The Prince and the Prankster

by QuestionableCertainty (NanaAdder)

Summary

When Lizzie Donovan meets Loki of Asgard, she hates him, wishing she'd had the wherewithal to do more than just slap him. However, as she is thrown in his company more, she begins to realize that perhaps there is more to the man than the bitter facade he puts up. She decides to help him on the road to rehabilitation, hoping to bring him to a point where she thinks he should be to defeat the impending attack by the Mad Titan. But when her own past comes back to haunt her, and her own lies are revealed, will his trust be shaken to a point where he reverts back to where he had been? Or will he decide to forgive and forget, becoming the Prince of Asgard that he once was?
Odin stood in front of his throne, his helmet of gold gleaming in the light which came in through the court windows. He had a grim look upon his face, a determined solemnity which dared anyone to try to contradict him; while his eyes gazed down upon his adopted son with sadness. How long had he raised Loki as his son, shielding him from the truth of his heritage... only to find that those very lies were the things which estranged Loki in the end?

Now, here his son stood, a muzzle preventing him from using his manipulating ways; from using his renown 'silvertongue'. Here he stood, green eyes staring up at him, awaiting his sentencing for his attempted destruction of Midgard.

"Loki... Odinson..." the King began, "The evidence has been brought against you, and you have been charged with attempted fratricide, attempted destruction of Jotunheim, and invasion of Midgard." he looked at his son, "Therefore, you shall be stripped of your power, which you have used for the destruction of others. You shall be sent to the Tower of Solitude, henceforth, where you shall have time to consider your actions, and hopefully learn to regret that which you have done."

Loki turned his gaze toward Frigga, eyes pleading with her to do something. Although he felt nothing but disdain for Odin and Thor, Frigga was the only one who he had truly felt had made him apart of the family – the only one he still considered as his mother... but she could only look at him just as pitifully. There was no way that she would openly disregard Odin’s decision, despite her love for Loki.

His glare then turned to Odin, and Thor who stood beside him. His 'brother' had been the only one to speak in his defense, or else he would have – no doubt – been banished to the Isle of Silence. Thor had said that Loki had been influential in his regaining his place in Asgard, as he would not have learned his lesson on Midgard unless Loki had sent the Destroyer... but that had only swayed the sentencing from certain death, to indefinite imprisonment. He was sure he would have preferred death, as imprisonment seemed to just add insult to injury. They still were trying to lie and say that he was apart of their family. And yet – he had not been allowed to speak.

"I, Odin, hereby take from you your powers." Loki could feel a tingling beginning to go through him, intense pain starting to replace it as his powers were extracted from him. He screamed behind the muzzle as he fell to the ground, but the sound was not heard by those present, who looked on with very little pity. Thor almost stepped forward, but Frigga held up a hand, shaking her head as she watched her younger son, in sorrow. The feeling dissipated, and Loki stood, his head held high as he felt a strange emptiness inside of him. He glared at his father, hating the fact that he had made him so weak...

"Sentencing has been carried out." Odin boomed throughout the court, "May the prisoner be taken to the place of his punishment."

The guard which surrounded Loki pushed him toward the doors, and escorted him to his new cell.

Phillip Dale walked down the hallway to his office in the marketing branch of Stark Tower. Being forty-five, and in charge of the entire department was something he found rather enjoyable. He had worked all his life to be in management, and now he was. After all, being a workerbee was a bit of a boring task for him, as he enjoyed being in charge instead. He couldn't help it, it was his nature.

He was early for once, that Monday morning, happy that he'd been able to wear his white shirt
without ruining it once during breakfast. Quite an achievement, considering the color white was his bane, he usually couldn't go for an hour without marking in it some fashion.

"Good morning, Mr. Dale." his secretary, Miss Hope, greeted. "Having a good day?"

"Yes, I think I am." Phillip replied, "Any messages?"

Miss Hope nodded, pushing her cokebottle glasses higher on her nose, her grey eyes scanning her notepad. "Uh, yes. You have an appointment at nine, and another at eleven."

"I'm also having lunch with my wife at twelve." he added.

"And don't forget the staff meeting at two, and the conference with the legal department at three." Miss Hope replied.

"And we have the proposals that have to get done by Friday."

"Sounds like we're going to be busy." she chuckled.

Phillip laughed, "Tell me about it." he said, going to walk into his office.

"Oh, sir, this was left under the door when I came in." she said, passing him a envelope which had his name scrawled in very elegant handwriting. Uh oh.

Opening it up, his worst fears were realized as he realized who it was from. "Dammit no!" he shouted, opening his office and running in. "I am going to have her head!" he shouted as he stormed back out of his office.

Meanwhile, on the legal floor, Elizabeth Donovan was showing her co-workers her most recent prank and Mr. Dale's reaction, using the recording system in the building which she had hacked – well, that she had been allowed to hack. She had glued his office, right down to the coffee cup on the desk, to the ceiling using a Stark-tested glue which would hold such weight. It was her best prank yet, and surely could not be topped by the equally pranking Phillip Dale. He had started it, but her grandmother had always told her to finish on top.

"Not even Langley can save her this time!" Phillip shouted as he stormed back down the marketing hallway, going into the the elevator and pushing the buttons a little too hard. His poor secretary waited until his stomping around the floor was no longer heard before she burst out laughing, calling the others in the office to come and see.

"Is something wrong, Mr. Dale?" Jarvis, the AI in the building asked the perturbed manager in the elevator, faux concern lacing its tone.

"Lizzie, you're so dead when he tells Mrs. Langley." Pat Morris told her, watching on her i-pad as the manager fumed.

"Ack, what can he do?" Lizzie asked, pushing a long lock of brown hair out of her face, "I work for Langley, not Dale. He can't fire me, and the worst she can do is forbid me from pulling a prank until April Fools – which wouldn't be too hard. This sneaky stuff is hard work."

"You seem to be good at it." Mark Miller replied, "Are you sure you're not related to James Bond or something."

Lizzie laughed, "Ha! I can see it now." she said, jumping down from the desk, and using her deepest
Thor walked into the throne room, unsure of why he had been summoned. It had been two years in Asgard since the Chitauri invasion of New York, the time passing differently on earth than the golden realm; the royal family still somewhat in mourning over what had happened to the fallen son of Asgard. Loki still sat in the Tower of Solitude, carrying out his sentence completely alone. Although Frigga had mourned her lost son, she did not speak of the younger prince... it simply brought about too much pain and guilt.

Thor still loved his brother, but he knew his father's decision for his brother's indefinite imprisonment was as merciful as he could be. Some Asgardians believed that Odin had gone too easy on Loki, stripping him of his powers and incarcerating him; believing that the prince should have been sent somewhere worse, or even executed for his crimes. Thor could only hope his brother would repent of his deeds, and one day be brought back into the family. For now, he waited to find out what his father wanted from him.

"Thor, there you are!" Frigga greeted, embracing him. "How did things go on Midgard?"

"Well, New York is rebuilding. Its slow, but they're making progress, the Avengers are very helpful in that aspect." he said.

"I'm glad to hear that. The mortals have always been so, let us hope nothing ever makes them lose their endurance." Frigga replied.

"Thor, I'm afraid we have some bad news." Odin said, bringing Thor's attention to the fact that Heimdall was in the room. Not much could get the gatekeeper to leave his post, Thor concluded that whatever his father had to tell him, it had to be serious to have pulled the gatekeeper from the remnants of the bifrost.

"What is it?" Thor asked.

Odin looked to Heimdall, whose all-seeing eyes seemed to look right past Thor. "There seems to be a force building in the outer reaches of the nine realms." Heimdall boomed, "The Mad Titan."

Thor looked at his parents, "The being who assisted Loki in his attack on earth." he said.

"Yes, apparently he has not forgotten how Loki failed him." Heimdall affirmed, "Nor has he
forgotten his want of the Cosmic Cube, and Hel's demand for her love. He is building an army, and intends to try to attack Midgard once again."

This caught the Prince's attention. "Again?" he repeated, "Midgard is weak at present, they cannot withstand another attack; and Thanos would be much more impacting than Loki ever was."

"That is why you were called here, my son." Odin replied, "We're going to need your assistance."

"We need you to speak with Loki." Frigga interjected.

"Loki?" Thor repeated, "How long do we have, Heimdall?"

"Not very long, my prince. He is almost ready to move." the gatekeeper answered.

The king and queen of Asgard shared a glance. "Loki has the most information on how to deal with the Other and the Mad Titan." Odin said, "We need his help. Midgard needs his help."

"What if he refuses?" Thor asked.

"We need his help, son," Frigga spoke, the love for Loki evident in her tone.

"Thanos will use Midgard as a vantage to Asgard, and from there the rest of the nine realms. Midgard must be protected." Odin replied.

Thor looked between his parents, then to Heimdall. "Hopefully Loki is willing to listen."

"That is what we all hope, Thor." Frigga replied

Lizzie looked out on the stormy weather, wondering where on earth it had come from. The morning had started out clear enough, the Weather Channel not aware of any kind of fronts moving in... but it seemed the guesserologists had guessed wrong again, and the rain had come pouring down as she waited for her sister to come into the lobby so they could go home.

She wondered what her seanmháthair – or grandmother if you didn't speak Gaelic – had decided to make for dinner. She had to hand it to the woman, she was a brilliant cook. Then again, she had come from the old country, and had only moved to America after her husband had died. Seeing as she had to raise two granddaughters, she figured that America was a better place to settle down than Cork, Ireland. More opportunities for everything.

"Lizzie, are you seriously looking out on the rain?" a voice called out from behind her. Lizzie chuckled, turning back to her twin sister.

"Yes, Bella, I am. I like the rain in case you haven't noticed." Lizzie said.

Bella shook her strawberry-blond hair out of her eyes. "Oh, I have. Wasn't it supposed to be sunny today, though?" she asked.

Lizzie snorted, "Yeah, that never stopped the weather." she said as they both braved the rain to get a taxi home.

"Where to?" the driver asked.

"230 Seeley St, Brooklyn." Bella replied, taking off her heels and allowing her feet to relax.

"Both to Brooklyn?" the driver inquired again. A blond and brown eyebrow rose at him, "Alright,
Brooklyn it is."

To be confused of why both women wanted to go to the same place was understandable – the sisters looked nothing alike. Yes, they were twins, but somehow they’d managed to wind up on opposite ends of the gene pool. While Bella was tall, Lizzie was short; Bella was fair with freckles, Lizzie was darker with olive skin. The only thing they had in common was the shape of their eyes, but the color contrasted that as Bellas were a startling color of blue and Lizzies were brown. Yet, they were sisters, there was no doubt about it. Even in school everyone knew that they were so close that no one dared to drive a wedge in between them... not even their boyfriends.

"How was work?" Lizzie asked her sister.

Bella sighed, "Interesting. I take it that you were the one who played that little prank on Mr. Dale?"

Lizzie ducked her head with a chuckle, "Is that where you were all weekend?"

"Hey, stuff like that takes time." Lizzie retorted.

"What did Mrs. Langley say?" Bella asked.

Lizzie shrugged, "Nothing, just a slap on the wrist with a 'no pranks till April' thing... then after Mr. Dale was gone she congratulated me on my ingenuity. The woman is a closet pranker." she replied as the cab stopped in front of their building. Getting out, Lizzie paid the cabbie, racing her sister to the door as they both tried to get out of the rain. "You only won because you took off your heels." she complained as they went inside.

"We're home!" Bella shouted once the door closed, shaking her blond tresses from the moisture which had formed.

"Oh, 'ello darlings." an Irish accent came as the red-headed elderly woman came out of the kitchen. Her age and her looks had never matched, as her hair was still vibrantly red at the ripe old age of seventy-eight, indeed for Kathleen Donovan had always been known for looking rather young for her age. "I just finished up the stew, it'll be ready in about ten minutes." Lizzie and Bella took turns kissing the woman on the cheek. "How was work?"

"Ugh, droll as usual." Bella replied as she collapsed on the couch, "I had Mr. Tyson yapping in my ear all day about how I was doing the books wrong, he wouldn't leave me alone. But Lizzie had some fun, I heard."

"Oh?" Kathleen exclaimed, "And what did darling Elizabeth do?"

"Played a prank on Mr. Dale." Lizzie answered, "I glued his furniture to the ceiling, caused quite a ruckus."

Kathleen fixed her granddaughter with a stare, "And did you tell Mr. Dale how to get it back down?" she asked, her wooden spoon sitting menacingly in her hand.

"Did you raise me to only play a prank that could be reversed, and never stick it out for too long lest you harm the pranked?" Lizzie asked.

"That doesn't answer the question, young woman."

"You did, and by the end of the day, he was happily finishing up his work at a desk on the floor. Quite ingenious if you ask me, I thought it was something which couldn't be topped." Lizzie said smugly.
"Until, of course, you top it." Bella quipped.

Her sister scoffed, "Well, I am the best."

"Humble too."

"That's enough, the pair of you. Go get into some clothes you won't mind dirtying, and come help me in the kitchen." she said, shooing them off. "And don't take forever Lizzie, or there won't be any food for you tonight."

"Yes, seanmháthair!" Lizzie and Bella called back, doing as ordered before dinner.

Loki sat in his cell, a book ever-so-casually in his lap. He had been here for what seemed like forever, and had resigned himself – bitterly – to the fact that he probably would be there forever. 'To think on his actions' that is what Odin said, but Loki spent most of his time brooding; pondering on when it was that he had first began to notice his family's distance from himself. When he noticed that he was different than they – and he wondered what would have happened had he never gone to Jotunheim with Thor that fateful day... would he still be living under the illusion that he was Odin's son?

The doors to his cell opened, but he did not look up. After two years of having his tray of food delivered to him by a fellow prisoner who had been made a mute, he did not even care if the man was present; he wouldn't talk back anyway. However, the familiar sound of his tray being set up was not present before the door shut, and he looked up all the same – then seeing who it was, he went back to looking at his book.

"What are you doing here?" he asked the Prince of Asgard, "Shouldn't you be off saving Midgardians from some horrible catastrophe, or starting a war with some unassuming realm?"

"I am here for one purpose Loki." Thor replied, "Heimdall has seen something from your previous ally."

Loki looked up once more, "Oh? And how does that concern me? I'm currently trapped in a tower – compliments of the Allfather – and have no means of escape, if that's what you're worried about. Whatever the Other is planning is not my concern anymore." he replied tersely.

"This has nothing to do with you, or the Other." Thor insisted, "It has to do with the Mad Titan."

Green eyes darkened, memories of what he had been warned about. 'There is nowhere we won't find you.' He looked at Thor. "Again, what has that got to do with me?"

"I need your help." Thor answered, walking further into the room.

Loki scoffed, "My help?" he echoed, "Oh, that is rich Odinson. Get the convicted criminal to help you get another criminal."

"Nevertheless," Thor began, "You are the only one who can help us."

"Oh... is that so?"

"Whatever gave you the idea that I liked Mike Shannon?" Lizzie asked Bella as arrived at work the following Friday. Bella rolled her eyes, a smirk on her lips.
"Perhaps because you talked to him the majority of the night?" Bella supplied. "You were there to see Courtney, and you wound up talking to her brother the entire night."

Lizzie huffed, "I was just being polite." she muttered, "He wouldn't stop talking – hell, I can't even recall half of what he said."

Bella chuckled as they went into the elevator, "Yeah, sure."

"Oh, come on..." Lizzie said exasperatedly, "He's too boring for me. I like a guy who can engage my mind, and make me think."

"Good luck, Liz." Bella replied as the elevator dinged, announcing that they had made it to accounting. "This is my floor, I'll see you at lunch."

"Sure, same as usual?" Lizzie asked as the doors closed.

Bella nodded as she walked away, leaving Lizzie to ascend to her floor. As she exited the elevator, the hum of office workers could be heard throughout the floor. After ease dropping a bit, Lizzie could make out what was going on. Apparently Mr. Stark had a visitor of the otherworldly kind. Thor had returned to New York, with a cloaked figure in tow, and everyone wanted to know who it was – and no one had any answers.

"Good morning Lizzie." Pat greeted, pushing a frizzy curl behind her ear. "Did you hear the news?"

Lizzie snorted, placing her starbucks coffee on her desk as she adjusted her blazer to hide the coffee stain she had already acquired on her white blouse. "Something about a cloaked figure arriving with the guy who called down lightening from the sky during the invasion?" she said, sitting down and starting up her computer.

"Yeah, how'd you know?" Pat asked.

"Uh, none of the women around here are very subtle... especially when it comes to gossip." Lizzie replied, shuffling papers around her desk."Hey, have you seen the proposal for the Baxter Building?"

"Mrs. Langley sent it off this morning. Apparently Mr. Stark finally signed it." Pat replied.

"About time." Lizzie muttered, taking a sip of coffee, burning her tongue.

A head popped over the cubicle wall. "Hey Donovan, you're wanted by Langley upstairs. You might want to get up there ASAP."

"Great." Lizzie said, "R&D?"

Gene snickered, "You wish. Don't look at me like that, everyone knows you have a crush on Dr. Banner." Lizzie's face got red as she reached up to smack Gene, but he ducked last minute. "Anyways, she wants you up in the apartments."

It was Pat's turn to snicker as she looked at Lizzie's incredulous look. "Why does she want me up there?" she asked.

"She has something she wants to talk to you personally about. Something that has sensitive material." Gene answered, "But if I were you, I wouldn't keep her waiting."

Lizzie stood up, "Thank you Gene, I know how to do my job." she snapped, heading for the elevators. Once inside, she asked Jarvis why it was she had been sent for.

"I couldn't tell you, Miss Elizabeth. I can assure you Mrs. Langley hasn't informed me." Jarvis
answered, "I'm sorry."

"No problem, I'm just surprised I'm being allowed above the thirty-ninth floor." she muttered to herself.

"It was Mrs. Langley's personal wish, she argued with Mr. Stark for quite some time before he conceded and allowed your clearance level upped." Jarvis said.

"Upped?" Lizzie repeated, pinching herself "I must be dreaming."

"I'm afraid you're very much awake, Miss Elizabeth." Jarvis said dryly as the doors opened, "Welcome to Mr. Stark's personal quarters. Mrs. Langley is down the hall, turn left, then the room to the right. She's waiting for you."

"Thank you Jarvis." Lizzie said, heading down the hall. Mrs. Langley was there as Jarvis had said, reading a book.

"Oh, Lizzie, there you are." she said, flipping her brown hair out of her eyes as she stood up to greet Lizzie. Mrs. Emma Langley was quite young, at only twenty-five, who had taken the twenty-year-old Lizzie under her wing the moment the girl applied for an internship. Ever since, she had treated her like a younger sibling. "Look, I need you to do something for me."

"So I heard. Emma, I hope everything is alright." Lizzie replied.

"Well, let's put it this way: I'm going to be having an extended stay with Mr. Stark due to some information which I just got." Emma retorted, "Can you get Andrew from my mom's house and bring him here? As well as bring a few of my things from my apartment."

"Of course. That's no trouble at all." Lizzie replied, "Can I ask why it is that you didn't just call me or something?"

"Because no one else is to know that I'm staying in the tower. Safety-wise its a bad idea, you can tell my mom that I'm on a business trip for Mr. Stark, and I don't know when I'll get back. Tell her I'm in Europe or something – you're creative." Emma replied, "Just don't tell her where I really am."

Lizzie nodded, "Anything else?"

"No, that should be it. If there is anything else I'll let you know when you come back up here." Emma said, "Thank you so much for this."

"Hey, no problem. Its all apart of the job description." Lizzie replied, "After all, I did decided not to be the paper girl."

"You were a marvelous paper girl." Emma teased.

Lizzie looked around, "So this is the infamous Apartment... I'm disappointed."

Emma scoffed, "Disappointed? How?"

"I was expecting hovering chairs, and all sciencey. It looks too normal to be Iron Man's." she replied as Emma chuckled.

"Well, maybe in another ten or twenty years, we'll see how he decides to decorate." Emma said.

"Alright, well I'll get going. Spread the word – what time does Andrew get off of school?"

"3:30." Emma answered, thanking Lizzie once again for her help.
Leaving the room, Lizzie couldn't help but get a little lost when it came to the directions, and she accidentally wound up making a wrong turn. "Jarvis, which way is the elevator?" she asked, finally remembering the AI was there to help her.

"Turn left, Miss Elizabeth." it instructed, but she wasn't prepared when she suddenly found herself faceplanted into a leather-covered chest.

"Watch where you're going!" the silky voice above her said as she righted herself, looking up at the person she had run into.

"Oh my god, I'm so sorry I didn't notice-" her gaze turned upwards, and she looked at him properly.

It was him. The man – or alien – who had tried to take over her city, her world. She couldn't believe that he was here of all places. It had been eight months since the attack, but she still woke up in a cold sweat as she remembered running around Manhattan trying to find Bella in the madness that was New York City. All because of this bastard.

She'd never seen him upclose, but there was no question in her mind that it was him. Eyes wide, and mouth agape she began backing away from him, not quite sure how to react. She looked him over, from his sleek black hair, to his aristocratic features – all in all she found him incredibly attractive. Who couldn't? His eyes simply bored into you, their green hue something which she had never seen before. His figure was lithe, but not skinny like most guys her age, which a girl like her appreciated.

"Were you not going somewhere?" he asked with a smirk, noticing her wide eyes appraising him thoroughly.

His voice seemed to snap her out of her reverie, and she remembered that behind this pretty shell was a killer. Narrowing her eyes, she slapped him as hard as possible, watching as his head actually turned with the blow. His eyes turned back to hers, a sad look lingering for a moment before his haughty mask returned. "How dare you?"

"How dare I?" she retorted with a scoff, "I do believe you tried to take over my planet. I think that I have every right to dare," she slapped him again, "Because one slap is not enough for the damage you incurred, you selfish bastard."

Green eyes narrowed as he wished he had his magical powers – the girl would be destroyed in a second. Sure, he took a moment to admire her bravery, as foolish as it was, but he couldn't help but want her destruction. Her pretty little face would be no more as she was reduced to dust. He was a god, and yet she had hit him hard enough to make a sting. If only...

"Loki!" the voice of the man out of time broke through his red haze, "We need you." Captain Rogers said, defensive as he watched the Asgardian. He had watched Lizzie slap him, knowing the girl was probably somewhat idiotic in that respect. He nodded in her direction, and she replied in kind.

"Yeah Rock of Ages, lets go. Stop tormenting the girl and get back in here, we have a job to do." Mr. Stark added. Loki didn't move.

"Loki!" A booming voice shouted from the other room. Thor. "Now!"

Loki looked at the girl a moment longer, threatening her with his eyes. Yet, she stood undaunted, a challenging brow rising. She wasn't afraid of him. Curious, he hadn't met a mortal that hadn't feared him at least slightly; well, exempting the Avengers, but they didn't count. But no one dared to slap him, not if they wished to live. Yet, she had managed to – twice! Curse the Allfather for making him so weak!
"Loki..." Captain America repeated lowly, daring the god to make a move toward Lizzie's demise. With a huff, the god of mischief turned on his heel, stomping away from the infuriating mortal.

Lizzie stood rooted in her place, wondering if that had just happened. "Yep, it did." Tony Stark said from a few feet away. She looked at him incredulously, "You're Lizzie Donovan aren't you?" she nodded, still unable to form words from the shock. "I told Emma that giving you higher clearance was a bad idea."

That snapped her out of it. "I'm sorry, Mr. Stark, I got lost. Jarvis was instructing me on how to get back to the elevator when I ran into... him." she replied.

"Yeah, well go get unlost, Puppy. You don't need to be wandering around here." Mr. Stark retorted, pointing in the directions of the elevators. "Go that way."

"Yes, sir." Lizzie walked down the hall, the doors of the elevator opened as she approached, allowing her just to in.

As the elevator descended back to her floor, she mentally kicked herself. She was brilliant, the top of her class, the assistant to the legal aid of Tony Stark!

And all she had managed to do was slap the bastard who tried to take over New York. Slapped! It probably hadn't even hurt him! She groaned as her mind then decided to go through all the other options she had before her. If only she'd thought of them then, she could have mentally thrown that bastard to wherever it was he came from.

Yet, she had not. That thought in mind, she made her way out of the building.
Loki was fuming sat down in Tony Stark's living room, purposefully ignoring the irritated looks thrown his way. He knew that they had all witnessed his little encounter with the mortal in the hallway, and knew they all had expected him to lash out, ready to defend her little life if need be. He snickered inwardly, wondering just how they would have reacted if he had actually given into impulse, but then he knew he would be back where he started; and that would be no good. After all, he had been allowed out of the Tower to 'help' the Midgardians... no need to muck that up before he could be 'reformed' and allowed to do as he wished. Yet, he vaguely wondered if he'd see the girl again, perhaps without the Avengers to protect her...

As everyone sat down, he did a headcount. Stark was there, a glass of whiskey to keep him company; Banner had come, but only as he held onto a young blonde's hand, whose blue eyes were watching Loki with interest as she spoke in a soothing voice to the Hulk's smaller personality. The Captain had also attended, his gaze continually flickering to the door where Loki knew a woman was, then back to him. It was obvious to him that the Captain was worried about her being in such close proximity to the god of mischief. He had to smile, it was endearing to watch.

He also noticed a certain couple of assassins missing. He couldn't be surprised, knowing that the Hawk and Widow were likely to wish to avoid him after what had happened. Understandably so, but still, it would have been interesting to see the two of them sending their most threatening glares his way – it wasn't as if they could hurt him. He touched his jaw gingerly, the place where the girl had slapped him was throbbing gently; perhaps they would be able to harm him. Either that or she was strong for her size.

"Well, Reindeer Games, now that we're all assembled, perhaps you can enlighten us to what Purple and Deadly can do?" Stark was the first to speak, sipping on his drink, his arc reactor no longer glowing underneath his shirt.

"'Purple and Deadly'?" Thor asked from Loki's right, causing him to chuckle at his 'brother's confusion.

"You know, Point Break. The Mad Greek... or whatever his name is." Tony replied.

Loki interjected, "Mad Titan." he said, "Though how do you know what he looks like?"

Tony shrugged, "I had Jarvis do a little research on your legends... speaking of, I never knew you were such a perverted bastard!"

"Beg your pardon?" Loki asked indignantly, he was unaware of any legends which were attributed to his sexual life.

"Seriously dude, you don't know?" Tony whistled lowly, "How drunk were you? I knew you were
crazy, but that's an entirely new kind."

"What does he refer to brother?" Thor asked.

Loki shook his head, he wasn't sure how this conversation had gotten to such a topic. "If I understood half of Stark's comments, I'm afraid that would not be a good sign." he said.

Tony's eyebrow raised, "You don't have any mini-Loki's running around causing mayhem then? Well, they aren't exactly 'mini-Loki's... more like... some weird Asgardian/strange things." he replied.

"I most certainly do not! It would be improper in Asgard to have children that were not by marriage; and over the last few years I have been a little preoccupied to consider such a thing." Loki replied.

"Do you mean to tell me that the legends of Sleepnear... or whatever, are not true?"

"Sleipnir" Loki corrected, "Was a horse who my magic altered physically – it was an accident, as I was trying something which I had never done before."

Tony pretended to wipe sweat off his brow, "Whew, that's a relief. I was beginning to wonder just how kinky of a bastard you were." he said, "How about that wolf, Fen-"

"Tony!" Bruce suddenly shouted, a green tinge beginning to seep into his brown eyes. "Can we please get back topic?"

"Bruce, there's no reason to let him get the best of you." the blonde beside him murmured, holding his hand a little tighter, her other hand stroking his hair lovingly. "He's just being Tony, you can't expect his mind to work like it should. Its got a short in it."

"That hurts, it really does, Greenwich." Tony retorted, "Perhaps I should fire you for that statement."

"Even if you did, I'd be around you all the time." the woman replied evenly, ignoring her given nickname. "But Bruce has a point, we should get back to topic and then you can grill Loki on his sexual preferences later." Bruce turned toward her, breathing deeply as she began whispering in his ear.

Loki looked at the woman in a bit of awe; it seemed she had the ability to tame the beast which Loki knew was very capable of destroying anything. His gaze unwittingly went toward where he had been smashed into the floor by the Doctor's alter ego, wincing as he remembered the pain. He had to give her credit, she was brave to take on that.

"Bruce and Justine are right." the Captain said, "We should return to topic. Loki?"

Justine. Loki chuckled, it fit her well. "What is it you wish to know?" he asked.

"Everything." the Captain replied, "His fighting style. His mind, and way of thinking. What his motive is, etc."

Loki chuckled, looking over at a hopeful Thor. "Well, we're going to be here a while."

Lizzie always loved interacting with Emma's son, oftentimes her mind drifting to what it would be like if she had a kid of her own. His blue eyes were on everything, his little voice constantly asking questions as his blond hair fell messily in the way little boys do. His cheery attitude caused her to forget her earlier irritation with Mr. Tall-Dark-Handsome-and-Dangerous, making her just as cheerful as her little friend as she got him ice-cream.
It wasn't until they were in the shadow of Stark Tower that she remembered her earlier surliness, dragging her feet as she reached the elevator – she wasn't looking forward to returning to the scene of the crime, that was for sure. For a moment, she wondered what her seanmháthair would say to her. No doubt it would be along the lines of: 'What? I didn't raise a coward, did I? Stop stalling and do what you need to do!' ah, how she loved the woman.

"What's wrong Lizzie?" Andrew asked as they ascended the elevator shaft. He was quite insightful for his age, she had always known that, but she wasn't sure what had given her away this time.

"What makes you think something's wrong, Andy?" she asked, knowing that she was lying – and knowing he thought so too as he just looked at her. He was right, she was way too easy to read. Her foot was tapping a fast rhythm on the elevator floor, her nails caught between her teeth in her all-too-irritating habit which she had yet to break. To add to that, she kept sighing, her brown eyes darting to the numbers as they continued to ascend. 33...34...35...36...37... it was torturous. She mapped out how it was going to go down in her head; quickly figuring out that it wouldn't take long this time to find Emma, drop Andrew and her things, find the elevator, and return to her floor. Five minutes, tops.

"Mommy says that people shouldn't lie... are you lying to me Lizzie?" Andrew asked, his little brain coming up with a sentence that Lizzie couldn't understand how he knew the meaning of his words.

"No... I'm just a little anxious." Lizzie replied.

"What's anksions?" Andy asked.

"Uh..." saved by the bell, the elevator doors opened, "Ask your mom." with that, Lizzie all-but ran to the room where Emma had been.

"Mommy!" little Andrew shouted when he spotted his mom, running in her direction.

Emma got up from her place on the sofa, catching him mid-air as he had literally thrown himself at her. "Hey kiddo, how was your day?"

Lizzie placed the bag of Emma's things on the floor as the boy began spouting off what he had done with his grandmother, concluding his ice-cream which Lizzie had gotten him. "I hope you don't mind, I thought he might like it as we took a little walk through the park."

"Nah, no problem." Emma replied, walking toward Lizzie, "Anxious to get out or something?" she asked as Lizzie had once more began tapping her foot.

The assistant looked toward the hallway, "I'm just... not too keen on meeting someone I met in Mr. Starks hallway earlier today." she said warily.

Emma nodded, looking down at her son, "You met the guest."

"How is he even here? Isn't he supposed to be in some jail somewhere up in the stars or something?" Lizzie asked, "Not down here strolling around Mr. Stark's apartment, glaring at guests as if he wanted to eat them whole."

"I doubt he could eat you whole, Lizzie. You're just overreacting." Emma replied.

"I'm not overreacting when it comes to the fact that the bastard tried to take over New York." Lizzie insisted, "How is he walking around without – at least – handcuffs?"

"Because he's a guest."
"How is he a guest? The guy is Hitler personified and godified." Lizzie retorted, "He deserves cyanide or something. Electric shock. Not Tony Stark's penthouse suite."

Emma shook her head, "Oh, Lizzie, you don't understand. I would tell you, except that I don't think Tony, or anyone else for that matter, would appreciate it. But I'll tell you this: he's an ally... for now."

"Ally?" Lizzie repeated, "Is that like when we took Nazi Germany's scientists and set them up here under the Odessa File?"

"Well, they did come up with good things. They put us on the moon." Emma reasoned.

"They killed several million Jews too. Just like Mr. Black-Narcissus destroyed half of Manhattan."

"Lizzie, some people deserve a second chance."

"Not him."

"You're taking this too personally." Emma replied, "You lost some people in the attack-"

"Let us not forget several months in the hospital." Lizzie added.

"And so you are taking his presence a little more seriously than you should." Emma finished.

Lizzie's brow arched, "Are you serious? Or are you just trying to convince yourself so that you don't wind up asking your super-soldier to just off the guy?"

Emma sighed, "Just try to understand, and in the meantime don't tell anyone." she said.

"Don't tell anyone?" Lizzie's voice betrayed her shock, "How am I supposed to keep something like that a secret?"

"You keep plenty of secrets, you can keep one more." Emma replied as the sounds of shouting came through an adjacent door.

Lizzie stared at the door, half of her wondering what was going on, and the other half wishing that someone would 'accidentally' snap the bastard in green's neck. "I'll be quiet." she finally said, "But don't expect me to like it."

Emma smiled at her, "Thanks kiddo. I don't just so that you know, but you're too good of an assistant to lose."

"I suppose that's a nice thing to hear?" Lizzie asked.

"It is."

The voices died down again, followed by a crash. "I better get out of here before it turns deadly." Lizzie said as she headed for the door.

"Yep, that would be good. I sincerely doubt that Mr. Stark would be happy to see you up here again so soon – not to mention you don't want to run into Loki."

Lizzie scoffed, "I still can't believe that bastard has a name."

"Lizzie." Emma's voice lowered.

"Sorry boss, I'll get going." Lizzie replied as another crash was heard.
Wasting no time, she got into the elevator and went down... hoping she wouldn't have to keep her mouth shut for long.

'I spoke too soon.' Loki thought as he gingerly touched his jaw once more, watching Clint Barton be held back by Rogers and Thor; Agent Romanoff and Tony Stark standing by Justine just in case Dr. Banner lost control and she needed to get the woman out of the way. The archer was giving the strongmen a bit of a struggle as he used his smaller size against them, trying his hardest to head in Loki's direction. A bit of satisfaction thrumming through Hawkeye as he had been able to land one solid clock in the jaw before he'd been dragged off.

They had all been taken by surprise when the pair of assassins strode in while Loki was mid-sentence. A few tense minutes passed as Clint in narrowed his gaze upon the god of mischief, Natasha trying talk some logic into him before he simply walked up to Loki and hit him with everything he could. The table which had been smashed when Clint had managed to get the Captain off balance, now lay at Loki's feet in splinters. Yet, he had been instructed to just stay out of the way – as he would only make matters worse.

Banner's eyes were beginning to tinge green despite Justine's efforts, and Black Widow took her arm to gently lead her away from what might happen. Tony started talking to him, doing his best to calm him down from where he stood. Another crash could be heard as Thor had thrown Clint into one of the walls, quickly locking his arms in a tense grip.

"Clint! C'mon, think!" Steve finally managed to say as Thor helped to keep the Hawk still. Clint's blue eyes did not move from Loki's green, every ounce of hatred shining through them. "This isn't helping anyone, least of all you." Steve said.

"What is he doing here?" Clint replied, speaking for the first time since entering the room. "He should be locked up tight where he can't hurt anyone else on earth. Why is he here?" he repeated.

It was Thor who answered, "Midgard is under a threat, Loki knows more about our foe than anyone else."

Clint eyed Loki for a moment, the wheels in his head obviously turning as he tried to think through the red haze. "Does he have the scepter?"

"The Glowstick of Destiny is currently in SHIELD's hands." Tony supplied from Bruce's side, "Locked up somewhere where he couldn't get to it if he tried, its location known only to a few."

"Including you, no doubt." Justine quipped quickly.

"Not that it would do him any good." Thor added, "Loki's powers were stripped of him by the Allfather as part of his sentencing. He is no different than any other Asgardian, no magic."

Loki scoffed, he could probably still use the scepter if he wished – but considering he knew that Thanos wanted his head on a silver platter, and might try to use it to capture his mind for his own torturous devices; he didn't want to handle it. After all, he had been a failure in the Mad Titan's mind. His death would be something the that he was looking forward to.

Clint seemed to relax with that statement, and with a nod Steve and Thor let him go; still close by in case he was simply tricking them. Everyone let out a sigh of relief and began to right themselves to be back in their original positions, Loki nicely sandwiched between Thor and Steve as they were the only two people who wouldn't lash out physically. Steve because he wanted to simply end this conversation peacefully, with everyone's cards on the table; and Thor because... he was Thor.
"Now," Stark finally said, "Glad we got that out of our systems. Anyone else want to take a swing at Loki?" he looked around the room, but they all shook their heads. "No? Good, then all I suggest is that you keep at least a five foot distance from any of the non-hero females in the building, they're the most likely to smack you at this point." Loki rolled her eyes at the mention of the mortal's women, but kept his mouth shut. Tony cleared his throat, "Right, you were talking about just how dangerous this Mad Titan dude is. What he's capable of."

"The Chitauri invasion which I brought about would be nothing in comparison." Loki said, "The Mad Titan has many more at his disposal, and he won't be ordering everyone about by proxy. In fact-

"Hold up." Tony interrupted, earning an irritated glance from Loki. "Proxy?"

"When Loki was trying to take over earth, he was somewhat under the influence of the Tesseract." Thor answered, "The scepter being the communicator between him and the Mad Titan's second-in-command."

Loki glared hard at his brother, not wishing to admit that he was the one who was being commanded. After all, he was the one who should be obeyed... not he to anyone else.

"So Voldemort here was under the Imperius Curse?" Stark asked in shock.

"I don't understand that reference." Thor said, looking over to Steve who just shook his head.

Justine was the one who informed the two of what it was, explaining how Voldemort was the main villain in a series of books. "But the Imperius Curse would be more like what Clint went through, Tony. Complete mental takeover." she added as a caveat.

"So Legolas got zapped by Volddie's Imperius, but Volddie wasn't really himself? Is that what I'm getting?" Tony asked Thor.

"No." Loki answered, completely understanding the reference. "I was in control of what I did. I just was given..."

"Orders?" Tony offered.

"Suggestions." Loki corrected.

Stark scoffed, taking a sip of his drink. "Orders. So you were Saruman huh?"

"I know that one!" Steve said excitedly, "Emma showed me that movie."

"Good for Atticus." Tony cheered as well, "So now you understand the Legolas bit with Clint here?"

Steve nodded, "I can see the reference."

"Do I look like a pointy-eared, long-haired, soft-spoken dude to you?" Clint muttered quietly, but Steve's enhanced hearing picked it up.

"No, but to call you Legolas is a compliment. At least Emma says so." Steve replied.

"Can we get back to topic?" Loki asked finally, "I'm telling you the seriousness of the situation, and you're pretending that I'm discussing a normal day. Can you take anything seriously, Stark?"

Tony smirked, "Its a very serious issue here, but if we all went too serious, we'd wind up like you."
So..." Loki narrowed his eyes slightly, wondering just why it was he had agreed to come here and deal with these... lesser-thans. "You were saying? Before we got all caught up on you being under the Imperius Curse, but yet not."

Loki fought the urge to roll his eyes, settling instead on Thanos. "As I was saying: the Mad Titan is planning on using Midgard as a springboard to get to Asgard. If he has to rip a hole in space and time to land his ships, he will do so. Nothing will stop him, and definitely not a little atmospheric pressure, or a few well placed explosive arrows."

"And if he does that?" Justine piped in, "What then?"
"He'll kill everyone in his path." Loki replied, somewhat happy that one person was actually listening to him. "I wanted to rule humankind, make them my subjects. But the Mad Titan has no desire for such a thing."

"What does he want?" Natasha asked.

"Ultimate power over the nine realms. Humankind would not be simply subjects, as he does not care for them in any form." Loki replied.

"Meaning?"

"Meaning... complete annihilation of the human race."

"What's got your knickers in a twist?" Bella's voice broke through Lizzie's hazy cloud of irritation.

"Nothing much." Lizzie replied tersely, "Just an irritating guy at work."

Bella chuckled, "Since when are they not irritating?" she asked rhetorically, "Hey, can you tell seanmháthair I won't be home for dinner tonight?"
Lizzie looked at her sister in confusion. "Why? What are you doing?"

"Well, I have a date." Bella replied, "I forgot about it until he sent me a little note attached to a bouquet of flowers telling me he was looking forward to it."

"Wow, I wish guys would let me know that they were looking forward to seeing me. My dates mostly just pick me up, drop me off, and we have a boring time in between." Lizzie replied.

"Maybe that's because you only dated the nerdy dudes, whose first love was Star Trek." Bella suggested, but Lizzie shook her head. "Or maybe its because there's an underlying understanding that you have no intention of continuing the relationship."

"Whatever do you mean by that?" Lizzie asked, pulling out her phone to distract herself from her sister.

"Quite simple. You and relationships have never gone well... and I think its because you're afraid of loving somebody." Bella said as they walked out to the curb.

Lizzie laughed, "Is that so? Maybe its because I simply have never met a man who can match me? Most of them are – as you said – their first love is Star Trek, or something similar. Whatever it was, it wasn't me." she said, waving down a cab.

"Frankly, I think you have unrealistic expectations of men. There's not a man alive who can live up to the image of your perfect man. Maybe mankind isn't enough for you? You want a guy who's a mixture of Adonis and Socrates, and one of those was a god." Bella retorted. The brunette froze at
her wording, quickly thinking on how she had just met a 'god'... not that she would ever consider him as such.

The cab pulled to the curb. "Well, I refuse to lower my standards." she called as she opened the door.

"And if Mr. perfect-for-you doesn't exist?" Bella asked.

"Oh, he does. Maybe just not in this city." Lizzie replied, "I'll tell seanmháthair about your date. What time do you think you'll get back, so I can tell her not to wait up?"

Bella shrugged, "I have no idea. No later than twelve I think."

Lizzie raised her eyebrows but said nothing. "Hey lady! You gonna get in or what?" the cabbie shouted.

"See you later." Bella said as Lizzie got in, giving the driver the address. All the way home, she couldn't help but wonder if perhaps Bella was right.

Maybe she was being unrealistic.

Heimdall watched the interactions between Loki and the Avengers very carefully. It seemed that Asgard's fallen prince was handling himself well, considering he knew that Loki despised the mortals. Odin came up from behind him, looking in the direction of the bridge.

"How are they holding up?" the king asked. Heimdall shrugged.

"As good as can be supposed." the gatekeeper replied, "They are more accepting of this arrangement than we originally suspected. Only the archer has tried to attack Loki, but he has calmed considerably. The others are listening to him, and they are preparing for what might happen. Though, earlier he was forced to contain his temper."

"Oh? What happened?" Odin asked.

"Several things, but the first began when he was slapped by a mortal girl named Elizabeth. She is one of the Man of Iron's workers, who chanced Loki in the hall." Heimdall answered. "Had not the Avengers intervened, I know not what might have occurred."

"Then he is doing well." Odin muttered, "And the Mad Titan? What of him?"

Heimdall shifted his sight, focusing on the edge of the realms. "He is gathering his army. He is not ready to attack yet, but there is no doubt it will be soon." he sighed, "He has a spy, although he is cloaked to me, who is telling him of how Midgard is faring after Loki's attack. He is also garnering allies from some of the other realms... already Muspelheim has joined him."

"Is it possible that this fight will be Ragnarök?" Odin asked, looking at his gatekeeper in concern.

The other man shook his head. "Possible, yes. But to bring that about, it will include all of the nine realms."

A dark cloud passed over Odin's brow. "It is possible that to win this war, it will have to include them all." he said, "And even a few which have been lost to history."

"You speak of Aghartha? The Inner Realm? They have not been in communication for some time, Your Majesty. They have been blocked from my gaze for a thousand years." Heimdall said.
Odin nodded, "So they have. But perhaps this will bring them back into our fold as allies."

"If you think so." Heimdall replied as Odin walked away. He turned his gaze back to the Asgardian princes, watching as Thor and Loki settled in their rooms for the night. Yet the watchman would not sleep... for there was too much which would need to be seen.

Lizzie stood on her balcony, looking out on what she wished were the stars. After all, New York was not known for its star observation points. She missed Ireland slightly, remembering when she and Bella used to play the game of 'name the stars'. It had always been something which she loved, and now it was impossible to do. There were no stars in New York.

"Elizabeth?" seanmháthair called walking out to the balcony, "What are you doing out here?"

"Trying to adjust my eyes to the haze – then perhaps I might see something." she joked. "After all, now we know there is more than just us out there."

Kathleen smiled warmly, pulling Lizzie closer to herself for a hug. "Aye, so there is. Not that your ancestors didn't already know that." Lizzie snickered, "D'you miss Ireland, is that it?"

"I do, from a certain point of view. But we never really lived there... just kinda visited." Lizzie replied, "Seanmháthair, did mother like Ireland?"

Kathleen chuckled, "Your mother?" she repeated merrily, "Nah. She was more fond of Wales, and her homeland. She said that your father's accent often drove her to the brink of insanity."

Lizzie sighed, "I don't remember her much, you know. I'm worried I'll forget her entirely." she said, "Have you found those photographs yet?"

"Ack, girl you keep pestering me. When I find them, I'll let you know." Kathleen replied, "After all, most of your mothers things were burned up in that fire."

"I wonder what she'd think of us now." Lizzie said, looking up at the sky. "If she's up there watching, looking down in either approval or disapproval. Did she laugh when I slapped-" she stopped short, not wanting to put her seanmháthair in any kind of danger. She knew that no one was supposed to find out that Loki was back, but she didn't like hiding anything from Kathleen.

"I don't know, darling. Its possible in any case. Though, who'd you slap?" Kathleen asked.

"Nobody interesting. Just some guy that had the nerve to bump into me and then smirk haughtily I was momentarily shocked." she bit her lip, knowing that wasn't the best lie she had ever come up with.

Kathleen didn't think so either as she gave her granddaughter a rather harsh look. "Is that how I raised you? To slap a man who just managed to bump into you."

"Its a little more complicated than that. I would tell you, but I can't – on threat that I will be fired from my job."

"It wouldn't be Mr. Stark would it?" Kathleen asked with a raised eyebrow.

Lizzie laughed, "No, I wouldn't slap him in any case." she answered, "Its complicated seanmháthair."

Kathleen nodded, pulling Lizzie back inside. "Well, you should get to bed. Its getting late, and I
don't want you sleeping in while the rest of the world is awake."

"Its Saturday."

"That doesn't mean that you should be lazy... now go." Kathleen shooed Lizzie upstairs, sitting down herself to wait up for Isabella to return.

Lizzie herself took a while to get to sleep, wondering just what was going on that would have the Avengers sworn enemy in the same building as themselves without killing him.

Something was obviously afoot... but she fell asleep before she could truly contemplate what.

She ran. Trying to escape the devastation which was being wreaked everywhere she looked. The giant hole in the sky was still allowing the strange lizard-like creatures to land on the city, firing their strange weapons at any person they saw. It was like something out of a sci-fi film, and Lizzie was just waiting for someone to wake her up and tell her it was a dream... but it wasn't a dream. It was real.

"Bella!" she called through the streets surrounding Stark Tower, looking for the familiar head of blond to come bounding out of a corner. But she didn't see her. Bella was no where to be found. She looked up just as a letter of Stark Tower came crashing to earth, screaming as she narrowly avoided it. It was worse than the Twin Towers, it was worse than anything she had ever seen or experienced. What made it worse, was that she didn't know what to do.

"Elizabeth!" she heard her voice be called from somewhere behind her, and turning around she could see Colin, her co-worker who flirted with her every chance he got. "Come on, lets get out of here!" he shouted over the sounds of a space-vehicle flying over their heads.

"But what about Bella?" she said back, running down the street despite herself.

"She's fine, Michael got her out. C'mon!" she looked down, wishing that just for once she would have work her Mary Janes instead of the heels which she sported. If any day was bad to wear heels, it was today.

The sounds of the fight got closer, and she could see cars flying as a guy in a red cape swung a hammer into them, smashing the invading aliens. She could see a guy dressed in stars and stripes next to him, hitting them with his shield, the object ricocheting back to him after it hit several of the aliens. She ducked as a blast of blue stuff – energy perhaps? – flew right past her head.

"Stay behind me." Colin ordered, taking her hand to lead her out of the devastation. Looking up, she saw a man with a strange golden helmet fly past on one of the flying contraptions, his green cape fluttering behind him as he flew past them. Inwardly, she knew that he was responsible for it all, and hoped that the Avengers would get him. He deserved it.

A creature jumped in front of them, firing his weapon in their direction. Colin ducked, blocking her as best he could, but the edge of it hit him in the shoulder, sending him sprawling on the ground. It took aim at her, but went flying as another car headed toward the creature and threw it away from where it was.

Lizzie reached down, trying to get Colin up, completely numb to the fact that his blood was going all over her white shirt. He groaned as he got up, limping slightly as they continued on. The sound of something cracking above them caught Colin's attention first. "LIZZIE!" he shouted as he flung her to the ground a few feet away, looking back she watched as one of the creatures aimed at Colin again, this time hitting him in the chest. His eyes were the last thing she saw of him before he was
blown backwards with a hole in his chest.

She screamed as she suddenly found herself being thrown backwards by a rumbling explosion, her world going black as she felt pain spread through her back. Then she knew nothing.

She woke up in a cold sweat, her breathing hard and ragged as she looked at her clock. The numbers glared 2:24 am in red numbers, informing her she still had several hours of sleep. Laying back down, she tried to think of something else, praying she wouldn't wind back up in the nightmares.
Mrs. Langley must go out on business, but leaves Lizzie to watch her son -- unfortunately, Tony manages to forget one major thing...

It wasn't until the following Tuesday that Lizzie found herself once more back in the penthouse, watching every corner she turned to make sure there was no Loki lurking.

Emma had called her that morning, announcing that she was going to need her to watch Andrew when she got in as she had a meeting with some top-secret organization which she was not allowed to tell her about. Not that Lizzie really wanted to know, she was never fond of cloak and dagger transactions, and was slightly worried that Emma was getting involved with such things... but Emma was a big girl, and she knew that any interference would be disliked.

So she dragged her feet on her way to work, not complaining when the traffic was bad, and took the stairs to the fourth floor before getting on the elevator and having Jarvis take her up. "Something wrong, Miss Elizabeth?" the AI asked.

Lizzie scoffed, "Nope, I'm just peachy." she said sarcastically, "Just woke up on the wrong side of the bed is all."

"Oh, I understand that. Mind you, I'm not sure why waking up on one side of a bed makes someone more saucy than usual; but I understand what you mean." Jarvis replied.

She had to laugh, "Yeah, I suppose you wouldn't know." she replied as the elevator stopped.

"I do hope you have a good day, Miss Elizabeth. I know you're probably not very happy with the situation to begin with, but I hope you know I'll keep you updated on anything you need to know." Jarvis informed.

"Thank you, Jarvis. I know." she replied, "Just point me in the direction of wherever Emma is at present."

"Of course, Miss Elizabeth." Jarvis said, giving her instructions. Lizzie followed them, grateful that the AI had made her avoid anywhere that she might run into a certain bastard. As she thought, Emma was running around her room trying to find her shoes.

"Hey there." she greeted, Emma flipped her hair out of her face, smiling in greeting. "Looking for something?"

"My black heels, I know you brought them, but I can't find them at this point... ugh, I need to have Andrew clean his stuff up, this is getting a bit much." Emma replied, looking under the bed for what was probably the fourth time.

Looking in the corner, Lizzie found a pile of Andrews toys... a black heel sticking out. Smiling somewhat mischievously, she went and grabbed the heels, holding them in her hands. "Ahem." she caught Emma's attention, causing the older woman to roll her eyes at herself.

"What would I do without you?" she asked as she slipped them on.
"You'd lose your brain on a regular basis, boss." Lizzie replied, holding out Emma's jacket, which she slipped into. "Speaking of, I have a few proposals that I need you to go over. You want to do that later?"

"Later? Yes, I'm a little too scatterbrained to think of anything else." she replied, "What was that yiddish word for it?"

"Meshuga." Lizzie answered.

"Right... how do you know that again?"

"My mother was Jewish," a knock sounded at the door, and Lizzie went to answer it. Tony Stark stood on the other side.

"Oh, if it isn't the lost puppy." he greeted in his eccentric way.

"Mr. Stark." Lizzie replied.

"I'm coming Tony, just hold on." Emma called from inside.

"You better not say that in front of Pepper, she might get the wrong idea." Tony teased, watching with amusement as Lizzie's face flushed. "So you found your way up here alright?"

She nodded, "Yes sir."

"Good." he replied, "I'm sorry, I didn't get your name?"

"Elizabeth Donovan."

"You related to Bella Donovan?" he asked.

"She's my sister."

"That'll work." he looked past her as Emma ran back to the bed to grab her bag and went to the door. "Whew, that was a total of..." he looked at his watch, "Forty-five minutes when you said fifteen."

"Don't you know never to ask how long its going to take a woman? And if you do to multiply it by threes?" Emma asked rhetorically.

Tony smirked, "Maybe."

Emma rolled her brown eyes, turning back to Lizzie. "Alright, so Andrew is in the living room at the moment. Don't allow him to play his nintendo for any longer than an hour. There's dvds and a few board games which Tony got for him which are in there – they should be next to the couch – and as for lunch."

"Just tell me where the kitchen is." Lizzie said. "I can make lunch."

"There probably isn't any food in the kitchen, is there?" Emma turned to Tony.

"Just tell Jarvis what you need, he'll take care of it." he answered, "We need to get going."

Emma nodded, "I should be back by one at the latest... if not... then put him to bed by eight."

"You're staying out till eight?" Lizzie asked surprised.

"You never know with who we're visiting, Puppy" Tony retorted, "Just prepare for the worst."
Lizzie shrugged, "Alright..."

It wasn't long before Tony and Emma were descending in the elevator with Lizzie waving goodbye. "Oh crap!" Emma swore.

"What?" Tony asked concerned, "What did you forget? I'll have Happy get it to you."

"No, I didn't forget anything..." she moaned, "Lizzie doesn't know that Loki is still in the apartment."

Tony's eyes filled with mirth. "Oh, is that all? Jarvis, make sure Miss Donovan doesn't kill Reindeer Games – and if he gets close hurting her, let me know. Or better yet, just activate one of the bots and sic them on him."

"Yes, sir." Jarvis replied. "Do you want me to tell her that Prince Loki is in the apartment, sir?"

"No need." Tony replied.

"You're not going to tell her?" Emma asked incredulously, "Tony!"

He chuckled, "Don't worry about it, I'm sure they'll be fine. Remember, she did slap him. Give the girl a little credit, she's got guts... question is whether that's a good thing with someone like her and someone like him."

"She's not going to be happy." Emma muttered.

"Well then she can slap me – or you can slap me – when we get back." Tony replied, "Jarvis, record anything that happens between Puppy and Reindeer Games okay?" he added as an afterthought, ignoring Emma's withering glare.

"As you wish, sir."

Lizzie looked around for a moment, the silence of the apartment somewhat deafening as she walked into the living room. Andrew was on the floor, playing with some toy trucks when she came in.

"Lizzie!" he shouted, running up to her and latching himself to her middle. "Are you going to babysit me today?"

"Yes I am, any objections." he shook his head vigorously, "Good, cause you have no one else to watch you in that case."

They soon settled themselves with a game of Chutes and Ladders, as Lizzie was not particularly fond of video games. After letting Andrew win one game, she then won one herself trying to teach him how to play and win for himself. An hour passed before Andrew loudly proclaimed he was hungry. Looking at the clock, Lizzie saw that it was time for a snack, and taking Andrew by the hand, she asked Jarvis where the kitchen was.

After making a few pb&j sandwiches, Andrew suddenly declared that he had something in his room that he wanted to get, and left Lizzie to clean up and start planning what to make for lunch. Jarvis was all too willing to get a shopping list together.

"Miss Elizabeth, may I recommend you leave the kitchen?" the AI suggested.

"Yeah, sure let me just finish this stuff up." she replied, as she made some extra sandwiches to take back into the living room. Turning toward the door, she found herself face to face with Loki.

"Well, well, well... what have we here?" he taunted, she narrowed her eyes as he walked forward. "I
do believe I missed your name last time."

"Not that it matters to you." she grit out, hoping that Andrew wouldn't come back anytime soon.

Loki clucked, "Ooh, fiesty." however, he hadn't anticipated just how close he had come to her, and a loud smack was the sound which filled the room as his head spun yet again. His green eyes narrowed on her. "Tell me, is this little slapping ritual going to happen every time you see me?"

"Hopefully I'll never see you again." Lizzie retorted, "But considering that reality and expectation often clash, it is very likely that I will see you again. As for why I slap you? I'm sorry, has your brain forgotten that you did destroy half of Manhattan, affecting the lives of probably millions of people in one form or another; I consider it my duty to slap you for their sakes. After all, none of them will have the chance, and I do. Statistically speaking, that's several times an hour... so I have a lot of catching up to do."

His brows raised, he had to admit, he didn't think that would be her reply. He smirked, he liked her. Sure, she was mortal, and annoying; but he had to admire her spirit. He watched then as she went to slap him again, but this time he caught her hand. "Tell me, firebird, are none of the slaps for yourself?" he mused.

"If I could control fire, jackass, you would be ashes by this time. As for the question, the answer is that I slapped you for myself the first time." she spat, "Let me go."

"Why should I do that?"

"Because I don't want your murderous hands touching me."

"Why not? Surely you can't mind considering you've already slapped me thrice, and I'm sure would do it again. Is that not a form of touching?"

She laughed, "No, that is a form of venting frustration. Slapping is not touching."

"Could be. It depends on the context." his voice turned sultry.

"Eww... what is it between you and Stark?" she wailed, "Guys really do only think about that stuff."

His eyebrow raised, "I beg your pardon?"

"Not likely, snake, now let me go." she ordered.

Looking at her for a fraction longer, he let her go, crossing the room backwards with his hands up. "Distance to keep me from further injury."

She scoffed, "Yeah, well you should have thought of that before." she hissed, grabbing the plate of sandwiches. "Come near me again, and I swear to you, I will do more than slap."

"Oh? And what makes you think you can?" he asked, enjoying her fire a bit.

She shook her head, throwing the dishes in the sink. "Because you're a man. You're more vulnerable."

"To what?" he asked.

With a smirk, she walked up to him, bring her knee right to where she'd strike. "Much more painful than a slap I've heard." he simply stared at her, watching as she turned back around and picked up the plates. Her eyes widened as she turned from him, surprised in her own sudden bravery – maybe it
was bravado instead. Whatever it was, she needed to get her anger under control... that knife in the block looked too tempting to touch.

"You have a lot of gall mortal." he stated simply. She shrugged.

"Takes one to know one, I suppose. I hear you've got more ego than Narcissus. Somehow it wouldn't surprise me if you were in love with your own reflection." she replied, "But lets face it, you have no idea what to do with me."

He laughed, "Oh, I don't eh? I could snap your neck with my little finger. You're nothing to me mortal."

"Sure, sure." she replied, "But I think in some sick, twisted, perverted, masochistic way you enjoy the fact that I insist on slapping you."

"Is that so?"

"Yes... that is so," she mimicked his tone.

"This is truly fascinating," he said in slight awe, "You are here, having a conversation with me when you should be running in fear – but you don't fear me, do you?"

She scoffed, "Why should I?" she asked.

He laughed, "I thought you said that I had forgotten that I had tried to destroy New York? It seems you are the one with the faulty memory."

"Au contraire mon amie, I have not forgotten." she replied, "You just remind me of a child throwing an adult-sized temper tantrum... like every other tyrant out there. Trying to prove yourself in one way or another, to someone. Be it daddy, or your big brother, or something along those lines – I'm not a psychologist but I got the idea. You didn't feel loved as a child, and so you decided to rebel so that you could get attention... am I close?"

Loki's green eyes hardened, wondering how she had gotten so close without knowing anything. He stalked up to her, towering over her much smaller frame as he said: "That doesn't mean that I am not dangerous."

"I didn't say that." she quipped lightly, squashing whatever fear was rising up. She needed to be level headed, and to let him know that she was afraid would be a bad thing."I said I wasn't scared because you reminded me of a two year old. Those are two... very... different things."

"Then you are a fool." Loki spat.

Lizzie laughed, "Is that your elegant way of saying that you have no reply and I've – metaphorically speaking – hit the nail on the head?" she asked, wondering internally if she had completely lost her mind. She was talking to a criminal who was towering threateningly over her, one who was responsible for near-takeover of her planet, as if they were simply having a merry-hearted debate. She made a mental note to check her meds when she got home.

"No." he said simply, backing off slightly, "I simply do not wish to correct you at this time. Your immaturity has reached new depths, Milady."

She snorted, "My immaturity. Hmm... how kind of you." she picked up the plate of food and walked to the door of the kitchen. She stopped in the doorway "I'll be coming back at about twelve, do me a favor and keep out of the kitchen. Oh, and don't go near the living room, I'm there with my little
charge for the day."

"Or what?"

She just smiled, "Or you underestimate my ability to make you sing my vocal range." and with that, she flounced out of the room, her nerves slightly frazzled with the fact that she had just talked to him without just screaming his ears off. Not that she didn't want to, she just wasn't sure what she'd say without taking one of Tony Stark's kitchen knives and stabbing him. "Jarvis, please inform me if he is in the kitchen when I go to make lunch. If he is, just order Chinese."

"Very good, Miss Elizabeth."

Meanwhile, Loki stood in the kitchen. His super-sensitive hearing picking up her statement and Jarvis' answer. Elizabeth. So that was the firebird's name. He had to chuckle, it suit her, and yet didn't. She was obviously hot tempered, but was polite about it, obviously wanting to do nothing more than to do something rather heinous to him – but keeping her emotions in check. He vaguely wondered if she had been in Manhattan when he tried to invade it, and if that was the source of her animosity. After all, he had met the woman named Emma a few days earlier, and she had not been so violent as to threaten him. But he knew she had not been in New York at the time...

"Prince Loki." Jarvis addressed him, and he had to smile – Stark may be rude, but at least he'd programmed his AI to be polite. "I must inform you that what Miss Donovan said is correct. The Avengers have made it clear that you are not allowed in the rooms where she will be, or I will have to inform Agent Barton and Agent Romanoff that you are somewhere off-limits."

Loki sighed and after getting an apple, he walked out of the room. Hearing laughter coming from the living room, he headed in that direction. "Prince Loki, I do believe I said-"

"I'm not going in." he said, just watching as the woman who had just been so forward, looking absolutely at ease with the blond boy in front of her. He exclaimed in victory, jumping up and dancing quite ridiculously around her before stooping down and throwing his arms around her neck to kiss her cheek.

Though he would never admit it to her, nor wanted to admit it to himself, he knew she had been right. Although he wanted to just end her life right there when she spoke of his supposed 'temper tantrum'. She would, in time, learn not to be so loose with her tongue. However, he would admit that he found her somewhat fascinating, and had – reluctantly so – since he had first met her. He had watched her eyes as she recognized her fear of him, and then overcame it – resulting in a slap. The girl whose name he didn't even know, usually he knew a woman a bit before she slapped him.

Elizabeth Donovan. That is what Jarvis had said. He chuckled to himself as he thought of how she'd react when he used her name next time. Though it probably wouldn't be very fun.

She didn't fear him now, he could see it in her eyes the first time she slapped him; and that was what made him stay the moment he'd seen her making her strange sandwiches. Yet, the fact that she was a different person when she was with the boy also made him curious. Was the threat an act? Did she put it up to make him leave her alone? If so, it wasn't working. In fact, it made him want to have her around a bit more...

She got up, walking over to Stark's audio center and putting something in. At that moment, some song began pumping out of the speakers, and they began dancing around together like small children. She was fascinating, but obviously was lacking in his eyes.
Immature mortals. He thought as he rolled his eyes at them before walking away. Oh yes, she was going to be interesting.

Thor landed on Tony's pad, stomping inside with a thunderstorm raging. It was infuriating what SHIELD was trying to do, their flippant attitudes something which made him want to simply destroy them. They were not doing this meeting for the good of Midgard, and were not taking the threat seriously enough. Had it been Asgard, every person of influence would be up in arms, ready to fight their foe... but these people just bickered, arguing that the Avengers were the cause of the whole mess.

As he passed through the living room, he briefly saw the woman who had slapped his brother. She was currently playing a game with the young son of the Captain's woman – even though the Captain would never admit that she was his. Upon his entrance, her brown eyes flickered up to him. She smiled, nodding slightly in his direction and he returned the favor, approaching the pair. She nudged the boy, pointing to Thor, watching as he stood up and ran to him.

"Thor! Is mommy coming home yet?" Andrew asked first, already warmed to the Asgardian over the last few days.

"What?" the woman exclaimed indignantly, "Am I not fun enough that you're so eager to get your mother back? Am I such a bore?"

Andrew rolled his blue eyes, "Lizzie, I didn't mean it like that. You know I like you."

Lizzie raised an eyebrow, "Mhmmm."

Thor turned to the woman with a smile, "I'm sure he doesn't mean it in that way, Lady Lizzie. He seemed to be having fun before I came in."

She chuckled, shaking her head. "Just Lizzie, thanks – but if you insist on the whole 'lady' prefix then call me Elizabeth. Lady Lizzie is kinda awkward." she corrected, "But I know, I'm just messing with him."

"Very well, Lady Elizabeth." Thor replied, getting down to the boy's size as much as possible with his enormous height. "I'm sorry to say that your mother is probably not coming home for a while longer. In the meantime, I believe I disrupted a game that you and Lady Elizabeth were playing."

"Ack, its not a big deal. We were almost done anyways." Lizzie replied, "Would you like to join us... or..."

Thor smiled widely, "Thank you for your offer Lady Elizabeth, but I'm afraid I have a matter to discuss with my brother." he said, she took a sharp breath, nodding. "Are you alright?"

"Huh?... Oh, yeah totally."

"I am aware that you are not particularly fond of Loki. He hasn't bothered you at all today, has he?" he inquired, hoping that his brother had not tried to harm the woman.

She snickered, "Yeah... nah... he didn't... bother me much." she said vaguely, "Nothing to worry about, at any rate."

"I'm sorry, I don't understand. Did he bother you, or did he not?" Thor repeated.

"He came and... talked to me in the kitchen when I went to get Andrews snack, but I haven't seen..."
him since." Lizzie replied, telling Andrew to clean up the game and pick out a movie.

Thor nodded in understanding, "I only hope he has not offended you. Loki is not known for his first impressions, especially not as of late. If he does do anything which makes you uncomfortable, please do not hesitate to inform me." he told her.

A scoff slipped past her lips. "His being here is making me uncomfortable. I don't think there's anything you can do about that." she admitted.

He nodded, "I understand. There is probably very little I can do to make you feel at ease with him in the same room. I take it you were in the city when the Chitauri tried to invade?"

"The Chi-whatta?"

"Chitauri. The... aliens, I believe you call them." he replied.

"Ah, got it. Weird name." she muttered, "But yeah, I was. I was working that day, actually."

"I am sorry. I hope you did not lose anyone?"

"Nah, I haven't lost anyone for ten years." she replied.

"Just..." Thor tried to begin, "I hope you do not take Loki the way which he has presented himself. He was not always the way he is now."

She pursed her lips, "Oh? Was he not always a murdering sociopath?"

"No, Lady Elizabeth. He was not." Thor retorted, keeping himself from correcting how she spoke of Loki. If she was in Manhattan at the attack, she would not take his defense of his brother very kindly.

"Hmm... yet another thing to add to the list of strangeness." she replied as Andrew ran up to her, a dvd in his hands.

"Well, I shall leave you, Lady Elizabeth. May you have a good day." Thor announced, bowing slightly and walking out.

"Goodbye Thor, I hope to see you again sometime." Lizzie called as the door shut. Andrew suddenly began whining, "Alright, alright... lets put this in."

It wasn't until eight-thirty that Emma finally came back to the apartment to see Lizzie curled up on the couch asleep... Beauty and the Beast playing on Tony Stark's 60" screen. She watched the last scene as Lizzie slept, telling Jarvis to turn it off as the credits rolled. She then shook Lizzie awake.

"Lizzie... Lizzie..." the girl simply mumbled, "Elizabeth, wake up!"

Olive-toned lids snapped back as brown eyes widened in surprise. "What – where's the – why am I –? Oh." she looked around the room, closing her eyes for just a moment longer. "Hello, you're back late."

"Sorry, the meeting didn't go as I expected." Emma replied, "How was watching Andrew?"

Lizzie smirked, "It went good. Your son is quite the little energizer bunny. He had me chasing him all over Bryant Park after lunch, I was exhausted by the end of it – as was he, he went to bed with very little protest." she said as she got up and stretched.
Emma looked around the room for a moment, trying to figure out what to say next. "So, uh... Tony didn't tell you, but there was someone here when we left –"

"Yeah, I saw him." Lizzie replied before Emma finished. "Conniving little bastard. Found me in the kitchen while I was making a snack. We had a little... tête a tête."

"Did it go well?" Emma asked nervously.

Lizzie chuckled, "You mean did I stab the guy? Nah. Though about it... resisted the impulse. Too much blood, didn't want the cleanup." she joked.

Emma rolled her eyes, "God, Lizzie, you're a closet psycho, you know that?"

"Its just a joke, Lizzie... I had no thought of the blood."

"Stop it."

"Yes, ma'am." Lizzie swore, "Though I like the other guy. Mr. Tall-Buff-and-Blond."

"Thor?" Lizzie nodded, "Yeah, he's great. He's like a giant kid, likes to be friendly to everyone. Real sweetheart."

Lizzie's brown eyes filled with mischief, "Hmm... sounds like your description of a certain Captain... hmm... what was his name again?" Emma threw a pillow at her, causing Lizzie to stumble back a step.

"I'm married."

"True. I would never condone a relationship, you know that. I just like to mess with you, you give a good reaction." Lizzie replied, "Well, I should probably head home before seanmhatháir begins wondering if I've been mugged."

After saying her goodbyes to Emma, Lizzie headed toward the elevator. As she waited for it to come up, she noticed a shadowy figure standing out of the corner of her eye. Looking up, she saw the tail ends of a green coat disappear behind the corner.

The doors of the elevator opened, and she stepped inside.

When Pepper found Tony in their room later that evening, he was laughing at something which he had playing on his i-pad. "Pep, Pep, come here." he called, turning the screen so that she could see it.

The view was the kitchen, and she could easily see one of their houseguests towering over a young woman who was at their counter. "Who is that?" she asked him.

"Emma's assistant, just listen." he shushed, turning up the volume.

"You just remind me of a child throwing an adult-sized temper tantrum..."

"That doesn't mean that I am not dangerous."

"I didn't say that. I said I wasn't scared because you reminded me of a two year old."

Tony started laughing again, watching as one of the other camera angles caught Loki's seething look. "Oh, oh, listen to this."

"Oh, and don't go near the living room."
"Or what?"

"You underestimate my ability to make you sing my vocal range"

"I like this girl." Tony suddenly announced as he turned the screen back to himself and shut off the pad.

"Well, she's either really brave or really stupid." Pepper replied, "Who is she?"

"Emma's assistant. Lizzie I think is her name." Tony answered, "I'm almost glad I upped Puppy's security clearance."

"Who's?"

"Puppy. The girl. She got lost the first time she came here, so I named her 'Puppy'." Tony replied as he turned off the lights.

"Let's hope she doesn't decide to slap you for it." Pepper quipped, settling into bed as far away from Tony as possible.

"I don't think she will." Tony replied, "Pep, you don't have to worry about it."

"Tony, I don't want to burn you." Pepper replied softly.

Tony snuggled in anyways, ignoring her protests. "Don't worry hon. You have plenty of self control, besides I have Bruce and Blondie working on a remedy - well, as much as the two of them can work together without jumping each other's bones." Pepper smacked his thigh.

"Be nice."

"Never."
Loki meets with Lizzie once more, and finds that the Avengers are quite protective. Meanwhile, Thor brings Jane to visit... in a way...

Another few days passed, and Lizzie crossed off yet another day as she was counting down to April 1st with anticipation and planning... and April 2nd with equal joy. Why April 2nd? Because that was her birthday, the day she turned twenty-one. It was a family joke, as her mother went into labor on the first – having Bella – and then continued in labor until the wee hours of the next morning – Lizzie was born then, as if to say 'you were just pranked'... it seemed to have stuck for the rest of her life. Going downstairs, went to have breakfast with her sister and seanmhatháir.

"Good morning." she greeted cheerfully as she poured herself a glass of orange juice.

"Good morning, darlin. I hope you slept well." Kathleen responded as she finished up cooking the sausages and set a plate before the girls.

Lizzie sighed as she took a seat, "Eh, I slept well enough." she said looking at the clock – it was 6:45 and she still needed a shower. "How'd your date with... Nate go?"

"Daniel, actually." Bella retorted as she finished up an email on her phone. "It went well."

"Why'd I think his name was 'Nate'?" Lizzie asked herself aloud.

"Nate was three weeks ago. The pharmacist, remember." Bella replied, "I came home early."

Lizzie nodded, "Right... Honestly, Bells, how do you meet people like pharmacists? You don't even go to the drugstore."

"How did you meet that Colin lad?" Kathleen asked.

Brown eyes rolled upwards. "Seanmhatháir, I met him in college. We were studying the classic period together."

"Yeah, the classics. Alexander was a known homosexual, just so you know, so much so that he left no heirs of the Greek Empire."

"Yes, Bella I know that." Lizzie snapped through a bite of scrambled eggs.

"Then I can't believe you had no idea the guy was not at all in your sexual range." Bella said, "You should have known when he was staring at Michaelangelo's David for a little too long."

"Well, he looked and acted like any other guy." Lizzie reasoned.

Bella scoffed, "Except, of course, when he cross-dressed at that frat party. Honestly, that should have been a clue... unless you're in a closet yourself."

"Bells!" Lizzie shouted throwing a piece of toast at her sister. "I am completely and totally straight. I
like guys too much to do that, I just haven't found one that is interesting enough."

"Oh, there's plenty of interesting guys out there." Bella replied, "You just like broken ones."

"Please, Bella. Who are you-?"

Their banter was disrupted by the telephone ringing. Seanmhatháir answered it. "Hello?... yes she's here, would you like me to get her?... alright... Elizabeth, the phone's for you." she handed her the handset.

"Hello?"

"Hey there Puppy." Tony Stark's voice echoed over the line. "You know, cellphones are there for anyone to get you on the line anywhere, anytime. They do you no good if they go straight to voicemail."

"I'm sorry, sir, my phone is upstairs at the moment. I just woke up." Lizzie replied.

"Well, you should keep it on you." Tony said, "But that's not why I'm calling. Listen, we need you up at the apartments as soon as possible."

"Oh? Why? What's up? Has your houseguest decided to start torturing cats or something?"

A chuckle could be heard on the other line, "Trust me, if Rock of Ages tried anything, I wouldn't call you – though kudos for your little conversation the other day. You kept your cool pretty well."

"Thanks, I guess. Though really I wonder if it was just a stupid idea to talk at all... unfortunately my meds have no psychotic side effects, so I can't blame them." Lizzie retorted with a crunch of toast.

"Well, I still congratulate you, Puppy." Tony's voice got low, "But all jokes aside, Emma just got some bad news. Garrett got blown up while on patrol yesterday afternoon... she's pretty broken up about it." he said.

Lizzie froze, "Oh God, is he dead?" seanmhatháir and Bella looked up in questioning, but she just shook her head as if to say 'later'.

"I'm afraid so, they're sending him home in a casket... well, what's left of him, which isn't much. They knew off his dogtags who the carnage belonged to." Tony answered, "So Andrew's going to need someone to look after him while Emma goes through this. Mellow Yellow – uh, Justine has been with her ever since she found out; the Cap is currently getting her parents up here; Thor is off in New Mexico visiting his girlfriend; the Natasha has taken Legolas – sorry, Clint – to the gym to calm him down; and I'm afraid I'm a little too busy to take care of him."

"I understand." Lizzie replied, "I'll be there as soon as possible, sir."

"Great, we'll be seeing you soon then?"

"Yes, I'll be there soon." Lizzie replied, "Bye." she hung up. "Oh, man..." she sighed, looking up at her family. "Emma's husband just died over in Afghanistan, they need me to take care of Andrew."

Bella and Kathleen nodded, "I'll call a taxi." Kathleen said, "You two can go in together, I'm sure Bella can get some extra work done."

The girls nodded and finished their breakfast and got dressed, Lizzie jumping quickly in the shower to avoid embarrassment.
"The taxi's here!" Kathleen called up to the girls and they both descended the stairs. She had to laugh, they were dressed so differently; Bella dressed to work, and Lizzie dressed in something which could get dirty and she not complain. "Have fun, girls – oh, Lizzie, take this to Mrs. Langley." she handed her a box of her homemade cookies, "Tell her I send my regards."

Lizzie kissed her seanmhatháir on the cheek, "I will." she said, running out to the taxi and getting in.

Loki felt like hurting someone, just to vent off his frustration. His morning not turning out in any way what he expected. First he had slipped in the tub, giving himself a rather nasty bruise on the back of his head; followed by complications when getting his clothes on, as usual since he lost his magic; which then he found out that no one was making breakfast that morning, as he had woken up late; only to hear the Captain's woman was currently crying her eyes out, and could not contain her little brat.

The boy, once he caught sight of him, wouldn't leave him alone. "What's your name?" the boy asked.

"What does it matter to you?" Loki snapped, but the boy was persistent.

"Because, I'd like to know your name. I'm Andrew." Andrew replied, "Are you going to tell me your name?"

"No."

"Why not? Do you not like your name or something?" Andrew asked.

"It has nothing to do with that." Loki replied.

"Then why won't you tell me?"

"Because I don't have to answer you." he was losing his patience, and wished that someone – anyone – would come take the boy away.

Andrew’s little brown eyes narrowed, "Well that's rude of you." he stated, "Here I am, trying to be friendly, and you are just being mean."

"Am I indeed?"
"Yeah... like Lizzie said: you need to have a time out!" Andrew practically shouted.

Loki raised an eyebrow, "She said that, did she?"

"She did. She said you were acting like I do when I don't get my nintendo." Andrew retorted. "Your mommy obviously didn't give you enough time outs when you were little."

His green eyes blazed at that. Of all the people of Loki's family, Frigga was the only one he wouldn't allow anyone to slander. He took a step forward "How dare you, you little-

"Touch him, and you'll regret it." a feminine voice growled lowly from behind him, he spun around to see Lizzie's brown eyes sparkling in fury as she glared him down.

"Lizzie!" Andrew shouted, running to the woman and throwing his arms around her waist. Her eyes didn't leave Loki's as she held onto the boy. "They're not letting me see Mommy, what's going on?" she broke eye contact to look down at Andrew.

"Mommy just needs some time alone, Andy." Lizzie replied, getting down to his height. Loki
marveled how she seemed to flip a switch between him and the boy... anger vs. love. "I'm going to be with you for the rest of the day."

"Is mommy going to be okay?" Andrew asked.

Lizzie kissed his cheek, "Yeah, mommy's going to be fine." Lizzie replied, "Now take my bag to the living room, I'll join you in a moment."

"Okay." Andrew replied, carrying the bag to the other room.

Her eyes once more snapped up to Loki, a fire blazing within. "If I ever hear that you're terrorizing Andrew, then you will believe in the old saying 'hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.'" she threatened, knowing in her mind there was probably no way she could really hurt him... but the threat sounded nice.

Loki smiled, "Stick to your wit, Elizabeth, you aren't very threatening. You're far too little." he chided, as if talking to a small child.

A brown eyebrow raised. "Why am I not surprised you found out my name?" she asked.

"Because you know that you truly are very little in comparison to me." Loki suggested.

"Is that so?" she asked, walking up to him a moment, she stared at him and he prepared to hold her if she decided to slap him again. He was getting tired of it. She smirked, "Then why is your hand twitching as if anticipating my strike? Obviously I am not so... little."

He looked down at her, noticing she didn't even come up to his chin. She truly was short. "On the contrary, you have no idea just how little you are. You remind me of a small dog, whose bark is worse than its bite." he said.

She laughed, and Loki had to admit she was quite nice looking when she smiled. "Touché." she said, "I take it that is your rebuttal for my little 'tantrum' statement from the other day?"

"A simple observation." he replied, "Your kind are simply too petty to consider just how small you are."

Lizzie considered him for another moment, wondering if she should slap him or walk away. However, her eyes caught a glimmer of something in his eyes, much like she had seen the first day she had slapped him... sadness. His words, his expression said one thing; his eyes spoke another. She sighed, she wouldn't slap him again. As much as she hated to admit it, it was getting old. "Well, Loki..." she paused, "Just remember that our kind were the ones who were responsible for your downfall, no matter how petty or little. So, you have to ask yourself just how mighty you really are? After all, you were defeated by the... ants.""

"I am more powerful than you will ever be." he replied lowly.

She smiled, and shook her head. "Then you wouldn't be here, would you? You obviously have delusions of your own grandeur."

"And what makes you think that?" Loki asked, keeping himself from tossing her against the wall. She truly was irritating with all her little statements... yet, he found himself even more fascinated. She was a bold one.

"Nothing much, just... simple observation." with that, she turned on her heel and walked away, chiding herself as the statement had sounded so much better in her head.
Loki watched her go, chastising himself for liking their short little banter. She was mortal, he was Asgardian – well, not really, but that hardly mattered. He may not be Odin's son, but he was not Laufey's either. In all actuality, he belonged nowhere.

"You leave her alone." a voice hissed from behind him. He turned to see Clint at the end of the hallway, his eyes narrowed in a glare. "She's not like the rest of us, she can't protect herself."

"Protective of the girl, Barton? I wonder what Romanoff would say?" Clint ran up, tipping Loki back until the Asgardian was against the wall, a knife in Clint's hand.

"You have no idea what you did to her back when you went for all-glory, but I pulled her from its wreckage." Clint spat, "Natasha and I found her in a concrete coffin, and took her somewhere safe, not knowing whether she would live or die as she was rolled into the emergency room with a concussion and several broken bones."

_Concrete coffin?_ Loki thought, perhaps what Elizabeth had gone through was worse than he had thought. "What does that matter to me?" he finally hissed back, ignoring the way the steel blade dug into his neck.

"If you ever hurt her, I swear to you I will put an arrow somewhere that you can't catch it." he threatened, "That girl has gone through enough because of you, and while I cannot control whether she talks to you or not, I will warn you." he backed off, "Stay away from her."

Loki straightened out his jacket, a haughty sneer on his face. "You couldn't harm me if you tried." he spat. "Like I told Elizabeth, your bark is worse than your bite."

The assassin's blue eyes narrowed, and he went to throw himself at Loki again when a shout came down the hall. "Clint! Enough!" Natasha's sharp voice cut in, her arms crossed in perturbation. Tony stood at her side, appraising the situation with interest.

"Its okay, Legolas, he won't hurt Puppy." Tony added.

"You don't know that. He's capable of anything." Clint retorted, "You guys shouldn't allow him up here when she comes."

"What do I care over such a little mortal? She's nothing to me." Loki replied.

Clint's looked over to him, "Clint," Natasha warned, "Lets go. Tony will take care of Loki, and we'll get some restrictions on what floors he's allowed on while Lizzie is here." she looked at Tony.

"If something happens Loki is on lockdown." Tony replied, "He's not allowed where she is."

"He better not be." Clint retorted, moving slowly to follow Natasha back off of the floor.

Loki chuckled, "Quite amusing to watch how you all flutter over her, as if she's some damsel in distress."

Tony smirked, "Oh, I don't believe anything is going to happen. You're right, she's not all that dangerous." his dark eyes suddenly glared hard at Loki, "But if you ever hurt her, Lokes, I'll throw you out the window without any suit to catch you."

"I thought you said you weren't worried." Loki retorted.

"I'm not." Tony replied, "She can hold her own against you... mentally, and that gives her a credit against you. But physically, she's as helpless as Pepper – well, as Pepper was."
"She is a mere mortal, why would I care about her mental prowess? She's no match for mine anyways." Loki replied.

Tony smiled, "Well, for a mere mortal, she seems to keep you talking. That, and you have already lost in having the last word... twice now, Reindeer Games. You have some catching up to do if you want to go with that argument." he chuckled as Loki stiffened in wounded pride.

"What do you know, Stark?" Loki snapped.

"I'd like to think I know quite a bit... I mean, I am a genius." Tony replied as he brushed past Loki and into the other room.

The Asgardian stomped off to his room, wondering what it was about the girl that made the Avengers so protective of her. Clint and Tony were the last people to threaten him, as he had already been approached by Steve, and Bruce – Thor coming in the other day to warn him about angering the woman. Was she so special that she somehow was liked by them all? Or was it that they just didn't trust him?

An hour later, Emma's parents showed up, and Lizzie took Andrew to see them. Looking at the clock, she saw it was 8:45, and she decided that they all would probably like a nice lunch. The sound of a storm could be heard outside, and she wondered if Thor had anything to do with it... she didn't have to wonder long as the Thunderer landed on the landing pad of Stark Tower, a woman under his arm. They seemed to be arguing somewhat, but Lizzie wasn't particularly interested in the conversation – she was too busy contemplating lunch.

"You didn't even tell me!" the woman shouted, Lizzie turned around slightly, watching as the woman beside Thor tiraded, she couldn't help but wonder how this conversation was going to turn out. "You were on Earth, and you couldn't get a hold of me somehow? I know Tony Stark has telephones, its not like you were in Siberia!"

"Jane, I-"

"And then you just swoop down and bring me here! What if I didn't want to come?" Jane asked. Thor's golden brow furrowed, "Why wouldn't you want to come?" he asked confusedly.

Lizzie shook her head with a smile as Jane threw her hands up in exasperation, stomping in front of Thor and rounding on him. "That's not the point." she spat.

The Asgardian looked thoroughly lost as his woman continued to rant, and Lizzie decided to leave the couple to deal with their problems by themselves. They didn't need her around to intervene, she sincerely doubted the petite brunette would approve. Therefore, she went to the kitchen, deciding to make some food.

"Okay, Jarvis... what do we have in the fridge that I can work with?"

Justine walked in several hours later, a tired smile on her face. "Its starting to smell good... what are you making?"

"Good old Irish stew." Lizzie answered.

"You're Irish right?" Justine replied, going to open the oven only to have Lizzie screech.

"Don't touch that! You'll make them fall!" she pushed Justine away, "And yes, I am Irish... what
“Just curious... you don't look Irish.” Justine replied, pushing a blond lock out of her face.

Lizzie chuckled, "Yeah, I get that a lot. I think its my Jewish heritage." she said, "And I'm sorry I yelled at you... its just... popovers are very delicate things to cook. Like yorkshire pudding. Heavy footsteps or a draft will kill their rising."

Justine looked at her with a smirk, "Passionate about cooking are we?"

"Not particularly... but I'm insanely proud when I do cook." Lizzie retorted with a slight blush. "How've you been Miss Worthington?"

"Just Justine, thanks." the blonde replied, "I'm exhausted, quite frankly. My cousin is currently about to lose her mind because of what happened to Garrett... she's very fortunate to have Steve and Andrew around, they'll keep her on the ground I think."

"Emma's strong. She'll be fine. Though, I have to say, I have never seen such a couple as she and Garrett since my grandparents. My grandfathers death nearly destroyed my grandmother, but she kept it together because of Bella and I." Lizzie said as she thickened the gravy in the stew.

"I agree... my parents don't have that relationship. Its hard for me to comprehend it, somewhat." Justine replied, "How about your parents?"

"Mine?" Lizzie repeated, "I don't know. My parents died when I was really young, like four or something. The house caught on fire, I have no idea how Bella and I made it out, but we did. We lived with my grandparents in Cork after that, until about twelve years ago when my grandfather died. Seánmhatháir moved us here."

"That's gotta be tough." Justine commented.

Lizzie shook her head, "Not really, I like it. I couldn't ask for a better childhood, I think." At that moment the timer went off, and Lizzie took her popovers out of the oven setting them on the stove. "Jarvis, please inform the rest of the household that lunch is ready."

"As you wish, Miss Elizabeth." Jarvis replied.

"Need some help setting the... counter?" Justine offered.

Lizzie smirked, "Sure." she replied, handing Justine the silverware.

"Miss Elizabeth, would you like me to inform Prince Loki that lunch is ready?" Jarvis asked.

She thought for a moment, taking the popovers out of the muffin cups. She didn't know how to answer the question. On one hand she didn't want to be around him... on the other... was she going to be heartless? Was she?

"Lizzie?" Justine's voice interrupted.

She looked up at Justine, over at the plates... she needed to answer now.

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A floor below, Loki was trying to read a book on Norse Mythology, completely disgusted with some of the legends which had formed about him and Thor. He could now understand Tony's comments about his having children, and wondered if the Midgardians who had come up with these tales had been lunatics. After all, how is it possible for him to have children which were so completely
opposite than he? Firstly, no reproductive system would work in that manner; secondly... he wasn't that perverse!

"Prince Loki?" Jarvis broke through his thoughts.

"Yes, Jarvis?" Loki replied tiredly.

"Pardon my intrusion, but lunch is ready." the AI replied.

Loki looked up where the voice was coming from, "Who made it? Hopefully not Stark."
The AI seemed to chuckle, "No, Mr. Stark is quite inept in the kitchen, it could even be said he doesn't know how to boil water – except he knows the molecular formula to make it happen." Jarvis replied, "No, Miss Donovan made lunch, sir. And from what Prince Thor says, it is exceptional."

That piqued Loki's interest. Not that Thor thought it was 'exceptional', as Thor thought anything which filled his stomach was 'exceptional'; but that Elizabeth was actually cooking. "Who has asked me to come?" he asked, because if it was Thor he was going to decline.

"Miss Donovan, actually." the AI said, twisting the truth somewhat... no need to know that the AI suggested it.

Loki nodded, shutting his book and placing it on the bedside table, "I'll be right up." he said as he left his room to go to the elevator. As he ascended, he wished he had his magic, as he would have simply teleported himself to the kitchen... but he didn't, and therefore had no other choice than depend on the Midgardian technology.

When the elevator doors opened, he felt somewhat self-conscious... all eyes turned toward him.
Tony nodded in greeting. Steve was so focused on the petite brunette beside him, holding Andrew on his lap, all he could do was nod in Loki's direction. Bruce tightened his hold on Justine, as she tried to keep him calm. Clint's fork was so tight in his hand that it began to bend, and Natasha tried to get him to 'knock it off'. There was a couple who Loki didn't recognize, but they looked at him in curiosity.

"There you are brother!" depend on Thor to greet him so loudly, "I was beginning to wonder if you'd decline the offer to join the feast."

"I wouldn't call this a feast, Thor." Loki retorted.

Elizabeth looked over at him with a raised eyebrow, then she laughed in Thor's direction. "Considering he's already had three bowlfuls, I think this is a feast for him." she replied, pulling a ladle-ful of some strange substance and putting it in the bowl, a small bread of some sort next to it.

Loki eyed the food, wondering just why he had bothered.

"Oh come on!" Lizzie exclaimed, "You don't know you don't like it until you taste it." A staring contest ensued, green eyes looking into brown. Finally she smirked, "Fine, I'm sure Thor will like it-"

"I haven't tried it yet." Loki interrupted stopping her from taking the bowl. Resisting the urge to gag, he took a bite.

"Well?" Lizzie prompted.

He looked up, "Its sufficient." he answered.
"Its excellent." Thor translated, "Loki is not one for giving compliments."

"I can speak for myself, thank you Thor." Loki snapped.

The Thunderer's booming laughter echoed in the room. "Ah, Loki, I have missed your remarks. Surely you do not wish to insult her? She has spent the last few hours making this meal – speaking of, is there a chance I could have another?"

"Are you actually asking, brother?" Loki asked, disbelief plain on his features.

"Of course!" Thor boomed, "I would not wish to anger Lady Elizabeth by giving her orders." he lowered his voice to a whisper, "I doubt she'd appreciate it."

Elizabeth laughed, "Just give me a sec – does anyone want seconds?" nobody answered affirmative. "Alright, then here you are." she replied, giving him another bowl. "I have to say, its been a while since someone has asked for more than seconds on my cooking... then again, my cousins live in Ireland so they can't ask for seconds. Its a high compliment."

"And you deserve high compliments, Milady, your cooking is quite good." Thor praised.

"Its just stew." Loki threw in.

"Well its very good stew." Thor retorted.

Lizzie put her hands up, "Lets not get in an argument over it." she suggested, "Thor, do you mind taking this to Jane for me?"

The blonde Asgardian looked at her mid-bite. "Do you think that wise after – well you saw?"

Putting a bowl in front of him she nodded. "Coming from a woman, yes, I do. She needs to eat, and you need an opportunity to talk to her. Just tell her I sent you, and she can be angry with me." she encouraged.

Thor considered her for a moment, then got up and walked out of the room – bowl perched precariously in his hands.

Lizzie watched him go with a smile on her face. "Trouble in paradise?" Loki asked. She shook her head.

"She's upset because he didn't check in with her when he came to take care of you." Lizzie answered, "So, right now he's in the metaphoric dog house. I'm just trying to help."

"Why would you do that?" Loki asked.

She shrugged, pushing her fringe out of her eyes as she sat down in the place where Thor had been, a bowl of stew in her hands. "I'm a romantic at heart." she answered, "That, and I never liked long-lasting contention. Its bad for relationships."

Loki chuckled, "You Midgardians, you are so focused on love, you miss everything else." Lizzie paused, looking over at Loki with disdain. "What?"

"You are so focused on your bitterness, aren't you?" she asked, "Love is the most powerful thing in the universe, without it man is nothing."

"Sentiment is a foolish emotion." Loki spat. "Only for the weak minded and foolish."

"Is that what you believe?" Lizzie asked.
"Did I say it?"

"Saying and believing are two different things. You can say things and not believe them... its called lying. And from what I've heard, you're very skilled at that." she replied. "So my question is simple: do you really believe that?"

"Of course I do." Loki replied, looking down at his food before he looked back up.

There was a moment where she just stared at him, her brown eyes scanning his. "Then you lie to yourself." she finally said, getting up from her chair to move closer to Justine and Bruce.

Loki stayed in his spot, wondering how it was she always managed to have the last word.
Lizzie pranks Mr. Dale yet again. Loki notices that there is something odd about her, and Thor explains to her what happened to make Loki the way he is...

"I can't believe you're already doing this again." Pat muttered as Lizzie put the finishing touches on her newest prank the next day: sealing off Mr. Dale's office by putting a fake wall up. For all intents and purposes, it looked real; complete with a flowchart which – if you looked closely – showed how many times Lizzie had pranked Phillip, and their 'awesomeness' in comparison to his own.

Lizzie's brown eyes rolled upwards as she spread some more white paint on the particle board. "Tomorrow is April Fools. The ban will be null and void." she retorted.

Pat smirked. "Mrs. Langley could always ban you again." she warned, but Lizzie shook her head. "According to sources, Mrs. Langley is currently on vacation. She is not to be bothered due to, what is known as, grief." Lizzie replied soberly, "She buries her husband tomorrow, and who knows when she'll be back. Besides, Phillip isn't so heartless as to bother her about a prank while she's dealing with being a widow."

"Are you attending the funeral?" Pat asked. Lizzie nodded, "Did you even know him?"

"Yeah, I met him a few times. He was a kinda cool guy – and I don't say that often. She's not going to be the same, that's for sure." Lizzie replied. "It's kinda hard to do this, actually, under the circumstances. She's up there crying her eyes out, and I'm down here trying to get a few laughs... God, I'm heartless."

Her companion shrugged, "You're coping." she answered, "It's perfectly normal for you to not know what else to do for her, so you do what you're comfortable with... in this case: pranking."

Lizzie scoffed, "You know what, Pat? You're probably right."

"Yeah, I know, its amazing sometimes what words of wisdom come pouring out of my mouth." Pat retorted, handing Lizzie a cloth to wipe up some residue that got on her pants. "But she's fortunate to have such good friends. I hear that Mr. Stark is giving her complete leave, for as long as she needs it." she said.

Lizzie nodded, "That he did. He knew Garrett, I think. From what I've heard, they had a pact between them, that Mr. Stark take care of her if something happened to him." she looked up, "Could you hand me that smaller brush?"

Pat passed her the object, "Well, I sincerely hope that she's going to be all right. I can't imagine if I lost my Henry, especially having a child so young."

"Well, like you said: she has good friends. That, and I think that she now has several males in her life who would be more than willing to play the male role in Andy's life." Lizzie said, "There, how does that look?" she asked, inspecting her work.
A laugh erupted from Pat, "I'll say this: I do not know how many people think of such crazy things as you do. How does Bella cope?" she asked.

Lizzie smirked, "She doesn't. Bella and my grandmother have immunity to my pranks. Seanmhatháir because she is never pleased when I play a prank on her, more willing to smack me over the head with a spoon; and Bella because I'm afraid of what she'll do in retaliation." she answered.

"Why? Is she like you in that regard?" Pat asked. "Something like in the movie Twins where DeVito burned his hand and Arnold felt it?"

"Not specifically. Pranks are not Bella's forte... unless riled up. She taught everyone in our family a long time ago not to play with her, as they wound up slightly embarrassed from her... ingenuity. I remember one time she stuck my phone in a waterproof container, and then stuck it in the big water jug which sustained the college students in the cafeteria. I started asking if anyone had seen my phone, and when the ringtone came from the water jug, I almost freaked. Needless to say, I never left my phone within her grasp again." Lizzie replied, deciding to just let the paint dry – and seeing as the term was not coined for nothing, she decided to go upstairs to check on dinner for the Avengers (who were still embroiled in deep discussions about things which she knew nothing of).

"Well, I think he'll be surprised at this." Pat finally said, "I don't know how many more things you could do to his office at this point, you've done twenty things already."

"Twenty-four." Lizzie corrected, "This makes twenty-five, which is one quarter of a hundred. I'm sure I could cook up something... I just don't know what yet."

"Where do you get all of your ideas?" Pat inquired

Lizzie shrugged, "At first it was the internet. Then I went to college and became friends with some pretty knowledgeable guys, then I came here and kinda modified what I already knew. This one is a classic." she said, "But, I think that this will be the last, and I'll go terrorize someone else – well, unless he decides he wants another round. At which point, I will be more than happy to oblige him."

Pat chuckled with a shake of her head, "Well, I hope he doesn't. I would like for there to be a week where he's not screaming 'Donovan' at the top of his lungs, while fussing over his crisp white shirt." she said, helping Lizzie pack up the paint supplies. "You going to finish this tonight, I take it?"

Lizzie affirmed that, and within a few moments, the women parted ways. Pat to go to dinner with her husband, and Lizzie to resume her position as babysitter... well, after she washed her hands.

When she arrived upstairs, she was surprised to find Thor's girlfriend, Jane, already in the kitchen, staring rather intently on the food she had in the oven. "Ahem." she cleared her throat, watching as the woman spun with a squeak.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't know you were there. What is that in there?" Jane apologized then asked, causing Lizzie to chuckle. She knew who the astrophysicist was, but had not really introduced herself.

"That's okay, I didn't expect you here either. As for what's in there, its lamb, so I hope you aren't a vegetarian. And I think now would be a good time to introduce myself." Lizzie said in quick succession, "Elizabeth Donovan... just call me Lizzie though."

"Jane told me you were the one who sent him with lunch yesterday, and I have to thank you for that. Sorry you had to witness my outburst when I arrived." Jane said.
Lizzie shrugged nonchalantly, "Hey, no problem. I figured it would be a good thing for him to do, I don't like to see strains between couples. Its a bad sign." she answered, moving around Jane to look at the food in the oven.

"Doesn't Mr. Stark have a cook or something? Or is that your job?" Jane asked.

Lizzie laughed, "No – well, yes he does have a cook. No, that's not my job. I work for Emma Langley, who I think you met last night, as her assistant. I simply offered to cook since Tony's cook actually was coming down with something, and I figured I'd give him a break. Its funny, this is the closest thing I've had for a vacation in the two years I've worked here."

"What is it you do?" Jane asked as Lizzie went to the kitchen to get her something to drink.

"Ah, just lawyerly stuff I guess. I am an intern at the moment, and just act as Emma's liaison for most things, taking care of the minor stuff so she can focus on the major. Simple really." Lizzie answered as she poured Jane a glass of lemonade.

"Wow, you cook, you work, you make lemonade. I'm fortunate if I get one meal a day, and I don't necessarily make it." Jane marveled.

"I was raised by a old Irish grandmother. If I didn't cook at least twice a week growing up, as well as do my chores, then I'd wind up missing out of most of her goodies – which, if you know my grandmother, are the best goodies you'll ever have." Lizzie replied sipping from her own cup. "So what is it you do? I heard you are some kind of a physicist?"

"Astrophysicist. I study – or rather theorize – on what goes on beyond our atmosphere. Its like astronomy, except I'm working more with what 'might' be instead of what I see." Jane explained, "Or something like that. I hope that made sense?"

Lizzie nodded. "How ironic you're with a guy who is from that 'beyond the atmosphere' thing. He's living proof of what you theorize." she said.

Jane laughed, "Yeah, he proved to me that what I was looking for wasn't just a waste of time." she said, her eyes growing hazy a moment as a small smile lingered on her lips.

Lizzie chuckled, heading to the cabinet for some ingredients. Hopefully Jarvis had managed to get the mint jelly she'd asked for.

"Hey Jane, did you find out what that marvelous smell is?" a new voice came from the doorway.

Lizzie turned to see another woman who she hadn't seen that morning, with large blue eyes behind the glasses which she wore. "Oh, hey... yet another person who I didn't see when I arrived." she said.

"Darcy, this is Lizzie. Lizzie, this is my friend, Darcy Lewis." Jane introduced.

"Nice to meet you Lizzie, I hope you're the cook in this establishment. The guys aren't very promising as I watched them. So what are you, like the only woman in the place?" Darcy asked.

Lizzie smiled, "Pleasure. Yes, I am the temporary cook, until the actual cook gets over his cold. As for the women, there are a few of us, but they're mostly keeping to themselves at present. Emma, who I'm assuming you didn't meet yet, her husband just died. Justine is with her, as she is her cousin. And Pepper is at a meeting in Chicago. So it seems I'm the only female besides yourselves, I suppose." she answered.

Darcy raised an eyebrow, "So there are a few of you Avenger women. Who are you with?"
"Sorry?" Lizzie wasn't sure that Darcy meant what she thought, but hoped that she didn't.

"Who are you with? Like Jane is with Thor; I know Pepper is with Stark; I heard the doctor guy mention a 'Justine', so I'm assuming they're together. The red-head and the short guy seemed close. So who are you with?" Darcy clarified.

Lizzie laughed nervously for a moment, somewhat disbelieving that someone actually thought she was 'with' someone. "I'm not 'with' anyone. I'm here to just help out." she finally answered.

Darcy beamed, moving closer. "Well then, similarly-situated-single-sister, I think we'll get along."

"Did you choose those words because they all started with 'si'?" Lizzie asked. Darcy nodded, congratulating her on picking up on it.

A moment later, Jane excused herself and left Lizzie and Darcy alone. "How ironic is it that your name is Lizzie and mine is Darcy?" Darcy asked.

Lizzie looked over at her, "Uh... because of Pride and Prejudice?"

"Yes!" Darcy exclaimed, "Its like some cheesy novel where all the characters have similar names or something, and its obvious that the writer had no imagination."

"Well, I guess I can see it." Lizzie answered.

"So how old are you Elizabeth?" Darcy asked, her tone taking on a posh flair.

"Twenty-one tomorrow."

"Aww... you're a baby." Darcy cooed.

Lizzie's brow eyebrow raised, "Baby? You can't be more than twenty-five." she drawled.

"Twenty-five on the nose, actually. You're good." Darcy corrected, "So what can I do to help? I'm a decent enough cook myself."

Together, the two women began working.

"ENOUGH!" Thor boomed, slamming his hand on the table which they were using. "Must you continue squabbling over nothing, Man of Iron? Loki says we need to get everyone we can together, and that includes all the mutants in the area – if possible."

Tony rolled his eyes. "I refuse to work with people with attitude issues. And if you have ever met the Fantastic Four, you would know that Johnny Storm has an ego comparable with you Asgardians." he said.

"I thought you liked Dr. Richards?" Bruce said from his spot on the couch.

"I do, but even the Capsicle had a problem with Johnny when he met him. Well, as much of a problem as you can have after you get over the fact that the guy looks exactly like you." Tony added as an afterthought.

Steve grimaced, "We're nothing alike." he said.

"Are you sure you never slept around back before you became a Capsicle? Spread a few of the Roger genes around?" Tony teased, watching as Steve just sighed.
"I assure you, Stark, not all men were like your father in the day." Steve retorted, watching as Tony shrugged. "Some of us had morals."

"Hey, I may not like my dad, but he did make you that shield of yours – not that I can't improve it." Tony said.

"So it is because of this one, Johnny Storm that you refuse to unite ourselves with a group who could help us?" Thor interrupted, "It is so petty. You all will have to unite at one point or another, to defeat this foe. How can you fight him when you are all squabbling how you don't like this person or that one?"

"We will manage without the group of radiated mutants – no offense Bruce." Tony said.

Bruce just shook his head, "None taken. Though I don't mind working with them. I like Dr. Richards, myself, and as for Johnny..."

"I say we don't worry about him." Natasha spoke for the first time. "We need the others – and hey, maybe Storm can help us in some way."

"Thor is right, Tony," Bruce continued, "We have to ask Reed and his team to help us. Despite Johnny."

Steve shrugged, "I may not like him, but I think he's probably useful as a member of the team. If he can pull his own weight, that is." he said.

"Then it is agreed that this group will be joining us?" Thor asked.

"I don't agree." Tony insisted.

"Well, you're outnumbered, Stark." Clint interjected, "The rest of us say 'yes'."

"Why am I not part of this little vote? I have as much say, if not more, as this is my ho-"

"Stark!" Loki finally shouted, "You're going to need all the help you can get. If these four people can help, you better hope they agree to do it, because the Avengers will not be able to handle them on their own! I was a picnic in comparison – if you had been listening to what I've been saying over the last few days, you'd know this."

Tony paused for a moment. "I'm sorry, I can't do it. Do you know how many women are in this building? Fireboy is a bad idea no matter how you slice it."

"I'm sure the women will manage." Loki retorted, "If he can help you, you're better off."

"I agree with my brother." Thor boomed, "Someone should call these Fantastic Four, have them apart of these meetings."

"Absolutely not." Tony swore, "I won't have-"

"Tony." Bruce snapped, "They're coming whether you like it or not."

A pout formed on Tony Stark's face, "Well I don't like it." he said, getting up to pour himself another drink, "You're all very ungrateful."

"Mr. Stark, might I inform you that Miss Elizabeth is outside the door trying to get in." Jarvis' voice echoed.
"Is she lost again?" Tony asked, heading for the door.

"No, sir, she wishes to bring you all some refreshments." Jarvis answered as the door opened to reveal a somewhat awkward Lizzie. A tray was balanced in her hands, several glasses with ice in them, two pitchers of what looked like lemonade and iced tea.

"Hi." she finally said, "I was trying to knock, but I'm not particularly coordinated."

Tony smirked, "Well, what puppy is?" he quipped, "Come in Prankster. Oh, by the way, did you get that particle board up and covered?" she looked at him in a mixture of incredulity and irritation. Loki looked up too, originally thinking that Stark was referring to himself – surprised to find that it was Lizzie he spoke to. His eyebrow rose. She was a prankster?

"Yeah, I did." she said as Clint got up to help her with the tray, setting it down on the coffee table. "Dale won't know what hit him."

"Sure he will. Its called a wall." Tony quipped. "Though it will be more of him hitting it."

"Whole new meaning to 'banging your head against a wall' I suppose." Lizzie replied dryly, "Okay, who wants what?"

Loki watched her as she doled out the drinks, handing them to each of the Avengers. He couldn't help but find her interaction with them rather interesting – despite the fact that his mind was screaming that he shouldn't find a mortal interesting. She was beneath him, a thing to be ruled, not studied. Yet, he couldn't help but wonder why she found Tony's attitude something to chuckle at; or why she shared a smile with the assassins; or her blush when she handed a drink to the resident beast. Though why she outright laughed at Thor was understandable, he seemed to have a charisma to him. Loki scowled. She was just like everyone else. Falling at his brother's feet at a smile. Mortals.

"Loki?" Thor's voice broke through him, "Are you all right?"

"Yeah, Voldie, you look like the very idea of Lizzie's lemonade is worth vomiting over." Tony interjected. Lizzie's brown eyes darted toward the billionaire. "I wasn't saying that's what I thought." he defended.

Loki shook his head. "You should keep to your toys, Stark. You understand them more than a thinking being. Probably because you don't understand how to think."

Tony's eyebrow rose, "That particular topic is still up for debate." he said.

The Asgardian reached up for the glass, his eyes caught a scar on the inside of her forearm, running from her wrist to a few inches above. Green eyes caught brown as she suddenly jerked away, yanking her three-quarter-length sleeves down in an effort to cover it. She was hiding something, but he wasn't sure what. "All right, well dinner should be ready in about twenty minutes, so if you want to eat, start heading down" Lizzie said as she gathered the tray, careful not to show her scar to Loki again, and headed for the door.

The group murmured their agreement that they would be there, and continued with the topic.

But Loki's mind lingered on the scar, and for the first time he wondered if there was more to the girl than met the eye.

Dinner was a simple affair, as it had been for the last few days. The group of Avengers all swooped in, Thor eating enough for four people instead of one, showering Lizzie with praises; and Loki liking
the food but saying very little about it. He had noticed that Lizzie had not been as forthcoming in slapping him as before, nor in her conversation. Not that he was particularly interested in beginning a conversation with the little mortal, but he did enjoy her spars – however dull they were.

Today, however, she seemed to be avoiding him more than usual, opting to speak with Thor's mortal woman or her friend instead. A rather foolish thing on her behalf, in his opinion, as the other Midgardian woman seemed to have no sense at all, her ramblings rather irritating to listen to. It was like listening to Fandral rave about his numerous conquests, and wishing he would simply shut up. As it turned out, they were discussing the Midgardian thing which Thor still was questioning about: films. Disney films to be exact.

"Are you kidding?" Darcy exclaimed, "You speak blasphemy of the Disney princesses with your words, Miss Donovan. You should be hanged and quartered. Or made into a villain by the sea witch."

Lizzie scoffed, "Please. I sincerely doubt you liked Aurora or Snow White growing up. You seem to have taken after Megara if you want my honest opinion. I can just hear you saying 'Megara. My friends call me 'Meg'. Or at least they would if I had any friends.'" she said, laughing at her own joke. Loki had no idea what she was saying, but assumed that it was a tease.

Darcy rolled her eyes, "Are you saying I have no friends, Miss There's-More-Than-This-Provincial-Life?"

"Do not diss Belle." Lizzie warned lowly, "She is the best princess Disney ever came up with. She's sassy, and sweet all at once. Of all of the princesses, I think she's the only one who could have taken on the beast without screaming out for their Prince Charmings. Besides, Belle and the Beast actually had conversations, the others just kinda looked pretty and let the guys do all the work."

"Touchy much?" Darcy retorted with a laugh.

"Over Belle? Yes." Lizzie replied. "My grandmother used to joke that she wound up my rold model."

It was at that moment that Justine came in, putting her bowl in the dishwasher, effectively causing Darcy to turn her attention to Justine instead as she asked what it was like to date the doctor. Loki watched as Lizzie rolled her eyes and returned to her meal.

"Arguing over a character, Elizabeth?" Loki clucked his tongue, "How disappointing that you can't find more of a match of mind."

Lizzie raised an eyebrow, "Sometimes I want to take a vacation. Dealing with jerks like you tend to be a bit tiring." she retorted. "Why does it matter to you anyways? I'm just a thorn in your side... or a sting in your cheek." she smirked.

Loki chuckled, rubbing his cheek. "That you are. But I doubt you find such trivial conversation very interesting. You argue for the sake of arguing, nothing more."

"You assume to know me." Lizzie replied, "Tell me, oh wise sage, how did you come to that conclusion?"

"You really wish to know?" Loki asked, "Because I'm sure you won't like the answer."
"How do I know I won't like it if I don't try it?" she asked flippantly.

He smiled, "You don't believe in that phrase. Why use it?" he asked.
Her brown eyes looked at him quizzically, "What makes you think I don't believe that phrase?"
"Your tone." he answered simply, "Besides, I am the god of lies."

She scoffed, "Only in your mind, my egotistical jackass." she replied, "Or perhaps I should say
you're bullheaded in your ego."

Loki smirked, knowing exactly that she was referring to his helmet. "That does not change that you
cannot lie to me."

She tilted her head, "Hmm... I doubt that. Though it might be interesting to see you play a game of
bullshit." she muttered the last bit to herself.

"I'm sorry, what kind of a game is that?" Loki asked, wondering what new levels of immaturity the
human mind could come up with.

It was Darcy who answered. "Bullshit is a game designed for liars. Basically its a way to lie and get
away with it, laughing the entire way." she said, looking over Loki with a critical gaze. "Right up
your alley, eh Mr. Kneel-Bitches."

Lizzie snorted, suddenly coughing as her mint jelly wound up in her trachea. Loki simply glared at
the other woman as she started pounding on Lizzie's back in an effort to alleviate the choking. "I'm
surprised you don't spend more time with Stark." he said sarcastically, "You two would get along
splendidly."

"Why? Because we are both blunt in what we think of you?" Darcy asked, "Of course. What's the
point of tiptoeing? What's the worst you can do?"

"Kill you." Loki retorted.

Darcy scoffed and Lizzie joined her in chuckling. "You could try." the political science major
replied. "Though I doubt you'd want to anger Mr. All-Powerful up in skyland. I hear he's not very
pleased with you. Not that you care, I suppose, I hear your daddy issues are pretty intense."

Loki's eyes flickered between the two women, noticing that Lizzie's face suddenly sobered, a
pensive look upon her features. "The All-Father could hardly matter to me." Loki said lowly, "I
suggest you keep your thoughts to yourself, little mortal, little mortal, no one wishes to hear them."

"Darcy, can you help me for a minute?" Jane called from across the room, and Darcy left Lizzie and
Loki alone. His green eyes watched the woman for a moment.

"Watch it Loki." Lizzie warned after gathering her thoughts, "She is a guest here. I'd hate to have to
slap you again."

He smirked, "Well, Elizabeth, considering that is all you can do – I'm not very afraid. After all,
you're obviously not as strong as you pretend." he said with a pointed glance at her arm. She quickly
moved to cover it up.

"You know nothing, Loki. Do me a favor and... 'Keep your thoughts to yourself, little 'g' god – no
one wishes to hear them.'" Lizzie spat.

This only caused Loki to smile wider, "Have I finally made you unable to retort smartly, Elizabeth?
Resorting to jabs instead? How mature of you." he asked.

"No, you just cheat." she said. "My business is my business, and if I'm not to proud to display
something like a scar, then leave it be. I can make that decision."
"Really? Or is it that you're afraid to acknowledge that you truly are weak?" he asked.

Lizzie scoffed, "Pinning your own self-condemnation upon me? That's not very confrontive of you."

"That is none of your concern... as you said: my business is my business." he repeated. "Clever though how you moved the conversation from you to me. I commend you, not many people can do it that smoothly."

Her brows furrowed, "Are you complimenting me?" she asked.

"Perhaps." he said, "Perhaps not."

"I'll take that as a 'yes'." she replied, "Though I must ask: why is my scar so interesting to you?"

"It reminds me of how little you are. Just how insignificant if someone can mar you in such a manner. No wonder they all fawn over you, you're so helpless." he said with a smile on his face.

"I'm not helpless." she replied smoothly.

Loki leaned closer, "Then you lie to yourself." he repeated her words from the day before, standing up and walking away before she could reply.

Lizzie watched him go with a shake of her head, "You just used my line. Cheater." she said to his retreating back. Looking around, she decided to go outside.

She needed some fresh air... well, as fresh as you could get in New York City.

"Lady Elizabeth?" Thor's voice called as softly as possible, not really wishing to disturb her as she watched the sunset across the city. The haze caused quite a bit of a problem to see clearly, the hues obscured and blurring into only a few.

"You know, I used to watch the sunset with my grandfather when I was a kid, we then used to just watch the stars come out. I never really thought about something being up there." she said to him as he moved to stand beside her. "Now that I know there is, now that I have living proof, I still find it impossible to believe. Is that ridiculous or what?"

He shook his head, "Not necessarily." he replied, "You have lived your whole life believing something about your world which wasn't true. Its hard to comprehend that after all these years everything you knew was a lie."

She sighed, "Was he always like this?" she asked softly, "Loki I mean."

"No. My brother also had to deal with what you are struggling to understand. He lived his life believing a lie. Although I know not what happened to my brother to make him how he is, he was not always so, that I can attest to." Thor replied, "He was raised to believe he was my brother, as was I to believe it of him. When I was banished to Midgard – forgive me, you call it Earth – my brother found out that he was not a son of Odin as he had been raised to think. He was the son of one of our most hated enemies, and a being which was a villain for a millennia. He thought himself a monster, from my father's account, and has fought ever since to prove to himself."

"Hence why he tried to take over Earth – or Midgard?" Lizzie concluded, "So Darcy was right, he does have daddy issues."
"His issue is indeed with my father, as he blames him for treating him different. Apparently my brother was always considered second best – and I did not even see it." Thor chided himself, "I was too busy being the hero of Asgard, I did not notice my own brother falling further and further into an abyss until – well, he fell into an abyss."

Lizzie nodded, and both were silent for a moment. "Why did he agree to come here?" she asked.

Thor chuckled, "Loki is advantageous if anything. His time in the Tower of Solitude is not to be envied. That, and I think that in many ways he is still the brother I grew up with, willing to help me."

"What if he isn't?" Lizzie asked, "What if he's just biding his time?"
"He may be, but I think there is still hope for him." he replied, watching as the sunset through the haze. It wasn't as beautiful as he'd seen in New Mexico, but it was somewhat nice to watch.

"What hope? The man is a lunatic." Lizzie hissed. "An egotistical lunatic with a understandable past, but a lunatic all the same. Its like dealing with a more dangerous version of Hitler... in fact I think Hitler had issues with his familial ties as well."

"You do not know him, Lady Elizabeth." Thor said, shaking his head lightly, "Loki is used to others hating him. He does not know how to act normally, I'm afraid. He spent all his time believing that my parents didn't love him when they did, choosing to focus on the bad rather than the good. But that is Loki. Do not hate him, Milady, there is a bit of my brother in there somewhere, he just needs someone to see it. Do not judge him harshly, Lady Elizabeth." Thor pleaded, "He may yet change." "I'm not sure I can do that." she replied, "He is responsible for my two month stay in a hospital, seeking rehabilitation after being buried under concrete." she paused a moment, "He's very fortunate he has you. I don't think that many here would be so forgiving of him." Lizzie replied with a smile.

Thor nodded, "I know. I just wish he'd realize it. Then perhaps he would return to being the Loki I knew."
"If he's what you say he is, then he will." she said.

"Hey!" Tony shouted from the doorway, "You two better get back in here. You don't want the astrophysicist thinking there's something going on between you two."

Lizzie rolled her eyes, but followed instructions as the two of them went back inside. He had given her a lot to think about.
On the edges of the universe, Thanos looked toward the Yggdrasil tree, observing the way the roots of the tree went around the Nine Realms. He could see Asgard from his vantage point, the golden city gleaming brightly in the distance like a star.

"Master," the Other greeted, "The representative from Muspelheim is here."

"And the representative from Jötunheim?" Thanos asked, remaining in his spot. "What was their answer?"

The Other sighed, "There is still no leader of Jötunheim, my lord. The death of Laufey has still made its impact on the realm. The traitor Loki's affect on the realm has caused them to wish to distance themselves from any rights with Asgard. They fear Odin."

"The son of Laufey – what is his name?" the Mad Titan inquired.

"Helblindi, my lord." the Other answered.

"Why has he not taken the throne?" Thanos finished his question.

"There is a rivalry between the two sons of Laufey." the Other informed, "Helblindi and Blyeistr are still at odds of who will reign. Helblindi is the elder, and full brother of the traitor, Loki; but their younger, half-brother still believes he should be the king of Jötunheim. Helblindi wishes to keep peace with Asgard, Blyeistr does not agree."

Thanos smiled, "Find the half-brother, perhaps he would be more willing to form an alliance with the promise of the realm when I am done with Asgard and Midgard." he instructed.

"You think it wise to involve the brother? Surely."

"You question me?" Thanos boomed, but the Other simply cowered.

"No, my lord. I shall do as you command." he replied timidly. "Also, the Sorceress is here, she wishes to discuss Asgard, my lord."

"Naturally, the harlot is far too keen on becoming the queen of that realm. Not that I'm interested in such an outcome, she is far too ambitious for her own good. The nine realms will be mine in the end, to believe else wise is not wise at all." Thanos replied, "And that of Aghartha? Has the queen replied?"

"No, my lord, we have yet to find a way into that realm. As you know, the Agharthians are well known for their secret ways of getting in. But I have been able to find one of the Guardians who was wandering Midgard to help us in." the Other replied. "I'm sure we can get him to cooperate."

Thanos nodded, "Good. And what of our informant from Midgard? The mutant... what is his name
"Shaw, my lord." the Other answered, knowing that Thanos knew the name himself. He was simply proving the point that the mutant 'Shaw' was inconsequential.

The Other could not help but smile. "He has informed us that the Avengers are currently trying to piece together what they know of you. The half-blood Asgardian is trying to tell them what he knows, to warn them."

"What has he told them?" Thanos inquired.

"Everything he knows, my liege." the Other replied. "Shall I send someone to eliminate him?"

Thanos shook his head, "No one shall touch him. I shall silence him myself for good when the time comes." he declared, "For now, let him try to stop me. He shall fail, like he does everything else."

The Other bowed, and left the Mad Titan to himself.

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Cold. That was all he could feel as he moved about the wasteland on the outskirts of the void. "You failed." a cold voice echoed from behind him, but when he turned there was no one there. "You think you can escape by the protection of your brother?"

He first found himself on Midgard, Avengers Tower in smoke as well as the city around it. He could see the Avengers still fighting the Chitauri among others who he couldn't recognize. Tony Stark could be seen shooting past, his armor quite damaged as he took on another Leviathan. The Hulk was clearly trying to destroy as many as possible by smashing the creatures who he could see. He could see Tony Stark's woman also in the fray, her skin glowing as if on fire; a strength which he had never seen her display being exuded as she threw a Chitauri into a wall, burning another when she touched it. Hawkeye was shooting arrows as usual, causing Leviathans to explode by shooting them in the weak spot on their heavily-armored face. He could see Agent Romanoff shooting as she saw, the Captain protecting her and her other female companions from any blasts.

The two women who accompanied the Spider were an enigma to him, he couldn't see their faces, but could see what they could do. The woman in black seemingly a blur as she ran toward one of the creatures and shot it with its own gun, her red-headed companion causing another creature from behind her to simply float. The woman in black broke the creature's neck, turning to her friend and nodding. The Captain fell with a cry, and the three women quickly sprung into action to protect him as they were surrounded by the beasts.

The last thing he heard before he was taken from Midgard was the sound of the Hulk's roar above the gunshots which suddenly rang out.

Asgard gleamed in front of him, but he was rooted to the spot as he saw the Golden City – aflame. The sounds of screams could be heard as he watched the creatures of Muspelheim and Jötunheim overtake the citizens, slaughtering them coldly. The scene panned to his left, where a group of Asgardian and Ljosofal warriors stood bravely, weapons readied to face the creatures.

Thor stood at the front, the Ljosofal prince standing beside him; Mjölnir glowing in the firelight as the mighty prince of Asgard swung it toward a group of Muspeheims, the elf prince following him as he swung with his own blade. The creatures fell at their feet, but were simply too many to kill them all as they swarmed them, surrounding the men in a matter of seconds.

Sif ran toward him, hacking at the creatures with her elvish blade, but she did not escape the creatures' claws as they suddenly swiped at her exposed neck. Thor let out a howl of anger, enraged
at the scene before him, unable to go to her aid as he was pinned to the ground by the creatures. They tore at him, a look of glee in their eyes as they ripped the son of Odin to shreds, pouncing on the Ljosafal prince soon afterwards.

He screamed, but could do nothing to help his brother as he was suddenly whisked away.

He was in Odin's chambers, the Allfather in Odinsleep as the battle raged onward. Frigga stood by his side, her blades shining in the dull candlelight as some yet-to-be-seen force began to pound on the doors of the chamber. His eyes widened suddenly as Thanos stood there, towering over Frigga. The brave queen attacked him, succeeding in making a rather nasty cut into his chest; but it soon closed over, and he made an attack of his own, forcing Frigga to duck out of the way of his blade.

It continued for a few minutes before Thanos struck a deathblow, the sword driving through the woman's chest. He screamed for her, but to no avail, her eyes were already glassing over in death. Odin shed a solitary tear, unable to do anything. Thanos turned to where he was, his grin sadistic as he took in his pain.

"And so shall fall the house of Odin... Odinson."

Loki shot up in bed, breathing labored and sweat coating him in a thin sheen. 'You cannot escape' a voice whispered in his head.

"Stop!" he whispered back, "Stop!" he held his head in his hands, leaning so his elbows rested on his knees. The images would not fade, no matter how he tried to think of other things. Climbing out of bed, he concluded he would not be able to sleep for the rest of the night, and simply decided to occupy his mind elsewhere. There was no question that he had been allowed a glimpse into Thanos' plans, the question was: why?

He left his room in search of the kitchen. As it was five in the morning, he was sure there was something that Elizabeth had left to eat in the fridge – despite Thor's incessant eating. As he entered, he could see Steve sitting at the table, just sipping on a cup of tea.

"Good morning." the Captain greeted, "Can't sleep?" Loki shook his head, but did not answer verbally. "Neither can I. Bad dreams?"

Loki snorted, "You honestly think I have bad dreams, mortal?" he asked, not really wishing to answer affirmative.

Steve shrugged, "Everyone has them. I wouldn't be surprised if you did – you haven't exactly had an easy life."

"Why are you so... personable?" Loki suddenly asked with curiosity. "Of all the mortals I have met, you are the only one who is in the least bit cordial."

"Everyone needs someone who isn't at their throats. You have enough enemies in this building, and I've never been one to hold long-lasting grudges." Steve answered, "Why? Would you rather I acted like Clint?"

"Did I say that, mortal?" Loki spat, causing Steve to just shake his head.

"No need to get irate, Loki. Though from what you've said, I'll assume you like me personable." Steve retorted.

"I refuse to accept such nonsense." Loki retorted, "Assume what you like, mortal." he said, looking in the fridge to find just a few things which Elizabeth had left. There seemed to be some stew left. He
looked at the clock with disgust as to what he had to eat in the fridge... fresh was much better. She usually came at seven, so he could last a few hours until she came to make some breakfast, so he settled with a piece of fruit instead.

"Do you want me to make some breakfast?" Steve offered, knowing that Loki was probably not skilled in a kitchen. "I can make some basic eggs, sausage and toast; it should tide us over until the cook comes."

"I can wait until she does." Loki replied with a scrunched nose, "Besides, she tends to make a slightly more interesting breakfast."

Steve chuckled, "Is that your way of saying you like her cooking?" he asked.

"You assume too much, mortal." Loki said, "I never said that."

"Sure, I believe that." Steve retorted, "But if you wait until the cook arrives, it probably won't be till nine."

This caught Loki's attention. "Why would she come at nine? Does she not realize that almost everyone here wakes at around seven?"

"It's not Lizzie who's making breakfast." Steve answered, "Tony's cook just got over his sickness, and she has work to do. She probably won't stop by until much later."

Loki hid his dissatisfaction with this sudden decision with a sneer. "Good riddance to bad rubbish."

"Do you honestly hate her that much? Cause you seem to talk to her a lot." Steve voiced, "What has she ever done to you?"

A chuckle erupted from Loki, "I simply care not for her rather mortal ways. You all are the same in your maturity, and besides Stark himself, she is rather immature."

"Good morning sunshines!" a voice suddenly came in. Darcy. "Nice to see you two awake, I hope you're hungry."

"Did I forget to mention this one in the immaturity scale?" Loki asked Steve, who simply chuckled.

"Watch it, Oh-Horny-One," Steve spluttered on his drink, turning red as she continued. "Or I shall not allow you breakfast."

Loki snorted, "I don't think I would want anything you made. I'll wait for Stark's cook, thank you."

"Well, I'm afraid you're going to have to deal with me as cook. Tony's cook called last night and said that he was still borderline, so Tony decided to give him a few days more." Darcy answered.

"Then why is not Elizabeth cooking? I may not like her, but at least I know she won't poison me." Loki asked.

Darcy feigned insult, "I can't believe how little faith you have in me. I wouldn't poison you, it wouldn't be any fun." she said, "If I killed you, it would be with one of the various knives which Mr. Stark has around here." to prove her point, she picked up the cleaver which was in the third drawer. "After tasing you of course, that way you couldn't stop me."

Steve gulped, "Remind me never to get on your bad side." he said.

"Duly noted." Darcy replied, placing the cleaver back where it belonged. "Besides, its Lizzie's
birthday today. Tony didn't want her ruining her family time, that and she didn't want her coming in hung-over tomorrow." she said.

Loki threw the core of his apple away, "Fine. But I don't want you to touch my food. I'll make it myself, or Rogers can. I don't trust you."

Darcy snorted, "Like you could. I doubt the Prince of Asgard cooks for himself." she said, turning to Steve.

"I'll make something." Steve replied, getting up, "It won't be Lizzie's cooking," he said with a pointed look at Loki, "But its good."

Loki nodded, "Fine, I'll be in my room. Jarvis can tell me when its ready." he said, leaving the room.

Darcy turned to Steve with an amused look on her face. "Do you think I'd poison him?"

"Uh..." Steve stammered, "No?"
Darcy scoffed, "Psh, why would I poison him? He's too much fun to annoy."

"Donovan, did you get those proposals for that patent stuff?" Chris Henley, who was in charge of all things that went between marketing and legal asked.

"Yeah, here you go." Lizzie answered, passing him the information. "Hey, do you have those audits which were accidentally sent to us. I need to send those to accounting."

"Care to tell me how those wound up up here?" Chris asked.

Lizzie chuckled, "One wrong number sends stuff all over the building. One bad apple ruins the whole bunch. Just yesterday we got a fax meant for marketing. I'm almost tempted to ask Ms. Potts to just fix it so that every department has a different number." she said

A sudden shout rang through the office building of "DONOVAN!" the entire office turned toward Phillip Dale who stormed in – redfaced and huffing.

"Uh-oh." Lizzie said in a childlike voice. "I'm in trouble."

Chris snickered, "Just share the video, Donovan. No use in you having all the fun to yourself."
"Watch it, Henley, or you may be my next victim." Lizzie hissed back as Phillip came up behind her.

"You just had to do it, didn't you?" Phillip asked, "The day you're off your probation, you're right back at it. Do you ever stop?"

Lizzie smiled, "I don't know? Does France concede?"

Phillip narrowed his eyes, "You need to grow up Donovan." he said, "Retaliation is not your forte."

Brown eyes rolled upwards, "Au contraire, mon ami. Retaliation is my specialty. In fact, my family thrives on retaliation – its what we do best."

"Then I think we need to have another talk with Mrs. Langley. You obviously do not understand that this office building is not your personal playground." Phillip retorted.

"Good luck talking to her, she's still off, and Mr. Stark isn't likely to let you up to the penthouse." Lizzie replied.
Phillip smiled, "Me? No... you however."

"Not happening. I will not be used as a pawn, or proxy. If you want to talk to her, wait until she comes back to work." Lizzie said.

The man opposite of her simply grabbed her arm, heading for the elevator doors. "Well, lets test that, shall we."

"Jerk, I'm not going to prank you again if that's what you're worried about." Lizzie suddenly announced, but Phillip simply shook his head.

"This is about so much more than that." he said as they entered the elevators. "Jarvis, can you take us up to the Penthouse?"
"Don't do it Jarvis!" Lizzie snapped.

"I'm sorry sir, but I'm afraid you are not allowed in the penthouse. Your clearance is rather low."
Jarvis replied in polite snarkiness. "Mr. Stark has made it clear that there are no exceptions."

"And Ms. Donovan?"

"She is allowed up, sir... but not if you accompany her." Jarvis answered. Lizzie smirked smugly.
Phillip scowled deeper, his eyes glaring daggers at her as she continued to smile – "Forgive me, Mr. Dale" Jarvis suddenly apologized, "Mrs. Langley has just requested that you be allowed up this one time. One moment."

It was Phillip's turn to smirk as Lizzie got a look of shock on her face. This could be bad.

"Care to tell me why you're locking me in my room?" Loki asked his brother.

Thor shrugged, "Tony has a guest who is not supposed to know of our presence. It is only for a short time."

Loki snorted, "Who could this possibly be?" he asked snidely, "Surely they don't think I'm going to harm their precious mortal now."

The Thunderer shook his head, "I assure you, it has nothing to do with Lady Elizabeth – which, I will remind you brother, she has a name."

"Yes, yes I know." Loki replied flippantly. "I have used her name, you know."

"She is not as bad as you think she is." Thor replied, "She is very kind, Loki. To what cause does she deserve your disdain?"

Loki laughed. "She is a mortal, brother – oh, wait, I forgot you are going to marry one of the dull creatures." he said, watching as Thor reigned in his temper. "Though, it seems your lady is not as dull as some of them."

"Lady Elizabeth is not a 'dull creature', Loki. She is quite enjoyable if you get to know her." Thor argued.

The dark prince shrugged, "I suppose if you like the sarcastic, puffed-up, idiotic banter which she seems to use quite a bit. Rather immature, if you ask me." he lied.

Thor didn't buy it. "Oh? Is that why you have sought out her conversation on more than one occasion, brother?" he asked, watching as Loki's green eyes narrowed.
"I have never sought her conversation." he spat, "The idiotic mortal has continuously stepped in my path, literally. She struck me, not the other way around."

"You did deserve it, brother." Thor replied, "From her point of view, you deserve much worse."

"So I've been told." Loki muttered, "How long am I supposed to stay in here while the mortal visits?"

"Until the guest leaves..." Thor trailed off, "Would you like me to remain with you?"

Loki gave him a withering glare, "Whatever gave you that inspiration?" he asked.

Thor sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. "Loki..." he started, "You are my brother, you always have been-"

"Wrong." Loki snapped, "I am not, nor ever was your brother."

"Blood does not make brothers, Loki. We had a bond which could not be broken." Thor replied.

Loki scoffed. "Obviously it was," he said, "So there goes your argument."

The god of Thunder paced, "Why, Loki?" Thor asked, "Why are you so different than you were?"

"Perhaps it is a mixture of secrets and abandonment." Loki quipped.

"You were not abandoned." Thor replied, "Mother always took you under her wing."

"And I was shamed for it." Loki retorted, venom lacing his tone so much that Thor actually winced. "Shamed because I was raised by Frigga, and Odin cared not one whit of what happened to me."

"That is no-"

"Prince Thor?" Jarvis interrupted, "Forgive the intrusion, but I'm afraid you're needed. The Fantastic Four have arrived, and there is currently a brawl going on which will need your assistance."

Thor sighed, "Very well." he said, picking up his hammer and heading for the door. He paused, and turned back to Loki. "I wish that one day you will forgive whatever grievances you have against me. I only wish we could go back to the way we were before. That one day we will once more be family." Loki only stared at him as he walked out of the room to attend the Fantastic Four.

"Things will never be the way they were before." Loki muttered to the closed door, setting himself down with a book.

He could vaguely hear crashes going on in the room above him, and despite himself he hoped that Elizabeth wasn't there yet.

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Tony was fully suited as he tried to calm the Hulk down. It had begun calmly enough, as Reed and his crew had arrived, and the Avengers were assembled in the main room. Where it seemed to go wrong was when Johnny Storm had proven himself to be the egotistical ass he usually was... and made a pass at Justine. A rather strong pass. Bruce lost it, quickly hulking out and throwing the fireboy across the room, resulting in pandemonium.

Justine had been forcefully taken out of the room by Clint, who believed the woman was in more danger than she believed. Emma had assisted him, taking Jane with her as they realized the situation was pretty bad. Where they went was unknown at the time.
It was in that moment that Lizzie had shown up with Phillip Dale, who was still fuming. This only seemed to make matters worse as Hulk didn't recognize the man, believing him a threat to – of all people – Lizzie. Steve ran over to protect the man, and Lizzie by proxy as she was caught in the middle, trying to calm Bruce down.

That was how Thor found them. Hulk in the middle, roaring at a petrified Johnny, who hid behind Tony; and Steve protecting Lizzie, Phillip, and Darcy (who had seemingly appeared out of nowhere). Ben Grimm, or the Thing as he was affectionately called by the Fantastic Four, was standing to one side, enjoying the show. Sue and Reed were trying to make heads or tails of the situation, unknowing really of how to deal with the Hulk, and being instructed to stay out of the way by Natasha. Sue tried to argue, but the red-head only had to glare.

The Thunderer sighed, swinging his hammer.

"Hey, Point Break," Tony's robotic voice echoed, "Do not destroy my house while you're trying to subdue him. I don't need to replace everything right now, as budgets are tight."

"Is that really all you care about?!" Steve shouted, "This is a dangerous situation, and all you can think about is your pocketbook!"

"Easy Capsicle," Tony retorted, "Its a very sensible thing to think about."

"If you had any sense." Lizzie quipped from behind Steve.

The slits for eyes that Ironman had would have narrowed if they could have as he said: "Watch it Puppy."

The hammer continued to swing as Thor made to break both he and the Hulk out of the window. However, to everyone's shock, Ben suddenly stopped laughing and stood in front of the Hulk.

"Watch it, big guy." the Thing said as the Human Torch still stood stock still from fear. "I may not like him anymore than you do, but I'm not beyond sending you right out the window."

The Hulk paused for a second, looking at everyone in the room. With a roar, he sent Ben into Tony's expensive bar.

"Geez, that's a hard landing." Tony quipped, "You owe me twenty grand for that, Bruce!"

The Thing suddenly stood from the rubble, stepping forward. "All right," he growled, "Its clobberin' time." However, neither one moved another step as they found themselves locked in a force field. "SUE!" Ben shouted, "Let us out!"

"Not happening." Sue Storm-Richards replied. "We're allies, not enemies."

"He started it." Ben argued.

"Technically, Johnny started it." Steve said from his place beside Lizzie, Phillip Dale being led by Darcy to where Emma was.

Hulk roared again, frustrated at his inability to move. "Hey, big guy." Tony said from beside him, earning a scathing look. "This isn't helping Mellow Yellow. She's in another room, worrying her blond brains out about you, probably screaming her head off at Clint for taking her away." he said, lifting the helmet from his face. "Now I know that Fireboy over here was an idiot. Not even I would make a pass at a girl who is intimately involved with Hulk." he turned to Johnny, "Or any of the women around here. If I find you flirting with Pepper, I will personally end your family legacy, as
you will be without the means of continuing the Storm name."

Johnny put his hands up in surrender, unconsciously protecting his – ahem – 'family jewels'.
"Agreed." he said, eying Hulk all the while. "I won't flirt with your girlfriends."

Ben scoffed, "We'll see about that." he said.

"Hey! Have I flirted with Alicia?" Johnny asked.

"Its only because you don't find her attractive, Johnny." Sue quipped from the side as Hulk began to dwindle back into Bruce Banner.

Thor still held his hammer, waiting for anything to happen that he would be needed for... but lowered it as the danger was averted and Bruce was laying on the ground – naked. Lizzie blushed and turned away, mindlessly humming another tune as everyone began dispersing with a sigh of relief. Steve went to find Emma, to let her and her the others know that all was clear. It was then that Johnny approached Lizzie.

"So... are you taken?" he drawled.

"Am I what?" Lizzie replied.

"Taken – you know. Like, are you with any of the Avengers?" he repeated.

"You mean 'if I flirt with you, am I at risk of having all 208 bones in my body broken, as well as possibly being castrated with a serrated knife'?" she asked in all seriousness, finding a strange amusement as she watched him suddenly gulp, "Yes, actually."

Johnny looked around, "Okay... well who are you with... so I don't piss him off?" he asked.

Lizzie smirked. "Oh, I'm not with anyone." she said, "I was talking about what I'd do to you if you mess with me."

His blue eyes bulged, "You'd do that?" he exclaimed, not being able to picture the petite woman with large doe eyes being so heinous.

She smiled, "No, but it sounds pretty threatening. But nah, not me – Clint maybe, if you mess with Natasha. Though Natasha may just do it herself, so I wouldn't mess with either of them. Steve wouldn't do anything, really, but Tony will if you mess with Emma. Hulk will smash you into the floor if you mess with Justine – just ask Loki what that's like if you're wondering about being a doll. Jane? Well, if you want an Asgardian prince with a large hammer that can smash large things to smash into you, then I wouldn't recommend it. Uh, I think that's it. But Darcy would probably taser you into oblivion, and I would tell Clint... who would probably aim an explosive arrow at your head, and let it explode – but I'm not particularly dangerous."

He laughed briefly, then stopped, questioning if she actually meant what she said.

"Uh, Miss Elizabeth." Jarvis' voice came from above, "Mrs. Langley is asking for your presence in her room."

"Ooh, kinky stuff." Tony commented from the side, earning a harsh glare from Lizzie's black eyes. "Though I'm not sure I want to know the details."

Lizzie sighed, turning around to head to Emma's room. "Quite frankly, neither do I." she said as someone – probably Tony – began whistling Taps.
Johnny Storm

Chapter Summary

The Fantastic Four come to visit, and Johnny gets a little fresh with Lizzie -- Loki intervenes.

Elizabeth stood like a chastised child in front of Emma. Phillip had just finished explaining what she had done to his office, and although she thoroughly had enjoyed herself, she wasn't too keen on getting consequences. She only wished he would have gotten it through his thick skull that she had no intention of continuing her game with him – nah, he wasn't any fun anymore.

"And what would you recommend, Mr. Dale?" Emma asked, her fingers pinching the bridge of her nose as a storm – which was probably Thor-induced – raged outside. The funeral had been postponed, and dealing with both grief and a wayward employee wasn't something she relished.

Phillip looked over at the silent Elizabeth. "I think she needs to have some more potent consequences." he said, "Perhaps returning to her post as the file-girl?"

That caught Lizzie's attention, "What?!" she exclaimed, "I worked hard for my position! How could you-"

"You abuse your job, Miss Donovan." Dale replied smoothly, "You are irresponsible. You waste your time on party tricks, and insist on being childish. Being an intern is not something which should be taken lightly, and if I were your boss you would no longer be in my employ."

"Good thing I'm not your intern then." Lizzie said smugly.

"Nevertheless, Miss Donovan, Mr. Dale is right." Emma said softly, "I will take care of this problem, Mr. Dale."

"What are you going to do?" Dale asked.

"Firstly, I think we need to establish if Elizabeth is no longer planning on playing pranks on you." Emma started, "Are you?" her gaze told Lizzie just what it was she wanted to hear: she was getting tired.

"No, Ma'am." Lizzie replied, "Mr. Dale doesn't need to worry about it."

"Good." Emma said quickly, "Does that satisfy you?" she asked Phillip.

For the next five minutes, the two women were subject to Phillip's ranting, and telling Emma how Lizzie should – for all intents and purposes – be fired. Emma and Lizzie exchanged a look of exasperation before they were interrupted by Captain Rogers, who quickly ushered the man out.

"Some people have absolutely no respect anymore." Steve said, "I can't believe he actually had the audacity to give you so much trouble today."

Emma sighed heavily, "He's irritated, Steve. I suppose its understandable." she said.
Steve shook his head, "In my day, no respectable man would come and give more grief to a woman who just lost her husband. It isn't right." he insisted as he sat next to Emma. "How are you doing?"

Lizzie watched the two of them for a moment, feeling somewhat awkward at standing in their private moment. "Well, I need to get going. I have a few more proposals to go over before I can go to my birthday party," she said.

Emma straightened up at that, "Oh, I almost forgot it was your birthday." she said, pulling out a box from under her bed. "From Andy and myself, considering I had to decline your invitation."

Lizzie nodded, "Hey, no worries, I understood." she said with a smile, "I'm just sorry I can't come to the funeral, but at least I can wear black for you." she motioned to her all-black outfit.

Her boss smiled, "Thanks, Lizzie. For watching Andrew these last few days, and for just being helpful I suppose. I just... when I heard that... Garrett... I..." she trailed off, her eyes once more beginning to fill with tears as the Captain put his arm around the woman in comfort.

"Don't mention it." Lizzie replied, looking over at the Captain. "I need to get going, I have... some stuff to get done."

He nodded in reply and she turned on her heel to get out of the room. Once out, she had to pause.

She wished she could have comforted Emma a bit, knowing that the woman needed all the friendly comfort she could get. But Elizabeth was never good at comforting people, her bedside manner nigh on non-existent. Bella had often teased her on it, as she had somehow acquired the nickname 'Ice Queen' after her grandfather's death – something which she was somewhat embarrassed about.

She headed for the elevator, suddenly finding herself face to face with none other than Johnny Storm. "Can I help you, Fireboy?" she asked in irritation.

He smirked, "I realized you were joking in there, when you said that thing about breaking my bones - and I had to come and say that you are pretty convincing." he said, getting a little closer to her.

"Believe me, Storm, I couldn't have been more serious when I told you what I did." she said through gritted teeth. "But I'm afraid I don't have the time to chat right now, as unlike some people I know, I actually have a job."

"Are you saying I don't work, Miss Donovan?" Johnny crooned, his fingers beginning to play with the edge of the scarf that Lizzie wore, his hand creeping closer and closer to her exposed neck.

Unnoticeable to him, she gulped hard. She was fighting her instincts to hit him... or worse. She could hear her heart in her ears, her sight beginning to go fuzzy. "No, no, no..." she muttered softly.

"What? I'm not going to bite or anything." Johnny said with a chuckle, "I just wanted to know if you were free on Friday, but if it's a 'no, no, no' then I suppose Saturday could work." the self-centered man said with an arrogant smirk arranged on his features.

Lizzie shook her head, trying to free her thoughts as suddenly Johnny stopped talking. She looked up as he started coughing rather profusely, leaning against the wall as he tried to catch his breath. It was this sound which shook Lizzie out of her semi-trance. "Are you okay, Johnny?" she asked.

"Yeah-" he coughed, "I just... that was weird, my throat just closed up. I can't explain it." he choked out as his breathing regulated. "Sorry, that's never happened to me before."

"Well, there's a first time for everything." Lizzie said softly, "I— I need to go."
He grabbed her wrist, "Oh, no you don't. You don't get to just slip away, you haven't even given me an answer." he said, getting a little too close for comfort.

"Let go." she hissed, trying to yank her hand out of his grasp.

"No, you give me an answer first." Johnny replied.

Lizzie's vision began to blur again when a new voice interrupted.

"I believe she told you to let her go."

Johnny turned around, surprised to see Loki standing there with narrowed green eyes. His lips were drawn into a thin line, his posture screaming danger. Lizzie met his eyes, her vision coming back into focus. She let out a sigh, whether it was of relief or stress Loki didn't know.

"Well, well, look who it is. The guy who tried to take over the city, I'm surprised they let you out of prison so fast. Didn't you leave in a muzzle?" Johnny commented, turning to Lizzie, "I thought you said you weren't with anyone." She shook her head, unable to form any words. Loki had stood up for her. Loki. Stood up. For her – the thought was still processing.

"I can hardly see how that is of any relevance to you, mortal." Loki said calmly, "She said she wants you to let her go."

Johnny chuckled, "Not until I get an answer." he replied, "Besides, this is... of no relevance to you." he mocked Loki's tone.

"No relevance?" Loki repeated, "As far as I can tell, I know Elizabeth more than you do. That, and I don't make it a habit to touch her when she doesn't want me to." he chuckled, "Though, she tends to do that all on her own."

Johnny's brows furrowed. "She told me that she wasn't with anyone." he said.

Loki smirked, "Whatever gave you the inclination to believe that I care for her in any capacity?" he asked sardonically, "I just don't particularly like you."

"Like that matters." Johnny replied, "From what I hear you're just a reject, an adoptee who somehow wound up so much different than his brother."

"Oh no." Lizzie moaned, closing her eyes as Loki just laughed. A cold shiver ran down her spine.

"How pitiful that you are what Midgard has to offer to protect it." Loki spat, "Against the Mad Titan, your pride will be your downfall. That, and your blatant disrespect for those who are so obviously above you." inwardly, Loki marveled at how much this mortal resembled the Patriot. It was as if they were the same man, except one was a little more slight, and much more disrespecting.

"Well, you haven't seen me in action." Johnny replied proudly, his attention fully diverted from his object of attraction. Lizzie didn't really know what to do, and just stood in her spot for a moment, her mind still wrapping around the entire situation. "I've taken on guys that are bigger than you."

"Oh?" Loki challenged, "Well let's hope you're better on a battlefield than in person."

Johnny took a moment to comprehend what he was just told, when he did, his blue eyes narrowed. "Maybe I ought to just show you here and now what I'm capable of, maybe I can send you back where you belong."
"Johnny..." Lizzie tried to stop the man, but it was too late. She let out a scream as he suddenly burst into flames, not two feet in front of her. She backed away as she tried to extinguish the flames which suddenly licked her sleeves. She had them out in a moment, her brown eyes glazing in anger as she then watched the irresponsible pyromaniac mutant begin to stalk toward the impassive god. "Hothead." she muttered under her breath.

Johnny took a swing, which Loki simply ducked and moved out of the way. He may be a Jotun, but he wasn't particularly keen on getting burned. However, Johnny did not anticipate the sudden icicle which created itself in Loki's hand, a freezing dagger which was suddenly thrown at him. It didn't melt quickly enough as it embedded itself into Johnny's side. He yelled in pain, heating up his body a little more to melt the damn thing.

Loki chuckled quietly to himself as he looked over at Elizabeth, his ire kindling as he noticed her peeling back her sleeve to reveal her reddened arm. The quick-tempered mortal had been so irresponsible, that he had forgotten that she was a mere human. She could not stand the radiating heat which the mutant gave off. He snarled, hating the fact that he had no choice but to use his loathed Jotun side. Were he still in control of his magic, the mortal would have simply been incapacitated, but that had been taken away from him, he had no choice. He created another ice-dagger, throwing it at the irritating man. This truly was a waste of time.

Unknowing to the trio, Lizzie's scream had brought the attention of the Avengers to the hallway, and they all came into the room. Tony moved to get Lizzie out of the way, passing her to Bruce and Reed to inspect her arm. Thor prepared to move forward, only to be held back by Ben Grimm with a shake of the head. "Better not, unless you wanna get burned." Ben said.

"Johnny! What the hell are you doing?!" Reed Richards yelled to his brother-in-law, Lizzie's arm being inspected by Bruce.

"Just teaching Mr. All-Powerful what it is that earth has to offer." Johnny retorted.

"I remain unimpressed." Loki retorted, "Is this the best you can do?"

Johnny growled, extending his hand out to shoot a stream of fire – when his coughing fit returned. He gasped, losing all conscious thought as he found it difficult to breathe. Suddenly his flaming body returned to normal... stark naked. Loki looked to Elizabeth, noticing her suddenly slump to the ground, resting her head on the wall behind her.

"GOD ALMIGHTY!" a shout erupted from Darcy. "Two naked men in an hour? This never happens on my birthday!"

Lizzie glared at the brunette, her cheeks flaming red. "How is it, Dr. Banner?" she asked, her heart beating even faster.

"Eh," Bruce tutted, "Its not too bad. He wasn't close enough to really hurt you badly, its just irritated." he gingerly touched it, earning a slight cry from Lizzie. "Its still burning her," he said to Reed.

"She needs some ice, or ice water, or-" Reed was cut off as Loki appeared next to him... his arm in his Jotun form.

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph he's blue!" Darcy exclaimed.

"It's his Jotun form." Thor said as Loki brought his hand to Lizzie's irritated skin.

"That's it, to hang with this crowd, I need meds." Darcy muttered, walking out of the room, "Or
maybe I can get some of Stark's whiskey – it should be strong enough..."

Lizzie looked up at Loki, surprise painted on her features. Who was this man? One moment he was hating her guts, arguing about everything; and then he had stood up for her, and now was helping her when Johnny had burned her. The cooling sensation from his skin was somewhat relieving before the burning of a different kind began... frostbite. His Jotun form was too cold for her human body to take, and within seconds the relief was becoming worse, the help beginning to work adversely.

Loki quickly backed off right as she gave a cry of pain, his green eyes widened in confusion. He couldn't believe what he had just done, both in protecting her from the disrespect of Johnnny Storm, and in helping her in her injury. He stood abruptly, her eyes following him in shock. He looked down at her, noticing her face was probably reflecting his own. Her brown eyes were transfixed on his green, her mouth in a silent 'o' of surprise as she cradled her injured arm.

The room was silent as they watched the strange interaction. Of everything, they did not expect this kind of behavior from either Loki or Lizzie, yet what they were seeing could not be denied. Loki had helped Lizzie. That, in and of itself, made Tony look down at his discarded whiskey glass... he had only drunk a third of it, it couldn't have been that potent.

"What the hell is with all the silence?" Johnny asked from the side, a blanket which had been produced for him by Steve wrapped around his waist.

The spell was broken, and Lizzie was once more a mere mortal in Loki's eyes. He felt disgust at himself, and suddenly turned on his heel, leaving Lizzie to the care of the two doctors. Yet, the same thought ran through both his and Lizzie's heads. Bewilderment. She at the entire situation; and he at his strange behavior.

It was in that moment he decided he was going to stay away from Elizabeth Donovan. No matter what. She was bad business for him.

Tony looked over at Bruce, "Did that just happen?" he asked. Bruce nodded, assisting Reed in getting Lizzie up and into the other room just to make sure she was completely alright. "Well I'll be damned. Diva has a soft spot."

"Did you doubt he did?" Thor asked.

The inventor snickered, "Well, I doubted that he had a heart which beat like any normal human being. I thought maybe it was made of ice..." he laughed to himself, "Pun fully intended."

"Though..." Natasha began, her arms crossed over her chest as she looked at the semi-naked Johnny. "I would like to know just how this whole thing started." Clint stood next to her with a fierce look in his eyes.

"So would I." Steve agreed, his own arms crossed as he narrowed his eyes at his look-alike.

"No doubt it wasn't something pleasant which made Loki suddenly protect her." Thor mused aloud, "Though I am certainly curious what sort of thing may have brought on my brother's rather rare protective side."

Johnny looked between the men of the Avengers, wondering if what Lizzie had originally said was true...

Thor certainly looked like he might just tear him from limb to limb – and rightfully so. The girl was somewhat odd, but she had won a place in the Thunderer's heart, and since she now had somehow
revealed the softer side of his brother, she was even more endeared to him. Though Clint and Natasha truly scared him, the archer's eyes were narrowed dangerously, and Johnny knew that the only thing which may save him was his power of flame – other than that, he knew that either one of these two could kill him quite easily.

"Out with it Powerpuff, I wanna know what made Reindeer Games throw ice shards at you." Tony snapped, his eyes betraying any anger which he felt as his posture just looked nonchalant. "And it better not be what I think it is, cause if it is, then I will warn you that my brain was born with a short circuit. I feel no guilt."

The semi-naked man gulped as he looked around the room. As the Avengers, Sue, and Ben were looking at him expectantly; all he could do was wonder where the nearest exit was.

Meanwhile, Loki was destroying his quarters in a fit of rage. Not only had he protected the Avengers pitiful pet, and helped her when she was burned, but he had used the very thing which made him an outcast in Asgard. He had used his Jotun side to fight the man of fire. He was disgusted with himself. He helped no one, and here he had allowed himself to willingly assist Elizabeth.

He mentally went over what had happened in his mind, remembering Jarvis telling him that he was once more allowed out of his room and that the guest had left. He had walked out, heading for the common room when he saw Elizabeth get cornered by the newcomer. He knew immediately who the man was, based on the fact that he looked remarkably like the Captain. That being said, he remembered all of Stark's comments about the man, mostly of how he was the exact opposite of the Captain. He proved himself to be in accordance to the rumors as he began trying to charm the woman, failing miserably. Loki laughed to himself as he watched, and using his long-acquired skill of keeping silent, he went toward them.

He almost enjoyed the show of Elizabeth getting irritated at the man who cornered her, listening as she basically just told the insistent man to leave her alone. He didn't, naturally, and it was when he began to get too close that Loki took greater interest.

Her eyes got glassy, and suddenly the man's breathing labored. A curious thing, as Loki suddenly knew it came from her. He watched her come to her senses, asking if 'Johnny' was okay. It had amused him to watch the mortal splutter, it reminded him of Fandral – irritating man he was – as both never understood that some women wished to be left alone. It wasn't until he touched her that Loki suddenly intervened.

But why? That was the one thing which had puzzled him since the start, the feeling of anger which welled within him as he watched the man seize her hand and pull her around to face him confusing him more than anything. Yet, his mouth seemed not his own as he spoke, bringing the man's attention away from Elizabeth and onto himself. Loki couldn't help but bait him, watching as his pride overcame his good judgment.

Then the irresponsible idiot burst into flames, accidentally burning Elizabeth. That seemed to have only made him more angry than before – and all without reason. After all, the irritating twit had slapped him... twice! Why in the nine realms would he be angry for something which happened to her? She was inconsequential, and had he succeeded in becoming King of Midgard, she probably would have died in the invasion. If he were Thor – which he thanked the fates he was not – he would understand it. His brother was constantly babbling on about how he saved some maiden from certain compromise.

But he was Loki. To be angry that one mortal harmed another was not his concern. What's more, that the mortal who was harmed had deserved it. Yet, he could not believe his own thoughts, in all truth.
To compensate, he wrote off his behavior as wishing to test the metal of the mortal who had just joined the Avengers – and was severely disappointed. The boy had a temper, which was easily stoked, and tended to think irrationally, not caring who he hurt in the process. It was not an admirable trait, and Loki had to admit that the boy's pride disgusted him as much as Fandral's did. It wasn't until the boy mentioned his heritage that he was forced to remain impassive... he doubted the All-Father would be particularly pleased to hear from Heimdall that he had killed the git because of his pride. Then he was sure he'd never leave the Tower of Solitude for the rest of his immortal life.

Then, to top it all off, he went and helped the useless mortal twit when she got burned. He *willingly* used his *Jotun* form to help her – that puzzled him to no end. Yet, her eyes... they had been so shocked, and yet curious. And he had to admit, they were a rather nice shade of brown...

He growled to himself, quickly throwing the desk into the wall before yanking a book off the bookshelf and sitting down. The girl would soon be out of his mind, and out of his life. Everything that she was would be inconsequential to him as it wouldn't matter. When Thanos came, there was no doubt in his mind, that she would be one of the first to die, due to the fact that she was so close to the Avengers.

And when she did, then perhaps she would no longer plague him – well, at least he would be dead and never have to concern himself with her again... unless of course, Hel decided to put them in adjacent chambers and she haunted him for the rest of his undying life. With this rather peaceful thought in mind, he settled down with a book – then groaned as he read yet another myth about himself.

"Why is there a constant theme of turning me into a girl? It only happened bloody once!"

After quite a bit of coaxing, and overall stubbornness, Lizzie was finally capable to convince the two doctors that her arm would be fine. She needed to finish her work, and then do a little shopping before she could go home. Tony told her that she could take the rest of the day off, for which she was grateful; yet, she wasn't quite sure how she was going to explain what happened to her arm to her seanmhathair.

"You could always tell her that you spilled coffee on yourself." Tony suggested.

Lizzie raised an eyebrow, "A second degree burn... through my jacket?" she challenged.

"Do you have a better idea?" he asked, but she only shook her head and sighed.

"I'll just... tell her the truth." Lizzie said, "And hope that she does not demand that either I quite, or that she is allowed up here to give Fireboy a piece of her mind."

Tony chuckled, reaching for his bottle of whiskey, only to find it gone. "Jarvis, where's the whiskey?"

"Miss Lewis took it sir," Jarvis answered, "She was muttering something about that if she was, and I quote: 'Going to see smurfs, she wanted to be drunk.' and that she 'Should have taken a psychology course to be able to deal with this kind of-' excuse me sir, but it was a little more explicit after that, but her last statement was that she didn't get paid enough to endure this... situation."

Lizzie chuckled behind her hand as Tony smirked, "Well, at least she has a good excuse."

"Quiet, Puppy." Tony retorted, opening another bottle. "I'm just twenty years ahead of her. Jarvis, see if we have an opening for a political science major."
"Yes sir." the AI replied.

Lizzie stood up a few minutes later, "One thing before I go."

"Making demands of your boss, Miss Donovan?" Tony asked, she shook her head.

"What happened to Fireboy?"

Tony smiled, "Oh, Reed took him back to the Baxter Building. Apparently they have a little more... debriefing to do." He took a sip of his drink, "You should know that Point Break was about to smash the little guy over you. Apparently – Lady Elizabeth –" he lowered his voice to imitate Thor "'You are a friend of Asgard, and as its prince, he is under obligation to protect you.' or something like that."

"That doesn't even make sense. I haven't exactly had a deep conversation with the guy." Lizzie replied, 'Except once'. She added in her head, but that time did not count.

"Well, that's the Big Guy." Tony replied, looking at the clock. "Don't you have to be somewhere?"

Lizzie smirked, "Anxious to get rid of me, Stark?" she asked playfully.

Tony smiled, "No, but if you stay you're making dinner."

He made a good point, "Leaving now." Lizzie replied, heading for the door. "See you... sometime in the future."

"Be safe, Puppy." Tony replied, "We do not want the hammer of Thor to come down on anyone who dares to... harm you."

After saying goodbye to Emma, Lizzie went to the elevator. She would be lying if she said that she wasn't almost wishing to see Loki one last time, if for no other reason than to ask him about his behavior – but she didn't.

All the way down to the parking garage, and while she shopped for the last minute things for the two-day birthday party, her mind was restless. In a word, Elizabeth was flabbergasted. Loki had seemed, ever since she met him, to be a selfish, self-pleasing, proud, haughty, and self-serving individual. No one mattered to him but himself, and all others were expendable. Sure, Thor had said he was different before, but that hardly mattered now. This was how he was at present, and Lizzie was having a hard time thinking any differently of him.

Yet, his behavior that afternoon gave cause for questioning. Why would he step in when it wasn't his concern, and Johny would probably just get the message eventually and leave her alone? What made him goad the Human Torch to a point of attack? Better yet, why did he so willingly help her? Surely he saw her as an irritant, and had said as much before; you don't help an ant, and more so one which insists on biting you every time it sees you. So... why?

She remembered how his cool hand had felt on her then-burning arm, and wondered if his eyes were always so green. She saw something which she never had in the past, some kind of fascination, and loneliness. Was it possible that Loki was fascinated with her? Was it possible that he felt lonely? Yet, the moment Johnny Storm – who she reminded herself to plan a prank on the egotistical jackass later in the week – said something, it seemed as if Loki's self-importance came back into focus; and she was nothing more than an ant under his boot again.

She nearly laughed aloud as she checked out of the grocery store. It seemed that was the question of the day: why. She was so lost in her thoughts that she didn't even notice that she had almost forgotten to pay the cashier, and had to be reminded. That was really irritating.
Once she left the building, she wondered if Thor was upset. Reason? It was raining cats and dogs, and the weather people were clueless of where the front had come from. She burst out laughing when she heard the meteorologist say "Really, its almost like Thor is in town. Maybe he is?"

When she got home, all thoughts of Loki flew out the metaphoric window. It was hers and Bella’s birthday, and she'd be damned if she spent it thinking about the god of mischief instead of drinking to her hearts content – after all, you're only twenty-one once.

Heimdall looked toward Midgard, his golden eyes watching the young Elizabeth. She greeted her family, speaking in her native tongue as she met her distant cousins. He looked at her carefully, knowing from Queen Frigga that this girl would eventually have a large part to play in Loki's life. What part, she would not reveal, but he knew that she had already managed to make a small dent in the stone encasing around the Prince's heart.

"Heimdall?" the Queen's voice came from behind.

"Your Majesty." Heimdall greeted Frigga. "What brings you here?"

She looked where the Gatekeeper's eyes were fixed. "How are they?"

"Loki is currently brooding, Milady; and the girl is celebrating her twenty-first spring." Heimdall replied.

Frigga smiled, "That is nothing new for Loki." she said, "But what has made him sour this time?"

Heimdall chuckled, "The girl." he answered. "He believes she has made him weak in some manner, that he is becoming soft like Thor."

"Loki has always tended to think it weakness to open himself to others." Frigga replied, "What happened?" Heimdall relayed all he had seen between the two that day, including Loki's tantrum afterwars. "Then all is well." Frigga finally said, "I believe, Heimdall, our prince may yet return."

Heimdall smiled at the Queen as she walked away, then returned his gaze to the sullen Prince.
Birthday, Pranks and Wolverine

Chapter Summary

Lizzie has a birthday party, and her family pranks her. Loki and Tony have their first talk, and Wolverine joins the Avengers.

Chapter Notes

Loki/Lizzie interaction, but its more to understand our OC's life. Also, huge shoutout to those who have followed and favorited within the last week since I updated. I love you all, and I'm looking forward to seeing your thoughts - feel free to leave a review. :D

"Laoise darlin' how are ye?" Elizabeth heard for the umpteenth time come from another relative who had come for her birthday. Laoise. Her 'Irish name' which everyone insisted on calling her. The reason? Because her Irish family members weren't too keen on the fact that her mother had named her such an English name. It was an Irish thing. She was 'Laoise' and Isabella was 'Brigh'. That was how they had been christened, and that was what the Donovans would use until the end of time. This time it was Great-Aunt Matilda – or 'Tilly' as she was called – who had flown in from Cork especially for the occasion.

"I'm very well, Aunt Tilly, are you enjoying yourself? You certainly look like you are." Lizzie asked, motioning to the glass of alcohol in her aunt's hand and waving to a cousin who lived in upstate.

"Aye, I'm well dearie. What's it like being twenty-one, eh? Pretty big for you." Tilly replied, "And Brigh."

Lizzie looked toward where her sister was introducing her boyfriend to an uncle of theirs. "Well, she got to have her day yesterday... it's my turn now."

Tilly laughed, pulled her down slightly, and Lizzie held in a wince as it was the arm which had been burned the day before. "Any mischief tonight, dear?" she asked. Lizzie smirked, looking toward her grandmother who simply raised an eyebrow.

"Perhaps." she replied, "We'll see..."

At that moment, she was called away by her twin cousins – Michael and Patrick, who were both 25 – affectionately nicknamed the Weasley twins. It was a family joke, as the two young men were just as mischievous; in fact, it was they who fueled Lizzie's penchant for it. It all began with a prank which the boys had played on the then ten-year-old Lizzie, where they had put honey in her bed – which backfired as she upped the ante, teaming up with Bella to booby trap their room. Ever since, when they were in the room together, they were known as the 'Three Terrors'.

"What do you want?" she asked them as she poured herself a drink, she was enjoying the freedom with which she could drink now, and was taking full advantage of it.
"Enjoying your drink?" one of the twins asked, and Lizzie assumed it was Michael based on the fact that Michael had a fondness for the color red – which he was sporting.

Lizzie looked down at her glass. "What did you do?" she asked suspiciously.

The other twin smiled widely, "You'll see." he said mysteriously. "You enjoying your night? I mean, you only turn twenty-one once right?"

"So I've been told, but with you guys at my party I worry." Lizzie replied, her brown eyes still looking warily at her glass. Something was up, and she assumed it had to do with retaliation.

She could still remember their faces when she – and the rest of the family – pulled a prank on them for their twenty-firsts. It was Lizzie's greatest achievement when it came to pranks, the one she had done just for the twins, as the grandness truly surpassed all others – in both reaction and money, she could still remember blowing a couple thousand dollars of her hard-earned cash just to do it. Simply put, she had turned both boys' bedrooms to look like hospital rooms, complete with monitoring equipment which she had borrowed from her Aunt Molly. Cousin Jenny had been more than willing to join in as she was a make-up artist, and was happy to assist.

In short, she had made both boys believe they had gotten so drunk on their twenty-firsts that they had been involved in a car accident... launching them into a thirty-year coma. In the family it was considered recompense for their rather hellish reign as the prank kings – and also ending their reign. Lizzie was the family's Prank-Queen, and unless another family member rose up to take her throne, it was very possible she would remain so.

"So, what did you do?" she asked Patrick again.

The boys exchanged a look, then gave a meaningful look at her glass. "We said you'll see." they said in unison, walking off.

Although she didn't trust them as far as she could throw them – which wasn't far – she knew that trying to get information out of them – which wasn't far – she knew that trying to get information out of them would be like trying to get water from a rock. In other words: impossible. Going to the kitchen, she got another drink, the drink in her hand far too suspicious to indulge in now.

"Hey, you alright?" Bella's voice came from behind her with a chuckle.

Lizzie smirked, "I feel like I'm some kind of damn sheep... and I'm about to be led to the slaughter." she replied, "The boys have something up their metaphoric sleeves, and I'm fighting both curiosity and anxiety. Is that odd?"

"There is nothing which isn't odd about you." Bella replied, "But tell me something, how are things going up at Wayne Tower... I mean... Stark Tower."

A loud laugh came from Elizabeth. "You know what, if I didn't know better I would think that Batman was based off of Tony Stark... good thing I know better."

"They would probably be best friends if Bruce actually existed." Bella said.

"Or worst rivals." Lizzie replied, staring at her drink... there was something funny about it, but considering her knowledge of alcohol was limited she shook off the feeling. "Tell me, how's... Daniel holding up?"

Bella looked out into the living room with a chuckle. "He's trying to deal with the overall Irishness of our family." she replied, "Which is proving to be difficult."
"I'm sure he'll manage." Lizzie said, "If he's serious about you."

Her twin scoffed, "He's not."

"Oh, that's pleasant." Lizzie replied.

"You know something, perhaps if you weren't so lonely, you wouldn't be so cynical." Bella retorted. Lizzie simply glared at her, "As your older sister."

"Six hours older." Lizzie interrupted.

"–I'm the one who must look out for you." Bella continued her blue eyes narrowing at her sister.

Lizzie's face turned incredulous. "Yeah, because you have experienced everything before me... oh... wait..."

Bella just shook her head, "You have to move on Lizzie. Not every guy is like Alex, you should know that by now."

"Zip it." Lizzie spat, taking a swig of her beer. It was starting to affect her, but she couldn't help but shake off the feeling that the boys had something up their sleeves – speaking of sleeves, she lifted her own to take a look at her slightly-red arm.

"You never told me how that happened." Bella commented.

"Because I can't, Bella." she replied.

"I'm your sister I think-"

"I work for Tony Stark, and am currently allowed in his private apartments." Lizzie stopped her, "As of right now, I am privy to certain information which I cannot reveal yet. You'll find out eventually, but not right now. It's too dangerous."

"Dangerous?" Bella's tone turned to worry. "What exactly are you getting yourself into?"

"Bells, I'm in the building with a group of superheroes. One turns into a giant green guy when he gets mad; one dresses in a suit and flies around New York; one is from the 40s, and is a scientific experiment; two are deadly assassins; and one calls lightening down from the sky. I think it's safe to say that I'm not in Kansas anymore." Lizzie retorted.

Bella looked contemplative, "Liz... I heard that there was a... guest in Stark Tower."

"Did you really?" Lizzie replied sarcastically. "I can neither confirm or deny such claims, I'm afraid"

"Who is it?" Bella continued, unfazed by Lizzie's attitude.

The brunette stared at her sister for a few seconds. "I can't tell you... you'd get mad."

"Why would I get mad? Do I know him?" Bella's eyes widened, her voice lowering to a whisper. "Is he – you know – one of them?"

Lizzie shook her head, "Nah, we left them behind a while ago." she replied, taking another sip

"There's no way they'd be able to track us down... I don't think they can't remember us."

"Are you sure about that?" Bella countered, "Because you di-"
"Bella! Lizzie!" Cousin Keira called, popping her head through the door. "Seanbhathair said it's time to cut the cake."

The twins instantly got off the counter, pretending they hadn't just been discussing a sensitive topic as Lizzie reached into the fridge to get the cake.

Loki stood out on the balcony of Stark Tower, trying to see the stars. So far they had been veiled to him, the smog of New York causing for only the brightest to shine – and only very dimly. He wished that he had his magic, so as to clear a patch of the fog... but he didn't, and that fact alone made him rather depressed. However, what little he could see did soothe him in a way, and despite himself he imagined he was back in Asgard, with Frigga pointing out the different constellations. They were different here than there, but it still did the same for him.

While outside, with only his thoughts to occupy him, he wondered if his mother knew what was going on. He had no doubts that Heimdall had reported to Odin of various things which had happened ever since he arrive on Midgard; but he wasn't sure that Frigga knew. Out of his entire fake family, only Frigga was the one that he truly was sad that he disappointed. She knew what it was to not truly belong; after all, Thor wasn't her son... then again, neither was he.

"What are you doin' out here, Smurf?" Tony's voice came from behind him. "Enjoying how the pollution enters your lungs in a poisonous fume?" Loki ignored the man as he sat down beside him, chuckling. "Too bad you're not Lizzie, she would have given a nice retort. Probably would have quoted Lord of the Rings or something..."

"Why are you here, Stark?" Loki growled, speaking for the first time.

"He speaks!" Tony exclaimed. "Eh, I'm just here to be a thorn in your side. Do you mind?"

"If that is the case, then yes I do." Loki replied.

Tony snickered. "Well, too bad."

"Honestly Stark, one would think that you are simply here to be a mindless dolt. Surely you have some reason to come out and bother my solitude." Loki finally said.

"Alright, alright," Tony conceded. "We're all a bit curious, is all."

"About what?" Loki inquired, though in reality he already knew what it was that caused the Avengers to be curious. Quite frankly he felt the same.

"About why you wear a horned helmet." Tony's sarcasm shone in his tone as Loki gave him a quizzical look. "About why you did what you did yesterday afternoon with Lizzie of course!"

"Ah, naturally your curious natures would turn to that slight." Loki said.

Tony scoffed, "Hey, you're the one that made a scene. We just want to know why you decided to suddenly stick up for a girl who you've made obvious you hate?"

Loki shrugged, "I assure you, it had nothing to do with her." he said. "The proud Midgardian was more my target-"

"Uh-uh, I'm not buying it." Tony interrupted. "If you wanted to kindle Powerpuff's fire then you could have done it in a different manner. He's going to be around here for the next – well, however long until Mr. Purple comes a-calling – so you'd have ample opportunity to irritate him."
"Why I do what I do is none of your business Stark." Loki retorted, "If I say that it was because I wanted to irk the man, then that is the reason." he stood up from his place on Tony's chair, making his way back into the apartment.

"Why is it so hard for you to admit you care about Short-Dark-and-Pretty?" Tony asked.

"I couldn't care less about her, Stark. So I don't know what you're talking about." Loki replied, "So unless you intend to remain in your childish imaginations about what motivated me to interrupt... Storm." he spat the name. "Then I think you need to accept facts. Elizabeth is of no consequence to me."

"Right, because you helped her with her burn for no good reason." Tony said.

Loki sighed, "I didn't help her, Stark." he said quietly, "In fact I probably gave her frostbite."

"Sure you did." the billionaire replied, "Bruce said that if you hadn't intervened her arm would probably had been worse."

The Asgardian's eyes snapped to Tony's. "How bad would it have been?" he asked, biting his tongue immediately after.

Tony smirked, as Loki had exposed his true thoughts. "Burns work in a way that even when the cause is gone, the burn keeps destroying the tissue underneath. The sooner the burn is introduced to cold, the better. Had you not intervened, and as quickly as you did, she would have burned a bit deeper and probably it would have been more painful." he explained, "As for the frostbite, apparently there was no proof of it, or very slight. You didn't hurt her. Though, I'm not sure why you helped her in the first place."

Loki still didn't know what had caused him to do what he did, but he wasn't willing to admit it to Tony. "As I said before, I have my reasons."

The billionaire's eyes darkened. "As long as those reasons are not manipulation, or anything which will harm her, then I have no qualms." he said.

"What do you take me for, Stark? Better yet, what makes you think that I could manipulate Elizabeth?" Loki asked. "I sincerely doubt she'd allow it."

That seemed to make Tony happy, and with a large smile he nodded. "Well then, I'll leave you to your depression."

"Whatever gave you the idea that I was depressed?" Loki asked, "I most certainly am not." his green eyes shone with a strange emotion... was it fury?

"Well, then I'll leave you with thoughts of butterflies, unicorns, and rainbows." Tony said, getting up and heading to go back inside. "By the way, just so you know, none of us like Powerpuff Boy, and we've actually set up a little way to keep him away from Lizzie."

"Whatever made you think I wanted to know that, Stark?"

Tony shrugged, "Just thought you should know." and with that, he left Loki to himself once more. Only now the trickster was irate at what the Avengers were assuming.

No doubt the next time he saw Elizabeth, he would set the record straight.
The next morning, Lizzie awoke with a clear mind – as if she hadn't been drinking the night before in any way. Getting out of bed, and placing her mechanical locket watch around her neck - a birthday present from her grandfather on her mother's side from years before - she went downstairs to find her family gathered in the family room... putting up decorations for the party. Confusion immediately flashed through her mind.

"Oh, there she is!" Bella exclaimed, embracing her sister in a tight hug. "We thought you'd died or something, you've been asleep for ages."

Lizzie looked at Bella suspiciously. "Didn't you say that yesterday morning?"

Bella tilted her head, "Are you alright? – Hey, you didn't start partying before you turned twenty-one did you? I mean, I'm a little hungover this morning, but I'm twenty-one now Lizzie! I can do that."

"Why would I drink at your party when mine was only twenty-four hours away?" Lizzie replied slowly, "It's just – you said the exact same thing... what day is it?" she clicked open her watch, noting that it was currently 9 o'clock in the morning. She looked at the clock on the stove, and it recorded the same time. She let out a sigh of relief.

"The second." Bella answered. "Why?"

"Either I'm having a Groundhog Day moment, or I had an excessively intricate dream last night; where all of my birthday occurred, and I had a few shots of whiskey." Lizzie said, turning around. "It still only comes once a year right?"

"Last I looked, Liz." Bella replied, "My birthday was last night, and yours is tonight... remember?"

Lizzie began getting flustered. "Well, yeah, but... Bells, I didn't... you know..."

"What, Liz?"

"You know... turn... time... go back a day." Lizzie lowered her voice to a whisper.

Bella looked at her with a giggle. "Lizzie, I think I'd know if you did that. I'm not so drunk from my own birthday to have lost a day, sis. Today's the second."

Lizzie looked around, running a hand through her hair as she sighed. "It seems so familiar." she said, her voice light as if far away. "Is today really the second? You're not playing with me are you?"

"Lizzie, I think you would know if I was lying to you." Bella said, "Wouldn't you."

"Well, yes," Lizzie replied, "But – you know, you did say the same things yesterday..." she trailed off as she heard a very light snicker. "Who's that?" she asked, coming around the corner to see a redhead cousin standing there, his look-alike standing next to him. Suddenly, it all clicked, and the pieces of her mysterious puzzle came into place. "You!" she shouted, pointing to her sister with wide eyes. "You little-" she stopped, spinning to face her twin cousins. "I should have known you two-faced – you told me to watch what I drank. I should have known – what did you put in it?"

"Hangover medicine." one of the twins replied.

"I googled every way to cure a hangover," Lizzie replied. "There is no way to make it happen that fast." her arms crossed over her chest, a brown brow raised in skepticism.

"Sure there is," the other twin added, mimicking her stance. "We're chemists, remember?"
"We can do anything as long as we have the ingredients." the first said.

"And get away with it because it's called..."

"Science." they said in unison. Bella suddenly started laughing at Lizzie's look of complete shock; she hadn't been expecting this, but Bella could see that the brunette was impressed.

Seanmhathair came from the kitchen with a smirk on her face. "I suppose this is where I say: you got your comeuppance, Elizabeth. If you don't want to be played, then you shouldn't do the same."

Lizzie laughed, "Well, I must say that I didn't expect that. Congrats, my cousins, I think we can safely say we're even." she paused. "For now that is."

The boys nodded, giving her a hug before they announced that it was time for them to go. Apparently they had stayed just to play this on her, and now they needed to get to work before they got fired for misuse of company material.

When they were gone, Lizzie ran back upstairs. As long as she wasn't hungover, she figured she could get some work done at Stark Tower.

The air was tense at Avengers Tower, as both the Avengers – plus Loki – and the Fantastic Four were currently embroiled in their first meeting. Loki was explaining to the Fantastic Four everything he had been debriefing the Avengers on for the last few days, trying to ignore Johnny as much as possible. Though truthfully, in his mind he was devising a clever way to make sure that the 'flamethrower', as was one of Tony's nicknames, got himself killed first. Bruce was trying his hardest, and considering that Justine was currently with Emma it helped somewhat. Johnny wasn't in the same room as her... he could relax.

Clint and Natasha, however, were the two that made Johnny want to disappear. It wasn't typical that he found himself intimidated, but right now he felt as if they would rather kill him than work with him – which, for the most part, was true. Thor sat stone-still next to Loki, Mjolnir within arm's reach, as if in warning.

Reed now looked contemplative, "This is really going to have to include everyone we can find. Have you contacted Professor Xavier?" he asked.

"We got called Xavier a few days ago," Black Widow replied, "But most of their team is in France, chasing Magneto."

"Who's Magneto?" Steve asked from Loki's side.

Natasha smirked, "He's a mutant version of Loki." she replied. "Hates humans, thinks them below him – you know, just the everyday villain."

"I am not the everyday villain." Loki quipped quickly.

"'There are no men like me' is what you said in Germany." Steve retorted, "You honestly still believe that?"

"Well... yes." was Loki's reply.

Steve looked a little suspicious while Tony let out a laugh. "C'mon Cap, the Smurf is simply egotistical. He'll never admit defeat... even when he's completely helpless."
"I am not helpless." Loki growled.

"I never said you were." Tony replied smoothly, causing Loki to recap the words which he had said in his head. "I said 'When you're completely helpless' not that you are."

A knock resounded on the door, and when none of the men got up to answer it, Natasha huffed and went to get it. Darcy stood on the other side, a screwy smile on her face. "Hey, I thought you should know, there's a guy who said some guy named Xavier sent him. Calls himself... Woolly or something like that." she informed, causing the Avengers to get up.

"Send him in Pup." Tony called, earning a sharp look from Clint.

"I thought you called Lizzie 'Puppy' or 'Pup'." he said with narrowed eyes.

"Lizzie has a new nickname, and Darcy gets distracted like a puppy does. So she's now 'Pup'." Tony explained as Darcy went to get 'Woolly'.

"Dare I ask what you're calling Lizzie now?" Natasha asked.

Tony snickered, "Ah, that's a secret until Lizzie gets here." he replied as the door opened again.

This time, however, it was definitely not Darcy. Steve seemed to recognize him, standing up to greet the man. "Logan?"

The newcomer looked at the Captain, a look of recognition on his face. "Captain." he greeted, "It's been a while since I saw you. I heard you were on ice for a few years."

Steve smiled, "Yes, well, you heard correctly." he said, "I'm surprised to see you still up and about, I wouldn't expect it after... well, so many years."

Wolverine chuckled, stroking his mutton chops a moment. "Well, it's a bit of a long story – and one which I'm not interested in telling." he said, "But I suppose it's good to see you still around."

"I blame the ice." Tony said, "It not only stuck him in the same body without aging, but it also seemed to keep his mind trapped in the past."

Steve purposefully ignored Stark's comment, "I heard you're with the X-Men now?" he said to Logan.

Logan shook his head, "I'm with no one. I just happen to know Charles Xavier, and when he heard that you needed help he contacted me." he replied, finding a seat next to Johnny – as no one wished to sit next to him – and sitting down. "So, what's going on? Airhead in the other room seemed to be unable to give me a good answer."

The Avengers gave a collective sigh, "Well, before we begin, we should probably do introductions." Natasha said.

"I'll do it." Tony said, sticking his hand out to point. "Thor of Asgard, god of thunder, also known as Point Break; Clint, or Hawkeye; Natasha, or as she's known to most of the populous, Black Widow; Loki or – as I like to call him – Reindeer Games; Captain Spangly-Pants you know; Bruce, or the Hulk – so don't piss him off, and as Johnny can tell you, don't make a pass at his girlfriend." Logan smirked at the young man beside him, taking a moment to notice his similarities to the Captain before turning back to the eccentric billionaire. "Reed Richards, known as Stretch Dude – okay, Reed, I don't know your real alias, stop glaring; Ben Grimm, the Thing – aptly named if you ask me; Sue Richards, Invisible Girl except for the clothes; Johnny Storm, who you're sitting next to, known as..."
Powerpuff around here – that's the nicest name for him. Last, but not least, is me: Tony Stark also known as Ironman."

Wolverine scoffed, "Nice little team you have here." he commented. "But what I'd like to know is:" he looked at Loki, "Considering you tried to destroy New York, what the hell are you doing here?"

Loki stared at the man, opening his mouth to answer when Thor did so. "He is here to inform us of our foe. Loki is the only one who really knows anything about him in our realm, and therefore is the only one who can help us defeat him." he said, turning to his brother with a large smile.

Logan raised an eyebrow. "Well, I hope you are as straightforward as you're pretending." he said, "Or you'll find adamantium a rather hard metal to cope with in your body."

"I'll try to remember that." Loki said; he took this man a little more seriously than the Human Torch. It was obvious that the threat was not as much pride as it was 'I don't tolerate betrayal.' Loki was able to tell the difference, and begrudgingly respected Wolverine. "Well, I suppose I should start at the beginning-"

"Uh, no need." Tony said, handing Logan a disk. "Here's all of our meetings over the last week, put down on this little discus and ready for your viewing pleasure. After all, we are past the basics, and if you want to know what's going on, you can take a gander later. Sorry Loki, but Jarvis cooked this sucker up this morning after he watched you stru – explain everything to the Fantastics here."

Loki raised an eyebrow at Stark, surprised that the man would be so helpful, and noticing that for once he noticed his near slip-up.

"So I'm coming in in the middle." Logan said slowly, "And you're not going to catch me up first?"

"Nope, you just watch that and you'll be caught up – I take it you're staying the night?" Tony continued, "Drink?"

"Sure." Logan replied, staring at the disk in his hand before pocketing it. "And I'm only staying if I decide that your little group is something I want to be a part of."

"We wouldn't have it any other way, Logan." Steve replied with a smile. "I remember you were a good soldier. It would be nice to have you on our side."

Logan nodded, taking the offered drink from Tony's hands.

"Uh, sir," Jarvis interrupted. "Miss Donovan is here."

"What? I gave her the day off to nurture a headache that she no doubt got last night from turning twenty-one." Tony replied. "Tell her to go home."

"Well, sir, I did remind her, but she said that due to a prank which was pulled on her this morning, she doesn't have a hangover." Jarvis replied.

Tony spluttered. "How did she manage that?"

"Perhaps you should have her explain sir, relay is not my strong suit." Jarvis quipped.

"Bull, J, I programmed you for relay." Tony replied as the door opened and Lizzie stepped in. "What are you doing here, Vitalii? You're supposed to be home, nursing a hangover."

Lizzie looked at Tony with a puzzled expression before she burst out laughing. "Did you seriously
just change my nickname because of Vitalii Sediuk's recent pranking the Grammys?"

Tony gave her a thumbs up. "You haven't answered my question."

"Well, my cousins are also pranksters, and for my birthday they decided an anti-hangover drug would be a good way to have payback for my prank on them a few years ago." Lizzie answered, stepping further into the room. "So, I currently am hangover-free, and figured I'd come back before Darcy poisoned you all." in the distance they all could hear Darcy's undignified 'Hey!' being yelled.

"Alright, I suppose that's acceptable." Tony replied, "As you can see, we're in a meeting with the Fantastic Four..."

Lizzie nodded with a smile toward the Richards' and Ben, to Johnny she just gave a mischievous wink. The Human Torch gave a quick look at Loki, as if expecting him to lash out in some way. Needless to say, the trickster simply ignored the mortal, instead watching as Lizzie looked around the room. He knew what he had planned for the egotistical – as Lizzie would say – jackass, but he was curious just what it was that she was going to do.

"How's your arm, Miss Donovan?" Reed asked.

"I was just about to ask that." Bruce said.

Lizzie walked toward the doctors – who actually had sat next to each other – and lifted her sleeve. Both doctors examined her arm briefly, and Bruce surprised everyone by giving a nod in Loki's direction as if to say: 'Good job'.

"Now, we also have a newcomer." Tony said, motioning toward Logan – who Loki had noticed only watched Lizzie in silence. "This is Logan, known as Wolverine."

Lizzie's brown eyes snapped up, and with a slight smile she extended her hand. "Nice to meet you, Logan." she said, though her tone made Loki wonder if she knew the newcomer.

Logan gave her a – seemingly rare – smile. "My pleasure, Miss Donovan."
Chapter Summary

Loki's curiosity reaches new heights as he asks Lizzie what it was that she did to Johnny... but is there something that Lizzie is hiding from everyone. What was it that she endured in her past?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

"Okay, the recipe says that this needs to go in for an hour... but its still not done." Jane said from her spot by the oven. She had told Darcy that she would do some of the cooking that day, as she thought that Darcy was doing too much in Lizzie's absence.

"Did you turn on the oven?" Darcy asked, though it sounded more like "Diou twern oon 'ven?"

Jane looked at her friend, noting the plate of leftovers in the woman's hands. "Care to try that again, without sounding like a caveman?"

The sound of a new laugh entered the kitchen and Lizzie entered. "She said: 'Did you turn on the oven.'" she translated, "Don't ask how I understood that, as sometimes I wonder."

"Hey!" Darcy exclaimed, her mouth free of all impediment. "Its the girl who can make men naked!"

The other two brunettes just stared at her. Jane had a look of shock on her face, but Lizzie's eyes showed her amusement. "Its nice to see you've decided to finally break into the leftovers. I'm afraid most of the guys here don't like old food, and Thor typically eats anything which may even allow it. I don't know why, but Asgardians are like the human equivalent of hogs."

"Watch it, Liz." Darcy said as Jane's brow lifted at Lizzie's statement. "Jane is protective of her man." Lizzie scoffed as she took the recipe from Jane's hands. "But aren't you supposed to be home with a massive twenty-first hangover?"

"Are you sure you're not Tony's daughter?" Lizzie asked, "Cause he asked me the same question."

"Great minds think alike." Darcy said simply, washing her plate in the sink.

"Drochrath air!" Lizzie swore, looking at the dial on the oven in comparison to the recipe. "Jane, do you cook much?"

The Thunderer's girlfriend turned red, "No, not much." she admitted. "I'm afraid I've never really had any time for more than takeout, or sandwiches for the last... several years. Since college in fact."

Lizzie and Darcy exchanged a look. "That would explain..." Lizzie began, "Why you let chicken be in an oven that wasn't on for an hour."

"Oh no." Jane said, going to the oven, she took a look at the dials. "Its on..."

"Uh, Jane," Darcy said, her eyes on the little screen at the top. "you set the oven to start for an hour..."
"What?"

Lizzie then explained to the astrophysicist how the oven worked, and that instead of the timer – she had set it to turn on an hour from when she began. As if to prove what she had said, the oven kicked on... exactly an hour after Jane had set the timer. The astrophysicist let out a moan of disappointment as Lizzie declared that the food was no longer edible due to a possible salmonella poisoning. That only seemed to make Jane despair a little more.

"Don't worry, Jane." Lizzie tried to comfort. "Anyone can make that mistake."

"Yeah, its alright," Darcy added, "You're probably just going to be royalty in the end, what with you getting together with Thor. So you won't have to worry about cooking. After all, I sincerely doubt that you'd be slaving in the kitchens."

"Darcy!" Jane hissed, reaching over to put her hand over Darcy's mouth.

Lizzie just chuckled as Darcy continued her taunts, immediately asking Jarvis for suggestions on takeout food that could be ordered. After a few minutes of debate, Chinese was chosen, and she told him to order 'a bit of everything' as she wasn't sure what people would like.

"Very good, Miss Elizabeth." Jarvis replied.

"You, however," Darcy turned to Lizzie, "Would probably be boasted in Asgard as being a magical cook."

"Oh? And who would give me that review?"

"Thor of course. I heard the way he raved about your cooking the first night, you'll be praised before Odin before you know it... and then summoned to work in the royal kitchens." Darcy continued, but unlike Jane, Lizzie just took it in stride.

"Well then, I suppose he'll boast you as being a fabulous court jester." to which, Darcy laughed.

Half and hour later, Jarvis announced that the takeout had arrived, and Lizzie went to get it. Bringing it back into the kitchen, she found the remaining Avenger women had gathered while she had gone.

"Mmm... smells good." Pepper said, "I'm starving. Business meetings tend to make me a bit hungry."

"Well, nothing fills you up like Chinese in my opinion." Lizzie said, "Except maybe Mexican... but I like Chinese better."

"Well, nothing fills you up like Chinese in my opinion." Emma said sarcastically, "Oh... wait."

"Painful, Emma, painful." Lizzie quipped, "After all I've done for you, you treat me with such disdain."

Darcy immediately 'ooh'ed. "Speaking of disdain – what happened the other day?"

"Sorry, I'm not following."

"With the Horny One of course!" Darcy exclaimed, "I saw how he looked at you – or rather, how you were looking at each other."

"Darcy... do shut up." Lizzie said lowly.
"I'm just stating the obvious." Darcy replied.

Pepper swallowed a bite before she began. "Tony told me about something regarding you getting burned after Johnny hit on you?" she said, "And Loki helped you?"

"I'm sure he was simply trying to irritate Johnny," Lizzie muttered. "I annoy him too much for him to think anything with regards to me."

"Maybe... maybe not." Darcy sing-songed, "I mean, the two of you were just gazing into each other's eyes like this:" she imitated Lizzie, her large blue eyes wide, and her mouth hanging open.

"I did not!" Lizzie exclaimed. "We don't like each other."

"Sounds half-hearted if you ask me." Justine said, "Though I wasn't there, I've noticed that something is going on between you two."

Lizzie sent glares at the blond. "Wow, I had no idea that slapping people meant you liked them... please inform me of which country this is in?"

The sound of Thor's boisterous tones could be heard from the hallway, stating how proud he was of Jane, and how he was sure that her food would be wonderful.

The women all looked in Jane's direction, and the astrophysicist's panicked face turned toward the ground, red with embarrassment. "Oh no, I'm going to disappoint him when he – oh god."

"It's okay, Jane." Pepper comforted, "I'm sure he won't be upset."

"But I told him I'd make something..." she was on the edge of tears, as the other women exchanged glances again.

Lizzie looked around the counter, then up at the clock as she then set down her plate with urgency. "Alright, all hands, we need to clear these boxes away – Jane, you made food."

"But I did."

"Don't argue! Justine, get some bowls, set them out, and I'll put the food on them. Move!" in a flurry of movement, the six women got all the food into the bowls, and the boxes into the trash. "Jarvis, if anyone asks, Jane made lunch. You can tell Tony otherwise if you wish – oh, and make sure that those boxes get taken care of ASAP."

"Very good, Miss Donovan."

"Darcy keep an eye on that trash can, until Jarvis takes care of it. Don't let anyone look into it – do you hear?"

"Loud and clear, chief!" Darcy replied, slightly surprised by the relatively quiet woman's sudden commanding presence. Yet, she did as she was told.

Lizzie looked up at the clock again, a smirk set on her face.

When the Avengers entered the kitchen, the women were lounging on the counters, plates of food in their hands, while the warmer next to the stove had a flame lit beneath. They were happily chatting away, Jane looking determinedly flustered as Pepper told her something.

"Well, my pretties, have you been hard at work?" Tony asked, standing in front of Pepper. "And what's this? What is your name, beautiful?"
"Ginny." Pepper answered sarcastically. "Can't you tell?"

"I am so glad your nickname is Pepper – Ginny just doesn't fit." Tony stated, pecking her on the lips. "Although I can see you as a Weasley"

"Well, she is a redhead." Darcy quipped, earning a slap on the arm from the nearby Lizzie. "Ow!"

Lizzie just smirked, looking over at the group. "Food's in the warmers, gentlemen. Dig in." she said, motioning to the nearby containers. "I take no credit, Thor, its all Jane's doing." which, wasn't a lie – Jane hadn't seen the button which would have cooked the chicken, and had caused for them to eat takeout – it was just a... bending of the truth. A little.

Thor beamed at Jane as he moved toward the food, getting his portion and walking back to lean on the available counter next to her.

Tony walked up, and with a raised eyebrow turned toward Lizzie. Leaning close to her, he lowered his voice: "Wow, Jane's food sure looks like it came from my favorite Chinese venue."

"Play nicely, Stark." Lizzie whispered back, "She already feels bad for disappointing Thor."

"Am I going to know who paid for this?"

"You did, of course –" she paused, "Through my pay check, that is."

Tony chuckled, "Alright, kid. I'll take a look at Jarvis for the rest of my answers later." and getting himself a plate, he went over to Pepper.

Loki had watched the exchange, and looking over at the oblivious Thor, he wondered what had happened that had caused Elizabeth to cover Jane's reputation. He had been hearing Thor's ranting over the last ten minutes of how 'His beautiful Jane was a woman of many talents'. Obviously, he had no idea that the woman had lied to him. Walking over to where the warmer was, he noted Elizabeth giving him a semi-smile. Ignoring her, he got his dish, and walked away as quickly as possible.

"See," Lizzie said in Darcy's ear. "Told you."

Darcy scoffed, "Please. This is the denial stage. First its denial, and then its..." she paused, taking a deep breath to make it more dramatic. "The kind of love that lasts forever."

"God you're annoying." Lizzie quipped, but Darcy just shrugged with a: 'You'll see.' thrown back at her.

It was suggested by Tony at that moment that everyone move into the other room, as the kitchen was quickly getting packed. Everyone followed him, and soon enough they were all comfortably seated elsewhere.

Lizzie looked around the room, doing a mental headcount to make sure everyone had food. In it, she saw Johnny look around for a chair, plate perched in his hand. Knowing there was more food where that came from, a mischievous smirk spread on her face, and she took a seat behind where Johnny stood.

Loki looked up at the sound of a loud clang. The Storm boy had dropped his plate on the ground, and with a swear, he bent down to get it – RRRIIPP! Johnny's blue eyes widened, a look of shock on his features as the entire room was silenced, and all eyes were on him. Tentatively reaching a hand behind him, he checked the back of his pants to find where the rip had come from.
Unknown to him, Lizzie was silently laughing, reaching her hand up to show everyone the piece of cloth which she had ripped in half to pretend that it was Johnny. Pepper hid her large smile behind her hand, while Tony laughed aloud. Clint and Natasha just shook their heads, large smiles on their faces. Thor and Jane looked completely oblivious as they had been engrossed in their own conversation and had no idea what was going on – while Bruce, Justine, Emma, and Steve all politely hid their laughs behind bites of food.

The Fantastic Four just watched the prankster lean heavily against an equally silent-laughing Darcy, trying to catch her breath. Ben looked as if he was satisfied with the prank; and Logan's eyes glinted with amusement and affection toward the young woman.

Loki raised an eyebrow, slightly amused at her rather simple prank. It wasn't original, but it seemed to do the trick as the mortal reached behind him with slight panic, standing up and trying to see the tear himself. Loki watched her, wondering what other kinds of things that pretty little head of hers cooked up... and whether she did this to everyone, or only those who upset her.

Johnny turned, his body contorting strangely as he tried to see the back of his pants and Lizzie burst out with long-restrained laughter. The Torch turned slightly red as she showed him the cloth, and with a grumble he picked up his plate and headed toward the kitchen.

"That... was... awesome!" Darcy said as she tried to catch her breath. "He looked so horrified. Damn, girl, you're horrible."

"So I've heard."

"Elizabeth." Emma's voice came from across the room. "I do hope you don't plan on making Johnny your next project."

Lizzie sobered, her eyes still alive with merriment. "Too late, Emma. He should be happy, he did want to be at the top of my list. He just didn't know which one he was applying for."

Emma just shook her head, looking over at Steve and beginning a conversation. Logan just shook his head with a slight chuckle. "Hellraiser." he muttered, "Haven't changed a bit."

Loki, who sat nearby, turned to the man. "Do you know Miss Donovan?" he asked, his curiosity finally getting the better of him."Before, I mean."

Logan snapped his eyes up to Loki's. "Whatever gave you that impression?" he asked in return.

"A hunch." Loki replied.

"Well keep your hunches to yourself. I've got no time for them, unless they have good information." the mutant replied, standing up and moving to sit next to Lizzie and Darcy. Loki watched him go, wondering if Lizzie did know the mutant as she beamed broadly at him and moved aside so that he could sit between she and Darcy. He did so, a protective look sent toward Johnny Storm as he walked back in the room.

There was no doubt in Loki's mind that Logan knew Lizzie. No man protected a woman without knowing her first - well, except the Captain, but Loki doubted that Logan was anything like that man. He watched them interact, familiarity going between the pair of them... however, Elizabeth's eyes strayed – more than once – to his. A small smile on her face as she did so, as if she was trying to be friendly.

His hackles raised, he didn't need this mortal believing that just because he helped her once - which, he decided, had nothing to do with her, but rather with the irritating fire-mutant - he was suddenly
had a different opinion of her. Scowling, he returned to his food... trying to block out Thor's incessant praises to his mortal.

Later in the day, Loki searched for a quiet place to read. Another thing which his beloved brother had done in the day was tell Stark's computer to lock his room. Why? Socialization. According to Thor, he wanted Loki to talk to everyone more, and be a little more outgoing. What led Thor to believe such, Loki had no idea, and to be honest he wasn't pleased. But, there was nothing he could do, as Jarvis had informed him that his room would open after dinner – and only after dinner.

Therefore, he was searching for a place where he wouldn't be found by the bumbling Avengers. Jarvis had spoken up about ten minutes into Loki's search for peace of mind, suggesting a little-used room two floors below – a library. Naturally, Loki followed the AI's advice, and was relieved when he found the room. Why Stark had a library, he wasn't sure, as he didn't think that the billionaire ever found the use for books. However, it was there, and the books within seemed to branch a large range of subjects. Looking in a specific area, he found where the book in his hand had come from. He decided then that he would be spending more time in this room. For if there was anything he loved more than himself it was books, for books contained knowledge, and he craved knowledge.

Finding a high-backed chair, he took a seat, opening his book to where he had left off. He had to admit, he found that he found the author's opinion on the criminal mind to be rather fascinating. Yet, he couldn't help but feel disgust toward the protagonist... who allowed his mind to betray him. Still. It was interesting.

"Oh!" a woman's voice came from behind him, he spun to find Lizzie standing there. "I didn't see you at first. You startled me."

"Any startling was of your own accord. I had nothing to do with it." Loki replied, his voice cold and unfeeling. "I was told that there was no one here."

"Well, I wasn't here five minutes ago." she replied, "I came to return a book I just finished. Tony doesn't use these books as much as he should, he depends too much on his toys to give him all the information he needs. A bad habit, I think."

Loki raised his brow. "You don't feel the same way about technology then?"

"I think its got its perks." she said as she walked over to the bookshelf, trying to set the book on the shelf – but finding it too high. "But one shouldn't be dependent upon it." she finished as she stood on her tiptoes, tipping the book to try to slide it onto the shelf. Grunting, she tried again only to have Loki's hand grab the book and slide it in with ease.

She turned to him, suddenly finding herself a little too close to the taller man. She somehow prevented herself from taking a deep breath as she found him smelling rather good. It was a mixture of leather – of course, that was probably his tunic, as he was sans his usual leather jacket – and sandalwood. She couldn't quite understand why she found that combination nice, but she did. She looked up into his eyes, noting his rather condescending look... that snapped her out of her haze.

"Wouldn't want your fumbling to knock over the bookshelf." Loki sneered. "Books are, as you said yourself, valuable."

"I could have done it myself." Lizzie snapped. "I was able to get it down, wasn't I?"

"That doesn't stop the fact that the bookshelf threatened to tip over due to your excessive leaning against them." he said, walking away and sitting back down in his chair. He had to get away from her, already she had caused him to speak to her, and help her. To him, it was getting ridiculous.
"What are you reading?" she asked, but Loki didn't answer. Rolling her brown eyes, she leaned down to read the spine. "Dostoyevsky. Crime and Punishment." she read aloud. "Good book."

"Are you going to stand there like a fool, or are you going to leave me be?" she straightened, pursing her lips in slight agitation.

"I was just curious." she replied, turning around to find another book. Loki lifted his eyes from his paper, watching as she purposefully chose a book from a shelf she could reach. As she turned, the returned his eyes to the pages, pretending to be engrossed in its words. "By the way..." she began, "I wanted to thank you... for what you did the other day." he didn't reply. "I never got the chance as you took off before I could say anything." Still, he said nothing. Lizzie let out a huff.

"What makes you think I did it for you?" he asked, his eyes leaving the page to look up at her. "Or at least, because of your idiotic little personality."

Lizzie raised an eyebrow. "Well, I don't know why you did it. I just wanted to thank you is all." she then passed him with a sigh, she knew where she wasn't welcome.

"You're not normal, are you?" he suddenly asked, although his tone was more of a statement. She stopped in her tracks, turning to face him.

"What?"

"In the hallway the other day, you made him stop breathing. Didn't you?" Loki replied, standing up and facing her. "Don't bother lying, you can't... not to me."

She scoffed, "Naturally. Because you'd know all about lying." she muttered, looking up at the wall. "Jarvis, cut the recordings." she said.

"Miss Donovan, I don't think-"

"You're right, you don't. Just do it." she snapped, "Don't worry, I won't tell Tony, and I can take care of myself."

"Mr. Stark actually requested that if this conversation ever came up, that I record it." Jarvis replied. "My apologies."

"Jarvis..." she said slowly, "Cut the recordings, or I'll cut them."

The AI was quiet for a moment. "Very well, Miss Donovan. One moment." Lizzie and Loki stared at each other, waiting for the AI to say – "Alright, I am no longer recording."

"Thank you." Lizzie said, sighing. "Understand something, I can't tell you everything. There are aspects of what I'm about to tell you that could be very dangerous... that, and I don't trust you with most of the information."

Loki narrowed his green eyes. "Reasonable."

"As for what you asked..." she began. "You could say that I made him stop breathing."

"How?" he asked, watching as she bit her lip. He couldn't help but find his eyes drawn to her mouth at that. Mentally chastising himself, his eyes met hers again. "Well?"

"The ability is something which I, myself, am not completely sure about." she answered, "In essence, I suppose you could call it 'temporary paralysis', where, in some way, I am able to paralyze a specific
part of the body for as long as I want. Say that someone was trying to attack me, they would find that their hand no longer works. Or their legs will no longer move - or, I can make their hearts stop. Complete paralysis is possible, but it takes a little more concentration."

"So that's how you made him begin to choke." Loki mused aloud. "You shut down his breathing in some capacity."

She shrugged. "I don't know, precisely. It probably was more of a failure in his bronchial tubes, but I can't be certain." she replied simply, casually, as if she were discussing the weather. "Lets put it this way... whenever I am threatened, it turns on. Its – well, I do have some control over it. Although sometimes, like the other day, I can't determine who it affects, or how."

This had Loki's interest, and he took a step closer. "You don't have control over it?"

"No... and yes. Its complicated." she replied, her eyes narrowing. "Why are you so curious about this?" she asked.

"Because your ability is something which I haven't seen in your kind." he answered simply. "It fascinates me."

She chuckled, "Mere mortals fascinate you?"

The statement seemed to snap his curiosity into place, and his original unfeeling mask slipped on. "Not likely, Elizabeth. Do not raise yourself higher than you are. Your abilities, however, are interesting – though not overly so. It is that which I find fascinating, although the word is most likely the wrong one to express what I mean to say."

"I was just quoting you, even if the word was... insufficient to express your true opinions." she retorted, a smirk on her face. Loki longed to retort with something hateful, but for the moment his mind seemed to only have one question:

"Were you born with your abilities?" he asked, watching as she suddenly froze, the smirk immediately fading away to a cold mask of indifference; her usually warm eyes turning to a frigid black, an anger boiling beneath their depths. The transformation caused Loki to second guess his question, and yet fuel his need to know more.

For a few moments, she was silent, as if debating what to say. "No." her voice breaking the silence surprised him. "I was not born with that particular ability." she spat.

"Oh?" Loki said, slightly more intrigued than he had been. "How did you acquire it then?"

Her eyes narrowed. "That, my dear Prince, is none of your business." she said, "My life is of no consequence to you. You've said it yourself."

"True, its not." Loki replied. "I'm just curious." he watched as her lips curved into a sinister smile. Against his proper judgement, he worried about her. This was not the woman he'd seen over the last week and a half, this was someone He took a step forward, checking her eyes just to make sure they were their correct color, and mentally sighed in relief. They were still the dark brown he was used to, so he couldn't blame anything outside of her.

"Curiosity killed the cat, Loki." Lizzie said, her voice sickeningly sweet, looking at his feet."Keep back."

"You are not yourself." Loki replied, taking another step toward her. There was definitely something wrong, and he feared that his words had been the catalyst.
An eyebrow rose. "You don't know me." she said. "All you know is that which has been done to you - which I might add is a cake walk. You may be a thousand years old, but you've got no clue on what reality is. Nor do you know what people like you do to others."

"And how would you know?" he asked, "Has not your life been sheltered? Raised by a grandmother who loves you, you have a sister - so I hear - who is your equal. What do you know?" Her head tilted as his legs suddenly gave out from under him. He landed on the ground in a heap, and from his vantage point he looked up at her.

"I know all too well." she replied, "How does it feel, Loki?" she asked in return. "How does it feel to kneel in the manner that you demanded all of us to kneel?"

His eyes locked onto hers, and he wondered just what kind of woman she was. Or rather, what she was. She came down to his height, her face inches from his. "Let me up." he ordered her.

"Why? Give me one good reason, Real Power."

"Do not mock me, chit."

"Why not? You don't mind mocking me." she retorted, her tone unsettling him - not that he would admit it.

"You have changed the subject again Elizabeth." Loki retorted, "Is it possible that you don't like talking about your past, and therefore use diversions to avoid the subject?"

She smiled, this time a little more genuinely. "You mean like you do?" she asked, watching Loki's eyes flicker from her eyes to her lips. "I suppose it takes one to know one."

"You are nothing like me." he stated, trying to ignore the impulse to cross the distance between them, her lips so close to his own. He found himself wondering what it would be like to kiss her, although he immediately dismissed the idea. She was a mortal, a surprising mortal, but a mortal all the same. To kiss her would be... excruciating.

Her chuckle sounded rather pleasant. "On the contrary, Loki," she said, her head going a little closer to his, her lips now centimeters from his ear when she whispered. "We are very much alike." he suppressed a shiver, her breath tickling his ear in a way that made him angry with himself. He was no young virginal boy, who got excited at the slightest attention from a woman. She backed her head up again, once more having it a few inches from his own, her own eyes flickered between his lips and his eyes.

A few tense moments transpired between them, just taking a moment to breathe each other's air. The fire which Loki had lit within Lizzie's eyes seemed extinguished, replaced by something a little more like what he was used to, mingled with some kind of anticipation. On one hand, it made him breathe in relief; on the other, it made me all the more curious. He had seen her switch between anger and contentment in the past, but never like today. And never had he found himself worried for her... nor had he ever wondered if she would allow him to kiss her. His head unconsciously moved a millimeter closer, and she took a sharp intake of breath. However, Loki realized in that second what was happening - and knew he had to put an end to it.

"Are you intending to leave me on the floor for the rest of the day, Elizabeth?" he asked, though his voice was not as condescending as he would have liked.

"Maybe." she replied, "It would certainly teach you a lesson in humility." her eyes sparkled in mischief, and Loki sneered.
"Yes, because that's all you mortals think of, teaching others their place. Yet, you don't know your own." he spat.

"Oh, right, because we must be ruled... correct?" she reiterated.

"You all kill each other if you are left to your own devices." he replied. "Unless someone guides you, you are blind. Yet, you think yourselves so damn wise, believing that you are above everyone else."

She snorted. "Says the man who believes that he is above everyone else." she replied, then let out a laugh. "But you know what I think?"

"Why should I give half a damn what you think?" he asked.

"Glad you asked." she retorted, "I think that your self-importance is a mask." she whispered.


"A mask to hide your true self-loathing." she replied simply.

He scoffed. "What have I to loathe?"

"You don't know? I think you do."

He leaned ever closer, whispering in her ear as she had done to him a few minutes before. "I am above you in every respect, Elizabeth Donovan. What have I to loathe?" he pulled away, noting her smirk as he did so. She was mocking him, he was sure of it.

She paused, as if considering what to say next. "The wretch," she finally began. "centered all in self, living shall forfeit fair renown and doubly dying shall go down to the vile dust from whence he sprung. Unwept. Unhonored. Unsung." he furrowed his brows, not understanding just what it was she was saying. "Have a good day, Loki."

He had no chance to respond as she stood up and marched out without a backward glance.

Loki regained control of his legs, but didn't get himself off the floor for a few moments. His emotions were turbulent. Anger, confusion, disappointment in himself, curiosity and - as much as he was ashamed of it - lust, swirled together in a truly dizzying manner. She was obviously not who he'd thought she was. She was someone who obviously had a lot more to hide, something which may prove to be the opposite of what she put forward as her true nature - but what? What happened in her very short life that caused her to act how she had? How did she acquire her powers, when she made it obvious she wasn't born with them?

He picked himself off the floor, standing to his full height, still looking in the direction that she had left. He wanted answers, and he was determined now that he would get them. At all costs.

Tony watched Loki and Lizzie that evening, confused to say the least. The pair were currently staring rather intently at their plates of food, as if the food had somehow harmed them in some manner. Jarvis had informed him that the pair had had a discussion earlier in the day, although the AI would not reveal his secrets of just what the topic had been. Whatever it was, it had caused the typically-perky Lizzie to clam up, sitting next to their newest recruit, a sour expression marring her pretty features. He looked over at Loki, noting the mischievous man was also rather quiet as he sat next to the boisterous Thor - although, that particular scene was nothing new.
"What do you think happened?" Pepper asked him. "After all, you told me that they seemed to have made some kind of a connection the other day."

Tony shrugged, "Jarvis won't tell me, he said that Vitalii preferred to keep their conversation confidential. Apparently she told Jarvis to cut the recordings, though why he obeyed her orders he won't say either." he answered, pouting slightly. He didn't like it when he didn't know what was going on.

"Have you tried asking her?" Pepper inquired.

"Eh, I told Puppy to get on it – apparently she's Miss Ice right now." Tony replied. "I don't know why, but I have a feeling that whatever was said was pretty important."

"Or," Pepper began. "She tried to get an answer of why he did what he did the other day, and he wasn't exactly nice about it."

"Since when is Reindeer Games nice?" Tony asked rhetorically. "Well, I guess you were wrong."

Pepper scoffed. "Since when have I been wrong?"

"Since you assumed there was something going on between The Ice Queen and Mr. Snow." Tony retorted, a smile on his face as he inwardly laughed at his own joke. "Cause they seem pretty frosty toward one another."

"Maybe."

"Pep, they took two steps forward, and three steps back. Oh yes, that's progress at its finest."

She chuckled lightly. "Never judge off of appearances, Tony. There is something going on between them, otherwise they wouldn't look so murderously at the poor chicken."

"What makes you so sure?" Tony asked.

"I don't know..." Pepper seemed to contemplate the question before suddenly went: "Oh, right, yeah... cause I'm a woman."

Tony snickered, wrapping an arm around her shoulders and pressing a kiss to her temple. "That you are. Thank God she goes back to work tomorrow... I don't think I can take anymore of this glaring."

Pepper just laughed, kissing him before taking a bowl of ice cream that Darcy offered everyone.

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Well? What do you people think? This chapter has made me quite nervous due to the content. So please, if you like it, leave a comment. I would like to hear from the 40-odd hits that I get. Besides, it would be nice to hear from you all.
Nell and Forgiveness

Prince Helblindi looked out on the wilderness of Jotunheim, the crown of his father simply draped in his limp hand. As heir apparent, it seemed natural that he should be king... but within him, Helblindi doubted whether it was a good idea. He remembered far too keenly how his father, Laufey, was a complete tyrant – even to his own family – ruling with a hand of iron. The very crown which he held in his hand, the very source of his father's power. Helblindi had hated him, and a part of him was thankful to his runt-brother Loki for tricking Laufey so as to kill him. It was one thing which now he didn't have to worry about doing himself... but now there was another problem at hand. One which Helblindi hadn't foreseen, and could blame his older brother about – two to be exact.

The second Prince, Blyeistr, his half-brother, was one – the younger Jotun fully prepared to start a civil war with him over the crown. It almost made him heartbroken that his brother would turn on him so quickly, so willing to destroy centuries of familial ties over something so trivial as power. Already Blyeistr was building ties with Helblindi's second problem: Thanos.

The Jotun Crown-Prince groaned as he remembered the meeting with Thanos' second in command. To say the least, Helblindi had not appreciated the visit. He was already worried about the war with his brother, and when the Other had told him that Thanos was contemplating taking over the Nine Realms, Helblindi had thrown him out of his halls. He could no risk open war with only a shaky treaty with Asgard, one opponent he could handle, but not two... and most certainly not Asgard.

"Helblindi?" a female voice echoed through the ice hall. Her black hair shimmered in the dimly-lit hall, her air that of royalty. Her features were sharp, but beautifully so, her appearance more that of an Aesir than a Frost Giant, as her eyes shone like emeralds. She was thin, and short in comparison to the Frost Giants with whom she resided, but she was warmly dressed, so as to acclimate. Her name? Farbauti: Queen Mother of Jotunheim. "Does something trouble you my son?" she asked.

The prince stood, descending the steps to join the woman on the floor. She shifted her form to that of a Frost Giant, allowing her son to hug her from his level. "Many things trouble me, Mother." he replied. "I know not where to begin."

She nodded, tracing the markings which trailed down his cheeks in a comforting manner. "I know about your visitor from a few weeks ago, is that what troubles you?" she asked.

Helblindi shook his head, turning around to sit back on the throne. "It is one of the things which trouble me. The other is that of Blyeistr, I fear he has made an agreement with Thanos – for this crown." he replied, lifting the crown and examining it. With a grunt, he threw it across the room, holding his head in his hands.

A hand rested on his shoulder, and Helblindi turned toward his mother. "You are the king of Jotunheim, Helblindi, even your brother cannot take that away from you. The Jotuns are loyal to you alone. He will never win that." she said in a comforting voice.

"He has already won half of my people's hearts." Helblindi replied, "He has already split any kingdom which I may have had in half." he growled.

"You are still its king." Farbauti replied. "And those who oppose you will be considered traitors."

"They view me as the traitor, Mother." Helblindi replied morosely. "For I did not attack Asgard when I had the chance – I did not seek revenge for my father's betrayal."
She kissed his brow. "It is not an ability to take vengeance that makes a good king," she said. "But do you truly worry about your brother?"

"I do, mother." Helblindi replied. "For he has made it clear that when we meet in battle he will kill me... I wonder if he will join Thanos in attacking Midgard?" he mused aloud.

"Midgard?" Farbauti repeated. "And why would your brother care for that place?"

"To kill Loki of course." Helblindi answered quickly, forgetting momentarily that his mother was still ignorant of what her eldest son had been up to the last few years. After Laufey's death, she had been informed as to who had killed her husband, and although she had shed tears for her lost-son's thought-death, she had been grateful to her eldest. He had freed her from her husband, and for that she loved him.

Farbauti's curious look was all it took for Helblindi to inform her of what the Other had told him about his brother... and that it was Loki's fault that Thanos was going to attack Midgard, and had asked for Jotunheim's assistance. For a few minutes Farbauti was silent, contemplating what she had learned about Loki.

"Mother?" Helblindi prompted. "Was I wrong to tell you?"

She shook her head. "No, my son. You were not." she replied as the doors of the throne room opened and a guard came in announcing a visitor from Asgard who wished to see the prince. Helblindi prepared to throw him out when Farbauti stayed his hand. "I shall excuse myself, my son. I have some things I must see to. Besides, we should stay on the good side of Asgard, they may be our only allies against Blyeistr when the time comes."

Helblindi sighed, she was right. Although he was not pleased to lose his mother's company so quickly, he knew that she would do what she wanted anyways. "Very well, send them in." he told the guard, placing the crown on his head for appearance sake, and watching as his visitor entered. "Welcome, Lady Sif, to my halls..."

Unknown to him, his mother had made a decision – and could only hope that what she had planned would work. Shedding her thick cloak, she prepared to traverse through the roots of Yggdrasil.

That night, Loki couldn't sleep. His mind centered on what he had learned about Elizabeth earlier in the afternoon. It was more obvious than before that she had a secret to hide, one which was dangerous, and she wasn't all that she had seemed. But what hid behind her smiles and free-seeming nature? He had sensed something dangerous about her earlier, something which caused him to worry – of course, he had played on her in that moment, trying to goad information out of her. However, he had been disappointed, and had not gotten much out of her.

A bit of excitement went through him as he contemplated how to find out what it was she hid – after all, he wasn't called 'Silvertongue' for nothing. She was a woman, surely that would be easy to manipulate with even with her cold attitude toward him. Although he knew he could not boast being a man that the ladies of Asgard fancied, he knew that Midgardians were different. Aesir were considered more pleasing to the eye, and surely it would be easy to trick the young Elizabeth into believing that he loved her so that she would trust him. Elizabeth was an enigma to him, but he was sure that with a few well-placed words he would get her to unlock her secrets – or at least, that was the plan.

He knew that Stark had sent her back to work the next day, but there was no doubt in his mind that he could get her back in the topmost floors of Stark Tower within the next 48 hours. That thought in
his mind, he settled down in his bed to think.

Unfortunately for him, his memories of the Chitauri dungeons plagued his dreams, meaning that he woke screaming.

Thanos was getting impatient. In all the millennia he had been alive, Thanos never had to wait so long just to fulfill his plans. The Other had given him more information which their Midgardian informant – the Mutant, Shaw – had given him, and apparently there was a new issue at hand.

The Avengers were not only forming, they were growing. Not that that concerned the Mad Titan too much, mere mortals were not something which he thought were a true challenge. No, what really concerned him was the fact that the gatekeeper Heimdall had spoken to the Allfather – according to his informant on Asgard – and that Odin was planning on sending Asgardian diplomats to the Nine Realms, and had already won a few to his side.

The Ljósálfar elves had already sided with Asgard, and its queen was already in the process of fortifying Alfheim. Despite its rather shaky past, Helblindi had been contacted by the Allfather, and for a particular price, half of the Jötans were their allies – for now. The second prince was now on his side with the promise of the Jotun crown given to him. Thanos knew that the bastard prince's hatred could be used to play him, even against Midgard.

The other Nine Realms had answered, with their allegiances being forged both openly – in the case of those who sided with Asgard – and in secret, as was the case with those who sided with Thanos. Already the Dökkálfar had answered him, and most sided with him. Muspelheim had done the same, Niflheim deciding to remain neutral.

Thanos chuckled to himself, knowing the prophecy of old – that Loki would bring Ragnarok – he had already surmised that this must be what the elders had foreseen. The Half-breed's idiotic wanting to rule Midgard had brought Thanos' wrath upon him, and therefore upon Asgard – and since we were on the subject, Midgard had also proven to be somewhat of a threat.

Yet, Shaw from Midgard had also come with information on a weakness which the Avengers had. Their women. Although it seemed trivial, and rather unoriginal, Thanos had to admit that those particular individuals would probably be very useful to him in the future. If men had one weakness, it was seeing their women in danger... and that was exactly what would happen. Shaw assured him that he could easily get the women within his grasp, all he needed was the word.

And it all could be blamed on one person: Loki. So, if one saw it in a particular light, one would surmise that he would be responsible. Thanos couldn't help but smile at that. Poor fool would realize his mistake too late. The realms were all taking sides, and soon a great battle would be waged, in which no realm would be untouched. All the realms would belong to him.

But it would begin in Midgard.

The sound of keyboards typing and phones ringing filled the legal sector of Stark Tower, followed with 'Hello's and 'How can I help you?'. Lizzie drank her second cup of coffee, quite surprised with how busy they were today – typically the legal department was easy work, no phones ringing off the hook. Apparently that wasn't the case today, although Lizzie surmised that it had something to do with the legal precedence over a few new Stark items which had been recently patented. She was thankful for her office door, it muted out most of the annoying noise.

Well, that was until a knock resounded on said door.
"Come in." she called out, looking up as it opened. Pat's head stuck around, "Hello, what did Micro-
Systems say about the patents on that chip that was sent last week?" Lizzie asked.

Pat blinked. "What?"

"I sent you that information didn't I?" Lizzie asked, looking at her desk.

"Oh, that, yeah you did. They haven't gotten back to me yet." Pat replied. "But that's not why I'm here..."

"Oh?" Lizzie replied with a chuckle. "Why are you here then?"

Pat looked behind her. "Do you know anything about a big-headed lawyer from Harvard coming in
to help us out now that Mrs. Langley is out of the business for the next few months?"

"Uh... no." Lizzie answered. "I was under the impression that Emma would be returning soon and
that I would be in charge until then. Jarvis?"

"Miss Potts did say something about a replacement to Mr. Stark yesterday, Miss Donovan... but I do
not think that he authorized this." the AI replied. "Shall I inform him that there is an intruder?"

Lizzie laughed. "Don't worry about it Jarvis, just tell Mrs. Langley that someone wishes to replace
her, she'll take care of it." she answered. "In the meantime, Pat, send the woman in – oh wait, what's
her name?"

"Nell Shiffer I think." Pat replied.

"Shiffer? What is she, a mop?" Lizzie asked sarcastically, cleaning up her desk at a surprising rate.

"No that's swiffer."

Lizzie gave Pat a condescending look, shooing her out of her office and cleaning up. Another knock
resounded on the door, and once more Lizzie shouted 'Come in'.

"Emma Langley?" a silky voice asked from the doorway, causing Lizzie's brown eyes to snap up.
When she did so, her jaw felt like dropping. The woman was stunning. Her black hair, green eyes,
and lithe figure making Lizzie wonder if Loki had a twin, and if he did, why he was keeping her a
secret. She wondered vaguely if it was Loki, she had read the mythology over the last few days, and
his shapeshifting abilities were well documented. "May I come in?"

"Yeah, yeah, sorry." Lizzie replied quickly. "I'm not Emma, by the way." she stretched her hand out.
"Elizabeth Donovan, I'm Mrs. Langley's assistant."

"Ah, I see." the woman replied, her voice having a hint of an accent which if Lizzie was to place,
she would give it British. "Nell Shiffer, its a pleasure."

"Unfortunately Mrs. Langley is not in the office, her husband just died and she's currently in grief.
She's been given the next few months off." Lizzie replied.

Nell nodded, her eyes which reminded Lizzie too much of Loki's roving around the office. "So I'd
been informed. Are you to do the interview then?"

Lizzie's mouth gaped like a fish, "I have no idea. I just found out you were here, quite frankly I had
no warning." she then sat down.

"Though if so, I suppose we could start with a little bit about yourself?"
"Is that what your interview was like?" Nell asked. Lizzie nodded. "Very well... what would you like to know?"

"Age perhaps?" Lizzie asked, "remember I have no idea what I'm doing."

Nell laughed lightheartedly, the sound quite pleasant to listen to. "In my thirties." she finally answered. "We can't expect a direct answer to that question, now can we?"

"You have a twin brother?" Lizzie mumbled.

"Excuse me?" Nell asked. "What was that?"

Lizzie cleared her throat. "Nothing, nothing, you just remind me of someone I know." she answered. "Uh, where are you from?"

"I was born in Norway originally, but my father moved about quite a bit. I've lived in various locations around the world before I was finally allowed to settle down when I was in my twenties. I got married, had a few children – do you like this man who you say I remind you of?" Nell asked in return. The question caught Lizzie off guard, and she accidentally choked on the coffee she was drinking. "Are you alright?" Nell asked concernedly.

"Yeah, I'm fine." Lizzie replied, clearing her throat a few more times. "To be quite honest the guy drives me up a wall. He's got some serious honesty issues, as well as a god-complex, tends to believe himself above everyone else. Ants he likes to call us, its like watching a supped up version of Sherlock Holmes, his narcissism is through the roof. Also he's determined not to like me, which is okay... but that's a bit personal. Where did you go to school, Miss Shiffer?"

"Harvard." Nell answered. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to pry."

"No problem, I understand, I did just compare you to someone I knew, its logical to be curious." Lizzie replied nonchalantly. "Now out of my curiosity, if you don't mind, how many kids do you have?"

Nell smiled. "Two boys." she answered. "One is back in Norway with his father's family, the other... well, he was adopted when he was a baby. He was my firstborn, but his father didn't like the fact that I had had a child."

Lizzie blushed. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have asked." she apologized.

"Its natural to be curious, Elizabeth." Nell replied kindly. "I did say I had sons."

"So you did." Lizzie replied, repressing the shudder at her full name... the woman said it with the same inflection Loki did on average.

"What makes you think that you'll be good for this job? I mean, its only a temp place, and its got really no reward."

"It will put Stark Industries on my resume. That and I'm not looking for a permanent job, I'm just looking for a jumping spot. I'm looking for my son, you see." Nell answered. "He's here in New York and I'm trying to get in contact with him. Once that's done I'll probably go back to Norway."

"The elder one?" Lizzie asked. "What's his name?"

The brunette on the other side of the desk had an empathic smile on her face. "I hope you find him." she said as the door suddenly opened behind Nell and Tony Stark came in. "Mr. Stark?"

"Last I looked, and I looked in the mirror only about two minutes ago – thirty seconds if you count the mirror in the hall." Tony replied, looking Nell over with a critical eye. "So you're the wannabe temp?"

Nell stood, her hand outstretched. "Nell Shiffer. Tony Stark I presume, also known as Ironman?"

"You don't presume at all." Tony said. "It's a pleasure Miss Shiffer, I suppose that Miss Donovan was good enough to already perform a interview?"

"In a manner of speaking." Lizzie replied. "Technically its not my place."

"Place?" Tony scoffed. "You've been listening to Reindeer Games far too much. He's the one who cares about 'places'. Speaking of him, she looks like him."

Nell laughed, looking back at Elizabeth. "Uh, 'Reindeer Games' wouldn't happen to be causing poor Elizabeth so many problems?" she said with a twinkle in her green eyes.

Tony smirked. "He is." he answered. "Tell me something, have you ever been convicted of something illegal?"

The raven-haired beauty looked up at the sky with contemplation. "Uh, no I don't think so."

"Then you're hired. Emma's not coming back for six months, if ever again. I'm sure Vitalii over here would enjoy having a boss again – just don't be surprised if I take her from you from time to time. She's got a bit of a place up at the apartments, and if I had my way she'd be my cook 24/7... unfortunately I signed the whole business over to my girlfriend so I don't call the shots anymore." Tony replied, giving Lizzie a pointed look. "For your knowledge, RG has been a total ass all day. I think he misses you."

"Yeah, like he'd miss getting stabbed in the gut." Lizzie quipped.

"You think I'm kidding." Tony replied. "He scared my cook half out of his mind this morning for breakfast, I never thought I'd see poor Kato in such a fright, but Prongs succeeded –" he paused. "Prongs... I like that. I'm gonna start calling him 'Prongs', I'm sure he'll like that."

"I doubt he'll understand the reference." Lizzie mumbled.

Tony rolled his eyes. "Oh come on, your boyfriend is smart, he'll get it."

"Stark!" Lizzie snapped. "He is not my boyfriend!"

"Really? You should have seen him this morning with Powerpuff Boy. I thought he would have killed him when the dumbass said something about how hot you were... well, him and Blade."

"Blade?"

"Wolverine," Tony answered. "Hey, is there something between you two?"

"I thought you just said that I was dating Lo – Prongs?" Lizzie caught her slip, looking at an amused Nell. She wondered what the woman thought of her just assigned co-workers.

"Well Prongs may have competition with Moony... damn, I'm coming up with great names here – all we need is a Padfoot and Wormtail and we have the Marauders." Tony replied.
Lizzie's brown eyes rolled. "You're a child, Tony."

"That's not new news, Pepper tells me all the time – get a new line." Tony replied. "Come up for lunch, okay Vitalii?"

"Why? So you can keep annoying me?" Lizzie asked. "No thanks."

"Hey, I'm just being the annoying brother you never had." Tony replied, walking over and giving Lizzie a one-armed hug. "I like you kid, if I didn't I wouldn't tease you so much."

"Really? You tease Prongs ever so much." Lizzie replied.

Tony smiled, "I never said I didn't like the egotistical bastard. I think we could get along fine if he didn't want to take over the world." he said, kissing her temple in a friendly manner before walking out of the office.

Nell and Lizzie exchanged a glance before Lizzie blushed deep scarlet. "Well, that was the supreme boss." she said. "What do you think?"

The older woman smiled. "I like him." she replied, easing Lizzie's worries with her tone. "And I like you as well, Elizabeth. I hope we can work well together."

Lizzie smiled. "I hope so too, Nell."

Nell looked around once more. "Now, where is my new office?"

When Lizzie did arrive at the apartments of Stark Tower, she saw just what Tony had been referring to. Kato the cook, whose real name was: Kevin Alexander Thomas Olivier, acronym 'KATO' was indeed scared out of his wits. Lizzie could see the man scrambling around the kitchen, obviously shaken. She scoffed, walking away from the kitchen in search of any other forms of life.

"Jarvis, where is everyone?" she asked.

"Well Mr. Stark as well as the Avengers are currently in another meeting." Jarvis replied.

"Another? Damn how many meetings are they going to have?" Lizzie asked.

If Jarvis could have chuckled, he would have. "I am afraid I don't know, Miss Donovan. Loki, however, is currently in the family room... reading."

"And the ladies?"

"Out currently. Miss Darcy wished to take Miss Emma out for the day and the others followed them. They should be back in time for lunch." Jarvis replied.

Lizzie 'hmph'd and walked into the living room. Loki sat on the couch, aimlessly tossing a small ball in the air and catching it deftly in his fingers before tossing it again. "I see you have returned." he said.

She looked around. "Yes, it would appear so." she replied. "Though you obviously had fun in my absence."

"Whatever gave you that impression?" Loki asked in return, not even bothering to turn to Lizzie. "Midgard is rather boring."
"Perhaps the burned food in the kitchen..." she trailed off. "Whatever did the cook do to you except make you food? From what I know, he's one of the better chefs of New York."
Loki finally turned to her. "Nothing."

"So you just... scared him for no reason?" she offered.

"No," Loki replied. "I never do anything without a reason, your mind simply is too innate to understand why I would do such a thing."

She nodded, waiting for him to continue, but he didn't. "Then why don't you explain it like you were explaining it to a small child?" she asked, trying to brush off his thinly veiled insult. "Loki, why did you mess with him?"

"He said something which disturbed me." Loki answered, tossing the ball in the air again.

"Disturbed people do not scare others." Lizzie replied in a patient tone. "What did he say?"

He turned once more to her, seemingly contemplating the idea of telling her. "It doesn't matter."

"There is something else which I wish to discuss with you."

"We speak on a regular basis since your coming here." Loki retorted. "Why does it surprise you so much?"

"Because you typically don't choose to 'speak' with me on your own accord... usually its forced and talking to you is like pulling teeth." Lizzie replied. "But what did you want to talk to me about, Loki?"

He sighed, laying back down to distract himself from Elizabeth as he tossed the ball in the air. "Quite simply I wish to apologize for my behavior. You did not deserve my previous attitude toward you, and for that I am sorry." he rushed out quickly, the words leaving a bitter taste in his mouth. He did not apologize to anyone, especially some irritating little mortal – indeed, for he had only earlier in the day insulted Thor's woman and had not apologized for it. He had no intention of it either. When she did not reply, he turned his head to look at her.

Her shock was obvious to him, and he knew that Elizabeth was just as surprised that he said it of his own accord. Her brown eyes were widened, with the brows practically disappearing into her hair, with her jaw only slightly open. Seconds ticked by, and Loki was getting impatient. Perhaps she did not believe him – which would be possible, she had not been fooled by him in the past.

"I don't believe you."

Damn.

"Why wouldn't you? I said it didn't I?" Loki asked.

Elizabeth shook her brown head, "Yes, you did – and I would like to believe you, Loki, I would. I don't like dealing with animosity, its not something I relish. I'm not a sadist..." she said, sitting down in a chair opposite of Loki.
"Then what comes into your way?" Loki asked quietly, silently fuming at her perception.

"You lack conviction... you said it completely devoid of emotion, completely unfeeling." she answered. "For example, if you meant it you would have looked me in the eye when you did it, allowing me to see whether you were sincere by looking into your eyes. Its very different, Loki."

He rolled his eyes, wondering just how she had known. Convincing her would obviously be a harder task than he had originally thought. "I don't apologize to anyone, Elizabeth, you should take it a little more seriously that I apologized at all instead of giving me requirements." he retorted.

"It has nothing to do with requirements, Loki." she replied gently, gentler than he had ever heard her speak to him. It was nearly how he had heard her speak to her friends and little Andrew, it made him turn to her. "I am not going to accept your apology unless you mean it because it would be a lie. Yes, you are the god of lies, I know this, but it doesn't mean I have to accept it."

Loki scoffed. "You accept what you must, that is the way of life."

"Yes, you do." she replied. "But as it turns out, I don't have to accept your false apology."

"What is it you want, woman?" he exclaimed, his eyes meeting hers.

"Truth." she answered easily. "Honesty. Its a lonely word, Loki, but if you favored it instead of your lies you might be in a better place than you are."

He jumped off the couch, now towering over her menacingly. "There is nothing wrong with me." he snarled.

She chuckled, standing to her own height, which was rather short. Slowly, gently, she placed a palm on his cheek, making him freeze his movement. He wasn't sure how to react to her strange behavior. "Sure there is, Loki. Maybe not as a man, but rather with your choices."

"And how about your choices?" he asked in return. "You ask for my honesty – for truth. Yet, you keep your past a secret." She flinched, her hand leaving his cheek, but he caught her wrist in his hand turning it over and pushing her sleeve up to show her scar. "How can you expect me to trust you when you are quite the liar yourself?" he asked in a calmer voice.

She snarled, trying to snatch her hand back but he kept it firmly in his own. "What do you know about anything, Loki?" she snapped, her eyes suddenly taking on a glow of recognition. "You bastard!" she hissed. "You were trying to manipulate me, weren't you? No wonder the supposed apology! You complete and utter bastard!"

Loki was almost expecting it when he was suddenly dropped to his knees by the force of her power, but he did not release her hand, dragging her down with him. What surprised him was that she did not paralyze the limb as she knelt by his side, forcing him to look at her.

"You know nothing about my life!" she spat. "And yet you think that you can play with my emotions to know? I am not that naïve, Loki!"

"You have yet to let me speak in my defense, Elizabeth." he replied calmly. "I was not manipulating you."

"Liar!" she exclaimed. "You look me dead in the eyes and you try to tell me you weren't trying to manipulate me into trusting you? Into giving you what you want?"

"I sincerely meant my apology." he continued to say, this time looking her in the eyes. She stopped,
her eyes searching his for lies; yet, he could see she wanted to believe him. It was as if she wished to forgive him after all.

"If you are lying to me." she began calmly. "If you are manipulating me in any respect whatsoever...you will regret you ever asked my forgiveness. Are you sure you wish to take the chance of my retaliation if I find out you're lying?"

"You honestly think that you can do anything to me?" he asked.

She raised an eyebrow. "For a man who wants my forgiveness, it may not be wise to insult me right now." she replied.

Loki seethed, but said nothing on the matter. She was a demanding bint, but he had a part to play – and that meant pretending to be sincerely apologetic. He threw himself fully into the actor he knew he could be. "Have your requirements been met?" he asked haughtily.

Lizzie pursed her lips. "As little as you can do, I suppose it counts." she replied. "You're forgiven... somewhat. Don't expect me to suddenly pour out my life-story over a cup of tea, if you're sincere I'll know it. But be aware that I will be watching you until I know for sure. I'm not going to trust you immediately."

He smirked, this time genuinely. "Oh, I know you won't."

The sound of the Avengers talking could be heard in the hall, and together, Loki and Lizzie got up off the floor.

"Hey Vitalii!" Tony greeted, "You came after all."

"I said I would didn't I?" she replied. "Though I feel kinda guilty. Its Nell's first day on the job, and you forced me to abandon her for lunch with you when I should be helping her acclimate." She was unaware that her wrist was still in Loki's larger hand, her mind completely ignoring it as if it were something ordinary. Later, she would wonder at why she had allowed it for so long, but now she simply chatted with Tony in complete ignorance.

He knew however, and was lazily tracing patterns on the scar which still made him curious. He had won this round, and knew within him that he would have to now be careful at how he behaved around her. He smiled smugly as Thor took him away from the group to discuss something about preparing for Thanos – he had no doubt that very soon he would know all there was to know about Elizabeth Donovan, and then he wouldn't care one whit about her. That rather gleeful thought in mind, he was left in a good mood as he dealt with Thor.

Little did he know that the Norns had another plan entirely, and in setting a trap for Elizabeth, he was – in fact – about to fall into their own.
The Duck and the Kangaroo

Chapter Summary

Loki and Andrew have some bonding time... and Clint finds out about Lizzie's decision to forgive Loki.

Chapter Notes

Thank you Sarah for your comment, I'm glad you like the story. Kudos to you for being the first comment on here. :)

Over the next few days, Lizzie was absent from the Avengers' daily life. They still planned what to do with Thanos, although for the most part they had chosen to relax. There was only so much they could do with what little information they had, and SHIELD was getting antsy. Thor had been able to contact Asgard, and had been informed that Jotunheim was currently considered an ally of Asgard – well, Helblindi that was. The crown-prince of the Jotuns had made an agreement with the Golden Realm, that they would remain peaceful as long as Loki was in custody.

When Loki had found out, he laughed, wondering if his brother in Jotunheim knew that he was currently wandering Midgard... well, maybe not wandering. He was only allowed in the tower, and had been given strict orders to keep out of the kitchen – although Tony had made it clear that it was only when Kato was playing cook. Loki wondered, however, if Tony had planned to keep Lizzie away for long? And if there was a way to get her back to the tower?

There was only one thing he was truly content about: the fact that the Fantastic Four had decided that Johnny would be absent from the meetings. Why? Because they figured out that Loki was determined to make the man's life a living hell – that, and they kept finding certain little booby traps for the fire-starter. Everyone blamed Loki, but he knew that Elizabeth had something to do with the pranks, even though no one else figured it out.

All in all, Loki thought that it had been quiet. Perhaps too quiet. Where was Thanos? Surely it didn't take all this time to gather forces and attack Midgard once more? Why was he so silent? He was not even bothering Loki in his sleep anymore, and for the past few nights he had had a good night's rest. The words on the page that Loki was reading seemed to hold no meaning as Loki's mind wandered, wondering what was going on outside the atmosphere of the small world. He knew that Thanos would strike soon... the problem was the constant waiting.

The sound of a child running into the room made Loki roll his eyes. The Captain's woman's son was unwatched too much as of late, allowed to simply run wild around the apartment, causing havoc wherever he went. Darcy had managed to keep him occupied for the first two days, but then she and Jane were called away to SHIELD with the express purpose of helping Erik Selvig to create some kind of energy shield to protect Avengers' Tower as well as other locations. They had used whatever they had scavenged from the Chitauri vehicles in an attempt to understand how to do their best to protect their warriors from another invasion; and with the threat looming with an untold date, they
worked harder than ever.

"Hi Loki!" the little boy shouted loudly. "What'cha doing?"

Loki looked behind the boy, searching for any female who was watching him. "Reading." he answered simply.

"What are you reading?" Andrew asked.

"Does it matter?" Loki asked irately.

Andrew rolled his eyes. "C'mon, Loki, can't you be nice?"

"No."

The boy ignored the god's remark, opting to lean up against the armrest to look at the book. "What kind of book is that?" he asked, causing Loki to sigh in exasperation.

"Isn't there someone else you can go bother?" he asked in return. "Justine, or Rogers, or someone other than myself?"

Andrew shrugged. "Mommy isn't here, and neither is Steve. Tina is with Buce, and Darcy is with Jane, but they're with Mommy too, so..." he trailed off, looking at the book once more. "S—siir..." he began reading. "Wat – Wal – Walt – er. Sc – So – Scoooott." he sounded out, trying it once more.

"Sir Walter Scott." Loki snapped. "Yes, what of it?"

The little boy, ignored him. "I don't know the first word... th—there a m—man..." his little brows furrowed. "With... what's that word?"

Loki rolled his own eyes, not particularly interested in helping the child. "Soul." he answered. "Why don't you find a book you can understand?" he said, a certain edge to his voice. He just wanted the child to leave him alone. "A picture book or something, I'm sure that with Stark's immaturity he has to have some around here somewhere."

"But I want to read with you." Andrew insisted. "What's the matter? Don't you like me?"

"No." Loki answered, although he was somewhat impressed that the child wished to read with him. From what he knew of children, such things did not interest them.

"I like you, though. And even though you don't like me now, I think, I think that we'll be good friends." Andrew answered, turning back to the book. Loki just stared at him. "Soul... so... d--"

"Dead." Loki supplied.

"Can you read it with your finger under the words?" Andrew suddenly asked. "That's how Lizzie does it. She puts her finger under the word, and then she – and then she reads for me, helping me so that I can read with her."

Loki paused. "Now why would I want to do that?" he asked.

"Because you're not that bad." Andrew answered. "You just like to pretend to be bad."

He raised an eyebrow. "Is that so?"

"Yes." Andrew huffed, placing his hands on his hips like he'd seen all the women around the building do. "Now are you going to help me or not?"
Loki thought for a moment, not particularly wanting to help the little boy, but deciding that he would not get the boy to leave him alone unless he did – or unless he scared him away. However, that was not an option as he knew that it would have certain repercussions which he didn't need to deal with.

"Fine," he eventually said, motioning to the stool which stood a bit off to the side. "Get that and bring it over here." The boy looked over, dragging the stool to be beside Loki. Unfortunately, Andrew was not tall enough to see over the edge of the chair if he sat on the stool. Had Loki had his magic, he would have simply raised the stool to the proper height... but as it was, he could not do it. After a few more minutes of thought, he decided to help the boy perch on his knee, as far away from him as possible. "Alright, now I will read it first, and then you shall."

"Can't you just read?" Andrew asked, trying to get comfortable on the god's knee.

Loki narrowed his eyes. "Do you want me to read at all?" he asked.

"Yes." Andrew replied, his eyes downcast.

"Then you will read it the second time, no arguments." he replied. "And no interruptions unless you don't understand a word, is that clear?"

Andrew nodded vigorously, his eyes having a hungry look in them which gave Loki a little hope for the next generation. With his finger beneath the words, he began reading the poem.

"Breathes there a man with soul so dead, who never to himself hath said: this is my home, my native land..."

"Uh, Loki?" Andrew interrupted.

"Yes?"

"What is native?"

The god of mischief sighed.

When Lizzie finally arrived at the apartment, she began to worry. She had been called by Emma two hours before, telling her that there was an impromptu meeting with SHIELD which she had been called in for. Unfortunately, Lizzie had been visiting Michael and Patrick, and was therefore half-an-hour out of New York... and seeing as traffic was horrendous, it was an extra hour before she finally made it to Stark Tower. After swiping her badge, she had rushed to the elevator, and waited until she had made it to the apartments – now she couldn't find Andrew.

"Jarvis, where is Andrew?" she asked the AI.

"He is in the library, Miss Elizabeth... with Loki." the AI replied.

Her heart leapt up into her throat. "Please tell me that bastard hasn't done anything." she pleaded with fate aloud.

"Quite frankly, I think you'll be surprised at what you're going to find when you get to the library, Miss Elizabeth." the AI said. "Its something which you don't see every day around here. Might I recommend being quiet when you first go in?"

She went down one floor, moving faster than normal until she heard a voice – Andrew's to be specific.
"You're so silly! Ducks can't be friends with kangaroos!" the boy exclaimed laughingly.

Elizabeth froze, he couldn't be talking to Loki... could he? She crept toward the door, walking in and following the next voice.

"Whyever not?" Loki replied.

"Because ducks are from a – a different part of the world. They would have to go, like, a trillion miles to be with a kangaroo. A billion, trillion miles." Andrew replied.

"Firstly, Midgard is not a 'billion, trillion miles' big." Loki argued. "Secondly, I think you made that up. Do you even know what a billion, or a trillion, is?"

Andrew nodded. "Of course I know what a billion is. Its a number."

"Can you even count to a billion?" Loki asked.

"Of course you can count to a billion. One... two... three..."

"That's enough, I get the picture." Loki interrupted. Lizzie snickered behind her hand. This was amusing for some odd reason. Andrew started giggling. "What are you giggling at, boy?"

"You." Andrew replied. "You look so funny right now."

"No, you look funny." Loki replied. "You look like you're having convulsions."

Andrew just giggled harder. "Anyways, ducks and kangaroos can't be friends because they are not from the same part of the planet."

"What makes you say that?"

"Because I've seen ducks here, and I know that Kangaroos are from Austra – Austrai –" he struggled. "Down under."

Lizzie lost it internally.

"Its a story, Andrew, it's not supposed to make sense." Loki said just as Lizzie's head tilted to see around the corner. "You honestly think that these people want it to make sense? If they did, they'd make it with creatures that can talk in the first place – and not so nonsensical." Her eyes nearly popped out of her head as she took in the sight.

Andrew was sitting, quite happily, on Loki's lap; a book of child's poems in Loki's limp hand, his other hand supporting Andrew's back so that the boy wouldn't fall off his knee. "Yeah, but still, ducks can't be friends with kangaroos."

"Yes, you're very smart – do shut up." Loki replied, lifting the book back up so he could read, Andrew settling against Loki's chest so that the man could use his other hand to point at the words. "Please give me a ride on your back! Said the duck to the kangaroo..."

Lizzie just stood there like an idiot as he continued reading, her mind trying to process what was going on as she listened. If she were honest with herself, she thought he was a marvelous reader, his voice quite soothing to the ear; and enough that – were she not who she was – she would swoon over him. After all, not many men can be brave enough to read a foolish child's poem aloud to a child who isn't even theirs. She decided she must have been dreaming, and she pinched herself, the pain hitting her nerves just right that she let out an undignified squeak. Loki suddenly stopped.
reading and she felt like hitting herself.

"What was that?" Andrew whispered – or rather, faux whispered, as he thought he was being quiet.

"An intruder." Loki replied simply, and Lizzie could practically hear the smirk in his voice.

Andrew gasped. "What are we going to do? Do you think they know we're here?"

"Oh, there's no doubt they know we're here." Loki answered."Elizabeth, you can stop hiding."

Lizzie rolled her brown eyes, stepping out from behind the bookshelf. "I don't even want to know how you knew it was me."

"Lizzie!" Andrew shouted, jumping out of Loki's arms and running to Elizabeth.

Loki huffed, trying not to be annoyed that the boy had left him so quickly to run to Elizabeth – was he not good enough that the boy still clung to her instead? He had been the one reading to him the whole bloody afternoon. "Good, because I have no intention of telling you." he replied to her earlier statement.

"Though, please, don't let me interrupt." she said in return. "You seem to be enjoying yourselves."

"Loki's been reading to me, Lizzie." Andrew exclaimed. "He read to me all about the man who has no home. And then, he read to me about the spider and the fly – which was really dumb, why did the fly think that the spider wasn't going to eat her? And then the duck and the kangaroo."

Lizzie smiled. "I'm glad you had fun." she said happily.

"It's about time you showed up, Elizabeth." Loki finally said. "I'm no nurse."

"You seemed to be doing alright if you ask me," Lizzie replied. "I'm just sorry I interrupted it seemed rather cozy in here." Loki looked up at her, remembering his goal to gain her trust. From the look on her face, she seemed to approve of what he had done with Andrew – perhaps it had been a good thing after all, despite the fact that it was completely despicable.

"I'm hungry Lizzie." Andrew suddenly blurted. "Loki's great and all, but I don't think he thought about food."

"You're the one that insisted on reading another story." Loki retorted to the boy. "That's not my fault."

Andrew rolled his eyes. "You could have thought of it though, you are the grown up." he said.

"If you were hungry you should have made it known. I cannot read your mind – well, not at the moment at any rate." Loki mused sadly. Had he had his seidr he would have been able to read the child's mind.

"Still, you should have looked at the clock." Andrew replied. "We eat lunch at the same time every day."

"You should have looked at the clock, and consequently taken yourself up to the kitchen to get a meal." Loki stated, looking down at the book in his hand. What in the Nine Realms was wrong with him? He was arguing with a child about nonsense...

"Well you should have--"

"Boys!" Elizabeth snapped, earning a glare from Loki, and a apologetic look from Andrew.
"Although this is a lovely conversation." Lizzie continued. "I'm hungry as well, so why don't I head up to the kitchen to see what Kato has made and you can finish your story?"

Loki raised an eyebrow at her suggestion. Did he really want to finish the story about the idiotic duck being friends with a kangaroo?

"Yay!" Andrew cheered, running back to Loki and surprising him by climbing up into his lap. Lizzie shook her head with a large smile on her face as she walked out of the library. Who knew? Tony was going to have a blast with this recording, she knew it.

"Oh, so now I'm interesting again am I?" Loki asked. "Now that Elizabeth is walking out of the room, you suddenly come back to me. I'm nothing more than second best."

"Just keep reading, Loki." Andrew replied boredly.

"No, I don't think I will continue if I am so haphazardly cast aside when she comes into the picture." Loki retorted.

Andrew rolled his eyes for the umpteenth time that day. "I like you Loki... but I'm going to marry Lizzie."

Loki smirked. The boy really thought that did he? "Are you indeed?" he asked.

"Yeah, I love her." the child declared.

Loki just rolled his own eyes, wondering at the child's complete ignorance of what love did to an individual. It made people weak. He just wondered how long it would be before he learned the hard way.

Elizabeth, after kicking Kato out of the kitchen for making food which would be wholly unappetizing to a five year old child, decided that she would have to do things herself, and for the first time, she wished she was not working for Tony Stark.

"Hey you." A voice came from behind her, and she turned to see Clint standing in the doorway. "How are you doing? I haven't seen you for a few days."

"Good, good." she replied. "Though even when I am here you tend to ignore me."

Clint scowled. "Sorry, Lizzie. This whole situation has Tasha and me really stressed out."

"'Tasha and I', Clint. You speak the language, then speak it correctly." Lizzie replied, her voice having a slight edge.

"Good, good." she replied. "Though even when I am here you tend to ignore me."

Clint scowled. "Sorry, Lizzie. This whole situation has Tasha and me really stressed out."

"Tasha and I, Clint. You speak the language, then speak it correctly." Lizzie replied, her voice having a slight edge.

The archer just chuckled. "Who pissed you off today?"

She sighed. "Kato. He decided to make fish this afternoon – which is fine... except the fact that he left the head on." she shivered in disgust. "I am so glad that I checked before Andrew came up here."

"Where is the little brat? I haven't seen him all day." Clint asked.

Lizzie paused. She wasn't sure how Clint would react knowing that the five year old was with Loki, after all, in her two weeks of hanging around the Avengers she had witnessed Clint losing his rather mild temper three times at the trickster. "He's in the library." she answered vaguely.

"You left him in a room alone?" Clint asked. "I'm shocked. Something about you being
overprotective of any child you come in contact with..."

"He's not alone." she replied. "I left him with, uh..."

Clint just waited, her unspoken word suddenly clicking into place. "Loki." he finished for her. "Please tell me you aren't that stupid."

"He was reading to Andrew before I showed up. I was shocked, but Andrew wanted to keep reading with him – it was the weirdest thing, Clint. He hated Andrew the first day I came here... and now he's reading the Duck and the Kangaroo to him as if he were some – I don't know – relative." she answered.

"He's gotten to you." Clint stated. "Lizzie, you can't let him in, he's a liar."

"I know." she replied, pausing again. She liked Clint, she really did. Ever since he pulled her out of her concrete grave she had had a certain amount of respect for him – and she not seen there to be something between him and Natasha, she was sure she would have let that respect grow into something more intimate. But she was no thief, and she wouldn't leave Natasha hanging like that. "He apologized to me the other day..."

"Apologized." Clint repeated. "A man who has been coined the 'god of lies' apologized to you? So what does that mean in your mind? That he is repentant?"

"I don't know." she replied. "But its a start isn't it?"

Clint scoffed. "Lizzie, Lizzie, Lizzie... this is Loki we're talking about. Not Steve, not Tony, not Thor, not Logan. Not even Johnny – Loki. He could look you in the eyes and lie to you so convincingly that you would fall for it." he said. "And apparently you have fallen hard for it." She sighed. "I just think that some people should be given a second chance." she said. "What if he really meant it?"

"He didn't." Clint answered. "Trust me, Liz, he didn't. The man is a pathological liar, there is no truth in him in any way, shape, or form."

"Well neither was there any in you, or Natasha. Yet, you gave her a second chance." she replied.

"Are you saying that Loki is to you what Natasha is to me?" Clint asked. "Is that what you're saying?"

"No..." Lizzie replied. "I just think that some of us should try to show him something else."

Clint narrowed his blue eyes at her, scrutinizing her physically as if he were trying to understand her mental status. "He is the reason you almost died, Lizzie. How can you forget that?"

"He did try to kill me personally, Clint --"

"Fine!" Clint interrupted. "He took over my mind! He was going to make me kill Natasha! He's not a good man, Lizzie. He doesn't feel remorse!"

Lizzie sighed. "Neither did you, Clint, when you killed those who you killed."

Clint's jaw clenched. "Do... not compare me to him." he ground out. "We are not the same."

"I'm not saying you are." she replied. "But some people deserve a second chance, and who are we to say that they don't get it."

"Why are you saying this?" Clint asked. "How deep has he ingrained himself in your mind that
"I'm not defending him." Lizzie said. "I'm just trying to be civil."

"Civil doesn't say: 'Hey, you tried to destroy my planet, and nearly succeeded.'" Clint shot back.
"Civil doesn't say: 'If you had succeeded, I would be dead, as would the rest of my family. My friend would have killed my other friend at your bidding, and the world as a whole would be completely and utterly destroyed. But that's okay, because you apologized' – that's not 'civil' Elizabeth, that's insane."

She let out a shaky breath. Her power was beginning to try and overtake her, to make Clint stop talking. She wouldn't hurt him, she wouldn't. She cared about him too much to harm him.

"Are you even listening to me?!" Clint shouted.

"That is enough!" a new voice boomed. Both Lizzie and Clint turned to see Logan standing in the doorway. "I don't give a damn that you saved her life, Barton, you do not speak to her that way." he said.

"Have you heard what she did the other day?" Clint replied. "Have you heard her sudden love for the bastard demigod in the library?"
Logan furrowed his brows. "qu'est-ce qu'il parle?" he asked her.

"Loki s'est excusé, l'autre jour. J'ai accepté ses excuses." she replied.

"Je sais toujours ce que vous dites, je parle français." Clint replied. "So cut it out."

"Cén fáth go raibh tú ag glacadh lena leithscéal a ghabháil?" Logan asked in turn, switching to Gaelic.

Clint huffed. "Fine, have your little conversation, see if I care," he said. "But when Loki turns on you, all I have to say is 'I told you so'."

"Clint," Lizzie began, stopping him from walking out. "I don't want us to fight. You're my friend, one of the very few. Please don't be angry with me."

He sighed. "I'm not angry with you, Lizzie." he replied, "It's not your fault you're a woman with a heart of gold." and with that he walked out, leaving Logan and Lizzie in the kitchen alone.

The sound of knives could be heard as Logan unsheathed his claws, using them to chop up the onion that Lizzie was sure to cry over. "So why did you accept his apology?" he repeated his earlier question in English.

She sighed. "Everyone deserves a second chance, James." she replied, going to heat up the pan on the stove. "Where would I be if I hadn't been given a second chance? Where would you be?"

"Loki is not you, Lizzie. The sooner you accept that, the better off you'll be." Logan replied.

"Is that the idea you had about me?" she asked. "Is that why you convinced Professor Xavier to help me?"

Logan chuckled, handing her the onions. "Not everything is so clean cut, Lizzie." he said. "There are shades of grey – and don't you dare mention that book!"
Lizzie laughed, "How did you know?" she asked. "But seriously, what's wrong with giving him a second chance?"

"Other than the fact that he'll probably knife you in the back as soon as he can?" Logan asked rhetorically. "I don't like how Barton talked to you, but he was right. You're too naive. Loki is out for himself alone – you won't change that, Elizabeth. He's as cold as ice – literally from what I hear – and he has no heart."

"Did I have a heart when you met me?" she asked him. "Did I have a conscience?"
Logan sighed. "I'm not comparing you in any respect." he replied. "You are a very special case, the fact that you made it out alive, and are able to continue your life as if nothing happened, is very rare."

"I had no heart, Logan." she finally said. "I had no conscience. I am no different than he is – in fact, those who knew me, didn't think there was any hope to win me to the other side. The fact that you succeeded goes to show that everyone deserves a second chance."

"And what if they blow that second chance?" Logan inquired. "What he does turn on you? You were willing to change, you were willing to right the wrongs you'd committed. What if when he decides that you are no longer of interest he kills you just to make a point?"
Lizzie sighed. "Then I brought it on myself." she answered. "And maybe in my death, he'll learn what I learned through Vera's."

Logan shook his head, washing his hands and drying them. "You're stubborn, Liz. You always have been, you get it from your mother." he said. "But I warn you now, if you let him in too deep, you're gonna get your heart more broken than when you found out Alex killed Vera to keep you in check."

"Don't worry, James." she said with a smile. "Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me. I've learned my lesson. If Loki betrays me, he'll be hanging himself."

"I hope so, kid." Logan replied. "Now, are you planning on adding salt to that, or are we going to learn what its like in poorer countries?"

Lizzie just snorted, adding the required amount of salt.

Unknown to the pair of them, Loki had been outside the kitchen, listening. He had come to the kitchen due to Andrew's whining about being hungry, but he had never expected seeing first Clint yell at Elizabeth for accepting his apology; and then Logan and her talking about her past.

He felt a swell of smugness within himself, he had always known that Logan and Elizabeth had known each other before, but now he had proof. He would even dare to say that Logan knew Elizabeth's mother in some capacity... however small. The entire conversation made him even more curious to find out about her. Who was Alex? Or Vera? What had Elizabeth done in her past that made her so willing to accept his apology due to a second chance which she believed everyone should have based on her own experiences.

Furthermore, at such a young age... how could she possibly have a complex past?

He walked back to the library, his curiosity was piqued more than before with this new information.

*What is he talking about?

*Loki apologized the other day. I accepted his apology.
*I can still understand what you're saying, I do speak French.

*Why did you accept his apology?
Tony couldn't handle it. He simply couldn't. He had watched the video five times now, and still he found it hysterical. Now he worked in his shop, his mind still wandering to the video... what was it he said again? Tony reached over to his pad, skipping the video to the specific location he wanted... there it was. Oh yes, this was good. Loki was on the screen, young Andrew sitting on his lap as he read a story which would forever be in Tony's memory: Captain Underpants.

"That's what you did!" video Andrew shouted loudly in Loki's ear as he read.

"I most certainly did not. I would never do such a thing." Loki replied, obviously wincing as the child had yelled about four inches away from his head. "My plan was more thought through than..."

"Zorx, Klax, and Jennifer." Andrew supplied. "But still, you failed."

"Yes, thank you for stating the obvious." video Loki replied. "Why am I reading this again?"

Andrew rolled his eyes. "Because you needed some cheering up after you came back from the kitchen." he answered simply, turning so as to see Loki better. "Why, don't you like Captain Underpants?"

Tony chuckled, quoting along."No, of course I love reading-"

"-about aliens from outer space which unrealistically try to take over the world, and subsequently lose due to a hero who is as idiotic as Fandral-"

"-as large as Volstagg-"

"-with events which only could happen to someone like Stark-"

"-well, perhaps when he's as drunk as Tyr-"

"-who wins the battle like Thor would against a group of bilgesnipes. The odds were only in his favor because the idiotic writer decided that someone like that could actually do something like this on his own." Loki finished his rant, while Tony laughed.

"So..." Andrew trailed off. "Just like when you took over New York!"

Loki rolled his eyes with a large sigh and Tony laughed loudly as his workshop door opened. "Hey, look who it is!" he shouted. "How are you my supposed daughter?"

Darcy rolled her eyes, but there was a large smile on her face. "Look,unless you were out and about, spreading your wild oats when you were in your early teens, I doubt you are my father."she said. "Anyways, I'm here for a little help."

"Oh?" Tony asked. "And how is it that I can help?" He froze, looking over at the door, and then again at Darcy. "Wait... how did you get in here without Jarvis informing me?"

Darcy smirked, pulling her phone out of her pocket. "You can thank a friend of mine, who equipped me with this little doohickey which can disable certain kinds of electronics."

Tony looked it over, his brows scrunching. "Who is it? I've never seen that make."

"Eh, he might be your kid." she said, "He's, like, ten and a genius. Name's Harley."
"Harley?" Tony repeated, a slight chuckle coming out of him. "Alright, I'm not jealous now."

Darcy shook her head. "Know him?"

"Yeah, I do." he answered. "So why did you come here, under pain of possible dismemberment if I thought you were an enemy – or death, if you weren't careful – to see me?"

She looked around the room, her eyes zoning in on a suit which was nearby – a smaller suit. "Who's this for?" she asked.

"Hey!" he exclaimed. "Don't touch that! Its a present for... someone."

"Pepper?" she guessed.

"Maybe." Tony replied. "So you gonna answer me? By the way, you owe me two hundred for the alcohol you've consumed. That stuff is from overseas."

"Is that why it tastes so good?" she asked. "That makes sense. Though I can't pay you right now, due to the fact that I don't make two hundred dollars for... well, anything yet. I'm still in college, Stark, college doesn't pay you to go there."

Tony rolled his eyes, taking a look at the image of his suit. "Well, did you get my proposal?" he asked.

Darcy's eyes went wide, her jaw dropping open. "Stark – look man, it's not that I think you're attractive, but I'm not the kind of girl that goes after another girl's – who I happen to respect – man. Sorry that's not-"

"You know that's not what I meant, Lewis, you're just being cute. Which you pull off quite nicely, by the way." Tony replied, earning a pout from Darcy.

"Fine. You're no fun. That's not why I'm here anyway." she replied.

Tony rolled his eyes. "Finally! The maze has made its way to the finish line! Why are you here?"

"I want your help on something... or rather... someone." she replied with a smirk. "Or rather, someones."

"Who?" Tony asked.

"Loki and Lizzie." she answered simply.

Tony smirked. "What about Vitalli and Prongs?" he asked, a holographic image of the new suit coming up for him to make changes. He used his fingers on the image to 'toss' it into the holographic wastebin, sticking his arm inside the image itself to test out its size.

She came a little closer, leaning against the table. "Surely you've noticed." she said, her eyebrow raised in mischief which would be more fitting for Loki than Darcy. "There is something going on between them, but they're both being far too thick-headed to get past their angsty problems. It's like watching the X-Files! You know that Scully and Mulder like each other, and its just like 'Get together already!' – you know what I'm saying?"

"Mhmm..." Tony replied. "Though I didn't really watch the X-Files when I was younger, I was more into MacGuyver and stuff. Anyway, what makes you think that you can get those two together?"

Darcy rolled her eyes. "Hello!" she replied. "You can feel the tension any time they're in a room
Tony chuckled, "I see," he said. "So you want help getting them together. You're asking the wrong person."

"Am I?" she asked. "Cause I heard you were some kind of genius... I must have been misinformed."

Tony's brows furrowed in irritation at the slight. "Even if I could help you, what kind of advantage would it be?"

Darcy smiled, leaning over the table as she laid out her plan.

"What are you doing, Elizabeth?" Loki asked the petite mutant who was balanced precariously on the edge of the bathtub as she tried to place the removable showerhead back to its place.

She let out an undignified squeak, dropping the showerhead onto the tub's bottom, small bead-like objects falling out of the shower head and scattering as she suddenly flailed, her balance becoming nonexistent. He came up behind her, steadying her just as she started to fall in, causing her to fall back against him. Her head came up, nearly popping him in the jaw with its speed.

"Loki!" she whined. "You shouldn't do that! It took me ten minutes to get those in there, and now you've made them scatter."

His eyebrow rose as she pouted, looking down at the scattered objects. "What are those things? And why are you putting them in the showerhead?"

She looked back up at him, a mischievous look in her eyes. "For mischief of course." she answered, suddenly laughing at her own statement. Loki didn't understand the humor, but just watched as she lost her mind in his arms. "Mischief" she repeated, more to herself than anything else. "I'm in the freaking god of mischief's arms and I say 'mischief'? Ooh, the irony." He let her go, waiting for her to calm down enough to actually say something of consequence – but she did not, opting instead to bend down to get the objects which fell out of the showerhead.

"Are you ever going to answer me?" Loki asked. She looked up at him.

"Sure." she replied. "I'm playing a prank on the god of fire in the other room."

Loki raised an eyebrow. "For your knowledge, I am the god of fire." he said. "So you had better not be playing this on me or else-"

"Not you, iceman." she replied. "Johnny Storm."

"How is he any kind of so-called god of anything?" Loki asked, picking up a small box of Tic-Tacs that held a few of the things which Lizzie had dropped. "He can't even claim being a supreme being over snark and pride as Fandral the Dashing has it in spades."

Lizzie smirked, placing the Tic-Tacs back into the showerhead. "Fine, oh god of taking everything personally, I'm getting my sweet revenge for Johnny burning me last week." she answered, trying to get the showerhead to screw back on.

That piqued Loki's interest, and with a sigh, he took the object from Lizzie's hand and swiftly reconnected the two pieces together. "It is rather childish, if you ask me." he said, handing it back to her. "It is something I would expect of an amateur prankster, not one who boasts such as yourself."
She laughed lightly, hanging the showerhead back where it belonged. "Well, sorry for not being a thousand years old." she said, turning back to him and wiping her hands on her jeans. "So I do not have your... extensive knowledge of the subject."

"Either way, you are immature." he replied. "He harmed you, this particular trick won't be enough to get your revenge."

"Perhaps I just want to mess with him, Loki, not get revenge." she said, standing directly in front of him. "By the way, how did you enjoy your time with Andrew earlier?"

Loki looked down at her, "It was tedious. He asks too many questions and interrupts at every turn." he said, although inwardly he had enjoyed himself. Not that he would admit it of course, as he could not allow himself to.

"Well, perhaps you ought to just try to talk to him with a little less condescending?" she offered. "He is a five year old after all. I doubt you knew as much as you do now at five."

Loki scoffed. "Asgardians and Midgardians are different in how they mature." he answered, wondering at her friendly tone with him. He reached his hand up, fingertips brushing her chin-length grown-out bangs out of her eyes and back behind her ear; he watched as she shivered at the contact, her brown eyes looking up at him in a strange sense of wonderment and surprise. "Just look at yourself." he whispered. "You're twenty-one and you're acting like you're a child with your antics."

She chuckled. "So says the thousand year old god of mischief." she said just as softly, "You ought to heed your own advice."

He raised an eyebrow, going to take his hand back when she stopped it, much like he stopped hers a few days previous. "Why did you turn blue?" she asked quietly, studying his hand intently. "Is it because of your Jotun heritage?"

He stiffened, snatching his hand from hers. "What does it matter to you?" he snapped, going to walk out when she stood in front of him.

"I'm just curious, Loki." she said. "I didn't mean to piss you off."

He seethed. How could she do that? How could she dare to ask about him when she was so secretive herself? "Well perhaps you should check your words in the future." he said.

"Loki, I said I was sorry." Lizzie snapped back. "There's no need to get upset when I was just curious."

"Why don't you just ask what you wanted to?" he asked hotly. "Why didn't you just ask what kind of monster I was?"

Lizzie's brows furrowed in confusion. "I never thought you were a monster." she said quietly, "I wouldn't – except when you were killing people."

Loki's hands moved of their own accord, coming up to her shoulders and taking them harshly. "Never ask-"

"Lizzie!" Jane's voice called from down the hall, causing Loki to let her go like a hotcake, turning around to wash his hands – as if that were the reason he was in the bathroom at all.

"Yeah?" Lizzie called back, her voice coming out as a squeak. She cleared her throat and tried again. "Yeah!"
Jane's head popped into the doorway a moment later, a large grin on her face. "Oh, hi Loki." she greeted brightly, he just grunted in reply. Lizzie rolled her eyes at his behavior, turning toward Jane who now looked disappointed.

"What's up?" Lizzie asked, practically feeling Loki scowl at her.

Jane blinked for a moment before clearing her thoughts and allowing her smile to come back onto her face. "We're going out for a girls night," Jane said, pushing her hair behind her ear. "Pepper, you, Darcy, and me. Apparently Darcy thinks that you and I need to relax more and-

"That's not what I said!" Darcy's voice echoed from down the hall, and suddenly her body was in the doorway as well, an annoyed look on her face. "I said," she began, pausing as she saw Loki standing menacingly behind Lizzie. She smirked, wondering just what was happening before Jane had interrupted them. She cleared her throat. "I said that because you didn't really get drunk on your birthday, that you had been cheated. Being so, I felt that you needed a proper twenty-first, hangover included."

Lizzie chuckled. "Girls night." she said, looking down at her clothes. "I take it that this is not somewhere casual, where jeans and a t-shirt suffice?"

Darcy smiled, shaking her head. "Uh-huh. This is a mini-dress, high-heels, makeup-ed night." she said, taking a glimpse at Loki – who was glaring at her. "So lets get to work, we don't have all night!" she exclaimed, grabbing Lizzie's hand to drag her out of the bathroom. Loki growled under his breath, but Darcy just smirked. "Don't worry, Lover-boy, Johnny is coming with us, at a distance. She'll be safe."

Loki narrowed his green eyes at the busty-brunette, "Doubtful. Storm couldn't keep himself protected, he's too busy centered on himself." he spat, storming out of the bathroom and heading for his room. He could hear Darcy laughing quite loudly as he walked away, Lizzie protesting something before he slammed his door closed.

He had no idea what made him angrier – the fact that Lizzie going out to a Midgardian 'club' dressed in nil, or the fact that Johnny Storm had been issued as 'protector'.

Natasha was getting a little irritated. She had been looking for Clint for an hour, and had yet to find him. She had checked everywhere, from the workout room to the roof, but after all this time she was beginning to wonder where he'd gone – she had even asked Jarvis about his whereabouts, but the AI had said that Clint had just 'disappeared' from the security footage after going out on the patio. So once more she headed in that direction, wondering just what had made him suddenly take off.

"Clint?" she called out as she went out on the patio, her eyes scanning the area for him.

"Up here." his voice echoed, and she looked up to see Clint somehow perched on the 'A' which once was apart of 'STARK' before Loki's little invasion – Tony just thought it was ironic, and had left it that way, renaming it 'Avengers Tower'. "What do you need, Nat?"

She placed her hands on her hips, a scowl forming on her face. "What is up with you?" she asked him. "You've been acting weird all day."

Clint hung his head, "It's nothing." he replied. "Don't worry about it."

"Is this about Loki?" Natasha asked, beginning to hate his predisposition to high places – it made talking to him rather difficult.

"No." Clint replied, his voice completely unconvincing. "Yes." he said after another moment, "Did
you hear what Lizzie is doing?"

Natasha sighed. "About her sudden truce with Loki?" she offered. "Is that what this is about?"

"What makes her think that he wants to be sudden friends with her?" Clint asked rhetorically.
"Doesn't she realize that he's no good?"

"Clint, I'm not craning my neck just so you can act like a six-year-old and go pout." Natasha said. "So come down here." she walked over to one of the chairs, taking a seat. A few minutes later, Clint was settling himself in the opposite chair. "I should have watched you come down," Natasha commented. "I would like to know how you got up there."

Clint smirked, "A tradesman never shares his secrets." he said.

"Give Lizzie some credit, Clint." Natasha said. "She's smarter than I think even Loki takes her for."

"She's young, Tasha." Clint replied. "Young and stupid – he's manipulating her, I know it. But she won't listen to me."

Natasha sighed. "Lizzie isn't like us, Clint. She's more willing to forgive." she said, ignoring the slight jealousy she felt at Clint's attentions to the younger woman. "Though, if anything you shouldn't be upset with her-"

"I'm not upset with Lizzie," Clint interrupted. "she's just naïve. I blame Loki, he's the one who has something cooking in his brain – and the one who has plans for Lizzie."

"Maybe she saw something in him that you don't." Natasha offered. "She's a smart girl-"

"Brilliant," Clint praised. "She has had a sheltered life – I've met her grandmother, she lived relatively isolated. She doesn't know what kind of guy Loki is. She's never met his caliber."

"Clint..." Natasha trailed off. "Lizzie seems capable of knowing what's going on. I think she'll be fine. But you can't help her if you're off pretending that no one else exists while you pout."

Clint hung his head. "I suppose I should apologize." he said. "Keep an eye on her... try to keep him from getting to her."

"She's a big girl, Clint, she can take care of herself." Natasha argued. He nodded. "Besides, Logan seems to be protective of her as well..."

The archer chuckled. "Apparently they have a history... " he said.

"What kind of history?" Natasha asked.

"I don't know." Clint replied. "But I think it might be a good time to go inside... you want to spar?"

Natasha nodded, following Clint inside.

Lizzie was feeling a little tipsy... who was she kidding? She was feeling positively out of control of herself. Quite frankly, she didn't revel in it, the feeling which most people liked – or the buzz – making her feel like an idiot. She couldn't think straight, and everything she heard or saw was funny. Add that to the fact that Darcy insisted on her dancing with some guy who had started flirting with her at the bar, she was more than ready to go home.

It wasn't that she wasn't having fun – oh no – she was having a blast watching Darcy act like an idiot
while Pepper and Jane tried to be reasonable. Fortunately, Johnny had left her alone, and for that she was grateful, she wasn't sure she would have been able to control her ability if he decided to bug her.

"Lizzie!" Darcy's voice called. "Where are you going?"

Lizzie stopped, turning around. "Out for some fresh air, I'm a little hot." she replied, completely lying. There was no way she could be hot in this outfit, something about being nearly naked – no, it was the guy at the bar... Brian or whatever, who wouldn't leave her alone after the dance. "I'll be right back."

She could feel Logan's eyes on her as she walked out, but she brushed her protective friend off as she headed for the back door. She had noticed him following earlier, but had made no comment – it just made her laugh at how he didn't trust Johnny. She wondered who did... or better yet, who allowed him to go along? Darcy. She had noticed that the busty brunette liked Johnny, and obviously had taken the opportunity to hit on him, as she could see them together now.

Once she got outside, she took in a deep breath, enjoying the smell of nothing; well, maybe not nothing, as the smell of trash was right next to her. However, she felt better. She sat down, just allowing the colder air to help clear her foggy mind.

The sound of something crashing further down the alleyway caught her attention, and she got up. She wasn't in any situation to fight anyone off, that much she knew, but her curiosity got the better of her... gingerly as she could, she snuck down the alleyway.

"Our master grows impatient." a voice snarled. "He says you have been taking too long in bringing us into this realm."

Lizzie's eyes widened, and she crouched down to hide as she watched the proceedings. She could see seven silhouettes, one of a man, and the rest of... something which made her skin crawl.

"I am doing my best." the man replied, his accent lilting quite nicely. "But I have yet to get into Stark Tower."

"We have been waiting too long." the first one growled. "We already have a small force here on Midgard."

Midgard. The word rang warning bells in Lizzie's mind. These things were not from Earth, or they would not have called it 'Midgard'. A voice in her head told her to go back to the bar, and to tell Logan what was going on... but she didn't. Ignoring that voice, she edged closer, wanting to get a glimpse of the man who was bringing these creatures to her world.

"You can't come en mass." the man replied, his voice triggering a memory within Lizzie. Eyes wide, and heart racing, she started to slowly back up. She couldn't let him see her, she simply – Crash! She heard the trash can behind her erupt in sound, and she immediately froze.

"What's this?" she heard the creature come closer. "A little spy!" She couldn't form words as she was suddenly lifted in the air by her neck. The face attached to the arm which held her making her blood freeze.

It was the face of a monster. The face of a Chitauri.

"Well, aren't you a pretty one." he said as three others came up behind him, the remaining three figures she had seen having the appearance of men.
"Elizabeth?" the man who she had heard from before cutting through her thoughts. She looked over. It was he... she had been right. His blue eyes were still as bright as she remembered, his blond hair tousled just-so which gave an appearance of good-naturedness. But she knew the truth of his evilness.

"Know her?" the Chitauri growled, tossing her through the air and into a wall. She fell with a cry. "Too bad." he finished as she tried to clear her head.

She now knew she should probably follow that little voice in her head in the future; she only hoped that someone had noticed she had been gone for a while.

As it was, Logan had noticed her long absence, and was on his way out to find her when a woman came into his path.

"Hey there, handsome." the woman said, her lips painted bright red so as to entice. "Where are you off to?" he tried to shove past her, but she wouldn't allow it. "Now, come on, I'm not that bad."

He scoffed, taking in her bleached locks of hair and rather tight outfit. "I've met worse." he said, "But I've met better."

"Would I be one of those better ones?" another woman's voice cut through the pair, her arm slithering into his. Her long black hair reminded him of Loki, and Logan wondered if this was the woman who Lizzie had talked of.

"Of course, my lovely Nell." Logan played along.

Nell smirked, turning to the blonde. "Was there something you wanted, little girl?" she asked in a haughty voice, one which again reminded Logan of Loki.
The blonde raised her hands in surrender and sashayed away – assumingly to catch someone more willing.

The raven haired woman turned to Logan, her green eyes filled with urgency. "Elizabeth is in danger, Logan." she said simply. "The alleyway at the back of the building. The Chitauri have her along with some man. They're going to kill her. Go!"

Logan didn't need to be told twice, and he quickly headed in the direction of the door that Elizabeth had gone out of. He turned only once to see where 'Nell' was – but she was gone. However, that did not deter him as he exited the building, letting the door shut behind him before he allowed his claws to extend.

"LOGAN!" He heard screamed, and immediately knew that what the woman spoke was true. Within seconds he found the source, and quickly threw the creature who was about to break Lizzie's neck off of her. Standing protectively in front of her, he dispatched every one of the creatures who circled him – and some humans who fought in the same manner. Where was that dratted fire-mutant? Didn't he know that you're supposed to watch everyone's backs?

"You fucked with the wrong girl." he spat, stabbing his claws into another Chitauri, throwing its body a good ten feet away before he turned to the last one – the one he had first attacked. It was more skilled than its companions, and proved to be more difficult, but eventually Logan was able to cut its throat, turning to the last individual who was in the alleyway.

The man smirked. "Well, Logan, we meet again." he chuckled. "I should have known you wouldn't be far away when Elizabeth was out – you always were protective of her. Ever since she saved your life, you've been like some kind of guard-dog." he said.
Logan stared at the man incredulously. "You were there?" he said. "You saw her go back didn't you, Alex?"

"Certainly." Alex replied. "And I remember every minute of it."

"I should have killed you back then – but now I'll be happy to make up for it." Logan growled, stalking toward the other mutant.

Alex chuckled, "Not this time, Wolf." he said, disappearing into thin air.

Logan yelled in frustration, retracting his claws before he knelt down to the semi-conscious Lizzie.

"Logan..." she whispered. "We need to get back immediately..." she trailed off.

"I know kid, just calm down, we'll get you home." he said, picking her up. "Why didn't your powers work?"

She sighed. "Too unstable... they went haywire as soon as I tried.. probably due to Alex." she muttered.

"It's okay, Bella will help you out-"

"No, Logan... Stark Tower... then need to know..." she mumbled, slipping into unconsciousness.

Logan looked at the bodies around him, deciding he'd have the human Flamethrower burn the carcasses before he walked out of the alley.

The sound of a commotion in the main room was what caught Loki's attention from the patio. He looked inside the windows, and could see Logan carrying Elizabeth and lying her on the couch. Rolling his eyes, he went indoors, expecting to find out that she had gone unconscious from hard drinking – what he didn't expect upon seeing her was her hair matted with drying blood, and bruises on her neck.

His blood boiled. Only one kind of creature that he knew of had that arrangement in their hand, with two thumbs and four fingers otherwise... Chitauri. He immediately turned on Johnny.

"You were supposed to protect her!" he growled, his fists coming up to Johnny's jacket. "And you let this happen?" Johnny's blue eyes widened, Loki could see the fear within them.

Clint was right next to Loki, finding himself siding with the bastard for the second time. It was decided, Johnny was not going to be let around Lizzie ever again. "Well?" he echoed Loki's sentiment, his curiosity piqued at why the god was so protective of Lizzie... as this was the second time he had seen him so.

Johnny let his flame ability turn on, burning Loki, and forcing him to let him go. "I had no idea she snuck out!" he shouted back. "Had I known, I wouldn't have let her."

"It's not Johnny's fault." Darcy's quiet voice piped up. "I distracted him... I'm sorry, Loki."

Loki turned to the woman, wishing he had his magic... they both would be destroyed.

"It's not your fault, Darcy." Pepper consoled. "None of us knew what was going to happen."

"It's a good thing that Logan decided to tag along, though." Steve said. "Or she would have died."
Logan nodded, "She called them Chitauri." he said. "They're using a mutant named Alexander Shaw to get into Midgard."

"What does that mean?" Bruce asked.

"It means that Thanos is bringing in his army." Lizzie answered in a whisper, causing everyone to turn to her. "By manipulating their appearance to look human."

"What makes you say that?" Tony asked.

She smirked. "Cause I know Alex Shaw... and I know what he's capable of." she said, once again slipping into unconsciousness.
more of Lizzie's past is revealed, and physical interaction between Loki and Lizzie happens for the first time.

She was in a sea of blackness, unable to pull herself out of the dark mire which was her subconscious. Her memories flitted around in her head, each one coming to the surface to torment her. She couldn't stand it, her past being something which she hated to think of – or rather, feared. Yet, in her unconscious mind, she was trapped, unable to escape. Yet, the memories continued to be drug up... specifically of one person:

Alexander Shaw.

The very name left a bad taste in her mouth. Oh how she loathed him – and yet, felt nothing all at once. Seeing him in the alleyway behind the bar had reminded her of just what her past had been... whom she had once been. She could still remember first meeting Alex Shaw, sixteen years previous.

The memory decided at that moment to make itself known, and she was forcibly taken out of the blackness to another time; this time, as a third party, observing, yet unable to prevent what she knew would happen. She had lived it a hundred times, remembering how she used to wake up screaming. Yet, it was here that she was happiest – it was here she could see her mother once more. It was Christmas Eve, the night she would never forget.

"Lizzie? Bella?" she turned, her mother's youthful face appearing in the memory. Veronika Donovan, with large, brown eyes so similar to her own, filled with love and caring toward the one she was speaking to. "It's time for bed, Elizabeth, come on." The elder turned her head, seeing her younger self get up from her place on the floor, next to the Christmas tree which was adorned so beautifully. The lights twinkled, the star on the very top she remembered she had put up there earlier in the morning.

"Mommy, when will the presents come?" the young Lizzie asked, her brown eyes looking up at her mother.

"Tomorrow morning, mäuschen." Veronika answered, picking her look-alike daughter up.

"When is tomorrow?" Little Bella asked as Sean Donovan walked in. With a smile, the red-headed Irishman picked up his daughter, looking over at his wife and Lizzie. Elizabeth could feel tears welling up in her eyes as she looked at her father... she missed him. She only wished she had known him longer than four short years, been able to have more memories of him which she could bring up.

"Well," Sean began, his Irish brogue already showing. "First, little Brigh, you and Laoise must head upstairs – and while you sleep, Father Christmas will come down that chimney, leaving your presents below the tree, and when you wake, they will be there." Elizabeth watched as Veronika and Sean shared a loving glance, her tears now flowing freely as she knew that in only a few hours they would both be dead. Yet, she would relish this memory as much as she could, ignoring the future for the time being.
"And what kind of presents will we get?" Lizzie asked.

"Well, what did you want for Christmas?" Sean asked in return.

Lizzie looked up at the ceiling. "I want... I want..." she clapped her hands, her mouth forming an excited 'o' as her eyes widened. "I want a puppy!"

"A puppy?" Sean replied, looking over at Veronika knowingly. "Well, maybe Father Christmas will give you that." he said, "Have you been a good girl?" she nodded. "Well then, I suppose you might have a puppy by tomorrow... but we'll have to see won't we?"

Elizabeth smiled, following her parents as they carried her younger self and her sister upstairs and into their room. Her parents gently set them in their beds, pulling their blankets up around them and tucking them in. "Now, do you want me to sing to you?" Veronika asked.

Both girls nodded vigorously. "Alright then," she replied, clearing her throat, she hummed a moment before beginning.

"Goodnight my angels, time to close your eyes.

And save these questions for another day.

I think I know what you've been asking me,

I think you know what I've been trying to say.

I promised I would never leave you,

And you should always know

I never will be far away..."

Elizabeth listened to her mother with reverence, remembering the lullaby that she had always heard as a child. Later on, Seanmhathair had used an old Irish tune to lull the girls to sleep; but Elizabeth would always remember her mother's soprano voice, her tone whispering over the notes soothingly as she fell asleep.

When the song was over, both girls eyelids were drooping, and Veronika laid one last kiss on their foreheads before following Sean out the door.

The memory paused, a silence accompanying it as she watched the two little girls in their beds. Elizabeth knowing that she never knew this part and would wake up to find her parents trapped downstairs about to die, immediately started sobbing. She knew she couldn't stop it, the two little girls in the beds completely oblivious to what would happen that Christmas Eve.

Suddenly she heard shouts, and watched with horrified anticipation as her younger self woke. "Mommy?" she called, pulling the blanket off of herself, and padding over to the door, her white stuffed rabbit – aptly named Mr. Rabbit – carefully tucked to her chest, his floppy ears draped over her arm.

"Lizzie, what's wrong?" Little Bella asked sleepily, rubbing her eyes.
Lizzie didn't answer, her little hands reaching up to the knob on the door, twisting it clockwise, the door opened and Elizabeth choked. She never liked this part. "Mommy?"

Elizabeth followed as Lizzie stepped onto the landing of the staircase, Bella not far behind her. Veronika shouted something, and both girls exchanged a glance. Elizabeth willed them not to go downstairs, but it was too late, Lizzie already started down. "Lizzie?" Bella whispered "Where are you going?"
"To find mommy." came Lizzie's reply as she descended slowly, the shouts growing ever stronger as a new voice echoed.

Elizabeth and Lizzie rounded the corner at the same time, both brown eyes examining the sight with different reactions. Elizabeth knew what she would find, but Lizzie didn't and a small gasp came out of the little girl as she saw her father being held on his knees, a man standing menacingly in front of him. Veronika was also being held a few feet away as the man turned to her. Lizzie didn't know what to do, but hid behind the wall, her head barely peeking out to see her parents.

"I can't believe you actually fell for this... mere human." the menacing man said, looking at Sean with a condescending glare. "What has he offered you? Eh?"

"More than you ever could, Alex." Veronika replied coldly.

"Is that so?" Alex answered with a small chuckle. "Yet, he can't defend himself." he said, clucking.

"Alex, please..." Veronika begged. "Don't do this. We were friends-"

"Yes, Veronika, we were." Alex snapped. "And you abandoned me for this. This useless excuse for a human being. He can't defend you, he can't defend anyone – in fact, you're more apt to defend him than the other way around."

Elizabeth watched defenselessly as Veronika shook with barely-contained rage. Sean looked up at her, and she instantly stopped shaking; they gazed in each other's eyes, and Elizabeth saw tears begin the swell within her mother's brown eyes. "I love you." she mouthed to him, and he smiled ruefully.

"Oh, how quaint." Alex taunted. "Shall I display my point, Veronika?" He asked, and with a nod of his head Sean suddenly screamed out in agony, falling forward clutching his head.

"SEAN!" Veronika shouted.

"DADDY!" Lizzie did at the same time as Sean suddenly was silenced, his body laying on the ground, unmoving.

Alex turned toward the door, his eyes catching on the little brunette girl who still peeked. "Well, well, well... what have we here?" he tutted, walking forward.

Elizabeth growled as he approached, and Lizzie went to run – but it was too late, he had already grabbed her arm, pulling her into the room. "Don't run away." he said quietly, looking at Veronika. "What's your name?" he asked Lizzie. The little girl's eyes pooled with tears as she looked at her mother, unanswering. "What's your name? Hmm?" Alex repeated.

"Leave her alone." Veronika hissed.

"Why?" he asked, "She's beautiful, Veronika. She's yours, no doubt, she looks like you." he turned once more to Lizzie. "What's your name, beautiful?"
Lizzie bit her lip.

"Answer me." Alex growled.

"Mommy!" Lizzie cried out to her mother, trying to pull out of Alex's grip.

"LEAVE MY DAUGHTER ALONE ALEX!" Veronika shouted, lunging forward only to be stopped by a rather large mutant.

He stood up, his hand coming up and hitting Veronika. "Silence." he snapped.

"Stop it!" Lizzie cried. "Stop it! Leave my mommy alone!"

Alex's head snapped toward the little girl, "Tell me your name..." he said with faux-sweetness.

"Alex-"

"Lizzie." the little girl replied. "My name is Lizzie."

"Elizabeth." Alex repeated, turning to one of his men. "Search the house, see if there are any others." The man nodded, moving out of the room. "Well, well, you have been productive with your idiotic human."

"We're humans too, Alex." Veronika said. "We are simply mutated to be something a little different, but we are still humans."

Alex smirked. "We are above humans." he said, going near Lizzie again and kneeling down. "What's her ability?"

Veronika stubbornly kept her mouth shut, unable to do anything as Bella's sudden scream was heard and the man returned with the other little girl held securely in his arms. He set her down, and she immediately tried to run to Veronika – only to be interfered by Alex's unyielding arm.

"Well, well, what's her name?" he asked her mother. "Answer me, Vera, and things will go easer."

"And why should I?" Veronika asked rhetorically, earning a hard glare from the man. "Isabella."

"Isabella and Elizabeth." Alex repeated. "Two pretty little girls – ah, ah, Vera you know that you cannot use your power when Luke is in the room, so you ought not try."

"I will not take this easily, Alexander. I will make every attempt to free myself." she growled.

Alex's grip on Bella tightened, and she let out a yelp. "Do that, and you will wind up watching one of your lovely daughters die as you did your husband." he warned her. "What are their powers?"

"I don't know." Veronika replied.

"Yes you do." he answered, "Your foresight is something which would allow you to know. But since you're being stubborn, I'll ask Mehuel." he said, turning to a darker-skinned man.

At that moment, the front door broke open, and several new mutants came in – these ones dressed differently than Alex's men.

"Alexander Shaw." a man dressed in red greeted, his German accent betraying him as much as his metallic helmet.
“Erik Lehnsherr.” Alex replied. "At last we meet."

Erik smiled ruefully. "Yes, well, sorry I took so long – your note only made it to me within the last hour."

"But you came nonetheless." Alex said. "No doubt to rescue your precious little daughter and her non-mutant husband? I'm shocked you let her marry him to begin with."

"He didn't." Veronika replied. "We haven't really been on speaking terms because of it."

Alex laughed. "Naturally. Erik Lehnsherr's daughter marrying a man who wasn't a mutant? Think of what that would have done to his reputation – good thing you were raised by Xavier, it was more expected from a child of his. Though, Erik, you must meet your granddaughters!" he exclaimed, bringing Lizzie and Bella forward to Erik's sight.

The metal-bender's eyes hardened at the sight of the girls – but not because of them, but rather because of Alex's obvious intentions. His gaze softened slightly as he saw the terrified looks on the girls' faces. He looked once more up at Alex.

Elizabeth watched as all hell broke loose, and Erik's men attacked Alex's in the small living room. Lizzie and Bella were soon grabbed by Veronika, who made a dash for the door, trying to get her daughters out. She was suddenly hit from behind, and was sent sprawling on the ground.

Elizabeth screamed as Alex was no longer there, a Chitauri guard standing menacingly over Veronika –

The sound of screaming woke Loki, and in an instant he jumped out of his bed, heading out of his room to head for the room which he knew Lizzie was in. After what had happened with the Chitauri, he was immediately on his guard, but he knew that in his current state he could not protect her fully. Why Stark had placed her a door down from him? He wasn't sure – would not Barton be much more apt at helping her if something was truly wrong?

He quickly entered the room, expecting to find a threat, ready to do what he must. His eyes scanned the room, looking for any Chitauri guard who had come to finish the job that the others had started –

However, there was none. Loki turned toward Elizabeth's bed, fully intent to question her idiotic screams, but stopped in his tracks as he saw her writhing on the bed, cries of anguish torn from her throat. "MOM!" His heart gave a sudden pang, and within moments he was at her side, trying to wake her. She quieted a little, her screams toning down as he attempted to pull her from whatever dream that caused her to react so violently. His own mind flashed to his nightmares in the Chitauri dungeons, the tortures which he was forced to endure at the mind of Thanos within his own, making his slumber as hellish as his waking hours.

"No!" she screamed, forcing Loki to hold her hands as they flailed around.

"Elizabeth! Elizabeth, wake up!" he called to her, and she opened her eyes. He immediately found himself kneed in the gut, Elizabeth knocking him over in a way that he didn't expect, and forcing him to release his hold on her hands. She immediately used the advantage, fist then clocking him in the jaw before pushing him off of her and landing on top of him.

For a few seconds they grappled – him trying to calm her down without hurting her, and she trying to hurt him in every way possible. He eventually used a little more force and she was once more on her back, him looming over her. "Elizabeth enough!" he commanded, trying to ignore the fact that he felt a sting in his cheek from where she'd accidentally scratched him.
She stopped struggling, her breathing beginning to even out; her eyes locked on his, fear radiating strongly from the orbs. "Loki?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper. He loosened his hold on her hands – cautiously, as the last time she had hit him a little harder than expected. He moved off of her and sat nearby, wary of her rather unstable nature at that moment.

Suddenly, Loki found a sobbing Elizabeth practically on top of him, her head buried in the crook of his neck. He froze, unable to figure out what to do with her sudden change in behavior. He had never comforted someone, and had only ever been comforted by Frigga in the past; even then, it had been years since he had been this close to another being without wanting to kill them.

His arms twitched at his sides, an overwhelming impulse to wrap his arms around her as Frigga had to him in the past; he couldn't explain it, but it felt like that was what he should do. His arms twitched once more, and the one closest to her raised up to touch her back. She seemed to react well to the touch, and her sobs subsided slightly; encouraged by this fact, Loki allowed his arm to encircle her, holding her closer to him.

Her door opened, and he immediately dropped his arm back to his side. "Laoise?" the voice of her grandmother filtered in as the woman came in and turned on the light. Loki looked up at the woman, and she knelt beside the pair of them, her hands moving up to pull Elizabeth away from him. "Laoise, come on... its alright... its alright... shh..."

Loki felt the young woman's arms loosen themselves from around him as she allowed the older woman to pull her away. He immediately felt the loss from Lizzie's body, and nearly reached forward to take her back; a strong desire within him to comfort her and send the old woman away – yet, he did not. Instead, he watched as Maureen allowed Lizzie to cry in her arms, soothing her with words in her language which Loki didn't know.

He felt out of place, as if he wasn't needed there, and was simply an outsider. He stood, wanting to get away from the situation – but suddenly found the old woman's hand on his arm as he went to walk away. "Wait." She said, whispering something in Lizzie's ear before moving the girl off of herself, standing up, and walking out.

"Where is she going?" Loki demanded, slightly surprised that the woman would leave Elizabeth when she needed her the most. Was it not obvious to her that the young woman was distressed?

"She's going to get me a glass of milk." Lizzie answered, wiping her eyes and peering up at him. "It's our little routine whenever this happens."

That piqued his interest as he ignored his want to reach over to her. "This has happened before?" Instead of touching her, he knelt once more by her side.

She nodded, her eyes scanning his face, her brow suddenly furrowing as she looked his face over. "Did I do that?" she asked him, motioning to the marks on his face which were already healing due to who he was. Her fingertips ghosted over the scratches, and Loki was momentarily taken aback. "I'm sorry..." she whispered.

"Its nothing." he said nonchalantly. "What were you dreaming of?"

Her eyes watered once more, her lips tightening into a thin line as her fingers moved away from his face. Loki sighed, not expecting an answer at this point – "My parents death." Her sudden answer surprised him. "I have dreamt it a thousand times before – seanmhathair is used to my waking up screaming by now. Typically they stay as far away from me as possible as I begin to thrash around... I gave Bella a black eye once."
He opened his mouth to say something more when Maureen reappeared in the room, glass in her hand and twinkle in her glasses-covered eyes. "Ah, how are ye, Laoise darlin'?' she asked, handing the milk to Lizzie. She looked over at Loki, her eyes examining the bruise on his jaw. "Thank you, young man," she said, "Her sister and I have been on the opposite end of her nightmares in the past." She looked once more over at Lizzie.

The young woman looked over at Loki, her eyes narrowing slightly. "What are you doing?" he asked her.

"Relieving any of the pain by paralyzing that spot." she said.

"As you should!" Maureen exclaimed. "You hit the poor man, its the least you can do under the circumstances."

Lizzie ducked her head, sipping her milk. Loki, however, mistook the woman's words and immediately leveled his gaze on her. "As she was disoriented, it is understandable that she-"

"Ah, hush!" Maureen interrupted, a small smile on her face. "Lizzie knows I meant it in the most loving way." He looked at Lizzie, noting her loving glance toward Maureen. "Now, Laoise, I don't intend to spend my night on the floor, so why don't we move back to that rather comfortable-looking bed?"

With a nod, Lizzie stood up. Loki followed suit, his tall frame towering over the two women. They looked at him expectantly, and he turned on his heel to walk out of the room – he had already done so much in that night that he wondered at his behavior.

"Loki?" Lizzie's quiet voice called to him as he reached the door. He froze, waiting to find out what she wanted to say, even though he already knew, but he wanted to hear it. He didn't know why, but he wanted to hear her say – "Thank you."

He tilted his head to look at her once more, and with a curt nod, he fled the room. He returned to his own room, fully surprised in what he had done with Lizzie.

One thing was certain: he wouldn't get back to sleep that night.

The next morning, everyone in Stark Tower was assembled, and now was waiting to hear just what had happened to Lizzie the night before. To Tony's surprise – and yet, not surprise – Loki sat next to Lizzie in a protective manner, with Logan on her opposite side. He smirked inwardly, JARVIS having informed him earlier that something had occurred during the night which pushed his and Darcy's plans a little closer forward – other than the Chitauri situation.

From what he understood, Lizzie had woken up screaming some time during the night, and Loki had gone to find out what happened. He had to give himself credit for a, putting Lizzie so close to Loki; and b, convincing everyone to allow Loki a little more freedom around the tower by not locking him in at night. Tony had seen the footage, watching as Loki had tentatively embraced the crying Elizabeth, and it gave him a little hope for the pair –

"Tony?" uh-oh, his name was being called by Bruce. "Are you with us?"

"Yep, I was listening the whole time," he said quickly. What was going on?

"Then you agree?" Clint asked.

Tony didn't quite know to what, but he nodded anyways. "Yep, of course I agree."
"Alright then," Lizzie replied. "Although don't expect me to cook as much. Who's going to take over my job?"

"Wait... what?" Tony queried.

All eyes turned toward him. "I thought you said you were listening?" Clint asked.

Tony looked like a fish out of water, his mouth opening and shutting. "I..."

"The topic of conversation was that Lizzie should move into the tower." Steve supplied. "After what happened, we thought that it may be a good idea."

A light clicked on in Tony's head. "Oh! Is that all? Man, I could have told you that was going to happen." he said, sitting next to Pepper who just shook her head. "Although she does have a job downstairs-"

"There is no chance of her returning to work after what happened." Loki snapped at the billionaire. "It is too dangerous. The Chitauri now know who she is, and will no doubt find a way to dispose of her – she knows too much."

"I must agree with my brother," Thor chimed in. "It is indeed too dangerous for Lady Elizabeth to leave our protection."

"Well, hold your horses!" Lizzie replied. "We don't know that that's true. Logan did kill the Chitauri who were in the alley, it may not be as bad as all that."

"It doesn't matter, Lizzie." Logan spoke up. "We would all rather be safe than sorry, and considering Alex now knows where you are it means that you are in danger from him as well."

"Logan," Lizzie began. "I don't think Alex-"

"He remembers, Elizabeth." Logan snapped back. "You're staying here, and that's final."

They all silenced, and Lizzie took a deep breath. "Very well..." she trailed off.

"Just out of curiosity," Tony began. "who is Alex, and how do you know him?"

Lizzie and Logan exchanged a glance, her biting her lip in nervousness. "Lizzie's past," Logan started. "Is something of a tender subject for her. Although she knew Alex, what she has to say is of no relevance to that relationship."

Tony shrugged, "Fair enough." he said. "Maybe later we can find out what we need in that regard."

"Alright," Lizzie sighed. "so I'll start at the beginning of what happened last night. After several drinks, and a few unsuccessful flirts and dances, I went outside to get some fresh air..."

Johnny Storm was sulking. More than sulking, he was positively depressed. After the previous night's events, he was officially now separated from the newly-formed group, and was left to be given second-hand information from Reed. He felt – in a word – terrible. Not only had he nearly gotten Lizzie killed by what happened the night before, but Sue, Reed, and even Ben had reprimanded him... and that was after he had gone through the wringer by Loki, Clint and Natasha with an ending of him no longer allowed in.

It surprised him, really, that one woman could be a catalyst for making sure he never set foot in the tower unless especially given permission.
"Excuse me." he heard come from behind him, and he turned to see a pretty strawberry-blonde standing there. "You're holding up the line." she said, motioning to the fact that there was now no one between him and the barista at the counter.

"Sorry about that," he apologized, "Why don't you just go first, I don't know what I want." moving aside, he motioned for her to go forward.

"Oh, thank you." she replied, moving up to the counter. "Hey, Michelle." she greeted.

"How's it going, Bella?" Michelle asked, reaching over to grab a cup. "The usual?"

"Yep." Bella replied, pulling out her wallet.

Johnny just waited for a while, still staring at the menu without really reading the words. He hadn't meant to get Lizzie where she was. He had only meant to go out and have fun, he had never expected that anyone would really get hurt... he supposed he should have expected it. After all, they weren't 'heroes' for nothing.

"Hey, pretty boy." Bella's voice broke through his thoughts. "I know it's none of my business, but I'm curious as to why you're looking so sullen?"

He looked down at her. He'd be lying if he said he wasn't enticed by the beauty, her name aptly describing just what she looked like – but the question was: did he want to leave this depressed state? "I suppose it wouldn't hurt to tell you." he said, noticing a second cup in her hand. "Is that for me?"

She smiled, handing him the cup. "I only have about thirty minutes before I have to get back to work... but you looked like a latte, double-espresso type of guy. Was I right?" she asked. Johnny smiled, nodding slightly as he took the cup. "I'm Bella, by the way – Bella Donovan."

Johnny held out his hand to shake hers. "Johnny." he answered.

"You got a last name, Johnny?" Bella asked sitting down at a nearby table.

"Uh... Storm." he answered, watching as she suddenly froze, her blue eyes glazed in some kind of recognition.

"Hmm... You wouldn't happen to be the Johnny Storm would you? As in the guy who is part of the Fantastic Four?" she asked, although her tone was light, he could hear an undertone of danger and wondered what he had said to make her upset.

"Yeah – you've heard of me?" Johnny asked.

Bella's smile turned sickeningly sweet. "Oh, I've heard of you." she said, "My sister is Lizzie Donovan." Johnny groaned. It was just his luck that the first pretty girl he met while in his current state of loneliness would be Lizzie's sister. "Speechless, Mr. Storm?" she asked.

"I'm sorry." he said, "I never meant for her to get hurt." He didn't know what to do. Should he sit down, or should he simply walk away before the woman did some damage?

Her eyes went to the chair. "Sit down, Storm." She ordered, and for the first time in his life, he obeyed.

The room was silent, everyone processing the fact that their enemy had been sneaking in slowly – under the radar – impatient to strike. Loki contemplated what he had just heard from Elizabeth,
knowing exactly what this meant: the undercover Chitauri could be anywhere, in any town or city, just waiting for their orders. He knew what kind of fighters the Chitauri were, and how they viewed humankind as a whole.

In a word: useless.

He could see the wheels all turning in each and every of the Avengers' heads, all trying to figure out what to do. One thing was certain, he now knew just why he had been allowed a form of peace of mind from Thanos. After all, now that his forces were already being put into place, he didn't need to bother the young Jotun; why would he? Loki's eyes shifted over to Elizabeth, the bruises on her neck drawing his attention instantly as they stood out against her pale skin. This posed to be something else which worried him.

Thanos knew of Elizabeth's existence, and therefore her knowledge of his plans. He didn't reveal this yet, knowing that it would only worry everyone, and making more trouble than it was worth. After all, would they believe him when he said that each and every Chitauri high-official had a link in their mind to Thanos, to be contacted at any time? They would then wonder about him, as he wondered about himself, and he wasn't in the mood to have them all be suspicious of him helping Thanos again.

"So what are we going to do?" Steve asked, breaking the silence.

"The women are in obvious danger," Clint answered, looking between Lizzie and Pepper. "We don't know what Thanos knows about them. You said that Alex liked exploiting weaknesses?"

Lizzie nodded, looking out the window to Loki's right. "It was what he did best," she said, her hand unconsciously playing with the watch around her neck. "He knows that people are more likely to do as he wants under threat of watching their loved ones in pain." Loki could see that she knew this facet of the mutant from experience, and wondered vaguely what the man had done to her in the past. "He forced my mother to watch my father's death in revenge..." she whispered. "Then he killed her." – that answered Loki's question.

"What's the most dangerous aspect of him?" Natasha inquired, for the first time wondering if there was something more to the girl that she and Clint had pulled from near-death.

"He is a heartless monster." she answered, sighing heavily. She was getting a bit tired from not getting any sleep the night before. "And his powers are unlimited."

"What do you mean 'unlimited'?" Bruce asked. "Does he never tire?"

Lizzie chuckled humorlessly. "No – in fact, that is his one weakness." she replied. "What I meant was that he has multiple powers due to a serum he injected into himself."

Her words from before rang in Loki's head, where she had said that her power was not natural to her body. Was it something similar?

"My father must know of this development." Thor suddenly said, being silent the majority of the conversation. "If the Chitauri have already begun coming into Midgard, we will not be able to defend it alone."

Unexpected to Loki, the entire room agreed.
Early Morning Awkwardness

Loki tossed and turned in his bed, unable to truly get any rest. The revelations about Thanos' plan gnawed without ceasing in his mind as he tried to figure out just what they were going to do. It was somewhat of an ease on his mind to know that Elizabeth would be safe in the tower from then on, even though it worried him that he was concerned for her in the slightest. Just a few days previous he was determined that he would not allow himself to get close to her, and now he listened intently to make sure he didn't hear any sounds from her room on the other side of the wall – it was as if someone else had inhabited his body.

He looked over at his clock, the red numbers reading 2:34am. Sighing, he stood up, wondering just what he should do until the rest of the tower awoke, as he knew he wouldn't get any sleep that night. He contemplated going to the library, but wasn't sure he wanted to leave Lizzie alone on the floor – finally he decided on a bath. It would give him plenty of time to consider, and quiet enough that if something did happen to Elizabeth, he would be able to hear.

Mind made up, he crossed the hall to the bathroom, started the water, and shut the door.

Lizzie whimpered in her sleep, nightmares once more plaguing her. It was always the same ones, her past making a very strong mark on her current life by reminding her of where she came from. Eventually she fought her way out of it and woke up with a start, escaping the horrors of her subconscious. She sighed, rolling over to look at her clock: 3:05am. Getting up groggily, her mind still reeling from her most recent nightmare, she left her room and headed for the bathroom.

Not really paying attention to where she was going, she accidentally hit her head on her doorframe, leaving her poor mind in a more confused state as pain made its way in. Eventually she reached the bathroom door, and tried the handle. It was locked. She vaguely wondered just what Loki was doing up at this ungodly hour as she knocked on the door, unknowingly leaning against it as she waited for an answer. She hated that she was so weak sometimes, so unable to protect herself in her mind as she lived through every horror she had ever been forced to experience.

Suddenly the door gave way, and Lizzie gave out a little squeak as she found herself faceplanted into Loki's chest – Loki's bare, wet chest. She went red with embarrassment, not daring to open her eyes as his hands came up to steady her, tightening slightly.

"Elizabeth?" his velvet voice uttered. "Did you have another nightmare?" She shook her head, not willing to admit her weaknesses to him so easily, but noticing his caring tone.

"Why are you wet?" she inquired, brain noting the moisture on her hands... which were on his chest.

"I was taking a bath, which you rudely interrupted." Loki replied easily. "If you didn't have a nightmare, then what are you doing up at this hour?"

"I had to go to the bathroom." she murmured sleepily, finally opening her eyes and forcing herself to stay focused on his face. "Its not my fault that you opened the door so quickly that I had no time to balance myself," she said, now fully conscious that he was only dressed in a towel around his waist, and that he was still holding her.

She gulped, placing her feet fully on the ground so that she could balance before pulling away from him. Although she tried her hardest, she couldn't help but look at him. Never in the amount of time that she knew him did she ever consider him truly attractive, except in a rather nonchalant way – but
now she had no other choice than admit that she found him truly handsome. Sure, he was lean, but it was obvious he wasn't weak by the muscles which were obvious; he was no Thor, but he certainly wasn't lacking.

Loki smirked as he watched her eyes rove his nearly-naked body, the blush on her cheeks increasing steadily as she caught herself and her eyes snapped back to his malachite gaze. He knew that she was lying when she said that it wasn't a nightmare which woke her, but he was enjoying himself too much right now to be bothered with pushing the issue. "Well in my defense, I did not know it would be you on the other side." he finally replied, enjoying how flustered she looked. He'd ask later what she'd dreamt of.

They were silent for a moment as he finally noticed just what she was wearing to bed. As it was a hot night, he supposed he could understand the rather revealing combination she had, between the thin, low-cut tank top and short shorts. Loki had to admit to himself that he always found her rather easy on the eyes, but for a moment he thought something else entirely... something he was sure would have her blushing much more if he voiced it.

"Um..." she started. "I still need to go to the bathroom."

Loki gave her a curt nod, reaching over to grab his clothes and moving past her, reveling once more in her tinted cheeks as she ducked into the bathroom and shut the door. With a chuckle, he moved into his room, finding the bathroom across the hall dark, and devoid of Elizabeth. He looked around, noticing she was neither in her room nor anywhere where he could see.

"If you're wondering where Miss Donovan is, Prince Loki." Jarvis suddenly spoke up. "She's in the kitchen. I believe she was muttering something about having the 'munchies'."

The dark-haired prince sighed, rolling his eyes. "Of course, thank you Jarvis." he replied, heading toward kitchen. Part of him was upset with her for not informing him of her decision to leave, after all he was there to protect her, how could she expect him to do so if she wandered off without telling him?

She was having a hard time ignoring the rumbling in her stomach, the feeling of hunger seeping into her now-awake brain – compliments of a semi-naked Loki. She pulled out a butter knife, grabbing the peanut butter to make herself a snack.

Just what she was supposed to think of what had just happened, she wasn't sure; all she knew was that it probably had nothing to do with what she did think. It had been years since she had been considered as 'sleeping with the enemy', but right now she was having a hard time not considering Loki as more than just the guy who once tried to take over the world because he was having a god-like temper tantrum. Her mind, unbidden, kept reverting back to the image of Loki in a towel.

"You shouldn't wander off." his voice suddenly broke her thoughts, making her jump slightly as she turned to glare at him. However, now that she saw him in a more attractive light, she was having a hard time ignoring the way his hair curled around his ears when he didn't have it gelled back; or the way his body leaned gracefully against the doorframe.

"I didn't wander." she replied. "Jarvis suggested me going to get something to eat, and I followed his advice. I was hungry, and my stomach was going to eat itself if I didn't do anything about it."

Loki's brow rose, a slight chuckled emanating from him as she heard her growl something under her
breath in another language. "Whatever is that?" he inquired, looking at her peanut-butter-and-jelly-sandwich.

"PB&J." she answered. "You want one?"

At that moment, Loki's own stomach seemed to like the idea and gave a growl of approval; Lizzie's tongue made a noticeable bump in her cheek as she tried to hold back a smile, reaching to get Loki a plate. "I suppose I should try it, you've often surprised me with your meals." he conceded, walking into the kitchen and leaning his long frame against the counter, arms crossed over his chest.

"Is that your awkward way of saying you like my cooking?" she inquired, making him an exact copy of her own little snack.

She tried not to let his burning gaze bother her as she finished her task, and to his credit he looked away from her once or twice, giving her a little less of a assessing glance. When she finished, she handed him his sandwich, moving to put everything back away as he sat down and took his first bite, a glass of milk soon joining his little meal as she sat down.

Loki watched her as she pulled her long hair up in a messy bun, the bruises on her neck now blatantly obvious to him. It still angered him to see them.

"You look like something is on your mind." she said, taking a bite of her sandwich. Her brown eyes looked up at him.

"There is, actually..." he muttered, curious of how much he could ask before he pushed her over the edge. "There's something which I would like to know, but only you can answer."

Lizzie paused mid-bite, her eyes narrowing a fraction as she brought up her head and stared at him. "Is there really? And what is it that you would like to know that only I can answer?" she asked, her tone slightly chilly.

"I want to know about your nightmares that you refuse to speak of, and lie about when I ask you if you're having them." he answered bluntly. "I know you had one tonight when you knocked on the bathroom door – or have you forgotten that I can sense when you're lying?" Inwardly he was telling himself to stop, to not bring her more pain by making her relive her nightmares in her waking hours. Yet, the other side of him was trying to fulfill his curiosity – or rather, replace the desire to slowly kill every single offender who had brought the fear into her eyes from the night before, plotting their demise, by pretending that it was only morbid curiosity which fueled his questioning.

She dropped her sandwich on the plate, looking now at it with a disgust which she didn't have before. Standing up, she threw it away, she had lost her appetite as her mind drudged up every last memory at Loki's request.

Loki watched her stiff posture as she washed the dish, instantly regretting his question. "Elizabeth..." he started, noticing that she froze, waiting for the rest of what he had to say – and he had no doubt she would be surprised as he was surprising himself at the next two words he intended: "I'm... I apologize."

She turned, her hand on her hip as her eyes evaluated him, "Do you indeed?" she asked bitterly. "And if I tell you, will you cease this endless questioning which you seem to have about me?"

"Forgive me, I shouldn't have asked." he said, "I can see that this is not a subject you wish to discuss." He stood, taking his empty plate to the sink, leaving it on the counter beside, his tall frame towering over her.
"You're right." she replied as her lip quivered. "You shouldn't have. Didn't stop you though." she scoffed. "God, why am I arguing about this?"

"I was unaware that there was an altercation." Loki said curtly, throwing his plate into the sink with a loud clang. "I was asking a question, and then I apologized – and like usual, you decided to turn this into something more than it was, doubting my sincerity."

"You infuriating little –" she closed her eyes, taking in a deep breath to calm down. "How about this?" she started, her brown eyes snapping open. "Why don't you get off of me for once, and talk about your favorite subject: you. Maybe you could decided to get off my back, and let go of your morbid curiosity for just one damn night, and tell me what I would like to know, that only you can answer."

"And why should I do that?" Loki inquired, not wishing to relive his own past.

She let out a mocking laugh. "Because, Loki, it goes both ways!" she snapped, walking away with a huff. "I want to believe you, Loki; I want to trust you. I don't want to fight, I'm too tired, I'm tired and I'm sick of it. I want to believe Thor, I want to see that underneath that sadistic, sarcastic, infuriating, insufferable little shit facade you put up, that there is someone who has a heart! Twice, I have seen something different than your mask – no, three times if you count Andy the other day. Don't you understand? I don't want you to force me to give up on you, but you require my trust, when you can't trust me yourself." Her voice was elevated now, an Irish brogue beginning to seep into her tone.

"What do you want from me?" Loki demanded, his voice reaching her level.

"I want to know 'why'!" she replied. "I want to know why Thor keeps telling me that there is some good in you, when all I see is a bastard! Why?" her rant finished, it left her breathless, trying to take in gasps of air as her eyes darted over Loki's thoughtful look.

They were both silent for a moment as she allowed her heart to slow down, and he considered her words. She sighed, not expecting an answer at this point, and flopped down into the chair at the table, burying her head in her hands. What a fool she had been. Did she really expect him to answer her with something which would fulfill her questions? Something which would warrant that he deserved to know anything about her? Of course not. He wouldn't be vulnerable, and she sure as hell wouldn't give him the satisfaction of her own vulnerability if he wasn't going to be so.

She felt a fingertip beneath her chin, and she lifted her face to look at him, sure that there was a look of defeat on her features.

"You shall know why." he uttered out of the blue, completely unknowing of why he was conceding – and completely furious with himself and her. He was furious with himself because he had given in so quickly; and he was furious with her because she was demanding that he give in. But now he had said it, he couldn't take it back. "And you will hate me forever."

She stared intently in his eyes, looking for any bit of falseness. "Are you really going to, or are you just saying that to get me to shut up?" she asked.

"I mean what I say, Elizabeth," he replied curtly. "But do not test my patience."

"I won't." she replied. "Why did you do it?"

He sighed, his fingertips moving from her chin to her neck, gently touching the bruises there. "You cannot ask for something as simple," he replied. "For nothing is purely black and white. There are
many shades of gray, and intentions have their basis's in various places. To ask me for a clean-cut answer is not possible as there was quite a bit that happened."

She nodded, unable to suppress a yawn which escaped her. "I don't know how much of that I understood, but I think I got the gist." she said.

Loki shook his head, looking at the clock – it only said 3:15. Impossible. However, he wasn't concerned with it as he looked at her suppress a yawn once more. "You need to sleep, Elizabeth." he said, picking her up bridal-style and beginning to carry her out of the room. He would tell her what she wanted tomorrow-

Suddenly, his legs gave out from under him as her power snapped into defense, causing him to topple, taking Lizzie with him. He grunted as he landed on top of her, and their lungs lost all air in that moment, and they were left a little lightheaded. However, now she was trapped beneath his larger frame, and he was unable to fix the situation by moving, only able to push his torso off of hers with his arms. "Stark will be beside himself." He muttered, looking down at her.

Her eyes gazed up into his, and she felt as if she had butterflies in her stomach – something which seriously concerned her. She tried to sit up, but as he couldn't move, she found herself accidentally knocking his arms out from under him and causing him to land once more on top of her. She let out an ironic laugh. "I think I never should have left bed." she murmured as he tried once more to lift himself off of her.

"Elizabeth, please let me up. Not that you aren't comfortable to lay on, but this is beginning to get a little ridiculous," he said, she chuckled.

"Do you honestly think that I haven't tried to disarm the stupid power?" she said, "It has a mind of its own, Loki. I can tell it to turn on, or it will turn on by itself; turning it off has always been a slight issue." Her face held a slight smirk as she watched him struggle.

Loki leaned down, his lips brushing her ear as he whispered. "Trust me. Just trust me." the power let go of him, and he rolled off of her, disentangling his legs from her own as he stretched his legs out on the kitchen floor, looking rather interestingly at her. She cleared her throat, pulling her tank top down back over her stomach, and her hair out of the bun on her head as he stood.

"Come on, Elizabeth. Let's get you to bed." he said softly, holding his hand out to assist her. She looked at the hand, then looked at his face. "You going to stare at it all night?" he inquired as she nodded, taking his hand and allowing him to help her up.

He didn't touch her as they walked back to the hallway which led to their rooms, slightly worried that if he did he would find himself once more on the ground. Elizabeth, still drowsy, and head spinning ever so slightly from falling onto the kitchen floor, went to open the first door that she came upon, only to have Loki seize her wrist. "Unless you wish to come to bed with me, I suggest you go to your own room." he teased, reminding her of what happened earlier. She blushed, laughing slightly as she headed for her own door, Loki closely behind her as he made sure she didn't go anywhere but her own bed.

"Loki, do you think-" she began as she opened her door.

"Bed, Elizabeth." he replied sternly, pushing her inside and watching as she walked across her room, getting into her bed. He waited until she was safely tucked into her nest of sheets until he shut the door and headed back to his own room. As he settled into his bed, he looked at the clock: 3:20. He frowned, wondering what was going on with time as he tried to get to sleep-
However, neither of them slept really well that early morning – although neither of them were plagued by nightmares, they both were thinking about each other. Loki contemplating Elizabeth's past, and how it was she seemed to hold such power over him...

Though Elizabeth was wondering if Loki truly intended to tell her what she wanted to know.

The throne room of Asgard was filled with warriors, all a-hum with conversation of the newest thing which they had all heard from the king: Asgard was soon to be at war, and all were to ready themselves for battle. From seasoned warriors to young lads, every able-bodied man who could bear arms had gathered to hear the next order from the Allfather.

"It's like a hive in here." Lady Sif commented to Hogun who stood beside her. "I never knew there were so many men in Asgard."

"Well perhaps if you spent a little more time as a woman," Fandral replied from behind her, causing her to growl internally. "You would know that the male populous existed."

She turned around, ready with her words to strike at her companion when Thor walked in. Their attention was now diverted to him, and dropping their previous taunting they moved to his side.

"You have returned." Sif pointed out. "Have you ill tidings from Midgard?"

"Yes, has Loki suddenly got his powers back and is currently waging destruction?" Fandral added, earning a harsh glare from his comrades.

Thor shook his golden head, "Loki is one of us, Fandral. He has already done much for Midgard, in giving my friends the Avengers the information which they need to destroy Thanos, he has helped. Besides," he said with a slight smirk. "He has a lady who would, no doubt, keep him from walking before he dared to do anything to Midgard."

"A lady?" Fandral replied. "Loki? I don't believe it."

"You will when the Allfather sends you to Midgard to see for yourself." Thor replied, sobering to look at Sif and Hogun. "No doubt you do not know why you have been brought here?"

Hogun shook his head. "All we know is that Asgard is soon to be at war," he said. "We know not with whom. Sif went to Jotunheim only a few days ago in search for their allegiance, she knows more than any of us due to what the prince said."

"And what did he say?" Thor inquired.

Sif sighed, looking around before lowering her voice so as not to be heard. "Jotunheim is split in half," she began. "Prince Helblindi has offered his help against our common foe, but his brother has sided with him."

"But who is our common foe, Sif?" Fandral asked exasperatedly. "That is the question we all want answered."

"The Allfather shall answer your question, Fandral." Thor interrupted before Sif could reply. "For he is to declare it before his warriors here – too long have we waited to find out just what he was up to, now we know. At somewhat of a price, as it was." He said, remembering seeing Lady Elizabeth's bruises – although, she was fortunate to be alive.

"And how did you find out on Midgard?" Hogun asked. "Surely the Mad Titan was not foolish enough to attack already!"
"He didn't," Thor responded. "For he is not that foolish. No, Lady Elizabeth of Midgard is the reason we know of his plans. She happened upon them."

"And just who is Lady Elizabeth?" Fandral asked, a twinkle in his eyes.

Thor smiled at his friend, "She is one whom you will be wise not to play with when you get to Midgard. I do not think that Loki, or any of my other companions would tolerate it; for she is someone who is beloved... by us all." his eyes narrowed at his friend in warning. He cared for Fandral as a friend, but he would not allow him to harm Elizabeth through his wild ways. Fandral simply nodded dumbly, understanding completely.

A pounding at the dais of Odin caught everyone's attention, and the room was instantly hushed.

"Warriors of Asgard..." Odin began, his blue eye showing his weariness. "It is with great sadness that I come to you today. Asgard is in great peril..."

"We shall depart now." Thor said, beginning to walk away earning a curious look from his friends. "We must go now, before anyone really sees us."

"Why should we worry about anyone seeing us?" Fandral asked as the others followed Thor out of the room and into a corridor; they could still hear Odin's booming voice echoing, but Thor was too busy to allow himself to stay any longer.

"Because there is a spy in Asgard, who is watching my every move. If they think I am here, they will not look for me elsewhere." Thor replied, moving to a panel in the wall and shifting it to the side before stepping in. Sif followed quickly, Fandral waiting for a moment before joining his companions, allowing the panel to shut behind him –

– And not a moment too soon, as a cloaked figure rounded the corner, immediately stopping in their tracks. They had been following the small group ever since they had left the Throne Room, but had lost them. There was only one thing that it meant, and that was that they had entered the secret passageways of the palace.

Turning on their heel, they walked away, knowing that they would have to inform Thanos of the newest development.

When the small group finally made their way to the end of the Bifrost, Heimdall already stood there waiting.

"Now that I have been made aware, it is easier to see where the Chitauri are coming in from." Heimdall informed him. "They come in on the outskirts of the city, they meet the mutant Shaw under the cover of darkness in the place called 'the Bronx'; although this last time they met under different circumstances due to Shaw's decision. I have not found where his quarters are, but I have been searching."

"And Thanos?" Thor asked.

Heimdall sighed. "Hidden. I cannot see him in any respect – which is slightly concerning."

"Hopefully" Sif commented. "It doesn't mean that he has already gone to Midgard under this mutant's influence."

Thor looked over at his friend. "It is a possibility that I hope is not the case." he said, his eye catching on that of the Tesseract. He hated traveling by that artifact, but he had no choice. "Well, we will keep you informed of what we find out." he said, his hand taking one of the handles of the case which the Tesseract was kept in.
"Thor!" he turned to see Frigga standing there suddenly. "May I have a moment?"

The prince nodded, motioning for his friends to go elsewhere while he spoke to his mother. He embraced her, a slight fear rising within him regarding what might happen if he failed – Frigga would only be one of the casualties, but she would certainly be the most impacting. "Yes, mother?" he asked.

Frigga reached within her cloak, pulling out a small bag. "For Loki," she said, "I thought he may need these." She reached once more into her cloak, pulling out a small box. "And for his lady, the young Elizabeth."

"She is not-"

"She is, Thor." Frigga insisted. "Give this to her, tell her that I am sorry I could not meet her for myself, but hope that one day I will. Loki does not realize yet just what she will mean to him, but he will realize soon enough."

"Have you seen something?" Thor asked his mother, she simply smiled.

"All I can tell you is that you will gain a sister which you never thought you would – and a friend." she replied, her blue eyes beginning to water. "Keep her safe, Thor, when your brother cannot. She is his redemption, and if he loses her... we will lose him."

Thor sighed, taking the two objects. "But they are not even in admittance of their feelings. He doesn't care for her, Mother. He views her as an insignificant little mortal." he said, looking closely at the small box which was set for Elizabeth.

Frigga chuckled softly, placing her hand on Thor's cheek. "There is much your brother hides from you, my son, and hides from himself. Elizabeth has already made a place in his heart – you have seen this. Have you ever seen him so protective over anyone before? So willing to do what he must to keep them safe?"

Thor shook his head.

"Then watch them closely, help them along a bit. I would, if your father would permit me to leave Asgard, do so myself... but I must remain here." she said, kissing his cheek. "And tell your little mortal, Jane, that I look forward to the day when she shall visit Asgard herself."

Thor smiled, "Thank you mother, I shall." he said, turning around to walk away.

"And Thor!" he spun. "Do not give up on your brother, no matter what happens. He has changed already – and one day he will return to us, even though his path may sometimes curve away."

Before Thor could ask for more information, Frigga disappeared, and he was left alone.

"Are you planning on coming with us?" Sif's voice called to him. "Or are we to stay standing here?"

Thor nodded, coming closer and grabbing his part of the Tesseract and disappearing from the edge of the bifrost.

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Verdandi, Queen of the Norns, looked toward the looms which had been brought to her depicting the fate of Loki Odinson and the Midgardian, Elizabeth Donovan. The two Norns responsible for their fates – Jora and Jodis – the only pair of twins among the Norns, stood before her.

"I suppose I should not be surprised that the pair of you have decided that the two whose fates you have been assigned to are to be together." Verdandi said. "You have always enjoyed plaguing the
rest of us with your rather... mischievous behavior.

"My apologies, my lady," Jodis, Elizabeth's Norn said. "But they are perfect for one another."

Jora smiled, looking over at her sister. "She will bring out the best in him." she added. "And he will protect her, helping her to forget the wrongs which have been done to her in the past."

The Queen smiled at the sisters, handing them back their looms. "You are right, they will do well together. Yet, you have devised so devious a plan that they will deal with certain heartbreaks – are you sure that they both can withstand the tempests you have ordained for their futures?"

The twins exchanged a glance. "If they do not, then they do not deserve each other." they said in unison, bowing before the great lady of the Norns and leaving her presence.
Chapter Summary

Loki and Lizzie finally set a time for their story sharing. Sif and the Warriors Three show up, much to Loki's annoyance, and Fandral decides to hit on Lizzie. Frigga's gifts are opened.

Logan walked through the legal department of Stark Tower, his eyes scanning every face in the room as they looked at him cautiously. He was here for one reason, even though he wasn't quite sure what that reason was – no, that's not true, he knew exactly why he was here. To Find Nell Shiffer, if that was who had saved Elizabeth the night of the Chitauri attack.

"Can I help you?" a woman asked, coming up from his left.

"I'm looking for Nell Shiffer, is she here?" he inquired, glancing slightly at the woman with frizzy curls and a necklace that had the letter 'P' on it – allowing him to deduce from what Lizzie had told him that this was her friend Pat.

The woman nodded, pointing to a door across the room. "Her office is over there, we haven't changed the name on the door yet, that's why it says 'E. Langley'." Pat replied.

Logan nodded, and quickly crossed the distance to the office, not even bothering to knock, instead just strolling in. The office on the other side was empty, but Logan knew that was because this was Elizabeth's office, and as she was upstairs it wasn't likely that she would be returning to it for a while... that being said, he was reminded that he was supposed to pick up some of her stuff. Walking over to the second door, he did the same that he had done with the first, and just walked in.

Nell was leaning back in her chair, her head tipped back to look at the ceiling as her feet crossed over each other on the desk; she was thinking, wondering how exactly she was going to get a new assistant. Elizabeth had been quite apt in the few days that she had been working for her, and although she knew that she wasn't likely to return, it still made her not particularly want a new one. Perhaps, she thought, she could get one of the other people in legal to do Lizzie's job?

"Nell Shiffer." a gruff male voice uttered shortly after she had heard her door open. She looked up, smirking as she saw the mutant.

"Although I was not born with that name, I reply to it." she replied, watching as he shut the door behind him and stalked toward her. Nell took her feet off the desk, straightening in her chair."I take it by your presence that you wanted to know who it was that had warned you, and why it is that I knew what I did." She stated, as if she had read his mind. "Isn't that right, Logan? – or should I call you 'James'?"

"Logan is fine." He replied gruffly. "And yes, that is exactly why I'm here." Logan replied, taking a seat opposite of the raven-haired woman. "How did you know what was going on? Are you a mutant?"

"Nell chuckled, her green eyes filled with mirth. "A mutant? No. Close, but no." she replied as she stood from her place and moved around the desk to sit down at the corner. "But I doubt that lying to
you would be a very smart idea."

Logan scoffed, his eyes watching her intently. "No, it wouldn't. I don't like liars." he said, understanding now why Lizzie wondered if she was related to Loki; her movements, her speech patterns, and her overall air made them seem exceedingly similar. In addition to that, her physical appearance was also such as to make it a question. "You aren't here to find any son of yours, are you?"

Nell clucked her tongue, crossing her arms over her chest. "Logan, Logan, its not right to jump to conclusions. As it turns out, I am here to find my son. The particulars, however, aren't exactly true."

"Then what is true?" Logan inquired, leaning forward. "How are you connected to Elizabeth?"

"Other than the fact that she worked for me, I'm not – well, not directly." she stopped, rolling her eyes. "Correction. I'm unofficially connected to her, although I'm sure to be rather officially soon."

"You're speaking in riddles. I prefer it when someone talks to me plainly, and without making me think too much." Logan spat.

Nell's eyebrow rose, her green eyes sparkling. "Well, I'm not in the mood to tell you too much while I'm still being recorded." she confided, standing up and walking back to her desk to get her jacket off the back of her chair. "Why don't we go out for lunch? Its twelve-thirty, and everyone will be taking lunch right about now."

"You can't disable the cameras?" Logan tested, wanting to get her to tell him something by simply throwing out a ridiculous statement. To his surprise, Nell laughed.

"On the contrary, I could – and have already. I'm not interested in losing my job when I just got it, so what is being recorded is not what is happening." she said, picking up her purse. "However, I like having my full faculties when I talk to people. It helps me not to be distracted with illusions."

Logan stood as she walked toward the door, leaving the office. "Now you are going to tell me the truth, right?" He asked as they entered the elevator.

"Well I suppose I could tell you at least a bit of the truth. Don't expect it all, as I'm not particularly interested in having anyone snooping around my life where they don't belong, however they are connected to Elizabeth." she stated, her tone showing how serious she was.

"As long as you tell me what I want to know, we'll have a deal." Logan declared.

Nell waited a few moments, her eyes calculating, examining Logan. Finally, she smiled, her green eyes filling with mirth. "Deal."

"Miss Donovan, might I suggest you going to the main floor?" Jarvis' voice interrupted her from her book.

"Is something going on?" Lizzie inquired, getting up from her chair in the library, putting the book down on the shelf where it had come from and leaving the room just to run into Loki in the hallway. "Do you know what's going on?" she asked him instead.

Loki's eyebrow rose. "Do I look like I'm in two places at once?" he retorted. "I was just in the training room with Rogers, he was called first, and I was just called – I know as much as you do, Elizabeth."
Lizzie rolled her eyes as they entered the elevator. "It was a question, Loki. You don't need to get all pissy over it." she said, looking him over. It was getting a bit ridiculous for her now, but ever since the morning before, she found herself ogling him more than usual – well, as much as she could since he’d been avoiding her. "You've been avoiding me." she voiced her thoughts, listening to his sigh.

"Why don't you just say what you want to say?" he asked her. "Asking me why I haven't told you what I promised to instead of avoiding it like the plague."

"Fine. Why haven't you kept your promise?" She rephrased as they reached the floor, however the doors did not open, and for once Elizabeth thanked Jarvis in her head.

Loki noticed it too. "Open the doors, Jarvis."

"I'm sorry, sir, but I'm going to have to agree with Miss Donovan." the AI said, sounding more human than it should have. "The doors will open when you have come to an agreement."

Lizzie bit her lip, trying to hide her laughter, but Loki only scowled. "Very well. I shall tell you later today, if you wish. Meet me in the library after dinner."

"The library after dinner?" Lizzie repeated, watching him closely for signs that he wasn't going to be there.

"Yes, Elizabeth, I do believe I spoke clearly." he snapped.

She nodded, noticing that he was beginning to fidget as she waited. "I'll meet you there." she finally replied.

Immediately the doors dinged open, and Jarvis' voice could be heard. "Sorry for the delay, sir. I hope it wasn't too much of an inconvenience."

Loki stormed out of the elevator, leaving Lizzie to follow slowly. "Thanks Jarvis." she said to the open air.

"You're welcome, Miss Donovan. I do hope that I was helpful." the AI replied.

"You were." she said, finding Loki looking statue-like in the entrance. "What's going on?" she asked him, peeking around his tall frame to look at what he was looking at.

In the room, she could see Thor, accompanied by four other people she had never seen before. A woman stood next to Thor, her eyes purposefully staying away from Jane, but Lizzie could see the rigidity in her posture. Three other men surrounded Thor: a larger red-headed man with a beard, who made Lizzie smile at his obvious cheer; an Asian-looking man, who seemed to have been the only one to have noticed Loki and her; and a blonde man who reminded her of Errol Flynn. The last, Lizzie had no doubt, was the Fandral she had heard Loki mention more than once.

She made to move forward, but Loki's hand suddenly shot out, keeping her behind him. She poked him, not liking that he was suddenly stopping her from doing what she wanted; he glanced down at her, and for a moment, she thought she saw fear in his eyes. "Loki, what--?"

"Loki!" Thor boomed, and both of them looked over at the golden prince just as he trapped the darker one in a bear hug.

"Thor, let me go." Loki snapped, his eyes still trained on Sif and the Warriors Three. He could see their obvious distaste for him – or rather, he could see Sif's obvious distaste for him, as her hand drifted ever-closer to her weapon. Volstagg too looked dangerous, but not to the same extend as she;
the normally happy man had his large arms crossed over his chest, his eyes scanning Loki for any signs that he was going to do something.

Fandral, on the other hand, was what made Loki growl internally. His blue eyes had already singled Elizabeth out, and with a large smile on his face, he began to walk toward her.

"Brother, let me go." Loki repeated, and finally Thor did as requested, and released him.

"I was only wishing to greet you, brother. No need to be so temperamental." Thor replied, but before Loki could say anything, he was already greeting Elizabeth with a similar hug – albeit, a little more gentle – "Lady Elizabeth!"

"Good to see you, Thor." Lizzie replied, trying to hold back a laugh at both Loki's discomfort and Thor's rather obvious display of affection. She wasn't quite sure she had ever seen him act like he did toward her, toward anyone else. He must just like her cooking a great deal. "How was Asgard?" she asked when he pulled away.

He laughed heartily, "It was well when I left it." he replied. "Hopefully it stays that way."

"We all hope that." Lizzie replied, looking over at Loki – who seemed to be caught up in glaring at one of Thor's companions. "Who are your friends?" she asked, Loki's eyes suddenly snapped to her with the expression of 'Are you mad?' on his face.

"Forgive me, you were not here with the other introductions." Thor replied, turning to face his friends but with his arm still slung over her shoulder in a – could she say – protective way? "Friends, this is Lady Elizabeth Donovan of Midgard." he began, and the Warriors Three bowed. Lady Sif, however, scoffed. "Lady Sif, have you issue with Lady Elizabeth?"

She shook her head.

Thor regarded his friend carefully, knowing that Sif didn't like Loki, and therefore probably wouldn't be very friendly to any woman with whom he was attached – even though, his mother said, he didn't know it. "Lady Elizabeth," He started again. "My friends: Volstagg," the large man with a red beard, and a large smile nodded. "Hogun." Lizzie nodded back at the Asian-looking man. "Lady Sif." the Woman – Lizzie thought to steal from Conan Doyle – gave her a curt nod, and Lizzie had the express opportunity to hear Thor mutter something in his native tongue before he continued. "And Fandral." The last smiled widely, and Lizzie thought she heard Loki growl.

"The Dashing?" Lizzie completed, earning a rather boisterous laughter from Thor. Loki turned toward her, but she only smirked. Sif rolled her eyes.

"You have heard of me?" Fandral asked, coming closer to the young woman, noticing Loki stiffen, but he ignored him.

Lizzie chuckled. "Oh yes." she replied, "Your narcissism is well known to me, for I have heard you spoken of often." Inwardly she was having a hard time keeping the smile off her face, and the laughter from coming out of her mouth. It was from Loki that she had heard of Fandral, and right now she couldn't help but find amusement that the egocentric man thought that she meant something else all by the tone of her voice.

Fandral – if it was possible – smiled wider. "And from whence has this praise been uttered to your ears?" he inquired.

"Oh, from a very reliable source." Lizzie replied.

Loki froze at her words, knowing that he had been the only one to truly speak of Fandral and the
others in her presence – she considered him a reliable source? Foolish girl, she should have known he would have led her astray in some respect. For in all of his hatred toward the four companions of Thor, they were still an honorable lot; although Fandral was a trifle too impolite in his rather forward advances toward the female sex, Loki knew that his heart was in the right place otherwise.

"Oh?" Fandral uttered.

"Yes, Loki has been very good at telling me all about how you deal with women – or rather, how you view women." She stated, her voice lowering to that of a serious tone, losing every husky aspect it had before... and she found that the look of shock on Fandral's face was a bit too amusing. "That being said, I'm not interested in any of your advances. If you wish to flirt, Darcy might be interested, she's talked of you before in a good light. But I'm not, so... keep away, unless you want to wind up in a lot of pain."

Tony choked on his drink, his mind suddenly flashing to the video feed he had watched the day before. "Tony, are you okay?" Pepper asked him as he continued to hack up whiskey.

"I'm fine." Tony replied, putting down his drink. "I'm gonna go get some water."

Pepper nodded, and he left the room. He would never forget Lizzie falling into Loki's chest, with obvious embarrassment; nor would he forget them being tangled up on the kitchen floor, that if anyone had seen them they would have thought something else was going on. He had been watching the pair of them ever since, and right now was noticing Loki's obvious jealousy as the blonde Asgardian got a little too close to Elizabeth – unfortunately, Fandral did not. He chuckled to himself, accidentally sending his body into a coughing fit, and remembered the bet he had made with Darcy. At the rate that things were going, he'd win.

Back in the main room, Loki was fuming at Fandral's sickening smile, yet somewhat proud of Lizzie's response. He was glad to hear that she wouldn't be falling for the swashbuckling Asgardian any time soon, as that would only be bad for her health – and his curiosity, he reasoned. He wouldn't want her to suddenly up and decide she didn't need to tell him anything because she was gallivanting all over Stark Tower with Fandral.

"Well, now that introductions have been made," Thor replied. "I will speak with you later, Lady Elizabeth." taking her hand, he kissed it chastely. "Loki, we have something to discuss." He then stated, dragging Loki away from the room, the darker prince angry that he couldn't push Thor off.

"So, Loki told you about me." Fandral said, pulling Lizzie's gaze away from the backs of the departing princes.

"Yes, he did." she replied. "Though I have to say, you're better looking than he declared you."

Fandral laughed, coming a little too close for comfort. "Naturally!" he exclaimed, earning an eye-roll and snicker from Lizzie. "Although, it is only normal that he should do so. When a man stakes his claim, he typically tends to want to get rid of the competition."

Lizzie's laughter stopped, her brows furrowing. "What?"

"Well, you are his lady, are you not?" Fandral inquired. He had not been as blind as Tony had thought, and had noticed Loki's subtle hints for him to leave the lady alone. Never had Fandral seen Loki be so obvious in his dislike toward him, but as he continued to talk to her, he could practically feel the coldness coming from Loki.

"I – I don't know what you're talking about." Lizzie replied, completely stumped as to what led
Fandral to believe such a thing. Loki wasn't interested in her... was he? No. Impossible, she was a mortal who he despised – although his actions seemed to be warming to her...

"Do you not?" Fandral asking, coming a little bit closer. "So you are not his lady?"

"No, I'm not." she replied, trying to figure out where Fandral had come up with that in only ten minutes of time. "Whatever gave you that impression?"

Fandral smiled. "Oh, nothing, I just assumed that when you came in with him that you were in some manner attached." he said, perhaps Thor had been wrong that she felt the same way, and therefore was Loki's lady. One thing was for sure, she had never met a man that was Fandral's equal in her short existence, and would therefore be unaware of just which charms he was using as he wooed her. And woo her he would, he was determined; for if Loki made no claim, then she was available, and perhaps would keep him occupied during his stay on Midgard. "I suppose I was wrong." He said.

"Yes, yes you are." Lizzie replied. "We were on the same floor, is all, so when we were called we had to take the same elevator."

"Ah, I see." Fandral replied, beaming.

Lizzie returned the gesture, but her mind was elsewhere.

"What do you want?" Loki snarled as soon as Thor shut the door to his room, unhappy with leaving Elizabeth with Fandral. "You know what Fandral is up to, and you abandon Elizabeth in the room with him! Do you want her to wind up in his bed?"

Thor's eyebrows rose upward, he had never seen Loki so passionate about a woman being abandoned with Fandral – not even Amora, when they were together, and he had been obsessed with her. Perhaps his mother had been right. "She's a brilliant girl. I doubt she'd wind up in such a compromising position." he replied, hearing Loki's huff of annoyance as he turned toward the window and looked out on New York. "Besides, give her a little more credit, Loki – did you not hear her toying with him, and then slapping him verbally?"

"I heard it." Loki replied, although Thor could hear a tinge of pride in his tone. "What do you want from me, Thor?"

The golden prince moved toward the bed, putting the packet his mother had given him for Loki on the mattress.

"Mother told me to give you this, she said you'd need them – whatever 'them' is." he said.

Loki turned at the mention of Frigga, his eyes falling onto the bag. Swiftly he moved toward it, his fingers nimbly undoing the strings. "And how is mothe – the Queen?" he inquired, a dull pang in his chest.

"Mother is well. She is preparing for an attack from the Mad Titan, as is all of Asgard. She wanted to come personally, but Father would not allow it." Thor answered, noticing that Loki had stopped opening the bag, no doubt to hide its contents from him.

"I'm sure the Allfather wouldn't want for her to come here, it is too dangerous." Loki replied, looking up at Thor.

"His thoughts exactly, I think." Thor said. "I would not risk it with Jane, if she were not from
Loki chuckled. "Is there anything else you wish to discuss with me?" he asked, wanting to open the bag, but refraining due to the fact that he didn't trust Thor completely. He didn't want him around when he took each thing from his mother out of its current place and looked it over completely.

"Simply the fact that she also sends her love, and hopes that you can return to Asgard soon." Thor replied.

Loki nodded, but said nothing. After a few moments, Thor decided to leave his brother, and headed for the door. "One more thing," he said as he stood at the threshold. "We have someone in Asgard who is watching us closely, someone who is not our friend. Heimdall doesn't yet know who it is, as he cannot see – but I can guess, as can you, I think."

"Amora." Loki replied. "She's probably doing the same in Asgard as the mutant Shaw is doing here."

"That's what I thought." Thor replied. "Is there any way we can catch her?"

"No, she can pass through Yggdrasil with ease. Have Heimdall look for her, and keep an eye on her if he can." Loki instructed.

"Have him look toward the tree to the best of his ability, she is probably passing through the worlds untouched due to it. Anything else?"

Thor nodded solemnly, taking a moment to gather his thoughts. "I think you should know, Sif was able to form an alliance with Jotunheim. If it comes to it, they will fight by our sides." he said, Loki scoffed.

"You honestly think you can control the Frost Giants?" Loki asked rhetorically after a few moments of silence.

"No. But we do not mean to control them." Thor replied. "They are on our side because Helblindi sees the danger of joining the Mad Titan, nothing more."

"There is always more." Loki muttered, turning his gaze back to his bag. "Are you finished now?"

Thor nodded to his brother's back, and with a step, left the room and shut the door.

Loki sighed heavily, his mind taking in all the information which he had been informed of as he withdrew the contents of the bag from Frigga. A small smile tugged its way across his lips, unbidden, as he saw the books that she had sent; he had always loved reading, and she had never forgotten it, sending him something easier to waste away with than the drivel in Stark's library.

Reaching in, he pulled out something else which she had sent him: his dagger. Although he could not use magic at the moment, he could still feel it within the artifact, feeling right at home in his grasp as he withdrew it from the sheath. He could remember when he had first received it as a gift from Odin when he was young, and how Frigga had imbued it then, making it his own. He wondered vaguely why she would send this to him, knowing that the Allfather would doubtless have disagreed with him having a weapon. When he held the sheath down, a small slip of paper slid out, and dropped to the floor. Bending down, he picked it up, recognizing Frigga's flowing writing.

To protect, not to harm. she had put on the paper, a small note to him, but he knew exactly what it meant.

Placing the dagger back in its sheath, he held the paper in his hands, knowing exactly who it was that
she was talking about him protecting, and he vaguely wondered what it was that she saw in his future and Elizabeth's that would cause her to send him this. Putting his hand, once more, into the bag, he withdrew the last item. It was a box, and within it held a ring, one which he used to wear to signify his birthright as the Prince of Asgard; two serpents with emerald eyes, entwined with one another, with one's mouth wide open as if to devour its prey – but the other simply sat there. Loki smiled, putting the ring on his index finger. The ring had also been imbued, and Loki knew it was connected to two other artifacts which Frigga no-doubt had in her possession. He could still remember when they had connected the three, for the express purpose of him knowing when Frigga was in danger, and eventually – as the third artifact would have an owner – to know when his own beloved would be in danger. Two rings, and a locket. A note was with it too which read: She will need you.

Loki's brows immediately furrowed in confusion. Who would need him? Was it Elizabeth whom she spoke of? And how would she be connected to his ring? Surely Frigga knew that to give a mortal something which had such power within it was dangerous, and could possibly kill them – mutant or not. Was there someone else whom Frigga was referring to? And if so, who?

Lizzie began to get a little worried when Loki and Thor did not return within five minutes of leaving, although it was not mere curiosity which drove her to look for them – quite the contrary. It was Fandral. Although she had only heard tidbits from Loki over the past few weeks, she hadn't had a very high opinion of the knight based on what he had said; however, it was quite clear now that Loki had been a trifle biased, as Fandral wasn't half-as-bad as he portrayed... well, maybe not as quarter-as-bad. Lizzie still thought he was an egotistical jackass, enough so that she went to look for Loki. As ashamed as she was to admit it, she actually preferred the company of that particular narcissist to the other. At least one had brains – which brought her mind to Loki.

So immersed in her thoughts was she, that she wasn't paying attention when she rounded the corner to the hallways which led to their rooms, and ran into Thor. A bad thing for a smaller person, as she merely bounced off of Thor's rather large frame, and nearly landed on the ground – had it not, of course, been for Thor's quick battle reflexes catching her.

"Oh, hey, sorry I wasn't looking where I was going." Lizzie said, blushing red.

Thor chuckled. "You seemed deep in thought." he replied simply, making sure she was steady before he let her go. "Did you not enjoy the company of my friends?" He inquired, inwardly blessing his time with his brother which had trained him how to keep a straight face.

"What? – Oh, them, yeah they're great. Haven't really talked to Sif... or Volstagg... or Hogun for that matter. Fandral seems to want to keep talking and doesn't get the idea that I'm not listening." she answered, running her hand through her hair.

"Yes, he tends to do that." Thor said. "Although in Asgard, he hasn't really had that problem with women."

Lizzie scoffed. "Well, I'm not into Don Juans." she said. "Too many options of names to scream in bed that aren't mine." Thor laughed heartily, although she blushed at her own statement. "Not that I would ever take him to bed." she added as a caveat.

"I would never assume you would. I thought you would be safe from him." Thor replied, leaving his expression to his rather large grin. "You sought Loki didn't you?"

"I actually was here to get my i-Pad, I need to get some work done that's in my emails." she lied, not willing to inform the one brother that she truly wanted to find the other – as she hadn't sorted it out,
she wasn't sure she was willing to have Thor sort it for her.

"Ah, yes." Thor replied, knowing from years of watching Loki that she was probably lying. "Well, before you go, perhaps I can give you something?"

"You want to give me something?" Lizzie repeated as he suddenly seemed to hold a small box. "You... can't give me something, Thor. What would Jane think?"

Thor laughed again. "Its not from me – although I don't think that Jane would mind – it is from my mother." he answered, holding the box out for her to grab.

Tentatively, Lizzie reached out and took the box – which was about the size of of her two palms together. "What is it?" she asked as she examined the runes on the lid.

"I don't know." Thor answered. "My mother gave it to me just as we departed. I have no idea what it contains."

Lizzie nodded, her fingers brushing over the engraving. It was beautiful, in her opinion. "Is that supposed to be Yggdrasil?" she asked him.

Thor looked at the lid, nodding. "Yes, I believe so." he answered, backing down the corridor. "I shall leave you now, as my quest has been completed. Loki is in his room if you still seek him." And with that, he disappeared.

Not knowing just why Loki was still in his room, Lizzie decided to go to her own to discover what it was that the Queen of Asgard had sent her in the mysterious box. Closing the door, she went to her bed, placing it down with reverence before she lifted the lid.

The first thing she saw was a note, which her name was elegantly scrawled on top, and with curiosity, she opened the paper.

'Lady Elizabeth,

Although you and I have never met, I have become aware of your existence and wish to extend my hand in greeting. As you well know, the threat of Thanos to Asgard is quite real, and therefore I am unable to do so in person. However, it has come to my attention that you have earned a place in my son's hearts, and being so it is my wish that we may soon meet.

Do not allow Loki's outward appearance of hatred deceive you, Lady Elizabeth, he once was a quiet, contented boy, who knew how to care for others. I know not what made him do as he has completely, but I know that somewhere underneath the veneer of harsh cruelty, there is something left of my son – you have seen it yourself, have you not? Do not let him hurt you, for he is such that does not realize that he needs others, and I assure you, he will need you before the end. Forgive my riddles, but as a seer, I am unable to tell you more. Just know this: Loki’s loyalty, once earned, is something to be cherished. A prankster he may be – as are you, from what I hear – but he is unwavering for those he truly loves.

I am sure that you have been informed of that of our watcher, Heimdall, and his abilities – and his knowledge of your abilities. That being said, I know a bit of your past, and wish to warn you of your future. Do not lose heart, Lady Elizabeth, for although your road will make a few bad turns, believe that it is for the best. As a token of my wish for your safety, I have enclosed an object which will safeguard you in the case of any attack to harm you, from the Mad Titan or otherwise. It is infused
with magic, which – given a threat – will protect you as much as it can. I hope that one day we will meet, and until then that you shall be safe.

Until then,

Frigga'

Lizzie stared at the letter, her mouth agape at the Asgardian queen's words, and implications. She didn't know what to think, quite frankly, and that made her more confused than ever. Frigga had, more or less, told her what Thor had a few weeks prior – and what she had assumed herself. Loki's facade was just that – a facade; and that somehow the Fates, or the Norns, or whomever was in charge of destiny, had thrown the pair of them together for some reason which she didn't know. She reread the letter, her mind still spinning.

Finally, knowing that she would not understand everything which was said, she decided to see what exactly Frigga had sent her. Reaching into the box, she withdrew a small pouch, turning it over in her hand, the object came out. It was a round locket, with an image of two snakes entwined with each other, one green, the other gold as they surrounded an emerald. After finding the latch to be within the green snake's mouth at the edge, she opened the locket – and found another note. She chuckled lightly at Frigga's antics, and wondered if Loki had inherited anything from his mother, other than his magic. This note was simple:

'I hope this gift may serve two purposes at once.'

Moving the note, she saw what Frigga meant. Within the locket, was a clockface, similar to the one which she wore herself.

As she was deciding just what to do with it, there was a soft knock on the door.
Loki

Chapter Summary

Loki and Lizzie discuss her new locket, then Loki tells the tale of his time in the Chitauri prison.

Chapter Notes

Thank you guys for the notes which I received this morning. I was so psyched that someone read it on here and liked it that I realized that I actually hadn't updated it here. My apologies, as I actually do have the next two chapters written. I hope you like it.

Loki had heard Elizabeth return to her room, and against his better judgment, immediately concerned himself about her reasons. Was she simply back to get something? Or had Fandral upset her? Just the thought made his blood boil, and his anger kindle toward the egocentric Asgardian; although he knew that Elizabeth could defend herself via her powers toward him, he still regretted leaving her with him.

Now he stood at her door, his concern growing as she had yet to answer it. He knocked again, a little louder this time, and within seconds the door opened.

"Hey, Loki, what's up?" Lizzie asked.

"I heard you return... you don't usually return to your room so early." Loki replied simply.

Lizzie took a deep breath, about to start speaking – then stopped. She opened her mouth again.
"Were you worried about me?" she asked.

"No." Loki replied quickly, a little too quickly in her opinion.

They stared at each other for a few more moments, her beginning to wonder if Frigga was right; after all, she had noticed how he mentioned what she usually did... did that mean that he was watching her? Her curiosity was now piqued, and she now wanted to know more about him than she originally did. She was so wrapped up in her thoughts that she didn't even notice that Loki was speaking until he started saying her name.

"Elizabeth!"

"What? Yeah? Sorry. Woah, I spaced a bit, my apologies." she exclaimed. Loki huffed in agitation, miffed that she hadn't been paying attention to a word he said. "Care to repeat what you said?"

"Not particularly. If you weren't interested in knowing what I had to say in the first place, then why should I cater to your whims by repeating myself?" Loki retorted, his irritation obvious. Lizzie sighed, reaching her hand out to place the locked from Frigga on the dresser beside the door. "What is that?"
Lizzie stopped, surely there wasn't any harm in showing Loki what Frigga had given her? Perhaps he could even help her put it on, as she seemed to have a problem with the clasp. "Well, apparently your mom has been doing some checking up on me since she found out I existed... something about foresight, or something like that..." she trailed off, bringing the locket into view. "Its supposed to protect me?"

Loki's eyes widened when he saw the object in Elizabeth's small hands, instantly recognizing snakes and emerald. Now he understood why Frigga had sent him his ring, knowing that Elizabeth held its cousin – and that worried him. What had his mother – the Queen seen that would cause for her to link the two of them for the future? He could only hope that the reason was not what he thought it was... but knew that it wasn't very likely.

"Loki?" Lizzie's voice cut in, her own worry suspended as she watched the flicker of emotions in his green eyes. He had recognized her new locket, that was for sure; but it was his concern, his worry, and his fear which made her worry in turn. His eyes finally snapped to hers, the fear still evident, but this time mingled with a strange resignation. "What is going on?"

Taking her hand in his, he picket the locket up and held it for a moment. The magic within, he knew would protect her – but he wondered if his mother had a reason for sending it that was beyond the young woman's safety. Surely Odin would not approve of what his wife had done, had he known it. And what was Frigga playing at? The locket he had created to be worn by a woman that he would be betrothed to, and he certainly was not betrothed to Elizabeth. "Frigga sent this to you." he finally said, his voice barely above a whisper. "Did someone tell you what it does?"

"She said something about protecting me." Lizzie repeated her earlier statement. "In her letter..." she answered his unspoken question within his gaze. "She said that something about my future wasn't too healthy – well, that's paraphrased."

Loki nodded. "It does contain magic... my magic to be precise." he said, watching the brunette girl carefully. Her eyebrow rose in a silent inquiry to continue. "She somehow placed a large amount of my power within it, which somehow will be triggered when you are in danger. It's complex, I don't expect you to understand it."

"I understand what a trigger is, Loki." Lizzie snapped slightly, taking the locket back. "It's kinda redundant, don't you think? My abilities are more than capable of defending me when I'm in danger. You know that."

Loki shook his head, lifting his hand to show her his connected ring. "It's connected to me, Elizabeth. What it means is: when you are in danger, I will come to help you." he hissed. "Not that I understand why that would be any help to you, its not like I can –" he stopped, his eyes narrowing at the object. "Unless..."

"Unless?" Lizzie prompted, but Loki refused to continue. "Loki!"

"Silence, Elizabeth!" he suddenly snapped. "If I do not wish to tell you, than I shall not tell you!"

Her eyes narrowed at him, and she focused on trying to work the latch on the chain – a little angrier than she would have under normal circumstances. Was it so hard for him to simply tell her? She huffed, irritated that she couldn't even place it over her head when it was suddenly snatched from her. "Hey!"

"You have no idea how to work the latch because you were never meant to put it on." Loki informed her, quickly undoing that which he created and opening the chain for her.
"What does that mean?" Lizzie asked him, staying in the doorframe with her arms crossed over her chest.

Loki sighed, she was a stubborn woman. "It means, my dear Elizabeth, that this chain was created by me so that it wouldn't be forced off of its wearer – more specifically, my wife." He felt a certain amount of gratification at Elizabeth's look of shock.

"Your... wife?" she spluttered. "You're married?"

"No." he retorted, trying to move the chain closer to her neck. "It would be for my wife to be." He suddenly regretted the words as she shrank back from him, as if repulsed by his insinuation. He wasn't sure why, but he felt pain at her sudden rejection, even if his statement had not meant anything. "I am sure that Frigga meant nothing by it, she would never force someone like you into her monster-of-a-son's presence."

Lizzie shook her head. "You're not a monster." she whispered quietly, moving closer. "Well, that is to say that I don't see you as a monster."

Loki ignored her words as she lifted her hair off her neck, turning around so that he could put the locket on for her. He hesitated for a moment, then lifting the necklace to her front, allowed the chain to come together at the nape of her neck. The two parts came together with a slight glow, the magic running down the chain, and making his own ring shine, as if assuring him that she was safe. However, instead of pulling away immediately, Loki let his fingertips brush against her neck, a strong desire to touch her being a bit too much to bear. He reasoned that it may have been the magic in their two objects influencing his mind, knowing that he had created them when he was young and idealistic – when he believed that some woman would marry him eventually.

She shivered, the contact from both the cold chain and his fingers making her blush; she needed to get her priorities straight, and being attracted to Loki couldn't possibly be good for her. But she couldn't pull away, reveling in the sensation which she hadn't felt in a long time. Just when she considered leaning back into him, allowing him to do as he wished, his fingers were gone, and he was across the hall, his back to her.

"What did Frigga's letter say?" he asked, his voice strained with emotion.

"Just what I already told you, plus a little extra which is really none of your business." she replied, walking out of the door and shutting it behind her, making sure the lock was in place. She stood with her back leaning against the door for a few moments, trying to argue with her emotions which told her to cross the hall, to make him look at her, and to demand answers of why he was suddenly bringing a feeling of want within her. "Shall we return to the others?" she finally said, clearing her throat in an attempt to avoid the tension between them. "I'm really curious about Lady Sif and Volstagg, they seem to be somewhat fun. Fandral took too much of my time when I was there, his stories are interesting enough I suppose." Loki grumbled under his breath in Old Norse, venting his frustrations in a way that she wouldn't know. "What was that?" she asked.

"None of your business." he spat back, his tone more venomous than hers had been as he stomped down the hall. Lizzie's steps stopped in the middle of the hallway, confused at his behavior. He spun around, "Well? Are you going to stand there like some kind of fool?"

"What is your problem?" she hissed, her hands on her hips. "Not that you aren't usually an ass, but this is more than usual. First you were all pseudo-nice, then you helped me with my locket, brushed your fingertips against my neck in a very... odd way, and now you're all mad! What the hell is wrong with you?"
"Well, I just thought you'd want to return to the illustrious Fandral and his stories – after all, I'm sure you find him quite fascinating." Loki snapped, surprised when Elizabeth's eyes showed hurt.

She marched up to him, craning her neck to look into his eyes at his height. "You're jealous." she mused aloud, her voice filled with surprise.

Loki scoffed. "Why should I be jealous over you? You raise yourself up too high, mortal." he hissed, but she simply shook her head.

"You don't mean that." she said quietly.

"I certainly do." he replied, dismayed when she chuckled. "You think you're worth my time?"

"Yes, actually, I do." his eyes widened at her statement.

"How dare-"

"Because I know that your touch was lacking in your disgust of my species." Lizzie interrupted. "Or rather, in your disgust of me."

"You repulse me." Loki said. "Why do you think I walked away? I was reminded of just how beneath me you are. You anger me in a way that I cannot explain, and do not particularly wish to indulge, lest I kill you."

She shook her head once again, her smaller hand reaching up to brush a piece of hair out of his eyes and behind his ear. His gaze softened, and he unwittingly leaned – ever so slightly – into her touch.

"Not today I don't." she whispered, removing her hand, leaving him slightly still stunned. "I'll meet you in the library later, as you no doubt are heading in that direction, and wish to ignore dinner."

He blinked rapidly, trying to regain his anger toward her touching him, and feeling nothing there. What was she doing to him? A single touch from her was leaving him completely speechless, unable to reach into the bottomless pit of anger and fury toward her. Just a few weeks prior she had been his bane, and now he was leaning into her touch! Finally he found his fury, but it wasn't at her, it was at himself. Nodding curtly, he spun on his heel and entered the elevator. "Don't be late." he ordered her, punctuating ever syllable as the doors closed.

"I wouldn't dream of it." she replied, feeling a bit of triumph over what had just occurred. Turning, she went back down the hallway to the great room, groaning at the fact that she would have to deal with Fandral. Gritting her teeth, she prepared to deal with the irritating man.

On the other side of the coin, she knew that she would only have to deal with him for a few hours before she got to spend time with Loki.

The time seemed to go faster than Loki anticipated, and once more he wondered if the god of time was drunk – then remembered that there was no 'god of time' in Asgard. Perhaps that was the problem? He hadn't even finished the first ten chapters of the book he had been reading – one which Frigga had sent him – when Elizabeth walked in, a plate in her hands, filled with a food which had Loki's mouth watering.

"Considering you didn't join us for dinner, I thought that dinner should be brought to you." she said cheerfully, holding the plate out in front of him. He stared at it, critically scrutinizing the meal in front of him – mostly because the food was purple. "Are you going to keep staring at it, or are you going to actually trust me?"

"What is it?"
"Shepherds pie... with purple potatoes." Lizzie replied, not even bothering to keep the smirk off her face. Everyone had acted the same way with the meal, to see him act like it was poison was something which she had enjoyed seeing from the Avengers above. "Just try it."

Tentatively, Loki reached out his hand and took the plate, looking at her once more to see if she was going to give anything away which meant that it wasn't good. All he got, however, was an amused grin, her brown eyes watching him carefully. To his surprise, the food was actually quite good, even though it looked odd. He nodded, and giggling she went to pull a chair next to him and sat down.

"You should have seen Tony, he was swearing up and down how he wasn't going to eat anything that looked so pretty." she told him, pulling her legs under her. "They're just potatoes, in fact they're a little creamier, I think."

"Where did you learn to cook? From what I have seen of women of Midgard, they tend not to be able to handle such a task." Loki inquired.

"Seanmhathair." she answered. "You're referring to Jane, aren't you?"

He nodded, his eyes catching on the locket around her neck – it seemed strange for it to be there, and yet it looked perfect on her. He instantly scowled, since when did he find anything about her 'perfect'?

"I finally had a chance to talk to Sif... and Volstagg. Hogun was a bit silent." she said, trying to break the tension that was obvious between them. It wasn't working, she noted, as Loki said nothing in reply and finished his food in silence. "So who's going to start?" she asked.

Finally, he turned his gaze toward her. "Pardon?"

"You or me." she continued. "Stories, Loki. I'm talking about our pasts."

Loki sighed, placing his dirty plate on the table beside him, wondering – and not for the last time – why it was that he had agreed to this. "Very well, I will begin." he declared. "But interrupt me in any manner, and I shall not continue in any respect. I'm not like Fandral, I don't tolerate anyone cutting in."

Lizzie nodded, watching as his eyes suddenly darkened, his shoulders sagging as if an invisible weight was suddenly put on him. "Jarvis!" she called out to the AI. "Turn off the recordings, I want for Loki and I to have privacy."

"Miss Donovan, I've told you before that Mr. Stark has requested all of your talks with Prince Loki to be recorded." Jarvis replied, a condescending tone coloring its words.

She sighed, shaking her head. "Shut them off, or I'll shut you off, Jarvis." she warned lowly.

"I'm sorry Miss Donovan, but I'm afraid-" the disembodied voice suddenly halted, the silence somewhat deafening afterwards. Loki turned to Lizzie quizzically, wondering if there was anything her paralysis did not paralyze.

She looked back at him, her eyes filled with expectancy. "Now we won't be disturbed, and you don't have to worry about anyone knowing things you don't want them to know." she said.

Loki was stunned. The fact that she would go through the trouble of disabling the AI just so that he would not have to deal with the repercussions of the Avengers knowing his secrets endeared her even more to him; not since Frigga had he had any kind of a confidant, someone who he knew would not share his secrets. It was somewhat relieving.
"I suppose I can begin with my childhood, as it will give you a slight understanding of where I come from..."

After twenty minutes of convincing, Tony had finally managed to get Pepper to agree to a romantic evening. Everything was already laid, between the candles, to the champagne, to the rose petals which he overdid in the water – that, perhaps, he was beginning to regret doing. All he was missing was violins... but even that was being provided by Jarvis' hard drive.

"A little enthusiastic are we?" Pepper mused as she entered the room in her bathing suit, a sarong tied across her waist. "And its not even 9 o'clock."

"I thought we should start early." Tony replied from his place in the tub, a glass held between his fingers. "You never know who might decide to interrupt later."

Pepper laughed, sliding into the hot tub, and wading over to Tony. "Good point." she said, taking her glass from his hand and clinking them together. Tony smirked, leaning closer to Pepper to steal a kiss.

"Uh, Sir?" Jarvis' voice interrupted, the music suddenly stopping. Tony's eyes closed in irritation, and he could hear Pepper chuckle as she sipped from her glass.

"Jarvis, I told you no interruptions tonight." Tony growled, turning his head in the direction of the camera.

"My apologies, sir, but I thought you should know that Miss Donovan has just disabled the recording devices in the library." Jarvis said.

Tony's eyes snapped open, his brow furrowing. "How the hell did she do that?"

"I suppose, sir, that it could be attributed to her power. Nevertheless, she is alone with Loki – and wants privacy." Jarvis said.

"Tell Legolas to get into the library immediately-"

"Leave them be, Jarvis." Pepper said at the same time. Tony's head whipped around to face her. "C'mon, Tony, you told me yourself that you and Darcy are trying to get them together."

"Yeah, but that doesn't mean I trust him with her safety yet!" Tony spluttered. Pepper leaned over and kissed him.

"Leave them be, Tony." she whispered against his lips. "Loki won't hurt her."

"How do you know?" Tony countered.

She smiled. "Because he's in love with her. He'd kill anyone who hurt her before he ever hurt her himself."

"Whatever gave you that idea? For all you know he-"

"Shh..." Pepper shushed him, placing a finger on his lips. "I just know. Besides, she'd knock him to the floor before he ever got around to hurting her – I mean, you did see the recording of them in the kitchen. That recording alone gave me all the evidence I needed regarding his feelings for her, even if he doesn't recognize it yet."

Moments ticked by, and Tony was sincerely wondering why Pepper was suddenly so adamant in
allowing Loki so much leeway. Finally he sighed, "Alright, J, leave 'em be."

"Very good, sir. Have a nice evening." Jarvis replied, turning the music on once again and leaving both couples alone.

"... Thor has probably already informed you of my fall from the bifrost, correct?" Loki prompted Elizabeth. He had recapped all the simplistic stuff of his childhood within the first five minutes, and now realizing that if he continued he would have to bare his soul to her, was beginning to question his judgement.

"He said that you went to destroy Jotunheim, and he stopped you by destroying the rainbow bridge – which apparently is still in disrepair." she replied.

"Well, after he threw me from the bridge-"

"Ah, ah, ah..." Lizzie interrupted. "Don't lie, Loki. You let go."

"Who told you that?" he demanded, feeling only slightly irked that she was correcting him on his own story.

"Thor did. He said you let go of Odin's scepter." she answered, pulling her knees up to her chest. "So no 'tossing' off of anything. Just stick to facts."

Loki growled. "I most certainly did not! Do you think that I would want to fall into the void?" he snapped. "Besides, Elizabeth, I requested no interruptions."

Lizzie put her hands up in surrender. "Argue with Thor about that point, if you wish. I'll stay quiet, and let you two go rounds on what really happened."

He nodded with a 'humph', and continued on. "I don't know how long I swirled in the void, unable to grasp at anything tangible or real. The pieces of the bifrost floated around me, but it often seemed as if there was no time there, no sense of purpose. It was all hurtling to nowhere, and I was sucked with it." he said, trying to shield himself from the pain of what followed. "I don't remember how, but I awoke in a cell. Cold, dark, bereft of all light or comfort and for some time I thought I was still in the void; I knew I was injured, not because I saw the wounds, but because I couldn't move in any capacity. There was no one there, no one to ease the silence, the loneliness I felt in the cell." he stopped talking, wondering why it was that he was telling her this. "Then, after some time had passed, I was introduced to my captor..."

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A loud squeak awoke Loki from his stupor, a pale light filtering in to his left. He looked up, surprised that there was any form of life wherever he was, and hoping that it had only been a misunderstanding which caused for him to be where he was. A shadow covered the light, and Loki felt himself being lifted by his arms. He cried out, pain shooting through his body at an agonizing rate.

"C'mon, we don't have all day!" a voice gurgled from the shadow, and with a few more pulls, Loki was brought before it. "He's still alive, I see." the voice continued. "Look at me." Loki tried, but his head was spinning from dehydration, and overall fatigue. A six-fingered hand gripped his chin, lifting his gaze up, and in an instant, he was recoiling in horror at the creature before him. Its face was half-covered in a mask, the eyes hidden, and all he could see was the hideous mouth whose teeth crooked at every angle. The creature seemed to smile, although Loki would compare it more to a grimace. "Take him to the Master, I think he may take pleasure in knowing that the Asgardian
survived." he said to the two creatures to Loki's sides.

The hands around his arms picked him up once more, hauling him off to another location.

Hallways, that was all he could see, his mind spinning still from questions unanswered. Where was he? How did he get here? Who was 'The Master'? And what were they going to do with him? Each question weighted heavily on his mind, and he suddenly missed home. Was Thor looking for him? He regretted what he had told his brother, regretted letting go-

"Wait a minute," Lizzie interrupted, earning a glare from Loki. "So you did know that you let go."

He stared at her, realizing what he had just said. He had known at the time, obvious by his recollection of the event. Why would he not have remembered it earlier? "I suppose so." he said softly.

"But you said that you were tossed." Lizzie continued. "Obviously you were wrong, you remembered incorrectly, or something happened that messed with your memory that caused for you to – today – say you were tossed, when you knew – then – that you were not." She finished, fiddling with the locket around her neck. "Alright, go on."

Loki swore in Norse, not liking her commanding tone.

Eventually he was brought before a large door of thick metal, fear seeping into his every pore. He was a prisoner, this he knew, but to 'whom' was what frightened him. The door opened, and he was taken inside, the darkness of the room once more reminding him of his cell. A large figure stood in the middle of the chamber, his back turned toward the newcomers as he hunched over – what looked like – a desk. Suddenly he turned, the speed of his movements making Loki nauseas.

"So, I see he survived." the large being said. "What is your name?"

Loki tried to speak, tried to stand, tried to be something other than the obvious weakling that he was at the moment – but failed, his body crumpling to the floor as the guards let him go when he tried to stand. The landing was hard on his injuries, and he felt a new wave of pain shoot through him, unconsciousness edging at his mind.

"Will you answer me?" the being inquired, obviously taking some kind of amusement in Loki's agony.


"Loki of Asgard." the being replied. "I can't say that I know of such a name, I have not been near Asgard in quite some time. And what are you doing here, Loki of Asgard?"

Loki once more tried to answer, but failed as his body convulsed into a coughing fit, unable to breathe. He felt magic surround him, the more serious wounds healing in a matter of moments. He looked up once more, his green eyes surveying the creature before him, his purple skin being something which he had never seen before. He tried to speak again, but could not.

"You seem to be having trouble." the creature said. "Allow me."

Before Loki could question what he meant by 'allow me' he felt a presence invade his mind with a painful entrance, the force of which nearly sending him once more into the spiral of darkness which
threatened his vision. He couldn't hear it, but he knew somewhere in his subconscious that he was
screaming in the pain of the forceful entry into his mind. He felt the creature rifle through his
memories, each one playing out mentally.

'A son of Odin I see.' the creature's voice echoed in his head, the memories of Loki's last
conversation with Odin coming up. 'Or are you?'

'I—I—I'm the monster that parents tell their children about at night?'

'Laufey's son.' the creature echoed in his mind. 'Apparently I have been out of the nine realms for far
too long.'

"GET OUT!" Loki yelled, using the little amount of magic he could access to push the being out of
his mind. Finally there was peace in his thoughts, the headache that he felt beginning to settle down.
He opened his eyes, trying to focus them on the being in front of him.

"An Asgardian, who really is a Jotun." the creature clicked his tongue. "Odin has truly made a
mistake, hasn't he?"

Loki tried to calm his breathing, his heart beating so hard that he feared it would beat out of his
chest, the sound of the thumping echoing in his ears, making him unable to hear what the creature
said. Oh how he now wished he had never tried to destroy Jotunheim – or better yet, had never
demanded an answer of Odin, or gone to Jotunheim with Thor. Where would he be now, had he
never learned of his ancestry? Would be at home, greeting his brother after his return, celebrating
the return of the crown-prince, and looking after Odin with Frigga? Would it have been different?

"I have a proposition for you." the creature's voice bellowed. "Which, if you agree – Laufeyson –
you will have a pricey reward."

"I want no proposition from you." Loki hissed. "I am not to be bought with pretty words."

"You lost your kingdom, did you not. For a king of Asgard you were, until your brother tossed you
off the bifrost. Then again, you weren't exactly wanted were you?" the being said.

Loki shook his head. "That does not matter."

"I can make you a king." the being replied. "I can bring you what you want."

"I want nothing from you – not even a kingdom." Loki retorted.

The creature cackled, the sound of it sending shivers down Loki's spine. "Ah, Loki Laufeyson, you lie
to me. For if you wanted no kingdom, you would not have sent the destroyer to kill your brother – or
set things up for your own father, or fathers, to die." he said. "You are the perfect person for this
mission which I will send you."

"I will not obey you." Loki replied hotly. "I will not be told to kneel before anyone."

"Oh, I think you will." the creature replied, motioning to the guards, speaking something to them in
a horrific language. "In the end," he suddenly started again at Loki. "Everyone bows to my will."

The guards once more grasped Loki's arms, and carried him out of the chamber, and down the hall
in a different direction. Fear once more settled within him, and he passed into unconsciousness.

Loki wasn't even aware that he had stopped talking until Lizzie's hand touched his shoulder. He
looked up, his green eyes meeting her brown, a sense of understanding within the chocolate orbs. She could see his fear still there, and she silently encouraged him to continue.

"After that meeting was when the tortures started." Loki eventually whispered, his eyes still boring into hers, looking for her to shun him – but all he could see was compassion, and feel it in her touch. He wanted to shirk from her, but instead, he let her continue to try to comfort him. "Thanos knew that there was one thing which truly hurt a Frost Giant: direct heat. I don't know how long he tortured me with it, each time healing me enough that I would still feel the pain, but not be in danger of harm. Every time he called me back to his chamber, offered me a chance to escape the pain if I got the Tesseract for him. I refused, and he once more sent me to the firepit."

"How did you withstand it?" she asked him, her voice cracking with emotion.

"I didn't, did I?" Loki retorted. "After a while, I was swayed to his side, and took him up on his offer. He was pleased and, once he made a permanent connection to my mind not very different than the one which I put on Hawkeye, he gave me a room with all the comforts I could want. He left me there for a week, I remember, allowing me to get comfortable, but reminding me that at any time he could take it from me once again. During that time, I was given the Chitauri Staff, and was taught how to use it. I was careful with my thoughts, hating the fact that I was being easily controlled by him, when I had been so careful never to be contorted to anyone's mind. I hid my true feelings, not that I think he cared regarding them anyway. He knew I hated the situation, but had agreed on terms of my life to do his bidding. With that in mind, I came to Midgard, hatred in my heart, and my mind twisted to a point of no return. You know the rest." he finished, hanging his head.

On the one hand, he could understand her compassion, knowing that she probably went through some type of pain which gave her her abilities; yet on the other hand, he thought she would hate him for giving in. He was sure that, had Thor been in the same situation, he would have fought until his own death, never compromising. But Loki was weak, and it only took physical pain to cause him to cave into the will of others.

As if sensing his thoughts, Lizzie touched his face, trying to bring him back to reality. He looked once more at her. "I told you you would regret knowing why I did what I did." he told her, pulling out of her grasp and walking away.

"You have no idea what's going on in my mind, Loki." Lizzie's voice came from behind him, closer than he would have expected. She came around to his side, her small hand turning him so he would look at her. "You think I think you a coward."

"Am I not?" Loki countered. "I so easily cowed to his wishes, a bit of pain being all it took to change my mind, my will. Were it Thor, he would have fought until his death, he would have-"

"Any man would break under a certain amount of torture. It doesn't make you a coward." she cut in. "Thanos knew exactly what would break you, he targeted it. I don't hate you for it, nor would I considering my past."

He stared at her, seeing pain in her eyes. "And what is your past that you are understanding to mine?" he asked softly.

She smiled ruefully. "You might want to sit down for this." she told him, moving back toward the chair. He followed her, sitting down in the chair beside hers.
Lizzie's Past

Chapter Summary

Lizzie tells her story to Loki.

Lizzie sighed, closing her eyes as if to brace herself for what was to come next – unconsciously, Loki moved his chair slightly closer, sensing that she might need some form of comfort. "Sixteen years ago--" she stopped, shaking her head. "No... no, no, I need to start further back. My story doesn't begin with me, ironically enough." Licking her lips, she began again. "My grandfather is where I should start, as he is the whole reason this mess ever happened. He was a mutant – is a mutant – who was born in the late nineteen-twenties, and had the misfortune of winding up in a concentration camp during World War II... you do know what World War II was right?" she asked.

"I do." Loki replied. "In order to understand everything about the Avengers, I became well informed of Rogers' past, and therefore the events surrounding his... change."

"Alright, alright, so you know that. I don't have to explain it, that's good." she muttered. "So, my grandfather was a Jew, and because of that he wound up in Auschwitz. The warden, I suppose you can call him, was also a mutant, who wished to expound his knowledge on the mutants and sought to find more. His name was Sebastian Shaw – or rather, that's what he called himself after the war, his real name I've forgotten... Schmitt I think. He killed my great-grandmother, and during my grandfather's time at Auschwitz, he tested him among other things. Eventually when the war ended, Shaw came to America under the new pseudonym, and started a group called the Hellfire Club, which was a group of mutants who he planned on building a new army out of. My grandfather, for twenty-some-odd years, sought revenge, and traveled all over the world to find him."

"What does that have to do with you?" Loki inquired.

"I'm getting to it, god of impatience." Elizabeth said, her voice shutting him up. "Long story short, my grandfather killed Shaw... fulfilling his revenge. Unknown to him, Shaw had a son – Alex – who was very young at the time, and after hearing of his father's murder, sought revenge against my grandfather. Now, Alex could not destroy my grandfather outright, as it would be a foolish venture. My grandfather is a lot like you, calculating... he isn't easily caught or fooled. Alex knew this, and for years sought out a way to kill Erik Lehnsherr. Now, my grandfather – around this time – fell in love with a young mutant woman, who had been orphaned during the war. They had my mother a few years later, but my grandmother died in childbirth, leaving my grandfather heartbroken, and my mother rather abandoned by him. He knew he wouldn't be a good father, and so he sent my mother to live with his old friend, and current enemy: Charles Xavier."

"That's the man that Logan was sent by." Loki commented.

"Professor X has more reasons than one to have sent Logan, but we'll get there." she replied. "Anyway, my mother was raised by the Professor, as his daughter, to keep her safe from my grandfather's enemies – as he grew to have many. My mom didn't know who her father really was until years later, but somehow Alex found out first. Taking on another name, he entered Xavier's School for Mutants, in an effort to use my mom against Erik. However, instead of killing her, as he wanted originally, he became obsessed with her, and wanted her for his own; my mother never considered him in that manner, and always considered him a friend. Eventually my mom found out
who her father was, and in a bout of anger, she left Xavier's School in search for Erik. He was in Ireland at the time, and when she found him, she became apart of his group, the Brotherhood of Mutants. She spent some time with him there, and lived happily never speaking to Professor X. It was in Ireland she met my father... but there was only one problem... he wasn't a mutant."

"You mean he was a normal human?" Loki confirmed.

"Yes." Elizabeth answered. "He had no powers or special gifts, but she fell head over heels and didn't particularly care. It drove a rift between my mother and grandfather, as he was determined his daughter would never marry a non-mutant, due to his hatred for the race. She married my father anyway, leaving my grandfather's group so that she could settle down with my father, and live a normal life. Now, Alex had followed her to Ireland, and when he found out, he also was furious with her choice. He thought that she had betrayed him, and vowed that he would kill my dad. She threatened in kind, but ran off with my father and changed her name so she wouldn't be found. Sometime in there, she found out that Alex was really Alex Shaw, the son of her father's nemesis, and that was actually the reason she cut off all relations with him. That is where I come in – or rather, Bella and I come in. We were born in the middle of all this, and drove the nail into the coffin on my grandfather's stance on her marriage. For four years I only knew Grandpa Charles, my family living in Pennsylvania at the time, so as to be close to him. We lived in complete peace and safety, my father being the most loving, caring man in the world; and my mother sweet, and kind."

Loki watched her take in a shuddering breath, her entire body tensing.

"You have asked me about my nightmares..." she whispered. "About what they contain... it was Christmas Eve. Bella and I had already hung our stockings, our presents already set out beneath the tree – we were four, completely, blissfully unaware of what would happen. My mother was expecting another child, our little family was going to grow, everything was happy. We were sent up to bed, excitedly awaiting for the next day when I first met Alex. My sister and I were awoken by the sounds of yells coming from downstairs, and being the naive little girl I was, I went to find out what was going on." Her mind's eye flashed to her memory, the scene playing out in her mind as it had so many times before.

She continued. "What I found, however, I never should have seen. Alex's cronies held my father down as my mother screamed at Alex, begging him to spare my father's life. However, Alex was always a sadistic bastard, and he had one of his minions use their power to kill my father." She scoffed at the memory, although Loki could tell it was out of grief rather than amusement. "I wish now that I had known to stay silent, but I did not. When my father fell to the ground dead, I screamed, which brought Alex's attention to me. He wanted to know my ability, which at the time made no sense, but eventually I found out that he was finishing his father's work and creating an army of mutants. Erik showed up, due to Alex's plan, and they fought." she swallowed. "My mother was caught in the crosshairs... and she... Alex killed..." She couldn't fight the tears which came, and looked away from Loki trying to not let him see her cry.

As it was, Loki didn't know how to handle her crying, and for the second time he found himself lifting his hand to try to comfort her. He went to rest it on her shoulder when she once more turned to him, and he dropped it, letting it rest on the arm of the chair. "He killed your mother." he finished for her.

She nodded, swallowing thickly. "I don't know how, but Erik managed to get us out of the fire which then engulfed the house. They never even found my mother's body to bury, she never got a chance to get out alive." she said, her voice cracking as she wiped away her tears. "My sister and I were sent to live with Professor X, as my own grandfather still viewed himself as a bad influence. Four years later, I met Alex again..."
The doorbell kept ringing, and eight year old Lizzie was getting a little tired of the annoying chime. "LIZZIE ANSWER THE DOOR!" her twin yelled from the adjoining room. Lizzie sighed, leaving the library to see her sister face to face.

"We're not supposed to answer the door, Bella! That's what Grandpa Charles said. 'Lizzie, Bella, while I am gone, you are – under no circumstances – to answer the door. If you do—'"

"Yes, yes, I know what he said." Bella snapped back as the doorbell rang again. "GO AWAY!" she shouted.

Lizzie snorted. "Yeah, that's likely." she scoffed. "Do you think that Uncle Hank knows that someone is ringing at the door?"

Bella just shrugged, and with a huff. Lizzie left the room to go to Hank McCoy's lab. "Uncle Hank." she called out from the other side of the door, and opening it, she saw his blue, furry body hunched over a desk. "Uncle Hank, the doorbell keeps ringing."

"Leave it be, Lizzie." Hank replied. "Eventually they'll go away."

"Was Grandpa Charles expecting anyone?" Lizzie inquired.

"No, he wasn't. If he was, I would be answering the door." Hank said, turning around. "Come here, Lizzie, I want to show you something." Lizzie went toward him, and he lifted her to look in his microscope. "See that?"

"Yeah, what is it?" Lizzie asked.

Hank opened his mouth to explain when there was a sudden crash from the direction of the door. Quickly putting Lizzie back on the ground, Hank shed his labcoat and headed for the door, listening for a moment before they both heard a scream – Bella's scream. Lizzie went to run forward, but Hank stopped her. "No, Lizzie, let me take care of it." he told her.

"But Bella's in danger, Uncle Hank!" she shrieked.

"I know, but you can't do anything. Just do what I say, Lizzie. Go hide in the closet." Hank commanded. "Please, this once, do what I ask you."

Lizzie, with tears in her eyes, nodded, heading for the closet. "Will you come and get me?"

"I promise." Hank replied, his golden eyes pleading with her. "Go Lizzie."

Doing as he ordered, she entered the closet, shutting the door behind her. In the darkness, her sense of hearing was increased, the sensitivity to the slightest sound making her heart leap out of her chest. She heard Bella scream again, followed by another crash, a loud growl from Hank echoing through the building until it reached her ears. She heard shouts, and a crash coming from the door of the lab.

"Where is she?" she heard, the voice sending chills down her spine. "Where is she?"

"Like I'd tell you." Hank's voice filtered through the door of the closet. "I know why you want her. I know what you did to her mother, your revenge having yet be satiated. Lizzie is not a toy to be used at your whim, Shaw." She had never heard Hank sound so threatening, but in that moment she was also terrified of him.
A scuffle could be heard on the other side of the door, the sound of breaking glass and Hank's groan making her heart beat even faster. "WHERE IS SHE?!

"Charles took her with him." Hank lied, his voice sounding weak. "She's in Maine with him and the rest of the group."

She heard a chuckle come from Alex's throat. "Thank you, McCoy. I suppose that Xavier and I will be having a chat soon, and he can thank you." she heard before Hank gave a blood-curdling cry of pain. Without thinking, she wrenched the door open.

"Stop!" she screamed, her eyes drawn to Hank's matted hair, dried blood along with fresh coating it. The lab was a wreck, with tables broken, glass crunching beneath her sneakers, and six men in black filling the room. Alex's ice-blue eyes turned to her, a sinister smirk on his face. "I'm right here."

Trying to swallow her fear, Lizzie moved toward Alex, her eyes constantly flickering between him and Hank. "Lizzie... no..." Hank whispered, tears filling his eyes.

"Well, well, I suppose she's suddenly developed the ability to teleport, since you said she was in Maine." Alex taunted the Beast, turning to Elizabeth. "You've grown." he said. "Its been a while."

"Let him go." Lizzie whispered. "Please?"

He knelt to her height, his hand resting on her head, his eyes filled with the mirth that he felt. "Alright." he said, nodding to one of his minions. The man moved toward Hank, and Hank tried to move back – suddenly he gave another cry of pain, and went limp.

"NO!" Elizabeth screamed before another minion grabbed her arm and she was whisked away...

Loki's heart filled with anger toward Alex Shaw, the vileness of the man causing him to want to tear him limb from limb. He had only heard a fraction of her story, that he knew, but for Alex to have forced her to watch three deaths of those whom she loved was painful to watch her reiterate. She continued to sob, her voice cracking as her tears came more freely. This time, however, Loki brought his hand up to her hand, trying to comfort her in his own way.

"That was when it really began. I was taken to a mansion – Alex's father's mansion – where I would spend the next several years of my life in a cell." she said, wiping at her tears with her sleeve. "I told you Alex wanted to build an army of mutants, but what he decided to try to do was to create an army by giving mutants a serum which would endow them with powers which were not originally theirs. My original power was viewed as useless to him-"

"Your original power?" Loki prompted, his curiosity unable to keep itself at bay.

She nodded, swallowing before she spoke. "I can control time." she answered. "Alex thought it was worthless because it is not defensive. At first he tried to make a serum which would simply destroy the power, but it always failed and the power stayed and became more resilient to their serums so he gave up on that venture."

"You control time?" Loki said a little too excitedly. Perhaps that would explain why time had been flowing so oddly over the last few days, she was controlling it. Lizzie gave a half-smile, motioning to the clock on the wall.

"Watch carefully." she said, staring at the clock. He followed her gaze, watching – to his surprise – as the clock stopped ticking, and moved backwards. His eyes widened, and he looked over at
Elizabeth with awe. She just smiled. "As I was saying, Alex's initial serums to give me a new power actually strengthened my original one. When I was young I could only make time stop. Through their serums I could slow it, make it go back, make it fast – either in general, or for specifically people. It actually did become very helpful to him, but it wasn't what he wanted."

"Why is that?" Loki asked.

"He wanted something that could harm others, give them pain, or allow others to give pain." she told him. "For five years I was brought from my cell to a laboratory, strapped to a table, and injected with serums which were always painful when administered. They burned and I never was able to numb myself from the pain." At this point, she lifted her sleeve to show him her scar. "One particularly painful treatment I underwent, I struggled too much, causing a needle that was in my arm to be ripped out. It took one of their mutants to keep me from dying, as the bloodloss was rather immense."

Loki moved his hand to her scar, tracing the raised pinkish mark with tenderness; she watched him for a moment, reveling in comforting touch of his fingers. His skin was cool, his eyes seemingly glued to that which he had wanted to know about since he saw it.

"Probably not as fabulous as you originally thought. The desperate clawings of a ten-year-old girl trying to get away from pain isn't as spectacular when you think about it." she said with a chuckle, although it was hallow and lacked the amusement.

His eyes snapped to hers, and she stopped talking from the fire which burned within them. "You don't find amusement in it, why do you want me to?" he asked her, his teeth gritted with anger – though it wasn't toward her.

She shook her head, unable to answer him. Instead, tears once more sprang up. "Sorry, I suppose I've tried to cope with the pain and I found that laughing is better than crying." she said, wiping at the tears. "It's easier to think of it with sarcasm, pretending I don't care, rather than allowing myself to go back there."

Loki brushed her hair out of her eyes, his hand resting on the side of her face. She looked at him, her eyes seeming to beg for him to keep any derisive comments to himself. He had no words for her, not knowing how to comfort her. He looked away, fidgeting, feeling entirely uncomfortable.

Lizzie shook her head, a slight smile on her face. "Don't worry, I don't expect you to comfort me." she whispered. He turned his gaze to hers.

"I... I don't know how to..."

"I know, Loki." she replied. "Do you want to hear the rest, or are you done now that your questions have been answered about my nightmares and scar?"

"No." Loki said quickly, then paused. "I want to hear it all, Elizabeth."

She nodded, her eyes training on his ring on his finger which rested on her scar, and she started tracing it with her other hand. "As I was saying, when my power finally came to me via the serum, Alex decided that it was time to induct me into his army. I wouldn't do it, I wouldn't join him. I told him that I'd rather die... but then he brought Bella in. He threatened to kill her like he had done with my father, with Hank. I hadn't seen Bella in five years, as her power was strong enough that he didn't view her as needing a new one, and the first time I see her, he threatens her death."

"That's why I said that I didn't blame you for your choice, as I did the same. He threatened Bella, and I complied, allowing him to use the power as he wished. Always he held Bella over my head, as she was dispensable to him, and forced me to do his dirty work. And I did... for ten years."
"Wait..." Loki stopped her. "How is that possible? You're only twenty-one – ten years would have made you twenty-two. Are you older than you say?"

A rueful smile crossed her features as she shook her head. "I told you I could go back in time, and so I did. After everything, I went back to change my past. Every little thing you do affects what happens in the future. Had I never been at Xavier's school, Alex never would have found out that I was still alive after the fire. He thought I had died, and that was what would have kept me safe, and has since I went back and changed things. I'm living in a different timeline, so to speak, at the same time. Bella controls space, together we could destroy the universe with a thought." she said. "But for ten years, in the other timeline, I did Alex's bidding. I was known as Anesthesia due to my paralysis' abilities, and my rather placid demeanor. I was the coldest member of the guard, as we were called, and Alex's right hand. I was a killer, and had been taught how to manipulate my new power to reach into a person's mind and stop their hearts. After a time, I lost my conscience, although all I cared for was keeping Bella alive, everyone else was worthless."

Loki was speechless. Never did he think she had been anything like the picture she painted. "How?" he asked without even thinking. "You are so... warm. Nothing like what you're saying."

She snorted. "I was very different then." she said. "I knew that Alex would use anything he could against me, and so I closed myself off from everyone except Bella for years. When I was twenty, I made a horrible mistake, and yet I made the most brilliant mistake of my life. It was what set me free, so to speak. I let someone in, a young guard who had gone through the same pain as I had, who understood my coldness and looked past it. His name was Timothy, his ability was empathy originally, due to the serum he could copy others powers and use them against anyone. It actually became a bit too much for him, as he had the same problem as I and couldn't control them. We were two peas in a pod, frankly... and one night on a mission to try to catch a mutant who had turned on us, we wound up comforting each other, which turned into something else."

Loki contained himself from growling in jealousy from her speaking of some other man – and yet, somewhat appreciative, as she said that he had freed her from her state in some manner. Yet, he still felt the gnawing jealousy bite through him – wait... jealousy?

"Loki?" her voice interrupted his musings. He nodded. "Did you hear any of that?"

"Yes, I did. You went on a mission and wound up in his bed." Loki snapped.

Lizzie raised an eyebrow at his tone, but said nothing about it. That was twice, in her mind, even though he knew nothing about Timothy he was treating him in the same manner that he had Fandral. "Well you seemed to miss the part where I said that I found out that I was pregnant." she said with a smile. He hid his surprise well, not expecting that little piece of information. "I said that Tim had changed it all for me, and that's what I meant. He gave me something which I needed, a little life growing in me which caused me to question my following Alex."

"Where is the child now?" Loki asked.

She closed her eyes, sighing. "Dead." she answered. "Saoirse, as I had started calling her, was stillborn, probably due to everything that had happened to me and Tim – maybe even due to my paralyzing power. After her death, and subsequently Tim's – as Alex found out about our affair – my coldness melted, so to speak. The final turning point had to do with Logan, actually."

"So you do know each other from before!" Loki exclaimed. "I knew you did! You looked at each other with such familiarity, there was no doubt, but he wouldn't confirm or deny it."

Elizabeth nodded. "Yes, we knew each other. It was about a year after Saoirse died that I met up
Lizzie stood outside the old dilapidated house, her eyes scanning everything she could see. From what she had heard, Wolverine was their target, and his crime was that he had kept a group of children that Alex had picked out from being brought to headquarters. However, she found the whole thing to be revolting, and half-wished she had been sent somewhere else. Alex was punishing her, and had been ever since he found out about Tim... she only thanked Fate that he had never found out about Saoirse.

"Elizabeth?" she heard Bella call her name. "We're ready to go in, are you?"
Lizzie sighed, nodding. "Lets get this over with." she snapped, unbuttoning her trenchcoat. "I am eager to get back to Berlin."

Bella moved closer. "I know this is hard for you, but please try to keep your emotions out of it this time. Alex is already suspicious of your sudden capacity to care about anyone but me." she warned, pushing a reddish-blonde lock out of her face.

A glare was what she earned in return, Elizabeth marching toward the house with the flair of her coat swirling behind her dramatically. She followed. Lizzie walked through the door, ignoring the way her chest constricted at the thought of what was about to occur. Entering the room which she assumed was the dining room, she looked around. It was empty, save a rug, dust covering every surface to give the impression that no one had been there for years.

"We searched the house," One of the minions informed her from behind. "No one is here. He must have known about it and moved them somewhere else."

Lizzie nodded, looking around the room. Something was off, she could sense it, and taking a careful survey she knew exactly what it was: the rug in the middle of the floor had recently been moved, and the dust had not been covered as the rest had. "You're probably right." she said, failing to mention her observation. "Search the woods to see if you can find Wolverine."

The sound of shouts caught their attention and she sent the others to find out what it was. "Aren't you coming?" Bella inquired.

"No." she answered simply, giving her a look which had her scampering off to help their companions. Instantly, Lizzie slowed time to a snail's pace, and reaching for the rug, she threw it back, prying at the floorboards until one gave and came up in her hands. Underneath, three pairs of eyes peered up at her, the fear obvious in each of them. "Shh..." she motioned, looking toward the door.

"Who are you?" the eldest child asked, a young boy of apparently ten.

"A friend. You need to stay quiet, I will try to come for you later." she said, placing the board back where it was and throwing the rug back on it.

"Lizzie?" Bella's voice could be heard in the hall. "Why did you slow time?"

"I thought you may need it." Lizzie answered simply. "Did you guys stop whatever was going on?"

Bella nodded, giving her twin an odd glance. "It was Wolverine, we've subdued him and are going to take him back to Berlin."

"Fabulous." Lizzie replied simply, moving past her sister. "Then our work is done here." When she
reached the outside, Wolverine knelt in the front yard, his eyes sparking in hatred and anger - then he saw her. Recognition filled his gaze, along with a sorrow.

"Elizabeth Donovan." he masked his surprise in his wrath. "Look who you're working for. You are aware he killed your mother?"

Lizzie walked up to him, smirking. "Nice to see you too, Wolverine." she replied, moving over to her vehicle and getting in. Why did he have to be there?

"We took Logan back to Berlin, locked him up in one of the cells." Lizzie said. "Tried to get information out of him, that I already knew. However, when Alex wasn't looking I plotted to get him out of his cell and back to the children. I succeeded, but in the process I got Bella killed. I learned that day what happens when you kill a twin of a mutant – the other inherits their powers. It was quite the debacle, but eventually we made our way back to Xavier's School; it was decided then that I should go back, and save myself and everyone else from what happened. So I did. I went back to the day that it was decided where Bella and I would stay, and I informed Professor X of what had happened. They changed their decision, and we stayed with seamnhathair. Logan was chosen to be our protector, and whenever Alex was found to be in the area, he moved us somewhere else. To assist, however, Professor X, in an effort to help us, locked away all of our memories of our past."

Loki's brow furrowed. "Then how do you remember, if everything was locked away?" he inquired.

Lizzie gave him a small smile. "A year ago, when you invaded New York." she started, watching as his eyes darkened. "In the invasion, I was buried under concrete with a concussion. During my time unconscious, the mechanism which Professor X had put in place in my mind melted away... I remembered everything during my time in a coma. When I woke, I remembered it all. Every last agonizing detail." she finished, sighing. "Well, you answered my questions, I answered yours... I suppose your curiosity is satisfied now, and."

"And I will tell you one thing, Elizabeth." Loki interrupted, wondering why the next words were going to come out of his mouth. "I am sorry."

Her head tilted in confusion. "Why are you sorry?"

"I was wrong, Elizabeth; I never knew your past." he said. "And I am apologizing for my behavior because of it."

"Loki, I-"

"Just accept the apology and move on, Elizabeth." Loki said. "Not everything I say must be examined."

She gave him a slight smile. "Thank you." she said quietly. "For listening. No one but my family really knows of my past. Its nice to have someone else know what makes me the way I am. Someone that I don't really have to keep secrets from because everything has already been revealed. Only Logan knows of my past, here – just... don't tell anyone." She begged.

Loki leaned over, his fingers brushing away the remnants of her tears from her cheeks. "I promise you, Elizabeth Donovan of Midgard, that your past is safe with me."

Elizabeth smiled once more, taking his face in her hands, and kissing his cheek, her lips lingering on his cheek for a second more than she should have. "Thank you, Loki." she whispered, moving away from him and looking at the clock. Loki sat stock still beside her, completely stunned by her action, and his inaction about it. She had dared to kiss him, and yet he found himself elated by that fact. He
had never felt so connected to a being before, except Frigga of course, but in that moment, he decided that no harm would ever befall her again.

"Elizabeth, I-" he began, but upon looking at her, he stopped. She had fallen asleep in the armchair. He watched her for a moment, noticing the tenseness with which she slept... it was as if she was prepared at a moment to have to fight something. No doubt from her past. Gently, he picked her up – careful not to wake her – and took her to her own bedroom. She seemed to relax in his arms, the stress which her body had before simply melting away as he held her close. By the time he actually laid her down in her own bed, she looked peaceful - innocent, even. The dim light from her lamp beside the bed shone on the scar, and Loki couldn't help but look at it once more.

Now that he knew her past, he couldn't help but plan the very slow, very painful death of Alex Shaw. The man had done something which Loki could not see as ever being acceptable in anyone's books: he had taken the innocence out of Elizabeth Donovan by exposing her to things she never should have seen. Death being the main, with torture being second. For a man, someone with the maturity to understand why things were being done to him, it was one thing. But a child? A little girl who had done nothing but live? Alex Shaw deserved a fate worse than death, and Loki hoped that he would be the one to give it to him.

Elizabeth mumbled in her sleep, and Loki's mind traveled in a different direction. She had spoken of one nightmare, but surely there was more... did she experience her past as she slept every night like he did? Did she go through the never-ending tortures during her slumber, waking to find a new day, but knowing that when she slept once more she would be forced to endure it again? Her breathing quickened, and Loki quickly saw the signs of an oncoming nightmare - "Sleep, Elizabeth, you are safe tonight." he whispered. His words seemed to calm her, and once more she seemed to relax.

Eventually, Loki returned to his own room, and tried to get some sleep. For a few hours, however, sleep evaded him as he couldn't help but wish that he had been a little more responsive to her kiss – but consequentially brushed that off due to the fact that he believed that he was too tired to think rationally, and fell asleep.
Clint Talks and New Developments

Chapter Summary

Clint and Lizzie talk about her newly-formed friendship with Loki, the Avengers women make bets about when the pair will get together, Odin and Frigga have a conversation, and a strange woman is keeping tabs.

The next day, Clint decided that he needed to apologize to Lizzie for his behavior toward her a week before. They had hardly spoken since their little interlude in the kitchen, and it was beginning to pain him. Not in the year that he knew her had she been so distant, and his worry was increasing. Now, of course, he had another worry to concern himself over – Fandral. He had noticed that the blonde Asgardian had taken a liking to Lizzie, and refused to leave her be the day before, forcing him to send Natasha to intervene at one point... and he hadn't heard the end of it. Apparently now, Natasha was taking the brunt of his attentions, now that Lizzie had disappeared for the entire next 24 hours, and it was driving her a little mad.

So, Clint had gone to Fandral, warning him not to go near either one of the women. Fandral had nodded, asking why he had taken claim to two women, and telling him that he would only leave one alone as long as that one was Clint's beloved. This, of course, had not settled well with the archer, as he was now in a slight problem: did he leave Lizzie to fend for herself, or Natasha. Naturally, he didn't care to have either pursued by Thor's friend, but he could understand Fandral's question.

However, at this point, he needed to find Lizzie – the only thing which stood in his way was that Lizzie couldn't be found. He had asked Jarvis a few minutes before, and had been directed toward the roof of Stark Tower. So, he was in the elevator which would take him there, all the while rehearsing what he was going to say.

When he finally reached his destination, he was surprised to hear Lizzie laughing. Putting his assassin skills to good use, he quietly kept to the shadows so as to see just who Lizzie was with. Much to his irritation, the green tunic and black hair gave him his answer: Loki. She had gone to see Loki the night before, and he hadn't seen her since. Just what was going on between them?
"I would have loved to see Thor dressed as a bride!" Lizzie exclaimed. "Though you dressed as a woman would have been interesting too."

"Oh, so my brother would have been more interesting than me?" Loki countered, amusement in his tone.

Lizzie giggled. "Yes, actually. I can see you doing it, and easily getting away with it, your charm and suave assisting you. But Thor?" Clint watched as she laughed again. "Big, bulky, deep-voiced, I'm-going-to-knock-you-into-the-wall-with-my-hammer, Thor? No."

"Well he didn't have Mjolnir in that moment, you see." Loki replied.

"Yes, but still... he's huge! That had to be some dress." she exclaimed, and this time Loki chuckled slightly. Suddenly he froze, his hand resting on her shoulder as her laughter quickly ceased. "What is it?" she asked him quietly.

Slowly, Loki turned toward Clint's hiding spot, his tall frame shielding Lizzie's smaller one. "I know
you're there. Come into the light." he said, and Clint slowly walked toward them. Loki relaxed slightly, knowing that Clint would not harm Lizzie. "Ah, it's you Barton."

"Yes, it's me." Clint replied, scrutinizing Loki's protective stance. "I was looking for Lizzie."

"Looks like you found her." Lizzie teased, peeking out from behind Loki. "Hey Clint!"

"We were wondering what happened to you last night. Jarvis assured us you were safe, but he said you had disabled any cameras from your location." Clint told her, wondering when it was that Loki and she had become such good friends.

"Ah, yes, sorry about that." she apologized, moving from behind Loki to stand in front of Clint. "Loki and I were having a little conversation, I wanted some privacy."

Her explanation didn't settle well with Clint, and he immediately retorted without really thinking. "Privacy? What could you possibly be speaking about privately with... him?"

Lizzie's eyebrow rose. "Things which are none of your business." she replied, her tone a degree chilly.

Clint looked at Loki, noticing a tick in the Asgardian's jaw. "What have you done to her?" he hissed.

"What have I done?" Loki snapped back. "I have done nothing, Barton. If anything I would question what she has done to me."

"Don't give me that crap, you've done something. She wasn't so readily accepting of you before!" Clint exclaimed.

"Shut up, Clint!" Lizzie shouted before Loki could retort. "What did you come up here for? Say it and go."

That seemed to catch Clint's attention, and he stopped. He wasn't happy with Loki's being there, but he was more discontent with Lizzie's displeasure. He had realized during his time not talking to her that he cared about her, and although he didn't comprehend the fullness of his attachment, he didn't want to distance her again – he had missed her too much. "I..." he trailed off. "I came to apologize, Lizzie."

Her eyes softened, and she looked back at Loki. "Can you leave us for a few minutes?" she asked him, Loki opened his mouth to protest – "Please?" – he quickly shut his mouth again, cursing his inability to reject her request. Glaring at Clint for a few seconds, he realized that he could not have her to himself, and stomped away from the pair of them to the elevator. When the doors closed, she leaned against the short wall which surrounded the roof. "Alright, we're alone. What do you want to apologize for?"

Clint joined her on the wall, wetting his lips as he brought to his mind what he had rehearsed in the elevator. "Lizzie..." he began. "The last time you and I spoke, I'm afraid I said some things which caused for there to be a rift between us. Although I see it did nothing for my troubles, you are more in his company than you were before. You were laughing with him Lizzie, don't you see that he's only trying to use you?"

Lizzie sighed. "Clint, I know I can't expect you to understand, but I need you to try." she said. "There are things which you don't know about Loki, and there are things which you don't know about me. You care about me, I know that, I care about you as well – but you need to understand that I care about Loki too. Don't interrupt, let me finish." she cut him off before he could begin to interrupt. "Loki knows more about me than you do, and I know more about him. We have things in
common, Clint, which you and I don't have in common. Things which you may conceptualize, but not necessarily grasp. I know what you're talking about, I know he tried to use me at one point to satisfy his curiosity, but he's not like that now. We've come to an understanding since the Chitauri incident, and I believe that Loki cares somewhat – in his own way."

"Loki is a villain, Lizzie. He doesn't know how to care." Clint interjected.

"You don't know that, Clint." she retorted. "Loki has gone through some crap in the past, most of it within the last two or three years. I know why he attacked us, which I may add you don't, and I don't blame him. He's more complex than you know, and there's more than just the cold, indifferent mask that he gives. Didn't you notice that he has shown that he cares about me in some regard? Shall I remind you about the day that Johnny burned me?"

"I am not sure that he didn't have plans for you then." Clint replied. "He obviously had his reasons for taking care of you at that moment, and I wouldn't be surprised if he did it just to gain your trust."

Lizzie looked out on New York as she said: "You didn't look in his eyes, Clint." She turned back to him. "You didn't hear what he's told me of his time in the Chitauri dungeons."

"Then tell me why he suddenly earned your respect and your defense." Clint said. "Help me understand."

"I can't tell you anything Clint, I promised him I wouldn't." she responded. "But know that there is more to Loki than meets the eye, and I've seen it."

Clint shook his head. "He's going to hurt you, Lizzie." he groaned.

"I don't think he will." she countered, pulling out her locked from under her shirt. "This was given to me by Frigga, Thor's mom. She said that she's seen something in our future which has caused her to send this to me... and Loki to protect me."

"He'd sooner kill you. Have you forgotten-"

"No, I have not." she interrupted. "You'll see, Clint. Not yet, but you'll see. All of you will. Thor was right, Loki isn't all bastard... there's a heart in there somewhere. A heart which has been obscured by what he's been through. Maybe one day you'll know, but I think that because of my own past that I understand him more easily than anyone else."

"You keep mentioning your past," Clint pointed out. "What makes your past so similar to his?" Lizzie paused, considering telling Clint what he wanted to know. "One day I'll tell you... but not now. I'm not ready." she told him. "Just know that there is more to me that meets the eye as well, and if you knew me from my past, you wouldn't like me either."

Clint's brow furrowed. What could she possibly be talking about? "And what do I do in the meantime, with you and all your secrets, and your newfound affection for the bastard who put me in his little mind control?" he asked her.

She smiled, taking a step closer. "Let it be?" she suggested. "Give Loki a chance, or at least let me give him a chance?"

"I care about you Lizzie... I can't watch you become friends with that snake." Clint argued.

"It's not up to you, Clint." she replied. "Watch, if you like. Look out for me, if you feel that's what you need to do. But you can't tell me what to do, and you can't interfere. I have sided with Thor, this once, and I'm willing to give the snake a second chance."
"He'll bite you." Clint countered.

"Then I have said before: it'll be on my head alone, and you can come to me and say 'I told you so'." she replied cheekily.

"I don't want you to get hurt." he said, leaning slightly forward. "He doesn't deserve you."

Lizzie shook her head, walking away from Clint. "Don't puff me up, Clint." she said, walking toward the elevator. "All I ask is that you don't try to come between Loki and I. Let the chips fall where they may, and see where they end up. You might be surprised."

Clint sighed. "I suppose its no use arguing with you. You're going to do what you want." he said, heading for the elevator himself, pressing the button.

"Clint," Lizzie said, her hand resting on his shoulder. "Don't let this come between us. You're my friend, a good friend, whom I owe my life to, and care about. I've missed you, and I don't like that you and I haven't been on good terms. Please, Clint..." she trailed off, allowing him to consider her words.

Finally he smiled, closing the distance between them to give her a hug. "I've missed you too." he whispered in her ear before pulling away. "I'll try not to be a bother, but don't expect me to like this whole arrangement."

"I won't." Lizzie replied, smiling. The elevator doors opened, and Loki was revealed to be on the other side. "Were you in the elevator the whole time?"

"No." Loki said quickly. "I was on my way back to see if you two were done yet."

Clint stepped forward with Lizzie, the air getting a little tense. "We're done for now, Loki." Clint said, pressing the floor he wanted. "I know that I've warned you before: if you ever hurt her, I will kill you in the most painful way I can imagine."

"Clint..." Lizzie's soft voice warned from his left.

"Your threat has been noted." Loki replied, fighting the urge to cross the elevator and make Lizzie be next to him instead.

Clint nodded, looking over at Lizzie. "You up for a game of Clue tonight, down at our wing? Tasha and I were planning on playing it, and were wondering if you might grace us with your presence."

Lizzie laughed. "Since when did you play Clue? I thought you thought that game was a waste of time."

"Since you had a fondness for it." Clint replied. "And Tasha has been trying to get me to apologize, and said something about this being the best way to apologize."

"Forget the game." Lizzie said. "But I'll watch something with you guys tonight... but not James Bond, Clint."


Lizzie laughed as the doors opened to their destination. "I'll talk to you later." she said, leaving with Loki.

Clint stayed in the elevator, eventually making it to the floor he had selected, and making his way down to the wing of the tower that he and Natasha were sharing.

"What's got you smiling like an idiot?" the red-headed assassin asked first thing.
"I apologized to Lizzie, and she's coming down here tonight to watch something," Clint replied. Natasha nodded, a smile on her own face masking the pain she felt in her heart at the fact that Clint had no clue that she cared for him.

Over the next few days the residents of Avengers' Tower became keenly aware that something had happened between Lizzie and Loki which made them more agreeable to one another than before. Loki spent more time in Lizzie's presence, staying around her in a protective manner – especially around Fandral – and holding more conversations with her than he ever had in the past. He had even gone out of his way to start to get to know Kathleen.

By the evening of the first day after the shared pasts, he had gone to Logan, telling him about what he knew, and how he wanted to help the mutant to keep Lizzie safe. Alex was still out there, and if he got a hold of either Lizzie or Kathleen he would wreak havoc with their lives. Logan agreed, with a little pushing from Lizzie, and shook hands with the Asgardian Prince.

As it was, Logan was gone from the Tower more frequently than before, going out to 'check on Alex' so he said... though Lizzie knew inwardly that it was something else. Had she known that the reality of the situation was that he was going to see Nell on a regular basis, asking her if she knew anything more about Alex's location, or incoming Chitauri, or if she wanted to go out for coffee again – she might have teased him. As it was, she didn't know.

Clint had even been included in their protective agreement, and although he wasn't too happy with Loki's involvement, he recognized that something had happened between him and Lizzie which caused for her to trust him. He reluctantly agreed to the arrangement, keeping an eye on Loki at all times regardless. He would never trust him, he told Natasha when they were alone, but at least he could use the help.

This newfound protectiveness caught the attention of the Avengers' women, and soon they were all hedging bets on when Loki and Lizzie would no longer be 'just friends', and move into the realm of romance. Pepper bet a couple of week; Jane, two months; Darcy bet that it may take a while, and 'Some other large thing to happen, causing friction and a final push' yet, only gave them a month; Emma was kept out of the bet, as there was also another pool going on when she and the Captain would finally realize their own feelings; Justine sided with Pepper and bet on a few weeks. Kathleen somehow wound up betting as well, and with a smug grin on her face placed her bet with Darcy; while Natasha – although quite put out by Clint's favoritism toward the brunette girl, and vowing up and down that she didn't believe in romance – secretly placed her bet along with the eccentric pair.

As Loki learned more, he found himself becoming more and more curious as to how Lizzie coped with the information on the terrors of her past. His fascination with her grew, and their discussions began to spread to more topics than their usual 'You're a mess, and I don't like you'. The library became their haven, and they were often found talking about the more happy aspects of their childhoods, and conversing on their opinions. When conversations about what to do about Thanos and Alex came up, Loki made sure that Elizabeth was present – staying by her, and offering her whatever strength that he could. They had an understanding, through their shared bond of pain, that they would be there for one another.

Lizzie was grateful for his new attention, enjoying her time with him more now than she ever had in the past. Part of his mask had been stripped away, and underneath she found a man who enjoyed the arts, and preferred to speak of her rather than himself. Though she often was able to get him to speak of those small things of his childhood that he looked on with a happy reminiscence. A tenderness was what she found, which she never would have thought him to have – although she saw it only a sliver of the time – and despite his prior claims, certain people who he pretended to hate, he actually
still cared for. Frigga was one person who he spoke of without any sign of disdain, and oftentimes she heard him speak with such reverence that she wished she could meet the queen. The few times she got him to talk about Thor, she managed to get into his mind that perhaps his brother hadn't been out for his destruction as he believed... and had simply been naïve to the favoritism shown by Odin. He listened to her with a grain of salt, and eventually conceded that she may be right.

Yet, for Odin she saw no love from Loki, nor did she try to persuade him otherwise. She knew not what Odin was like, but wasn't entirely sure she agreed with his parenting skills... and vaguely wondered if Kathleen would have anything to say the Allfather about his obvious favoritism toward Thor – as she had never shown favoritism toward the twins in her life. Loki found a confidant in her, a friend with whom he could converse without worrying about the consequences of her perhaps sharing her information with anyone else. After all, she disabled the cameras quite frequently after that first day, and left them alone in total privacy.

All this, Loki considered, and wondered when his original plans of using her for information skewed into actual care – well, as much as he thought he could care for a creature lower than himself. Yet, the gnawing jealousy was still within him whenever she spoke to anyone else, a selfish desire to snatch her away to the library overwhelming at times. When such thoughts came into his mind, he looked down at the ring his mother had sent, and let his mind wander to exactly what it was she had seen which would cause her to send it to him.

In Asgard, Odin leaned heavily against Gungnir, the weight of the news of the oncoming storm already beginning to cause uproar in Asgard. They blamed Loki, demanding answers of why Odin had allowed the Trickster to live when he obviously had brought this upon their heads. For this, Odin had no answer, and simply shut his doors to the complaints of the people. He could not deal with them now, not with the Mad Titan closing ever in – as Heimdall reported – threatening the very lives he had sworn to protect. He was old. Too old, perhaps, to deal with this onslaught which would bring death and destruction to his realm. If only Thor had taken the crown, if only Loki hadn't tried to steal it... perhaps he would not be subjected to such a conundrum.

"You are tired." Frigga's voice echoed from the shadows, her figure coming closer to him until she reached the throne. "You must rest, Odin, or you will tire yourself too much."

"War is approaching, Frigga, I cannot rest now." Odin replied.

"You're no good to anyone if you're in Odinsleep." Frigga argued. "The interruption of your last bout left you weakened, if you allow yourself to continue in this manner, you will weaken still. I beg you, my king, please rest."

Odin placed his hand on her face, allowing himself a rueful smile. "Shall I rest when Thanos cannot? Thor and Loki started this, but like the boys I raised they have left me to finish – but I brought this upon myself, I know. Had I been more careful, paid more attention, Loki would have never tried to overtake Midgard. He would be here with us, he would be the boy we loved. A Prince of Asgard who still did his tricks, and caused his trouble – but he would not be a convict in a realm where he didn't belong, stripped of his power with no hope of recovery." He sighed, his single eye roving the room.

"There may yet be hope for Loki." Frigga confessed, her hand taking his.

"What hope?" Odin replied. "What have you seen?"

Frigga shook her head. "You know more than any I cannot tell you the particulars, lest my power to foresee be taken from me – but I can only tell you that Loki will be returned to us soon." she replied.
"It was a lack of love which distanced him from us, a feeling of abandonment." He looked at her, tears beginning to form in his eye. "But it is love which will bring him back to us, restore him to being a Prince of Asgard. Already he has changed, Heimdall told me today that he is becoming much closer to the mortal Elizabeth Donovan; he is protective of her, and she is beginning to care for him in turn."

"You leave your hope in the hands of a mortal?" Odin inquired. "Is it possible that some mortal could bring Loki back from the brink when his own family could not?"

"She loves him, Odin." Frigga replied. "It is love which Loki needs and craves, she will give him that. Their pasts are quite similar, and their futures are intertwined. He will care for her more than he has ever, or will ever, care for any of us."

Odin watched his wife, the love in her eyes shining out through the cerulean orbs. She liked the girl, that much he could tell. "What did you send with Thor for the girl?" he asked, knowing that his wife's natural desire to protect would by instinct find a way to help the girl.

Frigga smiled. "Something which will defend her in any manner if she is in danger, and send for help..."

"From Loki." Odin finished. "But he is unable to assist in any manner as his powers are no longer within him, he is as defenseless as any Aesir without the ability to use magic."

She looked down, kneeling beside him. "Forgive me, my king, for what I have done and will inform you of now." she said.

Odin's brow furrowed. "Why would you need my forgiveness?"

"I reinstated his power – before you object, allow me to finish – I placed his power within the locket which I sent to Elizabeth Donovan." Frigga said. "When she is in danger his powers will return to him for as long as he needs to defend her. When she is safe, they will leave him once again and go back to the locket until My Lord sees it fit to restore him completely."

A smile worked its way across Odin's lips, and he chuckled. "You disobeyed my orders in such a way that I cannot be angry," he said. "You must have seen something rather destructive to this, Elizabeth Donovan which would lead you to such an action of love."

Frigga's eyes returned to his gaze. "I have," she replied, a sad look passing over her brow. "I can only hope that they will survive the storm ahead."

"Is it possible that they will not?" Odin inquired.

Eyelids closed over the blue eyes, a tear seeping out of the corner. "It is possible, my lord." she replied, her eyes once more opening. "But if he loses her, we will never get him back."

Odin nodded solemnly. "Then we will have to make sure he never does." he said, drawing his wife to his chest and holding her. Not a king comforting a queen over a lost prince – but a man comforting his wife over their son.

Across Asgard, a shadowy figure, cloaked in a cape of ever-night, stood on the mountains of the realm, unmoving as the stones they stood on. Behind them, a chasm lay – but no ordinary chasm was it. It was a portal between realms, between Jotunheim and Asgard to be precise. A commotion could be heard in the cave, and the figure outside turned, moving inside with ease. A light suddenly shone in their hand, illuminating the darkness and the figures within.
"You're late." the initial figure replied, their voice having the dulcet tones of a woman.

"Our master had a bit of trouble with the Jotuns," a Chitauri answered her. "They weren't too happy being used as transportation from the Void."

The woman chuckled. "Sounds familiar." she replied. "What took you so long at any rate? Jotunheim isn't exactly hard to navigate."

"The Jotun prince caught a small group a few days past and has since set guards about the realm." the Chitauri growled. "But we are not here to discuss that, Enchantress."

Amora flicked her hand, sending the Chitauri leader into the cave wall, holding him there. "Do not address me so flippantly, thrall. I am your leader here, and will ask what I will and demand answers." With another flick she released him from the wall and he fell with a cry. The Chitauri around them backed themselves away from the Enchantress, looking with fear at the blonde Asgardian traitor. "I hope I will not need to repeat that particular performance."

The Chitauri shook his head.

"Then we shall continue on with changing you all into Aesir." she said nonchalantly, a green glow filling the cave and surrounding the Chitauri. Within moments, there were twenty good-looking Asgardian men in place of the Chitauri warriors; the main Chitauri walked up to her.

"We were told to wait until the Master was ready to attack, but what precisely have you decided that we shall do until then?" he asked, his now-blue eyes looking out at the cave entrance.

"Follow me." Amora replied, pulling her hood back on and lead the way out.

Nell woke from her slumber, breathing heavily as her mind recalled the images that she had seen. A portal in Jotunheim had opened to a group of Chitauri, and had been lead into Asgard by Amora the Enchantress... she could sense it as the doors of the portal closed. Swearing loudly, she left her bed, knowing she would find no more sleep that night. Asgard had to be warned, but just how she would do so she wasn't sure. She wasn't ready to reveal her true identity to anyone, especially to Thor Odinson – but she would have to tell someone what had happened, and word would have to get there without knowledge of where it came from.

Reaching for her cellphone, she quickly dialed the one person she knew she could, turning on a few lights and getting dressed as she did so.

"Hello?" the groggy voice of James Howlett coming over the line.

"James, I need you to come over immediately." Nell replied quickly.

"What happened?" the change in Logan's voice was obvious, he was awake and already getting dressed.

"I have information which is vital to the Realm Eternal, which I'm going to have to ask you to pass on to Mr. Thunder. It concerns a mutual friend and her friends, and their friend's realm." Nell replied. "It must be passed on for the good of all."

Logan growled. "I hate when you speak in riddles."

"Our friend Shaw is not the only one." she replied plainer.
"What are you talking about?"

"Will you simply trust me for once and come down here?"

"Can't you do it over the phone?" he asked, irritation coloring his voice.

Nell growled. "No, I can't. I have no idea who is listening to my phone calls. As you know, I am being monitored. Someone figured out that I tipped you off the day that Elizabeth was attacked – so if you would please just come over, I'll tell you everything when you get here."

There was a pause, "I'm on my way." and he hung up.

Nell huffed, tossing the phone on the bed. "Irritating mortal."

In a small apartment above a bakery in Brooklyn, in a dimly lit apartment, a dark-haired woman stopped the playback on a recording device, rewinding it and hitting play.

"I have information which is vital to the Realm Eternal, which I'm going to have to ask you to pass on." Fast forward. Play. "It concerns a mutual friend and her friends..." the tape stopped, and the woman fast forwarded, hitting play again. "Shaw is not the only one..." Stop. Fast forward. Play. "Elizabeth." Stop. Rewind. Play. "Elizabeth." Repeat. "Elizabeth."

The woman stopped the voice, and put the recorder down on the desk, leaning over it with her hair obscuring her face. Turning off the light, she got up and left the apartment, leaving the recorder where it lay.
Loki and Lizzie spar while the Avengers are kept busy by a pissed off Nick Fury. The Avengers women watch via closed circuit as they do so, and Loki finally kisses Lizzie. I know. Amazing right? Never thought he’d get around to it either... however, miracles do happen.

Avengers Tower was in chaos, the new knowledge of Chitauri infiltrating Asgard causing quite a ruckus with all the Asgardians present. Logan would not tell anyone where he got his information, but it was obvious to anyone that he was convinced that it had truly happened. Tony was happy for once that Pepper had taken Jane, Emma, Darcy and Justine out for the day as each person reacted.

Thor raged, a storm quickly forming outside to match his mood at the news. Loki watched him with interest as he stomped around, worry etched on his features about his realm, demanding answers on how Logan found this out – but the Mutant would not answer, and simply left the tower to inform Professor Xavier. The Warriors Three were less obvious in their fury, as their abilities were restricted to their immediate surroundings; still, their anger was there, and they were beginning to demand Thor take them back to Asgard to help protect it. It was decided then that Thor would go to Asgard to deliver the news to Odin, leaving his friends in case something happened on Midgard.

Natasha called Nick Fury, who had his own tantrum on why he had never been informed that the Chitauri were already infiltrating Midgard. The answer was too obscure for him, and he told her that he wanted to see the Avengers immediately and hung up. After passing on the message, the Avengers and their associates gathered to go to SHIELD.

The change was magnanimous as the apartments went from uproar to absolute silence. Loki sat there, pondering the news on his own, and knowing there was nothing he could do while he was trapped here without his powers.

Finally, Lizzie stepped out of the kitchen, looking around dramatically. "Are they gone?" she asked, and Loki turned in her direction, his gaze softening as he saw her looking somewhat skittish.

"For now," he replied, standing up and walking to the window. "They went to go see Fury, apparently they never told him that the Chitauri attacked you a few weeks ago." Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Lizzie come to his side. He turned his head, his eyes roving her neck where once bruises marred it. There were no bruises now, but Loki couldn't help but worry about her. Now there was no safe for her to go if something happened in New York. "How have your nightmares been?" he asked, trying to change the subject.

She smiled broadly. "Fabulous. I haven't had one since... well, since I told you all my troubles." She laughed, her eyes sparkling as she looked up at him. "So a week... and a half? It's a record."

"How long have you had your nightmares?" Loki inquired, wondering why he had never thought of it before.

"Well my parents death was since I was four... the rest cropped up last year after the invasion." she answered, he nodded and looked out the window. Silence followed for a few minutes as they simply
observed the outside..."Are you worried?" she asked him suddenly. "About Asgard?"

Loki looked out the window. "Why should I be worried?" he replied flippantly, placing his hands behind his back.

"You know you have a tell when you lie." she muttered.

"What do you mean?" he inquired, looking back at her, his brow furrowed in confusion.

"You answer questions with questions." she answered him, sipping on her drink. "You have no reason to hide your thoughts from me." she said, trying to get him to talk.

He smiled every-so-slightly, then sobered as he looked out the window again. Nothing was said for a few moments, then Loki suddenly broke the silence. "I am... slightly concerned over the development in Asgard." he said quietly. "If Amora is bringing them into Asgard as Shaw is here, then we could have a definite problem."

"The problem of being worried about hitting your own troops." she added. "If you don't know what the fake ones look like, and they look just like your allies, then you would be killing your friends thinking that they're your enemies."

"Precisely." Loki replied. "He's looking to create confusion... it doesn't matter to him how many Chitauri die, as they are little more than slaves to him. But if he can get anyone to attack their own thinking they are Chitauri, then he won't have to battle at all. Everyone else will do his battling for him, thinking they're battling against him."

Lizzie nodded, looking out the window. "There's got to be a way to stop them from getting in." she said softly.

Loki laughed mirthlessly. "I could have done it." he said ruefully. "With my knowledge of portals, walking between the worlds, it wouldn't have been hard to close a few."

"You can't though." Lizzie said. "Your power is."

"Held by Odin Allfather at present – yes I know, Elizabeth." he snapped.

"Can I ask you something?" Lizzie inquired.

"You just did." he replied snarkily, a smirk firmly planted on his face.

Lizzie rolled her eyes, shaking her head at his antics before continuing on with her question. "Why would Odin take your power from you and then send you down here with nothing to defend yourself?"

Loki's eyes hardened at the mention of the Allfather. "Because he enjoys tormenting me for being something which he despised." he answered. "Were I like other Asgardians, I would not depend on magic to protect myself, as I would be able to do so as Fandral, or Hogun, or Volstagg do. I would not be helpless because I would already have engrained within me a knowledge of fighting."

"Do you not?" she queried.

"Yes, I do." he replied. "But my ability to cause illusions and attack without truly being right in front of the person is what I trained myself for. I never thought I'd be in a position where my power was held from me, and I could only defend myself with a dagger."
Lizzie hummed to herself for a moment. "I understand that." she said. "When I learned how to defend myself I used my abilities in tandem, to a point where I'm not sure I could fight without them."

Loki's eyes snapped to hers. "You know how to defend yourself?" he asked.

"Yes." she replied as if it were the most natural thing in the world. "My paralysis is so haywire that I learned some basic self-defense during my time with Alex. Add that to the fact that I am able to slow time for my opponent... it makes for an interesting fight." She raised an eyebrow at him. "Would you like to see?"

Before Loki could respond, Elizabeth's form disappeared, reappeared behind him, and gave him a push forward. He spun around, surprise written in his eyes. "How did-"

"I slowed time for you," Lizzie replied easily. "Which meant that for you time seemed to go regularly, but because it was slower, I was able to move at a regular speed and get behind you without you really seeing what happened. It's a bit complex to explain, and I'm not sure I explained it right, but the general idea is that I look like I'm moving at super-speed, when really I just slowed you down and moved regularly."

Loki's brows furrowed. "And you have used this to fight before?"

She nodded. "Along with my paralysis – yes. They work quite well, actually. But I can't imagine how I would fight without either one of them." she said, running her fingers through her hair.

She didn't expect Loki to suddenly snatch the glass out of her hand, grabbing her arm and twisting it behind her before he placed the glass down on the table beside them. "Get out of this situation."

"Are you serious?" she asked, moving faster than he thought and twisting her arm out of his grasp before knocking him down with a kick to his legs. An Elizabeth-blur moved around him before she stood in front of him. "Are you okay?"

He looked up at her, a smile stretching his lips before he reached an arm out to grab her ankle and pull her down. She fell with a cry before she became a blur to his eyes, kicking his arm aside, and winding up on his back with her hand on his neck. "Perhaps we should finish this in the training room?"

Lizzie laughed, getting off of him and moving to the elevator. "I thought you'd never ask." she replied, and they entered the elevator. "Why this sudden interest in my self-defense?"

"You brought it up, not I." Loki pointed out.

Lizzie's brow furrowed. "I did?" she asked before Jarvis suddenly played the footage from the main room on the screen at the top of the elevator. "I did." The doors dinged open, and Lizzie walked out first, turning around to see Loki just as his arm swiped at her head. She ducked, grabbing his arm and flipping him over, him landing on the ground. "Don't you think we should wait until we get to the ring before you start attacking me again?"

Loki smiled from below her. "Perhaps we should. Slamming into the floor is something I don't like doing." he replied, getting up and following her to the ring.

"Well then, let's begin." she said, and once he stepped onto the blue pad, they began their spar.
holding Lizzie's arm, his body behind her as he showed her something which would harm someone. He stopped, bending down to retrieve his dagger from underneath his pant leg before he put it in Lizzie's hand and showed her how the move worked with the dagger.

"Why does Loki have a dagger?" Emma asked, turning over to Pepper.

"I'd assume so that he can protect Lizzie." Justine replied. "After all, he's not allowed to have his magic, right?"

"Shh!" Darcy hushed. "We left them alone in the Tower so that they'd get a move-on – so shut up, Justine!"

Instantly, the two cousins silenced, glancing at each other for a moment before returning their attention to the screen. When Lizzie moved as a blur, the result was instantaneous as five voices exclaimed at once.

"Oh my god!"

"How did she do that?"

"Who is she? Flash!"

"What the hell?"

"Holy priceless collection of Etruscan snoods, Batman!"

The last, of course, emitted from Darcy's mouth, who was stared at for a moment before they returned their gaze to the screen just in time as they saw Loki laugh –

"Did he just laugh?"

"Loki laughs?"

"He Who Must Never Laugh."

"Darcy!"

"What?"

"Shut up!" the others shouted at once, and Darcy quietened. Pepper couldn't help but giggle at Darcy's kicked-puppy-face.

"C'mon, guys, this is like watching a soap opera." Emma complained. "They're not going to do anything."

"Never say never." Darcy replied as the waiter returned with their food and set it down before them. "Do you think they're ever going to kiss?" The rest of the table looked at her in supposed disbelief. "What? It's a valid question!"

"Of course they're going to kiss, the question is: when?" Justine replied.

"Hopefully before Ragnarok." Darcy retorted, earning yet another look from her companions. "What?"

Hours later, Loki and Lizzie lay on the boxing ring pad. They had practiced well, and Loki had taught Lizzie a few moves which would assist her in defending herself if the need came. They also
practiced her fighting without her abilities, as Loki was now more sensitive to fighting with a lack. He had gone easy on her, but by the end, she was a panting, sweating mess and simply collapsed on the floor. After a few minutes of convincing, Loki joined her.

"I can't remember the last time I sparred with a guy." Lizzie said abruptly. "It seems ages ago... Tim was the last time I think, I nearly killed him."
"You nearly killed your lover?" Loki queried.

She sighed sadly. "Yeah." she answered. "He'd been winning, and I got a little upset. My power kicked in, and I couldn't stop it. He was unconscious before I actually found the strength to stop it." Loki turned his head to face her, the barely-whispered words causing him to wonder at just how much she feared herself. "I avoided him after that..."

"Why?" Loki asked her.

Her head turned. "Because I couldn't control it around a man I cared about, and it scared me." she said softly. "It scared me because if I couldn't control it around him, then that meant I was exactly what Alex created. He succeeded in creating a soulless monster, who couldn't even control herself around the people she loved."
"You are not a monster, you never were." Loki snapped. "I have seen the way you act, and I would say that that monster failed in making you like him. Andrew – do not look so surprised I know his name, the boy worked very hard to make me use it – he adores you. If you were a monster, I think you would have shown it by now."

"Do you honestly think I don't fear hurting anyone here?" she asked him. "I'm like Bruce! One slip of anger and my control is compromised – I've dropped you on your knees more times than I can count, including the morning in the kitchen when you weren't even trying to hurt me! The power has a mind of it's own, and it hurts those who touch me even when I'm not trying to defend myself." Her voice had risen a few octaves in her frustration.

"I'm sure that you could control it, if you trusted enough. Your power hasn't harmed all of us, and it's not harmed me every time." he said.

"But it could. The last time I saw Tim I paralyzed him when he tried to kiss me..." she trailed off. "It's funny – I didn't remember any of it, but when I was in Middle School I kissed a boy and the power kicked in, his breathing stopped completely and he passed out, he nearly died. I was known as having the 'Kiss of Death' after that."

"I doubt that's true." he replied.

"Well, I haven't kissed anyone since because of it. I suppose you could say it's my one fear. Killing the guy I kiss."

Loki was silent.

"How did we get on this subject?" she continued. However, she did not receive an answer as Loki turned onto his side, his hand coming to the side of Lizzie's face. Her breath caught, her heart beating heavily in her chest as she looked into his eyes. "What – ahem – what are you doing?" she breathed.

"Showing you you're wrong." he said simply, his mouth lowering to her ear. "Trust me, Elizabeth. You won't hurt me."

Her heart beat even faster before he lifted his head once more, his lips ghosting over her own. She froze in shock, and his kisses became a little more insistent. Her eyes slid shut, and she responded,
moving her lips against his as she allowed her arm to come up around his neck, pulling him closer. She vaguely thought how Tim had never kissed her in such a way that made her feel as she felt now; she felt elated, complete, safe. There was always something a bit off with Tim, he had been more comfort – but with Loki it felt so much more, and she felt herself giving herself over to his kiss readily, thoughts of her power completely forgotten.

Loki's hand moved from her face, his arm reaching beneath her back to pull her closer. It was intoxicating – she was intoxicating to him. Her scent in his nostrils, her small body in his arms so perfectly, as if she was made to fit into his arms just so. He could feel her vulnerability, her fear, yet he felt something which was foreign to him, something which puzzled him. Her hand tangled in his hair, and he groaned lightly at the sensation, pulling her closer to him as he flicked his tongue at her bottom lip and deepened the kiss.

She moaned, the sound seemed to reverberate in his brain until he realized what was happening. He reluctantly pulled away, breathing deeply for a moment as he tried to calm himself – to regain his reason for kissing her in the first place. He began the intimacy from a desire to help her, to make her believe she was not the monster she thought herself... but he had not counted on the feelings which the kiss stirred within him, which fogged his mind until all he could think of was her. He opened his eyes, looking down into her dark orbs, and he nearly lost his self-control once more.

As gently as he could, Loki forced himself from her grasp, rolling back to his original place lest he lose himself to her. His instinct was to continue, the feeling of her arms around his neck he now missed as much as the feeling of her in his arms. How had she done this? How had she bewitched him so that, even now, his mind could only think of her?

"Why did you do that?" she asked him, her voice barely above a whisper.

Loki swallowed, he didn't even know the answer to that question, how was he supposed to answer her? "I was showing you you weren't a monster." Was what he said. "That you don't have the 'kiss of death' as you thought."

She turned her head toward him. "Is that the only reason?"

"What other reason would I have?" Loki asked in turn.

Lizzie closed her eyes, facing the ceiling before she once more opened them and sat up. She chuckled. "We're all drowning, but don't say it out loud." she whispered to herself, standing up and leaving ring.

"What?" Loki questioned, sitting up himself. "What is wrong? Forgive me, I should have asked you first, I suppo-"

"Loki," She smiled, but he noticed it did not reach her eyes. "It's nothing. Thank you for trying to help me, I'm sure it must have taken quite a bit out of you to kiss a mortal." she said.

"I did not even consider your mortality." Loki replied with an edge to his tone as he crossed the expanse of the ring and stepped out of it. "I simply wanted to help, to prove to you that you wouldn't hurt me."

She shook her head. "My apologies. I must seem very confusing to you at this moment. I thank you for your help." she replied, walking toward the elevator. "I need a shower, so I'm heading back up to our floor."

Loki followed her, entering the elevator. "Elizabeth... if there is anything I have said, or done I-"
"Loki, please." Lizzie begged. "You were just being you..." she trailed off as the elevator opened and she stepped off, leaving Loki stunned in the elevator.

"WHAT DID SHE JUST DO?" Darcy exclaimed so loud that the tables around them stared.

"Darcy! Quiet!" Jane and Pepper said simultaneously.

"I have a right to be excited. She just had the best kiss of her life – obviously, I mean, did you see the way she was kissing him – and then she just walked away?!" Darcy replied.

"Hold on, my ears are still ringing." Justine teased, touching a hand to her head.

"In all fairness," Pepper interjected. "He did deny that he kissed her for any other reason than to prove to her that she 'wasn't a monster' – she has every right to walk away."

Darcy rolled her eyes. "Did you see his hesitation? He so obviously wanted to keep kissing her." she declared as if it were public knowledge.

"But he didn't." Emma pointed out.

"And he is Loki." Justine added, sipping her iced tea.

"At least he acknowledged the fact that he doesn't think of her in terms of 'mortal' anymore." Jane said.

A chorus of 'True' echoed around the table.

"But did you see that kiss?" Darcy interjected. "God I wish I were her... where's my dashing Asgardian guy to kiss me like that?" Pepper and Emma exchanged a glance. "What?"

"Nothing." they said in unison.

Darcy gave them a look then headed off to get herself another round of pink lemonade.

"Jane, I think you may have a few friends when you go to Asgard." Justine said, elbowing Jane in the ribs.

"What?" Jane asked, a confused look on her face.

"Darcy and Fandral." Emma replied as Pepper turned off her i-pad "Have you seen their interaction over the last few days? I mean Darcy-" Pepper cleared her throat, causing Emma to change her topic. "- is simply jealous of Lizzie."

"Stop talking about me behind my back, you two-faced bitches." Darcy teased.

Justine laughed, patting the brunette on the back. "Don't worry, your guy will come."

Darcy squealed in delight before they all decided to go back to the Tower.

While Lizzie was in the shower, she contemplated what had just happened and the ramifications. She had just kissed Loki, god of mischief – a man who had driven her crazy ever since she met him. Through his annoying antics he drove her to the brink of insanity with his irritatingly pompous manner, his smile, his ego, his protectiveness, his self-centered attitude, his caring... she closed her eyes, sighing once more at her newest thoughts on Loki. It was beginning to be a little bit disturbing just how much she thought of him before the kiss.
That thought on her mind, she got out of the shower.

Sure she thought of him with a painful reminiscence before... but now? Now it was a hundredfold worse. She couldn't help but revert her thoughts back to that kiss, wishing that she had exposed her feelings in that moment when he asked her what was wrong. She knew from the moment that she asked him and he lied that he had different motivations than he said for kissing her, knew that he didn't want to come to terms with the fact that he might find her to be someone he would want to kiss. But then she considered his stance on mortals, perhaps that's why he had stopped? He said he didn't care, but obviously that wasn't true.

Yet, even this she didn't concern herself over as she crossed the hallway from the bathroom to her room and shut the door. No, her mind was on another thought which made her eyes begin brimming with tears: the possibility that she might be falling for Loki. Broken, hurt, self-centered, egotistical Loki... who called her an 'irritating mortal', and she slapped on multiple occasions. After she got dressed, she climbed into bed, curling up on the covers before she allowed the tears to flow. She knew what he was saying when he limited their kiss to mere 'help', he was putting her back in her place – reminding her that she was the lower being who needed him to prove to her that she was not as horrible as he was.

Knowing that Loki was probably in the room next to hers, she pulled a pillow over her head to muffle her cries.

However, the sound of her muffled sobs did make their way through the pillow and the wall, and Loki was forced to hear her heartbreak. As it was, he was already pacing from his own inner turmoil from what had happened in the training room, his thoughts running a mile a minute in confusion. He had concluded that he knew three things –

One: Elizabeth Donovan was one of the most fascinating creatures he had ever come in contact with; to a point where, if he were forced to spend the rest of his life with a Midgardian, he would chose her. She was smart, that he knew, and tended to meet his verbal spars with equal ferocity, making her an interesting partner in conversation. That said, she could be slightly grating in her questioning, but a refreshing breath of air in certain situations – as much as a mortal could be.

Two: He could not deny the desire which rose up within him regarding her, their intimate moment in the boxing ring had proved that to him. Now that his mind thought of it, there were many times where he allowed the desires of his heart to overrule his head – but even then, he considered it absurd that he would ever consider a mortal woman worth his time. It had really been building for a while, and had peaked slightly when he was training with her, her small frame against his own as he showed her how to use a dagger. His rather inappropriate thoughts could be attributed to the fact that he hadn't been intimate with a female in quite some time, and his near-constant time with Elizabeth had forged something between them which he was mistaking as desire.

Third: Her strange control over him. He couldn't explain how it was that she seemed to make him do what he did not, and cause him to question that which he would originally wish. That confused him more than anything, even the fact that he had kissed her in his attempt to help her again proved to him that there was something about her which caused bewitchment. He looked toward the wall where he could hear her sniffling and once more contemplated her control over him – and why he felt the overwhelming desire to go to her, to apologize for whatever it was he had done to bring her to her current state.

"Obviously she's a bad influence." Loki mused to himself aloud. "Someone I should definitely separate myself from."
"Are you sure about that?" the new voice had him spinning around, his dagger in his hand in ready of defense before he saw who it was.

"Mo—Frigga." he greeted, placing his dagger back where it belonged. "I'm surprised the Allfather let you come here."

"He didn't." Frigga replied, walking over to where he stood. "Heimdall told me what happened."

Loki shook his head. "Of course you have Heimdall spying on me. Does the Allfather think I'm intending to slaughter the Avengers? Surely he knows that I would never go against such odds without my abilities, it's suicide." he said.

"We're just looking out for you, Loki." Frigga replied.

"Well I don't need looking after." Loki snapped.

"Is that so?" Frigga asked, her eyes moving to the wall where Elizabeth's room sat on the other side, the sounds coming out a little less than before. "She weeps for you, you know."

"Whatever gave you that idea?" Loki inquired. "She thinks me as the monster who tried to take over her city."

"Is that why she told you her past?" Frigga asked in return. "Why she trusted you more than she trusted her own friends?"

"Her foolish belief that I will change doesn't alter the fact that she believes that I will hurt her eventually." he replied.

Frigga scoffed. "You know that is not true. Why do you lie to yourself?"

"Why do you think I'm lying?" Loki retorted.

She shook her head, a smile on her face. "After all these years, you still haven't changed." she said.

"When you lie, you answer questions with questions." Loki looked at the wall, remembering Elizabeth's statement from earlier.

"She understands you, doesn't she?" Frigga asked quietly. "She knows how to talk to you, to comfort you. She has become your confidant... you care for her."

"She is temporary." Loki replied. "When the Allfather calls me back to Asgard, she will remain here. I cannot care for her."

"Can you not?" Frigga asked. "Do you not?"

He sat down with a loud sigh. "I care not." he said, knowing that there was a portion of him which did care.

"I see..." Frigga trailed off quietly. "Is that why you kissed her?"

"I wanted to help." he replied.

"Help?" she repeated. "If you wanted to help, you would not have left her the way you did."

"She walked away from me." Loki hissed. "Not the other way around."

Frigga shook her head, sitting down beside him. "Oh, Loki... you know so much. The most intelligent boy I ever met, knowing more than any of your peers ever did; and yet, you are so ignorant of the female heart."
"What do you mean?" Loki asked her, confusion written on his face.

"Loki, women are not like men. They do not feel so indifferent to intimacy as men do, and when intimacy does occur... they tend to take it to heart." she said, looking at the wall again just as Elizabeth silenced – presumably falling asleep.

"Are you saying that Elizabeth has taken to heart my kiss, and is now heartbroken because I've somehow given her false hope?" Loki asked her, standing up and walking to the window. "I refuse to acknowledge such behavior. It's juvenile."

"Love is juvenile?" Frigga asked.

"Moth—I do not love her." Loki corrected.

Frigga nodded. "You know, she is good for you." she said softly. "Already you know this."

"I know she is damned confusing. I'm beginning to wonder if she has some enchantment in her blood, she certainly is bewitching enough." Loki admitted, wondering why it was he was revealing such things to Frigga. "She is constantly telling me how I should have never tried to take over Midgard. Apparently she likes to annoy me by comparing me to those who have tried world domination in the past."

"And she is right." Frigga chided. "To try to take over a world was not the smartest thing you've done."

"Thank you for making that so obvious, as if the stripping of my powers was not enough to inform me of that." Loki scoffed.

Shaking her head, Frigga got up from her place on the bed, moving to the bookshelf. "The books I sent, did they not interest you?"

"Is that how I am to wile away my time here? Reading?" Loki retorted.

"I did what was in my power to make you comfortable." she replied. "Heimdall said you'd been spending your time in the library, and I thought that you might want something from home."

"It's not my home." Loki countered. "I don't have a home."

"Nonsense." Frigga maintained. "Your home is with us, and always will be."

Loki walked back toward her, leaning against the bookshelf with a smirk on his face. "Does Odin share your sentiment? Your concern?" he asked in sarcasm. "It must be so inconvenient having him ask after me day and night. I'm sure Heimdall is beginning to contemplate quitting service because of it."

"You know full well it was your actions which stripped you of your power, and sent you to the Tower of Silence. You were brought here because of the threat at hand, but your actions have kept you where you are." Frigga answered.

"My actions?" Loki repeated. "I was merely giving truth to the lie that I've been fed my entire life. That I was born to be a king."

"A mere handful compared to the number that Odin has taken himself." Loki replied, walking away.

"And what of Elizabeth? Hmm?" Frigga quipped. "What of the trauma that she was subjected to because of your actions?"

Loki turned on her, his eyes ablaze, "Leave Elizabeth out of this!" he snarled loudly. Frigga stayed silent for a moment, allowing Loki's rage to settle before she dared to continue. "I never gave her the pain she endured! Do not bring me into the same place as Shaw! I would not force her to witness the things which she did, force her to become what she became by holding those who she cared for over her head!"

Frigga strengthened the wards she had put up between Loki and Lizzie's room. Although it would be good for the girl to know just how Loki felt about her, it would not be good at this time. "Did you not?" Frigga countered. "Did you not hold Agent Barton's love over him? Threaten to kill her, and force him to do it?"

Loki stayed silent, his earlier rage cooled drastically. "Leave Elizabeth out of this." he repeated, turning around to look out the window. "We were speaking of Odin, not her. He has killed before, and he has killed many. I was simply becoming the prince he wanted me to be."

"Loki, your father-"

"He's not my father!" he shouted, turning around once more to face her. "Then am I not your mother?" Frigga asked in turn.

Loki paused. "No, you are not." he said, the passion in his voice from before completely void.

Frigga smiled, allowing her mask to cover the pain she felt at his statement. "Always so perceptive, about everyone but yourself." she said, looking toward the wall once more.

Loki shook his head. "Mother..." he tried to reach for her, only to find that his hands went through her. She turned to him once again.

"She will need you, Loki. Do not allow yourself to distance her... she is your last hope." Frigga told him, her image fading out with a green hue, the last to go being her eyes – the pain and sorrow filling them, and leaving an imprint on Loki's mind.

He moved over to his bed, flopping down in guilt. It seemed there were two women in the universe who could always make him feel guilt, or care... Frigga and Elizabeth. Climbing up to the headboard, he prepared himself for a night of thinking.

Unfortunately for Elizabeth, the nightmares returned that night – the images of the hospital bed, the needles, the tortures, the horrors... everything causing her to shy away from any of the pain. Yet, in all her running from the memories, they always caught her, brought her back, and forced her to endure it all once more. She knew she was screaming, but she could not control what happened, her body betraying her.

For Loki, he had been shocked to hear her screams for the first time in a week, jolted from his contemplations about Frigga's mention of his love for Elizabeth. Although he initially hesitated, not sure that after the kiss that he should comfort her, he eventually gave into his instinct and ran to her room. He knew what to expect by now, and when he saw her arched on the bed he immediately went to her side, brushing her hair out of her face, trying to wake her as best he could - swearing to himself that if he ever met Alex Shaw, that he would murder him.
She was twisting on the hospital bed, trying to avoid the needle coming closer... but she could hear his voice, the soft baritone which called her from the terrors of her dreams, and banished the doctor and his needles away. "Elizabeth, wake up. It's only a dream, you're safe. Elizabeth... Elizabeth..."

Eventually the horrors faded away, and she returned to the waking world to feel Loki's hand gently touching her face. "Another nightmare?" he questioned, but she could not respond, a small whimper coming out instead as she nodded. "There is nothing to fear, I am a room away. You are safe, and the rest of the Avengers are a call away." he replied, pulling away.

To his surprise, her hand shot out, grabbing onto his wrist with a stronger grip than he would have anticipated. "Please..." she begged. "Please stay here."

"I do not believe that after this afternoon that I should—"

"I don't care." she interrupted. "We can talk about that in the morning. Please, Loki, they don't bother me so much when you're here."

He considered it for a moment, the terror in her eyes something which he could not ignore, which caused his heart to clench. Against his better judgment, he gave in, crawling into bed next to her as she settled into his side, gripping him as if he were a lifeline. He stiffened at the contact, surprised that she would do such a thing. However, her tears on his shirt, and her arm wrapped around his waist caused him to give in, allowing his arms to engulf her as he began to whisper in her ear that she was safe, and that no one would hurt her.

Eventually they both fell asleep, wrapped in each other's arms.
Alexander Shaw

Chapter Summary

Fury finds a file which belonged to Lizzie in her previous timeline, and Alexander Shaw makes an entrance.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

If Nick Fury uttered another word, Tony was sure that Thor was going to hit him with Mjolnir, and quite frankly, he wouldn't blame him. They had come here after lunch, it was now dinnertime and they had yet to find out what exactly they were going to do with the new situation regarding the Chitauri. As of yet, nothing had been decided, as S.H.I.E.L.D was bickering over what they were going to do... damn diplomats. Tony had spent the last few hours on his i-pad, hacking S.H.I.E.L.D's files so as to find the identities of the Council, they needed to get replaced, as far as he was concerned.

As he attacked another firewall around the computers, his screen flipped to inside Stark Tower, and he felt his eyes widen at what exactly he saw. Loki and Lizzie were laying on her bed, his arm wrapped tightly around her middle as they slept. What surprised Tony the most was a little fact that he was sure would cause the pair to want to kill him for knowing they were in a bed together. Jarvis had sent him the video of their little kiss in the training room, and their consequent conversation – which, of course, had Tony shaking his head, wondering what the hell was wrong with their brains.

"Stark!" Nick Fury's voice boomed. Tony looked up, completely nonplussed.

"Yarr Matey?" Tony replied, making fun of the Director's eyepatch. He'd been making comments the entire day, and knew it was only a matter of time before Fury lost it.

Clint hid his smile behind his hand, knowing that if the Director saw his amusement he'd probably lose his position; Steve just shook his head, wishing he had never left his time period while the Asgardians just looked confused.

"I just got a call from I.T. about a hacker in the database – a damn good one – who has been trying to access the files on the Council Members." Fury said, looking pointedly at Tony.

"So?" Tony replied, flicking his fingers across the screen to hide his current progress on the S.H.I.E.L.D files.

"So, I come back and you are playing around on your little motherfucking toys! Turn that fucker off, or I'll have one of our agents take it away from you!" Tony suppressed his laughter, finding it amusing that the Director was treating him as if he were a six-year-old. Behind Fury, Clint was silently laughing.

With a huff, Tony turned the screen to show Fury what he was looking at – Loki and Lizzie.

"I knew you were a lot of things, Stark. I never pegged you for a Peeping Tom." Fury said, taking the pad from Tony's hands, flipping a few things on the screen before passing it back – the screen
now showing Tony's progress on the firewall. "Though I always knew you were a motherfucking liar."

Tony shrugged as Fury handed the device to a nearby Agent Hill, who took it out of the room. "That's an expensive piece of equipment, I hope that's coming back." He said.

Nick turned to Tony. "Don't worry, Stark. It's just going down to I.T. with the instructions to fix their firewalls so that your little computer can't get in." he said, going back to his chair. Agent Hill returned to the room, and going to Fury's side, she bent down and whispered something in his ear. He nodded, giving her instructions before turning to the rest of the room. "So, you have yet to tell me who your guest is, Stark."

"Pardon?"

"A girl by the name of Elizabeth Donovan," Fury pulled out a file from behind the table, opening it and sorting through the papers. "Who may, or may not, be a threat to us."

"Why would Lady Elizabeth be a threat?" Thor spoke for the first time in an hour, although Fury could tell that he was more than ready to finally hit him with his hammer.

"Her parentage." Fury replied, leaning forward over the table, his fingers steepling.

"What about her parents?" This question came from Sif, strangely enough.

"Have you ever heard of a group called 'The Brotherhood of Mutants'?" Fury inquired. Natasha and Clint nodded while Tony discreetly pulled out his phone under the table, quickly entering the group's name in. "What do you know about them, Agent Barton?"

Clint cleared his throat, looking at Natasha one time before beginning. "Logan told us that they were a group that worked opposite of Professor Xavier. They don't like normal humans, and are led by a man named Erik Lehnsherr, who apparently – although going through World War II as a Jew – feels that everyone who isn't a mutant is a threat." he said.

"Very good." Fury replied as Tony finally got up Wikipedia. "This Erik Lehnsherr is Miss Donovan's grandfather." Tony's head snapped up, a look of shock surely across his features. Although it wouldn't surprise him that Lizzie had a mutant in her past – he had seen her drop Loki to his knees on more than one occasion, as well as watched the footage of her little training with Loki... no human moves that fast.

"So you're saying she's a threat because she's related to a threat?" Steve asked. "That doesn't make much sense to me."

"She is a mutant, Captain Rogers, anyone who knows about her little-talked-of past would put two and two together." The Director said, sliding the folder down in Steve's direction.

"But still," Bruce finally uttered. "That doesn't mean that Lizzie is a threat. She obviously doesn't believe the same things that her grandfather does."

Steve looked at the file, pieces about Lizzie clicking in his mind as he read of a young boy who nearly died because of her. "But she's not been dangerous around the Tower." He eventually replied to Fury's earlier statement. "You don't know she's a threat."

"Well if that were the only file on her I had, I wouldn't absolutely know she was a threat – it's not that which causes suspicion about her." Fury replied, pulling out a similar file. "We found this in our record room, our filing system had never seen this barcode before, but our security footage tells an interesting tale, as well as the person who left it." He slid it down to Steve, but he hadn't caught it in
time and Clint wound up with the file. Natasha watched him carefully, noting his reaction as he opened the first page, concern in his blue eyes.

"What is that?" Tony asked.

"Another file for Elizabeth Donovan, codename Anesthesia." Fury replied as Clint took out a photograph, so obviously of Lizzie — yet so not. "There was some kind of hole in time, in which the file girl from a different timeline wound up here, that file still clutched in her hands. When our men found her, they thought her mentally insane until we got a look at the file. There have never been any pictures of any other Elizabeth Donovan that look quite like that, and this is one is also connected to an Alexander Shaw, son of Sebastian Shaw alias Klaus Schmidt. He was a Nazi doctor, who we have well-documented."

"So what you're saying is that Lizzie was some kind of killer?" Clint uttered, looking up at the Director. "I don't believe this."

"Why shouldn't you?" Fury asked. "Its all there in black and white – her sister has a file too, should I give you Isabella Donovan, codename Universe?"

Clint shook his head, shoving the file away from him as he stood up. "If you knew Lizzie, not just looked at her on a camera screen, you would know that she wouldn't do these kind of things. But because you have only looked at her with a cold-heart, with judgment, you view her in a light which she doesn't belong in." he said, turning away from the table. "I'm going to get a cup of coffee." And with that, he left the room.

The rest of the table was silent as Natasha took the file next, looking it over. "I have to agree with Clint, there is no way this is the same person." She said, closing the file and passing it down. Although she said that she wasn't buying this information, a nagging feeling still gnawed at her gut — what if? What if Fury was right, and Lizzie actually was a killer? Would she be any different? She would be more like herself and Clint, more broken... but that wasn't the Lizzie she knew... was it?

"So I present you with facts, and the whole lot of you believe that this girl is still innocent." Fury said with a sigh.

"Has she killed anyone here?" Hogun asked, his voice causing everyone to turn to him as they hadn't heard him speak once during their time there.

"Not that I'm aware of." Fury replied.

"Then perhaps you were mistaken in your opinion of her." the Asgardian said. "If you cannot link these two women in anything more than a few pieces of paper, then perhaps they are not the same."

"The name is the same – hell, they fucking look the same!" Fury exclaimed. "I doubt that there are two Elizabeth Laoise Donovan's running around the world! In fact-"

"I will speak with Heimdall." Thor interrupted, his voice causing Fury to stop talking. "He will tell us if Lady Elizabeth is a threat." He turned his eyes to the Director, weighing his words carefully before he spoke again. "Be wary, Director Fury. For if Heimdall tells me that these accusations have no weight, and that you have said something which would perjure Lady Elizabeth, I will inform you that Asgard will not view that kindly. She is a friend, you would do well to remember that."

Fury looked puzzled at the Prince. "You all believe she is weak. That she's incapable of defending herself if need be... but you're all wrong. She's probably stronger than the rest of you through her power of paralysis and time bending, she could knock any of you to your knees or stop your heart..."
with just a thought." he said, looking around the table until he reached Tony. "But when the day comes when you realize what she really is, then I hope we can have a conversation."

With that, the Director moved the topic back to the Chitauri situation.

Alex smirked as he watched the situation unfold between the Director and his band of heroes. His plan had worked, creating a hole between the this universe and the one in which Elizabeth Donovan was a wanted criminal, sending a worker from the filing office of S.H.I.E.L.D to give her file to the Director in this one. It had been so easy... too easy almost. Now the seed of doubt was in the minds of all the Avengers, and his next step could now be put into action.

Lizzie woke to the sound of mumbling in her ear, a strong vice tightening around her waist as someone breathed into her hair. Her eyes flew open, at first disoriented by her situation – namely, lying with her head on someone's chest, their arm slung around her in a protective manner. Her hackles went up before she recognized the voice in her ear as Loki's, the previous few hours finally coming to the forefront of her mind. She craned her neck, raising her head off of Loki's shoulder to look at the clock, it was 6:30pm, the darkness of the room showing that the sun was beginning to set.

She tried to move out of his grasp, too uncomfortable with their current emotional situation to allow herself to stay with him. However, as she squirmed, it made him simply tighten his grip, turning over on his side toward her. She didn't move as he shifted, trying not to wake him. "Don't... touch...her..." Loki mumbled in his sleep, letting out a breath as he relaxed once more. Lizzie stayed still, her eyes darting over his face.

As he slept, Loki looked much different than when he was awake – he looked more childish, more afraid. The scowl which she had seen so much on his lips relaxed, an innocent look of slumber on his face; yet, when she tried to pull away again, he pulled her back, his brow furrowing as he mumbled again.

So, Lizzie laid there, at a complete loss about what she was going to do. On the one hand, she found herself enjoying his embrace, feeling safe for the first time since she found out her past; feeling as if, if anyone were to harm her right now, he would kill them. But on the other, she wanted to pull away more than anything, uncomfortable with how she knew her attachment was growing, and knowing he didn't care one whit. That being said, their current capacity of friendship would not make this little situation acceptable – he didn't love her, he viewed her as someone who needed his help, nothing more. For her, however, she was finding it hard to keep neutral on the matter, her previous feelings of betrayal and rejection surfacing as she continued to allow him to hold her. Those feelings made up her mind, and paralyzing his arm, she gently pulled out of his grasp.

It wasn't supposed to happen this way. She wasn't supposed to be wanting to return to him, not when he had acted the way he did. Loki mumbled again, and for a moment she thought it was her name, but that was impossible. She could feel her eyes watering, the tears unbidden as she realized just how deep she was in her affection toward him, and knowing he would never think of her in the same way.

Whipping the droplets away, she left the room, contemplating how she would handle the situation without hurting herself. She went to the training room, hoping that by venting her frustration, she would be able to think.

Pepper entered the apartment, sighing in relief at the fact that she was finally home. An entire day spent shopping had left her worn out, ready to kick off her shoes to spend the rest of the evening watching soap operas with a glass of wine in her hand. The others would be back shortly, she was
informed, and quickly sending a text to Tony she found out that they were wrapping up as well. Now all she needed was some dinner.

"Kevin?" she called as she entered the kitchen, the man already set about to making food. "Good evening, Kevin."

"Good evening, Miss Potts, did you have fun?" he asked in reply, adding some seasoning to whatever he was making.

"Ah, I had a blast for a while. My damn shoes caused problems though, I hate breaking them in." she replied, looking over what he was making. "Lizzie not making dinner tonight?"

"Nah, she had Jarvis call me. Apparently she went to work out, didn't want to be bothered." he replied. "Has Mr. Stark called yet?"

"He's coming home soon. What are you making?"

"German dish. Thought it might be fun to spice it up a little." he replied.

"I didn't know you specialized in German dishes." Pepper replied, taking a glance at the pot.

Kevin smirked. "I don't, per se. I know a few things to get me by, but nothing extraordinary. Miss Donovan asked for German." he said.

"Did she really?" Pepper hummed. "I thought she only made Irish dishes."

"Yeah, well, she surprised me too. Though I've been surprised by her before, she's an interesting girl, isn't she?" Kevin asked, his tone a little too personal.

Pepper tilted her head in curiosity. "I didn't know you guys talked much. Apparently you pissed her off regarding something you were going to serve to Andrew." she said, watching him carefully. Something was off.

"Yeah, well, that doesn't stop me from finding her interesting." Kevin replied. "You know what I really like? How she can make food in half the time it would take normal people. It's like she can manipulate time or something."

She watched him as he put some seasoning in the food. "Hey, you're not shaking anymore!" she said excitedly. "What happened, did you get some surgery or something to help out that bad nerve?"

Kevin looked up at her in surprise, looking down at his hand. "Uh... yeah. Finally got that taken care of. Such a nuisance, I finally just decided to get it over with."

"That's a great." Pepper replied, Tony needed to know that something was wrong with Kato. "Well, I'm going to go watch something, have Jarvis let me know when you're ready."

"Will do." Kevin replied with a smile, and she left the room.

"The God of Irritation left you to train alone?" Lizzie heard Natasha say, tilting her head in the direction of the redhead she smirked.

"I'm not training alone. I'm training with my imaginary friend, Scott." Lizzie replied snarkily taking a sip of water before sitting down. Natasha joined her on the bench. "How was the meeting?"

"Meeting?" Natasha repeated with a questioning tone.
"Yeah, the meeting, you know... Fury..." Lizzie trailed off. Natasha nodded, looking abashed.

"Oh the meeting!" she said. "It didn't compute that was the 'Meeting' you were referring to. It went well, although only Clint and I were allowed to leave."

Lizzie chuckled, taking another sip. "Poor woman, Fury must have been horrible for you to have forgotten so easily." she teased, looking around the room. "Where's Clint?"

"Somewhere high, he's furious right now." Natasha said.

"Why?"

Natasha took a deep breath, settling herself to face Elizabeth more. "Lizzie, you know that Clint and I have bad pasts, right?"

"Yeah."

"You know we were assassins, who killed people on orders, and didn't think anything of it?" she continued.

Lizzie straightened up. "Where are you going with this?" she asked, her tone slightly chilly.

"Fury brought a file today, he said you were a threat." Natasha said.

"Threat? How on earth am I a threat?" Lizzie asked, not liking the possibilities of what Fury told them. There was no way that this timeline and the other could possibly have intertwined in a way that would cause for any suspicion to be raised.

Natasha reached over to the bag she had brought, extracting a copy of the file she had obtained from the Director. "This is what he showed us, and this is why Clint is currently fuming elsewhere." She passed the file to Lizzie, allowing the brunette to look at the documents inside. "I need to know if this is true, Lizzie."

Lizzie picked up the first photograph. The image of her, dressed in her black uniform, leading a group of mutants to fight against a platoon of soldiers brought up a new memory which she didn't think she had. "Why did they think this was me?" she asked.

"The name, the face. Anesthesia was known to be the granddaughter of Magneto, and raised by Charles Xavier. The only problem is that this picture was taken a few months ago, by this stamp, and Clint and I know for sure that you were here in New York – with us – when this happened." Natasha said.

"Anything is possible when you're dealing with mutants, Tasha. We live in a world where the gods of mythology exist, and mere mortals can move mountains." Lizzie said, looking in the direction of Jarvis' cameras. "Each of us has a maggot in our pasts, which will happily devour our futures." she whispered to herself. This was her fault, if she were honest with herself, her obvious inattention to detail had caused for Alex to know of her existence outside of the world of the fire. She hadn't known that he had watched her go back, that his mind would not lose the memories of several years of her presence. She had brought this upon herself.

"What does that mean?" Natasha asked quietly.

Lizzie looked at the redhead. "Vy ne yedinostvennyy, s sekretami."

Natasha looked at Lizzie in curiosity, as Lizzie unfolded her tale... in Russian.
Loki awoke with a start, the previous nightmare he had just escaped from still fresh in his mind, still tormenting him even though he was no longer in its grasp. He had been in his cell again, the taunting of the Mad Titan still ringing in his ears as he had held Elizabeth, telling Loki that he had promised him a torture worse than pain. He remembered the Titan showing him how he would snuff out her life, in a painful, excruciating way. Loki knew he had been warned, but he had hoped Thanos would never know about the young woman who he had been spending his time with. Although, apparently, all his hidden thoughts had been for naught as Thanos knew exactly who Elizabeth was.

He looked around, Elizabeth's room seeming familiar, comforting, despite the stark-white walls she had managed to bring a bit of homeliness to the room, and that seemed to soothe Loki's terror. Elizabeth. He looked over to the other side of the bed, sudden worry overtaking him on why she was not beside him. Placing his hand on the empty space, he found it was stone-cold, meaning she had probably left some time ago.

Irritation rose up within him, wondering why she would leave him alone in her bed while she scampers off elsewhere. As if teasing him – or tormenting him, he wasn't sure – his mind brought up what Frigga had said, reminding him of Elizabeth's more fragile heart, and how his actions had probably hurt her. He sighed, standing up off the bed and crossing the room to the door, he would try to apologize, to change her mind about him. He knew he cared for her in some regard, perhaps not in the way his mot—Frigga wanted to say, but he cared nonetheless. He would hate to lose her companionship, no matter how immature it was.

"Jarvis?" he called out, wanting to know exactly where Elizabeth was. However, there was no answer. "Jarvis?"

"Loki, lad, is something going on?" he heard Kathleen's voice say from behind him, and he turned to see her standing there.

"Do you know why Jarvis is not answering?" he asked.

Kathleen shook her head. "No."

Loki's guard went up, suddenly aware that something was off with the apartment. "Do you know where Elizabeth is?" he asked Kathleen, earning a shaking of her head.

"What's wrong, Laddie?" she asked him as he gently took her arm and led her back to his room.

"Stay here, don't leave for any reason. You'll be safe." he said, reaching under his tunic to get his knife.

"Oi, Loki!" Kathleen called out to him before he left, he turned. "If someone is here, be wary. Laoise is quite dangerous when she wants to be, not knowing friend from foe. The first time one of her nightmares returned, she nearly killed Bella and I."

"I'll be careful." Loki replied, thankful that Frigga had forgotten to take the ward down from his room when she left. Heading down the hallway, he searched for Elizabeth, hoping that whoever was in the Tower wouldn't find her first.

The first warning signs that Tony had that Jarvis had been disabled was when he tried to view the footage of the apartment. The meeting was over, and Fury was finally allowing them to go home with a final decision regarding the current situation: Thor would go to Asgard for a very short period to pass the new revelations on to Odin, and then return in case the Chitauri decided to attack Earth. But now, Tony was beginning to get concerned, as all he saw was black screens.
"We need to get going," he told Steve as they prepared to leave. "I can't see into the apartment, and Jarvis isn't responding. I would say that Eyepatch disabled him on my pad, but the smaller program I put into this thing works fine... Big J isn't."

Steve's blue eyes showed how he understood. "Do you have your suit with you?" he asked, nodding to the briefcase that Tony brought. "Or is that something normal people carry?"

Tony smirked. "I'll get going, you want to tag along? Stark Express can carry one person." he offered. Steve smiled.

"Thanks for the offer, but I think I'll make sure these guys get back safely." Steve said. "Go on, we'll join you shortly."

The billionaire gave a curt nod, and jogging to the nearest exit, he made his departure, thankful he had put a smaller backup of Jarvis in the suit as the AI spoke. "Good afternoon sir, its been a while since you flew with me."

"Yeah, I know." Tony replied as he set off. "J, I need you to call Pepper."

"Yes sir." Jarvis replied, the image of Peppers face on Tony's screen. Brown eyes looked over as the phone connected, but it wasn't Peppers voice that answered.

"Hello?"
"Who is this?" Tony asked, fear rising up.

"It's Kevin, Mr. Stark. I'm afraid Miss Potts is a bit... tied up." Kevin replied coldly, his voice suddenly changing as he continued. "To a chair in the living room that is."

"You lay one finger on her..."

"Already done, Stark, what are you going to do about it?" the man replied. "I doubt you even know who I am." The dial tone followed soon after, and Tony fought to keep his temper in check.

"Jarvis. Call Steve, tell him what happened, and try to get ahold of Reed Richards as well. We seem to have been infiltrated. Tell him to make sure he calls the other women and warn them not to be there." Tony said.

"Very good sir-"

"Wait." he stopped. "Call the Tower first. See if you can get a hold of Romanoff, Barton, or Lizzie Donovan. As a last stand, call Loki. I gave him a phone last week in case we needed to get in touch."

The AI paused. "Very good, sir."

Clint had finally calmed down, his eyes still trained on the nearby skyscrapers which he could see from his vantage point on the roof. He wasn't sure what to believe anymore. He wanted to trust Lizzie entirely, believing she would never lie to him... and yet he knew that there were things she wouldn't tell him. Things which she obviously was willing to tell Loki – maybe there was something in her past, something which brought on the camaraderie which seemed to have formed between them?

His phone began buzzing in his pocket, and with a sigh he withdrew the device. He wasn't in the mood to talk to anyone, but seeing as it may be important he answered anyway. "Hello?"
"Barton? Thank god I got ahold of you." Tony Stark's voice came over the line.

"I'm not interested in talking to you right now, Stark." Clint replied.

"I don't particularly care whether you're interested or not. Jarvis isn't working in the tower, and there's someone inside who has Pepper. Romanoff isn't answering her phone, and neither is Lizzie." Tony stated.

Clint stood up, quickly getting down from his place. "I'm going in now." he said. "I hope you're bringing backup."

"Rogers is on the way, probably sent Thor off to make sure that the other women are safe." Tony said. "I'll be there in two minutes."

"Got it." Clint said, going inside the building, senses alert, unsure of what he was going to find.

"So that's the whole spiel." Lizzie finished telling Natasha. The redhead sighed, nodding.

"I'm glad you told me." she said. "But you realize that you're going to have to tell Clint?"
Lizzie shook her head. "Clint does not need to know about this."

"But you found it acceptable to tell Loki? Lizzie, if you don't tell everyone what's going on, how do you expect them to trust you?"

"It's in the past." Lizzie retorted.

"So? I have a lot of red in my ledger as well-" Natasha started to say.

"Yeah, but your ledger isn't in a different universe. A different dimension." Lizzie replied.

Natasha stood up, walking away for a moment. "Yet, somehow it didn't stop Shaw from remembering who you were." she said, crossing her arms over her chest.

"I don't know how that happened. There was no way he could have seen – wait. He might have pretended to be someone else... oh, god, I wonder who else knows?" Lizzie cursed in German. The door to the room opened, and Clint stepped in.

"Hey girls." He said, a bright smile on his face. "What are you up to?"

"Nothing much." Lizzie answered simply. "Clint, I heard about what Fury showed you, and I suppose now would be a good time to tell you everything. But before I do, you should know that the girl I was isn't who I am now."

Clint smiled, his grin sending chills down her spine. "Oh, Elizabeth... I know." He turned to Natasha, and she suddenly gave out a cry, falling to the ground in pain. "Oh, I'm sorry, was I a little too harsh?"

"Clint! What the hell are you?" Lizzie froze as Clint's face shifted, his body growing taller and his eyes going from the warm kaleidoscope of colors to a pure ice blue. She stiffened, her own eyes widening in recognition. "Alex." she breathed, taking a step back as her vision began to blur. No... it wasn't possible! How could he have come here?

"Good evening, Elizabeth. Did you miss me?" he asked her before her own world turned black.
Cliffhanger, I know. My apologies, but the next one will be out within the next few days, so please don't kill me. :) I hope you enjoyed this one like you did the last.
Robin-Fucking-Hood

Chapter Summary

Loki and Clint team up. Alex has a surprise for Lizzie. And the dark-haired woman's identity is revealed.

Chapter Notes

I hope you all enjoy this chapter after that rather abrupt Cliffhanger. Again, if you don't, by all means, let me know and I shall play with it until we work something out. :) Enjoy.

Loki moved quietly through the apartment, his anxiety increasing with each moment in which he didn't find Elizabeth. Where could she be? Surely she didn't leave the apartments when she knew that Shaw was out there possibly with her death in mind! He paused, listening intently to footsteps that grew ever-closer. Pushing his back against the wall, he waited with pounding heart for the person to round the corner. As soon as their head popped into view, Loki went into action, quickly grabbing the man and spinning him so his back was against the wall.

The suddenness of the movement caught the other man off guard, and his head hit the wall with a resounding 'thud' before Loki realized who it was. "Barton?"

"No, I'm Robin-fucking-Hood. Yes, Barton!" Clint replied, completely and utterly upset that he had been taken so easily off guard. "Care to take your pointy knife away from my throat?"

Loki nodded, stepping away. "Jarvis isn't working, and I can't find Elizabeth. I think someone got into the building," he stated, scanning the hallway.

"No shit Sherlock, someone's in the building," Clint snapped, trying to clear his head. "If I spend any more time around you I'm going to need a helmet."

"I can do without the sarcasm, Barton. Do you know what's going on?" Loki hissed, the more time he didn't know where Elizabeth was the more he worried.

Clint nodded, his face turning somber. "Tony called a few minutes ago, he said that somebody had Pepper. He also informed me that he couldn't get ahold of Tasha or Lizzie."

"Did he know who it was?" Loki asked.

"No," Clint replied. "He didn't tell me male or female even. But he's on the way, and so is Steve, along with Bruce, Thor and his friends – presumably that is."

"You don't know for sure?" Loki inquired.

"Considering Tony said Steve would probably send Thor to protect the others, I'm not completely sure that we're getting everyone here." Clint answered before they both heard a scream from down the hall. In unison, both men raced toward the sound, finding themselves in front of Tony's
"We work together, Barton." Loki stated turning to the archer. "Remember, we have the same goal."

"We do?" Clint asked, searching Loki's eyes for any deception. Finding none, he nodded once. "We do."

Clint did the honors of breaking down the locked door, finding Pepper strapped to one of Tony's work tables, a strange-looking man hovering over her with a gun in his hand. There were 3 more men in the room, who seemed to be transfixed by her skin glowing bright red, hands lighting up with flames as the other man grew closer. Clint moved first, taking his own gun and firing on the man on top of Pepper. The man crumbled, his body suddenly shifting to that of his original Chitauri form as Loki and Clint moved around the room. Each person who originally looked human wound up dying as Chitauri, proving everything that Lizzie had said about the alleyway. As Loki fought the last one, Clint moved toward Pepper to free her.

"Alex Shaw." she said quickly as he undid the handcuffs which held her to the table. "He came in as Kato."

"I never did like that guy." Clint replied, looking over at Loki taking a slice at the last Chitauri's neck, turning to face the pair of them. "Shaw is the one who brought them. Came in as the cook." Clint relayed to the Asgardian Prince.

Loki's jaw clenched. "Do you know where Elizabeth is?" He asked Pepper. The redhead stood up, her skin still glowing-hot.

"Alex said something about the training room before he morphed into Clint and took off." she said, looking carefully at Clint. Loki followed her gaze, his dagger turning over in his hands as he looked the man over.

"Don't worry, I'm the real deal." Clint assured, not liking how either one of his companions were looking at him.

"Prove it." Loki stepped forward, a threatening glare growing in his green eyes.

Frowning slightly, Clint walked over to where Tony was making him a new bow, taking one of the arrows he notched it. "See that mirror over there?" He asked, pointing to a small stress ball which stood on top of Tony's desk a good twenty feet away. Loki nodded as the ball was suddenly hit by the arrow and went flying into the wall. "Now you don't."

Pepper chuckled. "Alright, you're Clint." she said. "Do we know where Natasha is?"

Clint groaned. "She went to see Lizzie." he answered, grumbling in another language as he gathered his new arrows and bow.

"Is there a way to get Jarvis up and running again?" Loki asked.

"Not that I know of." Pepper replied sadly. "Only Tony can do it, I think. He's so secure that no one else can mess with his stuff, or fix his stuff in this case."

"Well we don't have time to lose." Loki replied, looking over at Pepper. "I assume that you've got a mutation of sorts?"

"Of sorts." Pepper said. "I'm practically indestructible, and my touch burns people."

"Sounds good to me." Clint replied heading toward the door. "Tony's probably arrived by now. We should get back to looking for Tasha and Lizzie."
Loki nodded, following Clint, with Pepper behind him. "Barton." Loki called to the man in front, pulling him aside. "No matter what happens, Shaw is mine."

Clint's eyebrow went up, surprise passing over his face before he finally answered. "If he hurt Natasha, he's ours."

"Very well, but only when I'm done with him." Loki replied as his ring suddenly began glowing. His eyes narrowed, and Clint could see fear within their emerald depths. Without any warning, Loki gasped, a golden glow shimmering around him for a few seconds before it was gone.

"Loki?" Pepper asked, fighting the urge to touch him in an effort to get him to respond.

The Asgardian didn't answer as he marched down the hall, leaving Clint and Pepper to simply follow, unsure of where he was going.

Lizzie awoke with a headache, her eyes adjusting to the bright lights which surrounded her. She tested her wrists, and panicked as she deduced she was tied to a chair, the white of the room around her causing for it to be brighter than normal. Turning her head away from the light, she saw Natasha tied up in a chair by her side, her red hair covering her face. She heard a light chuckle on the other side of her, and gingerly she turned to see Alex standing a few feet off.

"Hello, love." he greeted, coming closer to her with a chair to sit in front of her. His blue eyes landed on her neck, his fingertips ghosting over the skin in a familiar way. "I see that Chitauri's marks have finally faded, it was horrible they treated you so badly."

"Cut the crap, Alex, I'm not fooled by your little 'good guy' act." Lizzie snapped. "Why are you here?"

"So rude nowadays." Alex chastised. "I'm actually not here to cause many issues, but figured this would be the only way I could get you away from your little protection group for as long as I needed."

"You could have dropped me a phone call, I'm sure you have my number by now." Lizzie retorted. "Or are you getting forgetful in your old age?"
Alex laughed. "Always so snarky. Forgive me for my earlier statement, you haven't changed a bit." he exclaimed. Natasha groaned lightly and Lizzie turned to see her. "Don't worry, I haven't hurt her...much."

"I doubt those were waves of ecstasy which had her falling to the ground." Lizzie said. "You never were known to play nicely with that ability of yours."

"Neither were you." Alex replied lightly. "Though you must admit, I've gotten better at blocking that power of yours."

"My congratulations, I will miss the days of dropping you like a sack of potatoes when you pissed me off." Lizzie pouted sardonically.

"Well, I hear you've been dropping someone else like a – as you say – 'sack of potatoes'." Alex replied, running a hand through his hair. "It's amazing what kind of company you attract."

"You're so right. I'm a psycho magnet aren't I? Just look at you." Lizzie said with a smile. "Tell me, are you still trying to wipe normal humans off the face of the earth?"

Alex shook his head. "No." he replied, tutting. "Well, maybe a little bit."
"Too bad. You are aware what kind of guy Thanos is, right?" Lizzie asked. "You know how he betrays his allies."

"The Mad Titan will leave me be to do as I will as long as I give him what he wants." Alex said.

"And what is it that he wants?" Lizzie inquired, hoping that she'd be able to give some kind of information to the Avengers.

Alex wagged his finger in her face, standing up. "Ah, ah, ah. Curiosity killed the cat, Elizabeth – don't go playing with fire." he said, moving over to Natasha. "I wonder what I should do with her?" he mused aloud. "Do you think she'd make a powerful mutant?"

Lizzie's hackles went up, but she played along. "In a way, she already is. I doubt that my going back stopped the Russian's experiments on superhumans, and how to create them. I remember the KGB was working on it once upon a time, and I know she worked for them for a time – I think anyway," she said. "But Alex, I doubt that you're here just to threaten Natasha."

"True, I'm not." Alex replied happily, moving Natasha's hair out of her face. "Did you know that there was a hole in the universes?"

"I was informed of that, yes." Lizzie replied. "Apparently you sent someone with my old file to give to Fury."

"I did, but it turns out that another wormhole in the universes was opened up, and something miraculous happened." Shaw replied, moving toward her. "A little girl toddled through."

Lizzie's eyebrow rose. "So?" she asked, trying to wiggle around to get to the knot near her wrist.

Alex smirked. "She's about two years old, and looks incredibly like you." he said, reaching into his coat pocket and withdrawing his phone. "You want to see her?" He asked, flipping through the screens before he finally settled and faced the phone toward Lizzie. "See?"

She looked, hiding her shock as best as she could. The little girl's eyes looked just like her own, the blackish hair thinly sprouting out of her head. "Who is she?" she asked, looking up at Alex.

"She came through with a little teddy bear, the bear's neck having a little tag saying 'This bear belongs to Saoirse.'" he replied, moving away from Lizzie. "Does that name mean anything to you?"

"Why should it?" Lizzie replied. "Other than it being an Irish name, that is."

"I know about your daughter, Elizabeth." Alex replied, turning to face her. "I know that you gave birth to a daughter which – if you add up both the time you were in that timeline, and the amount of time that she has been here – would be the same age. I also know that you gave birth at the University Hospital in Dresden, around the same time I sent you on a long-term mission to flush out Erik Lehnsherr. According to those records, a girl by the name of Liesl Eisenhardt gave birth to a girl named Sasha. Eisenhardt was Erik Lehnsherr's original name, Liesl is the German version of Elizabeth, and Sasha could easily be exchanged for Saoirse when one returned to Ireland."

Lizzie swallowed. "It's impossible for those records to exist here, as I never gave birth in this universe." she said softly.

"Correct, I found these things out around the same time I killed that idiotic empath that dared to lay a hand on what was mine. Why do you think I killed him, darling?" Alex asked, bringing his hand to Lizzie's neck, stroking the skin there. "What I didn't know was that someone exchanged Saoirse for another baby, meaning yours lived."
She was speechless, unable to form any kind of answer. Her daughter lived? How? She was sure that the baby who had been handed her in Dresden was her own... who could have exchanged her.
"What is it you want, Alex? Why are you telling me this?"

"I'm going to give you an offer you can't refuse – in the words of the Godfather." Alex said, moving closer to Natasha. "You can, of course, take it or leave it."

"Oh that's just so detailed, I don't know if I can remember all of that." Lizzie retorted hotly, finding a tendril of her ability which Alex seemed to have ignored.

"Patience, darling." he replied, pulling Natasha's head back by her hair. "You'll hear soon enough..."

The elevator dinged, Loki, Clint, and Pepper stepping off. "Where are we?" Clint asked.

"R&D" Pepper answered. "He took them to R&D... bastard. What the hell does he want here?"

"He wants to put Lizzie back into her past by returning her to a laboratory." Loki answered from in front of them. "Now, don't be alarmed with what I'm about to do." he said, suddenly disappearing from in front of their eyes.

"What the—" Clint began to say. "Where the hell are you?"

"I'm right here, Barton." Loki replied, coming back into their vision before creating a double.

"Hey, I thought your powers were locked up or something!" Clint whispered harshly.

"They are, but in order to keep Elizabeth safe, I am allowed use of them until she is no longer in danger. It is temporary, Barton, I won't be off killing people if that's what you're worried about." Loki replied tersely, looking in the windows of the double doors. "Alright, I want you two to wait five minutes to go in there, when you do make a distraction. I'll sneak up on Shaw and try to get him away from Elizabeth."

Clint and Pepper nodded. "How are we going to know when Tony gets back?" Pepper inquired.

"As soon as we get those two away from him, we can go find out if he's here." Loki answered. "Otherwise, stay in this room. Alex is not to leave it, do you understand?"

"Perfectly." Clint replied, looking in as well. Natasha's hair is what he saw first, a larger man standing over her. "Remember, Loki, he's ours."

"I'll try." Loki stated, going invisible again before teleporting himself to the other side of the doors.

"Do you take my offer?" Alex was saying.

"What makes you think I'd do anything for you at this point?" Lizzie asked rhetorically. "You've threatened everyone I love, you killed my ex-lover. I don't think I want to trust you... not that you ever believed in trust. Besides, you should know be better than that... I never betray those who I have sworn fealty to. You're the traitor here."

Loki smirked, trying to focus on the task at hand as Lizzie defended herself with words. He had almost missed her quick-witted insults.

"Look, it's quite simple. Either you do as I say, or I'll kill your precious little freedom." Alex replied tauntingly.
"How do I even know you're telling the truth?" she asked in return, a condescending tone which Loki had never heard from her before emitting from her mouth. This must have been Anesthesia talking, the killer of hundreds under the orders of this real monster. He fought his instinct which told him to simply kill Shaw now and ensure Elizabeth's safety, remembering that the mutant might be harder to defeat than that. She had told him that his father had the natural ability to simply absorb attacks, and he wasn't sure if powers were passed down or not.

"You don't." Alex said. "But still, the facts are pretty hard to ignore."

"Oh, please. You always were a clever liar, but you forget that I lived in your presence for – what was it? Eight years or so?" she said with a smirk.

"And you always were a good card player. But you see, you forget that I taught you." He moved away from Natasha and toward Lizzie giving Loki an opportunity to place himself behind the ex-assassin, reaching into her mind to find out where she was mentally – or rather, how trapped she was. It seemed that Alex had more cards to play. He somehow had trapped Natasha's conscience in her mind, forcing the young woman to be completely unresponsive in the physical realm. Carefully, Loki attempted to bring Natasha back into her conscious thought.

"Well then, you should know that eventually the student overpowers the master." Lizzie retorted, although tied up, Loki was impressed with just how much she seemed to be able to keep herself together. No doubt, due to years of torture.

"Not this master." Alex said, moving back over to Natasha just as Loki finally reached her, building up shields around her mind so as to keep Alex from getting back in. She groaned, shaking her head in an attempt to clear it as she finally woke up. "What the—?"

However, it wasn't Natasha who finally took their chance, but Clint who – after seeing Natasha awake, and keeping careful watch of the time – rushed in, guns blazing. His job was a distraction, and a distraction he would make, anything to get Shaw away from Natasha. Alex tried using his powers of the mind on the archer, but failed as Loki shielded the Midgardian from any attacks. Out of nowhere, Pepper rushed in, kicking Alex in the chest and sending him flying into a nearby desk. The mutant stood up, incensed, and attacked back with a stronger force than before.

"Natasha?" Lizzie called to her friend, hating the fact that she was still bound. Suddenly, Loki knelt before her, his head down as he focused on undoing the ropes which tied her via magic. "Loki?" she gasped.

"Yes." he replied as she came free, hurtling herself toward him in a hug. He held her, elated that she was safe in his arms, wanting to hold her forever, yet knowing they didn't have the time for such behavior. He could feel her shaking, and held on tighter. "You'll be alright. He's not going to hurt you." Loki whispered, wanting to release Natasha, but the uncomfortable fact that she would fall if he did make him hesitate. "Elizabeth, Elizabeth..." he said, pulling the girl's arms from around him. "Look," he motioned toward where Shaw was. "We need him paralyzed."

"I can't." she replied with a sigh. "He disabled it. He's my neutralizer of sorts. When he wants to, he can disable them... I have a small tendril of it left, but if I use it I'm not sure how stable it's going to be."

Loki reached into her mind, finding a different kind of shield already in place... something which prohibited the use of her powers. She yelped as he tried to move it out of the way and failed. "Try to use that tendril." he said. Her eyes widened, seeming to contemplate it before she gave a slow nod. "Now I'm going to try to attack him, see if you can slow him down somewhat."
"Be careful." she whispered to him before he disappeared from her sight, reappearing behind Alex, and sending a blast of magic toward him. The blast caused Alex to wobble slightly, he then turned to Loki, using Loki's previous blast back toward him, sending him flying. Loki landed with a crash into a dozen beakers of liquid which made him wonder what was in them. Knowing now for sure that magic would do nothing to the mutant, he allowed his body to turn to it's natural Jotun form.

Alex's eyebrow rose as he watched the transformation, unsure of how to prepare himself for whatever Loki had in mind. Loki sent an icicle in his direction, causing the object to graze Alex's cheek, catching the mutant's attention to what it was. "You really shouldn't have done that." Alex said as the liquid around Loki burst into flames, catching his long coat on fire. Alex smirked as Loki threw his coat off, but soon the flames died as Lizzie managed to kill his ability in his mind. Slowly, he turned toward her, unaware that he had missed something.

Using the diversion to his use, Clint managed to shoot Alex in the shoulder, causing the mutant to howl in pain before turning to him with fire in his eyes. "CLINT RUN!" He heard Lizzie yell from his side, but seemed transfixed. Something collided with his body, sending him to the ground. It was Loki. Alex let out a growl of sorts, catching a nearby desk on fire as well. Both men moved out of the way, Loki's dagger in his hand as he disappeared, popping back up behind Alex and stabbing him. The mutant yelled, trying to stop the blood flow. His eyes caught Loki again, his mind trying to break past the Asgardian's shields of defense. Loki fought back mentally, grateful for Thanos' rather invasive maneuvers as they had taught him how to retaliate.

Without warning, one of the windows blasted through, sending glass hurtling toward all in the room. Loki, not even thinking, teleported himself to Elizabeth and put up a shield to protect them all before personally shielding her with his body. When they all looked toward the broken window, Ironman hovered in the space, his arm outstretched toward Alex.

"Tony." Pepper breathed in relief, a smile on her face at the sight.

"Party's over, Mata Hari." Tony said, sending a blast of energy from his repulsor into Alex, throwing him into the nearby wall. He then landed on the floor, walking toward Pepper as Clint ran to Natasha, undoing her ropes. The face shield flipped up, Tony's eyes already focused on Pepper. "We are never hiring another cook again, unless somebody does a polygraph."

"That's what I said." Pepper sing-songed, her skin returning to its regular shade. She looked toward where Alex had been thrown to, seeing the man get up. Tony followed her gaze, his own eyes hardening.

"Wait, Loki and I agreed we'll take care of him." Clint interrupted him, holding Natasha up on her feet, her body heavily leaning on him.

Tony's head tilted to one side. "So you're saying you call dibs?"

"In a way, yes." Clint replied, looking over at Loki, who still had Lizzie in his arms. It was funny, a few days ago he would have felt jealousy at the sight, complete anger at Loki holding her... but now he could see why she preferred the Asgardian. He could see why she trusted him when no one else did, noting the way that Loki held her, as if worry that he would lose her and absolute affection mingled.

"Too bad." Tony replied easily, his faceshield coming down as his voice became robotized. "I call first shots. He hurt Pepper, and while I can see why the pair of you decided that he was yours, I want to play as well."

Loki nodded, looking at Clint. "Fair enough." he said, pulling Elizabeth out of the line of fire from Tony's repulsor.
Whirring could be heard as Tony raised his arm toward the mutant, the repulsor lighting up before a blast knocked everyone back a few feet – in Tony's case, clean out the window.

"I. Will. Not. Be so easily defeated." Alex growled, his eyes lighting up in a strange glow, and focusing on Lizzie. "I want an answer from you within the next week, after which you can assume that she is on one of our tables, being subjected to the same treatments—" he stopped talking, his throat disabled by her ability and the glow leaving his eyes. Loki watched as she stepped toward Alex and whispered something in a language he didn't understand before she stepped back, reaching for Loki.

Alex scowled at whatever it was she said, a snarl coming out of his mouth, his eyes glowing again, causing Lizzie to slump over before he simply disappeared.

"Elizabeth!" Loki exclaimed, catching her before she fell. "Elizabeth!" In that moment, his ring stopped glowing, a shudder going through him. "No..." he moaned, gasping in pain as his powers left him once more. How could the ring believe she was no longer in danger? Did it not sense that she was unconscious, and that he had no answers of 'Why'? "Elizabeth?" He checked her pulse, still feeling her heart beating against his fingertips. She was alive, that much was clear, but obviously needed to get to her bed.

"I think we should get out of this room, head for the living room and regroup until Steve arrives." Clint offered, helping Natasha get to the elevator as Loki picked Lizzie's unconscious form up.

"Hey, is she still alive?" Natasha asked groggily, looking over at Lizzie.

Loki nodded, unable to form any words on the matter. She may be alive, but he had no way of telling if she would regain consciousness, and that scared him. Silently, they got in the elevator, Tony taking Pepper via his suit out the window. Once the doors dinged open, Loki stepped out, finding Tony's couch to lay Lizzie on. He didn't like this, not knowing what was going to happen to her, and wished that somehow he could change what happened to them only a few hours previous.

"Yo, looks like someone took a blowtorch to my alcohol." Tony whined.

"It's called Alex chasing me." Pepper replied. "Not that you need the stuff anyway." Tony shrugged. Carefully, Clint helped Natasha to a seat of her own, looking her over for any physical injuries. "I'm fine, Clint." she snapped. "Stop treating me as if I'm made of glass."

"Shut up." Clint said sternly, earning a confused look from the redhead. "Sorry, Tasha, but seriously I'm just making sure you're okay."

Natasha nodded mutely, unsure of how to process this seeming change in Clint's behavior to her. It was almost like the old Clint, the one before he met Lizzie Donovan...

"Is she responding yet?" Pepper asked Loki.

He shook his head, trying to figure out how to wake her. However, he didn't have to do much as she groaned lightly, her face screwing into a grimace. Loki sighed, relaxing slightly as he watched her stir. "That bastard." she muttered, touching her forehead. "That is the worst headache I have had in years. I feel like my head is about to explode."

"It won't." Loki replied simply, leaning back on his heels. "Your power is getting better with recognizing me. I carried you from R&D and didn't fall over once." he whispered in her ear.

"My power is currently recharging after that bastard had the gall to disable it for a time, and then
allow it back full force." she groaned in response. "That's what knocked me out."

Loki chuckled. "She'll be alright." he assured Clint and Natasha's anxious faces. He looked Natasha over, her focus already beginning to return to her.

"I'll be fine, thanks for asking." Natasha said, her voice hoarse. "And thank you for getting me out of that damn mind prison thing that he got me in. If I ever see him again—"

"You're going to sit back while I kill him." Clint finished, looking over at Loki. "You probably want to take her to bed. She's becoming a risk, getting targeted all the time."

Loki agreed heartily, and picked Lizzie up without even asking. "Hardly." Lizzie retorted, already wiggling out of Loki's grasp.

"What are you doing, Elizabeth?" Loki asked, holding onto her even tighter despite her wiggling.

"I am not some damn damsel in distress, and I don't need to be carried." she responded. "I am still in complete confusion about you, and I'm not interested in being beholden." Loki fought the pain in his chest at her words, knowing that he had somehow brought it on himself. He finally let her go, setting her feet back on the floor despite himself, watching her sway with every step. "Do not interfere. I have dealt with worse." Lizzie said. "Though Clint's right, I think I will go to bed. Sleep will help me out here."

"Loki, go with her." Natasha told him. "I have a feeling she won't make it. He played with her mind as well while she was unconscious the first time."

"We'll be here if you need us. And uh, if you see Stars and Stripes when you pass the elevator, then tell him where we're at, and that we're all in one piece." Tony muttered, his arms still tightly around Pepper, who simply nodded.

Loki nodded, moving along with the wobbling Lizzie as they moved down the hall which led to their rooms in complete silence.

The sun was settling, sending large shadows around the Port Newark-Elizabeth Marine Terminal. In these shadows, a woman could be seen looking at one of the container ships, a navy blue hoodie casting darkness over her face as she leaned against one of the streetlamps. Most assumed she was simply some kind of hobo, who for some reason liked hanging out with the ships, but for some of the men, they knew just what she was doing there.

A black car drove up, its headlights shining around the boats as it turned the corner, parking next to the ship which she seemed to be watching. The engine turned off, and Alex climbed out, still bleeding from his time with the Avengers. He kept muttering to himself, cursing them all in German as he looked around the pier to make sure no one watched him walk up the ramp.

His eyes caught the woman simply staring at him from her spot, unmoving. He squinted, trying to focus his eyes on her figure, sensing that he knew her from somewhere. Wanting to know who she was precisely, he teleported himself behind her, noticing she didn't move. He reached a hand out, grabbing her by her shoulder and spinning her around while taking off her hood. His eyes widened as he caught sight of her face.

"Veronica?" He breathed out in disbelief. She smiled, disappearing from his grasp in an instant, leaving him in a state of stunned confusion and fear.
Conversations

Chapter Summary

Loki and Elizabeth have a conversation about where they stand, and everyone else decides to give Loki their input on just what they think.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the lack in updates, but my computer has been having internet issues. Hopefully I'll be able to update more often. :)

After nearly falling in the hallway, Loki forced Lizzie to use him for support, at the very least. Although she didn't want to be seen as a damsel in distress, Lizzie allowed him to assist her, acknowledging her weakness. Eventually, she collapsed on her bed, her head feeling as though it would explode if she stayed awake a moment longer. However, there was something that needed to be taken care of, and it wouldn't do any good to put it off.

Loki put her legs on the bed, careful not to jostle her too much, still concerned over her sudden weakness. He knew she wasn't a woman who couldn't handle herself, but he wished she would let go of her pride and allow him to do more – after all, she had just been unconscious a few minutes ago.

"Loki..." she muttered as he pulled her blanket over her. "We need to talk-"

"Shh...later." Loki replied, placing his hand on her pale cheek. "Right now you need to sleep, and I'm sure your grandmother is worried." As am I. He almost continued, noticing how her face was paler than his hand. It bothered him.

"No." Lizzie shook her head, her eyes opening with a determination. "We are going to talk now."

"Elizabeth, I-"

"Shut up, and listen to me." she interrupted.

"Do not tell me what to do." He hissed, pulling away as she rolled her eyes, trying to raise herself to a sitting position. "What are you doing?" Lizzie didn't answer him, pulling her pillow behind her back so she would be comfortable before she looked back up at him.

"I know you want me to sleep, Loki, it has been one hell of a day and nothing would please me more than to close my eyes and just forget all about it." she started, closing her bloodshot eyes for a moment before she looked back up at him. "But I need some answers, and I allowed myself to sleep earlier before I got them."
Loki stiffened, he knew where she was going and wasn't sure he wanted to go there as well. "I already answered that particular-"

"No, you didn't." she cut him off. "Because that question which you are referring to is not what I'm going to ask you about. Now please..." She trailed off, motioning for him sit down.

"Your grandmother is in my room." he said. "I told her I'd come back for her when it was all over."

Lizzie sighed, nodding. "Will you come back then?" she asked him, looking up with hope in her eyes. After a moment of silence, his mind whirling on why he was allowing this mere mortal to have her way, he conceded promising he would return in a few minutes. "Alright, then we can talk." she said.

When Loki opened his door, Kathleen immediately rushed up to him. "Where is Lizzie? Is everyone alright?"

"Yes, we're all... in one piece, in the words of Stark." Loki answered. "Elizabeth is in her room, she suffered a bit more from the attack than the rest of us, and is going to rest in a moment. Shaw targeted her."

Kathleen nodded, her eyes catching the tick in Loki's jaw and the fury in his eyes. "Thank God."

Loki held back the retort which popped up in his mind, sure that Kathleen wouldn't approve very much of it... something along the lines of 'You're welcome.' – "You care about her, don't you?"

What was it with everyone asking him about whether or not he cared for Elizabeth? "She is my responsibility-

"I mean more than just a responsibility, and you know it, laddie." Kathleen interrupted, giving him a pointed look. What was it with everyone cutting him off as well? "You may be denying it to yourself, but it's clear to everyone around you."

"I don't know what you're talking about. Elizabeth and I are... friends at best. We have come to a kind of understanding, that is all." Loki replied.

"Friends?" Kathleen repeated with a chuckle. "She cares about you too, you know. I don't think I've ever seen her so caring about anyone else... she hangs on your every word, even though she doesn't realize it. She seeks out your company, and she told you her past."

"That doesn't mean she... loves... me." Loki choked.

Kathleen gave him a motherly smile, reminding him of Frigga as she placed a hand on his cheek. "You don't understand a woman's heart, laddie. It's already done, she loves you now – why do you think she allowed you to kiss her?"

Loki's brows furrowed in confusion. "How do you know about that?" he demanded.

"She didn't disable the cameras this time. Jarvis sent me the video, I watched it while I was waiting for you to come back." Kathleen answered. "I knew you were close, and when Lizzie went missing I didn't know the depths of your own feelings, although I knew hers. But I was wrong to what extent you cared for her, believing you to be rather indifferent... until I saw that video, and once I did, everything fell into place and I knew she'd come back safe."

"Whatever made you think that?" Loki hissed. "We almost didn't find her, and had it not been for my own mother sending me something which she wasn't supposed to we never would have!"

"But you did, didn't you?" Kathleen repeated, a smile on her face.
"Yes, but you couldn't know that." Loki replied, straightening up. "And you didn't know that when we found her she wasn't going to be dead." He swallowed, the image of Lizzie's dead body coming into his mind unbidden – he banished it, trying to return his mind to a very alive Elizabeth.

"Loki, I know you've been burned in the past, although Lizzie won't tell me why, by whom, or what circumstances – but don't let that destroy what future you have. Fate brought the pair of you together, if you're not careful Fate will take her back out of your life." He had no response, and only stood there while Kathleen walked past him and into Elizabeth's room. First Frigga and now her. Was something going on that he didn't know about? Sure, he'd been contemplating his... opinions of Elizabeth, but he had not contemplated any supposed feelings that he had for her.

Following Kathleen, he stood at the door of the room watching as the older woman fussed over the tired Elizabeth, whose eyes continued to close and then snap open. His mind went back to when she was missing, to his staunch determination to find her, and kill the person who had her. He had failed in the second, much to his chagrin, but the first had driven him until he succeeded. He looked down at his ring, knowing that the situation would have been much worse had he not been allowed use of his powers. Is that what Frigga had foreseen?

His mind went to seeing Elizabeth tied to the chair, standing up against the man who had tortured her for years – well, sitting down technically – facing him as if he were nothing to her. But the feeling of despair when, after hearing Alex's statement of departure, Elizabeth crumpled before his eyes completely unresponsive. That was what his mind focused on, proving to him that perhaps these old women were right, perhaps she meant more to him than he was willing to admit. But it was absurd... how could Loki, Prince of—no, he was not a prince of anything. Not anymore. Still, how could he care for a being like her? She was beneath him in every way... except for her mind, which seemed to keep up with him in every manner, meeting each thrust with a parry. An excellent swordswoman of the tongue, matching him in wit as well as cleverness.

Kathleen walked up to him, but his eyes were still focused on Elizabeth. She smiled to herself, remembering when her own husband did the same, standing in the door when she got a bad case of pneumonia. It had been before they were married, and he was denying it as much as Loki was doing now. Hence, why he just needed the little push she had given him. "You can talk to her now, if she's lucid... but I'd let her rest." she told him.

Loki scoffed. "Don't you think I tried to get her to rest? She's damned determined to have this little conversation about what happened, and refuses to sleep until she-" he was interrupted yet again by Kathleen placing a hand on his shoulder.

"I know you can work it out, in some manner. I'll see you later." Kathleen said, walking back to her own room and closing the door. "Ah, Ronald," she said to the heavens. "It's too bad you aren't here... you'd like him."

"Loki." Clint's voice muttered out of nowhere. Loki turned, seeing Clint standing behind him with a glass of water, an apple, and a bottle of pills. "Natasha said that she's probably got a headache, and sent me with these. She can't eat them on an empty stomach, hence the apple."

Loki nodded, taking the bottle, fruit, and glass. "She's right, Elizabeth said she was in pain." he said, reading the bottle. "What is this?"

"It's Tylenol with codeine, it'll put her to sleep as well." Clint replied.

"She's not likely to go to sleep, wants to talk to me about something." Loki scoffed. "How is Romanoff? The Mutant had her trapped in her mind, not many can get out of that safely."
Clint smiled. "She's got a headache of her own, but it's subsiding. I finally got her to get to sleep about... ooh..." he looked at his watch. "Two minutes ago."

Loki snickered. "You have the easy one." he said. Clint laughed.

"You have no idea," he said. "How is she?" He motioned toward the open door with Elizabeth on the other side.

Loki looked toward the door with a sigh. "I don't know yet, I haven't really talked to her about what happened. Would you like to see her?"

"No, I'll let her have her talk with you and rest as soon as possible. You should talk to her about what happened though, Natasha doesn't know what happened after she got locked up in her mind – said that everything kinda went fuzzy. It may improve, but for right now, she's still unsure what Alex said to Lizzie. She only has one word, Saoirse... but I don't know what that means." Clint said.

Loki's emerald eyes snapped up to Clint at the name. "I do," he said. "I'll see what Elizabeth says."

Clint nodded and Loki made to go into the room. "Loki..." Clint stopped him. "I want to apologize."

"There is nothing to forgive, Barton," Loki said quietly. "After what I did to you I can understand why you weren't very trusting."

"Oh, don't get me wrong," Clint added. "I said I was wrong about you and Lizzie, that doesn't mean that you and I are buddies."

Loki chuckled. "I don't think you and I could ever be buddies," he replied. "But to know that you aren't going to try to keep me from Elizabeth is good enough."

Clint looked at the door again. "Yeah, you guys are safe from me. I'll apologize to her later. Oh, and uh, thanks for what you did for Natasha too, she seems to think highly of you because of it. She might be your buddy, she was actually the turning point for my apology."

"I'm assure you, I—"

"Save it," Clint interrupted with a chuckle, causing Loki to glare harshly. This was the third person that had interrupted him, and he was getting a little irritated. "Just take the thanks, the apology, the glass of water, the pills, and get back to Lizzie before she bites your head off for taking so long."

Loki opened his mouth, but then closed it, nodding curtly before walking back into Lizzie's room. "Barton gave me these, said that Romanoff told him to give them to you," he announced as he set the water on the table, and handed her the apple to eat.

"Good ol' Clint..." she said through a bite of apple. "How is Natasha?"

"Has a headache, and is currently doing what you refuse – resting." Loki replied with a huff, reading the instructions before taking out two pills. "He said this would help."
Lizzie took the pills from his fingers, popping them into her mouth and taking a swig of the offered water. She sighed, head falling back against the headboard, her eyes glancing over at the bottle. "Does that have codeine in it?" she asked.

Loki paused for a moment, unsure if he should tell her the truth or not. "Yes." he finally said.

"Sneaky bastard," she murmured. "You should have told me."

"Would you have taken them if I had?" he retorted.

She shook her head. "Probably not," she said. "However, codeine will take a little bit to get into my system, so we can talk until then." He nodded, taking a seat on the bed. Lizzie was quiet for a moment, trying to gather her thoughts despite her headache. "Loki... I suppose I should start this conversation with: I don't know what to think. Last week I told you my past, and we seemed to become friends... but today, you left me completely, and utterly confused."

"I thought you said this has nothing to do with the kiss." Loki countered.

"I didn't say that, I said that I wasn't going to ask why you kissed me, and that's because I know you won't give me a straight answer," she huffed. "But what I do want to know is what you expect me to think of... what happened earlier?"

"I don't understand."

"You have left me in a very difficult situation!" Lizzie exclaimed. "On the one hand, I'd like to just let it go, forget that it even happened; on the other, you have no idea what the hell you unleashed in my mind because of it – don't interrupt me, I'm not finished. Until a week ago, I figured that you were just someone that had been dropped in my life, something I couldn't control and had to simply deal with. Over the last week I've considered you as a kind of friend, someone that understood me, and that I could trust. I don't know about that anymore."

Loki stood in a fury. "Is that what you believe?!" He exclaimed, his legs dropped out from under him, and he was forced to collapse on the bed for support.

"Will you do me a favor and simply be quiet until I finish, or do I have to paralyze your voice box as well?" she asked him, earning a look of irritation, yet he stayed silent. "What I was saying was: I can't consider you a friend anymore, not because I don't trust you, not because I don't enjoy you – I do, completely and wholly, and especially after what happened with Alex. But after what happened in the gym today, I'm not sure I could leave us at 'just friends'."

"What are you saying?" Loki asked quietly.

Lizzie could feel the codeine settling in, her eyelids beginning to droop. "I'm saying that kiss meant more to me than it obviously did to you, and that I am unsure that I can ignore it at this point." she replied, her tired eyes beginning to see double. "I care about you, Loki, more than I probably should. That being said, I have no idea where we go from here. Do we end our friendship? We can't afford to get any closer, knowing who we are."

Loki didn't know how to respond, sure of just what he should say at this point. "Perhaps some would believe that it would be better for us to spend less time around each other, the awkwardness of the situation being something which may prove difficult. However I am afraid I cannot assent to that." he said, looking her in the eyes. "I do not pretend that I do not care for you – I do, more than perhaps I admit. When you went missing I know that I was willing to go to Helheim to find you, if that was where he kept you. You are the only person I can stand in this building, and probably the entirety of the Nine Realms. You have the ability to infuriate me in one moment, and soothe me in another, just
to irritate me again. I will not lose your friendship, and that is final."

"That does not answer my question..." she said. "Are we staying friends?"

"I do not know if I can... love you, Elizabeth." he replied. "I can only assure you of my loyalty, and promise you that I will protect you no matter what the cost. Perhaps that is love, but I do not know."

Lizzie nodded, understanding where he was coming from. "So we shall remain friends?" she asked him, her eyes already closed as she let out a sigh.

"I think that would be the proper course of action for the time being, yes." Loki replied, taking her hand in his own.

"At least we know where we stand." she murmured.

"We do." Loki replied, determined to think the situation out further. "Now that we have come to it, I think you need your rest. We can discuss it further in the morning, if you wish."

She assented, and with a little help from him, she was soon laying down on the brink of sleep.

"Loki?" she called to him.

"Yes?" he replied, still leaning over her to help adjust the pillows.

Her eyes opened, and she brought herself up slightly. "Will you stay?"

He nodded. "Yes."

"Loki?"

"Yes?"

"May I have one last kiss?"

He could see the pleading in her gaze, and he brought his lips to her own gently, his fingertips brushing her cheek with tenderness as his lips moved against hers lightly. He pulled away reluctantly, remaining only inches away from her as fought between his desires and his mind.

"Loki?" she whispered one last time.

"Yes?" he asked, opening his eyes to look into her own.

"Goodnight."

"Goodnight Elizabeth..." he whispered in return as she finally fell off the edge of night.

Loki stayed at the edge of the bed for a few minutes, watching her as she slept and wondering what it was that everyone else knew that he didn't. He wished Odin had been a better father, telling him how to know what love was. He hadn't wooed many maidens in Asgard, and every time found they only wanted Thor, but for a woman to care for him was something which he wasn't sure how to react to. On one hand, it made him happy – if he could use that word – to know that there was another being in the universe who could care about his well being. On the other hand, he knew it would not last, and that when this entire Thanos mess was over, that he would return to Asgard as a prisoner, and she would remain here... if she was still alive.

"Good evening, Prince Loki." Jarvis suddenly uttered. "Might I suggest the high-backed chair to
spend your evening in? Miss Elizabeth also has a few books on her shelf which may interest you."

"Good evening, Jarvis, thank you for your suggestion." Loki said with a smile, walking over to the high-backed chair she had managed to get Tony to bring in, and pulling it over to her bedside. "But I think I'll leave off reading tonight."

"Very good sir. I hope you have a pleasant night." Jarvis replied. "And I also wish to inform you that Prince Thor will be leaving in the morning, and wishes to speak with you before he goes."

Loki nodded. "Thank you Jarvis. Goodnight."

"Goodnight sir." Jarvis replied, leaving him to watch her once more.

Now that he knew what Alex was capable of, he had no intention of leaving her alone. If there was anything he knew, he knew evil men and the way they worked and in that moment he determined that he would keep watch over her through the night.

After all, he wouldn't get any sleep anyway.

"Loki?" he turned, trying to find her in the gardens of the palace. "Loki?" she singsonged. "Over here."

"Where?" he called back, the giggling of children could be heard as he moved around the maze.

"Loki, over here!" It came from his left, and he came upon she whom he sought. "Took you long enough." she said cheerfully, her dark brown eyes shining in mirth. "Saoirse here had given up hope."

"Mommy, I said no such thing. I knew Daddy would come." the little girl called 'Saoirse' replied. Loki momentarily wondered how she was there, knowing that Elizabeth had lost her years before and in a different timeline... but he didn't ponder it long as he simply moved toward the girl, scooping her up in his arms and kissing her cheek. She giggled.

"No, you didn't have to... you were thinking it, I could tell by the look on your face." Elizabeth replied, looking back up at Loki with her hands on her hips. "What am I?Chopped liver?"

Loki laughed. "Mmmm... much better than that." he replied, kissing her as well. "But where is Erik?"

"My grandfather or your son?" Elizabeth quipped.

"My son."

"Your mother took him." she replied. "Apparently your father is still trying to feel better over what he did to you, so he wanted to spend time with him."

"Ah. I understand now." Loki replied, looking at Elizabeth.

"What?"

"Nothing..." Loki trailed off. "I'm just in awe of my wife, is that alright?"

She tilted her head, as she usually did when she was thinking of a reply. "Well I suppose so, she thinks of you quite often."
Loki smiled, placing Saoirse next to her mother who had taken to lying in the grass. He joined her, propping himself up on his elbow before he placed a hand on her stomach. He could feel the new life within her... life he had put there.

Loki woke with a start, the feelings which he had felt in the dream still quite there. Morning, it seemed, had also come, the light shining through the window with a soft glow. The dream confused him. He had been happy... elated even – he scoffed, he hadn't felt that for years. He had obviously been restored to the family, as both the conversation and his royal armor gave tribute to that. But that was not what had him in such confusion – as he had dreamed of being restored many times before – it was that he was married to Elizabeth... he had a son with Elizabeth... and he was expecting another. The thought, even now, made him giddy with delight. But its perfection was shattered with reality.

Looking over to his left he saw Elizabeth laying on her side, still asleep. Fortunately she hadn't had any nightmares, and so he was not forced to comfort her, their strained relationship already causing a bit of awkwardness within him. Still, one thing was decided for him during his night of contemplation, and that was that he would stay detached from Elizabeth Donovan. Yes, he was drawn to her, but he could see how dangerous it was for the both of them to spend too much time in each other's company. Dreaming about a woman who he had made clear with her that they were nothing more than friends would be bad for the both of them. Though he obviously knew she cared for him, and he knew he cared for her – still, the horrible truth for him was they could never be together. He was going to be re-incarcerated at any time, and he would be damned if he gave her more sorrow than she already had.

Remembering what Jarvis had told him the night before, he stood up from his chair and left the room as quietly as possible to see Thor before he left. "Jarvis?" he called once he entered the hallway.

"Yes, Prince Loki?" the AI replied.

"Where is Thor right now?" he asked.

"Prince Thor is currently in your room sir." Jarvis answered. "As soon as you woke up, I informed him. He's waiting."

Loki nodded once. "Thank you Jarvis." he said, opening the door to his room. "Good morning, Thor."

"Good morning, brother." Thor replied, shocked that Loki would be so open with a greeting. "I am returning to Asgard today, and wanted to see you before I left."

"I know, Jarvis told me last night." Loki replied, moving to his bedside table to look for something. "I am sorry I have not talked to you more as of late, brother." Thor apologized. "I have been busy."

"Yes, I know." Loki replied. "And I have been in the company of Elizabeth, so it all makes sense why we haven't spoken. Don't concern yourself over it."

Thor nodded, in a state of shock at his brother's seemingly polite attitude. His heart clenched, it was almost like the Loki he grew up with, the one he had lost when he became exiled."I heard what happened yesterday, I am also sorry I did not come."

"Did you come here just to apologize?" Loki asked him, a slight smirk on his face. "Because as I understood it, you went to make sure that the others were safe."
"I did... and I didn't come here just to apologize, Loki. I just wanted to say goodbye, I suppose."
Thor said quietly.

"Goodbye." Loki repeated. "What a lonely word. Very well, you've said it—"

"I heard what happened yesterday, Jane told me," Thor said.

"Jane told you what?" Loki asked.

"She told me about what happened between you and Lady Elizabeth." Thor said.

Loki rolled his eyes, swearing in old Norse. "Does everyone in the bloody tower know about it?!" he exclaimed, quickly silencing himself as he knew Elizabeth was still sleeping. "We are friends, Thor, nothing more."

"But—"

"No 'buts'!" Loki interrupted. "We spoke of this last night, and we came to the decision that friends would be our best option. Now leave the subject be."

"More like you came to the decision, and she knew she could never argue against it. I know you brother, you are afraid of her." Thor said.

"Whatever gives you that idea? I spend all my time in her presence, that hardly makes me afraid—"

"You are afraid to care for her because of what happened with Father, yet you are blind! Do you not see her affection toward you?" Thor's voice began to raise. "Fandral has been going positively mad over the fact that she keeps defending you, and Sif is concerned that you may turn her against us for your own gain."

"You can assure Sif that I have no intention of harming Elizabeth, and Fandral can mind his own damn business, she is not his!" Loki snapped.

Thor took a deep breath, wondering why every conversation with his brother ended in argument. "Sif and Fandral are not the only ones who worry about your influence over Lady Elizabeth. Nor are they the only ones to worry about whether or not she is a threat herself!"

"You believe Elizabeth is a threat?" Loki replied, his eyes alight with fury. "How dare you!"

"No, no, no, no, I don't believe she is a threat." Thor responded. "But there are doubts about her past—"

"What about her past?" Loki inquired.

Thor sighed. "She was accused of being some kind of criminal. Someone who would hurt us if she could, and under the power of Alexander Shaw. They said she had killed people, and that she was under some kind of code which would mean that she was a 'shoot-on-sight target'." he explained.

Loki's eyes narrowed. "Who is accusing her?" he asked.

"Director Fury." Thor answered. "He had some images of her... Loki is it true?"

"What makes you think I'd tell you anything, brother?" Loki asked in turn.

"I need to know." Thor replied.
"Why?"

"I cannot protect her if I don't know what it is she is being accused of and why."

"She is not under your protection." Loki snarled. "She is under mine."

Thor shook his head, gripping Mjolnir a little tighter. "Stop being so stubborn, I only want to help."

"I think I've had enough of your help." Loki replied. "You've said your goodbyes, now I think you need to leave."

"I did not wish for it to turn into an argument." Thor replied.

"Well it seems we can do little else." Loki stated, moving to his bookshelf. "But I will give you a message for Fandral..."

"Do not concern yourself, I have already given him the warning of going near Elizabeth." Thor interrupted. "You are not the only one concerned about her."

Loki scoffed. "Why do you think he'll listen to you? And furthermore, why is Elizabeth any of your concern? Have you been assigned her protector? Go back to your Jane, I'm sure your protection will do better with her." he mocked.

"Why are you so determined to keep me out of her life?" Thor asked.

"Because you will take her away from me!" Loki shouted, finally expressing his fear.

Thor was silent, taking in his words. "Why would I take her from you?" he asked, but Loki did not reply. "I care about you, little brother. I want to see you happy, and I have seen you happier with her than with anyone else. I have tried to—"

"When we are done here, you will take me back to Asgard." Loki said quietly, his face turned toward his books. "She will remain here, and I will complete my sentence. When I am done... when I am free to go about as I wish... she will be dead."

"And so..." Thor began, finally understanding. "You have decided to distance yourself because you do not wish to break her heart before your inevitable departure, and therefore your own. You are worried about loving her too much, because if you get in too deep, you're afraid you will hurt yourself too much."

Loki finally turned, a pained look on his face. "Now you see me, brother." he said. "Finally the brawn has gotten a brain." He could hear Elizabeth stirring on the other side of the wall, and immediately concerned himself.

"Loki... I didn't know." Thor said.

"Sorry for the interruption, sir," Jarvis interrupted. "But Hogun is waiting on you."

Thor nodded, looking at Loki. "Just go, you know how Hogun gets when he actually does get irritated." Loki said, turning back toward his books.

"Do you have any message, for Father or Mother?" Thor asked.

"Tell mother I am sorry, and I hope she'll understand." Loki finally replied. "And thank her for her presents. She'll know what I'm saying."

"I shall give her your message." Thor assured him. "You are aware that I can take her with me,
somewhere that she will be safe."


"Mother would keep her safe, as would father—"

"And why would Odin take care of a young woman who his bastard son cares for?" Loki countered. "I doubt it."

"I would keep her safe." Thor stated. "I swear to you, that I always will."

"Why in the Nine would you do that?" Loki asked incredulously, turning back toward him.

"Because you love her, and I can only hope that one day she will be my sister." Thor answered, heading for the door. "And I will always protect my family."

Loki smiled ruefully. "She will never be your sister." he said.

"I have to hope, brother. That is all Mother and I have." Thor replied, opening the door. "Goodbye, I will see you soon." With that he left Loki to his own devices.

Loki stared after him, wishing that the Norns had taken him down a different road than they had.

What he didn't know, however, was that the Norns still had quite a bit of hardship in store for him, and that the problems with Alexander Shaw had only just begun.
Bait and Switch

Chapter Summary

Lizzie is beginning to plan, and leaving Loki out of it. Meanwhile Pepper and Tony have noticed the distance between the couple. Lizzie then asks Pepper for help.

Baking was something which Lizzie had always been good at, finding it rather soothing when you felt as if your entire world had gone upside down. When her memories had been returned to her, with all of their painful and horrific attributes, she had gone into a baking frenzy, allowing her anger and pain be translated into whipping egg whites, cutting fruit, etc. Now was no different, and she found solace in doing a little baking before everyone woke up.

She was thankful that she and Loki had had their conversation the night before, as she was now quite engrossed in what Alex had told her the day before. How was it possible? Saoirse had been stillborn, so she had been told... a child who never had a chance to live. Alex couldn't possibly be telling her the truth, and even if Saoirse had lived she wouldn't have been able to exist between the different universes, the lack of her existence in the current one canceling out her existence completely. Yet, what if he was telling her the truth? What if, somehow, she was immune to her powers? It was too confusing for her, hence why she was baking while she thought.

Lizzie was so engrossed by what she was doing, she didn't even notice Loki watching her from the doorframe, his eyes catching a slight oddity about her. He had returned to her room after Thor had left, and upon finding her missing had immediately asked Jarvis where she was. After the day before, he was much more worried about her suddenly disappearing, concerned that something might happen to her if she was too far from him. Still, he could see her seeming stress as she cut up onions, each sliver being probably more vigorous than she had anticipated.

"You should talk to her." a voice sounded softly from his left, turning to see Natasha standing a few feet off, he walked toward her.

"I have no idea what to say." Loki replied. "She's obviously upset, I can see that. Though over what happened yesterday or me, I'm not sure."

"Ask her." Natasha replied.

Loki scoffed. "Easy for you to say, you're not me." he said.

Natasha sighed. "True." she looked into the kitchen just as Lizzie had Jarvis turn on some music. "Listen, I don't know what is going on with her, but I will tell you it isn't pleasant."

"Whatever makes you think that?" Loki inquired.

"Yesterday when Shaw had me imprisoned in my mind... I don't know how but I did hear something that he said to her. Something about a daughter that she had being alive, and in his custody." she confided. "Now, I know her story, as she told me after I returned from S.H.I.E.L.D headquarters. I forced her hand by giving her this." She held out the file she had shown Lizzie the day before.

Loki opened it, seeing Elizabeth as she once was for the first time being quite a shock. This was a far
cry from the Lizzie he knew, with eyes which he had only seen that first day in the library... cold and emotionless. An ice-queen who didn't mind killing. "How did he get a hold of this?"

"There was a rift in time and space, they say, which brought a file girl from another universe to this one. The universe which she came from had Anesthesia as a wanted killer, working in league with Shaw." she answered. "And Shaw told her yesterday that he was responsible for the file coming through."

"What?" Loki asked incredulously. "How is that possible?"

"Mutants have many abilities, the one he used could somehow create holes in the different timelines, merging them if he so desired." she said. "Alex said he had brought Saoirse in through one of those holes, causing her to be left in this timeline... and in his hands."

He stiffened, looking over at Elizabeth with that knowledge he could understand why she was so upset. "He has her daughter, a daughter she thought was dead..." his memory flashed to the day before, the pieces of the conversation he had heard suddenly making sense. "He's going to subject Saoirse to the tests if Elizabeth doesn't do what he wants. But what does he want?"

"I don't know." Natasha answered. "I'm afraid I can't recall that information, or else I would tell you. All I know is that he wanted to make some kind of deal with her, and she turned him down."

"I knew that, I heard it." Loki replied, looking down at the photograph again. "So this is who she was... doesn't even look the same."

"No, she doesn't, does she?" Natasha commented. "Billowing peacoat, black corset, doesn't even seem like something she'd wear."

"I'll see if I can get her to tell me just what happened, and what he said." Loki told the redhead. "In the meantime, where is everyone?"

"Still asleep I'd imagine. Clint said they went to bed really late trying to figure out what they were going to do." Natasha replied, turning to leave when Loki stopped her by a hand to her arm.

"Romanoff..." he started again. "Whatever it was that he asked, do you think she'd comply with his demands? She's not weak, I know that... but you don't think she'd give in to save her daughter?"

Natasha let out a breath. "I honestly don't know. We've never seen Elizabeth being a protective mother... or trying to help those who she cares for." she replied. "We don't know how far she'd go to keep Saoirse safe, or what she'd do. Remember, she became the woman in the file because her sister was in danger – I can't imagine what she'd do for a daughter she thought was lost."

Loki nodded, letting Natasha go and walking into the kitchen. Lizzie was stirring something, the music blaring from Jarvis' speakers quite melancholy. Proof further to Loki that she was not in a good mood. One thing was for certain: if Saoirse was alive, then that would alter everything. That, Loki feared. He feared watching Elizabeth go back to the way she was, a cold-blooded killer.

"I know you're there." she suddenly uttered, breaking him from his thoughts. "No doubt you've noticed my taciturn attitude."

"I have." Loki replied, sitting down at the table. "Elizabeth, what is wrong?"

"Nothing, I'm just pissed that Alex got in yesterday and managed to do what he did." she replied coolly. "We're going to need to figure out a way to keep him at bay. It's disconcerting to know that you aren't safe."
"Naturally." he said, looking up at her. "But there's something else isn't there? Something you're not telling me."

She finally looked over at him. "Something else? I don't know what you mean?"

Loki took a deep breath, unsure just how volatile she was at this moment. "Yesterday, when I arrived at the floor where Shaw was keeping you, he spoke of a deal. A deal which you then declined."

"And you want to know what it was." Lizzie finished for him. "He wanted me back in his ranks."

His brow furrowed. "What?"

She scoffed. "Silly really, but some men are so possessive it's ridiculous. There is a nice possession, and an irritatingly obsessive possession. Alex, unfortunately, belongs to the latter." she muttered to herself. "But basically he still views me as belonging to him – a prize, so to speak, against my grandfather. He created the power within me, and so he views it as his as long as it is in my body."

For the hundredth time, Loki plotted Shaw's death. Lizzie didn't belong to Alex Shaw... or Loki Laufeyson for that matter. She wouldn't stand for it. "So he wanted you to join him again, to fight on his side."

"Right." she agreed. "He thinks I can be useful... and that I can be bought."

"Romanoff told me that he has Saoirse." Loki tread carefully, knowing that Lizzie was not a woman he wanted to anger. As it was, she froze.

"She heard that?" Lizzie inquired. "Good. It saves me having to say it... yes, he has Saoirse – well, so he says, I have learned never to take his word for granted." she said, licking a spoon.

"Do you think it's possible?" Loki asked.

She shrugged. "I wouldn't know. I haven't spent much time with mutants, I never really came up against this problem." she replied. "Anything is possible... who knows. Who knows if time and paralysis are my only abilities? Those are the only ones I know about."

"If she is alive... what are you going to do?" Loki asked.

Lizzie shook her head, as if warring within herself. "I can't – that is to say, if she's alive, and if he actually has her, I will have to do something. I can't leave my daughter to my fate... I refuse." she said. "I have to save her, if she's actually there. But I don't know what I'm going to do. I have a week, by which I will be forced to act, or deal with the guilt of knowing that my daughter is going through horrors which I endured when I was older than she." She stopped, her eyes glazing over as if she was looking at something far away.

Loki got up, moving toward her and taking her hands in his. "Elizabeth..." he started, noting the way she clenched her jaw. "Don't keep things from me. I'm your friend."

She scoffed, nodding. "Yes... yes you are." she said. "You're my friend." Her brow relaxed, her entire posture visibly loosening as her eyes turned once more to the warm brown he was familiar with, fear lacing them. "But would you stay my friend no matter what?"

"Why would you even ask me?" Loki inquired.

"Because I'm afraid, Loki." she admitted. "I'm afraid of what's in that file that Natasha gave you and you left on the table. I'm afraid of going back to where I was... who I was. I'm afraid that doubt has
been placed in everyone's minds, and at the least provocation they'll all turn against me."

"I will not." Loki swore. "And you're wrong, they would not either."
"I'm not so sure." she replied. "Alex is very cunning, and I can play a good part."

"Why are you talking about these things?" Loki asked, his hands tightening around her own. "No one doubts you."

"No?" Her voice was light, yet challenging. "They don't?"

"No." He insisted, trying to reassure her. Yet, he could see in her eyes that she was not assured of her friends.

She gave a curt nod, forcing him to let go of her hands as she walked around him to check on the food in the oven. "I hope you're right." she said.

Loki pulled her up from looking into the door. "What has gotten into your head? Why are you asking these things?" he asked, his hands going to her shoulders.

"Because I know something you don't." she replied smoothly. "Something that would destroy me... and yet, save everyone."

Warning bells rang in his brain. "Tell me." he demanded. "What is going on?"

"Bait and switch." she answered. "A run of the mill bait and switch. But don't worry, as Shakespeare said: 'All that begins well, ends well.' I only hope he was right." With that, she walked out of the kitchen, leaving him worried and confused.

Logan walked into the Tower, already informed of what had happened the day before by Tony Stark. Alex had attacked Lizzie, this time not because she was in the wrong place at the wrong time. It was clear to him now more than before that the other mutant hadn't had his memory erased when Lizzie went back in time, and that now that Alex had found her, he wasn't willing to let her go as quickly. That knowledge in his mind, he knew it would only be a matter of time before Alex struck again, possibly in for the kill.

"Whatcha thinkin' 'bout?" Rogue, or Anna-Marie as her name was, said from his side once they entered the elevator.

"Alexander Shaw." Logan replied.

"Well that was 'bout as clear as mud." Anna-Marie replied. "What 'bout Alexander Shaw?"

Logan sighed. "How to kill him." he answered. "Do you think your ability would be able to stop him?"

Rogue shrugged. "Ain't met him before. How am I supposed to know what fightin' him's like?"

"You wouldn't. At least, not in this timeline." Logan muttered to himself. "Hopefully he's not immune to you."

"Yeah, he sounds like quite a doozy to get rid of. I almost wish that I did know what his fightin' style was like. Make things easier." Anna-Marie said. "Say, what's this Lizzie Donovan like anyhow? I ain't met her either, but seems to me, Wolvie, that you're pretty protective."

Wolverine nodded, looking up as the numbers continued to climb. "She's a great girl, but she has a
"Bad past." he answered. "She's got similar powers to you, except she doesn't actually kill people unless she wants to... well... that's a loose term anyway."

"Too bad I don't remember. Did she ever fight me before?" Rogue asked.

A chuckle emitted from her companion. "Yes... twice."

"Who won?"

"I refuse to answer that question." Logan answered. "I'm not causing a problem between you when you haven't seen each other yet."

Rogue huffed. "Spoilsport." The elevator dinged, announcing their arrival. Logan led the way, entering the main room where everyone was gathered... all seventeen of them, which included the Fantastic Four. "Big crowd." Rogue continued.

Logan wasn't listening, already spotting Lizzie and going to her side. Loki was already there, his eyes never leaving Elizabeth, even though he was a foot away from her. Wolverine's eyebrow lifted, wondering just what had happened while he was away, whatever it was it he didn't like the way it looked. He sat down on her other side, Rogue seated next to him. Lizzie turned to him, smiling in greeting, although it did not reach her eyes. "I was wondering when you'd get back." she said. "Did you hear what happened?"

"Yeah, I did." Logan replied, looking over at Loki. "I was told that you were the one that got her away from Alex."

"I did." Loki responded, his eyes looking out the window.

"Alex had better be glad I wasn't here," Logan said. "I would have gutted him."

"Honestly, Wolvie, you got to stop saying that." Rogue interjected. "It's ain't a pleasant way to dispose of anyone."

Lizzie looked past Logan, her eyes focusing on Anna-Marie, her brow rose. "Well, well, look who it is." she said. "Well, well, look who it is." she said. "Long time since I've seen you."

"I'd say the same, but I've been told that you somehow erased my memories." Rogue replied. "Miss Donovan, I presume."

"Your presumption is correct." Lizzie replied. "Although I'm curious as to why you're here? After all, we have never gotten along." She looked at Logan, expecting an answer from him.

"Well, Professor X sends his love, but he sent Anna-Marie because he said you might want a blast from the past." Logan answered. "Not that it makes any sense to me, but..."

"I get it." Lizzie replied, chuckling ever so slightly. "Poor Tony, he's already got fourteen people living here, I don't know what he'll do about Rogue."

"He ain't gonna do nothin' 'bout me." Anna-Marie replied. "I can take care of myself."

"Your grandmother is supposed to go back to Brooklyn tonight I was told, and Rogue is going to go with her. Keep her and Bella safe, and keep in touch with HQ." Logan supplied.

Lizzie nodded. "Makes sense, I know she can do it too. Bella maybe not as much, but I'd feel a lot gladder if seanmhathair was kept safer. There's a reason they call her Rogue."
"Do what? What do you know 'bout me that you're so trustin'?'" Anna-Marie asked.

"Oh, lots. You were my pet project once upon a time." Lizzie answered. "But for me to tell you everything would only confuse you."

"I ain't an idiot." Rogue replied hotly.

A laugh came from Lizzie. "Oh, Rogue... no need to get so uppity."

Logan looked over at Lizzie, noticing a familiar glint in her eyes, a glint he didn't like. "Loki, can I have a moment?" he asked, getting up and walking out of the room. Loki followed, unsure of what the mutant wished to speak with him about.

"What do you want?" Loki asked as soon as they were out of hearing range of the rest of the group.

"What happened yesterday?" Logan asked. "She isn't herself."

"You're telling me..." Loki replied, looking over at Lizzie. "It was something Shaw told her, I'm sure of it. Last night she seemed normal, herself, tired and in pain, but still the same Elizabeth we all know." and love. His mind added, although he quickly banished the thought. "But then this morning she was... different. Moodier. At war with herself over something although she wouldn't tell me what."

"Do you know what Shaw told her?" Logan inquired.

"Not precisely," Loki replied. "She told me that he said he wanted her back in his ranks, but there's more to it. He wanted to make a deal, and it has something to do with Saoirse."

"Saoirse?" Logan grit his teeth at the name. "That's not good. He knows how to get to Lizzie, even though he hasn't seen her in years... he knows her weakness. Target those she cares about, use them against her." he said, following Loki's gaze. "Moody... how?"

"She's afraid that something will happen that would turn the Avengers against her."Loki answered.

"Why would she think that?" Logan asked. "It's clear to anyone who watches them that they don't doubt her. Damn it, she's living here."

"That was then. Yesterday Director Fury of S.H.I.E.L.D gave them cause for doubt, via a file which somehow made its way from one timeline to another. He told them that she was a threat, and that she wasn't to be trusted." Loki replied, feeling absolute distaste for the one-eyed agent. Clint made his way to Lizzie's side, obviously asking how she was, she smiled, but in her eyes was a sadness, one which Loki didn't like seeing there. "That she could turn on them at any moment."

"And so she's worried that they will think that she's against us." Logan finished. "Sounds like when she came to the school for the first time after being a criminal for ten years. Rogue didn't trust her, swore she never would."

Loki nodded. "And then there's Saoirse. She said that she'd have to do something, although she didn't know what." Loki said.

The mutant scoffed. "She knows what." Logan replied sternly. "I don't know what she's going to do, but she does. She was always a strategist, always had a plan and a backup plan. And those plans were ruthless, you didn't know her then, but by God she was a force to be reckoned with when you pissed her off. Even more so when you touched her family."
"Hmm..." Loki looked around the room. "I know she's dangerous, but no one else does. If she confirms the information in the file, they'll treat her as they do me – with caution. If she doesn't tell them, and acts, they won't trust her again as they'll label her a liar as well as a killer. She's in a tough spot, and I don't know how to get her out of it."

Logan looked over at Loki with his choice of words, and subtly smelled the other man. Lizzie's scent was all over him, not just on his hands where he would – perhaps – touch her shoulder. No, something had happened that made him get closer to her, something to make him embrace her like he hadn't done before. Pulling out his phone, he remembered that Jarvis had sent him a video which he had ignored, maybe that was the key to his curiosity. He pocketed it again, not wanting to let Loki know that he'd gotten it.

"You don't think she'll do anything alone?" Loki asked, completely oblivious to what Logan was thinking in that moment. "She wouldn't be that foolish."

Logan shook his head. "She always preferred to work alone when she was under Shaw, and was forced to work with others. I don't think that particular trait has changed." he answered. "As for her being foolish... she's level headed, but her one major fault is that she always thinks she right. Whatever she has planned, she think will work completely – but I'm guessing it will fail."

"What makes you say that?" Loki inquired, looking at the mutant.

"My experience with her impromptu plans. I know she told you everything, so no doubt she told you that she got me out of Shaw's dungeon?" Logan looked over at him.

"She did." Loki replied.

"That plan failed entirely, got her sister killed, and nearly killed herself. Her only saving grace was that when her sister died, her powers were transferred over to Lizzie, meaning that Lizzie could get us out of there before they closed in so much that we couldn't escape." Logan explained. "She only thought through that plan for three hours. I don't know how long she's thought this one through."

Loki sighed. "Is there any way we can help her, even though we don't know what the plan is?"

Logan scoffed. "Even if we could, she wouldn't want it." he replied. "She's stubborn, and she wouldn't want more people to get hurt that she cared for. She wouldn't let you help her, or me, or Bella – no one."

"Do you think she'll meet his demands?" Loki asked the mutant. "Do you think she'll join him just to keep Saoirse safe?"

The other man shook his head with a frown. "I don't know. I hope not, but I can't leave it at 'hope'..." he paused, looking at Lizzie again. "I don't think so." Loki gave a sigh of relief. "Look," Logan started again. "I don't know what the relationship between you two is at the moment, but she cares about you more than she lets on, and if you dare to hurt her in any way – as a friend, or something more – if you break her heart... I warned you once before if you weren't straightforward you would know what my claws in your gut would feel like. I don't care if she kicks and screams, I will kill you without hesitation." His eyes showed his threat as strongly as his gruff words.

Loki nodded, somewhat relieved that the man didn't give him another speech on how he needed to realize his affections for her. "I swear to you, that if I ever hurt Elizabeth, I'll not struggle. You can do as you will." he promised, his voice barely above a whisper. Logan gave him a curt nod.

"Glad we understand one another." Logan said. "But let me get this straight from the horses mouth: what is your relationship?"

"Friends." Loki answered quickly. "We've settled on friends."
"You settled? You had a conversation?"

"Yes."

"What happened?"

Loki paused, that new feeling of his gut clenching made its presence known. "I kissed her." he finally admitted. "But I know I cannot care for her more than I do."

That explains the scent. Logan thought as he pursed his lips. He had eyes, he knew what the pair of them were like together... but he also could see they were both stubborn. "Fair enough," he said. "She agreed to it?" Loki nodded. "Of course she did." They really were perfect for one another.

"Shall we go back to the ladies?" he asked rhetorically, moving back over to where Lizzie and Anna-Marie were. Loki followed sitting back where he had been originally. If Loki were honest with himself – which he rarely was – Logan was probably the only one, other than Elizabeth, that he could stand. The gruff mutant being quite straightforward, and not in the habit of letting other people get in his way. He could understand why he had been chosen as Elizabeth's protector... he was as fierce as his nickname implied.

"You were over there a long time." Lizzie commented lightly, looking straight past him and out the window.

"Well, I had explain what happened yesterday." Loki replied.

"Ah... and what did Logan say?" she asked.

"About what?" he asked in return.

"About the price of tea in China?" Lizzie quipped irritatedly, her look sharp as she turned her gaze in his direction.

"I'm afraid I didn't ask what he thought of that, even if I did, I don't think he'd care about what something costs in another country unless he was there – and even then I don't think he would as I doubt he drinks tea." Loki replied, wanting a bit of the bantering Elizabeth to come out again, the one who enjoyed going back and forth. He didn't like this new one.

He felt happiness again as her lips stretched into a real smile, her eyes finally matching the look on her face. Unwittingly, he felt himself match her amusement, his own smile beginning to make itself known. She shook her head at his antics, giggling lightly to herself as she looked over at Logan. She turned back to Loki, leaning forward and burying her smile in his shoulder for a moment before pulling away. Loki dared to wrap an arm around her waist, pulling her slightly closer to him, and she allowed it. "Good reply," she finally said. "I don't think I've ever gotten quite that kind of an explanation before."

"Glad I could be of assistance." Loki replied completely without malice. He was simply happy that she wasn't pushing him away anymore, wasn't so engrossed in her own mind that she didn't remember he existed. He knew, in the back of his mind, that it was truly his own fault, he had decided to keep their relationship platonic, and now he suddenly wished he hadn't. She owed him nothing.

She shook her head again. "Okay, but seriously..." Her face fell again, and with it, it seemed the room had darkened. Loki felt awkward holding her to him once more, yet he stayed where he was in hopes she wouldn't pull away. "What did you guys talk about regarding yesterday?"

Loki sighed. "I told him—"
"Okay people, let's all gather round over here!" Tony's boisterous voice interrupted, pulling everyone from where they all were scattered around the room.

The billionaire's brown eyes landed on Loki and Lizzie, noticing how Loki had a hand around her waist, but that he was looking out the window, completely engrossed in the skyscrapers. He had been watching them all morning, and was definitely disturbed. After yesterday, he was sure that they would have finally realized their feelings for each other and gotten together, but this morning was evident that it had only pushed them further away. Yet, there was a glimmer of hope as she hadn't shrugged his hand off yet, which she had been doing every time he tried to touch her. Obviously Loki was feeling more impacted than she was. Maybe something had happened between them while Jarvis was down?

"Tony?" Pepper's voice broke him from his reverie, and brought his attention back to the present. He looked at his fiancée, sitting down next to her and placing a hand on her own waist. "What's wrong?"

"Project Cupid isn't going very well." he whined. "They couldn't be further apart in the love area."

"Well, I'm sure everything will work out." Pepper replied. "But you know, Cupid, you can't just sit around with a bunch of arrows and think things are going to work."

Tony's brows furrowed. "What does that mean?" he asked.

"It means, Mr. Stark, that you can't expect them to get together on their own." she answered. "Those two are stubborn, and on top of being stubborn, I was told by a little bird that she is as damaged as he is. Put those two together and you will have two people very much afraid of love, and you can't leave them to Fate. You have to help them a little."

"Tell me, Aphrodite, how do you help them when it's obvious that she wants nothing to do with him at this point?" Tony asked.

Pepper looked over just as Lizzie got up from her seat and went to the kitchen, leaving Loki looking awkward on the couch. "I wouldn't say she doesn't want anything to do with him... I'd say something happened, and she's now fighting it."

"What do you mean?" the billionaire inquired, looking over at Loki, who looked like his puppy had been kicked.

"He's obviously head over heels for her, and I was told that had a discussion and are leaving their relationship at 'Just friends'. Now, I'm assuming that after that kiss she was in a state of complete confusion, and Jarvis tells me that he had a visitor – his mother to be precise. Now, Alex attacks, she is put in danger, and I have never seen a man... besides you... look so determined to get anyone back. I was surprised he didn't just obliterate Alex on the spot, with the look he had in his eyes."

"So let's get this straight: he kisses her, mom comes calling, Alex attacks, he goes batshit crazy to get her back, she goes unconscious in his arms, he panics, they return to her room... then what?" Tony counted off on his fingers, looking at his girlfriend.

"Then they have a discussion, and they decide that they need to keep their relationship platonic." she finished.

"Why on God's good earth would they do that?!" Tony exclaimed.

"A couple of reasons, actually." Pepper replied. "But let's continue with the process of what happened. So then after their discussion, Lizzie starts thinking – very dangerous in her situation as by
this point she's been elated, confused, in love, and then told that she isn't wanted. Alex made some kind of statement about a deal yesterday, he gave her an offer – don't ask me what, Tony, I can't tell you – but whatever it was, it had her crazy with fury, which you saw in the very end where she told him off in German. That offer is hanging over her head, and obviously someone's life is attached to it.

"What makes you so sure about that?" Tony asked.

"He mentioned a 'she' being on one of their tables if Lizzie didn't respond to his offer in a week." Pepper answered lightly.

Tony's eyes got big, his mind finally remembering those words. He looked over at Lizzie. "She's planning doing something about it," he pieced together. "So she's pushing him away so that he won't get hurt by what she's going to do. Aw, shit! Why do people have to be so stubborn?"

Pepper chuckled, running a hand through his hair. "So you see," she ignored his question. "She doesn't want 'nothing' to do with him... she is simply pulling herself from him so what whatever she does it won't hurt him."

"Do you know what she's going to do?" Tony asked, Pepper sighed.

"No," she answered, getting up. "I'm going to get something to drink while you settle this rabble down." Tony nodded, shaking his head while muttering about how sorry he felt for the poor couple. Leaving the room, she went to the kitchen to find Lizzie already there. "Hello, Lizzie!" she exclaimed. "How are you today, I haven't really talked to you?"

Lizzie nodded. "No, you haven't." she replied morosely. "Pepper..."

"Yeah?" the redhead looked at the brunette, noticing the stress on the younger woman's face. "Lizzie, I know what happened with Loki yesterday, and today I can see that you're trying to keep away from him... but honey you should leave him like that—"

"I have no choice." Lizzie replied, sighing. "Pepper, if I told you something, something which I cannot risk anyone else knowing... would you keep it a secret?"

Filling up her glass with water, Pepper leaned against the opposite counter. "Of course." she replied.

"Good..." Lizzie started, here brown eyes filled with fear. "Because I need your help."
"Are you insane?!" Clint exclaimed, his blue eyes boring holes into Elizabeth due to her recent proposition, the entire idea throwing everyone off-kilter. Even Loki was looking at her in surprise, wondering what was going on in her head as she suggested that the women be sent elsewhere for safety. "The women are safest here in the tower, they don't need to be moved around."

"Shaw got in before, he targeted Pepper," Lizzie replied calmly. "He will do it again, and next time he won't be so easily overpowered."

"How do you know that?" Clint retorted, not even giving anyone else a chance to speak.

"Because I know him." Lizzie said, her voice soft yet stern. "He came with Chitauri soldiers, who he could not control – do you honestly think that a tactician such as himself would do anything without a reason?"

Clint scoffed. "He obviously has no pow—"

"That, dear Clint, is what he counts on." she interrupted. "The way you're thinking is what he is going to target and exploit. Alex is a master chess player, every piece is in place, and he just made a move to try and get you to think you're going to win!"

"What the hell are you talking about?" Clint snapped back. "Cause none of this is making any sense to me. You just want to move the women out of here, I don't know why, but you do."

"I'm talking about an army!" Lizzie shouted above him, effectively silencing what he had to say. "An army of mutants – bred mutants, with only the most effective powers. Weapons, not human beings, who at any moment could wipe out anyone who gets in his way. Mutants who have undergone the most atrocious things which have given them what they have, that don't remember what life was like before they were laid out on his tables. They do what he says just so they can stay alive. They have nothing to lose, because their identities have been stripped from them to create nothing more than heartless monsters who will do his bidding. That is what you're up against."

The fire in her eyes made it clear to everyone that every word she said she was convinced of. Knowing her past, Logan scooted a little closer to her, prepared to hold her back if Clint said something to truly set off the chained beast within her. Loki seemed to notice as well, and he smoothly slid a hand to her lower back. If she noticed his touch, she was purposefully ignoring it, her eyes still focused on Clint.

"So you're saying he's created a force to go against us?" Steve's voice cut through the silence. "Something much more deadly than Loki's army was?"

"Yes." she answered simply. "His methods are far more advanced than you might think."

Clint scoffed. "And how do you know all this?" he asked. "How do you know about what he
knows?" Lizzie wouldn't answer him, her lips tightened to a thin line, which outwardly showed her irritation. Clint's blue eyes widened as his mind flashed to the file Director Fury had shown him. Surely that hadn't been the case... but still, the nagging suspicion that the girl in the file was the girl who sat across from him, was there. She knew too much about Shaw for him to shake it, and there was a definite link between the two.

"All I'm saying," Lizzie began quietly. "Is that Alex will come back, and when he does you will be powerless to stop him unless you listen to me."

"But still, to send the women away from here?" Bruce asked, Justine clinging to his hand. "Wouldn't he expect for you to suggest that?"

Lizzie smirked, shaking her head. "Alex is a chess player, but unfortunately he never counts in the factors he can't explain. He expects you to stay holed up here until he comes again, at which point he's not going to just disappear, he's going to try to kill if he can." she answered. "If you separate the women to safe-places, even if he attacks the tower, he won't get what he wants."

"How are you so sure he'll go after the women?" Bruce asked from his place across the room.

"Because he likes to target people on their weakest points. Any man's weak point is easy to access, and easy to hit. Typically men, like yourselves, will do anything to protect the women they love. In Steve's case, he'd target Andrew. Why? Because if he targets Andrew, he targets Emma, and therefore Steve. He knows that Clint and Natasha are each other's pressure points, and therefore he could target one or the other. Pepper will always be someone Tony would do anything for, as made obvious by Tony's reaction to him when he showed up earlier. Bruce, you're easy enough, just go after anyone you care for and Hulk will show up. It's matter of finding the right place to push, and pushing that particular button." She took a deep breath, glancing at everyone in the room. "Then he just waits."

"So what you're saying is:" Tony started. "Mr. Heat-Miser is going to actually try and take the women, and so we should get them somewhere safe so that he doesn't succeed?"

"Exactly." Lizzie affirmed. "The last thing that needs to happen is Alex getting his hands on the women and wreaking havoc. Besides his capturing them, he can also play with their minds and get them to become your enemies. I've seen him do it before, taking those who are close to someone and twisting their minds until there is nothing left."

"You keep saying you know his methods," Fandral spoke up for the first time. "Yet, you have yet to say how you know."

Lizzie opened her mouth to speak, but Loki beat her to it. "I can hardly see how that matters, Fandral." he said, causing her to look at him in surprise. "She knows, and she's trying to help. You should be grateful she's actually knowledgeable of this subject instead of trying to discredit her." His green eyes bored holes into the blonde Asgardian, daring him to continue in his questioning of Elizabeth.

"I'm just trying to establish whether what she's saying is completely true," Fandral replied. "How will we know if she is credible if we don't know how she acquired the information?"

"How she knows is her business, and her business alone." Loki countered. "If she doesn't care for you to know, then it doesn't matter. Surely you would not question her if Thor were here."

Fandral's eyes glinted in irritation.

"Okay, that's enough you two." Lizzie interrupted before the Asgardian could respond. "I can see now that my past is becoming something of a problem between us all. Perhaps I should—"
"No." Natasha stopped her. "You should not be forced into something which you aren't comfortable with. Your past is not our problem at the moment, nor is it our business."

"What?" Clint turned to her in shock. "How can you say that?"

"Because I know her past and I trust her. Logan knows about her past as well, and yet I'm sure he would vouch for her." Natasha replied calmly. "If you don't trust us that she is on our side, then you wouldn't trust her even if she told you."

Clint opened and closed his mouth a few times, and Lizzie looked at the redhead in gratitude.

"Alright, I believe Agent Romanoff, and I trust Logan." Steve spoke up. "We shouldn't be unreasonable about this, we've trusted Lizzie so far and would have continued if Director Fury hadn't shown us that file on her yesterday. That's put doubt in our minds, and so we're quibbling over whether we can trust Lizzie when we should be discussing how to keep everyone safe. What do you say Logan?"

Wolverine smirked. "I couldn't agree with you more, Cap." he said. "What Lizzie says about Alex is true, if anyone knows about him it's her, and you need to simply acknowledge that. Remember, the Chitauri attacked her and he let them, they're not on the same side."

A chorus of 'true' was murmured through the building. "Besides," Pepper spoke from beside Tony. "Lizzie talked to me about it first, and I think she's right. We should hear what she has to say."

"So you say we need to get the women out of the tower." Bruce finally said. "Where would you send them?"

Lizzie let out a breath, thankful that the conversation was moving on. "They would need to be split up, making it harder for him to get them all at once." she said. "Get them out of New York. Alex's hunting ground is this city, and he would have to spread himself thin to send someone just to get a group of women who were in different parts of the country. He can do a lot of things, but I'd wager he isn't ready to go showing off at the moment. If he was, he would have taken the others when they were out yesterday, instead of coming after Pepper and I – and no one would have stopped him."

Darcy squeaked from her spot near the bar. "Can tasers affect him? Cause I can totally hit him with a taser if he goes after me or Jane!" she exclaimed.

Lizzie held in a laugh, she really hoped Alex never wanted to go after Darcy, she liked her too much. "I think he's still human, for the most part, so electrical currents might have quite the effect on him. At the same time, I don't know if he's manipulated that particular aspect of his molecular biology, knowing that he would eventually have to face Thor. He can absorb powers in general, if you direct them at him, that much I know..." she said. "Maybe you could taser him, maybe not."

"Is there a way to attack him that would be impacting?" Reed asked, his scientific mind already calculating the various risks and measures they would have to take.

"If he doesn't get to me first, I can disable his abilities, it's my one trump card. However, if he gets there first he can knock me out completely." Lizzie replied.

"What is your ability?" Reed inquired. "I don't think you've told us."

"Super-speed." Darcy answered from her spot. "We saw it on the recordings, she just blurs by... pops up in another spot. Like Flash! Or a vampire!"

"Don't you dare hon'." Rogue growled from Logan's side. "I don't wanna hear 'bout that movie."

"It's not super-speed." Lizzie replied, looking over at Loki. He took it as a sign to scoot closer, a
strange exuberance growing in him at her pleading. "I have a power which I was born with, and one which I wasn't. The one I was born with will probably explain to you why I know so much about Alex Shaw despite my young age: time manipulation. My twin, who you haven't met, can control – I guess you could call it 'space'."

"So, like, you two could make the universe implode?" Jane asked, her brown eyes wide as saucers.

"In theory, yes. We've never attempted to do it, so I couldn't tell you for sure." Lizzie answered. "My time manipulation is what makes it appear like super-speed as I slow everything down for you, and speed it up for me. It gives me an advantage, in a manner of speaking." she paused. "My second power you all have seen, it was the reason why Johnny had problems that one day. Remember, Reed, he said he felt like he was choking?"

Reed nodded.

"He was. I call it paralysis. It wasn't natural to my body, which is why I accidentally attacked Johnny that day—"

"That makes sense!" Tony suddenly exclaimed. "I knew you were doing something to Loki that day in the kitchen, I didn't know what though. Paralysis... of course." Loki glared at the billionaire, knowing exactly what Tony was referring to, and hoping he wouldn't say anything further or he wouldn't depend on Lizzie to silence him.

"Yes, I can affect both the body and the mind." she continued. "Loki unfortunately was subject to it a few times, which were uncomfortable for the both of us." She stood up and turned to Anna-Marie. "Can you stand up for me, Rogue, and take your gloves off?"

"Are you stupid, or just plain loony?!" Rogue exclaimed. "Hell no, I'm not touching you!"

"You won't hurt me." Lizzie replied, looking over at Logan. "Will she?"

He shook his head, nodding to Rogue for her to comply. With a grumble, the Southern Belle took off her glove, reluctantly holding out her hand for Lizzie to take. To her surprise, the brunette was not affected by her killing touch. "How is that possible?"

"I paralyzed your power temporarily." Lizzie explained, pulling away and sitting down once again, Rogue left staring at her in surprise before she finally sat down herself. "There is really one thing Alex can't manipulate in his favor with power," she continued. "And that is actual physical attacks. Logan was once able to disable him by sticking a claw in his abdomen, and had I had the ability to tell Loki I would have informed him that he could have stabbed him yesterday. So physical attacks is a weakness."

"You should have told me." Loki whispered from her side, his mind whirling to how he would have taken the mutant down the day before, and how he'd do it in the future. "I could have killed him."

"I couldn't." She replied. "He was messing with my mind, remember?"

"How about his powers?" Tony asked. "I hear there's always a weakness for every mutant, is there some kind of kryptonite for him other than you?"

She sighed. "Not really." she admitted. "I don't know what leaps and bounds he has made during my time away from his presence, but there was one thing that I do remember. He has put powers which are foreign to his body, and there's quite a few. That means that when it comes to switching between powers there is a slight delay, in which you can attack without his retaliation. The only problem is the power he was born with will rebound any energy attacks that you send his way, so Thor might have an issue."
Each Avenger and Fantastic Four member made mental notes on what she said, knowing that they would have to use them at a later date.

"Well, Pepper can go to the Malibu house," Tony suddenly said. "It's mostly finished after it got bombed, the safety measures would be easy to install."

Lizzie nodded. "At last," Loki muttered. "Some common sense." She leaned slightly into him, as if to tell him she had heard his comment and agreed. As the debate on who was to go where finally commenced, Pepper and Lizzie exchanged a look of understanding with one another...

… and only Logan saw it.

Thor entered the Throne Room with urgency, the messenger who had gone for him making it clear to him that Odin wanted to see him immediately. In the middle of the golden room were several Asgardian men, kneeling before Odin, with a group of Jotuns guarding them. At the sound of the doors slamming shut behind Thor, Odin spoke.

"Come here, my son." the Allfather said, and Thor obeyed, approaching the dais where the king sat. His blue eyes scanned the men who were in the room, looking to discover who they were before he was told, but there was nothing that he could observe. Heimdall stood beside Odin, his golden gaze looking at the prisoners with little interest, his eyes obviously keeping watch although he was away from his post.

"You sent for me, Father." Thor greeted, looking over the Jotuns in the room.


Helblindi stepped forward, his enormous height towering over Thor as he looked him over, reminding him of Loki in his mannerisms. "So you are the one who started the war with my father several years ago." Helblindi said.

"I did, although I have learned my lesson from it and do apologize for my actions – although I never had the chance before." Thor replied solemnly.

"Do not apologize to me," Helblindi replied. "I had no love for Laufey. In my opinion he brought upon himself the actions of the royal house of Asgard, had he listened to my mother, I think things would have gone very differently."

Thor couldn't help but smile, wondering if the queen of Jotunheim was anything like his own mother in her love for pacifism. "Still, I attacked without thinking, and would have caused chaos in the Nine Realms as well as being partly responsible for its partial destruction."

"Loki, your-adopted brother and mine by birth, is to blame for the devastation which was caused." Helblindi said cordially. "Not you."

"Loki would not have acted had I not done what I did. In his own way, he was trying to prevent a war from erupting between us, by eliminating the threat. Unfortunately, I caused the threat, therefore I should be held somewhat responsible for even his actions." Thor defended, remembering a conversation he had once with Loki where that particular topic of discussion had come up. Loki had said he was trying to keep Asgard out of war, though whether that was the reality of the situation or not, Thor was unsure... Loki was also quite distraught about his heritage at the time.

Helblindi nodded slowly. "Perhaps. I accept your apology, considering I do not believe you will
recant it despite my urging." he said.

Thor shook his head. "I will not." Helblindi nodded again, his look reminding Thor so much of Loki it made him miss his little brother. "Might I inquire as to why you have Asgardian warriors in your hold? That is, if you don't mind my inquiry."

"Not at all." The one prince told the other. "My mother, Fárbauti, is a sorceress – one of few – who can travel between the Realms via the roots of Yggdrasil. A week ago, she informed me that another who can do the same was bringing creatures from the void into Jotunheim, and therefore using a portal from our realm to yours."

"I was informed of this." Thor replied. "A friend of mine in Midgard has someone who knows of the same information, she informed him that Chitauri were being brought to both Midgard and Asgard via contacts on both realms."

The Jotun Prince's brows creased. "Perhaps this woman knows my mother?"

"I don't know, my friend would not tell me who she was." Thor replied, looking at the Asgardians. "Are these some of those who were brought into our realm?"

"Yes." Heimdall answered from behind Thor. "Amora brought them through like Logan Howlett told you she was, through the portal in the mountains."

"The Allfather sent a message to me through Lady Sif to keep an eye out for that portal, as my mother confirmed, and so when the creatures stumbled through we caught them." Helblindi said. " Originally we thought they were Asgardian warriors, and thought they were sent to make sure that we were doing our part of the job. However, it was discovered they were Chitauri sent to cause havoc between the realms."

Thor walked toward the men, scanning their faces carefully. He could not see difference between them and the Asgardians he knew, their builds and posture would make him think that they were apart of his brethren. "How did you figure it out?"

"One of my guards saw a woman appear out of nowhere. She disguised a few of them as Jotuns before disappearing into the snow, we have yet to find her or her companions." Helblindi replied. "As soon as I found out, I immediately came here to show you just what your foe will appear like."

"They look like us." Thor replied quietly. "Do you see a difference between them?"

"The way they talk is one main way to tell, they don't speak much, and look confused when you address them." Helblindi replied, telling his guard to do something in his own language. The large Jotun moved toward one of the Asgardian-looking creatures, picking it up by his neck and dangling it off the floor. The creature screamed at its frozen touch, but the touch did not affect it as it would an Asgardian. "Apparently it is only their appearance, and not their actual bodies that are changed. This is how we've been able to tell so far."

Thor looked at Odin. "Is there anything that you can think of that might give us an advantage to telling them apart?" he asked, remembering what he'd been told of the Chitauri attack on Stark Tower, and how they'd appeared like normal humans for the most part. "We'll be fighting an enemy who looks like us, we won't know who is who..."

"Their eyes." Heimdall said. "They are not like ours." Thor looked at one of them more carefully, noting how their colors were not blue like an Asgardian, but a strange golden-green.

"You would have to be very close to see their eyes, and that will not give us an advantage." Thor
said, swinging his hammer and sending one flying across the room and into a pillar where it crumpled into a heap, its form taking that of a Chitauri. "We are allies, Your Highness, but how do you propose that we rid our realms of this new problem?"

Helblindi shook his head. "I know not, but my mother is going to try to find a way to make it so we can see through the illusion." he said.

"My wife is doing the same." Odin replied from his throne. Thor turned to him.

"Father... there is another who could probably help us even more..." he began.

"If you are referring to Loki, that is out of the question." Odin stopped him. "We still do not know which side your brother is on – that, and his sentencing is not finished. It would be a dangerous thing to return his powers to him when he is still volatile."

Thor nodded slowly, wishing that there would be some way to shorten Loki's sentence. They needed him, more than he knew, and he was not allowed to help until he had proved himself. "Very well, father, I will speak no more of it." Thor replied, turning back to Helblindi.

The Jotun Prince noted Thor's downtrodden look, and he immediately knew that although Loki had brought this on them all, it was probably Loki who would be their real chance of getting out of the mess. Placing that thought down for a moment, he focused on speaking with the Royal House of Asgard about another problem.

His other brother. Blyeistr.

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After an hour-and-a-half of discussion, argument, and debate, the Avengers finally figured out just who was going where until Alex decided to show his hand. Out of the seven women in Avengers Tower, only one beside Lizzie and Natasha would be staying there: Darcy. Reasoning? She really wasn't associated with the Avengers other than as Jane's funny sidekick, and therefore probably wouldn't be targeted. This of course, had brought on a bit of a problem from the taser-toting-brunette, who didn't want to be left behind while everyone else got to leave. Of course, after a good twenty minutes, she conceded, understanding that she might be needed around the tower to help out with the men. After that, it was quick.

Pepper would go to Malibu, accompanied by Jane, while Emma, Andrew, and Justine were sent off to spend some time in Xavier's Institute, where the men were assured that they would be safe. Seanmhathair, as Lizzie and Logan had spoken about, was sent home with Rogue, with a message for Bella – who had, ironically enough, begun spending her time at the Baxter Building. Apparently she and Johnny had begun to go out, and she was enjoying herself. However, she was soon called home to assist in protecting her grandmother.

Finally, with all the arrangements made, the occupants scattered to the rest of the building, their departure times happening the next morning, which left them to their own devices. Lizzie and Loki were immediately roped into a little babysitting session with Andrew, who insisted that he may not see them for quite some time, and wanted to spend his last day with them. The request had brought Lizzie to tears, and Loki to confusion, and reluctantly they obliged to his request while Emma and Steve had a day to themselves.

"Loki?" Andrew asked quite loudly when Lizzie went to get her coat on, as he had asked if they could go to the park.

"Yes?" Loki replied, buttoning up the jade-green shirt which he had been told he had to wear.
"Are you going to marry Lizzie?" The question caught Loki momentarily off guard, as he had forgotten that everyone in the tower seemed to be asking the same thing.

"No, I thought you already said you wanted to marry her." Loki replied, sighing at how ordinary he looked in the button-up and black slacks as he reached for the jacket that had been supplied.

Andrew tilted his head. "Well, I was, but if you wanna marry her, why should I mind? After all, she is much older than me."

Loki snickered. "And I'm much older than her." he muttered. "What makes you think that I would want to marry Elizabeth?"

"I've seen how you look at her, it's like how my dad used to look at mom – like she was the most beeeautiful thing in the universe." Andrew replied.

"Don't you think she's the most beautiful thing in the universe?" Loki asked the boy.

"Well yeah!" Andrew exclaimed. "But you do too, don't you?"

The Asgardian looked at the boy's reflection in the mirror as he brought up Lizzie's face in his mind. "I wouldn't call her beautiful, no."

"Why not?"

"Because that word is thrown around too loosely, used too much. You can't use a word like beautiful because it has been cheapened. A woman of good-looks is called 'beautiful', no matter what she is like inside, but that word would not be the one I would use for Elizabeth." Loki explained.

Andrew tilted his head in confusion. "Then what would you call her?"

However, he didn't get to answer as the woman in question walked in, her brown eyes bright with mirth as she looked at the boy. "Are you ready?"

Andrew jumped off of Loki's bed, running over to her and grabbing her hand. "We were just talking about you." he declared.

"Were you?" Lizzie asked, looking at Loki then back at him. "And what were you saying about me?"

"Oh, just that you're beautiful – but Loki doesn't think you are." Andrew said, not noticing the look of hurt which passed in her eyes. Loki did however as she looked up at him.

"I said 'beautiful' would not be a word I used to describe you," he told her. "The boy took what I said out of context."

"That's right, he said that 'beautiful' is... cheap." Andrew said.

"Oh, and what word would you use?" Lizzie asked Loki, her eyebrow risen in inquiry. Loki felt as if his silvertongue was made of lead. "What's the matter? Cat got your tongue?" Loki grumbled, throwing on his jacket and walking out the door, leaving the pair of them to follow him. He would be damned if she made him say anything he didn't want to... or rather, admit something he didn't want to.

Nell sat in her apartment, worrying on her lip as she awaited a call from Logan. She had left him a message, asking him to return her call as soon as possible, as it had to do with some information she
had about a Chitauri she had come across. Apparently Thanos had a date which he was going to
invade by, a new piece of information which Nell wished she had had before. It would make it easier
to know when the killing blow would fall, instead of being unable to know. A knock resounded on
her front door, and she looked toward it in suspicion. She had no friends here on Midgard, and other
than Logan, no one knew where she lived. Grabbing one of her daggers, prepared for anything, she
approached the door, opening it. "Yes?" she asked the woman on the other side her eyes widening
slightly at the woman's appearance.

"Nell Shiffer?" the woman asked, her overall appearance reminding her of Elizabeth Donovan, her
voice having a different quality to it. She sounded English.

"Yes?" Nell replied.

"May I come in?"

"Do I know you?" Nell asked in reply, fully prepared if this was a Chitauri in disguise.

The woman smirked, reaching over to the wall beside her and throwing a Chitauri body into the
apartment, forcing Nell back to avoid catching the creature. "No." she said. "But you ought to keep a
better watch on the people who live in this building, they aren't all as they seem. However, you don't
need to worry about the guy downstairs, he's no longer any problem."

"Who are you?" Nell asked. "How do you know who I am, and how did you kill that creature?"

The woman smiled, walking into the apartment and shutting the door. "My name is Veronica
Lehnsherr-Donovan. He knew," she said, pointing to the creature. "And killing him was fairly easy.
He didn't plan on a mutant being in the building. Ironic when you think about it."

Nell's green eyes widened again, her dagger disappearing from her hand. "You're supposed to be
dead."

"I know. My father has been keeping me a secret for years, I had to keep my daughters safe." Verona said.

"You're Lizzie's mother," Nell stated.

"And you're Loki's mother." Veronica replied. "Strange how your son and my daughter have fallen
in love with each other, while we live in the exact same building."

"I'm trying to protect them."

Veronica smiled. "I know. I've been watching you for a few weeks, ever since you warned Logan
about Lizzie being attacked by the Chitauri, and quite frankly, I think we need each other for what
we know is going to happen."

"What are you talking about?"

"We have the gift of foresight, both of us. Mine I was born with, yours you acquired by study. We
are allies, Farbauti, and our children are in danger." Veronica declared. "You know this. You have
foreseen it."

Farbauti nodded soberly, banishing the body away and motioning to the couch. "Have a seat, Mrs.
Donovan."

Veronica sat down, preparing to have a long discussion with the Queen of Jotunheim about their
children's futures.
Loki and Lizzie take a stroll through the park and get attacked. Meanwhile, Veronica meets up with Logan.

It had been a long time since Loki had been allowed to walk freely anywhere, his time at the tower constituting a sort of prison which he had been forced into. It was almost like when he was a prince of Asgard, as he walked through the park with Lizzie and Andrew, completely free and allowed to do as he liked. It was a good feeling, and he was enjoying himself. It seemed Elizabeth was enjoying it too, as she seemed to allow herself to return back to the way she was before Alex made a mess of things in her new life. For himself, Loki wasn't complaining.

"So what word would you use?" Lizzie asked out of the blue as she walked beside him, walking a little faster due to her shorter legs in comparison to his own. He slowed to accommodate her.

"Sorry?"

"To describe me?" she asked again.

Loki looked over at where Andrew was hanging on her hand, happily licking his ice cream cone. This was his fault for bringing it up, and there he was without a care in the world, not even listening to the conversation as he saw a balloon in another kid's hand, and was now transfixed. "That was a conversation between Andrew and myself." he grumbled.

"Yeah, but it concerned me, and now you've made me curious." she replied. "C'mon, Loki! Humor me. I mean, it can't be that bad, can it?"

"Bad?" Loki repeated. "Whatever gave you the impression that it was bad?"

"The fact you won't talk about it." Lizzie answered simply - looking over at him, her jaw dropped. "Oh my god." she whispered.

"Careful, I'm not yours yet." Loki retorted, finding humor in his own joke. He earned a slap on the arm for his trouble.

"Wiseass." she said, leaning closer to him as they walked. "You're blushing."

"I am not!" Loki protested.

She immediately began giggling. "Yeah you are! Pale skin isn't very good for hiding sudden blood rush to the cheeks." Loki cursed in Norse, knowing the last time he'd blushed had been over a hundred years before. The blush deepened, and Lizzie giggled hysterically.

"Glad you find my embarrassment amusing." he complained, picking up his pace. Lizzie was forced to catch up.
"Hey! Daddy long legs! Slow up for us hobbits!" she exclaimed once she got back to his side.

"Well if you plan on finding amusement—"

"Lighten up, Lokes! Do you honestly think I haven't ever blushed?" she asked him.

"I know for a fact that you have, but I've never laughed at you!" he said, thoroughly offended.

Lizzie stopped him with a hand on his arm, pulling their little group to a halt. "This has nothing to do with me, does it?" she asked. "This has to do with unresolved issues with your family, which I refuse to take on, so stop attributing them to me."

"I am not—"

"Ah, ah, ah." she interrupted, waiting a few moments of silence before she continued. "I wasn't laughing at you out of some malicious contempt. I find it cute, to be honest – and I never thought I'd say that about a guy like you, but there you are – and so I was expressing that in the way I know how."

"Yeah, so chill, Loki!" Andrew added from his spot, now aware of the couple.

Had it been anyone else, Loki would have throttled them... but this was Elizabeth and Andrew, and he'd sooner throttle anyone who hurt them. He looked at Elizabeth, trying to wrap his head around the fact that she wasn't making fun of him. "Very well."

Lizzie's brown eyes roved around, as if trying to find the answer for what he was saying in the bush behind him. "Very well... what?"

"Very well, I understand that you weren't laughing at me, and I apologize for my behavior." Loki expounded.

She nodded in understanding, her head then tilted in confusion. "Do you apologize to everyone, or is it just me?"

"I do not apologize to everyone." he answered.

"Are you two done?" Andrew asked, his ice cream gone and the cone being devoured at that moment.

Lizzie and Loki both looked down at him. "We're never done. Just wait about five minutes and we'll find something new to argue about." Lizzie commented.

"Yes, we're done." Loki said at the same time, surprised by her own statement. "We do not argue all the time, Elizabeth, don't be absurd."

Andrew rolled his eyes. "Well can I go to the playground?" he asked.

Lizzie looked at where the playground was, and quickly figured out how she would act should the worst happen. "Yeah, sure, Loki and I will be walking around. But no wandering off, okay?"

"Okay." Andrew replied, running over to the playground.

"Do you think that's safe?" Loki asked her, his eyes also following the boy. They had been having an enjoyable day, but there was a slight worry about who was around them. After all, Alex could strike anytime, and right now he would be pretty powerless. Even with Elizabeth's training, it would be hard to make sure that no one took Andrew, and if they did he didn't think that he'd be able to protect him. His powers only unleashed if Lizzie was in danger.
"Stop it." Lizzie's voice sounded in his ear as she looped her arm through his.

"Stop what?" Loki replied, looking over where Andrew was playing. He looked safe enough.

"Stop thinking so much. Nothing is going to happen." Lizzie replied, causing him to look over at her. "Alex wouldn't pick such a crowded place, too many witnesses."

Loki's face showed slight disbelief. "How did you know what I was thinking about?"

A slow smirk stretched over her lips, a mischievous glint in her eyes which he hadn't seen for weeks. "I found I have a new ability."

"Really?" he perked up, Alex forgotten.

"Mhmm." she replied, looking over at Andrew but saying no more.

Loki waited a few moments, expecting her to reply with more information but she did not. "Well?"

"I have minimal expression-reading abilities." she said, looking back at him. "You have very expressive eyes. Contrary to what your face says, your eyes show the depths of your thoughts."

"That's not a mutation." he retorted. "That's something which perceptive pe—oh, you were playing, clever girl." He chukled, shaking his head.

"Ah, you finally caught on! See, I said 'ability', not 'gift' or 'power'. You should know all about technicalities and twisted words. How did you fall for that?"

"You're a mutant, of course I was going to fall for it." he replied, then after a beat. "Although the same could be said about you."

"So I've heard." she said. "They say the eyes are the windows to the soul, so it kinda makes sense."

Loki nodded. "And yours are sad." Her arm pulled out of his, and he knew she was going to clam up again.

"Loki, I told you earlier I don't want to get into it." she said softly, tucking her hands in her pockets and beginning to walk a foot away from him.

Pulling her over to an empty park bench, he sat her down. "Elizabeth, please, just tell me and I won't ask you again, I promise." he begged, wishing she would confide in him what was going on, and why she was suddenly so reserved.

Her brown eyes filled with the sorrow he had seen earlier. "I can't, Loki, because you'll stop me." she said. "And because if I tell you, it won't work."

"What won't work?" Loki asked.

She shook her head. "No." He sighed, his head dropping as he slid with his back against the bench. "Loki..." He turned his eyes away from Andrew, and once more toward her. "Don't ruin it. We were having a good afternoon, just forget all about what's going on with our lives, and let's enjoy it. Leave our troubles back at the tower."

"You're asking me to forget the fact that you are going to do something, possibly life-threatening, and pretend that everything is back to before Shaw reared his ugly head?" Loki asked her, trying to suppress the rage which it brought up within him.
"Yes." she replied. "It's the calm before the storm, and I'm not sure we're going to make it, so I just want one afternoon of normalcy. One afternoon where we can have fun, and enjoy ourselves before we're forced to face the fact that we're all in danger, and there's nothing we can do about it."

Loki shook his head. "What makes you think we're not going to make it?"

"Reality doesn't often live up to your expectations." she said softly. "I may be a mutant, but I'm human. If Alex doesn't get me, Thanos will—"

"He will do nothing of the kind." Loki ground out.

"Loki, be realistic... anyone can die. I'm no exception to the rule, in fact I'm going to die eventually, it's just a matter of tomorrow or in fifty-years with a pacemaker, hearing-aid, and Alzheimers. It's going to happen." she said.

"No." He said again.

She scoffed. "Oh? And what's gonna stop my eventual mortality? You?" she asked.

"There are ways... in Asgard... you wouldn't have to die." Loki replied, and she shook her head. She could see his pain, at the mere thought of her death, in his eyes... she didn't know what to do. On one hand she could feel herself become elated at the thought that he cared so deeply he didn't want her to die – a stark contrast, it seemed, from the first time they met – yet, she couldn't allow herself to truly feel that. She would only hurt him more in the end if her plan failed, and she wound up on a slab.

As for Loki, he could only watch her inner turmoil, knowing she would never share it with him. She was far too stubborn for her own good. Stubborn, willful, idiotic with her notions that he couldn't help her, completely self-sufficient, a woman who didn't depend on him to survive, and was loyal to a fault – yet that was what he loved about her. Loved? He didn't use that word, did he? But it was true, he loved her strength, her ability to fight back even when faced with the odds. Whatever it was she was planning, he knew she might not survive it, and guessed it had something to do with exchanging herself with Saoirse... yet, he knew she couldn't stop her, not because he didn't want to, but because if he did, she probably would never forgive him for anything that happened to her daughter.

Reaching a hand up to her face, he caused her eyes to focus on him once more. "I'm sorry, Elizabeth." he apologized – again – something which he assumed had to do with this idiotic notion of love. "I won't speak of it again this afternoon... as I think I already know what you're going to do and quite frankly I also know you won't allow me to intervene."

"Loki..." he brought a finger to her lips, silencing her.

"You won't let me, for some reason which I'm still wondering about. But I'm leaving it be because I think you might pull away more if I don't." he continued. "But all I ask, Elizabeth, is that you don't get yourself killed in whatever harebrained plan that you have."

"Harebrained?" Lizzie repeated, incensed.

"Logan told me of your previous plans, he told me how your sister died and you almost did too." Loki explained. "All I'm asking is that you get back from whatever you have planned, in that brain of yours, in one piece. And if you need my help, in any way, to tell me."

Lizzie was silent for a moment. "I'll try." she said. "But I can't promise I'll come back alive." Loki sighed, leaning his head back and closing his eyes. "I know that's not an easy thing to deal with, but I don't know what the outcome will be. I'm not a fortune teller, I don't know if it's going to work, I
hope it will without casualties.” Inwardly she wished she could simply tell him, simply allow him to help her, to comfort her. She wanted to be held, to be told that everything would be alright, and that no matter what she would be safe.

Loki raised his head once more, his heart clenching at the pain he saw flicker through her eyes. She didn’t look like the strong woman he knew, who would never depend on anyone for her needs, and could take care of herself; instead, she looked like a little girl, lost, alone, afraid, who just wanted to be told that she was none of those things. Reaching for her shoulder he pulled her to him, ignoring her initial protest, and wrapped his arms around her before slouching so she could rest in his hold. It was strange, he had never done this before, and the novelty of it intrigued him. She eventually relaxed, grateful for his silence and his willingness to comfort her in the way he knew how. She was used to seanmhathair’s comforting embraces, filled with the warmth of unconditional maternal love; Loki was different, Lizzie felt safe in a different way in his arms, as if he was silently assuring her that he would be there for her no matter what.

They stayed in that position for a few minutes, with Loki rubbing small circles on her back, his mind whirling as he figured out how things would change once they returned to the Tower. No doubt she would go back to being as frigid as she had been that morning, and he'd have to wait to find out what she was going to do with Alex... something which would be agonizing until it was revealed. His eyes watched Andrew on the playground, completely ignorant to the dire situation which surrounded him. When Thanos came, he would target the Avengers, he knew it, but would he target the boy?

Lizzie lifted her head from Loki’s chest, she could practically feel his tension, his concern. "What’s the matter?” she asked, looking in his eyes for a concept of what he was thinking about.

"Nothing.” he replied quickly. "Nothing is the matter." Yet. Was added as a subconscious afterthought. Things were fine for now, but eventually he wouldn't be able to say that calmly.

Pulling away slightly so she could look at him better, Lizzie examined his face for a moment.. "You're quite the confusing man, Loki Odinson. I don't really know what to make of you sometimes – or our current situation for that matter."

"Why not?” Loki asked.

"Because we said we should stay as far away from each other as possible – you said so, remember – and yet, here we are. I don't know what to say, I really don't.” she said with a sigh. "I wonder, if we had met before you tried to take over Earth – sorry, Midgard – back when you had no idea you were adopted, and were a prince of Asgard... would things have been different between us?"

Loki grimaced, this question he had asked himself many times. "Probably.” he replied. "What if you hadn't been taken by Alex, how would your life have played out?"

"The way my life did play out.” she answered. "It's because I got hit in the head that I remembered anything."

"So if we had met before Thor had been banished, and I fell off the Bifrost, we would probably be back in Asgard already and you would—" he stopped himself, he couldn't go further. "But does it do any good to dwell on what might have been?” he said instead.

"No.” she replied. "But it's a nice thought."

Loki gave a small smile, leaning in slightly, his hand cradling her head. "Elizabeth..."

"We shouldn't.” she whispered.
"You're right, we shouldn't." he replied, moving closer as she tilted her head to meet him. Her eyes closed, but snapped back open when they both heard a scream. They immediately pulled away, eyes snapping to the playground where they could see Andrew being picked up by a bigger man.

Without thinking twice, Loki and Lizzie sprang from the bench, running in the direction of where the man was headed – and that was deeper into the park. It wasn't Alex, from what they could see, as he seemed younger and more spry. As soon as they followed him far enough from the group of people that had surrounded the playground, Loki saw the man suddenly topple to the ground, dropping Andrew in the process. The little boy gave a cry of pain, but seemed fine as he ran away from the man and toward the couple. Lizzie caught him, hoisting him up in her arms and looking him over for any injuries. The man, however, stayed where he was on the ground, completely unable to move.

Making sure no one saw him, Loki stalked forward, picking the man up by his shirt before landing a solid punch to his face. The man groaned as he was sent to the ground once more. "Oh, if I had my powers!" Loki snarled. "I would make you pay for what you were about to do."

"Alex sent you." Lizzie cut in, her voice as cold as steel.

The man turned. "Why should I answer you, verräter?" the man hissed, his German accent thick. He suddenly started coughing, his breaths coming in short gasps. Loki looked over at Elizabeth, concern flowing through him as he noticed how she looked. Her eyes had taken on a darker shade of brown, appearing nearly black, the woman gone as something much more deadly took her place. Her features had schooled into complete neutrality – boredom – as if this man was nothing to her.

"Elizabeth..." he tried, giving her a slight warning. He knew she was afraid she would kill someone again, he wouldn't let her let herself down. "We should take him back to the tower."

She looked up at him, then back at the man. "I think not." she replied, a slow Cheshire grin taking over her face. "Alex obviously sent him to get Andrew, although I think he knew I'd catch you. You can give a message to Alex: sagen sie ihm, dass ich ihm ein geschenk bringe, wenn er mich durch den platz trifft, der meinen namen machte. Er wird bekommen, was er will, und das er hatte, besser halten sein ende des abkommens. Sag ihm wenn er die Rächer wieder angreift, ich wird meine kooperation zurückzutreten, und er sich mit der wut des Magneto befasst. Sie erhielten alle die?" Loki didn't understand what she said, but he could recognize her words as being from the same language she had spoken to Alex in. The mutant who had attacked Andrew nodded at what she said, and to Loki's surprise she turned to him "Let him go, Loki." she said, although it seemed to him that it was more an order than a request.

"What?" Loki asked. "But he could lead us to Alex."

"Let him go, he won't tell us anyway." she replied. Reluctantly, Loki did as requested, and released the man, who by now was allowed on his feet. The man stumbled for a moment, then with disbelief, he turned and took off. Lizzie held onto Andrew, her eyes following his figure until he left the park.

"Why did you do that?" Loki asked her, once the man was gone. "What did you tell him?"

Lizzie looked at him, her eyes guarded, and her voice cold as she answered. "I told him to tell Alex that he should stay away from the Avengers, and that I would not hesitate to bring in my grandfather should the need arise. Alex knows that if Erik Lensherr is brought in, he will not be alone, some of the most powerful mutants are under his command. That man will return to Alex, give him the message, and probably get shot for his trouble." she said.

"Shot?" Loki repeated.
"Alex would see him as a failure, as he didn't get Andrew like he wanted. Any type of failure is a death sentence when you're dealing with Alex Shaw." she explained, looking down at Andrew. "But we need to get back to the Tower, we have overstayed our welcome in the outside."

Loki had no choice but to follow her as she left the park, calling Tony to get a car to pick them up. It made no sense to him that she would let the man go, but figured it had something to do with her ridiculous plan. Whatever reasons she had, he could only hope that they weren't disastrous. Once inside the car, he tried to reach out to her – but she was already blocked off to him, leaving him completely cold from the lack of affection.

One thing was clear: their perfect day had come to an abrupt end, and Loki didn't know when the next time would be that he would be able to be around the Elizabeth who he'd grown to care for. He only hoped she survived this storm.

Veronica dragged the remainder of her things into Fárbauti's apartment, the arrangement being that the pair of them would live together for the moment, until Veronica revealed herself to her daughter. They had to work together, that was clear, as they knew that while Thanos was working to invade the Nine Realms, Alex would be the key to causing Midgard's demise.

"I will have to return to Jotunheim soon," Fárbauti told her new roommate. "Helblindi only knows so much, and I'm going to have to inform him of Thanos' new plan."

"Yeah, about that..." Veronica said, putting her stuff away. "How did you find out about the date?"

Fárbauti pursed her lips. "The Enchantress has been visiting Midgard over the last week, meeting with Shaw and giving him messages. I... happened upon them." she answered, looking at her watch. "Where is Logan?"

Veronica looked at the woman. "Logan's probably busy at the moment. He took my mother-in-law back to her house in Brooklyn an hour ago, along with Anna-Marie, so he should return to the Tower soon." she answered.

"When are you planning on meeting with one of your daughters?" Fárbauti inquired.

"I don't know." Veronica replied. "I feel like I need to stay hidden for just a while longer, then I'll see one of them. Bella first, I think, she'll take it easier. She didn't watch me... die."

Fárbauti tilted her head, taking a sip of her tea. "You never told me how you pulled that off." she said.

Veronica opened her mouth, ready to explain when Fárbauti's phone rang. The Queen looked at the screen, relief washing over her as she answered the phone. "Logan."

"You've called me ten times in the last hour. Are you dying, or just impatient to see me?" His voice came from over the other end of the phone.

"The latter." Fárbauti replied. It was a little game between the seriousness of the situations which they were involved in, a little banter which they often exchanged. "You need to get over here as soon as possible."

"No can do," Logan replied. "Lizzie just phoned me that Alex tried to kidnap Andrew Langley while she and Loki took him to the park. Apparently Alex has stepped up his game."

"As has the Mad Titan." Fárbauti told him. "I need you to come."
"I'm sorry, Green-eyes, I can't." Logan insisted.

Veronica motioned for the phone, and reluctantly, Fárbauti handed it to her. "Hello, Logan." she purred into the receiver. Logan was silent for a moment, and she wondered if perhaps he wasn't there. "Is this a fake hangup?"

"Vera?" Logan's voice whispered.

"Ah, good to hear you didn't faint." Veronica replied, watching as Fárbauti chuckled a little. "Come over here now, Logan, and you just might see me in the flesh."

A beat passed. "Oh, I definitely want to see that." Logan said, hanging up. Veronica looked offended.

"He didn't even let me say goodbye." she mock-pouted.

"He's not going to be happy about this, you know. You have no idea how much he's talked about you..." Fárbauti told her companion.

Veronica shrugged. "Logan is rarely happy." she commented. "Although I think he might be genuinely pleased that I'm still breathing. Either way, he knows that I need to stay alive, so he'll refrain from killing me."

Fárbauti laughed. "I don't think he'd kill you in any case." she said. "I'd think you used to be his lover with the amount he talks about you."

"No." Veronica replied. "He's like my big brother, always has been."

Fárbauti nodded, and they talked a little bit until Logan finally arrived.

When they returned to the Tower, Lizzie and Loki told everyone what happened while they were at the park, the actions of Alex's minion seeming to cement the idea that the women should leave the Tower. It had already been decided, but now it seemed as if Lizzie's worries actually had credence. The proverbial nail in the coffin to the idea, and the preparations were done with a little more speed.

Despite what he wanted, Loki was forced to leave Lizzie to her own devices, knowing that she was digging herself deeper into her plan due to what happened to Andrew. Even though she didn't say anything, it was clear what had happened had shaken her. Deciding to leave her be, Loki went to his room, resigning himself to the fact that he'd probably spend the night alone. Lizzie was too busy at the moment, and even if she wasn't, he wasn't sure that he'd want to talk to her. Their near moment in the park had brought his mind to a completely new place, and he didn't know what to do about it.

As if in answer to his confusion, Frigga suddenly stood at the end of his bed, her motherly gaze looking down on him. "Mother." he said, getting up, then stopping himself. It would do no good to try to touch her, her body wasn't corporeal. "What are you doing here?"

"I cannot stay long, your father has me working on finding a way to recognize the Chitauri who are disguised." Frigga told him. "But listen to me, you need to go to her. Try to talk her out of this plan of hers."

"W-what?" Loki stuttered. "I don't even know her plan, how am I supposed to stop her?"

"Loki, you don't understand. Elizabeth's plan will get her in trouble, I have seen it! You must convince her to stay here, where she is safe." Frigga insisted.
"How am I supposed to do that? You know what kind of girl she is." Loki retorted. "She won't even let me touch her! Let alone talk to her."

Frigga shook her head. "Tell her how you feel, beg her if you must. But you cannot let her follow through with this idea of hers, it will get her killed!" she told him.

"Killed?" Loki repeated, what little color draining out of his face. "You saw her die?"

"Yes." Frigga confirmed. "Alex will use her to his own devices, and when he finds what she has planned he will torture her until she loses the will to live."

Loki felt as if he'd been kicked, despair rushing through him. "Will she listen to me? She is so determined to stay away, all you had to do was watch her today, before and after the park. She pretends as if I do not exist." he said.

"She's trying to protect you," Frigga told him. "She doesn't want Alex to target you. But listen to me, she will need you in the end, and you will need her. I know I am overstepping my boundaries, and may possibly lose my ability from saying this, but I must – Elizabeth is your last chance, Loki, she is your soulmate."

Loki took a deep breath. "She cannot die..." he whispered. "But how can I stop her?"

"Give up your pride, Loki, for you will lose her unless you do." Frigga told him. "I beg you, my son, go to her."

"She will live if I do this?" Loki asked Frigga.

The Queen lowered her head. "I know not, for now. I only know what will happen as things stand at present." she paused, her eyes filled with sadness. "I must go. Your father is coming."

Loki nodded. "Thank you for the warning... mother." He watched as she smiled, her image disappeared. His mind racing, he laid in his bed for a moment, unsure of how to proceed. Lizzie was in her room, that he knew, he'd heard her go in a little while before, but he didn't know what he was going to do.

'Go to her.' He could hear Frigga's voice remind him in his mind. What would he say? How would he convince Lizzie that she needed to abandon her plan? Her daughter was at stake, and he knew that her daughter was everything to her at present... but would she change her mind for him? She would lose the will to live, isn't that what Frigga said? Would his going to see her now somehow affect her decision to live?

He didn't get a chance to decide as there was a knock on his door. Getting up form his bed, he went to it, and upon opening was shocked to find Lizzie already there. "Elizabeth, what are you—?"

"Let me in, I need to talk to you." Lizzie interrupted him, urgency in her tone. After a moment of his brain processing her request, he obeyed, and opened the door wider to accommodate her, then shut it behind her.

"What is it?" Loki asked her concernedly, she didn't answer, simply moving around his room as if in deep thought. "Elizabeth?"

She turned to him, and wordlessly walked up to him. "I needed to see you." she said softly. "Just once before tomorrow, before I—" she stopped.

"Your plan." Loki finished for her, his mind whirling. "I know you probably won't listen to me, but I must beg you, Elizabeth... do not go."
"I have to." she replied, her hand reaching up to straighten his collar. "She'll die if I don't."

"Let me help you, let anyone... Odin's beard, let Barton or Romanoff!" he exclaimed. "Or better yet, don't go at all, and wait until we all can take him at once."

She shook her head. "I can't risk it. I came to say goodbye." she told him.

"Enigmatic, riveting, alluring, irresistible... sublime, winsome." he started rattling off.

"What?"

"Those are the words I would use to describe you." he answered her. "There are more words than that, but those are off the top of my head."

Lizzie's jaw dropped, and he could see the multiple emotions flicker in her eyes. "Well," she cleared her throat. "I have to say, beautiful is pretty low on the totem pole in comparison to 'sublime'."

"It means sacred beauty." Loki answered, his eyes still fixed on her.

She smiled. "I thought so." she said.

"I was going to tell you, right before you came over, actually." Loki replied, swallowing hard. "I beg you, Elizabeth, do not complete this plan of yours."

"She's my daughter." Lizzie replied. "You're asking me to abandon her. I don't know her, Loki, but my motherly instincts are kicking in, they're telling me to go to her."

Loki shook his head, knowing that he was losing the argument for her to stay. Bringing his hands up to cup her face, he crushed his lips to her own, a silent plea for her to stay with him, to not abandon him. He couldn't bear it if he lost her, he knew that before Frigga had come... but he didn't know how to stop her. He could feel her hands tangle in his hair, and taste a saltiness from her tears which had slipped their way down her face. After a few moments, he pulled away, allowing her to breathe as he pulled her closer. "Please, my love..." he whispered into her hair, surprising himself with his own words. "I can't let you die."

She tensed in his embrace, her fear coming unbidden into her mind. This was the reason she had come, she wanted to say goodbye to him one last time, a haunting feeling that she would never see him again building in her. "I won't die," she whispered, remembering the conversation from earlier. Remembering his obvious concern with her mortality. "I swear to you, I won't die."

"Yes, you will. I know it." he replied. "Please stay, I entreat you. Get someone else to help you in this plan of yours – as I cannot, due to my current status as a prisoner – but if you must go, do not go alone. Stay."

She pulled back slightly, looking him in the eyes before cradling his face and bringing her lips to his gently. "I will stay." she whispered. "I will stay."

Taking the initiative, Loki kissed her once more, pulling away to pick her up and carry her to his bed. "Just for tonight..." he trailed off as he brought her into his arms again. She pulled away, rolling him onto his back and climbing on top of him. "Elizabeth, what are you doing?"

"Give me this." she pleaded, disabling the cameras in the room. "Please, Loki, give me a reason..."

Not thinking twice, Loki did as she asked.
*timidly creeps out from under bed*...well?
Loki and Lizzie both have nightmares induced by Thanos. Lizzie explains her plan, and leaves the next morning. Loki finds her gone, and freaks.

Fire surrounded her, the scorching heat of the blaze burning his skin. Loki looked around, his eyes widening as he saw something he wished he had not. Elizabeth was suspended in mid-air, her eyes wide, her mouth forming his name without sound. He ran toward her, only to be hurled farther away to land in a heap.

"Foolish boy." he heard a snarl come from his left. Turning, he saw Thanos stalk toward Lizzie, his magic obviously being that which held her where she was. "I warned you that you would wish for something as sweet as pain. Then, of course, I thought Frigga would be the one I would force you to watch as I slowly brought her life to an end... but it seems you have provided me with a much more painful alternative."

"No..." Loki whispered, his eyes going once more to Elizabeth. "Please... not her..."

"Did you honestly think I would not know?" Thanos mocked. "Our connection has not severed simply because you lost the Tesseract. I know how you care for her, how you have given your heart to her. I heard your vows throughout the night... I remember when you believed you were incapable of being loved. How quaint that you should find such a woman..."

Loki glared harshly, rage bubbling up as he heard how his time with Lizzie had not been his own. "You monster."

"Am I?" Thanos finished, laughing in the prince's face. "At least I do not hide what I am like you do. I do not pretend to be innocent as she does either."

"Do not speak of her!" Loki hissed. "She is nothing like you, nor am I!"

"What do you know but what she has told you?" Loki did not answer, watching as Thanos raked through her mind, not even allowing her the relief of crying out. Loki growled, trying to move only to find himself chained down. He pulled at the chains, but they only sent a magical fire through his veins, forcing him back to the ground.

"Please! Leave her be, your quarrel is with me!" Loki pleaded, his eyes never leaving Lizzie's look of pain.

"How pitiful you now look. The child who wanted to rule her kind now grovelling before me to save her." Thanos tutted, finally releasing her from her suspension. She fell to the ground in a heap, her cries finally being heard.

"Elizabeth!" Loki called her name, and she looked up at him with terror in her eyes.
"And I think I know exactly how I'm going to kill her..." Thanos told him. "You said it yourself once, and I think it was a rather marvelous plan for two lovers."

Loki didn't understand, his mind suddenly being taken over by a conscience which was not his own. The chains fell from his arms, and as if he was propelled by another force, he walked toward Elizabeth. He soon towered over her, and she looked up at him, her eyes brimming with tears. "Loki... please..." she whispered. "Please don't... I love you..." He didn't understand as his body knelt before her, his hands cradling her face, an intimate gesture which he couldn't help but feel was anything but. He kissed her, but there was no love in it, Thanos was doing it to him, and somehow it all fit into his plan.

His mind suddenly flashed to his day in the Helicarrier, and he understood what Thanos was going to do. "No..." he whispered to himself, but his hands still moved of their own accord. "No!" He yelled as the fingers wrapped around her slender neck, already cutting off her air flow. She choked, her hands clutching at his, attempting to pull his fingers away from her throat. He watched in horror as she continued to struggle against him for a few more minutes, her eyelids fluttering shut as she succumbed to the darkness which he knew was beckoning to her. A few seconds more and she was no longer moving, his hands still on her neck as the life left her body.

"Elizabeth..." Loki sobbed, his body his own once more as he cradled her lifeless form to his chest, his hands brushing over her face as he willed her back to life. She was dead, and he had killed her. Thanos was right, this was a fate worse than pain, worse than death. It was as if Thanos knew exactly how to break him, how to destroy every part of him which may fight in any way. She was gone, and it was at his hands that it had happened...

Thanos chuckled maliciously as he weaved the nightmare in the Asgardian's mind, his form cloaked by the darkness of the room. He had watched the couple sleeping, their obvious lovemaking which had sealed their bond blatant to him. Even now, the young woman was wrapped securely in the Prince's arms, his breathing elevated as he continued to live through her death in his mind. As for her, she was too wrapped up in her own nightmare that she could not save him from his – they were far too easy to break, the mere thought of those who they loved dying being simply too cliché for Thanos to deal with. Mortals, and the Asgardians who loved them. Foolish. His gaze turned back to Loki.

It was amazing how easy it was to cause the man to crumble, the simple thought of his love's life being snuffed out breaking him into silent cries, which turned to outright screaming in his mind. Her life was precious to him... it was a shame that her only use was in torturing the man, when Shaw said she could be so much more. Still, this dream was more than simply that – Thanos had every plan to have this particular dream come true. This trial run was what he was judging Loki's feelings on, and now he was more than pleased with the results.

Elizabeth Donovan would die at his hands, and Loki Odinson would break all in the same breath. Grinning in glee, he continued with the dream, torturing the poor minds which lay in the bed.

The whitewashed walls of the laboratory blinded her, the metal table below her back biting through the thin material which she was wearing. Yet, she wasn't tied down – a strange thing, for usually she couldn't move when she was in that room – and she sat up, looking around the room to try to figure out what was going on. Hearing a scream, she ran, trying to find the source of the sound. Going through the lab into another room, she found the voice's body, a little girl strapped to a table.

"Mommy..." the girl wepted. "I want my mommy..."
"Well Mommy isn't here." Alex's sickeningly sweet voice cooed from a corner of the room. "She left you here."

"No." the little girl wailed.

"Oh, but she did." Alex replied. "She left you to start a new life. She doesn't care about you."

"Mommy cares!" the girl shouted, but Alex simply tutted, leaving the room.

Eyes widening, Lizzie understood just who it was on the table, and she ran to the side of the table. The girl turned to her, her brown eyes filled with tears as she looked up at her. "Saoirse?" Lizzie whispered, brushing her wispy bangs out of her eyes.

"Mommy..." Saoirse whimpered. "Help me, mommy."

Lizzie's thoughts went to Loki. "I can't." she whispered back.

"Elizabeth!" Loki's voice echoed in the room, the tone filled with panic, but he was nowhere to be seen.

"Loki?" she called back.

"Elizabeth... come back to me..."

"Please, mommy. It hurts." Saoirse cried, turning Lizzie's attention away from the disembodied voice.

"I know it does." Lizzie sobbed, remembering when she was in the same place as her daughter. "I'm coming for you, I promise."

Alex suddenly returned into the room, and Lizzie was thrown back, her daughter screaming for her – the sound of Alex's laughing echoing in her ears.

Lizzie was awoken by the force of Loki's arm holding her tightly, his breathing frantic as her name passing his lips in such a panic that she reached over to the lamp with her hackles up. For all she knew, Alex was in the room, somehow manipulating Loki's mind as he slept – but there was no Alex, and she was forced to accept that Loki was having a nightmare which featured her. Looking at the clock, she read that it was 2:30am. "Loki." she whispered, her hand resting on his face, trying to calm him somewhat as she kept calling to him. "Loki, wake up."

"Elizabeth!" he exclaimed, his eyes snapping open. The green orbs were filled with terror as he sat up, crushing her to his chest so as to instill in his conscience that she was truly there – alive. "You were lifeless in my arms. He had me kill you—you died with my hands around your neck..."

"Shh..." Lizzie cooed in his ear. "I'm right here." She was, but now she wasn't sure. She didn't know what her daughters powers were, but she was sure that her dream was more than simply a dream. It shook her, and she questioned her promise to Loki... she couldn't stay, could she? Not if her daughter was in danger. It was confusing, and she wasn't sure what she was going to do. "Now what happened?" Loki sighed, loosening his hold on her slightly as he told her his dream. She listened patiently, helping him to relax. "Well you don't have to worry, I stayed last night, remember?"

"Yes, you did." he whispered, pulling away slightly to look her over. He still couldn't get the image of her lifeless body out of his mind, and he had to remind himself that she was very much alive... and
very much naked. He couldn't help but drink in the sight of her, reminding him of how they were occupied mere hours before. He smirked, his cooler hands resting on her hips. "Yes, you definitely did, didn't you?"

Lizzie chuckled, kissing him gently. "None of that now." she teased. "We have a busy day tomorrow. Everyone's leaving."

"You and I have nothing to do." Loki murmured against her neck, his hands already roving over her back. "We can do what we want."

"Loki, are you forgetting that Midgard is currently in danger?" she asked him. "We don't have time to do what we want."

"Says the woman who can manipulate time." he retorted, continuing his ministrations. "Had I my powers, I wouldn't give you a choice in the matter."

"Is that so?" She asked breathlessly. "I'd stop you in your tracks if you ever dared."

"I'm sure you would." he replied, suddenly feeling her push him away. "What is the matter?"

Lizzie sighed, her eyes closing. She had to tell him she couldn't stay, she had to warn him. She opened her eyes, looking into his and lost all resolve... partially because she wanted to ignore everything, and simply pretend that nothing was going on in the world around her. "Nothing..." she eventually sighed. "Nothing at all, we should get back to sleep."

"Doubtful." Loki replied, laying back. "My dreams have been invaded, and I'm not keen on returning to Thanos' nightmare."

"I can understand that." she whispered, knowing she wouldn't get to sleep either. "Loki?"

"Mmm?" he replied.

She opened her mouth, about to tell him once again about her own dream. She wanted to be comforted, she wanted him to tell her nothing was going to happen to her or Saoirse... but she knew that if she told him, he wouldn't let her go. "Nothing, just a thought that I just lost." she replied, snuggling into his chest, and letting him wrap his arms around her once more. "Just sleep."

"I can't—I—I—" Loki mumbled off as her power cut off his consciousness

Leaning up, she kissed him softly. "I'll be right back." she whispered to him, slipping out from under his arm and pulling on her clothes. She couldn't help but feel like she was being watched, and frankly it unnerved her. Hearing the sound of someone's laughing from behind her, she spun, fully prepared to defend herself if need be. She found herself, however, face-to-face with Thanos. He smiled at her, and she felt a chill go down her spine – then he disappeared. Her heart beat quickly in her chest, and she looked at Loki who still slept on the bed. Despite her sudden fright, she couldn't wake him yet...

Jane was in the lab, unable to sleep due to her current problem of trying to create a Midgardian bridge to Asgard. It was a pain to try to figure out just how the mechanisms worked, but she wouldn't stop until she'd found a way to create one from Earth to Asgard. She just had to do it. It would make it easier for Thor to come and visit after this whole ordeal.

"Shouldn't you be sleeping, Dr. Foster?" she heard, and spinning around she let out a relived chuckle.
"Lizzie, you scared me." she said. "What are you doing up?"
Lizzie shrugged. "I couldn't sleep," she answered, her mind flashing to Thanos' grin. "I suppose Pepper told you what's going to happen tomorrow?"

Jane nodded. "Something about the trip not really being a trip?" she offered. "But I thought that you said that we'd be safer if we were in groups. How would that work under the circumstances?"

"Simply put, it has nothing to do with safety," Lizzie replied, sitting down at a chair opposite the girl who looked similar enough to her to be her sister. "Yet, everything to do with safety."

"Sorry, you lost me," Jane said.

"Pepper and I have a plan. A dangerous, and life-threatening plan which has about fifteen different ways that it can go wrong. However, we have come to the idea that it has to be risked," Lizzie told her. "Other lives depend on it going through, although mine is not for certain."

"What is the plan?" Jane asked. "That is, if you don't mind explaining it to me?"

Lizzie nodded. "You might as well know, that way you can explain it to everyone else when the time comes," she said. "I'm going with Pepper, in your place. That'll give Pepper a little more protection, and you'll be able to be with Thor when he comes back."

"What about Alex? You said he'd attack if he can get one of us?" Jane countered.

"He won't," Lizzie replied. "I'm afraid I can't explain that to you very well... but I can at least tell you that Alex won't be bothering anyone but me after this."

Jane tried to process what Lizzie was saying. "But if you go with Pepper to Malibu-"

"I'm not going to Malibu," Lizzie interrupted. "In fact, I'm not leaving New York. I'm meeting Alex tomorrow after we leave, I'm going to try to save my daughter from him."

"What the hell kind of plan is that?!" an outburst came from the doorway, causing the two brunettes to turn toward the voice. "Are you trying to turn Loki back into Mr. Kill-Everyone-Who-Is-Below-Me?"

"Loki will not be affected," Lizzie said slowly to Darcy, narrowing her eyes at the woman. "And you were not supposed to be involved, obviously. However you will be now, considering you have thrown yourself into this plan by eavesdropping."

"Hey, I just came by to make sure Jane wasn't working herself to the point that when Thor came back she was a ghost," Came Darcy's defense. "I didn't expect you to be all James Bond at the moment – maybe not James Bond, as this whole plan is suicidal."

"I'm not going to die, and it'll help everyone if Alex is out of the way," Lizzie said.

Darcy's blue eyes went big. "You're going to kill him?"

"Simply put... yes," Lizzie answered.

Darcy took a seat next to Jane. "Alright, you better start from the top. You have a lot of explaining to do..."

An hour later, Lizzie returned to Loki's room, slipping beneath the covers once more and snuggling into him. Still asleep, Loki encased her in his embrace, and she once more felt her heart sink.
Everything was set in place, and now it was only a matter of completing the final steps... she could only hope that she returned to him in the end – and more than that, that he wouldn't hate her for lying to him.

The next morning, Loki woke with Elizabeth beside him, quite pleased that she wouldn't be going anywhere. He had succeeded in what Frigga had told him to do, and now it was only a matter of getting her daughter in her arms, safe and sound.

"Elizabeth?" he cooed in her ear, pulling her closer. "Elizabeth..."

"Go 'way." she mumbled, rolling her back to him. Chuckling to himself, Loki pulled her against him. "Lemme sleep, Lo."

"What did you just call me?" he asked, wondering if he'd heard her making a nickname for him.

"Lo." she answered cheekily. "One syllable, easy to say when you're still in the twilight zone. Speaking of, let me fall back into the edge of night." He peered over her bare shoulder to see her smirking.

"Well the women are leaving this morning, and seeing as this is your plan you should be there." Loki whispered into her hair.

Unseen to him, her eyes snapped open. "I think it'll be fine." she replied. "I'm pretty tired, something about nightmares – speaking of, did you get any sleep?"

"Prince Loki?" Jarvis' voice sounded, interrupting them. "Sorry to disturb you, but Mr. Stark requests that you be there, and was not specific about Miss Donovan."

Loki huffed. "I thought you disabled him."

"I was sleeping, Loki, the power doesn't necessarily work when I'm asleep," she murmured. "Just go. Tony will come in if you don't."

"Right. Stark's impeccably horrible timing." Loki sighed. "Very well." Getting up from the bed, he quickly dressed, kissing her just before he left. "I'll be back soon."

"Okay." she replied, letting him leave. Once the door shut, she jumped out of bed. "Jarvis?"

"Yes, Miss Donovan, I know..."

Emma and Justine left Avengers Tower, Andrew somewhat silent in it all. He hadn't spoken much since the mysterious mutant had almost kidnapped him, but it was obvious that the ordeal had left him a bit shaken. He stayed close to someone at all times until their departure, and when he left he seemed downtrodden. Lizzie wasn't there to see them go, as she had felt slightly guilty about what had nearly happened, and had yet to forgive herself. Loki, however, was given a hug and was requested by the boy to give Lizzie a kiss for him, to tell her 'he wasn't mad'. Loki agreed, and once the first group had left, he set off to find the brunette as Pepper set off.

"Loki..." Pepper had said. "I'm sorry."

"About what?" He had replied.

"Everything." she said, leaving him completely bewildered at what was going on. She and 'Jane' left
soon afterward, and Loki was allowed to finally leave the Avengers. Something he was grateful for, as Tony nearly didn't allow his fiancee to leave, complaining that she might be safer with him. Still, he let her go, and returned to his workshop.

Loki nearly felt sorry for him, but his own heart soared with the prospect of Lizzie her staying in the Tower and abandoning her plan. He had given her a reason to stay, had given her his heart, what was left of it that was, and now he wondered why he had pushed her away for so long. He would not be so foolish now, that much he had decided, and he was already rehearsing what he would say to her when he saw her again. Upon entering his room, however, he found she had already vacated it. Concerned and confused, he left the room in search of Lizzie. Walking around, he found her figure outside of Stark's large windows, looking out on the city.

Going out on the patio, he approached her from behind, his hands resting on her waist as he dipped his head down to her neck. She spun around, and to his surprise he found himself looking into a pair of blue eyes, not a pair of brown. "Not that you aren't handsome – you are, and you definitely know how to kiss a girl's neck – but I think you need to cool it." It was Darcy.

"Forgive me, I thought you were Elizabeth." Loki apologized, letting her go as if touching her burned him – which wouldn't be too far off, she wasn't Elizabeth.

"Hey, it's cool, I understand. We're both short, big breasted, brunette, and awesome. I understand the confusion." Darcy replied flippantly. "Tell me, do you often grab her waist and kiss her neck? Is that a new thing? Or did you actually know it was me and were trying to make a move – because if you were, I will totally hit you."

Loki's brow furrowed. "I can hardly see how that matters to you." he said. "I assure you, I thought you were Elizabeth, and would not have touched you had I known who you were."

Darcy's mouth dropped. "Dude, you know how to make a girl feel special, don't you? Was it this kind of charm that turned Lizzie into your loyal companion for life?" she asked. "Cause she must be some kind of a sadist."

"Elizabeth is no sadist, in fact I'm sure she'd want to stay as far away from pain as possible." Loki snapped, feeling a little more than irritated at the busty brunette beside him. Elizabeth hated pain... she just didn't mind throwing herself in the way of it if it meant it would save someone she cared about.

She chuckled. "Whoa, easy there partner!" she exclaimed. "I know you're crazier for her than a bee for lavender, but you need to relax! I like Lizzie, in case you haven't noticed, so you don't have to worry about me hurting her, or insulting her, or stabbing her in the back."

Loki relaxed slightly at her words, remembering how Elizabeth talked about her fondness for the eccentric woman. "Well... as long as you remain that way, I don't see how we could have a problem."

"Good." Darcy replied. "Cause I wouldn't mind you, if you weren't so psychotic. What she sees in you romantically, I'm not quite sure – I mean, you're good-looking, and charming, and know how to romance a girl like her – okay, I guess I could see it. You're too skinny for me."

He resisted the urge to roll his eyes. "What a mournful situation I'm in that I'm too skinny to suit your tastes." he said sarcastically. "Now if you'll excuse me, I need to find Elizabeth." He wanted to find Elizabeth more than anything, and talking to Darcy wasn't helping him in that regard. The night before had changed everything, and they needed to discuss what they were going to do.
"She's not in the tower." Darcy said as he turned to leave.

"What?" Loki said.

Taking a deep breath, Darcy tried again. "I said she's not in the tower."

Silence followed as the words sunk in.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Pepper asked Lizzie for the fourth time. "Because if you aren't, Happy can turn around."

"Pepper, I don't want to sound like a bitch, but I have to go through with this, that's all there is to it." Lizzie snapped. "Besides, Loki's noticed my absence by now, and is probably grilling Darcy and Jane. If I go back now, I won't get a chance like this again."

"Yes, but you won't lose him." Pepper replied. "I don't think he'll be half as upset if you return – not to mention Logan."

"Logan will know not to interfere." Lizzie retorted. "He may not agree with my methods, but he knows that it would be idiotic to try and stop me. Loki not so much. I don't know how he handles relationships overall, but I have a feeling that he's quite protective."

"You don't think he'll ever hurt you?" Pepper asked.

Lizzie shook her head. "When I say 'protective' I mean from everyone else. I have a feeling that he's not going to be able to protect me from himself if he wanted to... just look at his track record. He has a history of hurting the people he cares about." she replied, looking back out the window. "But he'll try."

Pepper chuckled. "You know, I don't know how you did it, but you have changed him." she said. "He's not the same man who turned up back in March."

"No, he's not is he?" Lizzie replied.

"Do you love him?" Pepper inquired.

Silence followed, and Pepper began to wonder if Lizzie had heard her, or just purposefully ignored her. "Yes." the younger woman finally answered. "That's why I'm keeping him clear of all of this."

"He could help you, you know?" Pepper retorted.

Lizzie sighed. "He's been stripped of his powers unless I'm in immediate danger. Alex doesn't want me dead, he wants me broken. Any danger I come into will not be immediate... it's not his style. Meaning that Loki would be completely helpless against him, save for his physical ability to incapacitate," she explained. "Alex would kill him in a heartbeat, for no other reason than to hurt me."

The car slowed, and Pepper swallowed the lump in her throat. "Tony knows something is up." she whispered to her companion.

"I'm sure he does, he's a genius." Lizzie replied, taking off her sunglasses and finally turning to Pepper. "It isn't too late to back out, you can still fly to Malibu and be safe, completely out of danger."

"I promised I'd help you get your daughter out of this guy's grip, I can handle myself." Pepper
replied sternly. “Ready?”

Lizzie nodded. “Thanks Happy.” she called to the front.

“You're welcome, Miss Donovan.” Happy replied. “Be safe, Miss Potts. You know what to do if Mr. Stark needs to come immediately.”

“Yes I do, Happy. Thanks.” Pepper replied as she suddenly found herself unable to move. “That is not a good feeling.”

“I know. You're fine, though, I just have to get Alex right now, and he'll come out here for you. Happy, you know the plan.” Lizzie said, leaving the vehicle and walking up the steps of St. Patrick’s Cathedral and going in.

Loki fought the panic which rose within him. “What do you mean 'she's not in the tower’?”

“I mean she's vacated the building.” Darcy retorted. "She made like a vine and swung out of here? Does any of this register?"

“Yes, you daft woman, I understand what you're saying – she's not here – but my question is: why is she not here? Did Logan take her somewhere, or... what? And how do you know about it?” Loki corrected.

Darcy sighed, her eyes showing an unspoken apology. "I plead the fifth." she said, looking out toward the city.

"What does that mean?” Loki asked her. Lizzie had promised him she would stay... she had told him several times the night before... she didn't lie to him, did she? No. Impossible.

"It means I choose not to tell you where she is." Darcy tried to explain. "Mostly because she said you'd get upset."

Loki quickly grabbed her arms, forcing her to face him. "You are going to tell me where she went, and why!" he snarled. "I don't care what she told you, I need to know."

"I can't, Loki, she made me promise I wouldn't." Darcy replied.

"Made you pro—no. No, you're going to tell me where she is, and I'm going to get someone to go find her and bring her back." Loki's voice rose.

"I can't! If I tell you, it'll ruin everything!” Darcy exclaimed. "I shouldn't have even told you anything, but I suppose I thought you'd take it better form a human being than from Jarvis. Now let me go, or so help me—"

"What? You'll taser me like you did my idiotic brother?” Loki completed in a mocking tone. "Do you not realize how much she's in danger? Alex Shaw wants her dead, as far as I know, and you've given him the perfect opportunity."

"She'll be fine—OW!” Her cry of pain made him slacken his grip slightly, but he was still angry with her... or rather, with himself for allowing her out of his sight. He should have let the boy leave without seeing him, he shouldn't have allowed Lizzie to convince him that she'd be there when he got back. But there was truly only one thing which angered him: Elizabeth had lied to him.

To his surprise, Loki suddenly found himself on the ground, clutching his face as Fandral stood over
him with his hand still in a fist, his blue eyes blazing in fury. "Ah, Fandral the Egotistical. To what do I owe the honor?" he asked, beginning to pick himself up.

The Asgardian didn't answer, simply picking Loki up by his shirt and preparing to hit him again. "Fanny, now that's enough!" Darcy's voice interjected, grabbing his hand. "Loki was simply worried about Lizzie, and he wasn't thinking. He didn't mean to hurt me."

"I don't give a damn, he should have known that squeezing your arms would cause you pain. He wouldn't do it to his beloved Elizabeth, why should he do it to you? Then again, perhaps he wouldn't mind hurting Elizabeth, he doesn't seem to care much for her, does he?" Fandral asked her, unknowingly hitting a spot in Loki which he should have left alone.

Fandral clutched his nose after Loki had headbutted him, thankful that the skinnier man didn't have his magic. He'd be done for in no time, that he could tell from the pure fury which burned in Loki's green orbs. He could faintly hear Darcy screaming for him to stop fighting with Loki, but it was just that – faint. Apparently Elizabeth was more of a pressure point on Loki than he had anticipated.

For three minutes the two men landed punches on each other, Loki putting up more of a fight than Fandral had expected. Darcy had enough, and ran inside to get some help, after all she wasn't wanting to taser Fandral and be helpless against Loki; but she knew if she tasered Loki she'd be unable to stop Fandral's tirade. Finding Steve first, she sent him outside and moved to get the other men.

Loki's nose was bleeding, and Fandral had a black eye forming. They had yet to notice Darcy's disappearance, but they were soon pulled apart by the Avengers and Volstagg. Bruce stayed inside, trying to keep himself from losing control and accidentally hurting someone, Darcy staying with him just in case.

"Okay, Prongs, time to calm down!" Tony yelled to the squirming Loki, trying to get through the other man's head. Loki ignored him, still trying to get out of his and Clint's grasp, hissing things in old Norse at Fandral that only he and Volstagg understood. Fandral's eyes widened comically before he fought against Volstagg and Steve's grip again, swearing he'd kill Loki.

Tony and Clint fought hard to keep a good hold on the much-taller Loki, his body being stronger than either one of them, and just below both of them combined. In short, they were getting tired. "If only I'd got my suit on first." Tony growled to himself.

"WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?!" Logan's voice suddenly bellowed from the doorway, Natasha standing next to him. Silence followed as the mutant's eyes went from person to person, trying to piece together what had caused the strife between the two men.

It was Darcy who answered. "Lizzie left this morning, and Loki was asking me where she was." she told Logan. "Fandral thought he was going to hurt me, and came out here like some idiotic knight in shining armor – then, like the blockhead he is, he decided to make a stab at Lizzie's personality. Shazam! Catalyst."

"Lizzie's gone?" Clint asked.

"I am not a blockhead." Fandral growled lowly, earning himself a slap from Darcy, and garnering the attention away from the problem at hand.

"Yes, yes you are." she said. "You're a low-blow son-of-a-bitch – no offense to your mother, but your dad must have been a right bastard to raise you to pick on people by hitting their weakest points."
“Elizabeth is not my weak point.” Loki hissed.

Tony laughed. "You're not foolin' anyone, Rudolph." he teased.

"Alright, that's enough." Logan interrupted the snide comment which was about to come out of Loki and Fandral's mouths. "Let the guys go, and I swear if you two start fighting again I'll put one – or both of you – out of commission."

Reluctantly, the two men were released, allowed only to glare at each other. "Where did Lizzie go?" Clint asked Darcy.

"I can't tell you." the brunette repeated once again. "She said we'd know soon enough anyway."

"What does that mean?" Natasha asked, looking at Logan – whose eyes were transfixed on Loki.

"Bad things." Logan replied. "It means that something is about to happen which could mean her life." Loki turned his head sharply, anger and fear reflected in his eyes.

"Her life?" Clint repeated, turning to Darcy, who looked very much like a deer in the headlights. "How could you not tell anyone?"

"Because Lizzie made her promise not to." Natasha answered, causing everyone to look at her, Jane – surprisingly to them – standing next to her.

"If you're here, that means that Lizzie is with..." Tony trailed off. "No... Pepper..."

Lizzie sat in a pew as she waited in the cathedral, wondering why Alex was taking so long to make himself known. She'd been waiting for five minutes, and still he had yet to appear.

"Patience was never your strong suit." His voice suddenly echoed through the vaulted ceilings. "Well... only in certain situations."

She stood, turning toward the pulpit. "Hello Alex.” she replied, her voice cold. "You took your time."

Alex smirked. "With you in my grasp? I have all the time in the world."
Bellatrix Black

Chapter Summary

Veronica and Nell find out what Lizzie has done, and Alex decides to use Loki as a pawn. Meanwhile, Lizzie and Pepper wind up in Alex's grasp, and Lizzie is forced to take on her old persona.

Veronica was awoken by the sound of her phone ringing, the incessant chirping making it hard for her to ignore. She'd been up most of the night by Logan, who was insisting on knowing every detail of her life since she'd faked her death fifteen years earlier. He'd finally gone home... did he ever go home? She distinctly remembered him settling into the couch thanks to her roommate. Reaching over, she looked at the number, and not recognizing it, she set it back down. She didn't have time for people she didn't know, whoever it was could leave a voicemail, and she'd get back to them if it was important. The phone stopped ringing, and she went back to sleep.

A knock on her door roused her next. "Come in." she called out groggily, looking at the door as Farbauti walked in, her already pale face much paler. Veronica was now fully awake. "What is it?"

"Logan wants to talk to you." the other woman said, passing her the phone.

"Oh, I thought Logan was on the couch." Veronica commented, putting the phone to her ear. "Hello?"

"I swear to God, you better have a good reason for not answering your phone." Logan growled over the receiver.

"I didn't recognize the number, I don't answer unrecognized numbers." Veronica answered sharply. "What is it that you're actually 'swearing to God'? Have you suddenly decided that he exists?"

"No... let me ask you something, Veronica, have you had any visions lately?" Logan inquired strangely.

Veronica thought for a moment. "No, I haven't. Why?"

"Because your daughter has done something which could possibly alter everything which you originally saw, and get herself killed." He snarled, his anger evident in his irritated tone. Veronica's heart beat faster.

"What did she do?" she asked, fearing the worst.

"She went back to Alex, like a lamb to the damn slaughter." Logan answered. "And she took Pepper Potts with her."

"What?" Veronica exclaimed. "She doesn't approve of collateral damage."

"Apparently, Pepper was in on it." Logan replied. "Did you know that Lizzie's daughter lived? The one she had while she was back in... the other timeline."

Veronica's brows furrowed. "What are you talking about? That girl was stillborn."
"Nope, Alex has her alive and well, and is using her as leverage against Lizzie. Loki didn't know what she had planned, but he knew that she was planning something, she wants to save Saoirse."

"What? No, no, no, no, I was the nurse at the hospital that night. That girl was stillborn, I delivered her." Veronica corrected. The other side was silent, Logan taking in the information. "Oh, God... oh, God, she thinks the girl is alive... Alex tricked her, and now she's made a colossal mistake by turning herself and Pepper in to him.. oh, God."

"Hold on, you were at delivery?" Logan asked.

"Yes." Veronica replied. "One of Charles' people had moved to Germany, and worked at the hospital as a gyno. When she saw Lizzie and Bella, she sent for me, and allowed me to help out in the delivery. Lizzie's daughter was dead, there is no way – unless Alex has found a way to resurrect anyone, which I highly doubt – that she is alive and well now. It's simply not possible. Do you know how he said she lived?"

"Natasha says that Alex told Lizzie that Saoirse went through some kind of portal in time, which did happen for a worker in SHIELD, who somehow brought Lizzie's file over." Logan answered the woman. "We need you here, and you better bring Far—Nell with you. If Lizzie has been tricked into going to Alex's side, he could use her 'daughter' against her to great affect. Remember what Lizzie became when he threatened Bella."

Veronica shuddered. "I remember all too well." She looked at her roommate. "We'll head over there now, you better explain what's going on – leaving out who 'Nell' is – to the Avengers. They're going to want to know."

"Loki and Clint are currently out, but you'll see everyone else. Loki was blowing too much of a gasket at Lizzie's disappearance from the Tower, and Clint took him out to blow off some steam. You'll like the guy, he's like your dad." Logan joked. "Anyway, I'll see you soon. Didn't see this coming, did you?"

"No, Logan. I didn't." Veronica replied, hanging up the phone. "We're going to the Tower." She told Farbauti.

The other woman nodded. "Do you think that Lizzie knows yet? That her daughter isn't alive?"

"I don't know. Probably not, as the ruse wouldn't work if Lizzie knew." Veronica replied. "I'm going to have to tell my father, and we're going to have to pick up Bella on our way to see the Avengers."

"Your other daughter?" Farbauti replied. "So fast? What happened to waiting until the whole Thanos thing blew over?"

Veronica shook her head. "We don't have time. Her sister has thrown my plan completely out of its loop. We have to move now, or we may not be able to get to her in time." she said.

Farbauti's brows furrowed. "In time for what?" she asked, taking back her phone from Veronica.

"Alex wants one thing: revenge." Veronica began explaining. "Revenge against Lizzie and Bella... and my father. Charles is pretty high on the totem pole as well, as the Xavier Mutants were one of his top enemies in the other timeline. If he knew I was alive, it would be revenge against me as well. His revenge is not to get Lizzie back on his side, she's betrayed him, he doesn't trust her and will look for any loophole to prove that he doesn't by throwing her back into the tortures she endured as a child. He'll have her fight against her friends to prove her loyalty to him, while dangling a child who doesn't exist anymore in front of her. When she's lost all of the Avenger's faith, he'll show her that Saoirse is dead, that she always was, and that Lizzie was a fool to believe him. He'll further taunt her that she has lost all of her friends, and that now no one would want her... the punchline being, that he
doesn't either, and he's going to send her back where she – quote – belongs. She'll wind up on a table, and give up." she finished, sitting on the bed.

"Loki plays into this, doesn't he?" Farbauti asked.

Veronica nodded. "Loki plays highest." she said. "Alex knows what happened back at the tower, he knows what Loki would do to defend Elizabeth, and therefore knows that their relationship is the strongest among the Avengers. He'll try to—Oh!" she stopped short, her brown eyes going wide. "Oh, dear God... Clint, Loki and Natasha... this has nothing to do with the Avengers or Thanos... he wanted to know how close Lizzie was to them and who he could target."

"What is it? What?" Farbauti asked urgently.

Veronica ignored her, quickly calling Logan back. "Loki and Clint are not in the tower." she told Farbauti, willing her to understand.

Farbauti tensed as she took in the meaning of those words, her pale complexion going paler. "He wouldn't dare touch Loki." she hissed.

"Loki is close to Lizzie... he would." Veronica replied, the other line going to voicemail. "Damn. We need to go now."

Pepper had been waiting in the car for five minutes, her worry increasing steadily throughout. Had something gone wrong? Did Alex know that Lizzie was only there to try to trick him? Had he even shown up? "Happy, what do you think is going on?" she asked the similarly incapacitated driver.

"I don't know." Happy replied. "But I can't think good things, that's for sure. You might want to prepare yourself in case you have to call Mr. Stark early."

"I'll give her a few more minutes." Pepper replied as the door of the church opened, two burly men walking out. "Let's hope this works." she whispered to herself. The younger man ran around the car to open Pepper's door, and she found herself now able to use her legs. "What is going on?" she asked, filling her role as the clueless exec who had been fooled.

"This way, Miss Potts," he said, helping her out of the car, and placing a hand on her elbow as if in warning her not to try and run. Not that she wanted to, but she could understand how they thought she might. The other man had done the same with Happy, and her eyes met the driver's right before he was led in a different direction. She tried to pull her arm out of his grip, showing a fight when she was really going along willingly. "Now, now, you don't want to do that. I'll just make you move." he warned her.

She glared momentarily before following his instructions and walking into the church without any further problem. Once inside, she could easily see Alex at the far end near the pulpit, and Lizzie standing at the altar. Proverbial, in Pepper's mind. "Ah, Miss Potts! How lovely of you to join us." Alex said from his position, his words prompting Lizzie to turn to face her.

Pepper gave a glare at the woman. "You!" she hissed.

"Yes..." Alex confirmed. "Darling Elizabeth has been planning to bring you here since the day I broke into the Tower. Yesterday, she gave me a location. How fitting that she chose here – although you don't know why – it is the place which made her name, in the last timeline. Shall I tell her, Elizabeth, or shall you?"

Lizzie looked at Alex, her eyes moving differently than Pepper was used to, the gaze more attributed to a cat, or a snake – cunning, devious, deceptive, with a hint of seduction. This, Lizzie had warned
her of, the change in personality, the stories she would have to hear. "I burned it down." Lizzie said without emotion, her voice sounding like pure velvet, so different than her regular tone which was more joyful. This was practiced, studied so she could be misleading and seductive; the quality of Hedy Lamarr put into an accent of an American, with a tone which sent chills down one's spine. Pepper then focused on her words. "On Sunday morning mass. We had one target, unfortunately he refused to leave the building, which we knew we couldn't enter due to the fact that it was filled with people, and we wouldn't be able to get in and out secretively. So, the most logical explanation was to fumigate him... so I locked the doors, and burned it down."

Pepper swallowed. Lizzie had told her she'd been rather evil once upon a time, but this she didn't know. "You... killed innocent people just because a man wouldn't come out?" she asked, her horror anything but acted.

"Yes." Lizzie replied simply. "I know it was very cliché, after all... the Patriot. But, it was effective. He didn't survive."

"Neither did a hundred other people." Pepper said.

Lizzie sighed. "Yes, I know. Collateral damage is not really something I approve of, despite my reputation, but sometimes it is necessary." she said.

"And what are you planning on doing with me? Fumigate me and Happy?" Pepper asked.

"Mmm... no." Lizzie replied. "There is a GPS system installed into that vehicle parked outside. Alex has somewhere he's going to take you... your fate is up to him."

Pepper fought back tears. This was not planned in any regard. Lizzie had told her that Alex would most likely put her under Lizzie's watch, to test the girl and see whether she was genuine... but apparently Lizzie had been wrong, and the very thing that both women feared was going to happen. "Why did you take me? Why not Jane, or Justine, or Emma, or Darcy... why me?"

"Because Alex wants Tony Stark." Lizzie answered. "Thor and Steve are too incorruptible. Bruce is too wild. And I don't think Fandral cares for Darcy like you think he does."

"Tony?" Pepper said in shock. Lizzie hadn't told her this... it seemed there was much Lizzie hadn't told her. "What about Tony makes you think you can turn him to your side?"

Alex laughed from his position. "Shall we take a look at Tony Stark's track record?" he asked. "The man believes he's a god, for starters. Follow that up with what he is willing to do to get you back to him, I think he's a prime candidate for joining our cause, despite the fact he isn't a mutant. He is a genius... and I need him, to be frank. I need his genius."

Pepper looked at Lizzie, still meeting that blank look of deceit. Perhaps Clint had been right, perhaps Lizzie was not to be trusted? 'No!' she shouted in her mind. Lizzie had warned her beforehand that not all was as it seemed... but still, did that mean that Lizzie was trying to tell her that the whole plan was a rouse? That Lizzie was on Alex's side? Or was she saying that what would happen between her and Alex was a lie? Pepper didn't know. The whole situation was too confusing.

"We should go." Lizzie told Alex, in that voice that she had been using. "Tony will track that GPS soon, and he'll find us here."

Alex grinned. "Always the one who is worried about getting the job done. Why did you say you'd changed? You haven't." he said.

Lizzie smirked, a breathy chuckle escaping her. "Perhaps I thought that with the several years of not
knowing who I was, I would be somehow different." she said. "But it seems you bring the worst out in me." She batted her eyelashes at the pulpit, earning a laugh from Alex before he disappeared from his position, appearing right in front of her.

"Ah, my little Messerschmidt." he purred, leaning in closer to her, his hands cradling her face. "I bring out the best in you." He kissed her, and Pepper's eyes widened. If Loki were there, he'd probably rip the man to shreds just for touching her, let alone kissing her. Still, Pepper was surprised that Lizzie just let him... were they lovers in the previous timeline? Hadn't she said her lover had been someone named Scott? He pulled away, a smirk on his face, which was matched by Lizzie. "You are mine." he continued to say before looking at Pepper and Happy, then to the vaulted ceilings. He sighed. "Well, time to go. Too bad you couldn't burn it down this time, it certainly is an eyesore."

"I can always burn it down, if you like. I still remember what I did." Lizzie purred in reply.

Alex chuckled, kissing her once again, lightly. "Maybe next time. I'm only waging war on the Avengers at present, I'm not ready to take on the X-Men and your grandfather."

"I doubt they'd care." Lizzie replied.

"They would, darling." Alex insisted. "Besides, the time will come." Putting an arm around her waist, he led her out a side door, motioning for the two mutants who had Pepper and Happy to follow.

"Okay, are you calmer now?" Clint asked Loki for the fifth time, since he'd taken Loki out of the Tower to blow some steam off. They were currently in Steve's old gym, the décor reminding Clint very much of the 40s. As it turned out, Clint too was furious, and was punching a gym bag to keep himself calm.

"I am not some ballistic missile, Barton." Loki snapped. "I am fully capable of returning to the Tower and thinking rationally."

"Uh, actually I think ballistic missile is pretty accurate of a description for you right now." Clint commented, hitting the bag again.

"Why did she leave?" Loki asked aloud, not expecting an answer.

"I don't know." Clint replied, punching particularly hard at the bag. "I've known her for nearly a year, and I don't know. Jane said that she and Pepper worked this out for some kind of daughter that she was wanting to save."

"I know about Saoirse." Loki replied. "It's complicated."

"Then don't ask me questions you don't expect me to be able to answer." Clint said.

Loki looked up. "I wasn't really asking you to begin with." he said quietly. "I just want to know why she promised to stay... why would she pretend she would abandon her little plan, just to lie to me? I gave—" he stopped. "And no, Barton, I'm not asking you to answer. Forget I'm here."

Clint sighed, stopping the bag from swinging before looking over at Loki. "Loki... I need to know about Lizzie's past."

Loki tensed, his green eyes glaring at the former assassin. "No."
"Why not?"

"Because you already have a predisposed opinion of her, thanks to Fury, about who she is. You made that clear yesterday when you spurned her ideas at every turn." Loki defended.

"And was I right? Did she have something other than the women's safety in mind?" Clint snapped.

Loki didn't answer, returning his gaze to the floor.

"Look..." Clint began, trying to figure out what he was going to say. "She's my friend, Loki."

"Yes, you've made that painfully obvious since the moment I arrived." Loki shot back acerbically. "Why did you even bring me here? You despise me."

Clint shook his head. "You proved to me that you aren't what you seem. You are on our side – and Lizzie trusts you." he said.

Loki scoffed. "You don't trust Elizabeth, how can you trust her judgment?"

"Do you want to start a fight? Cause I will fight you tooth and nail if that's what you want." Clint snarled. Loki shook his head. "Then shut up and let me talk." He waited a moment to see if Loki was going to reply, but he didn't. "Now, I need to know her past."

"No you do not." Loki snapped.

"I said: shut up." Silence followed, and Loki went back to brooding. "Alright, let's do this a different way. Why is she hiding from me?"

"Because you would hate her if you knew her past." Loki answered.

"You don't. Natasha doesn't."

"Natasha is a woman who has a similar story, and therefore sympathizes. I, lo—care about her."

"I care about her, and you know how I accepted Natasha." Clint defended himself.

"You would still hate Elizabeth." Loki said.

"What makes me so different than you in her eyes? Why would she tell you, and keep me in the dark?" Clint exclaimed.

"Simple enough to answer, I'm surprised you haven't figured it out: I am me, and you are you." Loki retorted.

"That makes no difference." Clint replied.

"Think about that statement for a moment, will you?" Loki asked. "You were so quickly willing to distrust her the moment you found out she was not what she seemed, whereas I did not care once I heard about her past, in fact I—" he stopped himself cold. "The point is, she knows your nature, she knows mine. I will accept her in the same manner that you accept Romanoff. But you will never accept Elizabeth in that manner, because you would view her as betraying you."

Clint scoffed. "In case you haven't noticed, I've known her longer."

"Did you know she had something planned today?" Loki snapped back.

"No... did you?"
Loki sighed, nodding.

"Why didn't you tell anyone?"

"Because I thought she was going to change her mind last night! I thought I had convinced her to stay!" Loki shouted.

"Well obviously your tactic didn't work." Clint mocked.

"No, it didn't." Loki said sourly. "Now be quiet, you're bothering my mind."

"Should I call you 'master' while I'm at it?" Clint asked, his tone filled with venom.

Loki's eyes filled with hatred. How dare he bring that up at this time? "Why you—" he didn't finish as they both heard something banging against a wall. Senses alerted, Clint reached for his gun while Loki reached for his dagger. From what Steve had said, almost no one visited the gym, and never at nine o'clock in the morning.

"You don't think it's Alex, do you?" Clint asked.

"Not him specifically, no." Loki replied as a man stepped out from the back, shades covering his eyes. "Like I said, not Shaw."

Clint aimed his gun at the hulking man. "Who are you?" he asked. Instead of answering, the man took his glasses off, looking Clint dead in the eyes. "What the—?" Clint tried to say before he suddenly felt as if he was no longer in control of his mind.

Loki, seeing what was happening, switched to his Jotun form, sending an icy blast toward the creature with the strange eyes. The mutant turned toward him, his red eyes narrowing on Loki, who made it a point not to look at him. "Well, well, aren't you a little charmer. My boss said you might be a little more of a problem." the mutant said. "But you should know what happens when Agent Barton is put under someone's control."

As if on cue, Loki was forced to duck as Clint shot at him, now understanding how Natasha or Fury felt back when he invaded earth. Taking a quick peek at the mutant, Loki formed an icy spear to try to hit him, earning a loud laugh for his troubles. Avoiding being seen by either man, he tried to leave the building, hoping that he could make it back to Stark Tower. Suddenly, he heard a cry from Clint, and he turned... he wasn't sure the Avengers would be pleased with him if he left Clint behind.

"LOKI!"

Turning around, he prepared to try to help Clint to get out from under the mutant's power. However, he found himself looking straight into the very red eyes he'd been avoiding. "Time to sleep, little prince."

His world went out of focus, and he lost all control.

Bella woke to the sound of the doorbell ringing. Groaning, she sat up from the couch, wondering when it was she had fallen asleep the night before... and why on earth had she been stupid enough to sleep there? It was damned uncomfortable, no one slept on it as long as they could avoid it. The doorbell rang again, and she sighed, standing up and trudging down the hall to the door.

"Shut up, I'm coming." she mumbled.
"You gunna answer that door, or am I?" Anna-Marie's groggy voice asked.

"I'll get it." Bella replied, reaching the door and looking through the peephole. "Who is it?" she called to the raven-haired woman on the other side. She vaguely recognized her, but not enough to actually answer the door.

"Hi, is Kathleen in?" the woman asked, her accent clearly denoting where she was from.

"Uh..." Bella looked at Anna-Marie, who nodded and looked at the kitchen. Of course. She could smell the food from here. "Yeah, she is. One minute." Unbolting the locks, Bella tentatively opened the door, Anna-Marie right behind her in case it was someone who shouldn't be there. "Who are you?" she asked as soon as there was a crack enough to see the woman clearly.

"Nell Shiffer. I'm Lizzie's boss." Farbauti said.

Bella smiled, opening the door wider. "Now I know where I've seen you. You get lunch down at the Starbucks close to Stark Tower."

Farbauti smiled, nodding as she got inside. "Yes, and you're Lizzie's sister. It's a pleasure to finally meet you." she said, noticing Anna-Marie. "It's good to see you again, Anna."

"Is it really? That's awful nice of you, Miss Shiffer." Rogue replied. "I'll go get your grandmother." She left as Bella began to shut the door.

"Wait!" Farbauti exclaimed. "I have a friend waiting outside, we didn't know if you were here."

Bella nodded as 'Nell' went to wave to the taxi which was outside. A woman emerged and paid the taxi, her long brown hair obscuring her face for the most part until she reached the door and went in, finally lifting her head to look at Bella. The blonde stiffened, her blue eyes widening and her mouth dropping. "You..."

"Hello, Bella." Veronica said, feeling as if her heart would beat out of her chest. "You've grown."

Bella just blinked, the information processing through her mind. "Mom?"

"They're gone." Steve shouted as he ran into the Tower's main room. "I went to the gym, the manager said that they were never there."

"Maybe they went somewhere else?" Tony offered. "After all, you haven't got the best of hangouts."

Steve clenched his jaw. "I dropped them off there, myself, remember?"

"Then that means that Veronica is right." Natasha said.

"Veronica? Who's Veronica?" Steve asked.

As if on cue, the woman in question stepped forward, her brown eyes taking in Steve, her appearance reminding him strongly of Lizzie as she walked up to him. "Veronica Lehnsherr-Donovan. Pleasure to meet you, Captain Rogers." she said, her accent betraying her as English, and reminding him strongly of Peggy – she stretching her hand out in greeting.

Steve nodded dumbly, taking her hand. "Donovan?"

"Elizabeth's mother." Veronica clarified. "I'm back from the dead... hello!" she smiled brightly, reminding him of her daughter. "Shall we sit down, I suppose I have a lot to explain."
"Damn right you do." a voice snarled from behind her, and Steve looked over Veronica's head, sighting a strawberry blonde who sat pouting on the couch, Kathleen next to her.

"My daughter, Isabella – or Bella, if you want to get technical. I think you know my mother-in-law." Veronica said.

"Johnny's girlfriend?" Steve asked, looking at Bella. She looked up at him, her blue eyes widening comically.

"Yeah... hot damn, you're like his more-buff twin." she commented. "No wonder he didn't want me to meet you."

Veronica laughed. "I approve wholeheartedly if this is what your boyfriend looks like." she commented. "Let's just hope he has the manners."

"I'm not interested in whether you approve." Bella spat. "After all, I don't even know you."

Tony interrupted before the mother and daughter had a spat. "This other person is Nell—"

"No, if Loki is missing, there is no need to pretend I am anyone other than who I am." Farbauti interrupted. "My apologies, Mr. Stark, and the rest of you. I am Farbauti, Queen of Jotunheim. I'm Loki's mother."

Silence reigned as the Asgardians took in who she was. It was Darcy who broke the silence with a well placed: "Oooh, Fanny... you're in trouble."

Lizzie stared at the bed which had been provided for her, the outfit which was stretched out on it being that of her old uniform. Apparently Alex had gotten it made while he was waiting for her, and had it waiting for when she finally showed up to fill it. Still, she couldn't help but be hesitant. It had been fifteen years since she had worn it, the memories of who she used to be rising to the surface.

So far things were going well – Alex had loaded Pepper and her onto the ship which he used as headquarters, sending the redhead off somewhere else while she was escorted to her own room. She was to meet his new group of mutants as soon as she got dressed in her uniform, so that he could introduce her to them all. But now, she felt as if the world was crashing around her ears. She knew that if she put that uniform on, she would never be the same; but it wasn't the copious amounts of leather, the buckles, or the corset that caused her to pause, it was the persona that came with the uniform of Elizabeth Donovan. The persona which scared Lizzie more than anything. A knock brought her out of her thoughts. "Yes?" she called out.

"Herr Schmidt sent me to see if you were ready yet." a male voice called from the other side. Taking a deep breath, Lizzie knew she had no other choice, and wished for just one moment that she hadn't left Stark Tower... she missed Loki already.

"One moment." she called back, pausing time long enough for her to put on the uniform, tying the laces of the corset up before she allowed time to relapse. Looking in the mirror, she gasped, trying to keep herself from crying as she saw the other woman in the mirror. She didn't recognize herself, thinking about how much she appeared like a specter, the total black ensemble being something she wasn't used to anymore. It made her pale skin much paler, her dark eyes appear blacker, while the long overcoat left her walking to a dramatic affect, and the corset reminded everyone that she was willing to use her wiles if need be. Still, that was not who she was anymore, and it was strange.

It was one mission, she assured herself, and she could return to the girl she had been. One last time of being a killer, of putting on the facade of hatred and cold-heartedness. When Saoirse was in her
grasp, she would return to the wide-eyed Lizzie Donovan that she'd been, leaving her past completely behind her. She could only hope that Loki wouldn't hate her, and be willing to let her come back.

She cleared her mind of such thoughts, focusing on the mission at hand. She wouldn't do Pepper any good if she focused on what might happen when she saw Loki again, she had to get this done or else. Pulling her hair up into a tight ponytail, she watched with fascination as she took on that which she needed to complete her job.

She opened the door, stepping once more out of the room, her persona completely in place as she went to the meeting of Shaw's Army, unable to stop comparing herself to Bellatrix Black.
Veronica explains how she lived, and Loki explains Lizzie's past to Clint. Meanwhile Pepper gets threatened, and Lizzie is dealing with being back in her old persona.

Volstagg cleared his throat first, bowing graciously to Farbauti. "Your Majesty, we are honored that you are here." he said, momentarily abandoning his jovial attitude to give her the respect she deserved.

"Thank you, Volstagg. I assure you, it is not often that I am in the presence of the Lion of Asgard." the Queen replied with a smile. Volstagg smiled bowing once more. Farbauti's eyes turned to Fandral, daring him to continue in his blatant disrespect for her. "And tell me, Fandral the Dashing, is your hatred for Jotunheim even further than that of your own king? For surely Odin would give me the respect I deserve, despite the fact that I am the wife of his enemy."

Yet, Fandral remained standing – that is, until Darcy elbowed him, giving him a look which would make any man whither in fear – but his attitude was clearly unchanged as he bowed to the Queen. He wasn't happy with this in the least, although it had more to do with his pride than he would admit to himself.

"At least you are not completely foolish." Farbauti remarked, giving Darcy a smile.

"So..." Tony started, looking her up and down. "You're Loki's mom, and head of the legal department." At everyone's quizzical glance, he showed them the screen of his ipad, which had her headshot for her badge displayed. "Been planning ahead, your majesty?"

"Very much so." Farbauti replied. "I knew about Thanos' plan long before you did, as I have kept a weathered eye on the borders of my own realm. He has caused problems between my younger two sons – or rather, my son and my husband's son. His anger toward my eldest has caused for his wrath to come against us earlier than suspected."

"And so you came here for Loki?" Steve guessed.

Farbauti nodded. "Yes, I did." she answered vaguely. "But I did not foresee Elizabeth coming into his life, I'm afraid."
"I don't think any of us did. I heard some of the things she had to say about him only a month ago, and it wasn't pretty." Bella commented. "But I'm sure you didn't come here just to lollygag about how you came to help Loki and obviously failed."

"Perhaps we ought to sit down, and calm down?" Veronika suggested before Farbauti could respond to the blonde's comment. Farbauti nodded, taking a seat, and motioning for the others to do the same.

Pepper paced the small room she had been put in, her mind going over everything which had happened within the last few hours. Several things were clear to her, the most evident being that things were not the way that she and Lizzie had originally planned. Lizzie had been sure that Alex would try to cause her some kind of pain, finding a way to get their location to Tony and have him come to 'rescue' her... but as of yet, Alex had only seemed to show Pepper hospitality. It was a twisted and strange form of hospitality, but it was still different than she had expected.

The room was simple, and evident to the fact that she was on a ship of some kind. Outside were two mutant guards, but she hadn't been tied up, or hurt in any way past the first time she had seen Alex. She didn't know why he was treating her the way he was, and it made her very uneasy. This was the same man who had tied her to a table and had Chitauri surround her with her death in mind, and from what Lizzie had told her, he was completely sadistic.

That was, if Lizzie was to be trusted. As soon as the thought entered her mind, she quickly banished it. She couldn't allow herself to doubt the only friend she had in this place.

As if on cue, the door opened and Alex entered the room, his face already set into a shark-like grin. "Ah, Miss Potts. Enjoying our hospitality?" he asked.

"Yes, although it surprised me." Pepper answered. "Tell me, why is it that you are treating me as more of a guest than a prisoner?"

Alex shook his head. "Always to the point, aren't you Miss Potts – soon to be, Mrs. Stark, if that ring on your finger is anything to go by. My congratulations." he said. "To answer your question, it is only temporary as I have men hacking into Jarvis at the moment. Disabling him was helpful when I was getting in, but to show Tony just what kind of conditions you have, we would need to use Jarvis to our advantage."

"You intend to hack into Jarvis and show me to Tony. What is your plan?" Pepper asked.

"To tell you would be to give you too much information, I'm afraid." Alex replied with a sigh, taking a seat on the bed which had been provided for her. "You're a smart woman, not as smart as me, but smart nonetheless. You'll find out soon enough." His eyes roved her figure, a hungry look in his eyes which unnerved Pepper. She unconsciously crossed her arms over her chest, trying to keep herself from his gaze. Alex laughed, the sound sending chills down her spine. "Do not worry, you are not useful to me in that regard... no, it isn't really you that is useful at any rate."

"What does that mean?" Pepper asked.

Alex stood from his place, walking closer to her. "Extremis was not something which Aldrich Killian came up with on his own, but that I wish to know more about." he said. "Giving a mutant new powers I have already accomplished and perfected... but giving a non-mutant mutant-like powers can be either detrimental or very helpful to my cause."

"You're going to use me as an experiment." Pepper finally concluded.

"No, you already are an experiment. It's all a matter of extracting what information I can from you, at
which point you will have no use to me.” Alex replied. "Except in luring Tony Stark into my grasp.”

"What makes you think that?"

"You're on the side of the Avengers, if I even thought to induct you into my ranks, I would have to keep the most watchful eye on you, and frankly it's far too much work." Alex answered her, placing a hand on her cheek, and finding a deranged delight in how she flinched. "You are very useful to me, you see. Elizabeth was brilliant to bring you... whatever her motives are." Pepper looked him dead in the eyes, concern in her gaze as she took in his words. "What are you talking about?" she asked him, thankful she had taken some drama when she was younger.

He didn't answer her, but simply smiled, chuckling and patting her cheek before he walked back out the door. Pepper shuddered, going over to the bed to sit down and contemplate what was going to happen. This Lizzie had not warned her about, and that frightened her in many ways. What frightened her more was that Alex was clear that he didn't believe Lizzie was there to join his ranks again.

She just hoped that somehow Lizzie would figure it out and react wisely.

"What I'd like to know is: what are we going to do about what Lizzie's done?" Logan asked as soon as everyone was settled down, apologies from Fandral finally made.

"You can't do anything about what Lizzie's done." Bella replied, looking at the mutant. "You know how she works. The fact that she thinks that her daughter is alive is enough to know that we have a serious issue on our hands."

"Yeah, see, no one has told me how that works." Tony interjected, trying to keep off the liquor. Pepper would need him sober for whatever was going to happen, and he wasn't about to let her down. "How does Lizzie have a kid? And why would that kid somehow make her turn Pepper in to that psychopath? Didn't she realize that Pepper would be in danger, and that none of us would trust her again?"

Bella sighed. "Lizzie has a plan, she always does. If Pepper is included, and Pepper was in on it, you don't have to worry about Pepper's safety." She told him."What you do need to worry about is when she finds out that her kid isn't alive. As for that story, Mr. Stark, it's going to take a while—"

"Let's hear it." Tony nearly growled. He wanted answers, and quite frankly this girl was the most difficult to get anything useful from at the moment. She quirked her brow, giving the room full of people a short breakdown of their past with Alex within fifteen minutes. When she was done, Tony sighed. "Who would have thought that Puppy had gone through all of that?"

"Poor girl." Steve commented. "But I've never seen any streaks of violence in her."

"Lizzie is one of those girls that is capable to keep certain things to herself." Veronika told him with a certain amount of pride.

"Like you would know." Bella spat. "Now that little story is over, why don't you tell me how you are still alive?"

Veronika's dark eyes showed sadness toward her daughter, Logan leading her over to the opposite couch and Farbauti sitting next to him. "I suppose I could start with the night that Alex came to kill us..."

"That'd be good, yeah." Bella said.
Veronika could see the hatred burning within her father's gaze as Alex thrust little Lizzie in front of him. Erik Lehnsherr had always been considered as a monster of sorts, but Veronika knew that he would always protect his family. The chaos began soon afterward, as the mutants between Alex and Erik began fighting and she was caught in the middle. Reaching for Bella and Lizzie, she took both of their hands, trying to lead them out of the room.

"Raven!" she shouted, catching the shapeshifter's attention. Moving quickly, she passed Bella off to her as Raven shifted to look like her. They went one way while Veronika took Lizzie's hand and ran in a different direction. What she didn't expect was for Alex to send one of his mutants after her, yanking her to the ground. Lizzie screamed, trying to scramble back to her. Suddenly the mutant before her changed into Alex.

"Nice try, Vera." he sneered, looking up at Lizzie. "But my revenge isn't over yet."

"Isn't it?" Veronika challenged, looking up at Lizzie. "Run Lizzie!" The girl stood stock still, unable to react. "RUN!" Lizzie started, looking at her mother in panic before running for the door.

Alex laughed cruelly. "You think that's going to work?"

"I think it might." Erik's voice uttered a few feet down the hallway, and Alex was picked up by the metallic railings on the staircase. Veronika looked at Erik in shock. He quickly lifted her to her feet, shielding her as Alex made his counterattack. The Christmas tree fell, catching the furniture surrounding it on fire, but he didn't care, his focus was on the Lehnsherr's.

By that time, other mutants had gathered in the room, and Veronika was accidentally thrown back into the wall, hitting it with such force that she went unconscious. She could hear her father's shouting as she fell into darkness. Her last thought was that she was going to be burned alive.

She woke several hours later in a strange room, a nurse looking her over. "Where—where am I?" she stuttered out. Movement from the chair beside her alerted her to her father's presence, and she turned her head. "Dad?"
Erik smiled wryly, taking her hand in his. "I thought you were gone, Veronika." he said gruffly. "The house went up in flames, and we barely got you out of there. Azazel was the one who eventually made his way to you, getting you out just in time."

"The girls, where are the girls?" Veronika asked. Erik hung his head, panicking her more than he meant to. "Dad, where are Bella and Lizzie?"

"They are with Charles." Erik answered slowly. "They are safe, Vera."

She sighed, smiling as she leaned back into her pillows. "Thank God... for a moment I thought they didn't make it." she said relieved. "Can I see them?"

Erik pursed his lips, holding her hand a little tighter. "Vera..." he started slowly. "They think you're dead."

She blinked, trying to figure out what he was saying. "What?"

"Shaw, Charles... the girls... they all think you died in the fire." Erik explained a little more. "You
"What do you mean I can't see them again?" Veronika exclaimed, her voice raising in pitch as the heart monitor she was attached to spiked. "They're my children!"

"There is more to this than meets the eye, liebling..." Erik said softly. Veronika stared at her father as he began to explain what he had learned about Shaw and his abilities to manipulate the mutant gene to bring about new powers.

"After that, he had convinced me that to contact you would only put you in more danger. Alex thought I was dead, and being dead meant that I could look after you from afar and make sure that nothing would happen..." Veronika explained to the room, hanging her head. "Unfortunately, it seemed to have done nothing about what happened. I tried to do what I could for you girls, but it was to no avail... Alex got to you first, and turned Lizzie into what he did. I forever wished I had made a different choice."

"But why did you continue to lie after Lizzie went back and changed everything?" Bella asked. "Being related to her, you were unaffected by her power, your memories were retained."

Veronika nodded. "They were, and several times I nearly went back to see you—"

"But you didn't." Bella interrupted.

"Your grandfather made a good point. If you two were in any communication with me, Alex would have known that Lizzie and you were alive. You see, he thought us all dead, which is why he never came after you the second time..." Veronika trailed off, hoping that her explanation was enough. "Bella, I am so sorry."

Her daughter nodded. "I'm sure you are... I suppose I can understand it from a certain point of view." she conceded, clearing her throat. "When Lizzie finds out, though – let's put it this way, she's not going to be happy."

"I wouldn't know about that." Kathleen spoke up for the first time. "But I suppose it depends on whether Lizzie even comes back alive." The grandmother in her spoke, protective, yet worried over the child she had raised for twenty years. "Forgive me, Vera, I am glad you are back... but I am concerned also about Lizzie."

Veronika smiled, nodding. "I do not blame, you Kathleen. I am worried about her too." Her gaze turned to the others. "Alex's headquarters are on a ship at the Port Newark-Elizabeth Marine Terminal. He doesn't know I'm alive, so that gives us an advantage—" she stopped short, a vision coming to her which had her eyes suddenly fill with panic.

"Vera?" Logan asked her worriedly.

"We need to go now." she told him, standing up suddenly. "We need to get to the docks now."

If there was one thing Loki knew, it was this: he was in pain. His poor mind had been left throbbing in the aftereffects of someone else's control, giving him slight pity for the man beside him. Was this what it was like for Clint when Natasha gave him... cognitive recalibration? Loki had known that for himself there was a slight headache, but it was nothing like this. He groaned, opening his eyes to assess where they were.

A second thing he now knew: it was dark. Straining his mind to focus on his ears, he could faintly
hear the sound of a thunderstorm raging outside. He smiled just slightly to himself, wondering if it was Thor, who would come to get him out of Alex's hands. Furrowing his brow, he banished the thought... why would Thor save him? Their relationship was far from brotherly. Still, he couldn't help but imagine it for a moment.

The last thing he noticed was that Clint was still unconscious beside him... wherever beside him was. In the darkness, Loki couldn't see just how they were situated, or how the room – as he concluded they must be in some kind of room – was arranged, but he could hear Clint's steady breathing, which informed him that the assassin was still asleep. Besides, if Clint was awake, he had no doubt he'd be hearing him trying to figure out what the room was like.

He decided now to test out the rest of his limbs, and find out just what the situation was – or at least, his situation. He discovered that he was tied to a chair, much like Lizzie and Natasha had been that day in the Tower. His arms were straining behind his back, and his legs were fastened to the chair's leg. The only thing which seemed to have been different was the fact that it wasn't ropes which held him, but some kind of chains. He sighed, knowing that chains he had no hope of escaping unless someone outside assisted.

Leaning his head on the back of the chair, he thought on what Alex could possibly have planned for Clint and he. Why would he take them? The answer which seemed to come with abundance was that Alex wished to use him, in some way, against Elizabeth. But in what manner? Obviously her daughter meant more to her than he did, evidenced by the fact that she left him when her daughter's life suddenly was in danger. Loki growled lightly. Although he loved her, he was furious that she would abandon him like that – much like everyone who so-called 'loved' him. Maybe she didn't? Maybe she was simply using him as some kind of distraction? He cleared his head, wondering when it was that he had started doubting her. 'When she left you, after she swore she wouldn't' the little voice in his head reminded him.

The sound of Clint groaning alerted him of his wakening. "Good morning... or probably evening by this point." Loki said in a faux chipper tone. "How was your rest?"

"Painful." Clint replied groggily. "Remind me never to go out with you again."

"You can't blame me for what happened." Loki replied. "Contrary to my reputation, I don't approve of mind control."

He could hear Clint snickering. "Well, remind me to take you to see that scepter, because I vaguely remember you touching every person you met with it." he retorted.

"Beside the point." Loki retorted.

"Very much to the point, tall-dark-and-green." Clint replied.

Loki groaned. "I swear, if Stark gives me another nickname I'll skin him." he threatened.

"If we ever get out of here, I'll help you." Clint said, the sounds of his own chains clinking reaching Loki's ears.

"Ah, so you've discovered that our host is quite archaic." the prince commented.

"Fucking heavy shit right here." Clint mumbled. "I can't remember the last time I was in chains."

"I can..." Loki trailed off.

"Well, I've no doubt you're into all that kinky shit." Loki could hear the smile in his voice as he said
"Kinky?" Loki repeated. "What does that—oh!" The memory of Tony Stark explaining the word 'kinky' entered his mind, which he quickly banished. That particular memory was not one of his favorites. "You read too many myths."

Clint chuckled, as if he'd suddenly hit on a marvelous joke he wasn't willing to let go yet. "Oh please, that helmet? You have to be into that kind of stuff." Clint immediately thought of Lizzie, but purposefully kept off the subject of the woman, remembering how sensitive the man beside him was about her.

"My... sexual preferences aside, we are currently in some kind of a ship." Loki said, switching topics. "I can smell the ocean."

"I can't." Clint replied, turning serious.

"Aesir have stronger senses than mortals, Barton. We can hear, see, and smell better." Although, Loki had to remind himself that he wasn't Aesir. "So, I can hear that a thunderstorm is outside—"

"Thor, perhaps?" Clint asked.

"Unfortunately I cannot tell the difference between a regular storm, and one of Thor's." Loki replied, wishing he could.

"Forecast predicted sunny skies for a week." Clint provided.

Loki chuckled. "Then most definitely Thor." he said, the two of them lapsing into silence for a moment.

"Hey, why do you think that Alex took us?" Clint asked, the question burning in his mind. "Does it have something to do with Lizzie?"

"I think so." Loki replied. "I don't know exactly his plan, but it definitely has something to do with Elizabeth."

Clint nodded, not that Loki could see. He braced himself for his next line of questioning. "Loki?"

"Yes, Barton."

"You have to tell me about her past."

Silence followed, and Clint thought he had lost any communication that he could have possibly had with the other man, resigning himself to considering how to get out of there alone.

"I suppose you're right." Loki's voice suddenly cut through the silence. "You have a right to know."

"Really?" Clint asked. "'cause every other time I've asked, I've been met with 'Lizzie' – sorry – 'Elizabeth will tell you when she's ready.'"

Loki sighed. "Considering we are most likely to see her soon, and Alex has a reason for what he's doing, I can't see the harm in sharing her story so as to help you understand the situation better." he said. "But I swear to you, if you treat her any differently, I will kill you."

"I take you seriously." Clint replied, settling in to hear about his friend's past.
Black heels clicked on the metallic floor of the ship's deck as Lizzie walked down the corridor. Her meeting was finished, and she felt physically sick, and emotionally ready to murder. Alex's guard had grown in her absence, going from a select few of twenty to a large group of seventy-eight. What made her even more nauseous was when she found out that more than half of them were created like she was. It was horrible to know that during her time away he had done more damage than the last time she had known him.

However, it was the last thing she had learned that made her want to absolutely kill anyone who came into her path. Pepper was going to be put on one of Alex's tables, her ability due to Extremis catching his attention enough that he wanted to take the next step and start doing it to normal humans. Had she not been on a mission, and had not Pepper been onboard, Lizzie would have killed Alex and simply dealt with the consequences. Her one mistake in the previous timeline had been to let him live, a mistake she would not be making again.

Without thinking, she had wandered into the hold of the ship, the thought that there might be prisoners down there not even crossing her mind until the voice of one of the mutants caught her attention. "May I help you, Anesthesia?" the mutant, who she vaguely remembered meeting in the very beginning. He was tall, and broad shouldered, reminding her of Bruce when he was in Hulk form.

"No, I wandered down here in search for some privacy, and the only way you can help is if you allow me to do that on my own." she snapped, giving him her best glare. The mutant's brow rose, and he backed away.

"I'm sorry, but Herr Schmidt said you were not allowed down here until orders came." he replied.

Lizzie opened her mouth to speak, but was cut off by Alex's voice. "Elizabeth? What are you doing down there?"

She turned, her face a mask of cool indifference as she took him in behind her. "I was interested in seeing what each of the parts of the ship held. It wouldn't do me any good to get lost, now would it?" she asked him.

"No, it wouldn't. You might meet someone you wish you hadn't." Alex replied, looking at the door past the hulking mutant. "Like the prisoners in that cell, for instance."

"Why, who's in there?" she asked, now curious to what he was hiding from her.

Alex seemed to roll her question around in his brain. "Perhaps I will show you tomorrow... tonight, I wish to have you all to myself." he purred, inciting disgust in Lizzie's stomach. This was another thing which made her want to throw up – Alex's constant possessive attitude toward her. However, she knew she could not show it, her charade included allowing his behavior. "I forbid you from entering that cell without me, Elizabeth, do I make myself clear?"

"Very well." she said, looking very much put out. "Tomorrow then."

A grin spread on Alex's face as he slithered his arm around her waist, pulling her body close to him as he teleported to his quarters in the ship. If she had looked into his mind, she would have been even more revolted at his thoughts – as he looked in hers, however, he was amused and furious.

As she had been around him, she could only compare him to the man who had been in the cell which he had forbidden her to enter until the next day... still, he felt absolutely amused with how much fun he was going to have destroying her beloved Loki, showing him how much Elizabeth truly belonged to him.
Frigga sat in her garden, contemplating the news which had just reached her ears. Heimdall had seen Lizzie's little plan carried through, and Alex's counter seizing of Loki and Clint. She was loath to tell Thor, knowing that the boy would most-likely do something rash in order to save his brother. Although it would be foolish, Frigga had to smile. No matter what Loki did, Thor would always come to his aid if he needed him – she only wished that Loki would realize that.

"You have been out here for three hours," Odin's voice sounded from behind her, alerting her to his presence. "What is it?"
Frigga sighed, she would have to tell him, she just wondered what his reaction would be. "I suppose you know that Heimdall sent a messenger to see me?"

"Yes, but he went straight to you. Apparently I was not allowed to hear it." Odin replied, sitting down next to her. "Why? What did Heimdall see that I am not allowed to be privy to?"
"You are allowed." Frigga replied. "But Heimdall did not think that Thor needed to know quite yet."

Odin's brow furrowed, his lone eye looking curiously at his wife. "Whyever not?"

She let out another breath, preparing herself to break the news to him, and then Thor – as he would have to know soon. "Elizabeth Donovan, the woman Loki is in love with, has made a fatal mistake." she told him. "She has turned herself over to her enemy in hopes that she can manipulate him into giving her a child of hers – which, as it turns out, is not alive anymore –" Frigga paused, then resumed. "Then she intends to kill him."

"But she will fail?" Odin asked.
"Yes." Frigga replied. "Her love for Loki is strong... as is his love for her... but I fear for the both of them."

Odin didn't say anything in reply, knowing that she would explain all in due time, instead he gazed on her, seeing the heartbreak on her face.

"I have seen her end, Odin." she eventually whispered. "I have seen her death."

"What does that mean?" he asked.

Frigga looked at him, her eyes glistening in tears for her son. "He will lose faith in her... and she will lose the will to live."

"Does she have it now?" Odin asked.

"She believes that he loves her, and that her daughter is alive. She has everything to hope for. A man who loves her, and a child, they could make the one thing she has always dreamed of: a family. At current, her life is looked directly up, unless she does something foolish and fails." Frigga explained. "But her first crush will be when she finds out that the child is not alive. The second, when Loki's faith in her grows dim as he watches what he believes she has become."

"Then we should stop this!" Odin exclaimed. "Stop this foolishness before it becomes fatal to them both. Why did you not tell me sooner?"
"I thought that he would change it." Frigga said. "I thought that by asking her to stay, by telling her that he loved her, her end would be different... but now I see it has only brought her ruin."

"I don't follow." Odin replied.

Frigga sighed. "By telling her he loved her, he has put himself deeper within her heart. In that case,
by then losing him, she will feel it more profoundly than if he had never said he loved her at all.
Instead of possibly causing her to cry, or feel pain at his rejection... it will break her—" she stopped.
"Oh!" she exclaimed.

"What?" Odin asked.

"That is what Shaw is planning..." she said, her voice light in understanding as she stood up. "He
wants her broken... that's why he took Loki. Of course."

Odin pursed his lips, his mind already whirling for a solution. "I will tell Thor, he will get Loki and
bring him back where he belongs – hopefully, he will also save the girl before it is too late."

Frigga nodded. "I only hope that Thor gets to Loki before Shaw does." she said. "Or else, everything
will happen as I have seen."

"He is still your son, isn't he?" Odin asked with a smile.

"He will always be my son, even if he doesn't look to me as his mother – or you as his father." Frigga replied softly.

"Will he ever?" Odin asked.

Frigga didn't answer, sitting back down instead. Odin nodded at her silence and left the garden,
heading to where Thor was... and preparing to tell him the dreadful news. She could only hope that
he would be able to help Loki, and avoid the very things she had seen.

Chapter End Notes

well? What did you guys think? Now, I'm going to give you a week to brace yourselves
for the fact that Loki is going to turn against Lizzie in the next chapter... know that now.
Let me know what you think below.
Betrayal

Chapter Summary

Lizzie and Loki see each other for the first time since she joined with Alex. Meanwhile the Avengers are trying to get to Alex's headquarters.

Chapter Notes

FEELS AHEAD. WARNING. GRAB A BOX OF TISSUES YOU WILL NEED THEM.

(at least that's what my beta says.)

Clint was reeling from the information which he just found out, knowing now why it was that Lizzie had been so reluctant to share her story with him. "That's horrible..." he said. "But why would she tell you, and leave the rest of us out of it?"

"She didn't want to be thought of any differently." Loki answered. "Let's be honest, shall we – her past is not so different than mine, her crimes quite similar. Would you have treated her with the same affection had you known that she had killed thousands?"

"Probably not..." Clint replied. "That doesn't mean I'm not still basically pissed with her for not telling me. If she had told me herself I might have been more lenient, but as it took us being kidnapped and Alex to come out of the woodwork, I'm less likely to be forgiving."

Loki fixed him with a glare despite the fact they couldn't see each other. "You swore to me that you wouldn't treat her any different."

"And I won't." Clint insisted. "Although, why do you think that she joined up with Alex now?" he asked. "I mean—"

His question was cut off as the door opened and a light turned on, momentarily blinding the two prisoners within. "Well, well, aren't you two absolutely friendly." an all-too-cheery voice said. "Quite the change from wanting him dead, isn't it, Barton?"

"Oh, don't worry, you've topped him in creepy-evilness." Clint snapped. "Say, do you think that we might be able to get a little stretch time? My arms are killing me."

The voice chuckled, and Loki finally was able to open his eyes enough to see who it was. "You're not Shaw... so who are you?"

"Wouldn't you like to know, god of mischief?" the man replied. "But I'm sorry, some secrets have to stay secret."

Loki studied him, his presence seeming very familiar. "Then why are you here?"

"To bring a little companion for you two. After all, it must be frustrating it only being you." the man
replied, sticking his head out of the door. "You can bring her in now!" Loki's heart jumped into his throat. It couldn't be Elizabeth could it? Surely she hadn't been caught in whatever she had been trying to do. If it was she he wasn't sure he'd be able to sit back and watch as they did whatever they planned to do with her...

The woman was brought in, and Loki breathed out in relief. It was Pepper, not Elizabeth. "Hello boys." she said tiredly as they sat her down in a spare chair, but didn't tie her. "So they got you too."

"Yeah..." Clint replied vaguely, waiting for their guards to leave so he could question what Pepper knew about what was going on. It was the one thing which neither he nor Loki knew about... what was Lizzie's plan?

"I'll leave this heartfelt reunion, if you don't mind." the strange man chirped. "La'ers!" and with that, he disappeared into thin air, making Loki uneasy. That was no normal man, and that didn't necessarily mean that he had left. However, it seemed that he was, indeed, gone – his presence simply disappeared.

Pepper groaned in pain.

"What have they done to you?" Clint asked.

"Nothing yet." Pepper replied. "Well, nothing much, at any rate. They don't have a laboratory here, so they can't run any tests. However, Alex did allow for his mutants to test and see if they could fight against my chemically altered abilities... and how much damage they could do to me."

"Is that what's planned?" Loki asked. She nodded.

"It's only a matter of getting past Jarvis' security. He wants to record a message for Tony, as it turns out it's Tony he wants." Pepper relayed to them, looking at Loki. "Lizzie's plan failed." she told him.

He clenched his jaw. "What was her plan originally?" he inquired.

Pepper sighed. "She was going to give me to Alex, believing that he would test her by putting her in charge of me. Once she found her daughter, she'd planned on getting us out and killing Alex... that plan was killed the moment Alex clapped eyes on me. He immediately transferred me to the care of two mutants – Lionel and Harvey. They're the he-men of the group." she told them. "I haven't seen Lizzie since the cathedral..."

"Do you know if she's safe?" Loki asked, immediately worried.

"Alex knows that something is up with her, although whether he knows that it's his death she intends or not, I don't know." Pepper replied, her eyes watering. "Oh, Loki... be glad you weren't there."

It was Clint who asked her "Why?"

Pepper closed her eyes. "She was so different. Her eyes, they were cold... dead. Her whole demeanor changed so much that I would have wondered if it were the same person if I hadn't seen it happen myself," she told them, looking at them once more. "It wasn't Lizzie. There was no warmth to her. No life." As her mind brought up the image of Alex kissing her, she went silent. She wouldn't hurt Loki like that... but she did have to warn him. "Loki, I don't know if we'll see her. But if we do... know that Alex is treating her like... a..."

"What?" Loki snapped. "What is he treating her like?"

"Like his property." Pepper answered vaguely. "Like he owns everything about her. Everything," she emphasized, hoping that when the time came he would understand.
Unknown to them, the cheery man had not left the room at all, and was now smiling widely under his disguise of invisibility. With a thought, he vanished from the room, this time for good.

"There has got to be another way to get to those dockyards!" Veronika growled as they were caught in traffic.

"Hey, sweet-cakes, I gave you an option." Tony replied, trying not to think what might be happening to Pepper the longer that they were stuck. "But you guys made sure that I couldn't get to Mark V."

Steve rolled his eyes. "Going in alone isn't the best idea, Stark." he reprimanded, not liking the situation any more than the other occupants of the vehicle. "They'd kill you if they saw you."

Tony huffed, glaring at his comrade. "I wasn't planning on going alone, Captain Puerto Rico."

"Can we leave the jibes until after we take care of Alex?" Steve replied, not liking one bit that Tony had pointed out that little fact of how he only had one star on his suit. Still, this was not his point, he needed to keep Tony on the ground until they all could work as one. "But have we contacted Fury yet?" He asked into the comms that he had in his ear.

"Working on it, Cap." Natasha answered from the other side of the connection. "There seems to be something blocking my signal."

Bella scoffed. "In the middle of New York City?" she asked, her face suddenly turning somber. "Someone must be tracking us."

"What does that mean?" Steve asked, giving Bella a questioning look.

"Mom, do you know the exact location?" Bella ignored Steve.

Veronika looked back at her daughter. "Yes. Why do you ask?"

Bella frowned, turning to Logan who was driving. "Logan, turn off at the next alleyway."

"What are you planning, Bells?" Logan asked, maneuvering the vehicle so that he could do what she wanted.

"Mom, I'm going to need you to do your little... mind-memory-thingy." Bella answered.

Veronika's brows furrowed as she looked at her daughter "Why didn't I think of that?" Veronika asked, knowing exactly what Bella had planned. "Logan, text Farbauti, we're going to need her car to follow us."

"I'm driving, Vera, no can do." Logan said, passing her his phone.

"I'll just tell Natasha." Steve offered, talking to the redhead in the other vehicle via the little mic. "Natasha can you hear me?..."

"Is someone going to tell me what the fuck is going on?" Logan suddenly bellowed, fed up with being out of the mother/daughter loop.

"I'm going to teleport us." Bella answered him. "Remember? Lizzie and I could rip the universe apart with just a thought. Time and space... are we getting through here?"

Logan looked back for a second, turning his eyes once more to the road. "A group of ten though? How can you get away with that?"
"I don't know to be honest, but I think it might work." Bella admitted.

Steve looked over at her. "I thought you knew how to work your power?"

Bella pushed a blonde lock out of her eyes. "When Lizzie started remembering her past, I was left completely out of what was going on. The block was still on my mind, so I had no idea of my past – that is, until a few weeks ago." she told them.

"What do you mean 'a few weeks ago'?" Logan demanded.

"Seannathair told me that to understand why my sister was suddenly in danger I needed to know my past... she sent me to see Professor Xavier." Bella told him. "So I'm remembering things bit by bit... but I don't know everything quite yet."

Logan had reached the alleyway and quickly turned into it, turning the car off. "You better know how to get in and out like this." he told her. "Because if anyone winds up stuck behind you'll be dealing with me."

Bella nodded, looking behind her to see whether the others were ready yet... trying very hard to keep her cool. This could end very badly.

"We're moving out now." Alex told Lizzie out of nowhere the moment she stepped into his office.

"Sorry, what?" she asked.

"You heard me, Elizabeth. The Avengers know about our headquarters here, and I'm not ready to deal with them yet..." Alex replied, giving her a look which would make anyone else wither.

Still, she gave him an impudent look. "And how could they possibly know?" she inquired.

"I don't know. The only reason I know is because one of the technicians was able to get audio – not video, unfortunately – of a conversation that was had at the tower. Only the last bit, I'm afraid. Some woman knows, and she told them exactly where we were." Alex explained a little more, moving to look out the window he had installed. "A shame really, I was just getting settled in."

Lizzie rolled her eyes. He always liked being dramatic. "So what do you want me to do?"

"The prisoners we have in the hold, I'd like you to get them prepared to move to our new location." he told her.

"And where is that?" she asked. She'd have to find a way to warn the Avengers as to where they were headed... after all, this was going on for far too long as it was.

Alex turned toward her, a sickeningly sweet smile on his face. "Transportation won't be a problem, if that's what you're worried about. I've already got it arranged." he said. "Go get your job done, we don't have much time."

Nodding, she turned around and headed for the door.

"Elizabeth?"

She turned, her face impassive. "Yes, sir?"

"You may go into that cell I told you about earlier... you need to move them as well." He told her, knowing that her curiosity would lead her in there anyway. Besides, he wanted to see the little reunion between the two lovers. "As a matter of fact, do that cell last, and stay there until I arrive."
Lizzie gave a slight bow of respect – as he had instructed for years – and left the room, heading out to complete her orders.

The strange man who had the ability to disappear suddenly removed his guise, walking up to Alex with a leery smile. "Sending her down there? You don't think she'll get suspicious?"

Alex smirked, looking at the door. "One thing Elizabeth never thinks of: that there might be someone smarter than her." he said, looking at the clock. "She should be slowing time right about now, she will want as much time as possible to get the prisoners out."

"But that cell? I thought you wanted to draw her out a little more before you brought her obvious betrayal to the forefront." the man replied.

"Patience, Gollum." Alex snapped. "Or do you think I don't know what I'm doing?"

The man nicknamed 'Gollum' cowed down, apropos to his name, nodding. "Of course, sir. I'm sure you know the best way to deal with this traitoress." he said.

Alex grinned predatorily, sending Gollum out of the room. It was now only a matter of time, and he always loved playing games.

She had slowed time, and quickly got everyone out of the other cells and send out of the ship. As it turned out, Alex hadn't changed a damn bit. His 'prisoners' consisted of mutants who he had captured, intending to help build his army. There were fifteen total, and now Lizzie was more than curious as to what was in the last cell.

"Thank you, boys, Herr Schmitt gave me orders that I will stay here and wait for him." She told them, her mind registering them as being the same mutants that she once worked with. They exchanged a look, and the larger one gave her a nod, opening the door for her. She entered, completely unknowing as to just who was on the other side – but that didn't last long as she looked up and her eyes widened.

Impossible. Her eyes immediately went to Loki, her persona momentarily dropping as she fought with her heart to simply run to him... she wanted to, she wanted to get him out of there, and to be safe with him once more. His own eyes spoke volumes as he appraised her, the green orbs taking in every piece of leather which comprised her outfit. She felt as if she had betrayed him in some respect, as if she had become the very thing she had tried to get him out of. She took a step toward him, wanting to take the betrayal out of his eyes, to spill her secrets and to beg his forgiveness for abandoning him in the tower after she'd sworn to stay...

"Lizzie?" It was Clint who spoke first, snapping Lizzie out of her stupor. Alex had sent her here, no doubt to test her, and being so she knew she was being watched. She couldn't fail, no matter how she wanted to, and her persona immediately came back to her face, her walls slamming up quickly. Saoirse depended on her, she needed to stay where she was for now. What's more, she couldn't give way to sentiment in any way. She could feel like she was being watched.

"Well, what an interesting surprise." she crooned in a mocking tone. "Alex didn't tell me that you were here."

Loki watched her in shock. She had told him what kind of a person she had been under Alex's influence, but to see her in person, dressed as she was, and talking so differently was more impacting. He saw the initial struggle in her eyes when she stepped into the room. How many hours had it been since he'd held her in his arms, and they'd teased each other? How could she have changed into this so quickly?
"So tell me, Hawk, how did you wind up with your wings clipped?" Elizabeth asked, her words being something which she would have said before, but the meaning behind them had changed. She was meaning to demean him. Her eyes turned once more to Loki, and he saw the woman he'd seen the first day in the library – cold, hard... an ice-queen. There was a determination that nothing would faze her. "And how did the wannabe King of the World end up beside his minion, hmm?" It wasn't as biting, but it stung. "I have my own questions, but I figure you have some as well."

"Lizzie, what's going on?" Pepper asked from her chair, bringing the woman's attention away from the two men.

Elizabeth's eyebrow rose, and she stalked toward Pepper. "What's going on? You're being moved." she said simply. "Alex found out that your loveable billionaire has decided to storm the gates and rescue his princess in distress... however, Alex isn't done playing with you yet, so he's not willing to give up so soon. I'm surprised, however, that he's kept you so long. You must be special."

Phrases like 'Play with you' and 'kept you' hit Loki hard. She treated Pepper as if she didn't care about her, which – from a certain point of view – he understood. She was wanting to get her daughter, she had to put on an act. "Elizabeth..." he called to her, watching as she froze, unknowing of just what his calling to her did. She closed her eyes, slowly turning to face him, a predatory grin on her face.

"Calling me, god of mischief?" she purred, walking toward him. As she stood in front of him, she smirked, placing her hands on her hips. "And what can you want? An explanation perhaps? You want to know why I left?"

"I already know why you left." Loki replied, craning his neck to look up at her. She seemed taller.

"Then what do you want to know?" she asked, wishing that she didn't have to do what she knew she had to... the weight of the guilt already bearing down on her shoulders... and she hadn't even said much yet. She was saved from any other conversation by the door opening, at which point she walked away, turning toward the newcomer. "And what are you doing here, Taylor?"

"Herr Schmidt's technicians have successfully hacked into Tony Stark's AI. He is ready to broadcast a video, now." Taylor replied, motioning to the bag in his hand. Elizabeth looked down at the bag, her eyebrow raised.

"Very well." she said, waving a hand nonchalantly. "Make it quick, we're moving out and I'm not interested in getting caught."

"Can't you just slow time?" Taylor asked.

Elizabeth turned to him, her eyes glinting dangerously. "Considering the Avengers have contacted my sister, and no doubt will use her to their advantage, I will not be able to stop her from coming. Everyone else, yes, but not her." she told him. "So make it quick."

Taylor nodded, pulling the camera out of the bag and setting up.

"Where are we going?" Loki asked, wanting to glean as much as he could from her.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" Lizzie countered as she looked at him, not liking the fact that she actually didn't know where they were going. It made her uneasy. She smirked. "Don't worry, Loki, I'm sure Alex has plans for you." They made eye contact, and Loki searched for any sense of the woman who he'd come to know over the last few weeks... but she wasn't there.

Suddenly, Alex was in the room, 'Gollum' at his side. "Ah, Taylor, have you set your cameras up
"yet?" he asked cheerily, looking at Loki. "How nice to see you, Loki. It's really a shame that I had to tie you up, but after your little show the first day I met you, I'm not interested in repeating it." Lizzie had looked away, focusing on Pepper as Taylor set her up in her chair so as to be sitting up.

"The feeling is mutual, Shaw." Loki replied smoothly. "I don't think we had a chance to really talk when you broke into the Tower."

Alex laughed, his eyes locked onto the Asgardian's. "Too true. Lizzie was my focus, as she was yours as well." he said, looking over at Elizabeth. "She's distracting, isn't she? Can't focus on much when she is around." His tone turned to musing, Lizzie's pulse pounding in her ears. She knew what Alex was doing, and she wanted to kill him for it.

"Perhaps she is." Loki replied, not wanting to give Alex ammunition. "But you have known her longer—"

"That doesn't matter, does it?" Alex interrupted. "You were so obviously enchanted with her from a few weeks of knowing her." He stepped toward her, tilting her head so she was looking at him. "Such beauty... so dangerous..." he trailed off, and Lizzie scoffed.

"We have things to do, Alex." she snapped. "Bella will bring the Avengers at any moment."

Alex tutted. "So impatient, though. It is a weakness of hers, she's so convinced that she has to complete her work that she doesn't think about how not everything is duty." he said, looking at Loki. "Of course, you wouldn't know that."

Loki felt like snarling in possession over Lizzie. How dare Alex touch her? She was his. Still, he watched, completely helpless as Alex moved his hand to Lizzie's neck, his thumb brushing her pulse point. "Naturally." he finally answered the man. "I haven't known her for the amount of time that you have."

"No..." Alex said looking at Lizzie once again. "No you haven't." Suddenly he crashed his lips to Lizzie's, and she froze momentarily, still disgusted by his blatant show of possession... what made it worse was that Loki was watching, and she felt as if she was betraying him by allowing Alex to do this. Yet, she did, forcing herself to pretend as if she was responding, hating herself every second of it.

Clint's eyes widened, and he looked at Loki. It sent chills down his spine as he saw the look in his eyes, the anger and absolute fury glaring daggers at Alex. He momentarily wondered if what Lizzie was doing was going to cause Loki to regress, sending him hurling back into the abyss that Loki had been in the first time Clint had seen him. He looked back at Lizzie, who - although she seemed to be accepting of Alex's advances – he could see was somewhat uncomfortable.

Finally, Alex pulled away, and Lizzie felt disgusted with herself, pulling away from him as quickly as possible and turning her back toward Loki. Her eyes immediately went to the floor, tears threatening to spring forth. How low had she brought herself for the sake of her daughter? She finally turned, but seeing the hardened gaze that Loki fixed her with, she nearly broke. She turned to Alex, the desire to simply end him rising up once more. He was grinning at Loki, as if to say he'd won, and all she wanted to do was stop his heart from beating. She didn't belong to him, and she never would.

"Alright, six year old, you've shown everyone your new toy." She snapped at Alex in irritation. "But I think that I'll head out, after all you don't seem to be taking the threat seriously, and I'm not interested in getting caught after my blatant betrayal."
"Betrayal?" Clint repeated, incredulously, surprised that she didn't seem to be reacting to Alex as he thought she should. She'd nearly killed Johnny Storm for barely touching her, yet she'd allowed Alex to kiss her without even reacting. "I'll say you've betrayed us."

She turned to him, not in the least surprised that he'd said such a thing. "Oh, Clint, don't be so ridiculous. It's not like you're any different – or shall I remind you of your time being brainwashed?"

Clint's jaw clenched. "At least I didn't know any better, being controlled by someone else. You don't have that kind of excuse."

"Now, now, children." Alex reprimanded. "Elizabeth may be insolent – which, Elizabeth, I will address you on your earlier comment later – but she is right. We need to get a move on. Taylor, are you ready to go?"

"Yes, boss." Taylor replied, holding the camera up and focusing on Pepper.

"Elizabeth, do disable Agent Barton and Loki's voice boxes. I want complete silence." Alex instructed, and with a nod, she focused on the two men, feeling as if she was slipping deeper and deeper into a hole she had dug for herself. "Good, now Taylor, here's what I want you to do..." He then proceeded to give instructions on what he had planned, intending to use Pepper as a little guinea pig as he caused her pain from the inside, allowing Tony to see as she writhed in pain, the source coming from her own mind. He then proceeded to threaten Tony, and say that all he wanted was to make a deal...

Clint and Loki stared at Lizzie as she allowed it to happen, unknowing that inside her mind was a battle raging, in which Lizzie Donovan conceded control and allowed Anesthesia to rule her head. It was about survival, and while she might lose her friends for the time being, she hoped that – if she made it out of there alive – she would be able to explain it all.

It was the longest five minutes of Lizzie's life, but eventually Pepper's screams stopped, the pain finally causing her to succumb to unconsciousness. For that, Lizzie was grateful, and she breathed a sigh of relief as silence took center frame. "Well, I think that's good, don't you?" Alex said to Taylor. "Take her out of here, Gollum. Take her to our new location."

Nodding once, the strange little man grabbed the redhead, disappearing in a second.

"Now, Taylor, I want you to send that video to Mr. Stark. Make sure that he gets it." he instructed, the mutant leaving the room. "Elizabeth, you can release Barton and Loki now."

"How could you?!" Clint snarled the moment his voice returned. "You were our friend! You were one of us!"

"I was never one of you." Lizzie said in reply, her tone completely calm and emotionless. "As Lizzie Donovan I was the normal human, completely helpless in the face of danger. As Anesthesia the mutant, I am not one of you because of my past. So no, Clint, I am not one of you, nor have I ever been." She paused. "I don't belong anywhere, nor have I ever."

"That's not true." Alex tutted, coming up behind her and wrapping his arms around her middle and looking at Loki over her shoulder as he moved her hair away from her neck and kissed it. "You belong to me."

Lizzie frowned. "Mighty affectionate today, aren't we?" she asked him, pulling out of his grasp. "Deadlines, Alex."

Alex smirked. "Ronnie, Davis, will you come in here please?" The two mutants who stood guard...
outside walked in, giving every person a once-over. "Take Agent Barton out of here and where the other prisoners are. What has happened to that driver, was he caught?"

"He was not, I'm afraid. We weren't able to track him down, either, sir." Ronnie replied. "I'm sorry."

"Sorry's aren't good enough." Alex said lowly. "But I don't have time to reprimand you."

Ronnie nodded, moving and getting Clint out from the chair, his burly arms keeping Clint in place nonetheless. Once Clint's arms were untied, they were pulled behind his back by the larger mutant, making sure he couldn't try to run away as he was led out of the room.

"Are you not taking Loki?" Lizzie asked, wondering just what Alex had up his sleeve.

Alex looked between the two of them, giving her a meaningful glance. "I'll leave him up to you, he looks like he wants to talk anyway." he said, walking out of the room, a behavior she hadn't expected from him. He had changed since the last time they'd been in each other's company.

Silence reigned for a few moments as Lizzie put time on pause, hoping that Bella wouldn't be able to do anything with the Avengers, all while keeping the ship running at normal speed. She wasn't looking forward to this conversation, though it had mostly to do with the fact that she knew that she was going to have to put the nail in the coffin with Loki, driving him away for good.

"What was that?" Loki finally asked, breaking the silence.

Lizzie spun to face him, her hands clasped behind her back. "What was what?"

"Do not play coy with me, Elizabeth, you know to what I refer." Loki snapped. "You never told me that your relationship with him was such."

"'Such' being that he was my lover?" she asked him. "Yes, I suppose I did leave that out. Why? Are you jealous?" She walked toward him, stopping just in front of him.

"Why would I be jealous?" Loki asked rhetorically. Lizzie tilted her head before she suddenly straddled his lap, her hands reaching up to his shoulders. He tensed, his body enjoying the physical contact more than he wished.

"I don't know..." she said softly, seductively. "But you are."

She finally gave in to her urge and kissed him, wishing him just to understand that this wasn't her, that she was still the woman who had given him her heart, that would give her life if it meant saving his. He responded to her kiss with fervor, thankful that she had finally responded to him in the way he'd wanted, a part of him wanting reassurance that she did care for him, and that it was all an act with Alex. She pulled back first, her forehead resting against his, her eyes closed.

"Look at you..." she finally said, causing him to open his eyes to look at her in questioning. "You actually thought I cared for you."

"What?" he couldn't stop his tongue from betraying his thoughts.

She smirked, her fingers tangling in his hair, pulling his head back slightly. "You thought that I had a heart to give to you." she said, her mouth hovering over his. "Even if I did, what makes you think I'd give it to a monster like you?"

He froze, his blood running cold. She didn't love him after all. It had all been a lie, one large lie which she'd done for whatever purpose, and one which he had fallen into. She kissed him again, but
this time he didn't respond, his fury beginning to build. She was like everyone else, like Odin who had abandoned him, and Thor who had tossed him into the abyss. It had all been a lie, and he began to hate her for it. She had used him...

"What's the matter? Silver tongue turned to lead?" She taunted, craving the warmth which he once had for her, already feeling the chill of his demeanor. This was her plan, but why did she feel so much pain? She knew her words would cut him, wound him deeply... but it was for his own good. Lizzie had seen what Alex had done to Scott, she couldn't risk the same happening to Loki. It would break her. She climbed off Loki's lap, knowing that if she stayed that she would give in and apologize, begging his forgiveness. "Davis?" she called to the door.

The burly mutant returned into the room, his eyes fixed on Loki as she gave him instructions in German. Loki could feel her power come over him as Davis freed him from the chair, lifting him. "My congratulations." Loki sneered at Lizzie coldly. "You are one of the few who have been able to deceive me so well. To do so to me is an accomplishment indeed."

Lizzie smirked, knowing the meaning behind his words. "That was the intention, god of mischief." she said, somewhat pleased with herself that she had deceived him – even though he didn't truly understand which part had been the deceitful. He was marched out of the room within seconds, but Lizzie stayed in the room, her eyes scanning the emptiness – or lack thereof.

With a cry, 'Gollum' suddenly appeared out of thin air, clutching his throat as he struggled to breathe, his gray eyes looking at Lizzie in terror as her black eyes narrowed on him. Anesthesia stalked toward him, clucking her tongue in disapproval as he fell to his knees.

"Naughty, naughty, boy. Whatever will I do with you?"
The Sounds of Silence

Chapter Summary

The Avengers go to the dock to find the ship empty, but find Happy. Meanwhile, Lizzie is brokenhearted by what happened and Frigga comes to see her.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bella felt like screaming. She had just gotten everyone assembled when the world around her froze to a complete standstill. She looked at her watch, feeling as if a bucket of cold water had been thrown on her face. Lizzie had stopped time, which meant only a few things, and none of them good. Trying to be proactive, she searched her memories on how to form a portal, wanting nothing more than to be ready to go as soon as Elizabeth resumed time.

"Frustrating isn't it?" Her mother asked from her place a few feet away. "Whenever your sister does this she always leaves us feeling helplessly alone."

"She hasn't done this to me in years, what's more I'm just remembering it. She used to think it was funny." Bella replied, finally letting out the scream, it wasn't as if anyone would remember it anyway, after all they would go from one second to the next with only a faint memory of something happening in between. "I'm gonna kill her."

"Let's not, Bella, your sister is already under a large strain." Veronika replied, looking down at her watch. "We're still stopped..."

"What do you think is happening?" Bella asked, she might as well find out since they were here.

"The worst thing that can."

Bella nodded, a portal suddenly forming in front of her, a ship clearly seen on the other side. "They can't go." she said, motioning to their still-frozen-in-time companions. "But we can. We might be able to do something."

"Just us?" Veronika challenged. "He has twenty to thirty mutants – maybe more. We can't take them all on."

"Our goal is to get the hostages, it has nothing to do with fighting our way around." Bella countered. "Mom! We have to! Lizzie is digging a grave for herself, and they're going to be moved, if we don't get there first it's possible that Pepper, Clint or Loki could die. Now I don't know about you, but I know how Lizzie would react."

Veronika sighed, shaking her head. "Bella, they would be the first people moved, don't you see?"

Bella shook her head, facing the portal. "I'm goin. If you want to stick around here and figure out a way to get everyone to the docks on your own, then fine." she said, expecting Veronika to change her mind.
"What if time resumes and the Avengers see that we are gone?" Veronika gave for Bella's consideration.

"Then we'll explain it when we get back." Bella answered, stepping through the portal. Veronika looked at each of the Avengers for a few more seconds, almost willing them to start moving before she stepped through as well, the portal closing behind her.

Silence. That was the first thing they noted when they arrived on the docks, the sounds of the water moving being the only thing to hear. It was suffocating at first, and it took a few moments before both women realized that there was no one in sight. The ship which Veronika had seen Alex board several weeks previous still stood there, but there seemed to be no life from within.

"You were right... they've been moved." Bella said first, breaking the silence. "We're too late."

"Maybe not?" Veronika replied, holding out hope even though both of them knew that the chance was slim that they were still in the vicinity. "Alex's car is there."

"I doubt he needs it." replied Bella. "When I knew him he could teleport himself, no doubt he has a mutant who can do the same – remember, he had me. I have no doubt that they moved like shadows, and without normal means of transportation."

Veronika moved to the side of the ship, in her minds eye she was able to see that the group had been there not long before, the scenes flashing through her head quickly. "Someone escaped..." she whispered, the sounds of a groan suddenly causing both women to turn, fully prepared to fight whomever was in the area. Bella followed the voice, her guard raised as her mind raced through its memories of fighting. She had no idea she was that ruthless. Finally she reached the source, and bending down, she lifted a large crate off the top of the dock. "Who is it?" Veronika asked from her place.

"Don't know yet." Bella replied, lifting a small hatch which seemed to be in the floor. Within she found a man, his eyes looking up at her in fear. "It's Happy." she called to her mother, using her power to transport him from the small place in the floor to beside the large crates.

"Must... see... Mister... Stark..." Happy breathed out laboriously.

Bella nodded. "We'll take you. How long have you been down there?" she asked, remembering the small bottle of water she had in her jacket and passing it to him. He drank it, and looked at her in gratefulness.

"This morning." Happy answered. "They were planning on moving Miss Potts, and basically said I wasn't needed anymore. They were taking her to see Agent Barton and Prince Loki."

"At least that means they're alive." Bella commented, breathing in relief. "For however long that lasts, though."

Veronika nodded, looking between the ship and Happy. "Wait, Bella... if he's awake and talking to us..."

Understanding dawned on Bella, and she nodded. "They're back. We'll take him with us, I don't see a point in bringing them here." stooping down, she grabbed Happy's arms, lifting him up as high as she could before she opened another portal, this time with the alleyway on the other side. Stepping into it, she practically collapsed into Steve Roger's arms, taking him off guard. But, being the gentleman and super-soldier that he was, he simply caught her and Happy, taking the man off of her.

"Where have you two been?" Logan snapped.
"Time stopped, you guys were frozen. We were the only ones still mobile." Bella explained quickly, looking back down the alleyway. The world was back to business as usual. "They were gone. Alex cleared out, he must have known we were coming."

Bruce was already examining Happy. "He's not normal guys, I don't know what's wrong with him." he said.

"An experiment, no doubt. Alex is vicious." Bella replied. "No need to stay here though, or to continue on to the docks. There's nothing there, and no clue as to where they went."

Tony looked murderous, the thought that Pepper was still in the hands of a lunatic making him feel completely hopeless. Pepper was his lifeline, and he'd be damned if he lost her due to one of Lizzie's stupid ideas. "Lizzie better know what she's doing." he snarled uncharacteristically.

"Lizzie wouldn't be foolish enough to go through with a plan she knew would fail. I'm sure she has everything under control, and that Pepper will be alright." Bella replied, looking at Logan for confirmation – he, however, just looked away. He wasn't as sure.

Tony nodded, calming down a little bit.

"What now?" Natasha asked. "Clint and Loki are still out there, and now we really have no idea where anyone is."

"We'll find out, I'm sure." Veronika replied. "Alex took them all for a reason, and he does enjoy gloating more than he probably should."

As if to punctuate her statement, Tony's phone buzzed, alerting him to a hacking of Jarvis. "Sonofabitch!" he exclaimed, looking at Steve. "Give me my suit, I need to get back to the tower stat, somebody has hacked Jarvis similarly to how that bastard did it last week."

Steve exchanged a look with Bruce, who just shrugged. "It's in the trunk." Tony moved like lightning, opening the trunk and grabbing the briefcase which had his suit in it. Activating it, he was soon completely armored as Ironman.

"C'mon Captain Puerto Rico, you too blondie, I have a feeling I'm going to need your help." the mechanical version of his voice said as he walked up to the pair, holding them around their middles before they even had time to protest. In seconds they were off and flying to the tower.

"We need to take care of the driver." Farbauti said, speaking for the first time. "He looks like he's sustained injuries that no normal human could produce."

"No normal human did." Logan replied, examining the exhaustion level in Happy, the scent which the driver gave off causing his brows to furrow. "That scent certainly isn't human."

"What do you mean by that?" Natasha asked, looking up at the man. Veronika and Farbauti exchanged a look, looking back at Logan with wide eyes as they all put the pieces together.

Lizzie leaned her forehead against the window of their new headquarters, tears streaming down her cheeks. She was in intense pain, her heart feeling as if it had been ripped out of her chest and trampled upon. The worst part of it all was that she had brought it upon herself. He wouldn't love her now, no matter what she did when all this was over to convince him that she hadn't meant it. It was too late, he hated her, she was sure of it.

"Loki..." she whispered to the window. "I'm sorry... I am so sorry..." He couldn't hear her, she knew
that, but she wished that somehow she could apologize to him, to make him understand. If only Gollum hadn't been in the room, she could have changed things, she could have told him everything that was happening, and begged him to forgive her just this once. She supposed that on the bright side, Gollum wouldn't be sneaking on anyone anymore, as she had permanently disabled that particular side of him. Alex had been furious.

It was raining outside, and Lizzie immediately wondered if Thor was back on Earth. Somehow it wouldn't surprise her. If he was, there was no doubt in her mind that he would have information as to their whereabouts, and probably come in as wrathful as she could possibly imagine him being. She had betrayed him too. He had asked her to change his brother, and to give him a second chance... it wasn't Loki who needed it now.

Her hand reached underneath her corset, grabbing onto the watch-locket which Frigga had given her. It was her last tie to him, and brought on a new wave of tears. It had only been a few days ago that they had had their discussions of 'what if?' and had decided that without the events in their lives they never would have met one another. A new 'what if?' filled her mind, this time recounting the events over the last day. What if she hadn't gone back to Alex? What if Gollum hadn't been in the room? What if she had been able to get them out of there before the transfer?

What if she knew where she was?

She didn't know, as it turned out, Alex refused to inform her of their location under the guise of 'It didn't matter'. Sighing, she held the locket at her heart, wishing that all of this misery would go away, and that the world she lived in would be simply and easy to maneuver. No deceptions, no lies, no forced hands... just life, and love.

"You grieve for him." a female voice suddenly stated and Lizzie gasped, her hands immediately tucking the locket back into her corset, her face of stone.

"How did you get in here?" Lizzie snapped, narrowing her eyes at the blonde woman in the strange dress. If she didn't know better, she would think her Asgardian. "Furthermore, who are you?"

The woman smiled kindly, motherly, her blue eyes filled with a sadness of her own. "I am Frigga, Elizabeth. I mean you no harm." Perhaps she didn't know better.

"Frigga?" Elizabeth echoed.

Frigga nodded, taking a step toward the younger girl, who frantically looked at the door. "I have put wards around the room, no one will hear us." she assured her.

Lizzie nodded, looking at Frigga once again. "You are Thor and Loki's mother?"

"And you are Loki's love. I have been watching you, been watching how you interact with him." she said. Lizzie's eyes went downward, the tears once more threatening to fall.

"Then you know what has happened within the last two days." Lizzie stated. "You know that I am no longer any love of his..."

"Nonsense." Frigga countered. "Loki loves you more than any other."

Lizzie looked toward the Queen, a sad smile on her face. "Not anymore he doesn't. Or did you not see what happened on the ship?" she asked, her voice cracking. "He despises me, and I drove him to it. I am sure that if he had a chance he'd sooner kill me than love me."

"His pride might, perhaps, but his pride is not him." Frigga replied, moving toward Lizzie. "You love him." She stated rather than asked.

"Surely you know that answer to that." Lizzie countered, wiping away new tears which gathered.
"But you have not told him." Frigga said. "He does not know of your love."

Lizzie scoffed. "If he did, would that make him love me more?" she asked, sitting down on her bed. "Forgive me, your majesty, but I have killed whatever love he may have held for me on the ship. I threw his feelings in his face and openly mocked them."

Frigga sighed, sitting next to her. "But that was not what you wanted in your heart, was it? The words you shamed him with were not those which you wished to say." she stated.

"I – no!" Lizzie stuttered out, the tears now coming more often. "Why would I wish to hurt him so harshly? To tear him apart at the seams, and dance over his soulless body?" she sobbed, and Frigga pulled her into her arms.

"I understand you did what you thought you had to, dear." Frigga said softly as the girl's shoulders shook. "But that does not mean that he does not love you."

Lizzie raised her head to look Frigga in the eyes. "The things I said to him." she murmured, shaking her head. "I was so cruel! There is no way he could love me at this point, not even if I got down on my knees and begged..." Her eyes closed, and she took a deep breath, trying to steady herself. "I did what I had to do." she said, this time her voice was much calmer.

"Loki is not a child, Lizzie." Frigga told her. "You must not believe that you need to protect him."

"Alex would kill him if he knew how much I loved Loki." Lizzie said softly. "And Loki cannot protect himself at this point." She stood, walking over to the window. "Do not take offense, but I must know... why are you here? For what purpose does coming to visit the woman who has destroyed your son for good, have?"

Frigga sighed. "You and I have a similar aim, Elizabeth. We also have one person whom we love dearly, who we never would want to see fall again into the abyss which he once came from." she told the younger woman. "Loki feels betrayed, yes. He doesn't deal well with betrayal, I'm afraid. That does not mean, however, that you two are not reconcilable."

"The ship is only the beginning, your majesty." Lizzie said, looking out the window. "When the Avengers – and possibly the X-Men – come, I will have no other choice than to fight against them. I will lose every last friend I have in the world, and all because I was a fool."

"They will understand when it is explained—"

"No, they won't." Lizzie interrupted sharper than she had intended. "The X-Men know my past more intricately than any other – excepting Loki of course. For me to join with Alex once more would be something which they all would view as treason. I was given my second chance, they will not give me another."

Frigga stood, walking to stand in front of Lizzie. "You are too hard on yourself, and you are too hard on them." she said, placing her hand on Lizzie's cheek, her blue eyes catching the immense pain which swirled within the chocolate brown. "They are your friends, and when they know the truth, they will not abandon you."

"And what is the truth?" Lizzie asked, her voice showing the depths of her current despair. "That I am Frankenstein's monster? That my creator holds the one thing which I hold dear most in this world, besides Loki himself, on a string with which to puppet me? Taunts and teases me, always baiting me to go that bit further for her sake?"

"You speak of your daughter." Frigga replied, suddenly going stiff. Lizzie didn't know about the fact
that Saoirse was dead, she had to tell her.

"You know about Saoirse?" Lizzie asked, her eyes wide with worry, as a mother should be no matter whether she had ever seen her daughter or not. "Please, tell me she is alright, tell me she is alive. Alex won't say anything, he keeps going on about how he's going to tell me when he's ready, and when I prove myself." She rushed out, not even allowing Frigga to get a word in in her panic. "I must know, she is the only thing keeping me sane in this madhouse."

"Elizabeth!" Frigga finally shouted, getting the girl to calm down so slightly. "Alex is lying about Saoirse."

Lizzie's eyes widened more, if that were possible, stepping back from the golden-haired queen. "Lying?" she echoed, her heart beating faster. "About what? Has he already started the tests? Dear God, please don't tell me she's on one of his tables!"

"She's not on a table, Lizzie, and she's not being subjected to tests." Frigga replied, her hands resting to Lizzie's arms. "Elizabeth... Saoirse... is..."

In that moment, there was a loud bang on the door which made both women jump. "Elizabeth? Open the goddamn door!" It was Alex who shouted. Obviously in her panic she had not heard his previous telling of her to open the door.

Lizzie panicked, looking at Frigga in sudden worry. "You need to leave." she stated.

"I will, but first—"

"No! Don't you understand what will happen if he finds you here? Even more so if I don't open that door right now?" her voice had turned higher in pitch. "Please, Frigga, go!"

Frigga looked at the door for a moment, then back at Lizzie. She had to tell her that Saoirse wasn't alive, she simply had to. However, she knew what would happen if Alex was not answered soon. "I will come to see you later. Do not believe what he tells you about your daughter." She said, disappearing from the room right as Alex broke the door in, immediately holding Lizzie up with a force field which reminded her vaguely of Darth Vader's choke hold.

"What the fuck?" Alex spat at her. "I was banging on that door for five minutes."

"I—I'm sorry." Lizzie choked, feeling helpless in that moment. "I didn't hear you."

Alex's eyes narrowed in fury, using his ability to throw her across the room and straight into the wall on the opposite side, holding her there. "Do you hear me now?" Alex growled, stepping close to her, his eyes glinting dangerously.

"Yes." she replied, her head beginning to go light. She almost wished he'd just choke her to death and get her misery over with, hating how easily he was controlling her. She felt heat from the chain around her neck, as if telling her that if he dared the magic would wreak havoc on him.

Finally he let go, and she gasped loudly for breath, doubled over as she saw stars. He had always been one to fury, and when he did it had always been she which he took it out on. She rubbed her neck with her hand, looking up at him in fear. The look in his eyes, though frightened her more than ever before. It was a hungry look, which made her wonder just what was going through his head in that moment, and fearing the worst.

"You know what I just realized?" He looked at the bed, and her heart spiked in panic, her vision already turning red. 'No.' she shouted in her mind as he suddenly grabbed her and threw her upon it.
She bounced, fighting to keep her emotions in check and her mask in place. "That you and I haven't had any fun yet."

Lizzie fought the tears which threatened to spring up, and swallowed the lump in her throat as her mask finally slid into place. She knelt on the bed, pulling her hair out of its ponytail as she took on the persona. "Well then, shall we make amends on that?"

He grinned like the predator he was. "If the lady insists."

Frigga was livid as the magical flame before her showed the following events. She was half-tempted to tell Thor to forget going to the Avengers first, and to simply take Sif and Hogun with him straight to the headquarters that Shaw had established in Rochester. She had watched Elizabeth break down into tears over what happened with Loki, and to see her suddenly transform for survival was what drove Frigga into a motherly frenzy.

"Thor!" she called, stepping out of her quarters and into the sitting room where her son sat. He immediately stood.

"Did you find out where they were?" He asked, Mjolnir hung in his bear-like grasp.

"An old house in the northern part of the state of New York." she said. "Loki is there as well, in the basement with Agent Barton."

"And Lady Elizabeth?" Thor inquired. "What did you discover from her?"

Frigga sighed, closing her eyes as her mind conjured the last images she had seen. "Not everything is as it seems, my son. When you see her, you will think she has betrayed you all."

"Has she not?" Thor boomed.

"No." Frigga snapped, silencing him quickly. "Elizabeth is in a very finicky situation, and one which she has no idea how deep of a problem she has. Get her out as well, if you can, otherwise I assure you that she will not survive."

Thor's brow furrowed. "What do you mean, mother?" he asked. "Surely Loki will, if she has seen him."

"Loki is under the impression that she seduced him and betrayed him." Frigga informed him, sadness overtaking her tone. "He will not assist her in any way, his pride will not allow it."

Thor nodded, adjusting Mjolnir in his grasp. "Does he not love her?"

Frigga chuckled sadly. "With all his heart." she replied. "And she him."

The Thunderer looked at his mother and kissed her forehead. "I will bring them both back, I promise. I will not return until I do." he swore, leaving her in her room, he then headed to the Bifrost.

"Loki?" Clint called across the room. He was worried, a moment ago Loki had been in the middle of talking about where they might be, trying to get Clint to think about what little they had seen when they entered the house. He wished Pepper were there, as it would help them somewhat if they were all together – but she wasn't with them, and he could only imagine what was going on wherever she was.
He knew there was nothing which they could do, but he wanted to work something out anyway when it came to trying to escape. Suddenly, he had gone silent, his green eyes looking as if they were looking somewhere else but him. "Loki?" he tried again.

Finally Loki came back to his senses. "I'm sorry, I got lost in thought. What were we talking about?" he asked, as if nothing had happened.

"Uh-huh, yeah, I don't buy it." Clint retorted. "You looked like you did the day that Shaw snuck into the tower and you got that vision-seeing-thingy where you knew where Lizzie was and that she was in danger. So what the hell just happened?"

"Nothing of importance." Loki replied, looking at the staircase. "Or maybe something of importance."

"What are you on about?" Clint asked.

Loki didn't answer him, his eyes moving to Clint's chair...his eyes narrowed, and a strange smile came on his face as Clint suddenly felt that which bound him loosen. Clint's eyes widened as he brought his hands around in front of him.

"Planning on staying there surprised that you're actually free, or can we start moving?" Loki's haughty voice asked, and Clint looked up to see he was already standing, waiting for him at the top of the stairs.

Clint jumped up, meeting the Asgardian. "How the hell did you do that? Your powers were incapacitated."

"Elizabeth's locket." Loki replied snappishly. "It believes she's in some kind of danger."

"Maybe she is..." Clint trailed off, and Loki scoffed.

"Aren't you funny." the darker haired man replied, looking at the door. "Now, we need a plan on how to get out of here."

"We need to get to Pepper." Clint replied sternly. "I don't care how we get out as long as we get Pepper while we're doing it."

Loki nodded. "Agreed. From what Elizabeth told me – if she was telling me the truth – Stark's woman is in grave danger." he said, listening carefully to the other side of the door. He heard footsteps and, looked over at Clint. "They're coming in." he said. "Go back down the stairs!" he whispered, sending the smaller man back to where they were before following.

"What are we going to do?"

"What do you think?" Loki retorted, staying silent as the door opened, the mutant coming down the stairs. Loki looked at Clint, and put a finger to his lips. Sneaking up on the guard, he covered his mouth, bringing a knife which he had conjured out and slitting his throat.

Clint came out of his spot, keeping his eye on the door. Loki looked at the man, his features changing from his own to that of the man who was dying. He tapped Clint on the shoulder, and the archer's eyes widened before he went to strike Loki. "Barton!" he hissed. "It's me." Switching momentarily back to his own form, Clint let out a sigh of relief.

"So what now?"

Loki looked back at the door, then to the man. He didn't know when his magic would run out, but so
far things were looking good. He made the man look like him, then looked at Clint. "Hit me." he said.

"What?"

"Hit me, punch me. I need you to start fighting." Loki as the guard replied.

Clint shrugged, pulling his fist back like an arrow and letting the punch fly. Loki's head spun to the side, blinking momentarily. "Thanks, I've been wanting to do that."

"Of course you were." Loki replied snarkily, suddenly disabling Clint by twisting his arm behind his back.

"And here I thought we were finally getting along." Clint said. "You're going to go up there and make it look like I fought and somehow you got yourself killed."

Loki's voice was different in pitch, but there was no mistaking the chuckle as his own. "Precisely. Glad you can keep up." he said, pushing the smaller man forward. "Now, move."

In a small shed to the side of the house, Pepper was crying. It had been the most painful half-hour she had ever experienced in her life as the doctors poked and prodded her, the needles sliding in and out of her skin with little care. They had finally left her alone, and she was now allowed to let her feelings overwhelm her.

She wondered if she'd ever see Tony again, to hear his sarcastic attitude when everyone else was around, only to be the most romantic guy in the universe when he was alone with her. God, she loved him, and this time she wasn't so sure that she'd be able to see him again in her life. She missed him. She just wanted to be with him, to feel safe as she knew he would – quite literally – kill anyone who dared to come near her. She just wanted Tony.

The door to the lab opened again, and she tensed, readying herself for whatever was about to happen. More pain, no doubt, as they tried to figure out how her newfound power had come into her body and didn't kill her – and somehow she was able to have good control over it. She wondered how much pain she could take before she finally gave into the unconsciousness which teased her vision, and called to her from it's darkness. She just wanted blissful ignorance, at least it would be less painful.

"Pepper?" she heard, and her heart nearly stopped. Lizzie? What was Lizzie doing there? "Pepper, can you hear me?" She opened her eyes, the face in front of the fluorescent lights discernable as Lizzie's, with her ponytail coming over her shoulder. She could feel the monitors being pulled away from her, the needles coming out of her skin. "Pepper, I need you to wake up." Lizzie kept saying. "C'mon, I know you can do it."

"Lizzie?" she finally croaked out. "How—" she coughed. "How are you here?"

"Alex is currently sleeping." Lizzie replied, slight disgust coloring her tone. "It was the only chance before this got out of hand."

Pepper felt Lizzie's small hands reach under her back, trying to pull her up. "But won't he notice?"

Lizzie scoffed. "Not likely, unless he's figured out a way to completely paralyze my paralysis. I disabled his waking state, and the only way he'll wake up is if someone shakes him really hard." she replied, leaving Pepper sitting up as she went to get her clothes. "Now, can you stand?"

The redhead nodded, leaning on Lizzie heavily as she did so. "I knew it was a lie." she whispered
with a tired smile. "I knew you were putting on an act when he was around."

"Shh... you've been through a lot, don't talk too much." Lizzie replied, pulling Pepper's clothes onto her. "I need to get you out of here before someone notices that time is moving particularly slow right now." she said, moving around Pepper as if a blur.

"Loki..." Pepper started clearing her throat. "He thinks you've betrayed him."

Lizzie stopped moving, and Pepper looked at her. "I know." the brunette announced. "I did it on purpose."

"You love him." Pepper replied.

"We don't have time for a discussion, Pepper. I need to get you out of here as soon as possible, and somehow get a hold of my sister – it's the only way to make this work." Lizzie told her, supporting Pepper's weight somewhat as she walked out of the laboratory.

"Thank you, Lizzie." Pepper said, fighting against her dizziness to stay awake.

Lizzie shook her head. "I got you into this mess, the least I can do is get you out." she said, reaching the front door.

She could only hope they wouldn't get caught. If they did, there was no way they would both live through it.

Chapter End Notes

*Hands out shock blankets and hot cocoa with promises of a happy ending*
Clint was nervous. Hell, scratch nervous, Clint was scared. He looked up at the disguised Loki, his heart beating quite furiously in his chest. This wasn't like other times where he'd been held a hostage, this was much more dangerous. He wasn't being held because he was a SHIELD agent, he was being held because he knew Elizabeth Donovan, and her boss was a psycho.

"These corridors all look the same." Loki grumbled, his hand unconsciously tightening around Clint's upper arm.

"Heads up." Clint whispered. "We have a mutant coming in on our three."

"I see him." Loki replied. "Don't say a word."

"Hey, what do you think you're doing, Evans?" the mutant who had originally been their guard said. "Where's the other one?"

"Knocked out down below." Loki answered in Evans' voice. "They got in a little fight, when I went down there he jumped me, I took care of him quickly enough though."

Clint looked down the hallway, there was no one else around, it was possible that if an altercation happened they'd be able to get out of there easily enough by incapacitating him. "...besides Herr Schmidt wants to speak with you. He sent me to find you actually." the guard was continuing to say. What?

"Why does he want to do that?" Loki replied.

The guard shook his head. "No idea. He just told me to come and get you – he said you would have the prisoner anyway, and he wants to see him too." he said. "He'll be in his study."

"Alright, I'll go." Loki replied, internally smirking at how easy it was for this guard to believe that he was Evans. Some Midgardians truly were obtuse. He started to head down one hallway when the guard grabbed his arm.

"Hey! Wrong way, Evans – what's the matter with you today?" the guard shouted.

"Bad night's sleep." Loki replied, heading – this time it seemed – in the right direction. He needed to get as far away from the guard as possible so as not to arouse suspicion... he could only hope that no one went looking for the body of the real one.

Clint looked back to make sure the other guard was out of hearing range before he spoke. "This seems too easy, doesn't it?" he asked.

"Yes, it does. Something is off, although I'm not sure what it is." Loki replied tersely, his entire
posture stiff and rigid. "We will have to play along at first, we're too far into the building, and have no idea how to get out yet."

"Right, you think this will work though?" Clint asked.

"We have to find out where Pepper is anyway." Loki said, pulling him along down the hall, his mind checking on the disguised guard down in the basement. There were three doors when they reached the end of the hall, and Loki took the one in the middle, counting on Shaw's impeccable sense of self-importance. Knocking, he waited for the signal, looking over at Clint. "You ready?" he asked as he was given the affirmative from inside.

"Let's do this." Clint replied stoutly. "Loki-" he said quickly.

Loki stopped, his hand hover over the knob. "What? Make it quick."
"If we don't make it out of here, I don't blame you." the smaller man said. "You're not as bad as I thought you were."

Such a thought coming from Clint Barton gave Loki pause, and he had to remember that they were here for a reason. "Noted, Barton." he said, reaching for the knob once more and opening the door.

"Ah, Evans... I was wanting to see you." Alex said from the other side of a lavish desk, the room painted dramatic red. "Shut the door, Evans."
Loki did as ordered, hoping that they'd be able to get out when they needed to.

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*Where the hell was Thor?* Tony wondered as he paced the length of the great room in his apartment. The others gathered watched him in concern, the events of a few hours before imprinting something rather unpleasant in their minds.

Tony had received a video of Pepper's state, apparently filmed on the ship before they had left. To say that he had been outraged would have been an understatement, as all present were worried about him more than anything. Had he been the Hulk, they were sure that he would have tore up Manhattan in a heartbeat, his obvious anger festering as he waited.

"I'm sure he'll be here soon, Tony." Jane tried to comfort him, her position next to Bruce who looked like he was about to blow as well. Of the Avenger women only Jane, Darcy and Natasha remained, and it had fallen to Jane to try to keep Bruce from hulking.

"Well where the hell is he? I'm sure Mr. See-All has informed him of what's going on down here, we can't move until he gets here because he's probably the only one who knows where Pepper, Clint and Loki are!" Tony was nearly shouting by now, something which worried everyone even more. This was nothing like anything they'd seen with him. He was worried about Pepper, the warning from Alex' video still ringing in his ears.

Veronika finally stood, walking up to him and stopping him in his tracks. "Lizzie will take care of her, Tony. She brought Pepper into this, she'll make sure she gets out alright."

"Honey," Tony began, his eyes flashing dangerously. "If it wasn't for your daughter Pepper would be here, safe and home with me. I wouldn't be worrying if something bad was happening to her, I'd know that no one would dare enter my fortress to hurt her."

"Nevertheless, she's right, Lizzie will make sure she's fine." Logan confirmed.

Tony looked at the mutant and sighed. "I'm going to work on my toys, let me know when Thor gets here," he said, leaving the room.
"He's going to use Tony." Veronika said, looking over at Logan. "The sooner we get Pepper back the better it's going to be."

"Do you think that Lizzie has gone back to her old ways?" Bruce suddenly asked. "You saw her in the video, she just stood there while Shaw did what he wanted, her ability obviously was keeping Loki and Clint quiet."

"I don't know." Vera answered, looking at Bella.

Her daughter shook her head. "Who knows what the hell she'd do, especially if she thinks Saoirse is still alive." she said. "We won't know until we get to her."

Veronika wrung her hands, pacing the floor as Tony had been a few moments ago. "We need Charles." she said. "We need his group. We can't take Alex on on our own."

"Woah, woah, there is no taking on going on." Logan replied. "We are there to get them out and get back."

"What if we fail?" she asked him.

Farbauti stood, walking up to her friend. "We won't." she said, smiling. A crack of thunder could be heard by everyone. "Thor is here."

The reaction was spontaneous as everyone instantly stood, walking over to where the platform's entrance was. Thor came in, his hair soaking wet from the rain which pelted outside. "Where is the Man of Iron?" he demanded.

"In his workshop, Prince Thor, he has been informed of your presence." Jarvis answered quickly.

"Good." Thor replied, holding Jane a brief moment as she ran up to him. "Heimdall has discovered the location of Lady Pepper and my brother. We are to leave with all haste."

"Where are they?" Steve asked.

"A place my mother called Rochester." Thor answered.

"That's upstate. How could he have gotten there so fast?" Bruce inquired, looking at Veronika.

"He has his ways." she answered vaguely, looking at Thor. "I think I know the place he's at. Bella can take us there."

"Who are you?" Thor asked in return, his eyes taking in the new faces of Bella and Farbauti as well.

"I am Veronika, Elizabeth's mother, Prince Thor." Veronika replied. "We have not met."

"No, we have not." Thor said. "An honor, to meet you, Lady Veronika."

At that moment, Tony burst back in. "Well? What news, Sky-god?" his attempt at humor was lost on everyone, they knew that it was simply a ruse to pretend that he was well. Thor reiterated once more where Pepper was and Tony nodded. "I'll get my suit. Jarvis type the coordinates in."

"No need." Veronika interrupted. "Bella can take us there. Thor, will you allow me to find the location from your mind?"

Thor's brow furrowed, and he looked at his companions.

"It's her mutation." Logan answered. "It enables her to glean certain information – memories – and transfer them."
"It's so that I can take us where we need to go with no delay." Bella told him. "Sorry, I'm Lizzie's sister."

"It seems I have missed much." Thor said, looking between the women. "Do what you must, we have no time to waste."

Lizzie adjusted her coat for the tenth time, walking down the hallway to Alex' room. She had gotten Pepper out, and to a little house she had found a mile or two away. She would be relatively safe there until Lizzie figured out what to do next. She opened the door, expecting to see him in the bed... but he wasn't. Her heart leapt into her throat. She hadn't disabled him after all, and he could be – quite literally – anywhere.

"Anesthesia?" the voice behind her made her jump, her persona not in place as her shock took over.

"What is it?" she snapped, looking at the young mutant who stood behind her. The girl could not have been more than ten, with hazel eyes and inky-black hair.

"Herr Schmidt told me to find you, and to bring you to see him. He said he needed to talk to you." the girl said.

Lizzie nodded, her heart slowing down slightly. "Of course. Where is he?"

"In his office." the girl replied. Lizzie nodded again, walking past the girl and back down the hallway, she would need to go a floor below. In the walk, she calmed herself greatly, doing what she had to to slip her mask back into place. She hadn't expected him to be able to fight her power off unconsciously... unless he hadn't been unconscious. It seemed there was more to him than she remembered.

Approaching the door, she knocked. "Come in, Elizabeth." Alex' voice came from within. Persona completely in place she opened the door.

"You wanted to see me?" she asked the moment she entered.

"Ah, yes, shut the door dear." Alex replied. Lizzie noted the guard who she knew had been assigned to Loki and Clint, the latter being held there with an iron hand. Doing as ordered, she approached the desk, placing her arms behind her back as she awaited to find out what was going on. "Where have you been?" Alex' first question came.

"I went for a walk." Lizzie answered.

"A walk?" Alex repeated. "And where did you go?"

"Down by the lake. It's pretty over there, besides it's good to know just what surrounds your headquarters, you don't want to run in one direction and suddenly find yourself over a cliff." she replied, quirking an eyebrow. "And how was your... nap, sir?"

Alex smirked. "Quite pleasant. I can't remember the last time I slept so deeply... I think I was under your spell then." he said pointedly, playing with a vial of liquid. "This guard says that a fight happened between the prisoners." he drawled, looking at her. "You wouldn't know anything about that, would you?"

"No, I wouldn't." Lizzie replied. "Though why you are asking me, is beyond me."

"Of course it is." Alex hummed, putting down the vial and looking at the guard. "You say the other
one is dead?"

"Yes sir." the guard replied, and Lizzie's heart rate spiked.

"What?" she asked quickly, forgetting herself and where she was. Loki? Dead? How? Her heart sank, remembering meeting his mother only hours before. She looked at Clint, her eyes wide with surprise.

"Apparently they got in a fight." Alex said from his place, a smile growing on his handsome face before he stood and walked over to the window. "The guard had to break it up, but the other one – Loki was it? – was a little hard to simply subdue. He's dead in the basement."

Her throat constricted, tears threatening to spill. She shut her eyes tightly to avoid their being seen. If she felt like a piece of her heart had been torn out earlier, there was no doubt of it now. He was dead... lying in the basement downstairs. She ducked her head, fighting to keep her composure and knowing she was failing. Her hand unconsciously gripped where she knew the locket lay under her clothes.

Clint noticed the distress in her, and spared a glance up at Loki. Did he see it? Did he notice how broken she suddenly looked? He had noticed that during their time in each other's company she had become quite devoted to him, defending him even when he hadn't originally deserved it. As she hung her head, he realized that it had all been an act – that Pepper had been right, and Lizzie was there to get her daughter no matter the cost... even if it meant Loki.

"Crying, Elizabeth?" Alex' voice cut through the room, and Clint watched Lizzie stiffen.

"For what cause would I have to cry?" she asked in return, her head coming up straight. "I hardly knew the man."

"Ah, but you were very close, were you not?" Alex replied, sitting back down in his chair. "From what I gather, you were lovers."

Lizzie's brow quirked. "Whatever gave you that notion?" she asked.

"A friend told me." Alex answered.

Loki watched with interest as Lizzie suddenly stiffened, her hands clenching to fists behind her back. "A friend?" she queried.

"Why do you act so surprised? He said that you saw him." Alex replied, giving Lizzie a pointed look.

"So I did." Lizzie replied coolly. "If by a 'friend' you mean Thanos."

Alex smiled. "So I do." he said, looking at Loki. "I wonder, did she tell you that she saw him?"

"Sorry, what?" Loki asked, pretending to be the guard.

"Did she tell you that Thanos watched the pair of you like a lech?" Alex repeated a little more clearly.

Lizzie turned, her eyes wide in surprise as she looked over his appearance. It was then that she noticed that more of the Guard had come in, and were standing around the room like statues. Her eyes once more went to Loki, although it didn't look like him, and she internally sighed in relief. So he wasn't dead, Alex had been gauging her reaction. Loki's eyes locked onto hers, and she practically willed him to see her emotions.
"You think I don't know who you are, Loki Odinson?" Alex asked, his form suddenly shifting to that of Thanos. The alien smirked as Loki's eyes widened. "A master of disguise... but you forget that you and I still share a link, be it ever so faint." Thanos moved toward Loki, as Alex suddenly appeared behind Lizzie.

Against his will, Loki's magic once more dissipated, leaving him once more in his original form. He looked at Lizzie, whose eyes were wide with fear, her hand slowly moving to her jacket. Loki's hand released Clint, unsure of what was about to happen.

"I warned you, halfling." Thanos said smirkingly. "I warned you of your fate should you betray me." He looked at Lizzie. "And to those who you love."

"What makes you think she means anything to him?" Alex asked, his arm coming around her waist from behind.

Thanos chuckled maliciously at the mutant. "You are a fool to believe that she means nothing to him, or he to her." he condescended. "That she belongs to you in any manner."

Alex' arm tightened, his pride wounded. "She is mine!" He hissed.

"Only in your mind, underling." Thanos replied. "She does not belong to you any more than your army does." He took a step toward Elizabeth, his hand moving up to her face. Loki fought the urge to snarl at Thanos not to touch her, that he would cut off his hand. Still, the words which the alien spoke resonated in his mind. "You see, underling," Thanos continued. "Despite her words to him, she is still quite in love." The word was drawled in mockery.

Lizzie fought to maintain control over her emotions, over her carefully constructed mask, but his unearthly eyes boring into hers proved hard to resist as she suddenly felt a whisper of another consciousness in her mind. This was what Loki told her of, his tortures under Thanos' control... would he try to do the same with her? Thanos chuckled. "Of course not." he answered her question. "You are all but useless to me, save as a tool for the destruction of others... I have no use for you."

Making his statement, he moved back, walking to Loki once more to stand in front of him. "What can I possibly give you at this point, oh Mad Titan? My life?"

A deep rumble came from Thanos as he leaned forward, invading Loki's personal space. "Oh, little prince, I fully intend on taking your life... though your life will not be required to do so." He said, pulling back. "When this little game is finished between myself and the Allfather, your death will not be an option. I do believe I have shown you twice what I intend on doing with you."

Lizzie watched in a mixture of curiosity and horror as Loki suddenly looked at her, his green eyes widening in shock, fear, and a sadness she had never seen before in her life. "NO!" He screamed out in agony, whatever he was seeing, he probably didn't know was not real. He fell to his knees, his arms still looking at her, his arms outstretched toward her. "ELIZABETH!"

Thanos laughed, his laugh sending chills down Lizzie and Clint's spines as Loki continued to cry 'No' over and over. "Well Little Prince, how do you like my ending to your story?" Thanos asked him mocking. "Does it end happy?"

Lizzie's vision blurred, and Thanos looked up at her in shock before he spluttered, the image before Loki's eyes fading from the lack of concentration from the alien. "Leave him be." Lizzie growled, not caring about her mask anymore. "Or I'll kill you."

Alex looked over at her smugly, he had been waiting for this moment, for her to finally snap with
what was going on around her, and drop her act enough for him to have an excuse to move. She was all his now, despite what Thanos told him – as that statement had unnerved him quite a bit. He was in control at all times, and no one breathed around him without special permission. How dare the alien say the opposite?

A condescending smile quirked on Thanos' lips, and he laughed. "She is quite brave, is she not?" he asked, his tone similar to that which one would use to a particularly foolish child who had just told them that they shouldn't do something. "Though bravery is another word for a complete and utter fool, so built up on the ideas of the goodness of the world and men."

"I mean it." Lizzie snarled, stepping away from Alex. She had made her choice, she could only hope that somehow she could save Saoirse and Loki... somehow.

Thanos laughed again, stepping away from the smaller man on the floor whose head was between his arms as he began to rock with whatever images that Thanos was putting in his head. His hand stretched toward him, motioning for her to comfort her love. She hesitated for a moment, unsure if it was a trap before she moved forward, her hands resting on his arms. "Do you think you could break my spell, little girl?" Thanos taunted.

Lizzie looked up at him, her hands beginning to pull Loki's arms away from his legs. "Loki..." she called. "Loki..."

"No, no, no, no..." Loki mumbled, his mind still in the torments which Thanos was causing him to endure.

"Loki, can you hear me?" she whispered, her mouth moving toward his ear.

Alex made to step forward, but Thanos stopped him cold in his tracks, leveling him with a glare which warned him of what was to come if he moved without permission. Gritting his teeth, the mutant obeyed.

"Loki?" Lizzie continued to call him, tears beginning to stream down her cheeks. What if he wouldn't respond to her? Her hand rested on his face. "Loki? Please, listen to me." Her voice lowered to a whisper. "I am sorry, I never meant what I said, I was... I was trying to protect you. We weren't alone, Loki, I had to say what I did..." she continued, going with light heart and heavy head. She knew in her mind that they were not alone, and that what she was saying would kill them both – but in her heart, she was happy to finally reveal all to Loki, and pray that he forgive her.

"Elizabeth..." Loki whimpered. "Elizabeth..."

Her hands moved his head up, forcing him to look at her. "Loki... Loki... you must fight." She could feel the laughter from Thanos, although she heard no noise. She really was pitiful, and how amusing he must find it all. "He doesn't hold you, not anymore."

"Elizabeth?" he breathed.

"Yes." she answered. "Can you hear me? Can you see me?"

As if in response, Loki's arms moved as lightening, wrapping around her quickly and pulling her to him, burying his face in her hair. "A dream, it was all a dream."

"A purposeful mirage, my love." she responded. "I'm so sorry..." She buried her face in his neck, finally allowing the tears to fall. His lips sought her own, the image from Thanos still imprinted on his mind. She was alive. What's more, every thing that he had been stewing over over the last day
had been a lie, a lie carefully crafted to keep him safe. She had said so, and being the god of lies he knew she told the truth.

Perhaps they would both die, Thanos having enough of the show and calling it quits, but at least she would get the emotions she had racked up over the last few days off her chest. She relished his arms around her, holding her to him as if he would never hold her again. Perhaps he wouldn't.

Either way, Loki held her as she continued to apologize for her actions, begging for his forgiveness. He looked over her shoulder, his eyes landing on the man who had held her in his grasp so tightly that she had done what she did... Loki wasn't entirely sure what the truth was in the situation, but he knew her past, and what she would have been willing to do. They would find a way to save her daughter – if they got out of here alive.

"This is ridiculous!" Alex shouted, his hands glowing with something, his power which Loki remembered from their first meeting. Apparently he didn't like his things taken from him, and Elizabeth was most definitely a thing. Loki growled, the locked around Lizzie's neck giving him the power he would need. He looked over at Clint, who was too busy staring out the window to notice what was going on.

"Silence, mutant!" Thanos boomed, a sly smile crossing his face. "They will die soon enough."

"She is mine!" Alex roared, his anger turned this time toward the alien. Thanos simply grinned, perhaps he'd be able to get rid of the annoying mutant once and for all—

A loud explosion was heard outside, and all attention was diverted. Alex went to look out the window, but Thanos just looked down, a glare strong in his eyes. Lizzie lifted her head from his shoulder, looking outside as well before she looked at Loki with a questioning gaze.

Loki smiled. Never in his life had he been so happy to hear that sound, the sound of rolling thunder across the sky. For years it had been his bane, but this time he relished the roar. He looked at Thanos and Alex, unable to stop himself from looking rather smug.

"Look out everyone, we have a badass over here." Clint muttered by the window as he watched the scene outside unfold.

"Man of Iron! Have you found a way in?" Thor asked, shooting a bold of lightening at a mutant who was trying to attack him with a wall of water. With a cry, they fell to the ground, learning the hard way that water and lightening did not mix well.

"Working on it, Thor!" Tony replied, using his repulsors against a mutant who was trying to put some kind of restraints on him. Another mutant knocked him to the ground with an invisible force, but Natasha snuck up on him, quickly putting him out of commission.

"We have better things to do with our time than play around!" she shouted in frustration, turning to hit a mutant who had come up behind her. "Bozhe Moy!" she swore, knocking the mutant to the ground. Steve's shield came out of nowhere, hitting the mutant in the back. "Thanks Cap!"

The shield returned to its owner, and he nodded before knocking another mutant to the ground.

"Got in!" Tony shouted above Hulk's sudden roar, the door of the building blasted through. He looked over to see Veronika roundhouse kick a few mutants, her power working on the mind of one of the obviously more powerful. Bella created a portal, with which she sent a few mutants several feet into the air, and they crashed relatively unhurt. Unconscious it seemed, but no deaths. Tony scoffed, she was kinder than her sister obviously.
He stepped inside, using his repulsors to hit a few mutants who tried to defend the mansion. They reminded him of ants trying to scurry around as he used brute force to obliterate them – he stopped himself. Since when did he start sounding like Loki? Behind him he heard Steve's shield hitting more mutants, and the Fantastic Four's arrival. Sue Storm appeared beside him.

"I'll find your girlfriend." The blonde said, disappearing once more. "Keep an eye on my back." Her disembodied voice continued.

"Is that supposed to be ironic?" Tony retorted, switching his panel for sight through the suit to heat sensor, which he then used to keep track of Sue. He followed her around to the kitchen, where she descended some stairs to a basement, his back to the door as he made sure no one came in.

It seemed strange that for as many mutants were outside, there were so few inside... Veronika had made it seem as if Shaw had an army of mutants. He only counted about fifteen outside, and a total of five as he entered the house.

Sue returned. "Loki's down there. He's dead it seems." her tone said sadly.

Dead? Loki? Impossible!

Before Tony could respond, Bella appeared out of nowhere. "I've found Pepper, we need to move fast." Creating a portal around them, she whisked them off to the other location.

"How the hell did they find us?" Alex shouted as he looked out the window. Thanos had left the room, telling them that he would get his forces who had been put in a different wing of the house. Alex spun on Lizzie, his face twisted into unadulterated rage. "You!" He spat. "You were gone for hours, where were you?"

"I went for a walk." she replied coolly, standing to hold her ground as Loki stood behind her.

Alex smirked, and looking at Loki, he sent the demigod flying backwards and into a mirror which hung on the wall. Lizzie's eyes widened, and immediately went to Clint. The archer returned her gaze and nodded, looking at the other mutants in the room and slowly making his way out of it.

"I think you and I are due for a little honesty, Elizabeth..." Alex said with a false sweetness in his tone. "Since your friends are here."

Without warning, the windows all shattered inward, knocking everyone to the ground.
The explosion emanated from the front porch of the building it seemed, rocking the lawn before it. The Avengers and their friends were momentarily stunned, the dust not yet settling, they helped each other up.

"What was that?" Steve asked Thor as he gave him a hand.

"I know not." Thor replied, his hammer in hand and ready for whatever came out of the dirt-filled air. "But whatever it is, it cannot be good for us."

"Has anyone found where Loki and Clint are?" Steve inquired, looking around. "Where the hell is Natasha?"

"I know not." Thor repeated as the haze began to settle and shapes began to take form. "And we do not have time to question, I'm afraid."

The moment that they could make out who their opponents were, their weapons discharged.

Chitauri. The grounds were covered in them it seemed, interspersed with humans – though it was obvious that they weren't human at all. Thor growled, sending lightening their way. Volstagg and Fandral could be seen on either side of him, fighting their own. Steve worked in tandem with him as a few rushed toward them, his back to Thor as he covered the demigods.

Off a little ways, Logan and Veronika were doing what they could with their own abilities, Reed, Johnny, and Ben helping them as much as possible – Hulk simply smashing where he saw fit. After all, they were all mutants, they had a kind of kinship to one another.

"Where the hell is Stark?" Logan demanded, stabbing another creature.

"Sue went with him to find the prisoners." Reed supplied as Johnny burned a chitauri a foot away from them.

"We were supposed to get in and out, not sit around and possibly get injured!" Veronika shouted in irritation as another two chitauri killed each other from the mirage that she put in ones head. "Bella went in to take him where Lizzie said to go to find Pepper."

"Lizzie?" Logan repeated in surprise. "Since when did you talk to Lizzie?"

Veronika ducked as a projectile was hurled her way and hit a chitauri behind her, before it ricocheted back to Captain America. "Thanks." she yelled at him and he nodded going back to what he was doing before he noticed the chitauri. "She sent Bella a text an hour ago. How Alex let her get to a phone, I've no idea."

"How'd you know it was her?" Logan questioned.

Veronika fixed him with a smirk. "We know."

Johnny flew up to them. "I think I saw where they are – Clint and Loki I mean." he told them pointing to the recently blown out windows of what was once Alex's study. "Looks like they were in interrogation or something and got interrupted. That Alex dude you were telling me about is currently doing something to them."
Logan nodded, looking at Veronika. "We'll take care of them." he said, looking at Reed. "You're needed out here."

The scientist nodded as Logan and Veronika moved toward the damaged building.

Alex was enjoying himself, Clint's groans of obvious pain enough to satisfy him as the fight raged on outside. After all, what was included was the fact Loki and Lizzie looked fit to kill, but couldn't do anything. "You like my new army, Elizabeth?" he asked, looking at the young man who was responsible for their current state of imprisonment by force-field – both Loki and Lizzie's powers were locked inside with them."You should have known he was more than just a... guard." He shooed him away, and he went to stand sentry at the windows.

"You never surround yourself with mere guards." Lizzie quipped. She looked over at Loki, who had been put in his own prison only a foot away, rage boiling in his eyes, but all else cool. "Though I'm surprised you haven't just killed us yet."

"Are you really?" Alex taunted. "Well, you should know, I never do anything without a plan. Just look at you, I had to plan getting you here didn't I? Although Saoirse's presence wasn't planned."

"Wasn't she?" She asked.

"Oh no, not at all." Alex replied, looking at Lizzie. "She just popped up the day I saw you again, quite apt I think. I had to figure out how to get you to come back, and I thought I could turn you away from your friends." he looked at Loki. "But, you were too far gone by that point."

Lizzie's brow furrowed. Something was off with that statement, but she didn't know what.

"You see, since you're going to die anyway – and as a traitor to the guard – I think I can tell you everything now."he said. "After all, you have no reason to give a pretense to be my... whore..." he looked at Loki again with a smirk on his face. "or my lieutenant."

"No I suppose I don't." Lizzie replied. "It was worth a try though.."

"I was never fooled." Alex answered, looking out the broken windows. "I wonder how they found us?"

"You think it's me, it wasn't me." Lizzie replied. "I was still playing the game."

Alex chuckled. "Yes, I will thank Thanos for showing me what you were really about. I always knew, as I said before, but it gave me a lovely excuse."

"Not that you need one." Loki finally piped up, his eyes catching a flash of red. Natasha.

"No, no I didn't." Alex replied, walking up to the demigod, and frowning as he realized he was shorter than him. "But I knew she'd break the moment she saw you. You were my trump card. She played it well for the first half of your stay here... but you in pain seemed to bring a new level of awareness of you. Quite ingenious don't you think?"

"Ingenious?" Lizzie scoffed. "You think everything you do is highly intelligent, when really it's quite moronic and childish. You could never be a genius."

"I built an army." Alex sing-songed.

"Your father came up with the formula, the ideas, and the original base of mutants to start your work on." she quipped with a mocking smile. "Without him, you would be a little man without any
Alex clenched his jaw, a sneer across his face. "How little you know, little Lizzie Donovan." he said, and Clint gave a sudden cry of pain. "I have become the most powerful mutant, with more powers than you can imagine."

"Oh?" Lizzie taunted. Alex talked when he was angry – and even more when he boasted – he was better talking than torturing Clint or killing Loki.

"Yes!" he said with glee, his eyes alight as he turned to face her. "I can set fire to whatever I please with a thought, or drown a person by simply thinking about throwing water down their windpipes. The elements are my playground – ah, but there is more. I have found the formula for certain types of mutations, and now I am good in mind as well as physically. Although I am not a telepath on par with Xavier, I can do plenty of damage. I create pain, where there is no probable cause. I can move from one place to another – not like Bella who has to create portals – but just by thinking about another place." he gloated, a smile of pride on his face.

"Well either way, you're wasted with all these thoughts of world domination." Loki quipped causing the mutant to turn in his direction. "You can't control them all at once, can you? It's one at a time, or none at all – and even those you control at those times are more in control of you than you are of them." Lizzie smiled.

"What makes you think that?" Alex asked defensively.

"They aren't natural to your body. They have been manufactured, and so have more holes in your ability than those who simply don't have good control. It strikes when you don't want to, and doesn't strike necessarily when you do. Am I right?" Loki asked, his eyes alight with mischief as he looked at Lizzie.

She shook her head, with a loving look. His damn antics were going to get them killed if he wasn't careful, but it was amusing to watch. For Loki's side, his words were more than just to taunt the mutant... Natasha was trying to approach Clint, and Alex couldn't see her if he was focused on Loki. Clint was the weakest out of the three of them, she had to get him out first.

Alex didn't answer Loki's question, instead he looked the demigod over. "From what I hear, you lost your powers, only to be given them every once in a while. No one can take mine." Alex replied.

"I doubt that." Loki countered. "If they can be given, they can be taken as well – it's just a matter of reversing the serum. I'm sure it would be a painful process."

"Well, you'll know soon enough." Alex said with a smile as he looked over at Lizzie. "She's not nearly as useful now, and I actually do have a serum that I want to try out. She's perfect really. Too bad she wouldn't come to my side."

Natasha had finally gotten to Clint, and keeping one eye on Alex, she slowly led him from the room. Loki met her eyes, giving her an assuring nod that he and Lizzie would be doing what they could to keep him occupied. She smiled and nodded back, supporting Clint as she walked out stealthily.

"How hurtful." Loki mocked, trying not to think of Lizzie strapped to a table once again.

"Yes actually it is." Alex cooed. "I gave her her ability, I created her from a piece of dry clay... and molded her into something beautiful." His mouth turned to a sneer of disgust, and his voice took on a bitter tone. "And then that mutant came, and put all sorts of ideas into her head about morals and what was right. That she wasn't too far gone not to be pulled back from the brink of hell."
"You obviously don't know Logan very well." she said with a tired look, but Alex just smirked, leaning closer to her through the shield.

"I wasn't talking about Logan." he replied. "The first one was Scott, the second was Saoirse's death, and the third was Logan." He tutted. "Pity you never got a chance to know her. You'll meet her soon though, I'm sure Hel will give you special privileges to see her."

Lizzie blinked. "What?"

"Oh, didn't I tell you?" he asked, his voice light. "Saoirse is dead."

"Dead?" Lizzie breathed in surprise.

"Well, when I say 'dead' I mean that she was never born." Alex continued.

Loki's eyes widened then narrowed as he took in the information that Lizzie was now receiving. had never been born... which meant that she—

"You said she was here," Lizzie said, her voice wavering as she fought to keep hold of calm.

Alex grinned predatorily, his tone light and airy as he said. "I lied."

Tears filled Lizzies eyes. She had done all of this for nothing... she had been played as well as she had pretended that she played Loki. Saoirse dead... the pain from when she first lost her flared anew, though this time it was coupled with what might have happened had she not seen Loki that day. Her eyes closed as tears streamed down her cheeks, unable to hold them back any longer.

Loki looked at Alex in pure hatred. As soon as he could, he would kill the man, make him pay for all the pain he had caused Elizabeth – furthermore for the new pain which he could seen written all over her face. Alex turned, still grinning, toward Loki, shrugging with a mock 'sorry' on his lips.

"Oh! I almost forgot to tell you." He suddenly exclaimed. "I have noticed something with my mutants, the created ones that is, they only seem to be able to have one child. After that, they're completely sterile."

Lizzie shook her head and opened her eyes, her jaw clenched. "Aren't you pleased." she stated, her hands beginning to shake in rage. This was always the way with her – heartbreak, loss... she would turn from it to anger, wishing to cause harm to the person responsible.

"Yes, actually, I am." Alex replied, his face turning to a scowl. "Wouldn't want you running around creating little demi-gods would we?"

"ALEX!" A shout came from the broken windows. They all turned to see Veronika standing there with her eyes ablaze in fury. "Leave my daughter alone!"

"Veronika?"

"Daughter?"

Loki looked confused.

Logan came up behind Veronika, his claws extended, and behind him – literally on fire – Johnny. "Step away from her, or I will kill you." Veronika said slowly.

"You're alive?" Alex asked stupidly.

Veronika grinned. "Yes, I am."
"But how? I—"

"I don't intend to tell you, right now I want my daughter and if you refuse to give her to me—"

"I'll rip you to shreds." Logan finished, his jaw clenched. "Hand her over, Alex."

Alex smirked, looking at Lizzie and Loki. "Come and get her."

His mutants rushed in through the doors to confront the trio, and it had begun.

Tony was getting irritated. He could hear the fight a few blocks away, and Bella had teleported them where she said they weren't supposed to be but that they would need to walk there as she was unsure of the exact location. So, Avengers fighting, and Pepper somewhere that he wasn't yet – that left for a rather irritated Tony Stark.

"This place." Bella finally said as they entered the open garage. "She said she'd leave it open for us, that way we knew which house it was. Sue can you stay outside and keep watch?"

"Sure, no problem." Sue said with a nod, going invisible again and leaving the garage as the motors began to whir to shut the door.

"It could just be some idiot who forgot to hit the button." Tony quipped as the door closed. A note was taped to the inside one that had something written in a language Tony didn't know.

"It's not." Bella replied, grabbing onto him and creating a portal on the door which they both stepped into.

The room they entered was the kitchen, from which Bella led him down a hallway. It was obvious from her body language that she was dangerous, but Tony was ready for whoever came around the corner. She came to a door and knocked softly, she turned the handle of the door, the hinges creaking as it began to swing open. When it was open enough for her to see the bed, she threw it open with a look of confusion. "I don't get it." she muttered. "I'll check the rest of the house, stay here." With that, she left Tony in the room, his sensors already picking up on heat which was gathered on the bed.

Lizzie must have left Pepper here. The bottle of pills on the nightstand gave him alarm, his worry increasing as to what state he'd find his fiancee in. What had they dared to do to her? He looked at the window, scoffing it amusement as he saw that he could see the mansion and the battle from here. Thor was still winning, and Hulk was still smashing – that was good.

"Tony?" he heard a small voice say from behind him. He spun, his eyes wide underneath his suit.

"Pepper?" Her red hair had been cut to a more tomboyish look, there were bags under her tired eyes, and her skin was a strange gray color – but through it all, it was still Pepper. Undoing his suit, he stepped out of it in time to catch her as she threw herself at him.

"I thought I'd never see you again." she cried, holding onto him tightly. "They said you were not going to be able to find me. Lizzie brought me here only an hour ago, I've been terrified ever since."

"Shhh..." Tony comforted, rubbing her back. "It's alright, I'm here. I found you."

She pulled back slightly, looking at him. "I now understand her." she said with a sniffle. "I understand why she is the way she is – Oh God!" Tony shushed her again, kissing her lightly for reassurance. She was there. God that had been horrible.
"We'll talk about it later." He said. "We need to get you out of here and in a hospital, for the first time since I met you, you don't look good."

Pepper laughed, nodding. "First sound decision I've heard since I met you." she teased back.

Tony looked offended. "Only the first? And here I thought you approved of me saving New York the first time, and making you a shareholder of the company—"

Bella interrupted by sticking her head in. "They've found Loki and Clint – Hi Pepper!" Pepper waved tiredly and Bella smiled before looking back at Tony. "They've found them, and Lizzie, but things aren't going to well. They need your help."

"I'm taking Pepper home." Tony replied, and Bella shook her head.

"I can do that." she said. "Don't worry, she'll be perfectly safe. Remember, Anna-Marie and Farubauti are at the tower, along with a few of our mutant friends. You don't have to worry about it."

Tony made to argue but Pepper shook her head, slapping a hand over his mouth. "I'll be fine with Bella. You need to go help the others." she said, giving him an assuring nod. Tony sighed.

"Fine."

Bella stepped up to them, giving Tony an apologetic look. "I'll get my mom after I've made sure that Pepper is settled in. She's a nurse, you know." she told him. Tony nodded, reluctant to let Pepper leave his sight, but knowing it was for the best. Creating yet another portal, Bella led the other woman back home, leaving Tony alone to prepare to do what he had to.

Alex was losing, Veronika was alive, and Logan was about to rip him to shreds. With a growl, he disappeared, reappearing outside of the room. The hallway was empty, as most of his guards were either inside his office or outside fighting. Running over to the front window, he looked out on the situation.

Thor, his friends, Steve, and the Hulk had successfully depleted the forces which had been sent out, the majority of the casualties being those of his mutants. Ironman could be seen taking care of the Chitauri with ease, falling into the old routine which he used in New York. He growled, looking back at the door of his office. This was a fight he couldn't win, his connections mentally to his mutants fading away mutant by mutant, making it obvious that they would probably all be dead within an hour. Graham – the Force-field mutant – began to fizzle, his consciousness wavering. If he was killed, then Lizzie and Loki would be released, meaning that the mission was successful, and that the Avengers would have his prize.

That simply wasn't going to happen. Sighing mightily, and momentarily stopping to get a syringe of lorazepam to assist in his taking Lizzie Alex teleported himself back into the room, directly behind her. The field was flickering, though each time she tried to move she found she couldn't. He could see Graham on the ground, where the others had left him. Loki was focused on who he was going to target, he didn't notice Alex grinning like a Cheshire cat behind his love.

Alex watched the fight as he waited, still somewhat in shock that Veronika was alive. So he had seen her at the docks. He concluded that she must have been the one who led the others to the ship, which he then had to vacate. Little Vera. She was fiercer now, and older – somehow that made him nearly want to take her instead of her daughter. He always did love the fire in her eyes when she was mad, her hair whipping about as she took on an opponent in hand-to-hand instead of slinking in the background allowing her power to take care of them for her.
Remarkable.

The field flickered once more before it died out completely and Lizzie made to run for it – she yelped as she felt an iron grip around her waist. Looking down she saw it was Alex. "Let me go!" she growled, fighting against him.

Johnny heard her, and careful not to set her on fire, he sent a blaze Alex's way. The mutant gave a cry of pain, his arm tightening around Elizabeth as he sent a spray of water at Johnny, knocking him to the ground. Reaching his other hand up, he could feel the skin on his face peeling from the fire damage. Third degree at least. "Time to go, Lizzie." he hissed.

"No, no! LOKI!" She screamed, catching the attention of the black-haired Asgardian instantly. Alex watched as his face turned to rage, his eyes completely cold as his body language took on the protectiveness which he felt, which only translated to danger.

"Let. Her. Go." He ground out. He lost her once before, he'd be damned if he lost her again. He felt a warmness go through him, one which he recognized as the locket releasing his powers, and grinned ferally.

Alex smiled, chuckling. "I think not." Without warning, he plunged the needle into Lizzie's neck, and she gave a cry, reaching blindly to try to pull it out. Loki made to move toward them, but Alex threw a wall of fire between them. "Say goodbye, lovers." He whispered in her ear.

"LOKI!"

Loki could only watch as Alex grinned at him and disappeared, Lizzie in his arms.

"ELIZABETH!" he shouted, about to hurl himself past the fire. The fire died out, and she was gone. He screamed in frustration, his magic back but her nowhere to be found. "No!" The power of it built within him, he watched successfully as he picked up Alex's desk and threw it into the far wall. She was unconscious, he couldn't see her, or her surroundings.

"Loki, we have to go!" Veronika shouted.

He looked at her, her face reminding him so strongly of Elizabeth herself. He shook his head. "No, we have to find her."

"We will." Logan replied calmly, killing the last of the mutants. "But we need to leave this place. We got Pepper, and Natasha brought out Clint right as we were coming in. We need to get back to the tower."

Loki shook with barely contained rage, unable to erase the pure terror of her face from his mind. He couldn't save her. She was now in the hands of the most dangerous man he had ever met, second to Thanos himself, and he couldn't save her.

Johnny stood up, his flames completely extinguished. He had seen the entire thing play out, and could now understand something he didn't before. "They're right." he said. "We're fighting those things that attacked New York out there," He pointed to the windows. "wherever they came from, there's more. If we stay here, they'll attack us, and we're cut off from everyone else."

Loki turned his head toward the flame-mutant, confusion written on his face. Who the hell was this and where did Johnny Storm go?

"We'll find her, I promise." Veronika said, placing a hand on his arm as a mother would to a son... in a way, she already saw him as such. "I will not let my daughter be in the hands of that lunatic for
very long. No Lehnsherr would."

Logan gave Veronika a look, and she nodded in reply. He shrugged. "Well, it was bound to happen anyway."

"Fine." Loki conceded, walking toward the windows. His powers were still intact, which made it obvious that the locket believed she was in serious danger. As long as that was there, he had hope that she was saveable... "I'll go with you."

Lizzie groaned. It was too bright, her head was in agony. She couldn't hear anything, save a slight ringing in her ears. Where was she? Her mind reeled with trying to piece the memory of what had happened together, only bits coming to her. Alex. Logan. Johnny trying to save her... her mother? That part must have been a dream, her mother had been dead for years. Pain hit her hard as she remembered Alex's words about Saoirse being dead, and that he had lied.

Loki. She finally remembered him, the entire scene playing out perfectly. She loved him, and she'd watched his agony, saw him nearly be broken."Elizabeth!" her name in his voice rang in her ears, a hollow cry of fury and fear as he watched horrors unknown to her happen. She had broken down, finally letting her mask fall away as she tried to save him from his own fear – from the darkness which Thanos was bringing upon him. Anesthesia was gone for good, she'd decided, as that persona was of no use to her anymore. She would never wear it again if she could help it...

She could still see Loki's face through the flames which Alex had thrown up as a barrier to hide behind as he took her away, his protectiveness and anger at her captor. His eyes were the last thing she saw before she was whisked off to somewhere unknown and the darkness of sleep took her mind. Her dreams had been no different or anymore pleasant as she saw all the possible outcomes of what happened after Alex took her.

But where was she now?

Finally opening her eyes, the first thing she saw was a light backdropped by a white ceiling. Fear gripped her, she had seen that light so many times before. She was awake now, and tentatively she turned her head to look at the rest of her surroundings. She gave a cry of anguish before she bit her lip, the cold metal of the table beneath her now registering, and the straps which held her down pulling tight. The thin material of the hospital gown doing nothing to ward against the chill of the room. The observation windows were clear of anyone, but she had no doubt she was still being watched.

She was the very place she had feared, her nightmares come true. The place of horror, and abandonment, a place she had hoped she would never be in or see again. A place so imprinted in her mind that she knew every bit of it like she knew her hand. There were 34 lines in the ceiling, and 400 dots. The light above her had a different glow than the others, more of a yellowish hue. She knew how many instruments were on the table, and their different uses. She could hear the tick-tock of the wall clock, the noise deafening in a way which horrified her.

Her heart hammered in her chest, her anxiety heightening as tears filled her eyes. Loki would never be able to find her here, no one would. She was alone, and helpless, strapped to a table in the place of her nightmares. Her mind envisioned outside of the room, and how the layout of the building was. When Alex was done with her here, she'd be moved to a cell which was out the door, a long hallway, and 18 steps down into the basement. But as her mind wandered there, she was all too painfully aware of the present and the room which she knew well.

Room 25 in Alex Shaw's lab.
The door opened, and she looked over in panic. She wasn't expecting a doctor so soon.

Alex strode in, half of his face showing the amount of damage that Johnny had inflicted, half of his face red and black, the burn marring his once-handsome face. Lizzie snickered as she looked at him.

"What?" Alex snapped.

"Nothing really, I just... find your lack of face disturbing." she quipped, laughing at him. His eyes would have killed her on the spot if he had the inclination. She kept the smile on her face, she wouldn't let him break her, no matter what, that she was determined.

Alex smirked on the half that wasn't burned. "I just thought I'd introduce you to your new doctor." he said, moving aside so that she could see the door. She gasped softly as she saw who it was, tears springing up once more. "I'm sure you remember Scott, darling? Although he doesn't remember you, I'm afraid. So sorry about that."

Scott walked in, his blue eyes looking her over, but there was no recognition in the orbs. Her heart broke a little more, as that was no doubt was the purpose of him being her new torturer.

"Well then, I'll leave you to it – see if you can get that locket off her." he told Scott. "Nothing is working."

Scott nodded dumbly, looking at Lizzie once more. She closed her eyes only wanting it all to be over... but it had only just begun.
It was dark. So dark it was suffocating him. Where was he? Why was he here? He walked, his surroundings reminding him strongly of his time in the void, and almost like the cell which he had been in with Thanos. But why was he in this darkness?

The lights turned on, and he raised a hand to shield his eyes, the pain flashing through his brain as his eyes saw the red of his eyelids. He groaned for a moment, his eyes adjusting for a moment before he brought his hand down. The room he was in reminded him of his cage in the helicarrier, the stark whitewashed walls enough to blind one without the bright lights, yet they were there. The sound of whimpering caught his attention, and he spun around to see a gaunt figure in the corner, their knees brought up to their chest, their dark hair falling over their face.

He walked up to the figure, the familiarity washing over him. It was confirmed as she looked up, brushing her hair away from her face. Her eyes were sunken in, her entire frame shaking as her eyes were filled with terror... she was so frail. “L—Loki?” she stammered out. It was she. How was this so? “How indeed?” she asked.

“I didn’t say anything.” Loki replied.

“Yes you did, you said ‘how is this so?’” she said, the faint glimmer of a smile on her lips as she uncurled herself and reached for him... but her hands passed right through him. A strangled sob emitted from her, and she curled up once more. “Why do you do this to me, Alex? Why?”

“Alex has nothing to do with this.” Loki replied, finally realizing what was going on. He reached for the locket, which was still hanging from her neck. “I never understood just how this thing would work, Frigga did it...”

Lizzie looked back up at him, her eyes now bloodshot. “Are you a ghost?” she asked.

“A ghost? No.” Loki replied, wishing he could touch her, still he reached for her, unable to feel her skin although he could see his hand next to her cheek. “I will find you.” he whispered.

“You can’t.” she replied, looking around. “He’s got this place covered, you’ll never find it.”

Loki growled lowly in his chest. “I will find it.” he swore. “And when I do, I will have Thor take you to Asgard. Shaw will never find you again.”

A hollow chuckle came from her. “Empty promises.” she said. “I would have liked to see Asgard though.”

“What are you saying?” Loki demanded.

“I’m sorry for the pain I caused you, Loki.” she said, her eyes going dull. “I brought this upon myself, you know. If I had stayed in the Tower, this never would have happened.”

“I do believe you once told me not to dwell on what might have been.” Loki quipped, getting as close to her as he could by sitting beside her.

She scoffed, looking over at him, her position stretching out – suddenly there was a sound of footsteps, and her eyes filled with dread as she looked over at the door. It opened, and a young man walked in, his coat reminding Loki of a doctor. “You’re early.” she said to the man, wondering if he could see Loki like she could.
The man did not reply, motioning toward the door. "No..." Loki said softly as the two guards walked up to her and pulled her off the ground with little effort. Why wasn't she fighting? He watched helplessly as they put her on the table, strapping her down. The man pulled out a box, the devices he knew contained some kind of lightening being withdrawn from it. "No!"

Lizzie screamed as they came in contact with her skin.

Loki woke with a start, his heart pounding in his chest as her screams echoed in his ears. He knew it wasn't a dream, the magic which was imbued into the locket created for the purpose of such things. Throwing off his blanket, he jumped up, pacing the room in the darkness. What were they doing to her? She looked near death, it seemed, and it had only been a day.

His mind contemplated what had happened since she'd been taken, and how things had gone. They'd returned to the tower with heavy hearts, the knowledge that they had failed in saving Elizabeth very present in each mind. Loki had not helped much, his rage fueled and rampant as he tried to find her immediately, knowing that the longer they waited the worse it could be...

Apparently he had been right.

"Aaaaaah!" he yelled, magic swirling around him as his anger increased, the power destroying everything in his room. He would destroy Alex, and he would regret ever laying a hand on her.

Yet, a part of him still thought of how she had pretended to betray him, and her words when she did. Looking around him, he took in the destruction, wondering at how he felt inside was what his surroundings had become... he needed peace, but he knew he wouldn't find it.

He cursed Odin for his weakness, for the fact that he was helpless in such a situation. He wondered if the old goat was up in Asgard watching with a laugh, somehow enjoying the pain which the Norns were inflicting upon him, counting down the time until Loki did something that would slam him back in the Tower of Solitude.

He hated his room. It was so impersonal, so cold and detached, a place he didn't care about and therefore hadn't made his own. He wished Frigga were here, he wished he could get her advice, her warmth, and her comfort. Comfort... he never realized he needed it until now.

Looking around he decided he didn't want to be there, and quickly setting everything right he left his room. But where would he go? Elizabeth's door seemed to call to him, and he went to it, seeking some kind of reprieve, something to calm him and comfort him in the only way he could get. Opening her door, he soaked in her presence even though she wasn't there, the room emanating her in every way. It was so different from his own room, the warmth of her personality everywhere.

Going to her bed, he laid down and took her pillow in his arms, inhaling deeply as he tried to imagine her laying beside him. This was only temporary, he decided, and soon it would be her who was in his arms where she belonged... and Odin be damned if he tried to take her from him.

Thanos was furious. He knew he never should have allied with the idiotic mutant, Shaw. He was far too self-centered with a large ego to be truly helpful, his possessive nature over Loki's woman showed this. She was definitely a problem to be removed, her power over both Shaw and Loki was dangerous, and from what he'd seen it could mean bad things if she continued living.

"Master?" the Other called, coming into the room, his Chitauri appearance having been changed to that of a Midgardian. He was blonde, tall, and brawny now, and to any normal being he would even
be considered attractive – of course, that meant little to him, his appearance being nothing more than a vehicle for him to go around in without drawing suspicion.

"What do you want?" Thanos boomed, his previous irritation adding a terseness to his tone.

"The soldier that Shaw manipulated is ready for action." the Other replied. "The only problem is that the Avengers found his original, it's going to be a bit difficult to get our soldier in there."

Thanos scoffed. "We'll get him in without issue." he said. "Send him in."

The Other nodded, and opened the door, Happy standing on the other side – but it wasn't Happy. He said a few words in the Chitauri language which Thanos responded to, and with a bow he turned around and left. Thanos turned to the Other, looking him over. "Get to the other women... I want the beast to come before me of his own volition." he ordered. The Other bowed and walked out.

Thor was distressed, his mind in such a state of troubledness that he had not felt since he found out that Loki was alive and planning to attack Midgard. It had been three days since the Avengers had surprised Alex, gotten back their friends, and left one behind. Clint was well, his injuries were minor, as he had been snuck out by Natasha early... whatever had happened in his mind, however, he kept a secret, telling only his partner. Pepper was also relatively alright, there had only been one test done on her, but she had survived and her abilities were still intact – if anything, Alex had actually done her a favor, and she somehow had found a way to curb the power easier.

What made matters bad was the knowledge that Thanos had been on the planet, and had escaped without anyone knowing where he was. Loki had told his story,

But it was Loki who Thor worried about the most. His powers hadn't left him, meaning he knew that Elizabeth was constantly in danger, that known his temper was shorter, and it took more to calm him down. He was driven to find her, but didn't know how. Veronika had been somewhat helpful in calming him, her presence enough to remind him of Elizabeth and that he couldn't lose his head for her sake. Still, he was furious.

Hence, Thor was at his brother's door, contemplating whether to knock or not. He hadn't really talked to Loki since Lizzie had been taken, and he felt like he needed to. Finally, he raised his massive fist to knock softly, the hollow sound echoing into the room. Loki made no answer, and Thor knocked again, a little firmer this time.

"Prince Thor," Jarvis interrupted. "May I suggest knocking at Miss Elizabeth's door?"

Thor nodded and sighed, moving over to the other door and knocking again. Somehow it didn't surprise him that Loki was spending time in her room, although he would never say it to his brother's face... after all, Loki wasn't entirely stable right now.

The door opened, by magic, as and Thor saw that Loki was on her bed, staring at the ceiling deep in thought. "You know, you've changed Thor. There was a time when 'soft knocking' wasn't something your mind registered." he quipped immediately.

"And there was a time you actually answered the door." Thor replied sternly, walking in and shutting said door behind him.

"Yes, well, I'm making sure everything works." Loki said, still not looking at his brother.

Thor looked around the room. "I'm surprised that everything isn't in tatters. Last time I was in here, you'd destroyed the place." he said.
"I never destroyed this room, you're referring to my own – which I will add is completely in order. If you wish to know what it looked like I'm sure Jarvis will give you a copy of my rage." Loki retorted, sighing. "What do you want Thor?" Sitting down on the bed beside Loki, Thor thought his words out. "Ooh, you have changed. You haven't sat on my bed to try to give me reason for years – furthermore you never actually thought your words through."

"It's not your bed." Thor commented.

"For all intents and purposes: yes it is." Loki replied coolly, the chained monster lingering just beneath the surface. "I am trying here, do please be quiet until I figure out what to say." Thor replied.

"Or what?" Thor growled, and Loki laughed. "Ever the verbalist, brother."

Still Loki did not look at him, but Thor still thought it through and decided what he wanted to say. "Loki..." he finally said, his booming voice brought to a soft rumble. "You do know that we are trying to find her. Even in Asgard, Heimdall is looking for her."

"Good for him." Loki mocked.

"I mean it, Loki. Mother is very worried, she—" he stopped, remembering how livid she had looked with whatever she saw.

"What?" Loki snapped, finally looking at Thor. "What did Frigga say?"

Thor stood, shaking his head as he walked away. "I always say the wrong things."

"What?!" Loki repeated, the anger coloring his tone a bit more each time as he sat up to watch Thor pace.

"She warned me. She told me what would happen if I didn't get Elizabeth out alive." Thor replied, his back to his brother... he couldn't face him. "And I didn't!" With a yell, he threw Lizzie's chair into the wall, trying to calm himself. He had failed, and he hated failing.

Loki stiffened."Never throw Elizabeth's things again." he warned lowly.

"Forgive me, I wasn't thinking." Thor replied, picking up the chair. How alike his brother and he were.

"Think in the future." Loki said. "What did Frigga say?" he asked.

Thor didn't answer for a moment, thinking of every way he could have saved Elizabeth, and he didn't. "She said..." He finally uttered, turning to face Loki. "She said that if I didn't save her, she would most certainly die. What she foresaw was not what happened though, do you think she's wrong?"

Loki scoffed. "Frigga is never wrong." he said, getting out of the bed and fixing the chair, as well as the hole in the wall as he walked up to his brother. "She told me the same."

"I am sorry, Loki." Thor said, his eyes filled with grief and anger. "I thought I could save her. I was so confident – I didn't even save you, Lady Veronika did."

The smaller man scoffed again walking over to the window. "Your pride has always been your downfall."

"But I didn't count on Shaw doing what he did!"
"Of course you didn't, I don't think anyone did." Loki said softly. "But she's out there, and only
Shaw knows what he's doing to her. You didn't see her face... her horrified expression..."

"What kind of things?" Thor asked, and Loki growled lowly.

"No."

"Loki I must know!"

"Why?" Loki spun around on his brother, this time his eyes alighted in rage. "Why must you know?
So you can save her from them, and be the perfect little Thor you always were?"

"Loki, that was not my intent!"

"Then what was it?"

"I simply wish to know what it is that you are pondering over that has you shut up in your room for a
day-and-a-half!"

"And you think it's her tortures?"

"I know it is!"

"And how do you know what it is that you think you know? Have you discovered new powers, big
brother?"

"I know you!"

On cue, thunder boomed, the sound of it nearly deafening anyone in the tower. It seemed to do
something to Loki because he actually contemplated his brother's words.

"And what is it you think you know?"

Thor sighed, hanging his head. "You too are focusing on how you failed her, and in that focus no
doubt you are thinking on what the consequences of it is." he said, more calmly this time. "It brings
fresh pain to you, which you revel in, every time you think of what she's going through right now.
Your powers are intact, and restored to you, that means that she is in constant danger. I am no fool, I
know the signs of your rage." he explained, looking at Loki in the eye.

He was right, and Loki couldn't deny it. He had been thinking about her and imagining what she
must be going through. She had told him of pain to incite her power, and the feeling of much of her
blood leaving her body to see what different things did to it. She had told him of the serums, and
how they burned when they entered her bloodstream, causing fire throughout her whole body. All of
these he imagined, the new pain of losing her child for yet another time no doubt leaving its mark on
her heart. Would she even be the same when he found her again?

"See?" Thor asked softly, a sad smile on his face. "Right now, you're thinking about it aren't you?
You're thinking of each of her tortures."

Loki narrowed his eyes. "Get out."

"No."

"What?"

"Every time you've needed me, I haven't been here. You can't throw me out if you tried, and if you
did it would be quite a battle." That was new. As if to prove his point, Thor sat down in the recently
mended chair, looking at Loki with an understanding. "I know what you're going through."

"No you don't." Loki quipped, his voice raising a level. "You never lost Jane like this."

"No, I haven't." Thor replied softly. "But I have lost you."

Loki said nothing.

"Loki, you must think of what she will come back to." Thor said, more insightful than Loki had ever seen him. "Do you want her to return, in pain and broken, to a man who shuts himself in his room? She will need you, and for you to sit here, and not work with the others to try to find her is childish."

"What can I do?" Loki snapped. "Alex has put some kind of protective force over her, I can't see her surroundings, and even if I could, I doubt I'd be able to do anything about it because I wouldn't know where it was!"

"But you have holed yourself up here for two days, Loki! You gave up the first day you came, and you've been here ever since—" Thor found himself thrown into the opposite wall, Loki's eyes alight in fury.

"I never gave up! Nor will I!" Loki shouted. "But what would you have me do, brother?! Be in there and reminisce with the puny mortals who you have so easily allied yourself with?"

"You forget that they are your friends!" Thor boomed. "You forget that Elizabeth is one of them!"

Loki snarled. "One of them?! Before I was taken she was seen with suspicion – suspicion cast upon her by your precious director of SHIELD. If she is one of them then why did they abandon her? Why do they now act as if she is already dead?"

"They do no such thing, they are looking for her!" Thor returned.

"Looking for her? Ha!" Loki mocked, his anger the only thing keeping his ultimate sorrow at bay. "I heard their words, Thor, they spoke of her in a past tense. They spoke of avenging her, as they did that idiot mortal Coulson."

Thor sighed, sitting down once more and hanging his head. "I cannot deny that they did speak of her as such..." he said slowly. "It has been three days, Lady Veronika cannot find her... and neither can Heimdall. But they are looking, Loki. They won't give up."

Loki scoffed. "They are mortals. It is in their nature to give up." he spat, walking back over to her bed and laying down.

"And obviously it is in yours." Thor retorted, getting up from his place and walking over to his brother, his defenses raised should Loki strike at him.

"I have not given up." Loki repeated, sighing. "I have... seen... glimpses of her..."

Thor's brow furrowed. "Glimpses?" he repeated. "What do you mean?"

Loki looked up, then down at his hands, which played with her old watch. "At the hour of three in the morning, I can see her. She's always crying... but her eyes... they're dying."

"Dying?" Thor parroted. "What do you mean 'they're dying'?"

"The life... she's giving up." Loki said, his heart throbbing in pain.

"Where is she?"

"I don't know." Loki replied, looking out the window. "I know nothing of Midgardian geography..."
though that is why I've not been in everyone else's presence... I have been researching in the library for the most part. I had just come back when you came in."

Thor sat next to him. "Loki... you should have spoken of this. For all you know others might know exactly where it is you see." he said, trying to reign in his anger. His brother had been keeping things from him... things which could be used. "What is it you see?"

Loki paused, pondering over the fact that he probably should have told Thor. "It is always light... there is a lone window from which you can see the outside. It's on a lake, surrounded by mountains... but that is all I can see," he said, the image continuing to revert to Lizzie on her table, with tears in her eyes.

"What time did you say this was?" Thor asked.

"Three in the morning." Loki replied.

"Three?" Pondering that information Thor stood up. "Jarvis, what realms would be alight at that time in the morning?"

Jarvis crackled to life. "Well, with the type of terrain which Prince Loki referred, it could be anywhere. Europe sounds like a perfect location for that..." it said. "Do you know what type of trees were around, Prince Loki?"

"I know not." Loki replied. "Midgardian vegetation wasn't something I was interested in last time I was here..." He trailed off. "But..." without another word, he left the room, leaving Thor to follow him down to the library. Jarvis had a point, the natural habitat would give evidence of the location, why hadn't he thought of this before? Going to the section – as he now knew the library quite well – which he knew he'd find the information.

Thor trailed behind him, unsure of what was really going on. Something had triggered Loki's desire for research, he only hoped that—

"Aha!" Loki exclaimed, bringing him out of his thoughts. "Cottonwoods. That is what they are called." Walking past him quickly, Loki practically ran out of the room. Thor followed, unable to do anything else.

"I'm not sure that now is a good time, Nell." Veronika was trying to reason with Farbauti.

"He is my son. He needs to know that I am here." the queen replied, sighing. "Vera, I understand what you're trying to say, and as your friend, I am listening with utmost attention and care. But I think that Loki needs to know of my existence."

"He may not react well." Clint's voice suddenly piped up. "I got to know him a bit more while we were prisoners together, I don't think that knowing you're his mother is going to be the best thing in the world while he's looking for Lizzie."

Farbauti looked over. "He has been lied to his entire life, do you want me to continue that trend?" she inquired.

"I would have you withhold the information until he's back to his stable self." Clint replied. "He does not need family drama right now."

Natasha scoffed. "He's got plenty of that with Thor, that's for sure – where is Thor anyway?"

"He went to talk to Loki." Jane supplied.
"Like that's going to do any good." Darcy piped up. "Loki is a damn nuisance right now, I want to smack him upside the head, maybe that'll get his brain to work again."

Bella looked at the brunette. "I was unaware that you had such a good relationship with him." she said, though her statement was more of a question.

Darcy smirked. "I have my days." she replied vaguely.

"Darcy." Jane chastised.

"Point is, I simply do not think it's wise at the moment." Veronika continued. "Look, I have sent for my father, he should know where Alex is – he knows practically everything about his opposition and Alex is among them. We'll have her back soon, and I've no doubt that everything will be able to be revealed then."

Farbauti scoffed. "Until then, you expect me to be no different than the people who adopted him. No different than Odin and Frigga? To sit here, and tell him I'm 'Nell Shiffer', Elizabeth's friend?" She asked, her temper beginning to flare.

"Stark!" Loki's voice cut through the room and he soon followed after it, the book in his hands. "Cottonwoods, daylight at three in the morning, a lake and mountains." he threw the book down in front of the billionaire who had his arm around Pepper. "Find that location."

Tony's brows furrowed, and he looked at the book. "How are cottonwoods supposed to help me here?" he asked.

"Loki has seen Elizabeth's surroundings through the connection of the locket." Thor supplied. "If you can pinpoint that location then we should be able to find her."

"Jarvis, do a scan on where those four variables coincide." Tony told the AI.

"Very good sir." Jarvis replied.

Loki looked over at Farbauti, and the Queen stiffened. Veronika eyed her friend, hoping against hope that she wasn't as stubborn as her son seemed to be... "Do you know of any locations that those things could happen at once?" Loki asked of her, and Veronika was momentarily stunned.

"Me?" she asked.

"Yes, you know the most about him beside Elizabeth herself – and your other daughter."

"Bella, my name is Bella." Bella snapped.

"Yes, yes, Bella." Loki waved off, turning to the mother. "Do you know?"

Veronika shook her head. "He didn't keep any of his old headquarters – save the one in Germany. But that's in lowlands, there are no mountains or cottonwoods there... nor is it on a lake." she said sadly. "I'm sorry."

Loki sighed, looking back at Stark. "Anything?"

"Have you any idea how many states in this country have Cottonwoods, mountains or a Lake?" Tony asked in return. "Give me some time."

"Don't forget the daylight." Darcy chipped in.
"What?" Tony asked.

"Daylight. He said it was daylight at three in the morning." She explained, finishing off her drink. Tony paused. "Daylight?" he repeated. "What's Russian summer like where it's daylight?"

"Cold and snowy." Natasha supplied. "Norway is possible... as is Sweden."

"They're seven hours ahead, so daylight makes sense there." Clint added. "It would be ten o'clock."

"Hey, how is it that nobody can see her?" Darcy asked... though it seemed she was asking the right questions.

Bella sighed. "Alex had a mutant back when we were with him, his name was Ivan, he put shields up – so to speak, and no one else could use their powers to see in... cloak would be a better word." she said. "Charles Xavier once came at us, but he couldn't get into anyone's mind, we were all cloaked to him as long as Ivan was there."

"This guy sleep?" Darcy asked.

"Yeah, of course he does."

The brunette threw her hands up in the air. "Hello! Is anyone getting this?" she asked. "The guy has to sleep, and there is obviously a time difference."

"Three in the morning..." Jane was beginning to get it.

"Oh my god." Pepper got it too.

"That totally makes sense." Bella understood.

"What? What am I missing?" Tony was still in the dark, as was everyone else by the looks on their faces.

"Time difference, Tony, Ivan goes to sleep. When he does, his shield is weakened." Bella explained.

Veronika finally got it. "The shield wouldn't weaken if he was ahead of us." she said. "So he must be behind."

"But where would there be daylight—?"

"ALASKA!" Darcy finally yelled through the thicket of comprehension, causing everyone to stare at her. "What? They're four hours behind us, three o'clock would be eleven their time. Reasonable enough time for a guy who's constantly busy to get to sleep."

"How long can you see for?" Thor asked, finally understanding what the others were.

"A few hours." Loki replied. "Until eight o'clock."

"Which would make sense." Jane replied. "They would have him stay up as long as he could, And wake up before any of us did."

Tony's eyes widened. "Jarvis narrow that search to Alaska." he said, pausing a moment. "And double the security, I don't like other people knowing my sleeping habits."

"You don't remember me, do you?" Lizzie asked Scott as he finished taking some blood from her,
her eyes watching him carefully. He hadn't changed much since she'd seen him last, his hair was shorter perhaps, but that was all, he still moved with fluidity – although she now found herself comparing him to Loki.

Loki... she was beginning to wonder how bad of a shape she was in. She had been seeing Loki during the time they weren't experimenting on her, but every time he was like a fleeting memory, a wisp to fade as soon as her tormentors returned. Was it a sign of some kind?

Scotts brown eyes looked up at her and he shook his head slightly. He was given strict orders not to talk to her, although if he had been able to talk he would have told her that he sensed that he knew her from somewhere... but as he couldn't he didn't. He looked down at the needle, cutting off her blood from leaving her body when he was done. She hissed in pain. "Sorry." he muttered, closing his eyes in irritation. He just had to do that didn't he?

"It's okay. I know why you're doing it." she replied softly, wondering what he would do if he had known of his past with her...

Scott scoffed, but said nothing, holding very closely to his mandate.

"How is Theresa?" Lizzie asked, trying to just get him to reply to her. Scott froze and looked her in the eye, his own hard and questioning.

"How do you know about Theresa?" he ground out, his hand tightening around the vial of her blood.

"I know everything about you, Scott." she replied, feeling confident. "That's why he doesn't want you to talk to me."

"Why?"

Lizzie had finally caught his attention. "Because he knows that there are certain things that – if I told you – would turn you against him." she said, careful with her words. She was treading on thin ice, and if she said the wrong thing she could wind up with someone else.

Scott narrowed his eyes slightly, although he seemed to consider her words all the same. "You should be careful." he finally said. "Remember what you're doing here."

She smiled, although it didn't reach her eyes. "Oh, I haven't forgotten." she said, all too painfully aware that in three days their experiments had left her in such a state that she was probably quite a sight to see. "I was an idiot, and this is my reward. Well, at least I have some fabulous room service."

A small smile graced Scott's handsome features as he looked down at her in amusement. "If you need anything, by all means just holler." he joked back, reminding her a bit of the Scott she knew. As if remembering that he was supposed to stay silent, he suddenly cleared his throat and walked out of the room, leaving her alone.
"Jora, why do you do this to me?" Jodis, Norn in charge of Loki Laufeyson whined to her sister, her loom forgotten as she had just gotten a glimpse of Elizabet Donovan's future.

"What's wrong with it?" Jora inquired, her head tilting as she looked. "Elizabeth is not yet ready for a happy ending, I thought this would be better." Jodis glared at her sister. "Loki is going mad."

"That's not my fault. He was the one who decided not to believe her when she told him she loved him in the first place – and he was the one who wanted to think that she had betrayed him." Jora giggled. "Besides, Birgdis insists that it is the best for Scott. Don't worry, little Lizzie will live."

"Live?!" Jodis shouted. "She better! I'm not going to answer to Verdandi on why Loki suddenly decides to hurl himself off of Stark Tower – which he will if you keep this up. I will lose all control over his future because he'll make a choice I can't rectify...namely death."

Jora sighed heavily, rolling her eyes and stopping her movement on her own loom to look at her sister. "Oh do relax, Twin. Verdandi would have my hide if something very terrible happened to Elizabeth. She is crucial for the Grand Loom – you can't think that I would be that foolish. Besides, you know I hate tragedy."

"Says the Norn who drove Helen into Paris' path, and made her fall for him resulting in half of the Norns being furious with you because of how many fates had to end." Jodis countered. "And the one who insisted that King Henry would be fine once Jane gave birth."

"Do not blame me for Henry, Hilde was the one who killed Jane." Jora defended.

"You had him kill off all his other wives afterwards." Jodis retorted.

Jora shrugged. "The other Norns agreed to it, I had to ask them first." she said. "Besides, it worked out fine."

"Worked out—Bah." Jodis exclaimed. "Only because I was chosen to lead Queen Elizabeth. Had it not been for me, England would have fallen because of your antics."

"Good job." Jora said. "But don't blame me, I didn't do half of the problems."

"Alright, you did, however, become in charge of the Romanovs in Russia. Why Verdandi gave you that particular lot I'll never know – especially after Troy!" Jodis continued. "You killed off all of them, leaving Hilde with that one daughter who got away – but only because of her!"

Jora winced. "Yes... she has never forgiven me for that. It took a few thousand years just to get the family – I don't think she'll do it again though." she muttered. "But why are you in a fuss? I never destroyed your fates – in fact, more often than not I have personally made sure your fates and mine get along and get along happily. Are we forgetting how I worked out that little matter of Henry the Fifth?"

"You killed Henry at age thirty-five, leaving only one child which was never a good idea for England in that time period." Jodis replied. "But closer to home, let's not forget what you did recently with poor Baldr, which Loki has forever held the guilt for."

Her sister frowned, looking rather sad. "I never meant for that to happen, I will confess. That was a
mistake." Jora said, sighing. "If I could change one fate it would be his."

Jodis paused, pursing her lips as she thought of what to say. "Just make sure that all is alright with Loki and Elizabth... please? For me?"

Jora tsked. "Jodis, darling, I can't tell the end. I work on a choice by choice basis – as do we all." she said, returning to her loom. "But I can assure you that I will do everything in my power to make sure that we do not have to go before Verdandi with heads hung low."

Giving a slow nod, her eyebrow quirked in begrudging acceptance she sighed. "Mmmhmmmm..." and with that, returned to her loom, sighing over what was going to happen soon enough.

Veronika searched for Loki, the Avengers still looking for where Alex' headquarters could now be. She could see in what little she saw of him that he was very much in love with Lizzie, and furthermore very upset at the fact that she was missing. She had to smile at his determination, wondering how Erik and Sean would have liked him. No doubt her father would very much enjoy his way of thinking, as well as various other aspects of him... but now was not the time to think of that. Now she searched, wanting to know the man who her daughter had turned herself over to Alex for.

Stepping onto the roof of the tower, she saw his tall frame outlined against the darkening sky. A silhouette, with his hands behind his back as a captain of a ship might be, his head raised high as he watched the sun set. "I know you're there." he spoke, though did not turn. "No doubt you wish to speak to me."

"You're very aware of your surroundings." Veronika replied, stepping up beside him.

"Considering who I am, I'm sure you understand why." Loki replied, still not looking in her direction. "Why have you sought me out?"

"I want to get to know you." Veronika told him, looking up at his profile. She couldn't say that her daughter didn't know a handsome man when she saw one. "My daughter is in love with you after all..."

"And why should you care?" Loki snapped, finally looking her way. "You who abandoned her – had you been in her life she would not have suffered as she did."

"I know." Veronika said softly, looking down. "How often I have thought the same. I survived two timelines, and in both I left her to the wolves."

Loki scoffed.

"You think I do not feel the guilt?" She asked him.

"Feeling guilt doesn't change things." Loki retorted, turning to face her. "You could have changed things at any time. Instead of watching from afar, you could have been there, helped her, given her the one thing she told me she always wanted. She held you up as a figure of love, and someone who she held dear the memory of – but instead you were sitting there allowing things to happen to her."

Veronika felt the tears which had been built up over the years begin to fall. "You think I do not know her agony? That I do not know every last memory of what happened to her? I do not know her pain, her loss?" she asked him, lips trembling. "I am more than an empath, Loki. I can not only feel the pain of others, but I get to see it from their eyes."
Loki blinked. "What do you mean?"

The older woman sighed, turning away from him as she gathered her thoughts. "I can see the memories of certain people..." she began slowly, reaching for him. "One touch, and I can get all your memories if I so desire. It's very helpful – it can also bring out pain which I would prefer not to experience." she dropped her hand, memories flitting through her vision. Horrors which she never should have known deposited in her mind from an early age, horrors she fought hard to suppress. "That being said, I have no doubt Elizabeth told you about Saoirse, her daughter? And that she was born dead?"

"Yes." Loki ground out, thoroughly wondering why it was that the Norns had brought that child into the world. It seemed that if anything, Saoirse had only been a curse to Elizabeth, and one which she could have lived without. "She is the reason that Elizabeth wound up in the power of Alex this last time..." He paused. "Why?"

Veronika looked away, gathering her thoughts in a mental basket, preparing them for presentation. "When Elizabeth gave birth to Saoirse... I was at the hospital." She began. "I was spending my time as a nurse, my father in hiding at that time in Berlin. I was shocked that night when they brought her in, the name something I recognized – naturally – and her face one I had seen before in visions."

Loki turned to face her, listening to what she had to say.

"When she delivered, I found that I needed to know what her life had been like. She'd been missing for about ten years by that time, and Charles had been looking for her. To have her suddenly appear was a marvelous thing... that was until I touched her." she said, taking a deep breath. "The memories I saw were such that I knew immediately that she was the very weapon who had been a holy terror to the mutant world... and had helped to cause a war."

"War?" Loki repeated quickly, interrupting. Lizzie had never told him about any war.

"Yes." Veronika confirmed. "Alex had begun a war between the normal humans and the mutants. Lizzie was his lieutenant. Anesthesia she was called – but I'm sure you know about that."

"A bit yes." Loki replied. He hadn't known about her involvement in any wars.

Veronika sighed. "The Evolution War, it had been dubbed. For the first time in a long time, my father and Charles Xavier fought on the same side... either way, in a brief time of peace Elizabeth came into the hospital. The memories I saw only were comparable to that of my father... the horror."

"She has told me some of it." Loki replied.

"I'm sure she hasn't told you the entirety... but you've seen a glimpse of her current tortures?" Veronika confirmed. Loki nodded. "There is a reason she did what she did, Loki. It wasn't a fluke, and it wasn't due to some strange sense of betrayal. He threatened that Saoirse would endure her tortures, you said, that is no laughing matter to Elizabeth."

"Why? I understand that it would be painful, but what is it she's afraid of exactly?" Loki asked. "What is it that you allowed her to endure?"

Veronika let out a bitter laugh. "You really don't think very highly of me, do you?"

"Not particularly, no." Loki replied with a sneer.

"Would it help you if I showed you what I saw?" Veronika inquired, her brown eyes pleading with the man who loved her daughter. Not waiting for an answer, she grabbed his hand, and Loki's world went dark.
Suddenly, the darkness lifted, and Loki could see where he was. It was a cell, its walls damp with moisture, the room was cold. Loki looked around, spotting a figure huddled in the corner. He went forward, his hand trying to touch the figure, but failing as his hand went right through. It was obviously a girl, as her outfit could once be described as a dress - if one ignored all the dirt and tears.

The door to the cell opened, and the girl lifted her head, taking Loki aback. It was Elizabeth, he could tell, but she was much younger than he knew. She whimpered, scampering back as a figure's shadow was cast over her. Loki looked up, seeing a rather burly man towering over her.

"Come on, Kid, I don't have all day." the man grouched, she continued to whimper, "Come on!" he shouted, forcibly taking her arm and dragging her up.

"No, no, no, no..." she kept muttering as she was drug out of the cell and down the hall. Loki studied the man carefully, remembering his face. He had seen this man before, he was a guard.

He followed, unable to do anything as she was led to a white room - this Loki knew, recalling what Elizabeth had told him when she was explaining her past. He watched firsthand as she was thrown onto it, tied down as she protested, fighting fiercely as she was held down. "Stop fighting, Elizabeth." a woman's voice said softly, "It will hurt less." Loki looked over to see the woman that Lizzie had fought so hard to protect from Alex. What had her name been?

"Terri, we don't have all day." A male voice interrupted. "Get her tied down." Terri followed her orders, reaching over and strapping the crying Elizabeth to the table. "It's done, sir." she said, pulling her long blonde hair out of her face and into a ponytail. "Shall I get the needles ready?"

"Nah, I've already got it. Have you checked on that other one yet?" the man replied.

Loki watched as the man came closer to Elizabeth, a vial of liquid in his hand which he stuck a needle into. Lizzie had told him that when she had first gotten her powers the first person to die - by accident of course - was this man. Loki felt pride swell within him for her. Yet, he felt anger surge within him toward the man who was about to cause her pain.

"When is this?" he asked Veronika, who stood beside him.

"The day she received her power." the mother replied, her eyes filled with tears as she watched her daughter get injected with the formula, writhing in pain. "Forgive me," she muttered. "I cannot watch this."

The scene blurred once more, and when it focused again, Loki saw Elizabeth before Alex, sitting down in a chair.

"Do you know why I brought you here?" he asked the girl that Loki had just seen. If he could guess her age, it would be twelve, while the last memory was probably only a little sooner.

"No." she replied. "Does it matter why you brought me here?" she asked, her Irish brogue confusing Loki for a few minutes.

Alex chuckled, "Yes, very much so, Little Elizabeth." he said condescendingly. "As it turns out, my dear, your ability is very rare. You would make a lovely addition to the Guard."

Lizzie glared. Loki could practically feel the hatred pouring out of her, and obviously so did Alex for he motioned to someone behind her and the door to the office opened.

"Lizzie!" the little girl behind her shouted, and Elizabeth turned. Loki recognized the girl, there was
no mistaking Bella.
Elizabeth got up, rushing to her sister - or would have rushed to her sister had not a force-field stopped her. "Ah, ah, ah..." Alex tutted. "First you must agree to my terms."

Lizzie raised an eyebrow, a look which Loki was familiar with. "And what are those?" she asked.

"Join my guard." Alex answered. "Quite simple, you wouldn't even have to do much... but you would be given respect. And you would be let out of that cell you hate so much."

"Why should I trust you?" she asked.

Alex chuckled. "You shouldn't really... but you have nothing to lose, and everything to gain by taking my offer." he replied. "So what'll it be."

"No more tests?" Lizzie asked.

"No, my little firebird." Now Loki understood why she hated it when he called her that "No more tests."

Lizzie seemed to consider this. "And what will happen if I refuse?" she asked, "What then?" Alex grinned, looking up to the mutant behind her. Bella suddenly screamed, clutching her head as if in pain. "Bella!" Lizzie shouted, trying to go toward her.

"Make it stop! Make it stop! Make it stop!" Bella pleaded, crumpling to the floor.

"Stop it!" Lizzie commanded, and Loki watched as the woman next to Bella suddenly started gasping for air, while Bella stopped screaming and started crying.

"Elizabeth!" Alexander shouted. "That is enough." Lizzie looked up at him, allowing the woman to breathe. "Now you know what will happen if you refuse."

"You dare to use my sister against me." Lizzie snapped.

"Oh, my little firebird. I will do more than use Bella against you..." he said, his voice low and deadly. "I will use your entire family if need be. Starting with Seanmhathair."

Loki watched as she just looked at him, her eyes glazed in fury before she spat out her decision: "Done."

The scene blurred once more...

Loki reeled the next time that the scene focused, this time causing him to be shocked. Three scenes he had witnessed, and each had proven to be more difficult to watch than the last. There she was, he could see her, Lizzie - but was it? She was dressed completely in black, her dark brown hair tied tightly in a bun, which made her features look more severe... but he could see the fear in her eyes as she paced the room which she was in. His mind flashed to the Lizzie he had seen under the influence of Alex... it was the same one, he could see.

"How old is she here?" he asked Veronika.

"Thirteen." she answered. "She was twelve in the last memory. For the first year after she was brought into the guard, she was taught how to control her power to her best ability. This is the first time that she is going to use it." He could hear the sadness in the woman's voice as the door to the room opened and two men dragged a young woman in.
"What is this?" Lizzie demanded.

"The Master said to bring you this one. Apparently she betrayed us." one of the men answered, his accent British.

"More than betrayed us." the other replied, his rough voice breaking the silence. "She played the whore to Lehnsherr's group... saying she was in love with one of his little minions."

Lizzie looked at the young woman, her brown eyes scanning her. "What is it that the Master wants me to do?" she asked, choking on the word 'master'.

The first grimaced, turning to her with a soft smile. "He wants you to incapacitate her." he said, "To make it so that she can't move." his eyes moved to the ground.

"Why?" Lizzie asked as the door opened again - the burly man who Loki had seen drag Lizzie out of her cell coming in. She stiffened, unconsciously moving closer to the first man. He rested a hand on her elbow, as if assuring her that she was safe. "What are you doing here, Brandon?" she asked.

Brandon smirked. "Didn't these two lugs tell you?" he asked, "You're to-"

"Incapacitate, yes I know." She interrupted. "But what are you doing here?" He just grinned, and Lizzie shuddered, images running through her mind which she probably shouldn't even have at that age. "No." She said quietly, looking over at the woman, her brown eyes filled with panic and worry.

"Excuse me?" Brandon asked, "Shall I tell the Master you are refusing his direct order?"

Lizzie shook her head. "No." she replied, turning to the first man and whispering. "Please tell me he's not going to do what I think he is..." she trailed off.

The man nodded.

She once more looked at the young woman, she wasn't sure she could do this...

"Shall I bring in some instigation?" the second man said. "I believe he said that if you did not comply, I was to fetch your sister, and put her in the chair..."

"No." Lizzie said quickly, moving toward the young woman. "I am sorry..." she whispered, and Loki watched as the woman suddenly went lax in the chair.

The image blurred as Brandon moved toward the woman, a sadistic smile on his face as Lizzie was forced to look on.

In the real world, Natasha and Clint were spending time together, simply quiet as he hung off the 'A' of the tower, having pulled Natasha with him. Finally she understood how he got up, and it wasn't as detailed as she had thought.

"So..." she said quietly. "Suction cups?"

"Yeah, they've been around a while, you know." Clint replied with a teasing tone as he looked out on New York. "I'm surprised you've never come across them."

Natasha gave him a playful glare, nudging him. "Smart ass." She was happy to see him a bit back to his old self, ever since he had returned from Rochester, he had been closed off... quiet and to himself, almost forgetting she existed. A worry had begun to creep within her, that she would never see Clint back to who he was before the whole ordeal.
"You're worried about me." Clint said, not looking at her yet. She sighed.

"I'm not worried at all." Natasha replied, adjusting herself a bit. "You're getting back to normal bit by bit."

Clint scoffed. "Exactly." he said. "I'm not me anymore... not since..."

"Clint..."

"No! I need to get it out." Clint snapped, finally looking at her. "It seemed like forever, but it was only about a minute." he started, looking back on the city. "He entered my mind and sorted through my memories – then he showed me Lizzie's life through his eyes, the things he had done to her. He raped her, Nat! She was a kid, and he raped her! He took pleasure in her pain!" His voice raised in pitch and anger, and Natasha smoothed back his hair in a comforting gesture.

Yet behind her calm facade she was boiling. Elizabeth had become a kind of sister to her, one she had never had, and to hear that Shaw had done something so heinous made her think of all the clever ways she'd kill him. In Russia she had been passed around between the men, being used as a toy by them – but she had been willing. It now made sense to her about certain factors of Elizabeth... why she had been afraid of loving Loki. Why she had been defensive when any man touched her. The pieces were falling into place, and Natasha saw red – and it wasn't her hair.

Clint's voice pulled her from her reverie. "He showed... He showed me...what..."

"Shh..." she shushed him, trying to comfort him as he began to shake. "You don't have to tell me, Clint, I'm not-"

"HE SHOWED ME WHAT HE'D DO TO YOU!" Clint shouted over her small voice. "He showed me how he'd kill you... how he'd make me watch, unable to lift a finger as he had you tortured. He'd put me on that table that he put Lizzie on, and he'd experiment on you, make you one of his soldiers – unless you fought. Then he would have his mutants have their way. You thrashed... it was painful I could tell."

"It wasn't real, I'm here, Clint." Natasha replied, touching his face and forcing him to look at her. "I'm not going to be killed by him – besides, we're all going to end this mess as soon as we find out where he is. He's not going to be allowed to live."

Clint gave a sardonic smirk. "You can't fight him, Nat. He's too powerful. This is a whole new playing field. It isn't Budapest, it isn't Manhattan. This man is completely insane, and he only cares about destroying those who get in his way, and you get in his way." he said, looking her over. His hands came up to her face, and he stared with intensity. "Promise me that you'll stay behind."

"Are you nuts?! After what he's done? I'm not staying here—"

Again he interrupted, but this time it was something which Natasha didn't know how to reply. His lips were on hers in an instant, his hands holding her face as he kissed her. Kissed her? She could
feel his love, and his concern, as well as a pleading which she knew his words did not express to
their fullest. It took a moment for her brain to respond, but not in time as he pulled away, a sad look
in his eyes. He was defeated, and she knew he felt rejection, but he still held her face. "That's why
Natasha... please..."

Mutely, she nodded in agreement, her eyes flickering between his eyes and his lips. She had to be
dreaming, because Clint suddenly got a goofy look on his face – one which she had never seen
before – and he leaned in slightly as if asking for permission. She nodded again, and he gently kissed
her again. This time with a newfound hope.

Loki gasped as the world of the rooftop came back into focus, his mind spinning with the last
memories which he saw, those being that of her pregnancy, and the hardship which she had endured.
The first person she had killed, the abuses she suffered at the detestable hands of Alex... her... he
couldn't even think about when Alex had forced himself onto her at age fifteen without wanting to
both vomit and kill the man with his bare hands. He could still hear her screams as the man had taken
her without her permission, the following memories of her dealing with the fact that she was then his
whore.

"You..." he started, looking at the crying Veronika.

"Felt all of it as if I were her." she finished, her voice cracking. "Every bit of her pain, I feel every
time I see those memories. I live through them through her eyes... like this."

His chest hurt as Veronika used her powers to make him feel the same pain, the same fear and
agony... he nearly doubled over at its force. The memories now flitting through his vision from what
he had seen. "I... I'm sorry." he apologized to the woman.

"No, I'm sorry." Veronika said sorrowfully, reaching to touch his face. "Had I done differently she
would not have suffered..." she paused. "But then, she would never have loved you, would she?"

Loki blinked. Part of him blamed the woman, but he understood what she said. Loathe as he was to
agree with her, he thought of an Elizabeth where she had had a normal life... he would never have
loved her. She would never have been interesting to him, nor would she have been a challenge. Her
understanding would have been limited, and her forgiveness even less. In all, she wouldn't be the
Elizabeth he cared about... she would have been someone else, and probably loving someone else.

Veronika could see he was thinking, and she smiled softly, stepping onto her tiptoes so as to kiss his
cheek. "I'll leave you, Loki." she whispered, pulling back.

A memory flickered across his vision, and for a moment he saw part of Veronika's life, a scene from
her life which he knew that not many had seen. To an outsider they would have simply seen Loki
tense, his eyes filling with fury, and his mouth tightening in rage as his temple pulsed. Within his
mind, however, he viewed her memories, and saw why it was she had never gone near Elizabeth.

Finally the memories stopped, and Veronika turned around. "I showed you that in hopes that you
may forgive me... I love Elizabeth very dearly, and as you do too, I wouldn't want us to be enemies." she
said, beginning to walk back into the building.

Taking a step forward, Loki stopped her from leaving by placing a hand on her shoulder, and
dropped a kiss on her forehead – one which he would have saved for Frigga only. "We are not
enemies, Veronika." he declared. "I only hope you find me worthy enough..."

Veronika smiled again. "You are."
Without another thought, she disappeared from his vision, and he was left alone on the rooftop.

He was running. He didn't know why, but his life was in danger. Why? He didn't know... he just knew he had to run. His blonde hair got in his eyes, and he growled, wishing he had listened to Lizzie and had cut it before this happened. Lizzie... His mind flashed to the brunette woman briefly, hoping that by running he might save her... and their child.

His child.

He had thought it impossible, Alex had told him as much. Still, to know that from such a friendship a little life had been born into the world of turmoil was a strange bit of happiness. But to have a child? How could he have been so irresponsible? The sounds of shouting met his ears again, and he ran faster. He had to live. He had to get out so he could come back and save them.

Suddenly he tripped, and he rolled on the ground a bit, his leg hurting him a bit.

"Timothy Scott Walters!" He heard from his right. "We will find you!"

Maybe if he stayed still he could go undetected.

It seemed like forever before the hunting party moved past him, and he could hear their voices fade away. He allowed himself to breathe again, giving a sigh of relief. Maybe he would get away after all—

'Oooh, you think yourself soo clever.' he heard a voice in his head, its tone that exactly of Alex Shaw's. 'But you forget that you are mine... like she is mine...' a headache built in his mind as he tried to push Alex away from his conscious. The man's mental voice laughed. 'You think it's that easy.'

His legs gave out, and he fell to the ground, his hands clutching his head. "NO GO AWAY!" he shouted aloud.

'She. Is. MINE.' he heard Alex growl as his heart beat faster.

"No...NO!" Scott shouted, grabbing at his chest. His heart was beating as if he was going to run a marathon.

'After you... everyone will know that she is mine and mine alone.' Alex sneered in his mind. 'Thank you for giving me a perfect example.'

Scott gave a cry of pain as every nerve of his body wracked in agony, his heart finally exploding from the trauma.

Scott awoke with a shout, bolting up in bed, his hand clutching his chest. His heart raced, though not to the extend as he had felt in his dream... or was it a dream? ... It had felt so real. Getting up from bed, he went into the bathroom and grabbed a glass of water, chugging it down in a heartbeat.

Memories were beginning to fade into his mind, memories that didn't seem to be his... and he didn't know why. Looking at the clock on his nightstand, he decided to get dressed. He'd be dealing with Elizabeth Donovan within the hour...

And these new memories of her being his lover in a different time frame weren't helping him in the least.
Chapter 35

Berlin was the way it always was, the city pulsing with life in another way than the people in it. It was raining, and everyone who walked down the street was either running for cover or happily walking with an umbrella. Logan looked around as he walked down the Niederkirscherstrasse, the buildings which remained making him wonder as to why Erik Lehnsherr had chosen to make this his address. After all, along the southern side of the Niederkirscherstrasse was the Berlin wall, on the other was the 'Topography of Terror', the headquarters of the Gestapo. Irony either abounded or Lehnsherr was being a bastard.

Either way, it made him laugh.

Coming around to the building which he knew the entrance for Lehnsherr's supposed headquarters, the rest of Berlin completely ignorant of the fact that there was a series of underground tunnels which served as bunkers in World War II. It was there that Magneto had decided to set up homebase. Following instructions which he had received from a friend, he quickly found the entrance, and after making sure he wasn't watched, he opened the door, getting inside.

Frigga paced, her blue gown swishing around her feet with each movement. Heimdall couldn't see where Elizabeth was, and the Avengers didn't know either. She was aware that their search had been narrowed down the Midgardian state of Alaska, but as it was a rather large state that meant it could be anywhere. She had tried to do as she had before, and to use the locket – but as most of its magic was drained out of it and in Loki the signal back to her was simply too weak.

That didn't stop her from seeing visions of Elizabeth... and it didn't stop her from worrying about her health. It had only been a few days, but she was not well in any way, it concerned the Asgardian Queen. In addition, Heimdall had made a recent report that the situation on Jotunheim was probably about to break as allegiances had finally been straightened out between those who followed Helblindi and those who followed Byleistr. There would be a war on that front soon, which Frigga had no doubt had to do with Thanos.

"Mother?" she heard a deep voice call her, and turning around she smiled softly at the dark-haired man who stood before her. His beard spread as he smiled, exposing white teeth beneath it. His blue eyes sparkled with joy and yet were slightly dull with tiredness. This was Vali Odinson.

"Vali, you have returned." she greeted, embracing him in a hug. Although Vali was one of the larger of his brothers, he was the gentlest of Odin's children, a large weight on his soul over the fact that he was born for the sole purpose of revenge. "And how is Alfheim?"

Vali sighed, laughing in relief. "The way it always is. They have made every affirmation that they are our allies when Thanos attacks, and they have made treaties with the other realms who are on our side." he said. "I must say, growing up with Loki has given me special abilities to make negotiations."

Frigga gave a sad smile. "Loki was always talented at bringing even the worst of enemies to become allies." she said. "It is a shame he did not use his abilities for the best."

"Yes..." Vali trailed off, pushing his black hair out of his eyes. "And how is Loki? When I was here last he was just adjusting to life in Midgard."

Finding a place to sit, Frigga explained all that Vali had missed in the few months he had been in
Alfheim, and the newest developments. To his credit, he listened intently and without interruption, taking in all the information his step-mother had to offer. His brow furrowed as he listened to the last bit of the tale, and the story of Elizabeth Donovan being willing to sacrifice herself. "This Lady Elizabeth... she seems very honorable – albeit, very rash in her decisions." his voice rumbled. "And she loves my brother?"

A smile spread on Frigga's face. Out of all of Odin's children, only Thor, Vali and his brother Vidar still considered Loki a part of their family. Had Baldr still been alive, she had no doubt he would have done the same. "Very much so... and he loves her in return." she told him. "But now she is missing, and they are searching for her. Heimdall cannot see her, and I cannot find her either. I am worried, Vali, she is in danger and we cannot save her unless we have more information."

"I have no doubt we will soon." Vali replied. "What does father have to say about all of this?"

Frigga sighed. "Your father is not sure himself. On one hand he is very supportive of the relationship, on the other he is skeptical that Loki has truly changed. He does not think a mortal can have that kind of power... he doesn't understand her. She is mortal, and that also does not settle well with him." she said, thinking about her last argument with the All-Father concerning Elizabeth – she had been furious with how he had suddenly brought out the fact that Elizabeth was not going to live forever. "The Norns are very clever bringing those two together... I don't know yet what other trials they will face, but if they make it through this nothing will be too difficult."

Steps near the doorway brought Frigga's attention to the fact that Odin had entered. She gave him a tired look, before she looked out the balcony. "Vali, Vidar informed me you had returned." Odin stated, his blue eye wandering to Frigga.

"Yes I have Father. Forgive me, I should have reported to you immediately." Vali apologized, standing up and walking to his father.

"Well what's done is done. Vidar said that things in Alfheim went well." Odin replied, looking at Vali.

"Yes. The Elves are our allies and have smoothed over all issues with those of Vanaheim and Jotunheim." Vali explained, giving Frigga a cursory glance of worry. Frigga had really been the only mother he knew in his childhood, his own abandoning him as soon as he was born. To know that he was supposed to grow up to kill his half-brother was something which had been very difficult for him, and Frigga had been there to soothe his confusion and fear. "They will be willing to join us in war, should our enemy ever expose himself."

"Good." Odin said, giving Frigga another look. He needed to speak with her alone. "Now, go get some rest, you have another mission which I need you to prepare for."

Vali nodded, giving his father a bow before turning to Frigga. "Goodnight mother."

"Goodnight Vali." she said softly, waiting until she heard his footsteps leave the room before she spoke to her husband. "And what manner of mission have you prepared for him?"

Odin did not answer, sitting down on the settee. "It is one which will bring him no harm, if that is what you concern yourself over," he said. "You have already lost two sons, I would not force you to lose another."

"Three if you count Hodr...for although he was not my natural son he was still a son of mine." Frigga replied, looking at him. "Did you come here only for Vali? Or did you have another reason?"
"I do not wish to fight with you, Frigga." Odin replied with a tired sigh. "Perhaps my last words to you were harsh... I understand why it is you find so much hope in this mortal—"

"Her name is Elizabeth, Odin, use it." Frigga snapped a little harshly. "One day she will be your daughter-in-law... if you ever bring Loki back into the fold of your children."

Odin groaned in frustration. "Loki made his decisions, I cannot force him to be the boy he was only a few years ago." he said. "He does not wish to call me 'father', I cannot force him – even though I love him as a son."

Frigga sighed, taking Odin's hand in hers. "Then do not hate the woman he loves so much." She advised.

"Are you sure it's love, Frigga?" Odin asked.

The Queen only smiled, resting her head on the All-Fathers shoulder.

Tony was psyched. Jarvis had succeeded in finding a box of area which fit the entire criteria of what was given to him by Loki's vision – or whatever it was. He had found the lake, the trees, and with enough satellite hacking he soon found the image of a building which looked very out of place in the middle of the Alaskan wilderness. "Got you, Esmeralda." he muttered to himself, using the satellite to zoom in.

"Sir, should I inform the others that you have succeeded in finding Mr. Shaw's headquarters?" Jarvis offered.

"Yep, let them know one at a time, and have one of 'em go get Prongs. I'm not interested in him going nutzo by himself because his girlfriend is in trouble." Tony said, flipping through a few screens. "Oh, and J... send Pepper in here will you?"

"Very good sir." the AI replied, going silent as Tony continued in his research. A few minutes later, he heard footsteps.

"Send for me, Almighty King of Science?" Pepper's voice teased. Tony turned around, looking his fiancee over.

"I need to talk to you about something important..." he said, his face serious.

Pepper's brow furrowed, her hand resting on his face. "What's the matter?"

Tony sighed. "What's going on. Lizzie in Alaska, everyone kinda diverging around the tower. It's like this whole thing went downhill in the last month, and I think we can point in one direction. Either way, I am... concerned now."

"You?" Pepper said with a strange look. "What are you concerned about?"

Tony thought a moment. "This... this entire thing. It's different than anything I've ever dealt with. The Chitauri incident was out of my depth almost, something I would never have expected." he said, sighing. "But this isn't an invading force, this is something much much more difficult to defend against."

Pepper looked at Tony in worry. He wasn't someone to talk like this, and she was beginning to wonder where he was going with it... Tony was rarely this somber. "But it's not just you, it's everyone."
"Yeah... that isn't much, Pepper. We're only six – seven if you count Loki – but... it's an army that's with us. They look like us, act like us." he said. "This one we're about to go against... they are humans with changed DNA. This isn't Bruce, they have complete control of themselves and we're the enemy." Turning around, he went to his computer again.

"I'm sure it's not as bad as all that." Pepper said. "We have Thor's friends, and SHIELD."
Tony scoffed. "Right. Like SHIELD is gonna help us. I don't trust 'em Pep. There's something seriously wrong in that organization... no matter what they say." he said. "As for Asgard... well..." he trailed off, leaving the statement open. "But that's not where I was going."

Pepper looked at him, but didn't say anything in reply.

"I think..." he started again, looking down at her left hand. "I think you should set a date."

Pepper blinked. "What?"

"Wedding, Pepper. Set a date for that." he replied. "Smallish I think, something which probably only includes us in the tower and Rhodey."

"You think now is a good time?" Pepper asked.

Tony nodded. "Gotta look forward to something right?" he stated with a smile. "You know what I mean?"

Pepper swallowed. She knew exactly what he meant.

Elizabeth's location had been found, and it took every fibre in Loki's being not to simply go where she was. His latest vision had disturbed him, the image of a pale and sickly-looking Elizabeth still imprinted in his mind. What was Shaw doing to her? He didn't know, but whatever it was he was already planning a very slow death for him. His plans went through his mind as he pulled his armor on, not really wanting to use his magic to do such a menial task – not because it was beneath him, he had been using his magic for that use for six hundred years – but because it let his body do something while his mind raced.

Strapping on his arm braces, he thought of what they may encounter. He had never fought mutants before, though what he had seen in his short time of imprisonment had been enough to make him question what an entire army of them were like. Was it like dealing with magic wielders?

A knock on the door abruptly interrupted his thoughts, and he turned toward the door. "Come in." he said, watching to see who would enter. To his surprise, it was Nell, the woman who Tony had been calling his 'mother' very quietly. He could see what Tony saw, the features enough to make the billionaire give her the nickname of 'Loki's mother'. "May I help you?" he asked.

Nell nodded slowly, stepping up to him. "We haven't spoken much... I'm sorry for that, I was... hoping to get to know you a little more." She said, completely catching Loki off guard. That certainly was something he wasn't expecting.

"Yes well matters at hand make such things nearly impossible." he replied coldly. "I'm rather busy __"

"You fear for her." Nell simply announced. "As you should be."

Loki gave her a stern look. "What do you know?" he asked. "I have heard you were the one who saved her from the Chitauri back when they cornered her in that alley. What do you know about her now?"
Nell sighed. "Nothing." she said sadly. "She is currently hidden from my gaze. I can't see her in any respect..." she paused. "But you can, can't you?" Loki tensed, his mind returning to what he'd seen. "You worry about her."

"Why are you asking a question that you most likely already know the answer to?" Loki snapped, turning toward her. "Is there a reason for your visit?"

The woman stared at him, a myriad of thoughts going through his mind. Now was not the time to tell him the truth, he wasn't in any state of mind to hear her. Reaching into her pocket she retrieved a cordial on a cord. "I came to give you this." she said softly, holding it out. "I cannot tell you what will happen, but I can at least give you this."

Loki’s eyes narrowed, looking at the bottle in confusion. "What is it?"

"Cider from the apples of Idunn – only use it in the greatest of needs... which I will tell you will be soon." She motioned for him to take it, and after another scrutinizing glance he reached up and took it from her.

"And how did a mere mortal like you manage to get cider from the apples of Idunn?" Loki asked with a suspicious tone, his eyes staring at her with intensity. He saw amusement, as well as sadness in her gaze. "You are of Asgard." He finally stated, looking her over. "You are not Midgardian that is sure... who are you?"

Nell smiled slightly before, turning around and walking to his door. She turned around again. "Stay safe, Loki." was her only reply before she slipped out of the room, the door shutting softly behind her.

Loki looked down at the object in his hands, and wondered as to what Nell knew that he did not... and who it was that she saw being injured.

"So it's going to be some kind of battle?" Jane asked Thor. He nodded somberly, holding Jane closely.

"According to what Lady Bella has said, this man created an army and caused conflict before." he paused, thinking. "We are not sure what we will find... it won't be pleasant."

"Yeah but we've got Thor the God of Thunder on our side." Darcy's voice interjected from behind them as she entered the room. "That has to count for something."

Jane sighed. "Darcy, can you make yourself scarce?" she asked.

Darcy chuckled. "Sorry, lovebirds, I didn't know this was your room." she said, motioning to the fact that they were in the family room. "Besides, you're acting like he's not coming back – for crying out loud, I doubt a mutant could take him down. All he has to do is bring up a storm."

"It is not as simple as that, Lady Darcy." Thor boomed with amusement in his tone. "And I am not indestructible."

"Close to." Darcy said, sitting down on a couch. "So how is Tall-dark-and-green taking it?" she asked. "This whole...thing."

Thor sighed. "He is preparing. The Lady Elizabeth is very dear to him, and although my brother is considered very self-centered he is quite capable of taking revenge. Mutant Shaw was a fool to take her, he has never met Loki in a rage."
"You think he's raging?" Jane asked softly. "You don't think he'll do something... drastic?"

"I don't know to be honest." Thor replied. "My brother has never had a woman in his life, though he is very protective of our mother. I would imagine he would be even more so of his intended."

"Intended?" Darcy repeated.

Thor turned to her. "Of course. You do not think my brother loves lightly do you? Loki may be a trickster, but even he cannot hide the matters of his heart. My mother has told me so."

"He's only known her for a few months, how can he already get ready to marry her?" Darcy asked, her eyes wide behind her glasses.

"In Asgard, we work very differently in the mind of romance." Thor answered. "Although his sentencing might put a damper on any views of matrimony he currently has regarding her."

Fandral laughed from his place a few feet away. "I'm sure that if he wasn't a criminal he would be all too willing to make her his wife in a matter of days." he said. "Probably wouldn't even let her recover before he put her in a marriage bed."

"You confuse me with yourself." Loki's voice entered the room, his gaze one to quell hardened criminals and looking as if he were ready to storm a small country with his tortured soul. His very appearance screamed authority and an enemy, his stance one of 'murder thy enemy', his green armor showing just how dangerous he was. "Why do you dare to speak of things you know nothing of?" he asked them, his green eyes focusing on Thor with a certain spark of disdain. "Furthermore I am shocked that you are so flippant considering the fight which is soon to take place, Thor."

His brother sighed, Loki was obviously in a mood. "Forgive me, brother." he said, getting up, Jane doing the same, their voices lowering to a hushed whisper.

"It'll be nice when all this is over." Fandral's voice came from the other side of the room, Darcy next to him. "She may be a beauty, but Elizabeth is certainly—"

"Do not speak her name, you insolent scoundrel!" Loki snarled venomously. "And furthermore, if you ever look at her in any way that you tend to look at your whores, know that I will tear your eyes from your head."

"Loki." Thor warned lowly. "I've no doubt he meant no offense to Lady Elizabeth."

"Oh, I'm sure he didn't." Loki said sarcastically.

Thor sighed. "Why must you pick a fight with Fandral? We are to fight in person with her captors, and Fandral had nothing to do with it."

Loki growled in the back of his throat. "I was simply giving him a statement of friendly advice." He said with a mock politeness. "I mean no harm to the empty-headed Fandral."

Fandral gave a shout of indignation.

"Hey!" Darcy's voice interrupted, pulling the blonde-haired Asgardian back on the couch with a stern 'Sit!' She turned on Loki. "Just because your girlfriend is in the hands of a psychopath that doesn't give you license to go around attacking everyone around here. We are your friends."

"He is not my—"
"Hey!" Darcy interrupted again. "Chill dude! We're on the same side, and you need to get your blue butt in line before I smack you upside the head."

Loki narrowed his eyes on the woman. "You little—"

"Damn, I leave for three days and you guys can't keep him under control?" A new voice cut through, and turning, everyone saw Logan and the rest of the Avengers in the doorway.

"I was wondering if you would join us." Loki said to the mutant, although he was truly happy to see him. Clint smirked from beside Logan and walked into the room.

"Should we leave you two alone?" he asked, plopping down on the couch beside Loki, Natasha following and sitting down beside him, his arm slinging over her shoulder, making their new relationship quite clear.

A glare came from the god of mischief, but the archer ignored him, too busy playing with Natasha's curls.

"Is anyone intending on actually doing anything other than standing here?" Loki heard an older voice ask, and he returned his eyes to Logan, the man behind him obviously the one who spoke. "I didn't know you brought me here for no other reason than to listen to an argument."

Logan rolled his eyes, turning to the room which was filling with the Avengers. "This is Magneto... otherwise known as Erik Lehnsherr."

"Lehnsherr?" Tony repeated. "Like Lizzie's grandad 'Lehnsherr'?"

"Her name is Elizabeth." Erik said sternly. He had never liked the nicknames that everyone had for her. "And yes, I am her grandfather." he looked around the room. "Where is Veronika?"

"Sent for," Pepper supplied. "She was with Nell and they were on the roof."

Erik nodded, his eyes landing on Loki, and he smiled, looking over the other man who looked younger but was much older. "A pleasure to finally meet you, Loki of Asgard."

Loki raised his chin a bit, appraising the other man with his eyes. "The same here, Herr Lehnsherr."

Magneto smiled and stepped into the room to sit down. "Well?" he said. "Can someone explain to me how my granddaughter wound up in the hands of the son of my greatest enemy?"

Lizzie felt completely out of it. She was barely awake recently, too weak to make it for extended periods of time. Although, in all truth, she preferred her unconscious hours to those of her wakeful – after all, they were the real nightmare. In her dreams she was happy, and completely carefree, living her life after all the pain was over, reliving her memories before she knew her past. Still, in her mind, she retreated the most to Loki.

Her mental library seemed to be the place where she kept her Loki, his continual book in his hand reminding her of their time in the library at Stark Tower. As she lost consciousness to the sound of the beeping of the machines, she woke in the doorframe of her library, Loki sitting in his high-backed chair, looking up at her with a rare smile.

'Escaping again?' her Loki asked her, putting his book down. She smiled, crawling into his lap, her head against his shoulder.
'I'm so tired as of late...' she said. 'I wonder what it means.'

'What do you think it means?' Loki asked, his hand running through her hair.

She swallowed. 'I don't want to know.'

'Why not?'

'Because if it's what I suspect I'm going to be afraid... they'll know if I'm afraid.' she murmured, her hand going around his neck. 'The real one hasn't come to visit in the last... however many hours. Do you think everything is alright?'

Dream Loki chuckled. 'I wouldn't have the faintest.' he said, his featherlight kiss touching her forehead.

'Do you think I'll live to see him again?'

'You are aware I'm only a part of your subconscious aren't you?' Dream Loki replied. 'I'm going to tell you what you think.'

She paused, feeling an empty feeling within her. 'What do I think?'

Dream Loki didn't say anything for a few moments, suddenly his chest rumbling beneath her hand. 'No.'

Lizzie held him tighter. 'I wonder what death is like...' she muttered to her Loki. 'I don't want to die.'

'You're already dying, Elizabeth.' Loki replied matter-of-factly. 'Question is: whether you are willing to give off that last push, or whether you can hold on until they come for you.'

'That is, providing, they come for me.' Lizzie replied, feeling dream tears begin to fall. 'Do you think they are going to come for me?'

Dream Loki looked her in the eyes, the silence breaking her heart into even more pieces than it already was as he said – 'I don't know.' – She broke down sobbing.

Scott was worried, Lizzie's heartbeat was steadily growing weaker as the days passed, and now it had reached an all time low. He looked at her body, the memories which had been unlocked in his mind nearly breaking every wall he had toward her. She was a human being, being tortured for the satisfaction of a madman. He had seen the footage from the mansion which had been destroyed, and he knew exactly what Alex had made her go through.

His eyes searched her face, taking in the dark shadows under her eyes and the sickly pallor to her skin. She was already looking dead. He looked back at the heart monitor, trying to make up his mind on what he was going to do. Days he'd been going through this, each one proving harder than the last. His hand touched her hand, the coolness of the skin scaring him even more. Were it not for the heart monitor, he'd think she was gone, and he wouldn't blame her. She'd undergone tests that he didn't even know they had the equipment for, or the thought to even consider it.

Alex had first wanted to test how much electricity a mutant could withstand before they passed out, then he decided to try testing how long it took for a mutant to reproduce blood, followed shortly by whether or not they could take her powers from her. Each process had been painful to her, and Scott was half tempted to kill her in each test... out of mercy more than anything. She was Alex's human guinea pig, and he didn't mind torturing her for his own experiments.
This last order made Scott half contemplate killing the mutant in charge, and half kill himself for even following it. He was going to bring in a mutant skilled with illusions and test how long it would take for Lizzie – in her state – to go insane. His last hoorah, it seemed.

Looking at the monitor again, he decided to do something about it, and going against his orders, he began unhooking her from each and every device, hoping she'd survive what he was about to do.

Over the silent wilderness of Alaska, a light wind blew through the trees, darkness finally setting on the state so north that it only got a few hours in the season. The Quinjet quietly flew over the wilderness, the final destination already found and targeted. It was now a matter of the planning and the last details.

"Alright, Thor, Bruce, and I will take care of preliminary. Tony, you and Reed work together to cover Natasha, Clint and Sue who will try to find Lizzie. Fandral, Hogun and Sif, I suppose you'll help Thor out. Rogue, Logan, you go in with the ones to get Lizzie. Once inside you five will split up to search for her." Steve rattled off, then looking at Loki and Erik who sat beside each other. "I don't know what you two will do, but I have a feeling you won't follow my orders even if I tried to tell you."

"Accurate feeling." Erik commented. He had been silent for most of the trip – as had Loki – simply brewing over the situation. Being Elizabeth's grandfather, her power had not affected him in her change of the timeline, and so he knew and remembered everything he had before. The knowledge that Elizabeth was in the hands of a psychopath didn't set well with him – and he was determined that she was going to stay in his protection from now on. He glanced at the man in green... "You know," he began. "I am not sure how I feel about this relationship between you and Elizabeth. After all... I am her grandfather."

"What is there you aren't sure about?" Loki asked, looking over at the mutant.

Erik smiled. "Your ability to keep her safe – so far you seem to have failed." Loki bristled, and Erik gave the other man an appraising gaze.

"You are not the only one." Loki replied a little harsher than he had wanted. "Though we both seem to have the same goal in mind."

"Do we?" Erik questioned. "How do I know I can depend upon you? I have heard your story from my daughter, and although she trusts you, I don't. After all, you did try to take over the world."

Loki smirked. "From what I've heard you haven't exactly been a model citizen." he said.

Erik chuckled. "Perhaps that is where my granddaughter gets her taste in men from." he said, looking at Loki once again before letting himself look elsewhere. "Veronika tells me you are very much in love with her."

Loki cleared his throat. He hadn't expected that much forwardness. "Yes." was his only answer.

"That explains your behavior." Erik said. "I suppose you know her past."

"Yes." Loki replied again. "She told me... nearly everything."

There was a long pause, and Erik thought a bit before he replied again. "How do you think we should dispose of... Shaw?"

Loki looked at him, a smirk on his face.
Chapter 36

Four hours of nighttime, that was all they had – of course, that was all they needed. The Quinjet hovered over the complex of Shaw's once, allowing the group involved to see their target. Flying a mile off, Clint and Natasha landed the aircraft, turning off all the power so as not to be detected.

Quietly, the different groups got off and set off toward the complex.

Looking at Clint's watch, Loki tried to do a link with Lizzie, to see how she was – but he could not. He felt as if he was reaching in the darkness, sensing that someone was there, but unable to see. To be frank, he didn't like that feeling... he didn't like what it very possibly could mean. Approaching the complex, he suppressed a grimace. Tall and imposing were the brick walls of the buildings – and there were many – a fence around it with a hum which inferred an electrical current. A gate could be seen from their vantage point, one which he could see some kind of guardhouse next to, while a house stood impressingly on the far side, on a small hill.

Erik growled beside Loki with a small sound of 'Du miststück' issuing from his mouth. Although Loki didn't understand German, he understood the hatred which the words expressed and had no doubt that he agreed with him.

"My god, it's a concentration camp." Steve said lowly from the side.

"More specifically," Erik said lowly. "He made it look like Auschwitz."

Logan and Steve looked at Erik, almost expecting him to do something major at that moment. The fact that Shaw had fashioned his headquarters to look like the concentration camp his father was in charge of seemed to be the icing on the cake of the whole thing.

"Typical Nazi." Tony commented quietly. "What's he going to do? Raise up the Fourth Reich?"
"Yes." Erik answered curtly.

Logan added. "That basically was what he did before... though they never really found his initial spot of launch. He kept this place quite hush-hush."

"That war you were talking about?" Clint asked. Logan nodded. "Sheesh."

Natasha cleared her throat lightly. "So, teams are assembled, I think it's time to break this sucker down." she said, looking at the gate. "Question is: which area do we attack first?"

"The gate is going to be more heavily guarded than the rest." Lehnsherr said. "Shaw relies too much on that gate obviously. It looks like electricity... but I'm not sure about that."

" Probably some mutant's powers." Rogue added. "Which means it ain't gonna act like your usual electric fence. You touch that thing there, you probably will wind up jumpin' more than once."

Logan smiled. "So, subtle or obvious?" he asked.

"Subtle." Steve answered. "We need to get in as quietly as possible. The goal is to get in, get Lizzie, and get out, not get in and start a war."

"If you don't start a war, he's going to use that army of his to start one on a global scale." Erik replied, looking at the Captain. "He did it before."
Steve nodded soberly.

"In other words..." Loki started, looking at the mutant, then at Thor with a smirk. "Wipe out the army."

Thor sighed and nodded.

"Can no one be saved?" Reed Richards asked.

"Possibly those that join us instead of fight against us." Logan said. "But they're probably not going to. Alex does quite well at brainwashing his troops. They fight for him out of fear, and stay with him out of 'it's something they like now.'"

"In layman's terms, if they are fighting against us they are the enemy." Johnny said.

"Exactly."

"Then we begin with subtle." Natasha said. "How are we going to disable that fence?"

"We won't have to." A new voice added from behind them, and each member of the team turned around ready to strike. Bella stood behind them, her hands raised as she chuckled.

"Bella!" Johnny, Logan, and Erik whispered harshly.

"What are you doing here?" Natasha asked.

She smiled, and crouched down. "You don't honestly think that I was going to stay behind while you lot were off saving my sister? No, no, no, no, I want to be here when Shaw gets his comeuppance."

"If Shaw gets you," Logan started, growling. "Then this whole thing will happen all over again. Get back to New York."

"Not likely." Bella replied, creating a portal which showed the other side of the fence. "Entré mon amis."

Tony chuckled lowly. "I think we ought to listen to the tyke." he said, stepping through then sticking his head in. "All clear."

Erik told her something in German, which she only raised an eyebrow at before snapping back angrily and motioning toward the portal. One by one, each was convinced that this was the best way, Erik and Loki going last before Bella closed the portal behind them.

"Why didn't you tell us about this place before, Swan?" Tony asked, earning a scowl from Bella.

"I didn't know that Shaw would come back and build this place. It didn't make any sense that he would at the time – in addition, remember, I had forgotten my past until a couple of weeks ago." she said.

"Oh right."

"I can't believe you keep forgetting that." Looking around, she sighed. "Alright, now here my memory is fuzzy. I have no idea which of the buildings Lizzie is in."

"It faces the lake." Loki said, bringing up the memory of her room as he still couldn't make the link with her.
"Uh, Prongs, which of the fifteen that face the lake?" Tony asked, motioning to the many buildings which surrounded them.

Loki looked at them and shook his head. He didn't know.

Somewhere a shout came in German, and each head turned to see a group of guards with AK-47s, each aiming at them. Another shout sounded behind them, and soon they were surrounded.

"So much for quiet." Natasha said, pulling out her guns.

"Budapest, Tash, Budapest." Clint commented with a smirk as the first gunshots rang.

Tony's mask flipped down, his hands extending out as he shot his repulsors, burning a few of the guards. Clint shot an arrow as Steve threw his shield, running at another guard and bringing him down before reaching his hand out as his shield returned to him, allowing him to use it again. Bella appeared behind a few guards, her movements swift and deadly as she took them out, Logan already unsheathing his claws and going after the guards nearest with Rogue. Being pyrokinetic, Johnny simply created a ball of fire, flinging it at a guard who attacked Bella from behind as he was grabbed, then turning into a ball of fire he quickly burned the one behind him. Bruce hulked with a roar, simply knocking out the guards nearest with a swat. No one seemed to see what Sue did as she was simply the invisible attack next to Reed.

Loki and Erik moved as one it seemed, while Erik disabled the weapons he struck them taking down five in seconds. Thor roared and threw his hammer, hitting ten before returning to him, at which point he reached to the heavens for a lightening bolt.

It was over in five minutes, the Avengers standing still as their opponents lay scattered around them.

"Okay, this may sound like a stupid question, but..." Johnny started, looking around. "Where are all the mutants?"
"I was about to ask the same thing." Steve asked, fixing his gaze on Bella.

"He probably uses normal people as guards because they're expendable." Logan answered. "I remember that it was his first line of defense."

"Yep, that's the reason." Bella replied. "Which means that it's only just begun."

"In that case," Tony's mechanical voice said. "Lightening Rod, can I get a top up?"

Thor laughed. "Certainly, Friend Stark." Aiming his hammer toward the billionaire, he shot a bolt of lightening at the suit, charging him.

"Thanks."

"Most welcome."

"We still need to find Elizabeth." Sue's voice said from... somewhere.

"Sounds good – Ooh, look..." Clint said, preparing another arrow as regular dressed people began coming toward them. "Mutants."

"That... is... a lot." Bella said slowly. "This should be fun."

"Remind me to show you the definition of fun when we get back to the tower." Logan said.

"I'll head over with Sue." Natasha told Clint.
"Be safe." He replied, kissing her chastely before letting her go.

Hulk roared, not wanting to wait before he could smash something, but Bruce being more in control he had no choice but to do so.

"Shaw won't come out on his own." Erik told Loki, who seemed to want to stay beside him. "We have to find him."

"Agreed."

Of course, they soon found they actually didn't have to find him at all as a loudspeaker suddenly screeched. "Ah, my old friends, how lovely of you to come up and see the place. Do you like it?" Alex's voice echoed around the complex. "I see we have the Avengers, the Fantastic Four – minus the Thing, I'm not quite sure that was a good idea my dears, but alright. We also seem to have – ah, Bella dear, it's been quite some time since I last saw you."

"Not long enough in my opinion." Bella snapped.

"Touchy touchy, tsk, tsk, Bella love, you never were good with manners." Alex tutted. "Ah, and we have Wolverine and Rogue – representatives of the X-Men no doubt. But what is this I see? Could it really be – no, it couldn't."

"Hello Shaw." Erik answered gruffly.

"It is!" Alex shouted excitedly. "Aw, that is truly a marvelous thing. I have wanted to see you, but you keep hiding. A shame really, I was hoping you would have joined me." he sighed. "But of course, you're all here to see Elizabeth." he sighed again. "Too bad. Only some of you will, I'm afraid. Poor, poor, Loki... you'll join your precious Elizabeth soon."

Loki's eyes widened marginally and he looked at Erik. The Mutant's mouth was in a hard line, his eyes narrowed in anger as Shaw suddenly shouted something in German before a song played over the speakers. "Ready yourselves." Erik said. "It's about to begin."

The mutants all turned from where the speaker had spoken back to the Avengers, and shouting a few things amongst themselves, they attacked.

"Elizabeth?" Loki called to her, his hand stretched toward her as the wind blew through his shorter hair. Her hand reached up and grabbed onto his, his strength pulling her up to see over the cliff. "Well?" he asked, wrapping his arms around her from behind. "What do you think?"

"Do you even need to ask?" she giggled, resting against him. "It's beautiful."

He chuckled, kissing her temple before stepping back and undoing his tunic. "Now, we try it."

"Loki, I can't toss myself off a cliff!" she protested with a laugh.

"Why not? There's water beneath." Standing up straight in nothing but his trousers, he grabbed her about the waist. "It'll catch you."

She looked down. "Are you sure? It's... far isn't it? Too far for me."

"Nonsense."

Scott was working diligently, trying to hook Elizabeth up to all the fluids she needed. She was
dehydrated, with almost no nutrients. Reaching for the bag of blood he'd stolen from the medical ward, he carefully inserted an IV into her arm, keeping careful watch of the heart monitor which she was hooked up to.

He was set up in the old Quarantine ward which had been abandoned when a new one was built. The place hadn't been used in ages, the bulbs were dim and the walls were dusty, but he had set it up in such a way that it still looked abandoned. He had to.

"C'mon, Lizzie." he muttered to her as he hooked the blood up to the IV. "You don't get to die on me."

"But Loki!"

"Here, shall I jump first? Show you that you aren't as breakable as you think you are?" Loki replied with a laugh, going to the edge.

Lizzie's eyes widened, and she snagged him around the waist, bringing him back to her. "What if you hurt yourself?"

He laughed, turning around in her arms, and kissing her, although it seemed to her that something was off about it. "Relax, nothing will happen to me, I've done it dozens of times."

"You have?" she asked, looking down at the water. It was so blue, but had a darkness to it. She looked back at him. "Must I?"

Loki rolled his eyes. "Yes." he answered, untwining her arms from his waist and undoing the clasps on her dress. It wasn't long before she was only in her underwear, his hands undoing the ties in her hair, the wind blowing the dark tendrils around her face. "Shall we do it together?"

She nodded.

The heart monitor stopped momentarily and Scott looked up in horror. "No, nonono, no!" he panicked, smacking the monitor once. Maybe it was just malfunctioning. Nothing happened. "NO! Dammit Elizabeth you aren't allowed to die on me, you aren't!" he shouted at her unconscious form.

Placing his hands on her chest, he began to press down as he heard explosions in the distance.

Loki brought up another shield against the mutant who spewed fire as he plunged his knife into another who seemed to use speed as his weapon. Erik used the metal of the fire-spitter's necklace to choke the girl, causing her to become distracted from attacking Loki. A thunderstorm brewed above, and a downpour began, and Loki growled – but was grateful. For while it seemed to make a kind of disadvantage for him, it also did the same for his opponents, and for that Loki had to thank his brother.

A black blob moved past him at high speeds, and Loki barely had time to register it was Clint before the archer was knocked against an opposing wall and fell to the ground unconscious. Spinning around, his gaze leveled on the mutant who was responsible, and he threw the boy into a wall of ice, encasing him almost entirely.

Hulk roared, running through the crowd of mutants and picked one up, tossing him into his friends. Fandral yelled in pain as another mutant kicked him in the throat, as if trying to damage his windpipe, but Volstagg simply clunked the mutant's head with another mutant, and left the pair of them to lay discarded on the ground.
Steve got hit by an energy blast, knocking the wind out of him, and him to the ground. With a groan, he stood up, throwing his shield only to have it ricochet to him in such a way it almost knocked his head off. Of course, it didn't as Erik stopped it mid-air, and he was able to simply pluck it from its place with a grateful nod toward Magneto, which was returned.

Two Logans fought each other, it seemed, as a young boy swiped his claws at the older man. But Logan was more experienced, and soon the boy found himself against a wall with an adamantium claw at his throat.

"Wait!" he whimpered. "Please..."

Logan gave him an interested look, and the boy sheathed his claws, raising his hands in surrender. "Will you fight for us?" the boy looked at his comrades and swallowed before nodding.

"Let me save my brother and sisters?" the boy asked.

"If they join us, save them all." Logan said. "I'll take you somewhere safe when it's all over." The boy nodded. "What's your name?"

"Trevor."

"Well then, Trevor, betray us and I'll finish the job I started." Trevor nodded and unsheathed his claws again, looking at Logan for direction. "Protect her."

Trevor nodded, and attacked the mutant who was targeting Bella. She spun around and gave him a curt nod, which he gave in kind, before they stood back to back in their fighting.

Tony hovered above the din for a moment, looking for one man in particular — surely Shaw wasn't sitting behind the walls of the grand house waiting for the whole thing to end. He wasn't disappointed as he saw Alex standing above one of the buildings which was above the fight, casting illusions now and then against Loki and Erik. He truly liked playing mindgames.

Landing behind him, Tony cleared his throat, the man turning at the sound. "Hello there. By the way, you owe me an entire floor of R&D." Reaching out a hand, he blasted Alex into the fight below before he could respond.

"Loki...?" Scott heard Lizzie say quietly as her heart began to beat again.

"Yeah, yeah, call the god of mischief." Scott said in a frustrated tone. "Especially since you just died on me."

"I'm sorry..." she whispered, her eyes fluttering open.

"You better be!" Scott exclaimed. "I just saved your ass, and then you went and flatline—"

She smiled slightly. "I love you." He stopped talking, looking down at her in shock before he realized she wasn't looking at him but behind him. Slowly, he turned, but saw nothing. He turned back to her.

"Loki?" he asked her.

"Loki..."

"You love him?"
"Yes..."

"Where do I find him?"

Her lips curved again and she tried to say something, but he couldn't hear her. Leaning closer, he brought his ear to her lips before he pulled back, looking at the heart monitor just as the power went out.

Alex was furious, so furious he hadn't quite noticed that he had unconsciously fried the power generator which stood nearby in his effort to use the energy against Tony Stark. Ironman had simply dodged his electrical outbursts, shooting off his repulsors when he could. By now, however, Alex knew that he had been noticed, and quickly switched his power to that of invisibility, trying to use two powers at once as he once more shot off energy at Tony. However, he failed, and the electrical pulse hit the Hulk instead, angering the green monster.

Tony flew up as Alex became visible again, trying to change his power. Doing so, he reduced Bruce to about three feet in height, the Hulk looking in surprise at him, his voice no longer roaring in the same way. Alex chuckled darkly, throwing a bolt of lightening at the smaller Hulk, sending him crashing into the wall, a type of force-field keeping him against the wall.

Enraged, Tony flew down again, grabbing Alex by his shirt before shooting up into the sky, taking him as high as he dared. Alex reached up, touching Tony's suit, and short circuiting it and draining all the power. His hold on Alex vanished and he began to plummet.

"Jarvis!" Tony shouted as he freefell, unable to start up his suit. "Oh god, this could be very very bad." Alex turned into some kind of large bird, and flew beside him. "Oh, that is rich you egotistical jackass!" The bird cawed, and flew down below, grabbing Steve with his talons and pulling him up to the sky before dropping him. The Super-Soldier plummeted, his body dropping like a large stone - of course, Thor saw this act and quickly flew into action and brought Steve back to the ground.

Tony closed his eyes, awaiting impact when he suddenly stopped falling altogether. Opening his eyes, he watched as he began to float to a roof and dropped from a foot off the surface. He smiled behind his mask.

Erik turned from that roof to look at Shaw who he had seen land on a nearby building again, his bird-like appearance dark and daunting for most. "Loki." he said, getting the Asgardian's attention. Loki finished with a mutant, and turned toward him before looking to where he looked. Jaw clenched, he grabbed Erik by the arm, disappearing from the crowd.

Natasha ran from one room to another, her mind whirling in frustration and panic. She couldn't find Lizzie, no matter what building she entered, but what she did find was something she wished she would never see again. Children, men, women, all strapped to beds with equipment hooked up to them which made sure they stayed alive. It was horrific for her to see, and she felt a burning hatred for the man responsible.

At the fifth room of the building, Natasha stopped and stepped inside. The room was empty, although the table looked like it had had a person on it only recently. The monitors were still beeping furiously, although the heart one was missing. There was blood on the floor which led out, and a bit pooled on the table. Dried blood was encrusted on the straps, and discarded needles showed the same.

Looking around the room, Natasha stopped at the window, and Loki's words flitted through her
mind. 'there is a lone window from which you can see the outside. It's on a lake, surrounded by mountains...' Peering through the glass, she saw what he meant, the trees he looked up. Bringing up the other rooms in her mental screen, she noticed that not one of them had the same view.

There was only one thing she needed to confirm that this room was the one that she thought it was, and taking a note of the number, she ran to the doctor's office. Yanking on the number she opened the file, her heart plummeting as she saw the picture of Lizzie on the front, her name in big black letters. Her eyes roved over the record, her blood boiling as she saw what had been done.

Ripping the papers from the file, she folded them and put them in her suit and headed out.

The last time written down was an hour before by a Scott Walters, and she determined she would find him if it was the last thing she did.

Alex perched upon his point roof, watching the fight as he had before Ironman had rudely interrupted him. He watched as Hulk looked helplessly about the fighters, completely encased in his force-field as he roared to no avail. His beak seemed to smile as he saw Clint Barton try to regain consciousness as he was being attacked at the same time. It was amusing to see them all fight against his army, their abilities rather weak in comparison to his. He viewed it as a testing ground – the Avengers were only the first to use, next he would move to Xavier's School.

The one thing that he found himself raising a metaphoric eyebrow at was the sight of some of his mutants turning on the rest, and siding with the Avengers. He expected it almost, after all soldiers were so fickle. He made a mental note to send them to his R&D when it was over, in punishment for their treachery. Of course, that was if they lived.

He hadn't planned on bringing his plans to fruition until Thanos ordered him – but it seemed that those plans would have to change. After all, the Avengers wanted to expose his plans early. Still, he reveled in it, it had been so long since he'd been in power, and he craved the feeling. Stretching his wings he turned back into a man, not liking the feeling of feathers very much.

As soon as he did, he found himself bound with green ropes and yanked to the roof with a thud. His head craned and he saw Loki standing there with a gleam in his eyes, he had to smile.

"Ah, what is this? You left your friends to see me? How quaint." he sneered as Loki stalked toward him. "You know, you really shouldn't kill me, my friend. After all, you are on probation."

"I think in this case, I will gladly return to the Tower of Solitude." Loki replied, his dagger in his hand. "So, how would you like to die?"

Alex laughed. "To think, I was about to ask the same of you." He said and Loki flew back about twenty feet, landing on the ground six inches from the small wall on the roof. Alex stood up, the ropes seeming to dissipate."You know, I must say, I have inherited many powers over my lifetime. I have been wondering how it will clash with your magic, but now I suppose I know."

Loki felt something in his mind which he hadn't felt since his dealings with Thanos. He felt weak, and with a growl toward Alex, he created a clone of himself, teleporting down below once more as Alex attacked the clone.

"You have very interesting tricks, god of mischief." Alex snarled, turning around and seeing Loki on the ledge. "But you have no idea of my weaponry."

"Then show me." Loki countered, and Alex smiled.
Before he could act, however, he was blasted back by Tony's repulsors, causing Loki to turn toward the billionaire.

"I told you I wanted my piece of him." Tony said simply, landing on the roof. "By the way, thanks Metalbender, I needed that help earlier."

Erik stepped out from behind the small building-like structure which held the stairwell down into the building. "You're welcome, Stark."

"So, what's the plan for – Ah!" Tony yelled suddenly, his body bending over. "That bastard!"

Erik and Loki turned toward Alex, his arm outstretched toward Tony. "Let's see how you survive now, Tony Stark." Shaw crowed as Tony collapsed onto the ground, his hand at his chest before he went silent.

Before Alex could crow over Tony's prone body at the other two, Loki threw his dagger at him, the metal embedding in his flesh deeply. Alex grunted, yanking the metal out and throwing it back at Loki before it suddenly flew back at Alex, embedding itself in his chest before it flew into Loki's hand. Alex looked toward Erik, and with a flick of his wrist he sent the older man flying into the stairway housing and Loki clear off the building.

Erik grunted in pain, trying to stand once more but Alex slammed him back into the wall. "I must say, old man, you put up quite a little fight – however childish it is." Alex said, getting into Erik's face. "Funny, I almost wish Kate had been here, maybe you would give it a little more, huh?" Erik's eyes blazed in fury at the man at the mention of his wife. "Did I ever tell you how loudly she screamed?"

Alex suddenly flew back as Erik used the metal of the air conditioner to grab him, yanking him back with quite a bit of force. Alex heated the metal, melting it before he flipped powers and threw Erik to nearly the edge. Stalking toward him, he held him in the air, casting illusions onto the older man which only he could see. "Do you see them, Erik?" Alex taunted. "Do you see her?" Eriks eyes watered, filling with pain which only he knew, transfixed on whatever scene he saw.

Before Alex could continue, he was blasted by Tony's repulsor one last time, engulfing him in flames. "My last hurrah." Tony muttered. Alex turned on the mere mortal, and sneered a moment before he reached his hand out to Tony one last time, the light on Tony's chest going dark as Ironman fell back and remained unmoving.

Erik struck back at Alex as his back was turned, using the metal around the building to be as weapons toward the man. Unknowing to both, Loki returned to the top, already having fixed Hulk back to his normal size, and allowing him to smash the mutants below. Alex swirled some kind of power around Erik, and the older man momentarily stumbled.

Loki used his distraction of Erik to his advantage and encased Alex in a block of ice, knowing it would take a minute for the other man to switch to something which could melt it. "Rogue..." he called and she suddenly appeared from nowhere it seemed. "Approach the ice, you should be able to touch his hand. My daggers are laced with a paralytic which I got from Stark, he's going to have a slower reaction time." She nodded and obeyed, walking toward the ice, it melting away to his hand. She touched it, draining him only slightly before it seemingly turned on her, and she was the one who felt weak. Letting go of his hand, she collapsed to the floor, shaking her head.

"We need a telepath." Erik ground out, standing up again. "But we don't have one here." The ice began to melt, and Loki gripped his dagger a bit tighter. Alex was revealed, his skin glowing red from the heat he had obviously used. Before he could really attack Loki, Magneto had ripped the
door off the hinges of the stairwell and flung it at the back of Alex Shaw. The other mutant fell to the ground, then turned on the old man, throwing flames his way. His cloak caught on fire, but he simply threw the material to the ground to turn to ashes.

Alex jumped up in seeming super-strength, and flames suddenly licked at both men, swirling around the roof in a fiery tornado as Alex laughed maniacally. Loki protected himself and Erik with a cage of ice, the inferno melting it quickly nonetheless. Suddenly it stopped and Alex gave a cry, his powers seeming to suddenly diminish.

Rogue had used his distraction to touch the back of his neck, and he dropped to the ground trying to reach back to grab her in turn. But Loki and Erik had already acted, and using the metal from Tony's suit, Erik had fixed him to the roof while Loki had magically created a boundary around him which confined him to his little space.

Realizing he was about to pass out, Rogue withdrew, panting heavily. Loki walked over to Tony in minor concern, his suit already stripped from him by Erik left him open. Without the suit, Loki could see what Alex had meant about Tony 'surviving', the Arc reactor was destroyed it looked like, and Loki knew enough about the billionaire to know that there was a piece of metal which would make its way to his heart.

"Rogue, go back down and find Doctor Richards." Loki instructed.

Anna-Marie nodded, and disappeared down the stairwell which was in the building. She looked back only once to see Loki and Erik both standing menacingly over Alex Shaw. Yet, she felt absolutely no pity.
Chapter 37

Tony felt really out of it, the voices above him enough to make him really curious and yet not caring. "I think he's coming around." a voice above him said, and the tone took a moment before it went through his mental recognition and the face of Reed Richards came to mind.

"Well that's good on one end... on another, it's not." A new voice said. "Loki gave me this, he said it could help save his life...but with that shard in him, I'm not sure it would help."

"Did he tell you how it works?" Reed asked. "Where is Loki anyway?"
The other person sighed. "Taking care of Shaw with Erik... and frankly I don't want to know what they did to him. When I got up there he was looking pretty terrified...I guess Loki was showing him what he was going to do."

Reed was quiet for a moment. "You don't think...? Bruce, you can't think that they'd—?"

"Frankly I both wouldn't be surprised, and think that the bastard deserves it."

Bruce! Tony Finally recognized the voice, although it sounded a bit out of pitch. Of course, hearing that Loki likely was doing something which was 'terrifying' was a slight concern. He may not entirely like the jackass, but to hear that he may be jeopardizing his probation was something Tony didn't like... after all, he was somewhat fun when he wasn't being insane.

"Is he awake yet?" Steve. Good ol' Steve.

"Tony?"

'Really?' Tony mentally screamed, of course he couldn't be heard.

'Don't count on that, Mr. Stark.' A feminine voice whispered in his mind, and if he could have jumped he would have. 'It's alright, I understand your surprise.'

'Who the hell-

"-Is this?" Someone on the outside was on his wavelength.

"Bruce, Reed, this is Clara. She's a mutant here. Saved my life actually." Steve answered.

Tony heard Clara chuckle. "It wasn't hard to save. Just a matter of distracting him, after that it was easy." Her accent was British, and Tony mentally groaned. As if he didn't have enough British-sounding people already in his life.

"How's Tony?" Steve repeated.

"We're gonna get him on the Helicarrier soon. Clint's getting it started up so we can lifeflight him to LA. He's gonna need surgery." Reed answered.

"Have you seen Loki and Erik?" Steve asked, concern in his voice. "Have we found Lizzie?"

"Yes and no respectively." Higher-pitched Bruce replied. "Loki took Erik and Shaw god-only-knows where after he made sure I had Tony under my watch. Lemme tell you, I do not want to be in Shaw's shoes. The look in both men's eyes was insanity. I don't think I want to know what they do to him."
Tony could easily imagine what the pair had planned, and to be sure he didn't expect anything pretty – closed casket no less – that was, of course, providing that there was a body when they were done. If they did by any chance leave a body worth burial, Tony would light it ablaze and dance on the ashes.

"Tony thinks that with their backgrounds he expects no less than evisceration and incineration."

Clara's voice cut through, and the men went silent.

"Sorry...what?" Bruce's hand touched Tony's shoulder, shaking him – although the force and the size of the hand shocked Tony. "Tony?"

"He's awake. Trapped in his mind at present."

'What. The. Hell. Woman?'

"Well, Tony, the short answer is that I am a telepath." The woman replied audibly. "And your thoughts are so loud that it's hard to concentrate on the actual conversation."

'Ooh, that's rough. Are you pretty at least?' A mental slap had him reeling.

'Hope you learned.' Her voice echoed in his mind. 'Now do please shut up.' She was a firecracker, and Tony wondered... 'no, Tony, I am not a redhead.'

'Legitimate inquiry."

Thor groaned loudly, frustrated beyond belief that he couldn't find Loki. He was worried as well, hoping his brother didn't do something too horrible... for while he hated Shaw, he did not want for all the good work regarding Loki to be wasted via Loki's want for revenge. His eyes scanned the bodies around the complex, sighing heavily. So many lives were lost due to the blind ambition of a madman.

He felt a presence behind him, but it wasn't one he knew. Spinning around he prepared to let his hammer loose when the man – covered in blood and haggard – raised his hands. "Please don't hurt me." he begged. "I'm looking for Loki."

Thor's brows furrowed. "And who are you?"

"Scott." The so-named replied. "Please, I need to find him urgently, he's the only one who can save her."

"Her?" Thor was confused, then his blue eyes dawned in recognition. "Elizabeth?"

Scott nodded, his eyes wide. "You know her?" Thor didn't answer, walking toward the man with purpose. "She's dying. I only know his name because she keeps whispering it – and I heard someone mention him over back there."

"I know not where my brother is." Thor replied sadly. "But if Lady Elizabeth is in danger, take me to her."

"Can you help her?" Scott asked. "Because if you can't—"

"Don't argue with me! Where is she?" Thor boomed, gripping his hammer tighter. He had no intention of killing the man, but he wanted results, and it didn't seem that the man was going to move otherwise.
Scott eyed the hammer, his powers rising up in him. He squashed the instinct to attack the man, a multitude of powers presenting themselves for his use should he want them. Powers of others. "All right, all right." he replied, walking up to him. "Fastest way." Grabbing his arm, he teleported him to the building where he had Lizzie.

The light flickered on above, and Thor's eyes squinted as they adjusted to the sudden flash. "Lady Elizabeth?" Thor murmured in shock. This wasn't the Elizabeth he knew, who was vibrant and healthy. He turned to the man.

"I told you, she's dying."

The knife in his hand was covered in blood, his thirst for the life now satiated as he looked at his companion whose eyes were fixed on their deeds. Alex Shaw was lying in a pool of his own blood. Dead. It was a gruesome sight to behold to say the least, and one which Loki was quick to eliminate by setting his body on fire. It had been a slow death, one which left both men's revenge fulfilled, and Loki's knowledge spread.

As it turned out, Erik's vengeance had to do much more with simply his granddaughter... it had to do with his wife. Unknown to Loki, Katherine Lehnsherr, Erik's wife, had been killed by the man who was now ablaze, and was the cause of his agony for many decades. The killing blow had been dealt by the mutant, who would forever treasure the terror in the eyes of his victim.

"Fifty years." Erik murmured. "Fifty years I hunted him – not including the twenty which Elizabeth exchanged."

Loki said nothing, but looked to the heavens where he knew Heimdall was watching. He would pay for this, he knew, though he was surprised that Odin had not already opened the bifrost and summoned him up to face trial and further punishment. His sentence on Midgard was over, he was sure, and he would be forever isolated to whatever punishment Odin put upon him.

But before such a thing happened, he needed to find Elizabeth.

"Come, we must return. I don't hear the sounds of fighting any longer." Loki said, turning to Erik who was watching as the body turned to ash.

"Agreed." Erik replied quietly, turning toward Loki. "We must find Elizabeth."

In a moment they were back in the compound. A flash of red caught Loki's eye, and he turned to see Natasha run up to him. "Thank god I found you!" she exclaimed.

"You're quite welcome." Loki quipped, but the feral look in her eyes caught his attention. "What is wrong?" Wordlessly, she handed him the papers she had found which he quickly leafed through. He read, and with that his ire kindled once more. He would go to Hel and bring back Shaw if only to kill him again – he handed the papers to Erik.

"We should have found a way to prolong his death." Erik basically growled, his hands crumpling the papers as he re-read them, agony from his own youth beginning to spark and flame. "The things he did. Is she still alive?"

"I'd tell you if I knew." Natasha replied, and at Loki's questioning glance, she continued with. "I can't find her. Her room was empty when I entered the building, I've been looking all over but I—"

"LOKI!" Thor's voice roared, and Loki sighed. He didn't want to deal with whatever Thor had to say.
"Not now, Thor!" Loki snapped.

"Yes, now! Elizabeth is dying!"

Loki sprang into action. "Where?!" he demanded and Thor spun his hammer, grabbing his brother by the back of his armor before he flew into the air, landing across the complex. Scott stood outside, his face somber and full of pain. "Where is she?"

"Inside." Scott replied calmly, unaffected by the demigod's tone. "You're too late. She's dead."

Dead. The word reverberated in Loki's skull, and without another word to the man he ran into the building, the magic from the locket leading him straight to where she was – he didn't even know how he got there but before he knew it he was in the doorway. Her body lay on the bed, an exact image of what he had seen of her in his visions. The heart-monitor gave a steady tone, her heartbeat a single line of nothing. He stumbled forward, unable to think, the pain crushing him as he approached her, his hands reaching out to her face.

"Elizabeth..." he whispered, his hands laying on her cheeks for a moment, as if to establish to himself that she wasn't a dream this time. Her skin was cold, her eyes closed, and he scooped her up into his arms, cradling her small body to his chest. "Elizabeth..." he whispered more urgently, his hand brushing her hair from her forehead. "I've come for you..." His voice cracked with emotion as he felt as if his heart was ripped from his chest.

She couldn't be dead. She couldn't. Not after everything. Not after he'd come to save her, had worked so hard to find her. The Norns couldn't be so cruel, could they? Raising his face toward the ceiling, he let out a heartbreaking yell, rocking gently as he held her in his arms, tears now freely streaming down his face as he looked back into her face, his hand cradling her head against his shoulder his lips touching her forehead.

Erik watched from the doorframe, the familiar ache from when he lost his wife settling into him. He knew intimately the agony which the other felt, and he stepped into the room, coming around Loki to see his granddaughter. His hand reached out to touch her head, his thumb tracing circles on her temple. "Liebling," he whispered. He had never known her but for a few hours when she was young, but he had always kept an eye on her. He met Loki's eye, the pain in the green orbs intense, and he had no doubt that he looked much the same when Kate had died.

Suddenly, the heart monitor beeped...

Erik looked over, unbelieving almost as it beeped again. It was a shallow beat, but it was there, and with aged eyes filled with almost unexpected hope, he watched as it steadily continued. Loki's eyes flickered from the machine to the woman in his arms, just as shocked as his companion as his hand moved quickly to her neck, the flutter of a heartbeat against his fingertip. "She—she—" he couldn't complete his thought, his hand moving to her nose where he could feel a slight breath leave her... then again. His eyes roving over her form once more, he unhooked her from the monitor, cradling her in his arms as he left the room, Erik hot on his heels.

"Okay, I'm beginning to get really, really worried." Jane said for the fifth time since no one had made any contact whatsoever with the Tower and it had been over six hours.

Darcy rolled her eyes from her place at the bar, though inwardly she was just as frustrated with the lack of communication. "Jane, what do you expect them to do?" she asked, taking a sip of her coffee. "Be all 'oh, wait, bad guy, I gotta call my girlfriend. Could you hold that particular blast until I let her know I'm alright?' and the bad guy is like: 'Suuure why not? Do you mind if I call my mother as
Jane leveled a glare on Darcy.

"Don't worry so much, Jane." Veronika added from her place on the couch where she was, flipping through baby pictures to cope. All that was left of her family was in danger since she'd sent Bella to Alaska as well, and she wasn't quite sure what would happen should she lose them all in one shot and not be there in some way to know she could have prevented their deaths.

Farbauti sat next to her, her green eyes studying her friend's face. She knew what was going on... she only hoped that Loki had been wise enough to give Elizabeth the elixir she'd given him. If he hadn't, she knew it might be too late to save her – the girl would be too far gone, the only option would be is if she went to Asgard for healing.

Out of thin air, Loki materialized, looking worse for wear and his eyes showing helplessness as he cradled Elizabeth in his arms. Erik stood beside him.

"Oh my God!" Darcy exclaimed as Veronika and Farbauti jumped up.

For once, Loki ignored any quips or remarks about that particular phrase and focused on Veronika. "You're a doctor aren't you? You worked in a hospital, you showed me memories of Elizabeth's labor – you were there." He rushed out.

"Yes, I'm a doctor." Veronika replied, her hand reaching out to touch her daughter, her heart gripped in fear. She may have been a doctor, but she wasn't sure she even knew how to help Lizzie in this case. "Jarvis, does Tony have medical supplies? IV's?"

"In his 'toy' room, Mrs. Donovan." the AI replied, surprisingly quite serious. "There is a room off of it which serves him as a medical facility."

"There's no time to lose getting there, touch my arm, I'll teleport us." Loki commanded, and without a second thought they were in said room, the alarms which Tony had set going off for a few moments before they were overrun by Jarvis. Loki moved quickly, and he and Vera entered the room which was mentioned a few moments later, and Elizabeth was set on the table there, her mother setting to work in no time.

Loki could only watch as Veronika worked quickly, setting IV's and various other equipment up to monitor Elizabeth. "Can you save her?" Loki asked, looking at Veronika with a lost kind of hope. She met his gaze, worried about him in a way she hadn't been before. Lizzie was his lifeline, his string to sanity... and she knew that if he lost her he would plunge into a darkness he would never pull himself from. "Veronika?"

"I don't know, Loki..." she replied. "I don't know."

His green eyes filled with fear as he looked down at his love. "Maybe I can—AAH!" He cried out in pain, a part of him feeling like he was being ripped apart. No... he couldn't lose his powers now. He had to save her! He tried to hold onto them, using his last tendrils of magic left to him as they dwindled to stabilize her, surrounding her with a green glow like Frigga had always taught him. It seemed that for some reason that the powers waited a moment, allowing him to fix a few internal injuries. Her lungs were so weak, and her heart barely was beating, it seemed that she was being killed from the inside...

. Suddenly, the glow faded and his powers returned like a snap to a whip to the locket as he saw stars from the recoil. "No!" he tried to protest as he lost consciousness, the struggle between himself and his powers too much.
He collapsed.

Several hours after Loki and Erik arrived, the rest of the crew returned – with the few extras they had picked up at Alex's compound. The returning flight had been a quiet one, and it was obvious from the looks on their faces that they were a mixture of relieved and worried. Relief came from the knowledge that Alex was no longer any kind of threat, but the worry had more to do with both the state of Lizzie and the fact that Tony was having a hard time breathing.

"We need to get him to a hospital." Natasha stated for the fifth time. "This is a medical procedure none of us are qualified for."

"At the same time, we should consider Tony and just what he would like." Clint replied, looking at Steve who held a three-foot-tall Bruce. "And I doubt that anyone could fix that."

"This isn't about what Tony wants." Steve said clearly, sighing down at Bruce who looked a bit put out that he wasn't large enough to do much. "We need to do what he needs."

"I could take him to Asgard." Thor interjected softly, looking at his friends. "We have much more skilled healers than those here." The rest of the crew were quiet for a moment, considering.

Bruce was the first who spoke. "You could take Lizzie too, couldn't you?" he asked, cringing at his slightly higher-pitched voice. "She was looking like she could die at any moment, that cordial thingy probably the only thing that stopped her heart from failing when Loki brought her to me." It was still so strange for the other Avengers to truly consider how Loki had acted, a complete difference to what they so clearly knew of him.

"Eir could help her, yes." Thor said, sighing. "I will speak to Loki. The sooner we get to Asgard, the safer everyone is." Looking to the Warriors three, he walked up and began speaking to them in Norse.

"So where'd they take Tony?" Clint asked.

"Medical room." Bruce answered. "Reed is seeing what he can do – but Reed isn't a medical doctor. In all fairness, neither am I so I shouldn't be too upset." A small smile crossed his small face, obviously as he was trying to find a bit of humor in the situation.

Natasha's brows furrowed as she looked around. "Where is Logan and Bella? And the...other mutants?"

"Logan decided to take them to Xavier's." Steve supplied. "he wanted them to meet the professor, he also wanted to see if there was a mutant at the school who had some kind of healing powers or something."

The group was silent for a moment, all thinking about one thing or another.

"Dr. Banner, Dr. Richards needs you in the medical room. And he says he needs you quickly, we're losing Mr. Stark." Jarvis suddenly spoke, and Steve looked down at the small man in concern.

With a nod, Bruce tightened his grip on the super soldier."Alright, I'm holding on."
had been a relief.

But what were the Norns playing at?

She was worried, confused, and most certainly upset. Her visions had shown so much happiness, with only a minor setback of Elizabeth going to Alex – but nowhere had she seen this agony which she now was aware of. Elizabeth near death, and somehow she had missed what was going to happen to Tony Stark... well, she knew how that had happened. Her focus on Loki seemed to have distracted her from the rest of the Avengers as a whole – save Thor – if she had known she could have warned them. But now it was no matter, the damage to their bodies had been done.

She continued to pace, hoping that Thor would somehow convince Loki to send Elizabeth to Asgard, and thereby Tony, her latest vision something she had seen as the most serious. But she didn't think there was anything she could do, Thanos was about to strike Heimdall said, and Odin had told her she was not allowed to go to Midgard as she had hoped after Shaw's destruction, he had also told her to let Loki decide for once when it came to Elizabeth, as he had also been informed of happenings on Midgard.

Although she had not wanted it, it had turned into an argument regarding his concern over the mortal's life, and Frigga sorrowed that he was beginning to lose hope for their son. He had replied that Loki's murder of the mutant Shaw had been somewhat influential in his decision, as Loki had done the very thing he had been imprisoned for. He said he understood why he had, but that he should have found another way to get rid of the problem.

To Frigga, Odin's statement had it's truth, although her understanding of why Loki did what he did was far too strong. There was no other way. Should they have simply imprisoned the mutant, he would have eventually escaped, and once more terrorized Midgard – though this time with a vengeance. Perhaps Loki could have killed him a bit quicker, Heimdall's description of the way the mutant died making the Queen grimace. Yet, even that she understood. She always understood him where others did not, as if he were her very own.

Stopping in her tracks, she changed her direction, heading for her only source of communication with Midgard. Thor had to be warned, and although Odin had told her to stop interfering, she couldn't.

He was and always would be her son.

Darkness swirled around Loki, voices dancing around his head along with an irritating beeping sound. Crying could be heard in a corner somewhere, though it was in the darkness he was in. Was it himself? He didn't know, but it seemed he was living through a kind of distorted memory, a dream where Elizabeth was imprisoned by Thanos, where she was living through the hell he had gone through. He hated dreams. They always had to do with his past, with his fears... the place of his own torture where everything he worried would happen did.

When he was a child, it had been Frigga dying which he always feared, some monster killing her – of course, then it had been Jotuns who he had dreamed, and yet he was the monster he always had feared. When he had gotten older, more mature, and seen the horrors of killing and war, it had been Thor who he dreamed a death, from some idiotic battle he felt he had to fight out of some misplaced sense of proving himself.

But now... now his dreams were of Elizabeth and had been nightmares ever since she'd left. This nightmare he was having she was on a table, connected to every monitor known to Midgardian medicine, her heart barely beating and her breathing shallow. A nightmare. But where did visions
blur with reality? The more he watched this particular nightmare, the more he began to realize it was more than simply a dream. He had held her in his arms as her heart had stopped... her body had been with him while her soul had flown off to Valhalla.

His eyes opened, the irritating beeping noise coming obviously from beside him. His head turned to see Tony laying in a bed, Richards and Banner – though much, much smaller – fussing over him. Turning his head to the other side, he was greeted by the sight which proved that his dreams were not simply visions of pain. She wasn't looking well, although the monitors which were attached to her said that she still lived. Her heart beat. She breathed. Living, in all technical versions of the word... but was 'living' enough?

Getting up from his bed which was between them, he crossed the step of space which separated him from Elizabeth, his hand reaching for her face with a gentle touch. Shaw was indeed dead, she was safe from him forever, he had assured it. Yet, such an act had been too late, if her condition was anything to go by. Those precious first few days – or even had he been wise enough to whisk her away when they had been in Rochester – had cost her dearly.

"Loki..." Thor's voice sounded from a corner of the room, and turning he realized that Tony had been taken out while he had been thinking about Elizabeth, Thor somehow coming in soon after. "How is she?"

Loki sighed. "Her heart is beating... her lungs take in air... by definition she lives." he said, looking down at her. "But her mind, and her soul... I fear they are somewhere else."

Thor walked up beside him, his large hand resting on the rail of the bed. "Mother came to see me." he said softly, looking at Loki.

"Did she now?" Loki replied, his tone blank of any true curiosity. "And what did she say?"

This part, Thor knew wasn't going to go over well, and clearing his throat he braced himself for whatever words were about to be thrown his way. "She said that Elizabeth's condition is much worse than it looks. She regained the will to live, but it will not be enough. Lady Elizabeth can only keep her own heart beating for so long." he said, sighing. "Loki, we need to take her to Asgard. Eir can do far more, and mother will make—"

"No." Loki interrupted with a fire in his eyes. "I am not putting her in more danger."

"How can Asgard be danger?" Thor asked, slightly incredulous. "They are the best healers the Nine Realms have to offer—"

"They also view me among the worst of villains – save Thanos himself – and I have no doubt that there are many who would like to pay me back for all the trouble I've caused." Loki snapped. "There are many healers beneath Eir who wholeheartedly agreed at my trial that I should be shut away for the rest of eternity, do you think that they would be so idle as to ignore the fact that my love lies in a bed underneath their supervision?" He scoffed, shaking his head. "I think not."

"You are allowing your bitterness and concern to cloud your vision." Thor replied with fervor. "Asgard is the only place that she can find the attention she needs."

"Yes, at the hands of cutthroats." Loki mocked, smiling. "They would sooner send me to my death than help the woman who I wish to one day make my wife."

Thor shook his head. "You underestimate the fact that neither mother nor I would allow it."

"Oh? And you think that somehow the healers would give you more credence than the Allfather –
who I've no doubt would rather that I was sent immediately to my cell the moment I stepped back in his precious realm?" Loki challenged, giving his brother a bitter laugh. "She's not going."

Thor resisted the urge to hit his brother, wishing there was some way he could get some sense into the head which was so stubborn. "Yet you would trust her to the hands of Midgardian technology? She is at more risk from them than Eir and her healers would ever give her."

"Veronika and Banner I trust. They care about her." Loki said stubbornly.

The Thunderer ground his teeth, shaking his head at Loki. "You say you love her... and yet—" His sentence was once more cut off as Loki shoved him against the wall, his fingers already wrapped around his throat as tears formed in Loki's eyes – anger and pain mingled.

"How dare you?!" He hissed. "How dare you question my love?!!"

"Your stubbornness will kill her!" Thor roared. "If you let her stay here, she will die!"

Suddenly they found themselves at the other sides of the room, Sue Storm in between them. "What the hell do you think you're doing?" she asked, her eyes appraising them in turn like a scolding mother. "Fighting in the medical room? Really?"

Loki's eyes met Thor's with an intensity which the Thunderer could feel into his being. He had said the wrong thing, that was clear, and whatever progress he had made with Loki had been destroyed with that one phrase. Yet, they both had been right. Thor knew that should Elizabeth stay where she was, she would die – but he knew he could not assure Loki that she would be safe in Asgard. There were vengeful people there. Realizing that the woman in front of them was saying something, he decided to listen.

"If you're gonna act like children," Sue was saying. "You guys can take it outside. We all don't want – and know you won't want – to accidentally bump into one of the machines which are keeping her heart going. So let's go." Not really giving them an option, she used her powers to pull them off the wall and push them out of the room. Door shutting securely behind them, she left them in the hallway.

Loki's jaw was clenched, his eyes fixed firmly on the wall across from where they were standing, his mind running miles a minute. Damn Thor. Damn his ideas. Did only ever always think of himself? Yes, Thor thought his beloved Asgard was that which would save anyone who came into it's borders. Naive Thor. He sighed, turning to his once-called-brother with one last retort. "Elizabeth is staying here." he said with finality, walking back into the room.

Thor was left in the hallway, sighing heavily at his brother's back. Loki was too stubborn for his own good, but Thor wouldn't let that stubbornness kill the one woman who he cared about. He had to figure out a way to get her out of his brother's grasp, or his protectiveness would kill her.

"So tell me, what exactly do you remember?" Steve asked their newest recruit – Clara – the morning after. So far she had only met the Avengers themselves, catching glimpses of the various other members of their crowded team. She chuckled, taking a sip of her orange juice.

"I remember waking up in Alex's compound, and asking him what my name was." Clara replied, shrugging. "I suppose I just had a minor case of amnesia. Either way he decided my time was better served – after the initial tests – by his side. Of course, I kind of preferred it... the powers he gave me are a little... haywire."

Steve nodded. "So I've heard. Lizzie has that problem." he said.
"Ah yes, Donovan – or Anesthesia – I met her once. Alex kept us apart for the most part, dunno why. Guess he didn't want to have to choose which one of us became his right hand in the end." She replied with a snicker. "You know, I actually was liking my time off."

"How good did you know Alex?" Steve inquired. Clara shrugged.

"Not really good. He was trying to romance me though – and I do mean romance. For some reason he thought I'd be interested in him. Haven't the faintest why." Footsteps informed them that someone else was entering, and both turned to see Thor. "Oh hey, god of thunder, why lookest thou so distraught?"

Thor's head turned toward her with a small smile, and he sighed. "I'm looking for Magneto. Do you know where he is?"

"Magneto? Is that the guy that wears like... maroon?" Clara asked, looking at Steve for confirmation. Steve nodded. "I think I saw him leave with the redhead that I haven't met."

"Bella." Steve supplied.

"Bella." Clara finished with the new information. Learning it all was a task indeed.

The Prince nodded, walking toward them. "Thank you Lady Clara."

"Most welcome, your highness." Clara replied, and although her look was slightly flirtatious, her tone showed that she was truly only playing with him. "Though really, what's wrong? You look like someone kicked your puppy."

Her tone and style of humor reminded him of Elizabeth, and Thor felt somewhat sadder than he had before. "Yesterday, I made the mistake of angering my brother over Elizabeth. He has since made Veronika agree that only himself, herself, Banner, Richards and Lady Nell be allowed into the room. She insisted on Lady Nell, apparently she is some kind of healer, but Loki isn't sure just how well he can trust her." He said as Clara got up and poured him a coffee. He thanked her and turned to Steve. "My brother is stubborn."

Clara chuckled. "Sounds like your brother is paranoid." she commented.

"That too." Steve replied.

"Though who is... Veronika?" She inquired, blinking a bit as if the name left some signature of recognition in her mind.

"Veronika Lehnsherr, she's Lizzie's mom." Clint's voice added from behind as he slid into a stool at the counter. "Good morning. Any improvement, Thor?"

"None, friend Hawk." Thor replied soberly, turning to the fridge for something to eat.

Clint grumbled. "Tony's getting worse. Erik can only hold that shard away from his heart for so long – and when Erik is off in Germany to inform his little band of misfits that he isn't returning yet because he's decided to play house with the Avengers – it gets that much closer."

"Erik?" Clara wanted clarification again.

"Magneto."

"Oh."
"He's in Germany?" Steve asked. "Is he going to try to get the Brotherhood to join us?"

"Dunno. Maybe. Hope not."

"Why not?" Clara.

"Because they're about second when it comes to being bastards that Alex's little band was." Clint replied. "They've been causing havoc since the sixties."

Clara nodded. "Fascinating. Alex didn't tell me about them."

"Yeah well... Alex and Lehnsherr go a long way back." Clint said, getting up to rummage through the food Thor and wrangled from the fridge. "What I recently heard from Rogue is that Erik's wife was killed by Alex originally. That's where his true feud starts with the guy."

"Alex killed his wife?" Steve asked incredulously.

"Yep. That's why he had a bone to pick with Alex. It was more than just his granddaughter, it was his wife – and Vera somehow plays into this when it comes to why she faked her death." Clint explained, looking miserably at the cereal he was eating. "You know, I'm so used to either Darcy cooking, or Lizzie – or your girl" Steve blushed at the reference to Emma. "I forgot what normal people eat like."

"Meaning you forgot that cereal is considered a breakfast food." Clara replied with an impish smile. Clint nodded. "What would you like?" The archer thought for a moment, but before he opened his mouth, Clara had already read his mind, practically danced over to the fridge and looked inside. "Gentlemen, you are in luck." She said, pulling out bacon and eggs, setting them down on the counter before turning to Steve, Thor and Clint. "I... am a cook."

Clint smiled widely, looking down at his cereal in distaste before heading over to the disposal and throwing it down. "And I... am a very hungry guy who needs more than cereal." he replied. "Can you help me?"

Clara only smiled, proving herself useful.
Veronika sighed, her hands smoothing Lizzie's hair back off her forehead. There was so little she could do, and she felt so helpless. In all the time that she had sat by and watched her daughters lives go on without her, it had been with the knowledge that should they ever need her she could come...she could help them, save them. Yet, here she was, and although she had saved her daughter's body, Loki's murmurings had been right – they had lost Lizzie.

"Vera..."

The mother turned, seeing Nell standing there, her green eyes filled with sympathy. Veronika managed a broken smile, looking back to her daughter with a sorrowful look. "You know, she was always such a precocious child. She spoke earlier than Bella did, walked earlier. She was determined to be a fully functioning human being as soon as she could." a broken laugh came. "You know, my husband and I used to joke that she was going to be older than us within five years, her very will having such a strength." She swallowed, looking up at Nell again with tears flooding into her eyes. "But Now I've lost her, I've lost her and I can't do anything about it."

Farbauti stiffened a moment, feeling the pain of the other woman slamming into her, empathy exuding from the Jotun as she rushed toward her friend, enveloping her in her arms. "You haven't lost her yet..." she said, holding her as she sobbed into her denim jacket. "No one has... she's strong, Vera. She's got your strength, your will, your determination. She won't leave Loki like this, she won't leave any of you." The sobs arose with a greater volume, Vera's finally breaking down from everything she had endured.

"I've lost everything, Nell." She sobbed. "I lost my husband, my children, my mother... my father to a degree." she said, sniffling between words. "I cannot lose her! I cannot lose her! She's my baby... my little girl..." Farbauti shushed her, brushing her hair with her fingers as she tried to figure out what they were going to do. Loki was stubborn, and it would take quite the force to push him from his staunch belief that Elizabeth had to stay on Midgard or else she'd die.

Thor was right, Elizabeth had to be taken to Asgard if she was going to survive, but the only thing which stood in the way was the very one who wanted her with him the most. She had to think, she had to plan... but what? What could she do to change Loki's mind? She'd barely spoken to him, and going up to tell him in this time that she was his mother didn't seem like a very good idea. Somehow though, she would have to-

Beethoven's 5th Symphony began playing, muffled from layers of a jacket in the corner. Farbauti sighed, looking at Vera a moment in contemplation of perhaps leaving the phone alone... "Give me one second." she finally conceded, walking over to the coat and withdrawing the device. Black brows furrowed as she read the name, pressing the green button to answer it.

"No dice, Nell." Logan said before she could answer. "No one here is qualified for what we need."

Green eyes fell behind their lids, the dark head dropping down in defeat.

"Well then... I guess we all know what that means."

"Jora..."

"Yes Jodis?" the dark haired Norn murmured in reply to her sister as she sat hunched over her
weaving of Elizabeth Donovan's future. The darker shades involved in the latest stitches clear to any observer.

"...Please tell me you aren't going to do what I think you are."

Jora looked up, her dark eyes settling on her blue eyed sister beneath quirked brows. "Ask what you really want to ask, Jodis. Be as specific as possible or we could go all day with me avoiding answers through technicalities."

Jodis huffed, standing up from her loom with a furious look. "I swear by the Nine, if she dies I will end you, do you understand?" her blue eyes sparked in liquid fire, russet hair rustled from continuous running her long pale fingers through it.

"You have no faith in me." Jora replied, peering over at Loki's own loom, her brows furrowed. "You shouldn't depend on what I do so much."

"On what you do?" Jodis snarled back. "Don't you understand? This isn't like when you were handed the fate of Julius Caesar, this life means more to the world than his - More to the Nine Realms. Stop this infernal toying back and forth do you understand?!" She finished with a waver in her voice, a quiver of emotion which was indicative of her mental state in regards to the lives within her care. "Loki is under my hand, but we both know that certain choices we make affect how they make their own choices."

"You think I don't know that?" Jora replied tersely. "Verdandi will have my hide if I kill her, why do you think I'm foolish enough to risk it? This is my last chance, we both know it. If I fail with this fate I might as well go live my existence on Jotunheim because I will never be forgiven. Besides, I do not wish to break your dearest Loki..." In all truth the darkness she had played with had gotten a little out of hand, her small shadowy stitches leading to this mess which she now had within her hands. Though for Jora it was not a matter of fixing but dealing. Every little decision had its price, she knew that as much as every norn, and she wasn't irresponsible. Every thing had a plan. She sighed, looking down at her work with a critical glance, sighing heavily before bringing her fingers to pinch at the bridge of her nose. "You worry too much, Dis." she murmured, looking up at her sister. "It will not be long now, I promise. I have already spoken to Eira, there is no cause for alarm. Everything will come to happiness I assure you."

Jodis stared, water filling her sea-like eyes which were still turbulent with pain. "Do you promise?"

Jora smiled, standing and going to her sister where she hugged her, kissing her cheek with a giggle. "I promise." she said. "Besides, you can't deny it appeals to your 'fix it all' nature. Isn't that why you took on Loki in the first place?"

Blue eyes rolled to the heavens with a shake of the head. "You are insufferable."

Jora just giggled.

Thor couldn't take it anymore, the anguish coming from his brother frustrating him. Asgard could help Elizabeth, but Loki had flatly refused. She was dying, and his brothers fear was letting her slip away bit by bit. He had to do something. "Fandral!" He called to his friend, entering the great room with a flair before he made to step right back out. "Get friend Stark."

"Get him? He's in a-

"We're taking him and Lady Elizabeth to Asgard. " Thor interrupted, beginning to walk out of the room.
Fandral's eyes widened comically, setting down his mug of coffee on the table before bolting off the couch, leaving Darcy to sit there with a bit of a clueless look on her face. "Loki changed his mind?"

Thor turned around, his face solemn. "No. I did." Was his answer as he walked out the door, leaving Fandral to exchange a look with Darcy for a moment before he bent down to kiss her, heading to fulfill Thor's wishes.

Approaching the door to Lizzies room, Thor felt slightly worried about how Loki would react... a part of him very grateful that Loki didn't have his powers as it would make matters easier. He sighed for probably the fiftieth time, leaning against the wall before he acted. He'd not gotten any sleep, his mind far too clouded on the matter at hand for a good nights rest to happen. Friggas warning from the last time he was there echoed on repeat in his mind, reminding him of the consequences that may come should Elizabeth die. He had already failed Loki before, he would not do it again.

"Thor." A deep voice came from behind him, and he turned to see Erik standing there, his helmet missing from his grey head, but his eyes displaying what he did not say. Worry. Fear. Pain. "You're going to take her to Asgard aren't you?" He asked.

"I must." Thor replied. "Loki will have to come to terms with the fact that she will die if she remains here. I do hope you will not come in my way."

Erik smiled sadly, shaking his head. "I will help you. " he replied. "For while I don't doubt Loki's love for my granddaughter, some compromises must be made to keep her alive. I was once like him, I'm afraid, I understand where he's coming from - at the same time, I know all too keenly the agony of losing the one you love."

Thor nodded. "Perhaps you can help Fandral with Stark? I was told you've been the one who has been keeping that metal shard from his heart, he is to go with us." Erik nodded solemnly staring at Thor a moment longer before walking out of the corridor with a swish of his red cape. The Thunderer walked up to the door once again, pausing only a moment before he entered without knocking. Veronika raised her head from her chair, her eyes glittering in tears, ye showing that she knew what Thor had planned. A nod came from her, confirmation she was in agreement, and Thor replied in kind.

"What are you doing here?" Loki's voice sounded from his place on the bed beside his love as Vera stood, clearing her throat. Something in her told her that the conversation that was about to happen wasn't going to be pretty.

"I'm gonna go to the kitchen, see if I can find Nell or Bella." she said, stepping out of the room.

"I'm here to take Lady Elizabeth to Asgard." Thor declared once she was gone, taking a step toward the bed with a determined glance. "Heimdall is all ready to receive us."

Loki's head shot up, his green eyes sparking in a viscous glare. "We already discussed this." He said lowly. "She's staying."

Thor shook his head, his golden hair sweeping across his shoulders, his brow grim. "She's going, brother. I will not watch as she dies due to your unnecessary fear." He softly boomed, taking another few steps forward, already leaning down to pick her up.

"Touch her, and you'll regret it." Loki hissed, but Thor ignored him, his arms scooping underneath her small body. Loki's eyes widened, and he moved to try and stop Thor when the larger pulled the woman to his chest. It was something Thor wasn't proud of, using Elizabeth as a sort of shield, but he was sure that Loki would not risk harming her. "You bastard." Loki spat in malice.
"In time you will see the wisdom of this decision." Thor replied as he began to walk out of the room, a pang in his chest coming with the recognition with how light she felt, her breathing barely there upon his neck. She was truly in bad shape. Loki's steps behind him were quick, and before he knew it, the trickster stood in front of him, his hands blue and his posture threatening. "Loki, it is for your own good, and her life that I'm doing this."

"What could you possibly think this could help?" Loki snarled defensively. "They'll kill her."

"Never. You know I would not allow it." Thor said vehemently. "You have to let me through or she will die."

Loki's green eyes looked at her frail body, and Thor could already see tears begin to swim in them. He swallowed, his mouth in a thin line as he looked torn between his fear of losing her here and his fear of her being killed there. "No... she won't, I won't let her," he said brokenly.

"Loki, see reason. You cannot control death. In Asgard you know that they have both magic and skill, the ability to heal her where they cannot here. You cannot save her." Thor argued, his arms tightening around Elizabeth when she shivered and whined, a sign that things were not at all well within her. "Loki-"

A dagger of ice whipped out from Loki's palm and Thor sighed deeply- Suddenly, Thor saw his brother fall down, Anna-Marie standing behind him with her hand still were she had touched him. "He was takin' too long" Thor looked down at his brother in concern, but Rogue just scoffed. "He's fine." She said, looking behind her. "A'ight Volstagg, he's all yours." With a chuckle, the red-headed Asgardian moved forward, winking at Thor as he picked up Loki, tossing him over his shoulder.

"Agh, he's heavier than he looks." Volstagg complained with a huff, earning a chuckle from Rogue.

Thor couldn't help but join in as he walked past, the sight something which he hadn't seen since the last time Loki had been so intoxicated that he hadn't been able to return to his room. "Well just make sure you don't bump his head on anything large or I'll let him loose on you when he wakes up." he said, but Volstagg only scoffed as they approached the platform.

"Well that's a sight I haven't seen in a hundred years." Fandral commented with a laugh at seeing Loki, Tony held in his own arms in a way that certainly would have had the billionaire joking if he'd been awake enough. "Dare I ask?"

"not particularly, my friend. We have no time to waste." Thor replied, looking around to see Erik come up behind him and look at Lizzie in concern, Vera besides him. Thor gave him a nod before turning his face toward the heavens. "HEIMDALL! OPEN UP THE BIFROST!"

The skies parted and a colorful beam struck where they were, in a flash of a rainbow they disappeared.

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Something was wrong, she could feel it. The walls of the room she was in were closing in, the single light above her head swinging to and fro as if in a wind... but there was none. The air was still...and silent...and cold. She wrapped her arms around herself, eyes turning upward to see the light, recalling how not long ago it had gone out and smothered her in blackness. Somewhere in her she felt like she was not in control of the light, and if it went out again there would be nothing she could do about it.

In this room she'd thought about her life until now, though every memory had been a greying blur. Something was happening and none of it good, she could feel the cold settling deeper into her, into
her soul. Her breath caught and she panicked, seizing her throat in her hands. No. She wouldn't let this happen again, she couldn't, she had to hold on.

The light flickered.

"No, no, no, no, no..." she murmured softly like a mantra, standing as best she could on her weakened legs.

A child's laughter echoed in the darkness, and she swallowed in fear of what lay within the shadows.

"Stay with me Elizabeth... Stay with me..." a feminine voice called from above. Warm, inviting, a calming force in the fears which were in the small, dark room.

"Who are you?" She called out in trepidation. "Who are you?"

Frigga jumped back in surprise, the magic which encompassed the young girl thrumming in a bright light. The Queen of Asgard had been working tirelessly upon the young woman since they had arrived in the Bifrost, giving a look to Eir the chief healer of plead before she was allowed to work personally. Even now her hands trembled in worry, future flashes in her mind resurfacing with pain attached to the images, seeing her son not long before carried by Volstagg to his chambers. She had failed him all else, at least she could do this for him in this moment.

The magic sparked again and her eyes met those of Eir's, concern echoing in the grey orbs of the healer. They both could sense something severely amiss in this procedure.

"Her injuries may be too fatal." Eir commented softly. "Frigga, there is no guarantee-"

"Don't say that Eir." Frigga replied swiftly, cutting off the other woman with ease. "Don't even think it. She will live." Her determination was clear, her fingers moving more securely though her words as she began to believe it more. Elizabeth would live. She would live. Stretching her magic once again through the lifeless girl, she sought to repair all damage done to her... but realized a problem. "The internal injuries are unlike any I've ever seen...it's almost like-"

"Like everything inside was taken out and put in haphazardly." Eir finished. "Though clearly there are no signs of such meaning it must have all been done inside her body." Her hands moved to the soul forge, seeking answers which inwardly she knew she would never find. "Frigga we have to consider all the aspects. There is a strong possibility she will not survive what will happen. She's not like us, she is fragile."

"But she is strong, Eir. Stronger than any of us are, in spirit. We have to facilitate that strength to fight through this, only she can save her life, but we have to give her the tools." Frigga argued, brushing dark tendrils of Lizzie's hair out of her face. "You hear me? You have to fight, you have to win, you can't leave him." She looked up at Eir who gave her a sympathetic look.

Within Lizzie's mind she could hear the voice echo, though the words were sometimes too soft to hear. Still, she had figured out that whoever it was, they were trying to get her out of this prison. She looked around, reaching up to the light, her fingers dancing in the open air as she tried to touch it and failed. "...You can't leave him..." Her brows furrowed. 'Him'? Who was him? Was she forgetting already, fading into whatever lie beyond the darkness which surrounded her? Her grasp on herself, on reality was getting worse, and everything felt dizzy.

The smell of leather and sandalwood filled the room, a feeling of safety coming into her presence. Green eyes danced upon her vision with a playful vigor, yet sadness weaved within the emerald
gaze. "Loki..." she whispered to the darkness, his form taking shape in the room of her mind, his
dark curls inviting her to touch them. She took a step forward, bony fingers grazing his cheekbones
as he leaned into her touch. "She's right..." She whispered. "I can't leave you can I?" Tears ran
down her cheeks, though when she brought a hand to her face they were dry.

The light flickered. "No... no..." she muttered as Loki looked worriedly up at the lamp. "No, I can't
go!" It flickered again and she looked at his visage, uttering three words she had never had the
courage to tell him, three words which could have changed everything for their futures.

"I love you..."

In the real world, Loki woke with a start, looking around his room in confusion and panic before he
recognized the details. Dark mahogany wood covered in accented silver and green, the chambers fit
for a Prince of Asgard... he was surprised Odin had kept it that way considering he wasn't one. After
all, wasn't he the monster prince?

Groaning, he sat up, swinging his long legs over the side of the bed and resting his feet on the floor.
Thor had gone against his wishes, had brought him and Elizabeth to Asgard even though he'd not
wanted it. Damnable git. When would he learn that some things weren't solved by brute force? One
hand came up to run through his hair as he took a look around. It seemed an age since he'd been in
this room, the warmth it used to hold now dimmed, a coldness in every shadow which had never
been there before. Looking down, he studied his hands, knowing that beneath the facade they held
the blue tinge which had forever altered the life of Loki Prince of Asgard.

How much he had changed from that man - boy rather - whose worst fault had been tricks played on
the gossipy cook, or turning Thor's wine into serpents. An outcast boy who thrived on paying back
everyone else in harmless ways, ways that earned him his reputation. Trickster, god of lies,
silvertongue, all names which in a way he had worn with pride, proving to Asgard that no matter
what they called him he would take it with pride.

But there was no pride in those titles now, guilt and shame bearing down with each pseudonym,
attributed to one last thing: Monster. The boy of his past would have run from the man of his present,
his future an indiscernible blur of whatever pain was to come.

He stood, walking to the double doors which led to his balcony, opening them with trepidation
within himself, an ache settling into him with the sudden realization that he missed his old life.
Adams apple bobbling with a swallow as he stepped out, his eyes took in the familiar scenery which
was before him. He remembered once speaking to Elizabeth about the concept of 'what ifs?' stating
how it was useless to think of them as they were the idea of fools... ah the memory seemed so long
ago, though it couldn't have been more than a few weeks. Another pain stabbed at his heart and he
leant heavily upon the railing with one thought.

Elizabeth.

Where was she now? Likely at the hands of Eir, the healer trying desperately to save her for the sake
of - who exactly? Odin likely didn't care, he had always hidden it well but Loki knew he had little
regard for mortals in general, seeing them as lessers. Furthermore why would the King of Asgard
stoop to wish to save the love of the monster who he had feigned to be his son? Green eyes blinked
rapidly, attempting to abate the tears of old wounds pulled up by memories. He hated his
weaknesses. All he had ever wanted was to be acknowledged as a son, for Odin to look at him in
the same pride as he did Thor - but in his heart he knew it would never happen. Odin's son was Thor,
Loki was merely the son of his enemy who he had raised to be a pawn on his board of chess.
Frigga perhaps may have swayed Eir, the Queen and the Healer having been friends for many years. Honestly Loki held out most hope for Frigga being able to do something about the situation, knowing that deep down she was still his mother... and she knew it. A chuckle escaped him at the thought of the woman, she had always held his heart between her fingers as gently as one would hold a glass figurine; she knew that inwardly he was quite breakable, his outer shell made of the toughest stuff, but with one precise aim at the chinks in his armor he would shatter. Even now he could feel that armor falling away, his glass heart being exposed bit by bit due to the recent events.

A knock sounded softly on his door, but he had no desire to answer it and didn't, his thoughts the only company he wished in this time.

What was he going to do? If Elizabeth died Frigga said his chance of redemption died with her - but even then it wasn't to do with him in this. It was to do with her. He had never once said he loved her, finding love a word which came with more baggage than he needed to associate with her. Sure, Frigga loved him, but she was the exception to the rule...the rule being that he was unloved.

Thor came to mind, and he sighed in the weight of confusion. Thor was always there wasn't he? Even when Loki wanted to be left alone, to simply lose himself to his own anger and bitterness and descend into the bottomless pit of darkness - Thor was always there to try and pull him out. He could hear Thor's voice saying "Brother..." in his mind, and he began to realize that throughout it all they still were... even though right now he was a little pissed that Thor had irresponsibly brought him here along with Elizabeth. His jaw ticked in the thought, anger boiling once more.

What was Thor thinking?

...

Still...

He couldn't help but wondered if it was too late to patch their relationship again.

On the other side of his door, Thor sighed, his knocks going unanswered as well as his calling for Loki. His fist came down to rest at his side as he leaned against the wall, his head thudding softly upon the stone there, a sense of defeat obvious in his face as his eyes closed. He had come to check on Loki, but he didn't have anything to say to his brother, that would change the situation, or give him any hope.

He'd just come from the healing wing with very little information, all he knew was that the situation was worse than they'd thought... and that there was possibly nothing that Asgard could do for Elizabeth. Thunder rolled in the distance, affected no doubt by his current state of mind. This wasn't supposed to happen, Elizabeth wasn't supposed to be nearly dying.

"No answer?" Thor's eyes snapped open with surprise at the voice, turning to face his father with a blink.

"None." he replied, standing back on his own feet. "Any news from Heimdall on Thanos?"

Odin shook his head solemnly, stepping toward Thor with heavy footfalls. Silence bridged the distance between them for a few moments, Odin's lone eye looking at the wooden door of Loki's room in thought. "I assume the Mortals condition has worsened." he said.

"Eir says its very likely they'll lose her. Mother says if that happens we'll lose Loki too..." Thor replied, slowly pacing the floor of the corridor before leaning again against the other wall.
"Thor," Odin began slowly, turning to look at his son. "Is your mother right regarding this mortal? Does Loki love her?"

Thor blinked. "Why don't you ask him?" he said, but Odin merely chuckled.

"I don't think your brother would like me asking a question like that, or any question for that matter. As you know, Thor, the last time we spoke was at his trial - if you can call that speaking." Odin said, hanging his head a moment. "Frigga and I have disagreed on the matter of her life and importance to us all."

"You think she isn't important?" Thor challenged lowly, something rising within him.

"She's mortal, Thor. In thirty or forty years she'll die, if she stays with Loki we're only prolonging the inevitable." Odin argued, his lone eye glazing over for a moment. "And then where will we be?"

Thor's blue eyes hardened, looking at the door of Loki's room, almost willing his brother to stay inside if he planned on coming out. Words flowed through his head in fury, a waterfall of anger which was echoed outside by another thunder roll. "You sound as if you've given up on him." he stated, surprisingly calmly, his voice deep.

Odin shook his head after a moment. "I don't know, Thor." he finally said. "Is it possible your brother has changed? Can this woman have done it-?"

"Elizabeth has done more for Loki than any of us ever managed - excepting Frigga only" Thor interrupted, stepping forward. "You asked if Loki loves her, and although he's never said it openly I can attest that he does. Every action he has done."

"He killed a man, Thor. A mutant who was set in his heart on domination of Midgard, but still it was cold-blooded murder." Odin countered. "What if his lust for blood has been reawakened?"

"You didn't see him." Thor replied. "Loki has changed. He is not the same as he was when I brought him back from his attempted siege on Midgard. He is on our side now, and from what I've seen will stay there." His voice was filled with the most sincere conviction, his very semblance showing the maturity which he had grown to possess since his exile. Odin gazed at his golden haired son, noting his authoritative posture, his confidence in everything he said as if he knew without a shadow of a doubt that what he spoke was truth.

The King of Asgard nodded solemnly, looking at the door once more before he reached into his cloak, withdrawing a golden object which Thor soon discerned as an apple. He blinked, surprise filling his face. "If what you say is true, then give this to Loki for his mortal. Only the magic of the apples of Idunn will keep her alive at this point." Odin explained, holding out the fruit for Thor to take.

"Idunn does not give her apples easily." Thor mused softly, looking between the apple and his father.

Odin gave a wry smile. "I know." he said. "She was very hard to persuade." He motioned with the apple again. "Take it Thor, give it to Loki." Thor did as ordered, his large hand closing over the fruit as it was transferred over. "Do not tell him it came from me..."

Odin smiled again, looking at the door once more before walking off and leaving Thor in the corridor once again with his thoughts. Thor knew what Odin meant when he spoke of persuasion, Idunn was not one who gave her apples with ease, and even though Odin was the King of Asgard there was no doubt that she was just as difficult with him as she'd be with any other.

In essence the King of Asgard was doubtlessly forced to do nothing short of beg for the fruit of the
goddess.

With newfound hope, he stepped toward Loki's door and not bothering to knock he just strode in, noting Loki was not in his bed but instead on the balcony.

"Don't you ever knock, Thor?" Loki sighed, not even bothering to turn to him.

Thor laughed. "Not when I have good news." he said, stepping toward Loki and out on the balcony. "Come brother, its time to save your love."

Loki snickered derisively. "Do not mock me, Thor, There is no way to save Elizabeth." he snarled, though the bite dropped into sadness toward the end.

"I wouldn't be so sure." Thor replied smugly, holding the apple out in front of Loki. Loki's eyes widened, his fingers reaching toward the fruit in surprise and wonder before they closed around the apple.

"Where did you get this?"

Thor hesitated, remembering what Odin said with a struggle. "That's my secret." he whispered conspiratorially. "Come brother, we have work to do." With that he made his way out of the door, elated in both the solution to Elizabeth's pain and one more thing:

For the first time in what seemed like forever, Loki gave him a genuine smile.
Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bella Donovan paced the floor of Stark Tower with a glass of brandy in her hand, her stress levels off the charts in regards to current events. She'd just been informed by Jarvis upon her return from Professor Xaviers school that her sisters condition had moved to critical and that she had been taken to Asgard for the magical abilities there.

To say the least, Bella was pissed and scared.

Ever since Lizzie had started this damn venture, she'd been running around like a chicken with her head cut off as she tried to piece together her own past. Powers had made themselves known that she'd never had any knowledge of from before - but the memories were the worst. Shuddering, she stood in front of one of the large windows, looking up at the sky as if it would hold some key to helping her sort through whatever it was that was happening.

"Liz..." she said to the stars, knowing somewhere up there her sister was on her fighting to stay alive. "You better not leave me alone down here. I mean I know death might seem like a nice option at this point, but you really need to get your ass back on this side of life..." A part of her wished she'd come sooner, wished that she could be there to talk to Elizabeth herself instead of to the glass, a distance between them that had never existed before. Tears formed in her eyes as she touched the window. "Liz... I don't know what kind of stuff exists in the metaphysical regarding twins... but if somehow you can hear me, or something...I'm just asking you to...to..."

The blonde's head leaned against the glass as she started to sob, heartwrenching pain within he chest unlike anything she'd felt in a long time. "C'mon Liz..." she managed somehow between gasps. "C'mon... you've made it this far... you can't leave me alone like this. We always said we'd stick through everything together - God!" She shook her head, wiping at her tears, trying to keep some kind of composure to herself as she slid to the floor, brandy miraculously staying inside its container. "Don't die... don't... don't leave me here... don't leave me alone."

In the shadows, Logan watched Bellas breakdown, Johnny Storm beside him.

"Its amazing how many lives one person affects even though they don't know it." Logan commented, heading to the kitchen. "She's gonna need some coffee, that brandy is her fourth and Bells isn't exactly good with her liquor.

"Shouldn't you like... I don't know..." Johnny stammered, his thumb pointing in the direction of Bella. Logan lifted an eyebrow.

"You're her boyfriend. That kind of stuff isn't my area of expertise, I'm good with the coffee getting."

"Well its not exactly my area either..."

Logan's dark stare caught the baby blues of Johnny Storm. "I thought you guys were together."

"We are-"

"Then go comfort your girlfriend. No time like the present to learn."

Johnny shifted uncomfortably, Logan clearly getting more terse by the moment. A few tense seconds
passed before Maureen came up to the two, and after fixing Johnny with her own cerulean stare of
disapproval, she went in to comfort Bella herself - one last glance sent in Logan's direction,
communicating something only they understood. Logan nodded and turned around, going into the
kitchen and fetching what he said he would, leaving Johnny to stand in the hallway awkwardly until
he returned.

"You and I are gonna have a talk." Logan said gruffly, and Johnny nodded once. He knew fully well
what this was gonna mean.

There had to be a way out of this dark cell, Lizzie knew it, but how? To step into the darkness
seemed dangerous. Who knew what was lurking in that unknown ready to drag her away from her
only source of light? Yet, to stay there was perfectly clear in her mind just how dangerous it was.
Loki still stood to the side, green eyes watching her intensely from under black brows, fear echoing
from herself in the orbs.

She needed to get out.

Suddenly, the light grew brighter, and she peered up at it in surprise. "Hello?" she called, her voice
echoing off of the uncountable walls. "Is anybody there?" She looked down where Loki had been,
only to find him gone. "Loki?"

"Elizabeth..." his voice was all around her. "Elizabeth wake up."

"How?" she shouted, breaking into coughs as she found her throat raw.

"Focus on my voice." the echo answered. "Focus on me." She swallowed, nodding as she closed her
eyes, feeling something holding her hand. "Wake up, my love, wake up..."

She smiled, looking up at the light again as she reached toward it, a feminine voice finally echoing
with a single word: "Come"

Loki hovered over her frail form, his fingers trailing through her hair as he tried to get through to her,
his hope kindled brightly by her softly whispered replies. Frigga stood beside him, her eyes closed as
she focused on reaching into Elizabeth's mind, drawing her out as gently as possible. He knew how
dangerous this was, her fragile state causing for the possibility of her waking up only for her body
itself to leave the stasis that Frigga had gotten her to and shut down. Needless to say, he was terrified
of what may happen, the apple in his hand clutched tightly.

"Elizabeth, please." he called again, looking desperately over at Thor who was focused entirely on
what was happening. His brother could do nothing anyway, but Loki felt the need for some kind of
support. If only he had his own magic, he could have done this all himself - but even though Frigga
had practically begged Odin for his magic to be at least a bit returned to him, he was still stripped of
his powers. Odin didn't trust him with any of his magic, it seemed, even if it was for a good purpose.

Utter bastard.

An eternity passed before he finally heard her voice, barely above a whisper, but enough for him to
hear her call his name. He straightened, green eyes watching her closely. "I'm here." he replied.
"Open your eyes, I'm here." Her eyes twitched, and slowly the lids drew back, blinking once as she
tried to focus on her surroundings. Loki couldn't help but smile which formed on his face when she
finally looked at him, a sliver of a smile of her own on her face.

"Well look at that..." she croaked out. "I feel a...strange sense of deja vu." Loki shook his head,
wondering why the hell her first words to him after they'd pulled her from the maw of death was what she said. She was such an odd woman - she just had to make him unable to even think of a good reply. Lizzie let out a wheeze of laughter. "Hey, hey, hey, look at that - I got the last word again"

His green eyes slid closed, and he dropped a relieved kiss to her cheek, nuzzling it for a moment as he assured himself that she was safe and alive. The last several weeks stress crashed on him in that moment, and the fact she had been toeing death for days made him hug her tightly, almost assuring himself physically she had truly survived. His lips pressed against her temple. "So you did." he whispered, a small smile touching his lips.

Frigga watched from above with tender eyes, exchanging a look with Thor who looked pleased and relieved as well. Yet it wasn't over quite yet, they had to give her the apple of Idunn before she slipped away from them again, possibly forever. With that thought, she cleared her throat, causing Loki to break away from his love and nod. Thor held the golden apple out, and Loki's long white fingers plucked it from his hand nimbly as he picked Lizzie up and cradled her to his chest. "Here." he said, holding the apple up to her still pale lips. "Eat, Elizabeth." He urged, watching her carefully, half afraid she might fall asleep again before he could save her.

It took a moment for her to realize what was going on before she comprehended his words, her weak hand reaching up to wrap around the apple as well, trying not to let the room spin too much as she bit into it. It was a shock to her system - the sudden intake of food taking her by surprise - and she coughed, blinking back tears which came when she accidentally inhaled a bit of the juice. Loki backed off until she was ready for another bite, a worried crease between his eyes which flicked back and forth from her to Frigga. "I'm fine." Lizzie soon croaked, swallowing. "It was just a shock." A nod toward the apple caused the apprehensive Loki to once more bring it to her lips and she took another bite.

"Thor." Frigga's soft voice caught her son's attention, and with a nod in another direction she motioned for them to leave the couple. The Thunder-Prince's brow furrowed in confusion for a moment before he followed her, stepping out of the room. "There is no longer any danger." The Queen stated before Thor could ask why she'd told them to leave. "The apples will put her to sleep as she changes to one of us, at which point no doubt your brother will wish to stay here or arrange for her to be taken to his quarters." With a tug on his arm, she finished, pulling him further away from the couple.

Lizzie and Loki sat there in silence as she ate, she merely focusing on not choking again, her eyes trained on him while he tried not to be too clingy in these moments. She didn't need him suffocating her in his relief of her being alive, she needed him to be level headed. She depended on it. Once again he brought the fruit to her lips, but her hand stopped him.

"Elizabeth..."

"You're eerily quiet." she said slowly, voicing the observation she'd had as she watched him. Something was guarded about him.

"You need to eat." he insisted, pushing against her hand a titch, not wanting to injure her in any way. She was still so weak, so frail, he feared holding her too tightly lest she break beneath his fingertips.

She was silent, though she made no move to bite into the apple. "Do you hate me?" she murmured resting her head more on his shoulder, afraid that in his own way he was angry with her. "I promised I'd stay with you if you gave me a reason, you gave me a reason and I left - I didn't tell you, I should have..." Her eyes closed as she swallowed back tears. "I'm so sorry"
Loki stiffened, feeling the scab ripped roughly off that hadn't healed properly. Why did she have to bring this up now? Couldn't she just eat the apple in silence? Blasted woman always being so annoyingly stubborn and intuitive. "Eat, Elizabeth." He countered more firmly, bringing the apple to her lips again. "If you wish to talk after the bite then fine, but right now eat."

Lizzie tilted her head for a moment before opening her mouth to receive the fruit which Loki still gently pushed toward her. She was already two-thirds done. She chewed for a moment, her mind clearing more than it had when she first woke. Guilt weighted down on her like a great burden, heavy on her mind in such a way that it felt like an elephant on her chest. There were so many things she still wanted to say even though she had a vague recollection of already apologizing profusely to him, spilling her heart as she confessed on Alex's floor to Loki how she'd been wrong, how she'd lied to protect him... but it didn't change the guilt. She wanted that away more than anything. She licked her lips, sighing as she looked up at him.

"Can I talk now?" her tone was meant to be snippy, but lacked the bite it usually held.

A sigh came from Loki, his green eyes closing as a tick developed in his jaw. She wasn't going to let this go. "You already apologized." he stated, opening his eyes. "When Thanos-"

"No, this I never apologized for." she cut him off, adjusting her positioning to be more comfortable. "I apologized for lying to you in a fruitless attempt to protect you, but I never apologized for breaking your trust."

"Not now, Elizabeth." Loki ground out as he looked ahead, not wanting to expose the pain that she'd dealt him when he'd found her gone, in the hands of Alex Shaw at her own provocation. He wasn't going to allow himself to go there at that moment, his emotions raw from the rollercoaster he'd been on the last few days - if there was one thing he knew about himself it was that he had a bad habit of turning pain to anger.

Two more bites would be all it would take for her now.

Lizzie sighed, taking one, beginning to feel exhaustion tug at her mind. "It hurt me too, you know. To leave you like that." she muttered softly. "We'd come so far from when we first met..." a crack of a smile graced her parched lips. "I knew that that one move would make you hate me forever-"

"I could never hate you." Loki finally shot back, meeting her eyes with a ferocity she'd not seen for some time, his hand around her tightening as his breathing quickened. "Even though what you did was stupid, and leaving me in that bed alone was the most hurtful thing I'd ever experienced, I could not hate you for it."

She blinked, feeling even more tired. Damn her body. "...Why?" Was all her quickly muddling brain managed. "'Why?' the question bounced about in Loki's brain with increasing magnitude, his adams apple bobbing up and down as he took a swallow, the answer coming all too easily, the memory of when He'd first realized he loved her coming to mind - even though a part of him was reluctant to admit it. Why could he not hate her? By the Nine he wanted to so badly when she was gone, struggling between the realization that he couldn't go on without her and the consequences of that revelation. How could he hate the one woman who had seen the wounded beast within him and nurtured it until it was almost fully healed? How could he hate the woman who had given him a second chance when no one else would? How could he hate the woman he loved?

"You don't know?" He asked softly, brushing the side of his hand over her face, pushing the hair out of the way which clung to her skin. A small smile quirked his lips upward on one side, the most
bashful look he'd ever displayed before her now prominent on his face. "I would think by now it would be pretty obvious."

Her brows furrowed, confusion clear in her slowly closing eyes. A vague thought crossed her mind that she had wanted to tell him something before she woke... what was it again? "I don't understand." she uttered.

Loki couldn't help the breathy chuckle which came with her declaration, kissing her forehead, his lips lingering longer than needed before he rested his own against hers in an intimate gesture, his heart quickening yet again. "Think, Elizabeth..." he whispered encouraging her brilliant mind.

She took a breath in, staring at him wide eyed as she shook her head imperceptibly. Her mouth opened and closed a few times, brows furrowing. "You...you...?"

"Yes." Loki confirmed to her unfinished question his eyes roving her face as he pulled back a few inches. She couldn't help the wheezy laugh which came from her, her hand coming up to rest on his cheek, a touch which he leaned into, turning his face to catch her palm with a kiss. "I almost had to lose you to find out." he softly mumbled, looking at her with eyes turbulent with the emotions which his statement expressed. Vulnerability was not his strong suit, yet here he was with heart laid bare within her hand - he only hoped she would not crush it.

"Funny..." Lizzie started, her thumb brushing his cheekbones, finally remembering what it was she wanted to say. "Cause I almost had to die to realize I loved you."

Green eyes darted between her two brown ones, his smile widening once more as he leaned in to capture her lips with his, her words striking a chord within him which even though he'd declared what he had he had worried about her rejection.

She loved him.

She loved him.

Her hands reached into his raven hair, meeting his kiss with as much fervor as she could manage in her state. It was strange how they were so jagged themselves - pieces broken off by their experiences, but in such a way that they fit so well together. He pulled away after a moment, remembering that she still had one bite left of the apple she had to consume before the magic could take hold. That took precedence over his desires, and he had no choice but to follow his head over his heart in that instance.

Wordlessly, he brought the fruit up to her lips, watching as her eyes started falling shut once again. With a smile on her face, she took the last bite, her fingers falling from his face as she swallowed and allowed herself to slip again into unconsciousness.

When the arcrreactor was forced into Tony Starks chest to save his life, he'd always had the eventual goal of getting it out again - he didn't know how, but he knew that was what he would do.

Therefore when he woke after passing out on the rainbow bridge to find his nightlight gone, he was a little surprised.

"Hey! Braidy-bunch - I mean, uh, 'excuse me'" He called to the woman who was a little far for him to whisper it, but as he was where he was he figured he'd go for politeness. "What happened to my arc reactor?"

"Arc reactor?" the woman replied, coming toward him. "What are you talking about?"
"The... thing... in my chest. Y'know the thing keeping my heart from getting punctured by my own personal metal javelin?" Tony explained, watching as she nodded, a laugh on her face even though she didn't laugh aloud.

"It was removed. Along with the... 'personal metal javelin'." She answered, walking away from the bed for a moment and returning with a tray, the arc reactor upon it, along with a piece of shrapnel. "Your other wounds have also been taken care of."

Tony's eyes were wide as saucers, his fingers picking up the metal pieces with wonder before he looked up at her. "What kind of machinery did you use? Or did you just... you know... 'magic' it?" he asked 'Braidy bunch'. "I mean this was pretty fast work."

The healer regarded him a moment, putting the tray down. "I suppose you would call it 'magic' though it is merely too advanced for your mind to comprehend at this point of your societies development." she answered. "Though the three weeks of your being unconscious-"

"THREE WEEKS?!" Tony exclaimed loudly, cutting her off. She leveled him with a look, which somehow reminded him of Pepper and shut him up quicker than he could have spelled 'three weeks'.

"As I was saying, your coma made things a little easier as your body was fully at our disposal without interruptions." she explained.

"Did Rock of Ages help out?" Tony inquired, surprised with the fact that he actually felt very comfortable with that option. More than comfortable. He actually trusted Loki more than this woman.

"Rock of Ages?" She repeated, enunciating every word as if it were despicable.

"Loki." Tony supplied easily.

"Ah" the healer uttered. "Prince Loki assist in a way, he was the one who informed me as to the purpose of the device in your chest, as well as what else would have to come out" she explained, holding out a glass of water. Tony merely stared at it, a look of perturbation on his face. "What is the matter?"

"I don't like being handed things" he stated simply, and with a slight roll of her eyes, the woman placed the glass down on the tray. Tony reached for it with pursed lips "Don't roll your eyes at me, Braidy bunch, I have good reason to have trust issues"

"My name is Eir. I am Chief healer of Asgard."

Tony gave her a half hearted salute. "Nice t' meet'ya Ear." he said, his attention once more taken by the metal - that was, of course, before he remembered something of interest. "Hey! What happened to Houdini?"

"Who?" Eir asked in confusion, beginning to grow rather tired of the man's strangeness.

"Houdini. Donovan. Y'know the girl that Loki has the hots for." Tony expounded, though unlike most people who would look confused or exasperated, Eir merely raised an eyebrow at him, a condescending look of one who was dealing with a small child etched upon her features.

"Lady Elizabeth is fully recovered." She answered. "The change from Midgardian to Asgardian went smoothly-"

"Wait wait wait wait!" Tony interrupted again, adjusting himself to sit up in the bed. "Houdini is
now one of you space gods? How the hell did that happen?"

Eir sighed. "It was the only way to save her life, her body no longer able to function due to the levels of stress and internal damages which she'd sustained. At length it was decided that she would be given an apple of Idunn, which upon being consumed changed her into one of us." she told him slowly. "She is currently with Prince Loki, and has been ever since the change."

Tony, for the first time since waking, was silent, taking his time to process the information before he finally spoke, though his words likely weren't entirely appropriate for the subject.

"He's gonna get married before me isn't he? Fucking bastard."

"Is it just me, or does everything you do echo Salazar Slytherin?" Lizzie asked as she stepped into the room, looking around at the decorations which was practically all in green and gold.

Loki chuckled, locking the door before he slipped his arms around her middle and pulling her back toward him. "It could be said that he echoes me." he said, his tone all too smug for her not to reply.

But she didn't, still tired from the transformation process. A week-long transformation. "Yeah well, you should have found yourself a Helga Hufflepuff. Instead you got me." she replied. "And I'd probably be a squib." Loki sighed over her shoulder, and she could basically feel the annoyance rolling of him. "Did you just roll your eyes at me?"

"Yes."

Lizzie craned her head back, laughing lightly as she looked at him. "I can't believe you actually answered that truthfully."
"I do that a lot, actually." Loki replied, mischief filling his eyes. "And yet everyone is always surprised."

"Oh for gods sake, now you're Jack Sparrow?"

"No. I am Loki. If anyone is Jack Sparrow its Stark."

"Are we really having this conversation?"

A laugh was all Loki replied with, scooping Lizzie up as she yawned.

"Please don't tell me this room is all for me. It's way too big" Lizzie complained as he set her on the bed, moving away from her to the wardrobe a bit to the side.

"Well considering it's my chambers also, and I am currently not in a cell - I'm happy to inform you that you do not have the room to yourself" he rattled off, pulling out tunics and examining them as he did before choosing one that was a distinctly non-Loki color. "Here, this should do" he muttered, heading back toward her.

"You actually have a red shirt?" Lizzie commented. "I thought you had an obsession with the color green?"

Loki smirked. "Well occasionally I had to pretend to be Thor." he stated as if it were obvious, holding out the shirt for her to take. "It'll suit you nicely."

A chuckle came from her. "It's not weird at all that you used this pretending to be Thor." she said, taking the shirt from his hand before looking down at herself.

"Well at least it was still me in it." Loki said far too smugly, kissing her a moment before he smirked and took off his own tunic.

Lizzie's eyebrow raised-

A chuckle above her head drew her from her thoughts and she craned her head to look at him. "What?"

"You keep drawing circles on my chest while giggling softly." he answered. "What are you thinking about?"

Lizzie giggled a little louder this time, still tracing figures. "You having a red shirt to pretend to be Thor. In a way I could joke and say I'm wearing Thor's shirt, cause a little scandal." she said, feeling him tense a bit at her words.

Loki hummed, his fingers toying with said shirt which she was still wearing. "I think green will suit you better."

"Oh? Changed your mind?" He didn't reply, which only caused her to laugh a little harder. "By the way, I didn't know you watched Pirates." She quickly changed the subject, though she decided she quite liked Loki when he was jealous.

Loki blushed a little. "Yes well, not all Midgardian entertainment is imbecilic." he stated very seriously, earning a poke from Lizzie which he gave an irritated look at. "I think I liked it better when you couldn't hurt me as much."

"Most of our entertainment is brilliant." she declared, stuffing her head once more into his chest.
"Your version of brilliance isn't very bright." he replied, brushing her hair back from her face. "Though I will give you credit on some."

Brown eyes rolled. "Oh we are honored." she said, smiling sublimely as he leaned down to kiss her briefly. "Good morning by the way."

"Good morning." He replied with a genuine smile, leaning in again to capture her lips, his hands sliding up under her shirt-

-when there was a pounding at the door.

"Brother!"

Loki growled in frustration. "Go away Thor!" He shouted back, burying his face in Elizabeth's neck as she laughed.

"Loki! Father requires our presence." Thor boomed from the other side.

"s not my father!"

"He's coming, Thor!" Lizzie shouted over Loki, who withdrew his head from her neck to give her a betrayed look. "Oh don't you dare. He wouldn't go away and you know it - besides, we probably needed to get up anyway."

Loki huffed, burying his head in the pillow before bringing it up again to look at her, reminding her quite a bit of a child who was told he needed to do something he didn't want. "Odin can wait. Thor is always way too dramatic about this. I doubt it really matters-"

"I can still hear you, Loki!" Thor said from the other side of the door yet again. "Don't make me come in there!"

"You come in here and you'll deal with me!" Lizzie called back, trying to get away from Loki's hand which sought to silence her mouth from speaking more. "We'll meet you there! - Loki Stop!" She screeched as he tried a new tactic of attacking her neck with his mouth, her eyes slipping closed. Damn him, he was far too talented with that mouth of his. "We are coming-aah."

"Very well, Elizabeth. Until then." Came Thor's voice, a laugh heard in it before footsteps echoed away.

But Loki had not finished his assault, fishing a moan out of her before he suddenly found himself falling into the bed with an 'oof', Elizabeth across the room and fully dressed. He blinked, looking between her and the bed as he concluded that her powers must have assisted her in getting away from him. "Elizabeth!" He cried indignantly.

"Don't 'Elizabeth' me. Your brother needs you." The Woman replied, tossing his shirt at him as he dramatically flopped back on the bed. She blinked at him, mouth open in shock of his supposed inability to understand what she was saying. "...You are literally five years old."

That caught his attention, and with a mischievous look in his eyes, he jumped out of bed, stalking toward her. "Well, if I was five years old... this would be rather inappropriate," he said lowly, catching her by surprise as he pushed her against the wall, kissing her hard for a moment before he pulled away, walking over to the wardrobe to get dressed, Lizzie's eyes narrowed at his back.

"Tease." She shot lamely, and Loki laughed.
He knew it was only a matter of time before she got revenge, and he knew it was going to be rather sweet.

Chapter End Notes

aaaaaaaaand that's all I have for now. haha. i know that was a bit of a whiplash with this chapter, but the angst was sooo killing me and I needed my fluffy otp back story is actually gonna be wrapping up soon, and merge into...another story of the same series because I am a slut for these characters. (with an addition and a highlight on Bella to be precise)

Let me know what you think in the box below :P
Chapter 40

Chapter Summary

Odin expresses what is in store for Loki.

Chapter Notes

HEY EVERYONE! So sorry it took so long I’ve been busy. Turns out writing a novel, worldbuilding, working, becoming obsessed with Hamilton, and doing other stuff has meant that my muse for this has gone way down. Therefore I warn you that this is pretty not to par, and apologize already - BUT BUT BUT we are moving forward, and i’ve decided that this part of the story will probably be ending in like 4 chapters. I think I said why in the past A/N but to just reiterate, the story will be merging into another "LTA" for Bella because I have not made this girl as awesome as she can be. What can I say? Besides, Lizzie and Loki are at a very nice place (Or will be soon) and everyone loves to watch cuteness all around. Though I do hope you all stay for the rest of it, I promise lovely stuff and cookies.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Amora sighed as her blue eyes scanned over the destroyed base in Alaska, kicking the rubble of the main building to the side. Thanos wasn't pleased to say the least, and a few Chitauri had been thrown against the wall as he growled about the idiocy of Midgardians and their petty problems. It was all that woman's fault, Loki's little toy who Shaw seemed so obsessed with, if it hadn't been for her their force of mutants would not currently be in the hands of their opposition while their Chitauri counterparts were all dead.

Which for Amora was a huge setback.

Funny how time was so different in each place, for she had come from Asgard where weeks had passed, yet here on earth it was only a matter of a few days. A few days ago they had come close to achieving their goal, of making the last moves to ensure victory... and now, due to the idiot mutant they were delayed by possibly months. By the Nine, she hoped not! If she ever got her hands on Loki she was sure to give him a good thrashing.

A breeze whipped at her blonde hair, and her gaze turned to the skies to see a storm building. She had somewhere else to be - for while one piece on the chessboard had been removed, there were still others which could be played, others she had to put into position for Thanos. Sure, they were a lesser pawn, one not as powerful, but certainly enough to cause a problem within the established sanctuary of Midgard.

Well, as loosely as 'sanctuary' as it could be called.

With a smirk toward the ruins, she disappeared.
If Odin said another word, Lizzie was sure Loki would lose his control and snap - and so would her grandfather for that matter. Vera clung to Erik's arm in a placating gesture as Odin explained that Loki was back under arrest and that there would be a trial for his actions regarding the death of Alex Shaw.

Lizzie herself was rather tempted to silence him but refrained.

"I'm afraid it's something I cannot help." Odin replied as Thor made an objection. "Loki knew that he was being allowed his freedom only as long as he kept within the rules which were set for him."

"Father this is ridiculous!" Thor boomed in irritation. "It was a situation out of his control, and Loki had no choice but to react how he did in defense of the Lady Elizabeth."

"Defense is one thing." Odin countered, emphasizing the word with a clipped tone. "Revenge... is quite another. He went too far in the murder of the Midgardian in question, and thereby violated his parole."

The hall was silent, the occupants of the room exchanging looks as they tried to figure out just what they were going to do. Odin's eye watched them all, a conflict within him as he saw their confusion and anger painted on their faces. He understood why, but the words of the council who he'd argued with for hours the day before had made it perfectly clear that in this he had no say. Asgard saw Loki as a criminal, and insisted that he be a king and not a father.

In fact that was one of the main arguments. Odin had made it clear that he had understood his estranged son's reaction, as he would have done the same had Frigga been in danger - but from the standpoint of justice, it became much harder to understand without sufficient evidence, and they lacked it far too much.

For Loki, he boiled in barely restrained rage, words itching on the tip of his tongue which he couldn't let loose quite yet. His eyes darted to Elizabeth, fury still filling him from the fact that the moment they had entered the Throne room Odin had separated them, surrounding him with guards so that if he tried to get to her he would fail. Fear returned to him from before they had come, the worry of harm coming to her striking even deeper than before due to the separation.

Her brown eyes turned to him, and within their depth he saw reflected his feelings - though dimmed due to who she was - a small smile given to him as if in assurance. But how good would that be if she was snatched from him by the Allfather? He tensed, the chains about his hands rattling softly, another reminder that Odin wasn't half as reasonable as he pretended to be - at least, to him.

"This parole you speak of," Erik finally spoke, Vera's eyes wide with worry as he stepped out of her hold to speak to Odin. "Did it, or did it not include the bereavement of Loki's powers?"

"It did." Odin replied.

"Powers which were returned to him in order to protect Elizabeth, who was - at the time - very much in danger." His voice seemed to magnify in the great room, the walls echoing it more than it would normally, or at least Lizzie seemed to think so. "These powers you took from him because he had used them for ill - am I understanding correctly?"

Odin's eye narrowed slightly, but he nodded. "Yes. His powers were returned to him by... other means" His gaze turned to Frigga. Another matter the Council had brought him to task for.

Erik looked at the man in question, a twinkle of amusement in his eyes as he decided to continue. "Then, considering the circumstances and the fact that he protected more than just Elizabeth, is it not
safe to say that the reasoning behind the bereavement of his powers is now null and void?" he asked, the memory of his own recently powerless state something which he could understand of the young Jotun.

"It would. But Loki has yet to fill his total sentence." The King insisted.

"Yet even on Earth-Midgard, forgive me, we allow criminals what is known as clemency under certain circumstances despite what sentence was originally given." Odin's head leaned back as he took a deep breath in, his hand tightening around his staff being the only indicator that something was going on in his mind. Yet, Erik wasn't done. "He saved lives instead of took them. Shown repentance for what happened in New York, and has been a crucial piece in knowing what we have to prepare for. Is that not right, Thor?"

"Aye. Loki has done much to help us prepare for Thanos' arrival, and had it not been for his abilities we wouldn't have found Elizabeth." Thor added in agreement, a respect showing in his face toward Erik for the defense of Loki.


"Asgard...or you?" The voice of Lizzie cut in as coldly as a shard of ice through a warmed room, Odin's focus now going to her as she stepped up, standing as close as she could to Loki who eyed her warily.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Do you mean that this is out of your control and that your realm demands justice, or do you mean that you demand Justice - whatever kind of justice you want to dish out? I've heard of the kinds of things you've come up with in the past, and I have to say that the punishment hardly fits the crime." she rattled off with an edge, and Loki half worried she'd lash out in more than words. A look was exchanged with Thor behind her back, the golden prince eyeing the woman in interest and concern. "As my grandfather said, Loki has shown repentance, and if you wish to truly fault him on his actions regarding Shaw, I cannot stop you - well..." she chuckled softly, looking back at Loki. "I probably could."

Green eyes narrowed in amusement as his black haired head shook. Damn woman probably would drop Odin to his knees before her if it came to it... though he could not deny just how much he liked the spark she was showing.

"I can hardly see how you have any say in the matter, your mind is clouded in your affection for Loki." Odin replied, attracting her attention once more. The irony which laced his words did not go unnoticed by him, those words the very same which were uttered to him regarding the matter. 'oh no' Loki thought, fighting the smile which wanted to spread on his face.

"You know, I've been looking forward to this moment for a long time, ever since I found out what happen with Loki when he fell from the Bifrost - and I have to say I'm more than disappointed in your parenting skills."

But Lizzie was already smirking, brown eyes narrowed to those which she'd been using for a few weeks, her very persona changing to- Loki's brows furrowed as he saw something different than he'd seen before. He couldn't say her looks were strictly that which he'd seen while she was in the company of Shaw, nor could he say she looked expressly the way she normally did. Rather a mix, and for Lizzie she could feel the difference, had somehow made its way into existence. "'Clouded in my affection'..." Lizzie repeated slowly, arms swinging behind her before her hands clasped in an authoritative stance. "You know, I've been looking forward to this moment for a long time, ever since I found out what happen with Loki when he fell from the Bifrost - and I have to say I'm more than disappointed in your parenting skills."
"How does this-"

He was cut off, a harsh glare sent his way from Lizzie. "You call me clouded," she continued after a beat. "That I am now on Loki's side merely because of my feelings for him, but I'll have you know that even before I fell in love with him I wondered at your own part in this play."

Odin's eyebrow raised. "Is that so?" he asked, a thin strand of hesitation in his voice, likely from the knowledge that if he wasn't careful she would stop him from talking. He began to wonder if it was wise that he had made her Aesir, though from the look on Frigga's face who stood off to the side, he could not voice it at this point.

"Yes." Lizzie answered. "And before you say it has no bearing whatsoever to the fact that you want to lock Loki up for another thousand years, I'd like to add that without your own lack of good parenting he likely wouldn't have done it in the first place." A look around informed her of the others opinions. Thor looked at the Allfather expectantly, Loki's countenance was something of curiosity - most likely to where she was going with it - and Frigga looked proud. "Now," she continued. "I'm not saying he wasn't wrong - God knows I think he was being absolutely psychotic and definitely deserved the four slaps I've given him for his conduct. Granted, he even deserves to a degree what you want to bestow upon him... but at this point, the punishment does not fit the crime. Killing a man whose own crimes surpassed Loki on so many levels because he wished to protect isn't wrong, never will be, and if you think that he still deserves what you are so willing to lay on him then I volunteer to go with as well because frankly you have fucked up as a father and now you're covering your tracks in the most fucked up of ways."

"Elizabeth!" Loki exclaimed, speaking for the first time in a while. "Under no circumstances-

"The prisoner is not permitted to speak." Odin reminded, and by some magic Loki was forced to remain silent. That, in and of itself, irked Lizzie who gave Odin a look of defiance. "What makes you think, girl, that you have the right to tell me what you have? I, who have saved your life as it hung in the balance between the living and the dead."

To that, Frigga turned upon Odin, shock written in her features as a 'What?' was echoed by Loki. Lizzie's head leaned back slightly, recognition dawning in her face as she quickly put the pieces together. Her eyes narrowed. "You?... Oh that's low." she said softly, taking a step forward. "Saving my life doesn't mean you get to silence me-

"Elizabeth!" Frigga cut her off, stepping up to Odin. "Allow me to speak to the King... Alone." The word was shown in her eyes as she turned to her husband, a fire in the blue orbs before she started walking out, the very semblance that of a command for Odin to follow. A few moments later, the adjoining room closed.

"You..." Loki's soft voice began, a storm already beginning within it as he turned to Thor. "He gave the Apple to you to give to Elizabeth... that's why you refused to tell me." Thor turned to his brother warily, fear building in his eyes as he worried that Loki may very well take it the wrong way. "It was his request that you did not know, he knew you would never accept it if you did." He said, stepping forward.

"With good reason." Loki snapped. "Now he hangs it over her head-"

"He saved Elizabeth - do you not realize what he must have done in order to convince Idunn to even give him an apple? She, who guards the apples with greater fervor than a bilgesnipe, who he had to convince for you! You, after what you did concerning Thjazi all those years ago." Thor roared, ending only a foot away from his brother, the guards having stepped back as Thor had advanced.
"Yes, I don't agree with the fact that he is now using it against Elizabeth, but for once he did something for you worth noting and you are just as unforgiving as he!"

The last word echoed for a moment in the hall, silence following from all parties. A stare off between the golden haired prince and his darker counterpart began, Loki unwavering as he tried to process just what everything meant.

Yes, Odin had saved Elizabeth, a fact which shocked him to the core. Why? That was the greater question. He had saved him from the frozen wastelands of Jotunheim, raised him as his own son - but there was a reason behind it. 'An eternal alliance between the kingdoms through him'... it was that which caused Loki to look at his saving Elizabeth with suspicion. A hundred possibilities ran through his head, and none of them were good.

"Loki?" Her voice cut through his mind, the realization that she was now close enough to touch causing him to reach out to her, drawing her to him with a glare to one of the guards who stepped forward as if to stop him. Her hand reached up to his face, turning his attention back to her and meeting his eyes. "He is right, you know." she said softly, still confused that the man who apparently had caused Loki to be where he was had saved her life. "Maybe we both are too hasty in our reaction to the Allfather?"

Loki's black eyebrow lifted, his emerald eyes filling with a curious look. "What do you mean?" he inquired, unsure just what he thought in that moment regarding what she was saying. Surely she saw the possible meaning behind what Odin was doing...

"I mean..." she continued. "If he saved my life, maybe you're not the only one who deserves forgiveness?"

Loki's mouth opened, but before he could respond, the door opened, and Odin and Frigga returned, the Allfather's lips pursed as he stepped back up to his dais and sat down, Frigga giving Lizzie a reassuring look which turned fond as she saw the proximity of her son and his lady.

"Frigga and I have spoken." Odin finally said, his eye landing on Loki with a guarded neutrality. "Unfortunately, the Council has already demanded a trial - and before you say anything, Thor, hear me out." His words cut the young Asgardian's words off before the spewed forth in frustration, his mouth already opening to form the first line. "Asgard will want a trial, and a trial shall be given, but unlike his last trial, where only you saved him from a fate which our kin demanded, this time we will have a larger one, with all evidence which can be given brought forth." He looked to Erik, the mutant raising a wizened brow of curious anticipation. "That includes the testimonies which your friends so eagerly wish to give."

"And until then?" Thor inquired, a tense tone coating his words. "Is he to be returned to his cell in the Tower of Solitude?"

Lizzie's hand tightened around Loki's, his touch equally as gripping in return. He couldn't go back there, he'd go mad this time, as mad as they all thought he was - solitude had never helped him in the past.

A shake of his head with a small smile came as half the answer which was soon uttered. "No." Odin replied, looking to his son. "He shall be under house arrest and confined to the palace, and since his powers are still inaccessible to him there shall be no complications given before the trial. After all, we all know how wild he can be, to confine him would only make matters worse I believe."

"When is this trial?" Lizzie asked, forcing herself to stay silent on the other part of the statement.
"Two weeks from now. Witnesses from Midgard must be gathered, and... arrangements must be made otherwise." he said, exchanging a look with Frigga, words passed between them though nothing was expounded on. "Thor, you will take the Lady Elizabeth back to Midgard, as well as our other guests. Doubtless your friends have gone with very little news, they'll be worried."

Elizabeth's eyes widened, looking up at Loki for a second, his own face stony and set on his adopted father. A part of her felt happy at the prospect of going home for a little bit, wanting to see everyone and apologize to them all - she missed them. But on the other side, she worried what Loki would think about it, and hoped that he would see it with at least some reason. Maybe even it would do him some good?

Thor looked toward her, her thoughts echoed in his eyes. "When do we depart?" he inquired of his father.

"As soon as possible. Time passes differently, as you know Thor, and time is of the essence." Odin replied, giving everyone the idea that the conversation was over. "You may take the chains off of Loki."

The green eyed Jotun smirked. "Are you so sure you want to do that? I am, after all, 'wild'."

Odin merely stared, as if daring his son to do anything when his chains were removed - but he didn't, he merely rubbed at his wrists before wrapping an arm around Elizabeth's waist and gave a mocking bow, turning them around with his usual regal walk. He wanted to get out of the room as soon as possible, and if he was going to endure a week without Elizabeth he intended to make the most of however little time they had before she left.

Thor followed, giving one last look at Frigga who nodded, Erik and Vera going along with.

"I do hope you know what you're doing." Odin said to Frigga once the room only contained themselves again. "Your plan is full of places where things could go wrong."

Frigga raised an eyebrow. "You and Asgard insist upon this ridiculous trial, the least I can do is make the result something worth their wile. Despite what you like to say, you know that girl is good for him - a little rough around the edges, but good for him."

A sigh came from Odin. "And what if Asgard finds Loki guilty and sentences him to a fate which separates them?" he inquired of his wife.

"They won't." Was all she said, smiling smugly.

"You're silent again." Lizzie pointed out as she dressed in clothes more of the fashions of Earth, Loki standing out on the balcony. "You're not going to do anything are you?"

Loki turned, his face still wearing the serious expression he'd had since they left the throne room. "Now what could you possibly mean?" He asked in turn, the edge in his voice unmistakable. "I am powerless, locked up in this gilded cage yet again with you being taken away from me. I can plot and plan all day, but there are still guards at my door, and soon you'll be gone."

Lizzie rolled her eyes, walking toward him and leaning against the door frame. "It's two weeks. You'll live." She stated, realizing how hypocritical she likely sounded, having been rather frustrated in the beginning of the entire situation - but she had had time to think, time to sort out her thoughts and realize that the time apart wouldn't be as bad as she had thought at first. At first she'd been afraid, but she had been berating herself for some time due to realizing that she was allowing her fears which were leftover from her time with Alex to dictate her. She was stronger than them...
...and so was Loki.

Her focus returned to him, his back now to her as he looked back out from the balcony. With a sigh, she ran her hands over his shoulders, squeezing as she dropped a kiss to his back, wrapping her arms around his middle. His jaw clenched, but he couldn't help but relax against her, bringing his hands up to her own. "It will be alright." she encouraged, stepping onto her tiptoes to see him as he turned his head. "I'll be back before you know it."

Loki sighed, letting go of her hands so he could turn, embracing her instead. "I know." he finally said, softly as the wind, his eyes slipping closed. "I don't like it though. Shaw was merely one piece on the board of Thanos' plans, there will be more, and what if he strikes and you're trapped there?"

He put a distance between them, an imploring look in his face. "Thor won't stop you if you wish to stay, and I'm sure Odin couldn't-"

"Shh." Lizzie placed a finger on his lips, moving her hand to his face. "You worry too much. I'll be perfectly safe, and as we already noted this week my new state has apparently given me complete control over my powers. If Thanos does strike, I'll have Bella open a portal here and be back before you know it."

"That isn't comforting." Loki told her simply, but Lizzie merely chuckled, pressing her lips to his in a lingering kiss. "You're trying to distract me."

"Perhaps... is it working?" she mumbled against his mouth, earning a hum of approval from him, reveling in the intimacy before she pulled away, a sigh escaping her. "Maybe you should take this time to spend time with your mother? I've not really spoken to her, but from the looks she kept sending you I've got a feeling she misses you." But the look of perturbation stayed put on Loki's face, his lips dangerously close to a pout. "And maybe..." she trailed off, unsure if she wanted to finish her second thought.

"Maybe what?" Loki pushed with a raised eyebrow, but before she could reply there was a knock at the door. He groaned as she went to open it, staring after her as she greeted the other person as he leaned against the doorframe.

"We're leaving soon." Fandral's voice informed him. "Thor said to inform you and that Loki is wanted by the queen immediately."

Lizzie nodded, thanking him before she shut the door again turning to the dark haired prince with a sad look which was echoed in his own eyes. "You know..." she started, grabbing her locket which she'd taken off the week before and handing it to him. "I don't know if I'm going to get used to our relationship. It seems so foreign, in a way."

"How so?" Loki inquired, unlatching the chain and holding it out for her to turn around, clasping it with a memory of the first time he did so. His fingers mimicked the former movements, brushing against her neck, still relishing in her shiver, unknowing that the same memory replayed in her own mind.

"We're just so...homey." she answered softly, a smile on her face as he pressed his lips to her neck, slowing time for a moment, wanting to buy herself a little more time. "We're so dramatic though. Look at us, you'd think I was leaving for months, not days."

A chuckle in her shoulder was all she got in reply from Loki, his warmth pulling away from her as he walked over to the bed, picking up the small bag which she'd packed and handing it to her. "Well, I have always had a flair for the dramatic."
Lizzie smirked, snickering as she took the bag. "Really? I had no idea." she teased, slinging it over her shoulder. "Alright, mandatory goodbye kiss and I'll go - pity you're wanted by Frigga, I'd drag you down there to see me off like a proper boyfriend."

"Trust me, I'd go if I could. If for no other reason than to make Thor uncomfortable with our affection." Loki laughed, hands wrapping around her waist as he pulled her into another kiss, forcing himself to be brief before he demanded she stay.

"You are a little shit." she replied, nuzzling his nose. "My little shit, but a shit all the same."

He only smirked more. "Go before I do something drastic," he warned, voice deeper than usual.

"Love you."

Loki smiled, this time with a genuine affection. "I love you."

Darcy jumped when out of nowhere a bright light illuminated the landing pad outside, her iced tea dropping out of her hand in surprise before she got her bearings. "Sweet heavenly choirs of angels - EVERYBODY THEY'RE BACK!" she called, though it was unnecessary as JARVIS was already declaring it through each room which held someone in it.

Pepper came first, practically rushing to the doors as Tony came in, the couple embracing in a rare display of affection where she fussed over him and he proudly showed off the fact that he no longer had the arc reactor in his chest.

The others filed in after him, Thor staying protectively closely to Lizzie even though it was unneeded. He knew fully well that Loki would skin him alive if anything happened to her, and he had decided to merely be aware at all times as to her safety... that was, until Jane came into the room and drew him over to the couch as Darcy started talking to Fandral.

A few minutes later, Steve came in, a still-small Bruce hot on his heels. Tony saw him first, his brown eyes widened in surprise and amusement. "Okay what did I miss? He looks like an Oompa-Loompa." he asked, earning an eye roll from Bruce.

"Oompa-Loompas were thirteen inches tall. Bruce is three feet." Darcy piped in, apparently listening to the conversation even though Fandral was still gabbing.

"What big ears you have, Puppy." Tony shot back, earning a smirk from the woman.

"Really, Tony, you don't remember?" he was asked in turn by Steve, a worried crease between his brow.

Tony's eyes narrowed a moment, looking at Bruce as he tried to retrieve a memory—there it was. The fight with Shaw had caused Bruce to be reduced in height, he could remember being absolutely pissed when it happened. "We need to find a way to get you back to size, you're not going to be useful at that height." he commented dryly, appraising his friend. "Well, except maybe to hit shins, that might be helpful."

"Tony." Pepper gave him a disapproving tone, to which he shrugged. "Thor said he was going to ask his mother for something to give him."

Across the room, Lizzie helped herself to a drink, unsure how it would affect her now that she wasn't human anymore. Bella, Kathleen, Logan, Clint and Natasha were still missing, and she wanted to see
them more than anyone- "Hey. Lizzie spun around, Clint leaning against the bar at the far end. Mentally, she ticked off his name on her list.

"Hi." she replied, walking over to hug him, the familiarity of his presence making her feel happier. "I was about to ask where you were."

Clint chuckled. "Miss me?" he inquired, subtly scanning her over for her injuries, noticing that in the short time she'd been gone she'd apparently healed completely... and there was something different in how she looked, but he couldn't put his finger on it.

"Very much." Lizzie replied, smiling. "I never got to apologize for what happened."

The archer shook his head. "No need. I got what you did, even though I will admit I was a little pissed at the fact that you didn't trust me enough to tell me about that little plan of yours." he said, a raised eyebrow along with pinched lips confirming this annoyance which he spoke of.

Lizzie blushed, remembering how badly she'd felt from knowing how he and Loki had been treated by Shaw. "I'm sorry, Clint." she said, this time much more seriously. "It was such a dumb plan, but I'm sorry you got hurt - both physically and likely emotionally."

"Liz, listen to me." Clint started, pulling Lizzie off to the side and sitting her down. "I know everything about what happened to you, and frankly I understand where you came from. Now yes, your plan was really dumb and you should have gotten advice before you ran off like you did, but it wasn't your fault that any of us got hurt... and, as much as I hate to admit it, it worked out pretty nicely for us."

Her head cocked to the side. "What do you mean?"

"He means that we not only were able to knock out Shaw, but we also doubled our forces." Natasha's voice came up, a drink already in her hand as she sat down, Clint's arm going around her naturally as he gave her a kiss to the forehead. She smiled, leaning into him.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa when did this happen?" Lizzie asked, eyes wide with happiness and amusement.

Clint looked bashful when he looked back at her, Natasha smug behind him. "While you were gone, Tasha and I..."

"Got together." Natasha finished, smiling in a way that Lizzie had never seen her smile before. "Turns out his watching Loki miss you made Clint realize the fact that I was pretty important."

"I always knew you were important." Clint argued. "I just didn't realize in what capacity."

"Oh really?" Natasha replied, their little banter causing Lizzie to start chuckling.

"Well I'm glad you guys finally did something about that little connection you have." She said, raising her glass in salute. It was then that a familiar blonde walked in, her blue eyes widening before she practically ran to Lizzie, the brunette standing to hug her tightly.

"I thought you were going to die!" Bella exclaimed bluntly, pulling away to look at her sister, her eyes already welling in tears. "You promised me no more missions alone!"

Lizzie shook her head, pressing her forehead against Bella's as much as she could considering their height difference. "I'm so sorry, Bells. I didn't want to involve you since you didn't even have your memory back." she replied, a pang of pain in her chest from the fact that of everyone she wished
she'd not hurt Bella. They'd already lost so much, and she had been so close to adding herself to the list of casualties. "I'm sorry..." She said, the circles under Bella's eyes a stark contrast to her pale skin, giving more evidence that she had been more worried than Lizzie had seen her in a long time.

Bella shook her head, a hand going up to wipe at her eyes. "You're always such an idiot, I swear." she said with a little laugh in her voice. "You were no different in Dusseldorf." The reference was one which surprised Lizzie, the mission one which she'd almost forgotten until that moment. "You and your heroics..."

"This had literally nothing to do with heroism." Lizzie countered.

"You're right. It had literally everything to do with 'Lizzie always thinks she can do everything by herself and always has'" Bella retorted, a sassy head tilt accompanying it.

The younger twin gaped like a fish before finally closing her mouth, Natasha and Clints snickering finally reaching her ears as she saw them not even bothering to hide. With a narrowing of her eyes, she turned to her sister, though there was no malice in her gaze - though the look soon disappeared as she smiled widely, hugging Bella again. "I missed you."

"I missed you too, idiot." Bella shot back, poking Lizzie in the ribs.

In Asgard, Loki toyed with the ring around his finger, berating himself for wishing he could be somewhere else.

Chapter End Notes

WILL YOU LOOK AT THE FUCKING CUTIES? DAMN. Oh and look he actually said "I love you".. finally we have those words of magic. Anyway haha sorry i'm getting carried away - let me know what you thought below :D

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