

Befitting

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Kapitel 4:

Dusk came too soon for Thor to feel prepared. It wasn't his punishment, still he was at unease. Loki did not know he was to be brought before their father, at least neither Thor nor Frigga had come to tell him. It wouldn't have made a difference anyway and Thor preferred to keep his distance from his brother as long as he could. Never had he felt any need to do so, but somehow he deep down perceived there was a crack in their bonds. At least he hoped it was only a crack, he couldn't tell. So once the afterglow came, blood-red as if it was to announce the end not only of the day, he readied himself in order to carry out the task assigned to him. Every little step towards his brother's chambers seemed a little bit longer than usual. Still, he felt unprepared when he opened the door. Behind the door Loki waited for him. And obviously he hadn't even bothered to get at least dressed again.

"Brother, I come to take you to father. It seems your sentence has been decided already." Even though Thor kept his gaze at Loki, he couldn't see the slightest hint of any emotional response. Loki simply nodded.

Indeed, for the time being Loki had resigned – there was no way to extricate himself from what was to follow, his magic was sealed, his voice silenced and the little strength he had was no match for his older brother. Not that he would just take whatever would be in store for him, no, but he was smart enough to understand the chance to prevent his dreams and fears from coming true had not yet come. All he could do was pretending he did not care and to act indifferent.

When Thor came closer, Loki couldn't help his flinching. *Don't touch me*, he thought and indeed, Thor stepped back.

"Get yourself dressed, Loki. It has never been a good idea to keep father waiting." Thor was right, Loki had to agree – once Odin was upset it was wisest to not irritate him further by keeping him waiting unnecessarily. Still his pride demanded him to hesitate for this one moment to make sure Thor knew he wasn't afraid. That he wouldn't bow down to anything. It was this one moment that gave Loki courage enough to go and fetch his garments. Usually he conveniently let them appear before himself, but given his magic was shunned he had to go and get them himself. Well, another moment won. And each second seemed to be crucial for Loki. Time to think. To figure out how to free himself. To not have to face the Allfather just yet. His hands were slightly shaking when he got out what he needed and somehow even the simple robe he had chosen felt too heavy, too much of everything. He needed to hurry.

"Are you ready, brother?" Thor sounded impatient, so Loki forbore from taking more time in order to make his appearance a little less wretched. He went back to his brother and signaled him that he was good to go. Well, as good as possible given the

circumstances. Thor looked at him and without realizing, he smiled as if to encourage his little brother.

"Good. Now come, father is waiting." He needed not to remind Loki to not try anything as he was sure Loki knew himself it would be better to at least stick to the little dignity he had left. Besides – there was no way open for Loki other than the one leading to their father's throne. With a simple gesture Thor neutralized the seal that had prevented Loki from stepping outside of his confinement and led the way once more. Loki wondered, whether it actually had only been about one day ago they had arrived in Asgard for to him it seemed so far away already.

Although the way from Loki's chambers to the throne room was rather long, Thor did not once turn to him. He did not bother talking to Loki – Loki couldn't answer anyway – and neither did he bother to even make sure his brother wouldn't stop following him. He knew Loki wouldn't and in the end Thor was right, Loki was still close behind him when they reached their destination. Without announcing them, Thor stepped in. "We are here, father. I, Thor Odinson and Loki Odinson have come to hear your decision." He stepped to the throne and bowed before their father. Loki stood next to him, but he couldn't bring himself to do as Thor did.

"You may get back up, my son." The fatherly warmth in Odin's voice was like a sting for Loki's heart. He clenched his fist. In the end there was no reason for Odin to address him this way.

"As has been announced yesterday, Loki shall face the punishment for his actions." Loki bit his lip to prevent the trembling he felt inside from showing. I'm not afraid of you, Odin, he tried to convince himself.

"However, before we come to this, there are several other matters I, Odin, king of Asgard need to take care of." With a short wave of his hand Odin made the muzzle drop. Unbelieving Loki held out his hand to catch the cold metal, only to let it slip and fall to the ground where it landed with a loud clank. Then he touched his skin where the metal had been, feeling the dents it had left.

"I have released your voice, Loki, but not your magic. For the time being this will be enough. Even though your fate is already decided, you shall here and now tell us what the reasons behind your actions were." There was not the slightest doubt in Odin's voice. Loki bit his lower lip. It had always been like this, from the very beginning: Whenever Odin punished him or Thor, he would have decided already before even giving them a chance to explain. Well, Loki had to admit this time it might have been quite hard to explain everything. He had toyed with his brother, trying to both break and kill him, had led the Jotun on their march to Asgard where he himself had taken care of dispatching their soldiers and Laufey, it was his doing that Thor had smashed the Bifrost – and still Thor, knowing everything, tried to save him from falling. He had chosen to come to an end when he let go of his brother's hand when they both were hanging. He had recognized nothing he ever did would be enough for Odin. The only end that had been open for him was to fall into oblivion as prince of Asgard before anyone else would discover the monster he actually was. But even this simple deed he was unable to do. He had survived, somewhere, somewhen he had woken up to find himself between the realms and then *they* had raised him up and presented him an opportunity, not only to take revenge, but also to finally become someone. He had had to kill these vile Midgardians and, well, it wasn't as if he was exactly against killing such worthless creatures. He would have killed them all and in the end: THIS he did not regret. Nothing of it. Not the fights, not the manipulations, nothing, except he hadn't been able to personally send that wench Thor had fallen for to Hel. Midgard

would have been his kingdom, had Thor not decided to meddle. *They* would have gotten the Tesseract and then...

"There is nothing to say about it, king of Asgard." The bitterness in his voice was only matched by his venom. He steeled himself for the next words, just a moment, and slowly raised his head in order to be able to look right into Odin's face.

"I'm ready to face whatever you have decided. I've died once and I don't mind dying again. But allow my... "brother" to be the one to slaughter this Jotun." Thor was one of the few Aesir he knew he might be able to trick into releasing him, should the need arise. And even if he wouldn't be successful, it still would pain Thor for the rest of his life. But actually he was not nearly as confident as his words suggested. The trembling inside hadn't stopped and had he been alone he might have succumbed to his fear. All he had left was the pride to be able to face Odin, no matter what would come of it. And the grief he saw there both satisfied and hurt him.

"Loki!" Thor started, but was cut short by his father.

"Is this all you have to say, my son?" Even though Odin's voice was as lordly as ever, his eyes spoke unmistakably of the sorrow even he felt.

"I see, so it is. Your thoughts are filled with what you chose to believe, Loki. Where to has your mind wandered that you, a prince of Asgard, turned into such a wrecked being? Don't be mistaken, Loki, it is not only your mother who always believed in you. And we still do. This is why I prevented such a sentence from being decided, even though it would have been adequate to your doings." Slowly, he raised from his throne.

"When time comes, you will come to understand, both of you. It is never easy to be a just king and a wise judge, but I believe there is no punishment great enough for a father, who has failed." Odin had said this more to himself, but he straightened up as if nothing had been said at all.

"There are still things left for you to righten, Loki. Heimdall warned us about the dark presence awaiting you. But this time, Asgard will not be your shield. This is your first punishment, Loki Odinson: You will set things right. As you probably won't be coming back, you are allowed to take three days to prepare your departure and to bid farewell. Once you leave, your magic will be restored, until then it shall remain diminished. After you will have stepped out of this realm, you are no longer belonging to Asgard. Until you have dealt with the things you stirred up, you are simply Loki, the one without a home." Loki chuckled. He couldn't help it, it somehow amused him to listen to Odin's words. So his deathsmen were the Chitauri, that was what had been decided. Soon he would be not only Loki without a home, but also Loki without a life. Given the Chitauri would be kind enough to eventually let him die. There was no doubt they would find him.

"I shall accompany my brother."