**Hidden Within**

**by Lynds**

**Summary**

Tony's on the verge of giving up when he stumbles into Lucas and his large brood of troubled children. He knows they're on the run, but frankly, he's not going to live very much longer, so he doesn't care. He just wants to hang out with the hot guy with stunning green eyes and crazy kids, and maybe fall in love with all of them. Just a little.

When Loki finds out he isn't Odin's son, he washes his hands of the lot of them. He steals his children back from their prison and takes them on the run, hiding their true nature and magic in a mortal form. But then Tony comes to their aid one day, and he has to choose between keeping his children safe and hidden, and releasing his magic to save the life of a man he might be falling for.
Hi guys! I'm so excited/nervous about this one...I've been writing it since January, and the first draft's all done (in a notebook). I'm in the process of transcribing it and editing it now, and it's a lot less action based than the last one, but I'm hoping to focus on the relationships and (eventually) the terrible way Thor had to prove his worth to get Mjolnir back (seriously, the guy gets banished for throwing himself into fights, and you want him to prove he's worthy by...throwing himself into more fights?) I also wanted to bring Loki's first mythology family into things - Glut, Eisa and Einmyria don't get enough attention.

/edit 16/7: Yeah, that's probably because they might not even be his kids. There's confusion over Loki and Logi, and Glut, Eisa and Einmyria are probably Logi's family instead. Love how I do loads of research at the start of a fic, write a whole first draft, and then realise I researched something wrong ;) I don't care. This lot are staying. Logi doesn't exist in this universe lalalalala!

The timelines are a bit weird, I decided that Aesir/Jotnar don't age in a linear way compared to humans, it's more like an inverse exponential (I have made a graph and a timeline if you want it...such a geek!) That's why Loki looks relatively young but has already had time to have 8 children. That and the multiple births...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony Stark leaned on the railing overlooking the San Diego freeway, flicking pieces of Randy’s doughnuts into his mouth, and trying to swallow the palladium nausea.

This was it. He’d officially tried every permutation of every element on the periodic table. The rubidium isotope had been a joke, but he’d still felt his heart sink when it failed. The strangely angular marks were creeping up his collarbones, and he’d officially tried everything.

He started planning. Pepper would get the company, of course - she was a better CEO than he would ever be. And as much as it hurt, he was glad they'd already broken up.

Rhodey could have the suit. Well, not the suit. He was going to wear that one to fly high speed into a cliff when he absolutely felt his life draining away. He was Tony fucking Stark and he would choose the manner of his demise.

A sudden burst of giggles caught his attention and his lip twitched in amusement as he watched the family walking in his direction. Three little kids, must’ve been about ten or so, two boys and a girl, ran the tips of their fingers along the railings to make a clatter, giggling and teasing each other. The little girl, black hair flying in the hot wind, shoved both of her brothers at the same time. No way could they be anything but. The tall one had the exact same black hair as her, and the other, though he was brown haired and slightly stockier, still had the same fine features and piercing eyes.
“Helen, George, Finn, not so far ahead,” a voice called, and two more kids came round a bend in the road. The one who’d spoken was possibly in his teens, long white hair pulled into a ponytail, his eyes huge and dark in his serious face. He was clutching a couple of plastic grocery bags like he was expecting them to be snatched from him, and his other hand was just as tight on the little boy beside him.

Kid number five must’ve been about four years old, his thumb firmly in his mouth, shaggy brown hair almost obscuring his eyes.

The original three turned, only a few metres from Tony, and stuck their tongues out. “Catch us if you can, Stephen,” yelled the dark-haired boy.

“You know I could catch you easily if my hands weren’t full.” The teenager, Stephen, had a slight speech impediment, like every word had to be carefully formed. “You should help Father, he’s carrying too much.”

The trio grumbled but the black haired pair slouched off to a man a few paces back. He really was loaded down with stuff, and trying to talk on a mobile tucked in the crook of his shoulder. But even frazzled as he was, his dark hair falling into his face, Tony could see he was breathtakingly beautiful. Tall and slim, with sleeves rolled up to expose muscular forearms. And the greenest eyes he’d ever seen. It was like they’d been photoshopped. He was frowning as he argued with someone on the other end of the line, but when the kids ran up and started taking bags from him, his face lit up in a smile so sweet and happy Tony thought he might cry.

“Thank you, but you don’t have to worry about that,” he said, and Tony wanted to hear more of the soft, deep voice.

“We want to help,” said the little girl, and the man laughed and gave them one bag each. The brown haired triplet (they had to be triplets, surely?) was taking one of his brother’s bags, and Stephen gave a very similar grateful look to the boy. “Thanks, Finn.”

The little boy shrugged and blushed, then glanced at the youngest brother a moment before trotting back to Helen and George.

The oldest and youngest brothers were level with Tony when everything went to shit. A beaten up old truck backfired right beside them on the overpass and a bunch of teenagers riding in the back jeered and whooped. Tony jumped, but the kids did a whole body flinch. Stephen cried out suddenly and dropped his one remaining grocery bag, hunching over in pain. Tony leaped forwards to catch him, and the littlest boy bolted. Tony’s heart nearly exploded with the stress of watching a little kid haring away with only a low rail to separate him from the traffic.

“Father!” screamed Stephen, and Tony looked up to see their dad drop everything and race after the little boy. Shit, he’d never seen anyone run so fast.

Stephen was still whimpering and shaking, so he turned his attention back to the teen. “Hey there, let’s see, where are you hurt?”

The boy flinched and cowered back as if he’d only just noticed Tony’s arms around him. He fell on his ass on the pavement, and Tony could now see his arms were in spasm, hands clenched into claws.

“It’s OK, buddy, I’m just gonna try loosen up those muscles of yours, if you leave them too long they’ll hurt like a…they’ll hurt real bad. C’mere, I’m gonna massage your arm muscles so they loosen up, OK? But I won’t try and touch you again without your permission, that was my bad.
May I?”

Stephen stared, then nodded jerkily, and Tony started gently working at the clenched up arm muscles, moving the fingers a tiny bit more each time, but never enough to force against the tendons.

The triplets huddled around their big brother, peering at Tony out of the corner of wide eyes, and Tony wondered who had made these little angels so scared and mistrustful. He passionately wanted to pull the throat out of whoever it was.

“I’m Tony, what about you guys?” He was pretty sure he knew, but figured it sounded kinda creepy to use a kid's name before you were introduced.

“Helen,” whispered the little girl, just audible over the cars. Her brown haired brother shushed her.

“Hey, Helen. Nice name. Better than mine - hey, d’ya wanna swap or something? You be Tony? I think Helen would suit me. No?”

The dark haired pair giggled, and even their paler triplet couldn’t hide a smile.

“I’m George, and this is Finn,” said the black-haired boy.

“Either of you wanna be Tony?” The boys shook their heads, both openly grinning now. “What about you?” he asked the teenager.

“S-s-stephen,” he said, fighting with his mouth as he rocked in pain.

“Hey, Stephen, is that getting better or worse? Is there anything that usually helps?”

“Father usually makes his arms warm,” said Helen, her face pressed against Stephen’s shoulder.

“Warm, huh? Well, I don’t have a hot water bottle or anything, but I can give them a rub.” He pulled the boy’s long sleeves back down and rubbed vigorously on the fabric. “How about you guys do the other arm?”

The triplets slipped their arms out of the grocery bags and battled for space around Stephen’s left arm. Tony laughed. “OK, bad idea. Tell you what, why don’t two of you go and get your dad’s stuff from down the path so no-one steps on it, and the other one takes over here. I’ll get the left warmed up. Otherwise we’ll smother poor Stephen here.”

Helen and George ran to collect the dropped bags and broken phone. George sat down with the sorry thing in pieces in his hands, and the kids shared miserable looks.

“Don’t worry,” said Stephen, forcing a smile for his little siblings. “Father’s good at fixing broken things.”

Tony pretended not to notice, but he made a mental note to get their address and send them a new phone. The thing was ancient, anyway, well past its natural life.

And now he was looking he spotted other little signs of a difficult life, like carefully mended rips in clothes, belts used to hold up too-large hand-me-down trousers, and the tread worn off every pair of sneakers.

There was a squeak of shoes on asphalt, and the triplets jumped up crying “Father!” and “Nathan!” Tony looked up from gently pushing Stephen’s hands backwards and smiled.
The man was carrying his son wrapped around his chest like a koala. The brown curls obscured the little boy’s face, buried in his dad’s neck, and both the man’s arms were wrapped just as tightly around Nathan. The poor guy still looked shaken.

“Hey,” grinned Tony. “Sorry, I’m Tony, I hope you don’t mind.” He gestured at Stephen’s hands. “I used to get spasms in my arms when I first started pulling all-nighters in the workshop.”

The man blinked and actually bowed slightly. “Thank you. If it is left too long it becomes even more painful, so I am grateful.”

“No problem. So, uh, your name is?”

“Oh, my apologies. I am somewhat distracted. Lucas Friggason.” He made to shift his little boy to offer his hand, but Tony waved him away with another grin.

“He OK?”

“He is exhausted, but unharmed.”

Tony nodded, then turned to Stephen. “How’s that?”

Stephen rolled his wrists a couple of times. “Much better, thank you.” He stood and started picking up grocery bags.

“Woah, woah,” Tony protested. “Give your arms a rest, or all my good work will be undone. I got these.”

“That is unnecessary, we will manage,” said Lucas, crouching down to slip handles on his wrists while still holding the little boy. “You have done more than enough, thank you.”

“Don’t be silly,” Tony laughed, stacking the bag handles up his arms and giving the lightest three to the triplets. “You’re carrying your little guy, you concentrate on him, Stephen can concentrate on feeling better, and me and the Three Musketeers here can do the heavy lifting.”

“Does that mean you’re D’Artagnan?” asked George.

“I thought he was one of the three.”

Helen rolled her eyes. “Everyone thinks that. He was their friend.”

“Four musketeers? That doesn’t have the same ring to it.”

“That’s because of the ee sound,” George sniffed. “Anyway, he only becomes a musketeer in the end.”

“Huh,” Tony laughed, and stole a glance at Lucas. He was looking pretty flustered, which Tony found adorable.

“This is really very kind…and very unnecessary.”

Tony shrugged. “I wasn’t doing anything, this is much more constructive than accidentally dropping baked goods on the freeway. More responsible, too.”

“Thank you.” He looked like he was too exhausted to argue, and Tony wasn’t surprised. He felt like he’d just had a heart attack watching the kid, he couldn’t imagine how his dad had felt chasing after him.
The triplets seemed to have warmed to him completely and kept up a stream of consciousness chatter. Tony loved it. Finally, someone who appreciated the wonders of talking full speed full time.

They turned off the boulevard onto some quieter roads where a few skinny trees cut out some of the sun. Lucas led them to a series of boxy apartments, painted in white and orange blocks with star motifs by the numbers. A pretty young woman opened the door when she heard them climbing the stairs, an apron still round her waist. “Father, what happened to Nathan?”

Tony couldn't stop a burst of laughter. “Really? You’ve got six kids? You don’t even look old enough for these guys!”

Lucas rolled his eyes, and the girl peered round him and waved cheerfully. “Hello, new person.”

“Hi, I’m Tony, nice to meet you.”

“I’m Elsa,” she said, taking half of his bags and beckoning them inside. “And actually, Father has eight children.”

“Elsa,” said Lucas, a slight warning growl in his tone that sent warm shivers down Tony’s spine. “I still don’t think you can possibly be old enough,” Tony grinned.

“I am a lot older than I look,” he replied, a slight smile curling his lips.

The family and Tony crowded into the flat’s open plan living area. The triplets put their bags on the counter and ran off to one bedroom with Stephen. Tony caught a glimpse of bunk beds and a mattress on the floor that Stephen flopped onto before the door shut.

Elsa beckoned Tony over to the kitchenette with her head, and they started sorting out the items that had been damaged in the fall. Lucas lowered Nathan onto a sofa bed and tucked a comforter over him, stroking his curls with a sad little smile.

“What happened, Father?” asked Elsa again. There was something different about her, Tony thought. She didn’t have the same haunted, suspicious look as the other children. Obviously she had a different mother to the rest - she’d still inherited her father’s high cheekbones and his bright green eyes, but her skin was a warm brown and her face was round rather than pointed.

Lucas joined them trying to salvage the food. “A group of young people in a car started shouting.”

Elsa winced, her face scrunched up in pity as she looked over to her little brother. “Did he get far?”

Lucas shook his head. “No. But we were on the bridge over the freeway, so he was running right by the busiest traffic. He was panicking when I caught him. I…I do not think he recognised me at first.”

Elsa turned and squeezed him tight around his middle. He pressed his nose to her hair and hugged her back, a slightly wobbly smile on his face. Tony pretended not to see him wipe his cheeks as Elsa went back to the shopping.

“I don’t think much of this flour is salvageable,” she said, crinkling her nose up as she lifted a paper bag out, torn and slimy with egg.

Lucas sighed. “Have any of the eggs survived?”
“Five are unbroken, another three only cracked. They should be fine if we use them soon.” She checked her watch. “I can buy more on the way back from class.”

“You should not have to waste your wages on—“

“Shh!” she said imperiously. “I insisted on coming with you, did I not? I will help you, Father, because I want to support my family.” She leaned towards Tony and lowered her voice to a mock whisper. “He thinks he does not need any help.”

“Elsa,” snapped Lucas, and the girl winked at Tony.

“I like this one,” laughed Tony.

“That makes one of us,” grumbled Lucas.

“No, indeed, because I like me, too, therefore you are outvoted, sorry, Father,” she sang. “I must go now, or I shall be late.” She picked up a leather satchel from the floor by the sofa bed, then threw her apron onto the bottom bunk in a tiny box room.

“Elsa,” called Lucas as she got to the stairwell door. She turned, eyebrows raised in a question. He came round the counter and hugged her tight. “I love you very much. And I like you quite a lot too.”

“I love you too, Father,” she replied, a smile in her voice.

“Be safe.”

“Always.”

Chapter End Notes

I really hope you enjoy it. I have an idea of how to turn this into a completely original work, but in plotting it out the original version has changed so dramatically from this version that I feel comfortable uploading this now. Constructive criticism is always welcome, and if you live in Inglewood CA please forgive me! I wanted to start with Randy's doughnuts so I've put Loki's family there! Any insider info would be much appreciated ^_^

Find me on Tumblr at GoldFromStraw - I'm new there and already love it, so come and say hi!
Welcome to Loki's POV - I hope the name situation isn't too confusing? Loki thinks of them by their Aesir names, but he has to call them by their English names, and he sometimes gets it wrong. Not as often as the kids do though.

Also, I have to admit...a large part of this chapter is completely self indulgent daydreaming over Tom Hiddleston as King Henry V - because OH MY GOD the words suit the Aesir so well! I LOVE the BBC Hollow Crown series, but if you get a chance have a look at the recent RSC version directed by Anthony Doran, because he makes them so bloody funny! Like that whole desperately boring scene at the start of Henry V with the bishop talking about Henry's right to the French throne? In the RSC version you've got half the silent characters mumming in the background about how they haven't a clue what the bishop's talking about and wish he'd shut up and go away. Also David Tennant as Richard II kissing Aumerle!

Ahem. I'll stop geeking out and get on with it, shall I?

Loki smiled after his beloved Eisa and closed the door. He’d almost forgotten the man standing in his kitchen, pretending not to smile as he washed apples. “I have been rude,” Loki said. “Can I offer you a drink? Coffee?”

“The day I say no to coffee is the day you need to start looking into euthanasia as an option.”

Loki laughed and flipped the kettle on, picking out his least chipped mugs. He flicked anxious eyes over the room feeling…not ashamed, but perhaps a bit awkward. Tony’s clothes may have been rumpled, and his eyes sleep-deprived, but his watch alone probably cost more than a years’ rent. Here was truly a prince of Midgard. And here was Loki, cramming his poor children in this shabby, two bedroom apartment. He wondered if Tony would be as sneering as his landlord had been to find out Loki had to share a sofa bed with his youngest son, or that Eisa brought leftovers home from the restaurant to turn into stew for dinner.

The bedroom door thumped open and Jor ran out. “Father, Sleip’s asleep,” he giggled.

“Sleep?” Tony asked, amused.

Loki shot Jor an irritated look and he shrank guiltily. “The triplets could not pronounce Stephen, they used to call him Sleepen.”

Tony grinned. “Cute. Poor kid, he must be exhausted.”

Loki nodded. “He always is, after an episode. George, have you done your homework yet?”

Jor groaned. “But it’s so boring! I did the maths and geography, but we have to learn this poem in English and I hate it.”
“But you usually love poetry.”

“I like real poetry. This one’s…it’s just crap.” Tony snorted and Loki narrowed his eyes at his son until the boy huffed again. “Fine. It’s facile.”

Tony giggled even harder, which was not helping Loki keep a straight face. “What is wrong with it?”

“Ugh, it’s this stupid thing about leaving the lid off the toothpaste - who even cares about toothpaste that much? Except maybe Hermione Granger’s parents.”

Loki allowed a little smile to creep onto his lips. “And what would you prefer to recite?”

Jor’s eyes lit up and he leaned forward on the counter. “Can you teach me that one you read yesterday about the band of brothers? That was amazing, it was like I could hear the swords and the horses. Please? Can you teach me now?”

Loki felt the heat rising up his cheeks and carefully avoided Tony’s eyes. “You mean the speech from Henry V?”

“Yeah, the one with the king, please?”

“You know there is more to life than Shakespeare.”

“Maybe, but not much,” he grinned. “Tony, you should hear my Father, he’s an awesome king.”

“I’ll bet he is,” Tony smirked. “C’mon, do the speech.” He leaned his chin on his hand and his elbows on the counter and Loki’s face practically glowed.

“I would be a terrible king,” he muttered. “I cannot even make my own children behave. You know where to find the book!” He shooed Jor, who was having none of it.

“I know how to read it, I want you to show me how to say it. I’ll get Hel and Finn, they’ll back me up.”

“I know how to read it, I want you to show me how to say it. I’ll get Hel and Finn, they’ll back me up.”

“I’m really looking forward to this,” said Tony, waggling his eyebrows, and Loki hid his face in his hands. Three annoying little triplets were soon bouncing around him, tugging and giggling and chanting “Henry, Henry, Henry.” Even Tony joined in, clapping to the beat.

Loki groaned and gave in.

“What’s he that wishes so?” He spun, taking his hands from his face and looking at each of his children. He pointed to Jor. “My Cousin Westmoreland?” Jor giggled harder and jumped up and down like a boy of just fifty.

Loki shook his head. “No, my fair cousin. If we are marked to die, we are enough to do our country loss, and if to live, the fewer men, the greater share of honour.” He spread his arms wide, thinking with a pang of guilt and regret and love and hate of Thor.

“God’s will, I pray the, wish not one man more. By Jove, I am not covetous for gold nor care I who doth feed upon my cost; it yearns me not if men my garments wear; such outward things dwell not in my desires. But,” he whirled and held up one finger to Hela, who nudged Fen and giggled. “If it be a sin to covet honour, I am the most offending soul alive.

“No, faith, my coz,” he turned back shaking his head at Jor. “Wish not a man from England. God’s
peace, I would not lose so great an honour as one man more, methinks, would share from me, for the best hope I have. Oh, do not wish one more!

“Rather proclaim it, Westmoreland, through my host, that he which have no stomach to this fight, let him depart. His passport shall be made, and crowns for convoy put into his purse.” He threw the cheap wallet from his back pocket at Jor, who caught it with a shriek. “We would not die in that man’s company that fears his fellowship to die with us.

“This day is called the feast of Crispian. He that outlives this day and comes safe home, will stand o’tiptoe when the day is named and rouse him at the name of Crispian. He that shall see this day, and live old age, will yearly on this vigil feast his neighbours and say ‘tomorrow is Saint Crispian.’ Then he will strip his sleeve and show his scars,” he said, pulling his own up to bear the wounds of centuries of skirmish as he and Thor and Sif and the Warriors Three had done at so many feast before, “and say, ‘these wounds I had on Crispin’s day’.

“Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot but he’ll remember with advantages what feats he did that day. Then shall our names familiar in his mouth as household words, Harry the king.” he pressed a hand to his own chest. “Bedford and Exeter,” he pointed to Fen and Hela, “Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,” he pointed at Jor and Tony. “Be in their flowing cups freshly remembered.

“This story shall the good man teach his son,” he said, trying not to think of tales of Frost Giants and two rapt boys. “And Crispin Crispian shall ne’er go by, from this day to the ending of the world, but in it shall be remembered we few, we happy few.” He bent down and his children crowded close. “We band of brothers; for he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother; be he ne’er so vile, this day shall gentle his condition; and gentlemen in England now abed,” they glanced at their sleeping brothers and giggled softly, “shall think themselves accursed they were not here, and hold their manhoods cheap whilst any speaks that fought with us on St Crispin’s day.”

There was quiet for a moment. Then “Well, I’ll just be over here adjusting myself and reliving the last few minutes, ignore me please.”

Loki flamed bright red again and let his head fall into his hand. “Do not make fun of your king.”

“Oh, trust me, I don’t. That was fu…uh, really hot.”

He rolled his eyes and shook his head at the idiot mortal. “Have you two, at least, done your homework?”

Hela and Fenrir nodded.

“Well, I suppose we should make something of these broken eggs. Any requests from the sous chefs?”

“Cake!” they yelled in concert. Big surprise there. All the noise had woken Sleipnir and Narfi, so he cracked all the broken eggs into a bowl and sent the five children to the rickety dining table.

Hela grabbed Tony’s hand and dragged him with her, and to Loki’s surprise, he went willingly, and listened intently to the discussion between Fen and Hela about which cake they should make. Loki sneaked a look at the man, and wondered what a beautiful, wealthy, successful person was doing in his kitchen mixing flour and talking about whisking with his children.

“Father, can I do the cocoa?”
“Aww, no…OK, can I do the sugar?”

“Can I crack another egg?”

Loki raised an eyebrow and just looked at his hyperactive brood, head tilted until they grinned sheepishly.

“Sorry, Father,” Fen said.

“That’s better. Right, Helen, get the butter from the counter. Slei-Stephen, we’ve got enough eggs already. George, you can do the sugar, and Finn, you’re in charge of cocoa. Nathan, do you want to find the cupcake cases?”

The kids scattered, and Tony grinned, still mixing the flour and egg. “You’ve got that down to a fine art.”

Loki shook his head. “It’s like herding cats at times.”

“So where are the other two, if you don’t mind me asking?” Loki looked at him sharply until he elaborated. “Elsa said you have eight.”

“I do mind, actually,” he said, stiffly.

“Oh…sorry. I didn’t mean to be nosey.”

Loki focussed on Narfi climbing onto his lap, smiling at him to press the grief further down. Narfi didn’t seem to have heard or noticed, or he’d have curled up into a little ball by now. Instead, he was laying the cupcake cases out into the tin.

“I’m sorry,” muttered Tony again.

Loki forced a smile and gave a slight shake of his head. “Helen, is the butter soft enough? Do you need the recipe?”

“Nope, I’ve got it.”

The kids co-operated and squabbled in turn, but in the end most of the ingredients were actually in the bowl. Fenrir offered to let Narfi put in the cocoa, but he turned to Jor to give him puppy eyes until he allowed him to help with sugar instead.

There was more squealing and laughter and bickering while they spooned the mixture into the cupcake cases, and Sleip carefully carried them to the oven, looking so proud that his temperamental arm muscles had allowed him a small victory.

Then all semblance of grace and good manners went out of the window as all five children plus Tony dived into the mixing bowl, covering their fingers in rich batter and licking it off before battling in again. Loki shook his head and rubbed the bridge of his nose. They were definitely sillier than usual, and as he watched Tony jab Fen in the ribs to make him giggle and lose the race to a particularly big blob of the mixture, he really wasn’t surprised.

Narfi suddenly poked Loki in the mouth, and he pulled his head back. The little boy was sitting on his knee, a blob of batter on his index finger and more smeared around his mouth. Loki flicked his tongue out to catch the smear on his own lip that Narfi had wiped there, but mostly he was captivated by Narfi’s face. Because he was smiling.
Loki struggled to hold his tears in, and smiled back. Narfi leaned forwards with his finger outstretched, and his smile became a mischievous little smirk. Loki didn’t want to move for fear he would break the spell, and just drank in his youngest son’s smile. He couldn’t even remember Narfi’s smile from before.

As his finger came close enough to nearly touch his lips, Loki darted forward and nipped it. Narfi pulled back, scrunching his face up, but still smiling. He leaned forwards again and again, creeping his hand close to Loki’s mouth and jerking back every time Loki went to lick or bite him. When he caught him again, Narfi made a wheezing, gasping noise, and Loki panicked, thinking he’d hurt or scared him. It took a moment to realise that Narfi was laughing.

He couldn’t bear any more, and pulled his little boy into a tight hug, burying his face in Narfi’s tangled curls, and tried not to sob. When Narfi wriggled to get down, he wanted to cling more, but he loosened his arms and turned his face, wiping at his eyes with quick movements.

A hand at his elbow made him jump. “You all right?” Tony’s honey brown eyes were soft with concern, and for a moment Loki wanted to let go of his pride and his poise and fall into the arms of a stranger and steal some comfort from somewhere. Anywhere he didn’t have to be the scaffold on which others leaned and grew.

Maybe if his children hadn’t been milling around he would have. Instead he smiled brightly and nodded, then jumped up to find a cloth for the mess. He could feel Tony’s eyes following him, and forced himself not to glance up.

There was something so warm about him. Of course he was beautiful, that was immediately obvious. Loki had been married twice to women, but he’d had plenty of relationships with men, too, and Tony’s compact wiriness was definitely his type.

He reminded him of Hogun, the first person he lay with after…after Sleipnir was born. He too had that searching look, carefully observing Loki to see what he needed, and if he decided it was something he could handle by himself, he left him alone. There was no judgement, no attempt to fix him, just an implicit support.

“Tony!” Hela ran into the kitchen, waving an Eyewitness Guide to space. “Did you know that even light can’t escape a black hole? It’s got so much gravity it sucks everything in.”

“Uh-huh,” he said, turning to face her. “Do you know what it’s called when something gets sucked into a black hole?” Hela shook her head. “Spaghettification.”

“Spaghettification?” She scrunched up her face in disbelief, stretching the last syllables out. “Like pasta?”

“Yup. It’s because the gravity acts on the closest part of the object with more force than the top of the object, so it gets all stretched out like spaghetti.”

“No way!”

“Yes way! That’s the proper scientific word, I swear.”

She looked at Loki for confirmation, and he nodded. The events were correct, though they had different words for it on Asgard. He could tell Tony wasn’t lying, though.

“That’s so cool!” she shrieked, and Loki grinned. The triplets had picked up the vernacular so quickly.
Hela started running around the room with Jor and getting caught in the gravitational field of one of the dining chairs. She slipped under it, feet first, yelling “Jor, Jor, save me, I’m being spaghettified!” Jor and Fen both grabbed her arms and pulled.

Loki wondered briefly if he should get them to use their Midgardian names even at home, but he couldn’t quite bring himself to force the issue. The triplets names in particular were so similar to their English versions.

He felt a swell of pride watching them lie in a heap on the floor together. “Thank you,” Hela gasped. “You saved me.”

Tony clapped. “That was awesome. You’re the first person ever to escape the event horizon of a black hole, good job.”

Hela rolled over and grinned back at him, then started sliding herself back under the chair again. “Oh nooo, I’m caught again!”

Loki huffed. “They’ll play the same scene for the next half hour or so,” he said to Tony.

“They’re awesome kids,” he laughed.

“I know,” replied Loki smugly, just as the oven timer went off.

“Cupcakes!” yelled Jor, and they crowded round him as he went to the oven.

“Get back, you fiends,” he groused, flicking them with the tea towel.

“Can we ice them now please?” Sleipnir asked.

Loki shook his head and checked his watch. “They must be completely cold or the buttercream will melt off. And you need dinner and a wash and bed.”

“Awww,” they moaned in chorus. Loki noticed Tony joining in too.

“We will ice them tomorrow after school.”

“Tony, you have to come too,” said Hela.

“Hel,” Loki sighed, embarrassed. “I’m sure Tony has plenty to do on a Monday afternoon.”

“Not really,” Tony shrugged. “Not anything more important than putting frosting on cupcakes.” He looked up at Loki, suddenly flustered. “I mean, if that’s OK, sorry, it’s up to your dad, I—“

“You would be welcome,” Loki said, bowing his head.

“Great! That’s…that’s great, I’ll bring sprinkles.”

The kids’ faces lit up. They’d seen sprinkles on other children’s cupcakes at school, and in shops, but Loki hadn’t allowed them to waste money on such frivolity, not on Earth. Cupcakes and icing were a rare enough treat. He couldn’t help a pang of irritation as he watched Tony take his leave, promising to be back at 4:30 the following day.

He adored his children, and loved spending time with them, but he couldn’t see a wealthy, successful businessman chasing to spend another afternoon with a room full of hyperactive children, and he felt a surge of disappointment that Tony would get their hopes up after Loki had provided him with such an easy escape route.
Chapter End Notes

I hope it wasn't too long and drawn out! Please let me know what you think? Con-crit is welcome!
Tony fell asleep thinking of vibrant green eyes staring at a little tousle-headed boy like he held the key to the universe, and woke up early grinning about spaghettification and Shakespeare. Even the grey lines across his chest didn’t distract him from wondering what sprinkles to buy for the Friggason kids.

“Jarvis, what’s my schedule like today?” he asked, plucking at his favourite t-shirt so it lay just right and hid the marks.

“You have an appointment with Ms Potts and Ms Rushman to discuss her takeover as your PA. Ms Potts then wants to discuss the expo at noon, and at 1pm you are due to leave for Monaco.”

Tony froze. “Monaco?”

“Yes, sir. The F1, you were asked to join the charity race tomorrow morning.”

Tony considered it for a long moment. He loved racing, loved speed of any sort. This had been in his calendar for months, and he’d actually been looking forward to it. But right now, he just felt a sinking disappointment when he thought of missing the kids.

OK, fine, Lucas was a pretty big draw as well.

Shit. Tony Stark wanted nothing more than to decorate cupcakes with a bunch of children in a shitty two-bed apartment downtown.

If he’d been healthy it would have been a no-brainer. Do the race, then spend time and money apologising and worming his way back into Lucas’ good graces. But right now he felt justified in being even more selfish than usual. He wanted to hang out with five little kids, their sassy big sister and their gorgeous dad more than he wanted to drive a ten million dollar car around a European city.

And anyway, he wasn’t sure he’d have enough time to apologise to Lucas if he blew them off this time.

“Send Michel in the team a message, Jarv. Tell him I broke a rib, or got Ebola or something, send my sincerest apologies and a mil for the charity. Jenson’s free anyway, isn’t he? He can take my place.”
“Yes, sir,” Jarvis replied, and Tony could swear there was an amused smirk in his voice. “Shall I call a doctor as well.”

Tony snorted and shook his head, then made his way to the door. “You should be delighted, Jarv. You don’t have to give me shit for not telling Pepper about the race.”

“I will focus all my energy on convincing you to tell her about the palladium then, sir.”

“You’re killing me, Jarvis.”

“Not me, sir,” he said softly.

***

He had thought Pepper would appreciate him not being drunk and late. He tried to flirt with Natalie, just to keep up appearances, but his heart wasn’t in it. He didn’t even manage to get that nerve in Pepper’s temple twitching, but she still didn’t see anything wrong. Apparently being a CEO is distracting. Who knew? Either way, he didn’t feel too bad about donating all his modern art to the Boy Scouts. Because why not? Kids needed to learn about the arts.

Eventually he squirmed and fidgeted and managed to be annoying enough to get her to wrap the meeting up after the bare minimum, and he leaped to his feet and practically ran out to the car.

One supermarket stop later, and he was parking on the side of the road and pressing the buzzer, keyed up and tired, and thinking he should have been that little bit more selfish and just blown off both meetings. It was pathetic how his heart lifted when he heard Helen yelling “Tony’s here!” even through the closed door.

A thundering of feet followed, and Lucas’ voice. “Do not open the door, Hela.”

“But Father, it’s Tony!”

“You do not know that. Eisa and I open the door, no-one else.”

The latches clicked and Tony gave his brightest, cheesiest grin as Lucas pulled the door open. It wasn’t hard. He took great pleasure in watching the surprise flicker over Lucas’ face before he smiled back, his gorgeous green eyes crinkling up.

Helen and Finn pushed past their dad, who was adorably flushed, and wrapped their arms around Tony’s waist. “Tony, come on, the cakes are all spread out ready, they’re going to taste amazing.”

“And look even better,” he grinned, and held up a grocery bag.

“Sprinkles!” Helen screamed, and grabbed the bag. “Thank you, thank you, thank you, this is the best day ever!”

“Wow, you are easily pleased,” he laughed, pulling on his ear which was ringing from the shrieks. The kids raced inside and Tony smiled at Lucas, suddenly shy.

“Thank you, Tony,” said Lucas.

“Hey, don’t look so surprised. I know my reputation precedes me, but I still promised.”

Lucas gave a little laugh. “I know nothing of your reputation. Come on in, or the children will tear the house apart.”
Tony followed him, frowning. Was Lucas being sarcastic or did he really not know who he was?

“Tony, come and sit with me,” yelled Helen, bouncing up and down on the chair she was kneeling on. Finn and George scuffled for the chair on his other side briefly, Finn looking smug when he won.

“I’ve never felt so in demand,” Tony grinned, waving at the other three kids, Nathan sitting quiet on Elsa’s lap. Stephen smiled shyly and waved back.

Lucas put a few small, mismatched bowls of icing sugar and soft butter on the table, along with some punnets of berries, and Helen spread Tony’s haul of sprinkles out for everyone to admire.

“Wow! Silver balls,” George yelled. “Miguel had those on his birthday cake last year.”

“Edible ball bearings, just what the Doctor ordered,” Tony grinned. “So, what do we do?”

“Haven’t you made cupcakes before?” Helen asked, grabbing a bowl and some blueberries.

“I don’t think I have.”

Elsa made a shocked face. “Deprived childhood!”

“I know, I’m scarred,” he sighed, one hand on the arc reactor.

“We use the fork to mush the berries and butter and sugar all together until there are no lumps,” Finn explained. “Then we can spread it on the top of the cakes and add the sprinkles.”

Tony nodded, lips pursed. “Let’s do this thing.”

He was pretty sure more icing and sprinkles went in mouths than on cakes, but by the end there were twelve of the most delicious, sparkliest, messiest cupcakes Tony had ever seen lined up on a chopping board. “This is the best bakery in town,” he told Helen, and pulled out his phone to take a photo.

“Oh, can we be in it?” George asked.

Tony raised his eyebrows at Lucas, who looked uncertain. “Why don’t we take a photo with all of you on your dad’s phone?” Tony said instead.

“Father’s phone broke,” said Stephen quietly, and Tony winced, remembering the mess it had been. He had meant to pick a new one up for him.

“Use mine,” Elsa said, passing hers over. It looked a lot newer than Lucas’.

“Everyone get in the picture then, you too, Dad.” Tony grinned as Lucas tried to dissemble and was dragged in by his children.

It was a good picture. Well, as a picture it wasn’t great. In some ways, it was shit. George had a ridiculous expression, mouth open and faced away in the middle of a sentence. Nathan wasn’t even looking at the camera, you could just barely see his profile. Stephen’s eyes were shut, and one of Helen’s had a serious case of red-eye. But every single one was smiling. Elsa was bending over slightly, her nose crinkled in a giggle, the triplets were crouched down, their faces level with the cupcakes, and Lucas…Lucas was beautiful.

His high cheekbones were emphasised by a wide grin that crinkled up his impossible green eyes, and the slight hunch to his shoulders betrayed his mild embarrassment. Tony found his lip curling
up in a little, soft smile, and quickly handed Elsa her phone back before he could make too much of a fool of himself.

The kids bounced around her, peering at the family photo, and Tony found himself staring at their gorgeous father. He actually blushed when Lucas caught his eye, but he noticed the way Lucas smiled as he looked away, his hand going to the back of his head to fiddle with his messy ponytail.

“Which one do you want, Tony?” Finn asked, hopping up and down with his hands on the table, causing it to wobble dangerously.

“I think I need blackberries and edible glitter in my face,” he said, and Helen beamed as he chose her masterpiece. The kids took that as their cue to grab one as well, not quite fighting over them, but still getting a bit too enthusiastic with the table.

“Careful,” Lucas said, glaring at George who’d been lying on his belly on the table to sneak closer. The little boy slid back sheepishly, blueberry cupcake in hand.

“These are amazing,” Tony moaned, crunching on glittery sugar. “Best cupcakes in town.”

The others agreed. Lucas was sitting at the table with Nathan on his lap tightly pressed agains this chest and smearing icing over Lucas’ grey hoodie every time he turned to hide his face. Which he did every time Tony looked in his direction. Which he did constantly because Lucas kept flicking his tongue out to catch crumbs or smudges of icing, and Tony thought it was more satisfying to watch him eat than to actually finish his own cupcake, as delicious as fresh fruit buttercream was.

Then Lucas caught him staring yet again, and obviously thought he was looking at the mess on his hoodie, because he noticed his youngest son’s handiwork and groaned. “Scruffy little puppy. Raised by wolves, you are.”

Nathan’s head snapped up to his dad, and huge eyes filled with tears. The whole family gasped, Lucas’ eyes widening. “Narfi, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it, I…Narfi!”

But he slipped off his lap and padded silently into the bathroom. Lucas closed his eyes and covered his face with both hands for a moment before standing.

“I’ll go, Father,” said Stephen, pushing away from the window seat. Lucas nodded and slumped back down.

“Is he OK? What…” Tony stopped himself. But he just couldn’t tell what could have upset the boy so much.

Elsa caught his eye and shook her head with a little smile. “Well,” she said cheerfully. “I’m going to take one of these for my boss and get going. Nice to see you again, Tony. Come over for Jollof rice and chicken at the restaurant any time, Veronica has a soft spot for Stephen. When I told her you came to the rescue yesterday she insisted on treating you to the best Nigerian food you’ve ever had.” She winked at Tony, then gave her dad an extra tight hug, waved at the triplets and left.

“We’ll take one to Mrs Henderson and Stephen wants one for his teacher, so the last one’s yours, Tony. Who are you going to give it to?” Helen asked.

“Aww, you guys keep it, you can share it or something.”

Lucas cleared his throat and sat up, pasting a smile on his face. “They will only fight over which piece is the largest. It will be much easier if you take it.”
“Oh, well, if it makes your lives easier,” he smirked, and picked the pink cupcake up. It had probably the neatest icing - Tony suspected Lucas or Elsa had made this one - and a whole strawberry, delicate sepals and all, sat on a whip of strawberry icing. “I’ll give this to my friend Pepper.”

“Your friend’s called Pepper?” George asked, nose scrunched up.

“Her real name’s Virginia, but her last name’s Potts. So, Pepper Potts.”

Lucas laughed, and Tony felt like he’d achieved something. “That is a tenuous link,” he grinned.

Tony grinned back. “Most of my nicknames are.”

Lucas glanced at the cheap plastic watch on his wrist and startled slightly. “It is late - will you stay for dinner, Tony?”

“Only if I can buy you guys takeaway.”

Lucas’ eyebrows raised. “Oh, no, that is not necessary, I have food ready to cook. It will not take long.”

“Who here thinks your dad deserves a night off?” Tony looked around at the triplets who all raised their hands and yelled “me!”

“It’s really no trouble,” spluttered Lucas. “I would not have offered if I hadn’t had something in mind.”

Tony shrugged. “Save it for tomorrow. My treat. You guys provided dessert, I’ll do the main meal, right?”

The kids cheered, and Lucas sighed. “Are you sure? It really is no trouble.”

“Yeah,” he said. “The triplets and I can order the food, you can check on Nathan.”

Lucas met his eye and a soft smile spread across his face. “Thank you, Tony,” he said, and Tony felt a warm glow spread through his chest, suffocating the pain and ick from the palladium for a moment.

Lucas peeled his dirty hoodie off as he stood, and Tony had to tear his eyes away from the ripple of muscle across his back and shoulders.

“Who wants to meet Jarvis?” he asked instead, pulling out his phone

Chapter End Notes

I wish I could draw from my imagination well enough to make a picture of the family I’ve got in my head, the photo that Tony takes of all of them! If you are an arty person and feel inspired I will love you for always!
Tony - Agents of Entropy

Chapter Summary

In which the children are not angels, and Tony is not oblivious.

Chapter Notes

Yes. Narfi/Nathan sleeps VERY HEAVILY. He's got used to his extremely loud family, even his PTSD has learned to ignore them, and in fact he finds it difficult to sleep in complete silence these days

By the way, I envision my eldest daughter growing up to be just like Finn/Fenrir, and my youngest being freaking exactly like George/Jor. Oh god. If you guys read my Spaces in Between series you'll know quite a lot about my little monkeys because Vali and Narfi there were completely based on my own kids. However, they're 4 and 7, so the behaviour of THESE little monsters is sort of based on some of my favourite kids from teaching secondary school!

The kids had never had Chinese food before. Tony pretended to be even more horrified than he actually was and ordered the entire menu, spreading it out on the beleaguered table.

Nathan was back in his usual place on Lucas’ lap, everything apparently forgiven. He was clearly exhausted, and Lucas soon slipped away to clean the little boy and tuck him in on the sofa bed.

The triplets and Stephen did try to speak a little more quietly after that. But one would get enthusiastic and start talking louder and louder, and the other would suddenly shush them violently. Lucas would roll his eyes and Tony tried not to laugh, because the hushing made way more noise than the original offence.

It was nearly nine o’clock when Lucas checked his watch again. “Oh, damn, it is late. Bed time for all of you.”

“Awww!”

“Come on. It’s past even your bed time,” he nodded at Stephen. “George, Stephen, get into your pyjamas. Finn, you’re showering first.”

“Do I have to shower today?” Helen asked.

“Yes, George and Stephen shower tomorrow after athletics.”

“But I had swimming today, so I already had a shower.”

“Was soap involved? No. So you need to get the chlorine off.”

Helen groaned and stomped into the box room. The boys slunk off to their room too, and Lucas
sighed.

“Peace at last?” Tony asked.

Lucas shook his head. “The battle has just begun.”

And sure enough, the squeals and shrieks coming from the boys’ room suggested there wasn’t much bedtime going on. Lucas sighed and pushed himself up. “Why are you not in your pyj — George, you have not even undressed, what are you doing? Finn, shower, now. No, get undressed in the bathroom. Stephen, you may not sleep in your jeans.” He glared around the room, then shut the door again.

Tony grinned at him, and he gave a sheepish smile back. “Sorry. Would you like some coffee?”

“Yes please.”

Both men jumped as a teenage voice yelled “get off!” Lucas rolled his eyes.

“I’ll sort the coffee out,” Tony said, waving him off.

Lucas opened the boys’ door again. Behind him Tony could just see George, still mostly dressed, straddling his big brother and apparently trying to smother him with the duvet. “Boys! Will you get ready for bed!”

“Tell him to get off me!”

“George, off. Why are you not in your pyjamas yet?”

The boy didn’t answer beyond a hyper, cheeky giggle, but since he climbed off and started pulling his jeans down Lucas closed the door again.

The shower started and Lucas made for the kitchenette, checking Nathan on the way. “I’m sorry. I would say it’s because they’re hyper from the unusual dinner, but bedtime is nearly always like this.”

Tony laughed and hunted for coffee.

“Daddy, can you read this to us tonight?” Helen came out of her room holding the Eyewitness Guide, still fully dressed.

“Hel,” Lucas sighed, exasperated. “I will not be reading anything if you are not ready for bed.”

“But Finn’s in the shower.”

“Yes, and he’ll be finished in a minute or two. Get ready, in your towel, and you can shower the moment he’s out.”

“Ooooo-kaay.”

The bathroom door opened and a naked child raced into the boys’ room, slipping on the bare floor. Tony burst out laughing and covered his eyes. Lucas threw his head back and groaned. “Idiot child. He always forgets his towel. Although why he could not use my towel, that’s hanging on the rail, I will never know.” He banged on Helen’s door. “The shower is free now, Helen, are you ready?”

“Nearly!”
There was a thumping noise from the boys’ room and Stephen’s voice shrieked “fuck off, Jor!”

Lucas growled and clenched his fists, marching over and throwing the door open. “What is going on here?”

“Jor’s being a little shit!”

“Language, Stephen.”

“So he’s allowed to be a little shit, but I’m in trouble for calling him one?”

“Out! I will deal with you in a moment.” The teenager stomped out and threw himself against the wall, arms crossed. Tony hid his grin and concentrated on adding milk to Lucas’ coffee.

“Right. I will ask again. What is going on here?”

“Jor’s not getting ready and he was poking Sleip with his foot while he was trying to sleep.”

“Tell tale!”

“Well, you were.”

“George, why are you not dressed?”

“Because I’m not tired. Why do I have to go to bed anyway?”

“You have school tomorrow, and if you do not sleep now you will be a nightmare in the morning.”

“I’m ready for bed, Father.”

“Ugh, you’re such a fucking goody goody, Fenrir.”

“JORMUNGRAND LOKASON, THAT IS ENOUGH!”

Tony jumped. Stephen jumped and stood up straight. Nathan sat up and blinked at his big brother with wide eyes, then slumped back onto his pillows and curled up again. The two boys in the room were very suddenly silent and still. Helen’s door creaked open and she slipped quietly into the bathroom.

Lucas took a deep breath. “Do you know why I am so angry?”

Silence.

He shook his head and rubbed the bridge of his nose. “We are family, and that means driving each other crazy sometimes. But you are being cruel to each other and that can break a family.”

The kids shuffled their feet. “Sorry, Father.”

“It is not to me you need to apologise.”

There were various mumblings.

“Right. George, go into Helen’s room to change. If you mess with her stuff I will not stop her from exacting retribution. Stephen, Finn, in bed. No reading tonight.”

“Awww.”
“Well, if you would get on with it and not swear at each other, and not try to get each other into trouble, I would be happy to read,” he snapped.

George came out of Helen’s room wearing blue and white striped pyjamas and chewing on his thumbnail. Lucas turned to look at him, one eyebrow raised.

“Sorry, Father.”

“For what?”

“For being a little shit.”

Lucas sighed. “Try again, without the swearing.”

He hunched his shoulders. “For not getting ready for bed when you told me?”

“Thank you. And?”

He curled in on himself a little more. “For annoying Sleip and being mean to Fen.”

“Then what do you need to do?”

“Apologise to them.”

Lucas nodded. “I will not be reading to you tonight. If you want one to read tomorrow I suggest you get yourself ready for bed when I ask you the first time, and not wait until you have driven your brothers and I up the wall.”

George nodded, his head still hanging low and his shoulders hunched. Lucas took a step towards the skinny boy, putting his hand on his shoulder. As soon as he touched him George pressed forwards and hugged his dad tightly around his waist, burying his face in his chest.

Lucas stroked his hair and murmured comfort to him before leading him to the bedroom and kissing all three boys goodnight. He spent a little longer in Helen’s room, reading a page of her book before slouching out of her room and slumping on the window seat. Tony handed him his coffee.

“I should have read to Finn and Stephen at least,” he muttered. “I don’t even know what I was punishing Finn for.” He sighed and ran his long fingers through tangled hair. “Now Finn has been punished for being ready before his brothers, and I was so caught up in feeling angry at George I didn’t realise how unfair I was being.”

“Hey, don’t be so hard on yourself,” said Tony, sitting next to him and curling his right knee onto the seat so he could face him properly. “I’m sure they’ll have forgotten about it all by tomorrow.”

He sighed. “I don’t want to have to rely on that. Things like this mean a lot to a child. They meant a lot to me.”

Tony smiled, remembering his own childhood. “Everyone makes mistakes, Lucas. You’re only human.”

Lucas laughed, harder than Tony thought was warranted. “But I should not be.” He turned to Tony, a mixture of mirth and sadness on his face. “I am a father, and as such my mistakes mean more. I must be better. I must be…a god.”

Tony wanted to beg him to adopt him in that moment. “You know how many parents don’t think
that? They don’t even care. You’re an awesome dad, Lucas, because you’re trying so damn hard to be fair and raise them to be thoughtful.”

He put his hand over Lucas’ and he wasn’t even flirting. He just wanted to make sure Lucas was paying attention and heard how sincerely he believed in him. “My dad wouldn’t have even thought about how I felt when he told me off. He would’ve yelled at me for whatever, and even if I didn’t do anything wrong, it would’ve been his prerogative as a dad to yell. You know your kids might get mad at you and feel like you’re being unfair, but I bet they know they can tell you about it and you’ll actually listen. They’ll appreciate that, Lukes.”

Lucas smiled slightly. “I hope so.” He rubbed his temples. “I’ll take Stephen and Finn aside and apologise to them tomorrow morning.”

Tony moved his hand to Lucas’ shoulder and squeezed. “You guys’ve had a rough couple of years, huh?”

“You could say that.”

Tony hesitated. “You know, if you need help…you know, I know you’re in hiding from someone —”

“What?” Lucas looked horrified, like he was about to start running right now, and Tony hurried to reassure him.

“No no no, I don’t…it’s not like I know anything, it’s just, I hear you using different names when you’re stressed, and the kids are all…I mean, they’ve basically got PTSD, haven’t they? Especially Nathan. I’m just saying, whatever you’re running from, I know it must’ve been bad and…shit…I just want…if you need any help, I’ve got some serious resources, just…please…” He sighed. “OK, please forget I said anything? It’s none of my business, just…please don’t disappear, will you?”

He stared at Tony for a long moment, and Tony bit his lip, wishing he could take it all back. “I’m sorry.”

Lucas leaned forwards and kissed him, just a gentle brush of lips. Tony found his eyes fluttering closed as the lip he’d been biting at tingled.

Lucas leaned back and looked at him, eyes searching his face for something. Whatever it was, he found it. He slid one hand along the side of Tony’s face until long fingers curled around his ear, then shifted forwards and claimed him. Tony sighed into the kiss, pressing back towards Lucas and sliding his hand around his slim waist, feeling a sliver of skin between the jeans and the soft t-shirt.

He wanted more than anything for time to stop right there, for an eternity of Lucas’ tongue caressing his, of silk skin under his fingers and the soft breath from Lucas’ nose fluttering in the hairs of his beard.

He didn’t even know his real name, any of them. If time insisted on continuing, they would be forced to deal with that. Lucas would still be running from whoever had traumatised his children, and Tony would only have a few weeks left to convince them to take all the help he could give before the palladium in his blood overwhelmed his liver and kidneys and they were all permanently out of his reach. He pleaded with time.

Time was a bastard. Lucas pulled back, pressing their foreheads together. His other hand came up to his face, stringing through Tony’s hair, and he squeezed his eyes shut, kissing him on the eyes,
the nose, the cheeks. Every time he looked like he was going to say something his breath would stutter and he’d kiss Tony again.

“Hey,” Tony said. “It’s OK, you don’t have to tell me anything you don’t want to. I don’t need your life story, just…if you need help, I’m here for you, OK? No questions asked.”

“You are mad,” Lucas whispered, leaning forwards until their foreheads touched and closing his eyes. “You know nothing about me - I could…I could be a monster.”

He shrugged. It was true, but Tony was dying. He’d probably never know and he was selfish enough to allow his fantasies to be his truth. “I know your kids are amazing,” he said. Lucas smirked, face still pressed to his, eyes still shut like he was focusing everything on the feel of Tony’s face against his skin. Tony stroked his cheek. “I know you’re an amazing dad. Everything else is just the backing track.”
Chapter Summary

What's it like for a bunch of depowered Gods doing something so human as to walk to school and interact with the other parents?

Chapter Notes

This is just a little side story, really...I love the idea of this family trying to live a normal life and finding out that the vast majority of humans just...aren't that normal! I hope you like it, especially all the OCs!

Loki lay awake for a few precious moments after his alarm went off. The kids were all still asleep, Narfi tucked in a little ball under his arm, the huff of his breath tickling against Loki’s t-shirt.

He thought about Tony and closed his eyes. He’d known he was ill since he first met him, the hidden rumblings of his seidr pointing him out as weak and vulnerable. And then he’d kissed him, the overwhelming relief and gratitude at having been seen as weak but not dismissed mingling with the physical and mental attraction that made him irresistible, and he’d known. Tony was dying, quickly. He could taste death’s approach on this beautiful, funny, ridiculous, kind man’s lips, and it wasn’t even a surprise, because hadn't Loki always brought pain and ruin to those around him?

He rubbed his face, slipping out of the sofa bed without disturbing Narfi to use the bathroom. It was self-centred of him to blame himself for Tony’s illness; it was something that had started long before Loki knew him, but he couldn’t help feeling guilty anyway. Because he could cure him, and he chose not to.

Frigga had helped him free Sleipnir even after he had put her husband in the Odinsleep, cementing her place as his mother, if not by blood then by heart. He and his eldest son, trapped in his world-walking horse form for just a little longer, had been able to release the triplets from their capture in pocket universes and brought them all to Midgard. Loki had tried to cloak the family from Heimdall’s sight, like he did for himself as a matter of course, but it had not been enough to hide the beacon of power his children produced when they used their seidr. After running from Einherjar in Norway with Eisa’s help, Loki had made the decision to take his family’s true nature away.

It had burned, making him think of Odin and his own jealously guarded glamour. In an effort to be different to his own…father? Was he still father? Loki sat the children down and explained the process, why it was necessary to make them all mortal. They would be able to stay longer in one place, age with their friends, not call accidental attention to themselves from the mortals, and hide in their humanity from Heimdall. Their seidr, as well as their nature, was tucked in a warm, glittering spark above their frantic mortal hearts, and Loki showed the older children the thread to pull with their minds to release the truth in absolute mortal danger. Narfi was not taught, his
tortured little soul in a state of such constant hyper vigilance that he would surely break the spell within days.

It was not a technique to lean on for so long. He knew it was doing them no good in the long run but he just couldn't think of any better technique. Loki leaned on the sink to look in the mirror. There was a scar on his lip, a bruise on his hip and a series of fine lines marking his face. He looked hundreds of years older, for an Aes. He had spent a year watching his children shoot up and out of their clothes, ageing that would take decades normally, development that would usually be guided slowly. There had been mistakes in parenting that should have had years to be corrected. He'd watched his babies come home with bruises that slowly faded grey to yellow, and taken paid fights to be able to afford hospital bills for Fenrir when he had broken his arm, an injury that would have been healed in less than a day on Asgard.

They had chosen to remain mortal and hidden. Loki had chosen not to heal his own children for the sake of their long term safety. He couldn’t now sacrifice his children’s safety for anyone.

The kids were sluggish and grumpy when he woke them. Hela first, he kneeled next to her on the bottom bunk and stroked her hair away from her face. She scrunched her nose up and burrowed under the pillow, groaning. “Wake up, love,” he whispered. “Time for school.”

He was a bit louder in the boys’ room, not having to leave any to sleep like he did Eisa. Fenrir didn’t even move when he touched his back, and Loki couldn’t bring himself to be rougher. Jor and Sleipnir were already sitting up and rubbing their eyes, so the noise and movement would wake the younger boy soon enough.

He left their door open when he returned to the kitchen area to start preparing breakfast, knowing the clattering and bumping, quiet as it was, would keep Sleip and Jor from falling back to sleep. Once the cereal boxes and milk were on the table, Loki returned to the girls’ room. Hela was, unsurprisingly, still under the pillow. He lifted her, ignoring her sleepy grumbling, and plopped her on the sofa bed next to Narfi.

As always, Jor was the first one dressed, and Fenrir was starting to squirm around as well. Loki felt a warm glow as he stroked the youngest triplet’s cheek and the boy nuzzled into his hand. His skin was still so soft, so young.

His glow only increased when he turned around to see Jor helping a stiff-fingered Sleipnir with his jeans. Sleip had spent nearly a century and a half exclusively in his horse form, punishment for sins that he'd had no hand in, and had done nothing to help Loki heal. He hadn't even had the pleasure of seeing him grow from a baby to a teenager. His eldest boy barely knew him, and Loki's heart ached with gratitude every time he trusted him enough to call him Father. He had, of course, managed to find where he'd been hidden, and sneaked to the stables to see him as often as he could, but it felt like a pathetic attempt on Loki's behalf. He should have done something so many years ago, not allowed those around him to convince him the loss of his children was a good thing.

Not long after they'd arrived on Midgard, Sleipnir had a assured him that he'd had a good life as a horse. He was delighted to be able to speak at last, and to be with his family, but he said he could tell how much it had hurt Loki to visit him as a horse. He'd always wanted to assure him he was OK, and he was glad he finally could now. Sometimes Loki felt guilty again for taking his strength and mobility from him. His legs were fine, better than most mortals, in fact, because they remembered the joy of speed, and the human gait came more naturally when Sleip could focus on the wind on his face and the passing of the ground beneath him. His hands, however...well, fine control of fingers had never been necessary to learn. It was taking much longer than speech - at least he'd been able to think in Aesir words as a horse - he just had no frame of reference for
fingers.

Loki stroked Sleip’s messy hair back and kissed Jor’s head before returning to the main room. Hela had fallen back to sleep, but Narfi was sitting up and rubbing his eyes, so Loki scooped him up for an indulgent cuddle, relishing in his silent little boy’s sleep heavy limbs. “Go and get some clothes, now,” he said softly, and Narfi burrowed deeper into his chest. Loki smiled. “Shirt and trousers, or I’ll choose for you.”

Jor came in and bounced on Hela. “Wake up, sleepy head.”

“Jor, shhh, Eisa’s sleeping.”

“How come she doesn’t have to get up?” moaned Hela.

“Because she was up late studying and she doesn’t have to be in the cafe until ten. We, on the other hand, need to be out of the house in forty-five minutes. Up, or I choose your clothes too.”

Hela grumbled and growled and stomped all the way to the bathroom. Loki hid a grin while he pulled Narfi’s shirt over his head. “Sleip, please poke Fenrir in the ribs if he does not get out of bed in five seconds,” he called, and a thumping, tumbling noise from the top bunk made his smile widen.

Within five minutes the five kids and Loki were sitting at the table sharing cereal around. “Why can’t we have fruit loops?” grumbled Jor.

“Because they are full of sugar and you will feel hungry again when your blood glucose levels crash in an hour or so. Have I not told you this before?”

“Only a million times,” Hela grunted, still lethargic.

“Do you need another lecture on the homeostatic mechanisms of the human pancreas?”

“No,” they all chorused, except Jor, who appeared to have inherited a disproportionate amount of Loki’s mischief, and said “yes please, with powerpoint.”

Loki hid his smirk behind his coffee cup. “Well, I’m not sure Eisa will let me use her laptop, but I can arrange for a lesson on the Islets of Langerhans just for you, Jormungandr darling.”

“Thanks, Daddy,” he said in an equally sarcastic tone. Loki rolled his eyes and they grinned at each other.

“Right, time to go,” Loki said, tapping the table. “Bowls in the sink, shoes on, bags in hands, go, go, go.”

“But I haven’t finished,” Hela wailed.

“That’s because you’ve been sulking.”

“I have not.”

Loki ignored her to avoid a meltdown and focused on the boys while she shoved the rest of the weetabix into her mouth and dumped her bowl, feeling like she’d won the argument.

“Other foot, Narfi. The other - that is your left shoe, you’re putting it on your right foot. The stripes go on the outside. That’s right, Sleip, have you got your wrist supports? Whose reading record is this? Fenrir, your shirt is half tucked in. Hela…Hela, where are your socks? No, you cannot wear
When the group finally tumbled out of the apartment block, Loki let out a huge sigh. Somehow the last little bit of the morning, putting on shoes and actually getting out of the door was always chaos. Really, a Chaos God ought to enjoy such things, but Loki suspected most Chaos Gods didn’t have to deal with Ms Gomez, the attendance monitor at Inglewood Academy.

Loki pulled Fenrir aside as they walked, letting Narfi run ahead to hold hands with Sleipnir. “I am sorry I was angry with you last night. I don’t really think you were saying that to get Jormungandr into trouble.”

“I really wasn’t, Father.”

“I know. I was angry with your brothers and failed to notice that there was no reason to be angry with you.”

“That’s OK, Father,” said Fen, smiling, and he wrapped his arms tight around Loki’s waist. Loki hugged him back, kissing him on the top of his head as they walked on. “Can you read extra to me tonight, please?”

Loki thought about it. “OK, that sounds fair.”

Sleipnir ran back to hand Narfi over as they approached the white concrete elementary school building, and gave Loki an anxious hug. “Are you all right?” Loki asked.

Sleip nodded. It wasn’t very believable.

“Good luck with the try outs,” Loki said, giving his biceps a squeeze. Sleip’s face broke into a grin and he nodded. Loki watched him run ahead down the road, his white hair streaming out behind him just as his mane used to.

Jor and Hela ran off to find their friends as soon as they arrived at the elementary school. Fen tried to encourage Narfi to come with him, but the little boy hunched his shoulder and pulled away from his half-brother, the beginning of a pout on his lips. Fen sighed and walked off to stand near a trio of boys who barely acknowledged him.

Loki and Narfi made their way to a shaded patch where a couple of other parents stood. It amused Loki that he was considered one of the few dads who did the school run, when he’d given birth to exactly half of his eight children. That then made him remember Vali, and that it was no longer eight children, and the stab of grief was almost enough to drop him to his knees. He supposed it was getting easier to think of his youngest son. He didn’t want it to be easier.

“Hey, Lucas!”

“Morning, Dianne, Salma.” Loki nodded to the two women and went to stand with them, looking out over the playground to hide the aftershocks of memory.

“You teaching the class this morning?” asked Salma. Loki nodded, and she looked satisfied. “I’ll walk with you if you’re going straight there.”

“I am.”

“When are you two going to join my karate class?” teased Dianne, her short blonde hair bouncing as she twitched with hyper energy. “You’d make black belt in a few years, easy.”
“I don’t want a black belt,” said Salma calmly. The two women amused Loki with how different they were. Dianne was athletic, competitive and somewhat pear shaped, with a blinding, round-cheeked smile, but what she called ‘resting-bitch face’. Salma was soft spoken and sarcastic, shorter and heavier than her best friend, with thick black hair that fell to her waist. “Lucas teaches me to fight dirty.”


“Well,” Salma continued, “if that ex of mine shows up I don’t want to be worrying about whether ripping his balls off is sporting or not.”

“Fair point,” Dianne nodded. “Not like he ever played fair.”

Loki agreed. He’d seen Salma’s scars.

“Look sharp,” said Dianne. “Here comes the PTA.”

“The phrase ‘yummy mummy’ was invented just for her, wasn’t it?” grumbled Salma.

Dianne snorted. “Isn’t that just PC speak for MILF?”

“Pretty sure both words are off the PC list,” Salma said. ”But yeah, I’d L to F that M.”

"Salma!" gasped Dianne.

"What?" Salma frowned. "Just look at her, all prim and put together. Wouldn't you like to rumple her up a little?"

"Not exactly my area of expertise!" Dianne blushed harder and Salma tipped her head back to laugh.

"Aww, you precious little heteroflake."

"Shut up, God damn it, I have images in my head I do not need right now."

The women both giggled and Loki pretended to understand as Leigh-Anne Jenkins approached with dainty steps on her ridiculously high heels. She wore a business suit with a ruffled pink blouse, and oh Norns, today she had a clipboard.

“Morning ladies. Lucas.” her voice dropped slightly and she drew out the first syllable slightly, smirking at him. Loki flushed. He could never figure out what she did not like about him, but she always spoke to him as though she knew something and was just biding her time before she used it against him. “Can I sign y’all up for the fund raiser on the sixteenth?”

Dianne scrunched her face up. “Ugh. What do you need?”

“Aww, now, don’t be like that, Dianne, you know this is to raise money for the new sports equipment. You know how important regular physical activity is.”

Dianne choked. “I’m just…you know…just…” she huffed. “What do you need?”

“Well, we’re thinking of running a few games like the lucky dip, and a raffle, and of course a bake sale.”

“Uh, put me down to bring some raffle prizes.”
“Well, now, you know as with everything to do with children, your time is more valuable than your money. Can’t I put you down to man one of the stalls as well?”

Dianne squirmed, and Loki couldn’t help being amused at her awkwardness even as he stepped in. “I’ll get the children to make cupcakes again,” he said, and just like that, Dianne was forgotten. He threw her a look to remind her how much she owed him.

“Well, now, that is just lovely. Thank you Lucas. Make your mark right here. I’m going to need your phone number too, just in case. Thank you.” She squeezed him on the arm and it felt to Loki like a warning. “Friggason, is that right? Now you must be Scandinavian with a name like that. Explains your adorable accent. Will you be bringing Mrs Friggason along on the day?”

“Who?”

“Your wife, of course. Though we wouldn’t say no to your mother either - the more the merrier, right, girls?”

Loki opened and shut his mouth, incapable of finding the words. Silver tongue turned to lead indeed.

Salma glanced at him and sighed. “His wife’s dead, Leigh-Anne, leave him alone.”

“Oh!” Leigh-Anne put her perfectly manicured hand to her mouth, her eyes big. “You poor lamb,” she breathed, and grabbed him in a hug. Loki froze until she pulled back. “You are so brave looking after all those little ones by yourself…if you ever need anything, anything at all, you just call me, OK, sweetheart?” She patted his chest, and walked away, leaving Loki staring after her with his mouth open.

“Fuck, she is a predator,” muttered Salma. "She needs to give me lessons, hot damn. Preferably practicals. Fuck."

Dianne jabbed her in the ribs. “Language, Salma!” she said, and pointed at Narfi.

“Ah, sorry. You know not to say rude words, don’t you honey?”

Loki collected himself and looked at Narfi, staring at his shoes. “If he speaks at all, the last thing I will be concerned about is swearing.”

Salma grimaced. “Uh, yeah, God, way to put my foot in it.”

Loki smiled. “It’s fine. Now please…what do you think Leigh-Anne has against me?”

Dianne sniggered. “Oh honey, it’s more about what she wants to hold against you.”

“I do not understand.”

“Seriously? Lucas, you have how many kids?”

He glared at her. “I do not see what that has to do with it.”

“Oh my God, you’re not real, are you?”

Salma rolled her eyes. “She fancies you.”

“What?”
Both women turned their most sardonic looks on him. Which was quite overwhelmingly sardonic. “She fancies you?” Salma repeated. “You know, wants to jump your bones? Get to know you in the biblical sense? Get in your pants?”

Dianne burst out laughing at his blank look, then leaned over to whisper in his ear. “She wants you to fuck her, Lucas.”

“You idiot,” added Salma.

Chapter End Notes

Loki's not innocent, obviously. He's just hyper vigilant, and always found Leigh-Ann vaguely threatening. Bless her. She has no idea, she thinks she's being cute. Sorry for the lack of Tony, he'll return next time!
Tony - Self-Defence

Chapter Summary

Tony goes to see Loki at work

Chapter Notes

For anyone who lives in Inglewood, there IS a Nigerian restaurant there, but I've never been, I just found it on Google street view, checked it out on the website, and sort of thought the picture of the proprietor looked like she'd send big pots of food home for Eisa's family and constantly tell them all they need feeding up, mostly because she looked quite a lot like the lady who helped organise my wedding...is that overstepping a boundary of some sort?? Like is RPF only for famous people?

Lucas/Loki's gym, however, is 100% based on the gym I used to train at, in my town here in the UK, before my sensei moved to Stratford and I now have to travel 30 minutes every week for my lesson (he's a very good teacher!) Loki's lesson is obviously based on a few I've been in, including idiot boys who think it's a GOOD sign if they can't pull their punches when sparring. I do, in fact, feel free to land my own when they're being dickheads.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony took a deep breath before raising his hand to the door. It was mid-morning, was he being too needy showing up unannounced so soon after their last...did it count as a date?

Tony frowned and knocked firmly. When you're in the process of dying you can't afford to play hard to get.

He was just considering knocking a second time when Elsa opened the door. “Tony! Good to see you.”

“Hey, Elsa.”

“Did your friend like my cupcake?” she asked with a dimpled grin, throwing a satchel over her shoulder and joining him outside the door.

“Uh, funny story actually. I knew there was this thing Pepper had with strawberries, thought maybe she really liked them. Turns out she’s deadly allergic to them. Who’s allergic to strawberries, seriously?”

“Ooh, bad luck,” she winced, her smile not dimming in the slightest as she locked the door behind her.

“So I’m guessing your dad’s not in?”
“He’s at the gym, would you like directions?”

The thought of Lucas in tight gym clothes getting all sweaty and out of breath made Tony’s brain do a little reboot, and Elsa’s widening smile said she knew it. He looked at her a little sheepishly. “I can wait until he gets back…”

She waved a hand and beckoned him to follow her down the stairs. “He’ll be there all day, but he’s got breaks between classes. If you’re going over there could you take some food to him and Nathan please?”

“Wait, he’s a personal trainer?” God, the fantasies just got better.

“He teaches self-defence,” she said, leading him across the road, down a little back alley and out to a tiny Nigerian restaurant. “Hi, Ronnie,” she yelled. “I’ve brought Tony to meet you.”

“You’re such a good girl,” said Ronnie, coming out of the kitchen drying her hands on a tea towel. “Here’s my hero.” She kissed him on either side of his face and patted his cheek before he could react. “My good Samaritan. Thank you for helping Stephen. That boy needs feeding up. Elsa! Did you take him that bowl of ogbono soup? It’ll be the best thing for his muscles.”

“Of course, Ronnie,” she grinned, rolling her eyes at Tony.

“Good. Your whole family needs feeding, you are all little sticks.”

“Tony’s going to take some food for Father and Nathan, isn’t he nice?”

Ronnie pinched him on the cheek like he was a little boy rather than a man probably around her age. Tony was shell shocked. He glared at Elsa, who was stifling giggles behind her hand while Ronnie bustled around the kitchen, filling up tupperware boxes and keeping up a constant stream of chat as she threw cutlery and napkins in a plastic bag with the food. “Here you go.”

“Uh, thanks.”

On the way back to his car, loaded down with food and drink, he realised he hadn’t managed to get more than one or two words into the conversation. Tony Stark had been out-chattered.

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Lucas’ gym was right across from the train tracks, a converted industrial unit sandwiched between a glaziers and a Mitsubishi garage. Someone had spray painted the Hulk smashing the words Powerhouse Gym on the wall, and Tony snapped a photo on the off-chance he ever came across Bruce Banner. Or even General Ross. That bastard deserved some needling.

Inside loud dance music blared from behind a closed door and the giant at the reception desk looked up and smiled. It was a surprisingly sweet and innocent expression on a heavily muscled tattoo-covered biker gang reject. “Can I help you?”

“I’m looking for Lucas Friggason, is he here?”

“Yeah, he’s in a class at the moment.” The door opened and Nathan appeared, crawling onto the chair beside Muscle Man. “Hey, buddy, you know this guy?”

Nathan glanced at Tony and back at his colouring without a flicker of recognition. The man shrugged. “Worth a shot. What do you need Lucas for?”
Tony held up the bag of food in answer and the receptionist grinned. “Good to see he doesn’t just attract women,” he said slyly. “Guy’s like the Pied Piper, our membership’s gone from an eighty-twenty ratio of men to women to almost sixty-forty since he got here.”

“Ignore him,” came another voice from the stairs. “He’s just jealous Lucas can do more pull-ups than him.” A short woman with arms that rivalled Muscle Man’s came down to Tony’s level and held out her hand. She had brown hair in a pixie cut and plump, pouty lips. Tony wondered how many guys mistook her for an easy target when she wore long sleeves. “Sure, Lucas is pretty,” she continued. “And that’s a draw. But he’s a good teacher. Women like his classes because he teaches them how to fight stronger opponents.”

“They come for the face, and stay for the pace,” grinned Muscles.

“That doesn’t even make sense, Alex,” the woman snorted.

“You could put it on his flyers though,” he shrugged. “Advertising never makes sense anyway.”

The woman ignored him. “So is this just a social call, or you want the tour? I’m the owner, Jenny Bane.”

“Nice to meet you. Tony Stark.”

Jenny and Alex’ mouths dropped open. “Bloody hell, I thought you looked familiar,” said Alex.

“I’ll pay for someone to sort out that mould problem you’ve got on the ceiling if you don’t tell the media I was here.”

Jenny snorted. “You don’t need to bribe confidentiality out of me.”

Alex raised his hand. “I, on the other hand, have no such morals.”

“Alex!”

“What? That mould’s scaring clients off, Jenny.”

Jenny glared at both of them. “I wouldn’t tell anyone anyway. I want people coming here for the right reasons. I want people who’ll stick with it.”

“And Lucas brings in quite enough of the other type,” Alex said.

Jenny sighed. “Yeah, some of them. But he also brings in people, especially women, who didn’t think they had it in them, and when they find out what they can do it’s a hell of a thing to watch. So keep your money, Mr Stark, unless you actually plan to work out here.”

“Tony, please,” he said. “And I guess you’d better give me the tour.”

The gym was obviously geared towards a little of everything, with a few pieces of aerobic equipment upstairs, and a massive cave-like room full of weights and machines for increasing strength. Tony spotted a few photos of both Jenny and Alex, posing on a stage and covered in fake tan and oil. But there were also punch bags and gloves, and through another rickety door, a roomful of people punching each other.

Tony spotted Lucas pacing around between the pairs, his hands clasped behind his back, and sharp eyes flickering from person to person as they moved. “Good, Naomi, move your foot inside Hannah’s guard and use more power. Joseph, twist your arm with the block to absorb the energy
from your opponent’s strike. Robin, if Gresch insists on landing his punches, feel free to land yours.”

The tall bald man laughed sheepishly and dropped his guard. The tiny woman who’d been glaring at him immediately punched him in the solar plexus.

The man doubled over and Robin stepped back, rubbing her own cheek which had started to redden. “She cheated,” Gresch gasped.

Lucas raised his eyebrow. “This is not training for a karate tournament, Gresch. And I can promise you, Robin pulled her punch more than you did with your last head strike.”

“It’s not my fault,” he grumbled, standing straight again. “She’s supposed to block it.”

“And you are supposed to be pulling your punches. When sparring we do no more than tap our opponent, lest we injure each other. Robin is not your enemy.”


Lucas rolled his eyes. “Strength means nothing without control.” He clapped his hands to get the class’ attention and led them over to the punch bags, raising his voice so the whole room heard. “The human body is both more impressive, and more delicate than most people realise. You will rarely need your full strength in any one punch.” He turned and slammed his fist into a punch bag, sending it rocking, dent remaining as he turned back, holding his fist out for his students to see. The knuckles were bright red, and beginning to swell slightly. “If I continued to punch the bag like that, my knuckles would split, my joints would become worn, and my smaller bones would be in danger of fracturing. If you were to hit a person’s face like that, the slightest weakness in your fist position or the way you hold your wrist would result in broken bones for you. Your opponent could well die of a brain haemorrhage.

“But none of us as strong as you, Lucas,” argued a round woman in the back of the group, scraping locks of thick black hair back into her ponytail.

“Perhaps not quite,” he agreed. “But my point is that you should not aim for strength like that. I do not strike with such power when I fight, because it is not necessary. Think of your face, your neck, your belly. Do you think it takes a strike like that to cause pain to those areas?” He turned back to the bag and smacked it sharply with a backhanded strike using the side of his open palm, then punched twice in quick succession. Both were much less explosive than the last time but still made the bag jerk. Finally he spun and smacked his heel into the bag.

“None of these strikes hurt me to execute. None were at the full extent of my strength. But were they to land on an opponent they would be likely to disarm and disable them long enough for you to escape danger. But to be able to trust your body to produce the right kind of force when needed, you must have enough control to punch…” he turned and struck at Gresch’s face like a cobra, stoping millimetres from the man’s wide eyes, “and not injure your training partner.” He lowered his fist and held Gresch’s eye. “Strength is nothing more than a liability if you cannot make it obey you.”

Gresch smiled sheepishly and bowed. “I’ll work on it, Sensei.”

“I am not your karate instructor, Gresch,” he grinned. “Time’s up. I shall see you all next week.”

The class stamped their feet together and bowed, some like martial artists with their hands on their
thighs, while others placed their right fist over their chest. Tony noticed Lucas made his own shallow bob with his fist on his heart.

Jenny patted Tony’s shoulder as the class dispersed. “I’ll leave you to it,” she said, then hesitated. “If you really do want to train here, we’ll be happy to have you.”

“Thanks,” he grinned, and moved closer to Lucas, who was chatting to the dark haired woman, explaining about torque and momentum and using your elbows if you’re worried about your fists.

“Tony!” he said, his face lighting up in a smile as he turned. “I saw you come in with Jenny, what are you doing here?”

“Elsa sent me with jollof rice and goat curry.”

“Oh, perfect. Thank you. This is Salma. Her children attend school with the triplets. Salma, this is Tony. He rescued Stephen and made cupcakes with us.”

“Ah, you’re Cupcake Tony, huh?” she smirked. “I’d shake your hand but I’m all gross. I’m gonna catch a shower. See you at pickup time, Lucas. Nice to meet you, Cupcake Tony.”

Lucas went red and rolled his eyes at her. Tony wanted to kiss him. He handed him a box of food instead, and they sat against the wall.

“You went to the restaurant?”

“Oh, yeah, I was knocking on your door, and Elsa was on her way out. I…uh…I didn’t mean to drop in unannounced, but, you know, I don’t have your phone number, and actually, you don’t have a phone because it broke so I figured you could use a new one, and I had this one I’ve been working on so I thought you could use it and…oh.”

Lucas had his eyebrows raised at Tony’s ridiculous babbling and held up a new mobile, just as cheap and shitty as the broken one. Tony scrunched up his face. “But this one’s better.”

Lucas laughed and beckoned to Nathan who had appeared at the door was being cooed over by a couple of passing women. “That is very kind of you, Tony, but I do not need something so complex.”

“Well, give it to Elsa then, she—“

“No,” he said sharply, then took a breath and smiled apologetically. “Elsa spends too much time walking the city late at night between classes, and work, and the library and home. I do not want anything to draw more attention to her.”

Tony tucked the phone away and ate his food sulkily. Lucas nudged him with his shoulder. “I would not want you to get in trouble with work, either.”

“What?”

“You said you were working on it? I assume you have something to do with design or manufacture?”

Tony stared at him, then laughed sharply. “You could say that, yeah. Shit, you really don’t know who I am?”

Lucas shrugged and popped a bottled milkshake open for Nathan. “You’re Tony, the ridiculous
man who plays with my children and seems to think for some reason that he cannot visit without some sort of gift.” He looked sharply at him. “You do not need an excuse to visit, Tony.” He leant closer so he was whispering in his ear, his breath sending goosebumps up his spine. “Your lips are gift enough.”

Tony shivered as Lucas moved back and pulled himself together under Lucas’ smirk.

“Tony Stark,” he admitted. Lucas frowned, and Tony laughed. “You really have been living under a rock, haven’t you?”

“You have no idea,” he muttered darkly.

“I own Stark Industries. And I’m also Iron Man. I’m sorry, I assumed you all knew.”

Lucas laughed, dry and self-loathing. “And what in the…what on Earth are you doing here? With *me*?”

Tony grabbed his hand, flexing his rarely used sincerity muscles. “Because you’re kind, and you’re an amazing dad, and you think about how your actions affect others which is something I suck at. Because you don’t look at me with judgement, which, to be fair, is probably because you didn’t know who I am. Because you and your family are funny and accepting and awesome.”

Lucas gazed into his eyes for a moment before leaning forward and brushing a soft kiss against his lips. Tony felt a dizzy happiness spread through him, starting by his heart like the poison, but warming and soothing him rather than sickening.

Lucas pulled back just far enough to rest his nose on Tony’s cheekbone. “I still cannot tell you my truth, Tony. I may never be able to.”

“Hey, that’s OK. I’m not asking you to. I know all I need to for now.” He leaned closer, moving his head to Lucas’ shoulder. He probably wouldn’t get the chance to tell him, but no way was Tony going to waste a moment fretting over his secret identity. “There’s plenty of stuff you don’t know about me, either,” he admitted.

Lucas slid one arm around his shoulder and squeezed him closer, pressing his face into the top of Tony’s head. “Hey,” Tony said, rubbing Lucas’ hand. “Really, you never have to tell me anything you don’t want to.”

“I do want to,” he whispered against his hair, and Tony worried at how much grief wrecked his voice. “But I cannot, for their protection. I…I am sorry, Tony, but I choose them.”

“Your kids?” Lucas nodded, still gripping him tight. “Of course you do, Lukes, so you should. That’s what makes you such an awesome dad.”

A little hand on his chest made Tony look down. Nathan was in his dad’s lap, but his hand reached out to pat and rub the area around the arc reactor. Tony stared at him, ignoring how Lucas moved his head, wiping at his face with the back of his hand. Nathan looked at Tony’s chest. Though his eyes flickered up towards his face they never met Tony’s gaze, just followed the poison lines like he knew they were there. How could he know? He hid them perfectly, Lucas hadn’t seen them or even felt the arc reactor, his hands always pressed against his cheeks or in his hair. Tony was sure, he’d re-lived those memories a lot.

He was about to freak out and push Nathan away, traumatised four year old or not, when Lucas moved his hand gently. “Nathan, it is rude to touch without permission,” he said softly, and put the little boy’s hand on his own chest instead. Nathan rubbed the logo on his dad’s t-shirt absently, but
kept his eyes on the arc reactor.

Lucas wrapped him in a tight hug, then gathered the dirty boxes and cutlery into the bag. “I will have a student in fifteen minutes,” he said, standing Nathan on his feet and pushing himself up. Nathan trotted off towards the reception area, probably to find Alex again. Tony swallowed his lingering wariness and took Lucas’ hand to stand up as well. Lucas held onto him and pulled him close until they were chest to chest.

“Would you…I have no classes in the afternoon tomorrow, would you like to come round? Uh, for coffee? Or we could—“

Tony kissed him and felt his shoulders relax from where they’d been ratcheting up during the course of the conversation. He pulled back and smiled. “Don’t need an excuse to come visit, remember?”

Lucas smiled and kissed him again, his tongue stroking his lips and into his mouth when he parted them to let him in. *This is your chance, time*, he thought. *Freeze me here, pressed against Lucas, and we’ll stay in this moment forever.*

“Ugh, get a room, would you?”

Both Lucas and Tony jumped and stared guiltily at the door. A young black woman with a shock of loose curls was grinning at them, hand on her hip.

“Riri,” Lucas sighed, rubbing the bridge of his nose and going adorably pink. “I apologise, that was —“

“Really romantic, I’m sure,” she smirked, throwing her gym bag down and strapping a pair of light sparring gloves on.

“Unprofessional,” he grimaced.

“Don’t worry about it,” she laughed. “Just get me a ticket for that fight of yours on Friday.”

“I haven’t even decided if I will do it,” he protested.

“Tell that to Jenny,” she said with a shrug. “You’re her big draw. Everyone wants to watch you wipe the floor with DiSantos.”

Lucas rolled his eyes. “Manipulative wench,” he grumbled, but there was a tone of pride in the insult. “Very well, I will get you a ticket.”

“Is your boyfriend coming?” she asked, looking at Tony and drawing out the word ‘boyfriend’.

“No,” snapped Lucas.

Tony raised his eyebrows. “Why not?”

“I do not want you to see me fight,” he mumbled, looking shifty, and Tony laughed.

“If I didn’t have an AGM in New York Friday I’d be there with bells on.”

Rihanna looked mischievous. “Just pretend Iron Man’s gotta come break it up.”

“See?” Tony pointed at her. “This is why I assumed you knew.”
“Lucas, you didn’t know you were dating Tony Stark?” she snickered. “You’re such an idiot.”

“You,” he said, pointing at her, “are going to pay for your insolence. I suggest you stretch well and begin your drills, because I seem to remember someone asking me for sparring practice.”

“Yes!” she said, punching the air. “I could do with a few new bruises, everyone else is such a fucking walkover.”

Tony stared at the girl. She couldn’t have been more than twenty-five, and here she was asking for bruises in (what he assumed) was a non-sexual way. Lucas laughed. “Riri is a masochist. She does not feel she has worked enough if she does not hurt after training.”

“I just don’t like being treated like I’m made of glass,” she protested, pausing in her stretches. “If I get in a fight my opponent’s not going to go easy on me, so how am I going to learn if my teachers won’t go hard on me?”

Tony blinked and nodded. “Good point, kid. Wanna be the next Iron Man?”

She laughed and started a complex sequence of moves with different paces, elbow strikes and spinning kicks. “You don’t want to give me that kind of power, Mr Stark. I’d go full supervillain.”

“It’s usually touch and go for me too,” he shrugged.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, that’s Riri Williams aka Ironheart :) She won’t be in any more of the story but it’s just a nod to the comics - I haven't read them yet, because there’s a backlog of stuff I need to read, so she's probably out of character, sorry!
Friggason vs DiSantos

Chapter Summary

I had no intention of writing Loki’s fight with DiSantos, but after a couple of messages from StrikeSnow and Moonliel I got inspired, and just under 3000 words happened. Oops!

This is my first go writing a fight scene like this, usually when there’s a battle I just get metaphorical and concentrate on the feelings. But I figured a structured MMA bout is different, you go into it knowing you’re not going to die, so you can be calmer and strategise more. It lasts a hell of a lot longer too - impromptu fights are over in seconds, a proper cage fight lasts 10 mins a round and 3 rounds for a non-professional fight. By the way, I’ve never fought in the cage, just sparring in my lessons, and oh god, I’ve never done anything as cool as Loki and DiSantos do in this!

Loki’s style is based on Capoeira, which is what Tom studied in preparation for the first movie. I’ve done a little Capoeira, SO MUCH FUN! But when you get hit you REALLY get hit, it’s all circular movements and massive amounts of angular momentum. So...let me know!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Loki took a few deep breaths and stretched his neck from side to side. Jenny handed him his gumguard and checked his gloves for the fiftieth time. Alex was in the cage, mic in hand, talking up the visitor, DiSantos, and Loki focused on his opponent.

He was possibly an inch shorter than Loki, but every fraction of the eight pounds he had on Loki showed rippling under his skin. Loki was light for a middleweight, while DiSantos was edging towards light-heavyweight category. As he stretched his sinewy arms back and windmilled them around to loosen up the shoulders, his muscles rippled across his entire torso, perfectly defined under his rich brown skin. Loki suppressed the urge to cover his own pale chest. If DiSantos wanted to break a collarbone, he’d have no trouble finding the damn things, he thought wryly.

Alex turned with his arm outstretched to call Loki’s stats, and he stepped forwards with his chin parallel to the ground, a prince in nylon shorts, his long hair tied back tightly. His fingers twitched under the padded knuckle guards of his MMA gloves and he forced them still, noticing Riri in the audience with her phone pointed at him. She winked and waved, and he narrowed his eyes. That video had better not end up in Tony’s possession, or she’d be doing plank variations next lesson. This was the first fight he’d agreed to at Powerhouse, and there was a knot relaxing somewhere in the region of his solar plexus. It wasn’t his first paid fight, not by a long shot, but the others had been...perhaps less well organised would be a diplomatic term. Bareknuckle brawls in back rooms of dive bars paid better than Jenny, but only if you won. At least Jenny was paying him for his overtime regardless, winning would just earn him a bonus. The last time he’d fought a bareknuckle fight, he’d had to sneak a tiny trickle of seidr out to heal his own fractured skull, and then spent the next few days looking over his shoulder in case Heimdall had noticed the weak magic. He was much less likely to be so badly injured in a bout that conformed to the unified rules of MMA.
The crowd cheered as Alex roared Loki’s human name, and his lip twitched as he saw a group of his students chanting for him, bopping up and down and spilling their drinks on each other. He wasn’t exactly looking forward to them watching his possible humiliation, but at least they already had a certain amount of respect for him. He inclined his head slightly, then stepped forward to tap gloves with DiSantos and move back into position.

Alex’s whistle blew. Loki and DiSantos circled each other, both making a couple of exploratory strikes. Loki’s roundhouse kick glanced off DiSantos’ bicep, but he retaliated quickly with a three-punch combination. Loki failed to block the third punch, but moved his body back with it to absorb some of the impact. As they learned each others’ styles, they sped up, becoming more aggressive. Loki relied on his legs more, and dodging, while DiSantos was stronger and blocked his strikes, diving in under his guard to use his elbows. He knew he was on the back foot, using all his energy to defend against the vicious rib strikes and not finding the openings to hit back. It was starting to get embarrassing.

Loki ducked under a jab, and grinned. There! DiSantos had overextended his reach, and Loki grabbed his wrist and stepped forward, elbowing him in the nose and digging his knee into the back of the other man’s knee, dropping him to the mat and digging in a couple of punches until DiSantos turned his body and held his legs up to fend him off. Alex leaped forward, whistle in his mouth, but Loki was already dancing back, making it clear to the judges he wasn’t getting any football kicks in while his opponent was floored. He bounced on the balls of his feet, his breath coming hard through his nose as DiSantos jumped back up and straight back into the fray. But it was too late for him, just a couple more strikes that went slightly wide, and the bell rang for the end of the first round, just barely awarding it to Loki.

“You guys are both being too fucking cautious, man, you need to be more aggressive.” Jenny handed him a drink and checked his gloves again, then palpitated an area on his ribs she’d seen DiSantos targeting. It was tender, but undamaged, better than DiSantos, who was bleeding from a cut above his lip. “He’s better at close quarters, but you’ve got those legs that go all the way to the floor, fucking use them.” She slapped him on the back, and he marched out to meet DiSantos again in the centre of the cage.

If it had been Thor, he’d be grinning and mouthing off at Loki by now. DiSantos was stoic, and Loki respected him for it, but at the same time, it wouldn’t hurt to be reminded of his arrogant not-brother and get a bit of anger pulsing around with the adrenaline. He had never enjoyed fighting, it was a means to an end, which was why he taught self-defence, and not traditional martial arts (that, and the fact that he had no human qualifications). If he hadn’t been paid to punch this man in the face, he’d probably be convincing him to join his cause or bargaining with him to leave. If it had been a bareknuckle, he’d be verbally eviscerating him until he flew into a rage and made mistakes, but there were apparently rules about such things in proper MMA fights.

This round was much faster. DiSantos had recovered from his loss in the previous round, which, if Loki was honest, hadn’t exactly been overwhelming, and was now firmly on the offensive. Loki was keeping up with him, though. He may no longer be a God but he had hundreds of years of experience on his side. On the other hand he was used to relying on his seidr and knives.

The roar of the crowd and the rush of blood in his ears were blending into one, and he dodged, twisted, turned, kicked and punched, trying to keep the man at arms’ length, but ducking in to lay a few strikes, open up the cut on his lip, and take advantage of the fact that the other man tended to be straight-backed. His throat burned from the fast breathing, his ribs ached where his opponent kept aiming his elbows and fists when he could get close enough, and he was pretty sure, the way his temple was throbbing, that some of the blood on the mat was now his.
Loki blocked a chest push-kick, and DiSantos came in with a second one immediately after. He grabbed his ankle with both hands, getting ready to twist, but DiSantos leaped into the air, his other leg arcing up and connecting with the bottom of Loki’s chin. He felt his head snap backwards, vision completely obscured by black and starlight. He didn’t notice himself release DiSantos’ foot, just felt the mat slap against his back before the man was on him, punching in his ribs, doing the maximum damage before Alex pushed him back. Loki hadn’t even curled up to keep the ribs guarded, so dazed was he, and it took him precious seconds to realise he was being counted out. He struggled to his feet, willing his eyes to follow Alex’s finger, proving he could continue. He spat blood, and breathed through his mouth because his nose had started bleeding too, the splatter of fluid disproportionately loud against the canvas. It was all he could do to hold his guard up when DiSantos came back towards him for the last minute of the round, and he concentrated on blocking and making some clumsy haymakers while trying to convince himself he could see the smug look in the other man’s fierce brown eyes. His vision wasn’t that blurry.

When the bell went and Jenny pulled him down to her eye level to rub vaseline over his eyebrows he had to admit it had been pretty blurry. He listened to her fussing, focused on her voice and her movement, and slowly his vision started to co-operate. It just needed a little time, that’s all.

Jenny glanced out to the audience, a half smile forming, and he noticed that his little group of students had started chanting his name, LuCAS, LuCAS, LuCAS. The visiting group were yelling back, MarCO, MarCO, MarCO, whistling and heckling each other, mostly good naturedly. Riri was talking on the phone, her finger in her ear, and when she saw him looking, she gestured at his head, mouthing ‘what the fuck?’ He snorted, and blood splattered onto the mat.

“Yuck, Lucas.”

“Sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry, just get back in there and kick that guy’s ass.”

There was no time to respond. The bell went, and Loki shoved his gum guard into his mouth, marching into the ring for the final round. He thought back to sparring rounds with Volstagg, Fandral and Thor, but they were all too predictable. The only one who came close to this guy’s versatility was Sif. Tyr as well, but he had less patience with Loki’s non-traditional approach, and mostly ignored him. Sif was sneaky and used more of her body, but they rarely sparred without weapons on Asgard. Loki’s memory flickered through centuries of sparring sessions, and thought about a few decades he’d spent on Alfheim when he had just started courting Glut, where battle dances were a popular pastime.

DiSantos was throwing everything into the fight, and he seemed to be compensating for Loki’s longer reach by stringing combinations together, breaking down his defence and forcing his way in. One strike to his side, again targeting that same patch under his left elbow, sent spears of pain flashing through his body, and he noted, detached, that he probably had a cracked rib by now.

His heartbeat seemed to ring out the music he remembered from the battle dances, a twanging rhythm, ululating voices, and bodies spinning, legs flying above an arched torso, then swinging around low so the partner leaped and backflipped. Loki dropped his right hand to the mat and lifted both feet into the air, double kicking to the other man’s chest.

DiSantos jerked backwards, both feet leaving the mat for a moment, and he stumbled as he landed. Loki spun himself around, and flipped his leg over, making a full circuit of his body and slamming into the man’s shoulder with his heel. DiSantos rallied quickly, kicking and punching, using his combination chains, but Loki was swerving and sliding smoothly under the strikes, hands almost completely reserved for blocking and deflecting, and his legs sweeping at DiSantos’ feet or
spinning high towards his head.

He felt his fist connect with his cheekbone, offsetting his vision again, but he rolled with it, dropping his head down almost to the floor as his foot swung high, right at head level. DiSantos jerked back, and Loki felt the change in air as the sole of his feet passed within an inch of his face. He carried on swinging his foot around, using the momentum as he leaped into the air. His body twisted, hips whipping around and the same leg lashed out once more, forward this time, and the top of his foot connected hard with the man’s temple.

Loki landed on all fours, still low to the ground and moving constantly to dodge the next attack, but it never came. DiSantos was on the floor, one hand moving, his head turning from side to side sluggishly as Alex counted him out. All the way out.

The whole crowd screamed as Alex lifted Loki’s gloved hand above his head, and Loki had to bring himself back out of the battle mindset, re-categorise everyone around him as non-threatening, particularly DiSantos, who was on his feet again. He clasped forearms with Loki, nodded, and slapped him on the upper arm, then retreated to his own corner while Jenny pulled him out of the cage and Riri jumped onto his back.

“You fucking aced that, Lucas, aced it! Tony’s gonna be so fucking hot for you!”

“What have you done?” he groaned, shoving her off and wincing as he pulled his bruised ribs. “You sent him that video, didn’t you?”

“I did one better, I’ve been video calling him the whole time, fuck the meeting in New York! Your babe just watched your fight!”

“Riri, I swear, you will regret that.”

She looked supremely unconcerned. “Go on into the changing rooms and talk to him,” she yelled, shoving her phone into his hand. “Then clean off some of the blood and sweat, you’re a goddamn mess.”

“Riri!” But she was gone. Loki looked down at the phone, where Tony’s worried face stared up at him. “I don’t suppose we can pretend you missed that whole thing?” he asked, pretending to sound casual as he closed the door to the changing room, leaving the crowd to their beers.

“Are you OK, babe? Shit, I swear when you went down in that second round, I thought I was gonna have a heart attack.”

He sighed. “This is why I did not want you to see me fight, I am not good enough to avoid being beaten up, and it is humiliating.”

“Humiliating? Are you fucking kidding me? You won! You knocked that guy out with your ninja moves, what the hell even was that?”

He laughed and avoided the question by propping the phone up on a shelf and washing the blood and sweat off his face. The cut on his mouth was still bleeding sluggishly, but his nose had stemmed.

“Are you OK, though?” Tony asked softly.

Loki looked up from pressing his ribs and smiled. “I’m fine, thank you. If I were a better warrior I would not get hit.”
Tony snorted. “Bullshit. Give the other guy some credit, you were pretty well matched. It would have been a shitty, pointless fight if you’d been able to wipe the floor with him straight off. Wish I was there to help patch you up, though.”

Loki’s smile widened and he looked away. “It’s really not necessary, I’m fine.”

“Well, if you don’t want me to kiss it better…”

He grinned. “You do not need an excuse to kiss me.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.” He shifted in his seat. “You know, if this is about money, you could just —”

“No,” he said, quiet but firm. “That is not how this works, Tony. Do you know, I have barely known you a week? A week. You cannot— that’s not what this is, and if you think that, then—“

“Lukes, god, no stop, please, I’m sorry. Please don’t go, please, I take it back.”

Loki closed his eyes and breathed out slowly, not wanting to look at the man on the screen.

“Look,” he said, and there was still this edge of panic in his voice that made Loki hurt. “I know things have moved fast, and yeah, it’s really not my style, so it’s a bit new for me… I just, I don’t like seeing you hurt when I can help, and I don’t want to waste any time…”

He nodded. “I know,” he said softly. “I know how…temporary life can be.” He wanted to tell him he knew, wanted so badly, but kept quiet. He knew how much he hated being pitied and coddled. He hated Tony even seeing this much of his bruised face. Telling him he knew about the palladium might scare him off where five children and his own emotional baggage were holding him still.

“Is this OK?” Tony asked, his face crinkling up, trying to look nonchalant and failing. “Is it OK that we’re… I don’t know, that Riri’s calling me your boyfriend, and I’m invading your lives, and taking up all your free time? Because I know I come off as intense ninety nine percent of the time, but this is fast even for me. Hell, no, it’s not fast, it’s light speed, Jesus, I barely do relationships at all. My last relationship started as ten years of friendship, so…”

Loki tilted his head to one side and forced himself to smirk so he didn’t scream with rage at the poison that was fucking Tony up like this. “I’m OK with this if you are,” he said. “More than OK.”

For as long as it could last, he decided. Even though he knew that would be measured in months at the most, and end in pain for him and his family, his selfish heart would take everything Tony could give and hold on for the ride.

Chapter End Notes

Also Loki is definitely going to make Riri do plank variations, particularly the ones my ballet teacher made me do recently which involved planking, then lifting one leg at a time leg to my elbow, or around to my shoulder, or curled to my chest, or whatever. They are evil and will hopefully make sure my hips and back don’t pop out of place again.

And yes, I do ballet as well as karate. Yes, I look way more ridiculous trying to do pirouettes and releves than I look doing a head kick. But I have designs on being
somewhat elegant and graceful and it's excellent for core body strength so it helps with the martial arts lol!
Chapter Summary

It's a couple of weeks after the fight. Loki's cautiously optimistic about life, so of course, that's when it all goes tits up.

Chapter Notes

I'm so incredibly humbled by your response to this story, you've all been so lovely and I've had so many kind comments ;_; thank you so much!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first Wednesday in June started fantastically. The children were all at school on time, Ronnie and Eisa had taken Narfi for the day, and Loki had two free hours between his class at the gym. He had come home to make himself a hot lunch instead of wilted sandwiches, and sat sideways on the window seat to sip his tea, looking out over the alley between the houses and letting his mind wander.

And then the doorbell rang, and when he answered it, Tony took just long enough to flash him a cheeky grin before he had his hands on Loki's hips and was kissing him, walking him backwards into the room until he was pressed against the kitchen counter, his fingers tangled in Tony's hair.

It had been three weeks of this, of Tony's hands finding their way beneath his shirt and raising goosebumps on his skin, of his talented mouth running down his neck and pulling the blood to the surface of his skin. It was three weeks of wondering how much longer this would last, grasping every moment while he could.

He felt a sudden surge of anger at the world for taking Tony from him too soon. It hadn't happened yet and already he knew it would be too soon. But at the same time he couldn't help thinking that if Tony had more time he would only get bored of Loki and his children, and move on to someone with less baggage.

He hated himself for thinking that, for the pathetic whimper he couldn't help making into Tony's lips, pulling him closer against his chest. He was supposed to be enjoying his company, not begging for more. But every day that Tony came back, Loki wanted that much longer with him, because it wasn't just the kisses and the touch. It was Tony printing out star charts for Hela, telling Jor about the new second hand bookstore in the next neighbourhood, and bringing reinforced wrist supports for Sleipnir. It was loud laughter and banter and teasing and random acts of kindness. Every day Loki felt more and more willing to beg Tony never to leave him, and it made the proud core of him furious that he could be so weakened so quickly.

Of course that's when the phone rang. Loki groaned and pressed his forehead against Tony's.

"Ignore it," mumbled Tony, his mouth making its way down to his collarbones.
“I can't. It could be about the children.”

Tony sighed and stepped back just far enough for Loki to work the phone out of his pocket. “Hello?”

“Mr Friggason?”

“Yes?”

“This is Mrs Mitchell, Finn’s headteacher. Would you be able to come in for a quick word as soon as possible?”

“What is it?” he asked, voice hardening.

“I’m afraid Finn’s been caught fighting.”

“Fenr...Finn? Are you sure?”

“Quite sure, Mr Friggason. The other student has had to receive medical attention, so I’m sure you can agree, we need to have quite a frank discussion.”

“Yes, of course. I will be there in ten minutes.”

He hung up the phone and Tony caught his eye. “Everything OK?”

“Uhh. Well. No, not exactly. I’m sorry, Tony, I have to go…” he rubbed his face, not sure what to do with himself. For Fenrir to get into a fight...if it had been Jor or even Hela he could understand it, but Fenrir was so quiet. “I have to go,” he repeated.

He barely heard Tony’s reply, just pocketed his phone and keys. The door latched automatically so Tony would let himself out when he was ready, he didn't want to waste any more time with questions or goodbyes.

He ran all the way to the school, the thump of the sidewalk under his shoes burning away some of the excess adrenaline and anxiety. Of course that meant he was sweaty and breathless by the time the school came into sight. He slowed down and got his breathing under control before buzzing into the building.

Mrs Mitchell was a middle aged, stern looking woman with dark black skin and piercing eyes. She wore a smart business suit, and shook his hand firmly when the receptionist showed him in.

“Please take a seat, Mr Friggason.”

Loki sat next to Fenrir, who was hunched into a little ball in front of the desk, a tissue clutched in one hand. He squeezed his shoulder as he sat, wishing he would lift his face so Loki could meet his eyes and show him everything was going to be all right.

“As I said on the phone, Finn here has been caught fighting.”

“There must be something more going on, ma'am,” Loki said. “Finn has never been confrontational - he avoids it almost to a fault.”

“The other boy’s broken nose suggests otherwise,” Mrs Mitchell said dryly, and Feb sobbed.

“What happened, darling?” Loki asked him.
“I...I didn't mean to...he-he grabbed...grabbed my mouth, Father, I’m so sorry, I just...I couldn’t—”

He was shaking, and Loki’s heart broke to see the anguish on his face when he finally looked up, eyes begging Loki to believe him. Loki wrapped his arms tight around him and turned to the headteacher as he sobbed into his chest. “I’m so sorry,” he said. “Finn has had some, uh, some bad experiences in the past. He...there was an attempted kidnapping. If a child tried to put their hand over his mouth it may have triggered bad memories.”

Mrs Mitchell’s face softened slightly. “Finn, why don't you go outside and sit in the corridor so I can have a word with your dad?”

Fen nodded and sniffled, his feet dragging as if he was going to his own execution outside the office door.

Mrs Mitchell clasped her hands together and leaned forwards over her desk. “I appreciate there may be extenuating circumstances in this situation. Finn is a good kid, he’s never been in trouble before. But if there are traumatic experiences in your children’s past that might affect their behaviour now, then the school needs to know these things.”

“I assure you, it will not happen again.”

“Mr Friggason, you can't make such assurances. Trauma is a tricky thing to get over, it can be unpredictable.” She leaned back and searched for a piece of paper on her overloaded desk. “I want all the triplets to attend counselling.”

Loki snorted. How to explain that was a terrible idea? “Please, Mrs Mitchell, that will not be necessary. I do not think it will be helpful in their particular situation.”

Her eyes hardened, her mouth set in a straight line. “I appreciate you may have a particular view about therapy —“

“I assure you, that is not the issue here —“

“But either way, Mr Friggason, the school has a responsibility to your children, to help them develop both academically and emotionally.”

Loki’s hackles rose at the implication. “I am aware of that, and I take my own responsibility for their development very seriously, and there are various obstacles to effective talking therapies for the triplets. There are some things they simply cannot discuss.”

“Sir, your son just broke his friend’s nose lashing out because of a flashback. George is constantly disrespectful to the teachers, and reactionary and aggressive to his peers. Both he and Helen find it difficult to make friends, and Helen seems to think that she can skip classes whenever she likes by hiding in the library. Her teacher tells me she deals with the other children and adults alike by ignoring them if they say something she doesn’t want to hear. And from what I can tell, your youngest son, who should be in school himself, suffers from traumatic mutism.” Her voice was rising with frustration, and Loki felt his fists clench and his teeth gritting together. The headteacher took a deep breath. “Look, Mr Friggason, we’re here to help you.”

“I appreciate that, and I know that there are some issues for us to work on, but we are working on them at home. It will just take time.”

She spread her fingers on the desk. “The school also runs an excellent parenting course, which I think you would benefit from. I understand the children’s mother is no longer around?”
Loki laughed, because he could feel the tears burning behind his eyes. *No, no she is not. I ate her heart.* “They never knew her,” he said eventually. *Parenting classes.* “I cannot…when are these classes supposed to take place?”

“The course runs every Wednesday evening from eight to nine pm, the counselling will take place during the children’s school hours.”

Loki stood, his entire body burning with shame. “I cannot take these. I — my eldest daughter takes night classes, I cannot leave the children alone, and—” He pressed his fingers against his eyes, feeling them start to tremble. Leave them all together, in their house, with only Sleipnir to take care of them. They had all been taken from the place they called home at one time or another, to have them all in one place, unprotected, without their *seidr*, it was —

“Sir,” she said, a sharp edge cutting into his boiling thoughts. “If you refuse to accept this help, we’re going to have to pass your case on to CPS. For you to refuse help when your children are obviously so in need of it would constitute gross negligence. Mental health is just as important as physical, and you’re putting them in danger if you — Mr Friggason! We are not finished here.”

But it was too much. If he stayed any longer he would explode, his body already vibrating with shame and anger and grief. He walked out, body rigid, and forced a smile at Fenrir, who had almost certainly heard everything. “Come along, Fen. Let’s go home.”

Chapter End Notes

So I have to admit I'm a little ignorant about school systems in the US, but this is essentially what a school in the UK would provide - if I've made any massive mistakes, please let me know, and I'll try and fix them...Mrs Mitchell is a great teacher, and cares deeply about all the kids, but she's got the impression that Loki's just being stubborn about the idea of counselling, putting his pride above his children's wellbeing. If she wasn't so tired she'd probably be a bit calmer. And no, the thought of asking Tony to babysit just hasn't even crossed Loki's mind.

Come say hi on Tumblr if you like, I re-blog random shite, and waffle on about family, fandom and original works. I'm GoldFromStraw.

Crossing my fingers to see if I can html or not...
Tony - Unwelcome help

Chapter Summary

Tony comforts Fenrir and Loki

Chapter Notes

Yay, Dad! Tony gets his first real outing! I'm kinda proud of this chapter, I think it works, and I'm happy with what I've done with Loki. I have a tendency to make my characters overly understanding about things, maybe because I tend to be a bit of a people pleaser? I like to imagine what other people's motivations are when they hurt me. Anyway, I'm trying to do that less with some of my characters, cos all books need conflict, especially with the quantity of angst I like to write!

Thank you all so much for all your wonderful comments, the vast range of experiences everyone's had with schools were fascinating, and I've had some great discussions with people about it, thank you! It seems like the reactions from different schools range from overly involved and threatening legal action to denying anything could possibly be the problem and burying their heads in the sand, so Fen's experience sort of lies somewhere in the bounds of possibility I guess! Thank you all once again!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony was starting to feel awkward, sitting at the window seat with a cup of coffee in an empty house that wasn’t his. He’d done the dishes and tidied up some clothes, moved some things from the washing machine to the line on the balcony, and now he was hoping he hadn’t overstepped the mark. He didn’t want to come off as patronising. He bit his lip and wondered if he was making a mistake, waiting for Lucas to come back. Maybe he should leave and give him space.

Before he could make any sort of decision, the key turned in the lock and Lucas pushed the door open, followed by a tear stained little boy. “Hey,” he said.

Lucas jumped. “You are still here.”

“Yeah…” he stood and rubbed the back of his neck. “Sorry, I didn’t really think about it, and then when I figured out you might not want me around, it was too late, so, yeah…”

“No, no, that’s…that’s fine, I apologise for leaving so suddenly.”

“Are you OK?” Tony asked Finn. The kid nodded, not very convincingly.

Lucas stroked his hair. “Would you like to get changed?”

He looked down at the bloodstained sleeve of his shirt and his lip wobbled again. He dragged his feet to his door and pulled it shut behind him.
“What happened?”

Lucas avoided Tony’s eye and walked to the kitchenette, rubbing his thumb into the palm of his left hand. “There was a fight.”

“Yeah, I guessed. But Finn? He’s not like that, is he?”

He whirled around, his eyes wide. “That is what I said,” he exclaimed. “I would not have been surprised if it had been Jor, or even Hel, but Fen — Finn is so placid.”

“There must have been more to it.”

Lucas’ face shuttered and he turned back to the kitchen counter, fiddling with the kettle and cups. He stopped suddenly. “You tidied up.”

“Oh, yeah, sorry, I was just keeping busy. I hope you don’t mind.”

He was quiet for a moment. “You did not have to.”

“No, I know. Just wanted to help out, you know?”

“I do not need help,” he said, his fingers clenching on the counter. “I have been coping perfectly well for longer than you can possibly imagine, I do not need you to come in and tell me how to raise my children, and keep my home clean, and…and keep them safe. I know I am not the first choice anyone would make for a father, but I am doing my best, and I do not need you to clean up after us, or send me to parenting classes or —“

“Woah,” Tony frowned, his hands up in front of him. “Lukes, calm down, I don’t know what you’re — “

“Well I do,” he snapped, turning around for the first time. His face was a rictus of fury and panic and pain, and Tony took a step back. “I know what I am bloody well doing. I may not have kept them safe before, but I will damn well keep them safe now. I am not going to fail this time. What do these therapists think they can do to help my children when they cannot even tell them what they have been through? I will help them, I will keep them safe.”

“Lucas, babe, I know, you’re doing an awesome job, I’m not — “

“Why are you still here?” He was yelling now, his fists clenched at his side. “Why are you pretending to care?”

Tony felt the hurt stab into his chest, but he forced himself to build a shell over it, and not react. There was something more going on than just Tony putting a few dishes away, and if he allowed himself to take it personally then something was going to get broken. Probably his heart. He lowered his hands and stood taller, glaring at his boyfriend. “You’re putting fucking words in my mouth,” he said, keeping his voice low. “Don’t tell me what the problem is if you don’t want to, but don’t go pushing at me just so you can have someone to blame.”

Lucas gritted his teeth and clenched his fists. For a moment Tony thought he was going to start yelling again, but he just stalked past him to Finn’s room. “Fen. We’ve got to get the others, come on.”

There was no answer, just a little shuffling and sniffling, and Lucas’ face lost its brittle edge, and his frown was just concerned. He knocked again, then pushed the door open. “Fen?”
The boy was sitting on George’s bed curled around a pillow, his shoulders shaking with sobs. “Oh, Fenrir, sweetheart.” Lucas immediately sat next to him and hugged him close. “Come on, darling. It’s not the end of the world. You know I am not angry with you at all, do you not?” He kissed his wild brown hair. “Do you think you can come with me to the school to pick Jor and Hel up?”

Finn gulped again and Tony could see him trying to get his tears under control. All it was doing was making him hyperventilate.

“Lukes,” he said softly. “Hey, why don’t I keep an eye on him?” Lucas’ gaze snapped to him, and really? Did he have to look so suspicious? He resisted the urge to roll his eyes. “Go on, you’ve got to get going if you want to be on time.”

Lucas checked his watch and bit his lip, then nodded once. He kissed Finn once more, hugged him tight and stood. He hesitated when he passed Tony. “Go on,” Tony said, flashing him an insincere smile.

He heard the door click, and sat beside Finn on the bed. “Hey. Can I give you a hug, kid?”

Finn sobbed and flung himself at Tony, practically crawling onto his lap for extra contact. Tony raised his eyebrows, but rallied and rubbed the boy’s skinny back, rocking him back and forth and murmuring nonsense platitudes.

It felt like he was crying there forever. Tony might have never had such a long hug in his life, but he just went with it. It’s not like asking for explanations had worked out well with the other Friggason, so he just let him cry it out until he was just flopped against Tony’s chest, fingers clenching and unclenching in his t-shirt, and eyes exhausted and staring into space.

“You OK there, buddy?”

He nodded.

“Want a drink? Some hot chocolate?”

Another little nod, but he didn’t let Tony go.

“Want to come with me?”

Finn nodded again, and Tony held back a laugh. In the end he walked to the kitchen with Finn still attached to him, arms tightly around his waist like they were running a three-legged race. He crinkled his nose up as he felt the boy smudge a snotty nose on his t-shirt, but held his tongue. Poor kid didn’t need any lessons on manners right now.

They sat on the window seat with a cup of hot chocolate each, and Finn leaned against Tony with a yawn, and Tony smiled down at him.

“I didn’t mean to hurt him,” Finn whispered, when his chocolate was nearly gone. Tony looked down at him and saw a little wobble in his lip again. “Marco’s my best friend, I didn’t want to hurt him, I would never.”

“Aww, hey, kid, I bet he’ll understand,” Tony said, wrapping his arm around his back.

“He just…he…he grabbed my mouth and…and I…everything went white, I was so scared of going back there. I know Marco wouldn’t…he was just kidding around, he was just trying to stop me from spoiling the end of his joke, but—“
He broke off with another gulping sob and Tony squeezed his shoulders close, his heart breaking for the little boy. What the hell had happened to these poor kids? He took Finn’s cup and put both of them on the floor by his feet, then hugged him close, hushing gently.

“I can’t handle water on my face,” he blurted.

Finn sniffled and wiped his nose before looking up through watery eyes. “How come?”

Tony took a deep breath. “I…uh. I nearly drowned a few times.” He didn’t need to give Finn any extra nightmares. “Doesn’t matter why. What I’m saying is, sometimes people just have…triggers. And it’s OK - well, yeah, it’s not OK that you have them because they suck. But it’s not your fault. You just learn how to work around them.”

“How?”

Tony frowned and thought. “Well, I found that I could do showers because it was like rain, and it wasn’t all on my face at one time. So I don’t have baths that often. That’s called avoidance, and it always seems like the most obvious idea, but sometimes you can’t avoid things. And then you panic, like you did when your friend touched your mouth. So you have to, I dunno, test your limits, push them a little at a time. I could start by using a wet flannel on my cheeks, then moving it to my forehead, and then my mouth and nose eventually. Then trying out shallow baths, and get them deeper and deeper, little by little. And maybe one day I’d be OK with swimming underwater.”

Finn stared off into space for a while, a little frown on his face. “So maybe I could practice by putting my own hand over my mouth.”

Tony nodded. “And then get someone you trust to put their hands near your mouth, and then over your mouth. Like your dad.”

“Or Sleipnir,” Finn said absently, and Tony frowned at the name slip. He’d noticed even Lucas had slipped a couple of times today. He wasn’t sure whether to be proud that they trusted him enough to relax around him, or worried that they were getting too slack. Also Sleipnir? What kind of name was that?

“Yeah,” he said. “Stephen would definitely help.”

The lock clicked on the door and Finn jumped up to hug his dad. The whole family looked miserable, so Tony guessed that Lucas’ mood hadn’t improved much. Stephen, or Sleipnir, or whatever, bent down to hug Finn too, and the two boys wandered off towards their room, talking quietly.

George, his face like thunder, stomped off to the bathroom and slammed the door behind him. Tony noticed Lucas’ hands clench into fists at the noise. Helen looked between them, her lips pursed, then shrugged and sat next to Tony, flicking her black hair behind her shoulder. “Finn’s been suspended for three days,” she said.

Tony scrunched his face up. “That sucks.”

“No way! He gets to miss school and we have to go every day, it’s not fair. I hit people all the time and I don’t get time off.”

“Hel!” Lucas snapped, his hand slapping the table. He took a deep breath and rubbed the bridge of his nose “Just…just go to your room, please. I cannot cope with any of you right now.”

She rolled her eyes and made an ugh sound that Tony recognised from every pre-teen everywhere,
and stumped off to her room. A moment later George left the bathroom and joined her, and their indistinct voices joined Finn and Stephen’s.

Lucas was silent, leaning on the kitchen counter, the only sign of life a pulsing muscle in his jaw where he was clenching and unclenching his teeth repeatedly. Tony pushed himself up and walked over to him in silence, then wrapped his arms around his waist and squeezed, just leaning his head against Lucas’ back.

For a long moment the energy of Lucas’ tense muscles vibrated under his skin. But as Tony stayed quiet, he felt him starting to relax, inch by inch, until he was bowed over, a crescent inside the cradle of a smaller one.

“I did not mean those things I said,” Lucas said quietly.
“I know.”
“I am sorry, Tony.”
“I know, babe.”

He was going to leave it at that, accept the apology with grace, but the words slipped out without his permission. “I do care, you know. I’m not just pretending.”

Lucas cringed. “I know that, Tony, it was…it was something cruel to say. I’m sorry.”

“I really do want to help, but I know I can be a bit annoying at times—“

“No!” Lucas turned in his grip and wrapped his arms around Tony’s back so they were pressed tight together, chest to chest. “I do not find you annoying. That was not why I reacted like that. I…I just cannot understand what you see in me sometimes. In all of us - we must be so far outside your experience. And pushing like that…it’s…”

“Yeah, I know. Offence is the best defence,” Tony laughed. “I get it, Lukes, I do it all the time.”

“I do not want to,” he whispered. “I don’t want to push you away.”

A glow started under Tony’s ribs and warmed through his body. “Neither do I,” he said, and he couldn’t stop the smile that cut through the sadness as he squeezed Lucas’ chest closer.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to wnnbdarklord for catching a Loki where there should have been a Lucas! I get so confused with the pseudonyms you guys, thank you for being so patient with them lol!
Loki - Faith

Chapter Notes

Slightly earlier upload than usual today because I'm off camping tomorrow ^_^ I hope you like the conclusion(ish) of this mini-arc. Also the Bloc Party song Biko makes me think of this chapter ('this world isn't kind to little things')

Loki had two children to take with him to the gym the following morning, and he walked into the playground with his head held as high as he could, feeling as if every single parent was whispering about him behind their hands, the way the court had on Asgard so often. He made the extra effort to smile at the triplets, to hold Narfi’s hand or pick him up when his hands twitched with anxiety, because if he didn’t he might cut someone with his tongue.

“Father, can I…?” Fenrir jerked his head towards a boy with spiky brown hair and a butterfly plaster over his nose. Loki raised his eyebrow but nodded, and let his son’s hand slip out of his own. He watched Fenrir approach the boy, his head down, shoulder hunched and submission in every line. “I’m sorry, Marco,” he heard. “I would never hurt you on purpose.”

The other boy frowned at him, a little pout on his lips. Then he scrunched his mouth up and shrugged. “That’s OK. I know you didn’t mean to.”

Fen’s shoulders slumped. “Thank you. How’s your nose?”

“Hurts like crazy,” he said, touching the broken skin. He was several shades darker than Fen, but the bruises under both eyes still glared, and Loki tried, and failed, to figure out which one was his adult, eyes flickering around the faces guiltily. If it had been Fenrir with two black eyes and a broken nose he knew he would have been furious.

“Hey,” said Salma, quietly appearing beside him. “What’s this I hear about one of your kids getting into a fight?”

Loki nodded towards Fenrir, still talking to Marco, his feet scuffing awkwardly. Their body language was slowly starting to unwind, thankfully. “Finn lashed out and broke Marco’s nose.”

“What? Finn? Like, Finn-Finn?” She whistled. “What brought that on?”

He winced. “He, uh. He panicked. He doesn’t like people touching his mouth.”

“Really? How come?”

“Uh…”

She narrowed her eyes at him. “What the fuck happened to your family, Lucas?”

He lowered his head and glared into the middle distance. What was it with humans and their perceptiveness? “You don’t need to worry. I am attending parenting classes to cope.” He injected all his considerable scorn into the description.

Salma snorted, which was gratifying. “ Fucking parenting classes.” She glanced down at Narfi.
“Sorry. Again.”

He shrugged. “Apparently it’s not as bad as what I am doing with them.”

She nudged him with her shoulder. “Hey. You all right?”

He gave her a weak smile. “Yes, I’m fine, thank you.”

“So seriously. Those things are such a crock. If you need to vent, let me know, yeah? I think Dianne did some before Jenny was diagnosed, when they just thought she was being a little shit.”

He inclined his head to her and smiled more genuinely as the bell went and she nudged him again as she left.

“I’m proud of you, Fenrir,” he said as they walked to the gym. “I could see how much courage you needed to apologise, and it was the right thing to do.”

“Thank you, Father,” he said, his cheeks dimpling up at Loki. He wrapped his arms around his chest, and Loki bent his head to kiss him awkwardly as they walked. His son was up to his chest, and still so sweet and desperate for praise and love. Loki’s heart ached for the little boy - not so little - who had only ever wanted to be good. Even Jor and Hela’s independence and self assuredness had never rubbed off on Fen quite as much as he had hoped.

Their world had never been kind to kind things, and Loki wondered at the unfairness of life that all his desperate desire to please had been passed to Fenrir, with none of his tendency to stick his middle finger up at everyone and go his own way when it inevitably didn’t work. When he thought of the genetic situation, it was even more strange, considering he was entirely of Angrboda’s blood, and none of the legends about her suggested she had ever tried to please anyone. Perhaps, somewhere back in her past, she had. Perhaps it had always been thrown back at her, and she forged herself into fire and viciousness. He squeezed his son’s shoulders once more. He would have to make sure the kindness was not completely burned out of Fenrir, either way.

On the second day of Fen’s suspension, at the gym, Loki noticed that Narfi was getting agitated by his brother’s presence. Fen had always adored Narfi, and followed him around in the hopes that he could be his favourite big brother again, go back to how they were before…before everything. It just seemed to annoy Narfi.

“Fen, leave him,” Loki called, when he saw Narfi’s fingers curl into a fist. “Come here and join me demonstrating this move instead.”

Fenrir was happy to be helping his father, and Narfi was happy sitting at Alex’s desk, but the time apart didn’t seem to help as much as Loki hoped. They were crossing the road on the way home, when Fen grabbed Narfi’s hand. “Hold hands, Narfi, it’s dangerous.”

Narfi tugged his hand away, but Fen went for it again. As Loki opened his mouth to tell Fen to back off, Narfi turned with a soundless grunt and pushed Fenrir’s chest hard with both hands. Fen, taken off balance, fell onto his backside, all the air whooshing out of his lungs and tears forming in his eyes, either from the shock or the pain or just the physical jolt.

“Narfi!” Loki snapped. He bent down to his youngest son’s eye level and held his upper arm, turning his back on the crossing beeping behind them. “You do not shove your brother like that, do you hear?”

“It’s OK, Father, I’m not hurt,” said Fen, still slightly breathless.
“That is beside the point,” Loki replied, his eyes still on Narfi, who simply stared at the ground, closed off. “We do not hurt people unless it is for self-defence.”

“It was self-defence to him, though,” Fenrir said softly. “Maybe he thought I was going to hurt him.”

Loki sighed and his head sagged between his shoulders. His children were already better parents than him. He rubbed Narfi’s arm with his thumb. “You’re right,” he said. He looked up at Narfi, whose eyes were aimed at Loki, though his face was still turned to the floor. “Fenrir is right, I suppose I cannot tell you that you will never need to defend yourself from someone you love.” He rubbed his thumb on Narfi’s bicep. “He only wanted to help, though.”

He stood up and held one hand out to each of them while Fen pressed the crossing button again. “If you could only speak,” he said, but quietly, and he hoped his sons wouldn’t hear him.

He still couldn’t quite convince himself that Tony wouldn’t get tired of their drama and leave. It surprised him once again, each time he knocked on the door and leaned in to kiss him, but it was a good surprise. He found his lips curling in a smile whenever Tony walked past him and chatted to the kids, and it was getting harder and harder to deny that he was falling hard for this ephemeral being. That he had already fallen.

The day after his first parenting class was the worst. He felt his soul scoured with sand, raw and burned and exposed to the elements, and wondered if he could ever be good enough for these people he’d dragged into a painful existence, and then dragged around the universe with no real hope for peace. How could he ever give them the self-esteem and continuity and security these facilitators said was essential for the normal development of young people?

His reaction to it was to push again. He snapped at the children, insisted that he did not need Eisa’s help, and nearly screamed with frustration when Narfi got stubborn about his clothes. When Tony arrived that afternoon he glared at him, only just holding back demands that he explain himself. What the hell was he doing here? Why was he playing with Loki’s expectations? Why was he still trying to pretend to be interested in their world, so different from his own experiences?

Tony narrowed his eyes at Loki, stomping around the kitchenette while Narfi sat with his arms crossed at the table. Then he took the cutlery he’d been tidying out of Loki’s hands, put it to the side and wrapped his arms around him.

Loki stood rigid, furious for a moment that Tony would presume to try and give him comfort, as if he were the cause of at least part of his distress! Then incrementally, he sank against his shoulder, his arms came up to wrap around his waist, and he lay his face against Tony’s skin and just breathed.
Loki - Self-Control

Chapter Summary

It's been 2 weeks since Fen's suspension, and Loki's feeling on more solid ground right now.

Which means there's space in his brain for worry about Tony's illness...

Chapter Notes

I don't know why he's singing Years and Years. I was listening to this song and Loki dancing with his kids just came to mind...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Ooh, oh oh, I was a king under your control. And oh, oh oh, I wanna feel like you’ve let me go, so let me go.”

“Father.”

“Don’t you remember how I used to like being on the line?”

“Father! What are you doing?”

Loki twirled the dishcloth, spinning figure eights above his head, and shook his shoulders at Hela and Jor who were glaring at him with crossed arms and raised eyebrows.

“Cut cover, take that test, hold courage to your chest, don’t wanna wait for you, don’t wanna have to lose.” He held his arms out to his children and fell to his knees, singing with as much mock passion as he could, and was rewarded with a smile sneaking out the corner of Hela’s mouth.

Jor rolled his eyes. “This is totally undignified, Father.”

Loki grinned and leaped to his feet as the chorus hit, shaking his hips, spinning, and bobbing his head to the beat. Hela giggled and he grabbed her hands, pulling her around the kitchenette and living room.

“You’re both ridiculous,” yelled Jor.

Fenrir opened the boys’ door and stuck his head out, grinning at the spectacle and joining straight in. Sleipnir followed, bobbing Narfi on his hip.

Loki turned to his too-cool second son, who had one disdainful eyebrow raised. He knew he’d made that face at Thor from around the same age. Instead of allowing himself to feel the never-lessening stab of guilt and pain and anger, he let Hela’s hands drop and body popped over to Jor, who pursed his lips to hide his involuntary smile. “Let go, let go, let go of everything.”
Jor rolled his eyes and dropped his arms in what Salma assured him was a classic teenage pose. But he also grabbed Loki round the waist and quickstepped him across the room.

Loki felt like his smile might break his jaw.

They had to run to school that morning, the triplets, even Jor, shrieking in delight like they were just sixty years old again. Loki had to sign them in with Ms Gomez, trying to smile charmingly with red cheeks and breathlessness, but even her disapproval couldn’t dampen his enthusiasm. Eisa had taken Narfi to a soft play area with a couple of her friends, and he had the day to himself - well, to himself and Tony.

They had been spending every free moment together since Fenrir’s suspension two weeks ago. Usually Loki would find the constant company disconcerting, always waiting for the other to sink too deep in him and find his sharp broken edges and step back, bleeding, from his presence.

But Tony… the last time he’d felt so eager to be in someone’s presence was with Glut. He’d loved Sigyn, her ethereal delicacy, but she always seemed like she was made of lace, and he’d held so much of himself back, in hindsight, not wanting to damage her as he had Glut and the girls. Tony was wonderful, but certainly not made of glass. He was something hard and sharp himself, with his own jagged edges and pitfall traps, but they didn’t seem to cut each other. And Loki wondered with a stab of guilt if that was only because they both knew their time was limited.

The taste on his lips when Tony kissed him became more present with each day, and stupid fights, jealousy, and insecurity, was set aside in favour of holding Tony close for as long as he could, felling the scrape of stubble on his skin, the slide of their kisses, the linking of his fingers. And every time Loki had Tony in his arms, his forehead resting on his shoulder while Loki’s fingers rubbed the back of his neck, he fought with the ache of his hidden seidr begging him to release it so its tendrils could flow through his veins and draw out the poison, atomise the shrapnel that gnashed at its leash, straining towards his heart. Clear the atheroma forming where his arteries had been damaged. And every time it was getting harder and harder for Loki to hold the faces of his children in his mind as he wrapped Tony’s tiring body closer in lieu of an apology.

Tony was waiting at his door when he got back, and he couldn’t help the smile that broke across his face even as his seidr rattled its cage in grief. He wrapped Tony in a gentle embrace and kissed his temple.

“Hey,” Tony grinned. “So I was thinking, we should go see a movie.”

“Is it possible for you to visit a cinema without being hounded?”

“Not really. Which is why I was thinking about my nearly endless DVD collection, half of which I haven’t seen, and my own cinema sized screen.” he looked awkward as Loki pulled back to see his face. “Come back to my place for popcorn and a movie?”

Loki smiled and ignored every warning about being too close to the kind of scrutiny that would surround Tony Stark’s house, because there was very little he would refuse this man. Even if he wasn’t withholding the key to Tony’s survival, even if Tony wasn’t slowly being poisoned, he had a feeling he would have very little will to refuse time spent with him. “I’d love to.”

“Great.” Tony let out a huge breath and grinned fit to break Loki’s heart. “C’mon, my car’s over here.”

Loki was surprised when Tony led him to a black BMW, sleek and fast, but not flashy at all. He was being subtle, and Loki figured that came about as naturally for Tony as it did for Thor. He
linked fingers with him when Tony held his hand out, as they whipped along the roads out of town.

The house on the cliff top was as sleek and white as some of the Vanir battleships Loki had seen as a youngster during the millenary of his parents...adopted parents’ wedding, and looking out over the Pacific ocean from the floor to ceiling windows of the living room, Loki felt sure they would start to move over the water, characteristic humming of the crystal drive beneath his feet.

“Can I get you a drink? Coffee, tea...or a soda? Or maybe some whiskey—oh, no, you’ve got to get the kids later, I—“

“Tea would be wonderful, thank you,” Loki interrupted, smiling at Tony’s babbling. He wondered if he would feel the same way, taking Tony to Asgard. Not that that would ever happen. Even if Tony had his health there were some things that were firmly in the past. He wrapped his hand around the mug Tony brought him and kissed him gently. “The view is beautiful.”

“It is, isn’t it?” Tony nodded, turning to the windows. “I mean, I know I’m meant to say the view of your ass is better, but genuinely, that’s why I built this place. You should see it when the storms come in. you can watch the clouds gather on the horizon and see them just swoop down on you, thunder and lighting and waves crashing almost right over the top of this window.”

Loki shuddered and took an involuntary step back.

“Babe?”

He forced a smile on his face. “So, did you have a movie in mind?”

“Not really.” Tony led Loki towards a set of stairs and down into a windowless room with a vast cinema screen at one end, and sofas scattered across the floor instead of the usual rows of seats.

“As long as I can get to Stephen’s school for his track meet at 2pm, I have no preferences.” He stretched out on an overstuffed leather sofa and pulled Tony down to rest on his chest, between his knees. Tony tensed in surprise before going completely limp and almost nuzzling into him.

“What kind of movie do you like?” he murmured into Loki’s chest, not even bothering to open his eyes.

“I haven’t watched that many. What is your favourite?”

Tony shrugged. “I’ve never been able to figure that out myself. Hey, Jarv?”

“Hey, Jarv,” Tony yawned. “Put a random movie on, will you?” He turned his head on Loki’s chest so he was facing the screen, then sniggered as the film started. “I knew it.”

“Knew what?” Loki relaxed into the cushions, stroking Tony’s hair.

“He always picks The Knight’s Tale. I think he’s got a thing for Chaucer.”
“I do not, sir,” said the voice haughtily. “I simply appreciate the genius of the late Mr Ledger’s acting.”

“Sure, Jarvis. So why don’t we get the Dark Knight or Brokeback Mountain next time?”

There was a quiet clicking and whirring from the walls, but no reply. Tony just laughed and squirmed closer to Loki, if that were possible.

Loki smiled down at him, relishing the way his mortal body could feel pressed down, secured by the man’s weight. In his Aesir (no…no, not Aesir) form he would have barely noticed his presence. Tony’s breathing slowed and he snored gently, and still Loki never stopped stroking his hair.

He could sense the poison in his veins, the black marks spreading almost up his neck like wire twining a net around his soul, ready to tighten and squeeze. The sound of the movie faded into the back of his consciousness, every voice in his mind silent, as his seidr trickled out, almost unfelt, almost unnoticed, into Tony’s body.

He felt a tension he hadn’t noticed leave Tony's muscles, and the flow of seidr brightened as the marks were pushed back slowly.

When Tony hummed in his sleep and rubbed his cheek on Loki’s breastbone he jerked his hand away, his conscience and rationality returning with a jolt. What was he doing? He could not risk discovery for one mortal. How could he be so selfish? He had cut his own children off from their true nature, and here he was risking all they had worked for over the past year to save one human man just because his stupid chaotic heart might be falling for him?

He pulled his hands away from Tony and pressed them into his eyes, waiting for the crack of the Bifrost and the invasion of Einherjar.

Thor would probably come for him, he always had, for good or ill. But this time he would know Loki’s true nature and there would be no rescue from a cave of venom, no fight for his honour. This time he was the villain, pure and simple, by his actions as well as his true form.

And there would be no safety for any of his children. The triplets and Sleipnir had always been in danger, but now even Eisa, Einmyria and Narfi could not be saved by their status as legitimate children of the prince. They could not even be counted as half Aesir. The girls’ half Nidavelir, and Narfi’s half Vanir blood would give no protection from the taint of a Jotun father.

He wanted with every fibre of his being to go to them, release his seidr entirely and teleport to every one, snatch them up and run again, but forced himself to stay still, hands covering his face, heartbeat fierce. His children were still hidden. The best thing he could do for them right now would be to stay away.

But an hour passed, and no warriors swarmed to him. His seidr was carefully tucked away, his mortal skin still intact. Loki let out a long breath and at last allowed his hands to rest on Tony again. As unbelievable as it was, Heimdall must have missed the glimpse of his power. He had only released a tiny trickle, after all, and it had been a year since he had gone. Thor’s banishment would surely be over, he would have been crowned by now. It was possible the idiot had started a war with someone and Heimdall’s gaze was needed elsewhere.

He slumped back against the cushions and closed his eyes, stroking Tony’s back A song chased its tail around his head, and, still deaf to the sounds of the film, he sang softly.

“God knows, God knows, the direction we’re heading in tonight. God knows, God knows that
when we’re gone they’ll paint our shadows white. And God knows, God knows most wars are lost before they even start. And God knows, God knows you’ll count the cost with blood or with your heart.”

“Thea Gilmore, huh?”

Loki’s eyes snapped open to the door where an elegant red headed woman stood, a wry half smile twisting her lips.

“Damn Tony,” she sighed, walking round the sofa to glare at the sleeping man. “He’s only supposed to have one night stands with people who have a terrible taste in music.”

Loki laughed and opened his mouth to explain that he’d never even seen Tony naked, but she dropped the armful of papers on the table with a crack. Tony’s entire body seized and he jerked upright, hand held palm out, his breath ragged.

“Jesus, Pep, fucking heart condition, remember?”

“You know, when you blow off the meeting with the Argentinian branch, I expect you to have a better excuse than sofa sex. But I suppose I should know better by now.” She turned to Loki. “I apologise for Mr Stark, can I get you a taxi? I’m afraid I’ll need you to sign a standard non-disclosure agreement first.”

“Pepper!” Tony snapped, sitting upright. “What the hell?”

“You could ask you the same thing,” she almost yelled, and Loki could see the hurt flash across her face before she took a deep breath and straightened up. “Look, I get that you’re the classic attention deficit genius, but you’ve suddenly lost an interest in everything, the company, your friends, the lab, even Iron Man. Did you even know that crazy whip guy from the Monaco GP turned up in LA?”

Tony deflated and rubbed his eyes. “Shit. Was anyone…”

“Yeah.” She let out a long breath. “Five dead, thirteen injured. He was yelling about you. When you didn’t show up he just left.”

“Fuck,” he groaned. Loki sat up to rub between his shoulder blades and Tony looks at him, guilt filling his brown eyes. “I was supposed to be in Monaco that night we made cupcakes. I could have stopped him there… I should have been there today, too, fuck…”

Loki winced and stilled his hand. “If you had been there,” he ventured softly, “the attack might have lasted longer. He would have had reason to stay.”

“Or I could have stopped him earlier.”

“Wait, you really did make those cupcakes?” Pepper asked, her tone incredulous. “I thought you bought that one at some roadside kids’ bake sale to piss me off.”

Tony sighed. “I really didn’t know you were allergic.” He turned to Loki. “I should have taken that one with the rainbow sprinkles that Helen made.”

Loki smiled and tried to keep his attention on that rather than the attack. “I’m sure the children would be happy to make a whole batch without strawberries at all.”

Pepper went red. “When you said triplets you really were talking about children - Jesus, Tony.”
“You really should trust me more,” Tony sniped.

“Can you blame me, with your track record?”

Loki grinned and checked his watch. “I must be going, Tony. Stephen’s meet starts in forty five minutes.” He stood and nodded to Pepper. “Please excuse me, I must ring a taxi.”

“Hey, no, wait, I said I’d come.”

“That’s OK,” he said, nodding at the pile of paperwork. “I understand you have a lot on your plate. Stephen will understand.”

Tony bit his lip and frowned, and Loki dipped his head to Pepper as he made to leave.

“No. Actually, no.” Tony stood and followed Loki out.

“Tony, come on!” Pepper groaned.

“No, I’m sorry, Mom, I’ll stay up late to do my homework, I promise.” He turned to Loki, ignoring Pepper throwing her hands up in the air behind him. “My dad never kept his promises. I don’t want to be like that.” He blushed suddenly. “Not that I think I’m their dad, obviously, they’ve got the best dad in the world, and I know I’ve only known you guys a month or so, but…” He trailed off and bit his lip, looking at Loki like he expected him to laugh or push him away. “Do you mind?”

“Mind what?”

“Me invading your lives like this…I’m not…I know it might feel like I’m playing house or something but—“

Loki wrapped his arms around Tony’s shoulders and pulled him close, pressing his cheek against Tony’s temple. He’d considered pulling back, of course he had. Extricating himself from Tony’s influence. But then he’d remember that it would deprive Hela of excited conversations about wormholes and quantum physics where she explained obscure articles by a Dr Foster to a man who treated her as an equal, not with a patronising ‘impressive for a child’ attitude. Jor would miss out on making Tony laugh with his cynical comments on literature, and Sleipnir had someone to bond with over motorsports. If he pulled them back from Tony, it might save the fierce, stabbing pain of losing someone close, but to deny them his presence while it existed was to leave a dull hole in their lives, nameless and unremarked, but with no sweet memories to ride through the storms.

Life could be a vicious bitch. None knew that better than Loki’s children, and he knew they could grow hard and twisted by their experiences. And maybe this was something else that would break them. But maybe they would grow supple and strong around the obstacles, taking the grief as due payment for the joy of throwing themselves into life and love with their whole heart.

And maybe, if he was lucky, they would avoid his mistakes. Revenge and silence and cruelty. Loki had modelled these for too long, and it was time he modelled something wholehearted before it was too late for yet another of his children.

“I think I knew you were serious about us when I saw you covered in Helen’s vomit last week, and still your concern was for her,” he whispered, and kissed Tony’s temple. “Play house with us as long as you like.”

“OK,” he said softly. “I’ll try not to suck at it.”

Loki laughed and let Tony go.
Pepper cleared her throat and walked past them. “Oh, OK. Happy’ll drive. No, don’t argue, Tony, you’re going to sit in the limo with me and sign papers while you,” she pointed at Loki, “are going to tell me your name and show me pictures of your kids.”

Chapter End Notes

I adore Pepper, I have zero hate for her at all. I do think she and Tony wouldn't make each other happy in a relationship, because she's so sensible and I don't think she entirely gets the whole PTSD thing, and Tony's too irresponsible and forgets things that are important to her. But I think she's an amazing friend to Tony and will protect him from everyone. She and Rhodey are his shield and I love them both.

And yeah, Hela got flu a week ago and projectile vomited all over Tony. I was going to write about it until I realised that was literally all there was to the anecdote...

Also I have a timeline to this fic. I have the DATES of all these events written in my first draft book! I would stick them up on Tumblr for anyone interested but 'spoilers, sweetie' - I'll do it at the end! If you're interested, the date of this chapter is 20th June 2012. It's a Wednesday ^_^
Leigh-Ann returns! And Loki finds out there's at least one area where Asgard is more permissive than Midgard

Pepper waved them off when Loki invited her and Happy to join them at the track meet. “I’m not exactly dressed for the grass,” she smiled, glancing at her expensive looking high heels. “I think I’m going to take my boss’ lead and goof off for the afternoon.”

“Not your boss any more,” Tony said.

She smirked. “Do you want Happy to pick you up tomorrow morning?”

Loki surprised himself by blushing furiously. “Actually, I have work this evening.” He did not add that unless Tony planned on sleeping on the window seat, there wasn’t much space for him to stay the night.

He was not ashamed, he reminded himself.

“Oh, look at that. Someone who actually turns up for work,” said Pepper, looking at Tony with her eyebrows raised in mock innocence.

“I don’t have a job, Pep, I have a company. Surely that means I get a bit of leeway?”

She just smiled. “Nice to meet you, Lucas. See you in a couple of hours, Mr Stark.”

Tony shook his head as they climbed out of the limo and made their way into the school. “Only she can make Mr Stark sound less respectful than Tony.”

“Hey, Lucas!”

Loki turned to towards the voice and smiled as Dianne raced up. “Afternoon. Is Jenny taking part today as well?”

“Yeah, she’s in the high jump and the 200m. Stephen?”

“1500m and long jump.”

“Hi,” she said, turning to Tony. “I’m Dianne.”

“Tony.”

“You look familiar,” she frowned, shaking his hand.

“I get that a lot.”

“Have you got kids here too?”

“Uh, no, I’m…cheering for Stephen.”
Loki smiled and linked his fingers with Tony’s, relishing the blush that spread up the man’s neck.

“Ooooh, my gosh, Lucas, this is your new boyfriend.” Dianne jumped up and down and clapped like a child, then cackled suddenly. “You know Leigh-Ann’s going to be around today, right? Oh, my God, do not let her see you two together unless I’m there to watch her face!”

Tony laughed. “Have you got an admirer, babe?”

Dianne leaned towards him. “Seriously, if that woman gets more grabby with Lucas we’ll be calling it sexual harassment.” She jerked her thumb in Loki’s direction. “He thought she was mad at him or something. How did you guys even get together if he’s so clueless?”

Tony laughed again, his head tipped back and his eyes crinkled up, and Loki rolled his eyes to cover how deep the affection went. “I thought she was being aggressive and threatening.”

“She was,” Dianne smirked. “In a sexual way.”

They made their way to the bleachers and found a place to sit a few rows up. Sleipnir was stretching with his teammates, his white-blond hair falling in a sheet across his face while he rested his forehead on his knees.

“How’s he doing - any spasms recently?”

Loki shook his head. “Not for a week or so. He had a timed essay to do for History last Wednesday, though, he said his forearm clenched up so hard he ripped the paper with the pen nib.”

“Ouch.” Tony screwed up his face in sympathy.

“I think he was more embarrassed than anything,” Loki sighed. “He mentioned a couple of kids were making fun of him afterwards.”

“Who was that?” Dianne asked, and Loki was reminded of Sif, the way her eyes flashed with the injustice. It sent a strange wave of nostalgia through him, which was stupid, really. He had Sif had never been close friends, but woe betide anyone who tried to pick on him. With Thor and Sif around it was a wonder he’d ever learned to fight his own battles. And of course, he was so grateful to her for taking Eisa under her wing. He winced again when he thought of his eldest daughter giving up her coveted position in the guard just for him.

“He didn’t want to tell me,” he said. “But he did say there were others who stood up for him, so I wasn’t to make a fuss.”

She grumbled under he breath. “Jenny was like that when she was getting shit for being gay. God, I just wanted to punch some of those kids.”

“Why did they care if she was gay?” Loki frowned.

“I know, right? Whose business is it of theirs who she has a crush on? But there was this group of girls who refused to get changed if she was in the locker room in case she was perving on them.”

Loki laughed. “That makes no sense. A straight man does not find all women attractive. How arrogant of them to believe a lesbian must be attracted to them.”

“I don’t suppose you could talk to her one day, if she’s having a rough time of it? If it’s not too presumptuous - Salma’s said she’ll take her out for a bit of a chat, but to be honest I think she might just tell her how to hide the bodies. I’m way too straight to be able to fully understand the
whole coming-out thing.”

“Coming out?” Loki wondered if the Allspeak was failing in some way.

“You know, the issues you go through when you find you you’re not straight, how to deal with bigots?”

Loki opened and shut his mouth for a moment. “I… actually do not know how much help I can be. Sexuality is not something that is remarked upon where I grew up. I do not know anyone who has not, at some point or another, had a same sex relationship.”

Both Dianne and Tony were staring at him, open mouthed. “Are you fucking serious? Where did you grow up, a hippy commune?” Dianne shrieked.

Loki burst out laughing because that expression did translate, and he tried to imagine his family and friends preaching peace and love and communion with nature like the Ljosalfar dryads.

“Seriously,” Tony said, frowning. “You’ve got to be in your thirties at least, to be old enough for Elsa. I don’t know any countries where homosexuality was that commonly accepted in the 80s. You guys must have been seriously anti-establishment.”

Loki folded himself double with laughter at that description of the King of the Nine Realms, but by the time he managed to pull himself together he was struck with a sadness that the mortals had spent so much of their history hating each other for such petty things.

Then stopped himself, and thought of blue skin and gender and his own hypocrisy.

“Where I grew up is complex,” he admitted. “And contradictory.”

“You know, I don’t think I’ve ever heard you talk about your past,” Dianne said, leaning forward, leaning her elbow on her knee and her chin on her hand. Tony gave Loki a concerned look out of the corner of his eye.

“I do not talk about it much. I left it behind for a reason,” he said. He clenched his fists once, twice, and stood. “I will get us drinks, I think. Back in a moment.”

He left with a flash of an insincere smile, trotting down the steps to the grass. Sleipnir waved at him, his face breaking into a smile, but he was busy with his warm-up, so Loki went straight to the refreshment stand. “Three orange juices, please,” he said with a short smile to the girl behind the table.

“Oh, Lucas, honey, it’s so good to see you.”

Loki gritted his teeth and turned to see Leigh-Ann, her brown curls perfectly tamed into a high ponytail, wearing a tracksuit and trainers. She might have been planning to take part in the track meet herself, if her trainers weren’t quite so immaculate. She clutched his arm and pulled him into a lingering kiss on the cheek. “How are you, sweetie?”

“Fine, thank you,” he said, stepping back and holding up his drinks in front of his chest like a shield. Knowing exactly why she wanted him around didn’t make her any less intimidating, he realised. “I must get these —“

“I must say, you are looking fantastic, have you been working out?” She giggled and put her hand over one of his pectoral muscles, and he gritted his teeth, resisting the urge to push her off and snarl at her.
“Jeez, Mom, leave him alone,” the teenage girl at the drinks table muttered. Leigh-Ann turned to her, her eyes narrowing. The girl hunched her shoulders and scowled at her mother. “Look at him, you’re obviously making him uncomfortable, just——”

“Oh, Marnie, you don’t know what you’re talking about,” she laughed, her hand fluttering and landing on Loki’s shoulder. “Lucas doesn’t mind a little harmless flirting.”

“Actually,” said Loki, his skin crawling under her touch, “it is a little awkward. I’m here with my boyfriend, you see.”

Leigh-Ann’s hand whipped away from him like she’d felt something disgusting, her eyes asymmetrically crinkled, her lip turning up at one corner. Loki nodded to Marnie, whose eyes were suddenly very wide, and walked back to the bleachers, letting out one long breath.

Wonderful.

“Hey,” Dianne said, as soon as Loki drew close enough. “I didn’t mean to push you, Lucas, I’m sorry.”

He shook his head and smiled as he handed her and Tony their drinks. “You didn’t push. I’m sorry I cannot tell you much about my past.” He took a deep breath. “I’m afraid you missed the look on Leigh-Ann’s face, as well.”

“What? Oh, this is gonna be good,” she cackled. “Tell me everything.”

Tony peered at his expression. “Hey, everything OK?”

He nodded. “Of course. I do not think she will be bothering us for any more PTA events.”

“What did you say?”

“I was perfectly polite, thank you very much,” he said primly. “I am not Salma. I simply told her I have a boyfriend and that her touching my chest is actually quite unwelcome.”

Dianne shrieked with laughter and clapped her hands. “Oh, yes! What did she say to that?”

“Nothing,” he shrugged. “She looked like I had stung her, though. And her daughter seemed shocked too.”

“Marnie?”

He nodded. “She was the one who pointed out to Leigh-Ann that she was pushing it, actually.”

“She’s a nice kid,” Dianne said. “She’s in Stephen’s class, I think.”

“I have heard the name often enough,” he agreed. “In fact, I think she was one of those standing up for him after that History test.”

“Proper little crusader.”

Tony snorted. “Good for her. Seeing through a parents’ bullshit is hard at that age.” He linked his fingers in Loki’s and squeezed. Loki smiled to himself and shifted slightly closer.

The athletics meet consisted of long periods of waiting and chatting, interspersed with short bouts of cheering Jenny and Sleipnir. As soon as the last race was over the three of them followed the rest of the parents onto the field to find their kids. Dianne waved at both of them, seeing Jenny over
by the high jump mats. Sleipnir was stretching off near the finish line and chatting to a dark haired cheerleader Loki recognised with a jolt as Marnie.

“Father, Tony, thank you for coming,” he said, his eyes lighting up.

Loki hugged him tight. “You did so well.”

“Thank you.” He turned to the girl. “This is Marnie.”

“Oh, my God, you’re Stephen’s dad?” she groaned. “I’m so sorry for earlier—"

“Not at all,” he smiled. It widened as he saw the way Sleipnir was looking at her from under his eyelashes, fiddling with the end of his hair. “I must thank you for that, actually,” he said. “Pointing out when someone is making another person uncomfortable is a very brave thing to do.”

She blushed and tucked her hair behind her ear, and Loki didn’t miss the way she glanced at Sleipnir.

“Marnie, come here, we’re leaving.”

The four of them spun round at the whip crack in Leigh-Ann’s voice, and Marnie rolled her eyes. “See you tomorrow, Stephen,” she said, giving him a little wave as she walked over to join her mother. Loki watched Leigh-Ann glare at them, speaking sharply to her daughter, and winced. It couldn’t have been easy, could it, now?
Tony closed his eyes on the black veins crawling up to his neck. He’d actually allowed himself to hope. The poison had receded without warning, black veins almost shrunk back to the square of his ribs and blood too levels had dropped by 20%. And then that whip wielding asshole Vanko happened. Again. The Iron Man suit happened. The fight happened. The suit had burned through yet another arc reactor and those angular lines were worse than ever, creeping up over his shoulders.

“Hey, Pep, what do you say we blow this joint and go for a birthday dinner instead? Just you, me and Rhodey? Lucas could even join us when his fight night’s over.”

Pepper frowned up at him, stylus hovering over her Stark Pad. “What? Tony, your guests are already arriving, you can’t cancel this now.”

Tony snorted. “Fuck it. Let them in, give them a free bar and they won’t even notice I’m not there.”

“Of course they’ll notice, Tony, it’s your birthday. What’s this about?”

“I just…I dunno, it’s stupid, isn’t it? None of these people are actually my friends, are they? C’mon,” he cajoled, aware he was starting to sound like a ten-year-old. “I’ll make an appearance and we’ll slip out the back, huh?” He waggled his eyebrows and spread his arms.

Pepper laughed and shook her head. “You’ll love it, Tony, you always do. You’ll be the centre of attention, dance like a loon, smash a few priceless artefacts.” Her smile softened. “If you’re really serious we’ll do a small dinner for your next birthday. I’d be honoured to be there. Now,” she patted his arm. “Let’s get this year’s revelry out of the way and not waste months of planning, huh?”

“Yeah,” he sighed. “Next year.”

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The music was loud, his favourite scotch tasted sour and he was being circled by a pack of freaking sharks. The only thing holding them back was the stunning woman talking passionately with him, her head bent towards him and her hands waving as she ranted about determinism and the ethics of terror attack prediction and pre-emptive strikes. Tony freaking loved Carol Danvers. He was deliberately playing devil’s advocate just to keep her arguing because if she got bored and wandered off she’d be replaced by someone who wanted to hang off him and grab his ass.

Unfortunately a group of them joined forces and started changing “suit up, suit up!”

“Your public needs you,” Carol laughed. “You gonna show us some action?”
Tony grimaced as the whole room seemed to take up the call. “All right, all right. Thanks for being here, everyone, drink me dry, dance on the tables, I’ll be back in a bit.” He turned to the blonde woman, her hands in her tux pockets. “This ain’t over, Danvers.”

“Bring it on, Stark,” she grinned. “You know I’ll wipe the floor with you.”

“I really need to introduce you to Rhody,” he said, half to himself. If he had any chance of living out the week he’d keep them the hell away from each other. He had a feeling they’d tag team him a bit too effectively.

But he wasn’t going to be here and they’d be unstoppable together.

He left the room to drunken cheers and grumpy looks from all the gold diggers who hadn’t got enough attention. He could still feel the bass through the floor as he stood in front of the suit in his workshop.

He kinda wanted to put it on. It was a part of him, his chrysalis, and to go out in a blaze of glory in the very thing that had saved his life, saved his soul, was poetic.

“Sir,” said Jarvis softly. “Mr Friggason has just arrived home from his fight.”

“You stalking him, J? Should I be jealous?”

“Not at all, sir. I would also like to point out that the fire dancers have arrived and the guests are enjoying the show on the cliff side.”

“What are you implying, Jarvis?”

“There’s also a taxi waiting for you by the gate.”

Tony burst out laughing and shook his head just to clear the ache in his chest. “You think you know better than me, huh, J?”

“Of course, sir,” the AI replied, and Tony was pretty sure he’d never programmed that much smug into him.

“You’re going to take over the world when I’m gone, aren’t you?”

“No, sir,” he said. “I’ll take care of it. After all, I learned from the best.”

Tony didn’t dare speak. Stark men don’t cry, even in the face of unbearable kindness and loyalty. But he couldn’t stop himself from stroking the nearest console as he stumbled out to the taxi.

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The drive should have been enough time to settle him down. Instead, when Lucas opened the door he stumbled forward and pressed his face against his collarbone, holding him close. The long, strong arms that would over his shoulders and pulled him close drained all the tension from him, and he sighed against Lucas’ neck.

“Tony, are you OK?” Lucas’ voice rumbled through his chest, and Tony smiled, knowing this was the one place worth being.

“Not really,” he admitted. “Kinda dying.”

Lucas tightened his arms and inhaled sharply. “I know,” he whispered.
“You do?”

He nodded, his face pressed against Tony’s hair.

“How?”

“I can taste it on your skin.”

Tony snorted. “Gross.” he sank against Lucas’ chest again, then tensed up. “Is that why…”

“What?”

“Is that why you’ve been so nice to — Jesus, what the hell happened to your face?”

Lucas rolled his eyes. It probably hurt like a bitch. “I was fighting, Tony. I got hit. And no, of course I was not ‘nice’ to you because you are dying. Just…will you come inside?”

“Are you sure?” Tony asked, narrowing his eyes as Lucas started re-locking the door

“Tony,” he snapped, turning and grabbing his wrist. “If I had any sense at all, I would stay away from you, knowing what I do. Instead, because I know you, because I…like you, I allow you to worm your annoying, cheeky, lovable, infuriating way into my heart and the hearts of my children, even knowing they will break without you. No, I am not ‘nice’ to you because you are bloody dying. Have a little more faith in me, for Norns’ sake.”

Lucas stomped past him and into the living room. Tony rubbed the bridge of his nose and followed. Lucas was standing at the kettle, his back rigid, movements sharp as he made coffee. Tony came up behind him and slipped his arms around his waist, resting his cheek against the curve of his neck. “I’m sorry. I’m an asshole.”

Lucas sighed and linked their fingers together until the kettle boiled. He patted him and gestured to the window seat, then followed with two mugs.

“Alls in bed already?” Tony asked, checking his watch. It wasn’t that late. “She was babysitting earlier, right?”

Lucas nodded. “She went to a friend’s place after I got home. They’ve got an exam coming up so they will go to the library tomorrow, and it’s closer from Lucy’s house.”

Tony nodded and leaned against Lucas. His muscles were aching, his stomach churning. It was like now he’d admitted it aloud his body had taken it as implicit permission to start shutting down. He closed his eyes and concentrated on the smell of Lucas. To die in his arms…maybe that was better than flying into a cliff.

Well, probably not much better for Lucas.

“Tony?” Lucas patted his cheek. “Finish your coffee, then you can lie down, OK?”

Tony sighed and sat up slightly. “Don’t crinkle your forehead up, you’ll pull the stitches,” he grunted, pointing at the ugly cut over Lucas’ eyebrow. “Guy did a number on you, Lucas.”

“Loki.”

“Hmm?”

“My name is Loki. My real name.”
“Aww, no, don’t go telling me all your secrets. Just means you know I’m gonna die too soon to tell anyone.”

Lucas - Loki - shook his head. “No. I want you to know. And…and who knows, maybe I’m wrong. Maybe you’ll be fine. I want you to know who I really am regardless. Maybe not all of it, but at least this little thing.”

“Well,” Tony shrugged. “It’s a nice name. Like the Norse God of Mischief, right?”

“Exactly like that.”

“Don’t suppose you know the Norse God of Lost Causes, huh?”

Loki snorted as he helped Tony to the sofa bed. “I think that is probably me as well.”

“Well, looks like I came to the right place, then,” he sighed, snuggling into the pillows. Nathan was curled up in a ball next to him. “You guys share a bed?”

“It makes the most sense,” he said, voice slightly stiff.

Tony turned to him and caressed his cheek. “You’re an amazing dad, you know that?”

Loki turned his face to kiss Tony’s palm and squeezed his eyes shut. “How can I be a good father if I cannot be a good person?”

“Hey, hey, don’t say that. You’re an amazing person. You’re awesome, Loki.”

He smiled. “You don’t know how good it is to hear you say my true name,” he whispered.

Tony continued stroking his cheek with his thumb. “I love you, Loki.”

Loki gulped, and tears flooded out of both eyes, spilling over Tony’s hand. “I love you too,” he said, his voice breaking. “Sleep now, darling.”

Chapter End Notes

TONY IS JUST ACTUALLY SLEEPING it's not a euphemism don't worry! I'm telling you because I didn't intend this to be a cliffhanger or anything, I just wanted the next chapter to be from Loki's POV
Loki - Decision

Chapter Summary

Loki finds he has to re-think his decision when he's got all his loved ones near him...

Chapter Notes

Sorry this is so short...but I promise a longer chapter next time! This is actually the shortest of the lot lol!

Loki watched Tony’s breathing even out into deep sleep. Watched his pulse, steady beneath his skin. The black veins were almost up to his chin.

He squeezed his eyes shut. It had been mere days since he’d trickled his seidr into him, and it hadn’t been enough. It should have given him longer than this.

He leaned his chin on his hands, still clasped around Tony’s. Narfi shifted in his sleep behind Tony, and his heart felt torn in two. It had seemed so obvious. Tony’s life for his children’s safety. Tony himself would surely make the same choice.

But he wasn’t being given the choice. He hadn’t been given all the options. And Loki was taking a human sacrifice to keep his children hidden.

And one day, within the mortal lives of these children, they would discover what he had done for them. In fact, Loki was sure they would work it out as soon as it happened, that their father had chosen to let someone they doted on die in exchange for their hiding place. Would they accept it? Would they accept him? Would they see a necessary sacrifice and continue on with their lives in California, or would they see their father for the monster he truly was?

The sun rose, painting the sky over the window seat. Loki set his jaw and slipped outside to call Eisa. He would start with his eldest and work his way down.

“Father?” Eisa yawned and whispered into her phone. “It is only six am, is there a problem?”

Loki scrambled through his heart for words, squeezing his eyes shut.

“Father?” Her voice echoed slightly. Loki wondered if she was in the bathroom or the corridor.

“I am sorry, Eisa,” he blurted. “I cannot leave him to die.”

“What are you talking about? Slow down. Who?”

Loki sniffed and rubbed his eyes, his hands shaking. Every choice he made was so selfish. “Tony,” he said at last. “He is so close, Eisa, I do not think he will last another day. I… I thought I could be strong but—“
“Oh, Father,” she sighed. “I didn’t know.”

“If…Eisa, if I break the cap on my own bonds, I believe I can still leave yours intact. Perhaps the others too. I will take Narfi and run as soon as it is done. I will take Tony back to his home first, I won’t do it here. Will…will you help Sleip and the triplets? I know it is too much to ask, I will take them too if they want to leave this life, or if you cannot, but—“

“Yes, of course. This is…you’re doing the right thing.”

The dam broke with her words, and his body curled in on itself, his sobs clenching his stomach muscles up, his whole face crumpling until the cut on his forehead started to bleed again. Eisa made soothing noises on the end of the line, her own voice starting to shake.

“You are so brave, Father, truly. I will stay with any of the young ones if they wish it, but I am sure we would all rather choose you.”

Loki gulped another heart wrenching sob, but straightened up and dried his cheeks and nose. “How can I do this to them?” he whispered. “They have only just settled here, they are starting to make friends.”

“It’s the right thing to do.”

“Not as a parent,” he laughed dryly. “You should be my first, my only priority. You…you always should have, Eisa, and I am forgetting again—“

“Father, stop. You do not get to blame yourself for that.”

“I should have been stronger, should have pulled myself—“

“Do not use the words ‘pull yourself together’, Father, do not dare.”

“I should have been strong enough for you and Einmyria.”

Eisa sighed. “You are strong. You always have been. A lot of really terrible things have happened over the last few centuries, but I refuse to believe anyone could have handled them better than you, and you were never to blame for what was done to you.”

“If I had only—“

“Shh. You did what you thought was right at the time, and you will do the same now. That is all anyone can do.” Loki leaned back against the wall and wiped his face again, a losing battle. He could hear Eisa moving around, clothes rustling and the phone’s mic crackling against touch. “I can be home in half an hour,” she said. “What is your plan?”

Loki took a deep breath and cleared his throat. “While Tony sleeps I will explain everything to the triplets and Sleipnir. I will take Narfi with me, and call a taxi for Tony and the two of us, heal Tony at his mansion and leave, immediately.”

“Where will you go?”

“New Zealand, perhaps. I won’t make any concrete decisions, but when we are settled, and mortal again, I will contact you.”

“Will you not come home once you are mortal again?” She sounded so young, and he closed his eyes against more tears.
“I will,” he allowed. “But we must be wary. I will have to spend some time laying a false trail so their eye is turned from you and the others. Once I’ve taken mortal form again we must give it some more time for the trail to grow cold.”

“How long?”

“A year, maybe two,” he sighed.

She laughed. “I never thought two years would sound so long.”

“I’m sorry, my love. Can you ever forgive me, any of you?”

“There was never anything to forgive.”

They were silent for a moment. “I will not leave until you return.”

“I should hope not.” He heard the door open and shut in the background. “I’ll be back—“

The twang that shocked through his chest doubled him over, and he heard Eisa’s gasp on the line.

“What was that?” she squeaked. “Father, my seidr…”

Loki held up his hand and watched his split knuckles heal in a shimmer of green. “Hela,” he whispered. “She has broken the cap.”
Tony woke slowly when the door to Loki's flat clicked shut. The ceiling was pink with dawn's first rays, and Tony tried to blink his way to full consciousness as if he was floating up through tar. His heart was a sickly thudding thing in his ribcage.

A door clicked open behind the sofa bed and Tony turned his head to see George frowning at him through sleep-bleary eyes. “Tony? What’re you doing here?”

“Came to visit late last night,” he said. His voice sounded slightly slurred. “Your dad lent me his bed.”

George went back into his room to shake his brothers. “Hey, wake up. We have a visitor.” Various groans answered him, and Tony pushed himself up, trying not to jostle Nathan. Coffee would make everything better.

George stomped out of his room again. “They’re still sleeping. Lazy gits.” He kicked on the girls’ bedroom door. “Hel! Tony’s here, get your ass up!”

“You don’t have to wake them,” Tony said, rubbing his temple.

“Where’s Father?”

Tony shrugged. “I heard the door go, maybe he just stepped out. Can I make you guys breakfast?”

“We usually just have cereal. In the cupboard under the kettle.” And he went into the bathroom, shutting the door behind himself.

Tony staggered to his feet and into the kitchenette. His head was throbbing, but his face seemed to be made of cotton wool, and when he rubbed his arm it felt as if there was an extra layer of skin between him and his nervous system.

Helen came out of her room as the kettle was boiling, her hair in an impressive birds nest. Tony wondered if they’d all let him give them a hug before he left. He didn’t think he’d be getting another chance.

“Did Jor say Tony was here?”

“Morning, Helen.”

“Tony!” She smile and yawned. “What’re you doing here?”

“Just hanging with my favourite people.”
“Are you OK?” she asked, frowning at him. “You look sort of fluey. Did you catch my tummy bug?”

He quirked a half smile and didn’t answer. As he turned to get the milk, his knees buckled, and he fell.

His head must have hit the counter. Either that or it was just game over. Maybe both, he thought. Sounds were echoing from a great distance, and vision was nothing more than a few swirls of colour in the darkness behind his eyelids. He thought he recognised Helen’s voice. She sounded panicked. This was never his intention. He didn’t want to die in front of the children. He could feel the shadows of small hands on his face, his neck, his chest, and as his heart slowed and ran down, he wished he’d stayed home and never brought this trauma to their door.

Everything faded with his heartbeat, just silence and black.

The light hit him like a thunder clap, electrifying every nerve and burning through his body. It coalesced and focused in on his chest, rushing into the arc reactor with a scream and obliterating the poison in his veins. He could feel his back arched, his weight bridged between his head and heels as his body heaved off the floor.

As the excruciating power cooled and subsided it left space for other sensations. His own racing heartbeat. All the hairs standing up on his neck. Small hands on his forehead. The heavy weight of the arc reactor on his ribs.

His complete rib cage.

Tony raised a shaking hand to touch the smoking remains of the arc reactor and its casing, lying on top of his chest, the skin and bones of his sternum solid and strong underneath.

He blinked and tried to focus on the bright halos of the people around him. Helen, George, Finn and Stephen, shimmering and flaring, and behind them, an incandescent green glow.

Sound was last to return, like the volume being slowly turned up to unbearable levels.

“…were you thinking? You have turned a beacon on us all, drawn Heimdall’s eye—”

“What were we supposed to do?” shouted George, waves of blue-green swirling around him and making Tony’s eyes defocus. “If we had left him he would have died!”

“You should have called for me! I had a plan!”

“Where were you? You weren’t even in the house. If we had waited for you it would have been too late!”

There was a thumping noise, and Tony turned his head to see Elsa throw herself through the door, an orange shimmer over her arms and head. “I came as soon as quick as I could. We need to go, right now.”

“I don’t want to go!”

“What about Tony?”

Loki snarled at his children. “Perhaps if you plan things more carefully —“

“He was DYING!” George screamed, his hands clenched into fists.
Tony reached out to grab the boy’s wrist, wanting to comfort or calm, or just find out what the hell was going on. George jumped and turned to Tony, wide eyed.

“Tony! You’re OK!” He knelt down, closely followed by the other children. “How do you feel?”

He didn’t know how to answer. Instead, he held up the cylinder of metal and electronics. Loki’s eyes widened and he sank down at Tony’s knees. “Look at me, Tony,” he said, helping him into a sitting position. He held his face with both hands, gazing into his eyes. Tony frowned and touched Loki’s strange clothes, leather and metal.

“Shit,” said Loki, his pale face losing even more colour. “He’s…he’s…” He swallowed. “Hela, how much did you give him?”

“I do not know…we were all working together, we just…he just fell, Father, there was all this blood, and his heart…his heart was so quiet and tired, I’m so sorry, Father.” She sniffled and wiped her damp eyes. Tony reached out to grab her hand.

“I think you may have overdone it, children,” Loki said, his eyes still wide and worried.

“What is it?” Tony croaked, and cleared his throat.

“Tony…” Loki looked like he might start crying.

“Loki,” he said, “I was dying. It’s probably not going to be worse.”

“I think you might live somewhat longer than most humans,” Loki whispered. “I think the children might have given you a lifespan more like our own.”

“Your own?”

Loki glanced at the others. “We are not human,” he admitted. “I am Loki, Norse God of Mischief. Not named for him.”

Tony laughed. Nobody else did.

“Wait, wait, wait a minute.” He pushed himself to his feet, ignoring the way the world tilted and spun. “You’re what?”

“We really don’t have time for this,” Loki muttered. “Eisa, get Narfi, please.” She nodded and ran to the bed, scooping the little boy up with hushing noises from where he’d been curled, whimpering at the loud noises. “Get dressed, children,” he said to the others. But instead of running to their rooms, they started to shimmer and their pyjamas changed to leather, metal and fur.

“What the fuck?” Tony gasped. “I’m dead, right? I’m actually dead and this is some sort of trippy afterlife.”

Loki stepped up close to him and a little part of Tony’s mind that hadn’t figured out its priorities noticed that his black eye and cuts had disappeared. He was dressed in green and black leather like some sort of ancient warrior, and if it weren’t for the big green puppy eyes, he wouldn’t be able to reconcile this powerful creature with the man who decorated cupcakes with his children. “Tony,” he said hesitantly, “I truly am sorry. This was never the plan, not entirely. I wanted to take more time to explain everything, but it seems it was not meant to be. And now our seidr - our power - has been unlocked. We will be hunted. We must go.”

Tony shook his head. “Wait, no, I can help.”
“We are going on the run again, it is not something you can help us with. I…I really am sorry, Tony.”

“No, Loki, look. You don’t have to run. Stand and we’ll fight. I can help.”

“Tony, this is not a battle you can win.”

“Bullshit. I’m Iron Man.”

“My once-brother is the God of Thunder, and I sabotaged his coronation a year ago.”

Tony shrugged. “So I’ll call Rhodey for backup. You can’t take the kids on the run like this.”

“We have been running before. We will not bring this battle to your doorstep.” He held out his hands and the kids gathered around him. Helen and Stephen stood on either side of him, and Tony could swear Helen’s face was different somehow. Like one side had been burned or paralysed or something.

“Don’t go, Loki. Or take me with you, please don’t…just don’t disappear.”

Loki closed his eyes and looked away. “I’m so sorry.”

Tony stumbled forwards to grab at him, hold him there physically, God or not. But they were gone.

Chapter End Notes

OK...so...I know this looks bad, but c'mon guys, this is TONY here! You really think Loki's going to get away permanently? ;)

You're all welcome to come rant at me on Tumblr if you like, I'm GoldFromStraw
Tony - You Don't Get Away That Easily

Chapter Summary

Here's hoping this will make up for how mean I was last time! On the other hand...yet another cliffhanger? So probably sticks with my theme of fixing one thing and immediately breaking something else!

Chapter Notes

Some of you may have read my last multi-part fic in which Thor is AWFUL. Please note, he's not nearly so bad in this one! Much more canon compliant!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first thing Tony did when he got back to the mansion, hands shaking with a mix of fury and fear, was to write a global search algorithm for Loki’s whole family, using facial recognition, mobile phone signals and fingerprints. He refused to entertain the possibility that they could dramatically change their appearance, or even leave the planet. Or dimension. Whatever.

The second thing he did was to allow Jarvis to give him a full medical, scans, blood tests and all. He could only look at the arc reactor, sitting on the workshop table, after Jarvis confirmed his chest cavity was free of shrapnel, and his ribcage perfectly reformed, only a ring of thicker bone around his sternum to show it had ever been there.

Tony held the arc reactor in his hand and took a moment to focus on breathing. The palladium was gone. He could sleep on his front again. He wouldn’t have to worry about the big glowing bullseye for every enemy sitting right over his heart. He was going to live. Apparently a lot longer than the average healthy human.

He was going to outlive Pepper and Rhodey.

He fought the rising panic and turned back to the computer. All the more reason to find Loki and his family.

***

Rhodey found him on the cliffs behind the house, his legs dangling over the edge.

“I’ve been looking for you,” he said, sitting on the grass with a sigh a metre or two back from the edge. “I thought for sure you’d be sleeping off a hangover in a ditch somewhere after last night.”

“Last night?”

“Your birthday?” he laughed.

“Oh. Jeez. That was only last night?” He rubbed his face and took a swig straight from the bottle of Jack. It was already half gone and he was barely even buzzed.
“Are you OK, Tony? Pepper says you’ve been acting weird recently. And to be honest I’ve been a bit concerned since the senate hearing, you were reckless—“

“I’m always reckless.”

He shook his head. “Nah. It’s like you didn’t care about anything any more. I mean, sure, you’ve always pretended not to care, but recently it’s like you actually don’t. Pepper said you’ve been a lot better recently, with this new guy of yours, but…sad. You’re never sad. What’s going on?”


Rhodey just raised an eyebrow. “Huh. See, usually I can tell when you’re being serious, but…”

“Trust me, Rhodey, I never know when life’s being serious. I think it’s all a massive joke.”

“Is this about what’s his name? Lucas?” he asked. “Did you guys have a fight?”

He laughed painfully. “A fight? Not exactly.” He turned properly to face him, crossing his legs. His knees seemed able to bend just like they had when he was in his twenties. “Turns out Lucas wasn’t his real name. I mean, I kinda knew that from the start, but I thought he was in witness protection or something, you know?”

Rhodey took a breath, then stopped. “Nope. I’m not even surprised.”

Tony shrugged. “I knew they were running from something. It’s just…I didn’t realise it was from, like, the Norse God of Thunder.”

“The Norse God—“

“Of Thunder, yeah. Thor.”

“What?” he sighed. “Tony, really, just…what?”

“How much do you know about Norse Mythology?”

He shrugged. “I read American Gods, ages ago.”

“Lucas is Loki. Like, Low-Key Liesmith, Loki.”

He stared at him, then burst out laughing.

“I’m not kidding, Rhodey. I’ve been dating the Norse God of Mischief.”

He shook his head. “I believe you, Tony. You know why? Because if it was going to happen to anyone, it would be you. Seriously, do you live in a comic book or something?” He sniggered a bit more, then patted his shoulder. “Sorry, man. Are you OK?”

He groaned and put his head in his hands. “I don’t know. I don’t know what to think, I just…I need to find them.”

He squeezed his arm. “Are you sure? I mean, just basing this on Neil Gaiman’s infinite wisdom, but Loki’s not exactly the good guy.”

He rolled his eyes. “Oh, and I am?”
“Yeah, Tones, you really are.”

He didn’t blush. Starks don’t blush. “I don’t care about the stories,” he said instead. “I’ve done a bit of research too. There’s not much about these guys beyond their names and what they’re known for, but you didn’t meet his kids, Rhodey. The triplets, the stories say they’re monsters, that they got locked away because people were scared of them. There’s like this throwaway line that Fenrir was kept chained in a cage with a fucking sword through his jaw, and that brings a whole load of fucking context to the panic attack he had in school a couple of months ago when one of his friends put his hand over his mouth. One of the first things I noticed was how fucking traumatised they are. Rhodey, what if that’s the kind of shit they’re running from? I can’t live not knowing they’re safe.”

There were times when Lieutenant Colonel Rhodes’ black-brown eyes were stone hard and cold, fierce gems that dared you to underestimate him and held an entire navy’s worth of privilege and fear under control. And then there were times like now when he smiled softly at his best friend, and he could see what a bottomless pit of compassion he really had.

“Rhodey,” he said. “There’s something else.” “There’s always something else with you, Tony,” he sighed, but one side of his lip was curling up in a fond smile.

“I think they might have extended my lifespan. Like, a lot.”

He raised that eyebrow again and just looked at him for a moment. “Huh,” he said. “That’s gonna make Iron Man even more of a pain in the ass, isn’t it?” He stood and stretched. “C’mon. Pepper’s waiting inside. She’s gonna want to hear this too.”

***

One day, five weeks after Loki left, Tony woke up with his hand slung over the edge of the bed and frost flowers spiralling across the floor, centred on his index finger. Pepper walked in with her tablet, nearly slipped, and burst out laughing. “Your majesty,” she giggled. “Born with the powers, or cursed?”

“Are you quoting Disney movies at me, you harpy?” He shook his hand, and ice crystals showered the bed. Pepper had to sit down she was laughing so hard. Tony glared at her. “Oh, I’m glad you’re having fun at my expense. Hey, where’s Natalie?”

Pepper’s eyes hardened. “Ah. Jarvis, do you want to do the honours?”

“With pleasure, Ms Potts.” Jarvis projected the holographic screen by Tony’s bed, showing a SHIELD employee file of Natalie Rushman, real name Natasha Romanoff.

“Code name Black Widow? What the fuck kind of intentions did they have for me?”

“Director Fury sent her in when they found out about your palladium poisoning. They were developing a treatment for you, planning to build up some sort of debt, I guess.”

“What, so they were going to set themselves up as my drug dealer? Who was I meant to pimp myself out to in return?”

“No idea. But I know Fury was looking for you the morning after your birthday. Think they know how bad you were getting?”

“How the hell did they know?”
“We think Natalie, or Natasha or whatever, was using her access to hack into Jarvis.”

“I’m going through my records since Ms Romanoff’s arrival, sir,” said Jarvis. “It’s a point of pride for me to find out how she was able to access your medical records and prevent it from happening again.”

“Probably a good idea,” said Tony, flexing his fingers. “I want to work out what’s going on with these new Ice Queen powers before I get shipped off to some research lab somewhere.”

Pepper snorted. “Yeah. No-one experiments on Tony Stark. Except Tony Stark.”

“Damn straight,” said Tony, snapping his fingers at her. A shard of ice flew out of his hand at Pepper, and she dodged, eyes wide.

“I’m not going to argue with you on that one.”

***

Six months. Six months of searching and worrying and calculating. Six months of a perfectly healthy liver, cuts healing in seconds, and blue sparks arcing across his fingers every time he got emotional.

By the time the algorithm pinged, Tony had almost forgotten what the sound meant. He frowned for a second, then fell over his feet racing for the computer. “Jarvis, suit, set co-ordinates for… where?”

“South coast of Kenya, sir.”

“Really?” he shrugged. “Ah, well, good a place as any, I guess.” He waited for the suit to assemble around him. “What’s the context, Jarv?”

“Mr Friggason was identified at a cash machine CCTV camera in a shopping centre in Diani. He seems to be using the alias Jarn Sterkr, and working as a research assistant in a colobus monkey conservation site. We should arrive in Kenya at five pm local time, would you like me to re-route you to his home?”

“Jarvis, have I ever told you how terrifyingly efficient you are?”

“Not often enough to ensure I don’t decide to take over the world without you, sir,” Jarvis replied calmly.

“You’re a scary dude, Jarvis.”

“Thank you, sir.”

They arrived hours later on an idyllic white sand beach, complete with palm trees and turquoise water. Tony barely noticed, because there were five children playing on the cliff tops. They turned as he landed on the lawn outside a whitewashed bungalow. Immediately Stephen - or Sleipnir, rather - crouched, ready to fight. Tony’s chest ached.

He retracted the suit and stepped out, hands up. “It’s OK, it’s OK. Just me. I just…” he released a long breath and rubbed his mouth. “Shit, it’s good to see you guys.”

“Tony?” Helen, no, Hela, poked her head out from behind Sleipnir.

“Yeah, it’s me. Uh, your dad home?”
Fenrir stepped out, his eyes wide and cautious, and it broke Tony’s heart. “He’s in the house.”

“Are you mad with us?” Hela asked, her voice a little wobbly.

“God, no, of course not! You guys saved my life. And…and you gave me, like, magic or something. Look.” He held out his hand and concentrated hard, collecting a current of tingling blue magic in his palm so it swirled and danced. It had taken him months of experimenting with ice and explosions and many, many failures before he’d developed the focus and control to even make the little glowing ball in his hand.

Hela put her hand over her mouth. “It’s the same colour as mine,” she whispered.

“Well, that explains why it’s so lovely,” he grinned, and released it, rubbing the fatigue out of his arm. “Do you…do you think your dad would want to see me?”

They looked at each other and smirked. “Definitely,” Jor said. “He’s been pining for you, Tony. It’s really undignified.”

Tony barked a laugh and let the kids lead him into the house. Hela slipped her hand into his and blinked up at him from under her black lashes. As soon as he smiled at her and squeezed her fingers, Jor and Fen were fighting over the other hand. Jor won. He didn’t look at Tony, just walked forward with his chin high.

“So. World Serpent, huh?” The boy flinched, his shoulders rounded, and Tony kicked himself. “Uh, I don’t actually know how to pronounce your real name.”

“Yor-mun-gan-thir,” he said quietly. “Most people call me Jor, though.”

“I’ll stick with that,” said Tony. “I don’t fancy butchering the Norse language.”

Jor flicked a look at him, and a smile almost as quick.

Sleipnir led them into the airy little house and through to the kitchen, and there he was.

A fan blew a light breeze across the room. Loki was wearing cargo pants and a blue t-shirt, his hair tied in a messy bun on the nape of his neck, sweaty tendrils escaping and sticking to his sun-pink skin. Just being back in the same room made the heart this family had fixed feel like it was being drawn out of his chest. He stood, frozen and silent in the doorway, watching a man he thought he might be able to love for the rest of his very long life.

“Father,” said Sleipnir, and Loki turned, a small smile on his lips. When he saw Tony, the smile dropped off his face. His eyes widened and he clenched his fingers around the edge of the table, the muscles in his forearm shifting.

“Tony?” he breathed.

“Hey.”

“You found us.”

“Yeah. I hope that’s OK? I mean, if…if you say you don’t want me around I’ll…I’ll leave, but I really want to help you. I really think I can, I mean, I can see you guys have hidden your true natures again, but I’ve got the suit, I can protect you - and I’ve got this, too.” He held his hand out, forming the ball of magic again, and Loki’s eyes went wide.
“Put it away, you fool! They will trace you!”

“What? I thought they wouldn't know me!”

“Heimdall can see anyone he wants to, and using magic will turn you into a flashing beacon,” Loki said, his hands clutching his hair. The children were looking at each other in rising panic.

“Shit, I’m sorry, Loki, I’m…shit!”

Loki bit his lip. “It’s fine.” He nodded like he was trying to convince himself. “I’m sure it will be fine. It was only a small thing.” He forced a smile. “Maybe Heimdall missed it, it was only for a short time.”

All the children looked at Tony, and he closed his eyes. “I did it outside. I made the light to show the kids a few minutes ago.”

Loki went pale.

“Shit,” Tony groaned. “Oh, God, Loki, I’m so sorry, I wanted to protect you and I’ve ruined everything again, oh, God.”

The sky darkened. A wind picked up, whipping the sea outside into white peaks.

“Father,” Eisa yelled, running into the kitchen. “The Bifrost!”

Loki closed his eyes, nodded once, and straightened up. His clothes shimmered, and he was in leather and gold again. Tony could feel the magic rippling through the room as all the children released their own powers. Fen’s eyes became yellow, his hair greying and spreading across his shoulders, and curling down his cheeks. Jor’s eyes were entirely black, and his skin shimmered with iridescence as he ran to the window. Hela had turned an ill blue grey, the skin on one side sagging, but magic crackled around her, and Tony could tell she was going to rival her dad’s power one day.

“Eisa, you are in charge. Take the children into my bedroom, Narfi will feel safest there. Hela, do you remember how to guide your brothers’ seidr?” She nodded. “Use it only if you need to. Otherwise, stay hidden. Stay safe.”

The children looked at him out of wide eyes. Fen’s lip was wobbling and he gripped Sleipnir’s hand as they ran from the room.

Loki advanced on Tony, and he bowed his head. “Look, Lokes, I know I don’t deserve to ask anything, but please let me help? I swear I —"“

But Loki’s hands were on either side of his face, and he was kissing him hard. Tony wrapped his arms tight around him, leather creaking and cool under his hands. Loki pulled him close as a crack echoed over the sea, and Tony wondered if a bomb had hit. Loki brushed their lips together one last time, then led the way out of the house.

A huge circle of runes was scorched into the lawn. In the centre stood three men and a woman, dressed like extras from Lord of the Rings, and a blonde, beardy guy in jeans and flannel.

“Loki,” growled the incongruous one. “I would have words with you, Brother.”
If anyone's interested, Loki and the kids are living in Sand Islands, Tiwi, which is a stunning bunch of cottages my old physics teacher now runs (cos obviously). Google it, and be in awe of my country ;)

So...here come the Aesir! If you're interested, Heimdall didn't turn up the first time Tony did magic because he quickly realised he'd be the best way to find the human-again Loki and family. Loki hid their magic again quite soon after he left, after leaving a bit of a false trail, so they've been living in Diani for a while like they were in California. Also for your interest, Diani and environs have a bit of a Northern European community so his new Germanic name doesn't stand out as much as you might think ;)}
Loki’s heart pounded as Thor advanced, and pushed his fear down the only way he knew how.

“What the hell are you wearing?”

Thor glared at him. “When one is banished for nearly two years, it is advisable to blend in, Brother.”

“Wait, are you still —“

“Banished, Loki. In New Mexico. And now I learn it was your doing.”

“But…” Loki frowned and looked at the warriors. “I was certain they would fetch you back when Father slept.”

Sif snorted. “No-one can rescind the Allfather’s command, you know that, Loki. Your mother took the regency and the Allfather awoke five days later. He insisted Thor remain on Midgard. We have been searching for you ever since.”

“Why did you run, Loki?” asked Fandrall, all solicitousness. “if you wanted the throne, that was the perfect time to take it.”

“I never wanted the throne,” Loki snorted.


His temper snapped, the thin walls holding back grief and panic worn away by hit after hit. “Well, I did not trust you! How could I, when you were all only willing to care for my children if they fit your narrow definition of normal?”

“Narrow? Narrow?” Thor screamed back. “Those children were parasites, feeding on your strength and seidr—“

“All children are! They feed of their mother’s blood in the womb, and leech minerals from her bones - or is it only abnormal when done to a man?”

“Of course it’s fucking abnormal, Loki!” Thor waved his hands in exasperation, and if Loki had needed any more proof that Thor had been stuck on earth for two years, he had it. “You don’t have a womb for a start. You ate that witch’s heart still beating, and her essence set up residence in your body. They used you as a cocoon, Loki! They burrowed into your flesh and you wouldn’t let us close - we thought you were dying!”

“But I didn’t die, did I? And they were not just hers, but mine too, a part of me. I sustained them.”

“With your life blood!”

“As a mother does!”

“But you are not a woman, so you cannot be a mother, can you?”
“Well, there was fucking precedence, wasn’t there? I have been a woman, have borne a child.”

“Yes, a horse, hardly a real child either.”

“That was not Sleipnir’s fault!” he screamed.

“But it’s not excuse to go and get yourself…knocked up again, is it?”

“Who fucking told me to solve the problem? I told you Angrboda would not be killed, and you called me a coward. Again.”

“I never told you eat her bloody heart, though, did I?”

“If I hadn’t she’d have reformed and killed us all. I saved all of you again and you repay me by trying to tear my children away from me again.”

“They were not children!” Thor yelled. “They were monsters.”

Loki’s anger boiled through his blood leaving ice behind. He found the tail of Odin’s glamour and pulled, feeling the blue cover his skin, feeling his physiology shift. “I am a monster.”

He refused to look at Tony. He didn’t want to see the horror and disgust on his lover’s face. He could live without Tony, but he would not be ashamed of what he was, because that’s what his children were too. The rest of the Nine Realms could turn from them, but all he needed was his children safe and happy.

Thor and the Aesir stared at him, open mouthed. Volstagg was the first to react, throwing himself forward with a roar. The others were quick to follow, and Loki leaped into battle with his knives and *seidr*. But this was not like sparring. They had always been stronger than him, but pulled their strikes, seeking to put him on the ground only. Now they saw their hated enemy, the beast who had killed Volstagg’s brother and Sif’s father in the first Jotun war, the creature who had stabbed Fandral in their last skirmish and killed the guards in the weapons vault. Thor was shouting, Tony was yelling, and the warriors roaring, but over the screaming panic in Loki’s ears he couldn’t make out separate sounds. He spun and blocked and pushed, forming doubles, becoming more ruthless out of necessity. Sif pierced his side with her glaive, Hogun took one of his daggers to the knee, and he spun, forming an ice blade, wielding it with all his strength…

…and Thor was in front of him, breakable, mortal Thor, without weapon or armour, and Loki pulled back desperately, every muscle working against the deadly momentum he had built up, and it wasn’t going to be enough, Thor was going to die before Loki could say how sorry he was, how much he missed him.

A blast of power sent both of them flying backwards, then held them suspended above the ground like children’s toys.

“When I send my son to Midgard to prove his worth, I do not expect to find him throwing himself into battle with the same reckless disregard for which he was punished.”

“Father,” Thor gasped.

Odin lowered Thor and Loki to the ground with a gesture. Thor ran forward, the great, galloping puppy that he was. Loki took the opportunity to count the Aesir, make sure none had run off to capture his children, and to check on Tony. He was in his Iron Man suit, facing Sif. She had scorch marks on her armour and her hair, while Tony’s had scratches and, somehow, frost burn. He stored up the horror that he might have accidentally struck Tony with his Jotun skin or powers in some
way, but for now he had to focus on the dangers still to come.

The warriors were all present. Hogun sat on the ground, Fandral kneeling next to him. Volstagg seemed torn between glaring and Loki and watching his king, but he was at least there. Loki let some of his tension out in a long breath, and his vanity made him replace his Aesir glamour. The wound on his side throbbed, and he had to focus so as not to stumble.

“Your Majesty,” said Volstagg. “There is a traitor in our midst, a spy—“

“What do you mean, Volstagg?” Odin approached and Loki squashed the urge to flinch or step backwards.

“Loki is a Frost Giant,” Volstagg spat. “It was he who let his kin into the Asgard. Traitor!”

“Volstagg,” said Odin sharply, and the man snapped to attention. Odin clasped his shoulder. “You are a loyal subject, but you are not in possession of all the facts.”

Thor stepped forwards after him. “Tell them it was an illusion, Loki,” he begged, and Loki did flinch this time, at the fear in Thor’s blue eyes. “Tell them it was one of your tricks.”

“Enough, Thor,” said Odin, and he turned to walk to Loki. He couldn’t stop himself from taking one small step back. The blood was warm on his tunic and had started to soak into his trousers as well. Sif must have hit harder than he thought, and now that the adrenaline was draining back to on guard levels, the wound throbbed hot under his armour.

“Loki, where are the children?” Odin asked, and Loki’s heart rate spiked again.

“You will not take them!”

“Silence, boy,” he growled. “I have no intention of taking them. I simply wish to know they are safe.”

“Safe and confined, Allfather?”

The old man rubbed his temples. “No, Loki. Safe. Will you not invite us in so we may talk?”

“I have had enough of Aesir talking for one day.” He needed them to leave. He needed to stagger back into his little house, embrace his children and give his body time to heal. But he was so dizzy.

“Come, Loki. We have been searching for you for years.”

“Why do you think I was running away?”

“Please, just give me a chance, son,” he said, and Loki’s eyes widened. His father (not his father not his father) had never said please to him or Thor in his entire memory. He must be getting delirious.

“Lokes?”

Loki’s head snapped round to see Tony. The movement jolted his side and making his vision swim.

Tony’s eyes widened. “Loki, you’re hurt.”

“I am not.”

“Don’t bullshit me, Loki, you’re dripping blood all over the lawn.” Loki looked down to see a drop
of blood spin from the leather of his armour and join a handful of others by his left boot. Tony retracted his suit and came to stand in front of him, his back to the King of Asgard, pushing Loki’s arm out of the way. He whistled. “That looks pretty bad, Lokes, let’s just get you inside. You can hear your dad out, yeah?”

“He is NOT my father,” Loki shouted, his anger returning full force, hurling itself through his veins, and it was too much. He felt his eyes roll back, felt Tony’s arms around him, and felt the shame of being the weakling again before he lost consciousness.

Chapter End Notes

There are a lot of things that may not make much sense in this chapter - there's a load of arguing and allusions to things that won't be explained until much later. However if you know your Norse myths, you’ll get some references. Just keep in mind that I have changed a couple of the myths ;) This is predominantly a family drama, there won't be any ragnarok here. Families can be fucked up and make horrible mistakes and stupid decisions and be general bastards, but with some notable exceptions, people have their reasons for making those choices. Loki, of course, can only see his own point of view - at least until he and Thor have a chance to properly talk!

Also, I promise, this is the last cliffhanger for a couple of chapters!
Chapter Summary

Thor and Loki have another screaming match, which may clear a few things up for Tony, but may also just raise a bunch more questions.

Or: this is not the chapter where lots of backstory gets explained, but it is a massive turning point for the family.

Chapter Notes

Just a short one today, but yay! No cliffhangers ^_^

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony reacted quickly, wrapping both arms around Loki’s ribs and leaning back as his knees buckled and his forehead landed on Tony’s shoulder. Thor and Odin were quick to rush forward and help, and together they carried Loki into the bungalow. He wasn’t completely unconscious, and was able to move his legs, arm slung over Tony’s shoulder and the other on Thor’s. Tony tried to angle him so he was taking most of the weight, because Thor looked a little more human than him right now.

They lowered Loki onto an Arabic style day bed in the living room and Thor made quick work of the buckles on Loki’s over-complicated armour. When he pulled the leather back, blood poured out onto the mattress. Tony glared at the woman warrior, who glared back. “He was a Frost Giant.”

“That was an illusion,” snapped Thor. “You know Loki and his tricks.”

“He nearly killed you, Thor!”

“You didn’t see,” Thor retorted. “He pulled his strike, he never meant to hurt me. I could see it in his eyes.”

“His red eyes,” growled the red-bearded Obelix wannabe.

“Enough!” Odin’s voice reverberated around the room, and Tony worried about the effect it was having on the kids, huddling in Loki’s bedroom. He didn’t want to leave Loki with hostiles, but at least there was one slightly human Thunder God on his side, for now. Probably Daddy Odin, too, by the looks of it.

“If I go check on the kids will I come back to an empty living room?”

Odin gave him an acknowledging nod. “Bring them here. None of Loki’s family shall come to harm, Tony Stark.”

Tony frowned at him. Creepy old Norse Gods with their gold eyepatches and omniscience. He spared one more glance for Loki, moving sluggishly under Thor’s hand. Tony would never
understand siblings. Thor had been screaming at him since he arrived, right up until the others laid into him.

The kids were hidden under the bed, Eisa sitting with her legs elegantly crossed on top of it, a fireball rotating ominously above her hand. “Tony!” she exclaimed as he walked in, throwing herself into a hug. Tony squeezed her tight. The wobble in her voice betrayed the steel in her eyes.

“Odin wants you to come into the sitting room. He’s promised you won’t be harmed.” He held out another arm for the other kids as they wriggled out from under the bed. Fen tucked his face into Tony’s side, and Jor snuggled up to his brother, while Hela ran to Eisa. Sleipnir was rocking Narfi and looking almost as terrified as the little boy.

Tony sighed, his chest hurting for these kids. He just wanted everyone to leave them the fuck alone. “Your dad’s been injured,” he said, meeting each set of eyes in turn. “He’ll be OK, I’m sure, but I don’t trust the Gods, and I want all of you in the same room. Will you trust me to look after you and your dad?”

The kids nodded. “We can fight too,” said Jor, clenching his skinny little fists. “Hel’s got really strong seidr, Fen and I can do a bit too. I…I can turn into a snake if I need to.”

“Let’s hope it doesn’t come to that,” he half-grinned, chucking the boy on his chin.

Loki was pushing himself upright when they got to the sitting room, and the children ran to his side. “I am fine, children. The Allfather used healing stones, there will barely be a scar.” He pushed himself back against the headboard, crossing an arm across his bloodied bare chest. Narfi immediately threw himself out of Sleipnir’s arms into Loki’s.

“Father,” said Thor, starring at he kids. “What has happened in my absence?”

Odin sighed and sat on the edge of the bed. “This is a family discussion,” he told the warriors. “Return to Asgard and await me there.” The Aesir bowed, fists clapped to their chests, and turned on their heels, patting Thor as they left. “Oh,” Odin added as they reached the door. “We will be having words about your disobedience on my return.”

“My lord?” asked the blonde.

“My orders were that Thor be left to prove his worth alone. You and Heimdall have taken it upon yourselves to countermand my orders.”

Warrior Princess Barbie looked like she was going to argue their defence, but the Japanese-looking dude, whose leg had obviously also been treated, nudged her and shook his head. They bowed again and left, heads hanging lower than before.

Odin turned to Tony with a clear ‘you can fuck off too’ look. Tony stood firm.

“Tony stays with me,” said Loki, not looking away from his youngest son.

Odin rolled his eye, but didn’t argue. “Sit, then. There is much to discuss.”

“Such as why Loki saw fit to wear a Jotun illusion and provoke our friends into attacking. And why he is here, not on Asgard, celebrating his tricks. And what they are doing here.” Thor glared at the family huddled on the day bed. “Well, Brother?”

“I am not your brother,” Loki said flatly.
“What? What are you talking about?”

“Do you want to tell your son or shall I?” asked Loki, looking at Odin with fake innocence. “How you brought a Frost Giant runt into your home, to compete with your blood. Or was it to make him look better in every way?”

“Loki—“

“I am a Frost Giant,” he said, turning to Thor, his chin jutting out. “Your father picked me up from the battlefield at the end of the war and decided it would be a good idea to keep the runtish son of his greatest enemy.”

“You lie,” growled Thor. “Father, how can you allow this foolishness to continue?”

Odin slumped and looked very old. “It is the truth, Thor,” he said, and Thor’s jaw dropped. Odin raised his face to seek Loki’s gaze. “Though that has never made you less my son.”

Loki scoffed but Thor spoke first. “So that is why…you found out about your blood and betrayed the family that loved you for one you never knew? This is why you let the Jotnar into Asgard?”

“Of course not, you bastard,” Loki shouted, leaping to his feet to stand toe to toe with Thor, his fists clenched. “I found out when you insisted we invade Jotunheim with a force of six!”

“Then why? Did you want the throne so badly?”

“For revenge!” roared Loki. “For my children!”

“I have never harmed your children!”

Eisa picked Narfi up and carried him briskly from the room. She tried to hustle the other kids out too, but they ignored her.

“You may never have raised your hand against them but you did nothing—“

“That is a lie and you know it! When Vali died it was as if my own heart had been torn from me. And who found Narfi and brought him home, Loki? Huh? Who searched for you for two years and pulled you from that Norns-forsaken cave? You have suffered, Loki, but you do not get to say I did nothing.”

“I do not talk of the twins, but of the triplets,” he hissed.

“Oh, don’t you dare, Loki. I never touched them. I did not like them, what they did to you, but I had nothing to do with their confinement.”

“You could have helped me as soon as they were taken, and with you at my side I could have found them, torn the truth from Baldr and Hodr, and none of this would ever have happened.” Loki was screaming now, tears pouring down his cheeks. “If you had helped me when I begged you on my knees, Vali would still be alive, Narfi would still be young and happy, and the child he should be. After Baldr and Hodr, I blame you - I blame you both.”

“They are monsters!” Thor screamed back.

“What? Look at them! Look at them! They are here, and real, and mine, just as monstrous as me, and you left them to languish in torture. I hate you! I fucking hate you!”

Fenrir suddenly sobbed, the pain cutting through the room, and Loki turned, his face uncurling
from its rictus. He climbed across the day bed and gathered his son tightly to him, before opening his arms up for the others. Every one of them was trembling.

“Loki,” said Odin, and he sounded wrecked. “We have wronged you, my son.”

“I am not your son,” said Loki, his voice exhausted.

“You are the child of our love, if not our blood.”

Loki laughed. It sounded more like a sob. “How can I believe that when I know, and you know, what I am?”

“You are Loki. It matters not what race you were born.”

“Of course it matters! You have spent nigh on two hundred years telling me that half my children are unworthy of my love just because of how they were born! Tell me, Allfather, how can you expect me to believe your love is so pure when you insist my own affections must have limits and conditions?”

There was silence apart from the children’s sniffling and clothes rustling as Loki comforted them. Eventually Odin rose and walked towards the little family, placing his hand between Loki’s shoulder blades. “I am sorry, Loki. I could not see it in the same terms. All I saw was my son’s pain and the causes thereof. I could not bring myself to think of them as people when they…” He looked at the children and frowned slightly, ducking his head like he was confused.

“They were never the cause of my pain, father,” Loki sighed. “If you feel you must blame anyone, blame Svadilfari and Angrboda, but know I have had my revenge and regret nothing. I could never regret what brought me my children, and I will forsake every right I was ever born with or given to keep them safe and with me.”

Odin smiled and squeezed Loki’s shoulder. Tony wondered if it was a trick of the light or if his smile was really wobbling that much. “You called me father again.”

Loki tensed up, then sagged. “I did.”

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, I don't think this is the best way to behave in front of your traumatised children, but Loki's only just starting to deal with his own trauma, and some of that is hundreds of years old
OK. Deep breath. Here's some backstory (not all of it) and a lot of angst...Also TW for mentions of rape, not graphic, and animal death.

Note that Eisa has very few bad memories of her grandfather, something that will be explained in more detail later!

Tony and Eisa were chopping fish and vegetables for a curry dinner when Odin walked in. Tony turned away to give them privacy while he spoke softly to his granddaughter. He heard Eisa kiss him on the cheek before leaving the room with a gentle thudding of bare feet.

“What is your relationship with my son?”

“Really?” Tony turned and wiped pepper seeds off his hands. “We’re having the shovel talk now? I’m not sure your relationship with Loki is on any more of an even keel than mine.” His body trembled with fury at the half-stories he’d heard.

“Mind your tongue, Son of Howard,” Odin rumbled, but seemed too tired to put much heat into it. “I simply wish to know how much support he will have on Midgard if I allow him to remain.”

“You think Loki cares what you allow him to do?” Tony laughed.

Odin rolled his one eye, and Tony wondered how the eyepatch stayed up. “I am the King of the Gods, mortal. Loki may have been able to hide his *seidr* and immortality but I have taken it from him entirely.”

“You what?”

Odin held a hand up as Tony launched himself forward. “Loki has accepted his punishment.”

“Punishment for what, running away from you nutcases?”

Loki’s revenge caused the death of two Aesir guards and two Jotnar. Because of his actions, Thor and the others invaded Jotunheim and killed thirty three others, nearly starting a war. Loki and Thor have both accepted their punishment.”

“And the kids? You’re just going to punish them too? What wars have they started?”

“The children will keep their lifespan and *seidr*.”

Tony’s hackles lowered slightly. “How long are Loki and Thor stuck like this?”

“Until they have proven themselves worthy.”

“And do they have any way of knowing how to do that?”
“If you tell a person how to think, do you think they will change their attitudes? Or do you think they will learn better through their own experience?”

“Yeah, but how are they supposed to know what to learn?”

“Their privilege has prevented them from empathising with those weaker than themselves,” Odin sighed. “Thor in particular - Loki has always had to fight for his place by Thor’s side. They must learn humility —“

“Loki already has!” Tony insisted, remembering Loki sharing the sofa bed with Narfi and fighting for money.

“And we have not been able to see that, since he hid himself from Heimdall’s gaze. If what you say is true, Loki will quickly regain his usual form and his powers. They each have to humble themselves in their own way, to prove that their pride no longer rules them.” He hesitated. “It is also my wish that my sons take they opportunity to reconcile, and for that they must live closer together.”

“So you’re, what, going to get Thor to move in with Loki? Do you really think that’s going to be a good environment for the kids, to have their uncle who hates them living with them in a two bed apartment, probably sleeping on the floor because there’s nowhere else?” Tony shook his head. “Nope, stupid plan, Daddy-O. If it was just Loki I’d let them do the whole student accommodation thing, but those kids deserve better. They’re living with me. All of them. I’ll even take Thundercat, get them family counselling or something. Loki!” Tony stomped out to find his wayward boyfriend, inform him of his new address and ignore his protests.

Thor was talking on his mobile, and Loki was walking back up the corridor having put the kids to bed. “Ah, great, gang’s all here,” Tony said. “You’re moving in with me.”

“What?”

“Uh, Jane, I’ll have to call you back.”

“Your dad says part of your punishment is to live together, right? So you can wear your get along shirt and not start any more intergalactic wars? Well, I’ve got space…”

Loki glared at him. “I am perfectly capable of providing for my own family, Tony.”

“I know, Lokes. You’ve proved that time and again, but—“

“But you thought you would indulge your heavy handed hero complex and take yet another thing away from me in the name of doing what is best for me, of knowing what I need better than I know myself?”

“That’s not—“

“No! That’s all people ever do.” He stood, his fists clenched, muscles on his forearms standing out in sharp relief. “Loki has been traumatised, he cannot possibly know what is good for him. Loki was raped, so take the child away because when that power was torn from him so was the ability to make any sort of decision about his own wellbeing’. Well, fuck you all.”

Tony felt like he’d been punched in the solar plexus. All the air rushed from his lungs and the floor fell out from under him as he stared at Loki in horror.

“It seems a century and a half is not enough time to prove that I am capable of making my own
decisions regarding my own life, let alone my children.”

“Oh, God, Loki, I didn’t—"

“You didn’t know? So what?” he snarled. “You still thought it was appropriate to tell me what to do. Are you trying to emulate my father? Is that a relationship you want to copy?”

“No, I just—"

But Loki had already turned, back rigid, and shut himself in his room. Tony felt his knees weaken and sat on the day bed. Thor cleared his throat and rubbed the back of his head.

“Loki was…” Tony couldn’t bring himself to say it. Couldn’t bear it to be true.

But Thor nodded.

“But…how? And what child?”

Odin sighed heavily and lowered himself into a wicker armchair. “He was trying to save Asgard,” he said, his voice old and tired. “There was a siege, nearly two centuries ago. Asgard fought valiantly, but the enemy was strong. They had on their side a mage of great power, Svadilfari. He was known as The Builder because of his penchant for dismembering his opponents and…building them into monstrous forms, animating them and sending our own shield brothers against us. The more of us that fell, the more he had with which to fight us. The psychological effects of having to battle our own loved ones’ mutilated bodies was…” Odin paused and rubbed his temple. Thor looked at his hands grimly, lost in dark memories.

“It was clear that Svadilfari would have to be fought with seidr, as none of our warriors could get close to him by regular means. He had a habit of shapeshifting into a stallion during battle, faster than any of our war horses and unencumbered by a rider. But seidr does not come naturally to most male Aesir - I can only use mine through Gungnir. And it is unusual for women to be trained in offensive martial arts. They have always been our last line of defence. But Loki…” he glanced at Thor. “Loki has always been different. A warrior with seidr.”

“I called him forth, charged him to face The Builder. I thought this would be his chance to prove himself, prove his worth among those who would minimise his skills.” He glanced at his son. Thor turned away guiltily, and Odin took a deep breath. “I did not know what he had planned, Loki has always been so unpredictable. This is why he is so hard for the Aesir to understand, not because of his appearance, or his strength, or even his seidr. His mind just works in a different way and that is…beautiful, and fascinating, and as a father I wish it were less so because it makes him stand apart. Makes him stand alone.”

“What did he do?” Tony asked, his voice barely more than a whisper.

It took Odin a while to gather the words. “We all thought he would use his seidr as a blade, battle Svadilfari head on. When he was not by my side at the start there were whispers.”


“But then…there was a mare, bursting from the city gates before our army, riderless and beautiful, pitch black and green eyed. And not only did Svadilfari turn to her, but so did all the other stallions in the enemy forces. Only our own horses were unaffected. It was an overwhelming victory, our forces destroyed theirs.” He swallowed. “We only started searching for Loki when he had not returned by dawn the following day. We…we followed the trail of horses carcasses, all dead from exhaustion. Loki as a mare, he was fast.”
“Fast as an Aes, too,” Thor said.

“I believe he would have outrun Svadilfari too, had he not broken his leg.”

There was silence apart from small animal sounds in the thatch roof above them, and the waves outside.

“The Builder?” Tony croaked, throat dry. “Tell me you killed the bastard.”

Odin shook his head, but it was Thor who answered when Odin seemed finally to have run out of words. “We found him with his throat torn out. We don’t now how Loki did it, what happened… none of us wanted to know. But it was too late, anyway. Loki was…flickering from one form to another, struggling to crawl away from that place, but every time he changed back into his Aesir form it was for less and less time, until he could no longer leave his mare form.”

“We did not know what to do,” admitted Odin. “A horse can rarely survive a broken leg, and at the time we didn’t know why he could not leave that form. The healing stones we brought with us were not enough for a horse’s large bones, so we had to carry him out of the ravine. A horse…any normal horse would have screamed in pain at every movement, but this one was silent. That was how we knew it was still Loki, entirely in control. Perhaps in more control of his horse shape than Svadilfari had ever been…if not…if his horse instincts were stronger, perhaps…” Odin swallowed hard. “A female horse in oestrus would not, perhaps, have fought so hard.”

Tony felt sick, and sad, and angry. He closed his eyes, wanting the story to be over and feeling guilty because it never would be over for Loki.

“When Sleipnir was born he looked exactly like Svadilfari. We…how could we leave him with Loki when he must remind him at every moment of what had been taken from him? Loki could only return to his Aesir form once the foal was weaned, forced to stay with him that whole time like a beast, his intelligence trapped inside. When we found Loki once more in his Aesir form we took him back to the palace, kept Sleipnir in the stables on the other side of Asgard, where he would never have to see him. It was the only way we could think of to give him a chance to heal, a chance to forget.”

“Did you really think he could ever forget?” Tony asked. Part of him wanted to scream at the old man, but he looked so broken.

“I hoped,” he said softly. “I hoped he could. I tried to make it easier, ban anyone from talking about the battle, to change Sleipnir’s appearance and keep him away from anyone who might speak to Loki.”

“You made it something to be ashamed of.”

“I…” Odin bowed his head. “That was not my intention. And Loki never spoke of it, never asked, after the first time. I thought it was for the best.”

“And now I’ve just done the same thing,” Tony sighed, rubbing his face. “Just deciding what’s best for him. Shit.” He stood up, stood still for a moment, wanting to run away from the horror, wanting to take the last half hour back, wanting to not be another bastard trying to take Loki’s agency away. He vacillated for a moment between saying something to Thor and Odin and finding his boyfriend, then nodded and turned to Loki’s room without another word.

Loki was lying on his side under a billowing mosquito net, the bright moonlight streaming in through the window, when Tony knocked and pushed the door open. “Can I come in?”
Loki hesitated for a horribly long time before he nodded. Tony noticed his heart thumping as he found his way through the white drapes of netting, pushed his shoes off, and lay facing Loki. “I’m sorry.”

Loki stared at him with hard eyes, like he was waiting for an excuse, but Tony couldn’t think of anything he could say that would make what he’d said acceptable. Eventually a little smile curled Loki’s lips. “Apology accepted.”

“I was being selfish.” Loki raised a wary eyebrow and Tony continued. “I wanted to make sure you came back to California, but you’re probably better off here, aren’t you?”

Loki shrugged. “I haven’t decided myself,” he said. “We have more space here, it’s true, but,” he screwed up his lips and looked away. “When the children say home, they talk of Inglewood. They do not care about the tiny apartment and sharing a room and mattresses on the floor, they only talk of their friends. And you.”

“And is that just them?” Tony asked, not daring to speak above a whisper.

“I missed you too, Tony,” he whispered at last, speaking up to the net and not looking at him.

Tony couldn’t stop the wide smile splitting his face. “I was looking for you the whole time.”

“I am sorry I ran.” He turned back, green eyes gleaming in the dim light.

“I know why you did. I’m so sorry I got you caught.”

“Perhaps it is for the best,” he sighed. ”It was not healthy for the children to run like this, always looking over their shoulders. They can have their natural form back, I do not have to worry about broken bones and illnesses, and they will be able to develop slowly, as they should. They have already raced through so many decades of their childhood in the years we have been here.”

“How does Aesir ageing work, then?” Tony asked, pushing himself up onto his elbows. “Now I have a vested interest and all. What is it, a hundred Aesir years to every human one?”

Loki shook his head. “It is nothing so simple. Aesir age quicker as children than as adults. Eisa is two hundred and fifty, but I am over a thousand, and as you once said, by human standards I look barely old enough to be her father. I married young for an Aesir, but not controversially so.”

“Does Thor have kids?”

Loki snorted. “Not legitimately, no. He is the human equivalent of about thirty years, not much different to me. But as Aesir, or Jotnar in my case, we would not age much for some time.” He thought for a moment. “In fact, the years we have spent her have probably aged us the equivalent of three hundred years on Asgard.”

“How old is Eisa?” Tony asked, not squeaking. Starks never squeak, especially not those with near immortal life spans. Loki laughed at him and Tony stared at the beautiful crinkles on his cheeks, the wide grin exposing perfect white teeth. “Loki, move in wth me. Please?” he asked.

Loki reached over and stroked his cheek. “Let me stand on my own a while,” he said, but he smiled to show he took no offence. “I will ask the children if they want to move back to California, but I would like to have my whole family feel safe under my care and not that they must rely on outside forces for once.”

“Can I help you with rent? Help you find a bigger place now you’re stuck with Thor?”
“Thor himself can help with rent,” Loki growled.

"Lokes, are you really going to be able to cope with him in such close quarters?" Tony bit his lower lip and watched the muscle flex in Loki's jaw as he stared up at the net canopy again. "Look, if it was just you, I'd suggest you go at each other in the gym, but he's...he's weird with the kids. How can your dad even suggest such a thing?"

Loki's eyes closed in resignation. "You're right. It's too much."

"Thank you!"

He glared at him. "You could not have approached it like this the first time round?"

"I never make the right decision when there's a bad one sitting right there to be chosen," he said flippantly. "Look, why don't I offer to put him up? If you won't let me help you guys out, then at least I'll be able to keep you two at the right sort of distance apart."

He grimaced like accepting help was something physically painful. "Very well. But we would have been fine, Tony!"

"Yeah, maybe you would. But I think the kids deserve a little bit more than just 'fine', don't you?"

He glared at him. "You have no idea what those children deserve," he said, his voice just above a snarl, and Tony backed off, his hands up.

"You're right, sorry. Overstepping. Backing off."

They were silent for a moment, cicadas chirping in the blackness outside Loki's window, the palm leaves and the surf hushing. Tony lay back down next to him and felt the tension slowly drain from both of them.

"You are a good man, Tony," Loki said at last. Tony smirked at the awkward apology, and Loki met his eye with a self-deprecating grin. "But on to more recent developments. Tell me more about this seidr of yours?"

Tony leaned back, his eyes lighting up, hands waving in front of him as he explained his latest experiments, outlined all the catastrophic failures and, more recently, the things he'd been able to achieve.

"Ice seems to be a natural thing for me," he said at last, after telling the tale of the frost on the floor and Pepper's Frozen references.

"I think that is probably my fault," Loki grimaced.

"It's awesome! But recently I've had a few breakthroughs with fire. That's why I was so proud of the little glow ball I made."

"The mage light?" he laughed.

"Whatever. Oh, and I think I’ve invented a new element as well."

“You’ve what?” he laughed.

“Yeah, so I found out really early on that I could move small things with my mind, because when you get Jedi powers you’ve got to try a bit of telekinesis, but the large things just weren’t happening. So I thought ‘everyone wants to go big, why don’t I try going even smaller?’ So I
focused on control instead. And I got pretty good at making these ball bearings spin around faster and faster, and then they, like, crashed into each other and fused and it was fucking awesome, molten metal everywhere. And that got me thinking about the large hadron collider—" 

"Of course it did."

He mock glared at the interruption. "So I thought, what if I do that with particles? So I got some palladium, because as you know, I don’t need that shit any more, and stripped it down into its component particles - I didn’t go as far as the quarks, just the protons, neutrons and electrons, no need to be silly about it. Then I made a massive wall of ice to protect me from the radioactive fallout of the collisions, and started accelerating those things on the other side. I cleared out all the air particles as well, to make it into a vacuum - it actually took a lot of concentration. I’m pretty sure Rhodey came down at some point and found me sitting on the table, sweating buckets for no apparent reason, with my eyes shut, pointing the palm of my hand at an ice wall. Think he just rolled his eyes and wandered off again."

Loki stared at him with his mouth open, and burst out laughing. “You…Tony Stark, you invented a new form of matter?”

“Yeah, turns out there are still some radioactively stable combinations of protons and electrons we haven’t played with yet. It’s just easier to produce them if you have more control over the number coming together. Once you convince the electrostatic force to look somewhere else and give the strong and weak nuclear forces a chance, and you can basically make whatever you want.”

Loki leaned up on his elbow and cupped his cheek. “Look at you. You impossible human,” he said, and kissed him, soft lips pressed against his. “You are a supernova, my love.”

Chapter End Notes

A couple of people mentioned it would be a shame for Tony not to have invented his element from Iron Man 2, so here it is ^_^ Little bit of lightheartedness for a heavy chapter.

Also, I don't know if you guys know this fantastic piece of science coolness, but all elements after iron are formed in supernovae...yes, you are made of stardust, how fucking awesome is that? So Loki's not even exaggerating, Tony actually is a human supernova
Loki and Thor have a peaceful chat. But then they have yet another confrontation, and this one doesn't end peacefully.

Arcadii came up with some truly Slytherin ideas for punishments for the Warriors Four, and I agree with them all wholeheartedly!

"Make Hogun become a telemarketer, Volstagg a caterer with food allergies, turn Fandral into a woman that has joined a convent), Sucky Sif becomes a super model and only allowed to wear dresses and high heels, and Heimdall, he should be made to watch and listen to endless rounds of the children's show, Barney."

Muahahaha!

When children made the decision to move back to the States, and Tony insisted Thor move into the mansion instead of whatever tiny flat Loki could scrape up, he made no arguments. Odin simply shrugged and waved a hand in acquiescence.

"Your hospitality is greatly appreciated," said Thor, bowing formally. "I have spoken with my employers, they are willing to transfer me to the San Fransisco branch in two weeks."

"Where are you working?"

"SHIELD employed me as a low level agent after I, uh, infiltrated their temporary base around Mjolnir."

Tony barked a harsh laugh. "You’re fucking kidding me! I just got rid of one bastard SHIELD agent."

"What?" Loki’s head snapped up, eyes narrowed. "What happened?"

"My PA, I think I mentioned her. Natalie Rushman?" Loki nodded. "Yeah, Pepper and Jarvis found out she was a SHIELD spy. They tried to put me under house arrest and blackmail me with a cure to the palladium poisoning. Didn’t realise someone else had got to me first."

Loki glared daggers at Thor, who held his hands up, eyebrows raised. "I assure you, Tony, I would not have such dealings." He pouted slightly. "I am barely trusted with a gun."

Loki couldn’t help snorting at the thought of the great Thunder God being no more than a probationary warrior, having led armies into war for the last seven centuries. But he still felt the blaze of fury at the thought that someone would take advantage of Tony’s illness so. Loki may
have had a twisted moral compass, but one did not grow up in Asgard without developing a clear idea of honour in battle.

Even if he ignored that idea when it suited him.

“Excuse me, Allfather,” said Sleipnir. Loki turned to face his son, eyebrows raised in question. He stood to attention, his back straight and the tiniest of tremors in his clenched fists. Loki frowned and got ready to come to the rescue, as soon as he found out what the battle was.

“What is it, Sleipnir?” Father seemed reluctant to look at his grandson, and Loki bristled.

“If we are to return to California I would like permission to wear mortal form again.”

“What?” snapped everyone.

Sleipnir flinched, but stayed straight backed. “I want to go back to my old school. I love being on the athletics team, I have friends…for the first time. I want to finish high school and go to college with my class. I think I can catch up if I work hard, please. I just…” He glanced at Loki, his big silver-brown eyes pleading. “I just want to be normal.”

“Sleipnir,” Loki sighed and folded his eldest son into his arms.

“Please, Father,” he begged. “I fit in there…as much as any of my friends fit in. But nobody minds that we’re all a little strange. We’re all strange together.”

“You know you cannot switch between forms, Sleipnir? The way we were hiding before, that is unhealthy, we cannot continue this way. You will age faster than any of your siblings, even overtaking Eisa in just six years, when it should take nearly a hundred to reach that age.”

“I spent a hundred and forty five years as a horse, Father. The length of time I have means nothing beside what I may experience in a short mortal life.”

Loki forced his tears back and turned his head to his own father, Sleipnir’s shoulders tense under his hands. He was aware that his own panic was showing through his eyes, his mask was not co-operating the way it should. “Make it reversible, please, Father, give him the power to decide and take on his birth form if he needs to or wants to.”

“Father…”

“Please, Allfather.”

“Loki,” sighed Odin. “This is not something you can take up and set down like a weapon. It should never have been. The effect of the mortal shell you were all wearing has been incredibly taxing to the children, I cannot in all conscience allow something like that. It would have to be a permanent change.”

“No, please—“

“The best I can do,” he continued, holding up a hand, “is give him until his majority to decide if he wants to become long lived once more, or if he wants to stay as a mortal and live a mortal life span.”

“But that is less than three years time!”

“Father, it’s OK. This is what I want.”
Loki turned back to his son and let the tears fall unchecked. He cupped Sleipnir’s cheeks in both hands. “I do not want to see you die,” he whispered.

Sleipnir covered one of Loki’s hands with his own and tilted his head into the caress with a small smile. “Then watch me live.”

Loki watched the silver fade from his son’s irises, felt his cheeks soften and his pupils become more rounded than their slight equine squareness. He wrapped his human son in his own frail human arms and hoped, and wished, and prayed.

***

Tony insisted on flying the whole family out to California from the Ukunda airstrip as soon as Loki had worked his three weeks’ notice at the conservation centre and found a place to rent online. Eisa took the kids out to the park, wrapped up tight in jumpers and scarves, while Loki unpacked their suitcases, immersing himself in the mindlessness of separating clothes, making beds and cramming books into shelves. When someone knocked on the door he had to blink several times to drag himself back to the present.

“Thor!” His eyebrows shot up. His brother shuffled awkwardly in the doorway and Loki played with his messy hair just as awkwardly. “Um, come in. Coffee?”

“Please,” he said, following Loki into the kitchen. This one was much more enclosed than the one in his previous flat. Three small bedrooms led off from the living room, so Sleipnir and Narfi could actually have proper beds.

“Have you settled in to Tony’s OK?”

“Aye. My Jane came to help me move, she will be staying a week or two. She and Tony have discovered a mutual fascination with complex pieces of machinery,” he said, his nose crinkling up. “I have left them to speak their own language.”

Loki laughed, and quickly swallowed the loud sound, trying to focus on the simple act of pouring hot water.

“What have you been doing since…” Thor cleared his throat and didn’t finish the question, adding three spoons of sugar to his coffee instead.

Loki led him over to the dining table. “Just ask what you want to know, Thor, I will keep my temper.” Thor raised his eyebrows at him, and Loki rolled his eyes to hide the half smile. “Very well, I will try to hold my temper. If I do not wish to answer a question I will simply refuse.”

“Unlimited passes allowed,” smirked Thor. “OK, then. Where are you working?”

“I have been offered my job at the gym back. I train students in self-defence. That is the job I held for almost a year when last we lived here.”

“Tyr would be so proud.”

“Surprised, I think you mean. The training ring was never my favourite place, was it? So. Jane, then?” He waggled his eyebrows.

Thor took his turn to roll his eyes and smiled. “She hit me with her truck. Twice. I imagine you would like her.”
He laughed. “You never did look where you were going.”

“In my defence I had just been dropped by Bifrost into the desert, I was not expecting motor vehicles.”

“Are you serious?” He shook his head. “You managed five minutes of banishment before finding a mortal to adore you? Clearly your bastard luck is inherent and not related to your Godhood.”

“She did not adore me straight away,” he protested.

“Oh, indeed?” Loki scoffed. “I’m sure it took her a week to fall for your golden charms. You poor thing.”

Thor muttered into his coffee.

“What was that, Brother dear? I couldn’t quite hear you. Your time on Midgard seems to have set your elocution back several centuries.”

“I said three days,” he grumbled.

Loki laughed and let his head fall to the table with a thump.

“Enough with your cheek,” Thor said, shoving his shoulder. “You are one to talk, with a mortal lover of your own.”

“Yes, Thor, whom I met after a full year of living here independently, and he is not entirely mortal either.”

He explained Tony’s story while Thor finished his coffee. He frowned at the quiet figure nodding and actually listening to something that wasn’t a tale of one of his own victories. “Have you truly changed so much in two years?”

Thor’s eyebrow raised. “I have changed? Look at yourself, Loki, slouched in your chair, relaxed and telling me things about your own personal life? Who are you and what have you done with my brother?”

Loki laughed and looked down at the cup he was turning between his fingers. “I am sorry, Thor,” he said at last. “I regret sabotaging your coronation. I look back on that time and I just remember fear and pain bubbling up in this pressurised container inside me, how I wanted to spit it at everyone around just to stop it turning inward.”

Thor shook his head. “I never knew.”

“No-one did. I have always been good at hiding things.”

“I hoped… I think we all hoped that you and Narfi were both staring to heal. That without the triplets always around, you were beginning to break the enchantment.” He held up one hand when Loki turned to him, his mouth open to argue. “Peace, Loki, I only say what I thought at the time.”

“They are my children, just as much as Eisa and Einmyria, Vali and Narfi,” Loki said, holding Thor’s gaze firmly.

“And to us, Loki, they were a wolf, a snake and a half-corpses that grew like tumours out of your body, emerging like demons from the skin of your torso!”

“That is not all they were, Thor! They took those forms when they were afraid, most of the time
they were children. It was not their fault that most Aesir glared and muttered around them. Even you.”

“I saw them pull from your emaciated frame after months of pain and sickness and then start lapping at the blood you had shed for them. You were close to dying, Loki! And then you took them and world walked to Vanaheim before even Mother and Father could see you?”

“I knew you would have taken them away while I was still weak! I could not risk that, not after Sleipnir. I needed to heal and recover my strength before I could trust any of you near me again.”

“For ten years?” he asked, raising a disbelieving eyebrow.

“I had lost a lot of strength.”

“You shouldn’t have been alone during your recovery.”

“It was for the best.”

“Was it for the best to push Glut away after Svadilfari?” Thor demanded, and Loki hated himself for flinching.

“It was best for her and the girls. You know I was in no fit state to be a normal husband and father. That much was made abundantly clear when they took Sleipnir from me.”

Loki clenched his fists and remembered waking up, his first glimpse of the world through Aesir eyes in a year and a half. Remembered the panic when he couldn’t find Sleipnir, couldn’t even feel the brush of his gentle young mind. Remembered the panic and the screams, how he tore up the healing halls until he was sedated, trapped again inside his body. By the time he’d woken he had understood that what should have been a glorious battle had brought shame upon his family. Taking Sleipnir had been his punishment. It had taken years of fighting with himself and his nightmares and his mood swings to be unselfish enough to let Glut and his daughters go too.

“You seem to think,” said Thor through gritted teeth, “that you must do everything by yourself. That no-one is good enough to provide you with assistance.”

Loki slammed his hand flat on the table, mugs jumping with the impact. “And what may have made me believe that? The one time I ask for help, the one time I humiliate myself, prostrated at your feet, you turn from me and tell me everything I feel is wrong, the the children I had loved for seventy five years were worth less than Freya’s bloody necklace. Oh, the Aesir will throw themselves into battle for a whore’s trinket, but three sentient, talking beings torn from their family in the middle of the night and subjected to torture and bondage for being different —“

“You should have been concentrating on Sigyn and the twins, but instead you left the family you had and lost all of them.”

It was like a blade of ice through his chest, because every word was true. “Sigyn understood,” he said, strangling back the tears. “She knew that I could not call myself the twins’ father if I let myself lose let more children, I had to try. Sigyn always saw them as her own.”

“Aye, and see what that brought her? Her husband trapped, one son murdered by the other? It was no wonder she took her own life!”

Loki hurled all his weight behind the punch, and Thor fell backwards off his chair, clutching his cheek. “Get out,” Loki screamed, standing over him in a red haze of grief and fury. “Get out of my house, get out, get out!”
“Loki—“

He roared wordlessly until he heard the front door click. Then he fell to his knees and sobbed until his throat ached and swelled.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry Loki ;_; I'll make it better, I promise. But all that pain's gotta come out somehow...

Yesterday was my 1st anniversary of writing fanfics on AO3 ^_^ yay me! Unfortunately Tumblr has been giving me nothing but shit so I've had to delete my account...if you would like to come and find me again my URL has changed slightly to gold-from-straw...so it's still me, just with added hyphens!

Also I just wanted to say, all your comments are just...so awesome. They make my day so often, and there are a whole bunch I had to copy out verbatim into my diary because I just wanted to have something to hug! Thank you ^_^
Loki - Grief

Chapter Summary

All the awfulness Loki's been suppressing has finally boiled over and he's forced to deal with some of it...

Jane makes her first appearance! I'm a fan ^_^

Frigga makes her first appearance! I'm...less of a fan, still think she's badass, but also a bit of an Odin enabler at worst, but Loki adores her, so yeah

Chapter Notes

Thor is giving me so much hassle at the moment (though let's be honest, not as much as he's giving Loki!) I've been frustrated with how little I'm able to show his growth, and I want him to grow, but from the limited POV of Loki and Tony who aren't paying much attention to him (they've got other stuff to deal with!) I'm worried that he's just going to look like he magically improved, and that's just not gonna work! But I had a bit of a brainwave a few days ago, I think, and I was SO EXCITED all through my ballet lesson, just itching to get back to my laptop. And then I got back...and sat there. Seriously, Thor, damn well co-operate! It's getting there, I just want to do a little scene with him, Jane, Sleipnir and someone else and it's JUST. NOT. WORKING!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Time didn’t seem to pass normally. Loki didn’t know how long he lay curled on the carpet, only that his sobs had long run dry and his head ached. When he felt strong arms wrap around him he couldn’t even gather the energy to turn his head.

“Loki? Lokes, babe, can you hear me?”

He curled tighter in on himself, hoping the voice would leave him alone. Instead it sighed and he felt himself lifted right off the floor. Part of him was startled. He hadn’t let anyone carry him like this in centuries. Unless he counted Thor and his father getting him out of the cave, which he did not, because he’d been unconscious at the time. His pride made a token protest, but even that wasn’t enough. He was just so tired of fighting and standing on his own two feet when his heart and soul had been chipped away from him. For the first time he understood why Sigyn had done it. To just fall, to let go at last, one final weakness. It would be so easy, to never have to worry about anything ever again. Just drift off into the void and let someone else deal with the fact he’d never brought anything but shame and pain to all the people he’d ever loved.

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When he woke up he could feel a chilly breeze skating over his bare arms, and hear the ocean crashing against cliffs. Thin white curtains fluttered, sending ever-changing shadows across the ceiling and the light blue bedsheets. He raised his hand to rub his head, still fuzzy and thick.
“Have something to drink, Loki, you are dehydrated.”

Loki sat up suddenly and stared, wide eyed, at his mother.

“Hello, dear,” she smiled, and held out the drink.

“Mother, what are you…”

“Heimdall told me about your argument with Thor,” she said, forcing the cup into his hands. “Thor himself called for your father and I not long after you ejected him.”

“I will not apologise for that,” Loki snarled.

“Thor does not expect you to. He was quite distraught, you know. I do not think he has ever realised the consequences of his words, but I believe you may find yourself on the receiving end of an apology from your brother.”

Loki snorted and lay back down. “Thor does not know the meaning of the word,” he said, glaring at the window. “And I have no interest in hearing it either.”

“What he said was cruel and unacceptable, and he knows that, Loki,” said Mother, tucking a strand of hair behind his ear. “But he is your brother, and family must make the effort to show how much they still love each other. Give him a chance, Loki.”

“You know well he is not my brother. And he has always had all the chances, all the forgiveness. Perhaps if these things were harder for him to earn he would appreciate them more.”

“Loki,” she chided, and his temper, still held by a spider thread, snapped.

“He told me Sigyn’s suicide was my fault, Mother.” He glared at her, his eyesight blurring with tears again. “He blames me for Vali and Narfi, too, and —“ He couldn’t go on, his voice stolen away by tears. Mother sat beside him, her gown crinkling against the sheets, and pulled him close until he could get his breathing under control. “And he is right, Mama,” he sobbed. “It is all my fault. I brought this upon them all.”

He cried in her arms, clutching her shoulders like he hadn’t since he was a child. She rocked him and stroked his hair and hushed him, and never complained even when his fingers dug into the flesh of her back hard enough that, had he not been human, he would have left bruises.

At some point during his shameful breakdown Tony arrived and quickly sat on his other side, stroking his back. Loki tried to stop the awful noises he was making, tried to dry his eyes, but one look at the compassion on Tony’s face and he crumpled once more.

“Babe,” said Tony at last, when he lay drained once more. “Please tell me what’s going on? I’ve heard fragments, allusions to some horrible things…is this about Sleipnir? How they took him away and now you’ve got him back he wants to be human?”

Loki shook his head and chuckled sadly. “Sleipnir was just the beginning.” He took a couple of deep breaths, a couple of false starts. Every time he tried to speak the sobs swelled in his throat and fought him, but he knew it was right. He had to tell Tony what he was dealing with if they were going to have an actual future together.

“Perhaps we should get some food and drink in you,” suggested Mother, seeing his struggle. “You haven’t eaten since you got here yesterday.”
“Are we in the mansion?” Loki asked, looking around. Then he sat up, his heart pounding. “Where are the children?” How could he allow himself to fall apart like this when they depended on him?

“It’s OK, they’re here, all of them. I called Eisa as soon as Thor got back and sent a car for them.”

Loki flopped back on the pillows, in equal parts relief and shame. “I need a shower.” There was no way he would let his children see him like this. He kissed Tony as he dragged himself out of bed. “I will tell you, I will. Just…”

“OK babe,” he smiled sadly, stroking his cheek.

By the time he was clean, his eyes were looking much less swollen and red, and the smell of waffles was diffusing around the mansion. Loki dressed in a t-shirt and too-short track pants Tony had let him, and followed his nose to the main living area.

“Father!” yelled Fenrir when he rounded the corner to the sitting room. He bent down and allowed his kids to mob him, pushing and shoving each other and chattering about their day.

"We had a sleepover!"

“Eisa got us ice cream yesterday—“

“—and then this guy on roller blades was just like crash! and fell—“

“—we had pizza for supper—“

“—Pepper painted Jor’s fingernails—“

“OK, OK,” he laughed. “I cannot hear if you all talk at once.”

“Father,” said Hela. “Auntie Jane says there’s a meteor shower happening tonight, please please please can I stay up? Pretty please?”

“The physical appearance of the please makes no difference,” said Loki in his best Despicable Me voice. “And who is Auntie Jane?”

Hela raced over to a tiny brunette woman wearing a plaid shirt and blushing. “This is Auntie Jane, she’s an astrophysicist just like I want to be!”

“I’m sorry,” said Jane. “I swear I didn’t ask them to call me Auntie.”

“It’s quite all right,” he smiled, and shook her hand. “I’m Loki.”

“Jane Foster. I—“ she hesitated and looked deeply awkward, then nodded to herself and looked him right in the eye. ‘I’m sorry about Thor. When he told me what he said I was so pissed at - oh my God! I’m sorry!’ She clapped her hands over her mouth, looking at the children in horror.

“Don’t worry,” said Jor. “We’ve heard way worse than ‘piss’ before.”

Loki couldn’t help but laugh, and he bowed slightly to Jane. “Thor is no more your responsibility than he is mine,” he assured her.

“Well, I know he’s really sorry, but if you want I’ll take him away for a few days, give you some space.”

Loki blinked at her. “You are not going to insist I accept his apology?”
“Well, no, of course not! Forgiveness is a very personal thing, it can’t be forced.”

“No, indeed,” he said. “Thank you, Dr Foster.”

“Jane, please.”

“Can I stay up, Father?” Hela begged. “Please?”

“What time is this meteor shower?”

“I’m afraid it peaks around one am, I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have told her.”

“Not at all. Hela is fascinated by space.” He thought for a moment. “Go to bed at your usual time and - no, do not ‘aww’ me, just listen! Then we will wake you at midnight. Does that sound acceptable?”

“Yes! Thank you!”

“Can we come too?” asked Fen.

Loki raised an eyebrow at Jane, who nodded. “Sure, the more, the merrier.”

“Breakfast is ready,” called his mother, and the children raced towards the dining area.

Jane touched Loki’s elbow as he made to follow. “Hey, if you want I’ll take Thor out for breakfast instead.”

Loki stopped. “Why are you being so thoughtful to me? I would have thought you would be on Thor’s side.”

She blushed again and used both hands to tuck her hair behind her ears. She really was tiny, he thought, barely a head taller than Hela. “I love Thor,” she said, smiling up at him through her confession. “But that doesn’t mean I think he’s perfect. I know it’s, like, a gross invasion of your privacy, and I’m sorry, but he kinda told me your life story. If he was hoping to justify his attitude to the triplets and Sleip, well, it won’t work. They’re awesome kids and…and I am so, so sorry for your loss, Loki. He should never have implied any of that was your fault, never, and I think he’s starting to understand that, but - oh my God, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to upset you!”

Loki wiped the tears away and shook his head. “Please don’t be sorry. I really appreciate your words, thank you.” He took a deep breath. “And I can handle my brother, do not feel you have to leave on my account.”

“You sure? It’s no problem, I’ll ask him to take me to the beach, I won’t even make it about you.”

“In mid-December?” he laughed and shook his head, plastering a smile on, hiding the bubbling gratitude that made him want to cry yet more. Surely this many tears were physically impossible.

“OK, if you’re sure. I’ll go get him then.” She patted his arm and they parted ways.

Mother was standing in the archway between the dining room and the kitchen with a slender man who managed to look distinguished even in an apron. He nodded to Loki and a crooked smile broke out as he shook his hand. “You must be the famous Loki. I’m James Rhodes, I was Tony’s roommate in MIT.”

“A pleasure to meet you - I’ve heard many stories.”
“They’re probably lies,” he said, narrowing his eyes at Tony.

“I would hope not,” Loki smirked. “They were all such fitting tributes to a God of Mischief.”

“Ah, well, stick with me, man, and let me tell you all about teenage Tony.”

“I like this one,” Loki said to Tony, who just rolled his eyes.

He followed Rhodey to the table and sat between him and Fen, and soon also had an armful of Narfi. By the time Thor sidled in, followed by Jane, he was feeling sufficiently fortified. Thor didn’t attempt to talk to him during the meal, and he wondered if that was Jane’s influence. For such a little waif she seemed to have a core of steel, and he thought she might have even more of an effect on Thor than his gentle, nurturing mother had had on his father.

After breakfast Rhodey and Tony got into an argument about which Disney movie the kids should watch, and the children took full advantage. Every time the discussion seemed to come to an end, Jormungandr would start asking controversial questions and set them off again. Sleipnir eventually called an end to it by tackling his brother to the ground and gagging him with a napkin, and Rhodey called a victory for Lilo and Stitch.

Loki settled the children in the theatre. Hela and Jor snuggled up on Tony’s lap and Fenrir sat next to Rhodey, sneaking closer and closer as the credits played while Sleipnir settled in a puffy armchair with Narfi dozing on his lap. Eisa even managed to pull Mother in and they sat elegantly on a sofa with matching indulgent smiles. Loki had never noticed how much like her grandmother Eisa had become.

The bright colours and loud noises weren’t reacting well with Loki’s head, so he wandered out once the kids were all settled, and pushed the sliding doors to the balcony wide, breathing in the salty air. The sea was a grey only a couple of tones darker than the sky, and whipped into white crests. He leaned on the railing and closed his eyes, focusing on the sound of the waves so he didn’t have to think of everything else.

“Loki?”

He jumped violently and spun to face Thor, his heart hammering. “Fucking hell!”

Thor held up his hands. “Peace, brother.”

“Are you trying to give me a heart attack?”

He sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose. “No…I was actually coming to say—“

“What?” he snapped. “Of what else have you come to accuse me?”

“Nothing! Damn it, Loki, I am trying to apologise!”

He narrowed his eyes, the fury subsiding to a petulant, simmering anger. “Well, you are doing an excellent job.”

Thor grit his teeth and fixed his eyes on the horizon. “It was cruel. I overstepped, and…I didn’t mean what I said, Loki.” He turned his big blue bloody puppy eyes on Loki. “I’m sorry.”

Loki lowered his gaze and turned back to face the sea with a slight nod. They stood side by side on the balcony, the air awkward and thick with things unsaid, until Thor turned back into the house with a sigh.
That wasn't too bad, right? Loki and Thor managed to exchange actual words without wanting to kill each other, that's a start, right? Right?!

I hope this all came across in character...what do you think? I feel like this particular chapter is a turning point for so many of them, and I hope I got that across OK!

Also this story has triggered off a massive original fic idea, involving mythology from all over the world, and I'm going to write it for NaNoWriMo! If that interests you, please come find me on Tumblr because I'm going to be ranting about it and sticking up sample chapters ^_^ gold-from-straw
Chapter Summary

Loki’s entire backstory, at last!

Chapter Notes

Sorry this is a bit late guys, I've had a really awful flu...still have, actually, I'm just fed up of being inactive so I'm seeing how long I can cope with sitting up!

Also if you fancy a laugh, imagine that I was considering, briefly, writing this in the style of the Lokasenna! I'm glad I didn't!

Between movies, reading, playing and mealtimes for the kids, Loki managed to distract himself from thinking about anything at all, let alone dead and estranged family. It was only after he'd settled them in bed with an alarm set on his phone for 12:30 that Tony beckoned him into the media room.

“Thor and Jane have taken your mom out for dinner. I was hoping you'd tell me...well, your life story, I guess?”

Loki sighed and leaned his elbows on his knees. “It's a long story.”

“Yes, well, funnily enough, I have time. Lots of it, now. And I was hoping I’d be spending quite a lot of it with you.”

Loki looked at him, swirling a glass of whiskey and ice, and couldn’t stop a smile splitting his face. “You're not angry about that?”

“It’s been a lot to take in but...no, I’m selfishly delighted. If I had to face it alone then yeah, I don’t know, but knowing there are others out there with an extended lifespan...ah, hell, I’ll be honest - knowing you’ll be around to share it, maybe? That’s a hell of a big hope. I mean, if you want to, obviously...”

Loki kissed him so there was no ambiguity. “My lifespan is actually significantly shorter than yours right now, Tony.”

Tony made a childish pfft noise. “C’mon, you really think your parents are going to leave you like this forever?”

Loki wanted to argue, but he remembered the glimpses of memory from the cave, what he’d thought were fever dreams of his father’s voice, trembling with worry and calling his name, and he frowned.

“I want to help, Loki. I don’t need to know everything, but I keep saying things that make the kids flinch, and I don’t want to hurt them. Just tell me what to avoid?” He took Loki’s hands. “If it
helps, I’ll go first. I can’t put my face under water. Even showers are difficult some days. And I…I can’t be restrained, it’s…yeah. Basically I was kept in a cave and tortured for three months so the dark isn’t great either. Or sand - Jesus I’m screwed up.”


“No really that funny, Lokes.” Tony sounded like he was trying to hide his offence, and Loki immediately wrapped his arms around him.

“Of course it’s not. It’s…I’m laughing because the universe has a sick sense of humour. I, uh…I too spent time in a cave being tortured,” he said, all in one breath, and watched Tony’s face to see if the world would end.

Tony laughed. “You’re right. The universe is a sick little bitch.”

He smiled at him and considered it for a moment. Perhaps Tony was right. If he was going to be around, which he hoped he was, he should know what the children had been through. He thought about Fenrir lashing out because his best friend put his hand over his mouth, and shuddered. He wouldn’t want them to feel unsafe around Tony.

He sighed and leaned back against the opposite end of the sofa. Tony mirrored his posture. “Eisa is probably OK. She is my eldest, and I was happily married to her mother for over a century.”

“Fuck,” Tony laughed. “Seriously? Shit.” He frowned for a moment. “Uh, that’s actually quite a lot to live up to.”

Loki nudged him with his toe. “You are not in competition,” he said softly. “Glut was perfect for that time of my life. You are perfect for me now.”

Tony’s ears went pink and he looked into his glass as if that would hide the shy smile that was warming Loki’s heart. “So,” he said, clearing his throat. “Eisa’s all happy and well adjusted, huh?”

Loki nodded. “She’s tough. She joined the Einherjar fifty years ago.”

“Einherjar?”

“The elite Aesir guards. They are almost entirely male, she was actually apprenticed to the Lady Sif, the one who stabbed me?”

Tony’s eyes narrowed. “Oh, yeah, Warrior Princess Barbie.”

“Are you planning to call my daughter that?” Loki laughed

He frowned. “Sexist?”

“A little bit.”

“Sorry.”

He shrugged. “Anyway, Eisa is the reason we were able to escape from Norway when we first arrived on Earth. I thought I would be able to shield all of us from Heimdall’s eye—”

“He’s your all-seeing pervert in the sky?”

Loki smirked. “Yes. I can usually hide from him, it was one of the first few things I learned when I was studying seidr. But trying to hide five traumatised and powerful magic users was a bit too much of a stretch. We were seen within a week and they caught up with us within a month.”
“But why? Your mom helped you escape, why would she send the army after you?”

“It was not her. My father woke while I was still retrieving the triplets and... well, he and my mother do not always see eye to eye in how they treat us. Hence the squadron of guards sent to capture me and my children. Eisa was among them. She turned on her fellows and fought by my side.” He smiled, so proud of his daughter, so sorry he had lost her what she fought so hard to earn. Just another way he had failed his family.

He leaned back and thought for a moment. “Her sister, Einmyria, I have not seen for... too long. Thor and Father told you about... about Sleipnir?”

Tony nodded, eyes going soft.

“Do not look at me like that, Tony,” he said, cocking one eyebrow. “I killed my rapist, I do not need anyone’s pity.”

“There’s a difference between ‘you poor thing’ and ‘fuck, that’s a shitty situation’, babe,” Tony said, cocking his own eyebrow right back. “I don’t pity you. But being a general badass doesn’t mean your life hasn’t been fucking unfair.”

He rolled his eyes. “Anyway. Sleipnir was born a horse, and trapped within that form for nearly his entire hundred and forty five years of life. They thought it would help me to hide him away, but I found him, of course.”

“Of course.”

“I should have taken him as soon as I found him,” Loki muttered. “Every time I have failed my children, it would all have been solved by taking them and running.”

Tony reached his foot across the sofa and nudged his thigh affectionately. Loki smiled up at him and rubbed the top of his foot, shaking off the unnecessary melancholy. “Anyway, he assures me he was happy enough. He’s happier now, being able to speak and so on, of course, but his problems are less, uh, psychological than the others. He has some attachment issues with me, at times he is almost shy with me, because I have spent so much more time with the others. But he has adapted so well.” He couldn’t help the smile curling his lips, the warm pride swelling in his chest.

“He is such a nice kid,” Tony smiled.

Loki nodded. “Physically it took him a little longer to adapt to bipedal form. His cramps, his clumsy fingers - and his speech. He had never spoken in his life.”

“Shit. He’s done brilliantly, then.”

“He tells me he used to verbalise replies in his head when people spoke to him as a horse, so that helped immeasurably, but it took him some time to learn to control his tongue and his fingers both.”

“Hence the spasms.”

“Exactly.”

“So,” said Tony, tilting his head. “What about the triplets? I’m getting the idea that these little guys have had a real shit time of it. What the fuck is your family’s problem with them, for a start?”
Loki took a deep breath and scrunched his face up. “There was this witch. Angrboda, said to be immortal. Every time someone tried to kill her she simply regenerated. Of course my brother claimed it would be a good quest for the six of us.”

“The two of you and his four crazy friends?”

Loki nodded. “We did it, as well, we killed her. But then, so did Sigurd, and Mimir, and look what happened to them.”

“Oh yeah, babe, I totally know what you’re talking about. Sigurd and Mimir and me, we’re like that.” He crossed his fingers and Loki laughed, kicking him in the hip.

“Anyway, fool, we burned her body, but I knew it wouldn’t be enough. The idiots laughed at me until the following morning when the ashes off the fire trembled and drew together, forming a heart, a liver, the beginnings of a brain.”

“Nice.”

“So I ate the heart.”

Loki saw in his memory the panic creep behind Volstagg’s eyes, the confusion in Thor’s unshakeable confidence, and he’d snatched the red hot heart from the fire. He’d eaten it, felt it burn like an ember, his daughter’s name scorching his throat. He’d felt it flutter and beat as it sat to his stomach. Felt the burn spread through his veins. But he’d also seen the other organs still on the pyre crumble back to dust and drift away.

“You fucking what?”

“It was the only sensible thing to do!”

“Jesus, and Pepper tells me I’m reckless.”

“You are reckless.”

“Hi Pot, I’m Kettle, good to meet you.”

Loki scrunched his face up. “I have no idea what you are talking about. Anyway, it, uh, it had unforeseen consequences.”

His whole body had felt like it was pulsing to an extra heartbeat, his own stuttering weakly in his chest, disturbed by the shockwaves. He hid it for months, the creeping battle with nausea and dizziness, the leeching of every nutrient he could force down his throat and the squirming alien lumps that grew out of the skin around his chest. He lifted his shirt to show Tony three starburst scars on his chest.

“The triplets grew under my skin here, and pushed their way out when they had grown strong enough. Everyone said it was just another one of Angrboda’s reincarnations, but I knew the moment I felt them move that they were mine, not hers.” He didn’t bother to hide the viciousness in his voice. “Thor found me when they were pulling away. He was horrified, thought they were some sort of disease or some danger to me, something to destroy.”

“Not even kidding, babe, I’d be pretty horrified too,” said Tony. “They pushed their way out? Through your skin? That sounds like the scene from Alien and I know you’re toning it down for me.”
“I was right though, was I not?” he said, perhaps more sharply than he had intended. “They are not the reincarnation of an evil witch, they are my children. I do not care how my children care to enter the world, none of that is their choice, and I was not prepared to have my family take any more of them away for my own good.”

“Hey, chill, Lokes, I’m on your side. I’m just saying, I’m seeing them now, when they’re awesome, cheeky little people.” He shrugged. “Anyway, how did you make sure they were safe?”

“I world-walked to Vanaheim with them before Thor could return with my parents,” he said, pulling his t-shirt back down. “I had a little house there, it had been a retreat for me and Glut, nobody else knew about it, and of course, I’d hidden it from Heimdall. It was perfect - like I said, every mistake I ever made as a parent was to do with not taking my children and running. The triplets grew up in peace. By the time my family found us I had recovered enough to stand up to them and tell them if anyone tried to take my babies from me I would fight them, even my mother.”

“Heh. Mama Bear.”

“Absolutely.” He shrugged. “We were bothered intermittently throughout their childhood, particularly as I started to venture back to Asgard and resume some of my duties. There were so many who believed they were just the reincarnation of the witch who had somehow enchanted me to care for them, just biding their time before they destroyed us all.” He snorted. “If they had only spent a few moments talking to Fenrir or Hela they would know how ridiculous that was.”

Tony laughed. “I like how you left Jor out of that.”

He smirked. “Yes. Jormungandr would probably burn Asgard to the ground just to see what would happen. I have no illusions about his personality. But that is because it is similar to my own, not because of Angrboda. It did not help that the children have their defensive forms - Jor is a snake, Fenrir is a wolf, and Hela half corpse.”

“No,” he winced. “Sorry to say that probably wouldn’t help their case. So I’m guessing you guys stuck to Vanaheim, huh?”

“I got married again there,” he said softly. “A woman called Sigyn from the next village - she loved the triplets before she loved me. We had forty years of happiness.” He smiled, remembering Sigyn’s curly red hair, the way her nose crinkled up when she smiled, how she’d raise one eyebrow any time he tried to pick a fight. How such thin arms could be so strong when the nightmares hit.

“She’s Narfi’s mom, huh?” Tony said into the pause.

Loki nodded. This was all getting so close, the memories were cuts instead of blunt strikes. “Narfi is…Narfi had a twin brother, Vali. They were so happy, all five of them. Fenrir lived for his little brothers. Jor and Hel went through the jealous stage, but Fen just wanted to be with them. And they loved him, too, especially when he was a wolf cub.”

“What happened to them, Lokes?” he asked into Loki’s pained pause.

Loki closed his eyes. He wanted to hold it back, it was too much, but the words fell uncontrolled. “I told you about the Aesir who still insisted the triplets were monsters. A curse on our society. Two brothers in particular, Baldr and Hodr, were…militant about it. They kidnapped the triplets, bound them in their other forms. Separated them - they must have been so scared, Tony.”

Tony put his glass on the table and pushed Loki’s legs away so he could come close, his arm around his shoulders, his hand linking with Loki’s fingers. He smiled. “I’m fine, Tony, I do not…it
was not me who was hurt.”

“Of course it was, Lokes,” Tony said, kissing him on the temple. “When your babies hurt, you hurt, don’t you.” He rubbed his thumb over the back of Loki’s hand. “What did those bastards do to them? It’s got something to do with Fen’s fight, hasn’t it?”

He nodded, and swallowed hard, as if he was about to vomit. “They…they had a powerful mage, she rivalled me, if I am honest. She formed pocket universes, one for each of them. They are incredibly difficult to access by anyone but the mage who makes them. Even for me, and I am one of the only sky walkers in existence. Each one was a different torment, and I swear, Tony, if I could find out who designed these nightmares I would be able to show you the true monsters.”

He took a deep breath and closed his eyes. “Fenrir was chained as a wolf, and…oh Norns…they pierced his mouth with a sword, I…I don’t even know why. Why would they do that?”

Tony wrapped his arms around him. “Fuck. I don’t know babe. I don’t think you can answer that, God, poor Fen. Fuck.”

“Jormungandr was trapped in an endless ocean, with no land on which to rest and…and Hela was surrounded by corpses, in silence.” He clenched his teeth and a breath hissed out between his teeth. “So. Jor cannot stand swimming, or any water in which he cannot stand. He was exempt from swimming lessons in school, so it is not usually an issue. Hela needs music to sleep, she cannot stand silence, or being alone. Actually, the size of our apartment was perfect for her, she could always tell there was someone around, some sign of life. In this new place I think I shall have to leave her door open at night. She also has a low tolerance for certain smells.”

He clenched the fist that wasn’t linked with Tony’s tight, digging his nails into his palm, distracting himself from the anger. Tony noticed and rubbed his wrist. “Hey, it’s OK, babe.”

“I spent years looking for them,” Loki whispered. “Thor said I should give up, maybe it was for the best. Even when I begged him, he would not…” He took a deep breath. “I could tell my parents thought the same, but not Sigyn. She was my fuel. And eventually I…I found out who did it. I confronted them, there was a fight. I took some down with me, but they bound me too. Then they…they took me to my home, forced me to watch as they turned…turned Narfi into a wolf, and…and in his terror, they threw Vali at him and he—“

Loki’s breaths came out of control and he could barely stand to exist. Tony’s arms faded into numb pins and needles around him as he howled in pain.

It was a long time before he could come back to himself, lying with his head in Tony’s lap. “Do you want to stop?” Tony asked, his voice sounding stuffy with tears too.

Loki shook his head and squeezed Tony’s knee, feeling the rough denim under his hands. He cleared his throat. “I was trapped in a cave, blinded, tied down. They tell me it was for two years. When Thor and Father found me, I was mostly delirious, and it took several more months for me to heal enough. When they told me Sigyn had taken her own life, I think all my remaining strength left me. She had thought Narfi was lost forever, too, he’d run in his wolf form. Mother found him while Father and Thor found me. He hasn’t spoken since. I…I had to give up looking for the triplets because he had no-one else. I…I’ve never felt such shame in my life, Tony.” Loki was whispering now, not willing to admit his weakness in full voice.

“I thought I could let go,” he said. “I thought I could focus on Narfi, be a part way good parent even if just for one of my eight children. Maybe not fail all of them so catastrophically. But I heard news of Baldr and Hoder, that they were back in Vanaheim. I tried to forget it, but I couldn’t. I made
Hodr believe his brother was a monster, and as his sword sank into Baldr’s chest, I dropped the glamour. I made him watch his brother die, knowing it was his fault. And then I killed him as he howled with grief.”

Tony’s fingers tightened briefly and he wondered if he was remembering Gulmira and the death of the Ten Rings. “It wasn’t enough, Tony. It didn’t bring my family back, didn’t quench my grief. It just made me want more, like it fed the fires of my bloodlust. My eye turned to Thor, who refused to help.” Loki sighed. Tony had already heard so much ill of him, his insane jealousy and anger couldn’t be much worse. “I didn’t want to kill him. I know, I know it wasn’t his fault, directly, but he refused to help, and I…I still haven’t forgiven him for that. I sabotaged his coronation, manipulated him into starting a war with the Frost Giants, the ancient enemy of the Aesir.” He clenched his fists. “I don’t regret it. Not truly. Not yet.

“But,” he laughed dryly. “It backfired on me. In battle, the touch of a Frost Giant should burn an Aes. I turned into one of them. I should have realised when every single one of my children was born a shapeshifter. The skill is rare in any race but the Jotnar. It turns out I was abandoned for being too small, Odin picked me up at the end of the war, the son of his greatest enemy hidden in his own home.”

“Why?” asked Tony softly, stroking his forehead with one rough fingertip.

“That’s what I asked. Father…he had some grand political plan at first. But then when Thor and I spoke to him, in Kenya, he told me those plans had to be put aside when I was still a babe. When he tried to ransom me back for a lasting peace and Laufey laughed at him.”

He closed his eyes and bit back the ache. “He paid attention when he saw Father had taken the Casket of Ancient Winters as well, though,” he sighed. “So it is kept safe in Asgard’s vaults, and if the peace lasts a full two millennia, it will be returned. Odin…Father said he was disgusted with Laufey, so they decided to raise me as one of their own. I had already settled in an Aesir form, so…” he took a deep breath. “I suppose I should be grateful.”

Tony huffed. “Hard to be grateful for something when you never got to choose it, but I know what you mean. Things could have been a whole lot worse, I guess.” He considered a moment, staring into space. “I think it’s because it’s something you had no control over. But everyone else thinks if you’re not grovelling with gratitude you’re an entitled ass.”

Loki laughed. “And in our respective positions, we have been very entitled arses.”

“Prince of Asgard and Heir to an Empire? I’ll say.” He winked at Loki, then frowned. “So how did you get the kids back?”

“Mother found me when I was about to free Sleipnir. I was going to take him and Narfi, turn Sleipnir into his Aesir form, and spend some time helping him to adjust. I didn’t really have a plan. My mother convinced me to leave Sleip as he was for a little longer. He has my world-walking abilities, you see, but only in his horse form.” He snorted. “Of course, no-one saw fit to tell me that before. Together, with both our abilities combined and my seidr, we could find the pocket universes.” He pushed himself up, dislodging Tony’s gentle stroking. “Those forms they were trapped in are their defensive weapons. It must have been like ten years of constant panic. They cannot…they can hardly stand to think of their other aspect. The best I could do was lock them into human form so they could at least get angry without worrying about accidentally turning into something else. But that was never a permanent solution. It wasn’t like Father did for me and Sleipnir. For growing children it could have done permanent damage to their organs, even their bone structure, but I couldn’t think of anything else - and we needed to hide. I believe if the Aesir found me they would kill all of us. I…I don’t think trapping my seidr that way was good for my
ment health either.”

“But what about now? You’re in mortal form, still, isn't that—“

“This is different,” he smiled. “A different spell. More like a change on the cellular level than on the surface only. Though that metaphor is imperfect. Father has taken our powers and stored them separate from us, in the branches of the world tree, whereas I tried to lock them away in side in case they were needed. I knew it was boiling away inside of us, eager to be free, but now it’s...just not there. It’s not something that should be done often, not at all - hence why Father will only give Sleipnir three years to decide on his final form before he allows his divine aspect to rejoin the energies of the universe.” He crossed his arms. “I know why he has done it,” he sighed. “But it feels as if I have had him taken away yet again.”

“Lokes,” said Tony softly. “What about you?”

“What about me?”

“You triggers. You've been through so much shit, babe. What do we need to avoid?”

He shrugged. “I’m fine.” He laughed at Tony’s skeptical look. “Truly, I cannot think of anything that triggers me particularly. Besides taking to Thor, of course.”

Tony looked at him for a long moment, then sighed and leaned over to rest his head on Loki’s shoulder. “Far be it from me to convince someone else to talk. That really would be the pot calling the kettle black. But you know I’m here if you ever need to vent, yeah?”

Loki nodded. “Do not worry about me, Tony,” he said. “I think I have proven I can handle whatever shit life throws at me.”

“Amen to that,” he said, holding up a hand for a loose high five. “I’m firmly in the school of repress and get on.”
Tony - Geminids

Chapter Summary

Jane (and by extension Thor) take the family onto the roof to watch the Geminid meteor shower

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Loki jerked when his alarm went off, and Tony realised he must have fallen asleep. He groaned as he sat up, rubbing his eyes.

“Ready to go stargazing?” he asked, massaging Loki’s back.

The children were reluctant to wake up, whining into their pillows as he and Loki stroked their hair and encouraged them into warm dressing gowns. Hela was quick to remember the point of it, though, and raced ahead of them to catch Jane’s hand as they climbed the stairs to the roof terrace.

Tony and Loki leaned against the railing to watch Jane set up her telescope. “It can take a little while to see a meteor, so we’ll have a look at the moon while we wait. We might even be able to see Saturn, but only if these clouds over there shift a little.” She tucked her hair behind her ears and started twisting dials and peering into the eyepiece.

“How does it work?” asked Jor, fingers hovering close to but not quite touching the black metal.

“Do you know, Hela?”

The girl nodded. “There are two lenses. One gathers all the light from the distant stars and the other makes it easier to see? I don’t know why.”

“That’s great, Hela, you already know so much. The eyepiece lens looks at the real image formed by the objective lens and makes it into a bigger, virtual image.”

“Like virtual reality?”

“Uh…” she said, looking up for a moment and probably suddenly remembering she was talking to the equivalent of pre-teens. “Kinda? But not really - look, let me draw you a diagram. Oh. It’s dark…”

“Show us tomorrow,” Jor shrugged.

She laughed. “Sure, if I haven’t completely turned you off by blinding you with science.” She looked at Jor, who pulled his fingers back from where they’d just made contact with the telescope. “Hey, Jor, do you want to adjust that lever there?”

“Really?” he breathed.

“Uh-huh. Hela, you can focus on the moon when I find it, how’s that sound? And Sleipnir, Fen, you can use the app on Thor’s phone to locate Gemini, because that’s where the meteors will
Tony’s head whipped round to see Thor straighten up awkwardly, looking between Jane and the nephews he resented. “Uh, yes, of course. Here, boys.” He stepped forward, flicking through his iPhone and demonstrating the app. Tony felt Loki grip his hand tight enough that it would have hurt a regular human.

“They’re OK, babe,” he whispered, keeping his gaze mostly on the boys, who were cautiously leaning forward to look at the screen. He flicked a glance at Loki and rubbed his thumb over his hand when he saw the tension in his shoulders.

“Oh my God! I saw one, I saw one!” Jor jumped up and down, pointing at the sky.

“What?” Hela shrieked, tearing her eyes away from the telescope. “Not fair!”

“It’s OK, there’ll be more,” said Jane, putting her hand on Hela’s shoulder. “Keep watching that area.”

"There! There, I saw one!” Hela squeezed her hands together under her chin, her little face shining. "And there! Father, did you see?"

"I did, Hela."

"They're amazing!"

Tony smiled like a sap as the minutes ticked by, bringing more and more streaks of light across the velvet of the sky. “You know, on Earth we make a wish on a shooting star, but right now there isn’t much I can think of that I want to change.”

“Wish for something to stay the same, then,” said Loki, and held his chin gently to kiss him.

As the night drew on, the stargazers started to drop to the floor, lying on their backs to watch the meteors. Tony was entering this rare, blissed out state where the world was reduced to the soft breeze, Loki’s arm round his shoulder, his thumb stroking along his jaw, and the light show captivating the children.

Or almost all the children, because Fenrir was sidling up to Loki, looking conflicted. “Father?”

“Yes, Fen?”

The little boy snuggled under Loki’s outstretched arm and pressed the side of his face to Loki’s chest. “Does Narfi hate me?”

“What? What could make you think that?”

“He never looks at me—“

“Fenrir, he never looks at anyone. I know you were the closest, before, but—“

“No, it’s not…I mean he looks away from me, whenever I come near. With the others, he just ignores them, but he looks away from me, and he moves away - and then yesterday, he fell asleep on the sofa, I sat next to him and he woke up screaming and kicking.”

Fenrir’s voice had been rising in pitch and volume, and as he buried his face in his hands and wailed, Loki picked him up, gangly limbs wrapping around his hips. Tony rubbed his back as Loki bumped him up and down.
“It’s because I’m a wolf, isn’t it?” he sobbed. “Because they turned him into one and he was so scared, now he hates me cos I am one.”

“Where did you hear that?” Loki asked.

“You were telling Eisa when we first moved to Inglewood,” he snuffled, and Loki closed his eyes in self-loathing.

“I’m sorry, my love,” he said, pressing his face into Fenrir’s rough curls. “I’m so sorry.”

The others had turned to see the drama and Sleipnir stood up. “Is he OK, Father?”

Loki nodded and cupped Fenrir’s head, walking across the roof to the stairs. Tony hesitated a moment, and Thor rose. “Is there a problem, Tony?”

He shook his head. “Fen’s upset about something that happened earlier. I, uh, I’ll just go check on them, you guys carry on.” He hurried after Loki, and found him in Fen’s room, sitting against the wall with the little boy curled in his lap, sniffling.

“Will it be forever, Father?”

“I don’t know, darling. We just have to give him time.”

“How much time?”

“As much as he needs,” he sighed, rubbing his nose on the top of Fen’s head.

“What if he always hates me?”

“I think… I think it’s not hate, Fenrir. He’s afraid, probably mostly afraid of himself and what happened when he was turned into a wolf.”

“But that’s not my fault!”

“I know, darling, I know. I’m so sorry, Fenrir, there is nothing any of us can do but be patient and love each other.”

Tony left them curled around each other and went to the kitchen to make coffee. By the time he came back, two mugs in hand, Fenrir was making little huffing snores and Loki was staring into space while his hand ran over Fen’s head. “I’ve been such a fool, Tony.”

“What? Why?” He sat on the edge of the bed, careful not to jolt Fen or spill the coffee.

“I thought that now I had reconciled with my family, that our problems were coming to an end. How did I miss this? How did I not see how unhappy he has been?”

Tony settled himself against the wall and handed Loki his coffee. “You’ve had a lot on your mind.”

“That’s no excuse.”

“No,” said Tony. “But it’s a reason. That’s why you didn’t notice, so don’t beat yourself up over it. Equally, don’t rest on it, like you said, not an excuse. Instead, focus on what to do now.” He laughed. “Not that I know what to do now. I guess love each other and all that jazz.”

“I doubt it will be enough.”
“What else can you do? It’s not like you can make Narfi get over his PTSD faster. Just...be there for them. Do what you think is right at the time, let them know how much you love them. And we can look into therapy for Narfi too, heck, all of you could probably do with it.”

Loki laughed. “I think we might be diagnosed with hallucinations.”

“Eh,” he shrugged. “I’m sure we could convince someone.”

Loki smiled and they finished their coffee in silence. Tony took the cups while Loki lay Fenrir on his bed, smoothing the hair off his sweaty forehead. “They look so perfect when they’re asleep,” he said. “Like nothing could ever be the matter.”

“Perfect’s overrated.”

Loki nodded. “Very much.”

They met the others coming down from the roof as they crept out of Fen’s room. Thor was carrying Hela. He smiled awkwardly at Loki. “She fell asleep.”

“I-I can see that,” he said, his eyebrows practically hidden in his hairline. “Thank you. Shall I?” He held out his arms, and Thor came closer to shift her over. Then with a nod and an awkward smile, he turned and walked away with Jane.

Loki turned to Tony, his eyes still shocked wide. ”Did that just...”

Tony just laughed and shook his head. ”I defy anyone to spend some real quality time with your kids and not at least start to find them awesome.”

Chapter End Notes

This is the first time Thor's really got to see the children as CHILDREN. He spent a lot of the day with them while Loki was out of it and although he still finds them odd, he's starting to see why Loki's been such a Mama Bear over them. Basically, he's starting to learn...it's not all sorted yet, but he's getting there.
This chapter is entirely full of fluff and silliness, and someone asked me MANY chapters ago for a girls' night out! Well, here it is: Loki and a bunch of OCs go for cocktails!

Also, I don't know if you guys realise, but for people to be so fond of original characters is a massive compliment as a fic writer (I don't know if I can speak for all fic writers but I can't imagine many would argue!) We all come here to read about characters we already know, and the fact that a few people actually requested MORE time with these guys is a huge big deal for me, considering I also write original stuff lol! Thank you very much, and I really hope you enjoy this chapter, a rare thing from me, almost entirely devoid of angst!

The kids were vocal in their disappointment the next morning, when Loki told them they would have to return to the apartment. Luckily Mother helped by asking the children to show her their rooms, and the neighbourhood. Part of him was embarrassed that the queen of Asgard should be walking around downtown Inglewood, but there was no way he was prepared to let his children see that. The new apartment wasn’t far from the old one, and they walked to Ronnie’s restaurant for lunch.

“Lucas, children, you’re back! I was so worried about you all!” She kissed everyone in turn, giving Eisa an extra tight squeeze, and shook Loki’s mother’s hand when they were introduced. “Come, now, sit. You all look so thin, you haven’t had good food without me. No, no, I insist, sit down and I’ll bring you fried plantains to start. There’s a pot of stew, I’m trying a new combination of spices, I need test palettes.”

It was nearly dark by the time they wandered home, full and tired. Mother slipped her hand in Loki’s arm and he smiled down at her beautiful face, feeling the peace settle over his family like a blanket even as cars whipped past blaring loud music.

“You have found yourself a home here, Loki,” she said.

Loki nodded. “It was not intentional,” he admitted. “Narfi chose this place with a pin in a map. But it feels like home, strangely.”

“I am proud of you, you know.”

He frowned slightly. “I am your disgraced son. What is there to be proud of?”

She just smiled and watched Hela and Fen singing a funny heckling song from school, and let Loki stew.

“Father, are we going to go back to school tomorrow?” Jor asked suddenly.
“I had not expected you to return until after the New Year.”

All three triplets made obnoxious awww sounds, and Loki raised his eyebrows. “Really? You want to go back for the last week?”

“I was planning to return tomorrow as well,” said Sleipnir from just behind him.

“I suppose there is no harm in it…it just surprises me.”

“The lead up to Christmas is the best time,” said Hel. “Nobody ever does any work anyway, it’s just a good excuse to make cards for each other - and we’d like to see our friends again.”

“Very well,” he laughed. “We had better get an early night then.”

The grumblings were a lot more conflicted than usual.

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“No fucking way! Lucas! Where have you been, man?”

Dianne nearly flattened Loki with a hug, and Salma wasn’t far behind. “We couldn’t get hold of you, what happened?”

Loki bit his lip. He hadn’t even considered what he would tell his own friends. The children had decided to tell everyone there was a family emergency, saying a cousin had been in a car crash and they’d gone over to Kenya to help, and that way they could tell the truth about their time in Diani, and keep their lies simple. But he found himself wanting to tell his best friends something else.

He’d never been one for close friends. He had his lovers, they were his closest companions, and everyone else was a chess piece to be moved where it suited him. But here on Midgard, where he’d been too engrossed in running and hiding and keeping his suddenly even more vulnerable children safe, he hadn’t been able to scheme and weave his plots. And he’d accidentally ended up with not just one lover and confidante, but two close friends. More, if he counted Jenny and Alex, and Riri and some of the other students he’d brought so far in the last few years.

“It’s a long story,” he said at last. “One best told with plenty of alcohol.”

“I don’t drink,” said Salma. “Muslim.”

“One best told with plenty of fruit based beverages in strangely shaped glasses with tiny decorative umbrellas?”

Salma nodded. “Great. How about tomorrow night? I’ll hunt down a babysitter.”

“My husband’s on leave, why don’t you send Amina to mine for a sleepover?”

“He won’t mind?”

She shook her head. “He spends most of his time in a massive tent full of bored soldiers, I think he can handle an extra ten year old.”

She looked skeptical. “Three kids is a bit different to two. It’s like, 50% more children.”

“Trust me,” Dianne said. “He’ll be fine.”

“OK,” she said, obviously not believing a word of it.
Dianne rolled her eyes. “Oh, come on. Trust me. I’m gonna bribe him with a blow job, of course he’ll do it!”

“Oh, yeah, he’ll definitely do it. Lucas, story time, Wednesday night.”

Loki shook his head and laughed. “I have missed you so much.”

“You better not tell Salma any of this shit when you go to the gym, you hear?”

“I don’t have a class with him today,” she snorted. “You’re not missing out.”

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Riri and Alex ended up along for the ride the next day too, though Jenny was out of state at a body building contest. Eisa stayed in and watched the kids, and Loki walked to the cocktail bar Salma and Dianne had chosen, clenching his fists rhythmically and telling himself that everything was going to be fine.

He told them everything, at least in outline, starting from the day he left Asgard. Once he started, he couldn’t seem to stop, and the tale fell from his lips without inhibition.

For a long time, the table was silent. Alex sipped his drink.


“Fucking really? I mean, really now? You’re an actual god?” Riri smacked the table, leaned back in her chair and laughed. “That makes so much sense!”

“It makes sense that your self-defence teacher is a pagan god?”

“When he moves like Lucas, yeah, it does.”

“Prove it,” said Alex over his beer bottle.

Loki scrunched up his face. “I cannot. My father took my powers in punishment for nearly starting a war between realms.”

The table was quiet again, then burst out laughing almost as one.

“I’m sorry, Lucas,” Dianne giggled, snorting as she tried to breathe. “We’re not laughing at you —”

“Yes we are,” shrieked Salma, holding her sides. Loki rolled his eyes and failed to suppress a smirk.

“But that’s either the best prank ever, or the most ridiculous punishment I have ever heard.”

“Maybe he should ground you next time,” Riri laughed.

“Yes,” he deadpanned. “Except I used to be able to walk between worlds without leaving my bedroom, so not particularly effective.”

It took quite a long time for them to all calm down, and every now and again one would start laughing again out of the blue, and set them all off. “Are you quite finished?”

“No. I will never be finished laughing at you being the Norse god of mischief.”
“I’m not even allowed to believe in you,” Salma giggled.

“Terribly sorry my existence is inconvenient.”

Riri snorted a gulp of beer out through her nose.

Dianne was frowning off into the middle distance while Salma mopped up the spilled drinks, and Alex thumped Riri on the back. “Hey…is that why George has suddenly got scales on his neck?”

“Yes. His name is actually Jormungandr, and he turns into a giant serpent when stressed. And Fin - Fenrir - is a wolf shapeshifter, which is why his eyes are a more orange colour, and his hair is so much thicker.”

“And Helen?”

“Hela. She looks like a zombie if she needs to.”

Salma shuddered. “Wait, really? You’ve noticed this?” she asked Dianne.

“Yeah.” She was still frowning, like she was trying to work out the trick in an illusionist show. “Yeah, and I saw Elsa the other day too. She…I swear she was holding fire in her hand.”

“Her real name is Eisa, which means embers. She and her sister can both control fire. They get it from their mother.”

The table was quiet once again.

“Wait…this isn’t a prank?”

“If it’s a prank it’s a damn good one.”

“It’s not a prank,” said Loki. “Though I wish it were. I am the god of mischief, after all, as much as I may be depowered.”

Riri raised her glass. “To be honest, at this point, even if you tell me you were lying, I’ll still believe you’re the Norse god of mischief.”

Alex grinned at her. “In ten years he’ll be all like ‘no, Riri, get the fuck over it, I was pranking you’, and you’ll be like ‘I’ve burned the best part of my breakfast bagel in your name, please grant me a boon’.”

“Exactly.” She pointed the head of her bottle at him.

“That’s Greek gods you’re thinking of,” Loki grinned. “If you would like to please me, you can just give me the bagel.”

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“You truly don’t mind, do you?” he asked, as he, Dianne and Salma staggered back through Inglewood to their neighbourhood.

“Mind what?”

“That I lied to you, I suppose.” He tipped his head back and breathed steam into the chilly air, enjoying the buzz from the alcohol and hours of ridiculous, uninhibited laughter.
Dianne shrugged. “If either of us - hell, if any of us were in an even slightly similar situation, we’d do the same. The kids’ and their safety comes first, end of.”

Salma made assenting noises and nodded, grabbing Dianne as she stumbled slightly.

“If anything,” Dianne continued, holding up a finger. “We’re just grateful you told us in the end. You didn’t have to.”

He smiled and put his arm around her shoulders, squeezing the back of Salma’s neck where she walked on Dianne’s other side. “You are my best friends in the world. In all the worlds.”

“You’re definitely drunk,” Salma snorted.

“No so drunk that it’s a lie,” he smiled.

“So wait,” she said. “Are you telling us that we’re better friends than Tony?”

“Tony is different,” he waved his hand airily. “He’s…he’s…”

“More than a friend?” Dianne teased, dragging out the first word so it took on connotations previously unknown to such an innocent four letter word.

“Friends with benefits?” smirked Salma.

"Your boyfriend?"

“He is my lover,” said Loki, sticking his nose in the air.

“Ooooh, lover is it? Look at you, ancient god with your ancient turn of phrase.”

He laughed and pinched Salma’s arm. She smacked him. “So. You love him, huh?”

He was definitely drunker than he should be. He had no control over his face, it just squirmed into the soppiest smile by itself. “I do.”

“Then we’re happy for you,” she said, turning to kiss the back of his hand where it lay against Dianne’s shoulder.

“Did you just kiss me?” Dianne asked, crinkling her forehead up.

“No, I kissed Lucas. Loki.” She frowned. “Do you mind if I still call you Lucas? Or is that rude? It’s rude, isn’t it?”

“I don’t mind,” he said. “You can call me whatever you like.”

“Fuckmonkey it is then,” she said.

Loki threw his head back and laughed. “I have missed you two so much.” He shook his head and staggered into Dianne’s side, who staggered into Salma’s. She huffed and pushed them both. “Come to Tony’s place this weekend,” he said suddenly.

“How come?”

“He has been asking if he can host a party for the triplets birthday. I told him that dates in Asgard do not match up with those here, but he refused to listen and decided they needed a birthday party. Personally I think it is just an excuse to show off the suit and his new seidr to a captive audience of
eleven year old children. Fenrir has told him that Marco’s a big Iron Man fan.”

“Now *that* is a great idea,” Dianne nodded. “I bet he’d have a parents’ bar as well, huh?”

Salma rolled her eyes. “You’re a terrible, terrible person.”

“Yeah, but so are you.”

“Of course. Why do you think I hang out with you?”

Chapter End Notes

If anyone's interested in my ramblings about the original book I'm writing for NaNo which is loosely based on Sleipnir and Marnie's relationship in this fic, please find and follow me on Tumblr at Gold-From-Straw. It's called Zero Degrees, and it's finally starting to take on a life of its own ^_^
So some of you might have been privy to me moaning about how I couldn't figure out how to get the early days of Thor's growth shown effectively, and this is the way I eventually came up with. I really wanted to keep the POV limited to Loki and Tony, but actually, neither of them would have been able to see how Thor's feeling and thinking - Loki's still got his hackles up (even though he thinks he doesn't), and Tony's not looking because Loki and his family are more important to him, as they should be. What are your thoughts? Sorry Dianne and Salma didn't show up much here, Loki hasn't really introduced them to him. Not because he suspects they'll prefer his brother (they're too sarcastic for that) but because he still doesn't trust himself to spend much time with him, he's trying to keep thing superficial for his own self-preservation

Actually this is quite a convenient chapter because I just saw Ragnarok today! (No spoilers, don't worry). I pissed myself laughing, it was incredibly silly and funny, almost cracky actually...completely angst free. Possibly the exact opposite of TDW in tone. I'm sure I'll have to write a story to, uh, remedy that lack ;)

Thor scraped his hair back into a messy bun and took a deep breath, glaring at himself in the mirror.

“You OK there, Thor?” Jane asked, amused, as she tamed her own tangled curls. She nudged him away from the mirror and scrunched her face up at her reflection. “You look like you're going into battle. It's just a kids party.”

“Yesterday you were recounting tales of your own childhood birthday parties. I believe they describe a battle much more accurately.”

She snorted. “Yeah, fair enough. But really. What are you worrying about?”

He pursed his lips and fumbled through his mind for the words that would have come easily to Loki. Jane just brushed her hair in silence, waiting so patiently, and he was side tracked for a moment with gratitude and love for his girlfriend. She was so much cleverer than he could hope to be, so kind and generous, and yet she never made him feel like he was an idiot for getting tongue tied. Even when he committed some faux pas, she simply corrected him firmly and graciously, and did not expect him to know everything about her world in advance.

“Have you ever come to realise that you might have been wrong about something? Something...huge?”

Jane stopped brushing her hair and put the brush down with a quiet clunk. “Is this about Loki.”
He screwed up his face. “About the children.”

She smiled, her warm brown eyes soft as they met his in the reflection. “Yeah,” she said. “Yeah, I have. I grew up in quite a homophobic environment, I’m ashamed to say - it wasn’t really overt, but there was a boy in school who left because he got bullied so badly about being gay. I didn’t ever say anything about it.” She shook her head. “I remember thinking…how wrong he was, how weird.” She blushed and ducked her head in shame, and Thor put his hand on her shoulder, thinking of a drunken conversation she’d had with Darcy about this situation.

“I remember the moment when my mind started to change,” she continued. "I was in college, and my roommate invited her girlfriend round for dinner. It sounds stupid, but I remember lying awake that night thinking that Lily had been so normal, so much like me. There had been nothing ‘weird’ about either her or Reine, so why had I automatically assumed this boy in school was weird for being gay?” She put her hand over his on her shoulder. “I didn’t change overnight. I’m sure I still come out with asshole comments, or at least asshole thoughts. But I’m thinking about what I was taught as a child. I’m asking myself if an opinion I’ve got now is something that’s coming from inside me, or from old acquired prejudices, and I think I’m getting better at not being a bitch.”

Thor laughed and wrapped his arms around her. She fit against his body like she was made for him, as different as they were, they were complimentary. “I cannot imagine you being a bitch. You are the kindest woman I know.”

She rolled her eyes and blushed. “You only think that because I’m good at not saying whatever comes to mind first. So…you want to tell me what you’re re-thinking?”

He sighed. “I…I am finding it difficult to reconcile the memory I have of those children with what I see of them now.”

“What do you mean?”

“I saw them tear from my brother’s skin, Jane,” he said softly, rubbing his eyes. “There was so much blood - he likens it to birth, but is there really meant to be so much blood?”

“No idea,” she shuddered. “I’ve heard it’s a pretty messy business, but it’s not exactly something I’m interested in investigating.”

“And then when they were older…they look…evil when they are in their other form. I know Loki says it is a defence mechanism, but it looks more like an offence than a defence to me. And yet…when I see them now, how can I think any ill of them? To look at Jor is to look at the brother of my childhood. Fenrir is…” he shook his head. “He is the sweetest child I have ever had the opportunity to know, I just…I cannot see him and that slavering wolf as being the same being.” He kissed Jane’s hair and smiled. “And of course Hela worships you, therefore she must be perfect.”

Jane laughed again, and rubbed his arm. “Why don’t you tell Loki?”

He groaned and leaned back, busying his hands by finger combing through her hair. “Every single time I try to talk to my brother it ends in a battle.” He snorted. “Me, avoiding battle. This is new. But I do not want to hurt him any more, and I do not…trust myself to speak to him about something so raw without saying something that will break this fragile peace.” A static spark shot from her blow-dried hair to his fingers as he stroked the soft curls. “And now I just feel like a coward! I have never avoided any confrontation, yet here I am avoiding my own brother?” He shook his head. “I don’t know what to do to fix this.”

She wrapped her arms around his waist. “You’ll figure it out, Thor,” she said. “If it’s important to
you, you’ll find a way. Just…be sensitive with him as well, OK? He’s not like you, he thinks about things differently.”

“How do you mean?”

“Well,” she frowned. “I haven’t known him for long, of course, but I can see that he’s one of those over-thinkers, you know?” She shrugged. “Takes one to know one. You said he always thinks the worst of what you say, so…maybe say less? Think about what you want to say, be clear when you say it?”

“That sounds exhausting,” he sighed.

“Well, like I said, if it’s worth it…”

“It is,” he nodded firmly. The old determination settled into place, and he nodded once more at himself in the mirror. He was determined to fix things with Loki and if that meant coming up against arguments and battle he would not back away from this challenge. No more cowardice, he was the god of thunder! He would win his brother back!

He smiled at Jane and bent to kiss her on the cheek before walking out into the mansion with his head held high. He was going to face his brother head on and remind him of everything they had as children. It wasn’t so long ago that they were inseparable, if he could just explain to Loki where they had diverged they could work together to bring their brotherhood back into line. It would be like a grand quest!

He trotted up the stairs to the main part of the building. Tony had offered to hold a birthday party for the triplets at the mansion and Thor could hear the children outside screaming in delight as he allowed them to take turns playing with the Iron Man gauntlet or stepping inside the armour. He spotted Loki through one of the plate glass doors, leaning against a pillar with his arms crossed, his head tipped back and a wide smile on his face as Tony lifted one of Fenrir’s friends off the ground with the Iron Man boots.

A sudden flare of jealousy made his steps falter. Was he actually jealous of his brother’s lover? Or at least of the attention Loki gave him? He frowned and shook himself. Of course he should miss Loki’s time and company, they had been close for centuries. But there was no reason to feel jealous, because he was going to get his brother back.

As he walked across the main room to the door, movement caught his eye. He turned, and immediately forgot what he’d been planning to do.

Sleipnir - his nephew - was standing in the doorway to the dining room kissing a girl with dark blonde hair, his arms wrapped around her waist.

Thor must have made a noise because both children - children! They were mere children! - jumped apart and looked up at him guiltily. Sleipnir’s face, which was as pale as Loki’s in the first place, drained of colour completely when he recognised him, and his eyes went wide. His hands started clenching into fists, and the girl grabbed his arms and started rubbing them. Sleipnir wouldn’t take his eyes off Thor and, breathing fast, moved to place himself in front of his girlfriend.

He was afraid of him.

It was like ice water poured directly over his heart. For perhaps the first time Thor saw what he was to these children. And they were, as he had just realised, only children. He had thought of them as his brother’s downfall, his brother’s pain for so long he had never noticed that they had their
own lives, their own identity beyond how they affected Loki.

“Sleipnir,” he said softly, moving slowly towards him with his hands out. “Nephew, it’s OK. Are you well?”

“He gets these spasms,” the girl said, glancing up at him. “If he gets a shock his arms cramp up really badly. So, uh…” she grimaced slightly. “You’re Stephen’s uncle, huh? I’m Marnie - sorry about…”

Thor shook his head. “Can I do anything?”

“I’m fine,” Sleipnir said, voice barely above a whisper. “S-sorry.”

“Calm yourself, Sleipnir,” he said. “I didn’t mean to…um…interrupt.” He narrowed his eyes. “Do your parents know about you?”

They looked at each other awkwardly and Marnie tugged at her hair. “Not yet…my mom’s a bit difficult…”

“She and father have a…well, they do not get along very well.”

Marnie snorted. “You mean my mom flirted outrageously with your dad until he told her he was dating another man.”

Sleipnir shrugged. “Yes.”

As if on cue a woman’s voice came through the door. “Marnie! Marnina, you come out here right now!”

“Aww, shit,” Marnie groaned.

“Is that…?”

“Yeah,” Marnie nodded. “That’s my mom.”

She sighed and made to walk past Thor and Sleipnir, but the boy grabbed her hand and linked their fingers together. “Do you want to…?”

She smiled up at him, her hair falling around her face. “It’s as good a time as any. I’m not gonna hide from her.”

Sleipnir took a deep breath and nodded, and the two of them walked out into the garden together. Thor followed to find an impeccably dressed woman, her blonde curls flying around her face and her features twisted in rage jabbing her finger at Loki, and anger flared in his chest. How dare she speak so to a Prince of Asgard?

He was ready to leap into action in front of his little brother when Marnie’s voice snapped out. “Mom! What the hell?”

“Marnina Dawn Jenkins you get in that car right now! I told you to stay away from that boy, his family’s a bad influence on you.”

“And what is that supposed to mean?” Loki snapped.

“Look,” she said, turning to him. “There’s nothing wrong with being gay as such, but to flaunt it in front of children like this is just inappropriate. If you just—“
“Mrs Jenkins,” said Sleipnir softly. He walked forwards, his head held steady but his free hand clenched so hard Thor could see the skin of his knuckles stretched white over the bones. “My father is hard working, strong, and loving. He encourages us to think of the consequences of our actions, he teaches us to care for those around us, and he teaches us to communicate with those we love. He has done this by himself, and he has done this since he started dating Tony. I know you teach Marnie the same things, too. So please don’t come here to shout at my father about the one thing he has done for himself in years. I respect you and like you as the mother of my…my girlfriend, but I can’t let you speak to my father like that.”

The entire group held their breath. Marnie squeezed Sleipnir’s hand and he blushed under her approving gaze. Loki simply stared at his son with his mouth open.

“How dare you—“

“Mom, stop it,” Marnie said, calm and firm.

“Marnie…” Her eyes softened, her forehead crinkling as she looked over at her daughter, hand out as she implored her.

“No, Mom, I’m sorry,” she said, swallowing hard. “I love you, and you’re a great mom, but…but you’re wrong about this. I’ll come home after the end of the party, but I’m not leaving with you now because you’re wrong.”

She stared at her daughter, and looked from face to face in the crowd. Loki sighed and took a step forward. “You are more than welcome to stay —”

“No. Just…” she held up her hand, her eyes hard again and glaring at him. Without another word she turned and stalked off to the driveway.

Tony was the first to speak. “Well, shit.” As if a spell had broken, some the other parents snorted with laughter. Tony grimaced. “Sorry, guys. Uh, kids, don’t swear.”

Thor was sure he heard Jor mutter ‘fuck’ under his breath anyway, and his lips twitched, remembering Loki and his love of elvish profanities in their youth. One by one the parents and children drifted back to other conversations or came up to give messages of support to Loki, Tony, Sleipnir and Marnie. An older teenage girl with her hair in two thick auburn braids came up to his nephew. “Hey, Stephen. That was cool, what you said.”

“Thank you, Jenny.”

She nodded. “It’s good to hear, you know? Someone standing up for people like me. Whatever the reason.”

He smiled shyly at her. She winked at him, punched his shoulder gently and slouched off. One of Loki’s friends watched the girl with a tremulous smile and gave Loki a tight hug before following. Tony shared a long look with Loki, steeped in history and love, before turning back to the excited crowd of children. And Loki himself raised his eyebrows and smiled at Sleipnir and Marnie. “So,” he said. “It did not take you two long to get together.”

“Father,” Sleipnir groaned, and Marnie laughed.

Perhaps this was not the time to get his brother back, Thor thought, watching Loki tease his son. The child he had been forced to leave as a horse for centuries. Thor bowed his head.

“Can I call you Uncle Thor?”
His head whipped around in surprise to see Hela standing and considering him with her head on one side. “Pardon?”

“I know you didn’t used to like us,” she said. “But you’re not so bad now. And I call your girlfriend Auntie Jane, it just seems silly not to.” She smirked slowly and he blinked at how much she looked like Loki…like her father. “I’ve been thinking about calling Tony Dad one day just to mess with his head. What do you think?”

Perhaps, he thought, it would be best to learn more about these children. If only from a tactical standpoint. He wasn’t sure he should even be crowned until he had a few more strategies for dealing with them.

Chapter End Notes

I don't know if it was clear but Thor's been made aware of homophobia and many other social issues because of living with Darcy - even if her internship only lasted a term, that was enough for a poli-sci student to take it on as her grand purpose in life, to educate an alien on human social issues! And music. You know it would happen!
Tony - Glut and Einmyria

Chapter Summary

Finally, FINALLY, we get to meet Loki’s absent daughter and first wife...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Life settled into a new kind of normal. Loki kept refusing to stay with Tony full time, insisting he had to be able to care for his children himself, not rely on other people all the time. Tony wondered who he thought he’d been relying on all his life, but when he asked, Loki just laughed as if it was obvious, and Thor, losing a game of monopoly to Eisa and Sleipnir, rolled his eyes and nodded in agreement with Tony behind Loki’s back.

The triplets were happy to stay at school for the time being, but that was only going to last a couple of years at the most. Eleven year olds age quickly, and the kids had something obviously different about them now their divine aspect had been unlocked. Jor’s skin shimmered like scales on his neck in the right light, Fenrir’s hair was thicker and greyish, and everywhere. And Hela’s eye had a nasty habit of popping out. Loki had to go into school one day to say she’d lost it in an accident and wore a prosthetic.

“They didn’t even ask how it could be possible to see out of it,” he said to Tony. “Are all humans this wilfully blind?”

“Mm, pretty much,” he said. “We’ve been trained for decades, maybe even centuries, to laugh at the idea of magic. Nobody wants to seem credulous.”

“Well, there is naïveté and then there is blindness. Why do you not trust your senses?”

“Because the information’s filtered through perception and previous experience,” he explained. “Come on, Lokes, get off your high horse. I guarantee you the Aesir and the Frost Giants are the same.” He raised his eyebrows at his boyfriend, who ruled his eyes but didn’t refute it.

Narfi was still pretty much the same. He was too young to have ever had much control over his magic anyway, and most of it lay dormant. He didn’t respond much to the psychiatrist Tony found, but as she said, it was normal. Once Narfi started to trust her, they mostly drew or played with toys while Dr Shah raised various topics of conversation to gauge his reactions.

Eisa seemed to flourish the most. She returned to her studies and got her old jobs back, and with her magic she was able to get everything around the house done in half the time.

“I’m so sorry, Eisa, I know I’m not pulling my weight,” said Loki one evening when Tony was helping Sleipnir with his physics homework.

“Don’t be silly, Father, you do more than enough for all of us.”

“But you have taken on nearly all the chores —“

“Because they are easy for me. And getting the triplets to help is excellent practice for them.”
He sighed and nodded, but didn’t look happy about it.

“Uh, Father, there is one other thing.”

“Yes?”

“Well…Mother contacted me this morning. She…she wants to visit. With Einmyria.”

“She does?” Loki sounded like all the air had been sucked from his body, and when Tony looked up at him he was paler than usual, holding a plate limply in one hand.

Eisa nodded. “May I say yes?” The please was clear even to Tony.

Loki still looked shell-shocked, and it took him a moment to nod. “O-of course. Yes, of course they can. Uh. If we move Hela onto the sofa bed with me and put down an air bed, the three of you can share your room —“

“She just wanted to visit for the day, Father, don’t worry.”

“Oh. Of course.” Loki looked torn between being relieved and disappointed, and Tony felt a pang of jealousy. This was Loki’s first wife, and they hadn’t exactly broken up because the love was gone.

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D-day was set, and as it approached, Loki got more and more flustered, and Tony got more and more morose. He’d swing between reminding himself that Loki was with him now, and he had to trust that, and realising that if Loki wanted Glut back, Tony would step away and leave them to it. All he wanted was for Loki to be happy. Even if that made him desperately miserable.

“What are you moping for, Tony?” asked Pepper, exasperated.

Tony considered dissembling, but Glut was arriving tomorrow and Tony wasn't able to get drunk any more. “Pep,” he sighed, throwing his tools down. “What if I just got made immortal only to have to spend it alone?”

Pepper narrowed her eyes at him, then kicked her heels off and sat. “Explain.”

When Tony had finished his tale of woe, Pepper leaned over and gave him a hug. “Oh, honey. You’re borrowing trouble, you know.”

“But what if—“

“What if what, Tony? What if you guys don’t last forever?” She shrugged. “Not much you can do about that, is there? I mean, obviously, be a good boyfriend. But it takes two and you can’t make him choose you, but,” she held up one finger, “you’re acting like it’s a done deal. You can’t make him choose her either, and that’s almost what you’re doing. You’re choosing for him in your head.”

“What can I do?” He threw up his hands. “I just want to be prepared.”

“Fuck that,” she said, and Tony’s eyes widened, his eyebrows disappearing into his fringe. “That’s not the Tony Stark I know. You’re not a defeatist, Tony, so you go out there tomorrow and meet some more of your boyfriend’s family. Charm them, keep Loki calm and show the kids a good time.”

“You know, I’ve missed your little Pep talks.”
“Ha ha.”

***

Loki was practically vibrating out of his skin when Tony arrived, bringing Thor and Jane along at Glut’s request. “Fenrir, have you brushed your teeth? Hela, you may not wear those shorts, I haven’t had a chance to mend them yet. Sleipnir, your shoes are in the middle of the hallway.”

“Hey, there, Cheaper by the Dozen,” said Tony, and remembering Pepper’s advice, made him a cup of coffee. “Calm down, babe, you got this.”

“But look at the environment I have been subjecting our daughter to. When I was a prince, and she was a diplomat, we were able to give our children everything, and now—”

“Now Eisa is a grown woman who’s chosen to live with her dad and half-siblings because she’s got great taste and can see how awesome they are.”

Loki let out a long breath, his shoulders slumping but his eyes still flickering from side to side. “You really think so?”

“I know so. Anyway,” he nudged Loki, “it’s not like we’ll be bringing them here.”

They piled into a couple of Tony’s cars and drove to the field Heimdall had identified as a perfect Bifrost target. Jane had been in charge of organising that, Tony thought she might have had a full orgasm when Queen Frigga had sent an astral projection to explain it all and allowed her to take all the readings her heart desired. She set up all her sensors while they waited with the farmer and his kids. He’d signed a confidentiality agreement with Pepper, but that didn’t stop him from wanting to bring his own kids along to gawp a little. Who could blame him? Fenrir took a shine to the little kids anyway.

The clouds gathered and formed a tornado-like funnel, blowing straw across the dry ground. The crack was deafening, as were the kids’ screams of delight. Sleipnir giggled a little at their excitement, but Tony’s eyes were fixed on the two women who emerged from the centre of the rune circle.

Holy shit, did he have a lot to live up to. Glut stood with her chin high as any princess, her red and orange dress fitted and flowing to her feet. She had short hair, high cheekbones and flawless skin two or three shades darker than Eisa’s. The girl in question flung herself into the woman’s arms with a squeal.

Glut’s smile only managed to make her look even more beautiful, a shine highlighting the roundness of her cheeks and bracelets tinkling on strong forearms as she embraced her daughter.

With a mom like that it was hardly surprising that her younger child faded into the background a little. Einmyria wore what was probably the Vanir equivalent of jeans and a t-shirt, black with red detail. her hair was unruly and flared around her face in loose curls. She had her hands shoved into her pockets, and a constellation of freckles was splattered across her pouty face. Tony wanted to be annoyed on Loki’s behalf about her lack of enthusiasm, but he felt for the kid. It wasn’t easy being a teenager, let alone seeing your dad again for the first time in years - centuries even - and surrounded by all his other children.

Eisa now grabbed her little sister, and Loki stepped forward to greet his ex-wife, wiping his pals on his jeans. “Glut…welcome.” He held out his hand awkwardly.

Glut looked at it and raised her eyebrow. “I am not going to shake your hand, Loki,” she said, her
“Yes, of course,” said Loki, closing his hand into a fist and hunching his shoulders.

Glut shook her head and stepped forward, grabbing him in a surprisingly unladylike bear hug. “You are still an idiot, Odinson.”

Loki laughed and rubbed the back of his neck as she stepped back. Glut glanced back at Einmyria, then deliberately turned to greet Thor and meet Jane.

“Einmyria,” said Loki softly, looking at his daughter like his last hope. “May I have a hug?”

Her lips twisted and she didn’t look at him, her shoulders hunched up around her ears, but she did give him a brief hug, her body barely meeting his, and Tony’s chest ached to see Loki try to hide his disappointment.

“Glut, Einmyria, I’d like you to meet Sleipnir, Jor, Fenrir, Hela and Narfi. And this is Tony, my boyfriend.”

Tony could hear Loki’s gulp as he introduced his families to each other, and he dived right into the charm offensive. “Hey, it’s great to meet you.” He shook both their hands. “Loki’s told me so much about you both.”

“Really?” frowned Einmyria.

“Einmyria,” snapped her mother through clenched teeth.

“What? It’s not as if he knows anything about me.”

“We have spoken about your manners, young lady.”

“It’s OK,” said Loki, his posture even more curled in on itself. “She’s right, after all.” He looked at Einmyria from under his eyelashes. “I would like to get to know you, though, if you are willing.”

She just shrugged and looked at the floor again, and Glut audibly gritted her teeth.

“Oh, is there anything you guys wanted to do here?” Tony asked, slightly desperate.

“We are at your disposal,” Glut replied with a grateful smile and a regal bow of her head.

“Do you want to go to the beach?” Hela asked, looking eagerly at Einmyria, obviously expecting to make a new friend.

“That would be delightful,” said Glut. “We have never been to Midgard, anything you find enjoyable, I am sure we will like too.”

Tony guided everyone back to the cars, tipping the farmer as they picked their way across the stubble field. Fenrir waved mournfully.

“We’re going back to my place for lunch,” he said to Glut as they sat in traffic on the way to Verona beach. “There’s a private beach just below the cliffs there, but it won’t be low tide until this afternoon, and my friend Pepper thought you guys might like to get a little culture shock, see the tourist sights.”

“We should take them to see Shakespeare,” said Jor, leaning forward from the back seat. “That’s real Earth culture. And Romeo and Juliet is even set in a place called Verona.”
“So is Two Gentlemen of Verona,” Tony reminded him.

“Is that the one with the dog? His first play?”

“You know better than me when it comes to Shakespeare, kid,” he laughed.

“I love Shakespeare,” the boy told Glut, who looked amused. “Father quotes his plays really well, he knows most of them.”

“Loki was always a talented wordsmith,” she said softly, and Tony concentrated hard on finding a parking space.

Malibu was at its campy finest, weightlifters showing off in the winter sun, enough breeze for the surfers, which managed to spark even Einmyria’s interest, and the bright colours of swimsuits and towels as the human peacocks flaunted their feathers.

Hela was determinedly following Einmyria, even trying to hold her hand, but the teenager wasn’t having any of it, and eventually she fell back to walk with Jane. Thor was giving Narfi a ride on his shoulders, and Loki was talking to Glut, which Tony did not feel a pang over, thank you very much. He turned his attention to the other demoted god instead.

Thor had surprised Tony since the day of the meteor shower. He was really making an effort with the kids, going over to visit or sitting with them when they came over to the mansion, though he was still a bit stiff around them. But he was also trying not to crowd Loki too much, only staying for an hour at a time. He’d offered to babysit once or twice, though. Loki had, of course, thanked him and insisted there was no need.

Pepper met them back at the mansion for lunch, and as anyone could have predicted, she and Glut got along instantly, two queens in all but name.

“How do you think it’s going?” Tony asked Loki.

“It’s…it’s good, I think,” he said, standing back a little. “I had a chance to talk with Glut properly, without all the angst and the yelling at each other.”

Tony couldn’t help it. He knew he was supposed to be taking Pepper’s advice and being just as self-assured as he was with business, but, “that’s great,” he said, with false cheer. “So are you guys…are you going to make another go of it?”

“Of what?”

“You know. I know you didn’t divorce because of a lack of love, and she’s still the mother of your oldest children, your first love, your—“

“By all the Norns, Tony, is that really what you - really?” He had his arms crossed, frowning at Tony.

“Uh…”

“Look. You idiot. The factors that broke us apart were complicated, and would not have been solved by one day of adult conversation, even back then. On top of that, Tony, you complete moron, I am already in love with a foolish human with an extended life span and serious self esteem issues. Just so that there is no ambiguity, that is you.” He held Tony’s chin and bent his head to kiss him, just a gentle slide of lips, pecks at the corner of his mouth, and a press of foreheads. “Also,” he added with a soft smile. “Glut remarried about three decades ago, to a lovely
Ljosalfar named Meredith, and they are very happy together.”

“Oh.”

“Yes. Oh. You fool.”

“You should really stop insulting me, you know.”

Loki just smiled and kissed him on the temple before turning back to the room.

Chapter End Notes

Oh my gosh...this is the home strait...the rest of this fic takes place on this one day! What am I going to do without chatting to you lovely people once a week!? My next long fic isn't even FrostIron ;__;
Loki watched his family all together, his children passing pizza around, Hela sidling up to Einmyria again and telling her about olives. Sleipnir shyly answering Glut’s questions. He leaned on Tony’s shoulder, wishing Vali and Sigyn were here. But even that streak of melancholy couldn’t ruin the contentment of the chatter and laughter, Narfi pressed against his thigh, attention focused on his pizza, Jane and Pepper listening to Jor expound on Shakespeare. And Thor offering to teach Fenrir how to use a wooden sword. He struggled with his residual anger. He didn’t want to risk believing that Thor could ever be as good an uncle to his middle four children as he always had been to the older girls and the twins, but over the last few weeks Thor had actually been making an effort, without trying to crowd Loki. It was like the last two years on Earth had grown him a sense of empathy and patience. He was torn between wanting to hold onto the hate that had fired his engines for so long, and hero-worshiping his big brother as he had done for centuries more before that. A middle road felt impossible.

It was almost inevitable that the drama should happen only after he had started to relax. The pizza was eaten, people were leaning back in their chairs, starting to feel dozy.

“Einmyria, do you want to see the view from the cliffs?” asked Hela.

“No, thanks.”

“Aww, come on, you don’t have to be shy, and it’s really pretty.”

“I said no. I’m not shy, I just don’t want to.” Einmyria raised her voice and Loki leaned forward to catch Hela’s eye, tell her to leave Einmyria alone.

Before he could speak, though, Sleipnir put his hand on Einmyria’s shoulder. “She didn’t mean to bother you. We’re just all happy to have another sister.”

Einmyria slapped his arm away and stood, her hands shaking and teeth bared. “I am not your sister. I hate you. You stole my father away from me, and I will always hate you!”

She was screaming by the end, shoving Sleipnir’s shoulders where he had stood with her, his hands raised in surrender. Then there was barely an instant of silence before she ran out of the room, crying. Sleipnir glanced round the group, his eyes wide in horror and embarrassment, then hunched his shoulders and ran out of the other door.

Loki stood staring from door to door, a hollow pool of panic instead of any hint of what to do about his children’s distress.

“Loki,” said Thor, standing. “Let me find Sleipnir. You should talk to Einmyria.”
His brother waited for confirmation, and Loki’s immediate instinct was to reject the offer, mistrust him. But Thor’s brow was furrowed, his eyes radiating concern, and Loki let himself rely on someone else, something he had not done by choice since Sleipnir was born. He nodded once, and Thor sprang into action. Loki glanced at Glut, then ran after Einmyria, listening carefully to gauge where she’d gone.

As he’d expected, he heard soft sobs coming from one of the spare bathrooms, and knocked softly. “Einmyria?”

“Go away.”

“I’d rather talk - and apologise - if that’s OK?” There was no response, and Loki turned his back to the door and slid down so he was sitting on the floor. “I know it’s not much. I know I let you down. But I really am so sorry.”

There was silence for so long that Loki wondered if he should give up and leave her. He was about to stand when the door behind him opened and he fell back with an oof.

“Oh, shit!” Einmyria squeaked. “Are you OK?”

“Yes,” he chuckled, rubbing his head and looking up at her from the floor. “Are you?”

She sighed and slumped down to sit cross-legged with her back against the bath. Loki sat against the opposite wall. “Why did you leave us, Father?”

He rubbed his forehead and grimaced. “What do you know already?”

“I know you had another child just after I was born. You gave birth to him, which is just…did you leave because he was a boy and you wanted an heir?”

“What? No! Of course not!”

“That’s what Lord Aulfred’s daughter told me,” she said sulkily.

“And what did your mother tell you?”

“She said you’d been hurt and it changed you. She said you didn’t feel like you could be a good father any more, but then I found out about the triplets, and the twins - why didn’t you just come back to us, Father? If you suddenly felt you were fine with children again, why did you not want us back? What did I do to displease you?”

She started sobbing again, curled in on herself, and Loki crawled across the room to gather her into his arms and just rock her. He felt torn. He had never wanted to appear weak to anyone, but least of all to his children. A father was meant to be infallible, unbeatable. How could he admit to having been debased in the worst way, and, more than that, allowing it to break him? But to choose to let her believe that this was in any way her fault was cruel.

“I did not cheat on your mother, Einmyria,” he said softly, trying to work his way up to the admission.

Einmyria snorted. “I know how sex works, Father, I am not a child. I wish you and Mother and Eisa would just accept that and stop trying to keep me from the truth.”

“I am trying, it’s just…” he stopped and dropped one arm so they were both sitting with their backs to the bath, the other arm still around her shoulders. “There was a battle. Led by a shapeshifter. I
turned myself into a female horse to lure him away - I had intended to return to my own form and
battle him but I must have…misjudged. Sleipnir was…the, uh, the product…”

“Wait,” she said, turning her body to face him. “You were raped? Oh, Norns…oh, and I’ve been so
horrible to you and—“

“Einmyria!” He grabbed her wrists to pull them away from her horrified eyes. “I did not tell you
this to make you feel worse, I wanted you to see how this is not your fault, please don’t.”

“And the triplets, the twins! Were they the same? Were they the same? Were you raped again,
Father?”

She was nearly in hysterics, her eyes wild as he shook his head, holding her gaze. “The triplets
were born of magic,” he said. “In the process of trying to destroy a witch, they grew under my skin
- but that doesn’t make them any less my children. However they have come about, I love you all,
and it was none of your fault to be born as you were.”

“But why couldn’t you…why didn’t you come home, we would have looked after you!”

“I did,” he said, letting her hands go and looking at his lap. “After Sleipnir…but I…” he laughed
mirthlessly and tried being honest with himself as well as her. “I couldn’t bear to be looked after by
the very people for whom I was meant to be strong. I was making my family miserable and I knew
it was best for you to have one amazing parent than a broken father who might well end up
breaking us all.”

“Father…” She sighed, and put her head on his shoulder. Loki put his arm back around her and
pulled her close, inhaling the smell of her hair and basking in the peace of having nearly all his
children safe under the same roof. His fingers tingled with it, like a low grade spell, and he thought
it was fitting that his children gave him the same joy as his magic.

“Are you better now, Father?” she asked, still sniffling a little.

He was tempted to say yes, of course, if only to put her mind at rest, but she was right. She wasn’t a
child any more, and she deserved to know at least some of the truth. “I cannot go back to who I
was before, I am sorry. But I am getting better. I was getting better before, but your mother and I
had made our lives apart, and I was with Sigyn. I was planning on asking Glut if I could visit you
again soon after the twins were born.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“It had been a hundred years since I had seen you, any of you. I was scared,” he admitted. “I didn’t
want rejection, and as stupid as it sounds, if you don’t ask, there is always the possibility, the
dream, of perfection. If you are rejected, even that is taken away.”

Einmyria nodded wryly, and he wondered if there was a story there, some crush at school she had
not yet acted upon. And maybe now he would have the chance to find out. His heart swelled, but
most of his body was now tingling, and he wriggled to dispel the pins and needles. “Are you ready
to come back? My ridiculous mortal body is protesting the hard ground.” He nudged her. “I think I
am getting old.”

She giggled, and it was the best kind of reward. “I can’t go back out there all puffy,” she moaned as
she stood, looking at her red eyes in the mirror.

Loki smiled and nodded. “Would you like me to send your mother? This is not my area of
expertise.”
She nodded. “Thank you, Father.” Then, after a brief hesitation, pulled him close for a tight hug. “Thank you.”

“I love you, Einmyria,” he murmured into her curly hair.

“Love you too.”

“I’ll send your mother with the mascara,” he grinned, kissing her on the tip of the nose, and left, the spring in his step nothing to do with the incessant pins and needles in his toes.

Glut was talking to Tony when he found her, looking unconcerned but picking at her thumbnail in a nervous tell he recognised from their youth. “Is she well?”

He nodded and smiled. “We had a good talk, I think. But she needs her mother’s skills with makeup now.”

“Loki Odinson, admitting there is something he can’t do,” she teased. “You really are growing up.”

He chuckled. “I had better find my son, make sure Thor is not encouraging him to fight for his honour or anything.”

Jane pointed towards the bedroom wing. “Hel and Jor went after him a few minutes ago, so he might be mustering an army now,” she joked. “Seriously, though, Loki. He’s a lot better than he was.”

Loki nodded and wandered down the corridor until he heard his daughter’s voice, raised in anger. “She’s horrible, though, she thinks she’s so much better than us. She’s just like those cliquey girls at school, I just want to *slap* her!”

Before Loki could step in, his brother’s voice rumbled. “You know that is no way to make things better, Hela. Einmyria is hurting too.”

“But she hurt *our* brother.”

“Aye, and she is your sister. You have all had such a difficult time of it, my poor nieces and nephews. There has been too much battle in this family. Let us try to fix things some other way instead?”

There was a small sniffling noise and movement. Loki felt his heart swell outside the bounds of his own body as he realised his berserker brother was comforting Loki’s little girl - and encouraging her not to fight! He never thought he’d see the day.

The tingling in his limbs seemed to intensify as he pushed the door open and smiled at the sight of the bearded Thunder God cuddling a sniffling Hela and Jor. Sleipnir sat next to him, smiling and wiping his eyes.

“Thank you, Brother,” he said, and Thor looked round.

“It was my pleasure.” He rose slowly, lowering the kids to stand as he walked up to rest his hand on Loki’s shoulder. “I’m sorry, Loki. I was wrong about a lot of things.”

“So was I,” he said, trying to keep his chin from wobbling to much, and pulled his brother in for a tight hug.

The tingling turned to tiny static shocks, and as he pulled back he saw arcs of electricity skitter
over both him and Thor. A rumbling crack sounded, and just as white light washed across his vision he saw Thor’s hand in the air.

For a moment there was nothing but blinding light and crackling silence, then with a whoosh, everything came back to him.

“Jesus Christ, what have you two done to my spare room?” yelled Tony.

Loki’s eyes snapped open. All the furniture was overturned, the three children looking dazed and windblown, but still standing upright in among the debris. There was a hole in the roof, and Thor stood in full armour, holding Mjolnir.

Loki felt a pulse of pride that his brother had proven himself worthy, and by counselling calm and moderation to his niece as well. The pinprick of jealousy was droned out by the hope that he’d be able to pass the test too one day.

He reached out to thump Thor on the shoulder in congratulations, and froze. His vambraces were back. He looked down to see his own battle armour, gold, black and green, his cape hushing around his ankles, the leather firm and cool against his skin.

“Well done, my sons.”

Both Thor and Loki spun to see Odin and Frigga standing arm in arm amongst the rubble.

“Father…Mother. We passed the test?”

Frigga smiled and Odin included his head. “You have learned diplomacy and empathy, Thor, and your strength may now be tempered with thought. Loki, you have learned to accept help, and that your weakness does not detract from your strength. I am proud of you, sons. You are true princes of Asgard.”

Chapter End Notes

Phew! I'm kinda nervous about this because poor Einmyria hasn't had much time to be built up here, so I really hope I've done her justice? Poor girl, she just wants her daddy, and thinks he doesn't love her any more :(. I just couldn't think of a way to bring her in earlier, and it is so much Loki's story, so I hope it doesn't feel tacked on here! But this chapter is one of the main reasons I wrote this story - I hated the idea of Thor getting his worth back by fighting again, he was up for dying for his friends well before he got banished, he didn't learn anything! THIS I feel is a much better lesson for both of them to learn...ummmm, what do you guys think?
Tony - Uncertainty

Chapter Summary

Now that Loki’s got his powers back, Tony’s not sure if he’ll want to stick around. Pure fluffy fluff ^_^

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tony found Loki lying on his back on the roof, staring out to sea. He was wearing human clothes again, but to Tony’s eyes there was no mistaking him for a human. It wasn’t anything he could pin down, more a general air of assurance and power projecting inches away from his flawless skin. He couldn’t imagine this Loki’s hair getting sweaty and creeping out of his ponytail.

He couldn’t imagine this Loki’s hair tied up in a ponytail, for that matter.

Loki noticed him standing there, leaning against the doorjamb, and turned to smile.

“How’s it feel to be the badass Norse God of Mischief again?”

“Pretty badass,” he said with a laugh. He held out one arm to Tony, and he gave up pretending to be cool and tucked himself against Loki’s side, head resting on his shoulder. He inhaled the slightly tingling magic smell of him, and wondered. He wanted to ask, and he really didn’t.

“So…you’ll be heading back to Asgard to pick up your princely duties, huh?”

Loki hummed. “Yes, I suppose so.”

He tried to tell himself he was happy for Loki. He’d had a really rough couple of years, shit, he’d had a fucking awful century or more. He deserved to have something go right for once.

And Tony had a few millennia to get over him. There were plenty more immortal fish in the sea, right?

“Are the kids gonna be OK back in Asgard?”

“I think it will be good for Narfi to be back with his grandmother. But the triplets - no, I think I shall send them to school elsewhere. I was thinking of talking to Einmyria, to see if she would be comfortable with them attending her academy in Vanaheim.”

Tony leant up on one elbow and frowned at him. “You’re gonna send your kids to boarding school? Really?”

“What? No, of course not. I have worked for decades to have them back with me, why would I send them away?”

“But…isn’t Vanaheim another world? Even with the Bifrost that’s a hell of a commute.”

Loki’s lips twitched. “Tony, did you know there is a grove on Alfheim where plums grow?”
“What?”

He held up his hand and continued. “Their scent permeates the air at this time of year, the flesh is rich and purple, skin flecked with silver imperfections. They burst on your tongue when you bite into them, fragrant and sweet. You cannot eat them without the juice running down your chin. And then when you reach the centre, the stone is made of silver so pure your teeth will dent it if you are not careful.”

“Well,” said Tony, swallowing the drool that imagery had set off. “That’s all very nice, but what does it have to do with—“

“Would you like one?” he asked, and disappeared.

Tony sat up with a jolt, his mouth open. A minute later, Loki reappeared, sitting cross-legged on the sun bed with two large purple fruits in one hand and a smug expression.

Tony gathered his composure and took one. “You handing me your plums, Lokes? Bit forward of you.”

Loki’s smirk turned into a wicked grin and he flicked his tongue out to lick the smooth violet skin of the fruit before fluttering his eyes shut and biting into it, hollowing his cheeks to suck on the juice.

Tony cleared his throat and shifted on the sun bed. “So. Alfheim. That’s another world, huh?”

Loki nodded.

“When you said world-walking, I expected it to be a bit more complicated than that, really. So it’s just a step between planets?”

“Between realms,” he corrected. “Between them, within them, if I know where I am going, yes, it is just a step. I could probably go to other planets, if I had a visual reference, but I have never tried to go to Mars or anything.”

“Why the hell not?”

“Because,” he said, as if Tony was a particularly slow pupil, “I have been without my seidr most of the time I was on Earth, and before that I had no reason to try.”

“Oh. So...” he nibbled on the plum. It really was delicious. “So this isn’t going to be quite such a long distance relationship, then?”

Loki leaned forward and kissed him, all sticky lips and wickedly curling tongue. “I can visit you during my breaks, do the school run across three realms, and meet you for dinner.”

“You could move in with me at last,” he murmured into Loki’s lips.

“Is that what you would like?”

Tony drew back slightly and really thought about it. “Yeah, it is. Maybe in a few decades I’ll want to leave, but I don’t want to waste any time with Pepper and Rhodey.”

Loki smiled, sweet and a little shy. “Then I accept. Sleipnir will want to continue school here, anyway, and Eisa wants to finish her degree, although she is doing so as a Vanir-Jotun, not a mortal. I am not sure if the Einherjar will welcome her back, as she has defected.”
“Still want to move the triplets to Vanaheim?”

Loki nodded. “Unless they really want to stay. I don’t want them to age quickly any more, and they will soon start to stand out if they do not. They don’t have to worry about making new friends quite as much as other children, they are all so close to each other. And the academy in Vanaheim will help them develop their seidr. And I can see Einmyria daily there.” He twined their fingers together. “I will be able to give you a few seidr lessons of your own, if you like.”

“Will you teach me how to teleport?”

“Probably not,” he admitted. “Sleipnir and I are the only beings anyone knows of who can world walk, and if he decides…” he took a deep breath. “Well, if he would prefer to stay human, I will be the only one. My father can travel without the Bifrost if he gathers a lot of dark energy, but while it is as fast as my own form of travel it exhausts him.”

“Hey, talking of humans, I wonder how Jane’s taking all this.”

“Actually, she may become the first human in several centuries to receive one of Idunn’s apples. It has been mostly her influence that has moderated his temper. Father said she reminded him of our mother, and he would not want to waste that. She may yet be the next queen of Asgard.”

“Woah, go Dr Foster. Science humans for the win.”

“Indeed,” said Loki, leaning forward to kiss him again. “I think my family feels a great debt to a couple of human scientists in particular.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh my god you guys...I'm so emotional right now! I love you all so much (I'm not even drunk!), thank you so, sooooo much for reading my story, and all the kudos, and the comments! The beautiful beautiful comments ;_; This has been, by an absolute mile, my most popular fic ever, and I'm going to miss uploading it and you guys giving me such awesome ideas! I really appreciate every click and kudos and comment.

There is the slight possibility of a sequel which might maybe deal with Steve and Bucky BUT I would want to do it properly - I'd write it out on paper first and then edit and transcribe it before uploading - I only just started this story back in January so we're talking a year at the minimum lol! I'm always open to requests - I won't promise to put any of it in but I can try lol!

I ALSO finished my NaNo, Zero Degrees, which is loosely based on this premise (the start is similar to the start of this story, but as if it was told from Marnie's perspective...it then massively deviates from there lol!) ^_^

Please come hang out with me over on Tumblr if you do that sort of thing (gold-from-straw) ^_^ I hope you enjoyed!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!