The End

Almost the Beginning

Chapter One

I’d just arrived back to Asgard after being on Midgard for eight years. Apparently, I was getting to be too much for my Midgardian adoptive parents. I’d grown bored of unpacking my few belongings and had wandered out onto the balcony of the room I would be staying in, in the school dorm for orphaned children, which is when I first saw them.

Down in the garden below there was a blond haired boy. For some reason, he was picking up a snake and I watched as it transformed into another boy and I looked on in shock as the boy who was a snake stab the first boy. I let out a gasp and took off for the garden, but someone else must have gotten there before me. Neither of the boys were still there when I arrived. I went back to my room confused. Who are they? I didn’t have to wait long to find out. There was a small party welcoming my arrival back to Asgard. Although it was not small to my standards and I have no idea why there’d be a party for me, but I think they just want any excuse to have one.

I was wearing a very simple tunic from home as I didn’t have anything to wear that would be considered Asgardian at the time. When I arrived, I was brought before Odin, the All Father, and Frigga, the queen. I curtsy quickly.

“Welcome back to Asgard, Sigyn. I hope it finds you well,” Odin asks.

“Thank you; yes it is more than I imagined,” I reply.

“You mustn’t be afraid to ask for anything if you need it,” adds Frigga.

“I will, but so far I’ve been given more than I expected.”

“I must present my sons, Thor and Loki,” Odin says as he points in the direction of two boys struggling to stand still for so long. I instantly recognize them as the boys from the garden, but I try to hide my surprise. I’m glad to see the blond one, Thor, is not any worse for wear.

“Nice to meet you,” I mumble shyly trying to avoid eye contact.

“Hi! It’s good to meet you, Sigyn. Fresh faces are a rarity around here,” Thor inputs. I look up to meet his eyes to see genuine thoughtfulness and glance to look at Loki. He narrows his eyes like he suspicious of something and adds a simple “hello.” I curtsy to all and walk away to let the rest of the party continue on.

I wander off to find some food and a quiet place to sit and eat. As I’m sitting in a corner I notice movement to my left. I look over to see a black cat had found its way over to me.

“Oh, hello. I didn’t know there were cats on Asgard. May I pet you?” I ask as I tentatively put my hand out to let the cat judge me for itself. The cat rubs its head on my hand so I take that as a yes and I begin to scratch behind its ears when it scurries off and I’m left feeling disappointed. Then I look up to see Thor making his way over with some other kids, three boys and a girl.

“Sigyn, these are some of my friends. May I present Sif, Hogun, Fandral, and Volstagg. We’ve all been training together, when we’re not training with proper teachers that is. We were wondering if you’d like to join us on occasion,” Thor asks.

“Well, that is generous of you, but I’m probably so far behind. I’d just be in the way, wouldn’t I,” I counter.

“Nonsense, why Sif here could bring up to snuff in no time I’m sure and you might feel more comfortable working with her at first anyway, right Sif?” he asks and looks at her. She looks me over and shrugs her shoulders noncommittally.

“Well, somehow I doubt I could learn that fast.”

“Is that a challenge,” Sif interjects, “you don’t think I could teach you well?”

“That isn’t what I meant at all,” I say defensively.

“Tomorrow at noon, be in the training room. We’ll see what you’ve got,” Sif announces and she walks off and the boys follow sharing confused and slightly worried glances.

“Now you’ve gone and done it,” a voice says from behind me. I place a hand on my chest and turn.

“Loki, you scared me.”

“You should probably get used to that,” he replies simply. “And you’re probably going to need something easier to move in than anything you’ve brought with you from Midgard. I’ll be by in the morning.”

“Wait,” I call out, but it’s too late as he vanishes as if he wasn’t even there. I search around the room, but there’s no sign of him anywhere. I turn towards the dais and I see Frigga looking at me with a question in her eyes, but I don’t know what she’s asking. I lower my gaze and leave the party earlier than is likely proper, but there’s too much too soon.

As I’m walking back to my room, I spot the cat sitting on the garden fence just outside the ballroom. Its green eyes glow in the dark as we watch each other for a moment before it hops down and goes off the other direction. I don’t know whether I should follow it or just go to bed when it returns and stares at me like it’s waiting for me. Against my better judgement I follow it through the maze of a garden until we come to a rather secluded spot.

“Now what,” I ask only to watch as cat looks at me, hops up onto the top of the garden wall, and then jumps off to the other side. “Oh you have got to be kidding me.  I should have known better. Now what do I do?” I ask aloud as if that’ll help.

Searching around me, I try to locate the direction we had come from, but it’s so dark here for some reason. I stubble my way to the wall to have something to give me a grounding point and briefly consider trying to scale it, but in the darkness I’d only hurt myself. I close my eyes and try to remember the way we came, but it’s like my mind has gone fuzzy. I decide to lay down and rest knowing it’ll be best to wait for morning or I’ll get further lost trying to find my way. I nod off dreaming of glowing green eyes.

Chapter Two

“Sigyn?” someone whispers. I open my eyes and notice someone kneeling over me in the darkness.

“Loki? Wait, where am I?” I ask as I sit up and then remember getting stranded in the garden. “Oh right, never mind. How did you know where I was?”

“Mother sensed you back here and sent me to find you. She knows I know this garden better than nearly anyone else. You’re freezing, come on let’s get you to your room.” He helps me up and takes my hand as he leads me through the maze. After a few minutes he asks, “What were you doing here in the dark anyway?” I don’t answer straight off. After all, I cannot exactly accuse a cat of making me fall into a trap, because that’s ridiculous.

“The party was a bit overwhelming and went for a walk. Clearly I wasn’t paying attention to where I was going and got lost,” I say instead, “I’ll try to remember to take a light with me next time.”

He doesn’t reply immediately as if he knows there’s more to it than that and can tell I’m lying, but he doesn’t press me on it and instead replies “well, you should be careful. There are snakes hiding out here.”

I stop walking and take my hand back and rub my shivering arm. “You mean you?” I ask and he turns to look at me.

“You did see that, didn’t you? I thought I’d seen you run from your balcony after, but you didn’t tell anyone?” he asks suspiciously.

“I wasn’t even sure who it was until Odin presented you to me. There was no one there when I reached that spot in the garden, just a puddle of drying blood. If it hadn’t been for that, I would have thought I’d made the whole thing up.”

“Ah, I see” he says knowingly.

“What does that mean?” I ask angrily.

“If you’d have known who we were you would have run off and told someone, right?”

“Thor could have died. If I’d have known who you were I would have known who to tell to get him help. Should I not care if someone lives or dies?” I ask quietly.

“Aren’t you going to ask?”

“Ask what?”

“You know what,” he mutters and when I don’t say anything, “if I was trying to kill him or not, obviously,” he adds irritably.

“Did you mean..” I start, but he cuts me off.

“No, I was practicing my transition from another form back to myself and I misjudged my stab a little. It wasn’t supposed to be as deep as it was.”

“Oh so he knew that was you?”

“Well, no. It couldn’t be a successful surprise attack if he knew it was me,” he adds slightly guiltily, but with a slight smile on his face. I can’t help myself and let out a slight huff of laughter.

“Perhaps you should use fewer sharper objects when you’re supposedly practicing,” I suggest and then I involuntarily shiver.

“Right, well let’s get you back and warm before my mother accuses me of stabbing you as well. Shall we,” he says as he holds out his arm for me to take. I hesitate, but knowing I cannot make it out myself, I take his arm and he leads me back through the maze as if it’s nothing.

He drops me off at my room, bows and then leaves saying nothing else. I go inside and get ready for bed wondering what I’ve gotten myself into. Before I get into bed, I take one glance into the garden from the balcony, but there’s nothing there except a few trees and the outlines of flower bushes. I shake my head and go to bed.

In the morning, I wake to the sound of knocking on my door and I vaguely remember Loki mentioning something about needing different clothes. I scramble out of bed shouting that I’ll be there in a moment and toss on something decent. Then I go to the door and open it up.

“Oh, my Queen, I didn’t know you would be here. I thought that,” I ramble but she interrupts me.

“You thought I’d let that mischievous little boy help you with acquiring more appropriate training clothes? He’s only 9 and at 8, yourself, my dear, you’d just as easily be swayed to wear something less than desirable. You’d better be warned against Loki. He has a tendency to cause, let’s say mishaps, wherever he goes. Not always on purpose, but I just want you to be careful okay?” she asks quite seriously while scanning me for something I can’t figure out.

“Okay,” I answer.

“I need you to promise me,” she adds nearly pleading. I scan her trying to figure out what she means by that, but I still don’t know so I nod and reply,

“I promise to be careful.”

“Good,” she says brightening up. “Now I’ve instructed some tailors to make up a few things for you. They’ll be delivered shortly. Until then, I’ve instructed a maid to bring some breakfast here so that you didn’t have to deal with everyone again so soon, unless you’d like to eat in the hall?” I shake my head no. “I thought so, I’ll send her in when I leave. And Sigyn,” I look at her, “don’t let Sif bully you too bad. I think you could both learn a lot from each other.” I nod and she leaves.

As promised, food is delivered a moment later, but I’m almost too anxious and confused to eat. However, the thought of fainting in front of Sif because I haven’t eaten gets to me and I force myself to eat at least some of it. I only have to wait two hours for clothing to be delivered and I spend a half hour or so sifting through each thing trying them on. Eventually, I put the most appropriate field training outfit on and head to the training room to face whatever Sif throws at me.

Chapter Three

Eight Years Later

“No, you have to place this foot here and this foot here,” Sif angrily adjusts my footing for like the hundredth time today.

“Sif, maybe we should just call it a day,” I practically beg.

“One more time,” is all she says as she places our arms into position and then we step off and then she flips me onto my back, again. “Ugh why aren’t you listening to me?” she barks in frustration, “are you sure you’re even Asgardian?” Several heads swivel around to us and I shrink a little under their gaze. “What?” she practically yells, “you’re all thinking it. Someone had to say it. We’ve been at this for over 8 years and she still cannot even grasp the basics. Anyone else can after a year. She’s impossible to train,” she sputters and walks out of the training area.

Thor wanders over to me. “Don’t let it get to you. She’s just always been a natural fighter. You’re clearly not and she doesn’t know how to work with that. Why don’t you take a break and just watch for a while,” he suggests and heads back to the others. I walk to the edge of the training area and sit on a bench to observe even though I just want to go hide somewhere. I notice Loki watching and I just shake my head at him and he frowns then turns back to practice.

He and Thor are sparring together while Hogun, Fandral, and Valstagg take turns sparring with each other and practicing with the bow and arrow. They all look so natural out there. Is there something wrong with me? Was Sif right, am I not Asgardian?

I’m brought out of my thoughts when I notice a sharp pain in my right arm and I grab it with my left arm. I glance around to see if someone’s snuck up on me, but there’s no one. I shake my head and return to watching the action and I can see Thor getting after Loki for not paying attention or something and Loki complaining that he didn’t have to hit so hard while rubbing his arm, his right arm. Well that’s weird I think to myself. I tilt my head in consideration, but then I shake it off, coincidence. I decide that’s enough and head back to my room for a bath and to change into something less sweaty.

I’m sitting in a quiet corner of the library a couple of hours later, when I feel something soft rubbing up against my arm.

“Are you here to lead me into some other trap today?” I ask distrustfully. He meows back at me as if affronted that I should ask such a thing. “Well the record shows that so far it could go either way with you, you know.” He tilts his head up and struts off. “Wait, I’m sorry,” I call after it, but it doesn’t return. I sigh and return to my book, but I cannot remember anything I’ve read. Darn cat. I get up and put the book back on the shelf where I found it. When I turn around, Loki is standing there. “Good grief, stop doing that.”

“I did say you should get used to it,” he laughs.

“You’ve been sneaking up me ever since I got here 8 years ago. Aren’t you bored yet?”

“Not when it gets you every time,” he replies with a smirk. I just roll my eyes at him. Then he frowns and asks, “You know not to listen to Sif, right?” I laugh quietly.

“You mean about my apparent lack of skills? I got over that ages ago.”

“You know that’s not what I’m asking about,” he responds softly and my face drops.

“Oh, that. I don’t think your father would let me be here if I wasn’t, at least in part, right? He’s not much for outsiders. Does everyone really doubt I’m Asgardian?” I ask in return.

“I don’t doubt it,” he firmly responds.

“Thanks, Loki,” I smile, “I know I can always count on you.”

“You probably shouldn’t do that. I’m only trouble don’t you know,” he says bitterly and I frown again.

“Loki, you’re not a bad person, okay” I tell him and I touch his cheek so that he knows I mean it even though he’s not looking at me, “They just don’t always understand that you’re not trying to hurt them; that you’re just having a bit of fun. It’s not always the best way to get their attention, but I know that you don’t always know how to show you care and…” he cuts me off before I can finish.

“Stop,” he says as he takes my hand from his face and grips my wrist tightly, “you think I care about them? I don’t. You’ve got it all wrong. I don’t care about any of them.”

He releases my wrist, turns, and stalks away before I can say anything else. I rub my wrist as I ponder his words. Perhaps I misjudged him after all.  I start to leave the library when I notice the cat sitting outside the doors.

“I am deeply sorry if I have offended you. I seem to only be good at shoving my foot in my mouth when I speak,” I tell him and he meows in return. Then I hear footsteps heading this way and I look up to see who it is. It is the queen with some of her ladies.

“Who are you apologizing to my dear?” she asks.

“Oh just this..” and I’m about to add cat, but when I look down he’s disappeared again. I’m starting to think he’s not even real so I say, “wall apparently. Practicing I suppose. Hopefully I’ve not disturbed you, my queen.”

“I worry about you dear and please you must stop with the ‘my queen’ business. I think mother should suffice. I feel like you’re nearly one of my own anyway.”

“Thank you, my, mother. I’m sorry I’m such a worry. You have enough to worry about without having to add me to the list. I’ll try to do better.”

“You mean, Loki, don’t you?” I nod once in admission. “Yes, I’m afraid I must be failing him. Teenage boys are so difficult to keep an eye on without being a nuisance. Well, I won’t keep you dear. Will I see you at dinner tonight?”

“No, I think I’ll eat alone tonight. I have some things to mull over,” I answer and she looks at me thoughtfully.

“Well, if you change your mind, you’re always welcome to join us.”

I nod my head in thanks as she continues on her way and I continue my own journey back to the quiet solitude of my room. I find a tray of food already waiting, but I don’t touch it.  I sit down in front of my mirror and stare at my reflection wondering if maybe I am an imposter. In a fit of anger, I get up and grab my pillow and scream into it and then the tears begin to roll down my face until I fall asleep.

I wake to the sound of someone softly knocking on my door. I quickly wipe the dried tears from my face and open the door only to see no one there. I’m about to close the door thinking I must’ve been dreaming the knocking, when I feel the cat winding itself around my legs. I pick him and close the door.

“I’m not sure you should be in here, but I don’t know if anyone else even knows you exist so there’s probably no harm.” I sit back down on the bed placing the cat down next to me and he immediately crawls into my lap. “Oh, are you no longer mad at me? At least that’s one fewer to worry about I guess, for now. I’m afraid I’ve quite made a mess of things. I never meant to hurt him, you know? And now she wants me to call her mother? And now I’m venting to a cat. I think I’ve officially gone crazy. What do you think?”

“Meow.”

“Yes, you are quite right, I’ve lost it. Perhaps things will be better tomorrow. Oh, I don’t have anywhere for you to sleep,” I say and frown only to notice him curling up on the pillow. “Hm, well just tonight,” I say yawning, “but that’s it.”

At some point during the night I open my eyes and see movement out of the corner of my eye, it almost looks like someone’s shadow. “Loki?” I ask, but then it’s gone before my eyes adjust to the dark. I look over and see the cat sitting on the balcony rail, swinging its tail back and forth. I soon fall back asleep.

The morning sunlight wakes me up before I am ready to be up and I let out a groan. I move to sit in front of my mirror to brush my hair, when I notice a section on the underside that’s been cut. My mind flashes back to during the night. I sigh, oh Loki. I’ll just have to tie it back loosely. I head off to my magic lesson to find Loki sitting nervously on a seat in the middle of the room.

“Good morning, Loki. I’m sorry about sticking my nose into things yesterday. I hope we can try to just forget about it?” He searches my face looking for the accusation of his little crime in my face, but I keep it as neutral as I can. After all, I did provoke him into it.

“If that’s what you wish,” he responds after what felt like forever. “Mother asked if I would take her place today. She had some other things to attend to. Do you mind?”

“Might as well. I’ve got nothing better to do.”

We spend most of the morning trying to get any sort of magic to come from my being, but I fail miserably as expected. Loki decides that I should take the afternoon off to practice on my own thinking that maybe the pressure of being watched is causing an issue. Of course this makes no sense, because of course I’ve tried practicing on my own, but I don’t argue. I can tell he’s frustrated with me and my lack of progress so I fill a plate of food on my way through the dining hall and go back to my room.

A few hours later, I’m sitting there studying intensely and getting nowhere when I hear a thunderstorm brewing outside. There’s a violent crack of lightning followed by the sound of someone yelling; Thor obviously.

“Loki! Where are you? Loki, get out here, right now!”

I cautiously make my way towards the balcony trying to determine if Thor’s storm is all noise or if there’s rain. So far it seems dry as I reach the rail to look towards the garden and the direction of where Thor is shouting from. After a few minutes, I watch as Loki walks his way over to where Thor is and then the rain pours down on everything but the two of them. I only stay out there long enough to watch Thor wave his hands around in frustration and anger and then return inside. Whatever has happened is between them. I’m not getting into the middle of it. And then I hear the clang of Odin’s scepter followed by Odin calling for both Loki and Thor. The rain immediately clears leaving puddles of glistening rain in the sudden sunlight. I try to go back to studying, but it’s no use. I sit and worry instead.

An hour or so later I notice the cat pacing on the balcony railing.

“Are you coming in or shall I leave you in peace to wander back and forth?” I ask not sure why I think he can understand me. He stops pacing, hops down, and slowly makes his way over. He pauses before climbing into my lap waiting for pets. I sigh and then oblige and I’m rewarded with soft purring.

“Well, I might as confess to someone. I’m worried kitty. I feel like Loki’s acting out and I fear it might be my fault.” He meows at me. “I pushed too far too fast. And then this morning’s lesson went horribly. I’m just letting everyone down. He was so frustrated with me today. He must have taken it out on Thor instead. I wish he’d have just yelled at me, you know? I should probably go apologize to Thor for that. Then, I should confront Loki. I had hoped he’d been satisfied after,” I pause mid-sentence to look in the mirror and then shake my head, “no, what’s done is done. I had it coming anyway, right?”

He lets out a quieter meow and then gets up to stretch. I look outside to see it’s grown darker and realize that I’m late for dinner. I ponder not going, but then remember that I need to talk to Thor. I brush out my hair and leave it totally loose and head down with the cat following for a ways and then he runs off towards the garden. I continue on my way to find Thor. He isn’t hard to spot with all his friends, Sif included. I should probably apologize to her too. I walk over.

“Thor? Can I talk to you for a moment?” I ask him

“Sigyn, how have you been? I haven’t seen you all day. What’s up?”

“I wanted to apologize for whatever is was Loki did. I have a feeling I set him off.”

“Not to worry. It was just Loki up to another of his tricks, although I think he went a little far cutting some hair from a few girls’ heads including poor Sif. Actually I’m surprised he didn’t cut some of yours. It’s awfully pretty, especially when you where it all loose like this,” he says as he pulls a little out from behind my ear. I hear Sif huff in the background. I turn to face her.

“Sif, I’m so sorry. I had no idea he’d done that. And I’m sorry I haven’t gotten any better in the combat training. I’m trying I promise. I just don’t know what’s wrong with me.”

“Well it’s not really your fault he cut my hair though I’m a little miffed that he didn’t touch yours. It’s a little suspicious if you ask me,” she states as she glares at me.

“Oh, well, I..”I stutter as I back up a step from her gaze. I glance around and notice Frigga and Odin watching us. I change course and finish with, “well, I’m sorry things turned out this way. I should, I should go I think.” I spin around and quickly make my way back out of the room. I’m looking down not watching where I’m going when I turn a corner and run into someone.

“What’s the rush? Fire in the dining hall I hope?”

“Ones I’ve started I guess,” I reply as I look up to face Loki willing the tears in my eyes not to fall. I don’t want him to see me cry, not today.

“Sigyn, what’s wrong, tell me,” he asks softly.

“No, Loki, not this time. I have to go,” I answer quickly and run back to my room.

When I get back to the room, I find a small bag and start packing a few of my things. As I finish shoveling my necessities in my bag, I stand up and catch my reflection in the mirror. I look around searching and finally find a pair of scissors buried under a pile of fabric. Before I think too much about it, I cut the rest of my hair to match the length of the section Loki had cut. I grab my bag and head out the door to the bifrost to beg Heimdall to let me pass. As I leave my room, the cat is sitting there very still.

“I have to go kitty, I’m sorry. I’m sorry I can’t take you with me, but I have to go.” He tries pawing at my skirt, but I stop and tell him, “no, stop that. I’m going.” He takes off running towards the dining hall and I continue to the bifrost. Just before I reach the end, I take a deep breath and then walk towards Heimdall.

“Heimdall, I ask you to let me pass back to Midgard or anywhere I can go and not disturb the habitants with my presence.”

“Do you not think I cannot see you running from not only Asgard, but yourself?”

“Please, Heimdall, I beg you to let me pass, please.”

“Not before our Queen has a chance to talk to you,” he replies simply and gestures behind me and I spin around slowly. Frigga stands before me looking sad.

“My dear, Sigyn. You cannot truly mean to go, do you?”

“You told me to be careful and I promised and I broke that promise. I cannot stay, can’t you see?” I say while a tear escapes. I brush it away quickly. She comes closer to hug me and then hands me an envelope.

“Read this on your 18th birthday if you don’t return sooner,” she instructs as she briefly touches my hair with sadness, “Be safe and come back home whenever you’re ready. Heimdall will open the bifrost to you by my command.”

I turn back to Heimdall who opens the bifrost and I step through.

Chapter Four

I land roughly on solid ground. It’s been awhile since I have last traveled through. The others stopped bringing me along saying I was just getting in the way not being able to defend myself, which was fair. Anyway, I stand and look around. There’s not much around besides a few trees, well a lot of trees. Where am I? I start wandering when I feel a slight pull to one direction.

“She wouldn’t have dropped me just anywhere, so it must be safe, right?” I ponder out loud.

I follow the tugging across a few miles, further into the dense jungle of trees and just when I’m about to start doubting myself I find myself standing at the foot of a mountain. I let out a sigh in frustration.

“My Queen, Mother, you know I’m no good at climbing,” I say and scan the mountainside for a hidden path of some sort. I then run my hand across the mossy grass until my hand finds a rock to start my ascent. As I start searching higher for the next hand hold, my hand turns the first rock as I’m stretching away from it and I nearly fall through an open doorway. After a moment of shock I mutter, “well I guess that could work too.” I take a tentative step through and ask, “hello? Anyone home?”

There’s no answer and I cautiously walk down the path further into the mountain. It doesn’t take long to lose the light from the open doorway and then I’m wandering through the dark so I keep a hand on the wall and check for pitfalls before each step. After what feels like maybe a half hour I see a little glint of light in front of me and I let out a breath of relief.  I walk a little faster, but hoping there are no traps this far in. After all that’s how traps usually work, right? Just ask Loki. I shake my head, no, don’t think about him. Finally, I reach the end of the tunnel and slowly step into the light.

I look up to find the source and it looks like it is the evening sunlight streaming through some sort of window.  Checking my surroundings, in appears to be some sort of secret hideaway. There are clothes covering the furniture and layers of dust on everything. I don’t think anyone’s been here in ages so I should be safe. Realizing the light might not last long, I search for some candles or lamps of some kind. There are several candles in a nearby cabinet and I set about lighting a couple. Suddenly I feel exhausted as the events of the day weigh down on me. I remove a cloth from what I hope is a couch. Thankfully, it is and I lay down on it and close my eyes. Despite being thoroughly exhausted, my sleep is not at all restful.

I wake in the morning feeling not only still tired, but hungry. Doubting the safety of consuming anything that might still be left from the previous occupants, I decide that I’ll have to venture back out of the mountain. I spot a torch near the door and with the last bit of candle flame, it lights up. As I make the return journey out, I scan the tunnel for cracks, rocks, or anything that I would’ve missed in the dark. Finding it mostly clear aside from a few fallen rocks, I exit the tunnel into the early morning light. I leave the torch in a crook inside the tunnel and hope that it’ll still be going when I get back.

Walking with the sun rising on my right I journey through the forest until I reach what seems to be the edge of it and luckily I spot what looks like a small village another half mile away or so. It doesn’t occur to me that I don’t have any way to pay for food, but perhaps I can exchange work for some. I knock on the first door I reach, but there’s no answer. “Hello? Is anyway there,” I ask. Still no answer so I back away and head to the next hut when I hear the sound of children laughing off to the left somewhere. I follow the sound until I find a group of children and likely their parents all gathered around a common eating area. The voices stop when they notice me.

“Hello,” I try again. At first no one moves, but then an elder gentleman waves me over and asks me to join them. I walk over and tell them, “I’m afraid I don’t have any way to pay you, but I’m willing to work for something to eat.” The gentlemen nods at me and gestures to have seat and another person places a bowl of some kind of soup and some bread in front of me when he speaks.

“You’ve travelled a long way from home. You must eat first and then we can discuss how you may contribute. I am Botulf and this is my wife, Pernilla,” and he gestures to the lady who now sits and must have been the one to serve me.

“Thank you over much. I wonder how you know I’ve travelled far?”

“Take no offense, but your clothes are a little worse for wear and you’re wearing clothes that suited to Asgard. There was also the matter of the rainbow bridge announcing someone’s arrival.”

“You know of Asgard?” I ask surprised and feel a little ashamed of my outward appearance. I hadn’t even given it a thought.

“Oh yes, there was an incident with some frost giants almost 2 decades ago now and the All Father, Odin, came and chased them off.” I look at him confused and then he asks, “you haven’t been told the stories of the war with the frost giants of Jötunheim?”

“Only old wives tales about them stealing bad children away in the night, just stories to scare us into behaving,” I inform him and it’s his turn to look puzzled.

“Well, I suppose that’s the All Father’s decision to hide such a terrible war. In any case, we’re glad to see that it is only a single Asgardian and not a whole army. I’m not sure we could feed that many. It’s been a rough harvest this year.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. I’m afraid I don’t have any magic to help increase yields though. I’m a rather poor excuse for an Asgardian. It is part of the reason I’m here. However I’m ready to help in any way that I can, you just tell me what I can do.” He looks me over curiously.

“Well, we’ll let you help clean up the breakfast dishes and then I’m sure Pernilla can find you something else to help with. And I’m afraid you still have the advantage, what shall we call you?” he asks and I feel even more shame for being so rude.

“Oh goodness, I apologize. I’m Sigyn,” I tell them and the adults all look at me and I shrink beneath their gaze and ask, “is something wrong?” It’s Pernilla who answers my question.

“No dear, it’s just that we haven’t heard that name in a long time, but I think that might be a story for a different time. Now finish eating and we’ll get to work.”

I eat slowly trying not to think about the new things I’ve learned and all the questions it raises. After we’ve all finished eating, I do my best to work quickly. Once the dishes are finished, I’m tasked with laundry. Pernilla has found a spare set of clothes so that I can at least wash what I’m currently wearing. As I change, I’m instantly reminded of the clothing I arrived in on Asgard. I’d nearly forgotten I lived here on Midgard for several years.

There’s a small meal for midday and then I help prep dinner. I can only help with small things because I never had to cook while on Asgard. It’s refreshing to be useful even if it’s minor things I’m helping with. They let me out of clean up after dinner so that I can make it back to the mountain dwelling before it gets too dark to see. Botulf assures me that they’ll cut back a path in the next few days to make it easier to get to the village and back. I thank him and promise to return the next day.

Upon returning to the cave dwelling I spend a little time cleaning and searching around trying to find out how extensive the space is. There are several more rooms that branch off the main entrance, including a small library. I pull out a few books to read later and then I move to the kitchen area.

I pack the bits of old remaining food in a sheet that was covering a table to take out with me in the morning. Then I pull out each of the outfits I brought with me and spend a little time removing some of the adornments that will only prove to be a hindrance and then I decide it’s time for resting. I sleep much better this time around, although I cannot escape from dreaming about the one person I want to currently forget.

“Sigyn, please, come home,” he begs and adds so quietly that I nearly miss it, “I’m sorry. I need you here.”

I wake up in a panic momentarily forgetting where I am. I turn over, but it’s no use so get up and grab one of the books I pulled from the library. It’s written in the Asgardian language and is a learner book on magic. I laugh to myself. She never misses anything does she? I open to the first page and begin to read even though I know it’ll do no good. Eventually I slip blissfully into an undisturbed slumber.

Time passes by faster than I imagined. I’d fallen into a routine of helping in the village and then reading myself to sleep only being occasionally woken by dreams of someone trying in vain to call me home. Thanks to a few things I’d read in one of my books I was able to create a substance to help the soil grow the food they’d need to make it through the colder months although I’m not sure how things could grow when it feels eternally cold.

One day I realize it’s nearly my 18th birthday. It’s a week away. I missed my last one. I haven’t bothered to track the days so I’m not sure why I remember now. It’s time to return to Asgard. I talk to the sky asking Heimdall to let the All Mother know that I’ll be home the day before and ask him if there’s a way I can return without being disturbed by anyone. There’s no answer, but somehow I think he heard me.

Then I inform the village of my decision thanking them for everything with a promise to try to come visit again. A couple days later after they’ve given me an early birthday party, I pack up my things and begin shutting down the mountain dwelling. It’s been a good place to hide for a while, but it feels right that it’s time to say goodbye for now. I’ll have to remember to thank the All Mother for allowing me to use the space.

Early the morning before my birthday, I take my things and head to the place where I first arrived. I stand there working up the courage to call Heimdall when he opens the bifrost without prompting. I take a deep breath and step through to the bridge and return home.

Chapter Five

When I arrive, I land more softly on the landing than I had going to Midgard. I turn to Heimdall.

“Thank you for opening the bridge to me. I wasn’t sure if perhaps after being gone for so long the offer might have changed.”

“The Queen would never withdraw her promise without cause and certainly without word. Welcome back to Asgard, again,” he says and then gestures behind him and adds, “message delivery, my lady.”

I look behind him worried that it might be Loki, but instead it’s just the cat patiently waiting with a note in its mouth. I slowly walk over and gently take the note and read it. It simply states, “Follow the cat.” I raise an eyebrow at the cat and he stands and starts to walk down the length of the bridge. I’d forgotten how long it was. At first I think he’s leading back towards the room I lived in before, but as we reach the garden he makes a left and then winds us through several dark alleys. It reminds me of the first night when the cat lost me in the maze and I briefly wonder if this is another trap, but Heimdall would’ve seen through that surely.

A few minutes later we’ve made it past the edge of the main city and come to a small cottage at the edge of the forest surrounding the city. The cat leads me to the door where there’s yet another note. As I take it down to read, the cat lets out a meow, winds around my legs a couple times and then returns to Asgard proper. I open the note and read:

“My dearest, Sigyn, welcome home. After the way you left I thought it best that you have a quieter place that you can withdraw to. The King has prepared a birthday celebration in your honor tomorrow night I’m afraid. I tried to persuade his otherwise, but even I can only do so much. Let me know if there’s anything you need and I’ll see you tomorrow evening.

Mother”

I turn the door knob and push the door open and step inside the cottage. It has been furnished simply, but decorated beautifully. There are several vases full of flowers and little trinkets placed here and there. I walk over to the fireplace where there’s a small fire burning, clearly lit with magic to not go out. On top of the mantle I notice a small porcelain snake decoration and it downs on me that Loki must have had some hand in this. I lock the knowledge away to deal with later.

I move to the kitchen where I find fresh food to cook with and I know that part was certainly the All Mother. Grabbing a few ingredients I start preparing myself something to eat, if only to distract my thoughts from that porcelain snake on the mantle. As I finish and sit down to eat, I notice the cat has returned carrying more items in its mouth. He places them carefully on the ground near my feet and then hops on the table to sniff my food.

“That is not for you,” I scold him and he leaps back down to the floor letting out a loud meow of displeasure. I ignore him and retrieve the small packages from the floor and ask, “More presents?” He nods. “Well, I’ll save them for tomorrow. I’ll add them to the box I had noticed in the bedroom,” and ignored, but I don’t bother to say that out loud.

I get up to do that and after placing them on top of the box I return to my seat when I see the cat has brought one of the items back from the pile.

“Am I to open this one now then?” I question him and he meows and nods. This is the strangest cat in the nine realms. It’s a small bag and I cautiously drop out the contents into my lap. There’s a two-fingered ring and yet another note. I let out a small groan; more reading to do.

“Darling daughter,

I wanted to make sure you never felt trapped again. I’ll show you how to use it sometime after your birthday.

Mother”

I look over the ring again, but there’s nothing remarkable about it. I’m not sure what it’s supposed to do exactly. I return it to the bag for safe keeping. By now my food has gone cold, but I eat a few bites and then offer it to the cat who warily accepts and eats only a few bites as well. Then I spend the day unpacking my few belongings and reading one of the books that I might have snuck here from Midgard. The cat stays with me the whole time in my lap, perhaps also reading the book or perhaps I am starting to lose my mind. In the evening I begin making dinner and make a second helping in case the cat decides to join me. I make up the two plates, placing one on the table and the other on the floor and the cat meows clearly offended.

“Well I’m not letting you eat sitting up on the table. I have to set some sort of boundaries with you,” I say as I shove a fork full of food in my mouth. He meows indignantly, but then gives in and nibbles on his plate.

Once we've finished eating and clean up the dishes from the day, I decide it's time for bed. I wander into the bedroom and carefully move the box and the extra package to a nearby table. I move to change into something more comfortable to sleep in when I remember the cat and move to close him out for a few minutes.

"I'll be back in a moment okay, although feel free to get comfortable on the couch or something," I tell him. I change quickly and then reopen the door to find him sitting there waiting. Then he moves past me and jumps up on the bed and curls up on my pillow as per usual. I let out a sigh and then climb into bed. It doesn't take long before I fall asleep to the comforting sound of purring.  When I wake in the morning, the cat is actually still there asleep. There's something oddly familiar about this cat that I just can't seem to wrap my head around. I carefully get out of bed trying not to disturb his slumber, put on a wrapper, and slip into the kitchen to begin breakfast. As I'm plating food I notice the cat coming in the room and coming over to sit next to me.

"Finally decide to get up?" I place an extra plate on the ground and he immediately helps himself and I tell him, “so nice of you to wait for me.” When he finishes, he glances out the kitchen window, and then immediately scurries for the door. He paws at it and I get up and let him out and he runs off for the city.

I have some time to kill before getting ready for the party so I spend an hour or two reading more of my book. Then I spend some time outside getting fresh flower cuttings to replace the ones in the house. As midday hits I resolve to finally open my other two gifts.

I start with the smaller one first. I tug lightly at the green ribbon and it easily comes undone. I lift the lid off the top of the box. Inside is a necklace bearing a small emerald. It is certainly the darkest shade of green I’ve ever seen for an emerald, it’s nearly black. There’s a note under the necklace. I unfold it and read:

“Happy birthday, Sigyn. I thought this would look lovely on your neck.

Loki”

Oh would it now? My eyes land on the larger box. I’m almost too nervous to open it. It too is wrapped with a green ribbon. I’m sensing a theme here. I untie the ribbon and after taking a breath I remove the lid. Inside are an outfit and a note. More notes. This is what I get for not wanting to see anyone I suppose.

“Mother and I thought you’d need something to wear to your party. She even let me have some input, like the pockets and the sleeves. Okay that was the extent of my input, but I was glad she let me help. I hope you like it.

Loki”

I lift the pieces of the outfit from the box. There are several layers apparently. There’s a pair of black leather pants with, as promised, pockets. Next are a long-sleeved top in green and an attachable skirt in the same green. I instantly realize the green matches the dark emerald of the necklace. There’s a black sash to cover the fact that the skirt is separate. I lay the pieces out on the bed and head to the bathroom for a bath.

Thankfully, it has been rigged to fill with water using magic of some sort for me. I soak for way longer than I should, but I know I have to put that outfit on when I get out and I’m not ready for that. Did Loki choose the color? He didn’t say that he did, but it matches the emerald. And two gifts from him? I really shouldn’t accept them. I’m sure I have something else to wear that will do, but then I’ll disappoint the All Mother.

When I notice the sun setting outside, I recognize that I’ve allowed too much time to pass. I need to get ready. Reluctantly, I get out and dry off. I skip the skirt for the moment and stand in front of the mirror brushing out my hair. It hasn’t grown as much as I thought it might have in almost two years so I leave it loose, but I take one of the green ribbons and tie a section on the top of my head back making a small bow. Now I can be the present.

Next I put on the skirt and sash. Then hesitantly, I pick up the necklace and put it around my neck. Lastly, I reach for my bag to get the gift the villagers made for me and the note All Mother gave to me before I left falls to the ground. I’d nearly forgotten about it. I pick it up and set it down while I struggle to fasten the clasp on the simple bracelet they’d made from terrible thread I’d made the first time I tried making it myself. It’s a simple white adornment and it’s such a large contrast to the dress, but it calms me.

Then I pick up the note. I’m not sure I want to read it. Something about it feels off, like it weighs more than I can hold even though I’m clearly holding it and I’m still standing. After a moment I break the All Mother’s seal and begin to read:

“Lady Sigyn,

I want to start with an apology for not being able to tell you this sooner, but the All Father had forbidden it. I’m not sure what you’ve learned on Midgard, if anything, but your parents didn’t die in a hunting accident as you were originally told.

A month after you were born, your parents took a recovery vacation on Midgard. The birth was hard on your mother and she needed time from prying eyes. While you were there, Midgard was attacked by the frost giants of Jötunheim. They stole you back to their planet during their initial raid. They froze your parents as they tried to protect you, I’m afraid.

When Odin reached Jötunheim, they were attempting to cast a spell trading your life for that of their king’s, Laufey’s, son who was dying. We don’t know how far they got in the spell so we don’t know the full extent of the repercussions. It’s why Odin bound your power. I know how much you struggled trying and it broke my heart that I was unable to tell you. I had hoped the practice would allow you to control it once your power was unbound.

No one but Odin and I know about your powers being bound and that you were stolen away. I caution you to be wary of whom you tell.

As you read this and learn your titles, your power will be restored to you. You will inherit the titles from your parents due to the sacrificial nature of their deaths. From the sacrifice of your father, you are titled with Goddess of Fidelity. From the sacrifice of your mother, you are titled with Goddess of Nurturing. Thirdly, your natural born title as Goddess of Grieving.

I’m sorry my dearest Sigyn.

Mother”

As soon as I’ve read to the end of the letter, I can feel the restoration and I was right, the weight of it is too much. My parents murdered by the frost giants. My powers bound for nearly 18 years. 3 titles. The pain builds until I scream and fall to my knees, releasing a burst of power when I clench my hands. I cry for a moment for the loss of my family and then I stay kneeled, numb.

I’m not sure how long I stay there. I’m only brought out my daze by the sound of pawing at my door and distressed sounding meowing. I stand, but my legs still feel wobbly as I slowly make my way to the door and open it. I don’t bother to close it again. I shake my head to reorient myself and pick up the cat.

“I’m fine kitty, I’m fine,” I reassure him, but I’m not sure how convincing I am. I put him back down and retrieve the letter. Then I move to the fireplace and toss it into the flames and it instantly turns to ash. Glancing around I notice the mess I’ve made and then look out the window. It’s gotten darker and I must be late now. I walk back to the mirror. I tell my reflection, “This will never do now.”

Closing my eyes, I search my memory for some magic lesson and then I rub my hands down across my bodice and then shake out my skirt. I look back to the mirror. My reflection shows an entirely black outfit and I touch my face to hide the tear stains and make my face seem refreshed. Then after a moment, I touch my necklace lightly and it vanishes from view.

However when I look down, nothing has changed. I’m not sure how long I’ll be able to hold it, but all they should see is me dressed in shimmering black. A simple deflection spell, but I didn’t want to truly change what I was wearing.

“That’s better, isn’t it, kitty?” I ask turning towards him and he gives me a small meow. “I suppose I ought to get going before they send an army to fetch me,” I say as I move to leave. I wait for the cat to follow and then close the door behind me.

We casually walk to the city, as I am not really in a hurry to get there. We turn towards the palace and I can hear the music radiating from the ballroom. As the two of enter the room, I notice myself scanning for Loki, but he’s nowhere to be seen. I do however notice the All Father and the All Mother. Looking down to check on the cat, I see that he’s run off again. I sigh and force myself to move in their direction.

“All Father, All Mother,” I say while curtsying, “I thank you for such another warm welcome as well as for all that you’ve done for me.”

“We hope you are able to forgive us for the secrets we’ve kept, but it was for the good of Asgard it needed to be done,” Odin states.

“Of course, my King,” I say though I have some questions, but we’ve gained an audience so I know that now is not the time.

“It is good to have you back my dear, hopefully Midgard treated you well,” the All Mother adds.

“It did. I can only hope I left it better than I found it, my Queen.” I turn to leave them when I spot Thor weaving his way over.

“Sigyn, you’re back. We’ve missed you. Life has been dull without our entertaining combat training lessons. And what’s this, you’re in all black. Tis more appropriate for mourning and not a birthday party surely, isn’t it?”

“It’s warmer,” I say crossly.

“But it’s not even cold, though now that I think about it, you have always been sensitive to the cold I guess.”

“Yes, now if you’ll excuse me, I need to go find a drink.” Walking away I can feel a few stares my direction and the whispers start to circulate. It’s not that I don’t love Thor, but honestly he’s always driven me a little mad. Always so chipper, always ready to try to make things better, but often saying the exact wrong thing. I know he doesn’t mean anything, but sometimes I wish he’d think more first. After grabbing a drink I make my way to the balcony that overlooks the city and the back gardens.

“Careful you don’t fall over the edge.”

“How do you know I’m not just planning to jump?” I ask back and turn around. Loki is standing in a shadow. I continue, “I’m not sure I can promise not to push you over though.”

“You’d never. At least not on purpose, now I on the other hand...”he trails off as he meanders over to where I’m standing. “Are you having a good birthday, Sigyn?”

“Oh of course, Loki. It’s been the best birthday, I’ve had in years,” I say bitterly, but then more sincerely, “Thank you for the gifts, Loki. They were unnecessary though.”

“It was my pleasure. Is there anything else I can do for you?”

“No, you’ve done more than enough.”

“Can I ask you a question?” he asks and I nod.

“I’m confused. I overheard Thor saying that your dress is black, but it’s not. I would maybe think he’s just colorblind, but I did hear some other whispers wondering about it being black,” he pauses.

“That’s not a question,” I inform him.

“Why can I see the green?” he finally asks and I don’t answer right away.

“It didn’t seem fair that you should be denied seeing your own gift in its true form. The All Mother can also see it as it truly is.”

“You can do magic now?”

“That’s two questions, but since I’m feeling generous today I’ll answer. I can do some, yes. I don’t know the extent of it. I learned some things while on Midgard. I’m attempting to not make it public knowledge yet so I trust you’ll keep my secret?” He nods and I add, “Thank you.”

“Can I have this dance?” he asks as he holds out his hand. I glance around and he says, “No one can see us here.” I roll my eyes and take his hand. He leads me the whirlwind steps, careful to never leave the safety of the shadows. At the end of the dance, he bows and then disappears leaving me to my thoughts.

Done with the party I go for a stroll. Absentmindedly, I find myself at the beginning of the rainbow bridge. After a moment’s hesitation I walk down the path to the bifrost.

“Lady Sigyn, I didn’t expect you to return here so soon.”

“Oh, you didn’t, did you? Somehow I think you must have known,” I state and then I ask him, “anything interesting happening out there in the vastness?”

“Do you mean, how are the villagers you were with on Midgard?”

“I know it’s ridiculous to wonder considering I only just left them, but,” I start to say, but Heimdall interrupts.

“But they have become good friends and you miss them?” he suggests rhetorically. He looks back off into the distance before continuing, “They raise a toast in your honor wishing you well.” He turns back to me and adds, “They miss you as well. You changed their lives; helped better their way of living. You’ll be worthy of your titles.”

“Wait, you know about them?” I ask in surprise and he nods.

“The All Father Informed me of the circumstances when he’d rescued you from Jötunheim. He didn’t tell me about binding your power though I did see it happen though I don’t know that they know that.”

“I won’t tell them, Heimdall. You have my word. I am curious though, did you know my parents?”

“I did, though not well. We only briefly exchanged words when they left for Midgard. It was I who informed the All Father of the attack on Midgard. I’m sorry I wasn’t able to get them help in time.”

“Thank you, Heimdall. You still saved a great many people, myself included. I owe you for that.”

The conversation comes to an end and I turn to walk back to my cottage. When I arrive, I notice the damage I caused to nearby plants. I sigh. I’ll have to ask if there’s a spell to restore them in a future lesson. There’s also the matter of the combat training. Given that my powers were returned I should maybe be more fluid in my movements, but I’m not sure who to train with without giving away all my secrets.

I go inside and remove the skirt section of my outfit and then collapse on my bed. I was only at the party a short time. Why do I feel so drained? I flip over and notice the cat has somehow found its way in. He hops onto the bed and curls up on the pillow again. I think I might have to invest in another pillow. I close my eyes and fall asleep.

Chapter Six

The next morning when I rise from bed, I find that the cat has already gone and I find that it makes me sad. I don’t know what I find so comforting about him. I’m not even sure where he came from or if anyone knows he exists. There’s also something highly suspicious and familiar about him.

In any case I get up to see if the All Mother is able and willing to give me a lesson today. I don’t bother to change other than to remove my jewelry and tie my hair back more securely. I put the two-fingered ring in a pocket and then I head for the palace. I peak in the dining hall to see if she’s there, but it’s only me so I grab a piece of bread on my way through to check the library. She’s not there either and I am about to head towards her chambers when I run into Loki.

“Good morning, Loki. I don’t suppose you happen to know where your mother is, do you?”

“I have not seen her yet this morning, so I’m sure she’s still in her rooms. Would you like me to walk with you?” I nod.

“Where did you go after our dance last night? Did I step on your toes without realizing?”

“You just looked like you’d rather be alone. You looked positively heartbroken actually. Would you like to talk about it?”

“And here I thought I’d hidden it pretty well.”

“You forgot that you didn’t use your magic to hide your true face from me. Plus there’s also the fact you asked me if I wasn’t sure you weren’t planning to jump from the balcony.”

“Oh, right that. I suppose it’s a bit of a long story. Can we talk later? The cottage, dinner?”

“Anything you wish. And here we’ve arrived just in time, Mother,” he says with a bow and leaves us.

“Loki. Good morning my dear. What can I do for you?” she asks curiously.

“Good morning, All Mother. I was wondering if you had time for a short lesson today. Plus I suppose I have a few questions,” I tell her.

“Yes, I have a little free time today after breakfast. Why don’t you head to the library to wait unless you also require something to eat?”

“I grabbed something on my way through to find you. I’ll meet you there in a bit. Don’t hurry on my account. There’s plenty to keep me occupied.”

She nods and heads one way while I go back the way I came. I find the library still empty when I return to it. Instead of reading while I wait, I ponder over the questions I most want the answers to. I’m not sure how many she’ll be willing to answer or how many she’ll be allowed to answer. It seems as though there are more secrets flowing throughout Asgard than I had thought. It makes me wonder how much of anything I know is true. The All Mother joins me after an hour or so.

“Where would you like to begin?” she asks entering the library.

“I do seem to have many questions, but I don’t know how overly bombarded you’d like to be. Perhaps you’d rather stick to magic lessons,” I offer as an out.

“If there’s anything I am unable to tell you, I’ll let you know after you ask. I should warn you though, it appears we have an audience so you may wish to consider what you ask,” she suggests and then looks back over her shoulder behind her. The cat sits in the doorway waiting for permission to enter.

“You might as well join us you ridiculous, sneaky thing,” I tell him and then back to the All Mother, “I’m glad I’m not the only one who can see him. For a while I had perhaps I’d made him up in my head.”

“I am quite certain he’s real. He’s,” she pauses for a moment, “partially mine. I have a feeling he’s become partially yours.” I look at her in surprise.

“Oh dear, I am sorry. I didn’t mean to lay any claim to him. He just has this way of showing up. I never have the heart to turn him out. He sort of just grows on you.”

“Yes, although he sometimes has a way of being ill-behaved.”

“Downright mischievous even, just like,” and I stop myself from saying Loki’s name, but I must have it written on my face.

“It is true though. They are nearly one and the same. It’s why I wouldn’t dare give him up,” she finishes and then looks at me expectantly.

“No, we shouldn’t do that,” I say after a moment.

“Well now, what else can I help you with?” she asks and then I feel confused. I shake my head and continue on.

“Right, well first things first, did he live?” I ask her and she smiles like I must have passed some test.

“He did,” is all that she says.

“I’m glad for that.”

“You might regret saying that later,” she mumbles to herself and I decide it’s best to move on even though I’m confused more now.

“Was there no way to unfreeze them? Shouldn’t they have been able to withstand the cold for longer?”

“Unfortunately, we couldn’t. It was their sacrifice that allowed you to survive for as long as you did,” she tells me and then pauses before adding, “Odin went to Jötunheim to get you first. By the time he made it back to Midgard it was too late. I’m sorry we couldn’t do more.”

“Thank you. I figured you couldn’t, but I had to ask,” I acknowledge and then continue, “I might have made a small mess yesterday when I read about my parents. Mostly I’m worried about the flowers, is there a way to restore them, aside from time healing them that is.”

“There might be, but everyone’s magic is different. It allows us to do different things. It’s possible you might be able to, but it might be awhile before you have enough true control to make it work. It’ll take practice and it’ll mostly be up to you to figure it out. I’m afraid I don’t know that much about your particular set of powers. I’ll see if I can find any resources for you.”

“Thank you, again. And lastly, about this ring thing you gave me. What is this for exactly?”

“That, yes, well I have a feeling you are not quite ready for that yet. We’ll return to it at another time. Let’s work on making sure you don’t accidently kill any more flowers, shall we?” she suggests and glances at the cat.

“You’re probably right. I like to get ahead of myself sometimes. What should I practice?”

“I did hear you pulled off a splendid deflection spell at your party, perhaps we’ll work with that. You must have a fair amount of control over it already, but let’s try and master it, shall we?”

I nod in agreement and we spend another couple hours working on not only deflection, but some minor transformations, adding embellishments to my outfit, changing my hair color, et cetera… We stopped in time for the midday meal which I decided to join the All Mother for. I cannot avoid the dining hall forever. After filling a plate, I search for a place to sit when I hear someone call over.

“Sigyn! Come join us. We’ve much to catch up on.”

I look behind me towards the voice to see Thor waving me over to join him and his group of friends. I don’t see Loki, however. Perhaps this will be a chance to mend some wounds. I sit down near the group to listen in to their conversation. I fiddle with my food while I listen to their words go in one ear and out the other. I smile and nod occasionally to make it appear as if I’m listening, but my mind is elsewhere.

“Will you be joining us for a rousing training session tomorrow, Sigyn?” Thor asks me and I slowly turn to look at him. It takes a moment to process the question before I answer.

“Is that wise? I’m horribly out of practice and besides you know I was never very good to begin with.”

“That is true,” Sif comments and Thor gives her a look.

“Which is why you should join us, we’ll start back over from the basics,” Thor suggests.

“I’ll give it some thought. Perhaps I should get a smidge of exercise in this afternoon to warm up. If you’ll excuse me, I realized I forgot something.”

Thor nods and I stand up and am going to take my plate when I remember that I don’t even know where the kitchen is. How thoughtless of me. I’ll wander later and see if I can find it. I head down to the training area and find a dummy to punch. I’m in the middle of a vigorous session of punches when Loki shows up to watch.

“Anyone in particular you’re trying to murder,” he mockingly asks and I stop mid-punch.

“Not yet. Perhaps you’d like to volunteer,” I ask in return and attempt to finish my punch, when he steps in from of me and catches my fist.

“You’ll have to try much harder than that,” he challenges so I pull up my other fist to divert his attention, but as expected he doesn’t fall for it and simply stops it with his other hand. “Are you even trying?” All I can do is glare at him.

“If you’re here just to make fun of me, you can go.” I say angrily.

“It is in fact not why I’m here. Mother sent me to make sure you weren’t hurting yourself and I’m afraid that if I don’t give you a lesson I’ll have bad things to report and I don’t think either of wants that, do we?” I look at him warily.

“Are you sure that’s a good idea? There’s a higher chance I’ll hurt you being this terrible.”

“Not to worry. I’m pretty agile. I’m sure I’ll be able to dodge just about everything you’ll attempt to throw at me today,” he says and laughs.

“Oh, you think you’re so clever,” I say as I spin out of his grasp to elbow him in the chest, but he quickly catches my elbow before it reaches him and then slides his hand down to my wrist and pins it against my back.

“That wasn’t all bad. I wasn’t sure you had it in you,” he says slightly proud which annoys me and I pick up my foot and step on his and I break free from his grip. “Now that wasn’t nice and not at all a proper maneuver.”

“It got me out, didn’t it?” I retort and bat my eyelashes at him, which catches him off guard, but not for long.

He comes at me, grabs one arm and is about to try to grab the other when I remember Sif always kicking my leg out from under me so I mimic that and he falls back, but his grip is too tight and I go down with him which he takes advantage of and flips us over so that he’s on top of me. We’re both breathing heavily and I look at him and he looks at me. We stay there for only a moment, but it feels like ages and then he stands up. He holds out his hand to help me up and then stalks off. I get a drink of water and return back to punching the dummy wondering who I’m hitting.

After a half hour I call it quits so I can bathe before making dinner which I’ve just now remembered I have to fix for Loki as well. What was I thinking? I shake my head and set out for home.

As I arrive at the door I notice the dead flowers again and wonder how I might be able to restore them. Once inside, I bathe quickly and put on one of my better dresses that I didn’t change too much on Midgard. It’s one I saved for special occasions, but I don’t it’s still fashionable here, but that’s okay.

I choose a recipe that doesn’t require too much effort and get to work. In a short time, dinner is ready, but Loki hasn’t arrived yet so I leave it covered to keep as much heat in as possible. Then I sit on the couch and wait. And then I pace and wait. Then back to the couch and wait.

And wait.

And wait.

After a couple hours I check the food, but it has gone cold. He’s obviously not coming. I go outside to see if I can see him coming, but there’s no sign. I wander to the flowers to give him just a few more minutes, but it’s no use.

A single tear escapes from my eye and before I can wipe it away it falls and lands on a dead blossom and it blooms back to life. I let out a sorrowful laugh and let myself cry a few more tears and each leaf; each branch a tear drop touches returns to life.

I force myself to stop crying and go back inside. I don’t bother changing. I just go to bed. It never occurs to me that I’d left the door open. At some point during the night, a cat silently makes it way in and climbs up on the bed and falls asleep on the pillow. By morning before I can wake, he’s gone.

Chapter Seven

Then next morning, I head to practice with Sif. She’s much more prepared for my lack of ability even though I can tell it’s still frustrating, but at least she’s not yelling anymore.

The next day I have a lesson with the All Mother. I discuss my progress with the flowers and although she seems curious as to how I came to such a discovery she never asks for all the details. We work more on some basic spells. All things I should have mastered ages ago.

I follow this back and forth routine for a couple weeks never once seeing Loki. Eventually, I break down and ask Thor. I cannot bear to ask the All Mother. He informs me that he sees him every other day for training; on the days I’m not there he doesn’t need to add.

The All Mother finally decides that I have enough basic control to start teaching me how to use the ring thing.

“Before we begin, it’s very important that you promise to use this with extreme prejudice. It’s not something you want everyone knowing that you have, okay” she starts off.

“Of course I promise. I’ll do my best to use it with caution,” I assure her and then ask, “What is it?”

“It’s a device that allows the wearer to harness the energy of different dimensions to create a pathway to anywhere within the multiverse. It’s something very few are able to access, use, and master,” she states quite simply and I just blink in disbelief at her.

“I’m not sure I should have that sort of ability and how do you know that I can even make it work?”

“The very fact you think you shouldn’t have it is enough testimony for me. Plus I can always take the ring from you. You can harness the energy without it, but this helps make it easier to control. There are even fewer people that harness the power to create the pathways without it. That is generally reserved for Sorcerer Supremes. And I have complete faith you can manage to make it work. You have to believe in yourself first though.”

“Well, there’s no harm in trying at least.”

We spend several hours going over the basics of reaching into the multiverse for power and using it to create other spells first. It takes a lot of work, but by the end of our session I’m at least able to see some sparks of energy. She warns me again about telling anyone else and I nod.

I leave for home and realize I’m the happiest I’ve been since I was on Midgard. It occurs to me that I haven’t checked in since my birthday. I’ll go visit Heimdall in the morning. After reaching home, I begin dinner and start on a loaf of bread. Perhaps I can offer some to Heimdall as a bribe for looking in for me. I hum to myself as I work. I turn to sit at the table when I notice the cat sitting in the doorway to the kitchen.

“Oh, have you decided to join me this evening? It’s been a while. I thought perhaps you’d chosen to go back to Mother. Not that I could blame you. I’m afraid I haven’t been the best of company lately,” I tell him and get another plate ready.

He nibbles the food, but doesn’t actually eat much. While I eat, I watch as he paces about as if looking for something or thinking something over. I still think there’s something I’m missing here, but I just cannot seem to put my finger on it.

“Sometimes, I wish you could just tell me what’s going on in that feline mind of yours,” I say and he stops to set his gaze upon me. Obviously there’s nothing for him to say so I continue, “I feel like I do all the talking sometimes or perhaps mostly complaining.

It’s only that I don’t have many friends here, at least not ones I can truly talk to. Loki was probably the only one who cared about what I had to say, other than Mother of course, but he’s either avoiding me or mad at me or maybe he’s simply up to planning some outrageous scheme to get himself in trouble.

If he were here, I’d have a chance to explain about my parents, at least in part and why I’ve been a bit extra off the rails lately. Perhaps I would tell him about my progress with my magic and we could…” I stop talking, catching myself in something that I’m not sure of what it is.

I look around for the cat only to see he’s gotten up on the mantle. He’s pawing at the little snake ornament and then he knocks it off. I shout “no” and race to try to catch it, but it falls and shatters on the floor.

“Why would you do that?” I ask helplessly as I kneel to the ground to try to pick up all the pieces, but of course there’s no answer. He jumps back down and runs back out of the cottage leaving me to stare in despair at the broken shards.

Eventually, I stand up and get a small bowl to put the pieces in. Then I put it next on a table next to my bed. Hopefully the cat won’t return and knock it off again. Mother was right; he is just as mischievous as Loki.

I return to the kitchen to clean up and finish baking the bread while I practice a few more of the things I was trying to learn today, but my heart’s not in it. Once the bread is done, I cover it to keep it as fresh as I can. Then I make sure the door is closed as well as check to make sure the windows are shut. For a moment I reconsider, but sometimes you have to set some boundaries and then I go to bed feeling miserable. All the joy I felt has vanished into nothing.

The following morning is gray and depressing. It fits my current mood. I think about not getting up, but then I remember the bread for Heimdall and I force myself up. I dress in my “mourning black” as Thor would call it and head to Himinbjorg. Heimdall doesn’t turn towards me when I approach.

“Good morning, Heimdall. I hope that I’m not interrupting.”

“There’s unrest building on a horizon, but I cannot tell which horizon at the moment so there’s still time to prepare,” he informs me.

“Oh. Do I need to let the All Father know?” I offer.

“He knows,” he replies and then asks, “is that for me?”

“It is. I was hoping you could look in on my friends, but you clearly have much higher priorities at the moment. I’ll leave you to your watch,” I say and turn to go when he speaks again.

“They seem to be doing well, for the time being. The current threat doesn’t seem to be radiating from Midgard.”

“Thank you, Heimdall. I appreciate your checking for me, again.”

He nods and I head to the training grounds to tell Sif that I’m not sure I’ll be worth training today. When I reach the field, Sif is sparring with Thor and it’s mesmerizing to watch. They always look so intimidating when they’re going at it. In another corner, Volstagg and Fandral are sparring. Hogun had returned to his home, Vanaheim, last week for some celebration or another. Or that’s the story anyway. Once Sif has bested Thor, she waves me over and I casually make my way over.

“You’re not dressed for training today,” she observes.

“No, I’m afraid I’d be more useless than usual today,” I say truthfully.

“You have gotten better, I’ll admit,” she says and I look at her in surprise and then she continues, “You’d still likely be dead in 5 minutes on an actual battlefield, but that’s 4 more than when we first started.”

“Thanks, I guess,” is all I can think to say back. She returns to Thor who explains that he let her get the best of him, of course. I can feel Sif rolling her eyes in annoyance as I leave the field.

As I approach the turn back to the cottage I see Loki. At first I think he’s going to turn and go a different direction, but then he waits for me to reach him instead. I smack his face. Not hard, but enough to make a point.

“I’m sorry, I don’t know why I did that” I apologize in instant remorse and then a little angrily I ask, “Where have you been?” And then I continue sadly, “You never showed for dinner that night and you’ve been avoiding me ever since. Why? What did I do?”

“You didn’t do anything,” he says quietly and then after a brief hesitation, he gently cups my face and kisses me. It lasts only a moment, but the second he stops I regret him pulling away and “oh” is the only sound I can seem to make. He chuckles softly and then leaves me standing there looking like a crazy person.

What does one do now? Do I go after him? I glance behind me towards where he went, but I don’t see him anymore. I touch my fingertips to my lips and continue on my way walking in a daze.

After arriving back at the cottage I check on the flower bushes that I’d made some progress with and they still look healthy. They seem to be once again back on their normal cycle of death and rebirth. I’m still not sure how to produce the effect voluntarily. Forcing tears hasn’t worked unfortunately.

I go inside to relax, but Heimdall’s worry over a potential threat has me worried. I’m not sure I’m well trained enough to fight. I’m not sure they’d let me go. Not that I want there to be some battle or other, but it does make me anxious about my worthiness to Asgard.

And then of course there’s Loki. Honestly I’m not sure why he did that. The biggest problem is that he’s quite the flirt so I shouldn’t read too much into it, but it certainly felt more real than I’d imagined. Not that I have been imagining it or anything. That would be crazy.

I had intended to practice my magic, but instead I spend the rest of the day thinking and worrying.

Chapter Eight

The next morning while eating my breakfast in the cottage, I hear the All Father summoning all of us to the throne room with the clang of Gungnir. After it appears that everyone is present he informs of his urgent announcement.

“Many of you know that Hogun went home recently for a family marriage; however what you might not have known is that he was also there on a mission. Heimdall had seen some unrest within the realms, but was unable to pinpoint where since nothing seemed like an immediate threat.

Hogun returned yesterday, wounded as he fought back against a group of rebels trying to overtake his people’s court. He has asked for our assistance in putting a stop to the coup.

I have called you here today to accept that request. I will assemble a task force for negotiations as well as a small legion of Einherjar warriors to assist should things go poorly with the negotiations.

Together we will restore peace to the realms.”

When he’s finished speaking, he dismisses the hall, but I see that Thor and Loki stay behind to wait for further instruction from the All Father. I can see Sif, Fandral, and Volstagg hanging together off to the side across from me. I linger waiting to see if I’m needed or if I should go.

After the three of them have had a chance to discuss matters further I see Thor and Loki making their way towards Sif and the others. Then I see Loki waving at me to come join them. I hesitate before crossing the room to them.

As a group we discuss the logistics of our plan. Everyone has some input on how to proceed, but I stay quiet. As I have no true experience there’s not much I can add to the discussion. It is best I think to just take direction. Honestly, I’m not sure if I should go. I haven’t progressed much in my training. I’m worried I’ll be in the way more than anything. I was really hoping Heimdall’s warning on a potential threat would produce little fruit.

In the end, Thor thinks it is best that we leave first thing tomorrow. He thinks that should give us each time to gather a few things and rest our minds. Plus he wants to give Hogun time to heal to potentially join us.

After Thor dismisses the group, we all go our separate ways. I walk away slowly trying to think over everything that was said. I’m stil having doubts. I’m in the middle of thinking I should tell either Thor or Loki that I shouldn’t go when I notice Loki has come up next to me. He asks to walk me back home. I don’t have the will to say anything so I nod and we walk in silence for a few minutes before I finally break down and ask him what he thinks.

“Do you really think I should be going Loki? I wouldn’t want to put the mission in jeopardy.”

“I won’t lie to you; that is what Father thought, but both Thor and I think it’ll be a great opportunity for you. Would you rather not go?”

“No, I do want to go. I just don’t want to screw it up.”

“You won’t. We probably won’t even see a fight and even so you’ll be covered. We’ve got you or we can always send you back with a report to Odin,” he reassures me. We walk in silence again for a few minutes before I just have to ask.

“Loki, about what happened yesterday, why did you, you know...” I trail a little. He takes a moment before answering.

“It was a poor excuse for an apology. It was completely inappropriate. I won’t do it again, I promise.” he says and then it takes me a moment to think about how to respond to that.

“So it didn’t mean anything? Just you being your usual overly flirtatious self,” I ask and he gives me an offended look.

“I do not going around kissing everyone,” he says defensively.

“That isn’t exactly what I said, but I suppose it’s good to know that I must have reached some important level to have earned that then.”

“Yes, well, like I said it won’t happen again.”

“Alright, Loki, you’ve made your point. I’m sorry I brought it up.” We’ve made it to the cottage finally and I tell him, “Thanks for walking me back. I’ll see you in the morning,” and then go inside closing the door behind me. I lean against the door wondering why I bothered to ask. I knew it had meant nothing, but I cannot help but wonder why I had hoped it might have.

As I reach my closet I search through wonder what it is exactly I’m supposed to wear. Do I wear something nicer for negotiations or something that says I’m ready to do battle? Do I have anything that’ll work for both? I stand there and consider my options. In the end I go with an outfit I can fight in, but with a detachable skirt that I won’t care about losing if necessary.

I could conjure one, but not everyone knows about my magic and for now I’d still like to keep it that way. I put the ring for traveling in a pocket just in case. I haven’t gotten it to work yet, but I’ll feel better knowing it could be an option.

I’m getting ready to practice some small magic when I hear scratching at the door. The prodigal cat has returned. I wonder what mischief lies ahead today after the last fiasco with the snake ornament. I open the door to see that is indeed the cat who has brought a book with him.

“How’d you carry this down here?” I ask and then I add, “never mind, I don’t want to know.” I give it a once over to see that it’s a book of records of some sort. Given our mission it could have come from one of two people so I ponder out loud, “I suppose this is from either Mother or Loki,” and then I look at the cat waiting to see how he answers.

He takes a moment trying to decide how to respond and then he meows twice. I mention Loki second so it must have been him. That boy is so confusing. He basically tells me he doesn’t care only to send me a book to, I pause and then I look at the cat again. Oh for Asgard’s sake. His Mother practically gave him away. Anyway, back to the book at hand.

“I see, Loki then. As tempted as I am to reject this out of spite, it might actually be useful,” I pause wondering maybe, yes let’s try that. Then I ask him, “If I wrote a message could you take it to him for me?”

He meows and nods. He sits patiently and waits while I write out the message. What do I write? Let’s go with something simple, but I do want to see what happens if I call him out, at least a little. Oh, I’ll write it on the back. Certainly he won’t be looking there before reading the inside message. I write:

“Loki,

Thank you for the book. Perhaps there’ll be something useful to learn before tomorrow.

I’m sorry I keep pushing all the wrong buttons with you. I just cannot seem to help it.

Sigyn”

I carefully flip over the message so he won’t see I’m adding something and write on the back:

“When are you going to fess up?”

I fold it up and then I pat him on the head and hold out the note for him to take. I know he won’t want to delay so I open the door for him and he goes out quickly. I close the door behind him.

Honestly, what am I going to do with him? He’s been sleeping on my pillow for goodness sakes. I think about all the confessions that I’ve shared. Somehow I must have known for a while anyway if not from the very beginning.

Shaking off the thoughts of Loki, I take a closer look at the book. I see that it is a book recording past wars and conflicts that Asgard has been involved in. Well this could take a while. I make myself something warm to drink and get a snack and settle in for another round of intensive reading.

I’ve read through about 20 different encounters and I’m starting to get bored. It’s all more of the same, fighting until Asgard has beaten everyone else into submission. The only fascinating parts have been the ones that involved infinity stones.

I decide to skim and as I flip through trying to find something interesting I find the one I suppose I was looking for, the war with Jötunheim and the Frost Giants. There’s no mention of a rescue or Laufey’s son. There’s no mention of my parents either. I’m about to close the book out of irritation when I notice something.

In the crease of one of the pages of the war with Jötunheim is a strand of hair. I hold it up. It has to be one of Loki’s. I go to the bedroom and add it to the bowl with the pieces of the snake ornament. It’s only fair to have at least one stand. Why did he do with what he cut anyway?

I decide to get a little magic practice in. I get the travel ring out of my pocket and see if I can get anywhere, but so far still nothing. I put it away after a little while and go back to tying to conjure things.

All I can manage today is a small hair pin. I add it to the bowl when I go to get ready for bed. I head to bed early as tomorrow is going to be a very long day and I don’t know how much sleep I’ll actually get so I might as well start early.

Chapter Nine

In the morning we meet in the throne room. Apparently the All Father has something he wanted to contribute before we left, perhaps some helpful words of advice or encouragement. Once we’ve all gathered, the All Father motions for Thor to come forward and kneels.

“Thor Odinson, prince of Asgard, it is my honor to present to you Mjølnir. Should you be worthy of it, it is now yours to wield.”

“Thank you Father, I shall try to be worthy and bring glory and peace throughout all of Asgard and the nine realms,” is Thor’s response.

Thor stands and approaches Father to take the hammer. After a moment’s hesitation he takes it and a surge of power rolls through the hammer into Thor binding them together. I look on in awe and with a small tinge of fear; that’s a lot of power and responsibility.

He turns back to face us and then lifts the hammer in victory. I roll my eyes. And then I wonder about Loki and how he might feel at Thor being given such a gift and not him. I’m sparing a glance his way when I see him looking at me. He looks away quickly like I caught him looking when I shouldn’t have.

Thor then leads the way out of the room towards the dining hall to grab a small bite before embarking on our true journey. The five of them gather together laughing and trying to lift the hammer and congratulating Thor on his achievement. However Loki is standing off to the side watching so I approach him first.

“It’s seems like it’s a big deal,” I say quietly. He turns toward me.

“It is indeed. Mjølnir has been wielded by Father in many a battle. It’s an honor to have been chosen,” he says clearly try to hide how he feels about it.

“I see. It must be difficult for you to see him with it then, yes?”

“Nah, it’d be too hard to hide. Knives and daggers are much easier,” he says. Then he demonstrates and conjures a dagger into his hand catching me off guard and says, “See? You had no idea, did you?”

“No, I suppose I did not know, but you do seem to hide everything. Sometimes I’m not sure I know you at all,” is all I can think to say after that. Then I go over to offer my congratulations to Thor.

“Thor, congratulations, perhaps now you might have a small chance to beat Sif,” I jest and that earns me a smile from even Sif.

“He wishes,” she says.

“What are you talking about, I always let her win, it would be rude otherwise,” he says defensively.

“Keep telling yourself that,” Fandral adds patting Thor on the shoulder.

“Don’t you suppose we ought to be going pretty soon, brother?” Loki asks when he finally makes his way over to join us.

“Right, yes, petty skirmishes wait for no one, not even me. Let’s get to Himinbjorg and then to Vanaheim to dismiss these rebels once and for all!” Thor announces and then purposefully walks out. For a moment we all just stare after him trying to not laugh or roll our eyes and then we follow him.

As we approach Himinbjorg, I notice that the legion of Einherjar are already there and waiting for us. As we join them, Thor stands up next to Heimdall to give a going into battle speech.

“Asgard, today we head to Vanaheim to restore peace by appeasing to the rebels who have staged a coup against their government. We go in peace, but should a battle inevitable we will be ready for it. For Asgard!”

“For Asgard,” we chant in return.

“For Vanaheim,” Thor shouts.

“For Vanaheim,” we echo.

Heimdall then opens the Bifrost and Thor leads us, the task team, through first and the Einherjar follow. When we reach Vanaheim, all seems quiet. Perhaps the threat was slightly exaggerated I think to myself. Thor and Hogun lead us across the terrain towards the main village. Sif, Fandral, and Volstagg run the second line while Loki and I run the line behind the legion to watch for anything behind us.

As we get closer, a smell in the air starts to get more and more intense and I realize it’s the smell of smoke and burning bodies. It’s nearly unbearable, but I try to hold strong. Once we reach the edge of what appears to be a battleground, I double-over with pain. Loki quickly comes over.

“What’s wrong, are you okay? Did you step on something?” he asks trying to give me options to pinpoint the pain and at first I’m not sure what it is, but then I know; it’s sorrow and grief from those that have lost loved ones in the battle and it’s overwhelming. I’m not if I should tell him that or not. No one here knows about the titles as far I know.

“I’ll explain later, I’m okay. Help me up?” is all I can manage to get out. He takes my arm and helps me stand and I see that Sif has joined us.

“What happened?” she asks.

“I tripped over something. I don’t think is any sort of trap though. I just wasn’t watching my feet well enough. I’m sorry,” I tell her and I see Loki frown at me, but he says nothing.

“Well let’s keep going. We’ve nearly reached the location of the rebel camp. Watch the ground as much as the tree line, okay,” she tells me and I nod at her.

She returns to her own line and we follow as fast I’m able. As we walk I try to push the pain into some designated section within myself to try to quench it. Loki walks closer than before, not wanting to let me out his sight.

By the time we’ve reached the outskirts of the camp, I’ve dulled the pain to a deep throb in one of my fingers. I think it’s the best it’s going to get until I can figure out how to get rid of it without hurting anyone. Thor motions us over to give us his plan.

“Loki and Hogun will come with me to talk with the leader or leaders of this outfit. It looks larger than I was hoping, so this may still end in a fight despite our diplomatic efforts. The rest of you will wait here until we either return or are able to give you a signal,” he says and lifts the hammer a little to know that it’s the signal. We nod and retreat a little.

I watch the three of them walk to the edge of the camp with their hands slightly up to show that they’re coming in peace and are then shown to the largest makeshift tent. And then we wait.

After a few minutes or so I feel another sharp pain in my arm, but this time it doesn’t feel like the other. Sif comes over.

“What is it now? Nothing has happened,” she says.

“Something is wrong,” I say through gritted teeth and add, “we need to go help.” I start walking towards the camp, but Sif grabs my arm.

“No, we have to wait for the signal,” she whisper shouts at me.

“It might be too late,” I start to say when a small bolt of lightning comes from the sky to the tent. Sif and I look at each other and then we run towards the camp. Fandral and Volstagg catch on and Volstagg lets out a battle cry and the Einherjar are in motion.

Vanir rebel warriors also heard the cry and are quickly emerging from their tents and picking up weapons and armor. Once we breach the perimeter Sif motions for me to head to the main tent to check on the boys. She knows it’ll allow me a chance to avoid the majority of the actual fighting.

As I make my way to the tent, I have to dodge several warriors on the way. Thankfully Fandral is able to draw them away from me and I can continue. Once I reach the tent I face the first person I have to actually fight.

I realize I don’t have a weapon so I quickly scan around and find a stake holding open the tent door. I feign one direction and when I see that he has fallen for it, I twist around to grab the stake and stab him in the leg.

“Sorry,” I say involuntarily and step over him and into the tent where I find the three of them in the middle of intense battles of their own. I have to jump out of the way though because Thor is pushing one of the rebel warriors towards the door and out into the open just as Hogun finally knocks out his own opponent and follows Thor back out into the fray.

That leaves Loki in here alone to face down his enemy rebel. He moves in a blur of motion, daggers in both hands, deflecting the attacks from the other person. I look around for something to fight with when another rebel enters the tent. Loki risks one glance, but it was enough and his opponent gets a piece of Loki’s leg.

A sharp pain cuts across my leg as well, but I see that the other fighter went back out for whatever reason. I’m confused, but I don’t have time to think about it. In a fit of pain and worry I walk as quickly as I can over to Loki and as the rebel is ready to make a final blow I grab his arm and the grief pain I’d pushed down escapes in a large burst of power.

The rebel falls to the ground, dead, and I can feel some of that grief returning to me from the life I’ve taken. I turn to Loki who’s on the ground, no longer able to stand with the cut on his leg. I consider things for a moment and then I kneel beside him and gently touch the wound and use the pain to heal the worst of the cut.

When the wound has healed enough that he can look at me in some sense of curiosity, I think to myself, ‘I was right, he is the cat’ and as I start to faint from the exertion of using the power I see the tent collapse on top of us.

Chapter Ten

At some point during the night, I wake with a start. I glance around and I’m not sure where I am. Then I feel movement next to me and then I start to panic a little, but then I realize it’s just the cat or well Loki and I at least know I must be somewhere safe. His eyes open and he looks at me.

“I know it’s you. You might as well transform back into yourself,” I tell him. He appears to hesitate, but then shifts.

Then I realize a moment too late that he’s laying next to me. I try my best not to think about it, but then he smiles that mischievous little smile and I can feel the color rising in my cheeks. We look at each other for a few moments trying to gauge each other when he frowns.

“I should go get Mother. She told me to get her when you woke,” he says and then makes a quick retreat from the room. I lay there for a minute and then decide to try to sit up, but there are too many blankets so I work on trying to remove a couple when both Mother and Loki return.

“Loki, be a dear and help her, would you?” Mother tells him. He comes over to help me arrange myself before Mother comes to sit on the bed and Loki sits himself down in a nearby chair. She looks at him, then me, and then back to him and sighs, “We’ll just start with asking how you’re feeling? Any lingering effects, pain, headaches…”

“No, it is mostly just confusion. I’m not sure what happened. It all happened so quickly,” I answer and then realize I don’t know how the battle went so I ask, “Oh, did we succeed? Is everyone okay?”

“There were a few casualties among the Einherjar, but everyone else is fine, though I’m afraid they have questions for you about what happened,” Mother says.

“I told Thor it was some random blast of wind that collapsed the tent and that’s how you sustained your injuries so you might want to have a headache or something,” Loki tells me.

“I’m not sure if Sif will accept that, I think she might be onto you in some way, she said that you somehow knew that the three of them were in trouble before Thor signaled,” Mother questions.

“I,” I start to say and then glance at Loki and change my answer, “don’t know. It was just something I felt that needed attention.” Mother looks me over and knows there’s something I’m leaving out and Loki looks confused.

“I didn’t know that part. When did Sif say this?” Loki asks Mother.

“We had a brief meeting after everyone was released properly from the healing rooms to discuss if any further action was needed,” she says.

“Why was I not included?” he inquires back.

“You were otherwise preoccupied and I didn’t think you’d really want to be disturbed,” she tells him while giving him a pointed look.

“This is all lovely, but we’re getting off track I feel, what happened? Do I need to come clean?” I interrupt.

“More details can be discussed later and for now let’s keep this between us and we’ll see what Odin wishes to do. For now you should get some rest,” Mother decides and then addresses Loki, “don’t linger too long, she does need to rest. I think she’s been through more than she knows at the moment.”

“Of course, Mother, goodnight,” he says as she leaves us alone again. And then he looks at me and asks, “is there anything you want to tell me?”

“I don’t know; is there anything you want to tell me?” I ask back.

“How long have you known?”

“Known what exactly?”

“Do I really have to say it?” he asks and I nod. “Fine, how long have you known I was the cat?”

“I suppose I’d known for a while, but hadn’t wanted to admit it to myself. Honestly it was when you brought the book though. It was a bit unbelievable a cat could drag that thing down from the library and still be that intact.”

“Oh, right. I didn’t think about that. Are you mad at me?” He looks at me sheepishly.

“I suppose I ought to be. You were sleeping on my pillow, on my bed. I said things I shouldn’t have. Why did you do it?” I ask sadly.

“At first I wanted to see what would happen, when I you know, did my tricks and stuff, but you never told anyone, about any of them. It was easier to follow up as the cat, but then I realized you needed someone to talk to and I’d already established myself that way. It felt more like an invasion of privacy after a while and I didn’t know how to tell you without it seeming like a huge betrayal. I was…”and he cuts off before finishing his thought.

“Afraid you’d lose me?” I suggest and he just hangs his head. “Loki, I’m not going anywhere. I wish you had just told me. I needed an actual person to talk to more than anything. I was starting to feel ridiculous thinking the cat was the only friend I had. I was lonely.”

We both sit in silence for a few minutes trying to figure out where to go from there when I know that I have to tell him about my parents and my titles and the powers that come with them or at least what I know.

“Loki?” I say breaking the silence and he looks at me. “I suppose there are some secrets I need to share with you and since we’re confessing now is as good a time as any.”

“Are you sure? Yours I have a feeling are a bit more personal.”

“It’s time I think, but you have to promise to keep it to yourself.”

“You can trust me.”

“Why do I feel like I’m going to regret this then?” I pause for a moment before starting in, “I didn’t just learn magic while on Migard. I mean I did learn a few things, but I still couldn’t actually do magic.”

“So why can you now,” he interrupts and I glare at him, “sorry.”

“The All Father had my power and titles bound until I turned 18. I inherited my parents’ titles of fidelity and nurturing because of their sacrifice to try to save me from the Frost Giants of Jötunheim. I was also granted my birthright title of grieving.”

“That’s what happened when we were on Vanaheim?” he asks.

“Yes, I hadn’t been anywhere near that much grief before, it was overwhelming and I must have been absorbing it and it came out later when I touched that man. I didn’t mean to kill him. I just wanted to distract him.” I say as I feel tears coming to my eyes.

“Sigyn, it’s okay. I know you didn’t mean it, but I don’t know how to tell you this, but that’s what happens in battles and wars.” He’s silent and it seems like there’s something he’s not saying.

“What is it?”

“He wasn’t the only one your power killed apparently.”

“What?” I say shocked.

“As I was walking to get Mother I heard someone say something about the blast clearing a fairly wide radius of rebels around the tent.”

“How many, Loki?”

“They weren’t sure, someone said it was only a handful and someone said it was closer to 30.”

“That’s a really large range.”

“Well, I think they were more confused about it only being the enemy that was affected than being worried about how many it actually was.”

All I can do is sit there in shock. I lift my hands up and stare at them. Loki thankfully doesn’t say any more about it. I’m not sure how I’m going to sleep now knowing I took so many lives.

“Loki, I have to go back,” I tell him and he shakes his head, his eyes widening.

“No, no, no. I really don’t think that’s a good idea. You do not want to do that to yourself.”

“I won’t be able to stop thinking about it if I don’t face it, please Loki?” I plead and he stares at me, thinking.

“I’ll talk to Mother and see what she thinks, but for now you do need to try to sleep. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Loki, wait,” I say making a decision. He looks at me, waiting, and I ask, “Stay?” I can see a thousand thoughts cross his face when he finally nods and leans back in his chair trying to get comfortable. I laugh and say, “That is not what I meant.” I pat the bed and his eyes widen again.

Slightly reluctantly, he joins me. Then we both lay there on our backs not touching or saying anything. After a short while, my eyes start to droop and I turn towards him and place a hand on the pillow between us. It’s not long before I feel him turn and place his hand on top of mine.

In the morning when I wake I find that Loki has moved back to the chair and is currently reading some book or other.

“Anything good in there?” I ask and he closes the book.

“Sigyn, you’re up. How are you feeling this morning?” he asks in return.

“I’m fine. Am I allowed out of bed yet?”

“Oh, yes, right. A message was delivered a little bit ago. Apparently my Father wants to see you,” he says and then getting serious, “I have to tell you I haven’t had a chance to ask Mother yet about going back. I’m still not sold on the idea anyway.”

“The All Father wants to see me? Is that good or bad? It seems like it might be bad,” I say slightly worried.

“I cannot say I’m fond of his little talks, but that’s just him with me. I’m sure you’ll be fine.”

“You won’t be there?”

“No, it’ll be just you, him, and probably Mother.”

“I see, but oh, I don’t have anything clean to wear here. I don’t know that I should attempt magic at the moment either, Loki?” I ask for some suggestion he might have though I’m not sure why. I’m not sure I have time to go back to the cottage to get something.

“Mother has you covered. She sent a simple dress with the message for you to wear. I’ll leave you to bathe and dress. You’re to join them in the throne room when you’re ready.”

“Thank you, Loki.”

He bows very dramatically and then leaves the room. An attendant comes in after him to help me. At first I want to resist, but truth be told I’m not sure I’d move if they weren’t pushing me.

After I’m clean and dressed, I’m lead down to the throne room to wait for the All Father and the All Mother. I wait for a few minutes before they join me, the All Father sitting in his throne and the All Mother standing nearby. He waves me closer so that we’re not yelling across the room.

“Frigga tells me that is was you that was responsible for the event surrounding the rebel leader’s tent on Vanaheim,” he says and I’m not sure if I’m supposed to say something until I see Mother make a slight movement with my head.

“Unintentionally, yes I suppose it was me,” I tell him. He stares at me for a moment thinking and then he says,

“I wasn’t sure at first where your abilities might run, but I see now how much of an advantage they might be given more proper training.”

“I don’t understand,” I reply.

“Grief can be shaped into a formidable weapon, as you have already discovered. If you could have more control over it, you could topple armies with ease. No one expects to be hit with such overwhelming waves of grief; that’s what I’m guessing happened on Vanaheim.”

“I guess it makes sense, but…“ I start, but the All Father cuts me off.

 “You will train further with not only Mother and Loki, but with me as well. For now we’ll continue to keep it a secret, but I’m sure you’ll be more prepared by the next battle and then we’ll have to truly announce you.”

“Yes, my King,” I say feeling slightly dismayed. Then on an off chance I ask, “Might I ask for one small request?” He makes a gesture for me to continue, “Is there a chance I could return to Vanaheim to observe the area? I feel like there might be something valuable to learn about the power if I can see the results.” He taps his fingers and ponders for a moment before responding.

“You cannot go on your own and I would normally suggest Thor accompany you, but since he does not yet know, I suppose it’ll have to be Loki. You may go this afternoon, but you must not linger. The treaty is still fragile and we don’t want to risk putting it in jeopardy, understood.”

“Yes, my King, thank you.”

He dismisses me. I curtsy quickly and then leave the room in a daze. As I walk through a corridor, I come across Loki making his way towards the throne room.

“Loki, where are you off to?” I ask even though I have a pretty good idea and I feel a little guilty about it.

“I have been summoned. I don’t suppose you know why?” he mockingly asks back.

“I’m afraid I might have gotten you roped into something you’re not going to want to do. I’ll be in the cottage if you need to find me later.”

He shakes his head in disbelief, but then continues on his way without saying anything further. I head to the cottage as promised after retrieving my dirty clothes from my temporary room here in the palace.

Even though I know I just bathed, I feel dirty again. I don’t know how much time I have before Loki shows so there’s no time to bathe again. Besides, I don’t think another bath would really make a difference. I settle for throwing cold water on my face and arms and then scrubbing until the skin is raw.

I glance around and see how dirty everything has become and I set to cleaning as a distraction while I wait. He still hasn’t arrived by the time I’ve finished so I get a drink and sit in front of the fireplace and stare at the flames dance across my retinas. I don’t know how long I’m sitting there, before he comes in.

“Sigyn? Are you okay?” he asks as he touches my shoulder gently pulling me out of the trance I’m in.

“Ok, Loki, I didn’t hear you come in. How did your meeting with the All Father and Mother go?”

“About as well as yours I think. Apparently you talked Father into allowing you to go back to Vanaheim?”

“He wants to train me as a weapon, the least he can do is let me see what kind of damage I’ll be having to cause.”

“He did mention wanting to up your training, but I didn’t know he meant in that way, but perhaps I should have,” he pauses and then adds, “he also wanted me to talk to you about moving into the palace. He said it would be easier to rotate among us as far as training is concerned.” I scoff at him.

“He wants to lock me in a golden cage,” I bite out and then ask him, “What do you think?”

“We’d be locked up together at least,” he replies quietly, “You can always come back out here if you need a break.”

“I suppose I don’t have much choice. How soon?”

“They’re prepping a room now. We can grab some of your things from here when we return from Vanaheim.”

I nod and then he helps me stand and we head to Himinbjorg. When we arrive, Heimdall is ready to send us through. He doesn’t say anything to us as he opens the Bifrost and we step through to Vanaheim. When we arrive Loki takes my hand and I raise an eyebrow at him.

We walk carefully towards where the battle was. There appear to be a few others wandering the area as well so we each mask our appearance with more traditional Vanaheim clothing that we’ve seen. The size of the battlefield is more expansive than I had thought it would be. I didn’t know the rebel army was this big, perhaps something did need to be changed.

The waves of grief hit me slowly enough that I can push it all down into a single area much more easily this time. It’s not nearly as overwhelming. By the time we’ve reached the area where my part played out, I’m feeling dizzy with anxiousness. As we step over bodies towards the center of the ring I can feel my own grief compounding with what I was picking up along the way.

I fall to my knees when I reach the detonation point, letting go of Loki’s hand. All I can do is stare blankly around me unsure what to think or do. Then Loki blocks my vision as he kneels in front of me.

“Sigyn?” he asks gently, but I don’t register it, not until he makes a move to touch my face with his hands and my eyes widen in fear.

“No, stop. Don’t touch me,” I say panicking, “I don’t want to hurt you.”

He stops only momentarily before saying, “You won’t,” and then he holds my face in his hands and looks at me. Softly he tells me, “Let it go.”

“How?” I ask as tears start to fall. I can see him thinking, his eyes never leaving mine. After a moment I see a brief glint of inspiration in his eyes.

“What about your other title, nurturing? Is that how you restored your flowers outside the cottage?” he asks.

“Oh, I’d never considered that,” I say quietly and then I ponder for a minute and then I nod at him and he removes his hands from my face.

I close my eyes envisioning what I want to do and then I touch the ground with my hands. I breathe my vision into my hands and into the ground around me, stretching it as far as I can until I feel nearly depleted. I save a small piece of the grief and tuck it safely away. I don’t want to forget. Then I open my eyes.

As I look around I can see the dried blood has soaked more into the ground and tiny wildflowers have grown around the bodies, marking their current resting places. I wasn’t able to fully surround them if I wanted to mark all of them apparently, but I didn’t want those fallen by other hands to be left out. Those nearest me have the most and the trail runs smaller the further out, but it’s better than it was.

When I finally get the courage to look back at Loki I can see the glimmer of pride in his expression. Whether it’s for me or his brilliant thought I’m not one hundred percent sure, but it’s not a look you see often so I’m glad to see him looking happy.

“That was the most amazing thing I have ever seen,” he says excitedly.

“It certainly felt more rewarding than actually killing them,” I say and then he frowns.

“We probably shouldn’t tell anyone though.”

“Why not?”

“My Father will only use it to his advantage. Send you into battle to kill everyone and then use you to clean it up as some twisted peace offering.”

“He wouldn’t, would he?”

“You know he would.”

“But Heimdall has probably already seen…” I start to say but Loki interrupts.

“Hopefully the invisibility spell I’ve been working on cloaked most of it from his view.”

“Your what now?”

“It’s a spell that hides one from his vision so that he cannot see or hear us. I’ve been working on it for a while now. I could teach you if you want,” he offers. At first my thought is to say no, but if it would allow me to do this on my own…

“Yes,” I tell him and he looks taken aback. “What, thought I’d say no,” I tease and he laughs.

“Of course I’d thought you’d say no.” He stands up and offers his hand. I take it and he pulls me up.

We look around before heading back to where Heimdall dropped us off. The landscape looks vastly different now. There’s no way Heimdall won’t see all of that, but maybe he can only see people. I’ve never had to think about that before. I shake the thoughts from my mind. Only a few people look our direction as we go, but we don’t pay them any mind.

Once we reach the spot, Loki releases his invisibility spell and calls for Heimdall to bring us back. Upon our return Heimdall gives us a weird look, but says nothing. I feel a small pang of guilt, but I try not to dwell on it.

We make a quick trip back to the cottage to pack a few things. I don’t take everything as Loki pointed out that I could come back for breaks on occasion. The last thing I grab is the bowl beside my bed with the snake ornament pieces and the strand of Loki’s hair. Then we journey to the palace.

Mother is waiting for us when we reach the main entrance.

“Glad to see you’ve both made it back in one piece,” she says almost as a question.

“Yes, I think we’ve both learned a bit from the trip. I am thankful for the chance to return,” I reply.

“I see Loki did break the news about moving into the palace,” she says as she gestures to the items we’re carrying.

“He did, though I would have been fine getting up earlier or staying late to learn instead of barging in on your space,” I suggest in one last ditch effort to remain in the cottage.

“I’m afraid Odin won’t be swayed, my dear. I’m sure you’ll eventually get used to the palace, besides I was at least able to have my way with room location. Shall we…”

She leads us up several flights of stairs and I sense Loki starting to get nervous, but I’m not sure why. We eventually stop in front of an open doorway and she motions for us to enter. I’m about halfway into the room before I realize Loki hasn’t followed us in. He’s standing in the doorway.

“Are you coming in, Loki?” I ask him. He shakes his thoughts loose.

“Just waiting for an invitation, it’s not proper to enter a lady’s room without an invitation.”

“Quite right, my son, such a gentleman, though more so these days than I knew,” Mother says thoughtfully.

Loki places my things that he was carrying gently on a settee in the outer receiving room. They make themselves comfortable while I start arranging my belongings. As I put my clothes away I notice several more outfits already in the wardrobe. I just ignore them for now not wanting to think about it. The last thing I do is place my bowl safely on a table next to the bed.

The two of them are conversing in whispered tones so I make a small coughing noise to announce my presence. The both look at me trying to hide whatever it is they were talking about from their faces.

“Am I interrupting anything important? I can go back into the bedroom if you’d rather,” I suggest. They look back each other, some thought between them, and then they look back at me and I sigh, “oh nevermind.” I sit down in a seat across from them.

“We were trying to figure out the best training regimen given that there are three of us to work with…” Loki starts.

“Yes, but then I told him that Odin wouldn’t be training you for a little while yet until after you’ve gotten a little more control practice in so that brings us back down to two…” Mother continues.

“But there is also combat training to consider in there somewhere, but I’m not sure who’s best to train you there…” Loki adds.

“Yes given that no one else knows about your titles yet so your Asgardian prowess is more prominent so I’m thinking…” Mother now adds, but it’s my turn to interject.

“Do I get any say in this?” I ask and they both look a little awkward. I continue, “I would say given that I do have three titles, couldn’t they learn about one, perhaps the fidelity one? It would still lend cause to being more *Asgardian* without necessarily jeopardizing the entire operation.”

“That’s not bad. What do you think Mother?”

“I suppose it might be enough to work. We’ll have to run it by Odin of course, but I’m sure he’d love to still have Thor and Sif training you. You were already progressing well with them.”

“Great, it’s a plan then. Perhaps we should get ready for dinner?” I propose trying to get rid of this annoying conversation.

“Quite right, yes I’ll go run this by Odin and see you downstairs shortly,” Mother agrees.

“I am feeling hungry. Hopefully Volstagg won’t eat everything before we get there,” Loki adds and holds his arm out for Mother, which she takes. I walk them to the door and close it quickly behind them before they can say anything else.

I don’t dawdle choosing something to wear. Most of my wardrobe appears to be green and gold in color and I sigh to myself. I do find a small selection of other colored dresses nearly hidden at the very end of the row. I choose a sapphire blue one and put it on quickly. I put my hair up in a simple braided style. It still hasn’t grown out enough to do more elaborate styles yet, but it’s better now than it was.

As I’m leaving my room I turn my head to the right towards the sound of a nearby door opening. It’s the next door down and I see Loki emerging. He sees me at the same time and we both freeze in our tracks. It’s only the briefest of freezes, but enough that we’ve registered the other and neither of us knows how to break the ice. I make the first move. I finish exiting my room and close the door behind me and walk towards him.

“Would you walk me to dinner? I must admit I’m feeling a bit nervous in case Mother is able to convince the All Father of our plan. I don’t know that he’d delay too much in announcing me,” I ramble.

“Of course,” he says and puts out his arm for me to take which I do. Then he continues, “I had no part in this room arrangement if it makes any difference.”

“It was certainly unexpected. Is there anyone else nearby I should worry about?”

“Only Thor is also in this particular wing of the floor. He’s across the hall and a couple more doors down. We’ll pass it on the way as we walk down to dinner. Hopefully he’s already there.”

I only nod in agreement as we start our journey back down the stairs towards the dining hall. He does point out the door to Thor’s chambers as we pass and thankfully he does not emerge as we go by. Once we reach the entrance to the dining hall I release Loki’s arm before we go in so that people don’t start getting the wrong idea.

I notice Thor already in attendance along with the others gathered on one side of the room. The All Father and Mother are in their places at the head of the room. The All Father stands as we fully enter the hall.

“Asgard,” he bellows and all heads turn towards him and the room falls silent. Once he has everyone’s undivided attention he continues, “It is my great pleasure to present to you Lady Sigyn, Goddess of Fidelity and future princess of Asgard.”

‘Future what?’ I think to myself as everyone’s attention shifts to me. I glance at Mother who looks just as confused as I feel. I avoid Loki for a moment and look to Thor whose brows are creased with visible confusion as well. Then I dare glance to Loki standing nearby who is trying and failing to look calm, but I sense some worry and frustration behind his eyes and in his clenched fists. I realize they’re waiting for me to say something.

“It is an honor, my King. I shall try to be worthy of such an honor as my natural loyalty is to Asgard and its interests.”

For a moment nothing else happens, but then The All Father speaks again raising a glass in toast and others follow suit.

“To Lady Sigyn, for Asgard,” and then the hall echoes his toast. Then he sits and the hall bursts into furious whispers around me, none of it fully decipherable. I notice Mother gesturing to us to come up towards the front of the room so we slowly make our way there. Conversations dying as we walk by and then starting up again once we pass.

We sit in the two empty seats next to Mother as Thor’s seat is technically on the other side of the All Father. An attendant fills our goblets with wine and food is served to us, which feels a bit unnatural. None of us say anything for several minutes. It’s just the sound of clinking silverware and the buzz of the hall. It’s suffocating. Finally Mother breaks the silence.

“I have no idea what he’s talking about. That was not any part of our discussion. I’ll speak with him again after dinner,” she whispers in our direction. Loki and I just nod unsure what else could possibly be said.

As the dinner itself comes to a close, everyone starts to mingle more about with others they weren’t sitting with. A few even come over to congratulate me on my ‘new’ title and future status. I try to be as gracious as I can, given that I still don’t understand. Eventually Thor and his posse find their way over to offer their congratulations.

“Welcome to the upper ranks of the Asgardian circle, Lady Sigyn,” Thor teases.

“It was a surprise given your lack of strength on the field, but given your title of fidelity, perhaps that shouldn’t be so surprising after all,” Sif adds rather rudely.

“She has gotten better Sif,” Fandral says in my defense and the boys nod and murmur their agreement. Sif just sniffs in defiance and distaste.

“Does this mean you no longer want to help with my training, Sif?” I ask her.

“Oh no, I’ll help, if it means I get to best you over and over and over again.”

“You best everyone Sif. I can’t be that much of a feather in your cap.”

“Oh, you’re not, but it’ll give me immense satisfaction to take you down every time,” she says with a dangerous gleam in her eye. Then she leans in closer to whisper in my ear, “One day they’ll see you as you really are, a monster.”

I look at her with eyes widened in shock. She laughs as she walks away. The boys all glance at each other not sure what just happened and then they all trail after her except for Thor and Loki.

“She’ll come around, don’t worry,” Thor assures me and then adds, “plus I’ll still help with your training. Eventually you’ll be able to best me on occasion.” He smiles, pats my arm, and then rejoins his group.

“What did she say to you,” I hear Loki ask me and I turn towards him. I wear my best fake smile when I answer.

“Nothing important, don’t worry,” I reply, but I don’t know that he’s buying it.

“She’s just jealous of you so don’t let her get to you, okay?”

“Jealous, of me?” I ask not sure what he means.

“The future princess part of the announcement… She’s wasting her time waiting around for Thor to see her, if you know what I mean.”

Before I can reply we notice the All Father and Mother leaving together and Loki motions his head to me to follow them. I hesitate, but then I nod and we try to sneakily follow them.

They finally pick a room to go into far enough away from the dining hall that they won’t easily be overheard. Luckily there’s no door to close either so we can wait just outside the room and hear them without looking too suspicious. It’s not long before we hear Mother start in.

“Would you care to explain yourself, dear?”

“Explain what precisely?”

“You know very well what. We never discussed anything about her being a future princess. What exactly did you mean by that?”

He doesn’t reply right away. Loki and I look at each other, wondering for a moment if they know we’re here, but then he finally answers her.

“Despite your obvious efforts, you know I will never approve such a match. I will however consider her as a match for Thor or we can go the long way route of officially adopting her into the family.”

“That is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard. Loki and Sigyn are clearly a match. She and Thor would never work.”

“I don’t care about matches. I need to do what is best for Asgard and you know why I cannot and will not allow it. I will not mix mischief and grief together.”

“You are being foolish.”

“You are my wife and I am your king and you will let this go.”

We hear Mother sniff and start walking closer so we make a quick getaway to a room nearby. We hear her walk further down the hall but we stay put until the All Father makes his way back to the dining hall to finish mingling and probably drink.

After Loki peeks around the corner to see if the coast is clear we meander back to our rooms. Neither of us says anything the whole way back. It’s not until we’re almost to my door that Loki breaks the silence.

“Do you want to talk in my rooms?” he asks and I blink at him and then he offers, “or in yours if you’d feel more comfortable.” I look around before answering.

“I wouldn’t mind seeing your rooms, if you don’t mind my being in there.”

So we walk a few extra steps and then he opens the door and gestures for me to enter. Gingerly, I cross the threshold and into his receiving room. I sit down in an armchair and look around.

For the most part it is a copy of my own only in reverse so that our bedrooms would actually be next to each other. It’s only sparsely decorated, but I do notice a few snake ornaments like the one that was in the cottage.

“Why did you break that snake ornament that was in my cottage? It looks like it was one from your own collection.” I ask him.

“It was an accident to be honest. I was a smidge frustrated that you weren’t getting the message that I was the cat and I just hit it too hard.”

“But you just ran off. Why didn’t you stay?”

“I figured you’d be mad at me or at the cat. I didn’t want to face you being mad at me in two different forms.”

“I’m sorry. I’m afraid my emotions tend to get the best of me. Your Father might be right.”

“Now I’m worried. I don’t agree with his methods or Mother’s clear hand in trying to match us, but would it truly never work?” he asks softly. Oh.

“I don’t know about never, but Loki we’re young yet. There are so many others you could make a better match with. I barely have control over myself. I’m a ticking time bomb,” I say and pause for a moment before I continue, “I’m not even sure I should stay here after all. Maybe I should go back to the cottage.”

I stand up and head for the door. Loki rushes to stand in front of me.

“Sigyn wait, stay, please.”

I gaze at him for a moment and then I push past him and out the door only to see Thor walking down the hall towards his own room. He stops and looks at me and then at the room I’m leaving. There’s a question on his face.

“It’s not whatever you’re probably thinking,” I tell him.

“No? What about Father’s proclamation then?” he asks.

“I don’t know, but it’s not us,” I say partially lying. I’m sick of all the lies. He doesn’t say anything as he thinks and then asks thoughtfully,

“Do you want it to be?”

“I don’t know what I want,” is all I can think to say and as I finish Loki takes that moment to come out after me. He sees Thor and stops mid-step.

“Brother,” Loki says.

“Brother,” Thor echoes.

No one says anything for a couple minutes, all of us standing there awkwardly not sure where the conversation should go. It’s Thor that eventually makes the first move by walking towards us.

“Sigyn, can I offer to walk you back to your room?”

“There’s no need, Thor, it’s right there,” I say point-blank and point to the next door down. Another look of confusion crosses his face.

“But you said,” but a thought occurs to him and he decides to skip the rest of that sentence and instead says, “Well this should be fun.”

Loki glares at him and then produces one his hidden daggers and goes after Thor. Thor easily counter-attacks and the two go back and forth until I unintentionally intervene.

I clench my fists in frustration and I must hit on some tap of grief over the situation within myself that I was denying and the torches lighting the hallway flicker low. The boys stop and look at me, but I’m past seeing them. It’s Loki who comes over and takes hold of my arms.

“Sigyn, stop, snap out of it. I’m sorry,” he says softly and then I release it and the lights return and I blink and look at Loki and then turn my head towards Thor who looks unsure.

“Oh god, I’m sorry, I…” I start and then Sif’s words echo in my mind so I finish saying, “Sif was right. I am a monster.”

I wrestle out of Loki’s grip as he protests and I run to my room and close the door behind me. There’s no lock so I push an armchair in front of it. I hear Loki knocking loudly and both of them calling my name, but I go the bedroom and close that door so that their voices are nothing but a mumble.

I lay down on the bed and stare at the ceiling taking deep breaths and trying to push away the darkness still sitting in my chest. I don’t know what came over me. I have to learn to control it so that it doesn’t control me. I should have practiced more before my powers had been restored, but it always seemed pointless.

As I lay there I hear a noise so I sit up, but there’s nothing but silence. I probably imagined it. I lay back down, but as I do there it is again but louder so I get off the bed and walk to where I thought I heard the noise, then I hear it again, it sounds like knocking, but there’s nothing here but this wall curtain. Then I hear a voice, Loki’s.

“Sigyn, please let me in.” I don’t respond still confused until I move the curtain and see a door. Oh, well I suppose that makes sense given the circumstances of location and I sigh to myself while he continues to speak through the door, “Sigyn please, I just want to know you’re okay. Can you at least tell me that?”

“What do you think, Loki?” I say bitterly. “How would you feel?”

“Why do you think I’m asking? Do you want me to go get Mother?” he offers. That’s a terrible idea.

“No, don’t do that. I don’t want to make a bigger mess of things,” I say and then I pause before asking, “What do you think Thor’s going to do?”

“I don’t know. If he’s smart he’ll keep it to himself, but I suppose there’s a chance he’ll go to Father,” he admits. That would be even worse. I’d take Mother any day over having to face him right now. I have certainly screwed things up.

“I’m sorry, Loki,” I say quietly and then mostly to myself, “You truly do deserve more.”

Then I move away from the door back towards the bed, but then I pace for a bit and eventually stand in front of the wardrobe. I riffle through the options and with every item I touch, the angrier I become. I knew Mother must have had some hope for my being with Loki, but this really was going too far.

Then there’s the All Father practically forbidding it. He’d rather force me on poor Thor or go through the elaborate operation of adopting me into the royal family. Can they even do that now that I’m of majority? Had he already begun the process before now or is it some desperate action to keep me from Loki? Is this a punishment meant for me or Loki?

Chapter Eleven

I must have fallen asleep at some point because I’m awoken by the sound of insistent knocking and an unknown voice calling my name from the other room. Then I remember I’ve blocked the door.

“I’m coming, hang on one moment,” I shout and the knocking immediately cease. Well, at least I know they heard me. I move the chair and open the door to find out who could possibly be looking for me that I don’t know.

“Good morning Lady Sigyn, I’ve been assigned as you lady in waiting,” she informs me.

“I see. Do you have a name?”

“How silly of me, I’m Eva.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Eva. You must call me Sigyn, except I suppose in more official circumstances. I feel like I’ve seen you around, though we’ve never been introduced,” I inquire trying to determine who might have sent her.

“I was a new recruit to the All Mother so I wouldn’t have been seen much as I was mostly in her chambers and not traveling with her. I hadn’t quite reached that high a rank yet.”

“So is this an upgrade or a downgrade for you?”

“Well upgrade I would imagine, though I am sad to be leaving the Queen’s service, begging your pardon.”

“I’m sure you’ll have many an opportunity to be around her. I do have to ask one more thing to which you may not be able to answer.” She looks at me with small confusion, but allows me to continue, “Have you been asked to spy on me by either the All Father or Mother?”

She has the look of someone caught, which me she isn’t experienced in this sort of thing. Honestly it’s probably both of them. I’ll put her out her misery.

“Never mind, Eva, I didn’t mean to put you on the spot. Chances are you’ve been asked by both to report back to them. It’s okay. I have nothing to hide,” I tell her simply. She now looks relieved.

“Is there anything I can help you with this morning? Shall I prepare a bath or do your hair or,” she looks me up and down, “perhaps find you something to wear?” I glance down and realize I never changed. I must look a mess.

“I guess there’s no rejecting your help even though I am perfectly capable of taking care of myself,” I say and pause. Then I decide I might well go all in. “Let’s test your skills. I wouldn’t want you to feel that you aren’t doing your job so how about all three,” I suggest and her face lights up.

She leaves to start prepping the bath and I do the minimal job of undoing my braids from last night. I glance at my reflection in a mirror and I still feel disgusted by what I see so I turn away and head towards the direction Eva went.

After I am clean and dressed, Eva and I head down to breakfast where everyone else has already arrived and begun eating. I take my new place at the head of the table, while Eva stands along the wall behind me in case I’m in need of something. This won’t do. I wave her over.

“Yes, my lady?” she asks with a small tinge of confusion in her voice as to why I might require something already.

“Do you have any friends eating somewhere in here this morning?” I ask in return.

“I do.”

“Wouldn’t you prefer to go eat and sit with them?”

“That’s not proper protocol, my lady,” she says with more apprehension in her voice now.

“Ah, well both the All Father and Mother are here nearby so they can keep an eye on me themselves if that’s really what’s bothering you,” I suggest as a reason why she really won’t go. She hesitates for a moment glancing in the direction of the All Father and Mother and I see Mother nod in agreement. She bobs a quick curtsy and then joins her friends. Mother turns to me.

“That was generous of you, my dear. I hope you slept well,” she says nonchalantly like she doesn’t recall the incident that occurred in this very hall just last evening.

“So was she your idea or our very generous King’s?” She blinks at me in denial, but I narrow my eyes at her in accusation knowing full well she had to come from someone.

“Odin did wish to assign someone to you and I chose her. I know she’s dependable and eager to please. I wouldn’t be surprised though if he had a word or two with her himself though,” she admits in defeat.

“I have a feeling there’s a conversation we need to have somewhere in the near future, don’t you suppose?”

“Yes, I think we need to clear the air, but now is not the time,” she says and Loki chooses then to join the conversation.

“Why not now, after all does it not concern the future of Asgard?” he proposes as a relatively sound thought. Then to me he says, “It’s good to see you’re looking well this morning.”

“Why would she not be well?” the All Father asks, barging his way into the discussion as well. Oh botheration.

“Well, that was quite the announcement last night. I’m afraid it took me more by surprise than I thought. After so many offers of congratulations I developed a rather large headache is all,” I offer hoping his doesn’t actually know anything.

“You should probably work on some breathing exercises as I’m afraid your duties within the kingdom will often bring on such headaches. You best get used to them,” he suggests and then turns back to whomever it was he was already talking to. Mother is looking at me more suspiciously and, oh Thor is in his seat, also looking at me funny.

Loki mouths a sorry at me and then goes back to eating. The other two do as well, reluctantly. I look down at my plate of food. I stab an egg rather aggressively and shove it in my mouth so I don’t have to say anything else.

At the end of breakfast the All Father gets up and looks to Mother, then at Thor, and then at Loki and myself as some signal for us to follow him, which we do. We enter what appears to be the war council room and we each take a seat, the All Father at the head, Mother at the other end, Thor and Loki across from each other, and I next to Mother as she gestures to a seat next to her.

“It has come to my attention that there is confusion to the announcement that I made yesterday. I declared Sigyn as a future princess of Asgard without consulting the rest of you, which as the king of Asgard I have the ability to do. However, as a husband and father I erred.”

All of us sneak peeks at each other in surprise while we wait for him to continue speaking.

“I have long considered the possibility of adopting Sigyn into the family properly, but there is also the possibility of accomplishing the same task through marriage,” he says. He looks us over carefully before adding, “The Queen Mother has made her own choices known as she wishes to pair Sigyn with Loki while I would pair her with Thor.”

“And what if I don’t want either of them or to be adopted?” I ask cutting him off. He stares at me in disdain and it feels as though he’d rather I simply never existed to bother him with this tedious affair. Mother places a hand on top of mine in an effort to either calm me or keep me from saying anything else. The boys are looking at the All Father for his response trying to keep their faces neutral.

“You will watch your tone,” he growls out with some other lingering threat behind his words. “No final decision will be made in a hurry. I seek to protect Asgard and if that means doing something that a few don’t like so be it. Is that understood?” He proclaims and levels his stare at each of us in turn.

No one nods in agreement, but no one argues against him either. Will none of them stand up to him? I push my seat back, screeching the legs against the floor as I do so. I turn away from all of them and leave them sitting there.

As I’m walking back to my room, I notice that Eva is following me, but at a distance. I don’t say anything until we’re in my room. I’m grasping at my head trying to undo the braids that Eva put in this morning when she comes over to help.

“Let me help with that, before you rip the hair from your head, my lady,” she says timidly.

“I’m sorry, Eva. I didn’t mean to frighten you, I’m just so frustrated, but that’s my problem, not yours,” I tell her and attempt to take a few deep breaths to calm myself. She finishes letting out my hair in silence. When she’s done I ask her to bring us some tea o that I can have a few minutes to myself.

When she returns and has served us tea we sit not saying anything. It’s fine at first, but I need something or someone else to think about and I realize I know very little about her and if she’s going to be sticking around awhile I should get to know her.

“So Eva, tell me about yourself, do you have any family? How long had you been working in the Queen’s service?”

“Oh well, I had only been working for her about a year now. Before that I was working down in the kitchens mostly running errands,” she replies with obvious diversion to answering about her family. I know I probably shouldn’t push, but…

“And about your family or are you an orphan like me?” I ask, jesting lightly. She lets out a little laugh, before answering.

“No not an orphan, but my family isn’t one of the higher ranked families I’m afraid,” she says looking down as if a bit ashamed to admit it.

“Well, the higher ranks aren’t all they’re cracked up to be. Were you waiting outside the council chamber?” I ask and she nods so I ask, “Did you hear anything?” She shakes her head no.

“Those walls aren’t quite as thin as these,” she responds and gestures the walls around us. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“Technically, I’m not sure I should, but I will say this much, somehow I’ve ended up in the middle of a large mess and I’m not sure how to get out of it.”

“If I’m being honest, I would say things could be worse than to be caught in a little royal drama, not to say that it’s not a great situation to be in, it just could be worse I think.”

“I feel like there’s something I’m missing here, Eva. Are you in some kind of trouble?”

She shakes her head no, but sips on her tea lost in some thought. I don’t bother her with any more annoying questions. I know she’s right, but the last couple of months have been overwhelming. Things were simpler on Midgard. We’re brought out of our individual thoughts by a knock on the door. Eva goes to open it and there’s an Einherjar in the doorway.

“Can I help you?” Eva asks him.

“Heimdall wishes to see Lady Sigyn as soon as possible,” he says and I walk over to him.

“Did he say anything else?” I ask.

“No, he did not, my lady,” he replies. I thank him and he goes on his way.

I go to my room and grab my currently useless traveling ring and put it in a pocket. I grab a cloak and then Eva and I make the trek to Himinbjorg to see what Heimdall needs so urgently. He’s gazing out into the abyss when we arrive.

“Heimdall, you sent for me,” I say when we’re close enough. He turns to face me.

“I did. There’s a sickness affecting the village you were staying with on Midgard. I thought you might want to know,” he informs me.

“I need to go to them. I’ll need to gather some supplies and get permission I suppose,” I ramble.

“You’re not the only one I notified,” he adds and gestures behind me. Mother and Loki are there. Loki’s carrying a bag with hopefully some medicines and such.

“I see you’ve beaten us here,” Mother says.

“Are you coming as well?” I ask her.

“Not me, but I managed Odin to let Loki accompany you since he knows a few of the healing spells that might be useful. Of course this means Eva will need to go as well to chaperone,” she answers.

“Of course, my Queen,” Eva says though she sounds unsure.

“Do we really need a chaperone Mother,” Loki asks.

“Right now, yes.” Loki rolls his eyes, but comments no further. She adds, “Be safe,” and then Heimdall opens the bifrost and we head to Midgard. Heimdall graciously puts us a smidge closer to the village so we’re not wasting nearly as much time getting there.

When we reach the outskirts I sense how quiet it is, almost as quiet as that first day, but this time I can also sense the grief coursing throughout. I shove it down. I’ll deal with it later. There’s a woman I don’t recognize running from one hut to the next as we walk through the main street and I stop them as they go by.

“Hello,” I say and they stop for a moment registering me.

“You shouldn’t be here, you’ll catch whatever they have, please go. I’ve work to do.”

“I’m Sigyn; perhaps Botulf or Pernilla mentioned me?” I try instead. She hesitates and then nods. She starts walking so I follow gesturing behind me to Eva and Loki to wait. After we pass a couple huts she points to one.

“They’re in there, but be warned, Botulf isn’t faring well. He might not fully recognize you.” I nod my thanks and walk the few remaining steps to the door.

I knock softly before letting myself in. The room is a mess and the stench in the air is definitely reminiscent of sickness. There’s a variety of sounds coming from my left so I walk that way and push aside the curtain to find several of the villagers laying about in varying stages of the sickness. Finally I spot Botulf near the back, Pernilla sitting on the floor near him, exhausted. I carefully make my way over and crouch n front of her.

“Pernilla?” I ask quietly trying not to scare her or disturb the others. She looks up at me.

“Sigyn?” she asks in return looking confused, “What are you doing here?”

“I got word that the whole village had fallen ill so we’ve come to help.”

“We?”

“I’ve brought one of the princes of Asgard, Loki, and my lady in waiting Eva. Not a whole army,” I promise, remembering they had been on edge about that the first time as well. She simply nods and holds out her hand and I help her up.

“We’ve had sickness similar to this before, but never this widespread or severe. It’s hit every family and there aren’t many people left standing to care for the others. We’ve already lost four children and three adults.” She glances to Botulf before saying, “I fear it won’t be long before those numbers increase significantly.”

“What do you need us to do?” I ask we weave our way back outside into the fresh air.

“Honestly, I was hoping you’d have ideas, because we’ve nearly exhausted all our supplies and energy already. This is beyond our capabilities.”

“I’ll converse with Loki and Eva and make a plan. Is there somewhere we can camp nearby so we don’t have to make the trek from the mountain?”

“We’ve tried to move everyone that’s sick towards the center huts of the village to make it easier to care for them. Our hut is the large one at the entrance of the village. There are two rooms, but also only two beds.”

“That’s generous and only two beds will be fine. We won’t all be resting at the same time anyway.”

She nods and leaves me to go back to Botulf while I return to Loki and Eva to fill them in with what little I know. I guide them to the hut Pernilla said is theirs and we take a few minutes to regroup before making a plan.

“Eva, do you know any herbal remedies that might help? You said that you had worked in the kitchens before, is there anything you learned from there that might help?”

“Not really, but I know I could hunt and find most of the herbs you need. Do you want me to go back to get some or?”

“No, I should check the library to see if there’s anything there that might work. What about preparing soups or broths?” I try instead.

“I know some basic ones that will go down easy,” she says sounding more hopeful.

“Excellent, I’m sure there are a couple women already in charge, but I want you and Loki to help them with whatever they need, got it?” I ask mostly looking at Loki to see what he has to say, but instead they both nod in agreement.

I tell them to let whoever’s in charge know that I sent them and that I’ll be back as soon as I can. After they’ve left in search of the main cooking area, I pull the travelling ring from my pocket and put it on my hand. Now would be a great time for me to figure out how to use this.

I concentrate intensely on the space before me and make the motion with my hand. I close my eye and see myself standing in the living room area of the mountain. I focus on the light filtering through the sky windows and falling on the furniture and myself below. When I open my eyes, there’s an open path to the mountain dwelling. I did it.

Before I get too excited and lose it, I step through. The doorway closes behind me. Well, at least I held it long enough to get here. I rush to the library and scan the shelves for anything of use. There isn’t much unfortunately, a few scrolls with spells that I’d never be able to perform. Mostly it’s just a list of tea to help with comfort and a note to keep anyone with a temperature cool.

Frustrated, I toss the book I’m reading to the side and stand up to pace. Then it occurs to me that I’m wasting time, time that I don’t have. I attempt to create the doorway back to the hut and after a moment it opens and I step back through. I go in search of Eva and it doesn’t take long to find her near a fire pit stirring. I look around, but there’s no Loki in sight.

“How are things going, Eva? Where’s Loki run off to?” I ask her.

“There haven’t been any new developments since you’ve been gone. How are you back already? They said you’d likely be gone most of the day. Oh and Loki went to get some fresh water.”

“It’s a long story. Anyway, there wasn’t much extra information. It was mostly different teas and rest and spells I’m wouldn’t be able to perform properly. I might have you go on a basic hunt for any herb or flower you know is safe to consume and go with trial and error, I guess.”

She nods and leaves me to continue stirring for her. She locates a basket and head in the direction of the nearby woods. She isn’t gone 5 minutes before Loki makes it back.

“Before you ask, no I didn’t find much,” I tell him as he sets the buckets of water he was carrying down.

“Should I go back to Asgard and see if Father will let be bring a healer or two?” he offers.

“That’s a lovely thought, but I highly doubt he’d agree to that. Is there any way to get ice from the river here before it melts? I want to try to keep them cool. There was a note that we should try to keep them as controlled cool as possible.” He nods.

“I’ll walk faster and carry it in a sturdy sack lined with straw. I’ll see what I can find.”

“Thank you, Loki,” I say am look at him a little sorrowfully. He turns and heads to what might be considered a barn.

I head to the huts and find able bodied people to help wrap the ill tightly with blankets and to help Loki gather ice to cover those sick with. After several hours and many trips to the river and back, everyone is finally taken care of, for the moment anyway.

Eva is making a second round of tea trips to those that are able to sip and sit. I send Loki to rest and then take over for Eva to rest as well. They can take a shift later so that I can take a break.

I can feel the collective grief hanging in the air nearly choking me, but I do my best to neither show my distress nor automatically collect it within myself. I have a theory going about what happens if I take their grief from them, or at least all of it, but I don’t yet know how to stop once I start so I’m trying desperately to resist it, but as the hours roll on it becomes harder and harder. I’m almost afraid that if I sleep I’ll collect it unconsciously.

A half hour after sending them to rest, most of the patients appear to also finally be resting and I sneak away for a few minutes to regroup myself. I head towards the hut where Loki and Eva should be resting. I quietly open the door to check that they are indeed resting. Eva appears to be in a restful sleep, exhausted from the work. Loki is tossing and turning in his sleep, which worries me, but I don’t want to disturb him so I make a clean escape back outside to breathe and center myself.

The rest of the night is a mix of quiet and chaos. There’s not much to be done. I make a few trips to get more ice for those that have the higher temperatures. I let Loki and Eva sleep. There’s no need to wake them if they’re able to get some rest.

Just before dawn, I lose my first patient. While I didn’t know them well, it feels like a hole has opened in my chest. He was a father who had two children depending on him. They’re currently in critical condition themselves so I’m not sure if I’ll be able to save them or anyone. I feel so useless.

For now I cannot think about it, I shove it away and get back to work, but several more don’t make it to morning. By the time the dawn arrives a total of six more died, four of them children, including the two that lost their father. I hadn’t even time to tell them.

I can feel my own grief blurring the edges of my vision, but I keep working, bringing tea, water, broth, or ice. Out of the corner of my eye on the way back from one of my trips I see Pernilla emerging from the hut where Botulf was. When she sees me she hurries over and grabs my hand urgently pulling me towards Botulf. When we reach him I can tell he’s barely hanging on. I take a hold of his hand.

“Sigyn,” he says weakly.

“I’m here. You need to save your strength for getting better,” I tell him.

“We both know that’s not going to happen,” he says and I look at him sadly. Then he continues, “Promise me you’ll be careful.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Don’t lose your heart; don’t let it consume you.”

He looks into my eyes to make sure that I’ve heard him. With tears in my eyes I reply.

“I promise,” I say and then he nods weakly. Then he attempts to take one last breath, but it never comes. His eyes glaze over and his hand goes limp in mine. I look back at Pernilla who’s crying silently. I tell her, “I’m so sorry,” and then we embrace each other tightly for a moment.

Then I rush from the room and down to the river. By the time I reach the river bank, my vision has nearly gone black. I wade out into the water until it reaches my neck and I stand there wondering if I should go further.

Then I take a deep breath and let myself sink. Once I’m fully submerged, I let out a scream or as much as one can scream under the water. I hold myself under the water as long as I’m able and just when I’m ready to come back up someone pulls me back up and to shore. I lay on my side and cough up water.

“I was fine,” I say in-between coughs.

“Not from where I was standing.”

I turn over to face my rescuer. A pair of green eyes is staring at me from too close up, practically leaving no room to breathe air that he was desperate for me to get to, but I don’t push him away either.

“For the record, I was just about to resurface,” I say softly and he rolls his eyes.

“Sure you were.”

“I thought you were still asleep.”

“Someone saw you run off and came and woke me up.”

“I’m sorry they interrupted your sleep. You should go back.”

“No, you clearly need to rest. I’ll take a shift. You’re clearly over exhausted and dare I say grieving,” he says trying to cheer me up.

“That is my job after all, isn’t it?” is all I can think to say.

Neither of us says anything after that. Loki is the first to stand and help me up. I start shivering realizing just how cold I am. Loki conjures a blanket and wraps it around my shoulders. We walk slowly back to the village.

I see Eva scurrying about as I suppose they woke her as well. Then I spot another large figure and I rub my eyes thinking my eyes are clearly not seeing well after all. Then he laughs.

“Thor?” I ask still unsure.

“Sigyn, Loki!” he exclaims, “What happened to you two? You’re soaked.”

“I was trying to get some ice further in the river and I slipped off a rock. Luckily Loki was there to fish me out. Unfortunately, I lost the bucket I had taken with me,” I tell him before Loki can say anything differently.

“Well, lucky he was there then.”

“What are you doing here, brother?” Loki asks him suspiciously.

“Ah, well Father sent me thinking you might need another pair of hands. I did try to convince the rest of the group, but they didn’t feel like freezing or something.”\*