

## 16. Asgard [Part I]

~ASGARD~

"What's that?" Joran hopped off the rock, nishing his ask in a hurry and ready to shift back and run. Or worse – ght. "Were you followed today?" he demanded.

"Wait!" Fenrir stopped him, stepping forward and poking out of the cave to conrm his suspicions. "I think I know who that is."

"Can we kill him?" was the rst thing Jormungandr asked, and his brother elbowed him to sustain his bloodthirsty nature as they tried to see what was happening outside.

Fenrir couldn't believe his own eyes. Out of all the people, it had to be her. What was she even doing here?

A slender gure of a woman in an elaborate white dress with long sleeves blown by the wind stood by the riverbank, watching the water ow before her eyes. Her silvery hair glowed like the stars in the night sky, each curl dancing on its own whim in the breeze, but what shocked him the most were the glowing dragonies uttering around her. Those belonged to another goddess and never liked anyone else. Yet tonight, they had a different favourite...

He still couldn't see her face, but even from this angle, she was mesmerising and seemed even more alluring.

"Who is that?" Joran asked, his voice gruffer than usual. "She is--"

For the rst time ever, his brother couldn't nd the right words, and Fenrir didn't care enough to mock him about it.

"Dragony," Fenrir muttered, unable to take his eyes off the magnicent woman.

"Who?" Jor huffed a laugh, asking with way more interest and enthusiasm in his voice, which, for some reason, irked his sibling.

"Someone we can't let see us together," the wolf responded, and after a long pause, added, "Or touch."

"She is one of the guests, isn't she?" Jormungandr was excited. He rarely got to see Asgardians, let alone deities from other pantheons.

"Yes, but remember--" Fenrir didn't get to nish his words as the woman in question shrugged her shoulders and threw her dress off in one swift move, letting it pool at her feet and stepping out of it.

They both forgot how to breathe. Her long silky hair covered everything, but at the same time, the outlines of her soft curves made their imagination go wild.

It was probably the most enticing thing they both had ever witnessed.

The beauty jumped into the water, and before Fenrir realised it, Joran left their hideout, storming towards where the woman just stood.

"What the hell, Jor?" He barely managed to catch up with him, pulling him behind a massive moss-covered rock to avoid her noticing them. "What do you think you are doing?"

"Don't get me wrong, it's a lovely family reunion, Rir, but there is a gorgeous naked woman in that river, and it happens to be my speciality. Nature calls, so to speak. I just have to introduce myself, and you and I can speak next month, all right?"

He was serious, and that made Fenrir angry.

"Of course not! No one is supposed to see you, remember?" His words were laced with fury and frustration, but they didn't have much effect on the dragon.

"She would never know it was me. I can introduce myself as... anyone, really. What seems to be the problem? I can be any Asgardian who decides to swim at night. She would never know the difference."

"Because so many people swim in the Gopul River at night!" Fenrir ran his hand over his face. This was ridiculous, and he wasn't sure what frustrated and annoyed him more - how easily Jor planned to abandon him or how condent he was that he could sleep with Astrea.

"Who cares!" Joran grinned at him, untying the top of his tunic as if this wasn't up for negotiation. "I saw her rst!"

"Well, actually, I saw her rst," Fenrir reasoned, trying to cool his brother down.

"Maybe, but unlike me, you aren't interested, right?" Jor snorted, throwing a quick glance at him.

"Wrong!" Fenrir snarled, and his brother's grin dropped. The boulder was hiding them from the river well, and from the corner of his eye, Joran noticed that the girl swam back to the surface. Only to dive back in again in seconds.

"Would you just look at her?" he sighed, admiring her. "No women love to dive this deep! She was made for me to--"

"No!" Fenrir growled louder this time. "It's dangerous for you to come here! Who knows what your next punishment will be if they nd out."

"And yours," Jor reminded him that his position wasn't much better.

"And mine," he had to agree with this. "Hell, even Father can suffer from this, and who knows what his wrath would look like this time."

Joran groaned, throwing one last look at the beautiful maiden. He was closer to their father than his siblings and believed in his cause. That was why mentioning the god of mischief was a safe bet.

Joran knew that one night with a woman wasn't worth the risks. He shouldn't have been there. The rulers of Asgard's couldn't nd out that he came here every month to nd out their secrets and drink their mead to grow stronger. He may have hated it, but Fenrir was right.

Nevertheless, it didn't mean he couldn't have any fun.

He ran as fast as a ash to where the starry maiden stood moments ago and returned back to his astonished brother with her clothes in his hands.

"If I can't touch, I can at least look!" he smirked, and Fenrir got furious for some reason.

"What is wrong with you?" he demanded, snapping the white fabric out of his hands. "We can't afford mistakes like that--"

"Correction," Jor chuckled, "You can't afford mistakes like that, and I can afford all mistakes in the world. What are they going to do? Throw me into the sea?"

His brother had a point. However, Fenrir calmed down, knowing that this was just his way of letting off some steam. Jor wasn't going to risk their little arrangement coming out to light. He literally needed it to survive. This was just a tantrum, and he would get over it eventually.

Now all he needed was to return the clothes and lead Joran as far away from here as possible. Just why did this woman have to come and swim here? And where were her guards? She had to have at least a few.

"Who is there?" Fenrir heard a sweet but condent voice and realised they got caught red-handed, and there was no more time for extra manoeuvres.

He was ready to throw the clothes back to the goddess in question and thought they could escape while she pulled them back on. Jormungandr could get back into the river and swim all the way into the sea while he himself could shift, and she wouldn't even notice his black fur in the darkness, thanks to his speed. Nor would she be able to catch up with him in his wolf form if she decided to try.

Yet in the next moment, his brother, his esh and blood, pushed him from behind the boulder that was their refuge, with the white dress still in his hands. Fenrir glared at his sibling and only received an apogetic smrk in return as Jor lifted his arms to show him he was giving up. He was their father's son, after all. And now Fenrir had to face the music because of that.

He nally looked at the woman, who stood waist-deep in water, giving him the iciest gaze he had ever seen. And he had seen a fair share of those. The dragonies still uttered around her as if they tried to defend her from him. And this was a miracle on its own...

She was undoubtedly the most beautiful woman he had ever laid his eyes on, shimmering like a star. Her beauty was otherworldly, almost ethereal, but at the same time; she held her heavy gaze on him with the whole universe enclosed in it. For a second there, it seemed to him that she was a raw and ancient power. But it couldn't be true because it was common knowledge that Astrea was practically brand new.

There was something about her that he had never seen or felt. Some kind of unexplainable power that kept him drawn to her.

"What is the meaning of this?" she demanded sternly, not afraid of him in the slightest. If anything, she seemed annoyed. And rightfully so. However, he admired how calmly she handled it.

"I-- didn't notice you," Fenrir lied, and he could swear he heard Joran chuckling just a few steps away from him, still leaning against the giant boulder.

"Didn't you?" She tilted her head, piercing him with her starry eyes. "I must be very unnoticeable with all that glow around me, and you--" she made a pause to arch her brow at him, "you must be into pretty dresses then."

The last phrase made his jaw tick, and he gave his brother, who had a hard time suppressing his laugh now, an annoyed glare. After all, this was all his fault.

Fenrir wanted to be introduced to the divine guest, but this wasn't quite how he wanted it to happen.

However, he still couldn't deny that he wasn't exactly unhappy about the whole thing because it allowed him to speak to her while they were alone. Something he couldn't count on in the city.

"Oh, this?" His lips curled slightly as he weighed the fabric in his hand. "Is this yours?"

She furrowed her white brows, and the silver glow intensified, spiking his curiosity again.

"You know it's mine! You stole it!" she accused him bluntly, a frown on her perfect face.

"I did no such thing!" Fenrir insisted, and it wasn't even a lie.

"Then give it back!" she gritted her teeth.

"Of course," he teased, not being able to help himself. She was so... not what he imagined. "It's yours. Come here and take it!"

He stretched his arm, and she pursed her lips, offering him another withering glance.

Fenrir waited a few seconds, knowing that in the end, he would give up and do the decent thing, but teasing her woke up some feral part of him that had rarely been awakened since he moved here.

"What is your name?" she asked him, still not moving in the water where she stood, her skin glistening in the moonlight.

"Fenrir," he genuinely smiled at her for the rst time, prepared to tell her that her dress would be where she left it and offer to escort her back later.

"Never heard of you," she broke his expectations, some kind of spite in her tone, and a little growl escaped him against his will. She was pulling the strings he didn't know he had.

"Well, you heard of me now, Astrea," he smirked, and she rolled her eyes at him as if to tell him how insignificant that was, although a slight tint appeared on her cheeks.

"And you are going to see me," her lips stretched into a sneer, something he didn't expect from such a sweet and innocent creature. He was going to come up with a good reply to that when everything changed.

Her glow went from subtle to blinding within seconds and disoriented him completely. He covered his eyes with his arm, knowing that trying to see anything was useless. Moreover, the temperature around him became unbearably hot, and Fenrir was ready to shift to defend himself when he felt the dress pulled out of his other hand.

She was so close, and she wasn't doing anything other than putting her clothes back on.

"Impressive," he chuckled, using the opportunity to inhale her scent. It was composed of oral notes that were accented with hints of shimmering stardust, her divine magic evoking images of glittering galaxies and twinkling constellations in his mind. He tried to recognise the oral notes and smiled when he distinctively smelled moonowers. All the notes intertwined in her, connecting both the natural world that was so close to him and her own cosmic realm.

"You smell like a spring night right before the dawn, goddess of stars," he told her, and he could feel her close again.

"Stars burn, Fenrir," she whispered in his ear, brushing her delicate ngers over his cheek to demonstrate him that she was in control now. "Never forget this."

"Don't worry, Astrea," he caught her arm, bringing it to his lips for a quick kiss, which he knew startled her. "You are unforgettable."

He released her and felt her leave immediately, to his own disappointment. He desired so much more than this, but when the light dissipated, and he was able to see again, he found himself alone on the shore.

Astrea was gone, and so was Joran.

Fenrir looked around and saw the serpent back in his domain, his scales glistening in the water as he waved him goodbye with his long tail.

Their time was up, but he wasn't regretting it today.

His cheek still felt warm where she touched him, and he rubbed his calloused hand over it, realising that something was on it.

Taking a closer look, the young wolf noticed that his skin had shimmering dust on it.

"Stardust," he muttered, not quite believing his own eyes.

She was made of stars, this Astrea...

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After Joran had nished the conversation with his brother over the phone, he gulped the whole glass of whiskey in his hand in one go and placed it back on the glass table, almost breaking it. He should have been happy because everything was falling into place just like he wanted. Still, for some reason, that familiar feeling of satisfaction he usually experienced when his plan worked wasn't there now.

He kept Astrea close to lure his brother out of his hiding. He knew that the moment Fenrir saw her, he would be in his hands. The one thing he needed from him now wouldn't be a problem. Sooner or later, he would give in.

For her.

So, why wasn't he happy?

Joran restlessly tapped his ngers on the armrest of his chair, and it would his eyes. He had to go through with this. Fenrir would give him what he wanted, and it would all be over.

"She is here," one of his trusted Firstborns announced, and Joran nodded, still with closed eyes, trying to keep his dragon nature suppressed. Today it was a struggle. No matter how hard he tried to avoid it, his Dragony didn't leave his mind.

"Master," Niki's voice was condent, making the corners of his lips turn upwards. She was still too young to not be afraid of him but managed to hide it well. She would be perfect...

"Please, Nikiyah, take a seat. I have a special task for you and would like to explain its importance to you together with some of the details of what is required from you."

Niki swallowed the lump that formed in her throat and nodded curtly. Who knew that Astrea trained her so well?

And now this girl would help him to get everything that he needed.

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