

The One That Got Away

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The One That Got Away

by [little_trickster_ghost](#)

Summary

The sudden announcement of an arranged marriage, to the most disreputable person in Asgard no less, leaves Sigyn torn between duty and the desire to decide her own fate. With everyone refusing to disclose any of the details behind the arrangement, and an unknown enemy silently preparing to strike from the shadows, things are only bound to get more complicated.

Notes

So, this is actually a rather old work that I posted ages ago on FFNET, and now as that site is slowly dying, and I am thinking about finishing this huge story, even as I am a different person now who would have written this much differently, so we are moving here. I will be reviewing the chapters and fixing some stuff as well as I post from there to here, but the core story will remain the same. I will initially attempt weekly posting, since a large portion of the story is finished and only requires editing, and I will not take it down from FFNET if anyone wants to read ahead, but the updated best version will be posted here.

A tumultuous beginning

Black clouds obscured the sunlight, casting a grey shadow all over the land. The wind howled, and thunder rumbled in the distance preceded by flashes of lightning, but the rain had yet to fall. Sigyn had always found thunderstorms to have a sort of revitalizing quality. She had always enjoyed days like this, when the heavens raged upon the earth breathing new life into it. This time a storm greater than the one about to break out was already raging inside of her. A storm that would never show on the surface as long as she had any control over it.

A week had passed since she had been called by her mother to have it announced to her that she would be leaving her home to be given in marriage to a man she only knew by name. Away from her home, in Asgard, no less. She had cried and raged more than her fill at having her own life taken away from her hands and manipulated to fit strangers' interests. Interests that were never even properly explained to her. But she knew enough about Asgardian diplomacy to have a good guess about what those were. Getting offered up like cattle to some member of the royal family. Not even an actual family member with any claims to the throne, apparently she was only good enough for someone lesser.

'Some things we do out of choice, others out of duty. It is how life is, and pondering on it won't change anything. You have many things to take care of rather than waste your time like that,' her mother had told her, otherwise remaining tight lipped about the affair. Sigyn had found it hard to accept, both the sudden announcement and the absurd near-secrecy. In the end she had given up, for the time being at least. Until perhaps a different way out presented itself.

As she waited in her empty room, looking out on everything she would be leaving behind, Sigyn decided not to dwell on her grief. Tears only did so much good, which was to say, none. The thoughts of the plains and forests of Vanaheim were already laced with a tinge of bittersweet nostalgia, even though she hadn't left them behind yet. She made a promise to herself, never to let that nostalgia turn into painful homesickness. With that little vow, she turned away from the window, towards the bare bed where a leather traveling satchel lay. It was the only piece of baggage she would keep on her person. She picked it up and walked towards the door as the first drops of rain hit the ground.

The storm had moved away from the Sky Citadel, but the skies of Asgard remained overcast. The lack of sunlight gave Loki a strange sense of comfort. It reminded him of a home that had not really been home for a very long time. The Jotun had been born in a mostly sunless realm, and no matter how long he lived under the Asgardian sun, it still felt foreign on his skin at times. He strolled outside the walls of the golden city through damp fields at the edges of which the flat landscape gave way to thick forests. The howling wind had been reduced to gentle gusts that carried the smell of wet earth. Normally he would be experiencing a pleasant interlude of inner peace, but at the very moment an unease was eating away at him.

Loki had always found himself subject to wanderlust; the open road was often the sole cure for the restlessness that was etched into his very bones. This time however, the very cause of his unease was how wandering was starting to lose its soothing appeal. And yet, staying still felt every bit as stifling as it always had. Seeing that his aimless roaming did nothing to ease his mind, he started making his way back to the inside of the massive walls. He made no effort to walk gracefully. He dragged his feet in the mud, his mood even fouler than when he first set out. He vaguely remembered something about some obligation his brother had mentioned to him.

If only it was easier to pay attention to this stuff, he thought, unable to recall what exactly he was supposed to be attending. The God of lies figured he could easily conceal this little negligence. *Just be presentable and available to any summons. It might even be somewhat of a pleasant distraction*, Loki mused, the right corner of his mouth turning up a bit as the prospect slightly lifted his spirits.

At the beginning of their trip, the storm had been raging in full force, the rain pounding harshly against the cart's canvas cover. The little hood over the drivers' seat hardly offered any protection, yet the two men sitting at the front had assured their two passengers, Sigyn and her handmaiden Erika, that it would be no problem for them. Approaching the city of Asgard, they left the rain behind, although the dark clouds still hung overhead and the occasional roll of thunder reached their ears from afar. Sigyn flapped the canvas on her side of the carriage open as soon as the rain stopped. She stared out, not really taking in the sights, lost as she was in thought. Erika sighed and gazed at the landscape. Enchanted by it, she did not really mind the silence. Leaving Vanaheim was wondrous enough for the younger woman.

Sigyn's lack of expression did not have its foundation in serenity, but in fear. It wasn't Asgard itself that scared her. She had visited it on occasion, seeing as her own father was the ruler of the realm. While they did not share a close family relationship, she had always been welcome in Odin's hall. Even though she had been but a child when she had last accepted that hospitality and her memories of it were less than clear, she still did not see the realm as something foreign. She let out a weary sigh. What scared her was what awaited her there.

Loki had never been physically present during her stays in her father's realm. Not as far as she could recall. He had sometimes been spoken of, and she knew that he was her father's younger brother, but only in title, a Jotun by blood. She had never really cared to learn more, not back then. When she'd learned that she would be getting married off to him out of all people she had tried to change that ignorance. In the end, none of the answers to her questions had been particularly illuminating. An almost conspiratorial tightening of lips had seemed to occur around Loki's name in even the most gossipy circles. That only helped to worsen her budding fear.

A known evil, she always thought, *is better than the unknown one. And why hide a truth that is not ugly?* When the walls of Asgard came into view, the young goddess focused on steeling her nerves, making sure her carefully built mask of manners and stone-cold formality would not fail her when she needed it the most.

Loki made a point of avoiding everyone and everything as he had walked through the city. He slipped into Odin's Great Hall from a small side entrance, and quietly made his way to his own quarters there. Halfway to his destination he decided that getting intoxicated to a point beyond consciousness would actually be the best distraction there was for his taut nerves. But he knew right away that it was a bad idea. There is a short number of bad ideas one should let manifest within a period of time. He was well past that number at the moment, which did not bode well for his physical integrity.

In the privacy of his quarters, Loki discarded his muddied boots and his damp clothes. He proceeded to submerge himself in scalding water that felt just right after the damp and the rain. He stayed in the bath until it went cold by which time the tips of his fingers had turned wrinkly from the water. He'd lost track of time by the time he got out of the tub and dried himself up with a towel that he then fastened around his waist. Next, he browsed through his clothing options, unsure of just what he was getting dressed up for. Eventually, he picked out a seafoam green tunic, a brown leather vest embroidered with gold thread, and close fitting pants of the same material. He threw everything on his bed and followed suit, only to push himself back up a few seconds later. Loki had always treated the unexciting kind of social obligation with mild disinterest, or even downright boredom, and yet this time a mysterious anxiety was nagging at him. Call it a sign of fate, a gut feeling, or perhaps a false alarm. Fact was, Loki needed a drink. Fortunately, his tendency for stashing necessities, such as wine, meant he would not really have to go far to get it. A moment later he was back on the bed, leaning against the headboard, wine cup in hand and much better equipped to deal with life than before.

The distance between Asgard's gates and Odin's great hall was covered swiftly and in silence. It was unusually quiet in the street, probably due to the storm that had just passed. Storms were a rare occurrence in Asgard, even more so the long-lasting, natural storms that were not caused by Thor's unfortunate combination of command of the natural elements and an exceptionally short fuse.

Sigyn had requested her old childhood rooms, and by the time she arrived her things had already been moved there. She and Erika took their light hand luggage, and the goddess guided them both inside after thanking the two coach drivers while the men tended to the horses. The hall too was a lot less busy than usual. Sigyn appreciated the peace. Normally guests would get some sort of formal reception, but after a personal request to Odin himself she was left to her own devices until she would be ready to present herself. The mere thought of such a ceremonial display was enough to turn her mood even more sour.

The bedchamber was just like she remembered; with the difference that all those years ago everything had seemed bigger. It was still big and cozy enough, the large canopy bed taking up most of the space. She loved that bed, it had always given her a sense of seclusion and safety. At the moment, however, she could not shake off the creeping feeling of being exposed; it clung to her skin like the humidity from outside and made her shudder. She ignored it as best as she could, and set to changing into more court-appropriate clothes, not wanting to abuse the freedom she was given instantly on arrival. She told Erika, who would be staying in adjacent rooms, that she was free to go look around. The girl agreed, without hiding her obvious delight. After she'd departed, Sigyn hastily slipped into a plain blue dress,

fitted in an Asgardian cut. Asgardian fashion was modest compared to what the ladies of the Vanir court preferred, or, if you asked *them*, straight up inelegant. Sigyn herself had never minded the sturdier fabrics and more practical nature of Asgardian attire.

"That will have to do," she mumbled to herself as she studied her reflection. Then, shoulders squared and jaw set, she left the safety of her chambers.

Wine was amply appreciated by Loki at all occasions, but especially so at ones such as this. One cup followed the other as he sat waiting, even though a little voice in his head – the one called common sense- told him that showing up drunk would be even worse than not showing up at all. He promptly ignored it, as per usual. So, in every passing moment of wait the world became a happier place for Loki. A knock on his door startled him, and as he jolted up he realised the world was also becoming a blurrier place.

"Master Loki?" A small voice came from the other side of the wooden door, but as he did not grace it with a reply the door remained shut.

Loki got up slowly. His head swam but he could stand. He tried walking towards the door, achieving more stability with every step. He pulled the door open a bit too suddenly and found himself faced with a small raised fist. The servant who had barely managed to stop mid-knock swiftly pulled her hand back. She lowered her eyes and let out an awkward cough before speaking up.

"The Allfather requests your presence in the throne room," She said.

Loki dismissed her with a nod, closed the door and walked back into his room. In an effort to clear his head he splashed cold water on his face before pulling his clothes on. Trying to achieve as much sobriety as he could, he took the longest route possible to Odin's throne room that included a detour through the gardens. The long walk and the fresh air both helped, so by the time he reached his destination he had complete control over his movements again, even if his head remained fuzzy.

He approached the double doors, pushed one of them open, and slipped inside, then proceeding to casually stride towards the only other people occupying the space at the moment.

Shortly after exchanging greetings and brief news Odin had suggested that Sigyn should officially meet her intended.

"What, right now? At this hour?" Sigyn had protested. "Would he not be really busy doing... things people usually do at this hour around here? We could always leave it for- "

"Now is as good a time as any," he had cut her off, leaving no space for refusal. He had then assured her that she would be excused quickly. Despite that, Sigyn felt her stomach turn into a knot the second the young servant who was sent to summon Loki had departed.

The creaking of the wooden doors alerted them to the Trickster's presence. When she took in the form of the man who had just entered, a wave of surprise hit the young goddess. Even though she knew that the Jotun, just like the Aesir and the Vanir, did not really have to abandon their youthfulness regardless of their years, by thinking of her father's generation she could not help but picture older looking people. Perhaps it was because her most prominent, if not only example, was the Allfather himself.

Loki, Sigyn thought, resembles the younger brother of Thor more than that of Odin. Not only he isn't a weathered old man, he is actually -she resented the involuntary thought- really attractive. Of course among the gods, good looks were not exactly rare. The average Asgardian man was strongly built, with masculine and well-proportioned characteristics. What made Loki stand out was how he differed from the pattern. As tall as any Aesir but with half the bulk, he moved with an effortless grace that hinted at the kind of femininity the men of Asgard would not dare be associated with. His features had a sharpness to them reminiscent of neither man or woman, but something wild and primal. He radiated allure and danger, and Sigyn felt one concern die down, and ten new ones coming to take its place.

Finding herself mesmerized, even for a few seconds, only made the flame of resentment in her chest flare up more angrily. Sigyn blamed the slip-up on her obvious surprise, and to some extent relief. Being forced to marry a handsome young man rather than an ugly old man was, admittedly, the lesser of two evils. The focus on 'evils', as looks did not speak for character, and she could only hope that her father would not force her to spend her life with a cruel or abusive man.

Then again, he has done worse to ensure his interests. The thought made her shudder, and she turned her scrutiny on the Jotun who had just stopped a few steps away. He gave her a quick glance, but quickly turned his attention towards his brother instead.

"You sent for me," said Loki, his voice as ambiguous as his looks, soft, almost too boyish but with a raspy edge to it. "Would you care to introduce me to our lovely guest?"

The lovely guest could introduce herself if you actually addressed her, Sigyn thought with irritation. As far as first impressions went, Loki was losing ground fast.

Odin, on the other hand, turned to her first. "My sworn brother and advisor, Loki Laufeyjarson of Jotunheim," He announced with stilted formality, inclining his head towards Loki.

Odin's choice of words didn't go unnoticed by Sigyn, and she wondered at the purpose of introducing the man as a foreigner, after so many years. She turned to Loki, wondering if she had to extend any sort of courtesy greeting. *He sure hadn't.* Before she could say anything, the Allfather spoke again.

"This," -Loki turned to look at her as Odin spoke- "is my daughter, lady Sigyn of Vanaheim. The woman that, *as you know*, you will be marrying."

In an instant Loki's confident, cheeky expression transformed into the very image of horrorstruck shock. Eyes about to drop out of their sockets and mouth hanging limply open, his expression looked like the comedic attempt of a predator to imitate trapped prey.

At first Sigyn was genuinely confused, but as realization dawned on her, her own shock could easily match the flustered god's who was staring from her to his brother and back. *He did not know.* The idea echoed in her head and she barely contained a hysterical urge to either laugh or cry, unsure which of the two would even win out. She suppressed it, and she merely eyed the Jotun with a carefully blank expression.

Loki finally snapped his mouth shut and clenched his jaw, regarding Sigyn like one would a festering wound. His expression brought the knot back to her stomach. He turned to Odin, who seemed unfazed by the whole affair, and muttered a strangled: "I will be what?"

He sounded so small in that moment. His air of elegance was gone, and he seemed dazed. He stood there, grasping for words for a few moments. Finally he said in a thick voice: "Why, no one seems to have remembered to inform me of that." He paused and took a long shaky breath. "Too bad. Had I known, I would have made sure to be more available," he concluded, and with the tiniest of head-bows towards the ruler of Asgard, and no further acknowledgement of Sigyn's presence whatsoever, he turned around and rigidly marched away.

For the first time Odin's mask of formality slipped, revealing a teeth-grinding sort of annoyance underneath. He turned towards his daughter, who was at the moment lost in a trance of silent befuddlement.

"Maybe we should had broken it to him a bit more gently?" Sigyn's tongue slipped. If Odin's stare was anything to go by, it was not a good time for sarcasm.

"May I be excused now?" she managed awkwardly, and Odin nodded. She turned away after a stiff bow, and barely resisted the urge to flee the room, briskly walking out and then almost running all the way to her quarters.

In the safety of her chamber, Sigyn felt herself breathe properly again. She flopped onto the bed with a long sigh, and there she stayed marble-still. When Erika returned to their quarters shortly after, Sigyn had not doubt she'd already heard the news. The walls had ears here, and of course they made sure to always inform the servants first.

The goddess did not even acknowledge her entrance, so absorbed she was in thought, her brow slightly furrowed. Erika walked to the bed, making sure to alert the goddess to her presence, and not to frighten her. When she sat down and placed her hand on Sigyn's upper arm the older woman did not flinch, she just turned her face towards her. Just when Erika was about to say something comforting, Sigyn spoke in a completely calm voice.

"So there is actually one person that is more terrified than me because of this affair." She let out a small giggle that evolved into a wheezing laughter. It surprised Erika, who had expected to find her in a state of distress.

"You are not upset?" Erika asked, eyebrows attempting to meet her hairline.

"All this time I pictured myself as the victim of this. The one that was getting traded away to a man who had agreed to it. But it would seem I have given the most consent out the two of us." Sigyn left the last sentence hanging and turned to her thoughts again.

"So it is true then? He had no idea and stormed out on you? How can you even not know something like this?" Erika let curiosity get the best of her and regretted it instantly, bringing a hand over her mouth. However, Sigyn was neither offended or displeased, she smiled a little at her and nodded.

"He did, and I don't know if I am glad about the fact that we are both in the same position, or scared to have this man resent me the way I had resented him up until now."

"You no longer resent him?"

Sigyn shook her head absently. "I resent what is going on, but it has become more than clear he is the least to blame for it. I think I almost... feel bad for him," she admitted.

"May I ask..." Erika started with an almost guilty expression that tugged at Sigyn's curiosity and made her nod urgently, "is he as good looking as I have heard?"

Erika's words were followed by a furious blush, and Sigyn found the display endearing. She grinned playfully at her handmaiden and responded with a bit of exaggerated drama: "Oh, do they even do him justice?" She paused and considered something, her expression turning mischievous. "Although maybe it also was the cat-that-just-got-doused-with-cold-water look flattering him."

Both women laughed, a nervous kind of laughter that slowly turned into something genuine. Sigyn felt her muscles relax, her pent up nervousness steadily ebbing away. With a lighter heart she eased down over her covers and let sleep carry her away.

Loki had made no attempts at a hasty exit, rage being the only thing that made his footsteps petulantly hurried. Part of him had been intent on running away, but his more chaos-loving side had been spoiling for a fight, hoping to be stopped, yelled at. Any chance for him to come down on them -them being anyone really- like a typhoon of flaming anger. And maybe some actual flames too. Nothing of the sort would happen though, much to his discontent and best interest at the same time. By the time he had reached the hall's front entrance, the inside of his head had become a dizzying cacophony of thoughts. He had absently stepped out instead of making his intended dramatic exit.

I've been set up, and I proceeded to make a damn fool out of myself! Oh by Vallhala who does Odin think he is? 'As you know', he says! As I know my arse. That lying- Suddenly his torrent of thoughts froze still, as one little notion sent a chill down his spine. The recollection of how Odin had started his little speech earlier this day. The speech that Loki had proceeded to completely ignore. In fact, he had allowed his brain to wander from the very start, exactly because of Odin saying: "You know, all this messing around with married people is going to land you in a lot of trouble."

As I sodding know. In a moment of clarity the incomprehensible recent events seemed to make a lot more sense. At the same time his wife-to-be was immersed in the world of dreams and free of all worries, Loki froze in his tracks in the middle of the street, realizing with a heavy heart that he himself had set the trap he was currently caught in.

A sudden drizzle-turned-downpour, like a bad-timed aftershock of the earlier storm, was the thing that snapped the disgruntled Jotun out of his trance and urged him to move on towards his intended destination. He rushed his step, soon breaking into a trek as he navigated in the dimly lit residential area. He finally stopped in front of a medium-sized house, identical to the ones around it, but for the fact that it was the only one without an awning. *Figures*. He pounded on the door, getting drenched every second no one was answering. The door creaked open to reveal absolute darkness, and a barely discernible figure outlined in the doorway.

"Loki?" The surprise in the man's voice was enough to get the message 'what are you doing out in this cataclysm' across.

"May I come in before I drown out here?" Loki asked impatiently, and the figure of the man disappeared from the doorway.

Loki stepped in, making a small flame hover over his palm bright enough to navigate himself inside. The door shut behind him but he did not turn around. He made his way towards the cold fireplace and set to getting a fire going.

Meanwhile, the owner of the house was deftly moving about in absolute darkness and then dim firelight without even regarding his surroundings. Being blind, he had no use of the light anyway. He looked –and was– younger than Loki, a mop of black hair hiding a face unblemished by age but not by worry. He was pale, lean, and tall, clad in dramatically dark clothing. In the dim light the combination looked almost ghastly.

Hod, Baldur's twin brother, was the exact opposite of his sibling. Many called him the shadow to his brother's light. Maybe that was what had originally drawn Loki to him. In any case, young Hod was the first person he thought of going to, like many times before.

"So, what happened?" Hod asked as he placed a full cup of wine in Loki's hands, before filling one of his own.

"Why does something need to have happened?" asked Loki, leaning against the wall by the fireplace and taking a small sip. He managed to sound completely unfazed, and he silently congratulated himself for that.

Hod eased himself down on a chair and sighed. "When does it not? Even if we assumed you were the kind of person to pay pleasant little visits, and more so in that downpour, you are still taut as a bowstring, one does not need eyes to see that. I don't know what it is that has happened, but something has," he concluded, sounding pleased with his deduction.

Loki let out a small humourless laugh. "Let me start at the beginning, then."

And so, Loki laid out the events the way they had happened, quickly muttering the parts about his own idiotic behaviour, and reciting the parts where he got wronged with exaggerated drama. Hod listened quietly without making any comments. He was a good listener like that, although they both knew that once the older god was finished talking he would offer a completely unfiltered opinion. Loki was not fond of that honest criticism, but neither was he particularly capable of it when it came down to himself. That was why he so

often sought out the young Aesir. That and his confidentiality, derived from the latter's total lack of interest in gossip.

When Loki's narrative was concluded, Hod paused in thought for a few drawn out moments. Loki rolled his eyes although he knew the gesture had no impact whatsoever on his conversation partner. Maybe that was another reason the two of them got on so well, Hod was naturally immune to a lot of the subtle cues and expressions that often made other people less inclined to talk to and more inclined to punch Loki.

"Sure, father's way of going about it was sneaky, and telling you today would have been too late even if you *actually* listened, but you are not exactly what one'd call innocent and gullible to fall for the old man's games," Hod stated.

Oh joy, he is also against me, Loki thought, letting his head drop in his palms.

"So while I see why you should be *somewhat annoyed*," Hod continued sharply, "I can't find it in me to feel bad for you. Because if *you* are panicking like that, I can only imagine what my poor sister must feel like in the middle of all of this."

"She could have said no if she had a problem, I don't think they dragged her all the way here," Loki protested.

"So could you, right there, right then. Why didn't you?"

The question rendered Loki speechless for a moment, long enough to realize that he truly did not care all that much about a stranger's feelings, especially the one stranger that he was being saddled with. He was about to voice just that, but he was cut off.

"I am not going for an appeal to your sensitivity," the blind god said with a hint of irritation, as if he could hear Loki's thought process, "but since you are in the same position, would it hurt you so much to make an ally rather than another enemy?"

There was finality in his tone, he had nothing more to say on the matter, and he would not attempt to do so.

Loki sighed. "I will make amends," he said in a resigned tone, "but not tonight." With that he got up and left Hod's house, weariness weighing down on him.

Sigyn found herself awake before sunrise because of her early retirement the previous night. She felt rested and refreshed. She noticed that her handmaiden had also fallen asleep on her bed. Much like herself, the girl was dressed in day clothes, although Erika had not even removed her shoes. She rose quietly to not disrupt her sleep and walked over to her window seat. She spent the next couple of minutes watching the sun go up, thankful that her quarters had a view of the sunrise.

She always tried to think of events in a detached way, which helped her stay positive; bask in the newness of things rather than dwell in the fear of the unknown. With that thought in mind, she gently shook her servant awake and they both departed from the quarters. Before

anything else, she really was in need of a bath to properly get the dust of the road off her skin and hair. Rather than ask for a bathtub to be brought to her chambers, Sigyn followed the familiar corridors that led them to one the currently empty women's bathhouse.

Erika was not sure if it was right to use it without any assistance of the hall's servants. Her mistress seemed to harbour a disregard for all rules she deemed redundant, as well as the tendency to try and do everything by herself. Erika sighed and settled for helping her run a bath.

They chatted absent-mindedly as Sigyn soaked in the warm water. Erika was in the middle of recounting her unexciting evening when the door of the bathhouse creaked open. A young girl walked in, tall and willowy but clearly not yet a woman. She was garbed in plain servant's clothes and she had a folded towel and a change of clothes tucked under her arm.

She did not seem startled to see the two women there, although after some silent observation she exclaimed: "I do not know you two. Are you lady Sigyn's handmaidens?"

Erika's eyes widened as she realized it must be common for servants to use the communal baths, but not so much for the highborn ladies of Asgard. She was about to correct the misunderstanding when she felt a wet palm squeeze her elbow. She turned to see Sigyn give her a pointed look, before speaking up.

"Yes we are," she replied. "Our lady wanted some time alone, so she sent us off."

Erika did her best to keep bewilderment from her face.

The girl gave them a knowing smile and got closer. "I am Roskva," she said. "I am also making the best out of my time off."

"Nice to meet you," Sigyn said, smiling. "I am Inga and this is Erika."

Erika inclined her head and opted for small talk, still worried about whatever game the goddess was playing. "Do you work here?" she asked.

"Oh, no," said Roskva, "I simply come over to help or spend my free time when my master is away or does not need me, which is quite often actually. Can't stand sitting around in an empty house."

She left the bundle of clothes and her towel next to the large bath close to where Erika was sitting and turned around to remove her clothes.

"And who would your master be?" It was Sigyn's turn to direct a question to the young servant, while politely facing away.

Roskva lowered herself into the water with a pleased sigh. "My master," she said in a dramatic voice, "is the teller of stories and weaver of lies. He is the one they call Silvertongue and Trickster. He is chaos incarnate," she grinned at the two women and laughed, "and I believe he is supposed to marry your mistress."

"Loki?" Erika exclaimed.

Sigyn's triumphant expression spoke volumes for itself; it was now obvious her little game of pretend had struck gold.

"May I ask," Erika started, "what your master is like? Out of curiosity. We thought it would not be appropriate to ask our Lady."

"And she would not yet know anyway," Sigyn added, a bit too enthusiastically.

Roskva smiled at the two almost apologetically. "One cannot possibly put him in a frame. He shows a different face to everyone, but for him to show his true colours, it takes time and patience. Or luck." Her expression did not show scorn, but rather endearment.

"But you should tell your lady this: she should not listen to what people have to say about him, which really is quite a lot and not entirely untrue." She paused thoughtfully for a moment. "They just don't know any better."

From all the rumours she had heard, Loki had not struck Erika as one who would be particularly kind to anyone, especially servants. And yet this girl's disposition told a different story. She spoke the least scornfully of him out of all the people Erika had talked to, and she was actually the one working for him.

"Maybe it is not my place to say so," Sigyn began with the appropriate amount of hesitation, "but it does not seem easy to know how to treat your master."

Roskva laughed out at that. "That would be an understatement," she said. "But he has stories to tell and things to say; he can be excellent company, and he is difficult but not impossible to figure out. If anything, that makes it more fun, don't you think?"

Sigyn nodded politely and proceeded to leave the water. Roskva turned away out of courtesy, as Sigyn dried herself up and slid into the dress she had brought with her. When Roskva turned towards her again her expression transformed from neutral, to curious, to bewildered. The woman she had taken for a servant was dressed in court garb, and Roskva was sharp enough to understand what it meant. Sigyn felt a peculiar mix of guilt and the lingering satisfaction of a deception done well.

She saw that the young servant was blushing and lost for words, so she said: "I am sorry for deceiving you like this, Roskva."

The latter looked up from the point in the ground she had fixed her eyes on, still slightly flustered.

"Roskva, you really should not feel bad about it," Erika supplied, and if there was an edge to her words directed to a certain goddess, she would never admit it, as it would not be her place.

Sigyn nodded furiously in agreement, as she was starting to feel rather wretched about what she'd just done.

Roskva sighed and gave the goddess an uncertain little smile. "Birds of a feather, it would seem," she muttered and then she turned her attention to her bath again.

They turned to leave, but Sigyn paused right before the door. "Will you tell him about this?"

"I doubt he will ask," Roskva replied, and the two left the room.

Making Amends

Chapter Summary

Peace talks, drunken shenanigans, Sigyn being a hopeless bisexual, Loki going to therapy way before M*rvel made it cool, and Sigyn meeting some interesting people.

Chapter Notes

Here's chapter two. Though it has been written for actual years, I actually had a hard time with it because I absolutely had to change a few things about it beyond the grammar and spelling before I could post. But it's here now!

Loki woke up with a headache and a knot in his stomach. The previous night had entailed more than a fair share of self-pity, anger, and alcohol, which eventually left him passed out over the covers. Yet his anxiety had him awake before the break of dawn, and he blearily dragged himself to Eira's house.

He arrived just as the first rays of sun spilled over the city walls, with the express purpose, it seemed, to stab into Loki's skull with sharp pain. He didn't hesitate to disrupt the healer's sleep to demand a remedy, only remembering to apologize for the hour after he'd gotten his cure. Eira, as always, took her patient's attitude with good grace. If there was anyone in Asgard who never ran out of patience, it would be her.

By the time the sun was fully in the sky, Loki was back at his house nursing his headache with the help of Eira's draught, and pondering the events he'd drunk so hard to forget. While the previous night he had been filled with rage and dejection, the new dawn also brought back in him the feeling of curiosity. The bitterness was far from gone, but questions about the woman that was to be his wife involuntarily leapt in his mind. He also found that most of his anger was directed at his brother and not Sigyn herself. Thinking back to their brief meeting, she really didn't strike him as the kind to play Odin's kind of game. In fact, she'd seemed rather out of her depth. But Loki had learned early on not to underestimate anyone, so he kept just enough suspicion close to his chest.

Pressed by obligation, and somewhat spurred by that curiosity, Loki set out to restore a semblance of order to the mess he'd made of his life. He arrived at his brother's Hall late in the morning and he did his best to ignore the pointed looks and low whispers that followed him from the courtyard to the stone corridors. The moment he entered the feasting hall, where a lot of the Aesir were gathered taking breakfast, a telling silence fell. He paid no heed to it,

determined to act as if the rumours that would have undoubtedly made the round of Asgard did not have an ounce of truth in them.

Sigyn was seated at Odin's table, engaged in conversation with Frigga, and while Loki's entrance hadn't gone unnoticed she didn't acknowledge it. Still, she could not help but feel her stomach clench when Loki started making his way towards their table. Sigyn didn't want to meet his eyes, but she observed him from the corner of hers; he looked nothing like he had the previous night. The very way he walked and held himself seemed lighter, gone was the barely concealed fury she'd glimpsed in him when he stormed out the previous night. He approached the table and chirped out pleasant greetings to both Odin and his wife, before turning his attention to her.

"Lady Sigyn, I owe you an apology," he said soberly, inclining his head in a polite bow.

"I hope you will allow me to make up for my less than exemplary behaviour last night."

Loki offered the invitation with a gentle smile and an extended hand, and Sigyn found herself equally inclined to smile back and gripped with suspicion. She was not one to trust a sudden change of heart, and she cast her eyes around the room to find any excuse to turn him down. She shuddered to realize that almost every pair of eyes was glued on them, with varying degrees of discretion.

While the thought of leaving the safety of the familiar company was unpleasant, and that of being left alone with Loki downright unsettling, nothing was worse than the barely disguised scrutiny of the people around her in that moment. The sense of being some sort of spectacle to them. She put her hand in his and let herself be guided out of the feasting hall.

They left through a small side entrance that opened up to one of the gardens. It was meticulously trimmed and a faint touch of magic tingled in the air. Frigga's magic, Sigyn soon realized, easily placing the strong, familiar signature.

The moment the door closed behind them all the noise ceased and Sigyn felt a sense of serenity, a product, no doubt, of the lingering magic, flood her chest. It did not last long however. Despite her impeccable practice in manners and diplomacy, she found herself unable to form the right words, or in fact any words at all. As anxiety rose in waves in her, Loki spoke up.

"Walk with me," he suggested.

She nodded and they fell in step with each other in a leisurely pace that allowed her to look around, taking in the carefully arranged plants and flowers.

"How was your journey here?" Loki asked pleasantly. If he was affected at all by the heavy atmosphere between them, he didn't let it show.

"Good, considering the conditions," she replied, her voice sounding terse and unenthusiastic even to her own ears.

"You don't like small talk much, do you?" asked Loki after a beat of thoughtful silence, with a hint of laughter in his voice that didn't show in his seemingly serene expression.

Sigyn felt the heat rushing to her face, as her embarrassment wrangled with her annoyance at the patronizing tone.

"Sometimes I do," she finally managed, and she knew she sounded petulant but she couldn't stop herself.

Loki didn't seem offended. In fact, he seemed wryly amused.

"You might as well be honest with me," he said, throwing his arms up in a theatrical shrug. "What's there to lose but our chains, right?"

It struck her just how true that was. With everything already decided for them, trying to impress was rather pointless.

"Alright, I find it a waste of time," she blurted out, momentarily surprised by her own bluntness.

Loki hummed thoughtfully. "But it's fundamental courtesy to somehow fill the silence, and most are averse to starting a personal conversation with someone they barely know."

Most are averse to marrying someone they barely know, Sigyn thought bitterly. "A conversation does not have to be personal to be interesting," she said instead.

He tilted his head, silently urging her to go on.

"Strangers can find common ground as well as friends do, as long as the subject is appropriate. It merely needs to be a conversation at all and not a mindless chat that neither person is truly interested in having," she concluded, hoping she didn't sound as pretentious as she felt the moment the words left her mouth.

"What would an appropriate subject be then?" Loki asked, and by now Sigyn was starting to get used to the amused lilt in his voice that she tried to convince herself didn't have to indicate mockery.

But maybe he would be right to mock her, Sigyn realized, because here was the catch. She could pile judgement on the conversational skills of others mercilessly, but she was neither ready nor willing to offer anything better. In fact, she didn't even want to be here right now. Maybe Loki could effortlessly turn his behaviour around and pretend to be completely unbothered by everything happening between them, *to* them, but she couldn't, so she offered no reply. She opted for brooding, and she kept frowning silently at the ground even after she realized how her mother would break out into hives if she saw her acting like this. Or perhaps because of it, as it fed into the little corner of her mind that always wished to rebel in whichever little ways she could.

"You might want to at least pretend not to be so discontent to be around me," Loki scoffed all of a sudden.

Sigyn was surprised by how upset he sounded, almost like she actually got to him. *Almost like he actually cared*. She lifted her head to meet his unsympathetic gaze.

"Why? Would you fall for it? Feel better?" she asked, trying to mimic his dry tone.

Loki didn't say anything for a moment. His eyes grew distant in what could be recollection, and his next words had no trace of his previous scorn.

"You don't have to do anything you don't want to, you know. And you don't have to decide anything now. It's mid-autumn. If by the beginning of spring you still loathe the idea, I promise you we will not have to get married."

Sigyn hadn't expected this, neither his words nor the gentle way in which they were spoken. Instinctively she searched for any hint of mockery or deception, but his expression seemed serious.

"Alright," she muttered, "but why are you making me such a promise?"

After all, it was a promise to each other that they were both bound by, even when neither of them actually made it. Would making one now help things, or bury them even deeper?

He raised an eyebrow, as if her question was the most redundant thing in the world.

"Because it only makes sense to do so," he declared, clarifying absolutely nothing.

"You might as well be honest with me," Sigyn said, echoing his earlier words.

"Hmm. You know, I have no idea," he admitted, flashing her a crooked little smile and shrugging. "Maybe I am actually looking for an excuse to cause a diplomatic incident, to liven things up around here a bit. The Aesir and the Vanir haven't had a war in quite a few centuries."

A laugh bubbled up from Sigyn's chest, one that had been pushed to the surface by her churning agitation, and finally released at his absurd words. Loki grinned at her, looking exceedingly pleased with himself; as if getting a laugh out of her was an achievement.

"I see, so I am to be your accomplice instead of your wife," Sigyn replied. Earlier this very morning, she wouldn't have imagined that she could ever say those words so lightly.

"There will be whole ballads about you." Loki confirmed, with a mock sage nod. "The woman over who's hand the Gods went to war. Has a nice ring to it, doesn't it? Up until the point where you end up gruesomely executed, of course."

"Of course. And what about you?" Sigyn shot back, noticing his suspicious absent from this imagined epic.

The laugh that left Loki's lips at that had an almost musical quality, a pleasant sound for all its harsh edges.

"They can't gruesomely execute *me*," he replied, "because then who would solve all their ridiculous messes?"

"Maybe," Sigyn said, tapping her lip playfully with her index finger, "but you still run the risk of ending up as a problem-solving magically preserved head Odin carries around."

She watched Loki's smile momentarily drop as he considered her suggestion. For a moment she even worried she took the jest too far; never one to know where those boundaries really lied. But then Loki looked back up to her, eyes full of mirth and lips twisted upwards, and she felt an unexpected rush of relief flood her chest.

"So we better plan this out thoroughly," said Loki, leaning in closer and lowering his voice to a conspiratorial whisper. "Bet I could find a way to pin it on Baldur."

Sigyn found herself laughing easily, even as she very pointedly rolled her eyes at him. It was strange, how the animosity between them melted away almost as abruptly as it had flared up the previous day. The complicated particulars of their acquaintance did not matter for a while; they were just two people, making the start of getting to know one another. Within the secluded little garden, the unwilling betrothed took the reluctant first step towards perhaps becoming willing friends.

Sigyn could hear the festive commotion of inside the hall from the entrance steps. She had yet to completely wrap her head around the idea of Freyja throwing an entire feast in her honor. Of course, the possibility that it was really just another excuse for everyone to drink themselves stupid—as Loki had so eloquently put it at some point—was now ringing quite true. She hurried up the stairs, eager to get inside the warm space. Raucous chatter and music, a wave of heat, and the mixed scent of food, firewood and people assaulted her senses the moment she swung the door open. It was slightly overwhelming, but inviting all the same.

No one seemed to notice her entrance. She started walking towards the mass of gathered people, uncertain of where exactly to go. Slowly, the crowd parted to reveal the hostess of the celebration. Freyja looked stunning; in an assortment of red silk and golden jewelry that not many people, even goddesses, could ever hope to pull off, she easily drew every pair of eyes in the room on her. She was aware of every bit of admiration, desire, and envy she caused, and she thoroughly enjoyed it. Unlike Sigyn, who felt overly conscious of the attention when Freyja walked over to her and greeted her enthusiastically, before turning to the expectant crowd, arms still linked with the younger goddess.

"I would like to officially extend my hospitality to my kinswoman, Sigyn Odinsdottir of Vanaheim. I am sure you will all make her feel welcome in Asgard," said Freyja.

A hearty cheer erupted from the crowd, and Sigyn stayed rigid on Freyja's side, smiling awkwardly, unsure whether she should say or do something. However the droves of people soon returned to their drinking and merriment. Freyja urged the younger Vanir to come along and Sigyn obliged. In Asgardian tradition—one that Sigyn never quite understood—men and women were still, for the most part, gathered in separate tables, a pointless arrangement that would cease to exist as the night wore on.

Freyja approached a group of goddesses that were laughing about something. She introduced Sigyn to those of them she did not already know, and easily joined the conversation. It concerned people Sigyn did not know much about, so she sat there listening, gratefully accepting a drink from a passing servant. It was pleasant to simply be part of a group, drink, and hear stories about Asgard's latest humorous exploits and misadventures. At times Sigyn would notice odd looks from someone at the table, but she was quick to dismiss it. Being quiet at feasts would always earn her a curious look or two, especially since the Vanir had such a reputation as outgoing.

"So, how are you doing?"

It took Sigyn a few moments to realize that Sif was directing the question to her. She'd spent the day with her brother's wife a mere few days ago, so Sigyn assumed that Sif was simply trying to include her in the conversation.

Sigyn smiled. "It's been really lovely so far, it's good to see Asgard again after so long."

"That is great to hear, what with all you are being put through," the woman who'd introduced herself as Nanna, the wife of her other half-brother, cut in.

Freyja glared at the goddess, but many in the group nodded and gave Sigyn the same odd look. Only then she recognized it for what it was. Pity. Sigyn felt anger bubble in her chest. She clenched her fists under the table, but she did not let it show on her face.

"Put through?" she asked innocently. "I have been enjoying the attention of many new interesting people, and reuniting with family I have not seen in years. Lady Freyja has done me the honour of holding a magnificent feast to celebrate my arrival. My stay has been nothing short of pleasurable and welcomed," she finished, unable to keep the heat from seeping in her voice.

No one spoke, although a few lowered their eyes in shame. Hesitantly, they picked up another conversation. Sigyn suddenly felt fed up with the pleasantries and the empty talk. She looked at her drained cup sullenly and scanned the room for another mead-bearer.

"They didn't mean any harm." The woman seated next to Sigyn spoke up for the first time since she introduced herself to her, a foreign accent colouring her words. Unlike the rest of the group her looks were too harsh to be considered the Asgardian standard for pretty. She had dark hair and intense red eyes, and she stood taller than most other women. In Sigyn's opinion, the Jotun that had introduced herself as Gerd looked *utterly captivating*.

Sigyn sighed. "I know. But to be honest, spending time with Loki is a pleasant break, because he is the only one who is not going on about Loki. Or at least, when he does it is more amusing."

Gerd laughed. "Even now a lot of folk see me as 'Frey's Jotun bride' and nothing more. You do not draw attention to yourself, so it will take time, and even then not everyone will be able to see you. But there will be people who will see you for yourself and realize you are not to be pitied. And those are the people that matter."

Sigyn smiled brightly at the woman, who's wise words put her heart at ease. "Let's drink to that then," she said as a servant finally refilled her cup.

The two women continued chatting. Gerd filled Sigyn in about what events and people the others had been discussing, and Sigyn occasionally commented. Slowly the groups became more mixed, and the crowd only grew more rowdy as wine and mead flowed generously. At the far end of the room, a commotion resembling a fight was starting to take place. A group of spectators was gathered, although what they were observing was hidden from view where the women sat.

"What's going on?" Sigyn asked.

Gerd shrugged, clearly unimpressed by the occurrence. A lot of the others also seemed uninterested, although some women sauntered over to the crowd of rowdy men. Sigyn's curiosity got the best of her. She got up and approached the scene. Before she could even see what was going on she heard a familiar voice from within the circle of spectators.

"I would like to see you come out of that without at least five arrows sticking out of your arse," said Loki.

"That idiot was probably so slow he couldn't hit a sleeping cow," a rather intoxicated sounding Frey retorted.

"Ah, so he'd still hit you?"

A bout of laughter erupted from the gathered audience.

"You're fuh-full of it, Loki. Bet you anything even I could shoot you down if I tried," the un-warrior like Frey boasted, a sign in itself that he was too far gone, in case anyone failed to notice the slur in his voice.

"A much better shot than you could not, in fact not even one of the best in Asgard!" declared Loki. "Want me to prove it?"

As he said that more ruckus broke out, and the crowd widened just enough for Sigyn to finally worm herself to the front. Loki was leaning against a table, arms crossed, and a few feet from him stood a very discombobulated looking Frey, trying to mirror his stance.

"Tyr, are you sober enough to shoot a crossbow?" Loki asked, striding towards the Aesir's table with renewed purpose, but less stability than Sigyn would have liked for someone making such claims.

The solitary warrior that had spent the entire night up to now drinking in silence looked up at Loki, confusion plain on his weathered face. "You are asking me to shoot at you?"

"A lifetime opportunity," Loki confirmed, giving an unimpressed Tyr a wink that rather befitted a very different kind of suggestion.

Tyr's brow creased as he seemed to be weighing his options, and eventually he got up from his table. He walked into the circle and someone handed him a simple crossbow, which

shouldn't really be that readily available at a feast, Sigyn found herself thinking. She stared, mouth slightly agape, as the two men positioned themselves, going as far from each other as the space allowed. Loki actually turned his back at the Aesir, and Tyr dropped his arms at his sides, crossbow clenched in his left hand.

"Ready when you are," Loki chimed pleasantly. His voice may have been loose, but his stance was now taut. As if it was matter of who would snap first, him or the crossbow.

Tyr nodded, and the crowd began a countdown that sent Sigyn's beating heart to her throat. Still, she could not tear her eyes from the scene.

"...Seven... Six... Five... Four... Three... Two... One..."

It all happened in a blur of motion, too fast for most eyes to fully follow. One moment they were both still, waiting for the countdown to end. The next Loki was facing Tyr, the short bolt secure in his right hand mere inches from his chest. Tyr still had the crossbow raised, almost level with his narrowed eyes. The crowd went deadly silent for a moment. Sigyn forced herself to breathe slowly; in and out, in and out. She shuddered upon noticing the little tear on Loki's tunic where the bolt was barely caught before it could break the skin underneath. It would had hit Loki's heart, had he not turned around in time.

Loki seemed as stunned as everyone else for a moment. He blinked a few times and looked down at his hand, his face slowly breaking into an exhilarated grin. It was so bright and infectious and lovely, that for a moment Sigyn felt compelled to smile along with him, as if it had all been nothing more than a little joke. The crowd broke out of its trance on cue, and they started cheering and shouting drunkenly. Loki made a mock little bow, and flicked the bolt at Frey, who seemed as relieved as everyone in the crowd, if not more on virtue of being the accidental instigator, for the outcome. The previously charged scene was suddenly reduced to nothing more than a little performance. Tyr did not seem too disheartened at losing either, even if he wasn't as obviously relieved as Frey. He shrugged and put the crossbow aside, presumably glad he didn't kill someone. He resumed drinking in his corner, clearly happy to escape the attention of the drunken crowd. Sigyn could understand him.

Soon the cluster of spectators dissolved, with only a few still lingering around Loki. For his part, he seemed rather unconcerned for someone who had just narrowly escaped death. Those few also dispersed soon enough. Sigyn did not realise her eyes had been on Loki while her mind was grasping for any shred of logic in what had just taken place. Not until it was brought to her attention.

"Staring is not very polite, you know."

Loki's voice startled her and she snapped her head up to find him much closer than expected, regarding her with an unreadable expression.

"Y-You almost got yourself killed," she stammered.

"Almost. Tough luck, eh?"

"What's that supposed to mean?" Sigyn demanded. Her concern was starting to turn into something else, something ugly that burned inside her ribcage and relentlessly tried to claw its way out.

Loki blinked at her as if she was missing the most obvious thing in the world. "It means that Tyr could have involuntarily solved your problem, do try to keep up. Or did we drain a tankard too many?"

He let out a chuckle, low and patronizing, and Sigyn felt something inside her that was growing taut with every word snap.

"You think *I* am the one not keeping up?" Sigyn's anger was free now, and it clung fiercely to every word that left her mouth. "You think I would see it like that? The ale must have gotten to *your* head if your conclusion is that I ever blamed you for any of this."

Loki didn't falter, for all the heated words thrown at his face. "But it doesn't really matter whose fault it is," he insisted, with no trace of apology in his voice. "Sure, I did not cause your problem, but I am your problem, and anyone would naturally wish it would be solved nice and easy like that."

He didn't even sound bitter. He presented his convoluted deduction so earnestly and calmly that it knocked the wind out of Sigyn. Her anger suddenly felt so aimless, trying to hold on to it was like trying to grab fistfuls of air. She didn't say anything for a moment, at a loss for words as she was, until suddenly he turned his back on her and walked away. She stared after his back until he was gone from view, and she couldn't help but feel a bitter taste in her mouth at the sight. Suddenly returning to the group of goddesses felt quite unappealing, as did sitting and drinking alone like Tyr and some others did. In fact, she decided she was no longer in the mood for revelry, and she resolutely made her way towards the front entrance.

Once outside, she realized that almost everyone in Asgard was gathered in Freyja's hall, making the streets, houses, and other halls practically deserted. Not a soul was in sight. The emptiness was strangely comforting, but not enough to settle the violent staccato of her heart. She couldn't fathom staying still, but thankfully tonight the whole city was her backyard; peaceful and still and welcoming. With a new plan in mind, she made her way back to Odin's hall.

"I thought you were getting along." Hod's voice was treading the fine line between exasperation and hysteria. He had already broken out in hysterics when Loki mentioned his little shooting game.

"We were. Or maybe not. It was different that time in the gardens. I don't know why I said those things tonight. It just sort of happened? It is not my fault! I cannot help-"

"Norns, stop having a breakdown!" Hod interrupted Loki's rant. "Every time you so much as talk to her you panic, offend her, run away, and then come here to panic some more."

"It's not the easiest situation to have something like that forced on me!" Loki protested.

"You have kept a better composure around people out to kill you, now you can't handle the one that's supposed to marry you?" Hod demanded.

Loki nodded wordlessly. Of course he was sending subtle visual signals to a blind man, but he was too out of sorts to realize.

Regardless, Hod could bet the Jotun currently looked every bit as pathetic as he sounded. In fact, he almost felt bad for him. But mostly he just regretted signing up for this in the first place. *Did I even sign up for it*, he wondered idly.

"Well that last time I was somewhat scared for myself, among other things, so I went to make up for my blunder with an apology. And then we just happened to talk for a bit, it's not like I had anything better to do," said Loki.

"You know, this has no point if you aren't honest. I get it, it's not your thing, but if you want help stop trying to deceive both me and yourself." Hod was losing patience, but he'd had more than a lifetime to learn to hold on to the last dregs of it.

"Alright, she looked so miserable, and I felt bad, and I remembered what you said about her being scared, and I made a promise I cannot keep without causing a diplomatic catastrophe, I think? But as a consequence we got to talk and it was actually nice for a while."

"I will be absolutely honest about this," Hod warned. "It seems that the reason she makes you so nervous is because you actually like her."

Loki jumped out of his seat so abruptly he managed to knock over two of the surrounding chairs and hit the edge of the table at such a bad angle he doubled over in pain. He grunted a few colourful curses and staggered back, while Hod remained completely still and unimpressed.

"I don't mean in the romantic way you'd like the one you want to marry," Hod eventually clarified. "Normally you would not care about any collateral damage, but she happens to be one of the few people you would easily befriend, had you two met under different circumstances. You want to hate her, but you can't. And you feel inclined to like her, but you don't want to."

By the time the Aesir finished, Loki was done with straightening up chairs and rubbing the bruise no doubt forming on his hip. He was just as done with talking. He did not say anything to refute Hod's words. Actually he did not say anything at all. He merely stomped over to the door, and proceeded to walk out, slamming it hard enough behind him to make one of its already abused hinges fall off.

"See if I ever listen to you whining again," Hod muttered to the empty air without any real conviction.

Sigyn emerged back out of Odin's palace dressed in clothes much more fit for exploring: wool pants and tunic, and a pair of comfortable worn boots. At a distance she looked no different than a servant, which served her just right. She ran out on the street, feeling a

childish sort of excitement starting to overtake her, replacing the dark things swirling around in her head. There were a lot of things she did not remember or know altogether about Asgard, and many things that had simply changed. Roaming those streets without any particular goal or purpose gave her a much needed rush of freedom. She remembered how as a kid she was never allowed to go too far out in the city, so she made for the outskirts. The further she went the landscape became less residential, gardens and groves taking over most of the space.

Sigyn kept walking, looking around and enjoying the quiet and the night air, until she stumbled upon a specific grove that caught her attention. It was larger and most sturdily fenced than any property she had come across. A strong magic aura tugged at her even from all the way out on the street. She paused, curiosity piqued, and considered whether it would be trespassing to just walk in. There was no one guarding it, and upon further inspection the metal gate was unlocked and easily slid open. Sigyn figured there was no obvious reason she shouldn't go in.

The moment she stepped into the grove the presence of magic in everything around her became crystal clear, whereas before it had been muted and blurry, like silhouettes behind a fogged-up window. It was powerful and vital, so much so that even someone with less sensing gift than Sigyn would be able to feel it. And yet it was gentle, malleable and unobtrusive. Sigyn cast her eyes around, her sight now adjusted to the pale moonlight. The trees surrounding her formed a strange variety, from apple and orange trees to large oaks and chestnuts, an unusual medley that paid no mind to climate. It had a calming effect, even more so than Frigga's gardens. Sigyn found herself wondering who this magic belonged to.

She noticed the sound of running water and followed it. From within the trees, a little clearing came into view. A stone-hewn fountain was in the center of it, and next to it a single apple tree; it looked just like every other one in the grove, only its fruit were an impossible shimmering gold Sigyn instantly recognized. She now had a name for the grove's owner, despite not having a face to go with it.

Under the tree's branches, on the fountain's unadorned ledge sat a young woman. She looked lonely but at peace, and Sigyn felt guilty for her presence all of a sudden. Her knee-jerk reaction was to start backing away. But then again, the woman hardly looked threatening, and Sigyn could always leave if she was asked to. It was much more polite than sneaking away, since she had already entered. After all, a small part of her brain supplied, she did want to meet whoever this place belongs to.

She stepped out of the trees into the clearing, and the woman turned her head towards her, mouth parting in soft surprise.

"Hello there," Sigyn greeted. "I didn't want to startle you, or to trespass. I thought it was alright to come in here. I can go if it's-"

"Oh, it's alright," the other woman was quick to reassure, smiling sweetly.

Her dark skin shone in the moonlight, her complexion warm and lively even in the pale glow. She had golden brown hair and big brown eyes that brimmed with warmth. Her smile was bright and contagious, and Sigyn found herself drawn to her immediately.

"I'm Sigyn. I'm sort of new around here," she said, shifting her weight from one leg to the other where she stood.

"My name is Idunn," the woman said, confirming Sigyn's suspicion upon seeing the golden apples. "I'm happy to meet you. Oh, do you want to sit down?"

Sigyn obliged and went to sit cross-legged at the base of the golden apple tree. She rested her back against the trunk and looked up at Idunn. "How come you are not at the feast?" she asked.

"I can leave this place, but it's really better if I don't. I don't mind though," Idunn replied.

Sigyn considered that for a moment, and she took in the bittersweet expression on Idunn's face. "Doesn't it get lonely?"

"Perhaps, sometimes," Idunn admitted. "But not always. You are here now."

"I came here pretty much by accident," said Sigyn, and at Idunn's crestfallen look she added: "Of course from now on I can visit, if you'd like that."

"I'd love that," Idunn replied earnestly. "Other people visit me too, and I also go into the city sometimes. But everyone's got their thing to do. So I can't expect them to come here all the time."

As if on cue, another figure emerged from the cluster of trees. A man, looking no older or younger than the two goddesses, his pale hair tumbling down freely, unlike a warrior's that was either short or braided. He carried a harp and had what looked like a guitar strapped to his back. A set of pipes hung at his belt. Idunn's face lit up the she saw him and he returned her beaming smile with one of his own.

"I finally managed to escape," he said, as he emerged onto the clearing. It was only then that he seemed to notice Sigyn.

"Hello there, I'm Bragi," he said, not dropping his warm smile.

"I'm Sigyn, honoured to meet you," she said, observing him and trying to place the sense of familiarity about him.

"The honour is all mine," Said Bragi with a small curtsy.

His getup and the familiar sound of his name both tugged at Sigyn's older and more recent memory, until she was sure she'd seen this man sing and play before.

"Are you a musician?" she asked.

Bragi nodded.

"He plays and sings so beautifully," Idunn exclaimed.

"Apparently you're not the only one who thinks so. Freyja wouldn't let me leave the feast earlier," he said apologetically.

Sigyn barely contained herself from pumping her fist in the air as she realized that she'd just caught sight of him playing before she left Freyja's palace, but hadn't paid attention, lost as she was in her own stormy thoughts.

"You didn't have to," Idunn said, lowering her eyes. It was barely perceptible, but her cheeks darkened in a soft blush.

"I wanted to." He smiled at her again. His whole face lit up every time he did.

Sigyn's eyes darted between the two, and suddenly she felt like she was intruding on something private.

"You two will be my little private audience for tonight," Bragi announced cheerfully as he sat down on the ground, his back against the fountain's wall.

He unstrapped the guitar from his back and set the harp aside. He tested and tightened a few strings, and then he looked up at both women in turn. "Any requests?"

Sigyn shook her head, and Idunn said: "whatever you'd like."

He started picking a simple pattern on the guitar that got more intricate as it went on. From the first note Sigyn felt peculiarly drawn to the sound. It was a plain instrument, but in the God's hands the melody had a magical effect, which only got stronger when he started singing. His voice was enrapturing; not too deep and not too high, but utterly beautiful. The song he chose was a ballad about two lovers' tragic fate to never be together. And throughout it, Sigyn felt so much emotion it brought her close to tears. After the song ended she was left stunned, as if a spell had been suddenly broken. She looked at Idunn who had actually teared up.

"Perhaps that was a bit too sad," Bragi muttered. "Let me play something else to pick up the mood."

And so, he continued playing; happy tunes that filled one's soul with laughter, bittersweet ballads about love, and peaceful songs that made nature itself want to slow down and take a rest. After a particularly calming harp piece, Sigyn found herself nearly dozing off against the tree's trunk. She yawned behind her hand and stretched as discreetly as she could before pushing herself up. She didn't know how much time had passed, but she was starting to feel weary, and she was inclined to leave the two have some time by themselves anyway.

"This was absolutely lovely. I hope I get to hear you play again," she told Bragi. She smiled at Idunn, and bid them both goodnight, before walking back into the trees and out of the grove.

Her walk through the city to Odin's palace was not interrupted, but she met the occasional drunk god or goddess returning home early from the feast. Of course she had no doubt it would last till morning, and it was still pitch dark. She wondered whether her absence had been noted. She hoped Freyja, or anyone else for the matter, would not take it as a sign of ungratefulness and take offence. Not much to do about it now, she reasoned and shrugged it off. She could never handle those festivities quite well. She would always find herself drained and missing bed earlier than most, and she would only sit it through out of obligation.

She hardly registered walking through the palace, she just realized at some point that she had gotten to her room. She changed into a nightgown and laid on the bed, strangely feeling less sleepy than when she had been sitting on the hard packed dirt in Idunn's grove. She had really enjoyed Iddun's and Bragi's company, and on the whole the discordant night had ended in a pleasant note. Her mind still wandered to the feast, and to the way Loki had talked to her. This behaviour of his puzzled her. One moment he was perfectly warm and respectful, despite what everyone had told her about him, and the next he was lashing out and full of scorn.

But in reality, the most worrisome to her was how Loki had disregarded his own life; first by endangering it, and then by presenting his potential death as a mere quick fix to Sigyn's problem.

Might try to talk some sense into him, was her last semi-coherent thought. Then unconsciousness came, and in the morning she would not remember having it.

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