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Servant of Life (The Loki Files #6)

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Published: 2014
Tag(s): Loki aventure mythology Fun fantasy

Author's Note

This is an adventure story. It has some action parts, it has some fun parts. It’s slightly based on Nors mythology, but that’s all. I used the parts I like and find fascinating and didn’t care much abou correctness. Thus Loki does not marry Sigyn, his wife in the sagas, and he gets to sit on the throne f a bit. Thus, like in the Marvel universe, Thor and Loki are brothers (ok, I did take quite some pointe from Avengers, but that was just what spawned my ideas). To explain discrepancies between th mythology and my story, I claim it’s Loki’s fault. Prove me wrong.

Chapter 1

Loki opened the door to Sarah's living room, saw a book flying his way, and ducked. When a vas followed the book, he stopped it in mid-air with a spell.

"I didn't even call you a woman with spirit lately. What did I do?" *I can't remember anything th would justify throwing something at me. For a trickster, I was rather well-behaved recently.*

"Nothing." She sighed and walked over to him, grabbing the vase from where it still hovered in t air. "I'm just throwing a tantrum, that's all. Sorry."

"Stressed out?" He picked the book up from the floor.

She put the vase back on a side table. "What if I'm not good enough for the royal family, Loki?"

"Are you kidding? If I manage to be regal enough for the family, it'll be child's play for yo You're no trickster."

"But I'm not even a goddess by birth!"

"Neither am I a god by birth." He pulled her close and wrapped his arms around her. "Sarah, you a a powerful goddess and a wonderful person. There's no reason to worry at all."

"No reason?"

"None at all. Mother managed it wonderfully, too, didn't she?"

"She wasn't part of the royal family before her wedding, either?"

"No, she was a healer, working in the hospital wing. I remember her saying father got injured purpose several times, so he could meet her."

"Your father?"

"He wasn't born as the all-powerful and aloof All-Father. He was young once, too … even thoug it's hard to imagine."

She smiled slightly. "When Odin was a little boy, right?"

"Right." He smiled back at her.

She gazed at the clock on the mantle. "I'll be late for a meeting with your mother."

"You're not going."

"But there's so much still to plan! How my family gets here, where we'll spend our honeymoon…

"Not tonight. You need to relax for a bit. Mother will understand, I'll tell her."

"But…"

"No 'but.' You remove the proof of your temper tantrum, I go and see mother. And once I did tha I'll organize a nice, private dinner for the two of us. No more thinking about the wedding tonight."

"There's only a week left…"

"And I'm sure you have organized everything already."

"The honeymoon … and my family…"

"I know how to get your family to Asgard without too much trouble. I'll take care of that. And know the perfect place for our honeymoon. I'll organize everything for it."

"Where could we go?"

"That's a surprise, my love. So there's one thing about the wedding you don't know. Trust me."

"You ask for a lot, God of Deceit." She looked up at him with her warm, brown eyes.

"But I ask the woman who tamed me, Tree Maiden. You know you can trust me."

“I do.” She closed her eyes and leaned against him. “A relaxing evening in front of the fire?”

“Is there anything better during an autumn storm?”

“But the fire went out. Didn’t you feel it?”

“You know I don’t feel the cold.”

“Right … Frost Giant.”

He gazed at the fireplace. “Well, wood is there…” He lifted his left hand and pointed his inde finger at the wood. A small fireball shot out. A soft gust of wind followed, then the fire was burnin merrily. “You need to remember you’re a sorceress. Making fire is easy for you and me.”

“But a fireball is battle magic.”

“Magic is all about intent. You use a fireball to attack someone, it’s battle magic. You use a fireba to make a nice, cosy fire, it’s just household magic.”

“So you could use household magic in battle?”

“Theoretically. But most typical household spells don’t do damage.” He released her. “I will te mother you’re not coming and arrange for our dinner.”

“And I’ll remove the remains of my tantrum.” With a sigh, she turned to the room. “I shouldn have thrown all the books … and it’s a good thing you caught the vase, it would have been a shame.”

“I could have repaired it, anyway. That’s a classic case for alteration magic.” He gave her a so kiss. “I’ll be back soon.”

* * *

A few minutes later, Loki knocked on the door of his parents’ suite of rooms. His mother opened i

“You are not Sarah.”

“Not right now, but I was once. She’s not coming, mother.”

“What happened?”

“She just threw a tantrum in her living room … out of stress.”

She shook her head and sighed. “I have been waiting for that, you know.”

“You have?”

“You forget I was a healer before I married your father, Loki. I felt her stress level rise, but she’s s set on doing everything perfectly. I told her most things were organized already, but she just continu to worry and to plan. The only parts missing are getting her family to Asgard and where you wi spend your honeymoon.”

“And I just took over both.”

“Good. How will you solve those problems?”

“A teleportation spell will take care of getting her family here. And I know a perfect place for o honeymoon.”

“Where?”

“My mentor from the Elven realm has a nice cottage at the edge of a forest. I will rent it from hi … or find something similar, should he have sold it.”

“A wonderful idea.”

“I hope so. The high energy saturation of the Elven realm feels great for a mage of any kind. And hope Sarah will enjoy the nature outside of the capital. We’ll take Darkness along, so we can be in th capital quickly, too.”

“As always, the Master of Manipulation has plotted everything in the wink of an eye.” She laughe

“Sarah is afraid of becoming a member of the royal family. She thinks she’s not good enough.”

“And what do you think?”

“I think, if I can pull it off, everyone can. Sarah will be a great royal wife.”

“Don’t underestimate yourself, Loki, you are a very fine prince. But you are right, Sarah will be perfect family member … oh, speaking of that…”

Loki turned to see Sif walk towards them.

She nodded to him. “Where is Sarah?”

“Not coming.” His mother smiled at her second future daughter-in-law. “The stress has final gotten to her.”

“That took longer than expected.”

“You expected it, too?” He looked at Sif.

“I did. It was obvious she was trying too hard. I’ve seen it often, with new recruits. They try to b perfect, better than everyone else. Sooner or later, they have a little breakdown, I talk to them about i and they become real Valkyries, doing their best, not someone else’s.”

“How did I miss it, then?” *How can I miss my love being so stressed out until she throws a book a me?* “How can I say we’re perfect together, if I miss something like that?”

“Don’t blame yourself, Loki.” His mother touched his arm. “She hid it very well, only Maggie, Si and I saw it. But Maggie and I are healers and Sif is in a position in which she sees something like th often. You had a lot of work to do lately, so you couldn’t spend as much time together as you woul have liked.”

“She acted whenever you were around.” Sif shot him a rare smile. “The young warriors I deal wi do that, too. It’s how I learned to see through the act, I see it often.”

“Well, I still should have seen it. At least I can take some work off her shoulders now.”

“You will interfere with her organisation? You think that wise?”

“No, Sif, I don’t interfere, I only take over plotting our honeymoon and I take care of bringing h family here.”

“That’s a good idea. You’re most suited for the transport problem, anyway, and you know a lot o places, so you should be able to find something nice for the two of you.”

“And the fact that Sarah will spend the evening with Loki gives me the chance to spend some tim alone with my second future daughter-in-law.” Loki’s mother smiled and grabbed the leader of th Valkyries by her right arm. “We have a lot to talk about.”

Sif shot Loki a worried glance and he grinned back. “That’s your problem, I’m afraid. I learned ov a millennium ago not to argue with my mother.”

“What a great help you are, God of Deceit.”

“I know my limits, Leader of the Valkyries. Good luck.” He walked off to organize the dinner.

* * *

Loki knocked on the door of Sarah’s rooms again, waited a second, then opened it. She wasn’t in th room, but he could sense her nearby. He waved the servants in to set the table. Once they were don he thanked them and shooed them out. When Sarah came out of her bedroom, everything wa prepared.

She smiled at him. “How did your mother take the news?”

“She expected them. As did Sif, by the way. They were only waiting for you to stress out, becaus you were too worried and wanted everything to be perfect.”

With a sigh, she sat down. “I’m overreacting.”

“You are. But then, you will only get married once, so it’s understandable. At least I hope you wi only get married once.”

“I don’t plan any more marriages, don’t worry. How could any other man replace my person hero?”

“True.” He took a seat as well. “Nobody can replace me.”

“How do you do that?”

“Do what?”

“Be so sure of yourself. You aren’t worried about what others think of you.”

“I grew out of being worried about that. You should have seen me as an adolescent.”

“I would have liked to, but I wasn’t even born then.” She smiled. “Your mother said you were very moody teen.”

“I was. I was a non-warrior in a warrior society and I had just learned I wasn’t a god by birth … an not born as son of Odin. My job made me grow more confident, as it were.”

“I can imagine that.”

They finished their dinner chatting about books and other things not related to wedding Afterwards, she slipped into her bedroom to change into something comfortable and he had the dish removed. They settled in front of the fireplace and she leaned against him.

“You already have a plan, don’t you? For our honeymoon?”

“No discussion about the wedding tonight, love.”

She snuggled closer and sighed. “Sorry, I forgot. I hope, your mother isn’t too lonely now.”

“She’s grilling Sif, so I guess she has fun.”

“Grilling Sif?”

“She said she was going to use the chance to talk things through with Sif. I’m just glad my twelv sparring fights with my future sister-in-law are over already. She’d make me pay for not helping h otherwise.”

Sarah didn’t answer. Loki gazed at her and smiled. *She’s deep asleep and I think she needs it, too* Carefully, he untangled himself and got to his feet. He opened the door to the bedroom, then he wen back to the fireplace, lifted her up, and carried her to her bed. He put her in, made sure she was tucke in well, and left her a note, in case she woke up during the night, wondering. Then he banked the fi and slipped out of her suite of rooms.

* * *

When Loki was only steps from his own rooms, he heard his mother’s voice from behind his bac “I thought you wanted to have a nice evening with Sarah?”

He turned around. “She fell asleep, so I put her in bed and left. She looks like she needs a goo night’s sleep.”

“You will make a very good father one day.”

“Are you done with Sif already?”

“We had a very nice chat, yes. You are getting along well with her now, aren’t you?”

“We cleared up our differences and she is a very interesting person.”

“She is. A very worthy future lady of Asgard, too. I’m very lucky when it comes to my daughters in-law … as lucky as I was with my sons.”

He smiled. “As lucky as Thor and I were with our parents.”

“We were all lucky.” She smiled back.

“What does father think about it all?”

“He is glad both of his sons have found their significant others. Even though one of them needed push.”

“How does he know that? How do you know that?”

“We know Thor. He is a brave boy, very courageous, but he isn’t bold when it comes to his feeling Like his father.”

“Did father really get injured on purpose, so he could come to the hospital wing?”

“~~Oh yes, he did.” She smiled at the memory. “He rather risked being in pain than just asking m~~ out. And it wasn’t because of my social position, either. His father had given him free choice of h bride. It was after his fifth sword wound I told him he’d either finally ask me out or I would refuse treat him any longer.”

“You did?”

“I had to. Otherwise, he would still be in the hospital wing three times a week today.”

Loki grinned as he imagined that scene. “Did you find it hard to be the future lady of Asgard all in sudden?”

“It wasn’t easy, but I grew into it well. Sif is a leader already, she knows what the pressure o leading feels like. Sarah is a strong woman and very intelligent, she matches you well.”

“How did you know I gave Thor a push?”

“Who else could have done that, Loki? You are his brother, the one he listens to. Not many goo things came from the war, but one definitely did.” She smiled at him.

He remembered the reason for the war. “What was father’s brother like? You must have know him.”

“He was not like you … he was a younger brother, first and foremost.”

“I’m the younger brother, too.”

“You are Loki, Prince of Asgard, God of Deceit, Master of Manipulation, right arm of Odin … an Thor’s brother. You don’t define yourself by being someone’s younger brother.”

“He did?”

“Yes, he did. Your father wanted to cure him from that by sending him on that mission. But instea of growing, he died.”

“He sent me on a diplomatic mission, too … to the Sidhe realm.”

“He hoped you would change, but you didn’t. I’m glad you ultimately found your own place.”

“I was a terrible child … a terrible youth at least.”

“No, you weren’t. You were an arduous adolescent, but not terrible. You were full of energy, eve though it was angry energy. You were set on being yourself, even though you didn’t know what tha meant. In short: you were a rebellious teenager, long before people called it that. And you ultimatel became the dutiful son and brother.”

“You will never stop calling me that, will you?”

“Why should I? It’s the best possible description for you.”

Chapter 2

The next morning Loki took the Bifrost to visit the capital of the Elven realm. He enjoyed h occasional visits, as the Elven realm had a high energy saturation that made him feel stronger ar more powerful. It wasn't just a feeling, either, the high energy saturation made spells far mo effective. He walked to the Royal College of Magic close to the palace and went to the office of h former mentor. After a knock, he entered the room.

The old mage smiled. "Loki, how nice to see you again … so shortly before you're getting marrie too."

Loki smiled at the elf. "You received your invitation, then?"

"I did and I look forward to the ceremony. Feasts in Asgard are always worth attending. So, wh brings you here a mere week before your marriage?"

"Do you still have that little cottage by the forest north of the capital?"

"Yes."

"Good. Can I rent it for a while?"

"Do you want to contemplate all your sins?"

Loki grinned. "No, that would take more than a while. I want to spend my honeymoon there. Sara my bride, is a sorceress, too. Her strength lies with life magic, she'll enjoy it there."

"Ah." The old elf smiled in understanding. "Well, I won't rent you the cottage…"

"Why not?" *Where will I find another cottage on short notice?*

"Because spending your honeymoon there will be my present for the wedding."

Loki relaxed. "Thank you very much."

"Please, it's the least I can do. Now, tell me about your future wife. Who is the woman who ca keep up with the trickster?"

"Her name is Sarah Lucas, she was born as a mortal and became a goddess a few years ago throug an artefact turned into a trap." Loki smiled. "I met her before and fell in love with her."

"You always were good at thinking outside the box."

"Yes, I was. Sarah is temperamental and intelligent, she loves learning as much as I do, and she ca deal with my love for pranks."

"So you have found the perfect life-mate. And now for the details."

"The details?"

"How you met her, how you fell in love, how she became a goddess, all the little details yo omitted."

"Very well…" Loki took a deep breath and launched into a long tale about treachery, adventure, an late revenge.

"You certainly live in interesting times, that much is for sure." The old mage smiled when Loki ha finished his tale. "I look forward to meeting her. For now, you could do me a favour, though."

"What can I do for you?"

"I planned to teach my students about alteration magic today, but you are much more suited fo demonstrating it. What do you think about helping me?"

"That could be fun."

“How far have you developed your shifting ability by now?”

“~~Let me demonstrate.” Loki touched his mentor’s face with his left hand for a moment,~~ then h own in the same way. He shifted into the elf without problems. “I’d like to think I perfected it.”

“Amazing, but you always were a very talented shifter. How far have you come with your inherite powers?”

“Since that time my heart was coated in ice, I don’t even need to shift partially any more to u them. They have become a true part of me.”

“Wonderful. Is the trickster ready to trick my students?”

“I’m always ready to trick people.”

“If that isn’t the truth.” His mentor laughed. “Then let’s see how well they can spot a false teacher

A few minutes later, Loki walked into a classroom he remembered rather well. He reached the litt podium in the front and turned towards the students. *Doesn’t look like any of them can spot a shifte but that’s an inborn talent.* He remembered his mentor’s mannerism well, so he had no trouble actin the right way as he greeted the students.

“Well, students, let’s talk about the uses of magic in everyday life. While some things can’t b tampered with, a lot of things can.”

One of the students dared raise his hand. “Sir, weren’t we supposed to talk about alteration mag today?”

“I’m getting there.” Loki forced himself not to grin. *Nothing better than to confuse a few peopl* “Alteration magic can be quite useful in everyday life. You can alter the cards you have in a game, fo instance…”

“But isn’t that illegal?” The same student spoke again.

“Only if you get caught.” Loki wondered how to continue, when his mentor stepped into the roor Quite some of the students gasped, looking from one of them to the other.

“That should teach you not to trust your eyes too much.” The original smiled. “Alteration magic ca be used for a lot of things. Some people have a special use for it, which we call shape shifting. M former student here is a shape shifter with the ability to use his alteration magic to shift into variou shapes.”

Loki shifted back to his normal shape and smiled. “It certainly does have its uses. Apart from th illegal ones, there are quite some legal ones as well. I use it for quick clothes changes and repair usually. Remember, though, that most alterations are temporal, so things will revert to their origin state. The only exception are repairs, because in this case the alteration magic is used to restore a original state … the state before something broke.”

“Alteration magic requires a lot of subtlety, which is probably why Loki is so suited for it. It als requires a good eye for details.”

Loki found himself a place in the last row and enjoyed being a student again for a little while.

* * *

Loki had spoken to Harold Lucas, Sarah’s father, before the wedding, plotting how to move th whole family, including Sarah’s aunts and their families, to Asgard. On the day of the wedding, h arrived at the house early, in order to prepare everything.

“And you can tailor a spell that precisely?” Sarah’s father watched him put the spell on the entranc door.

“Of course. Magic is quite flexible. The spell will be active between ten and ten-thirty a.m. loc time today. It will only transport people walking out, not people coming in. You’ll land close to th Bifrost, since that area will allow me to pick you all up. A lot of guests will be coming from th

direction, people from other realms.”

“They will?”

Loki grinned. “A prince of Asgard is getting married, that is more than a small ceremony. I kno my mentor from the Elven realm will be there, my blood brother, the Frost King, as well.”

“Mae will get the shock of her life.” Harold laughed. “She deserves it, though. Eric and Cryst know, don’t they?”

“Yes, they do. I told Eric everything and he made a comic book out of the story.”

“I’ve had a look at it, it’s very good.”

“I’d love to read it, but I can’t run the risk of father seeing it. I’ve seen quite some of the drawing though. He is very talented.”

“He is and he earned quite some money with his first comic already.”

“That’s good news. Everyone will be here in time, I hope. What did you tell them?”

“That you have chosen a secluded place for the wedding and we will drive there all togethe because it’s hard to find.”

“It’s not even a complete lie. Asgard is hard to find and pretty secluded. Ah … human deviousnes it’s so refreshing.”

His soon-to-be father-in-law smiled. “I thought you would like that.”

“I will be waiting for you all in Asgard, so don’t worry.”

“See you later, then.”

Loki nodded to Harold and took a portal back to Asgard. He met with Heimdall at the bridge. made sure Sarah’s family would be teleported here.”

“You think that is wise?”

“Why not? Just because they get to see the Bifrost and, possibly, several other guests?”

“You are the trickster even on your wedding day.”

“Well, part of the family knows that already.”

The Bifrost was activated. Both Heimdall and Loki looked at the jet-stream as two Frost Gian emerged from it. Loki recognized his blood brother immediately and he saw the second Giant was woman.

With a smile, he walked over to them. “How nice to see you today. It’s great you could make it.”

“It was a welcome chance for me to see you both again … and to have you meet my fian Amethyst.”

Loki bowed towards the woman. “It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

She smiled and bowed as well. “The pleasure is all mine.”

He turned back to his brother. “Shall I make a portal for you two to the great hall? Like that yo don’t have to walk in the sun.”

“We would appreciate it.”

He called up a portal and the two Frost Giants walked through.

Heimdall smiled. “You are a true diplomat.”

“Sun weakens the Frost Giants, it’s only a question of politeness.”

“Diplomacy.”

“Sometimes that’s the same.”

“In essence.”

Loki felt the teleportation spell taking hold. “They’re coming.” One by one, Sarah’s extende family arrived in Asgard, first Sarah’s father Harold, then her mother Emily, then her sister Angel Her aunt Linda with her husband and sons followed, then her second aunt Mae with husband, daughte unloved son-in-law, and grandson.

Mae stared at the new surrounding in surprise. “Where are we and how did we get here?”

With a grin, Loki took a step forward. “First of all, welcome to Asgard. And you came here b magic.”

“What?”

While Mae still looked around in shock, Brian, her grandson, pulled free from his mother’s han and ran towards the bright light of the rainbow bridge. Loki caught him and lifted him up. The bo squealed happily, he seemed to recognize Loki despite not having seen him for almost a year.

“Just to make one thing clear: I’m the one whose job it is to wreak havoc here … and I don’t share

Heimdall laughed. “If that isn’t the truth.”

Brian grinned and Loki handed him back to his mother. Crystal sighed. “You know, we should hav let you babysit him more often.”

“Oh?”

“Then we could blame his bad traits on you.”

Loki smirked. “Well, you missed that chance.”

Mae turned to her daughter. “Why are you not surprised?”

“Because I’ve known for a while.”

Loki used the time it took for Mae to understand that to greet the rest of the family. “This wa please.”

“What is that place?” Mae had recovered enough to wonder where they were going.

“The palace, built around the world tree.”

“And why are we going there?”

“You wanted to see Sarah before the ceremony and she’s staying in her rooms.”

“She lives in that palace?”

“She’s the keeper of the world tree, so she has the right to live near it.”

Mae sneered at him. “And you want to marry her so you can live there, too?”

They reached the gates, Loki nodded to the guards, and walked through. “No, I’ve been living he for most of my life already.”

“What?”

He grinned at her. “Remember when your sister told you my father was the most influential ar most wealthy person on earth? It’s not completely true, but true in essence. I am Loki, Prince Asgard. My father, Odin, is ruling this realm and earth is under our protection. He’s pretty influenti and we’ve always had a lot of wealth.”

“P-prince?”

“Yes, prince. Not the crown prince, though, that’s my older brother Thor.”

“You are a prince?”

“Yes, but I know it’s hard to believe sometimes.”

“And what is Sarah doing here?”

“She’s been turned into a goddess a few years back, now she is the Tree Maiden, the keeper of th world tree.”

“Goddess … maiden?”

“An honorary title.” Loki grinned. “Which is lucky, because we have plans for a nice family … ar speaking of family, what brings you here, brother?”

Thor walked over to them and grinned back. “Well, since Sif is staying with Sarah, I was wanderir around a bit.”

“Thanks for the warning, I will definitely not try to sneak into Sarah’s rooms then.”

“That wouldn’t go over well … mother would send Sif after you.”

“You are afraid of a woman?” Mae’s sneer was back.

Loki shrugged. “I’m afraid of the leader of the Valkyries, yes. She is an extraordinary warrior and

don’t even rate as one. I have been in the arena several times with her already and I dare say I he myself well, but I don’t want her really annoyed at me.”

“That wouldn’t be wise, given you two will have your wedding night tonight.”

“… and given the fact Sif has a good aim for exclusively male bits.” Loki shuddered.

“She does.” Thor’s grin broadened.

“You are too amused by that, brother.”

“What are you going to do about it?”

“Nothing … I’ll just keep it in mind for your own wedding. Revenge is much more sweet when comes after a long wait.”

Angela laughed. “You’re still very entertaining together.”

“We try.” Loki grinned. “After all that time it took to free his sense of humour, we have to make lot of use of it.”

“It didn’t take that long!”

“Most of our adult lives. But then, without that, I wouldn’t have met Sarah.” They reached the do to Sarah’s suite. *Still hers now, but we will live together when we come back from the honeymoon tri* He knocked on the door. “Sarah is staying in there with my mother and a few friends.”

Emily took the lead and opened the door. After her, Linda, Mae, and Angela filed through. Crysta picked Brian up and went in last. Sif appeared at the door, smirked at Loki, and closed it.

“Is she your sister?” Jonathan, Mae’s husband, mustered Loki.

“No, otherwise my dear brother would be in trouble. Sif is not related to him or me.”

“Not yet.” Thor smiled broadly.

“Not yet.”

“But she will be?” Linda’s husband George made that guess.

“Well, unless my brother does something very stupid, I don’t see how that can’t happen.”

“I never do stupid things.”

“Says the man I had to free from a military base.”

Eric, Mae’s unloved son-in-law, laughed. “You are so much more interesting together than I eve expected.”

“They are, aren’t they?” One of Linda’s sons nodded. *Not sure whether it’s Frank or Harry.* “You comic doesn’t do them justice.”

“I don’t think I can write or draw good enough to do two gods justice.”

“You should pray father doesn’t hear about that.” Thor grinned. “He wouldn’t be amused about it.”

“I am praying for that regularly. But I’ve done worse and the political situation is calm, so th yelling can’t be that bad. Or, maybe, I’m just getting used to it after all that time…”

“Well, it’s part of your job to get yelled at, after all.”

“Part of your job?” George looked surprised. “You are working?”

“Yes. As I’m not a warrior, I have to serve Asgard another way. I am my father’s right arm, hi agent, doing whatever he wants done. I usually bring him the bad news, too, so I get yelled at. Fath does have a fiery temper.”

Chapter 3

Loki led the men in Sarah's family through the palace a little longer, showing them the gallery and few other places, then he took them to the great hall. Harold waited outside, since he would lead h daughter in later on, the rest followed Loki and Thor into the huge building. Loki stood in the centre the hall with his brother, waiting for their father and Sarah to turn up and the ceremony to begin.

"Are you getting nervous?" Thor was visibly amused.

"Just wait until your own wedding day. And remember who had to give you a push."

"Well, I would have asked her out anyway."

"You wouldn't have." Loki shot him a glare. "You weren't even brave enough to ask her how sh was."

"Okay, I wouldn't have. How does it feel?"

"To wait for the ceremony? I'm nervous and I can't believe the day has finally come."

"That's how it usually feels." Hearing their father's voice, they both smiled and turned towar him, as he had come in through the south entrance. He smiled back at them. "Getting married is one the moments that even scare a warrior."

"And I'm not a warrior, I can be as nervous as I want to." Loki shot his brother a grin.

"I still can't believe my younger brother is getting married before me."

"I still can't believe one of my sons is getting married already. But I know you have chosen ve well."

"Thank you." Loki gazed at the north entrance, where Sarah would enter the hall. "I think I knew the first time I saw her … she was special."

"She must be special, if she can tame the trickster."

"She told you about that, brother?"

"She told Sif and Sif told me."

Yes, she has tamed the trickster, at least a bit. "I don't think the trickster will ever be complete tamed."

"No, that won't be possible." Odin smiled. "But taming you a bit is a difficult enough task."

"It is." Again, Loki looked at the entrance, just as the female members of Sarah's family filed i He also saw his mother, Sif, and Maggie come in. *Not long now.*

The doors of the north entrance swung open fully, admitting Sarah and her father. Loki realized h was probably grinning like a fool, but he didn't care. Sarah's red hair was glowing in the light of th torches that lit the hall. She wore a very pale green dress, as white was not customary for weddings Asgard, and it set off her hair as well as her warm, brown eyes. She walked to the centre of the ha with a smile that brightened visibly when her eyes met his. *My love … my life.* He felt his heartbe quicken. He grasped her right hand with his and barely felt the moment when his father's hand can to rest on both of theirs, giving them his blessing. *My wife, finally.*

* * *

"Dad looks ready to faint." Sarah laughed softly.

Loki watched his father and Sarah's talk and grinned. "Well, he has studied Norse mythology all h life ~~and now he's talking to Odin. Even more, now he's related to Odin.~~"

"Aunt Mae is still shocked, you know. Her niece is married to a prince."

"And to a god."

"That's even more of a shock. Aunt Mae is a Christian, now she has to admit that other gods exist.

"Do you want to meet another future sister-in-law?"

"Another one than Sif?" She looked up at him.

"My blood brother is here with his fiancé."

"I always forget you have another brother beside Thor. Yes, I absolutely have to meet my secon sister-in-law."

He led her over to his brother. The Frost King presented his fiancé to Sarah with a smile, then h congratulated them both. After some more small talk, they made their way through the hall, whic took quite a while. Finally, they reached their table again and sat down.

"Now, what have you planned for the honeymoon?" Sarah looked at him.

"Patience, love. You will know all about it in a few hours."

"Why not now?" She pouted.

"Because that would interfere with my plans."

"You're not having your first argument as a married couple right now, do you?" Angela looked a each of them for a moment. "It's a bit early for that."

"Well, he's refusing to tell me about our honeymoon."

"We agreed it would be a surprise for you … and it will be."

Angela laughed. "You two are so sweet together."

Sarah gave in and laughed as well. "He's plotting, but I've gotten used to that already."

"Of course, since I'm always plotting."

"Will I like the place?"

"Do you really think I would take you to a place I knew you'd hate?"

"Why do you think I'll like it?"

"Nice try." He picked up a mug and took a sip. "But you have to be more devious, love."

"Why don't you just wait and see, Sarah?" Angela grinned. "I'm sure you know how to punish hi if you're not pleased."

"She does … but she won't have to."

"I could still chain you to the wall … the place has walls, has it?"

"Most buildings have walls, love. But what is it with your interest in chains?"

Angela and Crystal, who had just come over, laughed at the way the conversation was going. Lo grinned at them.

"They are necessary for taming the trickster."

"That sounds very promising."

"It's a good thing Eric is looking after Brian right now." Crystal smiled.

"But it's very entertaining, isn't it?" Angela looked at her cousin. Crystal nodded back.

Loki shot Sarah a look. "Shall we continue to entertain them?"

"I think they can entertain themselves. Will there be a lot of entertaining in our honeymoon?"

"I'm sure we can make our own entertainment."

"You're a slick one."

"And you only realized that now?"

She put her hand on his. "I always knew that."

"Then you should realize nothing you do or say will make me spoil the surprise."

"That's right … unfortunately."

* * *

Loki gave Heimdall the coordinates in the Elven realm and wrapped one arm around Sarah. Sl looked up at him with a smile. *She loves the Bifrost more than any other person I've ever met.* Sl wrapped her arms around his body and he catapulted them both into the jet-stream of the bridg While they were approaching their destination, he made sure she couldn't see where they were flyin Not that he worried, she was squealing in delight, completely caught by the trip itself. *As every time s far*. He brought them down softly.

Sarah looked around. "Where are we?"

"What do you think?"

She concentrated. "Judging from the energy saturation, we're in the Elven realm."

"We are."

"But this is not the capital."

"Do you really think a realm with a high output of food has no rural areas? The capital is the on big city here, everything else is nature, pasture, field, village, or forest."

"And why are we here?"

He put his hands on her shoulders and turned her around. "Because we're spending our honeymoo here."

She looked at the small cottage nestled between the first trees of the forest and smiled. "It wonderful, but how did you get it?"

"Spending our honeymoon here was a wedding present. This cottage belongs to my mentor. Yo remember him, don't you?"

"Of course. His stories about you were very enlightening. As my teacher said, you can never hav too much blackmail material."

"Your teacher is a wise man."

"Attractive, too."

"Is he? I never noticed."

"He claims, he's the most attractive of the young gods."

"Well, if he says so…"

Sarah laughed and pulled his head down for a long kiss. He wrapped his arms around her body ar she wrapped hers around his neck. They only parted when they were out of air.

"He's also a great kisser."

"You shouldn't tell your husband that in your wedding night, you know."

"Not? I thought you should know."

Loki didn't answer, he just smiled and lifted her up. Then he carried her to the cottage and inside.

Sarah smiled as well. "Seems like our honeymoon has begun."

* * *

Loki slipped out of the bedroom the next morning without waking Sarah up. He went into th stables behind the cottage and was greeted by his horse. The black, Sidhe-bred stallion neighe happily the moment he came in. Loki patted his neck for a moment, then he fed and groomed the hor and led him out on the meadow. Afterwards, he picked up the pitchfork and started to clean the stabl with it.

"I knew you look good with a shovel," he heard Sarah's voice from behind his back after a whil "but you also look good with a pitchfork."

He turned around and shot her a smile. “Well, I wanted to keep everything simple and someone ha to take care of Darkness.”

“You are no average prince.”

“Of course not, I’m a god, after all.”

She laughed. “That should make it even more unlikely you’d shovel the manure yourself. Why d you take him along?”

“In case we want to take a trip to the capital or just a little ride through the forest.”

“The plotting Master of Manipulation.”

“The freshly married Master of Manipulation.”

“Why this wonderful, little cottage? Not that I’m complaining, but most people on earth want spend their honeymoon in a luxurious hotel of some kind.”

“We live in a palace, so what would be so special about a luxurious hotel? Here we’re seclude surrounded by nature, and infused with the energy of the Elven realm.”

“Yes, that’s true.” She smiled. “It’s a wonderful place for a honeymoon.”

“I knew you would like it. I thought of it the moment you mentioned you didn’t have plans for o honeymoon already.”

“Of course. Your devious mind plots with the speed of light.”

“The speed of thought, which is even faster.”

She laughed. “I’ll make breakfast, you go on cleaning the stable.”

Then she turned and left the stables. Loki went back to cleaning with a happy smile.

* * *

Loki juggled all the packages in his arms and followed Sarah down the main street of the capita “Are you sure, you bought enough books in that last shop? There still were some on the shelves wh we left.”

She stopped and smirked at him. “You are right, we have to go back there.”

He stopped, too, and lost control of the tower of packages in his arms. They fell and he curs softly. With a swift movement, he altered them, shrinking them to small cubes. Then he picked up a the cubes and stuffed them into his pockets.

“I thought, you said magic wouldn’t be necessary during our shopping trip?”

He smiled at her. “I underestimated your ability to buy things, love. You know, most women go fo clothes when they come here, but you go for books on old and mysterious magic. That I expected, b I wasn’t aware there were so many of them around.”

“Most women buy clothes here?” She cocked her head to the right.

“The Elven realm is known for their fashion, they make clothes from almost every fabric known the realms and they have an impeccable sense for beautiful design. Elven dresses and robes are ve popular.”

“We should at least take a look, then. What kind of dress do you prefer me wearing?”

He leered at her. “You know I prefer you wearing no dress at all.”

She laughed. “You do, but that is no reason for me to run around naked all the time.”

“I shouldn’t hope so.”

“Then I will have a look at the clothes, too.” She turned, spied a clothes shop, and walked towar it.

“As you wish, my love.” He followed her with a smile.

Once inside, she moved from one dress to the next, suddenly grabbing one. She had disappear inside a changing room, before he’d had a chance to see what she had taken. He looked aroun

studying the various styles.

“What do you think?”

He turned around, already opening his mouth for a compliment, and stopped dead in his tracks. Th dress she had chosen was made from spider silk and glittered in all colours of the spectrum. wrapped around her upper body like a second skin and fanned out into a wide skirt just below her hip

“A bad choice?”

“No, a breathtaking one.”

She smiled. “It feels as if I’m not wearing anything.”

“Do you know what you’re wearing?”

“No. What is it?”

“It’s spider silk.”

“Spider silk? From small spiders?”

“From huge ones. Long ago, the Sidhe learned how to clean the silk of the various kinds of hug spiders in their realm of the sticky substances in it. They still harvest the silk of various spiders toda mostly for use in ropes and nets, since it’s almost indestructible. There are a few species with a si suitable for clothes, though. And the elves are masters of making the best possible clothes out of it.”

She ran her hands over the dress. “It’s so beautiful and feels so good on the skin, but it’s expensiv too.”

He grasped her hands and held them in his own. “You’re a member of the royal family now, lov ‘Expensive’ is no longer a topic for you. Besides, you could wear this dress for a long time to eve feast or reception we will attend.”

“What if I spill something on it? Or if it rips during one of the fights that always happen at th feasts?”

“It’s spider silk, love. Whatever you spill on it, will wash out completely. And it would take muc more than any weapon used in Asgard to rip it. As a matter of fact, it’s probably the most durab dress you can find anywhere in the realms.” He turned towards a vendor who hovered nearby. “W will take it.”

* * *

Too bad our honeymoon is over. Loki handed Darkness to one of the stable hands of the palace, take him back through a gateway between the realms. *I would have loved to spend more time here wi Sarah, but, well, my work is calling me. The right arm is needed.*

“We should come back here.”

He turned and smiled at Sarah. “We will come back here. What do you think about a little detour o our way back home, though?”

“What kind of detour?”

“We could drop in at your parents’ home for an hour or two. So they see you’re still happy yo decided to marry me.”

“Sounds good. They’ll also see you are alive and in one piece, so I didn’t have to punish you f choosing a bad place for our honeymoon.”

“That’s true.”

He opened a portal to the little forest behind the house of Sarah’s parents. It was early evening an late summer on earth.

“Let’s enjoy the warmth here for a moment.” She leaned against him. “Asgard will be cold an stormy.”

“Autumn will soon turn into winter, yes.” He wrapped his arms around her.

“Well, we’ll have your big fireplace.”

“Our big fireplace.”

“Ours. Doesn’t that sound great?”

“It does. And we will have to find space on our shelves for our new books.”

She laughed. “That might prove to be a challenge.”

“I can fit a few more shelves in the study … I could also fit a second desk in it, if you want.”

“Oh, I definitely want that.”

“I’ll organize everything tomorrow. Let’s go and see if your parents are at home.”

He did a quick alteration of their clothes, just in case Sarah’s parents had guests, then they walke to the house at the edge of the forest and entered the garden in the back. Sarah’s parents and her sist were sitting on the veranda, enjoying the mild evening.

“Looks like you had a great honeymoon.” Angela grinned at them. “Where did he take you? mysterious castle on a mountaintop? A palace in the middle of a desert?”

“A cottage at the edge of a forest in the Elven realm.” Sarah laughed.

“And that was a good thing?”

“I live in a palace, Angela. A little cottage I only shared with my husband and his horse was a nic change. After all, I got to see him work hard every day.”

“She’s right there.” Emily smiled at both Loki and Sarah. “For most people, a luxurious suite something special, but for those two, it would be business as usual. Besides, most people hardly leav their rooms during the honeymoon, anyway. A cottage is just as good as a five-star hotel in that cas Why did he work hard, though?”

“Someone had to take care of Darkness, feed and groom him, clean up the stable.” Loki shrugged the question.

“And you did all of that?”

“I was taught how to take care of a horse as a child. A warrior has to be able to take care of h horse … I didn’t become a warrior, but I do remember the lessons. And we did leave the cottage ever now and then. Sarah bought a ton of books during a trip to the capital of the Elven realm.”

“You bought books?” Angela laughed. “That’s is so you.”

“I also bought the most unbelievable dress.” Sarah looked at Loki. “He made me.”

“You looked too good in it not to buy it. I had no choice.”

“My little sister bought a dress? An unbelievable one?”

“It’s made of spider silk and glitters in all colours of the rainbow … and it feels like you don’t we a thing.”

“Something like that exist?” Even though Angela had asked, both she and her mother were lookin at Sarah.

“Yes, it does, apparently. I only knew I had to try it on when I saw it. Loki knew what it was mad of.”

“When will you wear it, though?”

“I’m a member of the royal family now, mom. There’s a lot of receptions and feasts I will have t go to.”

“And risk the dress?”

“It’s virtually indestructible.” Loki smiled at his mother-in-law. “Spider silk is one of the mo durable fabrics in all of the realms. Ideal for a feast in the great hall, as it were.”

Chapter 4

Loki had hardly managed to work his way through the mountain of paperwork that had accumulate on his desk in his absence when a call from earth reached him. Jupiter, the head of a spy network h had allied himself with only a year before, wanted to see him as soon as possible. Leaving th protocols of the council meetings he had missed on his desk, he decided to heed the call. He altere his clothes to a business look and opened a portal to earth. Out of politeness, he appeared in a seclude yard a block from the network's headquarter and walked inside like any visitor would. He had been i and out a couple of times already, so the young woman at the reception desk recognized him an waved him right through. He took the lift to the top floor and knocked on the door of Jupiter's offic He was called in immediately. At the first glance, he already saw the spy was very worried. "Wha happened?"

"I don't know … and that says something." Jupiter turned to a screen behind his desk and pressed few areas on it. "I only know something is happening."

Loki joined him. "What do you know?"

"We have stumbled over a research facility that doesn't turn up anywhere. No financial backers, n cooperation with other facilities, no regular deliveries. After we realized we couldn't get an information from other sources, we decided to infiltrate. Ten of our best people were sent in, none o them returned or made any contact with us."

"They were all exposed?"

"Most likely, yes. Until two hours ago, we had no trace of any of them. Then one was found, tw states from the suspected location of the facility." Jupiter called up a picture.

Even Loki, who usually wasn't fazed by dead mortals, swallowed hard. The picture showed a dea person - a person's remains at any rate. The gender was guesswork only, there wasn't enough of th face or the body left to tell. The cold-blooded Master of Manipulation took over. "When will th autopsy be finished?"

"They hardly had to cut anything open. Our doctor says he was killed by a group of animals."

"What kind of animal?"

"The bite marks are typical for dogs, the doc said. But they are far too large for any known race."

"And a dog wouldn't feed on a human like that … unless it were absolutely starved beforehan Why have you called me?"

"You mentioned there is various realms. Could something from another realm have come here?"

"There is no dog big enough to do such damage in any of the realms. No wolf, either. Even Jenn isn't that big when he shifts. You know where that facility is?"

"We know the general area, yes."

"Have you considered going in with force? Sending in one or two of your S.W.A.T. teams?"

"I considered it, but we still don't know who they are affiliated with."

"Most likely nobody. Affiliation would have led to some kind of trace you would have found."

"Could it be someone from another realm?"

"No, they would create a flag on our scans and we would have taken a look already. Everything n native to a realm, as long as it's no everyday object made with everyday materials, would turn up o

the scans and we scan earth regularly. A simple visitor might stay invisible, if they were going dow
~~between scans, but a facility definitely would turn up. Whoever is behind it, is a human.”~~

“I’m not sure that is true. Someone who is ready to do this to another human … or accepts happens … isn’t human in my eyes.”

“They are in mine, but I see you all from a different perspective. I agree, though, whoever is behi it is probably missing quite a bit of their humanity.”

Jupiter turned to his desk and picked up his phone. He only pressed one number. “John, please com up here immediately.”

“You’re calling in the head of your security?”

“Yes. You are right, a S.W.A.T. team is the only option we still have.” Jupiter turned back to Loki “Would you go with them? I know you’re a good deal harder to kill than any of them.”

“I will come along, if you want me to. This definitely is something that needs to be looked at.”

“Good.”

Loki had met the man who called himself John Doe once before. When the leader of the network military branch entered the room, he nodded to Loki, but seemed surprised to see him.

“John, we are going into the facility by force. Whatever they are doing there, it’s obviously deadly

“Finally. We should have gone in before. I’ll call in my best men.”

“Loki will accompany you.”

“You think that’s wise, sir? He could be killed and that could lead to trouble.”

“It takes a lot to kill someone like me, you should rather worry about your men, judging from this Loki pointed at the screen.

“Dogs. They probably stumbled over the corpse.”

“Perhaps, but they still must be very big, judging from the marks.” Jupiter sighed. “John, plea take him seriously, he is a force to be reckoned. I’ve seen him kill ten mercenaries in under tw minutes. His friend killed even more of them.”

“Sif is a warrior, I’m not.” Loki remembered the first meeting with the spy network. “But I’m f from helpless.”

“He will come along with your team, John.”

“Yes, sir.”

* * *

Loki kept back as the team moved in. He stayed behind them, bringing up the rear, but the facili seemed empty. *They might have moved after the body was discovered. Some of the traces here sho they didn’t retreat calmly. They grabbed everything of importance and just left the rest where it was* Suddenly, one of the men of the S.W.A.T. team let out a loud yell. There were several shapes ahea but it took Loki a moment to recognize them as human bodies. They’d been hung from hooks and us as food for an animal - or several. *This is not good … someone has taught these creatures humans a food.* He moved to John Doe. “Are those the spies you sent in?”

The man had paled visibly. “Yes.”

“This is a message for you.” Loki heard a soft sound. “And a trap … there’s something coming.”

“How do you know?”

Loki didn’t get to answer, because a huge creature broke from the shadows of a side corridor. immediately went for one of the soldiers, throwing him down. Loki stretched out his left hand a shot an ice shard at it. The ice hit the creature’s head and embedded itself in the skull, making collapse. Some of the men went to pull their team member from underneath the heavy body.

“Not much of a trap.” John Doe stared at the creature.

“Only the most overzealous of the pack. There are more incoming.”

“How do you know that?”

“My hearing is very acute and those are dogs, not cats. They’re not moving noiselessly.”

“Get into protective formation!”

The men moved into a circle with their leader and Loki in the middle, their guns pointing outwards

Loki concentrated and pointed to one of the side corridors. “Two from this direction.” The creatur raced into the main corridor and right into the gunfire. The gunfire ceased as they fell to the groun still twitching. “One from this corridor.” Loki pointed at another one and the men managed to brin the creature down almost the moment they saw it. “Two from over there, one is injured or cripple already.” The first one shooting from the darkness was in perfect condition, but the men brought down quickly. The second one was moving more slowly, but it was very huge. It limped heavily, but took a lot more bullets to kill it. “One more, coming from behind us.” The last creature seemed to b the leader of the pack, it was bigger than all but the crippled one. With a ferocious howl, it shot rig towards the group. The bullets seemed to have no effect at all. “Down!” Loki lifted his left arm an shot a barrage of ice shrapnels over the heads of the ducking men in front of him. They slammed in the creature, driving it back by pure force alone. The sharp ice ripped the creature to shreds.

“Now I know why the boss wanted you to come along.” John Doe stared at the creatures no littering the ground.

Loki walked over to the first creature that had appeared, since it was mostly unharmed. He crouche down beside it and pushed it over. *It looks like a dog, but it’s far too big. It must have the shoulde height of a donkey at least. The skin is partially ripped, as if the flesh and bone underneath it grew to quickly. What could have caused such an extreme and sudden growth?* He stood and walked over the biggest one, the one with the limp. *That one took in at least two complete magazines of bullets.* H studied the limbs. *The legs couldn’t keep up with the sudden growth of the body, they were twisted That’s why it limped that much and was so slow. It seems someone played god here … someone wh has no respect for their fellow humans or other living creatures.*

“What were those things?”

“Dogs. Your doctor was right, someone mutated a pack of Rottweiler dogs and turned them int that.” Loki pointed at the bodies. “And he trained them to see humans as food. They must have bee locked away whenever someone was in here, otherwise every visitor or employee would have been peril.”

“Why did they place one body in the open, then?”

“To draw you here. This is a message.”

“And it says what exactly?”

Loki glanced at the bodies dangling from the hooks, then at the pack of dogs. “It says ‘stay awa from me, you are no match.’ Someone is very sure of themselves and likes playing god.” He turned John Doe. “The network has connections to a lot of labs. Take the creatures there, perhaps someon can find out how they were changed. This is technology which nobody on earth should have.”

“I can only agree with you there. Should we retreat now?”

“No, we should move on. They expected the team to get here and be slaughtered. Look around yo they obviously left in a hurry. They might have left behind more than they wanted.”

“People usually do in such situations.” John Doe nodded.

They moved on through the facility. Most of the things they found were trash and debris, left behin because they had no other use. *They were careful when they left. A few pencils aren’t going to lead u to them.* Suddenly, one of the men called out. Both John Doe and Loki moved over to him. *An artefac but I’ve never seen something like it before.* He looked the little statue over. *A woman, partial decayed. Why did they put a statue of Hel here? Especially as Hel doesn’t exist, I invented her. Ther*

is some dark energy to it, but it feels wrong.

He turned to John Doe. “Do you have a secure container for it?”

“Sure. Since that stone, we always take something with us. How will we get it inside, though?”

“I’ll levitate it, like this, nobody has to touch it.”

One of the men put a glass container on the ground next to the statue, then he stepped back agai Loki concentrated and lifted the statue with his magic. He moved it into the container and then clos the lid with magic as well.

“Practical.”

“As I once told a friend, magic might be smoke and mirrors, but smoke and mirrors have their u as well.”

“Did you recognize the statue?”

“Not as an artefact, but the woman is Hel, I think.”

“Hel?”

“Mythology claims Hel is the mistress of the underworld, half a corpse and half still alive. There only one problem.”

“Which one?”

“Hel doesn’t exist. I invented her centuries ago. This statue wasn’t made in Asgard, because peop there know Hel doesn’t exist, yet there’s dark energy clinging to it.”

“Wait … you invented her?”

Loki grinned at the head of security. “I invented more than half of what goes as Norse mythology. was a difficult teenager.”

“You invented mythology, because you were a difficult teenager?”

“I’m the God of Deceit, Mr. Doe. Inventing things to lead people astray is in my nature. I to people stories about Asgard that weren’t true, I twisted family relations, and I invented new gods . for fun, most of the time.”

“They should call you the God of Misinformation, then.”

“Misinformation is part of deception. Technically, I am the God of Misinformation.”

“What shall we do with the statue? Lock it away? Destroy it?”

“I’ll show it to the Artefact Master, perhaps he can help me understand what it is. Artefacts are h speciality, after all.”

“Then let’s move on, there’s still a couple of rooms left here.”

John Doe turned towards the exit of the room. Loki picked up the glass container and followed hi They reached a room with very thick steel doors.

“I guess this is where they kept the watchdogs while they were working in here.” Loki gazed in the room, taking in the dirt and the stink. “That’s barbaric.”

“It is. I’m not really a dog person, but those poor critters didn’t deserve what was done to them.”

“They didn’t. No creature deserves such a treatment.”

“Why did they do it, then?”

“For the reason for which some people would do everything … because they could.”

“You don’t have a high opinion of humans, do you?”

“I like mankind on the whole, but I’m not blind to your dark side.”

“And you despise it.”

“No, I accept you have it. I have my own dark side. Most of you humans have a good control ov those dark instincts, but there’s always some who wallow in darkness and enjoy it. Like the creator those monster dogs.”

“Why didn’t they take them along?”

“Would you want to move those creatures from one lab to the next, Mr. Doe? I dare say the

probably react bad to narcotics of any kind, so just putting them to sleep is no option. You have see how ~~much damage they all took, do you think anyone could have handled them? Look at their~~ kenne nobody tried to clean it, because it would have been suicide. Besides, they were part of the trap, the couldn’t be removed.”

“Why that trap?”

“Again: because they could do it.”

The former soldier shook his head. “We’re dealing with a very twisted person here.”

“Yes. Twisted and intelligent, a very bad combination.” Loki looked at the statue in the glas container. “I wonder why he left this thing here, though.”

“Perhaps they believed it to be from Asgard? As you said, she is in the myths, even though sh doesn’t exist.”

“Perhaps. What worries me more is the dark energy I feel around it. Something made on ear shouldn’t feel like this.”

Chapter 5

Loki took the glass container with the statue directly to the Artefact Master, the most experienced o all artefact makers of Asgard and a fellow council member.

The old man greeted him with a smile. “Loki, what can I do for you?”

“I found this on earth.” Loki put the container on the workbench. “It’s obviously not from Asgar yet it feels like an artefact.”

“It emits dark energy, yes. Is this … Hel?”

“It looks like her, yes. Which is why it obviously wasn’t made in Asgard. The craftsmen here kno Hel doesn’t exist.” *Yet … perhaps one day, if Sarah and I have a daughter and she agrees to namin her Hel*.

“That’s true. Let’s have a look at it.”

The old man wanted to open the container, but Loki pulled it away. “I have a bad feeling about th thing, let’s leave it in the container as long as possible.”

“I can block dark energy in here, don’t worry. It’s necessary for my work.”

“Let’s play it safe. How much can you tell without touching it?”

“I can’t say what kind of material it is, it doesn’t look like any kind of stone I am familiar with. can tell there is something inside, perhaps an old artefact. Not much energy left.”

Loki took a closer look at the statue, too. “It could be simple plaster.”

“Plaster? Why should they make a statue out of plaster?”

“I don’t know. Why should they make a statue of Hel at all? It’s not as if Norse mythology is ver popular at the moment.” Loki thought about it for a moment. “But it would allow them to fit in a sma artefact. If they pushed it in the plaster while it was drying, the artefact would be well hidden.”

“But the statue looks like it was carved, not made in a mould.”

“They could have made a block in the mould, then carved the statue from it by hand.”

“Why should they do that?”

“Easier than making a mould for it, if they only wanted one. A block would make for a simpl mould.”

“Definitely. Someone made it look older than it is.”

“Looks like they used some kind of varnish on it, so the surface looked older.”

“Yes. The lines are still too clearly defined. If it were old, handling and pure age would have turne them smooth.”

“True. Especially as plaster isn’t a very strong material.”

“Certainly not.” The Artefact Master turned the container, studying the statue from all sides. “Fro a craftsman’s perspective, this is solid work. Not overly artistic, but certainly not made by an amateu Perhaps we should break it and look at the artefact inside.”

“I’m still not sure. I can’t say what it is, but something about the statue worries me.”

“I will block the dark energy, so no matter what that artefact does, it won’t do it in here to us.”

“Well, if it’s necessary. I think we have learned all there is from the statue … unless … please le us turn it over first.” They did so and found a few runes in the base. Loki looked at them. “That rubbish, only random runes.”

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