

Chapter 13

They hadn't spoken for so long that hearing his voice still didn't feel real.

"Jor," Fenrir acknowledged his brother. After all, it would have been stupid to pretend that it wasn't him now. He was busted.

"How long has it been again?" Joran chuckled as if they did this every other weekend when in fact, it had been decades since the last time they spoke.

"Long enough." Sadly, Fenrir knew this wasn't his dream family reunion. His family was different. They were never like that...

"If I didn't know you any better, I would say that you are not happy to hear from me, Rir," Joran taunted, clearly pleased with the situation. The dragon loved to win, and this time, it looked like luck was on his side.

If only Fenrir had managed to send Astrea back the moment he saw her. Unfortunately, just a few minutes in her presence made him give up on all plans. Especially after seeing his brother's snake mark on her.

"We haven't seen each other for so long, but not much has changed since the last time we did," Fenrir brought himself to reply. "You are still your old manipulative self, brother."

"Ouch!" Joran's laugh rumbled on the other side of the line. "Tell me, Rir, was it worth it?"

"I'm not sure what you are talking about," the wolf replied, wishing to be done with this conversation as soon as possible.

"You are still so bad at lying after all these centuries," Joran said reproachfully. "Luckily for you, I am not taking it personally. I've learned that you can't think clearly when it comes to her. Although... that's not exactly her, is it? Does it make a difference? I've always wanted to know."

"What do you want, Jor?" Fenrir ignored the last question, returning to the main subject. He had only one weakness in his long life and hated when it was poked at.

"A brotherly conversation, of course!" Joran's voice was as sweet as honey on a warm summer day.

"And you are still very good at lying, but unfortunately for you, I now know when people lie."

"Ah, yes." Joran hummed, "Sure, you got me. But I insist that you answer first. Was it worth it to touch Astrea when you definitely couldn't miss my mark around her neck? If you had stayed away, I would have never discovered your location. You could have stayed hidden from me just like you wanted."

"I have no need to hide from you, Jor. Unless you have something new to tell me." Fenrir's voice was stone cold.

"It's just the way we parted--"

"That's also in the past," the wolf deity interrupted, his mood growing more sour by the minute. "Anything else?"

"So, about my Dragony--" Jor, on the other hand, was in the best of spirits.

"She is the past," Fenrir interjected roughly. "I don't like to be reminded of the past, and you know it."

"Are you trying to tell me that you don't care anymore?" The Serpent scoffed, the mocking in his tone too evident to miss.

"I am trying to tell you that the past is in the past, and I would like to leave it there."

"Hmm," Joran stretched the word, contemplating what was next. "So, are you telling me that I saved my Dragony for nothing?"

Fenrir hated how his brother repeatedly called Astrea his, using her old nickname. This was another test, another game, and he was failing at it badly. He failed the moment he kissed her, the moment he let himself trail his tongue down her silky skin, tasting what could have been...

What could he say now to downplay it in front of his sibling to keep her safe? Sadly, Joran knew what Astrea meant to him. What she would always mean to him, even if she didn't remember.

"I don't know what you were expecting, but as I have told you, Astrea is in the past for me," he insisted dryly, hoping that his brother would buy the deception, but knowing deep inside that he probably wouldn't.

"I expected that I would keep an eye on her for you, for old times' sake." Fenrir could practically see his brother smirking as he said that. "I met her when she was a damsel in distress and saved her knowing how much she meant to you. Sadly, you were nowhere around, and she was an orphan. I had to raise her and take care of her."

Fenrir closed his eyes in despair. He knew that Astrea was connected to Jor somehow, but he had hoped it was a recent and meaningless connection. His brother's words proved otherwise.

"Naturally, we grew very close, her and I," Joran went on, notes of delight in his voice. "One can say we are practically inseparable, and I have to tell you - I really see what you saw. All that being said, you should be proud of how far she has come."

Fenrir wasn't proud at all. He was fuming, feeling his insides burning with ames from hell itself. Hearing his brother make all these claims brought him more pain than he could have imagined.

"Cut the crap, Jor. What do you want? He had to ask bluntly because it was the only way with the tricksters like Joran.

"I want world peace," the Serpent chuckled, but after he got no reaction to his joke, he cleared his throat. "No, seriously. This is all I want and all I strive for."

"Sure! I'm convinced that your intentions are pure." Now it was Fenrir's turn to mock his sibling.

"I am offended that no one ever believes this, but this is what I've always wanted!" Joran insisted. "The world needs a better order because, at the moment, people who live in it do not appreciate it."

"So, it's world domination you want!" A laugh rumbled through Fenrir's chest.

"I want you to ght on my side again," the dragon's tone nally became serious. "The way we were always meant to be. Two divine brothers, showing mortals the way."

"Because it ended so well for us the last time," Fenrir chuckled darkly.

"Don't be like that," Joran reproached him. "I could feel your energy the last time I was in the North. You blessed many people back there and made me lose an important battle. At the worst time possible, might I add."

Fenrir knew this would come into play sooner or later. The dragon god would never forgive him or something like that.

"You broke the balance first," he reminded his younger brother.

"On the contrary, I was about to bring the balance back, but you stood in my way!"

"Those people did not deserve to die. Not like that."

"Don't you think I know that?" Joran nally snapped. "But it's not about them! What are their insignificant lives in the grand course of history? They were the sacrifices that had to be made for the sake of many!"

"See, and that's the problem for me right there," Fenrir closed his eyes and rubbed the bridge of his nose. This conversation was going nowhere. "I see it differently."

"Rir, if you'd just talked to me and let me explain," the Serpent sighed. "I have proof that what I am doing is right. I have numbers, statistics, and research. The Moonrise Kingdom was once what we loved, and if we managed to restore it, then people would actually stop dying in such quantities. This division they have now is bad for everyone. The North, the West, the South and the East have to become one again; only then would peace be possible. But I need your help, brother. I need you to side with me now."

Fenrir contemplated, remembering why he interfered the last time. He was in the North by accident and never planned to meddle in anything. When he saw the other shifters of the North ghting the bear shifters, their army blessed and enhanced by Joran, knowing that they didn't stand a chance against them, something changed. Fenrir always believed that everyone should build their own destiny, but at the same time, he knew how it felt to ght a power above and beyond you. So, he made a decision to help the ones who had prayed to him for centuries and blessed their army, too, giving them the much-needed boost to even the eld. That action alone weakened him significantly, and only one thing made him happy. At least Joran's powers were also running low now.

That boost ruined all of Joran's plans; naturally, he wanted revenge. His brother wasn't one to give up.

However, Fenrir knew that it couldn't be this simple. It couldn't be just kinship that Joran sought. His brother didn't exactly need him that much and was ne on his own for so long. Fenrir chose a life of solitude, and the Serpent was ne with it for a very long time.

"What else do you want?" He asked plainly, tired of all the games already. While Joran took after his father with his trickster nature, Fenrir was more like their mother, who preferred deeds over words and was a power to be reckoned with.

"You know me too well!" Joran snickered over the phone. "I miss this!"

"I am sure you do," Fenrir cut him off. "So?"

"You know what I want," the Serpent sneered. Fenrir didn't hear him, but he could feel it with his skin.

"No." That could be the one and only answer.

"Think of it, brother," Joran knew how to be persistent. "Give it to me and join me. Then you could nally get the life you've always wanted. I will be the one to give it to you."

"No!" Fenrir exhaled heavily. "You know I can't."

"I know you do not want to. That's what I know." With each new sentence, Jor's tone was getting icier, all the playfulness nally gone.

"I have my reasons," the wolf conrmed and they remained silent for a few minutes.

"Think about it for a week," Joran suggested nally. "Think while Astrea can still stay with you because after one week--"

A growl escaped Fenrir which only made his brother chuckle.

"Jor!" He was about to tell him what he thought about those hidden threats and ultimatums but only heard another t of laughter over the phone.

"I knew you couldn't hide it for long!" Joran sounded pleased with himself. "Don't say anything now. Think on it, my brother, the Rogue King."

He hung up, and Fenrir threw the phone at the stone wall of the room he was in, breaking it and only then realising that it wasn't his phone. Bash would be so angry.

He was cornered again, but for the first time in years, he knew exactly what he had to do. The only problem was that he didn't know how to get there.

"So?" Devoss and Bash waited for him outside and darted their eyes at him the moment he walked out.

"He knows," Fenrir reported and kept walking, the other two men following close behind as he tried to form a new plan in his head.

"Everything?" Bash's jaw twitched.

"Not everything," the king reassured him. "But he knows more than we need him to know."

"Bastian, call Kara and Warg. We need to discuss it," Devoss went into his strategising mode, which was so different from his usual self.

"Not right now," Fenrir shook his head. "I need to calm down first and think straight. See you in a few hours."

He left his friends behind and went up the stairs to his tower, fully settled into his gloomy thoughts.

The wolf entered his room and took off his shirt, wishing for nothing more than a shower to wash away all the blood he still had on his hands and body.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" Astrea's voice brought him back to reality the moment he entered his own bathroom and saw her in the bronze tub, staring at him with her blue eyes that shone now like stars in the night sky.

Her presence alone made him both agitated and calm, and he didn't know how that was possible.

He knew he should apologise for the interruption and leave her be. He knew it very well. A decent guy would do it, but...

"What surprises you so much?" The corners of Fenrir's lips turned upwards slightly. "It is my bathroom, is it not?"

The tint on her cheeks and the anger that made her delicate wet body shudder were too good to resist, so he closed the door behind him and went further inside, knowing she wouldn't make him leave.

She may not remember him, but deep inside, she had to feel it too...