

Befitting

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Kapitel 12:

Loki did not wake up again that night. He did not dream, either. When he awoke he could not tell how long he had been asleep. It angered and wondered him the same time. It had been far from save to be so careless. Sure, he had protected himself with a barrier but that was no excuse to drop his guard. He knew his magic to be strong in the worlds of Yggdrasil but this was not one of them. He had yet to discover how this realm worked, how its magic worked and what its inner foundation was. He sat up slowly and rubbed one of his hands over his temple. His body felt well but his mind seemed to be still a little clouded from sleep. Whatever the cause he did have a headache. But he knew better than using his magic to cur himself. Magical energy was quite a sensitive matter, one that differed from sorcerer to sorcerer. Only few were able to bring forth from within more than some feeble sparks, barely enough to sustain even the weakest of spells. There were those who used blood sacrifices to gain the power hidden in every exiting creatures blood, but Loki was not one of them. To take a life to increase one's own power tainted whatever was gained from it with the resentment of the sacrificed one and could lead the effects of spells cast into the wrong paths, weakening healing or even causing attacks to backfire if the sorcerer was not powerful enough to subdue the power inside. No, this kind of source was too delicate and unsure, not to forget about the lack of practicality – once a battle had started, it was unlikely there would be enough time to carry a correct sacrifice out. Other sorcerers drew their power from various sources, some lend it from animals, others from plants, some were rumored to be able to take what they needed from the wind itself. Loki had always wondered how he was one who could bring forth enough power in himself without needing a second source. This was something quite uncommon for an Aesir, only one race in the nine realms had specialized in this kind of magic – the Joutun. He had been ignorant to not notice this tiny link. Of course the Joutun had to adapt to the icy nothingness that was their realm, where neither plants nor enough other life could bloom. So they had grown used to be their own magical source – As was Loki. He had been so proud of that when he was younger. Had boasted about how he alone from all the Aesir was able to provide for himself whatever power he needed. Well, technically it had been a lie – his powers were limited when his only source was within himself, he borrowed the rest he needed from the realms themselves. He was not limited to one of the realms sources but he preferred the energy the ground turned out.

Sure, there was another possibility to drain magical power from another person, but he had never used that one as it involved a rather unpleasant manner of doing so. Or rather dishonorable. And even though Loki had indeed been curious about how this

kind of magic would feel, he had never tried it. Even he had his pride and this pride barred him from even considering this step. He had enough other sources.

But now he wondered whether those sources would be available to him in this world as well. He still felt drained from the attack he had used the night before and the conjuring of his barrier. Usually his magic should have been restored by now but he still felt a part of it lacking. Not all he had used, no, but still enough to be noticeable. It bothered him and he suspected this lack to be the reason for the throbbing in his head. He opened his bag and now that it was day, he could see the things Frigga had given him. Enough to eat for about five days, given he portioned it accordingly. Two skins, one of whom he assumed would hold water, the other one probably either mead or beer. Never would an Aesir be sent away without at least some alcoholic beverage. He smiled a moment until he realized he had once more thought of himself as Aesir. His smile died off right away and he hurriedly packed the skins back. He didn't feel thirsty anymore but he forced himself to eat some bites of the smoked salmon he found wrapped in linen. It seemed as if Frigga had not forgotten salmon to be one of his favorites as she had packed him at least two of them. He ate some bites and neatly packed the rest back. After a few moments of pondering, he overcame his childish pride and took one of the skins to at least a mouthful. Mead, so sweet and heavy as only the mead served in Odin's halls could be. He put the meadskin back and hoped the other one would indeed contain water and not even more alcohol. He felt a little better and got up, extinguishing his fire with a movement of his hand. It was time to go. Somewhere. Where to he would see on the way there. He clenched the bag and caused the barrier to collapse to release him.

There was no hint of the shadows he had seen the night before. The forest was quiet again, still too quiet for his own taste. A faint black trace of grime caught his attention. It was barely visible but he knew its origin right away. The shape... it was a remainder of his nocturnal visitor. He touched it and followed its shape with his finger. So it had not been a dream, it had been real. He shivered. Somehow he had hoped for this to have been only born from his imagination for this had left less questions open. But there was no denying the traces he saw, the black traces of this ... thing. He would figure out, what this meant, but not now that the only thing that confirmed it had been real were those faint traces.

He descended and it took him a moment to figure out where he had come from. So his way would be as far away from his starting point as possible. He hurried, even though there was no need to do so, he simply felt better that way. More awake, more alert to his surroundings. And after a while he heard a noise again, for the first time not from his own steps on the ground. It was a little distant but too close for comfort. The sound of something like.. steps? So this forest did not only harbor discarnate shadows but also beings of flesh and blood. He stopped. This time he would not run from whatever it was. Should the need arise, he still would be able to get away somehow. Still he tensed up and grabbed his dagger. Contrary to what most Aesir believed, Loki was ready to fight whenever he needed to. He simply preferred not to fight.

Through the trees he could see something approach, but it was unfortunately covered, so he could not tell what it was. It was big. Dark. And it seemed to be massive. He whistled to draw its attention on himself and it seemed to work. It ran – right through the trees, splitting them whenever one was in its way. So maybe trying to get the creature's attention had not been such a great idea after all, he thought, but now it was too late. He cursed himself inside for being stupid enough to refuse to just walk away. He quickly created a double of himself and hid behind a tree,

summoning his all-consuming flames once more whilst commanding his double to get ready to 'attack' in order to distract his foe. The last tree between them was ripped apart by the sheer force. Loki saw the stone shatter to thousands of small pieces and a reddish liquid shooting out of the severed stump that remained. It was as if the tree was bleeding... and then he remembered the pulse he had felt. It churned his guts to think about it. He was far from being touchy but what he saw defied everything he knew. His thoughts had distracted him, the creature had reached his double and fortunately his double was able to act by himself or he would have been mauled already. From his hiding point, Loki could hear the thing breathe, he could smell the strong stench that made him feel like choking. He sent out his flame, but missed, causing another tree to burst and sprinkling its red sap onto its surroundings. And it caused the creature to notice his whereabouts, altering his target from the double to the actual Loki.