

MAGNIUS
CHASE
and the GODS of ASGARD



THE HAMMER OF THOR





ONE

Could You Please Stop Killing My Goat?

LESSON LEARNED: If you take a Valkyrie out for coffee, you'll get stuck with the check and a dead body.

I hadn't seen Samirah al-Abbas in almost six weeks, so when she called out of the blue and said we needed to talk about a matter of life and death, I agreed right away.

(Technically I'm already dead, which means the whole *life-and-death* thing didn't apply, but still . . . Sam sounded anxious.)

She hadn't yet arrived when I got to the Thinking Cup on Newbury Street. The place was packed as usual, so I queued up for coffee. A few seconds later, Sam flew in, *literally*, right over the heads of the café patrons.

Nobody batted an eye. Regular mortals aren't good at processing magical stuff, which is fortunate, because otherwise Bostonians would spend most of their time running around in a panic from giants, trolls, ogres, and *einherjar* with battle axes and lattes.

Sam landed next to me in her school uniform—white sneakers, khaki slacks, and a long-sleeve navy shirt with the KING ACADEMY logo. A green hijab covered her hair. An ax hung from her belt. I was pretty sure the ax wasn't standard dress code.

As glad as I was to see her, I noted that the skin under her eyes was darker than usual. She was swaying on her feet.

“Hey,” I said. “You look terrible.”

“Nice to see you, too, Magnus.”

“No, I mean . . . not terrible like *different than normal* terrible. Just terrible like exhausted.”

“Should I get you a shovel so you can dig that hole a little deeper?”

I raised my hands in surrender. “Where have you been the last month and a half?”

Her shoulders tightened. “My workload this semester has been killing me. I’m tutoring kids after school. Then, as you might remember, there’s my part-time job reaping souls of the dead and running top secret missions for Odin.”

“You kids today and your busy schedules.”

“On top of all that . . . there’s flight school.”

“Flight school?” We shuffled forward with the line. “Like *airplanes?*”

I knew Sam’s goal was to become a professional pilot someday, but I hadn’t realized she was already taking lessons. “You can *do* that at sixteen?”

Her eyes sparkled with excitement. “My grandparents could never have afforded it, but the Fadhlans have this friend who runs a flight school. They finally convinced Jid and Bibi—”

“Ah.” I grinned. “So the lessons were a gift from Amir.”

Sam blushed. She’s the only teenager I know who has a *betrothed*, and it’s cute how flustered she gets when she talks about Amir Fadhlán.

“Those lessons were the most thoughtful, the most considerate . . .” She sighed wistfully. “But enough of that. I didn’t

bring you here to talk about my schedule. We have an informant to meet.”

“An informant?”

“This could be the break I’ve been waiting for. If his information is good—”

Sam’s phone buzzed. She fished it out of her pocket, checked the screen, and cursed. “I have to go.”

“You just got here.”

“Valkyrie business. Possible code three-eight-one: heroic death in progress.”

“You’re making that up.”

“I’m not.”

“So . . . what, somebody thinks they’re about to die and they text you ‘*Going down! Need Valkyrie ASAP!*’ followed by a bunch of sad-face emoticons?”

“I seem to recall taking *your* soul to Valhalla. You didn’t text me.”

“No, but I’m special.”

“Just get a table outside,” she said. “Meet my informant. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

“I don’t even know what your informant looks like.”

“You’ll recognize him when you see him,” Sam promised. “Be brave. Also, get me a scone.”

She flew out of the shop like Super Muslima, leaving me to pay for our order.

I got two large coffees and two scones and found a table outside.

Spring had arrived early in Boston. Patches of dirty snow still clung to the curbs like dental plaque, but the cherry trees

popped with white and red buds. Flowery pastel clothing displays bloomed in the windows of high-end boutiques. Tourists strolled by enjoying the sunshine.

Sitting outside, comfortable in my freshly laundered jeans, T-shirt, and denim jacket, I realized this would be the first spring in three years that I hadn't been homeless.

Last March, I had been scrounging from Dumpsters. I'd been sleeping under a bridge in the Public Garden, hanging out with my buddies Hearth and Blitz, avoiding the cops and just trying to stay alive.

Then, two months ago, I died fighting a fire giant. I'd woken up in the Hotel Valhalla as one of Odin's einherjar warriors.

Now I had clean clothes. I took a shower every day. I slept in a comfortable bed every night. I could sit at this café table, eating food I'd actually paid for, and not worry about when the staff would force me to move along.

Since my rebirth, I'd gotten used to a lot of weird stuff. I'd traveled the Nine Worlds meeting Norse gods, elves, dwarves, and a bunch of monsters with names I couldn't pronounce. I'd scored a magical sword that presently hung around my neck in the form of a runestone pendant. I'd even had a mind-melting conversation with my cousin Annabeth about the *Greek* gods who hung out in New York and made *her* life difficult. Apparently North America was lousy with ancient gods. We had a full-blown infestation.

All of that I'd learned to accept.

But being back in Boston on a nice spring day, hanging out like a regular mortal kid?

That felt strange.

I scanned the crowd of pedestrians, looking for Sam's informant. *You'll recognize him when you see him*, she'd promised. I wondered what kind of information this guy had, and why Sam considered it life-and-death.

My gaze fixed on a storefront at the end of the block. Over the doorway, the brass-and-silver sign still gleamed proudly: BLITZEN'S BEST, but the shop was shuttered. The front door window was papered over on the inside, with a message hastily scrawled in red marker: CLOSED FOR REMODELING. BACK SOON!

I'd been hoping to ask Samirah about that. I had no idea why my old friend Blitz had abruptly disappeared. One day a few weeks ago, I'd just walked by the shop and found it closed. Since then, there'd been no word from Blitzen or Hearthstone, which wasn't like them.

Thinking about this made me so preoccupied I almost didn't see our informant until he was right on top of me. But Sam was correct: He kind of stood out. It's not every day you see a goat in a trench coat.

A porkpie hat was wedged between his curly horns. A pair of sunglasses perched on his nose. His trench coat kept getting tangled in his back hooves.

Despite his clever disguise, I recognized him. I'd killed and eaten this particular goat on another world, which is the sort of bonding experience you don't forget.

"Otis," I said.

"*Shhh*," he said. "I'm incognito. Call me . . . *Otis*."

"I'm not sure that's how *incognito* works, but okay."

Otis, aka Otis, climbed into the chair I'd reserved for Sam. He sat on his back haunches and put his front hooves on the table. "Where is the Valkyrie? Is she incognito, too?"

He peered at the nearest pastry bag as if Sam might be hiding inside.

“Samirah had to go reap a soul,” I said. “She’ll be back soon.”

“It must be nice having a purpose in life,” Otis sighed. “Well, thank you for the food.”

“That’s not for—”

Otis snapped up Sam’s scone bag and began to eat it, paper and all.

At the table next to us, an older couple glanced at my goat friend and smiled. Maybe their mortal senses perceived him as a cute child or a funny pet dog.

“So.” I had a hard time watching Otis devour the pastry, spraying crumbs across the lapels of his trench coat. “You had something to tell us?”

Otis belched. “It’s about my master.”

“Thor.”

Otis flinched. “Yes, him.”

If I worked for the thunder god, I would have flinched when I heard Thor’s name, too. Otis and his brother, Marvin, pulled the god’s chariot. They also provided Thor with a never-ending supply of goat meat. Each night, Thor killed and ate them for dinner. Each morning, Thor resurrected them. This is why you should go to college, kids—so when you grow up you do not have to take a job as a magical goat.

“I finally have a lead,” Otis said, “on that *certain object* my master is missing.”

“You mean his ham—?”

“Don’t say it aloud!” Otis warned. “But, yes . . . his *ham*.”

I flashed back to January, when I’d first met the thunder

god. Good times around the campfire, listening to Thor fart, talk about his favorite TV shows, fart, complain about his missing hammer, which he used to kill giants and stream his favorite TV shows, and fart.

“It’s *still* missing?” I asked.

Otis clacked his front hooves on the tabletop. “Well, not *officially*, of course. If the giants knew for certain that Thor was without his you-know-what, they would invade the mortal worlds, destroy everything, and send me into a very deep funk. But unofficially . . . yes. We’ve been searching for months with no luck. Thor’s enemies are getting bolder. They sense weakness. I told my therapist it reminds me of when I was a kid in the goat pen and the bullies were sizing me up.” Otis got a faraway look in his yellow slit-pupil eyes. “I think that’s when my traumatic stress started.”

This was my cue to spend the next several hours talking to Otis about his feelings. Being a terrible person, I did not do that.

“Otis,” I said, “the last time we saw you, we found Thor a nice iron staff to use as a backup weapon. He’s not exactly defenseless.”

“No, but the staff is not as good as the . . . *ham*. It doesn’t inspire the same fear in the giants. Also, Thor gets cranky trying to watch his shows on the staff. The screen is tiny and the resolution is terrible. I don’t like it when Thor is cranky. It makes it hard for me to find my happy space.”

A lot about this did not make sense: why Thor would have so much trouble locating his own hammer; how he could possibly have kept its loss a secret from the giants for so long; and the idea that Otis the goat would have a happy space.

“So Thor wants our help,” I guessed.

“Not officially.”

“Of course not. We’ll all have to wear trench coats and glasses.”

“That’s an excellent idea,” Otis said. “Anyway, I told the Valkyrie I would keep her updated since she is in charge of Odin’s . . . you know, special missions. This is the first good lead I’ve gotten to the location of the *certain object*. My source is reliable. He’s another goat who goes to the same psychiatrist. He overheard some talk in his barnyard.”

“You want us to track down a lead based on barnyard gossip you heard in your psychiatrist’s waiting room.”

“That would be great.” Otis leaned so far forward I was afraid he might fall out of his chair. “But you’re going to have to be careful.”

It took all my effort not to laugh. I’d played catch-the-lava-ball with fire giants. I’d eagle-skied over the rooftops of Boston. I’d pulled the World Serpent out of Massachusetts Bay and defeated Fenris Wolf with a ball of yarn. Now this goat was telling me to be careful.

“So where is the *ham*?” I asked. “Jotunheim? Niflheim? Thorfartheim?”

“You’re teasing.” Otis’s sunglasses slipped sideways on his snout. “But the *ham* is in a different dangerous location. It’s in Provincetown.”

“Provincetown,” I repeated. “On the tip of Cape Cod.”

I had vague memories of the place. My mom had taken me there for a weekend one summer when I was about eight. I remembered beaches, saltwater taffy, lobster rolls, and a bunch

of art galleries. The most dangerous thing we'd encountered was a seagull with irritable bowel syndrome.

Otis lowered his voice. "There is a barrow in Provincetown—a *wight's* barrow."

"Is that like a wheelbarrow?"

"No, no. A wight . . ." Otis shuddered. "Well, a wight is a powerful undead creature that likes to collect magical weapons. A wight's tomb is called a—a *barrow*. Sorry, I have a hard time talking about wights. They remind me of my father."

That raised another batch of questions about Otis's childhood, but I decided to leave them for his therapist.

"Are there a lot of lairs of undead Vikings in Provincetown?" I asked.

"Only one, as far as I know. But that's enough. If the *certain object* is there, it will be difficult to retrieve—underground, and guarded by powerful magic. You'll need your friends—the dwarf and the elf."

That would have been great, if I had any idea where those friends were. I hoped Sam knew more than I did.

"Why doesn't Thor go and check this barrow himself?" I asked. "Wait . . . let me guess. He doesn't want to draw attention. Or he wants us to have a chance to be heroes. Or it's hard work and he has some shows to catch up on."

"To be fair," Otis said, "the new season of *Jessica Jones* did just start streaming."

It's not the goat's fault, I told myself. He does not deserve to be punched.

"Fine," I said. "When Sam gets here, we'll talk strategy."

"I'm not sure I should wait with you." Otis licked a crumb

off his lapel. "I should have mentioned this earlier, but you see, someone . . . or *something* . . . has been stalking me."

The hairs on my neck tingled. "You think they followed you here?"

"I'm not sure," Otis said. "Hopefully my disguise threw them off."

Oh, great, I thought.

I scanned the street but saw no obvious lurkers. "Did you get a good look at this someone-slash-something?"

"No," Otis admitted. "But Thor has all sorts of enemies who would want to stop us from getting his—his *ham* back. They would not want me sharing information with you, especially this last part. You have to warn Samirah that—"

THUNK.

Living in Valhalla, I was used to deadly weapons flying out of nowhere, but I was still surprised when an ax sprouted from Otis's furry chest.

I lunged across the table to help him. As the son of Frey, god of fertility and health, I can do some pretty awesome first aid magic given enough time. But as soon as I touched Otis, I sensed that it was too late. The ax had pierced his heart.

"Oh, dear." Otis coughed blood. "I'll just . . . die . . . now."

His head lolled backward. His porkpie hat rolled across the pavement. The lady sitting behind us screamed as if just now noticing that Otis was not a cute puppy dog. He was, in fact, a dead goat.

I scanned the rooftops across the street. Judging from the angle of the ax, it must have been thrown from somewhere up there . . . yes. I caught a flicker of movement just as the

attacker ducked out of sight—a figure in black wearing some sort of metal helmet.

So much for a leisurely cup of coffee. I yanked the magical pendant from my neck chain and raced after the goat assassin.