

Befitting

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Kapitel 10:

Falling into nothingness was something beyond words. The complete darkness made it feel dreamlike but the feeling of choking, the churning inside his guts and the cold were too real for this to be a dream. A nightmare, yes, but one that had turned out to never have been a figment of his mind only. There was no way to brace oneself for this, not even when there had been a previous time. Time and space ceased to exist, seconds turned to eternity without any means of grasping the time passing. It was by far more distressing for Loki this time. The last time he had experienced this had been in one of his darkest hours when he had thought he would welcome anything, even death, just to get away from the devastation and the turmoil inside. But he knew he would not die from this. Even though this thought should have soothed him a little, it made it worse. Where would he end this time? Probably near the place he had found himself in last time. He shuddered and forced himself to slowly open his eyes. It made little difference, really. Besides the faint light of stars far away to be seen ever now and again, only to be gone a second later, there was only the black darkness he saw with his eyes closed as well. Without thinking he gripped the amulet that had been given to him by his mother. No, he reminded himself, the queen. It calmed his heart a little and he hoped the little was enough to keep himself from losing his mind to the devastating nothingness once again.

How long it had been he knew not when finally he felt ground beneath himself again. It hurt and he was unable to move for some minutes, unable to tell above from beyond but he knew he better had not been lying there too long. He knew nothing about where he was and this was never a good start for resting in the open fields. Given he was in open fields. He looked around when the dizziness in his head allowed him to see again and was startled to find himself in the middle of a small clearing. surrounded by trees darker than the ones he knew from Asgard. There was something threatening about these woods, he felt it and struggled to get up. Once he was standing on his feet, he breathed deeply. He wasn't wounded, that was a good start. Still he summoned some magic to erase the last reminders of his fall and to increase his sight. It did not work nearly as well as planned, but for the time being it had to be enough. There was no sign as to which direction he would best be heading to, so he chose to get moving without knowing where to. The greatest dangers were waiting for those sticking to one place, especially when they did not have any strength in numbers. He passed the border between clearing and forest and found his first assessment mistaken: It was not a forest, at least not a typical one. The trees were not made of wood at all, they were grown from stone. He touched one of them and

flinched when he felt a slight warmth pulsating inside them. He knew not why, but it made him sick to feel this, even though it did fascinate him. Given different circumstances he would have tried to get to know more about these living stone trees, but he had to be more than cautious as every mistake he made could mean his end. It might have been the easiest way out, but Loki had no intention to die yet, no matter how desperate he was, his will to live was by far stronger than a momentary weakness, he told himself. He hurried on. Maybe there was a cave or some other place to hide until he figured out what to do next.

The further he went into the stone forest, the more he had the feeling of being watched. Did someone follow him? Or were there creatures he did neither see nor hear? There had been no traces of any kind so far but he doubted this meant he was alone. A sudden noise made him jump around. Nothing. But he had clearly heard it, the sound of something crashing. His heart raced and his hand was closed around one of his daggers tightly. He could not locate where it had come from and looked around. Nothing was to be seen anywhere and he did not feel any presence either. But it had been there. He started to run.

How long had he been running? He had lost track of time once more. Well, more accurately he had not gotten it back since he had stepped into the darkness. He struggled to regain his breath, constantly looking around. Nothing. Had his mind started to play tricks on him? No, probably not. But this strange surrounding had an unwanted impact on him. He felt jumpy, his hand unable to let go of the dagger. He looked up to find the treetops preventing him to gaze into the sky. But he did see the dim light of two celestial bodies, one shining bright, the other one only viewable as an oversized whirl made of purple dust, surrounding a blood-red disk. It was nothing like any realm he knew. But hadn't the allfather warned him when he told him he'd be sent to the borders of Yggdrasil's reach? So this was... a realm which wasn't connected to the world's tree. Loki had known this being possible, no, obviously it was the only possibility for a race like the Chitauri to exist. None of the nine realms harbored creatures like that. For a second he wondered how many more worlds existed out there, worlds not even the allfather knew about. He shook his head, he had not time to wonder about these things right now. The bright shine this sun-like orb made was starting to sink, it wouldn't take much more time until he would be left in the dark. Maybe this meant nothing here but deep inside the fear of old shone through. It was always worse in the dark. And he could sense danger here, even though there was no sign of anything alive here anywhere – excluding those strange tree-things, of course.

His surroundings were covered in a purple-red half-light that made it hard for him to see right. More than once he almost stumbled until he did find a small cavern only big enough to allow him to lie down. He dared not to light a fire even though it would have been easy for him, now that his magic was restored. But he used his magic to make himself feel warmer because the temperature had dropped significantly. If only there had been any way for him to take along one of his fur coats, maybe the one made from wolves' fur. But all he had was the bag Frigga had handed to him before he had left Asgard. 'Enough to last for the first time'... well, he truly was hungry and surely Frigga had not forgotten about this. Summoning a small flame, just enough to look into his bag, he rummaged around in it and got hold of some bread. It would suffice for now, he decided, unwilling to keep on seeking. And then he froze. Out of

the corner of his eyes he had seen something move. It had been not more than a mere shadow, but it had been fast, too fast for him to really seeing it. He forced the flame to die so whatever it was wouldn't find him right away. Suddenly he could hear so many noises, it was as if the woods had come alive all of a sudden. And he was in the middle of everything, unable to figure out what there was around himself. Were they harmless animals or bloodthirsty fiends? Had Thor been there, he thought with bitter resent, he would have been out there already slaughtering each and every being out there that might threaten them. By now the sky would have been illuminated by Mjollnir's lightning, heavy thunder would have drowned any noise out. Why was he thinking about that guy anyway? Thor was probably in his chambers right now or he was sitting with his friends, drinking their mead, completely forgetting about the one out there. In the end there was no reason for them to remember him anyway. Had he been Thor's brother... but he wasn't, never had been and even though Thor had denied this fact he had bowed to it eventually. Maybe one day there would be tales about Loki, the monster that had disguised himself as prince of the aesir.

A movement right next to the cavern's entrance shook him up. The thing came closer and telling from its size it was about as tall as a bear. Maybe there were bears in this realm as well, Loki wondered. He jumped forward to thrust his dagger into this creature and found himself on the ground only one second later, the shadow still lingering where it had been, undisturbed. Horror-stricken, Loki looked up.