March everyone! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Five

Loki slammed the old tome shut and slouched back in his chair. Their library wasn’t extensive, but he’d still been hoping to find something. Something had to explain why Jotunheim and Asgard were enemies. He had tried asking his father, only to receive a vague answer about the war. There was nothing in the library other than extensive stories of the atrocities Asgard had committed in battle.

And that was another odd thing—there was no history of the relations between Jotunheim and Asgard dating back before the war, which had lasted only a little more than two hundred years and had only ended at the time Loki had been born, 731 years ago. It was only ever referred to as “The War” between Asgard and Jotunheim as well, implying that there had only been one. So what exactly had happened?

Loki now knew that Asgard wasn’t as terrible as he had been led to believe. The people seemed happy (and didn’t, to his knowledge, actually consume the flesh of their unwanted children), they were productive and generous with each other, and the ruling family wasn’t despotic—here he had to acknowledge that his opinion was entirely based on Thor, as he had not actually met Odin or his wife, Frigga. Still, he’d never heard anyone at the tavern complain. Although, come to think of it, he had always been accompanying the crown prince, so perhaps that perception was skewed.

It was driving Loki crazy. If there was no real reason for them to be enemies, then why were they? The culture shock hadn’t even been too bad. Sure, there were definitely differences, but nothing so distinct that they would hate each other upon meeting. Certainly they had no more differences than Jotunheim and Muspelheim, which were allies.

Perhaps he’d ask Thor later. Loki glanced over to the enchanted ice stick that he had brought in with him, which had melted almost halfway down. It was nearly at the midday mark, which meant that it was late enough for Loki to go to Asgard without it looking like he was eager to return. Not that he was. He was torn between the desire to go back and the desire to avoid Thor like the plague after the aborted kiss last night.

Finally he decided to just go. If it was too awkward he could always leave, and it wasn’t as though he hadn’t dealt with unwanted suitors before. No, he would just ignore it and hope that Thor did as well. He had been pretty drunk. Perhaps he wouldn’t even remember.
Loki clung to this hope as he gathered his magic around him and transported himself to Asgard.

*****

He appeared under a tree near the training grounds, trying to look casual as he scanned the crowds of warriors and soldiers gathered for his friends. After a moment of not seeing them, he frowned. He’d imagined that they would stand out fairly obviously—Thor was a hard person to miss and, if possible, Volstagg was even harder.

Loki debated returning home for a moment, disappointment churning inside him. No, Thor had said they would be here.

He took a couple of steps forward before suddenly a thought hit him. Maybe that was exactly why they weren’t here. Maybe Thor was avoiding him on purpose.

He was surprised by how hurt he was at the thought.

Just as he was considering leaving to go sulk in the library, a voice called out, “Luke?”

Loki looked up quickly, but was instantly disappointed as he did not recognize the tall, dark haired man who was making his way towards him. “And if I was?” he asked hesitantly. The man grinned in response and Loki felt himself relaxing a little bit. Something about his eyes and manner reminded him of Thor.

“They said you were skittish.” The man told him, but before Loki could give him an irritated response he continued, “So you’re the one Thor’s been talking about for nearly two weeks straight now.”

Loki’s irritation was immediately replaced with curiosity. “He has? What has he said?”

The man laughed, his blue eyes sparkling. “Oh, you know, the usual type of thing. Any time we mention something that you have talked about with him we get to hear what your opinion is on it. Apparently half of the new jokes he has been telling were yours as well. Sounds like you’re quite the wordsmith.”

Loki grinned. “Perhaps a bit.”

“He’s been trying to figure out some of the moves you pulled on your quest with the dragon, too, so he’ll be please you’re here today.”

This reminded Loki that he still wasn’t seeing anyone he knew. “Is he even here? I don’t see—“

“Oh, right! Prince Thor took his friends to go settle a dispute over at the other end of the city. Apparently the disagreement got violent and he wanted to go help. I said I’d go—it is part of my job, after all—but he insisted. Thor likes to get involved with his people when he can. He did give me sad eyes as he left and asked me to keep an eye out for you, though. I get the impression that he didn’t think you’d actually come, even though he hoped you would.”

That was a relief, Loki thought. At least Thor wasn’t angry with him or purposely avoiding him. “I see. When do you think he’ll return? Shall I go and come back later, or another day perhaps?”

“No! No, I mean,” he laughed, “Sorry, I was practically given orders to make sure you didn’t leave if you came by. I’m pretty sure he’d have my head if he found out you were here and left.” Loki frowned, before the man quickly continued, “Not literally of course, I only mean to say I think he’d be upset.” He grinned, displaying a set of beautiful white teeth. What was it with Asgardians? This
one looked as though he was carved out of marble. “I’m Balder, by the way. I’m sorry I didn’t introduce myself earlier. I’m the Captain of the Guard here at the palace. And yes,” he continued, “I heard about the shenanigans you pulled over at the palace gates a couple weeks back. I’ll let it slide this once, though.” He winked.

Loki smirked.

Balder took Loki’s arm and began to lead him towards the practice ring. “Thor should be back soon, hopefully, but in the mean time I’ll introduce you to some of my men. Some of them you’ve met before, of course, but don’t worry, they’re willing to give you another chance for Thor’s sake.”

Loki scowled and dug his heels into the ground before sending the captain a slight shock—just enough to get him to let go. Okay, maybe a bit more.

“Oh, another chance? How gracious of them,” he sneered. “On second thought, I think perhaps I will just go. Good luck explaining that to Thor.” He gathered his magic and was about to leave when a shout across the grounds stopped him.

“Luke!” Loki dropped his magic and spun around, relieved as he recognized the voice. Thor’s grin was blinding, as usual, and Loki couldn’t help but smile—just a little bit—in return. The smile fell off of his face as Thor didn’t slow as he approached and instead swept Loki up into a hug. Loki gasped as the air rushed out of him.

“Thor, put me down you idiot, I can’t breathe,” he wheezed, but Thor just squeezed tighter. Loki heard the distinct sound of Fandral snickering. It took several good kicks to the shins before Thor finally released him.

“I’m sorry,” Thor said, looking not at all apologetic, “I just thought you might not come back after, you know…” He flushed slightly pink and rubbed the back of his neck. “I’m sorry about that. I was drunk and upset, and you were there, and…” he trailed off helplessly. Loki rolled his eyes.

“Don’t worry about it,” he muttered. Thor’s responding smile was so sunny it made Loki wince. He thought maybe it should come with a warning label.

Thor moved over to clasp Balder’s shoulder, “Thank you for keeping him entertained, my friend.”

Loki scowled, “Oh yes, because he did such a fantastic job of that.”

Balder looked sheepish as Thor gave him a questioning look. “I’m actually not quite sure what I did,” he admitted carefully, “I thought our conversation was going fine.”

Loki started to respond but stopped as Thor started chuckling. “Yes, that happens sometimes,” the golden prince confided to Balder, “He just seems to get into these pissy fits for no reason. But don’t worry, he’ll come around.”

Loki stared at Thor in shock before hissing, “What did you just say?”

Thor just grinned in typical Thor fashion, making Loki want to punch him. Or shock him. Or rip his entrails out through his stomach. Any of those would work. When the Asgardian prince noticed that Loki was, in fact, not taking his comment well, his smile turned careful. “Oh come now, Luke, don’t be like that. We love your little pissy fits. I mean that in the best way.”

Loki seethed and would have left right then if it weren’t for the fact that Sif had looped one of her arms through his. “You do realize, of course, that he’s trying to rile you up,” she said casually.
Loki gave Thor his darkest glare and spun away, Sif right on his tail. “Don’t go,” she told him, keeping a hold on his arm. “We’re just about to get everyone together to talk about something important.” Loki didn’t respond, and she continued, “Come on, you know he’d be upset if you left. He was just fishing for a reaction.”

Loki turned to see that Volstagg had followed as well, “He doesn’t think things through sometimes,” the big man told him, eyes still crinkled with amusement, “But he truly does mean well.”

*****

Thor looked a bit shamefaced as Balder gave him a stunned look. “Your Highness, I’m not sure that—”

“I know,” Thor sighed. “I just can’t help it. Did you see the way his eyes light up? It’s like the glare a feline gives you after you fish it out of the water, all poisonous green and full of death wishes,” he chuckled, “I’ve never met someone who riles up so quickly and so completely. It’s adorable,” he laughed again before quickly stifling it under the weight of his friends’ stares. “Oh come now, you can’t say you don’t think so.”

“Oh Thor, you have the oddest kinks,” Fandral drawled before raising his voice, “Hey Luke, darling! Thor has a thing for your death stare!”

Luke turned from where he was arguing with Sif and Volstagg, eyes narrowed.

“That’s the one!” Fandral crowed before Hogun clasped his arm and led him away to cool down the situation.

Thor turned back to Balder and spoke in a low voice as Volstagg and Sif returned, Luke walking sullenly behind them. “Truly, though, he does get upset over the smallest of poor word choices. I’m certain you didn’t mean to offend him. Look now, he’s so upset with me that he’s forgotten to be angry with you.” Thor winked and turned back to apologize to Luke as Balder just smiled.

*****

As their group—larger than normal this time, since Balder and some of his men had joined them—ordered their midday meal, Loki mulled over that fact that Thor was very difficult to stay angry at. Truly, it was a detestable feature. He just gave you that sunny smile and puppy dog eyes, and you couldn’t help but forgive him. It didn’t help that he was once again seated by Thor, who kept giving him little concerned looks.

Loki sighed and decided to let it go. For now.

As the group settled in for their meal—it was lucky that he never had to pay, Loki thought, given his lack of Asgardian currency. It appeared as though Thor just had a deal with the owner of the tavern and paid him for everyone—they began to speak of the upcoming hunt.

Apparantly every so often on Asgard a dangerous beast would wander too close to a town and start harassing the villagers. When that happened, the palace guard organized a hunt to protect its citizens. This time it sounded as though a group of bilgesnipe had gotten aggressive, possibly even diseased. The news had come from the next landmass over, had traveled via Asgard’s messenger ships, and was about two days old now.

“Thor, I know you want to come on this one, but I just think that given the state of things…” Balder was speaking carefully, not quite meeting Thor’s eyes. The Asgardian prince scowled. Apparently things were still not great between him and his father.
“What kind of prince neglects his people?” Thor demanded.

“Your Highness, you won’t be neglecting anyone! We will take care of it.” One of the other men spoke up. Loki hadn’t bothered to learn his name.

“I’m going, and that’s final,” Thor growled, eyes dark.

“What’s the name of the lord in charge over in that area?” Loki asked thoughtfully.

Thor turned back to him. “Lord Armand oversees it, why?”

“Ah, the Lord that’s angry with the new tax structure. He’s the one who has the son with the withered arm, correct? The one who wanted to join the army but could not, due to his disability?” Loki had been researching all of the men and women in power on Asgard, but wasn’t sure how dated his information was. Thor nodded, curious but obviously confused as to where Loki was going with this. “But the son is still an able fighter, despite his disadvantage?” Loki pressed. Thor nodded again. “So instead of going right to the hunt, we stop at Lord Armand’s household first and ask his son to join us. During the hunt, you can make sure he gets a kill—whether under his own strength or with an assist if needed. The lord’s son will be happy to be a part of something he enjoys, Lord Armand himself will be grateful for the opportunity for his son, you will get to go on the hunt, and your father will see it as a political move. Perhaps if the boy is good enough you can even reconsider his application,” Loki shrugged.

There was silence at the table for a moment before Balder said slowly, “You know, that could actually work.”

Thor beamed, “Then that is exactly what we will do! We will leave tomorrow morning. You are brilliant, Luke.”

Loki smirked. “I know.”

Sif snorted and rolled her eyes and Volstagg laughed and clapped him on the back so hard he had to catch himself from face-planting on the table.

The tone was merry after that as they finished their meal and Balder and his men dispersed back to the training grounds. Their smaller company lingered longer, enjoying each other’s company.

“You know, despite our little adventure a couple weeks back, I was beginning to think you might be nocturnal,” Fandral teased. “What with you only showing up for the evening meal. Are you going to actually join us this afternoon in the sparring ring?”

“I may. I might not,” Loki replied nonchalantly.

“Please stay,” Thor implored him, “You might really enjoy it. You can show us that nice little flip you did as you dismounted the dragon,” Thor’s voice was eager, but Loki couldn’t help but snicker at the thought of Thor’s bulky frame executing one of his tight flips. He wondered if that was what Thor had been attempting.

“I’ll at least stay for a bit, maybe watch a little,” Loki gave in, “But I might not participate.” Thor opened his mouth to protest but Loki beat him to it, “Don’t pester me about it, Thor.” In truth, Loki thought he should probably get some practice in anyway. Thrym was always in such a poor mood when Byleistr was gone that Loki normally skipped training that week. Now he had no real excuse.

Thor stopped bothering him about it for the moment, but Loki had a feeling he was going to hear more about it later. The conversation meandered through multiple topics after that, and Loki
remembered his question about Asgard and Jotunheim. He wondered if there was a subtle way to bring it up.

“Thor,” Loki began slowly, thinking. But no matter how he thought to bring it up, it sounded contrived. “Could I possibly visit the palace library? I have some questions about some of the other realms.” he settled for at last. Thor gave him a baffled look and shrugged, “Of course, you’re welcome to at any time. Do you know where it is?”

“Not exactly. I’ve never been inside before.”

“Oh,” Thor paused for a moment before smiling, “Then after you join us in practice today I will take you there myself. But you have to join in,” he added in case there was any doubt what he was after.

“Fine,” Loki said flatly.

“What other realms are you interested in?” Hogun asked conversationally.

“Oh, you know,” Loki shrugged, “Muspelheim, Svartalfheim, Jotunheim, any of the races not allied with—with us.” He only stumbled for a moment, but thought that no one noticed.

Fandral laughed into his drink, “Oh gods, I heard a great one today! Hey Luke, what did the Asgardian captain say to his commander when they met the universe’s most beautiful Jotun inside of Jotunheim’s palace?”

“What did he say?” Loki asked hesitantly, not certain where Fandral was going with this.

“But sir, how did a bilgesnipe get into the building!”

Loki stared at him even as Volstagg let out a booming laugh. “I’m not sure I understand…”

“That was horrible, Fandral!” Thor chuckled, “No wonder Luke didn’t get it. Here Luke, you tell us your favorite Ugly Jotun joke and I’ll tell you mine.”

Loki just blinked up at him, stunned.

Chapter End Notes

Poor Loki. Thanks for all of the support I’ve gotten, I really appreciate it! You guys are awesome. :) Please let me know what you think!
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Loki plots his revenge as Thor comes up with ideas of his own.

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! Sorry for the delay, and thanks for your patience with me! I was really overwhelmed by the positive response and support for my last chapter, so thank you all so much! :) I am working on the next chapter now and intend to update sooner than normal—maybe even in the next day or so if it looks as though everyone is caught up—as an apology for the wait for this chapter.

Obligatory ad moment: If you are enjoying my story and like reading about Loki, Thor, Asgard, and the Avengers in general, then my real-life friend EmilieMonaghan has a story of her own on here about Loki's son, Fenrir. It's called Sheep in Wolf's Clothing if you are interested :) 

Now on to the story!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Six

For a moment, Loki couldn’t even speak. The silence stretched on awkwardly, and Thor frowned.

“What’s the matter? Have you never heard an Ugly Jotun joke before? I thought everyone knew at least one—“

“Shut up,” Loki hissed, and then gritted his teeth. If he clawed Thor’s eyes out, he reminded himself, he might give away his disguise. Slowly the shock burned away into anger and hurt. Ugly?! If there was one thing Loki knew, it was that he was gorgeous. At least—his heart skipped a beat—he was considered beautiful on Jotunheim, and his Asgardian appearance had to be at least relatively attractive here, but…what of his Jotun form? Would the Asgardians find him ugly?

“Maybe the Jotuns find you just as hideous.”

Everyone stared at Loki, before Fandral let out a guffaw. “That’s great! Unconventional, true, but still funny. Know any more traditional ones?”

“I’m not joking,” Loki snapped, jumping to his feet. “I didn’t quite realize how arrogant you both were. You may find the Jotun people unattractive, fine, but to make jokes about it—“


Surprised at his sudden change in demeanor, calm washed over Loki long enough for him to regain his seat. He wasn’t going to forgive Thor that easily, but he could at least hear him out. …And then
superheat Mjolnir the next time Thor reached for the handle of his weapon. But he did like Thor usually, so he was at least willing to listen while he plotted his revenge.

Thor smiled fondly at him, “I didn’t realize that you had such a gentle heart,” he carefully reached over and smoothed Loki’s hair back, “But you’re getting worked up on the behalf of people who would not be bothered anyway. The Jotuns don’t care what we think of them. They do not care what anyone thinks of them.” Thor took Loki’s hand, and he was too shocked to resist. “Trust me, I have had to deal with them while on trips with my father. Jotuns aren’t like you and me—they aren’t kind, they aren’t thoughtful, they aren’t even rational. They are like the dragon we fought; sentient and dangerous certainly, but undeniably monsters. I promise you, they would not—”

Loki hit Thor with all of the force that he could muster.

As everyone stared at him, shocked, he realized what he had done and teleported back to Jotunheim.

Thor thought he was a monster. He thought that the people Loki loved were monsters. It didn’t make sense—Loki himself had never had dealings with Thor, but the Asgardian prince had met his father and brothers on more than one occasion! How then did he still think so poorly of them?

Slowly, he took a deep breath before turning to his mirror. He stepped closer to examine himself, heart racing. His appearance was the same as it always had been, but now he searched for some flaw. How could they possibly find him ugly? His skin was a lovely shade of blue, he thought, though he was paler than most. Was blue skin unattractive? He frowned as he thought of Thor’s blue eyes. That couldn’t be it, could it? Unless blue was only attractive as an eye color.

Thinking of eyes brought Loki’s gaze to his own. He had always found his eyes beautiful, glistening red like some of the gems he wore on formal occasions. True, Jotun eyes didn’t boast the variety of colors that Asgardians did, but there were still varying shades and his were bright and clear. Still… Loki remembered one of the few Asgardian tales he had uncovered as a youth about a warrior who sought to avenge his family by hunting the monster that killed them. The “demon,” he had thought at the time, looked a bit like a scaly bat-Asgardian hybrid, with one clear alteration—its fiery red eyes.

Loki chewed his lip as he considered his reflection. Was it the eyes? The markings that proclaimed his family? His fingers gently traced the graceful silver lines. He’d always thought that his markings were particularly nice. Loki sighed and sat before the mirror, running his fingers through his hair wondering whether his horns were the problem. Did all Asgardians find all Jotuns hideous? Is that why they found them monstrous? Were there exceptions?

Loki suddenly pushed himself to his feet, frustrated. Here he was examining himself in the mirror as though the problem was with him. Clearly, this wasn’t true. He was perfect. That meant that the issue lay with Thor and Fandral and Asgard in general.

He paced the length of his room, trying to decide what to do next. He was angry—furious, really—that they would promote such disgusting lies. To generalize all Jotuns showed either small-mindedness or complete ignorance. (Here Loki decided to pointedly ignore the fact that he had made some unflattering generalizations as well). He would have to teach Thor a lesson. But how? He groaned as he realized he had publicly punched the crown prince of Asgard. He probably should just never return.

As Loki collapsed backwards onto his bed, there was a knock on his bedchamber door. He sat back up just as his father entered.

Laufey smiled as his eyes fell upon his youngest son. “I received a message from Byleistr asking for me to send him his favorite pen with our next correspondence, so I went to fetch it myself from his
room. He always complained that your pacing next door made the paintings on his wall rattle, but I did not believe him until today. You have been gone too often, lately. I have barely seen you. What is on your mind, child?"

Loki rolled his eyes at his father’s use of “child” as he always did, making Laufey chuckle. “It’s nothing. I just have a friend who—no, it’s nothing.”

He could tell his father was concerned and didn’t believe him in the slightest, but Laufey chose not to pursue the topic. “Will you be at dinner tonight? Without Byleistr here it feels empty enough, but you’ve also missed many meals in the past several weeks. Have you been spending all of that time on Svartalfheim?”

Loki lowered his eyes and shrugged, unwilling to admit that it hadn’t just been Svartalfheim that he’d been visiting. “Mostly,” he replied vaguely. He snuck a glance upwards to see his father was looking slightly downcast. “Of course I’ll be at dinner tonight,” he quickly added. “In fact, I might be around a lot more in the future,” he mumbled, his thoughts full of anger and hurt as he considered his new (and now former) friends on Asgard.

Laufey’s gaze softened as he sat down on the bed next to his son. “You know you can tell me what’s bothering you, if not directly then indirectly. I would help, if you would let me.”

Loki sighed, and then leaned against his father’s shoulder. He probably shouldn’t say anything, should let his father get back to whatever important thing he was doing before he took time out for two of his sons. “I suppose, it’s just,” he searched for the words. “Let’s just say there is a person who believes some really horrible things about a group of people, and while there must be a basis for it somewhere, it isn’t true. But the person probably won’t hear any differently. What can fix that type of ignorance? Is there even a point in trying, or is it just hopeless? Does it mean, contrary to what I thought of this individual before, that they are just a terrible person?”

Laufey smiled a little, “Philosophical today, aren’t we?”

Loki glared up at his father, who pressed a quick kiss to his forehead in response. “I’m sorry you’ve encountered someone who is clinging to some untrue belief, but you should never give up on someone you think is a good person. People can always change their minds, but in my experience the truest way to change someone’s way of thinking is love,” Laufey continued speaking, but suddenly a spark of an idea lit in Loki’s mind and he was no longer truly listening. It was foolish to think that Thor would ever actually care for someone he thought was a monster, but that didn’t mean Loki could find a form of revenge. He would teach Thor a lesson. Loki was still busy spinning his plan while his father spoke on, “If a person cares for you in any respect they will care for your opinions. Of course, this doesn’t always work out and,” Laufey hesitated, not noticing that he no longer held his son’s attention as he finished quietly, “While love can cause peace and understanding, handled incorrectly it can cause war and regret. I personally know only too well the dangers unchecked love presents, and have made some decisions in my past that—“

“Thank you, Father,” Loki jumped to his feet and kissed his father’s cheek, “I know just what to do.”

He was going to make Thor fall in love with him. Then, when he was so in love he’d do anything for him, Loki would tell him the truth and they’d see who the monster really was. He’d make Thor rue the day he called Loki ugly.

Laufey frowned, “Loki, are you sure—“

But Loki was already gone.
Thor sighed heavily for the eighth time on their way back to the castle, and Sif rolled her eyes. “Honestly, Thor, that’s enough. Luke just overreacted to something, the way he always does. He’ll be fine, and he’ll probably be back soon.”

Thor frowned, his eyes on the ground as he walked. “Not this time. This was different, I truly upset him. I’m not sure what I said,” he wrung his hands and sighed again, dejected.

Volstagg laid a heavy hand on Thor’s shoulder, “Don’t fear, everything will work out. My wife and I have upset each other dozens of times, but we always come back around. Perhaps you can talk to him when he returns and allow him to explain why he was so affected by your words. Listening can be more helpful than speaking.”

Fandral snorted, “I’m not sure what happened, but usually Luke has a better sense of humor than that. Although,” he grinned, “that punch was beautiful, I didn’t see it coming. Has anyone you liked ever hit you like that before? Is it illegal?”

Thor shot Fandral a look and glanced quickly around at the people they were passing on the road before saying in a lowered voice, “I’m not sure, but we’re not going to tell anyone about it if Luke does come back. He was clearly upset and I don’t want to make this situation any worse.”

“Still,” Fandral squinted at Thor’s cheekbone, “I think he left a mark.”

The Asgardian prince rubbed his cheek absentmindedly, still worrying and replaying the moments before Luke disappeared in his mind. He had looked so hurt, like it was personal.

As Thor was thinking through everything to try to figure out where he had gone wrong, Hogan finally spoke up. “Jotuns aren’t monsters, you know,” Thor stopped short, almost causing an accident as a man behind them nearly ran them over with his cart. He apologized and then gave his friend a disbelieving look as they moved to the side of the road.

Sif raised an eyebrow. “They raided your village and killed innocent people. I thought you hated Jotuns.”

“I do,” Hogun’s dark eyes flashed, “But they are not monsters. Monsters cannot help but be what they are; those Jotuns chose their evil actions.”

Thor scowled, “They may have attacked your village, but you don’t know them as I do. I’ve had to speak with them, debate with them, eat formal dinners with them,” he shook his head, “I can’t see them as anything other than monsters. You remember what happened last time I visited Jotunheim,” Thor reminded them grimly, eyes dark with the memory.

Fandral cleared his throat awkwardly. “Not to be indelicate,” he said carefully, “But I feel like Hogan was trying to make a point. Were you going to connect all of this to Luke?”

Hogun was silent again for a moment, before giving Thor a considering look, “It’s very possible he knows a Jotun that isn’t terrible, and is fond of him. It would explain the personal reaction.”

Thor blinked at him, taken aback. “You think Luke has feelings for a Jotun?”

Before Hogun could say that wasn’t necessarily what he meant, Fandral cut in, “That makes so much sense! No wonder he was so upset that we called Jotuns ugly! He must find them really attractive,” Fandral grinned at Thor, “Which means that you need to grow another couple of feet. I also foresee blue skin paint in your future.”
Thor scowled and Sif groaned, “Can’t you take anything seriously, Fandral?”

“I suppose that could be it,” Volstagg supplemented in a thoughtful voice, “Love can be blind, after all.”

As they continued to debate the possibilities, Thor’s mood only darkened further. If one of those monsters had tricked Luke into liking him, nothing good would come of it. By the time they reached the palace gates he was considering forgoing sparring for the day in lieu of a visit with his mother, who always seemed to understand things better than he ever could. Those plans were abruptly changed, however, when they found Luke waiting for them at the palace entrance.

*****

Loki’s heart raced as the people he had considered friends approached, realizing he had to quickly make up for his missteps and redirect their attention elsewhere, or he could be sent away without ever even getting to put his plan into action. They hadn’t quite noticed him yet, and he felt a pang as he watched them argue over something. He truly had enjoyed their company. He might even miss this when it was over.

Loki firmly stamped those emotions out as Thor finally looked up and saw him. Something flashed through the Asgardian’s eyes then, but Loki wasn’t sure what it was. It couldn’t be anything good, however, so he quickly moved forward to do something before Thor could.

“I’m sorry,” he said quietly, stepping all of the way into Thor’s personal space and reaching up to gently lay a hand on Thor’s bruised cheek. “I didn’t mean to hurt you, it’s just,” he forced tears into his eyes and ducked his head to pretend to hide them, “The smallest things have been upsetting me lately. I shouldn’t have taken it out on you. My brother has been ill and I’ve barely been sleeping.”

He ran a hand over his face and peeked up to see how Thor was reacting. He mentally congratulated himself as he saw that the Asgardian prince was looking down at him, distress clear in his eyes. A moment later Thor had gathered Loki tightly into his arms and was holding him as Loki pressed his face into the prince’s chest, trying hard not to smile.

“Gods, Luke, I wish you had told me earlier. You must bring him to the castle at once! We have the best healers here in all of the realms, your brother will be better in no time.” He smiled down at Loki and stroked his hair soothingly as Loki thought quickly to fix the situation.

“Actually, I just visited and he, he’s been feeling better. It’s just the lack of sleep now, I’ll be fine. I just didn’t mean for things to get so out of hand,” he shot Thor a guilty look, which the other prince responded to with a fond smile.

“Think nothing more of it, it never happened. Will you stay with us today? Or would you rather be back with your family as your brother recovers?”

Loki pretended to consider this as he laced his fingers through Thor’s and chewed his bottom lip. “I think it would be better if I stayed,” he glanced up at Thor through his eyelashes shyly, “It’s a good distraction for me.”

Thor beamed and squeezed Loki’s fingers tightly. “Of course, we’re happy to have you. Let me know if your brother needs any further assistance, because you’re welcome to bring him here.” He gently pressed a kiss to the top of Loki’s head, and Loki’s heart raced—because of his plan’s success, of course. Certainly not for any other reason, he reassured himself. It was almost too easy.

As Thor released him and stepped back, Volstagg came forward to give him a tight hug, saying in an emotional voice how sorry he was and that the importance of family overrode everything else, in his
opinion. Fandral gave him a half-guilty grin and apologized for insulting the attractiveness of Jotuns, who he was sure could be very sexy at times, followed by a wink. Loki wasn’t sure how to interpret this, and gave him a confused smile. He didn’t miss the glare that Thor shot at Fandral, which perplexed him further.

Hogun also expressed his well wishes towards Loki’s brother, but when Loki turned to Sif, he saw her appraising him with narrowed eyes.

“I didn’t realize you had a brother,” she said casually, “You’ve never mentioned him before.”

“I have two, actually,” Loki replied slightly snippily, “And a father. My mother is dead. Do you want any more family details? It’s not as though you’ve ever asked before.” He was proud of himself for not even faltering on the word mother.

Thor was giving Sif a murderous look, and she had the grace to appear embarrassed. “That’s not what I—I’m sorry. You’re right, I just thought—but um,” she cleared her throat. “I’m sorry. I’m sure we’d love to meet your brothers when the sick one is feeling better. You should bring them around.”

Thor’s face lit up, “That’s a wonderful idea! I’m sure we would love them.”

Loki struggled to hide his alarm, “Well, they’re usually very busy,” he hedged, “But perhaps sometime. We’ll see.” Inwardly he hoped that they’d forget about it. He’d figure something out, though, if it became a problem later.

Sif gave him another slightly suspicious look, but appeared to think better of saying anything.

“Were we going to go to the practice grounds sometime today?” Fandral teased, “Or did we decide that loitering outside of the gates is a better option?”

Thor grinned and threw an arm around Loki, “To the practice grounds it is!”

*****

Thor was ecstatic that Luke had returned, although he fought to hide how pleased he was because of Luke’s situation with his brother. Thor tried to imagine Luke as a sibling and concluded that he was probably the youngest. He wondered if his older brothers were protective.

“What’s having siblings like?” Thor blurted out, following his train of thought.

Luke cocked his head thoughtfully, smiling. “Well, I can’t speak for everyone who has a brother, but I am quite a bit younger than mine, and they tend to dote on me.”

Thor grinned. He could see that.

“They’re actually my half brothers,” Luke said after a moment, “We had different mothers. Theirs died when By—Byren was young, and my mother died when I was born.”

The grin fell from Thor’s face. “I’m sorry,” he mumbled, feeling blessed to have both of his parents alive and well. “That must have been terrible for your father, losing two people he loved.”

A shadow fell over Luke’s face, and Thor felt guilty for bringing up something so depressing. “At least he has you and your brothers, though,” he added quickly. “It’s sounds as though you are a close family.”

Luke’s lips quirked up a bit at the edges, as though he was laughing at some joke that Thor didn’t
understand. “Yes, we are very close. We would do anything to protect and defend each other against anyone who would insult or hurt us.” There was an edge to his voice.

Thor nodded, “That’s how it should be. Sometimes I,” he hesitated and glanced ahead at the others. He and Luke had fallen behind. “Sometimes I wish my father and I were closer,” he admitted quietly. “I used to feel as though he truly loved me. He used to set aside time to spend with me and my mother. Lately though,” he paused, “It just feels as though he is distancing himself on purpose. He is disappointed in me. I used to try very hard to please him, but I admit I’ve given up. Even when I tried I never had his approval.”

Luke was silent for a moment, and Thor started to think that he shouldn’t have mentioned it.

“You shouldn’t have to be someone you aren’t just for your father’s affection,” Luke said at last. “I disappoint my father all of the time. Hel, if he knew some of the things I’ve done lately he would slap magic blockers on me and lock me up in my room for the rest of my life. But he still loves me, and I know that will never change.” Luke opened his mouth as though he was going to continue, and then closed it again, considering. “At least you have friends who care for you,” he ended quietly, looking away.

Thor’s heart leapt. Was Luke talking about the others, or his own feelings? And it sounded as though Luke really had been up to some mischief lately—or at least something his father wouldn’t approve of—but did that mean he had been to Jotunheim? Could he have feelings for a Jotun? It sounded like a stretch to Thor, but if it were true, well…

He was confident he could win Luke’s affection from him.

Thor grinned. If Luke fell for him instead, then he would be safe from the Jotun. Thor did always enjoy a good challenge.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you again for reading! Please let me know what you think and I will update the next chapter as soon as it is ready!

<3
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Loki, Thor, Sif, and the Warriors Three spar on the training grounds.

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone reading this story! I'm really thrilled and flattered at the interest it has received :) I'm sorry this chapter didn't get posted as soon as I had hoped, but I'm going to be incorporating this story into my Camp NaNoWriMo time, so I will be (hopefully, if all goes well!) upping my posting to about 2, *maybe* 3 times a week instead of only once.

I hope you all enjoy this relatively light-hearted chapter! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Seven

The training grounds were sparsely inhabited when they arrived, with only several men at some of the different weapon training areas. Thor explained that many of the men that usually filled the area were home or in their quarters preparing for the journey tomorrow, and that the rest of the currently active guard could be found patrolling the palace and the city.

Loki approached the castle skittishly, wondering as he always did what would happen if someone who could recognize him saw him. Thor immediately asked Loki for a match, but he declined. When it looked as though Thor might protest, Loki assured him that he would join them later, but would like to watch for the moment.

Disappointed, Thor walked off to challenge Hogun at staves while Sif and Fandral faced off with swords. Meanwhile Volstagg went to the other end of the training grounds to practice throwing axes.

Loki wandered over to where the thick green grass began to grow and leaned up against one of the trees there to oversee the proceedings. He watched with interest as Sif and Fandral began their match, aware the entire time that Thor kept looking over to see if he was watching. He smiled inwardly and pretended not to notice, fixing his attention determinedly on the other battle.

For a while they were very equally matched. Fandral was quick, flexible, and fought a bit dirty, (not that Loki was surprised), while Sif was determined and methodical, her strikes precise and clever. He was actually impressed, watching carefully to see what he could learn. Not that he thought they would be bad, but he guiltily admitted to himself that he had not thought they would be as good as some of the Jotun warriors he knew. Maybe—just maybe—the idea that Asgardians were undisciplined barbarians when they fought was ugly propaganda. Loki shifted uncomfortably. It wasn’t the same though, he reasoned. He was here willing to learn and leave those stereotypes behind, whereas Thor was uninterested in changing his mind. Although, he wasn’t really giving Thor a chance to change his mind, was he? Loki decided not to examine that thought too closely.
As the match progressed he watched for weaknesses. Fandral, while well balanced and careful at the beginning, had gotten a bit more reckless with some of his dodges. Loki thought that this could also be because Fandral was trying to be showy. Every once in a while the lithe blonde looked over at Loki and winked as he fought.

Loki snickered as Sif took advantage of these moments to give Fandral some solid bruises.

Sif, on the other hand, showed no obvious signs of weakness. Privately, Loki thought she might be the best warrior he had ever seen. She was at least in the top three. He watched with interest as she broke through Fandral’s defenses multiple times.

He was so focused on trying to find a flaw in her effortless motions that he didn’t notice Thor approaching from the other direction. He jumped slightly as Thor’s long red cape dropped carelessly onto the dirt beside him, followed by Mjolnir. Loki gave the golden prince a confused look as he worked on unbuckling his armor, which joined the pile a moment later. His eyes widened fractionally as Thor lifted the tunic over his head as well to reveal his chiseled chest.

Then, naked except for his tight leather pants and boots, he gave Loki a cocky grin. “It’s easier to move without all of the armor,” he said in explanation.

Yes, Loki thought sardonically as he pried his gaze away from Thor’s gorgeous hipbones, of course that was why Thor was stripping. He swallowed and tried to come up with a smart response. “Do you go into battle like that?” he muttered, irritated with himself as he fought a losing battle to not look.

Thor just laughed, “Sometimes.”

With that, the Asgardian turned and headed back to where Hogun waited for him with a faintly exasperated expression. Loki allowed himself to watch the muscles play across Thor’s back as he retreated, and the way the leather tightened over his ass as he walked. Truly, the man’s body was perfect. He edged forwards slightly to watch Hogun and Thor’s match this time, telling himself that it was just because he hadn’t gotten to watch them at all yet.

That really had very little to do with it.

*****

Thor peeked backwards as he stooped to switch out his staff for a blunted practice sword and felt a trill of success go through him as he noticed that Luke was finally watching. It was about time. He beamed over at Hogun, who gave him an impassive look while also switching out his own weapon. The man was probably a bit annoyed with him for stopping their match to strip. But really, they did battle all of the time, and it wasn’t every day that Luke was here.

Thor tossed the sword into the air showily, and Hogun rushed him, just as he expected he would. At the last second the Asgardian prince grabbed his sword from the air and spun quickly out of the way, turning to slash across the other’s back in one fluid motion. Hogun had recovered well from his missed lunge, however, and their swords clanged loudly as they clashed.

Thor followed up with several powerful attacks that he knew showed off his muscles nicely, but made sure to pace himself. Hogun, for his part, was putting up admirably with Thor’s showiness. He gave his friend a quick apologetic look as he feigned an attack on the left before quickly following up with a powerful blow on the right.

Hogun just managed to catch his sword, but was forced back several steps by the sheer strength
behind it. Not wasting time, Thor followed with a series of quick strikes to his abdomen and legs, finally breaking through Hogun’s defenses on the last one and leaving a solid welt just above his knee. He smiled triumphantly and looked back quickly to see if he still had Luke’s attention. He did. Distracted by Luke’s gaze and his success, he nearly missed Hogun’s next attack.

Thor parried the strike just in time, only to leave himself open enough for Hogun to knee him in the crotch. Hard. He doubled over, flushing red as he heard the distinctive sound of Luke’s laughter. Hogun rested his sword tip at Thor’s neck, signifying the end of the match. Thor glared up at his friend and, just slightly, Hogun smiled.

*****

Loki couldn’t contain his gleeful laughter at Hogun’s underhanded victory. He was sure Thor was wishing he had kept his armor on now. He was still laughing as Sif and Fandral finished their bout—Loki hadn’t seen the end, but he was certain that Sif had won—and moved back over to him.

“What did I miss?” Fandral asked as he sprawled next to Loki. “Unless you are laughing at my defeat, in which case, you injure me,” he clutched his chest melodramatically as Sif shook her head.

Loki just chuckled and explained what had happened in the other match as he regained his breath. Sif let out a good shout of laughter and grinned mockingly across the grounds at Thor, who gave her a dark look. Then he caught Loki’s gaze and turned quickly away, embarrassed.

Loki broke into a new fit of uncontrollable giggles, and a moment later Fandral and Sif joined in. Volstagg took notice of their revelry and left his axes to come and inquire what had happened.

By the time the laughter had finally subsided, Hogun and Thor had left the practice field to join their friends at the tree. Loki smirked up at them, and Thor grinned sheepishly and shrugged, “I probably deserved that,” he conceded at last, nodding to Hogun. Loki couldn’t help but notice that he made no move to redress himself, however. He made a conscious effort to keep his eyes up at Thor’s face level, reminding himself fiercely that he was angry with Thor, and not at all interested. That smile was disarming though.

“Well then,” Fandral said at last, jumping to his feet, “We haven’t gotten to see Luke fight yet. Are you done sitting on the grass and ready to try and take me on? Don’t worry,” he reassured, puffing himself up, “I’ll take it easy on you.”

Loki almost gave him a snippy response until Fandral broke his stance and grinned teasingly, “Come now, you didn’t think I was serious? I don’t think you’ll be easy, and darling I’m always hard,” He finished with an over the top wink before bounding off towards the training area as Sif groaned.

Loki couldn’t help but laugh just a little bit at his ridiculousness as he followed. Thor threw his tunic back on and he and the others got up and came closer as well. Just faintly Loki thought he heard Thor mutter, “Why does Fandral get to go first?” but whatever he had to say was quickly silenced by an elbow in the gut from Sif. Loki pretended not to notice any of it.

Fandral waited for him in the ring, already holding his practice sword and bouncing on the balls of his feet. Loki pushed up the sleeves of his green tunic and took a moment to stretch. After a couple of minutes he looked up to find Fandral grinning at him suggestively. Something made him think that Thor probably had been watching him closely as well, which gave him an uncomfortable fluttery feeling in his stomach. That was followed immediately by irritation with himself, but he had to remember that it was a good thing that Thor was watching. This was all just a part of his plan.

He’d make Thor fall in love with him, and then reveal the truth and laugh in his face. He’d laugh at
all of them. Loki gritted his teeth and grabbed a couple practice swords, testing them for balance. When he found two he liked, he moved to where Fandral was standing.

“Ready?” The slender blonde asked with a smile.

“Always,” Loki replied smoothly, before darting forwards.

His first attack was designed to fail. As Fandral dodged to the left just as Loki predicted, Loki spun and moved with him far faster than he would have had his first attack been genuine. Fandral was good, though, so his follow-through swipe only scratched the man’s arm instead of catching him across his back.

Now Fandral was alert, watching Loki warily with a serious expression that Loki hadn’t yet seen on his face. He was playing defensive, so Loki took the offensive and attacked again. This time Fandral caught him blow for blow.

A good quarter mark later neither of them gained any real ground, although both had managed minor cuts and bruises. Loki had done more damage, but he attributed that to the fact that Fandral hadn’t had a chance to really see how he fought beforehand, whereas Loki had gotten to watch Fandral take on Sif for an entire match and analyze his fighting style.

Finally Sif shouted out a draw, and the two dropped their stances, panting. Sweaty and tired they made their way back over to the others for a break.

“I’m impressed, you know,” Fandral told him when he regained his breath, “Not just anyone can hold out against me for that long. And I’m really not trying to brag, it’s just the truth. Who did you learn from?”

“Random people taught me the basics, but I’m mostly self-taught,” Loki replied, mentally apologizing to Thrym, who had first worked hard to develop a fighting style that matched Loki’s physique and then doubly as hard to make Loki practice it. He couldn’t risk naming someone and then having one of them check with that person, however, and he could hardly name a Jotun as his trainer.

“Really?” Sif asked, surprised. “That’s remarkable. I had to do much the same, since at first no one would train me.”

Loki frowned, confused. “What do you mean? Why wouldn’t anyone want to train you?”

After a long pause, Volstagg finally spoke up. “You don’t know? Have you not heard of how hard Lady Sif had to fight to be where she is now?”

Loki just shook his head quietly, now honestly confused. Why would Sif have to fight harder than the rest of them? Did she come from a lower rank?

Sif rolled her eyes, “It’s a long, tedious, stupid story and I’d rather not go into it. Plus, it would make certain people here look bad,” she glanced at the Asgardian men around her, who were all looking a bit ashamed. “But I should think the gist of it would be obvious.”

It wasn’t. Loki cocked his head slightly, thinking hard. He must have looked as confused as he felt, because finally Sif snorted. “Oh, come on Luke, you’re smarter than this. How am I different than all of them?”

He decided to go out on a limb and guess the only thing that had come to his mind. “Were you from a lower rank?”
Sif gave him an incredulous look.

“Actually,” Thor inserted, “Lady Sif comes from an old noble family, one of the highest ranking in Asgard. Her mother was especially displeased with her hobby of choice.”

Loki was lost. Sif finally threw him a bone. “It’s because I’m a woman, idiot.”

If anything, he was now even more lost. He knew, of course, that Asgardians were split into genders, and so each person only had one set of genetalia, but he didn’t understand how this would change anything. Svartalfheim also had two genders, and Muspelheim had three, but neither of them thought that this somehow affected fighting ability. Loki debated not saying anything, but then settled for humor. “Do Asgardian men fight with their cocks now?”

Sif let out a surprised bark of laughter. “Well, you would think so.” She gave him a considering look, “You're honestly having trouble understanding it, aren’t you? I knew I liked you for a reason.”

Thor shifted uncomfortably. “Well, there is some basis for…” Sif gave him a sharp look and he trailed off, looking embarrassed, before trying again, “Sif, you know I don’t think any less of you. You’re one of the best warriors I know. But men do have more muscle mass than—”

“Thor, darling,” Loki drawled, “Would you say you have more muscle mass than Hogun?” Thor blinked at him, before nodding. Loki continued, “I didn’t exactly see you besting him, did I?”

Thor flushed. “That’s different, I—“ he broke off with a sigh and after a moment gave Sif a guilty look. “I’m sorry, he’s right, it’s not. It’s just that some arguments sound so logical until you all poke holes in them.” He looked down at his hands, “This is why I’m not good at politics.”

“You need to stop listening to Tyr,” Sif said darkly, and Hogun nodded his agreement. “I’d recognize his poisoned logic anywhere. And for what it’s worth, Thor, you were one of the few who always supported me and I know that.” She turned to Loki, “Thor tried to have the rules changed for me when we were young, but Tyr wouldn’t have it.”

“What about now?” Loki questioned, curious.

“Now, with Balder’s cooperation, women are allowed to train and join the city guard,” Thor said, beaming. “It’s a good step in the right direction. Tyr still won’t allow women in his army, however.”

“And you have no say there?”

Thor shook his head, “Father gave Tyr full reign over the army, second only to him.”

Sif rested a comforting hand on Thor’s arm, “You’ve made a huge difference, though, and one day you’ll fix the rest of it. Don’t beat yourself up over things you have no control of.”

“Speaking of Balder,” Hogun said quietly, and then nodded behind them.

The captain of the guard was making his way over to the practice grounds, a dozen or so of his men behind him. He visibly brightened when he noticed them there. “What are you all sitting around for?” He yelled across to them with a smile, “I thought this was a training ground, not the barracks!”

Thor grinned and grabbed Loki’s arm, pulling him upright. “Come, let’s see how well you hold up against me.”

“Are you going to use the swords or the staves?” Volstagg asked, grabbing several of each from the racks.
“How about weapon of choice?” Thor suggested with a glint in his eye.

Loki weighed this option. Thor would choose his hammer, of course. He expected Loki to turn him down, but Loki grinned slowly. He had different ideas. “Certainly. Weapon of choice it is.”

“How about weapon of choice?” A concerned voice asked. Balder had caught up to them and had overheard their conversation. Loki looked back over to Thor only to see that he was looking concerned as well.

“Maybe we shouldn’t. I don’t want to accidentally hurt you,” Thor muttered.

Loki snorted derisively. “Don’t be ridiculous. Weapon of choice, or I won’t fight you.” He turned and moved off towards one of the practice rings, hands empty.

When he finally turned around to face his opponent, the first thing he noticed was that Thor had removed his tunic again. His mind immediately went blank for a moment. Thor took advantage of his distraction and literally flew across the ring at him.

He was faster than Loki had thought he’d be, and Loki very nearly didn’t teleport out of the way in time. He vanished at the last second and Thor, who hadn’t realized that Loki had chosen his magic as his weapon, was disoriented for a moment. It was just long enough for Loki to weave a hex to make the Asgardian prince’s arm go numb, causing him to drop the hammer.

Not missing a beat, Thor called the hammer to his other hand and aimed a lightning charge at Loki. Nothing lethal, of course, but Loki appreciated that he wasn’t taking it easy on him. He blocked it with one of his shields, but misjudged how powerful it was and was forced back several steps.

Thor advanced on him again, and as Loki cast his next spell he took the moment to admire how the other man’s muscles rippled as he stalked forward. A moment later he stopped, however, completely confused.

“What’s wrong?” The Loki to the left of him asked mockingly.

“Can’t figure out who to attack?” The Loki on his other side teased.

One of the clones teleported behind Thor and sent a concentrated charge at him. Thor immediately attacked that one, and Loki snickered as he fell right through it. Instead of getting disoriented again, however, Thor changed direction surprisingly quickly and threw himself at the Loki who had laughed—the real one this time.

Loki was distracted for just a split second by how Thor’s body moved as it shifted weight, but that second was just a moment too long. Thor tackled him into the ground, grinning triumphantly. Mjolnir pinned one of Loki’s arms to the ground, while Thor himself served to pin down the rest of him.

The Jotun prince attempted to weave a spell that would throw the Asgardian off of him, but nothing happened. He turned his green gaze to Mjolnir and gave the hammer a look full of professional curiosity. “It nullifies magic,” Loki murmured before turning back to look at Thor… whose face was now scant inches from his.

Loki’s breath caught in his throat as he registered Thor’s half-naked body on top of his, surrounding him and pinning him down. The heat from Thor’s bare, sun-touched skin soaked through his thin tunic and his warm breath lingered on his neck. His powerful thighs rested on either side of Loki’s own, holding him firmly in place.

Loki opened his mouth to say something—he wasn’t even sure what—but to his embarrassment he only let out a short, breathy pant. Thor’s eyes darkened with lust and his cock twitched with interest.
Loki’s own body was beginning to respond as Thor purposefully lowered his head, intent on capturing Loki’s lips as fully as he had the rest of him.

Before he could, however, he received a sharp kick in the ribs. Thor jerked and looked to his attacker, breaking the moment.

“Come on, get up already.” Sif grumbled, “No one wants to watch you two fuck in the dirt.”

Fandral cleared his throat loudly from the sidelines, his eyes sparkling with mischief.

Sif sighed and rolled her eyes heavenwards dramatically. “Fine. Almost no one wants to watch you fuck in the dirt. Now get up and let someone else into the ring.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you again for reading! If you have a moment I'd love to hear what you think :)
Chapter Eight

Loki looked up to see that more Asgardians had joined them during his match with Thor, and were watching them now with knowing smirks on their faces. He scowled and gave the idiot on top of him a shove.

With a sigh, the Asgardian prince reluctantly pushed himself off of Loki and stood, calling Mjolnir to his hand. Loki rubbed his arm, gave Thor a thorough glare that only intensified when Thor just looked amused, and then stalked out of the practice ring past him. He heard Thor sigh as he left, but he didn’t stop until he was several paces outside of the ring and realized that he didn’t have anywhere to stalk off to.

Now thoroughly annoyed, Loki crossed his arms and stared determinedly at the tree he had sat under earlier, trying to decide what to do. He could just teleport away, but that was a very passive way of expressing his displeasure, and he’d rather do something about it.

As he contemplated his options, he heard Thor approaching hesitantly. Loki’s dug his nails into his palms as he realized that he couldn’t retaliate without possibly damaging the progression of his plan. He took a deep breath and reminded himself that this was all an act, and it was a good thing that Thor was falling for it. He turned around, not certain what he was going to say yet, but Thor beat him to it anyway.

“Did you still want to see the library?” the Asgardian prince asked, looking cautious but hopeful. He was wearing his tunic and armor again, and that definitely wasn’t disappointment that Loki felt. It was relief, he was sure.

“Very well,” Loki replied casually, trying to contain his sudden excitement. The Royal Asgardian Library! He knew now that many Asgardians didn’t place much stock in books, but the ones who did had nearly limitless funds and resources. Loki cast a quick spell that removed all of the dust and dirt from his clothes and smoothed his hair before moving off eagerly in the direction of the main entrance to the castle.

*****

Thor looked off after Luke’s retreating back, bemused. One moment the man was panting beneath
him, the next he was huffy and irritated, and the moment after that he was happily heading off (in the wrong direction) to the library. Thor idly wondered what it must be like to live inside Luke’s head. He figured it must be fairly chaotic.

Finally Thor waved to Sif and the others and then hurried after Luke.

“So you are looking for books on our non-allied planets?” Thor asked, taking Luke’s arm and circumspectly redirecting him, pretending not to notice that they had been heading the wrong way, “Any reason in particular?”

“No,” Luke sent him a dark look, as if it had been Thor’s fault that he hadn’t known where the entrance of the palace nearest to the library was. Thor wasn’t sure how to respond to that, but luckily Luke continued, “I’m just curious, we didn’t have many books on the other races at home.”

Thor frowned, “What about the Great Library of Vanaheim? Surely they must have had something. That library makes ours look small.”

“I’ve never been there,” Luke replied with a wistful look on his face.

Thor was shocked. “Never? Why not? You could just teleport there, can’t you?”

Luke shrugged, “I have to have been to a place first before I’m able to transport myself there by magic. I’ve never had the opportunity to go to the Library.”

Thor carefully hid his excitement. He could take Luke to the Great Library sometime! Sure, he found it tedious, but he was certain that Luke would love it… and more importantly, he would be appreciative of Thor for taking him there.

They were approaching one of the side entrances of the palace. It was typically a servant’s entrance, not that Thor minded. It was far better than walking all of the way around to one of the main entrances and then doubling back to get in the direction you wanted to go. He smiled and nodded at the guards stationed there. The younger one bowed deeply while the older one just looked on, amused.

The bowing used to bother Thor when he was younger, but now he was used to it. In time, the young guard would be told that Thor didn’t care for all of the pomp and circumstance and so he would stop.

Luke said nothing at all about the bowing, and for the first time Thor found himself wondering what Luke’s social rank was. He couldn’t be too high up, or Thor would have met him already. He knew all of the great noble houses of Vanaheim personally, since Vanaheim was technically ruled by Asgard.

It was possible that Luke was lesser nobility, since Thor wasn’t familiar with all of them. He could be a peasant as well, but he certainly didn’t act like one. In fact, he didn’t even act like lesser nobility. Thor couldn’t stop himself from grinning. Luke acted even more entitled than Thor himself sometimes.

“What are you smiling at?” Luke asked him suspiciously, jogging Thor out of his thoughts.

“Am I not allowed to smile now?” The Asgardian prince teased, deciding not to bring up the subject of social status. Luke hadn’t talked much about his family yet, and Thor wanted to hear more about them on Luke’s terms. He also didn’t want to give Luke the impression that he cared about things like rank.
“Not unless I say you can,” Luke responded in an over-the-top pretentious voice, tilting his chin up haughtily while trying not to smile.

Thor tried to stop himself from grinning like an idiot, but failed. Luke rolled his eyes.

As they continued walking, Thor noticed they were approaching a dark recess where he had had several liaisons with the servants as well as young noble men and women during celebrations. For a moment, he wondered what it would be like if he just grabbed Luke and pushed him into the alcove without warning.

He’d probably get a sharp kick, or even stabbed if he surprised Luke enough. But if he didn’t…

He would herd Luke back against the wall, the stone cold against their heated skin. Luke would make that sweet breathy sound he’d made earlier as Thor pushed between his thighs, wrapping one hand around the back of Luke’s neck to finally guide his lips up to Thor’s own while the other slid down Luke’s back to firmly grab his ass.

Luke would gasp into his mouth and keen, surprised but aroused as Thor squeezed gently. He could already imagine his tongue slipping through the seal of Luke’s lips and entering the hot cavern of his mouth. He would distract and tease him with his tongue while nudging his legs further apart and pushing his hips flush against Luke’s.

“Thor,” he could already hear Luke groan into his mouth as Thor ground his arousal between Luke’s legs, feeling the dark haired man’s cock hardening against his own. Luke’s head would fall back in pleasure as he moaned, exposing his pale throat to Thor’s hungry lips. He would attack it voraciously, leaving his mark on Luke’s skin for everyone to see.

“Thor,” Luke would moan as he melted into Thor’s arms, unconsiously bucking his hips up against Thor’s own, searching for more friction. He’d recapture Luke’s lips then while sliding his fingers up underneath of Luke’s tunic, searching for his waistband…

“Thor, damn it!”

Thor snapped back out of his fantasy. Luke was standing several paces in front of him, glaring.

The Asgardian cleared his throat awkwardly, shifting his weight to ease the tension from his pants. He was thankful that he was wearing his armor now. Still, Luke’s eyes had narrowed into pretty green slits. Thor guessed he probably wouldn’t appreciate it if he mentioned how lovely his eyes were right now.

“What’s wrong?” he asked in what he thought was a fairly normal sounding voice.

That was apparently the wrong thing to say, because Luke’s expression was suddenly incredulous. “You stopped walking, you idiot. Are you going to show me the library or not?” he crossed his arms, eyes now flashing dangerously.

Luke really shouldn’t be calling Thor an idiot in his own castle, and Thor really shouldn’t find it endearing.

“Of course, I apologize, I was just… just thinking.” Thor explained as he finally continued walking.

Luke snorted as he fell back into stride beside him and muttered, “Trust you to not be able to think and walk at the same time.”

Yes, Thor thought as he hid his grin, his new friend’s snarky mouth wasn’t at all adorable.
Loki’s nerves had been overcome first by his excitement, and then by irritation. He had been terrified that someone would recognize him—but really, he had reminded himself, who would? He had never personally met an Asgardian until he had come here. So he would avoid the king and queen for good measure, but other than that it wouldn’t make a difference who saw him.

The promise of the library had been enough to make him forget about everything anyway, and at first he hadn’t even noticed that Thor had stopped walking. The man had been just staring off into space with a hungry expression on his face, and it wasn’t until they started walking again and passed a dark niche in the direction Thor had been staring in that Loki put two and two together.

He had probably been remembering a past rendezvous with some young noble slut, Loki decided with annoyance, gritting his teeth. It figured. Trust him to forget about Loki even when he was still there. He would have to push his seduction up a notch, not that he was doing a great job to begin with.

He just kept losing his temper around Thor, couldn’t keep his to the plan and kept losing sight of the end goal.

Loki pulled himself from his thoughts only to notice that Thor was now walking with a dreamy, far-off look on his face. Who knew if they were even still heading towards the library, Loki thought with a hint of irritation. He would have to do something about it.

Loki subtly drifted closer to Thor as they walked. When he judged the moment was right, he caught Thor’s hand and threaded their fingers together. Loki didn’t have to look at Thor to feel the resulting surprised face, followed by a smile that brightened the passageway significantly. Loki allowed himself a small smile as well as Thor’s fingers tightened around his. The plan was back on track.

They were now leaving the servant’s area of the castle, and the changes were as obvious as they were breathtaking. Crowded passageways opened up into soaring arched ceilings, marble pillars, elaborately embroidered tapestries that each would have taken a lifetime to complete, and gold touches and filigree everywhere. Loki had never seen such a casually decadent display of wealth in his life.

A sharp pang went through him at the contrast—Jotunheim was in ruins, and so poor they could barely support their people. Lives were lost to starvation and disease every day, as well as to other things which could so easily be prevented if only they had the wealth. And just over there, a man was dipping a brush into a pot of molten gold to touch up the trim on one of the pillars.

Loki stumbled slightly, suddenly finding it difficult to breathe. Thor steadied him with a concerned look on his face, and then seemed to realize what Loki was affected by.

“Ah, yes,” Thor cleared his throat and gave Loki a sheepish grin, “It’s a bit over the top, isn’t it? I’ve lived here all my life, so it wasn’t until I was nearly an adult that I realized this wasn’t normal. It is lovely, however,” he added with a smile, “But I think that’s more because it’s my home than because of the wealth. Most people find it overwhelming.”

Loki closed his eyes for a moment, trying to regain himself. Thor probably thought he was just gawking at the riches like a country wench. “It’s beautiful,” he said flatly. The Asgardian prince must have noted his lack of enthusiasm, because he frowned slightly. He said nothing about it, however.

As they walked through the decadent hallways, Loki kept his gaze fixed firmly ahead, determined
not to make a fool of himself again. Thor filled the silence with idle chatter about the servants and staff and the everyday goings-ons of the palace. Loki only half-listened, but perked up the moment he announced that they were almost at the Library.

The doors to the Library were made of a thick, dark shiny wood, and were carved with scenes from Asgard’s past. Loki lightly traced his fingers over an engraving of three men fighting off a large beast before pushing the door open.

The room beyond took his breath away, this time in awe rather than hurt or envy. Row after row of books lined the soaring walls of the library, and a veritable labyrinth of shelves wove through the space between. Ladders lined every shelf, reaching so high up that Loki had to crane his neck to see the top.

“How is it laid out?” he croaked, heart beating wildly.

“Uh,” Thor swallowed, “I’m not really sure,” he mumbled quickly.

Loki stared at him in stunned disbelief. “You’re telling me,” he said slowly, “That you’ve lived here all your life, and yet you don’t know how the library is laid out?”

“Well, I know where the section on weapons is,” Thor allowed, looking hopeful, “And I’m fairly certain that the maps are right over there—”

“May I help you?” A new voice cut in politely. A middle-aged slender man with light brown hair and hazel eyes stood before them, and Loki swore that he was giving Thor an exasperated look. “Fahim,” Thor beamed, clasping the man’s shoulder, “this is my friend, Luke. He is looking for books on our non-allied races. Luke, this is Fahim, one of my former instructors.”

Loki raised a brow, assessing the man. “You didn’t do a very good job,” he drawled.

Fahim gave him a thin smile in return, “I didn’t have much to work with.”

Thor flushed and laughed awkwardly as the other two smiled at each other. Loki could tell he was already regretting this introduction.

Fahim waved them forward, stepping to their right and navigating the shelves deftly. “Right this way. As Thor should have been able to recall from his studies, the books on foreign relations are over here,” he led them nearly all of the way to the back right corner before gesturing at the area before them.

“How is it laid out?” Loki asked, scanning the immense shelves.

“The entire isle,” Fahim responded promptly, with a small self-satisfied smile. “They are ordered by race. Is there one in particular you were looking for?”

Loki quickly debated not saying, but then realized that it might take him all day just to find the books on his own planet. “Jotunheim,” he admitted reluctantly, glancing back subtly to see Thor’s reaction. The Asgardian prince’s expression darkened slightly, and Loki continued quickly, “For now, anyway. It’s a good starting point.”

Fahim nodded and led Loki down to the middle of the bookcase, “The copies of books with mentions of Jotunheim begin on the third row down in this area,” he said before walking several yards away, “And they end on the last row down here. Is there anything else I can help you with?”
“That’s it, thank you,” Loki said faintly. The number of books that he had indicated would make up roughly a sixth of Jotunheim’s own library. It was certainly impressive.

Loki took a deep breath and figured he might as well get started. He climbed the ladder and began grabbing as many books as he could safely carry down. At one point Thor suggested he toss the books down to him, but Loki just gave him a look of disgust in return.

An hour later, Loki was thoroughly frustrated. Not a single book had mentioned the war so far. They ranged from admirably accurate to wildly erroneous and were on various topics from a detailed summary of the formation of their social and political structure to a chapter that mentioned a brief run-in between an Asgardian and one of his people. If Thor believed even half of the lies, Loki could begrudgingly understand some of his misconceptions. However, Thor had actually been to Jotunheim and had the opportunity to see through the propaganda, and yet he still believed it.

Loki pushed that to the back of his mind as he perused the books further.

An odd pattern appeared. It seemed that the older books were the ones that were giving honest details on Jotunheim and its inhabitants, while all of the recent books were absolute garbage. He was beginning to wish that he had just thrown some of them down to Thor. But the pattern gave him the impression that before the war, their two cultures must have been much closer. He had heard a rumor that they had once been allies, and this seemed to support that idea.

Loki threw down the latest book, and glanced over at Thor. He smiled fondly as he took in the Asgardian prince, who was slumped in his chair with his head back, snoring softly.

Privately Loki thought that this was how many of Thor’s lessons had been received. He gathered up all of the newest piles of books and put them all away before returning to give Thor’s chair a good kick.

Thor was startled into wakefulness, wiping his mouth as he sat up. Clearly embarrassed, he asked, “Did you find what you were looking for?”

Loki frowned, “No,” he admitted, “It’s almost suspicious, really.”

Thor perked up, now interested. “What were you looking for, then? Are the Jotuns up to something?”

Loki scowled at him, “No, you fool. But Asgard is missing books containing information on how the war with Jotunheim was started. Do you know why?”

Thor looked disappointed. He shrugged, “Of course I do, everyone knows. The Jotuns attacked Midgard and tried to conquer it, and we stopped them.”

Loki’s jaw dropped. “That’s a lie!” he exclaimed, horrified. “Who told you that?”

The Asgardian prince just gave him a confused look in return, “As I said, everyone knows that. Of course it’s not a lie. Who told you otherwise?”

Loki crossed his arms, “I have some Jotun friends,” he said defensively, a challenge in his voice.

Thor was quiet for a moment, looking introspective. “Are they all just friends?” he asked at last.

Loki’s heart nearly stopped. For a moment, he was convinced Thor had figured out his secret. It wasn’t as though he had been particularly sneaky about it, with all of his mentions of Jotuns and Jotunheim. But there was a look in Thor’s eyes that he couldn’t place, so he hedged, “Why do you
ask?”

Thor sighed, and then looked at his hands. He seemed to weigh his options for a moment before shaking his head, “Never mind. How did you meet people from Jotunheim, anyway?”

“My magic, of course,” Loki replied flippantly. “I have friends on many worlds. It’s just that since Fandral’s disturbing joke this morning, I was curious to see what caused the rivalry between Jotunheim and Asgard. So far, I have nothing,” he shrugged. Loki thought that his explanation sounded fairly believable. Hopefully Thor had forgotten that Loki had been interested in the non-allied planets before Fandral said anything, but Loki felt confident he could talk his way out of that as well.

Thor, however, seemed distracted, and didn’t appear to have noticed. He stood and made his way over to Loki, stepping just a bit too close. Carefully the Asgardian brushed some of Loki’s silky black hair back behind his ear. Loki’s breath caught, but Thor appeared as though he was still deep in thought rather than as though he was about to make a move on him.

“Luke, you know that I,” he hesitated, “You know that we are all here for you, right? If anything happens, you can come to us for help. Just… be careful, be on your guard.”

Loki raised an eyebrow, torn between amusement and concern. He truly had no idea where Thor was going with this, or what had prompted him to say something so odd. “Of course I do, and I will,” he reassured the Asgardian prince. He thought for a moment before quickly standing up on his toes and brushing a quick kiss to Thor’s jaw. “And thank you for bringing me here, even though it’s obviously not something you enjoy.”

Thor’s eyes softened, “You are welcome. And you’re also welcome to come back at any time, unescorted. I’ll let Fahim know, and he can tell the rest of the staff.”

Loki’s eyes brightened with excitement. “Really?” he asked breathlessly.

Thor grinned, “Really.”

“For now, I have to go, though,” Loki let his regret bleed into his voice, “I promised Father I would be home for dinner.”

“You will join us tomorrow, right?” Thor asked hopefully, “We are leaving to take care of the wild Bilgesnipe.”

“Of course I’m coming,” Loki reassured him, “After all, the whole political aspect of this journey was my idea, and I want to see how it works out.” He gave Thor a wink before transporting himself back to Jotunheim, head spinning with all of the information he had, and more importantly hadn’t, found.

Chapter End Notes

As always, thanks for reading! The next chapter is already in progress and should be up before the end of the week if nothing else goes wrong.

Let me know what you think! :)}
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Loki and Thor deal with some family issues.

Chapter Notes

So before we get back into the story, I just want to cover the fact that there are going to be some original characters in this, and that though they are not going to be the main focus some of them will be important. I will have a list of all of the important characters at the end of this chapter for reference. :) I mainly wanted to have the scope of this story be larger, and it makes sense that Thor and Loki will know people outside of just Sif, Volstagg, Hogun, Fandral, and their families.

Also, this is a slightly heavier chapter, and a bit shorter than normal. I hope you all still enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Nine

The room was only dimly lit, but that was common on Svartalfheim. Even though the palace was above ground unlike most of their main structures, the windows were narrow, just wide enough to let in thin streamers of light. Despite the lack of light, the chambers were lavishly decorated with deep hues of purple and red. A man sat back in the furthest corner, crowded over a book.

The man’s long dark braid fell over his shoulder, and he flicked it back with irritation. He ignored the growing headache gathering at his temples and attempted yet another revealing spell. The old book remained blank. He snarled and nearly tossed the book across the room, but familiar mocking laughter behind him froze his hand.

“What are you doing here, Loki?” he snapped without turning to look, tucking the book safely out of sight.

“Just checking in, Neyir darling. It’s always a pleasure to watch you play at magic. You just keep trying and trying… it’s like watching a blind bird flying into a building repeatedly, all while expecting a different outcome.”

Neyir spun around to face his tormentor, dark eyes growing even blacker with fury. “You think you’re clever now, but you aren’t so articulate when you’re panting under me like a bitch in heat.”

Neyir smiled as Loki’s blue skin flushed slightly, eyes flashing. Despite the years, their arrangement never failed to provoke him. The fifth prince of Svartalfheim took a moment to appreciate how pleased he was at the situation Jotunheim was in. The frozen planet depended on Svartalfheim for support, although proud King Laufey would never have dreamed of whoring his youngest child out for their assistance. Good thing that Loki had taken care of that himself. From what Neyir
understood, Loki pretended to be *pleased* about the arrangement when he was around his family. That just made the truth all the more enjoyable.

“Yes, darling, the only time you’re cleverer me is once every three months when my biological functions take over. You seem so proud of that,” Loki cooed, but Neyir could hear the edge beneath the softness of his voice. He reveled in it.

“It’s not the only time, but it’s certainly the most enjoyable,” the dark elf allowed.

Loki opened his mouth to respond, but just as he did so the door clicked open. Quickly the Jotun prince stepped forward into Neyir’s personal space, and Neyir slowly embraced him, smirking.

“Oh, hello Loki,” a cool voice greeted them, “I wasn’t aware you were visiting. Please forgive my intrusion.” The man who walked in the door was tall and graceful, with an expressionless face. His hair, which was long and dark with pale tips like the rest of the royal family’s, was worn loosely around his shoulders and down his back, softening some of the hard lines of his face.

“Not at all, Venith, your presence is welcome, please come in,” Loki said smoothly, stepping back out of Neyir’s reach.

Neyir scowled at his older brother, “What do you want? Has father sent you to spy on me again?”

If he had been hoping for a reaction, he would have been disappointed. Zenith merely blinked and replied, “No, of course not. I came with a request for magical assistance. But now that I see Loki is here, perhaps he would be able to help me as well.”

Neyir’s scowl deepened, and before Loki (the smirking bastard) could reply, he snapped, “I can help you with whatever you need, brother. Loki, leave us.”

“Whatever you want, darling,” the Jotun prince was smiling in that I-know-something-you-don’t way that made him simultaneously irritated and paranoid. “I will see you again soon, I’m sure.”

He vanished, and Neyir turned to deal with his brother, still inwardly seething. He didn’t notice until much later that the ancient tome he had been studying was gone.

****

It was a relief for Loki not to have to hold onto his Jotun form, but let it come naturally as the chill air of Jotunheim wrapped around him. He was so used to not worrying about keeping his Jotun appearance because of Asgard that he nearly forgot to fix it in place for his trip to Svartalfheim. After quickly checking with the servants preparing their meal to make sure he still had time before dinner and tossing the book he had stolen from Neyir onto his bed, Loki transported himself to a different palace on Jotunheim, this one much less grand than his own. His home had once been beautiful and rich, with glittering ice turrets and bright tapestries. At least so he was told. Now the main palace was a shell of what it had once been, but this place had never been anything but a fortress.

Loki slunk quietly through the halls, casting a small charm on himself to help conceal his presence. He wasn’t exactly forbidden on the southern continent, but he wasn’t welcome there either. The ruler of the clan there had long thought that he should have been king after the death of the previous king of Jotunheim, and much of the south supported him. So while Loki was not quite in danger, he thought it best to remain unseen.

His father would be displeased when he found out that Loki had visited, but he needed to see his brother. He hated that every three months Byleistr came to this dark and hostile place, especially when he was at his most vulnerable. But he understood why Byleistr did it—it was for the same
reason he had chosen Neyir. Jotunheim needed them. And hopefully, if everything went well, Loki would marry into Svartalfheim and they would come to Jotunheim’s aid, making there no need for Byleistr to make a permanent union with Aggar.

True, the thought of being stuck with Neyir for the rest of his life left a sour taste in his mouth, but Loki was confident that he could manage him.

Loki slipped into Aggar’s chambers apprehensively, hoping that he didn’t stumble into the traitor and his brother mating. That was certainly something he had no wish to see. But the outer chamber was quiet, so he cracked open the door to the bedroom.

Loki breathed out a sigh of relief. Byleistr was curled up in the furs on the bed, fast asleep, and he was alone.

The youngest prince grabbed a clean rag from the nightstand and soaked it in the water basin nearby, then leaned over his brother and began to clean the sweat and grime from his face. The Jotun heat cycle was an exhausting affair, leaving little energy for anything but mating and sleep, so it was easy for things to get messy. Especially, Loki thought darkly, if you had an inattentive mate.

He used his magic to untangle Byleistr’s hair, which was longer and finer than most, though not as soft and smooth as Loki’s own. His brother typically kept his hair pulled back into a braid, but much of his hair had pulled free of it. It was as Loki was dutifully rebraiding his brother’s hair that Byleistr finally started to wake.

Loki felt a pang of guilt as Byleistr moaned and turned, trying to go back to sleep. Loki finished braiding his hair and tied it off just as his brother finally registered what was going on.

“Thank you,” he murmured sleepily. Loki thought for a moment that he was going to fall back asleep, but suddenly he jerked awake instead. “Loki!” he half-hissed, half-groaned, “What are you doing here? You know I hate it when you see me like this.” He covered his face with his hands for a moment before sighing and looking at his little brother. “Is there something wrong?” he asked finally, his concern showing through his hoarse voice.

Loki opened his mouth to reply, to tell his brother about his original trip to Asgard and everything that had happened since, to try to figure out what to do now that he wasn’t as confident in his feelings on the matter, but then he closed it abruptly.

The fur blanket that had been covering his brother’s chest had fallen away slightly, revealing an ugly bruise. Byleistr followed Loki’s gaze and grabbed the blanket, pulling it back up. “Don’t, Loki. Just please, don’t. We both know this situation isn’t ideal, but it’s necessary. If we don’t keep some kind of alliance with the south—we don’t have the strength to withstand a civil war, and you know it. We’re lucky that we had something that Aggar was even interested in.”

“Byleistr—“

“And don’t pretend that you don’t understand. I know you’re not happy with Neyir either.”

Loki crossed his arms, frowning. “I don’t know where you got that idea. Neyir and I have always been close, we’ve been friends since we were children, and we share many interests.”

Byleistr just gave Loki a tired, knowing look. “You may be able to fool father, maybe even Helblindi, but I know better. No, don’t,” he raised a hand as Loki made to reply, “I’m tired, Loki. Tired of you lying, tired of arguing about this. Now,” he shifted uncomfortably, “What was on your mind when you sought me out?”
He couldn’t tell Byleistr. Not now. His brother had his own troubles to worry about and didn’t need Loki’s piled on top of them. It was bad enough that he knew Loki wasn’t happy with Neyir.

“Nothing. I was just—I was worried about you.” He swallowed his guilt as he spoke, knowing that that was the reason he should have come here. “Is there anything else I can do? You know I’m not much of a healer, but I can try—“

Byleistr smiled gently, “No, Loki. It’s okay, I’ll be fine. But you should probably go now, I... well,” he shifted and cleared his throat, and the flush that was starting to appear on his skin made words unnecessary. Loki felt sick inside knowing that soon Aggar would be back and there was nothing he could do to stop him from hurting his brother.

Ideas darted through his head—mischief he could cause to prevent Aggar from returning—but he couldn’t. If Byleistr didn’t couple with Aggar again soon, his heat would drive him from arousal to pain and desperation. Loki knew from experience how bad that could get. That aside, if any malicious action was ever traced back to him then there would be war for certain.

So instead of freezing a sheet of ice onto the steep stairs leading to the bedroom in hopes that Aggar would fall and crack his head open, Loki sighed and kissed his brother’s forehead before bidding him farewell. “I’ll tell father you’re well,” he added as he readied himself to go.

“He won’t believe you,” Byleistr said sadly. 

“I know. But it’s what he wants to hear.”

Loki transported himself back to his own bedroom and sat by the window, staring out into the latest snowstorm until the servants came to collect him for dinner.

*****

Thor slid the vegetables around on his plate subconsciously, his thoughts preoccupied. Was Luke right about the Jotuns and the other races? Or was someone tricking him, possibly with the intention to hurt him? Either way, he felt like the fool Luke was always saying he was. If it was the former, the lack of knowledge made him look uneducated and ignorant, and if it was the latter, his friend was in danger and he was doing nothing to stop it.

Thor sighed and placed his fork on the edge plate before picking up the knife. He proceeded to chop everything on his plate up into tiny pieces.

“Thor, sweetheart,” he jerked out of his reverie to find his mother looking at him with a mixture of amusement and fondness. “Is there something on your mind?”

“What? No, I’m fine,” he reassured her half-heartedly. It didn’t even sound genuine to his own ears, and he was certain he wasn’t fooling his mother. She always seemed to know more about him than he knew about himself. “Actually, I was wondering,” Thor said slowly, looking up at his father, “How did the war with Jotunheim begin?”

Was it just him, or did his father’s eyes harden slightly? Odin’s mouth definitely tightened, and after a moment he replied, “You have never been interested in foreign politics before, what makes you start now?”

Thor’s face heated. No matter how old he was or confident he was about something, his father always made him feel like a clueless child. “Are you not glad that I care? Is it not a good thing that I’m interested?” Thor demanded, feeling defensive.

“Oh of course,” Odin allowed mildly, “However, I find the timing suspicious.” His one-eyed gaze
turned to his wife, whose face was angrier than Thor ever remembered seeing it.

“I have said nothing to him, as you wished,” Frigga said curtly, “Although you should know that already.”

Thor frowned, “Said nothing about what?”

“Nothing that concerns you yet,” Odin replied evenly. His voice had a sense of finality to it that forbid any further inquiries on the matter.

Thor gritted his teeth. “Are you even going to answer my question?” he asked finally after a span of silence.

“If you had paid your tutor any mind growing up, you would already know. It’s common knowledge.”

Thor flushed, but before he could say anything Frigga snapped, “Oh for goodness sake, Odin, you know that isn’t true. Tell Thor the real reason behind everything so that he doesn’t make the same stupid mistakes that you did. You say that you want him to grow to be a wise ruler, but yet you allow him to believe the most ridiculous propaganda. Even you must see how counterproductive that is.”

“Very well,” Odin acknowledged with a nod, before telling Thor, “Laufey and I had many disagreements. We both made some foolish decisions which led to distance and distrust between our realms.”

Thor blinked, “So Asgard was partially at fault?”

If Thor didn’t know that his mother was a dignified and proper woman, he would have said the sound she made was a derisive snort.

His father’s face darkened, but he said, “Yes, some would say that.”

Thor was going to press for details, but his father stood before he could say anything more. “I have some matters that need to be taken care of. Thor, you should make sure everything is prepared for the journey tomorrow. If the inclusion of Lord Armand’s son in your party truly was not of your mother’s design, then you may not be aware of the political ramifications of this decision. I want everything to go well.”

Thor was about to protest that he was in fact aware, that that was the point, but his father cut him off. “You are taking Commander Tyr and Captain Balder with you, correct?” Thor nodded mutely, and his father gave him an approving smile, “Good. They have good heads on their shoulders, follow their lead. And Thor, make sure this goes smoothly. I don’t need to give Armand any more reason to cause dissonance within the council.”

Odin moved to touch his wife’s shoulder in farewell, but she stepped away, her eyes steely. Thor looked down at his feet, his gut churning. Even as an adult he hated to see his mother and father at odds.

Odin sighed before turning back to Thor, “I doubt I will be able to speak with you before you go tomorrow, so let me wish you luck now.” He moved forward to embrace his son, before pulling back to look at him, his eyes softening a bit. “You’re a good man, Thor, and a good warrior.” The end of his sentence lingered for a moment, as though there was a “but…” coming next. His father shook his head after a moment’s pause and finished with, “Have a safe journey.”

Thor said an uncharacteristically withdrawn goodbye to his father, left thinking that while he may be
a good man and a good warrior, those things somehow weren’t enough.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! The characters besides Loki/Thor/Fandral/Sif/Hogun/Volstagg/Frigga/Odin/Laufey are:

-Helblindi and Byleistr, obviously important since Loki’s family and the political mess they are in are significant to the plot.
-NEYIR and Venith, princes of Svartalfheim. There will also be other members of their family mentioned since Svartalfheim has a part to play in this story, but these two are the most relevant, with Venith being a much more minor character than Neyir.
-Balder and Tyr, Commander/Captain of the Asgardian forces
-Thrym, Commander of the Jotun armies
-Aggar, one of the lords of the south on Jotunheim
-Faren, Prince of Alfheim and one of Thor's good friends.

These are the recurring characters. Any others will probably only appear once or twice. Hopefully there will be no confusion! As mentioned before, the majority of the story will be focused on Loki and Thor, so have no fear there :)

As always, please let me know what you think!
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Loki overhears something he shouldn’t; the party readies to leave for the mission

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much to everyone who has reviewed or given kudos to or favorited my story so far! You guys are awesome X)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Ten

The next morning was hot and arid on Asgard, and the castle was alive and bustling. Thor loved the energy right before a mission, loved how the courtyard was packed with servants and warriors running back and forth with last-minute tasks, frantic to get everything done. He mostly stayed out of their way, but he did like to help down at the stables.

He brushed down his own horse and got her ready for the journey before asking after the horse he had chosen for Luke, since he was fairly certain his new friend didn’t have one of his own. The mare he had selected was mild-tempered and sweet, making her easy to handle. Having no idea what Luke’s comfort level with horses was, he had decided that was best.

After he finished preparing the young mare for the journey, he returned to his own horse with an apple, content to spoil her for a while until the men were ready to leave.

*****

Loki had fallen asleep analyzing the book that he had procured from Neyir—a perplexing old tome on some kind of ancient shielding that Loki thought was familiar, but couldn’t place—and had overslept just slightly. It wasn’t much, but was enough to make him tense and snippy. If he arrived late to Asgard would they leave without him? He thought probably not. Still, it was better to be safe, so he dismissed the servants who had come to do his hair and settled for a neat braid. Loki finished preparing himself in the bathroom and then grabbed the simplest clothing he could find for ease of dressing before transporting himself to Asgard’s training grounds.

His first thought upon arrival was that he needn’t have worried. Loki appeared right in the middle of what at first seemed to be a minor battle. Men and women were running back and forth shouting and throwing things to be packed at each other, while others cursed at each other creatively and tried to fix mistakes that had been made. Loki was amused at the general incompetence. Compared to what he was used to on Jotunheim, this was chaos. He wondered what all of the men were doing yesterday when Thor had claimed that they were preparing for this journey.

Speaking of Thor, he didn’t see the prince anywhere. Balder was overseeing the extra weaponry being packed, but Loki didn’t wish to bother him. The poor man looked harried enough as it was.
Loki also wasn’t as comfortable and familiar around him as the others.

Squinting into the distance, he thought he saw someone who could be Fandral across the palace grounds, closer to the gates. He was about to go check when someone else who was unmistakable stepped out of the crowd nearby and walked purposefully towards the training grounds. Despite the chaos, men and women scurried out of the way of Queen Frigga, whose figure was still commanding even if not intimidating.

Loki panicked slightly upon seeing one of the few people that might be able to figure out who he was, and so he quickly stepped back into the relative cool of one of the open-arched servants’ entrances to the castle. He peered outside only to find that the queen had pulled Balder aside and was now leading him to the very area in which Loki had decided to take shelter.

Cursing his luck, Loki moved deeper into what he now identified as a pantry and slid behind the first outcropping he found. He wove an intricate cloaking spell around himself as their footsteps grew nearer, making sure to keep it light and as undetectable as he could manage. He knew Queen Frigga possessed some talent and was heralded as one of the best (if not the best) healer in the galaxy, and that she was also renowned for her visions, so he thought it best to be safe.

It did occur to Loki that he could just teleport away, but he found himself curious. Why was the Queen of Asgard pulling the Captain of the Guard away into the servants’ pantry right before a mission?

Loki decided he wanted to know. He could always leave if his magic was detected.

“I want your word you will speak of this to no one, do you understand? This is confidential, and if you tell anyone—including my son—I will consider it a breach of trust and possibly even treason.” Queen Frigga’s voice was quiet but stern. Loki felt a hasty detection spell wash over the area, and was relieved that he had decided to take extra precautions with his own magic.

“Of course, You Majesty. I understand, and I hope you know that you can trust me,” Balder’s voice was also soft, and Loki thought he sounded slightly hurt. Perhaps it was because the queen was being uncharacteristically curt, as Loki had only ever heard of her being sweet and kind. She was the only person living on Asgard that he had ever heard his father say anything positive about, though he had previously assumed that it was because she was Vanir. But come to think of it, his father had only ever said good things about Queen Frigga. So what was it that had her on edge now? Loki found himself even more curious than before.

“Good. You and Thor are close, correct?” Balder must have nodded here, because she continued, “Then I want you to swear your loyalty and service to him, right here.”

Loki could actually hear the frown in Balder’s voice as he spoke his next words, “He already has it. I have never been anything but loyal to Thor and Asgard.”

“Thor first, Asgard second,” Frigga pushed. “He needs someone loyal to him and him alone right now, and I want that person to be you.”

“Of course,” Balder promised, now sounding relieved and perhaps a bit pleased, “I consider him almost family. I would willingly sacrifice my life before I’d let anything happen to him.”

There was a long pause after this declaration, and Loki wished he could see what was happening. Finally, Frigga sighed, “Very well, then. I’m glad you feel that way, because he needs you. You’ve probably heard,” she faltered for a moment before pressing on, “You’ve probably heard that he and his father have been… tense, lately. My husband loves our son very much, and was always very
lenient with him as a child, but lately he has been fretting that Thor is not turning into the ruler that he wants him to be. Thor has always been careless of protocol, and not very politically adept, but now Odin is finally noticing his missteps. I believe that Thor will be fine, of course. He needs guidance and help from the right people, but he is compassionate and fair, and I believe he will ultimately make a wonderful king.”

“As do I,” Balder said earnestly, “Everything else can be learned.”

“Then you feel the same as I. But the problem is that Thor has not been learning those things. On this mission, I want you to make sure he succeeds. Not just with the bilgesnipe, but politically. If he gains Lord Armand’s support in the council Odin may rethink his current course of action.”

Loki blinked several times, surprised, and he heard Balder shift uncomfortably. “And what is it that the Allfather is considering?” he asked finally, his voice full of trepidation.

There was another pause, and a sigh. “That’s not your concern right now, and hopefully never will be. Make sure Thor succeeds and we will not have to worry about anything else. But there’s one more thing,” Frigga’s voice hardened again slightly, “Take no credit for anything, and let no one suspect that you are helping in any way. If they do, my husband will be sure to hear, and will not consider it Thor’s success.”

“But what about Heim—the Watcher? He will see if I do anything and report it, will he not?”

Frigga’s tone turned slightly smug, and Loki could imagine the satisfied smile she had on her face as she said, “He is very loyal to my husband and the realm, it is true. But perhaps he is a little more loyal to Thor than Odin suspects. I am not worried about his reports.”

“Very well, then, I’ll do whatever I can to make sure this makes Thor look good. May I ask,” he hesitated before pushing onwards, “May I ask why you picked me? There are many men who are more than willing to help Thor, and maybe one of his close friends would be a better choice. They will certainly be around him more often.”

Queen Frigga didn’t answer right away, and when she did there was an odd note in her voice. Loki wished he could see her once more, wondering what passed through her expression when she wasn’t speaking. “I picked you more for your closeness to Tyr than to Thor,” she finally admitted, “I suspect that he may try to sabotage this mission and make my son look incompetent. He is one of the few that I believe Odin has entrusted with his thoughts on this matter, and he may not have Thor’s best interests at heart. Please,” the queen implored, “Help my son. He has no idea that any of this is going on, and he’d be devastated if he ever found out.”

“You have my word,” Balder swore solemnly.

“That will have to be enough,” Frigga sounded weary. “I will re-enter the palace through the pantry so that I’m not seen with you again. Hopefully in the chaos no one took note of me pulling you aside, but if someone does ask what I wanted you may tell them that I am just a worried mother watching her son go off into battle again, and that I was checking on the strength of the party you are taking to escort him. In a twisted way,” Loki imagined she smiled grimly here, “It’s not far from the truth. Good luck, Balder,” she hesitated before finishing, “And thank you. I apologize if I sounded anything less than grateful for your assistance in this. Please rejoin your men, it seems like you still have much to oversee.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty.”

Loki stayed still and quiet as Balder’s footsteps faded, still digesting everything he had overheard. It
suddenly occurred to him that the queen should have passed by him by now on her way back inside. He considered peeking around the corner, but then he’d risk discovery if she was still there, so instead he prepared to transport himself back out into the main courtyard.

Just as he was about to leave, Frigga’s voice said coldly nearby, “I swear to you, Odin, if the magic I’m detecting right now is one of your filthy birds spying on me again I will have him cooked into a pie and served at dinner.”

Startled by her detection and not sure what else to do, Loki teleported.

*****

It didn’t take very long for Loki to find Fandral in the courtyard. He appeared to be bidding farewell to what looked like half of the castle. Sif sat not too far away, her expression torn between amusement and annoyance. Hogun and Volstagg were nowhere to be seen.

Deciding not to fight through the crowd to reach his blonde friend, Loki instead passed by the throng of people and approached Sif, who perked up when she saw him coming.

“Oh thank the Norns, someone not here for Fandral. Finally some semi-intelligent company.” Sif was dressed in travel clothing of red and grey that complimented her coloring and her hair was pulled back into a sensible tail.

“Semi-intelligent?” Loki asked archly. “I daresay I’m the most intelligent person you’ve met.”

Sif’s lips twitched slightly. “That’s not saying much.”

Loki broke out into a full grin, “No, perhaps not. Where’s Thor?”

The smile fell from Sif’s mouth and she rolled her eyes skyward. “Really? If it’s not Fandral, it’s Thor. Anyway, I should have guessed.”

Loki felt himself flushing and decided to pretend as though she hadn’t said anything. “And I don’t see Hogun or Volstagg either. Where is everyone? I thought we were to be leaving by now.”

Sif laughed, “Oh Luke, you have so much to learn. No one ever runs on time here, especially not for a larger enterprise like this. Volstagg is probably still saying goodbye to his family, which always takes forever. The kids always try to latch onto his legs and try to keep him from leaving. Don’t worry, it’s not as sad as it sounds, they’ve made it into a game. He should be here soon, though. As for Hogun, I’m not actually sure where he is as the moment, but he went home to visit his friends and family on Vanaheim yesterday after we parted ways so it may be taking him longer to return.”

Loki waited expectantly for her to continue, but she just smiled like the cat that has the mouse, waiting for him to ask again. Finally, Loki said through gritted teeth, “And?”

“And what?” Sif asked innocently. “Fandral’s right over there.” Loki continued to glare, and she finally grinned and continued, “Oh, you mean Thor? He’s in the stables, I think, getting the horses ready.”

Loki felt himself pale several shades. “Horses?” he repeated, mildly horrified.

Sif raised a brow, “Of course, how did you think we were going to travel? The Bifrost will take us to Lord Arman’s manor, but after that we will be on horseback.” She gave him a speculative look, “That’s not a problem, is it?”
Loki licked his lips nervously but replied, “Of course not.” Maybe he could convince Thor that it would be more enjoyable to walk. Somehow, he didn’t think that would go over well. “I’m going to go see if I can find him,” Loki excused himself and walked towards the stables, his mind buzzing.

How was he going to explain that he had never ridden a horse before? The poorest people on Asgard and Vanaheim may not have either, he supposed, but he disliked the idea of pretending to be a peasant. He might not have a choice. Loki reluctantly decided to let this go and instead reviewed the startling conversation he had overheard earlier.

He had realized that Thor and the Allfather had argued, of course, but he hadn’t thought it was this extreme. What exactly was Odin’s plan if Thor didn’t live up to expectations? Surely he wouldn’t disown him. He couldn’t even really declare Thor not the heir, not without someone else to give the crown to. Unless he was considering another distant blood relative. Or maybe he wasn’t thinking along that line at all, but considering an arranged marriage to someone more politically adept, or perhaps he would send Thor somewhere remote for more tutoring and keep him there until he was ready.

Truly, Loki was grasping at straws. He only knew what he’d overheard, and now he wasn’t sure what he wanted to do with it. Should he just tell Thor?

Thor might be a fool, and he might have disgusting prejudices against Loki’s people, but it sounded as though most Asgardians shared his viewpoint. And Thor, Loki thought, could be molded. He had changed his mind about women fighting because of Sif, who was to say he wouldn’t change his mind about Jotuns because of Loki? So having someone else on the throne would probably not be to Jotunheim’s advantage. No matter what, Loki decided, Thor had to keep his title. He would make sure of it. And for now, Loki also decided to keep the information to himself. Knowledge was power, after all.

He finally reached the stables and stepped inside. They were huge, with high wooden ceilings and row upon row of spacious stalls. A slightly musky scent filtered through the air here, woven through with the sharp scent of hay despite the fact that many of the stalls were currently empty. This wasn't much of a surprise since he could see through to the other end of the stables where the men were starting to gather with their bags and horses.

Loki didn’t see Thor right away, so he began to head towards the other men, thinking that perhaps Thor was outside with them. He was halfway down the main isle of the stables when he heard a soft and familiar voice from one of the stalls.

“...think you’ll really enjoy getting to charge through the trees again. You’re probably just about as excited as I am for this mission, aren’t you girl?”

Thor was apparently holding a one-sided conversation with his horse. Loki smothered a snicker and let himself into the massive stall. He immediately wrinkled his nose—the smell was much stronger here. Thor sat facing away from him at the other end of the stall on top of an overturned wooden trough. He was rubbing the muzzle of his horse, which was a creamy golden color with a milky gold mane and tail. It was the first time that Loki had ever seen a horse up close, and his first thought (other than that it stank terribly) was that it was actually quite a lovely creature.

The hair looked soft and silky; its eyes were large, glossy, and rich. When it shifted its weight, despite its gangly legs, it moved confidently and gracefully.

Loki moved closer, curious, and Thor finally startled and noticed him. A broad grin immediately appeared on his face and he sprang up to pull Loki forward. “Luke! This is Gullfaxi, my mare. Isn’t she beautiful?”
She was. She was also much, much bigger than Loki expected her to be, taller than Loki himself. He supposed it made sense; she did have to bear Thor on her back, after all, and that was no mean feat. Thor pushed Loki towards her, but he dug his heels in. His knowledge of horses was severely limited.

“Go on, pet her muzzle, let her get your scent. What do you think of her?”

“She stinks,” Loki’s tone was disapproving, but he shuffled forward carefully despite the smell.

Thor laughed, “That’s no way to talk to such a beautiful lady! Besides, it would smell worse in here if I hadn’t mucked the stall out earlier.”

Loki grimaced at that. “You? Personally?” He stood his ground as Gullfaxi took a step towards him, curious.

Thor shrugged. “Of course, it’s a bonding activity.” He laughed at the face that Loki pulled and protested, “It’s not that bad!”

Gullfaxi wuffed at his palm a few times, her velvety muzzle just barely brushing his skin. Then she pushed forwards and nuzzled his hair. Loki stood as still as possible, petrified. It might have been almost pleasant if he could remember whether or not the beast was carnivorous.

“Relax,” Thor’s voice said, his hands coming up to rest on Loki’s shoulders, “She’s not going to hurt you.” As Thor spoke Loki became conscious of the fact that Gullfaxi’s eyes were to the sides of her head, and he breathed a sigh of relief. Right, an herbivore then.

Thor slipped something into Loki’s left hand, and he brought it up to look. A delicate sugar-spun flower sat in his palm. Gullfaxi perked up immediately and tried to steal it, but Loki stepped back quickly, causing Thor to break out into laughter.

“It’s for her, Luke! But if you want one, I think I have a few more.”

Embarrassed but determined not to show it, Loki held the lovely little flower up for the mare to take. She immediately moved forward and grabbed it greedily, sniffing around for more when it was gone.

Thor watched them interact with a grin on his face before moving forward to place a blanket on the horse’s back, followed by a supple leather saddle. “So, I’m going to assume you have never ridden a horse before,” he addressed Loki as he worked.

Loki placed his hand on Gullfaxi’s muzzle and rubbed it slightly, amazed at the softness. He purposely avoided Thor’s gaze as he replied, “You would assume correctly.”

The Asgardian prince nodded thoughtfully as he tightened the stirrups and then on slid the bit-less harness. Loki stepped back to let him work.

“Well, that does pose a problem. I was going to have you ride Mara, but with absolutely no experience on a journey like this that just won’t do.” He grinned again as he finished adjusting the harness and led Gullfaxi from the stall with Loki trailing behind them. “Fortunately, I have a solution.”

“What’s that, exactly?” Loki asked dubiously as Thor swung up into the saddle.

“You can ride with me.”

Before Loki could protest, Thor spurred the horse forward and fluidly scooped Loki up into his lap.
Thanks for reading! I hope you're enjoying everything so far, but let me know what you think down below! ;)

Chapter End Notes
**Chapter 11**

Chapter Summary

The party finally heads out on the journey...
...right?

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! Thank you so much for the feedback for last chapter! I apologize for not updating this past weekend--it had been my intent, but I've been having some computer issues lately. It's better at the moment, and hopefully it stays that way :P This chapter is a tiny bit longer than normal, so there's that :

(Just a quick note for anyone who hasn't ridden a horse before--Riding a horse at a walk is easy even for beginners, but a trot is a very bouncy gait and can be discomforting)

Enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

**Chapter Eleven**

Loki sucked in a breath through clenched teeth and twisted, trying to release himself from Thor’s grip and return to the safety of the ground. Behind him Thor laughed, and he felt the vibration of it in the chest pressed against his back. Thor’s grasp on him tightened as he struggled, easily holding him in place. “Calm, Luke, you’ll upset Gullfaxi.”

Loki stilled instantly, more concerned with getting thrown from the beast than he was upset about the situation. His legs were both still slung uncomfortably on one side of the horse, draped over one of Thor’s muscular thighs, and his hands clung to the arm around his waist.

“Good,” Thor murmured in his ear as Loki stopped moving, “Now when I lift you, swing your leg over to the other side.”

The breath lingered on his ear, distracting him, and so when Thor lifted Loki he obeyed without thinking. This time when the golden prince placed him down his legs separated over the saddle, thighs flush against Thor’s own. Loki tensed at the intimacy of their new position and sent Thor a sharp glare. Predictably, Thor beamed back, but before Loki had the chance to accuse him of taking advantage of the situation the other prince urged the horse forward and they were moving.

Growing up, Loki had always enjoyed riding the giant white mammoths and the thick leather hided annochs of Jotunheim. The former were slow, steady, and reliable, and so they were often used for long journeys; the latter were quick and agile with a graceful, loping gait.

Riding a horse was not like either of those. Loki bounced uncomfortably in the saddle, each step that Gullfaxi took grinding him back up against Thor. At this rate, he was going to be sore by the time
that they got to the Bifrost, let alone anywhere else.

Loki cursed Thor’s foolish ideas and clung to the saddle with white-knuckled fingers, trying his best to maintain his dignity. Several of the men outside gave them grins and knowing looks as they passed. Had Loki not been so focused on remaining in the saddle, he would have done something to wipe those smirks off of their faces. As it was, he just memorized their faces to get his revenge on them later.

Thor guided Gullfaxi to the main courtyard and Loki braced himself for his friends’ reactions.

*****

Thor almost felt guilty for starting Gullfaxi out at a trot instead of a walk. Almost. It was by far her jerkiest gait, causing Luke to rub against him in just the right way. Thor was fairly certain that Luke was too distracted by staying on the mount that he hadn’t yet noticed Thor’s growing… interest in the situation. He grinned and closed his eyes as Luke’s ass pressed against him, fitting perfectly between his legs. This was one of the best ideas he’d had in a while.

His spirits were high as he spurred Gullfaxi into the courtyard to meet up with the rest of the party. Sif and Fandral had tethered their mounts nearby earlier, and mounted them as they saw Thor approach. Volstagg and Hogun looked as though they had only just arrived, and had not yet dismounted.

“Hogun and I just met up on the road here,” Volstagg boomed as they approached, confirming Thor’s suspicions, “It looks as though we’ve arrived just in time.”

Thor drew Gullfaxi to a halt beside them, and Luke fell back against him, shaking slightly. After a moment, however, he suddenly stiffened and whipped his head around to glower at Thor, who grinned back unabashedly. Undoubtedly Luke had just noticed Thor’s growing hard-on.

“Really, Thor?” Sif sighed as she saw their arrangement, “How exactly are you going to fight like that?” She drew up her dark horse next to Gullfaxi, giving Thor an exasperated look.

“Exactly,” Luke snapped, fidgeting and shifting himself as far forward in the saddle as he could, “This is ridiculous. Let me down.”

“If you’re not happy with your current mount,” Fandral’s cheerful voice floated over to them as he brought his tan mare around to Gullfaxi’s other side, “You could always ride me.”

“Ride with you mean,” Volstagg corrected as he and Hogun moved their mounts closer.


“I just intend for him to ride with me until he gets the hang of it,” Thor clarified, “We’ll bring Mara along and he can ride her when he is ready.”

“I still think this is a foolish plan,” Luke said slightly petulantly. “But I suppose I can’t think of another.” He perked up for a moment, “Perhaps I should ride with Sif instead?”

“Exactly how uncomfortable do you want this trip to be?” he demanded, looking half-amused at Thor’s single-minded determination.

“It’s not so long a ride to Lord Armand’s Hall,” Thor reassured him with a twinkle in his eyes, “And I’m certain I can find a way to… ease my discomfort once we’re there.”

Luke’s eyes rolled skywards, but his lips twitched up into a very slight smile. “I do hope those plans have nothing to do with me, or you will be bitterly disappointed.”

Thor shrugged off his rejection with a smile and a wink, “We’ll see.”

*****

As Thor asked after Volstagg’s family and the large red-headed man enthusiastically began regaling them with the tale of how his eldest son had taken down a bildgesnipe when he was out walking in the forest—here Loki assumed an over exaggeration, due to the fact that Volstagg’s son was only eight. It was probably a rabbit—Loki noticed movement out of the corner of his eye.

Turning to look, he watched as a brigade of men rode past them, presumably making for the rainbow bridge. The man in front was large and muscle-bound, with multiple scars and long dark hair with the sides pulled back into tight braids. His appearance was intimidating and commanding, and Loki immediately assumed that this was Tyr.

Loki hissed in surprise and annoyance and, before he could think about what he was doing, dug his heels into Gullfaxi’s sides. She sprang forward as Loki inexpertly grabbed the reins and pointed her in their direction, almost panicking as he slipped from the saddle.

Thor grabbed him and stabilized him, quickly regaining the reins at the same time. “What are you doing?” he demanded, pulling Gullfaxi to a halt.

Loki gripped him tightly but spurred her on again. “You can’t let them leave without you, you imbecile! It would be a terrible affront for the prince to not be at the forefront of the party when you meet Lord Armand. It will be seen as careless and rude, like he is not worth your time!”

Thor blinked at him in surprise before his face darkened and he urged Gullfaxi into a gallop. To their credit, Sif and the warriors three immediately followed without questioning what happened. With how quickly Gullfaxi was going—and she was fast, like the wind, like he was flying, although Loki noted with a twinge of annoyance mixed with amusement that this gait was much smoother than the one Thor had her use before—they caught up to Tyr in no time at all.

“Were you going to let me join you on this trip, or did it just slip your mind?” Thor asked coldly as he drew Gullfaxi up next to the dark haired man.

Something ugly flashed behind his eyes before his features evened out and he smiled at Thor like he was an unruly child, “Of course we were going to wait for you, your highness. I saw you were engaged in conversation with your friends, and assumed we would meet at the bridge.”

Liar. There was no doubt in Loki’s mind that Frigga was right, for some reason Tyr was trying to sabotage this for Thor. Speaking of which… “Where’s Balder?” Loki demanded, using the same tone he did when one of his servants angered him.

Tyr’s cold dark eyes went colder, flicking over Loki head to toe before replying sneeringly, “I wasn’t aware we were inviting whores on this mission now, your highness. I believe it would be best to leave the poor little thing behind, you wouldn’t want anything unfortunate to happen to him.”
A chill washed over Loki’s spine and he hissed his displeasure, one of his hands dropping to a hidden dagger. Thor grabbed his wrist just as his fingers curled around the hilt, stopping him. “Luke is no whore, Tyr, but my friend and a warrior in his own right. You would do well to show him more respect.”

“Not a whore? Forgive me my presumption, your highness, but then why is he in your lap?”

Thor’s face flushed slightly, like he was a boy being told off for doing something naughty. “He has never ridden a horse before. I thought to acclimate him to the experience.”

“Ah, of course,” Tyr said, flashing Loki condescending sneer, “That makes sense. Very wise, your highness.”

Loki wanted to snap at this man, lash out and make him look like a fool, but he bit his tongue. Now that he had a hold on his temper, reason had taken over. This was not his world or his soldier, and he knew that making an obvious enemy of him was a mistake. No, he would rein himself in and ingratiate himself to the man, all while plotting his downfall. So instead he just smiled at Tyr, pretending all was forgiven.

Before anything else could be said, Balder and another team of guards rode up, looking harried. “My apologies, your highness, I wasn’t aware we were setting out yet.”

“Neither was I,” Thor replied, but this time it was with a grin, like it was a joke. He really had forgiven Tyr, Loki thought scornfully. The big, trusting idiot.

A troubled look passed over Balder’s face as he glanced to Tyr, who was now busy speaking with one of his lieutenants. “I see. Well, at least you’re all here now.” He paused, his gaze moving to Loki. He hesitated before continuing, “Perhaps, your highness, you should be riding your horse by yourself when we meet Lord Armand. For the sake of appearances,” he added quickly as Thor frowned at him.

Before Thor could protest, Loki interceded lightly, “He’s right, Thor, once we reach Lord Armand’s lands I will switch over to riding Mara for a bit. I can manage her at a walk, and I’m certain you would like to make a good first impression for this visit.”

Thor’s shoulders slumped in defeat, “I suppose you’re right. Still,” he perked up, “You can ride with me until then!” Without another word he urged Gullfaxi forward into a trot, pulling Loki as close as possible.

The rest of the journey to the rainbow bridge was brief but enjoyable despite the growing erection grinding against him, with Thor recalling all of the places he had visited using the Bifrost. Loki was almost jealous—being restricted to what he had already seen or had details about was very limiting—but he made himself content by knowing that with Thor more options were available. He would take advantage of that, too.

Too soon, they arrived at the rainbow bridge. The party narrowed out into pairs, with Thor and Tyr at the front and Balder and Sif directly behind them. As they rode over the glittering crystalline bridge Loki’s breath caught in his throat. It was beautiful and powerful—he could feel the energy thrumming through it—a great work of skilled magic. If he had the time he would examine it more closely with his own magic to try to discover its secrets, but he made due with promising himself he would return again later.

Loki frowned at the thought. Not too long ago, he had sworn he would cease coming to Asgard. Now it seemed as though he only spent more and more time there with little regard to the danger it
posed. He shifted uncomfortably at the thought, displeased at the idea of getting too comfortable here, and yet even more upset at the thought of not returning.

Thor must have noticed his unease and mistook it for nervousness as they rode over the rainbow bridge, for he wrapped his arm tighter around Loki’s waist and pressed his lips comfortingly to his shoulder. “Almost there, you’ll enjoy this.”

Loki already knew that he would. He pushed all of the other thoughts to the back of his mind for further perusal later and concentrated on what was happening now.

A tall, dark man with golden eyes and a golden helm stood waiting at the end of the bridge, and for the first time Loki felt a twinge of fear. If anyone on Asgard could recognize him, it would be the Watcher. He let his hair curtain his face and buried his head into Thor’s shoulder, playing up the nervous angle. Thankfully Heimdall paid him little attention, as Tyr immediately moved forward to speak with him.

“The Allfather sends us to Lord Armand’s lands to protect the town of Hengle from several aggressive bilgesnipe.”

“I’m aware,” Heimdall replied evenly, “And I am glad to see you all here together. I would not have allowed you to leave separately.”

Thor made a confused sound, but Loki smirked through his hair. That was a warning to Tyr if he’d ever heard one. You’re being watched. Loki’s smugness didn’t last long, however. “And who rides with you, my prince?”

****

Thor nudged Luke to make him look up, but Luke shook his head frantically and buried his head further into Thor’s shoulder. Thor stroked his back soothingly—clearly he was still distressed over the bridge, which could be disorienting the first couple of times. “This is Luke, of Vanaheim. He has been a companion of mine these past few weeks.”

There was a long silence before Heimdall spoke again. “I cannot see him.”

Thor blinked in surprise and glanced down at Luke, who didn’t move. “Truly?” He knew that Heimdall meant that Luke was invisible to his magic, rather than physically, but it was rare that anyone could hide from Heimdall’s gaze. “Well he is a powerful mage, I suppose. Perhaps one of his spells is obscuring your mind’s view of him. But you have my word that he is a loyal and trustworthy friend, there is no need to fear.”

Heimdall frowned, but nodded and stepped back. “Very well. Good luck on your journey, my prince,” he said, and activated the Bifrost. As he did so, a surge of energy consumed them all, encasing them and propelling them towards their goal. Thor heard Luke give a small gasp, and he sat up in Thor’s arms. In mere moments it was over, and they were standing on the banks of a large river.

“That was…” Luke seemed lost for words for once, and Thor grinned. He was going to pursue the conversation further—he knew Luke would be interested in the workings of the bridge—but Balder rode up and cleared his throat before suggesting nervously, “Perhaps now is a good time for Luke to switch mounts?”

Thor scowled, but reluctantly agreed. Just as he was helping Luke out of the saddle and to the ground, however, Hogun spoke up, “There’s a slight problem with that idea. Balder, Mara is not
saddled.’

Balder frowned and spun around to look. ‘They must have packed her saddle with the supplies since they saw Luke was riding with Prince Thor for this part of the journey,’ he sighed, ‘I hadn’t realized. But your highness, you really should be riding alone.’

‘Oh, this is no problem at all,’ Fandral, Sif, and Volstagg had gathered around them as they spoke, ‘He can just ride with me!’ Fandral’s mischievous smile made Thor’s scowl deepen.

‘Oh, come now, I’ll behave myself. It’s only for the ride up to the Lord’s manor. I’ll even keep my hands in view the whole time, I promise.’ Fandral winked at Luke and held out a hand to help him up. Much to Thor’s pleasure, Luke hesitated. At that moment, though, Tyr gathered up the party and started to ride towards the great bridge over the river. Luke took Fandral’s hand.

Fandral helped Luke swing a leg awkwardly over the horse and into the saddle in front of him. Thor felt a twinge of jealousy curl in his stomach as Luke settled against Fandral, already regretting not just saying no. He opened his mouth to speak up, but at that moment Luke leaned into Fandral and murmured something to him. The action looked almost intimate, but Fandral jerked slightly and pushed himself back into the saddle so that there was a space between him and Luke.

Thor grinned, wondering what it was that Luke had said.

*****

“One wrong move and I’ll curse your cock and balls right off,” Loki hissed into Fandral’s ear. The results were instantaneous, and Loki smirked to himself.

The y all gathered and moved forward, catching up with Tyr’s party halfway across the magnificent bridge. The bridge was carved out of some kind of smooth stone, and it fanned out at the end to present a huge courtyard. It looked as though the area was typically used as a marketplace, but the common folk had all moved to the sides to watch as their prince rode past. They cheered enthusiastically as Thor beamed and waved at them, and Loki felt his stomach lurch with envy.

His family was not hated by the Jotun people, but they weren’t beloved by all, either. They would never be able to ride freely through the streets of anything but the capital city for fear of rebels making assassination attempts, and even in the capital they typically were surrounded by guards. Loki wished that the people could see how well Laufey worked with so little, but there were still many who blamed him for the loss of the Casket.

Loki closed his eyes for a moment, resentment building inside of him. He couldn’t watch this—couldn’t watch Thor be fawned over by his people knowing that Thor’s family was the reason that Loki’s was never safe. There were still many who did love his family, Loki reminded himself. The princes—especially Helblindi—were largely supported by the people. It was his father that was criminalized.

As Loki wrestled with his conflicting emotions, they arrived at the open gates to the manor. The noble family, also mounted on horses, waited for them inside. A large but distinguished looking man stood in front, and he scowled heavily at Thor. Loki would never admit it, but the knot inside of his stomach loosened a little bit. At least someone disliked the Asgardian prince. He quickly reminded himself that they were here to convince this man—presumably Lord Armand—to support Thor.

Formal introductions were made, and Thor enthusiastically greeted Lord Armand’s son, Brandt, and (notably less-enthusiastically) Lord Armand himself. Then, to Loki’s surprise, they dismounted and began handing the horses off to the stable boys.
“What’s going on?” Loki murmured to Fandral, “Are we not leaving yet?”

Fandral chuckled, “Of course not! First, we celebrate!”

Loki spun around as far as he could in the saddle to give Fandral an incredulous look. “We haven’t done anything yet, what are we celebrating?” he demanded.

Fandral shrugged, “The joy of the upcoming hunt, I suppose. We’ll spend the night here tonight, before heading out tomorrow morning.”

Loki gritted his teeth. “You’re telling me,” he said slowly, “That we’re doing nothing today? That the entire point of getting everything ready was to come here and have a feast? What is the purpose of my being here? I could go home and do something productive.”

Fandral gracefully dismounted and held his arms out for Loki. “Wasn’t the whole political part of this your idea? Take this as an opportunity to mingle.”

“I thought that we’d be doing that after the mission, not before it.”

Fandral, however, just laughed as Volstagg called out, “Hurry, Luke! I hear their roast boar and mead is beyond compare!” Loki rolled his eyes and allowed Fandral to help him dismount. He gave his friend a displeased glare as, after Fandral caught him by the hips, his hands brushed downwards over the globes of Loki’s ass. Fandral just returned his look with an innocent smile, as though it had been an accident.

Loki sighed and pushed himself out of Fandral’s grasp, following Volstagg into the grand hall, which had been set up for an elaborate feast.

And they hadn’t even done anything to merit it.

Asgardians.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! If everything goes well with my computer the next chapter should be up by Friday or Saturday. If you have a moment, please let me know what you think so far! I really appreciate all of the feedback :)}
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Asgardian feasts are not Loki’s idea of fun.

Chapter Notes

Happy Memorial Day everyone! :) I stayed up late to make sure that this got finished tonight so that it would be up on Memorial Day. I hope you all enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Twelve

The feast was a study in excess. From the food, to the décor, to the people, nothing was subtle or underplayed. The grand hall had soaring arched roofs outfitted with rich, vivid murals. At least the solid gold detailing that was so blatant in Asgard’s palace was absent here, but the manor made up for it in spades. The entire room—large enough to fit Jotunheim’s throne room and dining hall with space to spare—was lit by magelight enchanted to look like actual flames, minus the danger and the need for a fuel source.

Large, supporting pillars rose up every thirty to fifty feet, elaborately carved with scenes of hunts and battles. The cold marble floor was covered with fine silken rugs, and Loki winced every time something got spilled or a muddy boot left a print. The courses were served on gold platters by a multitude of servants, who were also hovering about to refill glasses anytime someone took as much as a sip. The food was dished out onto porcelain plates rimmed in gold that matched the beautiful drinking mugs, delicately carved with the images of forest animals with tiny, winking jewel eyes. He spent a while when he first sat down admiring the piece. No piece was the same and the animals seemed so alive that he suddenly realized that the goblets were also enchanted. Mesmerized, he spent the next several minutes gently unraveling the artist’s delicate spellwork—designed as both art and function since it kept the beverage inside at the temperature it was served, he discovered—before reweaving it. It was exceedingly lovely, so he didn’t even mind Thor teasing him for staring at his mug for so long.

The first time that one of the men chugged his entire drink and smashed it on the ground before one of the servants could refill it, Loki actually gasped out loud. This, of course, caused his friends to laugh uproariously. Loki was indignant, and hissed that the man had wantonly destroyed a piece of art. Thor entirely missed the point and reassured Loki that the artist lived in the manor and would create another to replace it.

As the day wore on the novelty of the wealth surrounding them wore off a bit, and Loki began to grow bored. There were only so many times he could listen to battle stories, even if Thor did have a pleasant voice. He caused a bit of mischief here and there for fun—the man who broke his mug first suddenly found maggots in his food and screeched like a child before flipping over the entire table he was seated at. That had caused some amusing chaos for a while. The men who had leered at him and
Thor on the horse suddenly had an urgent need to relieve themselves, and it was entertaining to watch them all rapidly excuse themselves and trample over each other in their rush for the door.

But unfortunately such amusements were brief, and the entire evening still remained. Truly, how did Asgardians do this? None of his friends seemed to be getting agitated, but Loki found himself feeling restless and dissatisfied.

“Course five is about to be served!” Volstagg exclaimed happily, interrupting one of Thor’s battle stories. Loki had only been half-listening, so he wasn’t certain what it was about. He’d probably heard it before anyway. Brandt, on the other hand, had been enraptured. Seated on Thor’s other side, he listened in awe to all of Thor’s tall tales, exclaiming over all of the right parts.

Loki was content to sit and pick at the rich food. After a little while he asked for his wine to be replaced with water, but to his consternation no one else seemed to. Well, at least not at their table. He glanced over to where Lord Armand sat with Tyr and Balder, their glasses mostly untouched. As course five was served (he was full already—how was it that Volstagg kept eating?) Loki quietly changed Thor’s mead into honey water, reversing the fermentation.

Then he stretched and stood, intending to casually stroll over to the next table over under the pretense of chatting with Balder. What he was really interested in was what Lord Armand and Tyr had to say to each other. Judging by the worried looks Balder was shooting at Thor, it was nothing good.

To his surprise, however, Thor shot to his feet the moment that Loki did. “Where are you going?” he asked, perhaps a touch too loudly. He wasn’t drunk yet, Loki thought, but he had been on his way there.

“I thought maybe I’ll go speak with Balder about the mission—“ Loki began, but Thor frowned and reclaimed his seat, yanking Loki back down with him.

“No need! Tomorrow we will worry about the mission. Tonight, we celebrate.” He ran a calloused thumb over Loki’s fingers, and the Jotun prince had to repress a pleased tingle that passed through his body. Perhaps he’d had more wine than he thought. It was difficult to tell, with the way the servants had been refilling it.

Loki sighed heavily, trying in vain to jerk his hand back from Thor’s grasp. “Celebrate what, exactly?”

“It’s less of a celebration and more of a purge, I guess,” Fandral said in a thoughtful tone, answering before Thor could. “We get all of the feasting, drinking, dancing and fucking out of the way now so that it doesn’t distract us later.”

“I don’t see any dancing,” Loki said snippily, ignoring that last option.

“That’s because we haven’t finished the feasting and drinking yet!” Volstagg called over Fandral’s shoulder, sending a spray of damp breadcrumbs over the table. Hogun, on Volstagg’s other side and completely blocked from Loki’s point of view, handed him a napkin.

“The dancing will start soon, but there are still younglings among us,” Thor said with a grin, “They usually get sent away before the dancing begins. The line between the dancing and the fucking can get a bit blurry.”

Somehow, Loki wasn’t surprised. “Well, then, I suppose I’ll occupy myself elsewhere for the rest of the evening. I’m quite finished eating and drinking and I’m growing tired of all of this,” he waved a hand vaguely at the hall, “So I’ll head out—“ he rose again, but Thor’s fingers tightened over his
“You can’t go!” Thor insisted, seemingly shocked that Loki would want to. “Lord Armand may take offence,” he added in explanation, even though that was clearly not his reasoning. Loki’s eyes drifted over Thor’s shoulder to Brandt, who nodded quickly in agreement, clearly eager to please Thor. On Brandt’s other side, Sif snorted, content to watch the situation unfold without helping.

Before Loki could reply, a slim, delicate hand reached down to brush over where Thor’s clung possessively to Loki’s. “Oh, do let him go,” a sweet voice cooed, and both Loki and Thor turned to look at the new arrival.

She stood on the opposite side of the table from them, leaning beguilingly over it in a way that showed off her full breasts, her soft brown curls cascading invitingly over her bare shoulders. Loki stared at her appreciatively until he realized that Thor was doing so as well. He jerked his hand out of Thor’s now slack grip and rolled his eyes. “I’m certain no one will notice my absence,” he said venomously. Before Thor could stop him this time, he strode out of the room.

*****

Thor stared after Luke, dismayed and unsure what he had done. He had been hoping that maybe tonight they would be able to… get to know each other better, but Luke had seemed bored with his stories (no matter how much Thor embellished them and exaggerated to try to get his attention), and now he had left before the dancing even started.

Thor sighed heavily and turned his attention back to the brunette, who was still smiling at him. He hesitated, looking between her and the door that Luke had stormed out of. Finally he murmured, “I’ll be right back,” and stood, following Luke’s path out of the grand hall.

There was no one in the hallway. Thor was not easily deterred, however, and continued looking. He checked the gardens, the bedrooms (and apologized to the couple he interrupted that had started some of the evening’s activities early), the kitchens, and every other room that he could think of before finally realizing that Loki could teleport. He could be anywhere.

Thoroughly discouraged, Thor returned to the great hall.

The brunette had taken Luke’s seat and was laughing loudly at something Fandral was saying to her. Thor grinned and, forcibly pushing Luke to the back of his mind, decided to give Fandral some competition.

*****

Loki rested his back against the arched window, his legs stretched along the top of the bookshelf. He wasn’t sure if Thor had told anyone to give him access to the Asgardian library yet, but he was confident that if someone came in now they would not see him atop the bookcase in the dark corner.

He turned the page of one of several thick tomes he had removed from the shelves and perused the contents. Whoever had written this book should be flogged. It was long and ponderous, frequently getting off track and going on long rambles that had little to do with the subject matter. It was the most up to date record of the proceedings in Lord Armand’s land, though, and he was determined to be knowledgeable on the subject. There was no way he could help Thor if he made errors in judgment out of pure ignorance.

Loki frowned, unsure what exactly had happened to all of his plans. Did he still want revenge on Thor? Yes, he decided, but it wasn’t a priority, at least not at the moment. Eventually he would
follow his earlier plan, but this was more important. Thor still needed to be the crown prince, since whoever would take over if it wasn’t Thor would probably be even worse. This was entirely a political move on Loki’s part. That was the only reason he was going to help him.

Especially after today’s proceedings, Loki thought with some irritation. Thor had barely paid attention to Loki other than to glance over at him every so often while he was telling his stories, as though he was hoping for Loki to say something. He had no idea what Thor had wanted him to say, though. Oh, that’s so impressive! Even better than the last time you told it when the beast was only thirty feet long!

Loki let out a soft, bitter laugh and returned to perusing the tome. He skimmed over the text of the book, noting important differences between how things were handled here versus on Jotunheim. There were still many similarities, however, enough to make him still feel comfortable with the information.

Loki’s thoughts kept wandering back to a certain golden prince, however. Thor had made absolutely no attempt to speak with Lord Armand, although the seating arrangements hadn’t been conducive to that end. Still, he had impressed Brandt, which was a good start. Loki turned the page and rubbed his temple.

Maybe he should return. The thought of going back to that crowded hall to sit and do nothing for the rest of the evening rankled him, though, and the thought of all of the wasted food and wealth made him feel worse. The food that would be left over from this feast would be enough to feed the people living in the palace on Jotunheim for months. No, he would be miserable back in that hall.

But maybe he could steal Thor’s attention back, make him laugh, tell him a story or two…

Loki slammed the book shut and sighed. No, he reminded himself, it was a good thing Thor was focused on Brandt. Or, at least, had been. Now he was probably focused on the pretty brunette.

Loki growled and grabbed another book, this one illustrated with the portraits of all of the important lords and ladies as well as their families. He began to study them, committing their appearances to memory. A few of them he recognized from the books on Jotunheim, but many he didn’t.

He smiled to himself as he found a picture of Sif and her family. Asgardians might be disgusting in their excess, and he might hate them in an abstract sense for what they’d done to his people, but individually they weren’t so bad.

There were several pictures of Thor in this tome, mostly depicting him defeating various beasts in battle. Loki snickered to himself, wondering how many of them were exaggerated or even entirely made up. There was a gorgeous picture of him in his ceremonial armor, too. It was detailed in gold, and so accurate that Loki was fairly certain that this was a magical capture instead of an illustration. Loki lingered on this page for a while before turning it, telling himself it was because he was impressed by the skill involved in creating the picture.

He quietly paged through the book for a while before coming across Lord Armand’s family. The first portrait was of the Lord himself, followed by one of his wife, then one of his son, and then…

Loki froze as he stared at the next portrait, his eyes flickering down to take in the name. Brenna. Lord Armand’s lovely daughter, with wide hazel eyes, and a small smug mouth. Her brown curls were worn loose, and her silk gown was cut low. It was the woman from earlier that evening, and he was fairly certain that Thor had no idea who she was.

Loki quickly shut the book and moved to replace it on the shelf. Just as he was about to slide it into
the empty gap, however, he paused, thinking of all of the beautiful illustrations. After a moment of internal debate, he tucked it under his arm. Asgard probably wouldn’t even miss it. He would just make a quick stop on Jotunheim before returning to Lord Armand’s manor.

*****

Earlier in the night Thor had decided that his mead tasted weak, and quickly rectified the situation by calling for something far stronger. It had been the best decision he’d made all evening. He felt great. This was a wonderful party, and everything that everyone said was witty and fun. He pulled the pretty brunette onto his lap as she giggled. He couldn’t remember her name anymore, but he remembered that it was something pleasant. He would have to ask her again.

The only dark spot on an otherwise perfect evening was Balder. The man kept pestering him, telling him not to do this, or that he should probably do that. Ever since the meal had wound down and Balder had come to their table, he had been a consistent dampener on the mood.

Thor waved off something else that Balder said, ignoring him as he slid his hand under the lady’s skirt and onto her thigh. She giggled again and squirmed against him, reminding him of Luke on the horse earlier. He grinned and turned to make the comparison to Luke, but Luke wasn’t there. Thor frowned. He would have to find Luke later.

“Let’s dance,” the woman—what was her name?—said breathily, pulling at his arm. He laughed and let her, following her to the area that had been cleared of tables. Balder yelled something after him, and Thor was relieved as they pushed into the crowd and the captain disappeared from sight.

He grinned at people as they jostled him, some of them rubbing up against him suggestively. He saw a flash of green out of the corner of his eye and pulled out of the woman’s grasp to grab Luke. That wasn’t Luke. He apologized and let go, laughing off the mistake. The woman without a name threw her arms around his shoulders and draped herself against him, and he ran his hands down her back to grab her ass.

She made a pleased sound and wrapped a leg around his. Her legs weren’t as long as Luke’s. Where was Luke? He turned to look around, but the woman carded her fingers through his hair and brought him down for a kiss. Thor relaxed and kissed her back sloppily, thinking that she was a very nice woman. Very pretty, very smart. Not as smart as Luke though. Luke was a genius. Luke was the smartest person he ever met. Thor broke off the kiss to tell Luke that, but Luke wasn’t there. Where had he gone?

The woman had said something to him, but he hadn’t heard. It had probably been something funny. He laughed. She kissed him again, her hands running down to the bottom of his tunic and then up underneath of it. She felt nice. He pulled her harder against him.

The unnamed woman murmured something breathily into his ear, something about finding a dark corner. Thor brightened. Luke liked dark corners. Maybe he would be there! Thor pulled the woman through the crowd, the people’s faces swimming past as he looked for somewhere dark. The woman found the place first, though, pointing to it and pulling him along after her this time.

It was dark, but Luke wasn’t there. He asked the woman where Luke was, but she didn’t know. She didn’t sound happy. But then she kissed him again, so she must have been. Thor pushed her back against the wall, and she wrapped her legs around his waist. He leaned down for another kiss, and her breasts brushed against him as she eagerly returned it. They were soft and warm and he palmed them enthusiastically. She moaned and ground herself against him, just as someone else called his name.
Thor frowned. That voice was familiar. He looked around to find—Luke! He pulled away from the woman and she fell to the ground. He had not meant to do that. He told her she was sorry, and Luke called him an idiot. Thor grinned. Luke liked to call him an idiot. He didn’t mind when Luke did it, though.

Slender fingers wrapped around his and Luke began to lead him back across the grand hall. Thor wasn’t sure why—they had a perfectly good dark place here. He told Luke as much, but Luke just said something about a bed. Beds were nice, that was a great idea! Luke was so smart. He told Luke so, but he just rolled his eyes. They were a very pretty shade of green.

*****

In the two weeks since he had known him—which admittedly was not that long—Loki had seen Thor get drunk, but never quite this drunk. He followed Loki easily enough as they left the dining hall, though he kept asking where they were going. Loki kept telling him that they were going to whatever room Thor had been assigned to—Loki asked a servant as they left the hall—and Thor kept telling him what a great idea that was. Then, several minutes later, he asked again.

“There’s a nice spot here,” Thor pulled on Loki’s hand and tried to push him up against a window nook. Loki deftly stepped out of his grasp, something that he probably wouldn’t have been able to do if Thor had been sober, and reminded him that they were going to Thor’s room. Thor beamed at him. “That’s a wonderful idea! You’re so smart, Luke.”

Loki smirked, “So I’ve been told.” Thor was lucky he was so attractive. Honestly, this behavior should be intensely repulsive, but… Thor was just lucky he was good looking.

At one point they had to stop because Thor threw his arms around Loki and buried his face in Loki’s hair. Loki squirmed, but Thor just held him tighter. “You smell wonderful,” he was informed. Loki sighed in exasperation as Thor began to nuzzle at his neck. They were almost at Thor’s room.

“Come on,” he hissed impatiently, holding out a hand. Thor eagerly took it and asked where they were going.

They finally reached Thor’s room for the night and Loki pushed him inside. Thor perked up when he saw the bed and grabbed Loki around the waist, hauling him bodily over to it. He seemed to almost regain some of his motor functions as he quickly began divesting Loki of his clothing.

Loki slipped out of his grip and pushed Thor down onto the bed fully clothed. He pressed his fingers to Thor’s temple and muttered something under his breath. A moment later, Thor collapsed back onto the pillows, snoring mightily.

Loki grinned. He was going to have one hell of a hangover in the morning, and it would serve him right. Honestly, getting drunk at a political function like this. It was true that most of the other people had been fairly drunk as well—Loki had noticed innumerable couples rutting on the tables and against any surface they could find—but that didn’t excuse the crown prince. He’d only been lucky that Loki had been able to get him away from Brenna in time. Truly, the man was a fool.

Thor sighed and murmured something that sounded like Loki’s fake name in his sleep, turning on his side and grabbing at the mattress as though he was searching for something. Loki sighed and turned to go, but something glimmered on the nightstand, catching his eye.
Loki padded over to it and smiled as he recognized one of the porcelain mugs from the feast. He picked it up to examine it more closely, running his fingers over the leaping deer and rabbits. Their tiny gemstone eyes glinted back at him in the cool light of the moon. This had been Thor’s mug, he was sure of it. Thor must not have smashed it, after all. Perhaps he’d had one of the servants bring it up to his room earlier?

Loki moved to replace it on the nightstand and noticed the piece of parchment that had been next to it. Printed in a neat, unfamiliar script were the words, *For Luke.*

Loki smiled as he gently set the mug down and turned to look fondly at the sleeping prince. Well, perhaps he was not so much of a fool after all.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Really!Really!Drunk!Thor was a blast to write, and I hope you guys all found it enjoyable X) Have a great holiday (if you're in a place that celebrates) and, if you have time, please let me know what you think!
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Everyone deals with the consequences of the night before

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! I'm not dead.

Sorry that there was such a long time between updates! I had hoped to get in one more chapter before everything happened, but I didn't quite make it. My friend and I just moved across the country, and I had to deal with some stuff from that. On top of that we were hosting two of my other friends, and exploring the area around where we live with them.

I had known that June through the beginning of July was going to be bad, but I had hoped I would be able to get at least another chapter in somewhere. I'm really sorry it ended up being such a long wait! I hope some of you are still here, and that you haven't all completely forgot what's going on.

Sorry again! I hope you enjoy the update.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Thirteen

The guards stood aside as Heimdall approached the throne room and respectfully removed themselves once he went inside. The Allfather waited for him expectantly.

“You asked me to watch over Prince Thor on his mission,” Heimdall began. The Allfather nodded, and he continued, “Prince Thor has already won over Lord Brandt, who is more in awe of him than he ever was. I expect he will have nothing but good things to say to his father.” Heimdall stopped speaking then, but Odin gave him a scrutinizing stare.

“Is that all you have to report?” He finally asked softly, a resigned look on his face.

It wasn’t. Heimdall’s eyes darkened as he replied, “Lord Tyr’s actions have caused some disruption. He—“

The Allfather held up a hand, “I am aware, you need not report on Tyr. I only wish to hear more of my son.”

Heimdall frowned, but reluctantly pressed on, “There was a minor mishap with the Lord’s daughter, Lady Brenna. She is much older than when Thor saw her last, and I do not believe he recognized her. He was well into his drink by the time she mentioned her name.”

Odin closed his eyes and leaned back against the throne. “And?”
“The feast was well under way by that point, and there would be nothing wrong with the prince…
partaking of the celebration. However,” before Heimdall could continue, his King cut back in.

“However, not with Brenna,” The Allfather’s voice was steely and disappointed, “Lord Armand is
very protective of her; I’m surprised he even let her attend the feast. He’ll be furious when he finds
out Thor was with her.” Odin’s grip tightened on Gungir until his fingers turned white. Then he took
a deep breath and relaxed, looking older than Heimdall had seen him look in some time. “I wish
Thor would show some restraint, some adeptness with politics. However, perhaps I am looking for
something in him that simply isn’t there. I cannot force him to be something he is not.”

“My King,” Heimdall continued after respectfully waiting for Odin to finish, “You misunderstand
me. As I said, it was just a minor mishap. Prince Thor did not end up with Brenna in the end, but
parted ways with her halfway through the night and returned to his rooms to sleep. Lord Armand
was angry at Thor’s attentions to his daughter at first, but mollified when he heard that the Prince
presumably realized his mistake and left.”

The Allfather relaxed, looking younger again. “Then perhaps there is hope yet,” he murmured, “But
what of the other one I asked you to watch?”

Heimdall completed his report, answering questions until Odin nodded his head in satisfaction and
dismissed him.

He turned and began to cross the throne room, but then paused. After a moment of consideration he
turned and said, “There is one more thing.”

*****

Someone was banging on Thor’s head with a sledgehammer. He groaned and burrowed his face
deeper into the wonderful-smelling pillow, hoping to fall back into unconsciousness.

“Good. You’re awake. Now get up, you imbecile.”

Thor winced at the sound—there was no need for Luke to be so loud—but smiled into the pillow.
He pulled the blankets closer and—wait. Thor stilled suddenly in realization. His arm was around
something solid, and the area his head rested on was too silky to actually be the pillow. He raised it,
shaking from the effort, to see that he had been nuzzling shiny black hair.

The moment that he got up Luke moved as though to get out of the bed, but Thor just gripped him
tighter, pulling him flush against himself under the blankets. Luke stilled immediately, tensing. He
wasn’t behaving as though they were lovers now, but Thor wanted to be sure, “Last night… we
didn’t—“

“No idiot, we didn’t. If we had, you’d remember it, I promise.” Luke’s voice was sharp, making
Thor wince again.

“Gently, Luke, my head still pounds.”

“Good!” Luke snapped peevishly, “Do you even know what you almost did last night? You don’t
remember, do you?” Thor was sure that Luke was raising his voice on purpose, probably because he
was getting a vindictive pleasure out of making Thor’s head ache more fiercely. The Asgardian was
torn between letting go of Luke in hopes that the sound of his voice would become fainter and
holding Luke closer to try to distract him.

Neither would work though, Thor realized grimly as his friend continued to berate him. He nearly
reminded Thor of his mother while she was lecturing him after he had done something particularly
displeasing. Resigned to his fate, Thor covered his ears as best as he could with the blankets and snuggled closer to Luke, burying his face in his shoulder.

There was a moment of blessed silence, and Thor thought hopefully that it might be over.

“Are you even listening to me?”

Thor made a humming noise of assent and nuzzled Luke’s neck. He heard Luke sigh and mutter, “Apparently not.” Then the warm body beneath him was wrestling out of his grip as the dark haired man twisted around to grab something off of the elaborate nightstand. Luke shook the little bottle in front of Thor’s nose, “One of the servants dropped this off this morning. It’s supposed to cure your hangover within moments, but I’m not sure I want to give it to you.”

Thor made a grab for the bottle, but Luke deftly removed it from his reach. “Ah, ah, ah, not so fast. If I give this to you, you are going to sit and listen to what you did last night and then discuss the political ramifications of your actions and how to fix them. Otherwise,” He dangled the fragile bottle high over the hard floor and let it slip through his fingers a bit, making Thor startle. “Have I made myself clear?”

“Of course,” Thor growled, not willing to argue. He knew he could just have the servants send up another, but that would mean dealing with an irate Luke, and somewhere in the back of his mind he remembered that Luke had already been angry with him last night for something.

Luke handed him the bottle, which he immediately quaffed and moved to toss aside. At the last second he halted his action under Luke’s shocked and disapproving stare, and instead reached across his friend to place the bottle gently on the nightstand.

The ache in his head immediately began to dissipate, and the fog that lay over his memories of last night started to clear. He still couldn’t remember everything, however, and certainly couldn’t think of anything he had done wrong.

Thor glanced up to meet Luke’s shrewd green eyes, which were busy assessing him. “Well?” His friend asked after a moment.

Really, if it had been anyone else using that tone of voice on him…

Thor sighed and shook his head. “I remember everything clearly up until a point. Brandt seemed to be taking to our group; the festivities were pleasant and normal. You were a dark little storm cloud over the events, frowning and making disapproving faces at everything. Yes, that’s the face. Is that what I’m supposed to remember?”

Luke’s eyes narrowed so far they became dark slits with a dangerous hint of green in the center, “I confess the activities were in excess of what I prefer,” he said flatly, “But no, I’m referring to your behavior, not mine.”

Thor rubbed his forehead. At least his literal headache was gone now, but the figurative one sitting next to him didn’t seem to want to give up. “I remember that you left at some point, but I’m not clear on why. Then I remember drinking a lot, but everyone does that at these types of parties. There was a lovely woman…” He trailed off and tried to hide the sudden gleam in his eyes, “That’s not what this is about, is it? You aren’t jealous?”

Luke snorted derisively and waved a dismissive hand. “Jealous? Hardly. I left because I was tired of all of the endless drinking, eating, and bragging. The woman, however… do you remember anything about her?”
Thor ignored his disappointment and thought hard for a moment, but came up with nothing except, “I think she had brown hair,” he shrugged. Luke let out a long-suffering sigh and closed his eyes.

“That was Lord Armand’s daughter, one that I hear he’s very protective of. And yes,” he added drolly, “She has brown hair.”

Thor sat up straight, “The Lord’s daughter? But Lord Armand doesn’t have a daughter! I mean, he does, but not one that’s old enough to… Brenna is a tiny little thing, barely higher than my waist. He doesn’t have an adult daughter.”

Barely concealed amusement now played across Luke’s face as he asked, “When, exactly, was the last time you were here, Thor?”

He opened his mouth to reply, but then stopped when he realized he didn’t know. “It was a while ago, I suppose,” he admitted at last. “But that couldn’t have been little Brenna. Why, the last time I saw her she was running about picking wildflowers and catching salamanders in the river with her friends. You must be mistaken.”

“I’m not,” Luke reassured him in a dry tone, “And Lord Armand is probably less than pleased with you. I did get you away from her before anything regrettable happened, so hopefully that will make a difference.”

Thor was still trying to reconcile the woman of last night with the child he remembered. “But I remember her with her braids in her hair, and helping her with her art projects. You’re sure…?”

“Very. Now get up and get dressed, we need to fix this.” Luke finally freed himself from Thor’s grasp and vanished, presumably going to get dressed himself. Thor drug himself slowly out of bed, trying to remember any more details from the night before. It was futile, though. His memories grew hazy around the time that Luke had left, and completely blacked out soon after.

Thor glanced over at the nightstand, which stood empty, and frowned. Had the mug he had sent up for Luke only been a drunken figment of his imagination as well?

He sighed, disappointed with himself, and slowly began to dress for the day.

*****

“Hey Luke! It’s about time you showed up,” Fandral grinned as Loki sat down at the breakfast table. The Jotun prince nodded a greeting and reached for the food. He paused halfway through the action, looking dubiously at the table.

“Oh, don’t worry,” Fandral must have read the look on his face, “The tables were thoroughly cleaned after some of last night’s more vigorous activities.” Loki must have still looked doubtful, because he added, “In fact, this particular table is brand new. They had it made after the one from last night broke.”

Loki rolled his eyes but helped himself to a roll and some fruit while Fandral proceeded to tell him about his escapades from the night before.

Moments later Thor entered the hall and moved towards the main table instead of theirs, his broad shoulders slumped. He was followed closely by Balder, who had a displeased but worried look on his face. Loki felt a tiny spark of satisfaction upon seeing this. He felt he had let Thor off easy, so it was good to see he wasn’t the only one lecturing the spoiled Asgardian prince.

“I knew it!” Fandral brayed when he saw Thor enter, “Nice try there, attempting to hide it by not
coming to breakfast together, but I saw you two leave last night,” he winked roguishly just as Hogun took the seat on his other side. Hogun had clearly been awake for a while now, and Loki wasn’t surprised that he didn’t make a move towards the food. Loki would be willing to bet that the Vanir man had eaten earlier and was just re-entering to keep them company.

“Does either Thor or Luke look like someone who has had a pleasant night?” Hogun asked in his mild voice, and Fandral quickly reassessed the situation.

“Huh, was the sex that bad?” the blonde asked, “I’m surprised—Thor’s had drunken sex before and I’ve never heard anyone complain.”

Loki didn’t rise to the bait. “We didn’t sleep together,” he said, “Thor was so drunk he started snoring the moment he hit the bed.”

This new tidbit of information caused Fandral to break out into a fit of snickering, which was still going full throttle as Sif joined them, looking irritable and slightly more disheveled than normal.

“Shut up, Fandral,” she snapped as she sat down.

Fandral looked back and forth between all of his friends, “Is everyone in a poor mood this morning?”

“This is what happens when you get drunk and do stupid things all night before a mission,” Loki muttered, “I’m not sure what you all expected.”

“Well, I for one am in a great mood,” Fandral informed them all, “So I don’t see what the problem is. Hey, where’s Volstagg?”

Sif looked suddenly guilty and focused on her food, causing everyone to watch her suspiciously. After a moment she sighed and put down the loaf of bread she was tearing at. “Last night Volstagg got bored after the food and drink were taken away, and I was feeling fidgety and claustrophobic. So instead of staying in the hall we went out into the training yard to spar. Drunk. With our actual weapons.”

“Is he… um, alive?” Fandral asked tentatively, only half joking.

“Of course he’s alive,” Sif snapped back, “He’s fine, the healers looked after him last night; he just needed to stay for observation. He’ll be back any time now.”

Loki hid his amusement in his glass of juice and didn’t say anything, but Sif gave him a poisoned glare anyway. “What happened with Thor last night? Last I saw he was having a great time with some young brunette, which is probably why Luke is all pissy, but now it looks like he’s in some kind of trouble. Not that I’m surprised, but what did he do now?”

“Actually, yes, that is why I’m irritated,” Loki admitted, causing all three of his friends to raise their brows, at least until he continued, “Because that ‘young brunette’ was Lord Armand’s daughter, which means that Thor has already screwed over the political aspect of this mission. Balder is trying to fix it now.”

They all looked up at the main table, where Thor sat shamefaced between Balder and Lord Armand.

“Lord Armand doesn’t look too upset,” Fandral ventured cautiously.

He didn’t. The Lord looked neither angry nor happy, which Loki decided to take as a good sign. At least this entire thing might not be completely pointless. He finished his fruit and stretched, then turned to go outside. Fandral, Sif, and Hogun soon followed him, and for some reason he felt a rush of warmth for a moment. Then he had to scold himself and remind himself that this was only
temporary—they were only his friends because they didn’t know who he was.

Still, he wasn’t quite able to keep the small, satisfied smile off of his face.

As they got the horses ready in companionable silence—Hogun and Sif kept giving Loki pointers on how to put the saddle and harness onto his horse—Volstagg finally joined them, looking none the worse for wear. He gave Sif a broad smile as he approached and gave her an enthusiastic pat on the back, propelling her forward a foot or so. Apparently, they had brought him breakfast in bed. Three breakfasts, in fact, since he kept asking for more.

Together they helped Loki up into the saddle and gave him some lessons as they waited.

This was how Thor found them when he finally came out of the manor an hour later, looking slightly more cheerful. Balder still dogged his footsteps like a shadow, however.

“You’re a natural,” Thor beamed, and Loki rolled his eyes. He was quite aware that his seat on the horse was still fairly bad, and they had only ever covered how to ride the horse at a walk. He hadn’t become an expert in the last hour. Still, he supposed he could appreciate that the Asgardian prince was trying to encourage him.

“I guess this means I can ride by myself for the rest of the mission,” he said haughtily.

Fandral burst out laughing.

*****

Half an hour later the party bid farewell to the Lord and his manor as they finally rode out at a gallop, with Loki clinging with white-knuckled fingers to Fandral’s waist. He had firmly refused to ride in front of Fandral this time, instead choosing to ride behind him.

Brandt and Thor took the lead, with Balder and Tyr on their tail.

“Tyr looks less than pleased this morning,” Fandral called back to him, and Loki had to agree. The dark-haired Asgardian’s face was almost fixed in a scowl ever since Thor had apologized to Lord Armand and Brenna—calling her “little Brenna” the whole time, much to Loki’s amusement and the girl’s embarrassment. She had apologized in turn, admitting that she had heard a rumor that Thor was interested in her.

Thor had seemed confused as to where she could have heard that—not that she wasn’t beautiful, he had assured her—but Loki thought he had a pretty good idea of where such a rumor might have come from.

Balder seemed to share his suspicions, since he kept frowning over at Tyr as they rode.

Still, the overall mood was pleasant as they set out. The day was sunny and dry, Thor’s actions from the night before were forgiven, and (thankfully) no one had been permanently injured. The herd of Bilgesnipe had even been spotted nearby, not even a day’s ride away. Everything seemed to promise a successful mission ahead of them.

So even if Loki had known ahead of time that it was a trap, he would have had trouble believing it.
Thanks for reading! And thanks for not leaving me, if you made it this far! :) Updates should be once or twice a week now.
If you're still around, let me know with a review! ;) Thank you all!
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

The bilgesnipe hunt begins.

Chapter Notes

Hello again everyone! Not too bad of a wait this time at least, right? X) I hope you all enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Fourteen

Thor rode out quietly, much more subdued than normal. Brandt kept trying to strike up a conversation, and Thor responded as eagerly as he could, painfully aware that Brandt’s opinion of him was important, but he was having difficulty focusing. If he could turn back time he would have done things differently the night before. He would have drunk less, for a start, and maybe actually gone over to Lord Armand to talk to him like Tyr and Balder had.

But weren’t parties about having fun? About celebrating? It didn’t seem fair that he had to be careful and tread on glass and make nice with important people while everyone else could do whatever they pleased. Perhaps… perhaps he didn’t actually want to be king.

The thought startled him. He’d never considered anything else, after all—he had always taken for granted that he was going to be king. There really was no alternative, was there?

Or maybe there was. Not being king meant that he could do whatever he liked without worrying about how other people perceived him, meant that he could pick something else to do with his life, meant that he could court and even marry the person of his choice. There would be no more limitations on what he could and couldn’t do.

It was something to think about. He might have some trouble explaining to his mother and father, and it could potentially cause some difficulty with succession, but it just might be possible.

The day was sunny and bright, and after a while Thor began to feel better. Even if he wasn’t meant to be king, that didn’t have to mean the end of his life. He’d deal with that when it came. The smile returned to his face, and a tension he hadn’t even been aware of in the rest of the group eased.

Several hours into the trip they stopped and put up a temporary camp. They were near where the attack had been reported, and needed to meet up with scouts that had been tracking the beasts’ movements. As they erected a quick tent in the prearranged spot to shade the plans and reports from the sun, Thor caught a glimpse of Luke walking by, stiff and wincing.

Unfortunately, Luke noticed his stifled laugh and the bottom of the water canteen that Thor was holding magically gave out, splashing its contents all over the top of Thor’s pants and giving the
impression that there had perhaps been an accident. Thor couldn’t help himself any longer; he threw back his head and laughed. “Very juvenile, Luke,” he called when he recovered his breath. He thought he saw Luke smile just slightly.

“Prince Thor! The scouts have arrived!” He heard Balder yell. Thor spun around, still grinning like a fool, but then the smile fell from his face.

One of the two men was supporting the other almost entirely as the slowly moved forward. The injured man was bent double, grasping his middle.

“Stomach wound,” the other scout grunted as they helped the groaning man onto a blanket. “Not sure how it happened—one moment we were watching the group of bilgesnipe terrorize the livestock and trample the fences from a safe distance, and the next there was one right behind us, running us down. I swore there were only three of them—we’ve been watching and following since the day before yesterday—when we sent someone to notify Asgard. They’re to the northwest of the town now, in the upper pastures. All of this time, we only ever saw three, which means that the forth must have been hiding itself.”

“That’s atypical behavior for a bilgesnipe,” Tyr frowned, examining the soldier’s wounds. “It came up behind you and gored your partner? Then what?”

“Luckily we had our static shields with us, so I threw one up and grabbed Aryn, and ran.” He flushed as Tyr gave him a dark look, apparently judging his actions as cowardice. He added quickly, “We weren’t prepared.”

“Of course,” Thor reassured him, “It could have happened to anyone. You got your partner out of there and may have saved his life; you have nothing to feel poorly over.”

Tyr snorted and turned away, striding back to the tent to check the given location. Thor gripped the soldier’s shoulder firmly, giving him an approving nod. The man, tense at Tyr’s departure, relaxed and even smiled weakly.

“Your highness, this needs treated immediately,” a nervous voice spoke up. The two men looked over to where the healer they had brought as a precautionary measure leaned over the now unconscious injured scout.

“Then treat him,” Thor replied, confused.

“That’s just it, your highness—I’m not sure I can. I’m just an apprentice; I thought I’d be healing small wounds, bruises, those sorts of things. I was told maybe a few concussions or even broken bones at the very worst, but I’m not actually able to heal that sort of thing. I was just taught how to splint it for later healing.” The young mage bent the unconscious man’s knees up to keep his stomach in a good position and then began digging around in a bag for some dressings.

Thor frowned, “Who told you that? We weren’t sure what kind of injuries to expect, although most other missions of this sort have minimal injuries. It’s not often a bilgesnipe is able to sneak up on a person from behind. But we typically take experience healers just in case.”

The healer’s eyes flickered behind him and he nervously licked his lips, “I-I’m not sure I can—“

“It was me,” A voice to Thor’s left interrupted glumly. Brandt stared down at where the healer was shakily applying temporary bandages around the open wound, “I just thought—I thought no one would get hurt, not with,” his eyes darted over to Thor, and then back down, “I just didn’t expect this. I thought it would be a good experience for Sten. Your commander told me it was okay,” the
guilt was clear on his face. Obviously the young lord was friends with the healer, and had wanted to give him an opportunity.

“No one could have expected this,” Thor comforted both of them as best he could; “We’ll figure something out.” He brightened when he thought of an alternative and scanned the gathering crowd.

“Don’t ask it, Thor,” Thor jumped as Luke materialized across from him, “I know what you want, but I can’t help. I’m not a healer.”

Thor’s brow furrowed, “But you’re powerful—surely you know something,”

“I can barely soothe the pain when I stub my toe. Power doesn’t mean application. Just because I have the ability to do some magic doesn’t mean I can suddenly do all magic. I’m a warrior mage,” he sighed, “If we have no other options, I can transport him back to Lord Armand’s manor, but I wouldn’t recommend it. The severely wounded sometimes do not… travel well. There can be adverse reactions.”

“I can try to heal him,” Sten put on a brave face, “I know the basics, but I might not have the power to complete it. Still, I could possibly get him healed enough for transport.”

Luke shook his head, “Better we do it here, if possible. I’ll funnel power to you if you start to fail. I take it you’ve done a basic magic transfer before?”

The healer nodded, and Luke knelt next to him, “Then let’s begin.”

Thor quietly shooed the crowd away, leaving only one man to serve as an attendant if they needed anything. He pulled Brandt aside to make sure that the boy wasn’t still blaming himself, and then asked the young lord to accompany him to the tent where plans were being made.

As they approached they could hear raised voices emanating from within. Thor pushed back the flaps to find Tyr and Balder arguing over the table. He was surprised—usually they got along fairly well, and Tyr was much fairer and more lenient towards the young captain than many of the other men. The only other time that Thor could remember them fighting was when he asked Balder to introduce women to the palace guard and Balder agreed.

“It’s foolishness. We need to search the forests first, make sure there are no other outliers. Only when we are certain that we have them surrounded should we make our move. You young things are eager and foolhardy, and you think you are immortal. I’ve seen a bilgesnipe bull kill grown men. These beasts need to be handled with caution, not arrogance,” Tyr was leaning across the makeshift table with the map on it, his face dark.

“But what about the village? The bilgesnipe herd has been getting closer and closer while we’ve done nothing but watch and track their movements. Now they are right on top of it, and you propose we just watch them some more? We have plenty of talented warriors and we outnumber them ten to one. I’m not saying we just run in screaming, I just don’t think it’s necessary to search the forest,” Balder maintained, his voice tight and a fist clenched.

“The villagers are safe, they’ve been temporarily moved to—“

“But their homes and livelihoods have not been moved a safe location. The bilgesnipe have already trampled many fields and disrupted the livestock. We can’t have them destroying houses as well! What if—“

“Friends,” Thor finally interrupted Balder’s heated reply, “There are more than two options here. As Balder has mentioned, we outnumber the beasts ten to one. I propose we split into teams. Balder, you
and Hogun can take ten men to form a barrier between the beasts and the village. If they continue to move that way, you can engage them. Brandt and I will lead a direct assault on the group of four bilgesnipe that we are aware of, assuming that they are still all together. We will take a group of twenty men. But just to be certain that we are not taken unaware as the scouts were Tyr will take a group of ten men to comb the forests. I will send Luke with you if he is finished healing Aryn; perhaps he can use his magic to our advantage. Agreed?"

Balder visibly calmed and nodded, and a moment later Tyr nodded as well. Brandt was watching Thor almost worshipfully.

“Good. Then let’s get everyone organized.” He clapped Brandt on the back and spun back around to exit the tent and gather his men.

*****

Twenty minutes later, Thor crouched in the tall grass alongside Brandt, who had a nervous-but-excited grin on his face. They and the rest of their group watched the four bilgesnipe from their place downwind of the herd. The beasts’ scales glimmered in the sunlight as they feasted on the fallen livestock, completely unaware that the warriors were closing in on them. They were massive, but most of their kind were. The largest one, however, was the biggest that Thor had ever seen. It stood at about three times Thor’s height and its antlers were twice the length of an average man.

According to their plans, that was the one that Brandt needed to take down. Thor glanced over at the eager young lord, who clutched a sharpened spear in his good hand, and worried. He couldn’t let anything happen to the boy. He would have to help him if needed, but not so much that the victory was credited to Thor himself.

Thor slowly raised an arm into the air, waited a moment to make sure that Sif and the men following her on the other side of the field saw, and then waved everyone forward. The soldiers leapt out of the grass and charged forward on all sides of the beasts, surrounding them.

The hunt was on.

*****

Heimdall watched calmly as the soldiers descended on the bilgesnipe and began a tight, coordinated attack. With five Asgardians per beast, their numbers were just safe enough to still be worth boasting about at the end of the hunt. Thor was doing a good job of keeping Brandt in the limelight, and the young lord had managed to pull off several impressive moves.

Then, without warning, everything went dark.

Heimdall blinked, unaccustomed to the sudden nothingness. He turned his eyes elsewhere and saw that Queen Frigga was sitting in the garden tending to the flowers alongside the gardeners while two of her handmaidens watched from a nearby bench. Frigga stiffened and looked up as she felt his gaze upon her. He turned his sight back to Thor’s party.

There was still nothing.

Wasting no time, Heimdall sprinted down the length of the rainbow bridge towards Asgard.

*****

When Tyr had come to collect Loki, they had only just gotten the scout stabilized. Some soldiers were moving the man to the tent on a makeshift stretcher when the Commander approached him,
scowling.

“You, Thor’s bitch. Come with me. The prince’s orders.”

Tyr didn’t give Loki time to respond. Without another word, he left to gather the other members of their group. Loki was unaccustomed to being treated so dismissively, and he couldn’t say he was exactly enjoying the experience.

Now he walked quietly behind the Commander as they stalked through the trees, checking the perimeter of the field. So far, there had been nothing of note. His green eyes burned into the back of Tyr’s head.

The Commander had been nothing but patronizing and condescending, much as Thor had originally acted towards Loki except with less ignorance and more malice. Loki idly considered stabbing the man in the back while no one was looking, but decided that that would be too quick. Instead, roots and stones kept appearing to trip up the older man. Much to Loki’s displeasure, however, the Asgardian managed to gracefully avoid almost all of them.

Almost. Loki nearly did a little dance of glee when Tyr jammed his foot on a rock and had to muffle a curse. When the gruff Commander spun around and gave Loki a dirty glare, he plastered his best innocent, what-happened-did-I-do-something-wrong look on his face, and then smirked when the other man looked away.

After several minutes of idly causing trouble for Tyr and then pretending he’d done nothing, Loki turned back to check on the other men.

Except that they weren’t there.

He froze, surprised. There were supposed to be another three soldiers assigned to their party—Tyr had split them up into two groups. How had they not noticed that the others were gone? He’d been more tied up with trying to discomfort Tyr than on their actual mission.

“Tyr!” Loki hissed, and the Commander spun back around. Then his eyes widened, just slightly.

“Where are the others?” He demanded in a low tone.

“If I knew that, I wouldn’t have stopped us,” Loki sneered back, “Why didn’t you say anything earlier? You must have noticed they were gone when you looked back.”

“They weren’t gone, then.” The seasoned warrior replied grimly. The two went quiet for a moment, scanning the trees.

“They’ve only been missing for a couple of minutes at the most,” Loki murmured, “We can backtrack and——“

A choked off scream interrupted him. Without even stopping to look at each other, they sprinted in the direction of the yell. On the way Loki almost stumbled over one of their group members, the man’s neck twisted at an unnatural angle. Loki stopped for a moment, but Tyr snapped, “He’s dead! Keep moving or more of us will be.”

They barreled into what at first looked like a clearing. Then Loki realized that it was only a clearing because the trees in the area had all been broken and toppled during the struggle.

They had found the other group of scouts. Of the original five men, only three were still on their feet. They faced down a massive, enraged bull bilgesnipe. The beast’s flanks were heaving and covered
in blood, its eyes rolled back into its head as it lashed out hysterically. Loki threw a shield around the creature just before it lunged at one of the remaining men, causing it to bray in confusion as it hit a wall it couldn’t see.

“It just appeared out of thin air!” One of the men wheezed, stumbling over to Loki. “It’s not that we didn’t see it in time—it formed right before us as we watched. We were too surprised to react—it got Perrin right away, swung him around like a rag doll. Enrick got taken out by a falling tree—he’s pinned just over there.”

Magic. That meant someone was trying to sabotage the mission. Loki frowned, but he didn’t have time to consider who could be behind the attack. They would have to figure it out later.

He turned back to the soldier, who was watching him with desperate eyes. “The beast won’t escape my shield, I can keep it contained until we get reinforcements—”

Crashing sounds and a surprised shout stopped them from speaking further, as both Loki and the soldier turned just in time to see one of the remaining men gored through the heart by yet another bilgesnipe. The soldier beside Loki paled and screamed out his friend’s name as Loki stared, horrified. He threw up another shield, but he could feel the very beginnings of strain on his magic as the two beasts beat against the barriers. The healing earlier had taken a lot out of him—the young mage truly hadn’t been very good, and therefore his magic was not very efficient. It had taken huge amounts of power to even heal the man enough to stabilize him.

But the healing had left him slightly weakened, which meant that he didn’t have any time to mess around. He had to take out the source of these attacks now. Loki closed his eyes and felt for any magical disturbances in the area. There.

“Tyr!” Loki called, “I have to lower one of the shields!”

The Commander rallied the two remaining men and nodded. Loki dropped the shield and darted off into the trees after the magical disturbance. It was fading fast—someone knew that they were being chased, and they were trying to hide the ripples that their magic had left.

Loki was just closing in on them when horrified cries and shouts made him stop in his tracks.

The cries weren’t coming from where he had just been, but rather from the direction of…

“Thor,” Loki cursed. The main group was clearly under another attack. He teetered between his two options before sending one last terrible spell zinging through the trees at the perpetrator. Then, pale with exertion and worry over what he might find, he transported himself back to the fields.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about the cliffhangers, guys! Well, a little sorry, at least. Love you all! ;)
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

The attack continues

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading everyone! I appreciate all of the comments! <3
Love you all!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Fifteen

The main field was chaos.

Seven bilgesnipe lay dead in the tall grass, but six more were still fighting the group of soldiers. The injured and dead were everywhere. Loki immediately looked for people he recognized, and was instantly relieved to see Thor and Brandt together fighting the biggest of the group and Volstagg rallying some men around another one nearby.

Thor saw him as he approached, and Loki saw both anger and relief in his eyes. “Luke! What happened? You were supposed to warn us!” The Asgardian prince shouted as he fought, wanting an explanation but trying to keep most of his focus on felling the huge beast before him.

“What happened is that most of the scouting group is dead,” Loki yelled as he ran to help, unsheathing his swords. “We didn’t know it was an attack until too late.”

“What did you think we were going to do, herd the beasts into a pasture? Of course it’s an attack!”

Loki was momentarily confused, but then a chill went down his spine as he realized that Thor had no idea that this was anything other than another group of bilgesnipe that they weren’t ready for. “No, Thor, an actual attack! This isn’t natural, someone is teleporting the beasts in!”

Thor stared at Loki in shock, almost missing the beast’s next attack. “That’s an act of treason!” He roared as he dodged the beast’s great antlers.

“Only if they get caught,” Loki replied grimly, “Otherwise it’s an assassination, or even an accident.”

Thor swung his hammer around and cracked the bilgesnipe upside the head, propelling it up into the air. It crashed back down into the field several meters away and lay still. They moved on to the next one.

This beast was already surrounded by warriors, so a direct attack was impossible. Loki darted forward and leapt up onto the bilgesnipe’s back, slipping a bit on the glossy, blood-covered scales. He nearly slipped right off, but caught himself by driving one of his swords deep into its hide.
It roared, rearing back into the air and sending Loki flying, one of his swords still buried inside of it. Loki was disoriented as he hit the ground, causing him to land badly on one of his shoulders. His remaining sword skittered out of his hand, and he barely had time to recover his senses as he was almost immediately trampled by another beast. Someone yanked him out of the way just in time, and Loki looked up to see Sif, panting and covered in gore.

She yelled something at him then, but he was still too woozy to make sense of her words. She shook him slightly, “Go get the others!” she repeated, and he frowned, dizzy and confused.

“The others?” he repeated as she dragged him away from the battle.

“Balder’s group! Thor sent Balder, Fandral, Hogun, and seven other men down to protect the town! They should have come to help by now, but they haven’t. Find them!” She pushed him away as she spun around and ducked under one of the beasts, slicing its belly open. It bellowed in pain but didn’t go down right away, staggering for a moment before falling to the side.

Loki had only barely registered Sif’s cry of surprised pain before he had transported himself across the field. Telling himself it was too late to go back, he kept teleporting as far as he could see towards the village. The progress was slower than he would have liked, since he could only go as far as he could see—he had never been to the town before, and so had no point of reference—and left him feeling exhausted.

Finally he stumbled into the ghost town. “Balder?” Loki called weakly, winded. He caught his breath and yelled again, “Fandral? Hogun?” His voice didn’t quite echo, but the silent stillness of the town was still eerie. Despair and dread settled into his stomach as he realized just how upset he would be if anything had happened to them.

The sound of footfalls behind him would normally have been quiet, but was loud in the quiet town. “Luke?” A blonde head peered around the corner of one of the buildings, “Hey, it is you! What’s up?”

“Fandral,” Loki sighed in relief, “Fandral, where is everyone else? We have to get back up to Thor’s party as soon as we can—we’re under attack. This was some kind of set up.”

Fandral frowned, eyeing Luke worriedly, “Hey, buddy, are you feeling okay?” the blonde asked, placing a hand on the shoulder that Loki had landed on. Loki hissed in pain—it was only now that he was realizing his arm was probably dislocated. “I’m sure everything is fine. We haven’t heard anything, and if there was something wrong I’m sure we would be given the signal.”

Loki frowned, “What signal?”

“One of the men was given a banner to raise if they needed any help. I mean, it was just a precaution, but if they were in trouble we would know.”

Loki’s frown just deepened. He had seen that banner hanging—and the man lying dead or unconscious beneath it with his bloodied war axe still clutched in one hand. But, sure enough, when he peered up towards the pastures there was nothing. Nothing except… Loki caught the glimmer in the air and hissed angrily. More magic.

“This is a magical attack, Fandral, and someone is preventing you from seeing or hearing anything amiss. Now go get the men. Hurry!”

Fandral still looked confused, but darted off to retrieve the others. Loki debated his options—he probably couldn’t teleport even a couple of men back with him, but it would take them almost five
minutes to get back. Still, there was nothing he could do—they would have to get there on foot. He
didn’t have to, however. Not yet.

Loki took a deep breath and transported himself back to the battlefield.

By the time he got back, they had taken care of two more of the beasts, leaving only two left. He was
relieved—that meant that no more of them had appeared. But many of the remaining warriors were
injured and weakening. Loki counted seven soldiers standing of the original twenty, only two of
which—Brandt and Thor—were completely unscathed.

Loki wobbled as he tried to take a step towards them, and his vision started to go back. He swayed
and fell to his knees, closing his eyes tightly. When he opened them he felt slightly more stable, but
knew that his magic was not an option at the moment. Neither were his swords. Still, he smiled
grimly, he had a few tricks up his sleeves.

In this case, quite literally. Loki flicked his wrist, releasing the catch on the dagger he wore on his
right arm. The cold steel slid smoothly into his palm. He tested the weight only out of habit—he was
more than familiar with this dagger—before snapping his wrist in a tight, controlled motion that sent
the deadly piece of metal whistling straight into the nearest bilgesnipe’s eye.

The beast bellowed and staggered back from the pain, giving the men surrounding it enough time to
go in for the kill. It fell to the ground, twitching, just as Thor and Brandt worked together to bring
down its mate.

Then it was quiet. Loki sat back onto his heels, closing his eyes. The world tilted slightly, and when
he opened them again he was lying on the ground. Now that the adrenaline had left him, his foggy
brain decided that it would be a good time for a nap. Unable to fight it, he drifted off to sleep.

*****

Thor wiped his brow, straightening up after he finished placing yet another warrior in the line of the
fallen. Twelve of his soldiers—of his friends—would no longer drink with him and laugh at his
stories. He would have to personally relay the news to their families; they deserved that much.

They had retrieved the men in the woods and then set up a makeshift area to treat wounds. Except
for Balder’s group, who had only arrived after everything had ended, almost all of them had at least
one cut or injury to tend to. Thor’s heart had faltered when he had spotted Sif’s long dark head of
hair sprawled out beside one of the bilgesnipe. He had heaved the large beast off of her—she had at
least a broken leg, probably several broken ribs—but to his relief, she was alive. So was Luke,
though it was a gnawing worry in the pit of Thor’s stomach that no one seemed to be able to wake
him up.

Volstagg had been gored in the shoulder by one of the bilgesnipe, but had laughed and waved it off.
It was, he joked, the second wound this shoulder had taken on this trip alone, and the first one had
been far worse.

The only good thing that managed to happen from this trip was that Brandt had more than proved
himself. He had shown that he was good under pressure and kept his cool during unexpected
situations, and he didn’t let his disability stop him from fighting just as well as the other warriors.

Thor and Balder took a tally of all of the soldiers present and deceased, only to discover even more
bad news. One of their own was not accounted for, and it only took Thor a fraction of a second to
realize who.
Tyr was missing.

As if the situation couldn’t get any worse, their only non-soldier—the healer—was gone as well. This sent Brandt, who up until this point had kept it together, into a sobbing fit. Thor did his best to comfort the young lord before visiting each of his remaining soldiers, trying to see what everyone’s mental state was. Many of the men were still in shock. No one had expected any deaths on this trip, let alone this many. But he had to try to motivate them and lift morale, because now they faced the task of getting back to Lord Armand’s manor.

Thor finally finished his rounds with the men and collapsed into a sitting position beside Luke’s still form. He tentatively reached out and smoothed the man’s hair away from his face, but Luke didn’t stir. He just lay there, terribly still and as pale as the corpses. Thor’s heart skipped a beat when he couldn’t see Luke breathing, but then relaxed as his chest just barely rose and fell.

Thor continued stroking Luke’s hair as he thought back on what he had told him earlier. Had this truly been some kind of planned attack? If so, who was behind it? It didn’t make sense. They weren’t currently at war, civil or otherwise, and the people were happy and prosperous. He was only taking Luke’s word for it as well, though he trusted his friend completely. The bilgesnipe had run in from the forest, and no one else seemed to have noticed anything unnatural, other than Balder’s group not being able to hear the battle or see the signal. But that could be explained by other things—they had been far enough away that potentially the sound didn’t carry, and they had never tested the signal and had merely assumed that it would be able to be seen. The other scouts had all been killed, leaving Luke and Tyr the only survivors of that party. At least, assuming Tyr was still alive. They may have just not found the body yet.

The thought depressed Thor further. He might not always get along with Tyr, and he thought that some of his methods were outdated, but Tyr had been the Commander of the Armies for as long as Thor had been alive.

Thor sighed and rested his hand on Luke’s, wishing his friend would wake up. He wanted to know why Luke thought it was a magical attack, what he had seen to make him think that way. Until Luke woke, Thor decided not to worry about it. There were too many other things to worry about.

A shout went up, making Thor shoot to his feet. He looked over to the commotion to see Brandt crying and hugging his healer friend, who had apparently fled back to the manor to bring reinforcements. Lord Armand himself led the party, followed by a flock of warriors and healers.

Instantly, a huge weight was lifted off of Thor’s shoulders. He had been worried that they were going to lose even more soldiers due to lack of proper treatment.

He immediately moved to greet Lord Armand, who of course wanted to know what had happened. Thor almost mentioned Luke’s insistence that the attack was unnatural, but stopped himself. He wasn’t sure of that detail yet. Instead, he gave the details of the attack as he had seen them—They were successfully taking down the four bilgesnipe that the scouts had reported when they were attacked by nine more. Thor had sent men to search the woods for any outliers, but they had been attacked by two other bilgesnipe and killed.

“One, you mean, right?” A nervous voice spoke up, worried about correcting the prince.

Thor didn’t mind, however. He turned to the youngest soldier in their party and frowned thoughtfully, “The men reported that it looked as though the scouts were attacked by two different beasts.”

“But we only found the body of one.”
Thor frowned. That wasn’t good—it meant that there could still be yet another out there. Lord Armand seemed to be thinking the same thing, for he said, “I will send the soldiers I brought with me to scout the forest for the remaining one. Meanwhile, my healers will aid your injured. I hear that it was my son’s idea to only bring a novice healer, and I apologize for that oversight.”

Thor shook his head, “It was not his fault, nothing about this mission went as we thought it would. Any other time a novice healer would not have been a problem. That young healer was very brave and saved a man’s life, and your son fought admirably and saved many.”

Lord Armand smiled, just slightly. “Thank you, Your Highness. I’m sure that he appreciates your praise.”

Thor stayed and talked with Lord Armand for a while longer, and Balder came over to join them. They spoke of the unusualness of the attack—bilgesnipe almost always traveled in pairs or quads, and occasionally threes. It was odd that a group this large had gotten together at all, let alone attacked. Usually bilgesnipe were territorial and defensive, but not typically quite as aggressive as these had been.

“Luke did mention something else, but I have yet to confirm it with anyone,” Thor finally admitted, “He seemed to think that there was magic behind this attack, but that would make it a planned move to injure and kill. I cannot think of anyone who would wish to do something like this.”

Lord Armand looked slightly alarmed, and then thoughtful. “It would explain a lot,” he murmured, “But I cannot think of anyone either. There are reasons to be irritated at times, of course,” here Thor remembered that Lord Armand had been recently displeased with the crown, “But not any more than that. Nothing that would call for such drastic measures as this.”

Thor nodded, “I only mentioned his theory for the sake of completeness, he must have hit his head or seen something and misinterpreted. I have not been able to speak with him since. He is currently still unconscious.”

“The healers seemed to think there wasn’t much wrong with him, so he should wake soon,” Balder reassured him.

Thor smiled and was about to reply when a man on a horse came barreling into their camp. “My Lord!” the young man gasped as he dismounted his horse, making a beeline for Lord Armand, “Just after you left, the Bifrost activated! We have visitors from Asgard—the Allfather himself! He’s just behind me.” The young man’s eyes flickered over to Thor and Balder, and he did a double take, “My apologies, Your Highness, I had not seen you there,” he bowed.

Thor hadn’t even noticed, “My father is coming?” he asked urgently. That couldn’t be good. The young man nodded, “Do you know why?”

“I don’t, our captain just told me to ride after Lord Armand.”

Their conversation was suddenly interrupted by a warning shout, followed by a scream. Thor whirled around, his hammer flying to his hand as Balder and Lord Armand drew their swords. The last bilgesnipe had made its reappearance. It stormed out of the woods, its eyes rolling and its flanks covered in sweat.

Then Thor noticed what undoubtedly had caused the cry. Brandt and his healer friend had taken a walk in the field so that they could speak, and they were unarmed. They had only just turned and noticed the beast, and were trying to run, but Thor knew they wouldn’t be fast enough.
He didn’t even think twice. Thor spun the hammer around and flew at the two young men, crossing the field in a fraction of a second and knocking them out of the way. Suddenly he was in terrible pain, and Brandt was shouting something. He looked down to see the beast’s antlers protruding from his chest, right before the bilgesnipe flipped him over its back.

Then everything went dark.

*****

“You idiot!” the hooded figure seethed, “This was supposed to be easy, no one suspected anything! Why aren’t they all dead?”

“It’s not my fault,” one of the others whined, “They had an unknown mage in their party, he took out Sylvis. We had tried to drain his magic earlier, but he must be fairly powerful. He was still able to erect two shields and knock Sylvis out, then teleport away. If your reports had been more accurate —“

“You dare,” the hooded figure replied, “Accuse me?” Beneath the hood, eyes flickered over to one of the other men, who must have seen the unspoken command despite the cloak. Without question the other man drew a long dagger and ran the accuser through. He fell limply to the ground.

“Does anyone else want to question me?”

Only silence greeted this query, and the figure nodded in satisfaction.

Chapter End Notes

Well, I hope you, um, enjoyed? this chapter. I feel like it might have been one of my weaker ones, but hopefully it's still okay. I've been looking forward to the next chapter, though X) It will be up fairly soon, and will be a bit longer than normal.

Thank you for all of your support! Please leave a comment if you are so inclined :)
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Loki finally wakes up, only to find himself in a terrible situation.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for your patience everyone! My family just flew across the country to see me, which made me very happy but left me with very little time to write. This chapter was actually supposed to be longer, but I ended up cutting it in half so that I could post sooner. Expect the next one soon! Thank you all!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Sixteen

Loki awoke with a fierce throbbing in his temples. His body ached all over, as though he had been severely dehydrated. He could barely register his surroundings, and it took him several times opening and closing his eyes to comprehend that he was lying in a bed of some sort and staring at a ceiling.

That was good. That meant that help had come, and that they were safe, right? He tried to push himself up to look around, but his arms shook and would not support his weight. Sighing, Loki contented himself with lying still for a moment, trying to remember everything that had happened.

He remembered the fight, of course, and that they had finally taken out all of the bilgesnipe. After that, there was nothing. He must have passed out. Loki had only drained his magic several times before, and none of the experiences had been pleasant. Every other time he had been bedridden for days afterwards.

Speaking of beds… Loki shifted uncomfortably. He was surprised that Asgard even possessed such an uncomfortable bed. Opening his eyes and squinting against the light, Loki looked at the room he was in. At first, the golden light blinded him slightly, and he thought he might be in some kind of hospital wing. But then it sunk in that the tiny room he was in contained only the cot that he lay on, and that the walls were not really walls, but containment fields.

His blood ran cold and he closed his eyes again, determined not to panic or show weakness. For some reason he was in a prison cell. Had Thor finally figured out who he was?

“Luke? Are you awake?” Loki’s head snapped around quickly, causing the room to tilt in his vision. He had to reclose his eyes so that he didn’t get sick. When he opened them he squinted through the golden containment field to see Fandral sitting on a stool, looking disheveled. It looked as though he had been sitting there for some time, and that he’d barely gotten any sleep.

“Fandral?” Loki’s voice came out as a rasp, “What happened? Why am I here?”

The blonde shook his head, “There’s been some kind of mistake. Don’t worry, we’ll sort it all out.
Hogun, Volstagg, and I have been taking shifts to make sure someone was here when you woke up.”

“What about Sif?” He didn’t ask about Thor. The crown prince probably had too many duties to sit around in a prison cell all day. Or maybe Thor was the one who had ordered him in here. He didn’t want to think about that.

“She’s doing okay, but the healers asked her to stay for a bit so that they could oversee everything. Broken bones—especially large ones—can take a while to fix and are difficult to heal properly. Actually, you probably know more about that than me. Not that our healers aren’t up to it, they’re just cautious,” Fandral hesitated, frowning, “Aren’t you going to ask about Thor?”

“What about him? Before I passed out at the end of the battle he was fine. I assume he’s busy?” Loki’s heartbeat seemed abnormally loud for a moment.

“Oh. Oh shit, you don’t even know. Another bilgesnipe came in a couple of hours later and nearly killed Brandt, but Thor threw himself in front of him and so the beast gored Thor instead.”

A burst of adrenaline allowed Loki to sit halfway up before crashing back down painfully onto his shoulder. Fandral winced in sympathy and said quickly, “He’s alive, he’s going to be fine. I’ve never seen the Allfather so pissed or so worried, though.”

“He’s okay?” Loki whispered, almost too quietly for Fandral to hear, but before Fandral could reassure him again Loki cleared his throat and said, “The Allfather was there?”

“Yeah, he showed up right when everything went down. He fried the bilgesnipe to a crisp immediately. There was just a little pile of ash on the ground when he was done with it, and I’ve never seen anyone his age move so fast when he went to check on Thor. Poor guy—I guess it’s tough seeing your son almost killed right in front of you, even if you are a king. When he made sure Thor was still alive he scooped him up easily—I never knew he was so strong, either—and gave a bunch of orders to Captain Balder and a bunch of the men he’d brought from Asgard. Then he just vanished, like you do. Took Thor straight back to the palace healers, so he’s doing okay now. At least,” Fandral chewed his lip, “So I’ve heard.”

Loki took a moment to digest all of this before slowly repeating, “So you’ve heard? You haven’t seen him yourself?”

Fandral swallowed and shrugged, “No one has. The healers released him days ago, but he’s just kind of…disappeared. They say he’s not coming out of his rooms, but maybe he’s on bed rest. To be fair, I don’t think he knows that you’re down here, or I’m sure he’d be down here insisting on your release.”

“Speaking of which…”

“Oh yeah. So apparently your arrest was one of the things ordered by the Allfather, which is odd because he’s never even met you, at least as far as I know. He hasn’t been to see you at all and there’s no audience scheduled yet. Balder has been arguing with the guards, but they have direct orders from the king to keep you here, and there’s nothing he can do.”

“I’m surprised Tyr hasn’t stopped him from doing that much,” Loki said dryly, trying to cover the panic that was threatening to take hold of him.

“Oh yeah, him,” Fandral sounded conflicted, “I don’t like the guy much, you know? But he’s missing. Balder is very worried; he thinks something might have happened to him. Did you know
that they’re related? It’s not something he spreads around much, he’s worried people will think that Tyr helped him get the position he has now. That’s a laugh, though—Tyr might like Balder, but he didn’t lift one finger to help him, not that I know of.”

“They’re related?” There were too many questions, most of which Loki was too afraid to ask, so he stuck to small talk.

“Yeah, Tyr’s his uncle. His mother’s brother or something.”

“Oh.” Loki was quiet for a moment then, rubbing his shoulder absentmindedly. Inwardly, he was preoccupied, but he was trying not to let the terror overwhelm him. What would happen if Odin had found out? Would he start a war with Jotunheim? Loki shivered and tried not to think about it. Jotunheim wouldn’t survive a war with Asgard.

“So he’s awake.” Fandral jumped and Loki squinted into the shadows where Hogun was emerging.

Fandral half laughed, “You just took a hundred years off of my life, I swear. Why do you do that?” But the blonde was grinning, “Yeah, he’s awake. Not happy, understandably.”

Hogun grunted and nodded, before switching places with Fandral. “You might be awake finally, but we won’t leave you alone,” Fandral promised Loki, “I’ll be back in a couple of hours. I’ll try to see if Thor’s available again before catching a nap.”

He looked like he needed it, so Loki nodded. He knew he would miss Fandral’s inane chatter, however. Hogun’s quiet companionship wouldn’t quite be enough to keep him from dwelling on his fears.

Hogun seemed to sense this, however, and much to Loki’s surprise, he began to speak. It was more than he had ever heard the other dark-haired man say at one time. Hogun spoke in a quiet, level tone, catching Loki up on the long journey back, on Lord Armand’s promise that once everyone was well he would hold a feast in their honor, (Loki rolled his eyes—but at least this time they actually deserved a feast), and the odd tension in the castle since they’d been back.

They had all been to visit Thor, who had rejected their company in turn. The Allfather had cancelled all of his meetings and audiences for the week, and no one had even seen the queen. Balder had taken over Tyr’s duties and apparently more, and had been rushing around everywhere looking harried. Even more oddly, all of the major lords and ladies had been arriving to the castle in a steady stream although none of them seemed to know why. They all gave the same story when asked—they had been summoned to the palace by the Allfather himself.

What would warrant such attention? A declaration of war, maybe, Loki thought worriedly. Or—his breath caught—the execution of a political prisoner followed by a declaration of war.

“How,” Loki chewed his lip, debating, “How does anyone have any idea why I’m in here?”

Hogun gazed past him at the wall for a moment, seeming to think before saying, “Not anything concrete. It’s been guessed that the bilgesnipe attack was actually an assassination attempt—apparently Thor voiced his concerns about the attack being magical just before he was injured. Perhaps the Allfather suspects that you had something to do with it.”

Loki frowned, “Of course I didn’t. Does he have any reason for those suspicions?”

Hogun shrugged, “I’m just saying what I believe this might be about. I haven’t actually heard anything official,” he paused for a moment before continuing, “It doesn’t look good that Thor hasn’t been down to see you. Thor hasn’t seen anyone lately, but not everyone knows that. All they know
is that the Allfather had you arrested right after Thor was nearly killed, and now the prince has seemingly cut all allegiance with you."

Loki lay back and closed his eyes. “So even if I eventually get let out, everyone is going to think I’m guilty of something.”

“Probably.” Trust Hogun not to sugarcoat anything.

“What about you?”

There was a long silence before Hogun decided to speak. “I do not trust easily. I have enjoyed your company, but we do not know much about you,” he met Loki’s eyes, “That said, it is my hope that this has been a mistake. I have no reason to believe you are guilty of anything.”

Loki nodded. That was as much as he was going to get. A thought occurred to him, “How long has it been since the bilgesnipe attack?”

“It has been thirteen days. It took two just to return here and have the palace healers look at you so that your body could maintain itself even while unconscious, so you have been in the prison for eleven of them.”

Thirteen days? His family must be worried—he left for days at a time quite frequently, but he always tried to check in when he did so. They probably thought that something had happened to him. Which, Loki supposed grimly, something had. He couldn’t exactly brush off being in an Asgardian prison as nothing.

Byleistr would be home by now, too, Loki thought with a pang. He had wanted to talk to his brother about everything. He should not have returned to Asgard until he did.

But if Byleistr was home… Loki realized something. Quickly he recounted the days that had passed since his last heat. If thirteen days really had passed, then he had less than a week until he went back into heat. Loki groaned. He had better be out of prison by then, one way or another.

*****

Thor lay listlessly on his bed, refusing to get up even when he heard a knock on the door to his outer chamber. It was Fandral, he could tell. If he hadn’t been able to recognize each of his friend’s individual knocks before these past two weeks, he would be able to now.

He was still not in the mood to see anyone. He wasn’t sure how he was feeling about everything yet, but at least it would all be over soon. Tomorrow, that was when his father would make the announcement. That was when everything would change. After tomorrow, he would need his friends, but at the moment he didn’t want to see anyone.

Thor closed his eyes and rolled back over, trying to sleep.

*****

Balder ran his hands through his hair, feeling hassled. Yet another high noble family had arrived—that was all but one accounted for, and they were supposed to arrive later that day—and for some reason all of the complaints or issues were being directed at him. Balder wondered if Tyr usually dealt with some of the problems, or if the household maids were all on break, because he had just been dealing with a woman complaining about her sheets.

Sheets, like he knew anything about sheets. He slept in the barracks with the other soldiers, for
goodness sake. As far as he could tell, the sheets were quite nice. But now here he was in the laundry room trying to pick out new bedding for someone when he knew nothing about sheets or the person in question. The maids were giggling at him.

Balder sighed, took the deep purple ones that one of the more helpful maids had suggested, and shoved them into a sack. The maids giggled harder.

He understood why when ten minutes later he returned to the laundry to fetch new sheets, because the purple ones were “too wrinkled” for the woman’s taste. Who cared that sheets were wrinkled? Didn’t they get wrinkled anyway?

Balder sighed and accepted the nicely folded bedding offered by one of the maids, and then turned back around to deliver them. He took a deep breath. After tomorrow, after whatever announcement that was so important was made, things would go back to normal. He just had to make it until then.

*****

Dinner was actually quite pleasant. At least, as pleasant as dinner could be when you were locked up in a prison cell, possibly awaiting death or the proclamation of war on your country. Volstagg had come to take over for Hogun, and he was laden with all sorts of food. A young servant pushing a cart with drinks on it followed behind him, and the soldiers actually allowed Volstagg to join him inside of the containment field.

Loki had slowly strengthened throughout the day, and he was now able to sit up on his own. Hogun had helped him with that—the quiet man had apparently needed all kinds of physical therapy throughout the years, so he knew which ways to move to regain strength.

Volstagg was good company, too—He kept Loki’s mind off of his current situation by telling long, amusing, rambling stories about his children. True, Loki tuned many of them out (while he admired Volstagg’s dedication to his family, Volstagg could talk about his children for as long as Thor could talk about hunting), but the ones he listened to were amusing enough. Volstagg seemed highly aware of the fact that he was there to keep Loki’s spirits up, so he was obviously trying to keep the stories funny.

Loki actually laughed out loud when Volstagg told him about the time that one of his daughters drew a very highly detailed picture of Thor getting married to a frost giant after Thor had chided her for trying to ride his horse. Apparently the small girl had had romantic hopes of impressing the crown prince and stealing his heart. Instead, she ended up drawing him getting married in a puffy wedding dress to what sounded like Thrym. Volstagg had gifted it to Thor for one of his birthdays.

Loki hoped he still had it, he would love to see—

Even Volstagg noticed as all of the joy drained from Loki’s face. “This will all work out, you know,” Volstagg said softly, “Everything will be okay, and we’ll all go back to normal. Whatever is going on will be over soon.”

“You don’t know that,” Loki replied bitterly, “You don’t even know what this is about.”

Volstagg shrugged, “It can’t be anything too bad, you’re not actually guilty.”

Loki winced inwardly. He wasn’t, not really. Not of anything besides trespassing, and lying to a member of the royal family. “How do you know it will be over soon?”

“Oh, didn’t Hogun say? He must not have heard—there’s a huge gathering being called tomorrow by the Allfather himself. Some important announcement is being made. I’m sure it’s nothing to do
with you, of course, but after whatever else is going on is taken care of, Thor will realize you’re down here and fix everything.”

If nothing else, Loki learned from this conversation that Volstagg had a lot of faith—faith in Thor as well as in Loki. He had a sinking feeling that much of that faith was misplaced.

Loki returned to his food quietly, mulling over what Volstagg had said. The big man continued to try to distract him, but it was no longer working. So, it was going to happen tomorrow. Suddenly the dinner he was having felt like a final meal, turning it to ash in his mouth. He would have to do something, anything to make them believe that he was not a part of the attack on Thor. He realized how bad it looked—a Jotun prince sneaking into Asgard and befriending Thor just to lead him into a trap. Hel, the whole Brandt thing was technically his idea. Thor must hate him.

Loki felt as though he was going to be sick. Thor. He had to make Thor believe him, this was not what he had intended. He actually cared about the big idiot, at least a little.

After a while Volstagg left to get some sleep, and Fandral reappeared. He looked terrible, though, so Loki lied through his teeth and told him he was fine, and that Fandral should go get some sleep. Reluctantly, after asking if he was sure several times, Fandral left, looking both guilty and relieved.

Loki tossed and turned, terrible scenarios playing through his head. When he finally did fall asleep, he dreamed that he was being sentenced to death, and Thor was his executioner. He dreamed that his family was massacred, that Jotunheim was destroyed and its people left to die. And everything—everything—was his fault.

When the sun finally did rise, he was already awake, desperately trying to think of a way out.

“Luke?”

Loki’s head snapped up to see two guards standing before him that he didn’t recognize. “Yes?” he asked breathlessly, certain that they were about to lead him to his death.

“Please remain seated at all times. This is very unorthodox, but we have been asked to leave you and your visitor alone. If at any time you even appear to be threatening, she will notify us immediately.”

“She?” Loki asked, confused. Had Sif finally recovered? If so, why did she need an escort?

Then the two guards stepped back, and the Queen walked forward to greet him.

*****

Everyone gathered quietly in the courtyard, expectant faces turned towards the palace stairs. The nobility was closest, but the palace gates had been opened so that the commoners had access to the announcement as well. Guards patrolled everywhere, some mounted and some on foot. No one seemed to know what was going on. Hogun, Fandral, Volstagg, and even Sif waited anxiously at the base of the steps, exchanging the occasional concerned look with Balder, who was helping control the crowd. Brandt was there, too, and gave them a happy wave from where he stood beside his father, oblivious to anything being wrong.

At long last, the tall doors to the palace opened and out walked the Allfather, dressed imposingly in shining gold armor. His face was serious and somewhat sad, although not quite as solemn as his son’s, who followed him closely. Although the crown prince was dressed in his ceremonial armor, he looked tired and withdrawn, as though he hadn’t slept. The Queen was conspicuously absent.

So somber did the two look that the gathered crowd didn’t cheer raucously as they normally would.
Instead, everyone waited with bated breath to hear the announcement.

Odin greeted his people in a clear, confident voice. He complimented those gathered, assured them of the strength and prosperity of their planet, and that he had every faith that they would continue to live in a time of great peace and happiness. Unfortunately, he continued, there had been some recent events that had caused him to consider some major changes. There was an issue he wanted to bring to light.

“You all know my son, Thor.” A great cheer went up despite the previous glumness of the situation. “Many of you love my son nearly as much as I do, and I treasure him with all of my heart. He knows this,” Odin looked over to Thor, and Thor nodded. He even managed to force a smile.

“So it is with great difficulty that I must make the following declaration. It has come to my attention that Thor, while being a son that any man would be proud of, is not a natural born leader.”

You could hear a pin drop in the audience as everyone waited, unsure of where this was going next.

“Therefore, it pains me that I must announce that though Thor remains a prince of Asgard, he is no longer the crown prince and will not inherit the throne.” Odin waited for the guards to silence the crowd before continuing, “Instead, the throne will pass to my second son, whose existence until this moment has remained a secret due to the illegitimacy of his birth. It is with great pleasure that I finally welcome Prince Balder, the new heir to the throne of Asgard, to the royal family.”

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know what you think! ;)


Chapter 17

Balder and Thor react to the announcement; Loki and Frigga have a little chat

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all of your support! You guys are awesome, and I love every single one of you! X) I'm so happy most of you seem to be enjoying my plot line. I was worried that there would be too much political/backstory/world-building stuff and too little smut, and that you would all get bored with it. So thank you again, and I hope you like the newest chapter!

Chapter Seventeen

Balder just blinked for a moment, stunned. He had heard wrong, of course, but then why was everyone turning to look at him? His head felt light and he started to shake, stumbling back a few steps. Sif reached out for him, looking concerned, but he barely registered it. Everyone was watching him. Most people looked confused, some looked even a bit angry, like he had wanted this.

He looked up at Thor, but Thor looked just as shocked and confused as he felt. So for the first time in his life, he turned and ran.

Once he was safely in the secluded servants’ corridors, he leaned his forehead against the cool stone of the wall and tried to think. This wasn’t real. It couldn’t be. It had been a stressful week, and now he was having a nightmare. Him, the crown prince? It was almost laughable.

Balder tried to wake himself, but when he jabbed the tip of his dagger into his thumb he cursed—it just hurt, badly, and he was still in this nightmare. He started shaking again as he put pressure on the wound, trying not to hyperventilate. He couldn’t be the crown prince. He couldn’t even be a prince—he wasn’t raised for the spotlight. Oh, sure, he could deal with pressure and politics. Those were practically all he dealt with, being the Captain of the Guard. His soldiers relied on him and looked up to him, but he knew most of them, and they were the only ones who gave him much attention. Balder preferred it that way—he got things done without everyone watching him and waiting for something to go wrong. He remembered now all of the times that he had felt sorry for Thor, having to deal with judgment from people who didn’t know him, and in many cases had never even met him. Never in his life had he envied or wanted that.

And now Thor—Thor was his brother? Balder felt a sharp pang of mixed emotions. He had always wanted more family, had always wanted a sibling. And Thor was perfect, everything he could ever want in a brother. So why was he only finding out now?

He thought back to Thor’s face and was certain that Thor hadn’t known. He probably thought that Balder had betrayed him. Norns, he had even sworn to Queen Frigga to serve Thor, a vow that this
sSurely broke. He felt like he had somehow betrayed him, even though he had no part in this. Thinking back to the beginning of the journey and the way that the queen had watched him, Balder felt sure that she had known the truth. He wondered for how long. He wondered if she hated him now, and that hurt too. She had always been so good to him, so warm and kind, as though she had been his own mother. And now, with this, he felt like he had somehow betrayed her as well, just by existing.

Balder slid to the ground and cradled his head in his hands. The memory of his mother swam in his mind’s eye, and he felt even more helpless. Why hadn’t she told him the truth? He supposed in a way, she had. Every time he had asked about his father, she had told him that it was a complicated situation, and his father couldn’t stay with her. His wild imagination had pictured his father as a journeying soldier, traveling from planet to planet. As a child he had told himself that his father hadn’t even known about him. His mother never gave him any indication otherwise.

He had grown up on their country estate pretending he was his father, fighting monsters on unknown planets. He had been out in their small wooded area doing just this when his mother had died in the fire that had consumed several rooms of their home. When he smelled the smoke he ran to see what was wrong, but one of the servants had caught him and held him while they tried to put the fire out. His mother had been the only casualty, and the cause of the fire had never been discovered. He found out later that the only thing certain was that she had been barred in the room where the fire had begun.

Someone had killed his mother, and until now he never had any idea as to why.

His uncle had taken him in after that, raising him in the palace. Now Balder understood that he had also been raised under Odin’s watchful eye, in a place where no dissatisfied assassin would dare harm him. All that time he had been alone and miserable. Tyr had done his best, but he wasn’t exactly a warm, cuddly person. And all that time his brother had been right there, and he hadn’t known. His father had been right there, but he hadn’t cared.

So why did Odin want him now? Because Thor hadn’t lived up to expectations?

Balder’s heart hurt for his brother, cast aside like a rusty sword. He couldn’t do this. He would tell Odin no. Odin couldn’t force him to be king, could he?

But a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach told him that yes, he could.

*****

Thor numbly watched Balder retreat into the palace, his thoughts in disarray. When his father had initially told him that, due to his careless and reckless behavior, he would not be inheriting the throne, he had been too upset to even think about asking about who was taking his place. After all, even though he had briefly considered abdicating, he had only been lightly considering it. And if he had chosen to, well, it would have been different. It would have been his choice, not someone else’s. This way he felt as though he had failed somehow. He had disappointed his father so badly that his father had partially disinherited him.

So even though Odin had told him about the announcement today, he apparently hadn’t seen fit to divulge the small fact that Balder would be inheriting it instead. Balder was his brother, his half-brother. Why hadn’t he been told? They could have grown up together, been friends. Until Thor had befriended Sif, who was too straightforward and self-assured to be intimidated by the crown prince, he had had no friends. He had been so lonely, and he had always wanted a sibling.

When he had asked his mother time and time again for a baby brother or sister, she had just told him
sadly that it wasn’t possible. Had she known, then?

She couldn’t have, at least not for sure. His father was one thing, but his mother would never have let him grow up alone had she been aware of his half-sibling.

Thor held it together as his father made some closing remarks, a forced smile plastered on his face. When his father asked for him to comment, he even managed to tell everyone how pleased he was to have a brother and how great a king that he thought Balder would be. Hel, he thought that he even managed to sound convincing.

But as he finally passed through the great doors and was closed away from prying eyes, the smile fell and he made a beeline for the healing wing. Perhaps Luke had finally awoken, and would be willing to talk with him.

*****

“Luke, is it?” Queen Frigga’s eyes were sharp and scrutinizing, measuring him up. When Loki nodded she continued, “I’m told that my son thinks very highly of you. What do you think of him?”

Loki licked his suddenly dry lips. “He’s, well he’s very… loud.” Loki winced. Oh, that was great, she would surely enjoy hearing that. But to his surprise, Frigga’s eyes crinkled a bit at the corners in amusement. “I meant that he has a loud personality,” Loki amended smoothly, “He’s very charismatic, and of the people all love him.”

“Maybe,” Frigga acknowledged, her gaze still studying him like some kind of specimen in a magical analysis lesson. “But do you like him?”

Loki swallowed. Did he like Thor? He was somewhat fond of him, he supposed. He had been worried when he had heard that Thor was injured, and upset when he thought that Thor would be angry with him, so it was only logical that he did, in fact, like him. But was there really a reason for liking him, beyond the fact that Loki found it amusing to toy with him?

Loki opened his mouth to reply, not entirely sure what was going to come out. “He’s thoughtful, whenever he takes a moment to think. He’s fiercely loyal and cares about how his friends and subjects feel. He’s ignorant and prejudiced and arrogant, but yet,” Loki hesitated, “I don’t think he’s hopeless. So I suppose I do.” He was surprised to find that he actually believed it. Somehow, though, he doubted that the man’s mother would approve of such a direct statement.

But instead of getting angry, Frigga slowly smiled. “I think that’s a fair assessment,” she acknowledged. “Would it surprise you, then, that Thor is no longer the heir to the throne?”

Loki straightened, only the slight widening of his eyes betraying his surprise. “What?” he asked, and if his voice was slightly more breathless than usual, Frigga didn’t comment.

“It’s true. My husband is making the announcement at this very moment.”

Loki sat back, trying not to show his relief. “So that’s what the announcement was about,” he murmured, “I had heard there was something important being planned for this morning.”

Frigga’s smile was sad, “And you thought it was about you.” It was a statement, not a question. “I’m sure you’ve been wondering why you are in here. It seems that before you left with Thor, Heimdall discovered that you are invisible to his Sight.”

Loki shrugged, “I didn’t know that was a crime. I have studied magic my whole life and have made enemies who envy my skill. I started coming up with ways to thwart their attempts to spy on me
when I was still a child. I suppose somewhere along the way I discovered something that blocks Heimdall’s gaze as well, but I couldn’t even tell you which spell it was. By now they are all woven together into my protective shield, which must certainly have failed when I drained myself on the battlefield.”

“We wouldn’t know,” Frigga replied calmly, “Because Heimdall’s Sight was blinded to the entire area during the battle. That’s why you were our main suspect.”

“What?” Loki stood and took a step forward, eyes intent. “At what point? Did he see any of the mages involved? There was one teleporting in more of the beasts, which is why we were unprepared, and I’m certain he wasn’t alone. The attack was planned. I tried to catch up with one of them, but I had to leave pursuit to go aid the main party.”

“I know,” Frigga said with another small smile, “Because Tyr finished the job. You apparently managed to curse the perpetrator, who despite being injured still managed to lead our Commander on a chase that lasted nearly two weeks. Luckily for us, once Tyr has a purpose he’s like a hound with a scent. He didn’t give up until he captured the would-be assassin. He returned with the man in tow this morning, and absolved you in the process. Tyr assured us that not only did you likely save his life, but that your curse was the only reason he was able to keep up with the man responsible.”

Loki raised a brow. “Tyr said that?”

“Would you like to counter his claim?”

“No, of course not. It’s true, I was just… surprised that Tyr said it.”

Frigga’s eyes sparkled mischievously. “Tyr can be a difficult person. He’ll probably be just as terrible to you now as he was before, so don’t expect that to change. But he is always honest with Odin, which is one of many reasons why he holds my husband’s confidence. For example, he admitted upon his return that he threw some problems Thor’s way to see how he would deal with them. Of course, he wanted Thor to fail, because he wanted his nephew to be recognized. I suppose he got his way.”

Loki frowned, “His nephew? That’s Balder, isn’t it? Why would Balder get anything from Thor’s failure?”

“Because Balder is my husband’s illegitimate son,” the queen replied matter-of-factly.

Loki blinked, but bit his tongue. He wanted to ask questions, but sensed that Frigga would not appreciate them. He wanted Frigga on his side. “I didn’t know. I’m surprised that Thor never mentioned it.”

“He didn’t know either. He knows now, however, and he’ll probably want to be with his friends for a while. He asked us if he could be excused from court for a month while things settle down, and his father and I accepted his request. And now we come to the real reason I wanted to talk to you.”

Loki shifted forward, watching her with sharp, expectant eyes.

“Balder is a good man, and a great soldier, but my husband has made a mistake. Thor may have his flaws, and from a certain perspective it looks as though Balder will be a good choice, but I have reason to believe that he will struggle even more. So you are going to help Thor develop into the king I know he can be. I have been seeing small changes in Thor. He’s been taking more of an interest in matters and, contrary to my husband’s belief that it is my doing, I believe that you are responsible.”
Loki eyed her cautiously, “What exactly do you want me to do?”

Frigga’s eyes twinkled, “I think you’ll figure things out. But in three months there is a gala that our family attends. It is a celebration involving all of the nobles from Asgard, Vanaheim, and Alfheim. Thor always manages to embarrass his father, and he flounders when it comes to dealing with foreign nobility. This year, I want him to succeed. And not just succeed; I want everyone to be pleased and impressed with how he handles things. Perhaps then his father will rethink his hasty decision.”

Loki swallowed, “Let me get this straight. You are giving me three months to fix all of Thor’s problems?”

Frigga smiled conspiratorially, “Not exactly. I’m giving you three months to make it look like you’ve fixed all of Thor’s problems. The rest will come in time.” She waved a hand and the shielding that held Loki in his cell vanished.

“Because that will be so easy,” Loki said dryly as he stepped out of the small space he’d been confined to.

“You’ll manage it.”

“And if I don’t?” Loki challenged.

Frigga gave him a hard look, “You will.”

With that, she strode back down the corridor, pausing only when she reached the corner to look back at him. “You have three months to get my son his crown back. But Loki, dear?”

“Yes?”

“If I ever think that you are a threat to my family, don’t doubt that I can and will take care of it.”

By the time that he realized that the queen had used his real name, she had disappeared.

*****

Thor was furious. The healers had told him that Luke had been unconscious, but they had neglected to mention that he had also been in prison. He stormed down the steps that led to the dungeons, a small part of him registering that Sif and the warriors three had joined him at some point. He was just about to throw open the door and demand that Luke be released when the heavy iron door creaked open and Luke himself stepped out.

Luke took one look at him and smirked. “I suppose you were just about to charge to my rescue?”

Thor opened his mouth to blurt out all of the reasons why he had not come before, but ended up nodding wordlessly.

“Well, your mother beat you to it, so good job. Also, you’ll be happy to hear that I’ve been found innocent of any crime. They apparently have captured the culprit, so I’ll be curious to find out who was behind the attack if you hear anything. I didn’t get a chance to ask Queen Frigga about it.”

Thor processed that information. It was news to him; his father had held a private audience about something that morning but hadn’t bothered to mention what it had been about, perhaps because he thought that Thor had enough on his plate. Or, more likely, because it wasn’t necessary for someone who wouldn’t be inheriting the throne to know.
“Have,” Thor cleared his throat, “have you heard about…” he wasn’t sure how to continue, but Luke waved a dismissive hand.

“Your mother filled me in. I do hope you’re not waiting for me to throw you a pity party. I suppose that’s where you were for the two weeks I was locked up—in your room sulking?”

Thor felt his face heat up with embarrassment. “I truly didn’t know—“

“Yes, yes, of course. But you didn’t bother to find out either, did you? Never mind about that. Have you spoken with your brother yet?”

Thor swallowed and shook his head, and Luke sighed. “You do realize that, knowing Balder, he’ll be even more messed up about this than you, right?”

Thor had actually considered this, but hadn’t been sure that he was the one that Balder wanted to see. He told Luke as much, but his friend just rolled his eyes and sighed. “Of course you’re the one he wants to see. He’s clearly admires you, and now you’re his brother. So stop feeling sorry for yourself and do something constructive. Also, I assume you’ll be taking us with you on your little one-month vacation, so when should we be ready to leave?”

Thor just stared at him for a moment, a warm feeling stealing into his stomach. He had been avoiding everyone’s gaze, worried that when he looked at them all he would see was pity reflected in their eyes, but that wasn’t the case with Luke at all. He was treating Thor the same way that he always had, and it was exactly what Thor needed.

He stepped forward and grabbed his lithe friend, pulling him into a tight embrace. Luke gave some kind of muffled, half-hearted protest, but Thor ignored it, kissing the top of his dark head. “Thank you,” he mumbled into Luke’s hair, softly nuzzling the soft strands. He could feel Luke rolling his eyes, but since his friend made no further objection, he continued to hold him. Eventually he thought he heard Luke mutter, "I'm glad you're okay," but it was so quiet he couldn't be sure.

After a moment he felt someone else’s hand on his back and one flung over his shoulders as his friends pressed in to show their support. He closed his eyes and smiled as he realized that everything was going to be all right.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! (And yay, no terrible cliffhanger for a change! XD) Next up: We finally get back to what’s been happening on Jotunheim.

Please leave a review if you have time! <3
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Loki and Thor deal with some things at home; Then there's a kiss!

Chapter Notes

Happy Labor Day to everyone who celebrates! :)

Sorry this chapter took a bit longer than normal--I started writing it earlier, but then my computer crashed and I lost it, so I had to start over again :( I hate having to rewrite things, so I definitely dragged my feet a bit. Sorry!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Eighteen

The guards watched cautiously as their king crossed the hall for the fifth time. Laufey’s eyes were distant as he paced, absent-mindedly dispelling some of his anxiety and frustration between audiences. It had been difficult to focus the past few days—Loki had disappeared two weeks ago without a word and hadn’t been seen or heard from since, Byleistr had returned from visiting Aggar in the south covered in bruises with a broken rib and even a few cuts, and Helblindi had broken down and shouted at Byleistr for putting himself through the abuse and Laufey for allowing it to continue.

All in all, it felt as though their family was in pieces at the moment, and Laufey had nearly cancelled all audiences until matters were resolved. The problem was that there was no easy way to resolve them. Laufey had heard through the servants that Helblindi, wracked with guilt, had tried to apologize to Byleistr numerous times, albeit not very well. His intentions had been good but his wording poor, according to the servants. Helblindi had not even attempted an apology to Laufey, who he actively avoided.

Laufey wasn’t so sure his eldest should apologize. He was right. Laufey wanted to throttle Aggar and have him publicly beaten and dragged through the streets. He couldn’t, of course, but imagining that he could make him feel momentarily better. In reality he couldn’t even arrest Aggar without causing public unrest that would undoubtedly lead to another civil war.

Laufey sighed, suddenly exhausted, and moved back to the throne. He sat heavily and waved for the guards to allow the next subject to enter.

When the doors opened, however, it was his middle child who stepped inside.

“Father,” Byleistr greeted him, voice layered with warmth and concern. His partially healed injuries were almost entirely hidden beneath loose, deep blue clothing, but one faint bruise was barely visible above his neckline. To the courtiers who weren’t aware of the situation, it would look like a love bite, but the sight of it caused Laufey’s insides to churn uncomfortably.
“You will take a new mate,” the words slipped out before he could stop himself. “I will no longer allow you to return to Aggar and put yourself in harm’s way. We will find another way to appease the southern tribes.”

Byleistr closed his eyes for a moment and drew a deep breath. When he spoke his voice was emotionless and level. “We’ve had this conversation before. Perhaps at one point we could have found another way, but I made this decision for us. I offered myself as a way to improve his standing, knowing he wanted me. Maybe I should have waited, maybe we could have given him land or another seat on the council, but I didn’t. What’s done is done. We—I—cannot back out now without giving him grave insult. It would be the perfect excuse to rally the southern tribes behind him.”

“They saw your injuries. They saw the way he treated you—“

“They didn’t. Aggar is careful, Father. No one who even could be sympathetic saw anything. I barely see anyone but Aggar and his close friends while I am there. As far as his people know, he’s the perfect, loving mate. Everyone in the South thinks he dotes on me. And by the time anyone sees me again, we’re back up North where any naysayers would be accused of defamation and war-mongering.” Byleistr’s lips twisted into a grim smile, “They would blindly accuse us of the very thing Aggar is guilty for.”

“I will not have my son—“

Byleistr’s patience finally snapped, “And so what will you do, Father? Start a war? You know that’s what would happen, you know—” he stopped abruptly, face crumpling. “There’s nothing we can do. So please—please—let us stop talking about it.”

Laufey’s hands clenched as his heart ached fiercely. He would find a way to help his son, but clearly this was not the moment to discuss it. “What did you come for?” Laufey asked finally, since it was clear Byleistr had not come to talk about his situation.

His middle son’s shoulders slumped slightly. “Actually, I was hoping to hear news about Loki,” he said softly. “But I’m guessing that there is none, or you would have mentioned it right away.”

Laufey sighed. “No, there is none.” He had inquired after his youngest son on Svartalfheim, but received a report saying that his son had, to the best of their knowledge, not visited in the past couple of weeks. He had his soldiers ask around on a few of the smaller planets and way stations, and was even desperate enough to ask Muspelheim. No one had seen him recently. “I will let you know as soon as—“

The doors banged open carelessly, and Laufey whirled around to scold the guards for not stopping someone from barging in on a private moment. The words died on his lips.

“Good morning, Father!” Loki greeted cheerily, “I was told it was just you and By in here, so I figured I’d let myself in. Is the midday meal almost ready? Helblindi wasn’t in his room, but I can go look for him if you’d like—“ Loki, perhaps seeing the looks on his father and brother’s faces, turned back around and moved to go.

“**Loki Laufeyson, do not take another step.**” Laufey growled at his youngest. He saw Loki wince as he slowly turned back around to face them.

Then he blinked his eyes slowly and his face took on that who-me-what-could-I-possibly-have-done mask of his. Laufey was torn between hugging his son and strangling him. “Where have you been?” he demanded.
Loki’s eyes darted slightly to the side before he spoke, making Laufey sure that whatever came next was a lie. His youngest son’s tales and ability to spin the truth were well-known within the castle, but he’d never been able to lie well to his father.

“Oh, you know, around. I was on Svartalfheim for a while, and then I needed to pick up some supplies from—“

“You were on Svartalfheim,” Laufey repeated levelly. “So then why did the royal family quite clearly state that they had not seen you in the past two weeks when I asked?”

Loki paused for only a splinter of a second before deflecting, “Just because I was on Svartalfheim doesn’t mean I was at the castle, Father.”

He wasn’t on Svartalfheim at all, more likely. Laufey scowled, displeased with his son’s secrecy. “And you never thought to check in with your family, to let us know you were well? You never thought to leave us a message to let us know you would be gone for a long period of time?”

Loki’s expression hardened and his voice took on a slightly petulant tone, which belied his next words. “I’m not a child, Father. I can travel as I please, when I please. I had no particular responsibilities these past few weeks, so I decided to take a vacation. I’ve been gone for long stretches of time before, so I’m not sure what you’re so upset about.” His words were defensive. He knew exactly what they were upset about.

Before Laufey could reply, however, Byleistr finally broke in. “I was so worried about you, Loki,” he said softly. “I came home and wanted to speak with you, but nobody knew where you were. And you were gone for so long…usually you stop by for a little while just to let me know what’s going on. I thought that something had happened to you.”

His sad, injured look did what Laufey’s reprimands couldn’t do. Loki flushed and his gaze dropped, suddenly finding the ground fascinating. “I didn’t—that is, I mean, I couldn’t—“ he broke off and looked back up at his brother, defeated. “I’m sorry,” he said quietly, “I truly didn’t mean to make you worry.”

There was a long silence before Byleistr nodded, “You’ll have to tell me about it later.”

When Loki just chewed his lip thoughtfully, Laufey said, “Go fetch your brother for the midday meal.”

After his youngest son had exited the room, Laufey raised a brow at Byleistr, who smiled guiltily. “I know it was manipulative,” he said before his father could speak, “But it worked, didn’t it?”

Laufey just sighed and decided to be content. For the moment, all of his sons were alive and safe.

*****

Thor stood for a while outside of Balder’s room in the barracks, trying to figure out what he was going to say. He could feel the guards that his Father had assigned to Balder watching him when they thought he wasn’t looking, and it distracted him. Apparently Balder had returned to his rooms after the guards found him in the servants’ corridors, and he had spoken to no one since. What if he didn’t want to see Thor?

But then Luke’s words returned to him, and his resolve hardened. No, if Thor had been in his position, he thought that he’d want to talk to someone. Finally, he knocked.

“Please go away,” came the slightly muffled reply.
Thor dropped his hand, taken aback. “I… very well. Are you sure?”

There was a long moment of silence, and then the door cracked open. Balder’s eyes were red and his clothing and hair disheveled. “Thor?” he asked tentatively, voice filled with mixed emotions that Thor couldn’t quite identify. After a pause the door opened a bit wider. “You can come in.”

Thor ducked inside, and Balder closed the door behind him. There was an awkward silence where neither of them really knew what to say. “I didn’t know,” Thor blurted out finally.

Balder smiled a little. “I know. I could tell that you were surprised when the Allfather… when Father…” Balder shook his head and sat down hard onto the bed, covering his face with his hands. “I don’t even know how to talk about this,” he whispered. “You know I didn’t want… I mean, I could never… I want you to be king. I’ve always supported you. I think you’d be a wonderful—“

Thor stopped him with a raised hand, “Stop, Balder. We both know how badly I’ve failed at politics. I am restless, distracted, quick to anger. I would make a terrible king. But you—“

“No. No you wouldn’t. I know you have flaws, but they don’t outweigh your skills.” Balder was adamantine, and Thor’s heart warmed. At least one of his family members didn’t think he was a failure.

He laughed, “Do you happen to recall our last mission together? It’s only been two weeks, you can’t have forgotten already.”

Balder gave him a lopsided grin, “Well, I didn’t say you were perfect,” he admitted, chuckling. “You do have a certain knack for getting into trouble, especially where ale and beautiful people are concerned. But look how it ended.”

Thor’s brows raised, amused. “With me getting gored by a bilgesnipe?”

Balder let out an involuntary snort, which he tried to stifle. “I was referring to you winning Lord Armand over, actually. The getting gored part was just a minor setback,” his eyes sparkled as he smiled easily, looking more like himself.

Thor almost said, “Father wouldn’t agree,” but managed to stop himself. “Thanks,” he said instead, “That means a lot to me.” A slightly awkward silence followed as they both tried to think of something else to say. There was too much that needed to be said and no easy place to start. Thor shifted uneasily, fiddling absentmindedly with the edge of his dark blue tunic. Balder watched him for a moment.

“You’re the best thing to come from all of this,” Balder finally said softly at the same time that Thor confessed, “I’m going to be leaving for a while.”

They both stared at each other, and Thor flushed. For the first time, he felt guilty about ditching everything and everyone so that he could have a break. “I’ll only be gone for a month,” he added hastily as Balder looked hurt and lost.

“Do you have to go now?” Balder asked pleadingly. “You’re the only one I can talk to.”

Thor slumped a little bit. “I can’t be here at the moment,” he admitted quietly, “I can’t face Father every day knowing that I’m not the son he wanted me to be. I didn’t live up to his expectations. I failed him and I failed Asgard. I just need some time to figure out who I am now that I’m not the crown prince.”

“You didn’t fail anything,” Balder protested, “He’s wrong.”
Without thinking Thor reached out and rifled Balder's hair with a grin, “I’m glad you think that, anyway. Little brothers should always respect their elders.”

Balder laughed and smiled up at Thor for a moment. Finally he said, “I do understand why you need to go. I just wish it wasn’t now. I don’t suppose I could go with you.” His expression was wistful.

“I don’t think that would go over well,” Thor imagined his Father’s face as Heimdall told him that both of his sons were leaving. “But I wish you could. I always wanted a brother.”

Balder watched him warmly, “So have I,” he said with feeling.

*****

Apparently, Loki had missed a few things.

The midday meal was quieter than normal. Byleistr wasn’t speaking to Helblindi, Helblindi wasn’t speaking to their father, and none of them were happy with Loki. All in all, there had definitely been better family meals, he thought as he toyed with his food.

When it was finally over, Loki sought out Byleistr alone.

“You wanted to say something when you visited me two weeks ago. What was it?” his brother asked when they were by themselves. Loki wished once again that he hadn’t left his brother that day. He would make sure that Aggar couldn’t hurt him again, however. He just had to set a few things in motion, first…

Loki considered Byleistr’s question, hesitating. He remembered clearly why he had wanted to visit his brother, of course. But now, things had changed. Loki toyed with one of the decorative chains draped around his horns, thinking. Two weeks ago he wasn’t certain if he should be visiting Asgard. Now he was having difficulty imagining not returning.

Loki weighed his brother’s opinion against his new Aesir friends. He couldn’t remember the last time he could truly use that word—friends. He and Neyir might have been at some point, he supposed. Besides the Asgardians, Neyir probably was the closest non-relative to him around his age. Loki’s lip curled slightly in disgust. “Loki?” Byleistr’s voice brought him back to the present.

“Hmm? Oh. No, it was nothing. I just wanted to check on you, as I said then. I wish I hadn’t left, now.”

“Ah, then this book I found in your room has nothing to do with it?” From a bag at his side, Byleistr produced the book that Loki had stolen from Asgard’s library. He flipped the volume open to where Loki had left a marker—the picture of Thor. Loki fought back a blush and snatched the book back from his brother.

“What were you doing in my rooms? And if you must know, I was reading up on the various political systems of our non-allied planets. In a few years I’ll be allowed to attend all of the council meetings like you and Helblindi, and I want to be ready.

Byleistr sighed. “Very well, keep your secret to yourself for now. But you know you can share anything with me whenever you are ready. As for Aggar—there was nothing you could do. We can’t risk angering the southern tribes.” He intoned this as though he had repeated it a hundred times. He probably had, Loki thought. He looked up to find Byleistr studying his face carefully, “Promise me you aren’t going to try something.”

“Me?” Loki asked, cocking his head. A tiny innocent smile tugged at the corners of his mouth. “Oh,
I promise. *I'm* not going to do anything.”

Byleistr watched suspiciously as Loki sauntered off.

*****

Loki grabbed a few things from his room—there was no need to pack extensively, since he could (and would, to appease his family) transport himself back over whenever he wished—before stashing the Asgardian book in an old trunk under his bed. He almost snapped the chest closed right away, but then his fingers lingered over another volume.

Frowning, Loki removed the old tome on shielding from the chest, and then closed it up and slid it back under his bed. He supposed he’d better make things right with Neyir before he left. After all, his heat was in a week, and Neyir could get nasty if they weren’t on good terms.

Loki changed back into something vaguely Asgardian-looking (he reminded himself he would have to buy a few more Asgardian garments if he wished to continue keeping company with Thor), gathered his things, and transported himself to Svartalfheim.

Neyir didn’t even bother to look up from the book in his hand when Loki materialized in his room. This turned out to be a good thing, since Loki realized a moment later with some horror that he hadn’t maintained his Jotun form. Quickly securing it with his magic, Loki stepped out of the shadows towards the dark elf.

Neyir’s black eyes snapped up from the page they’d been perusing, only to drift back down when he recognized the intruder. “Have you come to steal something else?” the other prince asked, a slightly snippy tone to his voice.

“Actually, I’ve come to return something borrowed,” Loki replied smoothly. He held out the book, which Neyir gazed at with narrowed eyes.

“Did you enjoy it?” he asked in a way that was meant to imply he was disinterested. He wasn’t. Loki smirked—he knew the other man too well to fall for that. Neyir hadn’t been able to read the tome himself, and wanted the information it contained. Considering the ponderousness of the written work inside, as far as Loki was concerned he could have it.

Besides, it was the perfect olive branch to offer before Loki’s heat.

“Truly? I found it dull. But you can decide for yourself, I’ve left the concealment spell off of it.”

Neyir’s eyes gleamed greedily as he finally closed the book in his hand and strode over to procure the old tome from Loki’s grasp. “Why thank you, darling.” His eyes examined the Jotun prince with some amusement, “Your heat is approaching, isn’t it?” He reached out and slid his fingers across Loki’s cheek. “You’re always so sweet right beforehand. I wonder why,” He slid forward until they were nose to nose.

Loki looked up at him coyly from beneath his lashes, “I don’t know what you’re implying, dear. I thought I was always sweet.” His eyes sparkled mischievously, and Neyir smiled thinly in response.

“Of course, I don’t know what I could have been thinking.” His fingers curled around Loki’s chin and tilted his head back before capturing his lips in a kiss.

Loki slid a hand seductively down Neyir’s chest across his stomach, letting it linger just beneath his hipbone. He made a practiced pleased sound as the dark elf reached around him and stroked his lower back, humming contentedly into Neyir’s mouth as the other man let his hand drift down further
to caress the curves of Loki’s ass.

When Loki drew back from their kiss, he made sure to seem reluctant and made his breathing sound uneven. “I have to leave,” he said in a wistful tone, strongly implying that he would rather not. “But I will return soon, and we’ll be together then.”

Neyir watched him with an amused look in his eyes. He pressed one more kiss to Loki’s lips, sliding his tongue smoothly over his lower lip. “Oh, of course.” He let the Jotun prince step backwards, but just as Loki was about to depart he murmured, “It’s entertaining when you pretend to have feelings. You’re lucky—I’ll forgive you this time, since you returned the book. But don’t think I’ll be so generous next time.”

“You, generous?” Loki’s eyes glinted, “I couldn’t even imagine it.”

He departed for Asgard.

Chapter End Notes

So probably not the kiss you were hoping for XD
(Okay, okay, definitely not the kiss you were hoping for!)

Next chapter: Thor, Loki, Sif, and the Warriors Three head out for some valuable alone time (wink wink nudge nudge) and for a pit stop on Alfheim.

And finally, in the next chapter Faren will be introduced! Then I'll pretty much have my full cast of characters. Don't worry, it's still Loki/Thor, any other characters are recurring, but still secondary.

You can check out the authors note at the end of Chapter 9 for the full list of characters. Thanks again! Let me know what you think if you have the time! <3
Chapter Nineteen

Thor checked his saddlebags for the fifth time as they anxiously waited for Luke to arrive. He wasn’t sure what was taking so long—Luke had understandably wanted to go visit his family, but he thought that he would be back by now. Thor frowned; it was a shame they hadn’t known Luke’s family name before, they could have sent a missive explaining what was going on. They must have been worried. Thor resolved to ask Luke about it when he arrived. He hoped that he returned soon—he was surprised how much he missed him already.

He surveyed his friends again as they waited, trying to judge their mood. Fandral was lounging on a bench, sharpening his blade. Hogun was making sure all of his leathers were oiled and in good condition, though given his meticulous nature he’d doubtlessly done so before. Sif was lying with her back against a nearby tree, dozing, and Volstagg was sneaking his horse another apple as he brushed her and murmured compliments in her ear. They seemed normal, for which he was gratified.

No one else disturbed them. Thor had asked to be alone in the stables before they left, even going so far as to dismiss the stable hands. He didn’t want to see anyone watching him with pity or whispering about him when they thought he couldn’t hear.

He was a little bit disappointed that Balder couldn’t be there to send them off. Their father had finally called upon him to speak in private. Thor had actually tried to delay their departure so that he could go along, but Odin had firmly insisted on talking to Balder alone. So they had said their goodbyes earlier, Balder looking even more dejected than he had before.

A wash of mixed emotions still flooded Thor every time he thought about it. He had a brother. That thought would take some getting used to.
Quiet footsteps suddenly caught his attention and he perked up, thinking Luke had finally arrived. When he looked up, however, it was his mother who approached them, smiling fondly. Sif and the Warriors Three rose to greet her, but she just waved at them to signal that they continue what they were doing.

“Thor, darling, I was worried you might have gone already. I hadn’t realized you were planning on leaving so soon.” Thor thought he heard a hint of disapproval in her voice and studied the ground in avoidance.

Frigga’s gaze softened. “Sweetheart, it’s fine. I’m going to miss you, that’s all.” She stood on her tiptoes and pressed a kiss to his forehead. Normally Thor would have pulled away or stopped her before she could do something so embarrassingly motherly in front of his friends, but this time he bowed his head and allowed her. She squeezed his arm lightly in reassurance and lowered her voice, “I hope you know how proud I am of you. You’ve come a long way since you were a child, and every day I see you become more noble and compassionate. You’re everything I could have hoped for in a son, and I’ve never wanted you to be anything else.”

Thor felt his eyes prickle with tears and he cleared his throat and looked away before they could fall. “Thank you, mother,” he said awkwardly, but he had to admit that a part of him felt a little bit better.

Frigga’s eyes twinkled knowingly as she stepped back and turned towards his friends, who were all pointedly looking in some other direction. “Where’s your new friend, Luke?” she asked, a hint of something Thor couldn’t place in her voice, but then she looked back at him and her eyes were amused.

“We’re still waiting for him,” Thor replied, eyeing her suspiciously. He had a moment where he wondered when they had met, but then he remembered that she had been the one to release Luke from prison, and she had also likely been present when they initially brought him back in the coma. Thor flushed a little, “I never thanked you for letting him out of the cell,” Thor mumbled, “I can’t believe he was put in there in the first place.”

“Oh, your father had good reason for that. Probably better than he realized,” she said cryptically, her expression still implying that she was laughing at some inside joke. Thor gave her a confused look, but she didn’t elaborate. “Have a good trip dear. Oh, and I almost forgot,” Frigga pinned a small brooch onto one of Thor’s bags, “To remember home, and to contact me in case of emergencies.”

Thor nodded, familiar with his mother’s contraptions and how they worked. “Thank you again.”

Frigga smiled, bid them all farewell, and departed.

A moment later, Luke arrived. He slunk out of the shadows of the stables so non-chalantly that Thor was convinced he had been there earlier but had waited for Frigga to leave. He wasn’t sure what was going on between his mother and his friend, but he was too tired of intrigue to care. “Ready?” he asked the dark-haired man. He took a moment to appreciate the black leather pants that Luke had donned, emphasizing his slender legs and sculpted backside. The Asgardian prince felt a familiar heat rush down between his legs as he watched his friend approach. Luke somehow managed to get more attractive each time Thor saw him.

“Yes, of course,” Luke replied easily, but then eyed the horses and subtly tensed. “Those are not necessary.”

“They are, unless you’ve been to the royal palace on Alfheim,” Thor’s voice was firm.

Luke froze, staring at him for a moment. “The palace on Alfheim?” he repeated slowly, phrasing it as
a question. “Why are we going there?”

“Are we visiting Faren, then?” Fandral cut in with a grin. “And, perhaps, his lovely older sister?”

Thor grinned knowingly. “I’m not sure if we’ll see Narissa or not, but Faren is going to be joining us for part of this month. I contacted him last week. There is something we would like to take care of, and we have not seen each other in an informal setting for some time, so we decided this was the perfect opportunity.”

Luke was still frowning. “Perhaps I will wait until you finish your business on Alfheim, and join you later,” he suggested casually. “It sounds as though you might like some time to catch up—“

“Nonsense!” Thor cut in quickly, “There’s no reason we can’t catch up with you there as well. Besides, I would like to introduce you.” There was a certain tightness about Luke’s eyes that suggested he’d rather not be introduced, and this confused Thor. “I assure you he is kind, and even easier to get along with than I am. You’ll like him,” he reassured, hoping that this was all Luke was worried about.

“I’m not sure you remember our meeting correctly,” Luke replied wryly. “If you recall, I did not find you easy to get along with at all.”

Thor grinned, “I thought I was perfectly agreeable. As I remember it, you were the one that was being difficult.”

Luke waved a dismissive hand, “I’m never difficult, I just don’t tolerate fools well. And I’m not very certain I wish to meet another one. I still think it will be best if I sit this out. I can rejoin you at a meeting point in two weeks or so—“

“Stop.” Thor’s tone was final, “Whatever you’re issue is with this, bury it. You’re coming with us.” When it looked as though he was going to argue again, Thor’s voice softened, “Please. I need you there.”

There was a long silence as Luke presumably surveyed Thor’s expression. He turned away, “Very well, then,” Luke sounded stiff and resigned, “Let’s go.”

Thor frowned. There was no reason he could think of for Luke’s negative attitude towards this venture, and it seemed as though he just enjoyed being contrary for the sake of being contrary. He watched as Luke moved towards Gullfaxi, apparently presuming that they were going to ride together again. Thor made a snap decision. “No,” he said firmly, and he nodded to the horse behind Fandral’s. He had originally had Mara saddled up as an extra mount in case one of theirs got tired as well as for carrying spare bags.

Luke stiffened and Thor thought he flushed a little bit. “Of course,” he said coolly before turning and striding over towards the smaller mare. Thor stamped out the twinge of regret he felt. If Luke was going to be unpleasant, then he didn’t want his company.

*****

Loki mounted Mara without too much trouble, but he was still unused to riding. He kept a cool expression on his face, even though inwardly he was seething. He wasn’t even sure why—surely, it was better to ride by himself. Still, Thor’s decision had felt like a purposeful rejection, which he didn’t take well to.

He couldn’t believe he was getting roped into going to Alfheim. Loki kept getting deeper and deeper into the hole he had dug for himself, and there didn’t seem to be any way out. He inwardly cursed
himself for ever replying to Thor’s initial taunts about magic users, and cursed himself twice for not leaving after that whole affair had concluded. It had been foolish, a misstep. And his entire plan afterwards was even worse.

Loki wasn’t sure what he’d been thinking—in retrospect, he probably hadn’t been. Byleistr often said that Loki was very strategic until things got personal, and his brother was usually right.

Loki tried to distance himself and analyze the situation. If he told Thor who he was now, Thor would be furious about the deception. He had made it clear that he found Jotuns to be little more than monsters, and he would think that Loki had some kind of agenda. Worse, Loki would be accused of the recent attack. No, telling Thor now was not an option. Making Thor fall for him and then revealing the truth was doubly foolish, for then the Asgardian prince would hate him even more. He might even pin the entire thing on Jotunheim.

Loki’s idiotic plan could actually start a war. And now they were on their way to Alfheim, the only planet that probably hated Jotuns even more than Asgardians did.

For while Loki wasn’t sure why Asgard hated Jotunheim, he knew Alfheim’s vendetta was personal. The light elves had actually petitioned to have Loki’s entire family executed after the war, but for some reason Odin had refused. Loki’s stomach clenched unpleasantly, unsure how he was going to be able to meet Prince Faren’s eyes.

Fandral was trying to engage Loki in a conversation, rambling about how attractive Faren and his older sister Narissa were.

He didn’t mention the oldest prince, but then Loki supposed he wouldn’t.

*****

The delicate spires of the palace finally became visible over the fresh, late-spring leaves of Alfheim. Thor’s spirits lifted slightly upon seeing them, but he was not as happy as he hoped he would be. Luke had been silent the entire journey there, though it had only taken a little over a quarter-mark. He hadn’t even replied to Fandral’s efforts to get him to speak, hadn’t said anything as Heimdall activated the Bifrost, and still remained quiet as the dense foliage began to become sparser.

Thor glanced back at him, expecting to see him still caught in a sulk. To his surprise, however, Luke seemed more withdrawn and lost in thought than angry. For the first time it occurred to Thor that Luke might have had a good reason not to want to come to Alfheim. He certainly hadn’t been against joining them before Thor had said where they were going.

The Asgardian prince’s anger at the situation immediately dissipated into concern. Perhaps his friend had bad memories here. Thor hoped that whatever had triggered Luke’s nerves wasn’t too serious.

He didn’t have much longer to worry about it, however, because hoof beats sounded in the distance. A grin began to steal its way across Thor’s face as they came closer and closer. Before long a small group of elves on horseback were visible, charging at full speed towards Thor’s party.

Thor laughed and urged his horse into a full gallop, leaning low over Gullfaxi’s neck. All but one of the elven riders guided their horses to the sides of the path and Thor heard his friends do the same behind him. Thor didn’t slow, however, and neither did his opponent—this game of seeing who could unseat the other was an old tradition of theirs, reaching back to when they had first met.

He still remembered his father’s frustration with how slowly their party had to move because Thor—still a young child at the time—hadn’t quite gotten a handle on how to maneuver his horse. Finally
Odin became impatient and urged their group to a gallop, instructing Tyr to keep an eye on Thor to make sure he didn’t fall off. Thor, hard-headed as he was, stubbornly made Tyr’s job as difficult as he could, determined to figure things out on his own.

When they approached the royal elven delegation, Thor predictably panicked and forgot what to do—he yanked the reins at the same time as he dug his heels into the horse’s side. Confused, the horse charged forwards, straight through the ranks of the elven royal guard. Unable to stop the horse, young Thor tried to jump off to freedom instead. He launched himself off straight at a mounted young elf his age, sending both of them toppling to the ground.

Luckily there were no serious injuries, just bumps and bruises. After brushing himself off, the young elf told Thor snottily that he had been able to ride since he was a toddler, and that Thor must be an idiot not to have figured it out by now. Thor punched him in the face.

He and Faren had been friends ever since.

Now Thor grinned wildly as the horses charged each other down, both mounts as familiar with the game as their riders. Faren chucked something at Thor’s head—he always tried to cheat—but it missed. They passed within millimeters of the other, both swiping at each other but neither succeeding.

Thor wheeled his horse back around just as he heard Sif curse and a horse whinny. Mara, not trained as a warhorse, had shied and panicked at the charging stallion, and Luke hadn’t known to get out of the way. Mara reared back and her inexperienced rider slid right out of the saddle.

Thor’s heart leapt to his throat as he drove Gullfaxi forward, already knowing he wouldn’t make it. To his relief, Faren smoothly caught Luke before he could get trampled, pulling him up into his lap. Thor’s relief twisted into something else as Faren grinned down at his dark-haired friend.

“Well, that wasn’t exactly the expected outcome, but I think I like this version more,” the slight blonde elf prince teased. His smile gentled at Luke’s disoriented look. “You must be Luke. Thor has written a lot about you, so it’s a pleasure to finally make your acquaintance.” Faren lifted one of Luke’s hands to his lips and Thor’s grip on Gullfaxi’s reins tightened.

Luke blinked up at the elven prince and for a moment Thor thought his eyes flickered in Thor’s direction. But then he met his rescuer’s gaze and smiled.

Thor felt his stomach clench unpleasantly and he scowled. They should have gone somewhere else. This whole trip had been a stupid idea.

Loki gracefully allowed the elven prince to help him back onto his horse after they had gotten Mara calmed down. Faren was interesting—his manner was flirty, but not in the salacious way that Fandral’s was. He was courtly, well mannered, and incredibly good-looking with fine, flyaway pale blonde hair and twinkling cornflower blue eyes. He had high cheekbones and a delicate bone structure, making him appear almost fragile. Based on the wiry muscle that Loki had felt through his silk tunic, however, that frailness was deceiving.

More interesting than the prince himself, though, was Thor’s reaction to him.

Gone were the happy grins and excited eyes, now the Asgardian’s entire manner had darkened. He greeted Faren stiffly, as though pained to do so, and Faren responded by being even more sweet and
exuberantly happy to see him. The entire situation was so distracting that Loki forgot his initial apprehension.

The elf helped Loki dismount when they reached the palace, threading his fingers lightly through Loki’s own and watching Thor as he did so. Thor pointedly ignored him, focusing too hard on unpacking their supplies. Fandral was snickering, and Loki saw Sif roll her eyes. He even thought he heard Hogun sigh. Of course, Loki realized suddenly, Thor was jealous.

Fandral had rambled during their trip over despite Loki’s lack of response, and though he’d only half-heard what his friend had said, he pieced together that Thor and Faren were friends, but also on-again-off-again lovers. And here Loki was, stealing away all of Faren’s attention, however unintentionally.

Well, he kind of deserved it, actually. A small smile stole its way onto Loki’s lips as he gazed over at Faren from beneath his lashes. It was Thor’s fault for bringing Loki here in the first place. He had been completely against it. No one could fault him for accidentally-on-purpose flirting with Thor’s lover.

At that thought, Loki considered Faren for a moment, wondering what made him so special. The other man was very good-looking, in a willowy sort of way. Perhaps Thor was into that. He wondered if his own slender body was as appealing, or if the pale hair and eyes were also necessary… Loki shoved those thoughts down with a spark of irritation. It didn’t matter one way or another whether or not Thor found him as attractive as Faren since he was no longer planning on making Thor fall for him.

No, he would help Thor get his crown back as per Queen Frigga’s request, hopefully earning some goodwill from his actions. Then he would go back to Jotunheim, and when Thor inevitably figured out who he was years down the road he could use that goodwill as a counterbalance for his deception.

Until then, though, it wouldn’t hurt to make the Asgardian prince squirm just a little.

Loki laid his other hand on Faren’s arm and smiled up at the elf, asking sweetly if he could have a tour of the palace.

There was a loud crack behind them as the tent pole that Thor was unpacking snapped in half.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Sorry that this chapter was so uneventful after so long a wait, but most of this was unavoidable. I'm not actually too happy with this chapter, but I needed to post. The next chapter will be fun, though, so I hope you all don't mind this one slightly tedious lead-up chapter XD
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

The group spends their first night on Alfheim. Emotions run...kind of all over the place, actually.

Chapter Notes

It's still Sunday where I'm at, just so you know X) It's 9:30 pm, so I'm putting that disclaimer here even if archive takes it's time letting everyone know that I've updated. I kept my word! ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Twenty

Loki was not one who could typically be called dense, but he was beginning to question his powers of observation when it came to Thor. Everyone else had begged off the tour, saying that they were already familiar with the palace, but instead of going to the training ring with them Thor insisted on joining Loki and Faren. For a while Thor had followed right on their heels, so close the Jotun prince swore he could feel the taller man breathing. Just to test his theory, he stopped short in front of one of the delicate paintings, causing Thor to barrel right into him.

The inevitable bruises on his knees from being knocked to the ground by Thor’s large, muscle-bound frame were worth the look of shame on Thor’s face as he helped Loki to his feet. He coddled Loki for a moment, asking if he was sure he was okay so many times that Loki finally snapped at him. Instead of being put out, Thor gently took Loki’s arm instead and shot a glare at Faren, as if everything had been his fault.

For the rest of the time Thor had stood solidly between the two of them, but it was Loki he kept glancing over at.

Thor couldn’t be jealous over Loki. Loki knew Thor found him attractive; he would have been a fool not to have noticed that, though he wasn’t sure how he ranked in comparison to others. The point was that Thor found many people attractive, and Loki had caught him eying up people in the tavern so many times he had barely even noticed it anymore. But being jealous over someone implied a certain level of possessiveness, a certain level of feeling.

It made sense to Loki when Thor’s jealousy was over someone that Thor had known since childhood that he had slept with in the past, but the thought that it was aimed at Loki himself was startling. Until this point he had assumed that Thor’s desire for him was much as his desire for anyone else. Now he wasn’t so sure.

He also wasn’t sure how he felt about it.

When they had seen most of the palace, however, an elven soldier ran over to them and, after a quick
bow, asked Thor to join him at the training ring. Apparently Sif was trashing one of their guards and he was hoping Thor could call her off. Loki hid a smirk, wondering what had happened.

“Shall we continue?” Faren asked as Thor retreated, although not without sending one last worried look back at them.

“I had thought he was angry at me for stealing all of your attention,” Loki admitted wryly instead of replying to the question.

Faren laughed, delight spreading across his features. “You can’t be serious!”

Loki shrugged, “Fandral mentioned on the way over that you were lovers. It wasn’t unreasonable to think he was possessive of you.”

“Lovers?” Faren smiled with amusement, “I suppose in a way, sometimes. Thor has slept with a lot of people, though—Fandral should know. But we were never…” the elven prince struggled to find the words for a moment, “We were never more than friends, in a sense. Oh, maybe for a bit when we were very young, but we grew out of that idea quickly.”

Loki nodded, “We are just friends as well, which is why I was so surprised that his behavior was aimed at me.”

“Just friends?” Faren asked lightly, eyes sparkling. “Of course. I should have guessed.” His voice said one thing but his mouth said another, twitching up into a poorly restrained smile. “I must say, though, for just being one of his friends, he speaks of you quite a bit. Not to mention that Thor isn’t much of a writer, so when I contacted him to see if he could visit I expected a brief missive, not a several-pages-long letter detailing his new… friend.”

Loki carefully kept his face still, determined not to react. He was so distracted by the conversation as they walked that he didn’t notice they were entering the family crypt until it was too late. He stopped short and sucked in a breath as all of his reasons to not want to come to Alfheim rushed back to him.

His eyes flew to Faren’s as he took a step back. “I’d actually rather not see this particular area,” he murmured, carefully keeping his eyes to the ground.

“Actually, that’s probably for the best,” Loki noticed Faren’s eyes flicker over to a curtained-off area, “I apologize, I typically would not have included this area, but my feet have been leading me here so often lately that I didn’t even notice where we were headed.”

Normally Loki would have been intrigued by this, but he was so set on getting out of the room that he barely noticed. Faren moved back up the stairs past him, and Loki started to follow the elven prince. At the last second his eyes betrayed him, and he glanced over at the display around the tomb on the right. The fresh flowers and sentimental gifts were bad enough, but worse was the empty glass case sitting above it.

Loki shuddered and hurried up the remainder of the steps.

*****

Thor’s new ‘friend’ was… interesting, Faren thought. He was certainly not Thor’s typical fare, being much cleverer and more caustic than most. Not that he behaved that way around Faren himself—no, despite his sarcastic remarks to Thor, Sif, and the Warriors Three, Luke was unfailingly polite to Faren.

It made Faren wonder why. From what he’d heard from Thor, Luke was just about as rude as he could possibly have been when they first met—though when you heard Thor tell the story, you’d
think that his rudeness was just about the most adorable thing ever.

Faren grinned. Yes, Thor had it bad for this one. No wonder the Asgardian prince was being so paranoid around Faren. They had a habit of trying to steal lovers from each other, and since Thor had stolen that last curvy, dark-haired beauty from him, it was his turn.

Not that there was actually much of a chance of that happening. Thor clearly actually liked this one, but even if Faren hadn’t minded hurting his friend, he was pretty certain that Luke was uninterested in him. It wasn’t just his unfailing politeness, but there was something else… off in the way Luke treated him. The odd behavior had started when he’d accidentally brought the man into the crypt.

Faren startled, a thought striking him. *Could Luke know?* Surely Thor would have known better than to tell him! But then again, sometimes Thor wasn’t the most tactful person around. Luke seemed to be, though, so Faren forced himself to relax. Considering what he was about to ask of them, perhaps it was for the best that Thor’s friends already knew.

Whatever the reason for his initial stiffness, Luke loosened up as the afternoon wore on. Faren mentioned that he had studied at the library of Vanaheim for a while, which led into one of the most pleasant and intelligent conversations he’d had with anyone for some time. As an added bonus, the bright sunny day clouded over and threatened to break into a nasty storm…entirely out of season.

Faren just gave Thor his sunniest smile and placed one of his arms at Luke’s back, causing the sky to crack with thunder. Luke was so intent on describing his research into plant energy theory—which it sounded like he had done on Svartalfheim, of all places—that he didn’t seem to notice. A moment later, however, he proved that he had been paying attention when he leaned forward and murmured, “You should probably stop goading him. We don’t actually want it to rain.”

*****

They had been like this all afternoon. Cuddled up on that stupid blanket that Faren had brought out, daintily eating the sugary treats he had brought with him, and staring into each other’s eyes while they spoke of topics that Thor couldn’t even begin to understand. It really made him want to break something.

*Why* had he thought that this would be a good idea? He should have taken Luke up on his offer and met up with his friend after they had taken care of business here. He just—he had wanted to spend more time with him, had wanted Luke to meet all of his friends. Even if they were thieving bastards.

Thor had attempted to join their conversation for a while, but he couldn’t say more than, “That sounds very interesting”—even though it actually didn’t. He liked how Luke’s eyes lit up when he spoke of all of those musty, boring old tomes, but he really couldn’t understand why. Faren seemed to, though, and for the first time Thor found himself desperately jealous of that ability.

Luke seemed to notice that Thor was struggling with their conversation, so he seemed to seize on an idea and subtly turned the discussion towards politics. Now Thor was even more embarrassed—Luke kept posing questions that the Asgardian prince *knew* he should know, but didn’t. After Faren deftly described the rotation of crops and which ones were the most profitable on Asgard *for* Thor, he made some lame excuses and slunk away in humiliation.

Instead he tried to get Luke’s attention in other ways. He was more showy with his fighting than normal, picking the fighting styles that made him look the best rather than the ones that would be the most effective. His friends would have made him pay for this had he been fighting them, but the elven soldiers didn’t try the underhanded tricks that his friends would have, mostly out of respect for
Luke didn’t so much as bat an eye in his direction. Even when Thor removed his tunic again, Luke was too into whatever he was saying to Faren to pay attention. Some of the elves he was fighting were interested, though, so the Asgardian prince tried flirting with them in yet another tactic to get Luke to look his way. His dark haired friend didn’t even notice. It was disheartening.

Finally Thor pulled his shirt back on, threw himself down against one of the trees, and watched them sulkily. Sif walked by at one point and made a comment about him behaving like a child, but he ignored her.

As it started to cloud over, Volstagg hunkered down next to Thor and attempted to distract him. It almost worked—apparently one of Volstagg’s children had taken to wearing red tablecloths and brandishing building hammers, pretending to be Thor. At least, Thor thought with a glare over at the back of Luke’s head, someone appreciated him.

“Oh Norns, Thor, enough,” Sif finally snapped, planting herself firmly in front of him and blocking his view. “This is getting ridiculous. We get it, you like him. Either do something about it or turn your attentions elsewhere, because I’ve just about had it with—“ the rest of her sentence was drowned out by a loud boom of thunder. Sif gave him a murderous look causing Thor to actually laugh a little. Immediately, the sky lightened a shade.

“I’ve been trying, Sif,” Thor explained, “But he hasn’t been paying attention.”

“Removing your clothes doesn’t count as trying, you idiot.” She left without explaining what did count as trying. Thor sighed.

*****

The royal family had invited them to dinner. Loki, seated between Faren and Hogun, would have been interested if he hadn’t been nervous. He had finally managed to forget how much the royal family of Alfheim hated Jotunheim when he was around Faren, but the King and Queen were another story.

He eyed the King warily, knowing he was looking at the man who had demanded the death of Loki’s entire family. He had a high forehead and sharp cheekbones that made him look foreboding, and his eyes were more deeply set than his son’s. Or, perhaps, that was from lack of sleep. The King and Queen both seemed tired and solemn, and the mood had a dampening effect on the entire meal.

The food was as gorgeous as it was delicious, and while the obvious overabundance and garish extravagance of Asgard’s meals was not present, the food itself was clearly fine quality and crafted artfully in an understated fashion.

Another ugly pang of anger and jealousy shot through him. It was unfair that these planets had so much when his had so little. Perhaps later he could raid their pantry, though he would have a difficult time explaining to his father where he had gotten all of the food. Maybe he’d do it anyway.

Loki grasped his (delicately engraved silver) fork tightly and tried not to scowl into his food. Sometimes the differences in their situations became too much. He had been fascinated to hear about Faren’s education before, but now it seemed like just another slap in the face. All of this should have been his. The art, the libraries, the culture. It wasn’t fair.

He ate quietly, his morose train of thought making him deaf to the other conversations at the table. Not that it mattered. The King and Queen seemed nice enough, but it was all an act. They were
terrible, vicious, vengeful people, and Loki was done with this damn trip.

His thoughts spiraled in a steady downward direction until he was angry at everyone around him. He was sick of playing this game. He should go home, should never return to Asgard or Alfheim, pretend friends damned. If they knew who he was they wouldn’t be his friends, anyway.

“Stop kicking me,” he snarled across the table at Thor.

This dinner couldn’t be over soon enough.

*****

The meal started pleasantly enough, but Thor could see how strained the King and Queen were. They were quieter than normal, their easy smiles and joyful laughter absent. The two empty chairs between them and Faren were painfully obvious, though no one spoke of them. Even Faren was subdued.

He knew that Sif and Hogun had noticed. They kept throwing him questioning looks, but he subtly shook his head. He would have to explain everything to them later. If Volstagg had noticed anything awry, he was pretending he hadn’t. Seated down at the other end of the table with some of the soldiers, he was telling what seemed to be a raucous and enjoyable tale. The atmosphere down at that end was distinctly happier. Fandral, seated somewhere in the middle, was flirting with the elven beauties on either side of him. One, a chesty maiden with a low cut dress, was leaning towards him invitingly while the other, a slender male with a fetchingly rakish scar over an eyebrow, was sliding his hand slowly up Fandral’s leg. Thor grinned a bit and glanced over at Luke, feeling playful.

Underneath the table, he slowly moved his foot over to where his friend sat, running it over Luke’s calf.


Thor jerked back quickly, flushing. Well, that had gone over wonderfully.

The prince of Asgard sighed into his food, resigning himself to a long and miserable meal.

*****

Dinner couldn’t be over fast enough. Faren showed them where their rooms were afterwards, and Luke begged off joining them in the great hall, saying he would like to check in with his family.

Before returning to Jotunheim, he stole every piece of fruit from the royal pantry. He deposited all of it in Byleistr’s room with savage glee, but left before his brother could ask where it had come from.

He’d play innocent later and claim that he had nothing to do with it.

Feeling restless and irate, he visited Svartalfheim instead.

Neyir looked up the moment Loki appeared, a rare, genuine smile on his face. “Did you hear?” he asked gleefully before Loki could even speak, his eyes flashing with devious joy. He continued without waiting for Loki to respond, “Prince Thor has been disinherited!”

Loki blinked. Ah, yes. He’d almost forgotten, though he wasn’t sure how. It was probably because he’d known of Thor and Neyir’s hatred and long-standing rivalry long before he’d ever met Thor, back when the Asgardian was just the pigheaded killing machine of his imagination.

“No disowned, just disinherited,” Loki corrected, but this had no effect on Neyir’s good mood.
Neyir laughed, “Father just got the news this morning. Apparently there was an announcement made that Odin has chosen to give the crown to his bastard son over Thor. It couldn’t have even gone over better if I had planned it this way.”

Loki smiled thinly, not enjoying the derision of Thor in particular but enjoying the ability to ridicule something. All of the anger and frustration had pent up inside of him, and stealing the fruit had only helped a little bit. He needed another outlet. “I heard he locked himself in his room and cried for a week,” Loki shared, feeling like a traitor at the same time that he felt a tiny sliver of spiteful glee.

Neyir’s returning grin was almost predatory, “Oh, that’s just perfect,” he cooed lowly, eyes flashing. “Loki, darling, we should celebrate,” the dark elf slid over to where he stood and ran his hands down Loki’s sides. Loki growled in response and threw himself into Neyir’s embrace, tugging roughly at his clothing.

They stumbled across the room to the bed, trailing articles of clothing as they went. When Neyir viciously threw Loki down against the covers and thrust himself inside of Loki without preamble, Loki threw his head back and surrendered himself to Neyir’s vengeful passion, purging the roiling anger and hate that had been building within him.

*****

By the time Loki returned to Alfheim, it was so late that it was early, and everyone was already asleep. He collapsed down onto the bed and ran a hand through his hair, feeling crappy. His time with Neyir had effectively dulled his anger, but with that sharp edge gone he just felt tired and guilty. Ugh, he wished he hadn’t said anything about Thor. He hadn’t even been angry with Thor in particular. He should have just left. He had just been so… so…

“Luke?” A soft voice broke through Loki’s reverie, and he pushed himself up. Thor had apparently fallen asleep in one of the chairs in the room Faren had given him. “Hey,” the Asgardian yawned, rubbing the sleep from his eyes, “Sorry for falling asleep here, I didn’t mean to.” He took in Loki’s expression and frowned, “Are you okay?”

Loki winced, “I’m fine, Thor. I…” he trailed off, not sure what to say. Fuck. Now he just felt terrible. “I’m sorry for being in such a poor mood,” he finished lamely. “I’ve been…"

When he wasn’t able to finish, Thor reached forward and grabbed his hand. “Come with me.”

Loki allowed Thor to lead him over to the balcony, then quirked an eyebrow in amusement. “Is there something—“

He didn’t get to finish his sentence before Thor scooped him up and they shot into the sky. Loki sucked in a breath, clinging to Thor with white-knuckled fingers as the trees whizzed past beneath them. “There’s something I want you to see!” Thor yelled in his ear, making Loki wince. “It’s just up ahead here!”

There was a mountain up ahead, silhouetted against the moon. To Loki’s surprise, as they got closer Thor kept just flying straight at it. “Thor,” Loki said in warning when it was getting too close for comfort. “Thor!”

Thor just laughed as Loki closed his eyes, sure that the idiot was going to fly them right into the face of the mountain. When they kept moving, he cracked an eye open. Apparently hidden somewhere in the rocky, tree-riddled side of the mountain there had been a cave entrance. Rather than put Loki down, however, Thor continued to fly straight through it. Soon Loki could see moonlight filtering in the other side, and the Asgardian prince lightly set him down onto his feet.
“I remember you mentioned you’ve always like the stars,” Thor said eagerly, looking hopeful, “I always have as well, and Alfheim has one of the prettiest views. Come see,” He took Loki’s hand and tugged him forwards. Loki went along willingly, curious now.

The cave opened up onto a sheer drop, with a ledge just large enough for them to sit on. The mountain had a huge crater at the center, which was where they were now. “Years and years ago it was a volcano,” Thor explained eagerly. “Then the center collapsed and created this.”

In the heart of the mountain there was a serene lake, still and perfect except in the area where it was fed by a magnificent waterfall. It formed a silvery mirror that perfectly reflected the stars above. And the stars here—Loki caught his breath. On Jotunheim the stars were shimmery and pale, but here you could see the colors. They burned with such beautiful intensity that Loki completely forgot where he was for a moment. “They’re beautiful,” he said reverently when he remembered Thor was with him. “This place is beautiful. How did you find it?”

Thor laughed self-depreciatingly and tugged at one of his braids, “Actually, I found it when I had a fight with my mother and decided I was going to run away and become a mercenary. It was right after I’d gotten the hammer and learned how to fly, so I told her I was leaving and not coming back and then flew right out the window. I was a bit of a brat,” He gave Loki an embarrassed smile.

“Anyway, I accidentally stumbled upon this. I spent a while here, staring off into the stars or down into the water. The stars reminded me of my mother, and all of the stories she’d told me while helping me learn their names. I realized that much of the reason I wanted to fight was because of those stories—to be like those characters, helping people who couldn’t help themselves. Being a mercenary wasn’t going to give me that, and I realized what a fool I’d been and went home. It’s a good place for reflecting on things.”

Thor went quiet and watched Loki nervously, waiting for a reaction.

“Thank you,” Loki finally said quietly, and then leaned against him, feeling the warmth of his body through his thin tunic. “Could you tell me one of the stories that your mother used to tell you about the stars?”

Thor let out a breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding and smiled, “I would love to.”

They stayed out like that until the stars faded and the sun began to peak over the mountain, painting the cliff face in orange and red and filling the lake with color.

After they’d been silent for some time, Loki murmured, “I needed this. I’ve been…frustrated, lately. There is a very large difference between your lifestyle and mine, and you’re very…dismissive of it sometimes. It’s hard to see people who have so much when you know others that have so little.”

“Luke,” Thor frowned and tilted Loki’s head up to look at him, “What’s mine is yours, you know that, right?”

Thor was so close that Loki could feel his warm breath against his lips. “I know,” Loki whispered.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for reading! The next chapter will be up sometime within the next week.

Love you all! -H
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

“Everything you do seems to be potentially dangerous. It’s almost monotonous after a while. What is it this time? Another herd of wild beasts? A group of bloodthirsty marauders? A lethal magical creature?”

There was a slightly awkward pause before Thor admitted, “The last one, actually.”

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! Sorry for the slow update, but there should be another one following this shorting, hopefully around Thursday or Friday. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Twenty-One

The prisoner’s screams were sickening even after they were filtered through the force fields of the deepest cells of the dungeon. Balder stared determinedly at his feet, certain that if he watched the man he would be sick. Surely that would be a sign of weakness from the new crown prince of Asgard, and even though he knew that the man in question would not notice, Tyr’s hulking second in command would.

Since Tyr had still not returned from whatever reconnaissance mission that the Allfather had sent him on, Tyr’s right hand man had taken over his duties. He treated Balder with slight disdain, as though Balder had no right to any of the titles he claimed. Then again, he was probably right. Balder had always thought that even though his uncle was the Commander of Asgard’s armies, he had fought and earned the title of Captain of the Guard entirely by his own merit. Now he wasn’t so sure.

The screaming finally stopped for a moment as the second in command asked the prisoner more questions. The captive man lay shuddering in his own blood as he choked out half-formed answers.

“Who gave your orders?” Tyr’s right-hand-man intoned, his war axe slung casually and threateningly over his shoulders, and Balder fought back the urge to sigh. This question had been asked several dozen times already, despite being phrased slightly differently upon each asking.

“Don’t k-know…can’t, might be…could be anyone, from anywhere…” the prisoner gasped and spluttered as he coughed up more blood. Balder wasn’t sure how he was still alive after all of this time, but the healers somehow managed to patch him up after every interrogation.

The man standing beside Balder smiled grimly, almost as though he was pleased by the answer, and said, “We’ll try again tomorrow.”

They left the man heaving on the ground as the healers rushed in to remedy at least part of the
damage. Balder said nothing as he followed the other man up out of the dungeons and into the sunlight, wondering more than ever if being crown prince was something he could handle.

*****

Loki was half asleep in the saddle for most of the next day. Faren had come to wake him—far too early in his opinion, though it was nearly afternoon already—and he had reluctantly followed the elven prince down to the stables. Apparently, they were hunting for some kind of creature in the forests to the north. He knew he was missing something—perhaps some explanation had been given whilst he was dozing—but he couldn’t bring himself to care. If the bunch of idiots wanted to go hunt something again already despite the way the last time had turned out, that was their problem. He would just transport himself away when the time came and let them deal with it.

Thor kept shooting him concerned looks, which annoyed him. Why wasn’t the great golden imbecile tired? Loki was exhausted, and Thor looked as though he’d just had a great night’s rest. In fact, he looked better than that—he was irritingly cheerful and almost glowing. This caused Fandral to make some suggestive remarks about the two of them going missing after dinner, but Faren just laughed and said that Thor had been with him. Loki had apparently given him some kind of look (that he had clearly misinterpreted), because he tacked on the end, “for purely platonic reasons.”

Somewhere around midday they took a break for lunch, and Loki stiffly stretched his aching legs and wished he was back at home, preferably asleep.

He took an apple and a bit of bread from Thor, and then curled up against a tree and tried not to fall asleep before he ate them. The others talked, but Loki drowned them out. At some point, Thor finally spoke up.

“Luke, have you been paying attention?”

Loki yawned and shrugged, which didn’t seem to be a satisfactory answer.

Thor frowned. “This mission could potentially be very dangerous—“

“Everything you do seems to be potentially dangerous. It’s almost monotonous after a while. What is it this time? Another herd of wild beasts? A group of bloodthirsty marauders? A lethal magical creature?”

There was a slightly awkward pause before Thor admitted, “The last one, actually. Haven’t you been listening at all?”

Loki sighed and settled against the tree, closing his eyes again, “Something about a serpent, though I didn’t get the impression you meant a dragon.” He cracked one eye open slightly, “So it isn’t truly magical, is it?”

Thor cleared his throat, “It is, actually. The elven soldiers who have seen it from afar and lived think that it may be a Basilisk.”

Loki shot up, suddenly awake. “A Basilisk? Thor, are you an idiot, or are you just trying to convince me that you are?” Thor opened his mouth to reply but Loki held up a finger, “Let us establish some things first. Besides Faren, who has some minimal earth and healing magic, no one else besides me has any magical ability, correct?” When Thor nodded mutely, Loki continued, “So your first thought when going up against a creature who is known to spit venom, curse or kill people with no more than a look, and has an impenetrable hide is to get together a bunch of people with no magical ability and rush it with swords?”
Hogun spoke before Thor was able to, his eyes trained on the Asgardian prince. “You failed to mention it was a Basilisk,” he commented dryly. “I would think that would be relevant when we’re discussing our battle tactics.”

“It was just a wild story,” Thor explained quickly, “They don’t actually know what it is!”

“Oh, that’s so much better,” Sif sighed. “You made it sound like an overgrown snake,” she shot at Faren, who had the grace to blush and look away.

“But we have you, Luke!” Thor protested, “You’re a mage. You’re the most powerful mage that I know, and when I told Faren as much he said we could take it.”

Loki’s eyes narrowed, “Thor, look at me. Do I look like I’m up for fighting something this dangerous by myself right now?”

“We won’t enter its territory until midday tomorrow,” Faren interrupted calmly, “We’ll just have to make sure we’re all well rested by then.”

Loki stared at him for a moment, realizing that there had been another piece to this puzzle missing, but slowly the picture was forming. “What is your stake in this? You’re a smart man, that much is clear from our discussion yesterday. You do think we’re up against a Basilisk, since you made no effort to correct that theory. So why do you think that this mission is a good idea?” Loki continued without waiting for the other prince to answer him, “You have some kind of stake in this, and it’s not a logical one. You think we’re up against a creature so dangerous it can kill with a look, but we brought no backup—which I’m guessing means that your family doesn’t approve. You have a vendetta. You’re emotionally involved with this. Who did it kill?”

Loki knew he had hit the nail on the head when Faren went quiet and stared at the ground for a moment.

Thor shifted uncomfortably. “Faren, you don’t have to—“

The elven prince held up a hand. “No, they deserve to know. After all, if it truly is what we think it is we are all of us risking our lives. But we’re not quite as unprepared as all that. My family has been readying a team of mages to take out the Basilisk, but they have been stalling. They’re so preoccupied by the events at home that they’re taking too long to react.”

Loki gave Faren a hard look. “You’re compromised and you’re being reckless. Even half asleep I can tell you that the right thing to do is to wait until the magi are ready and have prepared an attack rather than to blindly venture out after the creature with one mage. We should go back.”

Faren frowned and turned pleadingly to Thor, who eyed both of them uncertainly. Sif crossed her arms and shook her head. “Come on, Thor. You know I’m not one to back down from a fight, but I agree with Luke. This hasn’t been planned out at all.”

“Together we took down the dragon, and that was even without Prince Faren with us,” Volstagg countered enthusiastically, “Surely we can handle one little snake.”

“Not exactly little,” Hogun returned quietly. “I’m not opposed to attacking, but we should return and prepare a concrete strategy first.”

“That is reasonable,” Thor said slowly, “Without a sound approach we could make some very foolish mistakes. Why don’t we return and coordinate with the team of magi?”

Faren sighed and ran a hand through his glossy blonde hair. “Since when are you so cautious? Or so
fond of magic?” Faren shot a defeated but amused look at Loki. “I still disagree, and I still think we should take it out before it harms anyone else. But I can’t exactly do that alone, and if I can’t convince you…” He trailed off as he watched Thor, a tiny gleam of hope still in his eyes.

Thor grimaced and looked away. “Luke is right, Faren. We are being reckless.” He turned back and placed a hand on his friend’s shoulder, “But I promise you that we will avenge your family. We’re not giving up, we’re strategizing.”

“Asgard didn’t allow us to avenge our family last time, so I hope this is different,” Faren bit out stiffly, before immediately wincing and adding, “I’m sorry Thor, that was uncalled for. You had absolutely nothing to do with that, and I know you want to help. You’re right, both of you,” he added to include Loki, “I’m being reckless. But it was my fault, and I just wanted to do something other than sit around.”

“Who was it?” Fandral spoke up quietly for the first time in the conversation, “Mya and Narissa were both missing from dinner last night. It wasn’t—?”

Faren swallowed, “It happened almost two weeks ago now. Mya was restless and wanted to go out for a ride, but her usual nanny was ill and she’s too young to leave the palace without her.” Loki remembered that the youngest of the elven royal family, Princess Myandria, was still a small child, only just barely out of her toddler years. “They were going to call in a replacement for her, but Mya was impatient and I felt like going for a ride myself, so I told the guards that I would take her. There was no reason for concern, we weren’t going far.” Faren stopped for a moment and breathed out slowly before continuing.

“Mya stopped because there were some wildflowers by the stream. We were barely out of sight from the castle, just at the edge of the forest. I had heard that there had been some attacks on livestock recently, but that was much further north and at the time we had assumed it was a natural predator that was a bit more aggressive than normal. There was no reason to think that whatever it was would come down closer to the castle.

“Anyway, we stopped to picnic and pick flowers since that was what she wanted to do. We were there for about a half mark before I heard an odd sound—like a dying animal—coming from the forest nearby. Mya was engrossed in trying to pick all of the flowers that she could hold, so I left her there for just a moment to check it out. It took me a moment, but then I found a large stag lying in the dense underbrush, its eyes rolling. Its sides heaved, covered in some sort of flesh eating substance. It was so clearly not natural that I immediately dashed back to the clearing to get Mya out of there. It was my intent to take her back to the castle and then get some of the guards to come back out with me to investigate, but when I returned to the field she was gone. I panicked and searched the forest for her before returning to the field and realizing that she was not gone after all—she was sprawled in the tall grass, covered in flowers, her eyes glassy and wide open.

“She was alive, and I carried her back to the palace. I had no idea what was wrong. No one else seemed to know either, until the reports of similar findings came in and we began to suspect a Basilisk. Even still, she might as well be dead. After a week and a half in the healing wing while scores of mages and healers looked at her, we finally gave up and moved her to the crypt. Narissa couldn’t handle it, so she went to spend some time at our summer home. She and I aren’t speaking at the moment.

I have to do this. It’s my fault she’s gone and there’s a chance, however faint, that by killing the beast we could find the antidote. I at least have to try.”

When Faren finally finished, Loki sighed. “Admirable, perhaps, but pointless.” Thor winced at his indelicacy and Sif actually glared at him, but Loki just rolled his eyes. “Well, do you want me to
wring my hands, bemoan his sister’s fate, and have a good cry with him, or do you want me to actually do something about it?”

Thor was definitely frowning now, but Faren didn’t seem to mind his bluntness. “So killing the beast can help revive Mya?” His eyes gleamed.

Loki waved a hand dismissively, “Of course not, weren’t you listening? As I said, that course of action is pointless. Killing the Basilisk may stop it from affecting others, but those it has already cursed will remain so. It has a powerful ancient magic similar to the dragons, and its magic is bound to those affected rather than to the beast itself.”

“You’re certain she has been cursed and not poisoned?” Faren asked skeptically, but when Loki nodded he seemed to accept it. “Then how can we help, if not by killing the creature?”

“I never said we could help,” Loki corrected. Faren opened his mouth to protest, but Loki cut him off, “I said that I can. I will need to return home to do some research, but then if it is permissible I would like to take a look at your sister. I am skilled in magic, but I am particularly adept with illusions and curses. There may be something I can do.”

*****

Loki quickly picked out a couple of books from the Asgardian library shelves before returning to the more familiar tomes he had on Jotunheim. He flipped quickly through the books on magical beasts, carefully marking any mention of Basilisks. He was on the last one when something bounced off of its pristine pages and spun onto the desk next to it. Loki blinked at the delicate Alfheim fruit before turning to raise a brow at Byleistr.

“Something you need?” he asked casually, plucking the bright purple fruit off of the ice-sculpted desk and holding it thoughtfully in one hand.

“Care to explain that?” Byleistr nodded his head towards it.

Loki gave him a carefully blank look, “You’re the one who threw it at me, dear brother. I don’t see how I should know anything about it that you do not.”

Byleistr’s face darkened slightly. “Don’t be coy, Loki. I’m not sure why you filled half of my room up with fruits from Alfheim, but I am certain it was you. It could not exactly be anyone else, now could it? What were you thinking, going to that realm? If anyone finds you there they would kill you in a heartbeat and say you were the aggressor, and we would never be able to claim otherwise. They would love to get their hands on one of our family, and I would never forgive myself.”

“I assure you, Byleist, I have no idea where these came from. I’ve been far too busy to frolic about on Alfheim and pick fruit. Now, if you don’t mind, I’m a bit occupied at the moment.” He turned back to his book as he peeled the fruit, the very picture of cool disinterest.

“Very well, don’t tell me. But you should know that I happened to mention it to Helblindi. He very much wants to speak with you—I suppose I will go let him know that you’re back right now.”

Loki paled and spun back around. “Don’t you dare!” he blurted out. His oldest brother would give him no end of misery if he found out what Loki had been up to. Byleistr smiled and crossed his arms. Loki smoothed his features and calmly replied, “Instead, won’t you please fetch Thrym for me? I have something I wish to discuss with him.”

The smile fell slowly off of Byleistr’s lips as he gave his youngest brother a hard, thoughtful look. Then he turned and left, leaving Loki to breathe a sigh of relief. He went back to work, hurriedly
Byleistr stepped out onto the training grounds and smiled as he saw Helblindi and Thrym sparring. He watched their familiar movements as he considered his options. Despite what he had told Loki, he had no intention of speaking with Helblindi. Even though they were on speaking terms again and he had, of course, forgiven his brother for the words he had spoken in anger, he had no desire to open a new can of worms. Helblindi had been suspicious of Loki’s absence lately, and since Byleistr had mentioned the fruit he had found in his room, he was intent on grilling their little brother for information.

As if that would work, Byleistr thought with amusement. Helblindi was very straightforward and honest, and therefore usually had much difficulty understanding Loki’s twisty little brain. Byleistr had more luck most of the time. His intuition was telling him that whatever Loki was up to, it was something he shouldn’t be doing. He would probably lie through his teeth if asked about it.

No, if Byleistr wanted to uncover what Loki was hiding—and he did—he would have to be more subtle about it.

“What can I do for you, my prince?”

Byleistr kept his expression calm and tried to control his body’s urge to flush. Commander Thrym made a point to always call Helblindi and Loki ‘your highness’ or, if in acceptable company, by their names, but Byleistr was always ‘my prince.’

“I wish to speak with you in private, when you have a moment.”

Thrym bowed shortly, “Allow me to clean up, and I’ll be right with you.” He exited the sparring ring as Helblindi sent Byleistr an exasperated look.

“You could at least have waited until we were finished,” his elder brother complained without malice, “You knew he was going to jump at the chance to speak with you.”

This time Byleistr really did flush. “I’m sorry, ‘Blindi, it’s time sensitive. I’m certain that someone else will very willingly take his place.” Sure enough, even as he spoke one of the other warriors approached Helblindi and asked him for a match. Helblindi accepted, but continued watching his brother.

“Is this about Aggar or Loki?” He finally asked quietly. “It has to be one or the other, because you would have told me what’s going on otherwise.”

Byleistr smiled. Most people underestimated his brother, who was much more perceptive than most realized. “Loki, this time. No,” he held up a finger as Helblindi moved to exit the ring, “Let me deal with this, Helblindi. You know I’m better at figuring out what he is up to.”

Helblindi stopped short and eyed Byleistr before grunting his agreement.

“But you’ll tell me what is going on when you know, won’t you?” He asked, a slight pleading to his eyes that was not perceptible to anyone by Byleistr himself. The second prince resisted the urge to shift uncomfortably. He knew that his older brother often felt left out when he and Loki were
concerned, and he disliked having to lie to him. “Of course,” he conceded.

Helblindi nodded, relief on his face, and turned back to his new sparring partner. At the same time, Thrym approached after cleaning himself up at the barracks, a bright look in his eyes.

He fell into step beside Byleistr as they moved back towards the palace, Byleistr purposely taking the long route back to Loki. There were a couple of things he wanted to speak to Thrym about, first.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! <3
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

"He had never seen a Basilisk’s curse before, but what he beheld was one of the most twisted and convoluted pieces of magic he’d ever seen."

Chapter Notes

A/N: I'm so sorry! I'm 52 minutes late now :( I got distracted with random genealogy stuff and didn't realize how late it was. I also blame Netflix. Anyway, to the chapter! It's a little shorter than normal, but I have some good news in the author's note at the end to make up for it :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Twenty-Two

“Loki wants to speak with you,” Byleistr informed Thrym without preamble. He had no desire to lead Thrym to think that this was anything other than business.

“Loki?” Thrym looked surprised and, if truth be told, a little bit disappointed. “What does your brother need to say that he could not come and tell me himself?”

Byleistr gave him a wry smile. “Actually, he had me come fetch you because he was trying to get rid of me. I assume Helblindi told you about all of the elven fruit I found in my room?”

Thrym grinned, “He did, yes. Personally I found the tale a bit amusing. You know how quick Prince Loki is—he likely snatched all of their fruit and was out of there before the elves even knew what was going on. It’s not like they’ll attack us because he took a couple pieces of fruit. Besides,” Thrym lay a soothing hand on Byleistr’s arm when he realized his teasing words had not cheered him, “At this point, we need all of the food we can get. I heard your father ordered the fruit dispersed amongst the soldiers and the villagers that came to the palace gates. It was a rare treat for many people.”

Byleistr sighed, “Oh, I’m aware of that. I wouldn’t be quite as upset if Loki had admitted to being the one who brought the fruit in. But instead of flaunting the fact that he stole it right from under their noses—which you know as well as I do that that’s what he would normally do—he tried to claim that it wasn’t him. And he was distracted—going through manuscripts that he kept covering up when I tried to look at them. No, this isn’t about the fruit, Thrym. The fruit was only a small piece of something else that he’s up to, and now I’m worried. He might be in a great deal of danger.”

Thrym watched him seriously as he spoke, and when Byleistr finished he nodded. “What is it you would like me to do?”

*****

“I’m fully aware that my brother asked you to report back to him,” Loki said lazily, not even turning
to look as he heard Thrym enter the room. “But you’re not going to. Not if you want him safe from Aggar.”

The footsteps stopped abruptly. Loki faced Thrym, eyes gleaming.

That was all it took for Thrym to hear him out.

*****

“What did he want?” Byleistr asked anxiously the moment Thrym reappeared.

Thrym looked conflicted, and Byleistr felt his heart sink. He should have known better—Loki knew exactly how Thrym felt for him; he would be prepared for Byleistr to use the commander to spy on him. That meant he must have had a good reason for Thrym not to…

Byleistr closed his eyes, suddenly weary. “This is about Aggar, isn’t it?”

Thrym’s silence was enough of an answer for him. “What is he doing? What does Alfheim have to do with anything? Thrym, please consider carefully—Loki is usually a great strategist, but when it comes to things affected by his emotions he has tunnel vision. If he’s doing something that could endanger anyone, I need you to tell me now.”

Commander Thrym’s expression was inscrutable. Finally, he replied, “In all honesty, I have no idea how Alfheim has anything to do with what he asked of me. Nothing he said implied the involvement of the light elves in the slightest. Perhaps you are over thinking this, my prince. You worry too much.”

Byleistr met Thrym’s sincere eyes and sighed. “Perhaps you are right.”

*****

Faren looked down at his little sister’s prone form, trying not to get his hopes up too much. Still, he prayed to the Fates that Luke would be able to help her. Mya’s tiny body was arranged to imitate a peaceful slumber. It appeared as though all he had to do was reach out and shake her tiny shoulder and she would awaken, rubbing the sleep out of her eyes and giving him sleepy, confused looks.

Being in the crypt would scare her. Faren felt guilty for a moment, wondering if they should move her to her room, just in case.

But no, that make him expect too much. He had to remember that this was a last ditch effort, and that there was little to no chance that she would actually awaken. They had already had all of their best magi look at her, and there had been nothing that they could do.

Faren tucked the fresh flowers he had picked on their way back underneath Mya’s folded hands. Thor had grumbled halfheartedly about Luke not just transporting them back before he had left, but Faren hadn’t really minded. It had been nice to be away in the fresh air again. Still, returning home without having accomplished what he had set out to do weighed on him.

He slowly breathed out and turned away from his little sister, sliding down to sit at the base of the raised platform she had been placed on.

Solid footsteps alerted him to someone else’s presence but he didn’t need to look up to recognize that it was Thor. None of the Ljósálfar had footsteps that heavy, and the rest of their Asgardian visitors would not attend the crypt unaccompanied.

Thor stood beside him for a moment, looking down at Mya. His long red cape brushed Faren’s
shoulder, and Faren curled his fingers into it, tugging. Thor obeyed his unvoiced request and settled down onto the floor beside him.

He leaned his head heavily onto the other prince’s shoulder, feeling hopeless. Thor shifted so that he could reach a comforting arm around him. They remained like that for several minutes before Faren said softly, “If this doesn’t work, I don’t know what I’ll do.”

Thor took his chin with his free hand and tilted his head up so that they were eye to eye. “I’ll tell you what we’ll do,” Faren swore he could see a storm brewing in the Asgardian prince’s eyes, “We’ll hunt that beast down and make it pay for what it has taken. I swear to you, we will have your vengeance.”

Faren watched the larger man, heart racing as he wondered…

If Thor knew what he knew, if Thor had overheard his own father speaking with Faren’s about whether there was a possibility that the Basilisk had been purposely bred and released on Alfheim to cause panic and destruction, how far would he be willing to take that vengeance?

The elven prince remained quiet for the moment, but he thought he knew the answer. Despite their differences Thor was one of his close friends, and the Asgardian was not one to take injury to his friends lightly. No, if someone was actually behind this attack, Thor would stick by him. Together they would make sure that whoever thought that they could harm his family without consequence would pay dearly.

As he leaned against Thor, Faren’s gaze traveled across the room to his older brother’s casket and the empty glass case sitting above it.

No, unlike his older brother, this sibling would have revenge.

*****

When Loki returned to Alfheim, he returned with a pile of scrolls and vellum that he carefully placed on the bed for reference. He then found Sif and Hogun down in the great hall, talking in low voices over the table.

“What’s going on?” he asked, slipping onto the bench beside them.

“Not much. Fandral and Volstagg are out trying to make sense of the mage’s plans on Thor’s orders, and I think Thor and Faren are already down in the crypt. Your request to visit Mya was accepted, although hesitantly. The King and Queen are reluctant to get their hopes up again,” Hogun replied.

“Actually, they’re also down in the crypt already. We’re supposed to take you there now that you’re back.”

Loki shifted slightly, uncomfortable. “Might they be willing to bring her up here? I admit to a certain dislike of the crypt area.”

Sif wrinkled her nose, “I don’t blame you. Why the elves like to encase their dead in stone and keep their rotting bodies close I’ll never understand. It’s disgusting. But no, I don’t think they want to move her. Come, let us get this over with.”

Loki nodded and followed her reluctantly down into the crypt, his eyes only flickering over to the glass case once before he forced himself to focus on the other living beings present. Thor and Faren stood closest to the body of a tiny girl elf, the curtain that had been concealing her during Loki’s last visit pulled back. The king and queen stood to the side a ways, looking tired and drawn. The queen
was even shaking a bit, her back towards her daughter as though she couldn’t bear to look at her. Another elf accompanied them, likely an advisor or a servant.

The king watched him carefully as he entered, assessing him. Loki moved over to where Thor and Faren stood and peered down at the child. She was young and doll-like, her small body only having just lost the chubbiness of toddlerhood. Pretty, fine golden curls were arranged about her head like a soft halo, and even in her cursed sleep her dainty features were curled into a small smile. Someone had left fresh flowers for her.

Loki wasn’t doing this for them. As much as he didn’t hate Faren, being around his family caused Loki acute discomfort. This was no act of generosity or charity—if he did this, they owed him, and the Jotun prince fully intended to collect. Still, helping a tiny, defenseless child certainly didn’t hurt his sensibilities.

He reached out and smoothed a miniature curl back from Mya’s face as he closed his eyes, triggering his magical Sight. When he opened them, he impulsively took a step back.

Loki sucked in a breath, both fascinated and daunted at the same time. He had never seen a Basilisk’s curse before, but what he beheld was one of the most twisted and convoluted pieces of magic he’d ever seen. To Loki’s mind’s gaze, the curse curled around the small child like vines, wrapping her closely in its deadly grip. The sick, glimmering threads of the curse dipped into her veins, poisoning her bloodstream and clutching at her heart. It was no wonder that the other magi had been unable to work her free of the curse; even with Loki’s specific training in ancient Jotun curse weaving, this task looked nearly impossible.

Nearly, but not quite. Here and there the Jotun prince could see loose threads. No curse was perfect and, similar to cloth, even the most finely woven piece could be unraveled. The problem was keeping the subject of the curse alive whilst unweaving it.

Loki stepped back and blinked hard, the flickering threads of his magical Sight blinking out of existence. He took a moment to recover his natural senses before turning to the royal family. “I think I might be able to do it,” he said slowly, making sure to promise nothing. “It will take several days and a lot of magic, but it might be possible.”

The queen lit up, but the king eyed him cautiously. “What are the risks?” he asked, eyeing Loki levelly.

“Besides the risks to my own health, her life,” Loki admitted, refusing to flinch from that gaze.

The king nodded slowly. “There will be consequences if you kill her, no matter how accidentally.”

Thor made a sound and stepped up, placing a protective hand on Loki’s shoulder. “No, there will not be. This is your choice, right now. Luke has generously offered to attempt a no doubt dangerous maneuver to free Mya from this powerful curse. All of your mages have attempted the same and failed. If nothing is done, she will never wake. You can either let Luke try to save her life despite the risks, or you let her stay this way. Luke is under Asgard’s protection and there will be no retaliation against him if for any reason he fails.”

Loki gave Thor a considering look as the Asgardian prince stared down the King of Alfheim. Finally, the king let out a sigh. “You are right, of course,” he turned to Loki, “Forgive my protectiveness, this is the second child I have had to watch slowly die. I pray to the Fates that you can save her, but if you cannot I will accept it. I am thankful for your offer of aid.”

Loki nodded. “I will begin tomorrow. Tonight I need to rest.”
Thor watched Luke exit, Sif and Hogun joining him at the door. The king and queen left next, the queen giving one last watery glance at her youngest child before her husband shepherded her away, their advisor falling in step behind them. Then, once again, it was just Thor and Faren left in the crypt.

Faren sighed and gave him a halfhearted smile. “Thank you for bringing him here. I’m sure he will try his best and,” Faren swallowed, “I will make sure my family doesn’t hold it against him if he fails. Despite how my father reacted, we’ve been hearing from our mages that it seems unfeasible to unwind the magic around her. Just the fact that Luke thinks it might be possible is an improvement.” He rubbed his eyes. “I’m tired, but I know I won’t sleep well tonight. I think I might just stay here, with her.”

Thor considered offering to stay as well, but he thought that Faren might like to be alone. “But you are still attending dinner with us now, aren’t you?”

Faren nodded, looking miserable. “I had better. It would only serve to make my mother worse if none of her children were at the table. I admit to having absolutely no appetite, though.”

“Perhaps we can talk of something else to distract you.” Thor wracked his brain for topics that would not inevitably lead back to Faren’s family, but his friend stopped him before he could come up with anything.

“It won’t make a difference, though I thank you for trying. Thor… do you think our family is just terribly unlucky, or do you think that someone or something has it in for us?”

Thor considered this question carefully before responding. “I think it has mostly been poor luck. Your brother died in the war, as did many other people. Your sister… well, I don’t believe anyone could have been prepared for this.”

“Not unless it was planned.” Before Thor could comment on this odd statement, Faren continued, “But back to my brother. It’s true he died at the time of the war, but the war itself had just ended. Taeryl made it through the entire thing alive only to have that… that monster cut him down after it was declared over.”

Thor frowned, eyes dark. “I remember. Father said it nearly sparked a second war. For what it’s worth, I’m sorry that you did not get retribution for his death, but I believe that my father was tired of the fighting. Ordering the execution of the entire royal family could have caused a secondary war that no one could afford. At least, that’s what he said when I asked.”

Faren gazed over at his brother’s crypt. “Asking to have the entire family pay was excessive,” the elven prince said slowly, “But I would have been content if we could just have the one.”

Thor followed his friend’s line of sight and eyed the case on top of the crypt. “I’m surprised that your family still displays that,” he murmured, “Your father truly hasn’t given up, has he?”

“Of course not. My brother died a slow and painful death, and there was nothing that anyone could do to stop it. One day, the beast that killed him will die an even slower and more painful death than he, and when he finally breathes his last father will cut off his head and mount it on a stake to be displayed in the case above my brother’s casket. Then he can finally rest in peace.”

Thor eyed his friend. He wondered how much of the vehemence spewing from his mouth was pain and lack of sleep, and how much of it was his father’s words repeated. Faren was normally the
peace-keeper, the first to advocate for compromise and the last to suggest violence. Not that Thor thought that the creature that killed his brother didn’t deserve death for what he had done, but for Faren to be so bloodthirsty about it was out of character. Thor sighed heavily, wishing for the days when nothing had clouded his friend’s merry blue eyes.

Faren seemed to notice his melancholy, for he took Thor’s hand and smiled sadly. “I’m sorry for the melodrama. I just want all of this to be past. You have no idea… the things our people have been saying…” he shook his head, “They think our family has somehow displeased the Fates. If Mya lives perhaps the dissenters will be quieted, but if we also finally got vengeance for Taeryl…"

“Luke will save her, I have faith in him. As for the other… well, you know how I feel about the Jotuns. I am in complete agreement with you; I am just unused to hearing you get so… vicious.”

Faren’s face was grim. “I know; I’m not usually. But while it may be a cruel death, it’s nothing less than a monster like Byleistr deserves.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Good news! I'll be updating again on Sunday :) (Most likely afternoon or evening Sunday, however. That's Pacific time, for anyone that's wondering!)
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

"The work took a toll on him, but he refused to acknowledge how weary he was. He had to make it to a certain point before he could take a break and rest, or he risked injuring himself or the girl when he tried to pull away."

Chapter Notes

A bit later than I intended, but it’s technically still Sunday! (I literally have minutes, lol.) Still, I hope the content of this one is enough to make up for the wait ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Twenty-Three

Loki woke up the next morning shivering slightly, panting from a dream he couldn’t remember. He had spent the night back in his room on Jotunheim after collecting the manuscripts he had left on Alfheim, knowing he’d sleep better in his own home. It hadn’t helped much—after perusing documented efforts to break the Basilisk’s curse, he had yet to find any successful endeavors. At least he had learned a bit about what not to do. Still, he was convinced that it was possible. It was more likely that, as Basilisks were not native to either Jotunheim or Asgard, there wasn’t as much documented information on them.

But no matter the reason for it, the lack of information to prepare him made him anxious. If at any point he thought that he would do irreparable damage, perhaps he would just stop and inform the elves that Mya was beyond saving. That was better than giving them even more of a reason to hate Jotunheim if they found out who he was.

He performed his daily hygiene routine and dressed slowly, not eager for what was to come. He was no longer as certain that it would be worth it.

Finally, when he felt as prepared as he knew he was going to be, he transported himself back to Alfheim.

*****

Thor perked up as Luke entered the main hall. He hadn’t slept well the night before. Even though he was confident in Luke’s abilities—he’d never met a mage like Luke before, and he was fairly certain that there was nothing he couldn’t do—he disliked that Luke mentioned there was a risk to his own health.

Therefore Thor had made a point to ask the king and queen if they would mind him sitting in on the attempt despite their reluctance to have anyone other than family present.

They had moved Mya to the healing wing rather than the crypt, something that Thor was thankful
for. The healing wing was light, airy, and felt fresh rather than dank and old. The Aesir prince showed Luke the way, and he saw the relief in his friend’s eyes as well.

Luke caught his hand as he turned to take his place on one of the benches, “Stay?” the dark-haired man asked quietly, not realizing that Thor had already demanded to be present. He flinched almost imperceptibly when the golden prince didn’t answer right away, “Not that I need you here. Actually I won’t even notice if you stay or go.” Luke withdrew his hand and stalked proudly across the room to the bed that Mya lay on, ignoring Thor so obviously that Thor was certain he was actually carefully paying attention. Thor sat on the bench and tried very hard not to smile when Luke’s shoulders softened in relief.

The only other people present were the king, queen, and Faren. Faren kissed his little sister’s forehead and then took a seat next to Thor, but the king and queen said their goodbyes and left the room, too anxious to be present.

Thor watched as Luke settled into a comfortable chair next to the bed and closed his eyes, breathing deeply. Then everything was still and silent and Thor knew that he had begun. He studied Luke anxiously, looking for any sign of discomfort. He was intent on staying alert for any indication that something was going wrong.

The Basilisk’s curse was by far the most difficult magic that Loki had ever tackled. He bent his will against it, steadily coaxing the tendrils of magic away from the child and unraveling them. But it wasn’t enough to merely unthread their grip on the girl; the magic was such that when Loki removed it, it slowly crept back towards its victim. Therefore as he went he had to disrupt and dissipate the magic as well, slowly converting the energy back into more natural elements.

The work took a toll on him, but he refused to acknowledge how weary he was. He had to make it to a certain point before he could take a break and rest, or he risked injuring himself or the girl when he tried to pull away.

By the time he found a stable place to stop the sky was dark. At some point Faren had crept over to the opposite side of the bed and had curled up next to it before falling asleep. In contrast, Thor was sprawled out on the too-small bench, snoring loudly. Loki smirked a little bit when the Asgardian prince shifted and became perilously close to falling onto the floor.

He stood, intending to find a comfortable place to take a nap, but he underestimated how exhausted his body was. The world swayed unpleasantly and he stumbled, knocking the chair over with a loud clatter as he crashed heavily onto the floor.

“Luke?” Thor jerked awake in an instant, springing to Loki’s side the moment he realized what had happened.

“I’m fine, just tired,” Loki said, slapping his hands away. “Just let me…” he shook and wobbled as he tried to stand, but found his limbs didn’t have the strength to hold him. “I just need to rest here a moment,” he muttered, too embarrassed to ask for the help he needed. To his credit, Thor said nothing as he scooped Loki up off of the floor and carried him to the rooms he had been assigned.

“Do you need the bathroom?” the Asgardian prince asked him as they entered. Of course he needed the bathroom, Loki thought scathingly; it had been an entire day since he used the facilities. He also was desperately hungry and his throat was so dry it hurt. Still, it injured his pride too much to admit it.
Thor seemed to understand. He carried Loki straight into the washroom and didn’t protest when Loki snapped at him for trying to undo his clothing. Instead, he nodded and left the room, telling his friend he would be just outside.

Loki fumbled miserably with his clothing, using every ounce of strength he had to relieve himself and wash afterwards. He hated—hated—when his magic left him this weak, and was even more humiliated that Thor of all people was around to see it. When he finished and staggered back into the bedroom, the Asgardian prince was ready with a platter of food and a goblet of water. Instead of thanking him, Loki snatched the food away and ate with his back to Thor, but still the idiot didn’t seem to catch the hint and leave.

Instead he stayed and let Loki lean reluctantly against him for support as he ate, stroking his hair in an irritatingly soothing manner. They remained like this until Loki’s desperate need for food and drink left him and his body’s demand for sleep took over. No longer entirely conscious of his actions, he twisted back against the comforting heat of Thor’s body, nearly kicking the platter of food off of the bed in the process. Thor lunged forward and caught it, placing it on the bedside table and extinguishing the lights in the room. He gently tried to untangle himself from the other man, but Loki didn’t let go. The least the big idiot could do was be a comfortable pillow, Loki’s less than reasonable mind suggested.

After a moment of hesitance Thor gave in and curled around him, holding him as he fell quickly into a deep sleep.

*****

Loki woke with his pulse racing, shivering all over. He reached towards the empty spot on the bed next to him, disoriented for a moment.

It took him a moment to collect himself and prepare for the long day ahead of him. He at least felt better rested than he had the morning before, but he could still sense that his energy was… off. Loki brushed it aside as a combination of nerves and overusing his magic.

The day proceeded much as the one before it had, though Loki was beginning to become frustrated with the slow progress. Unweaving this magic drained him horribly, and he couldn’t even tell if he was making any headway. When he finally reached the end of what he could do for the day, he sat back and wearily contemplated the work before him. Looking at her now, he could tell that the curse was receding. It was barely visible from the outside of her now, but the worst and most dangerous part was still clinging to her veins and heart, recalcitrant.

Once more Thor helped him to the amenities and bed, and once more Loki snapped at and insulted him before curling around him and falling asleep.

The next morning was even worse than the one before, and when Loki woke late to find Thor gone again he was furious and frustrated without understanding why. Despite the difficulties he had concentrating he forced himself to tackle the last part of the curse.

Wheedling the magic out of Mya’s heart proved impossible by the methods he had used to get rid of the rest of it. He swore and dug his nails into his hands, his body shaking and disrupting his focus. Desperate to be finished with this constant drain on his energy, he tried something entirely different. Since he couldn’t disrupt the final part of the curse, he sent out a tendril of his own magic as an offering to it, hoping that the magic would react as he thought.

It took the bait and released Mya’s heart, burning straight through the pathway that Loki’s magic offered it and into Loki himself.
He barely had time to react before it hit him, his magic and the curse clashing even as his body tumbled to the floor.

*****

The days were long and boring for Thor, and despite his best intentions to stay awake in case Luke needed his help he found himself drifting more often than not. He tried reading, pacing about the room, and chatting with Faren, but nothing seemed to help. Reading was not really to his taste, pacing let him let out some pent up energy but not enough, and Faren was alternately anxious and moody and therefore not a good conversationalist.

So he was dozing lightly when Luke collapsed, startling him awake. It took him a moment to understand what had happened, but then he launched himself across the room.

He rolled Luke over onto his back and shook him, calling his name, but he didn't awaken. With shaking hands Thor checked his pulse and was relieved to find it still strong. Perhaps he had just passed out from exhaustion—that would not surprise Thor in the slightest, considering what a strain these past few days had been on him.

"Thor," Faren breathed behind him, calling his attention back from his fallen friend. The elven prince was standing beside the bed, looking down at Mya with awe.

And Mya was looking back.

She yawned and sat up, stretching, but then her face scrunched up with confusion. "This isn't my room," she informed them solemnly. Faren was startled into laughter, breaking the trance he had been in. Then he sprang forward and pulled his little sister into his arms, calling joyfully for his parents.

Carefully Thor gathered Luke up and followed him.

The king and queen were overjoyed, the queen kissing her daughter and holding her close while crying and the king smiling down at her, his eyes no longer as dark and serious.

Faren was the first to ask after Luke, whom Thor had gently laid down on a lounge. He still had not awoken.

The king ordered the servants to tend to Luke as though he was a member of their family and to spare him no expense. Provided he woke in time for dinner, he would have a place of honor at their table that night as they celebrated his success and Mya’s health. Thor tried to enjoy the celebratory atmosphere, but a pit of worry gnawed at his stomach.

It was four hours afterwards and still an hour before dinner when Luke’s eyelashes fluttered. Thor, who this time had been diligently sitting beside him with no drowsiness whatsoever, startled upright.

"Luke?" he asked hopefully. Immediately his hopes were dashed when there was no response. Luke was as still as ever.

Frustrated, Thor grabbed Luke’s shoulders and began to shake his friend earnestly.

These actions were met with a swift knee to his ribcage and an indignant yowl. "Thor, you stupid, blundering idiot, what in Hel do you think you are doing?" Luke hissed, pushing the prince off of him.

Luke made tiny choking noises and pushed at Thor’s chest, so he relaxed his arms slightly.

“Of course I’m alive, you great oaf. Did I stop breathing? Did my heart stop beating? No. Usually those are key signs that the person in question is not dead. Norns, but you are a fool.”

Thor couldn’t help but laugh.

*****

Dinner was a happy affair, and the elves were in full celebration mode. The entire court had been invited to celebrate Loki’s success, and he had no lack of admirers. Even though great parties like this made him inwardly sick at the excess, he couldn’t help but enjoy the attention.

Faren’s older sister Narissa had returned at the news of her sister’s recovery, and she immediately seized Loki and kissed him, declaring him the most handsome man in the room. Fandral waggled his eyebrows at him encouragingly, but Thor growled under his breath. She wasn’t the only one who paid him special attention however. Many of the lords and ladies of the elven court showered him in compliments and affection, each one trying to gain his favor.

Loki was no fool—he knew the fervor over him wouldn’t last. He was the hero of the moment, but there was no glorious story to tell. This was no battle that he could describe blow by blow, that the elven bards could weave into their heroic songs and pass onto legend. His triumph over the Basilisk’s curse was a quiet thing, and it would be remembered only in passing except by few. But it was those few that mattered most to Loki, because the royal family would not forget, and neither would Thor.

And when the time came he would remind them.

But for now Loki just smiled as they toasted him, flirted with the prettiest of his admirers, and enjoyed the celebration.

Partway through dinner Mya managed to untangle herself from Faren and trotted over to where Loki was seated, crawling underneath of the chairs to get around the swarm of people that surrounded him, and grappled herself up into his lap. There was a startled and then amused silence as the little golden-headed child surveyed him carefully before announcing in her clear little voice, “You’re pretty. I like you.” Then she plopped herself down and began to eat from his plate, content with her seating arrangement for the rest of the night.

The nobles squeezed back as Faren made his way through the crowd after her. “I’m sorry,” he told Loki, his eyes dancing as he tried to grab Mya out of his lap, “She’s been wanting to meet you all night, but my mother told her you were too tired to entertain a small child.”

“He doesn’t look tired,” Mya said resentfully, squirming out of Faren’s reach. “You’re not tired, are you, my prince?”

Loki dropped his fork.

Faren blushed bright red and coughed. “Ah, sorry about that,” he mumbled quickly, “Before everything happened Narissa and I had started reading her fairy tales before bed. She had just read the one about the sleeping princess, and since you woke her up she thinks, ah…”

Loki grinned, relieved. “I see.”

“Next time, I want to be the prince,” Mya complained, “Being the princess was boring.”
Faren sighed and finally managed to grab her off of Loki’s lap. “Come on, Mother says it’s past your bedtime.”

“I don’t want to go to bed! I was already asleep for two weeks!”

Loki chuckled along with the courtiers as the princess was escorted from the room. Then he returned his attention to the slender blonde noble woman next to him.

*****

Thor hated that damn woman. Her laugh was fake, he could tell, and if she flipped her hair one more time he was going to offer to chop it all off so that it didn’t trouble her anymore. Even worse, from where he was seated he couldn’t see where her hands were. From Luke’s bright smile he thought he had a pretty good guess, though.

Volstagg was trying to distract him with a story about a hunt that he and Fandral had gone on—with Fandral interrupting every couple of moments to correct him—but it wasn’t working. He couldn’t stop glaring at the elves surrounding Luke, thinking that they hadn’t been the ones to sit by him every day while he countered the curse, they hadn’t carried him back to his room at night, they hadn’t fretted by his bedside when he hadn’t woken.

“—Thor!” He blinked and looked over at Sif, who rolled her eyes at him. “Were you listening to anything I just said?”

Thor shook his head, taking a deep swig from his mug and wincing. Elven wine was really too sweet for his taste.

“I was asking you where we were going next. Are we going to stay and help the magi track the basilisk down, or are we moving on?”

Thor frowned. He had told Faren that they would help, but that would mean that Luke would be staying on Alfheim for even longer, and—His gaze wandered back over to where Luke was sitting. Or, rather, had been sitting. He was gone… and so was that damn woman.

Thor stood up so quickly that his chair clattered to the ground. He didn’t even spare the time to reach down and pick it up before he swept out of the hall in the direction he hoped they had gone.

In the end, it wasn’t too hard to track them down. The woman’s sighs and giggles were slightly muffled, but not enough to quiet them in the moonlit, echoing hallways of the palace. Luke had her pressed into a dark alcove, his hand moving up under her skirts as she deftly undid his trousers. She had just slipped her hand inside when she looked up, saw Thor, and let out a little shriek.

“Get out,” Thor growled at her, and she stumbled away, running back towards the main hall.

Luke glared at him, still breathing heavily, his green eyes almost black in the dim lighting. “What in Hel was that about?” he snapped, his face flushed in anger. “I don’t know what exactly you think you’re doing, but—“

“This,” Thor snarled, and pushed Luke back into the dark recess, slamming him up against the wall. Before the smaller man could regain his breath, Thor stole it with a kiss, sealing the no doubt poisonous words to follow inside.

Luke stiffened, surprised, as Thor’s hot mouth moved against his own. His lips instinctively parted and Thor thrust his tongue inside, tasting like sweet elven wine and a hint of something richer beneath. Luke moaned into his mouth as Thor pinned him to the wall with his body, pressing as
much of himself against the dark-haired man as possible. He ground against Luke, panting and wild, his thoughts scattered as the slighter man wound a leg about his own. Something about Luke was driving him crazy, the smell of him urging him on.

Thor buried his head in Luke's neck as his hands worked their way down his body, finally reaching the place where his pants gaped open still. They lingered there a moment, teasing as Luke whined in protest, before slipping inside.

*****

Loki groaned as Thor’s large, hot hand palmed him. Some warning was flashing in the back of his mind but he shoved it away carelessly, his world narrowed to the places where his body was pressed to Thor’s. Finally, finally, finally, his body seemed to chant as Thor breathed against him in the darkness, barely out of sight from anyone who might pass by.

Then a familiar tingling sensation and a certain rush of heat between his thighs brought him back to reality. He finally pieced together the warning signs that his body had been trying to send him these past few mornings.

He didn’t have enough energy to transport himself to Svartalfheim, and he was going into heat.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you all enjoyed! See you Thursday/Friday-ish :)
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

Loki goes into heat

Chapter Notes

Sorry this doesn't go the way I know you all want it to, but don't worry--we're getting close!! ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Twenty-Four

It took all of Loki’s willpower to push Thor back even for a moment, but he did so. “Can’t,” he rasped, barely maintaining his self control. He wasn’t fully in heat yet, and he needed to be as far away from Thor as possible when it finally hit.

Thor flushed, embarrassed, but did not let go of him. “Sorry,” the golden prince mumbled, pressing back in to nuzzle his hair, “I only meant to kiss you. I’m not sure what happened—“

Loki weakly pushed against him again even as every muscle in his body cried out to pull him closer instead. “I’m still not feeling well,” the first excuse he could think of slipped easily onto his tongue, “I need to go lie down.”

Thor nodded and pulled back from him slowly, making it look as difficult as prying up a floorboard with too many nails. “I can escort you,” he started to offer, but Loki frantically shook his head and pushed past him, trying not to breathe in his scent. “I will be fine. Make my apologies to the King and Queen and thank them for their hospitality.” Before Thor could reply, he transported himself back up to his room on Alfheim and wobbled before locking the door and collapsing onto the bed.

The combination of denying his body’s urges and using up the little magic he’d been able to pool after healing Mya made his body feel like a wrung out rag. He fell asleep almost the instant he hit the mattress.

When he woke up, it was not a pleasant experience. He was already hard and leaking, creating a damp spot on the front of his pants, and his body felt overheated and tingly. Loki feverishly removed his clothes and curled back up on the bed. After using what little magic he had left to escape from Thor, even hours later he hadn’t enough to travel between realms. His body ached to be touched, and his own hand was not enough. He shivered and whined as he tried to find release, but when it did come he wasn’t satisfied.

Thor is right next door, his treacherous mind supplied unhelpfully. Loki moaned into the pillow, suddenly glad his body was too tired to support itself. If he could stand right now, he knew that there was absolutely no question about what he would do. He brought himself off twice more in the next hour before passing out again.
He slept longer this time, probably due in part to the past three days. It was nearly morning when he woke, and his body’s demand for release was beginning to turn painful. Barely conscious, he dragged himself up into a sitting position before realizing that he might have just enough magic to make it to Svartalfheim. In an uncharacteristic moment of recklessness, he transported himself off of Alfheim.

He barely made it to Svartalfheim. The last thing he saw was Neyir’s amused smirk as he collapsed onto the man’s bedroom floor, his Jotun form completely naked.

*****

Thor had tried checking on Luke a couple of hours after they had parted, but his friend had not answered his calls and the door was locked. He debated with himself for a moment on whether or not he should fly around to the window and enter that way, but ultimately decided that that action would seem too desperate. Luke was probably asleep, anyway—he had to be exhausted after everything he had done, and he truly hadn’t looked well earlier.

Still, a niggling part of his brain insisted that it had just been an excuse to get away from him.

The night passed slowly after that, with Thor finding release with his own hand several times while fantasizing about what could have happened if Luke hadn’t left.

When Luke wasn’t at breakfast, he was concerned. When he didn’t come to lunch either, Thor was flat out worried, but when he hadn’t shown up by dinner he gave into his desire to check on the dark-haired man. The door was still locked, so he used the window.

His heart sunk as he realized—after checking all areas of the room and the adjoining bathroom—that Luke was gone.

*****

Neyir was a bastard, Loki knew. He constantly threatened and insulted him—though, admittedly, Loki gave as much as (or more than) he got. But when Loki was in heat, he was surprisingly unaggressive. Far from being treated as Byleistr was treated by Aggar, Neyir never gave him any purposeful or lasting injury. Not that he was gentle, per say, and Loki wouldn’t have it any other way.

Instead, the only hints of his normal personality were the smug smirks planted on his face when he pushed Loki into a particularly humiliating position or situation. Loki didn’t actually mind—when he was in heat he barely noticed, and it didn’t hurt to let Neyir think he had the upper hand. Their relationship was all about power, and it amused Loki to allow Neyir to think that he had it.

*****

The third time Byleistr tried to eavesdrop on one of Thrym’s meetings with his men, he was caught by Helblindi. His brother watched him silently, torn between amused and irritated.

“What have you been up to, little brother?” he asked finally, and Byleistr hesitated. Getting Helblindi involved with whatever this was could potentially make things worse—he hated Aggar as well, and as heir to the throne, if he was caught in this plot the entire royal family would be implicated. Having Loki orchestrate whatever it was was bad enough, but at least his younger brother was discrete. Helblindi didn’t have a stealthy bone in his body.

Still…
“It’s Loki,” Byleistr told his brother in a low, concerned voice. “He’s up to something, and somehow he’s roped Thrym into it. Blindi, I’m worried. I think they may be in over their heads, here.” He gave Helblindi his best pained face, purposely leaving Aggar out of his explanation.

Helblindi looked alarmed. He considered the door to the meeting room for a moment before placing a protective hand on his brother’s shoulder. “I will take care of this,” he assured Byleistr. He moved to enter the room, but Byleistr stopped him.

“Wait,” he said, grabbed his brother’s arm. “Don’t go in there, not yet. I worry that if you confront Thrym about this now, he won’t tell you the truth. You know how convincing Loki can be, how he gets inside of people’s heads and persuades them that his ideas are worth risking their lives. Blindi, if Thrym lies to you, he could be convicted of treason,” Byleistr gave him a pleading look.

Helblindi frowned, and Byleistr could almost see him considering each course of action. The thought of Thrym lying to him angered him, but at the same time he did know how conniving his youngest brother could be. He sighed and dropped his hand from the door. “What were you thinking, then?” Byleistr told him.

*****

The hunt for the Basilisk was less than rewarding. When Luke vanished and left them on Alfheim, Thor had agreed to join the elven mages and warriors on their hunt for the beast. Faren had been barred from going by his father, and had watched sullenly as they had departed.

The mixture of steady rain, paranoid men, and concerned looks his friends shot him occasionally when they thought he wasn’t looking made for a miserable experience. He still hadn’t told them what had happened with Luke—all they knew was that he had charged after him the other night and that Luke hadn’t been back since. He wondered what they thought of him. He wondered what Luke thought of him.

He told himself that Luke had probably returned by now but had no way to find them. He had probably just wanted to go home to his family as he regained his strength from breaking the curse. But a darker part of Thor whispered that Luke hadn’t been at all into what he had done and he hadn’t noticed. Had he just imagined Luke’s response? He had been drinking elven wine that evening, but he hadn’t thought he had consumed that much. The more he thought about it the more it upset him.

Even the actual battle with the giant serpent didn’t shake him out of his mood, as the mages took care of much of the work. He got to aid them a bit with Mjolnir, but it was less than exciting. The warriors three and the elven soldiers proved useful only as decoys, though Sif did manage to blind the beast. She was bit in the process, however, and immediately needed to be seen to afterwards so that she did not perish from the venom. Out of the hundred men that had ridden out, only four had been killed in the fight. But for all that it was a resounding success, it didn’t feel like one.

His misery only compounded when they arrived back at the palace nearly a week later only to find that Luke had never returned.

*****

It was ten days after he had left Alfheim that Loki transported himself to Asgard and cautiously made his way down the rainbow bridge. He had stalled in returning, knowing that Thor might be a bit awkward about what had happened, and also knowing that if it should come up again he had to tell the Asgardian prince that he wasn’t interested. He couldn’t spend his heats with Thor without Thor—slow as he may be sometimes—figuring out that Loki was not, in fact, Asgardian or Vanir.
Heimdall gave him a searching look as he approached, but it wasn’t until Loki was right before him that he said in his deep, gravelly voice, “You remind me of someone.”

Loki kept his face carefully blank and curious. “Do I?” he asked smoothly, “Well, I suppose that’s not a surprise. Surely you have seen so many beings come and go that none are truly unique to you.”

“What is it you have come to ask, one who stalks the shadows of my Sight?”

Loki was relieved at the change in topic and ignored the reference to his abilities. “I came to inquire after Thor’s whereabouts, actually. I was forced to leave him on Alfheim due to illness, and I am uncertain how to rejoin him.”

Heimdall gazed at him silently for a while before responding. “I do not trust you,” he said at last. Loki cocked his head and lowered his lashes, “I am unsure why that is. Prince Thor trusts me,” he demurred.

“Which makes me trust you even less,” Heimdall’s eyes narrowed. “Still, the prince awaits your return and I will not bar you from him. This time. He has returned to Asgard to confer with his brother.”

“Did you know about that?” Loki asked with sly curiosity, referring to Balder.

“I know about most things,” the Watcher replied levelly.

“Except me, I suppose.”

“Except you.”

Loki smirked and left him, heading back towards the palace. He felt the man’s heavy gaze on his back as he winked out of existence on the bridge, only to reappear beside the training grounds. It was time to find Thor and figure out how much damage he had done.

*****

Fandral was in the middle of neatly dispatching Sif in the sparring ring (that low kick she had dealt him was cheating, and he had let her give him half of the bruises he was now sporting, really. So obviously it was clear to everyone that he was winning, despite not getting a solid hit in yet), when Luke appeared out of nowhere and he dropped his sword in shock.

Sif dealt him a solid blow to the ribs, winding him, before she lowered her defenses in concern. “Are you okay? What the Hel was that?” Clearly she had meant for him to parry her attack before he… well, disarmed himself.

Instead of answering (he was still regaining his breath), he pointed. When Sif saw Luke she scowled and threw down her sword before vaulting over the gate and rounding on him. “Where have you been?!” the female warrior snarled at the mage, “And don’t bullshit and tell me that you were resting, you’ve been gone for over a week!”

Luke looked embarrassed, but part of Fandral wondered if it was an act. “I initially went home to rest, but then some family issues came up and I decided to stay.” If it was an act, it was a convincing one. Sif lowered her guard, but only just slightly.

“You could have let us know,” she replied, the accusing tone in her voice only dampened a little bit. “Thor was worried sick about you. We were worried sick about you. Thor wouldn’t tell us what

By this point Hogun had noticed what was going on from the archery field and had made his way over, watching with dark eyes. Volstagg had gone home to visit his family after their two-week adventure and hadn’t yet returned to the palace.

Sif’s scowl turned uncertain. “When Thor went after you and that elven girl, we thought… well, we thought he might have said something.”

Yeah, sure. That was what they thought. Fandral gave her an amused look, but she pointedly ignored him.

“Oh, no,” Luke actually blushed, “I was more tired than I thought. I nearly passed out on the poor woman when we went into the hallway, and Thor came by just in time to help me back to my room. What did you think he was going to say?”

Fandral wasn’t sure if this was the whole truth or not, but he didn’t think someone would lie about passing out on a sexual conquest before the sex even started. “We weren’t sure, he just didn’t say anything about it afterwards,” Fandral ventured.

Luke shrugged, “Perhaps that was because there was nothing to say,” his eyes glinted in amusement, “Sometimes the most simple explanation is the right one.”

And sometimes it was too simple to be true. Fandral thought that something else must have happened, but if it had been serious than Luke probably wouldn’t have returned. More than likely Thor had just said something unwanted, or perhaps he had come onto Luke when Luke couldn’t… get it up. Fandral grinned in amusement. Come to think of it, maybe Thor had been the one that Luke had passed out on.

Sif looked as though she might press the subject further, but they were unexpectedly interrupted.

“Ah, Luke darling. I had been hoping you would drop by soon. My son will be delighted to see you.” Fandral turned to see the Queen approaching them, a small smile on her face. Was that alarm in Luke’s eyes? “As a matter of fact, there is something I would like to discuss with you as well. Do you mind if I borrow you for a moment?”

Yes, that was definitely alarm.

Chapter End Notes

(Just a reminder that Loki's relationship with Neyir is only there as a foil to his developing relationship with Thor, and for the sake of Jotunheim's relationship with Svartalfheim.)

Thank you for reading! And don't worry, there's more Loki/Thor to come... like I said, we're getting close now ;
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

"Thor, Loki found, was a poor student."

OR: Wherein Loki attempts to instruct Thor in politics and etiquette.

Chapter Notes

Well, where should I start? So last chapter was kind of a mess. If you read it after the explicit part was edited out, don't worry too much--I will find a way to work in the information that was lost later on. If you're curious, however, I answered a few questions in the comments (though there are quite a few comments to dig through!).

Overall I received a lot of support from all of you, so I'll be pushing on as though the response from last chapter didn't happen. After all, this story IS Loki/Thor and no matter what it may feel like, Neyir is only a minor character (I actually went through and pasted all of the parts he was in into another document. Collectively, it was three pages long. That's right. Three. This story is currently 175 pages.), and he is only there to provide a foil to Loki's relationship with Thor and to be an antagonist in the story.

Anyway, if you're here, you probably don't need to be told all of that, and I really appreciate each and every one of you! Thank you so much, and I hope you continue to enjoy the story!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Twenty-Five

“Of course,” Loki replied immediately—really, what else could he say—and warily offered the queen his arm. Frigga took it, her eyes crinkling up into a smile. He wondered if she enjoyed putting him into situations like this.

They walked some distance away before she said casually, “I’ve been checking in on your progress with Thor.”

It took Loki a moment to realize that she was referring to Thor’s political progress… or, rather, his lack thereof. “We have been a bit busy,” he defended, “It’s not as though I’ve purposely put it off.”

Frigga patted his hand, “Oh, don’t worry, I did notice how busy you’ve been. You have wasted no time with your own political agenda, have you?” Before Loki could respond, she continued, “But never mind that, dear, that’s not what we’re here to talk about. I merely wish to see you put as much effort in to aiding Thor as you have yourself. I take it that that week long absence means that your heat has passed, so that leaves you plenty of uninterrupted time to help my son.”

“I’m not exactly sure how receptive Thor is going to be to my offer of help,” Loki said wryly, “The
moment I even mentioned politics he went running in the other direction.”

Frigga gave him an amused look, “I take it you mean that day with Faren during the picnic,” she ignored the suspicious glance that Loki shot at her and continued, “I think it embarrassed him a bit, having Faren know more about his own country than he did… and in front of you, too.”

Loki raised a brow, “Then I’m not sure how I would be of any assistance.”

“Not many people can get through to my son as easily as you can. I think you’ll find you’re more adept at it than you believe, so I’m sure you’ll find a way. After all, having a solid, happy relationship with Asgard’s true heir is in your best interests, is it not?”

Loki couldn’t argue with that.

Loki was directed by several servants before he finally found Thor in—of all places—the library. He looked a bit ridiculous seated at one of the delicate desks by the window, his large muscled frame squeezed into one of the ornate chairs as he squinted at the book in his hand like it had personally offended him. Loki pressed a hand to his mouth to keep from laughing as he took a moment to enjoy the humorous tableau Thor made.

“Thor, I found another book you might want to—” Balder had appeared from the stacks with a volume in tow, but he stopped short when he saw Loki standing there.

Thor looked up and saw him at the same time.

With a cry, the golden prince jumped to his feet, banging ungracefully into the fragile desk that he had been seated at and sending it crashing unceremoniously onto the floor, spilling the inkwell everywhere. Somewhere in the library, Thor’s old tutor Fahim let out a little strangled cry. Loki, on the other hand, couldn’t help but let out a few surprised chuckles before he could swallow them down.

By the time he had gained control of his laughter, he was being enveloped in Thor’s arms as the larger prince squeezed him tightly. When he finally pulled back to look down at Loki, the Jotun smiled and greeted both of the princes. “Your Highness,” he bowed his head a bit formally at Balder before turning his eyes to meet Thor’s, “Oaf,” he acknowledged, his greeting to Thor decidedly less proper. Balder frowned, but Thor grinned widely.

“I have missed you,” he replied warmly before his gaze took on a slightly worried note, “Have you been well?”

“I’m doing much better now, thank you. It took some time to recover after breaking the curse, and then I ran into some family problems…” Loki waved a hand dismissively, “But that’s all over now, and I’m back.” He hoped that would be the end of it. He gave the book that Thor had dropped on the floor a curious look. “But what are you up to, exactly?”

Thor flushed and pulled back so that he could quickly cover up the book, but not before Loki caught a glimpse of the title. *A History of Governance on Vanaheim, Vol. I.* His eyes darted over to the title of the book that Balder was holding. *Rites and Rituals of Alfheim.*

So. It appeared that Loki wasn’t Frigga’s only recruit. “Decided to reclaim your title, have you?” He asked Thor casually, “What happened to vacationing for a month and not worrying about Asgard or its throne?” At least it made his job easier.
Thor’s frame jerked a little, and he gave Loki an injured look. “I have no intention to steal my brother’s title, Luke. He has been overwhelmed, and asked for me to help him. I can hardly say no to that, though admittedly I doubt that I have been of too much assistance.”

“You’re doing great,” Balder protested weakly. Loki raised a brow, amused. Even Thor didn’t look convinced.

“Perhaps I can be of some help, then,” the Jotun offered.

*****

Thor, Loki found, was a poor student. No, ‘poor’ didn’t quite do him justice—Thor was a terrible student, and the Jotun prince was constantly surprised at how Thor’s ignorance or forgetfulness surpassed his expectations. He wasn’t stupid, Loki knew, so his lack of political and cultural dexterity was confounding. The man could eagerly recite old battles blow by blow, describe in detail how weapons and defense systems had evolved. He understood each planet’s take on warfare and strategy. But their cultural history or policies? Well. After Thor had stammered through a mostly-incorrect explanation of the political system on Vanaheim where the only thing he got right was names of several of the officials, Loki was almost impressed. It must have been difficult to grow up as Asgard’s heir and still remain so…clueless.

“But Vanaheim is Asgard’s protectorate,” Loki’s voice sounded pained even to his own ears, “How can you not be familiar with everything about it? You were going to rule it one day!” He caught Fahim casting him a pitying look, as if to say see what I had to deal with?

“There’s just so much random decorum and ceremony,” Thor complained, trying to explain himself, “It’s all so silly—it’s not like half of this matters.”

Loki covered his hands with his face and wanted to scream. Norns, no wonder Frigga had been upset that he hadn’t started yet. This was going to be a long, tiresome, uphill battle.

“Let us start from the beginning, then,” he said wearily. He was partway through describing Vanaheim’s political structure and how it had evolved when Thor started forgetting things. Loki would have been angry had the other prince not looked so upset. Even when he was trying—and trying very, very hard—he still wasn’t retaining the information.

Loki considered this in silence for a moment before offering Thor his hand. “Come with me.” Thor took his hand without hesitation, and a moment later they were in a sunshine covered field on Vanaheim. Loki waved his hand and a blanket appeared with a strategy board atop it, complete with tiny, brightly colored pieces. Thor immediately reached for one, and it flickered out of existence the moment his fingers touched it. Loki made a disgruntled noise.

“They’re illusions, you idiot, do you think I just cart strategy pieces with me everywhere? Where do you think I keep everything?”

Thor gave him a confused look before asking, “Where do you keep your swords?”

Loki’s lips pursed. It was a fair question, but not one he could easily answer without explaining the space between realities, something he was certain Thor wouldn’t quite grasp. But while he was willing to keep the extended effort of linking the swords to him through the nether for the sake of practicality, he certainly wasn’t going to do so with random junk that might come in handy one day. “Never mind that, pay attention.”

He arranged the pieces in the semblance of a game. “Now, this is how we’re going to play…” Loki
explained the rules and they took turns playing, Thor giving him puzzled looks the entire time. Loki ignored them and moved the pieces as Thor directed. Finally, the Asgardian forgot that he was supposed to be learning something and got into the game.

“This game is rigged,” Thor complained a little over a quarter mark later. “The blue pieces are too powerful, there is no way for any of the other colors to make any ground.”

“You think so?” Loki asked, feigning surprise, “Well then, what do you suggest we do?”

Thor thought about it for some time. Finally, he suggested, “Why don’t we take away their ability to negate another color’s move? That would make it a bit fairer.” Loki nodded in agreement and they continued to play. Barely minutes later, Thor complained again. “Yellow doesn’t have enough pieces, there’s no point in playing them.”

“So what can we do about that?” Loki urged. Thor wanted to just add more yellow pieces, but Loki wouldn’t. “Those are the only pieces available,” he maintained.

Thor gave him a suspicious look, but conceded. Unfortunately, he was also at a loss for what to do. “What if we merged the yellow and red pieces?” Loki suggested finally. The two colors bled together until all the combined pieces turned orange. Thor nodded in satisfaction, and so they continued the game. It didn’t take long for Thor to change the rules again… and again… and again. Loki smiled every time, pleased.

Finally, they finished playing. Thor sat back and watched Loki with a question in his eyes as Loki dispelled the illusion and the game disappeared.

Then he looked at Thor and said, “Now. Let us try this again. Hundreds of years before Asgard claimed Vanaheim, the realm was largely split into five tribes. For a good while they warred amongst themselves before finally assuming a command order and establishing a council to help keep the peace. The Besit tribe was by far the most powerful as they were the most highly represented tribe on the council and therefore in practice had the ability to veto decisions made by the other tribes. What do you suppose the other tribes decided to do about it?”

Thor shrugged, “Kill them?” Loki’s eyes narrowed, and Thor quickly backtracked. “They…” his eyes flashed to where the game had sat and his expression became thoughtful, “They took away their ability to negate a tribes vote… by what, lessening the number of representatives on the council?”

Loki smiled. “Exactly. The Besits were displeased, of course, but at risk of causing another war where all of the other tribes banded against them, they rather ungracefully conceded. For a time things continued without any major problems, before it became clear that the Yunian clan’s numbers were dwindling quickly. They lived in the strategically secure area of a large mountain range, but always suffered difficulties with food and climate. As a result they became less fertile and more prone to disease. For the most part the other tribes had no desire to come to their aid, but the Renevive clan had long depended on the Yunian’s mountain range to divide them from the Geves tribe, who they quarreled the most with. The two leaders talked, and they…” he trailed off, looking expectantly at Thor.

Thor frowned. “They… decided to merge the tribes?”

Loki’s responding smile was exultant. “Right. The two heads of the tribes both had children, and so these children—now adults—were married as an example of the new bond between tribes. They renamed themselves after the mutual river that used to divide their territories, the Onghar. You see, politics really is just strategy under another name."
Loki continued telling the story of Vanaheim’s foundation, and Thor listened intently, getting each question Loki asked of him correct. It was more progress than they had made the entire time in the library. The information was basic and lacking in detail, but it was enough that Thor was retaining even this much. Small steps, Loki reminded himself.

“How do you know all of this?” Thor marveled after a while, his gaze admiring.

“Unlike you, I didn’t shirk my education,” Loki drawled. “I actually paid attention to what my tutors taught me of the other realms.”

Thor was quiet for a while after that, giving Loki a considering look. Finally, annoyed and feeling as though he must have missed something, the Jotun prince snapped, “What?”

Thor shrugged, “It’s just that from everything you’ve mentioned of your family so far, I assumed that you weren’t very well off. It’s surprising, then, to hear that you were so well educated.”

Loki cursed himself for not thinking of that, but recovered well enough, “My family valued education over all else. We had little, but we strove to better ourselves. Now, let us return to Asgard and talk more about manners and etiquette on Vanaheim.” He stood and offered a hand to Thor, who sighed and took it.

“Must we? I’m certain that Balder will be able to navigate that part well enough himself—“

“Do you want to risk embarrassing him at the summit in a few months? No matter how well he represents himself, you can do him great injury by failing to follow the expected decorum. Your behavior will reflect on both of you.”

Thor flushed and stared hard at the ground for a moment before looking back to Loki and asking, “Did Balder mention the summit? Is that what this is about?”

Loki paused, considering. “Yes,” he lied finally, “He’s nervous. It’s his first meeting with your other allied planets, and he doesn’t want anything to go wrong.”

Thor’s shoulders slumped. “He thinks I’ll embarrass him.”

“No,” Loki amended quickly, “He just wants you to do well because he knows how much your father’s approval means to you. And, as he said before, he wants you to be able to help him not to mess up. The more that both of you know, the better you will both look.”

That seemed to help lift Thor’s spirits a bit, though he smiled sheepishly at Loki and admitted, “I haven’t done so well in the past. I always seem to offend someone or forget something,” he shook his head dismally, “I’d much rather spend time with the common people, the nobility always seems to look for something to take offense to.”

Loki took Thor’s hand, “You’ll do fine. Remember that all of them are expected to learn the same etiquette that you are, so they are more aware when someone messes it up. But beneath that they’re still people, and you are good with people—think of Faren, he’s royalty and you like him just fine, right?”

Thor smiled, just a little, “Faren is an exception. If you saw the Ljosalfar nobility during a ceremony or meeting you’d understand. Suddenly everything becomes far more complicated than it should be. They may like me under normal circumstances, but during official meetings, it’s as though we have never shared stories over the evening meal and enjoyed each other’s company. Faren still acts as though he knows me, but the rest,” the Asgardian shrugged, looking forlorn again.
Loki hadn’t even liked the elven royalty much to begin with, truth be told. But then, Loki didn’t like many people. He squeezed Thor’s hand a bit and slid his other hand beneath Thor’s chin to lift his head. “This time it will be different,” Loki told him firmly. Then, before he considered what he was doing, he pressed a chaste kiss to Thor’s lips.

Thor’s eyes widened even as Loki realized what he had done and stepped back, alarmed. The Asgardian prince’s surprise turned into amusement with a touch of sadness. “You always do that, you know.”

“Do what?” Loki crossed his arms defensively.

“Every time you show me some kind of affection, you panic afterwards, like you have done something wrong,” Thor’s eyes scrutinized him, looking for a response.

Loki shrugged his shoulders dismissively and partially turned away, “I’m not sure what you’re talking about, I don’t panic.” His mind was whirring, quickly trying to come up with why he had done something so foolish and how he could still use it to his advantage. Clearly, there was a physical attraction between himself and Thor, and if he didn’t stop visiting Asgard this kind of thing would continue to happen. He didn’t want to give up going to Asgard just yet.

Thor would be angry when he found out that Loki was Jotun, but he would have been angry regardless. Perhaps… perhaps if Loki played this right, he could turn things to Jotunheim’s benefit. He could work his way into Thor’s affections and make sure Thor was so deeply indebted to him that by the time that the Asgardian prince found out his true identity, he wouldn’t care anymore. He had three months.

Loki looked up at Thor and met his tender blue eyes, calculating his odds.

Then he closed the gap between them and leaned up, slowly and purposefully recapturing Thor’s lips. Thor responded eagerly, one hand moving into Loki’s hair to hold him there. Their mouths moved gently against one another, long and slow but still sweet, only slightly parted. After a moment Loki drew back, trying to clear the sudden fog from his brain.

Thor leaned in again, but Loki stopped him. “No,” he said, thinking.

Thor frowned, exasperated, until Loki broke out a mischievous grin and purred, “Not yet, anyway. You can have another when you can successfully tell me the order in which you should greet the Vanir nobility.”

Thor gaped at him for a moment, and then he laughed. “You aren’t going to make this easy for me, are you?” he teased, looking down at the other man with fondness.

Loki just smiled. “If I were easy, then I wouldn’t be worth having.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! <3
Chapter Summary

Thor gives Loki a well-meaning gift

Chapter Notes

I liiiiiiiiiive!

First off, I just want to say that if you even bothered to come check this out, you have the patience of a saint. I apologize for my long hiatus. I knew that I was going to be gone for about a month or two in December, but I wasn't able to finish this chapter in time to let you all know in advance. And then life happened, and I ended up being gone for much longer than I intended. I'm sorry!

Also, guys, I got to meet Tom Hiddleston. And it was awesome.

Anyway, I don't really expect any of you to still be interested/remember what's going on/want to come back, but just in case anyone who read before is interested in this chapter I am including a little recap.

The Story So Far…

After Loki discovers that he has Asgardian blood, he sneaks into Asgard disguised in his Aesir skin and goes by the name of Luke to see what all of the fuss is about. There he meets Thor, Sif, and the Warriors Three, though they don’t get along right away. After a challenge is issued and they fight alongside each other, they win each other’s grudging respect and interest. Loki decides to continue visiting Asgard, since he apparently has nothing better to do and is finally finding the Asgardians mildly interesting.

Thor and Loki have a strong attraction to each other, though they of course both convolute everything. Loki makes multiples schemes and plans that he keeps changing so that he can keep visiting Asgard without feeling guilty about it (and also so that he doesn’t have to admit to himself that he’s interested in Thor in any way). Meanwhile, he starts researching the reason behind the war between Asgard and Jotunheim that ended when he was born. He also starts helping Thor in the realm of politics, giving advice that takes them to a lord’s home in Asgard where unknown to him a trap has been set.

They are attacked by what appears to be several magi, though they never truly see any of them. Thor is gravely injured, and Loki casts a spell that knocks out one of the mages. Commander Tyr, the foreboding and disagreeable commander of armies (who is also Balder’s uncle), finds the body of the attacker and brings it to Asgard’s dungeons where his second in command takes over and tortures the assailant for more information. Loki had been taken prisoner at the end of the battle and was under suspicion for being a part of the group due to his ability to hide himself from Heimdall’s gaze, but he is cleared when Tyr begrudgingly vouches for him. Frigga lets Loki out of his cell and reveals that she knows who Loki is. She also asks him to help her son.
Meanwhile, Thor has been removed from his position as heir to the throne in favor of Odin’s illegitimate child, Prince Balder. Balder has no desire for the position, but isn’t given much of an option.

Back on Jotunheim, Loki’s brother Byleistr has been suffering through an abusive relationship with his mate, Aggar, in hopes of keeping a tentative peace between his father and some of the southern tribes. Loki makes plans with Thrym, who loves Byleistr, to do something to stop him. Byleistr is suspicious and enlists Helblindi’s help.

I definitely don’t have everything in here, but that should be enough to go on for now.

From here on out, I will also be scheduling my next posts at the end of the current post, since I always work better with a deadline. See you on the other side!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Twenty-Six

Helblindi shifted uncomfortably within the confines of the covered sledge as Byleistr watched him nervously. He had recommended that they tour the lands of the surrounding lords, and knowing that Byleistr was at least semi aware of what Loki was up to, Helblindi had agreed. Besides, it was past time that they checked in with some of the nobility in their own homes, and their father was too busy to go.

Then they suddenly received word that there was some kind of incident up north where some wild Kaites—huge, white wolf-like beasts that stalked the tundra—had gotten desperate enough to attack a storage outpost since much of their typical prey had passed away due to Jotunheim’s increasingly cold temperatures. It was grim news, though grim news was growing more and more common as their planet was slowly becoming inhospitable.

Thrym had called in all of the soldiers from the closest part of the continent to the south of them to deal with the matter, since much of their army was already out dealing with various natural disasters. Helblindi had been about to ask if Byleistr thought they should return to the capital so that they might be able to go wherever their father and Thrym thought that they would be the most help, but before he could do so Byleistr gave the men orders to abruptly change direction.

Now they were heading south, and Helblindi thought he finally understood what was going on. The soldiers that had been called north to deal with the Kaites had been all of the men from Aggar’s province. That couldn’t be coincidental. Even Helblindi couldn’t argue that it made sense though, with their men up north needing support and Aggar being the closest of the Southern Houses. So if something tragically happened to their lord in their absence… well, it would just be unfortunate timing, and thus nothing to start a civil war over.

Helblindi was beginning to regret his choice to help Byleistr thwart whatever Loki was planning, since he now thought that he would have heartily supported whatever his youngest brother had in store for Aggar.

“You don’t think our presence will cause suspicion if anything… untoward were to happen to Lord Aggar?” He finally grumbled into the tense silence.

Byleistr’s lips tightened and at first Helblindi thought that he wasn’t going to answer. Then, finally, he said, “Then we’ll just have to make sure that nothing does happen, won’t we?”
Loki and Thor whiled away a week’s worth of afternoons sitting lazily on the grass in front of the palace while Thor tried (and occasionally succeeded) to learn Vanadheim’s court etiquette, and Loki provided increasingly heated rewards. The Jotun prince had tried to keep the smile off of his face after every exchange, but gave up somewhere around day three. His only consolation was that surely the dopey, sunshine-filled, love struck looks that Thor leveled at him were far more pathetic than his own. He just pointedly chose to ignore how much he enjoyed them. That day, Thor had just finished memorizing the right phrase to say over his food in thanks when Volstagg spotted them and dragged the others over. As they approached, Thor grabbed Loki to claim his kiss.

Each kiss had gotten longer and more intense as Thor pushed to see how much he could get away with and Loki allowed him to get away with more and more. Volstagg chuckled and Sif rolled her eyes as they joined them but made no comment. Fandral, however, couldn’t not comment.

“Nice. Are you two finally fu—“

His words ended in a gasp of pain as Hogun’s steel tipped boot seemed to accidently find his heel. Before he could say anything more, Sif addressed Thor, who reluctantly pulled away from Loki.

“The preparations are going well, then?”

Thor’s sunny smile dimmed slightly. “Well, I know a few pleasantries and I probably won’t mix up the Ljosalfar titles and Vanir ones, but other than that…” he shrugged helplessly. Loki silently agreed with him. Even with his help, the depth of knowledge that Thor was lacking in—and his frustratingly slow pace of learning—were making this task impossible. It wasn’t that Thor was stupid, only that he found learning little niceties and small details perplexing and needlessly complicated.

Sif’s smile looked a bit forced, “You’ll get there.” They all stood around awkwardly for a moment, before Loki realized that they hadn’t just come by to make small talk.

“What’s going on?” He asked impatiently.

“It’s not anything important, really,” Fandral hedged, “Just a side note, you know. We were on our way to a hunt and we thought we’d stop by and let Thor know that, well, there are some visitors in town. So in order to stay focused, you two should probably stay out here. For a day or five.”

Loki glanced over at Thor to see if this was making any more sense to him, but Thor looked just as lost. “Visitors? I’m certain my father and brother will handle them. Why would they be a cause for concern?”

Sif shifted her weight, “Not concern exactly, just… irritation,” She seemed to think for a moment more before just shrugging and saying, “You know the nobility has been trickling in for a while now to bid their congratulations to Balder and to feel out the mood of the court after the announcement. Well, she has finally shown up. I just thought you’d like forewarning.”

Loki glanced over at Thor to see if this was making any more sense to him, but Thor looked grim with sudden understanding. “Visitors? I’m certain my father and brother will handle them. Why would they be a cause for concern?”

Sif opened her mouth to reply, and then stopped, giving him a considering look. “Did she say anything to any of you?”

“Just the usual backhanded compliments and hidden insults. We just wanted to let you know before we left. We won’t be back until tomorrow.”

Loki cleared his throat, “Who is this, exactly?”

Sif opened her mouth to reply, and then stopped, giving him a considering look. “You know, it’s funny. I can’t decide if you two are going to get along, or if you’re going to destroy each other.” She
smiled thinly, “Her name is Lady Amora, and she’s a nasty piece of work. She has a reputation for twisting people to her every whim, and she usually gets away with it. Just steer clear of her.”

They said their farewells, and after they had gone Loki studied Thor, who was absently tearing up blades of grass. “I’m going to assume you have a history,” he said dryly.

Thor blinked and seemed to remember where they were. “Ah, well, yes. But it’s not of any importance.” He waved his hand dismissively and Loki sighed but decided not to press him further… at least for the moment.

He attempted to continue the lesson, but Thor stumbled over the information so much that Loki realized he was going to remember none of it. “Why don’t we take a break for a while and come back to it later,” he finally said, resigned. There was no way Thor was going to be ready in time.

Thor, however, brightened immediately. “Then this will be the perfect time!” He grabbed a very confused Loki and hoisted him to his feet.

“Time for what?” His suspicious nature got the best of him. Thor didn’t seem to notice his hesitance, though, as he began half-dragging Loki back towards the castle. “Aren’t we supposed to be avoiding the palace for a while?”

“We’re not going in, we’re going around back. Besides,” Thor shrugged, “Amora probably won’t leave until she has gotten whatever she came for, so if it does have something to do with me I’ll see her at some point regardless of how much I try not to. I don’t think it will be an issue, though. I think she might be Balder’s problem, now.” He looked half guilty, half relieved at this admission.

At first Loki thought that they were going to the stables, but only became more confused as they passed by them and paused by the pastures. He raised a brow at Thor, who for some reason suddenly appeared nervous.

“I had been thinking, you know, of a way to thank you for everything you’ve done. You have been helping me without promise of payment or reward, only out of friendship.” Loki carefully kept his face straight. This wasn’t strictly true—he had his own agenda, of course. But it wasn’t as though he could tell Thor that. Instead, he let the other prince continue, “For a while I couldn’t think of anything you would want. I considered books, for I know you love them, but I had no idea where to begin or what you would like. Besides, I thought that a paltry gift.”

Here Loki struggled not to roll his eyes. Thor would think books a poor present. He doubted the man before him understood the value of even the least of the books in his library.

“But then I remembered how much you loved Gullfaxi, and I thought that if you wanted to continue learning to ride, you should have a proper mount.” Loki watched Thor apprehensively. His “love” of Gullfaxi was a bit of a stretch. He didn’t find the beast unpleasant, per se, and besides the scent he supposed it was a bit charming, but he wasn’t sure if he liked where Thor was going with this.

“So… you are loaning me a horse while I learn to ride?”

Thor beamed, “Better! There’s a trader who comes to the capital once a year from Vanaheim who breeds the most beautiful horses. They are powerful and well trained, and he only even sells them to the most important and influential people on Asgard and Vanaheim. He is the man I purchased Gullfaxi from after I helped her dam give birth to her. He owes me a bit of a favor, and after I told him all about you he agreed to sell you one!” Thor looked excited, so Loki managed a weak smile. “I will cover the cost, of course,” the Asgardian prince quickly added, looking at him expectantly.
“I have nowhere to keep such a creature,” Loki deflected, but Thor just grinned.

“Not to worry, I have emptied the stall next to Gullfaxi. You may keep your horse there as long as you wish to,” He was still watching Loki hopefully, so the Jotun plastered a small but pleased smile onto his face. It was apparently convincing, because Thor eagerly pushed him forwards towards the gates to one of the pastures. “All of the beasts in this paddock are Barlan’s. You may choose whichever you wish.”

Loki let himself cautiously inside. All around him the large, gorgeous creatures grazed placidly on the grass. Two of the nearer ones perked up and shuffled over to investigate him, nuzzling his chest, back, and hair as though searching for hidden treats. Loki had a sneaking suspicion that certain people did, in fact, sneak treats to them. He glanced back at Thor, who was watching him with a silly grin on his face. Loki’s lips twitched slightly.

He turned back and, with more confidence, moved forward across the field. He rigidly allowed several more of the creatures investigate him as he slowly became more comfortable in their presence. He was eying a lovely soft white and grey creature when suddenly a sharp movement at the corner of his view drew his gaze.

That was the one. He knew it instantly, felt the connection in the way that only two magical beings can sense each other. The beast was enormous and coal black, its tail twitching to express its agitation. It shook its head several times, and it was then that Loki noticed that, unlike its companions, it was fettered to the fence.

“Thor,” he called out, and immediately the Asgardian prince joined him. “Did you choose one?” He asked, hopeful.

“Why is that horse tied to the fence?” Loki asked. He could feel the latent rage in the creature, its intelligence lending it an awareness of being more limited than its brethren, no matter how long the tether was.

Thor frowned. “Oh, don’t worry about that one. He’s just… a bit spirited. They were working on breeding a more intelligent war horse but whatever magic they were using backfired and, well, he’s the result. Just don’t go anywhere near him and you’ll be fine.”

Loki scowled and marched purposefully across the grass. The stallion shook its head again and danced from foot to foot, its dark eyes flashing a warning. Loki slowed and reached out to the creature with his magic, projecting his intention to cut the tether. The creature stilled and watched him with suspicious eyes. He made his way forward again, ignoring Thor’s shouts.

When he drew out his knife the stallion’s muscles tensed, but they relaxed as Loki quickly sliced through the thick rope that held him back. When he was free, the stallion considered him for a moment, moving forward as though to investigate him more carefully. Loki watched him steadily, unconsciously holding his breath. Then a mischievous gleam sparked in the creature’s eyes as it spun around faster than Loki could register and barreled straight at Thor. The horse moved more quickly than Loki had ever seen something of his size move, and crossed the paddock almost before Thor could react.

Thor threw himself out of the horse’s path just in time, banging his knee on the water trough, which sent him headlong into the feeding trough. He stumbled to his feet, sputtering and trying to wipe the muck from his eyes so that he could see what was going on. He heard the hooves approaching before he regained his sight, and slipped in a pile of horse dung as he tried to make his second escape.
Loki laughed harder than he could remember laughing in a long time. Tears ran down his face as he watched the regal prince of Asgard stumble gracelessly out of the pasture, covered in filth and probably a few bruises, but otherwise unharmed. Oh, he was not going to let Thor live this down. He couldn’t wait to tell Fandral.

The midnight stallion was prancing about the pasture now, king of the field. His tail was held up like a silken victory flag, his head held upright in an arrogant arc, and Loki could feel the fierce joy and wicked amusement radiating from him.

“Oh, I think I’ve chosen one!” Loki crossed the pasture, smiling with devious delight.

“Absolutely not!” Thor yelled back. He was still wiping his face, trying unsuccessfully to glare at the stallion that was strutting about the field mockingly.

“You said I could have whichever one I wished,” Luke reminded him as he approached the gate and leaned against it.

Thor looked from him to the stallion that, to his surprise, had approached his friend docilely and was watching Thor with a certain satisfaction over his shoulder. Luke reached up almost absent-mindedly to stroke the beast’s muzzle. Thor wondered where his friend’s nervous caution had disappeared to. Earlier in the pasture he had been tense, and that had been around far more well-behaved beasts than this nightmare.

He looked up to see two sets of eyes watching him. He swore both sets were laughing.

“What about the pretty grey one?” It was a last ditch effort. Luke just stared levelly at him, unwilling to back down. Thor sighed in defeat and waved his hand. “Oh, fine. But you’re feeding him.”

Luke grinned. “Of course. After you teach me. And give me riding lessons, as previously agreed. And I’m certain that you also promised that I could lodge him here…?”

Thor glowered at his friend. “Yes,” he said from behind gritted teeth, “I did.” He shook bits of mushy wheat and oats from his hair.

His only consolation was that Luke’s expression was radiant. That, after all, was what he had been hoping for. As his friend stroked the beast’s muzzle they seemed to have a silent understanding that Thor had no part of. “Does he have a name?” Luke asked at last.

“Svadilfari. His name means unlucky traveler,” Thor added under his breath, “Probably named for the poor bastard who had to help bring him here.”


He swore the damn horse preened.

Thor rubbed at a bruise on his thigh as he exited the stables. He had spent the past few hours teaching Luke how to put the saddle and bridle onto his new horse, as well as how to brush him and care for his hooves. Svadilfari had been as gentle and compliant as a newborn kitten when Luke handled him, but had bitten, kicked, and stepped on Thor at every given opportunity. One of the stable lads had to be sent to the infirmary. Luke wouldn’t hear a single word against the demon horse, though.
He was beginning to suspect that Luke was taking a great deal of pleasure from all of the difficulty.

Thor slumped tiredly against a post and closed his eyes. A small smile crept across his face as he remembered the unrestrained peals of laughter that had escaped Luke earlier. As distracted as he had been at the time, Thor had carefully filed that memory away for later. He sometimes got the impression that Luke didn’t laugh very often. At least, not quite like that.

All of the bruises (both the physical ones and the ones to his ego) were worth the memory of Luke rubbing the curry comb over Svadilfari’s flank in smooth circular motions, a peaceful glow around them. It didn’t even matter that he had had to watch from well away from the stall. He also noticed that Luke hadn’t complained of the smell even once.

He leaned his head back, resting it momentarily against the post as he recalled every tiny emotion that had flitted over Luke’s face in the past few hours, treasuring each one.

“Thor, darling, there you are.”

Thor’s head snapped up, his peaceful demeanor shattered in an instant. Amora was sauntering towards him, her smile predatory.

*****

Loki was so lost in his own thoughts as he ran the brush over Svadilfari’s coat that at first he didn’t notice the freezing sensation against his skin. When it finally registered with his brain, he dropped the brush in shock, snatching the smooth stone that was radiating cold out of his pocket.

He stared blankly at the pebble in his hand, the established magical signal from Thrym slowly turning his hand blue. How could it be time already? Loki dropped the stone and crushed it beneath his boot. Svadilfari watched him curiously as he stooped to reclaim the brush and dropped it into the bucket of grooming supplies, and then stood and ran a hand over the freshly brushed hair. Who knew that Thor’s gift would end up being so lovely?

He wished he had more time to spend here, but there was business to attend to first.

He had to get Thor to Jotunheim, and quickly.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! <3

Some notes: Horses typically eat dry food, at least in my experience. But these are Asgardian horses, and for -reasons- I decided to make their food damp. We'll just say it's some kind of Asgardian super-food for the Asgardian super-horses. ;)

I also feel like I have to reassure everyone that though Svadilfari is a nod to the Norse Mythology, Loki will not in fact be sleeping with him. Promise.

The next post will be on Monday, June 27th (at the latest)
Chapter Twenty-Seven

Thor straightened and took an involuntary step back in the direction of the stables. This was not something he wanted to deal with right now. “Amora,” he greeted hesitantly, not bothering to pretend to sound pleased to see her. “What brings you here?”

“Does there have to be a reason?” She purred, gliding over to where he was standing and invading his personal space. Her nose wrinkled just slightly as she noticed a clump of now-dried horse feed stuck in his hair. He brushed it away. “I just came to see you, darling. To see how you were dealing with… everything.”

She meant how he had reacted to losing the crown. He scowled. “I think,” Thor said in a low voice, “That my brother will be an excellent king.”

Amora pouted, apparently not happy that he wasn’t reacting as she’d hoped. “Well, let me know if your opinion changes, and I’m sure we could—“

“It’s not going to change. Now, if you’ll excuse me—“ He made to return to the shade of the stables, but Amora stepped in his way.

“I’ve heard rumors,” she said in a soft, sad voice that he was certain was entirely artificial, “That poor Balder hasn’t been adjusting quite as well as you. They say that he’s miserable. I could believe it, he always seemed so happy with his job and his life before now. He was remarkably… subdued when I spoke with him earlier. Haven’t you noticed anything?”

Thor knew she was playing him. He wasn’t sure what her endgame was, but he knew what Amora was like. Still, Balder had been quieter lately. And he certainly seemed stressed about the upcoming conference. In fact, he realized that Balder hadn’t seemed happy about the new arrangement at all, now that he was thinking about it. He had just been so distracted by his feelings on the matter that he hadn’t even thought to ask Balder how he was dealing with everything.
Thor felt a pang of guilt. He hadn’t been a very good brother. He would be better, he promised himself.

Amora ducked her head ever so slightly to hide a thin smile.

*****

Her pleased expression didn’t go as unnoticed as she’d hoped. Loki had stepped out of the stables only to quietly slip back into the shadows when he had noticed the gorgeous blonde woman speaking with Thor. He took note of how she leaned into him, the low cut of her dress, the way she glanced up at him through her eyelashes. She wanted something, or wanted him. Or both.

This, he decided immediately, was probably Amora. He smiled at the discomfited way that Thor cringed back from her. Well, if they’d had a history, it certainly wasn’t as pleasant as he’d feared. He had just been worried that she’d be a distraction, of course, not for any other reason. He stepped deeper into the shadows as he listened carefully to their conversation.

“Now that you mention it, I suppose he has been a bit down,” Thor admitted reluctantly, “But I’m certain that it will pass when he gets used to everything.”

“Maybe,” Amora replied, her tone suggesting that she seriously doubted it. “We’ll just have to wait and see.” She stroked her fingers down Thor’s chest, “Now, what have you been up to?”

It was time to intervene.

Loki stepped out of the shadows of the stables like he was exiting for the first time, eyeing Amora as though he was surprised to see her there. He asked, “Thor, who’s your friend?” at the same time that Thor said, “Luke!” in obvious relief.

Amora eyed him critically as he made his way over to Thor, and if the hand he placed on Thor’s arm was possessive, well, it was all for the look of things. He smiled pleasantly at her as Thor responded immediately, pulling him close. “This is Amora,” he said, looking only at Loki. His eyes were both apologetic and pleading.

“Ah,” Loki said thoughtfully, as though just making the connection, “I’ve heard a lot about you.”

Amora’s smile had an edge to it, “Oh, I’m certain you have. Thor and I are quite… close.” Loki wanted to laugh at her attempt to make him feel inferior. The way Thor was looking at him now, he truly doubted that statement. She continued, “Unfortunately, I don’t think I’ve ever heard anything about you.”

“This is Luke,” Thor said before Loki could answer, “He’s my… we are…” He floundered, unsure how to label their relationship.

“We’re lovers,” Loki lied smoothly, mostly for Amora’s reaction. He gazed up at Thor while watching her in his peripheral vision. She looked skeptical, but Thor beamed like the sun itself. “We’ve been together for quite some time now.”

Far from being intimidated, Amora smiled, “That’s right, I do remember your name, now that you mention it. I heard you were thrown in prison for endangering Thor’s life.” She blinked innocently at him, “I do hope it was a mistake.”

“It was,” Thor said firmly.

“Now, if you don’t mind, we have some business to attend to.” Loki took Thor by the hand and led
him away, sensing Amora watching them as they went. When they were almost out of her view, Loki pulled Thor down for a kiss.

His lips were warm and soft from the sun, and he responded enthusiastically, sliding his fingers through soft black hair to cradle Loki’s head and hold him close. His other arm wrapped about Loki’s slender waist and pulled him flush against his body. Loki forgot about the other people around them, forgot about Amora’s calculating eyes, even forgot about Jotunheim, and just kissed him back in the warm summer sunshine.

When they parted green eyes gazed into blue for a moment before Loki blinked and stepped back, regaining his cool composure and compulsively brushing the wrinkles from his tunic. “You didn’t earn that one,” he said, slightly rebuking despite the fact that he had been the one to initiate it.

Far from taken aback, however, Thor just grinned. He knew Loki well enough now to realize that the fussier he was afterwards, the more genuinely he had been into it.

“What now?” He asked softly as they continued to walk. He winced, “I don’t think I can go back to studying anything yet.”

“No,” Loki said abruptly, “Of course not. You need a little bit of a break, and I have just the thing,” he hesitated for a moment, but then reached back and pulled something out of a back pocket. It was a thin envelope with a finely detailed seal stamped onto the back.

Thor frowned at it, fingering the impression in the wax. “This… is familiar. What—?”

Loki gritted his teeth just a little bit. Honestly, if he didn’t like Thor so much, he would really start to hate him. “It’s Jotunheim’s royal seal,” he tried not to sound annoyed, but he didn’t think he succeeded because Thor gave him a sheepish, apologetic look.

“Oh. Jotunheim?” He slid a finger beneath the seal, breaking it. “What are you doing with a letter from Jotunheim?” His eyes quickly skimmed the paper inside, his gaze becoming contemplative.

“I got it from a friend. It’s an open invitation for all warriors to help get rid of some of the wilder beasts. W—they have been having some difficulties with the wildlife lately, and I thought, well, that sounded like something you would be interested in.” Loki watched Thor’s reaction anxiously. The letter was entirely his own work, of course, but it was important that Thor thought otherwise.

Thor folded the parchment and smoothed a finger over it thoughtfully. “That sounds promising,” he said slowly, as though trying to word whatever he was saying carefully, “But I am not exactly in Jotunheim’s good graces. You are certain it would not be taken ill?”

“Of course not,” Loki reassured him, voice like silk, “It is an open invitation after all. They did specify certain precautions, as I’m sure you noticed. No large groups, no magical weapons—so Mjolnir will have to stay behind. But other than that there is nothing explicitly against you or any other Asgardians. And with my magic we can be there and gone in a few hours, so it’s unlikely we’ll even be seen by anyone. You can relieve some steam and even help Jotunheim in the process, and no one will be the wiser.” That wasn’t exactly true, of course. Loki had arranged everything so that they would be seen—by one person in particular.

Thor looked amused. “I’m not sure that helping Jotunheim is a bonus. As far as I’m concerned, they can all get trampled by their wild animals—“ Loki’s look darkened considerably, and he quickly added, “But it does sound enjoyable. When do we leave?”

“Now,” Loki said, and if his voice was just a bit sharper than normal then Thor deserved it. “Go grab
your sword and get rid of Mjolnir. The sooner you relax the sooner we can get back to reviewing etiquette.”

*****

When Helblindi and Byleistr reached Aggar’s manor, they were greeted by a flustered attendant. The Lord of the Manor was out, he explained, distressed. They had not been expected.

Byleistr glanced over to Helblindi, worried, but Helblindi looked calm. “We will wait here for his return,” he informed the man.

The younger prince frowned. “Are you sure we should stay here?” he said in an undertone as the attendant led them to the great room to wait, “We should go out and look for him now. This is probably exactly what Loki had planned!”

Helblindi just shrugged, looking tired. “Honestly, I’m not all that certain I care if Loki’s plan succeeds. We’re here, under supervision. Father is still up north. All of our men are battling the Kaites. If something happens to Aggar—and I hope that it does—then no one can blame us. Of course, it would have been better if we hadn’t come at all, but I knew I couldn’t stop you.”

Byleistr dug his nails into his palm. “And what of Loki?” he demanded. “What if something happens to him? What if he gets caught?”

Helblindi gave Byleistr a calm, level look. “He has gone to all of this trouble to make sure that no one was implicated. Do you think he forgot about himself? You give our brother little credit.”

Helblindi looked tired. “Look, Byleistr, I’m not a schemer. I don’t know what Loki is up to or how he is doing it, but I know this. If we go out there now, it will look bad. We are too late. So we stay here, or we ruin everything.”

Byleistr fidgeted, but said nothing. His brother had a point. As they sat he watched Helblindi a little bit sadly, regretting dragging him into this. He and Loki always seemed to be drawing the eldest prince down into their plots, and Helblindi went along with it every time despite knowing that they were up to something because he loved them and didn’t want to disappoint them. He watched his brother stare moodily out of the ice window panes, probably wishing that he was with his men, helping to defend the village up in the North.

Byleistr promised himself that he, at least, wouldn’t get Helblindi mixed up in anything again.

He hoped he’d be able to keep that promise.

*****

Thor sucked in a breath, nearly freezing his lungs. He had forgotten how thrice-damned cold Jotunheim was. Even with the thick, fur-lined armor and his warmest woolen red cape, the chill went right down to his bones and made it ache even to move.

A slender white hand touched his, and immediately the ache disappeared. It wasn’t warm, per se, but it was as though Luke had sucked up all of the sharp, chillness to the air. He stared at his friend in astonishment, which made him roll his eyes.

“Magic, Thor. Honestly, one day you’ll stop being so surprised.”

His lovely green eyes flickered over the snowy landscape and his breathing was uneven. Thor frowned. Was he nervous? What for? It wasn’t as though this was the most dangerous thing that they had done. Although admittedly, they usually had the rest of the group with them. Did he not think
that Thor could protect him?

Thor opened his mouth to say something, and then shut it quickly, realizing that he was being ridiculous. Luke didn’t exactly need protecting. The nervous energy that Thor had thought he had seen had probably just been the product of his own imagination. Perhaps he was projecting.

“So, do you know where we’re going?” Thor asked, curious.

“Of course,” Luke replied, striding forward. He moved through the snow as though he’d been born to it while Thor struggled behind him. “There’s a frozen pine forest not far from here where many of the larger beasts reside. We should start there.”

*****

It was also, Loki thought to himself, where Aggar should hopefully be. He and his men had been scheduled to go on a hunt this afternoon, but after Thrym called most of them away to help in the north it was possible that he had called it off. Loki didn’t think he would have, though. At least, he hoped he hadn’t. It would be difficult to arrange something like this a second time.

Once they got close, Loki cast a charm around himself that would make him inconsequential to anyone who looked at him. Their eyes would slide right off of him—hopefully dismissing him as a random Asgardian traveling with the prince—and so they would have time to identify him. It was unlikely that he would be recognizable at first glance, since his coloring was so dramatically different. Still, it was an important precaution, but one that Loki hoped he had cast needlessly. It wasn’t in his plan to be there when Thor ran into Aggar. He would watch from afar, perhaps, to make sure that nothing happened to the other prince, but he did not want to risk fighting beside him.

He was sweating slightly by the time they reached the forest. His magical senses were stretched out as far as he could cast them as he searched for signs of Aggar, he was helping keep the cold away from Thor’s extremities and lungs, he kept the dispelling charm on himself, and he had to constantly battle with his own body’s urge to revert to his Jotun form to combat the cold. It was nothing he couldn’t handle, but he had to keep his focus and make sure not to drop any of the important spell threads.

When he finally felt Aggar’s presence, accompanied by two other unknown Jotuns, he stopped short. Thor ran into him and had to grab him before he fell over. “Sorry,” Thor grinned, then looked curiously at the expression on Loki’s face. “What is it?”

Loki cleared his throat, nervous now that they were here. He had seen Thor fight, and knew that his abilities were greater by far than Aggar’s. But Aggar had the advantage here on Jotunheim, as well as the numbers. With Loki helping from afar, though, Thor should be fine. “There is something over that way,” Loki he lied as he pointed North to a stretch of darkened trees, “And something over there,” he pointed East, the direction that Aggar was steadily approaching them from, still out of sight.

Thor frowned, “We don’t want them to flank us.”

Loki ‘hmm’ed thoughtfully, as though he was only just thinking of this. “You take the East, and I’ll check up North,” he said at last, “Whatever is up there is alone, so I’ll check it out and circle back around to help you. There are several creatures in the direction I’m sending you; do you think you can handle it?”

Thor laughed heartily, “I can handle anything,” he winked at Loki, whose smile was forced.
“Good. I’ll meet you there, then.” He disappeared off into the trees, wondering if this hadn’t been a mistake after all.

*****

Thor stalked through the snowy trees, heart pounding in excitement. He hadn't gone out hunting since his return from Alfheim, and he had begun feeling cooped up and hemmed in with all of the studying and paperwork. This had been an excellent idea. It was just what he needed.

Soon he heard the unmistakable sound of footfalls. He cocked his head, listening carefully, and then frowned. The footsteps didn't sound animal, exactly, but he couldn't be sure. It was all this damned snow, he thought with irritation. He quietly unsheathed his sword and crept forward. Ahead, the line of trees broke into a small clearing, and Thor ducked beneath the tree branches and stepped out into it, thinking this was the perfect spot to confront the creatures. It would be easier for him to move and swing his sword without all of the trees clustered around him.

Just that moment, three armed Jotun warrior stepped into the clearing as well. It seemed as though they had had the same idea that he and Luke did. They stared at each other for a moment, both parties surprised to see the other one. Thor cleared his throat awkwardly, prepared to explain that he was there by invitation to help with their wildlife problem, when the lead Jotun let out a guttural sound and charged at him, weapons bared.

Thor narrowed his eyes and braced himself for the attack. He would not be the aggressor, but he wouldn't just stand there and let the insolent Jotun cut him down. He smiled thinly as the bloodlust started to rush in his veins. Yes, this was exactly what he'd needed.

*****

Byleistr paced the room and chewed on his lip, his stomach a jangle of nerves. He couldn't shake the feeling that something was going on. Well, of course something was going on, he supposed. That was the point. But he wished that he knew what Loki was up to.

Suddenly an idea occurred to him. "Helblindi," he said brightly, and his brother looked up from where he had been idly sharpening his sword. "We might be stuck here, but we can at least know what's going on," he continued, grabbing the basin by the door and filling it with water from the pitcher that had been left for them. He murmured a few words over it, and it frosted over. Byleistr wasn't anywhere near as powerful as Loki, but over the years he had accrued a small amount of useful charms from him. One of them used the bond that a Jotun had with his mate to summon a brief image of where he was and what he was doing.

Helblindi hefted the huge great sword over his shoulder and joined Byleistr by the basin. "It will be short, just a brief glimpse, but I can check on Aggar," he was saying as his elder brother peered over his shoulder. The frozen surface in the basin shimmered for a moment, and then an image formed on the ice. Aggar was charging across a field of snow, his face twisted with fury as he thrust his spear forwards.

His opponent's image flashed across the ice and Byleistr paled, realizing too late that this had been a mistake. For there, bold and arrogant as he attacked a Jotun lord within his own lands, was...

"Thor," Helblindi snarled.

If there was one person in all of the realms Helblindi hated more than Aggar, it was the prince of Asgard.
I wasn't entirely happy with this chapter, so I might need to go back and edit it. There shouldn't be any major plot changes, though. As always, thank you for reading!! You guys are the best readers I could ask for X) Thank you for all of the awesome reviews, and I hope you continue to enjoy everything!

The next update should be up by this Friday (July 1st). And it starts with a little flashback! X) Finally I'm going to start wrapping up this first half and giving some answers to some of the earlier questions.

Until then!
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

A series of flashbacks; Thor faces off with Aggar

Chapter Notes

Whew, so I'm a little bit late with this one, but it's much longer than normal. I couldn't find a good place to end it within the normal chapter length, and I had to finish the story arc. So it's a little later, but a little longer ;)

I hope you enjoy it. I'm exhausted and need to proofread it, but I'll polish it up tomorrow.

For those curious and in case it wasn't clear, here's some info on their present ages: Asgardians/Jotnar live for about 5,000 years according to the MCU. They reach their majority (adulthood) at around 500 in this fanfiction, and don't really age beyond that until they are over 4,000.

Current Ages:
Loki: 631
Thor: 983
Byleistr: 1,006
Helblindi: 1,307

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Twenty-Eight

-981 Years Ago-

Helblindi slunk away from the adults to go sit in the garden where it was more peaceful. He used to enjoy visiting Asgard, besides the heat, but it was winter at the moment so the heat was bearable. What wasn’t bearable was listening to one more argument that the adults thought that he couldn’t hear. His father and the Asgardian All-Father, Odin, seemed to disagree about everything these days.

Helblindi went to investigate some bright purple flowers that were growing in the shade, fascinated at the vibrant colors. He liked flowers—Jotunheim didn’t have anything like them, and his dam had been especially fond of them. After his dam’s death, he liked to pick some to take back to Jotunheim, because he knew it would have made him smile.

As the young Jotun pulled at a few particularly richly colored blooms, he heard footsteps on the garden path. He froze, feeling a bit guilty for pulling up the flowers, and looked around to see the Asgardian Queen walking down the path. She had always seemed a bit sad to him, but at the moment she was smiling down at the screaming bundle of cloth she was holding.
Frigga's smile widened as she saw him, and he peered cautiously at the bundle in her arms. It was a baby. “Why is he so noisy?” Helblindi asked after a moment, confused. Jotun babes were quiet and docile, only making soft, sad cooing sounds when they were hungry or dirty or tired. This baby was screaming at the top of its lungs, like it was in pain or serious danger. Helblindi bit his lip as he peeled the blanket away a little bit, afraid he was about to see that the tiny baby was injured. Frigga didn’t look especially worried. He wondered if she was a good dam. Shouldn’t she be concerned?

The small, wailing terror appeared unharmed. It was peach-colored with a tiny tuft of golden hair, and it wiggled and flailed its fists about, strong for its age. Helblindi smiled, just a little bit. It was actually kind of funny, really. It was like he was a tiny warrior, trying to intimidate his enemy by his loud, crazy noises. Helblindi almost laughed, but he didn’t want Queen Frigga to think he was being rude and laughing at her child. “What’s his name?” he asked.

“Thor,” Frigga replied, her eyes warm as she watched her child. “He’s been a bit fussy for the past few days. It’s normal for Asgardian babies to cry a lot, even when nothing is wrong. Would you like to hold him?”

Helblindi backed up a step. Even though he was only 326 years old and still a child himself—although just starting to verge on puberty—he was still much, much larger than the tiny baby. “I shouldn’t,” Helblindi replied hesitantly. He held Byleistr whenever he could, of course, but his baby brother seemed so much less... breakable. “I might hurt him.”

Frigga laughed, her eyes warm. “You won’t hurt him. He’s much stronger than he looks. Here,” She gently passed the baby to him, showing him how to cradle the head. Helblindi held him carefully, as though handling a dainty ice figurine.

Thor’s wailing stopped almost immediately. Helblindi blinked, looking up to Frigga with a shy smile on his face. “I think he likes me!”

Frigga’s smile widened. “I think he does! I’m sure you two will be great friends.”

Helblindi carefully sat down between the purple flowers, still holding tiny baby Thor. His little eyes moved a little bit behind their eyelids, before they slowly slid open.

Helblindi stared in awe as eyes the same color as the clear Asgardian sky above them gazed upwards, still slightly unfocused. There was no doubt that Asgardian babies were ugly little things, the Jotun prince thought, with their little pink, wrinkly bodies and lack of markings. But this one’s eyes alone made him beautiful. He rocked the child a bit, and grinned as Thor reached up towards him.

When Frigga asked him to watch the child for a moment while she went to check on her husband, Helblindi happily agreed.

*****

-Present Day-

Byleistr ran after Helblindi as he stormed out of the room, heading towards the doors that led outside. “Helblindi, no!” he grabbed his arm, but Helblindi—who was large and muscled, even for a Jotun—shook him off easily. “Helblindi, we can’t go out there, we don’t want to cause any trouble—”

“Trouble?” Helblindi half-growled, eyes like fire, “You think we are the ones causing trouble? That Asgardian bastard shows up unannounced and uninvited on Jotunheim and attacks one of our Lords, how exactly are we the problem?” his voice seemed to get louder and angrier with every syllable.
“You didn’t seem so worried about Aggar a moment ago,” Byleistr said under his breath as he kept pace with his brother. They were outside now, bursting out of the doors and startling the guards as they quickly moved down the steps. “We don’t even know what Loki’s plan is,” Byleistr tried again, “And we only have a general idea of where they are. By the time we get there, we might be standing over Aggar’s dead body, and how would that look?” He knew it was hypocritical that he was worried about Loki’s plan now, after all of the times he had begged Helblindi to thwart it. But now that something was actually happening, he knew that they couldn’t interfere.

But Helblindi would hear none of it, and Byleistr couldn’t leave him. The moment they were out in the snow of the courtyard, they could hear very faint sounds of metal clashing in the distance. The guards on duty were watching that direction with concern, but they were unable to leave their posts without leaving the fortress completely defenseless.

Helblindi began running in that direction, grabbing a greatsword from one of the guards on duty as he passed. Byleistr took two long daggers from another, hoping that he wouldn’t need them.

*****

Thor grinned wildly as he ducked beneath another lunge with the spear, feeling the displaced air whistle above his head. The lead Jotun was skilled, but Thor was confident that he could handle him. He just had to watch the other two while he did so.

The two guards with the lead Jotun were clearly inexperienced, although not without some talent. They were hesitant to strike, worried about getting in the leader’s way, but they were still worth some consideration. He couldn’t afford to ignore them.

They circled Thor like wolves despite his attempts to make sure they didn’t get behind him, and he cursed a bit as the one in back of him quickly sliced at his calf and just barely landed a hit, leaving a long stinging line of red behind. Thor didn’t even really feel it; he was too hyped up on adrenaline and bloodlust. Faintly, he wondered where Luke had gotten to. If he was quick, he could make short work of these three before Luke even got back. It was too bad that the lead Jotun seemed to be intelligent enough to realize that Thor was more skilled than he.

Tired of pussyfooting around, Thor snarled and darted forward beneath the range of the spear. That was the problem with that type of weapon—it was meant for distance, and now Thor was far too close for it to be anything but clumsy. The Jotun tried to parry the swipe from Thor’s shining sword, but he only managed to knock it a bit to the right. The metal came away bloody, leaving a deep slash in Aggar’s thigh.

Another of the soldiers had attempted to disarm Thor as he pulled out of his swing, but Thor spun around in a smooth motion and slashed again, catching the man full across his chest. His attacker made a surprised, strangled sound and staggered backwards, not dead but certainly out of the fight for the moment. The lead Jotun bellowed angrily and chanced a swipe with the spear, using it as one might a staff to try to knock his opponent off balance. He dodged, but it still worked slightly because Thor was not accustomed to fighting in the snow and his boot slipped out from under him.

Thor curled into a tight roll as he fell, trying to move out of range from the blow that was to follow. Once again, he was only partially successful, since the Jotun’s reach was much longer than many of the foes he was used to. He caught the glancing blow on his shoulder, nearly knocking him from his feet again. The younger Jotun was circling around now. His weapons were designed for closer range, though he seemed hesitant to get too close to the Asgardian after he saw what happened to his friend.

In the brief moment that they all studied each other and readied for their next attack, they were
distracted by movement at the edge of the clearing.

Thor would be the first to admit that most Jotuns looked similar to him. Perhaps it was because he spent as little time dealing with them as possible, but if someone had asked him what any given individual Jotnar looked like, he would have shrugged and said large and blue.

But Helblindi… oh, Helblindi he knew.

*****

-929 Years Ago-

“Bindee!” Thor’s delighted cry echoed down the steps as the party from Jotunheim approached the Asgardian palace. The golden-haired toddler ducked out of his handler’s reach and tried to clamber down the steep stairs, but one of the guards caught him and drew him back. The tiny child sulked and struggled and didn’t seem to notice the tension in the air as the adults all eyed each other.

Helblindi couldn’t hold back a smile despite the situation. With every passing day it seemed that relations between Jotunheim and Asgard worsened—specifically, Odin’s relationship with his sire. There had once been a time when Laufey spoke often and fondly of his Asgardian friend, but slowly his talk of Odin had dwindled into nothingness.

Where once there had been friendship was only resentment. Helblindi tried not to watch as his sire and his sire’s new mate approached the King and Queen of Asgard. Instead, he focused on the one bright spot in all of this—the little Asgardian prince.

Thor and Byleistr were close in age, but Thor hadn’t taken to Helblindi’s little brother the way he had to Helblindi. Byleistr was quiet and introverted, preferring to sit back and watch people interact with large, curious eyes. Thor thought Helblindi was much more exciting. Last time, he had even shown Thor the proper way to stand while fighting, and he had given the tiny child a light wooden practice sword. The toddler had done everything wrong of course, (he was still unsteady on his feet in general), but that wasn’t the point. He had gotten to chase the older prince around wildly, screaming and brandishing the tiny wooden stick. Thor wished that the other prince could visit more often than a handful of times a year. When he grew up, he had told his mother as solemnly as a toddler could, he was going to be just like his big boo friend. He was still having some difficulty pronouncing his l’s.

As the Royalty met on the stairs and formal greetings were exchanged, Helblindi grinned and ducked down to scoop the tiny prince into a hug, glancing just slightly at the frowning guards as he did so. Their knuckles were white on their still sheathed weapons.

“Bindee!” Thor cried again, giggling as the Jotun tossed him lightly up into the air. “Again! Again!”

At a dark glance from one of the Asgardian courtiers and a slight shake of the head from his sire, Helblindi reluctantly put the tiny child down. Thor pouted.

Seeing her son’s distress, Frigga excused herself from the proceedings and approached them, a warm smile on her face. “Why don’t we all go to the gardens?” she proposed, encompassing Helblindi’s small blue shadow—Byleistr—in her invitation. Byleistr smiled and held out his arms. He had loved the Asgardian queen right away.

So it was that they left the others to talk of more serious things as Helblindi, carrying Thor, and Frigga, carrying Byleistr, walked in the direction of the gardens.

“I don’t wanna go see the fowers,” Thor complained quietly. Helblindi privately thought that the
gardens were probably where they took the toddler when they needed him to be out of the way. “Wanna go to the, the growns.”

Frigga laughed a bit helplessly at the confused look Helblindi gave her. “Oh, that’ll be your fault,” she teased him, “Ever since your last visit he’s been asking to go down to the practice grounds to watch the soldiers fight.

Thor flashed his tiny, perfect teeth. “Gonna be the best war-er, just l-like you!”

Helblindi smiled apologetically at the queen, but inside he was beaming. He absolutely adored his little brother, but Byleistr was very different from him and had never taken as much of an interest in the things that he enjoyed. Thor was going to be different. He was going to teach Thor everything.

*****

-Present Day-

Helblindi saw red as the Asgardian prince took advantage of Aggar’s distraction—the other Jotun lord had unsurprisingly looked displeased to see them. Had he thought they would take Thor’s side in this?—and slashed at the Jotun’s midriff. Aggar gasped and staggered back, clutching at his gut. It appeared that Thor had done some damage.

*Good*, Helblindi thought privately, but he was still furious at the absolute gall of the Asgardian to attack a Jotun lord on his own lands. He flew forwards and intervened before Thor’s next strike could fall, stopping the Asgardian prince’s sword from severing Aggar’s neck. He caught Thor’s sword with his and roared, using his superior strength to hurl the smaller man back through the air.

Thor was quick to regain his footing, but not quite quick enough. Helblindi was upon him in an instant, raining down blows that Thor was just barely managing to parry. The other Jotuns were standing back, thankfully, letting him take care of the menace.

Helblindi barely registered that more Jotun soldiers had come to join them, apparently abandoning their posts in favor of seeing what was going on. They had drawn their weapons as well and were forming a perimeter around him, eying the Asgardian prince with angry eyes. There was no way, none at all, that Thor was going to get away this time.

As Helblindi wore him down, he began to smile in triumph. At long last, he would be rid of the hateful prince.

Then a bright flash illuminated the clearing for a moment before everything went dark.

*****

-873 Years Ago (The Start of the War)-

Thor was crying. No, no, the adults were stupid and they were wrong. Helblindi was his friend, he couldn’t be his enemy. It just didn’t make sense.

He wiped his tears fiercely from his eyes as he crept under a sack on one of the small ships bound for Jotunheim, cradling the short sword that had been a gift from Helblindi for his 100th birthday. He still wasn’t great with it, but he was getting better. The Jotun had assured him that he would be great some day with practice, and his new instructors (given to him by his father despite his mother’s protests), said the same. He didn’t really need their reassurance, though—he knew he would be great. Just like he knew right now that the adults were wrong.
He had taken advantage of the confusion and flurry of activity that marked the start of the war to creep away from his caretakers and out of the castle. Now, he was going to sneak into Jotunheim on this ship, and then he was going to stop them from hurting his friend.

He held his breath as the Bifrost activated, whisking him away from Asgard for the first time.

As the ship shot out of the other side of the Bifrost, an aching cold stole into Thor’s lungs. In his rush, he hadn’t thought to dress any differently than normal. He had forgotten that Jotunheim was cold, and hadn’t ever quite realized just how cold. Shivering uncontrollably now, he tumbled out of the ship and onto the snow, wondering how he was going to find Helblindi. In the simple layout of his mind, Helblindi was just going to be right on the other side of the Bifrost, waiting for Thor to come and set everything right.

He wasn’t. Instead, footsteps thundered around him as the Asgardian soldiers leapt out of their ships, too intent on the enemy to notice the small child huddled in the snow. Thor’s eyes moved in the direction they were charging and widened.

Moving towards them in a mass of steel and sinewy blue muscle were the Jotun warriors. They looked wild and crazed, their red eyes burning and their painted horns and markings foreign and intimidating. Thor lay frozen to the spot as his heart hammered wildly, a tiny voice inside of him yelling to move, or he was going to be trampled.

He couldn’t move, though, and the Jotuns were upon them.

Later, as Thor lay huddled in a fur coat he had grabbed tearfully from a man who lay next to him with his throat slashed—Thor had realized with horror that he knew the man, had watched him laugh and joke with his friends on the palace practice grounds—he thought he was going to die. He was bruised despite his best attempts to get out of the way of the soldiers, and he was covered in blood and gore.

As Thor sobbed he realized that as usual, the adults had been right. His father had been right.

The Jotuns were monsters.

*****

-Present Day-

Loki watched the battle between his brother and his friend anxiously, not daring to breathe. He had to let it happen, had to let it go on just long enough so that everyone could see how heroically Helblindi was defending Aggar. His heart hammered in his throat, and he flinched every time the smallest hit was landed, convinced that at any moment this was going to go horribly, horribly wrong.

And it would be his fault.

He had planned it from the beginning, of course. He was no fool, and he knew from experience that Byleistr wouldn’t just leave well enough alone. So he had worked everything into his plot for Aggar’s downfall, a stroke of inspiration along the way making it something more. This wasn’t just about Aggar anymore. This was his family’s salvation.

It had gone almost exactly as he had pictured it. Byleistr would poke and pry and watch Thrym carefully, but Thrym wouldn’t give into Byleistr’s wheedling. After all, Loki’s plan was to protect Byleistr, and since that was the one thing that Thrym wanted more than anything in the world, he would defy Byleistr himself to see it happen.
So either out of desperation or out of convenience, Byleistr would turn to Helblindi. Their oldest brother tried to stay out of their plots, but always ended up being dragged along in the end. He would likely notice that Byleistr was up to something and, out of brotherly concern, try to figure out what was going on. Byleistr wouldn’t tell him—wouldn’t risk him taking Loki and Thrym’s side to get rid of Aggar—but he would use him, would drag him along.

The timing of the plan had to be obvious enough to get them to the right place at the right time, so he had Thrym stage a Kaite attack, calling all of Aggar’s men up to the North to help him. Thrym followed his plan without question, and Byleistr and Helblindi went the opposite direction.

Then it was just a matter of getting Helblindi to see Thor. Loki wasn’t certain why Helblindi despised the Asgardian prince so much—they had never exactly had a conversation about it—but he knew from experience that Helblindi would put aside reason for a chance to fight him.

So Loki had left Byleistr a little tidbit of a spell, detailing how to contact your mate if needed. He couldn’t be sure that Byleistr would use it, though, or even use it at the correct time, so he also made sure to take them close enough to Aggar’s manor that they could be glimpsed or heard. Even then, it might not work. But if it failed, his brothers would be safe under watchful eyes at the manor and Aggar would still be dead. Since technically Asgard would be at fault—Thor would be unable to produce any sort of invitation to prove he was asked to attend, and Loki would be surprised and confused—it would be up to Jotunheim to decide whether or not this act was one of war. Since Jotunheim could scarcely afford a war, it would be reluctantly swept beneath the rug with perhaps some small reparations.

This plan could have gone terribly wrong. Loki had spent late nights agonizing over all of the ways that this plan might not work. He had made fallbacks, and fallbacks of his fallbacks. He had gone over every what-if scenario until he felt as though he’d go crazy if he’d thought on it anymore. Then he had all of the dominos arranged perfectly and, gently, flicked them over.

And it had worked.

Aggar’s remaining men stood in a circle around Thor and Helblindi, watching as his brother rigorously defended their lord. Thor was beginning to falter despite his skill, Helblindi taking the lead under the freezing conditions and familiar terrain.

Now it was time to go.

Gathering up the threads of his considerably powerful magic, Loki sent a potent spell spiraling into the midst of the gathered men. It went off like a crack from a firesparkler, flooding the clearing with light and knocking everyone within a forty foot radius unconscious.

Loki stepped hesitantly out from the trees, nervously feeling for any signs of consciousness. He breathed a sigh of relief when there were none, and swiftly crossed the clearing to kneel beside Thor. The Asgardian was mostly unharmed, and Loki smiled. Then he glanced up and glowered.

He flicked his hand and the dagger hidden up his sleeve fell into his palm with a slight shink sound. He took several steps through the snow before stooping down over Aggar’s prone form. He sent a spark of his magic through the Jotun lord, waking him.

Leaning over the fallen man, Loki smiled grimly as he watched Aggar recognize him. “You… what…”

Almost gently, Loki bent down beside him and tenderly whispered in his ear, “This is for my brother, you piece of shit.”
Then he thrust the dagger up through Aggar’s gut wound, twisting it as the Jotun lord screamed in exquisite pain. Loki lingered and enjoyed his screams, smiling coldly. There was no one around to hear him.

When Aggar finally fell silent, Loki stood in a fluid motion, wiping the blood fastidiously off of his dagger and moving back to where Thor lay in the snow.

The next moment, they were back on Asgard.

****

When Helblindi woke groggily, it was to find many concerned faces leaning over him. He blinked, hard, trying to remember what was going on. When it came back to him he surged to his feet, lunging for his sword. But it was to no purpose. Thor had gone.

Helblindi snarled. The Asgardian must have had a friend with him to help him escape, and he had run like a coward. He paced and spat insults, furious that Thor had once again left unharmed. Byleistr reached for him, grabbing his arm, and Helblindi breathed deeply to calm himself.

When he turned to look at his brother, he found nearly twenty Jotuns looking back at him.

“Well, you defended him with your life. We all saw it, my prince, and we will make sure that everyone knows” he bowed deeply, “You have our allegiance.”

As the crown prince, Helblindi should have had their allegiance regardless. It sounded a foolish thing to say, but it wasn’t. The fallout from the conflict with Asgard had left Jotunheim’s nobility at odds with each other, many blaming his sire for the recklessness of the war and the loss of the Casket. Therefore, many of the southern tribes had thrown in behind Aggar, secretly plotting for him and his lineage to become their new line of kings at Laufey’s first wrong move. It had left Jotunheim shattered, a world at war with itself.

Until now.

****

-631 years ago (After the War)-

Helblindi sat amongst his favorite purple flowers in Asgard’s gardens, feeling a world away from where he had been the last time he was here. Then, the servants and courtiers passing by had smiled, or at least nodded respectfully when they had seen him. Of course, he had been a child then, and therefore less of a threat, but even Jotun children would not have been smiled at on Asgard anymore.

He watched tiredly as Byleistr foraged through the flowers, looking for his favorites. In one hand, he clutched a bundle of freshly cut blooms, and in the other he cradled their new baby brother. Loki was quiet at the moment, his seemingly incessant sad cooing sounds—his dam had been killed moments after his birth, and the babe still seemed to call out for him—temporarily silent. Perhaps, Helblindi thought, it was the smell of the flowers. They smelled like peace.

Byleistr looked up to find Helblindi watching him and smiled sadly. Helblindi frowned. His little brother only recently turned 375, just barely into his growing years, but he seemed much older. He
had lost so much so very young, and Helblindi wondered if he would even be able to remember the
days before the war. It was unlikely.

But at least they still had each other. That was the only blessing he had left, that his father and
brothers still lived.

He sighed and looked back down at the ground, waiting for his sire to finish speaking with the
Allfather and come out to meet them.

At long last, he heard footsteps and looked up. His sire and Odin stood a good distance from each
other, neither willing to look at the other. Tension, disgust, and anger were written in the lines of
their faces. Between them walked Frigga, stately, regal, and sad. And to Odin’s left…

Helblindi brightened. The golden haired kid with the bright blue eyes could only be Thor. Thor, who
he had laughed and played with. Thor, who he had taught how to hold a sword and encouraged to
practice. Thor, who used to smile at him as though he, too, was Helblindi’s little brother.

Thor stepped forward towards him. He was smiling now, but there was something off about it. An
edge that didn’t used to be there before, a darkening in his sky blue eyes. Helblindi’s responding
smile weakened, turning concerned. “Thor, what—“

The blonde youth turned to look back at his father, who wasn’t paying attention. He was speaking
with one of his advisors in a low voice instead of watching his son.

“Father,” Thor called out. There was admiration in his voice and gaze, hero worship. Helblindi
frowned, wondering when the Asgardian prince had started idolizing his sire. “Father, look!”

Odin shook his head as if to say not now, son, but Frigga suddenly took a step forward, going white.
She realized what was about to happen before Helblindi did. Byleistr had emerged from the flowers
a few feet away from the Asgardian prince, smiling politely as he shifted tiny Loki’s weight onto his
hip.

“Father, look, I’m just like you!” And with that, Thor lunged forwards, running Byleistr through
with the dagger that had been hidden up his sleeve.

It was the first time that Thor tried to kill one of them. It wouldn’t be the last.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! As mentioned, I’ll proofread tomorrow for small errors,
hopefully there’s nothing too glaring. The next update will be sometime around July 4th
if my schedule isn’t too hectic.

Love you all!
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

Loki takes care of the fallout from the events of the last chapter.

Chapter Notes

Oh man. Guys. I am so, so very sorry.

I can say that a lot happened—and don't get me wrong, a lot did (I hosted friends at my apartment for a long time and got a new job! So fun things, yay!)—but the truth is that I most certainly could have updated way, way sooner than this. But ugh, this chapter.

It was like pulling teeth, guys. I knew exactly what was supposed to happen since this story has been planned out since I've started it, but it just did *not* want to be written. No matter what I wrote, it sounded horrible. I actually really hate the end result too, but I don't care anymore. I just needed to get it out of the way so that I can move the story along.

At least the next chapter should be fun ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Loki staggered beneath Thor’s dead weight, dragging him towards the bed. Since he had never seen Thor’s actual chambers, he had settled for a guest room he had passed in one of the corridors a day earlier on his way to the library.

Thor grunted in his sleep as Loki heaved him up, only managing to get half of his heavily muscled body onto the bed. Then Loki collapsed next to him, panting. His eyes fluttered closed as he decided to just rest for a moment…

Loki woke up with a start to Thor leaning over him, looking worried. Relief flashed across the Asgardian prince’s face as he blinked sleepily. When Loki remembered where he was and what had happened, triumph swelled through him and he smiled.

Thor’s eyebrows furrowed quizzically. “I’m not sure there is much to smile about at the moment,” he said, though it was a very gentle rebuke. His voice held quite a bit of guilt. Loki quickly schooled his expression, reminding himself that his work wasn’t done yet.

“You don’t have anything to worry about, Thor,” the Jotun prince reached up and smoothed Thor’s hair back with a hand still shaking slightly from exhilaration. “You are not the one in the wrong. There was an open invitation to Jotunheim, remember?”

Thor frowned. “They certainly didn’t act like there was any sort of invitation, and I think I injured
one of their lords. Not to mention fought their crown prince.” He drooped, “Father is going to be furious with me.”

“No,” Loki pressed a hand against Thor’s chest and pushed him back so that he could sit up. Thor moved to allow him, and Loki quickly switched their positions so that he was straddling Thor’s lap. “There’s no reason to tell your father anything,” Loki soothed, skimming his long fingers over the Asgardian prince’s cheek. “Due to my presence he did not see it, and the Jotuns will tell Asgard nothing. It was they, after all, who attacked you. You have nothing to worry over.”

Thor looked hopeful for a moment, but then glanced away, ashamed. “That isn’t right, Luke. My father must be informed of everything that goes on so that he might prepare for any potential fallout. He must know all that occurs.”

Loki bit back an exasperated sigh at how indoctrinated Thor was. He briefly reflected on how miserable it must have been to grow up as Odin’s son, and thanked the Norns that hadn’t been his fate. “Thor, there will be no retaliation from Jotunheim for these actions, I assure you.” His eyes lit up, as though a thought had only just occurred to him, as though it hadn’t been as calculated as most everything else he had done, “Let me prove it to you.”

Thor just looked discomforted, clearly torn between reporting everything to his father in order to do what he believed was his duty and listening to his friend’s tempting advice. “How would you do that?”

Loki fought to keep his breathing steady so as not to betray his anxiousness. So much was on the line right now, but it would be worth it. He had to keep reminding himself of that. Choosing his words carefully, he replied, “Jotunheim will not retaliate for many reasons, the foremost of which is their vulnerability.”

He was gambling. Thor looked intensely interested—more so, indeed, than Loki was comfortable with. He was aware that Asgard didn’t know the extent of Jotunheim’s difficulties after the removal of the Casket, and he also knew that his father wanted to keep it that way. Unfortunately, Loki’s plans required otherwise.

“Vulnerability?” Thor asked leadingly. He had his full attention now.

“The removal of the Casket left the entire planet devastated, and time has only added to the problems they face. Trust me when I tell you that Asgard has no fear of confrontation from that quarter.”

Thor now looked thoughtful, and perhaps a bit more confident. “But you need not take it from me,” Loki added slowly, then held up a restraining hand, “I ask you to allow me time to explain myself after my next words,” he took a breath; “I want to take you back to Jotunheim. Not today, perhaps, but later this—”

“Of course not!” Thor interrupted, not waiting for him to finish. His face had darkened.

“Thor—“

“I said no! Norns, Luke, it’s bad enough that I let you convince me to go there once, and look what came of it! I will not report anything this time, for if it is as you say I do not wish to start any trouble, but I will not return.” Luke opened his mouth to speak, but Thor said firmly, “I will not go back outside of diplomatic visits, not even for you.”

Loki slowly stood and took a step away from Thor, keeping his face purposely blank. It would not do to show the anger and anxiety that raged within him. He had known that he would need to do this
the hard way, but still he found that he was disappointed. “Thor, allow me to explain—“

“Absolutely not. This conversation is over.” Thor’s foreboding expression prohibited any further discussion.

Loki stared at him for a moment. “Very well,” he finally replied tonelessly. He removed something from his pocket—a small, smooth stone. It glowed faintly green before Loki handed it to Thor, who just looked at it in confusion.

“If you change your mind and decide to at least hear me out, just hold this and say my name” Loki clarified, “Otherwise, do not trouble yourself.”

Then he disappeared.

*****

Three days.

It had been three damned days since Luke had left him to his own devices without a reasonable explanation, and Thor cycled from furious to despairing and back again. How could Luke expect him to just return to that frozen wasteland after their last disastrous visit? But without Luke, trying to learn anything for the upcoming conference was useless.

To make matters worse, his friends had yet to return from their hunt, and he hadn’t been able to speak to Balder—his brother, Thor reminded himself—in days. The only times Thor saw him were at meals and brief glimpses of him walking beside Odin as the two spoke of seemingly serious subjects. Tyr had returned suddenly without fanfare and with no explanation as to where he had been, and was often in private meetings involving himself, Odin, Balder, Heimdall, and no one else.

Thor reflected darkly that even when their relationship was at its best his father had never trusted him the way he seemed to trust those three.

To add insult to injury, Amora was still staying at the palace, and he had spent much of his past three days avoiding her to varying success.

He felt that everyone he cared for abandoned him right when he needed their support most. Worse, he felt foolish and useless for his lack of focus and inability to learn what he needed to. Thor ran a hand through his sweaty hair and tried to read the scroll he was holding for the eighth time that hour. The rather prosaic and high-handed style of writing swam before his eyes. He was beginning to develop a headache.

He glanced longingly across the terrace and down to the stables, imagining that at just that moment his friends would come riding merrily up the path from the entranceway, ready to divert his attention away from all of his troubles.

Thor thumbed the smooth stone that he kept in his pocket as he daydreamed, his mind returning (as it always seemed to) to Luke.

In some of his fantasies, Luke would return penitent and beg Thor’s forgiveness for leaving him for what seemed like no reason at all. In these fantasies, Thor was benevolent. He would gather Luke into his arms and kiss him soundly, assuring him that all was forgiven and forgotten. Then the embrace would become heated, needy. From there on Thor had to quickly end the fantasy, occasionally rising to dunk his face in the cold water basin nearby.

In others, he was not so forgiving. They would yell at each other and Thor would accuse Luke of
caring only for himself. What followed was a shouting match where Thor vented all of his anger and Luke made unreasonable demands, before finishing in much the same way as his first fantasy had.

Thor shifted uncomfortably and gave up trying to focus on learning anything. He leaned back with a sigh after giving one last hopeful glance at the forest. His gaze dropped to the stone in his palm. How bad would it be, really, going back to Jotunheim again? Terrible, he thought with a wry smile. Still, if it meant getting Luke back…

“Thor, darling?” He jerked out of his daydream to find he had dropped the scroll on the floor and his mother was retrieving it for him. She handed it to him with a wry smile, and Thor took it, ashamed. “Having trouble focusing?”

Thor shrugged, smoothing the scroll back out.

Frigga gently took it from him and put it away. “It wouldn’t have anything to do with your missing friends, would it? Or perhaps one friend in particular?”

Thor sighed, “He’s upset about something, I can’t explain—“

“Your little trip to Jotunheim, I’m guessing. I can’t very well say that I approve,” Her smile grew when he gaped at her, astonished. “Oh, Thor, I’m your mother. It’s my job to know what kind of messes you get yourself into. Or, more accurately in this case, what messes others get you into.”

“Then you saw what happened? You saw what I did? Have you told—”

Frigga settled into a chair next to him, “No, I haven’t told your father. I’m waiting to see how this turns out.” She tapped her fingers, looking distant and thoughtful for a moment. “You and Helblindi used to be such good friends.”

He scowled, and she continued speaking before he could comment, “So you refused to go back, and that is why he is upset, am I right?”

Thor frowned, “Yes. But don’t worry, Mother, I won’t change my mind. I know that what I did was reckless, and it will not happen again.”

“Recognizing your mistakes is a sign of maturity.” She touched his face fondly and said, “You should go.”

Thor blinked away his surprise, confused. “You… want me to return to Jotunheim? Even after what happened the last time I was there?”

“I have a feeling your friend is hoping that he can correct his mistakes,” Frigga rose to her feet, “Do let him know, when you see him, that I wish to have a word. In the meantime, go and enjoy yourself, love. You won’t learn anything when your heart is elsewhere.” She pressed a kiss to the top of his head and then left him to his thoughts.

He sighed heavily again, resigned, and stared intensely at the stone. “Luke?”

*****

Loki jerked up at the sound of his fake name. He had been sprawled out across his bed, wondering for the thousandth time if he had made a mistake. He had retaken stock of his plans, running through both the intended consequences and the actual outcome, but no matter how he thought it over he decided it was worth it.
Byleistr had returned from the South the night before, looking tired. The second that he saw Loki a myriad of expressions flashed across his face—anger, pride, relief, annoyance. “I don’t know how you did it,” he said finally, “But you… you…” he shook his head. “Helblindi stayed down in Aggar’s lands to consult with the other southern lords over Aggar’s successor.”

“Aggar’s successor?” Loki asked innocently, pretending to be shocked. “Did something happen to him?”

Byleistr let out a short laugh. “Please, Loki, don’t pretend you don’t know. I’m not sure how you got Thor Odinson of all people to attack him, but it worked. You successfully got rid of Aggar and made Helblindi a hero all in one move. Not that Helblindi isn’t facing opposition, but it’s already much less than before. He has the support of all of Aggar’s immediate councilors, which makes an impact.” He sighed, “Don’t think that you’re getting off this easily. I want to hear more about exactly how you did it later, but for now I need to go lie down. This week has been… draining. Try not to start any more political revolutions while I’m asleep, won’t you?” His tone was definitely amused now, but the exhaustion still seeped through. Loki crushed down the instinct to feel guilty. Losing a mate was always difficult, no matter how abusive they were, but his brother was better off for it.

Byleistr stopped partway down the shining ice corridor and looked back at him. He hesitated for a moment, as though considering his wording, and then shook his head. “I don’t like being a chess piece, Loki, no matter how much I love the player.”

Then he had left Loki to mull over what he had said, and it was those parting words that played through his mind now.

“Luke?”

This time Thor’s voice was less certain, even a bit worried.

Thor was a piece on his game board, too. Would he resent Loki if he ever found out? Probably. Loki lay back down and rubbed his forehead, frustrated with himself. There was no reason he should be feeling guilty. Everything he was doing—everything—was in the best interests of those he loved, even if they didn’t know it yet. And they didn’t know his every play for a reason. If every soldier knew the exact details of the mission, often times the mission could go awry.

Loki pushed himself back up, determined.

Life was a strategy game, and it was time for his next move.

*****

Thor let out a breath he didn’t realize he had been holding when Luke appeared beside him. He surged forwards and pulled him close, dropping his face to Luke’s hair. “I’m sorry,” he murmured, not even sure what he was apologizing for. He just didn’t want there to be any bad blood between them. But that said…

“Luke, you know I care for you, and you know that almost anything you requested wouldn’t be an issue, but,” he winced, “Going to Jotunheim just doesn’t seem like a good idea right now.” He tried saying it as gently as possible, worried that Luke would disintegrate beneath his fingers.

Luke let out what sounded like an annoyed sigh, and Thor’s grip on him instinctively tightened. “What I asked was that you listened to everything I had to say before you decided,” his tone was definitely irritated, even muffled as it was by Thor’s chest.

Thor dropped a quick kiss to his hair before saying, “I’m listening now.”
Luke pulled back to look at him, but Thor refused to let go. He got an amused look in response.
“Worried I’m going to disappear?” Luke asked wryly. Thor flushed and didn’t reply, waiting for his
friend to continue. After a moment, he did. “I felt guilty. You know I don’t hold the same opinion of
Jotunheim as you, and now it seems that I’ve made it worse. All I want to do is show you the
Jotunheim that I’m familiar with, but in order to do that we’ll have to go in disguise.”


“Using my magic, I can make us appear Jotun for a limited amount of time.”

Thor grimaced, but then looked down at the pile of texts he was trying to study and getting nowhere
with. Seeing his look, Luke added, “And afterwards, I will come back and help you with whatever
else you need to learn.”

“And you won’t leave until I’m ready?” Thor added hopefully, eyes sparkling with a sudden idea.

“Of course not.”

“Swear it.”

Luke sighed, as though Thor was behaving like a child. “I swear I will stay here until you are ready
for the conference.”

“Good,” Thor grinned, “Normally I would have the servants prepare you a room, but of course that
won’t be necessary. You can stay in mine.”

Luke opened his mouth to respond, confusion written across his expression. Then, like a tidal wave,
understanding spread over his features and he let out a surprised laugh. “Thor, I can’t stay here.”

Thor crossed his arms. “You swore.”

Luke’s bright green eyes flashed to the ceiling in exasperation, but now he was smiling. “Very well,
but then you will have to have the servants prepare me a room.”

Thor debated about arguing the point, but then decided against it. “Deal.” He could always change

Thor didn’t even have time to register his surprise as Luke transported them. His next breath froze his
throat and his body trembled in shock as they switched between realms. Then warmth stole back through him in a wave as Luke’s magic surrounded him, protecting him from the sub-zero air and changing his skin to a pale blue. Thor marveled at the strange pale lines that now decorated his arms. He had never wondered what they were for before. “What is the
significance of—“

Thor looked up and stopped mid-sentence as his breath was stolen from him again, though this time
it had nothing to do with the cold air. He stared.

Luke shifted self-consciously. His strange clothing—tight in some places, loose in others—swayed
with his body. On him, the pale silver lines looked delicate, flowing down his form and emphasizing
the length and grace of his limbs. “What?”

“Nothing, I… it’s just that,” Thor gathered his thoughts and laughed, “I’ve never seen such a
beautiful Jotun before.”

Luke’s responding smile was blinding.
“I suppose you’ll have to stop with the Ugly Jotun jokes now,” Loki purred as he sidled up to Thor, casually sliding one of his long legs up against him. Thor as a Jotun was… odd. Months ago, Loki would have preferred him this way—the smooth blue skin and dark hair clearly preferable to the odd paleness of the Aesir. Yet now… Loki found he missed the sky blue of Thor’s eyes. Currently, those eyes were deep crimson and full of an appreciative wonder that made Loki feel strangely light.

Thor grinned, “I suppose I will. Although I’m not sure it counts, since you’re not actually Jotun.” He cautiously smoothed Loki’s hair back from where it fell close to his horns, his fingers lightly brushing the base of one of them. Loki fought not to flinch at the accidental casual contact to this erogenous zone, trying to keep his breathing steady.

“Of course it counts,” Loki snipped, casually brushing the hand away, “I still look like one, don’t I?”

Thor looked both doubtful and amused. “Come,” Loki turned and stalked away before Thor could say anything else and, as ever, Thor followed.

Gradually, the barren snow fields gave way to something that was more familiar and yet still foreign to the Asgardian prince. Shining ice structures that were clearly homes became more and more common until they were on a road that was reminiscent of the one Thor took to the tavern every day. Even as his mind weighed the similarities, however, his hand dropped to where his hammer usually lay. The Jotuns that they saw barely gave them a glance, but that didn’t stop him from becoming increasingly tense.

The only thing that stopped Thor from speaking up was the beatific smile on Luke’s face. His entire body was radiating a fierce excitement and eagerness, which made Thor wonder at his attachment to this realm. Surely, if Luke loved it so, there must be something to enjoy here.

Luke seemed to have a destination in mind. His steps fell with a surety that Thor questioned—how many times had he walked these streets?—but then brushed aside. His companion seemed to be following the flow of the crowd, which was becoming denser as they moved forward. It reminded Thor of market day, where all of the Asgardians jostled each other for a place closer to one of the booths.

No one seemed to question their size, either, which surprised him. Perhaps the other Jotuns assumed they were children? When Thor quietly posed this question, however, Luke just brushed him off with an annoyed eye-roll and an irritated, “Not all Jotuns are eight feet tall.”

That was news to Thor. Though admittedly he only ever saw a select few, they must have earned the nickname frost giants for a reason.

They finally reached the edge of the town, where all of the inhabitants were gathering. Luke expertly navigated the crowds, apparently determined to reach a particular place. Thor followed quietly, watching the people as they went. All of those gathered appeared male, though Thor was aware this wasn’t strictly true, since the Jotun people were singly gendered. They appeared to mostly be in pairs. He wondered what they were waiting for, and if this was something that happened every day.

A thought struck him—was this a romantic event? He winced, not certain he wished to witness hundreds of Jotuns making love. Perhaps this was Luke’s idea of a joke.

And yet, Thor kept following him as they reached the edge of the crowd, where a large ice-and-rock
structure lay. Luke pulled him towards a crack in the wall—no, a small cave, Thor realized upon further investigation. It was far too small for anyone nearby to even notice. Luke had to duck to get inside, and Thor had serious doubts that he was going to be able to fit. Luke didn’t look back as he climbed up the steep passageway inside with apparent ease.

“Luke,” Thor grunted the second time he got stuck. His companion glanced down at him and sighed, and a little bit of the ice melted away under his magic. It was just enough for Thor to slip through.

“Why don’t you just transport us to wherever we are going with your magic?” The Asgardian asked through gritted teeth when his fingers slipped and he nearly went plunging back down the dark passageway.

There was just enough light filtering into the cave for Thor to see the responding mischievous grin that was pure Luke. “Well, now, that would be missing half of the fun, wouldn’t it?”

Thor resigned himself to the uncomfortable climb.

When they finally reached the top Thor slumped over to rest a moment. “What do you think?” Luke asked breathlessly, looking at him in anticipation.

Thor blinked and pushed himself to his feet so that he could see what Luke was speaking of.

From this height, Thor could see that the crowd down below him was gathered at the edge of a breathtakingly huge ice canyon. The sun was setting now, but its warm rays got caught and glimmered inside of the ice. Even Thor had to admit he had never seen anything like it, and it was stunning.

Still, the sunset didn’t seem to be the main event. There was an air of anticipation, as though everyone else was waiting for something. “What is this?” Thor finally asked in a hushed voice.

“The Festival of Lights,” Luke replied, eyes never leaving the sunset. His whole body was rigid with excited expectation. Thor smiled at seeing Luke so… so… he wasn’t sure. There was almost a wildness about him here, something carefree. As Luke sat at the edge of the rock outcropping they were on, legs dangling, Thor settled beside him. He was pleasantly surprised when Luke shifted closer, so that he was almost leaning against his chest.

“I don’t think I understand,” Thor murmured amusedly into Luke’s ear, nuzzling his hair slightly, “Why is it called the Festival of Lights if it happens after sunset?” He had not seen anyone with a lantern below, and they certainly had not brought one. He squinted down at the canyon as he tried to figure it out. Had the Jotuns strung magical lights up down there?

“You’ll see,” Luke said enigmatically, so Thor gave up and decided to wait along with everyone else. For now, he was content to just hold Luke as the sun slipped beneath the horizon.

Luke coyly rubbed one of his lovely ebony horns under Thor’s chin, and Thor dropped a quick kiss to it. “As beautiful as this is, I’m not certain how it will change my mind about Jotunheim’s people,” he said hesitantly, hoping he wouldn’t spoil the mood.

“We’ll join them later. There is dancing and singing, and there used to be feasting but—“ he paused, “Well, there will still be some food. And of course all of the excitement usually leads to… other things, as well,” Luke smirked, and Thor’s stomach flipped, “The children usually leave around that time, and I suppose that’s when we’ll go as well,” he gave Thor a look so full of innocence that it was impossible for it to actually be so.

Thor’s lips twitched into a smile at Luke’s relentless teasing. He leaned forward and fisted his fingers
in Luke’s hair, dragging him forward and roughly claiming his mouth. Luke hummed happily into the kiss, his lips surprisingly warm despite his Jotun form. Thor pushed him back onto the ice, pinning him to the ground and threading their fingers together as he deepened the kiss.

When he stopped to catch his breath he lost it entirely.

The sun had finally withdrawn all of its warm light from the frosted ground, collecting the last of its warmth as it disappeared entirely for the night. And yet Jotunheim was not dark.

The sky was flooded with a thousand colors, shimmering beguilingly in the atmosphere and dancing across the ice. The landscape that, to Thor’s eyes, had been a wash of blues and whites was now vibrant with color. The land itself seemed to rejoice as it reflected and echoed the colors of the sky.

Beneath him Luke let out a playful laugh at his gaping, drawing Thor’s eyes back to him. The lights had painted his Jotun skin as well, seeming to light up the strange shimmery markings across his skin. He was now smiling at Thor in a way that was so genuine and so sweet that, achingly, Thor thought that Luke had never been more beautiful.

Chapter End Notes

If you're still here, thank you sincerely. I'm sorry if there are any odd typos or weird jumps in the action, but trying to edit this made me want to puke and/or delete everything, so I kind of just skimmed it.

I love you all, and I definitely don't deserve you guys. Thank you <3

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