

The cool winds of Asgard pulled and tugged at his wings, in a way that made it almost impossible to tell that they weren't his own. Their movement was so instinctual, so natural, that he swore he could feel the individual feathers shift as he flapped. It was a heady sensation, swooping through the sky like this, in a way that felt as natural as breathing. The concept of personal flight was obviously not difficult for a god of his power, but flying with the Heart of Asgard was different in a way he couldn't fully describe.

Spotting his destination, he tucked his wings and dove, the wind ripping at him now as he controlled his descent. With a flare, his wings reopened to slow him down, catching him as he landed gently on the patch of grass that was his personal training yard. It was empty of course, no one would come here unless invited, and unlike the day following Maker's departure, in which he demonstrated and tested his armor's power, he had invited no one.

That had been an interesting way to spend an afternoon, however, fighting the best warriors that Asgard had to offer on even footing, without the help of his usual overpowered tools. To leave Gungnir by the wayside, using nothing but a mundane sword and the armor's shield to fight his son, his friends, and another dozen of Asgard's finest. It had been an exhilarating reminder of what he had been capable of in his youth, maybe even more than that. Of course, with the many abilities of the suit, his youth might yet return to him. Already the hundreds of little pains and wounds that he had accrued over his entire life were fading. His left knee no longer grated as he stood, and his right shoulder no longer twinged when he threw a spear. Every minute he wore his armor, was another day, month, maybe more that he grew closer to his prime.

He was glad that he had bought healing amulets as well as the palm healers, as growing younger while his wife grew older would have been a torture he was not sure he could endure. Instead, he got to watch as an old fire returned to his wife's eye, one that he felt within himself. It no longer felt as if time was slipping by, and that his life's only meaning was simply to pass on his legacy to his son. It was invigorating and made him feel like challenging fate itself.

Of course, such a powerful effect was a double-edged sword. The problems that he had ignored for so long, problems he had considered to be no longer his as his natural death drew closer, suddenly felt so much more... real, present... daunting. He had put so much aside. The connection he felt to Asgard... the souls of his people... Guilt, an old friend, rose stronger than ever before.

He had lived for a very, very long time. When he was young, new to the throne, and thrust into leadership by the death of his father, he had followed in his father's footsteps. War was the way of Asgard, standing up to the horrors of the universe and cutting them down. There was no mercy for those who would spread corruption, no mercy for those who would pillage and burn.

Even when there should have been.

It was a moment of clarity while riding to battle with Hela that showed him what Asgard had become. Watching on as she slaughtered hundreds, thousands of beings who stood no chance against them, whose crimes did not truly fit the butcher bill, all with glee in her eyes and mad laughter on her lips. He could see it then. It had corrupted them, turned a righteous mission into a campaign of terror and subjugation. The realms were prospering, but it was being built on a foundation of bones, their fields fertilized with blood.

It took centuries for him to shift the mission, to change the methods of Asgard. There was still no mercy for those who would burn or pillage, but now the punishment fit the crime. No longer did they condemn groups for the actions of their leaders. Diplomacy became their new sword.

While the people had slowly shifted, following their King, Hela had already been too corrupted. She was enamored with death, power, and bending others to her will. His love for her had blinded him for so long, and by the time he saw it, it was too late. She had become a monster, killing innocents on whims that shifted like the winds. Her natural divine aspect had shifted, from the gentle embrace of death to one of twisted, corrupt darkness. It had nearly killed him and Frigga to banish her away, sealing her imprisonment to Helheim with their own lives as the key. Cowardly perhaps, but he could not bring himself to kill her.

The king sighed, crossing the training yard with confident strides. He picked up a sword and activated the shield in his armor, before starting to go through the motions, stances, and strikes he had learned when he was young. He had missed this, the meditative feeling of exertion as he ran through a series of maneuvers, eventually moving to face a training mannequin, cutting away at the wood and metal facsimile.

For a while he worked through the movements, focusing on controlling his strength and speed. The armor Maker had built for him had increased both by a wide margin, enough that he needed to relearn his control. Already the palace trash was filled with damaged handles, goblets, and utensils. He felt like a child again, coming into his divinity for the first time, tapping into his inner strength without meaning to.

As he practiced his precision and control, his thought drifted back to his daughter, to how his failure as a father had left her corrupted, and how he could never forgive himself for that. He had thought that his mind would never let him forget it either, but now Loki, his son in all but blood, sat in a cell, missing a limb, angry at the world, determined to get what was rightfully his.

He had let it happen again. Or was it his fault completely? Was he the reason his children lay corrupt?

He swung his sword a final time, this time including a shout. It cut completely through the enchanted mannequin, breaking its magic and bisecting it through its shoulder and out its hip. His sword, which held no enchantment, also broke, cracking into several pieces that dug into the ground.

Loki had always been mischievous. Pranks, little lies, stirring up trouble, and on more than one occasion getting himself in way over his head. When he was young, it had all been good fun, little things to tease and poke. When he had come into his divinity, everyone had simply smiled and agreed that being the god of mischief was a perfect fit.

Somewhere along the way, he began to struggle, and neither he nor Frigga could figure out what was happening. His pranks became less and less teasing and more and more bullying, even downright cruel on rare occasions. His reputation of being fun and quick-witted shifted at some point to being cold with a barbed tongue that would cut all but the most confident to the quick. And yet he seemed to revel in it, enjoying each burned bridge and harsh look.

Where had it all gone wrong? He could remember every time he tried to reach out to his son, try to assure him, tried to teach him, Each time he pushed away, drifting further and further. And then the truth came out.

The damn had broken, cracks that had been deep and hidden releasing a deluge of emotion that washed any sense of reason from Loki's head. He had *a/ways* intended to tell Loki that he was his adopted son, but it never felt like the right moment to broach the subject. So instead he had waited.

Watching Loki fall, willingly choosing the abyss over being saved by his own father... He couldn't imagine what was going through his son's mind, what brought him to that choice.

Odin continued working in the training yard for a while longer, switching between all sorts of weapons and styles, working on his control, and testing the range of his armor. He worked on fighting while he was flying and utilizing other abilities his new armor held. When he was finally finished he spent a few minutes cooling down, picking up the remains of his mundane weapon and the broken training dummy pieces.

When he was done he pushed out his wings, once again taking to the skies. He flew across Asgard, enjoying the breeze and fresh air, letting it cool him down completely before heading to his destination, his personal study. He landed on the balcony, quickly pulling his wings in as he walked forward without missing a stride. As he did his armor broke apart into golden motes of light, fluttering around him before fading away. He knew it was more than a bit excessive, but spectacle had its own uses in the right scenario. He would start donning his armor with the normal, more subtle activation eventually.

The god made his way further into his study, looking at his large desk, a massive stone piece carved with wood and gold inserts. Stacked on top were the preliminary reports on Maker's "conceptually crafted" artifacts. He had made it through most of them, stopping when it became increasingly obvious that they all reduced down to "we have no idea" or "it should not work... but it does".

He stepped around his desk to a smaller cabinet across the hall, pulling out a small jug of mead and pouring some into a glass. A small enchantment chilled it before he was done pouring, something that many of his people would call blasphemous.

“So you do have mead here,” Frigga said, standing behind him, the door closing behind her. “I don’t remember you offering that to our guests.”

“Another mistake. I should have been a more gracious host,” He admitted, shaking his head before turning to face his wife. “I could have cost us a valuable ally.”

“Perhaps dear, but steadier thoughts prevailed,” She said, stepping around the table, reaching out, and taking his hand.

“Have the enchanters had any luck?” She asked, resting her head on her husband's shoulder.

“None, they are as baffled by his work as either of us,” He admitted. “The Destroyer Legion are nine completely identical duplicates. The magic I use to control them is the only separating feature among them.”

“Shall you be trading for more?”

“Yes, I am already looking for things he might be interested in,” He admitted. “The opportunity to defend Asgard with such a legion of support is too valuable an opportunity to pass up.”

“You beat one pretty handily by yourself,” Frigga reminded him. “And fixed it almost immediately”

“Aye... There is not much I couldn’t defeat in this armor, especially with the aid of Gungnir” Odin assured her. “Each of them is a worthy challenge to Thor, there is much I would trade for more of them.”

“Then why not make the offer before he left?”

“I wished to give our scholars a chance to study his creations,” He explained, leaning down and kissing his wife's cheek. “And I was caught quite off guard by his gift.”

Frigga cupped her husband's cheek, looking up at him with a smile. Her thumb gently rubbed under his now-healed eye, unable to keep herself from smiling.

“I am glad we were able to offer a useful gift in return,” She said, before pulling back.

The two were quiet for a long moment, enjoying each other's company in a moment of calm that the two rarely got. After a while Odin pulled away, moving to his desk.

"Have... Have you visited Loki?" Odin asked, focusing down at the papers and scrolls that took up the surface of his desk.

"I have," Frigga responded. "He is... frustrated at his bondage. He asked quite a few times to have his extra restraints removed."

"No. I will not remove them," Odin responded, shaking his head and meeting his wife's eyes.

"I didn't think so," She responded with a shrug, the sadness obvious on her face.

"I... Do you think I should visit him?" Odin asked.

"Do I..." Frigga trailed off, looking at her husband in confusion,

She had been with her husband for thousands of years, seen every side of him in countless situations. She could not remember the last time he asked for her opinion so openly. That wasn't to say that he didn't welcome her input, or listen to her advice. But openly ask for it?

"Yes. I think you should," She said with honest emotions clear on her face. "I think you should visit him as often as you can. He is broken, something is wrong with him and he has twisted his mind into something our boy... He is not well. Supporting him, showing that we care and are here for him... it is the only hope he has."

"...very well," He finally said, nodding in agreement. "I... I will go."

The room was quiet for a while, as Frigga examined her husband with a critical eye. Eventually, she sat down on the chair next to his desk, still studying him.

"What is wrong my husband?"

"...It is Maker's armor... its connection to Asgard, it's steady healing. It is returning me to my prime, I can feel it."

"I can feel the amulet doing much the same," Frigga agreed. "It is the most potent healing artifact I have ever encountered. More powerful than any spell our mages could singularly summon forth."

"I can feel it healing the age from my very bones," He added in agreement. "All of it, working together... I feel more connected to life than ever before... as if it has re-tethered my

soul to this plane. It is making me relive my mistakes, and question my choices. I worry... I worry I have already repeated my mistakes with Loki.”

Frigga listened to her husband's worries, doing her best to hold the shock from hearing even the slightest hint of her daughter's existence come from him.

“Loki... he is struggling, of that, there is no doubt. He is twisted and jealous, his mind worked into knots. But he is not steeped in blood in the way...” She trailed off, unwilling to say her daughter's name out loud. “He is not lost yet.”

“No, he is not,” He responded, nodding in agreement. “I will visit him now.”

“Do not preach to him,” Frigga said, reaching out and touching her husband's arm. “It will only serve to drive him further away.”

Odin nodded, taking a deep breath. It was strange for Frigga, to see his emotions hanging around him as he struggled to martial his exterior. A few words of assurance and a kiss on the cheek later and he left, his strides filled with purpose.

He would not fail again. He would not lose another child to his own mistakes.