

Thalos 91

Chapter 91: Loki Wins Big

The pure-blood Aesir gods were utterly stumped.

Without Idunn, there would be no golden apples.

They tried plucking ripe fruit from her tree, but eating them had zero effect.

The magic of eternal youth only worked when Idunn herself cast the enchantments on the apples.

Panic exploded among the Aesir.

They argued heatedly, while Bragi and his father Odin were especially troubled. Meanwhile, Loki was having the time of his life, grinning like a fox in a henhouse.

Odin, ever perceptive, stared at Loki for a long moment—so long that Loki nearly broke character.

But the Trickster God called upon his award-winning acting chops and met Odin's gaze with deep sincerity. "Odin, I feel you. I was devastated too when my loved ones disappeared."

Every muscle on Odin's face twitched like it had a mind of its own, caught between sorrow and fury.

He instinctively felt Loki had something to do with this—but he had no proof.

Luckily, divine barbarians like Odin don't always need proof.

Odin stepped forward and bowed. "Your Majesty! This matter is far too suspicious. I suggest we send Thor and Loki together to investigate."

Loki immediately freaked out. "Wait, why me?!"

Odin's single eye turned cold. "Everyone knows Lord Thalos is the wisest of us all. Among those merely somewhat clever... you're also the most idle."

The gods piled on.

"Yes! You've pulled off so many pranks, surely you're good at detecting trickery too?"

"It's time you put that brain of yours to good use."

"Exactly! You're the man for the job. Hurry up, or I'll be dead in three months."

Beautiful.

The same gods Loki had once tormented were now pressuring him to fix it. Just like that, the Trickster went from innocent bystander to prime suspect and chief investigator.

Seeing Loki's helpless expression, the other great actor on the throne—Thalos—nearly burst out laughing.

He clearly remembered that in the original epic, Loki had kidnapped Idunn. And even confessed! That led to the gods bossing him around like it was only fair.

But in this life, Loki had outplayed fate—he'd secured an airtight alibi. If he brought Idunn back now, every god would owe him big.

For Thalos, who was trying to steer the world away from Ragnarök, this was a deal worth making. There was no need to drive Loki into a corner.

Thalos declared, "Since Loki is innocent, and since his intelligence is essential to saving Idunn, here's what I propose: if he and Thor succeed in bringing her back, then all of you who depend on her golden apples must each bow to Loki and formally put your grudges behind you."

Boom.

Thalos had hoisted the aging gods onto a moral pedestal.

Either they bow to Loki later... or they wait to die now.

That hurt—but they had no choice.

So one by one, the ancient Aesir stepped forward and swore: if Loki helped recover Idunn, they'd not only forgive all past mischief, but even present him and Thor with valuable gifts in thanks.

Now Loki was truly elated.

As the secret mastermind behind this whole mess, nobody understood the situation better than him.

After the assembly broke up, only Thor remained behind to speak privately with Thalos.

"Father... do you already know something?"

Thalos blinked—surprised. This kid's finally growing a brain?

"You only need to know that Loki can be trusted this time. And that your goal isn't Idunn... it's a giant sea monster."

"A sea monster?" Thor immediately grasped that his father had foreseen something through the power of the All-Seeing Throne.

Especially the word "giant"—it reminded him of the Moon-chasing Wolf, Hati.

Thor understood instantly: this had to involve chaos.

"The sea isn't your domain. If you encounter it, just engage. I'll handle the rest."

Thor nodded solemnly. "Understood, Father."

"Go. And this time... try using your brain."

"Yes, sir!"

Rescuing a goddess was no joke.

Even if Loki had wanted to stall, the gods wouldn't let him. They buttered him up shamelessly, forcing themselves to be pleasant.

Loki's vanity was thoroughly satisfied.

Ah, you all hate me? I love it when you hate me, can't do anything about it, and still have to flatter me to survive!

Loki resisted the urge to ham it up. A mild, modest smile was all he gave in return—that was as much as he could muster.

Barely.

He and Thor packed light and made ready to leave.

Before departure, Loki sauntered up to Freyja and bowed deeply.

"Oh, radiant Freyja, this mission is extremely perilous. Just in case, may I borrow your Falcon Cloak?"

The Falcon Cloak allowed any being with magical talent to transform into a bird and fly.

It was a fine treasure, but to Freyja it wasn't irreplaceable. She glanced at Thalos—seeing no objection—so she nodded and lent it to Loki.

The Aesir's grip on the Nine Realms was still strong. Only three zones remained somewhat outside their control:

Jotunheim, which still spawned Frost Giants.

The Ironwood between Midgard and Jotunheim, and the northern seas.

The misty land of Niflheim.

Except Niflheim, Loki and Thor could count on resupply almost anywhere else.

Initially, Thor proposed using the Bifrost.

Loki immediately vetoed it. "Oh, Thor! Have you no sense? If someone managed to impersonate me and trick Idunn, then that someone must be very familiar with Asgard."

Thor paused. Then nodded.

"The Bifrost's light is visible for hundreds of miles. If we use it to approach, what if the kidnapper panics and kills Idunn? And you better not fly with that hammer of yours either—the thunder and lightning would give us away."

Thor couldn't fly on his own; he needed Mjölnir to do so, and it always made a scene.

Loki was making a lot of sense.

Thor agreed again.

And, of course, Loki was stalling.

If he could drag this out long enough for a few of those decrepit Aesir to die off, he'd win big.

So Thor hitched his beloved goat chariot.

These goats were related to Heidrun, the divine goat that grazed near the golden palace. They were sacred beasts.

They could fly through the sky while pulling the chariot—and their meat was delicious. Whenever Thor got hungry, he'd slaughter the goats, roast them, and feast.

Then, with a flash of lightning and a trail of laughter (mostly Loki's), the gods of thunder and mischief set off on their journey.