

THURISAZ



THOR'S HAMMER



TIANNA
XANDER

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RUNE SERIES: THURISAZ

BY

TIANNA XANDER

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*To Bonnie Rose Leigh, critique partner
extraordinaire...*

THURISAZ

Thurisaz, a representative of Thor, the Thunder God, is also the rune of destructive force and vital eroticism.

In Thor's Hammer, Thor needs to find a mate, and impregnate her in order to ensure the survival of the Universe.

Throughout the course of the story, he is forced to defend himself and his mate from Loki, the Trickster who is determined to bring about Ragnorak.

PROLOGUE

“The scrolls clearly state that if all of the Gods haven’t produced offspring by the tenth year of the new millennium, it will end life as we know it.”

Thor heaved a frustrated sigh. “If living this life is what I have to look forward to, I’m not sure that I want to continue being immortal.” The cold, demanding women of Asgard were not what he wanted. They were selfish lovers, demanding that he just have sex for sex’s sake. He didn’t want that. He wanted a connection with the mother of his children. A bond. Love. Was that so much to ask?

“You’re thinking only of yourself, boy,” Odin, father of all Norse Gods slammed his mug of mulled mead down on the golden table before him. “Think of others for a change. We do not want our lives to end. It will not only end your life, son. It will end the lives of all of us. There must be a balance. The universe has balance, without another of your blood soon the lack of

stability in the *Nine worlds* will continue to collapse. Soon, there will be no way to reverse it.”

Thor stood straighter, willing his father to realize that he would not settle for less.

“Then I will have a mate of my own choosing. One who not only demands my body as the Goddesses are so adept at, but one who is capable of accepting my love as well as loving me in return.”

His father stood quickly, his chair sliding out from beneath him to tip over onto the floor. “Then find this woman. You have been doing little more than existing since Siv refused you. Go, find yourself another. One who will love you as you say.”

Odin pushed him over to the scrying bowl on the table.

“Look in the bowl for your mate. The fates will lead you to her.”

Within moments, the waters began to churn. First, Thor heard a woman crying—heart wrenching sobs that tore straight through him, leaving a hole, a chasm, in the center of his chest.

As the ripples slowed to a gentle wake then grew still as a mountain lake on a windless spring morn, he looked into the scrying bowl. He saw the woman he intended to be his future consort kneeling beside a grave.

“I can’t do it without you, Dad. How can I raise

Alex by myself?" She leaned against the headstone. Moist earth beneath freshly laid sod stained her dress as she sobbed at the graves of her parents. "How could you both leave me alone with a ten year old boy to raise? I can't do it. I just can't."

Her sobs squeezed something deep in Thor's chest he was sure died long ago. The place where his heart had been. How many people had asked for his help over the years? How many more would ask, his honor demanding that he help them because they had gone down on their knees and begged it of him?

Sobs wracked her body. A breeze ruffled her shining platinum hair and he longed to reach out and stroke it. To offer her comfort within the security of his arms. He clenched his hand into a fist when she looked up and cast a glance around her, as if making sure she was alone. When she raised her face to the sky, tear-filled eyes bored into his through time and space.

His stomach clenched as he realized he watched the past. He hadn't been there for her then. Even when she'd asked, begged for his help.

"Please, Thor, please, help me."

Her sobs nearly unmanned him and he staggered away from the bowl as precious years passed. Where was he when this girl had needed his help? Wallowing in his own grief, letting

others cover for his loss of compassion? He returned to the bowl, looking down into the glassy depths, waiting to see where he could find her now.

She still knelt in the cemetery, older now, dressed in faded jeans and a soft pink blouse.

“As the Gods are my witness, I will never allow another human being into my heart. They all die. I will never love another. If Alex dies, I have no reason to go on living. No reason to fight.”

Again her tear-filled eyes seemed to stare straight into his. “I will never ask another favor from any of you. Prayers are for the weak and weak minded. There are no Gods. I wash my hands of you all.”

Her words belied the fact that she still wanted to believe in the Gods. She was just angry with them—angry at them all for ignoring her when she had needed their love the most.

While rage filled his mind, Thor swung his arm, his mighty hammer suddenly appearing in his hand. He hit the onyx scrying bowl, knocked it from the table and sent it flying across the room to smash against the wall. It fell to the floor in pieces.

Turning to his father, he knelt before him, his head bowed.

“I ask your permission to go back to Earth and right the wrongs I have wrought with this woman.”

CHAPTER ONE

Emma Thornton stood and brushed the grass clippings from her worn jeans. Humid and unseasonably warm early fall air blew across the headstones, stirring the dried flowers others had left for their loved ones. The crackling of dry leaves and flower pedals somehow soothed her frazzled nerves. Leaving the fresh flowers she picked from her mother's neglected garden on her parent's graves, she turned to walk through the cemetery. With the warm rays of the afternoon sun on her back, she could almost believe it was still summer, weeks before the seemingly endless work of the harvest.

She shook her head. "If it were only so."

Glad for the lengthy walk back to her car, she took the time to bring her emotions in check for the long drive back home. Checking her watch after settling herself in her car and buckling the safety belt, she grimaced. There were too many

long days and nights ahead of her, trying to bring the harvest in alone—not to mention running her business.

Resting her head against the steering wheel, she fought back the tears of frustration burning her eyes and reached down to turn the key. The backbreaking work certainly wasn't going to do itself and she couldn't afford to lose her crops. Not with all of the medical bills there were to pay.

Emma barely remembered the trip back home. Driving on autopilot had become a habit, a bad habit—one that would likely end in a bed at the hospital with her brother.

The police determined he had likely fallen asleep at the wheel of his truck. With no conscious driver, the vehicle veered off the road just before an overpass, shooting over a one hundred and twenty foot drop. He was lucky—or so they said. He could have been killed. But what kind of life would he have lying comatose in a hospital bed with a feeding tube in his stomach?

The driveway loomed long in front of her as exhaustion already took its toll on her body. The wooded acres between the road and the farm lent privacy to her home, also providing a natural wind block from the frigid northern winds. Dust flew up from the road, leaving a cloud behind her for several hundred feet.

Lost in thought, she almost missed seeing the

large object lying in front of her before it was too late. Jamming both feet on the brake pedal, she jerked the wheel causing the car to fishtail on the loose gravel drive.

Adrenaline rushed through her bloodstream. Her heart pounded in her ears as she fought off the urge to vomit from nerves or exhaustion. Hell, maybe both. It was hard to tell at this point. Her palms began to sweat as they held the steering wheel in a death grip. She stared through the windshield at the large man lying face down in the middle of her driveway.

“Oh, my God. What next?”

Prying her fingers from the steering wheel, she reached down and unclashed her seatbelt. Then, almost as an afterthought, she reached up to turn off the motor, pocketing the keys as she slid out of the car.

The skin on the back of her neck began to prickle as she stood staring at the man. Long legs, covered in worn, faded blue jeans stretched toward one side of the one-lane dirt tract. His head nearly reached the other side. The man was huge! What appeared to be a heavily muscled chest, encased in a once white t-shirt moved steadily up and down as he breathed. She released a relieved sigh at the sight. At least he wasn't dead. That was a plus.

Checking her watch again, she cursed her bad

luck and approached the man lying prone in front of her. She was losing daylight fast. During the harvest, every minute counted and she'd already wasted too much time.

Visiting Alex was not a waste of time, Em. You'll never know when your last visit will be. Take every minute he lives and treasure that gift.

She stopped next to the man and stared down at him, the sound of her mother's voice ringing in her ears.

There is always time for compassion, Emma. Never let the trials of life make you lose that precious part of you. The ability for a person to feel compassion for another, whether human or animal is the greatest gift given to us by the Gods. Do not squander it.

Yet her mother's prized compassion got her shot by an armed robber when she tried to help an old woman to her feet. She didn't toss him her purse fast enough and the man murdered her for it.

Adriana Marie Thornton lived just long enough to tell her husband and two children that she could never regret her choice to try to help the older woman that day. Her mother merely held their hands in a loose grip and smiled, constantly repeating her belief that compassion was her greatest God given gift.

Frightened, Emma shook off the heartrending memory and approached the large man. She took in his height and build, the farmer in her

appraising his size. Maybe he came looking for a job. She frowned. That still didn't explain why he was unconscious in the middle of her driveway.

A little voice in her head whispered frightening things about murderers and rapists as she moved toward the obviously unconscious man. Still, even as every alarm in her system shrieked for her to turn and run as far and as fast as she could in the opposite direction, she moved steadily closer.

Each breath he took caused goose bumps to rise on her skin. It was almost as if she could feel each exhalation. The sight of his huge upper arms as big as her thighs made her stomach do little flip-flops.

Sandy red hair sprouting from everywhere on his head and face, made him look like a huge orange bear and had her staring with awe. The man was the personification of the Norse God Thor. The only thing missing was that famed hammer.

Dropping to her knees, she shoved with all of her strength and managed to roll him over. She took her time assessing his injuries. Running her hands along his arms and legs, she was glad to find that he didn't have any broken extremities. His breathing hitched when she ran her fingers lightly over his ribs and rock-hard abs, looking for any obvious trauma. There didn't appear to be any...She frowned. Smoothing the dirt and hair

from his face, shoving her fingers through his hair searching for a lump on his head. Her fingers tingled, sending little bolts of electricity up her arm to settle deep in her middle.

How can she be attracted to a man she didn't even know, especially a man with such a scruffy beard covering his face? She looked closer. It appeared as though he may even be handsome under all of that hair.

Quashing the zing of sexual awareness that shot through her groin, she settled back on her heels, wiped her sleeve across her forehead and sighed.

Get a grip, Emma. The man is injured. You can't possibly be attracted to an unconscious man that has sprouted hair from his nose. She grimaced at the sight. Was that really coming from his nose, or was it an illusion of all that hair sticking out from every direction?

"I'll never be able to carry you to the car by myself, you know." She looked from the giant on the ground in front of her to her compact car. She reached out and poked him in the shoulder.

"Hello! Are you okay?"

Emma grimaced at the stupid question. Of course he wasn't okay. Men didn't fall asleep in the middle of driveways when they were okay.

She wiped her moist palms on her jeans. Every female part of her body was aware of the man

lying prone in front of her car. The sun sank lower in the sky and desperation fought with the hard won compassion her mother had tried so diligently to instill in her.

Grabbing his shoulders, she shook him with all of her might. "Wake up, damn it! I have work to do and I can't get to it until I know you're not dying in my driveway."

Patience, Emma. Compassion. Her mother's voice intruded again and she felt ashamed. Her mother gave her life for another and not regretted it. Here she was, unwilling to give up a couple of precious minutes.

The man groaned and let out what sounded suspiciously like a snore and Emma finally lost all patience. Standing, she walked back to her car, reached in and pressed the center of the steering wheel.

The loud piercing noise that emanated from the car even made Emma grimace. There was something wrong with her horn. It certainly should not sound like a shrieking cat in heat.

The man finally stirred, sitting up with his hand on his head. He looked around for a moment before his gaze finally settled on Emma.

Even in the fading light of late afternoon, she stood mesmerized by the sapphire blue of his eyes. So like her Thor. If she hadn't already sworn off caring for anyone, she could have fallen for her

scruffy visitor for his eyes alone.

The twinkle in those beautiful eyes promised good humor and compassion. The two most important things he mother had always taught her to look for in a man. Describing the characteristics of Thor, her mother told her that she would do well to find a kind man capable of vengeance but filled with the same loving compassion as her favorite Norse God.

Emma hadn't found herself a man, choosing instead to fall in love with the legends of Thor. She would live her life alone, devoting her every waking moment to his service. Until today. Today she had thrown away that childish dream. She'd finally grown up and realized that there were no real gods. No all powerful being watched over her and her brother, offering them protection and compassion. No one would show up and make things right for them. It was just a young girl's fantasies intruding in the real world. Well, no more. It was time to grow up. The only person she could rely on to help her and her brother now was herself.

Crossing her arms over her chest, she walked over to the man, knelt down a few feet away from him and stared into his eyes.

"What are you doing on my property?"

CHAPTER TWO

Thor sat up and looked at Emma Sue Thornton. Large, compassionate sky blue eyes stared into his as she fidgeted while she knelt across from him. He rubbed his head and looked around, trying to remember what he'd done to get here.

Odin, his father, removed his powers so he could live as a mortal. He hadn't wanted the temptation of taking her free will from her. He wanted her yes, but he wanted her to choose him. He didn't want to force that choice from her.

"I don't know how I got here...Miss." He'd barely stopped himself from using her name. He was supposed to be human. How would he know her name? "The last thing I remember was accepting a ride from two nice young men in a pickup truck."

She sighed and shook her head. "The two *nice* young men most likely robbed you and dumped you here." She stood, reached out to give him a

hand up. "Do you still have your wallet?"

Thor accepted her hand and stood, keeping her fingers imprisoned in his. He looked down at her, every nerve ending in his body demanding that he take her and make her his. He ignored the urge to throw her to the ground and bury his cock inside her regardless of her protests.

"Wallet?" Of course he didn't have a wallet. He'd never needed a form of identification in his life other than Mjolnir, his hammer. He made a show of feeling his back pockets and looked down at her. "No. I don't have my wallet. They must have taken it."

Staring down into her eyes, he tried to figure out what it was about her that made his balls ache. He wanted nothing more than to throw her on the ground and bury his cock deep inside her. Yet, he knew he needed to keep control over his base needs. Those feelings were the very reason his father had stripped him of his powers before sending him here.

Thor stood before the only woman in the universe worthy to have his children as vulnerable as if he were a newborn babe. He never felt so unsure of himself in his life. He needed to be with this woman. He needed to touch her, to feel her body pressing intimately against his. He took a step forward, intending to wrap her in his arms and stopped when she stepped back.

She stared up at him with wide eyes. Lines of sorrow and fatigue marred her face and suddenly his terrible need was gone. The steady ache in his balls was replaced with the urge to help and comfort her any way that he could.

"I heard that you needed a farm hand."

Her eyes widened. "How did you...?"

"It's a small town, Miss Thornton." He lifted a brow. "You are Emma Thornton, aren't you?" He knew she was, of course, but she had no idea he knew that.

He stuck his hands in the front pockets of his jeans to keep himself from touching her and scaring her half to death.

"News travels fast—especially bad news. I'm sorry about your brother."

Before she could tell him that she couldn't afford a laborer, he made her an offer she couldn't refuse.

"You won't find a better deal anywhere. I'm cheap and good. I work for ten bucks a day plus room and board. You can't afford to say no."

She had to agree. He knew farming. Maybe not as well as he should for this modern age, but he knew enough to know she stood to lose a hell of a lot more than some food and a few dollars a day without his help.

He watched her struggle with indecision. A cool breeze blew in from the west, lifting her hair

from her shoulders and exposing the gentle curve of her throat. He swallowed thickly, wanting nothing more than to kiss the vulnerable curve, nibbling his way to her shoulder and down to the rise of her breasts.

She bit her lip. The action drew his attention to her full, inviting lips and caused his cock to jerk in response. He met her gaze, watched as the indecision left her eyes and she made her choice.

Sighing, she held out her hand. "You have a deal, Mr...."

"Thor," He said with a grin.

Accepting her hand, he welcomed the illusion of electrical current that danced up his arm. It only served to prove to him that she was the one meant to bear his children.

"My mother liked the name and," he said with a shrug when she turned wide eyes on him, "what father wouldn't want his son named for a God?"

He heaved an inner sigh, glad that he didn't have to lie to her so far. Well, except by omission. The less he was forced to do so, the better off he would be.

"The daylight is fast dwindling and the full moon isn't for another five days," he said, turning toward her car. "Shouldn't we get to work?"

Walking around to the passenger side of her little car, Thor folded himself into the front seat. Her scent surrounded him immediately. It

wrapped itself around him, his body absorbing it though his pores. The sensation moved down low in his stomach, hardening his cock and squeezing his balls until just the smell of her nearly sent him over the edge.

He gritted his teeth and pressed his hands to his crotch, trying to hide his hard-on and determined that he would not embarrass himself. If he wasn't careful, he may just lose control and empty his load in his pants like an untried youth. He refused to humiliate either of them that way due to a lack of control.

His flesh tingled and the fine hairs covering his body stood on end as she slid into the seat next to him and started the car. Mimicking her movements, he secured the seatbelt around him and waited as she drove them to the barn.

He stretched as he unfolded himself from the car. Walking into the barn, he strode around the combine. Knowledge flooded his brain on the operation of every piece of equipment in the large barn.

"Where do you keep the keys for this monster?" he asked, staring at the huge metal dinosaur. She grabbed a set of keys from a rack beside the door and threw them to him.

"I assume you know how to drive a combine?"

Nodding, he caught the keys, climbed up into the large machine and started the engine.

He climbed back down without a word, hitched the large empty trailer to the large farm tractor and strode back to the harvester, ready to get to work.

"We have about an hour of daylight left," he said looking up at the sky. "We should be able to make two passes easily, before it gets too dark to see. Then we'll bring the trailer back and offload it into the truck." He looked past her to the second tractor and trailer sitting silently in the back of the barn.

"Tomorrow, we'll use that too. That way we can load the combine three times before we both have to head back here to load the truck and start over."

Emma shook her head. "I wish we could, but the other tractor is broken down. Mr. Hanson, our neighbor, is renting this one to us," she called up to him before turning to climb up on the tractor. She put on a headset and indicated that he should do the same.

"Can you hear me?" she asked when his was in place over his ears.

"Yes," he said with a nod. "I can hear you. After we're done in the field, I'm going to fix your tractor."

Did you hear that, old man? Either fix her tractor or give me the knowledge and the parts to fix it for her.

"You're welcome to try. Two tractors would

certainly make the going a bit faster.”

Thor shifted gears and the machine lurched forward. He drove it out to the field that he knew needed harvested first and lowered the mechanism to harvest the corn.

He was amazed at how far humanity had advanced as the machine cut the stalks, removed the ears and ground the remainder of the plant into mulch before dumping it back onto the field. After he made two passes, he slowed the combine to a crawl and waited as Emma pulled along side him with the trailer. After the flip of a switch, the corn dumped through a chute into the trailer she pulled behind her. All the while, the huge combine kept harvesting the corn as they moved across the field.

When the trailer was full, she signaled him to turn off the chute and pulled away to head back to the barn. Two more passes filled the hopper again and he headed back to help her dump the corn into the truck that waited there.

She smiled at him when he climbed down. “You drive that thing like my dad.”

She put on a pair of heavy work gloves and began to activate the dump lever on the trailer.

“Everything went so smoothly. Just like—” Her voice broke and she turned away.

“Just like when your father was here?” he asked, finishing her sentence.

She nodded, letting him take over the chore of emptying the trailer.

“Everything always ran smoothly when he was here. Until just before...” her voice trailed off and she stared into space. “He’d climbed up on the roof to fix a leak. It was something he’d done a million times before. Yet, that time he fell and broke his neck.” She closed her eyes. “It was a stupid accident. He didn’t anchor himself to the roof properly and it killed him.”

“You’re angry at him for that aren’t you?”

Her back was to him but he felt the anger rolling off her. The aura from her negative emotions surrounded her and was so thick he could see it. Yet, her posture alone would have given her anger away. She held her gloved hand clenched at her sides, and her back ramrod stiff.

She sighed, her shoulders slumping. “It doesn’t matter now. We need to get the harvest in. That’s all that really matters now. I need this harvest.”

The dump mechanism stopped, the trailer reached its highest point and Thor climbed up to make sure the trailer was empty before lowering the box back down. He watched as she climbed back up onto the tractor and pulled it away from the truck.

Climbing back onto the combine, he pulled it alongside the truck, flipped the switch that sent the chute out to the side and started dumping the

corn into the truck as he watched her drive the tractor into the barn.

After the equipment was stored away and he repaired the other tractor, they went into the house. Emma fixed sandwiches for dinner and he nearly swallowed them whole. He'd never been so hungry in his life.

"Sorry it's not more of a traditional supper...Thor. It's just that there's—"

"Not enough hours in the day to work and cook. I understand. Besides food is nothing more than a fuel for the body. It wasn't meant to taste good." He grinned around a large bite of ham sandwich and winked. "Though, it definitely helps."

She smiled at him and suddenly the two sandwiches he'd just eaten felt like two lead balls lying in his stomach. His heart slammed erratically in his chest and his hand squeezed his glass of milk so tight it was a miracle it didn't shatter.

She stared into his eyes for a moment, the smile slowly fading from her face, replaced by sudden awareness.

Thor watched, entranced as the soft pink tip of her tongue darted out to wet her lips. A small smear of yellow marred the perfect dusky rose of her mouth and he wanted nothing more than to lean over and kiss it from her lips.

Who knew mustard could be sexy? His father said dryly. Kiss her and get it over with before you both spontaneously combust.

Stop eavesdropping on my thoughts, old man. I thought you were a God, not a voyeur.

The sound of his father's laughter rang through his mind and he found it difficult not to smile.

Thank you for cooling my lust, father. I must take it slow with her, lest she runs.

They do not call me the Odin, the wise, for nothing, my boy.

CHAPTER THREE

Emma woke slowly, her muscles protesting. She stretched and glanced at her alarm clock.

“Damn!”

Scurrying from the bed, she hurried to the bathroom and jumped into the shower, barely able to hold back a squeal of protest as the cold water beat down on her skin.

“Nothing like a cold shower to clear the cobwebs from your mind,” she whispered to herself, shivering as she dressed.

She frowned, wondering if last night had been a dream or if she’d really been lucky enough to find someone to help her harvest the fields. Lucky enough, or stupid enough... Hurrying to the window, she looked out over the west field. Four neat passes had been cut into the stalks and ears of corn were stored in the tractor-trailer box next to the barn. Another four passes would fill that trailer and they would start on the next.

A tingling shot up her spine and she bit her lip. Had she really trusted that strange man enough to allow him to sleep in her parent's bedroom?

Someone knocked on the door and she jumped.

"It's past daybreak, Emma."

She closed her eyes when that wonderfully deep and husky voice filtered through her door to make her womb clench and sent shivers up her spine. Fisting her hands at her sides, she fought for control of her senses.

"Time's a wasting."

She rubbed her arms and shivered. The man had a voice to die for. After she finished dressing, she looked in the mirror and grimaced. Well, she wouldn't have to worry about the man making any sort of sexual advances, that was for sure. She looked like a bag lady with her holey jeans, frayed work shirt and dark circles under her eyes. She frowned after a moment and stuck her tongue out at her reflection. She was supposed to work in the fields today, not enter a beauty contest. It was a good thing too. With the way she looked, any beauty contest officials would probably set dogs on her.

Emma followed the delicious aroma of coffee into the kitchen and felt her eyes go round with surprise. Thor handed her a thermos full of the strong smelling brew, two bacon sandwiches and a heavy picnic basket.

“Lunch,” was all he said when he handed it over.

He picked up a second thermos, took the basket from her, hung it over his arm and grabbed one of the sandwiches out of her hand.

“What?” he asked when she stared at him, still stunned. “You didn’t think both of those sandwiches were for you, did you?”

“Actually, I’m just surprised that you cooked.”

He paused in the middle of taking a bite.

“You’re not mad, are you?”

“Me? Of course I’m not mad.” She took a bite of the sandwich and walked toward the door. “I’m a bit surprised, that’s all.”

Her father had never once thought of letting her sleep in while he fixed breakfast and lunch for them. It had always been the other way around.

She looked up at him and wondered why he seemed so attractive to her.

Are you kidding? A man who cooks and thinks about letting you get some much needed sleep while he wakes up before the dawn, fixes breakfast and makes coffee? What’s not to love?

Still, she’d never been attracted to a redhead before. Her tastes usually lead to tall, dark and handsome men—not giant, red, and hairy men. The tall, dark and handsome guideline became more like a rule in high school. Now though, looking at Thor with his unruly mop of red hair

and bushy beard, she realized the color was growing on her.

“After we’re through for the day, I want you to take a shower before we eat.”

He frowned, sniffed his armpits and blushed. “I’m sorry. I didn’t realize I’d become so...aromatic.”

Laughing, she shook her head. “I’m going to cut your hair.”

She had never shaved a man before in her life, but if he didn’t do it himself after his shower, she was going to make the attempt. She wanted to know exactly what he looked like underneath all that hair.

“What?”

She almost laughed at his genuine look of horror.

“Cut my hair? You’re not serious!”

She smiled and nodded, leading the way to the barn.

“As a heart attack, buddy,” she said, looking back at him pasting a grin on her face. His expression was nearly enough to bring her to her knees. She was almost afraid to uncover his face. “And the beard goes too. I find it hard to talk with you when I’m trying to stare past all of that hair.”

His eyes had grown round and he just stood staring at her speechless. You’d think she just told him he resembled a wooly mammoth.

“Don’t be such a baby, Thor. The way you’re acting, a person would think you’ve never had your hair cut. You can’t possibly be afraid of a pair of scissors.”

He just gave her a glare and pushed past her.

“You are *not* cutting my hair.”

Emma decided to drop the argument while they worked. Besides, it was all she could do to keep her mind on what she was doing. She watched him as he worked through the day. He didn’t take one break, constantly moving, bringing the end of the harvest closer with each hour he spent on the farm. It was endearing the way he always did the harder work, leaving the less strenuous jobs for her.

Around noon, he finally got hot enough to remove his shirt. She practically swooned when he exposed all that hard tanned flesh. No amount of body building in a health-club could build *that* kind of muscle. That kind of sinew could only be honed by years of hard work brandishing heavy hand tools.

Watching his muscles bunch and flex beneath his bronzed flesh, Emma could almost imagine him as a hero in one of her romance novels—a hero in old England—a blacksmith, swinging a large, heavy hammer.

The similarities between him and the God she renounced came back to her than and she pressed

her lips together at the reminder. She would not begin to care for this man. She refused to care for this man. If she needed to, she would sleep with him and get him out of her system, but she would not allow herself to become emotionally involved with the man.

Still, she watched as the perspiration glistened on his chest, arms and back as he worked.

She closed her eyes, stifling the urge to wrap her body around him and beg him to ride her like a racehorse—like the obvious slut she'd become.

She shook her head. *What in the world is coming over me? I've never felt this way about a man before in my life! When did I start imagining myself having sex with a man?*

Looking up at Thor, as he pushed the remaining corn from one of the trailers, she realized when she'd started having such thoughts. It was yesterday when she met Thor.

Thor, what kind of name was that to give your son? Wasn't that showing the Gods some sort of disrespect or was it some form of flattery?

Staring up at the hard planes of his body, she came to the decision that it wasn't him she was attracted to. She'd just been stuck here too long, caring for her brother the last six years. With no time for a relationship or even casual sex, her twenty-four year old virgin's body was restless with all of the testosterone emanating from the

only man she'd been exposed to who was not related to her.

Why shouldn't she be restless? She was only human. Women had needs too, didn't they? It just wasn't natural for a woman to reach her age, never to have been kissed by a man.

Reaching into her pocket, she pulled out a hair tie and pulled her hair off her neck into a ponytail. The sensation of her hair brushing against her shoulders made her hot and she had begun to sweat.

She lowered her arms, her hands lightly skimmed over her breasts, oblivious to the show she was giving to her employee. Her sharp breath as her hands skimmed her nipples drew Thor's attention from dumping the trailer. He stared at her with such intensity that her knees buckled and she almost fell to the hard-packed dirt at her feet.

Everything happened so fast, it was though it was a blur. Thor jumped from the box, stopped the trailer from dumping and ran to her. He moved so fast, she could have sworn he had been too fast for her eyes to see.

Catching her up into his arms, he stared down at her for a moment. She felt his look like a touch. It danced over her skin, heating her blood, nearly driving her mad with the need to bury her fingers in his unruly hair and pull his head down to hers.

Silently, she begged him to lower his head and

press his lips to hers. The attention of any man, even this scruffy giant of a stranger was better than wondering about what it felt like to be pressed intimately against a lover.

Slowly, he bent his head toward hers, giving her plenty of time to pull away if she wanted.

She didn't. She couldn't. She had to know what it was like. She could only stand and stare, speechless as his head lowered, his lips growing ever closer to hers. She stood mesmerized as he lowered his mouth to hers and groaned.

The soft touch of his lips sent electricity charging through her system. Lightning seared every nerve ending as his large hands splayed over her back.

His tongue touched her lips and she opened for him, impatient to deepen the kiss. It was her turn to groan when he thrust his tongue into her mouth. Her legs gave way again. She reached up, thrusting her fingers through his hair and held him to her.

He gripped her by the upper arms and pulled away after he brushed his lips across hers a few more times. Holding her steady until she could stand on her own, he looked out the door into the sunlight. His breathing was erratic and his chest heaved with the effort to catch his breath.

"We still have a lot of work to do."

His voice was deeper than usual. More husky.

The sound danced over her nerve endings and desire raced through her blood. It was almost as if he marked her, branded her in some way and now she was his.

She nodded and cleared her throat. She needed to make some kind of noise. To talk. She had to do something to take her mind of that kiss—to rid herself of the all-consuming need crawling beneath her skin.

“You’re right,” she agreed, licking the taste of him from her lips. “We have way too much work to do.”

Yet when nightfall came and the fields were cloaked in darkness, what excuse would they use then?

CHAPTER FOUR

By the time darkness fell, they had cleared the entire West field. Three large semi trailers stood full, waiting for the big rigs to pick them up in the morning, leaving the empties they would fill tomorrow.

The two trailers Emma towed using the tractors were also full. A testament to her determination to get her fields harvested. As was her decision to not visit her brother until the next morning. He could tell she wanted to go. Several times throughout the day, she pulled a worn picture from her pocket and stroked his face with her finger.

Hungry and exhausted, Thor wandered back to the house behind her thinking, if he was so tired, how exhausted would she be? It barely bore thinking about.

As he watched, she dragged herself up the back porch steps and into the kitchen, automatically

washing out both of the thermoses they used. She set them carefully in the drain-board. After that chore was finished, she began another like a robot.

She moved through the kitchen like an automaton, tired, yet unwilling to sit – hungry, yet unwilling to eat until she had prepared enough for the both of them.

He tried to help, the only way he knew how, by staying out of her way and setting the table. He poured cola from a two-liter bottle into two plastic tumblers and turned to watch her as she continued to work.

Gritting his teeth, he wondered how long she'd lived like this. She existed on too little sleep and too much hard work. He wondered and blamed himself for his ignorance. How many years ago had this woman gotten down on her knees and begged him for his help? She'd still been a child then. Now she was a woman – a woman with too many responsibilities, too many burdens and too little love and understanding.

He held her chair for her after she placed their sandwiches on the table, but refused to let her carry the soup, afraid that she would spill it and scald herself.

Swaying on her feet, she barely seemed to notice when he grasped her arm and helped her into her chair. She smiled up at him but he still saw the shadows of fatigue in the heavy rings

beneath her eyes, and the lines of stress bracketing her lips.

“Thank you.”

His eyes locked with hers. “You’re welcome.”

“I hope you like vegetable soup,” she said, looking down at her bowl after taking a bite of her bologna sandwich. “I’m just too damned tired to fix much else. I’m thinking we’ll have frozen pizza tomorrow.”

He nearly shuddered at the thought. “I’ll cook tomorrow. You don’t need to wait on me. I’m capable of pulling my own weight. Besides, we were both out in that field doing the hard work.”

She had done the work of two men out there today but he didn’t think she would appreciate the comparison.

“As a matter of fact, why don’t you eat and go to bed? I’ll take care of the dishes. You look exhausted.”

“I am exhausted, but *you* should be even more so. You were up before me this morning, remember.”

He grinned. “Yes, but I had that nice nap in your driveway yesterday.”

She frowned. “What *were* you doing passed out in my driveway, by the way?” Her eyes widened. “Good Lord! I should have asked you that sooner. My mind was on so many things, my brother, the harvest...” He half expected her to blurt out the

trip to the cemetery where she had renounced the Gods her family had believed in for generations.

“To tell you the truth, I actually fell asleep next to the driveway. I thought it was a dirt road. I got a bit tired and sat down hoping for another ride. The next thing I remember, you were blowing the horn of that dinky car you drive at me.” He almost cringed when the words left his mouth. It was his first real lie to her.

He couldn't very well tell her that he must have passed out when his father stripped him of his supernatural powers. She would run from him screaming that he was a raving lunatic. Hell, the night was young, she still could.

“Are you telling me you just rolled into the driveway while you were sleeping?” she asked, searching his eyes.

The look on her face told him that she didn't quite believe his story.

She sighed at his nod and then shrugged. “Whatever. If that's the truth, great. If not, it's not as if you owe me anything but the honest day's work you promised and you have already given me that.” Standing, she crossed the room to put her dishes in the sink.

“Thanks for offering to do the dishes.” She turned to him and grinned. “But if you think it's going to get you out of that haircut, you're sadly mistaken.”

She laughed when his mouth fell open.

“Don’t be such a baby about it. Go take a shower and get your butt back down here. I’m not going to bed tonight until I see what’s under all of that hair.”

Against his better judgment, he left her doing dishes to go take the warm shower that beamed to him like a siren. Just the thought of being clean again was enough to send him on his way.

His father’s laughter did little to lighten his mood.

How will anyone ever take me seriously if she cuts my hair and makes me shave my face?

It is your power that your people responded to, boy, not your fearsome looks. Besides, it’s not as if you cannot appear to them as you always have. You merely need to appear as a human to her. His father’s comments didn’t help him much.

I appear human to everyone.

Not to her. To her, you are a great orange bear. Large, intimidating and rather frightening.

That comment gave Thor pause. I frighten her?

He sighed. Studying himself in the mirror. He could see how his wild hair and scraggly beard could be intimidating. It made him look rather like an unwashed, unkempt bum. He grimaced. No wonder, Siv had refused him.

Turning, he reached into the shower and turned on the water. He waited a moment before climbing under the hot spray. It felt good to clean

himself the mortal way. Merely thinking his body clean was easier, yet it did not hold the comfort of the warm water cascading over his skin.

After washing the tangled mass that he'd mistakenly called hair, along with all the other necessary parts, he turned off the water to face the mirror again.

What would he look like with a clean-shaven face? He hadn't been without a beard since he was a youth. Remembering what he looked like as a boy, he grimaced. His mouth was too big, his nose had a pronounced arc. Not to mention his eyes. Those were both too big and too blue. He'd grown the beard to cover the fact that he wasn't perfect and as a God, he should have been.

Shave it off or wish it gone and I'll remove it. Either way, get it over with, you infant. His father's voice boomed through his head, a sure sign that he was becoming impatient. *If the woman is truly meant to be yours, she will love you regardless of the ugly face beneath all that hair.*

Thor closed his eyes. His father was right. He knew it. Yet it didn't give him any comfort. Why was he even having these thoughts? Besides, he was the son of a God. In truth, he was a God in his own right. It was ridiculous for him to fear anything—especially something as simple as the stroke of a razor on his skin.

It didn't take long once he started. The job was

done quickly and easily with the scissors and new razor Emma had provided. To be honest, all in all, it had been a rather pleasurable experience.

Reaching up, he felt the smooth skin of his cheek. He tried to ignore the fact that his mouth was still too big and his nose didn't seem to fit his face.

He shrugged at his reflection, got dressed in the clean clothes he found lying on the bed and started downstairs to face the music. He was confident that she wouldn't mind that he wasn't handsome because she was meant to be his. He knew it.

Her back was to him when he entered the kitchen. Her shoulder length hair was still damp from her shower, its length wetting the back of the pink pajamas she wore. The color looked good on her.

She smelled nice too. A bit like berries. He could smell her across the room and it made his cock jerk and his balls ache. She turned away from the sink, another pair of scissors in her hands. Her mouth fell open and the scissors dropped unnoticed to the floor.

This is wonderful, father. I'm so ugly she's going to pass out. I'll never win her over this way.

For once, Odin the wise remained conspicuously silent.

* * * *

After Thor left the kitchen to shower, Emma hurried to his room to set out clothes. He was a bit larger than her father, but his pants and t-shirts should fit him well enough. She tried not to smile at the picture of Thor wearing her father's large t-shirts when he was obviously an extra-large t-shirt kind of man. What a show she was going to get with that knit cotton stretched over all that muscle.

She set the clothes on the bed and hurried to her room for her own shower. She had time. If he was like any other boy or man who didn't want his hair cut, he'd take forever to gather the courage to leave that bathroom. After changing into her pink pajamas, she hurried back downstairs with the hair care kit.

She'd just organized the implements on the counter when Thor walked into the room behind her. She turned when she heard him and her mouth went slack. Her fingers loosened on the scissors and they fell to the floor with a loud clatter.

Just as she suspected, he was hiding a handsome face under all that hair. But she hadn't really expected this! The man was a god! A walking, talking, living, breathing God. To think, he'd hidden all of that beneath that scruffy,

scraggly beard and long hair.

“I—I’m only going to trim your hair,” she said, ignoring the electric trimmer on the counter.

Using a comb, she untangled the horrific mop of copper-colored hair and layered it, giving it a fuller, more stylish look.

No matter how she tried, she just couldn’t bring herself to cut it short like she had planned. Not after combing his hair and feeling the smooth, silky strands sift through her fingers. Leaving it long enough to run her fingers through, was the only thing she could think about.

Pausing, she frowned, fearing that running her fingers through the silky mass was her main motivation for leaving it long. She couldn’t help it. She loved the way it felt in her hands.

“There you go.”

She finally pulled the towel from around him and carried it outside to shake the hair from its folds. Refusing to look at him, she busied herself with putting away the hair cutting supplies. She had hesitated in uncovering him. The action seemed symbolic somehow, like she had been unwrapping a present.

Yeah, right, Emma. If you think he’s really attracted to you, you need to get a grip. He only kissed you today because you are convenient. It’s not like all the women in the county are beating down your door for a date with him.

Tears burned her eyes at the thought. No one had ever kissed her that way before and no one ever would again. That was a safe bet.

She would have to savor the memory of that kiss for the rest of her life.

“What’s wrong?” he asked as he walked up behind her. Heat radiated from his body, causing goose bumps to rise on her skin.

How does he do that?

She had asked herself the same thing last night. She’d lain in bed, staring at the ceiling, wondering. Why did he have such an effect on her? Why him, when no other man had even turned her head?

Warm hands rested on her shoulders and she closed her eyes. Heat from his body enveloped her. She inhaled, loving his scent. Even though she knew he smelled of the same soap her brother used, it was different on him somehow. Sexy. She fought the urge to lean back and press her body against his. What was it about him that turned her into such a quivering ball of need?

CHAPTER FIVE

“You smell good.”

The heat of his breath against the back of her neck, made her shiver. Who knew that she had such a sensitive spot just below her ear? Who could have known little tendrils of desire would attach themselves to her suddenly, over-sensitive nipples and burn a trail down to her nether parts.

Warmth settled in her middle as an unfamiliar heat pooled between her legs. She fought the urge to stiffen her spine. She didn't want him to think he made her uncomfortable. If anything, he made her feel alive for the first time in her life.

Relaxing against him, she sighed when his lips touched her neck softly. His calloused hands brushed down her arms and wrapped around her to pull her rear back against his hips. The press of rigid flesh between her buttocks was nearly her undoing. Suddenly, she didn't care that this man was a virtual stranger. All she cared about was

how he made her feel. *What* he made her feel.

"I love the feel of your body rubbing against mine," he whispered in her ear as he nibbled gently on the lobe.

She groaned when his thumbs brushed over her nipples, causing them both to pebble against the soft cotton of her pajama top.

He shouldn't be doing this. She shouldn't let him. Something deep inside her said it was wrong, yet she was powerless to stop it. Her arms and legs felt like gelatin and she couldn't force herself to voice her protest.

Even when her mind said no, her hand reached up and covered his. She pressed his hands harder against her breasts and instinctively wriggled her bottom against his hard cock.

"Yes."

She breathed the word out on a sigh. Swallowing thickly, she leaned her head back against his shoulder, giving him better access to the curve of her throat.

"Every time I look at you, I want to do this," he said as he kissed the side of her mouth. His hand trailed down to caress her stomach.

She turned toward him, deepening the kiss. He pulled his lips from hers and she whimpered a protest.

"Do you know what else I want to do when I look at you?"

She shook her head and gasped when he laved her ear.

“I want to do this,” he said as he covered her mouth with his. He brought both hands up to cup her breasts with his warm hands and lightly pinched her nipples. “And I want to bury my cock in your tight pussy, Emma. Does that turn you on?”

“Oh, my God,” she whimpered as her legs gave out.

His arms tightened around her, holding her pressed against him. The ridge of hard male flesh that rode between her cheeks, coupled with the overwhelming sensations of his lips sliding over her skin, had her breath coming in short gasps.

All of these new sensations were so wonderful, so new. The feel of that hard shaft pressed against her rear, his hands expertly stroking her breasts was almost too much to bear. Warm breath brushed her throat, sending shivers of delight through her nerve endings.

She couldn't lie to him. Couldn't deny the words he wished to hear. “Yes.” She nodded, her tongue darting out to moisten her lips. “Yes, it does turn me on.”

Spinning in his arms, she wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled his head down to hers. Deepening their kiss nearly drove her mad.

A little spear of doubt pierced her

consciousness when his arms tightened around her. He pulled her more firmly into his embrace, pressing every inch of her to the front of his solid frame.

What in the world had come over her? Why was she making out in her kitchen with a man she barely knew – a man she was barely even attracted to?

Turning her head, she broke their kiss. She gasped when he bent and covered the tip of her breast with his warm, wet mouth and suckled her through the material of her top.

He thrust his leg between hers, his thigh pressing intimately against her creaming pussy.

“Oh, my. That feels...”

Her breath left her lungs in a whoosh when he lightly bit down on the hardened nub.

Blood roared in her ears. Her whole body grew hot and every nerve ending in her body burned with the need for more.

Still panting, she untangled her fingers from his hair and did the most difficult thing she had ever done in her life. Placing her hands on his chest, she pushed him away from her.

“I can’t...” *Not here, not now, and not in Mom’s kitchen with Alex in the hospital in a coma.*

What right did she have to take this time for herself when her brother lay like a broken toy soldier in a hospital an hour away? What right did

she have to waste this time that should be spent on visiting him and harvesting the fields so they could eat this winter? So she could eat, because Alex was never coming home. It was time she faced the facts.

"I just can't..." The words came out on a sob. Her face burned as she wondered how she'd suddenly lost control. "I don't know what came over me. I'm so sorry."

She backed away from him when he released her.

"What's happening between us shouldn't be happening. I don't want a relationship now." *Or ever. I can't afford to fall in love with you. Something horrible will happen, you'll die and it will kill me.*

Her lips still tingled from their kiss. She placed trembling fingers to her mouth and looked up at him, her eyes wide.

Tears fought for balance on her lashes as she stared up at him. She would never be able to separate her feelings from her lust. With her, the two came hand in hand. Something told her the two were already irrevocably entwined.

"I can't have a relationship with anyone now."

She looked up into his clear blue eyes and knew she could go no further with this man. She could never make him her lover. To do so, would be the worst mistake in her life.

* * * *

Thor watched her. His thoughts raced as he did everything in his power to keep his face blank. She wasn't ready. She had been through too much in her young life and she just wasn't ready for a relationship. He needed to have patience but wasn't sure how much patience he could afford her before the repercussions of his selfish behavior wrought havoc on the world.

If she needed to lie to herself—if she needed to tell herself that she didn't want any emotional entanglements, that was her choice. His choice in the matter was to prove to her the lie that it was.

Tears she so desperately tried to hide still trembled precariously on her lashes. Those tears revealed her feelings, telling him it was already too late. They only served to prove to him that her emotions were already involved.

On some level, she had to know that she would never be able to separate her feelings from the all-consuming lust that filled her senses. The fates had drawn him to her. She was meant to be his. She *would* be his. He only needed patience.

She stood before him, looking more beautiful than any other woman he had ever seen before. Her platinum hair framed her face. Her pink, full, lips parted as she stood before him panting, her body trembling with need.

It was all he could do to keep himself from throwing her over his shoulder and carrying her to his room. He clenched his hands at his sides, nearly overcome with the desire to do just that and take the choice from her.

“Are you sure that is how you feel?” he asked thumbing a tear from her cheek. “It’s okay sweetheart. I shouldn’t have let it go that far. I lost control. I know you aren’t the type of woman to have a casual relationship.” He brought that up deliberately, wanting to remind her that, like it or not, her emotions were already involved.

Bending down, he kissed her gently on the cheek.

“I’ll go to bed so you can think. Don’t stay up too late. You wanted to get up early and drive into town tomorrow. You need your rest.”

Turning, he left the room. He hated leaving her alone. She was so hurt and confused and it was all his fault. Still, he knew she needed time to think, to come to terms with the fact that he was quickly becoming a permanent part of her life.

As he climbed the stairs to the second floor, he wondered how he was going to get any rest tonight. The longer he stayed here without his powers, the more sleep he required for his body to rejuvenate.

How did humans do it? How did they spend long hours, day after day, abusing their bodies

without taking the proper rest they need? Yet, he could see why they skipped the necessary sleep. He couldn't imagine spending a third of his life unconscious. How did they do it, knowing they would only die in a few short years?

Her scent hit him when he reached the top of the stairs and his body reacted, hardened with need. Every time he looked at her. Every time he smelled her, need slammed into him and made his chest and balls ache.

Be honest with yourself at least. Your unruly prick gets hard every time you even think about her. His father's voice interrupted his thoughts. Go jerk off or something. You're too tense and it's making her nervous. If you're not careful she's going to run from you and if you don't get her to the hospital tomorrow, she will lose her brother and feel she has nothing to live for.

His father's words rang true. She would feel that she had nothing to live for if Alex died.

I know, I know. How can I even think about what needs to be done with you yammering in my ear at every opportunity, old man? Then he paused. Do you really think I frighten her?

Odin chuckled. *Don't worry about it. If she were very frightened of you she would never have kissed you. Besides, she'd be on the phone with the police right now if she were.*

What is she doing?

Thinking of you. Now get some rest before you make

yourself sick. You're not omnipotent anymore.

Suddenly, the annoying presence was gone and he sighed. He may have been omnipotent, but he'd lived more in the last few days with Emma, than he had in the last several hundred years. He stopped outside her door, breathed in her lingering scent. Need hit him hard, his hand shot out and he leaned against the wall. No woman had ever affected him this way before. He smiled. As far as he was concerned, that was a good thing. It was just one more bit of evidence to prove she was fated to be his.

CHAPTER SIX

Emma sat up and rubbed the sleep from her eyes. A strange man stood over her bed, staring at her. His large frame wasn't much more than a silhouette in the darkness. The moon casting a silvery glow into her room, shielded his face from her sight. Yet she wasn't scared. If anything, she felt peace steal through her body as though she had been drinking the fine mulled mead the Norse God, Odin was said to favor.

"Who are you?"

"I am Odin. Your God. Don't you recognize me?" He stepped closer to the window so the lunar glow shed light upon his face. The man didn't look a day over thirty. Honey colored hair brushed his shoulders and his arms were huge. The man was a veritable giant, yet she didn't feel threatened in the least.

"You don't look like an old wise man who hung himself from the world tree for nine days."

She gave a soft laugh. No wonder she wasn't scared, she was dreaming. Her subconscious mind was attempting to make her feel guilty for renouncing the Gods her family had revered for generations.

"Eons," he said. "Your family has served mine for the good of all beings since the beginning of time."

"Then it's time we learned to survive on our own, don't you think?" She said with a scowl.

Reaching over to the nightstand, she switched on the lamp and blinked. There was no one there... and she was wide-awake.

* * * *

"Wake up, boy!"

Thor heard the words just before his body hit the cold, hardwood floor. He looked up, giving his father a fierce look. The floor was damn cold and he was naked.

"What in hell do you think you're doing, old man?" Thor sat up and glared at his father.

"I was just in your woman's bedroom having a look, when I realized something was wrong," Odin said, throwing Thor's clothes at him. "Get your naked ass off the floor and get dressed before I go blind. Your woman's barn is on fire. Get out there and to something about it before she loses

everything.”

Thor glanced up at his father, anger and disbelief crowding through his mind. If he'd decided to interfere...

“You didn't—”

“Of course I didn't set the fire, you dolt. I came here to see your woman. I only had a healthy curiosity to see what my new daughter was like. She's got spirit, that's for sure. She talked back to me,” he said with a smile, obviously proud his son had picked such a strong woman. His father paced restlessly next to the bed as Thor rushed to don his clothes. “When I realized that all was not as it should be I reached out with my senses to see who would do such a thing.” He stopped pacing and leveled his gaze on his son. “Whoever it is, is not working alone. Only another god would be able to cover their tracks well enough to hide from me.”

Thor looked up sharply. “Another god, but who?”

“I don't know who is behind it. If I did, you can bet I would be after them right now. And you can be damned certain that I'm going to find out who it is. No one messes with my family.” He looked out through the window, the occasional orange light flashing across his face. “You need to get your ass out there before she loses everything.”

Thor ran to Emma's room and pounded on the door.

“The barn is on fire, Emma! Call the Fire Department!”

Father, can you and mother make it rain?” He knew controlling the weather was an uncertain prospect. It took the power of at least two of his kind. Still he asked as he ran down the stairs, heading for the door.

We’re already working on it. She’s handling that with some help from the fates. They are pissed that someone is mucking about in their territory. They said this wasn’t supposed to happen.

Thor grimaced. Despite the fact that whoever it was, was hurting Emma, the Fates meted out punishment cruelly when their plans were thwarted. And they could be cold, hard, heartless bitches in the best of times.

Good. I hope they figure out who it is. I’d like a piece of him myself. If there’s anything left after the fates finish with him.

He ran into the burning barn with little thought to the fact that he was no longer an immortal. The intense heat from the barn grew every second he was inside the building. His lungs burned every time he took a breath, the heat of the fire searing the inside of his chest, burning his nose.

Grabbing the keys for the combine, he climbed into the huge machine and started the engine. Thankfully, it started on the first try. The large, clack-clacking of the powerful diesel engine

seemed comforting somehow. He was going to get it out of here, along with every other piece of equipment she needed for the harvest.

His heart nearly jumped to his throat when a streak of pink covered in gray ran past him, heading deeper into the barn toward the animals.

“Damn!”

Why hadn't he thought of them? All he could think of was saving the equipment to save her harvest. Leave it to her to remember the animals. Until now, his whole being had been centered on the combine and tractors. He hadn't heard the frightened cry of the animals. The two horses' high-pitched screams nearly chilled him to the bone as he started to climb from the combine in the now, raging inferno. He had to get to her, to help her.

“No!” She waved her hand and then pointed back to the combine. “You have to get the equipment out. We can't afford to lose it!” Emma yelled over the screaming horses, the crackling of the flames and the eerie squeal of metal heating up too quickly.

He gave her a curt nod, settled back into the driver's seat and put the harvester in gear.

It was just a damn good thing she kept the fuel in a one-thousand gallon tank that was five-hundred feet from the barn or they would never have had a chance.

As soon as he drove the combine clear, he shut it down, jumped to the ground and raced back into the barn. He'd get her equipment to safety and then he would get answers.

* * * *

"No!" Emma screamed, when Thor ran back into the barn for the third time.

The fire blazed hotter than ever. It was so hot, she couldn't even get near the barn. How had he been able to stand that horrible heat? It was suicide to go in there again.

Tears streamed from her eyes as the roof caved in. There was no way anyone could have survived that.

It was her fault he was gone. She slumped to the ground, covered her face with her sooty hands and sobbed out her fears and frustration. The sound of sirens and large trucks barreling up the driveway barely registered, until one of them slid to a stop beside her.

Firemen ran about, pulling the hoses from the trucks and sprayed what was left of the barn.

A paramedic rushed over to her, put an oxygen mask to her face.

"Was there anyone else? Anyone in the barn?"

She nodded her head and pulled the mask from her face.

"Only one. He went in for the tractor and the roof collapsed," she sobbed. "Why did he go back in there? He should have known he'd never get out." *Not alive anyway.*

"He was damned lucky, that's for sure," the man nodded his agreement. "Like you, he has some minor burns, but what has me worried, is the fact that the blaze was so hot and he has inhaled a hell of a lot of smoke."

It took a moment for his words to register.

"He— he's alive?"

The man smiled and covered her mouth and nose with the oxygen mask again. He looked back over his shoulder to a place just next to and almost behind the barn. She was almost afraid to believe.

"Yes, ma'am, he's alive. He's covered in dirt and soot but he's definitely alive." He chuckled. "He wouldn't let the rest of the guys treat him until I came over to care for you. He must love you very much."

Emma barely heard the rest of what he said. She ripped the mask back off her face, stood and ran to the area filled with rescue workers. She stopped when she saw them pick Thor up and put him on a stretcher.

"So, your name is Thor, huh?" A tall, slender, brunette EMT asked, with a smile as she took his blood pressure. She frowned and then tilted her head. "I guess you do sort of resemble him, only

you don't have a beard. Wasn't Thor supposed to have this big scruffy looking beard that made him look fierce so people would fear him?"

Thor glance toward Emma, his expression unreadable. He raised his hand and pointed at her. "She made me shave it off."

The woman blinked. "She *made* you shave it off?" She shook her head and laughed. "Somehow, I don't see anyone *making* you do anything you don't want to do." Then she grinned. "It's just as well, you know. It's better for women everywhere that you don't cover up that pretty face."

Emma frowned. Stepping up beside him, she laced their fingers together to show the woman that he was already taken. The EMT had a wonderful bedside manner, but she didn't need to flirt with her patients. Besides, Thor was her...

She frowned again and bit her lip. What was he exactly? He was more than her employee after that sizzling kiss earlier. And she *must* mean more to him than a job and a roof over his head...

"How..." She cleared her throat when her voice cracked—it was dry and sore, most likely from the smoke she had inhaled. She needed a drink. "How did you manage to get out of the barn before the roof collapsed?"

She looked past him to the second tractor he managed to save.

"I drove it out through the side when the roof

started to go.”

“Oh,” she said nodding.

Blinking back the tears in her eyes, she smiled. “Thank you, but the tractor was not worth your life.” *Nothing is worth your life.*

He shrugged. “It doesn’t matter now. We have it and we can still bring the harvest in. It’s a good thing we left the trailers sitting out here though. If we hadn’t, they would still be in the barn.” He glanced over to the smoldering pile of rubble that used to be the barn and made a face.

“Well, they would still be in what’s left of the barn, anyway.”

He sat up and started to slide off the stretcher.

“Hey, hey hey! Stay right where you are. We need to take you in to the hospital. You could have internal injuries.” One of the men tried to convince him to lie back down.

The female EMT rushed back over to push him back down.

Thor glared at her, grabbing her wrists, he pulled them from his shoulders.

“Do not touch me.” He didn’t raise his voice, but somehow, he was able to make it sound menacing, just the same.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The woman backed off, holding her hands in the air.

“You need to go to the hospital. A doctor should check you over.” Her full lips drew down in a frown.

“I will be fine.” He stifled a cough and glanced at Emma. “I will only go to the hospital with you and no other.”

The expression on his face told her that he would remain inflexible on the subject and stilled any argument that came to mind. He obviously wouldn’t budge on this.

When he stood up and stretched, Emma almost couldn’t look away, her gaze drawn to the rippling of his chest muscles and the bunching of his biceps. Her mouth watered at the thought that just a few hours ago, she had been necking with this man in her kitchen. A sound caught her attention and she spared a glance for the female

EMT and scowled.

The woman was staring! Her mouth was opened slightly and Emma half expected her tongue to start hanging out. Didn't they teach these people to comport themselves in a more professional manner?

Leaning forward, she wrapped her arm around Thor's waist and suppressed a grin at the woman's telling frown.

Under the innocent guise of helping him walk, she kept her arm firmly around his waist as she led him to the porch where they sat down to wait for the fire to be contained and extinguished. The porch swing was narrow. They sat close, their sides pressing against one another. Heat seeped from his body into hers and her heart began to race.

She looked over at him. How could she be sitting here next to the man practically ready to jump his bones when he almost died saving her livelihood? The poor man needed rest, not sex.

He wrapped his arm more firmly around her, pulling her closer to his side. He relaxed against her and sighed.

"I like this. It's nice. I think we should make a habit out of sitting out here on this swing, looking at the stars."

She swallowed thickly. Was he planning to stay? Would she let him?

Resting her head against the side of his chest, she made a decision. She would take this time with him and whatever it held. If she was lucky and there was more, great. If not, she would cherish every moment she spent in his company. It was already too late to keep her feelings from becoming involved. She may be able to lie about it to him and to the world, but it wouldn't make it any less true.

His arm rested comfortingly over her shoulder as they sat together. The close proximity of his body to hers caused bolts of electricity to shoot through her blood. Her blood burned and she felt her temperature rise several degrees. The feel of his hard, hot body pressed against hers was heady, intoxicating.

Two paramedics approached the swing where they sat softly swinging. One was the woman who couldn't seem to keep from gaping at Thor. She stared at the woman who seemed to take such a liking to her new... She looked at Thor, still trying to figure out what he was to her. A voice in her head said it quite succinctly.

He is your other half.

Emma frowned at the voice that sounded so much like the voice of Odin in her dreams. She cast a glance at the man sitting next to her and felt the rightness of those words.

Her other half.

When had she started thinking that way? And when had she become so possessive of him...and why? Was it because he risked his life to save her farm? Could she really be that shallow? She looked up at him, trying not to show what was on her mind.

Inhaling deeply, she tried to ignore his musky aroma that seemed to seep into her pores. Even the strong smell of smoke couldn't cover up the man's natural scent.

"You really should be seen by a doctor, you know," she said as they sat watching the firemen run about, aiming their hoses at the barn. One truck had concentrated on wetting the roof of the house down so a stray spark wouldn't ignite the older building. They were slowly bringing the blaze under control.

Several police cars pulled into the yard behind the fire engines, the officers strolling about asking questions of the firefighters as they took turns to rest and get drinks.

He stiffened next to her as the men, inevitably turned to indicate the two of them on the porch. He turned, his gaze piercing hers. Was that suspicion she saw in his eyes?

"I will go if you will take me but I refuse to leave you here alone. I think the Fire Marshall will find that this was no accident."

Turning his head toward the west, he stared out

over the harvested field as if he looked for something. Following his gaze, she squinted, but saw nothing.

She licked her lips, nervous. “Are you saying that someone burned my barn on purpose? Who would do such a thing?” She fisted her hands in her lap so he wouldn’t see her trembling.

Her gaze darted erratically over the floor of the porch seeing, for the first time, the muddy footprints just outside her office window. Those prints had escaped her notice before.

Her heart stammered in her chest as fear lodged in her middle.

Who would do such a thing?

The acrid tasted of bile burned her throat and she gagged. Who would want to hurt them? The question repeated itself in her mind as she tried to make sense of it.

A dim memory flashed in her mind—her mother’s face, tight with anger and her father shaking his head.

No we are not interested in selling. This farm has been in our family for generations. Her father paced, obviously agitated with the person who stood just out of sight. It’s entailed. It always has been. It will go to our son one day. He glanced over at Emma. Or it will go to one of Emma’s sons.

It wasn’t long after that overheard conversation that the accidents began to happen—little things at

first. The tractor broke down and needed constant repairs. There was a fire in one of the fields close to the road. The fire was blamed on a passing motorist tossing a cigarette out the window. The barn was broken into. The well water suddenly became undrinkable and a new well needed sunk. All of these were very expensive replacements and repairs. It made sense now.

But why?

Over the next few years the accidents became more frequent. They were harmless at first, then one day, one took her mother's life. Somehow, she had found herself in front of a robber's unyielding bullet by doing nothing other than helping an old woman.

Her death devastated her father. Yet, he still wouldn't sell to that unknown man who called frequently to make offer after offer. Her mother's death only served to make him that much more determined to keep the farm. She had loved it here.

He shook his head, a frown marring his handsome face. "I don't know who would do this. I only know that we didn't leave anything in that barn that would have caught fire. The tractors and the combine were sufficiently cool enough."

"You're right, they were. We allowed them to sit for hours while we emptied the last load in the trailers and cleaned out the horses' stalls. There

was no way the heat of the exhaust could have ignited anything.” She frowned, thinking. “Besides, if it had, it would have happened long before we went to bed.”

He nodded his agreement. “You’re right. It would have happened while we were in the shower at the latest.”

Heat stole up her cheeks. The way he said that so casually, made it seem that they had showered together. She glanced back over at the muddy footprints beneath her office window.

Pointing, she asked, “Are those your footprints?”

He turned to look and swore. “No they aren’t and now we know that whoever set the fire knows that you spend time in that room.”

He stood to walk over to the window. Kneeling down, he picked up a piece of the dirt.

“Were you in there tonight?”

She nodded. “Yes, just after my shower I...” her face blazed. “Oh, my God! I was in there earlier after my shower. I—I...” She covered her face with her hands. “I forgot to bring the laundry upstairs and I was so tired, I didn’t want to carry it up to my room for fear that I would fall or drop it. I dressed in there...”

* * * *

Rage, unlike anything that Thor had ever felt before rushed through his blood. For the first time in his life, he felt that he could kill someone with his bare hands. He clenched his fists, longing for the familiar weight of Mjolnir in his hands. How he longed for his hammer so he could wreak havoc on the person who dared to watch her dress, who dared to make his woman feel unsafe in her own home.

“Go get one of the policemen wandering around out there talking with the firemen. They will want to ask questions soon enough anyway. Better to go get them, than to wait here as if we have something to fear.”

He still knelt by the muddy prints, afraid that if he stood, she would see the killing rage in his eyes and it would frighten her. No, it was better that she left him alone for a minute so he could regain control of his emotions.

The Thunder God was not known for his patience or for his leniency when crossed. No, he was known more as The Destroyer. He was easy going and loveable until crossed, then he would invariably destroy what bothered him. Whomever it was that stood outside this window earlier tonight and watched Emma dress definitely bothered him.

He knelt beside the muddy prints and clenched his teeth until he felt a muscle tick in his jaw.

There would be no place the person who left those prints could hide from him once he found out who it was. The God who protected him wouldn't be able to protect him forever. It was only a matter of time before his father discovered who the culprit was behind this. Then there would be hell to pay.

Thor pointed out the muddy tracks when she returned with a police officer. He went to his car, pulled out a disposable camera and took pictures, advising them not to touch anything until detectives had a chance to investigate. Yes, the fire had been set.

After the emergency workers left they went back into the house and stared at each other in the kitchen for a few minutes.

The last thing he wanted to do was leave her alone again. He would never forgive himself if something happened to her while he soundly slept in another room. She nervously pattered around the kitchen, pulling out the first aid kit to clean the few small burns he'd received that were already healing. She frowned when she saw the mostly healed wounds.

"These looked worse outside."

"It was dark and you were understandably upset."

Father, stop healing my wounds so quickly, she will know something isn't right if they totally disappear in the next few minutes.

The burns began to burn immediately. Gritting his teeth, he was glad that his father had been able to heal him as much as he had before she'd noticed.

"Why don't you go shower," she said, putting the kit away. She looked down at herself and made a face. "We both need another bath."

"Yes. Why don't we go shower?"

She stiffened at his words and he wondered if his meaning was totally clear. He didn't plan to leave her alone for another minute and this interminable waiting would be done with.

She licked her lips, refusing to meet his gaze. "Um...you go ahead, I'm going to stay down here and read a bit."

"No. I'm not leaving you alone down here when someone has been spying in your windows."

He shook his head and sighed at her suddenly wary expression.

"I hadn't thought of that."

No. Of course she hadn't. She was too busy trying to get the thought of the two of them naked in the shower together out of her mind. He didn't need his powers to tell him that. It was written all over her face.

CHAPTER EIGHT

She nervously brushed her soot-filled hair from her face. "I can't shower with you."

"I never said you had to shower with me. I merely stated that I would not be separated from you again."

"And exactly what is that supposed to mean?" she snapped. "Are you just going to stand in there and watch?"

He shrugged.

Emma blew a stray strand of hair from her face. Dammit, if the man was going to take liberties, the least he could do was *take liberties*.

"You're just going to stand there and watch me shower?" She crossed her arms under her breasts. "Uh, uh. I don't think so."

In your dreams, buddy. If you want to see me naked, you can damn well seduce me for the privilege.

She stared into his smoldering blue gaze and shivered with anticipation. Somehow, he knew exactly what was on her mind. The question is,

would she allow it?

He approached her slowly, his gait not unlike an animal trainer who wanted to gain the trust of a wild animal.

She frowned. Where in the world had that analogy come from? She felt like a wild thing, all right. She felt like his prey. He moved still closer, as if stalking her, and she wondered if she could manage to get out of this if she tried. She shook her head, somehow knowing there was no way out of this. Tomorrow, she would be a woman in every sense of the word.

She trailed her tongue nervously over her lips, watching as his gaze turned more intense. Every move she made, every small action, caused his body to harden even more. Curious, she lowered her gaze to the bulge just below his waist. Her face burned with renewed embarrassment as her womb clenched and she shivered.

There was no hiding her reaction to him. He could read it on her face. Her life had always been an open book to anyone who knew her.

* * * *

Cupping her cheek in his hand, he leaned down, gently pressing his lips to hers. Her scent, her taste, was nearly enough to drive him wild. Too many lonely nights rushed back to greet him as

she yielded, opening her mouth to his kiss. His tongue caressed hers, reveling in the honeyed depths of her mouth.

His eager and unruly cock jumped to attention when her fingers lightly traced the muscles of his chest. His balls ached for release as he held her close to his body, absorbing her heat, her scent. He would be ecstatic if she could just crawl inside him where he could keep her with him and safe forever.

Part of him wanted nothing more than to throw her over his shoulder, stalk to his bedroom and relieve both their needs. He groaned when her inexperienced hands played tentatively over his stomach. His muscles clenched involuntarily when her arms wrapped around his waist and she cupped his ass. He fought a smile when he realized the path of her hands mirrored his own as they followed the same path over his flesh.

She tipped her head to the side when he suckled the curve of her slender neck. Her throaty groan was nearly his undoing.

“Stop me now if you do not want this to go any further. I don’t think I’ll be able to stop if you change your mind later.”

If she didn’t stop him soon, he wouldn’t be able to let her go.

“Mmm...”

She tilted her head back and moaned when his

mouth closed over the peak of her breast, suckling through the soft cotton of her pajama top. When she reached up to thrust her fingers through his hair, pulling him closer, he took it as consent.

He picked her up, encouraging her to wrap her legs around his waist. His knees nearly buckled when her moist heat settled over his rock hard cock.

Carrying her up the stairs was an exercise in restraint. His mind demanded that he make her first time perfect. But with her soft body pressed to his and her moist heat beckoning his cock, his body demanded that he make her his. His only saving grace was the knowledge that his ultimate satisfaction would come only with hers.

"Your room or mine?" he asked his mouth against her skin. He pulled his lips from hers to kiss a trail to the shell of her ear

"Mine."

She groaned as he plunged his tongue inside the perfect shell. She shivered in his arms, tightening her legs around his waist as he carried her to her room. After closing the door, he placed her in the center of the bed. He walked to the window and closed the heavy drapes. Someone had already spied on her once this night.

When he turned, he found that she'd lit a candle. The soft glow of the flickering light cast her perfect body in a thin shadow. The curve of

her hip, her full firm breasts beckoned. The sight of her sliver-blond hair spilling across the pillow drew him to her like iron to a lodestone.

He crossed the room, determined to hold on to his control. To make this night one she would always remember with fondness, not regret.

* * * *

Emma stayed on the bed awaiting his next move. He made her nervous just standing there and staring at her like that. He looked like some huge predatory animal and she was nothing more than his prey.

Her gaze dropped from his eyes to his chest. Now, *that* she could stare at all day! In fact, she had on several occasions throughout the last several days. She frowned at the small red splotches that still marred its lightly tanned perfection. His well-formed pectorals danced under his skin as he moved closer. Lowering her gaze, she fixed her eyes on his tight abs. She nervously licked her lips when she noticed the top two buttons on the fly were undone, revealing a thick thatch of red-gold hair just below the waistband. Apparently, he chose not to wear the boxer shorts she'd set out for him.

God's, he's beautiful!

Her face heated when she noticed the gap at his

waist getting wider as the now obvious bulge beneath his fly grew larger.

“You only have to tell me to leave you alone and I will,” he said. “But keep in mind that soon I will reach a place where I will not be able to stop. You must be certain this is what you want.”

She looked up sharply. Did he change his mind? Didn't he want her anymore? She looked away, not wanting him to see the disappointment that she knew would be in her eyes.

The bed dipped as he sat beside her. Placing his hand on the rise of her hip, he brushed his hand up under the edge of her pajama top. Goose flesh rose on her skin. The warmth of his hand left a fire trailing in its wake. Her body began a slow burn for him as his hand moved slowly closer to the underside of her breast.

He leaned down to kiss her as his hand closed over her plump breast, his thumb grazing her nipple.

He kept eye contact as he slowly lowered his head. Her eyes grew round with fear or anticipation she wasn't sure which. Was she really ready for this? She turned her head just before their lips met and he grazed her cheek with his kiss.

“Umm...shower. Remember?” She wrinkled her nose. “We both smell like smoke and burning manure. At least I do.” She pushed at his hand

that still rested under her top.

“Why don’t you go into the other bathroom and I’ll shower in here?”

She hoped he’d forgotten his earlier promise to shower with her, or at least watch her shower. She shivered at the thought and frowned. The man was still a virtual stranger to her. The thought of them showering or his watching shouldn’t turn her on so much. Her mother would be appalled!

Her heart sank when he looked at her and grinned.

“Oh, no, sweetheart. I’m not leaving you alone for a second.”

Emma’s face blazed at her relief. She did want him to shower with her. She just didn’t want to admit it.

“I barely know you. I can’t shower while you’re in the same room with me.”

He merely grinned again and raised a sandy colored brow.

“I bet you can.”

Quick as a shot, she rolled over and jumped from the bed, running for her bathroom. She’d just reached the door when he caught up with her, scooped her up and carried her into the bathroom shrieking.

After he closed and locked the door, he set her on the floor and leaned back against her only route for escape.

"Come here," he said, holding out his hand.

She crossed her arms under her breasts and stubbornly shook her head. She wasn't going near him. He was *not* going to undress her and shower with her. She wouldn't be able to bear the embarrassment. He would see her too skinny legs and bony hips. She was never going to undress in front of him and that was that.

He put his arm down and crossed his legs, still leaning against the door.

"I'm patient. I can wait a long, long time, Emma. You're going to get awfully tired of standing and I don't think the only seat in here is all that comfortable."

His eyes still blazed with the passion they shared earlier. No doubt, because he was certain that he was still going to get her naked. Uh, uh. It so wasn't happening.

"I'll make a deal with you." He stood up straighter, pushing himself away from the door.

"What kind of deal?"

"I'll strip first and you can let your fingers explore every inch of me while I try to convince you to let me shower with you. If you still refuse in..." he glanced at his watch. "...ten minutes I'll let you take your shower in peace."

"I—I'm not undressing in front of you," she stammered as he started unbuttoning the rest of the buttons on his fly. Still, she kept watching her

eyes glued to his crotch. Lord, the man was sexy as hell. She couldn't keep herself from staring as his hands kept slowly slipping button after button from their confinement.

His cock jumped out before he got to the last button and she covered her eyes.

"Put that away! I don't want to see that." She fought the urge to peek out between her fingers for a better look. She'd covered her eyes before she was able to get a good look at it. She lowered her hands. Maybe if she opened her eyes just a bit... *No! You are not going to open your eyes. He's trying to seduce you, stupid. If you don't look, you can't be tempted.*

Boy was she wrong. The rustle of his jeans as he peeled them from his body was enough to make her scream. Her body was already creaming just from the knowledge that he stood naked only a few feet from her.

She felt his breath on her neck as he lowered his head to sniff at her hair.

"Have I ever told you that I love the way you smell?" He whispered in her ear.

She whimpered softly as he blew gently on the curve of her throat, his warm breath stirring the hair on the nape of her neck—and her blood.

Oh, she was in so much trouble. He wasn't going to quit until his time was up or until she agreed to shower with him. And, of course, the

shower would lead to other things...

How could she feel this way about him so soon? She wasn't some kind of nymphomaniac. She had morals and scruples...and apparently a healthy libido.

Goose bumps rose on her skin when he circled around her. She squeezed her eyes shut determined to keep her hands and her heated looks to herself.

The first kiss on her neck was her undoing or, maybe it was the second. By the time he'd reached around her from behind and cupped both of her breasts in his hands to caress her already hard nipples, she knew she was a total goner. She leaned back and moaned, loving everything he did to her.

"You're supposed to touch me."

She shook her head. "I can't."

He moved back around her, stood in front of her for a moment before he brushed his hands up under her top and pushed it over her head.

Her face blazed as she waited for him to tell her how small her breasts were.

"You're beautiful, Emma," he breathed against her collarbone, his mouth trailing lower to capture her left nipple between his lips.

Her legs gave out and he reached up to hold her to him. Her fingers tunneled through his hair as she gripped his head and pulled him tighter

against her breast.

Gods, she was such a goner!

CHAPTER NINE

Thor wrapped his arms around her and buried his face in her perfectly shaped breasts. The dusky tips hardened under his stare. He sucked one into his mouth, then the other, laving, worshipping each one with his tongue before moving up to kiss her neck. He reveled in her unique scent.

She squirmed in his arms when he brushed his hands down over her flat stomach to the flare of her hips. He squeezed her shapely ass and pulled her tight against him. His cock pressed against her lower abdomen and he almost groaned with the need for release.

"Turn around," he whispered hoarsely. "I want to watch you in the mirror as I worship your body."

Holy Shit!

How was he ever going to keep control of his raging lust? This woman could turn him on with a

look, a touch, a soft sigh from those luscious lips. Surrounded by her sweet scent, with her softness pressed against him, he could barely think about anything besides burying his rock hard shaft into her tight, wet sheath.

He reached around her, splaying his hand over her flat belly. The contrast of their skin amazed him. He didn't tan well. Leaving his body to tan at the same rate a human male of his coloring left his body looking a bit pale and wan. Yet the soft, creamy skin of her stomach was still a few shades lighter than his.

Reaching down, he unbuttoned her jeans. The zipper slid down easily with a whispered hiss.

Her sharply indrawn breath when he pushed his fingers beneath the waistband of her panties gave him pause. He stilled his hand. His body demanding he continue to push through her soft nether curls to reach the treasure he knew he would find between her legs.

"Do you want me to stop, love?" he whispered in her ear.

He watched her reflection, noticing her eyes were still closed. The knowledge made him smile. The longer she kept them closed, the sharper her other senses would become. Namely that of touch.

"Well?" he prompted. "Do you want me to stop?"

He began to pull his fingers from under her

panties. He refused to give up, but perhaps, she needed a bit more time.

"N—No," she whispered as her body began to tremble. "Don't...don't stop."

Her tongue slipped from her mouth to moisten her bottom lip. His cock jerked in response. He almost shook with the tremendous need to bury his hard prick inside that luscious mouth.

Almost sighing with relief, he pushed his hand back under her panties, dipped his fingers through her slick folds and circled her clit.

She reached up and grabbed his arms as her legs gave out.

"Like that, do you?" he chuckled into her ear.

Emma whimpered something incoherent and nodded.

He watched her in the mirror, nearly awe-struck by her beauty. This woman didn't need him. She was already a Goddess.

"You're so beautiful like this. I love that I can do this to you. You're head is thrown back, pressed against my shoulder, making easy for me to do this," he suckled her neck, nibbling his way up to her ear.

She panted in his arms, her breaths coming in short gasps as his hands roved over her flesh.

"Your full, wet lips are parted, giving me all sorts of ideas."

He thrust his tongue into her ear and she

whimpered.

“It humbles me to be the one who has made your eyes glaze over with need. Your body creams for mine, readying itself for our coupling. Do you feel it?”

Her glazed eyes stared at the mirror, watching his hand as it moved under her panties. Her jeans slid down her hips to her knees. She stood in his arms panting with her desire as he talked and fondled her into a frenzy of lust.

Her hips jerked, pressing her ass tighter against his cock. She moved her hips back and forth, her inexperienced body instinctively knowing exactly how their bodies fit together.

He gritted his teeth, forcing his body under his control. He would not let his unruly shaft make demands her virginal body couldn't handle. He refused to take the chance of hurting his passionate Goddess.

She turned her head, brushing her lips against his. Thrusting his tongue against hers, he coaxed her to do the same. He suckled the soft wet velvet as it brushed against the inside of his mouth. Their tongues danced, mated as he took her over the edge of her first climax and he swallowed her inarticulate cry of ecstasy.

* * * *

Emma was lost. The sensations he introduced her to, were unlike anything she could ever have imagined. The brush of his lips against her skin, his fingers buried between her legs nearly overwhelmed her. Yet the physical stimulation hadn't been enough for him.

"In the shower, Emma. Now. I want to see all this glorious skin covered with nothing but soap suds and my hands."

He had to start talking. Why did that seem so sexy to her? Her resistance was gone. She couldn't wait to peel off the rest of her clothes and shower with him. When he led her into the shower, she took control.

Soaping her hands, she washed every inch of his hard body. Her hands slid easily over his quivering pectorals. They jumped and twitched when she paid special attention to the cleanliness of his nipples. She ran her tongue over each one after rinsing the soap from his skin. Nervous, she kept watch on his expression. He seemed to like it and as long as he didn't stop her, she was going to let her fingers do some walking.

She soaped her hands again and squeezed behind him, lathering his back. She drew soapy designs over the ropey muscles of his back and then paid special attention to his rear. Her hands trailed down over his tight rear, loving the feel of the firm flesh beneath her fingers.

Reaching around him, she lathered the hard, uneven expanse of his washboard stomach. Before she could chicken out, she lowered her hands a bit more and took his hard length into her hands.

He sucked his breath in with a hiss and she paused. When he didn't tell her to stop, she stroked her fingers down over his length. He began to shake and she smiled. Resting her head against his back, she stroked his shaft until his hips began to jerk and he covered her hands with his.

"Enough. You'll make me embarrass myself."

She let go, unsure of what he meant.

"My turn," he said turning around.

He stared down at her with a gleam in his eyes that made her nervous. She licked her lips and cast her gaze toward their feet.

Big mistake.

She felt her eyes widen when she got her first glimpse of his erection. She knew it felt big, but she never thought it was huge!

"You're going to put that where?" she asked with a squeak.

"Sh..."

He kissed her softly, his tongue dueling with hers as she clung to him with the hope that her legs wouldn't give out.

The man knew how to kiss, that was for sure.

He pulled his lips from hers and lathered her

body. Massaging her shoulders and neck, he relaxed her even more than the hot spray already had. He paid special attention to her breasts, the crease of her hip and between her legs.

When his mouth covered her breast and his fingers sank into the creamy flesh between her legs, she grabbed his biceps in an effort to stay on her feet.

Too soon, he straightened and gently pushed her beneath the warm spray to wet her hair. He lathered her tresses, thoroughly washing and massaging her scalp. He lathered his own when he set her beneath the spray to rinse the shampoo from her hair.

She turned the water off and stepped from the shower. Grabbing a towel, she began to dry herself until he held out his hand, his eyebrow raised.

Her face blazed as she handed him the towel. She still wasn't used to his heated gaze traveling over her body and somehow, now that they were out of the shower, she was embarrassed where she hadn't been before.

Perhaps because she'd had time to think and come to her senses when he rinsed the soap from his hair.

Even though her body still hummed with desire, she began to have doubts. Should she listen to her heart and have this one night? She could

have this one night with him where she could repay him for risking his life. That's all it was. He most likely figured he deserved this and all of his pretty words were only designed to turn her on and make it easier for him.

Pain stabbed through her chest at the realization. No. She refused to care for him, refused to become involved. She would have this night or maybe another in payment for the injuries he received while saving the tractors. It was the least she could do.

Gritting her teeth, she tipped her chin up and stared into his eyes. People did this sort of thing all of the time. She could do it. It didn't make her easy, or slutty, it made her practical. He was here, she was here and they were slaking a mutual desire. And if it hurt, just a bit, to think of this night in such a callous way, it was her problem. She wouldn't want him to expect anything more from her than tonight, anyway. Right?

She let him dry her off, holding his shoulders as he lifted each leg to dry her feet. He was gentle, she had to give him that. She only hoped he would be as gentle when it came time for the actual act. He was a big man—all over—and to be honest, the size of his penis scared the crap out of her.

CHAPTER TEN

“Um...I don't think I can go through with this,” she said, still staring at the size of his massive erection.

She didn't either. She didn't want to seem like a tease, but how was she supposed to know the man was packing a baseball bat between his legs? Okay, so maybe that was an exaggeration, but it was still huge.

He kissed her again, chasing away a bit of her reticence. He could kiss the socks off an Eskimo that was for sure. Still, she responded against her better judgment. What could she do? The man was hot with a capital “H” and he knew exactly where to put his hands to keep her breathless and wanting.

He thrust his fingers through her hair, tugging slightly on the strands. The sensation was different, a little rough but not really painful. Her body responded with enthusiasm when he

wrapped his arms around her and pulled her against his solid form. The press of his hard body against hers, his heat and his musky scent nearly drove her wild.

Warmth pooled in her middle and her stomach did flops as she realized that soon, she would be in her bed with this man, letting him pleasure her. She inwardly cringed when she realized she would most likely beg him to pleasure her. She could only hope that she would do the same for him as well.

Her flesh tingled as goose bumps rose on her skin wherever he touched her with his warm calloused hands. His touch alone was almost enough to send her over the edge. Bending, he scooped her up in his arms and carried her to the bed.

His hair hung around his shoulders in wet ropes, the moisture slowly dripped from the ends and onto her breasts. Tracks of water slid down his muscled chest and she longed to sensuously lap them from his body with her tongue. He didn't need a towel, she would be happy to lick every drop that ran down his perfect form.

Laying her down in the middle of the bed, he held her gaze with his as he climbed in next to her. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, as if he expected what he was about to say to be painful.

Starting at her knee, he ran his hand along the

smooth skin of her thigh to her hip and cleared his throat.

“Do you want this, love?”

It didn't take long for her to make up her mind. The man was a god. His hard body was nothing short of pure male perfection. She nodded.

“Yes, I do.”

He would be gentle with her. She could see it in his eyes. Thor didn't strike her as the type of man to take his pleasure, grunting and heaving over his partner to leave them still needing a release. No. He had the appearance of a slow, careful lover who would be certain of his lover's gratification before indulging his own.

He closed his eyes at her reply, almost as if he were saying a prayer, or thanking his God. Whatever it was, it didn't take long and soon his sapphire eyes stared at her with an intensity that she almost couldn't fathom.

What drove a man like him to wander the world working for little and owning even less? His reasons weren't really important now, but the questions still nagged at her. She was about to take a giant step with this man and she knew next to nothing about him.

She licked her lips and watched his eyes darken to near cobalt. The intensity of his gaze sharpened and she swallowed thickly, wondering what it would be like to live with a man like this forever,

to bear his children.

She groaned into his mouth when he wrapped his arms around her. His tongue rasped against hers and their tongues danced and parried with one another. He pulled her closer, their bare skin slipping and sliding together as they held each other close.

He pulled away to look into her eyes and her mouth went dry. Cupping her chin in his hands, he kissed her oh, so gently before dropping his head to her breast. He suckled her nipple for a few moments before moving lower to tongue her belly button.

“You are mine,” he growled against her skin. “Tonight, you will become a woman. My woman.”

She knew he didn’t really mean that. It was just a ploy to make her feel better about succumbing to him, but she didn’t care. She was past caring as the desire she felt flowed through her veins. She knew an intrinsic part of her would never be the same again.

She stiffened when he moved to lie between her thighs. Her face burned with a combination of lust and mortification as he dipped his head to her needy flesh. His tongue lapped against her nether lips and she groaned, needing more.

She buried her fingers in his hair, a silent invitation, a fervent plea. Slowly, his warm velvet tongue dipped into the slick folds and stroked a

part of her that she never new could bring her such intense pleasure. Lightning bolts shot through her blood as he suckled the little bud into his mouth. The erotic pull nearly drove her mad. Her head tossed on the pillow, her eyes squeezed shut as every muscle in her body tightened, reaching for some elusive...thing.

He brought her to a fevered pitch, his mouth working on her flesh until she couldn't bear the pleasure. It was too much, this...thing she sensed was just out of reach. If only she could...

"Oh, my God, Thor!" she keened as her climax overtook her. The pleasure-pain finally pooled in that one spot between her legs and she screamed out her pleasure as he eased one thick finger into her tight channel. The strange discomfort changed to the ultimate pleasure in the blink of an eye and she howled out another release as he continued to suckle that small bundle of nerves.

Finally, when she lay on the bed panting, he crawled back up her inert form, kissing his way up her spent body. He pushed her thighs apart, kneeling between them. She didn't know what to do, to think. Her whole world had just been turned upside down and there was still so much she didn't know. How much more could she take? How much longer would he draw this out?

Would he never show her what it's like to be a real woman?

* * * *

Thor reveled in the fact that she'd called his name during her climax. As he crawled up her body, he lapped at her skin, nipping the sensitive undersides of her breast, and suckling away the slight ache.

Raised on his arms, he stared down into her lovely violet eyes. Her damp silver hair spread around her like a halo and at that moment he would be happy just to stare at her forever. He loved looking at her. The way the shadows caressed her body, the way the flickering light from the candle she lit danced over her pale skin. She was beauty personified. His gaze was drawn to her chest. Each breath she drew, each soft sigh raised and lowered the creamy mounds for his inspection.

She took his breath away. He paused, holding himself over her until he could catch his breath. So he could breathe. The very sight of her was enough to make a man want her for his own. He wet his dry lips. How could just the sight of this woman cause his mouth to go dry and his heart to race? He didn't know and he didn't care. All he knew was that she would be his.

Balancing over her on one hand, he reached down between them to fondle his ever-hardening

shaft. He stroked it as he imagined her yielding body beneath his and plunging into her soft, wet folds. He took a deep breath. He had to regain some semblance of control or he would ravish her here on the spot. Determined to be gentle with her, he lowered himself between her spread thighs.

Breathing deep, he struggled to hold on to what little control he had. His lungs labored for huge gulps of air as he positioned himself at the entrance to her virginal channel. He leaned down to lap at her nipple, knowing there wasn't an inch of her that he hadn't already kissed and caressed. Her body was his temple and he planned to worship and be worshipped daily.

He refused to just thrust into her like some mindless animal. He moved forward slowly, gritting his teeth as he pushed the head of his cock into the opening of her tight sheath. Her cream covered his shaft as he pushed through her tight folds.

His breath hissed out between his teeth as his cock felt like it was being bent in half by her too tight channel. Soon he reached the barrier that proclaimed her still untouched and stopped. Sweat beaded on his forehead as he held himself over her, his shaft half buried in her clasp hole.

"Tell me you're sure. Tell me you want this. That you want me." His entire body trembled with

the need to sink his flesh into hers. Still he waited for her confirmation.

She looked up into his eyes, her own filled with trust. The sight nearly unmanned him. She had no reason to trust him this way, especially after he'd failed her so miserably.

"I want this, Thor, more than you know."

She reached up to caress his face. Turning his head, he kissed her palm and then smiled down into her eyes. He wanted this woman forever. He wanted to hold her to him, reveling in her scent, the feel of her body pressed against his and the soft wetness of her woman's heat.

"You're sure?"

"I've never been so sure of anything in my life."

He thrust his rock hard flesh through her virgin's barrier and groaned. He held himself still, waiting for her inner flesh to stretch and accommodate his size. It was the most challenging thing he'd ever done. How could he hold so still when everything in him wanted nothing more than to plunge his hard cock into her woman's flesh over and over?

She gasped, and when he would have withdrawn she wrapped her legs around him, locking him deep inside her.

He took a deep breath, hoping he would have the power to maintain his control when everything within him told him to claim her as his

in every way possible. To ram his hardened shaft into her slick softness until he would never find his way out.

Her channel clasped him like tight, wet velvet. Gritting his teeth, he slowly withdrew and then plunged deeper into her channel. His balls ached as they slapped against her rear. He'd never been so content, felt so alive before now. Somehow, this woman made him feel as though he had come home. There was nowhere on this earth he would rather be than buried balls deep in her clasping flesh.

He withdrew again, slowly moving from her flesh, unsure if he was being careful for him or for her at this point. The last thing he wanted to do was embarrass himself by shooting his load off too soon like an untried youth. It wouldn't do either of them any good. This was his one chance to prove to her that the physical act of love could be enjoyable for both parties and he refused to blow it.

She whimpered when he withdrew again. "Please, Thor. I—"

He leaned down to kiss her lips, his tongue caressing hers as he eased back into her.

"Please, what?"

"I need..." She paused, her expression clearly stating that she didn't know what she needed.

"I need...more."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

She whimpered when he withdrew again. Would this strange pressure never cease? Now that she knew what to expect, she couldn't wait to see what was next. He leaned down and lazily lapped at her nipple. The cool air hardened the dusky tip and she groaned.

"Please, Thor, I—"

"Please what?" he asked, moving up to kiss her lips, his tongue caressed hers as he eased his hardness back into her. His mouth moved back down her throat, to her breasts. He suckled each hardened peak in turn, gently using his teeth to heighten the sensation.

"I need..." she paused, confused, unsure of what it was she needed to make the pressure build into another orgasm. Threading her fingers through his hair, she pulled his head to hers. "I need...more."

He groaned as she tentatively thrust her tongue

into his mouth. The sound gave her a semblance of confidence. She wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling him closer. Tightening her hands into fists, she grabbed his hair, holding him to her with determination. She needed this. She needed him.

His body trembled as he continued to gently thrust into her. She squeezed her legs around his waist, pulling him deeper. He groaned again and finally gave in to her request. Raising himself up on his knees, he grabbed her hips and pulled her closer. The action tilted her hips up a bit more, giving him better access to thrust into her.

She gasped when his hard cock drove into her harder and he rotated his hips. The movement caused his shaft to rub a spot inside her that nearly made her scream. The musky scent of their lovemaking, the sensations and the intense pleasure was almost too much to bear.

He grasped her behind the knees and pushed her legs forward. The position opened her up to his long slow thrusts. The stretching sensation, a pleasure that bordered on pain, kept her so near the edge of another climax all she could manage to do was continue to scream his name.

She threw her head back onto the pillow and reached up to squeeze his arms. His large biceps flexed under her fingers. He groaned above her and then leaned down to take first one, then her

other nipple into his mouth.

"I'm going to cum soon, Emma. I want to take you with me when I do," he panted above her. "Reach for it, baby," he coaxed. "Cum again for me."

The pressure kept building. A strange burning began deep inside and heat spread throughout her body. The heat and tingling grew and flared out from her middle. She was going to cum again. She felt it.

Emma looked up at him. His sapphire eyes gleamed down at her, the flickering candlelight reflected in his expressive eyes.

A cool breeze wafted in the open window hampered by the drawn drapes. The air, cool and inviting, was just one more sensual assault on her senses. Her nipples puckered, drawing tighter. The turgid peaks tightened until the little buds were diamond hard.

She stared at up at him, mesmerized. His strong jaw, perfect nose and sensual smile made her heart thump in her chest. She couldn't look away.

He smiled down at her. His every movement, every one of his measured thrusts was designed to take her closer to the edge. His body moved above hers with a practiced expertise she tried not to think about.

"You're so hot, Emma, so wet, so tight. I'm getting close. You make me see stars, love."

The sound of his voice was sexy—too sexy and seductive to resist. The slight, unrecognizable accent turned her on. She wanted to hear him talk more often, to tell her stories. She wanted him to tell her children stories with that peculiar accent.

The thought scared her. She shouldn't be thinking of him in that manner. Men like him were free spirits. He wouldn't thank her for tying him down. In fact, he would come to hate her for it. She couldn't, she wouldn't do that to him. She watched him through her lashes, trying not to cry. How would she ever be able to let him go?

When he picked up the tempo, all thinking was a thing of the past. Their bodies came together forcefully. Over and over, his member drove into her harder and harder. The heat surrounded her. It consumed her. The friction from their joined bodies built to a fiery conflagration of mutual desire, lust and need.

A hoarse moan escaped his throat as she dug her fingers into his back. Her legs quivered, her thighs clenched. Sweat beaded up on her skin, giving it a warm sheen.

"I'm cumming. Oh, my God, Thor!"

He threw his head back and growled her name, joining her in mutual pleasure. Hot, thick jets of semen bathed her insides. The warm wash of the sticky fluid splashed against her womb, warming her from the inside out.

Still, he drove into her. He expertly flexed his hips as he groaned loud and long through his orgasm.

A brief worry about birth control flickered through her mind. She dismissed it easily when she realized that she didn't care if he made her pregnant. If she had his child, it would only mean she wouldn't be alone after Alex was gone and Thor left.

Content, she held him to her when he would have rolled to the side. She hoped he didn't mind. She wanted—no—needed this closeness now. He gave in, collapsing on top of her and pinned her to the bed.

She wasn't uncomfortable in the least. The warmth of his body seeped slowly into hers. It relaxed her, even as his weight crushed her to the firm mattress.

Comfortable, she stayed beneath him, content to have their legs tangled together as she stroked the sweat-dampened hair from his face.

After a moment, he lifted his head and looked into her eyes. He stared down at her, his own eyes seemed tortured, lost.

"I need you again, love," he whispered against her lips.

He began to rock over her again. His shaft grew impossibly larger with each gentle thrust. She reveled in the heat of his body pressed against

hers as the pressure and heat began anew

"I know that you were an innocent, you can't possibly be ready for this..." he bent to lap at her breast. "But I can't seem to help myself."

He kissed her gently, almost reverently.

"When I look at you, touch you, even smell your unique scent, I lose all control. All reason escapes me until the only thing I can think about is burying my cock in your slick, silky softness."

Emma moaned, wrapped her arms around his head as he bent to suckle her breasts once again. There was some line, some connection between the sensitized tips of her breasts and her womb. Every time he closed his lips over her breasts and suckled, it sent a burning, tingling sensation through her body, straight to her weeping pussy.

Her world was filled with nothing but the sensual delight of his warm lips upon her quivering flesh. How could she go from a complete innocent to this wanton woman who would do almost anything to be with this man?

Before, their lovemaking had been fast and furious. But, now he was slow and gentle. She keened his name again as another orgasm overtook her. Her body shook and trembled with renewed need as he continued to slide his thick shaft into her slick channel. She loved the knowledge that her body's cream covered his large member as he rocked above her.

The very gentleness the two of them shunned before, in their haste to taste each other and slake their lust earlier, now drove them both quickly over the edge of ecstasy.

Emma drifted on a cloud of relaxation, barely clinging to consciousness. She reveled in the knowledge that for now, at least, she wasn't alone. There was comfort in the knowledge that she had someone to hold, to cling to, even if it was only for a little while.

What happened now was uppermost in her mind. She refused to think about the future. Tomorrow would come soon enough, carrying with it the reality of her life. The knowledge weighed heavily on her mind. The routine visit to the hospital that she'd mentioned to Thor was not routine at all. Tomorrow she would force herself to walk into her brother's sterile room and tell him goodbye.

It was about time that she faced the facts. Her baby brother, the only person left in this world who gave a damn about her, was dying. Hell, according to everything the medical professionals had said, he was dead already. It was time she came to terms with the fact that her brother was never coming home.

She stayed in the bed beside Thor, soaking up his warmth. Her body had suddenly gone cold at the realization that it was late and it was already

tomorrow. In only a few hours she would finally tell the doctors to take her precious brother off life-support.

She rolled over and watched Thor as he slept. Golden lashes rested on his cheeks, his red-gold brows slashed over his eyes and she smiled, remembered the expressiveness of those two slashes. His tendency to give her a sexy look, with one raised brow, made her smile.

Her fingers itched to touch his perfect face, to smooth over the fine lines she knew were caused by laughter. The man had a wonderful sense of humor. He was a hard worker, a knowledgeable farmer and a breathtaking companion. It was hard to believe some smart woman hadn't snatched him up before now.

She frowned at the thought. Perhaps his freedom had made him the man he was today. Would she be the one to change all that? Did she really want to be the one who tied the tether to this free spirit? Or would she simply enjoy him while she could and hope that he would decide to stay?

She slid from the bed and headed for the open window. She needed to think and she always thought better while looking at the stars.

Thinking to don her robe first, she tied the sash tight around her waist before pulling the drape gently aside. She moved slowly as to not make

any noise that would wake Thor. The poor man needed his sleep to recuperate from his burns, even though they weren't quite as bad as she originally thought.

She stared out into the night praying for answers before she caught herself and scowled. She would not pray to that fickle God any longer. She had thoroughly washed her hands of the Asgard Thor and would never ask for his negligent attention again.

A movement below caught her eye and her breath caught in her throat. Someone was down there, doing something to the trailers the corn was in. She rushed back to the bed and shook Thor.

"Someone is outside messing around the trailers and the crib. We have to stop them from doing whatever it is they are up to before they cause more damage," she whispered. She didn't want to alert their intruders that they were about to be caught.

Thor sat up, his eyes gleaming in the night. Emma stepped back, her hand to her throat. What made him look so surreal, so...otherworldly?

She took a breath and shook her head. It was nothing more than her imagination. There was nothing extraordinary about this man other than the way he made love and quite possibly the size of his... Her face burned at the thought.

Watching him dress as they both donned their

clothes was both a shame and a treat. She loved the way his muscles bunched and gathered as he dressed, but hated seeing him covering them up. The man had an ass to die for.

She smiled to herself when he grabbed the same weapon her father kept just inside the kitchen door, a ten-pound sledgehammer. Now it was Thor's hammer, she grinned. No. She covered her mouth to stifle a giggle. That wasn't his hammer. Thor's hammer was a very useful tool that he always kept close and tucked away.

Her face heated at her own inane thoughts and she covered her face with her hands. Thor's true hammer was between his legs.

CHAPTER TWELVE

“I don’t understand what someone would want to do out there.” She bit her lip as she sipped her coffee.

By the time they had both dressed and gotten outside to investigate, the intruder or intruders were long gone. There wasn’t much evidence to even support the fact that they had been there. Only two sets of tracks remained—one, she said was a size similar to her brother’s, the other very large, like Thor’s. If he hadn’t been in her room with her, she may have believed him a part of this obvious plot to chase her from her ancestral land.

Her plate of pancakes sat cold in front of her. The pat of butter congealed in the center. Sticky, tar-like syrup held her fork glued to the plate. She had only taken a bite or two before pushing the plate away with a grimace.

“Perhaps they were just looking for another way to sabotage your harvest.”

She nodded. "I'm sure that's what it is, too. They must know that I can't take much more of this. I don't have much more money. The bank account is nearly depleted. They must know that if I lose this harvest, I lose everything once and for all. I won't be able to pay the mortgage and the farm will go up for auction."

"It won't come to that. I have a few... connections." He gave her a level stare and covered her hand with his own. "It will *not* come to that."

She lifted her shoulder in a shrug, acting like she didn't care. "You can take the day off, if you want. I'm going into town to visit my brother."

"You're going to the hospital?" he narrowed his eyes. "You aren't going there on the pretence of seeing your brother just to get me to see a doctor, are you?"

She shook her head, her emotions clearly swamping her.

"I wish that's all it was." She sighed and pushed a trembling hand through her hair. "I've thought about this for a long time. And prayed. I've prayed so long and so hard for him to get better that I'm sick of it." She thinned her lips. "But there is no God. I've prayed for my mother, I've prayed for my father," she chuckled mirthlessly. "But what did it get me?" She looked around the spotless kitchen and waved her arm.

"It got me an empty house."

"I'd like to go with you, if you don't mind." He stood, rinsed out his coffee cup and put it in the dishwasher.

"Why? You've already said you don't want to be seen."

He nodded. "And I still do not wish to be seen by a doctor. I would like to meet your brother, though."

She gave him a startled look. "Why?" she asked, pacing in front of him.

He turned to look at her. Her agitated state was obvious as she paced across the large kitchen. Her body language told him she wanted him to go. But she obviously couldn't voice her need.

"I would like to meet your brother. To let him know that, at least for now, his sister is cared for. I know you love him and he must have been a wonderful boy for you to still cling to his memory the way you do. I want to meet someone who is capable of garnering such love, loyalty and devotion."

"He's going to die."

The words came out on a sob as she leaned back against the refrigerator. Her legs gave out and she collapsed to the floor.

"He's going to die and there's nothing I can do about it. I don't know what I'm going to do without him. He's all I have left."

Her words hit him hard. The pain was sharp. The wound deep. She was right, to an extent. For years, her brother had been all she had left. But not any more. She had him now.

He knelt down and gathered her in his arms. She sobbed against his chest and he wondered how many times she had sobbed out the same sorrows while she prayed for the help of her God.

He couldn't think about that now. He refused to drown himself in his own pity while she cried her heart out against his chest.

"Then I should go with you. You shouldn't be alone to do this. You won't be in any condition to drive when it is over."

She nodded. "You're right." She pushed against his shoulders and stood. "I'll never be able to walk down the corridor, let alone drive all the way back here."

Reaching across the counter, she pulled a paper towel from the holder attached to the underside of a cabinet and wiped her eyes before using it to blow her nose.

"Just let me get my purse and we can get the hell out of here."

* * * *

They arrived at the hospital too early. The nurses in the ICU, reluctant to allow Emma see her

brother before the official visiting hours began, sent them away.

“You should be seen by a doctor while we’re here and it’s not like we don’t have some time to kill now.”

She turned to examine one of the exposed burns on his arm. He tightened his muscles, refusing to flinch. The way he figured it, if she even remotely thought he was in pain she would drag his ass to the emergency room and he didn’t want that. There was no telling what modern medicine could find out about his blood.

“I feel fine. There is no reason to waste the time of these people when I can clearly see they are needed elsewhere most urgently.”

Finally, after arguing with him for several minutes, she apparently realized he wasn’t about to budge on the matter. So she shifted tactics.

“You said you would see a doctor if I brought you,” she twisted his words in an obvious attempt to get him to let the medical professionals check him over.

The woman was tenacious as well as devious. He stifled a smile at the thought. Under certain circumstances he liked that in a woman.

“No,” he said shaking his head. “I did not. I said I would go with you to the hospital and no other. I did not agree to let another man poke and prod at my person.”

She crossed her eyes. *What a baby!*

"Why do you always talk so funny?"

Uh, oh. She was beginning to think that it was strange how he seemed to slip in and out of his strange, antiquated speech. He'd spoken like this for centuries. He was finding it hard to stop now. Apparently old habits *do* die hard.

He shrugged. "I didn't realize that I was."

Obviously deciding to give up on getting him seen, she steered him toward the cafeteria.

"Why don't we get something to eat? By the time we're finished, we can go in and see Alex."

He agreed. He wasn't all that hungry, but maybe she was.

He followed her down the brightly lit corridor, admiring the shape of her ass. He loved a nice ass and Emma had the nicest that he'd seen in some time. Her hips swayed from side to side as she led him down the hall. He wanted nothing better than to grab her and drag her into one of these rooms and fuck her brains out.

"I thought maybe you would be hungry after all that has happened over the last several hours."

She watched as he chose a cup of coffee and a bagel from the cafeteria shelves and he smiled at her.

"I rarely eat much when I'm upset."

He plunked his tray down on a table in the center of the room and straddled the chair with his

legs before he sat. He gave her a crooked grin.

"It never failed to worry my mother."

"Hmmm..." she took a sip of her coffee grimaced and put two more packets of sugar in it. "I'll bet it did. Moms can be like that." She glanced at her watch.

"Or big sisters who are used to playing at being a mom, too, I'll bet."

She gave him a noncommittal shrug.

"Yeah, I suppose." Taking a deep breath, she let it out on a sigh. "You don't understand. I've raised my brother since he was eight. When...when my mother died."

She stared down into her coffee and wrapped her fingers a bit tighter around the cup, turning her knuckles white.

"Then my dad died when I was eighteen. He left Alex and the farm in my custody until Alex is ready to take over. The way—" Her voice broke. She straightened her shoulders and cleared her throat. "With the way things look now, I'll never be able to hand over the reins."

He stared at her. Impotent rage at his neglect of her during her time of need raced through his blood, a lightening storm of seething emotion. How could he call himself her God, her protector when he hadn't been there for her when she needed him the most?

* * * *

Emma didn't want to lose her brother. Yet today she had to agree to let them take him off the life-support. The doctor had already told her several times that there was minimal brain activity. If his brain couldn't even function enough to keep his body breathing on its own, there wasn't much hope.

Despair lodged in her chest. A sob caught in her throat as she finally faced the fact that this could likely be the day of her brother's death. But, with the bank account dwindling and the insurance company about to stop paying the bills, she didn't have much of a choice.

She raised her head, knowing her eyes were filled with her sorrow.

"How do I do this, Thor?" her voice broke on a sob. "How do I walk into that room and tell them to take my baby brother off life-support and then sit there and wait for him to die?"

She buried her head in her hands and cried. She cried for the losses and hardships she'd had to suffer through. There were so many in her young life. How many more would she be forced to endure?

She ignored the varied stares from the other cafeteria patrons. Pity would only make her cry harder. What she needed now was a way to

become angry. Anger was a good thing in a situation like this. Perhaps she could make it work for her. Who knows? With any luck, perhaps she could force the tears back.

How can I do it? How can I ever make that choice?

Reach out and I shall be there to comfort you in your time of sorrow. My heart aches for you, my child. Reach for your God. He is there willing, waiting to help you.

Emma's eyes widened. She looked around. There wasn't anyone behind her and she knew Thor hadn't said anything. Had she finally taken a dive off the deep end?

She shook her head.

You did not hear that voice of a strange man in your head. What are you thinking? You are not hearing the voices of strange men in your head at all.

Studying the wisps of steam from her coffee, she busied herself with putting cream and sugar in the dark brew. It didn't take long to stir it in and she soon found herself with nothing to do again.

I am your God, Odin. Listen to your heart, child. Ask Thor for help and this time he shall deliver.

I am not hearing voices in my head!

Oh, God! She'd finally irrevocably gone off the deep end. Now she was hearing voices. What was next, wearing a tinfoil hat?

Tears ran down her cheeks as she stared across the table at Thor, as she contemplated the loss of her sanity. He was so strong, so caring. It would be so easy to fall in love with someone like him.

Shaking her head, she swiped her hand over her eyes. She couldn't let herself fall in love with him. If she did, and he died too, it would kill her.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Thor stood up quickly. His chair slid noisily across the smooth tile floor. Several people sat staring at Emma, during what should have been a private moment for her. He scowled at the gawking people, giving them his fiercest glare so they'd give her some small semblance of privacy.

He strode around the table and pulled her up into his arms. She stood easily, letting him press her face against his chest. She reached out automatically and wrapped her arms around his waist.

His heart ached for her. It was his fault she had gone through such terrible times. It was his fault that her prayers weren't answered years ago. He should never have been so caught up with his own troubles that he couldn't sense the needs of one of his people.

Yet he knew the conundrum. Had her prayers been answered all those years ago, she wouldn't

be the woman she had become. A woman worthy to be the consort of a God.

He tightened his arms around her, pressing his cheek against the top of her head. After a few moments, she pulled from his embrace and wiped the tears from her eyes.

She laughed softly, trying to lighten the mood, but the sound came out more of a croak. He reached up with a napkin and gently held the napkin against her nose.

“Blow.”

He felt nine times a fool, dragging that damned paper napkin over her face. Big and clumsy, his hands shook as he did his best to comfort her, even as he feared accidentally harming her in some way.

She cleared her throat. “We should go to his room now,” she said, checking her watch again.

“I want to spend some time with him before—” Her voice broke and she shook her head.

Holding her hand up, she shook her head again when he would have pulled her into his arms once more.

“Please, don’t be nice to me.” Her voice quavered when she spoke. Grabbing another napkin from the table, she blew her nose. “I’ll break down if you’re nice to me. I need to be strong today. For Alex.” She sighed when her words came out on soft hiccups. “He doesn’t

deserve to lay in that hospital bed with tubes sticking out everywhere. I have to be strong enough to let him go.”

Thor let her lead him up to her brother’s room where he waited silently for her to say her heartbreaking goodbyes.

Father, if you’re going to help this boy, now is the time. He said, reaching out with his senses trying to figure out if his father was even with them. *The hospital officials have been hounding Emma to remove the boy from the life-support machines. Those machines are holding him to this life.*

Move closer to the bed, son. The boy is too far gone. I can’t heal him through you. I must return your power to you and you must heal the boy. Even though you are with him, you will find that you do not have the power to heal him in one day. It will take several visits, but it can be done. When you have finished with the healing, then I shall strip you bare of your powers once more.

Following his father’s instructions, Thor moved closer to the bed. He placed his hands on Alex’s arm and stomach and closed his eyes. Reaching within himself, he found his power lagging and weak from disuse. Still, he felt the surge as he began to pour it into the injured boy.

Burning hot energy rushed from him and into Alex’s body, repairing the swollen tissue of his brain and healing his damaged organs. Heat built up inside his own body, making him sweat as he forced the healing energy into Emma’s beloved

brother.

Using up his energy this way was taxing, especially when his powers had begun to wane from neglect over the centuries.

Even though his family and the others were what these people knew as gods, they were only omnipotent when others believed. The less people believed in them, the less power they had. Soon, one day, they would be no more.

Every century that passed reduced the number of believers. Soon, his people would be mortal like everyone else. They were only gods by the grace of those who served and worshipped them.

His powers exhausted, he staggered back from the bed. Even after expelling every bit of energy he held within him, the boy still lay like the dead upon the narrow bed in front of him.

He was too late. He had waited too long. He raised his eyes to Emma, who looked on with barely disguised despair and knew that he had failed her. Losing her love and her belief had weakened him.

He fell back, slamming against the wall behind him. His knees buckled and he felt himself inexplicably sliding to the floor in a disgraceful heap.

She rushed to his side.

"I told you that you needed to see a doctor, you stubborn creep," she said, pushing the hair from

his face. "God, you look so pale! I'm going to find a nurse."

She started to leave and he grabbed her arm.

"I don't need a damned doctor," he grumbled wearily. "I need sleep. I'll be fine."

He let his eyes drift closed, hoping to gather enough energy to at least stand. It wouldn't do to have the hospital staff come in and find him on the floor like this.

The door opened beside him and a nurse and doctor walked into the room.

"It's time already?" Emma asked, darting a look at her brother.

Sparkling tears caught on her lashes before they fell to her cheeks, glittering like gems. He wanted to brush those tears from her face, but was still too weak to stand. He clenched his hands at his sides, berating himself for his continued selfishness that put her in this situation.

The nurse bustled around the small room with cold efficiency, unplugging equipment, removing the tubes that snaked down her brother's nose and throat, helping him to breath.

The steady beep and whoosh of the life-support, still attached to the tube anchored in his chest suddenly stopped and they all stood in the room surrounded by the eerie silence.

Alex's chest did not rise and fall on its own, and after a full minute, the doctor checked his watch.

“Eleven twenty-two, Mrs. Harper, Let’s call it.”

Suddenly, Alex sucked in a huge gulp of air. The heart and brain wave monitors started to go crazy and his chest began to rise and fall in a steady rhythm.

The doctor rushed to Alex’s side and, putting his stethoscope to his ears, listened to the boy’s chest.

He looked up at Emma and smiled.

“Against the odds, your brother has begun to breathe on his own.” He looked at the monitors and frowned. “And his brainwave activity has increased quite drastically.”

He strode to the foot of the bed and picked up Alex’s chart.

“That’s strange, his records show that yesterday...” His voice trailed off and he looked around the room, clearly at a loss for words, his face pale. “I do believe that we have all just witnessed a medical miracle.”

He looked back at the boy in the bed. His color had improved in just the few moments that he’d been breathing on his own. The doctor shook his head in obvious disbelief.

Thor heaved a sigh of relief. Emma’s brother may not be out of the woods, just yet, but at least he had improved enough that the medical professionals were no longer so eager to give up on him.

Before, there had been no hope that he would survive. At least now, Emma had his recovery to look forward to. At least now she had hope.

She rushed to her brother's side. She buried her head in his neck, whispering her love to him. Thor could hear her and hoped to one day hear those words said to him with such feeling, but only if Emma was the one speaking. He knew she didn't want to live without her brother and he'd had obviously fought, struggled to stay with his sister.

She gazed down at her brother. Perhaps now she would finally be able to rest, finally be able to smile and not feel guilty because she laughed while her brother lay dying. And she would find the place where she no longer felt guilty for stealing small moments of pleasure for herself.

* * * *

With every breath Alex drew on his own, Emma's guilt at having stolen a few moments of paradise in Thor's arms lessened. Even though she loved Alex with everything in her, she needed that time. Perhaps it was her turn to live. She had always put her wants, her needs aside to care for him and their father. Maybe it was time that for once in her life, that she took control and seized a few moments for herself.

Gazing down at her brother, so still and pale,

she watched the steady rhythm of his chest. She listened to the soft sound of his breathing and smiled. It was a beautiful sound.

She looked over at Thor and frowned. Why did he look so pale and tired? The normally small laugh lines around his mouth and eyes were deeper, more pronounced.

He stood leaning against the wall, his shoulders slumped. She'd never seen anyone look so tired in her life. It was almost as if he had somehow given Alex all of his energy and now stood here on the very edge of death himself.

What a ridiculous thought, Emma. Of course he did no such thing. He's merely tired because neither of you got any sleep last night.

"You should see a doctor while you're here. You're so weak you can barely stand." Should she put her foot down and make him go? Could she?

"I have already told you," he said shaking his head. "I'll be fine. I'm just tired. After a few hours of sleep, I'll be good as new." He looked up at her and winked. "I didn't get much sleep last night, you know."

Her face warmed and she turned to look at her brother.

"It's not very nice of you to bring that up in here, you know," she whispered. She turned to open the blinds. "I feel like letting some sun in. Do you think he knows the sun is shining on him?"

“Yes,” he said with a smile as he pulled himself up off the floor. “I think he knows the sun is shining and I would bet that he can even hear the smile in your voice.”

He cast a sideways glance at her brother.

“Now, are you going to introduce us or are we men supposed to do all of the work?” he teased.

The heart monitor changed rhythm for a moment and Alex’s hand jerked in response.

“Did you see that?” She pointed and clapped her hands. “He moved. He really moved!” she danced over to Thor and threw herself into his arms. “He’s really going to get better, isn’t he?”

“He certainly is, sweetheart. At least if I have anything to say about it.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Emma returned to her work with new vigor. She now had hope that her brother may recover. The odds that he would survive this ordeal increased every day. Now that her worry wasn't as sharp, she threw herself into her work, rushing to get the harvest in and preparing for Alex's eventual return home.

The next few days were spent working on the farm, her nights on getting to know Thor. She'd refused to sleep with him again. She wasn't sure what it was that happened between them, but at least she was smart enough to realize that her lapse into such slutty behavior was an aberration. An aberration she didn't dare allow to repeat itself.

Each moment she spent in his presence tested her will, her determination, to keep him at arm's length. Each moment inexplicably brought her closer to him. She knew that soon, her needs

would overcome her good sense and she wouldn't be able to stop the heated necking that had become a nightly occurrence. To make matters worse, she wasn't sure she wanted to stop it.

Wiping the sweat from her brow, she looked up. Watching his muscles flex and relax as he worked had quickly become a habit. God the man was the epitome of male perfection. She lifted the glass of ice water she'd just fetched from the cooler and took a long, slow drink.

Holding the plastic tumbler to her forehead, she attempted to keep the heat of the day at bay. With no breeze, the sun beat down on them mercilessly and she was fast reaching a point where she would no longer be able to keep going without a rest.

Tipping the glass to her lips once more, she sucked an ice cube into her mouth and spit it out in her palm. She ran the sliver of ice over her neck and between her breasts until it melted so much, she dropped it. She scowled as it slid down between her breasts, then looked up to see Thor's gaze riveted to her chest.

Her face burned, whether from lust or the sun, she wasn't sure, and she didn't want to explore it. His heated stare made her nipples pebble beneath her sports bra and she suddenly wished she'd worn more clothes.

She set her glass down and donned the worn

work gloves once again in an attempt to pretend nothing had happened. Still, she felt his heated gaze like a touch. His sapphire eyes blazed with intensity. They burned a fiery trail over her flushed skin that made her nether parts ache.

Heat pooled in her middle as creamy moisture rushed between her legs soaking her panties. She licked her lips and sighed. How much longer could they go on this way? She was like a cat in heat. Every night she wanted to rub her body against him and beg him to take her over and over again.

But what would that accomplish, she thought with a scowl. Other than relieving a small amount of sexual frustration? Nothing.

She barely knew the man. She found it hard to believe that she had entertained the notion of sleeping with him the first time, let alone again. Who was he? Other than a handsome drifter who had promised to help her bring in her harvest, she had no idea.

She climbed back up onto the tractor and backed it into position by the last trailer. Soon the corn would be in and they could start haying the other fields. She would need it for the horses this winter. Yanking on the lever, the trailer tipped and the corn began to pour into the other box.

The slick mud on her boots caused her to slip and she caught hold of the trailer with a squeal.

Quick as a blink, Thor was behind her, his arm around her middle, squashing her against his hard frame.

“You should be more careful, Emma.”

His breath brushed against her neck. The small hairs at her nape stood at attention and her nipples hardened into diamond-like peaks.

“I—I slipped,” she explained unnecessarily. She gestured down to her feet. “The mud on my boots...”

He held her against him as he backed down off the trailer. Her body pressed against his, his already hard shaft pressing between the cheeks of her bottom.

He sniffed her hair. “You always smell so good.”

“I smell like dirt and sweat,” she said, making a face. “I can’t possibly smell good. You’re losing your mind, Thor. Now put me down.”

He shook his head, his soft hair brushing against her neck.

“I don’t think so.” He kissed her shoulder. “You’ve been trying to ignore me all week.” He breathed into her ear, his tongue dancing around the outer shell. “I’m not going to let you do it today.”

He still held her close when they reached the ground, her back to his front. He wrapped his other arm around her, cupping her breast in his

warm palm.

"I've dreamed of this moment. I dreamed that one day I would catch you off guard and you wouldn't be able to refuse me."

He nibbled on her shoulder, his tongue darting out to soothe the slight ache. His thumb brushed over her nipple, and she gasped at the lightning-bolt of sensation that shot through her blood.

Her body trembled and her legs turned to mush. Still, he held her in his strong arms and assaulted her senses.

She felt his hard body behind hers, his fingers expertly bringing the tips of her breasts to hardened peaks. He tongued her ear, causing shivers of desire to course through her body as his hand worked lower over her stomach, to cup her mound in his hand.

She whimpered when his fingers tightened, rubbing her sensitive bud through her thick jeans. Reaching down, she covered his hand with her own, whether she tried to help or stop him was a mystery – even to her.

"I want nothing more than to strip you bare right here, right now. I want to sink my cock into your slick depths and fuck you until you scream."

She whimpered again. His words nearly driving her over the edge.

"Please, Thor. I can't."

"Shhh..." He whispered in her ear, causing

gooseflesh to rise on her skin. "Of course you can. Not here, though."

He picked her up and carried her into the shed she'd turned into a makeshift barn. The interior blanketed them in darkness and intimacy while outside, the sun still shone down upon the fields. Sitting her in the thick pile of clean hay, Thor gave her a kiss that curled her toes and a rumble sounded in the distance.

"Mmm..." she smiled softly. "God of Thunder," she teased.

He chuckled as he slowly removed his pants, unwrapping himself like a present for her gaze.

She licked her lips, as he slid the jeans from his hips. His hard cock jutted from the open fly and slapped against his ridged stomach. A drop of clear fluid eased from the tip and she licked her lips in anticipation. She was through trying to deny this thing that was happening to them. Through being afraid of what the future held. If he left her after their loving, so be it. But at least she hadn't been afraid to take the chance.

He sucked his breath in between his teeth with an audible hiss as she cupped his sac and slid her eager tongue around the head of his shaft.

"Shit!" he gasped as she licked the length slowly. He fisted his hands in her hair, his hips thrusting forward in an attempt to get her mouth to engulf his massive organ.

She smiled up at him, lowering her lashes in what she hoped was a seductive pose.

“Do you like this?” she asked, already knowing the answer. His hips jerked as she licked the length like a giant all-day sucker. She tried to remember all the things she’d read about in the several erotic books she’d bought over the last few years.

Finally, she covered the head of his shaft with her mouth and took him deep. Humming, she watched as he squeezed his eyes closed and groaned. Even though she felt him slide partially down her throat, she still couldn’t take his full length into her mouth. She worked his hard cock for a few minutes, moving her fisted hand at the base of his cock, to further heighten the sensation.

After a few moments, she slid her mouth back up his large shaft and let the head of his cock pop free, watching as it hit his stomach with an audible smack.

He shuddered and dropped to his knees.

“I don’t know how much more of that I could take,” he panted against her skin as he bent to draw a nipple into his mouth.

She reveled in his attention for a moment before she pushed him away. Hands on his shoulders, she grinned.

“Well, we’re about to find out.” She pushed him back into the hay and kissed her way back

down to his straining erection.

"How does this feel?" she asked, taking his length into her mouth. She started to hum again and Thor squirmed beneath her.

"It feels..." he paused, pushed her hair away from her face and watched her mouth work his large shaft while her hands massaged the tight sac between his legs.

She sucked harder, pulling her mouth slowly from his shaft as she watched him watch her head slowly bob up and down on his hard cock. It was heady, knowing that she could drive this man so out of control that he could barely speak.

"It feels wonderful, Emma."

He threw his head back into the loose hay as she continued to work his thick shaft. His hands fisted in her hair, alternately pulling and caressing as she continued to suck on his hard member.

"I don't know how much longer I can last, love," he panted, his fingers pulling her head to him. "If you don't want me to..."

She raised her hand and rested her fingers against his mouth for a second, effectively telling him it was okay. She wanted this. She wanted him out of control and pulling her to him like she was the only woman in the world that would ever do for him.

"Arrgh!" he cried as he began to thrust his hips up into her mouth. She took him all the way, even

as his hot cum began to shoot down her throat. She gulped down the thick fluid, her nipples pebbling against the material of the sports bra. Her hands massaged his scrotum as he shot the thick jets of hot fluid past her lips. White cream trickled from the corners of her mouth as she attempted to swallow every drop of his thick cum.

He lay on his back panting, his fingers still tangled in her hair. Rolling over on his side, he propped himself up on his elbow and smiled.

“My turn.”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Emma gasped as he drew her down over his hard muscular frame. Pushing up her top, his mouth closed over one nipple as his thumb and forefinger closed over the other. Electricity sizzled through her blood as he drew on the hardened nub, nipping the sensitive peak as he suckled.

She tunneled her fingers through his silky hair, gasping at the wondrous sensations rushing through her. Heat pooled in her middle. Thick cream coated her panties and her nether parts twitched with anticipation.

“Please, Thor, I...”

He shook his head and chuckled. “No mercy, no sympathy. You’ve made me wait. Made us both wait. You’ve teased us both mercilessly with your beautiful body and the sensual smell of your denied arousal.” He shook his head. “The only way you are going to stop me tonight is to look me in the eyes and tell me you don’t want this. That

you don't want me."

He stopped, kissing and nibbling her skin for a moment to look up into her eyes.

"Tell me you don't want this and I'll stop."

She shook her head, unable to tell him she didn't want it. She wanted him. She wanted all of him and right now, if he demanded answers, she would give them truthfully.

"Please," she whimpered as he watched her, waiting.

"Please, what?" he asked, kissing and laving the underside of her breast. "Please make love with you? Or please stop?"

She nodded. Unable to voice her wants and needs. Afraid to tell him what she wanted would make her look wanton and cheap.

"Well?" He raised his brow. "Which one is it? Do you want it or not?"

Still, she couldn't voice her desires, instead she showed him. Reaching up, she tunneled her fingers through his hair and pulled his head down her. Keeping her hands fisted, she held him to her breast until he began to suckle anew.

"I'll take that as a yes," he said with a chuckle as he switched to her other breast.

Reaching up, he peeled her top away and tossed it over his shoulder. He stared at her bared breasts with something akin to adoration in his eyes.

Her face warmed beneath that heated gaze and she turned her head, squeezing her eyes shut, embarrassed.

He smoothed his hand over her face, his fingers gently massaging the curve of her lips. He pushed his hands through her hair, kissing a burning trail down over her collarbone, to the rise of her breast. She arched up into him and he lifted his head to kiss her gently.

“Never be ashamed of your body again, baby.” He suckled her nipple into the moist heat of his mouth then withdrew, blowing lightly on the moistened peak.

The cool air on the wet bud caused it to pebble harder. His hand wandered lower, found the curve of her hips. She sucked in her breath as his large hand skimmed over the sensitized flesh of her mid-drift and she gasped as he sank his wet-velvet tongue into her navel.

Unbuttoning her jeans, he slid them down over her hips and inhaled deeply.

“I love the scent of your arousal and the unique smell of your natural musk.” He inhaled again, closing his eyes. “The taste of your rich cream is like ambrosia. A food fit only for the gods.”

He pressed his lips against the triangle of soft curls and sucked in another deep breath.

“You are a Goddess, Emma. You are my Goddess.”

Emma whimpered as he snaked his tongue between her nether lips and groaned.

“God, Thor, stop talking. If you don’t stop, I’m going to cum as soon as you touch me. It’s too sexy,” she panted, waiting for him to pull her into his mouth. *Just stop talking and give me action already.*

Crying out, she spread her legs wide, offering herself to him like a wanton. Her breath caught in her throat as his lips closed over the pulsing nub and he suckled her into his mouth.

Fisting her hands in his hair, she held onto him as her mind and body spun out of control.

His expert lips drove her over the edge of her climax. She keened his name in a loud, piercing wail.

Not waiting for the aftershocks to stop, Thor pushed two of his long, fingers through her slick folds and thrust them inside, against her stomach. He hit a sensitive spot inside that had her crying with ecstasy beneath him again.

Her muscles clenched tightly around his thick fingers, drawing down on them as yet another climax overtook her.

He kissed her, swallowing her screams as his mouth moved languorously over hers. His tongue explored every hollow of the inside of her mouth, thrusting his velvet tongue against hers as he continued to take her over the threshold of

another mind-numbing orgasm.

She moaned when he bent his head, drawing the peak of her breast into the welcoming heat of his mouth. How would she ever live without him again? They had only made love once and already she couldn't get enough of him. She couldn't wait to have him pounding inside her again.

She ran her hands over his body, feeling his hard muscles. His firm buttocks clenched beneath her fingers as she squeezed the rounded cheeks. He bore down on her, his weight barely registering as he moved between her legs.

"Tell me you want me," he begged as he positioned himself over her, the head of his penis at the entrance to her waiting channel. "Tell me you want this."

His fingers tested her entrance, made sure she was ready for him to impale her with his hard shaft. His eyes burned with passion as he gazed down at her, waiting for her consent.

She lifted her head, stroking her tongue over his chest, drawing on the flat light-brown nipple.

He groaned, still positioned above her, still awaiting her consent.

"Yes," she whispered against his skin, her teeth nipping gently. "Yes, Thor. I want you more than I can say."

* * * *

With those words of consent, Thor groaned as he finally pushed forward through her thick folds and settled deep within her tight sheath. The head of his cock settled against the mouth of her womb and he stilled, waiting, trying to regain his control.

“You’re so tight, Emma,” he said, unable to move, barely able to stand the tight clenching of her muscles around his cock.

His balls tingled, already aching for release as he settled himself more firmly inside her. He withdrew, slowly. The tight folds of her pussy clenched his cock, as he pulled free of the slick embrace. He quickly drove back inside her again, unable to bear the pressure within her, unable to bear the world without.

Thunder rumbled again as he eased in and out of her, trying desperately not to lose control. His father had forgotten to remove his powers from him and he didn’t want to hurt her. He attempted to direct the power outside of him, to the weather.

Lightning crashed, hitting the ground near the shed, a boom of thunder followed soon after and still he couldn’t stop himself from driving into her silky softness. He closed his eyes and a rainbow of colors danced behind the lids as he continued to spiral farther out of control.

The feel of her hands and mouth on his skin was enough to drive him over the edge and he

finally lost all control, all reason. He pounded into her with abandon, knowing his eyes had taken on the otherworldly glow of one of his kind.

Emma screamed out her orgasm as he drove into her, his body demanding that he slake his lust once and for all. He threw his head back and roared out his release as her body tightened around him, milking his shaft until there was little energy left within him.

He collapsed over her, aftershocks shaking his body as she gently stroked his sensitized skin.

Her hands stopped stroking him as he panted over her and she pushed at his chest.

“Thor, what are you?”

The sound of clapping came from the open doorway.

“Why he’s Thor, God of Thunder. Didn’t you know that?”

Emma squealed at the sound of the strange male voice and tried to cover herself.

The intruder snorted and looked away.

“Like I even want to look at your body.” His upper lip curled in a sneer and he inhaled deeply. “Ewww, Thor, it smells like nasty human sex in here.”

“Get out, Loki,” he growled, dressing Emma with a thought. “You’re the one behind all of the accidents aren’t you?” His eyes narrowed as he contemplated killing another of his kind for the

first time in his considerably long life.

Emma looked between them, her eyes growing wide.

"Thor...? Loki...?" She shook her head with disbelief. "This can't be happening. She looked down at the clothes covering her and bit back a hysterical laugh. "Tell me this isn't happening."

Loki scoffed. "Dream all you want, human. The only reason he is here is because he needs to get you pregnant." He strode around them, resting his hip against the outer wall. "He needs offspring or the whole universe is kaput." He laughed. "His Goddess spurned him for another and now he has to sink down to your level. A *human*." He said the word like it was a curse.

Tears began to flow from her eyes and she looked over at Thor, before lowering her gaze to the ground.

"Get out," she whispered, not able to even look at him.

"You don't understand, Emma."

"What am I saying?" she asked looking around the shed. "Never mind, stay here as long as you want. *I'm* leaving. And don't you dare follow me."

She ran from the shed. The sound of Thor's roar and splintering wood followed her into the sunlight and she ran into the house, to her room. How had things gotten so out of hand? How had she fallen in love with the very God who had left

her family to suffer for all those years? She pressed her hands to her mouth to stifle another hysterical giggle. She'd fallen in love with a God?

The words Loki spat in her face came back to her. He must really hate Thor to go to such trouble just to make him fail at getting offspring. And why did the future depend on his children?

The sound of the splintering wood came back to her as she realized a desperate man, immortal or otherwise, would carry a weapon.

"Oh, my God, Thor!" She ran from the house back to the shed, her love overcoming her anger. Falling to her knees beside her wonderful lover, she pushed the hair from his face. Those wonderful sapphire eyes gleamed back at her, filled with pain.

"I'm sorry, Emma. I never meant to hurt you."

He raised his hand and cupped her cheek. Strange, iridescent orange-red blood covered her breast as his hand fell away from her cheek, striking her chest on the way down. Her lover was her God. She eased back for a minute, remembering his kindness. Remembering the long hours he'd toiled in the fields so her crops could be harvested. How weak he was after their visits to her brother, her brother who'd grown stronger, while her lover's great strength waned...

"No!" she looked up at the sky. "Odin, father, please help him. Help your son. I believe in you. I

believe in him. I love him. Please don't let him die,
I beg you...!"

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Emma knelt on the straw-covered floor and cradled Thor's head in her lap. Tears streamed down her face, falling onto his forehead and into his hair. She moved her hand, caressing his forehead as the droplets ran down her cheeks.

"What would you do to save him?"

She jerked her head up, surprised to see the man who had been in her bedroom the other night. Though she shouldn't be, she supposed. The man *had* claimed to be Odin, after all. She swallowed thickly as she sat contemplating the possibility of facing the All-father.

"Anything," she said with conviction. "I would do anything." She tilted her head to the side and narrowed her eyes. "Are you really Odin?" She pressed her lips together when he turned his full stare on her. Perhaps she would be better off not saying anything. She didn't want to make him mad. Frowning, she inhaled deeply when he

nodded. "I always thought Odin was an old man with one eye and a beard."

He laughed. Though how he could laugh at a time like this was a mystery to her. His son lay dying at his feet, covered in blood, with his head held in a mortal's lap.

"That is merely one of my disguises. You wouldn't have me walking about creation telling people that I'm God, would you?" He shook his head with disbelief. "They would lock me away faster than I can blink." He winked at her. "Not that I couldn't get out of it. But it's such a bother." He waved his hand in a gesture that spoke volumes on his opinion of that particular shape he'd taken.

"Did you really think that a God would appear that way all of the time?" he asked, curling his lip. "I'm a shape-shifter. What makes you think I would choose to keep such a fearsome countenance all of the time? Hell, woman, I would scare more people to death than help them, in this day and age."

"I guess I never thought that much about it." She shrugged, still brushing the hair back from Thor's face. "Will you save him?"

Odin, the All-father, studied her and frowned.

He stared at her and she stubbornly lifted her chin.

"Let the fates take me, instead." She cast a quick

gaze down to Thor's still form. "I don't care anymore. I'm tired of the people I love dying. I don't want to live like this anymore. Tell them to take me so long as they let him live."

She looked down, watching the blood as it oozed from Thor's wound. His breathing was shallow, nearly non-existent and she knew he had little time left.

If he is a god, how can he become hurt?

"How could this happen? I thought he was a God. Isn't he supposed to be immortal?"

"He is the God humans made him." Odin said with a shake of his head.

He settled down on his haunches next to her.

"We are not gods. Not like you think, at any rate." He sighed, rubbing the back of his neck. "How to explain?"

Emma remained silent, knowing his last words were merely thoughts spoken aloud.

"Our people came here eons ago, near the beginning of time. Our ability to shift our shape and bring people over to immortality gave us the illusion of being gods."

He bowed his head and folded his hands between his knees.

"We are a proud people with special powers who rely on the energy of others to sustain our way of life. Without your belief and the belief of others like you, we would not exist."

Emma's mouth dropped open.

"Do you mean to say that you have perpetuated this myth throughout time merely to survive? You've..." She took a deep breath and choked back a sob, realizing that she, and her family, had lived a lie for generations. "You've perpetuated this belief system merely for your own survival?"

He shook his head. "No not just for our survival. We give back to those who believe. We always give back in the form of answered prayers."

She closed her eyes. "Answered prayers?" A derisive snort escaped her throat and she shook her head. "Not always."

"Yes, always."

She opened her eyes, knowing they were filled with the fire of betrayal. He lowered his gaze when she glared at him. He knew. She almost laughed. Of course he knew. He was the All-father, the wise one who knew all. What his wisdom didn't tell him, his two ravens did.

"Who answered *my* prayers, All-father?" she asked, gently laying Thor's head on the cold ground. "Who was supposed to answer my prayers?"

He looked down at Thor and a sharp pain stabbed her heart.

"You were my son's charge and he failed you. That is why he came himself, to save your brother,

the last of your family, from the same fate that befell your parents."

She closed her eyes again, but not before the tears escaped and slid down her cheeks. What could she say to that? Even with all she'd just learned, she didn't want him to die. She couldn't bear it if he died.

"Will you save him?"

Odin nodded. "Under one condition."

"And your condition?"

"That you allow me to take you to Asgard to await Ragnaroc with the rest of us."

She looked down at Thor, a shaft of betrayal driving through her heart. It was he who should have saved her mother and father, yet she couldn't bear the thought of his life being extinguished for all time.

"Will I..." She searched for the words before clearing her throat to try again. "Will I be with him?"

Odin stood and stared deeply into her eyes.

"Make your decision wisely, Daughter. You will live with it a mighty long time."

"I don't want to be with him. He has betrayed me and my family. I can't trust him again."

She gazed down at his silky red-gold hair spilled out on the ground, framing his gray face. "I don't want him to die." Her gaze met Odin's and she blinked. It almost hurt to look directly into his

eyes. "But, after this, I don't ever want to see him again."

"I can give you over into the care of the Valkyries. You are no longer a maiden but," he gave her a crooked grin. "I don't think they will mind a new face for a while." He stopped then rubbed his chin. "What if you should change your mind?"

"I really don't think I will, sir." She smiled wanly. "But I would like to think that you are a kind and benevolent god and would allow me to change my mind at least once."

"Perhaps," he said with a nod. "Do you have any stipulations before our deal is struck?"

"Just one, sir. I want to remain here on earth at least until my brother reaches the age of eighteen and is old enough to care for himself. I'd really rather wait until he's twenty-one, but I won't insist."

"Done." He leaned forward to whisper in her ear. "Prepare yourself."

He closed his eyes and the world tilted. Emma stood awestruck as he raised the power of life between his hands. The ball of white energy glowed between his hands before he thrust it at her, enveloping her with it. The ball of energy grew in size until it enveloped both her and Thor in its blinding circle of light.

Suddenly, she felt a sharp pain in her side and

she looked down. Blood seeped from a deep wound in her side and she looked up at Odin, her mouth agape.

“You said I could stay.”

It was the last thing she said before she stumbled forward and fell on Thor’s motionless form.

* * * *

Emma woke, only to find herself lying in her own bed.

Alex banged through the door. “Hey! I’m hungry. Are you going to lie about all day, or are you going to come downstairs and fix me something to eat?” He hung his head. “I suppose I could just fix myself a bowl of cereal.”

He banged back out of the room, his backpack hitting the doorframe as he left, the rollerblades on his feet making him clumsy.

She looked around her room, rubbed her head and frowned. Could Alex’s hospital stay and her subsequent visit from Thor, all been a dream?

No child. You have until the boy is eighteen to right your world, then you shall come to us in Asgard or Valhalla. Either way you shall belong to us after that.

What of Thor, did he live? She shook her head. He must or they wouldn’t expect her to join them in two years. The deal had been made to save his

life.

She brought a trembling hand to her head.

“What the hell happened? Why can’t I remember Alex coming home from the hospital?”

Suddenly, false memories assailed her. His eventual recovery. Picking him up, bringing him home, hugging him until he pushed her away, angry and smothered. Gone a long time, she had missed so much.

Who was here, taking her place as she recovered from that mortal wound in Asgard? Who did so well in playing the part of imposter? Pain assailed her from those memories. She knew she would never be allowed to see the one she loved, ever again. The one she loved hated her, couldn’t bear the site of her. Her love was torn asunder by the fickle jester, Loki—it infuriated her—no, him. The thoughts confused her. Whose thoughts were they?

She gasped when she realized she visited Thor’s memories. It was he who had taken her place while she healed in Asgard. He who visited Alex in the hospital, talking to his comatose body. He disguised himself as her, joked with Alex after he awakened and hugged him the way he knew she would have done, all in her stead. Now he gave her the gift of those memories—the precious gift of watching her brother growing stronger every day. Of watching him return home.

Putting her hands to her head, her gaze darted around the room and she steeled her resolve. She wouldn't forgive him. She couldn't. It had been his neglect, his selfishness that put her family into this situation. Regardless of the reason, he had made them vulnerable to Loki's attack. She could never forgive him for that.

Pain knifed her chest when she saw that she only had him to blame for her troubles and him to thank for her brother's recovery. Who said love conquered all? She shook her head. No, she didn't love him. She refused to love a man who could be so caught up in himself, in his own needs, that he could ignore the very people he depended on for his own survival.

She would live and she would love again, and if not, she would at least know that her brother had a shot at a normal life. Odin promised her that Alex would find a wife and have children. The mortals responsible for their troubles would be found through Loki, once he himself was found.

Emma didn't give a rat's ass if he did take her place, talking her brother from his coma as she healed in Asgard. Thor could rot in the hell he'd made for himself. She never wanted to see him again.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Thor hovered just outside her second-story window, feeling like a voyeur. He'd used his powers to push her curtain aside just enough to see her. He'd do as he was told and stay away from her, lest he incur his father's wrath, but he refused to never see her again. The thought was too horrible to be borne.

She sat at her dressing table, facing the mirror and combed her hair. The large comb slid easily through her silken locks. The shoulder length tresses gleamed silver in the muted light of her bedroom. Fat tears ran from her eyes, and slid down the silky soft skin of her face and neck.

His heart slammed painfully in his chest as he watched her and sighed. He touched the pane of glass that separated them. Cold from the glass seeped into his fingers, and his heart broke for what he'd lost.

"I'm sorry, Emma. I did not mean to neglect

you or your family.”

Thor bowed his head, knowing that no matter what he did, it would never bring back those she loved.

He almost laughed. It’s funny how her family had always considered him this all-powerful being, yet he couldn’t seem to keep his own love life straight. He shook his head and shoved his hand through his hair and barely stopped the moan from escaping his throat. Instead, he shook his head and sighed.

Emma stopped combing her hair, mid-stroke and her back stiffened. She turned to look at the window through narrowed eyes. Standing, she strode over to the window and pulled the drapes closed with a frown.

Praying she would leave it open just a crack, he remained outside watching her, dreaming about what could have been, had he not been such a selfish ass. Instead, she pulled them fully closed and he was locked outside without even the comfort of looking in.

He bowed his head when the curtain stopped swaying. The crack was gone and he could no longer see his love. It was time he faced the fact that she would never allow him into her life again. He raised his hand, tempted to use his powers to open the curtain, just a little. Shaking his head, he lowered himself to her porch to the swing where

they sat in such companionable silence not so long ago.

Bittersweet memories assailed him as he sank down onto the swing. She had leaned into him, holding his hand as they sat in this spot, swinging softly as they both watched the sinking sun set over the horizon. He had been such a fool. He didn't even have the comfort of thinking he should have told her the truth from the start, because he knew if he told her the truth, she would have had him committed.

Thor leaned forward, rested his arms over his knees and clasped his hands. There was nothing left for him here. Perhaps, in time, she would forgive him, but until then, it was past time he went home and made himself busy by checking on his other charges. How many others had suffered from his unintentional neglect? It was time he found out.

Standing, he stretched and looked out over the hewn fields and felt a surge of...something. Was it pride? In the way she'd been able to finish her work, even after her heart had been torn asunder.

It was time he made the effort to rebuild his life. It was past time that he let his people know they weren't forgotten. His plans now were great and to see them realized, he would need every ounce of power and self discipline that he possessed.

A soft smile curved his lips as he made his plan.

Since losing Emma was not an option, he had to figure out a way to win her back. That it wouldn't be without a fight was a thought that had never crossed his mind. Oh, he had no doubt that she would fight him tooth and nail. He smiled, prepared to love every minute of it. His would be a hard won victory, but that would only make his prize that much sweeter.

After checking on his people and leaving them in the capable hands of the fates, he returned to Emma's farm and made plans.

What surprised him was her sudden contact with a local realtor. Did she plan to sell? Tired of the constant accidents, had she finally decided to get rid of her property? He shook his head with disbelief. No, that was impossible. There must be another reason she contacted those people.

Every time he looked at her his heart ached. Not to mention his balls. He wanted nothing more than to sink himself inside her again and revel in the silky soft embrace of her wet velvet sheath. His body tingled at the thought of her satiny skin sliding over his as he thrust himself inside her.

Reaching down, he grabbed his constantly hard shaft in his hands and squeezed. He needed to regain control of his thoughts. Running about with his mind on having sex with his glorious Goddess would not serve his purpose well. He needed a well-formed plan to get her back. Perhaps if he

took the time to ease the tension coiled around the base of his cock, he could think clearly again.

He flashed himself back to Asgard, into his private chambers and lay down upon his bed. Undressing himself with a thought, he lay back with his head on his pillow, as one hand tightly gripped his shaft. His other hand reached down to fondle his balls as he slowly slid his hand over the rigid flesh.

He closed his eyes, imagining his sweet Emma's lips caressing the head of his massive shaft as he slowly pumped his hand up and down the length. She would lick and kiss the head before slowly engulfing it in her heated mouth. Warm moist heat, enclosed his flesh as he wished his fantasy to slide down over his heated flesh.

Mere moments passed when he clenched his teeth, ready to spill his seed. His balls tingled and fire flowed through his veins as jets of semen shot from the head of his cock, arcing up over his bed. He arched his back, the imagined sensation of Emma's mouth driving him mad as the ropes of cum shot from his shaft.

After a moment, he lay back on his bed, his seed spent. Yet his need for her was stronger than ever. Nothing would take the place of his Goddess in his life. He must make her forgive him. There was no other choice.

He wished himself and the bedding clean and

stood. There was naught else to do, but make her realize that she loved him. But how could he do it when she wouldn't allow him near her? He smiled sadly. There was a way. There had to be a way. He would find it and he would have her again.

Thor stood, a feral grin on his face. He watched himself in the mirror as he shifted his shape into one he knew that she would never be able to resist. When she came to love him in this guise, he would reveal himself to her. He could only hope that she would forgive him, not hit him over the head with something and call his father in on the situation.

"Now to put myself in a position where she will want to take me home..." He paused. "No. Lying about who I am is what got me into this mess to begin with," he said with a sigh. He changed back to himself. "What can I do to let her know how sorry I am?"

Send her flowers, you dolt! Give her chocolates, gifts. A way to a woman's heart usually leads you through a few expensive stores first.

Stay out of my head, old man. I don't remember asking you for your opinion, he answered his father with a scowl.

Still the idea had merit. He glanced back into the mirror and dressed himself. If he was going to win her back, he would have to work at it.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Emma made her way down to the kitchen to make Alex some breakfast before school. She inhaled deeply, loving the crisp, clean scent of the early morning air. The surprisingly strong smell of roses wafted through the opened window and she stood enjoying the treat. A noise outside drew her attention and she opened the door to see what it was.

A mountain of flowers sat on the porch. Roses in every color, daisies, calla lilies and other flowers she couldn't name sat on every flat surface of the porch. Only a narrow walkway to the steps remained open.

Who would send her flowers, especially so many? Reaching out, she grabbed the card that stuck up from a large bouquet of red roses on the table next to the swing. She absently glanced at the retreating florist's van as she went back inside, closing the door with her foot.

With trembling fingers, she opened the note.

Dearest Emma,

I was a fool. I know that now. Please forgive me.

T.

Tears burned her eyes and she closed them. Crumpling the note in her clenched fist, she vowed to carry the flowers to the burn barrel later. Their presence on her porch would only serve to remind her of all she had lost. She couldn't bring herself to forgive him. How could she? It was his negligence that ultimately brought about her parent's death.

Don't be so sure about that, child. The blame rests on the person or persons responsible for the accidents. You should hold them accountable for their horrible acts, not on one lonely man with so many vying for his attention.

She ignored the voice in her head, proclaiming to be Odin. If she didn't, it would drive her mad.

Alex clomped down the stairs, minus his rollerblades this time. He sauntered into the kitchen, his stuffed book bag slung over his left shoulder. The black t-shirt that he had haphazardly tucked into his cargo pants was covered by a large dragon-print button-down shirt. Headphones rested over his ears, the cord leading down to one of his large pockets.

"What's for breakfast?"

"Eggs, toast and sausage," she said, setting a pan on the stove. "Just give me a few minutes."

She popped the pre-cooked sausage into the microwave and punched the reheat button and busied herself scrambling the eggs. "Can you put some bread in the toaster?"

Alex did as she asked and looked out the window over the counter. He whistled. "Whoa! Where did all of the foliage come from?" He strode over to open the door and wrinkled his nose. "You got a boyfriend?" He turned an accusing glare on her. "How come I haven't met him? I've been home a couple of weeks now." He closed the door hard and the glass rattled in the frame. Hands on hips, he stood glaring at her.

Emma couldn't miss the hurt in his eyes. She could tell he wanted to meet the man who would send her so many flowers and was upset that she hadn't introduced him. He probably thought she was ashamed of him or something.

She turned the heat off under the eggs before she moved the pan from the burner. "I didn't introduce you because we broke up before you came home from the hospital."

She pulled two plates from the counter, set them on the table and served the eggs straight from the pan before she pulled the sausage from the microwave.

"He..." she paused. "He wasn't right for me."

For us. He was too self-absorbed. When things didn't go his way, he closed up, keeping himself away from people. Out of reach. I couldn't deal with that."

The toast popped up. Alex brought it to the table on a saucer and set it between their plates. "So you left him?"

She nodded as she sat down. "I couldn't bear the thought that he would leave us as soon as things got rough."

"Makes sense, I suppose," he said with a shrug as he lathered butter and a thick layer of grape jelly onto his toast. "Were you worried about him leaving us, or just you?" He slid her a glance from the corner of his eye. "Cause, you know, I don't want or need someone who wants to be a father figure in my life. Dad was a hard act to follow."

"You're right there," she said, nodding her agreement and giving him a sad smile. "He was a great dad." She blinked back the tears that threatened and looked down at her eggs, no longer hungry. She pushed her plate toward Alex. He grabbed it and scraped her breakfast onto his plate the typical teenage boy, always hungry. It made her want to smile.

"Thanks. I have an exam today and I can't concentrate if I'm hungry."

"What class?" She rested her elbow on the table, her chin in her hand and watched him

shovel the food into his mouth.

"History," he answered, as he pushed a huge piece of sausage into his mouth before guzzling down a half glass of milk.

"Is old Mr. Hamilton still teaching that class?"

"Yeah," he said with a grin, his mouth stuffed to near bursting. "He asked about you." He added that tidbit after he chewed what was in his mouth, swallowed it and washed it down with the last of his milk. He waved the empty glass at his sister and she stood to get the gallon jug from the refrigerator.

"And?"

"He wanted to know if I was just as stubborn and academically lazy as you were in his class." He laughed at her frown. "I told him that you didn't have a lazy bone in your body. That, usually, you are up before dawn and still going strong late into the night."

Emma winced when he crammed a whole slice of toast into his mouth and chewed.

"Thanks for sticking up for me. He was always riding me about how I never worked hard enough. He basically said that when he signed my yearbook. He wrote that I would go far if I ever learned to apply myself."

"The jerk!" Alex scowled down at the rest of his sausage as if it was somehow at fault for the teacher's comments.

“Don’t get too mad at him. He was right. I could have done better. But if I had, I would have gotten scholarship offers then Dad would have made me leave and I wouldn’t have been here when he died.”

“Yeah.” He swallowed thickly. “I don’t know what I would have done if you wouldn’t have been here.”

“Well,” she said, clearing her throat and swallowing around the large lump lodged there. “Let’s not dwell on things we can’t change.” She stood, grabbed her plate and the empty saucer and rinsed them out in the sink before putting them in the dishwasher. “Do you want me to fix you something for lunch?”

“Nah. Today is pizza day. I figured I’d eat that.”

“Okay.” She knew how much her brother loved pizza. “You need to get to school. I think I’m going to go buy a lottery ticket. I dreamt some numbers last night and I figured what the heck. I’d give it a try.”

After driving Alex to school, since she was in town anyway and the image of those numbers were still flashing in her mind, she drove straight to the nearest store.

* * * *

Thor watched with undisguised delight as the first part of his plan took shape. He whispered the numbers into her mind again as she told the woman behind the counter which numbers she wanted.

“Five, nine, thirteen, twenty-seven, thirty-three and forty-two.”

“Is that it, honey? You just buyin’ one ticket?”

The woman looked at her as though she expected more numbers to pour out of her mouth. Thor scowled. The one she had would win her enough money to rebuild her barn. Why would she need another?

“Yes, just the one. I only dreamt up the one set of numbers.”

“Oh, you’re one of *those*.” The woman said with a sneer.

Emma gave her a strained smile, and left the store.

Invisible, Thor followed her back to the house and watched, stunned, as she threw every one of the flower arrangements he’d sent her into the burn barrel and set them on fire. The stench of burning greenery filled his lungs and he stubbornly told himself that it was the smoke from the fire that burned his eyes, not the utter sense of loss he felt at watching those small symbols of his undying love going up in smoke.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The flowers arrived daily for the next two weeks. Every day Emma took them to the barrel behind the shed and burned them. Finally, after the sixteenth day, she'd had enough. She looked up toward the sky, and called to Thor.

"Okay, we need to talk. I refuse to go on like this." She waved her arms, indicating the plethora of foliage on her porch. "This wastes my time everyday, Thor. Get your butt down here and tell me what the hell you expect from me."

She leaned against the porch rail, looked over at the framework of her new barn and smiled. The lottery ticket she bought had been a winner, a big winner, and the five numbers she matched had given her enough money to rebuild her barn. "I suppose your love would be too much to ask?" he said from just behind her.

She gasped and turned, holding her hand to her chest.

“You scared the crap out of me, dammit.” She slapped his arm with a scowl. “Don’t ever do that again.” Her eyes widened when she realized what she’d just done. She was too comfortable with him. What would he do to her for slapping a god?

He stared down at her, his expression intense and she swallowed thickly. He smelled so good. He always did. His scent, a mixture of sandalwood and citrus always drove her wild. Clenching her fists, she stubbornly raised her chin and vowed to ignore the strange pull he seemed to have on her.

She itched to reach out and unbuttoned his shirt to check the two spots where Loki had stabbed him. The last time she’d seen his chest, it had been covered in blood, two angry looking wounds marred his perfect pectorals and upper abdomen.

Could he scar? She hoped not.

“I’ve missed you.”

It was all he said. He just stood there, staring down at her as if he would never get enough of just looking into her eyes.

“I will never get enough of looking at you.”

She groaned. “Don’t say that.” *Don’t be nice to me. Don’t look at me with those wonderful sad eyes. I can’t take it.* She licked her suddenly dry lips and looked down with a groan when he grinned at her.

“Please forgive me.”

Emma shook her head. "How can I?" She paced away from him and wrapped her arms around her middle. "How can I forgive you? It was neglect, just as surely as not feeding my animals would be. Or not caring for an infant's needs."

He nodded, then rubbed his face with his hands.

"I know and I will regret that for the rest of my life."

Have you considered how long that is? She wasn't sure if the inner voice she heard was hers or Thor's that time.

You are punishing him for another's misdeeds. Blame should rest solely on the person responsible for the events that took your parent's lives. Another god is responsible for this, not my son. The sound of Odin's voice did little to sooth the raw pain of her heartbreak.

She gaped when Thor sank to his knees in front of her.

"Forgive me, Emma. Take me back into your life and love me. I may be a powerful being but, like you, like anyone, I am not perfect."

Her mouth dropped open. She tried to say something several times but what do you say when someone whom you've worshipped as a god for most of your life prostrates themselves in front of you? How could she not forgive him?

"I—I..." She'd started to say 'I can't' but she

couldn't make herself say it. She didn't want to live her life alone anymore. She loved him, faults and all. Maybe it was time she forgave him for being a bit human.

She knelt before him and took him into her arms, unable to stand seeing the pain reflected in his eyes, unable to be the cause of that pain any longer. His arms wrapped around her. She closed her eyes and sighed.

The farm, all of their surroundings fell away and Emma realized that she was home. Home wasn't the house, the land or even the family she grew up a part of. Her home was right here in his arms wrapped in his warm embrace.

Snuggling deeper into his arms, she rested her head on his shoulder and sighed. How could she live the rest of her life without him in it? How could she refuse a god?

He buried his face in her hair and inhaled deeply. "I'm a man first, baby. Remember that. And I need you." Pulling back, he tilted her head back with his thumb to stare into her eyes. "I'm going to kiss you."

She licked her lips, nervously watched his eyes darken to near cobalt as they followed the trail of her tongue over her lips and smiled at his intense expression.

"Well, what are you waiting for?"

Apparently, he didn't need a second invitation.

Butterflies took flight in her stomach as he covered her lips with his. The warm pressure set her heart racing and moisture pooled between her legs.

"I love you," he said, still feathering kisses over her face and neck. "I love you more than my own life." He covered her lips with his again. His hand burned a trail down her back to her rear as he cupped the mound in his palm.

Emma moaned into his mouth. The sweet torture of his lips on hers was nearly too much to bear. Thrusting her fingers through his hair, she held him to her as his tongue plundered her mouth.

"Oh, man. Get a room, will ya?"

The sound of Alex's voice was like a bucket of cold water being dumped over her. She pulled away from Thor with a groan and covered her face.

"I guess you two got back together, huh?" he asked, looking between them with a grin. He held out his hand to Thor. "I'm Alex. I guess you're the boyfriend she dumped?"

Thor smiled and shook his hand. "Hi, Alex, it's nice to meet you. I'm Thor."

"Cool! Named after the God of thunder. How awesome." He turned to look at his sister. "You never told me he was a god, Emma." He chuckled at his own joke.

"Well, I never thought you'd meet." How much

did she tell him? Did she dare tell him that he was *the* Thor of Norse legend or should she merely make light of his joke?

He has the right to know, love.

Emma closed her eyes and savored the endearment for a moment.

You're right. He does have the right to know.

Standing, she held Thor's hand and faced her brother.

"We have something to tell you, Alex. Thor *is* the Norse God we've worshipped all our lives."

Alex just stood gaping at her as if he thought she had a screw loose.

"You're kidding, right? You don't really believe that..." he let his words trail off as he looked between them. "You son of a bitch!"

He threw himself at Thor and began punching him. Thor merely stood and waited for him to tire, taking his blows as if they were nothing, the mere buzzing of a fly around him. Barely a nuisance.

After a moment of shock, Emma grabbed her brother and dragged him away from him. "What are you doing? Leave him alone!" She placed herself between them.

"He's taking advantage of you. He's no god." He turned to look at her. "You have more sense than that. I know you do. Why are you acting this way?"

"Because he *is* Thor, Alex. He can prove it to

you, just give him the chance.”

Alex stepped back and crossed his arms over his chest. “I won’t be as easily duped as my sister.” He flicked a gaze to Emma when she gasped. “I don’t think you’re stupid, Sis. I just think that he’s somehow blinded you to the fact that he can’t possibly be who he claims.”

Thor smiled. “Very well. The challenge has been made.” He snapped his fingers.

Emma and Alex looked around themselves, their eyes wide.

A circle of standing stones stood to their right and a castle to the left. A mystical power emanated from the circle, surrounding them. The power was strong, tangible. Emma felt it. She cast a glance at Alex and smiled. The expression on his face was priceless. His mouth hung open, his eyes were wide. Yet he wasn’t looking at the landscape as she had been. He was staring at Thor.

“My...” He paused and swallowed. “My sister’s boyfriend is Thor?” He frowned. “I thought you had a wife.”

Thor shook his head. “She left me years ago. Nearly three hundred years ago. I began to fade out. I was shaken when she left me for another. I’m ashamed to admit that I neglected the needs of those who believe in me.”

“Oh,” Alex said, a look of awe on his face. “Do I...Do I need to kneel or bow down to you or

something?"

Thor frowned. "Have I ever required that of you in the past?"

"Well, no."

"Then why would I now? Now that you are the brother of my Goddess."

Alex's eyes widened and he turned to Emma. "Goddess? You're going to be a friggin' Goddess?"

She swallowed, unsure of how to answer his question. She knew she would be Thor's consort, but no one had ever told her she was going to have Goddess status. Turning to Thor, she raised her brow.

"Well, inquiring teens want to know."

"When you took the injuries in my stead, you proved to the Norns that you are worthy to be added to the ranks of our people. They said it was your destiny to become my Goddess in every way."

"Excuse me," a beautiful young redhead approached them. "Is one of you called Alexander?" she asked looking between them.

Alex stepped forward. He pulled his collar away from his throat. "I am." His voice cracked and he coughed. "How did you know I was here?"

She gave him a blinding smile. "I am Calla. I am a first level Kyrie. I fear that I will never be a full-fledged Valkyrie. They say I do not study hard

enough and that I'm far too attracted to boys." She smiled again. "Especially the handsome ones like you. I do like dark hair." Reaching up, she stopped herself, just before she touched his hair. "May I?"

Calla feathered her fingers through his hair at his nod and laughed. "It is as soft as it feels."

Blushing, she apologized. "I'm sorry. They also say that I do not think before I act." She looked down at the ground. "Would you like to see Valhalla with me? I think your sister and Thor need to have some time alone.

He nodded and swallowed thickly. "Yes. I'd love to."

"Good, why don't we go see the dragons first? They're so colorful..."

Their voices trailed off as they moved away from Thor and Emma.

Emma turned to Thor. "We do need to talk."

"I know we do, baby. But I need to feel your body against mine first. I need to hold you in my arms at least for a few minutes. Can we do that?"

CHAPTER TWENTY

Emma reached up, feathering her fingers through his thick hair as his lips covered hers. Closing her eyes, she reveled in the knowledge that he wanted her. That he had chosen her to become his consort. No, his Goddess.

All thoughts flew out of her head when his arms tightened around her, crushing her to him. His hands caressed her shoulders, back and hips, moving seductively over her body as he enfolded her in his embrace.

She felt a strange shifting under her and opened her eyes. The standing stones were gone. They were no longer outside. She assumed they were now in the castle they had been standing in front of. Thick stone walls surrounded them. A monstrous four-poster bed sat in the center of the room, beckoning her. She wanted this. She wanted to reaffirm her love for Thor more than anything.

Yes, her home was wherever he was, in his

arms and in his bed.

Thor lifted her in his embrace and cuddled her against his chest as he carried her over to the bed. He laid her down in the center of the soft mattress, and slowly lowered himself over her.

Emma closed her eyes, loving the feel of his warm body against hers. He lowered his head, pressed his lips gently against hers, silently begging for entrance. He tenderly eased his tongue into her mouth. The warm wet velvet brushed against her teeth, caressed every hidden place within the moist heat in an exquisite dance of seduction. She moaned. Her hands reached up to pull him closer, tighter against her.

He moved his mouth from hers, his lips gliding lightly over her skin, skimmed gently over her hammering pulse. Blood rushed through her veins as her body moved instinctively against his, crying out for his possession.

She wrapped her arms around him. The wave of unrelenting desire was so overwhelming, that she clung to him tightly as the world spun around her. Caught between his hard, muscular body and the bed, she reveled in the heavy sensation of his weight pinning her in place. God, how had she managed to keep herself away from him, away from the passion just a touch, a look ignited in her?

His hand skimmed down her body over her

stomach and hips. Her clothes melted away as his hand moved slowly, almost reverently over her body. The cool air brushed her exposed skin, a soft and sensuous caress. Thor raised his head. His sapphire gaze glittered down at her exposed flesh.

She arched her back, pushed her aching breasts up, inviting him to kiss the soft mounds. He reached up, cupped her breast in his hand and brushed his thumb over her taut nipple.

“Your skin is so soft, like silk in my hands.” He lowered his head to kiss the hardening nub.

“I love the way your flesh heats against me, the way your body trembles beneath mine, the way you enjoy the stroke of my hands.”

Her head thrashed on the satiny comforter. She fisted her hands in his silky hair, demanding—without words—that he continue the sensual assault on her senses.

His mouth found hers, moved to her jaw, temple and eyes. Each kiss was gentle, feather-light. Her body responded to his words, his gentle caresses. Thick, creamy heat pooled in her middle, settled between her legs.

A large calloused hand slid over her stomach, down to the juncture of her thighs. He dipped a thick finger into her slick folds and she moaned. His head lowered to her breast and she held him as the heat spiraled and carried her away on a wave of pure sensual pleasure. Each slide of his

fingers in her wet folds, each pull of his mouth on the sensitive tip of her breast, drove her closer to the edge of insanity.

She gasped as his fingers drove deeper, rubbing a spot inside her that made her scream his name in ecstasy.

“Thor!”

He chuckled against her breast, laving his way down her to her belly and lower still to her soft, creamy center. She longed to have him inside her.

“Please,” she begged, as his tongue found the crease of her hip. He tongued the sensitive flesh and she ground her hips up toward him.

“Do you like this?” he asked, delving his tongue deep into her wet folds.

“Yesss,” she mewled. Her hips undulated above the bed, searching for another taste of the paradise of his hot mouth.

Another long, slow lick up the center of her exposed slit and he pulled back chuckling again at her agonized moans.

Pushing her thighs apart, he separated her folds with his fingers and lowered his head to suckle on the little nub.

Emma screamed out her climax as she held his head to her, her fingers buried in his golden hair. Her back arched off the bed, her thighs clenched around his head, keeping him trapped between her legs.

He slowly pulled back, to look at her. He sat up straight, resting on his heels, his cock jutting out in front of him.

She licked her lips. Suddenly, she wanted nothing more than to take his thick length into her mouth and suck him dry. She wanted him at her mercy, begging her for relief. She sat up and took him in her hands.

He sucked in his breath in great gulps, his eyes closed. She smiled. Knowing she could do this to a man was heady. Knowing she did this to a God was a powerful emotion indeed. She got to her knees and pushed him down onto the bed.

"My turn," she breathed in his ear, laving the outer shell. She suckled the lobe into his mouth and he swallowed.

"Are you sure you wan—"

"More sure than anything in my life," she murmured, her fingers against his lips. "Now, lay back and enjoy."

She kissed him gently, trailing her tongue over the seam of his lips. When he opened for her, she plunged her tongue into the moist depths of his mouth, exploring every inch. Pulling back, she trailed kisses down his neck, suckling his flesh over his slamming pulse. Her hands skimmed down over his chest and rock-hard abs, the flesh-like satin over steel.

He sucked in his breath as her fingers skimmed

over his belly, feeling the rigid muscles and the uneven expanse of his washboard stomach. She stopped when her fingers reached the coarse hair at his groin.

She smiled when his hips jerked involuntarily as she pulled her hand away from his heated flesh. Emma followed the same trail with her mouth and tongue. Laving his nipples, she marveled that she could bring him to such a fevered pitch. When she lowered her head and tongued his naval, his hands came up. Tangling his fingers in her hair, he pushed her head down to his groin and his burgeoning shaft.

Wrapping her hand around the base of his erection, she ran her tongue around the velvety head. She smiled at his sharply indrawn breath. Her tongue stroked over the length of his cock, and she relished the fact that she could take him so close to the edge. His body stiffened when she lowered her mouth over his shaft. She pulled back to lick the clear fluid that oozed from the tip. She lowered her head once again, her mouth engulfing him, taking him far down her throat as he thrust his hips forward, over and over.

After a few minutes, he pulled her up and away from him.

“Not like this, baby. Not this time. I want this to be good for you too. If I spill my seed now, I will not be able to give you your woman’s pleasure.”

With almost no warning, Thor threw her back onto the bed and covered her body with his own. His weight pressing her into the bed was erotic, sensual. He slid his foot up and down her leg, as he looked down into her eyes.

"I love you, Emma," he said, his gaze searching.

"I love you, too, Thor," she breathed against his chest.

He shuddered above her when she lapped his nipple. She brought her legs up and wrapped them around his waist. Thor raised himself up on his elbows and positioned himself to enter her, stopping just before he slid into her tight sheath.

"Look at me," he said, kissing her closed eyes. "Look at me and know it is your god and your lover who takes you now."

She opened her eyes, met his gaze and he thrust forward up to the hilt. His sac slapped her bottom as his cock slid forward and touched the mouth of her womb.

He lowered his head, to take her nipple into his mouth. Each strong pull sent her closer to the edge of another orgasm. Her muscles clenched around him and he groaned against her breast. Still, he suckled harder. His teeth scraped her nipple, an erotic abrasion. The pleasure-pain drove her over the edge of another mind-numbing climax.

Her muscles clenched and she screamed his name. Her legs, wrapped around his waist, pulled

him to her, over and over.

The muscles in his neck bulged, the roped muscles on his back clenched as her nails scraped the sensitive flesh. After a few more thrusts he threw his head back and let out a roar as his orgasm over took him and he emptied his seed into her womb.

Thor lowered himself over her, panting. The soft sheen of perspiration covered his body as he kissed her gently. He rolled to the side, taking her with him and tucked her beneath his arm, warm and safe.

She rubbed her foot up and down his leg, loving the feel of the closeness, the way he held her as if he would never let her go. She drifted to sleep, floating on the languorous sea of contentment, lying in her lover's arms.

* * * *

Thor cast a glance back to Emma before he left. She looked so beautiful resting in his bed, wrapped in his blankets. She belonged there. With luck he would soon have children to balance out the powers of the worlds. He needn't worry about the death and destruction that had once awaited them.

Turning he opened the door to leave, thinking to only be gone for a moment before he returned

to his lover's arms.

A flash of light, bright as the sun blinded him for a minute and when he was able to see again, Emma was gone.

"No!" He roared, his voice so loud and fierce, thunder was heard in all the nine worlds.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Thor nearly fell to his knees in a moment of despair. How did this happen? The magic of another of his kind was not supposed to function in his home, just as his magic would not function in another's home. It was a safeguard among their people. Even though they attempted to remain equitable with each other, it did not always work out the way one would expect.

Instead of wallowing in his own grief, he strode through the door in search of his father. There had to be a reason someone had been able to use magical powers in his personal space. He looked for Odin in all the usual places, when he couldn't find him, he resorted to telepathy.

Alfader, someone has breeched the machtlos code. They have entered my home and took my woman.

That does not surprise me. Loki has been restless lately and I would not put it past him to be up to mischief. I have already sent my ravens Hugin and Munin in search of her. My wolves shall go with me

and search as well. They may be old, but their noses are just as strong as ever. He chuckled mirthlessly. You know how hungry and greedy they are. I didn't name them Geri and Freki by accident.

Thor felt as though he should feel a certain sense of comfort, knowing that his father was helping him. It bothered him that someone could actually do something of this magnitude without his father knowing about it. Yet, he knew his father didn't have any desire to bring about Ragnarok. It would mean the end of his own life, as well as the end of the nine worlds.

Hugin and Munin have communicated with me, son. Hugin has found her thoughts and cries echoing throughout the Crystal Caves of Valhalla. Munin remembers seeing Loki near there on their last hunt with the wolves.

At least he had a direction. Even if she weren't there, the trip would give him something to do. He flashed himself to the nearest location to the caves possible and began to walk.

It wasn't wise to use any power so close to the caves and he hoped he would not be forced to. The caves would magnify his power and wreak havoc on Valhalla. The repercussion would be so strong, that the damage may even carry over to Asgard. He could only hope Loki knew that, as well.

* * * *

Emma woke on a raised bed of glass. She sat up and looked around herself. No, it wasn't glass. It appeared to be crystal of some kind. The clear cool stone she found herself lying on was uncomfortable to say the least.

"What happened?" she murmured, glancing around. Noticing a light at the end of a very long, ice-blue tunnel, she stood and began to walk toward it. She didn't notice the shackles that bound her legs to the wall until she fell, flat on her face. The hard crystal cut into her hands and knees as she scrambled to her feet.

Staring down at the glowing bonds on her ankles, she tried to remain calm, even as the fear rushed through her mind, recommending she panic. She shook her head. No. Panicking was not the answer. She reached down and attempted to release the manacles trapping her inside this crystal prison.

What are these damned things made of? She examined her ankles closely. No ties, no hooks or locks, how are they fastened?

She tried to ignore the panic that began to set in. She didn't want to play the part of a shrinking violet. She merely wanted her man to know he could count on her to be calm in a crisis and he didn't even have the common decency to rescue her before she totally lost it.

Cold from the hard stone seeped into her bones. Strange noises made her jump. The distant shriek of birds in the distance was both reassuring and frightening. Gooseflesh pebbled on her skin as the illusion of courageousness she'd woven around her started to crumble.

Tears ran down her cheeks as she realized that whoever was responsible for everything that had happened on Earth, must be the person who brought her here. Thor had mentioned something about Loki. Perhaps he brought her to this place, this prison.

Covering her face with her hands, she attempted to muffle her sobs. Still, every few minutes, she jerked on the strange cord, with the hope that it would finally snap and release her. Hope diminished with each futile tug.

After what seemed like days, she returned to rest on the raised crystal platform that she'd woken upon, curled up into a little ball and cried. She was hungry, thirsty and she needed to go to the bathroom. Whoever imprisoned her in this place apparently didn't care about her needs. The obvious reason she'd been brought to this place blindsided her. Someone brought her here to die.

* * * *

Thor was in a rage by the time he reached the

caves. It could take days to find her here. The caves stretched on for miles, with numerous catacombs. The passages split off in several different directions, each of them thousands of feet in length.

He looked around him. The sparkling cliffs were beautiful, as usual. Made of pure crystal, with semi-precious and precious stones, they sparkled in the bright light of the sun. Prisms of color danced over the landscape, a lovely display of color. He'd wanted to bring Emma here one day to show her the beauty of the cliffs, but he had never wanted her to see them under these circumstances.

Taking a deep breath, he closed his eyes and searched inside himself, trying to find her in his thoughts. Perhaps, if he tried hard enough, he would be able to connect with her on some telepathic level and find her that way. His magic may not work here, so close to the caves, but perhaps his connection with her went deeper than that, deeper than the magic.

After a few minutes, he felt her somewhere deep inside a little corner of his mind. She was indeed here. He focused on her soft sobs as she contemplated her demise, alone in a crystal crypt. When he sensed her hunger, he berated himself for not thinking of the likelihood that no one had fed her.

Rage boiled deep in his gut as he felt her emotions, her hunger, her fear. Even knowing the consequences he would suffer from the Norns for harming another, he wanted nothing more than to kill Loki at that moment.

By the time he found her, she lay curled up on a crystal ledge, sleeping. Her swollen, red-rimmed eyes were closed. Her hands, pressed together under her cheeks, were her only pillow. Her red nose and eyes almost glowed against her pale skin. He thinned his lips and scowled at the golden cord wrapped around each of her legs.

Sitting on the edge of the cold stone, he cupped her cheek, hoping to wake her gently. Her eyes flew open and she pulled away from him with a shriek, her eyes wild. Her wide-eyed gaze darted wildly around the cave before it finally fixed on his face.

"Thor!" She hugged him fiercely, sobbing onto his shoulder. "I—I thought you would never get here. I tried to be brave, I really did."

Reaching up, he smoothed her hair and pressed his cheek against her head, relieved that she was finally where she belonged, in his arms again.

"Shh..." he whispered into her hair. "I got here as quickly as I possibly could." He wrapped her more tightly in his arms. "I was afraid I would never find you in the catacombs. There are hundreds of passages, covering hundreds of miles.

Our connection with each other is what made it possible for me to find you." Setting her away from him, he stood and pulled his hammer from the sheath at his back. "Whatever you do, don't move. I don't want to hit you."

He pulled the cord taut and lifted his hammer. A loud crack rent the air as he slammed the hammer down on the cord. The cord snapped and, no longer connected to the other end, untied itself and slithered from her ankle.

"Now for the other one." Raising his hammer, he aimed for the other one. "Don't move."

Emma squeezed her eyes shut with a nod and sat frozen on the crystal bed.

With another loud crack, she was freed from her bonds. Thor sheathed his hammer, lifted her into his arms and carried her from the caves.

An hour later, they left the caves and he still carried her in his arms. The bright light of the sun still shone down on the sharp rocks of the cliffs. The colorful prisms danced around them in a beautiful display and Emma's mouth dropped open as she gawked at the crystal cliffs surrounding them.

"My, my. That was quick. How did you manage to find her so quickly without your magic, oh great and mighty Thor?"

Thor stiffened, his arms tightening protectively around Emma when he heard the irritating voice

behind him. He turned and faced the prankster, Loki.

“You wouldn’t understand, fool. You would have to care for someone other than yourself, first.” He scowled at the other man. “That is something quite impossible to do since you don’t seem to have a heart.”

He set Emma down on her feet and pushed her behind him when Loki stepped forward with a sneer. Tall and thin, his wavy blonde hair covered his narrow face. It fell over his eyes as he paced erratically in front of them. Though the women always admired Loki’s looks, Thor just didn’t see it. If they only knew that the outside packaging didn’t come close to the self-absorbed God he’d become, they wouldn’t wait in line to grace his bed.

He looked from Loki, then back to his mate who watched Loki with undisguised horror. Perhaps good looks were overrated.

“Don’t underestimate me, Thor.” He waved his arms around. “Everyone always underestimates me.”

“Perhaps there is a reason people do, Loki.” Thor knew his words had the desired effect when Loki stopped his pacing, and strode straight toward him. He stopped just inches from Thor’s grasp and he knew if he pushed Loki just a little more over the edge, the God would overstep the

boundaries, the rules set up to protect each other from attack.

So long as Loki attacked first, Thor could not be blamed for defending himself.

“What did you say, Thor?”

“What, not only can’t you plan an abduction properly, but you can’t hear now as well?” Thor laughed, and just as he’d planned Loki struck out, flashing a golden sword into his hand and swinging it in a giant arc.

Sparks flew as hammer met sword. “Then a battle it shall be, Loki.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Wallowing in his own self importance, Loki danced around Thor waving the magical blade. Thor frowned. How did the fool plan to win when he couldn't even stand still long enough to strike?

Still, Thor resisted the temptation of a first strike. It must be perfectly clear who the instigator was in this matter. The Norns were fickle creatures at best. They did not like others meddling in their affairs. And everything having to do with life, death and destiny was their affair.

A breeze blew in off the cliffs. The warm, sultry air tickled his nostrils with the scent of warm soil and rock. The sun slowly moved ever lower in the sky as Loki continued to dance around him. Thor's arms grew heavy. Holding his hammer became too much of a burden and he longed to set it down in the grass. Yet he held still it. It was his. Why shouldn't he hold it?

He shook his head, trying to focus on his target. His eyes grew heavy, his arms no longer able to hold his beloved hammer.

Emma screeched a warning into his mind, but she was too late.

Loki attacked. Lunging forward, he swung his magical blade and knocked the hammer from his hand. Tired as he was, he dropped to his knees in exhaustion. What the hell was wrong with him? Why couldn't he focus?

"It's some sort of trick. Don't let him put you to sleep. He'll kill you. Dammit, Thor, wake up!"

He shook his head to clear it, finally seeing the draining spell for what it was. If it hadn't been for Emma, Loki would have had him right where he wanted him—lying unconscious on a slab waiting to be sacrificed. He stood and bent to pick up his hammer.

"Shut up, bitch!" Loki screamed, his face mottled red with rage. "I would have had him if not for your big mouth, damn it."

He moved to strike at Emma. Thor stepped in front of him, throwing his hammer up to block a killing blow.

"This is between us, Loki. She isn't a part of this."

"Of course she is." Loki looked at her and sneered, his usually handsome face filled with so much hate, he appeared demonic. "If it wasn't for

your lusting after her like some rutting pig, we would be able to await *Ragnarok* in peace. Instead, you decide to finally give a shit about your believers and go sniffing after her, in some misguided attempt to buy more time for the *nine worlds*."

He struck again, quickly and without warning. Thor expected nothing less from the trickster god. He deflected the second blow meant for his love and attempted to tamp down the rage boiling in his gut for the so-called "God" who would attack an unarmed human woman.

Thunder rumbled in the distance, lightning slashed through the sky. Clouds gathered, blocking out the light of the sun. Gathering his power around him and Emma like a cloak, he raised his hammer to the sky, leaving himself wide open for Loki to strike.

Bolts of lightning struck the ground where the trickster had stood. He appeared behind them, once again ready to strike out at Emma. Thor threw himself in front of her, ready to take the sword in her stead.

Winds ripped around them as his destructive power continued to rage in the storm around them. Lightning struck the face of the crystal cliffs, the force of the blow causing explosions as the shards of crystal and gemstones rained down upon them, driven by the wind.

Desperate, Loki attempted another blow. Just as Thor raised his hammer to the sky for a killing blow, three beautiful women appeared before them.

You shall stop this at once, Loki.

Thor lowered his arm, took Emma's hand and knelt before the three women, pulling her down beside him.

"The Norns," he whispered to her, "Stay on your knees and keep your face averted. Do not do anything to draw their attention to you."

He stood and bowed to the three women. "I..." He glanced down to Emma, excluding her would draw their attention just as quickly as including her would. "We welcome your intervention. Loki is attempting to kill my mate or me, to bring about *Ragnarok*."

The three women looked at Loki and spoke as one. "How do you answer this charge, fool?"

Loki sneered at Thor. "The legends clearly state that every one of us must have children or the end of the world will come. Even *I* have children. Yet Thor does not. And instead of fathering his children on a Goddess as befits his station as the blood son of the Alfader, he goes to earth and sniffs around this human as if she is a bitch in heat."

"And who are you to make this decision, fool?" The three looked at each other, obviously

communicating amongst themselves. "Do you not trust us to do what is right, to ensure that all life unfolds as it should?"

They folded their hands on front of them and took a step forward toward Loki.

"Why do you wish to bring about the end so soon?"

One stepped forward. The soft breeze caused her silvery hair to billow behind her. Like the others, her beauty was almost painful. She looked directly at Emma, and Thor stiffened. He wanted to step in front of her, yet knew it could be considered an insult to the three sisters. No one tempted the Norns, especially this one.

"I am Urd, your fate. Everything that happens to you is my doing," she flicked her gaze to Loki and frowned. "Unless someone meddles where they do not belong."

She turned to indicate her sisters. The redhead stepped forward. Her hair blew around her like fiery strands of crimson silk.

"This is Skuld, your being. Everything you are, everything you will ever be, is approved by her first."

Urd nodded to Skuld and she stepped forward. She rested her hand on Emma's head.

"You have shown us that you have incredible strength, both physical and emotional." She smiled softly. "Your heart is as big as Loki's ego."

You are an acceptable mate for Thor.” Bright waves of energy flowed from her fingertips, “I bestow upon you power befitting the mate of a god. From this day hence you are a goddess.”

Skuld stepped back to flank the last Norn who still stood silent. Her black hair hung straight over her shoulders, untouched by the wind. The shining ebony black strands didn’t move on the wind as did the hair of her other sisters. Urd waved her forward.

“This is my sister Verdandi. She is necessity. Everything you need comes through her.”

“I gift you with many children, knowledge and health.” She smiled. “I also gift your brother with health, since his health is necessary to your well-being.” She looked to Urd. “Now for your fate.”

Urd took another step toward Loki. Ignoring Emma, she addressed the trickster god instead.

“Loki, your fate lies in our hands. There is no defense, no excuse for meddling in the affairs of fate.” She looked back at her sisters, then turned back to him at their nods. “Intruding on destiny is a serious offence. I would be well within my rights to end your existence.”

“But—”

Urd held up her hand when he would have continued.

“Do not interrupt me! You have taken it upon yourself to end the lives of many humans all for

your own gain. I do not want to know why you wish to bring *Ragnarok* to us so quickly. Even now the roots of the great tree are rotting away. A few millennia and the battle will be upon us.'

"If the time was right for such a battle, my sisters and I would not still be pouring mud and the waters from the *Well of Fate* over its branches. If time for the battle was near, we would bring our efforts to an end."

She paced slowly in front of Loki who had gone silent, his eyes cast downward.

"Your hatred of the human race has been noted. We realize you no longer wish to be immortal. Death comes to the most brave and valiant of our people, fool. You are neither. Your death will not serve us."

Skuld and Verdandi stepped forward, flanking their sister. The three of them stood still, their arms raised to the sky, their eyes glowing white. Again the three voices rose as one.

"Punishment of the god Loki has been set. He shall live the rest of his life as a human. He shall die a human unless he learns the human capacity for love."

"No, you can't do this!" Loki cried, running forward in an attempt to stop the spell.

A ball of pure white light shot from the three sisters as he approached. It surrounded him before he disappeared.

The three sisters turned back to Thor and Emma.

“Nothing lasts forever, sister. Even we shall, one day, meet our fates.” They smiled down at her, then Urd separated herself from the others.

Placing her hand on Emma’s head she whispered into her mind. *I gift you with immortality. Your love for Thor knows no bounds, I feel it within you. Your love for him. I also feel your love of your brother. She smiled softly. I also gift you with the knowledge of his fate. Your brother, Alexander, shall have a long, long life. You needn’t worry about him any longer.*

With that she stepped back, and looked at Thor.

“The two of you shall return to earth to care for Alexander.” She paused then turned to Emma. “He shall need your help for many years to come. We shall inform Odin that you will return in six years to fulfill your half of your bargain with him. He will agree,” she said with a small smile, her brow raised. “No one tempts the fates.”

EPILOGUE

Six months later:

Emma hurried back up the stairs after fixing Alex his breakfast and getting him off to school.

She jumped into bed and snuggled up next to Thor.

"Your feet are cold," he mumbled, covering her feet with his own to warm them. "Go back to sleep."

Wrapping her arms around him, she giggled. "You sure do sleep a lot for a god, mister." She tickled his sides until he rolled over and kissed her.

"Mmm. You taste good."

"So do you." She kissed him again. "I figure we have about two hours before our farmhand wakes up and needs breakfast. Wanna play?" She waggled her brows playfully and reached for his

cock. "Good, you're already hard."

Emma leaned forward and kissed his neck, suckling his ear. Trailing kisses over his chest, she grinned when his breath hissed out as she suckled lightly on his flat nipples. His hand fisted in her hair as she moved lower, tonguing his bellybutton.

His cock was rock-hard. She took him into her mouth and hummed as she fondled his sac.

Thor grabbed her head, holding her. He thrust his hips up as his fingers massaged her scalp.

"I love the feel of your mouth on my skin, Emma." His words came out on short gasps as she lightly scraped her teeth over the sensitive flesh of his cock. He groaned, tightening his hands in her hair before he pulled her head back up to kiss her deeply.

He rolled them over, buried his face between her breasts and inhaled deeply.

"You always smell so good. Like vanilla and sunshine." He gave her a lecherous grin. "It makes me want to eat you up."

"Light my fire, baby," she breathed against his lips.

She arched her back into his hands and moaned as he gently pulled and twisted her nipples. When his lips brushed over her skin, took one dusky peak into the heat of his mouth, she groaned. Every touch, every soft caress of his lips made her

tremble. Gooseflesh rose on her skin as he moved his head up and laved the shell of her ear.

“Are you ready for me?” he asked, his gentle hands gliding over her flesh. His hands were everywhere stroking the hardened peaks of her breasts, his warm mouth following the same path. His hands left a fiery trail over her skin to the tight curls at the apex of her thighs. Long fingers dipped into her wet sheath, circled around her swollen clit.

“I love how you’re always so wet for me. How your juices run from your beautiful pussy like honey.”

Slowly trailing kisses down her body, Thor paused to gaze lovingly down at her moist center before he lowered his head. He swiped his tongue through her wet slit and she mewled his name. Reaching down, she fisted her hands in his hair. He grabbed her legs, threw her thighs over his shoulders, lifted her hips into the air and suckled her nether lips.

When his wet velvet tongue brushed over her clit, she whimpered, knowing he would tease her before he would allow her release. He teased them both, she knew. His body thrummed with desire, his muscles tense as he circled her clit with his tongue.

Sobbing out her intense need, she ground her hips against his face as his tongue danced over her

sensitized flesh. He brought her close to the edge, then stopped, leaving her gasping as he waited for the urge to climax pass. Then he started all over again, until he finally brought her over the edge.

"I'm cumming!" she screamed, squeezing her legs tight around his head. Waves of pleasure washed over her as he continued to suckle and lave her clit gently. Her hands released his hair and she collapsed onto the bed, her muscles slack.

"I love to hear you scream as you cum, baby," he said kissing his way back up her limp body.

He moved between her legs, positioning himself at the entrance to her dripping channel.

"Please, Thor" she begged. "Fuck me."

Suddenly, he thrust forward, driving into her with his hard shaft. All sense of time and place left her as her muscles clenched around him. He groaned. His long, thick shaft filled her, pressed deliciously against her womb as he rocked above her.

"You feel so good, baby," he breathed in her ear. "I'm not going to last this time. Every time I think about you carrying my child, it saps my control." He moved into her again, his thrusts measured and gentle.

"I want you out of control." Emma wrapped her legs around his waist, pulling him deeper. "Please, Thor!" She wrapped her arms around his shoulders, her nails scoring his back.

Grabbing her hips, he quickened his pace, thrusting into her deeply. He finally gave her what she wanted, what she needed.

“Yes! Oh, my God, Thor, I’m cumming!”

Thor rose above her, the muscles of his neck stood out as he threw his head back and growled her name. He stiffened above her as her muscles clenched around him, his hips jerked against her, his orgasm taking control. After a moment, he collapsed next to her on the bed and drew her into his arms.

He rested his hand on her rounded stomach and chuckled into her hair when the baby moved beneath his fingers.

“She’s a feisty one, your daughter,” he said, caressing her stomach. “Shall we name her after your mother?”

“What if it’s a boy? Can we name him after my father?” She yawned and snuggled deeper into his embrace, closed her eyes and drifted to sleep.

* * * *

The Norns stood over the large scrying bowl. After the water churned, then stilled, they watched for a moment as the two lovers slept in each other’s arms.

“She will go into labor in two months and sixteen days. It is unusual that a couple would

choose to be ignorant of the child's sex, is it not?" Verdandi asked, a slight frown marring her beautiful face.

Skuld smiled. "I think it is a wise decision that they wait. They await the event with more excitement if they do not know the sex of their child."

"Or how many."

Verdandi and Skuld turned to Urd, each of them raising a brow.

"You cannot make a statement like that without explaining yourself," Verdandi said, receiving a nod of encouragement from Skuld.

Urd stared down into the scrying bowl. A small smile flitted across her face.

"She will have twins, gifting her husband and the Alfader with two beautiful daughters to fawn over."

"What of Loki?" they asked in unison.

The water churned again, then settled to a smooth, glassy surface. Loki appeared in the glistening water sleeping, a frown marring his face as he unconsciously fought the sheets that wrapped tightly around him.

"He will never learn to love," Skuld said, a sneer on her face. "He is too selfish and too pretty."

Verdandi nodded her agreement. "He will die in a few short years. He will die an unloved, bitter

old man. It is such a shame. He could have known such greatness."

Urd kept her own council as she stared down into the bowl. The corners of her mouth turned up in a soft smile. "He shall meet his destiny."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tianna Xander is the author of several paranormal, time-travel and science fiction romance novels. She loves reading everything from romance novels, murder mysteries and encyclopedias, to handbooks on solar energy. Tianna is the first to admit she spends far too much time surfing the internet and chatting with her online friends and critique groups.

Having written four novels and working on at least one more at any given time, Tianna still finds time for her family, friends and her many pets. She currently lives in Michigan with her husband, two children, a pair of cats, two big dogs and one occasionally terrorized Netherland Dwarf bunny. Her life is anything but boring.