



Baldr's Secret Mate (Mated to the Viking Alpha #3)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: The mage trapped by a magical shield has been my best friend for nearly a decade. But he doesn't know his destiny is to kill my family. Or that he's my mate.

Baldr

I met Mist the day he arrived in Fenris. It's hard to ignore magic like his when I thought I was the only mage in town. We became fast friends and it wasn't long before I realized he was my mate. But he's being held captive by the enemy, and tortured so that he can be used as a weapon against me and my family. I want to be with him, to tell him I love him. But I've seen the future and my visions are never wrong. Mist will be the one that gets me killed.

Mist

I've been trapped in this magical bubble for almost a decade. Stolen from a home I can barely remember and tortured by a crazy werewolf to do his dirty work, I'm all alone in this world. Except for my best friend, Baldr, who makes it all tolerable. Being a witch too, he understands me on a level nobody else can. But recently I've been realizing how much I care for him. In fact, I think I love him. I'm not sure if it's because I don't know anything else or because he's actually the guy for me. All I know is that I don't want to ruin our friendship. If he leaves, I'll be all alone again. However, I'm a danger to him. I still can't control my magic and it's only a matter of time before it consumes me. When that happens, I want him as far away as possible.

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The Day Before the Attack

I stepped into the familiar forest on the north side of the Skoll mountain. Tyr's village wasn't far off, but that didn't scare me. He'd learned the hard way not to attack me the last time we'd met. Considering he's nearly gotten himself blown up, I didn't think he'd be coming after me anytime soon. My mother's magic, despite her departure from the mortal plane, was still intact. His promise held true, and despite his resentment and anger, it would not budge.

So I didn't fret as I stepped into their territory. No one could harm me there. Besides, I was good at staying out of sight. Maybe they couldn't physically hurt me, but they could still make my life a living hell. Staying out of the Skoll pack's way was the best course of action if I wanted to avoid that. Most of them were blind to my scent, anyway, considering I walked all over the mountains all the time. Even if the trail was fresh, they ignored it. That, combined with a little bit of magic on my part, made sure that nobody, not even Tyr or my own family, knew what I was up to when I went to the enemy's mountain.

I had a friend there that I liked to visit and as far as I knew, nobody realized we'd ever met. After all, he had been trapped in a giant magical bubble for the past few years. Getting close to it was easy for me. I could basically wrap myself in an enchantment to remain invisible to passersby. Then, with a simple spell, I could connect with him so we could telepathically communicate. However, no matter how many times I tried to free him from it, I couldn't get him out. The power that held him there was stronger and older than mine, tied to the land in a way that I couldn't quite wrap my mind around. And honestly, I was too scared to try to get in, afraid that once I did, getting back out would be impossible.

But that didn't stop me from visiting. It might seem a bit odd to an outsider, but I liked him. We were similar in more ways than one. Both of us were alone most of the time, though his solitude wasn't by choice. We understood what it was like to be the outsider of the pack. And we both knew how awful Tyr could be, both through personal experience.

There was more to it than that, though. There was the fact that we were both witches. Of course, I was half werewolf, and he was all witch, but that didn't stop us from bonding. His magic was much different than mine, though. I had almost complete control over mine, and while I was powerful, I was nothing compared to him. Through our telepathic conversations, I could feel the enormity of his power burbling deep down inside him. Try as he might though, he couldn't access it at will. And when he touched that power by accident, the results were almost always catastrophic. That's what made me think the bubble wasn't merely to keep him in, but to protect the people of Fenris from his power as well.

However, I kept those details to myself. Tyr already made him feel terrible about his power constantly and I didn't want to add to that burden. He was already berated by Tyr incessantly and forced to parrot Tyr's hatred back at him to stay in his good graces. As far as I could tell, Tyr was attempting to train him for some great purpose, although I wasn't really sure what it could be. He was the only one that could get in or out of the shield and he never let my friend go with him. He was up to something... I just couldn't figure it out.

Not that I had time for such wonderings lately. After Thor found his human mate and Loki ran off into the wilderness, things had been a fucking mess in the Hati pack. It was one of the reasons I found myself wandering through the woods more often now. I was avoiding the crushing weight of my responsibility as long as I could. But with every day that passed, I knew I couldn't wait much longer. Still, that didn't stop me from visiting the bubble.

I stepped into a familiar clearing, a thin layer of snow crunching under my boots. Snowflakes danced around me, drifting lazily to the ground. If I squinted and turned my head, I could just make out a small ping of energy the moment the flakes hit the invisible dome and passed through. Any other time of the year I wouldn't be able to see it, but the snow gave it away if I looked at it just right.

Closing my eyes, I drew up the runes in my mind for sight of the unseen. They came to me naturally, filling my mind as my intention took shape. With a few muttered words under my breath, there was a flash of purple light behind my eyelids. Opening them once more, I saw the world around me had changed. The colors were different, shifted into a brighter, more vibrant range. And there, not twenty feet in front of me, was the edge of the dome that stretched on for at least a quarter of a mile. It glowed a translucent green, the edge of it anchored to the land every few feet. I walked up to it, reaching my hand out and laying it against the smooth surface. It felt almost like glass, but it buzzed against my skin almost painfully at times, like a dull electric shock.

Closing my eyes once more, I reached out with my consciousness, searching for my friend. Considering he was the only living thing besides plants inside the dome, it was easy to find him. Familiar runes raced through my mind as I made the connection between us and felt that comforting warmth of his mind on the other side.

“Hey Mist,” I said, calling out to him. “I’m here.”

“Baldr,” he replied, the smile easy to hear in his voice. “North side?”

“Yeah.”

“On my way.”

It took only a minute or so before I could see the hazy figure appear in the distance.

The dome's magic made it impossible to make out any details, but as Mist got closer, I could see a few familiar features. He was tall, with broad shoulders and pale skin. His hair was long and unkempt, but I couldn't tell what color it was through the dome, just that it was darker than my own bright silver hair. And even though I didn't know the color of his eyes, the shape of his nose, or the plumpness of his lips, I still thought he was handsome.

He stepped up to the edge of the dome, placing his hand just on the other side of mine. Although I couldn't feel his skin or the warmth of his hand, the dome's buzzing changed between our fingers, giving me the sensation that we were actually touching. It always made me smile.

"Did Tyr bring you some warmer clothing?" I asked, feeling the snow begin to collect on my shoulders. "That cold snap came on fast."

"Yeah. I'm alright." I could tell he wasn't being entirely truthful, but he didn't like to make me worry. "I've got a fire going back at the shelter."

I'd never seen the shelter Mist had built for himself. He'd tried to project me images, but all I ever got were memories of building forts in the woods with my brothers when we were young. Then again, considering Mist didn't have a hardware store in there, that might not have been very far off. I just hoped it was warm enough. After all these years, he was used to living out in the weather, but I still worried about him. And I felt guilty. Living in a cushy hotel was quite the luxury while my best friend was huddled up in a stick fort out in the woods.

"The connection will hold if you want to go back and stay warm," I offered. "There's no reason for us both to freeze."

"No," he replied. "It's nice to see someone besides Tyr. He's been... visiting a lot lately."

I furrowed my brows, letting the emotion flow across the connection. Tyr had been pretty quiet lately, from what I knew. Thor was managing the majority of the security for our pack, but so far, things had been fairly calm. After he'd taken Tyr's hand off, we expected a counterattack almost immediately. But it seemed for the time being that Tyr was biding his time. Whether to recover or gather his strength, we didn't know.

"Is his hand still healing?" I asked, not knowing how much Mist would actually know.

"It's bandaged," he replied. "But he doesn't seem to care about it honestly. His thoughts are turned toward war. He keeps trying to get me to use my magic, but I told him... I don't know how."

I could feel the anxiety through our telepathic bond. Mist's power had always been Tyr's focus. I didn't know where Mist had come from or how Tyr had managed to trap him in that magical dome, but I did know that if Mist were to ever unleash his abilities, he could level all of Fenris in a single explosion. He had that much power. Even though I could feel it inside him and I probably could've helped him harness it, the last thing I wanted was for Tyr to have access to him. After all, if Tyr could find a way to erect the dome and keep this witch hostage, there was a possibility that he could exert control over him through some other means as well.

But why hadn't he done it yet?

"Someone's coming," Mist said, his voice suddenly fearful. "Quick! Hide!"

Pulling my hand away from the dome, I dashed back to the trees, tucking myself behind a large trunk. As soon as I was still, I heard the crunching of shoes through the snow. I glanced around the tree and saw Mist standing there just beyond the shield, watching as two figures approached. One was bulky and tall. I recognized him

immediately as Tyr's son, Heimdall. And next to him was a smaller man with long, dark hair. Shock jolted through my system as I realized it was Loki. But what the fuck was he doing with the Skoll heir?

"Here it is," Heimdall said, stopping in his tracks.

"Uh... where?" Loki asked, looking side to side.

"Give me your hand."

Loki raised his hand willingly, and Heimdall took it softly. His fingers laced through Loki's from the back, maneuvering his palm until it was resting against the dome. The gesture was soft and intimate, much more than I would expect between two sworn enemies. Something had happened and I didn't quite understand what just yet.

"The dome is nearly a quarter mile wide," Heimdall continued. "It takes up most of the forest on the northern side of the village. Everyone knows it here because they've run into it at one point or another, but they don't know what it's for. Tyr just tells them it's a secret and they believe him."

"You called him by his first name," Loki said, looking up at Heimdall with a smile. "You haven't done that before."

Heimdall sighed, shaking his head. "It's hard to call someone my father when I'm no longer a son in his eyes."

My curiosity was piqued. I leaned forward, trying to get a little closer to hear every word they were saying. Not only had Loki joined the enemy, but it seemed the enemy wasn't feeling very good about the situation with Tyr either. As I leaned around the tree, I caught Loki's scent on the breeze and my heart skipped a beat. It was his, but different than I remembered. It was intertwined with Heimdall's scent in a way that

could only mean one thing.

They were a mated pair.

What the fuck was Loki doing?

Just as I was about to take a step forward, the wind shifted, carrying my scent toward them. A second later, Loki's head snapped up, his gaze sweeping toward me. I managed to duck out of the way just in time to avoid being seen.

"What is it?" Heimdall asked.

"It... It's nothing," Loki replied. But his tone suggested otherwise. "I thought I smelled something, but I think it's a deer." He paused for a long moment. "We should head back. We need rest and time to plan."

"Right. There's an empty house at the edge of the village. We can take that so we don't have to be near him."

Loki grabbed his hand. "Lead on."

I watched the pair of them trudge away through the snow, heading back to the village, my brows furrowed in thought. What were they planning? Why was Heimdall being shunned by his father? And why the fuck had Loki mated with him? As far as I knew, Loki wasn't into guys at all. Then again, neither was Thor until Flynn came along.

"Any idea what they're talking about?" I asked Mist through the bond.

"Tyr was very excited this morning when he came to see me," Mist replied, his voice barely above a whisper. I could hear the pain behind his words, and I already knew what he was about to say. "He... He burned me again to try to get me to lash out."

Immediately my attention was drawn away from Loki completely and fury filled my chest. “Are you alright?! What happened? Do you need help?!”

“I’m fine—”

“Fuck, I want to kill that guy,” I spat, venom filling me from head to toe. “I really want to ring his fucking neck but...”

“Your visions,” Mist said knowingly, his head nodding on the other side of the shield. “It’s not your destiny.”

“No,” I conceded, hating how helpless it made me feel. “My visions are never wrong... so I know I won’t succeed if I try to kill him. I just wish I knew who would.” I walked back up to the edge of the dome, placing my hand on it. A complicated tempest of emotions filled my mind, the strongest of which was sorrow. “I’m so sorry you have to endure all this. I wish... I wish I could break this spell and get you out of there.”

“I wish you could too,” he replied softly. “And I know you would if you could. I... I know you’re my only friend in this whole world.”

“Don’t hate me, alright?” I added, my voice barely above a whisper. “My mother left me all this power and I can’t even help a person I... that I care about.”

I had to stop myself from saying the words I wanted to say. Even though there had been a shield separating us for all these years, I could still feel the spark of something between us. It had been there since the beginning, an invisible pull that I could never quite escape, always bringing me back to the heart of enemy territory just for a few exchanged words and a smile that I couldn’t even see. I’d known since the beginning that Mist was my mate. But I’d never told him. And I was glad I didn’t because my visions showed me a dark future and I couldn’t inflict that kind of pain upon him

when the time came.

No. We would have to remain friends with this wall between us. It was for his sake, anyway. And, since my visions were always correct, I knew there wasn't a way out of it. It was just the way things had to be. Besides, even if I wanted to be his mate, how would we ever be together? He was trapped, and I was too weak to help him.

"I don't hate you," Mist replied, his voice soft and affectionate. "You're my best friend."

"Are you sure you're okay?" I asked again, trying not to show how much I loved hearing those words from him.

"I'm okay, Baldr. Promise."

"Do you want me to read to you?"

I could almost hear him smile. "Yes please."

Page 2

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I loved it when Baldr read to me. It was one of the things that not only kept me sane, but made me feel like a normal person again. Of course, I knew people didn't just sit around reading to one another in the outside world. I didn't have a lot of memories of my life before my imprisonment, but I did remember that much. I knew Baldr was reading to me to be kind and to show me he cared. And I loved him for it.

Well, I loved him anyway, but I kept that detail to myself because I wasn't sure if it was real. For years and years, I'd been trapped in this magical hellhole, tormented and tortured by Tyr as he tried to force me to use magic I couldn't reach. There were times, especially early on, where I thought that if I tried hard enough, Tyr might grow to love me. Maybe he'd eventually see me as his own kin and start to treat me better. And if I finally did exactly what he wanted, maybe he'd let me go.

After a while, I started to care for my captor and tormentor, blaming myself for his emotional outbursts that led to pain and suffering on my part. It wasn't until Baldr came along and showed me what true kindness was that I realized how far I'd fallen into the darkness. After that it was a long road back to the surface, clawing back whatever sense of normal I could find. Baldr helped me along the way, always being there to support me even when I lashed out at him or spent our entire meeting crying because I couldn't process how I felt.

Being trapped in a dome for years on end with no way to reach the outside world made me feel insane. And it was only in the past couple of years that I started to feel a little closer to normal. Then again, Tyr had been paying less and less attention to me as well, giving me a break from his tyranny. There were times where he'd only visit once a week, dropping a sack of food and closing the shield without a word. Those were my favorite times because I hated that man with my entire being.

Still, I knew that if I could give him what he wanted, he'd let me out of the dome. So, I continued to try to find my power. But no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't reach it. Most of the time, I didn't think I had any to begin with. I knew better, though. There was only one time Tyr managed to break me and he nearly paid for it with his life.

But I didn't want to think about that. Not while Baldr was reading me a story.

"This one is a bit different than the ones you usually bring," I said during a pause in Baldr's reading. "It's... I don't know... somehow more ethereal than the other fantasy books you've brought."

"Earthsea is like that," he replied, a smile in his voice. "I think that's why I like it so much. Sometimes it feels almost like a long meandering dream instead of a story. There's something enticing about that."

I leaned my head back, resting it against the dome. The magic buzzed warmly, like it always did when Baldr was just on the other side. We were sitting back to back and even though we couldn't actually touch, it was comforting, nonetheless. I felt a little tingle run down my spine and pool near my groin. Being this close to him always got me a little excited despite my best efforts to be decent.

"Do you think Ged will win against the shadow?"

"I hope so," Baldr replied. "It wouldn't be a hero story if the hero didn't win at the end."

I hesitated for a moment, a question hovering on the edge of my mind.

"What is it?" Baldr asked, prodding me through the telepathic bond. "Tell me what's on your mind."

“It... It’s stupid.”

“I bet it’s not.”

“I don’t know,” I sighed. “I guess I was just wondering if my story would be like Ged’s?”

“How do you mean?”

“Do you think someone will defeat the shadow in my life?”

The question took Baldr by surprise. That was easy to tell. But the emotional response wasn’t anger at Tyr like I expected. Instead, it was a soft sort of pity, the kind that cut me down to the deepest places of my heart. I hated making him feel like that, especially when I was the cause. I didn’t want to be pitied, and I didn’t want my best friend to feel bad on my behalf.

“Sorry,” I muttered. “I told you it was dumb.” I shook my head, trying to clear the thoughts away. “Don’t worry about it. Just keep reading.”

“Mist...” he began, then stopped.

“It’s okay,” I said, repeating his earlier sentiment. “Just say what’s on your mind.”

He seemed to steel himself, gathering up his courage before he spoke. “I’m gonna get you out of this dome,” he growled through gritted teeth. “I don’t care what it takes. I will get you out of this hell.”

“Baldr...”

“No! I’m gonna do it!” he shot back. “I’m getting stronger and stronger every day. I

can even teleport over short distances now. Not very often, of course, but that means my powers are growing. At this rate, it's just a matter of time before I can get you out of here for good. And then you can come live with me... I mean us, up at the hotel. You'll never have to go outside again if you don't want to."

"That would be really nice," I replied, a tinge of melancholy hope in my voice. "I would love that."

"It's gonna happen. I promise."

"Baldr... you don't have to promise that. I know you'd get me out if you could."

"And I will," he repeated. He took a long pause. "Are you sure you don't remember who put you in here? Anything would help."

I let out a long sigh. We'd had this conversation hundreds of times and Baldr always held out hope that I'd finally remember something from my past. But I couldn't. And the more time I spent in the bubble, the less I seemed to remember.

"I'm sorry, Baldr... but I don't remember anything."

"Nothing about your family or anything?"

"I think I remember having one. And I remember life being different from how it is now. But the details... they're fuzzy. It's like I can see them, but when I reach out to touch them, they're behind glass, just out of reach."

"Someone put a block on your mind, too," Baldr growled. "I'm sure of it. If I could just touch you, I know I could get rid of it." He paused again. "Or if I could find out who did it, I could confront them."

“I’m sorry. I wish I could help, I really do.”

“I know. I’m not trying to make you feel bad, Mist. It’s just... frustrating.”

We both sat there for a long time, just thinking. I could feel Baldr’s thoughts racing. He tried to keep them hidden from me over the bond, but I knew he was thinking about me. I had to admire his magic, though. It was delicate, elegant, and woven beautifully. The connection between us could easily be invasive, and it had been the first few times we’d tried it as kids. But now that he was older, there was a thoughtfulness toward privacy in the spell, allowing us to communicate, but keep our thoughts private as if we were conversing verbally. It was beautiful, gentle magic, and I found myself wishing I could do something similar.

But the only times I’d ever managed to touch my own magic, it terrified me. All I could feel was a well of chaos deep, deep inside me. There was a place where it was trapped, a darkness that I couldn’t penetrate even when all my focus was bent on it. My one and only outburst had happened so quickly that I didn’t know what I’d done. However, from that day forward I kept my emotions in check, worried they might be the key to releasing the full wrath of a magic that I had no skills to control.

That’s why I never told Baldr how I felt about him. I was afraid it would set me off. Well, that and the fact that he was my only friend in the entire world. What if I told him how I felt and he never came back? Then I’d be alone forever with nobody but Tyr torturing me whenever he felt like it. That wasn’t a future I could face.

So, for now, I kept all those warm but terrifying emotions to myself. I could love Baldr quietly from the other side of the dome. Of course, that didn’t stop me from fantasizing alone in my hut at night about what it might be like if we were ever together. I was ashamed to admit that sometimes those fantasies got a bit naughty. Baldr wasn’t a prude about sex, of course and we’d chatted about it a little bit. But whenever I found myself alone and feeling frisky, it was him that came to mind.

Those were always the best fantasies. But, when all was said and done, they only existed in my imagination.

Besides, it wasn't like we could actually be together. The magic trapping me inside was never going to come down and Tyr would never let me go unless I could be useful to him. However, I figured it was only a matter of time before he killed me or forced me into some magical berserker state that consumed me completely. Either way, I wasn't going to get out of the dome and then have a life to live.

My fate was already set in stone. Destruction was my future, one way or another.

"You okay?" Baldr asked, interrupting my thoughts. "You feel... strange."

"Sorry," I said, projecting a smile his way. "I was just thinking about the story so far and what might happen."

"Want me to keep reading?" he asked, picking up the book once more.

"Yeah. I would love that."

And what I really meant was I love you.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

The Night of the Attack

I awoke with a start, bolting upright. To my surprise, I found myself sitting on my own bed, the soft sheets pooled around my waist. Reaching up, I rubbed my eyes, sleep still stinging behind my eyelids.

I'd been having a vivid dream. In it, Loki and Heimdall were sneaking up the mountain, with Tyr just behind them. I could feel their hesitation just as much as I could feel Tyr's ill intent. And when the resort came into view, I knew they meant to attack it. After that, it was just flashes of unlocked doors, dark hallways, and some sort of device I didn't recognize that was meant to destroy. Then I saw Tyr, all by himself, running through dark halls with several grenades strapped to a bandolier across his chest.

It was a vision. It had to be. My dreams were never that vivid. However, I had no idea of when such a thing was going to occur. The vision was fuzzy, more so than usual, with little detail other than there was snow outside as they came up the mountain. But that meant their attack could take place anytime in the next three to four months.

As I thought about it, my mind wandered back to the scene on the Skoll mountain with Heimdall and Loki outside the dome. They'd mentioned something about needing to plan and prepare. Something clicked into place and without understanding how, I knew the vision and their plans were connected. Foresight, unfortunately, wasn't an exact magic, and I was doing my best to take an educated guess. I had a feeling the attack would happen soon. I just wasn't sure when.

However, when the first explosion shook the building around me, I realized my

vision had come too late. The attack had already started. And that meant Tyr was inside the resort. If that were true, everyone was in danger.

Suddenly I was no longer tired, but filled with a cold fear. While I might be immune to anything Tyr could try, the rest of the pack was not. And there were still guests inside the hotel. In fact, we were coming up on the busy season. Humans loved to come to the hot springs in the winter to relax and wind down either before or after the holidays. The resort was filling up and if Tyr was inside it, there was a good chance people were going to get hurt. Or worse.

I sprang up out of bed, threw on a pair of jeans, and grabbed a hoodie. In a flash, I was out of my room and down the hall, banging on Thor's door. It took him only seconds to answer.

"Are you okay?" I asked, terrified Tyr's attack was focused on my family.

"Yeah," he grunted, pulling his t-shirt on.

"What was that?" Flynn asked from behind him.

"It's Tyr. He's inside the resort."

"You saw him?!"

"In a dream, yes," I said, giving Thor that look I always did when I'd had a vision.

"He's here with Loki. It seems he's..."

"What is it, Baldr?" Thor growled. "What aren't you telling me?"

"I think... I think Loki might've betrayed us."

Thor went silent, his eyes wide with shock. I understood how he felt. It had surprised me too at first. Even so, I couldn't quite shake the feeling that I was looking at the situation from the wrong angle. Something about Loki felt off the day before when he was talking about Tyr. Neither he nor Heimdall seemed to like the guy much, so why would they choose to join them? Unless... they never had a choice to begin with.

"Leave Loki to me," I said before Thor could respond further. "You need to sound the alarm and get this entire hotel evacuated now."

"Baldr... you can't go alone."

"Yes I can." I reached out, squeezing his shoulder with a reassuring hand. "I might not be as big as you and Loki, but I'm an Alpha, too. And a witch. I'm stronger than both of you."

Thor might've argued with me on that if we'd been in a less dire situation. Instead, he just nodded, knowing there was no way to talk me out of something once I'd made up my mind.

"Get everyone out. Now."

"But how? We don't have an alert system or anything..."

"I'll do it," Flynn said, pushing his way past both of us into the hall.

He started to jog and Thor was about to go after him. There was no way a human was going to get the entire pack to evacuate in enough time. And Tyr was dangerous to us. Should he and Flynn cross paths, that would be the end of my brother's mate. All the silver weapons had been locked away, so a repeat of their last encounter wasn't possible.

But then Flynn stopped and reached out toward a small box on the wall. It was only then that I realized what he was doing.

“Sorry about the fine you’re gonna get for this,” he said before he ripped the box open and pulled the fire alarm.

All at once, an ear-piercing noise began to squeal through the hallways. The emergency lights popped on, flashing brightly to fill the darkness. In a matter of seconds, I heard the entire resort come to life. Even werewolves would try to get away from a fire. It was a genius move and one I hadn’t thought of in the moment.

“Come on,” Flynn cried, grabbing Thor by the hand. “We need to help Nana!”

Thor glanced back at me as he was dragged along by Flynn. “Go on,” I said, nodding in his direction. I reached down deep inside myself, drawing from my well of power and letting it fill my entire body. “I’ve got this.”

The ground around me began to glow with golden runes. Thor gave me one last glance before he disappeared around the corner with Flynn. Only when they were out of sight did I turn counter clockwise, uttering my intention under my breath.

“Take me to the one-handed monster, Tyr.”

There was a sudden rush of magic as the golden light grew instantly blinding. I felt all the air leave my lungs as I was yanked downward, my body falling through space and time at an alarming rate. However, a single heartbeat later, my feet hit solid ground again and I found myself standing in the main lobby of the hotel. It was filled with smoke and dust, the far wall crumbled into a million pieces like a bomb had just gone off. And behind me there was a deep, cruel laughter that I recognized immediately.

“I figured you might show up, witch,” Tyr spat as I turned to face him. “You have a habit of being a nuisance.”

“Funny,” I scoffed. “I could say the same thing about you.”

Tyr’s left hand flexed, my gaze darting down to the grenade he held in his hand. He had a whole bandolier of them strapped across his chest like he had in my vision. However, all the wolves he’d come up the mountain with were nowhere to be seen. For some reason, he was on his own. But that suited me just fine. He’d be easier to handle without distractions.

“Looks like it’s just you and me, old man,” I grinned, feeling the power rise up inside me. I knew Tyr was destined to be killed by some great power, but for some reason, my visions always got hazy before I could figure out who it was that did it. So I figured, why not? Why shouldn’t I give it a shot? “I bet you’re a little slower with one hand, huh?”

“Not as slow as you think.”

It was only then that I heard the pin clatter against the hard stone floor beside him. I barely had time to react as Tyr threw it in my direction. It struck the floor once as I dove over one of the large lobby couches and struck the hard floor on the other side, rolling away. The next moment, an ear-splitting explosion rocked the room, sending debris flying in all directions. Broken stone and dust rained down on me as I came to a stop. Once more, the room was completely obscured. However, as I got back to my feet, I realized how lucky I was. The entire backside of the couch was blown to pieces. Another second slower and that might’ve been me.

“Don’t you remember what happened last time?” I called out into the haze. “If you hurt me, my magic will rebound on you again and you might not survive it this time.”

“I won’t be the one hurting you,” he growled back from somewhere to my left. “But you’re welcome to retaliate against the grenade all you want.”

Another pin struck the floor, and I knew I only had a second to act. Without the time to think about it, I chose to dive to the right. However, no sooner had I hit the ground than I heard the grenade land only a few feet away. I only had enough time to curl myself into a ball before it went off.

All sound ceased the moment it exploded, replaced by a high-pitched whine that blocked out everything else. The concussive wave hit me first, pushing me across the floor. It wasn’t until it fell away that I realized how much pain I was in. Little pinpricks of heat alit all over my body. I reached back and ran my hand over my side. It came back warm, wet, and covered in blood. And yet, even though Tyr had been the one to throw the grenade, my magic didn’t rebound.

When the high-pitched whine began to ebb, it was replaced by Tyr’s maniacal laughter filling the room.

“That’s what I thought, witch!” he cackled. “Your protection doesn’t extend to inanimate objects. Or maybe it only activates by proximity. Either way, now I know you can be killed.” I could hear the sneer in his voice. “You’ll be the first to go in your traitorous little family.”

He was trying to taunt me, but I wasn’t going to fall for it. The moment I spoke, he’d know where I was. But I didn’t care about his petty threats because his boots were crunching against the debris on the floor as he searched for me and that told me everything I needed to know.

Drawing up my power, I tasted the runes for fire and burning on my tongue, the metallic tang almost like hot iron. Reaching my hand out in the direction of the sound, a tiny red beam shot from the end of my finger. It struck the floor a few feet

away, exploding into a ball of flame that filled the room with a sudden flash of heat.

Tyr cried out in pain, his figure silhouetted against the flames. From the looks of it, I'd only caught him on his right side. My aim, unfortunately, was a little off when I had nothing to go on but my ears. Still, it was enough of a distraction to put him on the defensive for a moment. That gave me time to get back to my feet and scramble away from him.

I'd just made it to the other side of the room, intending to hide just beyond the door, when I ran face first into someone and both of us toppled to the floor. I landed on my ass, a bruise forming the moment I made impact. Pain shot through me, but I had too much adrenaline in my system to pay much attention to it. Before I could comprehend what had happened, a familiar voice spoke.

“B-Baldr?”

I looked up, seeing that long dark hair and those brown eyes I knew so well. “Loki?”

I wanted to ask him what he was doing there and why Heimdall came skidding into the hallway behind him, a look of concern on his face. But I already knew the answer to both. He'd switched sides. Maybe he wasn't loyal to Tyr, but he had shown him how to get into the building. Of that, my visions were certain.

“Why Loki?” I barked, giving him the most venomous look I could muster. “Why did you let that crazy asshole into the resort?”

But my brother just stared at me, his jaw flexing and his mouth open, by no sound coming out. The look in his eyes was one I'd seen before. In fact it was the same one he wore the day we found out our father had been killed by Tyr. It was fear.

“Tell him Loki,” Tyr laughed from behind me. “Tell him how you sold out your pack

and joined me. Tell him how you not only showed me the way into the resort, but how to cripple it so they would never recover. Tell your own brother how you intend to take his pack down so we can finally be reunited as one true pack once more.”

Again, Loki didn’t speak. He didn’t even look up at Tyr. Instead, he just stared at me, his gaze fixed on mine. Power surged through me as I cast a familiar spell linking Loki’s mind to mine.

“Tell me,” I growled through our connection. “Have you truly betrayed us?”

Loki flinched in front of me, but he made no motion for his head. Instead he narrowed his eyes, fixing them on me.

“Just think and I will hear it,” I said, knowing we were running out of time.

“I left something for you at the hot spring we used to go to as boys,” he said, his thoughts loud and full of fear. “It’s under the big rock by the tree.”

And just like that, our connection broke.

“I have nothing to say to you,” Loki snapped, pushing himself to his feet. The fear in his eyes was gone, replaced by nothing but malice. “You and Thor know what you’ve done and you’ll pay the price for it. Either turn over the Hati pack to us or be destroyed. Those are your choices.”

Behind him Heimdall forced an expression of fury, but it was only half-hearted. I found myself hesitating for what to say. In the past few seconds I’d received so much conflicting information that I wasn’t sure which way to turn. And it was just enough to distract me from another grenade pin hitting the floor. In fact, I didn’t know one had been tossed until it landed against a wall only a few feet away.

“Look out!” Loki shouted.

His hand grabbed mine, yanking me toward him. He wrapped his arms around me and turned his back to the grenade, shielding me with his body just as the explosion rocked the corridor.

Both of us were thrown off our feet. We hit the cold hard ground once more, surrounded by that awful ringing noise that seemed to swallow up the entire world. The force of the blast had stunned me, but only for a second. But when I tried to move, I realized Loki was still on top of me. Reaching up to move him out of the way, my hands found him warm and slick to the touch. It took me a moment to realize he was covered in blood.

He’d taken the blast to protect me.

“Loki!” Heimdall screamed behind us. It was the first noise I heard after the blast, although my ears were still ringing. “Loki! Wake up!”

Heimdall was already at my side, pulling Loki off of me and into his arms. He stared down at the limp man, his eyes filling with tears in an instant. The moment I saw that, there was no longer any doubt in my mind that they were mates. Heimdall’s gaze snapped up in the direction of his father, but it was too dusty to see much of anything.

“I’ll fucking kill him...” he growled under his breath.

Before I could get anything out, Heimdall scooped Loki up, threw him over his shoulder, and took off down the hallway. I watched him go, my ears ringing and the fire alarms still blaring. I couldn’t hear Tyr’s taunts anymore, but that didn’t make me feel better. I was worried he might be sneaking up on me again and I wasn’t going to get lucky again with those grenades.

Forcing myself off the floor, I ran in the direction Heimdall had gone, trying to get as far away from the lobby as possible. My magic could've handled Tyr. But heavy artillery was another thing entirely.

As I ran through the halls, I saw guests and wolves alike heading for the exits. I followed them outside into the snow of the front lawn at the top of the mountain. Wiping the dust and debris from my eyes, I looked around, searching for Thor and Flynn. My heart beat wildly in my chest and it wasn't until I finally spotted a bright red mop of hair that I felt some relief. I rushed over to them, finding my brother, Flynn, and his grandmother all cold, but in one piece.

"Are you alright?" I asked, skidding to a halt in the snow.

Thor looked back at me, his jaw falling open. "Me?! What about you?!"

"I'm fine," I said, dismissing his concern. "Is everyone out?"

We both stared back at the resort as people stopped streaming out of the front doors. There was a large crowd standing in the lawn and it was impossible to tell if we'd gotten everyone or not. However, the size of the group made me feel a little better. If it wasn't everyone, it was damn close. At least they were no longer inside with that fucking lunatic.

"It was Tyr," I said, looking back at Thor. "He was setting off grenades in the main lobby. And Loki... Loki was with him. But he tried to—"

I never got the rest of my words out as a thunderous explosion rocked the earth under our feet. Everyone cried out, covering their ears and dropping into a crouched position. Thor and I were the only ones that didn't duck because our eyes were fixed on the resort.

On the far end where the main utilities were housed, was a large cloud of dust shooting into the sky. Glass shards flew through the air, sparkling in the lamplight before the electricity cut out. That section of the building was engulfed in dust, but that didn't stop the crunching and cracking of concrete from reaching out ears. A moment later, with another loud snap, I heard an unfamiliar sound, almost like sudden torrential rain, but louder.

We looked on, our eyes adjusting in the dark. The alarms had stopped, the lights were out, and the snowflakes seemed to mock us with their gentle and calm downward spirals. It was about the time I heard the first outcry that the dust faded away enough for me to see what had happened to Fenris Hot Springs Resort.

The entire back end of the building had collapsed. It was now nothing more than a pile of rubble on top of a cold, dark mountain. My heart sank, seeing my childhood home nearly destroyed. Not to mention, a large section had collapsed into one of the hot springs, filling it with broken glass and rubble.

I just hoped nobody was inside when it came down.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

It was nearly three days before we were sure nobody was buried in the rubble that used to be the resort. The guests were told there was a gas leak resulting in an explosion that leveled part of the building. However, those of us in the pack knew better. With a couple wolves leading the local fire and police departments, we were told the truth.

Someone had placed plastic explosives in the heart of the resort, knowing it would take out all the major utilities and cause a chain reaction. The moment Thor and I were told the truth, I knew it was Loki that had led Tyr to that spot. Only he would know how to get in and deal us such a considerable blow. But, either by luck or plan, that section of the resort had been nearly empty. And thanks to Flynn's quick thinking with the fire alarm, what few wolves we had stationed in that part had gotten out before it was leveled.

It seemed, for as much loss as we'd endured, luck was somehow on our side. Not a single wolf or guest suffered more than scratches and bruises that night. Well, everyone except Loki. After he'd shielded me from that grenade, I didn't have time to see if he was breathing or not before Heimdall took him. A part of me hoped he was still alive. Another part of me realized that even if he was, Thor would probably kill him if he ever showed his face again.

But we didn't have time to think about that at the moment. Thor and I were far too busy shuttling guests out to other hotels to the north or getting them back home as quickly as possible. At the same time, we had to find housing for our wolves. The other half of the hotel had been deemed structurally sound so that we could keep living there. But with no utilities and no heat at the top of a freezing cold mountain, there wasn't much point in staying.

The small town of Fenris, thankfully, was home to at least three small hotels for summer guests not going to the hot springs. They were empty during the winter, so Thor called in a favor and took all the rooms available in the entire town. However, that didn't leave any for us, so we decided to take up residence in Nana's house at the bottom of the mountain.

It was a small house with only two bedrooms. That meant it was barely large enough for Nana and Flynn, much less two werewolves on top of that. Nana took her old room of course and I wouldn't let the other two take the couch. Flynn had a bed that was just barely big enough for the two of them and I didn't feel right taking it for myself. So I slept on the couch. Not that I did much sleeping though. Nana was a light sleeper who had a tendency to get up at two in the morning for a light snack. Then she was up again at five to make her coffee for the day and watch the sun come up. She always tried to be quiet for my sake, but I found it almost impossible to sleep through.

Not only that, but now that the other wolves had been moved into town, that meant farm chores were on our heads. Nana was far too old to be doing all of them herself, so Flynn took over. Usually he dragged Thor out into the farmyard at the ass crack of dawn to help him feed everyone breakfast. I helped a little bit, but I also wasn't much of an animal person. Maybe that was a little odd considering I was part wolf, but I didn't have much time to think about it. My mind was far too preoccupied with what Loki had told me before he was... well, blown up.

I'd tried several times to reach out with my magic and see if he was still alive. But no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get the spell to work. I remembered my mother being able to do such things. She could even communicate telepathically over long distances, something else that I couldn't seem to figure out. But no matter how hard I tried or tried to channel her wisdom, I just couldn't do it and it made me want to scream.

So I was stuck at the bottom of the mountain with a mountain of responsibilities and no idea if one third of my family was still alive. The only thing I had to go on was the message he'd given me. I wanted to go to the hot spring straight away, but with everything that needed to be done, I spent my entire day either on the phone or looking after our pack. Thor needed my help and I couldn't abandon him just yet.

However, as our third day since the attack drew to a close, I knew I couldn't wait much longer. I'd found a handful of minutes to escape to the front porch, taking a seat in one of Nana's rocking chairs. All the snow had been swept off the porch, but there was still a cold bite in the air as the sun sank below the horizon. I rocked back and forth, staring up at the last pinks and golds reflected on the underside of the clouds. If I had to guess, I'd say it was going to snow all night.

"Sit out here for much longer and your ass is gonna freeze to that chair," Nana's voice said as she stepped out onto the porch. She took a seat in the chair next to me and glanced back and forth before taking a partially crushed box out of her thick robe. I could smell the tobacco before she even pulled out a cigarette. "Don't tell Flynn about this," she said, casting me a sideways glance. "I'd never hear the end of it. He'd tell me it's not good for me."

"He'd be right," I smiled. "But I won't tell him."

"He might be right, but I'm old as shit," she laughed, lighting her cigarette with a lighter she pulled from her breast pocket. "Let an old woman enjoy her vices." She took a long drag, savoring every second before she blew the smoke up into the sky. "So why are you out here sulking in the freezing cold, huh? What's got you all wound up?"

"It's nothing important," I said, shaking my head.

"Try me."

I glanced back toward the front door, making sure it was firmly shut. Thor and Flynn were inside and I didn't want them to overhear anything I was about to say.

"I don't know if my brother is a traitor or not," I said softly. "And I'm not even sure if he's alive anymore."

"This is Loki, right? The grumpy one?"

"Yeah."

"Your brother seems pretty convinced he's joined that crazy bastard."

"I don't think that's true," I whispered, shaking my head. "He had the chance to let me get hurt. Really hurt. And he protected me... might have even given up his life for me."

She took another long drag on her cigarette, mulling it over as she chewed on the smoke. "So why not tell your brother and clear his name? It seems to be eating him alive that his own kin would betray him like that."

"I don't know... maybe because we'll have to face the fact that he could be dead." But I stopped, knowing that wasn't right. "Or because I feel like there's something larger at work here." I reached out, cupping my hand under the falling snow. "And every time I feel like I'm close to finding it, the feeling melts away." I glanced back over at her. "He told me something... but I'd have to leave to retrieve it and Thor has everyone, including me, on lockdown."

She just laughed at that, her cigarette glowing in the gathering darkness. "What the hell does that matter? You got something to do, boy, you go and do it!"

"You think that's the smart thing to do?"

“Let me tell you something,” she said, tucking the cigarette into the corner of her mouth. “Back when my husband and I were young and still hunting your kind, we had to rely on instinct. Instincts are the difference between life and death when someone or something wants you dead. There were plenty of situations where we didn’t have time to confer and plan and overthink. We had to simply feel and do the best we could.” Her cigarette glowed, lighting her face in a red glow as she inhaled. “And it always worked out for us. At least until the end...”

There was a long pause, an expression of melancholy darkening her features. Sure, she’d been a werewolf hunter in a previous life, but that didn’t stop me from feeling sorry for her. Losing someone you loved was a terrible thing to experience. And one I was all too familiar with.

“Anyway, I realize now that for all those years, I was making a mistake hunting your kind. The days of dark forests and missing townsfolk are far behind us. I was holding onto the past and tradition too tightly to see that.” She glanced up at me, a grin curling at the edge of her lips. “So what I’m saying is this. You need to follow your instincts. If your gut is telling you to go, then go. And forget what you’re supposed to be doing. Just because your brother is the Alpha doesn’t mean you have to listen to every little thing he says as tradition dictates. He’s acting out of fear but you... I can see the fire in your eyes. Something or someone is calling you.” She reached out, patting me on the knee. “So go get it. And if it turns out to be nothing, you won’t regret trying.”

“And what if I find something I don’t want to know?”

Her gaze fixed on me for a long moment. “The truth is always better than false hope, even if it hurts.”

Something about the way she said it made me feel like she had far too much experience with that sort of thing. And I didn’t doubt her either. A lifetime of being a

werewolf hunter was sure to come with a lot of heartache. It was odd to feel sorry for someone that had made a living murdering my kind, but I couldn't help it. She wasn't that hunter anymore though. She was nothing more than an old lady living alone on the mountain. There was a lot of past behind her and not much future in front. It was a unique perspective that I couldn't even begin to fathom.

"Alright," I nodded. "I'll go."

"Good," she nodded. "I'll tell Thor and Flynn you had something important to do."

"I'm not sure where this'll lead me," I added. "But I'll be back as fast as I can."

"I'll let them know," she smiled. "Go on now. Git!"

I patted her on the shoulder before I stepped off the porch. With one last wave, I headed across the farmyard and crossed into the woods as I headed up the mountain.

The journey to the hot spring wouldn't take me long. I just hoped whatever Loki had left me there explained what was going on, at least in some capacity. I was already doing Thor a disservice by ignoring his orders. I just hoped it was worth it.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

I inside my hut was warm and dry, the very antithesis to the world outside. Snow fell heavy and silent upon the world, quickly burying what little green was left under a frozen sheet of white. I counted myself lucky though. Tonight I'd sleep warm thanks to the extra insulation the snow provided.

Of course, I'd much rather have someone there with me to help keep the cold away, but that wasn't going to happen. I hadn't had a visitor in three days and I didn't know when to expect another. I was happy to be rid of Tyr for the moment, but I found myself missing Baldr something terrible. It was unlike him to stay away for so long, especially when things with Tyr were getting worse. I just hoped he was alright. I tried to tell myself not to worry, but I had nothing else to do.

And then, as if my thoughts had been answered by the gods, I felt a familiar spark in the back of my mind followed by the most wonderful voice.

“Mist! North side! Come quick!”

The urgency in Baldr's voice wasn't panic or pain, but excitement.

“Alright,” I replied, tossing another log on the fire and getting to my feet. “I'll be there as fast as I can.”

As soon as I'd thrown the entrance flap aside, I was off like a shot, running through the snow due north. It only took me a minute or so to reach the edge of the dome, Baldr's familiar figure standing on the other side. I could see him clearly through my side, his cheeks tinged pink by the cold. His bright silver hair was a mess and his eyes glowed with their familiar golden light. I couldn't help but admire that cut jaw and the

way his stubble grew in dark, unlike the rest of his hair. He was the most handsome man I'd ever seen.

“Are you alright?” I asked over the bond as I got close and placed my hand on the dome. “Did something happen?”

“My brother isn't a traitor!” His voice was filled with excitement and relief. “Even though he let Tyr blow up half the resort, he's on our side! He's just playing a double agent for his mate!”

“Woah, woah, woah,” I said. “Back up. Tyr did what to the resort?”

“He blew it up,” Baldr replied nonchalantly. “Well, part of it. My brother Loki helped him. You know the one we saw here the other night with Heimdall? But he didn't want to. He had to do it because he's infiltrated the enemy's side and he's working to help us all even though he can't tell us that.”

I stood there for a long moment, trying to process the sudden stream of information accosting me. Baldr's thoughts were wild and erratic, which was unlike him. I'd only ever seen him like that when he was either really angry or really upset about something. But I had no cause to disbelieve him. Whatever he was trying to tell me, it was probably true. He'd never been one to lie to me. It was one of my favorite qualities about him.

“So... is everyone alright?”

“Oh. Yeah! Everyone is fine. Thanks to Loki!”

“The one that helped blow up the resort?”

“Yeah. But he blew up the part where people don't stay and it was a good way to

make sure... Ah! Just let me read the letter he left behind. It explains it all.”

I saw him reach into his pocket and pull out a rumpled and folded piece of paper. It looked like it had gotten wet at some point, but the words were scribbled down in pencil. Not that I could read them. Growing up in a magical dome locked away from the world meant I couldn't do things like read or do math, something that everyone around me seemed to take for granted. But I didn't mind, not when Baldr was so happy to read to me. When he did that, it made me feel normal for a little while and I cherished every moment.

“Alright,” Baldr said, clearing his throat.

And then he began to read.

Baldr,

I hope I can find a way to tell you about this letter. I wrote it knowing that if things went sideways, I'd need a way to tell you what was going on. My guess is that either Tyr abandoned the plan, which I expect he'll do, or I'm dead. I sincerely hope it's not the latter, but either way, you need to know this.

First off, I wanted to apologize to you and Thor. I've been a serious asshole these past few months and you two didn't deserve that. I was so torn up about losing Dad that I just... I didn't realize there were people around me feeling the same pain. I cut myself off from everyone and then was angry that I felt alone. It was completely my fault that I felt that way and I should've looked to my family for support. I'm sorry I didn't and I'm sorry I've treated you two so poorly. I love you both so much. You are my family and you always will be.

Secondly, Heimdall and I are mates. Yes he's Tyr's son, but he's nothing like Tyr. Heimdall has a kind heart and he doesn't believe his father's crazy ideas anymore. In

fact, I'm not sure if he ever did or if he was just trying to make Tyr happy. Either way, if something has happened to me, I can guarantee you Heimdall is still on your side. He doesn't want to see his own father die, which I understand more than anyone. But, I'm afraid that it'll be an eventuality at some point. I just hope I'm there to help him through it.

And I'm sorry I had to attack the resort to prove my loyalty to Tyr. Without it, he would've killed both Heimdall and I on the spot. However, if I've played my cards right, I've crippled the building without hurting anyone too badly. Once all the guests are gone, our pack can wage this war without cause for concern. And I'm sorry to say, a war will happen one way or another. Tyr will have it no other way. So be ready.

Last, but certainly not least, Tyr has a secret weapon. He's imprisoned a mage in the woods north of the Skoll village inside a massive magical dome. From what Heimdall was able to figure out, the boy was kidnapped by Tyr with the help of another witch. She's the one who erected the dome and Tyr is the only one that can go in or out. The boy will be the downfall of the Hati pack unless someone outside the Skoll pack knows of him. Now that you do, I hope you'll be the reason this witch doesn't end up as Tyr's weapon. I can't imagine what years of solitude and Tyr's venom would do to a person. I just hope you're able to reason with him. You're a witch too, so maybe you'll have something in common. I don't know, but I need you to try.

Once you've got him convinced you aren't going to hurt him, go to the witch. Heimdall says she lives a full day to the south in the valley of two uninhabited mountains. She lives in a clearing deep in the forest, in a wooden house with a moss roof and a pond out front. I don't know her name and you shouldn't tell her yours either. But if she's the one that cast the dome around this boy, maybe you can get her to release it somehow.

Beware though, she has a price. It seems she steals life force via sex to stay alive. Tyr

has been paying her for years to keep his weapon secret and his pack strong. But I sincerely hope you don't have to pay her. Use your power to trick her if you must, but you need to get that boy out of the dome. Whatever it takes, Baldr. He cannot be set free on the Hati pack or he will kill everyone. That's what the witch foretold and I don't want anything more to happen to my family.

I wish you all the luck in the world, brother.

-Loki

Baldr finished the letter and looked up at me from the other side of the dome. Although I knew he couldn't see me well, I had a feeling he could see the look of shock and surprise on my face. Of course I knew Tyr wanted to use my power to hurt people, that was obvious. But I didn't know he was the one that kidnapped me. Or that a witch had imprisoned me. I expected some sort of magical being was involved of course, but for her to be so close for all these years? It was almost like a slap in the face.

It also explained why Baldr had been missing for the past three days.

"So, needless to say, I'm leaving," Baldr said, folding up the letter and tucking it away once more. "Immediately."

"What?" His words caught me off guard. "Why?"

The look on his face was one of complete disbelief. "What do you mean why?" he scoffed. "To get you the hell out of this dome of course!"

I shook my head. "You should be protecting your pack and your family. What about Loki and Thor?"

“What about them? Thor is more than capable of taking care of himself. And Loki is out of my reach for now. I’m not even sure if he’s still alive... but I have to believe he is. He’s a strong Alpha wolf. If anyone was going to survive a grenade, even out of pure spite, it would be him. Besides, Heimdall hasn’t come knocking on our door, so I can only assume he’s still alive.”

“But... I don’t...”

I wasn’t sure what I was trying to say. Of course I wanted Baldr to get me out of this dome, to rescue me from this fucking nightmare I’d been living for years. But at the same time, I didn’t want his family to get hurt because of me. If he somehow figured out how to get me out, Tyr would come after them.

“If Tyr finds out...” I began.

“By the time he does, it’ll be too late,” Baldr said, cutting me off.

“But he... he’ll attack your pack.”

Baldr lifted a hand, placing it on the side of the dome. I did the same, the magic barrier between us buzzing pleasantly.

“There’s going to be a war whether I save you or not,” Baldr said, his voice full of resolve. “Nothing will change that. Besides... my visions... I’ve seen you in them. And I’d rather have you be free because of me than because Tyr finally broke you.” He looked up at me, those golden eyes full of sad determination. “Let me do this for you. Please. In case this war goes poorly, I want to make sure you’re free so you can keep on living.”

The idea of Baldr not surviving the fight made my stomach twist into a wretched knot. I felt suddenly nauseous, but I bit it back. He didn’t need me overwhelming him

with anxiety just before he was about to leave.

“I can’t stop you, can I?” I said at last, realizing the truth.

“No. You can’t.”

“Promise me you’ll come back.” My voice was shaking despite my best efforts to remain calm. “Don’t let that witch hurt you.”

“I promise,” he nodded. “And if she’s lived in these mountains as long as I think she has, I have nothing to worry about. My mother’s promise will protect me. She made sure everyone agreed to it.”

“I never met her,” I said sadly. “I wish I had.”

There was a brief hesitation before Baldr replied, “I wish you had too. She was a wonderful person before she...”

I could feel the pain sweep through his thoughts. Despite his best efforts, he couldn’t hide it from me. For a moment, I counted myself lucky. Not being able to remember my parents, it was hard to grieve for the loss of them. I knew I had some and the idea of missing out on that made me sad. But I didn’t feel like I’d really lost anything. How could I lose something if I couldn’t remember what it was like to have it in the first place?

“Anyway,” Baldr said, forcing himself to smile. “I’ll come back for you and I’ll get you out of this fucking bubble, alright?”

“Okay,” I nodded. “But be safe. I want to... I want to see you again.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll come back. I promise.” He gave me one last smile as he pulled his

hand away from the dome. “Bye.”

Baldr turned away and headed for the woods, the telepathic connection between us severing as the magic faded. I felt a sudden rush of anxiety and fear fill my chest. My only friend in the entire world was leaving and I didn’t know if he’d make it back. He’d promised of course, but he didn’t know what the road ahead might hold for him.

I felt a tinge of regret as he disappeared into the woods. If this was the last time I was going to see him, I’d missed my chance to tell him how I really felt. That I was fairly certain I was in love with him.

And now, all that was left to do was wait and hope as the snow fell down around me.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

The moment I left Mist's dome, I ducked into the trees to grab my backpack. I'd taken a detour back into the hotel after I found Loki's letter to collect a few supplies. The place hadn't been stripped clean, so there were still snacks in my cupboards. I stuffed a few into my bag along with an extra pair of clothes before I headed down the mountain. And now that I was done letting Mist know where I was going, it was time to head out.

I stripped off my clothing, tucking it into the bag along with my shoes. Getting to the witch's cottage would be much faster on four feet instead of two. I knew I was running out of time. With Tyr already attacking the pack outright, I could only hope for a day or two more of peace before he moved against the Hati pack again. Hell, I wasn't even sure there was that much time to spare. But I had to find the witch because I knew that Mist needed to be set free. Loki was right, he was the key to Tyr's takeover. Without him the Skoll pack would be outnumbered five to one.

Still, I found myself hesitating in the snow, my bare feet stinging with cold. Part of me wanted to put this off for as long as possible. The visions I'd had were clear when it came to Mist. He was going to find his power eventually, of that much I was certain. And some... people were going to die because of it. All of their faces were fuzzy in my vision, meaning their fates could be changed. However, no matter how many times the sight came to me, one face always remained perfectly clear regardless of what the circumstances were.

I shuddered, but pushed it away quickly. The future was going to happen one way or another and while most of it remained open to change, there were certain points in time that were fixed no matter what. This just happened to be one of those points. Still, I endeavored to make it as positive as I could despite the end I saw coming.

Mist didn't deserve to be tortured any longer. And if he was going to find his power, I'd rather it be from freedom than from anguish.

Steeling myself, I stuffed everything in my bag and pulled the zipper shut. There wasn't time to tell Thor or Flynn what I was doing. They'd want to come along and that would only slow me down. There just wasn't time for that.

Taking a deep breath, I called upon the wolf deep inside of me, ushering it to the surface. Runes rose up beside it in my mind as the shift began. My shifting was slower than the others in my family, probably due to my half-blood heritage. However, the magic side of me made the transition painless despite my cracking bones and shifting flesh. In a matter of moments I found myself on four paws in the snow, shaking the itchy feeling from my fur. I glanced back at myself, the familiar creamy white fur covering my body lending me protection from the cold almost instantly. My paws, however, were black. Thor always teased me, telling me it looked like I'd permanently waded through mud. But I sort of liked it. The coloration was unique and set me apart from the others.

Reaching back, I snapped up my backpack in my jaws and started west, taking the long way around the dome so as not to be discovered by the Skoll pack. It took me a good ten minutes before I reached the southern side. From there I followed my wolverine senses, my nose and instincts carrying me south. As soon as I was out of Skoll territory, I picked up the pace, intent on being at the witch's house by morning.

I just hoped I could keep up the pace.

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The hut was more run-down than I expected. It had taken me until nearly noon the next day to actually find it. Loki's directions weren't exactly specific, but they got me there eventually with the help of my nose. The clearing was there just like he said

with the pond out front and a mossy roof. And even though there was snow everywhere else, it seemed to have left the witch's clearing untouched. Everything in her domain was still green and vibrant, like it was the height of summer.

I spent the better part of twenty minutes walking around her clearing still in my wolf form, checking the area for strange hints of magic. However, no matter how much I kept my nose to the ground, her clearing seemed, for lack of a better word, inviting. And the more I thought about it, the more I realized that might be the trap. It wasn't that some evil magic would spring the moment anyone got close, but that she wanted them to come in. Like a spider drawing her prey into a web, she needed someone to feed on. And if Loki's description about her stealing life force was true, that's exactly what she was trying to do by luring people in.

No wonder her sanctuary was always green and lively.

Going back to the far side of the clearing, I let my wolf form melt away. I landed in the snow on my hands and knees and quickly pulled my backpack open to retrieve my clothing. As soon as I was dressed, I picked the bag up, slung it over my shoulder, and stepped into the green circle of grass.

The temperature shifted instantly. It was like I'd just stepped into a massive heated greenhouse. In a matter of seconds I could feel the sweat gathering under my coat as the heat seeped in. All around me the wildflowers were in full bloom, tricked into splendor well outside of their season by her magic. Honeybees buzzed here and there, collecting pollen for their hives. The entire scene was magical and yet somehow... disturbing.

But I didn't have any more time to waste. I needed answers about Mist and his imprisonment. So, without hesitation, I strode across the vibrant lawn toward the hut. To my surprise, there was an orange glow from within, like a roaring fire was burning in the hearth. And before I made it to the front door, I heard the latch click and the

hinges creak as it swung open.

“Come in,” a gentle raspy voice said from inside. “All travelers are welcome with Madam Hecate.”

I had to stop myself from scoffing. Madam Hecate was a very pretentious name for a witch living in the woods. Was she decently powerful? Yes. But was she the mother goddess of all witches? I think not. Before I’d even stepped foot in her house, she’d given herself away for what she really was. A scam artist. Only those with little power would claim to have all of it. But she didn’t know she was dealing with another witch. At least not yet.

Up the steps I went, playing it shy as I stepped inside her hut. I glanced up at her, noticing her nearly white eyes. As I got closer, I realized they were actually gray, but unsettlingly so.

“Hello, my dear,” she nodded, pulling a kettle off the roaring fire. She stepped over to the table where two cups and a plate of cookies was already waiting. Clearly she’d been expecting company. “What brings you to my neck of the woods?” She poured one cup and then the other, the steam rising from the fine china teacups. “Not lost are you?”

“Actually... I came looking for you,” I said, still trying to play the innocent role. “I need to help a friend, but I don’t know how.”

“Come. Sit. Tell Madam Hecate all about it and she’ll see what she can do.” She gestured to a chair on the opposite side of a small round table. “Have a cup of tea to warm your bones.”

I took a seat opposite her, taking my chance to glance around the cabin. As far as I could tell, everything looked fairly normal. It was small and a single room save for

the bathroom tucked into one corner. Despite the old world decor and the mysterious dark glass bottles on the shelves, it seemed like she wasn't willing to skip on modern plumbing. Her bed was tucked into the opposite corner and draped in many hand knit blankets. Herbs and flowers hung upside down from the ceiling. It was an extremely witchy aesthetic and part of me wondered if it was all for show. Then again, living out here in the mountains all by herself meant she probably had to fend for herself most of the time.

"Here," she smiled, pushing the cup of amber tea in front of my place. "Now tell me about your friend that needs my help."

I lifted the cup, savoring the warmth after traveling all night through cold and snow. Giving it a cautious sniff, I detected no malevolent ingredients. And, when I took a sip, I found it to be kind of delightful. The old crone could brew a mean cup of tea.

"Thank you," I said, pulling the cup from my lips. "My friend is in trouble... well, I guess more like he's under some kind of spell."

"Is that so?" She seemed bemused by that claim. "How do you know?"

"We met the witch that cast it on him."

"Well, that leaves little doubt to the contrary then."

"And now he's trapped." I paused for a moment, twisting the truth to keep her from suspecting my lies. "He can't leave his house. It's like there's an invisible force holding him in and he's been stuck in there for days."

"And you want to get him out?"

"Of course!"

She placed her cup down on the saucer before holding her hand out. "Can I see your palm?"

"Sure."

I put my own cup out and reached out my right hand. But the moment her fingers touched mine, she pulled away, as if shocked.

"Oh," she murmured, a smile crossing her lips. "You have some power of your own I see."

I nodded, sticking to my half-truths. "Yes. But not enough. I have visions now and then, but nothing that can help my friend." I lifted my gaze to meet her cold gray eyes. "I need someone with real power."

She smiled wide, soaking up the attention. Clearly she enjoyed the praise, and I was happy to give it to her if that meant getting what I needed. I had to butter her up if I was going to help Mist and she couldn't know it was him until it was too late.

With her strangely long, thin fingers, she pulled my hand toward her, turning my palm upward. She traced a single finger over the creases in my hand, humming under her breath as she stared.

"A full heart I see," she smiled. "You must care for your friend very much."

Despite myself, I blushed, my cheeks burning. "He... He's just a friend."

"Of course he is," she replied, her tone nothing but disbelief. "You already know the truth of your feelings and in time you'll come to express them." She traced another line on my hand. "But your head is full of doubt. And your fate is tangled and twisted. A life-changing event is marching your way and there's nothing you can do

to stop it.”

Then she paused, lifting my hand closer to her face before letting out a laugh.

“What?” I asked. “What is it?”

“You don’t have a sun line,” she said, shaking her head. Her eyes darkened as she focused on me. “But you do have a moon line, wolf.”

I couldn’t help the small gasp that escaped my lips.

“Don’t worry. I won’t tell anyone your secret.” She turned my hand over, looking at the back of it. “You’re not a full wolf, anyway. That’s easy enough to tell. Someone had to give you those visions, right?”

“Yeah,” I nodded, peppering in the truth again. “On my mother’s side.”

“I see.” She turned my hand back over once more. “Your lifeline is very short, dear child,” the old witch said, tracing a long claw down my palm as a cruel smile curled over her lips. “Very short indeed.”

“I know,” I replied, realizing all of this was getting me nowhere. I had no need for soothsayers, I could see the future myself. “My visions have told me as much.”

But then she stopped, grabbing my hand and pulling it close once more to scrutinize further. “Interesting.”

“What?” I asked, my brows furrowed in confusion. “What do you see?”

“Your lifeline isn’t short,” she corrected, looking up at me. “It’s broken.”

I shook my head. “No. It’s short. You’re right. I... I have seen my own end.”

“Yes,” she nodded. “But have you seen your beginning?”

I stared at her, my head tilted to the side. What the hell was she talking about?

She let my hand go, tilting her head in curiosity. “Let’s consult the bones, shall we?”

Standing up from the table, she went to one of the nearby shelves and pulled down a leather drawstring bag. She moved smoothly for someone her age despite her hunched and withered appearance. It made me think I might not be the only one putting on a facade. I expected as much, but still, it made me keep a closer eye on her.

“Hold out your hands.”

I did as she asked, cupping them together. She tipped over the bag and poured an assortment of bones into my hands. They were all sort of short and thick with a single rune carved into each one. They smelled musty and old, like they’d gotten wet a few times in their leather pouch. However, there was also the distinct smell of human hanging over them. It wasn’t until she took her seat again that I realized it was because they were human bones. Finger bones from the middle digit of each finger to be precise. It took every ounce of restraint not to wrinkle my nose up and curse in disgust.

“Cast the bones,” she said, clearing the table in front of me to reveal a circle of ebony inlaid into the wooden surface. “And think of your friend that needs help. They will point the way.”

Closing my eyes, I concentrated on Mist and shook the bones before dropping them to the table. The clatter was hollow and strange to ears, but it didn't stop my curiosity from pulling my eyes open once more. The old witch leaned toward, getting close to

the bones and peering at each one individually. Then her head snapped up to me.

“Your mother's spell book,” she said. “Have you found it?”

“I... I didn't know she had one.”

“The bones tell me that the power to save your friend is in her book.” She picked up another, examining it closely. “They also tell me you haven't been entirely truthful with me.” Her cold gray eyes fixed on mine. “What did you say your name was?”

“I didn't.”

“It's only polite to give your name.”

“My name is my own,” I replied, nonplussed by her pathetic attempt at control. “And yours is not Madam Hecate.”

“Who are you, wolf?” she barked, sweeping the bones from the table with a huff. “And why did you really come here?!”

She was angry now, and I knew my welcome was officially worn out. I'd always assumed she'd figure it out eventually, but I'd hoped to get a little more information out of her first.

“Why are you helping Tyr?” I asked, realizing the jig was up. “What could he possibly offer you when he can't even control himself?”

“Ah,” she nodded. “You're from Fenris. I should have guessed.” She just shook her head, scoffing at me. “Tyr can offer me what I want most. Life.”

“So you supply him with the tools to perpetuate his madness and he what? Brings you

people to bleed dry?"

The witch clicked her tongue. "I'm disappointed in you young witch. At your age you should know the life force of ordinary people isn't worth much." She leaned across the table, her claws digging into the wood. "Werewolves on the other hand... they can give me power, heal quickly, and then give it again. I could have a never ending supply to keep myself young and beautiful forever."

"Tyr gave you a taste and now you can't get enough..."

Her entire demeanor shifted as I spoke. No longer was she the kind old woman trying to help me. Now she was an old crone with malice in her eyes and blood under her fingernails. Even the interior of the hut had taken on a more sinister air. For the first time I noticed several large spiders and serpents slithering over the walls. The entire place was an illusion.

"Everyone wants youth and power," she scoffed, disappointed that I even questioned her motives. "And soon, you'll have neither."

Her movements were much faster than I expected. In a flash she'd grabbed my arm with one clawed hand and was dragging me out of my seat and toward the fireplace. Her strength was inhuman and no matter how hard I fought to get free, she held me fast.

"Too bad for your friend," she grinned. "He'll die in the house without your help I'm sure. And he'll never know how much you sacrificed to save him." Her smile was cruel as she glanced back at me. "And you'll never get to tell him you love him." She cackled, yanking me closer to the fire. "Pathetic."

"And you're just going to let Tyr destroy Fenris with his war?" I shot back, trying to buy myself more time and information.

“What do I care about a few werewolves? As soon as I have my youth and power, they’ll be of no more use to me. As far as I’m concerned, they’re no better than the rest of the mountain trash around here.”

We got close to the fire, and I expected her to keep pulling me through the hut toward the bed to collect her prize. Instead she grabbed a ladle hanging on the mantle and dipped it into a boiling pot sitting directly on the flames. Violet liquid filled the utensil as she brought it toward me, a sickly green smoke curling up from it.

“Want to try a sip of my witches stew?” she laughed. “I promise, it won’t hurt a bit. In fact, it’ll make your death peaceful.”

“You... You’re not going to steal the life from me?”

“Not this time precious,” she growled. “Right now I fancy myself some werewolf stew. Not to mention, I bet that pretty white coat of yours would make a handsome rug.”

“You were watching me...”

“I knew you were coming the moment you stepped foot on my mountain,” she smiled, chuckling under her breath. She pushed the ladle toward my mouth. “Drink up precious.”

But when I merely pressed my lips together and turned my head away, all remaining vestiges of her merriment wore away. Her tiny amount of patience had run out.

“Fine,” she spat, throwing the ladle back into the pot with a splash. “Suffer. That’s all your kind inflicts on others, anyway, so why shouldn’t you have your share?”

Her iron-like grip tightened around my wrist and I realized, a little too late, that I

couldn't escape. When she finally did pull a knife from the back of her belt, I felt my heart leap into my throat. The blade was dark and dirty, like it had been lying at the bottom of a pond for years. I wasn't sure what it was made of, but as she rose it high, I found myself praying that it wasn't silver. I made one last vain attempt to pull away from her before the blade came slicing through the air.

I cried out in pain as it pierced the flesh of my chest. The blade sunk in a half inch before I felt an incredible magical power well up around me. Suddenly the knife was thrown backward, disintegrating as it spun through the air. Gold magic flared around me and runes lit up across my body. The witch had but a moment to look at me with fear and recognition in her eyes. At last she knew that I was no ordinary wolf, but the son of Freyja, the strongest witch to have ever walked those mountains. It was only then that she knew the gravity of her mistake. A blade to the heart was a direct attempt on my life in one fell swoop. All I could do was close my eyes, knowing the repercussions of my mother's magic would be terrible.

Bright golden light filled my vision despite my eyes being closed. There was a horrible scream as an explosion of magic erupted all around me. I heard the tearing of fabric, the breaking of boards, and the creaking of nails ripped from their mooring. The witch's scream was cut off as the magic suddenly stopped. I took a deep breath, preparing myself for what I was about to see. Nobody had ever tried to take my life in one swift move before, so I wasn't sure what to expect.

It was the smell of smoke that finally forced me to open my eyes. The moment I did, my jaw fell open. The witch was gone. And so was her house. The stone fireplace, the potion, the walls, the snakes, the bed, and even most of the floor had been blown away by my mother's spell. Smoke curled up from where the fire used to burn, nothing left now but a few coals glowing in the dirt. I glanced down, looking for any sign of the witch. And all I found was a pair of bare footprints on the charred wood. Everything else was gone.

“Fuck...” I breathed, looking at the devastation around me.

I had no idea such a thing was even possible. Sure, the magic had always protected me, but it had never killed anyone. Tyr was hurt and others who’d tried to bully me when I was young got a few singed fingers. But this... this was something else entirely. My power was growing and along with it, my mother’s spell.

“The spellbook,” I whispered. “I have to find it.”

My mother had never told me anything about a spellbook when I was a child. Her teaching methods for magic were somewhat... ethereal. Most of the time I was taught to feel my magic and use my intentions to draw up the right runes. I started out small and slowly worked my way up. By the time she was gone I could manipulate plants into flowering and kill them just as easily with my will. Locks didn’t stop me from entering rooms and now and then, I could hear a loud thought or two as someone passed by. But my biggest gift had always been visions.

If such a book existed, it might be the thing that I needed to get Mist out of his prison. I had no doubt the witch’s magic would hold despite her death. A barrier like that was connected to the earth where it stood, it operated without constant input.

However, as I stepped through the debris out into the green clearing, I felt the cold sting of snow on my nose. I glanced up, noticing the barrier around the clearing was now gone. Already the cold air was seeping in and strangling the delicate wildflowers and robbing them of their color and beauty. I felt a pang of sadness in my chest as I realized I was the cause of all this death. But there was nothing I could do about it now. The witch was gone and I didn’t have the time or the power to keep her sanctuary intact. Besides, it was time the mountain was free of her influence.

Stepping into the middle of the clearing, I bent down and picked a single red wildflower before the cold could take it. Holding it to the sky, I called up the magic

within me, runes appearing on the ground in a golden circle. It was time to go back to the resort to find my mother's spellbook and there wasn't a moment to lose. I didn't know how connected Tyr and the witch had been. He might already know of her demise and that meant Mist was in trouble.

I brought the flower down to my lips, cupping it in my hands.

"Take me home," I whispered before tossing it to the ground.

The moment the flower hit the grass, it burst into flame and the magic ignited all around me. I felt the familiar tug at my back again and the world around me disappeared.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

My feet hit the ground in another flash of golden magic and I staggered, reaching out a hand to steady myself against the nearby wall. My stomach turned for half a second as the teleportation caught up to me. I was still trying to get used to the feeling, but it really did make me want to hurl. And it got worse the further I traveled. Considering this was my furthest jump yet, I was surprised I hadn't emptied my stomach right there in the middle of my apartment.

But as I managed to catch my breath, I couldn't help but feel a little proud of myself. Not only had I teleported several dozen miles in a single bound, but I'd also managed to land myself smack in the center of my domicile on the third floor of the resort. Usually I tried to avoid buildings, especially ones with multiple floors. Things could get a little hairy if I didn't aim just right and getting caught halfway through the floor would probably kill me. However, since I was so familiar with my own place, it was surprisingly easy to land there without harm.

I could congratulate myself later though. Mist needed my help, and I was almost certain Tyr would notice the witch's death fairly soon. He'd been going to see her for years from what Loki could tell me and that meant they had probably forged some sort of connection, magical or otherwise between them. I had to find my mother's spellbook and get to Mist as fast as possible to set him free. I just hoped the book had something useful in it.

Finding it was going to be difficult though. However, I knew where to begin looking.

Righting the backpack on my shoulders, I headed out of my apartment and into the hallway. At the far end were two other doors, belonging to Thor and Loki, respectively. However, there was a fourth, smaller door leading to a small unit

stationed between the two. It used to be our father's overflow office for mostly storage and filing cabinets, but now it held mostly boxes and memories. After he died, Thor and I had packed up his things and placed them inside. Loki was too deep in grief to help at the time, but we had to get his stuff out of the way so we could continue running the resort. Not to mention, Thor's apartment used to be our father's. It would've been far too cruel a reminder to ask him to live with our father's things still decorating the space.

As I approached the door, I drew up a single rune for unlocking in my mind. As soon as it was formed, I let it travel down my arm. No sooner had my finger touched the door handle than the lock snapped to the side and the door creaked open. Inside the entire place was pitch black thanks to its lack of windows and since the power was still out, I had no other choice than to call on my magic again, filling the palm of my hand with a bright glowing rune. I made a mental note not to use any more magic. At the rate I was going, I would pass out from exhaustion. The teleportation nearly did me in and these tiny spells were already taking their toll.

Despite that realization and the need for haste, I knew I had no idea what I was looking for. A spellbook, I hoped, would be obvious. Then again, knowing my mother, it might not be. She loved her magic, using it to imbue everyday objects with a sense of wonder and joy for me when I was a boy. She even used to make little toys that would move on their own for the three of us. It was no wonder I'd never noticed a spellbook while we were packing up my father's things. There was a very good chance it was a mundane book or a modern copy of Tom Sawyer. Hell, it might even be a pamphlet or something for all I knew.

And that meant I'd need to go through every box, one by one, until I found what I was looking for. As much as I heard the ticking of the clock in the back of my mind, this task had to be done carefully. So, with a sigh, I grabbed a box, hefted it up onto the desk, and started to go through it piece by piece. I just hoped the witch was right and that the answer I most desperately needed was somewhere hidden amongst these

memories.

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Nearly two hours after I began, I was flipping open the very last box in the old office, my rune light glowing weakly in my hand. Despite the tiny draw of magic from the light, I was running on empty. I'd already broken into my backpack and eaten the rest of my snacks in the hopes it would replenish my energy. However, nothing I did seemed to help. I was running out and if I didn't find the book soon, I was going to have to spend the night in the resort. I was also on the last box in the office, so that meant if it wasn't in there, I'd have to start searching somewhere else and I didn't know where to even begin.

I was also exhausted for another reason. Going through those boxes and having to look at each item individually was a lot more emotionally taxing than I'd anticipated. It seemed there was still quite a bit of grief surrounding both of my parents that I hadn't worked through yet. Having lost my father recently, I expected to feel a bit of grief welling up inside me. But my mother had been gone for nearly six years and I thought I'd moved on. But seeing all those pictures and notes with her handwriting on them... it brought my grief right back to the surface.

Suddenly it felt like yesterday that I'd come back to the resort after being out all day at the hot springs with my brothers. We'd gone to our secret place where we could splash and yell and carry on without annoying the customers. We were soaked, exhausted, and as happy as could be. But when I came back up to our suite that last afternoon, the three of us found our father sitting with his face buried in his arms at the kitchen island. It was only when he finally looked up that we realized he'd been crying.

Back then I hadn't questioned it when he told me my mother was gone. There was no explanation, no accident, and no sickness. She just simply wasn't there anymore. I

knew from the way he said it, she hadn't left on an errand or decided to abandon us. She was dead, and he didn't want to tell us why or how.

My brothers were my support for the most part. Father was far too busy trying to deal with his own grief to worry about mine. Now that I was an adult, I could understand that. But as a kid, I felt abandoned in some respects. However, the questions I had now as I stared at old photographs and hand-written notes weren't about him. They were about her and why she'd disappeared so suddenly without warning.

Where had my mother gone? And why did she have to leave? Those were answers I never got and now that father was dead, I doubted I ever would. And now they burned in my chest despite everything else that required my attention. I wished I could find the answers I wanted in those old pictures, but alas, they would not speak to me no matter how hard I stared at them.

Once I'd finished the very last box and found nothing, I stood up with a huff. After all that time and effort, I had nothing to show for it except a heavy heart and a growing sense of urgency. Mist was counting on me and every moment that ticked by was another that he came closer to danger.

I lifted my hand in the air, the glowing rune on the edge of death as I stomped toward the door in irritation. However, just as I was about to leave my father's old office, my light fell over a portrait leaning against the wall that I'd never noticed before. It was sitting on the floor, half submerged in file boxes. The frame was ornate and gold, shimmering in the light. My interest piqued, I pulled it out from its dusty hiding place, holding it to the light so I could get a better look.

The woman staring back at me was powerful and strong. She sat straight and tall against a red velvet chair, her gold dress flowing around her. Dark auburn hair was braided and piled on top of her head, giving her an almost regal look. However, what struck me most was her golden eyes staring back at me. It was one thing that I'd

inherited from her. Whenever I looked in a mirror, I saw her eyes staring back at me.

Seeing her painted in such a lifelike quality nearly brought tears to my eyes. It had been so long since I'd seen something that captured her power and softness all at the same time. Photos usually only caught one or the other, but the painter, whoever they were, had caught both in this single image.

However, just as I was about to put it back and stop torturing myself, my eyes caught something else. There, in her right hand, was a book. I pulled the painting close, holding up my rune light to see it better. The book was bound in dark leather with runes painted across its surface. It definitely looked like a spellbook, or how I'd expect one to look. However, in all my searching, I'd found nothing that looked even remotely similar.

But that gave me an idea.

Reaching out my hand, I pressed my index finger to the painting, directly on top of the book's cover. I was surprised to feel a faint buzzing sensation against my skin. It felt like magic.

"Mother," I whispered. "Show me where your spellbook is so I can save my friend." I paused, taking a deep breath. "So I can save the man I... I love."

I let out a gasp as the painting began to move. I watched in surprise and frankly, a little bit of horror, as my mother blinked once, nodded, and unfolded her hands from the book. She lifted it up, holding the book out to me. As it came closer, I saw a faint golden glow. Suddenly the painting rippled and the corner of the book came out of it, as if a tiny portal had been opened. But I knew better than to hesitate. Reaching out, I took the corner of the book and pulled it free, the weight of it comforting in my hand.

My mother's portrait pulled her hands back, folded them in her lap, and gave me a

smile. With one last nod, she assumed her previous position, and the painting went still once more. My gaze darted between the book and the now still portrait of my mother, tears rolling down my cheeks. For half a second I thought I was going to see her, that she might... I don't know... step out of the painting and help me. But that wasn't the case. I recognized her magic for what it was, a simple pocket to store the book away from prying eyes and hands. And clearly, it had been meant for me or else I never would've gotten it.

Had she seen my future before she died? Her visions were always much stronger than mine. She must've known one day that I'd need the book and her help to save my friend and our pack. I just hoped I'd figure out how to use it in time to save everyone.

Now that I had the book, there was no time for rest or reading. I cut the magic to my rune light and darted out of the office down the hall. I made one quick pitstop at my suite to fill my backpack with snacks and sugary drinks. I'd need all the energy I could get if I was going to bring that dome down without sleeping first. But that also meant no teleporting. Oh well, at least I could eat on the way to the Skoll mountain.

Throwing my now stuffed backpack over my shoulders, I headed out of the resort and back into the snow. The past twenty-four hours had been absolutely wild. And I had a feeling things were going to get a lot crazier before it was over. But one thing was for certain, I was going to find a way to finally hold Mist for the first time and that feeling filled me to the brim with joy and no small amount of desire. Hopefully I'd be able to keep myself in check because I had a feeling my reaction to him was going to be much stronger than I anticipated.

For nearly the past decade I'd felt that he might be... my mate. But I wouldn't know for sure until I caught his scent. And that moment was fast approaching.

Hopefully I could resist its call.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

Darkness had settled in for the evening and I found myself outside the warmth of my hut. The fire was blazing inside and I was shivering in the cold. But I couldn't stop myself from going outside. It was one of those rare winter nights where the sky was clear and the stars were bright in the heavens. Of course, that usually meant it was much colder and tonight was no exception. My breath frosted in the air in front of me as I tipped my head back and stared up at the stars stretched out above me.

I didn't know their names or their stories, but I didn't care. Those little dots in the night sky were my friends and constant companions. After all my time trapped in the dome, I'd come to memorize their locations and the way they shifted throughout the night and the seasons. There were some that glowed brightly, making all the others look dim. And then there were those that sparkled blue, green, or red. They were beautiful and filled me with awe. I knew enough to know they were billions of miles away and unreachable by anyone. They made me feel small and insignificant, but somehow that didn't make me sad. In fact, it made me feel a little less lonely to see them all floating in the darkness. Maybe, somewhere out there, someone else was looking up at me and wondering the same thing.

Maybe Baldr was staring up there and thinking of me.

The thought of him made my stomach twist painfully. He'd been gone for nearly an entire day now and I was beginning to worry. Of course, he told me the journey to see the witch would take an entire day just to get there, but for some reason I was convinced it wouldn't take him as long. He was a powerful witch himself, so I thought the journey would be easy. However, I assumed the witch that entrapped me was powerful too. For all these years her spell had kept me a prisoner, and I doubted it would take anything less than a grand piece of magic to bring it all down.

I wished I could do it myself.

With my face still tilted toward the stars, I closed my eyes, taking a deep breath. The cold filled my lungs, numbing me from the inside. I used it to focus inward, allowing my consciousness to sink down into the center of my being. There I could feel the well of power bubbling just below the surface. My magic, even from a safe distance, reminded me of wild things. Not just animals or the natural world, but the chaos of shifting continents and erupting volcanoes as well. Something about it was far more primal than anything I'd ever come in contact with.

To be honest, it scared the shit out of me. And that's probably why I pulled away from it the moment I started to feel the power reverberating through my body. Despite my desperate need to leave this prison, I couldn't force myself to touch the magic I needed. It felt like trying to will myself to stick my hand in the hot coals, knowing full well it would damage me beyond repair. I just couldn't do it.

So, opening my eyes once more, I stared up at those stars, wishing someone, anyone, would come and save me from the nightmare I was living in.

The cold started to settle in. My fingers and toes were numb, plus I'd started to shiver. As much as I wanted to stare at those stars all night, I needed to warm myself back up. Baldr wouldn't be back for some time, so there was no use standing out in the cold hoping for the impossible. For now I could content myself with imagining his face and how it might feel to finally hug him for the first time. Or maybe even kiss him. I'd wanted to do that for a long time. Among other things of course, but I tried to keep those fantasies to myself. The last thing I wanted was for them to spill over our telepathic bond and give Baldr a show he didn't ask for. Besides, I wasn't sure he was even into that sort of thing.

However, no sooner had I started back toward my hut than I felt the familiar ping in the back of my skull. I spun on my heel, my gaze fixed on the northern border of the

dome.

“Mist!” Baldr’s voice shouted inside my mind. “North side!”

I was already ten paces ahead of him. The moment the connection formed, I was running. And I didn’t stop until I reached the far end of the dome, Baldr’s familiar face on the other side of the barrier. I slapped both hands against the barrier, smiling wider than I thought possible.

“You’re alright!” I shouted, making no attempt to hide my joy. “I was so worried!”

“I’m sorry I kept you waiting,” he replied, his voice full of the sound of his smile. “And I’m going to get you out.”

My heart nearly stopped in my chest. “R-Really?”

“Yes.” He sounded confident. “I promise.”

My stomach twisted into several knots as I tried to contain the surge of hope filling me from head to toe. Nobody, not even Baldr, had ever been able to damage the dome or dispel it. Even Tyr could do little more than cut a hole for himself that resealed the instant he was on the other side. Sometimes even that simple gesture was difficult for him. Could Baldr really have figured a way out of this nightmare at last?

“And we need to hurry. Tyr could be coming,” he added. “In fact, I’m almost certain he will.”

I cocked my head to the side. “Why? He doesn’t know you’re here, does he?”

“No,” Baldr replied, shaking his head. “But he might know the witch who built this is now dead.”

“WHAT?!” I saw Baldr flinch, my voice filling both our minds. “You... You killed her?”

“No. My mother did.”

“The protection spell?”

“Yeah. The witch usually takes payment in the form of stealing life so she can live longer. That was her promised bounty from Tyr for all her hard work trapping you. But for some reason she decided she wanted to eat me instead.”

I made a disgusted noise that made Baldr laugh.

“Yeah. My thoughts exactly. But she didn’t know who I was until it was too late, after she tried to run a blade through my heart.”

“Are you okay?!”

“I’m fine. The wolf side of me healed the wound in a matter of minutes. But my mother’s magic... well, let’s just say not even the witch’s shoes were left after that blast.” He chuckled under his breath. “It even destroyed her house.” Then he lifted his left hand, a smile curling over his face. “But not before she told me about this.”

I stared at the old leatherbound book. It wasn’t any larger than some of the books Baldr brought to read to me. However, the cover was inlaid with strange symbols I’d never seen before. They looked much different than the letters in the books he read.

“What is it?”

“My mother’s spellbook. And I’m going to use it to set you free.”

“Can it do that?”

“It has to,” Baldr replied without missing a beat. “I just have to find the right spell.”

“Then what will we do?”

“I don’t know,” he said with a smile. “And it doesn’t matter. We’ll run away if need be. Without you here for Tyr to manipulate, his pack will be easy to subdue. Not to mention, any magic the witch gave him to fight should be fading by now.” His own words seemed to startle him into action. “That’s why we have to be quick. He’ll notice she’s gone when the spells start to fade.” He kicked the dome with a fair amount of malice. “I just wish this stupid thing would fade too, but she tied it to the land and to you from what I can tell. It’s not going anywhere as long as you’re still inside.”

“But if you can get me out...”

“Then it should disappear, yes.”

My heart was filled with so much joy I thought I’d float right on up and off the ground.

“Are you sure you can do it?”

Baldr hesitated before he said, “I’m going to give it my best shot.”

“What do you need me to do?”

“Gather up whatever things you want to bring with you,” he said. “Because once I crack this fucking thing open, we’re gone.”

I smiled wide, feeling the giddiness well up inside me. My heart was racing and my limbs buzzed with energy as the adrenaline rushed through my bloodstream. I was finally getting out. After all these years of being treated like an object and tortured by Tyr, I was finally going to be free. I didn't know what to expect on the other side or what might happen when Try found me missing, but I didn't care. All that mattered was leaving this hell hole with Baldr on my arm.

And maybe, if it turned out I wasn't just projecting onto my friend, I'd tell him how I really felt about him.

What a happy life that would be.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

It took me all of five minutes to gather my things into a scrap of worn canvas that had once been a bag. There was still one strap and although it was full of holes, they weren't big enough to let my things escape. Over the years I'd collected a few essentials that Tyr had either left behind or had tossed inside the dome so I wouldn't need him as much. Most of it was junk, and I was happy to leave it behind. But I did pack my least ratty wool blanket, a small hatchet that had been gathering rust at the point where the handle met metal, and a small leaf-shaped pin that I'd been wearing the moment I woke up in the dome.

The pin was the most precious to me and not because it looked like it might be made of gold. It was the only thing I had left from my old life. It was a simple design of a long stem with five bright green leaves with rounded edges growing from it. At the bottom was a cluster of three white circles that I assumed could be berries. I loved the way they shimmered a rainbow of colors as I tilted the pin in the light. The back was a long straight gold pin that I'd used several times to clip my blanket around my neck like a cloak. It was useful, beautiful, and sentimental all at once, so I couldn't leave it behind.

The last thing I grabbed was my box of matches. It wasn't exactly essential, and I knew we'd probably be going somewhere with a fire already going. Still, I didn't feel right about leaving them behind. They had been my lifeline for so long and the difference between freezing or starving to death that I just couldn't let them go. Old habits would probably die hard.

Once I had everything gathered up, I shouldered my bag and pushed my way out of the hut leaving the fire burning behind me. If Tyr did come looking for me, the fire would make him think I was still there, wandering around the dome. It might buy us a

little bit of time if we were lucky.

Back at the northern edge of the dome I found Baldr standing with his face buried in his mother's spellbook. I got a better look at the runes on the cover and a strange sort of familiarity stirred in my belly. Something about those symbols brought memories to the edge of my mind. However, as they got close, I felt them grow hazy. It was the same way I always felt when I tried to call up my past before the dome. Had I known how to read runes in a previous life? I wasn't sure, but that was something we could remedy once I was out. For now, getting free was the most important thing. Reading, magical or otherwise, would come later.

"Find anything?" I asked, trying not to startle him. But he jumped anyway.

"Maybe?" he replied, clearly unsure of himself. "I flipped through the entire book and I don't see a general dispelling ritual. Maybe that's something that's just too basic to put in a book like this. Everything else in here seems really specific."

"Like what?"

He flipped a few pages. "Ah. Like how to kill a Draugr."

"What's a Draugr?"

"According to this, some sort of undead creature created from warriors left to rot in the fields."

"Well... we probably won't have to deal with that?"

"I hope not." He flipped through a few more pages. "However, there is a spell here for opening a door."

“A door? To where?”

“It’s not specific.” He skimmed down the page, his eyes darting back and forth as he read. “But it seems like it’s all purpose, like it can create a door anywhere.”

“Can it get me out of this dome?” I asked, my voice filled with hope.

“I don’t know. But we can give it a shot.” He looked up at me, placing his hand on the dome. “I’m pretty tapped out for today, but I’m gonna try this anyway. I ate a couple of snacks on the way here and I’m starting to feel better now.”

“Okay,” I nodded, worry twisting inside my chest. “Just don’t overdo it, okay? I don’t want you to hurt yourself.”

He gave me a warm smile and I could’ve sworn I felt some affection seep through our telepathic connection. “I’ll do my best.”

I stared at him for a long moment. “So... uh... should I move or?”

“Maybe take a few steps back,” he chuckled nervously. “I’m not sure how this is going to go.”

I did as I was told. As soon as I was a handful of feet away from the dome, Baldr held out one hand, the spellbook clutched in the other, and our telepathic bond ceased. The moment it did, he started to chant on the other side of the dome. Although I could see his lips moving, the barrier blocked the outside world completely from the rest of my senses. Instead, I watched as a golden sparkling light began to coalesce in his hand. It ran up his arm, through his palm, and illuminated his outstretched fingers. With his middle and index finger he reached out to touch the dome and slowly began etching symbols into the side of it.

The air around me began to quake and shiver, like someone was shaking the entire place. It was similar to when Tyr let himself into my domain, but more violent. For a moment I thought everything might come crashing down around me. The thought of being crushed by the dome was one that filled me with fear. But no sooner had the thought crossed my mind than Baldr finished drawing his final rune.

He pulled the backside of his finger down the barrier, an eerie tearing sound echoing through the silent, snow covered world. I watched as a thin line appeared in the dome and then, all at once, it split open, letting the sound of the outside world in at last.

Several things struck me all at once. There was the slight breeze rustling what few dried leaves still clung to their branches, the rattling echoing over the mountain. In the distance I could hear an owl cry in the night only to be answered by another much closer. But what I noticed most was the gasp from Baldr's lips as he saw me clearly for the first time in his life. And his jaw fell slack.

"You... You're so handsome," he said. But the moment the words left his lips, he turned bright red.

My heart leapt at his words, but I forced my feet to stay planted in the snow. I wasn't entirely convinced all of this was real yet. After years and years of being trapped inside the dome, it felt almost wrong to finally be able to leave it. I knew my space like the back of my hand. Every rock, tree, and spring had its rightful place. But everything outside of the barrier was foreign and strange. Who knew what kind of dangers might be lurking out there to sweep me up and carry me away.

However, none of those worries stopped Baldr from stepping through the barrier, the book still clutched in his hand. The magic split around him like a curtain. As soon as he was inside it folded back together neatly. But my eyes were no longer on that. They were on Baldr.

My best friend in the whole world was close enough to touch for the first time ever.

“Can... Can I hug you?” I asked, my voice shaking as I stared at him.

“Yeah,” he nodded, a grin pulling at his lips.

I dropped my bag in the snow and ran, the thrill of it all taking over me at last. Colliding with Baldr, I threw my arms around his neck and held him tight. The feel of his skin against mine, his chest rising and falling, and the sweet honey-like scent of his skin brought tears to my eyes. I’d never experienced something so wonderful in all my life.

“Is... is this what it feels like?” I asked, holding onto Baldr tightly.

“What do you mean?”

“To hold someone?” I pulled him in tighter, refusing to let go as tears streamed down my cheeks. His warmth seeped through my clothing, filling me with a sensation I’d never felt before. It was like I was floating. “It’s better than I ever imagined.”

He smiled, squeezing me back. “Well, get used to it. Because you’re free now.”

“I can’t believe this is finally happening...”

Baldr leaned back, placing his hands on my cheeks and rubbing his thumbs over my stubbly jaw. “It’s not just a dream anymore.”

My heart sang as he touched me and it took everything I had not to tell him right then and there how much I cared for him. I bit my lower lip to stop myself from speaking out of line. Instead, I just stared back at him, the butterflies in my stomach making me nauseous.

“You ready to get out of here?”

I nodded, still unable to speak.

“Then let’s get going.”

Baldr let me go, turning back toward the barrier. I took a moment to wipe my cheeks on my sleeve and gather up my bag. I felt silly for getting so emotional, but at the same time, it was a big moment for me. Freedom had always seemed like a pipe dream. But now that it was finally coming true, there was nothing I could do to regain control of my emotions. They would just need to run their course.

“Uh-oh,” Baldr said, drawing my attention back to him.

I didn’t like his tone. “What? What’s wrong?”

“The barrier sealed again,” he replied, tapping his hand on the solid magic that was now seamless. “The spell must be only temporary with something like this.”

“Can you do it again?” I asked, knowing that Baldr was already exhausted beyond reason.

He nodded. “I think I can. But after that... I’m gonna be toast.”

“I’ll carry you if I have to.”

A smile pulled at the corners of his mouth. “You might have to.” He pulled the book out once more, turning back to the dome. “Alright, let’s make another door.”

I took a step back, following the instructions from before. Baldr lifted his hand and opened his mouth to begin chanting. But the words never left his lips. Before he

could begin, the air around us shivered again, the familiar sensation washing over me. My stomach sank as I realized what was happening.

“Mistilteinn!” a booming, guttural voice cried. “Where the fuck are you?!”

Both Baldr and I looked at one another. We recognized that voice and the anger behind it. Tyr, it seemed, had finally found out the witch was dead, and he was coming to make sure his prize was still where it was supposed to be.

I stared at Baldr as cold fear flooded my system. Judging by his expression, he’d realized the same thing as I did.

He’d never have time to open another door before Tyr found us.

“Come on,” I whispered, gesturing for Baldr to follow me. “Back to my hut!”

“He’ll know I’m here!” Baldr shot back. “My scent is everywhere!”

“It’s too smoky at the hut. It’ll cover it up.”

“I don’t think that’ll—”

“Do you have another option?!”

Baldr glanced around at the snow surrounding us and the impenetrable barrier separating us from the outside world.

“No...”

“Then come on!”

Grabbing his hand, we raced south toward my hut that was stationed near the center of the dome. We made sure to run in single file so the tracks didn't look like two people, but just a regular path that I took. Thankfully, the hut wasn't far off and in less than thirty seconds, we were standing at the front of it. I quickly pulled Baldr inside and pushed him into the back corner where my worst blankets were piled. The fire was still burning brightly, and the hut was full of heat.

"Cover yourself up just in case he comes in here," I said, tossing my bag at him.

"If he finds me, he'll kill you!"

"Not if you get us out of here first," I replied, gesturing to the book. "I don't care where. We can figure it out later. But do something... anything to stop him from finding you, even if you have to leave me behind. I've put up with his malice before, I can handle it one more time."

There was a look of fear in Baldr's eyes, but he nodded, nonetheless. He opened his mouth to speak once more, but another shout cut us off.

"Mistilteinn!!"

I gave him one last urgent look and a signal to stay quiet before I stepped toward the flap of the hut and let myself back out into the cold air.

Page 10

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

“Didn’t you hear me calling, boy?!” Tyr spat. It sounded like he was just outside the tent. “I taught you better than to ignore me.” I heard his knuckles crack loudly. “Maybe you need another lesson though.”

My blood boiled as I heard the threat in his voice. If Tyr so much as laid a finger on Mist in my presence, I’d fucking kill him. To hell with my visions, I’d get the job done one way or another. The future wasn’t set in stone after all.

“I was asleep,” Mist replied, keeping his voice low and quiet. “I apologize. I didn’t hear you at first.”

“Asleep?” Tyr scoffed. “It’s barely past nightfall. You should be listening for me no matter what.”

I could hear the fear in Mist’s voice as he replied, “I’m sorry. I didn’t know you were coming tonight. Usually you let me know when you’re going to be coming by...”

“I don’t need your permission to visit my own property,” Tyr snapped.

There was a sharp sound, like flesh striking flesh, followed by a pained gasp from Mist. My fists clenched at my sides as I fought the urge to leap out and attack Tyr with every ounce of strength I had left. But I knew I had to stay hidden, at least for now. Mist was right - I needed to find a way to get us both out of here.

With shaking hands, I opened my mother’s spellbook again, desperately flipping through the pages. There had to be something in there that would take us away from that awful place. Away from Tyr. Preferably forever. I took the pages in one hand,

flipping through as fast as I could, reading titles as they flipped by. Witches Glass, Finding the Path, Drawing Energy from the Earth, Realm Gates, Calling a Guide, Drawing Down the Moon...

I stopped, turning back a few pages. Realm Gates... that could be useful!

I quickly flipped back to the page on Realm Gates, my eyes scanning the text as fast as I could. The spell seemed complex, requiring several ingredients I didn't have on hand. But at the bottom was a simpler version scrawled in familiar loopy handwriting, meant for emergency escapes. It would only work once and wouldn't be very stable, but it was our best shot.

Thank you, Mother.

Outside, I could hear Tyr's angry voice getting louder. "Where is he? I can smell another wolf has been here! How did he kill my witch?!"

"I-I don't know what you're talking about," Mist stammered. "No one else has been here."

There was another sharp sound of impact, followed by Mist crying out in pain. My hands shook as I tried to focus on the spell, knowing time was running out. The instructions called for drawing a circular gate with specific runes around the edge. I'd need to use my own blood as ink.

Gritting my teeth, I called up the wolf inside me, forcing only my teeth to shift. Sharp fangs dropped down from my upper jaw and I used one to slice open my palm. As blood welled up, I began tracing the circular gate on the dirt floor of the hut, adding the runes as precisely as I could manage. My heart pounded in my ears as I worked, straining to hear what was happening outside. I just hoped I wasn't too late.

“If he’s not here, why do you smell like him?!” Tyr roared accompanied by the sound of tearing fabric. “I know you let him in! I know you used your power to break through the barrier! How long have you been able to do this?!”

“I swear,” Mist cried, his voice full of anguish. “I didn’t do anything!”

Tyr cried out in rage. It was quickly followed by a yelp and a thud as a body collided with the hut. I knew it had to be Mist. Branches snapped and fabric toppled down around me. Thankfully my little section near the back was still standing. It was just enough room to finish my ritual, but not before smoke had filled the tiny pocket around me. A quick glance back showed the bonfire setting the fabric and branches ablaze immediately. We were running out of time. Thankfully I only had two more runes to go.

I squeezed blood from my palm, the warm liquid running down my fingers as I drew the last two runes to complete the circle. The moment it was done, they began to glow a vibrant blue. Instead of a hole in the center of the circle like I expected, the ground welled up around it, the dirt becoming and almost liquid like substance as it filled the space. It pushed up against the crumbling hut, forcing the fabric upward.

“What the fuck is that?!” Tyr roared.

As the fabric shifted, Mist’s hand came into view. I grabbed it, pulling him toward me. However, the moment I did, I felt resistance.

“Oh no you fucking don’t,” Tyr cried.

Mist’s body was yanked away, but I wasn’t about to give up. Letting the wolf take over me once more, strength flowed through my body and I managed to tear Mist from Tyr’s grasp. I lifted him to his feet the moment the realm gate began to solidify. The arch hardened in place, a portal opening in the center. Through it I could see a

grassy field full of green. Wherever it led, it looked to be summer on the other side. I could already smell the wildflowers in bloom as a warm breeze blew through.

Before I could take a step, Tyr's face came into view as he tore away the burning fabric, smoke and snow flying in all directions. His crazed eyes locked on mine and a cruel smile curled over his lips.

"I knew I smelled a fucking traitor," he growled. He looked even more insane than the last time I'd seen him. "And I know exactly how to deal with you now."

He reached down toward a bandolier strapped across his chest. It was the same one he'd been wearing the night the resort was attacked. However, now it was replenished with grenades and the bottom holster was now home to a handgun. My heart leapt in my chest. I wouldn't put it past Tyr to have gotten his hands on some silver bullets. And if he had, I was a fucking goner.

So, as he reached for the gun, I did the only sensible thing I could think of. I snapped my mother's spellbook shut, grabbed it with both hands, and swung it as hard as I could. In his fury, Tyr didn't notice the book until the last second before it collided with his jaw. There was a sickening crunch, and I swore I saw a tooth fly through the air and land in the snow a few feet away. Tyr's body lurched to the side and when he finally drew himself upright a moment later, there was a thick stream of blood trickling out of the corner of his smiling mouth.

"That felt good," he growled. "You've got some fight in you after all. Much more than your weak piece of shit father."

He was trying to bait me, and while I felt my hackles go up, I wasn't going to fall into his trap. I stood my ground with Mist held tight at my side. Tyr's eyes darted to the side, noticing the realm gate at last.

“And I see you’ve learned some new tricks.” He gave me another unsettling smile. “It was you who killed the witch, wasn’t it?”

“She killed herself,” I shot back. “She forgot the promise she made to a witch much more powerful than her.”

“Your meddling mother has been a thorn in my side for long enough. It’s about time I brought an end to her and her magic.”

He reached down, grabbing the gun from his holster. As he took a step back and leveled it at me I felt Mist force himself in front of me. He held his arms out wide, shielding me from Tyr.

“No!” he shouted. “You’re not going to hurt him!”

“What the fuck do you care?” Tyr snapped. “You don’t even know him!”

Mist glanced back at me. “I...”

“Oh for fuck’s sake,” Tyr grinned. Then he began to laugh louder and louder until it reached a pitch that made my brain rattle. “This is so fucking pathetic.”

I pulled Mist backward another step closer to the portal.

“You love him don’t you?”

I froze in place, feeling Mist stiffen in my grasp as well. There was a burst of electricity through my body starting where my skin touched his. Was there some truth in what Tyr said? Did Mist really care for me as more than just his friend? I couldn’t deny that my heart greatly desired it to be the truth. I just wished the timing was a little better.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” Tyr growled, keeping the gun trained on us both. “And maybe when I shoot him, you’ll finally show your power and stop being such a useless piece of shit.”

My wolf senses caught a faint sound above the crackling of flames and the faint hum of the realm gate behind us. It was the squeak of tension building in the spring behind the trigger. Tyr was going to shoot whether Mist was in the way or not. In a split second I made the only decision I could. Forcing Mist to the side I heard the pin snap and the gun fire. A blazing white hot pain filled my right shoulder as the bullet tore clean through me.

I gasped in surprise, nearly crumpling to the ground. The realm gate behind me shivered, the magic nearly severed by the pain that coursed through my body. Mist tightened his grip on me, stopping me from hitting the ground.

“No!” he screamed. “Baldr!”

My mother’s magic welled up inside me, looking for a target to inflict pain on. However, with Tyr several feet away, Mist was the only target close by. I saw the gold magic shimmer in the air around me and it took nearly every last drop of strength I had to stop it from destroying the wrong person. Even so, I heard Mist cry out in pain as the golden dust clung to his skin, blisters rising up in its place as if it were burning him.

However, there was no turning back now. As Tyr lifted the gun once more, I knew our only chance of survival was through the gate. Grabbing Mist around the middle I drug him backward toward the portal, all the while keeping my gaze fixed on Tyr.

As soon as realized what was about to happen, his eyes grew wide. He dropped the gun and lunged forward, trying to grab us and stop his decade long project from being stolen. But even injured, I was too quick for him. I turned to the side, pulling Mist out

of his reach and tossing him through the portal. At the same time I felt Tyr's hand wrap around mine that was still holding the spellbook. His grip didn't find flesh, but paper. The book swung open as Tyr held tight to the back cover.

But I was already falling. There was a loud tearing sound as Tyr ripped the back third of book clean off. With no more tension holding me in the mortal realm, I rocketed through the portal ass first. The second my body cleared the gate, it collapsed. A moment later I hit hard earth, a shockwave rippling through my body.

I tried to open my eyes, but the second the gate closed and the magic severed, I felt a deep exhaustion wash over me. It was a familiar feeling considering this wasn't the first time I'd drained myself past the point of no return. My fingers twitched as I tried to find Mist, and I swore I heard a voice, but the darkness was coming in too quickly. Before I could utter a single syllable, I slipped into unconsciousness. My last thought was simple, but worrisome.

Where had the gate taken us?

Page 11

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

It took me a second to get my bearings. Slipping through whatever magic Baldr had cast was an exceedingly strange feeling. As I sat up and shook my head, I reached down, my fingers expecting to make contact with cold, unforgiving snow. Instead they found only long grass and damp earth. I opened my eyes at last, staring out at my surroundings.

I was in a field of tall green grass swaying in the warmth of a summer breeze.

The sun was high in a clear blue sky, warming my skin in a way I hadn't felt in years. All around me wildflowers dotted the landscape in bursts of vibrant color. In the distance I could see the edge of a forest, its leafy canopy rustling gently. The air was filled with the buzzing of insects and chirping of birds - sounds I had almost forgotten existed after so long in the silent, snow-covered dome.

For a moment I sat in stunned silence, overwhelmed by the sudden shift from frigid winter to lush summer. It was as if we had traveled not just through space, but time as well.

Baldr.

The thought of him snapped me back to reality. I whirled around, searching frantically until I spotted him lying motionless a few feet away.

“Baldr!” I cried, scrambling over to his still body lying in the grass. My heart pounded in my chest, threatening to burst. “Baldr! Are you okay?”

I shook his arm, trying to wake him up. But there was no response. Ice cold fear filled

my chest immediately as I thought the worst. I stared at his chest for a moment, looking for the telltale rise and fall of his breath. But I couldn't tell if my eyes were making it up or if he wasn't moving to begin with. Leaning down close, I put my ear up to his mouth.

There, hardly more than a whisper, was his breath. I breathed a sigh of relief. He wasn't dead, thank the gods. But he was very unconscious. No matter how much I tried to rouse him, he didn't respond. It was only when I pulled my hand away from his shoulder and noticed the blood smeared across my palm that I remembered the gunshot.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck," I muttered, ripping my bag open.

Thankfully it had made it through the portal with us, the strap tangled around Baldr's feet. I pulled out my favorite blanket I had wrapped up inside and ripped a long strip out of it without a second thought. I needed something to stop the bleeding and we could always find another blanket now that I was free.

Freedom... at last.

I shook my head, pushing the thought away. I could steep in that revelation later. Right now Baldr needed my help. I carefully lifted Baldr's shirt, examining the bullet wound in his shoulder. The bleeding had slowed, but it still looked nasty, the torn flesh reminding me of some of the wild game Tyr had brought me to survive on. It always seemed to look like it had been mangled beforehand, though I never knew how.

I pressed the strip of blanket against Baldr's wound, applying firm pressure to stop the flow. As I worked, I couldn't help but marvel at how warm and soft his skin felt under my hands. Even injured and unconscious, being close to him made my heart race. It was totally inappropriate, but still, I couldn't help it.

“You're going to be okay,” I murmured, more to reassure myself than anything. “I'll take care of you, just like you've always taken care of me.”

Once I was satisfied the bleeding had stopped, I used the rest of the blanket strip to bind the wound as best I could. It wasn't pretty, but it would have to do for now. I gently lowered Baldr's shirt down and sat back on my heels, unsure what to do next.

We were somewhere. And that was about all the information I had. I didn't know what kind of magic Baldr had done to get us there, but clearly it had taken every last bit of strength he had left to make it happen. Wherever we were, it was far away. There was not even a hint of winter in that new place and everything was more alive than I thought possible. The breeze was warm, the sun felt incredible against my skin, and for some reason, it seemed to be late morning instead of night like it had been back in my dome. How far had we traveled that so much could have changed so quickly? I seemed to recall the fact that the southern hemisphere of the planet had opposite seasons from us. Could he have taken us halfway around the globe in the blink of an eye?

I wasn't sure. And sitting around wondering wasn't going to get me anywhere. But I knew I couldn't go far from Baldr either. Besides, I didn't know what kind of people or animals might be lurking around the picturesque scene I found myself in. Still, I thought it best to at least get my bearings and see if there was any fresh water nearby.

I carefully rose to my feet, scanning the surrounding area. The grassy field stretched on for quite a way, dotted with colorful wildflowers swaying in the warm breeze. To the east, I could see the edge of a dense forest about half a mile away. The trees looked tall and lush, their leaves a vibrant green. In the opposite direction, the land sloped gently downward before rising back into tall mountains that seemed to stretch into the heavens. One of them, I noticed, had a strange outcropping on one side where a massive waterfall fell for at least a hundred feet, shimmering in the sunlight. At least that meant there would be water, I just wasn't sure how close by.

I decided to head that way, hoping to find a stream or river at the bottom of the valley. Before leaving, I knelt beside Baldr once more.

“I’ll be right back,” I promised, brushing a silver lock of hair from his forehead. “Just going to look for some water. Don’t go anywhere, okay?”

Of course, there was no response. With a heavy sigh, I stood and began making my way down the slope. The tall grass tickled my legs as I walked, occasionally brushing against my hands as I held them wide to soak in the sun.

It was an alien feeling being on my own without a barrier confining me to a small area. And a little unsettling. Inside my dome I knew I had nothing to fear except for Tyr’s rage. But that only came once in a while. However, there were no predators, wild animals, poisonous plants, or anything of that nature to worry about inside the dome. It kept everything out, and me locked inside. Now that I was free, the fear threatened to consume my ecstasy.

Instead of worrying, I tried to focus on the sensations all around me. The grass against my palms had tiny little teeth at its edges that seemed to cling to my skin. I could feel sweat starting to pool under my layers of ratty clothing that had previously helped keep out the cold. For a moment I considered taking them off and leaving them to be collected on my return trip, but I didn’t want to lose them in the grass. It was warm now, but if Baldr opened another portal back home, it wouldn’t be anymore. Instead I peeled the top sweatshirt off and wrapped the arms around my waist, tying them in a knot at my belt.

As I came over a small ridge, I looked out onto an open valley. And there, shimmering in the sunlight, was the water I’d been searching for. A wide sparkling river flowed in a serpentine pattern through the grassland. Even from a distance I could see the white rocks and sand that made up its shore. It looked clear enough to drink, and I’d certainly had worse in my time under Tyr’s care.

With that worry aside, I headed down the hill, letting my thoughts wander. And, of course, they went right back to Baldr. I recalled what Tyr had said before he shot Baldr, saying out loud the words that I thought I'd kept so hidden and close to my heart. But it seemed like my secret wasn't so secret after all. The moment Baldr was in danger, I'd shown my hand.

I wished I could take it back, to stop that moment from happening so Baldr didn't have to hear it from Tyr first. However, I didn't have that kind of power. Not even close. And since Baldr was currently unconscious in the green field behind me, I couldn't talk to him about it either and clear the air. What was I going to say to him anyway? That it was all a lie? Could I really manage to speak those words without giving myself away?

The answer eluded me and by the time I reached the river, I still didn't know what I should do about it. Of course, that was pushed out of my mind the moment I knelt down to drink from the crystal clear water flowing swiftly over the white stones. I cupped the cool water in my hands and drank deeply, trying to push thoughts of Baldr from my mind. There would be time to sort out my feelings later. Right now, I needed to focus on our survival in this strange new place.

The water was refreshing, washing away the taste of smoke and fear that had lingered in my mouth. I splashed some on my face as well, scrubbing the dirt and grime from my skin. Before I knew it, I was stripping off my clothes completely and climbing into the river. The cold water stung against my skin, but the heat of the sun helped drive it away just as fast. I waded out to the center, looking around to make sure nobody was watching from the grass nearby. In my dome I didn't have to worry about being naked in plain sight, no one could see me anyway. But out here... well, anyone could walk up at any time and I had no idea where we were. Still, I couldn't turn down my first proper bath in years. The dome had a small pond, but it was smelly and stagnant. This was fresh and clean running water, something I'd never known until now.

I scrubbed and scrubbed, even going as far as picking up a rough stone from the shore to scrub the dirt off the bottoms of my feet. Ten minutes later, cold and skin pink from the friction, I emerged from the river. I stepped onto the shore, relishing the feeling of being truly clean for the first time in years. As I did, I caught a glimpse of my reflection on the rippling surface.

I hardly recognized myself. My hair had grown long and wild, tangled with leaves and debris that the water didn't quite wash away. A scraggly beard covered the lower half of my face. A bruise had formed on my right cheek where Tyr had struck me before we escaped. My eyes looked haunted, with dark circles underneath speaking to years of restless sleep. No wonder Baldr had seemed so shocked when he first saw me clearly. I looked more like a monster than anything. So why had he called me handsome?

Shaking my head, I went back to my pile of clothes near the edge of the tall grass. I decided to wash them in the river and just walk back to Baldr with them in my arms. As far as I could tell, there wasn't a soul around. Besides, I wasn't ready to give up the warmth of the sun just yet, not after I'd been fighting off the cold for weeks in that little hut. So, I spent the better part of another ten minutes scrubbing down my ratty clothes the best I could, wrung them out, tucked them under my arm and headed back up the hill with my dick to the wind.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

As I crested the hill, my heart leapt into my throat. Baldr was no longer lying motionless where I'd left him. Instead, he was sitting up, looking around with a dazed expression. Relief flooded through me at seeing him conscious, quickly followed by embarrassment as I realized I was still completely naked. I froze, unsure whether to call out or try to cover myself up. I wasn't embarrassed by my body, but somehow flashing the man that I knew I had feelings for seemed a bit extreme. There were more subtle ways of getting his attention than waving my dick in his face.

Before I could decide on what to do, Baldr spotted me. His eyes went wide, a blush creeping across his cheeks. "M-Mist?" he called out, his voice hoarse. "Is that you?"

I felt my own face grow hot. "Uh, yeah. It's me. I, um... I found a river and decided to wash up." I shifted awkwardly, trying to use my bundle of wet clothes to preserve what little dignity I had left. I was pretty sure he'd seen it all already now. "I wanted to bring some water back for you but I didn't have anything to carry it in."

Baldr stared at me for a long moment, his eyes wide. Then he quickly averted his gaze, looking down at the grass. "Oh, uh... that's okay. I'm just glad you're alright. I woke up and you were gone - I was worried."

I felt a pang of guilt. "I'm sorry, I should have waited for you to wake up. I just... I didn't know how long you'd be out."

I took a few steps closer, still trying to keep myself somewhat covered with my damp clothes. "How are you feeling? Your shoulder..."

Baldr glanced down at his bandaged shoulder, grimacing slightly. "It hurts, but I'll

live. My werewolf healing has already got it sealed up. And the bullet went clean through, so at least we don't have to worry about digging it out.” He looked back up at me, his eyes inadvertently roaming over my body before settling back on my face. “Are you okay?” he asked, reaching up and lightly tracing the bruise on my cheek. “Tyr hit you pretty hard.”

“I’m fine,” I nodded, savoring the touch of his fingers against my skin. I wanted to lean into him, to let him touch me more. But that simple thought shot straight to my cock, and I had to hike up my wet clothes to hide my excitement. “I’ve had worse.”

“Well, now you don’t have to worry about it anymore,” Baldr smiled, pulling his hand away. “Tyr won’t ever lay a hand on you again. I’ll make sure of that.”

I smiled, still too focused on my dick to do much else. “Do you know where we are?” I asked, desperately trying to change the subject. “I thought maybe you teleported us to the southern hemisphere of the planet or something because of the season.”

Baldr’s smile faltered. “I... uh... didn’t teleport us anywhere.”

“But the portal...”

“That was a realm gate,” he said, anticipating my question. “And it was an emergency one. I have no idea where it took us.” He lifted a hand to shield his eyes as he looked skyward. “But I don’t mind the change of weather, that’s nice at least.”

“Realm gate?” I repeated. “What does that mean exactly?”

“It means we’re technically only about six feet from where your hut used to be. Just in a completely different dimension.”

I stared at him in utter confusion.

He just laughed. “So basically there are nine realms. They all sit in exactly the same place, stacked on top of one another. The one we live in, Midgard, is the mortal realm. That’s our home.” He looked around, taking in the scenery. “I can rule out a few of them just by the weather and the greenery. But that still leaves two or three possibilities.”

“Are we in danger?”

“Not at this moment,” Baldr answered honestly. “But in a few minutes or an hour? Maybe.”

I felt a chill run down my spine despite the warm sun on my skin. “What kind of dangers are we talking about?”

Baldr's expression turned serious. “It depends on which realm we're in. Could be anything from wild beasts to malevolent spirits to... well, gods themselves.”

My eyes widened. “Gods? Like the ones in the stories you read me?”

He nodded. “Yeah. My mother used to tell us her own stories about the other realms. Some are beautiful and peaceful, others are harsh and unforgiving. And in some, the gods of old still walk among mortals, doing whatever they please. Some of them can be helpful, while others are tricksters or terribly selfish.” He shook his head. “My brothers and I are actually named after them. Everyone with Alpha blood in the Hati and Skoll packs are.”

I swallowed hard, suddenly feeling very exposed and vulnerable. “Maybe we should find some shelter then and figure out our next move?”

“Good idea,” Baldr agreed. He started to push himself up, then winced, grabbing his injured shoulder.

Without thinking, I rushed to his side to help him, dropping my wet clothes in the grass. I worked my arm under his good shoulder, helping him to his feet. His knees shook as he stood and I suddenly recalled the reason he'd passed out in the first place. He'd spent all his energy creating the realm gate to save us. What he needed was a good meal and some rest.

But when I glanced over at him, I saw his eyes were trained on my half-hard cock. He swallowed hard, and I felt my cheeks start to burn in embarrassment.

"M-Maybe I should get dressed," I said, unable to look him in the eye.

"Y-Yeah." He stared for another long moment before he finally snapped out of it. "Yeah. Good idea."

I retreated a short distance away, using the tall grass for cover as I pulled on my damp clothes. They clung uncomfortably to my skin, but it was better than being naked. At least with them on I could try to hide my excitement around Baldr, although I sorta felt like that cat had already been let out of the bag. Maybe I could just blame the breeze on my halfy? I wasn't sure. Either way, once dressed, I made my way back to Baldr.

He was still on his feet thankfully, looking a bit unsteady but otherwise okay. His eyes scanned the horizon as if searching for something. "We should find shelter first," he said. "And food. We have no idea how long we'll be stuck here and I need to get my strength back if I'm gonna heal the rest of the way. I'll need at least a couple good meals before I can do any real magic again."

I threw my own bag over my shoulder then leaned down to pick up Baldr's. He held a hand out to take it, but I shook my head and put it on my other shoulder. He was in no condition to be carrying anything around right now. He could barely stand under his own weight to begin with. I glanced down to make sure we hadn't missed anything in

the grass and spotted his mother's spellbook next to the indent where he'd been lying. I picked it up and turned it over, realizing part of it was missing.

"Oh no," I said, holding it in my hands delicately like an injured bird. "What happened to your book?"

"Tyr..." he muttered, shaking his head. He reached out, taking the book from me and examining it. "He grabbed a hold of it as we went through the gate." He turned it over, looking at the torn spine. "It looks like he got a good chunk of it too."

"I'm sorry," I said, reaching out and placing a hand on his good shoulder. "I know it belonged to your mother."

"It's okay," he replied, doing his best to give me a smile. "I'll get it back when we get home. Now that you're free and I've got this spellbook, it should be no problem to take it back from Tyr. Besides, I doubt he did more than toss it into the snow next to your shelter. It's not like it's any use to him. He's not a witch and the one he had on call is dead."

"Thank you, by the way."

"For what?"

"For what?!" I scoffed. "For saving me you dummy!" I wrapped my arm around his waist, pointing us back the way I'd come from the river. "I've been trapped in that fucking bubble for years! You saved me from that, from that witch, and from Tyr. I owe you my life."

"I don't know about that..."

"I do," I replied, not giving him a chance to argue. I felt a strong sense of

protectiveness wash over me, my fingers tingling where I touched him. “And I’m gonna make sure Tyr never gets a chance to hurt you again. I’ll protect you.”

Baldr just looked up at me and I swore I could feel the affection radiating out from him. Or maybe it was just wishful thinking. Either way, the sensation was wonderful. Of course, we both knew he was the stronger of the two of us. Being a witch and a werewolf at the same time made him almost impossible to hurt in the first place. But somehow, Tyr had managed it. And I wasn’t gonna let it happen again. Not when now, standing here with my arm around him, I was more sure than ever how I felt about him. He was mine and even if we never became more than friends, I would make sure he stayed safe.

“Come on,” Baldr said at last. “Take me down to that river and then we’ll get under the trees. Hopefully we can find some food in the forest.”

I held him tighter, trying to lend him my strength as best I could. “Maybe you can sniff us out a wild pheasant or something.”

“Was that a dog joke?” Baldr asked, his eyebrows shooting up.

“No?” I said, not really sure if I’d offended him. “I just thought... you know... werewolf nose and all, that you’d be good at finding wild game.”

“I’m not a Labrador Retriever,” he scoffed. A playful smile filled his face. “And I haven’t been trained for that sort of thing.”

“Bad at fetch?”

“Honestly? Yes.”

We just laughed, our arms around each other as we headed down the hill.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

After a quick stop at the river, I was feeling much better. My stomach, now filled with cool water, no longer ached of hunger. But I knew that wasn't going to last long. In fact, by the time Mist helped me limp my way to the forest on the far side of the grassland, my stomach was loudly grumbling once more. Not only that, but I felt like I was on the edge of passing out again. He helped me to the forest floor, tucking me amongst the roots of a massive tree.

As I settled against the tree trunk, I felt Mist's hand linger on my shoulder. His touch was gentle, almost hesitant, as if he was afraid I might break. I looked up at him, taking in his concerned expression. Even with his wild hair and scraggly beard, there was something undeniably handsome about him. His eyes, a deep forest green, were filled with worry as they scanned my face.

"Are you sure you're okay?" he asked softly. "You look really pale."

I tried to give him a reassuring smile, but I could feel how weak it was. "I'll be fine," I said, though my voice sounded strained even to my own ears. "I just need to get some rest and food then I'll be as right as rain."

Mist nodded, his brow furrowed. "I'll see what I can find. There must be some berries or something around here, right?"

"Probably," I answered hesitantly. "But bring them back to me before you eat any. Usually my wolf nose can pick up if they're safe to eat or not."

"Maybe I can try to hunt..."

“Berries are fine. We don’t have any weapons or a way to cook game, anyway. I’m too weak to conjure up flames right now.”

Mist smiled, a look of pride washing over his face. “Well good thing I come prepared then.”

He took off his bag and pulled it open. In one hand he hefted up an old hatchet that was rusting near the handle and in the other hand was a box of matches. He really was prepared.

“I did pack some snacks,” I said, looking at my own bag forlornly. “But I ate them all on the way to get you after finding my mother’s spellbook...” I felt a bit ashamed for munching through it all, but I never would’ve been able to call up the realm gate if I hadn’t.

“At least you had some empty bottles in there for water,” Mist replied, patting me on my good shoulder. “And we’re alive. That’s what’s most important.”

“Yeah...”

“Give me a half hour,” Mist said, heading back toward the edge of the forest where berries liked to grow the most. “I’ll come back to you, I promise.”

He gave me a wave and slipped out of the trees into the sunshine. I sat there for a long moment, his words filling my chest with a warm fuzzy feeling. Of course, the butterflies in my stomach were all aflutter and thanks to my weakened state, I didn’t have the will power to stop myself from daydreaming about him.

I leaned my head back against the tree trunk, closing my eyes as I thought about Mist. The image of him standing naked on that hilltop with the tall grass blowing in waves around him was burned into my memory. Even rough and unkempt from years in

captivity, he was breathtakingly handsome. I could still picture the way the sunlight played across his tanned skin, highlighting the lean muscles beneath. And when he'd rushed to help me up, pressing his bare body against mine...

I shook my head, trying to dispel those thoughts. Now was not the time to be fantasizing about my best friend. We were stuck in an unknown realm, possibly in danger, and I was injured and weak. I needed to focus on our survival, not my unrequited feelings. And especially not my dick.

But Tyr's words kept echoing in my mind. 'You love him, don't you?' And the way Mist had reacted... it had been a dead giveaway. Of course, if that wasn't proof enough, there was the fact that he put himself between me and Tyr's gun, risking his own life when he knew full well werewolves could survive a lot more than a single bullet. Maybe we both had the same thought that it might be silver or that it could strike my heart, killing me before my werewolf healing could take over.

I couldn't help feeling a surge of affection toward him. Clearly he liked me. But how could I allow myself to like him back when I knew what the future held? My vision... the one of my death... it wasn't far off. With the way things were going back home and the fact that Mist was free now... I knew I had maybe a month at most left before I would finally meet the great beyond face to face instead of just having visions about it. However, it was the way I went that scared me the most. I knew exactly how my last ten seconds in the mortal plane would play out and getting close to Mist now would only make the pain worse for him once I was gone.

My visions were never wrong, but my heart didn't want to give up hope. Not yet. Not before we'd even begun to try.

Try? What did I want us to try? A relationship? Would Mist even want that from me? I knew he'd been trapped in that bubble nearly his entire life and that was bound to take a toll on a person mentally and emotionally. I didn't want to say he was

immature, but I was the only other person he'd known all that time. And the only one that had showed him even an ounce of kindness. If he felt anything toward me, it was probably just misplaced feelings. Once he got out in the world and started to meet other people, he'd find someone that made him truly happy.

I just wished my heart would listen to reason. Because I wasn't trapped in that bubble and I'd known plenty of people in my life. I lived in a resort to fuck's sake. And yet, I found myself infatuated with Mist, anyway. For a long time I was worried I had a savior complex and that I only liked boys that had been mistreated. But as time went on, I realized that wasn't the case. And now that I was able to see him face to face, to touch him and smell him, I knew that wasn't the case. In fact, now a new problem had sprung up and this time, it wasn't my cock.

Mist was my mate.

I'd realized it the first moment I hugged him after getting into the dome. At the time I didn't have the luxury of trying to sort through those emotions. With Tyr after us, we had to act fast. But now that I was alone with time to kill, the word kept repeating over and over in my mind.

Mate. Mate. Mate.

When Thor brought Flynn home and told me they were mates when they didn't even know one another, I thought he was crazy. How could anyone believe something so stupid and naïve? But now that I was having those same feelings, I realized that I was the one that had been naïve. As much as I wanted to push the feeling away, to tell the wolf inside me that he'd gotten it all wrong and Mist couldn't possibly be my mate, I knew I couldn't. The wolf was right. He always was. Just like the witch side of me had visions that always came true. It seemed my two lineages never made a mistake. But in this case, they were completely opposed.

If Mist was my fated mate, the one chosen for me by destiny itself, then why was I doomed to die before we could even spend time together? Why would fate be so cruel as to give me a mate and never let me have them? I felt my chest tighten and my stomach twist. It wasn't fair that I had to deny myself the one thing that made me happy after spending a lifetime worrying about wolves, war, and prophetic visions. Why couldn't I have something just for me for once?

I was pulled from my miserable thoughts by the sound of footsteps approaching. My eyes snapped open, instantly alert despite my exhaustion. The wolf inside me perked up, ready to fight off anything that might threaten me. But as I found the source of the sound, I realized it was just Mist, his arms full of berries and what looked like some kind of tubers. His earthy scent wafted toward me and I felt my body buzz with happiness to see him return.

"I found some stuff!" he called out excitedly as he drew near, a big proud smile on his face. "There's a whole patch of berry bushes not far from here, and I dug up these roots that look kind of like potatoes."

He knelt down beside me, spreading out his bounty on the dry leaves of the forest floor. There were plump blackberries, smaller red berries I didn't recognize, and several dirt-covered roots. My mouth watered at the sight. Thankfully at least some of it was edible.

"Good job," I said, genuinely impressed. "Let me take a look before we dig in though."

I leaned forward, sniffing at the berries and roots. My heightened senses told me that the red berries were definitely not edible. I scooped them up and tossed them over my shoulder.

"Not those," I sighed. Then I pointed at the raspberries. "But those are perfect."

I picked up one of the tubers, rubbing the dirt away to reveal thick brown skin with a slight reddish tinge. They were long and sort of pointed on one end. I didn't recognize the smell until I broke one in half. It was bright orange on the inside and the earthy, sweet scent of the core confirmed my suspicions.

"Sweet potatoes," I smiled. "We can eat as many of these as you want! In fact, they might be good with some of these berries crushed up on them. Or a little salt if you have that stored in that magic bag of yours."

"No salt..." Mist grumbled. "But I can get more berries." He emptied his bag next to me, refilling it with the potatoes. "And I'll take these down to the river to wash the dirt off."

"Good idea. I'll see if I can get a fire going while you're gone." I glanced around the dense forest surrounding us, spotting several fallen branches that would serve as fuel for our fire.

"Be back in a minute," Mist grinned, like this was some big adventure for him.

But his smile was infectious, and I found myself returning the expression. I supposed, for him, this was a big adventure. It was his first time out of the dome and really on his own. He was probably enjoying his hard won freedom and I couldn't blame him for that. Besides, he looked really cute when he was excited. More so than I thought possible. And in the span of a split second, I was back to fawning over him.

"Alright," I muttered to myself. "Get your ass up and start this fire." I let out a long sigh, staring at the sticks strewn throughout the woods. I had no idea what I was doing. "I wish I hadn't skipped on boy scouts now," I sighed.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

I made my way back down to the river, my bag full of dirt-covered sweet potatoes bouncing against my hip. The sun was warm on my skin and a gentle breeze rustled through the tall grass. I couldn't stop smiling as I walked, still reveling in my newfound freedom. I never knew being outside that dome could feel so good. It seemed almost criminal to be this happy.

Even though we were in an unknown realm and potentially in danger, I felt more alive than I had in years. The simple act of foraging for food, of being useful and providing for Baldr, filled me with a sense of purpose and pride. For so long I had been helpless, trapped and dependent on others. But now I could take care of myself - and more importantly, I could take care of Baldr. Now if I could just figure out how to express my feelings to him. But I supposed I had to take things one step at a time. Today sweet potatoes, tomorrow the world.

As I reached the river's edge, I knelt down and began washing the sweet potatoes one by one. The cool water felt refreshing on my hands as I scrubbed each of them down to their shiny brown skin. Even though I'd left half of my clothing back in the woods, I was still sweating under the single layer I had left on. And while the sun had dried the dampness from washing them away, sweating was just making them itchy again.

I knelt by the river and began washing the sweet potatoes. But I couldn't help as my thoughts wandered back to Baldr. The way he had looked at me when I was naked, the gentle touch of his hand on my cheek, the warmth in his eyes when he smiled at me. My heart fluttered at the recent memories that were still so fresh in my mind. I wished I could go back to those moments and do something different with them. Maybe I could tell him how I felt. But how would I even begin to explain those emotions?

I had never felt this way about anyone before. Of course, I hadn't really known anyone else besides Tyr and the occasional glimpse of others through the dome's barrier. But what I felt for Baldr was different. Special. When I was with him, I felt safe and cared for, something I'd never felt with anyone else. He made me laugh, challenged me to think, opened up whole new worlds to me through his stories and knowledge. And now he had literally given me a new world, freeing me from my prison and Tyr's grasp.

As I finished washing the last sweet potato, I made a decision. Too many things had gone unsaid between us already. I could tell by the way he looked at me that he felt more than just friendship. And so did I. If there was one thing I'd learned in my time in the dome, it was that life was too short and time too precious to waste. Was I sure I was making the most perfect decision ever? Not at all. But I was sure that I wanted Baldr close to me. Besides, the worst thing he could say was no. So, I was going to tell Baldr how I felt and then, at the very least, the decision would be up to him and I could quit torturing myself over it.

I grabbed my bag and turned it inside out, dumping all the dirt onto the ground. Then I placed the neatly washed sweet potatoes into the opposite side, keeping them nice and clean. I stooped to take one last drink from the creek before heading up the hill and back to the woods where Baldr was waiting for me. And to my surprise, the moment I crested the ridge, I saw smoke. A lot of it. Way too much to be from a little camp fire.

"Shit..." I muttered, digging my feet into the soil and taking off for the woods.

There was a surge of cold panic through my chest as I watched the smoke rise high into the sky. I hoped Baldr was okay of course, but I also knew that we were in a strange realm potentially full of creatures that we knew nothing about. That smoke was high above the treeline already. If anyone for twenty miles was looking our direction, they'd see it. And if we weren't supposed to be there... well, it could only

mean trouble.

I got back to the woods as fast as I could, forgetting about going to find more blackberries. And not a moment too soon. As I skidded to a halt in the dry leaves on the forest floor, I saw they were the cause of the smoke. Baldr had managed to light a fire, just not the collection of sticks he'd gathered. Instead he'd set the forest floor aflame and was now running around like a crazy person, attempting to stomp it out before the entire woods went up.

Dropping the potatoes to the ground, I ran over to him, digging my foot into the soft humus and kicking it over the smoldering leaves.

"Use dirt to put it out, not water," I cried. "It'll keep the smoke down!"

Baldr nodded furiously, digging his shoes into the dirt and kicking it over the dry leaves. It took us the better part of five minutes to put it all out and by the time we were done both of us were sweaty and panting like dogs.

"Fucking... fuck," Baldr berated himself. "I didn't mean to do that! It looked like it was going well and I turned my back for two seconds then poof!" He threw his arms up in the air, wincing as his bad shoulder stopped halfway. "The whole fucking place is on fire!" He looked up at me, anger in his eyes, although I could tell it was directed at himself and not me. "I'm sorry... I didn't think I was this useless."

"It's okay and you're not useless," I grinned despite myself. "But we have to move before we try again."

The smoke was still thick around us in the unmoving air under the trees. Baldr waved his hand in front of his face, trying to clear it unsuccessfully.

"Because of the smoke?"

I shook my head. “No. Because every creature for twenty miles just saw your accident rise into the sky as a giant smoke signal.”

A look of confusion crossed Baldr’s face before realization replaced it in a rush. He swore loudly, kicking the dirt in frustration.

“Fucking goddamnit I’m an idiot!”

I placed a hand on his good shoulder, trying to calm him down. “No you’re not. Mistakes happen.” I turned him around, forcing him to look at me. “Besides, you’re too handsome to be mad at.” I reached up and caressed his cheek. “But we do need to get going just in case.”

He seemed to freeze for a moment, savoring the touch of my hand against his skin. Then, snapping himself out of it, he nodded at last.

“Alright. Let’s go.”

“Here,” I said, scooping up the blackberries that had survived the fire. “Eat these on the way. You need to heal.”

“But aren’t you—”

“No,” I said, before he could finish. “I’m fine. Once we find a place for the night, I’ll share these sweet potatoes with you. Maybe we can find some salt along the way.”

“Oh yeah,” she scoffed. “I’m sure they have a grocery store around every corner here.”

I patted him on the shoulder and gathered up our things as he reproachfully ate the blackberries. It was easy to smile seeing him so grumpy. The Baldr that read to me

back at the dome was always so calm and collected. He seemed more human than ever now and I liked it. It was adorable.

We decided it was better to keep just inside the woods as we headed away from the smoke. Without really knowing where to go, we decided to keep toward the river side, following it toward the mountains in the distance. There was a point we could see some miles off where the river and the forest butted up against one another. I knew we probably wouldn't be going that far tonight, but it might be a good place to set up a more permanent shelter until Baldr was strong enough to get us home. And I had no idea how long it might take him to fully recover. Sweet potatoes were good, but being a wolf, he'd need some meat if he wanted to get back to his full strength. So far, I hadn't spotted another living creature.

As we walked, I found my ears perking up here and there to the sound of animals throughout the forest, but I never seemed to be fast enough to spot them. They didn't sound like the creatures back home. The one trapped in the dome alongside me anyway. All I had was a family of racoons, a few possums, some game birds, and a single fox that only managed to survive the first three winters in the dome. More than once I'd left food out for him and he made it a habit of coming around the hut fairly often. I gave him as much as I could knowing hunting had to be slim in such a small area. But it turned out it wasn't enough. I'd found him dead on my fourth spring there, his body frozen in the melting snow. It had been a sad day since he was the only companionship I had, thin as it was, outside of Baldr's visits.

"Can you see anything in here?" I asked as we walked. "Any critters? I feel like I can hear them but I can't quite see them."

"It's not much," he replied. "Just a few rabbits and some squirrels I think. At least that's what they smell like, mostly. But there's something off about them that I can't quite place..."

“I had a rabbit once,” I smiled, looking over at Baldr. “His name was Fluffy.”

“Original name,” Baldr chuckled. “You never told me about him.”

The smile faded. “Well, I didn’t have him for long.”

“What happened?”

“Tyr...”

Baldr was silent, but I could almost feel him seething with anger next to me.

“He brought it to me one spring, telling me it was so I didn’t feel lonely. Fluffy was so tiny that he fit in the palm of my hand. I thought, for a moment, that Tyr had finally cracked and done something kind for me. That he might not be as bad as I thought.” I sighed, shaking my head. “I spent every waking moment caring for that rabbit, keeping him safe, and getting him food. He was my constant companion and for a couple months, I felt almost normal.”

I stopped and Baldr stiffened next to me in anticipation. He knew what was coming before I’d even said it.

“Then Tyr came one day, picked him up the scruff of the neck, and demanded I do magic. When I couldn’t draw on my power, he... he snapped Fluffy’s neck and tossed him on the ground in front of me.”

“God I wish that man was dead,” Baldr growled.

“He almost died that day,” I replied, my voice low.

“What? How?”

“My magic.” My voice shook as I recalled the feeling of losing control and total chaos taking over my body. “It... It exploded out of me in waves of blue and sickly green. It wrapped around him and nearly choked the life out of him.” I felt myself choke up. “If I’d been able to hold out just a few more seconds... Tyr would’ve been dead years ago and I wouldn’t have had to deal with his malice and torture for all this time. But the magic was too much for me to handle. When I awoke Tyr was gone, nothing but a giant crater left in the earth where he’d stood. I held out hope for a few days that I’d killed him. But he came back. He always came back.”

“I... I never knew...”

“I didn’t want to scare you,” I said, reaching up and wiping the tears from my eyes. “And I didn’t want you to know it was my fault that Tyr tortured me. Or that he tried to kill you.”

“None of that was your fault—”

“It was,” I said, cutting him off. “Because I gave him a taste of my power and let him live. I didn’t teach him to fear me that day. Instead, I taught him that I could be broken. And ever since then, I’ve done everything I could to keep my emotions at bay.” I glanced over at Baldr, sadness curling up the back of my throat. “But when I thought he was going to kill you... I almost lost control again. I couldn’t bear the thought of my only friend in the whole world being gone. Not... Not again.”

Baldr stopped, reaching out and pulling me into a hug. I returned the gesture, savoring the heat of his body against my own. I felt a sort of shock where our bare skin touched. It made me feel alive and cared for, something I wasn’t used to in either respect.

“But I’m okay,” Baldr said softly against my neck. “And even if something does happen to me someday, it won’t be your fault.”

“You don’t know that...”

“No,” he said sternly, pulling back and looking me in the eye. There was something there in his gaze, like he knew something that I didn’t. “I need you to promise me that if anything happens to me, you will not blame yourself no matter the circumstances.”

“But... you’re not going anywhere. Are you?”

He didn’t answer my question. “Just promise me. And mean it.”

I stared at him for a long moment, trying to figure out what he meant. But when I couldn’t puzzle him out, I just sighed.

“Alright. I promise.”

He let out a long sigh before giving me another hug. “Now come on. Let’s find a place to finally rest.”

I watched him walk a few feet before hurrying after him. He was hiding something from me, I just wished I knew what it was so I could help. I hated to see him hurting. That look he’d given me was a mixture of pain and knowing. I didn’t know a single detail beyond that, but it broke my heart, anyway. Out of everyone I’d ever known, Baldr was the one who deserved happiness the most. Something was holding him back though, and I needed to find out what it was. Not because I had to know, but because I wanted to help him through it. It was the least I could do after all he’d done for me.

With a sigh, I tucked away my feelings for the time being. I’d planned to tell him everything, but now that I saw the hurt in his eyes, it felt wrong to add more stress to his life. For now we would concentrate on getting home. And then, once the craziness was over, maybe then we could finally be truly honest with one another at last.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

By the time we found a suitable place to spend the night, the sun was sinking low in the sky. We'd kept inside the woods the entire journey, trying to stay out of sight in case someone or something came looking for the source of the smoke. It wasn't a difficult journey for the first hour or so, but after that we started have to weave our way through not only the trees, but several large jutting boulders as well. It wasn't until we came to a small clearing where more sunlight could come through that I realized they weren't boulders, but ruins of an ancient city overgrown by the forest.

And that's where we decided to take shelter for the night.

"This is incredible," Mist said as I let him start our cooking fire. I sure as hell wasn't gonna do it again. "This is just like in those books you read to me! Adventurers out on a quest, exploring ruins of an ancient world... I wonder what kind of place this used to be?"

"I'm not sure," I replied, watching him flawlessly get a fire going with hardly a lick of smoke rising into the air. "But let's hope we don't have to go exploring ancient ruins... I'm not sure I came prepared for that sort of thing."

"Where's your sense of adventure?!"

"I left it at home," I chuckled. "Along with everything else I own."

Mist stiffened, his gaze fixed on the flames. "I'm sorry you got dragged away because of me."

Reaching out a hand, I grabbed his shoulder and spun him toward me, my eyes fixed

on his in the darkness that was slowly consuming the forest around us. “Don’t ever apologize for that. If I could do it over a hundred times, I’d get you out every single time.”

He smiled at that. “Thanks.”

“Anytime.”

It took a bit more effort to let go of him than I expected, but I didn’t want to overstay my welcome. I still craved the feeling of his skin against my own and the more time we spent together, the harder it was to keep my feelings at bay. But I clenched my jaw and forced myself to pull my hand away. Instead, I committed to being satisfied just watching him work. In less than twenty minutes he’d burned down our wood, created a glowing bed of coals, and had nestled the sweet potatoes inside.

“There,” he said, brushing his hands clean of soot. “They’re gonna take a little while to cook, but it’ll be worth the wait.” He glanced around the darkening ruins surrounding us. “If we’re gonna stay here for a little while, maybe we should look for a pot or something. There might be one buried in one of these houses.”

“I saw a place further down the river where the woods and the water meet,” I replied. “I thought that would be a good place to camp out until I can get us back to our own world.”

Mist settled down beside me with a nod, his back leaned up against the stone wall. We’d decided to make camp inside one of the old homes that still had most of its walls. There was no roof of course and the tree growing through the center of it would’ve stopped another from being put in place. Still, it kept the breeze out and the heat in. It was enough to get through the night at the very least.

“Any idea where we are yet?” he asked, crossing his arms tight in front of him.

“I’m not sure. This place seems a bit too normal to be the home of the light or dark elves. And it doesn’t feel magical enough to be Vanaheim. I suppose it might be Asgard? But again, it’s really normal.”

“Are those places not normal?”

“Everything I’ve read or movies I’ve seen would lead me to believe they’re either whimsical, magical, or extremely gaudy. And this place seems to be none of those things.” I glanced around us at the ruins. “And I don’t remember any of them having rotting cities. Plus, if this was Asgard or Vanaheim, I would’ve expected to see something incredible and magical by now. But I haven’t even felt anything, much less seen it.” I paused for a moment. “Both places are home to powerful gods.”

“Do you really think we’ll see one?” Mist asked, his face lighting up.

“I hope not,” I replied. “They don’t exactly have the most wholesome reputations.”

I glanced over, noticing he was starting to shiver despite the hot coals in front of us. Reaching out, I patted him on the shoulder and beckoned for him to get closer. He smiled wide, scooted until his hip was pressed against mine, and leaned into me, my arm wrapped over his shoulders.

Mist nestled closer to me, his body warm against my side. I tried to ignore the way my heart raced at his proximity, focusing instead on the practical need to share body heat. But it was difficult not to be hyper-aware of every point of contact between us - his shoulder pressed to my chest, his hip against mine, the brush of his hair against my neck. His earthy scent was strong, and it made my wolf run in circles, chasing his own tail in excitement. At the same time I felt my magic swirl and bubble as if it were spurred into action just by his proximity. It seemed both the wolf and the witch were fixated on this man and I couldn’t blame them. It was taking everything I had not to kiss him right then and there.

“This is nice,” Mist murmured, his voice soft in the gathering darkness. “I’ve never gotten to sit like this with anyone before.”

I swallowed hard, trying to keep my voice steady as I replied, “Yeah, it is nice. I keep forgetting there’s so many things you’ve never done.” I trailed off for a moment. “I uh... I hope I’m living up to your expectations. You know, as a friend and stuff.”

“You are. And then some.”

Warmth bloomed in my chest at his words and I felt myself lean into him on instinct. Before I knew what I was doing, I pressed a tiny kiss to his temple. About halfway through I tried to abort and make it look like I’d merely bumped him by accident. He didn’t react, but it felt like he relaxed a little more. I wasn’t sure if that made me feel good or terrified. Maybe it was a bit of both.

We sat in companionable silence for a while, watching the embers of our fire glow. The sweet potatoes were starting to smell delicious as they roasted in the coals. My stomach growled loudly, reminding me how long it had been since I’d eaten anything substantial. Less than a day didn’t sound like a long time to go without food. But when I’d teleported several miles, retrieved a spellbook from a painting’s pocket dimension, and created realm gate from scratch in a single day, it was like going without food for a week. All I could say was that I was glad Mist had dug up so many potatoes because I fully planned on eating at least three of them tonight alone.

As we sat there, enjoying each other's warmth and company, I found my thoughts drifting back to the future that awaited us. The vision of my death loomed large in my mind, a constant shadow over any happiness I might find on our journey. I wanted so badly to just let myself fall for Mist, to explore these feelings between us. But how could I, knowing what was to come? I’d thought about it a thousand times that day and still I couldn’t come up with an answer. Just a lingering sense of restlessness.

I must have tensed up, because Mist lifted his head to look at me with concern. “What's wrong?” he asked softly.

I shook my head, forcing a smile. “Nothing.” I didn’t sound very convincing, not even to me.

He frowned, clearly not believing me. “You can talk to me, you know? About anything.”

I sighed, debating how much to tell him. “I just... I worry about what's going to happen when we get back. Tyr won't give up easily. And there’s the whole situation with my brothers that has to get sorted out. Plus I don’t even know if Loki is alive. I’m trying to convince myself he is, but the more I try, the more I begin to doubt.” I stared down at the coals and the sweet potatoes whose skin had turned completely black in the heat. “And I’m fucking hungry.”

“They should be about done,” Mist said, trying to be helpful as he leaned forward to check on the sweet potatoes. He carefully rolled one out of the coals with a stick, testing its softness. “Actually, they’re perfect.”

He used the stick to roll the rest out, letting them cool on some large leaves he'd gathered earlier. The rich, sweet aroma filled the air, making my mouth water. Even without salt or something sweet to top them with, they smelled heavenly. Besides, I was too hungry to complain.

“Here,” Mist said, handing me the largest one. “I can’t help with the other things that are bothering you, but I can at least help with this. Besides, you need it more than I do.”

I started to protest, but my growling stomach betrayed me. “Thanks,” I said instead, taking the steaming potato. “Are you doing okay with all of this?” I asked, peeling

the skin back and taking my first bite. “It’s a lot to take in all at once.”

“I’m having the best day of my life,” he grinned, picking up his own potato. “I’m free, I’m with the best guy in the whole world, and we’re on a storybook style adventure. Things literally couldn’t get any better.”

I stared at him for a long moment, chewing thoughtfully. “You are a lot more positive than I thought you would be.”

“Why wouldn’t I be? The worst thing that’s ever happened to me already happened.”

Those words speared my chest like a razor sharp icicle. My blood ran cold, and I forced myself to nod, pretending I understood him. But only I knew how wrong he was. Because the worst day for me, the day I died, was also going to be his worst day. He just didn’t know it yet. Having that knowledge without the heart to speak it aloud was my curse.

We ate in silence for a few minutes, savoring the simple meal as I tried to think about something other than my morbid visions. I chose to focus on the food. The sweet potato was perfectly cooked, soft and creamy on the inside with a charred skin that peeled away easily. It wasn’t much, but after the day we’d had, it tasted like one of those gourmet meals I could only get if I went out of town for the weekend.

The entire time we ate, Mist didn’t leave my side. He remained tucked up against me, the heat of his skin making it difficult to stay focused. And the more I tried to think about something else, the more my thoughts drifted back to him. Before I knew it, my cock was standing at full attention. Thanks to the darkness and my thicker clothing, I didn’t have to worry about him spotting it even though he was so close. But I still felt embarrassed by it. Clearly the wolf wanted him. Badly.

As we finished eating, Mist still didn’t move. In fact, he grabbed one of his ratty

coats and threw it over our shoulders as a makeshift blanket, his arm wrapping around my waist from behind as he snuggled in. I could barely breathe from being so turned on by him. Before I'd been able to push it away, to write it off as nothing. But now that his scent was all around me and his fingers were digging into my hip, I couldn't pretend it was nothing anymore. I wanted to jump up and shout that he was my mate and that we were meant to be together forever. My visions though... I knew I shouldn't. I just wasn't sure if I had the willpower to resist.

My wolf was going crazy, urging me to claim my mate over and over again. To solidify the bond permanently. And the witch in me was swirling with magic, wanting to bind us together forever. The sensations were so strong and yet, I couldn't force myself to move. I knew I should pull away, put some distance between us before I did something I'd regret. Instead, I found myself leaning into him, savoring every point of contact between our bodies.

"Baldr?" Mist's voice was soft, hesitant.

"Hmm?" I couldn't trust myself to form words.

He shifted slightly, tilting his head to look up at me. In the fading firelight, his green eyes seemed to glow. "Do you... Do you have a partner back home?"

It was a surprising question and one I never expected to have to answer. "No," I said slowly, biting back all the other things I wanted to say. "I don't."

Mist let out a heavy sigh. "Me neither." Of course I knew that, but it was a subject we'd never talked about in earnest. "Do you want one?"

"I think everyone wants a somebody," I replied, brushing his hair out of his face. "Even people who don't want sex or romance still want companionship. And since I'm a wolf, having a pack and a family is important to me. I love my brothers... but

sometimes they aren't enough, you know? Sometimes I want..." I trailed off, leaving my obvious words unsaid.

"Yeah," Mist nodded. "Me too. I mean, I don't have any family, but the idea of having one is nice. But that special person to come home to... that feels like home... that sounds nice." He glanced up at me, his eyes sparkling in the firelight. "It's just like those books you've read to me. Once all the adventure is done, the hero always has a special person to return to. They always get their happily ever after."

I let out a long sigh. "Those are just stories. Sometimes... Sometimes life isn't like that."

He cocked his head to the side, one eyebrow arched. "But you want that, don't you?"

"Of course I do but..." I paused, trying to find the right words. "None of us are promised tomorrow and there could come a day, sooner or later, where it's just too late for that sort of thing."

"How can it ever be too late for love?"

I stared at him for a long moment, trying to come up with an argument to prove my point. But the longer I thought about it, the more I came up with nothing. I sighed again, realizing that I was going to have to tell him the truth, eventually. Besides, if I told him about my vision now he might deal with it better when it finally came true. My demise wasn't far off, and it was about time Mist understood the role he had to play in it. I just hoped he would speak to me again once I was finished.

"Mist... about my visions. There's something—"

A high-pitched scream echoed through the woods around us and we both froze in place. We stared at one another wide-eyed until a crunching in the leaves nearby

began to draw closer.

We'd been found.

Page 16

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

I ce cold fear burned through my veins, filling me from head to toe. Suddenly all the heat from my meal and the fire was gone. And Baldr was just as chilled beside me, the horrendous screeching noise piercing us down to our bones.

My heart pounded in my chest as I strained to hear where the scream and footsteps were coming from. Baldr was tense beside me, his eyes darting around in the darkness beyond our little camp. I could see something flash in them, a sort of gold glimmer. I wasn't sure if it was his wolf side or the witch, but I didn't have time to worry about it.

“What was that?” I whispered, my voice quaking with fear.

“I don't know,” Baldr replied softly, keeping his voice low. “But we need to move. Now.”

He started to stand, but I grabbed his arm. “Wait! The fire - won't they see it?”

Baldr cursed under his breath. “You're right. We need to put it out quickly.”

We scrambled to our feet, kicking dirt over the glowing embers as fast and quietly as we could. The forest around us had gone eerily silent after that initial scream. No birds, no insects, nothing but the sound of our own ragged breathing and the crackle of leaves underfoot.

Baldr grabbed my arm, pulling me toward him. “We need to move,” he whispered urgently. “Now.”

I nodded, too frightened to speak in the eerie silence. We quickly gathered our meager belongings and shouldered our packs. The crunching of leaves and snapping of twigs resumed. And this time, it was much closer than before. But this time it was accompanied by an unsettling chittering sound.

“This way,” Baldr hissed, grabbing my hand and pulling me deeper into the ruins. “And stay quiet.”

We moved as silently as we could through the crumbling stone structures, ducking low to avoid being silhouetted against the night sky. My heart pounded so hard in my chest that I could hear nothing but the rush of blood in my ears.

We’d managed no more than fifty feet before another ear-splitting screech tore through the air. Somehow I knew the creature had found our camp site and the remains of our dinner. But then another screech rose up to answer it. And another.

Apparently there was more than one.

Baldr’s hand trembled as he pulled me through the labyrinth of buildings in the dark. Now and then, when his eyes caught the moonlight, I saw the greenish animal-like reflection in the back of his eyes. It seemed he’d let the wolf take over, at least a little bit, to help guide us through the darkened maze. However, as the crunching of leaves and echoing cries grew louder, I realized with a sinking heart that we were not going fast enough. And I had a feeling that even if we were running at a full sprint, those creatures, whatever they were, would still catch us in the end.

As the movement through the leaves got closer, I finally realized why the footsteps had sounded so strange from afar. They weren't footsteps at all. Instead it was a constant rustling that seemed to shift back and forth, ebbing and flowing with intensity as the creature moved. It almost sounded like slithering. And that threw me off completely. Before I thought they might be draugr, mindless zombies stumbling

through the forest in search of prey. But now I had no idea what was after us and the fear seemed to clutch its cold claws around my heart.

One thing was for certain though, they were not our friends.

Panic threatened to overwhelm me as we ran. But I forced myself to focus, to keep moving forward with Baldr. We weaved through the crumbling ruins as quietly as we could, ducking behind walls and darting between shadows. The moonlight only illuminated us once, but a screech tore through the air the moment it did. Baldr skidded to a halt in the dry leaves, his grip on my hand tightening painfully. I followed his gaze and my blood ran cold. There, slithering between two fallen pillars, was a creature unlike anything I'd ever seen before.

It was massive, easily ten times larger than me or Baldr, with a long serpentine body covered in iridescent scales that shimmered in the moonlight. However, where I expected to see a serpent's head, I saw something more akin to the dragons Baldr had read to me about in his books. Its mouth filled with razor-sharp teeth and bony spines protruded down its back. Multiple frills and spikes jutted out in every direction. Even if it didn't manage to bite, a single hit from its head would prove fatal.

"Oh my god..." I muttered, holding tightly to Baldr.

"Nidhogg," Baldr whispered. "Or one of its children at least. Usually they only feed on the sap of Yggdrasil, the world tree."

"Well it looks like it wants to feed on us right now..."

Another screech rose up behind us and both of us turned to see a second serpent rise up easily ten feet off the ground like a cobra. Its neck flattened into a wide hood, two bright iridescent eye-like patterns on its scales that struck me to the core with fear.

Baldr pulled me close, his eyes darting between the two massive serpents that were slowly closing in on us. I could feel him trembling slightly. But regardless of his fear, he kept himself between me and the serpents, shielding me with his body. I watched as his muscles flexed, his body seeming to grow against his will.

“We're trapped,” I whispered, my voice barely audible even to my own ears.

“Not yet,” Baldr replied, his voice low and strained. “I have an idea, but you need to trust me completely. Can you do that?”

I nodded without hesitation. “Of course.”

“Good. When I say run, you run as fast as you can toward that fallen pillar.” He nodded toward a massive stone column that had toppled onto its side, creating a sort of ramp. “Don't look back, don't hesitate. Just run. Understand?”

“But what about-”

“Promise me, Mist.”

I stared at him for as long as I dared, knowing I didn't have any other choice. “I promise.”

Baldr let go of my arm, stepping out in front of me. Both of the serpents raised their heads with a screeching hiss, their fangs extending. Despite their enormous size and their obvious ill intentions, Baldr didn't falter or back down. Instead, he stood his ground. To my surprise, he kicked off his shoes and unbuttoned his jeans. It would've been almost comical if I wasn't sure we were going to die.

But then his body began to change. Muscles rippled as Baldr arched his back, a cry echoing from his mouth that slowly turned into a howl. His body swelled, expanding

in all directions. The tearing sound of fabric filled the air as Baldr grew to nearly twice his human size. Dark claws sprouted from his long fingers, massive fangs dropped into his mouth, giving him a permanent snarl. His gold eyes began to glow in the dark as fur sprouted all over his body.

It was with a sinking feeling in the gut that I realized why Baldr wanted me to run. This was his Alpha form, one he said could be unpredictable when emotions were running high. In that form, he and the wolf were one. But something about his witch powers caused the wolf to become crazed and almost mad when he let it take over. However, his Alpha form, unlike those of his brothers, could do magic too.

“Run...” he growled through heavy breaths. “RUN!”

I didn't wait to be told again.

I took off running as fast as my legs could carry me, heading straight for the fallen pillar Baldr had indicated. Behind me, I heard a deafening roar that shook the ground beneath my feet, followed by the angry screeches of the serpents. The sounds of battle erupted - snarling, hissing, the impact of massive bodies colliding. Within seconds there was a blast of heat against my back and the ruins around me were suddenly illuminated by a bright golden light.

Every instinct screamed at me to look back, to see if Baldr was okay. But I had promised him I wouldn't stop, so I forced myself to keep my eyes forward and my legs pumping. The fallen pillar loomed ahead, a faint glimmer of moonlight reflecting off its smooth surface.

As I neared it, I realized it was even larger up close than I'd initially thought. The pillar was easily twice my height in diameter. How was I supposed to climb this thing? But I didn't have time to worry about that. Instead, I dove into some of the brush near the base, concealing myself as best I possible. From that vantage point I

could watch the battle unfold as werewolf and monstrous serpents fought to kill.

From my hiding spot, I watched in awe and terror as Baldr battled the giant serpents. His massive werewolf form moved with incredible speed and strength, dodging strikes and retaliating with vicious slashes of his claws that drew dark silvery blood from their slithering bodies. Golden magic swirled around him, occasionally bursting out in blinding flashes that seemed to sear the serpents' scales. From my perspective, it looked like he was winning this fight all too easily.

One of the creatures lunged at Baldr, its fangs gleaming in the moonlight. He caught it by the neck, muscles straining as he held it back. With a roar, he slammed it into a crumbling wall, stone cracking under the impact. The serpent screeched in pain but quickly recovered, its tail whipping around to knock Baldr off his feet. I thought he would dodge it like he had all their other attacks, but it seemed the snakes were working as a team. The second lunged, forcing him to dodge. But that spelled disaster as his feet were swept out from underneath him.

As he fell, the second serpent redirected and struck, sinking its fangs into Baldr's thigh. The Alpha werewolf cried out in pain, his voice filling the forest for miles. The first serpent took its chance to attack as well, sinking its fangs into Baldr's opposite shoulder. For one sinking moment, I wondered if the Nidhogg juveniles were venomous. But before I could form my panic properly, golden light began to spill from the Nidhogg's mouths. They pulled back, but not fast enough to avoid the blast.

Magic of a previously unseen magnitude erupted from Baldr in a bright flash. The force ejected the Nidhogg venom from his body. And, just as I lifted an arm to shield my eyes, I caught a glimpse of both serpents disintegrating from the hood up, their heads blasted clean off their bodies. By the time the forest went dark and I blinked the blindness out of my eyes, all I saw were their headless bodies slowly writhing to a stop. Silvery blood covered every inch of the clearing, the moonlight glinting all over the ruins as it caught the gore's surface. But my eyes were fixed on Baldr.

He was not covered in blood like everything else and while the bit wounds remained on his body, I could see the venom splashed across the ground in front of him. He was bleeding freely, but he didn't look like he was about to die or pass out for that matter. In fact, as he pulled himself back to his feet and tipped his head back toward the moon, he seemed almost invigorated.

His lips parted and a long, high-pitched howl filled the air. Even before he stopped, I could hear it echoing through the trees, down the valley, and through the mountains. Everyone in that world knew a werewolf was on the loose now, I was sure of it. I stood up, pushing the branches aside so I could see him better. As soon as he turned back, he was going to need my help. He was so weak... he hadn't eaten nearly enough to recover just yet. But that's when one of the small branches snapped in my hand, the sound cutting him off mid-howl.

My heart pounded in my chest as Baldr's glowing golden eyes locked onto me. There was no trace of recognition in them - only a primal, predatory hunger that sent chills down my spine. This was exactly what he had warned me about, why he had told me to run and not look back. In his Alpha form, consumed by the magic and adrenaline of battle, Baldr wasn't fully in control. He'd gotten a taste for blood with the serpents, but the look in his eyes told me he needed more.

I held perfectly still, barely daring to breathe as the massive werewolf stalked toward me. His lips were pulled back in a snarl, exposing long, razor-sharp fangs. Blood - both his own and the silvery blood of the Nidhogs - matted his light fur. He moved with an eerie grace despite his injuries, muscles rippling beneath his skin with each step. Cold fear filled my chest as I realized there was no escaping this monster. But... he wasn't just a monster, right? Baldr had to still be in there somewhere.

"Baldr," I said softly, my voice shaking. "It's me. It's Mist. You know me."

A low growl rumbled from his chest as he took a step toward me. His claws flexed,

still dripping with silvery Nidhogg blood.

“Please,” I whispered. “Come back to me. I know you're in there somewhere. And I know you don't want to hurt me. That's not who you are.

He stalked closer, a snarl still curled over his face. I stood up fully, knowing there was no way to outrun him. Instead, I backed up against the base of the broken pillar. My back pressed against the stone as I tried to find my footing in the loose gravel and dry leaves all around me. I felt stone under my fingers, searching for something, anything to defend myself with until Baldr came to his senses. His adrenaline fueled rage couldn't last forever, right?

“Baldr,” I said again, sliding my back against the stone as I inched to the right. “I know you can hear me. You saved us both from those serpents. You can let go of the wolf now.”

There was a strange glint in his eye, like the wolf lost control for a split second. I couldn't help but feel a sudden surge of hope. I was getting through to him! If I just kept talking, maybe he would come back to me.

“That's right,” I said softly, holding out a hand. “You did it. You saved us. Everything is okay now. Why don't you just take my hand and we can curl up together for the night side by side?”

He shook his head again, the affectionate words clearly sinking in. Maybe that was it. Maybe I had to appeal to his emotions to get the wolf to back down. Hopefully it didn't make things worse. Either way, I was willing to give it a try.

“Wouldn't that be nice? Me spending all night wrapped in your arms? Honestly... I've been dreaming about it for a long time.”

The wolf seemed to shrink slightly, the muscles a little less tense and full of rage than before. His snarl faded and a look of curiosity took its place. I was getting somewhere.

“I know this probably isn’t the right time to say it, but I’ve always had a crush on you. And now that I’m free... I don’t know... I guess I wanna know what it feels like to be kissed, you know?” I looked up into those big golden puppy eyes of his. “To be kissed by you.”

Baldr took another step forward, his feet crunching in the leaves. However, there was a strange clicking noise as he full weight leaned onto the ball of his foot. Baldr’s head swiveled as if he was listening for something. Then, without warning, a loud crack split the air.

Suddenly, the earth dropped out from under me. My stomach was in my throat as I fell into darkness, hands flailing but finding nothing. However, I’d only dropped a handful of feet before I saw the massive Alpha werewolf form of Baldr hurtling toward me. His body collided with mine, he wrapped me up tightly in his arms, and we plummeted into the darkness together not knowing when the final blow would rip our lives away in the blink of an eye.

Page 17

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

I didn't remember the impact of hitting the ground. All I knew when I came to consciousness was that we were no longer falling. That and the fact that I was surrounded by a gently moving, furry warmth.

Baldr.

Opening my eyes, I saw that we weren't in pitch darkness like I expected. Instead, there was a strange fungus growing from the walls like clumped strands of long hair that emitted an eerie green glow. Despite their off-putting shape, I was happy for the light. Being trapped in the darkness until we eventually starved to death wasn't a way I wanted to go. But that wasn't my main concern at that moment.

I ran my hands over Baldr's body, realizing I was perched around his waist. While he was still a little gross from his battle with the Nidhogs, he seemed to be uninjured himself. At least on the surface. Already his bite wounds were closed and the bleeding stopped. Still, I ran my hands over his chest, neck, and face to make sure I hadn't missed anything because he was still unconscious.

A pair of hands slowly wrapped around my waist, fingers trailing down toward my ass.

Well, he was unconscious.

I glanced down to find myself not looking at the Baldr I knew, but the face of an Alpha wolf, his eyes still glowing golden. However, instead of an insatiable need to kill in those eyes, there was something else. Something softer, but still just as hungry. It wasn't until his hands gripped my ass that I realized what it was.

Lust.

My body reacted immediately, his touch like electricity through my system. I wasn't sure whether it was the adrenaline, the fear, or the sheer intensity of the last few minutes, but I found myself leaning into him, begging for more with my body language. After all, I'd fantasized about being with Baldr many times. There wasn't much else to do but live in my imagination while I was trapped in that bubble. I'd thought about him in his Alpha form too, wondering what it would feel like to be fucked by a werewolf. And now, strange as the circumstances were, I had a chance. As much as I knew I should probably not give into his wolfy advances, there was something about his scent and the way he touched me that made it impossible to deny him.

I gasped as Baldr's clawed hands gripped my hips, pulling me flush against his muscular body. His fur was surprisingly soft against my skin where my shirt had ridden up. I could feel the heat radiating off of him, smell his wild, musky scent. It made my head spin. Not to mention the growing problem grinding against my ass that was becoming harder and harder to ignore.

"Baldr," I breathed, unsure if I was trying to stop him or encourage things to go further.

He growled low in response, the sound vibrating through his chest. His golden eyes locked onto mine, filled with primal hunger. Slowly, deliberately, he leaned in and ran his tongue along my neck. The sensation sent shivers down my spine. I couldn't help the tiny moan that escaped my lips, egging him on even further.

Part of me knew this was dangerous though. Baldr wasn't fully in control right now - the wolf was driving his actions. But another part of me, a part that had been lonely and touch-starved for years, craved this closeness that I'd dreamed and fantasized about. He was the man I wanted, the man I loved. And despite our circumstances, I

wasn't sure I'd ever get this chance again. With monsters roaming the realm and trouble waiting for us back home, the future wasn't guaranteed. Baldr of all people knew that with his visions. And I didn't want to let fear stop this moment from happening.

I leaned into his touch, my body trembling with a mixture of fear and arousal. "I... I want this," I admitted softly. "But only if you do too." I reached up, cupping his face with my hands. "Are you sure this is okay?"

His golden eyes locked onto mine, and I saw a flicker of recognition there. He wasn't fully human, not by a long shot, but there was an awareness behind those eyes that hadn't been there before. He nodded slowly, one clawed hand coming up to gently caress my cheek.

I leaned into Baldr's touch, savoring the gentleness of his clawed hand against my skin. His golden eyes searched my face, as if memorizing every detail. Slowly, he leaned in, pressing his lips against my neck. I felt his hot breath ghost over my skin as he inhaled deeply, taking in my scent. A low rumble of approval vibrated through his chest.

My heart raced as Baldr's hands roamed over my body, exploring with an almost reverent touch. His claws grazed lightly over my skin, careful not to hurt me despite their sharpness. I shivered at the sensation, arousal building within me.

Tentatively, I ran my own hands over his fur-covered chest, marveling at the powerful muscles beneath. Baldr let out a pleased growl, encouraging my exploration. My fingers worked over his torso, tracing every curve and ridge of his beautifully sculpted body. With no small amount of courage, I leaned down, pressing my lips against his. With a low growl, he surged forward. His fangs grazed my bottom lip, sending a shiver down my spine. I melted against him, wrapping my arms around his neck and tangling my fingers in his fur. A low buzz filled my body from

head to toe before it pooled in my groin. Waves of pleasure washed over me as I felt the breath leave my body.

With a deep breath and trembling hands, I reached down and began to undo my pants. Baldr growled softly in approval, his claws flexing against my hips. I could already feel his massive erection pressing against me through the tattered remains of his jeans. As I shimmied out of my clothes, Baldr helped by literally shredding what was left of his own with his claws.

I gasped as Baldr's fully erect cock sprang free. It was massive, easily twice the size of a normal human's, with a thick knot at the base. For a moment, I felt a flicker of fear - not only did I not expect that particular feature, but how the hell was it supposed to fit? I was a virgin, and that seemed a bit... intense. Still, I couldn't help but stare in a mixture of awe and trepidation. He was enormous, far larger than I'd imagined even in my most vivid fantasies. A small part of me wondered if I could even take him, but the rest of me was eager to try. And the hunger in Baldr's eyes and the ache of desire in my own body quickly pushed those concerns aside. I'd just have to do the best I could.

Baldr growled low as I stared, his hands gripping my hips as he positioned me over his throbbing member. I could feel the heat radiating from it and smell his musky arousal. My own cock was achingly hard, leaking precum onto his fur-covered stomach. For a moment I wondered how in the world we were going to make things work without any lubrication because that massive dick of his wasn't going anywhere without it. But that question was answered as Baldr lifted me up and turned me around so that my back was facing him.

I sat there for a moment, feeling a bit on display and suddenly self-conscious. However, I didn't have time to think about it as he grabbed my hips once more and pulled my ass up his body. Before I knew it, his face was buried between my cheeks and gasped in shock as his hot, wet tongue pressed against my entrance. The

sensation was unlike anything I'd ever experienced before. His large hands gripped my hips firmly, holding me in place as he worked me open with his mouth. The wet heat of his tongue sent shivers of pleasure through my body. I gripped his thighs tightly, overwhelmed by the new sensations.

However, in my new position, I found myself nose to tip with his cock. Between the adrenaline fueled bliss and the musky scent of his arousal, I couldn't deny myself the opportunity. Besides, the large bead of pre-cum forming at his slit looked far too tasty to turn down.

Wrapping my hand around his massive cock, I pulled him toward my lips, letting my tongue trail over his crown. The salty sweetness of his pre-cum surprised me. But what surprised me more was the shiver that ran through my body because of it. Something about his flavor just felt... right. I didn't know how to explain it, only that I felt I was meant to do this. It seemed stupid, but the feeling didn't fade as I licked him over and over again.

Moans were streaming out of me now thanks to Baldr's work and the only way I could stifle them was to take him in my mouth. Opening my jaw wide, I wrapped my lips around his hot, pulsing shaft, swallowing the first couple of inches easily. However, I found it almost impossible to go much further than that. He was just too big, and I was too inexperienced to know how to accomplish it. Still, his pleasurable growls of satisfaction against my hole were all I needed to keep going.

It was almost impossible to concentrate on what I was doing though. I squirmed in Baldr's grip, his claws flexing against my skin. His tongue delved deeper, stretching me in ways I'd never imagined. The initial discomfort quickly gave way to waves of pleasure. I couldn't help the desperate sounds that escaped my lips as he continued to give me the tongue lashing of a lifetime. I wanted more and I pushed back against him to prove to him how much I loved it. Baldr growled in approval, the vibrations adding to the intense sensations. His clawed hands kneaded my ass cheeks, spreading

me open as he delved deeper.

At the same time I doubled my efforts with my mouth still wrapped around the head of his cock.

I redoubled my efforts on Baldr's cock, sucking and licking with enthusiasm despite my inexperience. His growls of pleasure spurred me on, giving me a confidence I hadn't yet earned. I took him as deep as I could, hollowing my cheeks and swirling my tongue around his shaft. The taste and scent of him was intoxicating, clouding my mind with desire. Even if I once thought that maybe this was rushing things a bit, all thoughts of stopping were now gone.

Baldr's tongue probed deeper, stretching me open in preparation for what was to come. The waves of pleasure had me trembling in his grip. I rocked back against his face, silently begging for more. And he didn't hesitate to give me every little thing I wanted.

After what felt like an eternity of exquisite torture, Baldr pulled back. I whimpered at the loss of his touch, my nerves still on fire, but he quickly flipped me around to face him once more. His cock sprang out of my mouth with a pop, a long trail of saliva glistening down his shaft. As I came face to face with him, his golden eyes blazed with lust. Baldr said nothing as he positioned himself between my legs, the tip of his massive cock pressing against my slick entrance. I took a deep breath, trying to relax as he slowly pushed forward. There was a moment of resistance, a burning stretch that made me gasp. But the moment I blew the breath out, forcing myself to relax, I felt him slowly inch his way inside me.

And the sensation nearly took my breath away.

All at once the world seemed to fall away. We were no longer at the bottom of some strange ruin, lost in a strange realm, or on the run. Instead, it was just me and him,

our bodies as one at last. I felt the warm heat of affection flow through my chest, intensified by that new experience with a man I cared very much about to begin with. It was hard to imagine doing this with anyone else or having it feel nearly as incredible. And even though Baldr was still in his Alpha form, his instincts driving his every decision, he was still gentle, thoughtful, and delicate with my virgin body. However, the speed at which things were ramping up, I wasn't going to remain a virgin for long. That thought, and the fact that it was Baldr giving this gift to me, turned me on more than I could ever imagine.

Pre-cum leaked out of my cock onto Baldr's belly as I rocked back and forth, working his massive dick deeper inside me. He pulsed and throbbed inside of me, striking a sweet spot that made me cry out in pleasure. I had no idea what it was, and I didn't care. All I knew was that I wanted more of it, and I wanted it now.

"Oh god..." I moaned, my neck arched toward the ceiling. I ground my hips forward, the sensitive underside of my cock rubbing against his belly. "Oh my god... fuck... that feels amazing."

Baldr growled low in his throat, forcing me down even further on his cock. I cried out as my body was forced open, the full feeling driving me to new heights of pleasure. The thickness of his shaft pressed against that sweet spot, more pre-cum oozing out of me in waves. I felt like I might cum from that sensation alone. But judging by the heavy panting of Baldr and the way his body tensed below me, I had a feeling he wasn't going to last long. And that was just fine with me.

Reaching down, I grabbed my own cock, swirling the pre-cum around my crown to get it nice and slick. I slowly began to jerk myself off, my hips moving in time with my hand. With slow, controlled movements, I rode up and down Baldr's erection, savoring every sweet sensation that coursed through me. His claws gripped harder at my waist, but he didn't force any of my movements. Instead he was trembling because of the effort it took to keep himself still. As my body began to loosen up,

Baldr's pre-cum eased the friction between us, making every movement more exquisite than the last. In fact, before I knew it, I found myself coming to rest against his knot.

I looked down at him, my face flushed with heat. "I don't think I can do that part," I said, voice trembling. "Not yet."

He just nodded, either unable or unwilling to speak. With concentrated effort, he pulled his hands away from my hips, leaving behind bright red finger marks. Forcing his hands down at his side, he gave me another nod to continue. And I didn't need to be told twice.

With ecstasy flowing through my veins, I pushed back against him, riding from knot to tip over and over again. The friction combined with my hand swirling over my cockhead was driving me to the edge. My vision seemed to tunnel in from the sides, trapping me in a haze of lust and sexual bliss. I pushed harder. Then faster. Anything to get me over the edge I was riding.

All at once, a low growl began to build in Baldr's chest, vibrating through his cock and deep inside my body. His body tensed and his cock seemed to swell inside me. I found the perfect spot, short quick movements grinding me to perfection. Baldr's growl slowly built to a crescendo and all at once, I realized what was about to happen.

With a guttural moan, Baldr dug his hands into the soft earth around us, and his hips rocked forward. His knot came to rest against my hole as he buried himself as deep as he would go. A searing heat filled my belly as he came, coating my insides with his seed. That sensation combined with my own hand, drove me over the edge as well. With a cry, I leaned back, my cock throbbing wildly as I striped his chest and face with my load.

Baldr stared up at me, his tongue automatically licking the cum from his lips. He growled in satisfaction, wrapping his arms around me and bringing me down to his chest. Both of us were panting from the exertion, the rush of endorphins making it almost impossible to think. I ignored the mess between us, allowing myself to be wrapped up in his arms once more. I laid my head against his neck, breathing heavily as I tried to wrap my mind around what had just happened.

A wave of exhaustion washed over me and I felt like I was floating as he held me. Sleep was coming on fast. However, before it took me, I felt a strange tingle at the back of my neck, similar to when Baldr cast his telepathic bond between us. But this one seemed to be stronger. Much stronger.

But before I could think about it too much, I slipped into a dreamless sleep, the strength of his arms letting me know that no matter what the circumstances, I was safe with him.

Page 18

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

I felt warmer, safer, and more at home than I had in years. There were a handful of moments where I wasn't quite sure if I was sleeping or awake. Maybe I was somewhere in between. But those were the moments I savored because anything was possible. Any thought I could dream up would come alive in front of my eyes.

And this time I saw myself lying in my own bed back at the resort, all tucked in and cozy with Mist at my side. I could feel his soft breath against my neck and the way he threw one leg over mine, trying to get as close as possible. I had my arms wrapped around him, holding him tight so that he knew I wasn't going anywhere.

We were happy of course. The war with Tyr and Mist's years of imprisonment were nothing but a fading memory. The only thing we had to worry about was what we were going to have for breakfast or where we might take a walk that day. My brothers were home, their own mates just as safe as mine. Everything was perfect.

But then flashes of memory began to invade my peace. I saw Tyr striking Mist and flinging him to the ground. I saw my mother's spellbook tear as we stepped through the realm gate into an unknown world. There was peace and beauty for just a moment in those green fields before there was smoke, screeches, and serpents in the night. My vision shifted then as if I were outside of my own body. I watched as my Alpha wolf stalked toward Mist, intent on killing him in the adrenaline fueled fury of the moment. But then we were falling into darkness. It wasn't until I came to again that the memories turned pleasant. My groin stirred remembering the way Mist's body felt, his tight hole wrapped around my cock.

Had it all been a dream? I wasn't sure. The vision was still fuzzy, like I was half in and half out of my wolverine form. Everything was a confusing mix of emotions and

sensations. We both reached orgasm at some point and after that I expected the feelings to fade.

However, I could still feel Mist in my arms. His breath still danced across my neck. And it wasn't until I opened my eyes that I realized he really was in my arms, curled up on top of me. That wasn't all either, I could smell the sex and cum on us both. And there, tingling at the back of my skull, was the faint buzz of a connection. It was no ordinary mate bond though. Something more had bonded between us and I swore I could almost see his dreams playing in my head. Something similar to the one I'd had about being back home with him.

And that wasn't all. I could feel his magic as if it were my own. Without thinking, I reached for it, trying to get a sense of it. The moment my mind brushed up against it, I gasped aloud and forced my mind away from his. Suddenly I finally understood why Tyr had kept him in that dome for all those years. The power that was inside him was pure chaos, unfiltered and untamed. For nearly a decade Mist had been building walls around his power, making sure that nobody could access it. Not even himself.

But I saw the truth. His walls were fragile at best and his magic leaked out of them like pinholes in a dam. Given enough time and trauma, that dam would burst and anyone within a mile radius would be caught in the blast. Mist himself would be consumed by it as well, of course, nothing left in his wake but ashes and scorched earth.

I'd never felt anything so terrifying and awe-inspiring in my life.

The moment the terror of his magic faded away, I realized the truth about this newfound connection between us that had somehow been run over by my curiosity before I could put words to it.

We were mated.

My heart raced as the full implications of what had happened settled over me. We were mated. Bonded for life. And while a part of me rejoiced at finally being connected to my true mate, another part was filled with dread.

I had seen my own death. It was coming soon, far too soon. And now I had bound Mist to me, ensuring that when I died, he would feel that loss more acutely than anyone else. The pain of losing a mate could drive a person mad with grief. Some never recovered. And considering the way I'd seen myself perish, it would hit him even harder now. How could he go on living after such a thing?

What had I done?

I looked down at Mist's peaceful sleeping face, guilt gnawing at my insides. He had no idea what was coming. No idea of the pain I had inadvertently sentenced him to. In my lust-fueled Alpha state, I had acted on instinct without considering the consequences. I knew why, of course. The wolf had recognized its mate and acted on instinct. And I... I had wanted this too, even if I hadn't admitted it to myself. But I had known about my vision, about my impending death. I knew I shouldn't get close to anyone, least of all Mist. And yet here we were, bound together on a deeper level than any wolf had been bound before.

The bond usually came with the sharing of emotions. For some it was hardly there, only letting extreme emotions filter through during intense moments. But this was something else entirely. I could see Mist's dreams in the back of my mind as I stared at him. Hell, I'd been sharing them while we were both sleeping. Not only that, I could touch his magic, feel it as if it were my very own. A part of me wondered if I could use it too, although I was too afraid to try. And if I was that closely bound to him, what did that mean for me when his magic finally burst forth like it inevitably would? I couldn't see the future beyond my own death, but I had no doubt that would be the moment where he found he could no longer control the chaos roiling within him.

Everyone, myself included, was in danger now. And most of all, Mist.

Then he stirred in my arms, probably because I was freaking out on the inside and he could feel it. Just as quickly as I saw him move, I pushed my feelings down, trying to hide them from him. His eyes fluttered open and he looked up at me, a sleepy smile spreading across his face. “Hey,” he murmured.

“Hey,” I replied softly, trying to keep the turmoil I felt from showing on my face.

He stretched slowly, his body pressing against mine in a way that sent tingles through me despite my inner conflict. “Last night was...” he trailed off, a blush creeping up his cheeks. “Well, it was amazing.”

I couldn't help but smile at his bashfulness. “It was,” I agreed. And it had been - more incredible than I could have imagined. Which only made our situation that much more painful. I didn't want to give up what we had. The chemistry between us was palpable. I just didn't see how I could let it go on.

Mist's brow furrowed slightly as he studied my face. “Is everything okay? You seem... I don't know, worried about something.” He reached back, touching his neck. “It's almost like I can sense it.”

I sighed, shaking my head. Creating the bond usually came with a warning beforehand, but Mist had no idea what he was feeling.

“It's the bond,” I said at last. “It lets you feel my emotions. Or at least that's how it works between wolves. But for us... it feels stronger somehow.”

“I thought it was the telepathy spell again.” He paused, the realization of what I'd said sinking in. “Wait... are we mates?”

“Yeah. Officially now.”

“So that means... that you... did you know I was your mate?”

I reached up, caressing his cheek because it didn't if I was affectionate now. The damage was done. We were bonded.

“Not until I got through the dome,” I said truthfully. “I knew I liked you and I maybe hoped that such a thing could be true. But it wasn't until I caught your scent that I knew for sure that you were my fated mate.”

He just stared at me, his eyes sparkling in the dim greenish glow. A smile crept over his face once more. “I really like you,” he said at last. “I know you're the only person I've known besides Tyr, but I do like you a lot.”

He seemed to be holding back and honestly, I was thankful for it. I was having so many emotions all at once that I wasn't sure I could handle any proclamations of love. Not that he felt that way about me. Or at least, I hoped he didn't. Or did I? Fuck... my brain was such a mess.

“You okay?” he asked, sensing my feelings. “You seem... troubled.”

“I'm just...” I took a deep breath, trying to calm myself. Hiding my emotions was going to be a lot harder now thanks to the bond. “It's a lot to process all at once.” I gestured around in the darkness, taking a look at it truly for the first time. “And I have no idea where we are or how to get out or how to get home.”

“Well... maybe we should get dressed and then take a look at your mothers spellbook.”

I glanced down at the torn remnants of my clothing on the ground beside us. I seemed

to vaguely recall being so horny that I ripped them off in the moment without thought.

“Uh... well, I have a blanket in my bag that we could fashion into something?” Mist offered.

“Great...” I sighed. “Lost underground in a strange world and I’m gonna have to wear a kilt the entire time.”

“I think it’ll be cute.”

His smile was infectious, and I returned it despite the turmoil in my heart and mind. Without a word, Mist peeled himself off of me, evidence of our fun the night before matted into my chest hair. That was going to be fun to wash out, eventually. He rummaged through his bag until he pulled out the blanket and draped it over me. Then, putting himself on full display, he began to slowly dress. I had a feeling he was teasing me, but it wasn’t until he caught me staring at his ass that I was sure.

“You know...” he said, slowly pulling his pants lower once more. “We could always just do a quick repeat of last night. Just to make sure we did it right, of course.”

I sat up, letting the blanket pool around my waist and rock hard cock. Reaching out, I pulled him toward me, wrapping my arms around his hips. I gave him a few soft kisses on his left ass cheek, then a sharp bite before he yelped and skittered away from me.

“Don’t tempt me,” I growled, smiling despite myself. “I won’t be so gentle next time.”

Mist looked frightened, but blushed at the same time, the front of his pants tented as he pulled them on the rest of the way. Clearly we had a lot of sexual tension we

needed to work through, but I had to conserve my energy for now. Until we could get a good meal again, I had to save what little I had left for an emergency. Wrapping the blanket around me, I pulled out my mother's spellbook as Mist took a seat next to me.

"There was a spell in here that might help," I said, flipping through the pages. "I saw it flash by while I was trying to get us out of the dome."

"Couldn't we just open another realm gate to get home?"

"That would be easier. But it's a complicated ritual with supplies we'd have to find. Not to mention, I don't think I have the energy to pull it off again. And the emergency spell isn't specific enough to guarantee we make it home. It's lucky we ended up here in the first place and not Muspelheim or Helheim."

"Neither of those sound good..."

"If the stories are to be believed, they are no place for people." Finally I saw the spell I was looking for and jammed my finger against the page. "Aha! Here it is!"

"To Call A Guide," Mist read. "Is that what we need right now?"

"I think so. A spirit guide could get us out of these ruins and maybe back home to our own realm. At the very least, we can get some information out of them."

"Alright," he nodded. "What do we need to do?"

"All I need is a drop of blood and..." I trailed off for a second.

"Yeah? What is it?"

"I need a host."

“What does that mean?”

“It means one of us will have to be the medium for the spirit to speak through... It’ll have to possess one of us.”

“Uh... is that safe?”

“It’s a temporary spell, so yes...”

“But?”

“But it’s uncomfortable to say the least.”

“I can do it,” Mist offered without a second thought. “That’s no big deal.”

“Actually, I think I should.” He looked confused for a moment and I felt a pang of hurt in the back of my mind. “It’s not that I don’t trust you to do it,” I said. “Or that I think you’re not capable. What I’m worried about is your magic and the stress of the possession.”

“Oh. That’s nothing to worry about! My magic is untouchable anyway.” There was a tone of disappointment in his voice. “And I’ve been through a lot worse.”

“Mist,” I said gently, placing my hand on his arm. “I need you to trust me on this, okay?”

He lifted an eyebrow. “What do you know that you’re not telling me?”

I took a deep breath. “I promise we’ll talk about it, okay? But right now we need to focus on getting home.”

It was clear that I was hiding something and Mist felt it keenly through the bond. There was hesitation in his voice when he finally said, “Alright. I trust you. But the way you’re acting right now... it worries me.”

I squeezed his arm. “There’s nothing to be afraid of.” It was a lie, but I did my best to cover that up. “Once the possession begins, you’ll only have five questions to ask the spirit before they return to the spirit world.”

I placed the book down in front of me, lifting a finger to pierce with my own canine, but I stopped halfway.

“Oh, and whatever you do, don’t tell the spirit my name.”

“Why not?”

“Because some spirits,” I said, my voice low and serious. “Are not from the mortal realm. And if they have my name, they may be able to use my magic against my will.”

Mist clamped his mouth shut, nodding furiously. “Okay. Yep. No names. Ever. Got it.”

I nodded, giving him a smile before I took a deep breath. “Alright. Let’s do this.”

Page 19

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

By the time Baldr and I had agreed on what questions to ask, he was ready to start the ritual.

“Are you sure about this?” I asked one last time. “I know how tired you are.”

“I’m sure,” he nodded. “This spell shouldn’t take too much out of me. Hopefully.”

I shook my head, the anxiety gripping my chest. “I hope you’re right.”

“It’ll be fine. Don’t worry.”

“And I just wipe the rune from your forehead when I want to break the spell? There’s nothing else to it, right?”

“That’s all it takes.”

“I just... I can’t read that spellbook if something goes wrong and I don’t want you to get hurt—”

“Mist,” Baldr said, cutting me off. He reached out, placing his hands on my shoulders and gave them a squeeze. “It’s going to be alright, I promise. There’s not a lot of risk involved in a spell like this.”

“I just... I don’t want to lose you.”

“You aren’t going to lose me,” he said, leaning forward and pressing his lips to mine.

I allowed myself for a moment to get lost in his touch. The way his lips felt against mine sent a bolt of electricity through my body. Most of that energy seemed to pool in my groin, although it was totally not the time for something like that. But I couldn't help it. After spending all those years touch-starved in my magical prison, the slightest graze from Baldr got my heart racing. I loved it and feared it all at the same time. He was quickly becoming so precious to me that I didn't want to let him out of my sight.

"Now let's get this over with so we can get out of here," Baldr said, pulling away from me at last.

"Alright," I replied breathlessly, the taste of him still on my lips. I took a step back. "I'm ready when you are."

Baldr nodded, taking a deep breath to center himself. He pricked his finger with a fang that had emerged for that purpose, letting a drop of blood fall onto the open page of the spellbook. Then he began chanting in a language I didn't understand, his voice low and rhythmic. The air around us seemed to grow heavy, charged with an unseen energy that made the hair on my arms stand up. It almost felt like a thunderstorm was coming, a bad one, but we were underground. However, that didn't stop the glowing mushrooms from trembling as if thunder rumbled through the air.

As Baldr continued the incantation, his eyes began to glow with an eerie blue light. The blood on the page started to move of its own accord, forming intricate patterns before coalescing into a single rune. With one final word, Baldr pressed his bloodied finger to his forehead, tracing the rune there.

For a moment, nothing happened. Then Baldr's body went rigid, his back arching as if pulled by invisible strings. He let out a strangled gasp before the rune on his forehead turned bright gold, filling the ruins with its light. I had to hold up a hand to shield my eyes. But once it finally died down, I found myself staring into the now hollow

glowing white eyes of Baldr. The air around me turned cold, and I saw a faint white mist like fog rolling out of his mouth as if his insides were made of ice.

I opened my mouth to say his name, but then I clamped it shut. He'd told me not to tell the spirit his name. Forcing myself to stay quiet, I stared at him, waiting for the first sign that someone or something had moved into his body and was ready to answer my questions.

Finally, the possessed Baldr tilted his head, regarding me with those glowing white eyes. When he spoke, it was with a voice that was not his own - deeper, more resonant, with an otherworldly echo. And the accent was unlike anything I'd ever heard before.

"Who calls upon the spirits of this realm?" the entity asked with Baldr's lips.

I swallowed hard, my heart pounding. "I do," I said, trying to keep my voice steady. "I seek guidance."

"You did not cast this magic," it replied, giving me a good once over. "Who calls me?"

"The witch who cast the spell used themselves as the conduit," I said. "Now answer my questions."

The spirit nodded slowly. "Ask your questions, mortal. But choose wisely, for you have only five."

I took a deep breath, steeling myself. We had agreed on the most important things to ask. "First, where are we?"

"You are in the ruins of Asgard, the realm of the Aesir gods," the spirit replied.

“These dungeons lie deep beneath what was once a great city, abandoned long ago when the gods ceased to exist.”

“Why did the gods—” I began, but clamped my lips tight just in time. “I mean... How do we get out of this realm back to our home?”

The spirit regarded me for a moment. “You are from Midgard and you are bound to wolfkin.”

I nodded slowly, not having any idea how the spirit could figure something so complicated just by looking at me.

“Wolfkin and their mates can use the mouth of Fenrir to travel the realms. The Bifrost is long since shattered, but Fenrir’s power remains intact. Follow the river to its source. There you will find your way home.”

“Thank you spirit.”

“Three more questions child.”

The next question was a bit more on the personal side for Baldr, but I was more than happy to give it to him. I could feel his worry percolating in the back of his head and I knew it was important to him. Besides, if I were in his position, I’d want to ask the same thing.

“Is my mate’s brother Loki still alive?”

The spirit looked skyward, the glowing white eyes closing for a few seconds. When it finally returned its gaze to me it uttered a single word.

“Yes.”

I breathed a sigh of relief. Baldr would be glad to hear that. And I was too. Now that he was my mate, his family was mine too. I wanted to meet them and spend time with them, not start our relationship with a funeral.

“Fourth question,” I began. “How do we stop Tyr?”

“The god of war has long since ceased to exist as I said, child.”

“No not that Tyr,” I replied. “The one from my home. Tyr of the Skoll pack, the one wreaking havoc in Fenris.”

The spirit paused for a long moment as if thinking. “This Tyr is already on the path to his own destruction. There is no need for you to stop him. He will be his own end. But, the future is unwritten and can still be changed.” The spirit nodded, agreeing with itself. “However, if you wish to stop him before his self-afflicted fate, you are plenty powerful enough to do it yourself.”

I froze in place as the spirit finished speaking. Baldr and I had hoped for a more concrete answer. And we certainly didn’t expect my magic to be the answer. But I still wanted to stop him before he hurt more people. He might destroy himself eventually, but how many innocent lives would be lost before that happened? I thought of how he’d treated me all those years inside the dome and I just couldn’t bear the idea of him doing that to anyone else.

“What is your final question, child?”

With a sigh, I knew I had to abandon our last question. Baldr wanted to know more about his mother and the protection magic she’d cast around him. He wanted to know how he could use it to destroy Tyr. But if I was the key to defeating him, then there was something else I needed to ask. I took a deep breath and hoped he’d forgive me.

“How do I access and control my power?” I asked, hoping the spirit would give me the answer Tyr and I had been searching for all those years.

However, the spirit simply smiled, the white glowing eyes crinkling at the edges.

“Practice,” it said.

I stared up at the creature that wore Baldr’s face. Dumbfounded.

“Is that it? That’s all you’re going to say?”

“No, no,” it replied, wagging a finger at me. “You’ve asked all your questions. Now I have one for you.” Suddenly the spirit was in my face, its voice a full octave lower and reverberating in the cavern. “Tell me the name of my host!”

With a petty grin I reached out, placing my hand on Baldr’s forehead. “No.”

A quick swipe of my hand smeared the blood rune on Baldr’s forehead and the spirit let out a deep, guttural scream. His eyes flashed and went out, the mist stopped pouring from his mouth, and he fell to the ground in a heap before I could catch him.

And that, it seemed, was the end of Baldr’s spell.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

I gasped as I came back to consciousness in a rush, my head pounding and my body aching as if I'd been hit by a truck. It took me a moment to get my bearings and realize I was still in the ruins. At first I was worried I was alone, but then with a sigh of relief, I realized Mist was kneeling beside me, his face etched with worry.

“Baldr? Are you okay?” he asked, helping me sit up.

I nodded, wincing at the movement. “Yeah, I think so. Just... disoriented.” I blinked, trying to clear the fog from my mind. “What happened? Did you get the answers we needed?”

Mist nodded, but there was hesitation in his eyes. “Mostly. We're in the ruins of Asgard, apparently. And we need to follow the river to its source to find something called the mouth of Fenrir to get home.”

“The mouth of Fenrir?” I repeated, frowning. “Fenrir has been chained or dead since the beginning of time. He was killed in Ragnarok with the rest of the gods.”

“That’s just what the spirit said,” Mist replied. “But now that you mention it, he also said all the gods ceased to exist long ago.”

“Alright...” I huffed. “What did he say about Loki?”

Mist smiled at that. “He’s alive.”

I felt my heart leap, a lightness coming back to me for a moment. It didn’t fix everything, but it was good to know my brother was still alive. That meant the Hati

pack had someone on the inside looking out for us. His actions would save many lives, I was sure of it.

“And what about Tyr? Did he tell you how to stop him?”

That’s when Mist suddenly clammed up. Not only that, but he started glancing side to side. I felt a rush of nervous energy pulse through our bond and I had to grab his hand to steady myself. His emotions were so intense still thanks to the bond being so fresh. Not only that, but the turmoil bubbling inside him threatened those delicate walls around his magic.

“It’s alright,” I said, trying to calm him down. “Whatever the spirit said is fine. We can figure it out.”

“It said...” Mist paused, forcing himself to draw a shuddering breath. “He said Tyr would bring about his own destruction.”

I sighed. “Fuck. I already knew that.”

“You did?”

“Yeah,” I nodded. “I have visions, remember?”

“Oh. I didn’t realize you’d had one about him.”

“Several over the years, actually.” We were treading into dangerous territory, so I shifted the conversation back to the spirit. “Did it say anything else about Tyr?”

“Well... it said that there might be another way to stop him.”

“Which is?”

Mist took a long moment before speaking the words, his intense anxiety filtering through the bond. “He said I could stop him. With... With my magic.”

I stared at Mist for a long moment, trying to process what he had just said. The spirit had told him he could stop Tyr with his magic? That seemed like an impossibly dangerous suggestion. Mist's power was volatile and uncontrolled. Using it against Tyr could be catastrophic. Not to mention if he were to lose control, everyone within a mile radius or more could be affected. Asking him to use his magic against Tyr was like asking someone to drop an atomic bomb on Fenris.

“Mist,” I said carefully, “I don't think that's a good idea. Your magic is-”

“Dangerous, I know,” he cut me off, frustration evident in his voice. “But what if it's the only way? You saw what Tyr is capable of. He'll hurt more people if we don't stop him. I can't let him hurt people like he hurt me...”

I sighed, running a hand through my hair. “I understand why you want to use your power against him. But you don't have control over it yet. It could backfire horribly.”

“The spirit said I just need to practice.”

That caught my attention. “It offered that information freely?”

Mist shifted nervously, his gaze dropping to the floor. “N-No. I had to use the last question for it. I wouldn't have asked if I didn't think it wasn't important... but that meant I couldn't ask about your mother's protection spell.”

I nodded slowly, doing everything I could to stay calm. I wasn't mad at him for asking. In fact, if I had been in his shoes, I would've done the same thing. However, without that last question, it was impossible to know how far I could push the spell protecting me. My thought had been to use it against Tyr, but I wanted some sort of

guarantee that my plan would work. But now I'd never know.

"I understand," I said carefully. "Did the spirit tell you how to practice your magic?"

He shook his head. "No. Just that I should."

"Did it do anything else?"

"It asked for your name," he replied. "Twice actually."

I let out a long sigh. "That confirms my suspicions then. We definitely got some sort of trickster spirit. They're fairly common, but I'd hoped we would get lucky. Whatever it was, it gave you as little information as possible on purpose to waste our time." I shrugged, getting back to my feet and dusting the dirt off my blanket I'd fashioned into a sort of toga. "But at least we know it was telling the truth about Fenrir. That will be the way home."

"It also said the portal is only for wolfkin," Mist added. "And their mates. So I guess it's a good thing we did... you know... what we did."

I had to nod because he was right. At least that rash action on my part had an upside.

"Well," I said, placing my hands on my hips. "We better find a way out of here and back to the river then. Unless the spirit told you a quicker way out."

"It did not. Only that this place is ancient."

"I guess that means we better watch our step."

Mist moved close to me, linking his arm in mine. "There," he said, giving me a bright smile. "That should keep us safe."

I couldn't help but laugh, feeling the sudden rush of giddiness over the bond. "I bet it will." I held him tight, pulling him down the dimly lit hallway. "Now let's get out of here."

We made our way through the dimly lit ruins, arm in arm, relying on the faint glow of the strange fungus to light our path. To our relief and possibly our doom, there was only one way to go. It seemed we'd somehow ended in a long underground corridor that had collapsed. I had no way of knowing if our side had a way out, but I tried to remain hopeful. The air was damp and musty, thick with the scent of decay and ages past. Our footsteps echoed off the crumbling stone walls, sending small pebbles skittering across the floor with each step. Here and there mounds of dirt filled the hallway that we had to crawl over, the walls having long since given way under the strain of the soil above us. I had a good feeling that the ruins weren't exactly stable. But as long as we kept our voices low and moved quickly, I had to believe we could get out without inciting a collapse.

As we walked, I couldn't help but marvel at the ancient architecture around us. Even in ruins, there was a grandeur to the place that spoke of its former glory. Massive pillars, intricately carved with runes and symbols I didn't recognize, stretched up into the darkness above. In some places pure gold still clung to the stone, inlaid long ago by skilled craftsmen. Here and there, we passed remnants of tapestries and murals, their colors long since faded but still hinting at epic tales of gods and heroes. Maybe the spirit was right, gods really had roamed these halls at one point. I couldn't imagine who else could afford such magnificence.

"I can't believe we're actually in Asgard," Mist whispered, holding tight to me as we walked. "Do you really think the gods lived here?"

"Sure."

"So you think they were real?"

“I think any god is real as long as you believe in them,” I replied. “And once you stop believing, they stop existing.”

Mist stared at me for a long moment. “I can’t tell if that’s wisdom or pure insanity.”

“You’d be surprised how often those two meet,” I chuckled. “But try thinking of it in a different way. Do you believe in gods?”

“I don’t know,” Mist said slowly. “It doesn’t seem likely does it? There’s not really much tangible proof they’re real.”

“But do you believe in love?”

“Of course!”

“But why?” I asked, shrugging with a smile. “There’s no tangible proof it exists. You can’t touch love or hold it in your hand. So shouldn’t that mean it’s not real?”

“But love is in all those stories!”

“So are gods.”

“But... But you can see love! And touch it! If you have a partner.”

“And what if you don’t? Does that mean love doesn’t exist?”

“It can feel like that sometimes...” he nodded.

“And it can feel like gods aren’t real either.”

Mist stared at me for a long moment. “I think I know what you’re saying, but it’s

making my brain hurt.”

I laughed, leaning close and kissing his cheek. “Here’s my opinion. I think all gods recorded in history have existed at one time or another. I don’t know if they were once men or if they were ever mortal at all. But I think they were sustained by the beliefs of other people. But when those people stopped praying and believing and time marched on, those gods lost their powers and faded into the unknown.” I gestured to the ruins around us. “But phantoms didn’t build this metropolis. Something or someone did. So... I guess my thought is that the gods were real once and they might be real again if people start believing in them.”

Mist tilted his head to the side, looking at me with eyes filled with wonder. “That feels so... hopeful.”

I just shrugged. “I guess.”

“I should’ve known you’d be a dreamer. Especially with all the books you read and your visions.” He leaned against my shoulder. “I hope the future you see is just as hopeful.”

My heart sank, a cold sensation filling my chest. My stomach twisted, and I swallowed hard, forcing myself to smile. “Yeah. Me too.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

“So... if I’m supposed to practice my magic, maybe you could show me something simple to try?” I asked, prodding Baldr as we sat down in the center of a large chamber.

To our great relief, we’d found our way into a larger portion of the ruins. It meant we weren’t trapped in a tiny underground corridor, but we still weren’t sure we’d be able to get out. The air inside the ruins was stale and breathless, making it feel almost tomb-like. But even so, I found it hard to be worried about such things when Baldr was at my side.

Our new bond kept me in a constant feedback loop with him. If I touched his hand, I could feel the fluttering happiness in his stomach. If I kissed him, I felt the tingling on his lips. And if I wrapped my arm around him, digging my fingers into his skin, well that feeling went straight to both our cocks. So, needless to say, I was in a great mood. Baldr was more reserved than I was, but like I’d told him, my worst days were behind me. Even stuck in the ruins with him felt like a holiday compared to being under Tyr’s rule.

Baldr hesitated, a flicker of uncertainty passing through our bond. “I’m not sure that’s a good idea right now,” he said carefully. “Your magic is... unpredictable. And we don’t know how stable these ruins are. Or what could be in them.”

I frowned, feeling a spark of frustration. “But how am I supposed to learn control if I never practice? The spirit said I need to practice. It said I’m the only one that can stop Tyr before he hurts a bunch of other people.”

“I know,” Baldr sighed. “But this isn’t the right time or place. We need to focus on

getting out of here first. Once we're back home and safe, then we can work on your magic. It won't be something we can just fix overnight. It's gonna take a long time to make it safe."

I wanted to argue further, but I could sense Baldr's genuine concern through our bond. He wasn't just being overprotective - he was truly worried about the potential consequences. Still, it was hard not to feel disappointed or like he didn't trust me. Now that I had him, my magic didn't feel that dangerous anymore. In fact, with his power coursing through our bond, I felt like I could do just about anything. But he had a lot more experience than I did and he probably knew what he was talking about even if I didn't like the answer.

"Okay," I conceded reluctantly. But then I added, "Not even a tiny spell? Like lighting a candle or something?"

"The last thing I want you doing right now is conjuring fire," Baldr said, putting his hands up as if to stop me. "It's the most unpredictable and difficult element to wield. If you were going to start with anything, I'd start with earth. It's stubborn and slow to move, making it the safest to practice with." He looked around at the ruins surrounding us. "But maybe not underground, huh?"

"Fine, fine..." I grumbled, pulling my knees close to my chest. "I just... I don't like feeling so useless."

"You're not useless—"

"I am against Tyr," I snapped, turning away from him to hide the tears threatening my cheeks. "He's... He's just been throwing me around and beating the shit out of me for years and there was nothing I could do to defend myself. He's kept me too starved to fight back and even now I can't hold my own in a fight." I glanced back at Baldr for a moment, trying to hold it together. "I just don't want to be stepped on

anymore. I'm tired of being the weak one."

Baldr stared at me for a long moment. Even though he said nothing, I could feel him through our bond, searching through my feelings. His own thoughts were relatively concealed thanks to years of practice, but I got the sense that he was trying to figure out how to cheer me up. After a moment or two, he seemed to figure it out.

"Maybe I can teach you a simple spell," he said at last with a smile. "Something that won't hurt anything down here."

My depression slipped away in an instant. "Anything. I'll learn anything from you."

"Come here then."

I scooted close to him, intending to sit beside him. But Baldr scooped me up in his arms and pulled me between his legs so my back was resting against his chest. I felt butt come to rest snugly against his groin and I swore I felt a twitch there. Over the bond I felt Baldr struggle to keep control of himself.

"Hold up your hand."

I did as I was told and Baldr reached out, lacing his fingers through mine so his palm rested against the back of my hand. Then, directing my movements, he pulled my hand down to the ground, and we both dug our fingers into the soil.

"The power to coax life out of the ground is beautiful, delicate, and fairly safe as long as you're not sitting in a patch of poison ivy."

I couldn't help but chuckle. "Speaking from experience?"

"I'll never tell," he grinned. "Anyway. The earth is full of life. And it's also full of

life just waiting for the right conditions to thrive.” He dug his fingers through the cool soil, my hand in his. “The soil is full of seeds lying dormant, just waiting for the perfect moment to sprout and grow,” Baldr said softly, his breath warm against my ear. “All we need to do is give them a little encouragement.”

I felt a subtle shift in the energy around us as Baldr began to channel his magic. A gentle warmth flowed from his hand into mine, seeping into the earth beneath our fingers. The dirt seemed to warm around us, like it was suddenly sitting under the summer sun instead of deep underground.

“Close your eyes,” he instructed. “Feel the life force in the soil. You might see them as tiny sparks at first.”

I did as he said, trying to visualize the process of growth. At first, I felt nothing but cool dirt. But then, ever so faintly, I sensed a stirring. The barest flicker of life, like the flutter of a butterfly's wings. Tiny sparks of potential, like dormant embers waiting to be fanned into flame.

“I think I feel it,” I whispered, not wanting to break my concentration.

“Good,” Baldr murmured, his breath warm against my ear. “Now, imagine those sparks growing brighter. Picture the seeds cracking open, tiny roots and shoots emerging. Feel the life force flowing through you and into the earth.”

I did as he instructed, picturing the seeds sprouting in my mind's eye. To my amazement, I felt a faint tingle in my fingertips, like static electricity but somehow softer.

It was magic.

“That’s it,” Baldr said. “Find the seeds and give them the nudge they need to grow.”

Letting the magic flow through me and our bond, I reached deeper into the soil with the tendrils, searching for more seeds. Sparks appeared in my mind's eye and I reached out, touching each one in turn. I felt the seed shells crack and split as roots began to grow from them. And as they started to burrow into the soil too, I allowed more magic to flow out of me, giving them the boost they needed to burst free of their dirt prison.

“You’re doing really good,” Baldr whispered, his lips grazing against my neck. “Keep going.”

His touch sent a wave of pleasure through my system, the sensation wrapping around my magic and causing the plants to put on a burst of growth. I couldn’t help but laugh as I felt them surge through the soil around my hand, their tiny green leaves tickling my skin. Without a second thought, I fed them more magic, wanting to see if I could make them bloom too. And I wanted to make Baldr proud, to prove to him that I could handle my magic and that it was safe to try small things.

No sooner had the thought crossed my mind than I felt something snap inside of me. There was a loud crack deep down, somewhere beyond my body. And it wasn’t until the rush of chaotic magic came suddenly crashing through my body that I realized what had happened. Somehow, without meaning too, I’d tapped too far into the well of roiling arcane power contained within me. And now there was nothing I could do to stop it.

“What are you doing?!” Baldr cried, his fingers still laced through mine. “Stop!”

“I-I can’t! I don’t know how!”

Baldr tried to pull his hand away, but it was almost as if our skin was fused together. Not only that, no matter how hard I pulled, my fingers wouldn’t come free of the soil.

“How do I stop it?” I cried back.

But I didn’t hear the answer as my magic connected with the earth. Suddenly I was no longer inside my own body. Instead I was watching the scene unfold before me as if my spirit had been shunted ten feet above me. But it didn’t stop there. My perception followed the flow of dark blue magic down into the soil, streaking through it like a bolt of lightning. It shot off in several directions, seemingly searching for something. I only had to wait a split second to find out what.

My magic found bodies under the ground, except they weren’t buried. Instead they were entombed in vaults or laid out on stone shelves. I could see them plain as day, their swords and shields still at their sides or lain over their chests. My magic seeped out of the stone, wrapped around their corpses, and began to weave them back to life. Stringy mummified grey muscle swelled and pulled at joints. Where no flesh could be found, the bones rattled and creaked, moving of their own accord as the bodies came to life. And the last thing my magic did was grant them sight, coalescing in their eye sockets like burning blue flames. I felt more than a dozen take their first breaths in centuries and their bodies begin to shift and quake before I snapped back into my own body.

Suddenly Baldr and I came apart, both of us panting from the toll the magic had taken on us. It seemed my magic, thanks to the bond, caught his in the flow, and it drained us both to fulfil its purpose.

“Wha... What was that?” I asked, staring up at him wide eyed. “I... I was just trying to make the plants grow! To breathe life into the soil!”

Baldr stared at me for a long moment. “You did,” he said simply, a note of surprise and fear in his voice.

“Why did it go wrong then?! What did I just do?”

“You lost control,” he replied, not trying to spare my feelings. “And you made Draugr.”

“Draugr? What the hell is a Draugr?”

“Undead... Powerful undead.” Baldr shook his head, pulling himself to his feet. “And they will hunt us mercilessly until the magic that brought them back is extinguished forever. That way they might one day rest peacefully once more.”

“Can’t we just undo the spell?”

“Once you open the floodgates, how do you undo it?” Baldr asked, his eyes wide. “This isn’t telepathy or a simple candle-lighting incantation. You gave those creatures life. They are conscious now and in full control of their own faculties. Nothing short of burning them alive will put them back to sleep.”

“Doesn’t your mother’s spellbook have something about Draugr in it? You told me it did!”

“It did,” Baldr nodded. “In the part that Tyr ripped away.”

“What do we do then?”

He held out a hand, a look of urgency in his eyes. “We run.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

The moment Mist took my hand, I pulled him to his feet and we took off running. The ruins around us groaned and shifted, dust and small debris raining down as the Draugr stirred in their ancient resting places. We had to get out of there before they fully awakened and came after us, which they would inevitably do considering we were the only living creatures in the entire place except for a few rats. I seemed to recall that Draugr had an almost sixth sense for finding living creatures they could destroy.

“I’m sorry,” Mist panted as we ran. “I didn’t mean to—”

“I know,” I cut him off. “But we can’t worry about that now. We need to focus on getting out of here alive.”

We raced through winding corridors, the glow of the strange fungi our only light. Behind us, I could hear the scraping of stone against stone as the Draugr began to emerge from their tombs. The sound sent chills down my spine. It seemed their vaults weren’t enough to hold them back. Then again, they were said to have inhuman strength and some of them even had their own magic. That made them not only terrifying, but dangerous beyond all reason.

As we ran, I tried to recall everything I’d read about Draugr in my mother’s spellbook. They were undead warriors, often ancient Norse chieftains or powerful warriors who refused to truly die. They guarded their treasures fiercely and would attack anyone who disturbed their rest. Some could change size, shape-shift, or even drive people mad just by looking at them. And they were notoriously difficult to kill. Most people agreed that only by chopping off their heads and burning their bodies could you truly kill them. Not only did I not have a weapon, but burning them posed a problem as

well with my energy at an all-time low.

When we rounded a corner, I skidded to a halt, nearly causing Mist to crash into me. Ahead of us, the corridor split into three different paths. I cursed under my breath, trying to decide which way to go.

“Which way?” Mist asked, his voice tight with panic.

I closed my eyes for a moment, reaching out with my senses. There was a faint breeze coming from the leftmost corridor.

“That way,” I said, pulling him to the left. “There’s a way out through there!”

We ran as fast as we could down the tight tunnel. To my surprise, it wasn’t widening out or moving upward. In fact, it seemed to be getting smaller. Nearly two minutes passed before we came skidding to a halt once again, the way in front of us blocked by a collapsed room. I didn’t understand how I could still feel a breeze against my skin even with the tunnel blocked. I glanced side to side, searching for its source. But then I finally looked up.

There, above the collapse, was a long shaft leading away on an angle. If I turned my head just right I could catch the faintest hint of sunlight far off. It was only then that it dawned on me that it was a small tunnel specifically dug to let in fresh air far underground. And it was far too tight for either Mist or I to get through. And that left us only one choice.

We had to go back.

Guttural cries echoed up the tunnel from the deep. The Draugr had found their way into the main part of the ruins. Now it was only a matter of time until they found us. And we didn’t have days or hours to escape. We had minutes. At most.

“We're trapped,” Mist whispered, his voice trembling with fear.

I shook my head, trying to stay calm despite the panic rising in my own chest. However, the surge of Mist's emotions over our bond was making that difficult. “No, we're not. We just need to think.”

I scanned the collapsed tunnel, looking for any weakness or opening we could exploit. The stones were tightly packed, with no obvious way through. But there had to be something we could do. I refused to accept that this was how it would end. Besides, my visions were never wrong, and this wasn't how I met my fate. So there had to be a way out, right?

“Can you use your magic again?” Mist asked hesitantly. “Maybe to clear the rubble?”

I winced at the suggestion. “I don't think that's a good idea. My energy is already low from the spirit summoning and what just happened with the Draugr. If I push too hard, I could pass out. Or worse.” I paused for a moment, letting out a long sigh. “We have to go back,” I said grimly, turning to face Mist.

His eyes were wide with fear, but he nodded nonetheless because there was no other option.

I took his hand, giving it a squeeze. “Come on.”

We raced back down the narrow corridor, our footsteps echoing off the stone walls. The cries of the Draugr grew louder as we neared the junction where we'd made our choice. My heart pounded in my chest, adrenaline coursing through my veins. We had to find another way out, and fast. They were sure to have heard our running and definitely the panting. We had only moments to spare.

As we reached the split in the path, I paused for a moment, straining my senses. The

right path seemed to slope slightly upward. It was our best chance.

“This way,” I said, pulling Mist down the right-hand tunnel.

We'd barely made it twenty feet when a figure lurched out of the shadows ahead of us. It was a Draugr, the tight grey mummified flesh screeching as it kept shambling bones in place. Loose black hair hung down around its face, making it look like something out of a horror movie. In one hand it held a half-rotted wooden shield and in the other a sword that was almost entirely made of rust. However, the most unsettling thing was its eyes. Bright blue orbs of flame sat in the hollow skull, wisps of magic leaking out the sides. But it wasn't the look of them that scared me. It was the way they made me feel. Not cold or terrified, but warm and fuzzy, like I should follow them. Like I should listen to them and just stand still so they could get closer... and closer.

shook my head violently, trying to break free of the Draugr's hypnotic gaze. Its power was intense, threatening to overwhelm my senses. But I couldn't let it win. I had to protect Mist.

“Don't look in its eyes!” I shouted, shoving Mist behind me.

The Draugr let out an inhuman shriek and lunged forward with surprising speed. I barely managed to dodge its rusted sword, the blade whistling past my ear. The creature's strength was incredible - I could feel the force of the blow even though it hadn't connected. It made my very bones ache, knowing that it would've sliced clean through me had my heightened werewolf reflexes not kicked in.

We were in serious trouble. Unarmed and exhausted, we stood little chance against even one of these ancient warriors, let alone however many were now roaming the ruins. But I refused to give up.

When the Draugr let out another teeth-clenching shriek, I knew the attack was coming. I ducked, the blade singing as it streaked over my head. In that moment, instinct took over. I shifted partially into my Alpha form, my claws extending as I swiped at the creature's legs. My claws tore through the desiccated flesh and snapped bone, but the Draugr barely seemed to notice. It swung its sword again, this time forcing me to roll to the side.

Mist scrambled backward, pressing himself against the wall.

“Run!” I yelled to him, pushing myself back to my feet. “Back to the junction! Take the middle path! I’ll catch up!”

“Baldr—”

“I said RUN!”

Mist could feel the force of my words not only in my voice, but over the bond as well. Without argument, he turned on his heel and sprinted down the hallway leaving just myself and the Draugr standing there, staring one another down.

“Now that he’s gone,” I uttered, sharp fangs extending into my mouth from both sides. “I can send you back to hell where you belong.”

It was only when Mist was too far to stop me from being foolish that I stepped forward. Spreading my arms out wide, I stared at the creature, my golden eyes flashing with power. And, just as I expected, the Draugr cried out in an unearthly rage, raising his sword high. Instead of trying to dodge, I deliberately closed my eyes.

There was a whoosh of air and a white-hot pain in my right shoulder as the blade made contact. However, only a split second later, golden light burst in the room, nearly blinding me even with my eyes closed. Just as I’d expected, my mother’s

protection spell held true. I figured if she'd gone out of her way to secure a promise from the living, why would she not secure one from the dead as well?

When the light finally faded, I opened my eyes to find nothing but a smoldering pile of grave dust in front of me. A shield and sword laid on either side of it, scorched by the intensity of my mother's magic. I glanced down at my shoulder to see the last remnants of golden magic fusing my muscle and bone back together. In a matter of seconds the pain was gone, my arm was mended, and there was no more Draugr to do me further damage.

However, I could hear more coming. And fast. Unless I wanted to put myself through unimaginable torture letting them all slice me to ribbons, I knew I should get out as fast as possible. And, judging by the panic surging through the bond, Mist was already racing back toward me.

Digging my feet into the dirt and stone, I sprinted down the hallway. When Mist came into view, he cried out like he'd seen a ghost.

"Baldr! I thought—"

"I'm fine," I said, grabbing his hand and yanking him back down the hall. "Let's go!"

We sprinted back toward the junction, the other Draugr's heavy footsteps echoing behind us. As we reached the split in the path, I heard the shambling figures coming down the left tunnel. We were being surrounded. The middle path was our only option. So, without a second thought, I sprang forward.

The corridor sloped downward, taking us deeper into the ruins. It wasn't ideal, but what other choice did we have? The sounds of pursuit grew louder behind us as we ran. The air grew colder and damper the further we descended too. I caught the scent of minerals and cold water. If my wolf nose wasn't mistaken, we were headed toward

an underground lake of some sort.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

We raced down the sloping tunnel, the cries of the Draugr echoing off the stone walls behind us. My lungs burned and my legs ached, but terror kept me moving. I couldn't believe how quickly our situation had deteriorated. One moment I was practicing a simple spell, and the next we were fleeing for our lives from undead warriors I had accidentally awakened. The guilt gnawed at me, but I pushed it aside. There would be time for self-recrimination later - if we survived.

The air grew noticeably cooler and damper as we descended deeper into the ruins. The faint glow of the bioluminescent fungi that had lit our way earlier began to fade, leaving us in near darkness. Only Baldr's heightened werewolf senses allowed us to navigate the treacherous path without stumbling. I held his hand tight, hoping we would make it to safety. Although going deeper underground didn't seem like a good sign.

As we came around a curve, I noticed light up ahead. My heart soared as we raced toward it. Suddenly, the narrow passageway opened up into a vast cavern. My eyes widened as I took in the massive underground lake before us, its dark waters stretching out into the shadows. Baldr skidded to a halt at the water's edge, his hand still gripping mine tightly.

"Shit," he muttered, scanning the cavern for any sign of an escape route.

"Now what?" I gasped, struggling to catch my breath.

Baldr scanned the cavern quickly, his eyes glowing faintly gold in the dim light. "There," he said, pointing to the other side of the lake. "See that light? That's the way out!"

I squinted, trying to see what he saw. But all I could make out was the glowing mushrooms. Everything on the other side looked like just darkness to me.

“I don’t see it.”

“Trust me,” he said, his confidence surging over our bond. “It’s there. I can see it and smell it.”

“What if it’s another dead end like the last one?” I asked, terrified of what that might mean.

“Either way, it’s better than staying here and getting ripped apart by the Draugr.” I couldn’t argue with him there. “But we’ll have to swim.”

I balked at that. “Isn’t it going to be freezing?”

“Probably. So we’ll have to go fast.”

Before I could protest further, Baldr waded into the water. The frigid water made him gasp, but he still held out his hand to me. “Mist, we don’t have much time!”

Taking a deep breath, I stepped into the water. The icy lake took my breath away, but I forced myself to keep moving. The water was up to my waist, then chest-deep. I clung to Baldr’s hand as we struck out across the lake, swimming as fast as we could.

The cold water sapped my strength, and my clothes felt like lead around me. It felt like it was getting harder and harder to breathe no matter how much I gulped down air. I glanced over my shoulder and saw the light of the Draugr’s eyes growing closer. They had emerged from the tunnel and were now stalking along the shore, their dead eyes locked on us.

“Faster!” Baldr barked, his voice filled with panic.

I kicked harder, pushing myself to keep up with Baldr's powerful strokes. The cold water numbed my limbs, making each movement a struggle. But the terror of what awaited us if we failed drove me on.

Suddenly, Baldr let out a strangled cry and disappeared beneath the surface.

“Baldr!” I screamed, frantically searching the dark water.

He resurfaced a moment later, gasping and thrashing. “Something's got my leg!” he shouted.

I dove under, forcing my eyes open in the dark water. To my horror, I saw a skeletal hand gripping Baldr's ankle, pulling him down. One of the Draugr had slipped into the lake without us realizing it. And now it's bright blue eyes were the only thing I could make out in the lake except for a rare shimmer of white bone.

Without thinking, I grabbed the bony arm and pulled with all my might. The cold water dulled the pain as my fingers dug into the desiccated flesh, tearing with all my might. I screamed underwater, bubbles exploding in front of me. He couldn't have Baldr! He couldn't have my mate!

Suddenly, the water around us was no longer dark. A bright blueish light emanated from my body as I focused all my hate and fury on the Draugr. Something inside me snapped, and I felt magic rush out of me. But this time, instead of searching to create life, it sought to destroy. Before my focus had been spread thin, making control difficult. However, now I had only one target, the Draugr pursuing us.

Even under the water, I watched as flames exploded inside the Draugr itself, the liquid around it boiling in an instant. Bone quickly turned to ash and dust as it cried

out, the mummified flesh disintegrating in seconds. I felt a sense of pride and accomplishment as the light in its eyes finally went out and the skeletal hand let Baldr go. Both of us rushed back to the surface, gasping for air as we broke through. It was only when I cleared my eyes and looked back at the shore that I realized my magic had targeted all of the Draugr, not just one. Pillars of flame burned on the shore and in a matter of seconds there was nothing but ash and cinders left behind.

The Draugr were dead.

“Come on,” I said, grabbing Baldr who was staring with his mouth hanging wide open. “Or we’ll freeze to death.”

Without another glance back, Baldr and I swam as fast as we could to the distant shore. By the time we’d dragged ourselves onto the rocky shore, I was panting and shivering so badly that I thought I might pass out. It could’ve been from the magic draining energy, but I wasn’t sure. I’d never used it in that way before, so I had no idea what to expect. Besides, I was too cold to think about it much anyway. The cold made it difficult to be coherent. Baldr, however, seemed to be able to shake his shivering much faster than I did.

“How did you do that?” he asked, his jaw hanging open. “I felt the surge of magic but it was... controlled.”

“I have no idea,” I replied, still trying to catch my breath. “I thought of you getting hurt and it just... happened.” I glanced up at him, putting on an exhausted smile. “I can’t let my mate get hurt, right?”

Baldr smiled, but there was some hesitation in his eyes. I felt a tiny pang of melancholy over the bond. Maybe it was because he’d never had anyone say something like that to him. It was entirely possible that despite his being out in the world, he was just as lonely as I was. And I didn’t want him to feel that way. So, I

dragged myself up off the stone and threw my arms around him, holding him tight despite my shivering.

“It’s okay,” I said, channeling all my affection through our bond. “We’re safe now. I’m right here.”

I felt him tense up for a second before he relaxed into me, wrapping his arms around my waist. There was still a niggling worry at the edge of our bond, but all I could do was hold him and tell him everything was going to be alright. The rest he’d have to do himself. And he had plenty of time to work through it because after all this, I wasn’t going anywhere.

We stayed like that for a long moment, holding each other close, our wet clothes clinging to our shivering bodies. The warmth of Baldr's embrace began to seep into me, chasing away some of the bone-deep chill. I felt his heartbeat slow as he relaxed, the tension gradually leaving his muscles. Even the claws and fangs began to recede until he was merely human.

“Thank you,” he murmured into my hair. “For saving me. For... everything.”

I pulled back slightly to look up at him, my hands still resting on his chest. “Always,” I said softly. “We're in this together now.”

Baldr's eyes searched mine, a mix of emotions swirling in their golden depths. Wonder, gratitude, and something else I couldn't quite name. He opened his mouth as if to say something more, then closed it again, shaking his head slightly.

Instead, he leaned down and pressed his forehead against mine, closing his eyes and taking a moment to just breathe me in. I couldn’t bring myself to interrupt his moment of peace. Eventually he let out a long sigh and pulled away, a smile on his face once more.

“Come on,” he said, taking my hand. “We need to get moving before we freeze.”

I nodded and together we made our way towards the light Baldr had seen earlier. Now that we were closer, my human eyes could make out what he’d seen. It wasn’t much at first, but as we walked, it grew steadily brighter. Eventually that little tunnel turned in an upward direction, the air getting fresher with every step. As we climbed, I could feel warm air flowing down from above, a stark contrast to the chill of the cavern below. Even my wet clothing started to warm and I just knew we were going to make it.

“Do you think we're close to the surface?” I asked hopefully, holding tight to Baldr’s hand.

“I hope so. This feels too bright and fresh to be just a ventilation shaft.”

We continued on and within a minute, we found ourselves stepping out into bright sunlight. I held my arm up, shielding my eyes from the sun. It took a moment or two to realize we were standing at the edge of the forest. And another full minute before I finally felt like I could see enough to make sense of the strange sound I’d been hearing. We were standing at the mouth of a small cave. And there, not fifty feet in front of us, was the river touching the edge of the forest.

“Looks like we made it to your spot,” I said, giving Baldr a nudge. “Isn’t this where you wanted to set up camp?”

“Y-Yeah,” he nodded. “Although, after the Draugr, I think I’d rather just keep going.”

“It’s getting late though,” I said, glancing up at the sky where the sun hung low. “And I’m exhausted and starving.”

“I’ll find food,” Baldr said.

“And I’ll take care of the fire this time.” I reached back, pulling my soaked backpack off my shoulders. My box of matches was in there and it was with a heavy heart I realized they were now useless. “Uh... I guess I could try rubbing some sticks together? Probably shouldn’t try magic again.”

“How about we both get food and then I’ll start the fire,” Baldr offered, a smirk on his face. “And as much as I’m thankful to you, I think you should lay off the magic for a moment. You need to rest anyway before it takes too much of a toll on you.”

“Right,” I said with a shrug. “Well, lead the way I guess. I’ll follow your nose this time. And hopefully we don’t run into anymore giant snakes.” I glanced down Baldr’s body, my eyes zeroing in on his crotch. “Well, maybe just one.”

He lifted an eyebrow, planting his hands on his hips. “Seriously? Right now?”

I just laughed. “What can I say? I’m hooked.”

“I’m not gonna get any peace with you, am I?”

“At least I’m not boring.”

He just sighed, shaking his head. “Yeah. I guess you’re right.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

Night fell quickly in Asgard. We had just enough time to collect more food and rinse the grime away in the river before the sun hit the horizon. Our clothes were hung out on low branches to dry, although I knew they'd still be wet come morning. The only blanket we had was wet too, so a nest of dry leaves, soft pine boughs, dry grass had to do for a bed. Thanks to Baldr's magic, we were able to get a fire going and stay warm. But that didn't stop us from huddling together for warmth.

With our naked bodies pressed together, it was hard to think about much else than his flesh pressed to him. Even as we scarfed sweet potatoes and berries, I still couldn't ignore the way his muscles flexed against my back, the way his chest rose and fell with each breath, or the fact that both of us had been rock hard since our clothes came off. And once we were full from a good meal and settled in, thinking about anything other than Baldr's dick was proving to be impossible. Thanks to the bond, I could tell he was having a similar problem.

As if reading my thoughts, Baldr's hand began to trace lazy circles on my hip. His touch sent shivers through my body, igniting a fire that had nothing to do with the flames crackling before us. I turned to face him, our eyes meeting in the flickering firelight. A heartbeat passed. Then two. Without a word, our lips crashed together, hungry and desperate for what we'd been resisting since the sun went down.

Our hands roamed each other's bodies, exploring every curve and silky plane. The cool night air contrasted sharply with the heat of our skin as we flushed with desire. Baldr's fingers tangled in my hair and he deepened the kiss, his tongue dancing with mine. I could feel his lust through our bond, mirroring my own overwhelming need. A small part of me told me to slow down, but it was overruled by the rest of me. I couldn't deny that I wanted him desperately. Our first night together was too

wonderful to stop myself from pursuing it again. I needed him like I needed air.

Breaking the kiss, Baldr trailed his lips down my neck, nipping and sucking at the sensitive skin. I gasped, arching into him as pleasure coursed through me. His hand slid lower, teasing and caressing my nipples. I let out a shallow gasp, surprised that they could be so sensitive.

“Mist,” he whispered, his voice husky. “We shouldn't...”

But even as he said it, his hand began to wander, tracing the trail of hair leading down to my groin. The bond between us thrummed with desire, amplifying every sensation. I pressed my forehead to his, holding either side of his face.

“Why not?” I asked, my own voice barely audible over the crackling fire. “We're alone, we're safe for the moment. And I want you. I know you want me too.”

Baldr's eyes, usually so bright and full of life, were dark with need. He swallowed hard, his resolve visibly crumbling. “I know but...”

“But what?”

He froze for a moment, his jaw working as if he was trying to figure out what to say.

“We're already mates,” I said gently. “There's nothing we could do to make things more intense, could we?”

Baldr shook his head, letting out a long sigh. “I guess not.”

His hesitation worried me for a moment, but as his side of the bond surged and I was too lost in the feelings of pleasure to pursue it.

Baldr's hand finally dipped lower, brushing against the head of my cock, sending a spark through my entire body. I moaned softly and his lips found mine again, silencing the sound before it could echo into the stillness of the forest. His own breath hitched, and I felt his confidence grow, his touch more deliberate now, drawing out every ounce of tension that had built between us since this journey began.

Our bond pulsed between us like a second heartbeat—stronger than ever, alive with each shared breath and touch. It wasn't just desire, it was a desperate need for connection. I could feel his thoughts brushing against mine in a way that words never could. His longing for me wasn't just physical; it was deeper, tangled in a thousand unspoken emotions that he rarely showed on the surface. For all these years he'd been sharing his life with me, but now we were one and the intimacy was so much more than I ever imagined it could be.

As he moved over me, pressing me down onto the bed of leaves and pine boughs, the world beyond our small camp faded into insignificance. The stars above Asgard hung low and watchful, but all I could feel was him—his weight against me, his warmth seeping into my bones, and the way his breath hitched slightly every time we moved, our cocks finding friction against one another. I closed my eyes, allowing myself to drown in the sensation. His lips trailed lower this time, brushing along my abdomen with reverent softness like he was memorizing every inch of me.

"You make it so hard to think," Baldr said, glancing up at me.

I reached out, grabbing a handful of his hair and pushed him lower. "Then don't."

He didn't need to be told twice as his lips came to rest against the head of my cock. Baldr hesitated only for a fleeting moment, his breath warm against my skin as if savoring the tension between us. Then, with an almost insatiable intensity, he parted his lips and took me into his mouth. The sensation was electric, a surge of pleasure so consuming it left my thoughts scattered like cinders carried on the breeze. My back

arched involuntarily, the rough surface of pine needles and leaves beneath me forgotten entirely as his tongue moved with deliberate precision, coaxing sounds from me that I couldn't suppress.

The bond between us pulsed stronger now, like a living thing intertwined with the rhythm of our bodies. I felt not only my own rising pleasure but his—his satisfaction in eliciting these reactions from me. I felt him shift his tongue, adjusting his movements to drive me to even higher bliss. The constant feedback loop made sure he felt every miniscule tingle he gifted to me. And I could feel his lust growing. With every passing second, he wanted more, and it was taking everything I had to make this moment last, to resist that temptation.

The cool night air was forgotten entirely. All that existed now was him—his touch, his warmth, the rhythm of his movements that matched the pounding of my own heartbeat. Each brush of his tongue unraveled me further, each gentle suck drew me closer to some edge I couldn't yet see but desperately wanted to leap over. The way he reached down and cupped my balls in his hand while gently running a forefinger over my hole made me want to cum right then and there. I even heard him moan and felt the taste against his tongue as pre-cum surged into his mouth. He was driving me fucking crazy.

“Baldr...” I managed to gasp out his name, the word a plea on my lips. He glanced up at me through half-lidded eyes, the firelight dancing across his glowing golden ones. “Please...” I uttered. “I want you to fuck me. I... I need it.”

He stared at me, my cock still held firmly in his hand. “This time,” he said, his voice low and gravelly. “I’m staying in human form. That’ll make it easier.”

I let out a low whine, knowing I was hungry for every blissful stretch he could give me. But he was right. His Alpha form was fun, but extremely intense considering I was barely no longer a virgin. His human form was still well hung, more so than I

could've anticipated. It would be more than enough for me tonight and I was sure my body would thank me for it tomorrow when we started walking.

"Alright," I said breathlessly, releasing his hair from my grasp. "But don't make me wait."

His eyes glimmered in the firelight. "Don't worry, baby. I'll take good care of you."

Baldr's words sent a shiver down my spine. He sat up, his erection landing neatly on top of my own and dwarfing it completely. I reached down, taking us both in my hand, the heat of him seeping into my palm. Fuck... it was so incredible to touch him like this, to feel his pleasure through our bond. It only took me a matter of seconds to find all his sweet spots, pre-cum coating us both by the time I was done. And a good thing too because it was the only lubrication we had. Thankfully Baldr produced more than enough for us both.

I couldn't tear my eyes away from his thick shaft, standing at attention, begging for release. The bond thrummed with desire, our arousal feeding off each other in an endless loop as he grabbed the back of my knees and pushed them toward my chest. I felt the cool kiss of night air against my hole, but in only a second or two it was replaced by the throbbing heat of his cockhead.

"I want you so bad," I breathed, my voice trembling with anticipation.

Baldr's lips curved into a mischievous grin as he milked his cock, smearing his pre-cum over my tight hole. "I can see that," he purred, leaning his hips forward. "How does that feel?"

I let out a gasp as his cock pressed into me, the head stretching me already as my body desperately attempted to let him in.

“Fuck!” I groaned, throwing my head back against the leaves. “Oh fuck...”

“I’ll take that as a good sign then,” he chuckled.

However, the next moment, all Baldr’s grins and laughs were gone. He pressed harder against me, his expression intense and hungry. I stared up into those golden wolf eyes of his, feeling the predator inside him bearing down on me. The wolf was hungry for me, aching to ravage my body and leave me used and spent on the forest floor. I reached out with my mind, coaxing that side of him forward through our bond.

“Take me,” I muttered, my voice barely audible even in the silence of the Asgardian night. “Use me.”

Baldr’s eyes flashed with primal hunger at my words. With a low growl, he surged forward, burying himself inside me in one powerful thrust. I cried out, my body stretching to accommodate his impressive girth. The initial burn of his entrance quickly gave way to waves of pleasure as he began to move, setting a relentless pace. I’d never seen this side of him before, much less felt it through our bond. When I called on the wolf inside him, it answered. And despite him not being in his Alpha form, he was acting more like an animal than ever. But I didn’t care. It felt too good to even think.

Baldr’s hips snapped against mine, driving deep with each thrust. I could feel every inch of him, filling me completely, hitting spots I didn’t even know existed. Through our bond, I sensed his raw need, his desire to claim and possess. It only fueled my own lust, making me arch into him, desperate for more. When he’d bred me as an Alpha, I was in control, finding my own sweet spots. But now that he was taking every last bit of me, I found a new and profound sense of delight at becoming his plaything.

“Fuck, Mist,” Baldr groaned, his voice rough with desire. “You feel so fucking good. So tight...”

I couldn't form coherent words, lost in the sensations overwhelming me down to my very core.

My fingers dug into Baldr's shoulders, desperate for something to anchor me as he pounded into me relentlessly. The forest around us faded away, replaced by a haze of pure sensation and bliss. Every thrust sent shockwaves of pleasure through my body, building higher and higher with each passing moment. For a moment I wasn't sure I would survive the encounter. I thought the pleasure might consume me completely and drive me mad. And I found that I just couldn't bother to care.

Baldr's lips found mine again, swallowing my moans as he continued his merciless pace. His tongue mimicked the rhythm of his hips, deepening our connection even further. Through our bond, I could feel his mounting pleasure mirroring my own, creating a feedback loop of ecstasy that threatened to consume us both.

“Mine,” Baldr growled against my lips, his voice barely human. “All mine.”

“Yours,” I gasped in response, my body arching to meet his thrusts. “Always yours.”

The possessiveness in his voice awakened something deep inside of me. Spending my life trapped in a dome meant I didn't have a choice who I belonged to. But now that I was free and with Baldr, I realized I had the choice to turn myself over completely to someone if I wished. And I was more than happy to give myself to Baldr completely. He could have all of me and I'd revel in his possession.

Before I could even bother to reach down and stroke myself, I realized I was heading toward the edge at an alarming speed. And all it took was this man, my mate, and the bond between us to take me there.

“Baldr,” I gasped, my voice breathy and desperate. “I’m close... so close...”

He growled in response, his pace becoming even more frantic. Through our bond, I could feel his own release building, mirroring my own. The feedback loop of sensation was overwhelming, amplifying every touch, every movement.

“Cum for me,” Baldr commanded, his voice rough with desire. “Let go, Mist. I want to feel you...”

His words were all it took to push me over the edge. My back arched off the forest floor as pleasure exploded through my system. Cock throbbing wildly, I came over and over again, coating my belly with my seed as I cried out into the night.

At the same time my body tensed, pushing Baldr over the edge. With a growling moan, he drove himself to the hilt, his cock pushing deeper than I ever thought possible. A searing heat filled my belly as he bred me deep and thoroughly, his balls tight against my ass. In fact, he didn’t bother pulling out after his cock stopped throbbing. Instead he just sank down on top of me, smearing my mess between us and breathing heavily.

“Fuck,” he gasped, his chest heaving. “Fuck, fuck, fuck...”

The aftermath of our frenzied passion left us both panting, our bodies intertwined in the dim glow of the firelight. Baldr's weight pressed me into the forest floor, his warmth seeping into my bones. I couldn't remember ever feeling so complete, so utterly content. It was like a dream come true. And one I'd been dreaming about for a very long time.

“That was...” I trailed off, struggling to find the words to do it justice.

Baldr chuckled, planting a soft kiss on my temple. “Yeah,” he murmured, his voice

thick with satisfaction. “Yeah, it was.”

We lay like that for a while, letting our heartbeats slow and the world around us fade away. His fingers gently stroked my hair, the motion lulling me toward sleep in spite of the adrenaline still coursing through my veins. Just as I drifted off, however, I heard myself whisper into the night, “I love you.”

Baldr swallowed hard, his mind a tangle of emotions that threatened to spill over our bond. I didn’t get a chance to make sense of them before he regained control, and I was too tired and sleepy to think much of it.

“I love you too,” he replied at last, his voice raw with emotion.

With those words ringing in my ears, I smiled, and drifted into a world of lovely dreams that for the first time ever, had the potential to become reality.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

I awoke with a start, sitting straight up with a gasp. However, instead of happily snuggled with Mist under the trees of Asgard, I found myself sitting in a field of snow. However, instead of the glimmering white I expected, it was streaked with crimson.

The air was sharp with the metallic tang of blood, and my breath hung in front of me in frozen puffs of cloud. The world was eerily silent, save for the whisper of a distant wind that carried the faintest echo of something like a scream. My heart pounded in my chest as I looked down at myself. My hands were trembling, bare against the cold, but what froze me more than the chill was the sight of them—stained red.

I staggered to my feet, my knees crunching into the snow below me. The field stretched endlessly in every direction, vast and empty save for the crimson streaks that painted grotesque patterns across its surface. Something about those patterns unnerved me; they weren't random splashes or chaotic smears—they formed lines, symbols almost, though none I could recognize.

“Mist?” I called out hoarsely, my voice cracking with panic. “Mist!” There was no reply.

I spun around, desperate for any sign of life. And that's when I saw him.

Tyr.

He was standing there in the snow, his chest heaving and his Alpha form covered in blood from head to toe. In his remaining hand he clutched a ragged piece of paper. Upon further inspection, I realized it was the other half of my mother's spellbook.

“Thanks for the help,” he growled, holding up the book before tossing it away. “None of this would’ve been possible without you.”

I glanced back down at the blood on my hands, realizing that it was only through me that Tyr had been able to get this far.

“Where is everyone?!” I cried. “Where is Thor and Loki?!”

Tyr glanced off to the left, then the right. I followed his gaze both times, my heart nearly coming to a stop in my chest. There, lying frozen and bloody in the snow, was both of my brothers, their chests torn open and their hearts lying on the ground beside them. Fear was the expression their faces were locked into in death. I let out a choking sob, but I couldn’t force myself to take a step toward them. I didn’t want to see any more.

“Everyone you love is dead,” Tyr snarled, inching closer all the time. “And now I think it’s time to deal the final blow.” He lifted his bloody claws toward the sky, chanting under his breath. “Then you can live alone and sad for the rest of your days!”

Fiery red magic coalesced in his claws before he aimed it directly at my heart. However, at the last moment he swung his arm to the left, and I finally saw who his target truly was.

It was Mist.

The world seemed to go silent as the spell raced toward him. I saw his eyes go wide and fill with tears as he stared at me, a plea on his lips that he didn’t have time to speak. Before I knew it, my wolf took over and I raced through the snow at an almost inhuman speed. Without a second thought, I threw myself in front of him, the spell colliding with my chest and exploding outward.

There was a white-hot flash of pain and my world went dark.

???

I awoke with a gasp, bolting upright. This time, the ground beneath me was warm, soft leaves, not snow. The icy bite in the air was gone, replaced by the gentle caress of a summer breeze that carried the scent of wildflowers. My heart raced, confusion crashing over me like waves against the shore. My hands flew to my chest, expecting to feel searing pain or a gaping wound where Tyr's spell had struck—but there was nothing. Just smooth skin without a single blemish, though I could still feel an ache deep inside, like a phantom echo of what had happened.

“Easy,” came a low voice behind me. Soft but steady. Familiar.

I turned sharply and saw Mist sitting nearby, sprawled out naked in a patch of sunlight without a care in the world. His eyes were fixed on me with a mixture of relief and lingering worry. “You okay? You were mumbling in your sleep.” He tilted his head to the side. “I tried to see what you were dreaming through the bond... but it was blocked from me.”

“I... I was having another one of my visions,” I replied, shaking my head. “One I’ve had quite a few times, actually.”

“Want to tell me about it?”

I shook my head again, a streak of anxiety twisting at my stomach. “No. Not really.”

Mist stretched and got to his feet, coming over to our makeshift bed and snuggling up next to me. I felt his warm flesh press against my skin, the feeling reassuring me that not only was he okay, but I was still very much alive. Although, for how much longer I would be, I wasn’t sure. It seemed as if the end was quickly approaching.

“Baldr,” he said softly, running the back of his finger of my shoulder in a slow circle. “You know you can talk to me, right? I realize we haven’t been together long, but you’re my oldest friend and I trust you. I hope you can feel the same about me and I’d like to help you with your visions if you’re okay with that.”

I let out a long sigh. “It’s not that I don’t trust you,” I replied quietly, unable to meet his gaze. “It’s just... not a good vision. I haven’t told anyone about it. Not even my brothers.”

Mist’s hand stilled on my shoulder. For a moment, silence hung between us, broken only by the rustling of leaves and the distant chirp of birds. Then he shifted closer, his warmth grounding me in a way I didn’t know I needed.

“Baldr,” he said, his voice low and steady, “good or not... visions come for a reason. Maybe we can figure out what it means together.”

I wanted to argue, to brush it off as something meaningless or fleeting, but the weight of the vision still smoldered inside me like embers that refused to die out. That persistent ache in my chest wasn’t just from Tyr’s spell—it was from what I had seen. What I had felt so many times before.

For all this time I’d been holding back this knowledge, hoping I never had to tell Mist about it until the very end. Unfortunately, I could feel that end quickly approaching. I knew we wouldn’t get another moment of peace like this again. And, at the very least, if Mist knew what was coming, he could prepare himself for it.

“I saw them again,” I finally admitted, my voice barely above a whisper. “Thor. Loki.” The names felt heavy on my tongue, each syllable laced with grief that threatened to choke me. “I saw their bodies... dead in the snow.”

Mist’s sharp intake of breath told me that was the last thing he expected me to say.

Too bad it was only going to get worse from there.

“The future I keep seeing is fuzzy,” I added. “But I know that Tyr is the one driving it forward. If we don’t find a way to stop him soon, he’s going to kill every single wolf in Fenris. He talks about joining the packs together and leading us all into a better future, but that’s not what he wants. Not what he will eventually want.” I glanced up at Mist, seeing the fear in his eyes. “I’m not sure exactly when, but soon he will want to wash Fenris clean of its werewolves. The ones he’s deemed disloyal. From there he hopes to lead the birth of a new pack that will take what it wants from the humans and return to a world of fear and violence.”

“But... he must know that would never work,” Mist said, the hint of a plea in his voice. “If any of the humans caught wind of what he was doing... wouldn’t they stop him?”

I nodded. “Of course. But not before he destroys us all in the process. Tyr thinks he’s invincible, which will be his downfall.”

“Did you see his end?”

“No,” I replied. “Thor and Loki’s deaths are fuzzy too. That tells me that portion of the vision can still be changed. It’s when things are crystal clear that I know they are set in stone.”

Mist stared for a long moment before his lips finally began to work again. “I’m... I’m afraid to ask...”

Taking a deep breath, I prepared for the most painful moments of my life to unfold. I reached out with my mind, laid a hand on the barrier I’d constructed between our minds, and in one fell swoop brought it crashing down. Emotions welled up through our bond, spilling over into Mist’s mind. I allowed the vision to replay in my head,

letting him see every last moment of it. He gasped, his hand going to his lips as he saw Thor and Loki lying on the ground. However, as we neared the end of the vision and he saw my sacrifice, he just went silent. When I looked up again, I saw the tears running down his face.

“You... You’ve seen this before?” he croaked.

I nodded. “Ever since I met you.”

“Why... Why didn’t you tell me?” he asked, a tone of accusation in his voice.

I knew he would be angry of course, that was expected. I’d been hiding my vision from him for a long time.

“The first few times I had it there was still a fuzziness around the edges that gave me hope,” I explained. “So I didn’t want to bring it up and make you worry needlessly. But as time went on, it got clearer and clearer. In fact, every time I spent time with you, it seemed to crystalize further. The way I go changes from time to time, I’ve seen at least a dozen different possibilities. But the end is always the clearest part.”

“Why didn’t you stay away from me then? If I’m the one making you have these awful nightmares!”

All I could do was shrug. “Because I love you. I’ve always loved you and I knew I couldn’t just leave you behind. Besides, abandoning you doesn’t change the end of my story, only the middle. So I chose to be happy instead.”

“Are your visions ever wrong?”

I shook my head. “Not ones like this.”

“What if I stay in Asgard then?” he said, his face lighting up like he’d just cracked the code. “It can’t take place if I’m not there!”

“One way or another, you’ll be there.” My voice was soft and low as I reached out and placed my hand on his shoulder. “And I’m sorry you’ll have to see me die. But I need you to know it’s not your fault.”

“Not my fault? Not my fault?!” Mist cried. “It’s completely my fault! If I wasn’t here... if you hadn’t rescued me... then you... you...”

“If I hadn’t rescued you,” I said, forcing him to look me in the eye. “Then Tyr would’ve broken you and used your power to kill me instead.” His eyes widened in fear as I nodded. “That was the original vision. And the closer I got to you, the more it changed to what you see now.” I ran my thumb over his cheek pulling his forehead against mine. “I would rather die to save you then have you strike me down by accident and blame yourself for the rest of your life. This is the choice I made.”

“But you didn’t tell me...” he sobbed, his arms around my neck as he collapsed against me. “Why didn’t you tell me?!”

“I’m sorry, baby,” I said softly, holding him as the sobs wracked his body. “I wanted you to have good memories untainted by that knowledge, ones you could look back on and maybe smile someday. I tried to spare you as long as I could.”

“As long as you could?” he sputtered. He looked up at me, his eyes growing wide once more as the realization set in. “H-How long?”

“I don’t know. But we’re close to the end now. I have a feeling once we go back home, it won’t take long.”

“Then we’ll just stay here!”

“I can’t do that,” I said, cupping his cheek and wiping his tears away with my thumbs. “My family and my entire pack will be killed if I don’t go back soon. I can’t let that happen.”

Mist’s face twisted, pain flickering across his features as he gripped my arms tighter, as though he could anchor me here, in this peaceful clearing, forever.

“There has to be another way,” he whispered, his voice cracking. “We—I can’t lose you. Not like this.”

I swallowed hard, my throat dry as the ashy remnants of our fire. In all the times I had envisioned this conversation, I had never found the right words to soothe him. The truth was... there weren’t any. No words could soften the inevitability of what lay ahead.

“We’ll figure it out together,” Mist continued desperately, his hands trembling against me. “You said the visions aren’t always clear and maybe they’re not set in stone yet, right? Maybe we still have time—time to change it.”

I sighed, brushing a lock of dark hair from his damp cheek. His hope was a fragile thing, glimmering and warm despite the cold reality pressing in on us. It hurt to watch that lively green in his eyes fade until they were nearly lifeless. I could tell he knew my end was inevitable, he just hadn’t accepted it yet.

But I had. And it was time to go.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

My world was a haze. A thick blanket of desperation and unimaginable sadness hung over my senses, drowning out the world around me. I barely felt the heat of the sun anymore or the touch of Baldr's hand against my skin. My gaze followed him as he got up and pulled out his mother's spellbook, casting a simple spell to guide us along the path that would take us home. However, it wasn't until he physically lifted me to my feet that I really began to notice anything again. Even then, the world had turned gray to me once more. Despite the wildflowers in the fields and the lush greenery around us, I could feel no joy.

My mate was going to die. The man I loved more than anything, that I'd only just gotten to touch for the first time two days ago, was being ripped away from me. There was no greater cruelty I could think of and I couldn't figure out how to stop it from happening either. Baldr wasn't going to stay in Asgard, not with his family in danger. And I couldn't blame him. But I didn't have enough control over my power to save him. I was as good as useless and then some. The weight of that realization threatened to crush me to death. And for a moment, I wished it would. At least that way I wouldn't have to watch Baldr die right in front of my eyes.

His arms steadied me as I swayed on my feet, his grip firm but gentle, as though he feared I might shatter beneath his touch. His eyes flitted over me, bright and unrelenting, the way they always were when he was trying to read my thoughts. But this time, I didn't meet his gaze. I couldn't bear to let him see the defeat in my soul, the hopelessness carved into every inch of me. So, with nothing more than a soft nudge, we gathered up our things and headed out of the forest.

Before we left the cover of the trees, I noticed a small golden thread connected to Baldr's chest. It took me a moment to realize it was the magic he'd cast, the one that

would show us the way home. The power it took was almost negligible and even through the bond, I couldn't feel it draining either one of us. However, the fate that tiny thread connected to was more powerful than anything I'd ever witnessed in my life. How would I learn to live without him? And would I even want to?

Out in the sunlight the thread was harder to see, but Baldr followed it, nonetheless. It seemed to follow the river, which didn't surprise me considering what the spirit guide had told me the day before. The river was the key to going home. I caught myself wishing it would suddenly dry up so we couldn't return at all.

Baldr glanced back at me as we walked, his silver hair catching the light in a way that made him seem almost unearthly. Even now, with shadows of fate looming heavy over us, he radiated an effortless strength, a quiet resolve that only made my torment worse. He had no idea how deeply it hurt to look at him, to see the life still burning so brightly in his eyes while knowing it would be extinguished far too soon.

"You'll trip if you keep dragging your feet like that," he said softly, the corner of his mouth twitching into a faint smile. He was trying to lighten the moment again, though I could see the cracks in his facade. Not even Baldr could hide the worry pooling behind his eyes as much as he tried. I could feel it seeping into every corner of my brain thanks to our bond.

"I don't care," I muttered. My voice felt hollow even to me.

He stopped abruptly and turned toward me, his hand reaching out to gently cup my cheek. The warmth of his touch startled me—it always did—but this was different.

"Mist," he said softly, the hint of a plea in his voice. "Don't be like this. Not when we have so little time left together."

I choked up immediately, tears forming in the corners of my eyes. Baldr, without

missing a beat, wiped them away with his thumbs, putting on a smile for me.

“I want my journey to be full of laughter and smiles,” he said. “I know it’s hard... but this is all the time we have. So let’s make the best of it, okay?”

I stared at him for a long moment, wanting to scream, to argue, to tell him he was asking the impossible. But what kind of mate would I be if I forced him to live his last few days or even hours in a melancholy haze?

“O-Okay,” I croaked, forcing myself to speak at last. “I... I’ll try.”

He smiled, placing a soft kiss on my lips. “That’s all I can ask, baby. And thank you.” He pulled me into a firm hug, squeezing me tight. “I love you so much, Mist.”

“I love you too, Baldr.”

Taking a deep breath, I forced myself to smile. With some effort, I managed to stamp down a few of my emotions, letting the more positive ones rise to the surface.

As we continued our journey along the river, I made a conscious effort to focus on the present moment, to soak in every detail of Baldr's presence beside me. The way the sunlight caught his hair, the rhythm of his breathing, the gentle pressure of his hand in mine—I committed it all to memory. I found I loved the way he glanced at me now and then with those beautiful golden eyes and the bond between us surged with affection. It seemed he just liked to look at me and that made me feel more loved than I thought possible. My very existence made him happy.

“Tell me about your favorite childhood memory,” I said, breaking the silence that had settled between us. Baldr looked at me, surprised but pleased to carry a conversation as well.

“Well,” he began, a nostalgic smile spreading across his face, “there was this one time when I was about seven. My father took me fishing down in one of the hollers at an old pond. It was just the two of us, no pack duties, no expectations. Just a father and son.”

As Baldr recounted the story, his eyes lit up with joy. He described how they'd spent hours by the water, talking and laughing the day away. At one point the seven-year-old Baldr had managed to hook a catfish bigger than himself and it had nearly pulled him into the pond. However, thanks to his father's intervention, they were able to land the beast.

“It could have swallowed me whole!” Baldr laughed, his eyes glimmering in the sunlight. “Dad told that story every chance he got. He was so proud of me.”

“What about your mother?” I asked, grinning beside him. “Any good memories with her?”

Baldr nodded, his smile not losing its brightness for even a moment. “Yeah. When I first started having my visions... they came as nightmares. And she used to sit up and read me stories until I calmed down and went back to sleep. But when they began to grow stronger, we started meeting in the garden for witch lessons.”

“Witch lessons?” I laughed, raising my eyebrows. “I didn't know there was such a thing.”

He nodded. “Of course there are! Mom had this beautiful garden tucked away behind the resort with a tiny gazebo in the center where she would read with her afternoon tea. I can't tell you how many times I ended up right there beside her, playing in the grass or amongst the flowers.”

His gaze was far off, as if he were reliving those days in his mind. Through our bond

I caught glimpses of happy summer days spent in the sun and a woman with bright silver hair like his staring down at him.

“And that’s where we had our lessons,” he continued. “Sometimes it was tarot, sometimes it was a crystal ball, and every now and then we’d do some magic spell together out of her book.” He reached out, caressing the golden thread that led us. “My brothers were always jealous of my power. They thought one day I might try to take over the pack because of it. But I didn’t practice to make myself powerful. I practiced because I loved spending time with her.” He pulled his hand away from the golden thread. “I didn’t know how precious those moments were until she was gone.”

I could hear the loss in his voice and feel it through our bond. It seemed a small part of him was missing, ripped away well before its time. The same feeling rose up whenever he talked about his father too. I couldn’t remember my parents, so I didn’t feel like I’d really lost anything. But Baldr had grown up with them, been raised by them, and formed an unshakeable bond with them. And now they were gone. It was cruel considering he was the youngest in his family. He’d gotten to spend the least amount of time with them and it seemed like he still needed them most.

“Remember when we first met?” Baldr asked, a mischievous glint in his eye as he changed the subject. “You were so flustered, you could barely string two words together.”

I felt a blush creep up my cheeks. “You were the first person beside Tyr that I’d met! And you weren’t exactly Mr. Smooth yourself. I seem to recall you tripping over your own feet despite us standing still.”

He chuckled, squeezing my hand. “Fair point. But look at us now.”

The bittersweet irony of his words wasn’t lost on me, but I pushed the sadness away. Instead, I focused on the warmth of his hand in mine, the way his eyes crinkled when

he smiled. We walked in comfortable silence for a while, the golden thread guiding our way as the river flowed beside us.

As the day wore on, the landscape began to change. The lush forests gave way to rolling hills dotted with wildflowers. The air grew warmer, and I could smell the faint scent of salt on the breeze. When I asked him what it meant, he said we must've been nearing the coast. But try as I might, all I could see was tall green grass, the river, and the mountains growing ever closer.

“Look,” Baldr said suddenly, pointing ahead. “Do you see that?”

I squinted, following his gaze. In the distance, I could make out the jagged rock formation jutting out of the side of the mountain. But then I saw a bright gold shimmer. My heart skipped a beat. Was that where we were meant to go? Sure enough, as I took a harder look at the golden thread leading us on, I realized it was slowly tilting upward in that direction. The mountain was still a ways away, but no more than a day or two, which meant we were that much closer to returning home... and to Baldr's fate.

“Yeah,” I said, stamping down the fear inside of me. “That must be the way home, right?”

He nodded. “I think so. But it looks like we have a little time before then.”

“Right...”

We walked in tense silence for a while, the golden thread guiding our path. The river beside us burred gently, its waters catching the sunlight in a dazzling display. I found myself ignoring the beauty around us, as if my senses had stopped working completely. The only thing I could focus on was Baldr.

“I never thought I'd find my mate,” I admitted suddenly, desperate for conversation to steady my mind. “Let alone someone as amazing as you.”

Baldr's smile softened, his eyes filled with tenderness as he glanced over at me. “I feel the same way about you, Mist. You're everything I never knew I needed.” He paused for a moment, lifting his nose to the air and breathing deeply. “You’ve never seen the ocean, have you?”

I shook my head. Of course I hadn't. I'd been imprisoned for most of my life. It had made an appearance in several stories Baldr read to me, but I never understood what the big deal was. A big patch of water seemed like a silly thing to get awestruck about.

“Do you want to?”

“I guess,” I said tenuously. I didn't know what to expect. All I knew is that we seemed to be in a never ending sea of grass. How we were supposed to find the ocean was beyond me. “What's it look like?”

He pulled me up the rise to our left. “Come on. I'll show you.”

As we crested the hill, my breath caught in my throat. Stretching out before us as far as the eye could see was an expanse of shimmering blue, meeting the sky at a distant horizon. The sinking sun glinted off the water's surface, creating a dazzling display of light that almost hurt to look at directly. I raised a hand to shield my eyes, but didn't take them off the endless blue in front of me.

“Oh... It's... really big,” I whispered, unable to find any other words.

Baldr squeezed my hand, a smile playing on his lips as he watched my reaction. “Beautiful, isn't it?”

I nodded, still speechless. The sheer vastness of it was overwhelming. I'd never seen anything so immense, so powerful yet serene at the same time. The gentle lapping of waves against the golden shore reached my ears, a soothing rhythm that seemed to calm my racing thoughts. For the first time that day, I felt some modicum of peace.

“Want to get closer?” Baldr asked, already tugging me towards the water.

“Yeah!” Then I paused. “Can... can we camp here tonight?”

Baldr looked at me, smiled, and nodded. “Of course we can.”

So, without a second thought, I allowed him to pull me toward the ocean, happy to have this memory with him to keep in my heart for all time.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

I laid back against the tall grass that we'd stamped down to create our bed for the night. Ocean waves crashed nearby, the dull roar creating a sense of peace that I didn't know I could feel. Mist sat beside me, his gaze fixed on our little fire sheltered from the wind by a small copse of trees. I laced my fingers behind my head, staring up at the bright stars hanging in the darkness. They were the same stars we had back home, although they seemed to shine a little brighter here in Asgard. It seemed the theories were true. All nine realms existed in the exact same place in the universe, just in different dimensions it seemed. That meant, the moment we stepped through the gate to go back home, we'd be in the middle of a war with Tyr and the two rival packs. And that meant I didn't have much time left.

But there was one thing I couldn't bear to leave undone.

"Mist," I said softly, reaching out to lay my hand on his thigh. He glanced down at me, his green eyes sparkling in the firelight. "I want you to take me tonight."

Mist's eye's widened in surprise, then immediately darkened with lust. "Are you sure?" he asked, his voice husky and low.

I nodded, wrapping my arms around his waist and laying my head in his lap so I could look up at him. "I'm sure. I want to feel you inside me, to be yours completely."

Mist's hand caressed my cheek, his rough thumb tracing my bottom lip. "You've always been mine," he murmured, leaning down to capture my lips in a tender kiss. "At least, I always hoped you would be."

As our lips moved together, I felt the familiar heat building between us. Mist's kisses grew more urgent, his tongue seeking entrance. I opened to him willingly, savoring his taste as our tongues danced together. The bond between us flared, the feedback loop of lust and pleasure building quickly.

Gently, Mist lowered me back onto our makeshift bed of grass. His hands roamed my body, leaving trails of fire in their wake. I arched into his touch, craving more. There was something about being under his control that sent shivers down my spine. Fucking him was one thing, but letting him have his way with me... that was all but unknown.

“Baldr,” Mist breathed against my neck as he kissed a path down to my collarbone. “My beautiful Baldr.”

His voice made me shiver, a wave of gratitude washing through me. I was so happy to have this one last moment with him and I wasn't going to waste it. My hands found their way under his shirt, exploring the well-toned body underneath. Without a word, he reached down and pulled it off, tossing it in the grass beside us. Then he did the same to me, stripping off everything I had until I was lying there naked in the moonlight.

Mist's eyes raked over my body, his gaze burning with desire. He leaned down, trailing kisses along my chest and stomach. His tongue flicked out, teasing my nipples until they hardened into tight peaks. I gasped, arching into his touch with a low moan on my lips.

“You're so beautiful,” he murmured against my skin. “I want to taste every inch of you.”

His mouth moved lower, kissing down my abdomen, following the trail of hair leading to my groin. He went lower, skipping by my throbbing cock and leaving me

breathless with anticipation. I gasped as he nuzzled the sensitive skin of my inner thighs. Slowly, teasingly, he finally licked a stripe up my hardening length. I moaned, my fingers tangling in his hair instinctively.

“Mist, please,” I begged, not even sure what I was asking for.

He chuckled, the vibrations sending shivers through me. “Patience, love. I want to savor this.”

With teasingly slow movements, Mist took the head of my cock into his mouth, licking me clean of the pre-cum that had gathered there. He moaned as the flavor filled his mouth, looking up at me with those lustful green eyes.

“Fuck you taste good,” he sighed before diving back down on me once more.

I groaned as Mist's warm mouth enveloped me, his tongue swirling around my shaft as he took me deeper. My hips bucked involuntarily, seeking more of that exquisite heat. Mist's strong hands gripped my thighs, holding me in place as he worked me with an expert touch that he must've come by naturally. For spending so many years alone, he was an incredible linguist.

“Gods, Mist,” I panted, my fingers tightening in his hair as I forced myself deeper down his throat.

He hummed in response, the vibrations sending sparks of pleasure through my body. I could feel myself getting close already, the combination of his skilled mouth and our bond pushing me towards the edge. But I didn't want it to end so soon.

“Wait,” I gasped, tugging gently on his hair. His lips came away with a small pop. “I want you inside me.”

Mist released me with a wet pop, looking up at me with dark eyes. “Are you sure?” he asked again, a tone of trepidation in his voice. “I’ve never done that kind of thing before.”

“Yes,” I nodded. Reaching up, I cupped his cheek and pulled him in for a passionate kiss. “I know you’ll do great.”

Mist's eyes softened at my words, and he leaned in to kiss me deeply once more. His hands roamed my body, caressing and exploring as if committing every inch to memory. I shivered under his touch, my skin tingling with anticipation.

“I don't want to hurt you,” Mist murmured against my lips.

“You won't,” I assured him, running my fingers through his hair. “Just go slow.”

Nodding, Mist reached down between us, his fingers probing gently at my entrance. I gasped at the unfamiliar sensation, my body tensing instinctively. A bundle of nerves lit up that I’d never really explored and I let out a low groan, loving every bit of it.

“Relax,” Mist soothed, kissing along my jaw. “I’ve got you.”

Taking a deep breath, I forced myself to relax. Mist's finger slowly pushed inside, and I moaned at the strange mixture of pain and pleasure. However, the pain faded almost instantly leaving nothing behind but pure bliss and a pressure that made me squirm with delight.

Mist worked me open slowly, adding a second finger and then a third, stretching me carefully. He used his own pre-cum and saliva to make the friction as smooth as possible. The discomfort melted into pleasure as he found that spot inside me that made me see stars. I writhed beneath him, gasping and moaning as waves of ecstasy washed over me.

“Mist, please,” I begged, my voice hoarse with need. “I’m ready. I need you inside me.”

He withdrew his fingers, and I whimpered at the loss. I loved the feeling of being stretched by him. But if his fingers felt that good, I had a feeling his cock would be even better. Mist positioned himself between my legs, the blunt head of his cock pressing against my entrance. Our eyes locked, and I saw a mixture of love, lust, and nervousness in his gaze.

“Are you sure?” he asked one last time.

In response, I wrapped my legs around his waist and pulled him closer. “Yes,” I breathed. “Make me yours, Mist. Don’t make me wait any longer.”

Mist nodded, his eyes filled with love and desire. Slowly, he began to push inside me. I gasped at the initial stretch, my fingers digging into his shoulders. The sensation was unlike anything I’d ever felt before - a delicious fullness that sent sparks of pleasure through my entire body. And I was full of amazement. Mist was no slouch in the dick department, but I was much bigger. How the hell had he managed to take me so easily? And in my Alpha form to boot? The guy must’ve been built for this. I, on the other hand, felt extraordinarily delicate all of a sudden.

“Oh gods,” Mist groaned, his voice strained. “You feel amazing, Baldr. Fuck...”

I could only moan in response as he sank deeper, inch by glorious inch. When he was fully seated inside me, we both paused, panting. The bond between us flared brightly, our emotions and sensations intertwining until I couldn't tell where I ended and Mist began. The way he pulsed and throbbed inside me pressed my special spot, making it impossible to think anything remotely coherent.

“Move,” I whispered, rolling my hips experimentally. “Please, Mist. I need you to

take me.”

He began to thrust, slowly at first, letting me adjust to the new sensation. Mist's movements were gentle and controlled, each thrust sending waves of pleasure coursing through my body. I clung to him, my nails digging into his back as I adjusted to the unfamiliar fullness. The initial discomfort was a distant memory, replaced by an intense, building pleasure that left me gasping and begging for more.

“Baldr,” Mist breathed against my neck, his voice thick with emotion. “You feel incredible. So tight, so perfect. I love you so fucking much.”

“I love you too,” I moaned in response, arching my back to take him deeper. The angle change caused him to brush against that spot inside me, and I cried out, seeing stars. “There,” I gasped. “Right there, Mist. Please, don't stop.”

He growled low in his throat, a sound that sent shivers down my spine. His thrusts became more forceful, more confident as he found a rhythm that suited us both. I found myself crying out into the night each time his body collided with mine. His cock thrummed against my prostate, driving me nearly insane with pleasure. At the same time I felt his cock bottom out, hitting a second ring inside me that I didn't even know I had.

Our bodies moved together in perfect synchronization, the bond between us amplifying every sensation in an endless feedback loop. Mist's thrusts became more urgent, his breathing ragged as he drove deeper into me. I clung to him, my legs wrapped tightly around his waist, pulling him closer with each thrust. I needed all of him, every last drop inside me. My own cock had been abandoned since we started, but my orgasm was building quickly. With Mist's expert touch, I wouldn't need to help it along.

“Mist,” I moaned, my voice breaking with pleasure. “I'm close. So close.”

He nodded, his forehead pressed against mine as he continued to move. “Me too,” he panted. “Come for me, Baldr. I want to feel you.”

His hand snaked between our bodies, wrapping around my neglected cock. The dual stimulation was almost too much to bear. With a few expert strokes, I was teetering on the edge of ecstasy.

“Mist!” I cried out as my orgasm crashed over me. My body tensed, cock throbbing wildly as I shot my load between us, coating our abdomens in hot sticky cum.

At the same time I felt Mist’s pleasure reach a fever pitch, the sudden tightness of my body around him creating too much friction to resist. With a cry he slammed his cock to the hilt, burying it deep inside me. Heat flooded my belly as he came over and over again, breeding me just like I had done to him our first night. Even as I was lost in the heat of the moment, I felt our bond deepen, the prickling sensation at the back of my neck settling into a persistent and pleasurable warmth.

As our climaxes subsided, Mist collapsed on top of me, his weight a comforting presence. We lay there, panting and trembling, our bodies still intimately connected. I ran my fingers through his sweat-dampened hair, marveling at the intensity of what we'd just shared.

“That was...” Mist began, his voice muffled against my chest.

“Incredible,” I finished for him, pressing a kiss to the top of his head.

He lifted his head to look at me, his green eyes shining with love and contentment. “I've never felt anything like that before,” he murmured, leaning in to kiss me softly. “It was... I don’t know... better than I expected I guess.”

I returned the kiss, savoring the tenderness of the moment. “Me neither,” I admitted.

“I didn't know it could be like that good. I've never done that before.”

“Really? Not with anyone?”

I shook my head. “You're the first.”

He smiled down at me, his dark hair hanging around his face. “I'm honored.”

After a moment, Mist slowly withdrew from me. Every part of my body was overstimulated and I let out a sharp gasp as he finally came free. I missed the feeling of having him inside me, that closeness that we couldn't get any other way. But I also knew we needed to get some sleep. If we were going home to face Tyr tomorrow, we'd need all the energy we could get.

We laid there together for a long time in a peaceful silence. Mist wrapped his arms around me, pulling me tight against his body as his little spoon. Every now and then he'd plant soft little kisses on my neck or my shoulder, his fingers absentmindedly stroking my chest. However, after a while, I started feeling him shiver against me.

“Are you cold?” I asked, glancing over my shoulder at him.

“Y-Yeah,” he muttered. “But I want to stay here with you.”

“I've got an idea.”

Pulling myself out of Mist's arms, I crawled over and grabbed the blanket I'd been wearing instead of clothes. I spread it out and threw it over him to keep him warm before adding what wood we had left to the fire. Then, glancing up at the moon, I closed my eyes and called up the wolf inside me. My body began to shift and in a few seconds I found myself sitting back on my haunches and shaking out my fur.

Mist stared up at me, smiling as he reached a hand out and running his fingers through the fur on the top of my head. I gave him a soft growl of approval before I crawled my way under the blanket and curled up with him.

“You’re so warm,” he whispered, wrapping his arms around me once more.

I snuggled in as close as I could, keeping my mate safe from the cold of a seaside night.

“I love you, Baldr,” he said, barely audible over the crashing waves.

I turned back, licking his nose. And through our strengthened bond I answered him.

I love you too.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

The next day consisted of mostly walking and peaceful silence. Mist held my hand the entire way until we reached the base of the mountain around noon. The river and the golden thread had led us to the bottom of a giant waterfall that filled a deep pool that fed the river. To our surprise, we found an old switchback path that began at its edge, leading upward toward the teeth of the cavern opening. The closer we got, the more I realized that either the old legends were true and the mountain was actually Fenrir chained down until Ragnarok. Or because of the mountain's shape, it had been named after Fenrir. Either way, it was of little importance. As long as there was a portal home inside, that was all that mattered.

Mist held tight to my hand as we started to climb the rocky switchback path. At first he seemed fine, but the higher we went, the more I noticed him trembling. Then, when the path finally became too narrow, and he had to let go of me, his pace became agonizingly slow. I did my best to project feelings of safety and support through our bond, but his mind was so full of fear that he could hardly think. I couldn't blame him either. The path was thin, the drop was deadly, and the mist from the waterfall made everything slick with algae and moss.

"It's okay, Mist," I called back to him, my voice barely audible over the roar of the waterfall. It was much bigger up close and much more dangerous. "We're almost there. Just a little further."

He nodded, his eyes fixed on the path beneath his feet. I could see his knuckles turning white as he gripped the rock face beside him. The wind whipped around us, tugging at our clothes and threatening to throw us off balance. Even I was starting to get a little worried that we wouldn't make it.

As we rounded another switchback, I caught sight of the cavern entrance looming above us. It did indeed look like the gaping maw of a monstrous wolf, jagged stone teeth framing the dark opening. A shiver ran down my spine, but I pushed the feeling aside. We had come too far to turn back now. Besides, it was our only way home.

Suddenly, Mist's foot slipped on a patch of slick moss. He let out a cry of terror as he teetered on the edge, his arms windmilling to keep him in place.

Without thinking, I lunged backward, my hand shooting out to grasp Mist's forearm. The sudden movement nearly threw me off balance as well, but I managed to brace myself against the rock face with my other hand, my fingertips tearing as I gripped the stone. For a heart-stopping moment, we both teetered on the edge, the roar of the waterfall drowning out our panicked gasps. Through it all I could catch the scent of my own blood mixing with the mist.

"I've got you," I shouted, my voice strained with effort as I called on the wolf inside me. Muscles bulged and tightened as I held onto my mate, willing to do anything to stop him from going over the edge. "Don't let go!"

Mist's eyes were wide with terror, his entire body shaking as he clung to my arm. Slowly, carefully, I pulled him back onto the path, my muscles straining with the effort. He was heavier than he looked. As soon as he was on solid ground, Mist collapsed against me, his breath coming in ragged sobs.

"It's okay," I murmured, holding him close. "You're safe now. I won't let anything happen to you."

We stayed there for a moment, clinging to each other as our hearts raced. The wind howled around us, a chilling reminder of how close we had come to disaster. I could feel Mist's body trembling against mine, his fear palpable through our bond. I held him tight, whispering reassuring words to him over and over again as the water

soaked us through.

“We can't stay here,” I said softly, stroking his hair. “We need to keep moving.”

Mist nodded weakly, his face pale and drawn. “I don't know if I can,” he whispered, his voice barely audible over the roar of the waterfall.

I looked up at the cavern entrance, so close yet still so far. We had come too far to give up now, but there was still a sheer climb before we reached the ledge.

“You can,” I said firmly, cupping his face in my hands as I forced him to meet my gaze. “I believe in you, Mist. We'll do this together.”

“What if I don't want to?” he said, his voice choked with emotion. “If you let me fall then at least... at least I won't have to watch you die!”

His outburst caught me off guard, but it really shouldn't have. Mist was doing everything he could to keep those emotions at bay. I could feel him fighting them back for two days now, our bond being constantly shielded over and over to keep them from slipping through. But they did anyway. And even if they didn't, I was no fool. I knew exactly how he was feeling because I was feeling it too. It was so unfair that we should be with one another now only for our relationship to have a short shelf life with a definite expiration date. It was going to end all too soon, and I hated it just as much as he did.

“Shh,” I soothed, running a hand through his damp hair. “You're okay. We're okay. And you will be fine without me. I promise.”

“You don't know that...”

“I may not be able to see that future,” I said, kissing his forehead. “But I know how

strong and powerful you are. You're going to be just fine and you'll find happiness. And I'll be right there, watching over you, and cheering you on the entire way." I kissed him again. "I can promise you that."

He was silent, unable to speak through the sobs that wracked his body. But, after a few more moments, Mist's breathing steadied, and he pulled back slightly to look up at me. His eyes were still red and his cheeks stained with tears, but there was determination there too.

"We need to keep going," he said, his voice stronger now. "We can't stay here."

He seemed like he'd decided something, although what, I had no clue. Instead of questioning him about it, I decided to take this burst of confidence as a blessing. Mist would need it to reach the ledge and the cavern above.

I nodded, relief washing over me. "That's right. We're almost there. Just a little further and we'll be inside the mountain. Then we can go home."

Slowly, we started moving again. The path grew even narrower as we neared the cavern entrance, forcing us to press our backs against the slick rock face and inch our way forward. The wind howled louder, as if trying to push us back, but we pressed on. Water poured down around us, chilling my fingers to the bone. But I knew we couldn't stop. Not now when we were so close.

Mist's face was set in grim determination behind me, his eyes fixed on the cavern ahead. I could feel his fear through our bond, but it was overshadowed by a fierce resolve. Whatever decision he'd made down on that ledge, it was driving him forward now with a strength I hadn't seen before. There was nothing he couldn't do, and I pitied anything or anyone that stood in his way.

As we approached the final stretch, the path disappeared entirely, leaving us with a

sheer rock face to climb. I went first, testing each handhold carefully before pulling myself up. Eventually, with no small amount of effort, I pulled myself up and over the ledge, panting. Turning over on my belly, I hung my upper half over the ledge, beckoning for him to follow.

“Just follow my path,” I called. “You can do it!”

Mist nodded, his jaw set with determination. He reached up, grasping the first handhold I had used. His muscles strained as he pulled himself up, searching for the next grip with his foot. I watched intently, ready to grab him if he slipped. But at the moment, he was too far out of reach. I just needed him to be a few feet closer.

Inch by inch, Mist made his way up the rock face. His progress was slow but steady, each movement carefully calculated. I could see the concentration etched on his face, sweat beading on his brow despite the chilly mist surrounding us. He struggled to find his footing more than once, but he never stopped progressing steadily upward.

As he neared the top, I reached out my hand. “You're almost there,” I encouraged. “Just a little further.”

I leaned out as far as I dared as Mist closed in, my hand outstretched. Our fingertips brushed, then clasped, a burst of electricity shooting through my body. With a final burst of strength, I hauled him up and over the edge. We collapsed together on the ledge, our chests heaving with exertion and relief.

For a moment, we simply lay there, catching our breath. The roar of the waterfall seemed distant now, muffled by the cavern walls. Mist's face was resting on my chest, rising and falling with each heaving breath I took. He wrapped his arms around me as if he were worried that I'd suddenly disappear. I returned the gesture, knowing he needed the support right now. Of course, it was me that was marching toward death, but once I was dead, there was nothing to worry about. Mist was the one

staring down a brand new life that would now be full of grief. And for that, I pitied him more than anyone I'd ever met.

As we lay there, I couldn't help but feel a deep stabbing guilt. This was the exact reason I'd tried so hard not to become his mate. I had tried so hard to protect Mist from this pain, but in the end, I had only made it worse. The bond between us was now unbreakable, and I knew that my impending death would leave a void in his life that nothing could fill. I'd given him freedom and then enslaved him with guilt for the rest of his life. It made me feel like I was no better than Tyr.

Slowly, I sat up, pulling Mist with me. His eyes met mine, and I saw a mixture of love, fear, and determination in them. I cupped his face in my hands, my thumbs gently wiping away the tears that had begun to fall.

"I'm so sorry," I whispered, my voice barely audible. "I never wanted to hurt you like this."

Mist shook his head, his hand coming up to cover mine. "Don't apologize," he said firmly. "I wouldn't trade this for anything. The time I've spent with you was better than anything I could've ever dreamed of." He wrapped his arms around me, sobs quaking his body. "I'm gonna miss you so much, Baldr."

"I know, baby." It was all I could say because no words would ever make it better. "I know."

Eventually I had to get to my feet, gently pulling Mist with me. His arms remained locked around my waist, his face buried in my abdomen as he sat there on his knees. I could feel his tears soaking through my shirt, mingling with the mist and sweat that already clung to the fabric.

"Mist," I said softly, running my fingers through his damp hair as the air buzzed

around us. “We need to keep moving. The portal... it's close. I can feel it.”

He didn't reply, but he allowed me to pull him to his feet. We stood there on the ledge, the cavern entrance looming before us, dark and foreboding. The jagged stone teeth framing the opening seemed to gnash at us, as if warning us away. But we had come too far to turn back now. Besides, I wasn't afraid of another wolf. Even if Fenrir was real, we were kin and that meant I was welcome here. Mist, as my mate, would be too according to the spirits. It was enough to drive me forward toward my destiny.

I took Mist's hand in mine, giving it a reassuring squeeze. “Together,” I said softly.

He nodded, his eyes still red-rimmed but determined. “Together.”

We stepped into the cavern, leaving the roar of the waterfall behind us. The sudden silence was almost deafening. Our footsteps echoed off the damp stone walls as we made our way deeper into the mountain's belly. A swift river flowed not ten feet to our left, the same one we'd been following since the moment we arrived in Asgard. It seemed it had been our guide all along.

The air grew colder and staler the further we went. I could feel Mist shivering beside me, his hand tightening around mine. I pulled him closer, trying to share what little warmth I had left. Darkness seemed to press in around us and before long I had to shift into my wolf form just to see anything. Mist kept his hand firmly in my fur as I led him into the void.

The darkness seemed to stretch on endlessly, our steps echoing in the vast emptiness. I relied on my enhanced wolf senses to guide us, the faint scent of water and stone our only markers. Mist's grip on my fur tightened with each step, his breath coming in short, nervous gasps. The only thing I could see was the golden thread in front of me, leading me forward toward whatever end it had determined.

Suddenly, a faint glow appeared in the distance. At first, I thought it might be a trick of the light, a reflection off the damp cave walls. But as we drew closer, the glow intensified, pulsing with an otherworldly energy that made my fur stand on end.

“Baldr,” Mist whispered, his voice trembling. “Is that...?”

I shifted back to my human form, wrapping my body in the damp blanket and taking Mist's hand in mine. “The portal,” I confirmed, my own voice barely above a whisper. “We found it.”

The light grew stronger with each step, illuminating the surrounding cavern. The walls were covered in intricate carvings, ancient runes that spoke of the wolfkin that had not only lived with Fenrir, but were created by him. It was the ancient history of my kind, the history that nobody left in my world knew. I stared at it for a long moment, able to read a good portion of it with ease thanks to my mother's teachings. I just wished I had the time to copy it down and share it with my brothers.

But my end was drawing near and my heart told me we were already taking too much time. Tyr was on the move and if my visions were right, which they always were, my brothers were in grave danger. I had to go home and stop him once and for all. Even if I died, I planned on taking that tyrannical asshole with me.

“Come on,” I said, pulling Mist toward the large stone arch etched with golden runes. “It's time to put that dickhead down once and for all.”

There was no pang of fear or regret as Mist followed me. Only fierce determination.

“I'm going to kill him myself,” he growled.

I didn't have time to ask how he planned to do that before we met the portal and with a rush of magic, stepped through into the light.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

The first thing I noticed was the cold. My feet, that had been bare for the past two days, stepped from cool damp stone onto fresh, powdery snow, sinking in a few inches. Mist stepped up beside me, his hand still clasped in mine. I felt the shock of the sudden temperature swing through our bond, both of us beginning to shiver instantly. We'd either lost or left behind the spare clothing we'd had and now we were both terribly underdressed for the winter that was obviously in full swing back home.

But were we home? I wasn't sure just yet. I glanced around, finding us both standing at the mouth of a cave. Snow had blown in, drifting against the back wall where we'd appeared. Outside it was light, but that's all I could really tell. And when I turned around to see if the portal was still behind us, all I saw was a dark stone wall glazed with ice and snow.

"Come on," I said, pulling Mist forward. "Even if this isn't home, we can't go back now."

Mist just nodded, squeezing my hand tighter as I pulled him along. It only took a few steps before we stepped out into the sunshine, the brightness nearly blinding us both. I pulled an arm up to shield my eyes, trying to find any hint of where the portal had taken us. But when my eyes finally began to adjust, I felt a sudden surge of warmth and familiarity in my chest.

We were standing at the top of a mountain, overlooking several others. They were my mountains, the ones I'd grown up running all over. From our lookout point I could see the Skoll and Hati mountains some miles away, leaning toward one another like wolves about to tear into one another. It was a fitting image considering what I knew

was going on down in Fenris.

“We’re home,” I sighed, letting a smile come over my face at last. “The portal really did work.”

“I was worried that spirit had lied to us.”

“I told you,” I grinned. “They can’t. The spell doesn’t allow it.” I pointed to the south where I knew the resort lay just out of sight. “Home is that way. But it’s a few miles off.” I glanced down at my feet. “I don’t think I can make it there in this form.” My gaze turned to Mist, another smile creeping over my face. “Do you want to ride me?”

His eyes grew wide. “R-Ride you?”

“Yeah. My Alpha form can run on all fours. But you’ll have to hold on tightly. It can be a little rough.”

He gave me a small grin. “I’ve survived a couple rides with you already. I think I’ll be fine.”

I laughed, feeling joyful despite what was soon to come. Just being home in familiar territory filled me with warmth. “Over the hills and through the woods to Nana’s house we go!”

Mist just stared at me. “Nana? Who’s Nana?”

My little joke was completely lost on him. Dammit, and it was so clever too. I never read that fairy tale to him. “She’s Flynn’s grandmother. Thor and Flynn are staying with her.”

“Alright,” he nodded. “Let’s go then.”

I leaned in, giving him a quick kiss before I stripped the makeshift clothing off my body. Then, leaning into the wolf completely, I let the Alpha form consume me. When we were mating, usually I only changed partway. But this time I let it go until I was completely covered in fur, my body had nearly doubled in size, and a long muzzle sprouted from my face. If I had a mirror, I would've seen a massive movie-style werewolf staring back at me with bright gold eyes and bright silver fur. It was a sight to behold and Mist's eyes widened as he stared at me.

Giving him a grunt and a nod, I kneeled down in the snow, gesturing for him to climb onto my back. He did so hesitantly, probably remembering the last time I was in this form and I tried to kill him. I didn't blame him for that. It wasn't my best moment. But this was different. We weren't being chased by giant venomous serpents. I still maintained control over myself.

As Mist settled onto my back, I felt his arms wrap tightly around my neck, his fingers digging into my thick silver fur. His body pressed against mine, warm despite the frigid air. I could sense his nervousness through our bond, but also his trust. He knew I wouldn't let him fall. He was my most precious cargo.

With a low growl, I launched forward, powerful legs propelling us through the snow. The wind whipped past, carrying the scent of pine and ice. Mist clung tighter as we bounded down the mountainside, weaving between trees and leaping over fallen logs. His heart raced, a mix of exhilaration and fear pulsing through our connection. More than once I thought I heard him laugh.

We covered ground quickly, my paws barely touching the snow as we flew across the landscape. The familiar terrain blurred past - rocky outcroppings, frozen streams, dense thickets of evergreens. Home. After everything we'd been through in Asgard, it was nice to lay eyes on a familiar place at last. Here I knew every rock and tree and creature. Despite the danger that lay ahead, I felt more comfortable than I had in days.

As we descended further into the valley, the snow began to thin, giving way to patches of exposed earth and scattered pine needles. The air grew slightly warmer, though still brisk enough to nip at our exposed skin and never above freezing. I slowed my pace as we approached the outskirts of town, not wanting to startle any unsuspecting humans with the sight of a massive werewolf barreling through the forest. I quickly turned to the left, following the outer edge of Fenris all the way to the northern side where Nana's farm was located. It made the path more difficult, but I wanted to stay out of sight. However, we eventually started up the Hati mountain, crossing hiking trails here and there that had been left untouched. On the air I finally caught the familiar scent of farm animals and hay. We were close.

Mist's grip on my fur loosened slightly as we came to a stop at the edge of a small farm. I could sense his relief at being on solid ground again, though there was also a tinge of disappointment that the exhilarating ride was over. His heart was thrumming so loud in his chest that even I could hear it.

"That was... incredible," he breathed, sliding off my back. His cheeks were flushed from the cold and excitement, eyes bright with wonder. "I've never experienced anything like that before."

I let out a soft rumble of satisfaction, nuzzling his hand affectionately before shifting back to my human form. The change was quick and once again I found myself standing barefoot in the snow. Except this time I was completely naked with nothing to put back on. Oh well, I didn't have time to worry about it. Such was the life of a werewolf.

"Come on," I said, grabbing his hand and pulling him toward the house on the other side of the farmyard. "They'll probably be wondering where I've been."

The scent of wood smoke carried by the wind reached us before we got to the house and saw the fire glowing brightly in the hearth through the windows. I didn't stop to

knock on the door. Instead, knowing Nana always left it unlocked, I just let myself in, pulling Mist in behind me.

“I’m home,” I called nonchalantly. “Can someone get me a blanket please?”

“BALDR!”

I winced as I heard my brother roar from the other side of the room, his hulking form standing from the couch as he puffed out his chest. His face was red with anger and I knew I was in trouble.

“Where the fuck have you been?!” he cried. “We’ve been worried sick about you! I thought you were dead!”

I raised my hands defensively, trying to calm my enraged brother. “Thor, I can explain—”

“Explain? EXPLAIN?!” Thor’s voice boomed through the cozy little farmhouse. “You disappeared for days without a word! We thought Tyr had captured you, or worse!”

Before I could respond, Nana bustled into the room, her eyes widening at the sight of me standing naked in her entryway. “Oh, good lord!” she exclaimed, hurrying to grab a thick quilt from a nearby chair. She wrapped it around my shoulders, clucking disapprovingly. “Baldr, you’ll catch your death like that! Your dingle is gonna fall off!” She pulled me toward the fire, grabbing another crocheted blanket and adding it over my head. Then she turned back to Mist, who’s hand was still attached to mine. “And who’s this young man?”

Mist shifted uncomfortably beside me, clearly overwhelmed by the chaotic reception. He’d never been in a room with more than once person, so it had to be strange for

him. I squeezed his hand reassuringly. "This is Mist. He's... he's my.." I paused, swallowing my nervousness. "He's my mate."

"We'll talk about that in a minute," Thor interrupted, grabbing me by the shoulder and turning me to face him. "Where the hell have you been?"

"Asgard."

He just stared at me. "W-What?"

"It was an accident. We had to escape from Tyr. But we're back now." I glanced over at Nana. "I sure am hungry though. They didn't exactly have a fast food place on every corner in the realm of the gods."

"Give me ten minutes," she nodded. "I've always got an emergency meal or two in the freezer for just such an occasion." She paused, glaring up at Thor. Reaching up, she poked him in the chest threateningly. "And you keep your voice down young man. I ain't having no hollerin' in this house. Understood?"

Thor sighed, clearly terrified of this tiny human woman. "Yes ma'am."

"Good." She turned to Flynn who was still sitting on the couch, staring at all of us wide-eyed. "Get these boys some proper clothes, darlin'," she ordered.

With that, she hustled into the kitchen followed quickly by the sound of drawers opening and closing. Flynn nodded in her direction and scurried off to find some clothes, leaving me alone with Thor and Mist. The tension in the room was palpable. Thor's eyes darted between us, his brow furrowed in confusion and concern.

"Asgard?" he finally said, his voice quieter but still stern. "How is that even possible?"

I sighed, tightening the quilt around my shoulders. "It's a long story, but the short version is that Tyr ambushed us. We managed to escape through an emergency portal, but it took us to Asgard instead of where we intended. We've spent the last few days trying to find our way back."

Thor grunted, clearly not satisfied with that answer but willing to wait. His gaze shifted to Mist, who was trying his best to blend into the wall behind him.

"And you said he's your... mate?" Thor asked, his tone a mix of disbelief and worry.

I nodded, pulling Mist closer to me. "He is." I paused, glancing at Mist. "And he's the witch that Tyr has been keeping imprisoned for nearly a decade on the Skoll mountain."

"I'm sorry, what?"

I let out a long sigh. "I've uh... known about him for some time. In fact, I've been visiting him nearly every day since I was fourteen."

Thor's eyes widened in shock, his mouth opening and closing as he struggled to find words. "You... you've been visiting him for years? And you never told me?"

I winced, guilt washing over me. "I know, I should have said something. But I was afraid of what might happen if anyone found out. Tyr was keeping him prisoner, and I didn't want to risk his safety. He was already being tortured and I just... I didn't want it to get worse."

Thor ran a hand through his hair, clearly trying to process this new information. "So all those times you disappeared into the mountains..."

"I was going to see Mist," I finished for him. "He was trapped in a magical barrier on

the Skoll mountain. I stumbled across him by accident when I was younger, and we became friends. Over time, it became... more. Although, until a couple days ago, I didn't realize just how much more."

Mist squeezed my hand, offering silent support. I could feel his nervousness through our bond, but also his excitement. He was thrilled to hear me claiming him as my own, to share him with my family for the first time. It was a complicated mix of emotions we were both going through. And yet, despite all that, I could still hear the clock ticking in the back of my head.

"But we'll need to talk about it later," I said. "We could've stayed in Asgard and been safe for a while. However, we rushed back here because I've been having visions." I lifted my gaze, meeting Thor's. "Tyr is on the way here. Right now. And he's got half of my mother's spellbook."

On cue, Mist reached into his bag and held up the other half.

"Where... Where did you find that?" Thor asked, recognizing the book he'd never been allowed to open. "I thought it was lost."

"So did I, but there's no time to explain," I said, rushing him forward. "Tyr will be here by sundown with his wolves and with the spellbook. I have no doubt he's figured out how to harness its power somehow. That's what I saw in my vision."

"But how—"

"I don't know Thor," I urged. "Truly. If I knew, I'd tell you. But right now you need to gather the other wolves to fight. You also need to know that Loki and his mate are on our side."

"Loki is a traitor!"

“No, Thor, he’s not,” I replied, placing a hand on his shoulder. “I didn’t tell you at first, because I needed to be sure. But Loki is on our side. He’s the one who told me how to figure this all out and get Mist free. If it hadn’t been for him, we’d be dead and rotting under the rubble of the resort. He’s been helping us this whole time.”

Thor was silently staring at me, trying to process everything I’d said.

“But right now I need to eat and regain my strength.” I glanced back at Mist. “And Mist... he needs to—”

“I’m going with you,” he said, cutting me off. His green eyes stared daggers into my soul. “And that’s final.”

I nodded, feeling over the bond that there was no way I was going to convince him otherwise. “Alright.”

“But first,” he said as Flynn stepped back into the room carrying an armful of clothing. “I want to take one of these showers I’ve heard so much about.” He reached up, stroking his tangled beard and hair. “If we’re going to war today, I want to at least know what it feels like, just once. And I think I want to shave.”

“I can help you with that,” Flynn offered, handing the clothes off to me. “Come on. I used to cut hair in college for booze money. I’m not too bad at it.”

I reached out, squeezing Mist’s hand. “I love you.”

Emotion surged through the bond, showing him that I wasn’t just telling him how much I cared for him, but that I was wishing him safety and happiness and a long life all at the same time. He knew what was coming and yet, he’d kept it all to himself for my sake. He understood I needed my brother on high alert for the battle ahead, not mired down by the future that would inevitably arrive.

“I love you too,” he replied.

And he meant it.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

By the time I stepped out of the bathroom an hour later, I felt like a new man. I'd shaved away nearly all of my beard, leaving a small amount of scuff behind. I almost shaved it clean, but Flynn insisted the little bit left behind made me look devilishly handsome. He'd also cut and quaffed my hair into a short flowy style that I'd never seen before, but I thought it looked nice. It took me a few minutes to pull myself away from the mirror after I was done. The man staring back at me was one I'd never seen before, all hard edges and surprisingly handsome. I never realized in all the years I was trapped in that dome that this man was inside me. It made me feel like I could do anything.

And that's exactly what I was gonna do because nobody was going to take Baldr, my mate, away from me. While we were in Asgard, I'd touched my power. And since that incident with the Draugr, I'd been using it here and there without telling Baldr. It was a dangerous practice I knew, but that's why I always waited until the middle of the night before sneaking off. I didn't want him to feel it through the bond and stop me, not when he was marching to his death. I didn't care what his visions foretold, I wasn't going to let him die by Tyr's hand. I couldn't.

Still, even after all that practice, I felt like I barely had a grasp on how to use my magic. All I could do was find it and poke it. After that I didn't really know what I was doing. I might end up with exactly what I wanted or another Draugr situation. However, when it came to Tyr, I didn't really care about holding back. If my magic went wild and tore him apart, then that was fine with me. My only real problem was making sure I got to Tyr before Baldr did. But I had an idea for that.

I stepped out of the bathroom, my new look bolstering my confidence. Flynn was waiting for me in the hallway, his eyes widening as he took in my transformation.

“Damn,” he whispered. “You clean up good.”

I smirked, feeling a strange sense of pride course through me. “Thanks. Now, I need your help with something.”

Flynn raised an eyebrow. “Oh? What’s up?”

I lowered my voice, glancing around to make sure we were alone. “I need you to distract Baldr for me. Keep him occupied while I go after Tyr.”

Flynn's expression darkened. “Are you sure that's wise? Baldr's visions—”

“I don't care about his visions,” I hissed, trying to keep my voice low. “I'm not letting him walk into his death. Will you help me or not?”

For a moment, Flynn hesitated. Then he nodded. “Thor has already gone to collect the other wolves and Baldr is passed out on the couch. If you go out the back, he won't notice you've left for a little while at least.” He paused, looking me up and down. “Are you sure you want to do this though? Tyr is a monster... he won't hesitate to kill you if he gets the chance.”

“I have to,” I replied, the determination clear in my voice. “Baldr has done so much for me... and I can't just let him die. If I can kill Tyr alone, then maybe I can spare the Hati pack from going to war.”

“You know... I tried to take on Tyr by myself to save Nana,” Flynn replied, his gaze locked on mine. “And Thor crashing in at the last moment to save me was the only reason I survived.” He reached out, putting a hand on my shoulder. “Maybe Baldr and you need to work together to make this happen.”

“In Baldr's vision we are together. That's why he dies.” I paused, trying to force back

the tears that threatened to fall. “He dies because he’s trying to save me.”

Flynn stared for a long moment before he blew out a sigh. “I understand.”

“Thanks.”

I started for the back door when a hand came to rest on my shoulder, stopping me.

“Hang on,” Flynn said, pulling me toward his room. “I have something that might help you.”

We stepped inside the tiny room with a bed tucked into the corner. Flynn went to his closet, rummaging around for a moment before he came back with a long black piece of leather. It wasn’t until he unwrapped it that I saw the glimmer of silver and realized it was a sword, the same kind the knights used in the stories Baldr read to me.

“Take this,” he said, handing the sheathed blade over to me. “It’s a shortsword, so it’ll be easier to conceal. And it’s made of silver. Any wound you inflict to a werewolf with this blade will be immune to their healing powers.” He gave me a small grin. “That’s why Tyr is missing a hand.”

“That was you?!”

“Thor and I together.”

“Wow...” I took the blade, surprised by its weight in my hands. “I don’t know how to use this...”

“You hold it by the handle and you stab that motherfucker to death,” Flynn said nonchalantly. “If you’re close enough, you won’t need any fancy technique to hurt

him. But if he sees this blade on you, you'll never get near him, so keep it hidden."

I took the leather strap and pulled it over one shoulder, wearing it like a bandolier with the blade tucked inside the jacket Flynn had given me. "Thank you," I said, reaching out to shake his hand. "And thanks for not telling Baldr."

Flynn shook my hand, giving me a grin. "You're welcome. And I will tell Baldr. In about thirty minutes. So you better get moving."

"What? Why?!"

"Because none of us is going to win this battle alone," he said gently. "But if you think you can, I'll give you a chance. From what Baldr said, you are incredibly powerful. If anyone could kill Tyr without help, it'll be you. But if Tyr is still breathing after you try, your mate deserves the chance to fight at your side no matter what the consequences might be."

I wanted to argue, but I knew he was right. If the roles were reversed, I'd never forgive Baldr for running off without me.

I nodded, accepting Flynn's logic. "Fair enough. I'll do my best to end this before Baldr arrives."

With that, Flynn led me to the back door, and I slipped out into the night. The freezing cold air hit my face, and I took a deep breath, centering myself as a puff of mist expelled from my lips. I reached deep inside, feeling for that spark of power that had been growing stronger each day. It thrummed beneath my skin, eager to be unleashed. The well of chaos boiling deep within me wanted blood. Tyr's blood. After all those years of torture and pain, I figured I was due some vengeance, even if that was the sort of thing all those stories told me I should avoid.

But those stories weren't real life, and they didn't know my pain.

As I made my way through the darkened woods, I kept to the shadows, my senses on high alert. I knew Tyr's pack would be on the other mountain and were marching this way. In fact, as I reached down and prodded my magic within me, I swore I could feel Tyr getting closer, his evil presence like a shadow on my mind.

I followed an old trail that led me to the outskirts of town, where abandoned warehouses loomed like silent sentinels, remnants of the town's history I knew nothing about. Still, it seemed like the perfect place for a werewolf throwdown. And Tyr's presence grew stronger with every step. He was close by, I could almost taste it.

I paused at the corner of one building, peering around. And there, in a dimly lit lot, I saw him. Tyr stood all alone under the light of a single yellow lamp, the only one still glowing in that forgotten place.

My heart raced as I observed Tyr from my hiding spot. He was massive, more imposing than I remembered, with muscles rippling beneath his tight black hoodie. His silver hair gleamed in the lamplight, and I could see the stump where his hand should have been. A cruel smirk played on his lips as he scanned the area, as if waiting for someone. My blood boiled as I stared at him, remembering all those years of enduring his malice as he tried to break me. But now it was my turn to dish it back to him.

I took a deep breath, steeling my nerves. This was it. I had to strike now, while he was alone and unprepared. My fingers brushed against the hilt of the silver sword concealed beneath my jacket, its cool metal giving me a small measure of comfort.

Summoning my courage, I reached deep within myself, calling forth the chaotic energy that had been building inside me. It surged through my veins, making my skin tingle and my vision sharpen. I could feel the raw power at my fingertips, begging to

be set free. I felt the burning rage fill my chest as I stared at my captor. My magic surged, the air around me rippling with violet power like heat. As I stepped out from my hiding place, Tyr's gaze turned to meet me, his grin widening.

"Mist," he smiled. "I had a feeling I'd be running into you again soon."

I clenched my fists, feeling the magic coursing through me. "This ends tonight, Tyr."

He chuckled, his eyes gleaming with malice. "Oh, I couldn't agree more. I've been looking forward to finishing what I started with you. It's about time you served your purpose."

I took a step forward, my voice low and dangerous. "I'm not doing shit for you. Besides, you have no idea what I'm capable of now."

"Is that so?" Tyr's grin widened, revealing sharp canines. "Show me then, little Mist. Show me this power you think you have."

Without hesitation, I reached deep within myself and unleashed a surge of chaotic energy. Violet light exploded from my hands, crackling through the air towards Tyr like lightning. His eyes widened in surprise as he dove to the side, narrowly avoiding the blast. The energy struck a nearby dumpster, warping and melting the metal until it was nothing but a smoldering pile of ash and iron.

"Don't underestimate me," I growled, the power in my hands still crackling.

Tyr pushed himself back to his feet, a chuckle echoing over the snow-covered lot. "I've never doubted you, Mist. I knew what you were capable of the moment I paid that witch to imprison you." He brushed the snow off his shirt with his remaining hand. "If I'd known all it took was a little trip with that Hati boy, I would've let you run off long ago."

“Well, it’s too late now. I’m never going to let you use me again!”

“Oh no?” he smiled, lifting an eyebrow. “Even though I’m the only one left alive that knows who your parents are? Or that they’re alive and well and have never stopped looking for you?”

Suddenly the power surging around me faded, the air going still once more. His words seemed to wrap around my chest, making it hard to breathe. In all the years I’d been imprisoned inside that dome, I never once thought that I’d see my parents again. Hell, I couldn’t even remember them! How was I ever supposed to find someone that I wouldn’t recognize? But that didn’t mean I hadn’t dreamed about having a normal family and belonging to something bigger than just myself.

“That’s right,” Tyr continued. “I could take you back to your family. And I know how to take the memory suppression spell off you too. You could have a normal life if you just do this one thing for me.”

I shot him a dirty look. “And what do you want me to do? Kill everyone?!”

“Not at all,” he said, shaking his head. “I just need you to give up your power.”

Out of everything I ever expected him to require of me, giving up my power wasn’t even on the list. Was such a thing even possible?

“Give it up? What do you mean?”

“All you have to do is throw it away. Relinquish it to the universe,” he continued, walking slowly in my direction. “There’s a simple spell to do it. All it takes is a few easy words.” I watched as he reached into his back pocket, withdrawing the missing third of Baldr’s spellbook. “It’s just one little spell.”

“What’s in it for you?” I asked, far from believing he had nothing but good intentions. “You wouldn’t do this for no reason.”

“What’s in it for me?” he laughed. “To get you the hell out of my way.” His voice dropped into a low growl. “If I had known that little pup had been visiting you all these years, I wouldn’t have spent any time on you. The future where I use you to end the Hati pack doesn’t work if someone in their pack knows. So I’ve had to forge a new path. With your power out of the way, at least I won’t have to defeat you too.”

“I want your word that you’ll leave Baldr and I alone,” I snapped. “That you won’t hurt either of us!”

“As far as I’m concerned, you two can fuck off and never come back. My war isn’t with you. It’s with Thor.”

I stood there for a long moment, weighing my options.

My mind raced, torn between the temptation of a normal life and the power I'd only just begun to grasp. Tyr's offer was tantalizing - a chance to know my parents, to have my memories restored. But could I trust him? This was the same monster who had kept me prisoner for years.

“How do I know you're not lying?” I demanded, my voice wavering slightly. “You've never given me a reason to trust you before.”

Tyr's lips curled into a smirk. “You don't. But what other choice do you have? Stay here, fight a war that isn't yours, and likely die alongside your little mate? Or take a chance on freedom and family?”

I hesitated, my resolve weakening. The thought of seeing my parents again, of having a normal life, was almost overwhelming. But then I thought of Baldr, of everything

we'd been through together. I couldn't bear to lose him. His vision had always ended with him sacrificing himself to save me. But if I gave up my power and we escaped... then he wouldn't have to die, right? However, if Tyr was lying, we could be in even more danger. Who was I kidding though? I couldn't control my power, anyway. What little spells I'd been able to pull off were hardly more than a lucky fluke. The entire world, including Baldr, would be safer if I was stripped of my heritage and left powerless.

In the end, there was only one choice to make.

"A-Alright," I said at last. "I'll relinquish my power."

His cruel grin widened as he stepped forward, holding out the book. "A wise decision."

"No it's not!" a voice cried, slicing through the silence of the gently falling snow.

Both Tyr and I turned, seeing two figures step into the edge of the light. I recognized them immediately as Baldr's brother Loki and his mate that I couldn't remember the name of. He said they were double crossing Tyr from the inside. And as they stepped forward, the snarl on Tyr's lips told me he'd suspected their treachery all along.

"I knew it," he hissed. "I knew you weren't faithful to this pack!"

"I'll happily help your pack," Loki shot back, his long dark hair peppered with snow.

"But I'm not going to help you kill this man or steal his power."

Tyr scoffed. "You don't know what you're talking about!"

"Yes he does," Loki's mate added. "He grew up with a half witch, remember?"

“You shut your mouth you filthy traitor!”

“I’m not a traitor! I’m your son! And I’m trying to save you!”

“You’re no fucking son of mine.”

The man at Loki’s side deflated instantly, but Loki did not.

“Removing a witch from his power will either kill him or drive him mad until he wishes he was dead,” he said. “And that power has to go somewhere. It must be claimed or it will destroy everything in its path until it unravels.”

I turned to Tyr, taking a few steps back. “Is... Is that true?”

He pulled the spellbook back, his grin twisting into a cruel expression. “It was worth a try at least.”

“Y-You... You lied to me!” I cried. “Again! You’re a monster!”

“And you,” he shot back. “Are stupid and weak.” He pulled the spellbook up in front of his face, flipping to a dog-eared page. “And now you’re worthless to me.” He glanced over at Loki and his mate that had stepped closer to me. “Time for you all to go to an early grave.”

Power coalesced in the air around him, turning red as he began to chant. I felt a hand on my shoulder pull me back, disrupting my desperate reach for my own magic. However, as Tyr’s eyes glowed bright red and his body began to shift into his Alpha form, I knew it was too late. Whatever he was about to do, there was no way I’d be able to counter it in time.

I closed my eyes and waited for impact.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

“What do you mean he’s gone?!” I cried, grabbing Flynn by the shoulders and shaking him. “You just let Mist leave on his own? What the fuck is wrong with you?!”

“He said he wanted a chance to see if he could defeat Tyr alone,” Flynn replied, pulling himself away from me. “And I thought he deserved that much. Besides, I only gave him a small head start.”

“He can’t face Tyr alone!” I snapped. “That’s not how the vision goes!”

“Then maybe your vision was wrong,” Flynn snapped right back at me. “Ever since I met you, you’ve been enslaving yourself to these visions! You tell everyone they’re always right and you’ve been right enough times to convince them.” He paused, pointing a threatening finger in my face. “Did you ever stop to think that maybe it’s you that’s making them come true?!”

“Do you think I want them to be true?!” I cried, throwing my arms wide. “Do you think I wanted to see my own death, over and over and over again for the past decade? Or watch my father be killed by Tyr every night in my sleep without knowing when or where it would happen? I’d do anything to make just one of these visions false! I don’t want them to be true anymore than you or Thor do!”

Thor’s hand came to rest on my shoulder. “You... You saw your own death?” There was a tone of concern in his voice and accusation. “If you were seeing all of this... why didn’t you tell me about it? Maybe I could’ve helped.”

I pulled away from him, still too mad to speak sensibly. “Yeah, well, it’s way too late

for that.”

I turned away from them both, stomping toward the door. However, as I pulled it open I stopped, turning back to look at Thor, Flynn, and Nana standing in the small living room, illuminated by the firelight. It was probably the last time I was going to see them.

“I love you all,” I said, letting out a long sigh. “And I’m sorry for what’s about to happen. Just know, it’s not your fault.”

“Baldr, wait—”

But Thor’s voice was cut off as I burst out of the house, leaping off the front porch and tearing across the farmyard toward the Skoll mountain in the distance. I lifted my nose to the wind, catching the scent of Mist on the icy breeze. He wasn’t too far ahead of me and I knew I could catch up quickly. Letting my Alpha form seep out, my muscles swelled against my clothing and my speed doubled. Saving Mist was all that mattered. It was my destiny. Out of every vision I’ve ever had, nothing was more clear than that. And even when I fell, Thor would be right behind me to save the rest of them. Of that, I was sure and confident.

The wind whipped through my hair as I raced across the frozen landscape, my enhanced senses picking up every detail around me. The crunch of snow beneath my feet, the distant howl of wolves, the scent of pine and frost in the air. But I focused solely on Mist’s trail, pushing myself harder with each stride. I could catch his scent here and there and I knew he couldn’t have gotten far. But I had to stop him before he found Tyr. Whatever he was planning to do, it was damn foolish and it wouldn’t work. Of that I was sure.

My mind raced as fast as my feet. How could Flynn let him go? How could Mist think he stood a chance against Tyr alone? The visions flashed through my mind

again - Mist face full of fear, Tyr's maniacal laughter, my own final moments. I shook my head, trying to dispel the images. No, it wouldn't end like that. Not if I could help it. I'd rather lay down my life than have Mist's taken away from him prematurely. He already never got to have a life of his own and I wouldn't let him not have one on my account now.

As I crested a hill, I caught sight of the abandoned factory outside of town. The buildings were dark, but in the center of what was once the employee parking lot was a single sodium lamp still glowing brightly. Under the yellow light stood two figures. I didn't have to look twice to know that one of them was Mist. But as the second reached out toward him, holding something aloft, my heightened wolf vision focused in on the stranger.

It was Tyr.

Crying out, I let the Alpha wolf take over as I bounded through the snow at lightning speed. But before I could get there, another two figures had stepped into the light. However, I was moving too quickly to make out their features, and it wasn't until I came skidding to a halt at the edge of the light that I realized it was Loki and Heimdall.

But I was too late. Just as I came to a stop, a bright red power built around Tyr. His eyes flashed and he raised his hand, aiming the killing magic toward Mist. I dug my claws into the snow, knowing my vision was finally about to come true. It was my destiny to save Mist from Tyr's malice and I was more than happy to do it. I leaped forward, throwing myself in front of the spell.

Just before it collided with me I had a chance to look back at Mist, forcing all the love and affection I could across our bond. However, instead of Mist's face, I saw Loki's. His hand was outstretched, pushing Mist back into the snow. My eyes went wide as I realized my brother, the one that nearly everyone thought was too selfish to

do a good deed for anyone, had stepped between Tyr and my mate in an attempt to save him, to trade his life instead. I had just enough time to give him a soft smile before the spell struck me full in the chest.

The magic threw me to the ground, coursing through my veins like fire. All at once I was morbidly aware that my heart had stopped beating. Everything inside me ceased to move. My lungs wouldn't draw air, my blood wouldn't flow, and my arms and legs refused to move. And just before my head hit the snow, I had a moment to glance up at Mist and send him a message through our bond.

"I... I love you..." I whispered. "And I'll always... watch over... you..."

And then my world went dark.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:33 am

“B ALDR!” I cried, crawling through the snow on my hands and knees until I was at my mate’s side. “Baldr! Please! Say something!”

I grabbed his hand, patted his cheek, anything I could think of to get him to wake. But he didn’t respond. I tried reaching out with my mind, attempting to connect with him through our bond. Instead, I found it dark and cold, like there was nothing there at all.

“No...” I whispered, my hand on his cheek. “No, no, no! Baldr!” I shouted at the top of my lungs, shaking his shoulders to try to get him to wake up. “Baldr! You can’t do this to me! I need you!” I collapsed forward onto his unmoving chest. “I... I love you...”

I laid there sobbing, my shoulders shaking uncontrollably. My gut twisted into hard knots, trying to tear itself to pieces with grief. Blood pounded in my ears and I found myself hoping my heart would give out just so I didn’t have to live another moment with the love of my life. However, it was laughter that finally pulled me out of my insurmountable panic. Laughter that was cold and cruel.

“Well, I didn’t expect that,” Tyr grinned, dropping his hand back to his side. “He just came out of nowhere, didn’t he?”

I whirled around, my grief instantly morphing into rage. “You,” I snarled, baring my teeth at the Alpha wolf who stood before me without fear. “What have you done?!”

Tyr's grin only widened, his eyes glinting with malicious amusement. “Oh, I merely removed an obstacle. You see, my dear witch, Baldr was in the way of my plans. And now...” He gestured to the lifeless form of my beloved. “He's not. Let’s call it a happy

accident, shall we?"

I rose to my feet, my body trembling with fury. The snow around me began to melt as heat and magic radiated from my skin. "You will pay for this," I growled, my voice low and dangerous. "You will pay for this!"

Tyr laughed again, the sound grating against my ears. "And who will make me pay? You? A pathetic orphan that can't even control his power?" He took a step closer, his massive frame towering over me. "You are nothing to me."

"Orphan?" I asked, caught off guard by his words. "I thought you said my parents were still looking for me?"

A cruel grin curled over his fangs. "Oops."

"You... bastard..."

"I couldn't very well have them come looking for you, could I? Not when you and I had so much work to do."

"You fucking BASTARD!"

"Mist!" Loki called behind me. "Don't give into him!"

But his warning came too late. The deep well of magic inside me that I'd been damming up for all those years burst in and instant, pierced by the harsh grief that threatened to consume me. Dark blue crackling power filled the air around me, the snow melting instantly. I spread my arms wide as the magic gathered around my limbs. My eyes burned as I stared at Tyr, tears like fire running down my cheeks. But it wasn't until I saw my reflection in his fearful eyes that I realized my eyes were no longer green, but bright white like lightning. Slowly I felt my body become

weightless, and I lifted off the ground. Bolts of magic shot off me like electricity, striking everything nearby including Tyr, Loki, Heimdall, and the sodium lamp that exploded in a burst of sparks.

I heard everyone cry out, but their pain didn't register. My grief was too much to bear. I'd lost my childhood, my memories, a family I didn't even know, and now my mate who I'd loved for nearly a decade. There was nothing left in the world I cared about. And as the magic threatened to consume me, I gave into it. I was going to join Baldr, and I was taking Tyr with me, no matter the cost.

The magic surged through me, a torrent of raw power that threatened to tear me apart. I could feel it pulsing beneath my skin, crackling in the air around me. My vision blurred, the world becoming a haze of blue light and swirling snow. Tyr's eyes widened in fear as he realized the magnitude of what he had unleashed.

"Mistilteinn, stop!" Loki's voice barely penetrated the roar in my ears. "You'll destroy everything!"

But I didn't care. Let it all burn. Let the world crumble to ashes. Nothing mattered anymore.

I focused my gaze on Tyr, who had stumbled back, his eyes wide with fear. Good. Let him be afraid. Let him feel a fraction of the pain he'd caused me. He held up the remaining piece of Baldr's spellbook as if to shield himself, but I just laughed. There was nothing he could do to stop me. For all those years he'd wanted me to lose control and now that I had, he found himself the target of my fury. I was a tempest of raw power and anguish, and the ire of the storm was focused on him.

"You took everything from me," I snarled, my voice distorted by the magic coursing through me. "Now I'll take everything from you."

I raised my hand, a ball of dark blue lightning forming in the air in front of me. Tyr turned on his heel and tried to make a run for it. However, I lifted my other hand, summoning up a barrier much like the one he'd trapped me behind for nearly a decade. He struck the shield, pounding his fists on it as he cried out. But nothing he could do would break it. Even when he cried out his old spell for getting into my magical prison, the shield held strong. My power was far greater than some witch living in a hut in the woods.

When he finally turned to face me I saw the overwhelming fear in his eyes. His Alpha form had faded and for the first time in my life, he looked like the pathetic old man he was, terrified to lose now that he'd come face to face with death. I couldn't help but smile as I raised my hand, ready to strike him down.

"Mist..."

My heart nearly stopped. That... that was Baldr's voice! I glanced down at his body, but it was still unmoving.

"Mist..." the disembodied voice said again. "Mist... please... don't do this."

The voice seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere all at once. I hesitated, the ball of lightning flickering in my palm.

"Baldr?" I whispered, my voice cracking. "How...?"

"I'm here, my love. Not gone. Just... between. For only a moment." His voice was faint, as if coming from a great distance. "But please don't let your grief consume you. Don't become what Tyr wanted you to be. You are so much better than that."

Tears streamed down my face, evaporating in the heat of my magic. "But he took you from me. He took everything."

“No, Mist. He didn't. I'm still with you. I'll always be with you.”

I felt a gentle warmth envelop me, like Baldr's arms wrapping around me. The rage that had consumed me began to ebb. However, the moment that feeling faded away, all my anger and grief came crashing back.

“NO!” I screamed into the sky. “I WON'T LET YOU LEAVE ME!”

The ball of lightning in my hand began to shift and tighten, gathering into a sphere of light. At the same time my body drifted back down to the ground. The moment my feet touched the earth, I ran forward to Baldr's body, dropping down on my knees.

“You... aren't... going... anywhere!” I sobbed. “I revoke your destiny!”

Raising my hands toward the sky, I grabbed the sphere of magic and ripped it in two. Then, without a moment's hesitation, I slammed the magic down into Baldr's unmoving chest. Behind me I heard Loki cry out as a blinding flash of white light filled the abandoned lot, consuming us all in a flare as bright as the sun.

Then the light faded slowly, like mist dissipating in the morning sun. As my vision cleared, I found myself still kneeling beside Baldr's body, my hands pressed against his chest. For a moment, nothing happened. The world held its breath.

Then, suddenly, Baldr's chest heaved. His eyes flew open, wide and startled, as he gasped for air. Color flooded back into his face, and I felt the warmth returning to his skin beneath my palms. His hands flew up, grabbing my arms as if to stop himself from falling.

“Baldr!” I cried, half-laughing, half-sobbing as I gathered him into my arms. “You're alive!”

He blinked, disoriented, his gaze finally focusing on my face. “Mist? What... what happened?”

Before I could answer, a pained groan came from behind us. I turned to see Tyr on his knees, rubbing his eyes as if he’d been blinded. He pushed himself to his feet slowly, swaying back and forth like he was drunk. He reached out his remaining hand, resting it against the lamppost for support. I glared up at him, feeling my magic swirl around me again. His eyes lifted to meet mine, but as I met his gaze, I realized something was wrong.

His eyes were now stark white, all color drained from them in an instant. I couldn’t even see his pupils. And as he looked from side to side, searching for something, I realized he couldn’t see us at all. I glanced back at Loki and Heimdall behind us, wondering if they’d suffered the same fate. However, their eyes seemed to be just fine. Whatever my magic had done, it was targeted only at Tyr.

“What did you do to me you little fucker!” he screamed, his body swelling back into its Alpha form. “I’ll kill you for this!”

He reached down, tearing open his shirt to reveal a bandolier strapped across his chest. Just like the night he’d found Baldr in my hut, it was full of grenades. Before I could stop him, he pulled one free, yanked the pin out with his fangs, and threw it.

Thankfully it sailed far to the right, too far away to be anything but loud. That didn’t stop me from shielding Baldr with my body though. A moment later he pushed me off, trying to get to his feet. Golden magic was swirling around him as I pulled him up, keeping one hand around his waist to hold him stable. Baldr groaned and Tyr’s head snapped in our direction. With a cruel grin he yanked the pin out of another grenade and chucked it straight at us.

I reached out my hand to knock it away, closing my eyes tight and hoping it didn’t

explode on impact. However, when nothing struck my hand or the ground near us, I opened my eyes once more. There, hovering in the air, was a golden hand made completely from Baldr's magic. It grasped the grenade and hurled it to the left, sending it sailing more than a hundred yards away in the empty lot. It exploded harmlessly and Tyr's face twisted in confusion.

However, before anyone could say a word, something miraculous began to happen. All at once Baldr's magic suddenly intensified, an incredible amount of it flowing out of him all at once. Some of it broke off to bind Tyr, pinning his arms to his sides. But the rest of it joined the golden disembodied hand. And, within a matter of seconds, a figure began to form. At first I wasn't sure what kind of creature it might be. But after a moment or two, I realized it was a woman standing nearly ten feet tall with golden eyes and silver hair just like Baldr.

A streak of terror and grief washed through Baldr, followed by a tsunami of hope. It was only then that I realized who she must be.

"M-Mom?" Baldr stammered, staring up at her.

The golden figure turned to face us, her luminous eyes filled with warmth and sorrow. "My son," she said, her voice echoing with an otherworldly resonance. "You've grown into such a handsome young man. You look so much like your father."

Baldr's legs trembled, and I tightened my grip around his waist to keep him upright. Tears streamed down his face as he reached out a shaking hand towards the apparition. "Is it really you?" he whispered.

The figure nodded, a sad smile gracing her ethereal features. "Yes, my darling. I'm here, if only for a moment."

“But how?” he asked, his voice barely audible.

The golden woman turned her gaze to me, and I felt a wave of gratitude and approval wash over me. “Such a powerful young witch,” she said, a single finger reaching out to tip up my chin. “You revoked my son’s destiny and brought him back. That is a power only the gods possess.” She gave me a good long look. “It’s no wonder you two ended up in Asgard. The realm gate was trying to take you home.”

I didn’t know what to say. I was struck with awe and fear of this massive creature in front of me. Baldr said she was dead, but she’d touched me. I’d felt the warmth of her skin. Where had she come from?

“Does this mean you’re back?” Baldr asked hopefully.

She turned away from me, facing her son at last. “I’m sorry my love, but I won’t be returning.”

Baldr’s side of the bond darkened instantly, grief welling up inside him once more.

“Don’t fret, sweet child,” she cooed, leaning down and pulling him into her arms. “I’ll always be at your side, even if you can’t see me.”

“But why did you leave?!” Baldr cried. “You just disappeared! I was only a kid, and you left me behind!”

There was an intense melancholy that washed over her. She pulled back, lifting his chin so they were eye to eye.

“It was just my time,” she replied. “I walked the mortal plane for nearly two hundred lifetimes... and I couldn’t stay any longer. I never expected to meet your father so close to the end or to have another child... but I did. And I wouldn’t exchange that

time with you for anything even though it was terribly short.” She reached up, wiping his tears away. “I knew the end was coming and I just couldn’t find the heart to tell you. It seemed too cruel to stand in front of you and tell you I was going to pass into another realm, one that you couldn’t follow me to.”

“But why was your time up?” he sobbed. “I don’t understand...”

“All gods come to an end eventually,” she replied softly. “The time of Freya was over long ago, so I journeyed on.” She reached out, pulling Baldr into a tight hug. “Your father came to me sooner than I expected, but I’m just glad my magic remained intact to keep you safe until now.”

Baldr stared up at her. “Until now?”

“This magic and my presence here... they are just shadows of what once was. Long ago I saw every possible facet of your future, the someone or something would come along and try to bring you to an early end, so I made all of them promise not to harm you.” She pulled back, standing up to her full height. “But now you have died and after this final moment, the magic will be spent.”

“But... But I don’t want you to leave!”

“My sweet Baldr,” she cooed, patting his cheek. “You have a mate now and a love deeper than any I’ve ever seen. You have so much to live for and you don’t need me anymore. Of that I am certain. Besides, I need to take care of your father.”

Baldr seemed to understand, but I could tell he didn’t want to let her go. Instead he asked, “Is... Is he alright?”

“We are happily reunited and watching over you, Thor, and Loki. And someday, when the time is right, we’ll all be a family once more.” She pulled her hand back,

giving him a soft smile. “Until then, you need to live and live well, okay?”

“Okay...” Baldr whispered, his eyes filling with tears once more. He reached around my waist, pulling me tight against him as he glanced up at me. “I... I will.”

“Good,” she nodded. In an instant her smile faded and she turned back to face Tyr who was still struggling to escape from the golden magic binding him. “Now it’s time to complete this magic once and for all.”

Tyr, though blind, stared up at her, a sneer on his face. “Do your worst you pathetic bitch! I beat your magic once and I’ll do it again!”

“I doubt it,” she replied coolly. “Not when your flesh is stripped from your bones and your soul sent straight to Helheim.”

The golden figure of Freya advanced on Tyr, her luminous eyes now blazing with righteous fury. The air crackled with power as she raised her hand, golden light swirling around her fingers.

“For your crimes against my son, against this young witch, and against the natural order, you will face judgment,” she intoned, her voice echoing with divine authority.

Tyr thrashed against his magical bonds, his face contorted with rage and fear. “You can't do this!” he snarled. “I am the Alpha! I am trying to bring peace back to our clans! I am the rightful ruler of-”

His words were cut off as Freya's hand closed into a fist. Tyr's body went rigid, his mouth open in a silent scream. Golden light began to seep from his eyes, his mouth, even from beneath his skin. It was as if Freya was drawing out his very essence and crushing it beneath her fingers. Tyr let out an agonized scream as the finally light engulfed him, his body writhing in the magical bindings. We watched in stunned

silence as his form began to disintegrate, flesh and bone turning to golden dust that scattered on the wind.

In mere seconds, all that remained of the Alpha wolf was a swirling cloud of glittering particles. Freya closed her fist, and the dust compressed into a small, pulsing orb of light. With a flick of her wrist, she sent it hurtling into the sky, where it disappeared in a flash.

A pained cry echoed behind us and I glanced back to see Heimdall collapse to the ground. Loki was right there at his side, holding him tight as the last bits of Heimdall's father shot into the heavens and disappeared forever.

"It is done," Freya said, her voice echoing with finality. "He will trouble you no more."

Baldr clung to me, his body trembling. I could feel his mixture of relief and sorrow through our bond. He was grateful for his mother's intervention, but the weight of everything that had happened was finally settling on him. And he knew she was about to leave him again... for the last time.

Freya turned back to us, her golden form already starting to fade. "My protection spell is no longer needed," she said softly. "Baldr, my son, remember that I love you. Live well, and know that one day, we will be together again."

She reached out, her hand shimmering as it passed through Baldr's cheek in a ghostly caress. Then she turned to me, her eyes filled with warmth and gratitude.

"Thank you, young witch, for saving my son. Your love for him is a beacon in the darkness. Cherish each other and let that love guide you through whatever trials may come."

I nodded, unable to speak past the lump in my throat.

Freya's form began to dissipate, golden motes of light scattering on the wind. Baldr reached out, as if trying to grasp the last remnants of his mother's presence. But his fingers found no purchase.

“Mom,” he whispered, his voice breaking. “I love you.”

A warm breeze swept through the lot, carrying her final words: “I love you too, my sweet boy. Always.”

And then, with a small wave, she was gone.

Baldr's legs gave out, and I barely managed to catch him before he hit the ground. We sank to our knees together, clinging to each other as he sobbed into my shoulder. I held him tight, my own tears falling silently as I stroked his hair.

After a long moment, Baldr pulled back, wiping his eyes. He looked at me, his gaze filled with a mixture of love, grief, and wonder. “Mist...” he said, seemingly at a loss for words.

I just nodded, knowing exactly what he needed to hear. “I love you too, Baldr. So much.”

Behind us I heard footsteps crunching in the snow as a hulking figure stepped up beside me. I glanced up, seeing the long blond hair of Thor and his bright blue eyes staring down at us.

“Take my brother home,” he said. “We’ll take care of the rest.” He placed a heavy hand on my shoulder. “And thank you for saving him.”

I nodded, tightening my grip on Baldr. I turned him around, pulling him away from the scene. I glanced over at Loki consoling Heimdall and felt a rush of pity. Tyr was a monster, but Heimdall having to watch his father be killed in front of him was cruel. But Thor was already at their side and I knew they'd be okay. Right now I had to help Baldr.

So, with a deep breath, I called on the magic within me to lend me strength and we started back through the snow, heading for the tiny farmhouse and the warm fire within. In time, Baldr would recover. He was still alive, and that's what was important.

And that I loved him. More than anything.

Three Years Later

The door in front of me swung open and I saw a disheveled Loki staring back at me. He was naked from the waist up, an oversized pair of Heimdall's boxers barely clinging to his hips. I'd definitely woken him up.

"Sorry for waking you," I said, doing my best not to stare. "But have you seen Baldr?"

Loki shook his head. "Up until ten seconds ago, the only thing I've seen this morning was my mate's dick."

My cheeks burned, but I could tell Loki was anything but embarrassed. "Right... sorry."

"He's probably out wandering around doing something stupid like he usually does." Loki took a step back, swinging the door closed. "Now if you'll excuse me, my breakfast is waiting for me."

I couldn't help but grin as the door snapped shut. It looked like Loki was in for a meaty breakfast from Heimdall. After three years of being together, it was nice to see they still couldn't get enough of one another. Thor and Flynn were no different. Baldr and I were just as bad too, although I felt like we fucked outside of the resort much more than the others. But I guess that's what happened when two witches with teleportation magic got together. We had a lot of ground to cover and sometimes the change of scenery was nice. Who didn't love getting boned in picturesque locations?

However, this morning I'd woken up in Baldr's bed alone. It wasn't like him to run off, especially when today was such a momentous occasion. Today Thor and Heimdall were officially reuniting the Hati and Skoll packs for the first time in nearly one hundred and fifty years. That meant that all Alphas and their mates were required to attend. So why had Baldr chosen this morning of all mornings to run off?

I sighed, running a hand through my messy, slept on hair. It wasn't like Baldr to run off when he was needed. He was usually so responsible, especially when it came to pack matters. I decided to check the resort grounds one more time before resorting to more drastic measures.

As I walked through the lush gardens, my mind wandered to the upcoming ceremony. The reunification of the Hati and Skoll packs was a big deal, and tensions were already running high. If Baldr didn't show up, it could be seen as a slight against both packs. I shuddered at the thought of the political fallout. Heimdall had just barely been able to talk his pack into joining Thor's, but there was still more than a century's worth of animosity boiling under the surface. We couldn't risk anything being out of place, especially the man who had brought Tyr's reign of terror to an end. If anything, Baldr was the puzzle piece we needed to make all this work.

I caught myself smirking. It was incredible how much I'd adjusted to life with the wolves, how much I cared about their matters even though I wasn't one of them. Not only had I gotten out of my magical prison thanks to Baldr, but now I was fully assimilated into a family I didn't know how I'd ever lived without.

Living at the Hati Resort had been the best three years of my life. And even though everything was going well, I could tell Baldr and I were both getting restless. Thanks to his tutelage, I'd come to control my power. But both of us were feeling a bit... repressed. There was really no place in Fenris for us to stretch our magic and really see how far it could go. Not to mention, both of us were dying to go back to Asgard. With Freya's spellbook complete, we had everything we needed to go anywhere and do anything.

The need for adventure was palpable between us. But the family and the pack needed us too. And until that was settled, we'd just have to wait.

Just as I was about to give up and start knocking on doors, I caught a spark of Baldr's magic through our bond. Closing my eyes, I reached through our connection, trying to feel where he was. It was like a scrying spell, but free thanks to our mated bond. My consciousness slipped through the ether, reaching out until it touched his mind. The moment it did, I saw a flash of a familiar hot spring and a single word in Baldr's voice filled my mind.

"Come."

With a smile on my face, I made my way out of the resort through the back and began to climb higher up the mountain. I knew the path well after three years of visiting the secret spot Baldr loved so much. We usually went up there at least once a week during the winter. But now it was high summer and the air was warm with the scent of wildflowers blooming on the mountain. So high up there was still a bit of chill in the air, but not enough to stop the green things from exploding into splendor.

When my path ended at a sheer rock face, I knew I was in the right place. The bond with Baldr was much stronger and I could feel his excitement as I neared. It was almost like he was expecting me. On the edge of his emotions was something concealed, like a surprise. I didn't know what it was, but his anticipation was contagious. I found myself trembling with excitement as I began to climb. Thor had thankfully installed a rebar ladder set right into the stone, making it more than simple to climb the fifteen feet to the upper ledge. From there it was just a quick jaunt through the trees before I stepped into the clearing.

There, sitting at the edge of his family's secret hot spring, was Baldr, his silver hair plastered against his skull as he dripped water all over the stone. He was completely naked of course and on full display with just his feet in the water. Steam rose up all around him as he glanced back at me with those golden eyes I loved so much, his face

curling into a smile.

“Took you long enough,” he grinned.

“You left me less than zero clues,” I replied, stepping closer to him as I pulled my shirt off. “How was I supposed to know?”

“I left a note on the kitchen counter.”

“I didn’t see one.”

“I’m sure I did,” he replied, brows furrowed as he watched me continue to strip.

Catching sight of his clothes in a pile off to the side, I added mine to his. However, a thought crossed my mind, and I reached down, grabbing his jeans and stuffing my hand in the right pocket. Just as I suspected, I felt a piece of paper there and pulled it out.

“Uh... you mean this note?” I asked, waving it at him.

“Fuck...”

I just laughed. “It’s fine. Even if I had to sit down and scry for you, it’s not like you could’ve gone far.” I slipped off my underwear, stepping out of them as I joined him at the edge of the pool. The hot water felt good after my hike up the mountain. “I did wake up your brother though... and interrupted his blowjob I think.”

“Thor?”

I shook my head. “Loki.”

“Fuck. I bet he wasn’t happy about that.”

“Is he ever happy about anything?”

“Honestly, since we killed Tyr, I don’t think I’ve ever seen him so happy.”

“Oh... yeesh,” I sighed, rubbing the back of my neck. “He must’ve been a hoot as a child then.”

“He’s always been a bit grumpy.”

“Well, he’s really grumpy now,” I said with a shrug. “Oh well.” I reached out, wrapping an arm around Baldr’s waist and sliding closer to him until we were hip to hip. “So... why did you want me to meet you out here?” I reached up, brushing the wet hair out of his face. “I can feel you hiding something, but it feels like a good thing. What's going on?”

Baldr’s smile widened as he stared at me. “Today is the rejoining of the packs,” he began. “And after we’re done with that... we won’t really be needed here anymore. At least, not as much as we have been.”

“Okay.”

“So... I was thinking, if you want, we could maybe take a trip.”

“A trip?” I liked the sound of that. “Where to?”

“I was thinking... Asgard?” he grinned. “Then maybe the other realms too?”

“Is that possible? I know we have the spellbook, but you said the material components to build the realm gate would be impossible to find.”

“Well, it turns out I was just looking in the wrong place the entire time,” he replied, his smile getting bigger. “I was trying to find a piece of the world tree by finding the

tree itself. However, it wasn't until last night that I realized something."

"What's that?"

"My mother was a goddess," he nodded. "And she traveled the realms. Before I thought she did it through her divine power alone, but it wasn't until last night I remembered a ring she used to wear on her thumb at all times."

Baldr lifted his hand up, displaying a thick banded ring on his middle finger. I leaned close, noticing the striations along the band. At first I thought it was metal, but as I looked closer, I realized it was petrified wood. And at the center of it was set a simple smooth opal, flashing all the colors of the rainbow.

"This," he said softly, "is a piece of the world tree. And in the center is a tiny gem cut from the Bifrost itself." His smile widened again. "It is literally a permanent realm gate between Asgard and our world, only in tiny form."

I leaned close, running my finger over the band, still not believing what Baldr said. But, as I touched the ring, I felt the thrum of power inside it. Whatever the ring did, it was extremely powerful. And a realm gate seemed just about right for what I was picking up. However, there was one very important question left unanswered.

"But... it's so small..."

Baldr leaned forward, kissing the tip of my nose. "Size isn't everything, darling," he teased. "And the ring grows once it's activated so that we can step through it. After that, it shrinks to its normal size once more."

"So... this means we can go to Asgard?" I nodded excitedly. "That we can go explore those ruins and the mountain and see if we can find the city of the gods?!"

Baldr nodded. "All of those things and more. And, if we can find more pieces of the

tree and of the other realms, making more rings like this one to visit them should be possible. It's all in my mother's spellbook. It's complicated magic, but between the two of us, I'm sure we can figure it out."

I just stared at Baldr for a long moment, unable to speak. The rush of affection that flowed through our bond was mutual. Both of us had been wanting this for a long time. Ever since we returned from Asgard, we'd felt the call to go back. And now we could. A world of freedom and adventure I never thought could exist was now at my fingertips.

"When do we leave?" I asked, wrapping my arm around Baldr's bare waist.

"Tonight if you like," he smiled. "After the ceremony." He leaned close, pressing his forehead to mine. "I already packed everything we'll need and then some."

"How are we going to carry it all?"

"Remember that spell for a pocket dimension in a bag?"

"Yeah?"

"I figured it out last month," he grinned. "My backpack can hold my entire bedroom now and then some."

I just stared at him, shaking my head. "You are so incredible, you know that?"

"Thanks." He kissed me softly on the lips. "And you are too. I don't know how many witches can bring people back from the dead. But you pulled it off. I'm starting to think my mother was right. You must have some divine lineage."

"Maybe we can figure out where I came from in Asgard."

“Maybe,” he nodded. “And if not, we’ll keep looking.”

“Promise?”

“I promise.”

I threw my arms around him. “Gods... I love you so much Baldr.”

“I love you too, Mist.” He reached up, cupping my face and pulled me into a passionate kiss. When he finally broke away, I was nearly breathless and definitely rock hard. “Now... I want you to ride me.”

I glanced down at the long, thick cock throbbing between his legs, a tingle running up my spine. “Anything you say, baby.”

As I straddled Baldr's lap, the hot spring water lapping at our thighs, I couldn't help but marvel at how far we'd come. Three years ago, I was trapped in a magical prison, my powers wild and uncontrolled. Now, I was about to embark on the adventure of a lifetime with the man I loved more than anything. It felt almost too good to be true. But it was, and that's all that mattered.

Baldr's hands gripped my hips, his cock grinding against my entrance. After all this time together, my body knew what it needed to do to take his girth. It was instinct now as I felt myself relax, my body opening up to him. Baldr reached back to his pile of clothing and pulled out a small bottle of lube. Apparently he'd been planning this from the beginning. I couldn't help but grin though. He knew how easy it was to get me in bed and after all the life I'd missed being stuck in that dome, I wasn't about to play hard to get.

Squirting some of the sticky liquid into his hand, Baldr rubbed it over the head and shaft of his cock, smearing the remainder over my hole. He slipped a finger inside, pressing it against my prostate to draw an instant moan from my lips. I grinned down

at him, grinding my ass against his fingers. I wanted more. I needed more. And he knew exactly how to give it to me.

Baldr removed his fingers and began guiding me down onto his thick shaft. I gasped as his crown pushed inside me, the familiar stretch and burn sending shivers of pleasure through my body. His golden eyes locked onto mine, full of love and desire.

“Gods, I’ll never get tired of this,” he groaned, bucking his hips up to bury himself to the hilt. “You feel so fucking good.”

I began to move, slowly at first, savoring every inch of him. The water around us rippled and splashed with our movements. Baldr's hands roamed my body, caressing my chest and back as I rode him. Our bond thrummed with shared pleasure, intensifying every sensation.

I leaned in to capture his lips in a heated kiss, tangling my fingers in his damp silver hair. Our bodies moved together in perfect synchronization, the bond between us heightening every sensation. I could feel Baldr's pleasure mingling with my own, creating an intoxicating feedback loop of ecstasy. It was incredible, just like it always was. But this time there was something more, the excitement of what unknown worlds we would explore made our pleasure even greater.

“I can't wait to make love to you in Asgard,” I panted, increasing my pace. “I’m gonna ride this beautiful cock in every realm that exists!”

I started to ride him in earnest, the water splashing around us as we moved together. The mountain air was crisp against our heated skin, creating a delicious sensation that drove our delight even higher. Baldr gripped my hips, his fingers digging into my skin as he thrust upward to meet me, his balls slapping against my ass. I loved the feeling, the force, and the sound it made as I arched my neck and moaned into the sky.

The pleasure began to build and I felt the familiar tingle in my lower abdomen. And that's when our magic began to meld together as well. Dark blue and golden swirls erupted around us, mixing into a beautiful emerald green. All around the grass, trees, and plants seemed to burst into life, fed by the intensity of our magic. It was a strange side effect that we never quite understood, but it was beautiful and it felt amazing, so we let it flow.

As our passion intensified, the magic swirling around us grew stronger. Flowers bloomed in an instant, trees stretched higher, and the very air seemed to crackle with energy. I could feel Baldr's pleasure building alongside my own, our bond amplifying every sensation.

"Gods, Mist," Baldr groaned, his hips pistoning upward. "You're so fucking perfect."

I leaned down, capturing his lips in a searing kiss as I continued to ride him. Our tongues danced together as our bodies moved in perfect synchronization. The water churned around us, steam rising in thick plumes as our magic heated it further.

"I'm close," I gasped against his lips. "So close, Baldr."

His hand wrapped around my cock, stroking in time with our thrusts. The dual stimulation was overwhelming, and I felt my orgasm rapidly approaching.

"Me too," Baldr panted, his strokes becoming more erratic. "Come for me, Mist. Let me feel you."

Our magic swirled even more intensely around us, the green energy pulsing in time with our movements. I could feel Baldr's pleasure through our bond, building alongside my own. It was intoxicating, overwhelming, and utterly perfect.

With a cry of ecstasy, I came hard, my release splashing between our bodies. My body tensed around Baldr's thick cock, triggering his orgasm as well. I felt him

suddenly swell and pulse inside me, filling me with his heat. Our combined magic exploded outward in a dazzling display of emerald light, causing the surrounding vegetation to burst into even more vibrant life.

We clung to each other, trembling and gasping as the aftershocks of our pleasure coursed through us. The magic slowly dissipated, leaving everything more lush and beautiful than it had been before. I rested my forehead against Baldr's, trying to catch my breath. He leaned in, capturing me in another long, passionate kiss.

"I wasn't kidding," I panted. "I want to do that in every single realm."

Baldr laughed. "Even the bad ones?"

"Especially the bad ones," I grinned back.

"Only if you promise to return the favor."

"You know I will."

He reached up, pulling me into a tight hug, our bodies still connected. It felt good to be this close to him, to be entwined physically, emotionally, and magically all at the same time. I couldn't think of a better way to spend my life than at his side, in his arms, and in his bed.

"I love you so much, Mist," he whispered against my neck. "Forever."

"I love you too, Baldr," I replied. "Forever and a day."

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