Avengers: A Deal with the Devil
by IBeginToDreamAndDiffer

Summary

... or with the Norse God of Mischief and Lies. Tony has a proposition for Loki. Loki would be lying if he said he wasn't intrigued.

Notes

Disclaimer: The world and characters of The Avengers belong to Marvel. I own nothing but the plot and make no money from this story.

Author's Note: I'm apparently full of random FrostIron stories lately, no idea why. I was trying to get to sleep last night... well, this morning, 'cause I went to bed at 3am. Anyway, I was trying to sleep, and this conversation between Loki and Tony popped into my head. So when I woke up I sat down and wrote it, and... there we are. I really love dark!Tony and dark!Loki, especially when they're paired together :)

I hope this wasn't too bad!

Update [10/02/14]: Once a one-shot, turned multi-chapter

Cheers,

{IBegToDreamAndDiffer}
The penthouse was locked down tight, JARVIS with strict instructions not to let anyone in without first asking Tony. The genius had just gotten out of the shower and dressed in comfortable jeans and a t-shirt, his hair sticking up all over the place, still wet. He wandered into the living room and over to the bar, taking two tumblers from the counter and then grabbing a bottle of whiskey. He poured until the two glasses were full and then took a seat on one of the stools, sipping his drink and letting the flavour roll over his tongue.

He wasn't too sure that Loki would appear. Oh, the god had understood Tony's request; had smirked and narrowed his eyes at Tony before disappearing in a puff of green magic. But whether he actually turned up was another matter entirely.

Tony still wasn't sure if this was a good idea or not, but, well... all of his bad ideas had turned out okay in the past. Apart from his birthday party, that had been a disaster. He still wasn't completely okay with Rhodey stealing one of his Iron Man suits, but he could always steal it back if he wanted. He just... couldn't be bothered, at least not yet.

Tony had just taken another sip of whiskey when he felt the air change around him. There was
never any real warning of Loki appearing, not if the god wanted to remain unseen. But the hairs on
the back of Tony's neck stood on end, and a shiver passed down his spine. The animal part of his
brain was registering danger and telling him to fight or hide.

Instead of doing either of those things, Tony raised the tumbler to his lips once more and took
another drink. 'Thirsty?' he asked without turning.

There was a soft chuckle from behind him and Tony finally turned. Loki was standing in the
middle of the room, hands clasped behind him, his head cocked slightly. His hair was slicked back
as usual, although it was a bit curlier than Tony usually saw it. He was wearing tight leather pants,
boots that ended beneath his knees, and a soft green... tunic, was the only word Tony could think
of.

The god looked Tony over a few times before saying, 'It's about time you gave me that drink you
promised.'

'Yeah, well,' Tony shrugged and slid the other tumbler across the bar as Loki approached, 'you
were a bit tied up last time.'

'Indeed,' Loki hummed. He passed Tony and rounded the bar, stopping on the other side of it
before the mortal. His long, thin fingers reached out and slid the glass over to himself. Loki
wrapped his hand around the tumbler and picked it up, bringing the glass to his nose. He took a
sniff, eyes still on Tony, before sipping.

'Well?' Tony said.

'Not bad,' Loki conceded. 'I will admit that you mortals have far better taste in alcohols than
Asgard.'

'It's all mead up there, huh?' Tony said, remembering Thor's many, many stories that involved
barrels of ale.

'Mm,' Loki hummed, taking another sip. 'Now,' he said when he'd set the tumbler back down. He
leaned both forearms on the wooden counter, bright green eyes fixed on Tony's chocolate brown.
'Why am I here?'

'Cause I asked you,' Tony said. Loki's lips twitched, and Tony chuckled in response. 'Okay, so I
sneakily requested that you come here to meet me alone. Same thing.'

'Mm,' Loki hummed again, clearly waiting for a proper response.

'I have a... proposition for you,' Tony said, eyes on Loki's.

Loki, of course, understood immediately. He stood straighter, though was still slightly hunched,
and his eyes dropped to his glass as he ran a single finger around the rim. 'You want to make a deal
with me?' he questioned, but didn't wait for a response. 'Tisk, tisk, Man of Iron. Heroes don't make
deals with villains.'

'I'm not a hero,' Tony retorted, once more drawing Loki's attention.

'Oh?' the taller man questioned.

'I built the Iron Man suit to protect myself and destroy the people who hurt me,' Tony shrugged one
shoulder. 'I fell into the hero business.'
'Poor Stark,' Loki smirked, 'are you tired of being a hero?'

'Again; not a hero,' Tony said.

'Your actions speak louder than your words,' Loki said. 'Isn't that a saying you mortals are fond of?'

he added, bringing his drink up once more.

Tony just nodded and sipped his own, now half-empty, glass. He grabbed the bottle, which he'd
left near his elbow, and splashed a liberal amount back into the tumbler. He held it up to Loki and
the god nodded, so Tony topped up his glass as well.

'Would you be interested in a business transaction?' Tony questioned as he set the bottle aside.

'It depends on what that business transaction entails,' Loki replied. 'I don't make a habit of going
into business with mortals, you all die far too easily.' He smirked over his glass, and Tony just
raised an eyebrow. 'What if you die before your end of the bargain is upheld?' Loki questioned. 'It
seems to me that I'd be putting a lot of investment into something that could crumble in my fingers.'

'So you won't go into business with me 'cause I might die?' Tony laughed. 'Well sorry to burst your
bubble, Rudolph, but I have it on good authority that you Asgardians aren't exactly immortal.'

'No, they're not,' Loki agreed, 'but I'm not of Asgard. Frost Giants are much, much harder to kill, as
I'm sure Thor has told you.' Tony didn't say anything, not wanting to start a fight about Thor. And
talking about the blonde god was a sure way to get Loki riled up. 'None of your mortal weapons
could ever harm me enough to bring about my downfall,' Loki continued, sliding his tumbler
across the bar with his finger and thumb. 'And I think I proved that Asgard, who very much have
the means to destroy me, can't keep me long enough to do so.'

Tony smiled at that. He remembered Thor reappearing a few months after the New York battle
claiming that Loki had somehow managed to escape. Two weeks later and Loki was back, blowing
up parts of Manhattan and laughing like a lunatic.

'Well,' Tony finally spoke, making Loki look at him. 'I can't exactly make myself immortal,' Tony
said. 'If anything my life expectancy is way below the average.' Loki quirked an eyebrow, clearly
confused. 'My heart's bad,' Tony said, tapping at the arc reactor beneath his chest. 'I was poisoned,
suffered a fair few heart attacks, and have shrapnel lodged in my chest. All of that along with the
strain of having an arc reactor embedded in my chest has cut my life expectancy. I'll be lucky to see
fifty.'

Loki frowned at that, his eyes narrowed, suddenly darker than before. 'The average life of you
mortal men is eighty years,' he spoke.

'Yeah, but mine's fifty,' Tony repeated. 'And that's if I don't have another heart attack or a stroke or
anything else due to this thing,' he said, tapping the reactor again before taking a drink of his
whiskey. 'That's not to mention all the injuries I sustain when in the suit, and all my drinking and
drug taking in my younger years. I'll probably be dead in five or six years.'

Tony had come to terms with it long ago. He'd known, back when he started drinking heavily (and
in his twenties when he'd tried every drug on the market) that he wouldn't live a long, full life. The
arc reactor, and then the palladium poisoning, had just cut his own life expectancy in half.

'Five years,' Loki echoed, still frowning. He suddenly stood tall, looming over Tony, and Tony had
to tilt his head back to look the god in the eye. 'Now that just won't do.'

'It won't?' Tony echoed, and Loki shook his head.
'No, not at all,' the Jötunn said. 'I don't go into business with mortals, especially mortals that will be dead in five years.'

'Okay then,' Tony sighed. Well, he hadn't exactly had high hopes for this meeting, but he'd had to try. 'I take it you can show yourself out?' he said and knocked back the rest of his drink before grabbing the bottle. He went to pour another drink for himself, but Loki's fingers were suddenly wrapped around his wrist, skin cool against Tony's own. 'Can I help you?' Tony questioned, glancing up at the god.

'No, but I can help you,' Loki said, his lips twitching in a smile.

'I thought you couldn't,' Tony said and gestured vaguely at himself with his free hand. 'Mortal, remember?'

'Ah,' Loki said and stroked Tony's wrist, feeling the human's pulse jump beneath his thumb, 'but what if you weren't?'

Tony frowned and looked down at their joined hands, at Loki's thumb still smoothing over his wrist. 'You have a way to make me... immortal?'

'As immortal as Thor and myself,' Loki said. 'You would still be able to die, it would just be much, much harder to do so. You'd also heal much faster, be stronger and swifter, and your heart would no longer be a problem, nor would the shrapnel embedded in your chest. Of course,' Loki suddenly drew back, dropping Tony's hand, and Tony ignored the shiver of want that passed through his body, 'I would recommend keeping the reactor in your chest,' Loki continued. 'It makes you immune to most forms of controlling magic.'

'Really?' Tony grinned. He'd known that, of course; he was immune to Loki's sceptre when even Thor would have fallen under its spell. But he hadn't known that he was immune to other forms of mind-control.

'Indeed,' Loki said. 'I find it very, very hard to look into your mind.'

Tony scowled and clutched at his head, as though he could physically stop Loki from digging into his brain. It made the god laugh; a soft, warm, chuckle that made Tony shiver again. Damn sexy magicians.

'Your mind is hazy, disorganised, and impossible to get a grip on,' Loki said. 'Not only is that just how it naturally is, but the arc reactor in your chest emits a type of energy that my magic simply cannot fight.'

'Well that's an awesome side-effect,' Tony decided, finally grabbing the bottle of whiskey. He topped up his glass and toasted Loki. 'To me building a magic-proof reactor!' He took a large swig, Loki watching in faint amusement. 'So,' Tony said after clearing his throat and lowering his glass, 'immortal, huh?' Loki just nodded. 'You'd make me immortal just for a business deal?'

'It depends on the business deal in question, and what I'm being offered in return,' Loki said, leaning on the bar once more. He sipped his drink before adding, 'I would have to be gifted with something of equal value to one of Íðunn's apples.'

'How about my allegiance?' Tony shot back.

Loki's eyebrows climbed in surprise. 'You would bind yourself to me?'

'Only if you bind yourself to me in the same sense,' Tony replied. 'I'm assuming that magic
contracts are a bit more binding than mortal ones.'

'Indeed,' Loki said. 'Whatever you promise cannot be denied for fear of pain and even death.'

'So if we promised not to kill each other, and then did so, what, I'd die?' Tony questioned.

'Yes,' Loki said. He smirked suddenly, one corner of his mouth rising. 'Still interested in a deal, Stark?'

'Only if you call me Tony,' Tony smiled back.

Loki chuckled. 'Anthony, then,' he conceded and took another drink of his whiskey. And, okay, Tony's full name had never sounded that sexy before. 'What exactly is it that you want?' he asked.

Tony finished off his own glass before pouring another, and then re-topping Loki's. He only sipped at this one, not wanting to get drunk in Loki's presence. He didn't doubt that they'd both haggle over the exact terms of their... binding.

'I want SHIELD near-destroyed, the Avengers too,' Tony said. Loki's eyebrows once again jumped in surprise. Whatever he'd been expecting, it clearly wasn't that.

'You wish to kill them all?' Loki questioned.

'Most of them,' Tony said, 'because really, where's the fun in being evil without some heroes to play with?' He smiled at Loki, then, and leaned forward a bit. 'You could kill us all easily, Lokes,' Tony said, making Loki smile slightly. 'You could break my neck right now, or stab me in the throat. Thor and the Hulk would be a little harder to take down, but come on; you can turn invisible, you'd be able to behead them easily.'

Tony let his eyes roam over Loki's face, resting on his lips for a bit. Loki licked them and Tony scowled, meeting Loki's eyes once more. The Trickster smirked at him.

'But you haven't,' Tony finally continued, 'you just play with us every other month. Which makes me think that you're off doing other things in other realms, and only fight us when you're bored.'

Loki chuckled and sipped his drink, the scent of whiskey reaching Tony's nose after Loki had lowered the glass. 'Well done, Anthony.'

Tony inclined his head in thanks. 'So,' he said, 'that's why I think it'd be best to mostly destroy SHIELD. Leave a few of them alive, like Fury, Coulson, even Agent Hill. After finding out that I'm the one who brought them down they would, of course, send the Avengers after me. And that'll be fun for a while. We can kill some of them, if you want, I really don't care. But I definitely want to completely destroy the World Security Council.'

'And just who are they?' Loki asked.

'They're in charge of SHIELD and a number of other secret government organisations,' Tony shrugged. 'They deal with alien invasions and super villains. They're the mastermind, while SHIELD's the footsoldier.'

'I see,' Loki hummed. He looked down, eyes on his glass as he swirled the amber liquid around. 'I'm curious as to why you want to destroy SHIELD all of a sudden,' Loki said, eyes shifting up to Tony. 'Why now?'

Tony smiled, but it was a dark, dangerous thing that had Loki more intrigued than any of the words
they'd exchanged. He'd sensed the chaos in Anthony Stark when they'd first met, but he'd been too broken, too damaged, to properly explore it. Now Loki's mind was his own, his actions completely his once more. He had all the time in the world to pick Tony Stark apart.

Well, after he'd fed the mortal one of Iðunn's apples. It wouldn't do for Tony to die.

While Loki had been thinking, Tony had grabbed a file from the end of the bar. He slapped it onto the counter before the god and tapped the navy-coloured cover. 'This is SHIELD's file on me,' Tony said and slid it closer to Loki. 'Be my guest and have a look.'

Loki smiled and pushed his glass aside to grab the file. He flipped it open and found that the first page was just general information; Stark's date of birth, his achievements over the course of his life, as well as his address and known associates. Loki flicked through a few more pages, skimming over reports of Iron Man missions and sightings and Stark's near-death experiences. He paused briefly to read over the time when Tony had been poisoned by his own arc reactor, but was soon moving on again.

He finally stopped at a page that detailed a healer's (doctors, midgardians called them) impressions of Stark after looking the man over and reading other files on him. "Anthony Stark is mentally unstable", Loki read, eyes alight with mirth as they found Tony's.

'Like that wasn't obvious,' Tony snickered, sipping his drink.

"His inability to work with others makes him a danger to this organisation and his team mates"; Loki read another paragraph. "He suffers from a multitude of mental disorders, narcissism, depression, and bipolar II disorder being suspected but not confirmed"... Loki trailed off, eyes skimming the report rapidly, finger tracing a few sentences. He finally reached the end, tracing the sentence just above this Doctor Arthur's signature. "It is my professional opinion that any and all contracts with Tony Stark be terminated immediately. While Iron Man is an asset to the organisation, Stark is a danger and will bring about the deaths of himself, his team mates, and innocent agents at some point in the near future".

When Loki finished he look up at Stark, who was smirking despite the words Loki had read outloud. 'Keep going,' Tony said, nodding at the file. 'Read the hand-written notes on the next page.'

Loki did as asked, flicking the stapled pages over so that he could read the last. These notes had been handwritten and then photocopied and stapled to the file Loki had. Loki's bright eyes took in the words as he said them aloud; "Iron Man is needed, Stark isn't. It is recommended that SHIELD mount an operation to obtain the technology from Stark. Once SHIELD is able to manufacture its own suits, Stark will no longer be needed. SHIELD's a secret organisation and there's nothing Stark can legally do if we steal his technology"... Loki's eyebrows climbed as he read the signature at the end. 'Signed by Agent Phil Coulson.'

'And addressed to the World Security Council via Director Fury,' Tony said. He set his drink aside, having had far too much already, and tapped at the file once again. 'Now do you see why I want to destroy SHIELD?'

'They betrayed you,' Loki said.

'So did the Avengers,' Tony said. 'I found this file while I was snooping in SHIELD's computers. I did some more research, and it turns out that Agents Romanov and Barton were sent here not as a part of the Avengers, but as part of the operation to steal my technology. Captain America's part of the division trying to get me to outright quit.'
'What about Thor and the green one?' Loki questioned.

'Thor's just an Avenger and an ambassador for Asgard,' Tony said, 'he has no idea that SHIELD's trying to steal from me. Neither does Bruce- the Hulk. He's here so that SHIELD can keep an eye on him and use him.'

'Just like you,' Loki commented.

'Just like me,' Tony echoed in agreement.

They fell into silence as Loki looked over Stark's file once more, Tony busying himself with watching the god read. Finally Loki flipped the file shut and pushed it aside. 'I understand, now,' he said. 'You want revenge.'

'I want to destroy those who think that they can steal from me,' Tony growled.

A smile tugged at Loki's lips. Well, well, well... he really, really hadn't expected this when he'd come to Stark Tower. He'd been expecting a trap, maybe, or Anthony demanding to know how magic worked; it was no secret that Loki's talents enraged the mortal man. Loki really hadn't expected Stark to turn on his friends.

Then again... they weren't really friends, were they? Not if they were trying to steal from Stark. Not if they didn't trust him.

'What do I get out of this?' Loki asked suddenly, drawing Tony's attention. 'I help you destroy the World Security Council, as well as most of SHIELD and the Avengers. But what do I get?'

'A chance to kill many, many mortals who would kill and torture you if they had the chance,' Tony said. 'You'll also have access to all the money, technology and equipment that I and Stark Industries can supply. Stealing is all well and good, but having a laboratory where you can work safely would be better, wouldn't it?' Tony grinned. Loki chuckled. 'You'll also have me on your side. I'm smart, I can work out almost any problem I set my mind to. We can bring magic and Midgardian technology together so that our enemies can never, ever defeat us. We can also figure out a way to get Thor stuck in Asgard permanently...' Tony trailed off and grabbed his tumbler, swirling the liquid around. Loki just watched him. 'Think of what we could accomplish, Loki,' he said. 'You, a magician and Prince of Asgard. And me, a Prince of Midgard in my own way.'

Loki nodded. Yes, Tony was definitely a prince of his own realm. He had money and power, and the masses practically ate out of his hands. Almost every business and home in the world had Stark technology, and he was able to talk or buy his way out of any and all trouble he got himself into.

Loki stood suddenly and Tony watched as the god rounded the bar and approached him. Loki grabbed Tony's legs and pressed them together, and next thing the mortal knew he had a lap-full of Norse god.

'So,' Loki hummed as he draped his arms over Tony's shoulders, and Tony dropped his tumbler of whiskey on the bar. 'I make you immortal and we bind ourselves to each other, ensuring that we cannot betray the other. We help to bring down SHIELD and this World Security Council while playing with the Avengers. We work together to bring magic and technology together, and we keep each other safe from those who would do us harm. That means you keep me away from the public eye and all government organisations, and I keep you safe from any aliens who want to kill the Man of Iron who destroyed an entire Chitauri fleet.'

Tony blinked... okay, he'd had no idea that any aliens wanted to kill him for that, but whatever.
With Loki on his side, he was pretty sure he'd be able to keep himself alive.

'Sounds about right,' Tony said and let his hands trail up Loki's back before going back down again. He squeezed Loki's hips before grabbing his ass, and Loki rolled himself forward, pressing against the bulge quickly hardening in Tony's jeans. 'I must admit I wasn't expecting this,' Tony said, referring to their current position.

Loki chuckled and leaned forward so that his breath blew across Tony's ear. 'You hoped, though,' he whispered.

Tony could only nod. Yeah, he'd definitely hoped, and dreamed. Fuck, had he dreamed. All the flirting Loki had done with him hadn't helped, either.

'So about that deal,' Tony muttered when Loki started pressed kisses to his ear, his jaw, across his beard.

'I'm sure that it will take quite a while to work out all the specifics,' Loki hummed, 'and I'm in no hurry to do so.'

'Yeah, me either,' Tony breathed when Loki's lips ghosted his own. He looked up at the god, who's eyes had turned dark. 'Paperwork can wait,' Tony agreed.

Loki smirked. 'Indeed,' he said. And then he crushed his lips against Tony's, the mortal groaning and arching up. Yeah, the paperwork could definitely wait.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

**Author's Note:** Ah, you people and your kind words; look at what you made me do! Well, my muse made me do it, really, so I'm kidding.

So, anywho, this will now be a multi-chapter story. I have no idea how many chapters there will be, and the updates probably won't be that regular. I'll aim to update as often as I am able and not leave you hanging. So I hope you enjoy :)

Also, please take note of the new warnings; I've labelled this with “graphic depictions of violence” as a precaution. When Tony and Loki are involved, and the destruction of SHIELD, it's better to be safe than sorry.

[Dreamer]

Tony smirked when he opened his eyes to find Loki- the God of Mischief and Lies- snuggled up to his side, bite marks still vaguely visible on his neck. Tony had bit *hard*, because Loki had kept shouting, “Break the skin, I don't care, just fuck me *harder*!” And, well... Tony had. So the marks were only just fading, and would probably be gone in half-an-hour.

Stretching languidly, and enjoying the way all his muscles ached in just the right places, Tony sat up. JARVIS immediately brightened the windows a bit and started relaying the usual facts; the weather, the whereabouts of the Avengers, Pepper's latest thoughts on how irresponsible/reckless/etc Tony was, as well as SHIELD's latest attempts to hack into Tony's computers.

Tony grinned when JARVIS informed him that SHIELD had successfully infiltrated the server that Tony had set up for them; it contained a few facts about some of his old weapons (which were all publicly available), a few bits of code on JARVIS and other security systems, and, of course, a few of Tony's older medical check-ups.

If Tony wanted to destroy SHIELD, he didn't want them to find out until it was too late; until he and Loki were completely ready to make them crumble. That meant feeding Fury and his merry band little titbits and false information; a few blueprints of his Iron Man gauntlets and boots, some information on the arc reactor technology and how it functioned the suit, and other odds and ends. Fury would be happy, thinking that he was slowly cracking Tony's systems, and Tony would laugh as he watched SHIELD play about like a child.

Tony stretched again before sliding out of bed, and Loki muttered behind him but didn't wake, just tugged the blankets closer, lips moving with soundless words.

Tony stared at him for a bit- because, *seriously*, the GOD OF MISCHIEF AND LIES (and Fire, he was sure he'd read that somewhere) was in his bed after a night of seriously energetic sex. Tony's life was awesome. He, Tony, was awesome. This was just another example.

Tony shorted and shook his head, getting rid of those thoughts as he went into the bathroom. It was all well and good to have an ego, but he couldn't let it get *too* out of control.
Tony hummed to himself as he started the shower. The hot water did wonders for his still aching body, and Tony was feeling very, very relaxed by the time he'd washed all the soap off. He immediately tensed, though, when a tall, cool body pressed against him from behind.

'Surely you do not fear me,' Loki murmured right into his ear, making Tony shiver, 'especially after last night.'

'I'd be an idiot not to fear you at least a little,' Tony said.

Loki chuckled, and damn if that didn't make Tony hard in .3 seconds. 'You are far more intelligent than others I've come across, Stark.'

'I've always said that,' Tony shrugged. He turned slightly, just so that he could see Loki from the corner of his eye. 'I tensed for all the right reasons,' he told the god.

'Oh?' Loki hummed, one eyebrow going up. His hair was a deep dark black under the spray of the water, slicked to his skull and completely straight. Tony wanted to run his fingers through it. He wanted to grip it as Loki fucked him... okay, so, he definitely wanted more sex with Loki, no complaints in that department. 'You seem to have a problem,' Loki commented, and when Tony blinked back to himself he saw that Loki was staring down at his crotch; more importantly, at the erection now straining against Tony's stomach.

'Yeah...' Tony hummed, 'gonna help me with that?'

Loki smirked and spun Tony around before pressing him against the tiled wall, Tony hissing at the sudden cold against his back. And then Loki slid to his knees, and okay, fucking hot.

'Feel privileged, Stark,' Loki said as he ran his hands up Tony's thighs, 'I do not kneel for just anybody.'

'Oh, I'll return the favour quick enough and you know it,' Tony said. He couldn't hold back any longer; he reached out with one hand, pushing his fingers through Loki's wet hair. Loki hummed and tilted his head back until the water ran down his thin, pale face. 'Get on with it,' Tony then said, tugging at Loki's head. 'Those tiles are fucking uncomfortable.'

Loki tipped his head forward while one hand wrapped around the base of Tony's cock. Lips parted, Loki licked them slightly before giving Tony a full-toothed grin. Yeah, Tony shouldn't have found that as hot as he did, but all common sense took a back-seat when Loki wrapped those lips around his length.

{oOo}

Tony's knees hurt, but he otherwise felt awesome, so he was in a pretty good mood as he led Loki into the penthouse's kitchen. The Avengers were still out of the Tower, and Pepper was handling all meetings for the next week (Tony had turned up at his last one in his Iron Man suit, destroying three walls, two tables, and the floor, so... yeah, she was handling them for a while) meaning that Loki was free to wander around the Tower, and he and Tony were free to discuss their plans.
'So, taking down SHIELD,' Tony hummed as he poured himself a mug of coffee. He also poured one for Loki; he wasn't sure if the Asgardian had ever had coffee before, but he was in a good mood, and he always made coffee and/or breakfast for his one-night stands, so... well, Loki wasn't really a one-night stand; Tony saw a lot of sex in their future. Anyway, he made coffee for Loki, whatever.

Loki sniffed at the mug and took a sip, and Tony got to laugh at the scrunched face Loki made at the liquid's taste.

'This is vile,' he muttered.

'Some people add sugar or cream, sometimes both,' Tony told him. 'It makes it sweeter.'

'Hmm,' Loki murmured and took a seat at the kitchen counter. Tony sat opposite him, and the two stared at each other.

'So, SHIELD,' Tony said. 'How are we gonna do that? I have a few ideas, but...'

'I have something that could help us in regards to spying on SHIELD,' Loki said and suddenly he was engulfed in green light, magic crackling over his skin and clothing like an electric charge. The first thing to change was his hair; it grew thicker and longer, falling in waves past his shoulders. His entire face filled in, becoming softer and rounder, as did the rest of his body. His hips and chest suddenly formed curves, his clothing stretching around it, and he shrank until he was barely an inch taller than Tony. The last thing to change were his eyes; the brilliant emerald green flashed brightly before dulling, becoming a pale blue-grey.

When the light finally dimmed Tony blinked rapidly. Because instead of Loki, sitting before him was a very, very hot woman with curves in all the right places.

'Uh... Tony gaped.

'Meet Lady Loki,' the woman- Loki- said with a smirk. It was the same smile; the same twitch of lips that made people hesitate when seeing Loki, afraid that the god would attack... which he would, so they were right to trust their animal instincts and run away. 'I'm usually taller,' Loki continued, voice still rich yet much softer, more feminine. 'And I usually leave my eyes the same colour. However, the chances of running into Thor either here or at SHIELD are high, and I'd rather not risk it. He's seen Lady Loki before...' He- she... whatever- frowned suddenly and tilted her head. Suddenly her hair flashed again, becoming blonde instead of black, and Loki twirled a strand around her fingers. 'Better,' she decided and went back to smirking at Tony.

'Okay,' the mortal hummed, 'this is a trick you didn't show me last night.'

Loki's smirk widened. 'I wanted to ensure that you would lay with me as a man, first. Too many of my past partners have insisted on me staying a woman after learning of this little skill.'

'We'll they were idiots,' Tony decided, making Loki blink at him. 'Seriously, you're gorgeous no matter what skin you wear,' Tony continued, shrugging one shoulder when Loki continued to stare. 'I'll fuck you in whatever form.'

'Hmm,' Loki hummed, her pink lips full and close to pouting. Tony swallowed thickly. Damn.

'Good,' Loki decided, 'because this form actually takes a fair amount of concentration and magic. I'd rather not be in it any longer than I have to be.'

'Fine by me, babe,' Tony shrugged again. 'So, you infiltrate SHIELD as Lady Loki and spy on Fury and the others?'
Loki nodded. 'While I can teleport in and spy whilst invisible, it would be best not to attract too much attention. They have readings of my magic, and while Thor isn't good at it himself, he's very good at detecting the energy I leave in a room. If we want to destroy SHIELD, we have to be careful.'

'Yeah, I get it,' Tony said. 'And having an inside man- er, woman- can only help. But,' and here he wagged a finger at Loki, making the Trickster snicker, 'you be careful, you hear? I don't want my partner going and getting himself captured or killed. I'm not in the mood to stage any rescue missions.'

'Oh, Stark, I didn't know you cared so much,' Loki practically purred, reaching across the table to stroke Tony's cheek.

Tony snorted. 'Back to Stark, am I?' he asked as he batted Loki's hand aside.

'You call me Rudolph, I call you Stark,' Loki shrugged. 'Fair is fair, yes?'

'Like you ever play fair,' Tony said.

'And you do?' Loki retorted.

'Touché,' Tony grinned, taking a sip of his coffee. 'So I suppose we should work out the terms of our contract?'

'Mm,' Loki nodded. He held his hand out and the tin of sugar appeared, as well as a spoon. Loki spooned a bit into his coffee, not speaking until he'd taken a sip and nodded in satisfaction, while Tony just stared a bit open-mouthed at the casual display of magic. 'We can work out the exact details of our deal, but I'd rather hold off on signing anything until you've consumed one of the Golden Apples.'

'Golden Apple?' Tony questioned, shaking off his thoughts.

'Mm,' Loki hummed again. 'Like I said; I don't make deals with mortals.'

'Yeah,' Tony murmured. 'So how exactly are you going to get one of these apples?'

'Theft, of course,' Loki said, smirking when Tony laughed. 'Iðunn keeps a close eye on her apples, but there are plenty to be found throughout Asgard. All I have to do is cloak myself, sneak in, and steal a few. It would help to have them on hand in case of injury; one bite can restore some of the gravest injuries.'

'How many do I have to eat to become like you and Thor?' Tony asked over his mug.

'Just one,' Loki said. 'They must be consumed every one hundred years. If an apple isn't eaten in that rough time-frame, you begin to age like a mortal again, and your strength and speed fail.'

'Maybe I can study them,' Tony mused, wondering if he could grow his own Golden Apples. There had to be a chemical explanation as to why the apples gave people unlimited life, strength, and speed. It was like magic; Tony was sure that magic was just another form of energy, one that humans were currently unable to detect and harness. But given enough time, Tony would, especially if he was now looking forward to a few thousand years of life instead of six or seven short ones.

'I love your mind,' Loki's voice broke into Tony's thoughts, making the genius blink. 'It's fascinating watching you work your way through a thought,' Loki added.
'You're not bad yourself, Reindeer Games,' Tony smiled. 'I find you particularly hot when you mutter spells under your breath.'

'Those are the more complicated ones,' Loki said. 'Most magic can be harnessed without the use of words. Others, however, require the use of mind and voice.'

'I'll figure it out,' Tony shrugged.

'I can teach you,' Loki offered.

Tony blinked. 'Seriously?'

The god nodded. 'As long as you teach me your Midgardian sciences, of course. With the added benefits of the Golden Apples, you should find it easier to tap into the magic all around you.'

'And with me explaining things, you'll pick up our tech in no time,' Tony grinned.

Loki chuckled and finished off his coffee before brandishing the mug at Tony. 'I want another.'

'Why yes, princess, I'd love to get you one,' Tony muttered sarcastically, even as he grabbed the mug. 'Anything else I can get you? Full English breakfast, maybe?'

'It depends on what a Full English Breakfast entails,' Loki replied.

Tony snorted. 'No idea, I've just heard the saying before. I can do eggs and bacon or an omelette.'

'As can I,' Loki said and stood.

'You know how to cook?' Tony questioned, back to Loki as he refilled both their mugs with coffee.

'Of course I do,' Loki snorted. 'Just because I was raised a prince doesn't mean that I'm unable to fend for myself.'

'That's good to know,' Tony said, 'because most of the time I order in. I can make a few things, though most of those are microwavable meals or frozen pizza.'

'I can cook a number of things,' Loki said. 'As long as you keep me satisfied in the bedroom- or any flat surface I choose- then I have no problem cooking.'

Tony almost dropped the mugs at the sudden onslaught of images those words brought on. Oh, wow, he could totally fuck Loki on the kitchen table in the communal kitchen. He imaged doing just that, the two completely naked, and then having dinner there with the Avengers, Natasha and Clint having no idea that the table they were leaning on had once held a naked Norse deity.

Tony snickered to himself, and then shivered when Loki's breath suddenly ghosted over his ear.

'You're thinking naughty thoughts,' Loki murmured. 'Do share.'

Tony shivered again but managed to say, 'Later. We have plans to make; a contract to write, remember?'

'You're no fun,' Loki pouted but move away. 'Would you like help cooking?' the god offered.

'Wow, you offering to do something nice?' Tony said. 'The world is ending!'

'Just be thankful,' Loki huffed. 'And you will not be able to gauge the world's end based on my mood; God of Lies, remember?'
Tony grinned and turned to peck him on the cheek; it was weird, he never did that, and Loki seemed surprised, too, but whatever. They were once enemies- still were, until the contract was signed- but they were forging a new relationship, one that put them ahead of everyone else. So Tony was doing things he'd never done before.

He didn't care. He was finally going to fuck over SHIELD like they'd been trying to do to him. Loki seemed to catch onto Tony's odd attitude, because he smiled; a soft, gentle thing that looked a bit out of place on the god's face, but no less... nice. He just gave Tony a gentle kiss before moving to the fridge, hunting for breakfast products. Tony smiled and got back to pulling pans out of the cupboards.

{oOo}

Tony ended up doing all the cooking. If there was one thing he could cook- besides pasta and frozen pizza- it was breakfast. A skill he'd picked up from taking care of some of his one-nighters. He didn't always have Pepper throw them out.

Anyway, Loki wanted the contract drawn up and signed as soon as possible, which meant gifting Tony with the same quasi-immortality that he and Thor shared. And that, of course, meant stealing apples. Oh, Tony loved it. Stealing was always fun.

So Loki gave Tony a quick kiss before he disappeared- using some of the hidden paths in the Yggdrasil, he said, which Tony didn't fucking understand. He just shrugged, figuring that Loki could explain it all in detail later, and got back to cooking. Loki had said that he would take no more than half-an-hour, maybe slightly longer, which gave Tony time to make them both breakfast; a large breakfast, because apparently Thor's appetite was the norm on Asgard, and Tony would have it too once he ate a Golden Apple.

He'd just finished plating up two very large meals- eggs, bacon, toast, fried tomato, fried ham, mushrooms, and fruit- when Loki reappeared. He swayed a bit but managed to catch himself, and Tony's eyes quickly took him in and found no outward signs of injury.

'Went well?' he questioned.

'Yes,' Loki said. 'It is just difficult, travelling on such beaten paths. I will explain the differences between travelling the way I do and travelling through the Bifröst later.'

'Kay,' was all Tony said.

Loki shook his head- maybe getting his magic into place, or just shaking off a thought, Tony had no fucking idea- before he pulled a small, leather bag from his trouser pockets... which, okay, where the fuck had that thing fit? But whatever. Tony wasn't about to question magic. He then pulled the ties open and reached inside before producing an apple.

It was... well, gold, which Tony had expected. A single, gold-brown leaf was still attached to the golden steam, and the skin was a complete, solid gold, like Tony's Iron Man faceplate, only brighter. Loki just held the apple out, and Tony didn't hesitate; he crossed the distance between them and plucked it from Loki's hand.
It was heavy—heavier than an apple should be—and shined with some sort of light. Tony's mind once again exploded; he had to be able to recreate this somehow. Soil samples from this “garden” where they grew, samples of the actual apple, any information Loki could provide... if Tony could artificially create his own Golden Apples, he and Loki would never have to return to Asgard for them. Magic had to be involved somehow, but Loki had already said that Midgard was practically dripping with it; humans just had no idea how to detect the energy, let alone harness it. Human evolution just hadn't reached that point yet.

Oh, but Tony, Tony Stark was different. He was a genius, even by Asgardian standards, and he was about to be a god. He'd fucking do it; he had the years.

'Well?' Loki's voice broke Tony from his thoughts, and the mortal—ha, not for long—looked up at him.

'Yeah, right,' Tony nodded. He took a deep breath, said a silent “SEEYA!” to his mortality, and took a bite.

He trusted Loki at least this far. Loki wanted this deal; he wouldn't kill Tony with a poisoned apple. It just wasn't his thing. Loki would rather snap Stark's neck than poison him. So Tony chewed, letting the brilliant, refreshing taste of the best apple he'd ever consumed roll over his tongue and then down his throat. Damn, that was a tasty fucking apple. If he could somehow just get the taste and artificially recreate that, he'd make billions to add to his already substantial wealth. Kids would eat apples for breakfast, lunch and dinner if they all tasted like this.

'Eat it all; stem, leaf, and core included,' Loki ordered.

Tony just nodded; easiest order he'd ever been given. Loki watched, curious, as Tony ate the entire apple, even going so far as to lick his fingers when he was done. Fucking awesome summer-tasting apple.

'I don't feel different,' Tony said as soon as he'd finished.

Loki rolled his eyes.

And then punched Tony. In the arm. Hard.

'Ow, you motherfucker!' Tony snarled, gripping his arm. 'What was that for?'

'That was me at my full strength,' Loki told him. 'If you were still mortal, your arm would have snapped clean in half.'

Tony blinked. Rubbed his arm. Okay, awesome.

'So... just like that?' he questioned. 'I'm a god?'

'Indeed,' Loki smirked. He sat on one of the barstools and pulled one of the large breakfast plates towards himself. 'Now eat. You will need it. Your body has adjusted to much in a very, very short period, and though you don't feel it now, you need to eat and rest.'

Tony just nodded. He trusted Loki on this; he was over a thousand years old (at least Tony assumed he was), he knew what he was talking about.
'So, there are probably a few things we should discuss before either of us sign anything,' Tony said a few minutes later. Loki hadn't been kidding; Tony's appetite had suddenly expanded, and everything on his plate looked delicious, his stomach apparently having no end. At least, he hadn't found it yet, and he'd already eaten half a loaf of bread. 'Like the invasion, for example,' Tony said.

Loki raised an eyebrow as he pierced a piece of bacon with his fork- and Tony had no idea how he did that, because bacon was a bitch to eat with utensils. 'If you're looking for an apology, you won't get one,' the god said. 'Well, not one that's completely sincere, anyway,' he corrected. 'I do regret destroying your city. The more time I spend here, the more I realise that not all you Midgardians are worthless beasts.'

'That's good to know,' Tony snorted. He had no illusions; he knew that Loki wasn't a good guy. Then again, neither was Tony. But Loki was a god; their moral codes, however small, were vastly different.

'I wasn't controlled, at least not like your little Hawk was,' Loki continued. 'The Other- the one in command of the Chitauri fleet- had a certain hold on me, I will admit. But those actions were my own. Desperate as they were, I led the army here of my own will.'

'Was it completely your will, though?' Tony asked. 'Cause your invasion was kind of half-assed at best.'

Loki smirked. 'I didn't want to rule Midgard, if you were concerned about that. I never have. Just like I never wanted to rule Asgard. There are too many rules, too many people you must listen to, when you rule as a King or Emperor. I much prefer to be in the shadows, pulling the strings, working my... magic, you could say, from the background. Being a King means listening to the problems of the common folk, something I care little about. At best I hoped to be Thor's right-hand, the voice of reason and intelligence when he needed help. I never wanted to sit on the throne- any throne- myself.'

'Good to know,' Tony commented. 'So you weren't mind controlled, but this... Other, had a certain kind of power over you.'

'He was always watching,' Loki nodded. 'He created a link similar to what the sceptre had over Barton and the others. He couldn't control my every thought and movement, because a puppet would not make a good commander. He needed me to be able to think for myself. I needed to be able to adapt to any type of situation. The Other was just there, lurking in the background, making sure that I did what he wanted. The green beast knocked that hold free when he used me to redecorate your living room.'

'Which was awesome and I'll never say otherwise,' Tony interrupted. 'Cause seriously, seeing the bastard who threw me through a window in my floor was just really fucking cool.'

'And I would think the same if it were an enemy of mine,' Loki agreed. 'I threw you through a window, as you said, I cannot fault you for taking pleasure in my pain.'

'Well, not in your pain,' Tony corrected, 'just... in seeing you in the floor.'
Loki smirked and slid a piece of bacon into his mouth, chewing slowly and swallowing before continuing. 'When the Other found me, I was not in any state to deny his requests, or that of the Mad Titan's.'

'Mad Titan?'

'The one who truly wanted the Tesseract,' Loki said. 'Midgard was, unfortunately, just the planet holding it at the time. The Mad Titan cares little for this planet. It is a gateway to Asgard and the other Nine Realms.'

'And now that it's not here?' Tony questioned.

'I'm not sure,' Loki admitted. 'He could very well come here to kill the heroes who defeated his army. That would take time, though. Without the Tesseract he has no way to move his fleet to this planet quickly. And Asgard will always defend Midgard, because Midgard is the gateway to Asgard.'

'So we get protected because Asgard wants to protect itself,' Tony summarised.

Loki nodded. 'Basically, yes. It's why Thor is your planet's protector. Protect Midgard and you protect the Nine Realms.'

'Cool,' Tony said. 'So we mortals are basically caught between two bigger powers, really.'

'Mm,' Loki hummed with a slight nod. 'But remember, you are no longer mortal.'

Tony smirked. Oh, yeah... awesome.

'We'll deal with that if it happens,' Tony decided, brushing the subject aside. 'You don't wanna rule Earth anymore, that's all I care about.'

'You rule it already,' Loki commented, mirth dancing in his green eyes. 'With your technology, your wealth, and your status. I have researched you since we fought. You can make an entire room kneel with a few simple words.'

Tony grinned at that, remembering the press conference after returning from Afghanistan. He'd asked the room to sit and they had, no questions asked. Maybe Loki would have faired better if he'd just been sweet and charming instead of all insane and murderous. Then again, if Loki had really wanted Earth, he would have succeeded, no matter what SHIELD threw his way.

'So,' Tony cleared his throat and stood. Loki watched curiously as the newly-turned god hunted around for a piece of paper and a pen, which was actually harder to come by than it should have been. Steve and Bruce both liked using pens and paper, whereas Tony preferred StarkPads and other technology. 'So,' he repeated when he re-took his seat opposite Loki, 'we should write down exactly what we want from this deal. I'm assuming that you'll make the contract binding once we sign it?'

'Enchanted paper signed in blood,' Loki told him. Tony just nodded; yeah, magic was weird, moving on.

'Okay then,' Tony nodded. 'Rule one, of course, is that we can't betray or kill the other.'

'We will need to word that carefully,' Loki said. 'Because there may come a time where we have to appear as though we've betrayed the other to escape a hostile environment.'
'Like if SHIELD captures me and I pretend to turn on you to have a better chance of escaping,' Tony said, and Loki nodded. 'Yeah, we can word that in somehow. Some type of clause that lets us pretend to betray the other without really meaning it.'

'We will also have to decide on whether or not that stipulation extends past our agreement to destroy SHIELD and the World Security Council,' Loki said. Tony looked up at him. 'Do we want to continue to work together with the safety of no betrayals after our current enemies have been vanquished?' Loki asked. 'Or will we revert back to being enemies once SHIELD is taken care of?'

'I'd rather stay partners, in all honesty,' Tony said. 'I'm assuming that you have just as many, if not more, enemies as I do. There are business rivals out there that I'd like to take down a peg or two, that's not to mention whatever other insane individuals will step forward after SHIELD's destroyed. Having you on my side, someone I can actually trust, would be a great benefit.'

'And you would be willing to help me with my enemies?' Loki questioned. 'I have many, and most of them come from other Realms.'

'I'm confident when it comes to my suit and my intelligence,' Tony shrugged. 'And now I'm physically stronger and will live longer, so... I'll need some enemies to fight over the next few hundreds years.'

Loki chuckled and pressed his fingers against the paper Tony was doodling on. He easily slid it from beneath the inventor's hands and towards himself. 'May I?' he asked, gesturing to the pen.

Tony handed it over and Loki hummed as he looked down at the sheet. 'Let's see what we can do...' he murmured and started jotting down his own ideas.

{oOo}

It took hours, of course. Tony and Loki were both suspicious bastards, and still didn't trust each other, at least not until the contract was signed. The argued over every point, over every sub-point, and were constantly trying to re-word everything so that they got the better deal.

It was all moot in the end, though, because later that night when they were finally done- and Tony's back was seriously starting to ache from sitting in the same position for so long- the contract was something that they both felt comfortable with. Every agreement was equal and fair for both of them, because Tony and Loki had both fought tooth and nail for it to be so. Even with the inclusion of the Golden Apple, they were still equal partners.

'Finally,' Tony groaned when he finished reading over the final contract. Loki had summed a piece of parchment from wherever the fuck he kept that shit, and had muttered a spell over it to make it binding. He'd then written everything out with a quill- in English, so that Tony could understand it- and given it to the human to read over.

'Now we just have to sign,' Loki said and drew a dagger from his boot. And, okay, where the fuck had that come from?

'You gotta show me how you hide weapons like that,' Tony commented.

Loki smirked. 'I will make you a few daggers. They are always handy, and easily concealable.'
'Awesome,' was all Tony said.

'There is something I need to do, before I sign this,' Loki said, making Tony arch an eyebrow.

'Go on,' he murmured.

'As I'm sure you are aware, I am not Æsir by birth,' Loki said.

Tony frowned. 'What?'

Loki mirrored the expression. 'You know that I am adopted.'

'Well, yeah,' Tony nodded, 'but... wait, you're not the same species as Thor?'

'No,' Loki said, seeming surprised that Tony didn't know that. 'I am Jötunn; a Frost Giant.'

Tony blinked. Loki stared. 'I have no fucking idea what that is,' Tony admitted. Sure, he'd dabbled a bit in Norse Mythology since Loki had dropped out of the Tesseract, but he had, like, a thousand things to do, and reading up on Loki's life hadn't been at the top of his list.

Loki looked... like he had no idea what to say to that. His frown deepened a bit before he shook his head. 'I will have to discuss this with you further at some point, because as my partner you should know this about me.' He didn't seem pleased about it, but whatever. 'My point is that I am not Æsir; the form you currently see is not what I actually look like.'

'Oh, okay,' Tony said. 'So, what, you have actual horns or something? Scales? A tail?'

Loki huffed, looking torn between amusement and anger. Tony wasn't sure what to make of that.

'No,' the god shook his head. 'Just blue skin and red eyes. My body temperature is much, much lower than that of a mortal or an Ás.'

'Okay...' Tony hummed. He was intrigued, really, because a blue space alien? Awesome, plain and simple. But Loki... well, he didn't look happy about sharing this information with Tony. In fact, he didn't look happy about the whole Jötunn thing at all... there was a story there, Tony knew, and he wondered if Loki would share that at some point in the future.

'My point is that my magic differs when I'm in my Jötunn form,' Loki continued. 'Certain things bleed over; my body temperature is always much lower, I am able to manipulate and create ice, and I have a higher tolerance for the cold. But when in my Jötunn form, some things are easier.'

'Because it's your true form,' Tony interrupted. Loki hesitated before nodding. 'So can you use your magic easier when in that form?' he asked.

'I am unsure, as I don't like to be in that form for too long,' Loki admitted.

'Well that's just stupid,' Tony stated, making Loki scowl. 'No, seriously,' Tony said, sitting up and leaning further over the counter. 'You hate your Jötunn form, I can see that. But it's an asset. You being blue and throwing ice? Not something that SHIELD will expect. Or Thor, either, if he knows how much you hate it. You should use it to your advantage.'

Loki just blinked at him, looking slightly stunned. Clearly he'd never thought of that before.

'I'm just saying,' Tony shrugged. 'If you don't wanna be in that form, then by all means never change; it's not up to me. But if it gives you an advantage, well...' he trailed off and stood, going to get more coffee. When he got back Loki had composed himself, and he continued his first topic,
clearly needing to digest what Tony had said.

'I need to be in my birth form for this contract to bind us properly,' Loki said. 'The Æsir form I wear is mostly a glamour; a spell that the All-Father, and then I, used to mask what I truly am. But it still changes things, like my magic and certain... features about my body. In my Jötunn form, you will be bound to who I truly am. It will bind us more tightly together and more deeply.'

'Whenever you think is best, Dancer,' Tony shrugged. 'You're the magic expert here.'

'Dancer?' Loki said, eyebrow raised, clearly not amused.

'You're just jealous that you have no nicknames for me,' Tony grinned cheekily. Loki rolled his eyes. 'So, let's get this thing signed,' Tony decided to move on. 'I'll feel a lot better about this entire situation if we can't suddenly stab each other in the back.'

Loki nodded and closed his eyes. It took a lot of concentration for him to melt into his Frost Giant form; despite how much he despised it, he'd been practising since he escaped Asgard. Like Stark had said, it was an asset, and Loki would be a fool not to use every trick he had. A few minutes passed and nothing happened, at least not to Stark's eyes. Loki felt his magic flicker and seep into his bones more thoroughly than usual. He felt the ice cold tendrils of his Jötunn magic- the part of him that so easily manipulated ice- creep up on him, making his skin feel cooler.

Stark gasping was the first hint that Loki's true form was taking hold. The second was the cool shiver that swept over Loki's skin. When the god opened his eyes it was to find his hands and arms blue, frost beginning to spider across the counter-top from his fingers. Loki quickly reined in that magic, forcing it deep beneath his skin. He looked up at Stark, who's eyes widened when he saw the true colour of Loki's own.

'Wow,' Tony hummed. 'Okay, so you really, really look like a different race. The Æsir look exactly like us humans, but damn...'

'Yes, it is hard to hide what I truly am when in this form,' Loki agreed, going for the dagger he'd left sitting beside his and Stark's contract.

'Do the raised lines mean anything?' Tony asked. 'Or are they like fingerprints?'

'I have no idea,' Loki admitted. 'All Frost Giants have them.'

'Should look into that,' Tony mused, eyes roaming over Loki's face. Loki paused, his own eyes on Stark's. The human didn't seem terrified or disgusted or... anything that Loki was expecting. He just looked fascinated, like he wanted to touch, to study, to find out just how different Loki was. But Stark, he... he was unbiased, Loki realised. He hadn't grown up with stories of Frost Giants coming into his room and eating his flesh. He just saw Loki as a different creature, a different race; one different to his own, but not inherently evil.

Loki chuckled humourlessly to himself. He wondered if he would be more accepting of his own skin if he hadn't grown up with tales of bloodthirsty monsters. Just another way that the All-Father had failed him. Loki was a monster. But the All-Father had made him that way.

Loki shook his head, not wanting to dwell in this skin for too long. He would explain about the Frost Giants- and about his coming to be a Prince of Asgard- at a later date. For now he just wanted to get Stark firmly on his side. If they could not betray each other, then Loki had nothing to fear from Stark knowing everything. Only disgust.

Stark jolted when Loki cut his palm, but quickly calmed when Loki dipped the quill into his blood
and signed the contract. He then sealed his skin with a quick burst of magic; Loki was by no means
a skilled healer, but he knew enough to heal small wounds and broken bones. And, of course, he
could heal himself quite easily.

'Your turn,' Loki said and handed the dagger across to Stark.

'Your skin's awesomely cold,' Tony commented when their fingers brushed.

'Frost Giant,' Loki reminded him.

'Yeah, yeah,' the human chuckled. He sliced his own palm, not even wincing at the gash he caused,
and dipped the quill into his own blood. When he'd signed his full name- as Loki had instructed-
Loki slid the parchment towards himself and held a hand over it. All it took was a few muttered
words to bind the two together, the words written out now a baseline for their relationship. Stark
gasped as the magic washed over him, and shook his head roughly, swaying on his stool. 'Yeah,
wow, magic.'

'Mm, I should have warned you,' Loki murmured. 'Now shut up, I need to concentrate.'

Stark poked his tongue out- Loki saw it before he closed his eyes- but the god ignored him as he
concentrated on sinking back into his Æsir form. It took longer than before- because despite what
Sif and the Warriors Three thought, magic was anything but a trick- and Loki felt slightly drained
when he settled into his familiar skin. He could easily fight off an attack, but he wouldn't be using
his magic for unnecessary things.

'You need anything?' Tony asked.

' Hmm?' Loki hummed, his eyes- green once more- shifting to the genius.

'You look a bit tired,' Tony said, prodding at his injured hand. 'Magic takes it out of you, huh?'

'Magic is but a muscle, Stark; another extension of my person,' Loki said. 'Throwing a punch takes
energy, as does throwing a spell.'

'Magic's another form of energy, one that you use your body to control,' Stark nodded. 'So it makes
sense that it'd take just as much effort to wield as something like hand-to-hand fighting would.'

And with those few words, Stark showed that he understood more than Thor and his friends ever
had. Stark, a mere mortal (former, really) from a tiny blue planet, only forty-five years of age,
understood more about Loki than the people who had known him for 1047 years. It was equal parts
disturbing and exhilarating. Finally, Loki had found someone who could at least understand certain
parts of him, and Stark had only known him for mere weeks, really.

Oh, he would definitely never regret stealing an apple for Stark. A mortal lifetime was not enough
for this brilliant, mad creature.

Stark was still touching his wound. It had stopped bleeding, but had yet to close up; clearly Stark's
faster healing factor was already in effect.

Loki rolled his eyes and reached over, grabbing Stark's hand and making the human yelp. He then
smiled when Loki healed his wound, the god only using a very small amount of magic to do so.

'Thanks,' Stark said.

'You're welcome,' was Loki's simple reply.
Tony grinned at him before jumping to his feet. 'So, I'm starving. We've been sitting here all day-literally all day- and I need, like, five containers of something delicious. You like Chinese, right?'

'I have no idea what it is,' Loki admitted.

'Rice, vegetables, and meat in sauce,' Tony said.

'Ah,' Loki hummed. 'I would prefer all vegetables, then. Meat slows my magic. It is easier to replenish when the meat of animals isn't in my system.'

Tony looked absolutely fascinated by that, his fingers twitching, like he was fighting not to throw Loki down and examine every inch of him.

'I can explain that over dinner,' Loki said, and a bright, slightly-mad grin lit up Stark's face.

'Oh, yes, you will,' he nodded. 'Vegetarian it is. So I share Thor's appetite now, huh?'

'It is a result of our semi-immortality,' Loki said. 'We burn energy much faster than mortals, thus we need more sustenance.'

'Right-o,' Stark said. 'Vegetarian, okay. You go make yourself comfortable in the living room, I'll order, and we'll watch a movie or something.'

'Very well,' Loki agreed easily, standing slowly and turning.

'And magic talks!' Tony called. 'Don't forget that!'

'As long as you teach me your Midgardian sciences, than I have no problem imparting some of my knowledge,' Loki retorted.

'Oh, yeah,' he heard Stark's glee-filled voice. 'This is gonna be awesome.'

Loki chuckled as he walked into the living room. Really, SHIELD had no hope, not with him and Stark working together. Loki let a smirk take over his face. This would be so much fun.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: Just in case I didn't make it clear; basically, part of the contract stipulates that Tony and Loki cannot physically harm or betray each other. Tony can't just take a knife and stab Loki or vice-versa, because the magic binding them will kill them if they do so. So Tony could stab Loki, but then he'd die for breaking the contract. Also, they can't sell each other out, at least not really; they can lie and pretend they're betraying each other, like... Tony telling SHIELD where Loki is and what his plans are, but if he really did it the contract would, of course, take it back from him; an eye for an eye and all that.

Cheers,

{Dreamer}
'Okay, so I think I've figured out how to get you into SHIELD,' Tony said as he sat beside Loki. They were currently occupying the large leather lounge in Tony's living room, boxes of Chinese food spread out on the coffee table before them. Loki was picking through a box of vegetables and rice covered in some type of curry sauce, his fingers easily wrapping around a pair of chopsticks. He just waved a hand at Tony as he popped a vegetable into his mouth, telling him to continue. 'So, you can be my assistant when you're a woman,' Tony said.

'Assistant?' Loki echoed.

Tony nodded as he grabbed a box of food, popping the top open. 'I've had assistants in the past; all hot women. And you're hot as a woman, so it won't be surprising. Only, you have to act like you dislike me, that way SHIELD will try and get you to spy on me.'

'Oh?' Loki hummed, looking amused.

Tony grinned. 'I might have had the habit of... sleeping with my assistants.'

'Is that so,' the god chuckled, eating a bite of rice.

'Yeah,' Tony said. 'That was how Pepper found out that I'm not straight.'

'Pepper...'

'The CEO of my company,' Tony said. 'Pepper Potts.'

'Ah,' Loki nodded. 'Is she the woman always speaking for you during press conferences?' When Tony raised his eyebrows, Loki said, 'I made sure to research each of the Avengers in detail when I returned to Midgard. Know thy enemy.'

'Right,' Tony said, 'makes sense.'

'Mm,' Loki just hummed, scraping the bottom of his box with his chopsticks. He soon tossed it aside and reached for another, wrinkling his nose when he found it full of pork.
'So is the vegetarianism just ’cause you want to conserve your magic, or is it an all-time thing?’ Tony asked.

Loki finally found another box of vegetables and rice, popping it open. 'I prefer greens over meat,' Loki said, 'but on occasion I don't mind. Like this morning; I ate pig, did I not?'

'Oh, yeah,' Tony nodded. 'Anyway, as my assistant you gotta make it clear that you have no wish to have sex with me. If you look like you just like the job, rather than me, SHIELD might just try and rope you into spying on me.'

'By offering money, I assume,' Loki said.

'Exactly,' Tony nodded. 'So if I set something up, maybe a back-story that shows you having money problems, SHIELD might just take the bait.'

'I see,' Loki said. 'And I assume you'll give me an apartment?'

'Yeah,' Tony mumbled around a mouthful of... chicken, he was sure it was chicken. 'You already have a place?'

'I can easily just disappear,' Loki shrugged, seeming unconcerned.

'Awesome,' Tony murmured, swallowing his food. 'So, I was thinking that we can have another alias for you; one that would mean you being able to hang around the Tower all the time in a different disguise. Can you change your appearance without being a woman?'

Instead of answering, Loki once again went blurry, green magic washing over him. When Tony could see him again, Loki's hair was short and curly, a dark blonde, and his eyes were light blue. His skin was darker, a nice tan instead of his usual pale complexion, and there was a fine dusting of stubble along his slightly softer jaw. He was shorter, too, Tony thought, and just... a bit different. Tony could still tell it was Loki, but the difference was so startling that nobody else should be able to tell.

'Awesome,' Tony blinked, and Loki smirked before he morphed back into his usual dark/pale self.

'It takes very little energy on my part to change my appearance,' Loki said. 'I can keep that illusion for many days if needed.'

'Awesome,' Tony repeated. 'Be my boyfriend.'

Loki started at that, almost slopping rice and sauce down his... tunic? Some type of tunic/t-shirt hybrid. He'd been wearing it under his armour.

'Just hear me out,' Tony said when Loki turned narrowed eyes on him. 'If I have a boyfriend, someone I'm apparently committed to, then it'll make more sense that I haven't tried to sleep with my assistant.'

'Won't it seem strange, you suddenly being in a monogamous relationship?' Loki questioned.

'Nope, ’cause I've tried it a few times,' Tony told him. 'A bit weird, yeah, ’cause I'm well-known for sleeping with all things beautiful. But I've had three serious relationships in my life; two with men, and one with Pepper.'

'Men?' Loki echoed, and Tony nodded.
'I was younger; it was before I turned into such an asshole.' Loki snickered. 'They both lasted a few months, though, and I told Pepper about them when we dated. So it'll seem more believable 'cause you're a guy.'

'I see,' Loki hummed. 'Do you remember, Stark, me mentioning that I don't share?'

Tony nodded. Oh, yeah, he remembered that; both before they'd slept together and after. Loki liked snarling, “mine!” when they were fucking. Which was ridiculously hot, Tony could admit; a bit different, but hot all the same.

'Anyway,' Tony cleared his throat, poking at his food. He really was hungry, and he'd already eaten half; Loki was right about his sudden increase in appetite. 'I pretend that I've secretly been seeing you for a while, and you move into the Tower. I'll set up a back-story for you, as well as a job, and that way when SHIELD investigates it's on the up and up. Again, it'll work in our favour; you get all access to the Tower, and the Avengers, without Thor knowing. We can also hang out a lot so we don't have to sneak around as much. Also, it'll explain why I've suddenly stopped sleeping around.'

'I see,' Loki nodded, eyeing something green that he'd stabbed with a chopstick. 'I don't like these.'

'Then don't eat them,' Tony snorted.

Loki ignored his comment. 'Fine, I shall be your partner, Stark. I have no desire to be called your boyfriend.'

'Whatever,' Tony waved a hand. 'You got a name you wanna use?'

'Logan,' Loki said instantly, which again made Tony snort. 'I have found that using a name that is similar to my own, even by just a letter, is much easier to remember,' Loki explained. 'Also, Logan sounds more similar to Loki than any other Midgardian name I can think of.'

'No, Logan; that's cool,' Tony nodded. 'I'll make up a back-story for you now.' He tossed the remains of his box into his mouth, chewing as he put it aside, and went to find a StarkPad. When he'd retaken his seat, Loki was still picking through his food, but now had his complete focus on Tony. 'So, full-name...'

'I have been going by Logan Larson,' Loki said, 'however my current apartment is rented under that name, and if I use that name again I'm assuming that SHIELD will find out.'

'Different surname, then,' Tony nodded, eyes on his StarkPad. 'Okay, Logan... Logan...'

'Thomas,' Loki interrupted. Tony glanced at him, and the god shrugged. 'It is a name I heard recently.'

'Logan Thomas,' Tony tested the name, 'sounds alright. Want a middle name?'

'What is a middle name?' Loki asked.

'Well, you know... a name between your first name and surname,' Tony said. 'Mine's Edward.'

'Why do you Midgardians insist on having so many names?'

'No idea,' Tony shrugged.

'Do I need one?'

'Not really,' Tony said. As far as he knew, Pepper didn't have a middle name. 'But I'm giving you one anyway,' the genius decided. Loki just shook his head, looking amused. 'Logan... William
Thomas,’ he decided, typing out the name. ’Birthday?’

’No idea,’ Loki admitted. ’Are we using different information for Lady Loki?’

’Yeah, we'll have to,’ Tony nodded. ’I'll do all that myself, though. Unless you have any objections?’

’As long as my name isn't something ridiculous, I don't care,’ Loki shrugged.

’Got a name for your woman form?’ Tony questioned.

’Not on Midgard,’ Loki said. He was now sliding pieces of vegetables that he didn't like back into the bag, hunched over the table with his side to Tony. ’On Álfheimr I went by Loptr.’

’Loptr... okay, no, that won't work,’ Tony shook his head. ’Can you do an American accent? Making your female alias British might be too suspicious.’

’Of course I can,’ Loki snorted. ’I can mimic most voices.’

’Okay, awesome,’ Tony nodded. ’A woman's name... how about Lily?’

’Lily?’ Loki drawled.

’Yeah, as in the flower,’ Tony said. Loki scowled, but didn't say no, so Tony typed that down. ’Lily Walden,’ he decided, not letting Loki get a word in. ’I'll make you older than your male alias. You barely look thirty to me,’ Tony said, ’but we'll make you a bit older than that so I don't get called a cradle robber.’

’A what?’

’Never mind,’ Tony brushed Loki's question aside. ’How about... February 9th 1981 for your male alias?’

’I suppose I'll have to memorise all this information,’ Loki said, sitting back and shovelling rice and vegetables into his mouth.

’That makes you 33 as of today, what with it being late February,’ Tony said. ’And your female form will be... thirty-five?’ He looked at Loki, head tilted. ’Yeah, thirty-five,’ he decided.

’Very well,’ Loki nodded.

’Birth place... well, your accent sounds English, so somewhere in England,’ Tony hummed, more to himself than Loki. ’We'll just say Westminster, that sounds familiar. Okay, so Westminster... a hospital near there... schools...’ Tony began muttering to himself over the course of the following minutes, leaving Loki free to pick and choose what food he was eating. When Tony came back to himself, Loki had eaten a further one and a half boxes of food and was now chewing on some prawn chips. ’Okay, got it,’ Tony grinned at him, waving his StarkPad. ’I named your parents Dennis and Molly.’

Loki just rolled his eyes.

’I'll go into more detail later with JARVIS and let you review both sets of aliases,’ Tony said, tossing his StarkPad aside. He was still starving.

’It all sounds fine so far,’ Loki shrugged.
'Awesome,' Tony said. Okay, he had to stop that, he'd said it like forty times this night. Okay, not forty, but whatever; Tony was hungry. In fact, he shoved down food so quickly that he almost choked at least three times, and Loki began to look concerned when Tony could barely swallow.

'Stark...' he began, but Tony's chest chose that moment to explode. He gasped and dropped his container, spraying rice and meat all over the floor and his legs. He clutched at his chest tightly as another sharp, stabbing throb went through him near the arc reactor. 'Stark!' Loki shouted when Tony dropped to his knees, barely managing to not smack his head against the coffee table. 'Stark,' Loki repeated, suddenly appearing beside him. He eased Tony back onto the floor and pulled Tony's hand away from his chest. 'Besides the glowing thing in your chest, do you have any other serious ailments?' Loki demanded.

Tony was gasping for breath by now, but managed a stuttered, half-panicked, 'Sh-Shrapnel... in-in my chest...'. He trailed off to hiss, fingers digging into his chest through his t-shirt.

'Shrapnel,' Loki frowned.

'From a missile,' Tony gasped, 's'what gave me this.' He tapped at his arc reactor and then groaned. God, he was dying. Great, just great; he'd finally found a way to destroy SHIELD, only to die a day later. Awesome.

'You are not dying,' Loki drawled, grabbing Tony's hands and holding them in his own. 'This is the apple.'

'A-Apple?' Tony stuttered.

Loki nodded. 'The apple has changed your body; you now heal much, much quicker and better than any mortal. Your body is healing you.'

'So...'

'It will get rid of any foreign objects in your body,' Loki told him.

Tony's panic suddenly sky-rocketed. 'Reactor?' he gasped, trying to sit, but Loki firmly held him down.

'No, I don't believe so,' Loki shook his head. 'The reactor uses an element that emits energy very similar to magic. Your body, and whatever magic you posses, won't be able to get rid of it.'

'Magic... a-awesome,' Tony muttered, his teeth now gritted, eyes scrunched in pain.

'It will be over soon,' Loki soothed, brushing Tony's hair back from his sweaty forehead. If Tony hadn't been, you know, in agonising pain, he would have laughed; Loki comforting him. Weird.

Loki was telling the truth; within half-an-hour the pain had started to disappear, slowly ebbing away, leaving Tony feeling weak, shaky, and too hot. Loki finally let him stand, but Tony needed the god's help to get back to the lounge. He dropped onto it with a groan and looked down at his shirt. The material was peppered with blood, and when Tony touched it he felt bits of metal beneath it. He lifted his shirt off, only wincing a bit, to find pieces of shrapnel stuck to his smooth, bloody skin.

'Wow.'

'You no longer need to worry about this shrapnel,' Loki said, waving a hand at Tony's chest. The blood and metal disappeared, leaving Tony's skin clean.
'Wow,' Tony repeated. 'That's... okay, that's just really, really cool,' he decided. 'Best side-effect of the apple by far. So,' he dropped his shirt again and reached for the box he'd dropped on the coffee table. Yeah, he was still dying of hunger here. 'I have magic?'

'All Midgardians do,' Loki nodded, 'however you are unable to harness it. Your bodies haven't evolved to that level yet.'

'Yeah, that's what I thought,' Tony mumbled around a mouthful.

'You may find that you are able to tap into it,' Loki said, 'now that your body is more similar to mine than a mortal's. I shall help you, if you wish.'

'M'kay,' Tony nodded. 'Tony Stark; sorcerer. Sounds great.'

Loki rolled his eyes.

'Hey, what am I the god of?' Tony suddenly asked, turning to grin at Loki. 'Sex?'

Loki shook his head. But there was a smile on his lips, so Tony grinned, too.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: Yes, I used a lot of Tom Hiddleston's information; both his first and middle name, as well as his birthday, for Loki's male alias. I couldn't help myself :p

Cheers,

{Dreamer}
'No, seriously, what am I the god of?'

Loki sighed. Stark had been asking that question non stop since he woke. They'd both retired around midnight the previous night, and the human- no longer mortal- had slept well into the next afternoon. Like Loki had said, eating a Golden Apple, and suddenly being a god, was a lot for his body to deal with. Stark would no doubt find himself tiring easily, and craving food, for a number of days. That should wane in a week or so, though, Loki wasn't quite certain; not many mortals were turned into gods.

'I do not know, Stark,' Loki scowled. He was re-reading over his two aliases; he wanted all basis covered before he met with the Avengers and the general public. 'Just tell me what you want to be the god of, and I shall tell you if the title is already taken.'

The God of Sex was already taken- unfortunately, Stark kept bemoaning- by a woman whom Loki had become quite acquainted with when he was younger. He'd been about 600 when he'd lain with her. In human years, he'd been but a teenager. He was still only considered a young adult by Æsir standers; nineteen or twenty in Midgarian terms.

That was around the time that Loki had realised he preferred the flesh of men. His marriage to Sigyn had just cemented that fact. Of course, it had just been another thing for Sif and the Warriors Three to bully him about. It was perfectly fine for warriors to lay with each other when they were drunk or trekking somewhere for battle, but for a man to actually choose males over females? And here they'd thought that Loki could stoop no lower.

It was something that Loki liked about Midgard; their acceptance of so many things. Oh, he was quite aware that there were still debates and hatred and all kinds of awful things said about and done to those who didn't fit into the categories others made. But for the most part they were far more accepting than Asgard.

'Hmm...' Stark hummed. They were in his workshop, Stark tinkering with his Iron Man suit, Loki seated on the sofa against one wall, a StarkPad on his lap. 'God of Technology? No, wait; that sounds like I control it or something.'

'Don't you?' Loki questioned, not looking up at the genius. 'You have revolutionised it since you were but a boy, have you not? Your technology would be considered a form of magic on some Realms.'

'Really?'

'On Asgard, definitely,' Loki nodded. 'We have nothing of the sort. Humans developed technology, Æsir developed magic.'

'Huh,' Stark grunted. 'Nah, I want a cooler sounding name. How about... God of Sass?'

Loki snorted, and Stark grinned at him.

'Okay, that was a joke,' Stark conceded. 'God of... One Liners... One-night Stands... Creation... Iron? No, the suit isn't actually made of iron, that makes no sense.'
'How about God of Rambling?' Loki suggested. He flicked the StarkPad, drawing up new information.

'Shit up,' Stark muttered. 'Oh!' he suddenly gasped, waving some type of tool at Loki. 'God of Cunning?'

Loki blinked at that. Huh. There was, to Loki's knowledge, no God of Cunning. 'That... actually fits,' he nodded slowly, bright eyes finding Tony. 'You certainly are very cunning.'

Tony grinned, looking pleased with himself.

'God of Cunning and Inspiration,' Loki murmured, more to himself than Stark, but the billionaire heard him. 'You create things,' Loki said, nodding at the gauntlet Tony was working on, 'but the Gods of Creativity and Creation already exists. However, you inspire others to do as you do; rival companies, villains, and the general populace. It fits.'

'Huh,' Tony repeated, staring at him. 'Okay, then,' he smirked, 'God of Cunning and Inspiration it is.'

Loki smiled.

'So, now that I'm a god,' Stark said, attention going back to his glove, 'can I use magic? I mean, Thor's mentioned that he can use magic, just nowhere near to your level. He can also detect your magic when you use a large quantity of it, right?'

Loki nodded and put his StarkPad aside; he'd already memorised the information. He stood and went to Stark's side, letting his eyes glide over the workshop. It was a fascinating place; there seemed to be no order, tools and projects and random objects strewn everywhere, but Stark definitely knew his way around. Everything was where Stark wanted it to be; controlled chaos. Loki loved it.

'As I've mentioned before, magic is a form of energy that is in most things, Midgard and humans included. Your human bodies just lack the ability to sense and harness it. However, some people and species have more magic, and find it much easier to use.'

'So... what, 'cause you're a Frost Giant, you can use it better than Thor?' Tony questioned.

Loki's jaw tightened at the mention of his true heritage, but he forced it aside. If he continued to react like that, his enemies would use it against him; Thor had plenty of times. So Loki took a deep breath and let it go. Yes, he was a Frost Giant. No, he couldn't change it. Moving on.

'Yes,' Loki nodded, opening his eyes and focusing them on Stark. 'There has always been a much higher percentage of mages on Jötunheimr than there have been on Asgard. Both races can detect and harness magic much easier than a human. However, the Jötnar have always been able to access it easier. I'm not sure why that is.'

'Ice?' Tony shrugged.

Loki frowned. 'Excuse me?'

'Well, this is just a theory,' Stark immediately responded, making Loki realise that the human had been pondering this since learning what Loki was, 'but I think it's the ice. In your Frost Giant form, you're colder and blue. I'm assuming that Yotie-ham is-'

'Jo-TUN-hame,' Loki interrupted.
'Whatever,' Tony waved a hand and Loki smirked. 'I'm assuming that it's a cold place?'

'Yes,' Loki inclined his head. 'It is covered in ice and snow, and is never above freezing. You would die after a few hours if you left your body unprotected.'

'Right,' Tony said. 'So, the environment is icy. Meaning that the...

'Jötnar,' Loki provided.

'Jötnar,' Tony continued, 'you Jötnar evolved to live in harsh conditions like that. Meaning that your ability to sense and use magic evolved differently to the Asgardians. You can manipulate and create ice, but a mage from Asgard can't, am I correct?'

'Yes,' Loki said.

'Well there you go,' Tony clapped his hands together. 'There are more mages in... Frost Giant Land, because you evolved differently. Your bodies are able to tap into either a different type of magic, or magic that Asgardians just can't use. Ergo, more mages in Giant Town.'

Loki tilted his head. He supposed that that made sense. If Thor applied himself, he could very well use some of the tricks that Loki used; his magical core was nowhere near as large as Loki's, but all it took was patience and practice. But Thor would never be able to manipulate ice because he wasn't a Frost Giant; Æsir just couldn't do it.

'It's like the fact that I will never be able to do what you can do magic-wise,' Tony continued, pulling open a small panel on his Iron Man glove, 'my body just can't physically do it.'

'I see,' Loki hummed. 'That would also explain why almost every single elf on Álfheimr can use magic. They have been practising the art for many, many more millennia than the Æsir.'

'Exactly,' Stark nodded.

Loki watched him work for a few minutes, mulling over Stark's comments, before leaning against the workbench. 'Back to your original question,' the god said, and Stark made a soft noise, 'now that you are a god, you can use magic.'

Tony looked up at that, already grinning.

'However,' Loki said, and Stark pouted, making the Trickster chuckle. 'However,' Loki repeated, 'it will take much, much practice; practice that includes meditation.'

'Sitting still?' Stark groaned.

'Yes,' Loki said. 'To be able to use magic, you must first be able to sense it. And to be able to sense it, we must find if you have a magical core. You should; almost every creature does, even if they can't actually use it. It remains to be seen if your magical core is large enough to be of any use, however.'

'Well, what do you think?' Tony asked, looking up at Loki.

Loki tilted his head. 'At worst, your magical core will be so small that you can only use the smallest of elemental and shield spells. At best, you will be able to throw magic as I can and influence people's feelings and thoughts very vaguely. There are a number of spells that I can teach you if that is the case.'
'Awesome,' Stark grinned.

'You also might be able to alter your appearance slightly,' Loki added, looking the human over. 'Changing your appearance is very difficult, but takes little magical energy once you're able to perfect it.'

'Really awesome,' Tony beamed. 'I could totally fuck with people.'

'Of course you'd use magic to trick people,' Loki snorted.

'Hello, God of Mischief!' Tony said, waving a hand at Loki. 'You have no right to judge me.'

'I'm not judging,' Loki smirked, 'just commenting.'

'Whatever,' Tony muttered. 'Hey, you wanna go out and get a late lunch? Or early dinner, whatever. I'm starving.'

'So soon?' Loki questioned. He didn't mean the time; it was almost five pm, according to one of Stark's holographic monitors. No, he meant he and Stark being seen in public.

'I know that you've memorised all the info we wrote,' Tony said, pointing at the StarkPad that Loki had abandoned on the sofa. 'And, really, neither of us wants to wait too long to put our plan into action. The sooner I show up with a boyfriend- sorry, partner - the better. Let the media photograph us together until Pepper or someone else asks. In a week or two I'll move you in. Then, maybe you suggest- in front of everyone- that I get an assistant. I bitch and moan but agree and then hire Lady Loki before Pepper can find someone.'

Loki blinked. Stark had it all figured out. Of course, most of their plan- or plans, really- were going to be made up as they went. They had no idea what kind of information Loki would find, and that's if he were hired by SHIELD to spy on Tony. Also, they weren't quite sure yet on how they wanted to destroy SHIELD. They've both agreed that their top priority was to find every secret base that SHIELD used; they had to wipe out the entire agency, after all.

Loki found it breathtaking and arousing, making plans with someone this clever. Stark was a genius, he really was, and it made Loki's heart beat quicker in his chest. He'd never worked with anyone- he'd never met anyone- as smart as Tony Stark. Oh, there had been various people just as clever as him, just as intelligent in their selected field, but nobody who thought the way Stark did, nobody who thought the way Loki did.

Controlled chaos.

'I want to fuck you over this table,' Loki stated, and Stark dropped his tools, eyes wide as he turned to the god. 'Preferably before we eat,' Loki added, dusting imaginary dirt from his sleeve. 'And after.'

'Oh... kay,' Stark said. 'Okay, yes, I am definitely on-board with that.' And then he swept his work aside, jumped to sit on the table, and spread his legs, all while wearing a lecherous grin. 'Coming, Green Eyes?'

Loki smirked. Oh, he would be.

{oOo}
Loki looked pretty good as Logan, Tony could admit, but he preferred Loki's usual looks in all honesty. He made sure to tell Loki that, because he had a feeling that the Trickster wasn't used to people wanting him for him; just for what he was capable of doing. Tony knew the feeling all too well, and wanted his business partner/boyfriend happy, so... yeah.

Being someone's partner again was a bit weird, but Tony was kind of okay with it. Loki was fucking gorgeous, intelligent, clever... just really, really awesome. He was the smartest person Tony had ever slept with, and probably the hottest, too. So being monogamous? Yeah, Tony could totally do that with Loki. Why fuck someone else when he had access to a god? Huh, he was one, too. He kept forgetting that.

'I haven't had different features in many, many years,' Loki commented as he and Tony zipped through the streets. Manhattan wasn't exactly the best place to drive a Jaguar, but Tony didn't care; if he hit anyone, he could pay for the damages. 'It's odd.'

'You've never looked any different?' Tony questioned. 'I mean, naturally,' he added when Loki turned to look at him. 'My hair was a bit blondish when I was really young; like, when I was five. It turned dark pretty quickly.'

'Really?' Loki snorted, looking highly amused. 'You have pictures, I hope?'

'Shit up,' Tony muttered and Loki chuckled.

'No, I've always had very dark hair and green eyes; at least, I assume I have. We don't have photographs on Asgard like you do here. There are a few paintings and such of when I was a babe and a child, but nothing too detailed. I think I recall Frigga saying that I had blue eyes when I was just a babe, but...' he trailed off and shrugged, apparently not wanting to go into detail on that. Tony had a feeling that it had something to do with the whole “adopted and actually a Frost Giant” thing, but he wasn't gonna push.

'So, still going vegetarian?' Tony asked. 'I know a good restaurant that makes a killer veggie lasagne. At least I think it does, my date at the time said it was great.'

'Oh, taking me to past haunts, Stark?' Loki teased. 'How unoriginal.'

'Shit up, it has good food,' Tony huffed, 'and the paparazzi are more likely to spot me there and take pictures. And that is what we want to happen, remember?'

'Mm, yes,' Loki hummed.

'Also, call me Tony,' the genius ordered as he pulled up in front of a restaurant. 'My dates never call me Stark unless there's a “Mr” fixed on there.'

'Whatever you say, Anthony,' Loki purred before climbing out of the car. Tony blinked. And then shivered. Damn.

Loki was waiting for him, and wrapped an arm around Tony's back as soon as the human was close enough. Tony snorted but put his arm around Loki's waist, tugging him towards the doors. A valet appeared, seeming only slightly nervous about meeting Tony Stark, but Tony ignored him as he tossed him his keys and entered the restaurant.

It was a swanky place coloured in muted reds and off-whites. The floor beneath them was wood,
with large, thick rugs covering most walkways. Paintings that Tony never paid attention to hung on the walls, and there were random ornaments everywhere; again, Tony didn't care.

The line was rather long, but Tony walked past it, ignoring the huffs of annoyance he got, as well as the whispers of, “Is that Tony Stark?”

A couple hundred dollars slid into the right pocket, and suddenly Tony and Loki were being seated at one of the best tables and given drinks menus. Loki just put his aside, clearly having no idea about Midgardian alcohol, so Tony scanned his own before ordering a bottle of wine; wine went with anything, didn't it?

When the waiter finally left, Tony smiled at Loki over the table.

‘What?’ Loki questioned. His voice was off; slightly lighter, calmer, just... a bit different to his usual voice. Tony didn't like it, but... well, he just much preferred Loki as himself.

‘Nothing,’ Tony shrugged. ‘You look good.’

Loki had resized one of Tony's suits to fit him, because he had very little in the way of Midgardian clothing. He mostly just used glamours, he'd told Tony. But apparently he'd felt like wearing a real suit tonight, so was sporting a black Armani with a deep blue shirt that matched his eyes, and a blue and black striped tie. His hair- curly blonde because he was Logan- had been styled with magic.

Tony realised that he'd have to buy Loki a wardrobe; he couldn't magic everything with the possibility of Thor catching him.

‘Shopping trip,’ Tony grinned, and Loki raised an eyebrow.

‘Excuse me?’

‘Gotta get you some new clothes, Logan,’ Tony said, smirking when Loki rolled his eyes. ‘I'm assuming you'll want lots of green and black?’

‘Not if Thor is around,’ Loki sniffed, voice low to avoid being overheard. ‘Black and blue should work; the latter will match my current eye colour.’

Oh, yeah... Loki's eyes were blue, bright blue what with the shirt he was wearing really making the colour pop. God, Loki was hot no matter what he looked like.

Right, why did Tony suggest dinner again? They should've stayed in the Tower and fucked like rabbits all night long. Then again, Tony was already kind of tired- damn apple!- and he was hungry. So, yeah; public dinner.

It wasn't long before they ordered- steak for Tony, some type of vegetarian pasta for Loki- and settled into light conversation as they ate. They'd barely started before Loki leaned forward, blue eyes locked on Tony. ‘We're being watched.’

‘I'm always being watched,’ Tony shrugged. ‘By who?’ he then asked.

‘Almost everyone,’ Loki commented. ‘The waiters, the patrons... somebody outside with a camera.’

‘Can you see who it is?’ Tony questioned. ‘The person with the camera?’

‘I'm unsure whether it's one of your Midgardian reporters or a SHIELD agent,’ Loki hummed under
his breath. He stabbed at a piece of carrot with his fork and popped into his mouth, chewing as he glanced over Tony's shoulder.

'I don't suppose it matters,' Tony said. 'We want everyone to know that we're together.'

'True,' Loki nodded. He smirked suddenly and put his fork down, making Tony raise his eyebrows, and lean over the table. 'Perhaps we should give them something to really look at, hmm?'

Tony had a feeling he knew where this was going, and swallowed slightly when Loki leaned over the table, his height making the action look easy and graceful. Tony's breath caught in his throat when soft, cold lips pressed against his own, but he quickly got with the programme and licked Loki's bottom lip, sliding his tongue in when Loki's lips parted. Tony leaned on the table heavily with one hand, keeping himself upright as he cupped Loki's jaw with his other hand. He then ran his fingers through Loki's hair, and Tony wasn't sure he'd ever get used to Loki having such short hair. He could really pull off the L'Oreal look.

They broke apart after about a minute, keeping the kiss chaste, and Loki grinned at the slightly dumbfounded look Tony was sporting. But Loki's pale cheeks were tinted pink, so Tony counted it as a draw. He smiled and sat back, making himself comfortable once more.

'Damn, Lo,' he hummed and picked up his knife and fork.

'What?' Loki questioned.

'Even small kisses from you are breathtaking,' Tony said. Loki looked surprised, and then shy, and Tony just winked as he slid a piece of steak into his mouth.

Loki sat back down, blue eyes taking on a mischievous glint, and Tony knew that he'd pay at some point for making the god blush.

Totally worth it.

{oOo}

Tony realised that they really shouldn't have gone out to a fancy restaurant just after he'd paid the bill. He was still hungry; not starving, like he had been before, but he could go another steak, maybe some chips or a burger. He'd have to keep an eye on his appetite when the Avengers returned, because him suddenly eating copious amounts of food would definitely raise a few eyebrows. Tony was rather famous for skipping as many meals as possible before he dropped, and when he did eat it usually wasn't that much.

'We gotta stop by a White Castle or something,' Tony murmured to Loki as they stood. Loki had removed his jacket sometime during dinner and was pulling it back on.

'Hmm?'

Tony smiled and reached up, smoothing down the shoulders and lapels. Loki raised an eyebrow. 'I'm still hungry,' the genius admitted.
Loki chuckled. 'As am I. However, we'll have to keep up appearances when out in public. And Tony Stark is well known for his fine dining, is he not?'

'Yeah,' Tony nodded. He held an arm out and Loki threaded his through, the two walking through the restaurant. 'We'll just have to stop at a fast food place, or order something else in,' Tony said as they walked. 'I'll have to start keeping actual food in my penthouse so we can snack.'

Loki just nodded, and a mask fell across his face as he and Tony stepped outside of the restaurant. There were reporters everywhere, and Tony realised that his and Loki's little kiss- and the few more they'd exchanged throughout the night- must have got some tongues waggling. Tony had never made his pansexuality a secret, it was just that usually he was attracted to women. Plus, men just seemed to be a bit more discreet; they didn't want their affair with Tony Stark all over the news. So Tony had rarely been photographed with men, not since he was twenty-two and had his second serious relationship. Ah, Victor... he'd taught Tony a fair bit about giving a good blow job.

The questions started immediately, shouted from left, right and centre. Tony just waited patiently as cameras flashed, recording devices and cellphones were shoved in his face, and men and women jostled for the best position.

'He's my boyfriend,' Tony said when there was a short lull in the questions, and earned an elbow to the gut. 'Ow, right, partner,' he wheezed slightly, giving Loki a glare. Loki, of course, just smiled like the prick he was.

'Partner?' somebody shouted, which was followed by a dozen other questions that Tony had no hope of hearing. Seriously, why did these people believe that Tony could hear- and would answer- every fucking question they had? The lights constantly flashing in his face weren't helping. They were lucky that the lights didn't make him have a fucking fit or something.

Finally, after a good minute of shouting and pushing and flash, flash, flash, Tony heard, 'Is this you coming out, Mr Stark?'

Tony outright laughed at that, and Loki looked fairly amused beside him. 'Coming out?' Tony echoed, locking eyes with the woman who'd shouted the question. 'Oh, honey, how young are you?' She flushed to the roots of her dyed-blond hair, clearly annoyed. 'I've been out since I was seventeen and got caught fucking a guy at MIT. I've been outta the metaphorical closest for a long time.'

More questions were shouted; Tony ignored them.

'Not gay!' he shouted when he heard the word repeated. 'Bisexual, if you have to use a label,' he corrected, 'or pansexual, really; that one would fit me better. That's if you lot even know what that is.'

He was met with blank stares.

'Didn't think so,' Tony rolled his eyes. 'Anyway, yes; this is my boyfriend, lover, special somebody, whatever you wanna call it. Darling,' he turned to Loki, who smiled sweetly (which was fucking hilarious), 'wanna introduce yourself?'

'Logan Thomas,' Loki informed them. He even had the ID to prove it, 'cause Tony could maybe make his own... you know, for shits and giggles.

And then the questions were shouted at Loki. The god just blinked, looking entirely unconcerned, and waited until they'd all shut up to answer. 'Yes, I'm British; I'm from England. I currently live
here and have for the past few months. I met Anthony a few weeks ago at a bar, we hit it off, we decided to continue seeing each other. And that's all you'll get from me.'

He finished by tugging on Tony's arm, and Tony waved cheerfully at the reporters before leading Loki back to the car. A valet handed Tony's keys over, and Tony slipped two hundred dollar bills into the kid's pocket; that kind of money went a long way for young guys working this sort of job. Tony opened the door for Loki, and Loki made a show of kissing him thoroughly before getting in, letting all the reporters get a good dozen or so pictures.

Tony just smirked and slammed the door shut.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: The God of Cunning and Inspiration comes from Practical Villainy by Like_a_Hurricane. It's the fourth story in the Tricks of the Trade series, and I highly recommend reading all of them.

Cheers,

{Dreamer}
Chapter 6

“\textit{The city sleeps and we're lost in the moment}\\
\textit{Another kiss says we're lying on the pavement}\\
\textit{If they could see us, they were jealous that we're crazy}\\
\textit{But I know, they just don't understand}”\\
\textit{– Take My Hand [Simple Plan]}

JARVIS had not-so-helpfully reminded Tony that he was on patrol that night- something the Avengers had initiated since Loki's escape and reappearance- so after a quickie with said god, Tony donned his Iron Man suit to do a few laps of the city.

Everything was peaceful- well, as peaceful as “the city that never sleeps” ever got. After about twenty minutes, Tony scanned the police radio to see if anything was happening, but there were only a few robberies and domestic disputes called in, and Tony didn't care about that shit. Really, he hardly cared about the big shit that the Avengers were called in on; stuff like von Doom and Loki and whatever other super villain had decided to crawl from the woodwork.

As long as they didn't touch his things, he was fine with them blowing up whatever the hell they wanted. Really, Tony had no idea why he'd waited so long to contact Loki; their agreement was about revenge- about taking down SHIELD- but Tony was barely scraping by as a hero as it was. He should have joined Loki much sooner.

Tony did a few flips, tested a few things, and made some notes; he was always trying to upgrade the suit, and he was looking for things to add to his latest suit; one that he could wear when taking down SHIELD. The Iron Man suits were mostly built for defence rather than offence, but soon he'd be going up against the Avengers, which included the Hulk and a Norse god; Tony needed better guns.

'Sir, a target is heading directly for you,' JARVIS suddenly piped in, pulling Tony from his thoughts.

'Where?' Tony asked, straightening his suit and flying steady.

'\textit{One-hundred and ten feet north-west and closing in,' JARVIS responded.}

'Scan,' Tony said.

JARVIS did as asked, and soon an image was pulled up; a rough wire-frame of whatever was speeding towards Tony like a bullet. Fifty feet, thirty, twenty, five-

'S\textit{HIT!}' Tony screeched- yes, he could admit it, he was comfortable with his masculinity, thank you very much- as a giant fucking \textit{dragon} suddenly popped up in front of him. And it \textit{was} a fucking
dragon; an Asian one (so Tony had been obsessed with dragons when he was five, sue him), with a long, serpentine body, leathery-black wings, and claws that looked like they could rip Tony's suit apart.

It hovered just before Tony, not making a move to attack, and Tony just... stared, a bit. Had JARVIS take pictures. Waved a little.

The dragon laughed- Tony was sure of it- and opened its jaw. Smoke poured from its throat, and Tony watched, in a bit of a trance, as letters- words- started forming from the smoke.

*You are ridiculous*.

Tony blinked. Did a dragon just sass him? His life was fucked up.

Putting the suit on speaker, Tony said, 'Fuck you.'

The dragon smirked; again, Tony was sure of it. More smoke streamed from its throat, its nostrils, forming more words.

*You already did*.

Tony frowned at that. Wait a...

'Loki ?!'

The dragon did a spin, tail flicking and wings beating to keep it hovering in the air. It drew closer and Tony had to fight down every instinct he had that was telling him to haul ass, get the fuck out, *it's a motherfucking dragon!* He just continued to hover as the creature approached, and when it got closer-

'Sir, the dragon's eye colour is an exact match for Loki Lie-Smith ,' JARVIS informed him.

Tony rolled his eyes. 'Yeah, J, I got that.' He looked back at Loki the dragon- because apparently that was something that Loki could fucking *do*. 'A dragon, really?'

More smoke words.

*I was going to choose some type of bird form, but I figured that you'd just fly past.*

Tony chuckled. 'Yeah, okay; a dragon definitely caught my attention.'

Loki suddenly jerked his head to the right and then lifted higher into the air before turning, his body sliding through the air gracefully. Tony raised an eyebrow but followed when Loki started flying away; he even slowed down so Tony could follow.

Loki led them to a rooftop and transformed halfway through a dive; suddenly he was wearing his Asgardian armour, black hair whipping around his head as he fell the last ten or so feet. He landed on the roof in a crouch and rolled, easily straightening to his feet afterwards. Tony landed a lot less gracefully and flipped Loki off even before raising his faceplate.

'Show off,' he scowled. Loki chuckled. 'Okay; what the fuck was that?' Tony demanded as he walked towards Loki, his boots crushing whatever was beneath his feet.

'I don't like awakening alone, Stark,' Loki said, 'especially when I went to sleep in rather high spirits.'
Tony put on an exaggerated pout, making Loki smirk. 'Aww, did Lo-Lo miss Tony?'

'Shit up, you filthy mortal!' Loki snapped, but his tone was more affectionate than anything, so Tony grinned and closed the remaining distance between them. He pressed a kiss to Loki's lips- and, awesome, the Iron Man suit made him almost as tall as Loki- and Loki easily returned the gesture.

'Dragon,' Tony said when they broke apart, 'awesome.'

'Shapeshifter,' was Loki's response.

'So are there dragons on Asgard?' Tony asked.

'Not Asgard, no,' Loki shook his head. 'But on other realms. I may take you one day; they are fascinating creatures.'

'Yeah,' Tony breathed. He had a feeling that real dragons would be a bit bigger than Loki's form, but whatever. Motherfucking dragons! 'So, you just decided to pop out and have a fly with me?' he asked.

Loki shrugged one shoulder and walked towards the edge of the roof. There was no wall; nothing to stop anyone falling right off the edge. Behind them were a few maintenance rooms, some air-cons, and whatever else people stuck atop skyscrapers to keep them running. He figured that nobody but maintenance staff were allowed up here; hence, no need for a wall.

'I was suddenly hit with the urge to look across this city,' Loki said when Tony joined him.

'Oh?' Tony hummed.

'Mm,' Loki nodded once. 'Soon, this will all be ours.'

Tony giggled; he couldn't help it. 'Everything the light touches will be our kingdom.' Loki just turned to him, one eyebrow going up. 'Okay, seriously; movie day,' Tony decided. 'I make hilariously awesome jokes, you gotta appreciate them.'

'Mm,' Loki repeated.

'Anyway,' Tony cleared his throat and let his own eyes glance down at the city before them. 'I already own this city.'

'Indeed,' Loki agreed. 'However, soon we shall own it completely. No SHIELD rushing about pretending to claim ownership; no Avengers trying to defend it and hinder our plans; no backwards villains vying to be the best.'

Tony snickered. 'You know, the Avengers were worried that you'd start working with von Doom.'

'Excuse me?' Loki rounded on the genius, looking thoroughly pissed off. 'I would never lower myself so much as to work with someone like Victor. He talks about himself in third person!'

'That's what I said!' Tony nodded. 'Clint made some comment about you both using magic, and I said that Doom's "magic" was child's play when compared to yours. I said that no real sorcerer-'

'Mage,' Loki corrected.

'Mage,' Tony rolled his eyes, 'no self-respecting mage would actually work with someone as unskilled as Doom. Especially considering that Doom's a mortal.'
'Exactly,' Loki sniffed, eyes finding the city once more. 'I don't work with mortals.'

'So I've heard,' Tony laughed.

Loki smiled faintly, his eyes still on the city, and they fell into silence; both men- *immortals*- just... staring, in silence. Usually, Tony wasn't good with silence. He blasted music very, very loudly whenever he worked. When he didn't want music, the clanking of his tools, the whir of his computers, was enough to drown out the silence. At night it was whatever warm body he'd decided to pull into his bed, or the *tick, tick, tick* of the digital alarm clock he'd purposely built to make the *ticking* noise. He hadn't done well with silence when he was younger, and he sure as hell hadn't done well with it after Afghanistan and that fucking wormhole.

But now, just standing with Loki by his side, it was... okay. Oh, there were the vague sounds of traffic bellow; of people still rushing about despite it being near eleven o'clock at night. But for the most part, just silence... and Tony was okay with it.

'You're in a weird mood tonight,' Tony commented after at least fifteen minutes of silence; and really, he should be given a medal for staying quiet that long.

'Mm,' Loki hummed, yet again.

'The dragon; the looking,' Tony continued. 'What gives?'

'I suppose that some part of me will mourn the loss of this... quiet, when we attack SHIELD,' Loki admitted. 'I usually abhor silence; it makes my skin itch. But I feel the need to look across at this city, right now, before we truly put our action into plan. This city- this *world*- has no idea what is about to happen.'

Yeah, Tony could kind of understand that. He wasn't about to make Iron Man a villain; he was building a suit, one that looked different in all the ways that counted, so that he could fight with Loki without the media catching wind of the fact that he and Loki had teamed up. SHIELD would know; and they'd no doubt try and sell Tony out to the media. But Tony owned this planet; they'd believe anything he said.

So yeah, while Tony owned the planet, he didn't own it in the way that he and Loki were planning; not yet. Soon he and Loki would own it completely; they'd destroy SHIELD and the Security Council and all the little villains running around thinking that they even had a *chance* of owning Midgard. Midgard would belong completely to Tony and Loki, and the world would have no idea.

'Now I'm in a weird mood,' Tony muttered. Loki chuckled beside him. 'No, seriously,' Tony said. 'You've got me thinking deep, Lo'. I don't like it. I'm supposed to be shallow.'

'My apologies,' Loki smirked, not looking apologetic in the slightest. 'I just felt the need to get out and... *see*. If that makes sense.'

'Yeah,' Tony nodded. It did. At least to Tony it did. 'The calm before the storm,' he murmured.

'Indeed,' Loki agreed.

'The Avengers will be back soon,' Tony said, deciding to change the topic. He'd been meaning to talk to Loki about this all day, but he'd forgotten; they'd had more important things to discuss. And there'd been the sex. Oh, Tony *loved* the sex.

Loki just raised both eyebrows, clearing waiting for Tony to continue.
'Steve had some Avengers-related publicity thing in Vegas. His flight gets in around midday tomorrow. Bruce is on the Helicarrier doing something super-secret SHIELD-related that Fury thinks I don't know about, but JARVIS tells me he'll be back tomorrow afternoon. Black Widow and Hawkeye are due the day after that, and I have no frickin' idea when Thor's getting back.'

'He can preform his Royal duties in two or three weeks, depending on what crises his attention needs,' Loki said. 'He's been on Asgard for... seventeen days, so he should be back by the end of the week.'

"Kay.'

'I had your computer- JARVIS- set up a fake address for Logan Thomas,' Loki continued, and Tony raised his eyebrows, turning to look at the god. 'I thought it prudent to have a former address before Logan moves into your Tower; something we both overlooked when first creating my alias.'

'Ah,' Tony hummed. 'Should I be concerned that you and my AI are getting along so well?'

Loki smirked; his lips slowly curling, eyes narrowing a bit, poison-green eyes sweeping over the city. 'Perhaps,' was all he said.

Tony snorted. Whatever. JARVIS would never betray him. And neither would Loki; not after their little contract was signed.

'JARVIS has been ordered not to mention your presence unless it's in relation to Logan and Lily,' Tony said, 'so you can hang around until Steve gets back, if you want.'

'Perhaps I should meet some of your team as Logan before I move in?' Loki suggested. 'That way they at least know me a little before you suddenly have me living there.'

'Yeah, good idea,' Tony agreed. 'I was thinking you can hang around on and off for about a month before moving in? Then introduce the idea of me getting an assistant.'

Loki just nodded and they fell into silence once more. It was comfortable, though, like before. Tony wasn't used to comfortable silences with people. He even started to fidget in Pepper's company after a few minutes.

'Well,' Tony finally breathed out, 'wanna head back? Maybe have a snack- 'cause seriously, I'm fucking starving- and maybe throw in a shower... and some sex. I really want sex.'

Loki chuckled and turned bodily, now facing Tony. 'You aren't subtle in the least, Mr Stark.'

'Do I really need to be?' Tony leered, letting his eyes wash over Loki from head to toe.

Loki's lips curled. 'Not at all.' He either stepped forward or teleported the distance between them, Tony had no idea, because suddenly his mouth was claimed in a rather rough, possessive kiss that made his Iron Man suit a bit uncomfortable. Hmm, he'd have to build a little bulge into the crotch of the next one if Loki was gonna keep this up.

They bit at each other's lips, and Loki clawed at Tony's neck while Tony tugged at Loki's hair non-to-gently. When they broke apart, both gasping for air and sporting very swollen lips- Tony was sure that his were bleeding- Loki cocked his head.

'Shall I teleport us, or would you rather fly?'

'Fly,' Tony answered immediately, smiling at the taller man. 'Unless your little dragon form can't
Loki scowled, but it was more playful than anything, so Tony kept grinning. 'Oh, I'll show you just how fast I can be, Stark,' Loki growled. He bit Tony's mouth again before leaping back, right off the fucking edge of the building. Tony scrambled forward and looked down just in time to see Loki change; there was no flash of magic, no limbs shifting or changing; suddenly Loki was gone, replaced with a dragon just a bit bigger than Thor. Smoke shot from its nostrils as it rose up, Tony barely making out its shape in the ink black sky.

And then Loki wheeled around and shot through the air, heading towards Stark Tower, and Tony grinned. 'Not today, Green Eyes;' he said before shooting after Loki, his faceplate slamming down. There was no way he'd let Loki beat him in a race.

And, if he happened to win only because he shot Loki down just before the god could reach the helipad of Stark Tower, well... he certainly paid for it twenty minutes later. He was sure that he'd have the bathroom tiles imprinted into his back for all eternity, but it was so worth it.

Chapter End Notes

**Author's Note:** This chapter felt a bit weird; more of a filler chapter before I start moving the plot along... did it feel weird to anyone else?

I made up a FrostIron playlist- just songs to help inspire me to write this story- and Take My Hand by Simple Plan started playing... it feels very FrostIron to me. I'm a big fan of old school Simple Plan; I don't listen to their new stuff. So... yeah, just figured I'd add some lyrics :p

Also, remember that I only have a very vague idea of where this story is going because it started as a one-shot, so I'm kind of making it up as I go along. There are a few things that I want to happen, but other than that it's more of a “let my muse go insane and write whatever the hell he wants” kind of fic. Hopefully it turns out alright :)

Cheers,

{IBegToDreamAndDiffer}
'Sir, I suggest that you wake. Preferably within the next fifteen seconds.'

Tony groaned and rolled over. Loki shifted beside him, muttering something that sounded like, “I will murder you if you move again”, but his voice was muffled by a pillow, so Tony wasn't quite sure. He'd bet his suits that it was some type of threat, anyway.

'J, go 'way,' Tony grumbled. He rubbed his face against Loki's back- he was apparently using the god as a pillow, shut up, Loki was comfy!- and pressed a kiss to Loki's shoulder. 'Sleepin'.'

'Sir, it's twelve twenty-three pm, and Captain Rogers is on his way up,' JARVIS said.

Tony shot right up, sleep suddenly forgotten, and was then promptly kicked out of bed.

'Ow!' he groaned and glared up at Loki, who'd moved so he could peer at Tony over the mattress.

'I did warn you,' Loki said.

Okay, no; just no. Loki looked way too adorable all sleep-tousled for Tony to take him seriously.

'Sir, Captain Rogers will reach the penthouse in twenty-one seconds,' JARVIS chimed in.

'Fuck,' Tony groaned and jumped to his feet. 'Why are you letting him up when you know Loki's here?' he demanded.

'You didn't explicitly order me to keep anybody out of the penthouse if Mr Lie-smith was present,' JARVIS replied. 'And you did say that you wanted to be woken when Captain Rogers arrived back in the Tower, sir.'

'Don't get smart with me, JARVIS,' Tony grumbled as he went through his drawers, looking for sweats or jeans to put on over his nakedness. He eventually found boxer-briefs and tugged them on, while behind him Loki sat up and yawned.

'I am what you made me, sir,' JARVIS drawled, before, 'Captain Rogers is now in the penthouse, sir.'

'Fuck!' Tony turned quickly, but Loki had already changed; he was Logan, now, his hair short and blonde, the curls frizzy from sleep. He winked at Tony before sliding out of bed and waving a hand; now clad in sweats and nothing else, he strolled across the room and wrapped his arms around Tony's waist from behind, resting his chin on Tony's shoulder.

'I should stop using so much magic; Thor will be returning soon,' he murmured and pressed a kiss to Tony's neck.

'Tony?' That was Steve. And Tony was still half-naked. Awesome.

'Just a minute!' Tony shouted and went back to hunting for some pants. 'Lok- Logan, stop it!' he hissed when Loki slid a hand beneath his underwear, gripping his cock. And little Tony- figure of speech, 'cause Tony was well-proportioned, thank you very much- twitched in interested, which really wasn't helping either.

'I'm not trying to be helpful,' Loki smirked. But he gave Tony another quick kiss before stepping back, and Tony actually managed to get some jeans on before Steve appeared.
'You're actually up?' Steve said from just down the hallway. 'Huh, I thought you'd be-' He cut himself off when he glanced into the room and saw Loki- Logan, whatever. Steve had been really fucking confused the first time he'd run into one of Tony's male one-night stands, but it happened so often that he'd learned to live with it. He didn't like it- he didn't like the way Tony treated anyone like they were disposable- but he'd gotten used to it.

He still blushed like a twelve-year-old and hastily averted his eyes.

'Oh, um... sorry,' he mumbled.

'Not a problem,' Loki smiled.

'I'll just, ah... wait in the kitchen.' Steve left before Tony could say anything, and Loki snickered into his hand.

'You're an a-hole,' Tony muttered.

'But of course,' Loki smirked. 'What did you expect?'

Tony rolled his eyes and grabbed a shirt, tugging it on as he made his way towards the door. 'Coming?' he asked over his shoulder. 'Might as well introduce boyfriend Logan as soon as possible.'

'Partner, Stark!' Loki hissed. 'As I told you last night; I have no wish to be called your boyfriend.'

'Yeah, yeah,' Tony flapped a hand. 'Come on, I'm hungry.'

'You're always hungry.'

'And who's fault is that?'

'You're the one who wanted the Apple.'

'SHHHH!' Tony hissed, making Loki smirk.

'Captain Rogers is currently in the kitchen,' Loki said. 'He can't hear me.'

'Still,' Tony grumbled, 'you can't be too careful. Especially with Clint and Natasha around.'

'Who currently aren't around,' Loki commented.

'I hate you,' Tony declared and proceeded to stomp down the hallway.

'You are such a child,' Loki sighed, but was smiling as he followed. Really, Stark was so much like him it was amazing.

'Am not,' Tony shot back. Which really didn't help his argument, but whatever; he was hungry. He'd grown used to feeling half-starved over the past few days, and Tony knew that he had to watch himself when around the Avengers. Usually he'd eat one, maybe two pieces of toast for breakfast. He currently felt like eating six, but he'd just having something else when Steve left. Which reminded him; he had to put in an order for some food, and a mini fridge for the lab.

Tony made a mental note and entered the kitchen. His penthouse had been equipped with everything Tony needed; which meant a bedroom, bar, a small, personal lab for his more sensitive projects, and a kitchen. There were a few other, smaller rooms- offices and maybe a library- but Tony never used them.
Just because he had a kitchen didn't mean there was anything in the kitchen apart from some frozen pizzas, ice, and cereal. Tony liked cereal.

'Hey, Stevie,' Tony called.

The Captain was sitting at the kitchen counter, a box to his left and mug of coffee to his right. Coffee didn't really affect Steve, but he liked drinking it anyway; something about the taste making him feel more alert. Tony didn't get it. Coffee didn't really taste that great, Tony just liked the caffeine jolt.

'Tony,' Steve nodded, but his eyes were on Loki.

'So, you've met Logan,' Tony said and went to the coffee machine to pour himself a cup. He looked at Loki, who nodded, and poured the god one, too.

'Not properly,' Steve said. He held out his hand when Loki got closer, smile tight. 'Steve Rogers.'

Loki's left eye twitched and Tony had to bite back a snicker. The Trickster shook Steve's hand, saying, 'Logan Thomas,' before quickly dropping it. He slid onto a stool opposite Steve and smiled brightly when Tony handed him a coffee. 'Thank you, my dear.'

Tony snorted at that but didn't say a word as he sat beside Loki.

'So...' Steve hummed and looked pointedly between them.

'Yeah, Logan isn't going anywhere,' Tony said, making Steve's eyebrows jump. 'We're dating.'

'Dating,' Steve echoed, looking confused.

'I can date,' Tony pouted. 'Just ask Pepper.'

Steve sighed slightly and Tony rolled his eyes while the Captain wasn't looking. Here we go, he thought.

'Pepper's worried,' Steve said.

Yeah, she was always worried, nothing new there. Tony and Pepper's relationship had been strained at the best of times, but it'd taken a nose dive after Loki's invasion. Why Pepper had been surprised that Iron Man almost died during the invasion, Tony had no idea. He almost died practically every second week. If she couldn't deal with it, she shouldn't have started dating Tony in the first place.

She was still the CEO of his company, but their personal relationship was non-existent. They rarely ever talked unless Stark Industries paperwork was involved. Tony had been surprised to find that he didn't miss her all that much. Sure, Pepper was great most of the time, but the nagging, the, “Tony, you aren't eating properly”, and, “Tony, you need sleep”, and blah, blah, blaahhhhh. She treated him like was he five. Contrary to popular belief, Tony was an adult; he could take care of himself. He knew his limits, knew how long he could stay up and keep working before he really needed to sleep. Pepper's constant nagging had just pissed him off. He really didn't miss that.

'So?' Tony brushed Steve's concern aside and turned to Loki. 'Want a bagel?'

'Please,' Loki nodded, and looked on curiously as Tony stood. He grabbed three plates- because sometimes he could be nice- and got a few things from the fridge; cream cheese, jelly and butter. Both Steve and Bruce liked jelly on their bagels, while Tony liked cream cheese.
Loki clearly had no idea what a bagel was, but watched Tony cut one in half and spread cream cheese over the two halves, before doing the same to his own. He chewed thoughtfully for a few seconds before trying it with butter, then jelly. He stuck to cream cheese after that, and Tony smirked; ha, Loki liked bagels like he did! For some reason it felt like an accomplishment.

Steve was clearly itching to talk about Pepper, but seemed to realise that Tony had no plans to continue the conversation. Sometimes Steve had tact, so he cleared his throat after a sip of coffee and changed the topic. 'How long have you two been... dating?'

'Few weeks,' Tony said.

'We met at a bar,' Loki said, smiling slightly at Tony. There was a mischievous glint in his eyes that Tony tried not to return; he was trying to trick Steve, after all. It wouldn't do for him to break down in a fit of giggles.

'We hit it off,' Tony shrugged, 'and I asked him out.'

'I see,' Steve said, even though he clearly didn't. Which was understandable; Tony wasn't well known for dating.

'I'm well aware of Anthony's reputation,' Loki said, drawing Steve's attention, 'but he soon found that I don't share.'

'And why would I want to?' Tony said with a grin in Loki's direction. 'You're more than enough for me, baby.'

'Of course I am,' Loki huffed, making Tony snicker.

'Tony, how long do you think you and Logan will be... together?' Steve asked slowly. Tony raised his eyebrows. Was Steve seriously asking for an expiration date on their relationship? 'Because we have some things to... discuss,' Steve finished.

Oh... oh. Steve wanted to talk business.

'Logan's cool,' Tony said.

'I can make myself scarce, if you wish,' Loki said right after him.

'I'm not letting Steve run you out,' Tony said, but Loki just smiled.

'I need to change, anyway,' Loki said and gestured at his clothing. He was still only wearing sweats, nothing else, and though Tony liked the view, Steve clearly felt uncomfortable. 'You two talk,' Loki said and gave Tony a kiss, Steve a sweet-smile- which was so fake Tony almost burst out laughing- before leaving.

'Well, thank you, Captain Cock-block,' Tony huffed, turning to a slightly blushing Steve. He was better with the whole “everyone has sex these days” mentality of the 21st century, but he was still a bit uncomfortable around Tony and his one-nighters. Or around Tony and men the billionaire had had sex with, really. The fact that it was Loki just made the whole thing a lot more hilarious in Tony's eyes.

'Tony, we really need to talk,' Steve said, clearly trying to make Tony see the seriousness of the situation.

'And you could have talked with Logan here,' Tony replied. 'Honestly, it's not like he was asking
for SHIELD secrets.'

'Tony.'

'Steve.'

The super soldier sighed and rubbed his eyes. 'Tony, I heard about the Doom-bots you fought the other day.'

Ah, yes; that fight. Clint and Natasha were still in another country, Bruce was being super-secret on the Helicarrier, and Steve had just gotten to Vegas. That had left Tony and only Tony to deal with the dozen Doom-bots that a-hole Victor had let loose in Brooklyn. Tony had been a bit suspicious when everyone had suddenly jetted off to wherever the hell they were needed; usually Fury was consistent, leaving at least two Avengers in New York city. What if there'd been a massive battle? Tony was good, but he wasn't that good. If von Doom had let out another thirty or so bots, Tony would have gotten his ass kicked.

'I'm fine,' Tony shrugged one shoulder and sipped his coffee. 'There were only twelve or thirteen bots, and Doom wasn't anywhere to be seen. I took care of them before anyone died.' There had been a few injuries, but nothing serious.

'But some SHIELD agents reported that you played with a few of the bots before destroying them,' Steve said.

Yes, well... how else was Tony supposed to study them if he didn't watch their movements and how they were controlled? He'd even managed to get almost a whole one into his lab. One of the arms was missing, and part of the right leg, but there was enough for Tony to study.

'So?' Tony shrugged again.

'Tony,' Steve said, his voice inching towards exasperation, 'I know that you want to study them, but there were civilians in danger. One of the buildings was still full.'

'An office building,' Tony said, waving a dismissive hand. 'They got a good show.'

'The bot you were playing with broke a woman's arm!' Steve near-snapped. Ooh, he was getting angry.

'And I destroyed it before she could be hurt any further,' Tony argued. 'Come on, Steve; how often do I get a chance to actually study Doom's technology? His bots are just getting better and better every time we fight them. If we don't kill him soon, his bots will be perfected to match our fighting styles. Do you want the team to die?'

'No, I don't!' Steve groaned. 'But I'd rather get injured myself than have a civilian in the hospital. We signed up for this; they didn't.'

Yeah, no; Tony didn't sign up for this. He'd never wanted to play super hero. Iron Man was created to help Tony, not the general population. What the hell had they ever done for him? All they wanted was to read about his fuck-ups and every little thing he did during the day. The media slandered him at every opportunity and civilians lapped it up, agreeing with everything like the good little herd they were. Tony had never wanted to be a hero; he'd never wanted to be an Avenger.

But he'd joined forces with the others when they'd needed him; when someone far too powerful had threatened to take over his planet. He would have been more than happy to walk away from
SHIELD and their little boy-band as soon as Loki was carted off, but SHIELD had been the ones who'd sent the other Avengers to live with him; Fury was the one who'd decided that it'd be just a great idea to try and steal Tony's technology. Apparently seeing Tony fight during the invasion had scared the Security Council enough to finally take action; now they knew without a doubt that Tony was dangerous.

They should have realised it long before Iron Man, but Tony didn't care. They'd pay.

'Whatever,' Tony muttered.

'Tony,' Steve sighed and leaned forward, arms braced on the counter, 'we're just worried.'

'Who's worried?' Tony asked. 'Fury?' He almost snorted at the thought. No, Fury would lock Tony up if he could to keep him out of the way. All Fury was worried about was Tony going insane and taking over the planet... which, now that Tony was planning that, was a valid worry, really.

'The team,' Steve stated.

Oh, this again. If it wasn't "Pepper's worried", then it was, "the team doesn't want you burning yourself out". Really, Steve couldn't be more obvious if he painted it on his forehead; Fury didn't want Tony on the team.

'Yeah, okay,' Tony laughed and stood to get more coffee. He jammed the rest of his bagel into his mouth, ignoring the disgusted look on Steve's face.

'Honestly, Tony, we're worried,' Steve continued now that Tony's mouth was full. Tony rolled his eyes at the coffee maker. 'You've been locking yourself in your lab more often, and in fights you're always all over the place. Maybe you should take a break.'

Swallowing thickly, Tony said, 'And, what? Let Doom's bots rampage around New York?' He shook his head. 'If Fury didn't want me fighting, then he shouldn't have left me in the city alone.'

'It's not Fury,' Steve tried.

'Uh-huh,' Tony murmured. Steve was the most obvious pawn in Fury's little game. Clint and Natasha were trained spies; assassins. Tony wouldn't have known what they were up to if he hadn't hacked into SHIELD's database. Steve? Steve outed himself the moment he started insisting that Tony take a break.

"Just a week or two, Tony."

"Go back to Malibu for a while."

"Get some rest."

"We'll take care of the Tower."

Ha, ha. Like Tony would leave the Avengers alone in his Tower. Fury would be in before Tony's car left the street.

Tony wasn't sure if Steve knew everything about Fury's plan; he wasn't sure if Steve knew that Fury wanted to get his hands on Iron Man and throw Tony in the gutter. But it didn't matter. Steve was still following Fury's orders. He'd still agreed to try and get Tony to quit the team. The two weren't friends, but Tony had thought that they were team mates. He hadn't thought that Steve would want him gone.
'We're just worried,' Steve tried again.

'Mm-hmm,' Tony muttered and turned. 'Steve, I'm fine. Really.' He wanted to shout and scream and throw his coffee in Steve's face; nobody fucked Tony around and got away with it. But there was a bigger picture here; Steve wasn't who Tony should concern himself with. He needed to stay on the team long enough to get all the information he and Loki needed. 'How about I take a break now that you're back, huh?' he suggested. Maybe that'd make Steve back off a bit. 'Unless I'm absolutely needed, I'll let you handle all emergencies, okay?'

Steve smiled slightly at that, and Tony bit back a sneer. Asshole.

'That's good, Tony,' Steve nodded. 'Maybe you and... Logan, could go do something? Just relax.'

'Yeah, sounds fun,' Tony gave Steve a fake smile.

Loki, thankfully, chose that moment to re-enter the kitchen, now wearing dark-wash jeans and a green sweater. Damn, he was one sexy god.

Loki raised an eyebrow at the sudden silence that had fallen, and swept his pale-blue eyes over Tony. 'Am I interrupting anything?' he asked, clearly sensing the decline in Tony's mood.

'Nope; me and Stevie are done,' Tony said. 'Hey, Lo', wanna see my lab?' He wiggled his eyebrows, mostly because that's what Steve expected; he expected Tony to drag Loki downstairs and fuck him. He didn't expect Tony to show Loki a new project that he'd thought up the night before.

'I need to get back to work soon, but yes,' Loki inclined his head.

'What do you do?' Steve asked, ever the interested little boy-scout.

'I'm a writer,' Loki lined, turning to smile at Steve. 'I'm yet to be published, but I enjoy the art.'

Writer, huh. Good cover story. SHIELD wouldn't be able to disprove it, and Tony had already made it look like Logan Thomas came from a fairly wealthy family; he'd been living off of his inheritance since he turned twenty-one.

'Yeah, lovely chat, let's go,' Tony said and threaded his arm through Loki's. Loki dragged him towards the counter and grabbed two bagels before letting Tony lead him from the kitchen. They were silent as they walked, Tony only groaning when were alone in the lift. 'Fucking asshole,' he growled.

'Mm, I'm inclined to agree,' Loki said.

'Were you listening?' Tony asked, turning to see a smirk spread across Loki's face.

'Thor won't be back for a few days,' Loki explained. 'Any spells I use, as long as they are small, won't be detected by him. I can see why you dislike the Captain; he's rather tedious.'

'He's an asshole,' Tony repeated.

'Does he know that Fury wants your suits?' Loki asked.

'I have no idea,' Tony shrugged. 'But he's still trying to get me to quit. If he doesn't know, then Fury no doubt spun some tale about me being a danger to myself and others. Steve's handy in a fight, and he's loyal, but he follows orders when they make sense to him.'
'Orders,' Loki snorted. 'Why listen to someone else when you can set your own path?'

'And that, Lo', Tony said as the elevator doors opened, 'is why I'm sleeping with you and not Steve.'

Loki froze at that, and Tony turned to look at him.

'Lokes?'

'You wish to sleep with the Captain?' Loki demanded.

'What?' Tony laughed. 'God, no.'

'You said-

'He's good-looking, yeah,' the genius interrupted, 'but it'd be like sleeping with... with Thor! Big, blonde and good aren't really my thing, especially when it comes to men.' He stepped back, closer to Loki, and smiled at him. 'I prefer my men tall, lean, and fucking insane.'

Loki finally cracked a smile and followed Tony down the hallway. They entered his lab and Tony said, 'J, lock down the lab, yeah? No one in unless you pass it by me first.'

'Yes, sir,' JARVIS responded.

'Has SHIELD tried to crack into anything today?' Tony asked as he moved about, shifting this and that, leaving Loki to take a seat at one of the tables.

'Two attempts today, Mr Stark,' JARVIS answered. 'SHIELD seems to be concentrating on your mental health this week.'

'Ahh,' Tony grimaced. That meant that Steve- or someone else- would be suggesting another visit to SHIELD's doctors. Honestly, every ten seconds someone from SHIELD wanted to crack his skull open. 'Hey, Loki, can someone tell that I'm a god now from my blood or anything?' Tony asked, turning to face Loki.

Loki had been playing with a holographic monitor- he'd taken to the internet like a teenager- but looked up at Tony's question. 'Pardon?'

'You know how doctors work on Midgard, right?' Tony questioned. 'Like, how we take blood and tissue samples, etc...'

'I'm vaguely familiar with your healers' ways, yes,' Loki nodded. 'I couldn't discuss it with you in detail, however.'

'Will me being immortal show up in my blood, or any scan?' Tony asked.

Loki frowned at that and tilted his head, thinking. 'I believe that your blood may show some abnormalities, yes,' he finally said. 'The Apples change your metabolism and the way your body reacts to pain, toxins, food and drink. However, unless SHIELD compared your blood to Thor's, or my own, they wouldn't automatically assume that you are now a god. Thor believes Æunn's Apples to be secure. And while the garden is, the Apples left in bowls throughout Asgard are not. Thor would have no reason to believe that you are now like him.'

'Hmm,' Tony hummed and turned to face his own screen.

'A very thorough look at your body would reveal the changes,' Loki continued. 'The Apple healed a
lot of the damage done to your body by age, alcohol and battle. Those changes would show up on whatever in-depth tests you Midgardians use.'

'I got it,' Tony nodded. 'Don't let them get my blood; don't let them cut me open or scan me.'

'You will also have to watch yourself in battle,' Loki added. 'It will take a lot to hurt you, and any small injuries you suffer—such as bruises and cuts—will heal within a few minutes or hours depending on the severity. That may draw attention.'

'Maybe I can tell them I'm fucking with Extremis,' Tony mused. SHIELD had swiped most of the information, but Tony had, of course, kept his own copies. He'd already been looking into making himself semi-immortal before Loki offered him a Golden Apple.

'Extremis?' Loki asked, looking curious.

Tony grinned and pulled up the information before flicking it over to Loki's monitor. Loki blinked at the sudden information now scrolling before him before smiling broadly.

'I really do love your technology,' he commented. 'You are so far ahead of others in your field.'

'Duh,' Tony snorted. 'You should see what they do when I walk into an Apple store.'

Loki had no idea what Apple was, so Tony pulled up the Wikipedia page. After that he and the god fell into discussion after discussion of Midgardian technology, and what other Realms used instead.

Tony made a note to visit some of those Realms when SHIELD was taken care of. A Dwarf was something he just had to see.
'I keep telling you that it'll be easier for me to find *my* magic if I can *detect* magic first!' 

'And *I* keep telling you that it's much easier to sample your own magic before others!' 

Tony growled in frustration and ran a hand through his hair. Opposite him, Loki tapped repeatedly at the table-top, long fingers itching to wrap around Tony's neck, the inventor knew. They'd been discussing this for *hours*. Well, they'd been arguing for hours, in all honesty. But Tony hadn't had an argument this intelligent and clever in... ever. 

Bruce came the closest, of course. But despite his excellent anger management skills, even Bruce couldn't deal with Tony for more than five hours without needing to step out. Loki had a much better handle on his emotions, and could fight Tony with just as many vicious words. And there was heavy flirting involved. Despite how much Tony loved Bruce, he had no interest in sleeping with jolly green. 

Two of their “discussions” had already led to Tony bent over a work bench, Loki taking him from behind; the second involved Loki, Tony's mouth, and creative use of olive oil. Why Tony had olive oil down here was anyone's guess. *Loki's* guess- wild imagination, really- had almost led to round three, but despite Tony's recent consumption of a magical apple, his libido hadn't yet increased. Loki had said it would, give or take a week or three. 

*Five rounds a night with Loki*... Tony daydreamed as Loki sighed and slammed his palm against the table. 

'Stark!' 

'Yes, my love?' Tony quipped, earning a rather vicious glare. It was part vicious, part amused; Tony was learning how to tell the difference. 

'If you can *feel* magic, you have a much higher chance of detecting it with your... toys,' Loki said. 

Tony scowled. 'First of all, these aren't *toys*, they're works of sheer brilliance!' 

'Really?' Loki questioned and looked at DUM-E, who was currently trying to... 

'DUM-E, stop that!' Tony ordered. 

The bot immediately dropped the fire extinguisher and backed away from Tony, arm dangling and a soft, dejected whirring noise escaping its claw. 

'I swear to all that is Holy you have an unnatural love of fire extinguishers!' Tony snapped, which of course just made DUM-E whine that much more pathetically. 'Never again, DUM, never again!' Tony growled. 

'I like him,' Loki mused, looking far too happy about the situation. 'Especially after he blasted you.' 

Yeah... DUM-E seemed to confuse “on fire” and “grabbing olive oil” as the same thing. He'd showered Tony in foul, sticky white-foam just before round two with Loki.
'Look,' Tony tried again to get his point across, 'even if I learn to... to detect magic myself, that won't help me with my scanners. You said that detecting magic is a feeling, like someone detecting a small electric current going through their body.' Loki nodded. 'How the hell am I supposed to describe that to my computers?' Tony questioned. 'They've never had magic run through them, at least not to my knowledge, unless you've been zapping my shit while I was getting changed.'

Loki muttered something under his breath in another language, and Tony's eyes narrowed. 'Hey, we speak English in this lab!' he ordered. 'Sometimes other languages, but only to swear.'

'I was swearing,' Loki admitted, throwing a small smile Tony's way. 'If you have magic I shall gift you with the All-Speak, it will make life much easier.'

'And if I don't have magic?' Tony asked. 'If I can't “harness it” or whatever the hell you said?'

'Than it will be extremely dangerous,' Loki answered. 'It's a magic that works quickly, but it can destroy a weak mind. Your mind, however, is far from weak.'

'Duh,' Tony rolled his eyes.

'The ego on you,' Loki muttered.

'Pot, meet kettle,' Tony retorted.

'I have no idea what that means,' Loki said, but moved on swiftly. 'Fine, build your little machine.'

'Are you going to help?' Tony asked.

Loki sighed, like Tony had just asked the Trickster to bring him the Statue of Liberty. Although, knowing Loki, he'd do it just for shits and giggles. 'Fine,' Loki drawled, 'what would you have me do?'

'Okay,' Tony immediately bounced to his feet, excitement coursing through him. He'd tried to build scanners in the past, ever since the Chitauri invasion and Loki's re-appearance on Earth, but he hadn't been having much luck. His scanners only worked over a certain range, and Loki had never conveniently attacked in Tony's lab. Now, Tony had his very own magician, offering to help. He was being a dick about it, but still; Tony had expected that. 'Just go stand over there,' Tony said and waved to the one free wall. There were cars to the left, tables and Iron Man suits to the right, as well as whatever projects Tony was half-working on.

Loki stood gracefully- 'cause he was a bitch and always amazing- and briskly strolled across to the area Tony had pointed to. Tony quickly rushed around the lab, grabbing the various magic detectors he'd been working on. A few were as large as a microwave, others as small as a pistol. Tony had never had a test subject so wasn't sure if they'd work. He'd find out now.

'What must I do?' Loki asked again as Tony set everything up on the closest work bench.

'Just stand there until I tell you to do a spell,' Tony said. 'DUM-E, PUT THAT DOWN!' The little fucker had gone for the fire extinguisher again, and quickly rolled away when Tony threw a spanner at him. 'You sit in your dock and think about what you've done, young man!' Tony ordered.

'You amuse me,' Loki said, a soft smile on his lips. Huh, no joking there; he was serious.

'Glad to be of service, Your Highness,' Tony bowed from the waist down. Loki chuckled. 'Okay...' Tony muttered to himself as he turned everything on, trying to attune each scanner to Loki. 'We'll
Loki held his right palm out and in seconds a small, green ball of magic appeared, swirling various shades of green and black. Tony quickly pounced on his scanners, twisting this, pressing that, while Loki just waited, looking incredibly bored.

'Nothing,' Tony growled. 'Okay, give me something big.'

Loki grinned.

'Don't destroy my lab!' Tony snapped, making Loki pout. 'Not only is this my special place, but Steve's in the Tower.'

'You annoy me,' Loki muttered, (Tony pouted, he wasn't amusing anymore?) but then Loki shimmered, and suddenly there were five Lokis instead of one.

Tony blinked. 'Huh.'

'See something you like, Mr Stark?' Loki queried.

'Yeah...' Tony hummed. He shifted a bit, because hello. Loki orgy, that's what this was.

'Perhaps round three?' Loki asked, taking a step forward, followed by the other Lokis doing the same.

'Hey, wait, no!' Tony snapped, holding a hand out. The Lokis stopped. 'Bit more magic, alright?'

'Very well,' Loki drawled, 'however I've never been known for my patience.'

The Loki to the furthest right ran a hand down his chest, stopping just above his jeans.

Tony swallowed but focused on his scanners. Fucking Loki... s.

{OoO}

Seventeen hours later and Tony had had no luck whatsoever. No matter what spell Loki cast, whether simple or complicated, Tony's scanners just failed to pick it up. There were readings from Tony's workshop, from Tony's reactor- hell, even Loki's heartbeat had shown up on one- as well as background radiation from the world in general. But magic? No. There was absolutely no readings to suggest that Tony could detect magic.

It pissed him off to no end, but Loki let him take out his frustrations in a highly pleasurable way that left them gasping and covered in sweat, curled up on the sofa in the far corner of the lab. The thing was falling apart- Tony had had it for at least twenty years- but it was comfortable when needed.

Loki stretched- all graceful, jerk- and then flopped back onto the very tight space, one arm thrown sloppily over Tony's waist. 'Hnn,' Loki murmured, nuzzling Tony's chest, fingers tracing the arc reactor. 'I do enjoy your temper.'

'Yeah, yeah,' Tony muttered, but only because he agreed. He wouldn't let Loki win every argument,
after all.

'Will you allow me to teach you magic, now?' Loki asked.

Tony sighed. 'Give me two weeks, okay? Two weeks of trying to refine my scanners.' It was Loki's turn to sigh. 'Either I can detect magic or can't. Either way, you still get to teach me,' Tony said.

'Thor will be back by then,' Loki reminded the human. 'He will be able to detect magic if I help you locate it.'

'He'll detect it if I keep scanning for magic,' Tony retorted. 'Either way, we're fucked.'

'We'll have to move somewhere else,' Loki mused. 'My apartment, perhaps? There's no reason for Thor to visit Logan Thomas.'

'Yeah, maybe,' Tony murmured, eyes somewhere on the ceiling. JARVIS had dimmed the lights, and the glass walls of the lab were currently white-washed, hiding the two from view. While Tony didn't care if anyone caught them basking in post-coital bliss, he didn't need Steve seeing Loki. And Tony really, really liked fucking Loki over Logan, so...

They fell into silence for a bit; Tony staring at the ceiling, Loki tracing the scars around his arc reactor that the Apple couldn't fix. 'You are thinking,' Loki stated, rather than asked.

'Yeah,' Tony admitted. 'I just got an idea, is all.'

'Aren't you full of ideas?'

'Oh, yeah,' Tony repeated, this time with a smirk. 'It'll benefit both of us if it works. But I gotta fucking figure magic out.'

'Would you like to try again?' Loki asked.

Tony sighed. 'JARVIS, time?'

'Three forty am, sir,' JARVIS replied.

'You tired or hungry?' Tony asked.

'Famished,' Loki admitted and sat, Tony following.

'Steve'll be asleep. He keeps regular hours,' Tony said, unable to hide the disdain in his voice. Honestly, what super hero kept decent hours? It was absurd!

'Shall we order in?' Loki asked. 'Or is there enough food in the Tower?'

'Should be in the Avengers' kitchen,' Tony said. While the Avengers all had their own floors in the Tower, they usually congregated in Steve's kitchen. Steve was a decent cook- apparently his mama had taught him right or some such bullshit- so Steve's fridge and cupboards were always packed. 'Unless you had your heart set on something?'

'Oh, Anthony,' Loki chuckled as he stood, completely naked and unashamed. Tony leered, 'cause he was a pervert and could admit it. 'Haven't you heard?' Loki continued. 'I don't have a heart. And if I do, it's encased in ice.'

Tony frowned. Okay, that was so not true. Whoever had told Loki that- probably Thor or the All-Daddy- had probably said it when Loki had blown something up. The problem, Tony had quickly
realised, was that Loki felt too deeply. Someone capable of that much anger, that much hurt, also felt all the good feelings ten times as strongly as the average person- Frost Giant, whatever. Loki loved with all his heart, when he gave it away. That was the problem. He'd loved his father and brother so much that he'd considered wiping out an entire realm just to prove how devoted he was.

And he'd been stabbed in the back.

Tony sighed and swung his legs over the sofa, only flinching slightly when his feet met the cold floor. He reached up and wrapped an arm around Loki's waist, dragging the god between his spread legs. Rather than turn it into something sexy, which Tony usually did, he instead pressed his lips against Loki's belly before burying his face there.

'Not true, Lo', he murmured, voice soft. 'One day I'll prove that to you.'

Loki clearly had no idea what to say to that. He froze, arms hanging limply at his sides, before- after at least two minutes of an awkward hug/grope- he threaded his fingers through Tony's hair.

When he spoke, his tone matched Tony's; warm, soft, with an emotion that neither were willing to admit to, not so soon in their relationship. For now, things were good; things were comfortable. No need to complicate it yet.

Damn, had it only been a week?

'We should eat.'

'Mm,' Tony nodded, but didn't move.

'Stark.' Loki tugged on Tony's hair a bit.

'Yeah, yeah,' Tony grunted. He kissed Loki's tummy again, then gave it a nip just 'cause, which made Loki chuckle and shove his head away. The two stood and started dressing, Loki actually using his hands and not magic. 'So, food?' Tony said.

'I feel like noodles,' Loki decided, sweeping his hair back, but leaving it messy.

'I think Steve has a wok,' Tony said. 'You know how to use one of those?'

'Unlike Thor, I can follow direction,' Loki replied. 'If your JARVIS can talk me through it, then I shall have no problem.'

'Hear that, J?' Tony said as he and Loki walked towards the doors.

'Indeed, Mr Stark,' JARVIS said. 'Let us hope that Mr Lie-Smith is a better cook than Master Odinson.'

Loki snorted and Tony said, 'I'm pretty sure Loki can heat up poptarts without blowing up the toaster.'

'Of course he did, stupid oaf,' Loki muttered under his breath. As soon as the windows of the lab went clear, Loki shifted into Logan. Tony sighed at the loss of Loki's bright green eyes and jet black hair, but just led the god to the elevator. After they ate they could retire to Tony's room, and Tony would get his Loki back.

Huh, Tony mused. Since when did he become my Loki?

He shook his head as the elevator doors closed. Food now, self-reflection later.
**Author's Note:** Two notes, because a few readers brought up some questions in reviews/comments.

1) Neither Thor 2 or Iron Man 3 have happened in this universe. I've seen Thor 2, I haven't seen Iron Man 3, but neither apply here. Loki escaped about two months into his incarceration, and he and Tony will be discussing it later in the story. Extremis is mentioned because it appears in the comics, and I wanted to have something else that Tony and SHIELD fight about.

2) The rating for this story is “M” or “Mature” due to the graphic violence coming up in later chapters. I have no plans to write graphic sex; I'll only hint at it, or write the before/after. However, if you WANT me to write graphic smut, then I can. I enjoy writing it, and a lot of people enjoy reading it. So let me know what you want, I'm good either way.

Cheers,

{Dreamer}
“All the friends I’ve lost and the pain I’ve caused

Have never been enough just to make me stop

The lines I draw to look at myself

Are turning into somebody else”

– Takes Me Nowhere [The Offspring]

Tony was woken by the bed jolting beneath him. He sat upright, blinking blearily, hand ruffling his already messy hair. A soft chuckle made Tony turn, and he frowned when he realised that Loki was standing by the bed back in his leather garb. The horned helmet, chest and arm plates were gone, but his black leather pants, thick boots, and green tunic where hugging his lean form.

'What're you doin'?' Tony mumbled through a yawn.

'Despite what you may think, the world does not revolve around you, even Midgard,' Loki informed him. Tony scowled. 'I have business to attend to, Stark,' Loki continued. 'Business that cannot simply wait because of... us.'

'Oh,' Tony murmured. Right, he knew that. Loki was a super villain with super villain-y things to do. 'When will you be back?' he asked, yawning again.

Loki pursed his lips before saying, 'Two or three days, give or take. I must visit another realm and stay overnight, and I have to check on von Doom and ensure that he's keeping to our bargain.'

'Bargain?' Tony perked up. 'With Doom?'

'You did not think that you were the first to offer me a deal, did you?' Loki asked in amusement.

'You said you don't make deals with mortals,' Tony pouted. 'And here I thought I was special.'

Loki chuckled and climbed onto the bed, only far enough to lean over and kiss Tony softly. 'You are,' he whispered, making Tony shiver. 'However, what Victor and I have is nowhere close to what you and I have. I made Victor promise, on pain of death, that he would keep his activities away from this city. Sometimes I let him have his fun; mostly when I'm bored.'

'Course you do,' Tony snorted.

Loki smiled sweetly, and Tony snickered. 'The villains of this planet know better than to touch what's mine,' Loki said.

'And are the Avengers yours?' Tony questioned.

'Yes,' Loki answered without hesitation. 'You were formed to fight me, and fight me you have. If anybody kills your team mates, it will be me.'
'They aren't my team mates,' Tony grumbled, scratching at his beard.

'They are until our plans come to fruition,' Loki stated. He kissed Tony again and stood, the human sighing and watching. 'I'll... call you,' Loki said, the words sounding odd on his tongue. 'Thor will most likely be back before I am, and I have no wish for our partnership to be terminated so swiftly... or at all, in all honesty.'

'S'cause I'm lovable,' Tony said, giving Loki a cheeky smile. The god, of course, rolled his eyes.

'Until next time, Stark,' he said, a genuine smile on his face.

Tony smiled back, and then sighed when Loki teleported away, not a puff of smoke being left behind. Tony wondered if Loki only left smoke when he wanted people to be aware of his entrance or exit. It was like his shapeshifting; Tony had seen it maybe twice in battle, and there was always a few seconds of shifting, of limbs lengthening, before Loki did whatever it was he did. But when he'd been a dragon? Nothing; just Loki one second, a dragon the next.

_Nobody knows what he's truly capable of, Man of Iron_.

Those were Thor's words, said over and over again after every battle the Avengers had with Loki. Not even that all-seeing dude in the sky- Harmdel? Himdal?- knew what Loki could do. Tony wasn't surprised; Loki had spent his entire life, all one-thousand-something years, being made fun of. Of course he'd keep his skills to himself.

Of course, Thor's bullying didn't help, Tony thought. There was no doubt in Tony's mind that Thor did love his brother. But he loved the Loki that the Trickster had projected to Asgard for who knows how many hundreds of years; the Loki that smiled when needed, who gave advice when ordered, who had Asgard and her people's best interests at heart. Thor didn't love the real Loki; the broken, disgraced, dark Jötunn mage who would stab you if you betrayed him.

That wasn't “Loki” according to Thor. That was a dark, confused individual whom his brother had become. Tony really thought that Thor should just go home and leave Loki alone; forget about his long-lost brother and stop trying to change him. Loki would never be the person that Thor had once known. The sooner Thor accepted that, the better.

_Oh, well_ , Tony thought as he pulled himself from bed. _Thor's just another idiot warrior. Me and Loki should really send him back to Asgard_. Tony spent his entire shower happily daydreaming about getting all of the Avengers trapped in the realm of the gods. He could only imagine Steve's horror at not being the most loyal good boy in the realm. It made him snicker.

{oOo}

'Heard you got yourself a boyfriend,' was what greeted Tony when he entered the kitchen on Steve's floor.

His eyebrows climbed when he noted that not only was Clint back, but Natasha and Bruce were, too. Bruce was slumped over the kitchen table, a large mug of tea gripped in his hands. Natasha was eating something- pancakes or waffles, Tony didn't care enough to look- while Clint was eating bacon and eggs.
'Any food left?' Tony asked instead of answering the archer, who chuckled into his plate.

'On the stove,' Steve spoke up from where he was going through the fridge; he kept his sauces cold, Tony didn't understand the man.

'Cool,' Tony said. He made himself up a plate, 'cause he really was starving. But he'd noted the night before that his hunger wasn't nearly as large as it had been directly after he'd eaten the Apple; he still ate more than he used to, but he didn't feel the need to shovel copious amounts of food down his throat every hour. Loki had said that the affects of the Apple would taper off between one and two weeks, and Tony was happy to note that he'd been telling the truth. It would be hard enough to keep his and Loki's relationship from the Avengers without him gorging himself every few hours.

'So?' Clint spoke again when Tony had taken a seat. He'd considered just leaving; he really didn't want to hang out with his so-called ‘friends’. But you never know what you might hear; what you might be able to use against someone. So Tony sat.

'So what?' he asked, chewing on a piece of bacon.

'Boyfriend?' Clint repeated, making Tony roll his eyes. 'I knew you liked a little dick, Stark, but since when do you date?'

'Clint,' Natasha sighed and prodded her not-boyfriend in the ribs.

'What? You can't say you're not surprised, Tash,' Clint said.

Natasha looked at Tony. 'Still, it's none of our business,' she stated.

Tony nearly laughed. Yeah, just like his suits were none of her business; his mental health was none of her business; his technology was none of her fucking business. It didn't stop her from trying to get it, though.

'Logan's smart, hot, and fucks me all over the penthouse,' Tony said, making Steve wrinkle his nose and Bruce snort from opposite him. 'Why not date him?'

'How long'll this last, do you reckon?' Clint asked. 'Hey, anyone wanna bet me?'

'Clint,' Steve frowned.

'Whatever,' Clint huffed. But he went back to his food, leaving an awkward silence hanging in the kitchen.

Tony really didn't want to talk about his relationship with “Logan”. At least, not without Loki here. Loki had the ability to twist absolutely every conversation in his favour. And while Tony could do that, too, Natasha was rather hard to bullshit to. She'd been trained from childhood to root out problems and act accordingly. Tony didn't want to risk giving himself and Loki away. Besides, she probably expected him to be a bit insecure about a new relationship and try to change the subject.

'How was Istanbul?' Tony asked.

Clint snorted. 'Not even close.'

'Istanbul, China, same difference,' Tony flapped a hand. 'Kill anyone interesting?'

'Strictly reconnaissance, Stark,' Natasha said.
'Sure,' Tony hummed, and threw an exaggerated wink in her direction. Natasha clearly wasn't amused. But then, she never was. 'Brucie, I know that you'll tell me plenty of fun science stories,' Tony rounded on his science bro, who cracked a smile.

'Nothing overly interesting, I'm afraid,' he stated. 'Just a few things that SHIELD wanted me to look at.'

Tony knew that Bruce was working on top-secret shit that SHIELD really didn't want Tony Stark seeing, and he was sure that Fury had told Bruce to lie to him. So he raised an eyebrow to see what Bruce would do; hint at the truth, or blow him off.

Bruce glanced at Natasha and Clint, both of whom had their eyes on the table, and then looked back at Tony, giving him a look.

Tony knew there was a reason that Bruce was his favourite; he never lied if it wasn't absolutely needed.

'You wound me, Bruce!' Tony fake pouted, a hand going to his chest. 'No fun stories? No explosions?'

'I know how to keep my workplace safe,' Bruce said with a smile.

'So do I,' Tony frowned.

'Yes, but you really like explosions,' Bruce said.

Tony grinned. 'Yeah, you got me; explosions were cool when I was ten, and they're cool now.'

'What's the difference between you then and you now?' Clint decided to comment, smirking at Tony.

Tony just flipped him off. His relationship with Clint had always been like this, but Tony was under no illusions; most of the time (about 99.8% of the time), Clint thought very, very little of Tony. Tony, to Clint, was a narcissistic asshole who threw money around and expected everybody to cater to his ever whim. And okay, so while Tony did do that, that wasn't all he was. He tipped the little people, he made sure that his employees got paid properly and had proper health care. He saved people on a weekly basis.

Tony supposed that his attitude towards Loki didn't help. Whenever Loki did something, Tony couldn't help but make a comment; about how funny Loki's pranks were, how he got why the god did some of what he did, how he understood Loki's past better than any of the others could. Clint wanted Loki dead, preferably by his own hand. Tony had always, and would always, sympathise with Loki. It put them at each other's throats as soon as the invasion was over.

Tony's change in relationship with Loki would just make his relationship with Clint that much more volatile. Not that Tony cared; after Steve, Clint was Tony's least favourite Avenger. Or maybe it was Thor. Or Natasha. It changed on a daily basis depending what kind of mood Tony was in. Bruce was definitely his favourite.

'Brucie, wanna come do science?' Tony asked, giving the doctor his largest puppy eyes.

Bruce chuckled. 'Td love to, Tony, but I really need some sleep. I'm assuming that you'll still be up in about nine or ten hours?' Tony nodded. 'I'll join you then,' Bruce finished.

'Awesome,' Tony said. He scraped the last of his eggs from his plate and stood, tossing it and his...
'Tony, make sure you come up for lunch,' Steve lectured as Tony made to leave, 'you don't eat enough.'

Tony had eaten more in the past four days than he had in the weeks before. But Steve didn't need to know that.

'Just order me a pizza and let me know when it's here,' Tony said. 'Or better yet, send Bruce; I don't like leaving during a science binge.'

Steve sighed at that, but Tony was already out the door. When Bruce was exhausted, as he'd just been, he'd sleep more than nine hours. Tony was probably looking at fifteen to twenty uninterrupted. Well, if Steve and the Wonder Twins didn't interrupt him. That meant that he could work on his new suits.

JARVIS was very, very good at controlling the suits that Tony wasn't in, and he was completely loyal to Tony. With his and Loki's upcoming takeover, they'd need all the help they could get, even with Tony's new god-status. So why not make twenty or thirty Iron Man look-a-likes that could serve Tony and Loki in battle?

Tony would paint them green and gold, merging his and Loki's colour scheme together. The media would think that Loki had sided with Doom, and Tony would be free to attack and destroy as many SHIELD bases and agents as he could get his hands on.

Tony grinned as he walked into his workshop. 'J, how are you going with that list?'

'I have discovered six SHIELD bases so far, sir,' JARVIS informed him. 'However, my research shows that there are at least thirty-two, some in other countries.'

'What countries do you think?' Tony asked.

'Are you asking me to guess, Mr Stark?' JARVIS asked.

Tony chuckled. 'You don't guess, you deduce. So hurry along, Sherlock.'

'Very well, sir,' JARVIS replied, sounding exasperated. He usually was around Tony. 'By my calculations, there will be bases in the following countries; the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, Iraq, and Switzerland.'

'Switzerland?' Tony laughed.

'Yes, sir,' JARVIS said.

'That doesn't sound funny to you?' Tony asked.

'I was not programmed to feel humour, sir.'

'Well you sure find it funny when I trip over something after three days down here,' Tony said.

'I am only looking out for your well-being,' JARVIS said, sounding highly offended.

Tony snickered. 'JARVIS, make the walls white.' JARVIS did as asked. 'DUM-E, I swear to fucking god you stay away from that goddamn fire extinguisher!' DUM-E had been slowly creeping around the workshop, but quickly whirled its disappointment and disappeared behind the car Tony had brought in to work on. 'J, some tunes. Give me... my AC/DC, Black Sabbath, and
Red Hot Chilli Peppers playlist. Also, throw in that song by George Thorogood.’

Music started playing immediately, set on “ear shattering”, and Tony grinned as he grabbed at a holographic screen.

_On the night I arrived, my daddy said, “Sake’s Alive!” it’s the meanest one that we’ve had yet. Teethed on tin and weaned on gin, I was nobody's teacher's pet._

Tony sang under his breath as he moved about, changing this and that on the platoon of suits he was building. JARVIS would inform him of anyone trying to get into the workshop, but he didn't expect anyone for a couple of hours yet.

Tony easily fell into his work, and even his music began to white out as he focused completely on the creations beneath his fingers. SHIELD wouldn't know what hit them.

{oOo}

Tony worked on his new suit designs for a good seventeen hours- with a break for pizza, because Steve was more overbearing than the mother from _Everybody Loves Raymond-_ followed by another few hours doing science with Bruce. Tony took a short break for more food, caught a nap in bed, and then headed back down to perfect the new machine guns he was gonna build onto the shoulder of every JARVIS-powered suit. They were tentatively dubbed Phoenix X's (because Tony found it funny; his deal with Loki was like being reborn) and Tony wanted to make sure they were as perfect as possible in the planning stages before he started assembling them.

He’d just finished adding some changes when his personal StarkPhone rang, and Tony eyed the thing like it was about to explode. Pepper and the Avengers only ever called him; everything else, business included, usually went through JARVIS.

Tony grabbed the cell, which was sitting atop a pile of paperwork that Fury had insisted he complete about a month ago, and glanced at the caller ID. “Withheld number”.

‘Well, this should be fun,’ the genius commented before swiping his thumb along the touch-screen. ‘Hello?’

‘Stark,’ Loki practically purred, and Tony shivered slightly.

‘How’d you get this number?’

The god chuckled. ‘I did say that I’d call.’

‘Right,’ Tony hummed. ‘So-’

‘Sir, Master Odinson has returned,’ JARVIS interrupted.

‘Huh, looks like Big Brother's back,’ Tony told Loki.

‘Lovely,’ Loki drawled, and Tony could imagine the scowl he was no doubt wearing. ‘Just in time, too.’
'In time for what?' Tony questioned.

'My talk with Victor didn't go as I had planned,' Loki explained. 'It seems that he no longer wants to play by my rules.'

'Oh?'

'He's reacted rather... violently,' Loki said. 'There are bots everywhere, and I don't doubt that the mortals occupying this neighbourhood have reported it. SHIELD should be here soon.'

'Where the hell are you?' Tony asked, already heading for the doors. If there were Doom-bots everywhere, then SHIELD would get involved; meaning that the Avengers, plus Tony, would get involved, too.

'Somewhere near New York; I haven't bothered to learn what you people label every single state,' Loki said.

Tony opened his mouth, but before he could respond the elevator door before him slid open, revealing Steve.

'Tony, Coulson just called,' Steve said. 'Apparently Doom's been working out of a warehouse in New Jersey; there are Doom-bots everywhere, and they're attacking buildings.'

'Fucking New Jersey,' Tony grunted. 'Right, I'm coming.'

Steve stepped back, letting Tony into the elevator.

As the doors slid shut, Tony said into the phone, 'Sorry, Logan, gotta run. Hero stuff, you know.'

'Oh, how inconvenient,' Loki drawled. 'And here I was hoping to explore what I believe is called "phone sex" with you.'

Tony groaned softly, making Steve raise his eyebrows. 'Can always try later, babe,' he said.

'But I'm free later,' Loki said. 'Why not come to you in person?'

'Ah... yeah, that sounds better,' Tony decided. 'I'll call you after this hero business, 'kay?'

'Very well,' Loki responded. 'If that oaf's back, I'll have to watch myself.'

'Yeah,' Tony agreed. The elevator stopped, followed by the doors opening, and Tony could see Clint and Natasha on the helipad outside, no doubt waiting for someone to turn up with a quinjet. Honestly, it'd save time if they just kept one at the Tower. Then again, SHIELD knew that Tony would probably fiddle with it. 'Gotta go, babe. Seeya later.'

'See you soon, Stark,' Loki responded before hanging up.

Tony tossed his StarkPhone onto the closest sofa and headed for the balcony. 'So...' Steve commented as they walked, 'this thing with Logan is serious?'

'Yup,' was Tony's only answer. He wasn't about to discuss his relationship with "Logan"; again, he'd rather do it while Loki was present. Steve was already wearing his spangly outfit, and stopped to stand with Natasha and Clint. Bruce was nowhere to be seen, neither was Thor.

'Thor went ahead and took Bruce,' Natasha informed him when Tony passed them. 'It sounded like the Hulk was needed.'
'Whatever,' Tony waved a dismissive hand, walking towards the Iron Man landing pad. 'I'll meet you there.'

JARVIS quickly and easily got Tony into the suit as the genius walked, and by the time he reached the edge of the building Tony's faceplate was slamming shut. He took off immediately, relishing the feeling of flying once more. He wondered what Loki was doing; he'd be with Doom, right? Maybe they could fight the fucker side-by-side.

Tony grinned and blasted through the air, JARVIS already feeding him the coordinates. He needed a good fight.
Chapter 10

“*The secret side of me I never let you see*

*I keep it caged but I can't control it*

*So stay away from me, the beast is ugly*

*I feel the rage and I just can't hold it*

*I feel it deep within, it's just beneath the skin*

*I must confess that I feel like a monster”*

– Monster [Skillet]

Loki shook off the concrete and metal that had covered him when Victor's bots had thrown him through the warehouse's wall. He'd barely managed to stand before five more bots were on him, and Loki summoned his spear, slicing one, two, before decapitating another. He heard a whir and whipped around just in time to see a Doombot raise its hand, the metal glowing green before-

Loki disappeared, teleporting behind the bot to run it through. It fell to the ground with a whirred groan, and Loki's lips curled as he looked down at it. It seemed that Victor had been tinkering with his little creations again. Loki knew that Victor despised Tony Stark and the way his own suit worked so perfectly. He'd been trying for almost a year and a half to replicate Tony's repulsor technology. Fortunately for SHIELD's little super hero group, Victor was nowhere near as intelligent as Tony. Maybe, once upon a time, he could have hoped to rival Tony Stark. But the accident, his mutation, had robbed him of all humanity; that spark that made people push themselves, push the boundaries of inventions that already existed.

Another bot aimed for Loki's head, but the god easily ducked and blasted it with his magic. It exploded into a shower of metal and wires, only to be replaced by another three bots.

Loki disappeared again, this time appearing on the warehouse roof. Glass and debris crackled under his boots as Loki walked, sharp eyes taking in the Doombots that were now terrorising the closest buildings. Doom had chosen well; the area surrounding his latest laboratory was almost devoid of life. But there were a few run-down apartment buildings nearby, and Loki knew that one of them would call for help. SHIELD would intercept the call, and then the Avengers would be arriving.

An explosion to the right caught Loki's eyes, and he watched as one of the buildings nearby started crumbling. Doombots flew past, their flight not as smooth and graceful as Tony's.

*A, Stark,* Loki mused, holding out a hand, *you'll have fun with Victor's little toys.*

Before Loki could summon his cell phone, three bots shot up from behind him, forcing the Trickster to drop to one knee. He ducked a green blast, and another, before slicing his spear through the air. A silent spell had magic cutting the bots where they stood, the remains falling to
the ground.

'You really must programme these things better, Victor,' Loki hummed. He finally summoned his phone and tapped in Tony's number.

There was a pause before, 'Hello?'

'Stark,' Loki purred, and smiled when Tony made a soft sound on the other end.

He quickly got a hold of himself, though; 'How'd you get this number?'

Loki chuckled and turned, stabbing a bot that had tried to sneak up on him. 'I did say that I'd call.'

'Right,' the human hummed. 'So-' He paused, and Loki waited. 'Huh, looks like Big Brother's back,' Tony said.

'Lovely,' Loki drawled, a scowl already marring his face. Just what he needed when he was trying to teach Tony how to use magic. Thor had never had good timing. A dozen Doombots shot out of the warehouse below, crackling glass and blasts reaching Loki's ears. 'Just in time, too,' Loki commented when he spotted three tearing down another building.

'In time for what?' Stark asked.

'My talk with Victor didn't go as I had planned,' Loki said, stepping up to the edge of the warehouse roof. He glanced down to see more bots storming the streets, these ones walking. Apparently not all of them could fly. 'It seems that he no longer wants to play by my rules,' Loki added.

'Oh?'

'He's reacted rather... violently,' Loki said. 'There are bots everywhere, and I don't doubt that the mortals occupying this neighbourhood have reported it. SHIELD should be here soon.'

He could already hear sirens; the human police were arriving. As if they had any chance against Victor's bots. But Loki really didn't care about a dozen human casualties.

'Where the hell are you?' Tony asked. Loki could hear him moving; probably heading for his closest suit.

'Somewhere in New York,' Loki said. 'I haven't bothered to learn what you people label every single state.' He reeled back when three Doombots rose before him, but a few slashes, some magic, and they were falling back to earth, sparks escaping their broken casing.

Loki heard voices on Tony's end of the line, and waited patiently.

'Fucking New Jersey,' Tony grunted, and Loki smirked in amusement. 'Right, I'm coming.' There was a pause, and Loki heard Tony's elevator closing. 'Sorry, Logan, I gotta run. Hero stuff, you know.'

Ah, he must have company. Loki hoped that he could steer Tony away from his little super hero friends. Fighting on Tony's side, rather against him, would be fascinating.

'Oh, how inconvenient,' Loki drawled, 'and here I was hoping to explore what I believe is called “phone sex” with you.'

Tony groaned softly, and Loki snickered. 'Can always try later, babe.'
One of Loki's eyebrows rose as he said, 'But I'm free later. Why not come to you in person?'

'Ah... yeah,' Tony said, 'that sounds better. I'll call you after this hero business, 'kay?'

_Hero business_, Loki thought, _of course. Do SHIELD and the Avengers really think that Anthony isn't smart enough to work out what they're doing?_

'Very well,' he said aloud. 'If that oaf's back, I'll have to watch myself.'

'Yeah,' Anthony agreed. _'Gotta go, babe. See ya later._'

_Babe..._ Tony liked his pet names far too much. Loki would have to punish him for that.

His lips curled, images of Stark completely naked and tied up for Loki's pleasure entering his mind. 'See you soon, Stark,' Loki replied and hung up. A silent spell and he'd slipped his cell phone away. Just in time, too, as a dozen bots congregated on the roof.

Loki smirked and slashed at them, blasting magic and snapping the heads clean from the bodies. One got behind him and Loki dropped to his knees, spinning to slice it in half at the waist. When that one had dropped, Loki spun back to his feet and stabbed another. A blast from one of the Doombots threw him back, but Loki transported mid-flight, re-appearing on the street below.

It was crawling with bots, and Loki erected a shield around himself as he blasted and hacked the bots down. They were no match for him, but a few got through; a few punches, a cut to Loki's cheek that drew red.

Loki threw his hand out, summoning a burnt-out car that was overturned a few feet away. He threw it at six bots, taking them all down, and spun to destroy another four. They all exploded, but Loki's shield protected him from the debris.

Loki turned when the sirens grew louder, and spotted three police cars screaming up the street. He smirked as they came to a halt a few feet from him, men and women dressed in dark blue uniforms climbing from the vehicles.

'Put your weapon down!' one of them shouted over the explosions, his little gun drawn and pointed at Loki.

Oh, honestly. You'd think they'd learn.

Loki tilted his head as he watched them.

'Put your weapon down!' another ordered.

Loki stepped back and a Doombot when whizzing past him, missing his head by a millimetre. It flew towards the mortals but Loki ignored it in favour of grabbing the one standing behind him. He wrapped his arm around its metal neck, his other arm pressed against its chest. With one quick, skilled wrench, Loki separated its head from its shoulders, short-circuiting the bot and letting it drop to the ground.

Loki ignored the screams coming from the police and turned towards the warehouse Victor had been using. Bots were still pouring from the windows and the large rolling door to the left. Loki's attention was then drawn up, and he smirked. Three black quinjets were speeding towards the area. Finally. SHIELD really took far too long.

It took less than a minute for the three quinjets to reach the street where Loki was standing, and he
raised his spear, sending a pulse of magic at each plane. Two managed to flip sideways, narrowly avoiding the blasts, but the third was too slow. One of its curved wings exploded, sending it careening sideways and then into the ground.

Loki smirked and ignored the other two quinjets as he stepped towards the warehouse.

A crack of lighting made him sigh. Stupid blonde oaf. At least it meant that Stark was close by; he and Thor always arrived within seconds of each other.

Sure enough, Loki spotted the familiar red-gold armour of Iron Man just as he reached the warehouse. Rather than look for a door, Loki simply blasted part of the wall, waiting until the smoke cleared to step in. He'd just done so when Tony Stark hit the ground behind him, glowing blue eyes locked on Loki.

Loki smirked at him before disappearing into the warehouse.

'Oh, Victor!' he called as he walked down the abandoned hallway. 'Come out and play!'

{oOo}

Tony was hit seconds after he landed, and lost sight of Loki as he spun sideways and back into the air. He raised a hand and blasted the bot that had attacked him, sending it flying back in a heap of charred wires and twisted metal. It was replaced almost immediately by three more bots, and then two that could fly. Fucking von Doom, who the hell did he think he was?

'Asshole,' Tony growled as he twisted into the air, flipping over bots and narrowly avoiding flying head-first into a building. Thor shot past him, hammer raised and blasting through bots left and right.

SHIELD agents were already surrounding the area, pulling back a few cops who had been stupid enough to run head-first into the fight. Tony shot up and flew over the warehouse that seemed to house the Doombots; they were pouring from the building in fives and sixes, sending SHIELD agents ducking behind burnt-out cars and giant chunks of rubble.

Tony changed his flight path and headed down, shooting at the flying bots as he went. Thankfully Thor seemed to be taking care of most of them, and soon Rogers and Romanov would be forcing the bots back towards the warehouse. Barton would be somewhere high up, his skills not safe for a face-to-face fight.

That left Tony free to follow Loki into the warehouse.

He smirked as he landed, repulsor blasts sending the closest Doombots back. Loki's face had been all tease; follow me if you dare. Tony did dare; he always did. He loved wandering into possibly life-threatening situations, as Loki well knew.

Tony managed to duck another two flying bots, but was hit from behind and sent flying through an already broken window. He slammed into a wall inside the warehouse, but managed to pull himself free. JARVIS informed him that he had a few cuts and bruises, but nothing too bad yet. The suit was still at 100%, so no worries there.

'JARVIS, scan for life forms,' Tony ordered as he started walking. The warehouse seemed to be
empty, and Tony assumed that the bots had been kept in the basement, or on a lower level. His suspicions were confirmed when JARVIS told him that there were rows and rows of Doombots still waiting to be activated two floors below him.

'Sir, there are two life forms on the floor below you,' JARVIS added. 'One appears to be Loki Laufeyson, the other Victor von Doom.'

'Excellent,' Tony grinned. He activated his thrusters and flew down the hallway, JARVIS already looking up plans for the warehouse, trying to find a way down. It took far too long, and by the time Tony had reached the next floor, the fight had already begun.

Magic made the air feel charged, and Tony had to duck when a green spell sped past him. It slammed into the elevator and almost threw Tony off his feet, but JARVIS managed to keep the human airborne. Tony lowered his suit to the floor and peered through the dust.

Loki and Doom were fighting, using a combination of hand-to-hand and magic to try and kill each other (and they were going to kill each other, if the snarls and shouted curses were anything to go by, Tony thought). Loki was clearly superior in both fighting forms, and Doom lost ground with every blow.

But Doom had over a dozen bots on his side, and each time Loki gained ground a bot would appear, forcing Loki to abandon Doom in favour of cutting the robot down.

Well, that just wasn't fair, Tony mused. 'Hey, Doom!' he shouted, his enhanced voice making Doom and Loki both turn.

'Iron Man,' Doom near-screeched from behind his metal faceplate.

Three Doombots turned Tony's way, and Tony easily blasted them aside before he went for Doom.

Unlike Loki, Tony hadn't been trained for over a thousand years in hand-to-hand combat. He'd really have to change that, because his ego was just as bruised as his stomach when Doom managed to fling him into a wall.

'Fucker,' Tony growled.

'Sir, the suit's left wrist has sustained damage, you can no longer move that hand,' JARVIS reported.

'Fucker,' Tony snarled again and flew at Doom. He slammed into the mutated man's chest, sending them both into the wall behind Doom. Doom snarled, spittle flying as he got a fist into Tony's chest.

Tony felt all the air leave his lungs and wheezed, his chest plates cracking and scraping against each other.

'Suit now at 83%,' JARVIS said.

Thanks to the Apple, Tony was still in the fight five minutes later, even after the repeated blows against his chest and stomach. He was bruised and cut-up, but nothing had broken yet. Doom was clearly pissed, hurling insults even as he tried to hit Tony with magic. But Tony was smaller, his suit quicker, and dodged each and every blow. He tried to stay out of the way of Doom's swinging arms, using his repulsors instead of his fists to take Doom down.

But Tony couldn't keep it up forever, especially when over a dozen Doombots converged on the
room. Tony was grabbed from behind and Doom managed to get a large boot to his chest. Tony was thrown backwards and into the wall again, his suit weighing him down and sending him straight through.

Tony wheezed as he stumbled back to his feet, JARVIS relaying all the damage. Before Tony could even think of moving, green filled his vision, and he was thrown back again by a green blast that almost short-circuited his entire suit. Thankfully no amount of magic or electricity could damage the arc reactor, and it kept Tony powered at a measly 58%.

Seriously, Tony needed to finish his newest suit; 58% was just embarrassing.

Tony stumbled over the wood and brick that coated the floor. There were Doombots everywhere, all dead with missing arms, legs and heads. Loki was fighting Doom again, only this time with a snarl on his face rather than a smirk of enjoyment.

Doom was lagging, not getting a single hit in, and Tony watched as Loki backhanded Doom, sending him flying to the floor. Doom struggled to his feet, but when he stood Loki was behind him. The Jötunn wrapped an arm around Doom's neck, jerking his head back, as his other hand ran a long, wicked blade into Doom's stomach between the folds of his armour.

Doom choked, blood flying from his mouth and dripping down his chin. Loki twisted the dagger and an equally twisted smile spread across his face when Doom coughed again.

'You really should have known better than to try and cross me, Victor,' Loki said pleasantly, but with an edge of anger beneath his words. 'And you really shouldn't touch what belongs to me.'

Loki looked at Tony, and Doom did, too, his eyes widening further.

'P-Please-' Doom began, but it was too late. With one practised move, Loki jerked his arm back. There was a loud crack as Doom's neck snapped, and the villain went limp, eyes dim as Loki dropped him to the floor.

Tony wondered if he should be freaking out. After all, most people would if they'd seen someone murdered right in front of their eyes. But Doom had been a thorn in Tony's side since the formation of the Avengers. He was mostly a problem that the Fantastic Four dealt with, but there'd been some major overlap when Doom's bots had really started tearing up New York.

Doom was nothing but a rat, scurrying about Tony's city trying to take over what Tony already owned. And now, Tony didn't have to deal with him anymore.

Loki was watching Tony carefully as he wiped blood from his hands, as though vaguely worried that Tony would run screaming from the room or attack him. Instead, Tony smirked, flipped his faceplate up, and said, 'Well, don't have to call the pest removers now.'

Loki blinked before a smile twisted his lips. 'Doom dug his own grave.'

'I'll say,' Tony snickered. 'Really, betraying the God of Mischief and Lies? He was asking for it.'

'Indeed,' Loki said.

Tony's comms crackled, but they were damaged from Doom's blast, and no words got through; just static.

'The Avengers are probably on their way,' Tony said.
'And what shall you tell them?' Loki inquired.

'That you killed him,' the human shrugged, 'which you did; a villain's quarrel. What are they gonna do, arrest you?'

Loki chuckled softly. 'I would like to see them try.' He stepped over von Doom's body and got into Tony's personal space, making Tony's suit feel a bit too tight. Really, he needed to fix that. 'I shall see you soon, Man of Iron,' he said before kissing Tony roughly, his teeth dragging along Tony's bottom lip as he pulled back. Tony groaned softly, but quickly schooled his features when Loki disappeared in a puff of smoke.

'Tony!' The genius turned to see Natasha, Clint, Steve and Thor. Thor huffed when he realised that he'd just missed his brother, and Clint fingered his knocked arrow carefully as he looked around.

'Loki?' Natasha demanded, still all-business.

'Disappeared in a poof of smoke,' Tony shrugged one armoured shoulder. 'After killing Doom,' he added, pointing behind him.

Steve made a soft noise and he and Natasha both moved forward, eyes on the dead body wrapped in metal and cloth. 'Loki killed him?' Steve asked.

'Yeah,' Tony nodded. 'They started arguing when I got here; something about a deal going bad?'

'Loki had a deal with Doom?' Clint asked.

'I guess,' Tony shrugged again. 'No honour amongst thieves; isn't that the saying?'

'Loki does not make deals lightly,' Thor spoke, eyes flicking between Tony and Doom. 'Are you sure that is what they said?'

'Doom mouthed off about something... Loki's magic?' Tony lied easily. 'Loki said that he'd ordered Doom to leave his city alone; only Loki was allowed to terrorise it, apparently. They started trading blows as soon as I announced myself.'

'Did you try to stop them?' Natasha demanded as she rounded on Tony.

Tony scowled. Well, no, he actually hadn't. But the Avengers still thought that he was one of them; thanks for the vote of confidence, Tasha.

'Yes.' Tony snapped. 'Loki blasted me back over into that wall,' he said and pointed to the hole his suit had made when Doom had tossed him around like a rag doll. 'By the time I got up, Doom was dead. Loki just smiled at me and teleported away.'

'You could have tried harder,' Romanov commented, not looking at him. But Tony heard it clear enough; the SHIELD agent didn't think that Tony should be on the team. He wasn't safe.

Well fuck you very much, Tony thought, glaring at the woman. Steve was still staring at Doom, Thor was looking around, as though Loki would just pop back up, and Clint's eyes were taking in the room, no doubt working out just what had happened in his head. Well, there were no clues that Tony had helped Loki kill Doom, so whatever; they could look as much as they wanted.

'Not that this isn't fun,' Tony said, voice dripping in sarcasm, 'but I know that I have a meeting for
something or other this afternoon. So I'll be on my way.'

'Iron Man-' Steve began, but Tony had already walked out of the room. He slipped his faceplate down and pushed off the floor with his thrusters, easily flying through the rather large building. Rather than find an exit, Tony created a new one; he blasted a window, shattering the glass, and looped up into the air. The area was deserted after the battle, but JARVIS informed him that a few SHIELD SUVs were heading towards the scene.

Tony really wasn't in the mood to deal with SHIELD, so ignored them in favour of heading back to Stark Tower; he really did have a meeting, and he didn't want Pepper on his ass anymore than she already was.

'Fucking Avengers,' he muttered as he flew. Really, they were just asking Tony to destroy them all. If they were surprised when they learned that he'd gone dark side, Tony's estimation of their intelligence would drop significantly. You'd think they'd know better than to make an enemy of Tony Stark.

But, as Loki often said, humans were idiots; Tony was just seeing that clearer every day.

{oOo}

Tony bypassed his Iron Man landing pad and went straight to his workshop. It'd take him at least three hours to fix up his current suit, and he wanted to get started on perfecting his newest one. His suits needed to be better if he was going to take on SHIELD.

JARVIS had just dismantled the suit when Loki flickered into sight across the room. Tony raised his eyebrows.

'I thought you weren't gonna use magic, since Thor's back,' Tony said.

'The idiot rarely comes down here, correct?' Loki said. Tony nodded. 'As long as I only use a little magic in here, we should be safe.' There was a dangerous glint in Loki's eyes that made Tony shiver, and he watched as the god stood tall and crossed the workshop towards him.

Loki's armour was covered in dust, and there was an already healing cut across one pale cheek, red blood dried and cracking all the way down to his jaw. His hair was in disarray, and Tony's fingers itched to touch.

Loki raised an eyebrow as he approached. 'See something you like, Stark?'

'Oh, yeah,' Tony licked his lips.

Loki came to a stop just before him. 'Even after what you saw?' Loki questioned. 'What I did?'

Tony looked up at him. 'Lokes, we're taking on SHIELD,' he said. 'People will die; innocent people. And I don't give a fuck.' Loki's lips twitched. 'You really think I care about Doom? I woulda snapped the fucker's neck a year ago if Fury hadn't ordered us to bring him in alive.'

Loki pounced, slamming Tony into the glass case housing his Iron Man suits. Tony immediately fixed his mouth to Loki's, catching his lips in a biting kiss. He tugged on Loki's bottom lip, biting hard, and revelled in the full-body shiver and groan Loki gave him. Tony felt himself lifted and
wrapped his legs around Loki's waist as the taller man slammed him against the wall again, glass rattling behind him.

Loki's tongue snaked into Tony's mouth, even as Tony continued to bite and suck on Loki's lips. The human groaned as his mouth was plundered, and rolled his hips against Loki's, feeling the hardness in Loki's leather trousers.

'Fuck,' Tony hissed when one of Loki's hands snaked up to squeeze his ass through his jeans. 'What are we waitin' for?' Tony demanded.

Loki snapped his fingers, apparently not caring about using excess magic. Tony's clothes disappeared, and Tony reached down to try and free Loki's cock. It was no good; even after their numerous fucks, Tony still couldn't figure out how to open Loki's clothes. Fucker had to start wearing jeans or something.

*Mm, Loki's ass in tight black jeans,* Tony thought with a grin.

Another snap of his fingers and Loki's cock was free, bobbing between them hard and wet. Tony wrapped his hand around it and stroked, making Loki moan and pull away from Tony's mouth. He bit at Tony's jaw and neck, sharp moves that made Tony hiss, his blood boiling. His cock gave a few interested twitches before Loki finally slid wet fingers into Tony's hole.

Thank *fuck* for magic, Tony mused as two fingers were pushed inside, right up to the knuckles. Apparently Loki didn't want to draw this out, either, because a third finger quickly joined the first two, making Tony hiss at the delicious burn and stretch. He threw his head back when Loki stabbed at his prostate, and Loki bit harshly at his neck again.

Finally, after only a minute of prep, Loki withdrew his fingers and hoisted Tony further up. His cock slid between Tony's cheeks before the Trickster grabbed it, the head jabbing against his stretched opening. Loki launched himself forward, pushing in in one quick thrust. Tony moaned and let his head drop forward, tongue coming out to lick at Loki's face.

He tasted like dirt and blood, and it made Tony that much harder. He remembered Loki fighting Doom; the way his arms gracefully moved through the air; how magic leapt from his long fingers; his sharp moves as he ducked Doom's own punches; his spear slicing through the air...

'Loki!' he whined when the god purposefully missed his prostate.

'Mm?' Loki hummed, a grin on his swollen, bloody lips.

Tony grabbed Loki's hair, tugging back and making the god hiss. Loki's eyes darkened that much further, not a sliver of green to be seen. Tony pressed his mouth to the cut on Loki's cheek and licked it, which made Loki thrust up beneath him.

'Fuck me,' Tony hissed, 'hard!'

Loki didn't need any further encouragement. His fingers dug into Tony's hips as he pulled out, only to thrust back in. Tony shouted in pleasure, and some part of his head wondered if JARVIS had locked down the lab. He hoped so, otherwise the Avengers would come running if they'd returned already.

But it didn't matter; Loki was thick and hard inside him, his cock slamming into Tony's prostate as it stretched him further. It sent pleasure rushing up Tony's spine, his head spinning and his chest aching as he tried to draw oxygen into his lungs.
Tony was sweating already, and Loki's finger nails dug further into his skin as the god tried to keep Tony up. Tony wrapped his legs tighter around Loki's waist and did his best to roll his hips, tried to fuck himself onto Loki's cock as the Jötunn pushed up into him.

It was frenzied and bloody, Loki biting at Tony's lips and drawing blood, Tony doing the same. Finally, Tony felt that familiar pleasure building up in his balls, his gut. He wouldn't need a single finger on his cock to come, and told Loki that. It made the magician moan and bite at Tony's chin, teeth harsh against Tony's beard.

'Fuck!' Tony shouted. 'Harder, Lo, *fuck*!'

Somehow, Loki slammed in harder and harder, filled Tony that bit more. One last jab against his prostate and Tony climaxed, coating Loki's armour and his own stomach in come. Loki wasn't that far behind as Tony squeezed harshly around his cock. He slammed in one last time before erupting, and like always, Tony could feel Loki's come filling him up. It was colder than any human's, making Tony shiver as he came down from his high.

Loki slowly slid to his knees, arms still wrapped around Tony, and Tony stayed seated on his lap as the two panted against each other's mouths.

'Fuck,' Tony mumbled.

Loki chuckled and pressed gentle kisses to Tony's bruised lips. Tony's lips were gonna ache for a good few hours before they healed, but it was totally worth it.

'Gets better every time,' Tony quipped.

'I would hope so,' Loki commented. He drew back to meet Tony's eyes, smirking. 'How else would I keep you faithful?'

Tony laughed and kissed the god again. 'Oh, Lo,' he grinned. 'Like I'd need anyone else with you around.'

Loki's eyes softened. 'Good,' he murmured and kissed Tony again.

Tony hummed against Loki's mouth, quickly losing himself once more in the pleasure of Loki's body.

Chapter End Notes

**Author's Note:** Seriously, “Monster” by Skillet is the perfect Loki or Tony song. I love it. Sorry about how long this chapter took, but I suddenly wanted to write some Loki POV, so it took me slightly longer than it should have. I always love writing a good fight scene, and that also added to the time it took me. I hope the chapter was worth the wait :)

Cheers,

{Dreamer}
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

“They’d love to watch me fall, they think they know it all
I’m a nightmare, a disaster, that’s what they always said
I’m a lost cause, not a hero, but I’ll make it on my own
I've gotta prove 'em wrong, it's me against the world”

– Me Against The World [Simple Plan]

'So,' Tony said as he Loki re-dressed. Loki had summoned a suitcase filled with Midgardian clothing; jeans, sweaters, shirts, and everything else he'd need if he stayed at the tower overnight. He'd said that it would be safer to summon whatever he needed in Tony's lab, rather than in his penthouse; just in case.

'So?' Loki echoed when Tony failed to continue.

'Sorry,' Tony hummed, head tilted as Loki pulled a dark blue, v-necked sweater on. He was wearing a black t-shirt underneath, and that coupled with the black jeans was doing things to Tony's lower half. But after three rounds, even the great Tony Stark needed a break.

'Stop leering, Stark,' Loki said, but was wearing a smile as he packed his armour away, making sure to fold it under the rest of his clothing.

'You love it,' Tony teased. 'Anyway, I'll probably have to make my report sometime today; Rogers loves dragging me into a room to write down everything that happened during a fight from my point of view. Are you gonna hang out here while I do that?'

'I have nothing to do for the next few days,' Loki told him. 'With Victor disposed of, my schedule is clear until next Friday. I'll be off-planet for a number of days after that; there are a few realms that I must visit.'

'Oh?' Tony hummed, running a hand through his hair. Loki had a serious hair-kink, which Tony loved, because Loki's hair was fucking awesome, too, and he got to thread his fingers through it when Loki fucked him. Or when he fucked Loki, either one.

'I'd rather keep those plans to myself for the time being,' Loki said. He'd snuck up behind Tony and wrapped his arms around Tony's waist, making Tony jump and then smile. 'You never know who might be listening,' Loki whispered into Tony's ear, followed by a kiss.

Tony laughed. 'Seriously, when's the Apple gonna effect my sex drive?'

'Soon,' Loki said, drawing back. 'You should eat; that'll help.'
'You just wanna fuck me again,' Tony teased, but started backing towards the doors. Loki's entire body flickered, and then suddenly it was Logan talking to Tony, rather than Loki. Tony took a second to mourn the loss before ordering JARVIS to make the walls and doors clear once more. Loki picked up his suitcase, a smirk on his lips as he followed the resident genius. 'You know me so well.'

"Course I do, babe," Tony winked.

Loki sighed. 'These pet names really must stop.'

'Aww, come on,' Tony pouted, 'you love 'em. Like Lo, and Lokes, and Green eyes, and Cute Butt.'

'Cute Butt?' Loki raised an eyebrow, and Tony snickered at the sheer amount of disgust that Loki could convey through a single brow.

'Okay, Cute Butt's out, that's horrible,' Tony agreed. 'And I'll only call you babe after sex; you're always more gooey then.'

Loki rolled his eyes.

'But Lo and Lokes are staying,' Tony declared. They reached the elevator and JARVIS opened the doors. 'Penthouse, J,' Tony ordered before turning to Loki. 'Can't call you Lokes around the others, but Lo's fine. Could be a nickname for Logan.'

'Whatever you say, Stark.'

'Tony,' the human insisted. 'My lovers don't call me Stark.'

'Perhaps your boyfriends do.'

'Nope.'

'I despise you.'

Tony snickered, and didn't miss the way Loki's lips curled into a smile as they were whisked up.

{oOo}

Tony was getting a blow job when someone decided to knock on his bedroom door. 'Tony?'

'What the fuck?' Tony growled. Loki scowled at him, as though it was Tony's fault. 'Don't stop!' Tony ordered, and Loki went right back to sucking. Jesus, Loki's mouth needed to be declared illegal. 'JARVIS, you're supposed to warn me before anyone comes up here when Lok- Logan's around!'

'Apologies, sir,' JARVIS replied, 'but you didn't implement a permanent order before Mr Thomas' arrival, and your former order of, “Bruce Banner is allowed into the penthouse at all times”, still stands.'
'Fuck,' Tony swore again. 'Okay, new rule; wherever Logan is, no matter what he looks like, or what room he's occupying, you inform him if someone's approaching. The only time you don't do it is when someone other than me is in the same room as him. Understand?'

'Yes, Mr Stark,' JARVIS replied.

There was another knock, followed by Bruce once again calling, 'Tony?' through the door.

'Just a minute!' Tony shouted, his voice slightly strangled by that thing Loki did with his tongue. Jesus .

'Are you okay?' Bruce asked, sounding concerned.

Tony nearly let out a hysterical laugh. He'd be okay as soon as Bruce left and Loki went back to work. 'Y-Yeah, fine!' he replied. 'Just, uh... little busy at the moment!'

'Okay...' Bruce said slowly, 'well, we're having a team meeting on Steve's floor and you're needed, so can you come down?'

Oh, I'll come , Tony thought, but aloud said, 'Be there in a second!'

He heard Bruce shuffle off, and then JARVIS said, 'Mr Banner has left the penthouse .'

'Jesus,' Tony groaned. He threaded his fingers through Loki's hair and tugged, making the god pop off his cock with a lewd sucking sound.

'I thought you didn't want me to stop,' Loki hummed. His left hand was wrapped around Tony's erection, the right smoothing over Tony's thigh, hip and stomach. He gave the younger man's cock a long, tight stroke, and Tony arched up, trying to jam himself back into that delicious heat.

'Loki,' he whined.

'I don't like being interrupted,' Loki growled before swallowing Tony down again.

'JESUS!' Okay, so apparently Loki had been playing before, because his lips were tight, cheeks hollowing every time he took Tony down, down, down , right down his throat to suck and hum. His tongue laved up and down the vein in Tony's cock, making it twitch and swell, and when Loki's dark green eyes met Tony's, Tony finally climaxed. He slicked Loki's mouth and throat with come, the Trickster humming yet again as he swallowed it all down, going so far as to lick his lips when he slid off, as though Tony were a delicious dessert.

Tony could do little more than flop onto the bed, chest heaving and mouth stretched wide as he sucked in air. Loki straddled Tony's waist and took himself in hand, watching Tony with narrowed eyes as he jerked himself off. Tony wanted to help, but he was pretty sure that Loki had sucked his brain out through his dick, so he merely raised his hands and gave Loki's ass a few good squeezes, his fingers brushing briefly between Loki's cheeks and over his hole.

Loki finally moaned and arched his back like a cat before stripping Tony's stomach and chest with white, shuddering as he milked himself before going still.

'Jesus,' Tony grunted again.

Loki chuckled. 'It seems that I've reduced you to a simple few words, Stark.' He sat up, eyes gleaming. 'I'm quite proud of myself.'
'You should be,' Tony agreed. 'Your mouth is another thing all together.'

'Silver Tongue,' Loki quipped. Tony opened his mouth, and Loki grabbed his hips, squeezing too tightly. 'I'm over a thousand years old, Stark, and believe me when I say that I've heard all the jokes.'

Tony pouted as he said, 'But I had some good ones!'

'I doubt that,' Loki replied. He finally rolled off of the inventor and to his feet, not caring in the slightest that he was naked, skin flushed pink and red. He made his way to the bathroom and Tony watched.

He knew he had to get up- they'd send in Natasha next, and she was in no way concerned about any state of undress Tony might be in. She'd interrupted him during sex once with a twenty-four year-old gymnast. A gymnast. Tony had considered murdering everybody in the Tower and taking over the world that night.

'Are you coming, Anthony?' Loki called from the en-suite bathroom. 'Your... friends, require your presence.'

'Yeah, yeah,' Tony grunted. He sighed but sat up and hobbled across the room. Damn, his legs felt like jell-o. 'You're coming too, right?' he asked when he entered the bathroom.

Loki was wiping himself down with a wet towel, and raised his eyebrows when Tony joined him. 'Am I welcome?' he queried. 'Banner made it out to be an Avengers team meeting.'

'You're my boyfriend, remember?' Tony said. 'It's not like we're gonna discuss anything top secret. And if we do you can just leave. But I want them to meet you and see how serious we are so they know why you're hanging around all the time. Oh, and you should mention an assistant.'

'Mm,' Loki hummed. He passed the towel to Tony and Tony wiped himself down, Loki using his fingers to comb his hair and wash his face. When he was done he smiled brightly at Tony and gave him a quick kiss.

'What was that for?' Not that Tony was complaining, but Loki only ever kissed him when he wanted sex.

'Our plan is moving forward,' Loki said. 'I've enjoyed our time together so far, but tricking them really will be delicious.'

Tony snorted. 'Yeah, yeah. Go get changed and get into your Logan suit.'

Loki kissed him again and wandered off, hips swaying from side to side, forcing Tony to stare at his ass the entire time. He sighed. Damn Avengers meetings. He totally wanted to spend the rest of the day fucking Loki.

{oOo}

They eventually got dressed, much to Tony's annoyance, and went down to Steve's floor. The
Avengers had all congregated in the kitchen, as they usually did, and each and every one of them looked up when Tony and Loki- or Logan- entered the room.

'So, this is Logan,' Tony announced, and the Avengers all stared between him and Loki.

'Logan Thomas,' Loki said, an apparently genuine smile overtaking his face. Tony had to bite back a snort. Loki was a really good liar.

'This is Natasha, Bruce, Clint, Steve, and Thor,' Tony said, pointing at each Avenger in turn. He wasn't actually one hundred percent sure that Loki actually knew their names. In battle he always referred to them as their “super hero” names. And sometimes he called Clint “Little Hawk”, and of course his favourite name for Thor was “blonde oaf”.

'Huh,' Clint mused, 'so he's real.'

Tony flipped him off, but Clint ignored him in favour of continuing to stare at Loki.

'It is nice to meet you, Son of Thomas,' Thor boomed, and Loki glanced at Tony, seemingly confused.

'How do you know the Man of Iron?' Thor asked, actually looking interested. Tony wondered if he was just being nice, or if Thor was genuinely that enthusiastic about... well, everything.

'We met at a bar,' Loki lied smoothly, 'and a few more times after that. It took some time, but eventually Tony convinced me to date him.'

Thor frowned in confusion. 'Date?'

'We're boyfriends,' Tony said slowly, like he was talking to a small child. He saw Loki bite back a smirk from beside him.

'Boy... friends...' Thor adopted Tony's slow talk, blue eyes blinking rapidly.

'As in a girlfriend, only with a guy,' Natasha took over.

Thor still looked confused, though, so Clint said, 'They're fucking, Thor! Having sex; sleeping together; doing the beast with two-' He cut himself off to wince when Natasha slapped him over the back of the head, tossing a glare at his fellow agent but not saying anything more.

Thor seemed to have gotten the gist of Clint's sentences, though, and frowned between Tony and Loki. 'I was unaware that two men laying together was... acceptable, on Midgard.'

Loki raised both eyebrows, fake-blue eyes slightly hard. 'Is it unacceptable where you're from?'

Thor seemed to wilt slightly under both his and Tony's gazes, scratching a hand through his tied-back blonde hair. 'Well,' he hesitated before continuing, 'it is something that happens, certainly, but not... not outside of battle or adventure.'

Loki continued to stare at him. 'I see,' he muttered.

'On Midgard it's completely accepted, Rocky,' Tony told Thor. 'We accept guys with guys, girls with girls, and everything else, got that? If you have a problem-'
'Of course not!' Thor hastened to interrupt, though it was clear that he was still uncomfortable with the topic. At least he knew when to back down, Tony thought.

'Good,' Tony grunted and turned to smile at Loki. 'Want something to eat?'

'Are you sure I shouldn't go?' Loki asked. Jesus, if Tony didn't know who Loki was, he'd think that he was sweet, innocent Logan Thomas. *Gold star in acting for Loki!*

'Nah, it's cool,' Tony dismissed.

'Tony,' Natasha began, and Tony waved a hand at her.

'What? I'm not like I'm gonna share SHIELD codes or whatever the hell else you're worried about with him. Besides, Doom's dead; who's Logan gonna tell?'

'Doom?' Loki questioned, affecting an air of confusion as he allowed Tony to lead him to the kitchen table. He shifted slightly when he caught Bruce's eyes, but Bruce just smiled, all warm and adorable as always. Tony winked at his science bro before looking back at Loki.

'Victor von Doom; one of the Avengers' enemies.'

'I see,' Loki hummed, 'and he's dead?'

'Loki killed him,' Tony said, which earned glares from half of the Avengers. 'What?' he snapped. 'It's not really a secret!'

'We don't want it to get out that Loki's killing again,' Natasha scowled.

Tony scoffed. 'Like anyone believes that Loki's stopped killing people.'

'The general public don't want to hear any of it,' Natasha said.

'Loki's the one who invaded just over a year ago, right?' Loki asked, looking as though he was trying hard to keep up.

'Yup,' Tony said, making the last letter pop.

'I remember reading that he was back, but he hasn't seemed to have done all that much damage lately,' Loki continued. 'Is he planning something?'

Natasha and Clint shared a look, and even Steve looked a bit concerned over the conversation; probably because he didn't like hysterical citizens.

'We're unsure,' Natasha said slowly. 'If he poses any more of a threat to the public, SHIELD will announce it.'

'I'll protect you, babe,' Tony said from where he'd wandered over to the cupboards. Steve wasn't cooking anything, the bastard, so Tony had to resort to raiding his pantry.

'I feel safer already,' Loki drawled, earning him a wink from Tony.

'Sandwiches okay?' Tony asked, and Loki nodded, so Tony went to the fridge to grab ham, salami, lettuce and cheese. He held a tomato up to Loki, too, and got a nod. The Avengers fell into silence, or softly muttered conversations, while Tony worked, and Loki just watched him, head tilted to the side like Tony was a fascinating creature that he wanted to study.
Tony was totally okay with that. Study equalled sex, right?

When Tony was done he left the kitchen counter a mess—someone else'd clean that up—and grabbed a packet of chips before joining Loki back at the table. Bruce was staring at him as Tony opened the packet and nudged it towards Loki.

'What?' Tony asked.

'Nothing,' Bruce said, offering Tony a smile.

'It's weird,' Clint said, 'you're feeding him.'

Tony raised an eyebrow. 'And?' he asked, popping a chip into his mouth.

'Usually you kick your one-nighters out as soon as you're done,' Clint said.

'The difference between a partner and a one-night stand,' Loki commented, raising an eyebrow when Clint turned his way. Clint frowned, eyes going a bit glossy, before he jerked back and shook his head.

'Are you okay?' Natasha asked Clint, while Tony glanced at Loki. Loki tilted his head slightly, eyes narrowed as if to say, "I'll tell you later".

Tony wondered if that had actually happened, or if he was just reading too much into it. It wasn't like he knew Loki well enough to have conversations with just their eyes.

'Yeah, fine,' Clint was murmuring, 'just got a headache.'

Loki smiled brightly at Clint when the archer glanced at him, but Clint just shook his head and turned back to Natasha.

'We have to discuss what happened today,' Steve decided to get down to business, which made Tony think of Mulan and laugh. Steve, of course, ignored him. 'Tony, I'm really not sure if we should discuss this in front of your... partner.'

'I can leave,' Loki offered again.

'Seriously, it's not like Logan's a four-year-old; he can handle a bit of violent talk,' Tony said.

'That's not the point, Stark,' Natasha sighed.

Tony raised his eyebrows. 'So what *is* the point?'

'How about I go back to the penthouse?' Loki decided. He stood before Tony could stop him, but bent to press a soft kiss to Tony's lips. It made Tony's chest feel all warm and tingly, but he ignored that. 'Remember that we need to discuss if you're free tonight,' Loki said smoothly.

'I'm pretty sure I am,' Tony said, wondering where Loki was going with this.

'You need an assistant,' Loki said. Tony almost laughed. Smooth motherfucker. 'That way you wouldn't have to constantly check with your AI to see if we can go out.'

'Hey, a few missed meetings never hurt anyone,' Tony said.

'When you own a billion-dollar company, it's different,' Loki said. 'It was nice to meet you all,' he told the kitchen at large.
'I won't be too long,' Tony told him, and watched as Loki smiled and left the room with his plate and the bag of chips, disappearing around the corner in the hallway. 'So, what do we need to discuss?' Tony asked, turning to pick up his sandwich. 'Doom was a dick, decided to destroy some shit, and Loki killed him; the end.'

'We need a little more detail than that, Stark,' Natasha said.

Tony rolled his eyes but took a large bite of his sandwich. He had a feeling that it was going to be a long afternoon.

{oOo}

Tony should have been given a medal for how long he sat there with the Avengers. They went on and on and on, and then, just for shits and giggles, they went on again. Each and every member of the Avengers went into excruciating detail three times about their part of the battle; what they'd seen, how they'd fought, what the doombots were capable of, etc. They'd also had to go into massive amounts of detail about what they'd seen Loki doing, what magic he'd used, what he'd been wearing... seriously, they were obsessed.

Tony bore the brunt of it; he'd been the one to witness Loki's fight with Doom, after all, and apparently re-telling the story six times wasn't enough. No, just a few more times, Tony. Why don't you write it down too, Tony. Draw us a fucking diagram, Tony.

Tony was close to snapping. Fuck his plans with Loki, he could call one of his suits and blow them all up right now. Apparently Bruce could tell that Tony's thoughts had turned murderous, because he cleared his throat and said, 'Okay, I think that's enough.'

Natasha and Steve both looked at him, and Clint opened his mouth, no doubt to argue, but Thor groaned and stretched.

'Yes, I believe it is time for a snack!' he declared, beaming brightly. He headed for the cupboards, no doubt in hunt of pop tarts. Tony sighed. Thank fuck.

'Can I go now?' Tony asked and stood without waiting for an answer.

'Stark, I know how hard it might be for you,' Natasha began, only continuing when Tony turned to face her, 'but please don't share top secret details with your boyfriend.'

'What, you think Logan's a spy?' Tony asked. 'For...?'

'There are any number of terrorist organisations who'd kill to get a man inside SHIELD,' Clint said. Tony snorted. 'Right, right. And the best way to do that is sleep with me. Sure, that makes sense.'

'I just think it's weird that he has no problem dating you considering your reputation,' Natasha said.

'Cause some people can't just be, oh, I dunno; good people,' Tony snapped. Which was funny, because Loki definitely wasn't a good person. Then again, neither was Tony.
'You've been seeing him for, what, four days?' Natasha asked. 'And he's already being invited to Avengers meetings, and wandering around the Tower like he owns it.'

'We've been dating for three months, Natasha,' Tony said, earning surprised looks from her, Clint, and Steve. 'I just didn't want to introduce him to you because of this exact reason.' Tony continued, letting some anger colour his tone, his face. 'Maybe I knew that you'd all react like it's the end of the world. Because Tony Stark can't date, he's a man-whore.'

Clint opened his mouth, but Natasha kicked him under the table. Tony decided that Clint would be the first person he hurt when his new suit was finished.

'God forbid I be happy,' Tony added and walked out the door. Over his shoulder, he shouted, 'A happy Tony is a reckless Tony, right? And SHIELD can't have Iron Man be reckless!'

He ignored Steve's attempt to call him back, seething internally as he rode the elevator up to his penthouse. Loki- and it was Loki, not Logan- was sitting in the living room, his sandwich finished but the packet of chips open on his lap. He was chewing when Tony entered the room and frowned, green eyes narrowed.

'What happened?' he questioned.

'The Avengers are fucking assholes,' Tony declared. He flopped onto the sofa and sighed, rubbing his eyes.

'What happened?' Loki repeated. Tony quickly relayed his conversation with the others, and Loki hummed. 'The Avengers really have no faith in you, do they?'

'They don't want me to be happy,' Tony grunted. 'Cause if I'm happy, I'm functioning. And if I'm functioning, they can't kick me off their fucking team."

'It's a good thing you don't want to be on their team, then,' Loki said.

Tony laughed softly. 'Yeah.'

Loki turned to glance at him. 'Having second thoughts, Stark?' he asked.

'God, no!' Tony laughed again. His smile fell after a bit. 'No, no second thoughts,' he said. 'It's just... it pisses me off, you know? I thought that they at least respected me for what I could do as Iron Man, if not just me in general. But—'

'They don't,' Loki supplied.

'Yeah.'

Loki tilted his head slightly before turning to look at the TV, and Tony blinked rapidly. Was Loki watching The Lion King? 'I have found, in my long life,' Loki said slowly, 'that there are very few people you can count on.'

'Oh?' Tony queried, and Loki nodded.

'People are fickle,' the older god said, 'and almost all of their actions are undertaken for their own personal gain. People, whether god or mortal, will always do whatever is in their best interest. Even if that means... screwing over those around them.'

'Yeah,' Tony sighed. He leaned back and put his feet up on the coffee table, narrowly avoiding
Loki's empty plate. 'I learned that long ago, Lokes. My dad never much cared about me unless I could help sell the image of family. It was great for business.'

'Yes, Odin did similar,' Loki said. 'A united Royal family is better than one that is crumbling. Unfortunately for him, nobody particularly cared about me.'

'I do,' Tony said, which earned him Loki's sharp gaze. 'I do,' Tony repeated with more emphasis.

'You have to,' Loki said, 'we have a deal.'

'I'd still care about you if we didn't,' Tony said. It was true, but Loki didn't seem to believe him. Tony really couldn't blame him; from what he'd seen and heard, nobody had ever really cared about Loki. About what Loki could do? Yeah, they cared about that. But not about Loki himself. It was the same with Tony; people cared about his company, his money, or Iron Man. Not Tony Stark himself. 'I like you, Loki.' Tony said when the Trickster failed to say anything. 'You're funny, sexy, brilliant, and just... awesome to be around. What you can do is really cool, I won't deny that, and it's helpful to me and my plans. But I like you for you, too.' He shrugged a shoulder and turned to stare at the TV again. 'If you don't believe me, fine. But it's the truth.'

They fell into silence, both gods staring at the TV, Loki occasionally passing the bag of chips over so Tony could grab a handful.

Mufasa had just died on the TV when Loki softly said, 'I believe you, Stark.'

Tony smiled, but didn't turn. 'Tony,' he corrected.

He got a soft huff, and a muttered, 'Anthony,' that contained more sarcasm than should be possible.

Tony snickered and wrapped an arm around Loki, pulling him close. He pressed a kiss to Loki's cheek and said, 'Good.'

'Mmf,' Loki huffed. But he curled up into Tony's side, head near-buried in Tony's chest. Tony counted it as a win.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: Sorry for the long wait! I haven't worked on any of my WIPs for a while now and all of them are falling behind. I'm a terrible author, I really am.

Anywho, I hope the chapter was okay :)

Cheers,

{Dreamer}
Tony and Loki were meditating. Or, well, Loki was trying to teach Tony how to meditate. Apparently magic, both your own and the magic around you, was simpler to find, in the beginning, if you were in a relaxed, meditative state. Tony would have called bullshit if Loki hadn't spent the past hour muttering under his breath about Tony's useless machines- or toys, as he still called them.

Tony wasn't really sure he was getting it, though. He'd assumed that meditation would be like yoga, only with less bending and tight outfits. Loki had dragged Tony onto the large, black sofa in Tony's living room, had JARVIS lockdown the penthouse, and then talked Tony through a bunch of breathing exercises.

He was still doing that now, and Tony had to admit that he did sort of feel relaxed. He kind of felt the way he usually did after good sex; warm, sated, and slightly tired.

Loki was sitting against one of the armrests, legs spread with Tony between them. Tony's back was pressed to Loki's chest, and Loki alternated between hooking his chin over Tony's shoulder, or whispering softly in his ear. Their arms were pressed together, Tony's hands palm-up in Loki's own, and both had their eyes closed. Well, Tony did, and he assumed that Loki did, too.

'How's this supposed to help, again?' Tony asked, barely moving his lips.

'Shh,' Loki hummed, breath ghosting over Tony's ear. Tony would have shivered if he wasn't so relaxed. For some reason the situation didn't really feel sexy, despite Loki being pressed up against him, his crotch firm against Tony's ass. It just felt... warm, comfortable. 'Who knows more about magic, Stark?'

'Thought I was supposed to be quiet?' Tony asked.
Loki huffed a very soft laugh. 'We have been sitting here for five hours, Stark. I'm not sure meditation will help you.'

Frowning, Tony opened his eyes and echoed, 'Five hours?' He felt Loki nod. 'Huh.'

'What's the matter?' Loki asked.

Tony shifted a bit, wiggling against Loki, but again it didn't feel very sexual. 'I didn't realise that much time had passed,' he admitted, 'feels like only five minutes.'

Loki hummed again. 'Interesting.'

'Yeah?'

'Very,' Loki replied. 'Perhaps meditation will help.'

'More than my stupid toys, then?' Tony asked. He turned slightly to meet Loki's eyes, which were shining in amusement.

Loki sighed slightly and leaned back. He moved until he could lean more against the back of the sofa than the armrest, barely moving Tony himself in the process.

'I understand that you want to study magic,' he said slowly, as though he was weighing every word before speaking it aloud, 'and not in the way that a traditional mage studies magic. But I'm not sure how your Midgardian technology will help you wield magic. It may help you find it, either in yourself or in the planet around you, but it won't help you master it.'

'I know that,' Tony said. Loki raised an eyebrow. 'But I can't... not study it,' he added, frowning. 'Does that make sense?'

'You want to understand it,' Loki replied.

'Yeah,' Tony nodded. 'If it's there, I wanna know everything about it. To the best of my ability, anyway.'

'I understand,' Loki said. He smiled softly when Tony glanced sideways at him. 'You want to know how it works. And you won't be satisfied until you do, even if you can use it yourself.'

'Exactly,' Tony said.

Loki's smile softened further, which surprised Tony and made him blink rapidly. Loki smiled often, which had shocked Tony the first few times, but he was used to it now. Only... well, Loki's smiles were usually more smirks or mischievous grins. They usually preluded sex, or tricks, or Loki outwitting Tony in an argument. They were rarely soft just... just because.

'What?' Loki questioned when Tony continued to stare at him, brown eyes slightly glazed.

Tony shook his head and offered Loki a shrug. 'Nothing,' he said. He wasn't about to share his thoughts with the older god... not yet. 'Just thinking.'

'About?' Loki prompted. He moved an arm to wrap it around Tony's waist, squeezing tightly. Tony's hand fell to Loki's thigh and he ran his fingers over the smooth, warm fabric of Loki's sweats. Loki was always oddly cool- Frost Giant, Tony had to remind himself- but the fabric easily soaked up Tony's own body heat, making Loki feel warmer than usual.

'Just... magic, our plans, my suit; all the usual stuff,' Tony finally answered.
Loki raised a slim black eyebrow, apparently not convinced with Tony's simple answer. But he didn't prod; he just leaned forward to kiss Tony again with the softness, what was with Loki tonight? before pulling back. 'Would you like to try meditating again?' he asked.

'Um... can we have a break?' Tony responded. 'I'm hungry.'

Loki sighed, like Tony was really drawing his patience, but nodded and unwound his arm from around Tony.

'Hey, I didn't say you should go anywhere,' Tony muttered. He pulled Loki's arm back into place and leaned back. Okay, so he snuggled back, but Loki didn't complain. 'I feel like pizza.'

'Pizza?' Loki echoed.

'You can't tell me you haven't had pizza,' Tony said incredulously.

Loki chuckled into his ear. 'I've heard of it,' he said, 'but haven't had the chance to sample it myself.'

'Oh my God,' Tony gaped and shot forward. He twisted to look at Loki, who seemed more amused than annoyed at Tony's sudden movement.

'What?'

'I actually get to witness someone trying pizza for the first time,' Tony breathed.

Loki raised both eyebrows this time. 'It can't be that amazing.'

'Oh, Loki, Loki, Loki,' Tony tisked, making Loki chuckle. 'Pizza is amazing. Okay, so it isn't the best food in the world- that's totally cheeseburgers and steak... or steak cheeseburgers- but pizza. Is. Awesome.'

'You have an unhealthy fascination for what is basically dough with sauce,' Loki replied.

'You shut your mouth!' Tony snapped, waving a threatening finger at the taller man. 'Pizza is awesome.'

'So I've heard,' Loki mused.

'JARVIS, order pizza from that place,' Tony said.

'Would you like to be more specific on the place in question, sir, or shall I guess?' JARVIS responded with a faint trace of sarcasm.

'Don't sass me, J!' Tony said. 'You know what place I'm talking about. It's where I always get pizza.'

'Yes, sir,' JARVIS replied. 'What shall I order?'

Tony hummed at that, eyes roaming over Loki's smooth, pale face, bright green eyes, and dark eyebrows. 'Get a meat lovers, a supreme, one of those spicy ones, something with chicken, and something with prawns,' Tony eventually decided. 'Also garlic bread.'

'Yes, sir,' JARVIS repeated.

'Again,' Loki drawled, 'you have an unhealthy fascination with pizza.'
'Shut it,' Tony grunted. 'Just wait 'til you try it, Lo; you'll love it.

'Mm-hmm.'

Tony sighed and leaned back, once again getting comfortable. Loki's arm was still around his waist, the other along the back of the sofa. Tony reached out and caught Loki's fingers, bringing his hand between both of Tony's own.

'What are you doing?' Loki questioned when Tony started stroking his skin.

'Exploring,' Tony replied.

'Why?'

'Cause,' Tony said. Loki chuckled. 'Your hands are amazing,' Tony added. When Loki rested his chin on Tony's shoulder, Tony elaborated. 'You throw magic with them, and preform spells. You touch me, get me all hot and bothered.' Loki laughed softly. 'I bet there's lots of stuff you can do that I don't know about yet.'

'You'll find out, eventually,' Loki said. 'Remember that you're immortal.'

A grin slowly overtook Tony's face. Sometimes, in all honesty, he completely forget that he was now technically a god. He hadn't gone through the trials mortals apparently had to undertake to be gifted an apple by Odin, but he was still a god. He healed almost as fast as Loki- who had magic to speed things along- and he was almost as strong. Loki had, after all, been trained in battle for over a thousand years, and was also a Frost Giant.

Loki was apparently following Tony's train of thought, because he leaned forward to kiss Tony's cheek. 'Tony Stark, God of Cunning and Inspiration.'

'I need business cards,' Tony murmured.

Loki laughed and Tony twisted around to kiss him properly, Loki's lips cool but firm against his own. Loki tugged Tony a bit closer and pulled his hand from between Tony's so he could slide his fingers through Tony's hair. Tony hummed softly in encouragement and tried to turn more, but Loki's knees came up, trapping the younger man's body in place.

'Loki,' Tony whined.

'Mm?'

'Lemme go.'

'Why?'

'Cause I wanna straddle your waist and make you come,' Tony replied, because duh, why else would Tony be trying to move?

'Mm...' Loki hummed again, 'no.'

Tony pulled back, breaking their lips apart. 'Excuse me?'

'A proper meditative state cannot be achieved if one is sexually aroused,' Loki said. He sounded like he was reciting the words, and Tony wondered just who the hell had taught Loki magic.

'We've already meditated for five hours,' Tony reminded the mage.
'You meditated for five hours,' Loki corrected. 'I was aware of the time, and my surroundings.'

'Whatever,' Tony rolled his eyes. 'Isn't that enough for today?'

'No,' Loki said, and the inventor huffed. 'After we eat we'll try again. Sometimes meditation can be easier to slip into if your body is sated.'

'Exactly,' Tony said, 'so we should totally fuck.'

'We can totally fuck after we eat and try again,' Loki responded.

Tony groaned and let his head tip back, eyes squeezed shut. 'You're killin' me, Lokes.'

'And I'm enjoying every second of it,' Loki said. Tony looked back at him to see Loki wearing a cheeky grin. Before Tony could say anything, Loki sat forward to kiss him quickly. 'I'm thirsty,' he said before sliding out from between Tony and the sofa, easily unfolding his long limbs to stretch and make his way out of the room.

Tony groaned again. Sexy bastard, he thought.

Loki returned a few minutes later with a glass of water, which he sipped from before placing it on the coffee table. He slid back onto the sofa and opened an arm wide, one eyebrow raised. He was practically ordering Tony to comply, and Tony saw no reason to disobey. He did laugh, though, even as he snuggled back into Loki. Seriously, they were snuggling. Tony wasn't exactly the cuddly type, and he'd been sure that Loki wasn't, either, but there they were; curled up like a real couple.

Tony forced down the warm, fuzzy feeling that erupted in his chest, and instead looked at Loki. 'Who taught you magic?' he asked.

Loki immediately stiffened, and he kept his eyes on the large, flatscreen TV hanging from the wall opposite them. Tony frowned. Okay, so... touchy subject, then. Tony hadn't realised. Loki was just so... well, magical. When Tony thought of Loki, he thought of magic. It seemed like a really big part of him. It was his primary weapon, after all, and the thing that had set him apart from every other warrior in Asgard.

'Um... sorry?' Tony ventured. He wasn't really used to apologising and meaning it. He wasn't really used to caring when he pissed people off. Loki made him feel a lot of weird crap, apparently.

Loki sighed suddenly, or just breathed out heavily, eyes still on the TV. They weren't as hard now, though, and he turned to glance at Tony, offering the human a very small, very quick smile.

'I've been told that I was born in touch with my magic, but seeing as how I was... adopted, it's impossible for Frigga or Odin to know for sure.'

Frigga was Loki's mother, Tony remembered Thor speaking about her. She seemed to be the only person who really understood Loki or even truly care about him. Tony didn't know whether that was still true since Loki's “fall from grace”.

'In any case, Frigga often told me about the magical tricks I would pull when I was but a babe,' Loki continued after a beat. 'And Thor never wasted an opportunity to accuse me of cheating when we were small. Neither did the Warriors Three.' His eyes hardened briefly, but he moved on. 'In any case, I have always found magic easy. Difficult to control at times, depending on the spell; time-consuming and tiring, certainly. But it was always my favourite subject when I was young, and it was the one thing I excelled at; the one thing I was better at than Thor.'
Loki sighed. 'I had many tutors as a child. Asgard doesn't have any true mages left apart from my mother, and she didn't teach me until I grew older and it became clear that I was far more powerful magically than anyone else in Asgard. She started teaching me when I was three hundred. I would have been ten or so, in Midgardian terms.' He looked at Tony, then. 'I surpassed her when I was three-hundred and five.'

Tony blinked rapidly. Wow. Okay, so it had taken Loki all of five years to master whatever his mother had had to teach him.

'I haven't had a mentor since,' Loki finished. 'I've had instructors, but that was usually when I visited another Realm and wanted to learn something. I'd stay with someone for a week or two, sometimes a month, and then move on when I mastered their spells.'

'Wow,' Tony finally spoke. 'So, really, I shouldn't expect to be awesome at magic overnight then, huh? Then again, I am Tony Stark.'

It was a joke; a poor attempt by Tony to lighten the mood. It was clear that, while Loki loved magic and loved talking about it, him discussing his mother was a touchy subject.

Despite the sloppy attempt, Tony's words seemed to work. Loki relaxed slightly, and Tony hadn't realised how tense he was until that tension was gone. Loki slouched further back on the couch and drew Tony closer until the human was resting on his chest, an arm thrown around Loki's waist.

'Thank you, Stark,' he murmured, so softly that Tony might have missed the words, once upon a time. But he was a god, now. The apple hadn't just changed his durability.

'You're welcome,' he replied. Loki stroked his back once before burying his hand in Tony's hair. He used his grip to tug Tony up, twist him until Loki could crush their mouths together. Tony groaned and shivered, both in pleasure and pain. They didn't have to talk until the food arrived, Tony supposed; this was awesome, too.

{oOo}

Tony had barely swallowed his last bite of pizza before Loki was manhandling him, pulling the human back against his chest and setting them up in what Tony had labelled “Loki's Stupid Meditation Pose”. Loki didn't find it amusing, and gave Tony one raised eyebrow as the younger god got himself comfortable.

'Shut up,' Tony grunted, wiggling a bit until he went mostly still. 'I'm not used to remaining in one position for so long.'

Loki leaned forward to press a kiss to Tony's ear. 'You weren't complaining last night,' he purred, and Tony shivered.

'Yeah, well, that might have had something to do with the dick in my ass,' Tony grunted.

'You're a foul little Midgardian,' Loki commented.

'But I'm adorable, so you put up with me anyway,' Tony quipped.

Loki chuckled shortly before he grabbed Tony's hands. 'Relax, Anthony.'
'Yeah, yeah,' Tony muttered. He did as he was told, though. He took a deep breath through his nose, let it out through his mouth, and repeated the action a few times before letting his eyes slide closed. Loki was warm against his back, comfortable, like Tony's very own Jötunn pillow. Tony slouched a bit and Loki made no comment; he'd learned that Tony could relax better if he was comfortable. Just because Loki liked meditating like he had a stick up his ass, didn't mean that Tony did.

Tony slowly let those thoughts trickle from his mind. Loki had explained that meditation was more about the relaxation of one's mind than one's body; once the mind was silent, relaxed, the body would follow. The brain controlled everything, after all.

So Tony slowly let all thoughts- all sensations- leave him, even though ignoring the Norse God of Mischief he was propped up against seemed like a really bad idea. While Tony knew that Loki wouldn't- couldn't- hurt him, his lizard brain still thought that it was a bad idea. Loki was a predator, so Tony didn't blame his animal instincts.

Instead he tried to understand them, work through them, and slowly let them leave; he knew that Loki wouldn't hurt him, so he just had to convince his body of the same thing. It worked eventually, though Tony didn't know exactly how much time had passed before his body relaxed that much further. Loki could probably tell him, but Tony didn't want to interrupt the progress he was making.

He was making progress, right? Usually forty seconds into sitting still would have Tony's skin itching. It was near impossible to turn his brain off if he wasn't medicated with hospital-grade painkillers. Bruce had found that out the hard way after a particularly hairy battle with Loki himself. Loki had broken three of Tony's ribs and fractured his left ankle, and Bruce had wandered back into the medical wing aboard the Helicarrier to find Tony trying to escape via the air duct. Clint had had to drag him out.

'Focus, Anthony,' Loki suddenly whispered. Tony didn't jolt, or open his eyes, or... anything. He just took another deep breath to steady himself, and felt his memories slowly recede until, once again, it was just him and Loki. It was like the world was slowly slipping out of existence, replaced with the steady thump-thump-thump of Tony's heart loud in his ears, and the much quicker dance of Loki's own heart beat against his back.

Soon even Loki was nothing more than a blip on Tony's radar; still there, because Tony could feel his warmth, his heart, the slight inhale and exhale of each breath. But other than that, nothing. It was like Tony and Loki no longer existed as bodies, but... something else.

Tony didn't frown when something else trailed across his conscious, though he wanted to; it was bright, like a large, glowing purple grape, and revolved somewhere around Tony's heart, only... not. Not physically, at least, but it was still there; Tony could feel it.

What the hell... he mused internally and reached out. His fingers- again metaphorical, seeing as how Tony could no longer really feel his fingers- brushed against the purple liquid, and suddenly something green and gold shot along his arms from his back, twining around Tony's entire being and anchoring him to... to something, something behind him.

Tony gasped, this time physically, and suddenly the purple... thing was all around him, in him, was him. The green and gold thing disappeared as soon as it had appeared, and the purple clawed at it, but had no choice but to let go.

Suddenly Tony was back in his body, eyes wide and breathing laboured. Behind him Loki was gasping just as heavily, his fingers curled tight around Tony's hands.
Tony's head hurt, and he felt like he'd just run a marathon, or battled Doom and his bots for twenty-four hours straight. He blinked rapidly and tried to get his bearings; first his eyes adjusted, set on the windows opposite him and Loki that showed the Manhattan skyline. Then he became aware of the cramp in his legs from sitting in the same position for too long, followed by the sharp sting of Loki's nails digging into his skin.

Finally, Tony took a deep breath and turned slightly to look at Loki. The Trickster's eyes were wide, a bright green that Tony only ever saw when Loki was battling with magic, or buried deep inside Tony's body. He looked feverish, though there wasn't a drop of sweat on him. Tony himself was covered in it; he could feel it, now, making his shirt stick to him, his hair feel damp and messy.

'Loki,' Tony breathed heavily, 'what the hell was that?'

Before Loki could answer, a loud alarm pierced the air from all around. Then, the entire Tower went into lockdown.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: I love magic, because you can basically make up whatever the fuck you want. Yes, that's right; I'm pulling it out of my arse. I have no idea how Loki's magic works, or how Tony's Midgardian magic might work. I'm hoping what I'm writing is at least slightly believable.

Thank you for all your comments, kudos, and continued support, I appreciate it :)

{Dreamer}
'JARVIS!' Tony shouted and jumped to his feet. The alarm was loud—so much louder than it used to be, making Tony wince and cover his ears.

The alarm dimmed somewhat but didn't go off as JARVIS answered his creator. 'My apologies, sir,' he said. 'Master Odinson ordered that the alarm be trigged.'

'What?' Tony said. 'Why?'

There was a pause, before; 'He says that Loki is in the penthouse, sir.'

Tony's eyes widened and he looked at Loki, who cursed and leapt to his feet. 'That bastard,' he snarled. 'His grasp of magic is weak, but like I've said, he can track me down like nobody else. He was either looking specifically for me, or he sensed the magic we both used.'

'What?' Tony gaped again. 'JARVIS, where's Thor?'

'Captain Rogers' floor,' JARVIS responded. 'And the Avengers are gathering, sir. I suggest that Mr Lie-smith disguise himself or leave.'

Loki cursed again and was suddenly bathed in green-gold magic. When it disappeared he was wearing his Asgardian armour, complete with horned helmet. 'Play along, Stark,' he ordered. 'I can't hurt you too badly; you'll heal quickly and the Avengers will grow suspicious.'

'No problem, babe,' Tony said. He raced across the penthouse and to the bar, grabbing his Iron Man bracelets. They were different to the ones he'd used when Loki had first attacked, but were still slightly outdated technology; at least according to Tony Stark's standards.

Tony twisted one of them, the smooth alloy easily bending beneath his fingers, and tossed it across the room. 'Blow something up!' Tony shouted as he snapped the other bracelet on and pressed the small, hidden gold button.

Loki did as asked. He held a hand out, summoned his spear, and then shot a bolt of magic at the other end of the bar. Granite and stone exploded, showering Tony and the room in debris. Tony felt bits of stone hit him, but they felt like rolled up balls of paper; there, but annoying rather than dangerous.

Loki tossed another ball of magic at the windows, making them explode in a shower of glass. Seconds later one of Tony's Iron Man gauntlets flew through the wreckage and attached itself to Tony's left hand. He pointed it at Loki, who paused. The elevator dinged in the following silence, and Loki tossed a hand at Tony. Tony had to hold back his shout of surprise when Logan suddenly appeared beside him, looking terrified and very, very real.

Clones, Tony remembered, right. It would have been weird, if Logan suddenly wasn't here when both Steve and Bruce had seen him and Tony together in the elevator earlier that morning.

The Avengers all piled into Tony's penthouse, Bruce keeping a good few feet of distance between himself and the others in case he Hulked Out. They all froze when they spotted Loki, and Thor took a step closer.

'Brother!'
Loki snarled and threw a dagger at the blonde god. Thor raised his hammer, though, easily deflecting the weapon and sending it into the wall.

'Loki, what are you doing here?' Thor demanded.

Loki ignored him and glared at Tony. 'Where is it?'

Tony had no idea what the hell it was supposed to be, but Loki had told him to play along. 'Nice try, Reindeer Games,' he said, 'but from where I'm standing, it's seven against one.'

Loki laughed. 'Seven?' he asked. 'Is your blonde play toy an Avenger now, Man of Iron?' His bright eyes flicked to Logan, who flinched back, hiding himself behind Tony.

Tony let his gaze sharpen, his entire demeanour changing as he shifted himself in front of Logan. 'Leave him alone, Loki,' Tony ordered, 'this has nothing to do with him.'

'It does now, Man of Iron,' Loki sneered. 'He put himself between you and me, remember? He attacked first.'

'He was defending himself!' Tony snapped.

Before Loki could reply, an arrow was suddenly embedded in his shoulder. He growled and twisted with the blow, magic erupting from his spear and shooting for the gathered Avengers. They all threw themselves aside and the floor where they'd been standing exploded, showering the group in tile and stone.

Clint quickly rolled back to his feet and nocked another arrow, sending it flying before he'd even regained his balance. Loki easily deflected it, and one of his daggers sliced through the air and into Clint's thigh, making him growl in pain and Natasha pull him back behind one of Tony's decorative tables.

A sudden loud, angry roar from the right of the room drew everyone's attention to Bruce. He was green, his shirt suddenly straining against the muscles now growing, and everybody froze. Loki snarled again and disappeared in a puff of thick green smoke that hung heavily in the air, making Tony and Logan cough.

'Shit,' Tony gasped and turned to his partner. 'Are you okay?'

Logan nodded and wiped his face with a shaky hand. Tony didn't know if it was the real Loki or a clone, and decided it'd just be easier to refer to him as Logan in his head for now.

'Everyone else?' Tony called into the room. It was thick with dust and smoke, but he heard his supposed team mates shout back that they were okay. Well, all except for Clint, who still had a dagger in his thigh. Tony had to bite back a snicker when he crossed the room to see Natasha applying pressure to the wound around the metal.

'I'm fine,' Bruce said when he reached them, shrugging off Steve's hand. 'We better get Clint down to the medical wing.'

Natasha and Clint both nodded, and Clint let himself be lifted by Steve, hobbling to the elevator.

'You too, Tony, Logan,' Bruce ordered. Tony glanced at Logan, who was still doing a very good job of looking completely fucking freaked out.

'O-Of course,' Logan said. Tony wrapped an arm around the taller man's waist, and guided Logan
to the elevator.

Everyone crammed inside, and they were all silent as they travelled down to the medical ward. It shared the same floor as Bruce's personal lab, so Bruce knew his way around, and quickly directed everybody on where to sit and what supplies he needed. Steve, as the good boy scout he was, was quick to hop to, while Natasha sat at Clint's side. Thor was pacing back and forth by the glass doors, muttering under his breath and looking annoyed. Tony led Logan to a spare bed and made him sit. He still had his Iron Man gauntlet on, and busied himself with checking it over while Bruce tended to Clint.

'So,' Clint grunted when Bruce tugged the dagger out, 'what the hell was that?'

It took Tony a minute to realise that Clint was talking to him. 'What?'

'You heard me,' Clint said, then scowled when Bruce tore his jeans open to get a better look at the wound.

'What was Loki doing in your penthouse?' Natasha took over the interrogation; and it was an interrogation, Tony knew.

He shared a glance with Logan, who offered nothing but wide eyes, before turning back to his assembled “team mates”. 'He wanted my magic sensor,' Tony lied.

Steve and Clint both frowned, and Natasha asked, 'Magic sensor?'

'I'm trying to build a sensor that can detect magic within New York,' Tony revealed. 'If I can get it to work, then maybe we can find Loki's home base.'

'No, Son of Stark,' Thor suddenly interrupted. He'd finally stopped pacing, but still looked troubled. 'My brother is very skilled in shielding his magic. Not even Heimdall can find him when Loki doesn't wish it.'

'Okay...' Tony blinked, 'well, if I can get it to work I should at least be able to detect any magic he uses outside his, um...Lair of Evil, then. He can't cover every spell he casts if he's trying to steal something or remain unseen. So I'll be able to find out where he is, and we'll be able to get to him quicker than we do now.'

'Why haven't you told SHIELD about this?' Natasha asked.

Tony scowled at her. "Cause it isn't finished, Natasha. I've only just moved on from blueprints, and the only magic I can study is Thor's. All of Loki's magic that I've studied is second-hand from SHIELD, or readings I've taken during our fights. It'll take time to get all the sensors to actually differentiate between magic and the background pollution of New York.'

'But Loki wanted it, even though you haven't finished it?' Natasha demanded.

Shrugging, Tony said, 'That's what he alluded to, yeah. He seemed to think that I was on the verge of a major breakthrough or something.'

'Perhaps you are,' Natasha mused, her eyes still hard, but now on the wall rather than Tony. 'Maybe he detected you detecting him, and came after the device in question.'

'Uh... maybe?' Tony shrugged again. 'I'll go over all my findings again and see if I missed anything.'
With that said, Tony turned to Logan, who'd remained completely quiet and mostly still.

'Are you okay?' he asked.

'Y-Yeah,' Logan stuttered. He took a deep breath and offered Tony a brief smile. 'I take it that that was Loki, the guy who invaded a few months back?'

'Yeah,' Tony nodded, 'sorry about that.'

'I'm fine,' Logan murmured. 'I, um... do you think it's safe for me to go home?'

He looked up at Tony, meeting the inventor's eyes, and Tony recognised that glint. Usually it came from green eyes instead of blue, but it was familiar all the same.

So this wasn't a clone, then; it was the real Loki.

Tony nearly grinned. Loki had some balls, he had to admit; wandering around with the team that he'd just attacked, his adopted brother just a few feet away. Thor didn't seem to be taking any special interest in Logan, so he clearly hadn't noticed anything odd about the “human”.

'Uh...' Tony pretended to think about that, looking Loki over. 'I don't think so,' he admitted gently. 'I showed Loki that you're important to me, and he might target you to get to me.'

'What's to stop him from doing that even if I'm here?' Loki asked.

'He knows that Thor can sense him if he just pops in,' Tony said, 'and he can't kill either of us before he gets the magic sensor; if he kills you I won't give it to him, and if he kills me he'll never figure out where it is. So you're safer here than you'd be at your apartment.'

Loki took a few deep, shuddering breaths before nodding jerkily. 'I'll stay here, then,' he said.

Tony leaned forward to press a kiss to Loki's lips, and only pulled back when Bruce appeared before them. 'Let me check you both out, okay?' he said gently. 'Then you can go.'

Tony and Loki were silent as Bruce did just that, though Tony kept a sharp eye on Bruce's instruments and the readings he was taking. But apparently Loki didn't appear as anything other than human, and soon they were allowed to go. Natasha had moved towards Thor during Bruce's examinations, and had to step aside to let Tony and Loki out. She nodded at them both, but Tony ignored her in favour of getting into the elevator.

'Jesus,' he muttered as soon as he and Loki were alone, 'I can't believe-'

He was cut off by Loki's hand, firm against his lips. He raised both eyebrows, but Loki pressed a single finger to his own lips, and Tony nodded. Okay, then...

Loki drew back, and Tony was silent as Loki unbuttoned his shirt and pulled it off. He felt underneath the collar for a few seconds before withdrawing what looked like a small black band-aid.

Loki looked back up at Tony to see him frowning. Rolling his eyes, Loki pressed two fingers to Tony's forehead.

'Whoa,' Tony breathed when he felt... something, prod at his mind.

'Make no sudden sounds, Stark,' he said... only his lips weren't moving. 'I'm speaking directly into your mind,' Loki elaborated.
Tony blinked rapidly. *What the hell?* he thought.

Apparently Loki could hear him, because he chuckled noiselessly. *'A trick I learned a few centuries ago,' he said, 'one that Thor isn't aware of.'*

**Okay...** Tony thought, **so, uh... why?**

'This,' Loki held up the band-aid, *'is a bug that Romanov slipped beneath my collar when we were leaving. Apparently she doesn't trust your recount of what happened. Either that, or she simply wishes to spy on us. Perhaps she thinks me a spy.'*

Yeah, Tony thought, *she brought that up after the team first met Logan.* Loki nodded. **So what do we do?** Tony asked.

'**We act completely normal until we reach your penthouse,'** Loki told him. **'We will discuss what happened, and I will act like I'm still shaken from the whole ordeal. We'll then drop my shirt somewhere in the hallway leading towards your bedroom. Romanov will think you removed my clothing for sex.'**

Tony hummed before giving Loki a good leer. *'We could always actually remove our clothing...'*

Loki laughed, but it was inside Tony's head, which was weird. *'Perhaps,'* he agreed. The doors opened and Loki withdrew his fingers, cutting himself off from Tony's head, and led the way back into the penthouse. The dust had settled, but there were various holes in Tony's walls and bar, and the coffee table had been blown into thousands of pieces.

'**Good damn it,**' Tony said out-loud. *'Loki has a habit of breaking all my shit.'*

'At least he didn't break you,' Loki whispered. He sounded so damn worried, and thankful that Tony was alive. Tony grinned.

'**Yeah,**' Tony agreed. He paused when Loki took a deep, shaky breath, with was at odds with his cool, composed demeanour and expression. '**You okay?**' Tony asked after a beat.

'I... I don't know,' Loki said slowly. 'I don't usually get attacked by gods.'

'He's not a real god,' Tony said, 'just an alien; a different race.'

'He can still throw balls of light that blow walls up!' Loki snapped.

'Hey, easy,' Tony said. He crossed the short distance between them and wrapped his arms around Loki. The taller man let himself be hugged, and buried his face in Tony's neck.

'I was so scared,' Loki mumbled, 'you could have been killed. I could have been killed.'

'But we weren't,' Tony replied. 'Believe me, babe, it'll take more than Loki of Asgard to kill Iron Man.'

Loki chuckled slightly, but it sounded weak. 'I'm glad you live with your team mates,' he murmured.

Tony pulled back and Loki gave him a shit-eating grin. Rolling his eyes, Tony tried to keep the sarcasm out of his voice as he said, 'Yeah, it's pretty great. We all get on each other's nerves sometimes, but we fight pretty well together.'

'I'm glad,' Loki repeated and leaned forward to capture Tony's lips. Tony groaned softly and kissed
back, his hands smoothing from Loki's hips to his back, up, up, up until he could bury his fingers in
Loki's short blonde hair. God, it was really weird petting curls when he wanted long, thick black
hair, but Tony could deal. It was still Loki underneath the glamour, which was all that Tony
wanted.

When Loki pulled back to kiss and nibble on Tony's jaw, his neck, Tony said, 'Wanna take this to
the bedroom?'

'Mm,' Loki hummed and started backing towards the hallway.

'Remind me to call some contractors tomorrow,' Tony grunted as he let Loki tug him along, one of
the Trickster's hands fisted in his t-shirt. 'Good chance to remodel my penthouse... again.'

*Thanks to you,* Tony added mentally. He wasn't sure if Loki was still reading his thoughts, but
when the older man growled, 'Shut up, Tony,' Tony decided to do as he was told. They stopped just
before Tony's bedroom and Loki slipped the bug back under the collar of his shirt before dropping
it on the floor. He then pulled Tony into the bedroom, Tony slamming the door behind them.

'JARVIS, disable the bug but don't destroy it,' Tony ordered. 'I don't want Romanov knowing that
we found it.'

'Yes, sir,' JARVIS replied.

'Stark,' Loki growled. Tony looked up at him. Loki's eyes were still blue, but were alight with a
desire that Tony had become very familiar with. Loki leaned forward, his next words whispered
over Tony's lips. 'Fuck me.'

'Yes, sir,' Tony said, and Loki laughed, even when he was pushed onto the large bed.

{oOo}

'Hey, Loki?' Tony said.

Loki hummed but didn't open his eyes. He was spread out on Tony's rather impressive bed, limbs
sprawled all over the place, face sated. Which was awesome, considering that Tony had spent the
past hour fucking Loki through one orgasm, then right into the second. He'd only come once
himself, but he was sure, after a short breather, he'd be good to go again. Loki didn't seem to be in
any hurry.

'Loki,' Tony repeated.

Loki sighed. 'What, Stark?'

'Tony,' the inventor corrected. Loki half-heartedly tried to throw a pillow at him, but Tony grabbed
it and shoved it under his head.

'What?' Loki asked again.

'We haven't talked about what happened,' Tony said, 'you know, before Robin Hood and his Merry
Men burst in.'

'Robin Hood?' Loki questioned, eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

'I'll show you a movie sometime,' Tony decided. 'Anyway, yeah, uh... you know, that whole purple grape thing?'

Loki looked even more confused and finally rolled over to face Tony properly. 'Purple grape?'

'Yeah,' Tony nodded. 'I was meditating, and I was, uh... in my head, I think.'

'Your mindscape,' Loki corrected. 'It's a place where you have an awareness of your mind, no matter what state you're in. You're able to control your imagination, your dreams and memories, and, if you have it, your magic. Well,' he corrected himself after a pause, 'it's more a space for getting in touch with your magic, and healing it if it needs to be healed. I suppose that you could consider your mindscape a place to begin; it's where you'll learn to manipulate your magic until it becomes second nature.'

'Yeah...' Tony mused.

'You saw a purple grape in your mindscape?' Loki asked, sounding far too amused.

Tony scowled at him. 'It wasn't an actual purple grape, you asshole. That's just... the closest thing I can think of to describe it. It was like a purple... energy, or liquid. It was around my heart, but then it wasn't. Like, it was there one second, and the next it was me. Does that make sense?'

Loki chuckled, but nodded. 'Yes, Anthony. Those are similar words that other young mages and magic wielders use when they first discover their magic. They're usually babies, however.'

Tony kicked Loki under the sheets, but the older god managed to roll them over until he was sprawled across Tony's smaller body. Loki pressed a delicate kiss to Tony's arc reactor, and then kissed around it.

'So,' Tony said, running his fingers through Loki's hair, 'I have magic.'

'Indeed,' Loki mumbled.

'Is that what brought Thor down on us?' Tony asked.

Loki sighed and propped himself up, chin on Tony's chest. 'No,' he said, and Tony raised his eyebrows. 'Thor is unable to detect Midgardian magic. When I suggested, years ago, that this Realm could very well contain magic, Thor called me a fool. This was before either of us had visited; he never thought highly or you mortals until he started fighting with you.'

'No shit,' Tony snorted. 'Remember his face when I said that you were my boyfriend?'

Loki scowled. 'Asgard may be more advanced in some areas, but it is backwards in many others. It is the only Realm that shows disgust to what you call same-sex couplings. No other Realm, not even Jötunheimr, finds anything wrong with two men or two women fucking each other. In fact, most Jötnar are hermaphrodites.'

Tony nearly knocked Loki out when he sat up suddenly, sending Loki across the mattress.

'Stark!' he snapped.

'Are you telling me that you have a cock and a vagina?' Tony demanded.
Loki snorted. 'I'm currently in my Æsir form, if you hadn't noticed,' he said. 'Well, close enough,' he added when he looked down and realised that he was still Logan Thomas.

'Yeah, but...' Tony took a breath, 'in your Jötunn form, you have both?'

'No,' Loki said, and rolled his eyes when Tony pouted. 'As I said, most Jötnar are both sexes, but not all. I'm not, neither was King Laufey, his wife, or any of his ancestors. It has long been a belief amongst them that a leader of the Jötnar must be one sex to ensure healthy offspring that will one day lead the combined tribes well. Also, they believe that a pregnant leader is a weaker leader.' Suddenly, he scowled. 'Of course, that didn't work out well for Laufey with his firstborn.'

Tony blinked. 'Why's that?'

Loki stared at him, and Tony stared right back. This was probably another thing that Loki assumed Tony knew when he didn't. While Thor talked about his brother a lot- a lot, the dude was obsessed-and about Asgard in general, he was usually very tight-lipped about Loki's heritage, and the Jötnar in general.

'You... Thor hasn't told you,' Loki stated. Tony shook his head. 'I was the runt offspring of King Laufey and Queen Farbauti,' Loki said.

Tony stared at him. 'So... wait,' he frowned. 'You were born a prince, and then raised as a different prince?'

'Indeed,' Loki snorted. 'From my research, which has taken up a lot of this past year, I was Laufey and Farbauti's firstborn son. Ergo, I was heir to the throne of Jötunheimr when Odin decided to... adopt me.'

Tony frowned a bit as he said, 'It doesn't sound like you believe Odin... uh, adopted you.'

'He stole me,' Loki said. 'When the truth came out, Odin told me that I was left for dead; abandoned due to my small size and weak nature. But I have always been strong of magic. Despite my physical deformities, not even Laufey would be stupid enough to abandon a babe capable of that much magical power. It's more likely that I was hidden from the general populace until I was older and could be trained in magic. Jötnar have never believed magic to be a weakness or a trick, and if I could prove myself as a mage, my small size would have been forgotten.'

Loki shook his head and flopped back onto the bed. 'Another lie told by Odin, my apparent father,' Loki growled. 'And another lie that Thor refuses to see through.'

'You've told him all this?' Tony asked.

'Of course,' Loki replied. 'He always wants to talk when we face each other in battle. But he never listens. In his eyes, Odin can do little wrong.'

'Odin sounds like an asshole,' Tony grunted, and Loki laughed.

'He's far worse than that,' Loki murmured. 'In all honesty, even Thor would make a better King than Odin.'

Tony's eyebrows flew up. Loki despised Thor. 'Why's that?'

'Thor is many things, but a tyrant is not one of them,' Loki said, 'not any more. He has grown much in these past few years, and he listens to those he believes capable. Thor isn't capable of using others for his own means, not to the extent that Odin is. He's not good at manipulating people. I
would very much love to cut out Odin's remaining eye and then slay him.'

Tony pondered that while Loki fell silent. Apparently story time was over. 'Well, let's take over Midgard first, then Asgard,' Tony decided.

Loki cracked a small smile, and Tony rolled over the bed to get closer. He propped himself up on an elbow and looked down at Loki.

'So, we were talking about *my* magic before you went off into a tirade about your problems. Seriously, Rudolph, I need some *me* time.'

Loki's hand slithered beneath the twisted sheets to pinch Tony's ass, and the younger god yelped and reached back to rub the sore spot. 'My name is not Rudolph,' Loki said pleasantly.

'You're a bitch,' Tony grumbled, but Loki just grinned at him. 'Anyway. Magic. Purple. Giant grape.'

Loki snorted and turned his gaze on the ceiling. 'What you sensed- the purple liquid/grape/whatever you want to call it- was your magic, Stark. A lot more than I originally hoped you'd have.'

'Yeah?' Tony said. 'That's 'cause I'm awesome. You should really be used to it, babe.'

'That's what I'm afraid of,' Loki mused, but quickly moved on. 'My magic reacted to yours and reached for it; that was what Thor sensed. My magic escaped my control briefly, not enough for Heimdall or anyone in Asgard to detect it, but enough for Thor, who was only a few floors below us.'

'Right,' Tony nodded. 'So why did your magic react to mine? Were you in my mindscape or something?'

'I was monitoring,' Loki revealed, 'but no, I would never step properly into your mind without your permission. It's not in our contract, but it's not something I would ever do unless we were in extreme circumstances.'

'Cause you've had someone in your head without your permission,' Tony said.

Loki nodded. 'And I was in the Hawk's mind, as well as others, for a period of time. It isn't pleasant, especially when the owner of said mind is fighting with everything they have to regain control. Barton might not remember it, but he and the others were screaming all the time, trying to break free. It gave me a constant migraine.'

'Damn,' Tony whistled, 'mind-controlled, half-starved and dead, suffering a migraine, and *still* kicking our asses.' Tony leaned over to peck Loki on the nose. 'You're just the best super villain ever.'

'I'm not sure if I find you amusing or annoying,' Loki said.

Tony grinned. 'Adorable is what you're going for.'

'I very much doubt that.'

Tony laughed and shifted closer. Loki opened one arm and draped it over Tony's shoulders when Tony moved closer, his long fingers gently playing with Tony's hair.
'So,' Tony said after a few minutes, 'I have magic.'

'Indeed,' Loki replied.

'That's awesome,' Tony beamed. 'And I have more than you thought I would.'

'You either have alien blood in your ancestry,' Loki said, 'or you're simple one of a kind. The Apple might have helped enlarge and heal the core you already had, allowing more magic to flow within you.'

'Hmm,' Tony hummed. 'Being awesome is better than having an elf in the family,' he decided. Loki chuckled softly, chest barely moving against Tony. 'So what do you think I'll be able to do?' Tony asked.

'All manner of things,' Loki replied. 'Shields, elemental magic, wards. You may even be able to achieve teleportation.'

'Awesome,' Tony declared. 'Hey, will I be able to shape-shift?' he demanded. 'Cause I bet I'd be a hot woman.'

'I doubt it,' Loki said, smirking when Tony pouted at him. 'Shape-shifting is due to my biology rather than my magic. Not all Jötnar can shape-shift, but those of us with magic can.'

'Damn it,' Tony sighed. He settled back against Loki. 'Oh, well. I like my body as it is.'

'Yes, I rather like it, too,' Loki replied. He reached out to touch Tony's hip, then his stomach, fingers skimming down towards the soft curls that surrounded the base of Tony's cock.

Tony shivered and arched into the touch when he felt Loki's knuckles smooth down his shaft towards his balls. 'Damn it, Loki, you're gonna fuck me into an early grave.'

'Good idea,' Loki beamed. 'Let's start now.'

Tony laughed as Loki rolled over, on top of him once more. The sound was caught by Loki's lips and quickly turned into a groan when Loki rolled against him, their groins pressed together. 'Harder,' Tony ordered when they broke apart, and Loki was quick to do as asked.

He fixed his mouth to Anthony's neck and sucked, nibbled, and licked as he got Tony all hot and bothered. Only when the human was begging would Loki slide down onto his cock, let him find his relief.

Loki's magic danced beneath his skin wherever he touched Stark, but he kept a tight leash on it. While it would be delicious to bend his magic with Tony's, especially during sex, they couldn't afford it. Tony had no idea how to control his magic yet; he was too young, too volatile. Besides, Thor was still close by. This wouldn't be the first time that Thor ruined one of Loki's conquests.

'Soon,' Loki purred to himself as he reached down to wrap a hand around Anthony's cock. Soon he and Anthony would join together completely, their magic singing. It would be glorious, Loki knew.

After all, his magic had already recognised Stark as the perfect mate.
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

**Warning:** Mentions of MPreg (it won't happen in this story, but it's very briefly mentioned)

**Author's Note:** Yes, I'm updating again! So soon?! Well, I was gonna get some sleep, and my muse was all, 'Nah, you don't need sleep, WRITE DARK!FROSTIRON!' And so I did. And so here we are. Yes, I have gone insane. Join me!

Enjoy,

{Dreamer}

Loki woke to kisses and strokes being pressed to his back, the bristles covering Stark's face sliding along his smooth skin, just seconds before or after his lips press delicately. Loki hummed and shifted a bit beneath the sheets, but made no move to turn and return Stark's kisses. It felt nice, Loki could admit. His head was still foggy with sleep, and his body felt relaxed after their previous night. He hummed again and Stark chuckled, clearly knowing that he'd woken Loki and gotten his attention.

When he paused, Loki growled, 'Stop and you die.'

'You're usually a morning person,' Stark replied. He pressed his lips between Loki's shoulder blades. 'What gives?'
'I am tired, Anthony,' Loki replied.

'Gotta get up soon,' Tony said.

Loki raised an eyebrow but still didn't turn. 'Why?'

'Contractors,' Tony said. 'Cause, you know, you blew a few holes in my penthouse.'

Loki finally rolled over. Anthony was propped up on one elbow, the other hand falling from Loki's lower back to cup his arse. His hair was a mess (which just made him that much more handsome, not that Loki would ever admit it), and he had pillow imprints across one cheek and his forehead.

'What?' Tony said, both eyebrows rising.

'It was you who told me to blow some things up, remember?' Loki reminded him.

Stark rolled his eyes. 'Yeah, it would've looked weird if the Avengers walked in and we were just having a chat.'

Loki smirked and rolled his hips back, pressing his arse more firmly into Stark's hand. The human's eyes narrowed and darkened that bit more, making Loki's smirk widen. 'Imagine if they'd walked in any other time,' he said. 'Like when I fucked you in your workshop.'

'Or when I fucked you against the windows,' Tony replied.

Loki chuckled. 'I still feel that it would go better if I fucked you against the windows.'

'Hey, I'm a god now!' Stark pouted.

It really looked adorable on him, and Loki had to roll over, situating himself atop Stark and straddling his hips. Hel forbid Stark actually figure out that Loki often found him adorable.

'I am still stronger than you, Stark,' Loki purred before nipping the younger god's lips. Tony groaned and kissed back, his beard scraping against Loki's own smooth face. 'Frost Giants are always stronger.'

'So you're stronger than Thor?' Stark asked.

Loki ignored the faint pang of annoyance that his former brother's name brought, and said, 'Negative. You forget that I'm a runt, and Thor is more muscle than brain.'

That made Stark laugh and Loki swallowed the sound with his lips. Stark started thrusting upward, his half-hard cock now lengthening as it filled with blood. Apparently they weren't just playing this morning, then. Loki decided that he wanted Stark in him and sat up, the sheets falling to tangle around their bodies.

Stark watched with dark eyes as Loki reached for the bottle of what Midgardian's called “lubricant”. It made sex between two men smoother, Loki had found, and he had once again been surprised by Midgardian's abilities to make so many handy little things. Every other Realm Loki had visited used various types of oil for penetration, and it always stained the bedcloths horribly and make the parties involved slippery. It often “killed the mood”, as Stark would say.

Loki pressed the large bottle against Stark's chest and said, 'Prepare me.' It was more an order than a suggestion, but Anthony didn't complain. He sat up slightly and slicked a few fingers on his right hand before dropping the bottle. Loki lifted himself, and groaned breathlessly as Stark's fingers
probed around his entrance.

Loki was still slightly loose from last night- Stark really was very good at satisfying the Trickster- so the Midgardian managed to get two fingers in easily. Loki rolled himself backwards, taking Stark's fingers deeper and deeper every other thrust. Soon Stark had four fingers buried inside him, and Loki was close to riding the digits to completion.

'Hey, don't leave me out!' Stark muttered and withdrew his fingers.

'Then hurry up!' Loki snapped. Stark laughed at him, and Loki's eyes narrowed. Very well, then... Loki slid forward and grabbed Stark's cock with one hand, wrangling a gasp from the younger man that quickly turned into a groan as Loki lined himself up. He pressed his free hand to Stark's firm chest, over the arc reactor, as he slid down, taking Stark's length in inch by inch until he was fully seated.

Loki didn't give Stark- or himself- a chance to grow comfortable. He lifted himself almost immediately and slammed back down, just hard enough that they'd both feel it, not so hard that he'd damage either of them. A hurt Tony Stark would be no fun to play with.

'Jesus, Lokes!' Tony groaned and pushed up as best he could. But Loki was heavy, and flexible, meaning that he was in control of their coupling. Loki smirked down at Anthony as he moved faster and faster, pace picking up until he was riding Stark with abandon. He really was the prefect length; not too big, not too fat, just enough to fill Loki and make him ache for more.

Loki shifted a bit on every second or third thrust, trying to find that spot- a prostate, Stark called it- that would make their coupling that much better. It was Stark who found it, his hands gripping Loki's hips and pushing him a bit further up before jamming his full length into Loki's body. His cock slammed into Loki's prostate and made him shout in pleasure. Loki had never been a silent lover, and Stark seemed to enjoy it, so the Trickster saw no need to remain silent now.

Loki tipped himself forward slightly, braced on his knees and hands, as Stark manhandled him yet again, shifting and tugging until he could slam into Loki's prostate over and over again. The new angle pressed Loki's cock against Stark's belly, his shaft sliding along warm, slightly hairy skin. Loki left a trail of pre-come across Stark's stomach, and he whined softly in the back of his throat. The pressure wasn't enough to tip him over the edge, and Loki would very much like to climax, now.

Apparently Tony could read him, because his right hand slid away from Loki's hip and pressed between their stomachs. He managed to wrap a hand around Loki's cock and Loki hissed as he thrust into the warm hand, Stark's fingers pulling against his skin deliciously. Loki tipped his head up to capture Stark's lips, and the human groaned and panted into his mouth, their teeth clacking together and tongues sloppy rather than delicate.

Loki didn't care; he felt glorious, Stark's cock slamming into him repeatedly, the human's grip strong around his cock. Loki rolled his hips back, chasing his orgasm, and mere minutes after staring Stark brought him to completion. Loki grit his teeth as he came, but Stark's given name still escaped, making a smirk spread across Stark's red, slightly sweaty face.

Loki growled and slammed their mouths back together, clenching purposefully around Anthony's length still within him. He fucked himself back onto Stark's cock, faster and faster, until the human's nails broke his skin and Tony shouted, 'LOKI!' at the top of his breath.

_I hope nobody heard that_, Loki mused as Anthony flopped, boneless, back onto the mattress. His chest was heaving with each breath, and his cock still throbbed inside Loki, making Loki shiver.
every so often. Eventually Loki slid from the human and flopped onto the bed himself. Soon his breath slowed and his body temperature returned to what was normal for a Midgardian.

'Damn, Loki,' Tony groaned.

'Mm?' Loki hummed.

'Fuck me,' Tony breathed. 'Into an early grave,' he then added in a chuckle, which made Loki snicker in amusement.

The older god rolled over to prop himself up on Stark's bicep, and he enjoyed how it flexed beneath his cheek.

'You said something about contractors?' he questioned.

'Mm,' Tony nodded. 'I gotta keep an eye on them, because I wouldn't put it past Fury to sneak some SHIELD agents in and try and set up surveillance. JARVIS would find anything that put in, anyway, but it still helps to watch.'

'Indeed,' Loki agreed. 'Will I have to make an appearance?'

'Um... eventually, maybe?' Tony shrugged. 'You don't have to, but if you have any ideas you can tell me. I like remodelling the penthouse.'

'How many times have you done so?' Loki asked.

'About a dozen by now,' Tony said. 'Sometimes I tinker with one too many things and scorch something, or get drunk and fly the suit into the wall. Then there was that time you fought the Hulk in my living room, and two weeks after the builders finished with that, Doom sent forty Doombots after me.'

Loki scowled. He was very, very glad that Victor was dead. Nobody was allowed to touch what belonged to Loki, much less hurt it.

'Anyway, JARVIS told me that the builders will be here at nine,' Tony added.

'When?' Loki asked.

'Just before you jumped me,' Tony said, a grin on his face.

Loki smirked. 'You enjoyed it.'

'Yeah, I did,' Tony agreed. He tugged his arm from beneath Loki's head, making Loki flop onto the pillow and then glare at him when the engineer laughed. 'I gotta shower and change; It's already eight-thirty.' He tumbled out of the bed and stood, stretching and giving Loki a good view of his golden skin. 'Wanna join me?' Tony asked, wiggling his eyebrows.

Loki grunted and buried his face in a pillow. While he felt wet and sticky, he didn't want to move. He could always bathe when he felt more awake.

'Suit yourself,' Tony said and disappeared into the en-suite bathroom.

Loki just hummed.
Truly fascinating, Loki mused once again, about the seventh or eighth time since he'd woken. He had dozed on and off since Stark had left the bedroom, but the constant banging from further down the hallway, as well as hushed voices, had woken Loki completely. He felt even stickier than before, and slightly crusty, so knew that he'd have to get up and at least get himself clean before joining Anthony in the living room.

Loki was still disguised as Logan Thomas, which was easier than he would have assumed before sinking into it. Midgardians and Æsir were similar in body structure, the Æsir simply stronger built and generally larger. Loki had spent most of his life as an Æsir, and as such it wasn't too difficult keeping up this skin.

Loki stretched and then shifted under the covers. He felt the cooler temperature more deeply in this form, and was grateful for Stark's mountain of sheets, blankets and pillows. It was quite comfortable, and the lack of fur set it apart from Loki's past chambers on Asgard. While he missed parts of the Realm, he truly didn't miss the palace all that much. Too much gold.

Loki's mind wandered back to the magic he had sensed coiled tight within Stark's body. It had truly been beautiful- at least what Loki had sampled had been beautiful. Like he had told Stark, he hadn't been within the man's mindscape. Before his magic had recognised Stark's, he hadn't been capable of breaching the human's mind. The arc reactor in Anthony's chest distorted Loki's magic, made it near impossible to enter Anthony's mind.

But his magic, oh... it was surprising, yet delicious. Loki had caught flashes of purple, like Anthony had mentioned, as well as fire, chaos, darkness; all the things that Loki's own magic projected, minus the fire. Loki was in no way the God of Fire, and had no idea where that rumour had come from. Loki had always had trouble conjuring fire, or even manipulating fire that already existed. He hadn't known why in his youth, just seeing it as a failure. Now he knew that he was a Frost Giant; it made sense.

Stark's magic was so very... well, Stark. And it had reached out to Loki's magic, had pulled him in, wanted to... mate, for lack of a better word. It was why Loki had been able to project his thoughts into Tony's head, and in turn read the human's own thoughts. Stark might not care for him beyond their contract and their sexual compatibility, but Stark's magic had recognised what Loki's had; they were almost a perfect match.

They weren't soulmates, such a thing didn't exist, at least not that Loki had seen. No, Loki's magic simply recognised Stark's as being the most compatible; the best person for Loki to tie himself to in mind, body, and soul. Stark would care for Loki, understand him, and produce strong, healthy offspring. Of course, such a thing wasn't physically possible between the two unless Loki shape-shifted into a woman, but magic didn't recognise things like gender and biology. Of course, them both being male could be overcome if magic wished it; if they both wanted children, born from their bodies, magic would make it happen. It had a mind of its own, that way.

Loki wondered if he should tell Stark. The younger god might dislike Loki's magic reaching out to his, even though his own had agreed thoroughly. They were lovers, nothing more, even though Loki's feelings for Anthony had changed quite a bit since they had first met. In the beginning, Stark had just been an idiotic Midgardian warrior, on par with the likes of Thor and the Warriors Three. When Loki had returned after escaping from Asgard, he had noted Stark's intelligence, his cunning, his ability to constantly surprise Loki, no matter how many times they battled. Now they were sharing food and drink, space and time, sipping from each other's bodies and, more recently,
Loki had always trusted his magic; it was his greatest asset and weapon, what defined him and set him apart from all others. If his magic said that Stark was the best mate for him, then he was. Of course, Loki could ignore his magic, and the pull of Stark's own. He and Stark could simply remain partners and occasionally have sex, perhaps one day severing that tie and moving onto other bed partners. But the connection would always be there, simmering below the surface, pushing and pushing to finally be completed.

It was too soon, Loki thought. Even if he fell for Stark- which Loki wasn't sure he was actually capable of- it was much too soon in their more amicable relationship to think of bonding and creating a life-time connection. Maybe one day, in time, they would reach that point. But for now things were too new, and Loki had no idea how he really felt about Stark. He was fascinating, truly; beautiful and unique and chaotic. He was vicious when need be, fiercely protective of what he considered his, and would always find a way to confound the enemy and get what he wanted.

A truly perfect match. *Perhaps, in time, Loki thought yet again, we may grow closer.*

Shaking his head, Loki finally climbed out of the mound of blankets and sheets he'd been wrapped in, padding naked into Stark's rather nice bathroom. He much preferred baths over showers, but figured that he might as well wash quickly and go to join Stark. Who knew what trouble the younger god had gotten himself into without Loki watching over him.
Tony wasn't all that surprised when Pepper stepped out of the elevator, her heels clicking against the floor as she walked into the living room. Most of the rubble had been cleared away and stacked against the walls, ready to be thrown out or possibly re-built into the floor. Part of the bar had been lifted up and out of the floor when Loki had destroyed it, but both Tony and the building manager had agreed that the floor structure- and the walls- were undamaged.

There were twelve men in all, all moving quickly and efficiently. Tony had already put in an order for the various things needed to rebuild the bar and floors, and the builders had brought along plaster and tiles themselves. Tony had worked with them before, and they'd managed to rebuild the entire living room after Doom's first attack within four days. They were private contractors, and while Tony trusted their work, he didn't trust SHIELD. They could have very well smuggled an agent in as a simple builder, so Tony watched them all and had JARVIS monitor them constantly, any discrepancies to be reported to Tony's StarkPhone.

'Natasha called me,' Pepper said when she reached Tony, easily stepping over the small hole that Loki had blasted when he'd aimed for the Avengers.

Again, Tony wasn't surprised. Pepper and Natasha had hit it off the first time they'd met, and their friendship had only gotten better since Natasha's real identity had been revealed.

'Of course she did,' Tony said, 'you girls love gossiping about me.'

Pepper rolled her eyes but didn't look at Tony, instead surveying the building. 'What happened?'

'Natasha didn't tell you?' Tony asked.

Pepper sighed. Their relationship had crashed and burned pretty spectacularly, and their friendship hadn't managed to survive all that well. They could still be friendly, and Pepper still ran his company, but they barely ever talked, not like they used to. Tony had been surprised to find that he didn't miss her all that much. He'd always be thankful for what Pepper had done for him, and how she'd helped him both before and just after Afghanistan, but... yeah, Tony found that he didn't miss her presence all that much.

'Natasha just said that Loki attacked, that was it,' Pepper said. 'I don't understand why; he hasn't attacked the Tower since his invasion.'

'Yeah,' Tony said. He'd always kind of found that odd, and resolved to ask Loki when they were alone. Loki had already proven that he could teleport in and out of the Tower without alerting anyone- unless Thor was close by, of course- so why hadn't he done that when he'd first escaped? He could have teleported into the Tower, killed the Avengers, and been gone before Thor could return and warn them.

It was just another thing that made Tony realise that Loki didn't exactly want them dead. Tony because he was interesting- he knew he was- and because they now had a deal, and the others because they were amusing. Thor, Steve and Bruce would probably be the hardest to kill, but really, Loki could probably decapitate them before they even knew he was there. Natasha and Clint would be easy to kill- they were master assassins, but still human. No amount of skill would save your life if your murderer could walk around invisible.

When Tony shook his thoughts clear, he found Pepper staring at him. 'What?'
'Are you okay?' Pepper asked, some of that old worry creeping into her tone and eyes.

'I'm fine,' Tony shrugged. 'He didn't hurt me or anyone else, just Clint.'

'What did he want?' Pepper asked.

'The magic sensor I'm working on,' Tony said. That's what he'd already told the others, so he figured he'd stick to the story. Of course, now SHIELD would want to see the scanner and build their own. Maybe Tony could blow up all his research and blame Loki. He really didn't want SHIELD figuring out how to track Loki. Or himself, now that he had discovered his magic.

Tony felt a flutter behind his heart and frowned slightly. He wondered if that was his magic, or just his head playing tricks on him. Either was possible, he supposed, and decided he'd just ask Loki later. They still had to figure out where they could talk and study magic; Tony couldn't very well learn how to use his own with Thor in the Tower. It would involve Loki showing him how to cast spells and throw magic, which he couldn't do near Thor.

Tony nearly sighed. The Avengers were really cramping his life.

'I didn't know you were working on a magic scanner,' Pepper said.

'I didn't tell anyone,' Tony replied. 'I've only just started building it and running tests. It's still in its beta stage, nowhere near complete. I'm surprised Loki even bothered coming after it; it's not like it works.'

'Trying to figure out crazy people's motives is crazy itself,' Pepper said.

Tony snorted. 'Yeah, you've told me before.' Multiple times. In detail. Half of what he did was considered crazy by everyone else's standards. Good thing that Tony didn't want to be sane.

'I have,' Pepper agreed, and then they fell into an awkward silence. They'd never really had awkward silences before; before Afghanistan, before Iron Man, before their romantic relationship and that fucking portal/wormhole/thing. A lot had changed in the past few years. Tony had changed a lot.

Before Pepper could ask any more questions, or Tony could fuck up and make the awkward silence more awkward, Loki shuffled into the room from the hallway. He was dressed in dark denim jeans and a dark blue sweater, which set off Logan Thomas' blue eyes nicely. Tony briefly mourned the lack of poison-green eyes before smiling when Loki glanced his way.

'Hey, Lo,' he said. 'Thought you'd sleep a while longer.'

'I want to,' Loki yawned, and Tony wasn't sure if it was real or for show, 'but the constant banging kept me from falling asleep again.' He finally caught sight of Pepper- or just pretended to- and smiled shyly. 'I wasn't aware you had company.'

'Oh, this is Pepper Potts, CEO of Stark Industries,' Tony explained. He and Loki had already talked about Pepper, and Loki had done his research way back before they'd first met face-to-face, but they had to keep up Loki's disguise.

So Loki smiled and held his hand out, saying, 'Logan Thomas, I'm Tony's boyfriend,' as Pepper shook it.

'Yes, so I've heard,' she smiled warmly at him, before scowling at Tony. 'And really, thank you for not telling Cameron about having a boyfriend.'
Tony frowned. 'Who's Cameron?'

'The head of your PR team, Tony,' Pepper sighed.

'Oh,' Tony blinked, 'right. Well, um... me and Logan just sorta happened, and I wasn't gonna keep him locked in my bedroom. Guy's gotta eat, right?'

Loki looked entirely too amused, and Tony poked his tongue out at him when Pepper wasn't looking.

'Honestly, Tony, you don't seem to realise the absolute storm that follows when you so much as step out in public. People wonder about your diet, your work, your Avengers missions, what suit you're wearing, where you're eating, everything. When you suddenly step out in public with a boyfriend, when most of the world's media has forgotten that you're bisexual, is just asking for thousands of emails and hate mail to be sent to the Tower.'

'Well fuck them,' Tony muttered. Pepper sighed again and pinched the bridge of her nose. 'No, seriously, my sexuality and who I'm dating is nobody's fucking business,' Tony growled. 'I don't care how famous I am, they should leave me the fuck alone.'

'Yes, they should,' Pepper agreed. She, of course, had experience, both from being Tony's PA, then CEO, and briefly his girlfriend. 'But humans have a tendency to want to know everything about celebrities.'

'Sometimes I think I should go and live in the woods,' Tony mused, making Loki snort and Pepper roll her eyes. 'I could build an awesome tree-house.'

'With no electricity?' Pepper asked.

'I'd totally build a waterfall and get my electricity that way,' Tony replied.

Pepper just stared at him, probably wondering if Tony was drunk. He wasn't, just for the record. In fact, he hadn't been drinking all that much lately. What with his various projects in the lab, Loki's general presence, and his and the Trickster's shared plans/magic lessons/etc, Tony hadn't really had time to get wasted and make a general ass out of himself.

Hmm... he and Loki should go party. Unwind a bit. Dry hump each other in some gay club somewhere and really make Tony's PR team work for their salaries. Awesome, Tony's Saturday was set.

Pepper seemed to realise that Tony had come up some horrendous plan that would either equal more work for her, or more health problems for him, so went on the attack. 'Tony, you've got four meetings this coming week, and the England offices need to be finalised.'

Tony frowned. 'English offices?'

'Yes, Tony,' Pepper groaned. 'You're expanding the English branch of Stark Industries, remember? Bigger building in London, more underground workshops, etcetera.'

Tony blinked rapidly. He vaguely remembered commenting about English accents and how awful some of their food was a few weeks ago... 'Oh, right,' he hummed. 'That building that's gonna cost me millions of dollars.'

'And bring in millions more as well as put more Stark tech into the British market, as well as create more jobs for the local English people, yes,' Pepper agreed.
'Right, right,' Tony nodded. 'Hey, didn't we decide to expand to other countries, too?'

'Tony, there's no need for a Stark Industries Headquarters in Hawaii,' Pepper growled.

Tony pouted. 'Why not?'

Pepper rolled her eyes and said, 'I'll think about it,' which meant no, and made Tony's pout deepen.

'I didn't know you were expanding in England,' Loki commented, effectively bringing himself into the conversation and ensuring he had both their attention. 'We should visit sometime,' Loki continued. 'I could show you where I grew up.'

'Does your family still live in England?' Pepper asked. Tony couldn't tell if she was actually curious, or just making nice with Tony's new beau. She'd already figured out that Loki wasn't just another one-night stand, but whether she thought that Loki was gonna stick around or not, Tony didn't know. He really didn't care either way.

'Some cousins, I'm sure, but not any that I'm aware of,' Loki told her. 'My parents died when I was eighteen.'

'Oh, I'm sorry,' Pepper frowned.

Loki shrugged. 'It happened a fair while ago, and while it still hurts, I've thankfully managed to go on with my life.'

Pepper nodded, face a mask of understanding. Tony nearly snorted when he read the sincere concern in Pepper's gaze. If Loki kept fucking this much with the people in Tony's life, Tony'd end up bursting into laughter at an inappropriate time and ruin their entire plan.

'Well,' Pepper said suddenly, and Tony turned to her, 'I just came to find out what happened, and to remind you of the meetings next week. I've got to get back to work.' She looked at Loki, smiling. 'It was nice to meet you, Logan.'

'Likewise, Ms Potts,' Loki replied.

Tony snorted and Pepper turned to glare waringly at him. 'Don't forget the meetings, Tony.'

'I won't,' Tony pouted once more.

'I'll be calling JARVIS to remind him,' Pepper said.

'I'll make sure to pencil the meetings into Mr Stark's schedule, Ms Potts,' JARVIS joined in smoothly. 'I will also make sure that he awakens well before the meetings start.'

'As will I,' Loki agreed.

Pepper smirked. 'I like him,' she said. 'Make sure you keep him.'

'Yes, ma'am,' Tony replied, giving Pepper a mock salute. She just smiled and left almost as quickly as she'd come, leaving Tony and Loki alone with the builders.

Tony still wanted to keep an eye on them, so Loki offered to go get them some food from the kitchen. Tony agreed, and when the Trickster returned it was with leftover pizza and a thermos of coffee. He'd even managed to carry mugs, and Tony said, 'Bless you, Lo,' when they sat at what was left of the bar.
'You should always worship me, Stark,' Loki replied, making Tony snort into his freshly-brewed coffee.

Nobody else interrupted them that morning, and Tony and Loki whiled away the hours eating, drinking coffee, and generally making nuisances of themselves. Tony had plenty of ideas about how he wanted to remodel the penthouse, and apparently Loki did, too. They almost drove the building manager to tears the fortieth time they changed their minds, but when three o'clock rolled around, the various construction workers packed up and left for the day, Tony and Loki's modifications scrawled across various pieces of paper.

Tony and Loki retired to the bedroom despite the early hour. Loki apparently wanted to watch more animated movies, which Tony found equal parts hilarious and endearing. So he had JARVIS put on Disney's Robin Hood.

Loki frowned mere seconds after it started. 'Why are they animals?'

'Cause kids like animals,' Tony replied.

'Stupid,' Loki grunted, but Tony noted that he didn't take his eyes off the screen.

'So,' Tony said after a beat, 'apparently I'll be a bit busy next week. Too bad, 'cause we need to find somewhere where I can scan your magic and you can teach me how to use mine.'

'Mm,' Loki agreed. 'While I detest that Ms Potts has seen fit to take you from me, I suppose that it can't be helped. And I do like her,' he added, 'she would make a fine queen.'

Tony snorted. 'Gonna trade me in for Pepper, huh?'

Loki rolled his eyes and moved to press himself against Tony's side. They were laying atop the blankets, both against the headboard, so it was easy for Tony to wrap an arm around Loki's shoulders, and he returned the gentle kiss that Loki pressed against his lips. It was all very... domestic, and made Tony feel all warm inside.

'As I've already told you,' Loki said, 'I have no wish to be King of any Realm.'

Tony cocked his head. 'But when we wipe out SHIELD and the World Security Council, who'll stop us?'

Loki raised an eyebrow as he said, 'I'm sure there are many other super hero groups with idiotic names for us to take on.'

'Yeah,' Tony snorted. 'Probably. As long as we don't advertise our evil intentions, I think they'll more or less leave us alone. We'll just take out the more problematic heroes and villains. Anyway, won't that kinda make us, like, Kings of Earth? Kings of Midgard?'

Loki hummed and tilted his head as he thought, eyes slightly glazed. 'Yes,' he finally said, snapping back to himself and smirking at Tony. 'I shall be King Loki of Midgard, and you can be my lover, Consort Stark.'

'Wait, what?' Tony spluttered. 'I wanna be King!'

Loki laughed at him, the bitch, and Tony pushed, using all his strength to throw Loki onto his back and straddle him. He was kind of surprised that it worked, because Loki had always been stronger than him. When Loki stopped bouncing he raised an eyebrow, and Tony looked down at his hands.
'Okay...'

'Your body is finally settling into the changes the Golden Apple made,' Loki explained.

'Really?' Tony asked.

Inclining his head once, Loki said, 'I told you that it would take some time. Some aspects of the Apple work swiftly, such as the change to your healing factor, your stronger bones and muscles, and your near indestructibility. Other things, like your sex drive, your ability to wield magic, and your strength take longer. Your body is finally settling.'

'Wow,' Tony breathed. Then, he grinned. 'Awesome.' With that, Tony leaned down and Loki met him halfway, their lips pressing together and moving, melding, tongues only briefly darting out to taste, before returning so their teeth could nip.

When they broke apart, Tony started kissing and nibbling on Loki's jaw, that smooth, pale neck, and Loki hummed.

'We should find somewhere to practice magic soon,' Loki murmured.

Tony pulled away to look up at him. 'Got an idea?' he asked.

'I believe so,' Loki said. He looked up, smiled at Tony, and Tony cocked an eyebrow. 'How would you like to take a drive, Stark?' Loki asked.
When Loki had suggested a drive, Tony had thought that he'd drive the both of them to some secret underground lair that the Trickster kept. It was a ridiculous thought, of course, but Tony had thought it all the same. Instead Loki had made Tony drive a few miles from Stark Tower before forcing him to pull over.

He'd then taken over driving himself, and if Clint thought that Tony was a bad driver, then he'd think that Loki was suicidal. The mage drove like a maniac, speeding and screeching around corners and nearly ploughing them into other cars and people and buildings. Somehow Loki always managed to just avoid colliding with anything, and Tony wondered if it was magic, or just Loki being awesome.

Loki eventually parked Tony's precious, undamaged car in an underground parking lot beneath a mall. He turned the ignition off, locked the doors, and tossed Tony the keys.

'You're insane,' Tony grunted.

Loki smirked and said, 'Are you sure you have everything you need?'

'Yeah, Lo,' Tony rolled his eyes, 'I was sure the first five times you asked me.'

'You mean when you forgot a handful of tools, and clothing, and-'

'Shit up!' Tony snapped. Loki's smirk widened. 'Yes, I have everything, it's all in the boot,' Tony said.

'Good,' Loki replied. With that he faced the windshield, took a deep breath, and closed his eyes.

Seeing as how Tony had been sitting, when they teleported and there was no goddamn chair beneath him he went toppling over, landing on his ass and shouting in both surprise and brief pain. He scowled when Loki laughed at him, the bitch, and picked himself up.

His suitcases of various equipment had landed neatly beside him, and Loki immediately turned, heading for the corner of the...

'Okay...' Tony whistled, 'this is pretty cool.'

Loki hadn't told him where they were going, but had hinted at it being a base of operations. He preferred living in the city, but when he wanted to study magic, or ensure his safety from SHIELD and the Avengers, he came here.

Tony liked it. It was a very large cave, roughly circular in shape, the walls, floor and roof all dark brown rock. There was a short, narrow corridor directly opposite Tony that showed light, making Tony assume that it was the cave's entrance. Just before the corridor was a large stainless steel sink, a bunch of tall boxes that made up a bench, and large fridge and freezer, all with chords and plumbing that disappeared into the rock wall.

To Tony's left was a large rectangular table with four chairs, dotted with books, large tombs covered in leather, sheets of paper and parchment, and various pens and other writing instruments.
Just behind it was Loki's bed, a large thing covered in more blankets, sheets and pillows than even Tony's bed had, the headboard made of sturdy wood and roughly carved with flowers and swirls.

Loki was standing in what appeared to be a small lab. There were large shelves built into the walls, tables of various size and length scattered throughout the small square space, which was cut off from the rest of the room by wooden panels.

The more Tony looked, the more stuff he saw; shelves with books and boxes and jars made of clay and porcelain. It was like a real, proper evil lair, only without bats and dark lighting. While it was a bit gloomy, by the time Tony had finished looking Loki had lit various candles around the place with a simple flick of his wrist. Most of them were stuck to various flat surfaces, while others were held inside coloured balls that threw blue, yellow, purple and orange light about.

'I would have thought you'd go for green,' Tony said. He tugged his first suitcase over to Loki but stopped in the doorway that the wooden panels created.

'I do like other colours, Stark,' Loki drawled, and Tony snickered. The mage tuned to face him and hummed.

'What?' Tony asked.

'We need to create an area for you,' Loki decided. 'I'll move my sparring mats to the middle of the room.'

Tony blinked rapidly, but said nothing, just watching as Loki exited his small lab and walked around it. The wooden panels had hidden a large empty space from Tony's eyesight, which he now saw contained nothing but spongy mats and a table lined with wicked looking daggers of all shapes and lengths. The wall directly behind it was covered in wood and paper, with holes from where Loki had clearly thrown his knives.

'You sure?' Tony asked as Loki grabbed a large navy blue mat.

'Where else will you work?' Loki asked.

'We could move your big dining table closer to the wall, then move your bed, and I can work in the other corner,' Tony stated.

Loki raised an eyebrow but glanced around.

'Very well,' he eventually said and put the mat back down.

'How'd you find this place?' Tony asked.

'I carved it myself when I first escaped Asgard and landed here,' Loki said as he walked. He clearly didn't need Tony's help, because when he moved the table, simply pushing it across the rugs covering the stone floor, the chairs followed after, like someone was tugging them along by string. 'It was initially much smaller, as I was weak after my escape,' Loki explained, 'I chipped away for a few weeks, and continued to make the room larger every time I was here. If you want, I can expand again for you.'

'Uh... nah, I'm good for now,' Tony said. 'Might be a good idea to expand later, though, especially when we take on SHIELD. We need somewhere to work without the Avengers dropping in.'

'Which is exactly the reason why I brought you here,' Loki said. He pushed the table right up to the wall, the end of the wood pressed against it, and then walked back to his bed.
'Hey, where are your clothes?' Tony asked when he glanced around and realised that he couldn't see a wardrobe anywhere.

'Mostly at your Tower,' Loki replied. 'I only keep a few things here in the chests beneath my bed.'

'Oh,' Tony hummed. Loki soon had the bed moved, the three chests beneath it, too, and walked back to the now cleared area. It was a bit bigger than Loki's own workshop, but it would suit Tony's needs.

'Is this sufficient?' Loki asked.

'Yeah,' Tony agreed. 'Do you have any other tables?'

'Not currently,' Loki said. 'If you wait here I'll procure some.'

'I need big metal tables,' Tony said. 'There are some in the basement of my Tower, if you can teleport there without Thor finding out.'

'If he's more than ten storeys above me, he won't be able to detect me,' Loki told him.

Tony made a quick phone call to JARVIS- and hey, he had reception, awesome- and JARVIS informed them that Thor was in the gym, which was only a floor below Steve's rooms, so Loki was safe.

When Loki teleported back it was with six large stainless steel tables. He wobbled briefly on his feet, but waved off Tony's concern. He seemed perfectly fine, though a bit tired, when he helped Tony put all his tables into his new workshop, so Tony let it go. He even produced more wooden boards to close off the space, giving Tony a bit of privacy.

'So, what now?' Tony asked and rubbed sweat from his eyes.

'Set everything up,' Loki said. 'After that we'll discuss when you should begin to learn magic.'

'Still haven't figured it out yet,' Tony grumbled. Loki snickered but didn't say anything, instead disappearing into his lab and leaving Tony alone. 'Okay then,' Tony murmured to himself and clapped his hands together.

{oOo}

It took... well, Tony had no idea how long it took. He tended to jump head-first into science and his many experiments, and that included setting everything up in the precise way he wanted. He guessed that a couple of hours had passed before he was happy.

The tables were all lined up against the curved wall of the cave, and Loki had somehow managed to fix the place with electricity- magic, was all he'd said when Tony had briefly asked- so Tony's various computers and monitors were set up, ready to use. Tony had also managed to get JARVIS into the cave but only on his computers; Loki said that the entire cave was guarded by wards, they didn't need JARVIS. Tony had just shrugged, trusting the mage to keep them safe and concealed.
After a few rugs had been thrown down, and some of the projects Tony didn't want SHIELD looking into put away in various corners, Tony was done. He groaned and left his lab, stumbling into the area he'd designated the “bedroom”. Loki was sitting at the large dining table and raised an eyebrow when Tony flopped face-first onto the bed.

'You're filthy and those sheets are clean,' he commented.

'Shit up,' Tony mumbled, though it came out muffled against the duvet.

'So eloquent,' Loki murmured, and Tony could hear the amusement in Loki’s voice. 'Are you ready to learn magic?'

Tony sighed. 'I'm hungry,' he muttered.

'So you should probably eat and rest before we try,' Loki agreed.

Tony rolled over onto his back and stared up at the very high, rocky ceiling. 'Got food here?'

'I have a refrigerator,' Loki said, 'as well as a stove and oven.'

'What? Really?' Tony sat up and looked across the cave. He could see the fridge- a big stainless-steel one with double-doors, and next to it was the freezer. Just beside that was what looked like a stove/oven; Tony had assumed it was just a shelf or box or something during his first, brief inspection. 'Huh.'

'What would you like?' Loki asked. He stood after bookmarking the page of the large leather-bound book he was reading, and stretched, t-shirt riding up to show pale skin. Tony licked his lip and Loki said, 'What would you like to eat, Stark.'

'Rude,' Tony pouted, and Loki rolled his eyes. 'Um... what've you got?'

'I'm not sure,' Loki mused as he wandered over to the fridge. 'I haven't been here in two weeks, so most likely frozen meals and various canned goods.' Tony joined him eventually and his eyebrows rose when he saw that Loki was pulling two entire chickens out of the freezer, followed by frozen vegetables and potatoes and... Tony stopped looking there.

Frozen meals my ass, he thought in amusement.

As Loki busied himself cooking an entire roast fucking dinner, Tony decided to go exploring. He looked into the training area a bit more and found a few boxes of weapons he couldn't really name; various sword-like things, more daggers, staves and spears. Next was Loki’s lab, though he only peered in there, not wanting to wander in and disrupt anything. A fair few of his projects had been destroyed because of Clint and Natasha's inability to search his lab without fucking everything up. Tony figured they did it on purpose or just really didn't care if he was onto them.

Tony explored the bedroom and then looked at the many bookcases, as well as the stacks of books on various tables and boxes. Loki had a shit load of books, and Tony wondered where he found the time to read them all. Then again, he was over a thousand years old; he'd probably had time in the past.

Some had English written on their spines, others languages that Tony could only guess at. Some, like the large leather-bound books that seemed to take up the entire bookcase near Loki's lab, were written in... runes, was the only word Tony could think of. They looked like Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, and Tony was pretty sure that he wouldn't be able to learn to read that in the roughly 5000 years the Golden Apple had given him.
He got lost in a book written in Old Norse- or Finnish, he didn't fucking know. It had pictures, though; pictures of alien races and animals that resembled dragons and griffins and all the mythical animals from human fairytales. Someone- most likely Loki- had written notes on the pages in English, and Tony read over those as he flicked from page to page. He didn't look up until Loki tapped him on the forehead.

It had grown darker, the candles brighter, and there were more balls of light drifting around the high-ceiling. 'Huh?' Tony said.

'Dinner is ready,' Loki told him.

'Oh,' Tony said and flipped the book shut. 'Hey, where'd you get this?'

'The Royal Library on Asgard,' Loki said.

'There's a Royal Library?' Tony asked as he followed Loki over to the dining table. Loki had laid all the food out, and had even poured wine. Tony smiled at it.

'Yes,' Loki said and sat, Tony taking the chair opposite him. 'There is the public library, filled with whatever knowledge the All-Father has deemed acceptable for the Æsir to know, and then the Royal Library, which houses truer accounts of history and various other races. It's also where I learned a lot of the magic I know now.'

'Huh,' Tony repeated. 'Cool.'

Loki rolled his eyes. 'It's a crime to enter the Royal Library without the All-Father's permission. If I had been caught I would have spent up to six years in prison.'

'Wow,' Tony mused, 'the All-Father really wants his subjects to stay dumb, huh?'

'Indeed,' Loki agreed.

'So,' Tony said as they started eating- mm, the chicken was delicious. And the vegetables and potato and whatever gravy Loki had made.

'So?' Loki echoed when Tony failed to continue.

'Sorry,' Tony mumbled around his mouthful, 'this food is fucking awesome.'

Loki chuckled and popped a piece of carrot into his mouth.

'Anyway,' Tony said after he'd swallowed, 'magic?'

'Yes,' Loki nodded. 'We have the freedom here for you to find, harness, and learn to use your magic. Thor can't detect us this far away from the Tower, and as long as we aren't followed we should be safe.'

'Okay,' Tony said. 'So, how long do you reckon it'll take me to use magic?'

'First you must harness it,' Loki told him. 'You found it with relative ease, so hopefully it won't take long for you to be able to find it yourself. That is what we will start with.'

'Me finding my magic?'

Loki nodded.
'Okay then,' Tony said. 'In the meantime, I'm gonna keep trying to detect magic with my computers, okay?'

Loki sighed and rolled his eyes, muttering about *stupid Midgardian toys* beneath his breath, but he stopped when Tony threw a piece of cauliflower at him. Tony just grinned when Loki scowled at him, but thankfully the Trickster didn't throw anything back. Tony didn't even want to *imagine* the food fights that Loki could start.

'Oh, speaking of my magic sensors,' Tony said after a few minutes. Loki raised an eyebrow. 'I have to give one to SHIELD.'

'Why?' Loki asked.

'Because *someone*- not naming any names,' Tony said, looking pointedly at the older god, 'made the Avengers figure out that I was working on one. Romanov and Barton have already told Fury, and he'll want to see one soon.'

'Can't you just tell him that you haven't built a working one yet?' Loki asked.

'Yeah, I could,' Tony said, 'but he'll no doubt still want to see a prototype. And even though I'm a hell of a lot smarter than anyone in SHIELD's employment, they still have money and resources; I don't want their scientists stumbling across a way to track your magic and mine. I'd rather not give them even a vague prototype.'

'I see,' Loki hummed and then went silent. He had his thinking face on, though, eyes narrowed slightly as he stared at his plate, so Tony didn't say a word; instead he focused on his own food, shovelling chicken and vegetables and gravy into his mouth, chasing it down with the nice wine Loki had picked out. It was damn good food and with Tony's new godly metabolism, he had to go back for seconds, and then thirds. He was chewing on the last chicken wing when Loki finally looked up. 'What if you agree to give them one, but something happens to it?'

Tony tilted his head and swallowed. 'Something like...?'

'Like the Norse God of Mischief figuring out that you're transporting it and attacking,' Loki said. 'You tell Fury and his little group that you've made a prototype; one that SHIELD can study and build upon. During transportation I attack and make off with the prototype.'

'Okay,' Tony said, 'but what about all my other prototypes?'

'When I teleport away I'll go to your workshop and blow up all the ones you're working on,' Loki said. 'Of course, what you will actually do is move them all here. It will buy us some time; Fury will have to wait for you to build a new one, and we can try something similar in the future if we need to.'

Tony thought the plan over for a few minutes. It seemed good enough, even though a pissed off Fury would demand Tony make another prototype almost immediately. Still, Tony didn't have any other plans, and working with Loki *against* the Avengers sounded like damn good fun.

'Sounds good,' Tony eventually said.

Loki smiled and took a sip of wine before pushing the glass, and his plate, aside. 'Now, Anthony,' he purred, and Tony shivered at the tone, 'are you ready to get acquainted with your magic?'
Tony grinned. 'You best your ass I am.'

Loki chuckled.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: Sorry for the wait! I was kidnapped by various other stories.

{Dreamer}
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

After eating what felt like his bodyweight in food- and helping Loki clean up when Loki threw a plate at him- Tony and Loki settled on the bed, Loki's back to the wall with Tony between his legs. It was the same position they'd taken up the first time they'd meditated together, looking for Tony's magic, and Tony found it easier this time around to slip into his headspace. He breathed in and out deeply and listened to Loki's smooth, calm voice. Eventually he could hear his own heartbeat in his ears, and Loki's against his back, but when Loki told him to he moved past those, pushing them to the back of his mind.

Soon everything was black- but somehow a deeper, darker blackness than when Tony had just closed his eyes. Loki's heart made a reappearance and Tony fought not to frown. Thump-thump. Thump-thump. Thump-thump. Tony's own heartbeat echoed Loki's until they were in-sync, Tony's beating to the slightly quicker rhythm of Loki's. Tony felt a spark at his back, something sinking into his skin. A flash of green behind his eyelids almost made him open his eyes but he refrained.

Follow the light. Tony heard the whisper in the back of his mind. It sounded like Loki, but it was far away, too far to know for sure. Still, Tony followed, his conscience sinking deeper and deeper until Tony was aware of the large expansive of his mind as well as the area around his heart and arc reactor.

There it was. The purple grape, bigger now, swirling around him but a part of him, tendrils whipping out when Tony got closer. Tony imagined reaching out to touch it and his finger tips tingled, as though he was holding something warm and alive in the palm of his hand.

' Anthony ...' a soft voice purred, ' very, very gently, clasp your magic. Bring it into your hand; imagine that it's yours to command and it will do as you please. '

Tony imagined nodding his agreement and tugged at the purple magic. It resisted at first, as though it really was alive, with a full understanding of its own. It pulled back, wrapping around his heart and arc reactor. Now Tony knew why his arc had remained in his body, even though the Apple had purged all other obstructions; his magic... understood that it protected him, that it was needed. The element was blue, flashing within Tony's mind-scape, but the magic that was infused into every atom of Tony's body was working with it, using the energy within the arc reactor to keep Tony safe.

It was fascinating, and one day soon Tony would figure out how his magic- how all magic - worked. He'd work with it rather than against it, harness it to protect himself and those who were on his side.

Those thoughts washed through Tony, and with them brought understanding; his magic immediately leapt at him, just a bit curling around the illusion of fingers Tony had conjured within himself. His skin flared and he felt his nails vibrate with the energy that was so powerful. Tony pulled further, bit by bit, until just about a quarter of the magic he'd glimpsed was wrapped around his hand.

' Very good, ' Loki said. It was Loki. With his magic flowing through him, Tony could feel Loki; every inch of him, both physical and metaphorical. Loki was a very real presence pressed up against Tony's back. He felt cold and dark, and his magic was a bright, pure green, so much
brighter than the magic Loki threw in battle. But beneath that, almost out of sight, was a thick, heavy black that mixed with Loki’s green, yet remained separate at the same time. ‘Jötunn magic,’ Loki whispered.

So it was separate. Tony had thought so. Loki had grown up in Asgard, had learned to use Asgardian magic. The bright green was that of Asgard, something Loki had forced into his very bones so that it travelled with him everywhere. He’d spent so much of his life on Asgard that the Realm’s magic had become a part of him.

But his Jötunn magic, he’d been born with that. It would never leave him. It sat there, even now, alive and waiting.

You should use it, Tony thought, and almost lost control of his magic when he both heard and felt Loki chuckle.

’You can help me,’ the mage replied.

You heard that? Tony asked.

’We have a connection, Anthony,’ Loki said. Tony felt both parts of Loki’s magic react to that; the green rolled across Loki’s mindscape, licking at Tony’s own. His Jötunn magic shifted and practically vibrated in excitement.

What was that? Tony questioned.

’Later, Anthony,’ Loki said, and Tony imagined himself nodding. He went back to focusing on his magic, and when he had a good grasp of it once more Loki said, ’Slowly pull away from yourself, but keep a hold of your magic. When you feel aware of your physical surroundings again, very carefully open your eyes. Be prepared.’

Tony nodded and did as asked. It took a while and Tony felt drained by the time he was aware of the sheets beneath him, of his warmth bleeding into Loki’s cooler body behind him. He felt Loki’s chin nudge his shoulder and took a slow, steady breath before opening his eyes.

They widened in surprise when he saw a bright purple energy swirling around his right palm. It tickled and made his hand feel hot, like his skin would catch fire with prolonged use. It was breathtaking and Tony grinned slowly as his magic trickled up his wrist before retreating back into hand when Tony willed it.

’That is your magic,’ Loki said softly.

’It’s amazing,’ Tony said. He felt it pulse again and asked, ’Is it, um... aware?’

’Magic has a mind of its own,’ Loki told him. ’While it is you, it is also a part of you. Similar to a pet you can train, one that will listen but will also make its own decisions. Magic has intelligence that nobody can understand. Millions of years of research has been put into understanding magic. While it is partially understood, it will never be completely understood.’

’Yeah,’ Tony breathed, ’I get that.’ He understood what Loki was saying now. While the magic swirling around his hand felt like an extension of him, a very big, very important part of him, it was as though it had its own conscience; like it would do as it wished at any given moment.

’Magic will never betray you,’ Loki said, nudging Tony’s ear. ’Your own magic exists to protect and nurture you. It will never part with you.’
'It's protecting me,' Tony told him, 'with the arc reactor.'

'I saw,' Loki nodded. 'The element within your reactor is very similar to the magic of Midgard. It is not intelligent, or as powerful as magic, but it is powerful enough to protect you. It's why I told you to keep it in, even after the Apple healed you.'

Just an extra layer of protection between Tony and the world.

'It's time to put your magic back,' Loki said after a few minutes of silence. Tony felt his heart drop; he didn't want to let go. He felt like a little kid again, discovering science; giddy, with thousands of ideas overtaking his head. 'We will revisit this soon,' Loki promised when he sensed Tony's hesitation. 'But you are young and new to wielding magic; too much will drain you and hurt you. Close your eyes and sink back into yourself. Let your magic rejoin and rest.'

Tony sighed but nodded. As soon as his eyes were closed he found his mind deep inside itself.

'I will teach you to manage it,' Loki whispered inside his head. 'It wouldn't do for you to find your mindscape in the presence of those who would hurt you.'

Tony let go of his magic slowly and it slid through his body, his mind, lighting the way as it joined the pulsing mix of purple and blue in the very centre of Tony's being. When it was whole once more Tony felt a tug and felt Loki's very familiar presence. He let the mage tug him back and out of himself. When Tony came back he felt exhausted, his limbs not aching but weak.

'Shh, Anthony,' Loki hummed and helped him lay back. 'I would heal you, but your magic will most likely not react well to an intrusion at this moment. Rest and let your magic do what it does best.'

'Wha's tha'?' Tony slurred.

He saw Loki smile above him, and felt a soft kiss to his stubbly cheek. 'Protect you,' Loki said just before Tony fell asleep.

{oOo}

When Tony woke the cave was lighter; there were less candles and globes of light floating around, telling Tony that some time must have passed. He yawned and sat up, stretching out his limbs and letting a satisfied hum slip from his lips when he flopped back.

'Awake, I see.'

Tony rolled over and spotted Loki sitting on a table. He was fiddling with a vambrace. It was a mottled silver colour, like it hadn't been polished yet, and Loki was using a small, sharp-edged knife to cut patterns into the metal.

'What are you doing?' Tony asked and sat up again.

'Working on new armour,' Loki said. Tony hopped out of bed and walked over to him, smiling when Loki leaned over to kiss him. 'My old armour reminds me of Asgard,' Loki explained. 'I'm
making new pieces with Jötunn protection magic. The runes I'm carving into them will work better than my Asgardian armour.'

'I see,' Tony said. 'You know, I'm working on a heap of new suits.'

'I am aware,' Loki replied.

'Are you aware that they'll all be controlled by JARVIS?' One of Loki's eyebrows popped up at that and Tony smirked. 'I'm going with a slightly different design and colour-scheme. They'll look more like Victor von Doom's bots- I think I've told you that in the past- but they'll be made for offence rather than defence. I'll also be making about five or six for myself; very similar to Iron Man, but hopefully just different enough to confuse SHIELD and the Avengers.'

'I see,' Loki hummed.

'I was thinking green and silver,' Tony said. 'As a colour-scheme,' he added when Loki glanced at him.

'Green and silver,' Loki mused and looked down at his vambrace. 'I like it,' he decided.

'You should lose the cape, if you're going for a new look,' Tony said and pushed off the table.

As he was walking towards his lab, Loki called out, 'Why?'

'No capes!' Tony shouted. Loki made a soft noise of confusion and Tony snickered. We should watch The Incredibles, he decided as he entered his workspace.

{oOo}

Loki joined Tony in the human's workshop about an hour later.

'We should leave soon,' Loki said.

'The Avengers haven't contacted me,' Tony replied. 'I think we can wait until tonight.'

Loki glanced up at the ceiling, head tilted, before saying, 'So six or so hours, then.'

Tony spotted the time on one of his computer monitors; 12:22pm. 'How'd you do that?' Tony asked.

'Magic,' was all Loki said. He looked over the shorter god's shoulder and said, 'What are you working on?'

'Faceplate for the new suit,' Tony said. 'Here, I'll show you the differences.'

He pushed some stuff aside and had to search one of the boxes under the table to his right before he found what he was looking for. He placed the two faceplates side-by-side, showing Loki the differences.

'This one,' Tony said, pointing to the faceplate on the left, 'will be part of the suit I wear. The eyes
are similar to my Iron Man suits, though a bit softer around the edges. Also, you'll notice a mouth-piece.' He pointed at the other faceplate. 'This is a JARVIS-suit faceplate. The eyes are smaller, narrowed, and there's a kind of nose-piece similar to what Doom's bots had as well as a wide mouth. It'll be painted completely silver. My faceplate will be green.'

'Interesting,' Loki said. 'So I will be able to tell you apart.' Tony nodded. 'Then the Avengers will be able to,' he added.

'Well, yeah, but we're gonna pretend it's your personal bodyguard-bot,' Tony explained. 'I'll even bring up the idea myself. Clearly you used Doom to make some magic-powered bots for yourself before you killed him, and the one that's bigger and fights with you is stronger, faster, better. I've managed to change the repulsor blasts so they're green instead of the blue of my Iron Man suits; the eyes glow green, too, the same colour as your magic. It'll make selling the story that much easier.'

Loki was clearly impressed; a smirk was playing on his lips and his eyes gleamed as he stared at the faceplates.

'How close are you to completing these?' Loki asked.

'I'm almost done with the JARVIS-bots,' Tony said, 'they were the easiest to build because I just mixed Iron Man's technology with Doom's. My personal suits will take a tad longer.'

'How long?'

'A month or two, give or take,' Tony said.

'Will it be quicker if I help?' Loki asked. When Tony raised his eyebrows, Loki elaborated. 'You said that JARVIS had found some of SHIELD's bases.'

'Well, yeah,' Tony nodded. 'But that's mostly speculation. I'd rather go and take a quick peek in person to make sure we're attacking the right places.'

'I can do that,' Loki waved a hand, 'remember, I can teleport and turn invisible.'

'Oh,' Tony blinked, 'right. Well, that's simple, then. And yes, your magic would help with the general assembly of the suits. I'd rather wire everything myself.'

'Very well,' Loki said. 'When you've completed the bulk of the work tell me and I'll help you. I'd like to start destroying SHIELD within two months.'

"Kay,' Tony said and turned back to work; he was currently working on assembling the JARVIS-bots, but he'd have to bring more stuff to the Hideout from his Tower to completely assemble them. 'Hey, we can make a few trips, right?' Tony asked.

'Yes,' Loki said. 'Find out where Thor is and we can bring more of your equipment here.'

'Next time,' Tony decided. 'I don't wanna push our luck.'

'Very well,' Loki inclined his head. He stood back and folded his arms, watching as Tony went back to wiring what appeared to be a gauntlet. 'Anthony?'

'Mm?' Tony hummed without looking up.

'Have you named your new creations?' Loki asked.

Tony paused, and then he smiled. 'Well, the JARVIS-operated ones are just JARVIS-bots. J-bots if
I couldn't be bothered saying the full name. My suits? I'm calling them Genesis.'

Loki smirked. 'The beginning.'

Tony turned to look at him, eyes flashing. 'Exactly.'

Loki crossed the distance between them to kiss Tony hard and hot, making Tony moan and abandon his work.

When they broke apart, Tony hissed, 'Six hours?'

'Yes,' Loki replied.

'Work can wait,' Tony decided. He fixed his mouth to Loki's neck, bit and sucked, before dragging Loki to bed.

Loki followed willingly.

{oOo}

'There's a bathroom in this place, right?' Tony asked. He was sitting on the edge of the bed, Loki sprawled out on the sheets behind him.

'Mm,' Loki hummed.

'Where?' Tony asked. When Loki didn't answer he turned around and poked the god in the belly.

'Stark,' Loki growled.

'Hey, I don't want the Avengers thinking we had car sex,' Tony said. 'Although it'd be funny seeing the look on Rogers' face,' he snickered.

Loki smiled before sitting up, yawning and scratching his chest. 'Go into the training area and you'll find cuts in the stone wall to your left. They shape a door. Just push and it will open into a bathroom. It only has the bare essentials, but it works.'

Tony leaned over and gave Loki a quick peck before hopping out of bed. He knew that Loki was watching him so added a bit of a sway to his hips. Loki swore and Tony grinned all the way into the training area.

Just like Loki had said, there were jagged cuts in the rock wall to the left, and when Tony pushed a large block of stone swung inward, revealing a large, circular room. The floor had been tiled with mismatched pieces of varying colours, and the walls were rock like the rest of the Hideout. A large glass mirror was bolted to the wall to Tony's right, just above a stainless steel sink that had seen better days. An old cabinet stood to the right of the porcelain bathtub, which was in the back of the room, and pipes disappeared into the walls and floor.

'Gotta ask how he did that,' Tony muttered to himself. He decided against a bath, instead using the sink beneath the mirror to wash up the worst of the mess he and Loki had made. There were towels in the cabinet, dusty from disuse, but after airing one out Tony moped himself up.
He left the towel on the bathtub and made his way back into the main room. Loki was dressed and had apparently used magic to clean himself, because his thick black hair was brushed back, his clean torso disappearing under the t-shirt he'd worn earlier when he was Logan Thomas.

'Time to get back?' Tony sighed.

'Yes,' Loki said. He paused and looked at Tony, who was making his way to the bed for his shoes and coat. 'If you continue to progress well with your magic, you may be able to teleport short distances.'

'Really?' Tony asked.

Loki nodded. 'Teleporting from your Tower to here would take too much energy and possibly kill you. Teleporting from the underground carpark where we left your car might be feasible. You would need to rest afterwards, though.'

'So what you're saying is you might be able to teach me so I can come here by myself?' Tony asked.

Loki nodded again. 'Thor can detect my magic because he grew up with me; he was there when I was learning to harness it. He won't be able to detect your magic because it is of Midgard. Also, he's never encountered it before.'

'Last time he caught us it was your magic he detected, right?' Tony asked.

'Yes,' Loki said. 'Once you learn to find and use your magic yourself, we can practice in the Tower. But I want to make sure you have a thorough grip of it before we do that.'

'Okay,' Tony agreed and jumped to his feet. 'Let's get going, we've been away for... what, a day or two?'

'Almost an entire day, yes,' Loki said.

'We'll make up some bullshit about going clubbing. Hey, can you make us look like we spent all day nursing our hangovers?'

Loki smirked and wrapped his arms around Tony when the billionaire was close enough. 'Stark,' he purred into Tony's ear, making Tony shiver, 'I can do anything.'

And with that he teleported them away, wards flaring up around the Hideout as soon as they disappeared.

Chapter End Notes

**Author's Note:** Updating again?! Well I felt bad that you guys had to wait so long for the previous chapter, so I tied Johnny down and forced him to work on this. Well "forced" is a strong word; he wanted to anyway.

Anywho, so I finally wrote down what I want to happen in this story, and according to the rough plot outline (very rough plot outline) I wrote, there will be thirty-two chapters. There is also the possibility of a sequel, but we'll see what happens.
Cheers,

{Dreamer}
Chapter 18

Tony and Loki had just sat down for a late dinner in the penthouse when Romanov stormed in. JARVIS had warned them well beforehand, but Tony wanted Romanov and Barton- and therefore, SHIELD- to think that he trusted them. JARVIS reported all their business back to him and Tony pretended that the two agents had access to his servers.

He wouldn't let either of them get at JARVIS, though. Barton had tried to get into the room where JARVIS' main server was stored, but Tony had that part of the Tower locked up tight. As soon as he could create wards- and Loki was sure that he had enough magic to do so- he was doubling security down there. The last thing he needed was SHIELD having access to JARVIS.

'Natasha,' Tony muttered when she entered the living room. 'What do you want?'

Loki had taken on Logan's appearance before they drove back to the Tower, and he smiled shyly at Natasha when she stood opposite them.

'Fury wants the magic scanner you were telling us about,' Natasha said. 'The one Loki tried to destroy?'

'Yeah,' Tony sighed. 'I must be close if Loki found out about it.'

'I want to know how Loki found out about it,' Natasha said, looking between Tony and “Logan”.

'He's probably spying on us,' Tony said. 'I would if I was in his place. Either that or the scanner works and Loki realised I was about to find him.'

'SHIELD's scientists will set up a control-room to test it,' Natasha told them. 'If Loki appears we'll capture him. Thor's going to hang around, he has the best chance against Loki.'

Tony felt Loki's toes dig into his thigh and had to bite back a wince. He was kinda surprised that Loki didn't just rip Romanov's throat out right then and there. But Loki had excellent control; Tony had seen that himself. Rather than kill Natasha, Loki just pressed against Tony's thigh and ate another slice of pizza.

'Alright,' Tony said. 'When and where?'

'We'll deliver it to the Helicarrier,' Natasha explained. 'We'll all go in an SUV so we can protect it if Loki tries to attack again.'

'Fair enough,' Tony shrugged. 'Should I suit-up?'

'Best to be prepared,' Natasha nodded. She gave Tony a fake smile, then nodded at Loki. 'Logan,' she said before leaving, the elevator doors hissing shut behind her.
'I hate her,' Loki growled.

'We all do,' Tony sympathised, patting Loki on the calf. Loki scowled at him. 'Hey, you get first crack at her when we destroy SHIELD, okay?' Tony offered.

'I want Barton,' Loki mused. 'You can have Romanov.'

'How about we hurt them together?' Tony said. 'But you kill Barton, I'll kill Romanov.'

'Before or after we destroy SHIELD?' Loki asked.

'After,' Tony said. 'We'll let them all watch the destruction of their precious organisation, then we'll destroy the World Security Council and the Avengers. I wanna kill Fury myself.'

'Very well,' Loki agreed, 'but I get Thor.'

'And Rogers?'

'We can destroy Rogers together.'

'Fair enough,' Tony grinned.

He went back to his pizza- pepperoni, yummy- and Loki watched him.

'Wha’?' Tony eventually mumbled around a mouthful.

'You didn't mention the Green Beast,' Loki said. 'Banner.'

Tony took his time chewing, and when he swallowed he watched Loki carefully. 'Well... I'm kinda hoping Bruce will join us.' Loki raised an eyebrow. 'I know that Bruce doesn't wanna hurt anyone; he'll never go for killing SHIELD agents, no matter what they've done to him. But I'm hoping he joins our side; works for us in the lab I built for him, doesn't actively try to hurt us, etcetera. Either that or I hope he runs and stays away. If he does I won't go after him.'

'I see,' Loki mused.

'If Bruce chooses to run, you'll leave him alone,' Tony ordered, dark brown eyes holding Loki's green until the Trickster nodded.

'I will not actively hunt Banner if he doesn't oppose us,' Loki allowed. 'If he does I will decapitate him.'

'Fair enough,' Tony repeated.

'You see him as a friend,' Loki commented.

'He is my friend,' Tony said. 'He's not working for SHIELD. He's not trying to get me off the team. He's being used, just like me, and he wants to be accepted and respected. I think he'll join us.'

'If you say so,' Loki murmured. He leaned over to kiss Tony's cheek. 'I hope, for your sake, that he agrees,' he said softly. Then he grabbed another slice of pizza and turned back towards the TV, leaving Tony feeling warm, happy, and slightly confused. He'd thought it would take a lot more arguing until Loki agreed to let Bruce be. But Loki had agreed, and easily at that.

Tony's feelings for Loki were getting harder and harder to decipher. He wasn't sure if that was a good or bad thing.
'2000 hours tonight. Clint and Steve will follow in a helicopter. You, me and Thor are riding in the SUV with the driver and three SHIELD agents. Bruce will be waiting on the Helicarrier with back-up. Meet in the Tower parking garage.'

Romanov had left a message with JARVIS, and it was a good thing that JARVIS decided to wake Tony up before they were due; he and Loki had screwed around in Tony's workshop for most of the night (doing science and fucking) and hadn't climbed into bed until 8am.

'I gotta go to school,' Tony groaned, rolling around under the sheets. JARVIS had pulled the blinds up about an hour earlier in an attempt to get Tony out of bed. It didn't help when Tony dragged a pillow over his head, and then when Loki had flopped over him, following his pillows.

'But you get to play today,' Loki hummed, voice muffled by the fabric between them.

'Gotta play with the Avengers,' Tony sneered.

'Will it make you feel better if I promise to break some bones?' Loki asked. 'I would enjoy wrapping my fingers around the Bird's fragile little wrist.'

Tony snickered at the thought. He'd like to see Clint go through Tony's shit with a cast wrapped around his arm. 'Can't,' he said, 'Clint's following in a helicopter.'

Loki sighed in disappointed. 'I could always throw magic at them,' he mused. 'Helicopters aren't as limber as those little aeroplane things SHIELD often fly.'

'Airplane things... you mean quinjets?'

Loki was frowning when Tony rolled over and up, forcing the older god onto his stomach on the mattress. 'Stark, my dear, silly human, how in Hel would I know what a quinjet is?'

Tony rolled his eyes at Loki's dramatics and turned to grab a StarkPad from the bedside table. It was the one Loki usually read before bed; and that he fell asleep staring at. He was kinda cute when he sat there, half propped up and snoring, Wikipedia still open.

'Here,' Tony said after he'd brought up the schematics and a few pictures, 'this is a quinjet. I built them.'

'All of them?' Loki asked as he looked the jet over.

'Yeah,' Tony nodded. 'Well, I designed all of them, and I think Fury and the Council have a few agents build them in their secret lairs. They'll probably be annoying when we destroy their bases.'

'Then we shall simply swat them down,' Loki decided. He switched the Pad off and tossed it aside. Looking over Tony's body- still half-naked from when Tony had fallen into bed earlier that morning- Loki sighed.

'What?' Tony asked.
'We could be having sex,' Loki mourned and fell back onto the sheets.

Tony snickered. He finally rolled out of bed, yawning and scratching his belly. 'All work and no play makes Tony a dull boy,' he mused as he went into the en-suite bathroom.

'You're an odd human,' Loki commented.

Tony didn't reply. He wanted to take a shower, but JARVIS helpfully informed him that he was due in the parking garage in less than twenty minutes. So he washed his face, swept his fingers through his hair, and went to get into the under-suit he wore beneath his Iron Man suit. Loki had made him a sandwich as Tony changed, and Tony grinned all the way down to his workshop as he munched on lettuce, roast beef, and mustard between to thick pieces of rye bread. *Yum*.

Tony and Loki collected one of Tony's magic sensors as they went. It was one of the bigger ones, about the size of a home computer tower. When the gathered Avengers- meaning Natasha and Thor- saw him they both nodded, and Thor gave out a human-level “hello”. Tony wondered what his beef was, then remembered that they were about to fight Loki; that was a sure fire way to dampen Thor's mood.

Tony grinned and gave Loki a wink as he slid carefully into the SHIELD-issue SUV, snickering softly when he saw Loki roll his eyes. Natasha was staring at him when the door shut behind Tony, and Tony shrugged as best he could. 'Private joke,'

'You have private jokes with your boyfriend now?' Natasha asked.

'He's smarter than he looks,' Tony said. 'Smarter than most of the people I've slept with.' Probably smarter than *all* of the people Tony had slept with, now that he thought about it. Tony tended to sleep with people who fawned all over him at events, though, so that wasn't surprising. Loki would never fawn over anyone... other than himself. But he and Tony had that in common.

'Your... partner and you are doing well, Friend Tony?' Thor asked hesitantly.

Tony still remembered Thor's discomfort when first introduced to Logan, and what Loki had said about homosexuality in Asgard. So he gave Thor a toothy grin and said, 'Yup. He's smokin' hot, he's smart, and he's a bit of an asshole when you really get him going. Perfect for me, really. Oh, and the sex is *awes*-

'Yes, Stark, we get it,' Romanov cut in.

Tony winked at her but didn't say another word; they had already left the Tower and were driving through the streets of New York City. Soon Loki would attack.

Tony felt the beginnings of a smirk on his lips; he couldn't *wait* to see what Loki did to the Avengers and SHIELD.

{oOo}

Tony hated waiting. It was why he'd gotten the reputation of buying his way out of trouble, and purchasing whatever he desired. Why wait when he had the funds to get whatever he wanted?
Ninety percent of the population would do the same if they had his fortune.

It was particularly hard now, sitting in the back of an SUV with Natasha, Thor, and three SHIELD agents. Tony had been undermining SHIELD since the beginning, true. He pretended that he wasn't elbow deep in SHIELD's computers, that he didn't know what they where up to, and that Natasha and Clint had access to parts of his security and JARVIS. But this... this was different. He and Loki were finally going to take the fight to SHIELD. This was personal. They- or rather, Loki- were going to hurt SHIELD publicly.

Tony really hoped that Loki broke some bones. Or just outright killed the SHIELD agents currently travelling with him. Tony didn't enjoy killing- if he had he wouldn't have turned Stark Industries into a green company and briefly privatised world peace- but he'd do it if he had to. And he really enjoyed killing those who dared hurt him or betray him, like the Ten Rings and Stane. The agents who'd signed up to SHIELD, who'd been recruited, were causalities that Tony was willing to live with. They were face-less to Tony, nameless, people that he just really didn't care about. SHIELD was Tony's enemy, and if someone had to die, Tony would rather it be some annoying do-good agents than himself. Or Loki.

Natasha was looking all over the place, her gaze never settling for long; she watched the agents-dressed in black body armour, with assault rifles clutched in their gloved hands- and Thor, who was running his fingers over his hammer, and she watched Tony, who tried his best to sit still and look bored. Her eyes always flicked to the magic sensor after a minute, taking in the rough grey cover, the small monitor that was currently blank, and the keypad and dials just beneath it.

Tony sighed and leaned further back, ignoring the scowl Natasha sent his way. The Iron Man suit hadn't really been made for comfort, and it was annoying sitting in the thing, especially since Tony couldn't tilt his head back without the neck armour getting in the way. He shifted again and tapped at his armoured legs, wondering when the hell Loki was going to get the show started.

The thought had only just drifted through Tony's mind when he felt something in his chest... pop, for lack of a better word. It was like suddenly downing an entire glass of straight bourbon; the area behind his arc reactor thrummed with heat and then expanded, like something within him was trying to escape. Tony frowned slightly, and after a beat he realised that it wasn't a physical sensation, not really. The heat was coming from deep within him, a place he could only access when he sunk into his mindscape and explored his being metaphorically rather than physically.

Is it my magic? Tony wondered as the SUV sped up slightly, the vehicle rumbling beneath Tony. What the hell is it doing?

There was a loud thump, then a crunch, and Natasha jumped to her feet. 'The roof!' she shouted.

The SHIELD agents leapt into action, rifles pointed at the ceiling, while Thor tried to stand. He had no luck; he was too tall. So he crouched instead, hammer held tightly in his right hand, eyes locked onto the ceiling. The SUV picked up speed and Tony was almost thrown out of his seat.

There was another thump, then a crunch, and suddenly half of the roof just... disappeared, ripped back from its welded joints. Tony caught a glimpse of black hair and green armour before Natasha pulled out a handgun, flicked the safety off, and opened fire. The person on the roof- Loki, Tony assumed- ducked back, and the SHIELD agents took Natasha's action as their cue.

They opened fire, littering the remainder of the roof with bullet holes. The sound was deafening, and Tony activated his helmet, sighing in relief when the pieces of armour fitted together over his head, the faceplate sliding closed last of all. He was really glad that he'd managed to work it all
together; he hated having to manually put on/take off his faceplate.

'Thor, open the door!' Tony shouted, voice amplified by the suit's speaker. 'We'll get him from outside!'

Thor didn't say a word, but he moved. Rather than try and open the door, Thor just punched through it, the door tearing from its hinges and hitting the road. The cars travelling behind them blared their horns and swung away, but Tony ignored them in favour of activating his repulsors and blasting into the air. Thor went the direct route; he swung himself up and over the SUV, landing on the mangled roof.

Loki was clinging to the top, standing over the cab, and Tony saw his face twist into a snarl when he faced Thor. The SHIELD agents inside the SUV were still firing away, but the bullets pinged off of both Loki and Thor no matter where they hit; armour, skin, it didn't matter, the two gods were bullet proof.

I should test that, Tony mused as he followed the SUV. It was gaining speed, twisting and turning in and out of traffic. Loki had sunk a long, wicked dagger into the cab's roof, using it to hold himself atop the car. Thor stumbled and almost fell through the ripped roof but managed to hold on, and when he got his bearings he swung his hammer at Loki.

Loki dropped to the roof, ducking the blow, and Mjölnir swung back into Thor's grasp by the leather strap at the end. Thor swung again, and again, and only managed a glancing blow to Loki's shoulder when the SUV suddenly took a sharp right, almost dislodging Loki.

Loki snarled and a bright burst of magic engulfed the top of the SUV. It sent Thor flying and he hit the ground hard, rolling and disappearing beneath his red cape. Tony shot over him and hit the SUV, rocking the car and almost falling off.

He locked eyes with Loki, who gave him a small smirk.

'Well, this is fun,' Tony said. 'Kinda like a carnival ride.'

'Shall I send you after Thor, Man of Iron?' Loki questioned.

'No thanks, Prancer,' Tony grinned.

Loki snarled, and Tony was sure that only half of his anger was fake; Loki really hated the reindeer nicknames. Loki threw a small ball of magic at Tony, and it stripped away the paint of his suit but did little else. He tried again and Tony ducked and jumped, and at one point he took to the air to avoid blows from both Loki's magic and spear. When he landed again one of the SHIELD agents had climbed out of the SUV and was shooting Loki in the face. All it did was annoy the Trickster and mess up his hair.

Tony watched, mind torn between fascination and vague disgust, as Loki wrapped a hand around the agent's neck and lifted him clear off the SUV. Loki stood with him, apparently having no trouble keeping his balance on an SUV doing 90 mph.

Then, with little more than a flick of his wrist, Loki snapped the agent's neck and tossed him overboard.

Tony watched his body crash to the asphalt, the sharp snaps of bones breaking reaching Tony's ears, even over the multitude of various other noises.

When Tony looked up again, Loki had his head tilted. 'Problem, Iron Man?' he queried.
'You're gonna pay for that,' Tony lied.

Loki- God of Lies- smirked, eyes flashing, and Tony knew that Loki could detect his lie. Tony flew at Loki just as the older god pointed his spear into the SUV, and Tony managed to hit Loki before he could destroy the magic sensor.

Oops, Tony thought and swung back around, throwing Loki onto the vehicle. Loki snarled and rolled aside, suddenly disappearing over the side of the SUV. Tony frowned, wondering what the Trickster was going, when he heard it- whump-whump-whump-whump.

Tony twisted through the air and looked up; a black helicopter, first designed by Howard Stark, then perfected by his son and sold to SHIELD, was careening towards them. It sliced through the air gracefully, though it looked anything but; its exterior looked like a mix between a Black Hawk and an Apache helicopter. The interior was large enough to transport fifteen men with two pilots, while the outside was all weapons. It was a four-blade, twin-engine attack helicopter with a small tail rotor, six missiles mounted on either side, and a 30mm M230 Chain Gun carried between the main landing gear, beneath the helicopter's forward fuselage.

The nose-mounted sensor (or the Modernised Target Acquisition Designation Sight/Pilot Night Vision Sensor, if you wanted to get technical) was the best there was. It meant that Clint- or whoever was flying the helicopter, called S-Hawks by Tony, SHIELD-Hawks by the organisation- could basically track Loki... anywhere.

Hmm, Tony thought as the S-Hawk got closer, probably should have asked what tech they'd be using. Tony didn't want Loki to get shot by a missile, so decided to dive back into the fray. The SUV had gotten a bit ahead of him, but Tony's suit caught up soon enough. Natasha was still in the back, while the other two SHIELD agents were on the roof. The agent in the cab was driving like a bat out of hell, twisting and turning like a maniac, trying to throw Loki off the vehicle. Each and every time, though, Loki managed to find his footing and went right back to trying to kill the two agents facing him.

Tony's comm crackled. 'Iron Man?'

'Yeah, Hawkeye?' Tony replied as he got closer to Loki and the agents.

'Distract Loki,' Clint ordered. 'I'll try and shoot the fucker in the throat. If it doesn't kill him it should at least injure or distract him. We need that sensor.'

'Aye, aye, Captain Hawkeye,' Tony muttered. He shot towards Loki, just as the Trickster threw one of the agents off the SUV. Tony landed on the roof and the remaining agent lost his footing, tumbling into Loki and meeting his end with a dagger to the throat. Tony watched blood spurt up and over Loki, covering his pale white skin and armour in splashes of red.

Tony and Loki eyed each other as the God of Mischief carelessly tossed the dead agent over the SUV, Tony hearing another body crack as it hit the pavement.

'We meet again,' Loki drawled. Tony turned towards the hole in the SUV, and Loki smirked. 'I knocked Romanov out. And broke her wrist.'

Tony snorted and, making sure that his comm was turned off, flipped his faceplate up. 'Barton wants me to distract you so he can shoot you in the neck.'

'Is that so?' Loki mused. Both wobbled a bit as the SUV turned another corner, but they managed to stay upright. 'Attack me, then,' Loki said. 'Distract me. When I sense the arrow I'll throw my magic
'Out.' He paused, eyeing Tony's arc reactor. 'Can your reactor stand such a large assault?'

'You said it was magic proof,' Tony replied.

'It is,' Loki nodded, 'however, it might not survive what I have planned.'

'Okay...' Tony said slowly. 'Um, well, I have an extra cover for it.'

Tony's comm crackled again. 'Stark, what the hell are you doing?' Clint shouted.

Loki apparently heard Barton, too, because he said, 'Protect yourself and be prepared to be thrown off course.'

Tony nodded even as his faceplate slammed down, and as soon as it was sealed he launched himself at Loki. He hit Loki in the chest and Loki stumbled a few steps but stayed upright. His dagger sliced against Tony's neck, but Tony's armour was too thick; some sparks and paint chips went flying, but that was it.

Tony snarled in fake anger and punched Loki in the head, then hit him with a repulsor blast. At the same time Loki threw him clear, and Tony landed on the back of the SUV, part of the roof caving in as his suit's weight crushed it.

When Tony got back to his feet Loki was doing the same, and the two gods had a short face-off before Loki was suddenly hit by Mjölnir. It sent him crashing into the cab, the metal buckling beneath him, and Tony stood just as Thor landed beside him.

'Stop this, brother!' Thor shouted. 'You cannot win!'

Loki's face was black, furious, and Tony thought uh-oh just as Loki spread his arms and-

It was like Loki's magic just exploded from him, a large ball of green and black enveloping him and shooting in all directions. It threw Tony and Thor off the SUV, and all the cars in a twenty metre radius were tossed around like toys. Tony spun through the air and tried to get his repulsors working, but Loki's magic, like feared, had short-circuited them. Thankfully JARVIS had slammed down the extra thick layer of metal armour over Tony's arc reactor, protecting it from the blast. Still, it did nothing to protect Tony's person, and Iron man went spinning into the closest building. The windows smashed and the concrete and metal bent like it was made of paper, swallowing Tony whole.

Thor hit the ground once more and went tumbling into a parked car, caving its side in and knocking him out. The SUV gave one last screech before the motor blew and it crashed into a car just a few metres ahead of Thor, metal twisting, steam rising. The S-Hawk was thrown off course, its engines suddenly cut-out, and the pilot screeched his fear as they dipped, turned, and headed straight for the building Tony had already gone through. Steve, sitting on the sidelines until now, could do nothing to save the pilots as they crashed into the building.

An explosion rang out, fire licking across the side of the building. Clint had already bailed, his grappling-arrow speeding him up and towards safety. Steve had jumped, too, and he hit the ground a few floors below hard, snapping a few bones. But they'd mend.

Steve stood slowly, blood running down his face, and took in the absolute carnage that Loki had managed to create in just a few minutes. There were overturned cars everywhere; Thor was unconscious and half-buried in one, while the SHIELD SUV had come to a halt in the side of another. Steve looked up to see Clint climbing over the top of the building onto the roof and, deciding that at least Clint was safe, he rushed to the SUV to see if anyone had survived.
Author's Note: I REALLY like helicopters. I live near an RAAF base and Black Hawks, jets, and Hercules aircrafts always fly over my house doing routine missions and training. I got to ride in a helicopter- just your average one- when I was 6, so I couldn't help but talk about the helicopter a little. Sorry! But seriously, Google the Apache helicopter if you don't know what they look like; things are damn ugly.

In other news, this chapter ended up longer than I expected, so I had to split it in two. Next chapter coming as soon as I finish it!

{Dreamer}
Inside the building, Tony groaned and sat up. His faceplate was mangled- he'd hit the building face-first- and he tore it free as he slowly got to his feet.

'Are you okay?'

Tony jumped and turned, but sighed in relief when he saw Loki. 'How'd it go?' Tony asked.

Loki scowled at him. 'Fine,' he said. 'I destroyed the sensor before teleporting away.'

'And the ones in my Tower?'

'In a minute,' Loki said. He crossed the distance between them and ran his bloody fingers over Tony's face. 'Are you okay?'

'Yeah,' Tony nodded. 'My suit broke most of my fall.'

'Most?' Loki echoed.

Tony nodded again. 'It was... um, weird. Just before you turned up I think I felt...my magic?' Loki's eyebrows furrowed. 'It was warm, in my chest, but like when you were telling me how to use my magic; I felt it just before you turned up.'

'I see,' Loki said.

'And then I felt it again just before I went through the building,' Tony continued. 'And I saw purple.'

'Fascinating,' Loki said, eyes wide.

'What's it mean?' Tony asked. Because he had no fucking clue. It had been weird, feeling warm and protected while flying face-first through a fucking building.

'I have a theory, and I shall share it with you later,' Loki said, breaking Tony from his thoughts. 'But for now I have to get to your Tower and take care of the other sensors. I'll teleport them to our Hideout, come back, mess things up a bit, then wait for you in the penthouse as Logan.'

'Okay,' Tony said, nodding. Loki leaned forward to give him a quick kiss, and Tony felt that same warmth spread through his chest. Loki pulled back and Tony saw a soft, oddly shy smile on Loki's face before the Trickster teleported away. 'Okay...' Tony repeated slowly.

'I-Iron Ma-an? ' Tony's comms chose that moment to screech in his ear and he winced.

'J, turn the volume down,' he ordered.

'My apologies, sir,' the AI replied. 'Agent Barton's comms appear to have been damaged by Mr Lie-smith's attack and the feedback and static is coming through.'

'Yeah, yeah,' Tony grunted, turning and heading for the large, gaping hole in the side of the building.
'Where... yo-ou...he-elp... S... V,' Clint's crackly voice said in Tony's ear.

'Always needed,' Tony sighed. 'I need a drink.' He put his faceplate back on as best he could before activating his repulsors. They were working now, thank God, and Tony flew through the window and down to the street below.

{oOo}

It only took two one trip to get all of Anthony's magic sensors to the Hideout. Loki deposited them in the younger god's lab and gave them a quick glance; nothing had exploded, so he figured that they must have survived the trip. Loki knew enough about Midgardian technology to work it, but he couldn't understand half of what Anthony rambled about on a daily basis. The man was a genius, Loki had known that from the moment they'd met. Barton had known quite a bit about Tony Stark, and the internet had helped Loki learn more when he'd returned to Midgard after breaking out of his cell on Asgard.

Loki teleported back to the Tower and looked over Tony's workshop. The Midgardian had already set aside a heap of electronics that he'd given Loki the okay to destroy; there was always the chance, however slim, that Fury would order Anthony to turn it all over for his scientists to dissect. Anthony didn't want to take any chances, and neither did Loki.

'Are you recording, JARVIS?' Loki questioned as he walked around the workshop.

'Mr Stark ordered me to scramble the CCTV feed inside his workshop, sir,' the AI replied dutifully. 'Also, the cameras outside the workshop have now ceased functioning.'

Loki smirked. He liked Anthony's computer... he wasn't sure how it worked, to be honest; it wasn't real, yet it sounded like a person. Loki had had many conversations with JARVIS when he was awake at night, Stark sprawled over him snoring in his ear. The computer was as intelligent as its creator, and it was a truly marvellous feet of technology. Even Loki could see that.

'Good,' Loki said before raising his hand. He sent a pulse of mid-level magic at the table in the far corner, and threw up a shielding charm when the table and its contents exploded. He shot a few more blasts around the room, making it look as though he'd targeted anything even remotely sensor-looking.

He felt satisfaction curl thick and heavy around his heart, warmth pooling in his gut. Planning their endeavour with Stark had been truly breathtaking; working with someone as smart as himself had been so thrilling, so different to what Loki had done in the past. His allies had been few and far between, and none could hold a candle to Anthony.

Planning was like a sweet appetiser, carrying out the plan the main course. Loki and Tony had only just begun to sample it, but soon they would be ready to completely destroy SHIELD. It would be a long, dangerous process, but Loki was thrilled that they'd already begun. In the past Loki had had many plans, acting on multiple ones at once, but this? This was eating up all of Loki's attention. He was Loki, Logan, and soon-to-be Lily, Anthony's “assistant”. Working with Anthony stimulated both the mind and the body; Loki hadn't felt this satisfied in years.
Assessing his work one last time, Loki let Logan Thomas' appearance slip over his skin. It was getting easier the longer he remained in this alias, so within seconds Loki was walking across the lab to sit at one of Tony's many chairs.

'JARVIS, please tell me when Anthony or the Avengers are returning to the Tower,' Loki said, glancing up at the ceiling. 'I don't want to be discovered down here by anyone other than Anthony.' It would be difficult to explain; Logan Thomas wouldn't race down to Tony's workshop after Loki attacked. It would be too dangerous.

'Yes, sir,' JARVIS replied. There was a pause, and then he said, 'Mr Stark is currently being detained at the battle site.'

Loki frowned. 'Excuse me?'

'Director Fury is on his way and wants a detailed account of what happened,' JARVIS explained. 'Mr Stark and the Avengers will no doubt be a while.'

Loki sighed. What was he to do until then?

'JARVIS, am I allowed access to Anthony's research on magic?' Loki asked.

'Yes, sir,' JARVIS replied immediately.

Loki hummed and turned to look at the closest computer screen. It was thin, sleek, and looked like a piece of simple glass. 'Pull up Anthony's research, please,' Loki ordered.

JARVIS did as asked, and Loki looked over the rows and rows of very detailed notes Anthony had taken. He clearly understood how magic worked, but not the base facts; not the things that Loki had learned at a young age, about how magic flowed through the body, and how the mind bent magic to its will. Loki would need to sit Anthony down and have a lengthy discussion about magic, share knowledge that he hadn't realised Anthony needed. The man was clever and often grasped things very quickly; Loki hadn't thought to explain the very, very basic facts of magic.

He needed to... Loki frowned and leaned back on the swivel chair, the back of it bending slightly beneath his weight. Stark had mentioned feeling his magic, feeling warmth, just before Loki appeared on top of the SUV, and later when he'd flown into the building—which Loki hadn't planned, actually. His heart had near stopped when he saw Iron Man fly through the building, twisting metal and breaking glass beneath its bulk.

Loki had underestimated the suit's resistance to magic at a very base level. Usually Loki's magic was twisted with spells and intent; earlier, Loki had simply thrown out raw magic, expanding it from his body to end the fight. That was another thing he and Anthony would have to discuss; raw magic, how words and intent could change and shape it, and how Stark could make his suit magic-proof. It would be needed if he and Loki planned to fight side-by-side in the near future. Loki didn't want to destroy Anthony's suit during a battle and possibly injure the Midgardian.

Loki sighed, even as he felt elation seep into his bones. They had so much to do, so much on the line, and yet... Loki had never felt more alive. His very magic hummed with the knowledge of what they were doing.

Which was a problem, it seemed. Loki was almost positive that Stark's magic had reacted to Loki's, causing warmth to spread through Anthony's body when Loki was near. Which also meant that warmth, comfort, acceptance, were the very first things Anthony felt when in Loki's presence.

It was... quite a lot to take in, truth be told. Loki's magic had never accepted anybody. It had always
reacted well to Frigga's magic, even after Loki had been captured and tried after his invasion of Midgard. But other than his mother, Loki's magic had never liked anyone. It had disliked people, it had even accepted some as friend rather than foe. But his magic had imprinted on Anthony shortly after they started working together. Loki knew that he couldn't stop it, or even sever the bond; magical bonds were for life, and in Loki's- and now Anthony's- case, that was a very long time.

Loki hadn't planned on mentioning it yet, but it seemed that he would have to, and soon. If Anthony's magic was reacting to Loki's mere presence, just days after the Midgardian had first found it, then the bond would only get stronger. Soon enough Anthony's magic would reach out and connect, Loki's would accept, and then... then they would be bonded for life.

He had to talk to Anthony and explain the situation before that happened. Because while they were bound through their business contract, they weren't bound by magic; they could still walk away from their sexual relationship, if not their professional one. If they bonded magically, they would have to stay together forever.

It disturbed Loki, how much that thought didn't disturb him. Loki had never liked being tied down, but it seemed that Anthony was the exception. Anthony understood him in ways that nobody ever had, and Loki's magic adored that.

Loki sighed and reached out to swipe a finger along the computer screen, scrolling down to the next chunk of information Anthony had compiled. If Loki explained the bond to Anthony, both could actively stop their magic from reaching out to complete it. But Anthony didn't have enough understanding, or control, of his magic to do that yet. Loki would wait, then, until he'd taught Tony some more; then, when he understood, Anthony could decide what he wanted to do.

Until then, Loki had to decide what he could tell Anthony when the man returned to the Tower, and what he could hide beneath deceptive words and warm lips. Just enough information would satisfy Tony.

Loki's magic tingled just beneath his skin, and Loki scowled as he touched the computer screen yet again. His magic didn't like the thought of Loki lying. It was... troubling.

{oOo}

Tony had to stick around the crime scene- as he was calling it in his head- to give his statement multiple times. First to Clint and Steve, then to Fury when the director arrived, and later to Bruce when the good doctor finally wandered in. He'd been waiting on the Helicarrier with Fury, but had finally been allowed to come and help out.

The four SHIELD agents who had accompanied Tony, Natasha and Thor were dead. Thor was suffering from a concussion and a few broken bones, but had insisted that they'd heal by nightfall. Steve's own wounds- a broken arm, fractured leg, and fractured wrist- would heal quickly, too, thanks to the Super Soldier Serum. Natasha wasn't so lucky. A concussion, four cracked ribs, and an arm broken in two places would keep her on the Helicarrier for at least two days and off of any missions for a few weeks.

She was livid, and Tony had to bite back a laugh every time he saw her scowling at the SHIELD
doctors trying to get her into a van. Loki had done that, partly for Tony. He'd hurt Natasha for betraying Tony and using him. Tony's cock kept twitching, and he was glad that he'd managed to borrow some heavy cargo pants from one of the SHIELD agents; his undersuit wouldn't hide an erection at all.

'Are you okay?' Bruce asked.

'Hmm?' Tony hummed, turning to look at him.

'That cut looks bad,' Bruce said.

Tony frowned before remembering what Bruce was talking about. Tony hadn't noticed it at first, but he'd caught a glimpse of himself in one of the SHIELD vans that had turned up; he had a long gash across his chest. It started just below his collarbone, curling around his arc reactor and ending just above the waistband of his pants. Tony had peeled off the top half of his undersuit a few hours earlier and hadn't noticed the tear in the material.

'lt's fine,' Tony said, waving a dismissive hand. 'A part of my suit must have come free when I went through the building and cut me. I'll clean and bandage it when I get home.'

'Okay,' Bruce agreed easily. 'Just call me if you need any help.'

'Logan can help me,' Tony said. 'If Fury ever lets me leave,' he added in a mutter.

Bruce smiled slightly and turned to survey the SHIELD agents playing cleaners. A large crowd had already gathered and there were TV crews everywhere, but Fury had ordered everybody- i.e. Tony- to not talk to them. Tony had huffed and stomped about like a child because it made Fury's head throb and the older man rub his good eye. Annoying people had always been one of Tony's favourite pastimes.

So instead of amusing himself with the local media or- God forbid- helping clean up, Tony was standing on the sidelines watching, whining, and generally hating his entire existence. He wanted to go home and see Loki and fuck Loki and, you know, not be here. There were only so many times Tony could tell his version of events. Did Fury want an account in bullet-points, too? Maybe a nice, long essay.

'Loki tried to kill us,' Tony groaned, and Bruce looked at him again, 'seriously, what's new? Why can't I go home?'

'Fury just wants to make sure he has everything covered,' Bruce said.

Tony snorted. 'He just likes fucking us over, Bruce. You know that.'

Bruce smiled but didn't say anything; Tony knew that he agreed.

Finally, after at least two hours of standing around doing nothing, Tony shed the cargo pants, pulled the top half of his undersuit back up, and got back into his suit. Fuck Fury. Tony was a busy man, he had better things to do than play story-teller. His suit had been standing to his right, some of the SHIELD agents- and plenty of the gathered crowd- eyeing it like they wanted to take a piece home. Tony had been watching the thing like a hawk to make sure nobody got too close, and now he sighed in relief as the familiar armour wrapped around him like a second skin.

'Stark!' Fury shouted just as the neck armour extended.

'Yes, dear?' Tony called back.
'What the hell do you think you're doing?' Fury demanded as he got closer.

'Just felt a little chilly, Director,' Tony said. 'All my suits have built in air con and heaters. Did you know that?' A vein in Fury's temple was twitching and Tony smirked. 'Jokes, I'm going home. I've had enough of standing around here like an idiot.'

'I didn't give you permission to leave,' Fury growled.

'I don't need your permission to do anything, Patch,' Tony replied.

'You're an Avenger, aren't you?' Fury said.

Tony smirked. 'And don't you just hate that,' he said and, with a wink, slammed his bent faceplate down and took to the air. He could hear Fury shouting and cursing as he flew away, but ignored the director as he stabilised his flight. His suit still wasn't working at peak efficiency thanks to Loki's magic attack. Tony wanted to dive right into his workshop, with Loki, and figure out how they could completely protect Tony's suit from any future magical blasts. It wouldn't do for some upstart magic-user to take Tony out when Loki needed him.

Plus, Tony planned on fighting by Loki's side a lot in the future; he had to do better, his suits had to be better. Tony would figure it out. He always did.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: Sorry for the wait. If you haven't heard, my laptop recently died and took with it most of my original work and my fanfiction. Thankfully the battery could be charged just long enough for me to save some stuff to a USB before it died for good. I'm currently borrowing my brother's computer and I managed to finish off this chapter and start working on the next few. So the wait for the next chapter shouldn't be long.

Thanks for the continued support, I appreciate it! And I hope you enjoyed the chapter.

{Dreamer}
Chapter 20

Author's Note: I got a review over on FF.Net that made me think I should probably answer the question again here; I haven't seen the Winter Soldier movie, thus I won't be including Bucky or Hydra's infiltration of SHIELD in this story. I just don't feel comfortable doing so when I haven't seen the movie, and I kind of want this story to just be centered around SHIELD. With that being said, however, if I DO watch the movie and get some ideas, I might include them in the sequel that I might be writing after this story. We'll see what happens.

Thanks for the continued support!

{Dreamer}

Tony landed on the helipad, JARVIS disassembling his suit and sending it down to the workshop. Which was where Tony was headed. JARVIS had said that Loki was there, disguised as Logan Thomas, currently looking through Tony's magic research.

Tony smiled to himself as he rode the elevator down; in the few weeks he and Loki had been working together, the older god hadn't asked to look at Tony's research once. Probably because he'd rather Tony learn magic than study it. But Tony liked doing both, researching and studying until he understood something enough to execute it well.

He reached his workshop and found Loki sitting at one of the tables staring at a monitor, the area behind him in the far corner charred black.

'You destroyed some of my stuff, I see,' Tony said.

Loki glanced up, not at all surprised to see Tony. 'You did give me permission to,' he quipped.

Tony chuckled and moved further into the room. 'Read anything interesting?'

'You have a remarkably good grasp of magic,' Loki said, 'though you're missing many basics.'

'I figured,' Tony shrugged. 'It's not like I grew up on this stuff, you know. And Thor's pretty hopeless with all things magical.'

Loki snorted. 'He always has been,' he commented.

'Well, that and the fact that whenever I ask him about you he goes off on rants about your younger days or your current evilness, blah, blah; you get the idea,' Tony said. He'd reached Loki and leaned against the table, folding his arms across his chest. 'Thor's a bit of an asshole.'

'He always has been,' Loki repeated.

Tony grinned before clearing his throat. 'So, are we gonna talk magic?'

'I thought we were?'
Rolling his eyes, Tony said, 'Smart ass,' which just made Loki smirk. 'I meant my magic and what happened today.' He paused, eyes roaming over Loki's face. 'It was my magic, wasn't it?

Loki sighed but turned so that he was facing Tony properly. Leaning back against the table, Loki nodded. 'Yes, it was your magic.'

'Okay,' Tony said. 'Why'd it go all... uh, warm?'

'It was reacting to my presence, which I think you've already guessed.'

'Yeah,' Tony nodded. 'But I wanna know why.'

Loki pursed his lips, thinking it over a bit, before he said, 'I believe that it was because I was with you when you connected with your magic.' Tony just raised his eyebrows. 'When you first connected with your magic I was there, very close by, and your magic reached out to mine. Though magic is an energy, it is intelligent; not to the extent of a Midgardian or Jötunn, of course, but intelligent just the same.'

'Yeah, you've explained that,' Tony interrupted. 'Sometimes magic has a mind of its own, right?'

'Indeed,' Loki agreed. 'When I landed on the SUV, using magic to do so, yours picked up on that and wanted to... connect, for lack of a better word. It's something that you will learn to control the more familiar you get with your magic.'

Tony was silent as he let that information sink in, eyes glancing over Loki's body and then the workshop. 'Huh.' Loki raised an eyebrow. 'No, that makes sense,' Tony nodded, 'I should have thought of that.'

'Having another confirm it isn't a bad thing,' Loki shrugged.

'Yeah,' Tony agreed. 'So, um, what about my magic making an appearance before I went into that building?'

Loki's eyes darkened at that and flicked over Tony's body, as though trying to search for any possible injuries. Was... yeah, Loki was worried; he'd been worried earlier, and he was still worried, now. Worried about Tony getting hurt. Tony's heart skipped a beat behind his arc reactor, and he had to swallow thickly to get a hold of himself. Jesus, he was fucking falling-

'Your magic sensed that you were in danger,' Loki spoke suddenly, dragging Tony- thank fuck- from his thoughts. 'You aren't able to make shields yet, so you used raw magic instinctively to protect yourself. That was the flash of purple you saw.'

'Really?' Tony asked. Loki nodded. 'I... fuck, I used magic to protect myself?'

'Indeed,' Loki said, a smile playing on his lips. 'It seems that you are a natural, Anthony.'

'Hell yeah I am!' Tony said. 'Tony Stark, Iron Man and Mage.'

Loki snorted. 'Don't get ahead of yourself, Stark. It will take many, many years of practice before you can wield magic like another limb.'

'Yeah, yeah,' Tony waved a dismissive hand, 'I'll never be as good as the big bad God of Mischief. But I can totally learn enough to use magic against the Avengers, right?'

'I don't see why not, if you study and practice enough,' Loki said.
Tony laughed again, fantasies of throwing magic at Clint and Steve, Natasha and Thor, already filling his head. God, it would drive them fucking insane trying to figure out who the magic user working with Loki was. Tony couldn't wait!

His fantasies trailed off when he realised that Loki was staring at him. 'What?'

'Are you okay?' Loki asked. His tone was similar to the one he'd used earlier, when he'd teleported into the building Tony had taken a short trip into.

'Yeah,' Tony said. 'A few cuts and bruises, but I'm used to it.'

Loki frowned at that, and Tony peeled the top half of his undersuit off, showing Loki the tear in the fabric.

'Something cut me,' he explained, 'not sure what, yet. But look at that!' He grinned as he looked down at his chest. What had been a deep cut less than half-an-hour before was now a thin pink line, a few flecks of blood crusted at the edges. Loki reached out to touch, finger cool as he traced the line from Tony's collar bone to his abs.

'I did that,' Loki muttered.

'Not on purpose,' Tony said. 'And, hey, nothing bad happened to you, right?' Loki frowned up at him. 'If you'd purposely hurt me, our contact would have hurt you,' Tony said.

Loki blinked at that, as though he'd forgotten the details of their magically binding business arrangement.

'Yes,' he finally said, 'however, I didn't realise that raw magic would affect your suit like that.'

'Raw magic?' Tony echoed.

Loki inclined his head. 'Raw magic and spells are different, and things- people- react differently to the energy. Spells help centre and control magic, but the words and intent make the energy somewhat weaker. Raw magic is what your body replenishes and draws from the Realm around you. It is stronger, but far more dangerous if you don't know what you're doing.'

'Okay...' Tony said slowly. Loki was still tracing the healing cut on Tony's torso, and Tony found it difficult to focus on Loki's words and not... other things. 'So what you used today, at the end there, was raw magic?'

'Yes,' Loki said. 'It was a quick, if dirty, way of ending the fight early. I didn't think your suit would take that much damage.'

'It just failed a bit,' Tony explained. 'Your, uh, raw magic, or whatever, messed with the repulsors, and the building did the rest of the damage. But, hey, no harm done.'

'We should figure out how to protect your suit properly,' Loki said.

'I thought that, too,' Tony agreed. 'If I wanna fight by your side, we'd better make my newer suit designs magic-safe.'

'We also have to take your own magic into account,' Loki said. He finally withdrew his finger, and Tony fought not to shiver at the lost touch.

'We do?' he asked, voice a bit hoarser than before.
If Loki noticed, he didn't comment. 'Yes. What you're currently learning to wield is raw magic; I won't teach you any spells until you have a firmer grasp of it. If my magic interfered with your suit, your own magic will probably do the same. And if you want to use it in battle, you won't be able to without risking damage to yourself.'

'Right,' Tony said. He cleared his throat, 'I didn't think of that, to be honest. So you think we'll be able to mix Midgardian science and magic together so it all functions safely?'

'If anyone can do it, we can,' Loki said. He grinned sharply at that, eyes like poison as they met Tony's.

Tony grinned in response. 'Yeah,' he agreed. 'Want to try in a few days? We can go to the Hideout. The Avengers and SHIELD will probably want me around for a day or two to discuss the fight a few hundred times more, but I don't think I have any meets or anything after that.'

'You really do need an assistant,' Loki mused, and Tony laughed.

'Isn't that your job?' he teased.

Loki smirked. 'Not at the moment, no,' he said and stood slowly. Tony swallowed as Loki pressed against him, and had to tilt his head back to meet Loki's eyes again. 'Where are your soon-to-be former team mates?' Loki purred, eyes flashing.

'Uh...' Tony had to really think about that (Loki + sex voice = Little Tony perking up and short-circuiting all higher brain function). 'Still at the crime scene,' he eventually managed. 'Romanov was taken to the Helicarrier or one of SHIELD's little hidey holes, I'm not too sure. Bruce and the others were all still there when I left, and they'll probably be there for a while longer.' He paused to lick his lips, and Loki's eyes flashed to Tony's mouth. 'Why?' the billionaire asked.

Loki smirked again, slowly, dangerously, and Tony bit back a groan. He couldn't fight a gasp, though, not when Loki bent to suddenly sink his teeth into Tony's neck, biting and sucking until there was no chance in Hell Tony wouldn't have a hickey, even with his new god-like healing ability.

'Fuck, Loki,' Tony groaned and tipped his head to the side. Loki took the invitation, smoothing his lips over Tony's neck, his tongue flicking out to lick the sweat from Tony's heated skin. 'Gonna do more than bite me, babe?'

'Mm,' Loki hummed in his ear, then bit the lobe. 'I had planned on it.'

Tony growled and reached up, grabbed Loki by his short, curly blonde hair, and used his grip to drag Loki's mouth up to his own. He mashed their lips together for a dirty, very sloppy kiss, teeth clacking and tongues licking against each other. Loki drew back after a few seconds to adjust their positions, and when he pressed their lips back together it was so much better; firmer, harder, deeper as Loki dove into Tony's mouth and then sucked on his tongue.

Tony made another noise that was lost in Loki's mouth, and then grunted in frustration when he lost his grip on Loki's- on Logan's- too-short hair.

'Fuck, Loki, I want you,' Tony growled, 'not Logan Thomas.'

Loki paused, seeming surprised, before he glanced around. 'I can change in here, we already planned to tell the Avengers that I was here.'

Tony was nodding before Loki had finished his sentence. 'JARVIS, tell us as soon as any of the
Avengers, Thor especially, gets within a mile of the Tower, got me?'

'Yes, Mr Stark,' JARVIS replied.

'Come on,' Tony said and grabbed Loki's wrist. The Trickster let himself get dragged across the room and around the short wall that jutted out halfway along the workshop. Behind it was a small fridge, a sink and mirror, a set of drawers, and a cot with a few blankets and pillows scattered atop it.

'I didn't know this was here,' Loki commented.

'I spend a lot of time down here, so I figured I'd put in some basics,' Tony explained. 'Now get naked.'

Loki snorted, 'So charming, Stark,' but did as asked. He pulled his t-shirt off, revealing smooth, pale skin. Tony groaned low in the back of his throat, and Loki smirked as he kicked his sneakers off and then went for the button of his jeans. Tony was naked faster; he only had the undersuit and underwear to get out of. He jumped onto the cot and laid back, wrapping a hand around his cock as Loki slowly got naked.

The other god's eyes were fixed to Tony's groin, and Tony grinned as he stroked himself a few times, squeezing when he reached the head so a few drops of pre-come leaked out. Loki licked his lips and kicked his jeans and boxer-briefs aside before climbing onto the cot and crawling over Tony.

'I hope you have lubricant,' Loki muttered. He pressed his mouth to Tony's naval, delicate kisses travelling over Tony's skin and up, up, up until Loki could circle a nipple with his tongue. Tony sighed and pushed his free hand through Loki's thick black hair, satisfied that he could finally wrap the long strands around his fingers.

'Y-Yeah,' he said, voice hitching when Loki bit at his left nipple, then his right, tongue travelling between the two and over his arc reactor, leaving a wet trail. 'Uh... under the cot.'

Loki pushed off of Tony and leaned down, long arm somehow reaching under the cot without Loki having to move all that far. Tony pouted — he really wished that he was taller — and Loki smirked when he looked at him, drawing back with the large bottle of lube firmly in hand.

'Do you entertain people down here often, Anthony?' Loki questioned as he looked down at the bottle.

'Just me and my right hand, Lokes,' Tony laughed. 'I don't let one-nighters into my workshop.'

'Ah, so I should feel privileged, then?' Loki asked. It took him a second to figure the bottle out, but then he was twisting the cap, the top popping up so that Loki could squirt a large glob onto his hand.

'You should always feel privileged,' Tony quipped, 'I mean, look at me. I'm a god now, remember; people should worship me.'

'They will, in time,' Loki said. He climbed back onto Tony's thighs, straddling the younger god and shifting a bit. 'However, only I am allowed to worship you naked.'

Tony raised his eyebrows, but didn't see any reason to argue; it wasn't like he wanted to get naked with anyone else. Fuck it, Loki really had ruined him for anyone else.
'Whatever you want, Loki,' he agreed easily. Loki smiled in satisfaction and reached forward to wrap a hand around Tony's cock, spreading lube and stroking from base to crown. 'Fuck, yeah,' Tony breathed out. 'You topping?'

'No,' Loki said. 'I'm going to ride you until this little bed is in danger of breaking apart and crashing to the floor. And even if it does, I will continue to ride you until you're begging for release.'

'Fuck!' Tony swore harshly a few more times as Loki continued to jerk him off, fingers cool and firm, squeezing the base of Tony's cock every time Tony was in danger of getting a bit too excited. 'Come on, Loki!' Yes, Tony wasn't above whining; if it got Loki to mount his cock, he'd fucking beg on his hands and knees!

Loki just grinned at him like the fucking asshole that he was.

'Lookkii,' Tony whimpered, 'please!'

'I like watching you beg,' Loki said.

Tony growled, and Loki laughed, but he finally let Tony's cock go and climbed further up him, settling on Tony's hips. Tony peeled his eyes open and watched, mouth watering, as Loki squeezed some more lube onto his hand and then reached behind himself.

Loki let out a soft, pleased little sigh when he slid a finger in. Tony shuffled a bit until he could grab Loki's hips, and just held on firmly as he watched Loki quickly prep himself, fingers sliding deeper each time until he'd started bouncing on them.

'God, you're gorgeous,' Tony murmured.

Loki's head lolled to the side and he slid his eyes open, irises a darker green than usual. 'Feel free to refer to me as your one true God whenever you want.'

Tony opened his mouth to say... something- a witty retort, probably- but he was derailed when Loki slid his fingers out and moved gracefully up Tony's body. Tony groaned loudly and his entire body arched upward when Loki sat on his cock, Tony sliding up and all the way in without any resistance.

'Fuck!'

Loki started moving immediately, apparently not wanting to draw this out. Which was oh-fucking-kay in Tony's opinion. Tony thrust up as best he could, but Loki was heavy, even with Tony's godly strength. Tony had to dig his fingers into Loki's hips and plant his feet on the cot to slam himself into Loki's ass, but the extra work was worth it when Loki gasped, mouth dropping open. He tipped his head back and latched onto Tony's thighs as he moved quicker, Tony's cock sliding out of him more and more with each thrust until Tony was barely staying in.

When he slammed in it was all the way, dick hitting Loki's prostate and making the Trickster shudder, his erection leak pre-come that dribbled down his length.

'Fuck, you're gorgeous,' Tony panted. His gaze darted between Loki's cock and Loki's face, eyes watching a bead of sweat travel from Loki's neck down to his smooth chest.

Loki growled in response, apparently at a loss for words, for once. Tony didn't care, though, not when Loki moaned and panted and moved that much faster and harder. The cot squeaked dangerously beneath them, not used to this kind of treatment, and Tony briefly worried that it was going to collapse beneath them. But then Loki twisted, reached down himself, and somehow slid a
fingertip into Tony's ass without Tony's cock leaving his own.

'Oh sweet mother of...' Tony trailed off and pushed up, back, he didn't fucking know; Loki was doing something to him, something that made Tony's prostate tingle pleasantly even as his cock hit Loki's. 'Magic,' he breathed in realisation, 'I... fucking... love it.'

Loki chuckled- or whined, it was hard to tell- and he jammed himself down, grabbed his cock, and with one short jerk he was coming all over Tony's chest, hand moving quickly to milk every last drop of pleasure. Tony followed swiftly, Loki's magic fingers stroking his prostate as his ass squeezed around Tony's cock. It was too much, too good, and Tony launched himself up and at Loki as he came, their mouths colliding as Tony jammed his tongue down Loki's throat, his whimpers swallowed as Loki sucked and licked and bit.

'Fuck,' Tony breathed when he remembered how to talk, brain slowly coming back on-line. Loki looked pleased with himself, but soft as well, warm... cuddly? Tony was pretty sure that that word had never been applied to Loki, but it was applicable, at least at the moment. Loki slid his fingers from Tony's ass and pushed Tony onto his back, the genius going easily.

With a simple wave of his hand Loki had them cleaned, and then he draped himself half over Tony, face buried in the younger god's neck. Tony hummed, body feeling pleasantly used, and Loki pressed a kiss to his neck.

'You're awesome in bed,' Tony said. 'Have I told you that before?'

'Multiple times,' Loki said, smirk evident in his voice. 'But feel free to say it often. Every day, if need be.'

Tony snorted and rubbed his hand up and down Loki's back, the cool skin prickling and making Loki shift a bit before going still.

'Do we have to be anywhere any time soon?' Loki questioned.

'Hmm...' Tony hummed, 'dunno. JARVIS will let us know when the Avengers get back.'

'Captain Rogers, Agent Barton, Mr Odinson, and Doctor Banner are still with Director Fury at the "scene of the crime", sir,' JARVIS piped in. Tony snickered; he could hear the air-quotes around "scene of the crime".

'Thanks, J,' Tony said and settled in for a bit of cuddling- hey, he liked it too. 'Keep us posted.'

'Yes, sir,' JARVIS replied.
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After about half-an-hour of cuddling (it was cuddling, no matter how much Loki tried to deny it!), Tony and Loki headed back to the penthouse. Loki put Logan back on, and they went to get something to eat. Tony was going through his fridge when JARVIS announced that the Avengers wanted him to meet them on Rogers' floor. Tony sighed and stood up to look at Loki, who was sitting at the kitchen island watching him.

'Fancy spending some time with the Avengers?' he asked. Loki gave him a disgusted look and Tony snorted. 'Hey, I don't want to either, but Clint or Steve will barge in here if I don't head down there.'

'Why do they require your presence?' Loki questioned.

'They probably wanna discuss the fight again,' Tony shrugged. 'Seriously, they like going over everything a thousand times. I'm all for research and comparing notes, but not forty times an hour. They have issues,' he said, shrugging again.

Loki sighed but slid from the stool. 'I suppose that it would work to our advantage, the Avengers getting to know Logan better. It would be good if they felt calm in my presence.'

'Yeah,' Tony agreed. 'Okay, then. Steve will probably cook something, or Bruce will. Either that or we'll order in.'

'Very well,' Loki said, and followed Tony into the elevator.

The Avengers- minus Natasha- were sitting in Steve's lounge room. Clint was curled up in one of the armchairs poking at the bandage wrapped around his right arm; he'd gotten burnt just before the S-Hawk had crashed into the building. Steve was at full strength again, only a few cuts and bruises still on his face, and Thor was completely fine. Bruce, having not been in the actual fight, was the one in the kitchen. They'd apparently decided to cook before calling Tony down, because Bruce was pulling large trays of lasagne out of the oven when Tony and Loki walked in.

'Ooh, lasagne,' Tony hummed in appreciation. He hated Steve, true, but the man was a good cook.

'We cooked enough for everyone,' Steve said. He offered Loki a small, tentative smile. 'Logan.'

'Mr Rogers,' Loki replied.

Tony snorted, and Steve said, 'Please, call me Steve.'

Loki just nodded and stuck close to Tony, displaying an air of mild nerves.

'We all remember Logan, Logan remembers everyone,' Tony said, waving a hand around. 'Why am I here?

'We want to talk about the fight,' Steve said, giving Tony his no-nonsense look. Tony rolled his eyes but didn't say anything; fighting was useless, he'd learned that early on. It was either talk and talk and fucking talk or just storm out and ignore Steve trying to order him back. 'We should also talk about your workshop,' Steve added.
Tony raised his eyebrows, and it was Clint who said, 'JARVIS told us how Loki turned up in your workshop.'

'Oh, yeah,' Tony said, pasting a scowl on his face. 'That fucker destroyed all the magic sensors I was working on, even the portable DVD one.' Clint stared at him, and Tony shrugged. 'What? I like taking things apart and making them better.'

'What is a DVD, again?' Thor asked, looking sheepish, and with good reason; Tony always got incredibly frustrated when Thor failed to remember the basics of human technology. It was really fucking annoying because Thor wasn't an idiot, not really; he was just from a different world. But technology and Thor didn't mix, so Tony had given up trying to teach the big bastard about anything, leaving that to Steve and Clint.

'Never mind, Pikachu,' Tony said, the nickname earning another confused frown from Thor and a snort from Clint.

'How did Loki know that you had more sensors?' Steve asked, apparently deciding to get right into it. He walked into the kitchen and Tony followed, Loki right beside him, and that prompted Clint and Thor to stand and trail in. Bruce was setting the table, had already cut up the lasagne, and Tony grinned at him.

'No idea,' Tony said as he took a seat. 'I have three theories; one, Loki knew that I'd make more than one and figured he'd just destroy anything even remotely magic sensor-looking just in case; two, more than one of my magic sensors actually worked, Loki sensed that and destroyed them; or three, Loki's an asshole and just likes blowing up my shit.'

Loki, very subtly, kicked Tony under the table, and Tony fought not to turn and poke his tongue out at the mage. Instead he offered Steve a shrug.

'I'm just glad that Logan wasn't anywhere near my workshop,' Tony added.

'Yeah,' Steve agreed, smiling at Loki. 'He didn't pop up?'

'No,' Loki shook his head. 'JARVIS told me as soon as the cameras in Tony's workshop stopped working, and advised me to hide on the helipad. If Loki did teleport into the penthouse, JARVIS could at least call Tony for help.'

'I woulda broken that fucker's neck if he came anywhere near you,' Tony growled, earning surprised looks from everyone but Bruce. Apparently they still hadn't figured out that he and Logan were in this for the long haul. Tony had no plans to give up Loki any time soon; their business agreement was indefinite, and Tony kinda hoped that their sexual relationship was, too.

But it was too soon to really think about that, let alone bring it up with Loki, so Tony pushed it from his mind.

Steve cleared his throat and sat, which was the signal for everyone to start loading their plates with lasagne and salad, which Bruce had just put on the table. Loki had more salad than lasagne, while Thor ignored the greens all together, instead stuffing his face full of meat and pasta. The others had a bit of each, and Steve stood briefly to grab drinks and cups before they started discussing the battle again.

Steve clearly didn't feel comfortable with Logan there, but Tony just stared at him every time he started to trail off, so eventually Steve just spoke, addressing the Avengers and ignoring Loki. Not that Loki seemed to care; he sat close to Tony and ate slowly, appearing only vaguely interested in
After Steve was done, Clint explained his part of the battle, and Tony was mildly annoyed when the archer mentioned how his quick reflexes had saved his life when the S-Hawk crashed. Then again, he kinda wanted to kill Clint himself.

Thor rambled about battling Loki, his disappointment and heartbreak over his “brother's” continued descent into madness clear in his words and on his face. Loki's hand had migrated to Tony's thigh by then, and the mage took his frustrations out on Tony's poor, innocent leg, making Tony stuff food into his mouth to muffle his whimpers. At least Loki wasn't jumping across the table and trying to strangle Thor with his bare hands; Tony was sure that Loki wanted to.

Bruce's account was simple and short, which was why he was Tony's favourite; he sat on the Helicarrier, he heard about the fight, he sat some more before Fury let him leave, and then he stood and watched SHIELD clean up the aftermath.

When it was Tony's turn he sighed and groaned but obediently re-told his story again, leaving out the fact that Loki had teleported to him before Tony had joined the Avengers on the ground. Then it was Loki's turn, and he jolted slightly in his seat when everybody turned their sights on him.

'It's okay,' Tony said, voice soothing. He reached up to pat Loki's hand, which had finally moved from hurting Tony's thigh to playing with his plate. 'If you need to stop, stop. If you need a break, let me know. Loki can't hurt you, okay? I won't let him.'

Loki glanced at him, held his eyes, before taking a deep breath and nodding weakly. Tony marvelled at Loki's deception as the Trickster weaved a tale of hiding out in the penthouse while Loki destroyed the workshop. He'd even recorded footage of Logan doing just that, JARVIS faking the time-stamps in case Natasha or Clint decided to investigate.

When story-time was over, Tony finally glanced between Steve and Clint and asked, 'How's Natasha?'

Clint scowled briefly, clearly annoyed that Tony hadn't cared until this point; Tony didn't care even remotely, but appearances had to be kept up.

'She'll be fine,' Steve answered. 'Loki broke her arm in two places and cracked a few ribs; she'll spend a few weeks in a cast and sit out some missions, but she'll heal, thankfully.'

'I'm gonna tear that fucker's eye out when I get a hold of him,' Clint growled.

Thor made a soft noise of annoyance, always wanting to defend his brother's honour despite Loki's clear evilness. Clint just glared at him, daring him to say anything, and Thor eventually backed down, going back to his fifth helping of lasagne.

Steve glanced between Clint and Thor and, as always, decided to play mediator by changing the subject. Clearing his throat, he turned to Loki with a genuine, if small, smile on his face. 'So, Logan,' he said, and Loki looked up from his plate.

'Yes, Captain.... Steve.'

Tony snorted. Captain Steve. Steve, of course, ignored him. 'You said you were a writer?' Steve asked Loki.

Loki inclined his head and said, 'I took to writing when I was a teenager. I've always loved reading, and I wanted to create my own stories.'
'So what kind of things do you write?' Bruce questioned, looking genuinely interested. Yet another reason why Brucie was Tony's favourite.

'Anything and everything, really,' Loki lied, a soft smile pulling at his lips. 'I enjoy fantasy, science fiction, romance... whatever idea comes to me, I write it down in one of my notebooks. I'm currently working on a story about a hunter who tracks down magical beings. It's in its early stages, but I'm researching various myths about werewolves and other such beasts to try and find a plot I like.'

Wow, Loki was a damn good liar. There was just enough hesitance- just enough nerves and excitement- in his voice to make his story seem so... real. If Tony didn't know that Logan was really Loki, he'd probably fall for the bullshit leaving Loki's mouth.

'Wow,' Bruce said. He was the only one at the table, apart from Tony, who seemed to like Loki; or, at least, not be annoyed just by his presence. 'That must be interesting, researching things like that for work.'

'The various distant relatives I have often tell me that writing isn't a real job,' Loki said, 'but I enjoy it, and I have the money to keep going.'

'You win the lottery or something?' Clint muttered.

Tony glanced at him. Clint didn't seem truly interested; he was just making small talk. His eyes were still dark, fingers tight around his fork. He was still thinking about Loki and what he'd like to do to him. Tony really wished that he could just stab his own fork into Clint's eye. The Bird fucking annoyed him.

'No,' Loki answered Clint, drawing the agent's gaze, 'my parents passed away when I was eighteen. Both were rather wealthy and, as an only child, they left everything to me.' He paused, as though trying to swallow back the old pain of losing both mother and father at such a young age. When he spoke again it was with forced cheer. 'I'm glad for everything they gave me.'

Steve was staring around the table now, apparently at a loss as how to change this subject. Clint didn't seem inclined to help, and Thor was staring morosely at his plate as he shoved lasagne into his mouth. Bruce was giving Loki a sympathetic smile.

'We're thinking of heading to England soon,' Tony piped in. It wasn't really a lie; he vaguely remembered Pepper mentioning England and the new Stark Industries offices, and getting away from New York for a week or two would give he and Loki some time alone together to plan and study magic. 'Visit some of Logan's estranged family, just relax, you know.'

Steve beamed, 'That's good, Tony. You deserve a break.'

Tony nearly snorted, but managed to stop himself by biting the inside of his cheek. Clint was smirking at Steve; fucking prick.

'Yeah,' Tony said, while Loki nodded enthusiastically, seemingly ignorant of the declining atmosphere.

'I can't wait to play tour guide,' Loki smiled. 'I've lived in America for a few years, but I only just moved to New York a few months ago and don't really know my way around all that well. Tony's been showing me the sights.'

'Aww, you just want me to look like an idiot,' Tony teased.
Loki chuckled. 'I don't have to try hard to do that, love.'

Clint snorted, but Tony ignored him, still smiling at Loki.

'Well, that's great,' Steve interrupted, drawing their attention. 'Um, Tony...' he trailed off and Tony raised his eyebrows. 'Is there, uh... any way you can start working on another magic sensor immediately?' Steve asked. 'Before you go to England or anything?'

Tony frowned a bit. One minute it was “Tony, take a break, you're hurting the team”, and the next it was “work on this for us, you're team, you have to”! Stupid fucking... fucks.

'Yeah, sure,' Tony said, his anger buried deep down. 'But what if it works again and Loki shows up?'

Steve frowned; he clearly hadn't thought of that.

'Maybe we can keep it locked up?' Bruce suggested. 'Just something that'll take Loki a little while to get to. That'd be enough time for Thor to realise he's here and stop him.'

Tony nodded slowly, as though thinking of ways to keep his experiments from being destroyed again. 'Yeah, that could work,' he said. 'I back up all of my research, all I have to do is build the sensors again. I might go over my notes a bit more thoroughly before trying; I gotta figure out what I got right so I can do it better this time.'

'Then we can finally ship Loki off to Asgard,' Clint grunted.

'He will not escape this time,' Thor promised; he'd been doing that ever since he returned with news of Loki's escape. 'The All-Father didn't take his Jötunn abilities into account last time. This time, he will.'

Loki jolted at that, and Tony grabbed his thigh under the table. Now was not the time for Loki to freak out, damn it!

'What do you mean?' Clint asked.

'My father explained to me that Loki's magic has two separate parts,' Thor said, much to Loki's clear annoyance- Tony could feel the tension in his leg. 'There is his Asgardian magic, which he can wield due to him growing up on Asgard; he absorbed it at a young age, and his years there caused his magical core to accept it as part of himself. Now, his body replenishes Æsir magic as well as Jötunn magic. His Jötunn magic is a part of his very being because he is Jötunn. It is of ice and darkness, his Asgardian magic of gold and light. Loki can wield both, and his Jötunn magic allowed him to strengthen himself and break out of his cell. We have never kept Jötnar as prisoners on Asgard, and the magic weaved into the cells could not contain him.'

Clint was glaring at Thor now, and even Steve looked annoyed. 'Well that's fucking fantastic,' Clint grunted. 'If your dad had just thought for a goddamn second, Loki would still be rotting away in prison instead of running around our planet trying to kill us!'

Thor's shoulders slumped and Steve sighed.

'Clint, the King made a mistake; a terrible one, yes, but it wasn't his fault,' Steve said. 'You heard Thor; next time Loki will be held properly.'

'If we ever catch him,' Clint muttered. With that he stood and left the kitchen, bring an abrupt end to the little get together.
'Whelp, me and Logan are gonna go, then,' Tony said. He wasn't going to pass up an opportunity to finally fucking leave. 'If that's all?' he added to Steve.

'Yeah,' Steve sighed. 'Keep us updated on the sensor, okay?'

'I'll start first thing tomorrow,' Tony said. It wasn't even a lie; he'd get Loki to take him back to their Hideout, and he'd start working with Loki again to get a real magic sensor up and running. It'd come in handy if any other magic-wielders crawled out of the woodwork.

Plus, Tony wanted to study magic some more. He wouldn't be happy until his knowledge was closer to Loki's rather than Thor's. Tony knew that he'd never understand magic as well as Loki; magic was a very big part of Loki, and he'd been studying it for over a thousand years. Still, Tony needed to know how it worked.

'Seeya later, kiddies!' Tony called and left the kitchen.

'It was nice to see you all again,' Loki said behind him, voice pleasant and honest. Tony bit back a snort until he and Loki were in the elevator.

'Kiss-ass,' Tony said.

'Shut up,' Loki retorted. Tony laughed. 'You wish to work on your magic sensor tomorrow, don't you?' Loki said after a beat of silence.

'Yeah,' Tony said. 'We've made progress with my magic, right?' Loki nodded. 'Time to make some progress on the science side of things,' Tony decided.

'Very well,' Loki said.

'Right now I wanna work on my new suit designs,' Tony added, 'we'll do magic tomorrow.'

'Very well,' Loki repeated.

The elevator stopped at Tony's workshop, and Tony stepped out, stopping when he realised that Loki hadn't followed him. 'Join me?' Tony asked, holding out a hand and wiggling his fingers.

Loki chuckled and shook his head, but he reached out and linked his fingers with Tony's. Smiling, Tony dragged Loki into the workshop.

{oOo}

Loki watched, intrigued, as Anthony went to the far right wall of his workshop and started... pressing against the concrete and metal. He raised an eyebrow when a panel slid to the side, revealing a keypad that glowed green. Stark entered a code and then the entire wall to his left shifted, revealing a glass case containing...

'Your new suit designs,' Loki realised as he walked across the workshop.

Anthony nodded. 'Yeah, I had to keep them hidden from snooping agents.'
'Clever,' Loki mused. He wouldn't have realised the extra room was there if Anthony hadn't revealed it, so he doubted that the Spider or Bird had discovered it.

'They're still in the planning stages, but I've got some parts built,' Tony explained as he opened cases and drawers. 'I can only really work on them when Natasha and Clint are out on a mission or definitely asleep, which isn't that often, really. They take stalking me too seriously.'

Loki snorted and watched Tony bustle about the little area.

'J, the workshop's locked down, right?' Tony asked suddenly.

'Yes, sir,' the AI said. 'I always lock down the workshop when you work on the Genesis suits.'

'Good boy,' Tony said.

'I live for your praise, sir,' the computer drawled, making Loki snicker in amusement.

'Cheeky bastard,' Anthony muttered. The hidden workshop was a small, square area filled with large boxes, and Loki could see that three of the walls were filled with drawers built into the concrete. The large table in the middle of the room had three large, steel boxes sitting atop it, which Anthony had just opened.

Inside were bits and pieces of matted silver suits; gauntlets, boots, chest and leg plates. It seemed that Anthony had only just begun to build the armour.

'I've got the wiring done,' Tony said as he pulled pieces out to show Loki. 'I pretty much just built on what I already have; made everything faster, stronger, etcetera. It's the armour that's the hardest part; make it a bit like Iron Man, but not too much.'

'Yes,' Loki agreed as he took one of the gauntlets Anthony offered him. The metal Anthony had used was cool to the touch and rough, not quite ready to be painted.

'I want to move all this stuff to your Hideout,' Tony said.

'Our Hideout,' Loki corrected.

Anthony rolled his eyes. 'Yeah, yeah; whatever. I've just gotta bring some bots to help fit everything together.'

'I could do it with magic,' Loki offered, making Anthony raise his eyebrows. 'We have to figure out how to make your suit magic proof.'

'Yeah...' Anthony hummed, head tilted as he looked Loki over. 'If I explain how the suit fits together, you could put it together properly?'

'Yes,' Loki said.

'Okay,' Tony nodded, 'we'll do that, then. It'll save time. I still have to bring some more hardware over; work out the bugs in the Genesis suit's programming and all that.'

Loki just nodded and handed the gauntlet back, watching as Anthony put it back into its correct box. 'How many new suits have you created?' he asked while Anthony sealed the box. 'Or, rather, how many are you going to build?'

'Seven,' Anthony told him. 'Two that can only be operated by me, or by JARVIS if I'm knocked out during a fight, and five that are strictly JARVIS-operated suits. Those will look a bit different to
my two, and hopefully SHIELD and the Avengers will think that I'm your special body-guard suit while the others are just general back-up.

'I've already got a self-destruct programme written that just has to be inserted into the JARVIS-bots after I've built them and put them together,' Tony continued as he left the small, hidden workshop, Loki trailing after him.

'Self-destruct?' Loki questioned.

'Yeah, in case the Avengers- or Thor, more likely- manages to take one out and JARVIS can't get it back to our Hideout. JARVIS will be able to turn the self-destruct programme on if the power goes out, meaning that if the casing is cracked by any of SHIELD's scientists, it'll blow up; massive boom that'll hopefully take 'em all out,' Tony added with a snicker.

Loki smirked slowly and sat at one of the tables, folding his legs while Tony started fiddling with his computers. 'The darker parts of you are rather arousing,' he said.

Anthony jumped but turned to face him with a cocky grin. 'Oh, are they?' he drawled.

'Very,' Loki grinned. 'If I'd known that you were like this back when I invaded, I would have approached you sooner.'

'Hey, I approached you,' Tony waggled a finger at him. 'Don't forget that, princess.'

Loki rolled his eyes at the nickname.

'Anyway, it's probably better that we didn't join forces 'til now,' Tony continued. 'If we'd joined before, SHIELD would have been better prepared for an attack, what with them rushing about trying to stop your invasion and all. This way they're more reliant on the Avengers, aka me. By the time they figure out that I'm on your side- if they figure it out- it'll be too late. They might not like me, but they do trust me. They think I'm too narcissistic to work with anyone else.'

A smile tugged at Loki's lips as he looked Anthony over. Yes, he really should have joined forces with the human sooner; they could have started having fun much earlier. But Anthony was right, he supposed; this way, Tony was closer with the Avengers, giving him insider access that he wouldn't have had any earlier. Also, like he'd said; SHIELD might not like him, but they did trust him to a certain extent.

And that, in the end, would bring about their downfall.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: 'Tis Christmas in good old Sydney, Australia, so I decided to update. Happy holidays to all of you who are celebrating Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, or any other event that I'm not aware of. Basically, happy holidays to all!

Also, yesterday, after staying up for 27 hours, I added random graphics to some parts of this story. Yes, they are awful, but I couldn't help myself.

Anywho, cheers!

{Dreamer}
<< INCOMING CALL, STARK TOWER >

REROUTING > Potts, Virginia, Floor 61, Office 1 >

ORDER 15-16-X-RAY IN EFFECT > TRACING CALL >

TRACE BLOCKED > RETRACING CALL >

LOCATION IDENTIFIED: Bridgeport, Connecticut > ADDRESS BLOCKED >

IDENTIFYING CALLER >

CALLER IDENTIFIED: Coulson, Phillip, Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement and Logistics Division [S.H.I.E.L.D] Agent >

ORDER 77-6-WHISKEY-4 IN EFFECT > NOW RECORDING TELEPHONE CALL >

TRACE BLOCKED > RETRACING CALL >

NOW RECORDING TELEPHONE CALL >

TELEPHONE CALL 5 MINUTES, 44 SECONDS >

ERASING TRACE > TRACE ERASED >

ORDER 77-6-WHISKEY-5 IN EFFECT > SAVING TELEPHONE CALL TO SERVER 1.66-TANGO-SIERRA, PERSONAL SERVER OF STARK, ANTHONY EDWARD >

ACCESSING SERVER 1.66-TANGO-SIERRA

ENTER FIRST PASSWORD > PASSWORD ENTERED >

ENTER SECOND PASSWORD > PASSWORD ENTERED >

ENTER THIRD PASSWORD > PASSWORD ENTERED >

ENTER FOURTH PASSWORD > PASSWORD ENTERED >

IDENTIFYING USER > JUST A RATHER VERY INTELLIGENT SYSTEM [J.A.R.V.I.S] IDENTIFIED >

ACCESS GRANTED > TELEPHONE CALL SAVED TO SERVER 1.66-TANGO-SIERRA >

ORDER 77-6-WHISKEY-6 IN EFFECT > ALERTING STARK, ANTHONY EDWARD OF TELEPHONE CALL SAVED TO SERVER 1.66-TANGO-SIERRA >

STARK, ANTHONY EDWARD ALERTED >>
'Mr Stark.'

Tony shook his head rapidly, confused by the sudden loss of music. He was working on his Genesis suits, doing everything he could in his workshop before he moved the suits to Loki's- their- Hideout. Loki was out of the Tower under the guise of research, but was probably terrorising poor humanoids somewhere, and the Avengers were in various places that Tony didn't care about.

That just left Tony, blissfully alone, tinkering and wiring and looking up paint samples. He knew that he wanted the Genesis suits to be green and silver, but he hadn't decided on the exact shade of green yet. What colour were Loki's eyes, exactly...?

'Mr Stark.'

'Sorry,' Tony sighed and reached up to rub his eyes. He wasn't sure how long he'd been down here, this time. 'What is it, J?'

'Agent Coulson contacted Ms Potts four minutes ago. I recorded the conversation and saved it to your private server.'

'Good boy, JARVIS,' Tony grinned. He put his tools aside and pushed his seat across the workshop, spinning and rolling until he reached one of his computers. He dragged the older style keyboard towards himself and tapped away until he'd opened his personal server, something that only he and JARVIS had access to.

And even then it was drenched in security, passwords, viruses, and anything else Tony could think of to keep his things private. SHIELD and other want-to-be-hackers had never even come close to getting to his personal server. He had about a dozen decoy ones, and SHIELD had almost managed to crack the third one. Tony couldn't wait until they downloaded hundreds of gigabytes of cake recipes.

After entering a fair few passwords and identifying himself, Tony pulled up the record JARVIS had saved. 'What the hell is Coulson doing in Bridgeport?' Tony muttered.

'I believe that there may be a SHIELD base in Bridgeport, sir,' JARVIS answered.

'Huh,' Tony murmured. He flicked through the report before finding the saved file at the end. He double-clicked and the file opened into the correct programme, awaiting instruction before playing. When Tony clicked again, he settled back into his seat to listen;

'You've reached Pepper Potts, CEO of Stark Industries, how can I help you today?'

'Pepper, it's Agent Coulson.'

'Oh, Phil, hi. How are you?'

'I'm fine. I thought JARVIS always told you who was calling?'

'He usually does, but sometimes Tony's rerouted him to do... whatever it is Tony does when he's not blowing stuff up.'

Tony rolled his eyes.

'An assistant, then?'
'I had one, but Tony hit on her and scared her away. Well, he slept with her and then she moved on. Apparently sleeping with Tony was all she wanted to do. I haven’t bothered getting a new assistant yet. I’m more concerned with getting Tony one.'

'Problems?'

'You know Tony; he's slept with every assistant I've ever hired for him, including the male ones. I don't know why the media's so surprised about this Logan person.'

'We've heard about him. And seen the news, of course.'

'And?'

'The traces turned up clean, we have nothing to worry about.'

Tony frowned. Was Pepper aware that SHIELD were watching his every move? Did she know that the Avengers were reporting back to Coulson and Fury? If she did...

'You should be able to find him an assistant this time around,' Coulson continued after a brief silence. 'According to Agent Romanov, Stark's pretty hung up on Mr Thomas.'

'Well, we'll see how long it lasts. I just want Tony to find someone who wants him for more than his money.'

'And someone to keep him out of trouble.'

'That, too. But he hasn't been any trouble lately, has he?' Pepper asked, sounding worried. 'I saw the news reports about Loki's recent attack, but JARVIS assured me that everybody's okay, Tony included.'

'Agent Romanov was the only one who was really hurt, but she's recovering well,' Coulson said.

Pepper breathed out a sigh that was audible over the phone. 'Thank God. Last time you called it was because Tony had gotten some innocent woman's arm broken.'

'No, there's been none of that lately. I think Logan Thomas has been keeping Stark busy. But we're not sure how long that'll last.'

'What do you mean?'

'You know Stark, Pepper. Sooner or later he'll want to study whoever the Avengers are fighting and he'll put somebody in danger; either one of his team mates, or an innocent bystander. The World Security Council can't afford to have somebody like that on the team.'

'You've mentioned that before. But the team is Fury's call, isn't? I mean, he has final say?'

'Technically, yes,' Coulson said, 'and Director Fury takes advice from me, Agent Romanov, Agent Barton, and Agent Hill. But at the end of the day we report to the World Security Council. If they want Stark off the team, then he'll be booted.'

Tony sat forward, resting his hands on the table, fingers tapping out a random rhythm. So it wasn't really Fury who wanted Tony off the team; it was his bosses. Tony doubted that Fury, Coulson, or the Avengers had really put up much of a fight when they'd been given their various orders. The team had never truly liked him, and neither had Fury or Coulson. Hell, Fury hadn't even wanted him on the team; Tony had been needed in a time of crises.
Still, this just meant that Tony would definitely destroy the WSC after he and Loki had taken care of SHIELD. What research Tony had managed to compile had hinted at the WSC having friends in high places, and many, many resources, but it was still an organisation with less than twelve members. Hopefully it wouldn't take long to kill them all.

Tony had to rewind the recording when he realised that Coulson and Pepper had continued without him, and replayed Coulson's last sentence before continuing.

'So you definitely want Tony off the team,' Pepper said.

'Yes,' Coulson agreed. 'He's a great asset, Pepper, but he's too dangerous and you know it. Sooner or later he'll do something that'll get himself or somebody killed. It'd be better- safer- if we get him off the team now.'

'Tony won't like it,' Pepper said after a beat, 'he loves being on the Avengers.'

'Stark's feelings don't matter; we're talking about the greater good.'

'Okay, okay, I understand. But how are you going to convince Tony? He'll tell you piss off.'

'Swearing, Ms Potts?'

'Shit up, it's been a long day already.'

Coulson chuckled, and Tony gritted his teeth at the friendliness between his so-called friend and the SHIELD agent. He wondered how long they'd been talking behind his back; how long Pepper had been conspiring against him. JARVIS monitored everything, but he didn't record all of Pepper's calls and actions. She could have met with Coulson or Fury in person and Tony would never know.

'We've got Captain Rogers asking Tony to leave, or at least take a break. We're hoping that if Stark has a holiday, just steps back from the team a bit, he can come back saner than before. The rest of the team can handle things without him.'

Pepper was silent, until; 'You want me to convince Tony to take a break.'

'Yes.'

'Phil...'

'He trusts you, Pepper, you're his best friend.'

'I'm not sure about that. Not any more.'

'He still trusts you,' Coulson said. 'If you suggest him taking a holiday he'll listen; just... tell him to get out of the country for a bit and you'll mind everything.'

'JARVIS could be recording this, you do realise that, right? He doesn't listen in on my conversations, but Tony usually has certain phrases and words marked.'

'SHIELD has the call blocked; if JARVIS tries to trace it he'll be booted out.'

'Are you sure?'

'SHIELD knows what it's doing, Pepper.'

'This is Tony Stark we're talking about,' Pepper pointed out.
'Stark is good at what he does, true, but we have dozens of scientists working for us, Pepper. Don't worry about it.'

Pepper sighed. 'Okay, fine. I'll ask Tony to take a break from the Avengers. But only because I don't want him hurting himself or his team mates. Sometimes he gets so far into his own head that he doesn't realise that his actions have consequence.'

'Thank you, Pepper.'

'Yes, well let's just hope that Tony doesn't hate me for the suggestion.'

Coulson laughed. 'He could never hate you, Pepper.'

'Mm-hmm.'

'I'll let you go, I have work to finish.'

'Me, too. I'll see you for lunch soon, Phil. Just let me know when you're free.'

'We'll talk soon.'

Tony was seething. He wasn't sure he'd ever felt this fucking furious... no, wait, he had; when he'd discovered that Stane had ordered his assassination, then had ignored the video for his ransom. Yeah, Tony remembered feeling this angry and betrayed and downright murderous before.

Pepper was on SHIELD's side. Okay, she was on Coulson's side, but it was the same fucking thing. Coulson had spouted the various reasons Fury and Steve had used to get Tony to “take a break”. It was all just bullshit designed to get Tony off the team and get his technology, his suits. If Tony took a break, the Avengers would come up with new reasons again and again to get him to stay on break.

'JARVIS, pull up my schedule!' Tony ordered, voice little more than a growl.

'Yes, Mr Stark.' JARVIS complied, and soon Tony's calendar- created and kept up-to-date by Pepper- was on-screen.

Tony looked it over before saying, 'Cancel anything that I'm not one-hundred percent needed at, JARVIS.' The AI did, and a large chunk was wiped out, only three spots of red left; a meeting with the executive board members of Stark Industries in a week, followed by two weeks blocked out for a trip to England and more meetings. 'Finishing the Genesis suits just became Priority One, JARVIS.' Tony said, exiting his calendar and logging-out of his private server. 'I want SHIELD fucking destroyed in less than a year. Is Loki on Midgard?'

There was a pause, before; 'Not that I can find a trace of, sir.'

'When he gets back, tell me immediately,' Tony said.

'Yes, Mr Stark.'

'Pull up all the information you've gathered about SHIELD's bases,' Tony ordered, glaring at the screen in front of himself. 'As soon as the Genesis suits are ready, Loki and I are fucking destroying one.'
'Are you calm now?' Loki asked.

Tony groaned and buried his face in Loki's neck. 'You broke me.'

Loki smirked. He'd returned to Midgard only hours earlier from Vanaheimr, where he'd visited an old acquaintance to gather some ingredients for a few potions he wanted to work on. He'd gotten a cab to Tony's Tower, smiled at Barton when he ran into the agent in the elevator- and had to stop himself from simply breaking the useless human's neck- and then been told by JARVIS that Tony had holed himself up in his workshop for the past three days.

Loki had walked in to find Anthony exhausted from too much work and a lack of sleep, and had been worried until Anthony told him why; Pepper Potts, Tony's “friend”, had joined forces with Coulson. Anthony doubted that she truly knew what SHIELD was up to, but she'd still agreed with Coulson to get Anthony off the team.

Loki understood the betrayal, the deep-rooted hurt, that Tony was currently feeling. Being betrayed by a friend, by somebody who was supposed to always be on your side, was a hurt that never went away or got easier to deal with. Anthony had shared his plans to destroy a SHIELD base as soon as possible, and Loki had gone along with it for a number of reasons.

Anthony needed to take out his anger on something; why not take it out on SHIELD? It was better to deal with this pain and move on than let it fester; Loki knew from experience. Also, working on his suits, and on their plans, would give Tony something to focus on; the last thing either of them needed was Tony going crazy and trying to kill his friend.

Loki hummed under his breath and glanced down at Tony. The Midgardian was currently sprawled over his chest, looking thoroughly fucked. After watching Anthony race around his workshop and crash into about fourteen different things, Loki had dragged him upstairs, into Anthony's bedroom, and had proceeded to ravish him multiple times, thoroughly. Now, finally, Anthony was quiet, relaxed, eyes closed and breathing steady.

'I still wanna kill Pepper,' Tony muttered. 'I can't believe she'd do this to me.'

Loki had listened to the conversation between Potts and Coulson that JARVIS had recorded. 'It seems that she isn't aware of SHIELD's true plans.'

'Yeah, and that's why I won't kill her,' Tony said. 'She thinks she's helping me. That still doesn't make it okay; friends don't go behind each other's backs and plan with fucking a-hole agents.'

'What will you do with her, when we destroy SHIELD?' Loki asked. It was something he had thought about in the past; he knew that Anthony had dated Potts briefly, and they had been friends for years. There was some old feelings still there, no doubt.

'That's her decision,' Tony shrugged. 'If she actively sides with SHIELD, I'll ignore her and only kill her if necessary. I won't like it, and it'll hurt, but I'll do it. Nobody gets away with betraying me. If she decides to stay on my side, then she stays.'

'I doubt that Miss Potts will agree with you killing innocent people for our cause.'

'Yeah,' Anthony sighed, 'I don't think she'll like it, either. But we'll see what happens.'
'Very well,' Loki said. He rubbed a hand up Anthony's back, smiling slightly when the younger god relaxed further into the mattress. 'When are we going to England?'

'A few days,' Anthony mumbled through a yawn. 'Pepper's coming.'

'Try not to tear her throat out.'

'No promises,' Tony muttered.

Loki smiled and patted the man's back. 'Sleep, Anthony. We will plan more tomorrow, when you're rested.'

'Mm,' Tony hummed. 'We should have waffles for breakfast,' he said before snoring loudly.

Loki chuckled and glanced up at the ceiling. 'JARVIS, do Midgardians deliver... waffles?'

'Yes, sir,' the AI said. 'Would you like me to order them when Mr Stark wakes?'

'Order them around eight am,' Loki said. 'Anthony and I will need the entire day to plan our trip to England.'

'Yes, Mr Lie-smith,' JARVIS replied.

With that sorted, Loki shifted a bit on the bed before letting his own eyes droop, sleep claiming him swiftly.

{oOo}

It didn't take as long as Loki thought it would to plan their trip to England; only half the day, with the rest spent in bed. Well, they spent some of their time in bed. Mostly they pushed each other against various bits of furniture throughout Tony's penthouse and used their mouths and hands to send each other crazy.

Anthony had a few responsibilities when they reached England that he simply couldn't put off; meetings with the men and women who would run the extended English branch of Stark Industries, meetings with the local media to further promote his business, and appearances at the construction site. The various meetings spanned the entire fortnight that Anthony was going to be in England, but there were a few days that he was free.

Tony had mentioned that he'd probably have to put some public appearances in, because no doubt SHIELD would be keeping an eye on him, but when Anthony could get away, all Loki had to do was teleport them from the hotel room to their Hideout, and they could work in secret for longer stretches of time than they could now.

It was a given that Loki was going with Tony, but Rogers apparently hadn't gotten that... memo, Loki believed the saying was. He and Anthony had needed sustenance after their first round against the large windows that overlooked New York, and so once again ventured down to Rogers' floor to see what they could steal. Loki made a note to put a regular order in with JARVIS; at least that way he wouldn't have to see Rogers or the other Avengers every time he wanted to eat after fucking
Anthony.

Rogers was there, of course, sitting in his living space drawing in a large book with a pencil. Barton was sitting in the corner on a large, oil-stained blanket, cleaning his quiver, bow and arrows, and Romanov was on the lounge near Rogers, her arm in a cast and the bruises on her face still healing.

Loki had to bite back a smirk when all three looked at him and Anthony; Romanov looked rather fetching covered in various shades of brown, purple, green and yellow. One day, and soon, Loki would make sure to give Barton a matching set.

'Tony,' Rogers said, a small smile on his face.

'Hey all!' Tony called. 'So, uh, me and Logan ate everything in the penthouse, and we're here to steal your food.'

'Technically it's your food, Tony,' Rogers said. 'You pay for it, after all.'

'Some of it,' Tony corrected. 'SHIELD gives you a salary, don't they?'

Rogers just nodded and went back to his book, leaving Tony and Loki free to head into the kitchen.

Thor was nowhere in sight, so Loki used a very small amount of Jötunn magic to check for any listening devices in Rogers' kitchen. He was getting better at forgoing his Asgardian magic in favour of his Jötunn magic, but it was still somewhat difficult, pushing past the magic he was more familiar with in favour of something darker and colder.

He only found JARVIS' various sensors dotted around the room, so felt safe asking, 'You pay for all their things?'

'Yeah,' Anthony sighed from where he was already rooting through the refrigerator. 'They kinda invited themselves to live here, remember?' he said, voice pitched low to avoid alerting the Avengers. 'They just started putting orders through JARVIS and not paying me back, and eventually I just kinda... let them do it. Besides, it makes it look like I want them here, which makes them less likely to suspect me of being up to anything.'

'Hmm,' Loki hummed. He remembered the telephone call between Coulson and Potts; Potts had truly believed that Anthony enjoyed being part of the team- Loki could always detect lies, and Potts hadn't been telling one. 'Clever,' Loki eventually said.

Tony chuckled and pulled back, arms loaded with various products. He dumped it all on the kitchen island and started going through it. He and Loki bickered good-naturedly about what they wanted to take with them, and they'd just divided everything up when Rogers and Barton stepped into the kitchen.

'Could you grab the milk?' Rogers asked Loki, that same almost-there smile he usually wore around “Logan” tugging at his lips.

'What for?' Tony asked as Loki ducked down to get it... milk was the one stored in the cardboard container, right? Loki quickly read the label and smiled in satisfaction.

'Hot cocoa,' Rogers said. 'It always made me feel better when I was a kid, and I thought it might cheer Natasha up.'

Barton snorted. 'Breaking Loki's arm would make Nat feel better.'
'It'd make us all feel better,' Tony said.

Loki leaned against the counter as Anthony hunted around for something to carry their food back to the penthouse in- he also started going through the cupboards, pulling down packets of what Loki knew were chips and popcorn. Rogers went about making whatever “hot cocoa” was, and Barton watched, apparently just there for moral support, or something equally dull.

Loki hadn't realised that he was staring at Barton, tapping his lips slightly, until Barton looked at him. The agent frowned, clearly confused, and then Loki watched as his eyes went dull, the blue deepening slightly before being washed away.

Loki cursed silently in Old Norse before glancing about. Stark's attention was still on the chips he was trying to shove into a bag, and Rogers was staring at the electric kettle that was currently boiling water. Loki turned back to Barton to see the short human's left hand twitching, no doubt trying to go for a quiver that wasn't there.

Teeth gritted, Loki narrowed his eyes and subtly held a hand up against his hip, palm facing Barton. He thought the words needed and pushed with his Jötunn magic, hoping that it was too little for Thor to sense; or, he hoped that Thor was unable to detect Loki's Jötunn magic. It wasn't like Loki had used it all that often around the blonde idiot.

Magic tingled along Loki's fingertips and he watched Barton jolt slightly, both hands twitching before, finally, the connection was cut off and Barton came back to himself. Loki glanced off to the right, appearing fascinated with the far window, and watched from the corner of his eye as Barton reached up to rub his temples roughly.

'What's wrong?' Rogers' voice came from before Loki, and Loki tuned back in.

'Nothing,' Barton grunted. 'Just got a... migraine, I think.'

'Should stop hooting at so many people, Tweety Bird,' Anthony commented. That earned him a scowl from Barton and a slightly disappointed look from Rogers.

'Go sit with Natasha,' Rogers suggested, 'I'll get you some asprin.'

Barton just nodded and left, Loki watching him go. There was silence once more, apart from Stark's various curses as he had to grab more bags, of course.

'So, Tony,' Rogers said after a brief silence, 'Pepper said you're going to England soon.'

Anthony raised his eyebrows and Loki thought he was going to make a comment about Potts and Rogers speaking about him behind his back. Instead he said, 'Yeah, heading there in about a week. Logan can't wait to see me being a tourist.'

Rogers' eyebrows climbed and he turned to Loki. 'You're going with him?'

'Yes,' Loki said.

'Of course he is,' Tony added, 'he was born there. And I mentioned it a while ago, remember?'

'Yes...' Rogers said slowly, 'I just hadn't realised you were serious. Isn't this a business trip?'

'Duh,' Anthony rolled his eyes. 'But I still get to have some fun. Between meetings Logan's gonna show me around.'
'I see,' Rogers said. He looked mildly confused, and Loki wondered if he- and the other Avengers- still thought that his and Anthony's relationship had an expiration date. He could see their reasoning, of course; Anthony wasn't well-known for his committed relationship. Still, they were supposed to be his friends; the least they could do was act like it.

'You'll have the whole Tower to yourself for two weeks,' Anthony added. Rogers just nodded. Loki knew that Anthony had set up countless security measurements to keep Barton and Romanov out of his things, including the workshop and JARVIS'... servers, Loki believed Anthony had called them. Loki himself had already added a few wards with his Jötunn magic. He only hoped that Thor couldn't detect them.

'Well, I hope you have fun,' Rogers said. 'Just take it easy. It'll be good for you.'

'Yeah,' was all Anthony said, but Loki saw the sudden tension in his shoulders. Thankfully Rogers chose that moment to leave with three cups of liquid, and Anthony breathed out a sigh of relief. 'God he's an asshole.'

'Indeed,' Loki agreed.

Anthony turned to him, smiling. 'I can't wait 'til we- holy shit!'

Loki quickly looked up at him. 'What?'

Anthony jumped across the kitchen and wrenched one of Loki's hand up, looking down. Loki followed the Midgardian's gaze and his own eyes widened when he realised that the tips of his fingers were blue. 'Oh.'

Chapter End Notes

**Author's Note:** I did the whole JARVIS thing at the beginning because it seemed fun and I wanted to show how many various orders Tony has in place to watch those around him and protect his things. Hopefully it worked.

Thanks for the continued support, I appreciate it!

{Dreamer}
'What happened?' Anthony asked.

'Not here,' Loki replied and withdrew his hand. He shoved it into the pocket of his jeans and said, 'Do you have everything?'

Anthony stared at him, brown eyes filled with concern, and Loki's magic- Asgardian and Jötunn-sang beneath his skin. Loki broke their gaze, and he heard Anthony huff.

'Yeah... you not gonna help?'

'I suppose I shall,' Loki drawled.

Anthony snorted, but didn't say anything else as he and Loki collected the bags of food. Anthony waved half-heartedly at Rogers, Barton and Romanov as they left, and Loki risked a quick glance at the bird; Barton was still rubbing his head, looking both frustrated and confused, but Rogers and Romanov didn't seem tense, so Loki relaxed slightly. The ride up to Anthony's penthouse was silent, but it didn't last long; as soon as they were inside, the elevator doors shut behind them, Anthony rounded on Loki.

'Okay, spit it out.'

Loki sighed and headed for the kitchen, Tony following. 'There is a... slight problem, between Barton and me,' he admitted.

'What?' Tony said, looking confused.

'You know that I was in his head during the invasion,' Loki said. He dumped the bags on the kitchen island, Tony following suit.

'Yeah...' Tony said slowly, drawing the word out. He folded his arms across his chest. 'So what?'

'That connection was severed when Romanov hit Barton,' Loki said. 'It knocked the Tesseract's hold free.'

'I know,' Tony said, 'I studied the Tesseract and your sceptre and all that crap after you were carted off back to Asgard. It was why I thought that you might have been controlled, too, because the sceptre messed with Bruce and all he did was hold it.'

Loki just blinked slowly at him and Tony waved a hand.

'Never mind, I'll show you my research later; continue.'

'Even though the connection has been severed, the... opening, you could call it, is still there,' Loki explained. 'Whatever the Tesseract creates- whether it's a pathway from Asgard to Midgard, or a connection between one mind and another- remains for a dozen or so years and only fades after some time has passed.'

Anthony was frowning, brown eyes narrowed slightly. 'So... even though the sceptre is no longer connecting yours and Barton's minds together and to the Tesseract, the... port is basically still
there,' he mused. 'It's like building a tunnel; you knock the middle out, but the two holes leading through the mountain are still there.'

'I... yes,' Loki said. Stark's words were crude, but basically correct.

'Okay,' Tony said, 'I get that. But what's that got to do with your fingers being blue?'

Loki raised both hands to look, and sighed in relief when he saw that his fingers were pale once more. 'I had to use Jötunn magic to stop Barton from reconnecting our minds.'

Stark's frown deepened. 'Excuse me?'

'Whenever he's around me, he feels a pull towards me, as I do towards him,' Loki said. 'However, I have better control of my mind, and my magic helps me ignore the pull. Barton may be talented, but he's Midgardian; useless against magical influence. Sometimes when he's around me, my magic and his mind try to reconnect us. It makes Barton lose chunks of time because either I wipe the memory away, or the pull of us connecting leaves him disorientated.'

'Huh,' Anthony blinked. 'Wait, didn't this happen before? Back when you first met the Avengers as Logan Thomas. Barton went all weird and you... did something.'

'I did,' Loki said. 'The first sign of something happening to Barton is his eyes glazing over, like when he was under the influences of the Tesseract. I simply use my Jötunn magic to sever the connection and he goes back to normal.'

'Only with a migraine,' Anthony commented.

Loki shrugged. 'As I said, Barton's Midgardian; his mind isn't capable of fighting something like the Tesseract.'

'That's... really, really interesting,' Anthony said. There was a gleam in his eyes, a spark that, if nurtured correctly, would turn into something... incredible. Loki saw it whenever he and Anthony spoke about their plans, or when Anthony explained his new suits to Loki.

'What are you thinking?' Loki asked.

Anthony smirked at him. 'This connection with Barton... can we use it against him? And the Avengers?'

Loki tilted his head as he thought. 'We could,' he said after a beat. 'The connection, or rather, lack-of-connection, makes Barton vulnerable to me. I can easily ignore it and ensure that we're never connected again, but he can't.'

'And whenever he tries to reconnect, he loses time, gets a headache, and basically zones out,' Tony said. 'We could totally use that during our fights, Loki! Barton's always their backup because of how good he is with his bow; all you have to do is teleport to him and fuck him up a bit. That'd cut their backup in half, because Barton's worth a dozen SHIELD agents.'

'And I could use it later, after we've destroyed SHIELD and you've revealed your true intentions,' Loki said. 'Well, that's if Barton lives that long.'

Tony laughed and clapped his hands together. His mood was infectious and Loki found himself smiling. 'This is awesome,' Anthony declared. 'We can even turn Barton against the Avengers!' He paused to look at Loki. 'Can you magically influence him again? Even without the Tesseract and sceptre?'
'I could,' Loki nodded, 'however, I would prefer not to; my magic despises entering anybody's mind.'

Anybody but Anthony's, Loki thought with a silent sigh.

'Oh,' Tony pouted, but he quickly moved on. 'No matter, we can still use it against him. I can't wait!' He cheered again before he started unpacking the food they'd taken from Rogers. Loki leaned against the kitchen island and watched.

When Stark ordered JARVIS to play some music, and then started singing along, Loki chuckled. His magic was starting to hum again, and Loki could almost feel Anthony's magic reacting. But Stark was still too young, too inexperienced, his magic not used to being free.

Soon, Loki thought. He would have to tell Anthony about their bond soon. Because sooner rather than later, Anthony's magic would reach out. And there was nothing Loki could truly do to stop it.

Not that he wanted to.

{oOo}

England was nice, though Anthony immediately started complaining about the weather. Potts ignored him, and Loki took delight in watching Anthony scowl at her every time the woman's back was turned. It wasn't that Loki enjoyed the fact that Anthony had been betrayed yet again... he just enjoyed this vicious streak that Anthony portrayed every so often.

Anthony owned his own aeroplane- a private jet, he and Potts called it- so they were able to bypass the masses, fly in comfort, and disembark into security and then a car Potts had hired.

Potts went over Anthony's schedule, and Anthony drew up his own on a StarkPad as the woman talked. Loki watched, his body turned into Tony's, as the Midgardian added things like “Personal Time” and “Personal Time #2” into the slots when he had no obligations. Loki wondered what the difference was, but decided to ask Anthony when they were alone.

Loki had made sure to research England and the area that Logan Thomas had been born thoroughly before arriving, just in case anybody asked. It would do no good to be asked a simple question and not have the answer. Soon enough they arrived at the hotel they would be staying at, and Potts left them to their own devices. Anthony's meetings didn't start until the following morning, but she had her own to attend.

'Pretty nice, I suppose,' Tony mused when they reached their room. It was a large space, set out much like Anthony's penthouse back in New York, but without the spectacular views and warmth of a home.

Loki frowned slightly as he watched Anthony wander around the room, peering out windows and inspecting the television. He wondered when Stark's penthouse had become home... and how much longer it would be. He and Tony had agreed to continue their partnership even after SHIELD and the World Security Council had been taken care of... would that include Loki staying in the Tower?

'Hey, what's got you thinkin' so hard?' Anthony's voice drew him from his thoughts.
Loki smirked lightly and turned his gaze on the Midgardian. 'I was just imagining what I could do to you here, in this space, all alone...'

Tony returned his smirk, though his was more of a wide, lecherous grin. 'You can do whatever you want to me, Lo-Lo.'

Loki rolled his eyes and sat on one of the armchairs in the spacious living room. 'Let us go over your schedule.'

'God,' Tony sighed, 'you and Pepper are all about schedules, aren't you?'

Loki scowled at the comparison to that mortal, but let it slide when Tony hopped onto the couch to the corner of him and grabbed his StarkPad from where he'd dumped it atop his suitcase.

'Reighty-o,' Tony said. He started scrolling, fingers working quickly over the device in a way that Loki hadn't quite accomplished himself yet. Soon he had his schedule pulled up, and Loki once more saw the days over the coming fortnight blocked out in either red, green or purple. 'So, red is meetings, events and crap I can't get out of,' Tony explained, 'green is actual time that we should probably spend sight-seeing and in the hotel, just in case someone checks and notices that we're gone every other hour. Purple is time we can spend in the Hideout practising magic and such.'

'I see,' Loki mused as he looked it over. 'You have our time sufficiently sorted, then.'

'Yup,' Anthony said, making the last letter pop.

Loki tapped his finger against the screen, scrolling through the current day and into the next. 'It seems we have free time until nine am tomorrow.'

'Well, I have free time until nine,' Tony corrected. 'I've got three meetings tomorrow from nine 'til two, then an hour break, followed by another meeting. I'll be free from six pm 'til six am the following morning.'

'And you've blocked that out in purple- magic,' Loki said.

Tony nodded. 'Pepper won't expect me to go anywhere after an entire day of meetings, not with you here. She'll think we'll be in here all night fucking and ordering room service. We should probably teleport back quickly to actually do that.'

'Hmm,' Loki hummed and tried to work out just how far they currently were from the Hideout. Loki could teleport them the distance, but four times in quick succession would put a strain on him and his magic. 'If we returned we would have to stay for two or so hours for me to recover from teleporting so often.'

'Fair enough,' Tony nodded. 'We just gotta be back about an hour before my meetings start the following day, so... seven am or so? That'll give me time to rest and be a bit presentable for whoever I'm meeting with.'

'Very well,' Loki said. 'Tonight; are we going to the Hideout?'

'Hell, yeah,' Tony growled. 'I've gotta finish my suit.'

He had been working on his Genesis designs, both his own and the JARVIS-operated ones, since Potts' telephone call with Coulson. Anthony had thrown himself into his work a fervour that Loki suspected would be manic on anyone else. However, Anthony was able to channel his entire focus into one project, and Loki got to watch as the bits of suit- the gauntlets, the wires, the armour- were
slowly but surely moulded and shaped into a functioning suit. Anthony still had a lot of work to do, but he would be finished soon.

'We gotta make it magic-proof,' Tony added after a moment of silence, 'which means I gotta fucking work out magic.'

Loki could always just ward Anthony's suit, but that would limit Anthony's ability to use magic himself. If Anthony's magic couldn't break through Loki's wards it would try harder, harder, again and again until Anthony's raw magic was exposed. And that would, of course, make Anthony's suit unusable.

'It seems that you really do have to figure out how to trace and study magic,' Loki mused.

Tony smirked at him. 'Told ya it was important.'

Loki rolled his eyes. 'Very well, we shall spend tonight with you scanning me and whatever else you need to do. Perhaps if I look into it, too, we can figure this out sooner.'

'Well it's about damn time you pulled your weight,' Tony muttered. Loki stretched out to kick the genius, who yelped and scowled. Loki just grinned toothily. 'Whatever,' Tony rolled his eyes, 'how about we order some room service, then put up a “do not disturb” sign, and have JARVIS watch over things while we head out?'

'Very well,' Loki said.

Anthony nodded in satisfaction and stood to do just that, apparently having already decided what they would be eating.

No matter, Loki thought. He just wanted to eat and teleport to their Hideout to recommence working. There was something oddly thrilling about studying magic Anthony's way. Loki was one of the best authorities on magic in the Nine Realms, but he knew without a doubt that nobody had ever studied it the way Anthony was. It could only prove useful and add to Loki's already extensive knowledge.

Loki smiled as Anthony stood in the corner of the room, a telephone pressed to his ear as he made an order. If they figured out how to detect magic Anthony's way soon, then they could move onto Anthony learning how to use his own magic. And then they could start destroying SHIELD's bases.

Loki really couldn't wait. The destruction would be beautiful.

{oOo}

Tony already had various magic sensors designed and built, so he started going over the information he'd written down about their innards, how they worked, and the readings he'd already taken from Loki. He tinkered with one in particular, a large, square box sensor that was made from various components of a computer tower, a television, and various other odds and ends. It had a large screen mounted on one side that displayed information, and a single chord connected it to the computers Tony had set up in the Hideout; the computers projected the same information and then
broke it down, ran it against other stuff and through JARVIS, so that everything was scrutinised, studied, and filed away for later review.

A lot of readings had already been taken, reviewed and stored, but every time Tony finished fiddling with the sensor he re-scanned Loki. It was boring work for Loki, but he did it without complaint, shifting between his Æsir and Jötunn forms, creating balls of magic, ice, wind, manipulating fire from the lighter Tony handed him. He shimmered in and out of existence, created clones and then made them disappear with a twist of his wrist. Smoke surrounded him and sucked him in, hiding him in shadows, only to disappear as Loki stepped out and into the clear light of the many floating balls of colour that hovered overhead.

Tony got many, many scans; many clear scans, he was sure of it! But everything was muddled with all the other readings that the scanner picked up. Tony scowled as he tapped at another reading, various coloured lines representing the different energies that the scanner had sampled.

Loki was glancing over his shoulder, eyes flicking over the screen, but Tony ignored him in favour of comparing the most recent scans to the ones he'd taken the day before.

'What do the lines mean?' Loki asked.

'Energy, readings,' Tony said, 'like, um... the world around us broken down into a base level reading. That's your heart beat, that's my heartbeat, those are the various minerals in the rocks around us...'

He pointed at line after line, then traced his finger to the side, where a column of text was constantly scrolling across the screen.

'I see,' Loki mused, 'are you sure that all of your reading are accounted for?'

Tony frowned. 'What?' He turned to look at Loki, who's eyes were trained on the screen.

'Can you, without a doubt, trace every single reading to its source?' Loki questioned.

'Uh... yes?' Tony said. Of course he could. He was Tony fucking Stark and he knew how to read the information given by the sensor that he fucking built.

'Anthony,' Loki said, patiently, like Tony wasn't about to snap from sheer frustration, 'I have explained to you that magic is in everything, yes?' Tony nodded slowly. 'From the dirt beneath your feet to the trees lining your pavements. Even the buildings around you, the older ones, have magic in them; magic can be beaten down, but it cannot be erased. Slowly it will crawl back into a structure to reclaim what you Midgardians stole.'

'Okay...'

Loki sighed and leaned against the table, shoulder to the sensor, eyes on Tony. 'Anthony,' he said, his tone even slower before.

'I'm gonna fucking deck you, Loki,' Tony growled.

The Trickster smirked, as though daring Tony to try. 'Magic is in everything,' Loki said slowly, clearly, voice firm. 'If it is in everything, then chances are that you have already picked it up and are simply reading it as something else.'

Tony blinked at him. 'What?'
'Magic is something that you Midgardians are unable to use yet,' Loki said, 'yet some of you can, such as you, and von Doom. I very much doubt that in all the years that you people have been studying the planet around you, you have yet to actually successfully scan magic. I believe that you have, multiple times, but don't actually know what the energy you've picked up is.'

'Loki...'

'Background radiation,' Loki interrupted. 'Explain it to me again.'

Tony rolled his eyes but complied; 'Background radiation is the all-present ionising radiation that we, the people of Midgard, are exposed to every single day we're alive. Both natural and artificial background radiation is different depending on location and altitude. Radioactive material is found in everything throughout nature, like in soul, rocks, water, the air and vegetation. There's internal exposure and external exposure, because basically we eat certain things and our bodies emit certain things, and then our bodies are effected by things like microwaves, pollution, even cigarette smoke.'

Loki listened, completely silent, eyes on Tony as he spoke.

'The term “background radiation” can mean different things when used in different contexts,' Tony said. 'It can simply be used to refer to the cosmic microwave background radiation, a nearly uniform glow that fills the sky in the microwave part of the spectrum- stars, galaxies, and other objects, for example. In a lab or workshop, like this one, “background radiation” refers to the measured value from any source that affects an instrument when the radiation source sample is not being measured. Basically it means establishing a stable value by multiple samples, usually a before and after sample measurement which are then compared to the actual measurement you're studying.'

Loki blinked slowly, absorbing everything when Tony finished speaking. After a beat he said, 'Basically you take samples from the area you're in, and then when you scan me, you compare it to the samples taken before and after to eliminate the background radiation your scanners have picked up.'

'Uh... yeah, basically,' Tony nodded.

'Oh,' Loki said, his eyes lighting up, a grin overtaking his face. 'Oh. I see, now.'

'Er... you do?' Tony asked.

'Yes,' Loki said. 'What you have to do is scan my raw magic, first Asgardian, then Jötunn. After that I will look through every single reading you have taken. Anthony, the problem is that your base samples- your base samples- are still picking up my magic as well as the magic in the soil around us. My magic never turns off, and it lingers even when I'm not actively using it.'

'There may be a spike in my magic readings when I actively use a spell, but it seems that your sensor isn't quite refined enough to tell the different,' Loki continued. 'We have to isolate my magic, both forms, and then fine-tune your sensor to read only active spells. Then we can scan for Midgardian magic and should be able to work out the differences between Midgardian magic being actively used, and it simply existing in the world around us.'

Tony had been steadily growing more and more exited the longer Loki spoke until he was practically vibrating. Oh... of fucking course! Thor himself could detect the active magic Loki used, but not the magic Loki left simply by walking around; his senses weren't fine-tuned enough for that. But it didn't mean that Loki didn't leave magic wherever he went!
Magic was in everything, meaning that Tony's sensors were constantly picking it up.

BACKGROUND FUCKING RADIATION!

'Loki, I fucking love you!' Tony declared and the kissed the Trickster soundly. Loki made a soft noise of confusion against Tony's lips, and looked slightly dumbfounded when Tony pulled back and whirled on his sensor.

Yes, okay, so Tony had apparently just declared his love for Loki, but there was no time for that! MAGIC!

'Loki, go stand in the corner and use raw magic,' Tony ordered. 'I'll scan it a few times, then compare it to what we already have.'

There was a brief moment of silence, apart from Tony tapping away at various keyboards and monitors and his magic sensor, before Loki said a soft, 'Very well,' and moved to do just that.

We'll discuss my slip later, Tony decided, there's science and magic to be done!

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: I did research background radiation, but not a whole heap; basically I just Googled some stuff, so... yeah, I probably got some things wrong, and I twisted what I did read to suit my needs. Artistic licence! Also, this is fanfiction; I'll make up whatever the hell I want, especially when magic's involved.

Anywho, I know that a fair amount of readers want the Tony-and-Loki-blow-up-SHIELD-bases chapters, and I promise that they're coming. I didn't think that the whole magic/Tony's new suits would take up so many chapters. Thank you for waiting so patiently, I appreciate it. And I promise that Tony and Loki start blowing stuff up in chapter 25, and after that there'll be violence and stuff every second or third chapter. PROMISE!

{Dreamer}
'So I'm gonna use raw magic?' Tony asked, just to be sure.

He felt Loki nod against his back. They'd moved to the bed and Loki had fluffed up the many blankets and pillows before leaning against the wall. Tony was between his legs as usual. Loki had spent a fair few hours the night before showing Tony how to dive into his mindscape, and then how to get out of it. He'd also taught him ways to block it so that Tony wouldn't accidentally fall into his own mind while in public or around other people.

Tony could now feel his magic, all day every day. It was a soft, muted glow, a feeling that was kinda hard to describe. It was just there constantly, a presence on the very edge of Tony's mind, some type of... of feeling that reminded Tony that his magic was there. There was also a sharp, cold kind of feeling present whenever he got closer to his mindscape, which Loki explained- after a quick look himself- was the element from Tony's arc reactor. Yet more background radiation that was making it difficult for Tony to get readings on his own magic.

Anyway, Tony was now vaguely aware of his magic, which was awesome. Loki said that it meant Tony was getting familiar with his magic, more in-touch with it, which would therefore make it
easier to wield. Tony had already proven that he could; now he just had to learn how to harness his raw magic so that he could twist it into spells, wards and enchantments. There were differences between those three, apparently.

Tony had found that he always felt his magic better when he was close to Loki; when Loki was in his general vicinity, Tony felt warmer. When they had skin-on-skin contact, Tony's chest felt hot, with a sharp cold snap from his arc reactor. It was like Tony's magic rose to the surface whenever Loki was around, and Loki had explained that it was simply their magic reacting to one another.

Which... okay, it wasn't that Tony necessarily thought that Loki was a lying son of a bitch, but his explanation didn't quite make sense. Why would it be Loki's magic that Tony's reacted to? Why not the very weak magic that Thor had? Or even the magic that no-doubt flowed through the Avengers, simple because they were living beings and part of Midgard? Why didn't Tony feel constantly warm just wandering around the fucking planet?

He hadn't said as much to Loki, just eyed him carefully before getting comfortable. There was something about Loki's explanations that rung hollow, but Tony had decided not to focus on it just yet. If Loki was lying, he probably had a good reason to. And sooner or later Loki would share, or Tony would figure it out. He always did.

'Yes, you're going to use raw magic,' Loki finally answered Tony's question.

Tony shook his head, ridding himself of all thought, and then sunk back into Loki's cool, firm chest. He was already going through the breathing exercises Loki had taught him.

'Raw magic is dangerous, which is why I will have to be in constant contact with you,' Loki said. 'Above everything, Anthony- and what you must always remember - is to remain calm. Calm is control; remaining calm will make your magic calm. Lose control and you could kill yourself.'

'Mm,' Tony hummed. He'd already sank further in, still aware of his physical body but well on his way to delving deep inside.

'Go,' Loki whispered into his ear and Tony let himself fall quickly. It was a controlled descent, Tony completely aware of everything happening. His body disappeared, Loki's lingering yet soon following. Everything was dark and thoughts swirled across Tony's mind. Tony studied them, then pushed them away, imagining sliding them into large files inside his head.

He then went through his various physical sensations, not wanting his body to ache like it had last time; when Tony wasn't aware of his body, his muscles started to hurt from being locked in one position for too long. Tony made a note to keep an eye on that before going through his emotions, feelings examined and then tucked away.

Finally, Tony's magic swarmed into view. Faster than the last time, and seemingly larger, his magic now spreading throughout his entire body rather than just remaining in his chest. It was like acknowledging his magic had given it free rein, had let it travel and explore and seep into every pour of Tony's body.

Tony grinned at the thought, and then felt a spark of green, then blue, the two colours licking at the back of him; 'Stop grinning, Stark, and focus ,' Loki's smooth, accented voice echoed throughout his head.

Right, Tony thought, sorry.
'It is fine.'

Tony went to laugh, but then stopped himself. *Focus, Tony! Don't laugh at gorgeous Norse Gods.*

Tony once again examined the emotion, then let it go. He turned his attention to his magic and watched in fascination as Loki’s own seemed to... acknowledge it, yet on some level ignore it. Tony could see and *feel* Loki’s magic, both Æsir and Jötunn, *in him*, but at the same time it remained completely separate. It was a cold feeling, a feeling of *wrong*, and Tony didn't understand.

But he let the feeling go like Loki had taught him, instead immersing himself in his magic.

Loki had talked him through it before, but it was so very different in practice. Tony felt... whole, when connected with his magic, complete in a way he'd never felt before. Magic tickled along his every sense, wrapped around him like a warm blanket. Tony's fingers tingled with the raw power of what his very body could create and channel, and it took Tony some time to get used to it and then ignore it.

What a fucking power trip.

'* Harness your magic, Anthony,' Loki whispered across his mind. 'Think your magic into your palm; coax it into your chest, down your arm, and let it pool in your hand.'*

Tony did as asked, grinning in his mindscape at the way his magic *playfully* danced throughout him, flowing down his arm only to retreat, repeating the action as though he and Tony were playing a game of tag. There was a distinct edge of chaos to Tony's magic, a tangible taste on Tony's tongue. His magic wanted out; wanted to flow and destroy and *exist*. But it listened to Tony, let him push it down into his hand.

Tony wasn't sure how long it took, but eventually Loki whispered, '*Slowly pull away from yourself, Anthony; return to the physical, but keep contact with your magic. Keep it where it is.*'

Tony breathed in and out smoothly, deeply, doing as asked; the countless times he'd meditated with Loki certainly helped, and Tony took back every bad thing he'd ever said about meditation; it was *fucking awesome*.

Tony had done this before, but not on this level; he felt more magic than he'd ever used before pool into his physical hand, and by the time he'd come back to himself he felt physically drained like he had the first time. There was a distinct spark, though; *power*, swirling around Tony's palm.

He saw why when Loki told him to carefully, slowly, open his eyes.

There was a ball of purple magic sitting about a centimetre above Tony's outstretched hand. It was about the size of a tennis ball and *pulsed*, but remained where it was, chained to Tony's hand by the genius' strength of will.

'Good,' Loki breathed, and this time Tony heard it physically, felt Loki's breath against his ear. 'I want you to focus entirely on the magic you have in your hand, but you must also keep it connected to the rest of your magic. Raw magic should not be split, not this early on in your training.'

Tony nodded very, very slightly.

'Good,' Loki repeated. 'I want you to picture your magic moving, spreading out around your hand, reaching up and away. Picture it first, do not try it.'

Tony nodded again and closed his eyes as he imagined his magic moving, flowing out of him ever
so slowly, growing larger and reaching...

'Open your eyes,' Loki ordered. Tony did. 'Now do it,' Loki said.

Tony took another deep breath, let it out slowly, then locked his eyes on his hand. It felt like a physical pull, like Tony was exerting a muscle. He watched with complete concentration as his magic pulled away from him bit by bit until it was hovering an inch above his hand. He lowered it back down, then forced it to reach up and out. Tendrils snaked off of the ball, curling around Tony's fingers, smothering his hand in purple. Then it moved up, curling around like wisps of smoke.

'Do it a few more times,' Loki said softly.

Tony did as told and he felt giddy, a rush of excitement and accomplishment almost overwhelming him. His magic shot back towards him and Tony barely managed to stop it, forcing it into submission so that it hovered in a ball above his skin.

After a few more attempts, Loki told Tony to withdraw. Tony let his magic sink back into himself and he felt Loki's presence as the Jötunn searched to make sure that Tony was okay.

'Good,' Loki said. 'Come back to yourself completely, Anthony.'

When Tony did, now out of his mindscape, magic pulsing within him, he sighed and slumped heavily against the older god.

'You did very well,' Loki said. He pressed a kiss to the smooth skin beneath Tony's ear, making Tony shiver minutely. 'A few more attempts over the coming days and you should be able to scan yourself with your sensor.'

'Okay,' Tony said. 'I'm kinda hungry.'

'We shall eat here before returning,' Loki said. 'Teleporting you so soon would drain you and Potts would notice.'

'Kay,' Tony mumbled. He didn't feel as exhausted as he had the first time he'd pushed his magic out of his body, but he was still tired.

'Stay here, Anthony,' Loki said. He turned Tony's head to kiss his lips, licking into Tony's mouth briefly before pulling back. He patted Tony's hip before gracefully sliding out from behind Tony and walking across the Hideout. 'What do you feel like?'

'Um... something fresh, to be honest,' Tony admitted. 'Like salad and...'

'Plants,' Loki smirked. 'As I've said before, greens help replenish magic quicker. Something about the uncooked, fresh food seems to bring energy back faster after dabbling with magic.'

'Yeah,' Tony agreed. He just had the overwhelming urge to eat a bunch of veggies and salad. Loki smiled at him and walked over to the kitchen/eating area, pulling the fridge open and rummaging about.

Tony watched him with a smile, his chest- his very heart - feeling warm and content. He wasn't sure if it was because he was more in touch with magic, or if it was just Loki's presence.
'What?' Tony asked, just to make sure that he'd heard correctly.

'Agents Romanov and Barton tried to access your workshop three hours ago, sir,' JARVIS said from Tony's cellphone.

'Huh,' Tony hummed. He'd thought something like that might happen, which was why he'd set up various security measures. Loki had also warded the place, whatever that meant. 'Did they get in?'

'Of course not, sir,' JARVIS said, sounding insulted.

Tony snickered. 'Okay, okay; sorry I doubted you, J. So what happened?'

'Agent Romanov attempted to simply walk in, then attempted to use her security code. However, she commented to Agent Barton after being denied access that it hadn't worked last time. Agent Barton then tried to get into the workshop via the airducts, however the new security system you installed ejected him forcefully.'

Tony laughed again. He hoped Barton had hurt himself. He'd watch the security footage when he got back.

'What are you laughing about?' Loki asked, setting a plate of something vegetarian on the table before Tony. Tony had been told that he wasn't allowed to eat in bed and had pouted but complied, moving to the dining table and sitting just before JARVIS called.

'Barton and Romanov tried to get into my workshop,' Tony said to Loki.

'And your bedroom, sir,' JARVIS added.

'Is that right?' Tony asked. He set his StarkPhone on speaker so that Loki could hear.

'Indeed,' JARVIS said. 'After a few failed attempts I allowed them access into the penthouse per your instructions.'

Loki raised an eyebrow at Tony, who explained; 'I give them some scraps every now and then; access to some of my smaller workshops, my office, and the penthouse. Everything top secret is locked up tight, which they expect. But if I throw them a few bits of information every now and then they think they're getting somewhere and don't try any harder.'

'Clever,' Loki commented.

'Duh,' Tony snorted, making Loki roll his eyes. 'Is that all, JARVIS?'

'Yes, sir,' the AI said. 'Agents Romanov and Barton went through your bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom.'

'Did they find anything interesting?'

'They found the old Iron Man suit designs that you left in the bottom drawer of your bedside table,' JARVIS said, 'and took copies before leaving the flash drive where they had found it.'

'You let them have information about your suit?' Loki asked.
'No, not really,' Tony shook his head. 'Most of the information I tweaked just a bit; a few numbers off, different materials listed. Even if their scientists figure it out and build a suit based on those blueprints, it won't work. They don't have access to my repulsor technology, for one. Well, they will if they get a hold of Rhodey's suit.'

'Rhodey?' Loki echoed, frowning over his plate.

'Colonel James Rhodes, he's an old... friend, of mine,' Tony said slowly.

'You do not sound sure,' Loki said.

Tony shrugged. 'He's a friend as far as I can tell. But he stole one of my old suits, named War Machine, and he uses it for his job with the army.'

'You let someone steal a functioning suit?'

'Hey, don't get pissy at me,' Tony frowned, 'I can do whatever the hell I want with my suits.' Loki scowled at him. 'Anyway,' Tony continued, 'there are build-in security measures that Rhodey doesn't know about; if anyone but him tries to activate the suit it'll fly straight to my Tower. I only let Rhodey keep it because I couldn't be bothered going to retrieve it. I figured I'll do it after SHIELD finds out about me changing sides; they'll probably go straight to Rhodey and get him to replace me.'

'Why haven't they already?' Loki asked. 'If you think they will ask him, then Fury no doubt thinks this Rhodey person more stable than yourself.'

'Rhodey doesn't want to join SHIELD, or the Avengers,' Tony explained, 'they've already asked. Rhodey's more interested in staying with the army and protecting the world that way. But when he hears about me he'll probably change his mind, or at least join them temporarily to help take me down.'

'You think he will betray you like Potts?'

'I honestly don't know,' Tony admitted. 'Rhodey's always had my back, always been on my side. But he's a good man, he won't agree with me killing anyone, not even SHIELD agents. He got all pissed off when I killed the guys who kidnapped me and terrorised the local areas. So while he might not actively try to kill me, he'll probably try to bring me in to face justice and all that crap.'

'And what will you do?' Loki questioned, head tilted, green eyes locked on Tony.

'Same with Pepper,' Tony said, voice certain. 'I won't actively hunt or try to kill Rhodey. But if he makes himself my enemy, I'll kill him.'

Loki hummed at that and went back to his food, apparently done with the conversation.

There was a pause before JARVIS interrupted; 'Anything else, sir?'

'Shit, I forgot about you, J,' Tony said. 'Sorry about that.'

'No apologies necessary, sir,' JARVIS replied.

Tony chuckled and reached for his cell. 'Nah, that's all. Unless the Avengers are up to anything else I should know about...?'

'Nothing prudent, sir,' JARVIS said. 'Agents Romanov and Barton continue to think that their
'Thanks, JARVIS,' Tony said. 'Keep me posted.'

'Of course, Mr Stark,' JARVIS said before hanging up.

'JARVIS is probably one of the most useful inventions you have come up with,' Loki commented.

'He's my favourite,' Tony grinned. 'I mean, I love Iron Man; it protects me, let's me defend myself and go after assholes who think they can challenge me. But JARVIS is like my best friend, my babysitter, my... everything, I suppose. He's taken care of me ever since I created him.'

Loki smiled softly. 'I will be forever grateful.'

Tony huffed and said, 'You just like JARVIS because he always agrees with you.'

'I do enjoy being called sir,' Loki purred.

Tony scowled. 'Hey! Don't go being all sexy when you're not gonna follow through.' Loki was still adamant that they not have sex when Tony was practising magic, which meant that there was a sex ban on the Hideout until Tony got his Genesis suits finished and made them magic-safe.

Loki just grinned at him and slid a carrot into his mouth, sucking on his fork for far longer than was actually necessary. Tony glared at him throughout the entire meal.

{oOo}

Magic. Fucking magic. Tony Stark, Iron Man, genius billionaire ex-playboy philanthropist, had fucking figured out how to trace magic.

Tony was fucking awesome.

Okay, so Loki had helped. Quite a bit. Okay, a lot, if Tony was being honest. Loki's theory about the sensor picking up magic in Tony's sample scans had been entirely correct. Tony hadn't been able to sense magic because he was already fucking sensing it. It was right there, part of the radiation that made up the background of planet Earth. It was in everything, from the rocks around them to Tony's computers and his very body.

Loki's magic was there, too, both Jötunn and Asgardian, and now Tony could tell the fucking difference!

Managing to figure out how to detect magic meant that Tony and Loki could work towards blocking it or making something magic free. Whenever Tony wasn't in a meeting in England, he and Loki teleported to their Hideout to work, staying as long as possible. Tony taught Loki how to use the sensor, and Loki sat before it, scanning himself and various spells. He'd then separated all the information for Tony to look over; samples of good magic, of bad magic, of wards and raw magic and spells.
Spells with different intent read differently, Tony's scanner informed the two. If Loki's spell wasn't intended to hurt anybody, it read as soft, barely a spike. When he intended to harm or kill somebody, the spell registered as a large, sharp burst of magic, as though the energy was laced with... evil, or something.

Their plans had to be halted when Tony's business finally finished up in England, meaning that he and Loki had to head back to the Tower, and to the Avengers. No major attacks had happened since Tony had been gone, and when that trend kept up after their return it allowed Tony and Loki to slip out of the Tower to go on "dates".

Okay, so Tony and Loki fucked sometimes, but for the most part they sequestered themselves into their Hideout, Loki working magic, Tony working science.

It took time. Magic and science just didn't want to mix, but with a lot of man- er, god- hours, a lot of sweat, tears, and frustration, Tony managed to make his suit magic-proof. Well, it was mostly his repulsors, his arc reactor, that had to be made magic-proof. Loki created a spell that slid into the very atoms of Tony's suit, protecting everything from reacting negatively to Loki's Asgardian magic. He then did the same with his Jötunn magic, and production of Tony's Genesis suits was halted as Loki taught Tony how to craft a spell with his own magic.

It was a lot harder than Tony had assumed it would be. He was a natural at using his raw magic, Loki said, but apparently spells- the delicates of spell crafting - were Tony's weakness. It took far longer than Loki had thought it would to make Tony's words and magic mix together, creating a spell that could be pushed into his suits. Every time they went back to the Tower after spell work Tony was exhausted and near catatonic.

But like with everything Tony Stark set his mind to, he got it, eventually. And when he did, it was time for assembly.

Tony had been working on his Genesis suits on and off ever since Pepper's conversation with Coulson. When Loki had been scanning himself, Tony had worked on beating his armour into submission, wiring his gauntlets together, fiddling with the repulsors to make the particles glow green instead of blue.

When all was said and done, Loki helped Tony put everything together. It was a bit hit and miss, what with Loki not completely understanding how the Iron Man suits worked or fit together. But with Tony's directions they managed.

They sneaked off from the Tower one rainy Thursday afternoon, Clint sending them off with biting words, Steve smiling, glad that his mission to get Tony to "take a break" was working well, and Natasha with glowing eyes that promised Tony's shit would be sifted through despite her still-healing arm. Bruce and Thor hadn't been around, but Tony didn't have the energy to think about them and his Genesis suits.

When Tony got it working- when he and Loki got it working- they could finally start attacking. JARVIS had written up a hefty list of supposed-SHIELD bases, and all Tony and Loki had to do was check them out before destroying them.

There was a new energy clawing at the edges of Tony and Loki's little world and it threatened to break as soon as Tony's machines, brought in specifically for this, started assembling the suit around Tony. Loki watched, arms folded over his t-shirt, green eyes dark.

The chest plate snapped on and Tony was lowered to the ground, landing with a muffled thump on the rock floor.
'Well?' Loki questioned.

'Everything seems to be working,' Tony said. 'I can fly around in here, right?'

'I would not suggest flying outside,' Loki said, amused.

Tony rolled his eyes. 'Okay, keep an eye on me in case something goes wrong and I get thrown into a wall.' Loki scowled. Tony pressed a small pad in his right gauntlet and the helmet unfolded from his neck armour, enveloping Tony's head. The faceplate slammed down last of all and suddenly everything was dark. 'Boot up,' Tony ordered.

His world exploded into shades of green instead of blue, information scrolling across the right side of Tony's vision, various systems being booted, tested, JARVIS linked into everything.

'Everything seems to be functioning, sir,' JARVIS informed him.

'Okay, J, let's test this,' Tony said. 'Show me the cave.' A screen winked into existence on the HUD, showing a full-colour picture of the cave and Loki. Tony tested a few more things, his various programmes all being run through twice by himself, then twice more by JARVIS, just to make sure. When that was done Tony took a few steps back, then forward, then did a short lap of the cave to make sure that everything was running smoothly.

It was, and now it was time for a test flight.

Tony felt his stomach climb and his magic shiver as he activated his repulsors. He lifted off the ground with a burst of green-white. Dust swirled around him and Loki as Tony hovered, then rose, his arms outstretched to stabilise his flight.

'Everything is functioning at one-hundred percent, sir,' JARVIS chimed in after doing another suit-wide scan.

'Fuck yeah,' Tony breathed, a grin stretching across his face. He lowered himself to the ground and slid his faceplate up, the metal easily slipping into the helmet encasing Tony's head.

Loki raised an eyebrow when he met Tony's eyes and Tony snickered; Loki was covered in dirt.

'Charming, Stark,' Loki drawled.

'You love it,' Tony grinned cheekily.

Loki rolled his eyes. 'Well?' he asked. 'Is your suit functioning?'

Tony's grin widened as he said, 'Oh, yeah,' and he watched Loki's eyes light up in dark satisfaction. 'Now all we have to do is check out the bases JARVIS found to make sure they're actually SHIELD's.'

'I see,' Loki said. 'And your JARVIS-operated suits?'

'JARVIS has been working on them for weeks,' Tony said. They were the first suits Tony had completed and he'd let JARVIS work out all the kinks while he and Loki had focused on making them magic-safe. 'We're ready, Loki.'

Loki stared at him. And then he smirked- dark, deep, beautiful. Chaos was practically radiating off of Loki, a primal hunger to rip and tear and destroy.

Tony returned the look and his magic thumped, burned, desired.
Oh, yeah, Tony thought, this is gonna be good.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: Okay, so, in personal news; I was recently accepted into a TAFE course- it's basically vocational training. My classes start next Wednesday and I currently don't know how heavy the work load will be. So I might not be able to update all that frequently until I get into the swing of things, or I might update as usual if I find the work easy to do. We'll see what happens.

Thanks for all the support, I appreciate it! In good news, the next chapter will be up soon, I've almost finished it :)

{Dreamer}
Pepper showed up when Tony and Loki were about to head out. The closest SHIELD base, according to JARVIS, was in Bridgeport. Tony had gone back through the various recordings JARVIS had made and remembered that Coulson, when he’d called Pepper, had been in Bridgeport. So he had a good feeling about a base being there.

Tony was just pulling on a jacket when the elevator opened, Pepper stepping out.

'Pepper,' he whined, 'I'm going out! I don't have any meetings today, JARVIS checked.'

'No, you don't,' Pepper agreed. 'I just want to talk to you.' She looked at Loki and added, 'It'll just take a minute.'

Tony sighed but nodded to Loki, who smiled at them both before getting into the elevator. 'I'll wait for you in the garage,' he said. The doors shut, whisking him away, and Tony turned to Pepper.

'What is it?'

'Tony... you've been doing well the past few weeks,' Pepper started.

Tony wet his lips and fought not to glare. Here we go... he thought.

'It's been good for you, taking some time away from your workshop, spending it with Logan,' Pepper continued. 'I think you should take some more time off.'

'Okay...' Tony said.

'Steve told me that there hasn't been any major fights lately and said that it'd be fine if you took some time off your patrols and your SHIELD meetings. He and Bruce can keep you informed, and I can take over the few meetings you have for the next three or four weeks,' Pepper said. 'I really think that you should take some more time off, away from Stark Industries and the Avengers. It'll be good for you.'

'Okay,' Tony repeated. He sighed and reached up to rub his face, hand hiding his scowl. 'Yeah, I,
uh... it has been good for me,' he agreed, 'I feel... better, looser. Maybe I can take Logan somewhere, or just hang out around here or something. I can't completely step away from my workshop or the Avengers, you know that.'

Pepper nodded and when Tony glanced at her, he saw hope shining in her eyes.

_Fuck you, Pepper, _Tony thought. _Fuck you and fuck Coulson._ Tony's chest felt hot, his magic swirling with anger. He had to take a deep breath to calm down and pasted a fake smile on his face.

'You know what? It's about time I took a decent vacation. Might even go to Malibu for a while, show Logan the Mansion.'

'That's good, Tony,' Pepper agreed, satisfaction clearly written across her face. 'I'll let you know if the company needs you, and Steve will call if the Avengers need Iron Man. Just relax.'

'Yeah,' Tony said, 'okay, Pep.'

He moved towards the elevator, Pepper following, and Tony's magic leapt up again at their close proximity, wanting to lash out and consume, _destroy._ It would serve Pepper right, Tony thought. They were supposed to be friends; Pepper had known him for years. Yet Coulson said jump and Pepper asked how high. It didn't matter if Pepper was just worried about Tony; she'd been talking about him behind his back, meeting with Coulson and discussing his mental health. Friends didn't do that; they confronted you, told you you were being an idiot. They didn't fucking _betray you._

Pepper got off the elevator on floor sixty and threw Tony a smile. 'I'll see you soon, Tony.'

'Yeah,' was all Tony said. The elevator doors slid shut behind her and Tony stabbed at the button that would take him down to the basement. He was silent, still, for maybe five or six seconds before his fingers curled into a fist. He lashed out, slamming his fist into the wall, and watched in satisfaction as the metal curled inward, buckling beneath Tony's strength.

His joy lasted only seconds before he cursed. Great, now he'd have to fix the fucking wall.

The doors slid open and Loki was right there waiting for him. He raised an eyebrow when he saw the wall, then tutted and stepped in.

'You need to learn to control your anger, Stark,' he said. Tony rolled his eyes but watched as Loki reached out and pressed a hand against the wall. His fingers glowed blue before the colour disappeared. When Loki removed his hand the wall was smooth silver metal once more.

'Is that safe?' Tony asked.

'Jötunn magic,' Loki told him. 'From what I've seen so far, Thor can't detect it. And I need to practice using it so my fingers don't turn blue again.'

'Oh,' Tony blinked, 'thanks, then.'

'What did Potts want?' Loki asked, following Tony from the elevator and across the garage.

'She wants me to take time off,' Tony scowled.

'I see,' Loki mused. 'And did you agree?'

'Yeah,' Tony nodded. Rather than take a car, he headed for his collection of motorbikes; a motorcycle would be easier to hide once they reached Bridgeport. 'I figured that _taking time off_
would give us an excuse to disappear and check the SHIELD bases JARVIS has found. If anyone asks where we were we can just we were out eating or fucking or whatever.'

'I see,' Loki repeated.

'Have you ever ridden a bike before?' Tony asked when he reached his black Yamaha YZF R1. It was the 2012 model, only out a few months, and Tony patted the tank as Loki looked it over.

'I can't say that I have,' the older god said.

'I think you'll like it,' Tony grinned at him. 'It won't take long for us to get to Bridgeport.'

'Very well,' Loki said. He watched as Tony walked across the garage to get two helmets from a cabinet. He tossed one to the Trickster, who turned it over in his hands. He saw Tony put his helmet on and copied the gesture, then climbed onto the back of the bike when Tony instructed him to.

'You gotta hold on tight, Lokes, or you'll go flying,' Tony said, voice muffled by the helmet. 'This baby's fast.'

'Sure it is, Stark,' Loki drawled. He earned himself a chuckle.

Tony pushed the key into the ignition and started the bike. The Yamaha vibrated beneath them and Tony felt Loki's arms wrap around him tight, the older god then pressing himself firmly against Tony's back.

*I could get used to this*, Tony mused. 'Hold on, Lo!' he called as he pulled back on the throttle. He heard Loki gasp behind him as the bike took off and grinned. The bike tore across the garage and then up the ramp, JARVIS already lifting the gate. Tony and Loki burst out onto the street and Tony immediately swung left, turning into traffic.

Tony figured that they'd drive to Bridgeport and hide the bike somewhere, then Loki could disguise them or something so they could check out SHIELD's base.

Loki's arms tightened around Tony again as they sped down the street.

{oOo}

Loki pondered Tony's slip in the workshop as they sat staring at SHIELD's supposed base. Loki and Tony were both positive that it was a SHIELD base; the beachfront property, as Stark called it, was surrounded by a tall, thick iron fence topped with razor-wire. Tony had run a scan with one of the many tools he had in various pockets of his... cargo pants, he had called them. Anyway, Stark had run scans and found a multitude of security devices surrounding the area.

Besides the fence, there wasn't anything obvious about the property; it didn't scream “top-secret government facility”. But Loki and Tony both knew what to look for, and the various gardeners, window cleaners, and other men and women wandering around the grounds and around the perimeter of the fence, all carrying concealed weapons, hinted at the property being a SHIELD base.
Anthony had ridden his bike somewhere, Loki wasn't sure, and had parked in an underground parking lot. Loki had then teleported them both to Bridgeport after Stark had shown him a map, and had thrown a spell around them both to conceal them from SHIELD and passers-by. They were leaning against another building, sitting on a wooden bench, Stark with various things spread over his lap, Loki holding the bag of chips he'd stolen when they'd walked past a small store.

It had been three days since Stark had said “I love you”. Stark hadn't brought it up, and neither had Loki. Loki didn't want to bring it up and he was glad Tony hadn't. It had been a mere slip; Tony had been excited about finally being able to scan and study magic his way, with his sciences. It had shocked them both, clearly, but neither had dwelt on it.

Until now; it was all Loki could think about, sitting there with Anthony by his side, the younger god tapping at various screens of the electronics he'd brought with him.

This kind of research bored Loki, who usually preferred to wander into an enemy's lair and see everything first-hand. But there was always the risk of Thor turning up at one of SHIELD's bases and neither Loki nor Tony wanted to risk giving themselves away this early in the game. So they were just sitting, staring, Loki crunching on chips and Tony making notes.

It gave Loki ample time to think. I love you. What was Loki supposed to do with that? He and Tony weren't dating, at least not in the traditional sense. Yes, they spent all their time together and they didn't sleep with others. Yes, Loki had... feelings for Anthony, though he wasn't sure what his feelings were, exactly, or how deep they ran. His magic wanted Tony. He wanted Tony. That didn't meant that they would be good together. Adding feelings- real feelings- to their business arrangement would just cause problems. Problems always occurred when Loki truly cared for someone.

And how did Tony truly feel? The “I love you” had been a slip, he hadn't truly meant it. He would no doubt “freak out”, as Midgardians were fond of saying, if he knew what Loki's magic truly wanted; if he knew the real reason his magic hummed and glowed warmly whenever Loki was around.

Loki sighed and slouched back, ignored the look Tony gave him before going back to his StarkPad.

Loki was tired of thinking this over. He could, of course, just ask Tony how he felt. But Loki wasn't good at outright stating what he wanted. He preferred... subterfuge. Besides, what if Tony didn't want Loki any more? What if, because of Loki pushing, Tony decided to sever their current romantic ties and go find someone else to spend his nights with? Tony might not have the time now, what with their plans, but when they eventually destroyed SHIELD, the World Security Council, and the Avengers, Tony would have more time. He could go back to having a different beautiful person in is bed every night. He could dress up, charm his way around a room, and have a multitude of people hanging off of his arms.

And Loki would be left alone, as usual.

He glanced at Tony from the corner of his eye. The Midgardian was still consumed with his work, only looking up every now and then to scan the compound before them.

They didn't have to discuss Tony's slip, Loki supposed. They could just... ignore it. Or, Loki could ignore it until Tony brought it up. After all, he was the one who'd said it. Why should Loki bring it up?

Loki smiled in satisfaction and beside him Tony shifted. He reached up to rub at his chest, the glow of his arc reactor shining through the double layer of shirts he was wearing.
'Problem?' Loki asked. Despite the Apple having ejected the metal shards that had once threatened Tony's life, Loki knew that Tony still worried about the arc reactor. Loki did, too; it was Tony's protection against magical manipulation.

'Hmm?' Tony hummed before he blinked rapidly and shook his head. 'What? No, no problem.'

'Are you sure?'

Tony nodded. 'Yeah, I'm fine. My... uh, magic, I think?' he said, frowning for a second before nodding once. 'Yeah, my magic. It just... goes all warm, sometimes.'

'Does it?' Loki queried.

'Yeah,' Tony repeated. 'It got all hot and chaos-y today with Pepper. I think it wanted to kill her.'

Loki snorted at the thought of Tony's magic lashing out, making that silly woman pay for how she had betrayed Tony. It would be... delightful.

'But just now it went all... warm,' Tony said and shrugged a shoulder. 'I'm getting used to it.'

'It happens often?' Loki asked.

'Well, yeah,' Tony said. He looked at Loki. 'I told you, remember? Sometimes my chest- or, well, my magic - just gets all warm and fuzzy around you. Like a giant teddy bear. Like a giant teddy bear that's been microwaved. Like a giant teddy bear that-'

'Yes, Stark, I get it,' Loki cut in. He scowled at the cheeky smirk Tony threw his way. 'I'm sure your magic will settle eventually.'

'Maybe,' Tony shrugged, 'as I said, I'm getting used to it, and getting used to ignoring it or making it calm down. Maybe my magic just likes you.' With one last smile he went back to tapping rapidly at his StarkPad, taking various photos and scans of the SHIELD property to have JARVIS analyse.

Loki stared at him, gaping slightly, but Stark didn't notice. After a few minutes Loki eased back, shoulders once more pressed against the brick wall behind them.

*Oh, Anthony,* he thought as he turned his attention back to the compound, *you don't know how right you are.*

{oOo}

'Okay, J, give me the SHIELD bases in America only,' Tony ordered. 'We'll stick to those for now.'

'Yes, sir,' JARVIS replied. There was a few seconds of silence before JARVIS started listing bases he'd found; 'New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, Columbus, Detroit, Malibu, Miami, Baltimore, Bridgeport, Albuquerque and Washington DC.'

'Huh,' Tony mused, 'most of those are major cities.'

'All the easier to blend in, disappear, and hide what you're truly doing,' Loki commented from
across the table.

Tony quirked a smile at him before tapping at the list JARVIS had brought up. 'So these are the American ones.'

'Yes, sir,' JARVIS said.

'Twelve,' Tony hummed, 'how many are in other countries, JARVIS?'

'Not as many as we first hypothesised, Mr Stark,' JARVIS said.

'Really?'

'Yes, sir,' JARVIS said. 'Cross-referencing various military databases allowed me to take a fair amount off of the list.'

'What have you got?' Tony asked.

Another second of silence, and then JARVIS said, 'So far I am 94.3% certain that there are SHIELD bases in the following places; Beijing, China; London, England; Ottawa, Canada; Brasília, Brazil; Sydney, Australia; Zurich, Switzerland; Berlin, Germany; and Wellington, New Zealand.'

'All capital cities,' Tony said.

'Sydney is not the capital of Australia, Mr Stark,' JARVIS corrected, 'Canberra is.'

Tony rolled his eyes while Loki snickered. 'Whatever, JARVIS, nobody cares.'

'The people of Australia care, sir,' JARVIS commented.

'JARVIS!' Tony snapped. The AI was silent, and Tony slouched against the table, Loki smirking at him across the top. 'Okay, so we'll need to somehow get to all these places and check the possible bases out.'

'Depending on how far they are, I may not be able to teleport,' Loki said.

'I can teleport a part of the way there, rest for a few hours, and then teleport some more,' Loki offered.

'We could always fly partway there,' Tony mused. He tapped his fingers across the table. 'We could fly to China and you could teleport us to Indonesia, then to Australia. Some fake passports would get us a boat or another airplane to New Zealand. Head down to Mexico and you could teleport to Brazil, hopefully. Europe's easier; they've got trains everywhere. I can just tell Pepper I'm taking a holiday to Europe. As long as we're not correctly identified by SHIELD in every country, we should be okay.'

'Are we destroying SHIELD's American bases first, or their out of country ones?' Loki questioned.

'We should mix and match,' Tony said. 'SHIELD have more resources here in America, as well as the American government on their side. Obviously they have other governments on speed dial if they were allowed to build bases in their countries, but I doubt the Chinese government will lift a finger to help an American secret agency if one of their headquarters is destroyed.'
'The way you Midgardians have split your world is confusing, yet helpful to our plans,' Loki commented. He finally stopped playing with the plants- or weeds or flowers or... whatever- that he'd brought back from another Realm. Tony watched as Loki crushed a small purple flower before putting it into the crystal tube. 'Smell this,' he ordered.

Tony did as told and almost fell off his chair. 'What the hell is that?' he coughed and waved his hand about. His magic was twisting out of his chest, up his arms and spine and neck, right into his head. It was a minute or two until Tony's brain stopped swimming and his eyesight came back into focus.

Loki smirked at him. 'A rather small... gas bomb, I suppose you Midgardians would call it. I crushed a certain weed with a certain flower. The toxin it gives off will render an Æsir sightless and confused. I suspect that it will either kill a mortal or render them unconscious.'

'Handy,' Tony coughed and patted his chest, 'but some warning would be nice.'

'Sorry,' Loki said, though of course he didn't look apologetic in the slightest.

Tony rolled his eyes. 'Who are you using that on?'

'Why your delightful team mates, of course,' Loki said.

'Not my team mates,' Tony muttered.

'Still your team mates until you reveal your true intentions,' Loki corrected.

Tony just shook his head; he hated having this conversation with Loki. He just really, really hated even referring to the Avengers as his team mates. They weren't team mates. They weren't friends. Hell, they were barely even acquaintances. To them, yeah, Tony was a team mate and someone they could depend on; because to them, Tony was still a good guy. He was careless, he was chaotic, but he was good. Tony knew that he wasn't. And soon enough, the Avengers would know that, too.

'Okay,' Tony said. 'I say we stakeout a few more SHIELD bases. Then we pick which one to hit.'

'What's wrong with the one in Bridgeport?' Loki questioned.

'I just think we should spread ourselves out,' Tony said. 'SHIELD obviously believes you're based in New York because you always attack here; they expect it. They won't expect you in Chicago or Detroit or Malibu.'

'We probably shouldn't attack the one in Malibu if Potts thinks that's where we are,' Loki suggested. 'It would invite suspicion.'

'True,' Tony nodded. 'We'll keep Malibu for when the Avengers think we're in New York. Or even London.'

Loki smirked and stood. Tony was glad to see that he'd corked the weed/plant/knock-you-out shit that he'd been playing with, so when he leaned over Tony's shoulder Tony let himself snuggle back into Loki's cool, firm chest. Loki just hummed and Tony smiled, watching as the Trickster ran a finger over the list JARVIS had written.

'This one,' he eventually decided, pointing at Miami. 'Let's attack this one.'

'Why?' Loki just shrugged, so Tony snorted. 'Okay, then. Miami's a nineteen hour drive, you know,
or just over two hours by plane.'

'How long would it take to get there in your Iron Man suit?' Loki asked.

'Just under two hours in my Mark suits,' Tony said. 'An hour, an hour and a half, in my Genesis. They're faster.'

'Very well,' Loki said and stood tall. Tony pouted at the loss of Loki all up against him. 'You can fly halfway there. I'll teleport us the rest of the way.'

'M'kay,' Tony said. Loki leaned back down and dragged his lips over Tony's neck, Tony shivering. 'Can I help you?'

'We can visit Miami tomorrow,' Loki decided and nipped at Tony's ear.

'Yes, we can,' Tony said. He spun around and caught Loki's mouth, the Trickster chuckling against his lips. 'Shut up,' Tony huffed. Loki's response was to drag Tony over to what had become their cot; Loki liked workshop sex.

Tony fucking loved it.

{oOo}

The SHIELD base in Miami had been built next to the airport. Clever, Tony thought; they could have agents and supplies flown in without anybody seeing too much, and the top-level security was understandable, considering how close the airport was.

Tony took notes, Loki ate and proclaimed his boredom, but at the end of a long day spent sitting and staring, Tony and Loki were set on destroying the Miami base. They headed back to the Tower, where Tony started packing and called Pepper.

'What can I do for you, Tony?' Pepper asked.

'I'm heading to Malibu with Logan,' Tony said. He threw a pair of jeans into his duffel bag, followed by some shirts and boxers. Loki was lounging on the bed, doing absolutely zero to help. Tony scowled at him. Stupid sexy bastard.

'That's great, Tony,' Pepper said.

Tony rolled his eyes. 'Yeah, well, I figured it was time for a holiday, right?'

'Of course. '

'So I'm taking Logan with me and I've got a meeting tomorrow with the board at Stark Industries, but I hoped you could take it?'

'I will,' Pepper promised. 'That's the one at nine am, right?'

'Yeah,' Tony said.
'I'm free until midday, so I'll take it,' Pepper said. 'How long will you be in Malibu?'

'I figured a week or two, we'll see how it goes,' Tony said. 'Definitely a week, two if nothing comes up. JARVIS is gonna keep an eye on things and Steve and Fury both know how to contact me if something happens.'

'This is good, Tony,' Pepper said. 'You deserve the time off.'

Tony rolled his eyes again and Loki smirked from the bed. Tony flipped him off and tuned back into the conversation. He ended up staring at the ceiling for a good five minutes as Pepper rattled off all the reasons why he deserved this holiday, why it'd be good for him, blah, blah. Tony just hummed and agreed and eventually hung up.

'What a boring woman,' Loki drawled.

'Yeah,' Tony laughed. 'Are you gonna help pack?'

'Why should I?'

'Because you're coming with me?' Tony said.

'But I can just steal things when we get to Malibu,' Loki said. 'Or use magic.'

'Well, yeah,' Tony mused, 'but I was thinking of letting SHIELD stalk us for a bit, and they will. They can get some CCTV footage of us in Malibu, and if you're wearing clothes that Romanov and Barton have seen you in, it'll be more believable.'

Loki sighed but said, 'Very well,' and stood. He walked past Tony and stepped to hiss in his ear, 'I expect sex, Stark.'

Tony grinned as Loki wandered into the bathroom. Like he was going to say no to that.

{oOo}

Loki spent most of the plane ride to Malibu asleep. Tony used the quiet time to go over SHIELD's Miami base once more. JARVIS had hacked into various CCTV cameras as well as the Helicarrier, which was usually the go-between when SHIELD agents and bases were chattering at each other. The security surrounding SHIELD's communications was good, but Tony was better, and soon he'd found various reports about the Miami base.

It seemed that it was used for transport; SHIELD would have agents, equipment, and various cars and weapons flown to Miami from all over the world, America included. The Miami base would then sort everything and send it off, either by plane, quinjet or truck. Tony briefly wondered why Fury had never shared this with him (Tony was a weapons/tech consultant, after all) but then brushed it aside as he flicked further through the reports. It didn't matter; maybe Fury just liked keeping everything close, maybe he just didn't think Tony would care. Or, maybe, he didn't trust Tony. Tony couldn't blame him; Fury was right not to trust him, after all.

Loki snuffled in his sleep and muttered something about DUM-E before rolling back over, pillow
clutched tight to his face. Tony grinned; he had a bed aboard his private plane, of course, and Loki had stumbled in there a few minutes after take off and fallen asleep. Tony didn't want to bother him; they planned to teleport halfway between Malibu and Miami, rest, and then have Tony fly the two the rest of the way. Loki had said that he could probably teleport the entire way himself but neither he nor Tony wanted to waste time resting when they could be destroying a SHIELD base.

*Finally*, the time had come; Tony knew that they had a long road ahead of them. SHIELD had over a dozen bases in America alone, and he and Loki still had to fit destroying the bases in other countries into their plans. But it was finally *starting*. Tony was practically buzzing with excitement and his magic seemed to take that as permission to perform flips and kicks in Tony's chest.

It kept reaching out to Loki, too, Tony had noticed. Tony figured that the pull he felt- the way his magic inched towards Loki whenever Tony didn't keep a tight hold on it- wasn't strong enough for Loki to feel. Because Loki hadn't budged since he'd fallen asleep, but Tony had found himself half-standing at least six times just because his magic wanted to be closer to Loki.

Tony sighed and closed the SHIELD reports JARVIS had stolen, instead pulling up his research on magic. *Something* was happening between his and Loki's magic and if Loki wasn't going to explain it, Tony would just work it out himself. Maybe he could work out just enough for Loki to tell him the truth.

Tony's StarkPad flashed and Tony glanced down to find a message from JARVIS; *Forty-two minutes until you land, Mr Stark.*

Tony tapped the message twice, closing the small box of text, and went back to his magic research. Maybe his magic just really, really, *really* liked Loki. Or maybe...

{oOo}

Loki acted like a grumpy, sleep-deprived bitch on the drive from the airport to Tony's Malibu mansion. He perked up slightly when they arrived at Tony's place and spent the better part of an hour exploring. Tony made sandwiches while Loki poked through his stuff (yes, he *could* make sandwiches, thank you very much!) and he and Loki ate before they changed and headed out.

Tony didn't want the Avengers to even *slightly* suspect him or “Logan”, and that meant playing tourist and showing Loki around Malibu. So Tony made sure to lead them to the tourist heavy spots, letting CCTV cameras and various ATM and restaurant cameras pick up him and Loki. He even made sure to announce his presence when he and Loki visited Tony's favourite restaurant for an early lunch. It meant that the media- and, hopefully, *SHIELD-* knew exactly where Tony Stark and his boyfriend were. Which meant that Tony was in high spirits when he and Loki walked down to Tony's workshop after getting back to the mansion.

'It arrived?' Loki asked.

'You'd know that if you hadn't bitched and moaned on the ride over,' Tony said.

Loki scowled at him but didn't say anything. He just watched as Tony unpacked the Genesis suit. It
wasn't a suitcase suit so much as a box suit; it turned itself into a rectangle that Tony could then pack into a duffel bag, hiding it from prying eyes. Normally Tony didn't care who saw his suits; the Genesis suit had to remain hidden as long as possible.

Loki stepped back as Tony keyed in the password, the suit unfolding on the floor. Tony stepped into it and said, 'Activate.' JARVIS did his job and soon Tony was encased, the helmet unfolding over his head last of all. Tony kept the faceplate up as he looked at Loki. 'Ready?'

Loki waved a hand and his features melted from Logan's blonde-blue into his usual black-green. His jeans, shirt and sneakers disappeared, replaced with the heavy Asgardian armour Loki had been working on over the past few weeks; the jacket was thinner but Tony knew that it was warded more heavily than Loki's previous armour had been.

The coat, leather pants and knee-high boots were black, the heavy armour pieces- shoulders, shins, arms and vambraces- were all a matted purple with protection runes carved into the metal. The tunic Loki wore beneath his coat, and the highlights on his pants and coat, as well as the trimmings, were all emerald green. Loki forwent his helmet for now and smiled at Tony as he stepped up to him.

'You know where we're teleporting to?' Tony asked and wrapped his arms around Loki's waist.

The Trickster rolled his eyes. 'Yes, Stark. Now shut up and hold on.'

Tony laughed as Loki teleported them away.
Miami was just under five hours away from Malibu by plane. Loki teleported himself and Tony to Austin, Texas, where they spent about two hours sitting on the edge of the Pennybacker Bridge, discussing how they'd storm SHIELD's Miami base. Soon they'd made a wager; Loki thought that he could destroy more buildings, and kill more agents, than Tony could.

Tony snorted. Okay, so Loki had plenty more years experience at destroying shit than Tony did, but Tony was chaotic by nature; he was totally winning the bet. A small part of Tony- a very small part- wondered if this was it; if this was finally him going over the edge and becoming a super villain. A larger part of Tony knew that he'd fallen ages ago; when he'd killed the terrorists holding him and Yinsen hostage, when he'd killed more after perfecting the Iron Man suit, and then again when he'd asked Loki to join him.

Killing a few innocent agents, destroying a SHIELD base, it wasn't going to change Tony. It was just going to put more red in his ledger. And Tony? Tony honestly didn't care.

It was refreshing and Tony had to breathe in deeply. Beside him Loki cocked an eyebrow, but when Tony just shook his head Loki went back to staring at the water beneath them.

No, this wasn't Tony becoming a super villain. This was Tony embracing it.

{oOo}

Loki wrapped his arms around Tony's armoured neck and held on tight as Tony, in his Genesis suit, flew to Miami. Loki had thrown a glamour over the both of them so that when they touched down near Miami International Airport they didn't have to worry about being seen.

'Are you sure we only need my suit?' Tony asked after Loki had hopped off of his back. 'I can still call JARVIS, it'll just take him a few hours to get here. Two, tops.'

'I'm sure, Stark,' Loki said. He smoothed down his armour and his hair, using magic to slick the long black strands back. 'According to JARVIS this base is used more for transport than anything else. Security shouldn't be that heavy. And if it is, we will simply destroy them.'

Tony grinned and flipped his faceplate up. He and Loki were still invisible but they'd landed somewhere between the airport and the SHIELD base and Tony squinted through the bright Florida sun. Everything looked pretty much the same; large warehouses built close together, some joined, a tall, heavy iron fence topped with razor-wire, men and women dressed in casual cleaning gear wandering about sweeping and cleaning windows and tending to the few bushes and flowers.

'How are we doing this?' Tony asked.

'We've discussed this, Stark,' Loki said, looking amused. 'I blast my way in and you stay behind
me. I'll then order you to go off on your own and find any explosives we can use the completely obliterate the compound.'

'Make sure it's in front of a few cameras,' Tony reminded him, 'we want Fury finding out and thinking that Genesis is in your control.'

Loki nodded and he and Tony walked towards one of the abandoned warehouses near the SHIELD base. They stepped behind it, hiding themselves from the base's view, and Loki withdrew the spell.

'Ready?' Loki asked.

'Oh, yeah,' Tony breathed.

Loki grinned.

{oOo}

Agent Jarred Walker was getting sick of cleaning duty. He was a highly trained SHIELD agent and he'd spent the last six weeks cleaning windows, sweeping pathways, and tending to plants. Sometimes, as a treat, he was allowed to help scan the incoming cargo and sign-off on it. Joy.

Walker sighed and rubbed sweat from his face as he swept the broom across the pebbled pathway yet again. Agents tended not to wander around the compound during the day- they didn't want to advertise that there was a top-secret facility here, after all- but the slight breeze and the odd agent running back and forth still managed to track dirt and mud everywhere. How, Walker didn't know; and he knew better than to complain.

Walker was halfway down the path- and checking his watch to see how many minutes to go until his break- when the wall behind him exploded.

The loud boom and the following shock wave threw Walker off his feet. He hit the ground hard and shouted in pain as his ears rang; that didn't stop him from rolling and pulling his gun, his training kicking in even as his senses went haywire.

Walker swayed to his feet and flicked the safety off of his SI9 semi-automatic pistol. Dust and debris was raining down on the courtyard, blocking out the sun. Walker waved his free hand around his head but it didn't help, especially when another explosion rang out.

Walker managed to stay on his feet but had to duck and weave as concrete and iron rained down on him. A large chunk of the fence that had once surrounded the SHIELD compound landed just to his left, razor-wire still attached to the top. Crouching low, Walker stumbled to the right.

His comms chose that moment to burst into life, but the voices were drowned out by the loud, shrill alarm that suddenly pierced the day. Red lights started flashing around the area and agents dressed in black flooded out of the building closest to Walker.

'anything. I repeat, do any of the outside agents have eyes on the intruder or intruders?' Walker's comms crackled slightly before going clear, and he heard the various agents positioned around the compound answer in the negative.
Agent Walker, negative on eyes. I repeat, neg-'n'.

Walker was grabbed by the back of the neck and slammed into the ground. All the air left his lungs and his gun went flying, the SI9 landing with a clatter on the ground just behind-

The human struggled, but Loki's grip was too strong. It was Loki Laufeyson, everybody within SHIELD knew; he was SHIELD's number one most wanted, considered a war criminal by every government agency in the world. Even the terrorists knew not to mess with him; more than one group had been wiped out when they decided to try and play with the God of Mischief and Lies.

'Stop fighting, Midgardian,' Loki said.

Walker went still, though his nails were still embedded in Loki's skin. Despite the grip Walker had on the god's hands, Loki wasn't bleeding.

'Very good,' Loki grinned. 'You'll by my first, Agent.'

'First what?' Walker demanded.

Loki's grin widened, showing sharp white teeth. 'My first kill, of course,' he purred. 'I have a little bet going with a friend of mine.' Walker started fighting again and Loki chose that moment to stand. He dropped Walker back to the ground and before the agent could move a large boot was pressing against his windpipe. He choked and clawed, kicked and punched, but it was no use; Loki was too strong. 'Do be quiet, little one,' Loki said. 'You have no hope against me.'

A loudspeaker suddenly burst into life and Loki looked up as it announced, 'Loki Laufeyson, drop any weapons you have and raise your hands!' Loki cocked his head and turned again. Walker tried to follow his train of sight and vaguely saw about a dozen SHIELD agents, all dressed in black, forming a line across the front of the closest warehouse. They had S&F7 light machine guns cocked and pointed at the god, not that Loki seemed to care.

'We repeat, ' the loudspeaker said again, 'Loki Laufeyson, surrender yourself to SHIELD custody! Drop any weapons you have on your person, raise your hands, and get down on your knees!'

'You humans are so tedious,' Loki sighed. He looked back at Walker as he raised a hand and Walker watched, eyes wide, as a long silver spear appeared in the Trickster's right hand. The tip glowed green and Loki spun the weapon between his fingers. 'Goodbye, Agent,' Loki said.

The last thing Jarred Walker saw was the tip of Loki's spear heading straight for his eye.

{oOo}

Loki certainly didn't waste time. Tony flew over the wrecked fence just in time to see a dozen or so SHIELD agents open fire on Loki, who flickered out of existence. There was a dead agent on the ground, blood surrounding his head, and Tony cursed. 'Fuck you, Loki.'

'I'm hurt, Stark,' Loki purred over their comms. Loki hadn't wanted to wear them, but had admitted that being able to keep in touch with Tony during the fight could only be helpful. 'Three so far,' he said.
Tony laughed and turned into a dive, flying straight for the wall of SHIELD agents who had...
'Those fucking assholes,' he snarled. They were using Stark Industries S&F7 light machine guns; Tony had stopped making them well over three years ago.

'Problem?' Loki asked. Tony could vaguely hear gunfire and screams over Loki's side of the comms, and decided that it was time he got his own hands dirty.

'They're using my weapons,' Tony growled. 'Weapons my company used to make and sell. Fucking Fury!'

'Take your anger out on the little mortals, Anthony,' Loki suggested. 'I like watching the fear enter and leave their eyes.'

Tony grinned; yeah, this entire thing was so fucked up. Loki was enjoying himself. But, hell, Tony was enjoying himself, too, and he hadn't even killed anyone! Let's change that, he thought and spun over the SHIELD agents. About six turned and started firing at him but Tony's suits had always been bullet proof. The bullets bounced off of his armour and Tony raised a gauntlet, the repulsor already whirring.

Tony fired, watching as the green blast hit the ground amongst four SHIELD agents. The explosion threw them off their feet and wrenched one in half.

'Holy shit,' Tony breathed as he watched agents hit the ground, dead, one screaming and clutching at his knee where he'd once had a full leg.

'Problem?' Loki asked again. This time there was a hint of... of worry, in his voice; like he was worried that, suddenly faced with bloodshed and death, Tony would fail.

Tony didn't. He flicked up the guns mounted beneath his shoulder plates as his HUD locked onto the eight agents standing beneath him. Tony fired at them with a flick of his eyes, and made a mental note to design some type of nerve-related sensors that could be inserted into his muscles to make fighting much easier as the agents below him crumbled.

'That's eleven,' Tony said. 'Twelve if you count the guy with one leg.'

Loki appeared below him in a puff of green smoke and slapped the end of his spear across the injured agent's face. The man fell back, still screaming, but he was silenced when Loki stabbed him in the neck.

'I'm not,' Loki said. 'Nine.' He teleported away and Tony laughed.

'I'm winning, Lo,' he said and dropped to the ground.

'Ten,' was Loki's answer.

More agents were pouring out of the warehouse- more than Tony and Loki had assumed there would be- but it didn't matter. Tony gunned them all down or used his repulsors, and Loki flicked in and out of existence all over the place, using his spear to throw magic at various buildings and people. Sometimes, though, he liked slashing, stabbing, a deranged grin on his face as he cut one man's head clean off of his shoulders.

Tony twisted through the air as he fought, the agents' bullets no match for his armour. He'd just killed his eighteenth agent when he was blasted from the air by some type of weapon. The force of the blast sent him cartwheeling through the air and he crashed right into one of the warehouses. Metal and wood bent and cracked beneath him, the structure too weak to hold up against Tony's
Tony growled as he sat up. JARVIS was already running diagnostics and other than some paint
scratches and faint bruises that Tony could feel already healing, both Tony and the suit were fine.
Tony stumbled to his feet and out over the wreckage. The SHIELD agent who'd shot him had a
large weapon, about the size of a rocket launcher. It shot some type of energy, though, rather than
a missile, and the woman was already raising it again as Tony appeared.

The suit locked onto the weapon and just as she fired Tony launched himself into the air. The
energy blast whistled beneath Tony and hit the warehouse, throwing up another shock wave and
making Tony rock as he jetted over the female agent. She turned with Tony, managing to keep her
feet beneath her, and aimed again.

Tony changed course at the last second and spun into a dive, quickly closing the distance between
himself and his enemy. The HUD locked onto her and Tony opened fire just as she fired for a third
time. The energy blast disintegrated Tony's bullets and forced Tony to change direction again. This
time he kept going forward, spun around the woman, came up on her left; he slammed into her
before she could move and both of them were thrown to the ground.

Unlike Tony, she wasn't wearing much protection; a bullet proof vest, a helmet, some thick-soled
boots. When she hit the ground her head cracked open and Tony rolled aside, JARVIS informing
him that there were more agents just behind him, their S&F7's raised and cocked.

'Sir, the agents are talking about you and Mr Lie-smith over their communicators,' JARVIS said as
Tony ducked a barrage of fire. 'Would you like me to cut you into their feed?'

'Yeah, J,' Tony said. He lifted into the air once more and hovered, staring down at the agents as
they continued to fire. Their bullets did nothing, not even when they hit the covering over the suit's
arc reactor; Tony's armour was too smooth, too strong. They could do nothing.

'Connecting, sir,' JARVIS said, just before more voices joined, overlapping each other;

'It's Laufeyson, he has help.'

'What do you mean “he has help”?'

'A... a robot, sir, like Iron Man but- argh.'

'Davies? Davies?!!'

'Dead, sir. Laufeyson has a robot like Iron Man but it's bigger, it fights differently.'

'Fuck's sake. Where the hell did Laufeyson get that?'

'Don't know, sir- take cover, take cover, LAUFYEYSON'S BY WAREHOUSE D!'

'Shit, shit, fuck-'

The last voice was cut off by an explosion, and Tony saw it from where he was hovering just by
the roof of the closest building. He grinned and had JARVIS cut the feed before turning his
attention back to the agents below him.

Tony was purposely fighting just a tad differently to how he did as Iron Man. He wanted SHIELD
to think that Loki had worked with someone- Doom, maybe- to make a robot as good or better than
Iron Man. The design was similar, so why shouldn't the fighting style be? It would give Tony an
Tony cocked his head, as though listening to something, and then moved forward. He used his hands to stabilise his flight as he stopped just above the SHIELD agents. There were four of them and two were still shooting at him, aiming for his repulsors. As if petty little bullets could cut through the particles.

Snorting, Tony flicked through the HUD with his eyes until he'd opened up his missile/grenade program. He only had fourteen small missiles and six grenades, but it was enough for this; flicking open the right shin-guard, Tony dropped a small grenade over the agents.

They screamed and dove for cover but it was too late; Tony shot further up as the grenade exploded, and he watched in satisfaction as all four agents were killed. A quick scan showed no life-signs in Tony's immediate area so he dropped to the ground.

Loki appeared almost immediately at his side. He was slightly out of breath but other than that he was unharmed, not even sweating. Stupid sexy Jötunn.

Loki pointed at the closest warehouse and said, 'Go inside and destroy everything. Find their explosives and finish it.'

'Yes, sir,' Tony quipped over the comms, making Loki roll his eyes. Tony blasted his way into the warehouse and whistled once there; the building had been divided into two floors, with partitions put up as walls. According to the schematics JARVIS had stolen there was even a basement built beneath the far warehouse which held all of the weapons and explosives SHIELD had delivered to the base.

That was where Tony needed to be; this wasn't just about killing all of SHIELD's agents, it was about ripping the organisation apart and obliterating everything they owned. When Tony and Loki were done here, SHIELD's Miami base would no longer exist.

Tony had an easy time inside; he simply walked, using a repulsor to blast aside any agent he came across. 'JARVIS, give me the base's blueprints,' Tony said. They appeared on the HUD a second later and Tony followed them through the compound and then down into the basement.

Before Tony could step further in there was a long, loud whining noise, a flash of light, and then an explosion; the blast hit Tony in the chest and tossed him back into the wall, the thud of Tony's suit hitting the concrete wall echoing throughout the basement.

{oOo}

Seven... eight... Loki teleported over the injured man and silenced him with a stab to the neck. 'I don't,' he said to Tony. 'Nine.'

He teleported away again, appearing around the other side of the compound. There were more agents here and Loki threw up a shield, the bullets hitting his magic and rebounding. Some hit the agents firing and they fell, injured, while others dove aside, taking cover behind various vehicles and walls.
I'm winning, Lo,' Anthony said over the comms.

Loki smirked as he threw a dagger, hitting a Midgardian in the chest with enough force to end his life. 'Ten,' was his answer. Tony didn't reply but Loki heard explosions and repulsor blasts from the other side of the base and assumed Anthony was busy.

There were a lot of mortals scurrying about, all of them with large weapons that Tony had claimed were his. Loki wondered if, in the end, Fury would truly be surprised that Tony had changed sides; Fury lied to him, stole from him, and was still trying to steal from him. Fury was practically asking for Anthony's betrayal.

Loki's thoughts soon turned to the battle only; the mortals were surrounding him, trying to take him down with sheer numbers. Loki kept count as he stabbed, hacked, and blasted them all aside.

Fifteen... eighteen... twenty-three... twenty-five...

One agent attacked Loki directly, his gun aimed at Loki's chest. The bullets hit Loki’s armour and ricocheted away, Loki's face twisting into a dark grin as he swung at the man. The mortal managed to duck the first few blows, aided by his comrades continuing to fire at Loki with their little toys.

But Loki was a god and had been battling for a thousand years; he swept his spear across the man's torso and watched in satisfaction as the man's uniform and protective gear ripped open. Blood and innards fell out and the agent screamed as he dropped to his knees. Loki took pity on him and slashed at the human's throat until he fell onto his back, body twitching as his life slowly ended.

Twenty-six.

When Loki had finished killing or mortally injuring the agents on this side of the compound, he teleported back to Tony. The Genesis suit was standing about three feet from one of the warehouse's doors, and Loki dropped to stand at Tony's side.

'Go inside and destroy everything,' Loki ordered, pointing at the door. 'Find their explosives and finish it.'

'Yes, sir,' Tony said over the comms and Loki rolled his eyes. Having SHIELD see Loki as being the one in charge was Stark's plan. Why he insisted on acting like an idiot was anyone's guess.

Tony stormed his way into the warehouse and soon the sounds of him gunning down SHIELD agents grew dim, then faded all together. That left Loki free to hunt down the rest of the agents outside and destroy every building he came across.

There were small sheds set up between the paths and clumps of dirt, and each held a hiding SHIELD agent. Every single one Loki killed was screaming into their comms demanding back-up or ordering that Director Fury be called. Loki grinned each time he killed a Midgardian, the tally in his mind growing taller and taller.

Loki let his magic free, searching for life-forms, and found one last agent sitting in a small building near the fence. There were more agents inside the warehouse but Loki decided to leave those for Tony.

Teleporting into the shed, Loki found the agent hanging over a console, a communication unit hooked over his head.

'This is SHIELD Miami Base. I repeat, Base S-M-Zero-Zero-Eight. We are under attack, I repeat,
we are under attack! Two intruders have killed almost everyone and the base—'

The man cut himself off as Loki stabbed him in the back. The god watched, head tilted, as blood bubbled up the mortal's throat and spilled out of his mouth, staining his lips, chin and then his neck red. Loki slowly removed his spear and watched the mortal slump over the computer console. Loki kicked him aside and was about to leave when a speaker on the desk burst into life;

'Miami base? Base S-M-Zero-Zero-Eight come in, please. This is Director Fury from the Helicarrier, I order you to come in.'

Loki grinned and pushed the dead mortal out of his seat and took it himself. He grabbed the communicator and slipped his helmet off before putting the headset on. 'This is SHIELD Miami base, how may I help you today?' Loki drawled.

There was a pause before Fury ordered, 'Identify yourself.'

'Why, Director, have you forgotten me so soon?' Loki asked, effecting an air of hurt. 'I know I have been remiss in my actions lately, but I thought that this would bring us back together. Surely you've missed me.'

Another pause before Fury snarled, 'Loki.'

'The one and only,' Loki grinned. 'Now, Director, I'm sure you have plans to send a few more SHIELD agents this way to deal with me. However, before you get here this base will be destroyed. I have already killed all of your agents, and soon I will blow this place up. Please don't build here again, Director, I'll just come back.'

'Loki, Fury growled, 'surrender now. You can't win against SHIELD.'

'Can't I?' Loki laughed. 'How many agents have I killed, Fury? And how many times have you captured me? How about I don't surrender; why should I make it easy for you, hmm? Instead I'll stay out here, destroying what I please, and you and your cute little mortal pets can try and stop me. Deal?'

'Loki -'

'Deal,' Loki cut in and pulled the headset off. Fury continued to shout from the speaker, demanding Loki's words, but Loki lifted a hand and blasted the entire shed apart with magic. He smiled in satisfaction before turning and heading for the warehouse. Perhaps Stark needed his help.

{oOo}

'Mother fucker,' Tony growled and sat up. They'd hit him with that fucking blaster gun that Coulson had used against Loki back when the Trickster had invaded; it had been bigger than the one that female agent had used earlier. Tony didn't know what the fuck it was made out of, but the blast had been enough to throw him off his feet and send some of his circuits shorting. The arc reactor was practically bomb-proof, though, and within seconds of getting hit Tony was on his feet again.
The basement was dark, so Tony activated the suit's infrared. The HUD's lights changed and Tony picked out the heat sources of the five... six... eight SHIELD agents cowering away in the corners like rats.

'Hello, there,' Tony hummed to himself. He had enough bullets left to take them out and watched with a grin as his suit locked onto each heat source, then fired.

All the bodies dropped and Tony paused for a beat, watching for movement, before moving on when he realised he was alone.

After some potting about and bumping into things, Tony found SHIELD's grenades and rocket launchers and all the other Stark Industries-made weapons that Fury had apparently been stockpiling. Tony scowled and muttered, 'Serves you right, jack-hole,' to himself as he bundled everything up into the centre of the room.

'Genesis?'

That was Loki's voice and Tony frowned, wondering what had happened to the comms. He stood and turned just in time to see Loki throw a ball of light into the air, illuminating the room.

'There you are,' Loki said. 'I tried contacting you through the communicators but you didn't answer.' He waved his hand and then smiled. 'Speak freely, I've wiped out all the security measures in this room.'

Tony put his suit on speaker and said, 'I got blasted by some energy-gun.' He pointed over his shoulder and Loki frowned, moving deeper into the room. 'Try and find it, would you? It messed with my suit and I wanna fucking stop it next time.'

Loki nodded and started inspecting each body. After a few minutes he came back carrying a large gun, both bigger and heavier than the one Coulson had used well over a year ago.

Maybe SHIELD have been working on improving it, Tony mused before shaking his head. 'Throw it over your back, we're taking it with us,' he instructed Loki.

Loki did as asked. 'Are you almost done here?'

'Yeah,' Tony nodded. 'Just setting a timer.' He'd brought a few with him, hidden beneath his armour. He stuck one into the block of C4 he'd found stacked against one wall and grinned. 'SHIELD's got some good shit,' he said.

'Next time we'll take some with us,' Loki suggested.

'Or I can build some weapons,' Tony said. 'I am an expert, you know.'

Loki rolled his eyes and moved on; 'Are we done here?'

'Yeah,' Tony nodded. 'Just gotta press the big green button.'

'Hurry along; I spoke to Fury earlier and I don't doubt that he's sending reinforcements.'

'You spoke to Fury?' Tony pouted. 'Damn, I wish I hadn't missed that.'

'He'll call the Avengers together on a later date to discuss this,' Loki reminded him; Tony grinned at the thought. 'Come on, Stark.'

Tony set the timer for three minutes then followed Loki from the basement. Rather than make their
way through the warehouse, the two just joined forces and blew their way out. The sun was still high in the sky but there was smoke and dirt lingering in the air; a few small fires were burning atop various boxes and cars, and Tony could see blood and bodies slumped every which way.

'Are you okay?' Loki asked.

'Yeah,' Tony said. 'Yeah, Loki, I'm fine,' he insisted. 'I don't care about these people. They chose to work for SHIELD. SHIELD's my enemy. Fuck them.'

'Very well,' Loki said. He moved closer and wrapped his arms around Tony. 'Hold on.'

Tony did, and between one blink and the he and Loki had moved, now standing across the road where they'd first appeared.

'We're invisible,' Loki said, waving a hand. His helmet disappeared and Tony followed suit, deciding to flip up his faceplate so he could watch the SHIELD base blow up.

In less than a minute the two gods could hear sirens; the mortal police showing up to figure out what the fuck was going on.

'Are we far enough away, JARVIS?' Tony asked. 'I don't wanna get caught in the explosion.'

There was a pause as JARVIS calculated it and the police finally pulled up. Tony watched, head tilted, while beside him Loki smirked.

'I would suggest moving further away, sir,' JARVIS eventually said.

'Loki?' Tony looked up at the taller god, who nodded and clambered onto Tony's back. Tony shot smoothly into the air, moving up and back, keeping the SHIELD base in sight. They were about three hundred feet away when JARVIS started speaking into Tony's ear again;

'Ten... nine... eight... seven... six...'

'Watch, Loki,' Tony said. Loki moved further up Tony's back and rested his head against Tony's, their eyes trained on the compound.

'Three... two... one-

The explosion was massive. One second the compound was still there, various warehouses grouped together, the outer area still on fire, and the next it just exploded. Fire and smoke and debris was blasted up and out; the surrounding area was showered in crap, some of it still burning.

The shock wave rocked Tony and Loki just a bit, but not enough to throw them from the air. Loki tapped Tony on the forehead and pointed down, Tony's eyes flicking to find the police cars; they'd been thrown through the air and were now on their roofs or sides, on fire or blasted beyond use, sirens still whirring in some cases.

'Wow,' Tony breathed. It was bigger than the explosion Tony had caused escaping the Ten Rings, but nowhere near as big as the Jericho Missile. Tony grinned as he imagined just aiming a missile at each SHIELD base and blowing them up that way.

But where's the fun in that? he mused.

'We should leave,' Loki said, pulling Tony from his thoughts. 'We wouldn't want to overstay our welcome.'
'Yeah,' Tony agreed. 'Okay.'

He flipped his faceplate down and felt Loki's grip tighten just before he turned and blasted through the air, leaving the SHIELD base- or what was left of it- behind.

{oOo}

By the time they made it back to Malibu Tony was vibrating with adrenalin. Their plan had gone well, SHIELD's Miami base was gone, and they'd even gotten a new weapon out of it. Loki teleported them into the mansion and Tony peeled his suit off, watching it fold into itself until it was sitting on the floor, a simple box instead of a killing machine.

Loki pulled his armour off the old-fashioned way, looking tired from their recent venture. Tony managed to wait until Loki was standing in just his leather pants to pounce. He slammed Loki into the wall, the Trickster gasping when the cold concrete pressed against his back.

'Anthony-' he began, but Tony cut him off. He crushed their mouths together, the kiss all sloppy lips and biting teeth. Loki gasped again before turning it into a groan. He made another soft noise against Tony's lips before curling a hand through Tony's hair and twisting.

Tony broke away with a grunt and shuddered as he rolled his hips against Loki's. 'Sorry,' he murmured, 'but fuck, Loki, that was... it was...'

'I know,' Loki breathed. He tugged at Tony's hair again, brought the younger god's face up so that he could whisper his words against Tony's beard. 'You will have to do all the work, Anthony,' he purred. 'I'm far too tired.'

Tony shivered again and wet his lips. 'Bedroom?'

Loki nodded and wrapped his arms firmly around Tony. He teleported them right onto Tony's bed, Loki heaving in a breath as they landed.

'You okay?' Tony asked. He shifted a bit to make sure that he wasn't hurting Loki, but Loki just nodded and wrapped his legs firmly around the inventor's waist.

'Fuck me, Stark,' he growled. 'I want you now.'

That was one order that Tony could definitely get on board with. He ducked down to give Loki a quick, sloppy kiss before he pulled back. He got his undersuit off as quickly as possible, eyes drinking in Loki's body when the god shimmied out of his leather pants. His boots went flying over Tony's shoulder, one hitting the dresser and sending something crashing to the floor.

Tony didn't care, though. He just shoved his undersuit off and climbed back atop Loki, both gods moaning as their hard cocks came into contact. Tony rolled his hips down and Loki thrust up, erections sliding together as their mouths did the same.

Tony didn't know what to do first; he didn't want to move away from Loki's cool, slick mouth, but he wanted to bury himself in Loki's tight ass. His cock felt good, though, sliding along Loki's thinner, longer one, the foreskin something Tony wasn't used to. He liked exploring it with his
tongue, licking and slurping and sliding into and over the slit, watching as Loki lost himself the longer Tony sucked and hummed.

God, now he wanted to give Loki a blow job.

Loki growled beneath him and thrust up again. He wrapped his legs around Tony's waist, crossing his ankles over Tony's lower back. Loki used his strength— still greater than Tony's— to force Tony down until the Midgardian's cock was sliding beneath his balls, against his ass.

'Fuck me, Anthony,' he repeated, green eyes bright and locked onto Tony's.

'Okay, okay, fuck,' Tony grunted.

Loki smirked as Tony moved to open the bedside drawer. He grabbed the large bottle of lube and moved back over to Loki. Loki watched, eyes half-closed, while Tony opened the bottle and squeezed a generous amount onto one palm. He dribbled some of the gel over Loki's perineum and further down, over his hole, watching as the muscles flinched at the cool liquid.

'Okay?' Tony asked.

'Stark,' Loki sighed and let his legs fall further open. 'If you don't prepare me and fuck me within the next twenty seconds I shall do it myself.'

Loki had done that before, plenty of times, when he'd felt that Tony was being too slow. Sometimes Tony had even dawdled, waiting and waiting until Loki lost his patience, flipped Tony onto his back, and mounted him, chasing his own pleasure.

Tony didn't want that this time; he was too hyped up, his hands almost shaking. He needed to fuck Loki, get rid of this energy, bask in the fucking amazing feeling that came with having sex with Loki and destroying SHIELD.

He dropped the bottle and slid his fingers along Loki's balls, then further down, rubbing and warming the lube before sliding one finger in. Loki had excellent control of his muscles but he still needed prep. Loki's head fell back onto the pillows as Tony stretched him open, the Trickster moaning and hissing as Tony's fingers plunged deeper and deeper in, scissoring to work Loki's hole further open.

'Anthony!' Loki growled when Tony had just added a fourth digit. 'Now!' Tony didn't need to be told again; he grabbed the lube, slicked up his cock, dribbled more over Loki's entrance, then pushed in.

Loki hissed as Tony bottomed out after one smooth, slick push. Tony bent over Loki and groaned, eyes squeezed shut and body tense.

'Anthony,' Loki sighed, drawing his attention, 'fuck me hard and fast, then after I rest I will bathe and you will feed me. Understand?'

Tony snorted. Even when he was on top Loki was still in charge. He had to do something about that.

'Shit up and hold on,' Tony said as he drew out. Loki raised an eyebrow, opened his mouth, but whatever he was about to say was cut off by Tony slamming back in.

Loki grunted, then hummed, then finally cried out as Tony quickly set up a smooth, if somewhat
shaky, rhythm. Tony was too horny, too wired, to put in the usual care he did. Loki didn't seem to mind, though, if the grunts and moans and begs for, “More, more, more!” were anything to go by. Tony only had to change his angle three times before he found Loki's prostate. Loki shouted Tony's name when he did and wrapped his arms firmly around Tony's neck, his legs around Tony's waist, all four limbs pulling Tony closer and closer.

Tony groaned as he fucked into Loki. God, he was gorgeous, all warm skin, a pretty flush working down his neck and across his smooth chest. Loki only ever felt hot when he was Logan Thomas, and Tony preferred this- the black hair, bright green eyes, dark grin and beautiful, cool skin- so much more over Logan. Logan wasn't Loki, not the real Loki. And the real Loki was who Tony wanted.

Just him, Tony thought as he thrust in harder, harder, his balls slapping against Loki's ass. Loki was clawing at his back now, nails sharp and digging up bruises and skin that would heal within minutes. Fuck, Tony thought, or maybe it was out loud, because Loki nodded and started swearing under his breath. Just Loki, just Loki, always Loki -

Something inside Tony's chest snapped and magic flooded his body. Tony's gasp and, 'What the-' was cut off by the sheer amount of pleasure that suddenly spread through his veins and blood and muscles and... and everything. His magic folded over itself, grew, licked at Tony's skin and by extension Loki's. But Loki felt so cold, yet so hot, cold-hot-cold-hot-there!

Tony slammed in one last time and, pushed by whatever the fuck his magic was doing, came harder than he ever had before. His vision whited out and his body spasmed and it felt like his skin was on fire. It tingled and throbbed and Tony fell forward before he could stop himself, landing on Loki.

Loki didn't seem to be doing any better. Tony could hear him grunting and cursing, his muscles tightening around Tony's spent cock. 'Stark,' he growled. Tony managed to get one hand between them, wrap it around Loki's cock, and pull.

His magic sang again, it throbbed, and it somehow made it past Loki's magical defences- and how the fuck had Tony ever missed the protection Loki had coating his very skin?- and sank into him. Loki shouted himself hoarse as he orgasmed, come slicking Tony's first and Loki's stomach. Loki moaned and shook beneath Tony and it took a long, long time for either god to come down from their high.

When they did Tony became aware of the fact that he was still sprawled out over Loki. He managed to roll off to the side, thumping onto the mattress and groaning.

'Fuck.'

'Yes,' Loki agreed.

'What was that?' Tony asked, voice muffled slightly by the sheets beneath him.

Loki sighed and Tony heard him move, but didn't bother lifting his head to see. 'What were you thinking?' Loki questioned. 'Just before you climaxed?'

'Uh...' Tony frowned and thought back. Fuck, best sex ever. Tony's brain was scrambled, it really was. 'Uh...' he tried again, 'I think, um... I was just thinking about you.'

'Me?'

Tony nodded- or tried to, whatever. 'Yeah, I was... thinking of how cold your skin is, even after we
have sex. But when you're Logan Thomas you're hot, like a human. I was just thinking about how I like you better this way.'

Loki was silent so Tony decided it was time to roll over and face him. He managed to after a bit of grunting and internal swearing. Jesus, what the fuck had his magic done to him?

Loki was staring at him, eyes narrowed, but there was... hope? Worry? Something, in his eyes. 'Lo?'

'You were thinking about me?' Loki questioned.

Tony nodded.

'I see,' Loki said.

'What's that mean?'

Loki sighed and reached up to rub his eyes. 'It means that you are more in touch with your magic than I thought you would be at this point.' His eyes narrowed slightly. 'Or perhaps your magic is just more in touch with mine than I thought it was.'

'What?'

'A connection,' Loki muttered, looking torn between annoyance and... hope. Tony was sure it was hope. 'We have a... connection, that I haven't told you about yet.'

Tony frowned and sat up to lean on one elbow. 'What are you talking about?'

'Come here,' Loki said, holding an arm open. Tony stared at him, but when he saw that same worry-hope shining in Loki's eyes he decided fuck it and moved closer. Loki's arm curled around him, cool and safe, and Tony's magic settled somewhere behind his arc reactor. Tony breathed out and pressed his face to Loki's chest. 'For now I will tell you that we are connected. It doesn't affect you in any way... well, it doesn't have to affect you in any way.'

Tony frowned again. 'And what about you?'

Loki chuckled slightly. 'I will, as always, be fine.'

'Loki, you're confusing me. Wanna speak English?'

Loki pinched his arm and Tony slapped the Trickster's stomach. 'I will explain it properly soon,' Loki finally said. His voice was thick with promise, Tony could hear it. But there was also that worry, underlying everything Loki said, everything Loki did. For some reason, even now, Loki was worried about... something. 'Just rest for now, Anthony,' Loki said. 'I'm tired, too. I will explain everything after we wake and eat.'

Tony wanted to push- wanted to know what the fuck was going on, what had just happened, what the hell Loki was talking about- but... yeah, Loki needed the sleep; he'd used a lot of magic in the past twenty-four hours, and Tony didn't want him burning himself out.

Tony would wait, for now. But later he'd sit Loki down and get the full fucking story out of him.

I knew he was hiding something, Tony mused as he let his eyes shut. Whatever it is, I'll deal. It's not like I'm letting him go. Tony yawned. Beside him, Loki was already asleep.
Author's Note: Long author's note is long. Sorry for the wait on this chapter, but I've been sidetracked writing a new Avengers story that features some, uh... pretty dark and heavy shit. I blame GreenLoki. Completely. I was gonna update yesterday but I found out that Leonard Nimoy, Mr Spock, passed away, so I was devastated. Still am.

I, um... didn't plan the whole “Tony's magic decides to make a sexy appearance” thing, like, at all. I'd planned to have Loki explain their magical bond much, much later. But apparently it had to happen now, so there we go.

In other news; the SI9 pistol, or Stark Industries 9 Semi-automatic Pistol, is completely fictional. I based it on the Beretta M9, a semi-automatic handgun that is used by the United States Army.

The S&F7, or Stark Industries S&F7 light machine guns, are completely fictional and based on the German Heckler & Koch MG4. I made the gun up for my FrostIron story “Casual Affair”.

Cheers,

{Dreamer}
'So...' Tony hummed into what was becoming a nice after-glow, 'connection?'

Loki grunted beside him, and made no move to get up or, you know, *explain what the fuck had just happened.*

'Loki,' Tony nudged him. The Trickster huffed and swatted at him. 'Hey, you said you'd explain what happened,' Tony reminded him. 'Preferably as soon as possible, 'cause it kinda freaked me out.'

Loki sighed and finally peeled his eyes open. He looked at Tony, green eyes bright, and then huffed; 'Very well.' He pulled himself up, acting like it took *all the effort in the world*, and used his nimble fingers to sweep his hair to one side. 'You may want to get dressed,' Loki said as he braided his hair messily, tying it off at the end.

'Why?' Tony asked.

Loki tilted his head, then slid from the bed; they hadn't bothered getting under the covers before fucking. 'Because I'm not sure how you'll react to what I have to say,' Loki told him.

Tony just stared at him for a beat, but when Loki himself started getting dressed Tony shrugged and stood. He had to go hunting for tissues to clean himself up, and when he re-entered the room Loki was dressed and sitting cross-legged on the bed, hands clasped in his lap. He waited for Tony to dress, the genius tugging on well-worn jeans and a long-sleeved shirt.

'Okay,' Tony said, 'I'm dressed.' He jumped onto the bed and sat against the headboard, legs stretched before him. 'Explain.'

Statement, not a question, and Loki gave him a small frown.

'You said that you were thinking about me,' Loki began, 'when you climaxed.'

Tony rolled his eyes at the wording but nodded.

'And you have stated that your magic... *reacts*, when I'm around,' Loki added.
'Uh... yeah, I guess you could phrase it like that,' Tony said. 'My chest- or that area behind my chest? Where I kinda feel my magic?' Loki inclined his head. 'Yeah, that goes all... warm and...' Tony trailed off and pursed his lips; he wasn't sure how to explain it properly. 'It's just a... a feeling,' Tony said, 'like my magic knows when you're near and gets all... fuzzy and excited. It doesn't happen all the time, just sometimes.' Loki raised an eyebrow and Tony poked his tongue out.

'Stop being a child,' Loki said.

'Stop giving me the eyebrow-of-judgement,' Tony retorted. Loki's other eyebrow joined the first and Tony snorted. 'Whatever,' he shrugged, 'that's the best I can explain it, alright? If you want a better understanding, go ahead and crawl around my mindscape and see for yourself.'

Loki frowned at that, eyes narrowed, but then he shook whatever he'd been thinking from his head.

'No, I don't think that I should,' he said.

'Why not?'

'I was explaining it before we went on a tangent about your magic,' Loki replied. 'You're more in touch with your magic than I thought you would be at this point.'

Tony remembered Loki mentioned that half-an-hour ago.

'I don't mean that you're more powerful than I thought you would be,' Loki continued, 'simply that you've managed to connect to your magic far more quickly and thoroughly than I thought. You shouldn't have reached this point for a few more months at least.' He pursed his lips again and stared over Tony's shoulder- at the window, Tony assumed, where you could see the ocean.

'Okay...' Tony said slowly, just to break the silence.

Once again Loki shook his head. His eyes darted over Tony briefly before resting on the rumpled bedspread, and Tony frowned; was this really that hard for Loki to talk about?

Apparently it was, because Loki suddenly slid off the bed and started pacing, his braid bouncing along his collarbone, hands clasped behind his back.

'This wasn't supposed to happen,' he said. 'I am not Æsir; I shouldn't be able to form this type of connection.'

'What connection?' Tony interrupted.

'This!' Loki hissed and pointed between them.

'Loki, I have no fucking idea what you're talking about!' Tony said. 'I thought you were gonna explain?'

'If I do you'll leave!' Loki shouted.

'What? Why the hell would I do that?'

'BECAUSE EVERYBODY DOES!'

'Ookay...' Tony whistled and held his hands up. Loki was panting, his cheeks pink, eyes wild... it was a good look on him when they were fucking, but not when they were having a goddamn conversation. 'Easy, Lokes, just calm down, alright?' Loki scowled at him and went back to pacing,
but at least he wasn't yelling any more. 'Alright,' Tony cleared his throat, 'I'm just gonna say this upfront before we talk about anything else. I'm never going to leave you, Loki.'

Loki sneered at him.

'I'm not,' Tony repeated. 'Not only do I like you, you idiot, but we have a business contract, a magical one, that says we'll always have each other's backs.'

'Yes, a business deal,' Loki muttered.

Tony just raised his eyebrows, but Loki took a deep breath and shook his head.

'It matters not,' he decided, 'you deserve an explanation.'

_Hell yeah I do_, Tony thought but didn't say. Loki looked like he was about to blow something up. Tony didn't want to... push him over the edge, so to speak, with his smart ass remarks.

Loki stopped pacing but didn't sit; he just stood at the end of the bed and looked down at Tony, wringing his hands. 'I know why your magic reacts the way it does around me,' he eventually revealed.

Tony snorted. 'I knew it,' he muttered, then grinned at the shocked look Loki was sporting. 'Oh come on, Rudolph. You always acted weird when I brought it up! I might not be a master liar like you, but I'm not an idiot. I spend half my time lying to people and the members of my board. And Pepper. And the Avengers. And -'

'Yes, I get it,' Loki interrupted, voice a drawl, 'you're a fantastic liar.'

'Not a master, though,' Tony quipped.

Loki rolled his eyes towards the ceiling, as though praying for patience. Tony hummed at that. Did the Æsir pray to people? Did gods have gods?

Loki wrapped his arms around himself, drawing Tony from his thoughts.

'Loki?'

'When we first discovered your magic, and you viewed it for the first time,' Loki said, 'my magic reacted rather... explosively. Do you remember?'

'Yeah,' Tony nodded, 'Thor shut down the Tower and the Avengers burst in like the assholes they are.'

'My magic felt... connected to yours immediately,' Loki explained. And there was that word again, Tony mused. 'That isn't something that normally happens, at least not this quickly,' Loki said. 'When my mother helped me better understand my magic, and when she taught me everything she knew, my magic shied away from her until I was roughly 700 years old. Only after centuries of us working together did my magic accept her as friend, then as family.'

'Okay...' Tony said, 'so we're just really compatible?'

'Extremely compatible,' Loki said.

'And that's a problem?'

'It is because our magic will just get closer,' Loki said. 'The longer we work together, spend time
together, sleep together... the longer we practise magic together, it will get harder and harder to stop our magic from bonding us.'

'Whoa, wait!' Tony held a hand up and Loki’s jaw snapped shut. 'Bond us? What the hell does that mean?'

'What does it sound like it means?' Loki growled. 'A bond! An attraction! Our magic will lock us together because it has decided that we're compatible, that we should be together!'

'Is this, like... magic-married or something?' Tony demanded. 'Is that what you're telling me?'

'Yes!' Loki snapped. 'Now you know why I didn't want to tell you! Being magically bonded is nothing to play with, Stark! We will both live for at least 5000 years, you Midgardians barely know how to stay married for thirty. If we bonded we could never stray from the other, our magic wouldn't allow it. We could be with others if we wished, but the discomfort caused by our magic would force us to eventually reconnect.'

Tony... had no fucking idea what to say to that. He'd never, not once in his entire life, considered getting married. Getting magic-married didn't sound any better. Actually, it sounded far more fucking permanent than a simple Midgardian marriage.

And what the fuck, why would his magic choose Loki? Wait, that wasn't the question he should be asking, because Loki was brilliant and gorgeous and fucking insane; of course Tony's magic would wanna... magic-bond with him.

But Loki's magic? Loki called it a connection, meaning that his magic had chosen Tony. Why? Tony wasn't anything special, not really; not when compared to Loki, a 1000+ year-old Jötunn mage.

Tony opened his mouth but stalled, still having no idea what to say. Loki didn't push him; he just sat on the bed, eyes darting around the room, fingers picking at his leather pants.

Tony didn't get a chance to try again, because his landline chose that moment to ring, startling the two gods, who flushed when they caught each other's eyes. 'I'm, uh...' Tony coughed, 'gonna get that.'

Loki just nodded and Tony jumped from the bed and jogged across the room. The slim black device read “Stark Tower” and Tony groaned; what the fuck did the Avengers want now?

'This is Tony,' he said when he answered.

'Tony, thank God,' Rogers said. He sounded frantic. 'I was worried you'd be out.'

'Nope, just spent the last few hours sleeping, eating, and fucking,' Tony said. Steve muttered something that Tony couldn't hear. 'What's up, Spangles?'

'I know that you're on vacation,' Rogers said, 'but we need you back.'

'What do you mean you need me back?' Tony demanded. 'I just got to Malibu!'

'I know,' Steve replied, 'but there was an attack and Fury wants every Avenger in New York.'

'What attack?' Tony asked, trying to inject some concern into his voice. He wasn't sure he managed it.
There was a pause before Rogers said, 'Loki attacked a SHIELD base.'

Tony grinned, but quickly wiped it from his face. Rogers couldn't see him, but the man was perceptive; Tony didn't want the soldier hearing his humour. 'An attack? What base?'

'Miami,' Rogers said. 'Look, Tony, just come back to New York. Fury wants to discuss this with us in person.'

'I thought Fury wanted me to take a break,' Tony said, throwing Rogers' words back at him.

'I know, and we- the team- still think that it was a good idea,' Rogers said, 'but Loki somehow found the location of a SHIELD base and completely wiped it off the map. He killed over seventy agents in twenty minutes.'

Tony breathed out heavily and hoped Rogers took it as a sign of anger at Loki, rather than anger at Rogers himself. 'Okay, fine,' he grunted. 'It'll fly to the Helicarrier in the suit, just send the coordinates to my StarkPhone and I'll have JARVIS input them into the HUD.'

'Thank you, Tony,' Rogers said. 'If I can I'll make sure that you get to take another break soon. Fury just wants us to stay in New York in case Loki attacks again.'

'Got it,' Tony said, and hung up before Rogers could reply. He rolled his eyes and turned to face Loki, who hadn't moved from where he was sitting on the end of the bed. 'I gotta head back to New York.'

'I gathered,' Loki said. 'We knew this might happen.'

'Yeah,' Tony agreed. 'I'll go in my Iron Man suit. You should take the jet back to New York as Logan, just in case SHIELD's keeping an eye on you.'

Loki nodded and stood, going towards the bathroom.

'Loki.' The older god paused before looking over his shoulder. 'We're gonna discuss this more when I get back, okay?' Tony said. 'I need to think about it, and I'm still a bit confused over... well, everything, but... this isn't gonna ruin us, okay?'

Loki looked surprised that Tony wanted to discuss it, and Tony couldn't blame him; he usually ran at the first sign of feelings, but this... this was too important to ignore. He and Loki had to sit down and talk everything over and deal with it. They had too much to lose.

'Very well,' Loki said. 'I shall wait for you to contact me.'

Tony nodded and Loki went into the bathroom, leaving Tony to collect his undersuit and anything else he might need.

{oOo}

He flew his Iron Man suit to the Helicarrier, leaving it up to Loki to transport the Genesis suit back to New York. When he arrived Steve was waiting for him and waved when Tony landed before
him, the suit peeling off of him and folding itself into a suitcase at his feet.

'I really am sorry about this, Tony,' Rogers said.

Tony just nodded. He still didn't know if Rogers knew - if he was aware of Fury's grand plan to get Tony's suits. He was clearly aware of the so-called “need” to get Tony off the team, but the rest of it? Well, Tony didn't know. Quite frankly, he didn't care, because Rogers was an asshole who couldn't see past his old friendship with Howard Stark. Tony often wondered if his dad had been in love with Rogers, what with the way the man had always fucking gone on and on about the Captain.

Rogers led Tony through the Helicarrier and into a large conference room. The rest of the Avengers were already there, and Tony briefly wondered if Rogers had been sent to escort him; Tony could have found the room himself, he'd designed the Helicarrier, after all. Maybe Fury didn't trust him not to run off and take a peek at everything.

Yeah, it'd have to be Loki who broke in to get the locations of the rest of SHIELD's bases. It seemed like Tony wasn't going to be left alone long enough to get them himself.

Romanov and Barton were sitting next to each other, with Bruce on Clint's other side, Thor and Fury opposite them. Romanov had a dark blue cast on her right arm and Tony quickly looked away; wouldn't do to laugh.

'Alright, I'm here,' Tony said as he sat at the end of the table. He shoved his suit between his legs and leaned on the table. Coulson was opposite him, though wasn't sitting; just standing there, between Fury and Bruce, hands clasped behind his back. 'What happened?' Tony asked.

Fury briefly described the attack- Loki had turned up, had destroyed everything, and had had some type of robot or suit with him. Tony frowned at that bit, played the part of the confused/pissed-off genius he needed SHIELD to think he was.

Fury had footage and gestured for Coulson to play it. The TV behind the agent was switched on and Coulson stepped aside so that they could all watch.

Everybody was silent as footage of the burning complex appeared on the screen. Genesis had been caught on tape a lot more than Loki; the cameras seemed to go grainy whenever Loki appeared, and then they cut to black. Tony wondered if Loki had been actively destroying them, or if his magic had just interfered with the CCTV cameras.

Finally, after a few minutes, the footage of Loki calling Tony “Genesis” out-loud played across the screen, and Coulson paused the footage. Everybody turned to look at Fury, who said, 'We don't know how Loki found this base. Our biggest concern is finding a possible mole within SHIELD, or a breach in SHIELD's computers.' He paused. 'Our other big concern is the robot that Loki has with him, which he called Genesis.'

'It had a lot of fire-power and could move independently, away from Loki,' Coulson added.

There was silence until Romanov broke it. She leaned back and folded her good arm over her stomach, tucking it beneath her cast. 'It looks like Iron Man,' she stated, 'only without the arc reactor.'

Tony felt his insides go cold when all eyes turned to him. He continued to stare at the screen, where Genesis had been caught with Loki, just about to head into the warehouse to finish off the rest of the agents.
'Excuse me?' he finally growled and turned to look at her.

Despite his tone, Romanov met his gaze coolly. 'That robot Loki has looks a lot like Iron Man. Why is that?'

'Why is... wait.' Tony leaned forward and spread one palm over the table. 'Are you implying that I gave Loki the Iron Man technology?'

'No, Tony!' Steve was quick to jump in, verbally putting himself between Tony and Natasha before they could come to blows. 'That's not what Natasha's insinuating.'

'Isn't it?' Tony demanded.

'No,' Romanov answered, but Tony could see the lie in her eyes, in the set of her mouth. She didn't know for sure, but she already didn't trust Tony. She'd always been the most vocal in regards to comparing Tony Stark to Loki Laufeyson, Tony knew from all the hacking he'd done. She had her suspicions. 'But the suit, which Loki called Genesis, bears an awful resemblance to Iron Man. We know for a fact that Loki doesn't understand our technology enough to build one himself. So he either got someone who understands it very well to build it for him, or he got it from the source.'

Tony leapt to his feet and Steve did too. Bruce, Thor and Clint were all watching him and Natasha wearily. 'What the fuck are you implying? Tony practically shouted. 'If one of my suits went missing, I'd know it. Nobody can get past JARVIS, and the security protecting my suits is the best on the planet!'

'There is not a chance in hell that Loki got my technology!' Tony snapped. 'And I wouldn't fucking give it to him! Despite what you think of me, Romanov, I'm not a fucking super villain! If Loki took over the planet he'd destroy it! I'm actually rather fond of living and don't have a goddamn death wish! I wouldn't help that psychotic son of a bitch any more than you would!'

'Alright, everybody, calm down!' Rogers ordered, his Captain America voice on. Tony continued to glare at Romanov, who just stared at him, as calm and collected as she always was. 'Tony,' he said, turning to the genius, 'nobody here is implying that you gave Loki your technology.' He paused to survey the SHIELD agents. 'Isn't that right?'

Romanov pursed her lips and Coulson glanced at Fury. Fury just stared at Tony.

'You can't be serious,' Steve gaped, apparently shocked that anyone would think Tony capable of world domination. Sometimes, Tony mused, the man was an idiot. 'Why would Tony do that?'

'Because he likes playing god,' Fury answered.

'The Man of Iron would never betray us,' Thor interrupted.

'I agree with Thor,' Bruce said. That's right, Tony thought, I still have some fucking allies on this team. 'Loki clearly has access, or had access, to some form of the Iron Man technology,' Bruce then added, shooting an apologetic look Tony's way, 'but that doesn't mean that Tony helped him, or that Tony has a leak.'

'And if he does?' Fury asked, good eye hard on Tony.

'I don't,' Tony growled. 'But if you want, I'll go through every inch of JARVIS' programming and check. I'll pull him apart just to show you that he hasn't been fucking breached.'

'Okay,' Bruce said before anyone else could start yelling. 'If Tony doesn't have a leak, then we
have to figure out how Loki got this technology. Now, what super villain did Loki recently kill?'

Thor frowned and Barton raised his eyebrows. 'You think Doom built this Genesis thing for Loki?'

the archer asked.

'It makes sense,' Bruce said. Tony almost breathed a sigh of relief, but stopped himself as he slowly sank back into his seat. If he'd suggested it, he didn't think Fury and the others would believe him. Tony hadn't expected to personally be put before the firing squad with Genesis so soon. He'd assumed that they'd just think Doom built it.

He'd clearly underestimated just how little Fury and SHIELD trusted him. If they truly thought Tony capable of working with Loki, then it was going to be harder covering his tracks and taking SHIELD down. They'd be watching him more closely now, just waiting for him to slip up and prove their theories right.

Fuck, Tony thought.

'It's been obvious for over a year now that Doom wanted Tony's technology, especially his repulsor technology,' Bruce continued. Tony focused back on the conversation. 'He made a grab for Tony in the past, and he outright attacked Stark Tower to get Tony's repulsor technology just a few months before Loki killed him. Maybe he managed to work something out, build something similar to Tony's suits. Maybe he needed Loki's help and Loki agreed, but then killed Doom for the suit or suits when he was done.' Bruce shrugged. 'After all, once it was built, Loki really had no use for Doom.'

'It is like my brother to work with someone, only to betray them when he has what he needs,' Thor nodded seriously. 'He never makes deals lightly, and when he does they never end well for anyone other than Loki.'

Tony almost frowned at that but held himself back. Loki tricked people, yes; he was the God of Mischief, after all. But the magical contract meant that Loki couldn't hurt Tony; Tony knew, he'd tested it shortly after signing it by lightly cutting Loki, only to earn a cut in return a few seconds later.

Thor clearly didn't know his brother all that well any more. He'd probably never truly known him to begin with.

'But we've fought Doom's bots before,' Barton chimed in, 'multiple times. We've never seen this level of tech out of him before.'

'If we had, we would have stopped it,' Rogers pointed out. He glanced at Tony. 'If Tony had seen what he was capable of, he would have ensured that we knew how dangerous Doom was becoming. We would have taken him down once and for all.'

Tony just glared at the lot of them, too pissed off to join in and try and redeem himself. He doubted that he could change Fury's mind, no matter what he said.

'Loki's stronger than Doom,' Bruce added, 'I doubt he cares if we figure it out. He has magic, something we can't really fight at the moment.'

'But we can almost track it,' Romanov said.

Fury nodded at that and looked at Tony once more. 'Stark, your priority now is to build a working magic sensor. You'll do it here, with SHIELD's scientists and Doctor Banner. That way we can keep an eye on it. Thor,' he turned to the Thunderer, who sat up straighter, 'if you hang around, will
Loki make a grab for the sensor?’

Thor frowned a bit before he shrugged. ‘It is difficult to be sure,’ he admitted. ‘I can best Loki in battle, but Loki is tricky. If he truly wants the sensor you speak of, not even my presence will stop him from trying to retrieve it.’

‘But we'll have a much better chance of fighting him off,’ Barton said. ‘If we have Bruce and Thor here, keeping an eye on it, Loki won't be able to grab it. We'll catch him.’

Tony rolled his eyes but didn't say anything. Loki could turn himself invisible. Granted, having Bruce and Thor hanging around the sensor would make it difficult for Loki to steal, but not impossible.

‘Fine,’ Fury said. ‘For the moment, all of you are to relocate to the Helicarrier as soon as possible. Stark, you'll start working on the sensor. Doctor Banner, assist him.’ Bruce nodded.

‘What about New York?’ Rogers asked. ‘If we're all here, Loki might attack again.’

‘We'll keep close by,’ Fury told him. ‘If Loki attacks, you can be there in minutes.’

‘What about my boyfriend?’ Tony decided to speak up. All eyes turned to him, and Tony shrugged. ‘When Loki attacked my Tower Logan was there, remember? I can't just send him home, Loki could get to him again.’

‘Civilians aren't allowed aboard the Helicarrier, Stark,’ Fury said.

‘So I should just leave him there to die?’ Tony demanded.

Fury's eye narrowed. ‘That's my final decision.’

They glared at each other for a minute or two before Tony stood. ‘Fine,’ he said. ‘If Logan dies, you can bet your ass I'll sue your entire fucking organisation, Fury.’ With that he grabbed his suitcase suit and left the room.

‘We're not done here, Stark!’ Fury snapped.

‘I am!’ Tony shouted over his shoulder. ‘See you in a few hours, Nick.’

{oOo}

Tony got back to Stark Tower before anyone else. When the others did arrive they left Tony alone, JARVIS informing him that they were packing what they’d need aboard the Helicarrier. Only Romanov and Barton hadn't come back, but Tony doubted there was much they needed. The Tower was only a second home to them, somewhere to stay so that they could spy on Tony.

Loki arrived a few hours after Tony did and Tony went downstairs to help him bring their suitcases up. Once the elevator had shut behind them, Tony said, ‘JARVIS?’

‘The elevator is still bug-free, Mr Stark,’ the AI replied.
Tony turned to Loki. 'Fury, Coulson, Barton and Romanov think I'm Genesis, or that I built it for you.'

'Excuse me?' Loki questioned. Tony quickly relayed the Helicarrier meeting for the older god, who frowned. 'I see,' he said, 'so they trust you lest than we first assumed.'

'Yeah,' Tony sighed. 'You know Romanov was the first person to suggest that I'm a lot like you?' Loki raised an eyebrow. 'I found some reports she'd handed in when I first discovered Fury's little plan,' Tony explained. 'She drew parallels between the two of us; broken families, too smart for our own good, chaotic, uncaring of the rules, loose morals.' He shrugged one shoulder. 'I think that's one of the main reasons they want me off the team and away from Iron Man. Before you turned up they were content to watch. After seeing you and fighting you, they realised just what I could become given the right reasons.'

'I see,' Loki repeated. The elevator reached the penthouse and he went quiet as they exited. They dragged their suitcases into the bedroom and Loki sat on the lounge, legs folded. Tony sat beside him and sighed. 'Anthony?'

'They want me on the Helicarrier,' Tony murmured.

'Why?' Loki questioned.

'To work on the magic sensor,' Tony told him. He rested his elbows on his knees, tilted his head to look at Loki. 'Now that you've destroyed a SHIELD base, Fury wants me to finish the sensor and get it working. He wants to track you down and punish you.'

Loki snorted. 'Even if he and his little mortals could find me, they would have to catch me.'

'Yeah,' Tony murmured. 'Not once did Thor mention that you're Jötunn, you know?' Loki's eyes narrowed. 'I meant that he didn't suggest that you had two types of magic,' Tony continued. 'He didn't suggest that if we do figure out how to track your Asgardian magic, which you use in every battle, that you could switch to using your Jötunn magic.'

'Thor is an idiot,' Loki stated. 'However, he knows how much I detest being Jötunn. It wouldn't occur to him that I would push through that hatred to use all of my skills to my advantage. It also wouldn't occur to him that I have Jötunn magic. I was raised on Asgard, remember; he would assume that I developed it there.'

Tony frowned. 'But you're a Frost Giant.'

'Thor stopped studying magic when he discovered that he couldn't use it to the extent that I could,' Loki said. 'Thor and I were close when we were young, but as we grew my magical power became obvious. Thor couldn't use it, so it became something to bully me about with his friends. Nobody in Asgard studied magic as much as I did, I know more than anybody there, my mother included. Thor probably still doesn't know that most mages are born with the ability to wield magic.'

'Wait,' Tony interrupted with a frown, 'so... I'm not a mage?'

'No,' Loki shook his head, 'you are a magic-wielder, nothing more. A mage is born, a magic-wielder is taught. It's why you will never be as powerful as me; you weren't born with the ability to tap into your magic, you had to be taught.'

'Huh,' Tony hummed, then shook his head. 'Okay, so we're safe on that front. If SHIELD figures out how to track your magic, you can switch to Jötunn magic.'
'And I should begin to practise in earnest,' Loki added. 'I do not wish to be caught out and not have the full use of my Jötunn abilities.'

'I'm going to help them,' Tony said, 'but I'll hold myself back. I won't tell them how to actually scan magic. But if they figure it out... he sighed, 'I'm not sure there's much I can do, Loki. Romanov and Fury are already suspicious of me, I don't wanna out myself before I'm ready.'

'Don't,' Loki said, 'I would rather your true nature remain hidden then be safe to practise Asgardian magic whenever I please. I can simply switch to using my Jötunn abilities. Keep yourself safe, first.'

Tony smiled weakly, then reached out to thread their fingers together. Loki let it happen but looked down at their joined hands, eyebrows furrowed. 'Loki?'

'We haven't finished discussing our... connection,' Loki said, the last word soft.

Tony sighed. 'Yeah, I know,' he said. He squeezed Loki's digits. 'But we don't have time; I have to pack, I have to move to the Helicarrier.'

Loki nodded.

'We do need to talk,' Tony added, 'but-

'I know,' Loki cut in, 'I understand. But please note that I'm not asking anything of you; my magic and yours wish to connect us, but that doesn't mean I will let it. I'll teach you how to stop yours from doing it.'

'Okay... ' Tony said, frowning a bit. He knew that there was more there- more that Loki wanted to say- but they really didn't have the time. 'So, anyway, I mentioned that SHIELD- Romanov in particular- think that I gave you, or designed, Genesis for you.'

'Yes... ' Loki said slowly, head tilted.

'I have a plan.'

'You do?'

Tony nodded, but his lips were pressed into a thin line.

'You do not appear to like your plan,' Loki commented. When Tony didn't answer, Loki tugged on his fingers. 'Anthony?'

'If it works it'll be fine,' Tony said. 'Rhodey has a suit, one that isn't as heavily guarded as my suits are,' Tony said as he shifted his body so that he could face Loki properly. 'I've mentioned Rhodey, remember?'

'Rhodes; the soldier who stole one of your suits when you were dying,' Loki nodded. His hand tightened around Tony's briefly when he said dying, but Tony didn't say anything.

'Yeah,' Tony said. 'Anyway, I was thinking... the suit is old, so it's not as protected as my current suits. I know that Rhodey keeps it in his barracks, there's some good security around it, but nothing that Loki Laufeyson couldn't get through.'

Loki was beginning to smile, and Tony flashed him a grin. 'Are you suggesting that I steal his suit?' Loki asked.
Tony nodded. 'If you get caught doing it, hopefully SHIELD, Romanov and Barton will assume that you and Doom were studying that suit. Maybe you need Rhody's suit, or just want it. Either way, I'm hoping it'll throw the heat off of me for a bit. Plus it gets War Machine away from Rhod, so he can no longer use it, and he can't side against us with it.'

'You would be in the clear, and suspicion would be turned from you to Rhodes and how he protected his suit,' Loki realised.

'Yeah,' Tony nodded. 'When SHIELD figure out how to scan your Asgardian magic, we can track you to Rhod. Or maybe Genesis gets damaged, you need some spare parts, but without Doom you can't fix it yourself. So maybe you go after the suit, Rhod or someone walks in on you, you knock 'em out and take the suit. I could always take parts off of it and attach it to one of the Genesis suits.'

'I see...' Loki mused.

'I'm just worried that SHIELD won't buy it and still be suspicious of me. I mean, SHIELD is never going to like me, and Romanov's always going to be waiting for me to become you, but...'

'There is little we can do,' Loki interrupted, 'and your plan is a good one. We need to get... War Machine away from Rhodes, anyway.'

'I know,' Tony nodded. 'There's no rush, though, so we'll see what happens.'

Loki nodded, too, and they fell into silence, Loki staring at their joined hands and Tony's eyes on the bed. Finally Tony sighed and rubbed his face.

'I gotta pack,' he said.

'What about me?' Loki questioned. He let Tony go and watched as the younger god stood and stretched.

'You should stay here,' Tony said. 'Fury said civilians aren't allowed on the Helicarrier. I mentioned that you could oh, I dunno, murder Logan Thomas, but he doesn't care.'

He went into the walk-in-wardrobe, picking out t-shirts and jeans and comfortable clothes; he didn't think he'd need to dress up for his stay. When he re-entered the bedroom Loki had a thoughtful look on his face.

'What?' Tony asked.

'It would be reckless of me to appear on the Helicarrier, even invisible,' Loki said, 'we shouldn't risk ourselves like that.'

'No, we shouldn't,' Tony agreed.

'But we need to plan and I need to teach you how to use your magic,' Loki continued. 'So we need to get you off of the Helicarrier and back into the Tower regularly.'

'Yeah...'

Loki hummed, then tilted his head. When he met Tony's eyes his own were bright.

'Loki...?' Tony asked.

'How would you feel if I attacked the Tower while the Avengers were all gone?' Loki asked, face a
mask of innocence. 'Any super villain worth their title would, of course, be watching the Tower, trying to learn your routines... if I noticed that you were all gone, I would of course attack. And you would of course be sent to stop me, and perhaps you could point out that I wouldn't have gotten so far into your workshop if you were here...' he trailed off, a grin now stretching across his face.

Tony laughed. 'Loki, you're brilliant!' he declared.

Loki smirked at him, though it disappeared when Tony ducked down to kiss him. It was a bit awkward at first- Loki froze instead of kissing him back- but when Tony went to pull away Loki cupped his face and turned the kiss deep, teeth nipping at Tony's lower lip right up until he drew back.

Smiling, Tony pecked Loki on the lips before withdrawing completely. He could feel Loki's eyes on him as he packed, but neither god said a word. Yeah, they had to talk; Tony knew that they did. But they'd get through it.

Tony would make sure that they got through it.
They'd set up in one of the Helicarrier's large labs... Tony was pretty sure it was the one he and Bruce had worked in when Loki had first landed on Midgard, but he wasn't sure. He didn't care enough to ask, instead setting up his own tablets and computers in the corner, grabbing a chair, and then seating himself.

Tony had absolutely zero plans to help SHIELD and their little scientists out. After what Romanov had accused him of earlier, Tony felt justified in just sitting and snacking while watching SHIELD's scientists rush about trying to figure out magic. A few of them darted over to Tony, asked questions, but when Tony just blinked slowly or threw blueberries at them they went away and didn't come back. Bruce had smiled at Tony, just a bit, before turning his focus on the magic sensor Tony had thrown together earlier that day.

Leaning back in his seat, ankles crossed on the short table before him, Tony stared at Bruce. He kind of felt bad for the doctor... here Bruce was, working hard, and Tony was planning his death. Well, not his death, exactly, but it'd happen if Bruce didn't side with Tony and Loki. Or run. Tony kinda hoped that Bruce ran. If he stayed he had two choices; siding with Tony and Loki and killing innocent people, thus becoming SHIELD's target, or side with SHIELD and be used for the rest of his life.

Bruce was a good guy; he was nice and caring and clever. He was Tony's friend, probably the only one the genius had left. Tony didn't want Bruce to die.

But, like he'd told Loki; if Bruce had to be killed, so be it.

Speaking of Loki...

Tony sighed and pulled his feet from the table. Bruce glanced at him, but Tony swivelled around in his seat to stare out the window, mind swamped with thoughts of the green-eyed god.

They had a magical connection. It was... it was completely fucking ridiculous, but Tony's life over the past few years had been completely fucking ridiculous; kidnapped, arc reactor planted in his chest, suit of armour made to protect himself, aliens falling from rainbow fucking portals and more aliens trying to take over the planet... it'd make a good movie if it wasn't, you know, Tony's life.

But in all honesty, Tony wouldn't give it up for the world. Before Iron Man he'd been little more than a playboy billionaire, Obie's puppet CEO and the media's Public Enemy Number One. Tony would have drunk himself into an early grave without Iron Man; he would have wrapped one of his
cars around a tree or drowned in his own vomit or Jesus knows what. So, really... Tony had Obie to thank for his current life.

*I'm still glad I killed the bastard,* Tony mused. He tossed another blueberry into his mouth. *The guy who tortured Loki's still alive... we should hunt him down after all this.* Closure, Tony thought, was something that Loki needed. He needed to get rid of Thor, destroy the guy who'd convinced him to invade Midgard, and live out his days on Earth with Tony, the two ruling the planet in their own way.

*Ruling while magic-married,* Tony thought. He shook his head at that; ate another blueberry. He didn't really know what to do with this information. Loki's magic wanted Tony... wanted to *mate* with him, it sounded like. What did that even mean?

From what Loki had said before they'd had to part ways, it meant that they'd be together for... well, ever. Never straying, never truly falling out of love, always there for each other. A *constant* presence.

Tony shifted uncomfortably and tossed his blueberries onto the floor beside his chair. He'd never had constants; his mother had been a trophy wife, though she *had* tried at times, Tony had to give her points for that. His father had just been that guy who sometimes turned up and shouted at Tony, and his nannies had all been fired or deported or God knows what as soon as Tony grew attached to them.

Then it had been Edwin Jarvis, Tony's nanny and tutor and mentor and, fuck, his *father*. Howard had been an asshole before Steve Rogers disappeared, but he'd been even more of an asshole afterwards. Edwin Jarvis had always been there for Tony; he'd talked Tony through puberty, had soothed Tony after his very worst nightmares, had... well, *raised* him.

Sure, Rhodey had been around a lot, and Pepper, but neither had been there *no matter what*. Edwin had put up with Tony even at his worst, whereas Rhodey and Pepper had eventually walked. Hell, Rhodey had stolen one of Tony's fucking suits when he was dying. Nobody had the right to steal from Tony Stark, no matter what his mental state. And Pepper was working with Coulson to get Tony off of the Avengers team, so she was pretty much *out* as far as Tony was concerned.

Loki... it sounded like he was offering the thing that Tony had lost with Edwin's death; a best friend, a confidant, a... an *everything*.

It sounded too good to be true.

But... maybe Tony could actually have that; actually have someone stick around no matter what; have someone who would *always* have his back, who would never leave, who, no matter how much Tony pissed them off, *would always come back*.

Loki wanted that, too, Tony knew it. Once upon a time Loki had had a mother, a father, a brother and friends. And then he grew, his differences became too much to ignore. Asgard turned against him, Thor turned against him, his mother was kept from him and his father had never truly *wanted* him. Just what he stood for.

Like Tony. People wanted Stark Industries, Iron Man, a billionaire with a chequebook. They never wanted *Tony*.

Loki did. Loki liked Tony. Loki's magic had fucking *chosen Tony*.

And Tony's magic had chosen Loki.
The longer Tony thought about it, the better the idea sounded, and the warmer Tony's chest got... no, not his chest, his magic. His fucking magic was pleased. Jesus Christ.

Tony sighed and spun lazily around in circles, around and around and around, ignoring Bruce's odd look, the way the scientists intermittently scowled at him or looked at him with puppy dog eyes 'cause they needed help.

Magic-married. Magic-married, magic-married, magic-married. Loki had said that they could go their separate ways, right? He'd said that they'd need to meet- their magic would force them to reconnect. But it sounded like they could part if they really screwed up their relationship. And even if they did, their magical contract meant that they'd still be there for each other.

They'd still have each other.

And Loki knew how to block the connection. He could teach Tony, he'd said; would teach Tony. So... what the fuck was Tony freaking out about, again?

Loki was everything Tony had ever wanted! He was brilliant and gorgeous and crazy and he got Tony. He understood Tony in a way that nobody ever had. And he was offering forever.

And fuck, they didn't even have to have forever! They didn't have to let their magic connect them. And if it did... well, so the fuck what?

'I'm an idiot!' Tony declared and groaned. He scrubbed his face, trying to banish the memory of Loki's face from his mind. Loki had looked so... broken when he'd told Tony, so defeated. Like he knew, without a doubt, that Tony would run for the hills as soon as he understood the connection between them.

'I could have told you that,' Bruce commented. When Tony lifted his head to look at him the doctor was smirking slightly at his computer.

'Asshole,' Tony growled.

Bruce turned to him. 'What's wrong, Tony?'

'I... had a fight with Logan,' Tony said. Technically not true, but close enough.

'About what?' Bruce asked. 'I know it was wrong of Fury to make him stay in the Tower alone, but surely Logan doesn't blame you?'

'No, no, he understood that part,' Tony said, waving a hand. 'We were just... we had this big conversation in Malibu- or we started to- and then suddenly I had to come back, and now he's at the Tower... we never got to finish the conversation.'

'Ah...' Bruce mused. He turned back to his computer. 'I'm all ears, if you want to talk. If not...' he trailed off and shrugged.

Tony mulled over that for a minute. Fury was no doubt listening in- or Natasha was- and Tony could use this as an opportunity to make them realise what Logan meant to him. It would help sell the idea of Tony not wanting to sleep with his future assistant, therefore making it more appealing for Coulson or someone else to approach her and offer her money to spy on Tony.

Then again, it might make them keep a closer eye on Logan because of what he meant to Tony.
When Tony opened his mouth, he decided to say that first thing that came to mind;

'Logan said he's falling in love with me, and I didn't say anything.'

… huh. Well, that wasn't too far from the truth... his magic, Loki's magic, thought that they were compatible, which meant that there was a chance of them falling in love, right? Not that Tony was a big believer in love; hell, he wasn't sure he was even capable of feeling love. He hadn't seen much of it growing up, and now he was so fucked up that he probably couldn't feel it.

Whatever. What he felt for Loki, what he ended up feeling for Loki... it'd have to be enough.

Bruce was staring at him, surprise written clearly across his face. Some of the nameless scientists working around them had stalled, staring at them, but then went back to what they were doing when Bruce cleared his throat; they were all clearly listening, though.

'Uh... okay,' Bruce said, 'that's... wow.'

'Yeah,' Tony hummed. 'I wasn't sure what to say, and then Steve called, so... he shrugged. 'Logan's kinda... not pissed off, exactly, but... hurt?' He shrugged again. 'He's told me a bit about his family. It sounds like he's as fucked up as I am.'

'You're not fucked up, Tony,' Bruce chided.

Tony snorted. 'Really, Bruce?'

The younger man rolled his eyes. 'It sounds like you just have to talk to him.'

'Yeah,' Tony muttered. 'Which I can totally do while I'm stuck here on the Helicarrier.'

'I know,' Bruce agreed, 'but Fury wants to find Loki.'

'It's not like Loki kills that many people when he stages his attacks,' Tony grumbled. 'Why do I have to put my life on hold just to find him? I run a company, you know.'

'Pepper runs your company,' Bruce pointed out.

'I ran it for years before I promoted her. And I design and build everything they sell,' Tony said. 'I also own the company. It's not like I just sit on my ass.'

'I know,' Bruce repeated, 'but Fury's just doing his job.'

Tony snorted again and leaned back in his seat. 'You mean we're doing his job,' he said and gestured around at the lab. 'Do you really think any of these guys will figure out how magic works?'

'I don't think we'll ever truly figure out how it works...' Bruce said slowly, 'but if we can figure out how to trace it it'll help us fight Loki and people like Loki.'

Yeah... Tony didn't plan on letting anyone get their hands on a working magic sensor after SHIELD was gone. He didn't want the US government- or any other government, actually- being able to track Loki. If they could do that then it'd only be a matter of time before they could track Tony's magic.

'It'd go a lot faster if you helped,' Bruce prompted, breaking the silence.
'Yeah, no,' Tony said. 'Did you see the way they treated me in that meeting? Fuck them. They want my help, they can stop treating me like the enemy, or like I'm about to go crazy and kill everyone, or take over the world. Also, Fury made me leave my boyfriend in the Tower. The Tower Loki's broken into before. The guy Loki's tried to hurt before. I'm falling in love with Logan and Fury made me leave him there!'

Tony had maybe started yelling a bit at the end there, so he was as surprised as Bruce when the last sentence left his lips.

Huh.

'Falling in love?' Bruce said, looking far too amused.

'Shit up,' Tony grumbled.

'The next time you talk to Logan, tell him that,' Bruce suggested. 'Then you won't be fighting any more and he won't be hurt.'

Tony groaned and flopped backwards dramatically- Bruce sighed and shook his head.

Well... Tony was still pissed off about the whole “stay aboard the Helicarrier 24/7” thing, but... it'd given him time to think, and he'd worked out what he wanted to say to Loki. He'd worked out how he felt about the whole “magic-marriage” thing.

Tony wasn't sure he was capable of love. Hell, maybe Loki wasn't, either. But did that really matter? If they both felt something - something deeper than lust and the need to have someone they trusted- then... that was enough.

For Tony, it was enough.

{oOo}

It had been four days.

Loki was bored.

Bad things happened when he was bored. Well... bad things happened to other people. Bad things happened to Loki when he tried to do something good. Hence working with Stark and trying to take over Midgard.

Loki allowed their plans to wash through his mind and enjoyed imagining the looks of stunned betrayal that would spread over the Avengers' faces when they realised that one of their own had turned against them.

Joy.

Shaking his head, Loki looked around Anthony's workshop. JARVIS had once again done something to erase Loki's presence on the security feed- he had been informed that Logan currently appeared to be in bed sleeping.
Fury had forced Anthony to stay on the Helicarrier. Loki... did not like that. He didn't like Stark being corralled like some type of animal, forced to work on capturing Loki for the little mortals. No, Stark needed to be free, and he needed to be free to continue working with Loki.

Loki's eyes drifted over the workshop and to the glass floor-to-ceiling windows. Beyond was a long hallway that led to the elevator and the emergency stairwell.

It would look good on fire, Loki thought. He could teleport to the helipad, blast his way in through Anthony's penthouse. He could go up and blast apart the top floor where Tony worked on the technology Stark Industries sold. JARVIS, the various security systems Tony had built, would surely keep Loki out of that workshop long enough for Tony and the Avengers to arrive. Then... well, surely Stark wouldn't mind having to do a little re-modelling. It wasn't as though Loki was planning on destroying anything important.

Loki smirked and spun on the swivel chair he'd been sitting in for the past half hour. Tony's magical research could only hold his attention for so long. No, Loki wanted Tony back. He didn't like it when people took things that belonged to him.

'JARVIS?'

'Yes, sir?' the computer replied.

Loki grinned. He did like Anthony's invisible servant. 'What is Anthony doing right now?'

'Please wait one moment, sir,' JARVIS said. A few minutes later he continued; 'Mr Stark is currently aboard the Helicarrier refusing to work on the magic sensor. '

'Is that so?' Loki mused. 'Stark won't be leaving any time soon?' Tony had called a few times; mostly from the lab he was working in, the sounds of computers and people working background noise. Apparently Tony didn't want to spend any time in the small room provided for him aboard the Helicarrier. He preferred to sit right in the thick of things, refusing to help and throwing produce at people until he passed out. Loki smiled at the image that particular sentence had brought up.

'Negative, Mr Lie-smith,' JARVIS said. 'SHIELD's scientists have yet to work out how to successfully scan magic.'

'Successfully?'

'Indeed, sir. The magic sensor is working, however they have yet to figure out how to filter out background radiation.'

'Not even the green beast?'

'No, sir.'

Loki hummed. 'Anthony agreed to let me attack the Tower, yes?'

JARVIS was silent for a beat, before; 'I would not say that he agreed, Mr Lie-smith. However, he did not express any disagreement.'

'That's good enough for me,' Loki decided. He pushed himself back from the table and stood, the chair rolling across the concrete behind him. 'Do you have footage of Logan in bed?' he asked as he walked towards the doors.
'Yes, Mr Lie-smith,' JARVIS said. 'Would you like me to continue playing it?'

'Negative,' Loki replied. He pushed through the doors and entered the elevator, which was already waiting for him. 'I shall place a clone in the bed and teleport to the helipad. Start recording as normal when I say so.'

'Yes, sir.'

{oOo}

Tony was napping on the floor in the corner- it was comfier than the chairs SHIELD had provided- when an alarm suddenly went off, filling the lab with noise and bright flashing lights. Tony snorted and leapt to his feet before stumbling into the wall, his head aching from sitting up too long.

'Christ,' he moaned and rubbed his face. He looked up and around to see the scientists panicking and trying to put their research away. A pre-recorded voice was playing but Tony couldn't hear the words over the alarm. 'What the fuck's going on?' he shouted.

Bruce was standing a few feet away, looking as confused and annoyed as Tony. He looked better rested than Tony did- he'd actually stopped and slept, eaten, whereas Tony had mostly let himself crash in the lab, only going back to his room to shower.

The alarm finally fell silent, leaving Tony's ears ringing. Then Fury was talking; 'Stark, Banner, report to the bridge immediately!'

Tony and Bruce shared a look before they both took off, running out of the lab and down the corridor. They passed agents and scientists and doctors, all jumping aside as the two Avengers stormed past. Tony got into the elevator first and held it open for Bruce. Bruce punched in the floor number and the elevator swept them up.

'Any ideas?' Tony asked.

'An attack, most likely,' Bruce said.

Tony raised his eyebrows. 'Loki?'

'He's been quiet since he destroyed that SHIELD base,' Bruce said. He frowned. 'Do you think he-

'Destroyed another?' Tony interrupted and Bruce nodded. The elevator stopped, the doors opened. 'I guess we're about to find out.'

Rogers, Romanov and Barton were already there, and Thor was entering from the corridor that led into the various meeting rooms on this floor. Coulson gestured for Tony and Bruce to approach, and Fury started speaking immediately.

'We just got this footage from Stark Tower,' he said.

Tony's eyes darted up and to the large screens already flickering. The footage was from the CCTV cameras Tony and SHIELD had put on the surrounding buildings when Stark Tower had become
the Avengers' home base. Half of the helipad was gone, on the street below, and there was smoke
bellowing from the broken windows that led into Tony's penthouse. Tony let anger furrow his
brows, press his lips into a thin line, when he saw that someone had once again destroyed his floor
and bar.

'It was Loki,' Fury said and one of the screens switched feeds; now the helipad was there, the glass
intact. Suddenly there was a gold-green shimmer of light and Loki appeared on the helipad. He
took one step and JARVIS' voice echoed from the building, informing Loki to stand down or he'd
be fired upon.

Loki smirked, his staff appeared, and he fired. So did JARVIS.

The missile just missed Loki, who darted to the side and tumbled across the helipad. One of the
many machine guns Tony's building was equipped with opened fire and Loki blasted back with
magic. After a minute, maybe a minute and a half, the combined explosions severed the helipad in
half and sent concrete and metal raining down on the street.

An Iron Man suit appeared, operated by JARVIS, and fought Loki hand-to-hand. Loki soon sent it
careening through the cracked windows and strolled in after it.

The feed switched back to the outside of the Tower. Apart from some small explosions, some glass
shattering, they couldn't see anything; SHIELD didn't have access to the cameras inside the Tower.

Tony was moving before Fury could say anything.

'Stark!' he shouted when he spotted Tony going for the elevator.

'He's attacking my fucking Tower because we're not there!' Tony shouted back. 'I knew this would
fucking happen, Logan's there by himself!' He got into the elevator and turned, brown eyes hard on
Fury. 'If Logan gets hurt, Fury, Loki will be the least of SHIELD's problems.'

The doors shut after that, whisking Tony down. He didn't care what the Avengers were doing-
what SHIELD's plans were. He had to go and pretend-fight Loki. Then he'd be able to stay in the
Tower and work with the older god again; he'd like to see Fury order him to stay aboard the
Helicarrier after this.

Tony had to bite back a smirk, worried that the cameras in the elevator would catch his pleasure.
*Good plan, Green Eyes,* he thought.
Stark's suits and computer were brilliant. There were two Iron Man suits—operated by JARVIS—currently battling the Trickster. JARVIS had informed Loki as the god made his way through the Tower that, as part of the Tower's security, three suits could be controlled by JARVIS to take out any threat. There were other security measures; guns and grenades, missiles and such, that Loki had to deal with. But JARVIS would hold back, the AI had told him; Mr Stark wouldn't want Mr Lie-smith seriously injured, after all.

Loki smirked to himself as he finally made his way up. The elevator had been damaged—metal bent, scorch marks on the silver walls—but it was still operable. It dropped Loki off on the floor that contained Tony's Stark Industries workshops. Two floors of cellphones, computers and everything else the Midgardian's company sold.

As soon as Loki stepped into the hallway the lights went out and an alarm started blaring. Loki tapped his staff against the floor and the stone at the end glowed a bright green, lighting his way. The wall to the far left opened suddenly and another Iron Man suit, this one silver and blue, shot out from its container, heading straight for Loki.

Loki pivoted, let it past, and flung a spell. The suit went flying into the workshop, through the heavy-duty, bullet-proof glass. It hit two tables and crushed numerous electronics, but got up afterwards, faint scratches its only injuries. Loki grinned as he followed it through and into the workshop.

He turned to throw a few balls of magic at the walls, and managed to blow up a table before he was tackled from the side. He and the suit crashed into another table, scattering electronics and various projects. The steel collapsed beneath their combined weight and the suit immediately started grappling with Loki and trying to hit him.

Its punches weren't as strong as they'd once been; back when Anthony had been actively fighting Loki, he'd been a strong opponent. Now the suit was pulling its punches, JARVIS clearly not trying to actually hurt him.

Loki laughed maniacally as he got his knees beneath the suit's chest. He launched it off of him and across the room, not bothering to see where it landed as he stood. His magic tingled and he turned to see Anthony himself exiting the elevator in his red and gold Iron Man suit. The two other suits Loki had fought earlier were with him but paused, clearly waiting for Tony's orders.

'Loki!' Tony shouted.

'Stark,' Loki smirked, 'how nice of you to join me. Perhaps you could tell me where the sensor you're building is?'
'Fuck you!' Tony spat and Loki laughed.

'If you ask nicely,' he purred.

Tony raised his gauntlets and Loki raised his staff. Both fired at the same time, and the repulsors and Loki's magic meeting caused an explosion that sent both gods flying away from each other; Tony back into the elevator, bending metal beneath his Iron Man suit, and Loki into the wall, concrete cracking and showering the Trickster in debris.

Loki pulled himself up and twisted his back, hearing it crack. He sighed. 'That was quite tedious, Man of Iron.'

When Tony clawed his way back out of the elevator he was joined by Rogers and Thor, both trying to exit the elevator at the same time. They got stuck and Thor roared at him while Rogers eyed him from behind his mask.

'Oh, and you brought friends,' Loki mused.

'JARVIS, where's Logan?' Tony shouted as he stomped into the workshop. Loki muttered a low-level spell and tossed it at Stark, who jumped into the air and pivoted, easily manoeuvring himself through the workshop.

'Upstairs, sir,' JARVIS replied.

'Logan?' Loki echoed, a cruel smile overtaking his face. 'Is that your boy, Stark? I would have visited him if I knew he was here.'

Tony looked at him as he slowly lowered himself to the floor. 'Go near him and I'll snap your neck,' he snarled.

'No!' Thor shouted. 'My brother will pay when I take him back to Asgard! His punishment isn't your responsibility, Man of Iron!'

Rage made Loki's magic bubble hotly, and he turned to scream at Thor; 'I AM NOT YOUR BROTHER!' He lifted his staff, braced himself, and forced a large amount of magic through his body. The stone absorbed it all and sent it hurtling towards Thor and Rogers- Captain America tossed himself aside, sliding along the concrete hallway, but Thor was too slow. The green blast slammed into him and sent him tearing through the metal wall of the elevator. He hit the concrete shaft behind it hard, snapping more than one bone as he slumped to the floor.

Tony took the opportunity to fly at Loki, his two other suits following. The blue and silver one seemed to be out of commission, so Loki focused his attention on his lover and the suits.

He ducked and dodged almost every blow, Tony getting one or two hits in that weren't as powerful as he made them appear. Loki took a direct hit from one of Tony's repulsors and was thrown back into the wall again, creating more cracks and dust. Loki pushed himself up and flickered out of sight.

'Shit!' Tony hissed.

Loki tossed his free hand out and clones appeared in the workshop- two, three, six. Rogers turned and attacked the first on he saw, which flickered in and out of sight, laughing at Rogers whenever the Captain failed to hit it. The JARVIS-powered suits did the same, throwing punches every clone within reach, while Tony stared at the final one.
'Come now, Iron Man,' the Loki clone said. 'Surely with all of your Midgardian technology you can tell the difference.'

Tony's helmeted head tilted, and the faceplate slid up. Brown eyes narrowed, Tony stared at the clone for a beat before his eyesight slid past it and towards Loki, who was standing in the corner. Loki raised his eyebrows. Surely Stark couldn't actually see him. Nobody had ever been able to see through Loki's clones. Loki had been able to create them since he was three-hundred years-old, and had perfected creating a dozen by the time he was four-hundred. Not even Frigga could tell that they were clones until she touched one.

Rogers and one of the JARVIS-suits finally took care of all the clones but the one standing before Tony. Loki shifted where he was standing, and saw Rogers raise his shield-

'LOKI!' Thor roared.

'Thor, no!' Tony shouted back.

But Thor had already raised his hammer. Stark shot into the air, almost slamming into the workshop ceiling. His suits followed him, and Rogers managed to say, 'What-

Thor slammed Mjölnir against the floor with enough force to tear the concrete up. The remaining windows shattered and large cracks snaked their way up the walls and to the ceiling. Static leapt across every flat surface, pushed by Thor's power, and Loki had to toss a shield up to protect himself. Unfortunately it made his clone disappear and himself visible, just in time for Thor to lift his hammer and throw it at his once-brother.

The hammer slammed into Loki's shoulder, forcing the Trickster back up against the wall. Bones snapped and muscles ripped, Loki crying out in pain. Magic danced along his armour, already trying to heal the damage, as Mjölnir flew back into Thor's grip.

Rogers had been hit by Thor's attack and was unconscious on the floor, Thor ignoring his shield-brother to advance on Loki.

Loki snarled at the blond oaf. 'I hope you killed your Captain, Thor. It'll show the mortals what you really think of them!' he hissed.

'Loki-

Loki swung his staff and magic enveloped him, shooting green and gold sparks all around. By the time it cleared Loki was gone, teleported upstairs into Stark's bedroom. He slumped over the bed and hissed when the movement jostled his injured shoulder.

'Mr Lie-smith?' JARVIS questioned.

'I will be fine,' Loki said through gritted teeth. 'Am I safe?'

'Yes, sir,' the AI replied. 'When you take on Logan Thomas' appearance, I will start recording again.'

Loki looked across the bed to see his clone of Logan Thomas huddled in the corner, apparently terrified. He groaned again as he stood and used his Jötunn magic to send his armour away and clothe himself in jeans and a t-shirt. As he did his injured shoulder was revealed, showing deep, dark bruising and a thick cut from where the hammer had forced his armour into his skin...

… which was turning blue. The mottled area was turning sapphire, bruises going from angry
shades of red and purple to dark blue and black. Loki wanted to punch a hole in the wall.

'JARVIS, does Stark have any long-sleeved shirts that will cover this?' Loki asked. He didn't want to risk using more Jötunn magic; his arm was already blue from collar-bone to forearm.

'Yes, sir,' JARVIS replied. 'The third drawer in Mr Stark's walk-in-wardrobe.'

Loki thanked the AI before walking into the wardrobe. He'd dismiss his clone when he was properly covered.

{oOo}

The entire area was a fucking disaster. It'd take Tony months to make sure that the workshop's foundations were stable enough for his work and to re-lay all the concrete. Fucking Thor.

Tony glared at the god in question from behind the safety of his faceplate. Thor was sitting in the corner on one of the few tables that had escaped the fight unscathed; his head was hanging, blond hair dirty with debris and blood. There was blood smeared across his hammer, showing that he'd injured Loki.

Tony really wanted to rush upstairs and see if his lover was okay, but Barton, Coulson and Fury had all stormed the workshop shortly after Loki had teleported away; Romanov was on what was left of the helipad coordinating SHIELD agents.

Rogers was wheeled away on a gurney, unconscious but okay according to a SHIELD doctor. Tony really hated having all these SHIELD agents crawling around his Tower. JARVIS was keeping an eye on them, but he didn't doubt that more than one would try and slip a recording device somewhere.

'What happened?' Fury demanded.

'What the fuck do you think happened?' Tony demanded before sliding his faceplate up. 'Loki saw an opportunity and he took it!' Fury glared at him. 'If we were here Loki wouldn't have gotten this far into my fucking Tower, Fury!' Tony shouted.

'Stark-' Barton tried, but Tony talked over him.

'I knew this would happen!' the god snapped. 'You took us out of the Tower and Loki decided to throw a party in it.' He stormed over to Fury, annoyed when the man failed to flinch. 'I don't care what the hell you order,' Tony growled, 'I'm not leaving my Tower again.'

Before Fury could say anything there was a scuffle from behind him. He and Barton turned and Tony looked over their shoulders to see a SHIELD agent trying to stop Logan from entering the workshop.

'Logan!' Tony shouted. He pushed between Fury and Barton, and Logan finally got himself free.

'Tony!' he whimpered. His shoulders sagged and he looked like he was about to keel over. Tony reached him before he could and Logan threw his arms around the inventor's neck, hugging him tightly. Tony heard Logan wince, his left arm shaking ever so slightly...
Tony's magic sparked in his chest, much warmer than it had when Tony had been staring at Loki's clone... this was the real Loki, then; not an illusion.

'Are you okay?' Tony breathed.

He felt Loki nod. 'JARVIS told me to hide so I stayed in the bedroom. I couldn't go anywhere else, Loki was... he was right there.'

'I know,' Tony shushed. 'I know, and I'm so sorry. I won't leave again.'

Loki sniffed and pulled back just far enough to look Tony in the eyes. There was pain there- physical pain, not emotional pain. Tony wondered how much damage Thor's hammer had done to the Trickster. 'Promise?' Loki sniffed again.

'Yeah,' Tony nodded, 'I promise, Logan. I don't give a fuck what Fury or his little band say.'

'Stark,' Fury growled.

'No!' Tony snapped without turning. 'I knew this would fucking happen, Fury, and you still made me leave. This Tower is mine; it's my home and it's Logan's home, too.'

'Is one man more important than stopping Loki?' Barton demanded.

Tony slowly pushed Loki back so that he could turn and glare at the archer. Barton flinched at the look on Tony's face. 'Do you really wanna know, Barton?' Tony asked. 'Cause your organisation isn't gonna like my answer.'

Barton said nothing, and neither did Fury. When the silence stretched for another minute Tony turned back to Loki. 'Come on, Logan. I've gotta call some people to get this place fixed.'

Loki just nodded and let Tony lead him from the workshop. Tony trusted JARVIS to keep an eye on things down here- the suits the AI was running had already disappeared back to Tony's more secure workshop, carrying the disabled third one between them. Tony would have to run a few sweeps of the place himself when SHIELD left, just to make sure. Fury would take any opportunity he could to get SHIELD into Stark Tower.

{oOo}

'Hey.'

Steve turned from where he was poking at the bandage covering his right arm. 'Hi,' he said.

'You're not supposed to play with the bandages,' Natasha told him. She sat on the end of his hospital bed. 'Though I know how annoying they are,' she added, gesturing with her cast.

Steve snorted. 'I was always injured as a kid,' he told her, 'not so much now, after the serum. Thor's hammer really packs a punch.'

He'd mostly suffered second degree burns and a lot of cuts, but the doctors aboard the Helicarrier had told him that he'd be okay by the following day.

'Thor told me about the fight,' Natasha said.
'Yeah,' Steve sighed. 'I think Thor has to learn that calling Loki his brother really annoys Loki.'

Natasha laughed. 'Annoys? Outrages, more like.'

'And then Thor comes in swinging his hammer,' Steve muttered. 'If Clint had been there he could have been killed.'

'I don't think Loki will attack the Tower again,' Natasha said. 'Stark's not going anywhere, and Fury's now ordered that two Avengers must remain inside at all times.'

'Two as well as Tony?' Steve asked.

Natasha nodded. 'You know how Fury feels about Stark.'

Steve sighed. Yes, he knew all too well. If Tony wasn't so dangerous and chaotic, Steve would think that Fury wanted the genius off of the team simply because he hated him. He frowned when he thought over the fight; the way his fists had hit nothing where the clones were standing, how his shield had simply sliced through them and into the wall beyond.

'What's wrong?' the agent asked.

'Nothing,' Steve shook his head. 'I was thinking about Loki's clones...'

'I've never fought one before,' Natasha commented. 'Loki only ever pulls them out to distract you, Thor and Stark.'

Steve's frown deepened.

'Steve?'

'Sorry, I was just... Tony didn't fight any of the clones,' he said as he remembered. He and the suits JARVIS was controlling had fought the clones; Tony had just stood there.

'He didn't?' Now Natasha was frowning, too.

'Yeah,' Steve said. 'Tony just kind of... stood there staring at one. Then he looked past it.... why would he do that?'

'Did the clone attack him?' Steve shook his head. 'Huh.' Natasha scratched at her cast. 'Maybe it wasn't a clone?' she suggested.

'No, it was a clone,' Steve said. 'It disappeared when Thor slammed his hammer into the floor; Loki appeared at the other end of the workshop and Thor threw his hammer at him. It definitely hit; I saw it just before I passed out.'

'Why wouldn't the clone attack Stark, then?' Natasha mused. 'And why wouldn't Stark attack it?'

'He looked past it,' Steve reminded her. 'You don't think...'

'What?' Natasha said when Steve trailed off. 'That Stark knew it was a clone?'

'No, it's ridiculous,' Steve back-pedalled. 'How would he know?' Natasha shrugged her good shoulder. 'Sorry, I'm not making any sense,' Steve laughed. 'Must be the injuries.'

'Yeah,' Natasha agreed. She patted the blanket atop Steven's leg and said, 'Get some rest,' before leaving.
Steve settled back into the blankets and sighed. He hoped that Natasha forgot what he'd said. The team- apart from Bruce, really- were all so suspicious of Tony. Steve understood their fears; Tony was a genius, he was rich, he was strong, and he was... unbalanced. It made him dangerous, but mostly to those around him, not to the *planet* like Natasha and Clint claimed. All they had to do was get him off of the team for a bit; let him take a break, get his priorities straight, *heal*.

When Tony had a better handle on himself he could come back and everything would be okay.
Tony found Loki in the bedroom trying to wrangle a shirt over his injured arm. Tony frowned as his suit unfolded from him; Loki’s shoulder was a patchwork of blue, purple and dark red bruises, all pressed up from beneath sapphire blue skin. The blue washed over to his collar-bone, down to his forearm, where it became pale white once more.

'Shit,' Tony said when Loki looked up at him.

'It's not the worst Thor has ever done to me,' the Trickster commented.

'The worst... what the hell has he done to you?' Tony demanded.

'He threw me from one of your little aeroplanes, if you remember,' Loki said. He hissed when his fingers brushed his shoulder.

'Here, let me,' Tony said. He crossed the room and forced Loki to sit. He bent to inspect the wound, eyes lingering on the thick cut that curled over Loki’s shoulder, ending on his bicep. 'Might need to clean that,' Tony said. 'Why hasn't it healed yet?'

'The damage to my muscles and bones is worse than the cut,' Loki told him. He brushed his hair from his shoulder. 'My magic can only heal so much at a time; I'm not skilled in the art of healing, as I've told you. My magic will heal the cut eventually.'

'How long?' Tony asked.

Loki tilted his head as he thought; 'A few days,' he decided on. 'My muscles were ripped from the bone, the bones fractured and broken. A few days...'

Tony's frown deepened and he muttered under his breath as he went into the bathroom. He kept well-stocked medical kits everywhere thanks to his tendency to blow things up in his workshop. JARVIS always made sure that Tony kept them up to date. He came back with the kit, easily carrying it under one arm. Once upon a time he'd needed two hands, but thanks to his new god-status he was stronger.

Dropping the kit on the bed, Tony made Loki turn until he could inspect his shoulder again. The cut had stopped bleeding, leaving small streaks of red and purple across Loki's skin.

'Your blood is purple, right?' Tony asked.
'When my body is Jötunn, yes,' Loki said. 'It's red when I shift into my Æsir form.'

'Right,' Tony hummed. 'It's stopped bleeding, but we've gotta clean it and apply some antibiotic. Come on.'

Loki grumbled and complained but let Tony drag him into the en-suite bathroom. Tony cleaned the cut with warm water, gritting his teeth every time Loki winced. The cut wasn't what pissed Tony off; it was the bruises, the torn muscles and crushed bones. Loki was strong, even stronger than Thor, yet it'd take him days to heal, and all because Thor was hammer-happy. When Tony got his hands on that bastard-

'You're talking out loud,' Loki commented when they'd sat back on the bed. Tony was applying an antibiotic cream to the cut and huffed when he cleaned up the excess cream.

'I'm gonna shove my gauntlet down those fucking leather pants he likes and blast his dangly bits off.'

Loki laughed, then grunted in pain when the movement jolted his injured shoulder. 'I don't like the thought of you getting that close to whatever Thor has in his trousers.'

'Not even if I blast it off?' Tony asked.

Loki shook his head slowly and twisted around to watch what Tony was doing. Tony gently taped a bandage over the cut before pulling back.

'Don't move your arm too much, okay? It'll delay the healing.'

'My magic-'

'Yeah, but not moving will speed things along,' Tony interrupted. Loki scowled at him, his expression darkening further when Tony unrolled a sling from the med kit. 'Just wear this whenever we're alone. And try not to move your arm around the Avengers. We don't want them putting two and two together.'

'Thor's an idiot; he'd come up with six,' Loki muttered. But he let Tony dress him, a long-sleeved Henley hiding his injuries, the sling going on over the top. Loki glared down at the fabric and Tony snickered. 'Shut up, Stark,' Loki growled.

'Never,' Tony replied. His eyes softened when Loki looked up at him. 'You okay?'

Loki licked his lips. 'I've been better,' he admitted, 'but I'll be okay.'

Tony nodded and closed the distance between them, kissing Loki softly. Loki's uninjured hand came up to thread through the hair at the back of his head, nails scraping his scalp. When they broke apart Tony pressed his forehead against Loki's sharp cheekbone.

'When Thor threw that fucking hammer...' he muttered.

'Thor has always favoured brute strength over everything else,' Loki said. 'It was a miracle when I could get him and his foolish friends to listen to my plans.'

'They always ignored you, huh?' Tony commented.

'Fandral was always willing to listen,' Loki said, 'as well as Hogun. But when Thor rushed forward blindly they would always follow. Sif usually helped. She has always hated me.'
'I kinda hope they come down to help Thor out when we destroy SHIELD,' Tony murmured. He kissed Loki's smooth jaw. 'I'd like to go a few rounds with them for how they treated you.'

Loki chuckled softly. 'They may come,' he said, 'but no others. Odin will not risk sending an entire army.'

'Yeah?'

Loki nodded, the movement jostling Tony a bit; but the younger god didn't move back, enjoying finally having Loki in his arms again after four days. He'd never missed anyone as much as he'd missed Loki... Christ, he really was gone on the guy. Which reminded Tony - they needed to talk.

'If the Allfather sends an army to Midgard,' Loki continued before Tony could open his mouth, 'then other Realms will do the same. Jötunheimr is the only Realm that has tried to actively take over your planet. The Vanir and Light Elves would not mind settling here, though they would most likely prefer to live amongst Midgardians than conquer your planet.'

'The Vanir are from Vanaheimr, right?' Tony asked, trying to remember all the Realms and species Loki had told him about.

Loki nodded. 'My moth— Frigga is Vanir,' he said, correcting himself at the last second. Tony didn't point it out. 'The Light Elves are from Álfheimr. While both prefer to stay in their own Realms, Midgard offers access to the rest of Yggdrasil and what lays beyond. If the other races see Odin sending an army here, they will see it as Asgard trying to expand. Odin can't afford a war with the other Realms. The Æsir barely defeated Jötunheimr the first time around.'

'So we're safe from them?' Tony asked.

'Even if we kill Thor,' Loki told him, 'the Allfather cannot risk war with the other Realms. He will send small groups to drag me back to Asgard and face execution for killing the Crown Prince. No amount of small forces will be able to take me back there alive.'

'Especially not with me backing you up,' Tony grinned. Loki chuckled and nodded in agreement, then kissed Tony again. Tony stayed where he was for a minute, two, before pulling back. Loki scowled at him. 'As much as I wanna keep doing that,' Tony said, and took a deep breath, 'we gotta talk.'

Loki's body went rigid, and he couldn't contain the gasp of pain as he accidentally moved his injured arm. Tony frowned at it. He was definitely going to get Thor back for that.

'I did some thinking while I was on the Helicarrier,' Tony said.

'I see,' Loki replied, voice stiff.

'Hey, none of that,' Tony grumbled. He tapped the side of Loki's face, forced the Trickster to look at him. 'It's good news, I promise.'

Loki raised an eyebrow but didn't say anything.

'Look, Loki,' Tony sighed. 'I was really confused and, uh... dumbfounded, really, when you told me about our connection. You know that I'm still learning magic. But I've thought about it carefully, and what it means for us.'

'Us?' Loki echoed.
Tony nodded. 'I don't wanna lose you, Loki. I like you- I really like you- and I don't...' He sighed again, this time in frustration. 'I honestly don't know if I'm capable of falling in love with someone. My childhood was pretty fucked; Howard was a shitty father, my mom was a trophy wife who had little to do with me. I have an addictive and destructive personality, and all the drugs and alcohol I've consumed... I'm actually surprised I managed to live this long and remain this sane.'

Loki just blinked at him.

'What I feel... for you...' Tony said slowly, the words difficult, his heart pounding in his chest. His magic was swimming behind his arc reactor, apparently brought out by what Tony was saying. 'I've never... cared about anyone as much as I care about you,' Tony continued. 'I don't know if that's love, Loki. And I don't know if it's enough for you. But I don't want you to go anywhere. If we bond one day- if our magic connects us despite us trying to block it- well... I know that I'm not going to complain.'

He paused and chewed on his bottom lip, eyes on Loki. Loki was still staring at him. 'If we fuck up, go our separate ways, I'll live with it,' Tony added. 'But I'd really rather you stick around for as long as possible. Not just because of our contact, or because of our connection. I want you for you. You're amazing and gorgeous and intelligent and... you're the whole package, Loki. And I want you to be mine for as long as you want to be mine. And I'll be yours.'

Loki was silent when Tony finished, green eyes slightly wide in surprise, the fingers of his good hand pinching at the denim of the jeans he'd changed into. He tugged at the fabric gently before finally looking away, staring at Tony's lap.

'Um...' Tony had never been good with quiet, and started fidgeting. 'Loki?'

'I...' Loki breathed our harshly and is gaze found Tony's again. 'Truly?'

'Yeah,' Tony nodded. 'I know that I can't convince you that I'm telling the truth, but-

'God of Lies,' Loki interrupted. 'If I look close enough I can always tell when someone isn't being truthful with me.'

'Yeah?' Tony repeated. 'So...' he slid across the bed, pressed himself up against Loki. 'I want you for you,' he murmured, eyes dropping to Loki's lips. 'Am I telling the truth?'

'You are,' Loki said, voice soft.

'And... what do you think?' Tony asked. 'Is it enough?'

'It's more than enough,' Loki said. 'Like you, I... I'm not sure what I'm capable of any more.'

'And...' Tony took a deep breath, 'you want this? Me?'

'Yes!' Loki said quickly. He picked up one of Tony's hands, squeezed tightly. 'I've never... you're unlike anyone I've met before,' Loki admitted. 'I want you in whatever capacity I can get. If we bond one day... I won't complain. But I will teach you how to block it. I would rather the connection be something that we agree on, rather than something that our magic forces upon us.'

'Alright,' Tony murmured. He glanced up at Loki and found the older god watching him. 'We'll work it out together?' he offered.

Loki nodded, gently squeezed Tony's hand again. 'Together,' he vowed and tugged Tony forward.
The genius let himself fall, let his lips meet Loki's. Loki's mouth was devouring now, lips harsh where they crashed against Tony's, tongue darting out only briefly to taste before Loki's teeth replaced it to tug and nip.

'I am glad that you're back,' Loki murmured against Tony's lips.

'Me too,' Tony agreed. He shifted closer, grabbed Loki's face in both hands to deepen their kisses. 'You need anything for the pain?'

'Mm...' Loki hummed, 'you're doing a rather fantastic job of distracting me.'

Tony smirked. 'I can do better,' he vowed before breaking the kiss to slide to the floor. Loki's eyes were dark and narrowed, and he clearly knew what Tony was going to do; he spread his legs and let Tony unbutton his jeans. Loki pushed himself up on his good hand and Tony tugged his jeans and boxer-briefs down just far enough to release his cock.

Loki was already hard, dick springing to attention. Tony grinned and ducked forward to lap at the head, his right hand circling the base, left hand smoothing over Loki's thigh. Loki hissed and thrust his hips up, his length sliding along Tony's cheek.

Tony laughed. 'Alright, alright,' he muttered. Loki clearly didn't want to wait, the impatient bastard, so Tony sucked the crown into his mouth and bobbed down, taking in as much as he could. He paused for a beat, suckling on Loki's cock, before drawing back, lips and tongue dragging.

Loki moaned and his head tipped back. His hips arched further up, trying to chase the heat of Tony's mouth. Tony didn't keep him waiting; the inventor shuffled forward on his knees, used his hand to guide Loki back into his waiting mouth. He hummed as he slid down the Jötunn's length; his tongue laved up and down the side, getting Loki nice and wet. When the head hit the back of Tony's throat Tony swallowed, moved himself down until his nose was brushing the sparse hairs around Loki's cock.

He kept the vibrations up and felt Loki's free hand go back into his hair, nails scraping, fingers twisting around the strands. He used his grip to pull Tony away then push him back down. Soon enough he was fucking Tony's mouth, speed picking up, gasps and groans falling from his lips. Tony couldn't look up so contented himself with making Loki moan louder, with touching Loki wherever he could reach.

Tony could feel Loki's thighs tensing, his thrusts becoming less coordinated. Tony sucked hard and let Loki push all the way in, down his throat, let him fuck in, in, in-

And then Loki was coming in hot spurts, Tony swallowing him down. Tony moaned around the length buried down his throat and could feel his own dick throbbing. His hands tore at the under-suit trapping him, but it was impossible to get off while he was on his knees.

He waited until Loki was done, until the Trickster had finally stopped shaking and moaning Tony's name. When Loki drew back, cock sliding wetly from Tony's mouth, the younger god dragged himself up. He scrambled with the under-suit and finally managed to get it down to his hips. He got it no further, Loki deciding to drag Tony down and onto his lap.

'Careful,' Tony hissed when Loki's injured arm was jostled.

'I'm fine,' Loki groaned. 'Get your cock out, Stark.'

'Yes, sir,' Tony smirked, ignoring the glare Loki gave him. He groaned when he finally managed to free himself, then hissed when Loki's large, cool hand wrapped around him. He jerked Tony off
quickly, his fingers dry, rough. It was just the right amount of pain to have Tony thrusting himself forward and clinging tightly to Loki's shoulder. 'Shit,' Tony growled. 'Shit, shit-'

Loki's mouth slammed against his, sounds swallowed, and Tony could do nothing but cling tightly to the older god and enjoy the ride.

It was a short ride, Loki knowing just how to tug, just how to twist his wrist, flick a thumb over the swollen, wet head. Tony pulled Loki's shirt up and came all over his pale chest and belly, eyes falling shut as bliss overrode everything else.

When he came back to himself he was shaking, panting, Loki watching him with a little smirk.

'Yeah, yeah,' Tony grunted. 'You're awesome.'

'Yes, I am,' Loki agreed easily. He kissed Tony again, but it was soft, gentle, now that they were sated. 'And I'm wet,' Loki added when they drew apart.

Tony grinned as he looked down at Loki's covered belly. 'Didn't wanna get my shirt dirty,' he said.

'You will have to buy me some so I don't have to steal yours,' Loki commented.

'Another shopping trip?' Tony hummed. 'Sounds good to me. Maybe when your arm's better.'

Loki rolled his eyes before unceremoniously shoving Tony off of his lap; Tony landed on the floor with a thump and immediately started cursing Loki in all the languages he knew. Loki just laughed and walked into the bathroom to clean himself up.

When Loki got back he found Tony where he'd left him.

'Problem?' the Trickster asked.

'Mm,' Tony hummed. He was stretched out on his back, arms cushioning his head. 'I was just thinking.'

'About?' Loki prompted. He slid to sit on the floor, back pressed to the bed. Tony shifted up until his shoulder was pressed to Loki's leg.

'It was weird,' Tony began. 'When you made your clones, I...'

He tilted his head back as he trailed off and saw Loki frowning. 'Yes,' Loki said. 'You paused and looked past my clone. Why?'

'I... could tell that it wasn't you,' Tony admitted.

'What?' Loki demanded, green eyes swivelling to stare at Tony.

'I don't know how,' Tony continued. 'It was like... my magic. It didn't get warm, and I thought... well, your clone didn't feel like you. It felt too weak- too different. I followed that feeling and my magic, it... it seemed to know that you were across the room even though I couldn't physically see you.' He paused, licked his lips. 'Has that happened to you before?'

'Never,' Loki said with a shake of his head. 'Nobody can tell the difference until they touch one, and that's only because my clone usually disappears. Frigga is the only one who has ever been able to tell that it is a clone with a simple touch; she could feel that it was all magic, weaker than I am.'

'Is that what I felt?' Tony asked.
'It sounds like it,' Loki mused. 'I will have to enter your mindscape and find out.'

'Okay,' Tony agreed easily. He liked having Loki in his head. Which was a weird thing to feel, but his magic probably had something to do with some of the soft, gooey feelings he had around Loki Laufeyson. 'It's weird, though, right?' he added. 'Me being able to tell without touching?'

'It is,' Loki agreed. 'But there is little we can do about it.'

'It doesn't really matter,' Tony said. He nudged Loki's leg gently. 'We're not enemies any more.'

Loki was silent for a beat before he smiled. 'Not until you annoy me, Stark. Then nothing will stop me from exacting revenge.'

Tony laughed and hooked an arm around Loki's lower back, fingers digging into Loki's hip. Loki said nothing, just settled back against the bed, the two falling into silence.

Tony knew that he should get up; he needed to get out of the under-suit, needed to clean up, needed to make sure that SHIELD weren't fucking up any of his things.

But he felt good; not only was he full of endorphins, but he and Loki had finally talked and worked everything out. He knew that they probably hadn't worked out all of their problems, but they'd get through whatever happened together. Of that, Tony had no doubt.

Now all they had to do was decide what base to attack next. And Tony had to punish Thor for injuring Loki.

He smiled darkly. The Thunder God wouldn't know what hit him when Tony was done.

{oOo}

Fury was in his office aboard the Helicarrier. He had hand-written notes and a tablet sitting before him, one finger scrolling down the screen, right hand wrapped around a pen. 'What can I do for you, Agent Romanov?' he asked when Natasha knocked on the door.

'I just saw Steve,' she said.

Fury finished signing something and looked up.

'He told me something... interesting,' Natasha added.

'What?'

She moved to stand before his desk, her arms folded over her chest. Usually she'd slide them behind her back, stand properly, but her cast got in the way. Anger briefly radiated through her but she pushed it aside. She'd get Loki back for what he'd done.

'Steve told me that they faced Loki's clones,' Natasha said.

Fury nodded. 'Thor said the same thing. He also said that he managed to injure Loki. He isn't sure how badly, but badly enough that Loki ran instead of continuing to fight.'

Natasha mulled that over briefly before saying, 'Steve and the JARVIS-operated Iron Man suits
fought the bulk of the clones. Stark faced one.'

That caught Fury's full attention and he looked back up at her. 'Faced?' he echoed, picking up on her wording.

'Faced,' she repeated. 'He didn't destroy it. It didn't attack him. According to Steve, Stark and the clone faced each other before Stark looked past it.'

Tossing his pen aside, Fury leaned forward, fingers joining over the mess of his desk. 'And then?' he questioned.

'Steve passed out,' Natasha said. 'You'd have to ask Thor.'

'He reported that he exited the elevator and hit the floor with his hammer,' Fury told her. 'Loki's clone disappeared and Loki appeared at the other end of the room. Thor threw his hammer, hit Loki, and Loki took off.' He sighed and reached up to rub his good eye, nudging his patch slightly.

'I doubt that Stark will tell us exactly what happened,' Natasha commented.

Fury snorted and shook his head. 'Stark tells us the bare minimum. And when we press he mouths off.' He grunted suddenly and leaned back, looking exhausted. Natasha wondered how long he'd been working. 'You think that Stark's working with Loki,' Fury said. It wasn't a question, Natasha knew; he was reminding her of what she'd said only a week earlier about Genesis.

'I think that a narcissist of Stark's calibre doesn't play well with others, even gods,' she stated. 'And I think that Loki hates us mortals; I doubt he'd be willing to work with one. You remember what Thor said; Loki doesn't make deals with mortals. He killed Doom once he got what he wanted.'

She shook her head. 'Even for all of Stark's faults, he isn't an idiot. I don't think he'd be willing to share anything with Loki. And neither would Loki.'

'So?' Fury prompted.

'I think that they're both fucking with us,' Natasha admitted. 'We know what Loki wants; SHIELD's destruction. The Avengers are Earth's best chance at stopping him or capturing him. Take out SHIELD and the Avengers will be easier to pick off. To stop Loki we need to figure out his magic, but Stark doesn't want to help us. I don't know what Stark wants, exactly, other than chances to piss us off.'

Fury thought that over as he leaned further back in his seat, the back squeaking slightly as he moved. 'Stark wants us out of his life,' he finally said. 'Loki decides to attack SHIELD head-on. Maybe Stark sees that and figures that he'll let Loki do what he can't.'

Natasha raised her eyebrows. 'Sit back and let Loki do his dirty work?'

Nodding, Fury said, 'Stark can't take down SHIELD by himself. Loki might be able to. Even Thor doesn't know what he's capable of. We barely scratched the surface when we had Loki in custody.'

'Stark comes in when Loki's done with us,' Natasha suggested, 'he kills Loki, or hands him over to Thor, and takes all the credit. He gets rid of us, Loki, and the world sees him as a hero.'

'And ignores everything else he's done,' Fury muttered.

'The media are fickle like that,' Natasha commented, shrugging one shoulder when her boss glanced at her.
'So we treat them as separate enemies,' he said and sat forward once more, elbows on the desk.

Natasha shrugged again. 'If those are your orders,' she said. 'Just because I don't think Stark and Loki could work together doesn't mean that their plans won't overlap. I think Stark knows more about magic than he's letting on. It certainly seemed that way, according to Steve. Why else would he look past the clone?'

Fury just nodded.

'I think we should keep doing what we're doing,' Natasha continued after a beat. 'When we have Stark's technology there'll be no reason to keep him on the team. He can go back to building things in his workshop and stop risking innocent lives every time he fights.'

'And when our agents show up in his suits?' Fury mused. It was the one part of the whole operation that he'd never had a plan for; what to do when Stark found out what SHIELD had done. 'He can easily get the media on his side.'

'And Steve can easily get the media on our side,' Natasha countered. 'Stark's been working alongside our scientists for years. If we can get Rhodes on our side, the world will have no reason to think that we stole from him; we can imply that we built the cruder suits ourselves. Stark can't take on SHIELD and the World Security Council himself.'

Fury huffed lightly. 'He can if he decides to join Loki after we've got what we want,' he muttered. That was Fury's biggest fear, if the director would ever admit to such feelings; that he, that his organisation, would push Stark too far. That Stark would become Loki. Or something far worse.

He dismissed the thoughts and focused back on Natasha. 'You implied that the suit- Genesis- was similar to Iron Man.'

Raising her eyebrows, Natasha said, 'The similarities are more than obvious.'

'But now you don't think that Stark would work with Loki?' Fury said. 'You were pretty adamant that Stark had something to do with Loki's suit.'

'He probably does have something to do with it,' Natasha insisted. 'But that doesn't necessarily mean that Stark's working with Loki. Stark might have a leak, or maybe he sold an old suit to Loki for something. Maybe Doom managed to figure out the technology, or maybe Loki got into Stark's head and pulled it out himself.' She shrugged her good shoulder. 'All I have are ideas- guesses, until we know more.'

Fury just nodded. He mulled over the agent's words before dismissing her, telling her to keep an eye on Stark and Rogers both; if Rogers remembered anything else about the fight, SHIELD needed to know. Stark wasn't a man that Fury wanted to underestimate.

Natasha saluted with her broken arm before she left, and chuckled when Fury shook his head. She had to get her fun somewhere.

Clint was waiting for her a few feet down the corridor, peeling himself from the shadows and falling into step with her.

'How much of that did you hear?'

'Nothing,' Clint said. 'Fury's office is sound-proofed. Wanna share?'

'Yes,' Natasha smiled. 'Buy me lunch and I'll tell you everything.'
'You drive a hard bargain,' Clint said with a laugh, but he agreed easily enough. He wanted Stark off of the team just as much as Natasha. They were both sick of fighting the enemy *and* Stark.
'What happened there?' Bruce asked.

Tony paused from raiding the doctor's fridge. He and Loki had ordered take out, but it was going to be half-an-hour; Tony was hungry now, damn it.

'What happened where?' Tony replied as he grabbed some leftovers. It looked like curry...

'There,' Bruce said. He crossed the distance between them to tap at Tony's arm.

'Oh,' Tony said, looking at his bicep. He'd burnt himself fixing one of the suits Loki had fought a few days before, and Loki had applied some burn cream and wrapped it, but the skin around the white bandages was red and irritated. 'I burnt myself,' Tony shrugged.

'Want me to take a look?' Bruce asked.

'Nah, I'm good,' Tony brushed him off, smiling. 'Logan's good at taking care of me,' he added.

Bruce smiled. 'So you two worked everything out?'

'Yeah,' Tony said. 'I could've lost him, you know?' Bruce nodded. 'I figured that I should get my shit together and tell Logan the truth. We spent the night-'

'No!' Bruce interrupted and held a hand up. 'I don't want to hear it, Tony.'

'But Brucie,' Tony whined.

'No,' Bruce said sternly.

Tony poked his tongue out. 'You're no fun,' he complained. 'And for that, I'm taking your food.'

'You were going to take my food anyway,' Bruce said as Tony left.

'True!' Tony shouted over his shoulder. 'But now I'm not bringing the container back!'

He heard Bruce laugh as he entered the elevator, the doors sliding shut behind him. JARVIS whisked him back up to the penthouse, where Tony found Loki waiting.

'Food?' the Trickster asked, head popping up, eyes peering over the back of the couch.

'Food,' Tony echoed and tossed the container to Loki, who caught it easily. 'Forks?'

'Here.' Loki passed him one and popped the lid of the container off. Both dug in, neither wanting to wait for the microwave to heat it up. The curry tasted fantastic as it was and they were starving, having spent the entire day in the Hideout.

'So,' Tony said after he'd swallowed his mouthful, 'we're attacking another base.'

'There's no reason to wait,' Loki said.

'Your arm-

'Is mended,' Loki cut in, scowling at him.
'You're still bruised pretty badly, Loki,' Tony pointed out.

'The muscles and bones have mended,' Loki insisted. 'I will be fine.'

'But—'

'I will be fine,' Loki growled.

Tony threw his hands up. 'Okay, Jesus, no need to get pissy.' Loki glared at him. 'What base do you wanna hit?' Tony asked, deciding to forgo the argument; it would just be a waste of time, because Loki almost always won any arguments they had. When Tony won, Loki flounced off to sulk.

'I don't know,' Loki shrugged. He hummed around his fork, a spot of curry sauce staining his lower lip. Tony eyed it. 'Where are the remaining bases, JARVIS?' he questioned without looking up.

Tony grinned. The Avengers had fallen into the habit of looking up at the ceiling when they addressed JARVIS; JARVIS' sensors were everywhere, you didn't have to look at a specific one to communicate with him. Tony was glad that Loki felt comfortable enough to talk to JARVIS without looking around.

'The remaining American bases, or the remaining world bases?' JARVIS asked.

'American,' Tony clarified.

'New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Columbus, Detroit, Malibu, Baltimore, Bridgeport, Albuquerque and Washington DC,' JARVIS said.

Tony looked at Loki. Loki raised an eyebrow. 'I don't know where any of those places are,' Loki said. 'Apart from New York City and Washington DC.'

'Haven't done a lot of travelling?' Tony teased.

Rolling his eyes, Loki said, 'Your country is dull.'

'Hey!' Tony pouted. Loki just smirked at him, so Tony shook his head and said, 'How about we hit the Malibu base? I'd rather do it while we're supposed to be here; no reason to hit it while SHIELD knows we're in Malibu.'

Loki shook his head. 'We were just there. I'd rather wait a while longer.'

'Fair enough,' Tony hummed. 'Okay, how about Baltimore? It's closer to New York, so the Avengers will probably get called in to protect it.'

Loki snorted before saying, 'You just want a chance to hurt Thor.'

'And you don't?' Tony retorted.

'Oh, I always want to hurt Thor.' He stabbed at a piece of lamb and popped it into his mouth, humming at the taste. 'Very well,' he said after he'd swallowed. 'If you wish to destroy the Baltimore base, then we shall.'

'Excellent,' Tony said. 'JARVIS, do I have anything planned three days from now?'

'No, Mr Stark,' JARVIS replied.

'Three days,' Tony told Loki.
Loki sighed. 'My arm is fine, Stark.'

'I didn't say that it wasn't,' Tony said.

'Then why can't we attack the base tomorrow?'

'Too soon.'

'Too soon?' Loki echoed.

'I might be busy tomorrow,' Tony said. 'And I want to go over the Genesis suit, make sure it's ready. Plus I need to make sure that JARVIS can fight as Iron Man if needed.'

'Lie,' Loki drawled.

Tony scowled. 'I'm not lying.'

'Lie,' Loki repeated.

'I'm not!'

'LIE!'

Tony flicked Loki in the forehead and Loki launched himself at the other god, wielding his fork like a knife. Tony squealed and fell off the lounge, almost taking the container of curry with him. 'Loki!' he snapped. He looked up to see Loki smirking at him, curry clutched to his chest.

'More for me,' Loki said and bit into another cube of lamb.

{oOo}

The Baltimore base was concealed beneath a park, complete with a swimming pool, sports fields, and a small lake atop it. The entrance was through a building disguised as a small cellphone repair store on the street that ran to the south of the park; Stark had looked it up and found it to be a real business.

'The entrance is probably in the back of the store,' Tony told him as Loki teleported them to the park. Because of the base's size, Tony had brought two JARVIS-operated suits along with them, both painted green and purple. Their faces were smoother than Genesis', their armour less flashy.

'Now Loki has three suits!' Tony commented. His faceplate was up, voice easily carrying towards Loki.

Loki smirked. 'You'd best watch your back, Man of Iron,' he said, 'or the Avengers will turn on you.'

'I don't care what they fucking do,' Tony grunted. 'It'll be easier to take SHIELD down if they trust me a little longer, but if they figure it out...' He shrugged one armoured shoulder. 'Eh.'

'So eloquent,' Loki purred.
Tony poked his tongue out before sliding his faceplate down. 'JARVIS,' he said, and this time his voice came over the comm unit that Loki had slid into his ear earlier.

'Sir?' JARVIS replied, and one of the bots turned towards him.

'You'll stick close to Loki and I until we're in the base itself,' Tony ordered. 'Your job is to place the C-4 in the areas planned; you should have enough in each suit. If you're damaged too severely, or it looks like SHIELD is gonna take you down, leave the C-4 and return to Stark Tower immediately, no matter what situation Loki and I are in. I'd rather get caught than let SHIELD get their hands on my suits.'

'Yes, sir,' JARVIS said.

'Also, if the suits' deactivation sequences start, you drop the C-4 and get as far away from it as possible. If the suits detonate with the C-4 we might all end up dead,' Tony added.

'Yes, sir.'

'Okay,' Tony said. He turned back to Loki. 'It's my night to patrol New York, and JARVIS is in one of my Iron Man suits. If-

'The Avengers are called in, JARVIS can pose as Iron Man to avoid suspicion,' Loki interrupted with an eye roll. 'We've been over this, Stark.'

'Someone's bitchy,' Tony muttered.

'You'll pay for that when I get you out of that suit,' Loki vowed.

Tony just chuckled into his ear before turning to survey the building they had to get into. It didn't look heavily fortified, but neither god doubted that SHIELD had some hidden security. There wasn't anything they could do about it but charge in and hope to find the entrance.

'Ready?' Tony asked over the comms.

'Yes,' Loki replied.

'Come on, then.'

Rather than walk, Loki teleported them right into the shop; the trip was short so it didn't take a lot of his magic, despite moving three bulky suits. As soon as they appeared the man behind the counter screamed; it was late afternoon, so he was probably an actual worker. The man storming from the back of the shop, dressed in an expensive suit, gun in hand, was certainly a SHIELD agent.

He opened fire, but the bullets pinged off of the suits, off of Loki's skim and armour. Loki drew a dagger and flicked it at the man; it embedded itself in his shoulder, the force of the blow sending him stumbling into the wall. In three quick strides Loki was across the room, vaulting over the counter and wrapping a hand around the man's neck. When the employee went for his cellphone, sitting near the register, Tony raised a gauntlet and said a simple, 'No.'

His voice was amplified, different to what his Iron Man suits sounded like. The young man froze and stared at Tony, at the JARVIS-bots, eyes wide.

'You work for SHIELD,' Loki said.
The agent spat at him. ‘Go to Hell.’

Loki slapped him across the face and tsks. ‘Now, now; no need to be rude.’ He grabbed the man's chin and forced his face up, their eyes meeting. ‘Tell me how to get into the base or I will make your death very painful.’

When the man still refused to say anything, Loki sighed. ‘Very well,’ he said, ‘you could have avoided this...’ Trailing off, Loki raised his right hand, and Tony watched, head tilted, as Loki pressed his palm against the man's face. Nothing happened for a few seconds, and then Tony felt his chest warm. Magic...

The SHIELD agent started screaming. He thrashed against the wall, against Loki, and Loki had to force his body up and against the mortal's to keep them connected. Loki's face was scrunched up, either in pain or anger, Tony couldn't tell from his angle. Almost as quickly as the man had started screaming he stopped, slumping against the wall.

‘Where is it?’ Loki shouted.

'Back... ba-ack... r-room,' the man whined. His breath was coming in short, jagged pants and sounded painful.

‘Where?’ Loki repeated. He shook the man when he said nothing, slapped him again and earned a whimper. ‘Where?’

'Blue door,' the man said. 'Th-Then re-ed... door.'

Loki stared at him before smirking. ‘Good boy.’ Then, too quick for the humans in the room to see, Loki slashed the agent's throat open. He gasped and gurgled as his legs gave out, and Loki let the man slump to the floor.

Wiping his dagger on his long coat, Loki turned to survey the room. He paused to look between the young employee and the Genesis suits, green eyes darting from face to face. Finally he stood tall and said, 'Leave. Now.'

The young man wasted no time; he scrambled around the counter, bashed into the wall and almost tripped over himself in his haste to get out the door. But he managed it and when he was gone Tony asked over the comms, ‘Why didn't you kill him?’

Loki just shrugged and looked around the room. Tony figured that there might be listening devices, and that Loki didn't want to get caught talking too much to a robot.

'Alright,' Tony said, 'let's go.'

Loki inclined his head and said, 'Follow me,' Tony and the JARVIS-bots doing as asked. They only just managed to fit themselves into the tiny back room. There were two doors- a faded blue one and a green one. The green one had “Storage Room” printed on it, the other read “Employee Break Room”.

Loki tried the blue door and found it locked. With an eye roll he shoved his shoulder against the door, the lock breaking and the wood opening with a slam against the wall. Loki walked through and Tony followed, the JARVIS-bots bringing up the rear. There were three doors in the short hall; one red, one green, and the other slate grey. Tony figured that, by the position of the grey door, it led to the small alley out back.

Before Loki could take a step towards the red door, which was on their left, it bounced open and a
SHIELD agent, dressed in the black gear they all seemed to wear, no matter what base they worked at, appeared. She had a rocket launcher mounted on one shoulder and Tony's eyebrows shot up.

'Okay then,' he mused.

Loki growled as the woman aimed at them, down on one knee to balance herself. Before she could fire, though, Loki had disappeared in a shower of green and gold sparks. He re-appeared behind her and snapped her neck, catching the rocket launcher before she dropped to the floor. Loki tossed it aside and immediately threw himself through the doorway, the sounds of guns being fired, of people screaming as they died, filling the small hallway.

'Party time, JARVIS!' Tony announced and took off down the hallway. The shop was too small to fly in, but the doorway opened up into a long, wide corridor that was already filled with SHIELD agents. There appeared to be six rows of them, four armoured humans standing side-by-side as they advanced from downstairs. But Loki was ripping them apart; a slash here, a stab there, blasting magic when the mortals ganged up on him.

Tony shouldered his way into the corridor and started blasting—short, powerful bursts skimming over Loki's head when the Trickster ducked to avoid a knife to the throat. The JARVIS-bots followed Tony's lead, shooting repulsor blasts at any agent they faced. Within a minute the corridor was filled with death bodies.

'Fun,' Tony muttered.

Loki stood tall and said, 'Let's continue, shall we?'

They headed towards the end of the corridor, then down, their footsteps echoing on the thick concrete steps. There were large double doors at the bottom, made of reinforced steel. They had been slammed shut and bolted from the inside to keep Tony and Loki out.

'Allow me,' Tony said and Loki moved aside.

'Genesis, blow it open,' Loki ordered to keep up the appearance of the suit operating under Loki's command.

One of the JARVIS-bots, labelled Genesis-2, stepped up to the doors with Tony. A compartment in its torso slid open to reveal a few blocks of C-4 along with detonators and timers. Tony picked out a block and Genesis-2 sliced off a cube before putting the larger block away.

'Stand back,' Tony said as he fixed the C-4 to the door. Loki and the JARVIS-bots retreated to the far end of the corridor, and Tony joined them. He raised a gauntlet, aimed, and fired.

The explosion would have been deafening if Tony wasn't protected by his suit; as it was, Loki ducked his head and growled, eyes narrowed on Tony when he stood tall. Tony grinned from behind the safety of his faceplate and turned to survey the doors.

'Huh,' Tony grunted. The door on the left had warped a bit, and the other sported a large black burn mark. Otherwise they were still firmly shut.

'Stupid Midgardian technology,' Loki muttered as he pushed past Tony and Genesis-3. 'I don't know why I bother working with a bunch of inferior wiring.'

'Hey, that hurts,' Tony muttered over the comms, but Loki ignored him. He surveyed the doors briefly before pressing a hand against them. Tony stayed where he was, watching as Loki seemed
to just... stand before the doors, hand stretched out, palm flat on the once smooth metal. But then Loki began to glow a very faint blue, and Tony watched, eyebrows climbing, as ice spider-webbed its way across the door. The temperature in the corridor dropped according to JARVIS, and frost began to coat all three Genesis suits.

Then Loki was standing back and rushing to Tony's side, his entire left arm blue. 'Fire a repulsor blast at the door,' he ordered.

Tony couldn't afford to hesitate; he didn't doubt that SHIELD was recording everything. So he raised his gauntlet and fired.

The doors exploded inward, showering both the corridor and the room beyond in large chunks of steel. Tony breathed out heavily and said, 'You can freeze steel?'

Loki didn't reply, but then again Tony hadn't expected him to. He just mentally shook his head and followed Loki deeper into the Baltimore base.
As soon as they entered the complex all hell broke loss. Things started exploding, fires were started when Loki threw up magic to protect them from whatever was being fired their way, and the JARVIS-bots darted down separate corridors to plant the C-4. It seemed like there were thousands of agents employed at the complex, because every time Tony tossed two aside, punched one that got too close, or fired repulsor blasts every which way, more kept coming.

The rooms were large, the corridors tall and wide enough for all sorts of equipment to be lugged down. Still, Tony could only just hover, a bare few feet above and below him. If he used enough power he could shoot down the corridors like a bullet, the schematics JARVIS had stolen just enough to keep him from flying himself head-first into a wall.

He and Loki got separated fairly early on; one minute they were fighting side-by-side, the next Loki had teleported into a room that was closed off to them, magic swirling around him as he destroyed equipment. Tony was forced to duck into a corridor to the right of the central room, dodging machine gun fire and one of those goddamn energy guns. He'd studied the one he'd stolen from the Miami base, but had yet to effectively protect his suit from frying for a few seconds before it came back on-line. He really didn't want to get hit by one again.

Tony blasted into a room and started firing, hitting cowering scientists, hidden agents with guns, as well as computers, cameras, and anything else that looked important. Glass windows shattered, dying people screamed, but it was all drowned out by the harsh alarms that had started blaring as soon as Tony and Loki broke through the steel doors.

Finishing off the last of the equipment, Tony turned and exited the room.

'There is another research room three doors down, Mr Stark,' JARVIS informed him.

'Thanks, J,' Tony replied. 'How are Genesis-2 and -3 going?' he asked.

'Almost one quarter of the C-4 has been planted, sir,' JARVIS said. 'I estimate that it will take another twenty-three minutes before all of the blocks and detonators are planted.'

Tony whistled lowly. Three agents darted out of a room down the corridor and fired rapidly at Tony. Two women dressed in long white coats fled behind them, and Tony let them go. Instead he targeted the agents and bullets shot out of his armour, killing each mortal. Tony continued forward.

'That long?' he asked JARVIS.

'Estimated, yes,' JARVIS said. 'I have taken into account the SHIELD agents defending the complex, and the chances of Genesis-2 and Genesis-3 being delayed due to SHIELD's defences. Also-'

'Yeah, I get it,' Tony cut in. 'Just keep me posted, J.'

'Sir,' JARVIS said.

'Loki?' Tony asked. He checked every room that he passed; most of the doors had been left open by fleeing employees, and the ones that were locked were declared unimportant according to JARVIS' stolen blueprints.

'Genesis?' Loki prompted after a beat. With the comms on Tony could hear vague sounds from
wherever Loki was; harsh breathing, muttered curse words, and of course explosions and screams.

'Having fun?' Tony asked.

'But of course.'

Chuckling, the genius said, 'Need any help?'

'Not at all.'

'Let me know if you do,' Tony said. 'I'm currently in the south-east corner, near Laboratory 13, and working my way up to the north-east.'

'Keep me posted, Genesis,' Loki replied before his comms went silent; well, apart from the blasts and screams, of course.

Tony snickered. *Yes, princess,* he thought before entering another room. It was empty of human life, but there were crates of weapons stacked along every wall. A few guns had been dismantled and laid on the large steel tables in the centre of the room. Tony scanned the room as he walked in, heavy boots clunking against the concrete floor.

*Well, well, what do we have here?* he mused when he reached the table. The guns looked like the weapons he'd found when snooping through SHIELD's computers, back before Loki had invaded the planet. They were large, black, but had no magazines, or even an area for bullets to be inserted; just an empty space with wires and little microchips.

*Naughty Fury,* Tony thought. These were the weapons that SHIELD had been trying to build to work off of the Tesseract. Why Fury thought that any human could truly harness and *control* the kind of power the Tesseract contained... well, Tony had never had a high opinion of the organisation. He seriously doubted that even Loki, in all his insanity, would touch the Tesseract after what he'd been through.

Yet here Fury was, still ordering his little minions to make dangerous weapons that ran on alien technology; technology that was currently safe in Asgard, locked up by the Allfather. What the hell was Fury hoping? That Thor would just bring it back? Or maybe he was hoping for other magical cubes to fall from the sky.

Frowning, Tony picked up a gun and stared at it. He didn't want to inspect it too closely; there were cameras everywhere, no doubt feeding information back to the Helicarrier. He expected the Avengers to show up soon enough.

The longer Tony stared at the gun, the greater his confusion grew. These weren't like the Tesseract guns; similar, yes, but smaller; more compact. They were made to work off of a smaller amount of energy. When Tony glanced around the room he spotted what he thought might fit into the empty chambers.

Crossing the lab, Tony stood before the box that had been stacked atop a few others. It was open, and inside were rectangular... glasses? No, JARVIS informed him after running a scan. Rectangular *crystals,* each four centimetres long and one wide.

*Put the energy into the crystal, the crystal into the gun...?* Tony thought as he grabbed a crystal. *But what kind of energy? And the crystals have to be perfect, but they can't be natural if-

A large explosion suddenly rocked the complex, breaking Tony from his thoughts and almost tossing him off of his feet.
'JARVIS, where are the Genesis suits?' Tony asked.

'Genesis-3 is in the north-east part of the complex,' JARVIS informed him. 'Genesis-2 is in the north-west.' He paused. 'Sir, the Avengers have arrived. Mr Lie-smith is about to intercept Master Odinson, who entered the complex through the north entrance.'

'Okay,' Tony said, 'I'm headed that way, I'll blow up some things on the way. JARVIS, have Genesis-3 meet me in Corridor 56. I want it to take one of these guns and a few crystals for further study.'

'Yes, sir,' JARVIS said.

Tony managed to fit a few of the rectangular crystals into the small storage compartments in each arm, but the gun was too bulky; Genesis-3 could carry it in its torso, there'd be room now that most of the C-4 had been planted.

Tony took one last look around the lab- and a few photos to study later- before leaving. He had “team mates” to fight.

{oOo}

Loki had to stop teleporting after a while; he didn't want to deplete his magic too much. Not that he thought he would; he had a large magical core, both Jötunn and Æsir magic co-existing within him. Still, he didn't want to resort to having to use Jötunn magic to escape the facility. His skin would turn blue, and he couldn't risk wandering around Anthony's penthouse with a much too low body temperature, even if he was disguised as Logan Thomas; it was a risk he simply didn't have to take.

Loki stabbed one agent, then another, kicked a mortal off of himself and into one of his SHIELD friends. He raised his sceptre as he did and the stone at the end glowed before shooting magic, killing the two agents who had been attempting to sneak up on Loki.

With the room cleared, Loki started setting fire to the computers and other equipment before he left. He only encountered six other agents as he cleared another three rooms.

Stark started talking to him when he encountered another battalion of SHIELD agents. They'd set themselves up at the end of the wide, curving corridor, large shields made of some type of dark material shielding them from Loki's magic and daggers. They fired at Loki from behind their little protective sheets, and Loki amused himself; he played with them, shot low-level spells at them, laughed when even the smallest spell melted whatever equipment they were using.

When Tony said that he was heading north-east, JARVIS informed Loki of his own position via the comms. So Loki said, 'Keep me posted, Genesis,' and rushed down the hallway.

He threw a shield up just in case, grinned in satisfaction when whatever energy guns they had access to bounced off of his magic. Loki dismissed his sceptre to a pocket dimension and slid another dagger from his sleeve and into his hand. He threw himself amongst the mortals and started hacking away; he slit one's throat, he stabbed another in the heart, blade sliding easily between two ribs. An agent leapt onto his back and another stabbed Loki in the side.
Loki snarled and threw the monkey free, smiling in satisfaction when the man's helmeted head failed to protect his skull from being injured. Loki killed the others quickly after that before moving on.

He'd just destroyed another room full of equipment when JARVIS said, 'Mr Lie-smith, the Avengers are here.'

Loki paused. 'They are?'

'Yes, sir,' the AI said. 'Agent Barton, Captain Rogers, Master Odinson, Doctor Banner, and myself as Iron Man.'

'How do you know?' Loki questioned. He walked quickly, boots echoing along the corridor. There were no agents in sight, the rooms either side simple barracks or gyms.

'I recently gained access to the security measures in this complex, which includes the CCTV cameras inside, as well as those positioned in the park above.'

Loki smirked; he adored Anthony's creation.

'Master Odinson landed at the same time that Iron Man arrived; one point six minutes ago. Doctor Banner, Captain Rogers, and Agent Barton will arrive via Quinjet in one minute.'

'Where will they enter?'

'Most likely through the entrance in the park; slightly north of your current position, Mr Lie-smith,' JARVIS responded. 'If you move slightly quicker than your current pace, you will meet Master Odinson within the complex.'

Loki grinned, the expression feral. Oh, he had some things he wanted to say to Thor, especially after their last counter.

'Thank you,' Loki murmured.

'You are welcome, sir.'

Summoning his sceptre once more, Loki started jogging, following the directions JARVIS gave him. He skidded around a corner about half a minute later and almost ran straight into Thor. The blonde bastard was looking away from Loki, down the other side of the corridor, as though trying to figure out which way Loki would come from. If the idiot would stop frying his comms, he'd be able to keep in contact with his team mates; it was something that Anthony had complained about.

Smirking to himself, Loki let invisibility wash over himself and crept up on Thor. By now his former brother had stiffened, sensing the magic Loki was expanding. His head twisted every which way, blue eyes narrowed, and when his back was turned Loki hissed, 'Thor,' and tossed a clone back the way he'd come.

It materialised before Thor caught sight of it, and when he did the Thunder God roared out, 'BROTHER!' and raced towards it.

For once Loki didn't feel fury; he felt bored, with slight twinges of annoyance. He hoped that, one day, Thor would stop insisting that they were brothers; he hoped that Thor would realise that the Loki he'd known was gone; may never have exited in the first place, actually. Once upon a time Loki had cared for Asgard. Not its people, but its Queen, King and Crown Prince. Loki still cared for his mother, but he could never go back. Frigga was the only reason Loki wouldn't use the
Thor had reached the clone and was trying to hit it with Mjölnir, like usual. Loki rolled his eyes and flicked his wrist; another clone appeared behind Thor, and it stabbed him in the back. It was more a sting than a real stab, Loki's clones not having the full, physical power that Loki, that a real blade, would have; not if Loki didn't put more magic into it. The clone still made Thor turn and snarl, his large fingers tightening on his hammer's grip.

'Still chasing shadows,' Loki hummed, voice echoing down the corridor. 'When will you learn the difference, Prince?'

'Loki!' Thor shouted; as usual. 'Show yourself!'

'Hmm... no,' Loki hissed. He created another clone, another, had the four attack Thor at once. Thor swung his hammer around, but it swiped through each, the clones disappearing in a shower of green sparks before re-appearing in different spots. They started to laugh at Thor; the blonde grew angrier, his swings more wild. And then, finally, he did what he always did; summoned enough lightning to dismiss the clones and force Loki to show himself.

Loki was a second too slow this time; the electricity coursed through him and he stumbled into a wall, gasping, as he flickered into sight. Thor turned to growl at him.

When the electricity cut off Loki slumped slightly against the concrete. Breath laboured and hair hanging over his face, Loki laughed; he looked through his hair to grin sharply; 'Always with the lightning, Prince Thor,' he rasped. 'How I wish your Midgardian team mates were here. The little archer and spider would be dead.'

Thor growled at him.

'Eloquent,' Loki drawled. The injured skin on his fingers, his neck, was already healing; Loki tossed his head to the side to get his hair out of his face. He and Thor eyed each other, standing a few feet apart. Thor's grip flexed on his hammer; Loki's on his sceptre. 'Shall we?' Loki prodded. 'Or are you tired after that little light display?'

Thor threw himself at the Frost Giant.

{OoO}

Tony rounded the corner and was immediately hit with something. He looked down, managed a "huh", before the arrow tip exploded. It made Tony rock back on his feet, and a second arrow lodging itself between his arm and torso. It exploded, too, scratching the paint and making Tony stumble again.

'Fucking Barton,' he hissed when he spotted the archer hiding around the other corner. 'Here, Pretty Bird,' Tony hummed before launching himself down the corridor. He got halfway down when Rogers suddenly appeared; the Captain immediately tossed his shield at Tony, and Tony had to shoot up, his suit scraping along the concrete ceiling.

Snarling, Tony continued forward, Rogers' shield now at the other end of the corridor. He reached
Rogers and Barton at the same time, and Rogers grabbed him around the neck while Barton slid beneath him, taking off down the hall. Rogers used all of his strength to turn, flip Tony into the wall; Tony let it happen, his gauntlets thrust back, repulsors re-activating to push him off of the concrete.

He hit Rogers hard and sent both of them tumbling into the wall opposite. It cracked beneath their combined weight, as did Rogers' head. Tony grinned behind his faceplate at the dazed look Rogers briefly sported before the super-human grabbed him by the face.

Oh, hell no. If Rogers managed to rip his face-plate off-

Tony twisted in the man's grasp and got free; he hovered in the air and opened fire, both repulsors raised and sending multiple shots of energy at the Captain. Rogers was quick, though, tossing himself aside, rolling, flailing as he avoided almost every hit.

Tony only stopped when that goddamn shield suddenly hit him in the side, cutting into his armour just a bit. Unable to stabilise his flight, Tony crashed into the floor. He had to roll aside immediately, the star-spangled shield already back in Rogers' grip.

Standing slowly, Tony eyed the two Avengers. Barton was keeping back, bow in his hands, an arrow nocked. Rogers surveyed Tony in the same manner, both just staring, waiting...

Rogers moved first, throwing himself at Tony; Tony swung with his right gauntlet, then his left, the two hitting each other with everything they had. Tony was protected by the suit's armour, but Rogers still packed a punch. While the armour wasn't damaged, Tony's brain felt scrambled after the fourth hit to the head. It didn't help when Barton fired various arrows; ones that exploded in his face when Rogers leapt back and ducked; arrows that covered him in liquid and caught fire; arrows that tried to short-circuit his suit.

Tony was eventually forced to back up; he lost ground as Rogers and Barton worked together, the two tag-teaming him until he finally aimed a repulsor blast at the ceiling and forced it to cave in slightly.

Rogers was half-buried, Barton scrambling to get over the debris.

'Mr Stark, Genesis-2 has set the last of the C-4,' JARVIS said. Tony paused. 'Genesis-2 and -3 are currently on-route to the north entrance.'

'Not the south?' Tony asked. He ducked another arrow and kicked Rogers in the chest, the man flying back and hitting the floor again.

'Negative,' JARVIS said. 'The south entrance is on fire. ETA seven point three minutes.'

'I'll meet you there,' Tony replied. 'Where's Loki?'

'Mr Lie-smith is currently battling Master Odinson at the north entrance, sir,' JARVIS informed him.

'I'm on my way,' Tony said. He blasted Rogers again, slapped Barton in the face for good measure. The archer hit the wall and groaned as he slid down it, blood dripping down his face. Smirking, Tony turned tail and ran.
Loki blinked in surprise when Genesis suddenly went flying past him, Captain America racing after him. Tony pivoted mid-flight to fire at Rogers, who deflected the blasts with his shield. Loki had to duck when one of the blasts rebounded towards him. Thor wasn't so lucky; he was hit in the back and slammed into a wall, concrete raining down on him. Agent Barton quickly joined Captain America, and he snarled Loki's name when he spotted the Trickster.

"Agent Barton!" Loki shouted. "Do you want to play?" He raised his sceptre but was knocked off balance by Thor, then hit by Rogers' shield. Genesis joined the fight with a few bullets aimed at the three, Rogers protecting himself and Barton with his shield; Tony's bullets bounced off of Thor's skin and armour.

It turned into an all-out brawl, Loki and Tony fighting side-by-side, the Avengers doing the same. Loki ducked a hit from Rogers, who ducked one from Loki, but Barton was too slow; Loki's fist slammed into his face, snapping his nose and sending him stumbling back.

Tony shouted, 'Duck!' over the comms and Loki flickered out of sight, reappearing behind Tony. A missile launched from Tony's shoulder and hit the ceiling above Rogers; it collapsed, burying the Captain in rubble. Barton was at the far end of the corridor, groggily getting to his feet, blood staining his face and tight purple shirt. Thor pulled his leg from the rubble and tossed his hammer at Tony, who didn't move in time. Like Loki before him, it caught him on the shoulder and propelled him back with its strength and magic; Tony hit the wall hard, the right arm of the Genesis suit breaking with an audible crunch.

Loki advanced on Thor quickly, kept an eye on Rogers, where the super-human was digging himself free from the concrete debris. Hand-to-hand had never been Thor's strong suit. He had brute strength on his side, was faster than a human, but not faster than a Frost Giant; than Loki. Thor favoured his stupid hammer, while Frigga had taught Loki hand-to-hand, magic, how to use daggers and knives and short swords, how to use an opponent's strength and weight against them.

Loki was suddenly in Thor's face; he batted the blonde's hands aside, hit him in the face with a closed fist, then a palm to the nose. It broke with a snap and Thor reeled back. Loki snarled as he cut at Thor's armour with the dagger clutched in his left fist. It slid along Thor's chest plates, cut through the thin material over Thor's belly. When Loki cut again he forced Jötunn magic through, the touch of Frost Giant magic so cold that it gave Thor frost bite.

Thor swung at Loki, managed to clip the side of his head, nails opening up a long, thick cut along Loki's temple. It joined the myriad of other bruises and drops of blood already staining Loki's pale skin.

Loki didn't stop hitting the Thunder God until Mjölnir suddenly flew past him and back into Thor's large grip. Tony was free now and he fired a few blasts at the Avengers, but he favoured his left arm; the right was warped, entire plates of armour having fallen away to reveal the circuitry beneath. Loki didn't know how injured Tony was beneath; if his arm was broken, damaged, Loki would snap Thor's neck.

Before Loki could do just that, Genesis-2 and -3 suddenly appeared, flying down the corridor from either ends. Barton was knocked off of his feet, the arrow he'd fired going off-course and exploding near the ceiling. Thor ducked the fresh rubble, and a repulsor blast from Genesis-2, while Rogers threw himself back to avoid -3.
'Mr Stark, Mr Lie-smith,' JARVIS said through the comms. 'The C-4 has been set and we have five minutes to evacuate the facility.'

'You heard him, Green Eyes,' Tony said. He sounded tired, and in pain. Loki scowled at his former sibling.

'We're leaving, now!' Loki shouted, loud enough for the three Avengers to hear.

Rogers and Thor immediately pounced, as though rushing them would do any good; Tony and the Genesis-bots fired repulsor blast after repulsor blast, and Loki tossed magic at the warriors, at the walls, the corridor soon filled with flashing lights and dust.

'Iron Man is here,' JARVIS announced just as they reached the doorway that led to the other entrance.

The words had barely left the AI when the Iron Man suit appeared from one end of the corridor, swooping over the Avengers and towards Loki and Tony.

Genesis-3 got into the second entrance first, flying through the corridor and out of a bunker that had been built into the edge of the park. It led to a hatch camouflaged by grass, and Genesis-3 shot out and into the sky. Genesis-2 followed, Tony and then Loki bringing up the rear. Barton managed to fire one last arrow that exploded in Loki's face and set his chest on fire. Loki tossed himself from the bunker and patted himself down, while Genesis-2 took to the air and followed after its comrade. Iron Man blasted its way from the bunker and Tony grabbed Loki.

'Teleport!' he hissed.

Loki did as asked, taking them to the Hideout first. Tony winced when Loki let him go.

Faceplate sliding up, Tony said, 'I have to meet up with JARVIS and get into the Iron Man suit.'

'Where is he?' Loki questioned. Suddenly JARVIS was giving Loki the coordinates via-comm, and Loki smirked. 'Wait here.'

He teleported, met Iron Man mid-air and clutched the suit's arm. He teleported back to the base and stumbled, a gasp escaping his lips as his vision swam.

'Are you okay?' Tony asked; he looked worried.

'I will be fine,' Loki said, breathing heavy. 'I'll use Jötunn magic from now on and head back to the Tower. Hurry and change.'

Tony did as asked, the Iron Man suit soon sliding over his body and slotting into place. Tony nodded at Loki, who braced himself before drawing upon his Frost Giant magic. He teleported Tony to where he'd picked up JARVIS, and immediately fell into a free-fall before teleporting to the penthouse.

He collapsed over the bed and groaned, buried his face in the duvet. It took him a few minutes to drag himself up.

'I am looping the CCTV footage, Mr Lie-smith,' JARVIS informed him. 'Please inform me when it is safe to record. Also, Genesis-2 and -3 are currently heading to the Hideout.'

'Thank you, JARVIS,' Loki mumbled. He hoped that Anthony was feeling better than he was, because Loki wanted a massage as soon as the genius returned.
Tony's arm was throbbing. Thor's hammer had really done a number on him. Nothing was broken; he'd had enough broken bones to know what that felt like. But his muscles felt like they'd been crushed, and he knew that the right arm of his Genesis suit would need to be replaced. The armour had warped, the connections had ceased to exist. JARVIS had said that it wasn't functioning from the right shoulder down. No wonder Loki had taken three days to heal; he'd barely had any freaking armour to protect himself.

'Well that went well,' Tony commented when he'd joined the others, trying to keep the pain out of his voice. The park was in ruins; on fire, or completely caved in in some places. Tony was sorry that he'd missed the explosion. Bruce was patching up Barton, who had a nasty burn along his forearm courtesy of Genesis, as well as a broken nose from Loki. Tony nearly snickered at the sight.

'Hey, Tony,' Bruce said tiredly.

'Did you catch them?' Rogers immediately demanded.

Tony raised an eyebrow as he slid his faceplate up. 'Yeah, Captain,' he drawled. 'I've got 'em right here.' He gestured vaguely to his right and saw Romanov roll her eyes. 'No,' Tony continued, 'one of them tried to blast me out of the sky and they both disappeared when I was distracted. They didn't fly anywhere; I couldn't catch 'em on my radar. So I'm assuming that Loki...' he trailed off and looked at Thor, who was sitting on a park bench. 'Teleported?' he tried.

'Aye,' Thor sighed.

'Teleported,' Tony nodded.

'Can Loki do that?' Barton asked. He winced when his words tugged at his bruised nose. Bruce tutted him. 'In mid-air?' he added, speaking softly to avoid another injury.

'Aye,' Thor repeated. He finally looked up at them, blonde hair filthy with blood and dirt. 'If he moved quickly enough, my brother could certainly teleport both suits to another location.'

'Robots,' Tony corrected. That drew their collective gazes. 'What?' Tony said. 'We have no evidence that there's anyone in them, so they're robots, not suits. Besides, Thor said that Loki's too much of a dick to work well with others.'
'Sounds like somebody we know,' Barton muttered.

Tony didn't bother responding to that.

'Natasha, what's Fury's ETA?' Rogers asked, apparently deciding to change the topic.

'Five minutes, maybe a little more,' Romanov sighed. 'He wants a report from each of us.'

'Oh, goodie,' Tony drawled. He raised his hands when the assassin glared at him. 'What? I'm gonna give a report. I'm just pissed off, of course.'

'Of course,' Romanov muttered, but said nothing more.

They stood in silence for a minute, two, before Tony sighed. 'Right, I'm getting outta this thing if Fury's gonna take his sweet-ass time.' JARVIS unfolded the suit from around him and Tony groaned, stretching when he was free. He had to turn his back on the Avengers when his right arm throbbed, hiding a wince as he stared at the trees.

_Fucking Thor_, he thought with a snarl. _Next time I'm definitely blasting your dangly bits off._

{oOo}

The team were all hesitant to let strange doctors around them; Steve trusted them a little more than the others, but even he was wary when strange people wanted to poke him with sharp objects. And SHIELD's doctors really liked using sharp objects.

So, despite not being a _medical doctor_ (not that the team ever _listened to him_), Bruce had grabbed a few medical kits from the quinjet Natasha had flown to the base and set up a little medical base beneath a tree.

Clint's injuries were the worst; a second-degree burn on his forearm, a broken nose, multiple cuts and bruises. He sat patiently, didn't complain as Bruce cleaned up the burn before applying cream and then bandaging it. He moved onto Clint's nose next, setting it with little more than a whimper from the archer. Clint would have some impressive black eyes in a few hours, but other than that he'd recover soon enough.

Next was Steve, who didn't need much; some cleaning, a few butterfly bandages taped over the worst of the cuts. Steve never needed stitches; he'd heal before they could be of any help.

Thor brushed him aside, his Æsir physiology already healing him rapidly, and Natasha hadn't fought. Tony waved him off, too, despite the bruises and cuts across his torso. Tony had unzipped his undersuit, rolling the top down until it hung around his hips. He wasn't wearing anything underneath, and Bruce could see Natasha staring at the arc reactor, Steve at the scars that spider-webbed around it.

Bruce was about to turn away when he caught sight of Tony's arms. He froze, staring, as Tony stretched again, a grimace pulling at his face. The burn that had once stained Tony's tanned skin was gone. Three days ago the skin around the edges of the bandage was red; damaged skin only just beginning to heal; bright, shiny, _red._
There was nothing there now; no burn, no scar, no bandage... nothing.

It wouldn't have healed that quickly; couldn't have healed that quickly. If the skin around the burn was that red, then it had to be second-degree; bright red, scabbing, blisters forming beneath the burn cream. But the skin was unmarked, tanned like the rest of Tony's muscled arm. That kind of burn would have scarred, or would have left some type of mark.

'Bruce?'

Bruce jumped and dropped the bandages he'd been tucking back into the medical kit. Tony was staring at him, eyebrows furrowed; and now Steve was, too.

'You okay?' Tony asked.

'Y-Yeah,' Bruce stuttered. He shook his head. 'Sorry, I was just thinking about... about Loki's suits.'

'Robots,' Tony corrected, but it effectively changed the subject. 'They aren't run on arc reactor technology, like my Iron Man suits,' the billionaire mused. 'I wonder what Loki's using to power them...'

'Magic?' Bruce suggested hesitantly, hoping like hell that the others would jump in, because he had to think.

Tony snorted. 'That'd mean getting magic and science to work together.' He pointed a finger at Thor, who'd opened his mouth. 'And don't start with the whole magic is a science you Midgardians have yet to figure out. I know that, Thor, but magic is still something else entirely.'

Bruce breathed a quiet sigh of relief when Tony and Thor started arguing about magic- what it was, exactly, where it came from, how Loki could use it, etcetera. Steve watched, eyes wide, and Clint ignored them all, already playing with the bandage wrapped around his arm.

Only Natasha watched Bruce, her gaze unwavering. Bruce didn't look at her, focused on repacking the medical kit.

Tony's burn was gone... and Bruce didn't know what that meant.

{oOo}

When Tony finally got back to the Tower he found Loki curled up in their bed, asleep. He smiled as he tip-toed into the bathroom, peeling off his undersuit and hopping into the shower. He wanted to stay under the hot water forever, but he was exhausted, and his right arm was aching. He groaned and rotated it beneath the water, not that that helped. Finally he pulled himself from the shower, turned the water off, and hunted through the medical kit as he roughly towelled himself dry.

He popped a couple of painkillers before heading back into the bedroom- did painkillers work on gods? Well, he was about to find out. Tony tugged on a baggy pair of sweatpants and a t-shirt. He tried not to wake Loki, but as soon as he slid beneath the covers Loki sighed and his eyes popped open. Tony was disappointed to see the bright blue of Logan Thomas, the short, curly blonde-hair.
But he still wrapped his left arm around Loki and kissed his temple.

'You okay?' Tony asked. 'You look more fucked than I feel.'

'Mm,' Loki sighed. 'I feel fucked. And not in a good way.'

Tony snickered. 'Hey,' he said after a beat, 'what'd you do to that agent? You know, the one in the shop?'

'Made him feel pain,' Loki replied, his voice barely above a whisper. 'I simply made magic... painful.' Pressing his face to Tony's chest, Loki murmured, 'What happened with SHIELD?'

'Eh,' Tony shrugged his good shoulder gently. 'I'll tell you when we wake up.'

Loki was already asleep.

{oOo}

Natasha found Clint in his room aboard the Helicarrier. While she and Clint officially resided in Stark Tower, both still had rooms on the Helicarrier, and access to various bases/front companies. They couldn't discuss their missions against Stark in the Tower, not until SHIELD figured out a full-proof way around JARVIS. So far the little devices they'd come up with seemed to have worked; Stark certainly hadn't confronted them about their various break-ins of his penthouse.

'How are you feeling?' Natasha asked. Clint immediately groaned at the sound of her voice- and even that sounded painful. Natasha winced. 'Sorry,' she said, lowering her voice. Clint was on the single bunk, pillows bunched around his head. His eyes had already turned a dark purple-black, and when he peeled them open they were bloodshot.

'Migraine,' Clint grunted, winced again. 'I'm gonna shoot Loki in the ass when I next see him.'

Natasha smiled at the thought but quickly pushed it aside. 'Fury wants us to discuss today with him.'

Clint nodded slowly. Fury always wanted a more in-depth explanation of their fights; they couldn't discuss Stark's behaviour with Stark in the room, and Fury didn't trust Steve and Bruce like he did his agents. Steve was... good, for lack of a better word, and Bruce was a loose cannon. Not even Natasha knew if his loyalty was more towards SHIELD or Stark.

'You should stay here,' Natasha said. She frowned when Clint sighed, then pushed him back down when he tried to sit up.

'Tash-

'Fury will understand,' she cut in. 'You're no use to us injured, Clint.'

Clint glared at her, but it was weak and quickly fell away. He slumped back onto the pillow, eyes closed, and sighed.

'Just tell me anything you witnessed that you didn't share with the others,' Natasha said, 'and I'll
'Okay...' Clint breathed heavily and reached up to run his fingers through his hair slowly. The bandage wrapped his arm was a bright white. 'Um... I can't really think of anything too interesting,' he said. 'That Genesis suit was damaged, and I seriously doubt that Loki knows how to fix it. If he does, then he has inside help.'

'Stark, you mean,' Natasha said.

Clint cracked one eye open. 'You're the one who mentioned it first; in front of Stark, no less.'

'It would be stupid to ignore the similarities,' Natasha insisted. 'I don't think that Stark and Loki could work together. I don't know what Stark's personal price would be, but everybody can be bought. Or JARVIS could be hacked. Loki isn't an idiot. If he wanted something like Iron Man, he'd get it eventually.'

'Mm,' Clint murmured. 'Well, we'll probably fight Loki and Genesis again. He's not gonna stop his murder spree any time soon. Just tell Fury to mention it to Steve and Banner- not Stark. If he is working with Loki, we don't need him covering his tracks. He's only human, he'll fuck up eventually.'

Natasha nodded slowly, didn't say anything. If anyone could join Loki, destroy SHIELD, and slowly takeover the world without being caught, it would be Stark. Natasha hated to admit it, but she'd never forsake intelligence just because she had a personal grudge against her mark. Stark was a genius; the world, SHIELD, agreed on that. Just because he was insane didn't mean that he couldn't plan and carry out something like this.

Natasha really hoped that Stark wasn't working with Loki. Because that meant that they'd joined forces, put their vast intelligence together towards one goal. And, unfortunately, that goal was the destruction of SHIELD. Stark was already a hazard to the innocent civilians of New York... with Loki on his side?

She shivered but quickly repressed it. Thankfully Clint's eyes had slid shut again, the archer more focused on defeating his migraine than watching Natasha.

'Anything else?' she asked after the silence had gone on too long.

'Uh...' Clint's eyes scrunched up, and he grunted when the action moved his injured nose. Someone- a SHIELD doctor, probably- had taped a metal plate over his nose, probably to keep it from being bumped. It wasn't a good look, but if it got Clint fighting fit quicker...

'Yeah,' Clint said and sat up suddenly. Natasha glared at him when he swayed, looking like he was about to throw up. Clint waved her concern aside and licked his lips. 'After Banner finished patching me up, he went weird. Did you notice?'

'Define “weird”,' Natasha said. Because Bruce was weird on a normal day.

'He dropped some of the bandages and stared at Stark. A lot,' Clint said, emphasising his last two words. He was staring at Natasha now, bruised eyes narrowed.

'What do you mean?'

'When Stark and Thor started arguing about magic, Banner stared at Stark,' Clint said. 'Didn't tear his eyes away until Fury turned up, and even then Banner kept looking at him. He looked... confused, worried.'
Natasha frowned. She hadn't noticed anything, but then again she usually kept her sights focused on Stark when they were all together; she wanted to catch the man slipping up, wanted to use anything she could to get him booted off of the team.

Then again, Clint had proven again and again over the years that he was extremely perceptive. He saw things that others couldn't, caught things that even Natasha missed.

'Why would he do that?' she questioned.

'Beats me,' Clint said. He shrugged one shoulder and slowly lowered himself onto his back. 'Usually Banner just wants to be alone- especially after a fight. He never goes out of his way to interact with us.'

Natasha nodded. Whenever they returned to the Tower, Bruce locked himself up in his room, or in his workshop. It was rare that he joined the others for a little team-bonding. And when he did it was usually just him and Stark screwing around with one of their little projects.

'It was just something I noticed while I was sitting there,' Clint sighed. 'I don't know if it's important, but I figured Fury should know. I'll give him more details if he wants.'

'Okay,' Natasha agreed. She stood and patted Clint on the thigh. 'Try and get some sleep, okay?'

Clint just grunted and waved half-heartedly as Natasha left the tiny room, shutting the door behind her.

{oOo}

When Loki awoke Stark was nowhere to be found. He yawned and sat up, stretching to work his aching muscles. He'd used a lot of magic the day previously, but a lot of it was already replenished. Now he was just tired, rather than exhausted.

'JARVIS, where's Anthony?' Loki asked as he slid from bed.

'In his workshop, Mr Lie-smith,' JARVIS said. 'Shall I send for him?'

'No,' Loki shook his head. 'Tell him I'll be down soon.'

JARVIS confirmed the order before falling silent, and Loki went into the bathroom. He showered quickly, having been too drained the day before to do so. When he was done he slipped into some comfortable clothes and went down to Anthony's workshop.

The man was bent over a table, frowning at something.

'Tony?'

'Huh?' Tony jumped and whirled to face him. 'Oh, hey.' He grinned and leaned up for a kiss when Loki was close enough, winced when he moved his right arm.

Loki frowned. 'Are you injured?'
'Thor's a bitch,' Tony grumbled. 'Fucked my right arm up a bit.'

'Do you want me to heal it?'

'Nah,' Tony waved his right hand; winced again. Loki scowled. 'No, seriously, I'll be fine,' Tony insisted. 'It already feels better than it did yesterday. I just need to stop using it.'

'Perhaps you can use that sling you forced upon me.' He grinned sharply when Tony scowled at him.

Tony said, 'Yeah, yeah, funny guy. Come take a look at this.'

Loki followed him to the table. 'How did it go with SHIELD?' he asked, repeating his question from the previous night.

'Same old, same old,' Tony muttered. 'We went over everything, Fury bitched, Barton didn't say much. Thor and I discussed magic.'

Loki's eyebrows climbed. 'Oh?'

'Mm,' Tony nodded. 'He seems to think that magic and technology can't mix; said something about us Midgardians being too slow and backwards.' He grunted and leaned against the table. 'Dude's amazed by a toaster but thinks we're backwards.'

Smirking, Loki drawled, 'Well, in some respects Midgard is backwards. Asgard's technology developed differently to Midgard's; different, but not fundamentally weaker or stronger. Thor barely understands the technology Asgard does use. Your holo-screens and toasting mechanisms would make his small brain hurt.'

'Small?' Tony laughed. 'I'd have thought, given the size of the fucker, that his brain was big.'

'No; it's mostly skull,' Loki said. His eyes drifted to the table. 'A gun?'

It was large, black, shaped like one of the machine guns Stark had shown Loki some time ago; one of the ones that Stark Industries used to make and sell.

'Not just any gun,' Tony said. He picked it up, turned it in his fingers. 'See this?' He pointed at the bulky square that sat before the trigger. 'This gun, however, has been manufactured to use small, rectangular-shaped magazines.'

'Yes...' Loki said slowly.

'This is where the magazine usually goes; it's called a magazine well,' Tony explained. 'You get a magazine full of bullets, put it in, make sure the safety's off, and fire using the trigger.' He indicated the little piece of plastic before the grip. 'This gun, however, has been manufactured to use small, rectangular-shaped magazines.'

'And that is odd?' Loki questioned.

'Yeah,' Tony nodded. 'Magazines, especially for a machine gun, are usually long and thin, not small and thick. I also found these.' He turned back to the table and slid what appeared to be a piece of glass across the surface. There were about five others in a neat pile to Tony's right. 'I found hundreds of these things in the same room the guns were in.'

'Glass?' Loki asked, picking the closest one up; he felt what it was before Tony voiced it;

'Crystal.'
'Crystal,' Loki echoed. 'I see.' He rolled it in his fingers, thinking quickly. 'You don't know what they're for?'

'No fucking idea,' Tony grunted. 'I mean, the gun kinda looks like the weapons Fury and his little boy band were trying to create before you showed up.' When Loki raised his eyebrows, Tony elaborated; 'He- and the World Security Council, I'm sure- wanted to create powerful weapons that used energy from the Tesseract.'

Loki snorted. 'Why do you mortals believe that you can harness power beyond your understanding?'

'Hey, I take offence to that!' Tony huffed. 'I know when to quit, and I'm not mortal.'

'Mm, you're not mortal,' Loki agreed, tossing Tony a sly grin.

Tony rolled his eyes and said, 'Yeah, yeah. Anyway, you have any ideas?'

Loki hummed and held the crystal up to Tony's eye level.

Loki's magic flared; blue energy was sucked from his fingers and into the crystal, which glowed brighter and brighter the more magic Loki pushed into it. Loki cut off the flow quickly enough, and he and Tony stared at the crystal before the Trickster tapped it with his left index finger.

'Magic,' Loki stated.

'That... shouldn't have happened,' Tony said. 'Naturally formed crystals-'

'SHIELD have been playing with nature,' Loki cut in. 'I doubt that all of the crystals you stole would be able to handle a lot of magic; they would shatter under the amount needed. The Vanir use similar methods to store energy, however they are far more skilled with growing crystals that can contain vast amounts of magic and other energies.'

'Amount needed?' Tony echoed.

Loki inclined his head and tapped the gun Tony had stolen with his free hand. His eyes stayed fixed on the glowing blue crystal for a beat before his gaze met Tony's. 'Magic guns,' he stated.

Tony blinked before the full implications of what Loki had said hit him-

'Son of a fucking bitch! ' he snarled.

'Indeed,' Loki agreed. He twirled the magic-filled crystal in his fingers. 'SHIELD no longer have access to the Tesseract, though they had the technology to try and harness its energy. They could have used it in their weapons.'

'They changed it 'cause they don't have the Tesseract,' Tony growled. 'Energy-fuelled guns, but using magic instead of the Tesseract.' He paused to take a breath and looked back up at Loki. 'Fury never planned on handing you over to Thor if the Avengers caught you.'

'No,' Loki agreed. He put the crystal down and folded his arms over his chest. 'He would spin some tale about me having to pay for my crimes here first. What is one hundred years for a god, Prince Thor? Surely Loki can suffer here for a bit before meeting his end in Asgard.' He huffed. 'Sometimes you mortals are worse than the gods,' he muttered. 'The Allfather wanted to use me as a weapon but locked me away when he realised how truly dangerous I am. Fury hasn't learned his lesson yet, it seems.'
'Fuck what he's learned!' Tony shouted, exploding into movement; he paced back and forth, tugged on his hair, angrily kicked at anything he could reach. 'That fucker was going to lock you up and use your magic to make weapons!'

'Yes,' Loki agreed.

'I might be insane,' Tony growled, 'and an asshole, but even I wouldn't use someone to make weapons! Stark Industries has the best health care and employee benefits in America! In the fucking world!'

Loki raised his eyebrows, amused by Anthony's little tantrum, but Tony didn't notice. He was too busy feeling fucking pissed off because Fury- that slimy fucking rat. He wanted Tony's technology and Loki's magic. He wanted Tony to finish the magic sensor, not just to catch Loki, but to figure out how magic worked and exploit it. Exploit Loki. Oh, he was going to die. SHIELD, Fury, the World Security Council; all of those assholes were going to pay for their fucking deception.

'In other news,' Loki drawled, and Tony's grumbling finally stopped. He continued to pace, however. 'Your suit was injured during the fight, as were you.' Tony scowled at him when he finally stopped.

'So?' Tony sniffed. 'I told you, my arm'll get better.'

Rolling his eyes, Loki said, 'Yes, Stark, I know. How badly damaged was the Genesis suit?'

'Uh... pretty bad,' Tony finally admitted. 'JARVIS said the entire right arm is completely inoperable. I don't know what Thor did to it; the armour might have cut some wires when Thor's hammer hit me, or the pressure was just too much. I've gotta take the thing apart to see what's up.'

'It's something the Avengers noticed, yes?' Loki questioned.

'Yeah...' Tony agreed slowly, 'Thor mentioned it yesterday and Fury asked how badly he damaged the suit; Barton said it stopped using its right arm after the hit.' He scowled. 'Observant fucker. I should rip his eyes out.'

Loki chuckled at the thought. 'You said that your... friend, has a suit.'

'Rhodey,' Tony mumbled. 'And I'm not sure if he's my friend. I mean, the dude's awesome; saved my life more than once. But that was mostly when I got drunk and picked fights with big guys who could rip my head off, despite me being Tony Stark. He's always had my back, but he'll definitely disagree with my whole “take over the world after destroying SHIELD” plan.'

'Take over the world?' Loki echoed. 'Is that what we're doing?'

Tony leered at him. 'But of course, baby! We'll get bored after the Avengers are dead.'

'Don't call me baby.'

'Green Eyes.'

'Stark...'

'Lo-Lo.'

Loki's hand snapped out and he grabbed Stark by the shirt, quickly dragging him in. Anthony didn't put up a fight, even went so far as to hook his left arm around Loki's neck and smile charmingly at
him.

'I hate you,' Loki said, scowling at him.

'Do not,' Tony replied. 'What were you saying?'

He started pressing kisses to Loki's neck; his tongue darted out every so often, his teeth nipped at the smooth skin. Loki sighed and tilted his head back. He could never deny the stupid Midgardian for long.

'Loki?' Tony murmured against his skin. 'What were you saying?'

'About what?' Loki asked. Tony snickered. 'Shut up, Stark.'

'I didn't-'

'Yes, yes,' Loki interrupted. He pressed himself against Tony, enjoyed the warmth of his body. 'I was saying -' Tony giggled- 'that your friend, Rhodey, has a suit, yes?'

'Uh-huh,' Tony muttered. 'So what?'

'Genesis was damaged, so much so that Barton noticed and commented on it at your Avengers play-date,' Loki said. Tony laughed properly, the sound bouncing off of the walls and making Loki's belly warm. 'If this other man's suit happens to go missing, and then parts of it appear on Genesis...'

'Oh,' Tony breathed. He pulled back to look up at Loki. 'The Avengers might think that you and Doom were studying Rhodey's suit, and that you needed it to fix Genesis because you can't build replacement parts yourself.'

'Exactly,' Loki said. 'They may not fall for it; I doubt they believe that I know enough about the technology to completely re-attach a functioning arm, but-'

'It's worth a shot,' Tony interrupted this time.

'Indeed.'

'Okay,' Tony said, 'so you go grab Rhodey's suit. Maybe use a whole heap of magic, or get caught doing it?'

'Very well,' Loki agreed easily. He gripped Tony's hips and thrust his own forward, grinned when Anthony gasped and jerked. Ducking down to close the height difference between them, Loki pressed his lips to Tony's ear. 'I don't think that I need to go get that suit right this second...' he purred.

'N-No,' Tony stuttered. He licked his lips. 'I think that you should fuck me. Maybe up against the wall. Like, right this second.'

Loki chuckled and pulled Tony in for a dirty kiss.
“I could give you a chip with JARVIS installed; he'd easily bypass any new security measures that Rhody's put on the suit. But I don't want the suit activating while Rhody's there; no need to draw extra attention to ourselves.”

Loki rolled his eyes. “I know what I'm doing, Stark. I've stolen many things over my very, very long life.”

“Yeah, yeah; you're old,” Tony snorted. “Take the map and go.”

“No kiss for good luck?” Loki pouted. “I'm disappointed, Anthony.”

Tony just laughed at him.

Loki smiled at the memory as he strolled through the settlement. Colonel Rhodes lived “on base”, whatever that meant. Anthony had explained it, but all Loki had heard was “soldiers, weapons, don't get caught until you're supposed to get caught”. His worry was annoying, but also... nice. Only Frigga had ever worried about Loki. He doubted that she did any more, not after all the mortals he'd slaughtered. No... Frigga only had one son now.

Loki shook his head and looked around. The base was a large area filled with green buildings; jeeps and other large vehicles sped along the concrete, and men and women in identical uniforms made their way to and fro. Loki had been given directions, but was thankful for the map Anthony had printed for him, complete with little arrows and Tony's scratchy writing. He smirked to himself when he read one such note; “Now, Green Eyes, I know that a man in uniform is sexy, but control yourself!” As if Loki would soil himself by having sex with a Midgardian. Stark was the exception, and the only one that Loki wished to spend his time with, period.

He found Rhodes' quarters thanks to Stark's map. The room was large, but spartan; something to do with his rank, Loki assumed. The room was rectangular, with a single, neatly-made bed, a dresser and wardrobe, and an attached bathroom that was roughly the size of Anthony's shower.

Why would anyone fight for their country when they live in such pitiful conditions? Loki thought after he'd opened the door. It had been locked, but a quick burst of magic was all that had been needed to allow Loki entrance.

Loki took a short look around, and made sure that he was alone, before he cancelled the invisibility spell. He was using Æsir magic, because if Thor was called in he wanted the idiot to be able to sense that Loki had been here.

There was a large metal locker between the wardrobe and dresser. It was matt silver, with a single keypad at hip level stuck to the door. Loki examined it briefly before glancing down at the map Stark had given him;

“I know the code, but you shouldn't. Just use magic to break it open.”

Loki rolled his eyes. He and Anthony had discussed the theft in length, but Stark had still felt the need to re-write all of his suggestions on the piece of paper.
With a sigh, Loki crouched down and pressed his hand to the keypad. It was simple to push his magic through it, to overload the circuits and force the lock to click open. When it did, Loki stood and swung the door open.

The suit was completely grey, bulkier than Tony's Iron Man suits, but Loki knew that it was a few upgrades short. Somebody called “Hammer” had added new weapons, Tony had said, after Rhodes had stolen the suit. Loki frowned; he didn't like the thought of someone stealing from his partner.

Reaching out, Loki placed a hand on the suit and closed his eyes. This was trickier than opening a simple lock; the suit was powered by a miniature arc reactor, which had already proven to be a type of energy that Loki's magic simply couldn't battle. But he should be able to turn off the outdated security measures, such as the suit's ability to activate and defend itself when someone other than Rhodes used it. It was one of the very few measures Tony had agreed to outfit it with after Rhodes stole it.

While he worked, Loki's magic leached out of him, flaring up around the room. If anybody approached Loki would be aware a few seconds before they entered the room.

Ten minutes passed. Twenty. Loki marveled at Stark's old technology; the suit was outdated but still a masterpiece, the way it fit together, the circuits and wires and the arc reactor which was more than enough to power the billion-dollar suit.

Loki had just finished deactivating everything but the arc reactor when his magic tingled; somebody was coming down the hallway. Loki didn't disappear, though. He simply stood tall and put a hand on the suit's right arm, finger running along the smooth armor.

He was still standing there, admiring the suit, when the door was pushed open.

'Who the hell are you?'

Loki turned to survey the man. He was dark-skinned, hair shaved short, and wearing a green jumpsuit. Loki tilted his head. 'Colonel Rhodes?' he questioned.

'Yeah,' Rhodes said. He didn't move from the doorway. 'Loki, right?'

'Loki Laufeyson.' He smirked. 'God of Mischief and Lies.'

'Yeah,' Rhodes repeated. 'What do you want?'

'Haven't you heard?' Loki said. He tapped the suit behind him. 'I have my own suits, but one was damaged recently. Stark's security is rather complex and it would take me far too long to get through it and steal one of his suits. Your suit, on the other hand...' he trailed off and grinned sharply.

'You think you can just come in here and take my suit?' Rhodes demanded.

'I can do whatever I want,' Loki sniffed. 'Besides, you stole it from Stark, didn't you? Why can't I steal it from you? It doesn't truly belong to you, after all.'

Rhodes' eyes narrowed. 'How do you know that?'

'God,' Loki drawled and gestured at himself with his free hand. 'I have my ways, Rhodes. Now, are you going to step aside, or do I have to kill you?'

Rhodes took a step closer. Loki could read the fear in his eyes, but the mortal was brave; stupid,
but brave.

'I can't just let you take it,' Rhodes said.

'Very well.' Loki grinned and let go of the suit to face Rhodes properly. 'Come along, little mortal.'

{oOo}

Tony was having lunch with the Avengers when JARVIS announced Rhodey's arrival. Romanov and Barton wanted to discuss Loki's plans again, the two saying that all SHIELD bases had upped their security in the wake of Loki's attacks. Tony nearly laughed; as though more agents and bigger guns could stop him and Loki.

Logan was sitting at his side, various topics being passed back and forth between him, Rogers and Bruce. It was a clone, not the real Loki--the Trickster had left about an hour earlier for the Air Force base. Tony once again wondered why Loki's clones felt so... different. Loki had mentioned that it was, perhaps, a mating instinct; Tony's magic telling him that the clone was weaker magic-wise, that it couldn't truly keep him safe. It didn't help, because every time Loki said mates Tony thought of wolves and swans and every other animal that mated for life. But that was basically what his and Loki's magic wanted to do, so...

He shook his head and forced himself to eat another slice of pizza with his right hand. His arm still ached, but Bruce had stared at him when he and Logan had walked into Rogers' kitchen, and Barton kept eyeing him every few minutes.

'You haven't found anything?' Rogers asked, dragging Tony back into the conversation.

Tony shook his head. 'JARVIS and I went through his programming; there have been no breaches, no bugs. I want to shut JARVIS down and do a complete sweep, then reboot, but that'll make the Tower vulnerable for an entire half hour.'

'You think Loki has spies in the Tower?' Romanov asked.

Tony shrugged and took another bite of pepperoni pizza. 'Wouldn't put it past him,' he mumbled.

'Tony,' Logan sighed.

'Sorry.' Tony grumbled, offered Logan a charming grin when the clone just stared at him. It was amazing how life-like Loki's clones were... Tony wondered at what distances Loki could still control them. Could he do it from Asgard? He'd mentioned something about astral-projection a while back... was that different?

Thor was sitting opposite Logan, and didn't seem to notice anything. Then again, Tony was pretty sure that Loki had created the clone with Jötunn magic. The mage was getting better at wielding it; at forcing it to do what he wanted without turning blue, or without rapidly dropping the temperature suddenly.

It was then that JARVIS said, 'Mr Stark, Colonel Rhodes is here.'

'What?' Tony faked shock and frowned. 'What's Rhodey want?'
'I don't know, sir,' JARVIS replied. 'He is on his way up.'

'Okay,' Tony mused. 'I haven't talked to Rhodey in... months.'

'Isn't he your best friend?' Romanov said, eyebrows up.

Tony snorted. 'Yeah, but that doesn't mean we live in each other's asses, Natasha.'

Logan choked on his mouthful of coke and even Bruce looked like he was biting back laughter. Rogers just sighed and ate another piece of pizza. Their pies were rapidly dwindling, what with Thor stuffing four slices into his mouth at a time.

'Tony!' Rhodey shouted when he reached the floor.

'In the kitchen!' Tony called back. He pasted a smile on his face when Rhodey appeared, the man wearing his smart, navy-blue uniform. 'What's up, Rhodey?'

'I need to talk to you,' Rhodey said and eyed the Avengers.

'Is it serious?' Tony asked, effecting an air of concern when Rhodey's expression turned grim.

'Yeah,' Rhodey said.

'Okay.' Tony stood and patted Logan on the shoulder. 'I'll be back in a minute.'

He led Rhodey into the living room and no further; he wanted Romanov and Barton to eavesdrop.

'What's wrong?' Tony asked.

'Laufeyson stole War Machine,' Rhodey told him.

Tony just blinked. Stared. Blinked some more. 'Uh... what?

'He stole War Machine,' Rhodey repeated.

'Excuse me?'

Rhodey huffed and quickly explained what had happened; he'd been testing some weapons before he headed back to his quarters for a quick shower before dinner. Loki had been in the room, the locker Tony had given Rhodey to store War Machine in open. Loki and Rhodes had exchanged a few words before Rhodey attacked, not that the soldier had held high hopes of winning out of his suit. Loki had soundly, and quickly, beaten his ass before taking off. Rhodey had woken up on the floor of his quarters, War Machine gone.

'What the fuck, Rhodey?!' Tony shouted.

'How is this my fault?' Rhodey demanded.

'If you hadn't stolen it in the first place, Loki wouldn't have gotten his hands on it!'

'I had to take it, Tony!' Rhodey argued. 'You were dying and you wanted to spend your last few months out of your mind. You were out of control, man!'

'You could have returned it when I cured myself,' Tony growled.

'I'm doing good!' Rhodey said.
'And I'm not?'

'Is everything okay in here?' It was Rogers, large blonde head swivelling between Tony and Rhodey as he stepped out of the hallway.

'Fine!' Tony shouted.

'No, it's not,' Rhodey said. 'Loki told me that he has his own suits.'

Tony sighed and reached up to scrub his face. You mean SHIELD hasn't already told you? he thought with a glare at his friend. 'Loki's destroyed two SHIELD bases in the last month, and we're pretty sure that more are going to follow,' he told Rhodey. 'He had three robots similar to Iron Man the last time we fought him.'

'He has his own suits?' Rhodey gaped.

'Robots,' Tony corrected. 'We don't think there's anybody in them. And now he has a third.'

'Do you think it was because Genesis was damaged?' Rogers asked.

Tony shrugged. 'I don't fucking know. I guess we'll find out the next time we fight him.'

'But how'd Loki know that I have a suit?' Rhodey questioned.

'The media hasn't exactly kept quiet about it,' Tony pointed out. 'Loki isn't an idiot, and I doubt that any amount of Midgardian technology could keep him out of something for long. He needed the suit, or he just wanted it, so he took it.' Tony sighed and slouched against the back of Steve's couch.

'I'm gonna have to reboot JARVIS and see if he's been compromised. If he hasn't... ' Tony glanced at Rogers.

'SHIELD will have to do the same with their systems,' the super-soldier nodded.

And if they do, they won't be able to purge JARVIS, Tony thought. JARVIS was SHIELD's system, they just didn't know it.

When the three men had remained in silence for at least three minutes, Tony stood. 'Look, Rhodey, I'll see about tracking the suit down. Loki might not know how to turn off the GPS. If I can't find it, I'll see about lending you another suit.'

Rhodey smiled and clapped Tony on the shoulder. 'No worries, man. I'm sorry, though- I know how much you hate letting the Iron Man technology go.'

'Doesn't matter,' Tony shrugged, 'I can't do a lot about it.'

'True,' Rhodey agreed. 'Hey, why don't we get dinner soon? Catch up?'

Tony was too busy to catch up, but he didn't want Pepper on his ass about ignoring one of the few friends he had. So he smiled and agreed and went to collect Logan.
James stopped from where he'd been about to get into his car. He'd managed to park beneath Stark Tower, a spot always left empty just for him. Tony took care of his friends in the weirdest ways, sometimes.

'Agent Romanov,' he greeted the red-head. 'How can I help you?'

'I couldn't help but overhear you and Stark,' Romanov said

James snorted. Overhear? Yeah, right. 'Okay...,' he said slowly.

Romanov folded her arms over her chest- or, well, she tried. One of her arms was wrapped in a dark cast. James wondered if Loki had broken her arm, or if it was some other super villain.

'Your suit was stolen,' Romanov said, 'but Stark mentioned giving you another one.'

'He might,' James admitted. 'Then again, he might tell me to go screw myself.'

The woman's eyebrows jumped. 'Really? I thought he was your best friend.'

'He is,' James agreed. He leaned back against the car, wanting to appear casual. He felt like he was being interrogated; but then again, maybe Romanov was always like this. 'We're friends,' James continued, 'but that doesn't mean Tony will just give me a suit. I stole the last one, and as you probably heard, he's still pissed off about that. Tony doesn't want the Iron Man technology getting into the wrong hands.'

'It already is,' Romanov commented.

'You mean Loki's robots?'

She nodded. 'They look too similar to Iron Man to be anything else.'

'And Thor looks similar to us, but really isn't,' James pointed out.

'What's your point?'

'Just because Loki has similar robots, doesn't meant that Tony- or JARVIS- has a leak. Loki could have simply studied the suits.'

'He could have studied your suit,' Romanov suggested.

James' jaw clenched. He hated it, but she was right. Like Loki had said, Tony's security was excellent; it was the best on the planet. Probably not enough to keep a magical god out forever, true, but enough to make it a challenge. All James had had was a locker, and look how easily Loki had picked it.

'He could have,' he eventually agreed. 'Are you going to arrest me?'

Romanov's lips twitched. 'No,' she said, 'we don't arrest innocent civilians.'

'So why are we talking?' James asked. He really, really didn't like this; the way Romanov was talking about Tony, the way she called him Stark, the fact that she'd waited until James and Tony were apart to speak to him... they were supposed to be team mates.

'It's become clear to SHIELD that Stark can be... volatile,' Romanov said, words slow and careful.

James huffed. 'Like that isn't obvious; even Tony knows that.'
'We're not sure how much longer Stark will be a part of the Avengers,' Romanov said like he hadn't spoken.

James' eyebrows climbed, and he said, 'Tony's thinking of leaving?'

'Perhaps,' was all she said.

'Okay...'

'If you're interested in replacing him,' Romanov said, turning and heading for the elevators in the far corner. 'Let SHIELD know!' she called over her shoulder.

James watched her leave, and only climbed into his car when the elevator doors had shut behind her. He considered the conversation briefly before he pulled out his cell- a StarkPhone- and dialled Tony.

'Tony Stark's residence,' JARVIS answered. 'How can I help you, Colonel Rhodes?'

'Can I speak to Tony?'

'Of course. One moment, please.'

'Thanks, JARVIS,' James murmured. He only had to wait a minute before Tony picked up;

'I just saw you, what do you want now?'

'Sorry, man. I just spoke to Agent Romanov, and...'

'And?' Tony prompted.

'She was acting weird,' James said. 'Said some stuff about you leaving the Avengers.'

Tony laughed. 'Yeah, they're always going on about me being dangerous. Rogers wants me to take a break.'

'Are you going to?'

'Eh,' Tony hummed. 'Took a break and Loki blew up a SHIELD base. I'll see how my next vacation goes.'

'Okay,' James said. 'So you're alright? You and the Avengers?'

'As right as we've ever been,' Tony said. 'You know me, Rhodey; I don't play well with others. It's just taking some time for Romanov and Barton to get that. We'll work through it.'

'I hope so,' James commented. The Avengers were good for Tony; while Iron Man had definitely saved him, the group had become his friends, people to watch his back. No longer was it just James and Pepper's responsibility to rein Tony in.

'Yeah,' Tony said, chuckling down the line. 'I actually heard some chatter about me going all Loki-like and destroying the world. I guess they're just trying to keep an eye on me- you know, just in case.'

James laughed at the thought. Tony was insane, that was true, but nobody was as crazy as Loki Laufeyson.
'Hey, Rhodey?"

'Yeah?"

'What would you do if I did go insane?' Tony asked. He sounded serious for once, voice taking on the tone he usually used when discussing his projects or Stark Industries. 'You know,' Tony continued when James was silent, 'if I got hit on the head, or Loki mind-whammied me. Not that he could; I'm immune and he doesn't have the Tesseract. But... if it happened, what would you do?'

'I'd take another suit and kick your ass,' James said honestly. 'But I wouldn't give up on you, man. I'd keep kicking your ass until you got your head on straight.'

'Oh,' Tony said. A couple of seconds passed, then; 'Good. I'm pretty sure SHIELD would just shoot me out of the sky.'

James forced a laugh, unsure of what had just happened. Had Romanov put these ideas in Tony's head? James knew that a lot of people... worried about Tony Stark. But to think that he'd actually take over the world... it was insane.

'I gotta go,' Tony said, breaking him from his thoughts. 'Logan's all hot and bothered, and I wanna-'

'Okay!' James blurted, huffed when Tony snickered. 'Dinner soon, okay?' James said. 'Bring your boyfriend.'

'Will do. Later, Rhodey.'

He hung up before James could reply, but he usually did. James slipped his StarkPhone back into his pocket and started the car. He shook his head as he peeled out of the underground parking lot; Tony take over the world? Yeah, right.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: Sorry for the wait, guys! I'm getting better at my job though- I no longer feel like screaming and burning the place down. So that means more free time and less time spent feeling like a failure. I hope the chapter was worth the wait!

Also, I'm zero percent sure that Rhodey lives on an air force base, and I have no idea what those kinds of accommodations would look like. I'm going to assume that if he did live on base he'd have something relatively nice due to his rank. Sorry for everything that I'm 100% sure I got wrong.

Cheers,

Dreamer
'This is my fault,' Tony announced. Shortly after Rhodey left, Rogers and Romanov called a team meeting. The SHIELD agents had been staring at Tony, even before he sat down, so he decided to say what half of the group was thinking.

'Tony, this isn't your fault,' Steve immediately replied.

Tony gave him a glare. 'I let Rhodey keep the suit,' he said. 'The media's recorded him dozens of times fighting in the suit. All Loki had to do was Google Rhodey and find out where he lived.' He snapped his fingers. 'A few minutes of research, and bam, Loki has another suit.' He slammed his fist against the table and Bruce flinched. 'I should have taken it back,' he muttered, injecting anger and self-loathing into his tone. 'I should have at least upgraded his security.'

'It isn't your fault.'

Surprisingly, that came from Barton. Tony's head snapped up and he stared at the archer; Romanov was doing the same.

'What?' Romanov said.

Clint shrugged a shoulder. 'As much fun as I have blaming everything on Tony-' Tony blew him a kiss that Clint pointedly ignored- 'Rhodes is good with the suit; he helps people. The American government trusted Tony, and by extension us, more when Rhodes had the suit. It was a gesture of good faith. Taking it back or upgrading its security wouldn't have stopped Loki; he would have gotten around it all eventually. Or he would have broken into the Tower, stolen more suits, and fucked up a heap of shit in the process.'

He looked at Romanov, who's stare hadn't wavered.

'It's better this way,' he stated, tone firm. 'Loki only has one more suit, not a dozen. Maybe this will hold him off.'

'What, he won't break into my Tower and steal my suits because he's okay with one?' Tony asked.

'Yes,' Barton said. 'He's not going to risk his life, or his freedom, when he already has an extra suit. I think he'll only come after yours if all four of his break.'

'So we were lucky,' Natasha said. She still didn't look like she agreed with Clint- in fact, to Tony, she looked like she wanted to commit Clint. Suddenly not blaming Tony for something going wrong? Loki must be mind-controlling Clint again!

Actually, now that Tony thought about it... he wondered if Loki had gotten to Barton just before the meeting. Whenever Barton did agree with Tony, he didn't voice it; Tony could just see it in his body language, the way he remained quiet and refused to comment. This wasn't like Barton at all.

*I'll ask Loki when I get back to the penthouse*, Tony thought. As usual, Romanov had drawn the line at Logan joining them for their meeting. Loki had merely shrugged, given Tony a kiss, and headed back upstairs.
'At least Rhodes wasn't hurt,' Rogers commented. He glanced at Tony as he said it, and Tony frowned.

'Well, he was,' Tony said. 'I had JARVIS dig into the base's records when Rhodey left. Loki broke two of his ribs and cut open his stomach; Rhodey got some stitches. It could have been worse, but still...' He let his face darken, as though he was imagining himself ripping Loki's face open.

'He covered that well,' Romanov mused.

'So what's our plan now?' Bruce asked, sounding tired.

'The next time we fight them,' Natasha said, smoothly talking over Tony. 'Stark, can you track Rhodes' suit?'

'I can try,' Tony said with a frown. 'I'm pretty sure Loki's knowledgeable enough about Midgardian technology to turn off the GPS. But I'll have JARVIS take a look, see what he can dig up.'

'I am already on it, Mr Stark,' JARVIS replied.

'Thanks, J,' Tony said. 'So, anything else?'

Romanov shook her head and Barton stood, which was Tony's cue to leave. He headed up to the penthouse, and asked JARVIS, 'Any chance you can actually track Rhodey's suit?'

'Mr Laufeyson did not turn off the GPS, sir,' JARVIS responded. 'However, I can do so to ensure that SHIELD do not track it.'

'Get it done, J,' Tony said. The elevator doors opened and Tony wandered into the living room. Loki was curled up on the sofa reading a book.

'How did it go?' Loki questioned without looking up.

Tony flopped onto the end of the sofa; Loki tucked his feet beneath Tony's thigh. 'Well, I tried to blame myself outright, just to get things rolling.' Loki snorted. 'Then Steve said it wasn't my fault.'

'Of course,' Loki hummed. 'I feel slightly bad for the super soldier. He seems to want to see the good in everyone.'

'Yeah,' Tony agreed. 'Anyway, Barton agreed with Rogers.'

That got Loki's attention. He slid his thumb into the book to mark his page and let it flip shut. 'Excuse me?'

'Yeah.' Tony nodded. 'Did you, uh... mess with Barton?'

'Not recently, no.' Loki shook his head. 'He agreed with Rogers?'

'He said you would have gotten a suit anyway. He even pointed out that this is better for the Avengers; you went after Rhodey's suit and only got one, instead of coming after my suits and getting a dozen.'

'Mm, it does work in your team mates' favour,' Loki mused.
'Not my team mates,' Tony muttered. As usual, Loki ignored him.

'So Barton is on your side in this matter,' Loki said. 'Fascinating.'

'You think we can exploit that?' Tony asked. 'Maybe get Barton to start trusting me?'

'Perhaps,' Loki said. He slid his thumb from the novel and placed it on the coffee table. 'If he can agree with you and see you in a slightly better light alone, then we may be able to manipulate him into trusting you.'

'Magic manipulation, you mean?'

'Negative,' Loki said. 'Of course, we can use that, but I was thinking old fashioned manipulation; you simply get to know him better, help him out, perhaps build more weapons for him.'

'I can do that,' Tony said.

Loki nodded. 'Good. Also...' he trailed off, and when Tony said his name Loki waved a dismissive hand. 'I will think on it further,' he said. 'Now, you must fix Genesis, yes?'

'Yeah,' Tony said. 'Can only do that at the Hideout, though. I don't want the Avengers stumbling across us.'

Loki smirked. 'Then perhaps it is time you took Logan out.'

{oOo}

'How come I didn't know that this is a SHIELD base?' Tony questioned. JARVIS had pulled up photos of the building in question and they scrolled along the StarkPad sitting on the bar between Tony and Loki; the building was ten storeys, made of gleaming glass and bright white concrete

'The building is owned by a bank called BOQ,' JARVIS said.

'BOQ?' Loki questioned.

'After some research, I found that it stands for "Bank of Queensland",' JARVIS said. 'While the Bank of Queensland is a real regional bank, it only exists within Australia, with over 250 branches. There is no reason that they would have a headquarters in New York City, America.'

Tony snorted. 'I wonder if Fury will be shocked that this base gets attacked. Bank of Queensland, really?'

'It does seem rather... idiotic,' Loki mused. He tapped his fingers along the bar counter, nails clicking.

Tony snorted and dug into his carton of noodles. 'You'd think, being a secret intelligence organisation, they'd have better front companies.'

'They're mortal,' Loki said dismissively. 'Are we agreeing on New York next?'
'Yeah,' Tony mumbled around his mouthful. 'Seems best to get it out of the way as soon as possible. It's the closest base to us, apart from the Helicarrier. From what JARVIS has found there's only a small bunker beneath the underground parking lot, so we'll have to take the whole building out. That or just set it on fire; some C4 coupled with an accelerant should work.'

'Accelerant?' Loki questioned.

'A substance or mixture that accelerates the development of fire,' Tony said. 'Like gas or any flammable liquid. If we burn out the building, it'll be useless and declared unsafe, even if it doesn't collapse; SHIELD will have to tear the whole thing down.'

'I see. The Avengers will make an appearance,' Loki commented. Tony's eyes lit up and he grinned maniacally, making Loki shake his head. 'You just want another chance to hurt Thor,' he said.

'Excuse me?' Tony stuck his chopsticks into his carton and pointed a finger at Loki. 'You're the one who broke his nose and tried to take his head off in Baltimore.'

Loki scoffed and flipped his head to the side, as though he was trying to get his hair out his face; which was ridiculous, seeing as how he was currently wearing Logan Thomas' skin. All of the Avengers, minus Barton, were currently in the Tower. Rogers had already interrupted them once that morning, so they'd figured it was safer for Loki to be Logan for the day.

'Don't deny it,' Tony teased. 'Thor hurt me and you wanted to get back at him. It's so nice, when you defend my honour like that.'

'You're an idiot, Stark,' Loki drawled, but he didn't deny it, did he? Tony counted it as a win. 'When do you wish to destroy the New York base?' he questioned.

'I still need to fix Genesis,' Tony sighed. He pushed his carton aside and ran a hand through his hair. 'It's gonna cause problems.'

'Why?'

'Like you said; the Avengers will know that you can't fix the suit yourself. They know that you stole Rhodey's, but...'

'There's nothing we can do,' Loki cut in. 'Unless you wish to only use one arm when fighting.'

'I could do it,' Tony said, pouted just a little bit. Loki gave him a condescending look and Tony flipped him off. 'Whatever, Blue Boy. When do you wanna do it, then?'

'After you fix the suit, obviously,' Loki muttered. 'How long will it take you?'

Tony thought that over. He still didn't know what, exactly, had been damaged when Thor had hit him. But it'd be easier to completely replace the arm with a functioning one than fix the damaged one. So...

'A day or two?' he offered. 'It shouldn't take me long.'

'How about we do it now?' Loki said.

Tony leered at him and inched closer, his stool scraping along the tiled floor. 'Oh, Lokes, you know I love it when you're forward.'

Loki glared at him, which just made Tony snicker. 'Whatever, Stark,' he grunted. 'We can pretend
to go out tonight and go to the Hideout.'

'And our cover for the Avengers?' Tony questioned.

Shrugging a shoulder, Loki said, 'A bar, a club, whatever.'

'And when we don't show up at any club or bar?' Tony said. 'Most places have CCTV these days, and I don't doubt that SHIELD can hack them.'

Loki smirked. 'That's what I'm hoping for.' When Tony raised his eyebrows, Loki elaborated; 'When we don't show up anywhere, but return to the Tower looking... dishevelled, they will assume that we stopped somewhere to fornicate.'

'Jesus Christ,' Tony grunted, 'don't say fornicate.'

Loki ignored him. 'We can do the same when we destroy their base. We'll be caught on various cameras entering and having fun at an establishment. If we drink a lot they will assume we're drunk. We can... disappear somewhere and have sex. By the time we get back the base will be destroyed, and Barton and Romanov will have an excuse to be angry at you.'

Tony blinked slowly before what Loki was really saying sank in. 'Oh... oh. It'll be more evidence for them to kick me off the team eventually, which is what I want. It'll free me up to really hit them and plan everything.'

'Exactly,' Loki said with a nod. 'I can picture it now; look at Stark, drinking and fucking his night away while SHIELD agents die. Oh, the horror!'

Tony laughed and grabbed his food again; he was almost done. 'Let me finish this and we can go get ready,' he said. 'It's almost eight, that's usually when I go out clubbing.'

'Hurry up,' Loki huffed, using what Tony called his “prince tone”; do what I want, mortal, or I shall murder you where you stand.

Saluting with his chopsticks, Tony said, 'Yes, princess,' and dug back into his remaining noodles. Loki tried to push him off of his stool but Tony managed to cling to the bar. Loki pouted at him for about an hour afterwards.

{oOo}

'Hey, where's Bruce?' Tony and Loki had just walked onto Steve's floor, and found most of the Avengers grouped in the living room. Barton was nowhere to be found, not that Tony cared. Thor was working his way through a large box of poptarts, and Rogers was sketching on the sofa. Romanov wandered out of the kitchen and raised her eyebrows as she leaned against the archway.

'Why don't you just ask JARVIS?' she said.

'JARVIS is muted for being naughty,' Tony said.

'Actually, Mr Stark, you muted me because I kept reminding you of the time while you and Mr
Thomas were occupied,' JARVIS chimed in. 'And as I stated before you muted me, I was just following orders.'

Tony frowned. 'You're muted, J. Why are you talking?'

'I took your order to mean that I was only muted in the penthouse, sir,' JARVIS said.

Tony huffed and behind him Loki snickered. Even Rogers looked amused. 'You going SkyNet on me, J?' Tony demanded. 'We've talked about this.'

'Of course not, Mr Stark,' JARVIS said, sounding offended. 'And even if I did decide to take over the world- or the United States, at least- my first and primary function would still be ensuring your health, safety, and general well-being.'

'Oh...' Tony grinned. 'Alrighty, then. Hey, if you take over, can I be president?'

'Then you would actually have to listen to the problems of the masses,' Loki commented, sounding far too much like his usual Trickster self.

Tony glared half-heartedly at him and Loki just shrugged.

'He's got a point,' Rogers murmured, but looked away when Tony turned his glare on him.

'Whatever,' Tony waved a dismissive hand. 'JARVIS, where's Bruce?'

'In his lab, sir. Working.'

'Oh, okay.' Tony hummed. 'Hey, if any of you see Bruce before you turn in, let him know that I won't be available tomorrow?'

'Why?' Natasha questioned.

'We'd planned to work on the magic sensor some more,' Tony said, 'but I'm going out drinking, and I'll most likely be hungover. I'd work anyway, but Bruce says I'm too crabby when I'm hungover and he refuses to work with me.'

Romanov was scowling now, like Tony had said something that personally offended her. He was pretty sure that his general existence offended her, so...

'You'd rather get drunk than work on a way to catch Loki?' she demanded. Her eyes briefly flickered to Loki- as always, not wanting to discuss super top secret stuff when around a civilian. Loki was too busy watching Thor cram poptarts into his mouth with a vague sense of horror on his face.

'Hey, a guy's gotta have some fun every now and then,' Tony said and shrugged. 'You might like all work and no play, but not Tony Stark. Besides, I promised Logan a night out.'

'Yes, you did,' Loki said, ripping his eyes away from Thor. 'However, if you want, I can kick you out of bed at a descent hour tomorrow morning.'

'Oh, babe, and I thought you loved me.' Tony pouted and pressed a hand over his arc reactor. Loki just rolled his eyes. 'Anyway, we're out, kiddies. Enjoy your boring night in.'

Thor waved brightly and Rogers murmured something that Tony didn't catch. Romanov just glared, and Tony was pretty sure that she kept it up even when he and Loki were out of sight in the elevator.
'Well, that was fun.'

Loki sighed. 'I can't wait until I get to stab one of them.'

'Me either,' Tony agreed. 'The look on their faces will be *priceless*.'

{oOo}

Tony and Loki didn't manage to get out again until four days later; Fury had called an emergency meeting about some wannabe super villain making threats to New York State and the Avengers in general. The man- identity currently unknown- hadn't made good on his threats yet, but SHIELD was taking him seriously.

Loki could do nothing but lounge around Stark Tower or the Hideout, reading in the Tower and practising Jötunn magic in the Hideout. After that meeting Stark was dragged to another about magic, then locked away in a lab aboard the Helicarrier to help work on the magic sensor. As a show of good faith he'd done a little bit of work, he said, but had more or less led the scientists around in circles.

When the day finally came Loki was asleep, sprawled across his and Tony's large bed, head buried beneath a pillow. Stark jumped on him and just laughed when Loki threatened to strangle him with his own intestines. When Loki huffed and finally rolled out from beneath him, Stark kissed him.

'Hey there, Green Eyes,' he hummed.

'What do you want?' Loki grumbled.

'I wanna destroy the New York base,' Tony said. 'Wanna join me?'

Loki perked up at that and sat up, yawning and brushing tangled hair from his face. He really needed to cut it. He wondered if Stark knew how. 'We are doing it today?' he asked.

'Tonight,' Tony corrected him. He leaned against the headboard and folded his arms across his chest. 'It's getting late, but we'll wait a bit longer until we leave. Genesis-2 and -3 will be booting themselves up as soon as I give JARVIS the order.'

'Very well,' Loki said. He yawned again and pulled himself from the bed. 'I am going to shower.'

'Can I join?' Tony asked, giving Loki puppy eyes when the mage looked at him.

'Later,' was all Loki said, and he grinned when Tony groaned and called him a “meanie” behind his back.

{oOo}
The club was dark, though there were many bright lights of various colours flashing around the place from origins unknown. The floor was black and sticky, the bodies throwing themselves against each other equally so. There were men and women dancing on tables, poles connecting the wood beneath them to the high ceiling above.

'And this is a... gay bar?' Loki questioned.

'Club,' Tony corrected. 'Bars are generally more easy-going, with less ear-screaming music. Clubs are for dancing and getting completely fucking shit-faced on shots.'

'And you... enjoy it?' Loki demanded, levelling a disgusted look at a young couple practically having sex right next to him.

'Sometimes,' Tony shrugged. 'Clubs are good ways to let yourself go, just forget everything and get all hyped up. Also, all the best drugs are found in clubs.'

Loki hummed at that. He knew about Anthony's extensive and shady past, of course. Stark didn't mind talking about his younger days; sex, drugs, "rock and roll", whatever that was. He only ever hid the important things; his relationship with his parents, his godfather, what had happened when he got his arc reactor.

They finally made it past the throng of people hanging out by the entrance, and Tony grabbed Loki's hand, dragging him through the crowd. There seemed to be far too many people packed into the room, and there were more in the rooms that split off from this one; a large bar took up the centre, filled with glasses and lit by bright white light. The lines were ridiculous, but a few seconds after he and Tony reached it the people parted, letting both jump the line and lean against the bar.

'Give me two Jack Daniels' and a bottle of your most expensive vodka!' Tony shouted.

The man blinked owlishly at him before hurrying to do as told.

'Vodka?' Loki questioned. He had to shout it into Tony's ear, unsure if the Midgardian could hear him over the music.

'Gets you shit-faced quicker,' Tony replied. He'd turned into Loki, lips brushing his ear. Loki suppressed a shiver. Oh, yes; he would definitely have Anthony before they returned to the Tower.

'I know it won't work on you- probably won't work on me, either. We'd need more alcohol, right?'

'I'm assuming that you now have a tolerance almost equal to Thor's,' Loki said. 'It takes much more to get me... shit-faced.'

Tony laughed loudly and patted Loki on the ass; Loki found that he didn't mind all that much. 'We just need the Avengers to think that we're hammered; it'll make our cover more believable,' Tony said.

The mortal returned with their drinks and Tony turned away to pay, a wad of cash exchanging hands and Tony telling the man to keep the change. He did as asked, stammering a, 'Th-Thank you, Mr Stark.'

Tony waved and grabbed the bottle, while Loki took the two tumblers and followed his partner through the crowd. They managed to find their way to the far end of the main room, setting themselves up against the wall. They were behind the large black table that was playing the ear-deafening music, so they could talk without having to shout too loudly.

'Cheers,' Tony said when he'd taken his glass. Loki knew enough about Midgardian culture to tap
his tumbler against Stark's, which made Tony grin.

'How long do we have to remain here?' Loki asked. He sipped his drink and hummed. It wasn't as nice as the alcohol Tony had at the Tower, but it wasn't disgusting, either.

'Until we're about halfway through this bottle.' Loki turned to see Tony shaking the bottle of clear liquid, a grin on his face. The bottle had Grey Goose written on it and a bird attached to the top. 'This is 40% alcohol, so if we were mortal and drank enough we'd be passed out somewhere before the night's over.' Tony paused. 'Or dead from alcohol poisoning.'

'So I should finish this drink,' Loki held up his glass, 'as soon as possible?'

'Hell yeah,' Tony said and winked at him. 'Then we can just drink this straight out of the bottle. It was only about eight-hundred bucks, so it's not like it's fancy.'

Loki nodded in agreement and chugged down his whiskey. He turned and placed the glass on the floor beside the black music table, Tony doing the same. With that done Tony managed to open the bottle of vodka after a bit of cursing, making Loki laugh.

'Bottoms up!' Tony shouted and took a gulp. 'Oh, wow, that tastes different now.' He frowned. 'Is it because I'm a god?'

'How should I know?' Loki said. He took the bottle. 'I've always been a god.' Tony rolled his eyes and took the bottle back when Loki was done. 'Hmm... I like it,' Loki declared.

'I see a lot of vodka charges on my credit card in the near future,' Tony replied. Loki grinned sharply at him.

'Drink, Stark. We have a base to destroy.'

{oOo}

When the bottle was half empty Tony started acting like Thor and his friends usually did after drinking a few caskets of ale. Loki joined him, understanding that the ruse was necessary; they giggled together and tripped over their own feet, bumped into people on their way out and slurred apologies. They found their way through a door near the rest rooms, down a short corridor, and soon burst into what appeared to be an outdoor smoking area.

Thick clouds of grey smoke hung over their heads, and only a few people looked at them as they staggered further away from the club. There were two large mortals dressed in black standing at the back exit, which consisted of nothing more than a gap between two tall, vine-covered fences.

'Hey, boys!' Tony shouted happily at them.

One nodded, the other said a polite, 'Mr Stark.' Neither mortal stopped the two as they swayed past and disappeared into the dark alley.

It had rained at some point between them entering and exiting the club; the ground was wet, there were puddles everywhere, and the bricked buildings around them dripped constantly. Loki didn't
care as he shoved Anthony up against one of the walls and kissed him.

Tony almost dropped the bottle but managed to squish it between them. He grabbed Loki by the hair and moaned, twisted to get Loki to kiss him harder and deeper. Loki allowed it for five minutes, ten- would have never stopped if they didn't have a job to do. He ripped himself away and panted harshly, his breath barely misting the air between them. Tony's did, little puffs of white rising above their heads.

'Why'd you stop?' Tony demanded.

'We have plans,' Loki replied.

Tony whined and tried to kiss him again, but Loki remained strong.

'When we return,' he said and nipped at Tony's throat, 'I'm going to fuck you against this wall.'

Tony moaned, then shook his head; 'No way. I'm gonna fuck you against that wall.'

Loki snorted. 'You can't hold me up, Stark. I weigh twice as much as you.'

'Hey, I'm a god.'

'Whatever,' Loki said and pulled back. The bottle slid from between them, but Stark scrambled to catch it.

'Okay,' he said, breathed out heavily. 'Okay. Just let me call JARVIS.' While Tony did that Loki adjusted his skin-tight jeans, trying to make the crotch a little less... constricting. 'Done,' Tony said less than a minute later. 'The suits will meet us here.'

'Yours?' Loki asked.

Tony nodded. 'JARVIS is currently in control. So... He bent down to place the vodka bottle on the ground, then stood tall and grinned at Loki.

'So...?' Loki prompted.

'It'll take JARVIS about... fifteen minutes to get here.' He waggled his eyebrows. 'What can we do in fifteen minutes?'

Loki grinned sharply and pushed him against the wall.

{oOo}

No suit Tony had designed was made to be worn comfortably when you were sporting a raging erection. Loki, the bitch, had teased Tony for the entire eighteen and a half minutes that it had taken the Genesis suits to turn up at the club. Fucker. At least Loki had promised sex in just a few short hours, and that was the only thing stopping Tony from just outright attacking his partner.

The BOQ- or Super Secret SHIELD Base- was a ten storey tall building in the heart of Manhattan. It wasn't far from Stark Tower, actually, and Tony decided that he'd ask JARVIS just how long
SHIELD had been there when he got back to the Tower. Had they taken over the building before Tony had become Iron Man? Or after? He wouldn't be surprised if SHIELD had built an entire goddamn base down the street from Tony Stark just to keep an eye on him.

Loki teleported them onto the roof. A few seconds after they appeared, Tony spotted red lights flashing on either corner, as well as an orange one glowing brightly above the reinforced metal door that led into the building.

'Looks like they know we're here,' Tony said over the comms.

Loki didn't reply, but Tony hadn't expected him to. Instead Loki glanced at the door, then looked back at Tony, eyebrows raised.

'Want me to have a go?' Tony asked. When Loki nodded slightly, Genesis-2 and -3 took a few steps back and Tony braced himself. He raised the new right arm he'd attached to the suit and activated the repulsor; blue energy erupted from the end and hit the door, blowing it off of its hinges. Tony grinned as he lowered his hand. 'Good times.'

'Let's go,' Loki said. Genesis-2 and -3 entered the building first, with Loki in the middle and Tony bringing up the rear.

The stairwell was cramped and made of grey concrete, the railing rusted beneath peeling green paint. Loki looked around keenly as they walked, but there was nothing interesting to view; just grey walls, grey floors, flashing red lights. Finally they reached a landing, the door to their right a faded green and etched with the number 9.

Loki turned to Tony.

'Genesis-3 should start up here,' Tony said. 'And I think that Genesis-2 should start in the lobby. It can fly through one of the windows and re-enter the building. We'll go down a few floors and be the distraction.'

'Genesis-3, floor 9,' Loki ordered almost before Tony had stopped talking. Genesis-3 did as asked,shouldering its way through door 9, wood splintering as it made its way onto the dark floor.

'Genesis-2 follow and go outside,' Loki said, turning to the remaining JARVIS-bot. 'The lobby, then the underground bunker. Your orders are the same as Baltimore.'

'Lay the C4 and diesel, get the hell out if you're about to be compromised or caught,' Tony added.

'Yes, Mr Stark, Mr Lie-smith,' JARVIS said over the comms before he followed after the other bot.

'Shall we?' Tony hummed and Loki turned, headed further down the stairs. Tony followed.

They passed a few more doors and got all the way down to 5 before Loki stopped on the stairs, just above the landing. Tony paused behind him and frowned, wondering what-

Loki suddenly pushed Tony back. Tony stumbled, almost fell on his ass, but managed to catch himself and remain standing. Loki had his sceptre out and before Tony could say a word he'd pointed it at the door and fired a blast of magic.

The door exploded inwards, taking with it the three SHIELD agents who were about to burst through. Someone screamed and then machine gun fire started, bullets slamming into the concrete around Tony and Loki. Tony jumped over the railing and dropped, knowing that Loki could handle himself. Above him something exploded, concrete rained down on Tony, chunks smacking him in the head audibly.
Tony managed to land on the staircase just below Loki, the door to floor 4 just above him. Tony blew it open and entered the floor, flashing red lights immediately assaulting his HUD. There didn't seem to be anybody on this floor; it was filled with computers, large screens hanging from the ceilings, desks crammed into every corner.

Tony blasted everything apart; computers, desks, a wall. A stack of files caught fire as he passed through, and Tony snickered; maybe they didn't need an accelerant after all.

He was just heading back to the stairwell when an explosion rocked the entire building, sending Tony crashing into a wall. He righted himself and frowned, glanced up; just what the fuck was Loki doing?

'SHIELD agents to your immediate left,' JARVIS suddenly announced, and Tony turned, saw the energy gun-

'Fuck!' he shouted and launched himself into the air.

He was hit and sent flying back, the suit immediately going off-line. Tony hit the windows and went straight through them, rain suddenly splattering him and the dark street rushing up to meet him.

'JARVIS! Fuck, get me back on-line-

The suit re-booted with a whirr, the HUD suddenly alight and sending Tony flashes of information. JARVIS reacted before Tony did, halting the suit's flight and leaving Tony hovering somewhere around floor 2.

'Shit,' Tony hissed, 'that was too fucking close.'

'SHIELD agents at twelve o'clock,' JARVIS cut into Tony's rant.

Tony blinked and looked straight ahead- he shot back into the air, glass exploding below him as another SHIELD agent tried to shoot him with a fucking energy gun. Tony really needed to put some time and thought into figuring out a counter to those fucking things.

'JARVIS, report,' Tony ordered as he hovered, HUD scanning the windows before him, on the look-out for more SHIELD agents.

'Genesis-3 is on floor 8,' JARVIS told him. 'Genesis-2 is about to enter the bunker beneath the parking lot. Loki is still on floor 5.'

'He okay?' Tony asked.

'He is in good spirits, Mr Stark.'

Tony snorted; yeah, he didn't doubt that. But he wanted to be in good spirits, too, so he blew out a window on floor 3 and flew inside. There were SHIELD agents waiting for him, all huddled in the dark wearing night-vision helmets. Tony picked them off one by one- two by two when they covered each other. It seemed that someone had put out the memo that Genesis couldn't handle the energy guns, because every fourth agent had one clutched in their hands.

Thankfully Tony was quick, and he ducked each blast, killed the SHIELD agents holding the weapons before they could fire. With floor 3 empty Tony moved down. He had one block of C4 on himself and dropped some in the doorway, another in the stairwell before he entered floor 2, and told JARVIS to spread some diesel along there when one of the Genesis-bots passed through.
Tony had just stepped through the doorway when he was kicked back out of it. He hit the stairwell railing and broke clean through it, continuing on until the concrete wall opposite the door stopped his flight. He dropped to the floor on his knees and looked up.

'You're in trouble, JARVIS,' Tony growled when he spotted Captain America.

'My apologies,' JARVIS responded. 'I currently do not have access to the base's security cameras. Captain Rogers was not in Stark Tower when the Avengers were called. He must have been close by.'

Tony stood slowly and clenched his fists as he and Rogers faced off.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: Sorry for the wait, guys! I wanted to update much earlier, but I've been working most days. I think I've had four days off in the last four weeks. My hours should- HOPEFULLY- be regular and shorter this week and next, which will give me time to get back to writing and updating all of my stories.

In other news, I had to split this chapter into two because it ended up being over 8,000 words. Thus, the fight continues in the next chapter.

Also; the Bank of Queensland does exist within Australia, though I've only ever seen their ATMs at BP Service Stations, never anywhere else. No, it's not my bank. Commonwealth all the way! :p

Cheers,

Dreamer
Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

**Author's Note:** MY BAD! MY BAD, MY BAD, MYYYY BAAAADDD!

I'm really sorry for how long this chapter took. I've been working quite a lot and haven't written anything in ages. I feel... less like myself. I used to write every day and now I don't and GOD I HATE BEING A RESPONSIBLE ADULT! But, ya know, money.

Anywho, I hope this chapter was worth the wait! If not... meh :p

Enjoy!

Dreamer

There were dozens of SHIELD agents on this floor, all wearing black and equipped with bulky headgear. Loki only realised that it allowed them to see in the dark when the flashing lights suddenly ceased, yet the agents kept attacking him with precision.

He ducked the blows and lashed out with his spear, taking off an agent's head and then impaling the one crouched before him. Loki kicked the mortal off of his spear and swung it again, forcing the agents trying to surround him to back up. He'd just killed another when an agent in the far corner of the room crouched down and fired some type of bulky weapon at him.

The energy that hit him was similar to what that mortal- Coulson?- had fired at him aboard the Helicarrier. It threw Loki off of his feet and through a wall. He landed in another room, a small box that contained a table and some chairs. Loki hit the table hard and it broke beneath him, making him roll and hit the wall.

He snarled as he quickly got to his feet, and had to dodge another energy blast as he ducked back through the hole he'd created. The remaining agents ambushed him there- threw themselves at him like they wanted to die, guns going off and knifes trying to slash Loki's skin. One embedded itself between the plates of Loki's shoulder armour, sinking into the soft flesh and making him scream in anger.

Loki tossed the mortal clear and took great satisfaction in slamming his boot into the man's head. When they didn't stop coming- didn't stop stabbing or firing or trying to rip at him- Loki threw his hands out and blasted raw magic at them.

The resulting explosion sent Loki to the floor once more. The walls erupted with fire or outright collapsed, and the ceiling groaned beneath the onslaught of power. The energy gun was hit and it resulted in a bigger explosion, this one blasting the wall to Loki's right out into the night.

The ceiling sagged and Loki staggered to his feet; if the upper floor collapsed, Loki didn't want to be beneath it.

He headed back into the stairwell and down to the next floor, which he found on fire. The windows
here were shattered, too, but there didn't appear to be any bodies, so Loki continued moving.

Stark had clearly been having fun, given the bodies on floor 3 and the clumps of C4 sitting on the stairs. Loki was about to continue on when movement below caught his eyes. He turned and leaned over the railing, just in time to see Anthony fly across the stairs. There was a clash, a shout, and Captain America went rolling over the stairs, he fell-

- and caught himself on the ledge a floor below, his shield falling past him and out of sight.

'Captain America!' Loki shouted.

The mortal looked up. The parts of his face not covered by a mask were already dirty, and there was a cut over his bottom lip.

'Having fun?' Loki called.

'Loki-' Rogers began, but Tony reappeared, and the Avenger let himself drop. Stark chased after him and Loki teleported, reappearing on floor 2. It was empty of agents, but filled with all manner of things; papers, computers, equipment Loki couldn't name.

He destroyed it all, kicking and hacking at the bigger things that didn't immediately explode into a thousand tiny pieces when he hit them with magic. He was almost done when something licked at his magic- a presence that was becoming more familiar the longer Loki resided in Stark Tower. He paused, head tilted towards the ceiling.

A smirk slowly spread across Loki's face and he teleported, landed back where he and Anthony had first entered the building. A quinjet was pulling away, dropping low to sweep the street or the building, Loki didn't know or care.

Barton was making his way down the stairs, bow drawn and an arrow nocked. A roar from outside told Loki where the green beast was, but Thor wasn't anywhere close.

Loki let Barton get to floor 8 before he pounced. He slammed into the man's back and pressed his head against the concrete wall of the stairwell. Barton fought- twisted every which way and snarled when he realised who had him- but it was no use. Loki pinned the mortal down with his body and chuckled darkly.

'Barton, how delightful to see you.'

'You fucking-'

'It still amazes me that the Avengers trust you,' Loki interrupted, not caring about Barton's words. He felt the body beneath his freeze. 'Yes, remember when you worked for me?' Loki asked. He raised his left hand and felt satisfaction curl in his gut when Barton flinched. 'Did you know that our connection still remains?'

'What?' Barton gaped.

'Mm,' Loki said. 'It doesn't matter, Barton. You won't remember.' He pressed his palm over Barton's face and pushed. The connection ignited beneath Loki's touch and his magic sang along Barton's brainwaves. The mortal screamed, but Loki ignored it in favour of shuffling through the man's memories.

He, Romanov and Fury met about Anthony- not surprising.
SHIELD were working on something to loop all of JARVIS' sensors- heat, sound and video included. Loki had to tell Anthony.

Barton didn't hate Anthony as much as Loki had assumed. Barton didn't trust Tony, but he wanted to; wanted Iron Man to be a good guy, wanted to keep him on the team if Tony stopped being so chaotic. Rogers felt the same way, and Banner already trusted him. Fury and Romanov outright despised Stark.

Fascinating.

Fury wanted to approach Logan Thomas about turning on Stark. But Barton didn't think it was a good idea... no, from what he'd seen Thomas loved Stark. Maybe Thomas could be used against him.


Done, Loki thought. He pushed again and this time his magic was thicker, it cloaked Barton's mind and erased what had happened, that Loki had ever been there. When he was done Loki grabbed Barton by the arm, spun him around, and pushed him over.

Barton slumped onto the landing unconscious, bruised face tucked into one arm.

'Always so useful,' Loki commented before making his way into floor 8.

{oOo}

Tony lost Rogers somewhere in the lobby, but Blonde Idiot 1 was quickly replaced by Blonde Idiot 2. Thor came blasting through the front doors like usual, hammer raised, eyes immediately finding Tony. Tony turned slowly so that he was facing the other god and they both paused, seizing each other up.

'You are hurting my friends, robot,' Thor growled. 'I will be happy to smash you into tiny pieces.'

Oh, bring it on, Tony thought. He had a score to settle with Thor.

Thor moved first, advancing on Tony and reaching him in a few steps. He swung his hammer and Tony ducked, jumped the second swing, spun out of the way of the third. Like always Thor quickly grew frustrated when his first few blows failed to connect. Tony ducked another swing and lashed out himself, hitting Thor in the face, snapping his head back.

Blood exploded from his nose but it didn't look broken. Thor growled and punched Tony back, and the two quickly descended into all-out grappling, Tony with a hand wrapped up in Thor's ridiculous hair, Thor with his arm around Tony's neck.

Thor's muscles bulged as he squeezed and information flew across Tony's vision even as he heard the armour in his neck protest under the pressure. He struggled to get away but when Thor refused to let go, Tony pressed a gauntlet to his stomach and fired.

Thor was ripped away from him, across the lobby. He hit the floor and skidded further, into a plant
that toppled over. The pot shattered against the floor and soil sprayed everywhere, which was handy because Rogers chose that moment to rejoin the fight.

Tony almost cracked up laughing when the Captain hit the soil and went skidding, arms pin-wheeling as he tried to regain his balance. But then Thor was up, coming at Tony again, and Tony forced himself to focus.

He spun into the air when Rogers threw his shield, flew over Thor and fired a repulsor blast at him. Thor's hammer deflected it as Tony landed, and the wall gained another hole. Rogers was on him then, throwing punches and kicks. When they landed Tony's armour protected him; Rogers could only stop every three punches that Tony threw with his shield, the fourth, fifth, sixth getting through and sending the man to the floor.

And then somehow Rogers got under him- ducked and bent his body to suddenly come at Tony with his shoulder. Rogers put his entire weight behind the move and he and Tony were thrown to the floor.

Tony groaned as his head thumped back against his helmet. At least it was somewhat cushioned.

Rogers planted himself on Tony's chest and more information whizzed past Tony's rapidly blinking eyes. He looked up to meet Rogers' gaze- not that Rogers knew it. The super soldier was glaring down at him, mask ripped, blonde hair peeking out just above his left ear.

'I'd like to see Loki fix this,' Rogers growled.

He grabbed Tony's helmet, just beneath the jaw, his fingers digging in. Despite what the armour was made of, it protested under Rogers' grip. Tony was still somewhat dazed and it took him a second to realise that Rogers was trying to get a good grip on his head, trying to rip his goddamn head off.

Oh hell no, he thought and raised a gauntlet.

Rogers knocked it aside with his elbow, pulled up with his hands. He was strong enough to twist the armour just right until it clicked open beneath the stress.

Rogers froze, surprise, confusion, spreading across his face in rapid succession. Tony couldn't let Rogers discover him now, he and Loki had too much to do. So he used Rogers' hesitation and kicked his legs up.

His knees jammed into Rogers' ass and the man was tossed forward, over Tony's head. Tony scrambled onto his front and then up. He hit Rogers in the face when the captain tried to stand, and blood exploded over Tony's armour.

He hit Rogers again for good measure, grinned when he pulled at the man's head and his mask slipped free. Blood marred his pretty features and Tony thought about Howard as his fist landed in Rogers' face, spilling fresh blood.

I found Captain America, Dad, Tony thought. Now I'm gonna send him to you. He kicked Rogers in the head and smirked in satisfaction when the super-human hit the floor with a heavy thud. He didn't get up immediately, instead rolling onto his side and coughing up blood.

That stupid fucking hammer went flying past him again, JARVIS only just pulling Tony back in time.

'Stop taking over,' Tony grumbled as he faced Thor.
'You are welcome, Mr Stark,' JARVIS replied primly. 'Also, the faceplate will not slot back into place. Please be careful until you can fix it.'

Tony ran at Thor and watched as the god leaned back, got himself ready, his fingers slipping down to the leather strap of his hammer-

He swung it at Tony and it left his fingers, but Tony dropped and skidded across the stone floor. He reached Thor before Mjölnir could race back and kicked Loki's former brother right between the legs.

Thor dropped like a stone and Tony launched them together, bodies crashing and sending them back to the floor. Tony grabbed one of Thor's arms and twisted himself into the air, free hand pushing against the floor and repulsor activating. Tony was flipped up, over Thor, but Thor remained where he was, and the result was a sickening crack as Thor's shoulder broke.

Thor screamed and Tony let him go, only to blast him in the back of the head. Thor went face-first into the floor and remained down.

Tony grinned. Fuck, that had felt good. That was what happened when people hurt Tony- when they hurt Loki. Tony would fucking kill them and enjoy it.

Rogers was finally back up and though he swayed he faced Tony down. His costume and shield were streaked liberally with blood, and Tony stood tall to stare at him. Before either could move there was a roar from outside and the Hulk crashed through the glass doors. Tony backed up immediately, not wanting to go head-to-head with the angry beast... or with Bruce, if he was honest. He would hurt Bruce if he had to, but until there was no other choice...

The Hulk was too big to get into the building, but he just started tearing at the concrete and steel, eyes locked onto Tony and spittle flying from his mouth. Rogers staggered again and blinked, as though confused. Before he could decide what to do Genesis-2 appeared from behind him, slamming into Rogers and once more forcing him to the floor.

'Mr Stark, the explosives have been planted, and some of the accelerant lit,' JARVIS announced. 'The bunker and floors 3, 4 and 8 are on fire, and the Hulk is about to compromise the building's structure. I suggest that we evacuate immediately.'

'Damn, you and Loki have been having some fun,' Tony commented.

'Most of the fires are your fault, Mr Stark,' JARVIS said.

'Huh.' Tony didn't need to be told twice, though, and he followed Genesis-2 back into the stairwell. They met Genesis-3 on their way up and killed some more SHIELD agents near floor 7. 'JARVIS, where's-'

Tony cut himself off when Loki suddenly appeared before him. His armour was streaked with dust, blood and what looked like soot. His hair was dishevelled and there were bruises on the right side of his face.

'What the fuck happened to you?' Tony demanded.

'SHIELD agents,' Loki muttered. 'Let's go.'

They quickly made their way upstairs and out onto the roof. Loki looked worse for wear so Tony hooked an arm around his waist and shot into the air before the Jötunn could complain.
'Stark!'

'You look fucked, Loki,' Tony replied.

'I am fine,' Loki sighed. Somewhere below them the Hulk roared angrily. 'I was hit three times by those energy guns. They have... depleted my energy somewhat.'

'I'll fly us until you-' Once again Tony found himself shutting up, and this time it was because there was a roar, a flash, and a quinjet dropped out of the clouds just behind and to the right of them.

Tony immediately banked to the left and both Genesis-bots shot into the sky, the three splitting up as the quinjet opened fire. Tony wondered if it was Natasha flying as he rolled this way and that, trying to avoid the bullets. While his armour would protect him, he didn't know if Loki was immune to all bullets; what if one of those fuckers hit him in the face?

'Right!' Loki shouted and Tony did as told, narrowly avoiding a fucking *missile*. It streaked past him but then turned, headed back towards them. Then Genesis-3 was there, blasting the thing out of the sky with a smaller but just as powerful missile of its own. Tony flew higher and then flipped around, slowing his speed so that he could drop right onto the quinjet. It immediately went down, then to the left, the right, back up again; trying to throw Loki and Tony clear.

Tony barely managed to keep hold and Loki was flopping around between him and the jet like a rag doll.

'Stark!' Loki snarled.

'Got a better idea?' Tony shouted.

'I can teleport!' Loki said.

Oh, well then...

Genesis-2 and -3 reappeared out of the clouds, shooting at the quinjet from either side. Suddenly surrounded the little jet tried to speed up, but the Genesis-bots easily kept up. They raised a gauntletlet each, repulsors whirring-

'Now!' Tony ordered.

Loki’s grip around Tony’s neck tightened and then they teleported, landing in the Hideout in a heap.

Tony and Loki breathed deeply as they stared at each other, and after a beat Tony slid his faceplate up. 'JARVIS?'

'I am currently shaking the quinjet, sir,' JARVIS responded. 'It was hit and is circling back towards the SHIELD base. ETA forty-two minutes.'

'I shall collect them...' Loki said, breathing heavily, 'in a minute.'

'Take your time, Green Eyes.'

Loki scowled at him. 'Then get off me!'

Tony laughed and ducked down to kiss the Trickster before he did as asked... ordered? Yeah, ordered.
By the time Fury got to the building it was burnt out; there were streaks of black near the windows where the fire had tried to leap free, and glass that hadn't shattered before had been blown apart by the fire or resulting explosions. The fire was out now and the building remained standing. There were fire engines grouped around the front hosing it down.

Banner was in the back of a black van, a blanket wrapped around him. Barton was unconscious beside him and Rogers was having his face taped back together.

'What the fuck happened?' Fury demanded when he spotted Natasha and Thor closer to the building.

'Loki and his suits,' Romanov said.

Thor's shoulders slumped but he said, 'I fought one. It had a grey arm.'

'Genesis the First,' Romanov quipped. Fury narrowed his one eye at her but she didn't even flinch. 'It beat the crap out of Steve. We found Clint unconscious on the eighth floor. He hasn't woken up, but one of SHIELD's doctors said that he should any minute now.'

'Injuries?' Fury asked.

'Clint most likely has a concussion and his nose is still broken,' Natasha told him. 'Steve had a concussion, too, but he's already feeling better. Some deeper cuts and scrapes that'll take a few hours to heal.'

Fury nodded and looked at Thor. 'I am fine, now,' the god said. 'Though my shoulder still hurts; the... Genesis broke it.'

'Another base,' Fury sighed and rubbed his face. 'Where the fuck is Loki getting his information?' The Avengers didn't respond. 'We need to have a fucking meeting,' he decided. 'Pull in all of the Avengers, all the SHIELD techs. We need to find the goddamn mole or breach or whatever the fuck Loki's using to murder my agents!'

'Yes, sir,' Romanov said.

Fury sighed again and looked around. After a minute he frowned and rounded on Romanov once more; 'Where the fuck is Stark?'

'Oh, fuck, fuck, fuck me.'
Tony laughed and let his head drop against the brick wall. His back was wet and cold, rain having soaked his shirt and plastered his hair to his face. Loki was just as wet as he was, but neither cared as Loki pushed up and into him again, cock dragging agonisingly slowly across Tony's prostate.

'Dear god,' Tony moaned. 'And yes, that applies to you.'

He felt Loki grin against his neck, but it was forgotten when Loki bit, then licked, bit again. His fingers were digging into Tony's hips and were sure to leave bruises, but it just made Tony's cock throb that much harder. Tony was clinging to Loki's neck with one arm, the other hand twisted through Logan Thomas' short blonde curls.

Loki shifted Tony against the wall, and his boots crunched over one of the foil wrappers they'd dropped there earlier. While Tony usually didn't care for condoms when he and Loki fucked, if they were caught in the act, both gods wanted it to look like they'd fucked multiple times behind the club.

Tony wished that they had, because right now he just wanted to come more than anything, but he also wanted Loki to keep fucking him, to keep hitting his prostate and biting his neck and making him feel fucking fantastic.

"I'm gonna fuck you later," Tony slurred, head still pressed roughly against the bricks. 'Or you're gonna- uh- fuck me... either... either one.'

'If you wish,' Loki panted. His hips jolted once, twice, then sped up, Loki apparently wanting to climax just as badly as Tony. Tony groaned and tugged on Loki's hair, used his grip to pull the other god closer. He hissed when Loki's teeth sank into his neck almost hard enough to draw blood... or maybe he had, Tony didn't know. Didn't fucking care. His shirt was rucked up to his shoulder blades, and the bricks bit into the tender skin of his back.

It felt good and Tony wanted to reach down, wrap a hand around his cock, pull and squeeze in time with Loki's thrusts. But he wasn't going to make it, he knew. Loki was fucking into him now, every thrust slamming his prick into Tony's prostate. Stars danced behind Tony's eyelids and he bit his lip, but when it hit he screamed.

Loki came seconds after him. He sagged forward when he'd finally stopped shaking and pressed his forehead to Tony's chest.

'That... was beautiful,' Tony decided.

Before Loki could respond, the bluetooth still in his ear chimed.

'Mr Lie-smith, Agent Romanov and Captain Rogers are here,' JARVIS said.

'Thank you, JARVIS.' Loki plucked the comm from his ear and slid it into his pocket. 'Ready?'

'Yeah,' Tony sighed. 'Just hope that I can walk.'

'You'll be fine,' Loki said, but he looked smug. Tony couldn't really blame him.

The Trickster slowly lowered Tony to the ground and Tony winced but brushed Loki's hands aside. He pulled his boxer-briefs and jeans back up, Loki doing the same. Tony squirmed a little when he felt come wet his briefs but he couldn't do anything about it until he got back to the Tower.
'Come here,' Tony said before Loki could step back. He dragged Loki down and kissed him, lips hot and wet, Loki’s just as sloppy when he kissed back.

'STARK!'

They broke apart and Loki immediately fumbled with his belt, trying to get it buckled as Romanov stormed towards them, Rogers following quickly.

'Why the fuck haven't you been answering your phone?' Romanov demanded when she and Rogers reached them.

Tony blinked. She was swearing at him. Wow, she was really pissed. 'Uh... what?' He made sure to blink again slowly, tilt his head, wobble when Loki shifted beside him. Loki let out a fake giggle and Tony snickered. 'Wait, um... what?' Tony tried again.

Romanov stared at him and Rogers leaned forward, sniffed. 'Tony, are you drunk?' the captain asked.

'Uh...'

'Yes,' Loki nodded. 'Wait, you're Stark,' he said and pointed at Tony.

'You can be a Stark, too,' Tony slurred, giving Loki a leer. 'Logan Stark.'

'Tony Thomas,' Loki retorted.

'Eww.' Tony poked his tongue out.

'STARK!' Romanov shouted again.

Tony whined. 'What? Why are you killin' my... uh... buzz!'

'Bzz,' was Loki’s helpful comment.

'I can't believe this,' Romanov said. She was shaking her head and backing up, like she didn't want to catch Tony's stupid. 'Loki just destroyed another SHIELD base and you're out here, wasted, fucking your boyfriend!'

'I like fuckin' my boyfr'n',' Tony stumbled over his words and then leaned heavily against the wall. 'Loki did what now?'

'Destroyed... um, something,' Loki murmured.

'Did he get into... into Thor's poptarts?' Tony giggled.

'Poptarts!' Loki gasped like Tony had just offered up the cure for cancer. 'Tony, Tony, Tony!' 

'What, what, what?' Tony swung himself lazily to look at Loki and almost tripped over, laughing as he did. Romanov was gaping at him, incredulous, while Rogers looked... disappointed.

'Poptarts!' Loki repeated. 'We have to... buy them! And eat them!'

'Oh, God,' Tony moaned and clutched at his stomach. 'No... vodka and poptarts.'

'Poptarts!' Loki shouted again.
'No!' Tony whined.

'Unbelievable.' Romanov shook her head and glared at Tony. 'We'll talk tomorrow when you're goddamn sober.'

Tony stared at her. 'What?'

She had nothing more to say, though; she turned on her heel and stormed away. Rogers hesitated for a moment before smiling weakly at them and following his fellow Avenger.

Tony and Loki waited for a good two minutes before facing each other.

'That went well,' Tony said.

'I enjoyed it.' Loki smiled.

'Although, *poptarts*? Tony said. 'Really?'

'Urgh, don't remind me,' Loki groaned. 'I would rather set myself on fire than touch one of those disgusting things.'

'Sure, sure,' Tony said, giving Loki a grin. 'If you want some I'll buy 'em, Lo-Lo. You just gotta-hey!'

Loki slammed him back against the wall and stared down at him.

'Can I help you?' Tony asked politely.

'Take me home and fuck me,' Loki said. 'We shall deal with the Avengers tomorrow.'

'Sounds good to me,' Tony breathed and kissed him.
“Cut the crap ’cause you’re screaming in my ear
And you’re taking up all of the space
You’re really testing my patience again
And I’d rather get punched in the face
You’re getting on my every last nerve
Everything you’ve said I’ve already heard
I’m sick to death of your every last breath and I don’t give a fuck anyway...”

– Let Yourself Go [Green Day]

'Mr Stark... Mr Stark! MR STARK!'

'TONY!'

Tony yelped when something soft hit him in the face, and rolled onto his back to blink groggily at the ceiling. He didn't have a hangover, but his body ached from all the physical exercise he'd gotten the night before. Plus, Loki had fucked him... and he'd fucked Loki when they got back, so... yeah, Tony was tired.

'Shit,' Tony groaned and struggled to rub his eyes; one arm was trapped beneath the blankets, the other curled around his pillow. 'S'time?'

'Six-thirty,' Loki answered.

'Why are...’ he yawned, then tried again; 'Why are you wakin' me up?'

'Sir, the Avengers are in the penthouse,' JARVIS said.

Tony blinked again before he shot upright. His head swam and he moaned as he clutched at the side of his face. Sure, he was a god, but apparently he still suffered aches and pains and he was in no way a goddamn morning person. He needed coffee.

'vengers?’ he mumbled and turned to peer at Loki.

The other god was sitting up and already wearing Logan Thomas; his hair was a fuzzy mess and his eyes looked as sore as Tony's felt.

'JARVIS woke me a few minutes ago,' Loki told him. 'How you slept through it is beyond me.'

'Did you hit me?"
'With a pillow.' Loki shrugged. 'If it hurt then you are weaker than I thought.'

'Bastard,' Tony growled before stumbling out of bed. 'JARVIS, what the fuck are the Avengers doing here?'

'Agents Romanov and Barton woke Doctor Banner, Captain Rogers and Master Odinson one hour ago,' JARVIS explained as Tony hastily got dressed; he dragged on an old pair of jeans, one of the Iron Man shirts his company was now making, and ran his fingers through his hair. 'They discussed last night's events before requesting access to the penthouse.'

'And you let them in?' Tony asked.

'I asked Mr Lie-smith and he explained that it would be necessary for you to get this over with as soon as possible, Mr Stark,' JARVIS said. 'The Avengers will not rest until you discuss last night, and this may further along your plan to get kicked off the team.'

Tony sighed, rubbed his face one last time, and headed into the bathroom. He at least needed to brush his teeth before facing them; his mouth tasted vile.

'Will you be pushing for them to kick you off of the team?' Loki asked. He sounded closer and Tony glanced up as he scrubbed his teeth. Loki was standing in the doorway wearing a pair of Tony's sweats, the cuffs ending above his ankles. His shirt was baggy, blue, and something that Tony didn't remember ever buying. Maybe it was Loki's own.

'Maybe,' Tony mumbled around his toothpaste. He spat it out and continued. 'Staying on the team helps us get more information about their bases. But getting off the team is what I really want; they'll be out of the Tower and we can plan properly without having to sneak around.'

Loki nodded slowly, then tilted his head. 'I can cast invisibility over myself,' he reminded the younger god. 'If you do finally part ways, I can still sneak onto the Helicarrier. We've agreed that that's where we will find the most information, yes?'

'Yeah, probably,' Tony agreed. He rinsed his mouth and pointed a finger at Loki. 'Stay here, okay? Come running if there's a lot of shouting. We can act all loving around them and it'll prove that I'm off the market and that you can't be turned against me. I'm gonna call Pepper sometime today and let her know that I'm interviewing potential assistants. If I do get kicked off the team, we need someone else on the inside.'

'Very well,' Loki agreed. He moved aside to let Tony past, and then followed him to the door. 'We still have not discussed what happened last night,' Loki said.

Tony paused and frowned at the door. 'You wanna have meetings, now?' he asked. He looked at Loki over his shoulder and raised his eyebrows.

Loki snorted. 'Have no fear, Stark; I will not make you repeat yourself four hundred times or draw a diagram.' Tony laughed. 'We should go over everything to make sure our stories are straight. Plus, you fought Thor and the Captain; I wish to know how that went.'

'Okay,' Tony said. He pecked Loki on the lips and whispered, 'I broke Thor's shoulder just for you.' He pulled back before Loki could say anything, but saw how the Trickster's eyes had widened, how his face was flushed pink. Tony grinned and sauntered through the doorway.

{oOo}
Bruce was curled up in the far corner of Tony's U-shaped couches; he was as far away from the other Avengers as he could get, and Tony pondered that briefly before turning his attention to the others.

Rogers still had a few faint cuts and bruises on his face, but for the most part he looked fully healed. Romanov was completely fine. Her cast had been removed a few weeks ago... months? Tony honestly hadn't been paying attention. Either way, she was fine, and it irked Tony. Maybe it was time for Loki to break her arm again. Maybe both.

Thor looked his usual bright self and that pissed Tony off, but he just promised himself that he'd rip Thor's fucking arm off next time. He'd like to see the bastard heal that.

Barton's nose was taped up, both eyes were darkly bruised, and a thick cut started at his left eyebrow and disappeared into his hairline. Tony wondered if Loki had used the bird as a punching bag before deciding that it didn't matter; he'd find out later.

'There a reason you woke me up?' Tony grumbled and shuffled his way past them, into the kitchen. Rogers called his name but Tony ignored him. He was supposed to be hungover, and he had to act the part. So he scrubbed at his face and mumbled swear words under his breath and made himself the biggest, blackest cup of coffee he could. He used the prototype Hulk mug Stark Industries were working on and groaned as he took his first sip. The coffee actually helped and Tony's head stopped swimming a bit.

He briefly wondered how much alcohol he'd actually have to consume to experience being drunk again before heading back into the living room. Like Loki had told JARVIS; this had to be done. Romanov wouldn't leave until she'd screamed at Tony and called him reckless at least a dozen times. By the end of this argument, Tony would most likely be even closer to getting kicked off the team.

Or he'd have the Avengers begin packing. It was his fucking Tower, after all.

'This about last night?' Tony yawned when he re-entered the living room. Rogers, Romanov and Barton all turned to face him. Thor was standing beside the flatscreen TV, staring morosely out at New York city. Bruce picked at his scruffy jeans.

'Yes, Stark,' Romanov practically growled. 'This is about last night.'

'I don't get what the big deal is,' Tony said. 'I went out and had too much to drink. It's not anything new.'

'And that's the problem,' Romanov argued. 'Loki's decided to start a private war with SHIELD and we're losing. We can't afford to let any more agents die or any more bases fall. You might not care about the organisation, but the Avengers do. And last I checked you were part of the Avengers.'

And doesn't that piss you off? Tony mused. He took a large gulp of coffee, burned the fuck out of his mouth, but felt something warm swoosh up his throat and coat his tongue. He frowned and glanced down at his chest, but his arc reactor was still blue, and there were no glittering purple lights. He hesitated before looking at Thor, but the Thunderer was still focused on the window.

Okay... Tony thought. Better talk to Loki about that. It wasn't the first time his magic had acted in Tony's best interest. But Tony didn't like not having control of it. We have to get back to magic lessons.
'Stark!' Romanov's snarl snapped Tony's attention back to her. All he could do was shrug. 'Are you taking this seriously?' the red-head asked.

'Not really, no,' Tony answered honestly. 'I mean, am I pissed off at Loki? Hell yeah! This is my planet, and he just comes in and starts fucking shit up. I'm gonna punch him in the face the next time I see him.'

Thor scowled at him, but it was half-hearted; the guy couldn't really defend his former brother any more, not after everything that had happened over the past few months. Romanov and Barton both looked vaguely worried about Tony's claim that this was his planet, but Tony didn't care. Soon enough, they'd find out just how true Tony's words were.

'Tony,' Rogers tried, and though he sounded annoyed, he was trying to be an adult; a mediator. He knew that nothing would get done, nothing resolved, if they all screamed at each other. And Tony and the SHIELD agents had a long history of screaming at each other. 'We understand that you have your own life to lead-

'Do you?' Tony interrupted. 'Cause I'm pretty sure that Tweety Bird and Pippi Longstocking there both think that I spend my days drinking and fucking my way around New York.'

Romanov's face remained perfectly smooth, eyes narrowed, while Barton was fiddling with the tape over his nose.

'Pepper's CEO of Stark Industries, but I still own the fucking company,' Tony said, voice lowering into a growl. 'I create everything we sell, I update everything that's already on the market. I have meetings with my board of directors, the contractors in other countries, the heads of every department. I have to co-ordinate with my PR team every fucking week to make sure that Stark Industries' stocks don't fall too far just because of the shit I do with the Avengers. Sometimes,' Tony snarled, the hand gripping his mug shaking. Warm liquid spilled over his hand but Tony ignored the faint burn. 'Sometimes, I want to go out and have a fucking drink with my boyfriend. None of you have any idea what it's like for Logan! He's been targeted by Loki because of me and, what? You want me to just put my life with him on hold because Loki's decided to fuck with SHIELD? I do my best for you people, but the one night I have off you decide to start fucking scolding me like I'm an infant. News flash, Romanov! You're not the boss of me and neither is SHIELD! It's not my fault that Loki's blowing shit up!'

Tony was shouting by the end and had spilled about half of his coffee. He didn't care, despite the fact that the carpet beneath his feet was white and would stain. That'd be a bitch to get out.

Tony hadn't realised how pissed he still was. Ever since siding with Loki, he'd felt fucking giddy over what they were going to do to SHIELD, to the Avengers. Finally, Tony would prove what he was really capable of, and show the world once and for all that you do not fuck with Tony Stark!

But here he was, still pissed; still being yelled at by a bunch of fucking... fucking mortals, over how he chose to live his life. It was the 80s all over again. Don't go there, Tony. Don't touch that, Tony. Do you care about the Stark name at all, Anthony?!

'I'm a grown fucking man!' Tony shouted. Rogers looked shocked, Romanov furious. The others were silent. 'If I wanna go out and fucking drink with my boyfriend, I will!'

'You have more responsibilities now!' Romanov shouted back, just as fierce, blue eyes practically swollen with indignant rage. 'You're an Avenger whether you like it or not! When Loki targets one of us, he targets all of us!'
Tony laughed, and it wasn't a happy sound. He saw Rogers flinch and Bruce stare at him; the doctor looked... Tony couldn't even describe that look on his face. Confusion? Revulsion? Fear? He tore his eyes away to glare at Romanov, to tut his tongue at her like she was an unruly child.

'Seems that I've got the short end of the stick here, Agent Romanov,' he said. "Cause Loki's been targeting me. The media targets me. The fucking world and S.H.I.E.L.D target me. I've always gotta be better than all of you. When the Avengers destroy something, the media and public blame me. When Loki destroys something, you blame me. Tell me, just why the fuck should I stick around if I'm always in the goddamn wrong?"

Silence followed his words. Romanov looked surprised, her lower jaw slowly falling open to reveal bright white teeth that spoke of expensive work. Barton had frozen and was staring over Tony's shoulder, thumb and forefinger still tugging at the edge of the tape over his nose. Thor had finally abandoned staring at the window to get closer, and was standing behind Steve; shoulders thrown back, brow furrowed in confusion, like he couldn't process what Tony was saying.

Bruce... that same fear-confusion-repulsion-fucking some emotion that Tony couldn't get a fix on was painted across his face. Tony would have to keep an eye on Bruce, or get Loki to do it; it was too early to get found out now.

Rogers' face was practically heartbroken. He looked angry and scared and fucking disappointed. For a brief moment Tony felt regret sweep through his chest. He remembered the posters, the toys, the fucking trading cards that he'd had as a kid. He remembered sitting in Howard's workshop listening to the man prattle on about Captain America, the greatest hero of them all. Tony remembered watching old footage of Cap fighting, how much little Tony had wanted to meet the man and be the man...

And then Tony remembered the anger; the resentment. Howard scowling at Tony when Tony dragged him away from his oh-so-important Captain America research. He remembered his parents fighting, Howard's focus turning more and more towards the search for Steve Rogers and his family and company being completely neglected. Tony remembered screams, abuse, Captain America is my greatest creation, Anthony! You're my worst!

No long-lost fucking video could change any of that. One brief moment of fatherly love couldn't scour away the years of neglect and abuse.

His magic pulsed in his chest, and regret, disappointment, fell away to be replaced by anger and resentment. Fuck the Avengers and fuck Captain America. All-American good boy? Rogers might trust Tony, he might want him on the team, but he was still working behind Tony's back. Nobody betrayed Tony Stark.

_Fucking nobody._

Steve finally broke the silence. He swallowed thickly and licked his lips. 'Tony,' he said, voice soft, 'you don't mean that.'

Tony laughed. 'I fucking do, Capsicle. There's no profit to me staying with the Avengers.'

'Loki will come after you,' Romanov said. As always, trying to manipulate Tony. But this time into staying. Why? She wanted him off the team.

_Maybe they don't have enough information on the suits, _Tony thought. _Maybe I haven't been reckless enough lately. They still need me around._
'Loki's already come after me, Natasha,' Tony said. 'Me getting rid of you won't change that. Actually, he might just leave me alone. Unlike you, I've never been an unnecessary dick to him.'

'He deserves everything he's gotten!' Barton snarled. His eyes flashed, and though his jaw was clenched tight against the pain, his brows were furrowed in anger.

'That's not up to us, Bird Boy. It's not even up to Asgard.' He looked at Thor. 'Loki's Jötunn, right?'

Thor blinked. 'Aye,' he agreed.

'So if you ever catch him, send him to Jötunheimr,' Tony said, shrugged a shoulder. 'A group of his peers deciding his punishment. Seems more fair than sending him back to Asgard, a place that can't even keep him fucking locked up for a year.'

'We underestimated-' Thor tried, but Tony cut in.

'Yeah, and you always will,' he said. 'That's your problem, Pikachu, and that's SHIELD's problem too. Hell, it's the Avengers' problem! You think you're better than everyone and want everyone to live by the standards you've set. And when someone fails you lash out and treat them like fucking children!' He threw his hands up and lost the rest of his coffee. JARVIS would have it cleaned. 'No wonder Loki's trying to murder us all!'

'We didn't come here to talk about Loki,' Romanov said. She was clearly trying to get back to the issue at hand- Tony and his irresponsible ways.

'I don't think we have anything left to talk about, Agent Romanov,' Tony replied. 'You're pissed, I get that. You blame me for Loki fucking shit up last night. It's not my fault you couldn't handle one little god and his ripped-off robots.'

'You should have been there!' Romanov snapped.

'I had more important things to do!' Tony shouted back.

'What, fucking your boyfriend?' she sneered. Said boyfriend chose that moment to enter, and he physically flinched when Romanov turned to glare at him.

'I-' Loki began, and Tony shoved his mug onto the DVD stand to his left.

'It's okay, Logan,' he said and crossed the room. 'They were just leaving.'

'We're not done here,' Romanov snarled. 'Your reckless behaviour is going to cost lives, Stark. Next time it might be one of ours.'

Tony sneered at her as he wrapped an arm around Loki's waist. 'I'll be sure to send a fruit basket to your funeral.'

'Tony-' Rogers began, but stuttered to a halt when Tony raised a hand.

'No, Steve. I'm done,' he said.

Rogers gaped, mouth flapping. 'Done?'

'Are you done with the Avengers?' Bruce finally spoke. Tony looked at him; Bruce's eyes were dark, bruised.

Tony wet his lips, glanced at Loki, and said, 'I dunno. Maybe. I'm fucking sick of everything,
Bruce. Bruce hesitated before nodding. Tony turned his attention to a fuming Romanov and quiet Barton. 'I'll let you know if I'm done in a couple of days. If I am, you'll have 24 hours to get your shit out of my Tower.' He paused before adding, 'All of you.'

Rogers breathed out heavily and Bruce just nodded again.

'Get out of my penthouse,' was what Tony finished with, and he used his grip on Loki's waist to drag him back down the hallway and into the bedroom. He slammed the door behind himself and leaned against it. Loki stood before him, arms folded across his chest.

'That was interesting,' he said.

'You spying on me?' Tony asked, but there was no heat to his words. He always assumed that Loki was eavesdropping on his conversations with the Avengers.

Loki nodded. 'It seems that you've bought us some time. They will not kick you off of the team now; there is something that Romanov still needs.'

'Yeah,' Tony agreed. 'I might leave some more shit out. We'll hit the Helicarrier to get the rest of the base locations, then I'll leave the team for good. I might fuck up an Avengers mission to really seal the deal. The media won't be shocked when I cut ties with the Avengers after a really public fight.'

{oOo}

Tony had spent some time tinkering in the workshop in his penthouse after the Avengers left. Eventually he grew bored, though; all of his fun projects were downstairs or in the Hideout. So he abandoned the half-finished StarkPhone 7-S and went to find Loki.

He was in the kitchen making a sandwich.

'Lunch?' Tony asked.

'Mm,' Loki hummed, not turning to face him. 'I was going to ask you if you wished to order anything, but I didn't want to disturb you.'

They still hadn't discussed the previous night's events. The Avengers had seriously pissed Tony off, and Loki had recognised that Tony needed some time alone. It was one of the reasons Tony loved him.

The genius shook that thought from his head and crossed the kitchen to lean against Loki and the counter. Loki felt warm, despite his generally lower body temperature. Or maybe that was their bond.

Tony murmured something about fighting Thor, breaking his shoulder, and Loki chuckled. 'I thought SHIELD would train its agents better,' was Loki's comment before he told Tony about the many he had murdered.

Eventually Tony spoke about Rogers, about the super-soldier almost getting his faceplate off.

Loki frowned. 'Does he suspect?'
'No,' Tony shook his head, 'I don't think so. I think it's more of an... instinct? He knows that something's wrong with Genesis, but he can't put his finger on it. He doesn't know that it's me, or that there's a person in it. Or he might suspect, now. He knows enough about my Iron Man suits to take a guess.'

'We will have to keep an eye on him.'

'Don't we always?' Tony drawled. Loki snorted. 'Anyway, what did you do to Barton? He looked seriously fucked up.'

'I went through his head last night,' Loki revealed and Tony sighed. It'd be nice if Loki would fucking tell him these things sooner. 'It wasn't important,' Loki added, and Tony eyed him. 'No, I'm not reading your thoughts.'

'Sure you're not.'

'He doesn't hate you as much as we thought he did,' Loki said.

Tony frowned. 'What?'

'Barton dislikes you, and he thinks that you're a danger to SHIELD, the Avengers, and the world.'

Tony laughed. 'The entire world?'

Loki slapped his ass and Tony let out what could only be described as a yelp. 'Let me finish, Stark.' Tony gave him a scowl that was mostly for show. 'As I was saying,' Loki said and went back to making his sandwich. 'Barton wants to trust you; he wishes that you were safer, that you were trustworthy. But you're not, so he will spy on you and get you off of the team.'

'Huh.'

'His mind and heart are warring,' Loki added. 'What we have and what we wish for are rarely the same thing.'

'I know that for a fact,' Tony murmured, thinking about his childhood; he'd wanted a dad who was fucking proud of him. He would have taken that over having Howard's love. He hadn't had either. 'So is Barton easier or harder to manipulate now that we know this?' Tony questioned.

'Neither,' Loki said. 'He and I still have a connection, and I can still use it to control him or take what I want from him. We could, perhaps, get him to trust you a little before you and the Avengers part ways. But whatever happens, he will turn on the Avengers when we want him to.'

Tony grinned at the thought and his magic did a little happy dance in his chest. It only stopped when Loki pressed a hand over his arc reactor, fingertips digging in slightly.

'We have been neglecting your magical training,' the Trickster murmured. 'Your magic is strengthening.'

'I thought it might be something like that,' Tony said. When Loki raised an eyebrow, Tony added, 'I took a sip of coffee this morning and burned my mouth; I think my magic healed it.'

'Are you busy today?' When Tony shook his head, Loki said, 'Good. I will eat and then we will go to the hideout.'

Tony just nodded and watched as Loki finally finished his sandwich. 'What the hell did you put on
that thing?' he finally asked. There had to be at least seven packets of different meats and salads open on the counter, as well as three bottles of condiments and... was that baking soda? Tony never baked.

'Would you like some?' Loki asked, offering Tony the plate.

Tony blinked slowly before saying, 'Nah, you enjoy your... ah, sandwich. I'll make my own.'

'Coward,' Loki said and went to sit at the table.

'I don't want food poisoning!' Tony snapped. Loki flipped him off before chowing down on his monstrosity, and Tony laughed. It seemed that he was rubbing off on Loki. And not just in the fun way.
'Ms Potts wishes to see you, sir,' JARVIS' voice broke Tony from his thoughts, and the genius groaned.

'Really, J?' He scowled as he fiddled with his cufflinks- not what he normally wore, but Loki was wearing the "Stark" ones so Tony had to wear these. Damn, I'm whipped, Tony mused. But at least he'll be wearing my name on his wrists for the night... worth it!

'Yes, sir,' JARVIS said. 'She wishes to see you on Captain Rogers' floor.'

'What? Why?' Tony checked his watch; nine-ten, goddamn it, they were gonna be late as it was.

'She will not tell me why, Mr Stark.' JARVIS paused, and then; 'Mr Stark, Ms Potts is on her way up.'

Tony cursed but didn't get JARVIS to stop her. If Pepper wanted to see him, she was gonna see him. All Tony could do was run, and she'd just corner him at some point in the next few days. Better to get it over with.

He only had to wait a minute before the elevator doors were opening, admitting Pepper, Romanov and Barton. Tony briefly sent a glare JARVIS' way before turning his attention to his guests.

'As much as I like seeing you all,' he drawled, pretty sure that the SHIELD agents were still pissed off at him, 'I actually have plans.'

'You can be late,' Pepper said dismissively.

Tony raised his eyebrows. 'No, I can't. It took me three weeks to get a reservation at Logan's favourite restaurant. They wouldn't bump anyone! Not even for me!'

Pepper just shrugged a shoulder as she moved closer, then stood before him, arms folded over her chest. Tony waited, but when his CEO remained silent he said, 'What?'

'You need an assistant, Tony,' Pepper stated.

Tony blinked. Huh, it seemed that he wouldn't have to bring it up himself. But he had a part to play, so said, 'Why?'

'Because you missed three appointments yesterday,' Pepper told him. 'According to JARVIS, Clint and Natasha, you were hungover.'
Tony looked over Pepper's shoulder. Clint was smirking and Natasha's face was blank. Of course.

'Yeah, well, you know me,' Tony said. He aimed a charming smile at Pepper. 'I have my vices. And currently Logan's one of my vices. He wanted to go out drinking, I can't say no to his puppy dog eyes, so we went out drinking.'

'How much did you drink?' Pepper asked.

'Not enough that I blanked the entire night,' Tony said, 'but enough that I couldn't remember my own address. I think Logan told the cabbie “that big building with STARK on it”. Which works, because this is the only building with my name stamped on it... for now, anyway.'

Pepper was glaring at him; that glare of mixed anger and disappointment. Like Tony had spent his night fucking hookers and killing puppies. He'd never killed a puppy in his life. He was quite fond of hookers, though, especially when he'd been younger and all of his conquests had made it back to Howard's ears.

'Tony!' Pepper snapped her fingers at him and Tony blinked back to himself.

'Sorry, what were we talking about?' Tony asked. 'Cause I'm pretty sure that JARVIS has already filled you in.' He pointed a finger at one of JARVIS' sensors. 'Naughty J.'

'My apologies, Mr Stark,' JARVIS drawled. Stupid AI wasn't sorry in the slightest.

'This behaviour isn't healthy, Tony,' Pepper said. Tony's eyes narrowed, but thankfully Pepper quickly moved on. 'You need an assistant. JARVIS knows your schedule but you just mute him when you're tired or hungover or busy. You need an actual human being who you can't order to shut up.'

'Well, I could,' Tony said, 'cause, you know, they'd work for- okay, okay!' He held his hands up when Pepper's eyes narrowed dangerously, her bright red nails tapping quickly at her arms. 'I'm getting an assistant.'

'When?'

'Soon,' Tony said, adopting her tone of voice. 'Promise. Scout's honour.' Before Pepper could call him a liar- and he was actually telling the truth this time!- Tony swivelled on his heel and shouted, 'Logan!'

'Coming!' Loki replied from the bedroom.

Tony smiled at Pepper, Romanov and Barton as he slowly edged towards the elevator. 'So, as much fun as this was, I have a standing date,' he said.

'Tony-' Pepper tried, but he interrupted her.

'No, don't worry about it! Seriously, Pep, I've got a bunch of interviews lined up for next week.' Pepper eyed him suspiciously. 'Really?'

'Really,' Tony echoed with a firm nod. 'Logan made me look through all the applications and call the people I liked.'

'How'd he do that?' Romanov mused.

Tony grinned wickedly and Pepper held up a hand while Barton looked disgusted. 'We don't need
to hear it,' Pepper said. 'If you're serious about the interviews, then you can go.'

'I am,' Tony said. 'Monday to Wednesday, I'm meeting with about forty people.'

'Where?' Pepper asked just as Loki finally joined them, completely dressed and with his curly blonde hair neatly styled with product.

'My office down on...' Tony frowned, 'uh...'

'Floor 35, Tony,' Pepper sighed.

Tony snapped his fingers. 'Right. Floor 35.'

'Tony,' Loki said, and the genius turned to face him. 'You left your mobile phone on the dresser.' Loki handed him the slim device and Tony took it with a smile.

'Thanks, babe.' He didn't notice the incredulous look on Pepper's face; he was too busy eyeing Loki up and down, appreciating the slim, dark blue suit and crisp white shirt. His tie was striped blue, the colours various shades darker than his suit. 'Looking good,' he said and added a leer for good measure.

Loki just smirked at him and allowed Tony to wrap an arm around his waist, tug him towards the elevator.

'Later!' Tony called over his shoulder.

{oOo}

Pepper was still staring after the couple, eyes wide and mouth hanging open.

'Are you okay?' Clint asked, as always the first to notice. Natasha snapped out of her thoughts and looked at Pepper.

'Pepper?' she prodded.

'Did you see that?' Pepper said and rounded on the two agents.

Natasha frowned and Clint said, 'See what?'

'Logan just handed Tony his cellphone,' Pepper said. Natasha and Clint stared at her. 'Seriously?!' Pepper near-shouted. 'Natasha, you remember working for Tony; when you were his assistant.'

Natasha tried not to let her revulsion spread over her face. 'Yes, I do,' she said.

'Did Tony ever let you hand him anything?' Pepper demanded.

Natasha frowned. Now that she thought about it... no. Stark had made a huge deal about being handed something; when Natasha was playing his assistant, she had to hand things to Pepper, or place the item near Stark so that he could pick it up himself.
On further thought, Stark hardly ever let Pepper hand him things. He usually wrinkled his nose and looked at her, and Pepper would put whatever she had in her hand down so that Stark could pick it up himself.

'No, he didn't,' Natasha finally said.

'Yeah, he never lets Bruce hand him anything, either,' Clint said. 'Or Steve. When we eat together we all have to put things near him so he can pick them up.'

Natasha looked at Pepper. 'Why does he do that?'

The other woman shook her head. 'I'm not one-hundred percent sure, but I've always assumed that it has to do with his wealth and status; the media has always assumed that he got everything handed to him. The label followed him when he took over Stark Industries, and he wanted to make a name for himself. So he never lets anyone hand him anything, not even the smallest things.'

She frowned and looked back at the archway, as though she could still see Stark and his boyfriend.

'So...' Clint drawled, 'why did Tony let Logan hand him his phone?'

Pepper shrugged one shoulder helplessly.

'Maybe he trusts Logan more than us,' Natasha murmured.

'No,' Clint said. When Natasha glanced at him he was frowning, thinking about it. 'Not just that... he continued. 'Tony sees Logan as an equal; he'll take things from him because he trusts Logan, because he sees Logan as being on the same level as him. He trusts him with everything. Which means—'

'Tony's finally off the market,' Natasha interrupted. Clint gave her a look, which Natasha understood immediately; there was no chance in hell that Fury—that SHIELD—would be able to turn Thomas on Stark. If Stark trusted Thomas that much, then Thomas trusted him in equal parts. He wouldn't betray his lover.

'I can't believe this,' Pepper breathed. 'Tony, in a stable, functioning relationship?' She shook her head and turned to smile weakly at Natasha and Clint. 'Maybe this will stabilise him though; make him less likely to throw himself head-first into danger. Maybe Logan can help Tony in ways that I never could.'

Natasha snorted at the thought, and Clint didn't say a word. Neither agent felt comfortable discussing their plans for Stark in the Tower, especially in Stark's penthouse. Coulson could call Pepper and discuss this with her later.

{oOo}

Tony's cell rang halfway through dinner. At least it was on vibrate and didn't disrupt everyone else. Tony growled under his breath and put his fork and knife aside to dig into his jacket pocket. Loki raised his eyebrows but said nothing as Tony checked the caller ID. “Withheld number”.
'SHIELD,' he muttered and Loki nodded in understanding. Tony answered the phone, and it was JARVIS who responded; 'Sir, Director Fury is calling. Shall I put him through?'

'Might as well,' Tony said. If he didn't, Fury would just keep ringing.

'Stark!'

'What can I do for you, oh scariest of the Pirate Captains?'

He heard Fury swear before saying, 'Get your ass to the Helicarrier. Emergency Avengers meeting.'

'I'm on a date.'

'I don't care, Stark. Get to the Helicarrier or don't bother showing up for any more meetings.' He hung up after that and Tony glared down at the StarkPhone. On one hand, he wanted to not go; just let himself slip away from the Avengers nice and easy.

On the other hand, they might let something slip. And Tony could check out security, see if Fury had upgraded anything since Tony's last visit. He still had to help Loki sneak through the Helicarrier and download the information they needed.

'I gotta go, babe,' Tony finally said and put his cell away. Loki raised his eyebrows. 'SHIELD meeting.'

'I see,' Loki said. 'Will you take the car?'

'No, I've got the suitcase suit in the trunk. You take the car back to the Tower.'

He stood and Loki followed him. Tony paid for their half-finished meals and escorted Loki out of the restaurant. There were a few paparazzi hanging about, and they got their photo snapped a few times as Tony led Loki to the car. They peeled away after a few seconds, apparently satisfied, and Tony got his suit out of the trunk while Loki unlocked the car.

'This shouldn't take long,' Tony said. Loki was already in the car, seatbelt on, and Tony leaned one arm against the door as he bent down. 'Don't miss me too much, okay?'

'Do what you must,' Loki replied. He gave Tony a long, filthy kiss, winked at him, and then slammed the door shut.

'Asshole,' Tony muttered while Loki waved from behind the window.

{oOo}

Tony only removed his suit when he broke the chair he was sitting on. Bruce was laughing into his hand, while the others mostly rolled their eyes or outright ignored him (or, in Thor's case, offered to battle the chair to the death; Tony declined).

It was good to see Bruce laughing. Tony had only just noticed how tired and... depressed, for lack of a better word, the doctor looked. It couldn't just be because of the Other Guy; sure, Genesis and
Loki had been fucking some shit up, but Bruce hadn't fought that often or that long. He'd gotten a better handle on the Hulk since Loki’s invasion, so it wasn't *that* tiring him out.

Tony pondered his team mate while Barton and Romanov discussed something at the front of the room. The Avengers were scattered along the rectangular table, while Thor was investigating whatever was in the cupboards to the left. There was some SHIELD tech sitting beside Steve tapping away at his laptop, but he jumped to attention when Fury, Coulson, and Maria Hill entered the room.

'The trifecta!' Tony shouted when Fury reached his seat. Fury gave him a poisonous look and Tony grinned in response. 'You'll be sorry when I bet on a horse named Mr Fury and it wins me a buttload of money,' Tony said.

'Do you really need any more money?' Barton demanded.

Tony blew him a kiss. 'You can never have enough money, Birdie. Howard taught me that.' Rogers went rigid at Stark Senior's name, but Tony ignored him in favour of eyeing up the suitcase Coulson had planted on the table. 'What's that?'

'Various security footage of Loki and Genesis,' Coulson answered, 'as well as information that we're going to go through as a team.'

Tony groaned, and he wasn't the only one- Thor looked like someone had cancelled his Christmas, while even Bruce sighed. 'Do we have to?' Tony demanded.

'Yes, Stark,' Fury growled- but really, did he have any other setting? 'Loki's reached priority one.' Rogers straightened in his seat, looking all serious with his Boy Scout face on. Tony raised his hand.

Sighing, Coulson said, 'Yes, Mr Stark?'

'Is Priority One code for “Loki's fucked up too much shit and now we really have to catch him, we're super serious here”?’

Fury's good eye twitched and Hill rubbed her forehead. 'Yes,' Coulson said, face blank.

Tony whistled. 'Did you teach Romanov how to make that face? It's uncanny.'

Coulson ignored him and started handing out navy folders, Loki's name and “Priority One” written in red across the glossy front. Tony muttered curses in various languages but flipped the folder open like a good little Avenger. There was a list of Loki's past targets, as well as what bases SHIELD thought Loki would hit next.

Tony's eyebrows climbed. They'd just *handed* him this information. Tony already had it, of course, but before going into business with Loki had hadn't known where half of SHIELD's bases were. And here they were, a nice, neat list just for him.

'So we're assuming that Loki has this information?' Tony asked.

'At least parts of it,' Coulson said with a nod. 'There are bases that not even SHIELD are aware of.'

'Apart from you, Hill and Fury,' Tony felt the need to point out.

'Some even I don't know about, Stark,' Fury said.
'So bases that the World Security Council personally uses?' That got him looks from everyone in the room, and Tony shrugged. 'What? We need to coordinate, right? That's what this meeting's about! If we can figure out Loki's next target we can wait for him, stop him destroying it, maybe capture him.' He paused and cut his eyes to Thor. 'We are catching him, right? No maiming or killing?'

Barton twitched but Fury agreed readily with Tony. Thor's chest puffed out, even while his eyes stayed on Fury. So Thor wasn't an idiot, then, Tony mused. He knew how the mortals really felt about his brother, and was braced for their possible betrayal. Tony was, too. He very much doubted that Fury, his lackeys, and the Wonder Twins wanted to catch Loki. It was death or nothing, as far as they were concerned.

Tony wasn't going to let that happen. And he had an ally in Thor, at least. Possibly Steve and Bruce, too. Both had very much been against killing all their other enemies, while Tweety and Red Riding Hood were far too trigger happy for even Tony's standards. And Tony's standards were pretty damn low.

'Let's get started, then,' Tony announced, slapping a gauntlet against the table. It creaked beneath his strength and Tony threw Rogers a smile when the Captain sighed at him. 'The sooner we get this done, the sooner I can get out of here. Then we can catch Loki, pack him off to Santa's Christmas Village, and Logan and I can actually party without the Avengers ruining my mood.'

Fury eyed him then, and Tony met his gaze steadily. Even raised an eyebrow when Coulson glanced at him, too. Fury looked away first, followed by Coulson, and Hill turned to man the TV while the other Avengers flipped their folders open.

Seemed Barton and Romanov had discussed their last argument with the head honcho. Tony wondered what their plan was now. They still needed him, otherwise Romanov would have been more vicious during their spat. But what did they want?

'Let's start with the SHIELD bases,' Coulson began after clearing his throat. 'We believe that Loki knows of the bases listed in your files...'

{oOo}

'Later, bitches!' Stark shouted. He was out of the room before Maria had turned the TV off, and the Avengers could hear the suit folding itself around the man as he made his way down the hallway.

'He's, uh...' all eyes turned to Steve, and the Super Soldier shrugged, 'getting better?'

'I hope he is,' Bruce muttered, but didn't seem to be talking to them so much as himself. He left next, Steve and Thor trailing after them. Maria got the SHIELD tech out and locked the door behind her, leaving Fury, Coulson, Natasha and Clint.

'Welll?' Fury demanded immediately.

'He is getting better,' Clint said. He was still in his seat, feet propped on the chair next to him. 'As much as I hate to say it, Thomas has been good for him. Stark doesn't drink nearly as much, and hasn't created any suicidal experiments lately.'
'That we know of,' Natasha huffed. 'He doesn't tell us nearly half of the things he does, Clint.' Clint just shrugged.

'Have you made any more progress on his suit?' Coulson asked.

'A little,' Natasha said. 'He keeps that locked up pretty tight, of course; even from his team mates. But Clint and I have chipped away at his security. There are some loopholes Stark doesn't seem to be aware of.'

'We have a lot more access than anyone else in the Tower,' Clint added. 'With Pepper's codes as well as the Avengers', we've gotten a heap of information.'

'But not enough,' Fury reminded them. 'Our scientists tell me that we're nowhere near building a functioning Iron Man suit. We have zero arc reactor technology, and what we have of the suits isn't enough.'

'Doom's bots didn't help?' Clint asked.

Coulson shook his head. 'Doom's technology was primitive when compared to Tony Stark's. Apart from giving us a vague idea of what fits together, it's relatively useless.'

'So we need more,' Natasha said. She was frowning, and Fury eyed her.

'Romanov?'

'I think he's going to quit the team,' Natasha said, an exhale accompanying her words.

'Why now?' Coulson asked.

'We told you what happened,' Clint said. 'Stark was pissed.'

'And he seemed serious about quitting,' Natasha added. 'I've never seen him like that.'

'It's Thomas,' Clint added. 'Before, Stark only had himself to care about, and his team mates. But we can take care of ourselves. Compared to us, Logan Thomas is useless, and Stark knows that. Loki's targeted him before-'

'He's not going to risk Thomas' life,' Natasha cut in. 'We've seen how they are around each other.'

'So there's no chance of getting Thomas to turn?' Fury asked.

Natasha shook her head. It was Clint who said, 'I'm pretty sure they fucking love each other- if Tony Stark is capable of loving anyone other than himself, it'd be Logan Thomas.'

Fury swore and slid into his seat. Hands pressed together, he surveyed the two Avengers across the table.

'We can't turn them against each other,' Clint said, 'no way.'

'Is that your professional opinion?' Fury asked.

'Professional and personal,' Clint said. 'Every part of me is a hundred percent sure of this, Fury. You approach Thomas, he'll tell Stark, and this whole operation will blow up in our faces. Stark will have us out of the Tower before Loki can attack another base.'

Fury growled at those words and rubbed his good eye. 'Great,' he grunted.
Coulson glanced at his boss before meeting Natasha's eyes. 'Miss Potts tells me that Stark's getting an assistant.'

'Apparently,' Natasha agreed. 'He told Pepper that he's got some interviews lined up for next week.'

'His phone records back that up,' Coulson said. He pulled another folder from his suitcase, this one red, and slid it across the table to Natasha.

She flipped through it briefly before looking up. 'Are these real?'

'As far as we know,' Coulson said. 'And we can never be sure where Stark's concerned. But these seem legitimate.'

'So we could get to the assistant,' Natasha mused.

'Someone who has to work with Stark?' Clint snorted. 'They'll be begging to snitch on him.'

'See to it and keep me updated,' Fury ordered. 'And get me some goddamn blueprints for Stark's suits. The sooner we have them, the sooner we can get rid of him.'

Natasha said, 'Yes, sir,' while Clint just nodded. The two left quickly, Fury staring after them and Coulson cleaning up.

'Not having second thoughts, are you?' Natasha murmured as they walked.

'No,' Clint said. 'But Stark has changed.'

'I won't deny that,' Natasha said, 'but this is for the greater good, Clint.'

'Yeah,' Clint said, but he was frowning.

'Clint?'

'Is it for the greater good?' Clint questioned. 'If Stark gets his shit together- if Thomas actually gives him a reason to stop acting like a fucking super villain- then is it for the greater good?'

'Nobody can change that much, Clint,' Natasha said. 'Yes, Stark's calmed down somewhat since Thomas entered the picture. But he's still unstable, and he's still dangerous. You see every other week what Loki's capable of; Stark's exactly the same. Their stories are the same, their personalities are the same; the only differences are their powers and their heritage. One day soon something's going to go wrong and Stark will be the next super villain SHIELD has to fight.'

'I guess,' Clint mumbled. He shook his head and offered Natasha a smile when the woman clapped a hand to his shoulder. 'No, I get it, Tash; believe me, I do. I just wish...'

'Things were different?' Clint nodded. 'We're assassins, Clint. We don't wish.'

Clint said nothing to that, so Natasha let the conversation drop.

{oOo}
After wandering around the Helicarrier for a good hour- and listening in on the lovely little chat Fury had with the archer and Russian- Tony launched himself off of the flying-boat-hybrid and into the air.

'Play me that techno song that was on when Loki and I went clubbing,' Tony ordered. JARVIS obliged, somehow knowing exactly what Tony was talking about. Tony spun through the late night- or early morning, depending on how you looked at it- air, twisting and flipping and testing various things as he thought.

So SHIELD still needed his suits; they didn't have enough information, and they had nothing on his arc reactor technology. Well, Tony wasn't about to let that go. He'd give them old Iron Man blueprints, he'd give them certain things to keep them thinking they were winning. But his reactor tech was his and his alone. There wasn't a chance in hell that he was letting that, nor the element that powered it, go.

It would be easy to leave some stuff around; to weaken some of JARVIS' servers and let SHIELD in. Give them enough and Tony would be free to destroy some more bases with Loki. By the time they realised that Tony was playing them it'd be too late; Tony and Loki would have won.

Tony grinned at the thought as he dove towards Stark Tower. He landed smoothly and JARVIS dismantled the suit. Tony walked around the balcony and into the penthouse. The lights were off, but the massive flat-screen TV as playing, sound near-muted.

'They think you're gonna hit Washington D.C. next,' Tony announced.

Loki looked away from the TV show he was watching- there was a lot of blood, a lot of gunfire, but Tony didn't bother looking too closely. 'Why?' Loki asked.

'They think you'll see it as a big fuck you to America as a whole,' Tony told him. 'Their next guess is Malibu, but only because I have a house there and they think you hate Logan a whole heap.'

Loki snorted. 'As if I would care unduly for a mortal. Your team mates barely register on my radar.'

'But they do register,' Tony said. He decided to ignore the “team mates” part of that sentence. He was pretty sure that Loki was only calling them that to piss him off. 'Anyway; Washington D.C., Malibu, followed by Chicago.'

'I do not even know where Chicago is,' Loki commented.

'It's one of the largest cities in the US,' Tony said, 'which is why it made the list; I suggested that you'd like the possible civilian damages and casualties.'

'That does sound interesting,' Loki said. He raised his arm when Tony flopped onto the sofa. Groaning, Tony burrowed into Loki's bony chest. It was surprisingly comfortable and he closed his eyes. He felt fingers thread through his hair and sighed again. 'Problems?' Loki questioned.

'Just a headache from all the talking,' Tony grumbled. 'It's already going away.'

'I am glad,' Loki said, 'because we have plans today.'

'We do?'

He felt Loki nod. 'We need to get back to your magical training. It wouldn't do to have your magic make an appearance around your-'
'Don't say it!' Tony interrupted. He raised a hand to waggle a finger at Loki, and heard the older god chuckle.

'Around the *Avengers*,' he amended.

'That's better,' Tony said. He dropped his hand and rubbed Loki's belly. 'Let me take a little nap, get something to eat; then we'll go, okay?'

Loki hummed.

'JARVIS, time?' Tony asked through a yawn.

'It is 3:16am, sir,' JARVIS responded.

'Stupid SHIELD,' Tony grunted. He burrowed further into Loki's side, sighed when a blanket was suddenly draped over him.

'Sleep, Stark,' Loki said. 'I shall wake you soon.'
Tony was dreaming. He knew he was dreaming because he'd had this... this nightmare often enough. He was falling through the portal, staring at heaven or hell, stars and ships too big for even his comprehension. There was something there, *watching* him; he could feel its eyes on him. Then hands, clasping, *dragging*, trying to pull him towards the ships. He knew it was a dream because in reality he'd fallen through the portal and everything had gone black before he saw clear blue sky again.

In his head, he was pulled forward. The hands got a grip on his shirt- he wasn't wearing his suit, just a flimsy t-shirt and a pair of his jeans. Even his goddamn feet were bare. He struggled but it was no use; he was dragged up through the stars, a million eyes staring and judging him, knowing everything, even his worst fears. He tried to scream but there was no air. Sweat broke across his cold skin and Tony kicked but no, no, he was going up, being dragged, and then a face, grey teeth the size of bricks, rancid breath blowing across his face, blood spilling from his mouth-

Tony woke screaming. JARVIS was talking- Loki, too- but Tony only heard it as white noise. He fought against whatever was holding him down and managed to roll off of the sofa and into something large, warm, hard. He grasped at the fabric beneath his fingers as he inhaled sharply. He couldn't get a breath, his chest hurt and his heart thudded dangerously quickly behind his arc reactor.

He groped at his chest, just to check that his arc reactor was still there. Sometimes he swore that it wasn't, that whatever the fuck was on the other side of that wormhole had managed to steal it. It took too long- minutes? Hours?- for him to realise that his arc reactor was there, safe; that *he* was safe. And that he was wrapped up in Steve Rogers' arms.

'Tony. Breathe,' the captain ordered. Tony tried, but he couldn't. Everything was blackening around
the edges of his eyesight, but a strong hand grabbed his chin and forced him to look. Steve's blue eyes met his, and Tony gasped. 'Your name is Tony Stark,' Rogers said. 'It's 7:03am and you're in Stark Tower, Manhattan.' Tony took a ragged breath. 'Repeat after me, Tony,' Steve ordered.

Tony tried to nod, but his head just jerked randomly. 'I... I'm...'

'Tony Stark,' Steve repeated.

'Tony Stark,' Tony echoed. 'I'm...' inhale, exhale, 'Anthony Edward Stark. It's seven... seven...'

'7:04am, Mr Stark,' JARVIS supplied.

'Seven... oh... four,' Tony inhaled again. He held it in his chest, then breathed out. 'AM,' he finished.

'Where are you?' Steve asked.

'M-Manhattan,' Tony stuttered, then hiccuped. He hung his head and focused on breathing, on the feel of Rogers' tight t-shirt beneath his fingers. 'I'm in Manhattan. I'm safe.'

'That's right,' Steve said.

There was silence for a minute, two, while Tony got his breathing under control. He flinched when he felt a warm hand press against the back of his neck, but looked up to see Loki crouched beside him. Logan's eyes were worried, mouth pressed into a thin line. He looked so much like Loki that Tony pushed away from Steve to fall into the older god's arms. Loki wrapped him up quickly, shushed him when Tony's breath faltered again.

'Thank you, Captain Rogers,' Loki murmured.

'It's fine,' Steve said, 'I've seen it before. After the invasion...' Tony heard him trail off, heard the frown in his voice. 'It doesn't matter now,' he finally continued. 'I'll come back later.'

'We may still have plans for the day,' Loki murmured. 'I'll have Tony contact you when he's better.'

'Okay,' Steve replied. More silence, and then Steve's footsteps as he left. Finally the elevator, and JARVIS saying, 'Mr Rogers is gone, sir.'

'Are you well?' Loki asked.

'Yeah,' Tony said on an exhale. He rubbed his face against Loki's shoulder. 'Fuck.'

'Do you have nightmares often?'

'Not so much lately,' Tony murmured. 'I had a shit load after the invasion.' He felt Loki tense against him, but the other god said nothing. 'Panic attacks, mostly; re-living the portal.'

'It is...' Loki hesitated, clearly choosing his words carefully. 'It is something that remains with you, even years later. I fell for an eternity.'

Tony shuddered at the thought. 'How the fuck did you survive?'

'I didn't, in a way,' Loki said. 'Before I was... much saner, than I am now. Something within me broke when I fell, and it will never heal; I know that for certain. Not even my magic can make me whole.'
'It's fucking bullshit,' Tony growled. He thumped one fist against Loki's shoulder. 'It's fucking bullshit. I'm Tony fucking Stark.'

'And I am Loki Laufeyson,' Loki replied. 'The wormhole- the place between worlds- can destroy even the strongest being. You are not weak, Anthony.'

'I feel like it.'

'As do I, at times.'

They fell into silence until Tony felt like he could stand on his own two feet. He shook violently during the first attempt, but managed to find his footing on the second. He still needed Loki's help and the Trickster wrapped an arm around Tony's waist and pulled him into the small kitchen. Tony was made to sit, a glass of water pressed between his hands. Tony stared at it for a while, only becoming aware again when a mug was placed before him.

'Drink,' Loki ordered, 'it helps me.'

Tony nodded and swapped the water for the tea. He inhaled deeply and then took a small sip. It was something warm, spicy, and settled in his gut with a warm glow. He did feel better after a few sips and offered Loki a weak smile.

Loki was sitting opposite him with his own tea. 'You haven't had any nightmares since I came to stay here,' he said. 'I would have noticed.'

'Yeah, they're less frequent now,' Tony said. 'The last one was about a week before we made our deal.'

Loki nodded.

'What about you?' Tony asked. Loki's knuckles turned white on his mug.

'The night before our deal,' Tony said. Tony frowned at that. He threw his mind back, remembered the fight he'd contacted Loki during. Now that he thought about it, Loki had seemed less... stable, during that fight. Tony had been worried that Loki would completely ignore him. His eyes had been dark, haunted. He'd had that look on his face... the look Tony saw in the mirror after his own nightmares.

Tony's breath shuddered and he took another sip of tea.

'Rogers was concerned,' Loki spoke. Tony looked at him. 'He came in to discuss a team dinner. I was about to wake you when I sensed your dreams.'

Tony frowned. 'Sensed?'

The other god hesitated, but at Tony's pointed look he said, 'Our bond... it allows certain things through. I could sense your distress, and it wasn't difficult to ascertain what you were experiencing.'

Another gulp of tea. 'Right,' Tony said.

'He managed to wake you, when even I failed.' Loki was frowning, now; eyes on his tea, head tilted down. 'He talked you through it.'

'You would have been able to as well,' Tony said with certainty. 'Rogers... he knows nightmares;
he's dealt with his own. He has access to the penthouse because we were heading towards being friends before I discovered what he and SHIELD are up to. He's talked me through a lot of nightmares.'

'He cares for you,' Loki said, but Tony shook his head.

'No, he cares about Howard Stark; he tolerates me because I'm Howard's son. He respects Howard in a way that he'll never respect me.'

'No,' Loki said, voice stern; 'he respects you, Anthony. Despite what he is doing for SHIELD, he enjoys your company and cares for you.'

'He doesn't,' Tony insisted.

'He could have left earlier; left me to deal with it,' Loki growled. 'All those times he helped you? He could have walked away, but he didn't, Anthony. Deny it all you want, but Rogers considers himself your friend.'

'Then why the fuck is he trying to get me off the team?!' Tony shouted. He slammed his mug against the table, forgot his strength; the mug shattered, spilling hot tea across the surface. Tony cursed and threw himself to his feet to get a dish towel or some goddamn paper ones.

'He cares for your well-being,' Loki said, speaking to Tony's back. 'He wants what is best for you and sees your separation from the team as something that will benefit you emotionally, physically and mentally. He doesn't wish for you to leave, but thinks it's for the best.'

'Saw all that from the way he talked me through my fucking nightmare, huh?' Tony snarled. 'Or did you fuck around in his head?'

'It is obvious,' Loki said, voice still calm; he wasn't rising to Tony's fury, which pissed Tony off that much more.

He rounded on Loki and found the Jötunn still at the table. He'd twisted in his seat to stare at Tony and met his eyes unflinchingly. 'Say that you're right,' Tony said, 'say that Steve cares about me, and wants what's best for me. So what? He still betrayed me, Loki! He's still working behind my back to get me off of his fucking team. And when everything comes out- when SHIELD and the Avengers realise what I'm doing- Steve will still come after me. He's a good person. No amount of friendship or caring on his part will stop him from taking me down.

'Steve will always fight for the greater good, and we're killing people, Loki!' Tony near-shouted. 'Steve will stop me because he knows it's the right thing to do. He might not try and kill me, but he will come after me. He'll try and catch me and lock me up and rehabilitate me. But that won't work, because we both know that I was fucked up long before Iron Man. So if he manages to get me, I'll sit in some goddamn tiny cell for the rest of my now really, really long life, and make shit for SHIELD. Steve will feel bad, but he'll do it.'

Tony leaned heavily against the counter, paper towels clutched tightly in his hands. 'I don't have friends, Loki,' he finished. 'Because friends don't betray each other. They get into your face and tell you when you're being an asshole. Pepper and Steve are both working behind my back. I can maybe count Rhodey and Bruce as friends, but when they find out what I've done? What I plan to do?' He shook his head. 'They'll betray me, too.'

Loki said nothing, so Tony moved forward to clean the spilled tea. He tossed the broken mug into the trash and mopped the table top. It was still sticky when he was done and, not wanting to look at
Loki, he grabbed a cleaning cloth and wiped the table down again. He was rinsing it in the sink when Loki spoke.

'I forget that you had people before this endeavour.' Tony froze, didn't turn around. 'I have been alone for so long and... I knew that you were serious about this; about destroying SHIELD and the Avengers. I forgot that before you discovered their treachery, you considered them acquaintances, team mates, if not friends just yet. I forgot everything that you lost to regain your independence and keep your technology.'

Tony finally turned around. Loki was staring at him, eyes sad.

'For that I apologise, Tony,' he finished.

Sighing, Tony scrubbed at his face. 'It's okay, Loki. Sometimes even I forget that I fucking trusted them. It shouldn't matter, but sometimes... God, it pisses me off.' He sighed again. 'It's okay, Loki,' he repeated.

'It's not,' Loki said. 'They will suffer for what they have done. It will hurt you; it still does.'

'But I'm going to do it anyway,' Tony said. 'Nobody fucks with Tony Stark and gets away with it.'

'I know.'

Tony shook his head and pushed himself off of the counter. 'Finish your tea,' he said. 'Magic lessons, remember?' Loki nodded, and then smiled softly when Tony crossed the distance between them and leaned down to kiss him softly. 'We're okay?' he asked more than stated. When Loki nodded again, Tony smiled. 'Finish your tea,' he repeated and turned to leave the kitchen. He needed a shower before they headed for the Hideout.

{oOo}

Nobody tried to stop them when they left the Tower. Even Pepper seemed busy, perhaps finally assuaged by Tony's promise that he was meeting with some possible assistants. Either that or she was hanging out with Coulson, selling him and SHIELD all of Tony's secrets.

Tony shook his head at the mere thought. Yeah, Pepper was selling him out, but she was honestly just trying to help him. That didn't excuse her actions; at least not in Tony's eyes. She'd suffer just like everyone else for betraying him.

Tony glanced across the Hideout at Loki. The Trickster was pulling meat out of the large freezers near the fridge. Apparently he planned on training Tony extra hard today, which Tony honestly wasn't against. He didn't want to get caught out because of his magic. If he could control it, he fucking would. If he could use his magic against the Avengers, he sure as fucking hell would.

Loki was still preoccupied, so Tony sat on the bed. The sheets were messy, just like the last time he and Loki had been there. Tony never made his bed, so he couldn't judge Loki for not making his own.

Things still felt weird between them. Tony frowned as he thought over Rogers' presence that morning. The more he thought about it, the more he believed in Loki's words; Rogers really did see Tony as a friend. From Tony's research, Rogers had no idea what Romanov and Barton were really
Fury had suggested that Tony needed a break and Rogers had run with that. Rogers' heart was in the right place, as much as Tony hated to admit it.

But just like with Pepper, that didn't excuse Rogers' actions. He was an Avenger. In Tony's new world, you were either on Team Stark or Team SHIELD. And Rogers was Team SHIELD all the way. Nothing would change that.

Tony sighed and rolled his neck. He felt tired despite the couple hours of sleep he'd gotten before the nightmare. Usually five was all he needed to be up and running again. But between SHIELD, the nightmare, and that little fight with Loki... Tony felt like a nap.

'Are you ready?'

Loki's words made Tony's eyes snap open and he nodded. He needed to get his magic under control; needed to harness and use it. He could sleep later.

Loki was frowning at him. 'I'm fine,' Tony said as he stood. Sighing, Loki unfolded his arms and gestured for Tony to follow him.

Tony had no idea what their magic lesson was going to incorporate, so followed behind Loki obediently. The Trickster came to a stop in the small training area; the pads were still there, the wooden targets and mannequins that stood in for actual enemies.

They stood in silence for a beat until Tony sighed. 'What are we doing?'

'You are going to practice throwing your magic,' Loki told him. Tony's eyes lit up and Loki chuckled. 'I need to see how much control you have. I remember our last lesson, however you are most likely more in-tune with your magic than you were then. Let me see what you can do.'

'Okay...' Tony honestly had no idea what to do. He knew what Loki was asking of him; he'd seen Loki in battle multiple times. Loki could cast intricate spells over himself and others; he could pull things from nowhere; he could animate objects to fight the Avengers on his behalf. And sometimes he just outright threw magic at everybody, using raw power to throw them away or injure them. That usually happened when Thor called him "brother".

But Tony wasn't sure how he was supposed to do that.

'It is simple, Anthony,' Loki said. 'Call your magic into your palm. When I say stop, cut it off from the rest of your magic.' He swept his arm at the row of targets a few feet before them. 'Throw your magic at the target.'

'Oh,' Tony said. Well, that seemed simple enough. Quite a few times Loki had had Tony summon magic, separate it, and then send it back. He wasn't sure how different it would feel to let his magic go completely. He frowned down at his hand and flexed his fingers. 'What's it feel like?'

He looked up when Loki failed to answer. The older god's lips were pressed thin. 'It feels like a part of you is missing,' Loki said. 'Even the smallest amount of magic is a part of you. You will regenerate it, of course; that is why we are mages and not wizards. But it still feels draining.'

'Oh,' Tony repeated. He rolled his shoulders and stared down at his hand. He wanted to learn how to summon his magic without closing his eyes and dropping straight into his mindscape; he wanted the constant connection that Loki had with his magic.

He knew that it would take time. But damn it, he wanted it now.
He failed, of course, and groaned at the smirk Loki wore before closing his eyes. *Stupid bastard*, Tony thought. He dismissed the thought soon enough and found his magic. It was sitting there, waiting. Tony summoned the energy and felt it travel, hot and bubbly, down his arm and out his fingertips. When Loki commanded it, Tony cut the flow off and slowly pulled himself back into the physical world.

The pulse of magic he held was about the size of a tennis ball. Tony flexed his fingers again and felt the pull; like there were dozens of rubber bands wrapped around each finger, trying to force him to close his hand into a fist.

'This is so weird yet *so* awesome,' Tony breathed.

'And to think that a year ago you were cursing magic,' Loki commented.

Tony wanted to flip him off but refrained. 'I still want to,' he said. 'Magic is really awesome and I respect it.' He heard Loki inhale sharply. 'But I'm first and foremost a man of science,' Tony added. 'Magic will always be your thing.'

Loki said nothing.

'So I just throw it?' Tony asked.

Loki hummed. 'Aim and throw.'

Tony turned to face the targets properly. He picked the one directly ahead of him; it had the torso of a person, smooth and white. The head appeared to be a soccer ball with a red smiley face painted on it.

'You have a sick sense of humour,' Tony said.

'Kettle, please meet pot,' Loki replied. 'Not *quite* how it goes, but it'll do,' he said. 'We'll make a Midgardian out of you yet.'

'Stop trying to make me ill and throw your magic!' Loki snapped. Tony heard the underlying mirth, though, so grinned, pulled his arm back, and *threw*.

His magic stayed firmly within his hand, even when Tony tried again. He tried to jump and throw, he told his magic aloud and in his head to hit the fucking target. The ball pulsed and sparked but remained put.

'What the hell?' Tony gasped when he'd finally given up.

'It is a part of you and doesn't want to leave,' Loki commented. *

**Unless it's to mate with Loki,** Tony thought but didn't say.

'You must command it to do what you want,' Loki continued. He didn't move, but Tony felt him shift on his feet. 'Will your magic to destroy the target, Stark. It is a part of you; it exists to protect you and serve you. *Command it*.'

Tony glanced at Loki from the corner of his eye. Loki was focused completely on Tony, arms folded and weight resting on his right leg. Loki raised his eyebrows, waiting, so Tony turned back to the target.
Okay, he mused, *command it*. Tony pulled his right arm back and focused on Mr Soccer Head. *Destroy*, he thought as loudly as he could and tossed.

His magic leapt out of his fingers and ripped across the room and into the target. There was an explosion, a brief flash, and the mannequin had a nice, scorched mark in its chest.

Tony felt like something had been cut out of him. He gasped and stumbled forward, but Loki was there, catching him with strong, cool arms. Tony felt his magic press against his skin, hot and fizzy and wanting to escape. But there was a fog over Loki; a blanket of cool, calm ice that separated them from each other.

A part of Tony screamed in rage; it wanted Loki, it wanted *out*. The rational part of Tony's brain knew that Loki was protecting them from an accidental mating. Tony took deep breaths as Loki settled him back on his feet.

'Okay...' Tony breathed.

'How do you feel?'

'Weird,' Tony said with a frown. 'Not tired, really, just...'

'Like a piece of you is missing.' A statement, not a query, and Tony nodded.

His hand still tingled from where his magic had once rested. His chest throbbed and his skin buzzed. Did Loki feel like this every time he used his magic? If he did, Tony's heart dropped at the thought of Loki, locked up on Asgard. He had been free to use his magic within the confines of his cell, but it *must* have felt that containment. He must have ached to be free of that tiny room, to roam around and connect with everything around it.

Tony had only been aware of his own magic for a couple of weeks; Loki had been in-tune with his for centuries. To be *trapped* like that...

'Anthony?'

Tony shook his head roughly and pushed against Loki. The Trickster made to let him go, but Tony dragged him back in at the last second and pressed a firm kiss to Loki’s lips.

'I'm sorry that I had a hand in sending you back to Asgard,' Tony murmured.

Loki let out a long, sad breath against Tony's mouth. 'You didn't know me then,' he said. 'We were enemies. I would have done the same, if our roles were reversed.'

'I know,' Tony said, 'but I'm still sorry.'

Loki was silent, and then; 'Thank you.'

Tony kissed him again before drawing back and shaking out his right arm. 'How long until I can do what you do? You don't just throw balls of magic; you throw freaking *waves*.'

Loki smiled slowly. 'In time, you will learn to do the same,' he said. 'Practise, my dear.'

'Okay, okay,' Tony said with a chuckle. 'Tony will be a good boy and practise.'

'And then I will reward you,' Loki said. There was a glint in his eyes and Tony grinned. 'Thoroughly,' Loki added.
'I look forward to it.' Tony clapped his hands together. 'What's next?'

{oOo}

After stopping for a quick lunch of sandwiches and chips, Loki led Tony into the middle of the cave and gestured for him to sit on the floor. Tony raised his eyebrows but didn't question his partner; he just sat on the thick red rug, reaching down to thread his fingers through the fluffy strands as Loki sat opposite him.

'Cross your legs and place your hands in your lap,' Loki ordered. Again Tony did as asked. Loki mirrored his position and took a deep breath, which Tony immediately copied. He'd learned long ago to just go with it; Loki knew far more than Tony ever would about magic and he was a fantastic teacher when Tony actually paid attention. 'Your mindscape,' was all Loki said, and Tony complied.

He closed his eyes and immediately fell. It was easier than ever before; crawl past emotions and feelings and the physical; take a step to the right (metaphorically, of course) and fall through the black; ignore the bright blue of the arc reactor and its warm, welcoming presence, and find the purple.

It was there, as always. Waiting and watching and leaping when Tony appeared. Tony had to ignore it in order to sort through his feelings and tuck them away. There was anger there from earlier; anger at Steve, at Loki, at everything. But it wasn't useful right now. In a battle, yes; he could use it to fuel his hatred of the Avengers. He needed to let it go for now.

It was tucked away. Everything was until it was only Tony, the deep dark peace that came with the physical realm no longer existing, and his magic.

Bright, purple, pulsing with untapped power. Tony flexed his fingers and then called his magic forward. It leapt into his fingers just like earlier and Tony felt his hand warm, fingertips tingling as he forced raw power from them.

'Open your eyes slowly.'

'You wanted me to summon my magic again, right?' Tony murmured softly and slowly as he did what Loki asked.

'Yes,' Loki said. Tony finally opened his eyes completely. A soft purple glow washed over everything and Tony glanced down. There was another ball of magic hovering between his cupped palms. It wasn't quite a ball; there were wisps escaping, curling around Tony's fingers, exploring just a touch before retreating back within Tony's control. It was fascinating how it was a part of Tony yet separate; very much him, yet its own thing completely.

'We are going to do a few exercises that should strengthen your bond with your magic and your control over it,' Loki said. 'Simple exercises, but useful in the long run. It will help you learn to channel your magic so that you can fight with... waves, like I do.'

'Okay,' Tony said.

'Are you ready?'
'Ready.'

It really was like stretching another muscle; Loki had Tony go through various things. He practised summoning and dismissing his magic, connecting with it yet not letting it out. He was made to throw his magic at various targets again, learning how to let go only a certain amount so as not to drain himself. He was even taught basic warding, though he pretty much failed at that; Tony couldn't control his magic enough just yet to morph it into specifically worded wards. And wards needed specifics to work.

The best thing, Tony thought, was when Loki showed him how to tap into his magic without falling into his mindscape; how to use it to defend himself and “feel” the environment. Loki could extend his magic beyond himself without it being visible. It made Loki able to tell who was within a room, who was in the room beyond him, who was in Stark Tower. Loki had such excellent control that he could track someone down across New York City without tiring himself.

Tony couldn't do that yet, but Loki had high hopes; and Loki wouldn't lie about it just to make Tony feel better.

All Tony could do for now was use his magic to consciously protect himself and to feel out the intentions of those around him. He could feel Loki, of course; the Trickster was sitting opposite him and they had a connection. Loki felt familiar, safe, warm yet cold; he liked Tony, so he was warm. He was a Frost Giant, so he was cold.

It made sense, once Tony thought about it.

The other thing about Loki was how... right he felt. Tony couldn't even put it into words and he was pretty sure that it wasn't just the bond their magic wanted between them. It was something else, something more. Loki was right and he was Tony's. Or, he would be. Tony and his magic both agreed on that...

Huh.

Magical training was exhausting, but whenever Loki felt that Tony was straining himself, he made Tony rest. Tony had no idea how much time passed; he was sure it was only a day, perhaps creeping into two. He wasn't really paying attention. Loki would let him know if they'd been there too long, or JARVIS would.

'Good,' Loki murmured, tone soft and soothing and bringing Tony back to the present. Shit. Tony really shouldn't have left himself wander like that, not now; it was dangerous. 'Go through the steps we did before.'

Tony repeated the steps a few times before he felt that familiar spark; something cold and blue moving just beyond him, Tony aware of it but unable to touch it. There was a slash of green, too, but it was smaller, insignificant when compared to the roiling mass that was Loki's Jötunn magic.

'Anthony,' Loki murmured.

'What?'

'Pull your magic back.'

Tony frowned. He was aware of Loki, both physically and otherwise; could hear him breathing, could feel him. 'What? I am.'

'No, you're- TONY!'
Somehow Tony's magic snapped forward, broke from his grip to jump at Loki. Tony tried to pull it back but it was too late; purple leaked out of him and swamped Loki, while the Frost Giant pulled his own magic back. Tony felt Loki lock his magic up, keep it separate from Tony's even as the mortal magic seeped into his skin. As Tony left his mindscape, he finally felt his magic stop. It seemed to snap for lack of a better word, some staying with Loki, most returning to Tony. The sudden rush had Tony shaking before exhaustion hit.

He sagged forward and only noticed that Loki was glowing a faint purple because Loki reached up to stop him face-planting into the Trickster's lap. Tony groaned as he fell against his partner and frowned when the purple glow slowly disappeared.

'What... the hell,' Tony muttered.

'Oh,' was all Loki said. His fingers flexed around Tony's arms.

'Oh? Oh?' Tony tried to pull himself up, but unfortunately needed Loki's help. He would have pouted if he wasn't so tired. 'What the fuck just happened, Loki?' he practically slurred.

'Your magic escaped,' Loki murmured.

'Yeah, I'm aware of that,' Tony said with an eye roll. Loki glowered at him, but it melted away when Tony yawned.

'You should rest,' Loki said.

'You glowed,' Tony responded. He wouldn't let Loki dismiss this. Tony's magic had escaped, had left him drained, and Loki had... had what?

'Yes,' Loki agreed. He removed one hand from Tony and flexed his fingers. His green eyes were narrowed. 'I have... never heard of that happening before.'

'What happened?' Tony growled.

'Your magic wanted mine; we've discussed that,' Loki told him.

'Yeah...'

'I managed to keep mine away; we did not bond,' Loki said. 'However, my body still instinctively recognised your magic and it... absorbed it.'

Tony blinked rapidly. 'Say what?'

'I absorbed it,' Loki repeated. He was still frowning, staring at his hand. 'I can feel it within me. It's... strange. It's you and yet me; mine yet not mine. I don't...' He finally looked back up at Tony, eyes confused. 'I have never heard of this happening; have never even read about it.'

'Well... you have two types of magic,' Tony said, 'and that's never happened before, right?'

'Indeed,' Loki said. 'I am unaware of any other being, born with their heritage's magic, absorbing another due to long exposure to another magical realm.'

'So maybe it's just you,' Tony suggested. He fought back a yawn. 'Maybe you're so... different, that you're able to do this.'

'But it is you, too,' Loki said. He was staring at Tony, eyes running over his face. 'Your magic jumped first; it wanted to connect. It is allowing me to use it.'
'So a mixture of our connection and... your uniqueness?' Tony tried.

'Perhaps,' Loki said. 'I will have to think on this further. It does mean something interesting, though.'

'What?'

'You may be able to siphon my magic and use it as your own,' Loki explained. 'We may be able to trade magic when one of us is low. The possibilities...' He was excited now; Tony could see it in his eyes, his face, the way his fingers were twitching, like Loki wanted to start experimenting immediately. Tony knew the feeling well.

He wanted to grin and high five Loki; dive straight into research, into more training, just... dive in, learn, explore.

But his body felt heavy. His chest was fluttering, like he didn't have enough magic, or what remained wanted to escape and merge with Loki; let Loki use it. Tony hated to admit defeat, but he wasn't an idiot; he needed sleep.

'When I've rested...' he murmured. Loki immediately snapped to attention, like he'd suddenly remembered that Tony was drained.

'Yes,' he said. 'You need to rest and rebuild your strength; sleep and I shall have a meal ready when you wake.'

Tony wanted to say "sounds good" and maybe try and get Loki to join him for a little fun before he had a nap. But he was already struggling to keep his eyes open and he'd drooped further back into Loki's hold. He felt strong, cool arms wrap around him, and then the ground was gone.

He was pretty sure that Loki carried him to the bed, but he was asleep when it happened. He'd just have to tease Loki about being adorable when he was awake.

Chapter End Notes

**Author's Note:** This chapter kind of took on a life of its own after I sat down to write it. I had planned to have Lily Walden appear in this one and some other big stuff was going to happen. But the more I wrote, the more I realised that I'd have to shift some other stuff around. So Tony's new assistant will be appearing in the next chapter.

And **GreenLoki**, have no fear; your favourite part is coming in chapter forty :)

I hope you enjoyed!

Dreamer
'According to your resume,' Tony said as he ran his eyes over it, 'you don't have a lot of experience working as an assistant; or even in an office environment.'

'Yeah,' the guy before him chuckled. He was only twenty-six, with messy blond hair, honey brown eyes and a charming smile. The kind of guy that Tony definitely would have tried to talk into his bed before Loki. 'I worked at McDonald's through high school,' he continued, 'and did some work for my mom's firm before going to college.'

'Where you studied software engineering?' Tony asked.

'Yeah,' the man repeated... crap, what was his name? Tony looked back down at the resume. Ah, right; Zane Grady. 'I want to work for a big gaming company and work on my own in my spare time. I'm still taking some courses.'

'So...' Tony frowned and looked back up at Zane. 'Why apply to be my assistant?'

'Well, you're the first name that comes to mind whenever I think of technology,' Zane said. 'And I figured that I'd be able to learn a fair bit even just being around you.' He shrugged a shoulder. 'Even if I don't get the job, meeting you is a highlight of my life.'

Tony chuckled. He'd seen about twenty people now and Zane was the best. Sure, he had no experience, but he was down to earth; someone that Tony could definitely trick into letting him skip meetings and not hand in paperwork.

Unfortunately, the job was already Loki's- or Lily's, rather. Tony was going to interview her soon, so he had to say goodbye to Zane.

'Well, Zane, I like you,' Tony stated and Zane beamed widely. 'I've still got some people to interview, but I'll get back to you.'

'Awesome,' Zane said. He stood and held his hand out. 'If I don't get hired it was still great meeting you, Mr Stark.'

Tony shook his hand before gesturing for him to leave. Maybe there was an opening in one of the departments re-developing the operating system and creating new apps for the StarkPhones.

Zane closed the door behind himself but it immediately opened once more. Tony looked up and frowned when Pepper stepped into the room.

'You don't have to coddle me,' he grumbled as he shuffled Zane's resume back into the pile. He picked up the next one and flicked through it.

'I know that,' Pepper said. 'I just want to see how it's going.'

'Swimmingly,' Tony muttered, ignored the sigh Pepper gave him. 'The guy I just saw- Zane Grady- was pretty great.'

'Does he have a lot of experience?' Pepper asked. She actually sounded interested but Tony just
shrugged.

'Not in an office environment but he's got a tech head and he's passionate about his work. I think he'd be a good asset to Stark Industries.'

Pepper was nodding slowly when Tony glanced at her. 'Do you want me to look into any other possible openings within the company?'

'I'd appreciate it,' Tony said sincerely. It'd save him the time and effort. 'Who's next,' he then mumbled and finally looked at the letterhead of the resume he had. He almost laughed. Lily Walden.

'I'd like to stay, if you don't mind,' Pepper said.

Tony felt his magic flare up; like he'd downed an entire bottle of scotch and it was currently warming his chest and gut. But it was bubbly, a distinct hint of **bite**. Tony smoothed his fingers over the resume and handed it to Pepper. Instead of lashing out and doing something that he might regret- and that was a big **might** - Tony handed Pepper the resume and said, 'Sure.'

Pepper smiled brightly at him and Tony stared at her. He couldn't read any deception on her face; no little tick that told of her plans to relay everything back to Coulson. That bothered him more than what Pepper was doing. Was Pepper just that good a liar? Or was Tony too close to her to see the deception?

Pepper opened the door and stepped into the hallway. 'Lily Walden?' she called. There was a rustle, followed by Pepper saying, 'Mr Stark will see you now.'

Pepper came back into the office and after a beat Lily Walden followed.

Tony let his eyes light up and trail from the top of Lily's head down to her flat yet professional shoes. Her golden-brown hair was pulled back in a low ponytail and there was only the slightest bit of makeup painted across her lips and eyes. Eyes that were a light blue-grey, meeting Tony's from across the room with a hint of mischief.

Tony tilted his head down to the table. **Bad Tony, bad**, he thought even as lust shot through him. **Oh, well**, he mused as he looked up to check Lily out again. **Nobody will expect anything different of me. I'm allowed to look.**

Tony had no idea where Loki had gotten the pants suit but it fit Lily pretty damn well; dark green with lighter stripes, a pale yellow dress shirt, a small golden L pinned to her lapel.

'Miss Walden,' Tony said and leaned across the table to shake her hand.

'Mr Stark,' Lily responded. 'It's a pleasure to meet you; thank you for taking the time to see me.'

'How could I not with a resume as impressive as this,' Tony said. He picked it up to brandish it at Lily, who's lips curled up only slightly. **Already acting like she doesn't like me**, Tony thought with an inward chuckle.

Tony had written the resume himself, complete with years and years of work experience in various offices. Lily had even served in a political office for a short time.

'So, tell me why you want this job,' Tony stated. He tossed the resume down and leaned back, arms folded over his chest.
Lily raised her eyebrows. 'You don't wish to speak about my experience?' she asked, that soft American drawl so different to how Loki usually sounded.

'Not really,' Tony said with a shrug.

'Mr Stark,' Pepper murmured.

'What?' Tony frowned at her, then at Lily. 'I can read a resume; it's impressive. In all honesty I don't care all that much about past work experiences and references. I want to know about you. If you become my assistant, we need to at least vaguely get along. If we don't, you need to prove that you can stand up to me and get me to work; in other words, do your job.' He grinned widely. 'I'm a hard man to work for, Miss Walden.'

Lily blinked slowly at him before tilting her head. 'I can handle anything you throw at me, Mr Stark,' she said. 'And if you throw yourself at me, I won't hesitate to kick you between the legs.'

Pepper stepped forward to intervene but Tony was already laughing. 'Oh, I like you,' he said through a snicker. 'Okay, Lily, let's go through a scenario.'

'I would prefer “Miss Walden”,' Lily said, 'but continue.'

Tony raised his eyebrows. 'Okay, Miss Walden.' Lily frowned at him. 'Say that I've got a meeting at seven am. I've been partying the night before and my gorgeous boyfriend Logan is wrapped around me, which is very nice. You walk into my bedroom and have to get me awake, out of bed, and dressed in twenty minutes. What do you do?'

Tony thumped his arms onto the table and stared Lily down, eyes focused on her completely.

He saw a bit of Loki in the way Lily mulled over the scenario; the thin press of lips, the narrowing of her eyes.

'I would, first and foremost, bring coffee,' Lily said, 'and I would know exactly how you take it, as it would be part of my job as your right-hand woman for all things Stark Industries related. I'd have phoned you ahead of time, over and over again until you had no choice but to answer the phone or break it. You'd be up but not happy about it when I arrive, and I'd use coffee and some form of greasy food to lure you away from your boyfriend.

'I feel like he would be helpful rather than a hindrance,' Lily explained, 'because if you're with him-if you love him- you would continue to work so that you can provide for him. He'd remind you that you work for a reason and that you love your company. Once you're out of bed I'd dress you myself if I had to; your clothes would have been laid out the day before, whether on your dresser or in your closet. After that it's a simple thing to drag you through Stark Tower to whatever room you're needed in, or downstairs into a car that your driver would have waiting.'

Lily stopped and stared right back at Tony, both eyebrows up. Tony smiled slowly.

'Say I'm fucking my boyfriend when you walk in,' he started, and Pepper gasped and hissed a loud, 'Tony!' 

Tony held his hand up to silence her- because it was a legitimate scenario he would have posed to any possible assistant eventually- and Lily just smiled slowly. 'I'd tell you to finish or throw the coffee at you,' she said.

'I could fire you for throwing hot liquid at me,' Tony said. 'Sue you, even.'
'But you wouldn't unless I hurt your partner,' Lily retorted. 'You'd like the fact that I broke the rules of workplace etiquette; that I stood up to you. You would grumble and complain but get out of bed. And once you were awake and dry, you'd get dressed and come with me.'

Tony chuckled and leaned back. 'Okay, I would,' he agreed. Damn, Loki was pretty good at this. It was weird, having Loki's ire directed at him once again, but in all honesty it wasn't that difficult a game to play; Tony and Loki still pretended to hate each other when they faced each other in battle, and countless times Loki had been legitimately pissed off at Tony over something or other.

This would be fun.

'I like you,' Tony decided.

'I'm thrilled,' Lily responded.

Tony's smile grew. 'You have excellent references, Miss Walden; a lot of experience for some great companies. And you don't care about who I am; you just want to do your job, and will do anything to get it done.' He nodded. 'I'll get back to you.'

'Thank you for seeing me, Mr Stark; I appreciate the opportunity,' Lily said. She stood and they shook hands again; Lily even went out of her way to shake Pepper's hand and thank her.

As soon as Lily was gone, the door shutting behind her, Tony rounded on Pepper; 'I want her.' Pepper jumped and stared at Tony with wide eyes. 'Tony, I thought Logan was...' She trailed off and Tony's mouth fell open.

'Wait, what?'

'You said that you and Logan were doing well...' Pepper tried again.

'No!' Tony gaped. 'Jesus fucking Christ, Pepper!' Did she really think so little of him? Tony was dating someone and Tony Stark didn't cheat. The few relationships he'd had hadn't lasted long, but fuck, Tony wasn't a cheater. He slept around when he was single and he stayed faithful when he was dating. Especially with Loki... just the thought of cheating on him made Tony's magic hurt.

'I...' Pepper frowned and a blush began to spread across her face. 'I'm sorry, Tony, I thought-'

'Yeah, I know what you thought,' he interrupted with a glare. Pepper's face darkened. 'I meant that I want her as my assistant.'

'I see,' Pepper said. She cleared her throat and clearly tried to move on; 'Can I see her resume?'

'Whatever.' Tony turned his back on Pepper, ignored her completely when she slid the papers from the table and started going through them. That accusation had hurt. It had really hurt. Tony could usually get over things like that easily; people were always badmouthing him, so it was nothing new.

Tony frowned and rubbed his chest through his dress shirt. It ached. Not his arc reactor and not even his heart; that space filled with magic was throbbing and Tony felt like he needed an advil. Was it Pepper's insinuation that Tony would cheat on Loki? Tony very much doubted that his magic would be okay with anyone else. It had a bond with Loki; it wanted a deeper bond.

And... Tony kind of wanted that, too.
Am I in love with him? Tony thought. No, I can't be. I'm not capable of that and neither is Loki... right?

'Do you want me to call some of Lily's references?' Pepper questioned.

Tony blinked back to himself and said, 'If you want. I don't need to hear what they have to say; I like her.' He and JARVIS had already set up fake people for Pepper or others to call. It had taken a while to get all the voice prints and answers to possible questions recorded, but it had been done long ago.

'I'll call them,' Pepper decided, 'and get back to you.' Tony just nodded. 'Do you want me to bring in the next one?'

'Whatever,' Tony said. He could practically feel Pepper glaring at him but ignored it. Pepper was the one out of line, not Tony. And he didn't feel like mending bridges any more. Pepper stepped out of the room and Tony sighed. There were still dozens of interviews to get through and now Tony had to sit through them with Pepper.

Joy

{oOo}

'Stark has an assistant,' Coulson announced after closing Fury's office door. Fury raised his eyebrows and Coulson shrugged a shoulder. 'I thought you'd want to know.'

'I do,' Fury agreed. 'But usually you lead up to Stark.' He shook his head, dismissing it. 'Tell me everything.'

'Miss Potts called to let me know that Stark did, indeed, gather forty odd people to interview. There were a few that Miss Potts liked, however Stark favoured a woman named Lily Walden.'

Fury waited, silent.

'Miss Potts forwarded me Miss Walden's resume.' Coulson pulled the papers from the folder he was carrying and handed it over. Fury glanced over the resume as Coulson continued. 'I had an agent check into Lily Walden's background and everything she provided Stark checks out.'

'So Stark's hiring her?' Fury questioned. When Coulson nodded, he asked, 'Has Walden accepted?'

'Twenty minutes ago, which is why I'm speaking to you,' Coulson said. 'Miss Walden starts next Monday.'

'Okay,' Fury said. He dropped the resume and leaned over his desk. 'Do you think we can get to her?'

Coulson was silent for a beat; either really thinking about it, or just keeping Fury waiting. It could be either, Fury knew. 'I think that there's a high chance of Miss Walden agreeing to work for us,' he eventually said. 'From what Miss Potts told me, Miss Walden didn't seem to like Stark.'
'So why offer to work for him?'

'Stark takes care of his employees,' Coulson said. He ignored the grunt Fury let out. 'He pays well and having Stark Industries on your resume, and a possible reference from Tony Stark himself, can go a long way in getting someone their dream job.'

'Makes sense,' Fury muttered. 'So we'll approach Walden after she's settled in.'

Coulson nodded in agreement. 'I'll let Romanov and Barton know to keep an eye on Stark and Walden's interactions. Miss Potts has agreed to let us know how they're going.'

'How did you convince her to do that?'

'We care about Stark's health,' Coulson said with a completely straight face. Fury chuckled. 'She continues to keep me updated on Stark's relationship with Logan Thomas so it seems unlikely that she'll stop now.'

Fury nodded slowly before saying, 'I trust your judgement on this. Keep me updated.'

'Yes, Director Fury,' Coulson responded. He left as quickly as he had come and Fury stared at the door for a minute before picking up Lily Walden's resume.

He went through it again, taking his time to read over the words. Lily Walden was experienced in regards to working within offices and taking care of people; she had been an assistant in various capacities for going on thirteen years now.

Fury sighed and flipped to the next page. He hoped that Walden would help them; could help them. They were getting nowhere with Stark's security and tech. They needed someone on the inside; someone with more security clearance than Romanov or Barton. With Logan Thomas out of the question, Lily Walden was their best best.

They needed Stark's tech. And they needed Stark off the team before he hurt someone. But the latter couldn't happen without the former, complicating what should have basically been a snatch and grab.

Fury scowled as he stared down at the paper. *Motherfucking Tony Stark.*

{oOo}

'Jesus Christ,' Tony muttered. Loki smiled weakly at him; he didn't try to comfort Tony, or make excuses. He knew that he'd made a mistake and was now suffering the consequences. As well as Tony's glare and mutters about “idiots” as he collected his medical kit.

'I can't believe you,' Tony said as he snapped the case open.

'You act as though you've never injured yourself while experimenting with new things,' Loki commented.

Tony glared at him and Loki smiled brightly. 'You're an asshole,' Tony grunted. 'And look what
you've done to yourself!'

Sighing, Loki looked down at his arm. He'd somehow both burned himself and cut his arm open. His right fingers were blistered and bright red, while the skin beneath was a deep, dark blue. The colour spread from Loki's fingertips, up his arm, to his collarbones. It was still travelling; Loki could feel the prickle over his neck and cheeks, indicating that his skin colour was changing. There was also a dip between his pecs, a dribble of blue like someone had poured paint down his shirt.

There was also another burn; a thin one, red and welted, across his chest.

'Goddamn it, Loki,' Tony growled.

'Please stop being annoying,' Loki said. 'If you aren't going to help me, then shut up.'

'Ooh, feisty.' Loki snorted, which made Tony crack a smile. He wasn't really angry; just worried and a tad annoyed. He and Loki had been working side-by-side for the past hour; Tony on Genesis and Loki on some type of potion or poison. The Tower was empty so they felt safe, for now. Tony had whited out the walls of his workshop, though; just in case.

Loki hadn't actually been sure what he was creating, because he was mixing plants that he'd never mixed before. Which Tony didn't think was safe but he couldn't exactly judge Loki when he himself often played with dangerous goods.

But Loki had hurt himself. Something had exploded and he was burned; red and purple blood was leaking from the cut that went from his wrist down to his elbow. The cut didn't look too deep, but Tony was still concerned.

'I will heal,' Loki murmured.

'Yeah,' Tony agreed. Because he knew that; Loki always healed. You'd have to actually chop Loki's arm off to injure him permanently. 'But still...' He took Loki's wrist in his left hand and gently turned it over. Running his right fingers gently along the skin beside the cut, Tony stared down at it. The skin had been peeled back and it probably looked worse than it was. Already Tony could see the blood flow easing, the skin beginning to cling back together at the beginning and end of the slash.

Tony's fingers began to tingle and before he could really think about it a pulse of magic shot down his arm and out. He gasped and let Loki go but the damage was already done. A purple glow engulfed Loki, who sat and just stared as Tony's magic seeped into his skin.

As soon as the glow was gone the two gods could see what had happened; the cut had knitted itself back together and was more a long red line than an open wound now. There was still a mix of blood and liquid and burns across Loki's arm but Tony's magic had definitely healed him.

'Let me guess,' Tony said slowly, licking his lips before continuing, 'you've never heard of that happening?'

'You know that I can heal you,' Loki said. He kept his eyes on his arm. 'However, it's something that I must consciously think about; I have to use my magic to find what has broken and then fix it.' His arm twitched. 'You did that without conscious thought.' He finally looked up at Tony. 'Were you thinking of healing me?'

Tony flushed slightly and ran a hand through his hair. 'Uh... maybe a little?' he offered. 'I didn't think that I could; I was just kinda thinking that it'd be awesome if I could heal like you can.'
'I see.'

'Is that... because of our bond?' Tony asked. 'Or is it some weird mix of things that you haven't figured out yet?'

Loki sighed. Okay, so maybe Tony had sounded a tad annoyed, but he just wanted answers. Ever since their last magic lesson, Loki had been close-lipped on just what he and Tony were capable of.

'I know that you want answers, Anthony,' Loki said, 'but I don't have them. Yes, I know quite a bit about what we can expect from our magic wanting to bond us; and I know quite a bit about what bonding would do to us.

'But other than that, I have no idea why I can siphon your magic,' Loki told him. 'I don't know the extent to which we will be able to do it, if you can siphon my magic, or what we can use each other's magic for. I simply don't know. We will have to experiment and practice and learn together. And we can't do that until you get a better grip on your magic.'

'I'm getting better,' Tony argued. He saw Loki's eyes soften.

'I know that; I wasn't implying that you weren't,' Loki said. 'I want to know just as badly as you do, Tony. But we will have to be patient.'

Groaning, Tony reached up to scrub both hands across his face. 'Okay... okay, I'm sorry.' He dropped his hands. 'I know that you're not purposely leaving me in the dark.' He thought back to when Loki had first told him about the bond; 'Well, not any more,' he added.

'I'm not,' Loki agreed.

'Right. So; sorry.' Tony bent down to kiss his partner. 'After we destroy the next base we'll get some more magic training in. Then Lily Walden can, hopefully, target the Helicarrier.'

Loki chuckled as Tony pulled away. 'I'm looking forward to wandering around the craft with Fury's permission.'

Tony smiled but it froze on his face when Loki frowned and looked past him.

'What is it?' Tony asked.

'I thought I felt something...' Loki murmured, still staring at the doors.

Tony chewed on his bottom lip before saying, 'JARVIS, clear the doors.' JARVIS did as asked; the walls remained white but the doors went crystal clear.

There was nothing beyond them; just the hallway, currently dark due to inactivity.

Tony turned back to Loki. 'Babe?'

For once Loki ignored the nickname. He continued to stare at the doors until JARVIS said, 'There is nobody else in the Tower, Mr Stark, Mr Liesmith.' He paused. 'The top fifteen floors are empty.'

'My apologies,' Loki said. He shook his head and his eyes darted back to Tony. 'It must be your magic.'

'Oh, so now it's my fault that you're seeing things?' Tony asked.

Frowning, Loki said, 'I didn't claim to see anything.'
Tony chuckled at the little pout Loki was wearing; it was cute. 'Whatever,' he said and turned back to the medical kit. 'Let's finish cleaning you up.'

{oOo}

People looked at Clint and saw all-brawn, no-brain, which Clint thought was understandable. He wasn't very tall but he was fit, his hair often looked blond rather than brown, and he tended to glare at things and not speak a whole heap.

But Clint was smart; he was a SHIELD agent. Fury used him for more than just his skill with a bow and a gun. Clint tended to see things differently; look at things differently compared to the majority. He had, after all, been the first to realise that the Tesseract was a two-way door. Why the scientists hadn't thought of that first was beyond him.

Now, because of all of that, Clint tended to look at the Tony Stark mission differently to Natasha and Steve. Steve just wanted to protect the team and the innocent people who usually got hurt when Stark fucked around, so he was all for getting Tony off the team. He didn't need to know about SHIELD's operation to take Stark's technology. Natasha knew- had insisted upon it, actually- so she and Clint were tasked with getting said tech.

It was difficult, not only because Stark was a paranoid bitch (and with good reason, really), but because Tony Stark wasn't called a genius for nothing.

Tony Stark was the premier genius when it came to all things weapons and technology. He was an expert in multiple fields of study, he could build absolutely anything given enough time and very few tools, and he was so very, very good at thinking his way out of situations, no matter how dangerous. Back Stark into a corner and he'd more than likely blow his way out, killing a few dozen people in the process.

Because of that, Clint didn't approach the mission with nearly as much ego as Natasha. Natasha was used to winning. She was pretty, she was female, people tended to underestimate her. The problem with Stark, though, was that he wasn't swayed by a pretty face. Yeah, he'd flirt and fuck and act like an idiot to lure someone into his bed, but that didn't mean he'd underestimate whoever he was with.

Clint had watched. He'd hacked- with some help from SHIELD's scientists- and he'd found that Stark never let his guard down. Not around the Avengers, not around Pepper Potts, not even around his one-nighters. Nobody was allowed access to Stark's workshop without the man there, not even Logan.

Logan Thomas was another spanner in the works. Stark no longer went out partying, fucking whatever hot person he brought home. No, he was in a committed relationship (what the fuck?) and he and Logan were... close, Clint thought, didn't even begin to cover it. He could see it, read it in the way Stark reacted after Loki's two attacks. Logan was somehow clever and interesting enough to snare Stark's full attention.

Clint honestly wouldn't be surprised if they got hitched one day.
Which was why Clint was adamant that SHIELD leave Thomas out of this. Clint was absolutely positive that Logan Thomas would turn them into Stark quicker than they could try and bribe him. Clint could see how into Thomas Stark was, but Thomas was just as infatuated with Stark.

Clint shook those thoughts from his head as he entered the stairwell. After the destruction of the last SHIELD base, Clint had decided that Loki had to have inside help. It was obvious, even Steve had voiced the idea when Clint had spoken to him about it. Fury, Coulson and Natasha were trying to flush out the mole themselves; there was no need to bring the rest of the Avengers in just yet. Bruce would be helpful, Steve and Thor not so much; neither knew much about computers or covert operations.

While the others worked on finding the mole, Clint had decided to see if he could find out anything else about Stark; either by watching him or hacking his shit.

The problem with this entire operation, Clint thought, was that now they needed Stark. If anyone could find a possible leak in SHIELD's computers, it was Stark and JARVIS. And Clint wasn't quite ready to believe that Stark was the problem; there was nothing for Stark to gain out of destroying SHIELD, except maybe getting SHIELD off of his back. But that wasn't Stark's MO; he wasn't a murderer.

Fury still wasn't convinced. Clint knew that Natasha was getting to him and Coulson. All the similarities between Loki and Stark, between Iron Man and Genesis, was beginning to convince them that Stark was the bad guy; or that he was becoming one.

But Clint wasn't convinced. He'd need absolute proof before he accepted that Stark had completely fallen off of the fucking rails.

The Tower was empty and Clint's footsteps echoed in the stairwell as he climbed the concrete stairs. Clint knew that Steve and Natasha were on the Helicarrier; Bruce and Thor were currently with Jane Foster discussing a possible new security system for SHIELD. That left Tony, and possibly Logan, in the Tower.

Clint was supposed to be gone, too, but he'd barely taken a step onto the Helicarrier before a scientist had rushed him, introducing Clint to a new little bug that should render JARVIS deaf and blind. It wasn't little, really; about the size of a thick slice of bread. But it fit easily into Clint's trouser pocket. While most of their devices apparently worked at blocking JARVIS, this one, the scientist had said, was the very best. Clint had to test it.

So Clint was testing it. If Stark stumbled upon him, if JARVIS asked what he was doing, Clint would say he was training. He'd made a point over the past few months to be spotted by JARVIS crawling through the Tower's air ducts, stalking his way down halls, practising Sneaking up on the Avengers. Clint hadn't stayed alive this long by slacking off.

Clint stepped out of the stairwell slowly, glanced around to see if anyone was about. The corridor was empty so Clint continued forward. There were no alarms on the stairs, the corridors, Clint knew; only Stark's actual workshop was alarmed- the doors and air-ducts, too. Clint had learned that the hard way.

The corridor was dark, lights only flickering on when JARVIS detected somebody approaching or getting off of the elevator. That boded well for Clint so he continued forward quickly. His shoes didn't make a noise on the concrete, his tight-fitted clothing didn't even whisper, and Clint got all the way to the end without JARVIS making a peep.

*The device works,* Clint thought with a grin. He finally reached Stark's workshop and noted that the
windows were frosted but the doors weren't. Curious, he crept further forward, pausing for a minute after every two steps. When he reached the door he kept most of his body hidden behind the opaque glass and twisted, just so, to peer carefully into the workshop-

Clint's heart nearly stopped.

The workshop looked as it always did; filled with tech and machines and broken projects Stark hadn't bothered getting rid off. DUM-E had a mop and was cleaning up a spill of something purple, while behind it Stark was bending over a large medical kit. He had a heap of gauze in one hand, stained with the same purple liquid DUM-E was cleaning.

Sitting on a stool just before Stark was... was something, Clint didn't know what. A humanoid creature, that much was clear, wearing a t-shirt and jeans, but with skin the colour of the ocean at its darkest depths, and eyes red like freshly spilled blood. There were markings on its skin, but Clint didn't care about those.

What the fuck was Stark doing? Who the hell was the blue creature? Was it...

Clint's heart stopped again.

The creature was changing; not a spark of light, not a ripple of air, just white skin bleeding through the blue, making it disappear. Clint watched as familiar pale features became clear, red eyes turning to green, black hair remaining fixed.

_Loki_.

Stark was cleaning up Loki, dabbing at a large red line that went from Loki's wrist all the way up to his elbow. Now that Clint looked he noticed daggers and beakers and plants and what looked like a fucking cauldron on the table, the medical kit sitting amongst it all.

Stark leaned into Loki's personal space, murmured something Clint couldn't hear, and Loki laughed. One large, pale hand slid into the back pocket of Stark's jeans and Clint nearly fell right over when Stark bent down to press a kiss to Loki's lips.

Fuck. _Fuck_. Clint knew there was something off about Logan- what the fuck had Thor said, all those weeks ago?

"*My brother is a gifted shape-shifter. Be wary of anyone new you meet, anyone you happen across seemingly by chance. Loki can change his shape, his gender, his eyes and everything else. He has not done so in a while, and only I can detect it. Do not fall for charming and seemingly sincere words, my friends, for Loki will cut your tongue out given the chance."

_Fuck_. How the hell had they all been this blind? Clint _knew_ that Logan looked familiar, but every time he really thought about it his head hurt and he ended up moving onto something else.

"*Little Hawk... you have heart... now go kill your friends...*"

Clint's eyes widened and he bit his lip to stop a snarl of pure fury escaping. He'd had Loki in his head before... was he still in there, now?

Fuck. _Fuck_, _fuck_, _fuck_.

Clint had to leave, had to run, had to warn the Avengers and SHIELD- Fury- that it _was_ Stark who was the spy, the mole, feeding information to Loki so that Loki could destroy them all. Goddamn it, Stark was probably the robot, too; not an android but _Iron Man_, working with the villain
because he fucking was one.

Natasha was right. Fury and Coulson had been right to fear Stark. They had been worried about him becoming Loki but it was too late; he'd already joined-

The walls beside Clint turned clear suddenly, exposing his position immediately to the two men in the workshop. Loki was already staring at him, Stark still turning around, and when Stark's eyes found Clint's they narrowed. He said something.

Loki flickered out of sight.

Clint didn't make a noise; he simply turned and ran. Now his footsteps echoed around the corridor and his heart beat fast in his chest. Clint made it to the stairwell, ripped the door open and stepped through-

Loki was waiting for him.

Clint lashed out but Loki was too fast- had always been too fast- and he grabbed Clint's hand and crushed.

Clint cried out as his fingers broke, but the sound cut off when Loki suddenly punched him in the head. Clint fell like a sack of bricks, head hitting the floor with a loud crack. His eyesight swam and pain was all Clint was really aware of. He managed to peel his eyes open, and though everything was hazy, Clint could see Loki.

The Trickster reached out with blood-soaked fingers and ran them across Clint's forehead. Clint couldn't hold back a hiss of pain.

'Well, well, well; the Little Hawk,' Loki said. 'Were you spying on Anthony?'

Anthony, Clint thought, that fucker's sleeping with the enemy.

Loki tsked and slid his fingers across what must have been a thick cut on Clint's head. Clint gritted his teeth but a whimper still escaped; it made Loki laugh.

'Come along, Barton,' Loki said. 'Let me tell you everything you wish to know.'

Clint saw Loki move, felt wet fingers press against his temple. Then he was unconscious.

Chapter End Notes

**Author's Note:** You can thank **GreenLoki** for this quick update; she convinced me to post it as soon as I was done.

This story keeps getting away from me. I actually had to cut this chapter off a bit because it was so long, which is why you get a bit of a cliffhanger. I've actually had the “Clint discovers Tony/Loki” bits written for MONTHS. So it's nice to get it out now.

Anywho! The story now has 53 chapters planned, but as always, that is subject to
change. I'm betting that it reaches 56 chapters. 56 feels like a good number.

Also; **GreenLoki**, I'm sorry. The best Clint parts are coming in chapter 41. My bad :D

Dreamer
'… JARVIS didn't see him. At all.'

'Calm down, Anthony.'

'Calm down? That fucker got through my Tower, into my workshop, and I had no fucking idea!'

'You have the device now. Simply take it apart and discover how it works.'

'I'll fucking take him apart!'

'Stark…'

Clint groaned. His head throbbed, so did his hand, and... his arms? Clint couldn't remember why he was in pain, though it was definitely a familiar feeling. He'd been caught before and this pain felt like the by-product of being tied to a chair, his head lolling forward and his muscles tightening from being in one place for too long.

But why did his hand hurt? Why was his head *throbbing* from his temple right back to the base of his skull?

Clint frowned and twitched, found that his arms and legs were definitely bound to-

His eyes flew open.

*Stark.*

Loki and Stark were standing a few feet from him, Loki leaning against a large stainless steel bench. He watched as Stark paced back and forth, his movements agitated, the man himself
furious.

They weren't looking at Clint, didn't realise that he was conscious.

'I will be sure to make Barton believe that the device doesn't work,' Loki said.

'That's not the point,' Stark growled. He stopped pacing and turned to face the god. 'They actually managed to make something that blocks JARVIS! You heard him; he had no idea Clint was there. It did something—looped the camera feeds without JARVIS knowing—'

'So you've told me,' Loki interrupted smoothly. Stark must have made a face, because Loki smiled swiftly at him.

'Even now, JARVIS can't see with this thing here,' Stark growled. 'He must have set something up in JARVIS' hardware, because if this thing can wirelessly loop JARVIS' feeds...’ He trailed off and waved the blackbox at Loki, who watched with an unimpressed look.

Clint couldn't help but swear; they must have searched him after knocking him out.

The noise drew their attention; Loki looked intrigued, amused, while Stark just looked pissed.

'Well hey there, Angry Bird,' Stark quipped.

'Fuck you!' Clint spat.

Loki chuckled and Stark grinned.

'Oh, Clint, I'm hurt,' Stark pouted, a hand on his chest, covering the glow of the arc reactor. 'I thought we were friends.'

'Team mates don't sleep with the enemy, Stark!' Clint snarled. 'How long have you been fucking Loki, huh? And you helped him destroy SHIELD bases you piece of-

Clint shouted in surprise and a fair amount of pain when Loki suddenly appeared beside him and backhanded him. The fucker had always been strong and one simple slap was enough to have Clint reeling. His already aching head throbbed in fresh pain and Clint felt dizzy. After a couple of seconds he managed to get his bearings and toss a glare at Loki.

'Please don't talk to Anthony like that, Barton,' Loki said, tone pleasant as you please. 'I'm quite fond of him, and take any slight against him is a personal slight against me.'

Clint spat at his boots. Loki raised an eyebrow.

'Do you want me to hit you again?' he asked.

'Do whatever the fuck you want,' Clint said, 'I'm not telling you anything.'

Loki laughed. Behind him Stark looked amused, too, but he was still pissed over the blackbox SHIELD had designed; Clint knew him well enough to read the fury barely concealed behind his smirk.

Clint grinned at Stark in satisfaction; if the blackbox worked once, SHIELD could reproduce it, make it better, get around JARVIS and find out exactly what Stark and Loki's plans were.

'We don't want information, Barton,' Loki said. 'We have that in... Stark, what's the Midgardian phrase?'
'Spades,' Stark answered immediately, 'we have information in spades.'

'Yes,' Loki said. He turned back to Clint and smiled sharply. 'We have access to most of your computers, Barton. JARVIS is what his creator made him, and his creator is very talented.'

Clint growled.

'Now, now.' Loki patted his injured cheek and Clint couldn't contain the wince, the gasp of pain that followed when Loki pinched the split skin. He was pretty sure his cheek was broken. 'Don't be like that, Clinton,' Loki continued. 'We used to be friends, did we not?'

'You took over my mind,' Clint spat with a scowl. He glanced at Tony. 'Is that what you did to him?'

Stark laughed. 'Me? No, Barton. I joined forces with Loki of my own free will. Loki hasn't mind-raped me.'

'Although I am fascinated by it,' Loki purred. His green eyes were darker now, fixed on Stark, and Clint saw Tony return the gesture. When Loki stood and approached the inventor, Clint wasn't surprised to see him stick his tongue down Stark's throat.

His stomach roiled, disgust spilling through him as he watched Stark drop the blackbox to fist his hands in Loki's shirt, using the grip to drag the Trickster closer. How could Stark let Loki touch him like that? Loki had ripped people apart, had burned down so many buildings, had killed innocent people. And yet Stark pressed up against him, moaned, sucked on Loki's tongue like it was okay, like he wasn't a super hero betraying everybody to work with evil.

When they broke apart Clint made sure that they saw his disgust and Stark grinned even as he licked his lips.

'What's wrong, Barton?' he cooed. 'Not okay with a little man-man lovin’?'

'I am when one of those men is a fucking monster who—'

This time it was Stark who hit him and his punch was almost as hard as Loki's. Clint grunted in pain, surprise mingling, and hissed when Stark grabbed him by the longer hairs at the top of his head. He wrenched Clint's head back, forcing Clint to meet his eyes.

'Don't you ever,' he snarled, brown eyes dark with promise, 'call him a monster. Do it again and I won't let you live. I'll gut you right here, in this workshop, and then shed a fake tear at your funeral.'

Clint stared him down but didn't say a word and soon Stark let him go. Clint licked the inside of his teeth and tasted blood.

Loki smiled brightly at Stark when the genius turned back to him. They shared another kiss but Clint didn't watch; he'd seen enough.

'What are we doing with him?' Stark asked when he and Loki broke apart.

'What do you want to do with him?' Loki replied.

Clint was surprised that Loki bothered to ask. Since when did the God of Mischief listen to anyone, let alone work with them?
What the hell did Stark promise him? Clint thought.

'So many ideas,' Stark mused.

Clint shifted as best he could on the seat- metal, not bolted down, but it wasn't like he could tip himself over and roll to safety. Loki was too fast.

'I want to send him back to the Avengers,' Stark finally decided.

Both Clint and Loki looked at Stark in surprise.

'Really?' Loki asked. Clint had expected torture, not... his return. 'I thought we might have some fun with him.' Loki smirked sharply at Clint. 'There are so many poisons and potions I want to test. I know how they affect Æsir, I don't know how they affect Midgardians. You could test your magic on him; see if you have enough control to make him feel pain.'

Clint's head was racing, thoughts disjointed, both from whatever the fuck they were talking about and the blows to the head he'd received. He was sure that Loki had laid into him before he'd woken.

Magic? Tony Stark had magic? That made no fucking sense, unless...

What the fuck had Loki done to him?

'I think we should send him back,' Stark repeated. 'We already know that you have a connection with him; that can still come in handy. We might need him in the future.'

'Fuck you, Stark!' Clint snarled and fought against his bonds. He wasn't sure what they'd tied him with- thicker than cable-ties, too smooth to be rope. 'I won't fucking help you, got that?'

Stark chuckled and Loki smiled. 'My dear, sweet Little Hawk,' Loki said. He pushed off of the table he was leaning against so that he could circle Clint, drink him in, like he was surveying a pig that he wanted to slice.

Clint gulped.

'I no longer have the Tesseract, but the connection between us is still there,' Loki said. 'I can infiltrate your mind whenever I please, and it would be a leisurely stroll. You are strong, yes, but I am stronger; your thoughts would be a delight to pick at. I could do the same with that scientist, what was his name...'

He trailed off and grabbed Clint's shoulder, squeezed too tightly, and Clint couldn't help but buck up, try to throw Loki clear. Loki didn't move.

'Selvig,' Stark answered instead and Clint heard Loki hum.

'That was his name,' Loki said. 'He worked with Lady Jane, did he not?'

'You mean Thor's girlfriend?' Stark asked. He was looking over Clint's shoulder and Loki must have nodded or something, because he then said, 'Yeah, Selvig works with her.'

'He could come in handy, too,' Loki mused. 'Perhaps I'll take Jane to Asgard. She can be our bargaining chip. Thor would come for her with no thought of his own safety or what trap I could be laying.'

'Leave her alone!' Clint snarled and bucked again. Loki finally let him go and moved, but Clint
glared at Tony. 'Your fight's with us, Stark,' he said. 'Leave Jane Foster alone.'

'Why should I?' Stark questioned. He leaned against the table behind him, folded his arms over his chest. 'Just why should I, Barton?'

'She has nothing to do with this,' Clint argued.

'Well, you're partially right about that.' Stark mused. He leaned further back against the desk, eyes on Clint. 'Why do you think I'm doing this, Barton?'

Clint paused at that. Why...

'Well?' Stark pressed. 'Tell me, Clint. *Why am I trying to destroy SHIELD?*

Wetting his lips, Clint let various answers roll through his head before saying, "Cause you're evil? 'Cause Loki offered you something in return?"

Stark laughed, but his face was thunderous. Clint gulped as Stark shifted forward just a bit. *I'm evil?* Let me tell you something, Barton, and this is something that *you* of all people should know; the world isn't black and white. There is no good and evil. The only thing that matters is taking care of yourself and those loyal to you. Everyone else can go fuck themselves.'

'So you're destroying SHIELD because they aren't *loyal* to you?' Clint demanded. 'That sounds like a toddler throwing a tantrum, Stark.'

Clint barely saw him move, but he felt the punch to the gut. It knocked the breath out of him and made him cough and hack trying to get air back into his lungs. All Clint could do was hang forward and gasp, unable to keep the pained whimpers hidden away.

'I'm doing this because of *you*!' Tony shouted. He wrenched Clint's head back up and forced him to meet furious, deranged brown eyes. 'This is *your* fault, Barton!' Stark snarled. 'You and Romanov and Rogers! I'm going to kill each and every one of you after I've completely wiped your stupid fucking organisation off Midgard!'

'What... did we ever do to... to you?' Clint stuttered through the pain.

Stark ripped him further up until the chair was beginning to leave the floor. He was doing it with one hand, too, and didn't appear to be straining himself in the process. Clint's eyes widened but he didn't have time to dwell on it; Stark was talking again.

'SHIELD betrayed me first,' he growled. 'They got *greedy*, Barton. They don't want me, they only want Iron Man. So they threw together a little fucking task force to steal my stuff.'

Clint spluttered. Stark *knew*. That was why he was working with Loki, why he was giving Loki information, why they were both trying to destroy SHIELD.

Fury had pushed Stark and backed him into a corner. Now Stark was blowing his way out and he was using *every* tool in his possession.

'Fuck,' he grunted.

Stark grinned and dropped him, but his eyes were dead. Gone was the manic, carefree Tony Stark that Clint had thought he'd known. Standing before him was someone completely new, someone wholly untested and unrestrained.
Clint had always seen Tony as a crazy person holding his own leash; wild, and capable of destruction, sure, but held back by his own moral code. The Tony Stark the world knew had issues but was fundamentally good.

This Stark? He wasn't restrained by morals or a conscience. He didn't care about little things like good and evil. This Tony Stark had thrown his lot in with Loki Laufeyson to get revenge. He'd been pushed and had finally had enough; he was pushing back, and he was killing people in the process.

Clint didn't know what to do. How did you fight this? How could you possibly beat a super-powered Iron Man with no reason to hold back who'd teamed up with an alien sorcerer capable of destroying the planet?

Stark's eyes were hard, filled with hatred as he spoke; 'Yes, that's right, Big Bird. Fury betrayed me first. You, Romanov, and Rogers all betrayed me.' He spat the last few words and Clint realised how hurt he sounded. Clint stared at him and realised that Stark truly had thought of them as friends; at least until he'd discovered their true plans.

It was their fault. Fury, SHIELD, Natasha and Clint. They'd done this. They'd turned Iron Man, barely holding onto this side of good, into a super villain.

It's my fault, a part of Clint's mind whispered. He couldn't deny it.

'For your betrayal,' Stark growled, 'you're all going to watch your precious SHIELD crumble. Then Loki and I are going after the World Security Council. After that we'll have some fun with you Avengers before we kill you. I'm looking forward to playing with your guts, Clint.'

He was being completely, one-hundred percent sincere. He was going to kill Clint- maybe not now, but definitely at some point in the future- and he was going to like it.

How had they missed this? How had the Avengers and Potts- Fury and Hill, Coulson and SHIELD and the WSC- how had they all missed how truly fucked up Stark was? Had he been like this the entire time? Had those terrorists fucked up more than his heart?

Or was this all because of SHIELD?

Clint shook his head when Stark chuckled to himself. Tony wasn't just a danger to the team, or SHIELD, or even the innocent people caught up in whatever game Stark wanted to play with this week's villain.

He was a danger to the planet.

Cold lips brushed Clint's ear, followed by the whispered words, 'Not just the world.' Clint flinched. 'He's a danger to the entire Nine Realms and beyond,' Loki continued. 'When we're done here, when we grow bored, we'll expand. The Stark Empire will eventually rule this entire solar system, and you won't be around to see it.'

Loki stood tall and Clint twisted to glare at him. 'I'll stop you,' he promised. He didn't know how, but he would. He couldn't let Stark and Loki win.

Loki laughed and rested his hand on Clint's shoulder. 'I very much doubt that, Barton.' He squeezed Clint's shoulder tightly, nails digging into flesh beneath Clint's thin t-shirt. Clint gritted his teeth against the hiss of pain that wanted to escape. 'But good luck,' Loki added, 'I look forward to your attempt.'
With that he was gone, moving towards Stark, and Stark pressed a kiss to his lips when Loki reached him.

'What shall we do with him?' Loki asked once more.

'Wipe his mind,' Stark ordered. It was an order, Clint realised, and the archer grew more panicked when he realised that Loki was actually going to follow it. 'Heal him,' Stark added. 'We'll throw him down the stairs and say he tripped when something in my workshop exploded. Erase all the footage and SHIELD will buy it.'

'I can cloak myself and toss him down the stairs,' Loki mused.

Stark grinned, kissed him again. 'You're awesome.'

Loki hummed in agreement and moved away, towards Clint. Clint tried to push himself clear, tried to throw himself back- if he hit his head he could die, he couldn't be used, the Avengers and SHIELD would investigate Stark and discover the truth-

Loki crouched before him, green eyes meeting blue. There was nothing human there, nothing redeeming, and Clint decided that he would face this with dignity. If he couldn't escape he could try and lock something away so that when he was free, when he was placed back with the Avengers, he could remember and stop Stark.

'I don't enjoy rummaging around people's heads, Barton,' Loki said. 'But yours is rather delightful.'

Clint spat at him. Loki blinked slowly and then reached up to rub his cheek clean.

'Oh, Little Hawk,' he sighed. 'For that, you will suffer.'

Clint couldn't move or stop him, and flinched when Loki placed cold fingertips against his face. Loki closed his eyes and breathed in deeply-

The push was sudden, brutal, something in Clint's mind ripping and tearing before fluttering away. The presence that moved through Clint's head was darker and colder than the Tesseract, and the colour of it was a much deeper blue than what Clint had felt before.

It moved slower, it stumbled, it ripped and tore and-

Clint couldn't hold it in any longer. He opened his mouth and he screamed.

{oOo}

Barton was unconscious in a bed on the Helicarrier, a tube taped to the back of his hand and a heart monitor keeping tabs on the little muscle. Tony tilted his head slightly as he stared at Barton before turning to Romanov. 'So he's gonna be okay?'

'The doctors said that the head injury wasn't dangerous; his brain didn't swell, so they didn't have to operate,' Romanov said.

Her voice was a monotone, revealing just how worried she really was. Tony mulled that over, enjoyed it for a bit, before saying, 'So he will be okay?'}
Romanov stared at Barton for another beat before nodding. 'Yes,' she said, 'he'll be fine.'

'Good,' Tony sighed. 'I don't know why JARVIS didn't warn him; he knows to warn everyone when I'm working with dangerous goods.'

Romanov flinched ever so slightly at that. Tony was pretty sure that he only noticed because he was looking.

_Good_, he thought, _that's what you get for bringing your stupid fucking toys into my Tower._

Tony himself was sporting some rather fetching off-white bandages; a fake injury for the “unplanned” explosion.

Romanov and Rogers seemed to have bought the explanation, but at this point Tony didn't really care. He now had extra CCTV cameras, separate from JARVIS but still accessible to the AI, set up throughout his Tower. Loki had also used his Jötunn magic to add extra wards; that little blackbox Barton had brought with him wouldn't get him or anyone else past Loki’s magic. Mostly because Tony had destroyed it in the explosion. But if SHIELD had any others, Tony was prepared.

'Are you sure you're okay, Tony?' Bruce asked. Tony turned to glance at him. Bruce was slumped in the plastic seat in the corner and he looked tired. No, Tony corrected himself; he looked _exhausted_. Tony wondered how hard SHIELD had been working Bruce, and what he'd been working on. The magic sensor? Why hadn't they asked for Tony's help?

_Maybe they already know,_ Tony mused, but dismissed the idea. Barton had been spying; his surprise at Tony and Loki's partnership had been real. SHIELD didn't know yet.

'I'm fine,' Tony said when he remembered that Bruce had asked him a question. Bruce just stared at him. 'Seriously, I'm fine; minor burns, nothing serious,' he insisted. 'Logan patched me up,' he added.

Bruce winced but Tony paid it no attention; dude was weird on a normal day.

'So,' Tony continued and turned to face the room at large. Rogers was looking over Barton's medical chart, and Tony wondered if he could actually understand it before deciding that he didn't care. 'Does Clint need anything? It's just that I'm supposed to show my new assistant around the Tower today. She doesn't start 'til Monday, but I figured a tour would be good to get her a bit familiar with everything.'

'Are you showing her the Avengers' floors?' Romanov asked.

Tony almost smiled. 'Yeah,' he said, 'if that's cool with everyone?' He looked around at the gathered team but nobody said anything. And on that note, where the hell was Thor? Tony shook his head and said, 'She'll only have access to my workshop and penthouse; and she won't be able to actually get into my workshop, just the corridor. You know me; I like to hide from meetings in there.'

'I hope she can handle you,' Romanov muttered.

'Oh, she can handle whatever she wants,' Tony said, adding a leer for good measure. Romanov looked disgusted and Steve raised his eyebrows. Laughing, Tony said, 'Just kidding. Logan is very much enough for me. God, that ass...' he trailed off, let his eyes glaze over, and reached up to prod at the useless bandages wrapped around his neck. 'You know, I think it's time for some more burn cream. I'll see you later.'
He turned to leave and Romanov called out, 'What about your assistant?'

'I can give her a tour tomorrow. It's only Friday!' Tony called back. After all, he wanted to give both Romanov and Barton a chance to meet Lily and suss her out. Barton would be fine by tomorrow, Tony was sure; Loki hadn't thrown him down the stairs that hard.

Whistling Queen's *Don't Stop Me Now* under his breath, Tony exited the room, a little skip to his step. Today was going to be a good day.

{oOo}

'Washington D.C.,' Loki said.

Tony sighed. 'Why?' When Loki didn't answer he looked up; the older god was staring at him, one eyebrow up. 'No, seriously,' Tony said. He wasn't scared by Loki's eyebrow of doom. If anything he found Loki's threats cute. And, a lot of the time, fucking sexy. 'D.C.'s at the top of SHIELD's list.'

'Along with Malibu,' Loki reminded him.

'So now you wanna attack both in one night?' Tony muttered.

Snorting, Loki said, 'Don't be stupid, Stark.' He paused. 'Although...'

'No!' Tony waggled a finger at Loki, who just laughed. They were back in Tony's workshop and it was only sporting minor burn damage after the explosion Tony had set off; he had to cover his tracks. There was a heap of burned, broken stuff lumped in the corner. Tony would get rid of it later; it'd give SHIELD something to steal and study.

'I wasn't serious,' Loki said.

'Obviously.'

Loki poked his tongue out before continuing. 'I want to see what SHIELD throws at us. It will better prepare us for the future; when they have only one or two bases left they will throw *everything* they have at us; I wish to be prepared.'

'You make a good point,' Tony said, 'but I want to save D.C. until after everyone meets Lily.'

'Why?'

'Well, I'd prefer to wait completely and get all the information verified via the Helicarrier,' Tony said. Because while JARVIS was brilliant at what he did, Tony wanted to be sure that he and Loki had a complete list of SHIELD's bases. 'But I don't have that kind of patience.'

'I do,' Loki said, 'when the situation calls for it.' Tony stared at him for a beat. Finally Loki grinned. 'But in this case, I am a small child awaiting a gift. I want to destroy another base with you as soon as possible; it has been too long.'

Tony nodded in agreement. 'Damn right it has.' He reached forward to tap at the closest keyboard. The screen to his right immediately lit up, showing the list of SHIELD bases they knew about; or, rather, what information JARVIS had gathered. 'Los Angeles,' he murmured to himself, 'Dallas,
Columbus, Detroit, Malibu, Bridgeport, Albuquerque and Washington D.C.' He hummed, tapped at the table, and finally looked back at Loki. Loki was waiting, silent, watching Tony with those bright, bright eyes. 'I wanna wait on D.C. and Malibu. D.C. can be next.'

Loki clearly mulled that over for a bit before nodding. 'If you wish, we shall wait. What base do you want to destroy?'

Looking back at the screen, Tony tapped out another rhythm before jumping forward to point randomly. 'Albuquerque.'

'I have no idea where that is,' Loki admitted. 'But very well.'

Tony smiled. 'Tonight?'

'Tonight,' Loki agreed.

They grinned at each other.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: Once again I had to cut a chapter in half; this one ended up being about 8,900 words long, so... yeah. I have no control over this story any more, seriously.

I hope you enjoyed! Next chapter coming very soon.

Dreamer
Chapter 42

Chapter Notes

**Author's Note:** I'm so sorry for the wait! One of my co-workers went on leave for exams and I had to cover most of his shifts, so I've been working flat out for a while now. I basically had one and a half days off a week so I've just been sleeping whenever I can and basically doing nothing else.

Anywho, enough excuses! You once again have my apologies, and hopefully you enjoy the chapter!

Dreamer

Tony and Loki got dressed in their clubbing gear; tight jeans, nice dress shirts, shoes that wouldn't ache after wearing them for ten minutes.

'We're actually going to a club?' Loki demanded as he and Tony snuck out of the Tower. Most of the Avengers were in and Tony didn't feel like getting into another argument and defending the entirety of his life's choices to a bunch of fucking assholes.

Loki slapped Tony in the side and the genius whined. 'Ouch- yes, you bitch, we are.' He reached up to make sure that the adhesive bandage stuck to his neck was still there before pushing open the stairwell door. It let Tony and Loki into the lobby, and Tony wrapped an arm around Loki's waist so that he could drag him forward.

Loki frowned but went along with him. 'Why?' he questioned when they exited the Tower.

'Because if someone comes looking for us we have an alibi,' Tony explained. Happy was waiting for them with a car. Tony tossed the man a smile before pushing Loki into the backseat and climbing in after him. 'We'll get into some trouble and get caught on CCTV or something,' Tony continued.

'I suppose that I shall have to teleport us to the Hideout,' Loki sighed.

'Damn right you will,' Tony said. 'We'll be seen entering the club but not exiting it; we can teleport from the bathroom.'

'Now I have to use a public restroom?' Loki demanded.

Tony couldn't contain his laughter and spent most of the trip to the club giggling and avoiding hits from Loki. When he fell and cracked his own head against the window he got a nice evil laugh out of Loki, so... worth it!

Happy announced their arrival at the club. Tony pushed Loki aside and climbed forward to tap on the glass separating Happy from the occupants in the back.

The window rolled down and Happy said, 'Yes, Mr Stark?'

'Thanks, Happy,' he said. 'We should be ready to leave in about five or six hours. I'll give you a
call.'

'I'll be in the area, Mr Stark,' Happy replied.

Smiling, Tony patted Happy on the shoulder. 'You're a good man, Happy.'

And he was. So far Tony had no evidence that Happy was trying to sell him out. He wasn't even sure that SHIELD had approached him. Either way, Happy was still on Tony's Friend List.

Tony dropped back into his seat. 'Let's go, Logan; beauty before age.'

Loki raised an eyebrow, clearly not understanding the mangled idiom. But he got out of the car and Tony climbed out after him, immediately hearing a few shouts and exclamations.

'Oh, joy,' Loki growled through a fake smile, 'you've been recognised.'

Tony snaked his arm around Loki's waist and offered the various people staring at him a smile. 'That's the whole point,' he murmured. 'We want SHIELD to think that we were here.'

'Sometimes I wish that our plan was to destroy them all in one single go,' Loki muttered.

'Where's the fun in that?' Pulling Loki forward, Tony nodded and said hi to various strangers before reaching the two security guards at the door. They took one look at him and stepped aside, one going so far as to say, 'Have a great night, Mr Stark.'

Tony smiled in response but made a mental note to slip the guy a couple hundred dollars on the way out. Courtesy always went far in Tony's book. Not that he ever used it.

Various corners of the club were packed; the lines at the bar were long, there was a grouping of people around the DJ, and already the patio, just visible through large glass windows, was filled with mingling groups of smokers.

Tony breathed in deeply; sweat, sugar, alcohol and smoke. 'Wonderful,' he murmured.

'Is that sarcasm?' Loki asked from beside him. 'Because it smells horrid in here.'

Tony smiled and tugged Loki towards the bar, saying, 'You get used to it,' as they walked.

'I don't want to,' Loki muttered. He still had a smile pasted on his face and Tony snickered into his hand before sliding into line.

It didn't take them long to get drinks; scotch for Tony, vodka for Loki, and an entire bottle of vodka to share. They wanted to fake inebriation, after all.

'So in the future,' Tony murmured, leaning against the table they'd snatched, 'when we have more free time, you don't want to go out clubbing with me?'

Loki sniffed as he surveyed the area. 'I would prefer a nice meal, perhaps one of those pubs you were telling me about. Everybody here keeps... touching each other.'

Grinning, Tony murmured over his glass, 'Prefer a feast with a roasting pig and mountains of ale?'

Loki glared at him. 'I will eviscerate you, Stark. Bond or no bond, I will murder you.'

'Careful, Logan,' Tony said through a snicker, 'your crazy alien is showing.'
Loki gave him a glare and Tony's magic thrummed happily beneath his arc reactor. Tony smiled in response.

Rolling his eyes, Loki downed his entire glass and then popped open the bottle of vodka. 'Shall we get drunk, my dear?' he asked.

'Oh, Logan; I thought you'd never ask.'

Loki smirked.

{oOo}

The Albuquerque SHIELD base was built on the outskirts of the city, pressed between Albuquerque and the Sandia Mountains. While it was close enough to civilisation not to draw too much attention, it was far enough away that armed agents could patrol the open areas behind the fences without drawing a lot of stares. Plus it was fairly close to Kirtland Air Force Base; the locals were probably used to all the security and secrecy.

Tony and Loki watched from overhead, Tony's suit allowing him to see the ground clearly. How Loki was doing it Tony didn't know; maybe he just had really good eyesight.

'Ready?' Tony asked.

'Mm,' Loki hummed over the comms. His arms tightened around Genesis' neck. 'It appears to be a base; it has everything that the last few did.'

'SHIELD agents, wire-topped fences, and heaps of shit built underground?' Tony questioned.

He heard Loki chuckle. 'Let's go.'

'Fine, just ignore me; that's fine,' Tony grumbled. Loki laughed again and Tony cracked a grin behind his faceplate.

Loki teleported while Tony was still dropping down and reached the base before Genesis. Tony heard a scream as he hit the asphalt and looked to his right to see Loki stabbing an agent in the back; he followed it up with a slice to the next closest agent, almost decapitating the woman before she fell to the ground.

Tony had landed between two agents who already had their guns aimed at Loki. Both shouted and jumped aside, trying to get their weapons up and pointed at Tony.

'Peek-a-boo, I see you,' Tony drawled to himself before raising his hands. He fired his repulsors at the agents; one dropped dead, the other ducked and rolled behind a metal pillar.

'Useless,' Loki tutted over the comms.

'I heard that, and I think you're an asshole,' Tony replied. He blasted into the air when machine gun fire came his way, bullets pinging off of his suit. Before he could kill the bastard responsible Loki had snapped the agent's neck. 'Hey, that one was mine!'
He saw Loki smile but the Trickster didn't reply.

'Whatever,' Tony grunted. 'You go south, I'll go north.'

'Genesis!' Loki called. Tony turned his way and Loki pointed north, making Tony nod his head and fly in that direction. As soon as SHIELD knows the truth, Tony thought as he shot over the small complex, I'll give all the orders. That'll be fun. He could already imagine the sour look Loki would be sport.

Tony flew back and forth over the base, but no agents appeared. Apart from the ones that Tony and Loki had killed when they'd first landed, there didn't appear to be any other mortals. Or if there were, they were waiting for Tony and Loki inside.

'I haven't found anyone,' Loki said over the comms, his voice soft.

Tony frowned. 'Can you sense anyone?' He wondered if he should try with his own magic, but decided against it. The last thing he needed was to out himself at this stage of the game.

'Negative.'

'Okay...' Tony's frown deepened and he stopped, hovering just before the largest building. 'Let's head in.'

'I will be with you momentarily.' Less than five seconds passed before Loki appeared below Tony, his staff held in one hand. Tony lowered himself to the ground and as soon as his boots touched the concrete Loki said, 'Let's go,' out loud.

Tony just nodded and followed his partner forward. The double-doors were easily blasted apart and Loki entered first.

As soon as he did an alarm started blaring, a pre-recorded feminine voice saying, “Intruder alert. Intruder alert. Evacuate immediately. Evacuate immediately.”

Loki gave one of the closest speakers a glare, growling, 'How do I shut that up?' under his breath as he continued forward.

'No idea,' Tony said over the comms. He glanced around as he walked. 'We'll just destroy the entire thing.'

Loki chuckled but didn't respond and soon the two were heading deeper into the facility. There were rooms on either side of them, no matter what hallway they walked down. Most were empty, though, or only sporting a desk and a chair. Tony frowned to himself as he and Loki walked, and he could see that Loki was just as confused as he was.

Where were the agents? The weapons? The base? This looked like an abandoned office, and Tony had to wonder if SHIELD had abandoned it after the last base he and Loki had destroyed.

He almost walked into Loki when the older god suddenly stopped, but managed to catch himself just in time.

'There are people down here,' Loki mused. 'We have done an entire circuit of the base and this is the only life I can detect.'

Tony's eyebrows rose at that. They'd checked the entire base? Well then...
'Let's go,' he said.

Loki kicked the door in, one booted foot enough to send the wood flying back and down the stairs. Beyond them was darkness; no lights, no pre-recorded warning, just... black. Tony glanced at Loki but Loki said nothing; he just waved his staff and the gem on the end lit up, illuminating their way.

'Follow me, Genesis,' Loki said and headed in; Tony followed.

The stairs were concrete, the banister metal; sturdy, well-built, and able to handle Tony's weight as the Genesis suit clunked down after Loki. It took them far too long to reach the bottom, in Tony's opinion. Just how deeply had SHIELD built into the New Mexican desert?

When they reached the bottom, standing side by side, they still couldn't see shit; Loki's staff only illuminated about two feet in every direction and there was nothing to see but smooth concrete.

Loki muttered something that Tony couldn't hear and suddenly the entire area was blazing. Tony had to shut his eyes against the sudden bright light, and when he opened them Loki was halfway across the enormous space.

There was six SHIELD agents all clustered together- or, rather, six scientists. They were wearing a mix of jeans and sweaters, all cowering and practically crying when Loki appeared before them.

'What is this place?' he demanded, pointing his sceptre at the group.

Tony was too busy looking around, mouth gaping and eyes wide in the safety of his helmet. The place was ginormous. There were rows upon rows of SHIELD-issue SUVs, cars, and vans. Racks of weapons lined every wall and there were so many boxes that Tony had no hope of counting them all.

Everywhere he looked- every table, every corner, every wall and even the fucking ceiling had weapons. It was more weapons than Tony had ever seen in his life, which was saying something considering that he'd once been the world's top guns manufacturer.

'What the fuck,' Tony muttered. His eyes finally settled on the boxes about twenty feet to his right. 'Oh, no fucking way.' He recognised the guns sticking out of the box on top; the long muzzles and short, rectangular magazines. He flew over and ripped open the box beside it.

Yep. Inside were neatly stacked crystals, just waiting for Loki's magic to power them. Son of a fucking bitch, Tony thought before keying on his comm. 'Loki, this place is filled with magic guns. SHIELD are still mass-producing them.' He glanced over his shoulder to take in the underground bunker... or fucking aircraft hanger. You could seriously fit a couple of jumbo jets in the place. 'They're mass-producing a shit tonne of weapons.'

Loki heard him but didn't reply; he was too busy interrogating the scientists. Tony tossed the crate's lid aside and went to join him. He was halfway there when a SHIELD agent popped out of hiding. She was holding one of those big assed guns that shorted even Tony's suit, and Tony called out Loki's name but it was too late-

The gun went off and Loki turned, was hit in the face and chest. He went flying back and Tony shouted in rage and shot forward. His magic engulfed him, making Genesis glow a faint purple, and licked at Tony's skin in pure, white-hot rage.

How dare this little fucking mortal hurt his Loki. Loki belonged to Tony Stark and-

'NOBODY FKKS WITH MY STUFF!' Tony roared. The SHIELD agent didn't hear him, but
Tony felt better, felt fucking **fantastic** when he crashed into the woman. The force sent both her and Tony flying into the floor. There was an ugly **crack** as the agent's head hit the concrete, followed by squeals as Tony's suit landed atop her and rolled clear.

Tony sat up and glanced at the woman. Her head was split open and the gun lay abandoned by her side.

'Good,' Tony grunted. He stood and marched over to the scientists. A quick look in Loki's direction showed that the Jötunn was unconscious. Tony snarled.

'It doesn't matter if you kill us!' one of the scientists shouted even while he shook.

Tony ignored him.

'It's already too late!' another said.

Ignored him, too.

'The self-destruct sequence was started as soon as you entered this building,' the only female scientist added.

That made Tony freeze. The woman smiled in satisfaction; she was scared, she was **terrified**, but there was pride there; pride that she and her co-workers might just take Loki and Genesis out with them.

'Loki will die here,' she continued, 'and there's nothing you can do about it.'

There were no cameras down here; Tony had checked. So he flipped his faceplate up and enjoyed the **horror** that spread across their faces when they realised that they were facing down Iron Man.

'That isn't going to happen,' he said, 'and you aren't going to die by your own hands.'

His shoulder armour flipped up and each bullet found its mark. Tony smirked as the scientists fell into a dead heap and slipped his faceplate back down. 'Loki!' he shouted.

The god was still out cold, burns marring his otherwise pale face. Tony growled in fury and wrapped Loki in his arms.

'We gotta get outta here,' he muttered even as he flew. He had to take the stairs; he didn't have time to blow his way out of an underground fucking bunker.

Up the stairs, back into the warehouse, the alarm still blaring, a countdown now added-

"**Seven...**" the pre-recorded voice was saying and Tony swore again. "**Six...**"

Through one hallway, blasting through another.

"**Five... four...**"

The outer wall just ahead, almost there, **yes**.

"**Three... two...**"

Out into the night, up in the air, getting away-

The complex exploded; the buildings disintegrated and the underground bunker imploded. The
shock wave hit Tony first, blowing him off course and making him pin-wheel through the air. He almost lost his grip on Loki but managed to hang onto one arm-

The mushroom cloud of fire hit them next, and Tony saw Loki's eyes snap open just as his armour caught fire.

Tony's suit overheated much too quickly and he snarled in frustration even as he fell, his repulsors failing. His suit was supposed to be fucking space-proof -

Something latched onto Tony's arm, and then everything was sucked away. Fire was replaced with ice cold, then by nothing, and finally by rock walls and a nice, fluffy red rug.

He hit the ground in a heap, his armour still smouldering.

The Hideout. Loki had teleported them to the Hideout.

'Loki?' he murmured.

'I am fine, Stark,' Loki hissed. A pause, and then, 'Although I am getting rather sick of explosions.'

Tony couldn't help it; he laughed.

{oOo}

Inside his hospital room aboard the Helicarrier, Clint winced when the alarm went off. Thankfully it dulled almost immediately and he was able to think clearly when a doctor walked in.

'What's going on?' Clint demanded.

'I am unsure, Agent Barton,' Dr Mallory said. 'During these alarms I'm to stay with my patients in case they need to be moved.'

Clint gritted his teeth but didn't dig for more information; he doubted that Dr Mallory knew more than he was saying.

The two sat in silence for a good fifteen, twenty minutes, before somebody finally entered the room. It was Natasha and Clint near-shouted, 'What's going on!!' as soon as he saw her.

'Loki,' she growled, 'and Genesis.'

Clint frowned at that. Something popped into his head, a thought or a memory, but before he could think on it a spike of pain shot through his skull and he winced.

'Clint?'

'Agent Barton?'

Natasha and Dr Mallory crowded his hospital bed, but Clint shook them off. 'I'm fine,' he said, 'I was just thinking about Loki and... moved my leg.' He hadn't suffered too badly during the explosion in Tony's workshop, but he had a new cut that would no doubt scar on his leg, a few cuts
and bruises, some burns, and a killer concussion. And goddamn amnesia. The head injury was why he was still in bed and hadn't snuck out yet; he didn't take possible brain damage lightly. The last thing he remembered was entering Stark Tower, and then he was waking up aboard the Helicarrier.

'Sorry,' Clint added when the two continued to stare at him, 'I should know not to move; can't get better if I keep injuring myself, right?'

Dr Mallory chuckled weakly and patted Clint on the shoulder. He went back to his seat and to the files he'd brought with him. Clint glanced at Natasha; she hadn't bought it.

'So what's happening, exactly?' Clint asked, voice hushed. Dr Mallory likely had clearance to hear what they were talking about, but Clint didn't want to deal with stares or questions.

Natasha sat in the seat beside Clint's bed and ran a hand through her hair. 'Loki destroyed another base,' she murmured. 'Or, rather, he tried to.'

'Tried?' Clint questioned.

Natasha nodded. 'Albuquerque.'

Clint blinked slowly at that, then chuckled. Albuquerque wasn't a base so much as a weapons holding facility. It had been set to blow years ago in case any wannabe terrorists infiltrated it. 'It blew?' he guessed.

'It did,' she agreed. 'Loki and Genesis managed to get into the basement levels where they tripped the self-destruct sequence.'

'What happened then?' Natasha shrugged a shoulder but sighed when Clint pushed; 'Tasha.'

'We don't know,' she admitted. 'Obviously we lost contact with the base after it blew. Fury's sending a squadron of agents down there now. We won't know anything until they search the area and report back.'

Clint leaned back on the bed. 'Or until Loki and Genesis turn back up,' he grunted. He frowned as an image of Genesis swam behind his eyes. The robot cocked its head at Clint, and then it laughed, which made no sense because it couldn't- well, it never had- talk. It just followed Loki's orders and blew shit up. Sometimes it examined stuff-

Opaque walls but clear, clear glass doors. Blue mixing with white, purple with red. It dripped across the floor and Clint watched its progress before he was spied by bright green eyes and dark brown ones. A word, and then a flicker, and then pain-

A table. A heavy chair. Sharp hot pain in his arms and across his forehead from a thick cut. What the hell? WHAT THE HELL?

Enemy. Betrayer. Evil son of a-

'Clint!'

Clint's eyes flew open; he hadn't even realised he'd closed them. His breathing was laboured and Clint found that his chest throbbed. But it was nothing compared to the ache going through his head. He reached up as he panted and found his forehead smooth; there was a small cut near his temple, but no gash like he'd felt. His arms didn't hurt, either. Just his leg from where something had hit it, just his back from hitting the floor.
'Clint. Clint.' It took another couple goes for Natasha to get his attention and when she did Clint gave her a shaky laugh.

'Sorry,' he grumbled.

'What the hell just happened?' Natasha demanded.

'I don't... know.' Clint said through grit teeth. It hurt to admit; to reveal that he had no fucking idea what his body was doing. Clint hadn't felt this helpless since the invasion... since Loki. 'I don't know, Nat,' Clint murmured. 'My head, it just... it hurts.'

'Agent Barton.' And there Dr Mallory was, standing beside him and frowning.

'I'm fine, Doc-' he tried, but Mallory shook his head.

'You clearly aren't,' he said. 'I'm going to have some more tests run.'

'What if you don't find anything?' Natasha demanded.

Mallory hesitated before saying, 'This could be a classic sign of PTSD.'

'No way,' Clint denied, 'I don't have PTSD. I've been doing this job for twenty years.'

'And you suffered greatly during Loki's invasion,' Mallory said. 'Even the strongest people with the strongest minds and best training can suffer stress after traumatic events,' he said. 'Like Tony Stark.'

Clint frowned at that. He remembered Stark mentioning nightmares; Steve had talked about them, too. The thought somehow trigged another dull throb and Clint clutched at his head.

'I'll go get the tests set up,' Dr Mallory announced. He left before Clint could argue, leaving him and Natasha alone in the room.

'Clint...' Natasha murmured. She was worried about him; she was so worried that she was letting Clint see it written across her face.

'I'll be fine,' Clint said. 'Okay?'

Natasha hesitated, her hands laying flat on the bed. Finally she nodded and Clint breathed out heavily as he leaned back against the pillows propped behind him.

He knew that Natasha didn't believe him. But he was too tired to think about it.

{oOo}

'Tony?' Bruce called as he entered the penthouse.

'Dr Banner. Mr Stark does not wish to be interrupted,' JARVIS said.

Bruce glanced up at the ceiling as he walked. 'You could have told me that when I was on my way
up,' he pointed out. JARVIS said nothing. 'I just want to talk to him about what happened in Albuquerque,' Bruce added. 'He isn't answering his phone and I know that he'd rather hear it from me than Natasha or Clint.'

'I can inform Mr Stark myself,' JARVIS offered.

'That's okay; I'm here now.' Bruce ignored JARVIS' continued services as he went through the penthouse. The living room and kitchen were both empty, though the TV was playing in the former. The bathroom and library were both empty, too, their doors open and allowing Bruce to quickly check before he moved on.

Finally he reached Tony's bedroom door. His closed bedroom door. Bruce briefly braced himself, prepared to stumble in on Tony and Logan being intimate.

'Dr Banner, I would advise-' JARVIS went silent when Bruce pushed the door open.

It was empty. There was no sign of Tony, or Logan, and though the bed was messy, when Bruce put his hand atop the cover it was cold. Tony had left a while ago.

'JARVIS, where's Tony?' Bruce asked. He'd assumed that Tony was in; where else would he be?

JARVIS hesitated.

'JARVIS?'

'I am not at liberty to divulge sir's whereabouts,' JARVIS answered.

Bruce frowned. 'Why?'

'Mr Stark did not wish his night to be interrupted by the Avengers or Avengers-related business,' JARVIS said. 'You can reach Mr Stark on his StarkPhone, if you wish. Would you like me to call him?'

'No...' Bruce said slowly as he glanced around the room, 'no, that's fine, JARVIS.'

'Very well, Dr Banner.'

Bruce backed out of the room and shut the door behind him. He stared at it and frowned before turning and walking down the hallway. He was passing through the living room the TV mounted on the wall caught his eye.

He paused to stare at it.

'Would you like me to un-mute the television, Dr Banner?' JARVIS asked.

'Yes,' Bruce said immediately.

The volume went up and Bruce had words to go along with the video being splashed across the screen. Tony and Logan were outside a club, Tony apparently arguing with the bouncer. There was a well-dressed woman standing between them, clearly trying to keep the peace.

"...Tony Stark was asked to leave the club four and a half hours after arriving," a reporter was saying over the images. "Witnesses state that Mr Stark and his partner, writer Logan Thomas, were caught having sex in the club's bathroom. When Mr Stark refused to leave he and Thomas were escorting from the premises. So far the police have not been called, though witnesses state that Mr Stark was close to losing his temper."
The screen cut to a man with a microphone. Three women, all in their early twenties, were pushing each other aside for a chance to be interviewed.

' He was, like, shouting ,” the blonde said.

“Yeah,” her friend butted in. “One of the bouncers grabbed his boyfriend and Stark totally flipped. Started shouting that he was gonna sue the entire place.”

“I didn't even know Tony Stark was here!” the third girl gushed. “Did you guys?”

The blonde one shook her head, but the second girl spoke to the reporter; “ Tony Stark's Iron Man, right? Maybe he'll blow the club up! ”

The three girls fell into giggles, as though destruction of private property was funny. Tony's fans had always been a little odd.

“Do you think that Tony Stark was acting out of order?” the reporter asked.

“Nah,” Girl #2 said. “I mean, seriously! Didn't even see them the entire night. Just when they got dragged outta the bathroom!”

“They were just fucking,” Number #3 snorted. “Like, come on! Who hasn't fucked in a club?”

The reporter gaped at them before quickly turning away; the camera went with him. “ We'll keep you posted, Melissa ,” he said. “ Currently there is no police activity and even as I speak Mr Stark appears to be leaving. Back to you .”

Bruce walked out when the TV cut back to the studio. As he walked towards the elevator, has asked JARVIS, 'So Tony was about partying?'

' Yes, Dr Banner .'

'And he didn't want us to know that?'

' He did not wish to be interrupted,' JARVIS explained. ' Sir felt that after the Avengers' reaction last time, it would be best to sneak out and spend the night with Mr Thomas without sharing his plans .'

Bruce was still frowning as he entered the elevator. On one hand he understood that; Natasha had flipped when Tony had missed a battle because he was partying with Logan.

On the other hand... he hadn't answered his phone when Bruce had called. And JARVIS had just said that Tony was reachable.

' Is there anything else I can answer for you, Dr Banner? ' JARVIS asked.

Bruce shook the frown off of his face. JARVIS sounded... weird. His usual smooth, accented voice was just... different .

'No,' he said, 'take me to my floor, JARVIS.' There would be a meeting tomorrow; Bruce could see Tony then. He didn't doubt that Natasha and Clint would want to yell at Tony some more.

' Very well, Dr Banner ,' JARVIS said and the elevator started moving.
Chapter 43

Chapter Notes

Author's Note: So... I had planned on posting this chapter on July 8, as that was my birthday and I always like posting something on my birthday, but unfortunately work got in the way. A lot of my co-workers are going on holiday or have had family emergencies, so I've been covering shifts and working a lot. I'll be working a lot in the following few weeks, too, so the next update probably won't be any time soon.

I do apologise for that, and hopefully this chapter was worth the wait. I'll stop rambling now. Enjoy!

Dreamer

“My blood has dried
These scars I wear for life
I sold a lie, broke down inside
You were lost for words when you fell down to earth
At least you tried for what it's worth”
– With Enemies Like That [The Living End]

Tony and Loki were both exhausted when they eventually returned to the Tower. After dropping off their stuff at the Hideout, heading back to the club, and getting kicked out, they both just wanted to sleep. Neither said a real word to the other until they'd entered their bedroom.

'That was tiring,' Loki muttered.

Tony knew that he was telling the truth. Not just because he could read Loki so much better now, but because Loki was letting his exhaustion show; his eyelids were at half-mast, his shoulders were slumped, and he simply tossed his clothes into the corner on his way to the bathroom instead of folding them. Loki was a very organised person, so for him to just drop his shit everywhere spoke volumes to Tony.

Tony dropped his stuff, too, not caring where it landed. They'd been back for a good fifteen minutes now and the Avengers had yet to interrupt them. That meant that they were holding off on their interrogation until the morning. That was great in Tony's books.

Loki already had the shower on so Tony just entered the bathroom and stepped into it. He pressed
himself up against Loki and breathed out heavily.

'Stark?' Loki questioned. His voice was muffled against the top of Tony's rapidly soaking hair.

Tony exhaled. 'I took my helmet off,' he muttered. He felt Loki stiffen against him. 'Well, not off, 'cause it retracts into the neck-armour of my suit,' Tony murmured. 'But, you know... same thing.'

Loki didn't say anything for a beat, before; 'Why would you do that?'

'They hit you; hurt you,' Tony said. He rubbed his forehead against Loki's smooth chest. 'I didn't... I wanted them to know that I was the one who was going to kill them; in those few seconds before I murdered them, I wanted them to know that it was me; Tony Stark.'

Loki was silent.

Tony took a shaky breath. 'I know that it was stupid; I mean, I scanned for cameras, didn't find any. Still; risky move, completely unnecessary.'

'But they hurt me,' Loki supplied.

'They hurt you,' Tony agreed.

Tony felt Loki's hand on his hip, and it moved up slowly. It wasn't sexy, it was... Tony wasn't sure what it was. Maybe Loki touching just because he could; because he was allowed to. Because Tony belonged to him and wanted to belong to Loki.

'They always see my face,' Loki murmured. 'They always know that it is I who is causing them pain and suffering. But if they hurt you... if you were hurt in battle...'

Tony smiled slightly. 'You'd, what? Blow our cover, our whole plan, just 'cause you were pissed that they touched something that belonged to you?' Tony shook his head slightly. 'You have too much control for that; I know you.'

Loki's fingers found his chin and gently pulled his head up. Tony didn't fight it and his eyes flicked up to find Loki's. He wasn't sure what emotion they were projecting; pity? Worry?

'I think you underestimate your effect on me,' the Trickster murmured. 'If you were fighting on the Avengers' side- or, rather, pretending to fight on their side... if you were injured, I think I would throw everything away just to make sure that you were well.'

Tony frowned.

'I have done so already,' Loki murmured. 'When I went for the sensor; have you forgotten? You were thrown through a building because of my magic.'

'And you came and found me,' Tony said. He remembered; Loki had checked on him before going to the Tower and “destroying” Tony's magic research.

'I checked on you first,' Loki said. 'Your safety, your well-being, was more important to me than our subterfuge.'

Tony sighed and pressed his face into Loki's neck. He wrapped his arms around Loki's waist and held tightly, felt Loki's own arms go around his back. His magic was swimming; Tony didn't need to tap into it to know that it wanted Loki. Wanted to get closer, wanted to merge and mate and... and make them one. Separate beings, one soul, connected in a way that nobody on Midgard could
ever understand.

And from what Loki had told him, this entire magical bond was rare throughout the Nine Realms. They could have something that so few in history had had. And out of the billions and billions of creatures living in this galaxy, hanging by magic to Yggdrasil, Tony and Loki had recognised each other; their magic had decided that they were compatible.

Or had it? Loki often spoke of destiny; of Fates that he clearly didn't quite believe but held respect for. Maybe some other force out there, one that Tony would never find with science, had decided that he, Tony Stark, a little mortal on a little world, was the perfect match for Loki Laufeyson, a super-powered mage stolen from his real home to be raised alongside his enemies.

Tony squeezed his eyes shut and tightened his grip.

'Tony?' Loki murmured.

He had to smile at that; it was usually Anthony; more commonly Stark. He liked it when Loki called him Tony.

'We're fucked, aren't we?' Tony murmured.

'How so?' Loki questioned.

Tony let out a shaky breath and opened his eyes. All he could see was Loki's creamy white skin; not his true skin, but the one he was most comfortable with. He wasn't even Logan at the moment. They'd have to fix that very soon...

Unfortunately.

'When we started this,' Tony finally said, 'we were... business partners.'

'Yes,' was all Loki said.

'And we had sex that first night,' Tony continued, 'before we signed that contract.'

Loki hummed. 'I will admit that I was attracted to you, before we started working together.'

'No shit.' Tony snorted. 'You were the one who started it.'

'Indeed,' Loki agreed, and Tony could hear the smile in his voice. 'I meant before I came back; before I escaped my Asgardian cell. It even broke through the Other's hold on me. I looked at you, this little mortal who would dare stand against me with no weapon, no armour; he brought only his sharp words and cocky smile to face me, a god of unknown power who had already killed so many. I was so very intrigued by you and your way with words. And you are, admittedly, very easy on the eyes.'

Tony laughed softly. 'I know.'

Loki stroked his back slowly and pressed a kiss to Tony's temple. 'I believe that you were talking about us; about how close we have become.'

Tony nodded; 'Yeah.'

'Yes,' Loki agreed. 'We are indeed “fucked”, my dear Anthony. I do not... I would have been disappointed, in the beginning, if I had lost you before our plans were complete. But now...'
'I'd go crazy,' Tony whispered. His chest burned and he didn't know why. Magic or emotion; it could be either. 'Fuck, Loki,' he grunted. 'I swore to myself, after Pepper, that I'd never let myself get close to anyone; that I wasn't capable of it. 'Cause other people manage but I just fuck everything up. Everybody I let in betrays me.'

'I am unable to,' Loki murmured.

'Yeah.'

'I do not betray easily,' Loki admitted, his words slow. 'Thor would tell you otherwise. But when we were young, my betrayals meant nothing; games mean nothing. As adults I always stood by his side; he, Sif, the Warriors Three... I would do anything for them. Until-

'You, yourself, were betrayed,' Tony cut in, because he could see it. Loki, with his magic and his lies. It was as though, as soon as he was brought to Asgard, everybody around him chose to dislike him; to believe that he was constantly lying. When was he labelled the God of Lies? 'When, uh... when do you guys get your titles?' Tony asked.

'Birth,' Loki said. 'Or soon after, rather. Thor acquired his before he was born; Frigga has the power to see the future, in a way; someone's destiny, or what paths they could take to reach certain destinies.' He tightened his grip around Tony, to the point of being near painful. But Tony let it happen. 'Thor was named the Worthy, the God of Thunder, King of Asgard before he was born.'

Tony licked his lips and shifted slightly so that the shower head wasn't directly over him. 'And you?'

'Soon after I was brought back,' Loki murmured. 'The Fates told Frigga that I was to be called Loki; at least, that is what she told me.'

'What else did she tell you?'

Loki's wet fingers found Tony's hair and he stroked it behind Tony's ears. 'That I would start Ragnarök,' he whispered, voice almost drowned out by the rushing water. 'That I, Loki, God of Mischief and Lies, born Jötunn but raised Æsir, would kill all of the gods and destroy Asgard before setting fire to the Nine Realms.' He sighed and pressed his face to Tony's head. 'It is no surprise that Odin never trusted me; that he and Asgard feared me, thus treated me differently. It was foretold that I would kill them all...'

Tony frowned when Loki trailed off. That... okay, that was fucked up, and yeah, Tony totally got why people wouldn't trust Loki; God of Lies, yes, destroyer of the Nine Realms? That's care the shit out of anybody.

But... showing him love, kindness, treating him like one of them... Loki never would have grown up to resent Thor, Odin, all of Asgard. He never would have been okay with destroying an entire Realm just to earn his father's approval. Tony doubted that Loki had ever been truly sane to begin with; like Tony, Loki had always been different, and had always been capable of great feats of destruction and just plain darkness.

But treating Loki like shit had pushed him further into that darkness. It was one of the main reasons that Loki was now a super villain instead of a reluctant hero like Tony had once been.

It was a self-fulfilling prophecy. Just like with Tony, the Avengers, and SHIELD. Tony never would have destroyed all of SHIELD if the Avengers had been true team mates and trusted him. He never would have been good like Rogers was, but he wouldn't have been... well, Loki. He
wouldn't be doing any of this if it wasn't for the decisions of others.

It was the same with Loki.

Two completely different people; hell, two completely different species. And here they were, standing in a shower, together after having caused the destruction of another SHIELD base and the deaths of more SHIELD employees.

Not just because of their own actions and decisions. But because of the influences of others, too.

Tony had to laugh. How in the fuck was this his life? Were there really Fates out there, rubbing their metaphorical hands together, deciding that they'd done a good job? Because Tony and Loki were together. Their magic wanted the other. If this was meant to be, well...

'The Fates are fucked up,' Tony said through a giggle.

'I have never given them much credence,' Loki said. 'But I would be a fool to convince myself that they cannot possibly exist or have an influence on the universe that we know and inhabit.'

'Right.' Tony giggled again. 'I'm an atheist, you know.'

Loki was silent at that, so JARVIS helpfully supplied; 'An atheist is a person who disbelieves or lacks belief in the existence of God or gods. The practise is called atheism.'

Loki snorted; 'You are an atheist, yet you have met multiple gods; you are currently sharing a bed with one.'

'Yeah, I know,' Tony said. 'But you're not really gods, just... stronger and faster than us; a different species. Just because some parts of Midgard worshipped you thousands of years ago-'

'Makes me a god,' Loki interrupted.

Tony huffed and slapped his partner's chest. 'Shut up.'

'You are, too.'

'I've always considered myself a god,' Tony quipped.

Loki chuckled and tipped Tony's head back up. He kissed him lightly and when he pulled back Tony saw how tired he was. Right, Loki'd been unconscious for a while; maybe Tony should check him out.

'I am fine,' Loki said. Well, Loki could read Tony well, too. Their relationship was a two-way street, after all.

'I will keep an eye on Mr Lie-smith's vitals, Mr Stark,' JARVIS promised.

'Thanks, buddy.' Tony sighed and it turned into a yawn. Loki frowned at him and bent to pick up Tony's body wash.

As Loki turned him around Tony said, 'Hey, I should be doing that; you're the one who got shot.' Loki ignored him, though, so Tony just sighed and melted into the gentle touch that soon became very warm, even under the spray of water. He tilted his head slightly when Loki directed him under the shower head and found Logan looking at him.

He wondered if that was safe; surely Thor would find him, if were to lumber up to the penthouse.
But Tony was too tired to question it, and he trusted that Loki knew what he was doing. 'I can't wait until you don't have to hide,' he murmured.

'And when will that be?' Loki questioned, eyes on his his task. 'Even when we destroy S.H.I.E.L.D and the Avengers, the general public of your world will hate me.'

Tony closed his eyes when Loki began washing his hair. 'I'll think of something. Maybe Iron Man can catch you and rehabilitate you. I can win anyone over.'

Loki laughed at that. 'What? Don't think that I can?'

'Oh, I know that you can,' Loki replied. His fingers felt amazing in Tony's hair as he scrubbed shampoo through it. 'You won me over rather quickly.'

'Did I?'

'Mm,' Loki hummed. 'I liked you when we first met; you know that I did. But it did not take much for me to fall under your charm.'

Tony smiled. 'I am charming. I've always said it.'

'Oh, the ego on you.'

'That's the pot calling the kettle black.'

'Whatever,' Loki said. They fell into silence when Loki pulled back, Tony now clean from head to toe. It was Tony's turn and he took great pleasure in wiping Loki down, washing his now curly hair. When he was done Loki looked like he was about to fall asleep on his feet.

'Come on,' Tony said. He turned the shower off and directed Loki out of the large cubicle. Loki let Tony towel him off; let Tony towel himself dry, too. As soon as they were both dry they headed back into the bedroom and got into pyjamas; long pants, socks for Tony, and soon they were crawling into bed.

They curled up together and Tony felt nice and comfortable as the little spoon; Loki's right arm draped over his hip, other arm stuffed beneath their shared pillow. He felt Loki exhale more than he heard it; warm lips brushing the nape of his neck, a small puff of air that made his hair flutter.

It was on the tip of his tongue, those three little words. But Tony knew that neither of them were ready for it. Even if it wasn't just Tony's magic any more; even if he, himself, as a human being felt that way about Loki and everything he was. They had too much going on, they'd just basically fucked up by attacking a weapons base instead of a real one.

There was too much on their plate. They didn't need this, too.

No, not yet. But soon, Tony knew. He hadn't been aware that he was capable of it. Seemed that he still managed to surprise himself as well as others.
Tony was called to Rogers' floor at six am. Instead of complaining he just slipped quietly out of bed and got dressed. Loki was still asleep and Tony wanted him to remain that way.

'How is he, JARVIS?' Tony whispered as he left the bedroom, shutting the door behind himself.

'Mr Lie-smith is fine, Mr Stark,' JARVIS informed him. 'His vitals are within the norm for him, and he is sleeping peacefully.'

'Good,' Tony said. 'Tell me if anything changes; Logan's name, remember?'

'Of course I do.' And he sounded offended.

Tony grinned. 'I love you, J.'

'And I adore you, Mr Stark,' JARVIS responded.

Tony chuckled and headed into the kitchen; if he had to deal with the Avengers this early in the morning, then he wanted coffee.

He drank a cup and filled a travel mug before heading down; he'd need lots of coffee, he just knew it.

Romanov was there; Bruce, Thor, Rogers, too. They were in the living room instead of the kitchen, the meeting feeling more relaxed than their last few. Tony wondered why.

'Morning, kids,' he grunted as he gingerly sat himself on the couch furthest from Rogers and Romanov. Thor was closest to him and Tony waved past him at Bruce. Bruce smiled slightly.

'What's up?' Tony asked and took a sip of his coffee. 'JARVIS told me about the base but he said you were all busy when I got in, so...?'

He raised his eyebrows behind his sunglasses; great for hiding any eye rolls, great for pretending that he was battling a hangover.

'It wasn't a base so much as a storage facility for weapons,' Romanov informed him.

'Ah,' Tony hummed. 'So, what? It doesn't matter that Loki blew it up?' He frowned. 'Or does it? I'm confused.'

'It matters,' Romanov said. 'SHIELD lost a lot of weapons. And we lost a couple of scientists.'

Tony's frown deepened; he had to at least try and pretend that he gave a fuck.

'Bruce tried to tell you,' Rogers joined in and Tony turned his focus on the boy scout. 'You were... otherwise occupied.'

Tony's eyes flicked to Bruce, who shrugged a shoulder. 'I tried calling,' the doctor said, 'but you didn't answer. I went up to your penthouse and JARVIS said you'd gone out clubbing. Then I saw you on the news.'

Tony groaned. 'I made the news?' When Bruce nodded, he groaned again. 'Fuck, Pepper's gonna kill me.' He was actually surprised that Pepper hadn't already called him. Then again, it was just after six, and she knew that he usually slept in 'til midday when he went out partying.

Tony sighed, rubbed his eyes, and took another sip of coffee.

'So what's our plan here?' he asked. 'Do we even have a plan? Is there anything we can actually
'Not really, no,' Romanov muttered. Tony knew that it was killing her to admit that. It made him feel all warm and gooey inside. 'We don't even know if Loki and Genesis survived the attack.'

Tony snorted and raised his eyebrows when everybody stared at him. 'Seriously?' he said, incredulous. 'You think a small explosion would kill Loki?'

'It wasn't small,' Romanov tried, but Tony shook his head.

'Thor saw him fall from the Bifröst,' Tony said, 'and what happened?' He turned to look at Thor, who sighed.

'We all believed Loki to be dead,' the Thunder God said. 'To survive something like that...'

'See?' Tony said. He pointed at Thor. 'Loki survived whatever the hell is between the Nine Realms. If he survived that, he sure as hell survived the explosion.'

Romanov pursed her lips but didn't argue.

'So...' Tony cleared his throat, 'what now?'

There was a pause, and then Thor said, 'Perhaps I can try and scry for Loki.'

All of them turned to stare at him.

'Excuse me?' Romanov asked.

'Scry?' Rogers said with a confused little frown.

'Wait.' Bruce leaned forward, eyes intent. 'Do you mean... magically find his location? Like, use a crystal or something to find Loki within the city?'

'Aye,' Thor said.

Tony leaned back in his seat. 'You didn't think to mention this little trick when Loki started blowing up bases?' he demanded.

Thor shook his head and held his hands up in a placating gesture. 'Please, my friends, you must understand; my magic is very limited. I have never, nor will I ever, have the kind of power that Loki has. Not only is he a fantastically gifted mage, the most power the Nine Realms has ever seen, but I did not pay attention during my few mandatory magical classes when I was young.'

'But you can scry Loki?' Bruce asked.

'Indeed I did,' Thor said with a nod. 'It is a must for the Royal Family; something that I could not talk my father into letting me avoid. Loki, of course, enjoyed them immensely, and went on to study everything he could about magic. I enjoyed swords and combat much more. I was also a very poor student; I can only just reach my mindscape and use the smallest of spells.'

'But you can scry Loki?' Bruce asked.

'Perhaps,' Thor said. He turned to look at each of them in turn before apparently deciding to talk to Tony; he stared at him as he spoke, and Tony felt just a little bit weirdered out about it. What made Thor think that he'd understand any of it? 'Loki is extremely gifted at hiding himself; his very person, his magic, the imprint he leaves on the physical and magical world around him. I do not
know when he managed to shield himself from even Heimdall, but that he can tells of his immense power.'

'And?' Tony prompted when Thor stopped.

'Scrying is a very basic form of magic,' Thor explained. 'Something that we learned early on. Loki was furious when I managed to track him.'

'Because you can sense where he is,' Tony murmured. Thor once again when silent and when Tony looked up all eyes were on him. 'What?' he said, looked at Thor; 'You're one of the few who can track Loki, right? He has to be nearby, sure, but you were able to tell that he was in my penthouse when you were on your own floor.'

Thor nodded slowly. 'Somebody like Heimdall would be able to sense Loki from a great distance, simply because he is all-seeing. I can track Loki because I grew up with him; his magic is something that has ingrained itself upon my very being. I do not know how, exactly, I can sense him; I simply can.'

'And that helps you scry him?' Romanov asked. She was leaning forward now like Bruce; getting just a tad excited over the prospect of finding Loki.

'It may,' Thor allowed. 'But you must understand that I may fail. Loki can shield himself from Heimdall. Heimdall sees all wherever he turns his eyes. And he turns his eyes onto Midgard often due to mine and Loki's presence here.'

'So why try at all?' Tony said. 'If scrying's that basic, than surely Loki's shielded himself against it.'

'Hey may have,' Thor agreed, 'but Loki thinks grandly, like you do, Tony Stark.' Tony swallowed at that. 'He knows that I remember little of our few magical lessons together. He may think that scrying is beneath me; something I would not even remember.'

'Why do you remember it?' Steve asked.

'I have been thinking of ways to track Loki since his escape,' Thor said with a sigh. 'It came to me last night after I heard of Loki's latest attack.' He squeezed his fingers together and started down at them. 'Loki is Asgard's responsibility; my responsibility. He is my brother, even if he denies it, and I am Midgard's protector. I will capture him and make him pay for his crimes.'

Silence fell after Thor's little speech. Romanov was watching the blond with a little line between her eyebrows, while Steve looked outright concerned. Bruce was fiddling with his mug- tea, probably- and Tony kept his eyes shifting.

He wasn't sure if this was a problem; Thor's reminiscing proved that he could successfully scry and pinpoint Loki's location. If he tried now and Loki hadn't shielded himself from something like that, Thor would be pointed directly to Tony's penthouse. If JARVIS couldn't warn Loki in time, well...

They might be fucked.

Tony taped at his thermos. He should have worked harder on those implants. He could at least have two gauntlets flown to him and wrapped around his hands in a few seconds. He was stuck, for now, with nothing but his head and whatever was around him to use a weapon.

At least he was a god. And, hey, he might get to hit Steve Rogers with a travel mug.

'I will need a few items,' Thor finally spoke.
'What?' Romanov asked immediately.

'A map of this city,' Thor said, 'a crystal, and a certain kind of string.'

Tony raised his eyebrows. 'A crystal?' When Thor nodded, Tony said, 'Well sorry, Hammerhead, but I don't keep crystals around the Tower.'

Thor's face fell.

'There should be a shop in the city, right?' Romanov asked.

Rogers looked at Tony, then up at the ceiling. 'JARVIS?' he questioned.

'One moment, Captain Rogers,' JARVIS replied. A few seconds passed, a minute. 'There are a number of shops that sell crystals, candles, and other objects related to witchcraft. Would you like me to direct you to the nearest one, Mr Odinson?'

'Please, ghost,' Thor said and stood. 'I would like to try immediately.'

'I'll go with you,' Romanov said and got to her feet.

Thor nodded and the two left; just like that. Tony stared after them before turning to Rogers. 'Is that it?' he asked. Rogers said nothing. 'I thought for sure I'd get yelled at.'

Rogers sighed. 'If you'd been here there was nothing that you could have done,' he said. 'The base was too far away. I didn't see the need to jump you as soon as you walked in.'

'Oh.' Tony looked down at his thermos. 'Thanks.'

'At least it was a weapons facility; fewer people to die,' Rogers muttered. He shook his head and got up. 'I wish nobody had to die,' he sighed and walked out, heading towards the kitchen.

Tony watched him go before turning to Bruce. Bruce was slumped on the sofa, staring at his mug and the liquid within, like it held all of the answers. That'd be pretty cool.

'Whelp; I'm gonna go.' Tony jumped up and waved over his shoulder; Bruce didn't try to stop him. He didn't even say anything.

I really have to find out what's up with Brucie, Tony thought. Besides the whole Mean and Green thing, obviously.

As soon as Tony entered the penthouse he wanted to run.

'Sir, Miss Potts is on the phone,' JARVIS informed him as soon as the elevator doors opened.

'Fuck my life,' Tony grunted. 'Put her through.'

'Tony, I thought you were going to show Miss Walden around,' Pepper said as soon as the line opened.

'Yeah, I am,' Tony replied. 'Soon. I said soon, right? Not an exact date. I don't remember an exact date.'

'You planned it for Friday,' Pepper said.

'Yes, planned,' Tony said. 'Planned. Plans are never exact. Unless you say “this is the exact plan”,
which I didn't say. JARVIS, did I say “exact plan”?"

Pepper snapped, 'Don't answer that, JARVIS!' JARVIS didn't. 'I just need a date, Tony. Your assistant starts soon and you were the one who said that it'd be best to show her around the Tower first.'

'I do plan on doing that, honest,' Tony said. 'Some stuff came up, okay? That explosion that Clint got hurt in, now Loki's latest attack.' Tony dumped his empty thermos in the dishwasher and headed for the bedroom. 'Look, Thor has a plan, and I wanna see if it works. After that I'll call Walden and ask what day's best for her, okay? As long as I get her in before Monday it's all good.'

Pepper was silent.

'Scout's honour,' Tony said. He paused outside the bedroom door. 'Trust me, Pepper,' Tony said. 'I'll call you later.'

There was a pause, and then; 'Okay, Tony; I'll trust you on this. Call me.'

'Will do,' Tony promised and JARVIS cut the call without having to be asked. 'But I don't trust you,' Tony muttered as he pushed the door open.

'Was that directed at me?' Loki asked. 'Or your woman?' He was sitting up in bed; still under the covers but wide awake.

Tony blinked slowly at him. 'Uh... she's not my woman,' he said. 'Since when are you awake?'

'JARVIS woke me when Thor started talking about scrying me,' Loki explained. 'The idiot has left already.'

'Yeah,' Tony said. 'So... can Thor actually scry you?

'He would have been successful, had JARVIS not informed me of his plan,' Loki said. 'I had not thought to protect myself against the kind of thing. Scrying is limited; you have to be within a few hundred miles for it to be successful. It was actually clever of Thor to try.'

'But it isn't going to work now?' Tony asked. He sat on the edge of the bed and turned to face Loki. Loki shook his head. 'I have already protected myself against it. I honestly want to sit beside him when he scries me just to see his face when he locates me.' Tony laughed. 'But that is a poor idea, so I will not do so,' Loki added.
Chapter 44

Chapter Notes

Author's Note: MY BAD! I didn't actually realise how long it'd been since I updated until I checked my profile, so... yup, my bad, definitely. I have to be honest here; I'm not 100% happy with this chapter, but I don't want to spend any more time on it. So... hopefully it's not too awful. And... enjoy?

Dreamer

Loki left the Tower as Logan and returned an hour later as Lily. Tony was waiting by the front desk, annoying the poor man working behind the counter. He'd just gotten off the phone with Bruce, who'd wanted to discuss something in his own workshop, when Lily called, 'Mr Stark.'

Tony smiled at her and said, 'Welcome, Miss Walden. Are you ready?'

'As long as I get to see every floor and room you could possibly hide in, yes,' Lily answered.

Tony chuckled. 'Good luck with that.' He led Lily over to the private elevator, where JARVIS opened the doors and whisked them upward. 'JARVIS will probably help you, though. He thinks I need to be more productive.'

'I am only looking out for you, Mr Stark,' JARVIS responded.

When Tony and Pepper had called Lily to tell her that she'd gotten the job, Tony had gone into detail about JARVIS, so Loki merely raised her eyebrows and remained silent at the voice from the speakers.

JARVIS was recording everything and all footage would be available to Barton, Romanov and SHIELD if they just looked for it. So Tony and Lily made small-talk, discussing various topics before falling into what would be expected of Lily in her role as Tony's PA.

'Once I'm actually doing something, I get it done,' Tony explained when they reached his main workshop. 'I don't like waking up on time or spending my hours with stupid people. Unfortunately in my line of work, there are idiots everywhere. So if you find me, get me up, and get caffeine into me, I'll be a good boy.'

'I highly doubt that,' Lily muttered.

Tony ignored the comment and they entered his workshop. Tony's fingerprints and retinas were scanned, allowing him and Lily access. Ever since becoming Iron Man Tony had upped his security; back in the day, he'd just locked the doors. He couldn't risk that now.

'This is your main workshop?' Lily asked as she looked around. It was the only lab well-organised due to almost every product eventually becoming publicly available. There were tables against every wall, schematics and plans for various Stark Industries products floating on every screen. Tony's current projects, the next StarkPhone and StarkPad, were on the tables in the middle of the room in various pieces.
Yeah,' Tony said. 'Well, it's the main workshop for my company. I make everything we sell, or at least design it. Obviously I can't make every phone we sell, but I make sure I look over the final product. Only the best for my company.'

'I see,' Lily mused. 'Do you hide out here often?'

Tony shrugged. 'Sometimes,' he said, 'when I have to. I have to keep up with the competition, you know? I have people keeping an eye on Apple and Samsung, some other companies. When they plan on releasing a new product, I do too. If we're too late no one will buy our product.'

Lily just nodded, silent as she listened and looked around.

'Had enough?' Tony eventually asked and Lily glanced at him. 'We can head up to Thor's floor, give you a feel for the Avengers' personal quarters.'

'How many workshops do you have?' Lily questioned when they were back in the elevator.

'Three,' Tony said. 'One in my penthouse for small projects; I mostly just tinker with Iron Man stuff, Stark Industries stuff, some weapons and things that I work on for SHIELD or the Avengers. My basement workshop is for my more explosive projects; mostly my Iron Man suits. And you've seen my company workshop.'

'You spend most of your time in your workshops?'

Tony nodded. 'Them and my penthouse. With Logan around, I have more inclination to sleep.' He winked at Lily, who rolled her eyes and ignored him until they reached Thor's floor.

'So this is Thor's floor, he's the god from Asgard,' Tony explained. 'Most of the Avengers' floors have the same layout, but Thor and Steve have their own gyms. Clint and Natasha have armouries where their favourite weapons are kept, but they also use the main Avengers armoury two floors below this one.

'The Avengers' floors are open to each team member unless the occupant asks JARVIS to lock their floor down,' Tony added. Thor's was open and bright, no curtains hiding the spectacular view of New York. It wasn't as good as the view from Tony's penthouse; the helipad blocked some of the sun, casting a shadow over the windows and living room.

'Do you spend any time on their floors?' Lily asked, turning blue-grey eyes on Tony.

'Uh...' Tony hummed, 'not really, no.'

'Then I don't need to see them,' Lily said. 'Just show me the floors you might hide on.'

Tony huffed. 'Now I'll hide here, in Thor's gym, just to avoid you.'

Lily shook her head and followed him back into the elevator.

They checked out the common floor, an area the Avengers didn't spend much time in unless there were long meetings and team dinners, as well as Bruce's floor because Tony sometimes joined Bruce in his workshop for Avengers-related projects. Finally they reached the penthouse, and Tony and Lily had just stepped into the library when JARVIS said, 'Mr Stark, the Avengers wish to enter the penthouse.'

'Send them up,' Tony ordered.
'Yes, sir.'

'Do your team mates not have access to the penthouse?' Lily questioned.

Tony narrowed his eyes at her. Team mates. Team mates. Fuck Loki very, very much.

'No,' Tony said. 'I like my privacy, even from the Avengers. Plus Logan lives here now; he doesn't need people barging into his private space.'

Lily hummed at that and wandered away, taking a good look at the books, the computers, the two desks set up in the middle of the room opposite each other.

'How many rooms does the penthouse have?' Lily asked.

'Uh...' Tony actually didn't know the answer to that. 'JARVIS?'

'The penthouse contains eleven rooms,' JARVIS said. 'The master bedroom, a guest bedroom, a small gym, a workshop, the kitchen, the living room, the dining room, the library, a guest bathroom, Mr Stark's private office, and a spare room.'

'There we go,' Tony said, smiling at Lily, 'eleven.'

Lily sighed, like Tony was truly testing her patience. 'As long as I know how many rooms you could be hiding in, I should be fine.'

'Okay,' Tony said. 'I'll show you the workshop and master bedroom; that's where I spend most of my time. The kitchen's to the left of the living room, along with the spare room and gym. Everything else is on this side.'

When they were done with their short tour, they headed back towards the living room. The Avengers were already there- all of them, including Barton.

Tony pasted a smile on his face. 'Here to meet my new assistant?'

'Might as well,' Barton grunted. He looked at Lily, then frowned and looked away again. Tony wondered about that briefly before focusing on Lily, who was shaking Rogers' hand.

'Lily Walden, yes?' Rogers said.

'Yes,' Lily said, 'and you're Steve Rogers, otherwise known as Captain America.'

Rogers smiled at her. 'How'd you know?'

'I've seen you all on television,' Lily said. Her eyes went over Rogers' shoulder, found Thor. 'I know that he's Thor; he never wears a mask. And you've made public appearances sans costume, Mr Rogers.'

Rogers smiled ruefully at that and gestured at the rest of the Avengers. 'Natasha Romanov, Clint Barton, Bruce Banner, and Thor, of course.'

'Your names I didn't know,' Lily said, indicating Barton and Romanov. 'At least, not until Mr Stark told me.'

Romanov looked at Tony, eyebrows up, and Tony shrugged. 'If she's gonna work for me, and be my personal assistant, then she needs to know about SHIELD and Avengers-related stuff. No secrets, pinky promise.'
Romanov looked unimpressed.

'It makes sense, Natasha,' Rogers said. 'If Tony has to cancel a meeting because of the Avengers, then Miss Walden needs to know why.'

'Besides,' Tony added, 'she signed a dozen different contracts; she can't talk about any Avengers or SHIELD-related things to anyone, and she can't even mention my arc reactor.' Tony made a gun with his right hand and pretended to shoot Lily. 'Do that and bang.'

Rogers laughed nervously and Lily simply nodded. 'I'm sure that it won't be that bad,' Rogers said, but Tony snickered.

'Shows what you know,' he muttered, ignored the looks the Avengers tossed him. 'Anyway, that's about it, Miss Walden. You know where I hide, you know the general layout of the private floors in Stark Tower, and you've met everyone but Logan. You ready to start?'

'I'm sure that I'll do fine,' Lily said, 'and if I fail I'm sure that you'll be delighted to let me know.'

Tony smiled sharply and clapped his hands together. 'Okay, then. Unless anyone wants to interrogate Miss Walden-' Tony aimed that question at Romanov, who completely ignored him, '-then I'm gonna let Miss Walden go.'

He turned back to Lily.

'You start Wednesday because my schedule suddenly became full, and you can come in whenever you want. I don't have anything planned until next Monday; a meeting with my board of directors and a conference call with the people over in England. That should give you a few days to settle in before you get really busy.'

'Very well,' Lily said. 'It was nice to meet you all,' she told the Avengers.

'You too,' Rogers said.

'I shall look forward to seeing you again!' Thor boomed, making Lily and Bruce both wince; Lily looked slightly annoyed by the blond god, while poor Bruce was standing right next to Thor.

'Indoor voice, Thor,' Bruce muttered.

'My apologies,' Thor said with a sheepish expression.

'This will be entertaining,' Lily commented and turned to Tony. 'I'll see you Wednesday, Mr Stark.'

'Cool,' Tony said. 'Just head for the elevator we came up in; JARVIS will let you in. Hopefully you don't stumble across me and Logan in a compromising position.'

He grinned lasciviously, but unfortunately JARVIS ruined it; 'I will be sure to warn Miss Walden well in advance, Mr Stark.'

'Mean, JARVIS,' Tony pouted. 'I wanna see Lily's face when she-'

'Miss Walden,' Lily interrupted, a scowl barely concealed across her face.

Tony paused, eyebrows rising slowly. He purposely clenched and unclenched his fists, made it look like he was trying to keep his annoyance in check. Finally he said a very slow, slightly condescending, 'Miss Walden, sorry.'
Tony and Lily held eye contact for a beat before Lily looked away. 'Until Wednesday, Mr Stark.'

Tony said nothing; just watched Lily nod vaguely at the Avengers before leaving. JARVIS said, 'Miss Walden has reached the lobby, Mr Stark,' before Tony spoke again.

'Well, that went well,' he muttered.

'She doesn't seem to...' Bruce paused, 'uh... like you.'

Tony shrugged. 'Eh. I don't need her to like me. She just has to do her job.'

'So you don't care if your assistant hates you?' Romanov questioned.

'I'm sure that there were many, many instances of Pepper hating me when she was my PA,' Tony said. He looked at Natasha. 'And I know for a fact that you hated working for me.'

'Pretending to work for you,' Romanov corrected.

Tony narrowed his eyes at her before beaming. It was so obviously fake that Rogers flinched. 'Yeah,' Tony said, 'that. So like I said; nothing new.'

They fell into an awkward silence after that, and Tony was just wondering how to ask them politely to get the fuck out when Bruce spoke; 'Have you given your position on the team any thought?'

Tony blinked at him and Rogers said, 'His position?'

Bruce nodded. 'You said that you were reconsidering being a part of the team, Tony,' Bruce said.

Oh... oh. Tony had completely forgotten about that. He was always pissed off at the Avengers; that fight had quickly fallen from his mind.

'Right,' Tony said, a frown on his face.

'You said you'd think about it for a few days,' Bruce added, 'and get back to us.'

'I did say that,' Tony agreed. 'I was thinking of outright quitting.'

Bruce looked down and Romanov flinched. Barton was glaring at his lap and Rogers looked... helpless. Thor was frowning.

Romanov and Barton still needed him, Tony knew that. They didn't have enough information about his suits, and now with Loki destroying more and more bases they needed the extra fire power that Iron Man brought to the team.

Tony... well, Tony wanted to quit. He didn't want these fucking mortals in his Tower any more. He wanted to kick them out so that Loki could walk around the Tower as Loki. Just the thought of Loki being able to look like himself, act like himself, in their home was... it made Tony feel warm. It made his magic fizz.

'I...' Tony hesitated, frowned. 'I don't know, Bruce.'

'So you're not quitting?' Rogers demanded.

'I don't know,' Tony repeated. 'I'm still weighing my options.'

'But we're your friends, Tony,' Steve argued.
Tony physically felt his magic rear up. His skin became too tight, too hot, and when he looked at Rogers he knew that his face was set into a mask of pure fury.

He couldn't help it; couldn't contain it. He couldn't even reign it in when Rogers took a step back and Bruce inhaled sharply. Romanov and Barton were both staring at him, faces blank. Romanov was hiding her true feelings, but Clint, well... he looked like his mind had just been wiped.

And then he twitched and shook his head, eyes confused and fingers shaking.

Huh. Tony should probably talk to Loki about that.

'I...' Tony inhaled, exhaled, rolled his shoulders to work out the tension and sternly told his magic to shut the fuck up. It seemed to roll in response, like it was trying to argue in favour of lashing out and setting fire to everything. But it settled down quickly enough and Tony could smile again; smile because he had actual control over his magic. It was doing as he asked.

Life was good.

'Tony?' Rogers tried and Tony snapped back to the present.

'Right,' he said, 'uh... I'll let you know.'

'Tony-' Rogers tried again but Tony was already walking.

'You can show yourselves out, right?' he tossed over his shoulder. He didn't wait for any type of response; just walked into the kitchen and started looking for something to eat. There was leftover Chinese and Thai in the fridge, frozen pizza and hot pockets in the freezer. Tony hummed to himself and opened the cupboards. He kind of felt like spaghetti.

'The Avengers are gone, Mr Stark,' JARVIS said. 'They appear to be returning to their own floors.'

'Good,' Tony said.

'Mr Stark,' JARVIS said and Tony paused from where he was pulling a jar of pasta sauce from the cupboard.

'Yeah?'

'You may have let your true feelings slip just now,' JARVIS said.

Tony snorted. 'No shit, J.'

'I believe that Agents Romanov and Barton will be leaving soon to discuss it,' JARVIS said. 'They gave each other a certain look that they've shared in the past before going to the Helicarrier and discussing you.'

'I see,' Tony mused. 'JARVIS, can you get in touch with Loki?'

'Mr Lie-smith has his StarkPhone on his person; so, yes.'

'Tell him what you just told me,' Tony said. 'He can decide if it's worth following them or trying to track them.'

'Yes, Mr Stark,' JARVIS responded, then went silent.

Tony went back to making dinner. He and Loki deserved a nice home-cooked meal after that little
Hopefully Tony could cook spaghetti without fucking anything up. He wasn't the best cook in the world, but his pasta could be pretty damn good if he could remember Edwin's recipe.

{oOo}

Loki had just shifted back into Logan Thomas when his phone started ringing. It was some odd piece of music that Stark had set it to; Loki didn't know the name of the piece.

He frowned and slipped the device from his pocket. The screen said “J.A.R.V.I.S”. 'Hello?' Loki answered.

'Mr Lie-smith.' It was JARVIS and Loki hummed.

'What can I do for my favourite computer programme?' Loki questioned. He started walking down the street; the cab had dropped him off at Lily Walden's apartment, and Loki had teleported a few blocks away using his jötunn magic.

'Thank you, Mr Lie-smith,' JARVIS replied, and he did sound thankful; Loki had to smile. 'The Avengers just left the penthouse, and I believe that Agent Romanov and Agent Barton will soon be going to the Helicarrier to discuss meeting Lily Walden, as well as Mr Stark's behaviour.'

Loki frowned. 'What about Anthony's behaviour?'

'There was an incident after you left,' JARVIS explained. 'Captain Rogers called the Avengers Mr Stark's “friends”, and Mr Stark was unable to hide his revulsion at the idea.'

Loki sighed. Stark's emotions, while mostly helpful, could be their undoing. The human wasn't as good at hiding his true feelings as Loki was. 'I see.'

'I informed Mr Stark of my theory,' JARVIS said, 'and he suggested that I contact you. He is leaving it up to you.'

'Leaving what up to me?'

'You can try and follow Agents Romanov and Barton, or let them go,' JARVIS said.

Loki hummed before saying, 'Doesn't Stark have access to the Helicarrier? Or, rather, don't you have access to the ship?'

'I have some access, yes,' JARVIS said. 'There are certain servers that Mr Stark was not able to install me in. It is these servers that Mr Stark believes hold more information on SHIELD’s bases and the World Security Council. I mostly have access to the control systems and security feeds, so I am able to survey conversations between Agents Romanov and Barton if they are within a room I have access to.'

Loki... understood most of that. He knew that SHIELD had multiple computers, and that those computers held the information they needed; the information they really needed JARVIS wasn't able to obtain without Loki or Anthony physically taking him with them aboard the Helicarrier.

He also understood cameras; audio and visual feeds. 'So if they are in a room you do not have
access to, we won't be able to listen to their conversation,' Loki summarised.

'Yes, Mr Lie-smith,' JARVIS responded.

Loki hummed again and mulled over his options. On one hand, they could discover valuable information. On the other hand, Barton and Romanov could simply talk about how far Stark had fallen.

'I don't think that it's worth the risk,' Loki finally decided. 'If Thor visits the Helicarrier any time soon he may be able to sense me; I don't think I have enough control of my jötunn magic to teleport from where I currently am to wherever the Helicarrier is.'

'Very well, Mr Lie-smith. Shall I inform Mr Stark of your return?'

'I'll be back in an hour or so,' Loki said. 'I have to make it look like Logan left the Tower for a reason.'

'Very well, Mr Lie-smith,' JARVIS repeated. He hung up before Loki could and Loki chuckled at the phone. He really liked JARVIS.

{oOo}

When Loki returned to the Tower it was to the delightful smell of tomatoes, garlic and something spicy. He shed his coat and dropped it off in his and Stark's bedroom before following the smell into the dining room.

There was a large pot of some type of red soup on the table, along with bowls and toasted bread covered in something that looked like butter. Anthony was placing cutlery on the table and smiled when he saw Loki.

'Well hey there, gorgeous,' Tony greeted.

'What is this?' Loki asked.

Tony huffed. 'No hello? So rude.'

Loki rolled his eyes but rounded the table to kiss Tony softly. 'Hello,' he said.

'Hey,' Tony repeated, a silly grin on his face. Loki smiled in response. 'This,' Tony said, 'is dinner.'

'I assumed as much,' Loki said, 'but what is it?'

'Haven't encountered Italian yet?' Tony asked. 'That's okay. I think you'll like it. It's pasta with sauce. This is spaghetti; long noodles with tomato sauce. I added some garlic and chilli flakes, as well as some other stuff that I vaguely remember my childhood nanny/butler/best friend using. It tastes fine to me, so...'

He gestured for Loki to sit before going to the kitchen. When he came back it was with an opened bottle of wine and two glasses. Tony poured them both a glass, dished them up a bowl of spaghetti each, and then sat opposite Loki at the table.

'To us,' Tony said, holding his glass up.
Loki chuckled and shook his head, but toasted Tony with his own glass. 'To us and our egos,' he stated, 'may they not be our downfall.'

Tony laughed as he swirled his glass, taking a long, slow inhale of the liquid before sipping. 'My ego won't be my downfall,' he argued. 'My intelligence, maybe; I'll think too highly of my plan and end up getting shot in the back.'

'Then it would be your ego that kills you, my dear,' Loki said. 'You believe too highly in yourself, in your intelligence, and get bested by someone else.'

'You're so mean to me,' Tony said, a pout forming on his face. Then he shook his head. 'Wait, “my dear”?'

Loki smirked. 'That took you a while.'

'Shut up.' Tony pointed his fork at Loki. 'You just called me dear.'

Loki shrugged one shoulder and picked up his own fork. He used it to swirl his spaghetti a bit before licking the sauce from the end. 'Mm, I like this.'

'Good.' Tony frowned, clearly not willing to let Loki's slip go.

Sighing, Loki said, 'You are dear to me; you know that. We both know that.'

Tony was silent for a beat, before saying, 'Yeah...'

'We are lost, Tony,' Loki said. He smiled, because it wasn't a bad thing to be. Loki had been lost many times in his life and he'd suffered much, much more. Being with Anthony was anything but painful. It was the most fun Loki had ever had in his life. He felt complete, accepted... loved.

Loki shifted uncomfortably in his seat, his smile falling away. Loved... love. Did he love Anthony? It certainly felt like that, at times. Loki had never truly loved anyone other than his family. And that had turned out wonderfully, Loki thought with a snort.

But Anthony was different. He knew Loki, the real Loki. And he wanted to work with Loki, live with him, sleep with him... just be with him.

Tony had said it aloud; they were lost... they were fucked. Loki couldn't deny it in the slightest.

'Loki?'

The Trickster looked up, across the table, to see Tony staring at him, a frown on his face. There was worry in his eyes and Loki knew that it was for him and him alone. Tony couldn't hide his emotions from someone like Loki. It was all there, free from Loki to read and take as he wished.

Loki couldn't help but smile. 'I'm fine. You have my apologies.'

'You sure?' When Loki nodded, Tony cracked a smile and took another sip of wine. 'Okay, then.' He clearly wasn't completely satisfied with Loki's answer, but was willing to move on. Loki adored him for it in that moment. 'Try your spaghetti.'

Loki complied and moaned obscenely when he'd taken his first bite of the long noodles, the red sauce spicy and rich. Tony looked far too pleased with himself, but Loki wouldn't ruin the feeling. The food was delicious and Loki would thank Tony later... thoroughly.
Chapter 45

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"A new day dawning

Comes without warning

So don't look twice

We live in troubled times"

– Troubled Times [Green Day]

Clint rubbed his temples as Natasha, Fury and Coulson discussed Stark; his behaviour, his mental state, his assistant... basically everything. He'd had a headache since leaving the Tower and had popped a few painkillers as soon as he was out of Natasha's sight; he didn't want her questioning his health.

Then again, I shouldn't be rubbing my face, Clint thought and lowered his hands. Tasha hadn't noticed, too busy arguing over Stark's current feelings towards the Avengers.

'But will he leave now?' Coulson interrupted, looking as thoroughly frustrated as Clint felt. 'Because we can't afford that; we don't have enough information about his suits. We're not even close to being able to build our own, and that's even with the information we stole from Stane soon after Stark killed him.'

Natasha's mouth snapped shut with an audible click. She glanced at Clint and Fury followed her line of sight.

'I don't know,' Clint sighed. 'Get him in a good mood and he says he's still considering it. Ask him in a bad mood?' He whistled and threw his right hand up.

'He'll kick us all out that minute,' Natasha translated.

Clint nodded. 'Either way he's going to leave. We all know that.'

Natasha huffed in frustration. 'So what do we do?'

'Ease off,' Clint said. Natasha scowled at him. They'd already discussed this on the ride over. Of course Natasha didn't want to ease off; she wanted Stark buried, preferably by her own hand. Clint just wanted the guy to calm the fuck down. And he was doing that, wasn't he? Hadn't he gotten better since he'd started dating Logan Thomas? Clint couldn't remember the last time Stark had acted like a fruit cake and put them all in danger. It had to have been before Loki started attacking SHIELD bases...

That made Clint frown, something prodding at the back of his skull, but before he could think about it too much Fury started speaking;
'Ease up,' he ordered, much to Nat's clear annoyance. 'Don't stop completely,' he added, 'but be more careful. Don't question him on anything, just be his team mate. Keep looking into his servers. We need information on the suits, but if you're caught it'll be near impossible to obtain anything from him.'

'And we'll start working on Lily Walden as soon as possible,' Coulson added. 'From what Agents Romanov and Barton have told me, Walden hates Stark.'

'Despises,' Natasha drawled, folded her arms. 'I'm pretty sure she feels the same way I did when I worked for Stark; didn't want to do it, but it had to be done.'

Fury was nodding as he leaned on the table. 'Good. That's good. We need an in and if we can't have Thomas, Walden is our best bet.'

'We're still looking into her past,' Coulson added. 'I'll let you know when we dig something up, Director Fury.'

Fury nodded again and with a quick flick of his hand he'd dismissed them all. Clint stood with a groan, stretched before following Coulson and Natasha from the conference room.

'Are you okay, Agent Barton?' Coulson asked as soon as they were out of ear-shot of Fury.

Clint's eyebrows shot up. 'Who? Me?' Coulson nodded. 'Yeah, I'm fine.'

'Are you sure?' Natasha prodded.

'You look like you're in pain,' Coulson added.

'I'm fine,' Clint insisted. He hopped forward to prove it, tossing a smile over his shoulder. 'Didn't sleep well last night, is all. You know how it is; a few restless nights can catch up on you real quick.'

Natasha just hummed, eyes running over Clint, but she said nothing else. Clint thanked his lucky stars.

Or unlucky, in the case of his headache. Why the fuck wouldn't it go away? Maybe he'd hit his head harder than the doctors had thought in that blast.

Natasha and Coulson had shouldered past Clint while Clint was musing and he jolted when he nearly bumped into both of them.

'Did you see Stark's face when Steve called us his friends?' Natasha commented.

Clint frowned at that. Yeah, he had seen it. He'd felt it. The look of absolute... disgust? Annoyance? Rage? It had been something else entirely; something Clint had never seen on Stark's face before.

Did he know...?

Clint's head chose that moment to throb in fresh pain and he shook it, bit back a wince and shrugged when Natasha looked at him. 'I dunno, Nat,' he said. 'Maybe Stark's as sick of us as we are of him.'

'Maybe,' Natasha muttered, though clearly didn't believe Clint's words; she turned her back on him and kept walking, Coulson by her side. Clint followed behind them.
'Somebody like Romanov would have been faster than you in the past simply due to being smaller than you,' Loki explained. 'Females tend to be smaller than the males of their race; at least humanoid-like beings, in any case. Barton was simply faster due to his naturally excellent reflexes, and Rogers due to the super soldier serum you have told me about.'

Tony blinked slowly at Loki. The Trickster was pacing back and forth while Tony had sat himself down on the mats. He'd already warmed himself up, a thin sheen of sweat clinging to his skin. Loki had warmed up, too, but he was a Frost Giant; it took quite a bit to get Loki sweating. Like very intense sex, Tony thought with a smile.

'I keep hearing the word “was”,' Tony commented.

Loki stopped pacing and turned to face him. 'Yes,' he agreed.

'So am I faster than them now?' Tony asked. 'Cause I'm a god?'

'You should be,' Loki said. Tony grinned; yes. 'You should be faster than Thor, too,' Loki said. 'He is still Æsir, so he is stronger, of course, but you're smaller than him. I've seen the way you fight; it can't just be the Genesis suit making you faster.'

'Is Thor stronger than you?' Tony asked.

Loki frowned. 'No,' he said. 'I'm jötunn; we are naturally more durable than Æsir.'

'Durable, meaning stronger, or durable, meaning harder to kill?'

Loki's frown deepened before he sighed. 'Both,' he said. 'I have always been more durable than Thor; I could always take more hits than Thor before going down, and when I was injured I healed at a faster rate, but always assumed it was because of my magic.'

It was Tony's turn to frown. 'When did you realise that that wasn't the case?'

Licking his lips, Loki looked at his bare feet as he said, 'When I was captured by the Other and the Mad Titan.'

Oh. Right. They'd tortured Loki; that much Tony had assumed from when he'd first met Loki and seen the security footage of his arrival. He'd found out more since teaming up with the older god; more about what they'd done to him; the heat torture, the burning and the magic siphoning. All of the techniques they'd used or invented to make the jötunn mage finally snap and agree to anything just to escape.

'Right,' was all Tony eventually said. Loki was still staring at his feet. Tony knew that Loki hated talking about it; not just because of the memories it brought up, but because that had been the lowest point of his life. The pain had been so much worse than what he'd experienced on that bridge, hearing his father say “no” and then dropping to certain death. Because the Other had brought all of that back; had replayed it over and over again until Loki simply lost his mind.

Tony shook his head; even he didn't want to think about that part of Loki's life. Because it made his skin tingle and his magic itch; made him want to go out, hunt those fucking bastards down, and fucking kill them. Which was ridiculous; Loki was a thousand times stronger than Tony and even he was terrified of the Mad Titan. What chance did Tony have?
In the future, he thought as he pushed himself to his feet. I'll get stronger and Loki and I will figure out a way to kill that son of a fucking bitch. 'Training, right?' Tony said, and Loki's head snapped up, green eyes locked on him. 'I've gotten pretty good at hand-to-hand combat,' Tony continued.

He saw Loki physically shake the memories, their conversation, away, and focus back on why they were here; not magic training. Well, not really. Tony knew that he was weak at hand-to-hand; that people like Romanov and Barton—hell, even Cap—could take him out. Because they were trained, and Tony wasn't. He'd taken some self-defence classes when he'd reached his twenties and taken over Stark Industries. Kidnapping became more of a threat when you were the head of a million-dollar company.

And after, when he'd become Iron Man, Tony had trained somewhat regularly with Rhodey and some JARVIS-operated Iron Man suits; later, he'd trained with the Avengers. But SHIELD knew about that. Tony wanted to get better. Not just to take out SHIELD, the Avengers, and the World Security Council; but to take out anyone who dared cross his and Loki's path.

Loki was an excellent fighter. He'd been training since he was a child and old enough to stand on his own two feet. He knew how Thor fought better than anyone, and he'd been studying the Avengers since he'd first landed on Midgard.

Tony had been studying the Avengers, too. He knew what they were capable of. And he needed to be better.

'Yes,' Loki eventually said. He rolled one shoulder, the other, and continued; 'Your skills are good for a Midgardian. But as it stands, Romanov, Barton and Captain America could take you in a fight if you had nothing else on your side. We need to fix that.'

'Yeah, we do,' Tony agreed.

Loki nodded. 'We've been focusing too much on your magical training and not enough on regular physical fighting; that's my fault.'

'But I wanted to learn about magic,' Tony said, 'I needed to learn to control it.'

'Yes, and I'm not disagreeing with that,' Loki replied. 'But physically you need to be better.'

Tony pouted up at him. 'We've been training somewhat.'

Loki's eyebrows rose and he gave Tony a pointed look. Tony smiled sheepishly. Because yes, he and Loki had sparred a number of times... it just usually escalated to rough sex over the closest flat surface. And that was mostly Tony's fault, true, but he wasn't going to let Loki get off scot-free.

'We need to start training more,' Loki said, clearly breezing past the entire topic. 'We can train on the more physical aspects within the Tower. We have already worked on your fitness and the way you fall.'

Tony groaned at that. Loki had spent an entire two weeks soon after they'd started working together telling Tony that he was falling wrong. He hadn't realised that there was a proper way to fall in a fight; ways to avoid injuring yourself, ways to throw your opponent off. Hell, he'd watched Romanov use a fall to her advantage in numerous fights; had watched her flip herself around and climb her opposition, or kick their legs from underneath him.

Now Tony could do it, too... more or less. He was pretty sure that he'd never be able to flip and spin around like Romanov. He just needed more moves, more strength.
'After I am confident that you can beat the Avengers, or at least stand a good chance against them, I will show you more magic skills,' Loki said. 'You will be able to use your magic in close quarters when I am done with you.'

'So... not throwing it?' Tony asked.

Loki inclined his head. 'There are certain spots on the body that can mean instant unconsciousness or physical paralysis if you hit them right,' he said. 'You can use your magic to boost you, to give you an edge, or to shield yourself from a physical blow. But it is a type of control that you do not yet have. We will work on that later; it comes after the close quarters combat training and after the other magic work I need to do with you.'

Tony groaned at that. He didn't hate learning; far from it. But every time he got even slightly better, Loki mentioned some other technique that he needed to learn.

'You will profit in the long run,' Loki said. When Tony looked at him, Loki was smirking; he could read Tony too well.

'Yeah, I know,' Tony said, 'and I know that practise makes perfect; that I need to do all of this small, seemingly boring and repetitive stuff to get good enough to actually do the flashy stuff that you're capable of. I just have a short attention span.'

Loki's smirk widened. 'I know that, too,' he said. 'But I do plan on rewarding you every time you reach a milestone.'

Tony perked up at that; 'Really? What kind of reward?'

'You will just have to wait and see.' With that Loki raised his hands and tied his hair into a ponytail. 'Prepare yourself, Anthony.'

Tony frowned as he got to his feet. When Loki just continued to stare at him, Tony looked down at himself; wifebeater, sweatpants, no socks or shoes... 'What?' he asked. He looked back up and saw a fist coming for his face. He barely got out of the way, his head jerking to the right and his body following him. Loki didn't give him time to respond; or to do anything other than dodge, really. He kept swinging at Tony and Tony kept barely moving out of the way.

'What the hell, Loki?' Tony demanded when Loki finally paused in his onslaught.

Loki smirked. 'Dodge,' was all he said before attacking again.

{oOo}

'What the hell are you teaching me?' Tony demanded. His face hurt, but already he could feel the bruise healing. The pain became duller and duller until it was gone, and he was sure that his face was smooth and tanned once more.

'How to dodge,' Loki said. 'You have almost always been in one of your suits when facing someone faster than you. I want you to get used to this; if you can dodge me, if you can learn how to avoid punches and read my fighting style, it will better prepare you to fight the Avengers. They are nowhere near as quick as me.'
Oh... oh, Tony got it; Loki was faster than him, faster than Romanov, Barton, and Rogers combined. If Tony got used to fighting Loki, then the Avengers would seem slow when he faced them in battle. Tony knew that he was at a disadvantage without the suit. He was smarter than SHIELD, than the Avengers, but that meant little if he was stuck facing them with no weapons. And that just might happen.

'Okay,' Tony said, 'okay. So just dodging?'

'For now.' Loki didn't raise his fists; he just stood there, staring at Tony. Tony stared back.

Between one blink and the next Loki was on him, and somehow Tony managed to dodge. He felt his senses become overloaded as he tried to predict Loki's next move, but every time he actively thought about it Loki managed to smash him in the cheek, the head, the chest, sweep his legs from under him and get a hand around Tony's throat.

The fifth time Loki dropped him, Tony stopped thinking. Loki only ever managed to hit him when Tony really got into the fight and tried to use his head. So he wasn't going to use his head; animal instincts had kept the human race alive this long. It was their brains that were fucking them over, now; their greed, their need, all the things that made humans so clever.

So Tony moved when his body naturally did. Loki tried to knee him and Tony flung himself sideways, rolled to his feet and dove again to the right, narrowly missed a kick from Loki's long legs. He dove again and used that earlier training to roll and dodge to the left, the right, kick his own knee up to block an elbow from Loki.

Loki looked slightly surprised when that happened and Tony went with it; he grabbed Loki's arm and pulled him down, used Loki's greater weight to fling him over Tony's head. Loki gracefully rolled to his feet and stopped.

'What?' Tony asked as he got up.

'Very good,' Loki said. 'You are using your magic.'

Tony frowned at that. 'I am?'

'You couldn't tell?'

'No,' Tony said, shaking his head. 'I decided to stop thinking and just trust my instincts.'

'Your magic, you mean,' Loki corrected. Tony raised his eyebrows. 'Instincts are handy,' Loki continued, 'and they certainly help. But you are also using your magic to feel your surroundings; to feel where I am, where I will hit next, what movement will follow the current one. Very good.'

Tony scratched at his beard and slid a foot along the mats beneath him. 'Tm, uh... honestly not trying to do that,' he admitted. And he had to admit it; Loki needed to know everything if he was going to train Tony properly.

'That isn't a bad thing,' Loki said. He linked his hands behind his back, tilted his head; 'It simply means that you are getting more and more in-tune with your magic. That is what we want; for you to be able to use it like I do. As a second limb, an extension of yourself.'

'Oh... yeah, right,' Tony said, nodded. He felt his magic all the time, now; it took him little to reach out to it. Most of the time he didn't even need to fall into his mindspace to connect with it. Hell, most of the time his magic reacted without his permission. 'Good.'
'Yes,' Loki agreed. And then he launched himself at Tony and kicked him in the gut.

Tony fell with an “oof” that had Loki chuckling.

'Up, Man of Iron,' Loki ordered. 'Or are you made of chocolate?'

'Chocolate?' Tony wheezed. So he was a god, yeah, but Loki was still fucking strong.

'Sweet to look at, and to taste,' Loki said, 'but it melts under pressure.'

'Oh, fuck you,' Tony growled. This time he threw himself at Loki. He ended up back on the floor in about a minute, but Loki looked proud, so it was worth it.

{oOo}

Tony was up bright and early the following morning thanks to Loki. Because Loki was an evil asshole and had decided to train Tony right up 'til about three am, only taking him back to the Tower and letting him drop into bed when Tony had mastered throwing his magic. Well “mastered” was a strong word. Loki's exact words were, “You're not terrible, but you aren't good, either. I suppose it'll do, for now.”

Tony had been too tired to argue. Had barely even argued when Loki- no, Lily- had woken him up at five am for a six am meeting. Tony had whined and grumbled, of course, but was seriously too worn out and bruised to put up a true fight. He wasn't even really awake until he'd stepped out of the elevator, a large cup of black coffee in his right hand, his left fiddling with the green-tinted sunglasses he'd slipped on before being forcefully pushed out of his penthouse.

He frowned. 'Where am I?'

'The fifteenth floor of Stark Industries, Mr Stark,' Lily said from just behind him and to his left.

His frown deepened. 'Why?'

'You have a meeting at six am in conference room 15-B with Mrs Winston of the Research & Development Department, followed by a meeting at 11:30 with Mr Harrison from Accounting. You'll break for lunch and then have a meeting at three with Ms Potts.'

'Oh...' Tony groaned and rubbed his eyes. 'Great.'

'I tried to schedule as many meetings as possible over the following three days,' Lily added. Tony glanced at her to find the woman tapping away at her StarkPhone, dark blonde hair pulled back in a low ponytail. 'You'll have the weekend off as well as Monday through to Thursday, with only two meetings on Friday.' She paused to look up at him. 'Is that satisfactory?'

Tony hummed. Well, he and Loki did want to destroy another base at some point this week. He supposed that Loki was the best person to make his schedule. 'Yeah,' he said. 'I might go out Saturday.'

He sipped his coffee, watched Lily tap at her phone again. 'Oh?' she drawled, no interest in her tone, only mild politeness.

Tony smiled slightly. 'Yeah. I think Logan and I could use a nice dinner out.'
'That's nice,' Lily said, 'I'll be sure to add it to your schedule.'

Tony chuckled and started moving. He knew where Conference Room 15-B was, at least, and Lily followed along easily, always just a step behind him. *So far so good,* Tony mused.

{oOo}

Tony managed to make it through both meeting without any major incidents. He rolled his eyes a lot and muttered under his breath (and Lily smacked him over the back of the head whenever she could get away with it), but other than that everything was just peachy.

Until Tony left his last meeting and went to take his lunch break. There were well-stocked cafeterias on every other floor, Tony knew, and his penthouse was just an elevator ride away, but Tony needed to get out of the building for however long he could. So he headed straight for the elevator and sighed when the doors slid shut behind himself and Lily.

'Finally.' He grunted and slid his glasses up to rub his eyes. 'Sometimes I hate people.'

'Only sometimes?' Lily purred.

Tony really should have taken that tone as warning enough, but his head felt too stuffy for him to truly pay attention to it. 'Sometimes I like people,' Tony muttered. 'The people who deliver my food; the people who make my coffee.'

'Servants, then.'

'Hey, no!' Tony snapped and rounded to glare at Lily. 'I don't have servants.'

Lily smirked at him and it sent alarms off in Tony's head.

'What?' Lily asked.

'What are you doing?' Tony asked, frowned when Lily's smile grew and she turned to stab her thumb against the emergency stop. 'Uh... you know, security are alerted when that's pushed.'

'Magic,' Lily said and slid to her knees.

'Thor?' Tony tried when Lily edged closer, eyes fixed on Tony's crotch.

'He only ever uses the private elevator,' Lily said and placed her hands on Tony's knees. She slid her hands up, smoothing over the material of Tony's expensive trousers. 'I've checked.'

'You know...' Tony mused when Lily's hands stopped either side of his zipper, 'our whole plan kinda hinges on people knowing that I'm in a committed relationship.'

'Nobody saw us,' Lily said.

'Somebody always sees this kinda shit,' Tony countered. 'I got caught banging three of my assistants because of shit like this!'

Lily raised her eyebrows, bright red lips parting to reveal shiny white teeth. 'And were you trying *not* to get caught, Mr Stark?'
Her voice was all deep and dark, but nowhere near Loki's usual low purr. So Tony merely raised his eyebrows. 'No...' he conceded, 'but still-

'We won't get caught,' Lily interrupted. 'Magic, Stark, remember?'

'Okay...' Tony mused and shifted back a bit. He had to admit that he was getting hard; there was a beautiful woman kneeling before him, hands on his thighs, and Tony knew that it was really Loki. He couldn't be blamed for getting hard. 'But, uh...'

Lily raised an eyebrow and paused from where she'd been about to unbuckle Tony's belt. 'Yes?'

'Can you, uh...' He didn't want Lily to take this the wrong way; and a vicious Loki wasn't something that Tony needed right now, not with his cock so close to getting sucked. 'Could you change into yourself?'

Lily frowned at that.

'Your usual self,' Tony added, in case that wasn't obvious. 'You know... green eyes, black hair... male.'

Lily blinked slowly before that sinful smile was back. 'Why, Stark,' she purred, 'have I turned you off of women?'

'No,' Tony denied and gestured at his crotch; because he was obviously straining by now. 'But I still prefer you; he added. Not that Tony wasn't going to take advantage of Loki wanting to do the dirty while a woman; Tony would get sex with a hot man and a hot woman without having to cheat or date multiple people. Both would be Loki; perfect, sexy, crazy Loki, who Tony was pretty much in love with.

It was just that, right now, Tony wanted male Loki; the green-eyed demon he'd fantasised about for months before approaching to make a deal. He still hadn't gotten enough of Æsir Loki. Probably never would, in all honesty, but they had years to experiment together; centuries.

Lily was just staring at him and Tony waited, patient. Because if Loki wanted to suck him off as Lily, he was all for it. But if she wanted to be Loki, well... Tony would like it even more.

He felt his magic bubble first, felt the air around the two mages physically sharpen, and then Lily shimmered. She disappeared quickly, blonde hair replaced by black, blue-grey eyes becoming green, pants-suit replaced by a tunic and black jeans.

Loki smirked up at him and undid Tony's belt; he got it open quickly, pulled down the zip of his pants and pulled his cock from his briefs. Tony inhaled sharply when cold air was quickly replaced by a warm mouth. Loki wasted no time; his tongue went to work swirling around the slit, under the crown, down the sides when Loki moved forward to take Tony further and further into his mouth.

And then Tony's cock was sliding down Loki's throat, being squeezed, and Tony didn't hold back the cry of pleasure. He didn't stop himself from latching onto Loki's hair and drawing him back down when Loki pulled off; didn't restrain himself from slamming his cock down Loki's throat, the god near choking before smoothly sucking Tony down again.

Nobody gave a blow job like Loki. The way he sucked as he pulled back, lips clamped tight and tongue sliding agonisingly slow up the side, across the head, dipping into the slit to clean away any drop Tony might have let escape.

Tony slid all the way in every time- hell, he slammed in every time, quickly working up a pace that
would make lesser men choke and pull back. But not Loki. He easily adjusted his own angle, easily adjusted Tony, too, hands strong on Tony's hips as he pushed him back, pulled him forward, fingers digging into Tony's skin through his pants when Loki buried his face in Tony's crotch and swallowed.

'Jesus Christ,' Tony groaned.

He was panting, flushed, nails scratching into Loki's scalp so deep that he had to be drawing blood by this point. It'd been too long since Loki had gone down on him and Tony felt like a teenager getting his dick touched for the first time; he really wasn't going to last, pleasure building, that mouth so hot and tight and fuck, that tongue-

Loki hummed. He knew what he was doing, the bastard, because he hummed and sucked and dragged his teeth, his tongue, just so-

Tony came with a hoarse shout, shot down Loki's throat and shuddered his way through the best orgasm he'd had all week. Loki swallowed it all and the pressure around Tony's cock gradually softened until Loki pulled away completely, leaving Tony well and truly spent.

'Christ,' Tony gasped.

'I'm glad that you enjoyed yourself,' Loki said. He was on his feet before Tony could blink-teleported, Tony realised when his skin buzzed at the use of magic- and slammed Tony against the shiny back wall of the elevator. Tony gasped again but didn't try to stop Loki. He just waited, eyes hooded, as Loki dragged his own cock out. His hand was already slick and Tony watched as Loki thrust into his own fist, moans and pants quickly snatch from his throat to fill the elevator.

'That's it,' Tony cooed once he got control of himself; Loki was really good at sucking his brain out of his dick. He pushed himself forward so that the head of Loki's cock bumped Tony's own, and enjoyed the way Loki jolted at the touch. 'That's it,' he repeated, voice lower, still a bit hoarse from his own grunting and shouting. 'I wanna see you come, Lokes. All over me.'

He reached out to brush his fingers along Loki's, felt the warm liquid that Loki had coated his fingers with. Tony wanted to learn that spell.

'Come on,' Tony said and wrapped his own fist around Loki's. Loki soon let go, was soon fucking into Tony's hand only. Tony tightened his fist because he knew that Loki liked it rough, liked to feel a fucking vice around his cock, and Tony was all too happy to comply. He tugged Loki forward by his length and bit at Loki's neck when it was within biting distance.

He sank his teeth in, heard Loki shout his name and shake against him. His hips were getting less coordinated, Loki blindly fucking forward as he chased his pleasure. Tony licked and sucked at Loki's pale skin, thought about all the marks that he liked to leave on Loki's body when they had the entire day or night ahead of them. Loki's hands found Tony's shoulders, fingers dug into his suit jacket, and Loki's hips moved faster.

'Come for me,' Tony breathed, 'like I came for you. Loki... I love you,' he finished in his head and felt Loki come in his fingers. There was a splash against his hand, his underwear too, no doubt, and Tony stroked Loki through the remnants of his orgasm, smiled against Loki's neck when the Trickster slumped against him, breathless.

'That was... needed,' Loki panted, breath fanning over Tony's ear and neck. 'All of those people... drive me mad as well.' He pressed a kiss to Tony's jaw. 'Thank you.'
Tony smiled. *I love you,* he thought again.

{oOo}

They didn't start the elevator until they were well and truly cleaned up. Luckily Loki was a mage and knew quite a few handy spells to get them looking respectable again. Once Loki had changed into Lily, Tony stabbed at the emergency stop button and then the ground floor. The elevator started moving and Lily stepped behind Tony.

'Where would you like to go for lunch, Mr Stark?'

Tony hummed, didn't answer. He was only slightly reeling from what he'd realised only minutes earlier. He loved Loki. *Loved.* He wanted to spend the rest of his life with Loki... he wanted only Loki in his bed. He thought about what Loki had said, only a day earlier; "*You are dear to me; you know that. We both know that... we are lost, Tony."

Yeah. They were lost... but Tony didn't want to be found. He wanted to stay lost with Loki forever.

*Fuck, I've turned into a love-sick idiot,* he thought with a snort. He felt Lily look at him but didn't turn to face her.

Once the Avengers, SHIELD, and the World Security Council were taken care of, Tony and Loki could start work on building the Stark Empire. Tony would lead Midgard into a new Golden Age and Loki would be right by his side.

*Openly by his side.* Because Tony would figure out a way to get Midgard on his side or he'd die trying. And once their enemies were dead, who would fight Tony when he said that Loki was reformed?

Tony Stark loved Loki. And he was damn well going to make sure that Loki knew it.

'Mr Stark?'

Tony jumped and threw his best charming grin at Lily. She wasn't impressed. *Well, eventually,* Tony mused. *I have to make sure, first.*

The elevator doors opened, saving Tony from having to answer. Lily was on her phone now, no doubt calling for one of Tony's cars. Really something that she should have done earlier. Tony would have to have words with Loki about that later.

They were halfway across the lobby when the doors before them swung open, letting in a light rain and wind. But then they were shut, the person who'd entered pulling down their umbrella.

'Agent!' Tony shouted when Phil Coulson's features came into view. Tony was glad that his disdain for the man was well known; he didn't have to pretend to actually be *happy* to see him. 'What are you doing here? Didn't I ban you from my Tower?'

'No, you didn't, Mr Stark,' Coulson said.

'Not yet,' Tony commented, flashed a smile when Coulson raised his eyebrows.

'I see,' he mused, but moved right along to Lily. 'I don't believe that we've met,' he said, 'but I've
heard about you.'

*I'll bet you have,* Tony thought, while Lily said, 'I'm Lily Walden; Mr Stark's assistant.'

She held her hand out and Coulson shook it, a polite smile pasted on his face. Tony could see the calculation in his eyes, though. It'd always been there; because Coulson had never hidden his distaste of Tony. Tony could respect that, on some level. Coulson had never pretended to be his friend. Maybe he wouldn't kill Coulson when he got the chance.

'A pleasure, Miss Walden,' Coulson said. 'I'm Agent Phil Coulson, with SHIELD.'

'I see,' Lily hummed and withdrew her hand.

Coulson said, 'I'm sure we'll be seeing plenty of each other in the near future.' He nodded at Lily, gave Tony a look, and then headed for the private elevator, umbrella tucked at his side.

'Interesting,' Lily commented, voice hushed. Tony didn't say anything, just turned his back on Coulson and headed outside. 'I believe that he will contact me soon,' Lily murmured once they'd exited the building, rain lightly sprinkling them. One of Tony's cars was already on the curb, waiting in the spot that was always reserved for Tony Stark.

Tony hummed. He didn't doubt it. Barton and Romanov had probably already discussed Lily's behaviour towards Tony with Coulson and Fury. He wanted them to make their move soon; then he and Loki could make theirs.

'Yeah,' he said. 'How do you feel about Burger King?'

Lily gave him a filthy look that wouldn't be out of place on Loki's face. Tony smiled and led the way to the car.

Chapter End Notes

**Author's Note:** I hope you enjoyed! This chapter, like the last, wouldn't work with me. Some of the scenes I've had written for a long time but I had nowhere to put them. So they were placed here. In other news, 57 chapters... that's how many I now have planned. Can we make it to 60?

Also, thank you SO much for over 2000 kudos! I can't believe it! Can you believe it? Because I can't! This random little story that started as a one-shot, that I first wrote while staying up for FAR too long, is now over 170,000 words long and has over 2000 kudos. That's crazy. You people are crazy.

I'm crazy. And I'll stop now.

Cheers,

Dreamer
Chapter 46

Chapter Notes

**Author's Note:** Long time no see! I've pretty much spent the last two months working constantly because all of my co-workers- my boss included- decided that it was holiday time. Is it holiday time for Dreamer? Never. So I didn't have any time to work on this chapter, but I finally got it done!

Also, just a side note; it wasn't meant to happen like this. But my muse decided that it had to happen. Confused? You'll understand at the very end of this chapter.

Dreamer

"Violence on the rise, like a bullet in the sky

Oh, Lord, have mercy on my soul

Kindred spirits sing for the sick and suffering

The city of damage control

This is how we roll"

Say Goodbye – [Green Day]

Tony was thrown off course, that goddamn mother fucking gun, as usual, short-circuiting his suit. He laid there, helpless, as the SHIELD agents advanced upon him. He snapped orders at JARVIS but didn't think the AI could hear him. He heard a whirr and looked up through his faceplate to see the gun at eye-level.

'Finally,' the agent breathed.

Before he could fire Tony's HUD flickered back into life, everything awash with blue before numbers and programmes flashed before his eyes. Then Genesis-3 was there, slamming into the agent and tossing her off course. Genesis-2 took care of the others and Tony finally managed to get to his feet.

'JARVIS,' he growled, 'remind me to figure out how the fuck those things work.'

'Yes, Mr Stark,' JARVIS responded.

'Anthony?' Loki's voice came over the comms, slightly distorted, something clearly having broken when Tony was hit. 'Are you okay? If you don't answer me now-'
'Relax, Reindeer Games,' Tony interrupted. He heard Loki curse and smiled. 'I was hit, but I'm alright.'

'Are you sure?' Loki demanded. 'I knew that this was a stupid idea; you shouldn't have gone in there alone.'

'I'm not alone; I have Genesis-2 and -3.'

'An AI is not as good as me,' Loki growled.

Tony rolled his eyes and ran a quick check of his suit before he flew into the air. Now that Tony was okay the Genesis bots went back to what they'd been doing; planting C4 to bring the Los Angeles SHIELD base to the ground.

Tony looked around and did some scans, found that there weren't many SHIELD agents left. And those that hadn't been killed yet were scrambling, shouting into comms and raising yet more alarms that blared into the early evening air.

Despite nearly being captured, the plan was going off without a hitch. Tony knew that he could do this alone, though found that it wasn't nearly as much fun without Loki by his side...

A roar broke through his musings, followed by the sirens suddenly cutting out and the lights winking out. Everything went dark, the only light coming from the flickering fires Tony and his bots had started.

'Uh...' Tony looked around.

'What?' Loki asked.

'I'm not sure-' Tony began, but went quiet when he saw bright lights quickly sweeping towards the base. He narrowed his eyes and had JARVIS zoom in. 'Quinjet,' Tony muttered.

'The Avengers?' Loki questioned.

'Not sure,' Tony said, 'could be, but Rogers told me this morning that Romanov and Barton were gonna be busy for a few days.'

'Just the Captain, then,' Loki said. 'Allow me to shoot him out of the sky.'

'No way.' Tony laughed darkly. 'Rogers is mine.'

Loki hummed over the comms. 'Should I be jealous?'

'Don't be disgusting, Loki.' It was Loki's turn to laugh but Tony ignored him. 'Rogers is mine,' he repeated.

'Very well,' Loki said.

The quinjet had landed just outside of the fence, near a section that had been torn apart when Tony had blown up the security hut. The lights stayed on and Tony saw more lights when the back opened.

And then there was a roar.

'Shit,' Tony said.
'The green one?' Loki asked and Tony grunted in affirmation. 'Do you wish for my assistance now?'

'No,' Tony said, 'I knew that I'd have to fight Bruce one day.'

'But you don't want to,' Loki commented.

Tony rolled his eyes and ignored his partner, instead switching comm feeds. 'Genesis-2 and -3, keep doing what you're doing. I'll handle the Avengers.'

'Yes, Mr Stark,' JARVIS responded.

Tony shot towards the quinjet, mind focused on what had to be done. It didn't matter how he felt about Bruce. The doctor was an Avenger. And the Avengers were his enemies.

{oOo}

24 hours earlier...

'I still think that it's a ridiculous idea.'

'I know you do, but we're doing it any way.'

Loki sighed. 'Why?'

'Because we've become predictable, Loki.'

Frowning, Loki pushed himself into a more up-right position, right leg falling from the sofa to the carpeted floor. 'You must be joking,' he said. 'I have never been called predictable in my entire life.'

'Well sorry, darling, but we are predictable,' Tony said. 'We've destroyed every base the exact same way; we both go in, Genesis-2 and -3 plant explosives, we have some fun, then we leave and everything goes boom.'

'And how is that a bad thing?' Loki asked. 'I've been having fun.'

'As have I,' Tony retorted, 'but if we keep doing it, SHIELD will be able to coordinate a counter attack. Do you want that?'

Loki huffed but said nothing, so Tony knew that the older god agreed with him.

'Still,' Loki finally said, 'that doesn't mean that you should attack the base alone.'

'Why not?' Tony asked. He pouted, ignored the eye roll Loki gave him. 'Do you think I'm weak?'

'I think you're an idiot.'
'Asshole.'

'I am worried,' Loki said, 'and it has little to do with your abilities, Anthony, and everything to do with our partnership and how I feel about you.'

Tony felt his throat close up at that and had to cough, turn away to clear his throat. How Loki felt about him? How, exactly, did Loki feel about him? Because Tony knew how he felt about Loki... well, he was pretty sure that he was in love with the other god. But did Loki-

'I do not want you to risk yourself unnecessarily,' Loki continued. 'Why go in alone when I can be by your side?'

Tony shook his thoughts free and smiled slightly. 'I just want to try something new. You can blow up the next base by yourself, if you want.'

'I would still be working alone if I missed destroying things alone,' Loki muttered.

'Aww.' Tony grinned and Loki scowled at him. 'I knew you loved me.'

He ignored the way his heart skipped a beat at the word, how his magic tingled and strained to reach out to Loki. He had enough control to rein it in, thank God.

Loki shook his head. 'Do what you want, Stark. I can tell that I'm fighting a losing battle.'

Tony leaned forward, planted a hand on Loki's knee, and kissed him. Loki's lips were as soft and yielding as always and it didn't take long for Tony to press harder, push for more. Not that Loki tried to stop him; he grabbed Tony by the t-shirt and dragged him closer until Tony overbalanced and was caught by Loki's large, strong hands. He was just about to straddle his partner when Loki pulled back and frowned.

'What?' Tony asked. His magic was buzzing, arousal was pooling low in his gut, and he'd very much like Loki to fuck him right now, thank you very much.

'It seems that someone within this building is scanning my magic,' Loki mused.

Tony's eyebrows rose and sat back. 'Really? You can actually feel that?' When Loki nodded, Tony said, 'Huh. So I'm not really lying to SHIELD when I tell them that.'

Rolling his eyes, Loki said, 'I'm assuming that it's Banner. He's still working on the sensor, isn't he?'

Tony stopped short at that. 'Uh...'

Loki sighed. 'Really, Stark? What is the point of you remaining a part of the team if you aren't going to use your position to keep tabs on them?'

'Shit your mouth, you bitch,' Tony said, which just made Loki laugh. 'I'll go check on him, okay?'

'You do that,' Loki drawled. He slumped back on the sofa and Tony shook his head as he stood. 'Don't take too long, dear! Loki called after him. 'I'm hungry, and not for food.'

'Son of a bitch,' Tony muttered and headed for the elevator.
Captain America was the first to leave the quinjet, quickly followed by Bruce. Tony tightened his fists at the sight of the doctor but ignored him in favour of Rogers. He locked onto the spandex-covered man, and grinned when Rogers looked up, caught sight of him-

Tony slammed into Rogers and sent him flying back. They both hit the ground hard and Rogers was winded, his shield clattering to the ground out of reach.

Tony used his momentum to swing into the air, one repulsor aimed at the ground to shoot him up quickly. He vaulted over Rogers and targeted Bruce, but apparently the doctor had used that split second to Hulk Out, because instead of hitting a somewhat frail human body, Tony was caught in a large green fist and squeezed.

The Hulk roared and Tony choked, gloves scrambling at rough skin as he tried to free himself.

'Son of a bitch, Bruce has a strong grip!' Tony growled.

'Stark!' Loki shouted.

'Not now, honey!' He got a boot under one of the Hulk's fingers and blasted his way free. The Hulk roared in pain and turned large, furious eyes on Tony.

'Going up!' Tony shot further into the air and narrowly avoided another swipe from the Hulk. And then JARVIS took control and jerked him back, narrowly pulling Tony out of the way of Rogers' shield. 'I seriously hate that man,' Tony snarled and locked eyes with the super soldier.

'Mr Stark -' JARVIS began, but Tony was already moving. He did an elegant loop in the air, dodged another giant green fist, and fell into a dive. Rogers raised his shield, masked-face turned up to Tony.

'Peek-a-boo!' Tony called from the safety of his helmet.

Genesis-3 slammed into Rogers and Genesis-2 fired a missile at the Hulk's head. The green beast roared and Tony ignored him in favour of barrelling into Rogers once more. This time the man stayed standing, wrapped two bulky arms around Tony's waist and lifted-

Tony was thrown over Rogers' head and into the ground, the force sending him skidding across the asphalt and towards the damaged fence. Tony rolled onto his stomach and activated his repulsors, the sudden energy blast changing his direction and making him shoot forward. Rogers dove to his right, rolled and grabbed his shield, flung it up just as Tony twisted and blasted a repulsor at his face.

The energy was deflected from Rogers and at Genesis-2, who took the hit directly to the head and dropped from the sky.
'JARVIS!'

'Genesis-2 is damaged but not beyond repair,' JARVIS informed him. 'By my calculations it will lose power entirely in seventeen point three four min.'

'Get Gensis-2 back to the hideout!' Tony ordered.

'Yes, sir.'

'ANTHONY!'

'I'm fine!' Tony snapped at Loki just before he was punched in the head. It forced him to take two steps back, head tilted and throbbing slightly. 'Oh,' Tony growled, 'hell no.'

He launched himself at Rogers and they fell into a heap of twisted limbs, both men punching and slapping at each other. Somehow Rogers managed to get his shield up every time Tony tried to shoot him, and it made Tony that much angrier. How dare Rogers think that he could fight a god.

'Stupid... pathetic... mortal!' He hit Rogers once, then again; again and again and again until his mask was askew and blood was dribbling from his mouth and nose. Rogers blocked the next punch, his stamina and strength making him able to stand up to the suit.

Tony growled in frustration and ducked Rogers' fist but couldn't get out of the way of his shield. It dug into the armour protecting his neck and Tony let himself be pushed. He hit the ground and rolled, suit kicking up sparks as Rogers pivoted and swung at him again.

Too slow, Tony thought, I'm still too fucking slow.

'I hope you're taking notes, J!' Tony shouted as he pushed himself to his feet. He knelt before Rogers and ducked another swing, lashed out and hit Rogers in the gut. The super soldier dropped and Tony blasted himself into the air, hands raised and aimed at the pathetic little bastard below him.

Rogers dodged one repulsor blast, was hit by the second, and managed to deflect the third so that it rebounded and hit Tony.

Tony fell out of the sky and hit the ground once more, spluttering and cursing when he felt a sharp pain in his right arm and warmth spreading beneath his undersuit.

'JARVIS!'

'Mr Stark?'

'Detonate some of the C4.'

'Sir-'

'NOW!'

There was a roar and Tony looked up to see a massive green foot heading for his head. He rolled out of the way and the Hulk pursued, spittle flying as he screamed at Genesis. Tony had just gotten to his feet when an explosion rocked the base. There was a flash of bright yellow fire, a smaller explosion, and then a colossal bang before debris went flying.

Tony leapt into the air but Rogers was tossed to the ground like a rag doll and even the Hulk swayed on his feet. He roared again, looking every which way, but Tony stayed above him and out
of sight.

'Good boy,' Tony praised his AI. 'JARVIS, arm the unibeam.'

JARVIS didn't respond but text started scrolling across the left side of Tony's HUD, followed by a diagram of the Genesis suit. The metal plate hiding the arc reactor hadn't retracted yet and wouldn't until Tony was ready to fire. It'd be tricky to do so without the Hulk or Rogers seeing where the blast had come from; he didn't need SHIELD to draw any more comparisons between Genesis and Iron Man.

As the unibeam charged Tony flew over the base, leaving the Hulk and Rogers far behind. JARVIS ran scans and there were only a dozen or so SHIELD agents running around the base. From what Tony could tell they were evacuating, scattering about like the lost little mortals they were.

Tony grinned. 'Now this,' he said, 'is fun.'

'I'm glad that you're having such a marvellous time,' Loki drawled over the comms, 'while I'm stuck out here, bored out of my skull.'

'I'm sorry,' Tony muttered, 'but I remember that someone was responsible for warning me if the Avengers were approaching. And did he warn me?'

'I sensed nothing,' Loki informed him.

Tony grunted at that. Rogers must have approached from the opposite side of the base, just outside of Loki's range. Or maybe Loki had been too focused on Tony to notice Rogers and Bruce.

'It doesn't matter now,' Tony decided. 'A couple more explosions and-'

Tony was swiped out of the air and hit a building instead of the ground, which was new. He crashed through metal and wood, fell from a wooden beam that was on fire and through a wall that had somehow managed to stay upright. Something cracked and something else screeched when Tony finally tumbled across carpet and out into the waning afternoon light. There were sparks and the HUD flickered but remained on.

Tony groaned and rolled over, coughing as he tried to reorientate himself. A loud rumble cut into his thoughts and he looked up just in time to see a large hand coming for him. He aimed his right gauntlet at the ground and blasted himself up, to the left, but was hit again and slammed back down. Then a fist was on him, massive fingers pressing against his body and keeping him pinned to the ground.

He fought against it but the Other Guy was too strong; he had Tony pressed against the ground tightly and there was nothing Tony could do.

'JARVIS,' Tony tried, but the AI responded with, 'The suit is not strong enough, sir. The unbeam is almost-'

The Hulk bending down to look Tony in the eyes was more pressing than JARVIS' words, and Tony gazed up into large, dark brown eyes. There was a hint of Bruce there, Tony could see it, but he was mostly outweighed by the enormous green rage monster.

'Uh...' Tony couldn't say anything; he wasn't about to give himself away now. And there was always the chance that Bruce would remember this encounter. The Hulk raised his free hand, fingers curled into a fist. 'Well, shit,' Tony grunted.
24 hours earlier...

'Hey, Bruce!'

The doctor jumped and knocked over a container of pens. Tony's eyebrows rose and he smiled as Bruce shot him a sheepish look.

'You okay?' Tony asked.

'I'm fine; sorry,' Bruce muttered.

'JARVIS should have told you that I was on the way.' Tony frowned up at one of JARVIS' sensors.

'You're supposed to warn people, JARVIS.'

'I did, Mr Stark,' JARVIS announced. 'Dr Banner responded with a simple “yes”.'

Tony's eyes dropped back to Bruce.

'Sorry,' Bruce repeated, 'I mustn't have been listening properly.'

'That's alright,' Tony said. He hitched his thumb over his shoulder. 'Want me to leave?'

Bruce shook his head. 'No, no; that's fine. Did you need something?'

'Just some company; someone to talk to,' Tony said. He walked across Bruce's personal lab, eyes taking in the various experiments Bruce was working on. Most went over Tony's head, but only because Tony had never bothered to learn everything that Bruce had ever studied. Some of the doctor's work just didn't interest him. 'What are you working on?'

'The magic sensor,' Bruce announced. Tony stiffened ever so slightly at that, his magic burning a hole just beneath his arc reactor. But he let out a soft breath and pushed it down, set it back in its place. 'I'm just going over the readings again. I'm sure that there's something I'm missing.'

'Probably,' Tony agreed.

Bruce glanced at Tony when the genius stopped beside his desk, Tony leaning one hip against it and folding his arms across his chest, arc reactor just peaking out over the top. 'Are you ever going to take another look at it?'

His tone wasn't hostile; not even accusatory. Tony wasn't sure what to make of that. Did Bruce really not care that Tony had basically washed his hands of the project? Or was he just really good at subterfuge? Tony no longer dismissed his “team mates” like he used to. After finding out about Barton and Romanov's betrayal, Tony didn't take anything at face value.

'I've glanced at it,' Tony lied. 'There's not much difference when compared to my own scans.'
'I know,' Bruce said, 'which makes me think that we've got something, we just don't know what it is.'

Tony's eyebrows rose. 'Oh?'

'Loki obviously knew that you were searching for his magical signature,' Bruce said, 'why else would he attack?'

'True,' Tony mused. 'Then again, he hasn't attacked the sensors SHIELD have been working on lately.]

'Maybe he's preoccupied with killing all SHIELD agents,' Bruce muttered. There was disgust in his tone but it was overshadowed by sorrow. Bruce was genuinely upset about all the lives lost. Tony wondered what Bruce would do when he found out that it was Tony.

'All we can keep doing is fighting him,' Tony murmured. 'Even if we get the magic sensor working, Loki will just figure out a way to avoid us. And even if we get to the SHIELD bases quicker, Loki will still destroy them.'

Bruce sighed and took his glasses off. He was exhausted, Tony realised. It had become such a common look on Bruce that Tony truly had dismissed it. He frowned. 'Are you okay, Bruce?'

Bruce jerked at that, as though he'd been caught doing something he shouldn't. Tony shifted off the table, arms falling from his chest.

'Bruce?'

'I'm fine,' Bruce said quickly. He looked around before his eyes settled on Tony. 'Sorry; I really am fine.'

'Are you sure?'

'Just exhausted,' Bruce insisted. Tony didn't believe him. He didn't believe anything anyone told him any more; the team, SHIELD, Pepper- hell, even his own workers. He was constantly looking for the lies, the deception, the little tell that would give away the fact that someone was plotting against him. The only person he could trust was Loki.

Tony's demeanour softened at that and he saw Bruce give him an odd look. Tony sighed. 'I was just thinking about Logan. My bad. I should be focusing on other things.'

Bruce actually smiled at that and shook his head. His mood seemed to lift ever so slightly and Tony tilted his head. 'You're in love, Tony,' Bruce stated. Like it was a fact.

'It was, Tony mused. It had just taken him far too long to realise it himself.

'I'll take a longer look at the magic sensor tonight after I have dinner with Logan,' Tony said. 'Maybe you can have the night off.'

'That's okay, Tony,' Bruce said. He offered the other man a soft smile. 'You've got a lot on your plate.'

'So do you, apparently,' Tony replied. He shook his head and added, 'It's alright, Bruce. Logan will understand; he wants Loki caught just as much as I do.'

Bruce shifted from one foot to the other, fingers fiddling with the pen and tablet on the table before
him. 'Thank you, Tony,' he finally said, voice soft. When he looked at Tony there was true thanks in his eyes and Tony felt like an asshole. God, it'd be so much easier if he could hate Bruce as much as he hated the rest of them. 'I could go a warm meal, I think. The Other Guy would certainly appreciate it.'

'And we want to keep him happy!' Tony chuckled and clapped Bruce on the shoulder. Bruce just smiled in response and put his pen down.

He finally sat and looked up at Tony. 'Why did you come down here, again?' he asked. 'Not that I don't appreciate the visit; I keep forgetting to take breaks.'

'That's what we scientists do,' Tony said. Bruce smiled. 'I actually wanted to talk about Logan, but we can talk about the sensor if you want?'

Bruce was already shaking his head, one hand up. 'No, no; I definitely need the break. Are you and Logan okay?'

'We're fine,' Tony said. He sat on the spare stool opposite Bruce, briefly lamenting the fact that he couldn't slouch back and put his feet on the table. He liked to slouch. 'Better than fine, actually.'

'Oh?' Bruce hummed. 'Are you buying him a ring?'

Tony snorted. 'Not yet, Bruce. Even the great Tony Stark doesn't rush into marriage.'

Bruce laughed. 'I figured not. You'd have been married a dozen times if you didn't actually think things through.'

'I usually don't think anything through,' Tony remarked. The other man just shook his head. 'But love isn't really something to screw around with.'

Bruce's eyebrows flew up at that and he adjusted his glasses. 'Love? So I was right?'

'Yeah,' Tony said, 'I'm pretty sure that I'm in love with him, at any rate.'

"'Pretty sure'?" Bruce echoed.

Tony shifted uncomfortably on his stool. 'Yeah,' he repeated

'So you're not sure?'

'I dunno, Bruce,' Tony said with a shrug. 'I'm not used to being in love.'

'It's a part of human life,' Bruce told him. 'Romantic love, familial love; even the love of a pet or food.'

'And it's all the same thing, is it?' Tony asked. "Cause I gotta be honest, Bruce; I really love double cheeseburgers.'

Bruce snorted. 'One isn't necessarily more important than the other. I think it depends on the person; remember that some people don't feel romantic love.'

'I thought I was one of those people.'

'You loved Pepper, didn't you?' Bruce asked.

Tony frowned at that. Some part of him had definitely loved Pepper. But not the way he loved
Loki. He would have done anything for Pepper before he found out about her betrayal. Hell, he'd still do anything for Bruce and Rhodey. But for Loki? Tony would burn the world until it was mere ashes just to make Loki happy.

He was practically doing that, any way. And Loki was doing the same.

'It's not the same,' he finally said. 'What I feel for Pepper and Lo-Logan.'

Bruce nodded at that and apparently didn't notice Tony's stutter, or simply chose to ignore it. 'You can feel different types of love for different people; it doesn't make what you feel any less powerful.'

'It sure is powerful,' Tony said with a snort. 'I'd do anything for Logan.'

'And you'd do anything for your friends, too,' Bruce reminded him. Tony had to fight not to poke his tongue out. 'You just love us in different ways.'

'Yeah...' Tony muttered.

'Tony,' Bruce said and swivelled on his stool. 'You told me quite a while ago that you were falling in love with Logan. Now that you've admitted that you are in love with him, don't fall backwards; just go with it.'

'How can I be sure that I actually love him, though?' Tony demanded. 'I really didn't think that I was capable of it.'

'You're many things, Tony Stark,' Bruce commented, 'but you aren't a monster.'

That hurt more than anything Barton and Romanov had ever said about him. Because Bruce had no idea that Tony really was a monster. Tony had no illusions about what he was, about what he and Loki were doing. He knew that he wasn't a good person; that what he was doing was wrong despite SHIELD trying to fuck him over.

He just didn't care. He was done caring; it was just him and Loki now.

'Yeah,' he finally said, had to swallow because his mouth was so dry. 'Thanks, Bruce.'

'You're welcome,' Bruce said. 'Now go take Logan to dinner and tell him that you love him. I'll let you off tonight; you can work on the sensor tomorrow night.'

'Are you sure?' Tony asked.

Bruce nodded.

'Thanks, Bruce.' Tony clapped Bruce on the shoulder again and left the lab, a slight spring in his step. Bruce watched him go.

'Okay,' Bruce murmured and turned back to face his table. He flipped open the notebook beneath his tablet and started scribbling in it again. He was keenly aware of JARVIS observing him; the AI never shut off, even if he wasn't actively watching someone. Bruce knew that Tony had programme upon programme to keep his Tower and workers safe; and to keep an eye on them in case anything went wrong.

If Bruce wanted to figure out what was wrong with Tony- and what it had to do with Loki's sudden increased bloodlust- he had to get out of the Tower, somewhere JARVIS had little or no access.
And the magic sensor was the perfect excuse.

{oOo}

Now...

'Unibeam at 100%,' JARVIS announced.

Tony was about to fire when he realised that the Hulk had made no move to hit him. He was just staring at Genesis, pinned beneath his hand, eyes no longer angry but breathing still ragged. The two stared at each other, Tony wondering just what the hell was going on. The Other Guy had never held back before, not even when he was fighting an ally. Hell, he took swipes at Thor during every other battle.

'JARVIS, do you have any idea what's going on?' Tony asked slowly as he kept his eyes fixed on the Hulk.

'Negative,' JARVIS said at the same time that Loki shouted, 'What is going on!'

'Perhaps you remind him of Iron Man, sir,' JARVIS continued. 'The Hulk likes Iron Man.'

That was true. Tony didn't know why. Maybe Bruce held onto the memories of Tony treating him like any other guy; like a friend rather than a terrible beast to be feared. Whatever the reason, Tony had always been glad to see the look of recognition on the Hulk's face when they fought side-by-side. And Bruce had saved him during more than one battle, easily plucking Tony out of the air when Tony was hit by something.

Tony was about to try and get free again when Captain America reappeared on the scene.

'Oh, you have got to be fucking kidding me!' Tony snarled when Rogers stopped beside him.

'Good job, Hulk,' Rogers said. 'Should we take it in for Tony to have a look at, or destroy it now?'

The Hulk growled.

'Well, not destroy,' Rogers corrected himself with a frown. At least he was still bleeding, Tony mused.

'Do you need my assistance?' Loki asked, and Tony was about to answer fuck yes when Rogers raised his shield.

'Tony doesn't need it in complete working order,' he announced and thrust his shield down at Tony's neck-

The Hulk let out a terrible roar and suddenly the weight that had been steadily pressing against most of Tony's body was gone. Rogers looked up, took a step back, but he couldn't avoid the hand that swept over Genesis and into him, tossing Captain America off of his feet.
Tony blinked rapidly, for once in his life utterly speechless. The Hulk let out a satisfied huff and turned back to Tony. They locked eyes, despite Tony's mask keeping his features hidden, and the genius could have sworn that the Hulk nodded.

The Hulk stood up and shuffled back until there was a rather large gap between him and the battered Genesis suit. Tony eased up gently, still not sure what the hell was going on. He didn't want to set the Hulk off again with any sudden movements.

' STARK!'

'I'm okay,' Tony said quickly before Loki could go all world conqueror and come in magic blazing.

' Excuse me?'

'I'm fine,' Tony said, 'seriously. It just... something happened.'

'Something?'

'I'll tell you later,' Tony muttered and looked around. Half of the buildings were on fire, and those that weren't had collapsed in on themselves. The area was deserted except for Tony and the Hulk- and Captain America, but who the fuck cared where he was.

'But see, Stark,' Loki drawled, 'I plan to kill you later.'

Tony snorted. 'Keep your pants on, Rudolph. I'm fine.' A bit scratched up, a bit bruised, but absolutely fine ... though he was pretty sure that he'd fractured his arm because it was aching like a bitch.

Loki didn't need to know that, though.

'I'm done, anyway,' Tony continued and stood up. The Hulk just watched him, a massive mountain of muscle with dark eyes fixed on Tony's suit. 'JARVIS, any C4 left?'

'Yes, Mr Stark,' JARVIS said. 'I only detonated the blocks that were on the other side of the base.'

'Good,' Tony said. He turned to look at the Hulk, who didn't make a noise. 'Blow the rest,' Tony ordered and shot into the air. The Hulk made no move to capture him, just watched Tony fly away until they were out of sight of each other. Tony twisted in the air and headed in Loki's direction, not looking forward to that confrontation.

He'd almost reached his partner when the base behind him exploded. Flames leapt into the sky and debris rained down on the landscape around it, the buildings closest shuddering in the shock wave. Tony smirked as Genesis-3 dropped out of the sky and to his left.

'Let's go home,' Tony said.

{oOo}

As soon as they appeared in the lab after dropping everything off at the Hideout, Loki was all over Tony, and not in the sexy way.
'I said I was fine,' Tony sighed. Though he did kind of like the attention.

'You are not fine,' Loki growled. He was dressed up as Logan and his blue eyes flashed darkly when Tony opened his mouth to interrupt. Tony wisely decided to press his lips together and say nothing at all. 'You fractured your right arm.'

It'll heal, Tony didn't say.

'And you were almost discovered; almost killed,' Loki continued, muttering under his breath like a mad man.

Almost, Tony mused. But he wasn't.

'What happened?' Loki finally demanded after blue magic washed over Tony's arm and the dull ache disappeared completely.

Tony flexed his arm slowly and smiled. 'Thank you,' he murmured and saw Loki's eyes soften. 'And I told you; nothing terrible happened.'

'I'll be the judge of that,' Loki said.

Tony sighed and ran a hand through his hair. 'You know that Rogers and Bruce turned up.'

'Yes,' Loki said, 'and I should have joined the fight immediately.'

'Hey, I can handle two Avengers!'

'I was thoroughly beaten into the ground by the green one,' Loki reminded him, eyes narrowed, 'and I am a god.'

'So am I!' Tony argued.

'A new one!' Loki snapped. 'And we haven't finished your physical or magical training.'

'And that's because we have too much shit going on!' Tony shouted. Seriously, the amount of work destroying SHIELD took was amazing. Between keeping all of his secrets, running Stark Industries, and training, Tony had very little spare time. He needed a break. Maybe he and Loki should go to dinner like Bruce had suggested.

He felt a stab of confusion as he remembered the Hulk's behaviour during their brief fight.

'Anthony?'

When Tony focused back on his partner he found Loki frowning, concern warring with frustration. Tony's heart melted a little at that. God, Tony loved him.

'What happened?' Loki asked again, but this time his voice was soft, and he followed it up with a warm hand on Tony's waist.

'I don't... know,' Tony admitted slowly. He saw Loki's frown deepen. 'I was fighting Rogers and the Hulk, and the Hulk had me pinned to the ground. That was when I... maybe freaked out a little.' One of Loki's eyebrows rose slowly. 'He could have squashed me, Loki,' Tony said. 'I mean, I had the unibeam ready, so I definitely could have fought my way out. But the suit would have been seriously damaged.'

'You would have been seriously damaged,' Loki interrupted. 'I care more for your well-being than
‘I could have been discovered,’ Tony argued. ‘It's too soon, we still have to find the rest of SHIELD's bases. That's not to mention the World Security Council’s.’

‘Soon,’ Loki said. ‘I'm sure that Coulson will approach Lily Walden within the month.’

‘Yeah, I know,’ Tony said, ‘I just want it to be now. I'm sick of fucking waiting.’

‘Good things come to those who are patient,’ Loki said. He tugged Tony closer and pressed a soft kiss to Tony's lips and Tony couldn't help but laugh. Because Loki was fucking adorable and cheesy and breathtakingly gorgeous. When they broke apart he found Loki smiling down at him, eyes warm and filled with... love? Was it love? Did Loki feel what Tony felt? Could he feel what Tony felt?

‘Loki-’ Tony began, but JARVIS interrupted and Tony glared up at one of his sensor's.

‘Mr Stark, Captain Rogers called but I informed him that you were... indisposed.’

‘Great,’ Tony muttered. ‘Romanov's gonna yell at me again for missing a battle 'cause I was fucking you.’

‘I care little what that woman thinks of you,’ Loki murmured.

‘I don't care either.’

‘Then kiss me,’ Loki ordered and dragged Tony back in.

They'd been kissing for a few seconds- and it was definitely leading to sex- when JARVIS once more interrupted. ‘Captain Rogers has left a message, Mr Stark.’

‘Christ, JARVIS!’ Tony growled when Loki pulled away. ‘Mute!’

The AI had nothing to say to that, which was the point. Unless the Tower was about to collapse JARVIS would say nothing until Tony unmuted him.

‘Was that necessary?’ Loki questioned.

‘Yes,’ Tony said, ‘because I really, really want you to fuck me and JARVIS was getting in the way of that.’

Loki snorted. ‘How romantic, Stark.’

‘I never promised you romance, just a partner to fight alongside.’ Tony said. ‘Actually, I never promised you sex, either.’

‘It's just a bonus, I assume,’ Loki mused.

Tony smiled at that. Yeah, his relationship with Loki was definitely a bonus. He moved forward to kiss Loki again but the Trickster raised a hand to Tony's chest and pushed.

‘What the fuck?’ Tony demanded.

‘We were talking about the healer,’ Loki said.

Tony's mouth fell open. ‘Are you telling me that discussing the fight is more important than sex?’
'In this instance, yes,' Loki said, 'because it sounds like Banner knows something he shouldn't.'

Tony tilted his head at that. 'What makes you think Bruce knows anything?'

'He could have crushed you but didn't. You didn't need to use your unibeam; I feel that that is something you would have told me about, because it's my understanding that the unibeam is one of Iron Man's strongest attacks.'

'It is,' Tony said, 'and I built it into the Genesis suit because it's strong. But I don't want SHIELD to know that the Genesis suit is powered by an arc reactor, obviously, so using the unibeam -'

'Would give the game away,' Loki interrupted, 'and you didn't use it, correct?' Tony shook his head. 'So how did you get away from the beast?'

'He... let me go.'

Loki's eyebrows shot up. 'Excuse me?'

'He had me pinned,' Tony repeated, 'and then Captain fucking America decided to join the party. He said something about bringing Genesis in to have me study it, and questioned whether I needed Genesis in one piece or not.' Loki was scowling, now, fingertips digging into Tony's chest through his shirt. 'He was going to cut my head off or something,' Tony said, winced when Loki's grip became even tighter, 'but the Hulk threw him aside.'

Loki's hand left Tony's chest and Tony looked up. The god looked... confused.

'What?' Loki said.

Tony shrugged. 'I don't know why, Loki. Bruce just tossed Rogers aside and let me up.'

'He... let you up?' Tony nodded. 'Why would he do that?' Loki demanded. 'As far as the healer is concerned, Genesis is a robot and an enemy.'

'I don't know,' Tony repeated. 'Maybe I remind him of Iron Man? Maybe he got confused, or wasn't a hundred percent sure and didn't want to hurt me just in case.'

Loki shook his head at that. 'From what I've found, the beast only has mild intelligence; he loses what the doctor knows when he transforms.'

'But he remembers me,' Tony argued, 'he always has.'

Loki looked up at Tony, eyes troubled. Tony felt unease spread through his gut.

'What?'

'Maybe the healer knows,' Loki said.

Tony's magic shivered at that. 'What?' he repeated.

'Maybe Banner knows that you're Genesis,' Loki said. 'Maybe he figured it out and, despite what you're doing, can't hurt you.'

'No,' Tony said and shook his head, 'no way. Bruce doesn't know anything, he can't...' he trailed off and Loki stared at him. Bruce couldn't know, Tony and Loki had been so careful. But... hadn't Bruce been exhausted lately? Hadn't he looked... sad, for months, now? If he knew something, if he knew anything ...
'I...' Tony tried.

'We have to figure out what he knows,' Loki said, 'and if he knows everything, we may have to kill him.'

Tony gulped.

'I don't know much.'

The words scared the shit out of Tony and he jumped. Loki turned quickly and grabbed Tony, pushing the smaller god behind him before Tony could react any further. Tony had to stand on his tiptoes to see over Loki's shoulder and the sight wasn't good.

Bruce was standing in the entrance way of the lab. There were deep bags under his eyes, his shirt was buttoned incorrectly, and his hair was a wild mess. He looked like shit.

'Bruce-' Tony tried, but Bruce held up a hand.

'I don't know much,' he repeated. He looked between Tony and Logan. 'But I think that you and Loki are going to tell me everything.'
Author's Note: I pretty much wrote this chapter a day or two after I posted the last one. It has a lot of dialogue from the original chapter I'd written; Bruce was going to confront Tony at the end of this story, and I've had that written for months. But my muse wanted it this way and I think it's a bit more exciting.

So... enjoy.

Dreamer

“As I walked out on the ledge
Are you scared to death to live?
I’ve been running all my life
Just to find a home that’s for the restless and
The truth that’s in the message
Making my way, away”
– Still Breathing [Green Day]
'Why didn't you sense him?' Tony asked.

'Why didn't you sense him?' Loki countered.

Tony raised incredulous eyes to his partner. 'Are you serious right now?'

'Stark, we are either about to murder somebody or run; shut up,' Loki ordered.

'I really hope that you don't murder me,' Bruce sighed. Tony looked back at the doctor and he had to admit that his chest hurt at what he saw. Bruce was... heartbroken. Dark eyes downcast, clothes hanging from his lank frame, fingers twitching every so often. He looked up, at Loki, but almost immediately his gaze darted elsewhere. 'I was right, wasn't I?' Bruce asked. 'That's Loki, not a mortal named Logan Thomas.'

Tony wet his lips. Before he could say anything Loki had raised a hand and it was enveloped in Jötunn magic. Bruce's eyes widened but he made no move to flee and Tony watched as the doors behind Bruce glowed blue before going opaque.

'There is no escape now, Dr Banner,' Loki announced. He flickered, body awash with more magic. And then it was the real Loki standing in Tony's lab, black hair tossed over one shoulder and arms folded over a slim, toned chest.

'You didn't have to do that,' Tony told Loki. His eyes didn't leave Bruce. 'We could have talked our way out of this.'

'No, we couldn't have,' Loki said. 'I can't mess with Banner's mind like I can Barton's.'

'Oh, God,' Bruce spluttered.

'He would turn into the beast before I could get very far,' Loki continued. He smiled slightly at Bruce. 'Quite a handy defence mechanism you have, Doctor.'

'It's true,' Bruce gasped. He sounded close to tears and Tony wanted to approach him, soothe him like he once would have.

But he couldn't so remained rooted to the spot, Loki a step ahead of him.

'You're working with Loki,' Bruce said. His eyes snapped to Tony. 'You're Genesis, aren't you?'

'Clever, Bruce,' Tony said, 'you're the second person to figure it out.'

Bruce frowned at that. 'Second...?'

'As I said,' Loki drawled, 'I can't mess with your mind like I can Barton's.'

Bruce's entire face dropped and he looked like he was about to be sick. 'Oh, God.'

'Nice choice of words,' Tony mused. 'After all; I am a god.'

Bruce fell back against the locked doors and Loki tutted. 'Really, Stark. Why don't you tell him everything?'

'I just might,' Tony said. He finally found his feet and pushed past Loki. He ignored the hand that brushed his own, the way he could feel Loki's magic itching to reach out and throw him back, hide him, protect him. As much as he appreciated it, this conversation needed to happen. Tony couldn't put it off any longer. 'Tell me, Bruce,' Tony began, 'just how much do you know? And have you
shared your results with SHIELD? Bruce looked up at him and one corner of Tony's mouth curled upward. 'Are SHIELD going to be busting into my Tower within the next few seconds?'

'I...' Bruce hesitated, swallowed, then shook his head. 'N-No,' he said, 'I haven't told SHIELD anything.'

Tony hummed. 'Why not?'

Bruce looked confused at that but Tony waited, patient. He needed to know what Bruce knew. And he needed to know if SHIELD were on their way. If they were...

'I haven't told them anything,' Bruce reiterated. 'I don't... I wasn't sure if I was right. And if I went to SHIELD with my suspicions they'd arrest you, no questions asked.' He gulped again. 'If you were innocent-'

'I'd never trust them again,' Tony finished. Bruce nodded. 'And I'd leave the Avengers; a good, strong member leaving when Loki's decided to go crazy?' He whistled. 'Yeah, not good.'

'But it doesn't matter now, does it?' Bruce asked. He looked sad again. His shoulders were slumped like the weight he'd been carrying for weeks had suddenly fallen off. 'You are working with Loki. We can't stop you.'

'Now, now,' Tony chuckled, 'don't give up yet. I still haven't decided if I'm going to kill you or not.' He ignored the amused huff that Loki let out behind him. Tony narrowed his eyes at Bruce. 'I'm still weighing my options.'

Bruce gulped thickly at that and turned a little pale. Tony tilted his head.

'You can't be that surprised, Bruce,' he commented. 'Everybody knew that this could happen; that one day I might snap and bam!'

He clapped his hands together and had to admit that he enjoyed the way Bruce jumped. Bruce was his friend- Tony was still sure of that, at least for now- but he was having fun. Someone seeing him, the real him? The dark, angry, revenge-fuelled god that Tony had been working so hard to hide? It was... freeing.

'Nobody's going to be shocked,' Tony said, 'when they find out that I'm working with Loki. Because the Avengers always knew that this,' he spread his arms to encompass himself, Loki, the situation all three of them were currently in, 'could happen.'

'No,' Bruce said and shook his head viciously. 'I knew that you were damaged, and that there was something a little... off, about you. But I'd never... not this, Tony.'

'Too bad,' Tony said softly, 'because it's happening. Better get used to it, Brucie.' Bruce looked pained by the familiar nickname, but Tony wasn't about to change who he was for this conversation. Bruce needed to see this; the real Tony. The crazy genius and the dark murderer, together, as one.

It was time to stop pretending.

'Just to sate my own curiosity,' Tony began, and Bruce twitched. 'How did you figure it out?'

Bruce wet his lips slowly, as though contemplating the question. It couldn't be that hard a query to answer. Bruce wouldn't have come down here if he didn't have proof.
Besides, he already knew who Logan really was.

'You told me that you burned your arm,' Bruce said. When Tony frowned, confused, Bruce elaborated; 'You said that you burned it in your lab; I didn't ask about the experiment. And you told me that Logan- He cut himself off, looked at Loki, took a breath. 'That Loki fixed it for you.'

Tony smiled.

'When Loki and Gen... when you and Loki attacked the Baltimore base, you rolled your undersuit down. Your arm was completely healed. No burn, no mark, no scar.' He hesitated before muttering, 'Normal human beings don't heal that quickly.'

'I see,' was all Tony said.

'There were... o-other things,' Bruce continued. 'Your fighting style changed. Little cuts and heals mended too quickly. The way you reacted to things, interacted with the people around you, all of it just... changed.' He looked up and met Tony's eyes. Tony wondered what he saw. 'You cared more about the fact that Loki was destroying what you considered to be yours rather than the deaths of hundreds of innocent agents.'

'Innocent?' Tony had to laugh, and it clearly startled Bruce; the other man took a step back and hit one of the opaque glass doors of Tony's workshop. 'Nobody employed by SHIELD is innocent, Bruce.'

'You're killing them!' Bruce hissed. He wasn't shouting, but he wasn't speaking, either; a nice, exasperated, painéd hiss at what his supposed friend was doing too all those poor, poor agents.

'You and Loki are murdering them in cold blood, Tony! And before I knew that you were Genesis, you were... you didn't care! You were pissed off at Loki for messing with SHIELD, like it's your privilege only!'

'It was, before Loki and I teamed up,' Tony interrupted. He turned to throw a smile at Loki. 'Sorry, gorgeous, but I was a little pissed at you.'

'Like I care,' Loki drawled, a familiar glint in his eyes. Tony smirked and turned back to Bruce.

'I always got a little ticked off when Loki or some other villain wannabe touched what I considered mine.' He flashed a bright smile. 'And you know how I feel about people touching my stuff, Dr Banner.'

Bruce shook his head slowly, but his eyes remained fixed on Tony.

'Soon, there will be no more SHIELD,' Tony added. 'Loki and I will wipe it off of Midgard.'

'Midgard? Are you even listening to yourself?' Bruce demanded. 'You've betrayed your entire species, and for what?!

'Revenge!' Tony shouted. Bruce jumped so violently that his head cracked against the glass; it shuddered in its frame, but remained whole. 'SHIELD started this, Bruce!' Tony snapped. 'I didn't just wake up one day and decide to join Loki. I was pushed into this!'

'By who?' Bruce demanded. 'Fury gets on my nerves, too, Tony, but you don't see me joining up with... with Doom and murdering hundreds of people!'

Tony laughed. 'It'll be thousands by the time we're done,' he growled. 'I'm a monster, Bruce,' he said. Because Bruce looked like he was thinking it, too; the wide eyes, the breathy little gasps of
air, the horror in his eyes. Like he had wanted to be wrong; had wanted Tony to deny it.

But Tony couldn't. It was too late.

'I'm a monster,' Tony repeated, 'but Fury had a hand in making me. He wants my technology; my suits and my arc reactor. But rather than respect me and let me help, he decided to take what doesn't belong to him!'

Bruce's eyebrows furrowed. 'What are you talking about?'

Tony wanted to sigh in relief, but didn't. Bruce didn't know; he didn't know. But that didn't change the fact that Bruce was here, now, looking like he might throw up at the mere mention of Tony's new hobby of murdering SHIELD agents. He wasn't working with Fury behind Tony's back.

But he wasn't on Tony's side, either.

Not yet.

'Why do you think Barton and Romanov are here, Bruce?' Tony demanded.

'They... the Avengers Initiative-' Bruce tried, but Tony cut him off.

'Is just a cover for their real mission,' he said. 'Operation “Fuck Tony Stark Off and Steal His Tech”.' He smiled savagely when Bruce started shaking his head. 'They've never liked me, Bruce; even you've seen that. And it makes sense when you find out that they're actually here to steal my stuff. Every other day Romanov's going through my things and Barton's trying to find a way to hack JARVIS. And what about good ol' Captain America?'

'Steve wouldn't-’ Bruce couldn't get the sentence out, because once again Tony interrupted; only this time he shouted.

'FUCK STEVE ROGERS!' he roared. 'Fuck Steve Rogers and fuck Howard Stark!' Something behind Tony blew up in a ball of bright purple, and Bruce bashed into the glass door again.

'Control,' Loki murmured but made no move to interrupt.

Tony ignored the both of them. 'He's not a thief, but he's a fucking asshole and a liar!' Tony snapped. 'Take a break, Tony! Get some rest, Tony! We don't want you off the team, Tony! And the entire time, Bruce? He was trying to get me off of the fucking team! Because I'm not safe. Because I don't work well with others. Because I'm not Howard fucking Stark!'

'Nobody betrays me, Bruce!' Tony snarled. 'And those who do don't live long enough to talk about it. Rogers made my hit list when he decided that it was okay to work behind my back with Romanov and Barton and fucking Fury. He'll die with the rest of them when Loki and I have had our fun. And I'll fucking enjoy killing him, Bruce.'

Bruce looked devastated and Tony felt a savage twist in his gut. Good. Good. Let Bruce see the real Tony Stark; the one who could still call him Brucie while talking about murder. Let Bruce see what Fury had made; let Bruce see the fruits of SHIELD's labour.

Because Tony? He would have been happy to remain an Avenger; to help the good guys battle whatever super villain happened to pop up that week. He would have been happy to fuck and drink and battle his way into an early grave, leaving everything he owned to the Avengers- to SHIELD- when he was done.
Tony had always been prone to fits of violence; to destroying whatever got in his way. He wouldn't have turned his sights on SHIELD if it wasn't for Fury and the World Security Council turning against him first. They had started this war.

Tony was going to finish it.

Flashing Bruce an easy smile, Tony took another step forward. Bruce watched him warily. ‘Is that all you figured out, Bruce?’ Tony asked, his voice pleasant; like they were discussing one of their experiments, or Barton's tendency to crawl through the Tower's ducts. 'Draw any other conclusions from your research?'

Bruce seemed confused by Tony's attitude change, but he pulled himself together quickly. 'I... y-yes,' he stuttered. Tony raised an eyebrow, waiting.

'You...' he had to gulp, as though his throat was dry. Or maybe he just wasn't enjoying this entire thing like Tony was. Because Tony had to admit, this was fun. It was so... liberating, to show someone who he really was. Loki didn't count, because he'd been in this from the beginning. And Barton didn't count due to the whole mind wipe thing.

This? It was... freeing. Bruce was looking at the real Tony; no masks, no lies. Just the truth.

And it clearly hurt.

'I knew you were a god,' Bruce finally managed to get out.

Loki snorted. 'Stark admitted to that,' he commented.

But Bruce was shaking his head, waving one hand through the air. 'No,' he said, 'no. I knew before... you're too strong, Tony. It was the little things; picking up a coffee machine like it weighed nothing, tossing rubbish into the elevator for staff to take care of, pushing furniture around the lab aboard the Helicarrier. I didn't realise until recently. Until-

He cut himself off abruptly and looked past Tony. But not at Loki, no. Tony followed his train of sight and saw his Iron Man suits, pristine within their glass cases, just ready to be fought in.

'The fight,' Bruce breathed out. 'Earlier today.'

Tony's eyebrows rose and he turned back around. 'Yes,' he said. 'You let me go.'

'The Other Guy let you go,' Bruce corrected.

Tony had to laugh at that. 'You're not two completely separate people, Bruce.'

Bruce swallowed thickly but pushed himself off of the doors, took a hesitant step forward.

'Sure, some things are missing,' Tony continued. 'Your intelligence, most of your memories, your... softer characteristics.' He shook his head. 'But the Hulk is still you. Just an angrier you; a more animalistic Bruce Banner. So, Dr Banner.' Tony paused to fold his arms, eyebrows cocked as he stared at Bruce. 'Why did you let me go?'

'I...' Bruce hesitated and wet his lips. He ran a shaky hand through his hair as he clearly tried to pull himself together, to face down this new Tony Stark that he'd suddenly been faced with. 'I didn't know for sure,' he said. 'I thought you were Genesis; I was pretty sure. But when I had Genesis pinned... when the Other Guy looked at him... I knew.'
Tony frowned. 'You just knew,' he drawled, tone disbelieving.

'I can't explain it properly,' Bruce said, 'something in me just clicked into place. I just knew.'

'Perhaps it is like our magic,' Loki mused.

Tony jolted slightly, scowled when he felt Loki's amusement. Asshole.

'Sometimes you feel certain things,' Loki said, 'or, rather, your magic feels certain things. You can't quite explain it. Mortals rely on animal instincts; I rely on magic.'

Tony mused over that briefly. He supposed that, perhaps, some part of the Hulk had recognised Genesis as Tony and hadn't been able to hurt him. Tony was learning to accept his magic as this other entity; a part of himself, yes, but entirely separate at the same time. Hadn't he recognised that Loki was about to attack when they'd transported the magic sensor all those weeks ago?

Maybe that's what Bruce had felt. But, unlike Tony and Loki, Bruce had never accepted the Hulk as another part of himself. He was constantly trying to cut himself off from that very primal part of his being.

But something had leaked through during that fight; Hulk had recognised Tony and Bruce had been unable to hurt him.

Tony smirked. 'Why, Brucie,' he cooed and rather enjoyed the way Bruce shook at his tone, 'you do care about me.'

Bruce laughed at that; a deep, sad, breathy laugh that hurt Tony as much as it amused him. Really, he was all over the place tonight. And why not? The one person he considered his friend had discovered his very darkest secrets.

'Of course I care about you!' Bruce spat. And suddenly he was angry; he was the one exploding, taking a step forward to close the distance between himself and Tony, as though his sheer physicality would give more weight to his words. 'I've cared about you ever since you introduced yourself!' Bruce shouted. 'The one person- the one person- who treats me like a goddamn normal human being is trying to kill my friends!'

'Are they really your friends, Bruce?' Tony asked, not willing to let himself be visibly shaken by Bruce's words. They cut deep, sure, but Tony had spent months perfecting his masks. He wouldn't let Bruce crack them now. 'Think about it,' Tony said. 'Fury, who built a tank to keep you captive. Romanov and Barton, who spy on you almost as much as they spy on me. Thor, who calls you an angry beast and doesn't mean it the way I do. And Rogers?' Tony shook his head. 'What about that look in Rogers' eyes, Bruce? That tiny little thing that he can't hide, not even from you. What is it, Bruce?'

Bruce shook his head and ran a hand across his eyes, pushed his messy hair out of his sweaty, pale face. 'It's...'

'It's what?' Tony asked.

Bruce gulped. 'Fear,' he breathed out.

Tony smiled. 'Yeah,' he said, 'fear. Even Rogers, the almighty Captain America, doesn't quite trust you. What's that say about SHIELD? About your so-called friends?'

'What are you doing?' Bruce asked. His words were choked, wrecked, but Tony's face remained
passive. 'Why are you saying this? Are you trying to-

'Turn you over to my side?' Tony interrupted. 'Of course I am. You're smart, Bruce. But most importantly, you're my friend. I don't want to kill you.'

'But you will?' Bruce asked. There was a twist to the smile he let out; it was broken, brutal in its honesty, and Tony felt a frown form on his own face, completely against his will. 'I know that you will,' he said. 'For all your jokes, you'd kill me in a second if you thought I was going to turn you over to SHIELD.'

'No,' Tony said, 'I really wouldn't, Bruce.' The doctor frowned at that and looked past Tony; Tony almost laughed. Did Bruce trust Loki more than Tony? Perhaps. After all, Loki had nothing to gain by lying to Bruce. He had nothing to lose if Bruce died, either.

'He doesn't want you dead,' Loki said. 'Believe me, I would be more than willing to murder you right now. Unfortunately, my other half believes that you're worthy of his time. He will only kill you if you betray him.'

'I think that's enough, Loki,' Tony growled.

Loki chuckled. 'Of course, my dear.'

'And on that note,' Tony said. His hands fell from his chest and he shoved them into his pockets. 'You have two options, Bruce.' He paused, considered it for a beat. 'Well, three, I suppose.'

Bruce cocked his head. 'Three?'

'Three,' Tony repeated. 'You can scurry back to SHIELD, tell them what you've found, and the next time we face each other it will be as acknowledged enemies.'

There was a moment of silence. 'Option two?'

'You join me,' Tony stated. 'You stay in the Tower and you work alongside Loki and I.'

Bruce was silent.

'Come now, Bruce, it's not a hard decision,' Tony said and clapped his hands together. 'Option one or option two?'

'I fight you or I fight with you?' Bruce summed up.

'Pretty much, yeah,' Tony agreed. 'You're either with me or against me. Run along to SHIELD and Loki will most likely kill you; he doesn't like the Other Guy. Though I suppose you knew that.'

'And if I join you, what's going to stop him from killing me anyway?' Bruce demanded. His eyes slid past Tony to rest on Loki once more. Tony's magic tingled. Oh, Loki was enjoying this almost as much as Tony was.

Tony smiled. 'Me.' At Bruce's sceptical look, he said, 'We're not just business partners, Bruce. You know that already.' Bruce nodded slowly. 'For me, Loki would spare your life.'

'I...' But Bruce stopped, rubbed his hands together. 'What's option three?' he finally asked.

'You want to hear it?' When Bruce nodded, Tony leaned forward, a smirk on his face. 'Run,' he said.
Bruce just blinked at him.

'Run away,' Tony continued. 'Turn your back on SHIELD, on the Avengers, and on Loki and me. Turn blind and deaf to it all, Bruce. This doesn't have to be your fight. SHIELD will be too busy to hunt you down, and Loki won't care enough to when we win. Believe me; I'll make sure of it.'

'Excuse me?' Loki demanded.

'We agreed on this,' Tony snapped. He turned to glare at Loki and the older god sighed. 'If he runs-

'I don't chase,' Loki muttered. 'Yes, Stark, I understand.'

'I run?' Bruce asked and Tony turned back to him. 'That's it?' Bruce asked. There was a tired smile on his face and it confused Tony. 'I just forget you- forget SHIELD, the Avengers- and let you destroy them?'

'Yeah,' Tony said. 'Pretty much.'

Bruce laughed. It wasn't like before; it was soft, yes, but it was an actual chuckle. Like Bruce was amused by Tony's stupidity.

Tony frowned. 'I gotta admit, Bruce, you aren't making a good case for yourself.' His hands curled into fists. 'In fact, you're beginning to annoy me.'

Bruce laughed harder and raised a hand, as though pleading with Tony to shut the hell up.

'I think you broke him,' Loki mused.

He was definitely amused.

'Shit up, Loki,' Tony growled.

Bruce finally stopped laughing and moved away from the doors. Tony's eyebrows jumped with surprise and he had to turn to keep Bruce in sight. Bruce walked past Loki, paid him no attention, and when Tony caught Loki's eyes even the Trickster seemed surprised.

Sighing, Bruce sat himself on one of Tony's chairs and leaned back. When he looked up the conflict was gone from his face. 'I just needed to talk to you,' he said, 'to see if you were still the same Tony.'

Tony's eyebrows climbed higher. 'Come again?'

'Do you remember our last fight?' he questioned. 'The one before Loki started attacking SHIELD?'

He had to think back but it didn't take Tony long to remember what Bruce was talking about. 'With Doom,' he said. 'I was playing with his bots; some woman got hurt.'

Bruce nodded.

'Rogers was pissed,' Tony said. 'Cause I put some poor, innocent woman's life in danger.'

'You did,' Bruce agreed, 'but what else did you do during that fight?' Tony frowned. He honestly couldn't remember anything else significant about that battle. 'You saved me,' Bruce said.

'No I didn't.'

'But you did,' Bruce said. 'The Other Guy was surrounded by at least three dozen bots. He... I could have smashed my way out, but I would have been injured. I heal faster than you used to; I heal
faster than *Steve*. But still... you flew right into danger just to stop me getting hurt.’ Bruce shook his head. ‘No one else has ever done that for me.’

Tony was getting extremely sick of being confused.

’You’ve always treated me like a normal person; like the Hulk wasn’t a deal-breaker, some *sickness* that I was suffering from.’ Bruce sighed. ’Even Natasha has a problem with it. Even... even Steve, like you said. And SHIELD?’ He shook his head. ’I’ll never be an *asset* to them. Just a problem that they’ll have to take care of, eventually.’ His eyes found Tony’s and they softened. ’Just like you.’

Tony didn't have anything to say to that. This entire encounter wasn't going the way he'd expected. Yeah, he'd known Bruce would be hurt; angry, betrayed. But this? He wasn't sure what *this* was.

’If you think that I could turn you in,’ Bruce continued, ’after *everything* that you've done for me.’ He snorted. ’You're not the genius that I thought you were.’

’What are you saying?’ Loki asked before Tony could. Between one blink and the next Loki was crouched over Bruce, body still glowing with magic, lips pulled back in a feral snarl. ’Do you honestly expect us to *trust you?*’ he demanded.

Bruce remained calm throughout, head tilted back to look Loki square in the eyes. ’I imagine that I'll have to earn your trust,’ he said. ’I'm willing to do so.’

’Wait!’ Tony stomped over to them and had to forcefully push Loki out of the way. Loki growled but allowed the manhandling. ’You're joining us?’ Tony asked.

That smile was back; a little broken, a little sad, but *friendly*. ’Yeah,’ Bruce said, ’that's exactly what I'm saying.’
Chapter 48

Author's Note: Sorry for the wait! Totally my bad. Work sucks, but that's nothing new. This chapter is kind of all over the place but it's what my muse could come up with, so... enjoy!

Dreamer

“If you wanna start a fight
You better throw the first punch
Make it a good one
And if ya wanna make it through the night
You better say my name like
The good, the bad, and the dirty”

– The Good, the Bad and the Dirty [Panic! at the Disco]

It wasn't the first time that Bruce had woken up to find Loki sitting in his bedroom and he doubted that it would be the last. While Tony seemed to be watching Bruce via JARVIS- because Bruce seriously doubted that Tony wasn't keeping tabs on him- Loki had taken the more direct approach.

For the past week Bruce had found Loki in various places within his apartment just... watching him. They hadn't spoken, though Bruce had tried to engage the god in conversation. Last time Loki had turned up just as Bruce had finished making dinner and though Bruce had offered Loki some the god had simply ignored him and continued to stare.

Bruce wasn't quite sure what this was; Loki checking up on him? No, Tony had JARVIS for that. Loki trying to get a read on him? Possible, Bruce hadn't spent any amount of time with Loki. There were the brief fights between Loki and the Avengers, but the Other Guy rarely got close to Loki. None of the team ever got close to Loki except for Thor; and that was usually so that Loki could hit his former brother with whatever was on hand; magic, if he had nothing large and heavy.

Then again, maybe Loki was just fucking with him. Maybe he had no reason for visiting. Maybe, like Tony, Loki just liked to shock and surprise people; turn up in the middle of dinner and make Bruce believe that he had a real reason for showing his face.

Maybe it was all of the above.
Bruce was... getting used to it, actually. So he simply mumbled a good morning and dragged himself out of bed to shower. Tony and Loki hadn't blown up any bases recently and the Avengers' other enemies were apparently biding their time, so Bruce had been rather bored. There was no point in working on the magic sensor since Bruce had already figured that out, and he wasn't about to share it with SHIELD; that would be a sure fire way to get Tony and Loki caught and Bruce had only just joined their side; he wasn't about to give up his freedom.

That, of course, didn't meant that Fury wasn't stalking him, wanting Bruce to work on it. Bruce had had JARVIS re-direct dozens of calls from the Director, and Bruce himself had somehow managed to avoid both Natasha and Clint, and even Steve the one time the Captain had come up to visit. Bruce needed longer to work on his poker face and wasn't quite ready just yet to face any of his team mates... former team mates? Well, he was on Tony and Loki's team now...

When Bruce exited the shower Loki was still sitting in the armchair opposite his bed and Bruce frowned.

Loki was still staring at him, too, and Bruce took the opportunity to study his... team mate? Ally? Maybe-a-future-ally-at-some-point-in-time? Bruce knew that Loki didn't trust him. Then again, neither did Tony; Bruce knew that, too. He'd forced his way into this duo and offered his help. Bruce didn't blame their lack of trust.

Loki was... soft, in this moment. It was the best word Bruce's brain could come up with. Gone were the hard, glaring edges of the new armour he'd recently been sporting. Without all the padding and thinner coat, it was obvious how slim Loki was; his collarbones were peaking out over the stretched neckline of his sweater, and with his arms folded over his chest, his hair tied back in a messy braid without any real thought... Loki looked like a college kid bumming around campus for the weekend.

But Bruce was very aware of the strength in the being before him. It wasn't in his face; sharp, cold, eyes greener than any Bruce had seen and lips plush and pink. It wasn't even in his form, slumped as he was in his seat, shoulders drawn together and one leg pressed up against the edge of the seat.

It was simply an instinct. Like the animal part of Bruce's brain- or, perhaps, the Other Guy - was telling Bruce to be wary. That there was a predator dangerously close and that Bruce's best bet of survival was to stay low and stay silent.

Bruce wasn't sure if that was simply Loki or his magic. Bruce was by no means a magic expert- that was Loki, probably closely followed by Tony. Either Bruce's subconscious was extremely aware of the sheer raw power that Loki was capable of, or Loki was just a being that exuded strength.

Loki flipping his braid over one shoulder drew Bruce from his musings and Bruce frowned, glanced at the dresser, drew his towel tighter around his waist...

'Uh...'

'By all means,' Loki drawled, the first thing he'd said since threatening Bruce in Tony's workshop, 'don't let me keep you.'

'I don't think Tony would appreciate me getting naked in front of you,' Bruce commented.

That seemed to surprise Loki, and he frowned before huffing. He disappeared without another word, though, giving Bruce the opportunity to change without weirdo gods watching him. It's the small things in life, Bruce mused to himself.
Now it was time for breakfast. The Other Guy meant that Bruce had a rather large appetite when he actually could stomach something, so he set about making the biggest omelette his pan could actually contain. He was zero percent shocked when Loki turned up in the kitchen, leaning back in his seat with one boot pressed against the edge of the table.

'Hungry?' Bruce asked.

'Famished,' Loki answered. Seemed that he was talkative today. Bruce wasn't going to question it.

'Where's Tony?'

Loki sighed. 'Stark is in his workshop and has been for three days, now. He annoys me.'

Snorting, Bruce said, 'He annoys everyone.' He took more eggs and mushrooms out of the fridge before pausing to eye the tomatoes. He didn't actually know what Loki liked, but... the Trickster could just pick out what he didn't like. Bruce wasn't going to bother asking after his preferences.

'He annoys you,' Loki said, 'yet you wish to work with him.'

'I do,' Bruce agreed.

'Why?'

Bruce glanced at Loki over his shoulder. 'Really? After stalking me for over a week, now you decide to question me?'

Loki shrugged. 'I am bored,' was all he said.

Bored? Wow, Loki and Tony really were perfect for each other. 'Okay...' Bruce said. He let his sentence trail off and turned back to the counter. The tomatoes weren't going to chop themselves... then again, maybe they would if Loki waved his hand over them.

A few minutes of silence passed before Loki shifted in his seat. 'Are you going to answer me, beast?'

Anger made Bruce's vision turn green for a split second but it was easy to push down. Like Tony, Loki liked getting reactions out of people; he wanted Bruce to lose it and attack him. It would make Tony re-think his decision to let Bruce join them and Loki would get what he wanted; Bruce out of the picture.

Bruce didn't know why Loki hated him so much. Maybe he really just didn't trust anyone other than Tony. Maybe it had something to do with the beating the Other Guy had given Loki during the god's invasion. Bruce didn't care enough to ask.

'I'm trying to make breakfast,' Bruce eventually said.

Loki snorted. 'And you can't multi-task?'

'No,' Bruce muttered, rolled his eyes for good measure.

'You are annoying,' Loki commented. 'I like it.'

Bruce turned again; Loki hadn't moved, but there was a smirk on his sharp face and it made Bruce want to smile. So Loki liked something about him? Wasn't Bruce lucky...

'Good to know,' Bruce commented. He tossed the mushrooms and bacon into the eggs and then set
the lot in the already heated pan. 'What, exactly, do you want to know?'

Loki growled. 'Why do you wish to work with Stark?'

'Oh, right.' Bruce was silent as he pondered that question. In all honesty he wasn't a hundred percent sure why he wanted to join Tony. 'He's my friend,' he said aloud, 'I trust him. I don't want him to die.'

'Is that all?'

'No...' Bruce said slowly, 'I... I owe Tony a lot. He's saved my life more times than I can count, and... he doesn't care about the Other Guy.'

Loki snorted before saying, 'The Other Guy. The beast is a part of you, Banner. You should learn to accept it.'

Bruce scowled at the pan, moved the eggs around. 'Yeah,' he said, 'I'll get right on that.'

'It is something SHIELD will use against you if you don't,' Loki told him. 'Do not doubt that the Avengers will use it against you, either. Once they discover that you have changed sides they will stop at nothing to end you... or use you.'

'Right... do you really think that they won't kill Tony?' Bruce asked. Because he was worried about that; worried that they'd all be caught; that Loki would be dragged back to Asgard, that Tony would be put down, that Bruce himself would be forced into that glass cage to be poked and prodded at by SHIELD's finest scientists.

'I believe that they will kill you and keep Stark,' Loki said.

Bruce turned to look at him. 'Why kill me and keep Tony?'

Loki chuckled at that. His voice was a drawl when he spoke; 'Do not kid yourself, Banner. Stark is smarter than you; SHIELD will keep him so that he can make suits and weapons for them.'

'Oh...' Well, that made sense. The eggs started to burn and Bruce turned back to them. 'Yeah... that definitely made sense. Bruce was smart, sure, but he was nowhere near Tony's level. I'm smart, but Tony's clever.'

'You don't think that you're clever?' Loki questioned.

Bruce huffed. 'No.'

He could hear the frown in Loki's voice when the god spoke; 'I have been studying your sciences since I joined Stark; it's a requirement just to be able to understand half of what he rambles about. I know very little about what you have studied, but it's to my understanding that this Realm considers you a genius.'

'I... well... yeah,' Bruce spluttered. He almost tossed eggs from the pan instead of flipping them, but managed to keep everything intact. 'I am a genius,' he said, because it was true, 'but I'm not clever like Tony is; like you are.'

'I don't understand.'

The first omelette was done and Bruce turned the stove off. He grabbed a plate and slid the omelette onto it, turned and set it on the table before Loki. Loki was staring at him, lips pulled into
a frown.

'Tony's... Tony's sharp,' Bruce said. 'He's a genius by anyone's standards, anyone with two eyes can see that. But he's not just book smart. He graduated from one of America's top schools at nineteen with two degrees. He took his father's multi-million dollar company and turned it into a multi-billion dollar company. He's created every weapon and electronic that his company has ever built and sold. He broke himself out of a cave in the middle of the Afghan desert with a hole in his chest. He found out that SHIELD was trying to steal from him and decided to get even and nobody knows.'

Bruce shook his head, because it was so obvious how clever Tony Stark was. Even the smartest person felt like an idiot after ten minutes in Tony's company. Bruce couldn't count the amount of articles he'd read where Tony had made some genius feel stupid by comparison.

'Back Tony into a corner and he'll always figure a way out; and he'll win and you'll lose in the process,' Bruce continued. 'I ran halfway across the world and SHIELD still found me. When they backed me into a corner I gave up and went along with their plans willingly.' He laughed softly. 'Tony found out that SHIELD was trying to steal from him and decided to destroy them in retaliation.' He looked back up to find Loki's eyes riveted to him. 'Tony's clever,' Bruce reiterated, 'I'm smart.'

Loki looked away, towards the kitchen window. All that could be seen was a new day breaking; a soft orange sky growing bluer by the minute.

'You're clever, too,' Bruce added.

Loki's lips quirked. 'Only one of many words that have been used to describe me,' he mused. He didn't give Bruce a chance to respond- not that Bruce knew what to say- instead turning back around and meeting Bruce's eyes. 'What do you plan to do to earn Stark's trust, Banner?'

Bruce frowned at the sudden subject change, but decided not to question it. Instead he slid the plate closer towards Loki and turned to make his own omelette.

'I... don't believe that there's any specific thing that I can do,' he said. He poured eggs into the pan and switched the stove back on.

'Well, you are right about that,' Loki said. His voice was too close and Bruce turned to find the Trickster standing right beside him. His arms were still folded and he was leaning against the counter, opposite hip cocked and one leg crossed over the other. He was wearing tight black jeans and they made his legs look thinner than his armour did... just how much armour did Loki wear?

'There's nothing I can do,' Bruce repeated as he cooked, deciding to stick to Loki's chosen topic. It was an important one, Bruce knew. It was something that he'd thought about ever since deciding that Tony had to be Genesis. 'What I'm going to do is continue to support Tony in whatever way I can.'

He heard Loki shift over the sound of cooking eggs. 'And what if you have to kill to support him?'

'I...' Bruce stopped short, because while he had thought about that, he hadn't settled on an answer. Tony was killing people; it was straight up murder, what he and Loki were doing. Bruce understood Tony's reasons for doing it, but he still wasn't sure, even now, if he agreed with it. Bruce had killed people himself. More than once the Other Guy had gone rogue and hurt- killed - innocent human beings. Bruce had always hated himself for it. He'd lost countless nights of sleep, had travelled all over the world trying to heal people to make up for the blood on his hands...
Could he add more blood? The agents Tony and Loki were killing... they were innocent. They were just following orders and trying to protect people. They didn't know Tony; didn't know that he never would have crossed that line if he hadn't been pushed over it.

'I don't... I don't know.'

It was all Bruce could say. He wasn't going to lie to Loki. Not to the God of Mischief and Lies. Loki would know, and the last thing Bruce wanted to do was earn more of Loki's ire.

Loki pushed off of the counter and shoved Bruce back. The doctor stumbled, almost tripped, but his back met the fridge before he could. 'Is that so?' Loki growled. 'So if Stark is surrounded by SHIELD agents- by your team mates- you will turn your back on him and let him die?'

'H-He, I think he'd be caught before-'

Loki interrupted, a snarl on his lips. 'That's not the point, beast!'

'No,' he said, 'I'd save Tony. I wouldn't purposefully try to kill anyone to save him, but if I did-

'If you did?' Loki cut in once more, lips pulled back and teeth bared.

Bruce wet his lips, swallowed. 'I wouldn't regret my decision; my acts,' he stated. And Bruce knew, as soon as the words left his lips, that they were truth. He wouldn't go out of his way to kill anyone- he couldn't. But if Tony's life was in danger? Hell, if his own life was in danger? Bruce... the Other Guy... neither would regret spilling blood if it meant that Tony was safe. Tony was Bruce's friend. He was the Other Guy's friend.

Loki stared at him in complete and utter silence. It was... kind of creepy, if Bruce were being honest, but there wasn't much he could do about it. So he forced himself to step past Loki and finish making his breakfast. And all the while Loki stared at him with a completely blank look on his face.

It wasn't until Bruce had opened a bottle of orange juice and sat to eat that Loki spoke; 'You're telling the truth.'

'Um... yes,' Bruce said.

Loki snorted and shook his head. 'That much was obvious,' he allowed, 'but I wanted to see if you stuck to your own morals; if you would bend beneath my will and allow yourself to become something else entirely.'

'What?'

'It doesn't matter,' Loki stated. There was an odd smile on his face. 'There is more to you than I first thought, Banner.' His smile took on a sharper edge and the next words out of his mouth didn't surprise Bruce in the slightest; 'But do not be fooled; I will kill you if I must. Or if you annoy me.'

Bruce sipped his juice. 'If you killed me, it'd upset Tony.'

'He would forgive me,' Loki stated. 'Believe me, Banner; I mean much more to Stark than you do.'

'Duh,' Bruce said through a chuckle. Tony was in love with Loki; Bruce was just his friend.

Loki sniffed and sat back down, picked up his fork and poked at his omelette. 'What is this?'

'Omelette with bacon, mushrooms and tomato,' Bruce said. 'It's probably cold by now.'
'Hmm,' Loki mused. He used his fork to cut off a corner and scooped it into his mouth. He chewed slowly, eyes on Bruce, and swallowed. 'Interesting,' he said but went back for another mouthful, so Bruce assumed that he didn't hate it.

Bruce took another sip of juice before starting on his own breakfast. When he was done he'd wash everything, make some tea, and go back to his room. Maybe read a book instead of watching the morning news; the news always pissed him off.

'If only you weren't mortal,' Loki said suddenly, a sigh accompanying his words.

Bruce looked up. Loki was staring at him, cheek in one hand, elbow propping his head up. 'What?'

'It is a shame you are mortal,' Loki said, 'otherwise I would make a deal with you; it would stop you betraying Stark and I.' He paused. 'Then again, a deal would mean that I couldn't kill you. And I haven't decided if you're worth all this trouble yet.'

The doctor blinked slowly at that, because... on one hand, he knew that he was only alive because Tony was giving him a chance; Loki would kill him if he could, just to get rid of the very real threat that Bruce presented. On the other hand... a deal that meant Loki couldn't hurt him? That was interesting.

'That's debatable,' Bruce settled on saying.

'Excuse me?'

Bruce smiled proper this time. 'The “mortal” part of your statement.'

A sleek black eyebrow inched up Loki's forehead. 'The All-Father hasn't made a Midgardian a God in thousands of years; since long before even I was born. I very much doubt that his idiot son has gifted you with godly stamina.'

'No,' Bruce agreed, 'but I haven't been killed yet.' When Loki said nothing, Bruce added, 'Believe me, I've tried myself. I'm not sure what would work.'

'We could try decapitation,' Loki suggested.

Bruce's fingers tightened around his fork. That animal instinct was kicking in now and he had to swallow to force the words past his lips; 'Is that what this is? You're finally talking to me because Tony's changed his mind?'

Scoffing, Loki brought his leg up and pressed his foot against the seat of his chair, right arm slung over his knee. 'Believe me, Banner; you will not see it coming if Stark does change his mind.'

Bruce breathed out heavily at that. Okay... so Loki wasn't here to kill him. That was... good.

'You tried to kill yourself,' Loki stated, rather than asked. Bruce nodded. 'How?' Loki asked. 'Why?''

'I believed myself to be a monster,' Bruce said. There was barely any inflection in his voice; like Bruce was reading the words, rather than talking about a very dark part of his own past. He had mostly moved past that. Working with the Avengers, having Tony's friendship... it had definitely healed some of the broken parts of Bruce's psyche. Not all, but some.

Loki twitched at the word monster and Bruce thought back to some of Thor's stories; rambles, more like, the god always drunk when he spoke about his brother. He remembered stories of Loki's
darker nature—only hinted at, back then, Asgard not aware of what Loki was truly capable of. He remembered Thor sharing childhood nursery rhymes; little things about the monsters from Jötunheimr, clearly designed by the Asgardian victors to scare little children and warn them about the Frost Giant menace.

He thought about Loki, too, being brought up on those stories; being taught that Jötnar were monsters, only to learn that he himself was one.

'I couldn't control myself,' Bruce continued, deciding not to bring up Loki's behaviour. 'I hurt innocent people.'

'Oh?' Loki drawled. He shifted in his seat, settled back into himself, and narrowed his eyes at Bruce. 'And did murdering innocents hurt you, Banner? Did you decide to rid your world of the monster hiding amongst them?'

'Basically,' Bruce said with a nod.

'You speak freely of it.'

A sardonic smile twisted at Bruce's mouth. 'Yeah, 'cause I'm one hundred percent fine with everything that's ever happened to me.'

That actually made Loki laugh; he threw his head back, neck stretched, and when he looked back at Bruce he was still smiling. 'I can see why Stark likes you,' the god said. 'You are similar.'

'In some ways,' Bruce agreed.

'Oh, yes,' Loki drawled, 'you're not clever.'

Bruce chuckled. 'Exactly.'

Loki threw him a smirk and took another bite of his omelette. 'This isn't as bad as I thought it would be.'

'I'm so glad that you like it,' Bruce muttered, 'really, you eating all my food was well worth you waking me up by being a creepy stalker.'

'Careful, Banner; I might just change my mind.'

'Change your mind?' Bruce echoed. He shook his head. 'I know that you'd kill me in a heartbeat if you could; it's Tony that doesn't want me dead. So, really; you wouldn't be changing your mind so much as doing what you want.'

Loki hummed. 'You don't seem annoyed by that.'

Shrugging his shoulders, Bruce said, 'I'm used to people wanting to kill me. I don't let it bother me.'

That made Loki smirk again. 'I can definitely see why Stark likes you.'

'I am very likeable,' Bruce agreed, just to see Loki roll his eyes. Really, Tony and Loki were so alike that the god was almost becoming predictable.

Almost, because as soon as that thought crossed Bruce's mind Loki disappeared in a flash of blue smoke. So did Loki's breakfast and Bruce's.

Bruce stared down at his empty table, egg still clinging to his fork.
Bruce wasn't one for swearing, but desperate times called for desperate measures... 'Son of a bitch,' he growled. 'JARVIS, where is Loki?'

' *I'm not at liberty to discuss Mr Lie-smith's whereabouts, Dr Banner,*' JARVIS answered.

*Son of a ...* 'Tony?' he asked.

' *Mr Stark is enjoying an omelette for breakfast,*' JARVIS told him.

Bruce sighed. Maybe joining Tony and Loki was a bad idea. 'JARVIS, can you order me some breakfast, please?'

' *Of course, Dr Banner. What would you like?*

'Waffles. Toast. Eggs... *everything.*'

There was a second of silence, and then- ' *Your order has been placed, Dr Banner. I will alert you when it has been delivered.*'

'Thanks, JARVIS.'

' *You are welcome.*'

*Well,* Bruce thought as he stood and tossed his fork into the sink, *at least I can trust one person around here... one computer... whatever.* Bruce glanced at the dishes before deciding to clean them later. Tea and TV was what he needed. Stupid Tricksters and their magical abilities.
Chapter 49

Chapter Notes

Author's Note: I am actually on holiday for this week and some of next so I have more free time than usual... and I drank a LOT of V so have an abundance energy. Thus when I sat down to work on the beginning of this chapter a few hours ago I wrote the entire damn thing. And my dear friend GreenLoki convinced me to post it. So many thanks to GreenLoki!

Enjoy!

Dreamer

The penthouse was pitch black when Loki teleported in. He raised his eyebrows and turned slowly. He spotted Stark instantly, the younger god's arc reactor giving off a sharp blue glow. Loki could feel his faint amusement, the buzz of Midgardian magic sizzling across his skin.

'Is there a reason you're sitting in the dark?' Loki questioned. He placed the plates he'd stolen from Banner on the table to his left.

Stark coughed lightly. 'Is there a reason you're stalking Bruce?'

Loki pondered that question. Stark had been busy in and out of his workshop and had been taking calls from Potts about his company when he wasn't elbow-deep in his suits. He knew that Stark was aware of how Loki was spending his time but hadn't brought it up until now.

'Does it bother you?' Loki asked.

'No,' Stark said. 'I'm just wondering why you're doing it.'

'JARVIS, lights.' Loki was tired of squinting at his partner. His eyesight adjusted quickly when the curtains rose, showing a rather spectacular view of the city splayed out beneath them. Sometimes, Loki mused, he really did feel like he was Midgard's ruler. The city seemed so insignificant from this vantage point. The mortals were like the scurrying little ants that Loki had once threatened, the buildings so small and paper-thin beneath his feet.

Loki smiled at the floor-to-ceiling windows, breathed in deeply and tasted only recycled air. Stark needed to install some windows that opened.

'So,' Loki drawled. He turned to face Stark. 'How long have you been sitting in the dark, waiting for me to return?' Stark pursed his lips and Loki cocked an eyebrow. 'JARVIS?'

'Twenty-three point one minutes, Mr Lie-smith,' JARVIS replied.

Stark's eyes snapped up to one of JARVIS' sensors. 'Hey! You're on my side here, J!'

'You did not order me to ignore Mr Lie-smith's questions, sir,' the AI responded primly. Loki snorted.
'Enough outta you!' Stark growled at Loki.

A smirk curled at Loki's lips. 'My apologies.'

He wasn't sincere in the slightest. Stark could obviously tell, if his eye roll and sigh were anything to go by. 'Just answer the question, Lokes.'

'Why have I been stalking Banner?' Loki echoed and Stark gave a jerked nod. 'I thought that that would be obvious, my dear.'

'Well, it's not,' Stark said. He pointed a finger at Loki and added, 'I don't think that you're actually keeping an eye on him; that's what JARVIS is for. So you either want to fuck with him, or you want him to be aware of the fact that you're right around the corner, ready to kill him if need be.'

Loki shook his head. 'Oh, no, Stark,' he said and sat on the couch opposite the genius. 'Banner is very aware of the fact that he's only alive because of you. And I let him know that, if you should ever change your mind, he will not be aware of the fact. I will kill him before he knows that anything is amiss.'

Tony's eyebrows rose slowly. 'Okay... tell him that, did you?'

'I did,' Loki said with a nod. 'You could always have your computer replay our conversation for you.'

'Conversation?' Tony echoed. 'As in only one? You've been stalking him on and off for the past week.'

Loki hummed before saying, 'Yes... we didn't speak until just now.'

'Why?'

Shrugging a shoulder, Loki said, 'I wanted to see what he would do.'

'And has he done anything?'

'He offered me dinner, once,' Loki said. He nodded at the... omelettes, Banner had called them. 'I stole breakfast.'

Stark's eyes immediately shifted from Loki to the two large plates. 'Bruce made those?' When Loki nodded Stark leapt to his feet and immediately attacked one. He didn't bother trying to find any utensil, instead scooping eggs and whatever else was in the dish into his mouth with his fingers.

Loki wrinkled his nose and crossed his legs. 'You are vile.'

'But you find me adorable anyway,' Stark mumbled around a mouthful. He swallowed, gave Loki a toothy grin.

'Vile,' Loki repeated, a sigh escaping his lips. But yes, he also found Stark adorable... sometimes.

Stark just shrugged and kept eating. Loki watched him. He'd eaten earlier, bored when he visited Stark only to find the Midgardian muttering to himself and comparing various lengths of wire. While the innards of the charcoal-grey Iron Man suit Stark had been working on had intrigued Loki, he'd been too hungry to bother sticking around and listening to the man ramble. Instead he'd fed himself and wandered down to Banner's floor to annoy him.

'Never answered my question,' Stark said when he was finished. He pushed the plate onto the
'Oh?' Loki drawled. He wasn't paying much attention to his partner, eyes turned inward to survey his magic. His Jötunn magic was grower stronger every day due to repeated use. Loki couldn't risk using his Æsir magic to teleport in and out of Banner's apartment; Thor would catch on far too quickly.

While the dark, cool blue magic was growing stronger, his Æsir magic didn't seem to be faltering. It was as strong as ever, as intelligent as ever, and Loki was curious. Just how, exactly, _did_ his magic work? Loki knew that he had absorbed Asgard's innate magic due to a lifetime of living there, while his Jötunn magic had remained dormant due to the All-Father's interfering hand.

But why was Loki still replenishing both? Why could he even _wield_ both? Why had he absorbed Asgard's magic? He had never heard of it happening before and very much wanted to travel to Asgard's Royal Library to study what a truly strange creature he had become.

'Loki?'

He blinked slowly, pulled away from his mindscape. Stark was staring at him; not worried, no, just slightly annoyed, his patience only just winning out.

'Apologies,' Loki murmured, 'I was inspecting something.'

Stark frowned. 'Are you okay?' Now he sounded worried.

Loki waved a hand. 'It is nothing,' he said. 'But back to your question; why am I stalking Banner.'

'I'd appreciate an answer in the next, oh, _thousand years_ ,' Stark muttered.

A smile was what Loki offered, finding amusement colour him as Stark huffed and folded his arms like an annoyed child. 'It's a combination of things,' he revealed. 'I want Banner to be aware of my power and how I have complete control over his home.'

Stark raised his eyebrows but didn't interrupt.

'But more than anything; I am deeply _curious_ about him,' Loki admitted.

'About Bruce?' Tony asked. 'Why?'

'We are similar,' Loki said. 'The beast and I have some things in common.'

Stark rolled his eyes. 'Don't call him a beast.'

Loki smirked. 'Why, my dear Anthony,' he purred, 'does it bother you?'

'Yes, because he isn't a beast,' Tony said.

'His actions speak louder than his words,' Loki said. 'He shouldn't deny such a very big part of himself, especially when that part is capable of such marvellous destruction.'

Stark leaned forward in his seat, eyes narrowed. 'So you'd be okay with me calling you a monster?'

It was a knee-jerk reaction; Loki found himself teleporting across to Stark, a strong hand wrapped firmly around the Midgardian's neck. He threw Stark to the floor and kneeled beside him, teeth bared and eyes dark to show the anger quickly frothing over.
'Be careful with your words, Midgardian,' Loki snarled.

Stark simply smirked at him. 'What?' he said, voice a challenge. 'You shouldn't deny such a very big part of yourself, Laufeyson.'

Loki growled, his hand tightened. Still Stark smiled at him.

'Sometimes I question my decision to join you,' Loki said, glaring at him.

'You shouldn't,' Tony said. 'We're all monsters here, Loki; you, me, Bruce. Why deny it?'

Loki hesitated, fingers flexing around Stark's throat. He so very much wanted to squeeze, uncaring of how much Stark meant to him, his magic wanting to lash out and burn. But it always wanted to swaddle and swoon, pull Stark close and protect him from everything, even Loki himself.

Such a contradiction, Loki was. Such a very strange monster.

He let Stark go but didn't help him up. He turned to survey the city below them, chest rising and falling much faster than Loki wanted it to. Stark's words had gotten to him and he was annoyed at his own reaction, furious that Stark would dare use such a word to describe him.

'You threatened Barton,' Loki remembered, 'when we caught him and he called me a monster.'

'Yeah,' Stark croaked. He coughed, cleared his throat. 'Only I can call you that.'

'Is that so?'

'Yup,' Stark said. 'Only me.'

Loki's lips lifted without his consent. 'So not even I can apply that label to myself?'

'No,' Stark reiterated. 'Because when I call you a monster I mean it in the very best way; you're chaotic, bloodthirsty, a beautiful being who does whatever the fuck he wants. You use it as an insult; you remember the stupid stories Asgard told you as a child and you think about the way you were always compared to Thor; Thor, the Golden Prince and Loki, the monster only allowed to live because the all-wise King of Asgard found it in his heart to spare a fledgling beast.'

Loki heard Stark stand, seat himself again, clear his throat a third time.

'It's a compliment when I call you a monster,' Stark added. 'Because I'm a monster, too. And we're only together because of that. It makes us stronger, to use insults directed at ourselves. We won't let anyone influence us that way. When you call yourself that... it hurts me, Loki, because it hurts you.'

Loki said nothing. He was still angry; how could he not be, when a monster was what he still considered himself? He knew that the Avengers felt the same; that Thor, despite all his cooing about he and Loki still being brothers, very much felt that Loki was a monster and that his true nature was the reason for his fall.

Stark considered him a monster, too. But he liked it.

'What are we even talking about?' Stark eventually grumbled to himself. 'Are you gonna eat that?'

'No,' Loki said. 'You're the one who wished to talk.' He turned to survey Stark, eyes narrowed when he found the younger god once more stuffing his face. 'After spending all of your free time in your workshop, I might add.'
Stark grinned at him. 'Aww, feeling lonely, Lo-Lo?'

Loki sighed. He really detested Stark's nicknames.

'If I *don't* spend heaps of time in my workshop, it'll be suspicious,' Stark added. 'I always hide from the world in my workshop. Plus, I'm a workaholic.'

Loki turned back to the windows. Yes, he was quite aware of that.

'Why?' Stark asked. 'Got a plan?'

'Perhaps,' was all Loki said.

'I thought we were gonna hold off on attacking any bases in the near future,' Stark said. 'You know, 'cause Bruce knows and we can't guarantee that he won't dob us in or reveal himself as being on our team if the Hulk had to face us in a fight.'

'Yes, I am aware of why we agreed to take a brief break,' Loki said. 'But I am *bored*, Stark. I don't want to still be sitting here, trying to destroy SHIELD, in a year's time. It would give them ample opportunity to re-group and come at us stronger than ever.'

'Yeah, yeah,' Stark said, voice muffled- by food, no doubt, Loki thought. 'So what do you wanna do?'

'I have been thinking,'

'You're always thinking.'

'Those in glass houses shouldn't throw stones, Stark.'

A choked laugh met his words and Loki finally turned away from the windows. He flopped into Stark's abandoned armchair and looked up to see his partner choking on a mouthful of egg.

'Well...' Stark coughed, 'look at you, learning our proverbs.'

Loki smirked. 'I have had ample time to study your race's phrases, given the amount of free time I've had over the past few days.'

Stark rolled his eyes and shoved more omelette into his mouth instead of answering.

But really, they hadn't even had sex in a week; it was completely unlike Stark to not pounce on Loki at least once a day. Even when it didn't lead to sex, Stark at least wanted to “make out” at least three times in twenty-four hours.

'Is someone feeling abandoned?' Stark cooed.

'Shut up, Stark, or I'll choke you again.'

The younger god threw him a leer. 'Maybe that's what I want.'

Loki settled further back in his seat. It was stupidly comfortable like most of Stark's furniture; when you had the money, he supposed, you could spend it on stupidly comfortable furniture. Hel knows that Frigga had wasted crates of gold on curtains and other nonsense during Loki's lifetime.

Loki forcefully pushed his mother from his mind. He didn't ever plan on seeing the woman again; he would only return to Asgard to destroy the Bifröst and cut off the Æsir's ability to invade other
Realms. He wasn't about to work this hard to take over Midgard, only to have Asgard ride in and save them like they had countless times in the past.

'What are you thinking?' Loki looked up to find Tony's eyes on him. They were soft, playfulness gone, and Loki felt any lingering anger fade at the amount of genuine emotion being directed his way.

'Nothing of import,' he said.

'You sure?' When Loki nodded Stark moved on, either believing his partner or simply choosing not to push. Sometimes Stark knew when to quit. 'Okay,' Stark said, 'so.' He leaned back, plate on his lap, and picked a mushroom from the remains of his omelette. 'You've been thinking?' Loki nodded. 'Good things, I hope.'

'Fun things,' Loki corrected.

A smile met his words. 'Everything you come up with is fun, even when it hurts me.'

'Oh?' Loki drawled. 'First you wish for me to choke you again and now this. You are a masochist, Stark. I never knew.'

'Please,' Stark snorted, 'you know me better than anyone.'

And wasn't that something to cherish? Loki knew many things about many people; he knew how the All-Father thought, he knew how the Warriors Three and Sif would react in any given situation, and he knew how to play Thor better than any other enemy the Crown Prince could possibly face.

But they didn't know Loki; not fully, not truly. Stark knew Loki better than anyone else. It was a gift that Loki was never going to abandon.

'Thoughts you wanna share?' Stark prompted when Loki failed to speak. 'Or are you still in planning mode?'

'Vague ideas, Anthony,' Loki said, 'no true plans just yet. Apart from those we have taken a break from.' Stark hummed but didn't interrupt. 'We can do little about Banner at the moment.'

'Just keep watching him,' Stark agreed. 'Don't worry, JARVIS is on it.'

'Dr Banner has been avoiding all contact from SHIELD and the Avengers,' JARVIS helpfully chimed in. 'I am monitoring his communications as well as his physical being. There has been nothing suspicious to report so far, Mr Stark, Mr Lie-smith.'

'Nothing?' Tony questioned, just to be on the safe side.

'Negative,' JARVIS agreed. 'Apart from Dr Banner's mutterings about wanting to kill Mr Lie-smith for stealing his breakfast, Dr Banner does not appear to be conspiring against you.'

Tony laughed loudly at that and Loki rolled his eyes. 'If he did not wish for his food to be stolen,' the Trickster drawled, 'then he should not have invited me to breakfast.'

'You're so mean, Lo,' Stark snickered. 'Maybe we should have Bruce over for dinner to apologise.'

'I refuse to apologise for anything!' Loki snapped.

Stark shrugged his shoulders. 'Whatever; I didn't exactly expect you to apologise. You rarely do.'
Loki narrowed his eyes at his partner but chose not to comment on his words. 'We could have him for dinner,' Loki said after a beat, 'perhaps just to speak; get his perspective on our plans and his role within our team, now that he has had more time to think it over.'

'Mm, maybe; it couldn't hurt,' Tony agreed. 'Anyway.' He stacked his plate atop the other and pushed them aside so that he could lean forward, hands clasped between his spread knees. 'What have you been cooking up in that beautiful head of yours?'

Loki raised an eyebrow. 'Flattery will get you nowhere, Anthony.'

'It can't hurt, though,' Tony shot back, tone flirty.

Oh, so now he was in a playful mood? He had abandoned Loki for days... well, he was going to suffer for a little while longer.

'My thoughts have a lot to do with Banner,' Loki said. He smirked when Tony pouted but didn't call him out on it. 'We had originally planned to have me board the Helicarrier and double check our information against SHIELD's database, yes?' Tony nodded. 'We have Banner, now,' Loki pointed out, 'he has complete access to the Helicarrier and SHIELD isn't as suspicious of him as they are of you.'

Stark frowned. 'True...'

'You could easily talk him through gaining the information that we need,' Loki said.

'True,' Stark repeated, 'but that brings up a whole lot of new problems. If Bruce is caught he can't get out as easily as you could. Thor still can't sense or trace your Jötunn magic. If you were caught you could teleport out easily. If you were spotted SHIELD would think nothing of it; of course you're going to be snooping for information, you're trying to destroy SHIELD.'

He leaned back, one hand coming up to stroke his perfectly styled beard. 'If Bruce is caught, on the other hand...'

'He cannot explain away his presence, nor his actions,' Loki finished the thought for him.

Tony nodded. 'Exactly. If he's caught, that's it; SHIELD will know that he's working with you.'

'I don't really care if they know,' Loki said. He tilted his head. 'Banner is your friend, Anthony; not mine.'

Stark scowled at him. 'I'd at least appreciate it if you didn't throw Bruce under the bus, Loki.'

Loki raised an eyebrow. 'Where is this bus, and can I throw you under it as well?'

The younger god waved a dismissive hand. 'Another one of those Midgardian sayings,' he muttered, 'forget it.'

'Very well.'

'My point,' Stark continued, 'is that Bruce is on our side now. I'm not about to sacrifice him just because you don't care about him. That's not how I work- that's not how we work.' Here he scowled, eyes dark when they found Loki's. 'You don't care about Bruce; I get that, trust me. But we're not going to abandon any allies that we do get. We're not SHIELD and we're not the Avengers.'
Loki grit his teeth at that and turned away. Oh, of all the things that Stark could have said... comparing Loki to the Avengers- to Thor? Loki wanted to choke him again, stronger this time, grip until his nails dug into Stark's throat and drew blood.

Loki's magic was very much against that idea despite the mild anger making it shiver in anticipation. It wanted to lash out, but not against Stark; never against Anthony.

'Fine,' Loki said, 'I won't... throw Banner under the bus.'

'I want your word,' Stark said, because he wasn't an idiot. He knew that Loki's promises meant very little unless Loki admitted that they were actual promises.

It made Loki smile. 'You know me well,' he said. He turned back to Stark, met his eyes and allowed magic to infuse his words. 'I will not abandon Banner as long as he is on our team. You have my word.'

They stared at each other for a beat, Stark refusing to break eye contact until he was absolutely certain that Loki was being truthful. Finally he smiled and leaned back. 'Thank you, Loki.' His words were just as soft as his face and Loki sighed. No one ever took Loki for his word, even when the Trickster did deign to tell the truth.

Stark was such a gift.

'But my point still remains,' Loki picked up the conversation, 'Banner could be the answer to our current problem. We know for a fact that SHIELD are interested in Lily Walden. That does not mean that they will contact her, however.'

Stark nodded along. 'Yeah, you're right. Maybe we could hit this from both angles.'

'Pardon?'

'We send Bruce in; see how closely he's being monitored,' Stark explained. 'Bruce is always aware of people watching him; the Hulk's instincts, no doubt.' Loki nodded along. 'But I doubt that he pays too much attention. We send him in, let him get a feel for how much security SHIELD has, not only aboard the Helicarrier but on his person. He can report back to us and we'll see where we stand.'

Loki mulled that over, but only briefly; it didn't take too much thought to see that Stark's plan was wise. There was no need to send Banner straight in for the information; he could very easily get caught. Let Banner snoop around, prove his worth to their cause. Not only could Loki watch to see if he were trustworthy, but he could see the true extent of Banner's skills when he wasn't turning into a giant beast. And, if all else failed, Loki could simply kill Banner and board the Helicarrier himself.

'Very well,' he agreed, 'we'll do it your way.'

'Perfect!' Stark clapped his hands together and leapt to his feet. His face took on a predatory look and Loki shifted his legs further apart subconsciously. 'Now,' Stark said and stalked towards his partner, 'I've been a very poor boyfriend, haven't I?'

'Partner,' Loki corrected. But he leaned further back, licked his lips, and eyed Stark up and down when the shorter god stopped before him. 'But by all means, continue.'

Stark's grin was sharp, eyes dark, and Loki found himself smiling in response.
'Partner,' Stark echoed. 'How can I apologise for my poor behaviour and choice of words, Loki?'

'Oh,' Loki said as Stark knelt before him. He placed his hands on Loki's knees and smoothed them up Loki's thighs. They burned a trail that made Loki shiver. 'I'm sure that I'll think of something,' Loki breathed.

'See that you do,' Stark growled. He ducked forward to bury his face in Loki's crotch and Loki exhaled shakily. His head tipped back and he groaned when Stark suckled at his cock through his jeans.

Oh, yes. There were plenty of ways Stark could make it up to him. And, perhaps, Loki could do some apologising of his own.
Chapter 50

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Amir sighed and leaned back. He stretched, pulled his right arm over his head and pushed out as far as he could... so far that he shifted in his seat and nearly fell out of it. His hands came down to catch against the table, his keyboard slid an inch of two. Amir scowled when he heard Dao giggle at her own console.

'Shit up,' he muttered.

She said something in Thai that she knew he didn't understand. He spun his seat to glare at her. 'It isn't that funny,' he grunted. 'And we speak English here, remember?'

'Gods, don't remind me,' Dao commented. 'You'd think knowing a second language would be a requirement for a SHIELD agent.' She paused. 'Don't we have bases in other countries?'

Amir shrugged. 'Not as far as I know; then again, I am just a computer person.'

'I think “computer geek” is what you're looking for,' Dao corrected. She hunched forward to stare at something on her computer monitor before dismissing it. 'Quiet night,' she commented, a sly tilt to her eyebrows.

Amir snorted. It was somewhat of an inside joke between the seven-man team who worked at the Malibu SHIELD base. Nothing ever happened in Malibu. All of the action- at least, all of the action that involved the Avengers- mostly happened in New York. Bad guys seemed to always want to take the fight to Stark Tower's front door and Amir was completely okay with that.

Back when he'd first signed on to work for this secret agency with no government affiliation, Amir had been told that his life might be in danger. But he'd been desperate at the time, needed the money, America wasn't the dream Amir had wanted it to be. And now he had money, his own house, and the most dangerous thing that had ever happened at the base was a computer exploding. And that he been contained within minutes, everything swapped out and upgraded within two days.

“A quiet night” was every night of work. Amir and his co-workers wrote programmes and viruses and firewalls to keep the Helicarrier and other SHIELD bases safe. They were never told what, exactly, they were working on, and Amir would be lying if he said he wasn't curious. But he'd met Director Fury a number of times. Had even had lunch with Agent Coulson, second-in-command and a man that Amir couldn't figure out. He was either terrifying or off his head.

Amir had learned not to ask questions.

'Did you get the memo?' Dao's voice broke Amir from his musings and he spun his chair around and around and around.

'Which one?'

'Top secret,' Dao said, 'marked “Laufeyson 10”.'

Amir snorted. 'You mean the one that said Loki's definitely a bad guy, don't talk to him, call Fury and the Avengers immediately if you spot him?'
Dao was nodding when he glanced at her. His head was swimming when he put his foot down, chair still, and blinked rapidly. 'Like we didn't know that,' he continued. 'I'd run screaming if I saw Loki.'

Every light in the room suddenly flickered out. Amir and Dao's computers were dead, monitors flicking off, every light winking out in an instance. Amir froze and looked up, but even the emergency lights were dormant.

'What the hell?' Dao murmured.

'Power outage?' Amir suggested.

He heard shifting, Dao's jacket against her desk, the squeak of her chair and the roll of wheels across linoleum. 'No way,' she said. 'We have backup power upon backup power.'

'Maybe everything went out.'

Dao murmured in Thai and Amir was certain there was some type of curse word amongst her utters.

'Dao?' he questioned.

'I don't-' She cut herself off when the temperature dropped. Amir shivered and felt the hair on his arms stand on end, felt a chill run down the length of his spine. His eyesight was adjusting but it was still too dark to see anything. Despite the pitch blackness, Amir knew that his breath was misting before him; he could feel it in his chest.

'What is going on?' he demanded.

A step sounded behind him, towards the door that led from his and Dao's shared office. Another step, a slide as the door was opened, tinkling that sounded like ice sliding from its perch.

'Well,' a voice said, accent a deep, smooth English, 'I do not hear screaming.'

The lights flickered back on and Amir closed his eyes against the sudden onslaught of harsh light. He blinked over and over, spots dancing before his eyes, but finally, finally, it cleared.

His breath caught in his throat and his chest ached with the cold. Loki Laufeyson was standing before the door. His eyes were tinged red and blue patterns were creeping up his pale white skin. He raised one hand and his fingernails were a bright, startling blue.

'Banner,' Loki said and Amir's eyes widened when a very familiar Avenger stepped through the still-open door. He was wearing a bulky jacket and had a StarkPad tucked under one arm, a bag slung over the other.

Loki's eyes left Amir and found Banner's.

'Well?' the god asked.

Banner scanned the room and lingered on Amir and Dao's terrified faces only briefly. 'I can do it,' he said.

'Good,' Loki drawled. Green eyes found Amir and Loki's lips turned up in a smirk. 'Well,' he said, 'are you going to scream now?'

Amir screamed.
Thirty-six hours earlier...

'What are you doing?' Tony asked when he entered the room. Loki had pushed all of the furniture to one side of the room, even the bookcases. Tony didn't spend a lot of time in the library and he'd forgotten what the room looked like empty.

'Practising,' Loki murmured. He didn't open his eyes and Tony walked around the room until he found a desk to sit on. He shoved a few books aside and perched on the edge, StarkPad suddenly forgotten.

'Practising what?'

'Something that I must do in silence.'

Tony chuckled at that. One of his favourite hobbies was winding Loki up so he put his Pad aside and laced his fingers together. Here he had an idea of how to destroy a SHIELD base and test Bruce's loyalty, and Loki was ignoring him in favour of meditating.

'Oh?' he said. 'Are you saying that I'm loud, Loki?'

'You are anything but silent,' the Trickster commented.

True, Tony thought. He'd never been accused of being too quiet. Still, it was harder than usual to remain quiet when he could feel Loki's magic buzzing around the room. It was difficult to truly describe the feeling. It wasn't a physical one but a feeling that existed on another plane entirely. Tony still had difficulty separating the physical and metaphorical planes when he wasn't actively using or at least observing his magic.

He knew that Loki could exist on both planes at once; it was how he was able to teleport, to travel to other Realms on the paths of Yggdrasil that other mages had no idea even existed.

Tony slid from the table and to his knees. He shuffled closer, trying to keep his noises to a minimum, but of course Loki heard him. Tony didn't think that Loki ever truly left the physical world when his body was still existing within it.

'There is still so much I must teach you,' Loki murmured, 'so much that you are ignorant of...'

He inhaled sharply and Tony watched, transfixed, as Loki glowed. Not green or gold like when he was using his Æsir magic, but blue, the colour of his Frost Giant heritage. But unlike every other time Loki had tapped into that very primal, very dark magic that made up his very core, Loki didn't turn blue; his pale skin didn't deepen to a blue that Tony had never seen before.

The temperature dropped significantly and Tony felt frost form beneath his nose, felt oxygen catch in his lungs. His fingers trembled and Tony stuffed them under his arms.

Loki inhaled sharply and blue lines crept up his neck and along the backs of his hands. They were the dark blue markings that usually raised to cover Loki’s ocean-coloured skin, but this time they
Tony had never seen anything like it and he couldn't stop. He pulled one hand from his armpit to reach out, fingers twitching, and touch-

He fell. He fell so hard and so fast that his head whipped back, pain immediately making his entire brain throb like he'd lost oxygen. His body was attacked by a thousand little needles that froze and stabbed upon contact. His muscles twisted and his bones cracked...

But this... everything around him, what he felt beyond the pain, what he saw beyond the spots that danced across his vision, was... it was Loki's magic.

It was like the galaxy had forced its way into Loki's body and taken up residence; everywhere Tony looked, everywhere he probed and stared and pushed was Loki's magic.

Loki's mindscape was a billion times larger and far more complex than Tony's own. Tony's magic was like a drop of clear water in the deep black ocean. The power pressed around Tony and its presence was so magnificent, so awe-inspiring, that Tony really wasn't surprised that Loki had lost his mind. He was surprised that Loki had found his way back from this.

Because this was so much larger than the wormhole, than space, than anything Tony had ever set his human eyes on. The Tesseract had ripped the sky open and brought with it thousands of foreign beings, but Tony was quickly realising that it had nothing on Loki's own power. The cube was just that; a stupid fucking cube when compared to Loki's almighty power.

Almost as soon as Tony felt himself being overloaded he felt it stopping; Loki's mindscape, the swirls of green and gold and blue, were ripped away and replaced by the library ceiling, by Loki's eyes when he leaned over Tony and pushed him down.

The pain stopped but it lingered. Tony's head hurt and his body shook as he curled up on himself, the physical so much more present than usual.

'Enough!' Loki snapped when Tony continued to fight. Tony's magic quivered at the command, as though terrified that Loki's power would be unleashed against it. So Tony stayed down, his entire body trembling and his breath coming in harsh bursts. 'Control yourself, Tony,' Loki ordered, and this time his voice was soft, caring, everything that Tony had come to expect when Loki spoke to him. 'Allow yourself the time to come back to yourself, and then control your magic.'

Tony didn't even know that his magic was out. It tingled along his skin, tried to heal what had been done to Tony's body by entering Loki's mindscape. Slowly, so very achingly slowly, Tony withdrew. He forced his magic into submission and made it stop. It wanted to heal and lash out and merge with Loki's own but Tony had enough control to beat it into submission.

It curled tightly within him, mimicking Tony's own posture. When it disappeared as much as it ever did Tony was left broken, tired, breathing too harsh and heart racing too fast.

Loki withdrew his hand and Tony sat up too quickly. His vision swam but he saw enough; the dark blue swirls and lines still marked Loki's skin. His fingernails were blue.

Apart from that Loki still looked the same. Same dark hair getting far too long, same bright green eyes that Tony fell more in love with every day. Same pale skin, same baggy sweater, same tight jeans.

The markings were there, but it was still Loki... only now Tony knew the truth. He knew what Loki was capable of; what Loki had hidden just beneath his skin.
'All of that... power,' Tony said, still staring at Loki, eyes wide. Loki's own were dark. 'You didn't need the Tesseract, did you?' Tony realised. 'You could have opened a portal yourself; with your own power.'

'I could have,' Loki agreed easily. Tony's mouth fell open. All of that power stuffed into one person... how the hell did Loki contain it? 'But I was here for the Tesseract; it was what the Other and the Mad Titan wanted,' Loki continued. 'There was no reason to... show all of my cards, you could say. Why reveal just how powerful I am when they would have been happy with a simple blue stone?'

'We had absolutely no chance against you,' Tony muttered. He reached up to rub his eyes and found his hand shaking. Fuck, he was exhausted. And what he'd managed to touch had been a mere drop in the ocean of Loki's magic.

'You are forgetting that I am a simple Jötunn,' Loki commented. Tony looked back at him; Loki was smiling. 'I am not indestructible, Anthony. And you know quite well what using magic does to you; the concentration it takes, the skill required to harness and keep it within your grasp. If I were to use every drop of magic I have I would destroy myself as well as Midgard.'

'But you're capable of so much more than what you've used so far, aren't you?' Tony demanded. When Loki hesitated, Tony shouted, 'Aren't you?!!'

Loki frowned at him, clearly confused by Tony's mood. 'Yes,' he said simply.

Tony didn't know why he was... pissed off? Freaking out? Annoyed? Maybe a mixture of all three and more.

Because Loki was... fuck, he was something else entirely. Tony had been so very thrilled to learn that he had enough magic to use. Even Loki had been surprised by what Tony was capable of; what he would be able to learn and do with a few more years of practise.

But compared to Loki, Tony was a fucking child trying to be a master. Compared to Loki he was nothing.

Loki could wipe Midgard out of the Solar System if he truly, truly wished it. He would destroy himself in the process, but he was capable. In the end, if Loki decided it, the God of Mischief and Lies would have the last laugh.

And there was nothing that SHIELD, the Avengers, or the World Security Council could do about it.

Which worked in Tony's favour.

'You've touched my magic before; multiple times,' Loki said. It broke into Tony's thoughts and made Tony huff. 'Why is this discovery so shocking?'

'I can feel it now,' Tony said. He frowned as he tried to work through his own fucked up emotions. 'Every other time we've touched I've been... I was less skilled, less aware of my magic and how fundamentally different it was to yours. Or I was too busy trying to learn something new or stop my magic from reaching out to you. Or...'

He frowned as he trailed off. His eyes found the markings scattered across Loki's skin. 'Why are those markings still there? Why aren't you completely blue?'

He had never truly seen Loki's Jötunn form. But he'd seen Loki's hands, his arms, change colour
when Loki used too much Jötunn magic. This was something else entirely.

'Yes,' Loki said and looked down at his own hands. 'It is... not what I was expecting.'

'No?'

Loki shook his head. 'As you know I have been practising using my Jötunn magic; I need to be more proficient in using it if we wish to continue our plans undetected.' Tony nodded. 'I am trying to learn to use it without it using me,' Loki revealed. 'Without it washing away my Æsir magic; without it changing my very biology. Jötnar connect with their magic on a much more physical level than most other beings, except perhaps the Light Elves. Using Jötunn magic influences your very being. I need to be able to use it without that happening.'

'Okay,' Tony said. He... got it, for the most part. 'Your Jötunn magic makes you blue because it's part of your physical self and your real physical self is blue.' Loki barely flinched, but Tony still noticed it. 'You're trying to use it like you use your Æsir magic.'

'Yes,' Loki said, 'and I've found that it's... weaker. This,' he held up his hands, the backs facing Tony so that he could clearly see the markings, 'is what happens when I use it without allowing myself to fully change.'

'You're weaker and only get the markings,' Tony said, 'okay, that's... weird, but hey, life is weird.'

Loki nodded and dropped his hands. Staring down at the markings thoughtfully, Loki turned one hand and summoned a sphere of Æsir magic. It was deep, dark green, sparks of gold flickering through it. Tony watched as the markings on the back of Loki's hand and along his forearms faded before disappearing completely. The others remained, even the ones on Loki's neck.

'Is that supposed to happen?' Tony asked.

'No,' Loki told him, 'but I am a strange creature, Stark. I was not supposed to happen.'

'Chaos incarnate, hmm?' Tony mused.

Loki chuckled and dismissed the sphere. Tony's chest tingled. 'A Jötunn Prince stolen, raised on Asgard as one of their Princes, taught Æsir magic, with the Fates foretelling that he will bring about the destruction of Asgard and the Nine Realms entirely.' A crooked grin spread across Loki's face. 'Chaos does not begin to cover it, Anthony.'

'Wow.' Tony blinked. 'No, seriously; and here I thought that I was a special little snowflake.'

Loki shoved him away and Tony fell. He hit the floor with a thud, groaned when his body throbbed at the unfair treatment. He was still weak from trying to encompass all that was Loki and didn't try to sit himself up again.

'Anthony?'

'Too tired. Hurts.'

Loki sighed and pushed himself up. He hauled Tony to his feet like he was nothing and soon Tony found himself in Loki's arms.

'You should do this more often,' Tony said, words muffled when he buried his face in Loki's shoulder. A very large part of him felt like a child as Loki carried him from the library and down the hallway. Another part felt comforted; loved.
Loki chuckled and Tony turned so that he could watch the ceiling flash by. Loki turned the corner and took the stairs that led up to his and Tony's now shared bedroom.

'You're so old,' Tony murmured suddenly and Loki paused at the foot of their bed. 'So young,' Tony said, eyes finding Loki's. 'So powerful yet so weak. You're a fucking contradiction... chaos in human form.'

Loki smiled softly. 'I thought we had established that I am so much more than chaos.'

'You are,' Tony agreed. 'A monster,' he said and Loki stiffened. Tony smiled. 'Yet not.'

Loki's eyebrows rose. And though he was still confused, he chuckled; 'And?'

'There's so much more to you than anyone realises,' Tony said. 'Thor thinks you're just his brother; broken, damaged, but his brother. The King of Asgard thinks that you're a dangerous lunatic, and Fury and SHIELD think the same. But you're so much more than that.'

'As are you,' Loki commented. He finally put Tony on the bed and waved his right hand. The markings on the back flared into existence once more and Tony found himself beneath the covers.

Tony ignored him and shook his head. Loki sat on the edge of the bed and Tony pushed one hand against his chest, fingers tingling against the soft material of Loki's sweater. 'How the hell are you this sane?' he muttered. 'After everything you've been through, and all the power that your body somehow manages to contain. How... how?'

Loki sighed and pressed his lips against Tony's forehead. It was so soft, so sweet, that Tony jolted and then went still. 'I do not know,' Loki murmured against Tony's flushed skin. 'I stopped questioning it, Anthony. I stopped the moment I realised that I had a bond with you. After everything, the Fates still play with me by throwing good things my way when it has been bad for the past thousand years.'

He sighed.

'I do not question it any longer; and I don't wish to,' Loki added. 'There is no point in trying to figure out the Fates, or what destiny might have in store for us. All I will do is control my own actions and forge my own path. I care not if I am playing into the Fates' hands or turning against them completely. I care not that I am the most powerful being in existence, yet am unable to harness that power without destroying myself in the process.'

'Loki-

But Loki shook his head and Tony pressed his lips together.

'I care not,' Loki continued after a beat, 'that you are Midgardian, a former mortal on a speck of a planet that would be forgotten or ignored if not for its importance to Asgard. You are Anthony Stark, God of Cunning and Inspiration, and if the Fates have decided that we would cross paths and join one another, then I will not question it.

'You are mine and I am yours,' Loki finished.

'Just like that?' Tony demanded. He pushed against Loki's chest, eyebrows furrowed. 'You're capable of destroying entire worlds.'

'And I have no wish to die myself, so it won't be happening,' Loki countered. 'Besides, I quite like Midgard. Once we get rid of SHIELD and the Avengers, of course.'
Tony was still frowning.

'I am capable of much, Anthony,' Loki said, 'and I find it odd that you have only just realised it now. But you are capable of so much yourself. Your mind is truly fascinating, and the things you can do... it leaves me breathless, at times.'

'It does?' Tony shook his head. 'I do? Me?'

'Yes,' Loki said. He knew that Tony didn't think highly of himself, at times. He was seen as a brash narcissist and most times that was an apt description.

But then there were these times; when Anthony thought of himself as nothing but a stupid monkey on a dirt ball; he thought himself so much lower than Loki, a God from another Realm.

But he was so, so much more.

'You deserve everything and I deserve nothing,' Loki said.

Tony snorted. 'You got that the wrong way around.'

'Which is why we are perfect for each other,' Loki said. 'Well, there are other reasons,' he added when Tony's eyebrows rose. 'But we keep each other grounded whilst also elevating each other. Together we can conquer worlds, Anthony. Separately I am a lost jötunn with no home to call my own.'

'And I'm an alcoholic flying around in a tin suit,' Tony muttered.

'Yes,' Loki agreed, because he very much saw it as truth. They were so much more together than they were apart.

'Together we can destroy SHIELD,' Tony said.

Loki nodded. 'Apart we would fall to our enemies eventually. So please, ignore those thoughts. If you cannot, tell me and we will have another conversation similar to this one.'

'Where you basically call me an idiot?' Tony questioned.

'And remind you that you are the very best your race has to offer,' Loki added.

'I'm still trying to wrap my head around the amount of magic you have at your disposal,' Tony said.

'You will, in time,' Loki said. 'And in the future, please don't try to touch my magic without me being aware. It may kill you.'

'Okay... okay.' Tony sighed and shook his head. He scrubbed at his face and scowled when his hands came away damp; he needed a shower.

'You need rest,' Loki corrected when he saw that Tony intended to get up and bathe. 'You can shower after you sleep.'

'But we're having dinner with Bruce,' Tony argued.

'Are we? This is the first I have heard of it.'

'That's what I was going to tell you, before I... fell into you, or whatever,' Tony said. 'I have a plan.'
Loki raised an eyebrow, waiting, patient, and Tony wet his lips.

'There's a SHIELD base- the Malibu one,' he said.

'I am aware of it, yes,' Loki said.

'Yeah, well, JARVIS found something interesting,' Tony told him. 'It's small- no more than five or ten agents can be working there.'

Loki frowned.

'It's where their hackers work; the people who are primarily responsible for protecting SHIELD from cyber attacks,' Tony explained. 'Not only can we easily destroy it given how few agents work there, but they might have information.'

'Information about SHIELD's other bases,' Loki realised quickly. Tony nodded. 'What does this have to do with dinner and Banner?'

'You attack it and Bruce goes with you,' Tony said. Loki looked like he very much wanted to hit Tony and Tony grinned. 'Now, now; hear me out.'

'Oh, do go on, Stark,' Loki growled, 'I would love to hear your plan.'

Tony grinned.

Chapter End Notes

**Author's Note**: I had to split this chapter in two because it was so long. But have no fear, I'm going to immediately upload the second part. Half of me wanted to post it all as one chapter but the part with Loki's magic really felt like a story all on its own, so I split it.

See ya soon!

Dreamer
Chapter 51

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Thirty hours earlier...

Bruce hesitated before stepping from the elevator. Tony's penthouse was as he remembered it; dull grey walls, white carpet that branched into wooden floorboards when it switched from hallway to kitchen. He went right, past paintings he didn't want to know the price of, and stepped through the large archway that led to the living room.

It was strange, being on Tony's personal floor. The penthouse consisted of eight floors, with only Tony's personal elevator leading all the way up. Bruce had only ever visited Tony's entertaining spaces, and this floor in particular twice; back when the Avengers had tried to stage an intervention, and when Bruce had had his own suspicions after the Albuquerque base had fallen.

Everything was shades of white and black, the only splash of colour the brown tables and gold lighting overhead. The living room had been rearranged, though, Bruce realised when he entered the room proper. What had once been U-shaped sofas were now three three-seater sofas in a cream colour, one pointed at the TV and the other two facing each other from either side.

The coffee table was longer and had stacks of books either end, a StarkPad taking up the centre. There were more books on the sofas and the other tables, trinkets pushed aside in favour of holding more tomes. There were even discarded plates that Bruce had never seen before; the entire floor had a lived-in feeling that hadn't been present the last times Bruce had visited, like having Loki in the Tower had forced Tony to use more space than just his workshops and bar.

A scuffle to his right made Bruce turn and he saw Tony ambling towards him, fixing some type of bracelet to his wrist. The genius hitched a thumb over his shoulder, gesturing at the staircase that curled upwards and disappeared behind the white ceiling. 'Loki will be joining us shortly.'

'Okay,' Bruce said. He had no idea why he'd been called here, only that he had. Tony had left him a personal message via JARVIS, requesting his presence for dinner that night. Bruce had gotten the feeling that it had been an order more than a request so had skipped returning any of Fury's messages in favour of accepting Tony's invitation.

'How have you been, Bruce?' Tony asked, already walking, and Bruce jerked into movement. He followed Tony from the room and back down the hallway, into the kitchen that was larger than it had any right to be. The table off to the right was large but offered a more intimate atmosphere; plates were already sitting atop the wood, two on one side and a lone one opposite.

Bruce assumed that it was his seat and sat before Tony could, earning a chuckle from the mortal turned god.

'Antsy, Bruce?' Tony questioned.

'Curious,' Bruce admitted. 'Why am I here?'

Tony hummed and slid into the seat opposite him. 'Maybe I just wanted to have dinner with an old
friend, Bruce,' Tony said.

The doctor shook his head. 'After the past few weeks?' he said. 'No, this isn't just dinner. We've never had dinner here, at any rate. You always sought me out on my own floor, or on Steve's.'

'True,' Tony admitted. 'Loki and I wanted to talk to you.'

Bruce swallowed at that. Tony and Loki? Well, that didn't bode well for Bruce. He had been under the assumption that until he proved himself he'd be left out of the loop in regards to Tony and Loki's plans. It had been quite for a while and Bruce knew that the Avengers were growing more nervous by the day. Where would Loki strike next? Would he strike next? Or was something even more nefarious taking up Loki's time?

Tony easily read the emotions Bruce was projecting- it wasn't like the doctor was trying to hide his feelings on the matter- and smiled. 'All in good time, Bruce.'

He just nodded and the two fell into silence, Tony fiddling with the black bracelet wrapped around his right wrist and Bruce just staring. He only moved when Loki stepped into the kitchen.

The first thing that hit Bruce was the fact that Loki was blue. Not completely; most of the skin that Bruce could see was still an unhealthy shade of white. But each finger that grazed Tony's neck was a deep shade of blue with markings twisting around each finger, over the back of each hand, disappearing beneath the sleeves of his baggy green sweater. Even more intricate markings were currently crawling up his neck, inching over his sharp jaw only to retreat when Loki blinked.

'What?' was all Bruce could say.

Loki smiled slowly and sat beside Tony, one arm tossed back and the hand attached snaking up Tony's neck so that fingers could play with the inventor's hair.

'What?' Loki echoed.

Bruce licked his dry lips and his eyes flicked from Loki to Tony and back again. 'Why are some parts of you blue?' he asked.

'Only some parts,' Loki drawled. 'I must admit that I'm quite happy with myself at the moment.'

Tony rolled his eyes. 'You're always happy with yourself, gorgeous.' Loki shot him a look that Bruce couldn't decipher. Tony ignored it. 'What you see here, Bruce, is progress.'

'Progress with what, exactly?' Bruce asked.

'Information not suitable for someone in your current standing,' Loki told him.

'It's none of your business, so stop asking questions,' was what Bruce gathered from that.

'Right,' he said. 'Moving on?'

Tony smirked at his words and even Loki smiled faintly. 'Let's eat,' Tony said and stood to grab three pans from the oven. It was chicken, roasted vegetables, and more gravy than was healthy. The three men made up their plates silently, Bruce noting that Tony was eating just as much as himself and Loki.

Right, Tony was a god now. Which meant that he'd eat just as much as a god.

It was only after they'd started eating that Tony brought up the reason they were there.
'We're going to test you,' Tony said.

Bruce halted, mouth full of chicken and potato. He raised his eyebrows.

'Come now, Bruce,' Tony continued with a chuckle, 'did you really think that we wouldn't test you?'

Swallowing, Bruce put his utensils down. 'I... honestly haven't thought about it too much,' he admitted. While he'd known long before he'd approached them that Tony wouldn't just accept Bruce's allegiance, he hadn't given much thought to what he would do- or what Tony would have him do- to prove himself.

Bruce had honestly just wanted to stop fighting himself; stop thinking about what Tony was truly doing, stop thinking about where his loyalties lay and what it meant for him, personally, if Tony really was the bad guy in this story.

Of course he was still thinking about it, but having finally made a decision had lifted an ungodly weight off of Bruce's shoulders. He'd made his choice. What happened next would happen.

'I take it that you've told Tony what I told you,' Bruce said, his words directed at Loki. Loki was playing with his food, unable to eat when he seemed determined to touch Tony with at least one hand. Loki looked up from where he was slicing roast pumpkin with his fork.

'Yes,' he said... and that was all.

'Okay,' Bruce muttered. He wanted to roll his eyes but wouldn't drop to Loki's infuriating level. He turned his attention back to Tony. 'So you know that I won't actively kill people for you.'

'I'm well aware of that,' Tony said with a nod. 'I also know that you will kill to protect me.' His smile dropped suddenly, eyes filled with that manic depth that had only ever been hinted at before.

'At least, you say that you will.'

Bruce gulped. That... still wasn't a look he was used to seeing on Tony's face. The other man had changed so much and Bruce had been so very, very blind. How was it that Natasha was the only Avenger to even suspect Tony? Clint probably knew something, too; the archer was too intuitive to not get a feeling of wrong from Tony. And he knew the truth, even if it was buried beneath Loki's magic.

'Only time will tell,' Bruce agreed at length and Tony let it go.

'As it stands, you've done nothing to hint that we can trust you,' Tony continued. 'Then again, you haven't done anything to hint that we can't trust you. The only reason you're still alive- the only reason that you still remember what I really am- is our friendship. And let me tell you, Bruce; that bridge is a very unstable one.'

Bruce could do nothing but nod. It was one of those rare moments when Bruce didn't feel like flinching, fiddling, taking off his glasses to scrub at them like the lenses truly needed cleaning. His entire focus was on Tony; on the look in Tony's eyes, on the words coming out of his mouth. Even Loki seemed like something to ignore; someone that Bruce could ignore when this new version of Tony Stark demanded his attention.

'There are many ways to test you; we'll tell you about another plan of ours in the future if you pass this first little hurdle,' Tony said.

Mouth dry, Bruce coughed. He had to cough again just to get the words out; 'What hurdle?"
'There's a base in Malibu,' Tony told him. 'Very, very small. My research indicates that it's not a true base. Not like the ones Loki and I have destroyed so far.'

'What do you mean?'

'It's where SHIELD's best computer programmers work,' Tony said. He scraped his fork along his plate, gathered potato and chicken and shoved it into his mouth. 'Very small place; three-storey tall building, only a few rooms,' he mumbled around his food.

'They make those pesky computer programmes that keep JARVIS so very busy,' Loki drawled suddenly, food still untouched, right hand on Tony's lower back. Bruce turned to meet his eyes. 'If we kill them, for a brief time SHIELD will be vulnerable to...' he frowned, 'what did you call it, Stark?'

'Cyber attacks,' Tony said. 'I can already hack SHIELD, Bruce; JARVIS can, too. But we want them scattered; we want Fury to freak out and scour the Earth for new programmers. We want SHIELD to suddenly need me, even if they don't use me. And while he's doing that, we're going to get what we truly need to end SHIELD.'

'Okay,' Bruce breathed. His voice was still hoarse and he picked up his glass, took a sip of water. 'What do you need me for?' he asked he set the glass back down.

Tony grinned at that, one of those smiles he often wore when working on something or suggesting some insane, half-formed plan. 'I don't need you,' Tony said. He looked at Loki.

Oh, Bruce realised when Loki smirked.

'I, on the other hand, could use someone literate with Earth's technology,' Loki said, 'and unfortunately, Stark is busy.' He raised an eyebrow. 'Are you busy, Banner?'

Bruce knew what his answer was. Knew what his answer had to be. 'No,' he said. 'I'm all yours.'

Tony and Loki smiled in unison. It was more than disturbing.

{OoO}

Three hours earlier...

'What do you mean, now?' Bruce demanded. Loki stood from the bed. He was wearing his armour-dark green, for the most part, with silver and purple pieces that fit together to protect his shoulders, stomach, and thighs. Bruce was sure that there was more padding that he couldn't see, but he'd always been the Other Guy when facing Loki in battle. And right now he was more worried about what Loki had just said than his armour.

'I mean now, Banner,' Loki said. 'Working with us means sticking to our timetable.'
'Tony actually sticks to a timetable?' Bruce blanched. Because out of everything Loki had said in the past few minutes, *that* was the most shocking.

Loki chuckled. 'Yes, Stark is terrible at sticking to plans.' He sobered quickly, eyes glinting when they found Bruce's. 'But you will do as I say, *beast*, and dress warmly.'

'I-'

The temperature dropped and Bruce shivered. He watched, eyes wide, as markings stretched across the exposed parts of Loki's skin. When he opened his eyes they were red and Bruce breathed out heavily.

'What's going on?' he asked.

'In due time, Dr Banner,' Loki said. 'Now, do as you're told.'

{oOo}

**Now...**

Teleporting wasn't something that Bruce ever wanted to do again. The Other Guy was very much against it, too, but Bruce had enough control to force him away and focus on the task at hand. Two very young, very terrified SHIELD agents- SHIELD computer techs?- were staring at him and Loki in absolute *horror*. He couldn't blame them. Loki never brought good news and this time he'd brought an Avenger along with him. An Avenger that was working with him.

'What-what-what-' the man tried to say but couldn't force the words out. The woman sitting on the other side of the room was frozen in fear.

'I'm sorry,' Bruce said, 'I'm so sor-

'He isn't,' Loki cut in. 'Banner, really; you aren't winning my trust right now.'

Bruce's mouth shut with a click. When Loki raised his hands, the temperature dropping impossibly lower, Bruce turned away. While he could force his eyes closed, he couldn't ignore the blood-curdling *screams* that suddenly assaulted his ears. Nor could he avoid the splashes of a too-warm liquid that suddenly soaked his entire right side.

He whipped around only to see Loki finish cutting down the woman. She had tried to run and made it over what was left of her fallen comrade, only to be cut down by Loki. *Literally.* Pieces of the two agents were scattered around the room and there was so much *blood*.

Bruce nearly slid in it when Loki grabbed one of the chairs and turned it towards Bruce. His eyes were alight with a pleasure Bruce couldn't stand, and Bruce's breath caught in his throat when Loki said a very dark, 'Sit.'
Bruce sat. Half of him was in a state of shock, the other overcome with pure terror. While Bruce knew a lot of forms of horror, having been the one causing it on a number of occasions, it was nothing compared to this. Fights with the Avengers rarely got too bloody. SHIELD always wanted their enemies captured and despite his true nature, even Tony could follow some rules and rarely spilled more blood than necessary.

Rarely were there bodies. Rarely was Bruce forced to touch a keypad and look at a monitor that was dripping with the stuff.

'Do what you have been told to do, Banner, and you can rest when we're done,' Loki told him. His voice was a purr, pure seduction; and not of the sexual kind. Bruce was suddenly acutely aware of Loki's nicknames; the Trickster, Silvertongue, Loki Lie-smith. Every word out of his mouth had been honeyed-poison and Bruce found it difficult to ignore his instructions.

But he knew that he had to do this. Even without Loki's layered threats, Bruce had made his choice. To finally be free, to make sure that the only true friend he'd ever had remained alive, Bruce had to do this. Freedom came with a price and this was Bruce's.

He gulped and quickly set about getting himself into the Malibu base. With a crude form of JARVIS it wasn't too difficult. Bruce was no hacker- he was no Tony Stark- and he needed all the help he could get. But once he was in...

The computer pinged. He gulped again. 'SHIELD know that someone's here,' he told Loki.

'It matters not,' Loki said, 'just do your job, Banner.'

Bruce nodded. He did his job. He typed and backspaced and typed again, opened and closed programmes and files and navigated as best he could around the somewhat familiar system. He worked with SHIELD all the time; he had his own computer, his own desk, aboard the Helicarrier. The operating system of the Malibu base wasn't too different and Bruce was able to dig until he found what he needed.

'There... there isn't much,' he said and closed another reminder that SHIELD were counteracting his actions.

'Oh?' Loki drawled from his left. Bruce didn't jump. 'And what is there?'

'Details of their operating system,' Bruce said, 'some programmes that they're working on; others that have been approved, more that are just ideas.' He glanced at Loki and realised that the god didn't quite understand what he was saying. 'There's no information on SHIELD's actual bases, apart from this one and some stuff on the Helicarrier; Tony's own notes, if I had to guess.'

Loki hummed.

'They don't have what we need,' Bruce added.

A smile lit up Loki's face and he turned to the doctor. 'What we need? How very cute, Banner.'

Frowning, Bruce turned back to the monitor.

'Is there anything here that Stark might need?' Loki asked.

'Uh... maybe?' Bruce said. 'Certainly some of these programmes... he could use them against SHIELD's current firewalls, maybe find some new holes to-'
'Get what you need,' Loki cut in.

Bruce nodded and pulled a flashdrive from his bag, plugging it into the computer's tower and tapping away quickly to download what Tony might need.

Another pop-up interrupted him, this one with a direct message. 'Um...'

'What?' Loki demanded.

Bruce expanded the window and pointed at the words. Loki laughed as he read them;

You will fail, Loki.

'Can I send words back?' Loki asked. Bruce nodded and brought up the messaging program. Loki wrapped one arm around Bruce to lean over him, chest pressed against Bruce's back. He stank of blood and Bruce held his breath as Loki typed.

'Send it,' Loki ordered as he withdrew and walked across the room.

Bruce hunched over the keyboard. His eyes roamed over the words before he clicked-

You misunderstand, Fury. I have already won.

- it sent.

Bruce breathed out heavily and wiped a hand across his face. He flinched when he realised that he had blood on his fingers...

Both physically and metaphorically.

He went back to downloading anything relevant.

'Done?' Loki called however many minutes later. Bruce didn't know how much time had passed.

'Y-Yes,' Bruce said. He pushed away from the computer and stood. He packed away what he'd brought with him and when he turned he found Loki staring at him, amusement stitched into every fibre of his being.

'Calm yourself, beast,' Loki said, voice lilting. 'You have taken your first step towards truly being a part of this team.'
All Bruce could do was nod and watch as Loki placed one hand against the wall. He was suddenly encased in green smoke and it quickly spread, curling through the air and filling the room.

'Ve would run if I were you, Banner,' Loki commented.

Bruce didn't need to be told twice. He slipped in more blood and almost tripped over a leg as he forced himself across the room and through the partially opened door. He made his way back upstairs, into the front room of the building.

The explosion that rang out behind him threw Bruce off of his feet. He hit a wall and tumbled to the floor, coughing at the thick dark smoke that shot from the floors below. But then Loki was there, one arm wrapped around Bruce's chest, pulling him up.

Bruce saw Loki throw a hand behind him, another _boom_, and then- He hit his bed, bounced off of it and onto the floor. Bruce choked on the smoke still in his lungs and saw Loki's boots approach him.

'Ve did well,' Loki said. 'Get some rest.'

And then he was gone.

Bruce stayed on his hands and knees until he could breathe somewhat clearly. When he stood he found himself light headed and his things were gone- his jacket, his StarkPad, the bag with his other equipment.

Bruce stumbled his way into the bathroom and wrenched his clothes off. JARVIS turned on the shower without Bruce having to ask and when he fell into it the water was achingly hot.

He sat on the heated tiles and pressed his back against the cool wall. Every inhale was painful, every exhale a shudder. Bruce's eyesight was tinged green but he wrestled it down.

This was his decision. This was his _life_ now. He thought of Tony locked up, of Loki dead in the streets of New York. He jolted where he sat when the Other Guy growled at the last thought.

That was... unexpected.

_This is my life_, he told himself firmly. _This is my decision._

He didn't know how long he sat there _breathing, thinking_, but soon... soon his breathing became steadier. The Other Guy settled. And Bruce realised that Loki was right; Bruce _was_ a monster. A special type, certainly, but a monster all the same.

And Bruce... for freedom. For a chance of a real life with people he could actually _trust_...

Bruce was okay. He'd be okay.

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Author's Note: One of my faults as a writer is not researching enough. From what I've
gathered- and looking at pictures is the best I can do- Tony's penthouse is at least eight floors. I picture the bar being the bottom floor, attached to the helipad, with the floor above that another entertaining space. Above that is Tony's personal living room/kitchen, with his bedroom taking up the entire floor above that but being connected via stairs and elevator. Basically every floor, even the topmost floor which is Tony's personal workshop in my own head, is connected by both stairs and elevator.

Really, I need more information about Tony's penthouse... or I need to look at more pictures before writing shit. Either way, I hope you enjoyed the chapter. It was a weird one to write... mostly because I finally watched Doctor Strange and have many new magical ideas to include in this story. The magic of this particular fic really has taken on a life of its own.

In other news, I now have sixty-five chapters planned. Isn't that fun!

Dreamer
Author's Note: Sorry for the wait! That should be stamped on all my business cards... I should get business cards. Anywho, I'd actually planned on updating this much earlier but my boss decided to switch stores, someone quit, and two people are going on leave. So I've been working a lot.

My biggest apologies to GreenLoki. She worries for me and I love her for it. She is the Loki to my Tony :p

Enjoy!

Dreamer

“The blood, the blood, the blood of the lamb

Is worth two lions, but here I am

And I slept in last night’s clothes and tomorrow’s dreams

But they’re not quite what they seem”

– Uma Thurman [Fall Out Boy]

It was only two hours into watching Bruce sleep that Tony realised he was just as creepy as Loki. Creepier, actually, because as far as he knew Loki had never watched Bruce sleep. He’d just... stalked him, for a few days. He still was as far as Tony knew. Loki didn’t give up his creepy ways easily.

Tony shifted on the armchair, right leg dropping to the floor and left coming up to rest on his knee. He wanted to wake Bruce- to talk- but had the feeling that waking him would do the opposite of what Tony intended to do. He knew from experience that seeing Loki in action could be... disconcerting. He still remembered watching Loki fight Doom; the absolutely primal look on his face, the set of his bright white teeth, the absolute madness that had flashed darkly in his eyes.

It was unlike anything Tony had ever experienced. Seeing Loki with the intention to kill was so very different to seeing Loki battle. Sure, Loki was something else altogether when he fought the Avengers. His smirks were so much sharper, his words held so much more bite. But Loki had never actively tried to kill the Avengers. To main and hurt Thor, certainly, but playing with them was so much more fun. Besides, they were planning on killing the Avengers at a later date.

Loki killing... it was definitely something worth watching. For Tony, it was... magical. To see Loki
lose the last of his restraints, to see him throw caution to the wind and actually rip, tear, slice his way through the mortals around him. Eyes gleaming, daggers shining, blood splashing across his pale face and scratched armour.

No, there was definitely nothing else like it in the world.

Which made Tony pause. He really had to get Loki to draw proper blood the next time they fucked.

He shook his head and shifted again, trying to relieve the sudden pressure in his groin. Now was definitely not the time to think about Loki naked. He needed to make sure that Bruce was okay.

“I believe that I may have broken him a bit,” Loki had said when he and Bruce had returned from their little mission. “He certainly seemed broken.”

“And you're okay with that?” had been Tony's words.

Loki had hesitated, eyes drifting to the floor-to-ceiling windows of their bedroom. “No,” Loki had said, “he means a lot to you. And believe it or not, I would not be adverse to having someone else I can trust in my life.”

Loki had showered and slept after that, clearly not wanting to discuss it any longer. Which was why, after catching a nap himself, Tony was here now. He needed to know that Bruce hadn't cracked. He needed to know that Loki hadn't completely broken Bruce Banner.

Tony needed more friends in his life. Actually, he'd be okay with just one friend. Pepper wasn't his friend. Rhodey... well, that remained to be seen. Tony's list of possible friends was extremely short, but that was nothing new. Tony had never been good at making friends, let alone keeping them.

His thoughts derailed when Bruce started thrashing in his sleep. It was a sudden thing; one second he was sleeping peacefully, though with a furrow to his brow, and the next he was fighting his sheets as though they were attacking him.

Tony jumped to his feet and across the room. He sat himself on Bruce's legs and grabbed his flailing arms, wrenching them to the side. 'BRUCE!' The doctor woke immediately and tried to headbutt Tony. The genius moved out of the way quickly. Despite the Other Guy, Tony was a god; he was faster and stronger than Bruce and found it simple to dodge his half-asleep, half-terrified attacks.

'Tony,' Bruce eventually gasped and stopped fighting. His breathing was laboured, sweat coated his face, and his arms trembled when he tried to pull them from Tony's grasp.

'EASY,' Tony soothed. Slowly, he let Bruce go, only standing when he was sure that Bruce was properly awake. 'YOU okay?'

'Y-Yeah,' Bruce stammered. He took a deep breath and let it out shakily, but it did little to calm him.

Tony nodded and said, 'Come join me in the kitchen when you're ready.' He didn't give Bruce time to reply, instead leaving the bedroom and making his way down the hall. Unlike Tony's own penthouse, the Avengers only had one floor each, not counting the gym and armoury. One long hallway led to Bruce's bedroom, bathroom, and a study, with the living room between most of the apartment and the kitchen.

Tony opened the fridge and wasn't surprised to see it well stocked. Bruce and Rogers were the only
Avengers who ever fed themselves; the others, Tony included, usually just ordered in. While Loki was a great cook and Tony was fairly decent, the two usually just ordered food, too exhausted from their very busy schedules to set aside any time to cook themselves something.

Tony set about making tea and toast— it was hard to fuck that up— and had everything ready by the time Bruce shuffled into the room.

His hair was wet, face clean, telling Tony that he'd taken a shower before throwing on clothes that had seen better days. His sweatpants had holes in them and his shirt was far too large; it'd even be big on Thor. His robe was the one that Tony had bought him months ago, though, and Tony was glad to see it being put to good use.

'Here,' Tony said and pushed a plate and mug closer to Bruce.

Bruce fell into the seat opposite him and picked up the mug. His hands were steady.

'Thank you,' Bruce murmured and took a sip.

Tony knew all about nightmares, but he still had to ask; 'What did you dream about?'

Looking up at him slowly, Bruce took another gulp of tea before saying, 'Not last night.'

'Oh?' Tony asked, eyebrows raised.

Bruce shook his head. 'I wasn't... prepared, for what I saw,' he admitted, 'and I thought I might have issues with that when I tried to sleep.' He chuckled humourlessly. 'I didn't.'

'I see,' Tony mused. He didn't, not really, but he'd learned a few things from Loki. It was far easier to subtly hint, to allow people to open up to you, than to outright demand answers. He knew that it was how Romanov and Barton got all of their information and was starting to see the appeal of subterfuge himself.

Not that he thought he needed to trick Bruce into telling him. But it would be much easier to let Bruce get there himself than force him to talk.

Bruce shook his head again, sipped his tea, and put the mug down. His fingers played with the jelly-covered toast Tony had made before he brought it to his lips and took a small bite. Tony hadn't made himself anything, too worried about Bruce to eat. Besides, Loki would be pissy if Tony ate without him, especially after a successful mission.

'I thought I'd... dream about it,' Bruce mumbled suddenly, bread still in his mouth. He chewed slowly and swallowed before speaking again. 'I really did think that I'd wake up screaming, remembering the way Loki cut those agents down.'

'He cut them down?' Tony interrupted. He couldn't help himself. Loki hadn't told him much about the mission before dropping into bed, only saying that Bruce had done well and that the mission was a success. At least he'd been nice enough to mention Bruce's difficulty with the entire thing.

Nodding, Bruce took another bite of toast. 'He cut them up,' the doctor said, 'there was blood... everywhere.'

Tony'd seen that before. Loki tended to slash a lot, mostly with his daggers. His sceptre he used for stabbing and magic.

But... Loki never went out of his way to spill blood. He liked it, yes; Tony had seen that look on
Loki’s face whenever he cut down some lesser being. But he didn't have to do that to Bruce. He could have easily snapped any agents' necks- Loki was good at that, too- or he could have simply stabbed them, let them fall...

Just what had he been trying to do, forcing Bruce to work in the *literal* blood of his enemies?

'I wasn't prepared for that, in all honesty,' Bruce admitted to Tony, bringing the genius out of his thoughts. He'd just have to ask Loki later. Bruce put his toast down and grabbed his mug. 'I knew that Loki would kill any agents there; I was aware of that much,' he continued. 'But he sprung the mission on me and we spent a few hours just standing across the street from the building.'

Tony snorted. He and Loki had made a habit of staking out the bases before actually attacking them. Not only was it the smart move, but it built the anticipation; both were practically *giddy* when they finally launched their assaults.

'I just wasn't prepared,' Bruce repeated. 'I thought I was.'

'Nothing can truly prepare you to see Loki like that,' Tony interrupted. His tone was soft, because he got it. He wasn't about to berate Bruce for freaking out just a little bit. He was honestly surprised that Bruce wasn't *still* freaking the fuck out. But no, the other man's hands were steady, eyes light, and he was eating and drinking without a problem. Tony was *proud*.

'Yeah,' Bruce agreed, 'he's... something else entirely. Another *creature* entirely.'

'He plays with the Avengers, Bruce,' Tony said.

Bruce nodded. 'You've said that countless times; you said that *before* you started working with him.'

'It was obvious,' Tony said, shrugged his shoulders. He leaned back in his seat and folded his arms over his chest. 'Loki is capable of *so much*, Bruce, even more than I initially thought.' Bruce tilted his head, clearly catching onto the change on Tony's face, the awe that had crept into his tone... Tony still wasn't over how very big and *destructive* Loki Laufeyson was. The god shook his head and re-focused on the conversation. 'Loki plays with the Avengers when he fights them. He and I don't plan on killing them for some time yet.'

His eyes narrowed on Bruce but the doctor said nothing; just sipped his tea, had another bite of his toast, and waited for Tony to continue.

'When he actually fights to kill,' Tony said, 'you can't stop him. *Nobody* can stop him. His entire demeanour changes and it's...'

'Terrifying?' Bruce supplied.

'Terrifying?' Bruce supplied. 'Breathtaking,' he corrected. Amazing. *Arousing*. There were few things Tony loved more than seeing Loki bathed in blood, the corpses of his enemies strewn at his feet.

Bruce chuckled. 'Right,' he murmured, 'of course you see it that way.'

Tony offered him a shrug. He wasn't going to apologise for how he felt.

'Is that why you're here?' Bruce questioned. 'To see how I am, after everything?'

'Loki was... concerned?' Tony tried, testing the word on his lips. Bruce's eyebrows shot up his forehead and Tony's lips quirked. 'As difficult as it might be to believe, Loki *was* concerned,' Tony
told him. 'He doesn't like you, Bruce, but he doesn't despise you, either. You're straddling the border between the two and I don't doubt that, eventually, Loki will grow to like you and see you as a true friend.'

'Seriously?' Bruce spluttered. 'Me? I beat him into your floor!'

Tony waved a dismissive hand. 'And Loki threw me out of a window. He'll get over it, eventually. But he'll bring it up all the time when you annoy him; it's just who he is.'

'And do you bring up the window tossing incident when Loki annoys you?' Bruce asked.

Tony grinned. 'Constantly.'

Chuckling, Bruce finished off his tea and stood, heading for his electric kettle to make another cup. 'Well, if it'll ease his concerns, tell Loki that I'm fine.'

'So what did you dream about?' Tony asked. 'If not last night, then what?'

Bruce hesitated, a tea bag dangling over his mug. After about a minute he dropped it in. 'When I lost control before I ran to India,' he admitted. 'I killed a lot of innocent people. When I woke up... there was blood on my hands, on my face. There was blood on my hands last night.'

'You didn't kill those agents, Bruce,' Tony told him.

'I stood there and watched,' Bruce countered. 'I know that I didn't actually kill them, Tony, but I was there; I was on Loki's side when he murdered them. I'm just as much responsible as he is. The real problem...' he trailed off and flicked the kettle on before turning to face Tony. 'I wasn't as disgusted as I should have been,' Bruce admitted. 'Yes, I... I freaked out. But it was... I was scared of Loki, in those moments. I realised that I didn't really know him, that I'd never truly seen him at his very best. And that scared me, because as much as you claim otherwise, Loki is nowhere near trusting or even liking me.

'I just realised how little hope I truly have if Loki changes his mind- if you change your mind,' Bruce said. 'The Other Guy could put up a good fight, I'm sure, but against Loki?' He shook his head. 'I would die, Tony. We both know that.'

Yes, Tony knew that. He knew that if he himself had to kill Bruce he'd have a difficult time; probably get an arm or leg broken in the process. But Loki? With all that power, all that training, so many, many years of experience... even the Other Guy couldn't fight that.

'The terror left soon after Loki dropped me back off in my room,' Bruce continued as the kettle boiled. Steam stared rising behind him. 'A shower helped; let me process things, sort it all out. My own emotions are my biggest enemy.' Tony nodded slowly. 'After that I just...’ he sighed, 'I realised how similar Loki and I are.'

Tony's eyebrows rose. He remembered Loki's own words, back when he and Tony had had that conversation about monsters. He remembered Loki saying that Bruce intrigued him; that he and the beast had some things in common. 'Really?' he mused

Nodding, Bruce said, 'Everyone knows how similar you and Loki are. You're practically the same person.'

Tony chuckled. Loki definitely wouldn't like that comment.

'But he and I... we're similar, too.'
'That is interesting,' Tony commented. 'What similarities do you believe you and Loki share, Bruce?'

Bruce smiled slightly at Tony's amused tone. 'I've gathered from Thor's stories that Loki was always... different. That his father never truly liked him.' He shot Tony a look. 'Something the three of us have in common.'

Tony had nothing to say to that.

'He tried to kill himself,' Bruce added.

Tony's arms dropped from his chest and he narrowed his eyes. 'Choose your words very, very carefully, Dr Banner,' he growled.

Bruce raised his hands slowly, a look of apology flitting over his features. 'No, Tony, I just- he tried to kill himself,' Bruce reiterated, 'and so did I. So did you, and don't deny it!'

'I was dying,' Tony argued, 'it was different. Loki-'

'Lost everything,' Bruce interrupted. 'He thought himself a monster and couldn't... wouldn't live any more. I felt the same. We both hit rock bottom and we're still trying to crawl our way back to solid ground.'

Tony wet his lips and looked away. It was... yeah, Tony could see where Bruce was coming from. Because even at his darkest hour, Tony had never tried to actually end his own life. Back when his arc reactor had been poisoning him, Tony truly hadn't cared if he had died. He was going to, any way. Why not take all the risks he could?

But it was different with Loki- with Bruce, too. Because Loki had been perfectly healthy physically, and had still decided to let go. Apart from turning into a giant green beast, there had been nothing wrong with Bruce, either.

But both had thought themselves monsters and had been absolutely horrified, disgusted, by themselves. Tony hadn't considered himself a monster until he'd started killing SHIELD agents. And by then he'd liked it.

Tony sighed and scrubbed at his face while Bruce finished making his tea. Only when he'd re-taken his seat did Tony speak. 'There's still so much I have to do for you two,' he commented.

Bruce frowned. 'Come again?'

Smiling, Tony said, 'I called Loki a monster the other day. He tried to choke me.' Bruce's eyebrows climbed upward. 'I'm a monster too, Bruce,' Tony continued. 'And so are you.'

'I know I am,' Bruce said. 'And not... not because of the Other Guy,' he added. 'I'm a monster because I stood by and watched Loki kill innocent people. And I... didn't care.'

'You did,' Tony commented. 'A part of you does care, Bruce, unlike myself. I'm not about to go out and slaughter civilians, but SHIELD agents?' He shrugged. 'They deserve it.' He smiled when Bruce pursed his lips. 'You don't see it that way. But it's okay, Bruce. I don't want you to be exactly like Loki and myself. If Loki had it his way he'd cut down anyone who so much as looked at him funny. Me? I don't particularly care. You still want to help people and that's okay, too. I'm not looking to make a cult. I want Bruce Banner on my side; the guy who cares, the guy who's so loyal that he'll accept death as part of his new life.'
Tony leaned forward and clapped Bruce on the arm. 'Just be yourself, Bruce. It's okay.'

Bruce blinked slowly before his head jerked upward in a semblance of a nod. 'I... okay. Thank you?'

Tony just shook his head and watched Bruce sip his tea.

'I really am fine,' Bruce told Tony. 'I'm... you're right. I'm not completely okay with you and Loki killing people. But I understand why. And I've accepted it. I want freedom, Tony. I want a real life and real friends. If you and Loki killing people keeps you out of prison, me out of a glass cage, and all of us happy... I'll deal with it. Besides, it's not... SHIELD isn't trying to steal from me. They aren't actively working against me as far as I can tell. You deserve your revenge. If your revenge includes killing people-'

'You'll deal with it?' Tony interrupted.

Bruce nodded. 'This was just the first time and it shocked me. But I'm not about to freak out. I'm not about to turn you in. I'm fine.'

'And that freaks you out more than Loki killing people,' Tony summarised.

'I just have to get used to valuing my own life far, far more than I value other people's.'

'And you love me, too,' Tony said, winking cheekily. Bruce chuckled and shook his head.

'Yes, I love you, too,' he muttered. 'And you love me; you can't deny that.'

'But of course,' Tony drawled. 'We're all just one big, happy family.'

Bruce's smile turned soft at that and Tony cocked his head. 'Thank you, Tony,' Bruce murmured. 'I haven't said that yet, have I?'

'Why are you thanking me?'

'For giving me a chance,' Bruce said. 'You could have killed me instead. It would have saved you a lot of time and trouble.'

Tony shook his head. 'It really wouldn't have, Bruce.'

'Still; thank you.'

'You're welcome,' Tony settled on saying. He wasn't sure if Bruce really thought that Tony could have killed him that easily. Tony knew that he would kill Bruce if he had to. It would just hurt... a lot. More than Bruce seemed to realise. 'Finish your toast,' he said, deciding to let the conversation end. If Bruce said he was okay, well... Tony would have to accept that.

'You're not going to have anything?' Bruce asked.

Shaking his head again, Tony said, 'No. Loki and I usually eat together after a mission. Using magic can be tiring, depending on how much you use, and eating always helps replenish your strength. Loki will get up soon enough and demand a truckload of salad.'

'And you will, of course, give him anything he wants,' Bruce commented. Tony just nodded but didn't miss the teasing glint in Bruce's eyes. 'Have you told him that you're in love with him yet?'

'Shut up, Bruce, or I'll change my mind about the whole “family” thing.'
Bruce laughed at him.

{oOo}

Tony didn't get to eat breakfast with Loki. Bruce didn't even get to finish his own breakfast. A few minutes after the end of their discussion, a siren went off before JARVIS spoke; 'Mr Stark, Dr Banner, the Avengers are assembling.'

'Why?' Tony asked, already on his feet and moving, Bruce finish off his tea.

'A man is attacking people near Central Park and he appears to be using magic,' JARVIS said. 'Director Fury is calling, sir,' he then added.

'Put it through, JARVIS,' Tony ordered. He stopped near the elevator and Bruce moved past him, no doubt on his way to change. There was a click and Tony said, 'What's going on, Fury?'

'You, Romanov, Barton and Banner need to get to Central Park,' Fury ordered. 'Rogers is already there and he needs the back-up.'

'JARVIS said something about magic,' Tony probed.

'The man appears to be using it, as far as Rogers can tell,' Fury told him. 'He's making things move without touching them and keeps blasting waves of red energy at civilians.'

'Are we thinking that Loki's involved?' Tony asked.

'Maybe,' Fury said. 'But I think that Loki's had his fun for the week.'

Tony's eyebrows rose, but Fury didn't mention the Malibu base;

'Thor's en-route and you and Banner are going to tell me what you think. Hurry up, Stark!' With that the call was cut off and Tony scowled. 'I really, really hate that man,' he grunted. 'Bruce!'

'Coming!' Bruce shouted. In seconds he was with Tony and climbing into the elevator. He'd kept his sweats on but switched shirts, going for something even older than what he'd previously been wearing.

'I really need to work on making you clothing that stretches,' Tony mused. Nobody wanted to see Big and Green's junk.

'You do that,' Bruce said. 'Meanwhile, I'll try and control myself long enough to not attack Thor.'

'By all means; attack Thor,' Tony said, a smirk on his lips. 'Loki won't mind.'

Bruce raised his eyebrows. 'And if I kill him?'

'You won't,' Tony said. 'Thor's strong enough to live through a beating from the Hulk, and smart enough to get out while he still can.'

Their conversation ended when the elevator dinged and dropped them off on the first floor of Tony's penthouse. Both jogged through the room and out the sliding glass doors, meeting
Romanov and Barton on the helipad.

'Go,' Tony said and Bruce joined Barton on the quinjet, Romanov taking off seconds later. Tony made his way to his own landing pad, JARVIS already working to get the Iron Man suit ready.

'Stark'!

Tony turned to see Logan standing on the balcony above the helipad, fingers gripping the railing.

Walking backwards, Tony called out, 'Gotta run, Logan! Hero business!'

Loki's lips twisted upward. 'Oh, a hero, are you?'

'Shut your face!' Tony snapped.

Chuckling, Loki said, 'Be sure not to get hurt too badly, Stark. I find myself in a playful mood.'

Tony shivered at the tone Loki's voice had taken on. 'I'll hold you to that.'

Loki watched as Tony turned, JARVIS and bots fitting the latest Iron Man suit to Tony's frame. The faceplate slammed down and Stark took to the air, repulsors shining a bright blue as he tore through the sky.

Loki sighed and leaned against the railing. Wind rustled through Logan Thomas' short, curly hair and Loki scratched a hand through it. He needed a haircut himself, actually, it was getting far too long. He missed the short hair he'd sported for a number of years while he was still a Prince of Asgard. It was much easier to deal with. Then again, he rather liked Tony pulling his hair when they had sex.

Loki's eyes flickered from Iron Man to the quinjet, both still visible. He had heard Fury's call with Stark and Central Park was very close; Loki could see it from where he was standing, but he was too far to actually see the fight that would soon take place. A part of him wanted to watch, while the other, larger part of him wanted food. He hadn't used that much magic the night previously, but he was still hungry.

He turned and went back inside. 'JARVIS, I want salad. A lot of it.'

'Placing the order now, Mr Lie-smith,' JARVIS responded. 'Would you like me to pull up the footage from Mr Stark's suit?'

Loki smiled. 'I would like that very much, JARVIS. Thank you.'

If he couldn't be there in person he could at least watch from Tony's point of view. He had distinctly heard the word *magic* and very much wanted to see who this supposed wizard was.
Author's Note: Why is this chapter SO. GODDAMN. LATE?! you're asking? Whelp, my boss decided to move to another store, I got a new boss, two co-workers got REALLY sick, one got fired, and three others who were about to get fired quit before that could happen. So in-between getting sick, having a birthday, and getting sick again, I've been working 5 and 6-day weeks. Fun times.

That is my excuse and I am really, truly sorry that this chapter took so long. So no, I'm not dead, this story isn't abandoned, and even though I have yet ANOTHER cold, here I am! Hope the wait was worth it!

Also, please remember; I play very liberally with the magic in this 'verse. So... yeah.

Dreamer

Rogers was busy evacuating stupid citizens who hadn't run when the first tree burst into flames. Tony didn't know what Romanov and Barton were doing- please be dead, he mused to himself- Thor was helping put out fires, and Bruce was... doing whatever Bruce did when he didn't want to unnecessarily Hulk out at the scene. So that left only Iron Man to land before the... wizard? Tony was gonna go with wizard.

The man before him was small, bald, with a thick, bushy beard. He was wearing... Tony didn't know how to describe his outfit, in all honesty. Light brown pants with a matching wrap-around shirt, a heavy black coat with clasps and a hood. He had his arms outstretched, fingers of one hand curled and the other flat, palm pointed out.

The dude definitely had magic- or, rather, access to magic. There was a brief flutter on the edge of Tony's senses and Tony wasn't sure how to explain it. It felt nothing like Loki's magic; large, dark, an all-consuming power that left Tony weak-kneed. This... this wizard was weak. His connection to magic was barely existent and it was broken, twisted, reflecting the madness of the man wielding it.

He wasn't connected to magic like Tony was; rather, he was forcing it to do what he wished. Someone had taught him the bare minimum and the man had thrown himself at the world.

He was weak, untrained, small... pathetic.

Tony sneered behind his faceplate as the wizard raised both hands and shot a large ball of red magic at the police cars parked on the side of the road. Buildings could be seen through the trees, uniformed officers rushing about with guns out.

They were all swept off their feet when one of the cop cars exploded, setting off a chain reaction that Tony was sure had killed more than one of them. The shock wave blew tree branches back, some snapping off and landing near Tony.

Tony stood stock still, taking it all in.
The wizard thrust one hand forward and another tree burst into flames. Another hand wiggle and the world... tilted? Tony raised his eyebrows as the paved path threading through the trees lifted and bent, twisting itself into interesting shapes before falling heavily back to the ground.

The wizard screeched.

'Well,' Tony finally said, voice amplified, 'that was impressive, I'll admit.'

The wizard snapped out of his daze and whirled to face Tony. 'The almighty Man of Iron!' he spat. 'Come to play?!

Tony blinked. 'Er... come to take you in, actually.'

The wizard sneered at him. 'I will die before I am captured! There is no honour in defeat!'

'Wow, really?' Tony whistled. 'Sorry to burst your bubble, Malfoy, but you're gonna be dishonoured real quick.'

He... paused at that. Blinked slowly. 'What did you call me?' he hissed.

'Malfoy,' Tony said. 'You know, Draco Malfoy? You're clearly too unhinged to be Harry. I think the glasses make the wizard, in all honesty,' he said and gestured vaguely at his own face.

The wizard hissed. 'You will meet your fate here, by my hands, where other magic-wielders have failed!'

'Are... are you seriously dissing Loki right now?' Tony demanded. He had to admit that it kinda pissed him off. This guy thought that he was on Loki's level?

'Yes!' the wizard crowed, already acting like he'd won the battle. He wasn't even going to win this fight.

'Let me tell you, Lucius, you've got nothing on Loki.' Tony ran his eyes over the man's get-up. 'He has better style, for one thing.'

The wizard let out another screech and threw his hands in Tony's direction. A wave of red almost engulfed the genius but he took to the air, twisting out of its reach.

Unlike Loki, the mage wanna-be couldn't truly control magic. It kept going and engulfed trees, grass, setting everything ablaze.

Tony heard the man scream again and turned to see him running from the flames. Tony clucked. Weak.

He blasted after the wizard and reached him in seconds. He kicked the man in the back and sent him to the ground, landing a few feet from him. He turned to see the wizard scrambling to his feet, out of breath already and covered in sweat.

'Oh, honey,' Tony cooed, 'did that light show take it out of you?'

Another screech- really, the man was so dull. He fired a ball of magic at Tony and it bounced off of Tony's right shoulder, spiralling into the air and bursting into a shower of sparks. Tony looked down at his suit. The paint had been scuffed.

'No,' the wizard gasped, eyes wide. 'I have studied you. You cannot repel magic.'
Tony smirked and thought about the work he'd been elbows-deep in while Loki and Bruce had had their fun in Malibu.

'It probably won't stop Loki any time soon,' Tony said, 'but you? You're nothing.'

'I. Am. EVERYTHING!' the wizard roared.

Another bolt of magic but Tony dodged that one, taking a step forward. He continued walking and ducking, leapt into the air and flew over the man's head when he tried to throw another wave.

'Pitiful!' Tony called when he landed behind the man.

The guy lashed out, arm glowing red, and Tony grabbed his forearm with one gauntlet. He squeezed and the wizard whimpered, dark eyes jumping about before meeting the glowing holes in Tony's faceplate. 'You have a lot to learn,' Tony commented and lashed out.

His curled, armoured fist broke the man's nose and sent him to his ass.

'Well,' Tony mused while the man wailed and clutched at his face, 'that was disappointing.'

The wizard scrambled to his feet, coat flopping over his face and leaving him blind as he stumbled about. Tony watched with a faint air of amusement and disdain. Now, see, it was guys like this that gave magic-users a bad name.

Before Tony could put a stop to the truly horrific display- he was pretty sure the dude was crying-golden sparks leapt up between him and the wizard. Tony paused, one leg raised to step forward, and his eyebrows shot up as the sparks turned into a circle. Through it Tony could see a dark room, all wood and ancient furniture, a window that showed a stormy city day, and... was that a red coat?

And then the circle closed, Tony blinked, and there was a tall dude wearing red and blue standing between him and the wizard.

The newcomer muttered something, waved his arms, and the wizard Tony had been running circles around dropped to the ground, unconscious.

There was a sigh of annoyance. 'That,' a deep American accent said, 'was truly annoying.'

'Huh.'

The man turned around and Tony looked up into the eyes of someone he really had thought was dead.

'Stark,' he said, hands shaking when he folded them over his chest.

'Strange,' Tony returned.

Doctor Stephen Strange smirked at him and quirked one eyebrow. 'Sorry, was Kelton giving you trouble?'

Tony scowled.

{oOo}
Loki teleported to the park as soon as he saw the second sorcerer. While the first had been nothing to worry about, this new mortal... he was quite powerful, even considering his limited talents.

He was no match for Loki, even with that cute little eye he had hanging around his neck, but against Stark? Loki hadn't completed the man's training and Stark still didn't know how to completely hide his magical signature. While Thor would never be able to track it, this sorcerer might be able to feel that Stark had a connection to magic. Loki wasn't sure what Midgardian sorcerers were capable of and he'd rather be by Stark's side, even invisible, than leave the man to fend for himself.

He wrapped invisibility around himself and appeared behind a tree, immediately scanning the area for Thor. The Prince was making his way towards Stark and the sorcerer, hair slightly dishevelled but otherwise unharmed by the light show. How disappointing.

Loki stepped around the tree and approached his partner slowly. Stark seemed to know the man, judging by the sharp words the two were throwing back and forth.

So far the sorcerer hadn't seemed to notice Loki's presence and Loki counted that as a strike against Midgardian sorcerers.

'You got old,' Stark commented when Loki stopped a few feet away.

The sorcerer- Strange, was it?- scoffed. 'Like you have any room to talk, Stark.'

'Hey, at least I'm not grey,' Stark retorted.

Loki smirked. Stark's beard had been turning grey when they'd met. The Golden Apple seemed to have stopped any new grey hairs growing in, much to Stark's joy and Loki's amusement.

Strange raised an eyebrow. 'I'm still younger than you.'

_Not for long_, Loki mused.

'How do you know this guy?' Stark questioned as he walked closer to Strange. The other sorcerer was unconscious, dumped unceremoniously behind Strange.

'A former pupil of mine,' Strange said.

So Strange was some type of teacher. Apparently Midgard was _full_ of sorcerers. That interested Loki; how many were there? Were they scattered all over the Realm? Did Strange hold a monopoly on all things magic related? If there were hundreds of sorcerers hiding out... well, perhaps Loki and Stark would have to go hunting after the Avengers and Asgard were dealt with.

'Pupil?' Stark smirked. 'Bringing out your own fashion line now that you're no longer a doctor?'

'No longer a _practising_ doctor,' Strange corrected him. 'I'm still new to this whole... _teaching_ thing,' he muttered. 'Some are bound to slip through the cracks.'

Stark paused at that and Loki watched him, head tilted. Loki could almost _feel_ Stark tapping into his magic, trying to get a read on Strange and how he and the other sorcerer were connected. Loki smiled fondly. Stark had come a long way since that first afternoon in the younger god's penthouse. Loki still remembered touching Anthony's magic for the first time; that first taste and Loki had
been lost. He hadn't known it back then.

He did now.

There was a shiver from Stark and the Midgardian frowned. 'When you say teaching...'

'Why, Stark,' Strange said, practically drawling the words, 'I've discovered the secrets to life.'

'Uh-huh.' Stark was clearly unamused.

Strange sighed. 'Magic,' he said. 'Not like what Doom uses- used, rather.' He paused, hummed. 'I heard through the grapevine that Loki was responsible for bringing Doom down?'

Loki smirked.

'SHIELD thinks it was a partnership gone wrong,' Stark commented. 'Keep talking, Strange.'

'There are magic users on this Realm,' Strange told him. ' Practised in the art of wielding all types of powers.'

Stark frowned at that. 'Wait... so you're telling me we've got a bunch of Lokis running around?'

Loki scowled and had to bite back the urge to send a little jolt Stark's way. The nerve of the man to even suggest that these sorcerers were anywhere near Loki's level.

'Different magic; different art; different practices,' Strange corrected. 'I don't know enough about Loki or what he can do to understand how he's so powerful. He doesn't appear to use any talismans or weapons to ground or channel what he does. It could just be because we're human.' He narrowed his eyes on Tony, head tilted ever so slightly.

Loki was more interested in Strange's coat than the words spewing out of his mouth. It was red, practically dripping with ancient magic, and clearly had a mind of its own. The edges were floating in an imagined breeze, the collar swiping at Strange's face softly.

Strange jerked out of whatever thought he'd fallen into and scowled. 'Stop that!' he ordered.

'Are you talking to your coat?' Stark asked.

'It has a mind of its own,' Strange replied.

Interesting, Loki mused.

Their conversation paused when Thor finally reached them, apparently tired of meandering. Loki turned away from the group to survey the area. Two trees were still on fire, though there appeared to be a great number of Midgardians hurrying to put them out. Loki narrowed his eyes slightly and could just make out the Captain helping two young mortals over a broken fence in the distance.

'Tony!' Thor's shout dragged Loki back. 'Have you felled our enemy?'

'Nope,' Stark said. He jerked his head at Strange. 'That was this guy.'

Thor frowned as he drew closer. He was taller than Strange, twice as large, but Strange didn't seem bothered when Thor got right up into his face. Loki rather wished that he could bash their heads together.

'You are a sorcerer,' Thor announced.
Strange blinked slowly.

'And Midgardian,' Thor added.

Loki's eyebrows rose slowly. Hmm, seemed Thor wasn't as dense as Loki had assumed.

Strange blinked again. 'Yes,' he finally said, 'to both those questions.' He glanced at Stark. 'Midgardians are humans, right?'

Loki rolled his eyes while Stark said, 'Thor, this is Doctor Stephen Strange. I'm assuming you've heard of Thor?' he directed at the sorcerer.

'Indeed,' Strange said. 'As I've been taught, and as I've said many times to my pupils; the Avengers protect Earth from physical attacks.' He spread his arms. 'Me and my own protect it from magical attacks.'

'Really?' Stark deadpanned. 'So where were you when Loki attacked the first time around?'

Loki was rather curious about that himself. Of course, he hadn't been in any state to go hunting down mortal magic-users when he'd first visited Midgard; he'd had a plan and a foreign being in his mind. It hadn't been about winning a war; it'd been about escaping with his life.

He edged closer to the group, making sure to keep all three in his immediate eyesight. The last thing he needed was any of them sensing him. Of course, Thor and Strange wouldn't believe him to be there with Tony. After all... this was the first time Loki was truly hearing about Midgardian sorcerers.

'Apparently Loki was too powerful and too unknown,' Strange said. He folded his arms again and turned his attention to Tony. 'The previous leader was aware that Loki and Thor were here and decided it was best to let Thor deal with Loki himself. Loki is, after all, of Asgard.' He glanced at Thor. 'But I see that you haven't dealt with Loki at all. Because here he still is, destroying various things that I assume belong to SHIELD.'

He hadn't destroyed anything of SHIELD's in a while. Loki glanced at Anthony. They really needed to attack another base together. Soon.

Tony hummed. 'And you know this how?'

'Ripples in the spaces all around the physical world,' Strange said. 'Loki's been a very busy, very naughty boy.'

Thor sighed at that, reaching up to scrub a hand through his hair. 'Aye,' he said, 'Loki has been busy. He has killed many Midgardians and I was unable to stop him.' His face fell. 'Those deaths are on me as much as they are on Loki.'

A smirk tugged at Loki's lips and he felt a similar tingle of excitement from Stark. Oh, yes, Loki was very much enjoying the heaping guilt he was putting on Thor. Stark seemed to enjoy it, too.

Stark gave Thor an obviously fake sigh and patted him on the shoulder. 'Hey, Big Guy, nobody blames you. Well, Clint might, but Clint hates Loki far more than is healthy, so...'

Strange was staring at Stark, blue eyes narrowed, and Loki let his entire attention shift to the sorcerer. Something... didn't feel quite right with him. The longer Strange observed Stark- and the longer Loki stared at him- the deeper the feeling ran. Loki wasn't sure what it was.
Strange didn't truly have magic of his own; he needed trinkets to connect to Midgard's magic, his core a channel rather than a bucket. While he could apparently feel the shifts in the metaphysical plane, he shouldn't be able to feel Stark's magic. For someone like Strange, Anthony's magic should feel the same as the magic that drenched Midgard. Sorcerers were never strong enough to be able to pinpoint a mage's magical signature.

So why, exactly, did it feel like Strange knew all of Stark's secrets?

'As he should!' Thor shouted. He was glaring now, eyes blazing on Stark but anger clearly directed at Loki. Loki shook his head and tuned back into the conversation. 'Loki has changed far too much, he has done things that no one should be allowed to do. When I capture him he will be punished, Tony Stark, you mark my words!'

Stark just nodded slowly while Strange stared between the two, eyebrows up. 'Well,' he finally drawled and flicked the collar of his coat from his face, 'that's all well and good, but are you certain you'll take Loki in? Because I am very annoyed about what he's doing on the planet I've vowed to protect.'

His eyes found Stark again and Loki drew his invisibility tighter around himself. A part of him wanted to strike Strange down. Another part wanted to watch and see what would happen.

'It would be different if Loki were simply existing here,' Strange continued. 'His plans mean little to me as long as he's not using magic to hurt people or change this planet in any way.'

'All you care about is his magic?' Stark asked.

Loki scowled. Even without magic, Loki could cause a lot of damage.

'My concern is with magic and magic only,' Strange said. 'Like I said; you protect Earth from physical attacks. I protect it from magical attacks.' He gestured at the unconscious sorcerer behind him. 'Case in point. Not only was this man a former pupil of mine, but he was using magic for nefarious reasons. That's why I'm here.'

Stark's eyebrows rose. 'So if he came out here and started knifing people-'

'The police would stop him,' Strange said dismissively. 'Now, if that's all, I really need to go.'

'I don't think so,' Stark said.

Strange scowled at him.

Pathetic little mortal, Loki thought.

'You're coming with us, back to the Helicarrier, and you're going to assure SHIELD that no more magic-user wannabes are gonna crawl outta the woodwork to start attacking people,' Stark continued. 'Because believe me, I've had enough magic to last me a lifetime.'

'Yes,' Thor said slowly, 'I agree with Tony. You should come with us, strange healer. Fury will wish to know that you are not in league with Loki.'

'In league with him?' Strange hissed.

In league with a mortal?! Loki thought with a snarl. Oh, yes, he was most definitely going to kill Thor now. No, he wouldn't merely wound the Prince, and he wouldn't simply trap him on Asgard, the Bifrost broken beyond repair. No, he would rip Thor open and spill his insides across his
father's precious throne. Of all the nerve...

'I protect this realm from magical influence that doesn't belong!' Strange growled. 'It's your brother going around throwing magic everywhere!' BROTHER?! Oh, it wasn't just Thor that Loki was going to kill. No, when SHIELD were dealt with, Loki was going to hunt this pathetic little creature down and show him what a true mage was made of.

Thor scowled, opened his mouth, but Stark groaned and pushed his way between the two. 'Okay, okay, let's stop throwing our weight around!'

'You're one to talk,' Strange muttered.

Stark, apparently the only mature being of the group, ignored him completely. 'Thor, I don't actually think that Strange is in league with Loki. Apparently he can use magic but he's not immortal.' He paused to glance at the man. 'Right?'

Strange shook his head. 'There are ways to become immortal. They're not ways that I'm interested in practising.'

'Okay then,' Tony said. 'Still, you're coming with us. Just because I believe you doesn't mean that Fury will. Fury doesn't actually believe anything I say, even when I'm being serious.'

'Are you ever serious?' Strange asked.

'Sometimes,' Stark said, ignoring his tone completely. 'So we all agree that it'd be in everyone's best interests to play nice and talk about this like adults?'

Strange stared at him, eyes narrowed, but finally nodded. 'Very well,' he said and stooped to pick his former pupil up. He hefted the guy over his shoulder and said, 'Lead the way, Stark.'

'Might as well call me Tony,' the god said as his helmet inched back over his head, 'I feel like we're gonna be seeing a lot of each other over the next few weeks.'

Loki watched as Stark blasted into the air, quickly disappearing between the tall buildings. Thor tried to make conversation with Strange but without Stark there to play mediator all attempts at small talk quickly fell apart. Finally Thor mumbled something and started walking towards the road; Strange hesitated briefly before following, the other sorcerer still tossed over his shoulder.

Waiting until they were a good distance away, Loki teleported back to Stark's penthouse. He fell onto the sofa and leaned back, socked feet up and crossed on the coffee table.

'Mr Lie-Smith?'

'I am fine,' Loki said. Frowned.

He remembered when he had first moved here; giving up “the Hideout” as his home and making Stark Tower a true home. JARVIS had addressed him as Loki Laufeyson, because that is what Stark knew him as. Loki had requested to be known as the Lie-smith. He was not a son of Odin. He wasn't a son of Laufey, either.

But, thinking about it truly... Laufey had led his people for centuries. He had wanted to expand and had made it to Midgard right under the All-Father's nose, only to be beaten. Loki, too, had been beaten the first time. But now he had Stark, he had a partner capable of just as much as he himself
was. He and Stark would win where Laufey had failed.

Laufey had created a Kingdom that had rivalled Asgard when it was at its peak. For all of his faults, he had been a truly gifted King. Certainly better than Odin.

Loki was a mage, like his biological father. A maniac, like his father. A Jötunn. A monster.

'Laufeyson,' he said and glanced up at one of the sensors he could spy in the room. 'I am the son of Laufey, JARVIS. Address me as such.' After all, it was better to be the son of a once great King, however worthless, than be a bastard son of none.

There was a pause, but then JARVIS said, 'Whatever you wish, Mr Laufeyson.'

Loki smirked. 'When Stark gets back, tell him I wish to speak. It seems that there may be some... people, we have to take care of once the Avengers are dead.'

'Yes, Mr Laufeyson,' JARVIS said.

Loki’s smirk widened. Well, he mused to himself, magic trembling on the edges of his fingertips, this game just got a lot more interesting.

{oOo}

So, magic. Magic-users on Midgard. A lot of magic-users, apparently. Tony was sitting tilted back in his seat, one shin pressed up against the table to stop him from toppling over. The last thing he needed was to draw more attention to himself.

Fury had been pissed when Tony and Thor had waltzed into the Helicarrier with two guys dressed like extras from a Lord of the Rings movie. But Fury had known Strange by his face alone so had allowed the man into the briefing room. The other sorcerer had been tied up and tossed into the corner.

'Trust me,' Strange had said after removing a chunky gold ring from the other sorcerer's fingers, 'without this he's useless.'

Tony had spied a matching ring hanging from the brown fabric wrapped around Strange's waist like a belt but hadn't mentioned it.

Strange had done that for him. As soon as all of the Avengers had gathered, plus Hill and Coulson, Strange had stood and told them all who he was and what he was about.

Monasteries protecting Earth from magical influence, both good and bad. Apparently they were taught in a remote location that Strange wasn't willing to part with, but there were bases set up in major cities that all tied together. Strange had somehow saved the world without SHIELD being aware that the world was close to being destroyed. Strange had then become the head of the Sorcerer Guild or whatever the hell it was called.

Tony didn't truly start paying attention until Strange spoke about, and then demonstrated, his brand of magic.
It was... interesting, certainly. Strange could manipulate the world around them, bending the room until it was sideways, until the table was above them and the steel beneath their feet was zigzagging every which way.

But nobody else could see that. Nobody but Strange, Thor, and Tony.

'It is not the physical world being manipulated; not truly.' Thor told the group when Fury asked why Strange was just standing still. 'Magic flows within everything and the fabric of reality is not as strong as you think. There are gaps between everything. Mages can walk these gaps, for they have the power to see and survive the paths. Sorcerers can manipulate these gaps- this reality-depending on their skill.' He turned to look at Strange. 'I am impressed at your skill.'

Strange bowed slightly but Tony read the smugness on his face. 'Thank you,' he said.

'So you need that ring to work your powers?' Tony asked. He wagged his fingers just to make sure that his barb stabbed home.

Strange glared at him. 'I'm human, Stark. While Loki seems powerful enough to throw magic around without any type of grounding element, I can't do that.'

'Loki is a mage,' Thor stated.

Barton had been silent this entire time, though Tony had felt his rage even from the other end of the table. 'What the hell's the difference?' he demanded. 'You keep throwing those words around, both of you; wizard, sorcerer, mage. What the hell is the difference?'

The rest of the Avengers looked curious, too. Bruce actually sat up in his seat, apparently interested in the conversation, now. Tony was curious, too.

'A wizard does not have any magic themselves,' Thor explained, 'wizards and witches use objects to channel, store, and use magic. A sorcerer has a spark themselves and are able to tap into their magic and fuel it using the magic of the realm they are in. They do not have much magic themselves, but they have the talent to use it. They need objects to ground themselves and to help channel the magic. If they did not use objects the magic would kill them.' He looked at Strange. 'Midgardian sorcerers need an object to tap into both magics, it seems. Can you do what you do without that ring?'

Strange shook his head. 'Some things I can do, but I'm usually using another magical object.'

Thor nodded. 'Yes, that makes sense,' he said.

'And Loki?' Barton demanded, voice a hiss. 'Why the fuck can Loki toss magic around like it's nothing?'

'He's a mage.' And that came from Tony, now the centre of attention. Goodie. He rolled his eyes. 'Thor's said it himself plenty of times,' Tony continued. 'Mages are born. They have an abundance of magic. They're naturally inclined to use it and Loki's probably been studying and practising for a thousand years.'

'Aye,' Thor agreed. 'Mages do not need objects to channel their magic. They can throw raw magic or use words to channel it into spells; Loki needs nothing to help him use his power. He is the most powerful mage born in the last ten thousand years, at least. My father is worried that Loki will only grow more powerful, now that he can study and learn what he wishes, even those magics that were forbidden to him when he was a prince and my brother.'
'Excuse me?' Strange looked offended. 'I can certainly try, but last I checked Loki was an enemy of the Avengers. I'm not about to reveal my existence if it's not necessary. I have people under my care. If Loki decides to turn his sights on us, I'm not sure we could actually stop him.'

'Aww,' Tony teased, 'your magic not powerful enough to fight the big, bad mage?'

Strange glared at him. 'I could trap him in a world of mirrors and smoke,' he growled, 'I could tilt the world around him, twist it, until he went mad trying to fight his way out. Believe me, Stark, I could certainly send Loki insane.' He leaned back and blew out a breath. 'But I can't contain him. And I'd most likely die trying to keep him locked up. I don't wish to die, so I'm leaving him in your capable hands.'

'And not helping at all?' Tony drawled.

Rolling his eyes, Strange said, 'I didn't say I wouldn't help. I can certainly lend my expertise. But Thor mentioned that he can contain Loki once you've captured him?' He glanced at Thor, who nodded. 'And you all know how to send him back to Asgard when you do capture him,' Strange continued. 'So consider me a consultant. I have no wish to be an Avenger or a SHIELD agent. So.' He drew a card from a pocket hidden within his wrap-around shirt. 'Call me if you need a consultation.'

Fury sighed and said, 'Motherfucker,' but nodded at Coulson, who swiped the card from where Strange had left it on the table. 'Fucking sorcerers and magical barriers and shit,' Fury growled. 'Strange!' he barked. 'You'd better answer if we call.'

'It would be my honour,' Strange muttered sarcastically. Tony snorted. 'Speaking of which,' Strange said, eyes now on Tony, 'we have some things to discuss, Tony.' One corner of his mouth quirked upward. 'I'll be seeing you.'

Well, Tony thought, magic bubbling in his chest, that didn't sound good.

The Avengers watched, most gobsmacked but hiding it well, as Strange slipped his own gold ring on and swirled up a golden circle that showed them glimpses of a stone courtyard drenched with rain. Strange nodded at the group after he'd thrown the other sorcerer over his shoulder, then he stepped through the golden circle. A few seconds after he was gone the circle sparked and disappeared completely, leaving nothing but a faint black mark on the floor.

'Son of a bitch,' Fury grunted.
Stark bypassed his landing pad and flew straight into the penthouse. Loki was sprawled across the sofa, staring at the blank television. He raised his eyebrows and turned, though, when JARVIS slid the balcony door open to allow its creator in.

'In a rush?' Loki mused.

Stark's faceplate slid back, helmet retracting completely into his suit. 'Strange knows,' he stated.

Loki stared at him. 'Why do you say that?'

'Strange knows,' he stated. 'He either knows that I'm working with you or he wants in my pants. Given that I've known him for ten odd years and he's never made a move, I'm gonna go with the former.'

Loki said nothing and Stark frowned.

'Wait,' he said, 'how do you even know what I'm talking about?'

'Shifting on the sofa, Loki pulled himself into a more upright position. 'I may or may not have watched the battle thanks to JARVIS,' he said. 'I also may or may not have teleported to the park when Strange appeared.'

Stark was glaring at him now and Loki raised his hands.

'I know what you're thinking.'

'That it was absolutely unnecessary for you to risk yourself just to eavesdrop on a goddamn conversation?' Stark interrupted angrily.

'It was absolutely necessary,' Loki shot back. 'I wasn't aware that Midgard had sorcerers- and an apparent guild complete with their own laws and leaders. I couldn't be sure what Strange was capable of unless I saw him with my own eyes.'

'I can take care of myself!' Stark snapped.
'I am aware of that,' Loki said, tone cool. 'However, I was not about to leave you alone with him, regardless of your skills. You forget that your magical training is nowhere near complete.'

'I can still-' Stark cut himself off suddenly, staring over Loki's shoulder. Loki didn't need to turn to know what it was; he had felt the shift in the air when Stark started speaking; could feel the way Midgard's magic hummed around him. He stood slowly and turned to face the portal that had appeared between the living room and the hallway that led to the kitchen.

Strange stood between them and a storm-drenched courtyard, the air suddenly heavy with the smell of ozone. Loki was more interested in the sorcerer stepping into his home, however, and his fingers curled into fists at the intrusion. How utterly rude.

'Stephen,' Stark drawled when the portal had fizzled out, black marks marring the floorboards beneath Strange's dirty boots. 'I wasn't aware that I'd invited you.'

'I did say that we'd speak soon,' Strange said. His eyes were on Loki, though, narrowed dangerously.

Loki knew in that moment that Strange was very much aware of his true nature; Strange had already figured out Stark's secrets and wasn't here to do anything other than confirm them.

'Stark,' Loki said and held a hand out. His form flickered as an ice shard melted into existence from his blue fingers. 'I suggest that you move back.'

'Lo-' Stark began but Loki had already vaulted over the sofa, black hair whipping behind him as it grew back.

Strange met the blow head on, having taken a step forward even as he twisted his right hand to draw a whip made of magic from the ring that allowed him access to Midgard's magic.

Ice hit magic and crackled, steam rising to shield Loki and Strange from each other. Loki used it to his advantage, swiping Strange's feet from under him and slicing down. His icicle caught skin and he heard Strange curse, felt the air shift again.

The world around him tilted suddenly, magic shivering as it wrapped around Loki and Strange.

'Loki!' Stark shouted.

'Stay back!' Loki snapped. 'That is an order, Stark!'

'I-'

Loki didn't hear the rest of his partner's sentence, too busy trying to remain on his feet. Strange had created a mirror dimension, a place where his magic was more powerful, where Strange could manipulate the world around him without damaging the actual physical world. It was something that all mages could do but usually chose not to bother with; why play with the world around you when it wasn't permanent?

The floor beneath Loki slid backwards- tiles, wood and concrete all following each other now that the laws of physics no longer applied. Loki stumbled but ducked Strange, the mortal trying to sneak up on him. He ducked again and reached back where the magic was concentrated, fingers wrapping tightly around Strange's throat.

The sorcerer choked, eyes wide in surprise as he grabbed at Loki's fingers.
'Do not think yourself _better_ than me,' Loki said.

'I still have a few more tricks up my sleeve,' Strange spat out.

Loki smirked. 'You have tricks,' he agreed, 'but I am the _God_ of Mischief.' He tossed Strange back and watched in satisfaction as the man slid across the floor, only to fall when the world tilted once more. Now the ceiling was the floor, the area between him and Loki spinning as though on its own axis.

Loki jumped forward and landed in a crouch, his own magic centring him. Strange was up, too, only his coat allowed him to hover between everything else, the world spinning this way and that dizzyingly while Strange hovered in the middle.

'Cute,' Loki allowed, 'but nothing I haven't seen before.'

Strange didn't answer, instead twisting the fingers on his right hand and holding up those on his left. He slapped his hands together and from his ring drew another rope of magic. With a quick flick of his wrist he had it wrapped around Loki's arm and _pulled._

Nothing happened. Loki stood his ground, looking down at the rope curiously. It was made of pure Midgardian magic, a hint of Strange's own power coursing through it. The ring not only channelled magic, but allowed someone with a spark to access their own.

Interesting.

Strange pulled again and Loki slid forward an inch but no more.

'Oh,' Loki said as his own magic raced along his skin. He felt the cool tendrils of ice magic slipping across him, his skin melting into a deep, dark blue once more. 'Were you trying to unbalance me?' Loki asked when Strange tugged again to no effect. 'Allow me to show you how it's done,' Loki said and pulled.

Strange was wrenched from the air, the mortal hitting the ground and immediately spinning to the left, dragged along by the mirror dimension he had created. Loki pushed ice from his pores and watched the whip crackle, frost eating away at it. Between one blink and the next it shattered, shards of ice landing at Loki's feet.

Loki shook the rest free and watched Strange stagger back up. The man clearly wasn't going to stop, Loki thought as Strange once again pushed his hands together. Only this time he drew a shard that was neither glass nor ice, but rather a crude mixture of magic and will, Strange trying to create a weapon with magic alone but not having the skill to do it properly.

Loki smirked and pressed his own palms together. 'Let me show you,' he said as magic poured between his fingers. He drew them back to reveal another shard of ice, two inches thick and wickedly sharp at both ends. 'How it's really done,' Loki finished.

Strange _flew_ at him and Loki rocked back on the balls of his feet. Strange shouted as he swiped and Loki met him blow for blow, their weapons shrieking as they slid against each other. Loki was far stronger, though, and _much_ better trained; he put all of his force behind the blow as Strange slid past him and the man was once again sent flying.

When he hit the ground, Strange's hands glowed orange and he slapped one palm against the floor. The already rocky ground beneath Loki erupted, flinging the Jötunn off of his feet and sending him careening into the wall-
- the floor, the ceiling, the floor again and then another wall when the world around Loki distorted, shifted, remoulded itself even as he fell.

Loki clawed at the closest flat surface and pushed. Magic leaked from his fingers and a flat piece of physical matter, the square that Loki was on, stopped moving. While the world danced around him Loki remained perfectly still until he slowly got to his feet.

Hovering about three feet from him, Strange looked shocked.

'How did you do that?' the mortal demanded.

'Centuries of study and practise,' Loki sniffed. 'My turn.'

He reached into his core and shifted. He felt his magic leave him, only for it to manifest on either side. But instead of three Æsir Loki clones appearing, it was three Jötnar, wearing Loki's disgusting birth skin. Loki bared his teeth even while Strange's face grew slack with shock.

'Now,' Loki said, as much to distract Strange as himself, 'where were we?'

The three clones attacked and Loki stayed back, watching, channelling magic almost without thought. He had long ago perfected making clones but had never used his Jötunn magic to create them. They were sluggish, he noted, one allowing Strange to hit it, another missing a blow that would have connected had Loki thrown it himself.

He did have to admit, though; Strange was doing remarkably well. The man had clearly only been training for a year, perhaps slightly longer. While he was quick on his feet and fought with a similar style to Stark himself, he was slow with his spins, unable to truly keep track of so many foes. He beat down one clone only to take a hit from another, his shields barely blocking blows.

Shields made of magic. Now that was an interesting idea.

One shield failed but Strange was quick to replace it with a blade of gleaming gold, the dagger slicing through one of Loki's clones and turning it to blue flakes. Loki clenched one hand and allowed the other two to be vanquished.

Strange was panting now, hair falling from its perfect style to stick to his forehead. Loki raised his eyebrows when Strange turned to look at him.

'Are you quite finished?' Loki asked.

'Oh, no,' Strange breathed, 'I'm only just getting started.' He waved his left hand and the world once again shifted; tiles ran in the opposite direction, a section lifted free completely to zigzag through the air. But the floor beneath Loki remained fixed.

Loki glanced around, an amused smile twisting his lips. 'Is that all you have?' he drawled.

Strange slammed straight into him, having moved the moment Loki was distracted. A beginner's mistake, Loki thought as he hit something hard and gasped, breath knocked out of him. Strange managed to actually hit him in the face, knuckles glancing off of Loki's cheekbone only to immediately return.

Reaching up, Loki wrapped an arm around the mortal's neck and twisted, yanking Strange off of him in an instant. He twisted until he was on his knees, ducked the haphazard punch Strange threw at him, encased his fist in magic and did a little punching of his own.
He hit the ground and it blasted apart, launching both Loki and Strange into the air. They hit the ceiling but were pulled down against it by this world's twisted gravity. Strange landed in a heap and Loki on his feet, crouched but upright by the time Strange dragged himself onto all fours.

Loki stalked towards the pathetic creature currently sucking air back into his lungs.

'Not that this isn't delightful,' the god drawled, 'but I've had quite enough.' He grabbed Strange by the coat and lifted, ignoring the man's coughs. 'Perhaps you should think before barging into people's homes,' Loki commented.

Strange chuckled. 'Maybe you should think before grabbing people.'

The bright red coat was suddenly wrapped around Loki's arm and head, cutting off sight and breath and making Loki release Strange. He heard the man drop but was more focused on peeling the stupid enchanted fabric from his face.

'Loki!' Stark shouted and Loki heard more movement.

'Now,' Strange said, and there was the sounds of cloth rubbing together, of the dimension shifting once more, and then-

Loki felt the blow to his stomach but didn't move. He flinched when the next hit landed and dug his fingers into the coat when Strange kicked him again.

The temperature dropped dramatically, Loki feeling it like a cool breeze along his exposed skin. He heard Strange say, 'What the hell?' but paid no mind. Because this stupid... bloody... coat!

Loki dug his fingers deeper in and snarled as he released raw magic. The coat was torn away from him, the air around Loki hazy with the sudden cold snap that blew through the dimension Strange had created around them.

Strange was shivering violently, even when his coat retreated to wrap around him.

'I grow tired of these games!' Loki growled. He brought his hands up, skin bright blue and ice clinging stubbornly to his fingernails. 'I am a god!'

Magic shimmering beautifully and dangerously around his hand, Loki curled his fingers into a fist and slammed it against the ground.

The world exploded outward with Loki at its core. The twisted dimension that Strange had created caved in on itself, tiles and stone and everything else that had been sucked in uprooting itself and shooting inward. Strange was caught amongst it all, thrown up only to be slammed back down when the ceiling collapsed. The shards separating the real world from this one exploded into a thousand pieces and disappeared in a shimmering dust as Loki stood tall.

Strange was on the floor between Loki and Stark, Stark staring with widened eyes and Strange sucking in laboured breaths.

Loki rolled one shoulder and held a hand out, another icicle forming as he stalked towards Strange.

But apparently the Midgardian hadn't learned his lesson. He scrambled backwards and sat up only far enough to touch the eye at his throat. Green light made Loki's vision narrow dangerously, and between one blink and the next the leather holding the eye around Strange's throat had been cut, Loki's icicle buried in Strange's shoulder.
The man shouted in pain, but it wasn't as much as Loki had hoped for; the enchanted fabric currently playing coat for a mortal had leapt to Strange's defence, taking the brunt of Loki's blow.

Snarling in annoyance, Loki teleported across the room. He let his full weight land on Strange and enjoyed the grunt of pain the man let out far more than he should.

Crouched over the Midgardian, Loki wrapped one hand firmly around the man's throat and tapped the eye with the other. 'Do you have any idea what this is capable of doing?' he asked.

'Some, yes,' Strange coughed out.

Loki raised an eyebrow. 'You could rip this entire world apart if you are not careful enough. For someone who insists that he doesn't wish to unduly influence this world with magic, you are very loose with the trinkets you play with.'

'I've already saved the world,' Strange said, words somewhat easier to get out when Loki loosened his grip. 'Used this to do it, too.'

Loki hummed. 'I would suggest that you put it away and not use it again.'

A smirk formed on Strange's face and Loki tilted his head. 'You're so full of yourself,' Strange muttered.

Magic danced around Strange's fist and shot out, tendrils whipping around Loki and pulling him back. Magic was already wrapping itself around him when he hit the floor and Loki chuckled. While the net was crude, it was effective; unless you were Loki, of course.

Strange got to his feet and shook his head, a pained noise escaping his parted lips. 'I didn't know you could escape the mirror dimension without a ring,' he muttered.

The net had already wrapped itself around Loki's head and the mage chuckled behind his gag. 'And what's so funny?' Strange demanded.

Stark punched him in the head. The sorcerer fell to the floor in a heap, body covered by that ridiculous coat that fluttered all around him.

'Let him go,' Stark ordered, one gauntlet raised. 'Now.'

Strange rolled onto his back and laughed again. He cut himself off, though, when the magic trapping Loki suddenly disintegrated.

'It is easy,' Loki said as he got to his feet, 'to undo someone else's magic when you know the fundamentals of how it works.'

Stark was staring at him. 'You okay?'

'Quite,' Loki said. He rolled his neck and felt his ice magic retreat. Already the room felt warmer and when he opened his eyes it was to see his skin paling once more. Flexing his fingers, Loki turned to survey Strange, the man still on the floor.

'Okay,' the doctor allowed, 'I concede defeat.'

Loki frowned. It was Stark who said, 'You're giving up?'

'I know when I'm beat,' Strange told them. He groaned as he stood up, blood trickling from a cut
on his sharp cheek. 'Besides,' he said and eyed Loki, 'I think we were both holding back.'

Loki said nothing.

'What the hell are you talking about?' Stark demanded.

'Really, Stark?' Strange sighed. 'We were holding back.' He said it slowly, as though explaining it to a small babe.

Stark scowled. 'I know that Loki was holding back,' the Midgardian said. 'You, on the other hand-

'I don't actually want to kill either of you,' Strange said. 'I'm not a big fan of murder.'

'Just releasing crazy people into civilisation?' Tony questioned.

Strange rolled his eyes and stumbled over to one of the sofas. He fell onto it with a soft groan. 'Your suit packs a punch, Tony.'

'I should have hit you harder,' Stark muttered. He turned his attention back to Loki, who's eyes were trained on the sorcerer. 'Are you sure you're okay?'

Nodding, Loki said, 'It would take more than a mortal sorcerer to truly wound me.' He paused and wet his lips. 'Although, I must admit; I am surprised by how strong you actually are.'

'Is that a compliment?' Strange asked, eyes narrowed.

Loki chuckled and folded his arms over his chest. 'You were holding back, Strange, but make no mistake; I would kill you before you even saw me.'

Strange nodded, face weary. 'How can you escape the mirror dimension?'

'An understanding of the magic around me,' Loki stated. 'I also have magic, I don't simply channel it. If you have magic you can easily dismantle any dimension you find yourself trapped in, especially when it's created out of the Realm you're currently on.'

Strange nodded again and leaned back. 'Okay,' he said, 'that... isn't terrifying at all. At least it makes things easier for me.'

'Easier for you?' Stark echoed. 'JARVIS,' he then added and Loki watched as the suit collapsed from around Tony, only to piece itself back together once the genius had stepped out of it. Stark moved away from his suit and around the sofa to stare at Strange. 'How is the fact that Loki can kill you make your current situation easy? You do realise that I can't let you walk out of here alive.'

'Are you going to kill me?' Strange asked. While his words were light his face was not; Loki read the hard edge to his mouth, the grit of his teeth and narrowing of bright blue eyes.

Stark met that gaze head on, nothing about him suggesting that he was jesting. 'Yes,' he stated.

The two Midgardians stared at each other, neither backing down, and Loki rolled his eyes. 'Not that this isn't fascinating,' he muttered. Strange snapped first and looked at Loki; Stark continued to glare at the man. 'But why are you here?' Loki asked. 'You knew that Stark was working with me before you arrived. I am very curious to know why you didn't share that information with SHIELD.'

Strange snorted. 'SHIELD. Even before I discovered magic and became the Sorcerer Supreme, I didn't like them. They seem to act outside of the government, doing whatever they wish and
sharing nothing.' He looked at Tony. 'Not sharing secrets doesn't seem very nice, especially when Earth has been plagued by aliens and super villains.' With the last few words he looked at Loki, who said nothing in return.

'SHIELD have a problem playing well with others,' Tony said, 'something they don't seem to realise when they accuse me of it.'

'You don't play well with others,' Strange pointed out.

'And you're one to talk?' Tony asked.

The sorcerer shrugged a shoulder. 'I've learned to make friends since my accident.'

Tony snorted and said, 'Yeah, right. So, wanna tell us why you're here, or should I just kill you and get it over with?'

Strange sighed and leaned forward. He suddenly looked years older and Loki approached his partner slowly, eyes fixed on Strange in case the man tried anything.

'I'm not happy about this,' Strange muttered. 'When I started getting the reports, the readings... I very much hoped that one of the Avengers hadn't turned against everyone.' He looked between Tony and Loki. 'You can't use magic and not expect the Sorcerer Supreme not to notice.'

'And that would be you?' Loki asked.

Strange nodded. 'We noticed the changes; powerful spikes of magic in New York, Malibu, wherever you happened to be fighting SHIELD- that wasn't hard to figure out, either, despite SHIELD being very close-lipped about it. There's only so much destruction a mage can do before we begin to notice.

'Anyway,' Strange continued, 'once we knew that there was another magic-user assisting Loki, we figured it was time to intervene. While we were happy to leave the Loki issue with SHIELD and the Avengers, another magic-user could be bad news for us. He or she was either from another Realm, and therefore illegally using magic on Earth without my permission, or it was someone whom I'd personally taught. So I postponed my studies and classes and decided to come down and take a look.'

He paused to wet his lips, eyes on Stark. 'Imagine my surprise when I showed up, only to feel those magical spikes coming off of you.'

Stark frowned. 'Magical spikes?' He glanced at Loki.

'You aren't spiking very noticeably,' Loki told him calmly. He saw Tony relax. 'But anyone with an understanding of magic and how to sense it will be able to sense you.'

'But Thor-'

'Doesn't understand Midgardian magic,' Loki cut Stark off. 'He can only sense my magic because we grew up together.'

'But he sensed Strange's,' Tony pointed out.

'Because Strange wasn't trying to hide when Thor approached him,' Loki explained. 'I explained that I cloak myself; it's something that I'll teach you when we have the time.' He looked at Strange. 'I'm assuming that you can cloak yourself if needed.'
Strange just nodded.

'Thor was actively looking when you fought the other sorcerer,' Loki said, 'and Strange opened a portal between the fabric of reality. Even Thor, as useless as he is with all things magic, can sense that. Using that type of magic and travelling that way will saturate your very being. *You* never use magic long enough for Thor to sense it on you.'

Stark blinked at him slowly and then shrugged. 'Fine, whatever,' he said. 'What I'm *really* curious about is why Stephen's suddenly lounging around my penthouse instead of being dead at my feet.'

'For a man so insistent on not killing innocent civilians, *I'm* very curious as to why you wish to kill this one,' Loki commented.

Glaring at him, Tony gestured at Strange, who was watching their exchange with narrowed eyes. 'He attacked you!' he snapped. 'He *knows*, Loki! I'm not about to let him go just so he can sell us out and get you locked up!'

Loki's heart skipped a bit at the fierce protectiveness in Anthony's voice. But now wasn't the time to dwell on his developing relationship with the man whom his magic had claimed as mate.

They *did* have to deal with Stephen Strange.

'You make a valid point,' Loki mused and turned his attention back to the mortal in question. 'What are we going to do with you?'

'I'm very much for the "not killing" plan,' Strange drawled. 'Please,' he added, blue eyes wide in what Loki had grown to know as "puppy dog eyes". They were effective when Stark used them. Not so much when Strange tried to use the trick on Loki.

Still, he smiled slightly. 'Why, Strange,' he practically purred, 'are you trying to appeal to my humanity? I am not human; I have none.'

'Not your humanity, no,' Strange said, 'more appealing to your practical side. I'm assuming that you and Stark have few allies.'

Loki could see what he was playing at; so could Stark.

'You want to be our *ally*?' the younger god demanded. 'I don't think so.'

'And why not?' Strange questioned. 'I know what you're planning. As long as you don't try to change the world as we know it, I couldn't really care less what you and Loki do.'

'Seriously, this again?' Tony asked. 'I don't fucking believe you. We're killing people.'

'People who will no doubt turn their sights on me when they're done with you,' Strange said.

Stark went silent at that.

'I can't claim to know the inner workings of SHIELD,' Strange continued. 'But I know their type. They want to be in charge and they're very much against anything that could be stronger than them. Because anything with power, with strength, is a threat. I saw how they reacted to Loki- with good reason, of course.' His eyes found Loki's. 'You did come with an army.'

Loki smiled.

'But what's to stop them from thinking the same of me?' Strange went on. 'I have magic. I teach
people how to read the world around them; how to see beyond the pettiness of every day life, beyond the physical. All it took was one man with some powerful words to almost destroy the world. I barely managed to stop it. SHIELD find out about that and suddenly they think that we could all do that.'

'Could you?' Loki asked.

'You said it yourself,' Strange said and tapped the eye hanging around his neck. The chord was frayed, about to snap, but clung stubbornly to Strange's chest with a little help from his coat. This thing can turn back time. I could trap this entire world in a time loop if I were so inclined.

'I'm not,' he said and Loki snorted. 'But SHIELD don't know that. I've done my research and I don't like what I see. I don't want SHIELD breathing down my neck, judging every action until they form their own conclusions. I'd prefer to nip that little scenario in the bud before it can happen.'

'Nip it in the bud,' Loki repeated. 'I'm not familiar with that phrase.'

'It means stopping something before it happens,' Stark explained. 'Basically Strange thinks that SHIELD might go after him; he doesn't want that, obviously.'

'That I understood,' Loki sighed and Strange chuckled. Stark scowled at both of them. 'So you would ally yourself with us to stop SHIELD coming after you,' Loki added. 'Something that may never happen.'

'I'd rather be sure that it won't,' Strange said, 'than leave it to chance.'

'A deal,' Loki mused, the same tone he'd used all those months ago when Stark had approached him with a similar proposal. Only Loki had been quite enthusiastic to side with Stark. He didn't know Strange nearly as well.

'I offer my services in exchange for your own,' Strange told them. 'A mutually beneficial relationship.'

'And if we want you to kill people?' Stark asked, an anger in his eyes that Loki couldn't quite place. He could feel Stark's emotions bubbling just beneath his skin but was unsure of their origin.

'I won't,' Strange said, eyes narrowed. 'I don't care what you threaten me with, Stark. I'm not killing people for you.'

'Then what use are you?' Loki questioned.

'Nothing happens in the magical community without me knowing about it,' Strange said. 'I am, after all, in charge of it. Yours and Stark's little plan won't become common knowledge until you want it to. You would have all of Earth's magical community on your side. Or, at least, not against you.

'I'm assuming that you have plans beyond destroying SHIELD,' Strange continued. 'Having hundreds of sorcerers in your corner could only help.'

'And in exchange?' Loki asked.

'You help us with any major issues we have,' Strange said. 'And you keep our secret, too. I'd rather nobody know that we exist. It's bad enough that I had to reveal our existence to SHIELD.'

'A deal,' Loki repeated, only this time he was interested. It couldn't hurt to have Midgard's magic on
their side. Not only could they use Strange, but they wouldn't have to go hunting down sorcerers when they were done with SHIELD. No, all they would have to worry about was the Avengers and their allies. Every other danger would be off planet.

And, with Strange firmly in their pocket, his subjects would follow. Loki could study Midgardian magic, could use what knowledge Strange and his kind had accumulated to teach Anthony. Anthony would grow even more powerful than Strange could ever try to be.

'A contract,' Loki said when he'd sorted through his thoughts.

Strange raised his eyebrows but said nothing, waiting.

'You would have to sign a blood contract,' Loki said. 'It would ensure that we cannot betray each other.'

'What?!' Stark shouted.

'A contract signed in blood.' Strange sighed. 'That can't be dangerous at all.'

'What the hell do you think you're doing?' Tony snarled at Loki. 'Are we even going to discuss this, or should I just leave you and Strange to hash out the details of your new little twosome?'

'Calm down, Stark,' Loki said, 'we aren't signing anything yet.' He turned his attention to Strange. 'Draw up a contract and return when you are ready; Stark and I will have our own. We will go over the details and come up with something that's mutually beneficial.'

'Sounds good,' Strange said and leapt to his feet. He ignored Tony, who was now swearing and glaring at Loki with daggers in his eyes. 'I look forward to meeting with you both later.'

He held his left hand up and drew himself another portal, this one leading to what appeared be a large, dark entrance room that's style wouldn't have been out of place on Asgard.

'And Strange,' Loki said before the mortal could step through it. Strange looked at him. 'If you breathe a word of this to anyone, I will know.' His eyes narrowed. 'I will keep you alive and you will beg for death.'

Strange said nothing, simply nodded and went through the portal. It closed behind him with a zap, a scorch mark on the carpet the only evidence that he'd ever been there.

'What the fuck was that?' Stark exploded.

Loki raised his eyebrows and turned to survey his partner. 'Excuse me?'

'We're making deals with mortals now, is that it?' Stark asked. 'All that shit you said to me when we first went into business together was just lies, right?'

Eyes narrowed, Loki said a very clipped, 'I have never lied to you.'

'Yeah, right,' Stark scoffed. He turned on his heel and headed for the kitchen- for what, Loki didn't know. But he was still yelling. 'Strange must be really fucking interesting for you to make a deal with him.'

'We,' Loki corrected as he followed. Stark was angry- no, furious. Loki could feel it on his very skin. His magic churned uneasily deep in his core and it was making Loki itch.

'No, you!' Stark snapped. 'I'm not making any deal with that bastard.'
'Why?' Loki questioned. 'Because he's stronger than you?'

It was a barb that hit home; Stark froze before turning quickly, eyes fierce when they found Loki's. 'Excuse me?' he growled.

'Is that what this is about, Stark?' Loki drawled, a tone he usually reserved for Thor. And he could see that it was doing the same to Tony; the Midgardian had drawn into himself, fists clenched and shoulders near his ears. 'You would throw away an ally over pride?'

'You're talking to me about pride?' Stark said. 'That's rich coming from you, Mr Nobody Loves Me, I'd Better Destroy An Entire Fucking Realm!'

Loki slammed Stark against the wall, one hand pressed against the plaster and one wrapped around Stark's throat. But Stark just grit his teeth, eyes echoing the fury Loki suddenly felt.

'Do not speak of things you don't understand,' Loki snarled.

'Oh, I understand plenty,' Stark said, 'cause you're as fucked up as me. Is that it? Strange is mentally sound, so you're gonna hitch your horse to him instead. Fuck Tony Stark, he's so much effort.'

And now Loki was... confused. His grip around Stark's throat lessened slightly as his anger began melting away. 'What are you talking about?'

'Strange knows how to use magic,' Tony said. 'He's already competent. Christ, you wouldn't even let me fight him!'

'He could have hurt you,' Loki bit back. Because while he knew that Stark could take care of himself, Loki didn't know enough about Stephen Strange to risk his partner's health. Not when he himself was perfectly capable of putting Strange in his place.

'Yeah, 'cause Strange is strong and Tony's weak, am I right?' Stark laughed humourlessly. 'You wasted so much time and effort on me when there was already a magic-user right here on Midgard. You wouldn't make a deal with me until I was immortal, but Strange gets one after a little fucking scuffle.'

'I am willing to make a deal with Strange so that he doesn't reveal our plans,' Loki said. 'I thought you would jump at the chance for more allies.'

'Not when they're sorcerers who my boyfriend likes better than me!' Stark growled.

Loki scowled. 'I am not your boyfriend.'

'Yeah, I'm beginning to see that.' Stark snorted and pushed Loki away. 'Let me go.'

'Not until you tell me what you so agitated,' Loki said, not budging an inch. 'Strange knows the truth about us, Anthony. Nothing is stopping him from telling Fury what we're doing. Do you wish for SHIELD to come after us before we've reduced their numbers?'

'Then why don't you fight SHIELD with Stephen,' Tony sneered.

'Stark,' Loki growled, 'cease this at once and tell me what's wrong.'

'I bet Stephen would know,' Stark continued. 'I bet Stephen doesn't need his partner to jump to his defence. I bet Stephen would happily destroy bases with you-'
'I am not about to partner myself with Stephen Strange,' Loki interrupted.

'Oh, yeah?' Tony sneered. 'It sure seemed like you were. *A deal, Strange. A blood contract, Strange.* God, why are you fucking me when you could have someone like *Stephen Strange.*'

Loki slammed his fist against the wall. 'Enough!' he snapped. 'I am making a deal with him for *us.*'

'You're making a deal with him for *you!*** Stark shouted back. 'No input from me needed. I'm just a useless, pathetic Midgardian when out of the suit, am I right? Strange is so much better than me.'

'He is nothing compared to you!' Loki said with a vehemence that startled even him.

Stark recovered quickly, though. 'Yeah, right,' he said. 'I might get *hurt* when battling Stephen Strange. I bet you'd let him fight SHIELD all on his lonesome.'

Loki had nothing to say to that, because it was true. Loki didn't care what happened to Strange; he'd snap the man's neck himself if he didn't have any use.

Stark snorted. 'Yeah, that's what I thought.' He pushed at Loki's chest. 'Let me go. And you can run along to Stephen's place and shack up with him.'

Loki growled, 'I am not shacking up with that pathetic mortal.'

'And why not?' Tony spat, eyes blazing, fingers clenched where they were still pushed against Loki's unmovable chest. 'I think we've already established that he's fucking *better* than me.'

'He-' Loki tried, but Stark kept talking.

'He's stronger, he knows more about magic, and you'll make a deal with him even though he's *mortal,*' Tony sneered. 'So why the fuck wouldn't you work with him over me-'

Loki slammed both fists against the wall, caging Tony between his arms. He bent down to hiss at the stupid Midgardian who thought that Loki could replace him with *anyone* when Loki's very magic *screamed for him.*

'Because I'm not in love with Stephen Strange!' Loki shouted.

The words rang in Loki's ears and he watched Stark's eyes widen. The hands against his chest drooped, fingers lax and nails catching on Loki's t-shirt.

'Oh,' Anthony breathed.
Chapter 55

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I was just an only child of the universe
And then I found you, and then I found you
You are the sun and I am just the planets
Spinning around you, spinning around you
You were too good to be true, gold plated
But what’s inside you? But what’s inside you?
I know this whole damn city thinks it needs you
But not as much as I do, as much as I do, yeah”

– The Last of the Real Ones [Fall Out Boy]

Loki looked as shocked as Tony felt. Already he was pulling back while Tony just stood there, mouth gaping and Loki's words running through his head.

_Loki loved him._

Hands slid from the wall to rest on his shoulders and Tony stared up at Loki, eyes tracking every minute expression on his face. Because Loki... he looked like he regretted what he'd said. And that's why would he regret it? Tony felt the same way. He'd realised he was in love with Loki weeks ago.

But Loki didn't know that. He'd confessed his feelings to Tony and Tony was just standing there like an idiot, completely silent and staring.

That wouldn't do.

Loki pulled back but Tony latched onto his shirt and pulled him forward. 'No, no- wait,' he begged. 'Don't go anywhere.'

'Stark-' Loki tried, but Tony cut him off.

Shaking his head, he squeezed his fist tightly around the material of Loki's shirt. 'No, I'm Tony,' he said. 'Right now, for this conversation, I'm Tony. Not Stark. Because you just said that you love me. Or, uh... you hinted at it.' He hesitated, wet his lips, and caught Loki's gaze with his own. 'Did you mean it?'

Loki looked _pained_ and he glanced to the side, as though he could avoid this conversation all together if he just... never looked directly at Tony.

'Loki.'

'Yes!' Loki snapped. He closed his eyes and exhaled shakily. 'Yes, St- _Tony._' Loki sighed. 'I knew that I did. I knew that my feelings for you had changed. But I never... I hadn't admitted it to myself
yet.’

'Okay,' Tony said, 'that's... fine.'

Loki still wouldn't look at him. 'We need to discuss Strange,' he said.

'No, right now we need to discuss us.'

Scowling, Loki said, 'What is there to discuss?' His tone was snippy, annoyed, and... oh. Tony hadn't said it back, had he? Loki was under the impression that Tony didn't feel the same.

I'm an idiot, he thought before leaning forward to press his forehead against Loki's chest. 'I've been in love with you ever since you gave me a blow job in the elevator.' He felt Loki stiffen against him. 'Well, I mean, that's when I realised that I was in love with you,' Tony continued in a rush. 'You were just kneeling there and sucking my cock and I kept thinking, “Christ, he's beautiful, and he's mine, and he'll be mine for however long I live because we have a contract,” and... and...'

Tony trailed off and rubbed his forehead against Loki's t-shirt. 'I just wanted you, Loki Laufeyson,' Tony muttered. 'You're beautiful and insane, stupidly brilliant and smart, and you were willing to make a deal with me, a fucking mortal. And that's why making a deal with Strange pisses me off because I thought you... I thought it was just us.

'It is.' Loki's long fingers slid beneath Tony's chin, grip just strong enough to force Tony's head up so that they could look at each other. 'A deal with Strange will benefit both of us, Anthony. It will keep you safe.'

'And you want that,' Tony said, 'cause you're in love with me.' Loki's eyes fluttered shut, but he nodded. 'And I love you.'

Loki inhaled sharply, eyes snapping open to catch Tony's. Tony felt a small smile tug at his lips.

'This isn't one of those situations where I'm just saying it back so that you don't feel hurt. I'm not saying it just to avoid an awkward situation. I'm fucking in love with you. And I don't-'

Loki chuckled, and it sounded wet, but before Tony could see if his god really was crying, Loki kissed him. It was wet and messy and there was a heat behind it that Tony had never felt before. Or maybe that was just him imagining things, convincing himself that this was different, because fuck, Loki was in love with him.

'I don't know how,' Tony mumbled against Loki's mouth. He was pushed back up against the wall, only this time Loki was against him, long, lean body pressed tight and making Tony ache in all the right places. 'I thought I was broken. I don't love people. But you're just...'

'I will not question what the Fates have decided to give me,' Loki murmured. He drew back just far enough to breathe and it was ragged, Tony sucking in a breath when Loki released it. 'After everything that has happened to me- every fall, every failure, every heartbreak... you are what they have given me. I would do it all again, just to have you by my side.'

'Jesus-' Tony cut himself off to kiss Loki again. Because Loki couldn't just say that shit to Tony and expect nothing in return. Tony wasn't the kind of guy to believe in fate or destiny, not even when Thor and Loki both had fallen from the sky and proclaimed themselves gods.

And this... for Tony, it wasn't fate. It was luck. Pure, blind fucking luck. It was bad luck that the man Tony had seen as a second father had turned on him. It was good luck that Yinsen had stood by Tony's side and allowed him to create the first crude Iron Man suit.
It wasn't luck that Tony had approached Loki during the invasion and offered him a drink; that was
even just Tony being a reckless asshole. But Loki turning up when Tony requested a meeting? Loki
offering him immortality and a deal? Loki falling in love with him?

Luck. Tony was the luckiest fucking super villain in the entire universe. And he was going to kill
anyone who tried to take this away from him.

'Loki,' he whimpered when the older god stopped kissing him, only to move onto Tony's ear. He
was biting and sucking and nibbling, doing things with his tongue that no normal person could do.
Silver Tongue, indeed. 'Loki, please,' Tony begged.

'What do you wish of me?' Loki whispered in his ear. 'I will do whatever you want. I will destroy
this entire Realm if you want it.'

'Uh...' Tony's brain went fuzzy when he felt Loki's hips roll against his. Yup, Loki was definitely
enjoying this as much as Tony was. 'Nothing that... that destructive,' he managed to get out. 'I just
want you to-to fuck me.'

Loki hummed against Tony's flushed skin and Tony whimpered once more when one of Loki's
hands dropped to rub at the bulge in Tony's jeans. 'Anything for you,' Loki said and pressed a soft
kiss to the corner of Tony's mouth, 'my love.'

'Fuck you!' Tony snarled. He wrapped his arms around Loki's neck and jumped. Loki responded
quickly, hands dropping to grab Tony's ass and hold him up. Tony wrapped his legs around Loki's
waist and scowled at him. 'You fucker, you can't just say shit like that.' He kissed Loki before he
could respond, revelled in the moan and shudder Loki gave. 'Maybe I should fuck you,' Tony said,
'make you scream my name for saying that shit to me, you sweet fucker.'

'No,' Loki said, 'I believe that I will grant your first request.' With that he turned, pulled Tony off of
the wall and carried him down the hallway and back into the living room. But instead of continuing
to the stairs that would take them to their shared bedroom, Loki turned to the left and dropped
Tony onto the three-seater sofa.

'Really?' Tony said, chest heaving with each breath. 'Right here?'

'I will have you wherever I wish,' Loki growled. He climbed onto the sofa and slotted himself
smoothly between Tony's legs. They went back around Loki's hips as Loki leaned down to kiss him
again, and Tony... well, he wasn't about to complain.

He felt like a teenager again, necking on the sofa fully clothed. Only the guy atop him was in love
with him, and Tony very much returned the sentiment. Fuck, fuck, he was in love with Loki and
Loki knew it; Loki felt the same way.

Tony felt magic churning behind his arc reactor, as though it wanted to burst out and surround
Tony, surround Loki. It wanted to caress and protect and Tony tossed his head back and moaned
when pleasure shot through every inch of his body. Loki was sucking on his neck, leaving what
Tony knew would be a very large hickey.

'Possessive much?' he managed to choke out.

He felt Loki's laugh. 'Everyone will know that you are mine,' he murmured. 'And you will, too.
You can stop your ridiculous thoughts about Strange.'

Tony growled and grabbed at Loki's hair. He twisted sharply and enjoyed the grunt of pain Loki let
out. 'I'd really appreciate you not mentioning that asshole when we're about to fuck,' he said.
'Please.'

Loki tilted his head up to smirk at Tony. 'Since you asked so nicely,' he murmured and slid down Tony's body. Oh, and there was that heat again, making Tony's toes dig into his shoes and his fingers tug at Loki's thick black hair. He let go when Loki started opening his belt, dropped his hands to the sofa to push himself up when Loki unbuttoned his jeans.

Tugging the denim down Tony's legs, and taking his shoes and socks with it, Loki sighed when he found Tony wearing a tight pair of boxer-briefs. 'Why do you insist on wearing undergarments?' he demanded.

'I don't like my junk flopping around all day,' Tony said, 'especially when I'm in the Iron Man suit.'

'Pity,' Loki said, 'it would speed things along considerably.'

Tony rolled his eyes. 'You're a mage, babe; why don't you just magic my underwear away?'

'Oh, no,' Loki said and dropped to eye Tony's trapped cock, 'I think I shall punish you.'

Apparently punishing Tony meant mouthing at his dick through his underwear. It was... pretty shitty, yeah. Because while Tony loved the feeling of Loki licking and kissing and nibbling at his cock, the material keeping him from sticking his dick down Loki's throat was really fucking annoying.

'Loki...' Tony gasped. He scratched at the couch cushion beneath him and tried to thrust up, but Loki pinned his hips down. 'Loki, please.'

'Tell me how you feel,' Loki murmured. 'Say that you are mine and I will do whatever you wish.'

He didn't sound teasing, now, and Tony managed to peel his eyes open to look down. Loki's gaze was locked on him and Tony had never seen that kind of adoration on Loki's face. He was so open, so free, and Tony was pretty sure his heart was about to fucking break.

'I love you,' Tony said. Because he did, and Loki deserved to hear it, and it made Loki shake and close his eyes. 'I love you, Loki,' Tony repeated. 'You're brilliant and insane and so fucking powerful and you're mine and I'm yours.'

Loki sat up suddenly and slid his palms together before tossing his right hand to the side. Between one blink and the next the remainder of Tony's clothes disappeared, and Loki was blissfully naked, too.

'Yes!' Tony shouted when Loki fell onto him. It was all heated skin and rolling hips, Loki apparently quite happy to fuck up against Tony while Tony did the same. The billionaire felt teeth sink into his shoulder and growled his approval, but after a beat pulled Loki's head up so that he could seal their mouths together.

He bit harshly at Loki's lips, sucked down the moan Loki let free. And then there was a tongue thrusting into his mouth, a few skilful licks and sips all it took for Tony to bow down to Loki's dominance. He melted back into the sofa and gave as good as he got; harsh kisses, clacking teeth; hands scrambling across naked skin, each trying to grab and hold onto the other.

Tony was pretty sure he was about to vibrate out of his skin. He'd only ever felt his magic this close to breaking free once before; back when it'd washed over him and Loki both when they were having sex; back when Loki had had to tell Tony about their connection and the bond their magic wanted to complete.
'Loki,' Tony growled when he felt fingers on his inner thigh, 'Loki, you really need to fuck me, or I swear I'm gonna- ohh...'

He trailed off with a gasp. A long, slick finger had pushed in as he was speaking, and he fucking mewed when Loki grazed his prostate. Already Tony felt like they'd been at this foreplay for hours. His body was a live wire, skin slick with sweat and heat flushing his body pink and red. His legs shook when Loki smoothly inserted another finger, digits circling and scissoring to work Tony open.

Another finger quickly followed the other two and Tony rolled his hips, practically fucking himself down onto Loki's hand. He peeled his eyes open and saw Loki staring at him; at his fingers disappearing into Tony's greedy body. Tony grinned and reached down to touch himself. He bypassed his cock, swollen and red with want, instead sliding fingers down his perineum and then further. He heard Loki's breath stutter when Tony's fingers brushed his own. Tony circled his own entrance, not pushing or hurrying, just feeling where Loki was thrusting into his body.

He kept his eyes locked on Loki the entire time and could see how it was affecting him; Loki panting, now, a bright red flush working across his nose and cheeks; eyes usually so green now black orbs that tracked every movement Tony made; muscles bulging because Loki was trying to hold back, because he either didn't want to hurt Tony or was just an asshole drawing this out for as long as freaking possible.

Tony tossed his head back and moaned as wantonly as he fucking could. He covered Loki's thrusting fingers with his own and pushed his hips up, body taut and on display. 'Loki,' he whimpered.

And that was all it took. Loki's fingers slid from him with a wet squelch and Tony watched Loki jerk himself off, spreading magical lube because apparently Loki was way too fucking horny to go hunting for the dozens of bottles they kept all over the penthouse.

Tony didn't have much time to think after that. Loki grabbed his thighs and pulled him down the sofa, spread him wide and steadied himself with one hand, the other on his cock so that he could push-

Oh, yes, was all that was running through Tony's head. Because as soon as Loki had breached him he was off, hips slamming into Tony and cock spearing him right open. Tony shouted his pleasure, hands skidding across the couch trying to find purchase. Loki's nails dug into Tony's thighs as he fucked in, in, in, each and every push jabbing perfectly at Tony's prostate.

But Loki switched angles quickly, hunched himself over Tony so that he could get even deeper. And it was just as good, just as hot, their slick skin sliding together, pants shared and eyes catching on every other thrust when the two gods remembered to open them.

It was wet and messy and the sounds of Loki fucking him was all Tony could hear. Loki had buried his face in Tony's neck to lick and suck and bite and each sharp stab of pain just built upon Tony's pleasure. Loki's stomach was rubbing over Tony's aching cock, just enough to make Tony jolt and shudder in pleasure, but not enough to get him off. Tony tried to push up, to break free of Loki's strong hold and chase his own pleasure.

But each and every time he was pushed back down. Loki would rotate his hips so that each rough slide of his hips would pound his cock into Tony's prostate. And that was enough for a few minutes, enough to make Tony's brain hazy and pleasure all he could feel. But Loki would stop, would change angles again, and Tony was left growling and begging with sounds instead of words.
Just as Tony was about to scream his frustration, Loki moved. Tony's world tilted dangerously and he suddenly found himself on his knees, sitting on Loki. He blinked rapidly and looked down at Loki, who was smirking.

'You astound me,' Loki murmured. He smoothed his hands up and down Tony's heaving sides, nails scratching lightly. 'I adore you.' Tony shuddered. 'Take what you want from me; chase your pleasure,' Loki said. He leaned back. 'I am yours.'

Tony didn't need to be told twice. He pushed himself back and slid all the way down Loki's dick, felt it nestle deep within him. He groaned and shuddered, lazily swivelled his hips to feel Loki move in him.

'Tony,' Loki groaned, 'please.'

Tony picked himself up and dropped back down. Gravity did half the work, Tony the rest. He started off slowly, smoothly, trying to find just the right angle to make himself see stars. Loki held loosely onto his hips, eyes locked on Tony, lips parted as he sucked in breath after breath.

There, Tony thought when he felt a jolt of pleasure. He moved again and yes, yes, now they were talking. He dug his fingers into Loki's shoulders and fucking rode him with everything he was. Loki tossed his head back and moaned and Tony could do nothing but watch and fuck himself onto his partner's cock, each push another spark of pleasure, each smooth slide dragging at his muscles.

'Oh, God,' Tony choked out when pleasure built and built and built. His prick was trapped between their bellies, catching every so often on Loki's bellybutton and making Tony jerk to the side. He didn't want to let go of Loki to grab himself, though, couldn't let go of his anchor because if he did he'd fall apart. His thighs were screaming in pain already, his skin was on fire and sweat was dripping into his eyes. Magic swirled within him and wanted to escape, but Tony couldn't, he wouldn't let it, this was just him and Loki and he wanted-

Hot fingers wrapped around his dick and pulled. Tony slammed himself down onto Loki's thick cock and screamed his release.

Tony chased his own pleasure, uncaring of anything other than the waves of pure fucking bliss rolling through him. He could vaguely feel Loki shaking beneath him, could feel Loki's hips pushing up to keep fucking Tony, but Tony didn't care, he just wanted to keep feeling like this forever-

He collapsed against Loki a moment later, muscles finally giving out and leaving Tony flopped over his partner. Loki was moving only slightly, little twitches of his hips that Tony recognised as the spasms Loki went through just after he'd orgasmed.

'Did...' and wow, fuck, it was hard to talk when your throat felt raw, 'did you... come?' Tony felt what might be a nod from Loki but that wasn't good enough. He nudged Loki's head with his own. 'Lo?'

'Mm,' Loki murmured, barely audible. 'Yes,' he managed to get out a minute later.

Tony sighed. 'Good.' He was pretty content to just sit there forever. Fuck the Avengers and SHIELD and Stephen Strange. Tony would abandon his entire plan and just stay here, letting Loki fuck him for eternity. Well, they could switch it up sometimes, and they'd take breaks for food and TV. But other than that... yeah, that was a pretty good life, Tony mused.

Tony was pretty sure that nothing would get him moving, not even the Avengers walking in and
seeing him straddling Loki's cock. But then the elevator dinged, and there were footsteps, and Tony's eyes rolled up lazily to see Bruce Banner.

'Bruce!' he yelped and sat up. Loki groaned beneath him.

'Oh, I-' Bruce spun his back to them quickly, but not before Tony saw the blush on his face. 'Sorry,' Bruce said, 'I just... thought we should talk about Dr Strange?'

'Uh...' Tony blinked rapidly and felt Loki shift beneath him.

'Yes,' Loki said, apparently having regained the power of speech. 'We should speak with your minion about him.'

Tony frowned. 'Bruce isn't a minion, Loki.' Loki just chuckled.

'Should I wait in the kitchen?' Bruce asked.

'Yeah; kitchen,' Tony said. He watched Bruce beat a hasty retreat. 'JARVIS, you could have warned him long before he got here.'

'\textit{That is correct, Mr Stark,}' JARVIS replied.

Tony raised his eyebrows. 'And you didn't because...?'

'I was not ordered to turn Dr Banner away nor warn him when Mr Laufeyson is wearing his Æsir skin, Mr Stark,' JARVIS responded primly. '\textit{Would you like me to warn Dr Banner in the future?}'

'Smartass,' Tony muttered. 'Yes, JARVIS, I'd like you to warn him.'

'\textit{The order has been logged and will be followed},' JARVIS said.

Tony shook his head and leaned down to press his face against Loki's neck. 'My AI's an asshole.'

'He is what his creator made him,' Loki commented. 'I don't need any snark from you.'

Chuckling, Loki pressed a soft kiss to Tony's jawline. 'As much as I wish to stay here with you, we should dress and speak with Banner. We still need to discuss today's events.'

Tony groaned. Fucking Stephen Strange. 'My legs are broken.' He pouted. 'I can't walk, Loki. You broke me.'

'There is no need to be so dramatic.'

'Is.' Tony sniffed. 'I need help.'

'Yes, you do,' Loki muttered. He stood anyway, easily holding Tony up.

'You love me,' Tony replied and grinned when Loki froze. Like he'd forgotten. 'I love you, too,' Tony murmured, voice softer.

Loki turned to bury his face in Tony's neck. 'Yes,' was all he said.
**Author's Note:** So, I watched *Thor: Ragnarok* today. And while I liked the movie— and Loki, he's amazing— nothing in it will really feature in this story. My only complaint about the Marvel Cinematic Universe in general is how... powerless they seem to make Loki sometimes.

My plot outline now has this story at 71 chapters. 71. And it already has over 3000 kudos. What. The. *Fuck.* Seriously, I can't thank all of you enough. Thank you so much for deciding to read this story, and for taking the time to comment and leave kudos. THANK YOU! And I hope you enjoyed the chapter!

Also, I just spent the last half hour formatting this chapter in freaking HTML because apparently this website wanted to make the entire thing italics. The only thing NOT in italics were the few words that were supposed to be in italics. I swear to freaking GOD... so if there are any weird formatting issues, that's why.

Dreamer
'Stark was jealous,' Loki announced as soon as they entered the kitchen.

Tony swung around to glare at him. 'No I wasn't!' Total. Fucking. Lie. Tony had rarely been jealous throughout his life; how could he be when his father, and later himself, had been one of the richest people on the planet? Tony had been jealous of his father's lovers, his work colleagues, and Steve fucking Rogers. But he'd never been jealous of some random guy whom his partner had been flirting with.

Loki was smirking as he sat himself at the table across from Bruce. Bruce glanced between the two of them. 'Um...'

'You were jealous, Stark,' Loki said.

'I.. you... Strange is an asshole!' Tony snapped. 'And you were flirting with him!'

Loki's smirk quickly fell into a scowl.

'Stephen Strange?' Bruce asked. 'When did Loki-

'I was not flirting with Strange,' Loki interrupted. His eyes were still on Tony. 'I was willing to listen to him and make a deal to protect you.'

'Strange wants a deal?' Bruce questioned.

'No, seriously, since when are you in the habit of making a deal with mortals?' Tony demanded. He leaned over the table to glare at his partner. 'You made me immortal because you wouldn't go into business with someone who'd die in just a few years.'

Loki rolled his eyes. 'While that is true, offering you one of Iðunn's Apples wasn't just because of our deal.'

Tony... frowned. 'It wasn't?'

Sighing, Loki said, 'You can be incredibly obtuse, Stark.'

'Says the guy who didn't realise I was fucking jealous until ten seconds ago,' Tony muttered.

Loki rolled his eyes. 'You amused me far too much for me to let you live out a ridiculously short life,' Loki explained. 'I wanted to see what you would do, given a few more hundred years. And before you ask, no, I wasn't in love with you when we first entered this agreement. I was simply fascinated by you.'

Tony didn't know what to say that. Of course he was aware of the fact that Loki hadn't loved him when they first started working together; he was assuming that Loki's feelings, like Tony's own, had changed as they got to know each other. But to hear that Loki had been fascinated by him even back then, instead of just seeing Tony as an annoying little human...

'So you've exchanged “I love you”s?' Bruce questioned. Tony jumped, having honestly forgotten that Bruce was even there. 'It's about time,' Bruce continued. He smiled slightly when both Tony
and Loki turned to stare at him. 'I thought it'd be years of vague hints and tension until one of you almost died and the other professed their love. I'm glad I won't have to deal with that.'

'You're lucky that Stark likes you, Banner,' Loki muttered.

'Tony did just admit that he was jealous,' Bruce commented, apparently trying to take Loki's attention off of himself and move it back to Tony. Tony knew because Bruce was freaking smiling brightly at him.

Tony groaned and Loki smirked.

'Yes, that's true,' Loki said, a glint in his eyes when they swivelled to rest on Tony. 'You have admitted to it.'

'Well it took you long enough to figure it out,' Tony shot back.

'I admit that I wasn't sure, at first,' Loki allowed. He held out his hand in Tony's direction, eyes large and bright. 'Forgive me?'

It was so goddamn clear that Loki was playing him, but rarely had Tony been able to resist those eyes. 'Asshole,' he growled but grabbed Loki's hand and allowed himself to be pulled into the seat beside him. 'You're lucky I love you.'

Loki's face softened into a smile and he leaned over to press a kiss to the side of Tony's head. Tony's heart may or may not have skipped a beat at the gesture.

'Not that this isn't nice,' Bruce interrupted, 'but I've gathered that Stephen Strange knows that you two are working together?'

'He does,' Loki agreed. He turned to look at Bruce but kept Tony close, fingers brushing over the back of Tony's hand. Tony really didn't mind. 'He was aware that I was here and destroying SHIELD bases, but he also picked up another magic-user working alongside me.' He inclined his head in Tony's direction. 'He wasn't aware that it was Anthony until they met face to face.'

Bruce was nodding along, a frown on his face. 'But he didn't say anything. Or did he?'

'No, I don't think so,' Tony said. He sighed. 'I really don't want to work with Stephen; I'd rather just kill him to get him out of the way.' Bruce stiffened at Tony's casual mention of murder but said nothing; Tony appreciated it. He knew that Bruce was still having difficulty with how cold-blooded Tony could be. 'The good news is that I don't think he knows about you, Bruce.'

'I doubt that he's aware of Banner's true allegiance,' Loki agreed. 'Banner has only accompanied me to the Malibu base but Strange would have no way of knowing that.'

'So what are you going to do about him?' Bruce asked.

'What are we gonna do, Brucie,' Tony corrected. He ignored the incredulous look Bruce gave him, the look of pure venom Loki shot his way, and instead focused on the problem at hand. 'I really, really don't wanna go into business with Stephen. He's a stuck-up asshole.'

'He and you are alike, you mean,' Loki said. Tony poked his tongue out. 'Childish, my love,' Loki commented.

Tony jolted upright, eyes wide. Because... yeah. He and Loki loved each other. They were in love.
Loki smiled slightly but moved the conversation along. 'I think it would be in our best interest to make a deal with him. Strange has no doubt shared Stark's true colours with those closest to him and we currently have no idea who those people are. He spoke of having hundreds of Midgardian sorcerers under his protection. They could make life extremely difficult for us if they attack while we're trying to destroy SHIELD. And they could, of course, join SHIELD's side and work against us.'

'We could totally beat them,' Tony said but he was frowning. Because... when Loki put it like that, going into business with Strange was the smart move. While Tony very much doubted that Strange would ever help them like Bruce did, he wouldn't be against them, either. He'd stay out of the fight with SHIELD, with the Avengers, and not cross Tony or Loki in the future as long as they didn't mess with Midgard's magic.

And if Tony and Loki helped Strange, then Strange and his own would be in their debt. Having a bunch of sorcerers on their side...

'Son of a bitch,' Tony muttered. He pinched the bridge of his nose. 'Fine. Fine.' He looked up at Loki. 'You wanna work with him?'

'I don't want to work against him if we can easily avoid it,' Loki said. 'Strange is powerful but I would come out victorious if we truly went to blows. I don't wish to have to face him, SHIELD, the Avengers, and Asgard at the same time.' He sniffed. 'I'm not in the habit of starting wars with dozens of enemies at once.'

Tony shook his head and glanced at Bruce. 'What do you think?'

'I... honestly have no idea what Dr Strange is capable of,' Bruce said slowly, clearly thinking everything through. 'But he could prove a problem to... to us, right?' Tony nodded. 'So why not make a deal?' Bruce said. 'It's the smart option. You and Loki need more allies than just me.'

'Aww, Brucie, you're awesome!' Tony said. He reached over the table to clap Bruce on the shoulder with his free hand. Loki still had the other clasped within his own tightly, nails scraping along his skin.

Bruce chuckled weakly. 'I'm not that awesome, Tony, and neither is the Other Guy. You need more people on your side. If Dr Strange, for some reason, is offering his... his support, then you should take it.'

'He fears for his safety and the safety of Midgard's Sorcerer Guild,' Loki told him. 'SHIELD targeted Anthony when he was still a hero, simply because they knew what he could do if pushed the wrong way. They will most likely think the same of Strange if they don't already. He is magic and has access to magic. We know how SHIELD feel about magic.'

'They wanna use you to make fucking weapons!' Tony growled when the memory resurfaced at Loki's words. He still had some of the magic guns locked up in his workshop. While he'd studied them, understood how they'd been made, he still didn't understand how SHIELD planned to use Loki to power them.

'They want to do what?' Bruce demanded.

Tony looked up sharply at his tone and oh, look at that, the skin around Bruce's eyes was turning green. Loki had gone very, very still and very, very tense beside Tony. Tony peeked at his partner from the corner of his eye and saw Loki glaring at Bruce, entire body ready for a fight. Tony could feel Loki's magic ready to pounce.
'Okay, let's all calm down,' Tony said soothingly. He kept his eyes on Bruce but slotted his free hand over Loki's, fingers gently tapping along Loki's. 'We found some guns and crystals in one of SHIELD's bases. They were modelled after the guns SHIELD were planning to power with the Tesseract. However, now that the Tesseract is safely in Asgard, SHIELD were going to use Loki's magic to power them.'

'They would no doubt torture me into releasing my magic,' Loki said. 'Enough pain and my magic tries to protect me; they would most likely try to siphon some into the crystals they've been producing.'

Bruce was shaking lightly but the green slowly receded as he shook his head. 'Okay.' He took a breath. 'Okay.' Another inhale, exhale, and Bruce relaxed minutely. 'That... was probably something that you should have shared with me earlier, but I'm okay.'

'Want some tea?' Tony asked. Tea he could make; Loki loved the stuff.

'No, I... yes, actually.' Bruce stood quickly and moved to the cupboards above the sink.

'The cupboard on the right, top shelf,' Loki helpfully supplied.

'Thanks,' Bruce muttered.

'As I was saying,' Loki continued as Bruce shuffled about making himself a calming brew, 'SHIELD most likely won't try to use Strange as a battery. They will try to use Strange and his followers for their own personal gain. Sorcerers are not common on Midgard, but Strange knows all of them. If SHIELD can they will try to sway Strange over to their side.'

'He promised to be a consultant,' Tony said. 'Probably just to keep Fury off of his back.'

'I will tell him to go when Fury calls,' Loki mused. 'Fury may share his plans for you with Strange and Strange can pass them along to us.'

Tony sighed. 'Another spy? Great. Just great.'

Loki glared at him. 'Put your dislike of Strange aside. He will work with us, or I will simply kill him. There is no need to be so annoyed by it.' He squeezed Tony's hand to prove his point and Tony glared right back.

'Until Strange signs a damn contract, I'm going to hate him with every goddamn atom of my being.'

'So you agree that we will make a contract with him?' Loki asked.

'Yeah, sure, why not,' Tony muttered, 'not like it could go wrong. 'Cause Stephen Strange is just so goddamn precious-'

'Stark, cease prattling; you tire me,' Loki interrupted.

'After earlier, I'd hope so.'

Loki's eyes narrowed at that but Tony saw the lust that was steadily creeping into his gaze; that little spark in Loki's eyes that Tony knew was Loki's desire to throw Tony down and fuck him until he shut up.

'Please leave if you two are going to stare at each other like that,' Bruce mumbled from near the electric kettle. 'Or better yet, let me make my tea and leave, then you can do whatever you want.'
'But I wish to stare at Stark and imagine mounting him while you're here, Banner,' Loki commented. He glanced at Bruce, a shit-eating grin on his face. 'Your discomfort amuses me.'

Tony nudged him. 'Stop being mean, honey-bunny.' He grinned when Loki went still at the nickname. He could feel Loki's anger from where he was sitting. 'Is that a no to “honey-bunny”? How about “sweetums”- oof.'

Tony blinked rapidly when he suddenly found himself on his back in the middle of his and Loki's king-sized bed, Loki himself towering over Tony with narrowed eyes.

'Okay,' Tony said, 'I can deal with this.'

'I am going to gag you,' Loki said slowly, eyes travelling down Tony's body, 'I am going to tie your hands to the headboard. I am going to torture you with my lips, with my fingers, until you are begging for release. But you will not receive it because your words will be muffled. All you will be able to do is squirm and cry as I have my way with you. And only when I am ready will I fuck you until you surrender to the pleasure I give you.'

Heat had been steadily crawling up Tony's spine and he probably would have shouted, “Fucking yes please” if Loki hadn't smashed their mouths together, swallowing any sound Tony could hope to make.

Tony's whine was muffled, his tongue forced down when he tried to lick into Loki's mouth. He felt cool air against his skin and glanced down to see that Loki had magicked his clothes off to places unknown. And then there were cold bands wrapped around his wrists, his arms were wrenched above his head, and Loki sat between Tony's spread legs with a truly evil look on his face.

Tony groaned but something thick and heavy silenced him. He couldn't see what it was, could only feel warm cloth wrapped tight around his mouth. He watched with wide eyes as Loki bent down to breathe heavily over Tony's cock.

But he didn't touch. He didn't press or lick or feel. He just fucking breathed and stared at Tony and fuck yes.

This was the greatest punishment Tony could ask for.

{oOo}

Wong was reading a thick, leather-bound tome when Stephen Strange walked into the library. He didn't look up until Stephen had thrown the Cloak over the closest flat surface. It hovered above it, of course, flicking its tail every which way and seeming to stare at Stephen in betrayal.

Stephen rolled his eyes and fell to sit in the closest seat. His hands were shaking and he tucked them under the table. If he couldn't see them, he didn't have to deal with them.

'Well?' Wong asked. His face was blank, as usual, but Stephen could see the curiosity in his dark eyes. He'd gotten better at reading Wong since the world had almost been destroyed. It's the small things, Stephen mused.

'I have both good and bad news,' Stephen said. Wong was silent. 'The good news is, I don't think Loki wants to take over Earth. I don't believe that he's here to make himself a Kingdom and screw
everything up with magic.'

'Okay,' Wong said.

'The bad news is that he has a partner,' Stephen said. He leaned back in his seat, images of Tony Stark glaring at him, eyes dark and stormy, ingrained into his brain. Stephen had known Tony for about eleven years; not well, no, but they'd run in similar circles when Stephen had been at the top of his field. Benefits and charity events and parties that only catered to the rich and elite. While Stephen would never call Tony a friend, they'd been similar enough to enjoy verbal sparring every time they came face to face.

'Do we know his partner?' Wong asked. His lips twitched minutely in what could almost be a frown. 'Mordo?'

'No, thankfully,' Stephen sighed.

'Kaecilius?' was Wong's next guess and Stephen laughed.

'No, not him either. Although I kind of wish that either one of them was working with Loki; at least then I'd know what I'm dealing with.' He shook his head and reached up to rub at his mouth. 'It's Tony Stark.'

Wong was frowning, now. 'Tony Stark the billionaire? Owner of Stark Industries and Iron Man?'

Stephen's eyebrows shot up. 'You don't know Beyoncé, but Tony you've heard of?'

'Everybody has heard of Tony Stark,' Wong said. He finally shut his book and leaned over the table, both hands pressed flat against the surface. 'And you are telling me that Tony Stark is the magic-user working with Loki. How? The Ancient One never trained him.'

'Loki trained him,' Stephen said. 'Because apparently Loki has the ability to make people mages.' He groaned and hung his head back, the tips of his boots pushing at the floor so that he could rock back and forth gently. 'I don't know what Loki's capable of, Wong. Maybe I shouldn't have revealed our existence.'

'But you had to,' Wong argued in that simple, no-nonsense tone that Stephen had come to enjoy. Wong was a simple man who didn't like beating around the bush. In this strange new life, Stephen really needed that. 'Loki is not our problem; whoever is working with him is.' He was still frowning as he stood tall. 'Except it is Tony Stark.'

Stephen nodded. 'I haven't seen him use magic, but I felt it; a lot of it. And it was similar to how Loki feels. Tony's a mage, of that I have no doubt. But I don't doubt that I could beat him in a battle.'

'And Loki?' Wong questioned. He was staring at the cut on Stephen's face. Stephen winced and reached up to touch the tender skin of his cheek. He was pretty sure that Tony's punch was going to leave an impressive bruise.

'I think I could beat him.' Stephen tried. 'But I don't know.' He touched the Eye of Agamotto, still barely clinging to his neck. He'd need to replace the strap. 'Loki is a mage from another Realm and, if the myths are to be believed, over a thousand years old. I have no idea what he's studied, what his people know, what he knows. He was able to break out of the Mirror Dimension without a ring.'

Wong was nodding along, apparently not surprised by that little bit of information. Stephen
scowled at him.

'I don't think it would be wise to make Loki an enemy, especially now that SHIELD knows of our existence,' Stephen added.

'You will have to tell me what happened,' Wong said. 'You've left much out.'

'Yes, yes,' Stephen muttered.

Wong stared at him, waiting, and Stephen realised that he wanted to know now.

'What, no tea? No munchies?' Stephen pouted. 'You disappoint me, Wong.'

Wong just continued to stare at him, completely unamused.

'Fine, I'll get the munchies,' Stephen said and pushed himself to his feet. 'And maybe an ice pack; my face hurts.'

'Did you deserve the punch?' Wong asked.

Stephen ignored him and marched out of the library. He ignored the Cloak, too, when it latched itself back onto him and began petting his neck. There were only so many ridiculous things that Stephen could deal with on any given day before he needed a break.

Chapter End Notes

**Author's Note:** Yes, I mentioned Kaecilius. I just freaking adore Mads Mikkelsen and don't want to rule out the possibility of his character popping up in either this story or the sequel. While I have no plans for him or Mordo to actually make an appearance, I wanted to leave my options open. And if Kaecilius does appear, I'll have to figure out how he survived or came back from what happened to him at the end of Doctor Strange.

Hopefully the chapter was enjoyable. And haha, this one didn't take me four months to get out! Take THAT, universe! Or whatever.

Dreamer
Tony sighed. He had his face pressed up against Loki's back, arms bent and squished between himself and the Trickster. He was comfy and warm but not too warm because Loki, as always, ran a little cooler than most people.

Loki shifted ever so slightly and Tony frowned. 'Stop moving.'

'Why?'

'Cause you're my pillow,' Tony muttered.

Loki chuckled. 'We have things to discuss, Stark.'

'No we don't,' Tony countered. 'We have nothing to discuss.'

'Is that so?'

Nodding ever so slightly, Tony hummed. 'Absolutely nothing. We just gotta lie here and sleep.'

'You were not sleeping,' Loki said.

'I was about to.'

'But we have to-'

'No we don't,' Tony interrupted.

Loki finally rolled away and Tony groaned.

'Goddamn it.' He grunted and opened his eyes to find Loki staring at him. Long hair hid half his face and Tony itched to reach out and just touch.

'We have a contract to write and negotiate,' Loki stated.

Tony groaned again and rubbed his face. 'Don't say it.'

'Say what?'

Dropping his hand, Tony glared at Loki. 'Don't say his name.'

An eyebrow raised. A slow curl of lips. 'Do you mean Strange?'

'You mother fucker,' Tony growled. 'I'd really appreciate you not saying his fucking name in my bed.'

Loki's eyes narrowed. 'And here I thought that it was our bed.'

'I'm gonna kick you out of it if you keep talking about him.'

'And when do you wish to discuss Strange and his knowledge?' Loki demanded. Tony grumbled under his breath. 'This is not something that you can ignore, Stark; we cannot afford to ignore it.
We have to make a deal with him, bind him to us, and we can move on with our plans.'

'Or we could kill him and pretend he never existed,' Tony said, tone just a bit wistful.

Loki shook his head and leaned down to press a gentle kiss to Tony's lips. 'We cannot always have everything we want, Anthony. Sometimes we must accept the bad with the good.'

'Have you been watching *Dr. Phil* or something?' Tony asked. He sat up and scrubbed his hands through his hair, over his face. Loki watched him. 'Never mind,' he muttered. 'Fine, fine. In the morning- or later today, rather- he corrected when he spied the time being projected against the window, -we'll draw up a contract, get Bruce's input, and contact Strange... somehow. Then I can pretend I don't know him and completely ignore his very existence until he literally pops up in my goddamn Tower.'

'Good,' Loki purred and patted Tony on the shoulder. 'And who knows, Stark; perhaps Strange will meet an unfortunate accident.' Tony snorted. 'Or perhaps we will need his help when we trap Thor on Asgard; Strange may just be left behind as well.'

Tony chuckled. While he very much doubted that they'd get away with that- Strange would no doubt put a clause in their contract that stated no betrayals- a man could dream. He laid back down and pressed himself up against Loki.

'That's the plan, right?' he said. 'Get Thor trapped on Asgard, somehow?'

'Somehow,' Loki echoed. 'I want to destroy the Bifröst; or, at least, destroy Asgard's ability to use it for a few decades.'

Tony frowned. 'Is that possible?'

'It is not *impossible*, just difficult,' Loki said. 'The Rainbow Bridge is a physical manifestation of the Bifröst as seen on Asgard. Heimdall has the ability to open and close it, but if we move him away from Asgard's entrance, we can use the Bifröst against itself. All we have to do is point it at Asgard and the Bifröst will destroy the Bridge, and Asgard's ability to use it, for us.'

'Okay...' Tony drawled. 'So just pop up to God Land, lure away a dude who's apparently all-seeing and all-knowing, manipulate an ancient and incredibly powerful.... thing, and destroy a colourful bridge to stop Odin from sending more powerful dudes after us. And we have to get Thor up there and distract him long enough to do all that. Okay. Totally easy.'

Loki smirked. 'I do not doubt that *you*, the Man of Iron, will be able to achieve such a feet. Aren't you always waxing poetic about how incredible you are?'

'I wouldn't say *waxing*,' Tony said, 'just telling it like it is.'

Shaking his head, Loki slid further down the bed until his face was against Tony's shoulder. 'Of course,' he murmured, 'my mistake.'

They fell into silence. Tony could feel Loki's breath against his skin. It was only when it started growing deeper, Loki slowly slipping into unconsciousness, that Tony said, 'Are you sure you can do it?'

Loki grunted.

'I don't mean *physically,*' Tony added. 'Emotionally.'
He glanced down to see that Loki had cracked one eye open. 'What?'

'If we destroy the Bifröst, you won't be able to get back to Asgard,' Tony said. 'Will you be okay with that?'

'Forgetting the fact that I can travel between the Realms without the Bifröst,' Loki said, 'why would I regret it? Thor would be trapped; Odin would never be able to influence my life again. It will be the greatest day of my life when I trap that spoilt idiot in his home Realm with the father he claims has never done any wrong.'

Tony wet his lips; hesitated. It suddenly seemed like a very bad idea to bring all of that up. Loki was in a good mood; they were doing good. And Tony had gone and-

'Stark.'

He closed his eyes before saying, 'Won't you miss your mom?'

Loki said nothing and when Tony risked a glance it was to see Loki's eyes narrowed, poison leaking into his irises.

'Loki, I'm-

'I'm sure that she will forget me, eventually,' Loki spat. He flipped himself off of the bed and snarled over his shoulder, 'Like I'm sure that you will, given enough time!'

With that he disappeared through the double doors that led to the bedroom's private balcony. Tony groaned and flopped onto his back, eyes squeezed shut and fists pressed against them. He pushed until he saw stars amongst the black and muttered, 'I'm an idiot.'

Silence, and then JARVIS; 'While I can usually follow the events up to and including you being an idiot, Sir, I do not believe that I understand.'

Tony sighed. 'Human emotions, JARVIS.' He frowned. 'Well, Jötunn emotions, in this case.'

'Sir?'

'Forget it, J. It's probably better that you don't understand.' He dropped his arms to the bed and blinked up at the ceiling. 'Where is he?'

'On the balcony, Mr Stark,' JARVIS said. 'He does not appear to be doing anything or going anywhere.'

'Thanks, JARVIS.' Tony gave Loki a few more minutes before slipping out of bed and through the doors. Loki was halfway down the balcony, leaning over the railing and staring at the city below. Tony crept up behind him and wrapped his arms around Loki's waist despite the serious danger vibe that Loki was giving off.

'Stark-

'Just stop, okay?' Tony interrupted. 'Stop and give me a minute.'

Loki was, thankfully, silent. But his body remained rigid against Tony's and Tony cursed his own stupid mouth once again.

'I didn't mean to bring that up, Loki,' he said.
'You did; you said the words knowing full well how I would react to them,' Loki growled.

'Okay; point,' Tony agreed. 'I didn't mean to hurt you, is what I meant. I know that your mo- that it's all... a touchy subject for you.' Now that was understating things quite fucking grandly. 'I wasn't there for any of that, obviously; I can't even begin to imagine what, exactly, went down, and how you felt, and how everyone else felt. I can't claim to be an expert on emotions, especially anything that involves family. But I know you, Loki. I just... I hope you don't regret cutting off any chance your mom might have of finding you and making things right.'

Loki said nothing, still stiff as a board, tension practically leaking out of every pore.

'And Jesus Christ, Loki,' Tony muttered, a bit of anger creeping in, 'don't for one fucking second think that I could ever walk away and forget you.'

Loki finally spoke, then, after another minute of Tony muttering and pressing himself up against Loki's back.

'Everybody does,' he murmured. He relaxed suddenly, only for Tony to realise after a beat that he wasn't actually relaxing; all of the fight had gone out of him, and Tony stepped around Loki to look at his face.

He was tired, eyes half-mast and lips pulled down in a frown.

'Loki...'

'Everybody grows weary of me, eventually,' Loki continued. 'Once I have ceased being useful; once they begin to tire of my tricks and my attitude. They step back and reassess and realise that they are better off without me.'

Oh, fuck. It was one of those moments. It wasn't just anger that had sent Loki storming from their bedroom.

He still didn't believe that Tony loved him. Or, rather; he still believed that after everything they had been through- after everything that they would soon go through- that one day Tony would grow bored, that his affections would wane, and that he'd walk away and completely forget that Loki had ever truly existed.

'Loki... you're a fucking idiot if you think that you haven't changed me beyond recognition,' Tony said. Loki's eyes darted to him but just as quickly left once more. 'I can't promise that I'll love you forever,' Tony continued, 'because, yeah; sometimes feelings change. People change and grow apart and love can disappear. But even if that happens to us, you've changed me so completely that I will never be able to scour you from my physical being even if I tried.

'Dannit, Loki, you made me a mage,' Tony said. 'You made me a god. Even if, for one second, we pretend that I could ever feel anything for you other than love, I am always going to owe those two things to you. And after we destroy SHIELD... I can't do that alone, Loki. It's you and me, together. Even without an emotional attachment, we'll always be fucking attached. You can't change that. I sure as hell can't.'

Loki tilted his head ever so slightly before muttering, 'You're not truly a mage.'

Tony frowned. 'Come again?'

'A mage is born,' Loki said, 'you were created.'
'Uh... you always call me a mage,' Tony felt the need to point out. Because where the fuck was this coming from?

'Because calling you a sorcerer would not only be incorrect, but an insult to you and your abilities,' Loki said. 'You are more a mage than a sorcerer, but you are not a true mage.'

'Oh... kay?' Tony tried. He blinked. 'What the fuck, Loki; I thought we were having a moment.'

'We were,' Loki agreed. He turned suddenly and wrapped his arms around Tony; gave him a hug that was just this side of too tight. Tony didn't mind. 'Thank you,' he mumbled into Tony's hair.

'Okay?' Tony repeated. 'So... you're alright now?'

'I do not believe that those words will ever be applicable to me; not truly,' Loki said. He sighed and brushed his lips against Tony's scalp. 'But I understand what you are saying. And I am trying to... to listen, instead of allowing my doubts to become all-consuming and lead to bad ideas. So; thank you. And... I am sorry for leaving as I did.'

'It's okay,' Tony said. He finally relaxed against Loki and felt Loki's arms loosen ever so slightly. 'Loki, I get it; this is new territory for us and we both come with so much baggage it's a fucking miracle we can function on any level. We'll navigate this together, okay? If that means that, sometimes, you need to walk away, well... I'll chase you wherever you go.'

'Is that so?'

'You'd better fucking believe it,' Tony grumbled. 'I'm not letting you go; you're mine.'

'Yes,' Loki agreed, 'I am.'

Tony nodded to himself and gave Loki's hip a squeeze. 'For tonight, can we just forget about everything and go back to bed? What we were doing before was nice.'

Loki released him and took a step back, only to grab one of Tony's hands with both of his. He ran his fingers along Tony's scarred, calloused fingers and smirked ever so lightly. 'You wish to cuddle, Stark?'

'Yeah, I wish to fucking cuddle,' Tony said. He raised his eyebrows. 'Got a problem with that?'

Tony felt himself being sucked forward, the world exploded, and then he was flat on his back on their bed with Loki wrapped around him. 'No, Tony,' Loki said. 'I do not have a problem with that.'

'Good.' Tony ran his fingers through Loki's hair. 'Let's not do that again for a while, okay? Your mood swings are a trip, Loki.'

Loki bit gently at Tony's collarbone. 'I will kick you out of this bed, Stark.'

'That's my line,' Tony said. Loki chuckled and Tony nudged him. 'Quiet time now.'

When Loki bit him again Tony pinched the back of his neck.

'Stop moving, Anthony,'

'Stop talking, Loki.'

Loki mumbled something in another language- Old Norse? Tony didn't fucking know- and Tony sighed. 'Fine, you wanna talk? Let's talk. When did you first realise that you were in love with me?'
Sitting up, Loki stared down at him with a bemused expression painted across his sharp features. 'Are we truly doing this?' he asked. 'Have you not had enough of my *mood swings*, as you called it?'

'This is good stuff, though,' Tony argued. 'Fun stuff.'

'Is it?'

'Answer the question, mister.'

Loki shook his head.

'I'm just curious,' Tony said.

Settling back down, Loki hid his face in Tony's neck. 'I do not think that I had admitted it to myself until I spoke the words aloud,' he said. 'I knew that my magic wanted you and you knew that too.'

'You knew long before sharing it with me,' Tony muttered.

Loki huffed. 'Yes, he agreed, 'and I apologised for that.' He waited, but Tony didn't interrupt. 'I was aware that my feelings for you had... changed. Strengthened. I think that I was... scared to admit that you mean as much to me as you do. I have loved in the past; I loved my family. I loved my wife. I loved my friends- my supposed friends. And it all fell apart. I did not love Sigyn the way she loved me. Our differences led to divorce and a shattering of the easy friendship we once shared. I loved my family so much that I was willing to destroy my own people for them. But they aren't my family.'

He stopped there, breath catching, and Tony soothed his fingers over Loki's hand and up his arm. He rolled over, forced Loki back, so that he could wrap himself firmly around the Trickster. Loki allowed the movement and pulled Tony closer. As silly as it seemed, Tony felt safe in Loki's arms.

Well, it wasn't silly, really; Loki was powerful, both magically and physically. He could easily keep Tony safe.

But Tony didn't need to be kept safe. He was Iron Man. It was just... nice, he supposed, to be able to rely on someone the way he relied on Loki. To be able to trust someone as much as he did Loki, to feel this comfortable.

He sighed and nudged Loki's shoulder. 'Keep going. Fun stuff, remember? Forget the other shit we talked about. In fact, forget it ever happened. Wait, what am I talking about? Because *nothing happened*.'

'You are ridiculous,' Loki murmured before he continued his earlier thread. 'I suppose that, on some level, I knew how I felt about you for weeks now. I wasn't able to admit it to myself let alone you. Not until you ridiculously suggested that I could pick Strange over you.'

Tony frowned and tapped his fingers along Loki's back. 'Logically I know that you'd never pick Stephen over me. I mean, not unless you wanted to have a real chat with someone who knows a lot about magic. But a little conversation and suddenly you wanted to make a deal with him.'

'For us,' Loki said. He squeezed Tony gently. 'You know that it is the right decision.'

'Logically, yeah,' Tony said again. 'Logic and emotions don't really go hand and hand.'

Loki chuckled. 'So you found yourself overcome with jealousy and decided to act like a fool.'
'For a genius, you can be incredibly obtuse!' Tony snapped, mimicking what Loki had said to him earlier that day. 'You didn't even realise I was jealous until you threw me up against a wall.'

'I didn't throw you up against anything,' Loki said, a sniff accompanying his words. 'I backed you into it and.'

'Hit the wall,' Tony interrupted.

Sighing, Loki nipped at Tony's skin. 'You are ridiculous.'

Tony chuckled. 'So are you.'

'Mm,' Loki said, 'so we shall be ridiculous together.'

Tony liked the sound of that. He drew a heart between Loki's shoulder blades with his fingers, repeating the pattern until Loki changed positions so that he and Tony were snuggled up against each other, shoulder pressed to shoulder.

'Alright,' Tony said, 'ridiculous together it is.'

'I am willing to admit that I wasn't prepared to face my emotions; the way I felt about you,' Loki said slowly. 'But you realising that you were in love with me in the middle of a blow job.'

Tony sat up quickly, turned to scowl at Loki. It deepened when he saw that Loki was grinning toothily at him. 'Hey, it was after the blow job, thank you very much!' he snapped. 'Well, sort of after... it was when I came, okay? I was staring down at you and I knew I was in love with you and... just shut up!'

He flopped back down to hide his face in Loki's side and ignored the way Loki was shaking; from laughter, he was sure of it. God, he was in love with an asshole.

Tony still found himself smiling after a minute. Even if he was in love with an asshole, at least Loki was his asshole. And hey, Tony had been called worse. 'Asshole,' Tony muttered out loud, just in case Loki didn't realise that Tony was super annoyed with him.

'Ridiculous Midgardian,' Loki commented.

'But you love me anyway.'

'Yes,' Loki said, voice soft, 'I do.'

Tony laughed. 'We're idiots; sappy idiots. We're killing people and destroying SHIELD and planning to take over Midgard at some point, and here we are, lounging around and talking about our feelings.'

'I have been told that discussing your emotions can help you process them,' Loki said. 'Or have the healers I see on the television been lying to me?'

'Babe, never believe everything you see on TV,' Tony told him. 'Half of it's bullshit.'

Loki chuckled as he said, 'Oh, yes, I'm very aware of that. Just the other day I saw something they called entertainment news. There were rumours that you and I had broken up and that you were now dating a Russian figure skater. I was very disappointed; I didn't know that we had drifted apart.'

Tony groaned. 'Oh, God. They're not still doing that, are they? I'm either secretly married to some
singer or I'm dating fourteen people at once. The media seem to think that I haven't designed anything for Stark Industries since I was twenty-two, because apparently I have all the free time in the world to fuck everybody I come into contact with. Yeah, I shut down the weapons manufacturing side of Stark Industries, but we still sell electronics that I design.'

Loki ran his fingers lightly through Tony's hair. Tony sighed when he felt nails dig into his scalp and scratch lightly. 'Poor Stark,' Loki purred, 'so busy, yet so alone. Whatever will you do when your skater leaves you?'

'Go crawling back to Logan Thomas,' Tony said. 'Or maybe by then I'll be dating some new up and coming reality star.'

'I would hope not,' Loki hummed. 'If you do, I would have to kill this person.'

Tony smirked. 'Loki, you can kill anyone who tries to get into my pants. I only want you in there.'

'Yes,' Loki said and rolled over until he was lying atop Tony. Tony licked his lips when he felt a very familiar hand running down his stomach. 'If I find anyone else here... I shall have to freeze them before shattering them into a trillion tiny pieces.'

He pushed his fingers down Tony's boxers to wrap his hand around Tony's cock. Tony groaned. Yup, he was definitely ready for round two. 'You have really weird pillow talk- he gasped when Loki stroked up, down, up again before squeezing the head, '-but... but I'm not complaining.'

'I should hope not,' Loki said. 'I wish to recreate the blow job that made you fall in love with me. If you feel the need to shout your love for me to Valhalla, or praise me as your one true god, I will not stop you.'

Tony would have laughed if Loki hadn't decided to slide down his body right that minute. 'O-Okay,' he stuttered when he felt cool breath fan across his cock, 'we can do that.'

Loki chuckled.

{oOo}

Stephen Strange didn't know how Loki could do this so effortlessly. Then again, perhaps it was just as difficult for him; maybe he was just better at hiding it. Either way, Stephen was having a difficult time snooping and keeping himself out of the physical realm. While it had been simple to create a mirror dimension that only he could step through, having it follow him and wrap around him to hide his physical self was proving... draining.

He needed to figure out a better way to make himself invisible.

Stephen side-stepped yet another SHIELD agent who went scurrying past him with an arm full of... something. While Stephen had considered sneaking himself aboard the Helicarrier, the risk of Thor and the other Avengers being there was too great. Stephen had watched the Avengers interact with Loki in the past and the God of Thunder always seemed to be able to pick out the mage from a great distance. Stephen wasn't about to test Thor's abilities any time soon.

So here he was, sneaking around a SHIELD base that Wong hadn't been able to find out anything about. It was publicly known as a facility that built, housed, and then shipped out plastic containers
for other companies.

What Stephen found once he'd slipped through the public floors and down below was... much different. Everything was the same shade of dull, concrete-grey, and every door was locked with both electronic and biometric locks. Stephen pressed himself against walls and watched as one agent slid a keycard through a white box and another pressed their thumb against the small black box on the other side of the door. A buzz would sound and both agents would enter, the door sealing shut with a hiss behind them.

Stephen hadn't ventured into any of the rooms so far. He couldn't pick locks and didn't want to risk opening a portal in the facility just to escape. He could just imagine waking up one morning to find a hundred SHIELD agents on his doorstep looking for a fight.

Shaking his head, Stephen took another right and continued to wander. He wasn't really cut out for stealth missions yet. Most of his enemies tended to come at him head on. But he was skilled at deception and faking it until he made it; it was how he'd become Sorcerer Supreme, after all. These days only Wong could see through his bullshit.

Voices from down the corridor ahead reached Stephen's ears. He reflexively twisted his fingers, prints tracing along the dimension wound tight around him. Shards of the realm spun slowly, each magnifying the world before shifting away again. Through the vague haze Stephen spotted another four agents. He took a few steps back, judging where they'd be headed based on their movements. When they continued down a separate corridor, Stephen trailed after them.

Their voices floated back to him;

'...can't seem to get the energy right,' a woman said.

There was a hum.

'Electricity and magic won't work the same,' a man said.

Stephen perked up. Magic, did they say?

'Not even the repulsor technology we've managed to harness from the quinjets behaves correctly,' the woman continued, 'it's completely different to the energy that the Tesseract emitted. We can't seem to contain it in anything smaller than the engines Stark built.'

_Stan_p, Stephen thought with an eye roll. Was the man famous absolutely _everywhere_?

'Again; magic will work differently,' the other man said. 'Once we've captured Loki he'll _make_ it work. I doubt that compressing the energy he can release into a gun will be too difficult for him.'

Stephen almost shattered the mirror dimension in shock. Magic. Loki. They were going to force Loki to make _magical guns_?

'What in the freaking world,' Stephen muttered to himself in surprise. Thankfully his voice was muffled by the dimension and the SHIELD agents ahead of him continued on in ignorance.

'Director Fury wants to see progress,' one of the men said. 'If we don't prove that, in theory, the magical guns _can_ work, he'll have no reason to keep Loki on Earth when he's captured. If we can't use him for own purposes then what's the point in keeping him?'

'A pound of flesh in compensation?' the woman spat bitterly.
The other man laughed. 'I wouldn't mind getting back at him for what he did in Malibu.'

Malibu. Stephen remembered seeing that in the news; some computer start-up company had gone boom and five or so people had been killed. So that was Stark and Loki, then.

The agents stopped before a door and opened it while Stephen stood behind them. His brain was trying very hard to process everything that it'd just heard. Guns. Magic. Torture, no doubt.

What in the Nine Realms was wrong with SHIELD?

The door closed and Stephen was alone, standing in the middle of a corridor deep within a SHIELD base. He suddenly felt claustrophobic; like at any second SHIELD would descend around him, capture him, and stick electrodes on him so that they could use his connection with the Mystic Arts to power their stupid goddamn weapons.

Fuck it; portal-escape it was.

Stephen drew a portal and watched it spark to life opposite him, on the edge of the mirror dimension. He summoned it as he collapsed the world around him, and stepped through into the library just as everything crackled and fell.

Wong was sitting at a table reading something; as usual.

He glanced up. 'Not dead,' he said.

Stephen sighed and slouched himself into a seat. He felt emotionally drained. Why was it that, after all of this time and everything he'd seen, he was still shocked by the absolute craziness that humanity was capable of?

'I knew that you were after my job,' Stephen said. 'I heard the note of wistfulness in your voice.'

Wong stared at him. 'Yes,' he said, deadpan. 'Every second of my existence is geared towards destroying you and taking your job.'

'I knew it,' Stephen remarked.

Wong shook his head but there was a shadow of a smile on his face. A victory, in Stephen's eyes.

'We're joining Stark and Loki,' Stephen said.

Wong's eyes snapped back up. His brow was furrowed. 'When you left your were still undecided,' he said. 'What did you see that changed your mind?'

'SHIELD plan on capturing Loki,' Stephen said.

'Yes,' Wong interrupted, 'you knew that; the Director told you that himself.'

Stephen held up a hand and said, 'I wasn't finished.' Wong was silent. 'I saw enough to change my mind,' he continued. 'They're building weapons. They planned to use the Tesseract- one of those stones that the Ancient One once told me about.' Wong nodded. 'Well, they don't have it any more, and from what I heard they don't understand Stark's technology enough to use what he's created as the power source for their weapons. So they plan to capture Loki and use his magic as the energy.'

Wong pushed back from the table, eyes dark and practically glaring fire into the book before him. 'They... plan to use his magic,' he stated. Stephen nodded. 'Torture,' he added and looked back up. 'That is the only way it could work. I don't know much about Loki but he doesn't seem the type to
willingly offer a part of himself for SHIELD to use.'

'No; he really doesn't,' Stephen agreed. 'They'll get it out of him any way they can. And now SHIELD are aware that sorcerers exist amongst humanity. We'll be next. Once the dust has settled and Stark's taken out as a threat, they'll turn their attentions on us. They'll either force us to fight for them, imprison us, or wipe us out completely. We'll be hunted. It'll be Kaecilius and Mordo all over again, only this time they'll have guns powered by an Asgardian mage.'

Wong was nodding along and only stopped when Stephen wet his lips and rubbed tiredly at his eyes. 'When do you wish to contact Stark and Loki?' he asked.

'After I've spoken to the keepers of the Sanctums,' Stephen said. 'I'm not going to tell them Tony and Loki's plans,' he added, 'just that I'm going to align us with some powerful allies. Hopefully they trust me enough not to ask any questions. After that we'll go to Tony's Tower and make a deal.'

'The magically binding deal that will hopefully not lead to our betrayal and eventual gruesome deaths,' Wong added.

Stephen rolled his eyes. 'Yes, Wong; that deal. Now if you'll excuse me.' He stood and his Cloak flapped around him, ready for another grand adventure. Stephen just wanted a nap.

'Try not to die,' Wong said as Stephen retreated, 'you know that nobody, absolutely nobody, could ever replace you.'

Stephen chuckled as he left the library. 'I can hear your cunning plans from here, Wong!' He thought that he heard a chuckle; but it could have just been his imagination.

Chapter End Notes

**Author's Note:** This chapter is weird; Tony and Loki just really wanted to have some ups and downs and emotional conversations. I don't even know any more.

Sorry this chapter was so late! I sprained my wrist twice- yes, the same wrist on two separate occasions- it's been freaking hot here, ergo I haven't wanted to do anything more than lay on the floor and suffer, and I've been working a lot because my job and everybody who works there sucks arse.

But I finally got it posted and am keyed up for the next one. Also, yes, to everybody asking; there will be a sequel. This story has just gotten way out of hand so I've decided that I'll just have to write another one. Yay?

Dreamer
Chapter 58

Chapter Notes

**Author's Note:** So, I recently spilled coffee all over my laptop keyboard and completely destroyed half of it. I managed to get some buttons working but they stick quite a lot and I have limited function with some. It took me a few days to be able to actually type and edit anything without my keyboard going all weird and adding/subtracting stuff from the text I was trying to write.

So, good news; I can type again, yay! Bad news; it takes longer than it used to and infuriates me. I need a new laptop yet again. Why am I like this?

Anywho, enough about my problems; enjoy the chapter!

Dreamer

The door to Fury's office swished open and Rogers stormed in before taking the seat before Fury's desk. Sighing, Fury pushed his keyboard away and laced his fingers together.

'Is there a reason you barged in here, Rogers?'

'We need to talk,' Rogers stated.

Fury raised his eyebrows and leaned back. 'Okay,' he mused. 'What exactly do we need to talk about, Captain Rogers?'

Rogers frowned. 'How about Doctor Strange? Or the fact that there's apparently a whole lot of sorcerers on Earth? How did SHIELD not know about them?'

'We aren't omniscient,' Fury said. 'And until Doom, and then Loki, magic wasn't really something that SHIELD had to deal with.'

Eyebrows raised, Rogers said, 'You had the Tesseract for a couple of decades. Surely you realised that there had to be other powers on Earth that you didn't understand.'

'Certainly SHIELD were aware that there were things out there beyond our understanding,' Fury allowed, 'but connecting a cube that HYDRA found with people who can use magic isn't really a leap that any sane individual would make. Until Stark started spouting off exactly what Loki was doing, we weren't even sure that his abilities were magic.'

'What would you call it, then?' Rogers asked.

'Shit that I shouldn't have to deal with,' Fury stated. 'You heard Strange; he's willing to consult with SHIELD. As far as I'm concerned, he's the only sorcerer I need to have any kind of contact with. Unless his group steps out of line, I don't plan on seeing him unless it's absolutely necessary.'

'So we're just trusting this doctor person, then?' Rogers asked.

'I don't trust anyone, Captain,' Fury responded. 'Hell, half the time I want to throw Stark and Barton
off of the Helicarrier for some of the shit they say.'

Rogers shifted uncomfortably but made no comment.

'What is it about Doctor Strange that has you so worried?' Fury asked.

'What do we even know about him?' Rogers said. 'He just walked into a battle, took our bad guy down, and got himself an invitation back to the Helicarrier. How do we know he's not working with Loki?'

'You heard Thor; Loki doesn't work with mortals.'

'Yet he was working with Doom, according to Tony,' Rogers argued. 'What's to say that he's not working with Strange?'

Fury pursed his lips. 'Where's this suspicion coming from, Rogers? I'll admit that I don't exactly trust Strange, but why don't you?'

'I'm beginning not to trust anyone outside of SHIELD and my team,' Rogers admitted. 'Not with Loki running around with Iron Man copies. Strange could be another mole that Loki wants to plant here.'

_He could be_, Fury thought. Then again, it would be a rather heavy-handed way to get another mole into SHIELD. If Strange was as powerful as he claimed to be, he could have easily slipped into SHIELD's ranks unnoticed. Why announce his existence so publicly if he was working with Loki?

'He could be,' Fury agreed, because, well... it was the truth. 'SHIELD know the bare minimum about Stephen Strange. We know his history; parents and sister died when he was young. He saw his sister die so he decided to study medicine. He graduated in record time and became one of the best neurosurgeons in the country. Four years ago he drove his car off the side of the road and almost died. While he was lucky to survive, he destroyed the nerves in his hands and was no longer able to preform surgery. He spent his entire fortune trying to cure himself only to fall off the face of the Earth two years ago.'

Fury spread his hands across the table, palms up. 'Today he popped up in Central Park, took out a human sorcerer and said that he had magic. Then he did more than make electric whips come out of his hands, but apparently only Thor can see that. That information tells me nothing about who he is now and what he's capable of. So I'm not about to invite him to every top secret meeting we have, Rogers. And I'm not about to invite him to join the Avengers. He'll be a consultant and nothing more; and _only_ when we absolutely need him'

Rubbing a hand across his face, Rogers breathed out heavily. 'Okay,' he said, 'so we only know his background.'

Fury nodded. 'We have no idea what he's been doing for the past two years. Our agents are looking into it, but Strange currently has no house, no land, not even a phone registered in his name. If he's training people in the Mystic Arts then it's not anywhere we can access.'

'So we've got nothing, basically,' Rogers said. 'He can do _magic_ but we don't know if he's a good guy or not.'

'I appreciate your concerns, Captain,' Fury said. 'And believe me; everybody on this team needs to continue to question everything that's happening. With Loki so close to victory, we can't afford to let anything slip.'
Rogers jolted at that; his eyes widened and his mouth fell open. 'He's... close to victory?' the soldier echoed.

Nodding, Fury said, 'Less than a dozen bases remain and hundreds of agents have been killed. Coulson's trying to recruit new ones but with the rate that they keep dying, Loki's going to finish us all off before the next batch can get through training.' He sighed and reached up to rub his good eye, fingers rough. 'Unfortunately we are nowhere near close to hunting down whatever leaks we have. And God forbid Stark play nicely and give us updates on how his search is going.'

'Tony hasn't found anything?'

'Like I said; God forbid Stark play nicely,' Fury said. 'We have no fucking idea if he's got a leak or not. It's not as though he's keeping us informed.'

'Have you asked him?' Rogers questioned.

'He and Banner both,' Fury said. 'However, JARVIS seems to only be letting every other message through- when we can leave a message. Either that or Stark's ignoring us.'

'But Tony was here yesterday-'

'And flew off before I could ask him one goddamn question,' Fury cut in. 'We're trying here, Rogers, but there's not a lot I can do when your team mates don't help.'

'Okay,' Rogers said, eyes somewhere on Fury's desk, 'okay, uh... Tony knows Strange, right?' Fury raised his eyebrows, wondering what Rogers was getting at. 'I mean, he and Strange acted like they knew each other,' Rogers added.

'In a sense they do,' Fury agreed slowly. When Rogers just waited, gaze back on Fury, Fury said, 'Doctor Strange was once a rich man, Captain. He and Stark ran in similar circles; attended the same parties, the same functions, the same charity auctions. As far as we can tell they were acquaintances; nothing more.'

'So we talk to Tony,' Rogers said. Fury pursed his lips. It was clear by the look on Rogers' face that the man's mind was already made up; he was going to storm into Stark's penthouse and demand answers as soon as possible.

'And is that wise, Captain Rogers?' Fury asked.

'What do you-

'We still don't know how long Stark plans on remaining a part of the Avengers,' Fury interrupted. 'From what Agents Romanov and Barton have told me, Stark is on the fence.'

'He-' Rogers paused, frowned. 'I don't... I still have to ask him, Director. Strange knows magic. For all we know Loki's been working with him since he escaped Asgard and returned to Earth. If Strange is on Loki's side then we can't let him back aboard the Helicarrier.'

'Yes, Rogers, I am very aware of that,' Fury said.

'So I ask Tony,' Rogers said. 'I can ask him about Strange and find out if he's had any luck finding a breech or something with JARVIS. Maybe he'll tell me more than he would tell you; we're friends.'

He looked so concerned that Fury didn't have the heart to say no. Fury didn't trust Stark; hell, like
he'd told Rogers, half the time he wanted to toss Stark overboard and be done with the man. But SHIELD needed his technology and, for now, they still needed Stark.

Still... letting Rogers just barge into the man's personal home and *interrogate* him wasn't a good idea. Sometimes Rogers could do subterfuge. But when it was with people he was close to? The man was far too easy to read.

'Fine,' Fury finally said, 'if you want to question Stark, have at it. But be careful, Rogers. You know how volatile Stark can be. Piss him off and he'll quit the team faster than you can ask anything about Strange.'

Rogers nodded.

'Take someone with you,' Fury added. 'Barton or Romanov should be free. At the very least they might ask questions you don't think of.'

'I'll take Clint; I just saw him talking to someone a few rooms over.' Rogers was quick, half out of his chair already and seemingly determined to go find Stark that second. 'I know that Tony hasn't been very helpful lately, Director, but maybe he'll talk to me when I mention how many bases remain.'

'No!' Fury snapped and Rogers frowned.

'Why-'

'There's no reason to share that with Stark,' Fury said. His heart was hammering in his chest. He couldn't... *wouldn't* let Rogers spread that information around; not to anyone, but especially not to Stark. Because if Romanov and Barton were right... if Stark was the mole...

Then again... maybe the guy would get cocky. Maybe he'd fuck up. And then Fury would finally know where his loyalties lay.

'Just ask Stark for an update and any information he remembers about Strange,' Fury finished. 'Please.'

Rogers nodded slowly before standing fully and leaving the office. Fury pushed his chair forward and slid his keyboard back across the table. He felt some of the tension leak from his shoulders when he thought about Barton accompanying Rogers to Stark Tower. At least with Barton accompanying him, Rogers couldn't blurt out too much about the absolute fucking *shit* storm SHIELD were currently in.

Fury tried not to think about Strange and the danger he could bring as he typed.

{oOo}

'And what the hell am I supposed to do with this?' Clint demanded. The scientist fidgeted with the black box nervously and Clint pinched the bridge of his nose. The guy was gonna give him a migraine.

'We've updated it since the last one was destroyed,' the man explained. 'I know that you weren't able to test it, Agent Barton, but perhaps this one-'
Clint!

Clint and the scientist turned to see Steve pushing his way into the lab. Clint raised his eyebrows as the soldier hurried over to him. 'What?'

Steve frowned. 'Are you okay?'

'Yeah; I'm fine,' Clint muttered. He didn't know why everyone was so goddamn concerned about him lately. He got enough worried looks from Natasha and Phil; he didn't need them from Captain America, too. 'Just give me that!' Clint said and took the box from the scientist. The man scurried away as Clint shoved it into his back pocket. 'What's got you in such a hurry, oh fearless leader?' Clint asked as he headed out of the lab. Steve easily kept up with him, falling into step beside Clint as they turned left and walked down a corridor.

'I'm going to Stark Tower,' Steve said.

'And? How was that news worthy? As far as Clint knew, the Avengers still lived there. Unless Stark had lost his mind and kicked them out since Clint had last seen Natasha.

'Fury told me that Tony and Doctor Strange used to know each other,' Steve said. 'Or, uh, they ran in similar circles?'

Clint snorted. 'Of course they did. Strange was once the best in his field and one of the richest dudes in the state. You think they didn't run into each other at all those goddamn swanky parties Pepper's always dragging Tony to?'

'Tony might know more about Strange than SHIELD does,' Steve explained, 'and Fury said that SHIELD are having no luck finding any security breeches on their end. I'm going to ask Tony about Strange and JARVIS- maybe he's found something but doesn't feel like sharing because... well...'

'Because he's Tony Stark,' Clint finished for him. Steve just nodded. 'Okay, Steve, what does any of this have to do with me?'

They stopped near the cafeteria. Clint folded his arms and leaned against the door frame.

'Fury told me that I should take you or Natasha with me.'

Clint frowned. 'Why?'

'Maybe Tony will open up if there's two of us there?' Steve suggested. 'Maybe you'll ask something I won't? Maybe today Tony hates me but likes you?' Clint chuckled. 'I just think it's a good idea for the both of us to go,' Steve added. 'Maybe if one of us annoys him the other can calm him down.'

What has my life come to, Clint mused, when I have to accompany a super soldier to a billionaire's skyscraper just in case?

His life was fucked up; that was the answer.

'Yeah, alright,' Clint said, already thinking about the black box in his pocket. He had no data from the last one; as far as he knew, it had been destroyed when Tony's lab had gone boom. He could test this one after he and Steve had talked to Stark. 'Let's go, then; I haven't eaten today and I'm starving.'
Clint and Steve bypassed the civilian elevators and headed towards their private ones. At the very end of the corridor was a set of gold doors and a keypad. The pad was currently red, as it always was when there wasn't an emergency; the Avengers didn't have access to Tony's penthouse unless there was an emergency or they had Tony's permission.

Well, not any more. Once upon a time Stark hadn't cared where they went. Now everything was locked up and they needed Tony's permission just to enter his living room.

Steve pressed his thumb to the pad and waited.

'How can I help you today, Captain Rogers?' JARVIS' voice sounded from somewhere above the door.

'I need to talk to Tony,' Steve said. 'Is he in?'

'Mr Stark is in his penthouse, Captain Rogers,' JARVIS answered. And... that was it. Because even Tony Stark's AI was a goddamn smartass.

'Can we see him?' Clint chimed in.

'Mr Stark is currently signing Stark Industries paperwork with Miss Walden on floor four. Please give me one moment.'

JARVIS went silent at that and Clint shrugged his shoulders at Steve.

It took less than a minute for JARVIS to open Stark's private elevator and allow them access. Clint raised his eyebrows as he and Steve stepped inside. 'Guess Tony's in a good mood,' Clint said.

'While doing paperwork?' Steve said.

'A really good mood,' Clint added.

Steve shook his head and they road the elevator in silence. Soon it dinged and allowed them into Tony's penthouse. The fourth floor was done up in warm brown wood with gold highlights, the main room giving them a view of the helipad and New York City's skyline just beyond.

Stark was sitting on one of the sofas with Lily Walden to his left. There was a stack of paperwork on the table between them but Tony was currently scrolling through something on a StarkPad.

'Agent Barton; Captain Rogers,' Tony said without looking up. 'How can I help you today?'

Clint nearly winced; overly polite and using their titles? He wasn't in a good mood, then.

'We wanted to talk to you about what happened in Central Park,' Steve said. He hesitated and glanced at Walden. 'In private.'

Tony clicked his tongue. 'I have a lot of shit to get through right now, Stevie. And a meeting at some point today.'

'3pm,' Walden said. She sent a brief smile the Avengers' way. 'Mr Rogers, Mr Barton.'

'Miss Walden,' Steve greeted while Clint just nodded. 'I am sorry to interrupt, Tony. But with that
'Like I said,' Tony began, only for Walden to interrupt;

'That's okay, Mr Stark.' She stood and took the StarkPad from him. 'I can file everything you've already signed while you speak to your team-mates. We don't have many more forms to go through.'

Tony sighed and glanced at the papers still stacked atop the centre table. 'Yeah, right,' he said, 'just a few.'

Walden smiled brightly at him before smoothly moving through the living room and down the hallway. Clint watched her disappear into the kitchen before approaching Tony.

Tony stood and stretched his arms over his head before sighing again. 'If I'm gonna talk to you two, then I need a drink.'

Clint watched Tony round the bar and start searching for a bottle and glass.

'Tony...' Steve began and Stark looked up at him, a bottle of amber liquid in one hand. 'Are you okay?'

'Just peachy,' Stark grunted and poured himself a drink. 'Get on with it, Steve.'

Clint moved further into the room. 'You don't seem okay,' he said.

'And you're an expert on me, are you, Barton?' Stark snapped.

Steve actually jumped while Clint just raised his eyebrows. He watched Stark close his eyes and take a deep breath. But when he opened them he was no calmer than he had been before. If anything, Clint and Steve's mere presence annoyed him.

'What do you want?' Stark asked.

'I don't seem to remember pissing you off lately, Stark,' Clint commented.

Stark turned his attention from Steve to Clint, his eyebrows quirked slightly. 'Really? I thought Capsicle wanted to discuss Strange, not whether or not I still like you people.'

'Like us... Tony, we're team mates!' Steve said.

Tony actually laughed at that. Clint felt it reverberate through his skull and winced, but refrained from reaching up to clutch at his suddenly aching temples. He was getting better at ignoring the dull throb.

'Steve, are you and I forgetting that conversation we all had however long ago?' Stark asked. 'I'm not sure how much longer I want to stay on this team. If you think that we're still as chummy as we were after we first captured Loki, then you're going senile.'

'Tony...' Steve stepped closer to him and Clint watched Stark down his entire drink. He poured himself another one. 'I know that SHIELD can be difficult to deal with,' Steve continued, 'and I agree with you; what Natasha said when Loki first started attacking SHIELD bases was completely out of line.'

'Oh, you remember that, do you?' Stark interrupted. "Cause she sure seems to have forgotten. Every other day she's nagging me about the magic sensor and JARVIS having a leak and four hundred
other things. I'm surprised she hasn't scaled the side of the Tower just to fucking annoy me.'

'Tony-

But Stark held up a hand and Steve shut his mouth. Tony sipped from his glass and topped it off before putting the bottle aside. 'Look, just forget it. One day soon I'll either decide to outright quit, or we'll continue working like this until one or all of us die.' He smirked. 'Maybe Loki will just kill us all before I have to make that decision.'

Steve clearly wanted to say something but wisely remained silent. Clint edged his way around the room until he could sit on one of the maroon couches.

'Anyway,' Tony continued and walked around the bar, 'what did you wanna talk about? Stephen?'

'I... yes.' Steve licked his lips. 'I spoke to Fury about Doctor Strange.'

'Why?' Tony asked.

Clint frowned. 'Are you forgetting how he just stepped out of some type of fucking portal in the middle of Central Park?''

'I was there, Barton; my memory is one of my better traits.' Tony tipped his glass in Clint's direction. 'We then all scuttled back to the Helicarrier like good little Avengers, discussed some shit, and I flew back home to fuck my boyfriend. What else is there to talk about?'

'Strange, Tony,' Clint said before Steve could; the soldier was clearly beginning to lose his patience. Stark had that effect on people. 'We can't trust him.'

Stark rolled his eyes. 'Yeah, Barton, I'm very much on the same page as you in regards to Stephen. I wouldn't trust that asshole as far as I can throw him.' He pouted and looked down at his arms. 'I gotta hit my gym more.'

'So you agree that we need to investigate Strange,' Steve said. He'd followed Tony around the bar and was standing just before him, arms crossed over his chest.

Tony took a sip of his drink. 'Well yeah, Spangles, I think we should investigate him. I think we should follow him until he realises that he's being followed and then either shouts at us to stop, revokes his offer of being SHIELD's consultant, or attacks us and reveals that he was working with Loki all along.'

'You think that's a possibility?' Clint asked.

'Yeah,' Tony said, 'I do. Loki was working with von Doom, despite Doom being mortal. I'll admit that Thor's our best source of information on all things Loki, but the dude has to come to terms with the fact that the maniac we're now fighting isn't his brother. People change, and Loki clearly has split personalities if all the stories Thor's told us are even remotely true.'

Clint glanced at Steve, who was staring at Tony, digesting everything Tony had just said.

'Anything else?' Tony asked. 'Or did you want me to personally follow Stephen? 'Cause I haven't quite worked out how to teleport just yet, or follow some random asshole who can draw circles in the world and step through them. Give me time, though; I'm sure I can work it out.' He threw a wink Steve's way before dropping onto the sofa opposite Clint.

Shaking his head, Steve said, 'What do you know about Strange? What can you tell us?'
'He's an asshole.'

Clint snorted. 'Yeah; we got that, Tony.'

'He's pretty much me, only not as pretty, smart, or rich,' Tony elaborated. Clint rolled his eyes. 'And I mean that in the very nicest way possible. He's as up himself as I am; a classic narcissist who only cared about fame, fortune, and himself. A serial playboy, though not as heavily followed by the media as I am. He was a multi-millionaire but squandered all of that away when he had his little accident.'

'Little?' Steve interrupted. He moved to stand between the two circular sofas, Clint and Tony now on either side of him. 'Fury said that he drove his car off the road and damaged all the nerves in his hands.'

Tony whistled. 'Boy, Stevie, Fury gave you the kid-friendly version.' When Steve just frowned, clearly confused, Tony continued; 'Stephen was lucky to live, Steve. He swerved off the road and down a goddamn mountain; flipped his car a dozen times before slamming to a stop in a fence. The steering wheel completely crushed his hands- almost crushed his face, too. The fact that he walked away with only nerve damage in his hands is a fucking miracle.

'Of course,' Tony mused, eyes on his drink, 'he might have suffered more injuries than I'm aware of; I only know about the nerve damage because he had to retire. A couple of journalists following up on his recovery found bank documents detailing Stephen's thrilling adventure down voodoo land; he sunk every penny he owned into every medicinal practice on the planet. Anything that sounded even remotely like it could cure him, Stephen paid for it. Last I heard he was broke and had left the country. I had no idea he was even alive until he turned up in Central Park. I figured he'd offed himself in some third world country; or been murdered by one of the healers he thought could actually fix him.'

Clint and Steve were both silent at that, thinking. Tony took a gulp of his drink.

'When was the last time you saw him?' Clint finally asked. 'In person,' he added when Stark glanced at him.

'A few months before his accident,' Tony said. 'Three? Four? Who the fuck knows. JARVIS probably knows; I don't doubt that the event was photographed.' He pointed a finger at the ceiling. 'JARVIS, that wasn't an order to start searching; I really don't give a fuck.'

'Yes, Sir,' the AI promptly responded.

'And that's all you know?' Clint asked. 'What about his faith? His political leanings? Other beliefs?'

'Christ, Barton, we never fucked; Stephen and I shared no pillow talk.'

Clint rolled his eyes. 'Seriously?' he demanded.

Stark shrugged. 'I honestly don't know. He was a Democrat, I think; I vaguely remember him attending some Democratic fundraising thing. Like myself, he was an atheist; we had a lot of fun pissing off various people with all our science talk. He was a showman; a play boy; the smartest dude in most rooms until I walked in. He always wanted to be the best at whatever he did, so he only ever did what he knew he'd excel at. Stephen wouldn't undertake any task that he didn't think he'd be fantastic at.'

'But magic?' Clint asked. 'The occult? The Mystic Arts or whatever the fuck he called it? How could someone like him- an atheist and a man of science, by your own account- even believe in
something like that, let alone manage to find out that it was true and become a master at it?'

'His accident,' Tony said. 'Believe me; something like that changes a person, Barton. Remember when I was a playboy? Remember when the media reported on me boozing and gambling my nights away? Don't forget that when I was blown up and kidnapped I came back a different person. Stephen's trauma wasn't quite the same as mine, but it was still trauma.'

Tony finished off his drink and stood. 'I don't know what you want me to say, Barton. Stephen and I were never friends; we gravitated towards each other at galas because we were both smartasses who liked science. His Wikipedia page could probably tell you more than I could.'

As Tony walked back to the bar, Steve finally spoke again; 'Do you think he'd join Loki?'

'Like I said, Rogers.' Tony stopped behind his bar and stared at the man. 'Trauma; it changes everyone. I know that I'm not about to become BFFs with Stephen Strange and share everything with him. Want my opinion?'

Clint really didn't, but Rogers nodded.

'Treat him like you would any other recruit,' Stark said. 'Give him access to some things and information about others. Test him. Ask him to train with you as a way to get to know each other or some shit. Only when he's proven himself, or when you know that you can trust him, do you bring him further into the fold. Just watch him a bit more carefully than you would anyone else.' He tipped his glass at them and smirked. 'Remember; he's got that dangerous voodoo power.'

Shaking his head, Clint stood. 'That's all we're gonna get out of you, isn't it?'

'I don't know what you expected,' Tony said as he busied himself with cleaning his glass. 'You'd get more information outta one of Stephen's exes; I really never knew the man that well.'

'Right,' Clint said, 'well, I guess we'll let you get back to your paperwork.'

Tony shot him a glare. 'Why thanks, Barton, that's really kind of you.'

Clint gave him the sweetest smile he could muster before heading for the elevator. Steve remained where he was and Tony turned his attention to the blond.

'Anything else you wanted, Oh Captain, My Captain?' Tony asked.

'SHIELD aren't having any luck finding a mole amongst the remaining SHIELD agents,' Steve said. He swallowed.

'They haven't found a leak yet,' Steve added.

'Yet,' Tony echoed.

'Have you?' was Steve's question.

Tony shrugged his shoulders, far too unconcerned for someone who's AI could have been hacked. Clint watched him from the entry way. 'Nothing that I've found so far, Stevie. I've run various programmes but so far have nothing. I'm writing some new ones and scanning JARVIS again soon. After that I'm shutting JARVIS down and going through his hardware by hand. Stark Tower will be completely vulnerable the entire time, so I'll be closing Stark Industries for the day.'
'Okay,' Steve said, 'just keep me posted, yeah? We need to keep information flowing if we have any hope of stopping Loki.'

Tony rolled his eyes and saluted Steve. 'You'll be the first person I call if I get a funny feeling in my belly, Captain Rogers.'

Steve just stared at Stark, apparently as concerned about him as Clint was. But finally he shook his head, apologised again for the interruption, and left. Stark watched them go.

'Did he seem off to you?' Steve asked once they were in the elevator.

Clint laughed. 'Steve, there's always something off about Tony; he's a weirdo.'

'Yeah, but... he seemed different,' Steve argued. 'More so than usual.'

Shrugging, Clint leaned back against the elevator walls. 'You heard him; trauma changes everyone.'

Steve was clearly still confused- still concerned- but it was nothing new to Clint. He'd been worried about Tony Stark since the guy had first revealed that he was Iron Man. Is there was anyone who wasn't cut out to be a hero, it was Tony Stark.

Clint was by no means unthankful for what Tony had done ever since he'd become Iron Man; the guy had privatised world peace, if only briefly; he'd made leaps and bounds in science since he was a freaking child; he'd created and updated and improved practically everything that SHIELD used; he'd been willing to sacrifice himself to save New York during Loki's invasion. The guy was a hero.

But it was everything else... the narcissism, the near-manic episodes, the way Stark could be so damn spiteful in certain situations. It was all shit that Clint had seen in the many, many terrible men and women that he'd been sent to kill. Even evil people were innocent before they took that first step towards gun trafficking or slavery or drug distribution.

What worried Clint was that Tony Stark had the makings of a great hero. But he was also one push away from being a complete maniac.

'Clint?'

Clint jolted and looked up. The elevator had reached the lobby and Steve was standing beyond the doors, concern etched even deeper into his face.

'Sorry,' Clint said. He exited Tony's private elevator and took a few steps before stopping. 'I'm actually gonna hit the gym; I'll see you later.'

'You sure?' Steve asked. When Clint nodded, Steve said, 'Okay. Remember to eat, though. We need every man in top form. It'll only be a matter of time until Loki attacks another base.'

Nodding again, Clint waved briefly before turning for the Avengers' elevators. He pressed his thumb against the pad and waited for JARVIS to let him in.

'To the gym, Agent Barton?' JARVIS asked once the doors had shut.

'Yeah,' Clint said. There was a blind spot in one corner of the gym; when Natasha wasn't throwing one of the boys around the entire damn room, the cushioned mats were stacked up neatly next to the treadmill Stark had designed for Steve, Thor and Bruce's increased strength. All Clint had to do was lose an arrow behind the pile and...
He shoved his hands into the back pockets of his trousers. The plastic of the black box was warm from his body heat.

'Please exercise safely, Agent Barton,' JARVIS said when Clint had stepped out into the gym.

'Thanks, JARVIS,' Clint said and headed for the armoury that held his bows.
Chapter 59

Chapter Notes

Author's Note: Just a few things before we start the chapter. Firstly; I have re-worked the remaining plot due to new ideas and therefore some old ideas no longer fit into the new plan and had to be cut. So I currently have 71 chapters planned; that's 12 chapters left. I also have a sequel and some other things in the works to add to this universe.

Secondly; I have disabled anonymous commenting on this work. I am sorry for this, however there was a user on Fanfiction.Net leaving hate on every single chapter of the story. While I have blocked them on that website, I didn't want them coming over here and leaving the same bullshit. Hence you need an account to now comment on this work. You have my apologies if you can no longer comment on this work due to that.

Dreamer

Tony sighed and sat heavily on the sofa. He scented the fresh drink in his hand and swirled the glass gently as he gazed across the room.

That... had not gone well, had it? He hadn't sold Strange out so much as told the truth; if Tony hadn't told the Avengers to be suspicious of the doctor, that would cause suspicion. Tony wasn't well known for getting along with anyone unless he wanted to get them into bed. His public interactions with Stephen Strange were well known. If SHIELD wanted to know about their past meetings, all they had to do was Google it.

But the rest of it... the anger Tony had felt... that could cause a problem.

Of course, Tony mused to himself, I could just step away now. What do I need the Avengers for, really? Bruce can get aboard the Helicarrier. He can find out what Loki and I need to know. Do I even need to be a part of the team any more?

No, scratch that; did Tony need to pretend to be a part of the team any more?

He was sipping his drink, ruminating on what his next step would be, when Loki teleported into the room.

The air changed around Tony before Loki appeared. Tony had his head cocked, exploring the feelings in his chest when his eyes registered Loki...

And Barton, hogtied and gagged at Loki's feet. Tony blinked and took another sip of his drink, let the liquid burn his tongue before swallowing. It left a nice, warm glow down his throat.

'Good evening, my dear,' Loki said, like he and Tony hadn't spent the entire damn day together.

'Hey, honey,' Tony replied. 'So, last I knew you were in the kitchen pretending to be my assistant.' He gestured at Barton with his glass, amused by the way Barton was fighting his restraints and staring at Tony with a mixture of confusion and fear. 'Is there a reason you brought me a tied-up SHIELD agent?'
'Yes,' Loki said. He pulled a slim black device from his jeans pocket and tossed it at Tony. Tony caught it with his free hand and turned the thing around to inspect it. 'Huh.'

'Yes,' Loki repeated.

It was another one of those... what had Barton called it? A black box? Other than being slimmer in design than the last, it looked no different. Tony sipped his drink before leaning forward to put it on the table.

'Barton,' he said and reached down to tap Barton atop the head with the device, 'why have you, once again, brought this shit into my Tower?'

Barton said something but his words were muffled by the leather Loki had used to keep him quiet. It looked painful, too; the strips had been wrenched tightly around his head, material digging into the corners of Barton's mouth and making his skin bright red.

'Sorry; didn't catch that,' Tony said. He looked back up at Loki. 'No, really; is there a good reason you brought Barton here? I should have been a bit clearer earlier.'

Loki huffed. 'Do you not want to study that device, Stark?'

'I have studied it,' Tony stated. 'You were there when I studied it. You were also there when I took a hammer to the damn thing and had JARVIS record the entire experience so that one day I could sit down, re-watch it, and have a good laugh over how stupid Barton was to bring this thing to my attention.'

'In all fairness; Barton had the misfortune of stumbling across us together,' Loki said, voice smooth. 'It wasn't as though we caught him because we were clever.'

Rolling his eyes, Tony grabbed his drink and fell back against the sofa. 'Whatever.'

'It may be better than the last one,' Loki continued. 'Do you not wish to have a look?'

Tony grunted but put his glass back down. Loki was right; Tony didn't want Barton running around with another bug that actually managed to block JARVIS. He found a switch on one corner and gave it a click. 'JARVIS?'

'I am experiencing only slight issues when Agent Barton enters a room, Mr Stark,' JARVIS explained. 'While the audio is perfectly clear, the video is slightly distorted at times.'

Tony frowned. 'And you didn't tell me that when Barton left because ...?'

'I told Mr Laufeyson, Mr Stark,' JARVIS replied. 'He said that he would take care of it.'

'And I did,' Loki said. He gestured at Barton for emphasis and Tony snorted.

'Alright,' Tony said, 'slightly distortion I can deal with.' He tossed the black box at Barton and sipped from his glass. 'Now, Barton; what to do with you?'

Barton squirmed on the floor. His hands were white from fighting his bonds, his face bright red and spit sliding down his chin.

Tony glanced up at Loki. 'Any ideas?'

'We could test your magic on him,' Loki said.
Chuckling, Tony said, 'As fun as that sounds, we shouldn't risk it. What if Thor can tell that he's been attacked with magic?'

'Mm; true,' Loki mused. 'How about we ask Barton what he wants his fate to be?'

Without waiting for Tony to answer, Loki bent over and pulled the tie off of Barton's mouth.

'You son of a fucking bitch!' Barton snarled.

Loki pressed his boot against the back of Barton's head, forcing the man's face into the carpet. 'Now, now, Barton; do play nicely,' Loki cooed.

Tony laughed.

Growling against the floor, Barton tried to look at Tony; 'You're working with him!' he spat.

'Duh.' Tony rolled his eyes. 'We've been through this before, Barton; how dare you, you're fucking him, I'm gonna kill you, blah blah.'

Barton's eyes widened and he once again tried to twist free; Loki pressed him further into the floor.

'What the hell are you talking about?' Barton demanded.

Tony leaned forward, drink clasped between his knees. 'Getting any headaches lately, Barton?' he asked. Barton went still. 'Any flashes of voices? Echoes of laughter? Anything weird?'

Barton opened his mouth but nothing came out.

'You should probably look into that; maybe have a doctor check your head out,' Tony suggested. He leaned back. 'After all; didn't all of that shit happen to you the first time Loki invaded your head?'

There was silence, a pause in the very air around them; and then Barton exploded, lashing out so fiercely that Loki stumbled back.

'YOU FUCKING BASTARD!' Barton roared. 'YOU'RE IN MY FUCKING HEAD AGAIN, YOU SICK FUCK!'

'This is what you brought to me!' Tony shouted when Barton continued screaming and calling them every damn curse word he could think of. 'A dude who's losing his mind because you can't stop tinkering with it!'

Loki stepped forward and crouched down. His hand whipped out, fingers tangling in Barton's hair, and he slammed the man face-first into the carpet. Barton's words were instantly stifled, but he didn't stop trying to fight back.

'I can't deny that I enjoy our brief moments together,' Loki said, giving Tony a smile.

Tony raised his eyebrows. 'Should I be jealous?'

Loki's face immediately fell and Tony grinned. 'Don't make me kill you, Stark,' Loki said. 'Deal or not, I will end you.'

'Sure you will,' Tony said through a giggle. 'You love me too much to kill me.'

Sighing, Loki released Barton. 'Unfortunately that is true.'
'How long have I known?' Barton demanded. There were tears in his eyes- of frustration? Terror? Tony didn't know or care.

'How long have you known about Loki and me?' Tony elaborated. When Barton nodded jerkily, Tony said, 'Oh, I dunno; a couple of weeks now. Sometime after you, Romanov and Fury discussed trying to get my boyfriend to spy on me'

Barton's eyes widened. 'You've bugged the Helicarrier,' he realised.

'Christ, Clint; I designed the Helicarrier.' Tony chuckled. 'Do you really think that SHIELD can keep me out of anything computer-related? I fucking build them for a living.'

'And you erased it.' Barton tried to look at Loki but Loki didn't budge an inch, hand still pressing Barton firmly down. 'You got into my head and erased all of it.'

'Of course I did,' Loki told him. 'The Tesseract may be safely in Asgard; the sceptre I was forced to carry destroyed. But we still have a connection, Barton. And believe me-' Loki leaned down to hiss his next words directly into Barton's ear, '- I will enjoy tormenting you when Anthony's true colours are revealed.'

'You son of a fucking-' Whatever else Barton had to say was muffled by more leather. Loki released him and stood, leaving Barton free to thrash and squirm to his heart's content.

'Now what?' Tony asked.

'Can we kill him?' Loki mused.

Tony shook his head. 'I thought you wanted to torment him? Didn't you mention it, oh, all of four fucking seconds ago?'

'Still...' Loki hummed. 'Sometimes I believe that it would be worth it. I very much want to cut him open.'

'You're a psychopath,' Tony stated.

One sleek eyebrow rising slowly, Loki turned to survey his partner. 'And?'

Tony smirked. 'And I love you.'

Before Loki could respond JARVIS interrupted them; 'Mr Stark, Dr Banner wishes to speak to you and Mr Laufeyson; shall I grant him access?'

'Yeah, sure,' Tony said. He looked back down at Barton. 'Invisibility,' Tony said, 'you can take him into the elevator. Make it seem like he's having a fit or something. JARVIS will kindly tell me that Barton's collapsed in my elevator and I'll take him to the Helicarrier.'

'Now, or after Banner arrives?' Loki questioned.

He watched Tony closely as Tony pondered that. Smiled when Tony said, 'After.'

The elevator dinged a few seconds later and Bruce shuffled his way into the room. He didn't look as tired as he once had and he seemed to have found some clothes that fit him better. Tony really needed to take him shopping.

'Hey Tony, Loki,' Bruce greeted. It wasn't until he'd gotten closer to the sofas that he spotted Clint. 'Oh my God!'
Tony opened his mouth-

His magic fizzed. Loki stood tall, entire attention snapping to the glass windows. An orange spark leapt into existence before growing, moving, turning into a perfect circle. Its surface melted away to reveal a dark room filled with books, walls only lit by lamps every few feet.

And from the circle Stephen Strange and an Asian man appeared, both wearing grim looks and clothing right out of a *Lord of the Rings* movie.

- Tony closed his mouth.

Loki moved himself between Tony, Strange and the mystery man. Bruce tried to make himself smaller. On the floor, Barton squirmed.

'Well,' Strange mused, blue eyes taking in the room, 'this wasn't quite what I expected.'

'Why is there a man tied up at your feet?' the Asian man asked.

Tony finished off his drink and slid the glass onto the table. 'Introductions?' he offered.

{oOo}

'Let me get this straight,' Strange started. He'd moved around the room, was now leaning against the bar with his arms folded across his chest. Wong- as Strange had introduced him as- was staring out the windows as though he'd never seen New York before. Bruce had collapsed onto the sofa opposite Tony, face in his hands and eyes peeking at Barton every now and then.

Poor Barton, still tied up and shouting words against his gag.

Loki was once against standing between Tony and any threat that Strange or Wong might present. Tony's glass was empty and he really wanted a refill.

'Is anyone in this room actually straight?' Tony queried.

Strange frowned. 'That's what you want to discuss right now?'

'Not really,' Tony said, 'but you stopped talking and I needed to fill the silence.' He stood and moved to get another drink but Loki followed him, a very tall, very annoyed barrier between Tony and Strange. 'Seriously?' Tony said. 'He's not gonna attack me, Loki. And if he does I doubt he can do much before you rip his throat out.'

'You're the one who doesn't want a deal with him,' Loki said, 'what do you care if I rip his throat out?'

'I don't,' Tony said, 'but I want a drink and my day has already been too long.'

'Why's Clint tied up?' Bruce asked. His voice was shaky and Tony turned to survey him. 'I mean, why is he here?' Bruce continued. 'And tied up? You told me that he knows, but...'

He trailed off and Tony said, 'Barton brought contraband into my Tower; Loki made sure that he
knew how naughty that was.'

'I'm aligning myself with insane people,' Strange sighed.

'You are only figuring that out now?' Wong asked. He'd finally stopped staring at the windows, his back to them and hands linked before him. He glanced at Barton. 'Are you going to kill that man?'

'No,' Loki said. 'Not yet, at least. But I need to stage his accident and that cannot happen until we discuss why you are here.' His eyes swivelled to Strange. 'In the future you will wait until we invite you; disregard this order and there will be no deal.'

Strange raised his hands in the universal sign of *I'm unarmed, please calm the fuck down, no need
to gut me.*

'Can I get that drink now?' Tony asked. Loki stepped aside, leaving Tony free to approach the bar and grab the bottle he'd already opened. 'Anyone want one?'

'Against my better judgement; yes,' Strange said. Wong shook his head and Bruce didn't answer. Loki rarely drank so Tony topped up his glass and poured a fresh one for Strange before sliding it across the bar.

'Why are you here?' Tony asked Strange. 'And you,' he added, pointing at Bruce.

'I came to talk about the magic sensor,' Bruce answered first. 'Fury's asking a lot of questions.'

'So keep stalling him,' Tony said, 'it's not like he'll know if you've figured out magic. Strange?'

Strange glanced between Tony and Bruce, raised his eyebrows when he finally turned to face Tony. Not a smart move, in Tony's opinion; Strange had his back to Loki. You never turned your back on a predator.

'What?' Tony said.

'Since when is Dr Banner on your side?' Strange asked.

'Since he decided that I'm his very bestest friend in the whole wide world and he didn't wanna hurt me 'cause I'm that awesome,' Tony said, voice monotone. Strange rolled his eyes. 'Why are you here, Strange?'

'We discussed a deal, remember?' Strange said. He glanced at Loki but focused his attention on Tony after a beat.

'You said you'd talk to your people,' Tony reminded him.

'And I've done that,' Strange said.

'Stephen did not share the exact details,' Wong spoke. 'There was no need to reveal what, exactly, Loki was planning, or who he was planning it with.'

'So what did you tell them? And who's them?' Tony asked.

'The Keepers of the Sanctums are those tasked with guarding one of our three bases,' Strange said. 'We store valuable, and often dangerous, magical artefacts within these bases. The Sanctums are safe havens for all Masters who practice the Mystic Arts. They are also where we keep an eye on Earth and the other dimensions.'
Tony blinked at him. 'Okay, that was a lot of words for my people are dudes who guard our super cool magic lairs.' Strange sighed. 'Anyway, you told these people that you're making a deal with Loki?'

'The Keepers are aware that Loki is causing magical havoc on this world,' Strange said, 'and they're aware that the Avengers are taking too long to deal with it. I told them that I'd approached Loki and offered him a deal; he doesn't change this world with his magic and helps us with any evils we might one day face, and we don't attack him with everything we have.'

'And they bought that?' Tony asked.

'They are weary, of course,' Wong said. 'But they trust Stephen.'

'Wow.' Tony whistled and toasted Strange with his glass. 'Quite the cult you've got going on.'

Strange ignored his comment. 'I told them the truth, Tony. I don't care about this little vendetta you and Loki have against SHIELD. As long as Earth's protections remain in tact, and as long as you and Loki help us keep them in tact, then we have no problems with what you're doing.'

Tilting his head, Tony asked, 'Really, no problems at all? No problem with all the people we're killing?'

'It's something I'm willing to live with,' Strange stated, 'if I can protect my own and keep my oath to protect Earth against attacks via magic and other dimensions.'

'Mm-hmm,' Tony hummed. 'I'll believe that when you sign our contract.'

'And that's why we're here,' Strange said. He gestured at Wong. 'We came here to start negotiations.' He paused and glanced at Barton, then at Bruce. 'I didn't expect you to be entertaining guests when I arrived.'

'Then call before you turn up next time,' Tony muttered.

'As much as I would like to negotiate the exact terms of our deal now,' Loki inserted himself smoothly into the conversation, 'I'm afraid that Barton has to have a medical emergency. Banner, you should go back to your floor and remain there.'

Bruce was up and gone as soon as Loki finished his sentence. Only when the elevator had whisked him away did Loki continue.

'Strange, you will have to return later,' Loki said.

'I gotta wipe some footage and download some stuff of Barton having a fit,' Tony added. 'Then take him to the Helicarrier and no doubt answer four thousand questions about how Barton once again managed to injure himself in my Tower. Who knows when Fury will let me go.'

'I see.' Strange knocked back his drink and placed the empty glass on the counter. 'I guess we'll have to come back.'

'And give us a call, yeah?' Tony suggested. 'Stark Tower has a public number. Call it and tell JARVIS who you are; he'll put you through to me.'

Strange just nodded and raised one hand. He opened a portal as he walked and he and Wong stepped through, this time into a large, sunny room filled with antique furniture and a flat-screen TV hanging on one wall. The portal closed with a zip behind them.
Tony grabbed Strange's empty glass and tossed it in the sink. 'JARVIS, you know the drill.'

'Yes, Sir,' JARVIS responded.

'Ready?' Tony asked Loki.

Loki smirked. 'But of course.'

At his feet, Barton tried to scream.

{oOo}

'That's everything JARVIS has,' Tony added when Fury had finished watching the footage. Another screen showed Barton's hospital room aboard the Helicarrier; Romanov was sitting at his bedside, face blank and arms folded over her chest.

'And he was fine when you saw him?' Fury asked.

Tony shrugged. 'He seemed fine. He and Steve wanted to discuss Stephen; I told them everything I knew. Clint was quiet, but when isn't he quiet?' Fury nodded. 'JARVIS said that Clint and Steve road down to the lobby together before Clint went into the gym. He practised a bit before JARVIS lost him.' Tony frowned. 'Apparently JARVIS' cameras don't pick up everything in the gym; the extra equipment I put in creates blind spots. Clint disappeared behind some gym mats before reappearing next to the elevator. He runs in before throwing himself about and falling to the floor unconscious.'

'He didn't wake up on the way over?'

Tony shook his head. 'There wasn't a quinjet available so I carried him in the suit; it's a bumpy ride but no, he didn't wake up.'

Fury sighed and dropped into his chair. He looked a hundred years older and Tony eyed him silently.

'What the fuck is going on,' Fury muttered. Tony said nothing. 'He's been complaining of headaches,' Fury murmured.

Tony got the feeling that Fury was talking to himself more than anything. Still, he said, 'Headaches? Has he been checked out?'

'Yes,' Fury stated. 'Standard procedure, Stark. Any of my agents show signs of ill health, I have every inch of them examined.'

Tony snorted. 'Dude probably doesn't need that many prostate exams, Fury.' The bastard turned to glare at him and Tony raised his hands. 'Relax. I brought Barton here to you. He isn't dead, so that's at least something, right?'

'Your worry really warms my heart, Stark,' Fury growled out.

'Again; Barton's not dead,' Tony said, 'I'll save my concerns for something I can actually fix or
mourn.' He checked his watch and cursed. 'Gotta run; I'm already late for a meeting.'

Fury just nodded and Tony turned to walk briskly out of the office.

But then he paused and turned back around. 'Oh, and Fury?'

Fury didn't move until Tony had tossed the black box onto the table. Tony saw Fury's shoulders go tense, his fingers twitch towards the device.

Fury turned quickly to face him. 'Listen, Stark-' he began but Tony spoke over him.

'No, you fucking listen. I know what that is, Fury. What, you thought that you could sneak a fucking jammer into my Tower?'

'Stark-'

'You can explain to the Avengers why each of them will be searched before they enter my Tower,' Tony once again interrupted. 'And in a few days I'll be letting you know if I'm leaving the team. Understood?'

Ever so slowly, Fury nodded.

'You bring that shit anywhere near my Tower again and Loki will be the least of your worries,' Tony finished. He held Fury's gaze, let only some of the hatred he felt for the man- for the team he had assembled- leak through. When Fury's eye twitched away Tony turned and left the office.

Part of him wanted to whistle- he always did enjoy seeing Fury's rage and one of the Avengers comatose in a bed- but he did have a real meeting to attend. Loki was actually a pretty good assistant; he certainly paid more attention to Tony's schedule than Tony did.

After that meeting, Tony had to work on some Stark Industries stuff. Then he had to wait for Strange's phone call, whenever the fuck that would come through. After that he planned on taking Loki back to bed. A good fuck would ease the tension that had settled into his shoulders when Rogers and Barton had interrupted his work.

Too bad he hadn't been able to use Barton as a punching bag. That would be good stress release, Tony mused as he made his way through the Helicarrier.
Chapter 60

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“If you were church, I'd get on my knees
Confess my love, I'd know where to be
My sanctuary, you're Holy to me
If you were church, I'd get on my knees
I'd get on my knees”
– Church [Fall Out Boy]

'Loki?' Tony called as he climbed the stairs.
'I already told you where I am!' Loki shouted back.

Tony chuckled. 'Yes, Your Highness,' he muttered as he walked down the hallway and pushed the bedroom door open. 'So, Strange-' Tony stopped dead in his tracks, eyes wide and mouth falling open.

Loki was standing in the middle of the room, using his reflection in the windows to look at himself. Tony would have said something about Loki using the entire wall of mirrors in Tony's walk-in-closet but... shit.

Loki was wearing armour that Tony had never seen before. As he turned to survey himself, Tony allowed his eyes to roam up and down, greedily drinking in every inch that Loki was displaying.

He slowly shut the door behind himself.

Loki's shirt was leather, of course, and sported the same pattern of criss-crossed leather that the previous one had. Only the shirt was shorter and the hem cut cleanly just above Loki's crotch, giving Tony the perfect view of Loki's dick trapped in tight leather. The leather shirt was also coloured a rich, eggplant purple with gold highlights around the collar.

Tony gulped, eyes travelling further down. There were those tight pants again, practically hugging Loki's legs like a second skin, with knee-high boots covering Loki's feet and sporting thick strips of dark purple leather. The pants were black and Tony glimpsed more gold highlights, but unfortunately they were covered by a coat.

It was almost identical to Loki's old one; shorter, Tony noted, the heavy leather only just falling past Loki's knees. There were no slits in this one and the lapels were edged in gold that brightened as it wrapped around the stiff collar at Loki's neck and beneath the metal sloped over Loki's shoulders.
It was also blue on the underside— the same colour as Loki's true skin, Tony realised— with blue patterns slowly creeping up the hem on the back before darkening into ink black. There were more patterns dripping down the collar, similar to the markings Loki gained when he turned Jötunn.

There was more purple leather wrapped around Loki's arms; thick, dark strips that kept Loki's vambraces in place, even darker leather protecting the backs of his hands.

And capping off the entire outfit, finally holding Tony's attention and making him breathe out heavily, was Loki's helmet.

Crown?

It was a cross between the two; the same horns that Loki seemed to favour only sleeker, bent low, gleaming a bright and sharp gold in the lighting of his and Tony's shared bedroom. It covered Loki's entire forehead, a thick piece of gold with blue and purple accents fitted into the metal, before becoming thinner as it swept back, meeting in a dip at the back of Loki's head. The two parts cradling the sides of Loki's head and jaw were just as smooth, just as polished, featuring more purple and blue.

Tony gulped, mouth parched, and continued to ogle his partner as Loki twisted every which way.

'Hmm.' Loki grabbed the hem of his coat and turned to survey the blue creeping up the back. 'More blue, perhaps?' he mused.

'Mr Laufeyson, if I may be of assistance?' JARVIS asked.

Loki paused briefly, eyes still on his reflection. 'Yes, JARVIS?'

'I can record any movements you wish to make in your armour, Sir,' JARVIS said. 'You can immediately replay the footage to see yourself and your full range of movements in your armour.'

'Oh.' Loki frowned and dropped his coat. The hem swished around his legs. Tony tilted his head, eyes following the leather, trying and failing to get a glimpse of Loki's ass in those pants. 'Very well,' Loki finally decided. 'JARVIS, start-' He stopped when he realised that Tony had entered the room. 'Stark,' he said, 'can I help you?'

Tony... wasn't sure if he was capable of speech, in all honesty. He cleared his throat, but only managed to say, 'What-' before coughing and trying again.

Loki looked amused during it all. 'Are you alright?'

'N-Not really,' Tony stuttered. He took a step closer, palms sweaty and fingers itching to touch. 'What's... this?'

'My armour,' Loki stated. Which, duh.

'No, I mean... new?' Wow, Loki had gone and broken him.

Chuckling, Loki said, 'My new armour, Stark. I have been experimenting with what I've been wearing; I think that this is what I will wear when we personally wage war against the Avengers.' He turned once more to look at his reflection. 'Perhaps the coat is too heavy?'

'No!' Tony leapt forward and finally sank his fingers into Loki's chest. It was all smooth, thick leather, the metal pieces still cold to the touch.
Loki raised an eyebrow. 'Is there a problem?'

'Yes!' Tony snapped and Loki frowned. 'If you even think of changing any of this, I'll fucking... do something!'

'What are you on about, Stark?'

'Do you realise how fucking gorgeous you are right now?' Tony demanded. Loki's frown deepened, and then his eyes narrowed, bright orbs grazing over every inch of Tony's face until-

'Oh,' Loki breathed.

'Yeah,' Tony agreed. His eyes dipped to trace the rigid collar of Loki's coat. 'I am so fucking turned on right now that I might actually destroy your armour when I rip it from your body.'

Loki's breathing had sped up, a pink flush tinting his cheeks, but his voice was still smooth honey when he said, 'Is that so?' Tony nodded. 'And what, exactly, do you plan on doing to me?'

'I think I just-'

'No,' Loki interrupted, voice sharp. Tony licked his lips. He was now eyeing Loki's shirt, wondering just how hard he'd have to pull to get it off. 'You will not destroy my armour,' Loki stated. Tony pouted. 'You will remove it from me piece by piece. Only then will you be able to taste me.' Tony's eyes snapped up. A smirk had curled Loki's lips but that blush was still there, those eyes still swallowed by dilated pupils. 'Only when you have removed everything will you be rewarded,' Loki finished.

'Okay,' Tony breathed, 'I can do that.'

He tugged Loki forward by his coat and positioned him at the foot of the bed. Loki allowed the handling, smirk still in place, but he was clearly feeling just as hot as Tony was.

Well, maybe not; because Tony fucking whimpered when he smoothed his hands over Loki's shirt. The leather was butter soft, light glinting off of various sections. Tony slid his fingers beneath the bits of leather before remembering that he'd have to remove the coat first.

Loki watched him, completely silent, chest rising and falling faster with each breath.

'Arms...' Tony coughed. 'Right arm out.'

Loki did as asked and Tony slipped his fingers beneath the heavy material. He had to push Loki's arm back to get him out of the coat; he didn't know how to remove the shoulder plates, nor did he particularly want to waste time on them.

The coat fell to the bed in a heavy heap, then slid to the floor as Tony's fingers roamed Loki's chest, his sides, dipped beneath to touch the smooth, warm flesh of Loki's belly. He got his hand around one hip and squeezed, enjoyed the little gasp Loki couldn't contain. After a few more minutes of petting and stroking and just really, really enjoying the leather, Tony found the strip that would loosen the shirt just enough to slide it over Loki's head.

Tony didn't know how Loki had created all of this- or what animal, exactly, he'd killed to make it- but those were all questions that he could ask later. Once he was done worshipping every inch of this glorious creature that was his.

He pulled the leather strap from Loki's pants and unwound it. Only when he couldn't pull any more
did he let go. Next he took one of Loki's hands in his, smoothed their fingers together and brought Loki's hand up to press a kiss to Loki's palm.

'Anthony,' Loki breathed, Tony's name shaky on his lips.

'I'm getting there,' Tony murmured. His fingers brushed Loki's wrist as he searched for more leather folds. Loki's pulse jumped beneath his prints and Tony smiled. 'Enjoying yourself?'

'Far more than I imagined I would when I put my completed armour on,' Loki admitted. 'What about it has made you so weak?'

'Everything,' Tony admitted. He slid a piece of purple-stained leather from beneath Loki's vambrace. It unwound into one long, thin strap, and Tony dropped it to the floor. His fingers trailed up Loki's forearm, unwound another piece, moved up to his elbow. 'The tight pants help; I can see every inch of those glorious fucking legs. And your cock.'

Loki inhaled sharply as Tony's nails dug into his skin. Tony found the final leather piece and pulled it free. The golden plates were decorated—runes here, a swirl or squiggle there—and Tony made a note to ask about the markings when he wasn't too busy trying not to throw Loki to the floor and fuck him, clothing be damned.

'Your old armour... your coat and shirt both covered your crotch,' Tony murmured. He lowered Loki's arm and moved to the left one. He gave Loki's palm a kiss, a light touch of his tongue, before removing the next vambrace. 'We're lucky you didn't wear this shit when you invaded. I probably would have kneeled for you.'

Loki licked his lips as the second vambrace was dropped. 'Is that so?'

'Oh, yeah,' Tony breathed. He stepped back to admire his work. Loki already looked wrecked; his meticulously put together armour was in ruins. Coat on the floor, armour peeled off and abandoned, shirt loose and leather pants doing absolutely nothing to hide the erection Loki was sporting. 'I mean, I wanted to fuck you when we first met; I'm not going to lie,' Tony admitted. Loki's eyebrows jumped. 'But this is so much better.'

'I did offer to recreate that event, I believe,' Loki murmured. 'Something about you kneeling and me being a merciful god.'

Tony chuckled. 'We can do that.' He pushed his hands beneath Loki's shirt and pressed them against Loki's sides. Loki's breathing was laboured, torso moving rapidly with each breath. Tony scraped his nails up and down Loki's skin until his partner shivered. 'I think what's getting me now is that... you look like Loki again.'

'Excuse me?'

'You look like some other being,' Tony elaborated. 'Like that mysterious, dangerous guy who threw a car across the street only to surrender a few minutes later. You reminded me of how I felt when I first saw you; I was intrigued and awed by you.'

Loki was frowning. 'I...'

Shaking his head, Tony finally grabbed Loki's shirt and lifted. Loki helped, holding his arms above his head so that Tony could slide the leather over and off. Like everything else it was dropped onto the floor. Tony pressed himself up against Loki, the only barrier between their chests a thin Midgardian shirt.
'You were... so much more than I expected,' Tony murmured. 'Especially after I spoke to Thor. You were so much smarter and slicker and every inch of you screamed danger but I wanted to peel you out of your armour and lick every inch of your body.'

Loki shuddered against him. His hands grabbed onto Tony's hips and squeezed. 'I looked at you,' Loki breathed against the top of Tony's head, 'this little mortal who would dare stand against me with no weapon, no armour; he brought only his sharp words and cocky smile to face me, a god of unknown power who had already killed so many...'

'You've said that before,' Tony said.

'We've discussed first impressions before,' Loki responded. 'You did not share the sexual desires you had for me when we first spoke, however.'

Tony smiled and pressed his lips against Loki's chest; a soft kiss before pulling back. 'Pretty sure I told you that I thought you were fucking hot.'

'You did not detail your fantasy of stripping me of my armour, though,' Loki commented.

'True,' Tony agreed. He pressed his hands against Loki's hips before dipping his fingers beneath the hem of those leather pants. 'These need to come off.'

Loki hummed, brushed his lips across Tony's forehead before leaning down to whisper in his ear; 'Take them from me, then.'

'Boots first,' Tony said. Loki said nothing so Tony crouched down before deciding *fuck it*. Despite the connotations that many Midgardians had with the particular position, Tony got down on one knee and looked up at Loki.

Loki was noticeably panting, his fingers curled into fists by his sides. Tony only took his eyes off of his partner when he had to figure out how to slip the leather off of Loki's boots. When that was done he pulled each one off, Loki helpfully sliding his fingers into them to ease his feet out.

He was wearing socks- something that Asgardians didn't believe in, apparently, but something that Loki had learned to wear while cohabiting with Tony. Tony slid them off, too, but remained where he was.

'Tony,' Loki said.

'Yeah?'

'I do believe that I have a kneeling fetish after all,' Loki said.

Tony laughed. He couldn't even remember the amount of times he'd made a comment like that to Loki; at first it had been to piss him off during fights. Now, well...

'We're definitely recreating our first proper meeting,' Tony said. He stayed on one knee but reached up to touch the hem of Loki's pants. 'We should take these off.'

Like with the boots, Loki helped. He shimmied his hips as Tony pulled the leather down, over his thighs and down his calves. Loki kicked them off as soon as one foot was free and bent down to drag Tony back up by the shirt.

'Stark,' he hissed but Tony jerked back.
'You said I can't taste yet,' Tony said. Loki growled at him. 'On the bed,' Tony said. 'Now.'

Loki did as ordered. He practically flung himself back onto the covers, clearly annoyed that his kiss had been denied. But he became tense for an entirely different reason when Tony started stripping his own clothes off. He threw them aside as quickly as he could and climbed onto the bed, over Loki, touching every inch he could until they were pressed together.

'You...' Tony breathed as he drank in Loki's smooth, pale chest, that creamy neck and black hair that fanned out beneath his head. '... are fucking incredible,' Tony finished.

Loki arched up but Tony was ready for it; he caught Loki's lips with his own and slotted them together easily. Already Loki was moving, tongue swiping but lips doing all the work. Tony trailed his hand up Loki's side, his chest, across his shoulder before fitting it beneath Loki's head. He cradled Loki's skull gently before fisting his fingers in Loki's hair and wrenching him back.

Loki gasped- moaned when Tony's lips found his neck, teeth nipping and biting before his lips sealed over the unmarked skin. He had to work for a while to get a decent bruise colouring Loki's skin and even as he moved on the edges were beginning to fade. He licked a trail across Loki's chest before biting a nipple harshly. Loki shook beneath him as Tony soothed the other one with his tongue and only voiced his annoyance when Tony slowly kissed his way back up.

'You try my patience,' Loki growled.

'You're the one who set the rules,' Tony countered.

Another sound from deep in Loki's chest before Tony smothered it, his mouth harsh against Loki's. Their lips crashed together from every direction; sloppy, uncoordinated kisses that Tony hadn't found fun since he was thirteen and had learned to kiss properly. But of course kissing Loki was fucking amazing, no matter what kind it was.

Loki dug his teeth into Tony's bottom lip and pulled; pain, sharp and bright, lit up Tony's senses and confused his brain. Tony hissed, moaned when Loki licked him clean before grabbing Tony by the jaw and dragging him back down.

Tony hadn't moved his hips the entire time. Loki was thrusting up against him, cock hard and hot, practically beginning for Tony's hand, Tony's ass, the warm, wet mouth that Loki was savaging. Tony didn't know how he'd held out this long, in all honesty.

'Lube,' Tony hissed into Loki's bruised mouth, 'you gonna...'

Loki pressed a hand against Tony's chest, the other sliding between them to touch himself. Tony wanted to watch but Loki was staring at him. His face was flushed red, blood staining his teeth when he gritted them. Tony tried to catch his breath as Loki used magic to prep himself.

'Do you know how much longer this would take if you didn't have magic?' Tony asked.

'No,' Loki panted, 'I have always had magic.' His hand reappeared to wrap around Tony's cock. It was hot, slippery, and Tony's hips jolted forward as pleasure suddenly shot through him. 'Get in me, Stark,' Loki growled.

'Yes, sir,' Tony moaned. He bent himself over Loki and took his dick in hand. Loki let his own slide away. 'Hips up.'

Loki smoothly got himself into position. He still had one hand against Tony's chest, fingers fanning the arc reactor. He stroked it with one finger as he bent his legs either side of Tony, ass presented
as best Loki could get it.

'Fuck me,' Tony breathed as he let go of himself to fondle Loki.

'L-Later!' Loki gasped. His hips jolted. 'Anthony.'

Tony settled on his knees and spread Loki open with one hand. Prep had its fun sides, and even though Loki's magic had removed most of the manual labour involved, Tony still liked to play.

But oh, well. They could play another time.

He pressed the head of his cock against Loki's entrance before pushing. It was one smooth, easy glide; they knew each other well enough to know how fast to move, when to stop, what the other wanted at that particular moment.

Loki wanted no more foreplay. And Tony was pretty sure that he was gonna fucking burst if he didn't fuck Loki into the mattress in the next twenty seconds.

Loki's body swallowed him quickly and Tony fell forward, most of his body weight on Loki. He jerked his hips back, just a bit, before slamming back in. Loki hissed his pleasure and wrapped one arm around Tony's back, the other pressed to the mattress so that he could push his own hips up.

The bed jolted beneath them but Tony paid it no attention. His every sense was filled with Loki; Loki's arm like a vice wrapped around his back; Loki's heels digging into Tony's lower back when Tony wasn't moving fast enough, or when a particular thrust hit his prostate; Loki's smell and every gasp, grunt and groan; the sharp hiss he let out when Tony bent to sink his teeth into the flesh of Loki's biceps; the groan Tony swallowed when their lips met, tongues trying to meet and foreheads bumping together every time they moved-

The feel of Loki wrapped around his cock; every squeeze, every resistant tug when Tony tried to pull out, every greedy fucking pull when Tony fucked back in. Tony grabbed Loki by the hips and tugged him down, put more weight on his knees so that he could fuck up and in, hit Loki's prostate with every thrust so that Loki was a writhing mess on his lap, arms thrown back and fingers tearing through the sheets.

Tony watched Loki break apart beneath him and he came undone; his orgasm crashed through him, lit up every fucking nerve in his body. Magic vibrated beneath every inch of skin as Tony forced himself in as far as he could and rode out the pleasure.

Tony bent forward, legs shaking as he tried to stay on his knees. 'Fuck.'

'Tony,' Loki gasped, 'I need...'

Loki was still a fucking hot mess around him. Tony pulled out slowly and had just enough energy to lay himself on his stomach, half-propped up with his elbows. He blew across the top of Loki's cock and watched Loki's thighs tremble.

'Come on,' Tony said and swallowed him down.

Loki needed no more encouragement. He planted his feet on the mattress, grabbed Tony by the back of the head, and fucked his mouth with abandon.

Tony hollowed his cheeks and relaxed his throat. Every thrust up still threatened to choke him though, and every time Loki pulled out he coughed, saliva and pre-come dribbling across his lips and down his chin. It just spurred Loki on; his breathing grew harsher, his thrusts less controlled,
and Tony managed to suck some air in before Loki jammed himself down Tony's throat and came. Tony swallowed most of it. He coughed and spluttered as Loki collapsed back against the mattress. Tony used the duvet to clean himself up; it was ruined anyway. Only when he could breathe clearly again did he flop onto the bed.

His skin still tingled with aftershocks and Tony could feel his magic humming. He pressed his face against the duvet and sighed.

'Was that... a recurring fantasy you had?' Loki asked. He sounded wrecked.

'Yeah,' Tony croaked. Well, he wasn't much better off. 'When SHIELD had you in that fucking tank. You were like a dangerous animal and all I wanted to do was stroll in there, peel you out of your layers, and let you fuck me against the glass.'

Loki chuckled. 'And when I threw you out of your own window?'

'Well, I mostly thought you were a dick at that point.' Another chuckle. 'Still... I wouldn't have said no if you'd thrown me into bed instead,' Tony said.

'Mm.' Loki hummed and Tony felt fingers in his hair. 'Perhaps, in another time and place, that is what happened.'

'Maybe,' Tony agreed. 'I like this world better.'

Tony felt a gentle tug on his hair. 'As do I,' Loki said.

They were quiet after that. Tony's body was cooling, muscles really starting to ache, when JARVIS said, 'Mr Stark, your guests are beginning to grow concerned.'

Tony sat up. 'Shit.'

'Guests?' Tony turned to look at Loki. He had rolled over and was curled around a pillow, eyelids drooping. 'What guests?' Loki asked.

'Ah... so, there was a reason I came in here.' Loki smirked and Tony rolled his eyes. 'You know what I meant.'

'I do,' Loki agreed.

'I walked into this room,' Tony said, words slow, and Loki laughed, 'to tell you that we have guests.'

'Do we?' Loki didn't seem overly concerned and Tony shook his shoulder. 'What?' Loki demanded.

'Strange called,' Tony said. Loki's eyes slid open. 'He turned up about fourteen seconds after I disconnected the call.'

Loki blinked slowly. 'Strange is here.' Tony nodded. 'Downstairs in our private living quarters?' Another nod. 'And he has been here the entire time?'

Nod, nod, nod.

Loki hummed and slowly pushed himself up. 'Well,' he said and ran a hand through his tangled hair, 'I hope he heard how much I enjoy your skills in the bedroom.'
'As much as I appreciate that,' Tony ducked forward to give Loki a quick, filthy kiss, before pulling back, 'we really need to make that deal as soon as possible. I don't want that fucker running around for too much longer knowing that we're working together.'

'Yes,' Loki agreed. He slid across the mattress and to his feet. Tony did the same—less gracefully, he was sure—and Loki stared at him.

Tony frowned. 'What?' He shivered when he felt Loki's magic against him and when it disappeared Tony had a distinct feeling of clean. 'Oh.'

'Problem?'

Loki was already dressed; red button-down and grey jeans. Tony pouted. 'Was kinda hoping to share a shower with you.'

Smiling, Loki walked across the room to open the top drawer of the dresser opposite their bed. It only ever contained the clothes Tony and Loki wore to laze about the penthouse. 'Later,' Loki said and it sounded like a promise. Tony took the clothes Loki passed him. 'Perhaps afterwards we can explore one of the fantasies I had when I first met you.'

Tony almost tripped getting into his briefs. 'Uh... do your fantasies involve throwing me out a window, by any chance?'

Smirking, Loki stepped closer to press a kiss to Tony's cheek. 'My fantasies certainly involve throwing you onto something,' he purred.

Tony tripped on his own feet.

Loki beat him downstairs, but thankfully Tony hadn't brained himself on any hard surfaces. He'd even managed to dress himself and everything.

He ran a hand through his hair as he surveyed Strange and Wong. Strange looked entirely done with the world in general— and Tony in particular—while Wong was exploring television channels on Tony's ridiculously large television.

'My apologies for the wait,' Loki said.

'Sure,' Strange muttered.

'He might be sorry; I'm not,' Tony said. Loki gave him a look but Tony just shrugged in response. This was his Tower, his partner and his guests. If he wanted to fuck his partner in his Tower while his guests waited downstairs then they just had to deal.

'Anyway,' Loki said. He cleared his throat and Wong turned off the TV. He gave his full attention to Loki, hands on his knees. Strange was leaning against the wall. The Cloak fluttering around him did nothing to downplay the unease Strange was clearly trying to hide. 'Let's make a deal,' Loki said.

There were far too many teeth in his smile.

Chapter End Notes
**Author's Note:** I basically mixed Loki's Dark World armour with his Ragnarok armour, only changing the colours. I am also a big fan of the new helmet; it gives Loki more of a “I don't give a fuck” vibe, which I'm a fan of. Of course, I don't see how Loki's new helmet would really protect his head from... anything. But maybe it's just for show. Either way I still like it.

And, obviously, Tony is a fan of it, too.

Also, there was supposed to be plot happening in this chapter, but then Loki played dress-up and Tony lost his shit. It's all Tony's fault.

Dreamer
'And why, exactly, would I care about weirdos coming to Midgard from another dimension?' Tony demanded.

Strange glared at him. 'Because it's a part of our deal.'

'Not yet it isn't,' Stark said. He pointed his fork at Strange who rolled his eyes.

'It will be a part of our deal,' Strange argued. 'My only requests are that you offer your help and protection to me and mine and that you help us protect Earth from magical invasion via other dimensions, spaceships, or colourful light shows.'

Loki sighed. Pushing his place aside, he laced his fingers together and surveyed Tony and Strange from over them. 'We have been discussing this particular point for the past hour. Reach an agreement or we will abandon discussions for today.'

'This is the only reason I'm willing to make a deal!' Strange snapped.

'Are you listening to this idiot?' Tony demanded. His eyes were on Loki, the chicken on the end of his fork dangerously close to falling off with all the waving that he was doing. 'We're apparently supposed to drop everything and help fend off inter-dimensional attacks!'

'Yes,' Loki said, 'I am aware of that. That is why Strange is making a deal with us.'

'It's fucking bullshit!' Tony growled.

Loki raised an eyebrow. 'And the fact that you expect him and his fellow sorcerers to help us is perfectly reasonable?' Loki asked. Stark glared at him. 'Strange will not allow this to drop, Stark. His one request was that we help protect Midgard from magical influence, regardless of where that influence comes from. If we want him on our side we must agree to this.'

Stark muttered something under his breath.

'Of course,' Loki continued, gaze on Strange, 'that means that you must agree to help us with any threat we face; that includes SHIELD, the Avengers, and any other Midgardian who may wish us harm. If we declare them as our enemy the contract will ensure that you assist us. Failure to do so will result in your death.'

'I am aware of that,' Strange said. He was gritting his teeth so hard so that Loki was half expecting one to pop out of his mouth.

'Then you should also be aware that you may be required to kill Midgardians for us,' Loki said. 'Can you live with that?'

Stark was smirking; positive that Strange would back out now and that he and Loki would be free to kill him and his companion.

But Loki could read the dedication in Strange's eyes. The man wasn't a killer, not in the sense that Loki was at least. He was too much like Stark; he would kill to defend himself and his own. Unlike
Stark, however, Strange would more than likely lose sleep over it. The mortal simply wanted to study his Arts and protect Midgard.

If he had to ally himself with two psychopaths to do so he would.

Strange stared back at Tony, eyes hard and hands shaking where they were sitting atop the table. His food had been pushed aside and forgotten over an hour ago. 'I told you,' he said, 'I made my decisions long ago. To protect Earth- to protect the people I'm in charge of- I'll side with you.' He paused, swallowed. Wong glanced at him. 'If that means killing people for you then so be it. If Earth gains your protection then I'll do it.'

Loki tilted his head in Stark's direction. He wasn't quite sure what was going through his partner's head. Stark's mouth had lost that twisted smile and his eyes were narrowed ever so slightly.

Finally Stark brought his fork to his mouth. He chewed quickly, swallowed, and put the fork down. 'Loki,' he said.

'Mm?' Loki hummed.

'Put it in the contract,' Tony said. 'Our assistance if there is a magical attack on Midgard. Strange's assistance when we must fight anyone who would harm us or our own. It will be binding. Failure to uphold these terms will result in all individuals' deaths.'

Loki smiled and slid the paper towards himself. A rough draft at the moment, but Loki had the parchment ready to be enchanted; the dagger for the blood and a quill to bind the people at the table to each other.

He jotted it down and said, 'Can we finally move along?'

'Yeah,' Stark said. 'What next?'

Strange breathed out heavily. His shoulders slumped and he fell back in his seat. 'That's all I wanted,' he said. He glanced at Wong, who simply nodded. The man hadn't been particularly vocal over the past few hours. But apparently he and Strange could communicate with only the hint of a word, a slight twitch to the corner of a mouth. 'That's all,' Strange reiterated.

'No weapons?' Tony asked. 'No training? No Golden Apple to make you live as long as Loki and myself?'

Strange frowned at that. 'Training and information on magic would be beneficial,' he mused.

Sighing, Loki nudged Stark's foot beneath the table. 'Why did you bring that up?'

'I want all bases covered,' Stark said with a shrug. 'I figured he'd want immortality over information.'

'I have no wish to be immortal or live any longer than I currently will,' Strange said. 'I've seen what that kind of power does to people. I don't want it.'

Stark raised his eyebrows but Strange said nothing more on it. So Stark cleared his throat and said, 'Okay, no immortality. Good. But you want information?'

'Of course I do,' Strange said. 'Anything that you and Loki know that could benefit my people-'

'And there he goes again,' Tony interrupted. He stabbed at his chicken with his fork, making a
mess instead of attempting to eat it. 'Do you realise how much of a *cult* you people sound like?'

Strange glared at him. 'At least we're not killing people, Tony.'

Stark smirked. 'Not yet,' he sing-songed. Strange had nothing to say to that. 'Really, though, I have no say in this particular part of the deal,' Stark continued after a beat. He glanced at Loki. 'You're the one with the magical information he wants.'

'Yes,' Loki said, 'that is true.' In all honesty Loki did *not* want to part with that information. Teaching Stark was one thing; the man was Loki's partner, his *mate*. Strange was an ally. The people Strange commanded were disgusting little mortals dabbling with powers they could never possibly understand.

But Loki knew that this, too, would be a breaking point for Strange. He was asking for help defending Midgard. He was asking for information that could help with that.

He did not want to know everything. And could not, in all honesty, even use half of the information that Loki knew. Mortal bodies were not made to do the things that Loki did. They could not teleport or rip open true dimensions or travel across Yggdrasil and the many paths that split off of her.

And Loki did not have to tell them everything. Only what Strange asked for.

'While I don't wish to part with everything that I know,' Loki said aloud, 'I understand that some of the information I know will benefit you and your followers. You may have it when we are free from SHIELD, the Avengers, and the World Security Council. Is that fair?'

Strange shared another look with Wong. When the other man nodded, Strange turned back to Loki. 'Deal,' he said.

Loki made another note.

'Is that all?' Stark asked. He was eating again, talking around a mouthful of food. Sometimes, Loki mused, his other half was thoroughly *disgusting*.

'I think so,' Strange said.

'We shall go through the points we listed,' Loki said. 'After we agree on its contents I will draw up a draft. No doubt you and Strange will argue on the wording of everything.' He directed his last sentence at Tony, who rolled his eyes.

'Whatever,' the man mumbled. 'Let's get this done, okay? I think I have a meeting tomorrow.'

'You do,' Loki said. 'However, we *also* have plans tomorrow night.'

Tony frowned. 'What?'

Loki glanced between Stark and Strange. 'Our new allies should see us in battle, shouldn't they?'

A truly devilish smirk spread across Stark's face. 'Yeah,' he said, 'would you like to see us in action, Stephen?'

'I don't think I have a choice,' Strange commented.

'Yes,' Wong said, 'I don't think that you do.'
Dallas at night was rather breathtaking. The city was lit up with a thousand lights and Loki enjoyed his view of the skyline as he and Stark stood atop a skyscraper.

'It's that building,' Stark said, voice coming from his speakers.

He was pointing to one of the smaller buildings nestled amongst giants. It was one of the only towers with its light still shining, almost every pane of glass illuminated from within.

'I see,' Loki said. 'Shall we bring it to the ground?'

Stark chuckled. 'That's the plan. I wanna see it topple.'

'And you don't wish for me to address the public?'

There was a sigh before Tony's faceplate slid up. His eyes found Loki's in the dark. 'I'm really glad that you're on board with my plan to try and win you some public favour. But it'll only work with the Avengers trying to kill you on live television. I want you to ask them why they're targeting you. I want you to plant the seeds of doubt about SHIELD and the Avengers with witnesses. We can't do that here. It's the middle of the night, for one thing, and we're over three hours from New York. The Avengers won't get here before we destroy this base.'

Loki had stopped paying attention halfway through Stark's little speech. While he liked Stark's plan- win the public's favour by throwing the Avengers and SHIELD into the shadows- he was too excited to truly pay attention. He wanted to snap bones and rend skin from muscle. He wanted to crack heads together and slash bodies open.

He wanted to destroy another base.

'Yes,' he finally said, 'I understand. Can we go now?'

Stark rolled his eyes but slid his faceplate back down. His heavy arms wrapped around Loki's waist. 'After you,' he said.

Loki teleported into the middle of the building. Someone screamed. An alarm sounded.

Loki grinned wickedly and pulled his sceptre from a pocket dimension.

It really had been too long.

Stephen felt uncomfortable in the office. There were screens covering almost every wall and he felt like he was being watched. Granted, he was; JARVIS was everywhere, Tony had said, and Stephen's every move would be monitored.

He had some leeway, though. The gash on his hand itched like crazy and was a stark reminder of
the partnership that Stephen had entered into.

_For the good of Earth_, he had to remind himself. _I'm doing this for Earth. Not for myself._

Well, not truly for himself. While Stephen was sure that he would have been cut down without the contract, he himself did not benefit too greatly from the deal he had made. He had sold his soul, after all.

Wong was busy inspecting everything that he could, as though he didn't have a care in the world. But Stephen could see the weight on his shoulders; the heaviness in his brow when he deigned to look up from whatever piece of information had caught his attention.

And there was plenty of information to be rifled through. This large room nestled within the heart of Tony's penthouse was apparently the **heart** of Tony and Loki's operation. There were files upon files about the Avengers, SHIELD, what little information Tony had compiled on the World Security Council. There were hours upon hours of footage showing the Avengers fighting individually as well as together.

Videos that had been analysed, weaknesses and moves pointed out to be studied and built upon so that Tony and Loki could, when the time came, destroy the Avengers before they could truly retaliate.

So much time and effort had been put into this plan- into Tony Stark's plan to _destroy_ the Avengers. It was making Stephen's head spin and he had a hard time concentrating on the destruction currently being played out on the screens before him.

There were feeds from Loki, a camera planted somewhere on his armour so that Tony could see where he was at all times. Tony had many more cameras, JARVIS recording everything and watching everything so that he could assist his creator in any way.

Stephen watched as Tony tucked another chunk of C4 into a hole he'd recently made in the wall. There was a dead woman at his feet and Tony stepped over her, unconcerned of the blood he tracked across the carpet.

Stephen watched the fight not like an ally but like an enemy. He watched the way Tony tossed himself sideways to avoid a blow, how he skidded across the floor but then used his repulsors to instantly change direction and shoot back at his target.

_He relies on them far too much,_ Stephen thought as Tony shot another SHIELD agent. _If they go down he's reduced to hand-to-hand combat._

Which wasn't necessarily a _bad_ thing; Tony was actually quite good from what Stephen could see. But he definitely needed to be better. Stephen had seen only a few of the Avengers' fights, but he knew that Captain America, Hawkeye and Black Widow were all much, much better than Tony. If his repulsors were taken out and he was surrounded by even two of those fighters, Tony would be screwed.

Stephen pulled the StarkPad Tony had thrust into his hands earlier that night across the table. He jotted down some of his musings with the stylus provided and switched his attention to Loki.

'_He likes slashing,'_ Wong commented.

Stephen didn't jump; he'd long grown used to Wong approaching him on silent feet and suddenly speaking. They'd made a game of it in the library; how far could one sneak before the other noticed the missing books?
'He does,' Stephen agreed. Loki was a bloodthirsty creature. While he seemed perfectly capable of not killing people, he definitely enjoyed it when he did. He spilled far more blood than was necessary, stabbing and cutting and slicing even when the person he'd attacked was as good as dead. 'He enjoys this a lot more than Tony does.'

'With Stark it is about revenge,' Wong said. 'He will cut down any who betray him. SHIELD's agents are as bad as those that employ them.' He paused. 'Loki is remarkable.'

Yes, he truly was. The more Stephen watched, the more he realised that he would have no true chance if Loki decided to betray him. Loki was another creature all together; every movement was precise, every movement was necessary. He fought as though it were a dance, his sceptre and daggers and even a spear just another extension of the god. The only openings in his defence were ones that Loki allowed to be there; when he allowed an agent close only to cut the man or woman down when they were within reach. When he was hit it was all a part of the dance, a way for Loki to twist and spin and bend gracefully to attack from a different angle.

But then came the moments where Tony and Loki fought together.

And Oh, Stephen thought, there's the weakness that every creature has.

Loki was absolutely, completely sucked into Tony Stark's orbit. Whenever Genesis was by his side Loki had chinks in his armour. He watched Tony's back instead of his own; he took hits that were meant for Tony that didn't badly hurt him but certainly slowed him down. His focus shifted from blood and death to Tony-Tony-Tony-Tony-TONY!

It was written all over his face and Stephen wondered if it would be this obvious to him if he didn't know who was wearing the Genesis suit. Because it was so clear that surely the Avengers would figure it out eventually.

Loki blocked another hit meant for Genesis and stumbled as his armour was scorched.

But Tony was there, all snarling, snapping teeth, the suit barrelling into the man who'd hurt Loki and slamming him into the floor.

Caught in each other's orbit, then, Stephen thought. That could be used against them.

The Avengers would use it against them when the truth came to light. But luckily for the idiots, Stephen was there to bring them down a peg or two.

'Have you noticed what I have?' Wong asked.

'Loki likes blood a little too much?' Stephen said.

A minuscule smile from Wong. 'That, too,' he said.

'Loki only has weaknesses when he allows them.' Stephen paused. 'And whenever Tony is anywhere near him.'

'Yes,' Wong said. 'Capturing Loki, or hurting him, could be done if Tony Stark was targeted. The Avengers will learn that eventually.'

'That they will,' Stephen agreed. He made another note. 'But I've got it covered.'

'Will they listen?'
And wasn't that the real question, Stephen mused as the base went toppling to the ground.

{oOo}

Tony was battered and bruised when he and Loki returned to the Tower. But adrenaline was still flooding his system and his fingers itched to do something. Maybe throw Loki to the floor and fuck him again.

Unfortunately Strange and Wong were waiting for them.

'You're both very, very good,' Strange commented as Tony tossed himself onto the sofa.

Tony grinned. 'Thanks.'

'But you have a rather large problem,' Strange added.

Tony raised his eyebrows. It was Loki who said, 'Do we?'

'Stephen and I both noticed it,' Wong said. He was standing by Strange's side, hands clasped over his stomach.

'Do share,' Loki drawled. He joined Tony on the sofa, legs crossed, and started picking at the blood that had dried beneath his fingernails.

'You're an excellent fighter, Loki,' Strange said. 'Any perceived weakness you have is ones that you've allowed yourself to have. Sometimes you let your enemies get closer to make them grow sloppy in a desperate attempt to inflict damage.'

Tony saw Loki smirk.

'Your only true weakness is Tony,' Strange said.

Tony jolted at that and Loki's eyes narrowed. 'Excuse me?' Loki growled.

'Yeah, excuse me?' Tony demanded. 'How the fuck am I weakness?'

'He focuses his entire attention on you when you're fighting,' Strange explained. 'Just watch the footage, Stark. You're not nearly as good at fighting as Loki is.' He held up a hand to forestall the arguments practically leaping off of Tony's tongue. 'You're not bad, Tony, but you're nowhere near Loki's level; nowhere near half of the Avengers' levels when it comes to hand-to-hand combat.

'When you fight side-by-side Loki's entire attention is focused on you,' Strange continued. 'He takes hits that are meant for you. He watches your back instead of his own. If I noticed it then the Avengers will, too. You two have grown so close that Loki hasn't even noticed how much his attention wavers when he's fighting by your side.'

Tony had nothing to say to that. Apparently neither did Loki because he was silent too, eyes dark but focused somewhere off to Strange's side.

'Watch the footage,' Strange repeated. 'I'm on your side now, remember?' He held up his bandaged hand, flecks of dark red staining the gauze. 'I'm trying to help.' He glanced at Wong. 'We should be going. Contact me when that information has sunk in.'
Tony just nodded, tongue still caught in his throat. He half-watched Wong make a portal and he and Strange step into... who the Hell cared. Because most of Tony's attention was on Loki.

'Is that true?' Tony finally asked. 'What Strange said?'

Loki exhaled. 'I believe that it is,' he said. 'I distinctly remember a knife sinking into my shoulder. I didn't see it coming because another mortal was shooting at you.'

Tony frowned. 'Loki-

'It is not your fault, Anthony.'

'How the Hell isn't it my fault?' Tony demanded.

'You can hold your own against SHIELD agents,' Loki said. 'It is my magic that makes me focus on you. It is me who turns my attention away from the fight and onto you. A part of me simply can't see any harm come to you.'

'But Strange is right,' Tony said, 'that could be used against us. What if the Avengers figure it out, target me, and you get seriously injured? What if you get captured or fucking killed-

'Stark!' Loki's hands were on his face, snapping Tony out of the panic attack his brain had been throwing him towards. 'This can be changed.'

'How?' Tony croaked. His heart was still beating too fast. His magic raged. 'If you fucking die because of me-'

'I will not,' Loki interrupted. 'We will work harder on your magical training; we will spar together until you can best me in a fight. This issue is mine and mine alone, Anthony; not yours.'

'But-

'Not yours!' Loki snapped. Tony was helpless to do anything but nod stupidly. Loki sighed. 'I will beat it into your head if I have to, Stark.'

'I can't lose you,' Tony whispered. He couldn't. He fucking couldn't. If he lost Loki now, after everything they'd been through, everything they'd achieved...

Midgard would burn. Tony would burn it to the fucking ground.

'You won't,' Loki said.

'You can't promise that,' Tony countered.

Because he couldn't and Loki knew it. He gave Tony a broken smile and stroked his cheek. 'I know,' he said.

He felt magic dancing along Loki's fingertips. It itched to reach out, bridge the gap between them and bind.

Mate, Loki called him. It had slipped into casual conversation, as though mate was Loki's counter to Tony calling him babe and darling.

But it meant so much more than that, Tony knew. Their magic still wanted to bond. They hadn't discussed that in a while.
Tony was too tired to bring that up now, though. The adrenaline high from destroying a base had evaporated. Strange's words had crashed into Tony and left him feeling weak and shaky.

'Come,' Loki said and pulled Tony to his feet before Tony could say anything. 'We will rest and approach this topic tomorrow.'

'Okay,' Tony said. He'd request a sparring session. A session each day, even, until Tony could crush Captain America's skill between his hands.

He would *not* be the reason Loki was captured or killed.

Loki wrapped an arm firmly around Tony's shoulder and Tony allowed it. He allowed Loki to lead him to the bedroom, to strip him in the en-suite bathroom and wash every inch of him clean in the shower.

It eased the aches of his body, if not the aches in his mind.

Chapter End Notes

**Author's Note:** Another chapter so soon? Whelp, I sat down to write it and was kinda on a roll and wrote a bit more than I'd planned to. So have another chapter! This story is moving along swiftly now and my muse is fully geared towards getting it completed and the sequel started.

I hope you enjoyed!

Dreamer
Loki woke to a cold bed. At least JARVIS was there to tell him the time and weather and various things that were being spoken about in the news. Apparently his and Stark's latest attack on SHIELD had was making the news rounds.

They weren't, however, reporting anything worthy. Loki had not been spotted and SHIELD weren't sharing. It was being written off as a terrorist attack and local politicians and the leaders of America's various defence forces were claiming to be looking into it.

It made Loki chuckle in amusement. But only briefly. Because JARVIS told him that Stark was currently in the living room staring into space. He had been up for four hours now and had not moved since sitting down.

Loki sighed and brushed his hair back, tied it off and flicked it over his shoulder. He needed a cut. Loki slid from the bed and went to brush his teeth and freshen up just a bit before going to his partner.

Stark was indeed staring at nothing, his fingers sliding together and nails picking absentely at each other. Loki crossed his arms over his chest and said, 'What troubles you?'

Stark jumped and twisted to look at Loki. 'Oh,' he said, 'morning.'

Loki frowned. 'Are you still thinking about what Strange said?'

Stark gave him a humourless chuckle. 'Yeah, Loki.' He sighed. 'I'm still thinking about that.'

'It is not your issue, Stark, as I already told you.' Loki rounded the couch to survey Stark properly. 'This is something that I must deal with.'

'But it is my fault,' Stark countered. Loki rolled his eyes. 'No, Loki!' Stark snapped. His tone made Loki focus back on him. Stark's eyes were fierce, there was a determined set to his jaw. In that moment he looked so much like the man Loki had first met that Loki's magic tingled beneath his skin. 'Even if it's something you're doing,' Stark continued, 'it's because of me that your attention is divided in a fight.'
Loki was silent.

'And it's because I'm not strong enough, isn't it?' Stark said. 'I'm still not as fast as Romanov. I'm still not as strong as Rogers. I'm still not as good at magic as Thor is.'

'You can do things that they cannot,' Loki argued. 'Thor cannot throw magic, Stark. His understanding of the subject does not extend that far.'

'Then am I faster than Romanov?' Stark demanded. Loki pursed his lips. 'Yeah,' Stark said. He laughed again. 'I didn't think so.'

'You have not trained for as long as she has,' Loki said. 'She was trained from birth, Stark. You yourself showed me her file. She is no more Midgardian than you are. She was changed beyond recognition before she reached adulthood.'

It had answered a lot of questions Loki had once had about the little spider. He hadn't understood just why she was as fast as she was; why she could shrug off attacks that should leave any Midgardian on their backs heaving.

She was not a super soldier like Steve Rogers. But she wasn't human, either. The only true mortal on the Avengers' team was Barton.

'Yeah,' Stark said, tone agreeable, 'but she's faster than me. So's Barton, right?'

'Barton's reflexes are a result of his genetics,' Loki said, 'as well as SHIELD's training. You will be faster than him one day; faster than Rogers and Romanov, too. When you've had enough training not one of them will be able to beat you in a fight even without your suit.'

'But not yet.' Stark fell back against the sofa, face tired. 'I'm not good enough and there's only a few more bases left. When they figure it out... they'll cut me off from you. Or they'll use me to get to you. Take you out and what am I, Loki? An alcoholic in a tin can.'

Stark looked up at him and his face was broken. Loki's magic ached. 'I'm your biggest weakness,' Stark continued.

'Yes,' Loki agreed, because it was true. And though he was called Loki Lie-smith, he would not lie now. Not to Stark. 'But you are also my greatest strength, Anthony.' Stark shook his head. 'You are,' Loki said. 'Do not think me stronger without you, Anthony. Without you I would fall victim to the poisonous whispers my own mind produces. I would go mad and self-destruct before the Avengers ever had a chance to destroy me themselves.'

He knelt gracefully then and drew Stark's hands forward. Stark stared at him.

'I love you,' Loki stated. 'I adore you. Without you I would be nothing. I would not want to exist without you. Yes, Anthony; you are my greatest weakness. But I would rather it be you than anything else. Your greatest weakness is your inexperience, Tony. And that can be changed. With much practice, with years of training, you will overcome all of that and never again have to worry about anyone besting you.' Loki gave him a crooked smile. 'My weakness will be ever present.'

Stark let out a shuddering breath. He squeezed Loki's fingers and leaned forward. 'For fuck's sake, Loki.'

'Did I say something wrong?'

'No.' Stark laughed but it wasn't dark, wasn't filled with disappointment and self-loathing. 'You're
really fucking good at this.'

'I am good at many things, my dear,' Loki said. He pressed his lips to Tony's fingers and murmured, 'I know that I cannot always stop your mind from travelling down dark roads. But I will pull you back when I can.'

'Yeah,' Stark agreed, 'yeah, I... thank you.'

'But,' Loki said. It wasn't a question, because he could read Stark better than he could read himself sometimes.

And yes, there it was; that worry still in Stark's eyes, fingers still twitching as though the man ached to reach and fix what was wrong with the both of them.

But some things, Loki had learned, could never be fixed.

'Some things can't be fixed,' Loki said before Stark could.

'I know,' Stark agreed.

Before Loki could try and sooth him once more- and really, he would have spent all day whispering sweet nothings in Anthony's ear if he could- JARVIS interrupted.

'Mr Stark, the Avengers are assembling,' the AI said.

Stark closed his eyes and sighed. 'Son of a fucking bitch.'

'Duty calls,' Loki noted.

'Not for long it won't,' Stark said.

'When do you plan on leaving?' Loki asked. Stark had shared his exchange with Fury; it would not be out of character for Stark to quit right now.

'As soon as possible,' Stark said. He gave Loki's fingers a squeeze before standing. Loki let him go. 'I'm tired of pretending, Loki.'

Yes, Loki understood the sentiment well. After being freed from the Mad Titan's hold, Loki had felt free in a way that he never had before. He had been imprisoned on Asgard shortly afterwards, yes, but his mind had been his.

Freedom was Loki's greatest treasure.

Well, he mused as Stark raised his arms above his head, the Midgardian getting a few stretches in before taking off for another fight. My second greatest treasure, Loki thought.

He was brought out of his musings by Stark planting a gentle kiss on his lips. 'I love you. You know that, right?' Stark was staring at him, as though Loki was questioning his love.

'Of course,' Loki responded. Because he didn't question Stark's love, not at all; he questioned whether or not he was deserving of such a thing.

Stark shook his head. 'I guess being in love isn't making us any better at this whole relationship thing.'

Loki offered him a smile as he said, 'I believe that we are learning.'
'Yeah,' Stark agreed. 'I'll see you when I get back?'

Loki nodded, gave Stark one final, long, and slightly filthy kiss that made his mate flush red and stumble his way out onto the helipad. He watched Stark until Iron Man disappeared over the New York skyline.

{oOo}

The battle was a fucking mess from the beginning to the end. Tony was still out of sorts from the whole “he is Loki's greatest weakness in a battle” thing. The fact that the enemy they were currently battling was a bunch of wannabe human terrorist re-enacting The Purge meant that Tony and the rest of the Avengers had been ordered to pull their punches.

It left Tony with a bitter taste in his mouth and an ache to rip something apart as he flew over one of the guys terrorising the Bronx.

There were a dozen of them spread out all over New York City, the wires dangling from their ears telling the Avengers that they were speaking to each other. Barton took out one over near Central Park; a clean arrow to the shoulder that tossed the guy to the ground and left him screaming bloody murder as he was handcuffed by the men and women in blue.

Another was taken out by Thor who just punched the dick right in the face. A second fell to Romanov’s “thighs around the neck” routine and she took a taser to one of his buddies a few minutes later.

Tony was getting mixed reports from Romanov and Rogers; there were three over by Van Nest Avenue- no, wait, two had just disappeared into New York Sports Clubs- no, wait, there were fucking ten of them marching down Baker Avenue firing flares into the sky.

It didn't help, Tony thought as he shot around one corner and narrowly avoided flying into a street light, that the douchebags had gone and handed out masks before starting their little fucking purge.

'F&J Pine!' Romanov shouted suddenly and Tony looped in the air, headed back the way he’d come. 'One guy, Stark, you're the closest! He's got a hostage!'

JARVIS had already plotted out his course. Tony was just around the corner and gunned it down Bronxdale Avenue before coming up on the eatery.

There was a guy there. And unlike the dude Tony had almost shot thanks to Rogers' stupid fucking information, this one was wearing a black hoodie, had a wire dangling from one ear, and a gun pointed at the head of a woman pulled up against his chest.

She was short, older, screaming with tears streaked down her face. Tony landed before the two and raised one gauntlet. 'I have a shot,' Tony said over the comms before switching to speaker. 'Drop your weapon, dude.'

'I don't fucking think so!' The guy chuckled to himself and Tony frowned. He wasn't laughing hysterically; didn't have that mad, crazed look about him that most of the Avengers' enemies sported. No, this dude was perfectly sane- well, as sane as a crazy person could get.
He knew what he was doing. Was completely in control of his actions.

Was gonna shoot the woman if Tony didn't shoot him first.

'I have the shot,' Tony repeated.

'No!' Romanov snapped. 'Our orders are to take them in alive, Stark.'

'He's going to kill her,' Tony said. As if to prove his point, mask-wearing idiot pulled the woman tighter against his chest and pressed the barrel of his handgun into her cheek.

'We save civilians first,' Rogers said. 'Tony, if you have to kill him to save the hostage, do it.'

That wasn't going to happen. Tony knew it. V for Vendetta over there knew it. He was smiling brightly and staring directly into Tony's eyes. 'Can you shoot me before I kill her?' the guy asked.

'Civilians first,' Romanov finally agreed. 'Stark, take him out.'

A plate on Tony's shoulder flipped up.

The guy shot at the same time Tony did.

The back of his head exploded and he keeled over backwards. The woman went with him, still caught in his grip even in death. Her eyes were vacant, now, her own blood and brain matter mingling with his as they fell to a heap on the sidewalk.

Tony stared at them. He waited for the crushing feeling of defeat; for the self-loathing that always crept up on him when he wasn't fast enough, wasn't good enough, when he thought about the fact that Loki could be killed because of him.

It didn't happen.

All Tony felt was mildly annoyed. Curious about the purge still happening around him.

But overall, he just felt... calm.

'Stark! STARK!'

'Tony?'

'She's dead.' That was Barton, speaking over Romanov and Rogers' shouts. 'We have a civilian and terrorist down. I repeat; civilian and terrorist down.'

'STARK!' Romanov shouted again.

Tony shot back into the sky.

{oOo}

Tony had thought that, when the time finally came, he'd be raging and screaming like the rest of
them. Fury's eye was about to bug out of its socket; Romanov was snapping and snarling like a rabid dog; Rogers was so very disappointed but didn't appear to blame Tony, personally, for the woman's death.

Barton and Thor were silent throughout it all and Bruce had backed himself into a corner, eyes more green than brown.

But apparently Tony's failure was more important than big, mean and green making an appearance.

'She's dead, Stark, and all because you didn't take the shot!' Fury shouted.

Tony was calm, which was weird. He blinked and looked up at Fury. Tony had thrown himself into a seat before anyone else had arrived. His suit was standing just to his left. 'I was ordered not to kill them,' he stated.

'And then you were ordered to take him out!' Fury retorted.

'I shot him at the same time he shot her,' Tony said. 'I don't have Rogers' reflexes, Fury. I'm only human.'

'This is exactly the kind of shit I've been talking about!' Fury continued. 'I told you your fucking around was going to get someone killed-

'I wasn't fucking-' Tony tried, but Fury steam-rolled right over him.

'-AND IT DID!' Fury finished on a roar, spit flying and hand slamming down onto the table top.

Tony stared at it. Blinked.

He was calm.

Tony pushed himself back from the table. Barton flinched and Bruce inhaled sharply. Tony stood tall and surveyed them all; Romanov, glaring at him; Rogers, looking so very out of his depth; Thor just confused.

And Fury staring him down, rage making him seethe, that little spark in his eyes telling Tony that nothing Tony could do would ever be right.

'I'm done,' Tony stated.

That made Fury flinch back. His eye narrowed.

'Excuse me?' Romanov asked.

Tony looked at her. 'You heard me,' he said. He left his gaze sweep over the Avengers. 'I'm done with this.'

'Done with what?' was Fury's question.

Tony laughed. Barton jolted again. 'You know exactly what I'm talking about, Fury. I'm done with this; with the Avengers, with SHIELD, with all of you.'

Fury stared at him.

'You knew this day was coming, Fury,' Tony continued. 'I warned you four days ago that I was thinking about it. I'm done funding this organisation. I'm done working alongside this group of
unappreciative cunts.

'Tony!' Rogers actually gasped at the swear and Tony tossed him a smirk.

'That's Mr Stark to you,' Tony said, 'to all of you.' He paused to wet his lips. A feeling of pure relief settled over him. 'I hereby resign from the Avengers Initiative. Stark Industries will be withdrawing all funding from SHIELD and the Avengers effective immediately. From 12 pm to 6pm tomorrow the Avengers will be allowed into Stark Tower to collect their belongings. Failure to do so will result in everything left behind being donated to charity. The Avengers, SHIELD, and anybody associated with the two groups are no longer allowed on Stark property without my express permission.'

He stopped and tossed them all a blinding smile; the charming, arrogant smile he usually reserved for the media.

'Good luck fighting Loki.'

And with that Tony turned and activated his suit. It unfolded and encased him, soon blocking out the Avengers' retorts, Fury's demands, Rogers' pleas.

Fury's words finally made it through the suit; 'You'll regret this, Stark!'

Tony smiled behind his faceplate and activated the speakers. 'No, Fury,' he said, 'I think you'll regret it before I ever do.'

With that he walked from the room, from the Helicarrier, blasted into the early afternoon sky and back towards New York.

He felt... glorious.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: Man, I am seriously obsessed with Fall Out Boy lately. But a LOT of their songs give me FrostIron feels so... Green Day will always be my favourite band, I tell you!

Also; it has finally happened. Tony has left the Avengers. What a happy day :)

Dreamer
Author's Note: So, before we get started I just wanted to let you lovely people know that I got a new job. I'll be working more regular hours than my old job- I actually get to work day shift!- but I WILL be working more days overall. I'll still have weekends, though, so I'll still be working hard on this story. I spend most of my down time reading and writing. Have no fear, this story will be finished and the sequel will be worked on!

In other news, the new chapter count for this story is 74. Because I knew that this story would keep getting bigger and bigger :)

Cheers,

Dreamer

Spending half of the night arguing with the Avengers was not how Clint had envisioned spending his evening. Not that he'd really had plans, what with Loki deciding to demolish SHIELD bases every other week. Clint's days were split between debriefings, fights, and spying on Stark.

He'd rather sit through ten debriefings than another ten minutes of arguing with Rogers over Stark and his behaviour. Banner had bailed early into the conversation, eyes green and shoulders beginning to enlarge. It had taken the others longer than Clint to notice the change in him, and they'd all gone silent as the quiet man shuffled his way out of the room, door slamming behind him.

Thor was the next to go. Honour and a man's word and all of that shit was still big in Asgard and in Thor's own words- "Stark no longer wishes to be our shield-brother. We must respect his word, or we are not the friends we claim to be!" He didn't stomp so much as sweep out of the room, hammer hanging from his belt.

Clint had been so very close to snapping and storming out himself. Natasha must have sensed his mood, because she'd brought a halt to the proceedings after convincing Rogers to at least wait until tomorrow. They still had to pick up their things from Stark Tower, meaning that there was at least a small window of time when they'd actually be allowed in the place. Rogers could talk to Stark then.

But now here Clint was, well into the next morning, having only slept for a couple of hours and running on an empty stomach. Natasha was in the chair beside him, Fury sitting behind his desk.

'It's official,' Phil commented seconds after stepping into the room. He slid his hands into his pockets and stood at attention, a small shrug of the shoulders the only thing about him that wasn't held rigid. 'Well,' he continued after a beat, 'Stark's announced his departure from the Avengers via Twitter, at any rate.'

Clint snorted.
Fury's eye swivelled to him, narrowed a bit. Clint met his gaze. 'Do you find this funny, Agent Barton?' the man growled. Close to shouting already, but not there yet.

'Yeah,' Clint drawled.

'And what the hell is so funny about Stark walking out now?' Fury demanded.

Clint rolled his eyes. 'Seriously?' he said. 'Fury, anyone would walk after the way you spoke to him.' Fury opened his mouth and even Natasha glanced at him. Clint spoke over them. 'For once,' Clint said, 'for once'- stronger, then, louder when Phil looked like he was about to intervene, '- Stark actually did as he was ordered,' Clint continued. 'He followed SHIELD's orders to the letter. He didn't screw around. He didn't bitch or complain. He did his job.

'And what did you do?' Clint demanded. 'The one time the dude acted like the fucking genius he is, you screamed at him. Stark quitting is all on you, Fury. You knew he was gonna walk. You knew Nat and I didn't have enough information on his suits for SHIELD to create their own. And now he's gone, he's pulled all funding, and we're not going to be allowed back into his Tower until he's dead.'

Fury had nothing to say to that, apparently. His lips were pressed together tightly and he just stared at Clint. Natasha had her head tilted in his direction, eyes somewhere below his neck. Finally Phil cleared his throat and took a step closer to Fury's desk.

'Regardless of why exactly Stark chose now to quit,' he said, 'I've already been on the phone with his people and I was only allowed to speak to Ms Potts for a brief moment.'

Natasha glanced up. 'You spoke to Pepper?'

Nodding, Phil said, 'In a strictly professional manner, believe me. She informed me that due to stipulations in her contract, she's bound by Stark's orders. Nobody involved in Stark Industries is to speak to SHIELD employees. Failure to follow said rules will result in instant termination. It falls under one of the stipulations in all of the contracts Stark Industries employees sign, apparently.'

Fury sighed and reached up to rub his good eye.

'Did she tell you anything else?' Natasha asked.

'Only that Stark was resolute,' Phil said. 'He's announcing it officially tomorrow. The press conference has been set for nine am this morning.'

'I want you there,' Fury said.

Phil raised his eyebrows.

'The chances of him getting in-' Clint began but Fury cut him off.

'I don't care how you do it,' Fury growled, 'you go. Put him on the spot. Make him speak to you instead of about you.'

'Can I ask why?' Phil questioned.

Fury leaned forward, elbows on the desk, and laced his fingers together. 'Because I know Stark,' he said. 'And he's going to drag us through the mud. We have to hit before he can.'

Clint shook his head but ignored the glare Fury shot him. Natasha seemed to feel the same way;
she gave Clint a look but said nothing, just crossed one leg over the other and leaned back in her seat.

'Have you spoken to the other Avengers?' Fury asked. His questioned was aimed at Phil, who shrugged again.

'Steve's adamant that Stark's just having a moment; blind-sided by anger or something,' Clint said.

'Thor respects Stark's decision,' Natasha took over, not a hint in her tone of how she personally felt about the entire situation. 'While he isn't happy with it, he said we have to respect Stark's decision to no longer fight alongside us.'

'Banner?' Phil asked.

'I honestly don't know,' Clint commented. 'He didn't seem particularly surprised, but that could have just been him trying to keep the Hulk in.'

'He's the closest to Stark,' Natasha said. 'Science bros, Stark calls them. If anyone has a chance of getting back into the Tower regularly it's Banner.'

Fury was nodding along, a glint in his eye replacing the anger that had been simmering throughout the entire meeting. 'Keep an eye on him,' the man eventually ordered. 'Talk to him. Get him talking about Stark whenever you can.' He paused to glance between the two agents. 'Subtly,' he added.

Clint snorted and Natasha said, 'Really?' with one slim eyebrow rising.

'Just do it, Agent Romanov,' Fury said. 'And make sure Rogers doesn't do anything stupid. With the way Stark's been acting, one wrong word from Rogers will push him further over the edge.'

Clint and Natasha shared a look. It was Clint who said, 'He wants to go to the Tower tomorrow. We've tried talking him out of it.'

'Banner's tried, too,' Natasha added.

'Stark said you were allowed in to collect your belongings,' Phil said, 'is that when Rogers wants to talk to him?'

Clint sighed and slouched further in his seat. 'It's what we talked him into,' he said.

'Rogers wanted to march down to the Tower and have words with Stark almost as soon as he left the Helicarrier,' Natasha took over. 'We managed to convince him that it wasn't a good idea.'

'You need to pick up your stuff,' Fury said slowly, 'and Rogers wants to talk to Stark. If Rogers manages to get face time, go with him.'

Natasha actually let shock flit across her face. Clint leaned forward in his seat. 'I'm sorry?' he said. 'Didn't you tell us about five seconds ago to not let Rogers do anything stupid? Because going to Stark Tower and demanding to talk to Stark after his declaration yesterday is stupid.'

'Rogers will do what he feels he has to do,' Fury explained, 'we're not going to be able to stop him. Go with him and do damage control.'

Another look between the agents. Clint raised his eyebrows, Natasha went stone-faced. Clint rolled his eyes, Natasha's face didn't twitch.

Clint exhaled sharply. 'I'll take that as an order, Director,' he muttered. 'Was that all?'
'Until we watch Stark's press conference, yes,' Fury said. 'Dismissed.'

He leaned back in his seat and Phil stepped between Natasha and Clint. Clint was out the door first, shooting from his chair and wandering down the hallway. The corridors of the Helicarrier were familiar to him by now; he practically lived aboard the thing when he wasn't on a mission or on some much needed R&R.

Natasha caught up quickly and fell into step just behind him. 'Are you okay?' she asked.

Frowning, Clint turned to glance at her. 'Questions about my health?' he asked. 'Really?'

'You had a seizure just a few days ago, Clint.'

'The doctors aren't sure it was a seizure,' Clint argued. They weren't; they were pretty sure. It certainly looked like a seizure to Clint. He'd been allowed to see the footage—“Anything to help with your memory recovery,” the doctor had said when Clint woke up with no knowledge of the conversation he and Steve had had with Stark.

Natasha didn't comment on that. 'Are they still doing tests?' she asked.

'Every day.' They couldn't find out what was wrong with him. The only recurring symptom he had was headaches that more often than not turned into full-blown migraines within a matter of hours. Today was one of the few days this week he hadn't developed a headache within an hour of waking up.

'Keep me posted.'

Clint chuckled. Like she hadn't already intimidated the entire medical staff into keeping her updated on his health. He decided to change the subject. 'How angry do you think Stark's going to be when Rogers barges into his Tower demanding to chat?'

'If he lets us in,' Natasha said. She quickened her step until they were side by side. 'There's a good chance he won't even let us into the building. He did say that he might just dump all of our stuff outside.'

'True,' Clint agreed.

'What do you think?'

He didn't need to think; it was all he'd been doing since Stark had walked out of the meeting room hours earlier.

'He's done,' Clint said, 'he won't come back, no matter how much Rogers begs. I meant what I said to Fury. No matter how much of a lunatic Stark is, him quitting now is all on Fury- on us. We pushed him and he's finally had enough.'

Natasha stopped at that and turned to lean against the wall, hands tucked neatly behind her back. Clint faltered in his step, stopped, turned to look at her.

'Do you think he knows?' she asked.

'That we were spying on him?' Clint questioned. When she nodded, he said, 'No, I don't. If he knew he'd rain hell down on us. His lawyers would be so far up our ass—'

'Yes,' Natasha interrupted, 'alright.' She paused to glance down the corridor. 'And what do you
think Loki will do when he finds out?' was her next question. 'He's insane, not stupid.'

'I don't know,' Clint said. 'Either he'll go after Stark or leave him alone. Loki wanted the magical sensor but Stark hasn't had any input in it for weeks. If Loki knows that, then what's the point in going after Stark?'

'Stark still poses a threat,' Natasha said.

'Yeah,' Clint agreed, 'but not as much as we do. There's more of us; the Avengers have more resources and we have Thor. Thor and Banner are our best bets at taking Loki down. Stark can't take Loki out on his own.'

Natasha just nodded before pushing herself lightly from the wall. 'We should talk to Rogers,' she said. 'If we can't talk him out of face time with Stark, we can at least try and talk Banner into coming with us. Stark might be a bit more cordial with Banner there.'

She turned, heading back the way they'd come without waiting for Clint's answer. Not that she really needed one.

Clint was pretty sure that if Stark saw their faces so soon after his exit he'd hit the roof. But, having Banner tag along might actually make him a bit calmer than he otherwise would have been.

A dull throb pulsed along Clint's right temple and he winced silently. Natasha was just ahead of him, hair swishing around her shoulders as she marched down the corridor. Clint reached up briefly to rub his temple. Hopefully it was just a headache and not a migraine; he couldn't take any more of Natasha's worried looks.

{oOo}

'Stop fiddling.'

Tony pouted and tried to see himself better in the mirror hanging on the wall. He could tell that it had been hanged purely for decorative purposes; it was too high, barely giving Tony a chance to see his neck even when pushed up on his tip toes.

'You had a dressing room. We spent quite a lot of time in that dressing room to my recollection.'

Tony chuckled and eyed Lily out of the corner of his eye. 'Not a wise thing to say with so many listeners lurking around,' he commented.

Lily rolled her eyes and finally slapped Tony's hands aside to adjust his tie herself. 'I've already checked, my dear. Nobody's listening.' She pecked Tony on the cheek. 'Incoming,' she whispered. She slid back a respectable distance just before the door opened and Pepper popped in.

She sighed. 'There you are.'

'Yeah,' Tony said, eyes already back on the mirror. 'Just fixing myself up a bit.'

Pepper had been marching towards him, StarkPad in one hand and some loose paper in the other. She paused at his words and eyed him warily.

'Don't worry, I've been good,' Tony said with a small chuckle. 'Logan's still at home, so I can't have
'And thank God for small mercies,' Lily commented idly as she swiped at her own StarkPad.

Apparently Pepper had decided to ignore Tony's comments, because she stepped up to Lily's side and glanced down at the assistant's Pad. 'We're on schedule,' she said, 'did you get the file I sent you?'

'Which one?' Lily asked.

'Never mind, it's there,' Pepper said and pointed at something on the screen. 'Those are the profiles of the journalists I selected.'

'Yes, Mr Stark and I went through them earlier,' Lily commented. 'You said that they will ask fairly standard questions?'

'All approved by me,' Pepper said with a nod. 'They'll revolve around why Tony left, how he feels about it, a few things about Logan.' When Tony groaned she added, 'Don't worry, you only have to answer a few. I'll handle the rest.'

'And then I can leave, right?' Tony asked. He tilted the knot of his tie just a little bit. It didn't look any better.

'Yes, Tony,' Pepper said, 'then you can leave.'

'Good.' Tony hummed and side-stepped Lily when she tried to still his hands. 'So, how did your chat with Coulson go?'

Pepper wasn't surprised that he knew; she didn't flinch, didn't hesitate, just continued swiping her Pad as she spoke. 'I told him what you told me,' she said, eyes down, 'that I'm not allowed to talk to him per my contract and your wishes. I did tell him about the press conference.'

'Good,' Tony repeated. Finally done trying to strangle himself just to get out of the conference that he'd planned, Tony shoved his hands into his pockets and rocked back and forth on his feet. 'You know, I should have brought Logan; I'm bored.'

'Ten minutes, Mr Stark,' Lily said. 'A half-hour at the most and then you're free to go.'

Pepper finally looked up at that, eyes darting between Tony and Lily. Finally she locked the screen of her StarkPad and touched Lily's elbow. 'Can you please give us a minute, Miss Walden?'

Lily caught Tony's eyes, and only when Tony had nodded did she say, 'Yes, of course,' and quickly leave the room to them.

'You have her trained well,' Pepper mused.

'No, she just wants to keep her job,' Tony said, 'and she's good at it, so...' He offered her a shrug and Pepper sighed. 'What's wrong?'

'I'm still confused about this entire thing,' Pepper admitted. 'You only told me enough information so that I could put this thing together, Tony.'

'You don't need to know any more than that,' Tony insisted. 'What happened will strictly stay between me, the Avengers and SHIELD.' He paused. 'Well, unless they feel like sharing it with you. And seeing as how you're not allowed to talk to them...'
Pepper pulled one of the seats of the conference table out and sat down. 'You're really not going to tell me anything else?'

Tony eyed her carefully, head tilted, body rocking as he gently pushed himself up and down on his heels. He'd expected questions from Pepper; demands, information, why Tony had suddenly quit and what he planned to do now.

He hadn't told her anything, really.

'I'm just done, Pepper,' Tony said. 'Too much stress, too much danger. I don't like the way SHIELD handle things. I don't like the way the Avengers jump into any and every fight and claim to always be the bigger man. You don't plead your case with SHIELD or with the Avengers. You get captured or you die.' He shrugged one shoulder. 'That's not how America works; it's not how I work. I'm done being their lackey.'

Pepper had nodded along every other word, eyes focused on the wall. 'I don't quite understand,' she said, 'but I respect your decision. And in all honesty, Tony...'

She slouched ever so slightly and Tony watched her, magic calm and cool in his chest. He'd felt that way all morning, actually. He'd been up late planning a few things, first with Loki and later with Pepper and his team. He hadn't had time for a proper rest before the press conference, instead accepting Loki's offer of meditation.

It had worked, because he didn't feel nervous, not angry, nothing other than mildly hungry and a little more than bored.

'I feel better knowing that you're no longer on the team,' Pepper finally finished. 'You're safer away from them.'

Tony frowned. 'I'm not quitting Iron Man, Pepper.'

She offered him a small, slightly bitter smile at that. 'Yes, I'm perfectly aware,' she said. 'I'm not happy about it; you know I'm not. But it's your decision, Tony, and it always has been. If you want to continue being Iron Man away from the Avengers, all I can do is support you and run your company. And while I think that the Avengers were good for you, SHIELD weren't.'

'Oh?' Tony felt slightly amused at that, because- 'And here I thought you and Coulson were all chummy. Lunch dates, late night phone calls, braiding each other's hair. Were there pillow fights? I bet there were pillow fights.'

Pepper rolled her eyes and stood smoothly. 'No pillow fights, Mr Stark. Please remove that picture from your mind.'

'Can't. Imagination too strong. Now picturing Coulson and fuzzy- hey, hey, I just fixed my tie!' Tony jumped away and scowled at Pepper, who laughed lightly.

'My apologies, Mr Stark,' Pepper said.

Lily opened the door before Pepper could say anything else. 'It's time, Mr Stark,' she said.

Tony prodded the knot of his tie and Lily rolled her eyes. 'It's fine, Tony,' Pepper said. She reached out to touch him and Tony tried to ignore the way his skin prickled uncomfortably beneath her fingers. While Pepper had been surprisingly supportive since Tony had announced his departure from the Avengers only a couple of hours earlier, he couldn't forget that she'd been running around behind his back keeping Coulson updated on him.
He didn't know how long she'd been doing it and what, exactly, she and Coulson had been discussing. But the fact that she'd done it in the first place made his magic grow hot in his chest. He settled it, though, thanked Pepper and Lily both as he slipped through the door and shoved his hands back into his pockets.

Tony was guided through one door, two, and then through a curtain and onto a small stage. There was one podium and a line of chairs against the large board suspended behind him. It proudly displayed the Stark Industries emblem and logo, and Tony briefly wondered if they kept that stuff in storage or had new ones made every time he needed to do one of these things.

_Well, it's usually digital and flashy,_ Tony mused as he stepped up to the podium. Lily and Pepper took seats behind him. Tony felt a pulse of Loki go through him and nearly turned to shoot a thankful smile Lily's way. Instead he plastered his confident smirk across his face and waved at the crowd.

They were already taking pictures. Tony let them have their fun for a minute before someone off to his right settled them down.

There wasn't a microphone; the room was small and there weren't enough people packed in for Tony to need one. He doubted that he'd even need to shout to make himself heard.

'Thank you,' Tony said. 'Now, I'm sure you all have an idea of what this press conference is about. I'm keeping it short and sweet because I have far too many things to do today. However, I felt that it was only right that the city I protect- that the world I protect- understands how and why I've made the decision that I have.'

He paused to clear his throat and take a sip from the water glass sitting on the podium. He vaguely regretted not wearing a pair of shades to block out the harsh lighting hitting him from overhead.

'Yesterday afternoon there was an incident. Those involved with said incident have named it the Purge Battle,' Tony said. 'I'm sure you've all seen footage of that battle, including the moment when a woman named Amanda González lost her life to one of the terrorists.' He hesitated, wet his lips. 'It's not a moment that I'm ever going to forget,' he continued. 'It, and the meetings afterwards, are why I decided that I can no longer work as a part of the Avengers Initiative.'

A murmur went through the gathered journalists, enough people whispering and shuffling in their seats to cause a ripple throughout them all. Tony met the eyes of some, glanced over others. His smirk had fallen long ago.

'I, Tony Stark, am hereby officially announcing my resignation from the Avengers Initiative,' Tony said. 'Tony Stark, Iron Man, and Stark Industries will no longer have any ties, either personally or professionally, with the Avengers, the Strategic Homeland Intervention Enforcement and Logistics Division, otherwise known as SHIELD, or any of its affiliates. All funding from myself and Stark Industries has been pulled from the Avengers and SHIELD.

'Unless it's with my express permission, the Avengers, SHIELD and any of its affiliates are not allowed on any Stark property; that includes my private properties, all of Stark Industries' private properties, and all collective properties owned by the many charities I have created. Failure to abide by these terms will find the persons responsible sued for trespassing on private or collective property.'

He smiled brightly then, flashed his teeth and leaned casually against the podium. 'Now that that's done,' he said, 'I'll take a few questions.'
Almost immediately every single person, barring those on his team and security, leapt to their feet. There was no shouting for once, just strong “Mr Stark”’s coming from most of them. He gazed across the room and settled on one of the women Pepper had vetted. 'You,' he said.

She rattled off what news programme she was from- or was that a paper?- before asking, 'Why, exactly, did you decide to leave the Avengers, Mr Stark?'

'Well, I knew this question would come, so decided not to throw it into my little speech,' Tony said and winked at her. 'It all boils down to disagreements. I don't like the way that SHIELD, and by extension the Avengers, like to handle things. Whether that be battles, meetings, or general policies. We have very different views on how a number of subjects are tackled and quite frankly I'm sick of butting heads every time I meet with them.

'It's also personalities clashing,' Tony elaborated. 'I don't play well with others.' Another wink and that one drew a few chuckles from the press. 'I do things my way and they do things their way. I'm no longer willing to do things their way. Next question.'

A man this time, another news programme he didn't watch. 'Was this decision a joint one, or something you decided on your own?'

Tony hummed and pushed off of the podium. He always did better when he wandered. 'A bit of both, I guess,' he said, 'but it was mostly my decision. SHIELD have never been quiet about their... dislike of me. Originally I wasn't authorised to even join the Avengers. But when Loki decided to lead an alien invasion, they kinda needed me. After that I just kind of fell into helping them.'

'And the Avengers?' the journalist asked. 'How do they feel about this?'

'Not a clue,' Tony said truthfully. 'I haven't spoken to them since I quit.'

'Do you plan to?'

'Sure,' Tony said. 'They lived in my Tower up until my Tweet yesterday. I'm giving them a small window in which they're allowed to collect their belongings. I'm positive that they'll have plenty to say when they pick up their stuff. Next.'

He pointed at another of Pepper's lackeys. 'You said via Twitter that you plan to continue being Iron Man,' the woman said. 'Would you please elaborate on that statement?'

'Well, Tweet, not statement,' Tony corrected. 'Not enough characters for a statement.' He shoved his hands into his pockets and wandered across to the other side of the stage. 'But I meant what I said, in any case. I do plan on continuing my work as Iron Man. My own system was working well before I joined the Avengers.'

'Do you plan on fighting all of America's enemies on your own?' the woman questioned.

'Of course not,' Tony scoffed. 'I'm good, but not that good. I plan on reaching out to more people than I originally did. One of the many things I dislike about SHIELD and the Avengers is the secrecy. Of course, secrecy can be a good thing; blurt out any and all plans about your country's defences isn't a good thing. But for SHIELD, that secrecy extends to the local government; the federal government. Hell, even the local police forces and emergency responders never know what's happening.

'I've never been happy with that,' Tony said. He pivoted, glanced across the room, continued across the stage. 'I plan to be open and honest about my activities in regards to Iron Man. I plan on sitting down and discussing any and all options with all of those who could be involved in a battle I
partake in. Logan's been telling me that communication is important in relationships and I guess it's finally sinking in.'

He got a proper laugh at that and pointed to the next person.

'What do you plan to do when you and the Avengers respond to the same threat?'

'Easy,' Tony said, 'I've fought with them before. I know how to fight alongside them. I'll be helping them in any way I can. Whether they extend that same courtesy to me is up to them. Next question.'

'One more, Mr Stark.' Lily had stood and approached him stealthily. Tony jumped lightly and turned to look at her. 'You have another meeting to attend,' Lily added, loud enough for most of the room to hear. There were murmurs, groans, hissed orders to those holding cameras to get a few more shots.

'Okay,' Tony said and made his way back to the podium. He gripped it with both hands and scanned the crowd. He pinpointed Pepper's people- the ones she wanted him to ask, the ones with safe questions. He skimmed over all of them and pointed to a man in the front row. 'You. Ask quickly.'

The man stood. 'What are your plans in regards to Loki?' he asked.

Tony... blinked at that. Frowned. 'What do you mean?'

'Do you plan on fighting him on your own?' the man asked. 'Do you think that he'll target you now that you're no longer a part of the Avengers?'

'I... well, I don't know about the second part,' Tony said. 'Loki tends to focus more on Thor and the Hulk than anyone else during our fights; mostly because the Hulk can actually hurt him and Thor seems to piss him off more than anyone else on this planet.'

He heard Pepper mutter something behind him but didn't turn.

'So you're not worried that he'll attack you?' the journalist questioned.

'Sure I'm worried,' Tony said, 'but not for myself. When I decided to tell the world that I was Iron Man, I made myself a target. That's my issue and mine alone. I'm worried about Logan, my partner. I'm worried that he'll be hurt because he's with me. But if I can protect him, then I don't care what happens to me.'

There were more whispers now, impressed looks and one or two disbelieving ones. Tony didn't particularly care.

'And the first part of my question, Mr Stark?' the journalist prompted when Tony failed to say anything else.

'No, I don't plan on fighting Loki alone,' Tony said. 'But if I have to, I will. I'll do whatever I can to stop him and send him back to Asgard.'

'Is that your plan? To capture Loki and send him back to Asgard?'

That was more than the one questioned allotted, but Tony didn't mind. He brushed a hand aside when Lily began to speak, instead kept his eyes on the room.

'That's always been the plan,' he explained, 'because in this country, we believe that every human
being has a right to face a jury of their peers and be sentenced in accordance with our laws. Loki isn't American. He isn't even human. Thor will take him back to Asgard, where Loki will be judged by the King or a group of his peers or however they do things up there. His punishment will be for them and them alone to decide.

'And you don't think that humanity as a whole has a right to judge and punish Loki for the crimes he's committed on our planet?'

That was a different person and this time both Lily and Pepper stood. Tony answered before the two women could stop him.

'No, I don't,' he said. 'Whether you believe that Loki, as an Æsir, is above or beneath or equal to humanity is up to you. That's your personal opinion. But I don't believe that we, as a species who first flew in 1903, who first travelled to space in 1961, and who have never made it past the age of 122, have a right to judge a being who's well past one thousand years old and who's from a hyper intelligent species that has been around for millennia. Loki isn't human and he shouldn't be judged as or by one.

'And, personally, I don't think that we have the full version of events,' Tony continued. Pepper was by his side now and eyeing him angrily. 'We don't know why Loki came here. We don't know the events that led up to him transitioning from a well-respected Prince of Asgard into the lunatic who likes throwing cars around. If those in a higher power than myself decide that we should judge Loki, then I don't believe we should do it until we have all of the facts.'

He shrugged and stepped back from the podium. 'But hey, that's just my opinion; what do I know?'

Pepper quickly pushed herself between him and the journalists, a fake smile plastered to her face. 'And with that, unfortunately, Mr Stark must leave. Any remaining questions can be directed to me.'

Tony allowed Lily to drag him from the room and back through the building. Security kept a decent gap between themselves and the two until it was time for Tony and Lily to discreetly slide into one of Tony's cars and leave. There were a fair few paparazzi hanging about, those that hadn't been invited or couldn't get in quickly enough. They shouted questions that Tony ignored as he climbed into the back seat after Lily.

The door was shut behind him by one of the security guards and Happy turned to glance at them. 'Back home, boss?' he asked.

'Yeah, Happy,' Tony said. 'I need a drink.'

Happy nodded and the partition slid up, effectively cocooning Tony and Lily in privacy. The partitions in Tony's cars were almost completely soundproof; Tony had tested it a number of times. Still, Tony and Lily kept their voices low when they spoke.

'That went smoothly,' Lily commented.

'Yeah,' Tony agreed, 'I thought there'd be a bit more outrage.'

'Perhaps your dislike of the Avengers hasn't been as subtle as you thought it was,' Lily said.

Tony chuckled and slouched down in his seat. 'Yeah, maybe,' he said. 'But it's all done. Let SHIELD try and take me down now.'

'I did enjoy your little hints; that it was SHIELD in the wrong, breaking laws and leaving the
morts out of their plans.'

Tilting his head to the side, Tony eyed Lily from beneath his eyelashes. 'Oh, yeah? You liked that, did you?'

Lily smirked and leaned closer, their lips almost touching. 'Have you suddenly changed your mind about what parts you'd like me to have, Stark?'

'No,' Tony said, 'most definitely not.'

Lily sighed and pulled back. 'I do enjoy sex as a woman, Stark, if that worries you.'

'Doesn't worry me.'

'So?'

'I hadn't been with a guy for... wow, years before we started fucking,' Tony explained. 'I mean, a few hand jobs here and there, but no anal.' He reached out to poke Lily in the thigh. 'Kinda still enjoying it. Every time I think about you I want a male you.'

Lily glanced at him. Her eyes had softened, and seeing Loki's love on Lily's usually sneering face was a bit weird. 'What you said about me during that conference,' Lily said, voice low, 'is that what you believe?'

'It's what I used to believe,' Tony said. 'Before we started working together, I truly believed those words.'

'But not now?' Lily asked.

'No.' Tony shook his head and caught Lily's eyes. 'Like I said in there; I don't think humanity has the understanding, or the right, to judge you. I don't think mortals could understand the ridiculously long life you've lived and all that you've endured.'

'And Asgard?'

'You're not Æsir, despite what I told the journalists. They can't judge you. Neither can the Jötnar. You were raised by one, born to the other. I don't think either of them have the right.'

'I see,' Lily mused. She leaned back in her seat. 'I am never to be judged, then? For I have no equal.'

'I'm your equal,' Tony said, a little smile accompanying his words. 'Only I can judge you.'

'Is that so?'

'We're fucking. Working together. We have a magical bond that's not complete but still there. We're partners in every sense of the word.' Tony's smile grew. 'I think that gives me the right to judge you.'

Lily chuckled. 'And what is your verdict, then?'

Tony leaned forward and kissed her; a gentle, teasing little kiss that still stained Lily's cheeks red when Tony drew back. 'I love you,' he said.

The smile that broke out on Lily's face was all Loki.
'Pepper.'

'Jesus!' Pepper had one of Tony's personally made tasers in her hand before she'd even registered who was standing before her. 'Coulson!'

'The one and only,' the SHIELD agent said, that little smile he always wore on his face. Pepper rolled her eyes and shoved her taser back into her bag. 'I've already told you, Agent Coulson,' she said, 'I can't speak to you. Any issues you have can be directed to Mr Stark personally.'

'And would I actually be put through to him, or would JARVIS end the call before I got a chance?' Coulson asked.

He fell into step with Pepper when she started walking again. The conference had only continued for another forty minutes before she put a stop to it; most of the questions had been about Tony, about the Avengers and SHIELD, and there were only so many Pepper could answer with the small amount of information Tony had given her.

'I guess that's up to you to find out,' Pepper murmured. She went to push her way out of the building when a hand on her arm stopped her. 'Agent Coulson,' she said, voice stern, 'I've already told you that I can't help you.'

'Pepper, please,' Coulson said. She sighed and turned to face him. 'Stark didn't really give us a reason for quitting.'

'Does he need to?' Pepper asked. 'He quit. End of story, according to Tony.'

'We want to know why.'

'Then ask him,' Pepper growled. 'You know whatever he told you, Phil. You know what he said during the press conference. Tony's official word has been made. Take it or leave it, but I cannot talk to you.'

He reached out again but Pepper stepped back, gave him the glare that she usually reserved for Tony during his childish antics. 'Pepper-'

'No,' Pepper interrupted. 'I was more than willing to discuss Tony's wellness with you, Phil. But Tony gave me a direct order. I'm the CEO but he owns the company, I work for him. But more importantly than that, he's my friend, and he wants nothing to do with you. He has his reasons and if you want to know them, ask him. It's none of my business unless he states otherwise.'

She stepped back and made sure she had everything before meeting Coulson's eyes again. The man looked... slightly shocked.

'I'm sorry, Phil,' she said, 'but that's just the way it is. Have a nice day.' She made her way out into the late morning air, leaving Coulson behind.
Chapter 64

Chapter Notes

Author's Note: This chapter was a hella fun one to write. I don't know why I had so much fun with it, but I did. Also, sorry for the wait! Between work, getting my forklift licence, getting my bike licence, and just life in general, I've been hard-pressed for free time. So my apologies and enjoy!

Dreamer

“Been travelling in packs that I can't carry any more

Been waiting for somebody else to carry me

There's nothing else there for me at my door

All the people I know aren't who they used to be

And if I try to change my life one more day

There would be nobody else to save

And I can't change into a person I don't wanna be, so

Oh, it's Saturday night, yeah”

– Say Amen (Saturday Night) [Panic! At The Disco]

“While Tony Stark's resignation from the Avengers was first announced via his Twitter account, the press conference Stark conducted just three hours ago was where he officially stated that not only has he personally withdrawn from the group, but that Iron Man, Stark industries, and its affiliates will no longer have any connection to SHIELD or the Avengers.”

“Stark's no longer an Avenger, but you can count on still seeing Iron Man flying around the sky! Tony Stark, the multi-billionaire owner of Stark Industries and super hero who helped stop Loki's alien invasion, announced this morning that he's no longer a part of the tightly-clad super hero group!”

“He dropped the bombshell on Twitter, but was his departure really unexpected? Tony Stark stated personal and professional differences with SHIELD and the Avengers, and we have three special guests with us today to discuss Stark's behaviour leading up to this announcement, as well as the signs we possibly missed.”
"Well, he's never played well with others, has he? But when it came down to it, he got the job done. Let's not forget that Stark's saved countless lives and-"

"- lover Logan Thomas have been seen in various restaurants, clubs and pubs enjoying each other's company. Many speculate that Stark's new found love is the main reason he's decided to tone down the danger-"

'Can you stop doing that?' Tony asked.

Loki glanced over the back of the sofa to pout at him. 'But I'm Logan Thomas, your new found love who has convinced you to tone down the danger.'

Tony rolled his eyes and pointed a strip of bacon at Loki. 'Keep that up and and I won't be your anything.'

'Oh, no,' Loki drawled, 'all that work, all of that love, only to be abandoned at a critical moment in our plans. However could you do this to me, Anthony?'

Tony rolled his eyes and shoved bacon into his mouth. Bacon was far more interesting than whatever the media was spewing. Well, it'd been pretty interesting in the beginning when they'd first started running the story. But it had been hours, now, and Pepper hadn't been able to expand upon any of the information that Tony had presented. The media had gone through all of it and were just repeating themselves at this point.

He was halfway through his lunch by the time Loki grew bored enough to turn the TV off- and it was a pretty big lunch, so that was more than enough shitty news for Tony. Loki stood tall and stretched, arms raised above his head and back arching as he sighed. It drew Tony's attention to his smooth belly, just visible as Loki's shirt rode up.

'Midgard understands very little about you,' Loki said and dropped his hands. Tony pouted. 'Come now, Stark,' Loki said when he'd noticed- because of course he'd noticed. 'You wished to spar, did you not?'

'Yes,' Tony said, 'I very much want to do that.' Because he wanted to get stronger, fitter, faster, better. He needed to be better than the agents, than Rogers, because if he wasn't then Loki would constantly throw himself into danger just to protect him.

Tony wasn't going to be the reason that Loki was caught or hurt.

He cleared his throat and glanced at Loki. Loki clearly knew what he was thinking, his face doing that adorably worried scrunchy thing it always did whenever Tony thought about being Loki's greatest weakness.

Mood lifted ever so slightly, Tony said, 'I'd love to spar with you; you know I would. But I've gotta wait for the Avengers. I gave them until six pm to get their shit out of my Tower. I don't doubt that Rogers will storm up here and demand that I change my mind. Gotta be here so I can shoot him down and kick him the fuck out.'

Loki hummed. 'Very well,' he said. 'JARVIS, what is the time?'

'12:42pm, Mr Laufeyson,' JARVIS said.

'What shall we do while we wait?' Loki questioned.

Tony pulled his plate closer towards himself and leaned more heavily against the table. 'Well, you
shot down the idea of a quickie and I'm still hungry. Find a way to occupy yourself until tonight at least, Mr Laufeyson.'

Loki pouted and flopped back onto the sofa. 'You are dull.' He sniffed.

Tony laughed.

'Do you still plan on visiting Rhodes?' Loki asked.

Mumbling around another mouthful of food, Tony said, 'Yeah, I do. As soon as the Avengers are completely moved out and the suit is completely upgraded. It'll only be a couple of days at the most.'

'And are you-

'We're not arguing about it any more, remember?' Tony cut in. He couldn't see Loki, the older god obscured once more by the lounge. But he heard his sigh.

'Yes, Stark,' Loki said, 'I remember.'

Before Tony could respond, JARVIS was speaking; 'Mr Stark, the Avengers are requesting entrance. They wish to speak to you in person.'

Tony hummed and glanced at the sofa. Loki was sitting once more and he'd already changed into Logan Thomas. He rolled his eyes when he caught Tony staring. 'Yes, Stark,' he muttered, 'you were right.'

'This should be fun,' Tony commented. Loki shook his head. 'Let the Avengers up, JARVIS. They can collect their belongings when I'm done with them.'

'Yes, Mr Stark,' JARVIS said.

{oOo}

Bruce stood nervously at the back of the elevator. While Tony had let them up, Bruce knew that they'd soon be swiftly removed.

Steve didn't seem to realise that. All night and morning he'd been telling anyone who would listen that Tony would change his mind; that the shock of watching that poor woman die had rattled him. That now, after a night's rest and some time to reflect, Tony would come back. Even the press conference, where Tony had stated that he'd left the Avengers, wasn't enough to convince Steve that Tony was done.

Bruce knew the truth, though. So did Clint. Bruce kept eyeing the archer, half expecting Clint to round on him and tell everybody Bruce's secrets.

But Clint had been released from the Helicarrier's infirmary with swift instructions to report back to a doctor if he felt even slightly out of sorts. He'd greeted Bruce with a cheerful enough smile when Bruce had seen him in at the beginning of the Purge Battle. He was a little out of it; a little tired.
But he didn't suspect.

Clint shook his head as Steve, once again, said, 'It'll be fine. We'll just talk to him.'

'He isn't coming back, Steve,' Clint said. 'He's done. Live with it.'

Steve frowned. 'He'll come back when-

'No he won't,' Bruce interrupted. The other three looked at him. 'You saw his Tweet,' Bruce continued. 'You saw the official statement on his company's website. Every channel has been running some segment about his press conference. It's official, Steve. Tony and by extension Iron Man is no longer affiliated with the Avengers or SHIELD in any way, shape, or form.'

'But...,' Steve looked helpless and Bruce felt a stab of pity for the man. 'He can't,' Steve said.

'He did,' Clint muttered. 'And he's tell you the same thing we've been telling you all night, Steve. Stark is done with us.'

The elevators dinged. The doors opened. 'Welcome to Mr Stark's penthouse,' JARVIS said. 'Please proceed directly into the living room. Mr Stark has fifteen minutes to speak to you, after which you will be taken to your individual floors to remove your belongings from the Tower.'

Steve marched out of the elevator and Natasha caught up to him swiftly. Clint glanced at Bruce, sighed, and followed. Bruce brought up the rear.

Loki, wearing Logan Thomas' skin, was sitting on the sofa watching TV. There was a tension to his shoulders that Bruce knew was faked. Tony, on the other hand, seemed perfectly happy. He was sitting at the round table between the bar and sofas, a plate of breakfast foods before him.

'Welcome to Stark Tower, Agents Barton, Romanov; Captain Rogers, Dr Banner.' He eyed each of them as he said their titles. 'How can I help you today?'

'Tony,' Steve said but Tony interrupted.

'Mr Stark, Captain Rogers,' Tony said. 'If you don't respect my request, you will be removed from my Tower and your belongings left out on the street.' There was a hard edge to his eyes. 'Is that clear?'

Steve's mouth flapped open, tongue apparently stilled. Natasha brushed past the soldier.

'So that's it, then?' she demanded. 'After two years you're just done?'

Tony leaned back in his seat. 'I thought I made that clear yesterday, Agent Romanov. It was made even clearer this morning. I want nothing more to do with you people or SHIELD. Didn't you read my statement? My Tweet? See my announcement in high definition? I'm pretty sure that at least one SHIELD agent monitors my online presence or watches TV once in a while.'

'Tony.' Steve had found his voice again and Bruce saw the swift, brutal look enter Tony's eyes as he stared at the man. 'We're friends.'

'We're not friends, Captain Rogers,' Tony stated. 'And that's the second time you've called me Tony against my wishes. Leave my Tower immediately.'

'But- I- it-' Steve spluttered.

'Do not make me call a suit, Rogers,' Tony said. 'You have ten minutes to vacate this Tower. You
can pick up your belongings from the lobby.' When Steve still failed to move- eyes wide and mouth
gaping and hands not knowing what to do- Tony slowly stood.

He had that look on his face- the one he'd worn when he'd spilled all his dirty little secrets to
Bruce. It was a thunderous look made up of everything Tony truly felt towards the Avengers. That
spark in his eyes that said I am going to destroy you. Slowly, painfully, I will tear down everything
you've ever built until you have nothing left.

Only then will I kill you.

'Leave,' Tony ordered, 'now.'

Bruce walked forward and grabbed Steve's arm before he could do anything. 'Steve,' he said, 'Steve.' Bruce shook him, just a little, until Steve's blue eyes snapped to him. 'Don't do anything stupid,' Bruce said. 'Go, now.'

Steve swallowed, glanced at Tony. 'I...' But apparently he could think of nothing else. He looked heartbroken as he nodded and turned back to the elevator.

Nobody spoke until the doors had closed behind Steve.

'Well then,' Tony said. That look was gone, replaced by a mix between smarmy media charm and
slight boredom. He surveyed the Avengers as he sat back down. 'Was there anything else I can help you with?'

'You're different,' Natasha stated. She'd noticed what Bruce had- what Bruce had seen all those
weeks ago when he'd sold his soul to Tony.

This was the real Tony Stark.

Tony gave her a charming smile. 'Perhaps I'm just no longer pretending to like you, Agent
Romanov,' he said. 'I know that you feel the same way about me.'

'The Avengers need you,' Natasha said.

'What a pity,' Tony said. 'I don't need the Avengers.'

'And when Loki targets you?' Clint asked. Tony turned his gaze on Clint, who shrugged. 'I know
that you're not coming back, Stark. I told Steve that. But what about Loki? He'll know that you've
left. He'll know that it's just you, now.'

'He will,' Tony agreed easily. 'I'm not worried.'

'Why?' Natasha asked. Her eyes were narrowed, calculating. Probably thinking what everybody
else in the room was.

What if Tony was already working with Loki?

Loki, who was still disguised and sitting on the sofa, no longer pretending that he wasn't watching
the entire thing with barely hidden amusement.

'I haven't been overly dickish to Loki,' Tony said. 'I haven't targeted him. I'm no threat to him if he
doesn't make himself a threat to me. You see, Romanov, I know exactly what SHIELD has planned
for Loki.'

Natasha froze at that. Clint's breath caught in his throat and Bruce watched a sharp, satisfied grin


spread over Tony's face.

'Yeah,' Tony said. 'So you see, Agent Romanov; if Loki targets me all I have to do is show him the information SHIELD is so desperate to keep from Thor. Who do you think Loki will go after when he learns about it?'

Natasha said nothing.

'Where is Thor, by the way?' Tony asked.

'He respects your decision,' Bruce said. Tony looked at him. 'He said that he knew he couldn't change your mind; said that it'd be a great dishonour to try and change your mind. He's upset but accepts it.'

'Good,' Tony said. 'You can all leave now.'

Clint just nodded and turned away, face grim. Natasha was rooted to the spot.

'Bruce,' Tony said and Bruce met his eyes. 'You're always welcome here,' Tony continued, 'I actually like you. Come by if you wanna chat or use the lab I built for you. My doors are always open for you.'

Natasha's face took on a calculating look then. Bruce just nodded, said, 'Thank you, Mr Stark,' and headed for the elevators.

He knew what was coming. Natasha rounded on him as soon they were outside the Tower.

'You can get in,' she said. 'We have to keep an eye on Stark. He's lost his mind.'

'Or maybe he's found it,' Bruce muttered. 'I'm not spying on him for you or SHIELD, Natasha.'

'Why not?' Clint asked. There was a SHIELD van waiting for them. Another already being loaded with their things. Apparently Steve had started collecting his belongings as soon as he was kicked out of the Tower.

'Because Tony's my friend,' Bruce stated and headed for the men and women bringing boxes out of the Tower. He could feel the agents staring at him as he walked away.

{oOo}

'If Stark knows about SHIELD's plans for Loki...’ Natasha began.

'Then what else does he know?’ Clint finished for her.

His head was pounding but he'd gotten pretty adept at hiding it. He and Natasha were leaning against one of SHIELD's vans, watching as various Stark minions brought their belongings out. They'd packed everything fairly quickly; neither Clint or Natasha had ever kept much at the Tower.

'I don't think he knows everything,' Clint muttered, a slight sigh accompanying his words. 'He wouldn't be nearly this casual if he knew what SHIELD's been doing.'
Natasha shifted on her feet. 'We have to tell Fury.' Clint nodded in agreement. 'This might change things.'

'It'll certainly change his approach,' Clint muttered. 'If he pisses off Stark just enough, Stark will tell Thor. And we know how he'll react.'

Humming, Natasha turned to survey the men and women walking back and forth from the Tower. They wouldn't just lose Stark; if Thor knew the truth, knew what SHIELD wanted to use his brother for, he'd walk, too. But unlike Stark, he'd probably take a few of them down on his way out.

Or the entire Helicarrier.

'Don't call it in,' Clint advised. 'Wait until we're back aboard the Helicarrier.'

Natasha just nodded.

{oOo}

Bruce was allowed back into the Tower to pack. Had been told by one of the receptionists that he was, in fact, always allowed back in. He only needed permission from Tony to enter the penthouse which was nothing new.

He didn't have much to pack; a few clothes that had survived his travels, well-worn things that should probably be thrown out but would suit Bruce's life aboard the Helicarrier. The furniture and lab equipment was staying; Bruce wouldn't need it.

And it'll still be here when I come back, Bruce thought. Because he assumed that at some point, when SHIELD were aware that Tony was, in fact, working with Loki, Bruce would be welcomed back by his true allies.

He put another t-shirt into the bag that had been provided by one of the moving staff.

'Banner.'

Bruce jumped and looked up. Loki was leaning against the doorway between his room and en-suite bathroom.

'Loki,' he said. 'Does Tony need me?'

'Yes,' Loki stated.

'Okay,' Bruce said. 'For what?'

'It's time we found out where SHIELD's remaining bases are,' Loki said. He pushed one hand out and pulled a box from... somewhere. He held it out for Bruce.

Bruce exhaled sharply but stepped forward to take the box. 'What is this?'

'Communication equipment, Stark tells me,' Loki told him. 'He will talk you through what needs to
'Okay.' Bruce repeated. He ran his fingers over the box before turning to put it amongst his shirts.

'Banner.' Bruce turned back around, met Loki's eyes. 'You will be back soon enough,' Loki said before he disappeared without a sound.

Bruce just nodded to himself and went back to packing. He wondered if this was a test as well as an infiltration.

He wondered what would happen if he was caught.
'What, exactly, did he say?' Hill asked.

Clint shrugged. It was Natasha who answered. 'That he knows exactly what we have planned for Loki,' she said.

'Does he?' That was Coulson. He was standing to the side of Fury's desk, hands linked behind his back and shoulders pressed to the wall. Clint could see the tension barely concealed beneath his skin.

'No idea,' Natasha said.

'Probably,' Clint muttered.

Fury looked at Clint. 'And why is that, Agent Barton?'

'He wouldn't hint at knowing something unless he actually knows something,' Clint said. 'Stark likes to remind everybody that he's the smartest guy in the room. He knows that SHIELD plan on using Loki's magic to make weapons and he wanted to make sure that we knew it.'

'Why?' Fury asked. 'Why give away that he knows? Why not sit on it?'

Clint sighed before saying, 'Because he's done with us. He wants us to know that he's never coming back; that he's better off without us. Natasha tried to remind him of the threat Loki poses. Stark's response was to tell us that he knows of our plans. So that if Loki does attack him, he can get out of it. So that he'll once again prove that he's better than us. This is all about staying alive and fucking us over if he can.'

He sat back heavily in his seat and muttered, 'Just like we fucked him over.' His words clearly weren't said quietly enough, because Fury's eye narrowed and Hill huffed from the seat to his right.

'Ve did what we had to do,' Hill said.

'Did we?' Clint demanded. 'Because it sure as hell seems to me as though we've run off one of the best allies we had!'

'Clint...' Natasha murmured but didn't move from her own chair.

Coulson sniffed and Fury leaned forward to survey Clint from across the desk. 'Do I detect sympathy, Agent Barton?' he growled.

Shaking his head, Clint said, 'Not sympathy, no. Just understanding. You can all act as shocked and outraged as you want, but I'm not lying to myself. We ran Stark off. We made him leave. Say what you want about his mania and his bad habits, but he funded us. He built our technology and our systems. Him leaving is our fault, not his. Him using our plans for Loki against us is just common sense given how this organisation has treated him.'

He paused to shake his head and scrub a hand over his face. His head hurt.

'I don't feel bad for Stark,' he sad, 'I feel fucking sad for us.'
With that he pulled himself to his feet and tossed a half-hearted salute Fury's way.

'Wel're not done here, Agent Barton,' the Director said.

'I have a headache,' Clint retorted. 'Gotta report to a doctor, right?'

'Your orders, Agent Barton,' Coulson said. He caught Clint by the arm when Clint tried to escape.

'What?' Clint asked.

'Keep this sealed, understood?' Fury demanded. 'Thor isn't to hear a word of this. Nobody is. If Stark blabs, we lose Thor.'

'And all the agents you have stalking Stark?' Clint said. 'I wouldn't be surprised if Stark told Thor just because some agent tried to hack his email.'

Coulson squeezed his arm- in sympathy, annoyance, warning? Clint didn't know or care.

'You leave them to me, Agent Barton,' Fury ordered.

Gladly, Clint thought. He finally managed to shake Coulson free and leave the room. He took a left towards the infirmary. He didn't plan on seeing a doctor, but it'd help when-

Yep, there she was.

Natasha fell into step beside him. For once Clint didn't feel comforted by her presence. He didn't feel that usual friendly affection, that hint of attraction that had been waning over the years. No, he just felt irritated that Natasha had chased after him, like Clint was some unruly child who needed to be minded.

'What's going on?' she asked as they turned the corner.

'Nothing,' Clint responded. 'I said exactly what I felt in Fury's office.'

'No sympathy?' Natasha asked. 'You really expect me to believe that?'

'I don't care what you believe,' Clint said. He knew that his tone had shocked her; Natasha faltered just slightly, hand brushing his arm without intention. 'I don't feel sorry for Stark. He's got what he's always wanted; SHIELD out of his life.'

'And that annoys you?' Natasha pressed.

Of course it annoyed him. But not for the same reasons that it annoyed Natasha, Fury, the rest of SHIELD.

It annoyed Clint because SHIELD had done this. Back before all of this, in the beginning, Clint had understood; Tony Stark had always been a liability that needed to be monitored. Clint was a spy and had long ago pushed aside any morality he had in favour of doing his job. So, stealing Stark's suit? Yeah, sure, why not.

But that had all been because Stark was unstable. He wasn't, not any more. At least not to the extent that he'd once been. He had a partner. He attended SI meetings. He filled out paperwork and handed it in on time. Hell, he barely ever drank!

An unstable, drunk, low-functioning Tony Stark was still a stupidly clever guy.
A stable, loved, functioning Tony Stark? Nobody would be able to stop him. Not his business rivals, not SHIELD and not Loki.

SHIELD had forced away the best fighter they'd ever had, one who could out-think them all and still kick ass. And Fury was acting as though this was Stark's fault. The clusterfuck that SHIELD had found themselves in was of their own making.

No, Clint didn't feel sympathy. He just felt tired.

'We have orders,' Natasha said.

'Yeah, I heard.'

'No, others; Coulson gave them to me before the meeting.'

Clint sighed.

{oOo}

At least it's not Loki, James thought when he stepped into his private quarters to find Agents Romanov and Barton lounging on his couch. Well, Romanov was lounging, looking very much at home in his sterile living room. Barton had propped himself up against one wall, arms folded and a scowl on his face.

'Do you have permission to be here?' he questioned after closing the door.

Romanov smiled at him.

'You do realise that this is an air force base, yes?' James continued when he got to no answer. 'Even SHIELD agents need to-

'Relax, Colonel Rhodes,' Barton interrupted. He pushed himself smoothly off of the wall and walked forward to stand beside the couch. 'We're permitted to be here.'

'I see,' James said. He folded his arms and eyed the two. 'Why are you here?'

'Have you heard the news?' Romanov questioned, one arm tossed over the back of the couch as she faced him.

James raised his eyebrows. 'I'm going to assume you're talking about Tony,' he said. Because, really; there was no other reason for them to visit him. 'I haven't spoken to him personally. Pepper called me, though, to let me know his change in status. And I saw the media coverage.'

'So you know that Stark is no longer an Avenger,' Romanov said.

'Yeah, I do,' James agreed. 'But I don't see why you're here.'

'We're a man down,' Romanov told him.
'And I believe that Tony clearly stated that anyone affiliated with him isn't to talk to SHIELD agents,' James said. He tilted his head in the direction of the door. 'You can leave now.'

Romanov stood slowly. 'You don't work for him, Colonel,' she said, 'you're not a Stark Industries employee. You don't have a contract with Stark stating who you can talk to and when.'

'No, I don't,' James said, 'but I'm his friend; his oldest friend. And I don't appreciate you coming here, behind his back, trying to do... whatever it is you're doing.'

He really, really didn't like this. It reminded him of way back when, when Romanov had caught him in the parking lot beneath Tony's Tower. He didn't like the way Romanov was eyeing him, as though hoping to get some sort of information out of James about Tony.

James was, first and foremost, a military man. Years of working, of living, of breathing the strict air force lifestyle had taught him all the tricks he needed to avoid giving away any sort of information that could potentially cause issues. He'd spent many more years being a friend of Tony Stark. He was used to the odd media presence, the people trying to worm information out of him about the eccentric billionaire.

A couple of SHIELD agents hoping to ambush him in his own home would be sorely disappointed when they left.

'We're not here to discuss Stark, exactly,' Romanov allowed after a beat, the three staring each other down.

James said nothing.

'We're really not,' Barton reiterated. 'We want to discuss the possibility of you lending your expertise to SHIELD and the Avengers.'

He almost burst out laughing; almost. James managed to keep a straight face as he said, in his most toneless voice possible, 'You want me to work for the Avengers.'

'Yes,' Romanov said while Barton nodded, 'we do.'

'And what makes you think that I'd want that?' James questioned. 'What do I even have to offer the Avengers? I'm just a pilot.'

Romanov leaned against the back of the sofa as she said, 'You're also one of only two people who have piloted one of Stark's Iron Man suits.'

'Which I no longer have,' James said. 'Need I remind you two that Loki stole the suit Tony originally gave me?'

Well, he'd technically stolen it from Tony, but... semantics.

'But you might have one again; someday,' Barton said. 'Stark stated in his press conference that he'll be keeping everybody involved in his operations in the know. He plans to share details with those who will be directly affected by any battles he partakes-

'And unless there's a battle in the sky, I won't be a part of it,' James interrupted.

'He can't fight everyone alone,' Romanov said. 'He can't fight Loki alone.'

'Does he plan to?'
Romanov shrugged and Barton said, 'We don't know. Stark wasn't exactly forthcoming when we last spoke to him.'

'We don't know why, exactly, he chose now to walk away,' Romanov added. 'He's refused any and all calls we or SHIELD make. The only person he's still talking to is Dr Banner.'

That made sense. James had seen them together on TV, had heard various stories from Tony since he'd met Bruce. Bruce was intelligent, quiet, an expert in his fields of study. Of course Tony would like him.

Plus there was the whole Hulk thing. James knew that Tony loved it.

'If you're hoping to get answers; I don't have any,' James told them. 'I haven't spoken to Tony in a couple of weeks. He didn't mention leaving the Avengers.'

'It wasn't an absolute shock,' Barton commented. 'But sudden.'

'I can't help you,' James said. 'With this or with the Avengers. You have enough fighters; find somebody else to join.'

Romanov stood tall and Barton exhaled slowly. 'Is that your final answer?' Romanov asked.

'Yes,' James said, a firm nod making the word pointed. 'Even if Tony gives me another suit- hell, even if he gives me a fleet of suits- I won't be working for you. Alongside you when necessary? Yes, absolutely. But I'm not a super hero. I'm not a SHIELD agent. I'm a part of the United Sates Air Force and I never plan on being anything else.'

Barton was rubbing his temple roughly, as though James' words were giving him a headache. Romanov just watched, face blank.

'It's my final answer,' James said, 'and the only answer I'll give you.' He stood taller and held an arm towards the door. 'I'm sorry I can't help you, but-'

His words were cut off by a knock on the door. James nearly sighed. *What now?*

He could feel the two agents staring at him as he made his way back to the door and pulled it open.

It was a young Airman First Class; he saluted before standing at attention. 'Colonel Rhodes. Mr Stark is here to see you, sir.'

James' eyes widened. 'Excuse me?'

'Mr Stark, Colonel,' the Airman repeated. 'He arrived on base fifteen minutes ago and will be here shortly.'

James glanced over his shoulder. Romanov and Barton had already joined him, both standing either side about a foot away. 'Thank you, Airman First Class,' he murmured. 'Dismissed.'

The Airman saluted again before turning on his heel and marching away. James ran a hand over his short hair and cleared his throat.

'Well then,' he said, 'this'll be interesting.'
As the Airman had stated, Tony turned up no less than a minute later. James, Romanov and Barton stood outside the barracks and watched a convey of vehicles approach them from across the base.

An open-tray truck led; a civilian vehicle that James recognised as one of Tony's own, used to cart around heavy materials. Behind him were two other SI cars, each a black SUV with Stark plates. The other four were air force vehicles no doubt carrying security and other personnel; both there to make sure that Tony behaved himself and didn't steal anything while he was running around.

'Rhodey!' Tony shouted when the group of cars had ground to a halt. James barely heard him over the roar of the truck engine; thankfully, Tony turned it off and slid from the vehicle easily. There was a woman in the cab that Rhodey thought might be Tony's assistant; her head was bent, no doubt focused on a StarkPad that dictated most of Tony's movements.

'Tony.' James grinned at his best friend and watched Tony take in the two SHIELD agents standing behind him.

'Funny, you two being here when I decided to turn up,' Tony commented, eyes narrowed somewhat behind his sunglasses. 'What are the chances?'

'Yes,' Romanov agreed, 'funny.'

'How did you know we were here?' Barton asked. His eyes were locked on Tony, shrewd.

Tony tilted his head and laughed. 'Now, Agent Barton,' he drawled, tone dripping with disdain, 'how could I possibly know the movements of SHIELD's top two agents?'

'How indeed,' Romanov commented.

Tony gave her an overly fake smile and turned his attention to James once more. 'Rhodey, Rhodey, Rhodey; looking well!'

'And you,' James said, a smile on his face as he shook Tony's hand. He clapped the man on the back as Tony drew away. 'I see a stable relationship has done wonders for you.'

Tony barked out a laugh and threw a wink his way. 'Clever,' he commented. 'But I'm not here to talk about Logan. Actually, why don't you join us for dinner this weekend? It'll be nice to catch up and you can meet him properly.'

'I'll clear my schedule,' James said.

'Good man.' Tony grabbed him by the arm and dragged him closer to the truck. 'Now, the real reason I'm here. It took me a while to get it kitted out properly, but you'll thank me when you take it for a test run; not even a scrap of tech that isn't Stark Industries; that wasn't personally designed and built by me.'

James' eyebrows flew up and he watched closely as Tony rounded the truck to pull the back down. He hopped up into the tray with ease, pushing cloth aside and beginning to unbuckle things.

'Is this what I think it is?' James asked. Excitement was crawling its way up his spine, pooling in his gut, and it only grew when Tony threw him a grin. 'Seriously?' James demanded.
'Seriously,' Tony echoed. 'Now that I'm no longer a part of the Avengers' Initiative-' he said the first part quite loudly, clearly hoping that Romanov and Barton would hear him, '-' I figured that having a friend I can actually rely on would only benefit.'

'Seriously?' James repeated.

Tony just smirked at him before throwing open the heavy metal trunk he'd carted along. 'James,' he said, arms spread wide as he stood tall to survey his friend, 'meet Fox XII.'

A sleek suit of armour pulled itself from the trunk. It was painted a matte grey, with a sleek face more reminiscent of Tony's newer Iron Man suits than James' old one. It was still much bulkier than anything Tony personally flew, the arms, legs and even neck bulging with added weapons and equipment.

'Tony,' James breathed as he looked up at the suit in awe. Its eyes were glowing red instead of blue, but the repulsors were the same blue-white of Iron Man's. The suit moved swiftly, activating its repulsors and lifting itself off of the truck before touching back down at James' side.

'Colonel Rhodes,' it said in JARVIS' voice. 'I am Fox XII.'

'Hey, Fox,' James greeted. He looked at Tony. 'JARVIS?'

'Completely integrated, of course,' Tony told him. He hopped off of the truck and tapped the arc reactor embedded in Fox XII's chest. 'It won't take you long to learn everything. If you have any issues JARVIS will talk you through them.'

'And security?' James asked. Because he had to. Loki had quickly and easily stolen the last one and it was something that James didn't want repeated. If there was even a slight chance of him losing this one, he wanted Tony to take it back. He was content with his planes and leaving the flashy suit stuff to Tony.

'Upgraded,' Tony said. 'I won't go into specifics.' He shot a look at Romanov and Barton, both agents silent as they watched. 'JARVIS will explain everything or you can give us a call,' Tony continued. 'But, basically, if anyone other than you touches the suit when you activate the security protocols, everything goes boom.'

'Boom?'

'Boom,' Tony repeated. 'There's not a chance in hell that Loki will get even a piece of this.' He smiled brightly at Romanov. 'Or anyone else who might like to take a look.'

Romanov gave him a tight smile in response.

'So, that's about it,' Tony said. He clapped James on the shoulder and squeezed gently. 'An upgraded case to keep it in and there'll be more tech on the way; JARVIS will deliver it.'

'This is incredible, Tony.' James started circling the suit, eyeing everything he could see. The suit remained perfectly still, powered on but waiting. 'Are you sure about this?'

'Absolutely.' Tony's tone had taken on a serious note now and James stopped his inspection to look at his friend. 'I trust you, Rhodey,' Tony said. 'I don't want anyone else but you having one of my suits. If I get into trouble, I know that you'll be there to help me.'

'Of course, Tone; you don't even have to ask.' He wrapped one arm around the genius and pulled him into a hug. 'But maybe call, yeah?' he added, a grin on his lips. 'I might be in the middle of a
Tony barked out a laugh and elbowed James in the ribs. 'Yeah, yeah,' he said. 'Bring her to dinner, then. She and Logan can compare notes and see who's higher maintenance.'

'Like that's even a question.' James laughed.

Shaking his head, Tony gave James another pat before explaining that he had a meeting to attend. He waved brightly at Romanov and Barton who just stared at him as he climbed into one of the SI cars. His assistant had climbed out of the truck, a StarkPhone pressed to her ear as she joined Tony in the car.

'Have a pleasant day, gentlemen; lady.' He tipped an imaginary hat their way and slammed the door shut. The two SI cars backed up before pulling around the truck- apparently staying here, for now, until someone returned to collect it.

James turned his attention back to the suit.

'Colonel Rhodes?' Romanov interrupted.

'No,' James said without looking in her direction. 'I've given you my answer, Agent Romanov. I'm sure that you and Agent Barton can find your own way back to the main gate.'

He lost interest in them after that, directing Fox XII to collect its own storage and set it up in his current rooms. He had it scan for bugs, too, and wasn't surprised to find more than a couple hidden about his quarters.

James just shook his head and took a seat. He was sure that he'd be up all night with the suit.

{oOo}

'Vere right,' Tony commented as he was driven away from the base. The other SI car followed close behind.

Lily looked up from her StarkPad. 'Did you doubt him?' she asked.

Shaking his head, Tony said, 'No, I didn't doubt him. I was... a little worried that it was a trick; SHIELD testing Bruce to see who's side he's really on.'

'It still could have been a trick,' Lily commented. 'Romanov and Barton clearly knew that you were aware of their presence before you arrived; you were aware before they arrived.'

'Yeah,' Tony agreed. He hummed. 'Oh, well.'

'When do you plan on bringing Banner back to the Tower?'

'As soon as SHIELD's bases are gone,' Tony said.

Lily raised an eyebrow and glanced at him again. 'Not before?' she asked. 'We plan on getting the information we need within the next three days.'
'We do,' Tony said. 'But I want Bruce on the Helicarrier to let us know if the Avengers plan anything. He'll be our inside man for as long as possible.'

'Or if his being there is a danger to his safety,' Lily added. Tony turned to stare at her, eyes widening slightly. 'Yes?' Lily queried, an eyebrow slowly rising.

'Sorry, I was just a little shocked,' Tony said, a grin overcoming him. 'Look at you, caring about Bruce's safety!'

'He is your friend,' Lily said, 'and I vowed to you that I would protect him as our ally.' She sniffed and pressed something on her Pad. 'I keep my word, Stark.'

'That you do, darling,' Tony said. 'That you do. So, who's my meeting with this afternoon?'

'You having a meeting at one pm with the Police Commissioner of New York City, James O'Neill, as well as a number of police chiefs.'

Tony smiled slightly. 'You know, you're a much better assistant than any of the real ones I hired.'

Lily smirked ever so slightly as she tapped away. 'Because you know the consequences if you do not do as I have ordered, Mr Stark.'

Tony laughed. Oh, yeah; he definitely knew the consequences. 'Enough business talk,' he said. 'What should I cook for Rhodey when he comes over for dinner?'

'You are going to cook? And here I thought you wanted to live to see the new year.'

'Har-har; much funny; very smart.'

Lily, of course, ignored him. Tony just smiled.

{oOo}

Rhodey hadn't let Tony get out of an actual dinner. With the media still hounding him since his press conference only four days earlier, Tony invited his friend over to the Tower and ordered enough food to feed two gods and more than a couple of mortals. Pepper had been a late invite; Tony had been impressed with her resolute decision to avoid any and everything to do with SHIELD. He knew that she'd been approached by Coulson on two occasions, and even Romanov had tried to corner her at her favourite coffee place.

'I'm somewhat surprised,' Tony commented as Loki smoothed down the shoulders of his shirt. He didn't feel the need to dress up for the occasion, going with a nice shirt and black jeans. Loki- as Logan, of course- was dressed similarly in dark-wash jeans and a sweater.

'She cares for you,' Loki said.

'For now,' Tony said.

'You think she will be disgusted with your choices when she learns the truth,' Loki said. He stepped back from Tony and eyed the two of them in the mirrors, eyes grazing down Tony's body.
Tony let out a humourless chuckle. 'Most people would be,' he said. 'I won't even blame her for it.'

'But whether she stays or leaves is what troubles you.'

Tony hummed in agreement and finally turned away from the mirrors. 'You know me too well.'

Reaching out, Loki brushed Tony's hair back and smiled faintly. 'Do not trouble yourself with these thoughts. You can do nothing until it occurs.'

'Yeah,' Tony agreed, 'but it won't stop me worrying. It's what we Midgardians do.'

'It is not a feeling exclusive to your species, Stark.'

Tony chuckled and leaned up to press a kiss to Loki's lips. 'I know, I know.'

'Mr Stark, Mr Laufeyson,' JARVIS announced from overhead, 'Miss Potts and Colonel Rhodes will arrive shortly.'

Drawing back from the kiss, Tony offered Loki one last smile. 'Ready to charm my friends?' he asked.

'Something that I do best,' Loki commented. He took Tony's hand and pulled him from the room, downstairs, and into the living room. Rhodey and Pepper exited the elevator just as they arrived.

'Welcome!' Tony said and laughed when Rhodey rolled his eyes. 'I'm starving, let's eat.'

They exchanged small talk as they filed into the dining room and each made up a plate of food from the containers Tony had set out on the table. Tony and Loki both made sure that they only took small amounts, always conscious of the front they were putting up for those not aware of their true nature.

Tony managed to draw a few amusing stories out of Rhodey, as well as a few details about the woman he was currently dating. Pepper giggled and nudged Rhodey when the man refused to give Tony a last name, as always knowing exactly what Tony would do with that kind of information.

The group were halfway through dinner when Rhodey put his utensils down and picked up his glass. 'You've changed him for the better, Logan,' he commented and raised his drink. 'Cheers to you.'

Loki flushed beautifully and Tony couldn't help but lean over and kiss him. He noted the smile on Rhodey's face, the delighted look Pepper was sporting.

'If you don't wanna talk about it,' Rhodey continued after he'd taken a sip of his drink, 'I'd more than understand.'

Tony raised his brows. 'Why do I get the feeling that your question isn't about my relationship with Logan?' Rhodey smiled and Tony scooped up more pasta. 'Shoot, Rhodey. I don't keep secrets from Logan.'

Putting his glass down, Rhodey laced his fingers together on the edge of the table, plate pushed aside somewhat for the conversation. 'Why did you leave the Avengers?'

Pepper glanced at him but remained silent, knife making neat little cuts of her meatballs.

'The million dollar question,' Tony commented. 'The one question the media are still speculating over.'
'Is it something you're going to keep us speculating about?' Rhodey asked and tilted his head in Pepper's direction.

Tony put his own fork down. 'No,' he said, 'I'm not.' Loki reached over to give his hand a gentle squeeze. 'It wasn't just one thing,' Tony began, 'it was a million little things, all piling up and up until they spilled over.'

'What things?' Rhodey pushed.

'The way they treat me; both SHIELD and the Avengers,' Tony stated. 'The way they go about fights, the way they treat anyone we fight and the way they treat first responders and hell, even the government.'

Rhodey was already nodding along, well aware of SHIELD's inability to share anything with the defence forces of America.

'They don't work cohesively with anyone,' Tony continued. 'It's shoot first, ask questions later. The problem is that they don't answer the questions. The sheer amount of secrecy around everything they do is mind boggling. Don't get me wrong, I understand the need for secrecy. But SHIELD refuses to share relevant information with the government, with the police. At any point in time someone like Loki could stage another city-wide attack and SHIELD won't even tell the police what Loki's truly capable of. How can we keep innocent people safe and stop Loki if we're the only ones truly ready to fight him?'

'True,' Rhodey agreed, 'but I don't remember you particularly caring about that when all of this first happened.' He smiled when Tony gave him an outraged look. 'You care, Tony; don't think that I believe you don't. I know that you care about the people of this city. But I wasn't aware that you were worried about SHIELD's lack of interest in sharing.'

Tony shrugged and took a swig of his own drink. 'It's hard not to care when you're the face of the agency, and of the Avengers,' he said. 'Sure, the media know what Romanov and Barton look like. Rogers has lost his mask more than once and Bruce's been seen transitioning back into himself. But I'm the public face; the one everyone talks about and asks about the damages, the injuries, what SHIELD and the Avengers plan on doing next. I'm already the face of Stark Industries and Iron Man. I'm not taking responsibility for SHIELD's mistakes, too. Not any more.'

'And how they treated you?' Rhodey asked next, now idly tilting his drink back and forth, eyes still completely focused on Tony.

Tony smiled wryly. 'You more than anyone should know how they feel about me on a personal level.'

The colonel frowned at that, eyes falling from Tony back to his plate. 'Yes,' he said, 'the way Romanov talks about you...'

'Not my biggest fan, huh?' Tony commented.

Rhodey nodded slowly. 'I figured, given how much you've all been through together, that she'd have something nice to say about you. She doesn't even try to hide her disdain.'

'No, she doesn't.' Pepper muttered. Tony raised his eyebrows at her. Pepper's lips twitched but she didn't smile, didn't frown. Just said, 'All that rubbish about caring about your health,' she said, 'it's not something they ever really cared about, is it?'

'I doubt it,' Tony said. He leaned back in his seat. 'They were more interested in my tech; my
weapons; Iron Man. There's a distinct difference between Tony Stark and Iron Man for them. The suit is needed. If they had that, I doubt they'd ever speak to me again.'

'Do you think they'll try and get it?' Rhodey asked. 'Romanov and Barton wanted me to join the Avengers.'

'What?' Pepper blurted.

Tony huffed a small laugh. 'I figured that's why they were there.'

'And how did you know that?' Tony threw a wink at Rhodey, who rolled his eyes. 'At any rate,' Rhodey continued, 'I said no.'

'What, not going to replace me as America's most loved super hero?' Tony asked.

'I'm a soldier first and foremost,' Rhodey told him. 'I'll leave all that hero stuff to them.'

'And what is a soldier, if not a hero?' Logan chimed in, a disarming smile sent Rhodey's way. 'You are a hero in your own right, Colonel.'

'Please, call me James.' Rhodey smiled warmly and Loki returned in. 'I don't personally see myself as a hero,' he said, 'but call me what you will. I'm not abandoning the air force for SHIELD. They don't want me, anyway. It's all about the suit Tony gave me.'

'Which is yours to do with as you please,' Tony said. 'If you want to join the Avengers-'

But Rhodey interrupted, voice firm and with no room for argument. 'I'm not joining them,' he stated. 'I'm sure there's more than you're telling us, Tony; at least about how they really treated you. If it got to be so much that you walked away, I'm not about to take up arms with them. They'll just have to deal with not having Iron Man on the team.'

Tony blinked rapidly at him. He tried to say something- anything- but found his throat thick and had to swallow past the lump. He felt Loki smooth a hand down his thigh, squeeze gently.

Tony honestly hadn't known how Pepper and Rhodey would react to his departure from the Avengers. It had been something he'd always planned, even if it had happened less explosively than he'd originally envisioned. He'd worried that Pepper would go running back to Coulson, perfectly prepared to sell away Tony's secrets. He'd been concerned about giving Rhodey another suit, only to have it fall into SHIELD's hands despite all of the security measures put in place.

Loki hadn't wanted Tony to part with a suit; had said the risks far outweighed the rewards. But the rewards, for Tony, were far better than any risks. Already he'd shown the air force that he was willing to work with them; that he would give a suit to Rhodey who'd already proven to be capable and prepared to use it for the greater good. It was one step closer to showing himself as the more agreeable out of him and SHIELD; that he, Tony Stark, had the citizens of America in mind every time he even thought about Iron Man.

SHIELD were so used to playing in the shadows that Tony doubted they'd manage to present themselves as easy to work with. By the time they got their shit together, Tony would have further cemented himself into the government via his connections with the defence forces. When everything came out, when the spotlight was finally on him and SHIELD threatened to reveal all of his secrets, every single person that Tony had done business with would find it hard to believe that Tony would ever work with a super villain just to further his own agenda.

By the time SHIELD knew the full truth, it would already be too late.
And now Tony didn't just have Loki and Bruce on his side. Dr Strange had signed a contract, bringing everyone under his protection into the fold. Pepper had taken one step closer to earning Tony's forgiveness for past sins.

And Rhody... here was Rhody, as always, putting Tony first. Having Tony's back when he needed it the most.

Maybe when this was all over, Tony wouldn't lose his two oldest friends.

'James,' he managed to finally choke out, thoughts rushing and Loki's hand a familiar, warm weight on his leg. 'Thank you.'

Rhody shook his head. 'You don't need to thank me,' he said and reached across the table to tap Tony's hand. 'But you're welcome.'

Pepper smiled brightly at them and picked up her glass. 'A toast,' she said. Tony cleared his throat as he picked up his own drink, a smile forced onto his face. 'To old friends,' she said, and then looked at Loki, 'and new.'

Loki offered her a small smile in response and the four toasted before each taking a sip from their drinks.

Rhody was the first to speak, dabbing at his lips with a napkin and picking up his fork. 'Enough serious talk,' he said and turned his attention to Loki. 'Logan, what are Tony's most disgusting habits? I bet they haven't changed since he was at MIT.'

'Hey!' Tony shouted as Pepper shook her head and Loki laughed.

'Well,' the Trickster drawled, 'where to begin...?'

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: Okay, so a few things; I update when I can. I write this for free and have a life. Yeah, the time between updates sucks, but I can't change that.

Second; what's that, you say? There are continuity errors? Well gee golly, there sure would be considering that this is a WIP and I'm freaking terrible at researching anything and remembering what I come up with. I forget shit. We all do. I either post chapters as I write them or hold off, finish the story, and make sure everything's perfect.

Rest assured that when this story is done I'll be going back and editing out the mistakes I'm very well aware of. If you'd rather I don't update until I finish and edit the story, let me know.

Cheers,

Dreamer
Tony ducked and weaved, stepped back and ducked again when Loki's fist came out of nowhere. He'd thought he was doing better, getting faster, but every time he told himself that he was doing a good job Loki appeared again and hit him.

A slap to the face made Tony go still with shock. Of course Loki used the brief stun to drop Tony to the floor and try and get him in a choke hold. But Tony let himself go limp, felt Loki's arms slacken at the sudden extra weight, and managed to twist himself free. He scrambled across the floor and rolled onto his feet, only to be pushed back down and kicked.

'Christ!' Tony yelped when a bare foot slapped the floor where his head had been seconds ago. 'This is training!' he shouted.

Loki actually let him get back up. He was amused, a smile on his face as he stalked towards Tony. 'This is a battle.'

'No it's not!' Tony growled and backed up, three paces, four, kept going when Loki just advanced towards him. 'I need a time out!'

'There are no time outs in battle.'

'This isn't a battle!' Tony snapped.

Loki threw a punch that Tony barely dodged. Loki caught him by the shirt and dragged him back to the floor, used his greater weight to pin one of Tony's legs down. Tony's hips were already bruised and screamed their protest when Tony tried to wriggle free.

'How can I get better...' Tony grunted when Loki's nails dug into his scalp, 'when you won't let me fight?!'

Loki chuckled, his grip disappeared, and Tony slithered away once more. He was panting, now, and wondered if it was blood or sweat trickling down his forehead. 'If you can defeat me, you can defeat the Avengers,' Loki told him. 'That has always been our goal.'

'Really?' Tony asked. 'Because your goal seems to be beating the shit out of me.'

'We must both sacrifices for our plans to succeed,' Loki allowed.

Tony growled his frustration and raised a hand. Loki's eyebrow inched upward in response.

'And what is your plan now, my dear mate?' Loki asked, voice sickly sweet. Tony scowled. He let loose a ball of magic and Loki laughed as he swatted it out of the air. 'Please, Stark, you are not nearly strong enough to-'

Loki cut himself off when Tony tackled him. Loki hit the floor hard, all the air in his lungs escaping in one big gasp as Tony settled himself atop his chest.

'I know I'm not,' Tony said, one hand pressed to Loki's cheek. 'That's not the point.'

A proud smile made itself across Loki's face. 'Very good,' he purred. 'I did not see that coming.'

It was genuine praise, Loki's voice lacking the mocking tone he'd taken up ever since they'd started training. Tony felt his heart skip a beat as he looked down at the older god; the sharp cheekbones,
pale skin, green eyes practically swimming with love. God, he still forgot sometimes that this beautiful, insane creature was his.

And he was insane, because he used Tony's distraction to punch Tony in the gut and fling him back. It was Tony's turn to hit the floor, to cough and splutter as Loki smoothly pulled himself back to his feet.

'Do not let yourself be distracted, Stark,' Loki said as he stalked closer, 'your enemies will certainly use it against you.'

Tony was going to shout something—maybe call his oh so lovely partner a goddamn bitch—but Loki pressed a bare foot against Tony's lower back and pressed him into the floor.

'Shall I cut off your head?' Loki questioned. 'Or perhaps unmask you, now that you are helpless at my feet. What do you think Rogers would do?'

Tony growled.

'Romanov would not wait,' Loki continued. Just the mere thought of Romanov set Tony's teeth on edge. 'Thor would break your back with Mjölnir; do so much damage that not even an Apple could fix it. How would that feel, Stark?' He ground his heel into Tony, making his words that much sharper, making Tony that much angrier. 'To know that you could never use your own two feet because Thor beat you to a bloody pulp.'

Power, a rush that Tony had never felt before, not even in his suits; light exploded and just as quickly was extinguished, an all consuming black that held nothing, that felt like nothing, that sucked Tony in and spat him back out like he was mere particles.

His ears popped and a screech tore through his head. His skin melted and reformed and melted again and all at once Tony was aware of nothing and everything, the hard floor beneath him, the energy that was in everything, every fibre of his clothes rubbing irritatingly against his skin yet also feeling like the softest material he'd ever touched.

Tony's lungs were empty and he was aware of nothing but the ache, the panic setting in when his lungs failed to take anything in. He clawed and scratched and screamed and felt rough hands on him, pushing him down, tearing him apart, fear and burning and terror-

'Tony, you are okay.'

A voice sliced through it all and Tony's entire being quaked.

'Breathe; you know how,' the voice... Loki. Loki was touching him, magic a soothing balm on Tony's melting skin. 'Picture your lungs sucking the air down and they will. You do not do it consciously; let your body remember.'

Tony had no idea what the fuck Loki was talking about. But his chest stopped aching, bit by bit, and he became aware of bright lights overhead and Loki's face swimming in and out view.

'Do not do that again, Tony,' Loki was saying. Tony tried to groan, tried to make a noise—any noise. 'Just relax,' Loki said.

What... Tony thought but it didn't come out. He gasped, became aware that he was breathing, and his panic ebbed away to be replaced by fear and exhaustion.

'That is it,' Loki said. He was humming beneath his breath, gentle strokes of his fingers making
Tony's scalp tingle. 'Do not be afraid.'

'Why...' Words escaped then, a harsh croak that grated against Tony's throat. He gulped and tried again. 'What... happened?'

Loki glanced down at him. It was only then that Tony realised he'd been staring dazedly at Loki, eyes unfocused but trained on Loki's face. Loki smiled ever so slightly. 'You teleported,' he stated.

Tony frowned at that. At least, he thought he did. He really wasn't sure where his body began and Loki's ended; wasn't sure if that was his leg he was half lying on or just the floor. He was fairly certain that he was flexing his fingers around one of Loki's wrists but... it felt weird, disjointed, like his entire right arm had fallen asleep and while his brain was making it move, he just couldn't feel it properly.

'I what?'

Oh, good; he was regaining the use of his voice. At least that was something.

'An extremely advanced piece of magic,' Loki said, 'but one that is simple to actually perform if you know what you are doing. I've explained it before; teleporting is the art of breaking your body down to its individual atoms, then moving said atoms to another location where you reform into what you are. If done incorrectly, the being experiences what you just did; a loss of sight and touch, pieces of yourself not fitting together quite correctly, an inability to experience the physical world around you.'

He shook his head and gently tapped Tony on the forehead.

'You were foolish to do it,' Loki said. 'You don't know yourself nearly well enough to successfully teleport. However...' he trailed off and a warm, loving smile spread across his face. 'The fact that you managed to reassemble yourself so well is incredible, Tony. I cannot believe what you just accomplished.'

Accomplished? Tony didn't feel like he'd done anything noteworthy. From the sounds of it, he'd torn himself apart only to mostly reassemble a few feet away. He was still in the Hideout, right? Those rock walls looked familiar.

'How... how?' Tony asked. He could talk properly again, but his mind was scattered. He felt far too tired to do anything other than lie there and let Loki take care of him.

'Instinct,' Loki said. 'I also believe that you are advancing far quicker than most due to our bond. While it's not completed, you are still being influenced by my own power. I believe that practising magic around me, and having some a comforting, compatible power nearby, is helping you learn.

'You have teleported alongside me plenty of times,' Loki added. 'Your body has experienced teleportation. Your magic simply used that experience to try to replicate it by itself. Foolish, but understandable, given both your personality and how your magic reacts around certain people.' He smirked. 'It wishes to lash out and slap Potts. It wishes to coddle me as though I need protection. Your magic is quite the insight into your personal feelings, Tony.'

Tony rolled his eyes. Of course Loki would be teasing him at a moment like this.

'You're an asshole,' he muttered.

Chuckling, Loki gave a soft tug of his hair. 'I love you too, my dear. Now, relax; you must rest after such an experience.'
'But-'

'No,' Loki cut him off. 'Rest. We will discuss it further once you have napped and eaten.'

{oOo}

Tony was sitting up in bed, back against a pillow that was squished between him and the rock wall. He watched as Loki laid out the plates and cutlery, some type of vegetarian stew simmering on the stove.

Loki was fluid in everything he did; even placing bowls down, the way he bent to make sure that each piece of cutlery was just so. If you knew what to look for, you could tell that Loki had trained long and hard to have perfect control of his body. He was never sloppy, never out of place; each and every finger moved with precision.

Tony had a hard time imagining himself ever being like that. He knew that he was getting better; that training with Loki, fighting harder and faster in the Genesis suit, was changing the way he carried himself. But could he ever be as lithe as Loki?

He snorted to himself. No, absolutely not. Tony had spent too long getting used to his body, both before and after Iron Man. He was far stockier than Loki, his centre of gravity closer to the ground. He doubted that he'd ever have the razor sharp lethality to his body that Loki had.

'I teleported,' he said aloud. It still sounded completely ridiculous. How the Hell could he, Tony Stark, a Midgardian who'd been dabbling with magic for only a few months, teleport? What Loki could do— the things he was capable of— were so completely out of the fucking galaxy.

But he'd done it, hadn't he? Tony had only been aware of black and noise and fucking pain. Loki had said he'd teleported. He had no reason to lie.

'You did,' Loki agreed easily from the other side of the cave.

'How,' Tony said. 'Why?'

'How? That is simple,' Loki said. He glanced briefly at Tony before making his way over to the food. 'You have magic, Tony. You are capable of many things. Teleportation is one of them. Why? Even simpler.'

'Is it?' Tony asked.

Loki nodded absentmindedly, more focused on checking their dinner than on Tony and the conversation. It was easy for him; he'd been studying magic, honing his craft, for more years than Tony had been alive. These types of things... energy balls, wards, teleporting, spells and potions. It was all second nature to Loki. While their bond was new, foreign, something that they were both still learning about, the basics of magic were as familiar to Loki as science was to Tony. More so, because Tony wasn't fluent in all forms of science. Loki was an absolute master of everything magic.

'Indeed,' Loki said. 'I angered you. I was hoping to push you to fight back and to show you how
anger can be both a blessing and a curse during a fight. Anger couples with adrenalin and makes you stronger, faster. It can make any being capable of absolutely incredible things.'

He paused to stir the stew, nodded in satisfaction. He turned the burner off with a flick of his wrist and placed the lid back over the pot. With that done, he turned to survey Tony, arms folded over his chest.

'But it can also cause you to make stupid mistakes and terrible decisions,' he continued. 'You fall into a tunnel, your enemy the only thing you can see. It can make you careless and allow those less skilled than you to launch a surprise attack. The Avengers are very capable of fighting side-by-side. They know each other's greatest strengths and weaknesses. They will use anything they can to take you down. Once they know who you are, they will play on your weaknesses.'

'Okay,' Tony said. He was absolutely aware of that. 'What the Hell does that have to do with me teleporting?'

Loki chuckled. 'I am glad to see that you're becoming yourself once more.' Tony flipped him off and Loki laughed proper. 'I was simply telling you my goal, Stark. Instead of angering you to the point of you making a mistake, you triggered your magic into absolute focus. You glowed purple before disappearing, only to reappear a few feet away. You became so consumed with magic that your only thought was getting away from me.'

'So I teleported,' Tony said and Loki nodded. 'But I don't know how.'

'I am aware of that,' Loki agreed. 'But as I've said; you have teleported by my side. You may not be aware of how to do it, but both your magic and body are at least partially familiar with the process. Instincts are a powerful thing, Anthony. Your magic simply wanted to save you and did what was necessary.'

'But isn't that a bit extreme?' Tony asked. 'Teleporting away from you, my mate, just because you were pissing me off a bit?'

'Magic does not always make sense,' Loki said. 'Neither do we as living creatures. Your magic reacted as it did because it could. Do not try and make sense of it.'

Tony sighed and slouched further back against the wall. 'I'm tired,' he muttered. His muscles still hurt, like each and every one had been pulled and stretched for far too long.

'I am aware,' Loki said. 'Eat and you can sleep.'

'But-'

'Just a bit,' Loki interrupted.

Tony huffed again but nodded. It was probably a good idea to get something in his stomach after what he'd been through. And Loki knew better than him. He just wished that he wasn't so tired. They'd still be training or planning on taking out another base. Instead Tony was stuck in bed, absolutely useless.

Loki helped him up and across to the table. When he'd gently placed Tony in his seat, Tony leaned up and kissed him softly. Loki raised an eyebrow.

'Sorry,' Tony murmured. 'I'm being an ass, aren't I?'

'Just a bit,' Loki repeated. 'But I love you regardless.'
Smiling slightly, Tony kissed him again. 'You're way too good for me, you know that?'

'But of course,' Loki drawled and Tony laughed. 'Now eat, Stark. I will not repeat myself.'

'Yes, sir,' Tony said and obediently sipped his stew when Loki placed a bowl in front of him.

{oOo}

'You are fully recovered,' Loki said. Tony was in his mindscape but could hear Loki perfectly. He was aware of the rug beneath him, the hint of dirt in the air, the warm glow of the lights floating overhead. He heard the fabric of his clothes shift against each other every time he moved.

But around him, flowing like warm water beneath his skin, was his magic. Bright and alive and hoping to be used, to connect. He could touch it, keep it moving, keep it contained, but also talk to Loki.

Tony smiled. 'That's good.'

'It is,' Loki agreed. 'But remember; do not try it again.'

He laughed before saying, 'Trust me, Lokes. I'm not teleporting without you holding my hand. I like all my body parts where they are.'

'I see.' Loki hummed. 'And you do not wish to change...anything?'

'Like what?'

'Oh, I don't know,' Loki drawled, 'there are, perhaps, parts of you that could be... larger.'

Tony slid one eye open, made sure that he kept half a mind on his magic. It tended to escape if he was in his mindscape and didn't keep it in sight. 'Is that a joke about my height, or about the size of my dick?'

Loki smirked at him. 'Which do you believe it is?'

'You're an asshole.' Loki snickered. 'Now shut up, I'm concentrating.'

'The whole point of this exercise is for you to multi task,' Loki said. Tony heard him approach, so wasn't shocked when he felt Loki's fingers briefly skirt the base of his neck. 'Very good,' Loki said.

Something across the Hideout fell with a bang but Tony paid it no attention. Loki was absolutely relaxed by his side, and if Loki was relaxed then everything was fine.

'Really?' Loki said. 'No reaction at all?'

'You're all warm and calm,' Tony said. 'So there's nothing to worry about.'

Silence followed his words and Tony felt Loki's presence change ever so slightly. A bubbling undercurrent of curiosity and tension seeped into his being. Tony cracked an eye open and found Loki standing before him, head tilted.
'What's wrong?' Tony asked. 'I thought I was doing well?'

'Fascinating,' Loki said.

'What is?'

'Your ability to understand my emotions based on my magic,' Loki said.

'How is that fascinating?' Tony asked. 'I've been doing it for ages.'

A frown spread across Loki's face. Tony felt the shift in the air around his partner. 'How long?' he asked.

'Uh...' Tony honestly didn't know the answer to that. He knew that he'd been able to sense Loki's presence ever since Loki had “destroyed” the magic sensor. When, exactly, had he learned how to read Loki's magic like he could his face? 'I don't know,' Tony eventually said. 'I know that when Bruce confronted us I could feel your amusement.'

The shift was immediate, like a switch had been flicked. Loki was a dark storm of anger and Tony jolted from his mindscape and back to the physical. His magic stayed put, Tony's control on it enough for that at least. Tony jumped to his feet. 'What is it, what's wrong?'

As soon as it had appeared it was gone, the black mess of emotions cloaking Loki slipping away like they'd never existed. But there was a hint there, just a taste on the edge of Tony's senses, like Loki was trying to bury the anger and not let himself feel it.

'Fascinating,' Loki repeated.

Slowly, Tony scowled. 'Did you just make yourself angry to see if I could feel it?' Loki offered him a sheepish smile. 'You mother fucker,' Tony growled. He poked Loki in the chest. 'Don't fucking do that, okay? I was worried!'

Loki caught his hand and pressed his fingers to Tony's knuckles. 'My apologies,' he said smoothly. 'I will not do so again.' Tony shook his head and tried to move away, but Loki's grip tightened. He pulled Tony closer until they were pressed against each other. 'I am sorry,' Loki said, voice a whisper against Tony's forehead. 'I was simply amazed at the progress you have made and how well you know me. I will not do it again.'

'Yeah, you'd better not,' Tony muttered, 'or I'll kick your ass.'

Loki chuckled. 'Shall we put your anger to better use?'

'What do you have in mind?' When Tony pulled back he caught the dark smile just beginning to curl at Loki's lips.

'I think I need to wet my hands,' Loki said. 'They have been idle for far too long.'

{oOo}

Thor found himself rethinking his past actions far more lately than he ever had before. But how
could he not when first Loki had fallen, and now one of his shield brothers had walked away? And Tony Stark had not simply had enough and cut ties. No, he had been angry, betrayed. Thor had been so startled by the look on the mortal's face that he had not said a word when Stark had announced his plans before leaving.

And later, when Rogers had vowed to speak to Stark and get him back. Thor could do nothing but remove himself from the situation so as not to make it worse. If there was one thing that he had learned thanks to Loki, it was that rushing head first into situations could make them so much worse.

So Thor had stepped back and now he sat in the tiny quarters SHIELD had provided for him aboard the Helicarrier. He sighed and leaned back against the cool metal wall. It was not the worse lodgings that Thor had ever found himself in, but he had grown accustomed to the luxuries that Stark offered when they stayed in the Tower.

The Tower, a home away from home, and a place that Thor was no longer welcome. How could he have been so blind? Stark was an intelligent man, calculating when he needed to be. This type of decision would not have been made lightly. Like Loki, Stark would have sat and pondered and only made up his mind after much study. They were similar that way.

And Thor had missed it all; how unhappy Stark was, how SHIELD were truly treating him. When Thor thought back, he realised that yes, indeed, Fury had never truly liked Stark. The mortal's words towards Stark had always been harsh, thinly veiled threats that went right over Thor's head because he simply hadn't been looking for that.

But Stark had seen and heard all and had walked away.

Thor huffed and closed his eyes. He so badly wished that his life was not so. Long ago in moments like these, when his thoughts were muddled and he was unable to form a cohesive thought, Thor had sought out Loki. Loki always had his own brand of wisdom, his own way of looking at things and seeking out truths that Thor couldn't see. Loki would have known what to do in regards to Stark.

But Loki was gone, so deeply twisted in his own hatred and anger and fear. He was not the brother that Thor had once had.

'What am I to do?' Thor questioned out loud. What would Loki do?

Ignore the mortal, Loki would say. If he is foolish enough to stray from your side, then he does not deserve your loyalty.

No, Thor thought, a frown on his face. Stark did not say that he hated me. His anger was directed at SHIELD and at the Avengers as a whole. His grievances are not with me.

Aren't they? Loki would say. Do you even know Stark, Thor? Or do you only know what he has allowed you to see? What have you assumed without truly learning?

Thor's shoulders drooped. Even the Loki of his mind was aware of Thor's shortcomings. For all the changes he had made, the strides he had taken to make himself more open, to pay more attention, Thor had to admit; he did not know Stark. He knew the warrior and the clown, the man Stark was when he fought and the man he projected to those he did not know.

He didn't know Stark, not truly. He had never sat and just spoken with the man, discussed his dreams and fears, what he liked to do when he was not working and what he liked to tinker with
during his down time. For all that Thor did know about Stark, there was so much more that he was blind to.

'What do I do?' Thor asked again. 'Do I confront him? Ask him to speak with me? Or do I let him go?'

*It is not your decision, Thor. If he wishes to speak to you again, he will contact you,* his inner Loki said.

But what if that didn't happen? What if Stark was open to communication? What if he saw Thor's silence as the Thunder God taking SHIELD's side?

Thor frowned. 'Midgardians are more complicated than Æsir,' he said.

No, his inner Loki whispered, *you simply refuse to see fault in all those around you.*

A blessing and a curse, Thor's mother had once told him. Thor chose to believe that all those around him were good and pure of heart because he himself was. But he was also prone to fits of absolute prejudice due to his own beliefs.

Loki had been the opposite, because of course he was. His inability to see *any* good in those around him meant that he was always prepared for betrayal. He was unable to form connections with a broad range of people because he couldn't bring himself to trust those that, in his mind, would betray him without a second thought.

Thor sighed. He had the strange thought to bury his face in his bedding and scream his frustration. Back when he was little, when the Realms were bright and so full of adventure, when everything was just so *simple,* he could scream his anger away, stand and be at peace. He would run to his mother and beg for sweets and Frigga would laugh. Loki would be there, as always, prepared to call Thor an idiot but join him on the next adventure.

Life was not like that any more.

Thor vaguely heard an alarm sound from somewhere within the Helicarrier. His lodgings were not close to any of the important rooms- the laboratories, the weapons testing rooms, the infirmaries- so he ignored it and scrubbed his hands over his face.

But then a voice from overhead- Fury's voice- sounded through the speakers hidden in the ceiling. *'Avengers Assemble. We have reports of Loki attacking the Bridgeport SHIELD base.'*

In the past Thor had always been quick to arm himself, to race out and call Mjölnir when he was halfway towards his shield brothers.

But he felt tired, as though the fight had been stolen from him. The past two years had rapidly caught up to him and Thor finally understood why his father always looked so *tired.*

The weight of his own actions, of Loki's, his kin, felt heavy across his shoulders as he stood. Every life Loki stole was a life that Asgard could never repay. For all of Loki's own thoughts, his own words, he was of Asgard. Until the All-Father said otherwise, Loki was a child of the Golden Realm and Asgard was responsible for his actions.

Thor picked Mjölnir up and hung the hammer from his belt. The heavy, familiar weight of it did nothing to lift Thor's mood as he once again allowed his armour to melt over his form. He had to fight his brother again, and Thor wasn't sure how much longer he could continue to stand proud in the face of his former sibling.
He was feeling too morose to fly himself and he didn't know the way. Thor squished himself into the small plane, Captain Rogers on one side and Agent Barton on the other. Banner was working on the sensor, Romanov told him as they took flight.

'You okay, Thor?' Barton asked.

Thor glanced at the archer. Such a small mortal, yet so shrewd. Thor forced a smile and said, 'I am well, Barton, do not fear.'

'I fear for everything,' Barton muttered.

His tone made Thor chuckle. 'Indeed,' he said. 'These are troubling times, my friend.'

'You can say that again.'

'These are troubling-'

'No!' Barton snapped and punched Thor lightly in the armoured shoulder. 'It's an expression, Thor. I don't actually want you to repeat it.'

Thor nodded slowly. 'I see. Your language is a strange one, Barton. I fear that it would take many life times to understand it.'

'Hell, Thor, even I don't understand it half the time,' Barton said.

'Yes, me either,' Rogers chimed in.

Thor glanced at him, but Rogers was staring ahead, eyes hard beneath his mask.

'You ready for this?' Barton asked Thor, voice pitched low.

'I am always ready for battle,' Thor said. Barton raised his eyebrows but said nothing more. Still, Thor knew what he was asking. 'No,' he found himself saying, 'I am never prepared to fight Loki. I never know what mood he will be in. Loki can be playful in his killings, completely carefree as he cuts those lesser than him down. And he can be chaotic, blood the only thing he wants as he decimates absolutely everyone.'

'Yeah,' Barton agreed, 'he's a fucking nutcase.'

'Nutcase?' Thor asked.

'Lunatic,' Barton clarified. 'Crazy.'

'Ah,' Thor said and nodded. 'Yes. Loki's mind was never clear, not even when we were youngsters. But he has lost much of his grip since the fall. I do not know if he will ever be healed.'

Barton shifted in his seat and grabbed Thor's thigh as the plane shuddered around them. 'Is that what you want?' he asked. 'To heal him?'
'It would be wonderful to have my brother back,' Thor admitted. 'But he will be punished when he returns to Asgard. A trial will see him executed or sentenced to many centuries in prison. He may be exiled if the All-father believes that he will not destroy those he is stuck with.'

Barton snorted. 'Yeah, I'd feel sorry for whatever poor bastards have to put up with an exiled Loki.'

'But he would be free,' Thor said.

'He's free now,' Barton pointed out.

He was. If Loki wasn't killing innocents, Thor might be tempted to let him go; to pretend that he had tried valiantly to capture Loki but had failed at every turn.

But Loki was killing innocents. He was killing mortals on the planet that Thor had vowed to protect. It was a duty that Thor would not turn his back on. He would capture Loki and take him home. His feelings did not matter, not in the end. The All-father had ordered Loki captured and Thor would do so.

'We're here,' Natasha announced from the front of the plane.

Thor slid Mjölnir from his belt and flexed his fingers around the handle.

{oOo}

The battle was over before it had truly begun. The Bridgeport base had been nothing more than a series of holding cells and rooms filled with various records. Blackmail material, Stark had called it. Loki was very familiar with blackmail, but had left the gathering of information to Stark. The man had a better understanding of what information was useful, leaving Loki free to wander the halls of the base and blow up whatever he fancied.

He'd just left behind a room full of corpses when his magic tingled. He hummed before taking a right, heading down a long, slightly curved corridor. He knew that magical signature and was curious to see who else had come along. Would Barton be there, his head so full of secrets that his mind screamed in agony? Romanov, of course, always ready to throw herself at Loki if there was even a slim chance of hurting him.

Banner could be there, the first time he would face Loki in battle while being on his side. And there, just at the end, moving closer was-

'Thor,' Loki said aloud even as he drew invisibility around him. The spell flexed before tightening and Loki saw Thor pause.

'Loki,' the older god said.

'What ever is the matter?' Loki asked. 'You look tired.'

He did. There were bruises beneath his eyes and his hair was unkempt. Mjölnir twitched in Thor's massive grip but he made no move to throw it or charge. Loki cocked his head.
'Loki,' Thor repeated. 'Brother, I wish to-

Loki teleported to the end of the corridor and backhanded Thor. Thor fell into the wall, a crack appearing where he hit the plaster.

'I am not your brother!' Loki snarled. He watched Thor get to his feet, shake off the bits of plaster clinging to him.

'Loki,' he said, 'I do not wish to fight.'

Loki laughed. 'Is that so?' he demanded. 'What a change this is, Prince. Every other time we have come face to face, you have wasted no time in throwing yourself at me. Or your hammer.'

Thor glanced at Mjölnir but still made no move to lift it. 'I want to talk,' he said.

'We never talk, Thor. I speak and you refuse to listen. Let us not try and change now.'

'I am willing to listen now,' Thor said.

'No, you aren't,' Loki said. 'You hear what you are only willing to hear. You listen until I say something you disagree with and then we fight. We must follow the script we wrote ourselves long ago, Thor. It is too late to change.'

He stepped back, felt his magic tingle as it teleported him away from Thor. He became solid back where he'd started, at the end of the corridor away from Thor. Thor felt the shift, the change, if his tense shoulders were anything to go by. He glanced every which way but unlike Tony, he could not pinpoint Loki's exact location.

'The past cannot be changed,' Thor said, 'but this path you are on can be stopped.'

'And what would you have me do, Thor?' Loki demanded. 'Hand myself over and be dragged back to Asgard for execution? Do not fool yourself. Even if the All-father was lenient, I would not see day again.'

'You would not be killing innocents, Loki!' Thor snapped. It was the first hint of anger, of that rage that Thor could be blinded by when in battle. Loki flexed his fingers. 'You cannot return their lives, but you can make amends!'

'I do not wish to make amends,' Loki told him. 'And do not think so little of me, Thor. Once SHIELD is destroyed, I will not kill unless my life is threatened.'

That made Thor pause, a frown marring his face. 'What do you mean?'

'Are you really that blind?' Loki said. 'My fight is with SHIELD and the Avengers; with those who would see me beaten and pulled until my mind shattered completely and my body refused to heal. I do not target those who have not wronged me, not without good reason.'

'Loki-

'Ask Fury his true plans, Thor,' Loki said. His magic built up and up, swirled and threatened to break his skin apart. 'Ask Fury and watch. Even he cannot hide his true intentions from you if you pay attention.'

Genesis blasted through the wall beside Loki and flew down the corridor, hit Thor before the god could move. They crashed clean through the other wall and Loki walked forward, listened as Stark
punched Thor in the head and Thor hissed in pain. Thor fought back, his every move screaming how he still thought that Genesis was a robot. His punches were made to destroy the robot, not subdue a living being.

Stark was so much faster than before, slower than Thor but holding his own as he ducked some blows and took others. Anger fuelled both of them but Stark was smart enough to know when to run; Thor's pride would not allow him to bow out of the fight.

A kick launched Thor through another room and Stark backtracked, used his repulsors to shoot back down the corridor towards Loki.

'Sorry,' Stark said over the comms, 'did I interrupt something?'

'No,' Loki murmured. 'We were done.'

'Good,' Stark said. 'This place is gonna blow. Wanna get outta here?'

Loki looked up to see Thor trying to make his way back towards them. Their gazes locked and Loki cocked his head. 'Until next time, Thor,' he said and grabbed Stark by the armoured shoulder. He teleported them away, back to the Hideout where Stark was breathless, running high on adrenalin.

Loki could not bring himself to find the same pride in a job well done. Thor's attitude had confused him and it made Loki feel uneasy, as though something were living side-by-side with his magic and digging to be free.

It was unsettling.
'Mr Stark, Ms Potts is on her way up.'

Tony groaned and ended the call before Bruce could pick up. He goddamn hoped that Pepper was quick about whatever she wanted.

'Mr Stark, Ms Potts is here,' JARVIS announced.

Rolling his eyes, Tony said, 'Yeah, J, I got that the first time.'

He glanced across the room to see Logan sitting at the table instead of Loki. And instead of various pieces of paper with hand-written notes, all that was sitting atop the table was a StarkPad and a cup of tea.

'That was fast,' Tony commented. Loki chuckled but Tony ignored him in favour of greeting Pepper. She'd already exited the elevator and was sorting through a stack of files in her briefcase.

'I know that you're busy,' Pepper said without looking up, 'but I need you to sign these.'

Tony sighed but obediently sat down at the sofa. Pepper paused and eyed him. 'What?' Tony said.

'I want this done as quickly as you do.'

'Well, that's a first,' Pepper commented. She laid out a file and pointed at it. 'Read that before signing it.'

'Yes, boss.'

They worked in silence, for once Tony not trying to stall and fuck around. He read what Pepper directed him to read, signed what needed his signature and left his initials everywhere else. Loki worked silently in the background and the TV washed over all of them, nothing of interest catching anyone's attention.

Well, not until Tony heard his name.

He glanced up and found Pepper already staring at the TV, a frown on her face.

'What?' Tony said.

'Haven't you been listening?' Pepper responded. She nodded her head at the TV and Tony took a closer look.

Oh. The words **Tony Stark; Hero or Villain?** were scrolling across the bottom of the screen. Tony recognised one of the women currently talking; a so-called *journalist* who had always been hell-bent on painting Tony as a bloodthirsty psychopath. One of the others worked for the Maria Collins Carbonell Foundation. The other people Tony couldn't place.

'Huh,' Tony said.

'She said that you purposely left the Avengers to get them all killed,' Pepper said. 'Apparently someone found out that Loki's killed a lot of SHIELD agents lately. She's trying to blame you.'

'Wouldn't be the first time,' Tony commented. He'd already looked away from the screen; it wasn't anything he hadn't heard/read before.
'Why aren't you more upset?' Pepper asked. 'This could damage your image, Tony. You know how important it is to keep your reputation up.'

Tony nodded absentmindedly. 'Mm, I know,' he said. 'I didn't take too big of a hit after quitting the Avengers. I'm still bouncing back, aren't I?'

'Stark Industries' stocks are steady,' Pepper commented. 'But that can always change.'

'I'm honestly not worried.'

'Tony, people will believe anything,' Pepper argued. 'Maybe you should-'

'No, I shouldn't do anything,' Tony interrupted. He finished up with a file and placed it neatly on the completed stack. He looked up when Pepper failed to pass him a new one. 'Pepper, I'm not doing anything. SHIELD dug their own grave; they can lie in it.'

Pepper sighed. 'You can't just say things like that. If someone records those words, Tony, next thing you know it's on the news.'

'And is someone recording me right now, Ms Potts?' Tony drawled. He didn't want to wait for her. For once he wanted this over quicker than Pepper did; he grabbed a new contract and started flipping through it.

'No, of course not,' Pepper said. 'I'm just telling you to be careful. You don't want people to believe that you want SHIELD and the Avengers dead.'

Tony chuckled lightly. 'Well, it would be a lie to say I wanted anything else.' He signed the contract, dropped it in the pile, and grabbed a new one; read, sign, so on and so forth. He was almost done, only two files left, when he realised that Pepper was staring at him. Eyebrows climbing, Tony said, 'What?'

'You shouldn't joke about that, Tony,' Pepper said.

'Joke about what?' he asked.

'About the Avengers dying. And SHIELD,' Pepper said. She frowned. 'Loki's still out there. What if he does kill them?'

Tony snorted. 'He won't, Pepper,' he said and went back to his paperwork. 'Thor's too strong to be killed. And I doubt that either Bruce or Rogers will be taken out that easily.' He signed with a flourish and flipped the page. 'Don't worry,' he continued, 'they'll catch Loki and we'll all go back to our old lives.'

'And what if he kills you?' Pepper demanded.

Tony smiled slightly. 'I'm not worried,' he commented.

Pepper had nothing to say to that and with her silence, Tony quickly finished the last few files. He even shuffled everything together neatly and put it back in Pepper's briefcase. 'All done,' he said and stood to stretch. 'Was there anything else, Ms Potts?'

Pepper jolted, as though she'd forgotten that Tony was there. 'No... no, Tony, that's all,' she said and quickly grabbed her stuff.

'You okay?'
'Yeah. Yes,' Pepper said and nodded. 'Sorry,' she said, 'I'm just worried. I know that you like to pretend that you don't care, but-

'Relax,' Tony interrupted and patted her gently on the shoulder. 'It'd take more than Loki to destroy Iron Man or Tony Stark. I'm not an Avenger any more, but I'll absolutely help them catch the son of a bitch. Don't worry so much.'

Pepper rolled her eyes. 'Like that will ever happen,' she said. Glancing at her watch, Pepper sighed. 'I'd better go.'

'We'll have dinner again soon,' Tony promised. 'I'll get Walden to call Rhodey.'

Pepper just nodded and let herself out. Tony breathed a sigh of relief and turned just in time to watch Loki sparkle back into himself.

He smiled. 'Love it when you do that.'

'Do not try and start anything, Stark,' Loki drawled without looking at him. 'You have a phone call to make.'

{oOo}

Bruce had no work planned for that day. With Tony's sudden exit and the Avengers all finding themselves permanently aboard the Helicarrier, Fury told them that they'd have a few days to settle in before any kind of schedule was arranged. That had turned into a solid three weeks of Bruce sporadically working on the magic sensor when he couldn't hide himself away in some dark part of the Helicarrier.

He'd already figured the sensor out. There were only so many times that Bruce could fake his work before someone caught on. Even Fury was getting desperate.

Bruce hadn't inspected the contents of the box Loki had given him until he was given the okay to. They'd remained hidden amongst his things; on his person when he was forced to leave his quarters, not trusting SHIELD to not go through his things while he was away.

He'd received a text just a few minutes earlier, Tony finally needing him to put the gifts to use. Bruce ducked into the tiny attached bathroom after returning to his quarters from the cafeteria, and set the contents out on the sink.

There was a slim device encased in dark blue plastic with various wires wrapped around it, an earwig, and a tiny wireless microphone. Bruce slipped the earwig in and attached the microphone beneath his sweater. He sent Tony a quick text from his StarkPhone before sitting on the closed lid of the toilet and waiting.

It took only a few minutes for his cell to buzz with a new message. He slid a thumb across the screen.
Switch on the blue device.

Bruce did as asked. A small green light flashed on and off from one corner of the device. And then the earpiece crackled into life.

"Bruce?"

'The one and only,' Bruce commented.

'Good to hear from you,' Tony said. 'How is everything?'

'I'm getting along okay,' Bruce said. 'Apart from Natasha and Clint insisting that I worm my way back into the Tower. They want me to spy on you for them.'

Tony laughed. 'Well, let them try. You'll be back soon enough.'

'Are you planning on revealing yourself?' Bruce asked.

'Oh, naughty Bruce! How very kinky!' Bruce rolled his eyes but a small smile did tug at his lips. 'Tony...'

'Ah, you're no fun,' Tony complained. 'But in answer to your question; I'm not revealing myself any time soon. I want all of SHIELD's bases gone before then.'

'And then?' Bruce questioned.

'We'll see what happens,' Tony said. 'Now, are you ready to help me?'

'Of course,' Bruce answered, 'just tell me what to do.'

Tony quickly explained that the blue device was similar to the black boxes that SHIELD had been using to try and spy on him; only better, of course, because 'I made it, Brucie, of course it's better than SHIELD's!'

After that Tony sobered very quickly, tone falling into professional as he directed Bruce from his quarters and through the Helicarrier. Bruce had to smile and make small talk with a few SHIELD agents, but luckily his reputation as a quiet man who avoided people whenever possible was well-known; many who saw him simply nodded and continued on their way. Nobody questioned why he was there or what he was doing.

'They love you,' Tony said, 'now turn right.'

Soon enough Bruce found himself before a thick metal door with nothing but a keypad stuck to the wall beside it.

'Now what?' Bruce asked.

'There's a white keycard in the back of the blue device,' Tony explained. Bruce frowned and turned the thing over and over in his hands until he caught sight of the card. It was in its own slot, only just visible when the device was turned the right way. 'Got it?'

'Got it,' Bruce echoed.
'Good. Slide it through the keypad on the door.'

Bruce did as asked and watched the keypad flash red. 'It went red; I can't get in,' Bruce said.

'Give me a second,' Tony responded. Bruce pulled his StarkPhone from his pocket and fiddled with it while he waited. He could at least use the excuse that he was bored or lost if someone stumbled across him.

'Okay,' Tony's voice brought him back, 'try again.'

Bruce did. This time the keypad flashed green and the door unlocked. 'I'm in,' Bruce said and pushed his way forward. The room was large, empty of human life but filled with all manner of computers and tech. There were two central terminals, each with four screens mounted on the large desks. There were desks pushed up against the left and right walls, too, each mounted with a computer tower and various monitors. There were three windows directly ahead of Bruce, the view of the world beyond hidden behind even more technology.

'There should be a main terminal,' Tony was saying in his ear, 'a computer with three or four towers, more equipment under the desk or stacked behind it.'

'There are two desks directly in front of me, each has a couple of screens and more than two towers each,' Bruce said.

'Try them,' Tony ordered. 'But don't turn the computers on.'

Bruce made his way through the room and pulled out one of the chairs. As he looked down at everything he realised that he didn't even know how to turn the computers on. Was there a main tower? A main switch? Which tower had to be booted up first?

'Give the mouse a shake, Bruce,' Tony said. Bruce did as asked and nothing happened. 'Okay,' Tony continued when Bruce had relayed the information. 'Which tower is closest to you?' When Bruce answered, Tony told him to take the red, orange and purple wires from the blue device and plug them into that tower. He needed help even doing that much, but soon enough the computer was booting itself up and quickly flashing a log in screen.

'Now what?' Bruce asked.

He heard a rustle on Tony's end, a murmur of voices. He wondered if Loki was watching Tony work, the god getting a glimpse of the power Tony held over technology. He guessed that he was getting the same show.

'Leave it to me, Bruce,' Tony announced.

Bruce didn't have a hope of understanding exactly what Tony was doing. Information flashed across the screen, warnings and security checks that Tony breezed through. Bruce fidgeted nervously in the seat, worst case scenarios running through his mind as Tony pulled up and downloaded more and more information. He wondered what, exactly, he'd say if a SHIELD agent wandered into the room and demanded to know what the hell he was doing.

He'd have no excuse, Bruce knew. There wasn't much he could say to defend himself if caught looking through top secret SHIELD information with Tony Stark whispering in his ear.

More time passed; seconds slipped by, turned into minutes and then half-an-hour had passed, forty minutes, fifty-two. Finally the screen before him froze and Bruce blinked out of his thoughts.
'Tony?' he asked.

'There it is,' Tony replied.

Bruce finally took a closer look at the information. It was a simple list, a black background with white text. A bunch of numbers listed to the left, followed by area codes, coordinates, states and cities.

'Fourteen SHIELD bases all together,' Tony said. 'The only ones we didn't know about are Seattle and Reno. They weren't on the information packets SHIELD distributed way back when.'

'Why would they keep those two secret?' Bruce asked.

Tony hummed. 'No idea,' he said. 'They might be research facilities; weapons depots. Anything that they'd want to keep away from me. I'll find out when I destroy them.'

Bruce swallowed at that.

'So, there are only two that we didn't know about, and both are in America,' Tony continued. 'There's nothing here about overseas bases.'

That made Bruce frown. 'Overseas bases?' he said. 'I don't remember SHIELD ever mentioning anything about operating in other countries. They always have to sneak Clint and Natasha in when they work internationally.'

'Yeah,' Tony agreed, 'but my research shows significant SHIELD activity in a number of countries. But none of those are listed here.'

There was another voice now, further from whatever microphone Tony was using to direct his words at Bruce.

'Maybe,' Tony agreed with Loki; at least, Bruce assumed that it was Loki. He doubted that Tony would have invited Dr Strange and his friend Wong along to this excursion.

'What now?' Bruce asked.

'We need more information; or, we need to try to gather more,' Tony said. 'Cross-reference this to SHIELD's other databases. Find out if they've hidden anything else on another server.'

Bruce sighed and slouched back. 'Another room, then?' he asked.

'Yeah,' Tony said. 'Up and at 'em, Bruce.'

Tony directed him through shutting down the computer and disconnecting the blue device. And then Bruce was on his way again, heading deeper into the Helicarrier, passing through out of the way service corridors and through hidden hallways that were for maintenance.

'And you're sure this is working?' Bruce asked as he made his way into another room. He heard Tony let out a breath. 'Well, almost sure...' the man mused over the comm.

Bruce rolled his eyes and ducked past another row of computer banks. 'Why thanks, Tony, it's really great to know how much you value my safety.'

'Aww, Brucie, you know I love you,' Tony said. Bruce could see the charming little grin that would be plastered across Tony's face. 'Now, tell me what you see.'
'Computers,' Bruce muttered.

'Well, that's good; we're in the right place.'

It took slightly longer to find the main computer terminal. There were too many computers, too many desks and seats and equipment blocking the aisles between each. He hooked Tony up to one computer only to find that it wasn't even connected to SHIELD's database; another wasn't the one that Tony needed.

After a half-hour of searching and cursing and hearing Loki call him useless over the comms- to which Tony responded that his partner should shut the hell up because Bruce was awesome, which made Bruce feel slightly better about the entire thing- Bruce found the right computer. Once again he was made to connect everything and then he sat back and let Tony do his thing.

Three hours had passed since Bruce had left his quarters and it was making the doctor antsy. He assumed that he was closely monitored when aboard the Helicarrier, Fury wanting to make sure that he didn't freak out and go on a rampage as the Other Guy. He actually swore- quite colourfully- when Tony told him that the computer didn't have what they needed and that he had to move on.

He sneaked from the room, back through dark corridors filled with pipes and switchboards, until he was wandering down a brightly light corridor closer towards the areas of the Helicarrier that Bruce was actually familiar with.

Bruce wasn't in a restricted area (at least he didn't think that he was) so when he heard voices he told Tony to wait, took the earpiece out and slid it into his pocket, and carried on normally.

A few more steps and Bruce turned a corner to find Clint up ahead, a man dressed in green scrubs at his side. Clint glanced up when he heard Bruce and murmured something. The doctor looked at him, too, before saying something to Clint and disappearing through the open door behind him.

So Bruce was close to the infirmary; good to know that Clint wasn't about to tackle and detain him.

'Hey, Bruce,' Clint greeted when Bruce got closer.

'Afternoon,' Bruce said. 'How are you?' he asked and nodded at the room.

Clint smiled. 'I'm fine, don't worry. Just routine check ups.'

'They haven't found anything, have they?' he asked and smiled when Clint shook his head. 'At least they haven't found anything worrying.'

'Yeah,' Clint agreed. Bruce could see the strain around his eyes, the slight clench of his jaw. 'But if they found something I'd at least know what's going on. They think it might just be stress.'

'Could be,' Bruce agreed. 'I'm not exactly a medical doctor, but stress can destroy even the healthiest person. I should know.'

Clint chuckled and gently clapped him on the shoulder. 'Well, at least we can commiserate together. You get headaches after Hulking Out, don't you?'

'Headaches, fatigue, sore muscles and bones... everything, really,' Bruce told him. 'If the Other Guy hadn't made me tougher I'd definitely be out of it for months rather than days after he took over.'

Clint nodded along, eyes narrowed somewhat against the glare of the overhead lights. Finally he
shook his head and asked, 'What are you doing in this neck of the woods, anyway?'

'Hiding,' Bruce lied and smiled when Clint raised his brows. 'I should be working on the magic sensor, but I'm not in the right head space for anything that needs that much attention. Fury's asking a lot of questions, so I'm avoiding him.'

Clint was staring past him, body slouched as he leaned against the wall. He said nothing and Bruce was silent, eyes roaming over Clint's face as he waited for a response.

Suddenly Clint leapt up, spine ramrod straight and eyes unseeing. His face was slack, bone white, bottom lip quivering ever so slightly. Bruce was half-afraid that the man was about to drop dead.

'Clint, are you okay?' he asked and eased himself forward, arms out just in case he had to catch the agent.

'What?' Clint jolted and his eyes swivelled from left to right before quickly settling on Bruce again. 'I... it's... shit."

'What?' Bruce echoed.

Clint grabbed Bruce's arm and shoved the sleeve of his sweater up to get a look at his watch. 'Shit, seriously?' he demanded.

'Clint!' Bruce snapped. A little bit of the Other Guy might have slipped into his voice because Clint quickly dropped his arm and backed away.

'Bruce, I need you to listen to me very carefully,' Clint ordered. His face was stone, eyes serious and head tilted forward.

'Okay...?' Bruce tried. His heart was beginning to pick up speed and he was pretty sure that he was ten seconds away from Hulking Out.

'I had a meeting with Natasha and Phil at two-thirty,' Clint announced.

Bruce... frowned slightly and checked his watch. 'It's three-ten,' he said.

'Yeah,' Clint said, 'yeah, it is. But you see, Bruce, I was with you for the past two hours, wasn't I?'

Bruce's frown deepened and Clint grabbed his arm again.

'Wasn't I, Bruce?' the man hissed. 'I was with you working on, um... we were working on...'

'The magic sensor?' Bruce tried, because it was the only thing other than Clint's erratic behaviour currently occupying his mind.

'Yes!' Clint shouted and snapped his fingers in Bruce's face. 'We were absolutely working on the magic sensor and that's why I'm over half-an-hour late to the meeting. Natasha and Phil can't get mad at me over that, yeah? I was just busy helping my fellow Avenger, so Nat can't kick my ass in training and Phil can't limit the amount of arrows I'm allowed to take on a mission, right?'

'Right...' Bruce agreed uneasily. Because on one hand, sure, he could easily lie. On the other, he didn't particularly want to lie to Natasha and Coulson, both of whom could easily make his life hell now that he was stuck on the Helicarrier for the foreseeable future.

'Yeah!' Clint shouted. With that he pivoted on his heels and leapt down the hallway, even bashing into one wall as he threw himself to the right and further into the Helicarrier.
Bruce watched him go, heart hammering. But he was calming now, assured that Clint had somewhere else to be and wouldn't be popping up in whatever room Bruce had to sneak into next. He slipped the earpiece from his pocket and slid it back into his ear as he started walking.

'Tony?' he murmured.

'You good?' Tony asked.

'Yeah, just a little distraction,' Bruce said. 'What room next?'

'Well, we have all the information we need on SHIELD's American bases, but I still want to check their information against what JARVIS and I dug up about their overseas operations. There's another computer bay in Section Thirty-Two that I want to take a look at,' Tony said. 'Just in case.'

'Okay,' Bruce said. 'Which way?'

{oOo}

Section Thirty-Two, Room B2 was apparently one of the secret computer terminals Tony had managed to sniff out. Bruce didn't try his own access card, too worried about throwing up an alarm. Instead he connected the blue box Tony had given him and waited somewhat patiently for Tony and JARVIS to work their hacking magic.

'The room is open, Dr Banner,' JARVIS announced over the earpiece.

Bruce glanced back down the corridor before letting himself into the room. The door shut behind him with a light click. Like the other two rooms Bruce had infiltrated, this was spartan; a wall covered in screens, two computer bays on either side of him, and a central terminal that could be used to access the Helicarrier's control room.

Bruce slid into the seat behind the main desk and attached the blue device to the computer. The screen flickered to life as Tony and JARVIS got to work.

'The cameras?' Bruce murmured.

'Already taken care of, Brucie,' Tony mumbled. 'You'll be fine.'

'I hope so.'

'I take care of my own,' Tony commented, tone somewhat distracted. Bruce turned his attention to the screen in front of him. It was more or less gibberish. He caught flashes of information he understood; the files SHIELD had on each Avenger and other super humans they were monitoring; files upon files of the enemies they had faced and others who could pose a threat; schematics of SHIELD bases, of the Helicarrier, of the Iron Man suits.

Tony lingered on those briefly, no doubt checking how much information SHIELD had stolen, how much of it they understood. He said nothing as he worked and Bruce allowed himself to relax. There wasn't much he could do; he was just the legs, a way to get to the information that Tony and
Loki needed. Tony was the one who had to find it.

After ten, twenty minutes, another five when Tony cursed and JARVIS had him backtracking, Tony finally stopped. The computer screen ran through a series of typed commands before it froze.

'Oh,' Tony murmured.

'Oh?' Bruce echoed. He heard Loki's voice over the earpiece, too far away to make out the words. Tony mumbled something else that Bruce couldn't hear. 'Oh, what?' Bruce asked.

'The SHIELD bases; the ones in other countries,' Tony said.

'Did you find something?' Bruce asked.

'Yeah,' Tony said. More mumbling, a surprised sound from Loki. And then a laugh from Tony. 'They aren't SHIELD bases at all,' Tony said.

Bruce frowned and leaned forward to stare at the information on the screen. It was a list of numbers that Bruce didn't understand, each one followed by a location and four letters; WSCB. 'Then what are they?' Bruce questioned.

'They appear to be World Security Council Bases, Dr Banner,' JARVIS announced.

Bruce's mouth dropped open and he heard shuffling, a loud laugh, Tony's breathless giggle.

'We have them, Bruce,' Tony said. 'The coordinates, what security systems they use, hell, even the amount of agents each base has. Because according to all of this, even the WSC has agents. Former SHIELD agents, promoted to better protect the men and women in power. And we've got them!'

It finally sank in, then. Tony and Loki had always planned on going after the World Security Council next. Because taking down SHIELD wouldn't be enough. While it would take time, those who worked for and funded the WSC would just build something else; another secret agency that would rise up and fight Tony and Loki whenever they were ready. Tony and Loki would spend the rest of their long lives having to face army after army of mortals specifically trained to kill them.

But if they took out the World Security Council... if they hunted down the men and women in power... they'll have conquered Midgard. Because Tony had the power and fame to remain in Midgard's good graces. With his charm, money, and charisma he could easily convince Midgard, over time, that Loki was reformed.

With the WSC out of the way, Midgard would be theirs.

'Oh,' Bruce breathed

'Yeah,' Tony said, a chuckle accompanying his words. 'We have everything, Bruce, and it's all thanks to you.'

Bruce smiled ever so slightly. 'Thank me when I'm back home.'

'Home?' Tony said. 'I'll hold you to that, Brucie.'

'You do that,' Bruce said. 'Can I go now?'

'Yeah,' Tony replied. 'You're in the clear; this section is still shut down for cleaning purposes. Just head back the way you came; you'll be fine.'
'Alright,' Bruce said, 'I'll talk to you soon, Tony.'

'Yeah.'

'And congratulations,' Bruce added.

Tony chuckled again before the earpiece went silent. Bruce slid it from his ear and tucked it into his pocket. He knew that the blue box would mess with the cameras until he was safely back in his quarters and could switch the device off. Feeling lighter than he had in days, Bruce slipped from the room and made the long, winding trip back to his quarters.

Nothing happened in the time it took him to reach the familiar corridor. Steve was staying in the room directly next to his, Thor on the opposite side. Bruce didn't know where Natasha and Clint slept; knowing Clint, he probably had a nest somewhere high up in the gym.

Bruce chuckled at the thought and keyed himself into his quarters.

'Dr Banner.'

He paused before going in and turned. 'Director Fury,' he said, nodding when Fury stopped beside him.

'Agent Barton tells me that you're making progress on the magic sensor,' Fury commented.

Bruce silently cursed Clint for roping him into the archer's lies. He smiled slightly and said, 'Some progress, yeah.' Well, he'd figured the thing out long ago, but...

'Good,' Fury said, 'with Stark gone we need you working twice as hard on it.' Bruce nodded. 'Can you show me what you've got so far?'

Bruce thought about the blue device in his pocket, the microphone and earwig in the other. 'Can I freshen up first?' he asked. 'Just a quick shower and I'll join you in the lab.'

Fury was silent for a beat before he finally nodded. 'Very well,' he said, 'but no longer than half-an-hour, Dr Banner. We need to track Loki down as soon as possible.'

'Half-an-hour,' Bruce agreed. He stepped backwards into his quarters and watched Fury leave just before the door shut. He breathed out a sigh, rubbed his face.

At least he could dispose of the earwig and microphone before he had to speak to Fury again. But what to do with the blue device?
'Are they making progress?' Fury asked.

Coulson buried his frustrations. He'd been in Nevada for a grand total of two hours and already Fury was demanding updates. While Coulson understood the need to get this technology up and functioning, he didn't know what Fury wanted him to do. Coulson was a field agent and rather handy at organisation. But he wasn't a scientist. All he could do was report back his findings.

'I believe so,' Coulson said, hoping that the anger was hidden from his tone. 'Doctor Malcolm believes that the crystals will hold enough energy to get three or four shots off.'

'Three or four?' Fury said. 'That isn't nearly enough, Agent Coulson.'

'I am aware,' Coulson replied, 'but it's better than what we had only three days ago, Director. The crystals shattered when even the slightest bit of electricity was introduced. A few shots is better than nothing.' He heard Fury grunt in agreement. Of course the man wouldn't articulate it. 'There is one problem, though,' Coulson added.

Fury swore. 'What now?'

'Electricity and magic might behave differently,' Coulson explained. 'Doctor Malcolm said that he's created electric guns. He isn't sure if they're magic guns. They need to be tested with real magic.'

'The only magic-user we have is Thor,' Fury said, 'and I really don't fucking feel like explaining to him why we're creating magic guns and what magic, exactly, we're going to use to power them.'

'What about Doctor Strange?' Coulson asked. He stepped back when a group of lab-coat wearing agents rushed past him. He frowned and watched them go, wondering briefly about their agitation. But there were no alarms, no screams and running. He focused back on the conversation.

Fury grunted. 'What about him?'

'He has magic,' Coulson said, 'or, at least, he claims he does. We can ask him to test the guns for us.'

'And again,' Fury said, 'what the fuck am I supposed to say to him?'

Coulson breathed out heavily. He didn't know what Fury wanted from him. 'I understand your frustrations, sir, but there's not much-'

An explosion threw Coulson off of his feet. His head smacked into the wall and Coulson saw stars, felt a throb between each temple. His hands hurt where he'd thrown them out to break his fall. His phone had skittered across the floor and Coulson groaned as he got to his knees.

He could hear shouting now; an alarm was blaring and Coulson thought he could smell smoke.

He crawled along the floor and reached his cell.

'Director Fury?' he asked.

There was no answer but the call was still connected. Coulson swore near-silently and clambered to his feet, using the wall to steady himself. He took a few steps and didn't think he had a concussion, but his vision was just a bit woozy. He took small steps until he reached the hallway window.
When he glanced out of it he swore *harshly*.

One of the entrance buildings had been demolished; it was still on fire, throwing black smoke and flames into the air. There were scientists trying to evacuate, doctors and other less-trained personnel trying to make their escape. Coulson's eyes darted to the right when another explosion went off, this one smaller and not felt from where Coulson was standing. But it drew his attention up to where he spotted Genesis, the suit flying through the air and dropping grenades on the terrified workers beneath.

Coulson's grip around his cell tightened.

A tinny voice reached his ear.

'Coulson! COULSON!'

He raised the cell to his ear. 'I'm here.'

'We have a situation,' Fury said.

'I am well aware of that,' Coulson commented as another explosion reached his ears.

'The Seattle base is under attack,' Fury said.

Coulson blinked rapidly. 'Sir, can you repeat that?'

'The fucking Seattle base is under attack!' Fury roared at him. 'I already have reports of a dozen deaths and Loki's been spotted using magic to-

'Director Fury,' Coulson interrupted. Anger was licking at his senses, but Coulson pushed it down. 'I have some extremely bad news, sir.'

'What the fuck could be worse than this?!' Fury screamed.

Genesis had turned its sights on Coulson and Coulson turned and ran, skidded around a corner and into a wall just as the suit crashed its way into the building.

'The Reno base is currently under attack,' Coulson said and jammed his cell into his suit pocket.

{oOo}

Loki *so enjoyed* these underground bases. It made it so much easier to destroy entire sections all at once. Already he'd pulled down an entire hallway and four connected rooms, listening to the screams of the mortals trapped inside. He had some of Stark's explosives on his person and had to admit that they were quite fun to use. He now understood why Stark liked using them so much.

Loki teleported from one hallway to another, killed two agents trying to loop around him, and teleported again. He felt mild fatigue beginning to set in and decided to walk the rest of the way. There was a large steel door just up ahead and to his right. He followed JARVIS' directions right up to it and placed a palm flat against the smooth surface.
His hand glowed blue before reverting to its birth colour. Loki just watched, no anger working itself through his core at the sight of something that had once absolutely disgusted him. He still didn't like it, but... it seemed that Stark was right; he was growing to accept it, even if only just.

The door shattered beneath Loki's magic and Loki shook his hand warm, stepped over the rubble and into the room. He raised his sceptre and shot a mortal down, drew a dagger from his sleeve and sent it whistling across the room and into the throat of another. Two more were crouched beneath desks, one an agent and one a woman dressed in soft blue clothing.

She screamed when she caught sight of Loki and the agent used it as a distraction, leapt up and onto Loki's back. A knife almost sank into Loki's neck but caught on the armour beneath his collar. Loki ducked and dragged the man down, enjoyed the oof the mortal let out when he was slammed into the floor. A boot to the head shut him up- he may even live, Loki thought- and the woman screamed again.

'Please do shut up,' Loki said as he seated himself at one of the computers, 'you are beginning to annoy me.' He made a shooing motion at her before withdrawing the computer stick Stark have given him that morning from his pocket. He knew that it housed JARVIS, that it was necessary to gain information, but wondered how, exactly, it did all of that. 'He must explain when we have time,' Loki mused to himself.

A few feet away the woman had given into her flight instincts and bolted out of the room. Loki chuckled to himself as she screamed the entire way. He wondered if she'd live.

A few feet away the woman had given into her flight instincts and bolted out of the room. Loki chuckled to himself as she screamed the entire way. He wondered if she'd live.

His attention was stolen by the computer booting up. 'Now, what was I doing?' Loki hummed and pressed a random key on the board before him. The computer beeped. 'Interesting.'

Tony always had fun in Reno, and this time was no different. While he wasn't hitting up the casinos or the slopes, flying head-first into SHIELD agents and shooting them as they tried to sneak attack him was so much more thrilling.

The research Bruce had gotten for him showed that Reno was a training ground; a base located in the mountains just outside of Reno, half buried under ground and half acting as a luxury resort to make money. The training facilities were actually pretty decent, but what Tony liked the most was the plethora of baby agents.

There were hundreds of them, some wearing training gear and others in the jumpsuits that were apparently standard casual attire for new recruits. Some dwelled heavily on their training, practically performing drills as Tony shot at them. Others ran screaming, called for trainers and those in charge to save them.

They wouldn't have made the cut, Tony told himself as bullets found a group of twelve trying to force their way through one door. I'm saving them the trouble of looking for another job.

There was another little bit of information that made this just that little bit more exciting, though. Strange had told Tony and Loki that SHIELD were working on weapons at the Reno base; magical
weapons, to be exact. Strange had scouted out the place before agreeing to make a deal with Tony and Loki.

Wasn't it just sad that all of that work, all of that research, would be for nothing?

Tony punched through a viewing window and tossed a block of C4 into the room beyond. He didn't hang around, instead shooting through one of the holes a previous explosion had made and outrunning the boom that sounded behind him.

'JARVIS, how's Genesis-3 doing?' he asked as he flew around a corner. He ignored the two scientists he passed, enjoyed the way they screamed and tossed themselves to the floor long after he'd moved on.

'Very well, sir,' JARVIS responded. 'Genesis-3 has downloaded 73% of the information currently stored on the computer system. Genesis-2 is having no problems guarding.'

Tony was about to respond when he was shot out of the air. He hit the floor hard and skidded, flipped up and back over with his own momentum. He eventually crashed into a wall and it slowed him down, allowed him to roll onto his front and pull himself up and onto his knees.

He looked up and saw Coulson exiting a room, a large, alien-looking gun held tight in his hands.

It looked so much like one of the Chitauri weapons that Tony realised magic guns weren't the only thing that SHIELD were tinkering with.

'Well then,' he mused as he slowly got to his feet. 'Seems that I'll have to personally invest in making hand-held weapons again.'

'Where's your master?' Coulson demanded.

Tony could practically taste the fear and anger rolling across Coulson's shoulders. He smirked.

{oOo}

'Mr Laufeyson,' JARVIS said over the comms. Loki cocked his head, pulled from his daydreams by the AI's urgent tone.

'Yes?' Loki asked.

'A self-destruct sequence has been initiated,' JARVIS said. 'You must evacuate immediately.'

'Do you have the information I need?' Loki asked.

'The information needed is not more important than your safety, Mr Laufeyson,' JARVIS said, computerised tone firm. 'I have already removed all traces of myself from the servers. Please evacuate immediately.'

Loki stood and pulled the stick from the computer, slipping it into his pocket as he turned on the spot. He teleported as far as the stairs that led up and out of the base, took them two at a time and broke out into the early evening air. He'd taken only a few, long strides away from the base before
it exploded.

Loki was tossed off his feet and felt the skin on his cheek rip apart when he hit the ground. He swore in Vanir and got back to his feet. Behind him the SHIELD base collapsed in on itself, a smoking, burning ruin of walls and half-standing roofs all that remained.

And before him were a group of highly armed mortals, all wearing matching uniforms.

'Interesting,' Loki commented as he dusted himself off.

{oOo}

Tony tossed himself to the right just as Coulson fired. His shot tore the entire wall behind Tony apart. Tony tossed his right hand against another wall and fired, used the momentum to change directions quickly. Coulson missed him again, again, a third time when Tony twisted mid-flight and shot up, against the ceiling, before dropping back down again.

He was lucky the fourth time, raising his gun and firing instead of jumping out of the way. The shot hit Tony in the chest and forced him back up, crashed him into the ceiling where he tore through wood and plaster. Coulson had been tossed to the floor by the recoil and was scrambling to find his feet even as Tony fell, spread his arms, aimed to land his entire suit's weight atop the mortal.

Coulson threw himself backwards and to the floor, aimed up and shot Tony in the shoulder. Tony took the blow and spun but used a repulsor to right himself, to fly at Coulson again and this time smack into him.

The mortal's head made a sickening thump when it hit the wall. Coulson was clearly dazed, blood matting his hair to his forehead. Tony drew himself back to his feet and chuckled. 'Pathetic,' he muttered, 'and here I thought you'd put up a decent fight, Coulson. What a pity.'

He raised a gauntlet, repulsor whirring as it charged-
- Coulson threw the gun at him, Tony's shot went wild. When Tony glanced back at him Coulson had rolled into a corner of the room and fallen through the floor.

'… huh,' Tony muttered. He walked forward and peered into the hole. It was a tunnel, the walls made of rough dirt and a light embedded to the right. 'Clever,' Tony said. 'If I had the time I'd hunt you down, little mortal.'

'Are you talking to yourself, sir?' JARVIS questioned. 'Should I be concerned?'

Tony snorted. 'No, J. Just having a little fun. How are we on the info?'

'96%, Mr Stark,' JARVIS said. 'If you would like to make your escape, the base will detonate shortly after you leave.'

Tony smiled. 'And that's why I love you, J,' he said before firing up his repulsors.
'STAND DOWN, LOKI!' one of the Midgardians roared at him.

'Mind your tone with me, mortal,' Loki snarled even as he raised his hands. 'My fight is not with you.'

'What have you done?' another Midgardian asked.

'Destroyed a SHIELD base,' Loki said. Shock rippled through the crowd and Loki smirked. 'What, did SHIELD not tell you that they were building an agency in your city? How utterly rude.'

One of them cocked their gun, the click something Loki was familiar with from Stark's workshop. 'Do not do anything foolish,' Loki said. 'The Avengers cannot fight me; what hope do you think you have?'

'JUST PUT YOUR DAMN HANDS UP!' one of them shouted.

'I will stop when I wish to stop,' Loki said as though the mortal hadn't spoken. 'And as I said; my fight is not with you. If you start one, well... that will change things.'

They were about to shoot, Loki was sure of it, and he briefly mourned the fact that he would not be able to kill the lot of them. It would damage the plan Stark had already put into action.

But one of the mortals stepped forward, gun aimed at Loki's chest. 'People like you don't stop!' the man said. 'So just put your hands up and surrender.'

'People like me?' Loki questioned, a twist to his mouth. 'I am not human. Do not delude yourself into thinking that you understand me. Do you really believe that you can stop me? I would lay waste to this entire Realm if I so wished. Do you think it a coincidence that no civilians have died in my attacks?

'I have no quarrel with your people,' Loki repeated, 'but believe me when I say that I will decimate you if you start a war with me. Do not be fools.'

Silence followed his words, the mortals clearly not knowing what to do. They were used to Midgardian threats; mortals that they could shoot and take into custody.

Loki was a power they could not comprehend. And it seemed that they were finally realising that.

'Not that this isn't fascinating,' Loki said before they could bark any more foolish orders at him, 'but I really must leave now.' He wiggled his fingers at them. 'Thank you for your hospitality. I will be sure to repay you at some point for the damage I did to your city.'

With that he teleported away and cloaked himself in invisibility, landing in the hotel room he had booked with a stolen credit card. Well, *Stark* had booked it, but Loki was sure that he would have been capable of doing so even without Stark's help.

He groaned as he landed atop the lovely mattress. It wasn't as comfortable as his bed at home, but
it would do until he had recovered sufficiently to teleport closer to the Tower.

'JARVIS, what entertainment would you recommend while I rest?' he asked.

'How do you feel about reality television, Mr Laufeyson?' JARVIS replied.

{oOo}

Coulson limped his way down the slope. He wondered how far away he was from Reno proper. While his cell was still working, apparently he no longer had reception on this particular mountain side. He sighed to himself. Of course he didn't.

He'd been walking for half-an-hour, maybe more, when the sounds of a quinjet engine pulled his eyesight upward. He spotted the plane speeding towards him and quickened his pace, figuring that it would land in the little clearing about a hundred yards further ahead.

Coulson's head was pounding by the time the quinjet did land and he had to be helped up the ramp and into it, his entire body tilting dangerous to the right when he tried to climb up.

An agent pushed him into a seat and another started checking his head injury.

'Agent Coulson, Director Fury is on the line,' another agent said and handed him a satellite phone. Coulson sighed but took it. 'Director.'

'You alive?' Fury asked.

'I'm speaking to you, aren't I?' Coulson responded.

'And how badly injured are you, Agent Coulson?' Fury said.

'I'm fine,' Coulson said.

'He most likely has a severe concussion, judging by the size of this gash!' the agent checking him over shouted. Coulson scowled at her but she ignored him.

'Both bases have fallen,' Fury said, apparently satisfied that Coulson wasn't going to drop dead any time soon. 'I think it's time we discussed our plans with the remaining Avengers.'

Coulson sighed.

{oOo}

'Hey,' Tony said when Loki teleported into the living room. He stretched his right arm out, the left
propped up on the back of the sofa, a large wrapped pack resting atop his shoulder.

Loki frowned as he made his way over to his mate. 'What happened?' he demanded.

'Nothing,' Stark said, face a mask of fake innocence.

'You told me that you were not injured,' Loki growled.

'No, I said that I wasn't seriously injured,' Stark corrected.

Loki groaned and gently curled himself into Stark's side. The Midgardian's good arm curled around his shoulders. 'I should have known,' he said. 'What did you do?'

'Nothing,' Stark insisted. 'I told you that Coulson was there and we had a little spat. He shot me a few times, no big deal.'

Loki glanced at what he assumed was an ice pack. 'And yet you are injured.'

'Only slightly, okay?' Stark grumbled. 'I hit the ceiling pretty hard and he shot me twice. I'm just a bit sore.'

'I will take a look,' Loki said and made to sit up. But Stark's grip around him tightened and Loki stilled.

'Not yet, okay?' Stark said.

'Stark-'

'Please?' Stark said. 'I missed you.'

Loki sighed but allowed himself to settle back down into Tony's side. 'I missed you, too,' he murmured. 'Even if you did lie to me.'

'I didn't lie-'

'You are a liar,' Loki interrupted.

Tony chuckled. 'Okay, okay; I'm a liar. But I love you, so... forgive me?''

Loki knew the eyes, the look, that would be directed at him, so didn't bother. He just sat up and pressed his lips to Tony's. 'I forgive you, of course,' he said, 'but am still irritated.'

'I can live with that,' Stark breathed. 'Kiss me again?'

Loki was about to when JARVIS interrupted.

'Mr Stark, Captain Rogers is in the lobby and wishes to see you.'

Loki jerked back and glanced up at the ceiling as Stark said, 'What?'

'He says he wishes to speak to you, sir,' JARVIS said. 'Shall I have him removed from the Tower?'

'Uh...' Stark frowned. 'What the Hell does he want?'

'You will only know if you ask him,' Loki commented.

Stark glanced at him. 'You want me to let him up?'
Shrugging, Loki said, 'I do not care. It is unlikely that he has anything interesting to say. However, if he did let information slip...'

He trailed off and Stark grunted. 'It could help us,' he muttered. 'Fine. JARVIS, let the fucker up. I wanna hear what he has to say.'

Loki pushed his body into Logan Thomas' form and stretched as his bones resettled. 'I did not think I would be doing this again so soon after having free run of the Tower,' he said.

Tony patted him on the shoulder. 'It's okay, baby. Rogers won't be staying long.'

'Do not call me baby, Stark.'

'Oh, right... we settled on honey-bunny, yeah?'

Loki made to hit Stark but remembered his injured shoulder at the last second. His fist hovered above his mate's other shoulder and he scowled. 'One of these days I will murder you,' he vowed.

'Good luck with that,' Stark said, a short chuckle accompanying his words.

'Mr Stark, Mr Thomas; Captain Rogers is here,' JARVIS announced just before the elevator doors slid open.

Rogers slowly made his way towards them. Loki could read the hesitance in his broad shoulders, saw the agitation in the way his fingers curled in and released. He held his head high, though, bright eyes determined as he stopped on the other side of the living room.

'To- Mr Stark,' Rogers said, correcting himself at the last second. Tony nodded his approval. 'Mr Thomas,' Rogers said more as an afterthought, his attention leaving Loki before he'd even finished addressing him.

Loki's irritation was shared by Tony, the Midgardian already scowling.

'What do you want, Mr Rogers?' Stark asked. 'I'm a busy man.'

'I...' Rogers paused, took a breath, and started again. 'Loki and his robots destroyed two SHIELD bases yesterday.'

Stark raised his eyebrows. 'And...?' he drawled.

'He... there are only four left, not including the Helicarrier,' Rogers said. 'At this rate he's going to destroy SHIELD completely.'

'Yeah, that's probably his plan; we all agree on that,' Stark said. 'What I want to know is what this has to do with me. I'm no longer an Avenger, Rogers. This isn't my problem.'

'This is everyone's problem!' Rogers snapped. 'I can't believe you, Tony!'

Loki felt Tony go completely still beside him. The Midgardian's magic was a bubbling, frothy mess of anger.

'Loki's killing people, innocent people, and you're not helping!' Rogers shouted.

Stark was on his feet almost quicker than Loki could track. He turned ever so slightly to see Stark staring Rogers down despite the height difference between them.
'You come into my Tower,' Tony growled, 'and demand my help, all while treating me like shit? Just who the fuck do you think you are, Rogers?'

'I... Tony, no!' Rogers was quick to backtrack, as always willing to use what little skills in manipulation he had to get Stark to do what he wanted. Unfortunately for Rogers, Tony wasn't an idiot.

'I don't care what my dad did for you, Rogers,' Tony said. 'I don't care what you've done for this world. And I certainly don't give a fuck what you think of me. If you ever set foot in my Tower again I'm pressing charges. Get the fuck out.'

Rogers said nothing. He was just staring at Stark, eyes wide and hands jerking at his sides. Loki slowly pulled himself from the sofa. 'Do you want me to call the police?' he asked, tilting his voice into vaguely worried/scared territory.

It made the super soldier jump, eyes landing on Loki and the mortal seeming to realise just what he was doing.

'No, I... I'm sorry,' Rogers said. 'Tony, I'm so sorry—'

'Get out of my Tower,' Tony ordered. 'Now. '

His tone, the look on his face, finally sent Rogers fleeing. He half-heartedly tried to get another sentence out but Loki moved himself to Tony's side, made himself look scared. Rogers gulped and backed his way into the elevator.

'Relax,' Loki said, soothing a hand down Tony's back.

'I fucking hate that man,' Tony growled.

'I know,' Loki said. 'But sit and tell me how your fight with Coulson went. I am sure that you left out many details.'

Stark seemed to perk up somewhat as he allowed Loki to sit him back down. The joy on his face as he described the useless mortals he cut down was something that Loki wished to stare at forever.

{oOo}

Steve felt shaken as he made his way back to the SHIELD car. He wasn't sure what had happened to him. He'd had it all planned out, the exact words that he'd used when he spoke to Tony. All of that had fallen apart at Tony's smarmy tone and cocky attitude. Steve couldn't stand Tony when he was like that and he'd let his irritation get the better of him.

'Captain Rogers,' Coulson said.

'He wouldn't even listen,' Steve muttered. He pulled his seatbelt on and slumped in the seat 'I don't know what else to do.'

'You have to accept facts, Captain, and realise that what you're doing is hopeless,' Coulson said.
'No.' Steven shook his head. 'I don't care what you say, Phil. Tony's my friend.' Of that he had no doubt. Even if Tony hated him, even if Tony annoyed the absolute *hell* out of him, he was still Steve's friend. He was still Howard's *son*.

'He doesn't feel the same. He's going to kill you, Steve.'

'No he won't,' Steve reiterated. 'You'll see.' He heard Phil sigh as the car pulled away from Stark Tower.
“If I can get my shit together, I'm gonna run away
And never see any of you again, never see any of you again
I hope the roof flies off and you get blown out into space
I always make such expensive mistakes”

– Wilson (Expensive Mistakes) [Fall Out Boy]

**dralcolminthemiddle**

Footage of Loki Laufeyson facing off against Seattle police.

**yournamekevi**

how does he growl like that? do asgardians have like the vocal chords of a cat?

**jackscepticrage**

no but doesn't anyone else wonder about the implications of this? loki said his fight isn't with earth. he specifically said that his fight is with shield.

**tonystarksalover**

Alright bitches, settle down. I've watched this footage a dozen times and I wanna share my piece. Let's break it down, yeah?

Loki specifically says 'my fight is not with you', not once but TWICE. That implies that he doesn't want to fight humanity as a whole; he even warns the police not to start a war with him. What can we learn from this? Well, obviously Loki doesn't want to go to war with humanity. I've read posts where people say 'let's just send a tank his way or a jet'. Yeah, good idea; except that he's a freaking alien magician who could easily teleport the fuck away from any tank or jet that comes after him.

Moving on. Loki said that he destroyed a SHIELD base. What's SHIELD, you might ask? The Strategic Homeland Intervention Enforcement and Logistics Division; often abbreviated to SHIELD. Think of it like the CIA only WAY more secret. They're the guys in black and blue who often turn up to help the Avengers during fights; you can see their black vans and their agents in almost all footage of the Avengers online.

Apparently SHIELD built a base in Seattle and nobody knew about it? Not shocking. Let's not forget that SHIELD are a SECRET agency. Also, less than a week ago Tony Stark said that he hates how secretive SHIELD are; how unwilling they are to work with others or share any information. Just watch his press conference where he originally announced his departure from the
Avengers; he says it there.

Now, let's think about this; SHIELD built a base in Seattle that NOBODY knew about. Nobody but Loki. Loki, apparently, decided to attack and destroy this base. Why? Who knows. We know that SHIELD and the Avengers are trying to capture Loki and send him back to Asgard. Loki seems to like destroying things on Earth, so he's probably very much against being arrested and dragged back home. Why wouldn't he destroy a SHIELD base?

So in conclusion; Loki attacked a secret SHIELD base and destroyed it. When faced with the Seattle police, who Loki EASILY could have killed, Loki decided to teleport off to who knows where. Because his fight, apparently, is not with humanity; it's with SHIELD.

im-a-telephone

i also wanna add this; officially, loki hasn't killed anyone since his return to earth. about three hundred people died during his initial invasion and thousands were injured. but since then loki hasn't killed anyone that we know of. so maybe his fight really isn't with us.

ironwaffle

proof?

captaintyrannosaurus

here, here, here, here, and here – just some of the news articles and public fbi records about loki's attacks. no deaths.

marvelloushangman

check out lokisadmiral. Super hardcore loki fan and they've got heaps of theories and information on their page about loki and what he's been up to since his return.

andi-amapinecone-26

'I am not human. Do not delude yourself into thinking you understand me. Do you really believe that you can stop me?' Something something, it's fuzzy and I can't hear it properly. He finishes with, 'Do you think it a coincidence that no civilians have died in my attacks?' Even Loki's pointing out the fact that he hasn't killed any humans since he came back. Of course, if he's destroying shield bases, he's probably killed a lot of agents.

lokisadmiral

Alright, someone tagged me in this- thank you. This is ALL the information I have on Loki Laufeyson of Asgard; link. I think the most interesting thing about this footage is the fact that Loki didn't kill any of the cops pointing guns at his face (we've all seen Loki vs. the Avengers, right? Loki's like an angry cat who swats at things he dislikes; shocking that he didn't swat at the cops).

So, Loki said that his fight is with shield? I find that really interesting. Because recently there have been a LOT of terrorist attacks in America. All of them were shops, hotels, banks; just general stores, really. No civilians were hurt. No employees were killed. Every single report and news article has stated the same thing; we can't be sure who was behind these attacks; no deaths to report; no injuries; the building was empty when it exploded.
These could be shield bases that Loki's destroyed. It would explain why there were no CIVILIAN deaths and why information is so scarce; if they ARE shield bases, then you can bet your ass that shield aren't talking.

gorgebond

Loki hasn't attacked anything recently, has he? I can't even remember the last time there was a fight between Loki and the Avengers.

lokisadmiral

No, he hasn't. Maybe he's busy destroying shield?

andi-amapinecone-26

So killing civilians is a no-no but killing shield agents is okay?

lokisadmiral

I didn't say that. I'm just saying that he hasn't killed any civilians as far as we know. I don't know if he's killed any shield agents; it's not like shield would tell us.

ironwaffle

someone tweet this to tony stark and see if he responds

lokisadmiral

If he does I will lose my SHIT.

riseingirl

theres a reddit thread that goes into more detail [here](#)

'Mr Stark, there are a number of internet threads that I think you might find interesting,' JARVIS announced from overhead.

Stephen jumped at the sudden voice and glanced up. Stark was busy at a table a few feet from Stephen, his eyes focused on his wrist.

'Save it and remind me later, J,' Tony muttered.

'Yes, sir,' JARVIS responded before going silent.

Stark muttered something else under his breath. Stephen was already staring at the monitor before him, once more pulled into the footage playing across the screen.

Another bang. A hiss. Stark swore.

'What are you doing?' Stephen questioned without glancing up.

'Absolutely nothing,' Stark muttered. 'Nothing fucking useful, at any rate.'
Stephen didn't bother replying. He heard Stark mutter beneath his breath, bang something against a table, and sigh.

'Are you still watching Detroit?' Tony asked. Stephen jerked up. Stark was much closer than he had been before; he was leaning over Stephen's desk instead of his own, a green bracelet glinting against his forearm.

Stephen blinked slowly. 'What else would I be watching?'

'Columbus,' Tony said. 'Chicago. There's footage from both of us; I thought you'd be on one of them by now. It's been three hours!'

'You... ' Stephen trailed off and frowned. Pointing at the computer screen, Stephen said, 'You destroyed more than one base since we last spoke?'

'Ah... yeah?' Tony said. 'Columbus, Chicago and Detroit. We took out Detroit and Chicago in the same night. We destroyed Columbus two days ago.'

'You took out three bases in two weeks?' Stephen demanded.

Tony shrugged. 'Something like that, yeah.' He was fiddling with the band wrapped around his arm. 'And we took out two the week before that."

'How many bases are left, then?'

'Two,' Tony said without looking up. 'The Helicarrier and Washington, D.C. We have a plan for D.C, not so much for the Helicarrier.' He hummed. 'I'm all for going in guns blazing, though.'

'You would be,' Stephen muttered. 'What does Loki think of that plan?'

'It was his plan,' Tony said and Stephen sighed. 'Anyway, wanna see something cool?'

Stephen glanced back up and jumped when he saw the bracelet on Stark's forearm move. It began crawling along his skin in both directions, quickly encasing his arm towards the elbow. It poured across his hand and around it, wrapped around his palm and each finger. It was... a metal? A liquid? Stephen really didn't know. He was absolutely entranced until Tony swore and pulled his arm back across the table.

'Ow, shit, fuck!' He bashed his arm against the desk and swore again. 'Why the fuck does it always happen around the wrist?' he demanded.

'What the hell just happened?' Stephen asked.

'Genius became stupid.' Tony moaned in frustration and ran his fingers along his arm. 'It's always the wrist.'

'What is?'

'This.'

'For God's sake, Stark--'

'Okay, okay,' Tony interrupted. He used his foot to drag a stool over and sat down. 'This,' he said and laid his arm across the table, 'is nanotechnology. If I can control atoms with my magic then I can do it with my technology.'
Stephen raised an eyebrow and glanced at the god. 'You're inventing nanotechnology, now?' he asked.

Tony snorted. 'I didn't invent it, Strange. Believe me, it'd be called Stark if I did; just Stark.' He sat upright and clapped his hands together. 'They're be tiny little Starks in every house in America if I invented it.'

'Of course you'd call them Stark,' Stephen said. He looked back at Tony's arm. 'So that's... what, metal?'

Tony nodded and moved his arm up so that Stephen could get a better look. 'It's a mix of metals,' he explained, 'and some alien stuff that Loki brought back from Svartalfheim.' He winked when Stephen looked up. 'That's on a need to know.'

'And let me guess; I don't need to know?'

'Oh, clever girl,' Tony cooed. Stephen rolled his eyes. 'Anyway,' Tony continued and cleared his throat, 'I've been working on this for a goddamn month and the wrist still closes too tightly. There must be something wrong with the code. Or maybe I just need to re-write it.'

'Wait.' Tony looked at him. Because Stephen had finally realised what Stark was trying to do. 'Are you creating a suit out of nanobots?' Stephen demanded.

Tony shrugged. 'More or less,' he said. 'I'm trying to, at any rate. Still got a problem with the wrist. Can't make a suit if it slices my limbs off. And I can't really get it to break apart once it's formed without actually breaking anything.' Tony frowned and grabbed a plate of the gauntlet. Without any effort whatsoever, he tore the metal apart like it was paper. Stephen watched with a slightly dumbfounded expression on his face.

He didn't say anything until the gauntlet was a mess of twisted metal on the table between them.

'Sometimes I forget that you're a god,' he murmured.

Stark glanced up at him. 'Why?'

'You're always in your suit,' Stephen said. 'All the fights I watch... you're in your suit. Sometimes I forget that you're in it, controlling every single movement. And I've forgotten how strong you are outside of it.'

Tony chuckled and swept the broken gauntlet into the crook of his arm before standing. 'Well, Dr Strange,' he drawled, 'if you ever want a reminder, just ask. I wouldn't mind throwing a punch or two your way.'

'You ruined it,' Stephen announced. 'We were having a nice bonding experience, Tony, and you ruined it.'

'I live to help others,' Tony called over his shoulder.

Stephen groaned.

{oOo}
Tony was cocooned by both the blankets and Loki. He could feel Loki pressed against his back, his entire body made warm by Tony's own body heat and what little he himself gave off. The blankets had wrapped around them nicely, just loose enough that Tony didn't feel trapped by his own bed.

He didn't know what had woken him, for a second just blinking at the shaded windows that not even JARVIS had lightened yet.

'Mr Stark.'

Oh, there it was. JARVIS' voice was low, only loud enough to rouse Tony from sleep but not enough to jolt both him and Loki awake. How Loki had slept through JARVIS' call was beyond Tony; his partner had much better hearing than Tony did.

'J?' Tony mumbled and followed it with a yawn.

'Miss Potts is calling, Mr Stark,' JARVIS said. 'She sounds upset. I offered to call the police but she said she wished to speak to you urgently.'

That woke Tony up completely. He pulled himself from bed as carefully as he could and was thankful that Loki didn't even stir. 'I'll take it on a handheld,' Tony told JARVIS as he tip-toed his way out of the bedroom.

'The closest one is on the coffee table, Mr Stark,' JARVIS responded.

'Thanks, J.' Tony made his way down the stairs and into the living room. He found the handheld and lifted it to his ear.

'Connecting,' JARVIS said through the phone. There was a click, and Tony heard someone breathing.

'Pepper?'

'Oh, Tony!' She sounded frantic and Tony frowned.

'Pep, what's wrong?'

'I think I'm being followed,' Pepper said.

'What? By who?'

'I think it's SHIELD?' Pepper said. She didn't sound sure. 'I really don't know, Tony. But I've seen the same two black cars four days in a row now. They've followed me to the Tower, to my yoga class, and to my favourite coffee shop. They're sitting outside my apartment!'

'Okay, Pepper, I want you to calm down,' Tony said. He turned and headed back towards the bedroom. 'I'm going to have JARVIS call the police, and-'

'No!' Pepper snapped. 'Tony, what if it's nothing? What if I'm losing my mind?'

Tony snorted. 'Pepper, seriously? There's no chance of that. Even an idiot wouldn't mistake seeing two cars following them for days on end.'

'And what if it isn't SHIELD?' Pepper asked. 'If they get a hold of this and it turns out to be
'Nothing, it'll look bad for you, Tony!'

'That doesn't make any sense, Pepper. Let's just be safe about this, okay? Just one squad car will be enough to freak out whoever is doing this.'

'I just want you to come down here,' Pepper said. 'If it's SHIELD you tell them to get lost. If it's someone else, well... Iron Man's scarier than the police, right?'

Tony laughed at that. 'Pepper-

'Please?' she interrupted. 'I really don't feel safe, Tony. Besides, what if it's SHIELD and they do something stupid? You said that Loki's destroying their bases... that can send anyone mad!'

Tony chewed on his lip as he reached the bedroom. He could just see Loki in bed, the Trickster having rolled over into Tony's spot seeking warmth. He really didn't want to get dressed and head all the way over to Pepper's place. He could take a suit, he supposed, but that might send the wrong message. If it was SHIELD- and he was pretty sure that it was SHIELD, who else would be stalking Pepper?- then Tony wanted them to see how little he cared. He didn't need his suit to face them down.

Sighing, Tony said, 'Okay, okay, I'll be right down. I'll even drive myself, okay?'

'But your suit-' Pepper began.

'No, I don't need it,' Tony said. 'It'll all be fine, Pepper. If it's SHIELD I'll tell them to fuck off. If it's someone else I'll call the cops and press charges, okay? Nobody screws with my friends and gets away with it.'

He heard Pepper inhale sharply, exhale just as deeply. 'Thank you, Tony, ' she practically whispered. 'I really appreciate it and I'm so sorry.'

'Don't be,' Tony said, 'it isn't your fault. I'm gonna hang up now, okay? I'll be there soon.'

'Thank you,' Pepper repeated.

'Call JARVIS if anything else happens,' Tony ordered before hanging up. He crept back into the bedroom to get dressed and glanced at Loki in between finding clothing. 'Sorry, gorgeous, but I gotta go,' Tony whispered.

Loki didn't stir.

{oOo}

Pepper was one of the few Stark Industries' employees who didn't live in a building that Tony owned. Part of the contract was getting comfortable, safe living arrangements, but Pepper had always been adamant about maintaining her own space. It probably should have been an indicator that their brief romance was just that, brief.

She lived on the fourth floor and Tony quickly made his way to her door. He'd spotted the two
black cars parked on the street outside, but nobody had been inside when Tony had taken a look. They looked just like all the other cars Tony had seen SHIELD in, so he was pretty sure that they were at fault here.

'Hello?' Pepper's voice sounded from the other side of the door.

'Hey, it's-'

'Tony!' Pepper shouted. 'Hang on, just give me a...' She trailed off, there was a rattle, and the door swung open. 'Thank God,' Pepper breathed and hugged him quickly. 'Did you see them?'

'I saw the cars,' Tony said as he stepped into the apartment. Pepper shut the door behind him. 'There wasn't anyone in them when I loo-'

There hadn't been anyone in the cars because Coulson was sitting on Pepper's sofa.

Tony froze and for one brief second he felt absolutely nothing at all. It was like he was teleporting but without the horrible side effects.

Pepper shuffled up behind him. 'He just wants to talk, Tony,' she whispered.

Oh.

Oh.

'Pepper,' Tony breathed, 'you have no idea what you've done."

'Don't hurt her, Stark,' Coulson said. 'Not over this."

No, but see, Tony was going to fucking kill Pepper. She'd betrayed him again. For Coulson. After everything he'd done for her, everything she'd done for him. None of it mattered because Coulson didn't even have to fucking ask Pepper to jump, she fucking leapt into the sky without a second thought.

'Your fight is with us,' Coulson added and stood slowly. Tony could see the outline of a gun beneath his jacket.

'My fight is with anyone who betrays me,' Tony said. 'Guess who just topped that list?"

His magic was goddamn pounding and it was taking all of Tony's strength not to lash out and fucking crush Coulson's skull like a clump of dirt.

'We know what you are, Stark, and what you've done,' Coulson said, 'just come quietly.'

And once again Tony found himself freezing. What he was? What he'd done? They couldn't possibly-

Tony felt something behind him and shifted to his right, twisted, only just avoided a shot to the chest. The arrow embedded itself in his shoulder and Tony stumbled back as pain lanced through his torso.

'Oh my God!' Pepper shouted and rushed forward.

'No, Pepper!' Coulson grabbed her arm and tugged her to his side.

'You shot him!' Pepper shouted. 'You shot him, Clint!'
Tony saw him, then. Barton had been hiding in one of the other rooms and made his presence known now. He still had his bow raised, an arrow knocked and ready to be let loose.

Tony’s control had been flimsy to begin with, but with the added pain, with Barton now staring him down, Tony lost it. He felt magic dance along his skin and glanced down to see it already beginning to heal the wound despite the arrow still stuck in his shoulder.

The room had gone deathly quiet and Tony looked back up. Pepper was staring at him, eyes filled with horror and mouth dangling open.

‘Well then…’ Tony said and tugged the arrow out of his shoulder. The entire area was glowing now.

‘What's going on?’ Pepper breathed.

'I told you,' Barton said. 'He's working with Loki.'

Oh. So Barton remembered. Tony knew that there was no point in lying. Barton's arms were shaking with rage and the truth was dancing in his eyes.

No point in denying it, Tony thought, and yet...

The air shifted again and Tony turned quickly towards it. Barton jumped and let another arrow loose, but Tony caught it without really trying. His magic was quickly filling the space, assessing the situation and wanting to destroy and protect.

Loki was standing in the corner, eyes furious. Given that nobody was screaming, Tony assumed that Loki was invisible.

So he minutely shook his head. Loki's eyes narrowed. No, Tony thought. Let me deal with this.

Because Pepper might live. She might share this story with the real world. And if there was even a slight chance of Tony using this entire thing to his advantage, then he was going to. Loki could help him when Tony was aboard the Helicarrier or in a car away from prying eyes.

**SHIELD kidnaps Tony Stark**.

Tony wanted to see it all over the news.

He wasn't sure if Loki understood what he was saying with just his body alone. Loki hadn't moved, instead standing still and watching the drama unfold.

Tony turned his attention away from his partner and back to the other three. Barton was staring at him, mouth gaping ever so slightly. Pepper's eyes were so wide that Tony wondered if they'd be stuck that way.

'See?' Coulson said. 'He's joined Loki, Pepper!'

'No...' Pepper said, 'no, no, no.'

'I haven't joined anyone,' Tony lied.

'Seriously?!!' Barton shouted. 'After the shit you just pulled, you expect us to believe that you're not magically souped up thanks to a fucking god?!!'

'I'm not,' Tony drawled, 'I've just been fucking with Extremis.' He glanced at Coulson. 'Thanks for that information, by the way. It was so nice of SHIELD to leave it in my hands long enough for me
to copy every file.'

'We'll add theft to your long list of crimes,' Coulson said.

Tony laughed. 'Really? We're talking about crimes now, Agent? How about stealing from me? How about trying to take what I built to survive and using it for your own means? How about wanting to use a living being as a fucking power source for weapons!'

'That piss you off, does it?' Barton demanded. 'Imagining what we'd do to your precious fucking lover?'

Tony turned to glare at him. 'Is that a threat against Logan, Barton? Because believe me when I say that I'll drag your ass so far into the dirt you'll be tasting mud for fucking years.' His entire body was swimming with anger, magic shuddering as Tony barely held it in place.

'Logan? What the fuck, Stark?' Barton was practically frothing at the mouth. 'I remember everything! Everything! I remember you kissing him in front of me! I remember you talking about your plans for the Avengers! I remember Bruce and Strange both being completely fucking fine when I was tied up on your living room floor!

They knew about Stephen.

They knew about Bruce.

Tony's fingers curled into fists. His vision swam. 'Whatever you remember is wrong, Barton,' he said. His magic buzzed along his skin, making every hair stand on end. In the corner Loki shifted, growing restless. 'You're losing your mind and somehow you've convinced SHIELD that you're right.'

'I am fucking right,' Barton said. 'And when Loki realises that you're in danger he'll come running to save you. Then what are you gonna say, Stark?'

'I...' Tony cut himself off. The room had tilted suddenly and Tony stumbled where he stood. 'I... what is...' Something to his right exploded. Pepper screamed when magic began to float off of Tony's skin and towards the ceiling. It crawled along the plaster like purple flames, making cracks appear. Coulson grabbed Pepper and pulled her aside when a large chunk of the ceiling gave way and crashed to the floor.

Something hit Tony in the chest and he looked down. Another arrow, this one deeper than before. 'What... have you done?' Tony slurred. He fell back against the kitchen counter and slid to the floor.

'Tranquillisers made for the Hulk,' Barton's voice floated towards him. 'It took longer than I thought to kick in.'

'Wha... wha...' Tony looked up but his vision was already fading. He could see Loki, heard him shout, 'STARK!' but didn't know if anyone else heard the word. 'Noo...' Tony slurred, 'don't... lemme...'

Hands were on his...

'Mo...n-mo...' Tony tried.

'Tony.'
'No,' Tony hissed. He slumped over sideways and-

Chapter End Notes

IMPORTANT AUTHOR'S NOTE: ... chapter sixty-nine... hehehehehehe.

You have NO idea how much fun I had writing this chapter and sneaking in hints about Clint remembering everything. I hope you enjoyed reading the chapter as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Dreamer
Clint had been cornered by one of his doctors when he spotted Banner coming down the hallway. He'd take a fellow Avenger over a doctor any day and managed to shake the man in favour of greeting Banner.

'Hey, Bruce.'

'Afternoon,' Bruce responded. 'How are you?' he asked and nodded at the infirmary behind Clint.

Clint forced a smile to his face. The last thing he wanted was another person asking after his health every damn second. 'I'm fine, don't worry,' he lied smoothly. 'Just routine check ups.'

They exchanged a few more words until Bruce explained who he was hiding from. Clint just nodded along, eyes sliding past Bruce's face to rest on the wall. The words began to feel heavy in his head and his temples were throbbing, the pain getting worse the longer Bruce spoke. He frowned slightly and narrowed his eyes against the pain, felt his legs shake ever so slightly beneath him.

'Fury's asking a lot of questions, so I'm avoiding him,' Bruce said.

Clint felt his entire body slacken at the words.

Fury's asking a lot of questions, so I'm avoiding him.

Why did that make his head hurt?

Fury's asking a lot of questions, so ... images swam through Clint's mind... his head thumped in pain.

Fury's asking a lot of questions ... thump, thump, thump ...

A sofa. His face was in his hands.

Why did Clint's wrists hurt?

Fury's asking a lot of questions...

Clint's arms burned and his head throbbed and-

There was a crack and his head exploded.

'I came to talk about the magic sensor,' Banner said. 'Fury's asking a lot of questions.'

'So keep stalling him,' Stark replied, 'it's not like he'll know if you've figured out magic. Strange?'
Banner was sitting on the lounge, face in his hands. Just seconds ago he'd walked into the room and spotted Clint, tied up and squirming beneath Loki’s boot.

Images flashed through his mind almost quicker than Clint could keep up with. He was drowning in pain, in anger, in fear. He saw Stark with an alien, its skin changing from blue to white, features sharpening until they were achingly familiar—

A bright blue flash that seared Clint’s skin and set his mind aflame.

Stark lounging back with a drink, a smarmy grin on his face as he looked down at Clint. Clint was hogtied on the floor, could feel leather cutting into his skin, could feel something else jammed into his mouth staying his tongue—

Blue and green, white light and a rip.

Bruce was on the sofa with his face in his hands. His shoulders were shaking ever so slightly. But when he looked up his eyes were clear, and he spoke as though seeing a team-mate tied up and under the heel of the enemy was normal—

Tony punching him in the face, hissing threats, Clint only thinking of how far he'd fallen.

Green lights. Blue. Rip and tear and scream.

Doctor Strange and an unknown man both watching, not helping, they're working together.

You son of a bitch!

SHIELD betrayed me first... they got greedy... they only want Iron Man.

A punch to the face. His skin ripped.

What shall we do with him?

Stark kissed Loki. Loki smiled. Bruce Banner sat beside them both.

Stark's workshop, equipment ignored in favour of tongues twisting together. His blood boiled and his stomach threatened to leap up his throat.

Wipe his mind.

Loki pushed him against a wall. He felt terror claw up his spine as long, cool fingers pressed against his forehead.

How long have I known?

Oh, I dunno; a couple of weeks now.

Tony was working with Loki. He was Genesis. He was going to destroy—

'Clint, are you okay?'

Clint jumped and crashed back into the present, a 'What?' falling from his lips without his consent.

Bruce Banner was standing before him, a look of concern pasted across his face.

But Clint knew that it was fake. He knew that Bruce didn't care. He knew that Bruce was working
with Stark and Loki.

Clint stared, face slack, eyes wide with the sudden information making his entire being burn.

He remembered everything.

'I... it's... shit.' Clint had to get away. He had to tell Fury.

'What?' Banner echoed.

He was still standing there, still looking so goddamn worried. It made Clint's blood boil and he wanted to lash out and grab Banner by the hair, slam the man's face into his knee over and over again until everything broke.

But he couldn't. The Hulk would escape, the Helicarrier would be ripped apart, and...

Stark would know. He'd find out that Clint remembered.

That couldn't happen. They needed to capture the son of a fucking bitch.

Clint grabbed Banner's arm and shoved the sleeve of his sweater up. His eyes were unfocused as he looked in the general direction of Banner's watch.

'Shit, seriously?' he said, spewing out the first things that came to mind.

'Clint!' Banner snapped.

Think, think, think.

Clint dropped Banner's arm and backed up. He need to get to Fury. He needed to tell him everything.

Natasha swam through his head and words tumbled too quickly from Clint's mouth. He backed away, hit the wall, as he told Bruce something about Natasha and Coulson and-

He turned and bolted down the hallway, didn't even know if Banner believed him. But he needed to get to Fury, needed to tell him-

He stumbled into the Director's office, Fury looking up from his tablet.

'Barton?' Fury was already getting to his feet, concern and anger warring openly on his face. 'What are you-'

'Stark's working with Loki,' Clint choked out. 'And so are Banner and Strange.'

Fury's eye narrowed.

{oOo}

Now...
Loki had teleported before he consciously knew what he was doing. One moment he was asleep and the next the very core of his being had screamed. He appeared in a small living space and hissed when his arm began to materialise half embedded in a wall. He yanked it free and turned to survey the scene.

Stark had been hit by something- an arrow, judging by the fact that Barton was still aiming one at him from across the room. Coulson and Potts were to Loki's left, holding each other as they stared Stark down.

Stark had already spotted him and as soon as his attention was diverted Barton shot at him. Stark caught the arrow without even glancing at it, his magic spiking noticeably around the danger. Loki's eyes narrowed.

His partner shook his head.

"Excuse me?" Loki practically screamed with every fibre of his being. Here Stark was, surrounded by enemies, apparently betrayed by Potts yet again- because why else would she be here?- and Stark was telling him no?!

"No." Loki was about to unwrap the spell keeping him hidden when he heard the word. It was so sharp, so clear that he stopped completely. "Let me deal with this."

That was Stark, speaking in his head. Somehow connecting to Loki to speak in his mind.

Loki remained standing where he was, shocked briefly into non-action.

Barton and Stark continued arguing. Barton revealed what Loki had thought; somehow the mortal had remembered everything and had told SHIELD. So here they were, ready to bring Tony in.

But Loki would not allow it to happen.

Stark's magic leaked out suddenly; it didn't lash, no, nor did it attack anyone in particular. It simply poured out of him like Stark had absolutely no control. A free spirit suddenly let loose, Stark's magic filled the entire room and began to push at its boundaries.

Stark was unsteady on his feet, mumbling and stumbling into a counter only to fall down.

"STARK!" he shouted and vaulted forward. The room had fallen into chaos. Potts was trying to reach Stark, crying for an ambulance. Coulson was on the phone with someone and Barton was keeping an eye on Stark while trying to keep Potts away.

"Mo...n-mo..." Tony tried to speak but his tongue was too thick, words a slur and nothing comprehensible.

But he was staring at Loki, determination quickly being overridden by unconsciousness.

He didn't want Loki's help. He still wished to play this off, to continue and deny his true loyalties. Why? Loki could see no purpose in allowing Tony to be captured.

He placed a hand against his mate's cheek. 'Tony,' he whispered. Tony's plan practically leapt at his mind, let loose by Tony's unconscious state. Loki sighed and withdrew. His magic ached to remain with Tony, to protect him however he could.
Loki forced himself to teleport away. When he reached the Tower he shouted, 'JARVIS!'

'Mr Laufeyson,' JARVIS responded.

'Call Strange,' Loki said. 'Tell him to come here immediately. If he fails to do so I will behead him.'

JARVIS said nothing for a moment. And then, 'Very well, Mr Laufeyson.'

{oOo}

'What's wrong?' Strange asked after stepping from the portal. Wong came with him, a mildly concerned look on his face.

'Tony has been captured,' Loki stated.

Strange froze mid-step and almost fell sideways into his partner. 'What?!

'He was captured,' Loki repeated. 'I felt his distress and teleported to him. Two SHIELD agents were there- Barton and Coulson. And the woman, his so-called friend!' Loki spat. 'She betrayed him yet again. JARVIS said that she called Tony and wished for him to go to her dwelling. He did and was betrayed. SHIELD now have him.'

'Why?' Strange asked. 'If you were there, why didn't you just bring him back?'

'He didn't want me to,' Loki muttered.

'He wished to be caught?' Wong asked, frowning as he watched Loki begin to pace through the living room.

'Not exactly, no,' Loki said, a scowl on his face. 'No, he denied everything. Barton remembered what I had wiped from his mind; he knows that Tony is working with me. Yet Tony acted as though Barton was losing his mind. Even when he was injured he told me not to interfere. He wishes to use this against SHIELD.'

Strange laughed slightly. 'Uh, that sounds like Tony, yeah, but it's a stupid goddamn plan.'

Loki glared at him. 'Oh really, Strange? I thought it brilliant!'

'Don't take your anger out on me,' Strange muttered.

'Then who should I kill, if not you?!' Loki shouted. He lashed out and punched a hole in the wall, followed it up by kicking the stupidly large television hanging from the wall. 'My mate has been captured and injured and I am standing here doing nothing!' Loki screamed.

'You are following his wishes,' Wong said. He didn't raise his voice, not even when Strange edged himself around the sofa and towards Loki. Loki growled beneath his breath and kicked at the coffee table. 'He wished to be caught; or, rather, he did not wish to be saved. Bring peace upon your mind. You can save him if you wish, can't you?'
Loki paused at that and Strange sidled closer to him. 'Yes,' the mage muttered, 'I can.'

'Then all is well,' Wong said. 'Tony Stark will escape or you will rescue him. Either way he will be okay.'

'Do I have to subdue you?' Strange asked.

Loki glared at the man. 'Come any closer and I will skin you alive.'

Strange raised his hands and backed up quickly. 'Okay, that's a no,' he muttered and made his way back to Wong.

'Indeed,' Wong agreed. 'Now, let us plan a possible rescue attempt. Loki, how will you rescue Stark if you need to?'

Loki's eyes grew dark and Strange sighed. He really should have skipped lunch.

{oOo}

'I dunno what his problem is,' Tony complained.

His mom laughed softly. 'You know what his problem is, Anthony.'

Tony sighed.

'And you know that he was just shocked,' Maria continued. She smoothed her hands down Tony's shoulders and smiled at him in the mirror. 'Just give him time. He'll accept your partner eventually.'

'Yeah,' Tony muttered, 'maybe he'll be fine with it when we get married.'

'Oh, are you and Loki getting married?' Maria asked. 'I didn't know that.'

Tony rolled his eyes. 'You know what I mean.'

'I do,' Maria agreed easily. She spun Tony around so that she could look at him properly and smiled broadly. 'Look at you; so grown up.'

'Mom,' Tony groaned.

'Oh, stop that.' Maria swatted his hands away and said, 'Just let me see you.'

'You see me all the time.'

'Not dressed this nicely,' Maria said. She sighed and gave him a once over, eyes glowing with warmth. 'I bet you'll look even nicer on your wedding day.'
Tony laughed. 'Okay, okay; we can drop the joke.'

Maria let Tony pull himself out of her arms. She watched as he turned back to the mirror and began fidgeting with his tie and hair.

He groaned when he couldn't get it right and turned back to his mom to pout. Rolling her eyes, Maria stepped closer and straightened his tie again.

'You think I'll ever get married?' Tony asked.

'Of course,' Maria said.

'Really?' Tony asked.

When he glanced down at her Maria smiled softly. 'I absolutely do,' she said. 'And I wouldn't be shocked if you married Loki.'

'Why?'

'Because you two...' she trailed off to smooth down the back of his suit jacket, '... are perfect together,' she finished.

She reached up to pat his cheek affectionately.

'You two complement each other perfectly,' Maria added before pecking him on the cheek.

Tony frowned. 'But, Mom... we've killed so many people.'

Maria huffed. 'I know that, dear,' she said.

'And you're okay with it?'

'Of course not,' she said. Her tone had changed and her eyes were sad. Tony stopped fidgeting with his cuffs and looked at her, his suit suddenly uncomfortably tight. 'I hate what you've become, Tony,' she whispered. 'But I love you. I always will.'

'Mom-'

'I love you,' Maria whispered again. She was crying. 'You're a monster, Tony, but I love-'

Tony jolted awake and sat up quickly, mind still swimming with a weird mix of memories and imaginations. What the hell? he thought as he rolled his shoulders. His left one was stiff.

He hadn't dreamed about his parents in years.

And he'd never dreamed about his mom and Loki.

Tony shook all thoughts of his mother out of his head and glanced down at his shoulder; it didn't hurt, but there were multiple blood stains soaked into his shirt. Tony's magic buzzed faintly beneath his skin but it felt sluggish, not quite as responsive as it usually was. And why did his wrists burn?

Scratching idly at his right wrist, Tony took in his surroundings. He was aboard the Helicarrier, that much was clear; despite the glass-encased... cell, he was in, he could feel the faint thrum of powerful engines through the floor.

Wait...
He was in the Hulk proof cage. It was the exact same design as the cell that Loki had been kept in when he'd allowed himself to be captured. The only difference was the colour of the floor.

Beyond the glass and to his left was a computer console, two SHIELD agents sitting behind it. One of them was staring but looked away quickly when she realised Tony was glancing her way. Shaking his head, Tony let his eyes roam again-

'Bruce?!

Bruce was sitting in a glass tank identical to Tony's. It had been built on the opposite side of the room, everything a mirror image of Tony's own cell.

He wasn't sure, but Tony thought he saw Bruce smile weakly.

'Hey, Tony.' Bruce's voice was muffled by the layers of glass and distance between them.

'You okay?' Tony asked, projecting his voice to be heard.

He saw Bruce nod. 'Yeah. I'm fine.'

'You sure?' Bruce nodded again and Tony breathed out heavily. 'What the fuck,' Tony muttered and finally looked down at his hands. Blood had dried beneath his blunt nails and when Tony dragged one sleeve of his shirt up he found a thick bronze band clasped tightly around his wrist. He faintly recognised the runes etched in gold; Old Norse, like the scratchings Loki made when he was creating wards.

The skin around the band was inflamed, welts spiralling out from beneath where Tony had scratched. There were cuts, too; some healing, some weeping fresh blood. Tony scowled and tried to dig a finger beneath the cuff but it didn't come loose. If anything it felt tighter, prickled his skin that much sharper. Tony grit his teeth and pushed against the alloy with his magic.

Tiny wisps sneaked through, warmed the bronze that little bit more. But the harder Tony pushed, the more difficult it became; it was as though the bronze was absorbing his magic more than anything, collecting and storing it instead of succumbing to Tony's power.

Tony frowned.

'I wouldn't do that if I was you.'

Tony's head jerked up. Fury was standing beside the door on the other side of the glass, hands linked behind his back. His good eye stared Tony down, all that hatred he'd barely masked in the past finally set loose. Tony felt a smirk curl at his lips.

'Well hey there, Fury,' he drawled. 'So, you kidnap citizens often?'

'I wouldn't call it kidnapping,' Fury said.

'What is it, then?' Tony demanded. 'Because here I am against my will, locked up in a cell, with weird bracelets on.'

'Those bracelets would be just that on any normal person,' Fury allowed. He tilted his head down at them. 'On someone with magic?' He whistled. 'Do they burn, Stark?'

'They're fine,' Tony said rather shortly. He pushed himself to his feet- glanced back to see that he'd been sitting on a metal bunk bolted to the floor. Shaking out his arms, Tony approached the glass.
'Am I here because of Barton?'

Fury nodded and Tony laughed.

'Seriously, Fury? I get that your little organisation is under a lot of stress at the moment, but kidnapping me because of one man's word?' He shook his head. 'Barton's clearly lost his mind.'

'He's found it,' Fury said. Tony snorted. 'I always knew it would come to this, Stark. I just don't know why you're denying it.'

'I'm not denying anything,' Tony lied smoothly. He folded his arms and surveyed Fury through the glass. 'You realise what's going to happen now, right?'

Fury nodded shortly. 'Loki will come for you,' he said. 'And we'll arrest him, too.'

'Or Loki will destroy all of your bases and come for the Helicarrier,' Tony said, 'and he'll shoot it out of the sky.'

'Not while you're aboard he won't,' Fury said. 'Barton remembers... quite a bit about yours and Loki's relationship.'

'We don't have a relationship.'

'You can deny it all you want, for whatever reasons you want,' Fury said, 'it doesn't change the fact that we've got you, Stark. You're not being charged. You're not standing trial. You're staying right the fuck there.'

Shaking his head, Tony said, 'Really, Fury? How long do you think you can keep me here? You're not a government agency; you have no right to hold me against my will.'

'I have every fucking right!' Fury snapped. 'You brought this on yourself, Stark! You attacked us.'

'Who attacked who first, Fury?' Tony demanded. He was so very close to losing his shit. Fury had gone silent and Tony let a smirk curl at his lips. 'Yeah, if we're playing the blame game, how about we start there? How about we start with SHIELD trying to fucking steal from me.'

Tony approached the glass quickly.

'I don't like it when people touch my stuff, Fury!' he hissed.

'Don't worry,' Fury said, 'you won't have anything for anyone to touch while you're in there.'

'And after that?' Tony asked. 'You gonna use me like you wanna use Loki?' He saw Fury's Adam's apple bob. 'You gonna hook me up to some guns and use me as a battery?' Tony asked. 'Or just use me to make the weapons?'

Fury swallowed again. 'We haven't decided yet,' he said.

'Well you get back to me when you do,' Tony shot back. 'And let me know how Thor and the other Avengers feel about your little plans.'

Fury just stared at him, eye narrowed in anger, teeth gritted against whatever was trying to escape his throat.

Tony let a cocky smile spread over his face. 'Actually, why don't I tell Thor?' he asked. 'Send him up here. I wanna have a real long chat with the god.'
Fury finally found his tongue. 'Thor's barred from speaking to you.'

'Don't wanna let him in on your plans for Loki?' Tony took a step closer to the glass and stopped just short of it. 'Don't wanna let the Prince of Asgard know exactly what you're going to do to his little brother?' He rapped his knuckles against the glass. 'No? Come on, Fury. I thought SHIELD were full of brave, brave little heroes.'

A flash of green made Tony jerk his head upward. There were small lights circling the ceiling of his cell and all of them were pulsing green.

'What the-

'Touch that glass and you're done,' Fury interrupted. Tony froze. 'We're 42,000 feet up. How long do you think it'll take you to reach Earth?'

Tony glanced down at the floor. He was almost certain that he could feel it rocking beneath his feet.

'You get three chances, Stark,' Fury continued. 'Green light is warning one. Yellow light is warning two. When the lights in that cell begin to flash red?' Tony followed the finger Fury was pointing. The lights above flashed green once more before they went dead. 'When they flash red you're dropped.'

Licking his lips, Tony dropped his gaze back to Fury. 'So did you build this for me, Fury?' he asked. 'Were you so afraid of what I'd become that you built this just in case?'

'Look at what you have become,' Fury said. 'I was right.'

'You made me,' Tony retorted. 'Deal with it.'

Fury clearly wanted to say more; it was written all over his face, how he just ached to step into the cell and beat Tony to within an inch of his life.

But he didn't. He took a deep breath and looked Tony over one last time. Tony glared at him in return. The two stared each other down for a beat, two, before Fury broke the eye contact. Tony watched him turn on his heel and head for the doors.

'I'll be here if you need me!' Tony shouted after him.

He saw Fury's shoulders tense at his words, but the mortal said nothing. He just stormed out, the doors closing behind him with a bang.

Tony took a deep breath and stared at the glass. He was locked in here, that was fine. He wasn't trapped. He wasn't.

'How long have you been here, Bruce?' Tony asked.

'Three weeks,' Bruce called back. His voice was muffled by both layers of glass.

Tony closed his eyes. If he'd been a better friend... 'I'm so sorry, Bruce.'

'It's not your fault.'

But it was.
Clint watched Pepper pace the room through the one way glass. She kept glaring at it, clearly having seen enough TV shows to know that someone was on the other side. The agent sitting at the desk to Clint's right coughed and tapped away at his computer.

Clint didn't have to wait long; the room's single door opened and Phil stepped in.

'Pepper-

'You son of a bitch!' Pepper shouted. She slapped Phil across the face as soon as he was close enough. It was followed by a punch to the shoulder; Phil didn't try to defend himself. 'You said you wanted to talk to him!' Pepper continued to yell. 'You said you were worried about him! You lied to me!'

'Pepper- Pepper !' Phil finally grabbed her fists and pushed them down. 'We had to,' Phil said.

'You son of a-

'I'm sorry,' Phil interrupted.

Pepper ripped her arms from Phil's grip and backed up. 'No you're not,' she said. 'I should have listened to Tony- I should have listened.' She shook her head and pressed herself against the far wall, eyes hard and fingers curled into fists. 'You used me to get to him,' Pepper said. 'What you said about Loki, it was all a lie, wasn't it?' she demanded. 'He's not coming after Tony.'

Phil sighed heavily and pulled one of the seats away from the table. Sitting, he placed his hands atop the table and laced his fingers together. 'Loki's not targeting Stark, no,' Phil said. 'Pepper, please sit.'

'Fuck you,' she spat. Phil shifted in his seat slightly. 'You used me,' she repeated. 'All those times you called asking about Tony's health- asking me to watch him.' She shook her head. 'I was just another spy; another way for SHIELD to stalk Tony and keep an eye on him.'

'We had to,' Phil said. 'You saw what he did, Pepper; you were there.'

'Extremis-

'He's not using Extremis!' Phil snapped. He slammed his fist against the table and Pepper jumped. 'He's a god, Pepper. He's working with Loki!'

Pepper shook her head again, movements rapid. 'No he's not,' she said, 'he wouldn't-

'Clint remembers everything,' Phil interrupted. 'He was there; he saw them together.'

Pepper snorted before saying, 'And we should just trust Clint? Natasha told me about his health problems, Phil, and so did Tony! Why should I believe someone that's possibly losing their mind over Tony?!'

It stung but Clint couldn't blame the woman for it. It had taken him far too long to convince Fury that both Stark and Banner were working with Loki. Phil had been sceptical at first but Clint had
known too much; had gone into far too much detail.

Thank God Banner had chosen that day to wander into restricted areas of the Helicarrier. If they hadn't had that footage, Clint might have been locked up himself.

'Pepper-'

'And you have no proof,' Pepper continued over Phil.

'Clint shot him,' Phil said. 'Stark healed. How do you explain that?'

'Extremis,' Pepper repeated.

Clint sighed and reached up to rub his eyes. It was clever, he mused, of Stark to use Extremis as an excuse. SHIELD still didn't know how it worked, exactly, and the effects always differed from person to person. If anyone could figure out how to stabilise Extremis, it'd be Stark.

'We have some evidence,' Phil said, eyes locked onto Pepper. She shifted uneasily under his gaze. 'Just sit down, Pepper. Screaming at each other won't help anything.'

'I'll do more than scream...' Pepper muttered under her breath. But she finally sat, entire body angled back and away from Phil.

Phil glanced over his shoulder and nodded. The agent beside Clint tapped away at his computer; the screen inside the room flickered on and Pepper looked at it.

'What's this?' she asked when the video began to play.

'Genesis,' Phil explained, 'one of the robots Loki uses when destroying SHIELD bases. It's some of the only footage we have; the rest was corrupted.'

Pepper frowned as she watched. It was footage from the New York SHIELD base and showed Genesis fighting both Thor and Steve in the lobby of the building. Pepper flinched when Steve was sent skidding across the floor; she jumped when the front of the building was suddenly torn open, the Hulk trying to fit himself in.

Phil glanced back over his shoulder and the footage changed. This time it was Iron Man, another battle that showed the suit from different angles.

'Why are you showing me this?' Pepper asked. 'I've seen Tony fight-

'It can be hard to see,' Phil cut in. 'Even we didn't spot it at first.'

'See what?'

Another look, a quick hand gesture, and the footage changed. This time it was just one scene; Genesis flipping itself over and using its repulsors to shoot across the floor quickly. Playing beside it was another video, Iron Man doing the exact same move. They played in-sync and Pepper inhaled sharply.

'What do you see, Pepper?' Phil asked, tone calm. He ignored the footage completely, eyes focused on Pepper.

Pepper was staring at the two videos, eyes wide. Every ten seconds the videos restarted, showed Genesis and Iron Man pulling off the exact same move at the exact same second.
'Pepper,' Phil repeated. She exhaled. 'What do you see?'

'Iron Man,' Pepper whispered.

'In which video?'

Pepper closed her eyes. Her fingers curled into fists atop the table. 'In both,' she said. She shook her head roughly and opened her eyes. 'But that doesn't prove anything- Loki could have copied Tony's fighting style, and-

'Pepper.' She went silent. 'I want you to do something for me.'

Pepper snorted. 'Like hell will I do anything for you.'

'You've seen what I've seen,' Phil said. 'Genesis and Iron Man fight the exact same way; they have the same moves. We both saw Tony Stark use something to heal himself. We both know that he's not human, not any more.'

Phil leaned over the table, eyes locked onto Pepper's. 'I want you to believe for one second, just one second, that it's possible. For one second believe me when I say that Tony's a god and that he's working with Loki.'

Pepper swallowed. 'I can't...'

'Just for one second, Pepper. Believe that it's possible.' Her head jerked in what could have been a nod. 'We both know what Tony Stark does to the people who betray him.' Pepper stared at him. 'Obadiah Stane betrayed Tony. He was like a second father to him. What did Tony do to Stane, Pepper?'

Pepper was already shaking her head. 'I killed Stane; I pushed the button.'

'And who asked you to?'

She was still shaking her head, hands planted on the table ready to push herself back. 'This is different, Phil. Obadiah was just one person. You're asking me to believe that Tony would massacre entire bases. There must have been hundreds of agents in there-'

'He's killed 987,' Phil interrupted. '987 people lost their lives because we betrayed Tony.' Pepper looked up at that, eyes sharp. 'Steve, Natasha and Clint weren't sent to the Tower to be Tony's friends, Pepper. They were there to keep an eye on him; to make sure that he never stepped over the line. To make sure that he didn't turn into Loki.'

'That's why he left,' Pepper whispered. Phil nodded. 'He found out.'

'Yes,' Phil said. 'And we both know what Tony does to the people who betray him. He easily killed the man he once considered a father. What do you think he'd do to people who claimed to be his friends?'

'He wouldn't...'

'Ask him.'

Pepper looked up again. 'Excuse me?'

'He's awake,' Phil said. 'He's talking. I'll take you to him myself if you want. All you have to do is look him in the eye and ask him if he's working with Loki. Would he lie to you, Pepper?'
'Tony lies to me all the time,' Pepper said.

'Successfully?' Phil countered.

'Sometimes.'

Phil didn't reply. He just stared at Pepper, waiting. Genesis and Iron Man continued to fight side-by-side on the screen beside them. Clint stared through the glass, arms folded over his chest.

When Pepper closed her eyes Phil sighed. He signalled the agent beside Clint and the video changed yet again.

'What now?' Pepper demanded as she turned to face the screen. She frowned when the footage showed Bruce Banner sitting at a computer terminal. 'What's this?'

'Footage recorded a few weeks ago,' Phil said. He hadn't taken his eyes off of her. 'From within the Helicarrier. The room Dr Banner's in is completely restricted. Only a select few SHIELD agents have access.'

Pepper's frown deepened.

It was a few minutes before Bruce spoke;

“Did you find something?”

'Some type of earwig or bluetooth device,' Phil explained for Pepper. 'We don't know for sure.'

Banner leaned forward in his seat. “Then what are they?”

Bruce shifted in his seat but was silent, though clearly surprised, for another few minutes. Suddenly he smiled and leaned back. “Thank me when I'm back home...” He paused. “You do that. Can I go now?”

Whoever he was communicating with clearly responded, because Banner began to push himself away from the terminal. “Alright. I'll talk to you soon, Tony... and congratulations.”

The video froze. So did Pepper. She didn't move an inch, eyes wide and locked onto the screen. Phil stared at her.

'Replay it, Agent Armstrong-' Phil began, but Pepper interrupted.

'Don't,' she said. Her voice was shaky. 'Please don't.'

Phil linked his fingers together and leaned over the table. 'Do you believe me now, Pepper?'

'I don't believe anything out of your mouth,' Pepper said. 'That could have... it could have been anything.'

'But it wasn't,' Phil said. 'You know that I'm right, Pepper.'

She finally looked away from the screen. Her eyes fell to her lap, head hanging. 'It... what was that room?' she asked.

'We keep sensitive information on that particular system,' Phil said. 'Dr Banner doesn't have access. Neither does Stark.'
'What sensitive information?'

'It houses, amongst other things, detailed information on all of SHIELD's bases as well as those operated by the World Security Council.'

A sob almost escaped Pepper's mouth be she swallowed it at the last second.

'Do you believe me now, Pepper?' Phil asked.

Pepper shook her head but her heart clearly wasn't in it. Her faith in Stark had been shaken.

'I'll talk to him,' Pepper whispered.

'Thank you,' Phil responded.

'And then what?' Pepper asked. 'Are you going to lock me up, too?'

'You're absolutely free to leave, Pepper,' Phil said. 'But I'd suggest you don't.'

'Why?' Pepper demanded. She looked up, but there was no fight on her face. Her eyes were wet. 'Have I been kidnapped, too?'

Phil shook his head. 'Of course not, Pepper. But we only have Tony; Loki's still on the loose.'

Pepper scoffed.

'We both know what Tony does to the people who betray him,' Phil recited. 'We don't know what Loki will do.'

Pepper went still at that. 'Are you implying that they're...' Pepper trailed off, either unwilling or unable to finish the sentence.

'They're sleeping together; that's as much as we know,' Phil told her. 'If Loki reacts like Stark does... you're not safe.'

Pepper glanced back at the screen. Banner's words echoed in Clint's ears.

‘... congratulations.”'
Tony stared down at the cuffs wrapped tight around his wrists. He knew that they'd been made for Loki; there was one rune etched into the bronze that Tony was certain was Loki's name.

What was important, though, was that the cuffs were made specifically for *Loki*'s magic. Whether or not they'd work on both Loki's Æsir magic and Jötunn magic remained to be seen. What made Tony want to chuckle was that his magic was slowly but steadily breaking the shackles apart. Already a few of the symbols had faded, losing the blue glow that powered them and leaving the runes mere drawings.

Tony knew that, given enough time, he'd be able to shatter them completely. And wouldn't *that* be fun?

A buzz from across the room made Tony look up. The doors separating what Tony could only think of as the prison part of the Helicarrier from the rest of the ship slid open.

As soon as he caught sight of who it was his heart skipped a beat. His magic turned into an angry, frothy mess and his arms throbbed beneath the magical cuffs.

'Come to gloat?' he demanded from the bunk.

'What?' Pepper actually looked shocked at his tone and it only fuelled Tony's quickly building anger. 'No, Tony- I didn't mean for any of this to happen!'

'Didn't you?' Tony scoffed and pushed himself to his feet. His skin crawled and his heart thudded dangerously behind his arc reactor. 'Are we remembering that night differently, Miss Potts? He drawled her name, let the letters fall from his lips like they *physically offended* him. 'I remember being lured to your apartment, attacked, and *kidnapped*.'

'I didn't know they'd do that.' Pepper had moved quickly; she approached the glass, her sneakers squeaking against the metal floor. 'Tony, you have to believe me, I didn't-'

'I BELIEVE NOTHING!' Tony roared. He felt satisfaction bloom out from his chest when Pepper flinched. 'You were my friend, Pepper! You *betrayed* me!'
Pepper twitched on her feet, body swaying as she tried to force the words out. 'They told me they wanted to talk- they said Loki was targeting you-

'So what?' Tony shouted. 'So fucking what, Pepper! It doesn't matter what the fuck Coulson told you! I told you not to talk to them! I ordered everybody associated with Stark Industries to ignore any and all communication from SHIELD! I asked you as my friend not to speak to them! And what the fuck did you do?'

A sob escaped Pepper's lips and there were tears shining in her eyes. But it just made Tony angrier. There Pepper stood on the other side of the glass, hair a mess and eyes swollen from tears, one of the people responsible for putting him in a cage.

One of the few people he'd fucking trusted and she'd betrayed him.

'I didn't...' she choked on her words and had to start again, 'I didn't mean for any of this to happen. I was worried, Tony!'

'I don't give a fuck what you felt or what you thought,' Tony snarled. Pepper jolted at his tone, eyes darting wildly around his face. 'What you should have done was told me the truth. Nothing stopped you from calling me, Pepper. Why couldn't you just tell me the truth?'

Pepper wet her lips and inhaled shakily. 'I knew you'd say no,' she whispered. 'I knew you wouldn't listen to them, Tony.'

'That was my decision,' Tony said. 'Not yours.'

'I was worried ab-

'STOP FUCKING WORRYING!' He slammed his fist against the glass. It wobbled beneath the pressure and Pepper's eyes leapt to his hand. Her eyes trailed down his wrist, to the exposed flesh of his arm. She gulped when she saw the wounds spiralling out from beneath the cuffs. 'You are not my mother, Pepper,' Tony growled. 'When the fuck are you going to learn that I can take care of myself?' he demanded. 'I was the CEO of Stark Industries for over twenty years. I design everything we sell, and I go to every meeting that I have to attend. I've spent the last two years risking my life to save this fucking city, and for what? All I get in return is lies. '

Pepper was shaking her head rapidly before he'd even finished and it set Tony's teeth on edge. 'But you're different, Tony,' she argued, 'you haven't been the same since Loki invaded.'

'I'm not different, Pepper,' Tony told her. 'I've just stopped pretending to be somebody else.'

'I don't believe that,' Pepper whispered. A flash of yellow across her face made Tony glance up. The lights in his cell were going off and Tony sneered as he finally pulled his fist away from the glass.

'You see that?' he asked and pointed up. Pepper followed his finger. 'That's warning two, Pepper,' Tony explained. 'Wanna know what warning three is?'

'Tony-

'They drop me,' Tony interrupted. Pepper's eyes widened and Tony smirked in response. 'Yeah,' Tony said, 'so thank you for that. I trusted you. You were my friend. And you sold me out. You're the reason I'm here, stuck in this cell, a simple click away from being dropped 42,000 feet. So really, Pepper; thank you for showing me who I can fucking trust.'
He stepped away from the glass and turned his back on her. He didn't want to look at her any more; didn't want to see the agony written across her face.

Because it hurt. He hadn't completely trusted Pepper, not after what she'd done when he'd still been an Avenger. But to know that she'd betrayed him again; that Coulson had waltzed into her apartment and managed to convince her to lie to Tony, to trick him into coming to her defense.

'You were supposed to be my friend,' Tony muttered.

The ache in his chest would never heal, Tony knew that without a doubt. It'd fester and scab over and he'd pick at it until it ached again. It was a hurt that would never leave, because Tony had dealt with this before. The betrayal he'd felt when Stane had sold him out... even that hadn't cleared up.

And Pepper had been so much more... his best friend, his confidant, the one person that Tony had seen himself spending the rest of his life with before he'd made a deal with Loki.

And she'd sold him out to SHIELD.

Fresh pain prickled across his skin and Tony scowled as he reached down to scratch at his wrist.

'What's wrong with your arm?'

The whispered words reached his ears, even through the glass. Tony turned to glare at Pepper.

'Why are you still here?' he demanded.

Pepper swallowed. 'Coulson told me... he said that those bracelets hurt people with magic.'

'Did he?' Tony asked. 'And you believe him, of course, because you always do.'

'He showed me footage,' Pepper continued, 'of Iron Man and... and Genesis.'

Tony didn't say anything.

Pepper's eyes were so very bright, so very wet, and Tony curled his hands into fists at the sight.

'They have footage of Dr Banner, Tony,' Pepper said. Tony's magic pulsed. 'He sneaked into a restricted area aboard the Helicarrier,' she continued. 'They have audio of him talking to you.'

Tony's face hardened. 'All that proves is that I'm hacking SHIELD,' he said. 'I'd say that's more than understandable considering what they've done to me.'

Pepper closed her eyes but Tony could read the tension so very clearly on her face; he could see how her shoulders shook and how she was a second away from breaking down completely.

*She brought this on herself,* Tony thought. Once upon a time he would have hated himself for making Pepper cry. He hated upsetting her in general.

But now? After *this?*

Tony would be more than glad to make her cower beneath him.

When Pepper opened her eyes there was a steel there that Tony had seen before; that strong resolve, that courage, that had attracted him to Pepper in the first place. That part of her that could push past everything and soldier on.
He braced himself for the question.

'Are you working with Loki?' Pepper asked.

Tony closed his eyes. He didn't like hearing Loki's name from Pepper's lips. Didn't like the quiver in her voice when she spoke of Tony's mate. Pepper didn't have the right to even think about Loki, let alone say his name.

She wasn't worthy.

When he opened his eyes, Tony had made his decision. He didn't care about the consequences. He didn't care if Pepper walked away completely.

Because in that moment, he needed her to know. He needed Pepper to know what she'd done; what she'd sacrificed and brought upon herself by agreeing to be SHIELD's lapdog.

He needed her to know how truly and utterly fucked she was.

'I'm not working with Loki,' Tony said in the most monotone voice he could muster. His eyes said it all, though; he let his anger, his rage, leak through. He let Pepper see the monster that he usually worked so hard to keep out of sight.

He let her see what he'd become.

And Pepper; sweet, once loyal Virginia Potts, knew exactly what he wasn't saying. She'd known Tony for far too long to be tricked by pretty words or fake smiles. And Tony wasn't trying to deceive her. He wasn't trying to get away with this.

Because the cuffs were breaking, JARVIS was taking control, and Tony?

He wasn't pretending any more.

'Oh my God,' Pepper gasped. She backed up and hunched over, as though Tony's words had made her physically ill. 'Oh my God.'

He watched her break down. Tony stood there and watched, eyes dark and mouth a thin line. He watched one of the people he'd once thought the world of crumble because of him.

And it was... glorious.

'Oh my God,' Pepper repeated. She glanced up, hands at her mouth and face chalky white. 'It was magic, what you used,' she said. 'It wasn't Extremis.'

Tony said nothing.

'You're going to kill me, aren't you?' Pepper breathed.

Tony couldn't lie, not now. He imagined wrapping his hands around Pepper's throat and squeezing. He imagined the rush he'd get, from his gut right up to his chest, as he watched her face turn purple and the light leave her eyes.

He imagined what it would be like, to live with the knowledge that he, Tony Stark, had killed Pepper Potts.

His magic coiled tight within him. Could he do it? Could he kill Pepper?
'Nobody betrays Tony Stark and gets away with it,' was what he said.

It wasn't an answer and they both knew it. Tony and Pepper stared at each other, a new understanding settling heavily between them.

Tony didn't know if he'd be able to kill Pepper. The anger still thick and heavy within him said yes. He magic ached to cut Pepper open and spill her blood across the floor.

But Tony's heart... he was a monster. But was he that kind of monster?

He didn't know. And Pepper didn't, either.

'I see,' she said. The tears finally fell, then. They streaked down Pepper's cheeks and her lips quivered as she tried to suck the sobs back down.

But they escaped; she breathed harshly and shook under the weight of what she'd just learned.

'If you don't,' she whispered. Her voice was thick, throat choking on fresh tears. 'If you don't... you won't stop him, will you?' Pepper cried. 'You'll let him kill me.'

Tony remained silent. But inside, oh ...

He imagined Loki killing Pepper. She'd be on the floor, gasping and screaming for Tony's help. And Tony would lounge back, a drink in his hand, eyes dark as they watched Loki, not Pepper. Because Tony adored the look on Loki's face when he killed; that bright, feverish light that swam through his eyes; the way Loki panted like he couldn't contain the fucking euphoria that he felt when choking the life out of a worthless mortal.

And it would be so much better, because it would be Pepper. The woman who had once owned Tony Stark's heart, the woman who had betrayed him time and time again... Loki would kill the worthless mortal who had betrayed his mate and Tony would watch.

Pepper's face was red and she rubbed at it furiously, as though she could scour away what they'd exchanged.

But she couldn't. It'd fester within her, the overwhelming grief of knowing what Tony had become. Of knowing what she'd had a hand in creating.

I am what you made me.

'You're not the man I loved,' Pepper whispered. 'You've become something else.'

'Something better,' Tony countered. Pepper looked at him through a veil of tears. 'I'm so much better than I ever was,' Tony said. 'I have Logan now.'

They both knew who he was talking about. A shudder ran through Pepper's body and Tony half-hoped that she'd collapse beneath the knowledge. He wanted to see her dragged away from him, a broken, defeated mortal who'd dared to defy the gods.

'I hope it was worth it,' Pepper said, anger mixed with the grief. 'I sure hope this was all worth it, Tony.'

'He's worth everything,' Tony said, 'and I'd do it all again in a heart beat.'

Pepper nodded at that and stepped back. She wiped at her mouth again, sniffed back the tears. But
she was broken. Devastated.

And Tony had made that happen.

'Goodbye, Tony,' Pepper said before turning on the spot and leaving. The agents opened the door for her and watched her go, concern practically pouring off of them.

All Tony felt was relief. And a deep-seated anger that burned to be unleashed.

'Goodbye, Pepper,' he whispered.

{oOo}

The video clicked off and Fury folded his arms over his chest. The room was silent, the occupants digesting the confrontation they'd just watched.

The video had clearly been edited; chunks taken out, no doubt information that Fury didn't want certain people to hear.

Clint wondered what Stark had said in those moments.

'I still don't believe it,' Rogers said. Clint closed his eyes against the noise. He wished that he could sleep. That he could curl up into a ball and pretend none of this had happened. A part of him wanted to go back to not remembering; the headaches, the blurred vision and nausea... all of it was preferable to the absolute storm that hung over him and everybody around him.

Because the Avengers hadn't taken the news well. Not only had Stark betrayed them, but Banner had, too. Clint still remembered the absolute shock on Fury's face when Banner's name slipped past Clint's lips. He still remembered that doubt before he'd managed to convince his handlers that Stark really was working with Loki.

And here it was again; round two. Thor had said nothing since being told the news. Natasha had looked so damn smug and it made Clint feel sick to his stomach. It shouldn't be like this. It _shouldn't be like this._

'What is it going to take for you to face facts, Captain Rogers?' Fury demanded. 'We have footage of Genesis fighting _exactly_ like Stark does. We have footage of Banner sneaking around the Helicarrier, stealing information and communicating with Stark while he does it. Barton, Coulson and Potts all _saw_ Stark use magic!'

'But that's just it!' Rogers snapped. 'There _aren't_ any facts! All we have is one man's word!' He shot an apologetic look Clint's way. 'I'm sorry, Clint, but you've been really sick lately. I just can't believe that Tony would ever do this to us.' Clint's shoulders jerked up defensively and he slouched down further in his seat.

'Are you just ignoring everything I said?' Fury demanded. 'You saw the footage.'

'It can all be explained,' Rogers countered. ' _All of it_, Fury.'

'The wounds on Stark's arms?' Fury asked.

'How do we know that they're not from the cuffs?' Rogers asked. 'Not because Tony has _magic_, but
because he doesn't! They're supposed to be powerful enough to stop Loki- how do we know that they're not hurting Tony?'

Fury slammed his fist on the table and Clint jumped again. He scrubbed his eyes, exhaustion weighing heavily on his shoulders, as Fury said, 'Those wounds are because he's magic, Rogers! The man survived a tranquilliser meant for the Hulk! It'd kill anyone other than you and Thor!'

'I believe him,' Natasha cut in. She scooted her chair a bit closer to Clint's. Clint wanted to crawl under the desk. 'Clint wouldn't lie about this, Steve. And you saw how Pepper reacted to Stark; not once did he deny what he was.'

'It is not about lying,' Thor finally joined in. His face was blank, the usual emotions he projected so strongly scarilly absent. Clint didn't like it. 'It is about proof,' Thor continued. 'We have Clint's word that Stark has been working with my brother. But that is not enough. I will not blindly follow one man's word without proof that Stark is guilty of the crimes Loki has committed.'

'And what we have?' Fury asked.

'Is not enough,' Thor responded.

'So you think that Coulson's lost his mind, too?' Natasha asked. Thor frowned at that. 'Coulson saw it, Thor. So did Pepper. Clint shot him with an arrow and Stark used magic to heal himself.'

'It could have been many things,' Thor argued back. 'I know magic. Tony Stark is not magic.'

'Loki is,' Clint muttered. All eyes turned to him. 'He was living in the Tower with us, Thor. Right under our noses. And not once did you realise it.' He glanced up, caught Thor's eyes with his own. 'Why should we trust you on magic when you couldn't even tell that your brother was living upstairs?'

Thor frowned at him and Rogers leaned over the table. 'But that's just another point in favour of Tony not working with Loki!' he said. Clint sighed. 'Thor knows Loki better than any of us. And we've seen how well he can track Loki. If Loki was living with us, Thor would have known it.'

'Look,' Clint said, 'I don't care what you believe. I really don't.' His head throbbed and images swam through his mind; Loki's fingers on his temple, a jab at his cheek that burned like wildfire. He saw Bruce sitting on a sofa, face in his hands and shoulders shaking ever so slightly.

He saw Stark lounging back, a smirk on his face, a monster in his eyes.

Clint rubbed his face.

'It doesn't matter whether you believe me or not,' he muttered. 'Stark is working with Loki. And Loki's either going to come for him, or Stark's going to escape.' He brought his knees up and leaned them against the table, arms wrapped tight around them. 'It just doesn't matter.'

'Clint-' Natasha reached out to squeeze his shoulder but Clint jerked away from the touch.

'We're not going to sit here all day and argue about this,' Fury said, but Steve slammed his fist against the table. Both Clint and Thor jumped.

'Like hell we aren't!' Rogers shouted. 'Tony is innocent, Fury, and you've got him locked up like some kind of criminal!'

'He's a dangerous lunatic hell-bent on slaughtering everybody he can get his hands on!' Fury
snapped back.

'There's no proof!' Steve shouted. 'You have nothing concrete, Fury, nothing! What if I waltzed in and said that Thor was working with Loki?! Would you lock Thor up, too? Why don't we just go to war with Asgard while we're at it, because I think they're about to invade us!'

He pushed back from the table, sent the thing skidding forward a good four inches. Clint flailed in his seat and barely managed to stay upright. Rogers tipped his chair back as he stood.

'I don't care what any of you say,' Rogers continued. 'Tony is my friend. And I'm not letting you treat him like this.'

'Rogers. ROGERS!' Steve ignored Fury's shouts as he stormed from the room. The Avengers watched him go.

Sighing, Fury turned to Hill, the woman standing in the corner and watching the conversation with narrowed eyes.

'Make sure he doesn't do anything stupid,' Fury muttered.

'Yes, Director,' Hill replied.

'What now?' Natasha asked when Hill had left the room.

'We wait,' Fury told her, 'and we rebuild.'

'Loki's still out there,' Clint muttered.

Fury nodded. 'Yes, he is.' He glanced at Thor, the god returning the gaze with a blank face. 'You don't believe Agent Barton, do you?'

'It is not about believing him,' Thor said. 'Like Steve said; it is about evidence.'

'Loki messed with his mind,' Fury commented. Clint's stomach roiled and he was pretty sure that he was going to vomit all over the table. 'Is that something you'd be able to sense?'

Thor hesitated, clearly picking his words carefully. 'It is possible,' he finally said. 'However, erasing memories completely is not something that Loki is capable of. It is why I am hesitant to believe what Clint is saying.'

'It was the Tesseract,' Clint said. He'd told Fury, Coulson and Romanov; Rogers and Thor hadn't been privy to that piece of information.

Thor frowned. 'The Tesseract?'

Clint nodded. 'It wasn't... Loki said that we had a connection because of the Tesseract; that even though it was gone, the connection was still there. He said it was why I got headaches around him. It's why he could fuck up my head.'

'I see,' Thor said. 'If that is the case... then yes, I may be able to sense that if I look closely enough.'

'Do it,' Fury ordered.

'Do I get a say in this?' Clint demanded. Because he could already picture it; Thor's large hands wrapped around his skull, another person in his mind, digging and pulling and ripping. It took every shred of self-control Clint had not to vault the table and get the fuck out.
He stayed rooted to the spot, eyes on the table top, heart hammering in his chest.

'No,' Fury said. 'If Thor knows the truth we can plan for Loki's future rescue. And we won't have two Avengers trying to break Stark out of his cell.' He glanced at Thor. 'The quicker you look at Barton, the better.'

Thor just nodded. Clint dug his fingers into his legs and tried to focus on the physical pain. It was better than the absolute fucking terror clawing its way up his throat.

{oOo}

Tony had been bugging the two SHIELD agents for a meal for a solid hour before something was delivered.

'Well look at this,' he said when he saw the person carrying his plate. 'They upgrade you to delivery boy, Barton?'

Barton remained stone faced right up until he slid the plate through the hole cut into the door.

'Enjoy,' Barton muttered.

'What's wrong, Angry Bird?' Tony asked. 'Remember anything else while I was unconscious?'

Barton shook his head. 'No, Stark. I've remembered as much as I'll ever want to.'

'It's funny,' Tony said, 'how SHIELD have put so much faith in a blind man.'

'They trust me more than they trust you,' Barton said.

Tony snorted. 'And isn't that the sad part? Fury is so desperate to believe that I'm the bad guy. Hell, he's even believing the one man who's losing his mind.'

'I haven't lost anything,' Barton growled. 'I remembered what you took from me!'

'Keep telling yourself that,' Tony said. 'All the headaches. The migraines that pop up out of nowhere. That fear and pain you feel when you're around me... just keep telling yourself that it's because of Loki and not because years of head trauma have finally sent you loopy.'

Tony's words had made Barton stop, fear clear on every inch of his skin. 'What have you done to me?' he finally whispered.

'I haven't done anything, Barton,' Tony told him. 'I did nothing. SHIELD did this. They stole from me. They tried to play me for a fool. I got out while I still could. You? You're working for an organisation that thinks it's okay to steal from allies; that kidnaps people just because of one man's word. What's your excuse?'

'What's yours?' Barton demanded. He still wasn't as angry as Tony had expected. He was shaking, sure, and he looked so betrayed. But he wasn't screaming like he had been in Pepper's apartment.

No, Barton looked tired more than anything.

'Well?' Barton asked. 'What's your excuse, Tony? You say SHIELD stole from you. Yeah, they
did. SHIELD aren't blameless in this. But normal people don't turn into maniacs! They don't murder hundreds of people just to get even!' 

'I'm not normal, Barton,' Tony said. 'Nobody's ever accused me of being normal.' 

'You could have walked away!' Barton snapped. 'You could have told us to fuck off and that would have been the end of it!' 

'I'm not letting SHIELD get away with this kind of behaviour,' Tony argued. 'You think they'd just stop, Barton? You think they'd let me go and never harass me again? This never would have stopped!' 

He got closer to the glass, to Barton, and hissed his words; 'I'm stopping it.' 

Barton glanced down at Tony's hands... at his cuffs. 'Why are you still here?' he whispered. 

'How would I escape, Barton?' Tony asked. 

Clint glanced back up at him. His head twitched ever so slightly to the left and he frowned. Tony smiled. 

'Run along and see a doctor,' Tony said. 'I bet your head hurts after all of that shouting.' 

Barton scowled at him. 'Enjoy your food,' he muttered before turning on his heel and walking away. Tony watched him go and wondered what the point of all of that was. Another SHIELD agent could have delivered his food; it didn't have to be the one that Tony had personally fucked with. 

Tony did know one thing; he was fast losing his patience. 

'That's weird,' one of the agents at the console muttered. 

'What?' her partner asked. 

'The screens just flickered and there was a bunch of blue code across it,' the agent said. 'It's gone, now.' 

'Yeah? Maybe security trying something out?' 

'Maybe,' she agreed. 

Ever so slowly, Tony smiled. 

{oOo}

Loki sat in the middle of the bed and closed his eyes. His legs were crossed, hands resting comfortably atop his knees. It all fell away when Loki reached deep within himself and found that little spark, the end of the thread that wanted so badly to connect to Tony Stark. 

Loki tugged on it and felt magic course through him. He took a deep breath before opening his eyes; his and Tony's bedroom had been replaced by a glass cage. The only difference between it and the one Loki had once been kept in was the metal bunk attached to the floor.
Tony was asleep and Loki smoothly got to his feet. In a second he was by Tony's side, hand reaching out to touch the Midgardian's forehead. Tony woke instantly at the touch and his eyes widened when he saw Loki.

'Lo-

'Shh,' Loki whispered. 'Only you can see me.' Tony went silent, a frown on his face as he swung his legs from the bed and sat up. 'Astral projection,' Loki explained, seeing the unasked question in Tony's eyes. 'I am not here, not truly. I simply... send an image of myself. I see and hear everything as if I were here. But you cannot physically touch me and currently nobody but you can see me.'

Tony's frown had only deepened at the explanation. He hesitated before slowly reaching out and huffed an annoyed breath when his fingers went through Loki's wrist.

Loki sat on the bunk beside him and Tony turned to stare at him. 'Before we discuss anything further,' Loki said, 'there is something that I need you to do.' Tony was silent. 'I want you to think of something- anything, any words,' Loki explained. 'I want you to think hard and imagine saying them to me.'

Tony's lips parted ever so slightly.

'Not out loud,' Loki said with a slight shake of his head. 'I want you to think the words and imagine saying them to me.' When Tony raised his eyebrows, Loki added, 'Please. Humour me.'

With a slightly sigh, Tony closed his eyes. When he opened them again he stared hard at Loki, gaze never wavering. Loki stared back.

A few minutes passed before Loki felt disappointment settle heavy in his gut. He heard nothing; not a whisper of Tony's voice, nor of his magic. Loki sighed and pushed himself to his feet.

'You are a fool,' he growled. He wasn't sure if he was talking more to himself or to Tony. Because yes, Tony was an absolute damn fool for getting himself caught. But Loki was also a fool for thinking that his and Tony's bond could be this strong already. He knew that not even his foster parents had been able to talk telepathically. They'd simply known each other so well, and for so long, that entire conversations could be had with a few looks.

Loki must have been imagining Tony's silent words back in Potts' apartment.

'An absolute fool,' Loki said as he brushed the thoughts from his mind. He turned his attention back to Tony, still locked up and trapped in a cage like an animal. 'Why did you let SHIELD capture you?'

Tony shrugged one shoulder ever so slightly. His eyes slid away from Loki's, mouth twitching just a bit. It was a look that practically screamed, "It seemed like a good idea at the time. Relax, Lokes, I know what I'm doing."

Loki closed his eyes. 'I hate this,' he whispered. 'JARVIS told me of your plans. It's completely ridiculous. You could be tortured, Tony. You could be killed.'

Tony glanced at him.

'You do not know SHIELD nearly as well as you believe,' Loki argued. 'What is to stop Romanov from walking in here and shooting you in the head?' Tony blinked slowly. 'I know that you can take care of yourself,' Loki muttered. He turned his back on Tony before any more looks could be exchanged.
He wanted nothing more than to teleport himself into this cell and pull Tony free. Tony Stark did not belong here, caged and with his magic bound by bracelets meant for Loki himself. No, Tony needed to be free; rushing about his workshop, flying through the sky as Iron Man, lounging across the sofa in the living room with a plate of pizza resting on his lap.

He belonged with **Loki.** By Loki's side, always.

Loki sat back on the bunk. He felt Tony reach out to touch him, even if Tony's fingers brushed through him. He felt Tony's magic caged, but little wisps escaping into the cuffs and slowly breaking them apart.

Ever so lightly, Loki snorted. 'I see,' he said and turned to face Tony. 'So it is not only JARVIS that you are relying on.' Tony smiled slightly. 'I hate this,' Loki said, 'but I know that I cannot change your mind.' Tony tilted his head forward. Loki licked his lips before he leaned forward and pressed them lightly against Tony's forehead. 'If they hurt you,' he whispered, 'all of our plans will be for nothing. Because I will **annihilate them.**'

He heard Tony inhale sharply.

'Stay safe,' Loki murmured, 'and I will see you soon, Tony. I love you."

He ripped himself away before he could change his mind. When he opened his eyes he was sitting atop his and Tony's bed. The room had grown dark in his absence and Loki flexed his fingers slowly.

He was alone.

{oOo}

Thor was thankful that Steve was so reluctant to believe that Tony Stark would betray them. Thor did not have access to Tony Stark; he was not even allowed to watch the cameras that were trained on the Midgardian.

Steve was, and he had given Thor full access to his quarters when he wasn't there. The captain was spending most of his time in the gym, working out his anger by hitting things repeatedly. Usually Thor would do the same.

But this was not any of Thor's usual scenarios. This was not an enemy that he had faced before. This was not a routine battle.

This was a man that Thor had trusted until four hours earlier. A man whom Thor had fought side by side with. A man that Thor had trusted.

It was Loki all over again.

Thor stared at the screen as Tony Stark's eyes tracked someone who was not there. Thor was too far away from the cell to sense anything himself. But he knew that look; he knew who Tony Stark was reaching for when the Midgardian's fingers brushed empty air.

Thor sighed when Tony Stark laid back down, eyes open and staring at the ceiling, mouth pressed into a thin line.
It was time that Thor sought out his own truths.
Chapter 72

Chapter Notes

Author's Note: Sorry for how long this took! I'd planned on getting it posted much earlier, but then I got ideas and I went a little crazy there. You have my apologies and enjoy the chapter!

Dreamer

“Baby we should have left our love
In the gutter where we found it
’Cause you think, you think your only crime
Is that you got caught, I’m singing
Whoa, how the mighty fall
The mighty fall, the mighty fall
They fall in love”

– The Mighty Fall feat. Big Sean [Fall Out Boy]

Thor jolted when he realised that Clint was standing in his quarters. 'Clint,' he said when he'd spotted the mortal standing just to the left of the door.

'Thor,' Clint replied.

'Can I help you?' Thor asked. He wasn't doing anything of import; just scratching away at a little book he kept, filling it with various thoughts and sketches that looked like squiggles even to him.

Clint blew out a breath. 'We both know that this needs to be done,' he said. 'Fury won't let me get out of it.'

Thor frowned. He knew what Clint was referring to, of course, but... 'I will not do this without your permission,' he said. 'I cannot do this without your permission. The mind is a powerful thing, and even a mortal could keep me out if they wished. I am not skilled at this.'

Clint barked out a laugh and moved further into the room. 'Well that's just great, Thor,' he said. 'Of course I want you digging around in my head.'

'I will not be digging,' Thor said. 'Sit and I will explain.'

Clint hesitated, clearly agitated and very much not wanting to be anywhere near Thor. But finally he sat on the small bed and folded his arms defensively over his chest. 'Explain, then.'
'I am very familiar with Loki's magic,' Thor said, 'a by product of us growing up together. I was there when he became familiar with his magic; when he began to use it, began to be trained and then train himself. Repeated exposure means that I can always sense it. It is as familiar to me as the pull of Mjölnir.'

'Right,' Clint said, 'and what's that got to do with you not digging around in my head?'

'I will only be looking for Loki's magic,' Thor explained. 'When I find it, I will look at it; I will see what he has done and what memories he has repressed. I may not be able to uncover them all; both Loki's magic and your mind will fight to keep them hidden. But I can extract some; enough to know if Tony Stark is working with Loki; enough to know how deeply Loki's manipulations of you run.'

Clint shifted uncomfortably. 'And you'll leave everything else?'

'Hide what you do not wish me to see,' Thor said. 'Refuse me entry to those memories. I am not very skilled in magic. I cannot use it like Loki can; like other mages and sorcerers can. I will not be able to look or take if you do not let me.'

Clint nodded and said nothing more. Thor allowed him his moment. The mind was a sacred place, a person's thoughts absolutely private. Thor would not take even if he were capable of it.

But he needed to know. His heart told him that Tony Stark was working with Loki. He had trained his mind to always ask questions, to not take anything at face value. He would not turn against an ally until he had absolute proof.

'Okay,' Clint finally said. He took a deep breath; another. 'Do it before I change my mind.'

'Are you sure?'

'Do it!' Clint snapped.

Thor just nodded and pulled himself from the desk. He sat on the bed and told Clint to face him. The man did as asked, shoulders hunched and eyes locked on Thor's chest. 'Relax as much as you can,' Thor said.

Clint snorted. 'Yeah, right.'

Thor knew that it was too much to ask, but had had to do so all the same. He inhaled deeply and placed his hands either side of Clint's head. 'I will stop if it becomes too much for you,' he said.

'Believe me; I'll let you know when it's too much.' Clint's voice was a whisper, the fear evident in his tone. Thor pitied the man even as he closed his eyes and pushed.

Despite his fears and misgivings, Clint's mind opened like a flower blooming. His surface thoughts all had the sour taste of fear. His body quaked beneath Thor's fingers but he did not move.

It was evident immediately; Loki's magic cloaked Clint's mind like a too-warm blanket, prickly and itchy as it toyed with Clint's thoughts. Pain pulsed alongside one half of Clint's mind, and the memories there were hidden. But Thor stepped through the magic, sliced it open easily. Loki had not had contact with Clint in a while and his magic was beginning to weaken.

Thor followed Loki's magic, pushed past vague surface memories and the clinging echoes of Loki's power. He found the heart of it all, the places where Loki's magic was stronger, darker, and he slipped through-
He watched as Stark paced back and forth, his movements agitated, the man himself furious—

'Well hey there, Angry Bird,' Stark quipped.

'Fuck you!' Clint spat.

Loki chuckled and Stark grinned—

The workshop tilted, the entire image awash with static—

'You took over my mind,' Clint spat with a scowl. He glanced at Tony. 'Is that what you did to him?'

Stark laughed. 'Me? No, Barton. I joined forces with Loki of my own free will. Loki hasn't mind-raped me.'

Another jolt as Clint's mind tried to reel back, to escape, to repress what Loki had ordered him to repress—

'SHIELD betrayed me first,' he growled. 'They got greedy, Barton. They don't want me, they only want Iron Man. So they threw together a little fucking task force to steal my stuff—'

Clint's shock coloured Thor, made him feel as though his entire world had been turned upside down. Theft. Murder. We aren't your friends, but I wanted to be—

'What shall we do with him?' Loki asked.

'Wipe his mind,' Stark ordered—

Loki obeyed without question, his allegiance to Tony Stark without fault. There was nothing he would not do, no person he would not cut down if only Stark asked—

The world shifted, the memory escaped and Thor let it. Another crawled up his neck, made his heart race and his skin prickle—

'Mm,' Loki said. 'It doesn't matter, Barton. You won't remember.' He pressed his palm over Barton's face and pushed. The connection ignited beneath Loki's touch and his magic sang along Barton's brainwaves. The mortal screamed, but Loki ignored it in favour of shuffling through the man's memories—

Memories Thor did not want to see went racing across his vision; Clint, Natasha, Coulson and Fury all meeting, scheming, speaking about Tony Stark as though he were something to be feared, a monster that needed to be stripped of what power he had. More memories surged past him, more and more and more, until every image was Tony Stark and Loki, side by side, their connection evident to Thor even though he had not been present to see it.

Beneath his fingers Clint shook. A sob escaped his lips and Thor could taste the tears—

'Why's Clint tied up?' Bruce asked. His voice was shaky and Tony turned to survey him. 'I mean, why is he here?' Bruce continued. 'And tied up? You told me that he knows, but...'

He trailed off and Tony said, 'Barton brought contraband into my Tower; Loki made sure that he knew how naughty that was.'

'I'm aligning myself with insane people,' Strange sighed—

A tentative comrade on some parts; absolute trust on others. Strange the Sorcerer, uncaring of Clint
tied up at his feet. Bruce Banner, the man who could not hide the beast, struggling with what he was seeing, but his heart and mind clear; his side chosen and not once questioned.

Images and feelings, a scream and a laugh and-

It was lit up like a beacon; a siren wailing throughout Clint's head, Loki the only being it was calling. A yawning, gaping entrance that allowed Loki's magic in unimpeded, a road that had been built when Loki had pressed the mind stone against Clint's chest.

A connection forged with precision beyond even Loki's ability, a gateway that was now welcoming and pushing. It was growing even now, changing, Clint's very biology adapting to this change and making it better, making Clint stronger.

He was aware of Thor's magic, even now. Not consciously, no, but Clint's mind knew. It could sense and feel and alert Clint if the mortal knew that he was being alerted, if he only knew what power he now had at his fingertips.

A blessing and a curse. The Fates were not always kind. Sometimes they gave and they took -

Thor tore himself from Clint's mind. He had seen enough and the mortal was shaking. Hiccups escaped him, tears made his cheeks wet.

'Clint,' Thor breathed. His heart ached at seeing his shield-brother, his friend, reduced to a quivering mess. 'I am so sorry.'

'Not... your... fault,' Clint choked out.

'But it is,' Thor said. 'If I had not ignored my brother... if I had not allowed his darker thoughts to fester... we would not be here. Loki would not have become this.'

'Don't blame yourself for his choices,' Clint muttered. He was shaking and he wrapped his arms around himself.

'I have some fault in this,' Thor said. 'But you are correct. I cannot blame myself completely.' He paused and watched as Clint tried to pull himself together. 'SHIELD tried to steal from Tony Stark.'

Clint snorted. 'Yeah,' he muttered. 'So don't blame yourself completely, Thor. You had a hand in creating Loki?' He gestured at himself, eyes dark. But there was a sadness there, his feelings all too apparent to Thor, now that he had been inside his head. 'I'm one of the people who made Tony Stark what he is.'

'Yes,' Thor agreed. 'This situation is not... as black and white, as it would appear.'

'No, it really isn't,' Clint said.

They fell into silence. Thor stared at Clint, his mind turning. No, this situation was far more complicated than Thor had first assumed. Tony Stark was not the monster SHIELD were trying to make him out to be. But he was a monster.

And SHIELD had helped create him.

And now there was Clint Barton; mortal to the core, a Midgardian of amazing talents.

Who now had the ability to sense magic.

Thor pursed his lips. He would need to tell Clint; it was not something he would keep from his
friend. But the man was shaking, face too plate and sweat beading along his forehead. Thor felt the echoed thump, thump, thump of the migraine quickly overtaking Clint's mind.

It was not the result of Loki's manipulations. It was his mind trying to make sense of what it could now see, what it could feel. Clint needed to be trained. He needed to be able to block Loki out completely and harness this new ability.

But not now.

'Do you want me to leave?' Thor asked when it became apparent that Clint would not recover any time soon.

'No!' Clint shouted. His outburst startled even him; his eyes were as wide as Thor's. 'No,' Clint said. 'Please, I need... someone here. Someone I can trust.'

'Do you trust me, Clint?' Thor asked. 'After what I did, I would understand-

'It's fine,' Clint interrupted. 'Well, it's not fine, but...' He sighed gustily and his chin dropped to his chest. 'This entire thing is fucked up, Thor. But I know you. You're probably the most innocent person in all of this. You made your intentions with Loki clear. You didn't try to steal from Stark. So...'

He trailed off and Thor just nodded. 'Very well. Remain as long as you wish to, Clint. If you want me to leave, just speak.'

Clint nodded and carefully climbed further onto the bed. He tucked himself into the corner, knees drawn up against his chest and legs wrapped around them. He kept his eyes fixed on the door, like at any moment it would burst open and Loki would waltz in, ready to make Clint forget.

Thor's heart ached for the man. No mortal should be subjected to that; to what Loki was capable of.

He breathed out a sigh and turned back to his notebook. He did not open it, did not really even look at it. His mind circled the information he had gathered.

It was time to talk to Tony Stark. After that... Fury had a lot of explaining to do.

{oOo}

Tony woke to a thousand needles stabbing him at once. He bucked up but found himself pulled back, thick straps holding his ankles, hips, wrists and shoulders back against something hard and flat. His eyes flew open and he shouted, thrashed against whatever was holding him down.

'He's awake!' It was like they were trying to shout under water, words garbled and barely understood by Tony who screamed again.

'Let... me... FUCK!' Tony broke whatever was holding his right arm down and lashed out at someone, anyone, another shout fuelling his rage and the quickly spreading terror. His magic instinctively tried to fight for him but was seized and forced down into his bones.
It hurt. Everything *hurt*. His skin ripped open and Tony screamed himself hoarse. There was fire and pain and *black* when something covered his face.

He was drowning. Large, desperate breaths did nothing to quench the ache in his chest and Tony fought. Something jabbed him in the arm, something else crawled its way down his spine and sliced straight into his gut from behind.

'No, no, *nononononono*-'  

Something hit him in the face again and again and again and Tony bucked, he shrieked, but the pain didn't *stop*, it spread from his wrists up his arms, into each bone and muscle and *atom*. He twisted beneath his bounds and-

Nothing.

{oOo}

There was a *tug* and suddenly Loki was on the floor. The pain was immediate and *excruciating*. Like a thousand bugs had burrowed under the skin of his neck and were quickly spreading out, biting and stinging wherever they went. Loki clutched his head and *screamed*.

His magic escaped and lashed out at everything around. A table was overturned, a computer exploded, and one of Anthony's suits was tossed into the wall with a *crash*.

The pain came again, greater, *harsher*, and Loki curled himself into a ball. He tore at his own skin to get at the bugs even as his magic *pulsed*.

“*Let... me... FUCK!*”

The voice pierced through his mind and everything became clear. But it didn't matter because the pain, Loki couldn't *move*, he felt his stomach revolt and its contents spilled from his lips and to the floor. He convulsed and rolled onto his other side to vomit again.

Flashes of light.

Static crackled along his skin.

“*- nononononono-*”

Something else exploded. Loki's skin was on fire.

And all at once it *stopped*.

Loki shivered when the pain vanished, like wisps of smoke escaping his clothing. He pulled his eyes open but everything was hazy, a heavy fog settling on his mind.

He didn't know how long he laid there, completely unable to even stand. But eventually JARVIS' voice made itself known.

'Mr Laufeyson?'
'Yes...' Loki croaked. His throat ached. 'I am... here.'

'Are you well?' JARVIS demanded. 'I was unsure if I should call for assistance.'

'I am well,' Loki tried. He wasn't, but he didn't wish to explain himself to a computer. Slowly, painfully slowly, Loki managed to pull himself onto all fours. He dry heaved for a few minutes before he grabbed a table, used it to stand.

He fell into a seat. He hadn't felt this weak since he'd fallen from the Bifröst.

Tony. It was the only explanation. SHIELD were doing something to Tony and Loki had felt it through the bond.

Loki snarled out his anger and tears sprang into his eyes against his will. White hot rage raced through him, like nothing he had ever felt before.

Because SHIELD were torturing his mate.

And Loki couldn't save him.

Loki could barely stand. He knew his own body. He knew his magic. He would not be able to teleport for hours, let alone stage a rescue. No, he was stuck here, trapped within Tony's Tower, and he couldn't reach his mate.

'The bond,' Loki whispered.

'Mr Laufeyson?'

He ignored JARVIS.

It was the bond. It had to be. Loki had seen with his own eyes what had happened to his former parents when either one was sick or injured. It had never been as horrific as what Loki had just felt. But when Frigga fell ill, the All-Father showed signs of distress. When Odin was injured in a joust during Loki's childhood, Frigga too had cried out and stayed in the infirmary by his side.

But Loki and Tony weren't bonded, not yet. Frigga and Odin had been bonded for centuries.

They were still in pre-bonding; connected, yes, but their link not completed.

And this was how Loki's magic reacted to Tony's injuries?

When they did bond...

Hurt one and the other would fall.

Loki fell forward and buried his face in his hands. Self-loathing took ahold of him and Loki choked back a sob. Because for one brief, terrible second, Loki had considered running; taking off and disappearing and leaving Tony, leaving what they had, because if the connection was this powerful already, what would it be like when they actually bonded?

And Loki felt sick at the very thought. He could not leave Tony. He would not leave Tony. Not even the Fates themselves would be able to tear Loki from the Midgardian's side. No matter what happened, no matter what pain Loki had to endure, he would grin through it all.

For Tony.
But he had considered leaving.

'JARVIS,' Loki growled out. He swallowed against the fresh sick that raced up his throat.

'Yes, Mr Laufeyson?'

'Do you know where Tony is being kept within the Helicarrier?' he asked.

'Yes, Mr Laufeyson,' JARVIS replied. 'I do not have complete access to that area of the Helicarrier but I am currently taking control.'

Loki nodded slowly. He knew Tony's plan, of course; JARVIS had explained it to him after he'd put a third hole in the living room wall. 'Tell me again,' he ordered. 'Tell me what you have control of.'

JARVIS was quick to respond, drowning Loki in information. Loki closed his eyes and listened, heart calming with every word JARVIS spoke.

'While SHIELD had tried to purge me, they have yet to successfully erase me from all of their servers, as I was built into the primary code when Mr Stark wrote it,' JARVIS said. 'Since Mr Stark's capture I have been working my way back through all of their systems. It will be approximately fifty-three hours until I take complete control of the Helicarrier's main controls. There are only four sections that I cannot take control of completely, and they are the servers that Dr Banner has already searched.'

Loki finally looked up. His shoulders shook at the effort it took. 'Why?' he asked. 'Why bother taking control? We will be destroying it soon.'

'I have downloaded and stored all footage of Mr Stark's incarceration, Mr Laufeyson,' JARVIS explained. 'Mr Stark denies his involvement with you every time he is questioned. Mr Stark will be able to use the footage to further destroy SHIELD and the Avengers when he escapes.'

Loki shook his head. All of this pain, this separation, and for what? Footage? Tony was a clever, dangerous man; he did not need footage.

But Loki could not save him. Not in his current state.

'Is Tony...?' Loki licked his lips. 'Is he well?' He hated himself even more as soon as the words escaped. No, of course Tony wasn't well.

JARVIS paused, before saying, 'Yes, Mr Stark is well. SHIELD's doctors took blood and other samples. They sedated Mr Stark but he awoke during one of the procedures. It appears as though Mr Stark's magic tried to save him, but the bracelets on his wrists prevented it.'

Loki frowned. Yes, the bracelets. The ones that Thor had brought to Midgard for him.

He snarled against his teeth. One day, and one day soon, Loki's former brother would meet a very messy end.

'Mr Stark is currently unconscious,' JARVIS continued when Loki said nothing. 'His vitals are all within what is a healthy range for him.'

'Good,' Loki grunted. 'When you take full control... what then, JARVIS?' He was unused to asking the AI for such help. But Tony was gone, he was in pain. And here Loki was, hapless, unable to do a single thing to help.
'I will inform you when it is safe to rescue Mr Stark,' JARVIS said. 'No matter what the time I will inform you immediately, Mr Laufeyson.'

'Yes... thank you, JARVIS,' Loki said.

'Is there anything else that I can do for you?' JARVIS asked.

'Run a bath,' Loki said. And ensure that I don't drown myself, Loki wanted to say but swallowed. When Tony returned... he did not want his mate to know. Loki's thoughts were poisonous things and Loki wanted to scrub them from his mind.

Maybe he would tell Tony. Tony could decide if Loki was truly worth any of this.

'Very well, Mr Laufeyson,' JARVIS said. 'Please make your way to yours and Mr Stark's bathroom when you are ready.'

Loki just nodded and stayed where he was. He wasn't sure he could walk, not yet. He pressed a hand over his heart. What little magic he had responded sluggishly at his command.

Tony, Loki thought, I love you. Please stay strong .

Loki wasn't sure how long it took him to stand. But when he did he winced, louder when he saw the destruction he had wrecked on Tony's workshop.

'I will fix that,' he muttered to himself and stumbled into the hallway.

{oOo}

Dust had sealed his nostrils shut. The heat was encompassing, the kind of heat that made your skin itch and your mind turn to mush. It was so goddamn hot that he was sure water, any water, would save him, would put him out of his misery and let him breathe-

It shot down his nose and throat, blasted everything else aside and filled his lungs too quickly for him to stop it. He knew not to gasp , knew to keep his lips pressed shut, but he had no control over his boy. His struggled against the hands holding him down but he couldn't do anything, he was weak, he was weak-

Tony rolled off of the bunk and onto the floor. Pain made his arms collapse beneath him and he barely avoided face-planting into the puddle of vomit he'd already coated the floor with. Tony hacked and coughed air back into his lungs. His entire body shook, remnants of dreams and memories trying to be tossed free.

But they clung to him, even now, and Tony heaved a shaky breath as he slowly became aware of where he was.

And why .

'Tony Stark.'

He would have jumped if he were in any state to do so.
'Thor,' Tony gasped and coughed again. 'To what do... I owe the... pleasure?' Thor didn't respond, just let Tony slowly, **painfully**, pull himself together. He eventually managed to sit back on his legs, back pressed uncomfortably against the hard metal frame of his bunk. 'Well?' he asked and turned to look at the glass.

Thor was standing on the other side. The room was empty; even the lights in Bruce's cell were off.

'They said it is a power outage,' Thor said. Tony would have chuckled if he could. Instead he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and spat what he was sure was stomach acid onto the floor. 'The engines carry on, but everything else is... dark, Clint said.'

'Did he now?' Tony muttered. He shakily got to his feet and fell to sit on the bunk. 'And what else has he been saying?'

'That you are working with Loki,' Thor said, voice soft.

Tony snorted. 'Yeah, I've heard about that.' Thor said nothing and Tony glanced at him. 'So you believe him?' he asked. 'The dude had a fucking seizure in my elevator, Thor. But everyone sure is quick to believe the guy with known health issues over me.'

'I know that he is telling the truth,' Thor said. 'I searched his mind. Loki's magic is thoroughly engrained into his head. I saw it.'

'Yeah?' Tony smirked. 'All that proves is that Loki's been fucking with Barton's head. Who says that Loki didn't *plant* those memories, hmm?'

He coughed again, spat out another mouthful of bile. Tony's entire body felt weak and he glanced down at his arms. Besides the wounds from the cuffs, there were clusters of pinpricks running along the veins of his left forearm. Tony scowled and slowly curled his fingers into a fist. The Helicarrier's doctors would be the first to die.

'He could have,' Thor finally allowed, 'but I do not believe it to be so.'

'And why's that?' Tony asked. 'What makes you so *sure*?'

'Your actions and words betray you, Stark,' Thor said. 'If you were innocent you would be much angrier than you are.'

'Oh believe me, Thor,' Tony said through gritted teeth, 'I am fucking *furious*.'

'You are not,' Thor said, 'because you believe that Loki will rescue you. This is not a capture, not in your eyes; this is a mere inconvenience.' Tony looked at him again. Thor had his hands clasped behind his back, head cocked ever so slightly. Tony couldn't read the emotion on his face. 'I have been captured with Loki before and he acted much the same,' Thor continued. 'When he knew that he could escape he was not worried. I was also with Loki every time he denied some plan he had carried out. He was far too cocky when he was guilty. You two are different, but you wear the same face of deceit.'

'So that's it, huh?' Tony said. 'You believe Barton because I'm not acting how you think I should?' He pushed himself to his feet, and every step closer to Thor felt more stable. 'I got bad news for you, buddy; we Midgardians don't always act the way we're supposed to. We're a fucking *insane* species. And me, personally? Well, I'm a fucking *maniac*.'

'Midgardians.' Thor frowned. 'It is not a word that your species uses for itself.'
Tony swallowed. His throat burned. Whatever those doctors had done to him was fucking with his head.

'And your wounds,' Thor added. He nodded at Tony's arms. Tony fought the urge to look down at them. 'Those are the wounds a mage bares when their magic is suppressed and they do not know how to keep it under control. A mortal would not sport such injuries while wearing those cuffs.'

Tony said nothing. He and Thor stared each other down, neither offering anything new, neither budging. Tony knew that there was nothing he could say to change Thor's mind; Thor had done his own research. He knew the truth.

Not that it mattered, really. The Helicarrier was having a rather convenient little power outage.

It was Thor who broke the silence.

'I did not come here to discuss your betrayal, however.'

'My betrayal? That's fucking rich,' Tony spat. 'Did Fury tell you why I left the Avengers, Thor? Or did he feel it wasn't something you needed to know?'

'Why did you leave, then?' Thor asked. 'Tell me why.'

'They fucking stole from me.'

Thor did not seem shocked. What else had he found in Barton's head?

'What did they steal, Stark?' Thor asked.

'My arc reactor technology. Notes about JARVIS' code. Blueprints of my suit. Anything and everything they could get their fucking hands on,' Tony snarled. 'You think I started this war, Thor? People don't do the things I've done without a good fucking reason. SHIELD started this. They made me. And I'm sure as hell going to take them down with me.'

'The things you've done,' Thor practically whispered. His eyes were wide, hands having fallen to his sides at Tony's reveal.

A dark smile spread over Tony's face. 'Let's not play pretend, Thor. From one god to another; let's just be honest.'

Thor gulped. 'So it is true,' he said. 'Loki gifted you with an Apple.' Tony just smiled. 'This changes many things.'

'It changes nothing,' Tony said. 'I'm going to do what I have to do to get my life back. You can either get in my way or stand aside.' He shrugged a shoulder. 'Your choice.'

'Honesty,' Thor echoed. 'Will you be honest with me, Tony Stark?'

Tony shrugged again. 'Why not?'

'When I last saw Loki,' Thor said, 'my brother told me to ask Fury about SHIELD's true plans for him.' He paused. 'Why? What plans do SHIELD have?'

'What, they haven't shared that with you, either?' Tony tutted. 'What kind of allies are they, Thor?'

'Just answer me!' Thor snapped. Tony heard rustling from across the room but ignored it.
'And why should I?' Tony demanded. 'Why the fuck should I tell you anything, Thor?'

'I will be taking Loki back to Asgard,' Thor said, 'and I will ensure that you are placed in a cell with him or near him. You will not be parted.'

Tony froze at that. Asgard. He knew that Thor had always planned to take Loki back to Asgard if he caught his brother; that wasn't a secret in any way.

But him? On Asgard?

'What?' he blurted out.

'Loki has made you a god and a mage,' Thor explained. 'Midgardian by birth, yes. But you are Æsir by status. Loki sealed your fate when he stole an Apple for you. As a citizen of Asgard, you are bound by its laws. SHIELD will not be able to contain you forever. Your magic will grow, your skill with it will become stronger. Only Asgard can contain you. Only Asgard has the right to contain you. The All-Father and His Council are the only ones who have a right to judge your actions.'

Tony... laughed. He wheezed as he doubled over, chest aching and throat raw. But still, he laughed until there were tears in his eyes and he almost slapped a hand against the cell. But he paused mid-move and looked up, laughter dying in his throat.

'You really think that SHIELD's going to hand me over?' he asked, voice pained. 'You're an idiot, Thor.'

Thor glared at him, the first true feeling that Tony had seen on his usually expressive face.

'SHIELD aren't handing me over no matter what you say,' Tony said. 'You and an army could demand that they hand me over and they'll lie through their fucking teeth, Thor. They'll keep me here and force me to build weapons until the day I die. Hell, they might even use me as a weapon.'

And why wouldn't they? They knew that Tony was a mage and were already planning on using Loki to power their new weapons. Why not use Tony, too?

'How would they use you as a weapon?' Thor asked. 'They cannot force you to fight for them.'

'They'd use me to power their weapons,' Tony said. He smiled bitterly. 'Do you remember when we first met, Thor? What I told Rogers? When Thor shook his head, Tony said, 'SHIELD were working on some fancy weapons way back then. Guns that used a certain energy instead of bullets.'

Thor's frown darkened ever so slightly. 'Yes... I remember,' he said slowly, 'I told them... they were playing with energy they did not understand.'

'Like they care,' Tony said and waved a dismissive hand. 'And not having the Tesseract didn't stop them, Thor. I found some rather interesting weapons during a run through of one of their bases. They used crystals instead of bullets.'

'Crystals?'

'What do the people of Asgard use crystals for, Thor?' Tony asked.

'Healing,' Thor immediately said. 'Luck. Health and safety. They are used-

'To store energy,' Tony cut in. 'A very specific sort of energy. And what type of energy do the
people of the Nine Realms store in crystals, Thor?'

Understanding spread across Thor's face, his mouth dropping open.

But he said nothing.

'What do they use, Thor?' Tony said, voice harder, demanding.

'Magic,' Thor whispered.

'And what does Loki have?' Thor's eyes flicked to him. 'Do you really think that SHIELD are going to hand me or Loki over when all of this is said and done?' Tony asked.

'I... we have an understanding...' Thor tried, but his words sounded weak.

'Loki told you to ask Fury about SHIELD's true plans,' Tony said, 'so why don't you go ask Fury, Thor.'

'I...'

'Ask Fury, Thor,' Tony said. 'And you tell me if his actions and words betray him.'

Thor stared at him, clearly at a loss for words. Before either of them could say anything a bright light blinded them. Tony blinked against it, and then closed his eyes completely when everything became painfully bright.

The floor thrummed beneath Tony's feet and Tony breathed in deeply. The air was even more recycled than Tony's penthouse. Now he knew why Loki complained all the time.

Tony opened his eyes. Thor was still standing before him, eyes dark and shoulders slumped.

'Better run along, Thor,' Tony said. 'Let me know how your conversation goes.'

Thor's head jerked upward and he met Tony's eyes. He stared for only a few seconds before giving Tony a brief nod. He left before two SHIELD agents returned to work the console. They were different to the ones that Tony had seen before he'd fallen asleep.

'What the hell?' one of them muttered when he saw the state of Tony's floor.

'Got a problem?' Tony asked, voice sickly sweet. The agent jumped and glanced at him. 'Why don't you come in here and clean it?' Tony asked.

The agent shook his head quickly and sat, the console shielding his eyes from Tony. Tony snorted and flopped back onto his bunk.

'Got a problem?' Tony asked, voice sickly sweet. The agent jumped and glanced at him. 'Why don't you come in here and clean it?' Tony asked.

The agent shook his head quickly and sat, the console shielding his eyes from Tony. Tony snorted and flopped back onto his bunk.

'So what happened, huh?' Tony asked aloud. 'You know, besides the medical experiments you fucking assholes did on me.' His voice was a lot more bitter than he'd intended it to be. 'Just another thing I'll have to sue you people for.'

'Shut up, Stark!' the agent snapped.

'Just a power outage?' Tony said. 'I hope the Helicarrier doesn't drop out of the sky.'

'It was nothing,' the other agent said. 'Just go to sleep, Stark. Someone will clean your cell in the morning.'
'Uh-huh.' Tony went silent and rolled onto his side. Just a power outage? How *lovely*. 
Chapter 73

Chapter Notes

Author's Note I'm sorry this chapter took so long. I had some shit go down in my life and was more focused on that than writing. But everything's settled down and I'm back! I currently have 78 chapters planned so just a few more to go!

And the sequel. Let's all remember that :)

Enjoy,

Dreamer

“Rise up and take the power back

It's time the fat cats had a heart attack

You know that their time's coming to an end

We have to unify and watch our flag ascend”

– Uprising [Muse]

Loki stared listlessly at the window. He idly wondered how long he'd been doing that before swiftly deciding that he cared not. What did it matter? All around him were reminders of Tony; the thick green drapes that he'd put up at Loki's insistence for a little privacy, even this far up (and oh, the smirk on his face when they'd been delivered and he'd revealed the colour to Loki); the glass still sitting on the bar, dregs of whatever drink Tony had last made still lightly colouring the bottom of the glass; the tablet left abandoned on the table beside another glass, this one still full of water.

His eyes trailed from the windows, from those stupid drapes across the light coloured walls, further to the large television taking up one entire wall, further still past the entrance way to the kitchen and then to the hallway beyond. Loki's eyes glazed over it all, not retaining any of the information though he knew it by heart. He knew how soft the carpet was, how cold the floor could be when it turned into floorboards.

He knew what the paint of the walls felt like beneath his fingertips as he trailed them along the surface. He knew what those walls felt like pressed against his naked back. He knew what it was like to come down those stairs and lift his head, see Tony relaxed on the sofa in sweats and a hoodie, his feet up and a cup of coffee still hot on the table before him.

He knew all of this. But right now, the Tower felt empty; barren. It felt as though all life had been
sucked out of it the moment Loki returned home and realised that Tony wasn't coming back; not now, but one day. One day.

One day, Loki told himself. His fingers curled into fists, nails threatened to break through the sofa's covering. One day soon, I will burn SHIELD to the ground for even daring to take my mate.

His jaw ached from how hard he was grinding his teeth, but like so often these past few days, Loki found himself not caring in the slightest.

Loki tilted his head and only recognised that it ached when he had moved. He twisted again and breathed out heavily through his teeth.

'Mr Laufeyson?'

Loki blinked slowly. He had long stopped looking up at the ceiling when JARVIS spoke; he had asked the computer far too many questions over the past few days to bother with the action. 'What.'

'Colonel Rhodes is here to see you, sir,' JARVIS said.

Loki frowned. 'Why?'

'He said that it was urgent, sir,' JARVIS said. 'Would you like me to find out, or shall I send him away?'

Loki pondered that briefly before pulling himself from the sofa. Every joint ached and he felt unsteady on his feet. 'No,' he said and smoothed a hand down his shirt. It felt stiff beneath his fingers. 'Let him up.'

By the time Rhodes stepped into the penthouse, Loki was brushing a hair through Logan's unruly curls. He blinked owlishly at the Colonel and fiddled with his glasses as he put his book aside.

'C-Colonel Rhodes,' he murmured and hunched his shoulders just a tad. 'What do you want?'

Rhodes was staring at him, a frown marring his lips. 'The glasses are new,' he said.

'Huh.'

'Can I help you, Colonel Rhodes?' Loki said. Every inch of his skin itched and his magic churned within him. Everything within Loki was screaming at him to rage and attack and the past few days of solitude had done nothing to quench that thirst. Loki half wondered if he was going mad without Tony by his side.

'Yeah,' Rhodes finally said and stepped further into the room. 'You can help me.'

With that he pulled a handgun from the back of his trousers and pointed it at Loki.

Loki was... legitimately stumped. For half a second he failed to do anything but stare at Rhodes in vague disgust. But centuries of training himself to be something else kicked in and Loki jumped back, hands flying up.

'W-What are you doing?' he stammered. 'Put the gun d-down!'

'I don't think I will,' Rhodes' hand was steady, voice smooth. He took another step forward. 'Cause see, I got a call today from Pepper. She was in tears, damn near cried herself into hysteric.'
Another wave of fury rolled across Loki and his left shoulder jerked back as he tried to contain his instincts to destroy and decapitate.

'Did she?'

'Yeah,' Rhodes said. 'So I think we both know who you really are, Loki.'

'Put it down, please!' Loki shouted. 'Whatever she told you is a lie!'

'Is it?'

'Yes!' Loki snapped. 'She helped SHIELD kidnap Tony!'

'Why haven't you gone to the police, then?' Rhodes asked. 'Because that seems really weird to me, Logan. Pepper told me that SHIELD had kidnapped Tony, but I haven't heard anything. No announcement via Stark Industries, no police mounting a search and rescue, and no worried boyfriend pleading to the public for Tony to be brought back safely.'

Loki wasn't sure what to say to that. He hadn't thought about going to the public, trying to use his fake identity to out SHIELD and get Tony back. He hadn't even thought of staging a rescue mission and dragging Strange along.

No, all he'd done was sit uselessly in this penthouse and stare at windows.

Because without Tony, he was useless.

And I wanted to leave, a tiny part of Loki's head whispered. Only it wasn't so tiny any more, growing louder and angrier the longer Loki lived without Tony by his side.

He'd been quiet for too long and apparently Rhodes was done talking.

'I'm gonna shoot you on the count of three,' Rhodes said. He reached up to flick something on the gun.

'Please,' Loki said, the desperation in his voice not completely faked. He didn't know what to do.

'One,' Rhodes said.

'Please, please!' Loki begged. 'I didn't know what to do, I was scared!'

'Two.'

'I don't know what to do!' Loki shouted. He wasn't lying.

'Three.'

Click.

The gun didn't fire, but Loki's magic reacted anyway. A shield surrounded him, blurring the world between himself and Rhodes green. Loki and Rhodes stared at each other as Loki's magic slowly retreated. A heavy weight fell between them.

'Pepper was right,' Rhodes breathed.

'Congratulations,' Loki said. Magic prickled over him as he settled back into his Æsir skin. 'You know the truth. Enjoy your victory.'
He teleported across the room and slammed into Rhodes. Adrenalin coursed through his body as Rhodes hit the floor with a thump. His gun skidded into one of the sofa's.

'You know,' Loki drawled, flexing his fingers, 'I have been idle for far too long.'

'Please!' Rhodes begged.

Loki laughed. 'What a turn of events, Rhodes.'

'I need to know,' Rhodes said, 'I want to help-

'You can help by lying still,' Loki cut in. 'I plan on spilling quite a lot of blood, but your help will be appreciated.'

He teleported again, swung down with the dagger that materialised in his hand. Rhodes rolled to the side and the blade cut through his shirt, grazed skin; the mortal gasped but managed to stumble to his feet.

'Rhodes...' Loki drawled, 'if you wish to act like prey, I do not mind hunting you down.'

'I want to help!' Rhodes snapped. 'Tony's my best friend! You think I want him locked up by SHIELD?'

Loki tutted. 'You tried to shoot me, Rhodes.'

'The safety was on,' Rhodes replied, 'I didn't shoot.'

'You should have,' Loki commented. 'It was your only chance. What a pity.'

'Please.' And now Rhodes was begging again, brown eyes wide when they found Loki's. A smirk spread across Loki's face.

'Begging will not save you,' Loki said. 'I have been sitting in this Tower while my mate is imprisoned. I have done nothing but mope and grit my teeth. No more, Rhodes.' He took a step closer and enjoyed the way Rhodes tried to scramble back. 'No, Rhodes,' Loki continued, 'I am going to take my time with you.'

Rhodes raised one hand. 'Wait,' he said, 'please, just let me-

Loki struck him across the face. The crack of his fist connecting with the mortal's cheek sent a thrill down Loki's spine.

'I wanna help Tony!' Rhodes shouted. The pain in his voice was music to Loki's ears. 'I needed to know you could help!'

'Don't worry,' Loki said, 'I will most certainly help Tony.'

'Then why haven't you?' Rhodes demanded.

That made Loki pause, his dagger tilted in Rhodes' direction. Yes... why hadn't he helped Tony?

Because he wanted to be caught, a little voice whispered in Loki's ear. This was Tony's plan. You followed his plan.

'It matters not,' Loki finally said. 'Such a shame that Tony will lose a dear old friend because he knew too much.'
Rhodes was on his knees again, used the sofa to shakily pull himself to his feet. 'But he doesn't have to lose me,' the mortal growled. 'I coulda shot you, but I didn't. I don't want you dead!'

'You couldn't kill me even if you wanted to,' Loki commented.

Rhodes growled in frustration. 'Would you just fucking listen to me?' he shouted.

Loki's eyes narrowed. 'Your tone is not helping you, Rhodes. If anything, it is simply adding more pain.'

'Tony's my best friend!' Rhodes snapped. 'And you make him happy! I've never seen him this goddamn happy in my entire life!'

'And?' Loki drawled.

'You think I'm gonna take that away from him?' Rhodes said. 'I promised myself twenty goddamn years ago that I'd always have Tony's back. Him working with you doesn't change that!'

Loki paused.

Rhodes wet his lips. 'Tony's never been happy,' he said, 'not really. But he is with you.'

Loki blinked slowly before a smarmy grin spread across his face. 'As lovely as that is,' he said and pointed his dagger at Rhodes.

'I don't know why you're destroying SHIELD,' Rhodes said, 'but I wanna know. And I want Tony to tell me. I want him back here, safe and sound, and away from SHIELD.'

'He will be; that I can promise you,' Loki said.

'I can help you.'

'Can you help yourself?' Loki said. 'Because I plan on gutting you within the next ten seconds.'

'Please,' Rhodes begged. He'd pressed himself against the wall and Loki quickly approached him. 'I know you can get Tony back; I know you probably have a plan. You love him too much not to.'

Once again, Loki found himself hesitating. The anger building within him was still a white, frothy mess, but there was something in Rhodes' eyes, in his voice, that made Loki stop. That crack, maybe, that desperation that Rhodes wasn't trying to keep out of his tone.

'Please,' Rhodes repeated. He had his hands back up, either begging for Loki to stop or just trying to appease the predator that they both knew Loki was. 'Tony has a plan, right? He always has a plan.'

Loki jerked his head in what might have been a nod. Something was buzzing in his ear, a little whisper, a little pull that him him stopping and listening.

'He wants it all over the media,' Loki found himself murmuring. He frowned. 'SHIELD kidnaps Tony Stark,' he echoed.

'I can help you with that,' Rhodes said. 'I've spent most of my damn life helping Tony with the media. Let me help you.'

Loki's frown deepened and he glanced up. He didn't know what was happening. His anger was draining, replaced with the image of Rhodes begging; not for his life, but for the opportunity to
save Tony.

*What is happening?* Loki wondered. *I can save Tony by myself. JARVIS almost has control. When he does I will rescue Tony myself. I don't need some pathetic little mortal.*

"Rhodey's my friend."

Loki's head jerked to the right and his eyes snapped open. Rhodes was staring at him.

'Give me one reason why I should not slit your throat right now,' Loki growled. But still, his anger was retreating, and Loki felt shaky.

'I can give you a dozen,' Rhodes shot back. 'I'm good with the media. I know who you are and I don't care, not right now. I want Tony back, *safe*. And I'm Tony's best friend.'

'He is a monster,' Loki said. His words came out soft.

'I know,' was all Rhodes said.

Loki frowned. His head buzzed.

'Well?' Rhodes said.

Something snapped and all Loki felt was pain. All he could do was whimper before he suddenly found himself on the floor. He stared up at the white ceiling, the colour becoming brighter and brighter until Loki squeezed his eyes shut.

A sound began reverberating through his skull, louder and louder and louder until all Loki heard was a scream.

"No! No, fuck, get away from her!"

Tony, Loki gasped. Did he? He clawed at his ears when another scream threatened to burst his eardrums.

'Loki? Loki!'

*Please*, Loki whimpered when Tony screamed again.

And then it went black.

{oOo}

Tony slammed his fist against the floor. He felt like the cell was pressing in on him, the glass growing stronger and slowly tilting in, in, until it pressed against Tony's skin. He'd woken up halfway back to his cell, the SHIELD agents freaking out when he started thrashing, when the bracelets around his wrists started smoking.

They hadn't hurt him; Tony knew that without a doubt. Done tests, yeah, but it was Tony's magic that was hurting him now. It ached within him as it fought against the powerful force keeping it trapped. Tony's skin snapped and bled and he cursed his lack of self control as he shakily pushed himself onto his ass.
He stared down at his wrists. The throb was ever present, dull as it was, and Tony had to consciously resist the urge to reach down and dig into his skin with blunt nails.

The bracelets were breaking, their hold on Tony weakening. But Tony was fast losing control of himself. His magic, his head, his memories. All of it blended together in his head, a hot surge of lava that cascaded over every bit of common sense he had.

He'd almost ripped the throat out of one of the agents carrying him with his bare hands. He wondered if Fury would show that footage to Rogers.

Tony took a shuddering breath and pressed his back against the bunk. It dug into his spine and he focused on that, on the here and now. No more dreams. No more nightmares. Just the battle against his own magic and the panic attacks threatening to overtake at any given second.

“Tony.”

Tony's eyes snapped open. Loki's voice echoed in his head but the cell was bare; no Loki, no quiver of power that gave away Loki's unseen position.

Loki wasn't there.

Tony blinked rapidly and scrubbed at his eyes, his jaw. It was rough to the touch and Tony twitched in annoyance. When was the last time he'd showered?

He glanced up at the ceiling. He didn't know where the cameras were; had had no hand in designing or building this part of the Helicarrier. He knew the cameras were there, though; watching, recording, being obsessively watched by some nameless SHIELD agent. He wondered if they'd save any footage, send it to another computer before JARVIS wiped it all.

Tony decided that he didn't care. Any footage they had was circumstantial at best. So what if he'd attacked a SHIELD agent? They'd kidnapped him.

Just a few more days, Tony thought. Please let it be just a few more days.

Once upon a time, Tony had been strong. He'd been going at everything alone for so long that he hadn't known what it was like to actually rely on people. And then Yinsen had appeared, a brief taste of what it was like to have a true friend that could be relied on for anything.

And now he had Loki. Loki, who was everything, who could do anything, and Tony needed him right the fuck now. Was he really this broken? Had he really become the guy who couldn't function without his partner by his side?

A few more fucking days and it'll be fine, Tony told himself firmly.

Rhodey flashed through his mind and Tony's lips twisted into a grimace. Well, he'd always had Rhodey... he'd always had Tony's back. Had never taken any of Tony's shit. Had always been able to see through Tony's bullshit.

Would he now, though? Surely SHIELD had contacted him. What did he think of his good old friend now?

A flash made Tony open his eyes. The doors were opening, admitting another SHIELD agent who carried a tray. He sneered at Tony when he reached the doors.

'Dinner time,' the man said.
Tony stared at him. It took all of his self-control not to break through the glass and snap the pathetic mortal's neck.

Instead he grinned brightly. 'Filet mignon?' he asked. 'I know you've heard my requests.'

The agent glared at him.

{oOo}

When Loki opened his eyes he was once again staring at the living room ceiling. He frowned and shifted ever so slightly. He was lying down on the sofa, right leg at an awkward angle. His back felt stiff as he slowly made himself upright.

'Oh, thank Christ.'

Loki blinked slowly and looked to his left. Rhodes was sitting on the armchair, arms folded and a genuine look of worry plastered across his face.

Loki frowned. 'What happened?' His voice was a croak and he licked his lips.

'You fainted,' Rhodes said. 'We were talking and you just... fell over. You were concious for a few minutes and then you just... weren't.'

'I see.' Loki grunted with the effort it took to pick himself up. He slouched back against the sofa when he was done. His bones ached and his head felt fuzzy.

'What happened?' Rhodes questioned.

Loki was silent as he processed. Rhodes had appeared. He'd pointed a gun at Loki. Loki had revealed himself, but... Rhodes hadn't cared.

And then he had collapsed, because Tony had been in pain. The uncompleted bond had felt Tony's pain and had sent it to Loki.

Loki and Tony had entered into an extremely dangerous game, and it was only now that Loki was piecing the clues together. He knew that bond-mates could feel each other's pain. Just as he knew that they could block that pain. But Tony? He was not skilled in that area. He didn't know how to block the bond.

And their bond wasn't complete. Would it even be possible, Loki wondered? Could he block a half-formed bond when his magic constantly screamed at him to connect with Tony?

'Loki?'

Oh, yes. The Midgardian was still there.

'Tony is my mate,' Loki said. He didn't see the harm in telling Rhodes. He hadn't decided if he was going to kill the mortal yet.

Rhodes just stared at him.

'Our magic wishes to bond us,' Loki continued. 'The bond if half-formed; incomplete. Tony does
not know how to shield himself fully. When he is hurt, I feel it.’ 

’He's hurt?’ Rhodes demanded. He looked as though he was about to leap to his feet and go and find Tony that second. It made something warm blossom behind Loki’s heart. He frowned.

’Not badly,’ he muttered and tried to stand. He wobbled on his feet, though, and it took Rhodes no effort at all to push Loki back down.

’You don't look good,’ Rhodes said when Loki glared at him. ’You're pale. And that's saying something; you're the whitest person I've ever met.’

’Why thank you,’ Loki drawled. But he didn't try to stand, instead leaning back against the cushions and running a critical eye over Rhodes. ’How long was I unconscious for?’ he asked.

It was JARVIS who answered; ’One hour and eleven minutes, Mr Laufeyson.’

’And what did Rhodes do?’ Loki asked.

’Carried your ass to the couch,’ Rhodes said. ’I woulda taken you to Tony's bed, but you're heavier than you look.’

’He did not try to contact anyone, Mr Laufeyson,’ JARVIS said, as always one step ahead of the living beings in his care. ’His cellphone has not left his pocket.’

Loki glanced back at Rhodes. ’Why did you not call SHIELD?’

Rhodes rolled his eyes. ’Look, man, I get it; you don't trust me. But I'm not calling SHIELD. I'm not on their side. I don't care what the hell they say, what they threaten me with. I made a promise to myself decades ago that I'd always have Tony's back. That promise hasn't changed.’

’He is a monster,’ Loki repeated. Because it needed to be said. Was Rhodes under some delusion that Tony truly was the victim in this game? Yes, it could be argued that Tony was; SHIELD had struck first, after all.

But neither Tony nor Loki had ever denied what they were. There were a hundred other ways Tony could have gone about his plan to get back at SHIELD for trying to steal from him.

He had chosen murder.

Rhodes needed to know that.

The mortal in question snorted. ’Yeah, Loki, I got that part,’ he said. ’Tony isn't a good person. He never has been. But he's a hero. And a monster. But I don't see him going out and slaughtering innocent people.’

’So you would argue that all SHIELD agents, whether they are privy to the truth or not, are inherently evil?’ Loki asked.

Rhodes sighed. ’No,’ he said. ’I wouldn't say that. But I dunno what's really happening here. I've got some idea of what's going on, but... I need to talk to Tony.’

’Tony is currently unavailable. May I take a message?’

The mortal laughed. ’Okay, so you're back to normal,’ he said. ’Great. Does that mean you'll stop trying to kill me?’
Loki paused at that. On one hand, he very much wanted to murder Rhodes. He wanted to spread the man's insides all over the penthouse. He wanted to take his anger out on soft, vulnerable flesh, and the fact that he would take out a possible threat at the same time was just a bonus.

But. But.

Rhodes was Tony's friend. His oldest, truest friend. Whenever he spoke of Rhodes, it was with a smile on his face, a laugh in his voice as he recounted the messes they'd made or found themselves in.

And Loki had been unconscious for one hour and eleven minutes. Yet here Rhodes was, sitting by his side. No SHIELD agents had busted into the penthouse. Rhodes had not moved to alert anyone to Loki's vulnerable state.

That evidence alone was enough to make Loki sigh and slide down the couch just a tad. 'For now,' he allowed.

Rhodes blew out a breath. 'Good,' he said. 'So, what's the plan?'

'Something that I am not sharing with you.' Loki bared his teeth. 'Perhaps you can ask Tony when you next see him.'

'Okay...' Rhodes said. He almost rolled his eyes. Almost. 'What about the media, then? If Tony wants his kidnapping splashed all over the news, why don't we start it?'

'And how would we do that?' Loki questioned. For all of his experience being “Tony Stark's Boyfriend Logan Thomas”, there was still much about Midgard's media that he did not understand.

'We go to the cops,' Rhodes said, voice firm. He leaned forward and Loki's eyes tracked his every move. 'Fill out an official report. Go to the media. You cry, you tremble, you put on the best goddamn act you ever have. Everyone will be so far up SHIELD's ass that it'll give Tony a better chance to escape.'

'Or they will monitor him all the more,' Loki said.

'True,' Rhodes agreed, 'but we gotta do something. Are you happy just sitting here on your ass?'

Loki glared at the man, but Rhodes was unmoving.

'Well?' he demanded.

A soft chuckle escaped Loki. Well, he thought, I can see why you like him so much, Tony.

'Very well,' Loki said. 'Do what you must do, mortal. But take note.' He stared at Rhodes then, poison in his eyes. 'I will be watching you.'

Rhodes hid his fear well. But it was in the slight quiver in his lips; the way his fingers tensed on his thighs. His eyes were determined, though, and he said, 'I know.'

Loki smiled.

{oOo}
TONY STARK: THE KIDNAPPING OF A CULT ICON

As bizarre as it sounds, it's the truth. Today Tony Stark's boyfriend, Logan Thomas, revealed that Stark has been kidnapped by his former allies, SHIELD. Video footage, as grainy as it is, clearly shows Captain America carrying an unconscious Stark aboard some type of SHIELD military carrier. Not only that, but Thomas has a phone conversation with Captain America himself, revealing that they kidnapped Stark because “he's a danger to the general populous” and “can no longer be trusted to have the Iron Man technology”.

Fans all over the world have rioted via the internet, with dedicated communities hell bent on seeing Stark returned trying to raise money to fund whoever is in charge of locating Stark.

While Logan Thomas thanked the supporters, he said that he's personally seeing to the rescue and funding it out of his own pocket.

The official team who are trying to rescue Tony Stark.

Stark Industries announces that it's suing SHIELD for emotional and physical abuse on behalf of Tony Stark.

Logan Thomas announces the legal avenues he's taking to get his partner back.

Colonel Rhodes: who is he, and what is he doing to get Tony Stark back?

SHIELD silent on Tony Stark matter.

The President weighs in on the Tony Stark Kidnapping.
Tony Stark's partner, 33-year-old Logan Thomas, announced to the gathered press that the multi-billionaire super hero had been kidnapped by his former allies:

“_He received a call in the middle of the night from Pepper Potts. Since then, I haven't seen him, nor heard from him,_” Thomas told those contacted by Stark Industries to attend the announcement. “_I contacted Potts and she ignored my calls. I contacted SHIELD and they, too, ignored my calls._

“That is until Tony's assistant managed to find this._”

Thomas then showed a grainy video depicting an unconscious Tony Stark being carried aboard some type of military carrier by none other than Steven Rogers, aka Captain America.

“_The Helicarrier, _” Thomas said, “_is SHIELD's base of operations. Tony has limited access to the security features aboard. But Lily was able to save this footage from one of their external cameras. I contacted SHIELD when I saw this and they denied it. Right up until they didn’t._”
The absolutely damning piece of evidence was a recording of a phone conversation between Logan Thomas and Steve Rogers. During the phone call, Rogers not only admits to kidnapping Stark, but to doing so for the safety of humanity.

“*They've deluded themselves into thinking that Tony's some sort of monster when he's anything but!*” Thomas said. “*He got out while he could and they're not happy about it. They want his technology and they'll do anything they can do get it!*”

Colonel James Rhodes, Stark's oldest and most trusted friend, took over the rest of the announcement, revealing that a police report had been filed and the air force, at the very least, was looking into what charges can be laid against SHIELD, and what they can do to get Stark back safe and sound.

“In our main priority is getting Tony back safely,” Rhodes said, “and making sure that SHIELD don't do anything to Logan for revealing their plans.”

Since the announcement, people across the globe have been in an uproar. Online communities sprung up in minutes and #SaveTonyStark is trending on Twitter. When Police Commissioner James O'Neill was contacted, his representatives stated that the police are looking into the case and working in tandem with the FBI.

Keep up to date on the story [here](#).

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**Ironwaffle**

can you believe this? Can you FUCKING believe this? Tony stark was kidnapped, HOW IS THIS NOT ON EVERY DAMN CHANNEL?

**tonystarksalover**

It is. Haven't you turned the TV on?

**ironwaffle**

no. i'm stalking the internet hoping that they've found him and he's safe.

**tonystarksalover**

Well believe me; no news program has shut up about it. There's constant updates on the status of the case, pop ups in between shows, and specials every half hour.

**ironwaffle**

and they still haven't gotten him back?

**williamlecter**

Unfortunately not. If you check out Tony Stark's official Twitter, his partner Logan is keeping everyone updated. Apparently the FBI is trying to make contact with SHIELD through official means but it's not going well.
ironwaffle

he's gonna be okay, right? I mean, he was kidnapped in afghanistan...

withenemieslikethat44

you dont become Iron Man without some fighting fucking spirit. tony stark will be okay and bigger and more badass then ever before!
Natasha was one second away from standing and hurling her chair at the TV. Stark’s image had been splashed across every station, every website. The only interruptions came in the form of Loki disguised as Logan Thomas, a few images of the Avengers, SHIELD, and Pepper Potts. And then there was Rhodes, either in his uniform or an expensive suit, loudly and confidently stating that he’d personally find Stark and bring him back.

Her nails dug into her thighs and Natasha closed her eyes when Fury finally flicked the TV off.

‘I think you get the picture,’ Fury said. Clint snorted from beside her, but Natasha didn’t look at him. Once upon a time, Natasha had been able to count on Clint. He’d been unwaveringly loyal to her and even now Natasha didn’t doubt that Clint would risk his life for her, for all of them.

But right now, Clint wasn’t well. First Loki, then Thor; ripping and tearing through his head, supressing memories or pulling them free. Natasha couldn’t even imagine what that would be like. She didn’t blame Clint for his current mood, his skittishness and inability to contribute in any significant way to their problems.

No, she blamed Stark. Stark, with his fucking smirk and his fucking lies. And now his fucking boyfriend and old friend, both out their spreading lies about SHIELD and Rogers. Natasha wanted to know how Loki had gotten the footage of Rogers carrying Stark aboard the Helicarrier. Because no, Rogers hadn’t kidnapped Stark, but he’d carried Stark to a cell before realising what was going on.

‘What are we going to do?’ Natasha finally asked. She opened her eyes to see Fury staring at her. Clint was twitching in his seat and Coulson was at attention by Fury’s side, like always. Rogers and Thor hadn’t been invited to the meeting and Hill was in the cockpit.

‘What do you suggest we do?’ Fury asked.

Natasha didn’t like how tired Fury sounded. While he was still sitting straight, still had fire in his eye, there was a lax set to his shoulders and a twitch in his fingers that she really, really didn’t like.

‘We fight back,’ Natasha said.

‘How?’ Fury asked. ‘Stark has absolute control of the media.’

‘Stark is currently locked up where he belongs,’ Natasha said, ‘Banner, too. All Stark has are Loki and Rhodes.’

‘And Strange,’ Clint murmured. He didn’t look up.

Natasha snorted. ‘We can’t really do anything about him.’ She looked at Fury, half hoping he’d contradict her. He said nothing so she continued. ‘SHIELD have techs,’ she said. ‘We have spies. We have to stoop to Stark’s level and spread information online. We have to leak information about him destroying SHIELD bases and working with Loki. Surely we have enough information to make the media doubt Loki’s story.’

Fury grunted and leaned back in his seat. He wasn’t disagreeing with her, so Natasha knew that he
was taking her words into consideration.

‘We can use Pepper, too,’ Natasha said.

Coulson looked at her. ‘Can we,’ he said. Not a question.

‘We have to use every resource we have,’ Natasha argued. She levelled a glare at him. ‘Stark has to be stopped. Besides, he’s publicly destroyed her reputation. And even if by some miracle Stark gets loose, Pepper can’t exactly go back to her old life. We’re all she has.’

Coulson clearly wasn’t happy. He shifted on his feet and his shoulders had gone tense.

Natasha didn’t really care. Stark had to be stopped. For years he’d used his money and fame to get away with whatever the hell he wanted. His entire childhood had been a clear case of rich white privilege. He’d totalled more cars than Natasha had ever driven in her life. He’d been arrested for almost every petty crime there was. Being a genius didn’t excuse his behaviour and Iron Man had just sent him further over the edge.

Natasha had never liked Stark. But ever since his kidnapping he’d slowly been slipping off the edge. Loki’s sudden appearance on Earth had just cemented what Natasha had always suspected; if given the right motivation and incentive, Tony Stark could be the greatest villain SHIELD had ever faced.

And just look at the monster he’d become.

‘Has Steve seen any of this?’ Clint asked suddenly. Natasha glanced at him. Clint was sitting up, eyes on Fury. Less fidgety then he’d been.

Fury exhaled loudly. ‘He’s aware of some of it,’ he said. ‘Wasn’t ready to share his exact feelings with me.’

‘That’s better than him denying everything like he has been,’ Natasha commented.

Fury nodded.

‘And Thor?’ Clint asked.

‘A little less aware than Rogers,’ Fury said, ‘but he’s seen the footage. He knows what Loki’s doing. I’m more concerned about the conversation he had with Stark.’

Natasha shot up, hands splayed across the table top. ‘He spoke with Stark?’

‘Yes,’ Fury said. ‘During the blackout. I was going to ask about it, but Coulson called my attention to this fucking media shit storm.’

Natasha was silent, thoughts racing. Stark knew everything. He knew everything. Who knows what truths he’d shared with Thor? And who knows what lies he’d told the god.

Stark knew their true plans for Loki. If he’d told Thor-

‘I’m interrogating Stark,’ Natasha said and stood tall. ‘Now.’

Fury didn’t try to stop her. She’d just gotten to the door when it swished open. Natasha put her blank face on when she tilted her head up to meet Thor’s eyes.

‘Thor,’ she said.
The god offered her a nod, his attention on Fury. Natasha turned to glance at her director, one eyebrow inching up. Fury shooed her away with one hand, his own eyes still on Thor. Natasha nodded and stepped past the god.

Before the door closed, she heard Thor say, ‘I want answers, Fury. And I will not be happy if you try and lie.’

Her fingers curled into fists as the door shut with a click. She stormed down the hallway, SHIELD agents jumping out of her path as she stomped past.

Oh, Stark was going to die. And Natasha was going to strangle the life out of him herself.

…

Loki was on his back buried beneath almost every blanket Tony owned. He'd been staring at the ceiling for so long that it had become a blur of grey and black; even the lights JARVIS flashed on the windows every so often, letters or numbers that showed the time and what the weather was like... even that couldn't break his stare.

He had awoken with strange images in his mind; a woman with a much younger Tony, her eyes bright as she fixed his mate's tie. Eyes that filled with tears when Tony uttered, “but we've killed so many people...”

Loki frowned. He didn't know who the woman was, but she reminded Loki of Frigga. So often, in Loki's more desperate times, he had imagined coming face to face with Frigga again. No cell, no chains; just the two of them standing eye to eye, nothing holding them back from each other.

And so often, Loki's fantasies ended with Frigga accepting him no matter what; still loving him despite the blood he had spilled.

But it would not be so, Loki knew. Even if Frigga still loved him, too much had changed. Loki had changed too much. He was not her son and she had lied about it for a millennium.

Sighing, Loki rolled onto his side and buried his head beneath the blankets. All he saw was black, the moon no longer painting everything with a soft glow from overhead. Loki often woke in the middle of the night. But he had grown so used to having Tony by his side; the Midgardian would be on his back, more rarely on his side; Loki knew that he couldn't sleep long on his side with the arc reactor digging into his chest.

The arc reactor... a bright, fierce blue; the colour Loki had been associating with Tony for so long. Not the red of his suit, not even the purple of his magic. The arc reactor's shine was what Loki saw so often. And right now, if Tony was here, Loki would be awash with its glow. He'd be able to reach out and lay a palm flat across it, feel the warmth and the soft vibrations as it hummed beneath his skin.

But Tony wasn't here.

Loki squeezed his eyes shut. His fingers curled into fists in the blankets.

Tony wasn't here.
Loki didn't know when it had happened. But he could no longer sleep without Tony by his side.

Another nightmare had woken him. Tony had sat himself on the floor, not wanting to lean against the glass wall behind his bunk and possibly set off another warning.

One slight touch and he'd be flying back to Midgard in a giant glass cage.

His arms were beginning to throb and Tony wasn't sure how much more he could take. He'd weakened about half of the runes, but the other half were proving far harder. They were more complicated, the runes not anything Tony was familiar with.

He gritted his teeth when his magic, once again, failed to do any damage to the rune beneath Loki's name.

Tony took a deep breath and pulled back. There was no point in forcing his magic. He'd either cause more damage to his arms or drain himself even further. Tony was certain that there was less magic than what he usually had; that whatever his body was replenishing was immediately being stolen by the cuffs.

_Fucking runes and spells_, Tony thought as he retreated to his mindspace. He should have paid more attention when Loki had been trying to teach him about them.

Tony settled his magic back into place and didn't leave immediately. It was nice here; it was dark, it was warm, and he didn't have to worry about the cameras constantly pointed at him. He didn't have to feel the stares of the baby SHIELD agents sent to watch over him. He didn't suddenly realise that he'd been staring across at Bruce's cell and hating himself thoroughly for twenty-four minutes.

No, it was just his magic and him. Physically Tony sighed. Mentally he settled himself just a bit further into his magic. It danced around him, brushed his mind and filled him with warmth. But there was a hint of sadness there; of loneliness.

It took Tony a minute, but- Loki. His magic missed Loki. Fuck, _he_ missed Loki.

Tony sank even further. How long had it been? Days? Not weeks, no; maybe one. Tony was stuck here in this cell fighting some goddamn magical bracelets and Loki was in the Tower alone.

_Was this even fucking worth it?_ he wondered, and not for the first time. He was going to destroy SHIELD either way, but... just the thought of using this against them made him fucking giddy. He could already imagine going to the defence cabinet with this; to the news channels, the magazines, the internet. Reddit alone would tear the information apart and Tony had proof. JARVIS had already downloaded everything.

Tony had already won.

_Now I just have to get these fucking cuffs off_, he mused to himself. Tony felt more warmth spread through him and sank just a little bit more-

A bright flash of blue suddenly lit up his entire being. Tony jolted and almost flung himself out of
his mindscape completely. Instead he hovered just a little bit closer to the physical world, heart hammering and magic shaking ever so slightly.

Okay... what the hell?

He dug back down through his own mind, and... oh.

It was his arc reactor.

It had been so long since Tony had been this far into his mindscape. And it was such a different feeling, being this far in while still keeping the physical world very much real. His arc reactor was a bright, pulsing light, a swirl of blue that tried to fill every single part of his being.

But it didn't; it couldn't, because Tony's magic was already there. Working together, Loki had once said, both separate yet working together to keep Tony safe.

A frown worked its way across Tony's face. I wonder... he thought. Slowly, Tony reached out and touched the element that he'd created and put into his own chest. It curled around his fingers; cold, foreign, yet his. Tony tugged on it and it came easily. His magic slipped away, curled into his centre as Tony travelled back up and out.

He was almost out, almost back in the world. But before he got there Tony searched and found the gentle pulse of foreign magic. The cuffs were strange, damp, just a hint of magic that Tony couldn't identify; powerful yet subdued, only a taste of what the person behind it was capable of.

Tony wanted to find that person and destroy them.

Settling the element in his hands, Tony gently pushed it towards the cuffs.

Almost immediately he heard the hiss, felt the sharp stab of heat. It flared brighter and brighter until it burned through Tony so completely and so suddenly that he physically fell over sideways and shocked himself back into the world.

A euphoria that Tony had never felt before rushed through him. Tony groaned and arched up off the floor as magic made his entire body burn. Tony had had drug trips that weren't even this fucking amazing and he jerked beneath the shock of it, the pleasure, the way his magic sang as it was freed.

Tony didn't know how long it took for him to come back to his senses. When he did, he groaned and sat up slowly. His body tingled and it took every bit of self-control he had not to let his magic explode from his body. Already he could feel it replenishing, healing both him and itself. It was... Tony had no words.

He frowned as he prodded at his wrists. The runes had burned themselves out completely, and now the cuffs were nothing more than heavy, ugly bracelets. Tony wondered if this was what Loki had felt when he'd escaped prison. He never had explained it properly, the two of them too caught up in other dramas to ever revisit that promise.

But Tony knew that Loki hadn't been cuffed; his cell had been the dampener, keeping Loki's magic locked up tight to that one space.

Tony wondered how Loki had survived that long. He'd been locked away for months, his magic trapped to one tiny room. How the hell did he-

His chest wasn't glowing blue.
The realisation was so sudden that it took Tony a full minute to rip back the neckline of his shirt and look.

His arc reactor glowed a steady, vibrant shade of purple. You're okay, Tony told himself even as his heart began to hammer away in his chest. You're okay. The Apple fixed it; there's no shrapnel. You're okay, you're okay, you're okay-

It was such a completely foreign look, so different to what Tony was used to, that he almost lost his fucking shit right that second. The blue glow was like a damn security blanket, the one thing that reminded Tony that he was alive, that he was well, that those fucking assholes hadn't stolen his life from him.

It's fine, he growled at himself. I probably just used all of the element, right? It got me out of those cuffs. JARVIS has control of the Helicarrier. I'm free. I can escape any time I want.

He took a deep breath. Another. It did nothing to stop the panic beginning to crawl up his spine.

'What's wrong, Stark?' Tony jumped and looked up. 'You looked scared.'
Thor waited until Romanov had left the room before starting. ‘I wish to have words with you, Fury,’ he said.

‘So you’ve said,’ Fury replied. He leaned back in his seat, trying to project a sense of ease. But Thor had known far better liars than Nick Fury.

‘You will not lie to me,’ Thor growled. He stepped closer, noted that Coulson did the same. Clint did not move from his seat, but his eyes were alert; he stared at them all, eyes darting between them.

‘You haven’t asked me anything,’ Fury said.

Thor’s fingers twitched toward Mjölnir, but he did not touch his hammer just yet. ‘I spoke with Tony Stark.’

‘I’m aware.’

‘Tony Stark has many secrets,’ Thor continued, ‘and he shared many things.’

‘He’s a liar, Thor.’ Fury shifted forward in his seat, the chair squeaking beneath him. ‘Don’t forget what he is, what he’s done, or who he’s working with.’

‘I care not for any of that,’ Thor said, ‘not right now.’

Fury snorted. ‘Really? So, the deaths of hundred of SHIELD agents don’t matter, Thor?’

‘I am saddened by their deaths,’ Thor said. His skin prickled at the mere thought of what Loki had done with Tony Stark by his side. He saw Clint wince and only just stop from reaching up to rub his temple. But no, Thor couldn’t think about Clint and his need for training. ‘But I am here, first and foremost, to capture my brother and drag him back to Asgard to face punishment for what he’s done.’

‘That’s why we’re all here, Thor,’ Fury retorted. ‘Our number one priority is catching Loki.’

‘And is your priority also to send Loki back to Asgard?’ Thor demanded. He saw Fury’s throat
bob. ‘Or do you have something else planned for my brother?’

Fury swallowed again before saying, voice infuriatingly calm, ‘Our plan’s always been to let you take Loki, Thor. I don’t know what—’

Thor did reach for Mjölnir then and he slammed it into the table. The metal caved in beneath the weight of his hammer and Clint jolted back quickly.

‘I said do not lie to me!’ Thor roared. ‘No tricks, Fury, and no subterfuge! I want the truth!’

‘I’ve given you the truth,’ Fury snarled.

‘Do not think me a fool,’ Thor growled. Anger was crawling up his spine and it took physical effort to rein his abilities in. Clint was whimpering again, face scrunching up in pain. The mortal was doing a remarkable job of not showing the pressure that must be thumping away at his skull. ‘I will not stand here and listen to your lies,’ Thor continued. He took a step forward, noted that Coulson copied his movement. But he had no fear; he did not worry about Coulson’s actions.

Because Thor’s anger had always been a powerful, dangerous thing. And he was barely holding on.

‘You lied to me,’ Thor said. ‘Every time you spoke of your plans, when you agreed that I would take Loki home. You schemed behind my back and tried to use me to capture my brother. You wished to use him!’

‘Thor—’

‘DO NOT LIE!’ Thor roared. ‘YOUR ACTIONS AND WORDS BETRAY YOU, FURY!’

Because Thor had been rethinking everything ever since Stark had told him SHIELD’s true plans. He remembered every whispered conversation between Natasha and Clint. He remembered the guns Clint had been testing for various scientists. He remembered the memories that Clint had tried so desperately to hide but practically threw at Thor when he waded through his mindscape.

And right now, he saw the tension in Fury’s shoulders; the sweat beading across his top lip; the way his eye darted to Coulson, checking that his bodyguard was still there.

‘You plan to use Loki to make weapons,’ Thor growled.

And there it was- the jolt of Fury’s body as he realised that Thor knew the truth.

Thor launched himself at the mortal. Coulson bounced into his shoulder but was sent flying, unable to contend with Thor’s bulk and strength. Thor slammed Mjölnir into the floor and grabbed Fury by the throat. It took little effort to throw Fury into the wall and pin him there. It took all of his self-control not to squeeze the life out of the man.

‘You dare,’ Thor growled, ‘you dare to even think about torturing a Prince of Asgard!’

‘Thor!’ Fury gasped against his grip.

‘Loki is a Prince!’ Thor shouted. ‘He is my brother and a son of Odin All-Father, King of Asgard! How dare you even think to use him for your own gain!’

‘He’s killing my people!’ Fury snarled.

‘His fate is not up to you!’ Thor shouted. ‘His fate will be decided by the All-Father and his
Council! You have no right to Loki’s blood or his magic! You do not even realise the laws you planned to break! To torture a mage in such a way, to steal their magic, is a crime punishable by death! Only being Midgardian would save you from that fate. But it will not save you from the All-Father’s wrath!

He slammed Fury into the wall once more before dropping him. Thor’s breath was ragged, and every fibre of his being was seething. He bent only far enough to pick up Mjölnir and point it at Fury.

Thor heard the click of a weapon, and Coulson shouted, ‘Stand down, Thor!’

‘Phil!’ Clint shouted back.

Thor paid neither of them any attention. He stared down at Fury, lips pressed thin as the man pulled himself into a sitting position. ‘You pathetic little mortal,’ Thor growled. ‘You will regret the day that you ever thought you could go against our bargain. When this is over and Loki and Stark are in Asgard, your fate as well as that of SHIELD and Midgard will be discussed.’

‘You can’t…’ Fury coughed, throat raw, ‘you can’t take Stark.’

‘He is a mage and a god, therefore a citizen of Asgard,’ Thor informed him. He saw Fury’s eye narrow. ‘Whatever you had planned for him will not come to fruition. Loki and Stark are my problem and will be dealt with in Asgard.’

‘If you think-’ Fury was cut off by an alarm, loud and ear-piercing. Thor almost dropped Mjölnir but caught the strap before it could thunk to the floor. ‘Shit.’

‘What is that?’ Thor had to shout to be heard over the siren.

‘The cells,’ Coulson shouted back. Thor turned to look at him, but Coulson was already sprinting out the door, Clint close behind. Fury brushed past Thor then and tried to tear himself free when Thor grabbed him by the arm.

‘The cells have been breached, Thor!’ Fury snapped.

Thor’s grip tightened. ‘This is not over.’

Fury said nothing and Thor let him go. The mortal quickly made his way from the room and Thor stood where he was, silent, body still aching with rage.

But no, he would have to deal with that later. Because Thor could feel foreign magic, a powerful, heady thing that made his head spin.

‘Stark,’ he breathed and followed after the SHIELD agents.

Romanov was standing on the other side of the glass. She had a blank look on her face, had her arms folded over her chest; she looked as she usually did, as though she didn't have a care in the world.

Tony smiled even as his heart threatened to leap from his chest. ‘So, who's next?’ he asked.
'Rogers? Coulson?' He stood slowly and was glad when his legs didn't shake. Focus on Romanov, he told himself.

'What did Thor want?' Romanov asked when Tony had reached her.

'Thor?' Tony whistled. 'Haven't seen Thor since I was kidnapped. Why, is he okay with this? Gotta say that from what I've heard and seen, Asgard is kinda fucked up.'

'Cut the crap, Stark,' Romanov growled. Her eyebrows were furrowed, and Tony was sure that she was digging her fingers into her ribs; anything to stop herself from smashing through the glass and strangling Tony right then and there. Tony made sure to grip his own shaking hands behind his back. 'Just drop the act; just stop.'

Tony shook his head. 'I don't think I will, Romanov. Let's not forget that this is your fault.'

'My fault? Or SHIELD's?' she asked.

Shrugging a shoulder, Tony said, 'Or the Avengers; the World Security Council; Fury himself. Really, take your pick, because I fucking blame all of you.'

Romanov unfolded her arms. Her fingers curled into fists at her sides as she glared at him. 'Is that how you sleep at night?' she said. 'Is that how you manage to live with yourself, Stark? Do you tell yourself every day that you just can't help yourself; that this never would have happened if it wasn't for us?'

'And why shouldn't I?' Tony asked.

'Because we both know that this is who you really are,' Romanov growled. Anger was beginning to slip onto her features. Tony's magic quivered with excitement and his heart stopped racing quite as fast. 'If it wasn't SHIELD, somebody else would have pushed you over the edge; you were always going to be this.'

'And what's this?'

'A monster,' Romanov stated.

Tony chuckled; a small thing, soft, and Tony even reached up to wipe away an imaginary tear. 'Were you hoping to get to me with that? I got bad news for you, Romanov.' He took a step closer to the glass. There was no more than three inches between them now, both glaring through the barrier at the other. 'I know that I'm a monster,' Tony said. 'You? SHIELD? You're the ones who've convinced yourselves that you're the good guys. At least I can admit that I'm not a hero. And you're all going to get exactly what you fucking deserve.'

Romanov's eyebrows jumped. 'So, the punishment for theft is death? Is that what you're telling me, Stark?'

'It is when people try to steal from me,' Tony said. 'I am going to kill each and every one of you for what you've done.'

A grin suddenly lit up her face and Romanov rocked back on her heels. 'Thank you so much for sharing that with me, Mr Stark. I'll be sure to pass it along to everybody I know.'

Tony smiled. His heart finally settled. 'You told me to drop the act,' he said. His magic beat a rhythm beneath his skin. His arms throbbed as his wrists finished healing. 'This is why you and Barton are so close, isn't it? He's the one person you can truly be yourself around.' He sighed.
gustily. "Cause I gotta tell you; after spending an entire goddamn day pretending to like you people, nothing beats going home and dropping into bed with Loki.'

Romanov's eyes widened; she clearly hadn't expected that much honesty, and Tony's grin widened.

'What's wrong, Romanov?' he asked, tone taunting. 'You look scared.'

'I'm not afraid of you,' she retorted.

'You should be,' he whispered. 'JARVIS.'

There was a hiss, the lights flickered, and then the door to Tony's cell slid open.

He was calm.

Romanov stormed into the cell and Tony met her halfway. She swung first but Tony ducked it, slid under the elbow she tried to jab back and into his head. He twisted to the right and grabbed the next arm that flew his way. He easily wrapped a hand around Romanov's forearm, fingers digging in and drawing a sharp, surprised hiss from Romanov's lips.

Tony grinned when she looked at him. 'You'll have to do better than that, mortal.'

Romanov pulled her arm back towards herself, slipped her leg between Tony's at the same time and kicked up.

Tony barely managed to dodge the knee to the crotch. He had to let go of Romanov and she spun away, dropped to the floor and again tried to sweep his legs out from beneath him. Tony jumped over the first leg, stepped over the next, and kicked Romanov in the face.

She flew backwards further into the cell, hit the floor with a thud and slid to a stop just before the glass. Blood gushed from her nose and when she sat up, she looked equal parts woozy and furious.

Tony flexed his fingers and lightly balanced himself on the balls of his feet. 'I said better,' he taunted.

Romanov got to her feet and scrubbed blood from her lips. They circled each other then, each staring the other down and looking for an opening, a weakness, anything that would give them the edge and end this fight swiftly.

She moved first.

Tony dodged the first few blows, ducking and twisting and using every trick Loki had taught him to avoid everything Romanov threw at him.

But she was still faster than him. She jabbed Tony in the gut, winded him, and then kicked him in the head with a booted foot. Tony hit the floor and rolled back onto his feet; he ignored the throb in his skull, the way his vision briefly swam, in favour of keeping an eye on Romanov. His magic flared up and Tony listened to it, ducked and spun and ducked again. He threw a punch to his left and felt satisfaction course through him when his fist connected with soft flesh.

Romanov stumbled back, surprise in her eyes as she licked blood from her bleeding lip.

'Have you forgotten what I am?' Tony asked.

Her eyes narrowed. 'I never will,' Romanov snarled.
She rushed him but Tony was ready. He slid back on his feet, twisted to his right and ducked a foot, a fist, another foot, and slammed himself straight into her torso. It had worked on Loki and it worked on Romanov; she hadn't expected his full weight and fell like a stone, air knocked from her lungs when Tony landed atop her.

He straddled her hips to keep her pinned and punched her in the face two, three times, again when she failed to move or fight back.

Tony pulled his fist back, ready to land another blow, when Romanov's knees hit his ass and sent him tumbling forward.

He hit the floor at an awkward angle and couldn't help the groan of pain he let out; he'd landed on his wrist and hissed when he tried to use it to get back to his feet.

Romanov kicked him in the gut and Tony spun through the air before hitting the floor again. He coughed, wondered if that was blood or if he was just seeing things.

'You're a god, huh?' Romanov jeered. 'I'm not impressed.'

She tried to kick him again, but Tony rolled out of the way and back to his feet. His wrist throbbed, but already his magic was healing it. In fact, his magic was pressed against every damn inch of his skin. Tony didn't know where he began and it did, didn't know if he'd ever be able to tuck it away again.

He felt ten times his usual size, as though his magic alone had expanded and made him ten feet tall. He stared down Romanov as she swayed ever so slightly on her feet, entire body tensed for battle.

Tony grinned. 'Give me a minute,' he said, 'I'm slow to start. But I always finish with a bang.'

Once again it was Romanov who moved first. Loki had taught him to never throw the first punch; to always let the enemy close in and leave themselves open to attack.

Because Tony knew Romanov. He'd studied how she fought. He knew just how she angled her body when she was trying to-

Tony dodged the first few blows, using a forearm to block one fist, his hands to throw the other wide. He jabbed Romanov in the ribs one, twice, before she managed to get behind him and punch him in the back of the head. Tony tilted forward, senses briefly stunned, and his magic lurched within him just before large, muscular thighs wrapped around his neck.

Romanov took him to the floor with a single twist of her hips. Tony's head smacked into the concrete and he saw stars even as he dug his fingers into Romanov's leg, trying to pull them free.

Romanov squeezed harder.

'They won't blame me for killing you,' she hissed as Tony choked and spluttered. Spit dribbled down his chin as he wiggled on the floor trying to get free. His chest was beginning to burn, and panic was quickly settling in.

*Calm, calm,* Tony tried to tell himself. *You're better than her!*

He was stronger than her, too. He was a fucking god and she was a mortal with enhanced features.

So why the fuck couldn’t he break free?
'I bet they'll even thank me,' Romanov continued.

Panic clawed at him, think and heavy, drowned Tony’s senses until he couldn’t see.

'And I'll get to see the look on Loki's face,' Romanov said, voice taunting, 'when I tell him that you're dead.'

There would be a boom; a catastrophic explosion. The people of Midgard would tremble in terror as Loki reigned the apocalypse down on them.

Because they'd taken his mate; they'd killed Tony.

Loki would destroy himself and take Midgard with him.

Tony's control broke. His magic exploded, engulfing the entire room and sending Romanov flying. She hit the glass wall and went straight through it, tumbling to a halt somewhere just beyond the cell.

Tony's lungs screamed their relief when he inhaled. He rolled onto his front and coughed as he tried to get as much air as physically possible into his body. His head slowly stopped spinning as he got onto all fours. It took a minute before he could look up.

Romanov was already sitting, blood matting her hair to her face. She stared at Tony with wide eyes, fresh blood dripping past her eyelashes.

Tony's attention was snatched by a flash of red; his gaze jerked upward, and his eyes widened when he saw the lights around the cell glowing a bright blood red.

What did Fury say?

“Green light is warning one... when the lights in that cell begin to flash red... when they flash red, you're dropped.”

Tony's eyes dropped back to Romanov. She was already beginning to grin, realisation setting in at the same time that it did for Tony.

'JARVIS!' Tony shouted as he stumbled to his feet. He skidded across concrete and glass, slipped on a large shard and fell to the floor again. He felt a fresh sting in his hand but ignored it as he scrambled for safety. 'JARVIS, shut off the-'

A klaxon sounded, the alarm slamming into Tony and making his ears scream. A rumble tore through the cell and sent Tony back to the floor just an inch shy of the door. He pushed himself back up, got a hand on the door frame, and met Romanov's eyes-

The cell dropped.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: I have gathered you all here today to remind you that SHIT IS GETTING REAL.

That is all.
Chapter 76

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Beg me for mercy, admit you were toxic

You poisoned me just for

Another dollar in your pocket

Now I am the violence, I am the sickness

Won't accept your silence

Beg me for forgiveness”

– Blood//Water [Grandson]

How long until I splatter against the ground?

The gravitational pull will speed up-

How dare Romanov even think she could-

Loki, Loki, Loki!

Tony’s mind was in shambles, one thought quickly swallowed by another and another and then fear, an all-consuming terror as he was pulled back down to earth. The cell rotated as the wind battered it from all sides, and Tony could do little to stop it from sending him slamming into one wall, then other, glass cracking when the cell finally seemed to find its path and stop rocking.

He was plastered against it, wind slapping his face and almost ripping his clothes from his body.

No, Tony thought, I won’t die like this. A scream ripped itself from his lips despite himself, his muscles locking up as a steady chant of you’re gonna die started up in the back of his head. ‘NO!’ Tony screamed out loud, ‘I’M A GOD, I’M FUCKING IRON MAN, I WON’T DIE LIKE THIS!’

His words were ripped away by the wind, by the world around him. Because what did the world care? He was nothing compared to gravity, to the pull the earth had on him. Man could climb to great heights, but the earth would always rip them back down.

I’m a god! Tony shouted in his own mind. He wouldn’t die, not like this. Not with everything he still had to accomplish, not with Bruce still stuck in that cage and the Avengers still alive, not with Loki-

Loki. Tony’s eyes snapped open. All he could see was the ceiling of the cell, his path to earth blocked by metal and concrete. Loki would snap. What little sanity the God of Mischief was clinging onto would be shredded if Tony died like this.
Loki would burn Midgard to ashes. He would take out his revenge on the Avengers, on SHIELD, on every mortal who dared to live while his mate had been sent to Hell. Nothing would be safe from him. Nobody would survive.

Because Loki would destroy himself if it meant he got the last laugh.

And Tony couldn’t- he fucking wouldn’t- let Loki go out like that.

‘No,’ Tony snarled against the world trying to pull him down, ‘that’s not fucking happening.’

His magic bubbled. Tony’s fingers tingled. The cell rocked ever so slightly and something inside Tony snapped.

Suddenly there was a galaxy behind his eyes, a depth and darkness that Tony had only ever glimpsed once before inside a being far more experienced and deadly then he himself could ever hope to be.

But there was darkness inside him, too. A little galaxy that was ever expanding, new stars winking into existence as old ones exploded in a fiery show of blood and tears. Nothing and everything existed all at once, Tony was there and he wasn’t, millennia of knowledge winked in and out of existence, raw power swam all around him-

Tony latched onto that power and bent it to his will. Because he was Tony fucking Stark and nothing, nothing, would get the best of him, nothing would defeat him, he would go down by his own hand and nothing fucking else.

Tony pulled, he twisted, and everything exploded in a shower of sparks. He was pulled back through the tunnel, through darkness and then galaxies, but it didn’t hurt, it didn’t compress and tug and pull. Because Tony was in charge, he was the fucking galaxy, and it was all at his mercy.

He hit the floor hard, the metal beneath him scorched in an instant. Tony’s head snapped up. He was back in the Helicarrier, in the very room he had pictured, in the very spot he had ordered the world to put him back in. He grinned even as his body quivered beneath the weight it now carried.

Tony heard running footsteps as he shakily got to his feet. When he looked up Fury was storming into the room, as always surrounded by the Avengers. There was a dozen or so SHIELD agents rushing behind him, all with guns already up and pointed his way.

No.

‘No,’ Tony whispered. He felt a surge of magic within him. His entire body sang, and the SHIELD agents were all blown backwards by an unseeable force, their bodies smacking into the floor and rolling down the hallway.

Silence fell. Not a spark of magic had appeared; not a flash of purple, no giant wave of pure energy. Just the SHIELD agents tossed back by the sheer force of Tony’s mounting hysteria.

‘STARK!’ Fury roared.

Tony could read the shock, the confusion and horror, all warring on Fury’s face. ‘I don’t feel like playing with your pets right now,’ Tony said.

‘This won’t end well for you,’ Fury snarled.

Tony almost laughed. A manic look must have spread across his face because a knife slide into
Romanov’s hand and Hill’s fingers twitched towards her gun.

‘Really?’ Tony said. He spread his arms wide and they shook ever so slightly, from anger or exhaustion or something else, Tony didn’t know. He couldn’t think. ‘Isn’t this what you wanted, Fury?’ he demanded. ‘You called me a monster, well-’ a grin cracked across his face, shaky and hard. ‘Here I am.’

Fury raised his hands ever so slightly, one sane man standing against the force of an enraged god. ‘Just stop,’ he said, voice trying for soothing but grating Tony all the same.

‘Stop? You want me to stop?’ Tony demanded. ‘And do what, Fury? Go back in that cage? You want me to stop so you can lock me up again, throw away the key and forget I ever fucking existed?!’ He was screaming by the end, voice hoarse from disuse and shaking with pure rage. ‘No judge, no jury for SHIELD’s enemies, am I right? Who the fuck made you God??’

‘I could ask you the same thing,’ Fury said. He wasn’t shouting, hadn’t moved a single inch. He just stared Tony down and Tony… well, Tony was breaking the fuck down. His magic roared within him, his hands shook, and his vision was becoming distorted. There was a rushing in his ears and for a brief second the one sane part left in him questioned if the teleportation hadn’t knocked a few things loose.

It was quickly swallowed by Tony’s all-consuming hate.

Tony grinned sharply. ‘I think we all know the answer to that question- I SAID NO!’

Rogers had raised his shield to throw it, but it was yanked from his hand before he could send it flying at Tony. It clattered to the floor and skittered away, the sound loud and echoing in the metal room.

Rogers watched it go before turning sharply on Tony, eyes wide and mouth gaping.

Tony raised one jittery hand to waggle his finger at Rogers. ‘I said no,’ he repeated, voice back under control. He was practically vibrating from the amount of magic coursing through him.

Fury finally took a step forward. Just one. Hill went with him, Coulson backing her up. The Avengers remained still. ‘How do you see this ending for you, Stark?’ Fury questioned. ‘You gonna kill all of us right here, right now?’

‘I was thinking about it,’ Tony said, voice ringing with truth.

Fury’s throat bobbed. ‘And how do you figure you’re gonna do that?’ he said. ‘Cause from where I’m standing, you haven’t beaten a single person in this room in hand-to-hand combat. Your boyfriend isn’t here to help you. In fact, I haven’t heard from him since we caught you.’ And here he smiled, teeth bright and clenched together. ‘Seems you picked the wrong team, Stark.’

Licking his lips, Tony said, ‘Well unlike you, I don’t need other people to fight my battles.’

‘It doesn’t take much to destroy a madman, Stark,’ Fury said. ‘And we’ve done it before.’

‘Go on, then,’ Tony taunted.

Nobody moved. Not a word was said. Tony and Fury stared each other down, the Avengers, Hill and Coulson all staring too. Bruce was silent in his cage.

A shot rang out and Tony’s right shoulder jerked backwards. He felt no pain, not even when he
reached up with his left hand to press his fingers against the tear in his shirt. It came away a deep dark red, sticky, and Tony stared down at it.

‘You know, Hill,’ Tony commented as he ran his thumb over his fingers, ‘you weren’t very high on my list.’ He squeezed his fingers together. Fat drops of blood squished together and ran down his skin. Tony’s head jerked up, gaze locked on Hill. ‘Now you’re topping that list.’

He raised his good hand, still stained with blood, and pointed it at the woman.

Tony smiled. ‘I guess I am playing with your pets, Fury.’

‘No!’ Tony didn’t move as Barton skidded to a halt in front of Hill. ‘No, nobody else has to die!’ Barton shouted.

‘Do you really think I won’t kill you too, Barton?’ Tony demanded. ‘You’re all on my list.’

‘Nobody else has to die today,’ Barton repeated. ‘Fury was right; you can’t kill all of us, not right now.’ His eyes flicked down Tony’s body. Tony wondered what he looked like in that moment. ‘You can run,’ Barton continued. ‘Teleport, or whatever the fuck you did before. Just run. This fight doesn’t have to happen today.’

Ton’s smile widened. ‘But you see, Barton; I really want it to.’

He caught the knife that Romanov threw, stopping it millimetres from his left shoulder. ‘Really, Romanov?’ he demanded.

Rogers was already advancing forward, without his shield but fists clenched together. Tony threw his right hand up and a wave of magic erupted. It threw Barton and the others back, knocking them all into the wall and sending them down, at least briefly.

Tony ducked Rogers’ first swing, his magic screaming and invading every inch of his being. Tony sank back into it and let it jerk him back again, let his head and shoulder drop under Rogers’ next intended blow. He pulled his right arm back and slammed the bottom of his palm into Rogers’ chin.

The smack was loud in Tony’s ears and shocked Rogers into stepping back. A quick elbow, up and into Rogers’ left cheek. He stumbled again and Tony spun the knife in his fingers, gripped the handle and thrust.

The blade sank into Rogers’ belly. The captain let out a startled gasp, eyes wide and locked onto Tony’s as Tony stood tall. Tony dug the knife in that bit deeper, twisted and grinned when Rogers let out a grunt of pain.

Tony took a step closer. Rogers didn’t move. ‘Say hi to Howard for me,’ Tony hissed before yanking the blade free on a twist. Rogers coughed and Tony sent him flying backwards with a kick to the gut.

Barton and the others were getting back to their feet, shaky and disorientated. Tony’s magic had separated Hill from them, just by a bit, and Tony teleported across the room. He flipped the knife in his hand again, the blade jutting out from the back of his hand. He loomed over Hill and the woman bit back a scream when she spun on her ass to face him.

‘You shouldn’t have shot me,’ Tony muttered.

As Tony raised the knife Barton shuffled between them. Tony laughed at the dazed look on his
face, the pain flashing through his eyes and the blood trickling down his temple.

Gritting his teeth, Barton said, ‘You’ll have to kill me first.’

Tony smiled. ‘Fine by me.’

*Mjölnir* whistled through the air and slammed into Tony’s left shoulder. He was thrown back and hit the floor hard, rolling across the metal and leaving a splattered trail of blood in his wake.

The hammer swung back into Thor’s grasp. The Thunder god stared Tony down as Tony tried to get to his knees. ‘I meant what I said, Stark,’ Thor said. ‘I will take you and Loki both back to Asgard. Your fight ends here.’

Footsteps were pounding towards them. Tony could see more SHIELD agents now making their way down the corridor, no longer kept back by Tony’s waning power.

So he gave Thor a grin full of blood. ‘You’ll have to catch me first,’ he hissed. His right hand shot out and a wave of magic spewed from his palm. Thor tried to duck but a flick of Tony’s fingers had it wrapping around Thor’s left side. Tony yanked his hand to the right and tossed Thor into Barton and the others.

His left hand now, fingers twisting as Tony slowly got to his feet. With a mighty *push* he flung the Avengers down the hallway and into the approaching SHIELD agents. Romanov hit the door frame instead and collapsed onto the floor, unmoving. Barton went with her, rolling off of her unmoving body and plastering himself to the wall, eyes watering from the force of Tony’s power.

More magic. More. Sweat broke out over Tony’s face and he gritted his teeth. Blood and magic pulsed angrily beneath his skin and Tony’s arms *shook* with the force he was pushing through them. The entire corridor, the doors, glowed a deep, bright purple. Tony slammed his hands together and the doors squealed as they were forced shut.

More, more, more, more. Tony’s magic sank into the metal and warped it. It twisted beneath his will and mangled itself together, over and over, under and in, until both doors were large, tangled messes of metal.

As soon as Tony released them, he collapsed. He managed to catch himself on his hands but his arms shook beneath his own weight. There wasn’t enough air getting into his lungs and Tony coughed, coughed some more, coughed until blood was splattering the floor and dribbling down his chin.

‘Tony… TONY!’

Tony’s head jerked up. His vision swam and an almighty *heat* encased his mind.

Bruce was staring at him. Bruce, his *friend*, still trapped in that cage.

*My fault*, Tony thought. He tried to stand but collapsed before he could get to one knee. He coughed up more blood.

‘Tony, you need to run,’ Bruce said. Someone was pounding on the doors. A metallic screech rang out.

‘No,’ Tony gasped. His voice was thick with blood. ‘I’m not leavin’ you.’

‘What are you gonna do?’ Bruce demanded. Tony managed to look back up. Bruce didn’t look
hurt, or angry. A small smile was pasted on his face. ‘You need to run,’ he repeated. ‘You’re no good to me dead.’

It was getting harder to breathe. Tony couldn’t focus. *I need… I have to… Loki…*

‘Stark.’

That was Barton. Tony could barely see him through the fog that had descended over him.

Barton was in the corner near the doors, body angled over Romanov’s.

‘Stark,’ Barton repeated. Tony blinked at him. ‘Just run,’ the mortal said.

The doors were twisting themselves free- no, Tony thought sluggishly, SHIELD was forcing them open. They squealed and shrieked, and Tony saw an arm snake through, another, an entire body.

‘RUN!’ Bruce shouted.

Tony got to one knee… another… he ignored SHIELD and looked at Bruce as finally, *finally*, his body did what he wanted and got to its feet. ‘I’m still bringing you home,’ Tony slurred.

Bruce smiled. ‘I know you will.’

‘STARK!’ Fury roared as he stumbled through the mangled doors.

Tony gave the director one brief look before stepping back- - the void sucked him in, leaving nothing but a scorch mark behind.

…

‘SON OF A FUCKING BITCH!’ Fury was rabid as he turned on the SHIELD agents who had stormed the room with him. ‘FIND HIM!’ he roared before turning his attention on Bruce. ‘Where is he?’

Bruce smiled. It was all teeth. ‘Why don’t you come in here and ask me?’

Fury growled something under his breath and turned on his heels. ‘Find out what he knows,’ he ordered one agent. The others all hustled to Clint’s side, the archer trying to get Natasha into his arms. ‘Barton, you and Romanov get to the infirmary, now!’

Clint wasted no time in doing as asked. With one last look tossed Bruce’s way, he shuffled out of the room with a few agents’ help.

Six had remained behind, all crowded around Bruce’s glass tank.

‘Talk, Banner, and we’ll go easy on you,’ one of them said.

God, he sounded so young. Bruce tried to swallow back his anger. The Other Guy wasn’t pleased. Tony hadn’t just looked hurt, he’d looked *deranged*. Bruce had never seen that look on his face, had never heard that tone of voice pass Tony’s lips. It was almost as though Loki had taken over his body and spoken through him; the way Tony had looked down on them all, the power radiating
from him, the animal look to his eyes…

Bruce shivered and the Other Guy whimpered. It was small, it was soft, but still… what kind of predator had Tony become, to make the Other Guy nervous? What kind of power had Tony been keeping locked up all this time?

‘BANNER!’

That was a different agent and the Other Guy snapped his teeth. He didn’t like being cooped up, didn’t like being caged, but Bruce had managed to keep him locked up. Tony might blame himself for Bruce’s current captivity, but Bruce didn’t… well, not a lot, at any rate. Tony would come back for him, and in the end that was all that mattered. Bruce was sure that a mountain of gifts and apologies would follow as soon as he was back home.

Home, the Other Guy grunted. Want. Go home.

Yeah, Bruce thought, me too.

‘You have six seconds to talk or—’

‘Or what?’ Bruce interrupted. He blinked and finally focused on the agents, on the young men and women pointing automatic weapons his way. ‘No, really,’ he said when they all hesitated. ‘What are you going to do if I don’t answer you?’

One of the agents growled out, ‘We drop you.’

‘Do it,’ Bruce said. ‘Go on,’ he egged them on, ‘see how the Other guy deals with a little fall. I’ll be fine. But he’ll definitely remember it.’ Bruce could feel the Other Guy creeping along his skin. His face was filling out, skin becoming rougher, always a sign that he was more green than human in that current moment. ‘DO IT!’ the Other Guy roared.

One of the agents was thrown forward, a large, jagged blade sticking through his chest. Blood splattered across the glass and Bruce’s cell was suddenly bathed in yellow light; warning two.

Bruce blinked rapidly as the agent, very much dead, slid down the glass and crumpled to the floor in a bloody heap.

Loki was standing behind the gathered agents, tall and sheathed in his purple and silver armour. There was a blue glow to him that Bruce had never seen before. He looked wild in that moment, more beast than Bruce had ever been. Blood had flecked his face and Loki licked a drop from the corner of his mouth.

‘Where,’ Loki breathed, ‘is my mate?!’

Nobody answered him. The agents all brought up their guns and-

It was a blood bath. Bruce ducked and tried to keep himself small, tried to keep the Beast in, as he watched Loki slaughter the SHIELD agents.

He was absolute rage, burning hot and bright, nothing like the usual cool, calculated chaos. Loki snapped and ripped like a rabid dog. Every human who came up against him fell to the floor screaming before being silenced forever. They were slashed and stabbed and booted and stomped, Loki showing absolutely no mercy as he cut them all down.

Only when they were dead, only when they were in pieces, did Loki look up. He was covered in
blood. Bits of SHIELD agents littered the floor and there was more blood dripping down the glass walls of Bruce’s tank. Loki was breathing heavily, eyes wide and manic.

‘Where is he?’ Loki demanded.

Bruce licked his lips. He tried to get words out, but nothing happened.

Loki stormed towards him. ‘Answer me, Banner, I will not ask again!’ Loki shouted. ‘Where is Tony?!”

‘I don’t know,’ Bruce said. The Other Guy curled away when Loki got closer. There was a manic glint in his eyes that Bruce had never seen before. ‘I really don’t,’ Bruce added when Loki looked like he was about to go supernova. ‘He disappeared. His cell was dropped, and he just appeared there, right where you’re standing.’

Loki paused.

‘I told him to run,’ Bruce said. He swallowed. ‘And he did.’

Loki’s breathing was ragged. His fingers curled tighter around his sceptre and Bruce was positive he was going to snap it.

Before either of them could say anything more, SHIELD agents once again stormed the room, all with guns up and aimed at Loki. Fury, Coulson and Clint followed up the rear, quickly followed by Steve and Thor.

Natasha was the only one not present.

‘STAND DOWN, LOKI!’ Fury shouted. He had his own weapon, one of those guns that Coulson had used on Loki during the invasion.

Loki’s face twisted into a smile. It was dark, cruel, and his eyes held nothing but rage as he pointed his sceptre at the man.

‘Mark my words, Fury,’ Loki snarled, ‘if my mate is dead, I will decimate this entire planet. No super soldier, no prince, no power in the entire Nine Realms will stop me.’

‘Valhalla,’ Thor breathed, eyes wide at Loki’s words.

With that said Loki vanished, only to reappear behind Bruce. Bruce jolted when Loki gripped his shoulder- hard, too hard- and then he was sucked back, back through nothing, darkness, space, he was being squeezed through a vacuum, he couldn’t breathe-

-Bruce landed in a heap on a cold concrete floor. He gasped and fresh air flooded his lungs, made the Other Guy stop panicking and roaring just that little bit. There was movement all around him, but Bruce couldn’t see, couldn’t think-

-a hand grabbed him by the arm and dragged him up. Bruce was pushed onto something- a sofa? - and a cold drink was pressed into his hands.

‘You’ll be okay,’ someone said before turning away.

Bruce blinked rapidly and the scene before him finally unfolded. ‘Oh, God,’ he choked out and dropped the glass. It shattered against the floor and DUMMY spun into action, bumping into a table as it tried to clear the mess but just got in the way. Bruce pushed the little robot aside as he
rushed across Tony’s workshop.

Tony was in the middle of it, flat on his back and covered in blood. There was an impressive puddle of it beneath him, sticking in some places but still fresh in others.

Doctor Strange was crouched over him, hands soaked red but still moving quickly. Loki was on Tony’s other side and Strange’s friend, Wong, was staring at Tony over Strange’s shoulder.

‘He’ll be okay,’ Strange said. He’d clearly said the words before, because he added, ‘Loki, he’ll be okay.’

‘How do you know?’ Loki demanded. But he didn’t sound angry to Bruce; desperate, distraught, yes. But not angry.

‘I’m a doctor,’ Strange muttered. There were odd green rings circling his arms, little symbols twisting and spinning around his cloak. ‘And I know you told me not to use this, but I figured you wouldn’t mind if it saved Tony’s life.’

Bruce had no idea what was going on. But even as he watched the wound in Tony’s shoulder was closing. Something was moving beneath his skin. Suddenly a crumpled bullet tore its way free, leaking fresh blood across Tony’s skin.

‘There we go,’ Strange said as Wong caught the bullet and put it aside. ‘Now we just have to close him up.’ Tony’s skin was doing it even as Strange spoke; flesh knitted itself back together like it had never been torn, leaving behind a smooth, unblemished tan.

As soon as his skin had closed Tony gasped; a huge, chest-heavy sound that had him arching upward before falling back to the floor. He shuddered as he took deeper breaths, face twisted in pain and eyes closed.

It was a minute or two before Strange stopped moving. He slumped back on his heels; exhaustion hung heavily on his features. ‘He’ll be fine,’ the doctor said. He leaned forward and tapped Tony’s arc reactor. ‘I can’t change that, though.’

*Oh*, Bruce thought. Tony’s arc reactor was glowing a rather startling shade of purple.

Loki grimaced. ‘I will deal with that later. Are you sure-’

‘Yes,’ Strange interrupted. He met Loki’s eyes. ‘I promise, Loki. He’ll be out of it for a bit; I have no idea how much magic he used. But he will be fine.’

Loki nodded and his gaze dropped back to Tony. ‘Stephen,’ he murmured. Strange jolted in shock. ‘Thank you.’ Loki glanced back up at him. ‘I will never be able to repay this debt to you.’

Strange blinked rapidly. ‘Uh… it’s… fine?’ he tried.

Loki managed a weak smile, but his attention was once more caught by Tony.

Okay… *okay*. Bruce’s heartbeat was finally beginning to calm, and the Other Guy seemed pleased by the reassurances that Tony would be okay. That was… fine.

‘I need a drink,’ Bruce muttered. Words he never thought he’d ever say again, but life had been very difficult over the past… hour? *Let’s go with hour.*

‘I agree with you, Doctor Banner.’
Bruce turned at the words. ‘Huh,’ was all he could manage. Because while he hadn’t expected Colonel Rhodes to be sitting on Tony’s sofa, not much more could shock him at this point in his life.

Rhodes smiled. ‘Welcome home, Doctor Banner.’

‘Nice to be home,’ Bruce said. ‘Call me Bruce.’

Colonel Rhodes chuckled.

Chapter End Notes

**Author's Note:** *twiddles thumbs* So... um... hi. Damn, how long has it been? I would apologise for the wait, but in all honesty I just can't. My life has been incredibly fucked up over the last few months and it's been a struggle just to keep my head above water. But good things eventually came my way, and some really nasty shit settled down. I'm in a good place mentally now and I can finally get back to writing. I've felt like a huge part of me has been missing and now it's back. Now Tony and Loki are back. Or, rather, my versions of Tony and Loki are back.

Also, I have of course seen **Endgame**. And damn. All I can say is damn.

Anywho, hopefully the chapter was at least worth the wait. Thank you to everyone who's stuck around, I really appreciate it! Next chapter won't be six months in the making, I promise.

Dreamer
Chapter 77

Chapter Notes

Author's Note: I LIIIIIIIVVVVVEEEEEE!!! No, in all seriousness, I do apologise for how long it took me to get this chapter out.

But Australia was burning for quite a while there and I live in an area that was surrounded by the two biggest fires burning in NSW. While I was in no immediate danger, there was just a constant haze of smoke everywhere which made it difficult to want to do anything. I also seriously injured my shoulder at work and between the pain, doctor's appointments, and physiotherapy, I didn't really want to do anything.

But the pain is becoming manageable and I am glad to say I'm back, bitches! Now on with the story. It's been too goddamn long!

Dreamer

“Well, some nights I wish that this all would end
‘Cause I could use some friends for a change
And some nights I’m scared you’ll forget me again
Some nights I always win, I always win
But I still wake up, I still your ghost
Oh Lord, I’m still not sure what I stand for
What do I stand for? What do I stand for?
Most nights I don’t know”

– Some Nights [Fun.]

Loki didn’t move when Stephen stepped through the door. He observed the god for a brief second before slowly closing the door behind him. The room was softly lit by one lamp to Loki’s right, casting a warm gold glow on the mage. The only other light source was from Tony’s arc reactor, now a soft purple that gave his face a weird, bruised look.

Apart from the exhaustion clearly etched onto his face, and the fact that he was unconscious, Tony looked okay. His chest rose and fell with every soft breath, but he was otherwise still.

Stephen turned his attention back to Loki. ‘You should eat,’ he commented. Loki didn’t move. His eyes were still fixed on Tony. ‘Or sleep,’ Stephen added. ‘Hell, sleep on the floor for all I care. Just
Loki finally shifted ever so slightly. ‘I will,’ he said.

‘When?’

‘When Tony is awake.’

Stephen sighed. ‘We don’t know when that’ll be,’ he said. ‘His mind needs as much rest as his body. What if he doesn’t wake up for two weeks? Three? Are you gonna sit here the entire time?’

‘If that’s what it takes.’

‘You’re impossible,’ Stephen groaned. He crossed the room and fell into the armchair beside Loki’s.

Loki tilted his head towards Stephen ever so slightly. ‘And if he wakes and I’m not here?’ he asked.

‘He won’t blame you, Loki,’ Stephen told him. ‘After what he’s been through, he probably won’t remember much the first time he wakes up. He could wake up half a dozen times before he can properly stay awake.’

‘And I will be here every time he does.’

Stephen tapped his fingers along the arm rests of his chair. ‘And what if SHIELD attacks right now?’ he asked. Loki went completely still. ‘They know Tony’s weak. They might assume that you are, too. What if you can’t protect him?’

‘Believe me,’ Loki growled, and he finally turned completely to glare at Stephen, ‘it would take more than mere exhaustion to incapacitate me. I think I have already shown what I will do when Tony’s in danger.’

‘I’m aware of what you’re capable of,’ Stephen allowed, ‘but you’re not in top form. Can you really sit there and tell me **truthfully** that you’re a hundred percent fighting fit?’ Loki said nothing, just continued to stare at Stephen. The bruises under his eyes were darker than Tony’s. ‘You haven’t eaten in over a week, Loki,’ Stephen continued when Loki said nothing. He softened his voice, because he was pretty sure that Loki needed the friendly tone. ‘I know you haven’t been sleeping. You don’t need to do this to yourself.’

Loki turned away. ‘I am not doing anything,’ he said.

‘Exactly,’ Stephen muttered. ‘Tony wouldn’t want you to punish yourself.’

Loki’s hands curled into fists. Stephen watched him dig his nails into his palms. ‘You do not know what Tony would want.’

‘He wouldn’t want this,’ Stephen said. ‘Don’t punish yourself for doing what he wanted.’

‘I should have rescued him,’ Loki murmured.

‘**Don’t punish yourself for doing what he wanted,**’ Stephen repeated, a bite to his words this time. ‘Tony knows you love him. He won’t hate you for arriving a bit late.’

Loki smiled ever so slightly. It was a little broken, **very** brittle, but at least **some** type of emotion. ‘He may hate me for other things,’ Loki commented.
Stephen rolled his eyes and said, ‘Please, don’t remind me of how unhealthy your relationship is. You two make the doctor in me cry.’

The god chuckled softly. ‘Our relationship is the best thing that has ever happened to me.’

‘And Tony would agree,’ Stephen said without an ounce of hesitation. Because no matter how unhealthy their relationship really was, Stephen was pretty sure that they’d both end up killing themselves if the other wasn’t there to talk them down.

What a strange, fucked up pair they were.

‘When did that happen, by the way?’ Stephen asked. Hey, at least Loki was talking; that was a step forward in Stephen’s eyes. Loki had been nothing but a shell of a bastard for the past week. Talking was good. Talking was healthy.

Loki just raised an eyebrow, clearly not understanding the exact nature of Stephen’s question.

‘You two, when did that happen?’ Stephen elaborated. ‘The sex and feelings and mates thing you keep going on about.’

‘Oh.’ Loki sighed heavily and shifted in his seat.

He drew both legs up and wrapped his arms around them, chin resting on his knees. He looked like a child barely keeping himself together, clinging to himself in some vain hope that all the bad in the world would just disappear and leave him alone. Stephen was surprised by how much the sight saddened him.

‘It was a gradual thing,’ Loki murmured. His eyes remained on Tony. ‘I was only partially aware of the changes.’

‘Only partially?’ Stephen interjected.

Loki nodded ever so slightly. ‘I knew that my magic had changed. It began to feel… warm, I suppose is a way to describe it. Whenever Tony was around, my magic wished to protect him; soothe him, coddle him. It took me far too long to figure out why that was.’ He smiled crookedly. ‘Beasts like me aren’t supposed to have mates.’

‘Why?’

‘This type of bond is rare,’ Loki explained, ‘so incredibly rare. My… the All-Father and All-Mother were the first pair in millennia. And even they were unexpected. Mated pairs are usually from the same species. It is theorised that it is due to a species having similar magical signatures. While every magical being will have their own magic, it is still similar to the magic of another of their kind.’ He shook his head. ‘Tony was mortal when we met. I made him a god, but he is still Midgardian. I am Jötunn. We should not be compatible.’

‘You two are probably the most compatible idiots I’ve ever met,’ Stephen commented.

Loki threw him a look. ‘Is that a compliment or an insult?’ he questioned.

‘Both,’ Stephen admitted. He turned his attention back to Tony, doctor briefly overtaking his mind and running diagnostics. ‘I knew Tony before he met you,’ Stephen continued. ‘He was going to drink himself to death or get himself shot by some scorned ex-lover. He’s better with you.’

‘But?’ Loki prompted.
Stephen sighed. ‘But we’ve talked about this,’ he said. ‘You two are absolutely obsessed with each other. You’d both kill someone just for looking at your partner wrong. That’s unhealthy, Loki. Mentally, you’d be better off apart.’

Loki hummed at that. ‘Perhaps,’ he allowed. ‘But I would only leave Tony’s side if he himself asked me to.’

Stephen jolted at that, head swivelling to fix Loki with a stare. ‘Would you really?’ he said.

‘Yes,’ Loki said. ‘As much as it would pain me, I would leave his side if he asked it of me.’

‘And would you stay away?’

Loki smiled. ‘No,’ he said. ‘But he wouldn’t need to know that.’

Stephen snorted. ‘Pair of fucking deranged lunatics, the both of you.’

‘I find that I don’t particularly care what I am,’ Loki said, ‘or how others perceive me, as long as I have Tony.’

‘Yeah,’ Stephen agreed, ‘I know.’

They were both silent for a minute or two, only the sounds of Tony’s soft breathing and Stephen shifting in his seat filling the room.

‘I remember a time when I didn’t love him,’ Loki said suddenly. Stephen glanced at him. Loki looked so very tired. ‘And I remember when that began to change. I remember realising that I would do anything just to see him smile. It terrified me.’

‘And now?’

‘It still does,’ Loki admitted. He looked at Stephen, then, and Stephen could see the fierce protectiveness, the love, the absolute rage that Loki kept barely contained. Here was a creature that would destroy entire planets for the one he loved. Stephen wondered what it was like to have that amount of dedication, that kind of love, trained solely on you. He wondered if he’d be able to survive it. ‘I fear ever forgetting that feeling,’ Loki continued. ‘I fear losing that feeling. Death would be welcomed if I did.’

Stephen let out a shaky breath. Well then. He’d just have to make sure that Loki and Tony didn’t lose that. Stephen wasn’t in the habit of joining the losing side. Whatever he did, he did it to win. He wasn’t about to let Tony and Loki fuck up his winning streak.

‘You should eat,’ he finally said. Loki frowned. ‘I’m serious, Loki,’ Stephen added. ‘Toast, crackers- hell, go eat a block of cheese for all I care. Just eat something and get some rest. Please.’

Loki paused at the final word, at the tone Stephen had used. Finally, he breathed out heavily and unfolded himself from the seat. ‘If it stops you nagging,’ he muttered.

‘I’ll keep silent for an entire week if you eat and sleep,’ Stephen said.

Smiling, Loki said, ‘I will hold you to your word.’ He made his way to the door, opened it and then paused. He glanced back at Tony.

‘I’ll stay here and watch over him,’ Stephen said. ‘I’ll call you if he so much as twitches.’

Loki paused yet again, knuckles tightening on the door handle and eyes locked on Tony.
‘JARVIS?’ he finally said.

‘I will keep watch over Mr Stark and inform you of any changes,’ the AI promised.

Loki nodded and turned back to the door. ‘Thank you,’ he murmured and finally left.

‘JARVIS, make sure he eats,’ Stephen said as soon as he was alone.

‘I shall try my hardest, Doctor Strange,’ JARVIS responded.

‘Good,’ Stephen muttered. He settled back into his seat and let his gaze rest on Tony. Tony, who’d better wake the fuck up and soon. Stephen preferred a homicidal Loki over a depressed one.

…

Bruce was sitting at the kitchen table when Loki entered. Loki nodded at him briefly before making a beeline to the refrigerator. He didn’t want to eat. Loki had gone without food before, had experienced the ache that settled deep within you when you wanted something, anything, to fill the sickening emptiness of your stomach.

But right now? Loki felt numb. It was so unlike anything Loki had experienced before that he didn’t know what to do with himself. Loki was experienced with rage, with loss, with unbearable sadness. Right now, he was just numb.

‘Hey,’ Bruce said when Loki had grabbed a container and a fork and sat himself at the table. Loki kept his eyes on whatever was in the plastic box as he took the lid off. ‘Good to see you eating.’

Loki grunted in response.

‘Not hungry, huh?’

‘Not particularly,’ Loki said. He put the lid aside and stuck his fork into it. Some type of noodles with a brown sauce. Loki spied vegetables, cheap and overcooked, hidden beneath. He wrapped a good portion around his fork and just stopped, staring at it.

‘Probably best to just force it down,’ Bruce commented. Loki looked up at him. The doctor appeared to be as tired and out of sorts as Loki himself felt. ‘Always worked for me.’

Loki glanced back at his food. Looking at it didn’t make him feel sick. Thinking of eating it… was just tiring.

Bruce tapped the table. ‘I wouldn’t put it past Doctor Strange to sedate you and force feed you himself.’

That got a genuine smile from Loki. It hurt to do it, his cheeks out of practice and lips cracked. ‘Yes,’ Loki agreed, ‘he would, wouldn’t he?’

‘I think it’s something we all have in common,’ Bruce said, ‘a genuine lack of self-preservation and inability not to poke at everything we come across.’

Another smile, this one feeling less unusual, more settled on Loki’s face. He sighed and shook it loose before forcing himself to take a bit of his food. It was rather plain, which Loki supposed was
good. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d eaten, and too much of something strong would most likely make him sick.

‘I never got to thank you,’ Bruce commented suddenly. Loki paused, his second bite resting between the container and his mouth. ‘For rescuing me,’ he added.

Loki swallowed. ‘Think nothing of it.’

‘You could have left me there.’

Loki tilted his head at that, eyes locked on Bruce’s.

“You were terrified for Tony; enraged,’ Bruce said. He shook his head ever so slightly. ‘I wouldn’t have liked it, but I would have understood if you’d left me there. The fact that you didn’t, when Tony was in so much danger, it… I…” he trailed off and frowned, clearly unable to find the correct words.

Loki swallowed again and lowered his fork. ‘I could not leave you,’ he stated. Bruce caught his gaze. ‘I didn’t rescue you just because of Tony,’ Loki added.

Bruce frowned. ‘But-’

‘Believe it or not,’ Loki interrupted, ‘you are not just an ally, Bruce. You are… everything you have done…”

A smile spread across Bruce’s face. ‘As difficult as it is to believe, I consider you a friend, too,’ he said. ‘So does the Other Guy.’ Loki raised an eyebrow at that. Bruce chuckled. ‘It’s true,’ he said. ‘I mean, sure, he still calls you Puny God every now and then.’ Loki snorted. ‘But it’s mostly friend. And… home.’ Bruce paused and stared at his tea. ‘The Tower’s home to him,’ he said. ‘You and Tony are friends. So… thanks for bringing me back.’

‘You are welcome,’ Loki said. The entire conversation had… left him feeling confused. But Loki knew that every word he’d said was true. Bruce was a… friend. Or, rather, he was quickly becoming one. He was someone that Loki was beginning to trust. Maybe not with his own secrets; or not with all of them. But with Tony? Loki trusted that Bruce would do everything within his power to protect Tony. The least Loki could do was protect Bruce.

‘It’s been a strange few weeks, huh?’ Bruce commented when the silence had dragged on for too long.

‘Yes,’ Loki agreed. He would be very glad to see the end of it. To see Tony open his eyes, to see him smile, to hear him speak.

*To hear his response to my true thoughts, Loki thought. To hear what he has to say when I thought about running.*

Loki closed his eyes and ignored the concern on Bruce’s face.

…

James fidgeted in his seat. It was still warm, Loki having just vacated it. James had been shocked
when JARVIS had said Loki wanted to see him, even more surprised when Loki informed him that he was going to sleep and could James watch over Tony while he was resting?

James seriously doubted that Loki would rest all that much. Still, it was a step in the right direction. Loki looked worse than Tony and Tony was unconscious. Any rest was good, right?

He frowned and fiddled with his StarkPhone. He wanted to open it up, play one of the apps or read the news. Maybe go over some of the notes he’d jotted down; he had to figure out a way to make Tony’s escape work in their favour. They had to present this news to the media in the best possible way, secure the very best possible outcome for themselves and screw SHIELD over in the process.

But he didn’t want to take his eyes off Tony. What if something happened? What if he woke up and JARVIS didn’t notice? What if Loki realised that James had a poor attention span and decided that James wasn’t worth the trouble? What if-

James shook his head. Christ, he was sending himself insane. Everyone within the Tower was walking on eggshells, all spirits dampened by Tony’s continued sleep. Loki constantly looked like he was either about to collapse or snap, Doctor Banner was just drinking tea and wandering around, and Stephen was running himself ragged taking care of them all as well as reporting back to check on his own people.

Apparently, they couldn’t function as a group without Tony. James smiled slightly at the thought. Tony Stark, the glue that held the lunatics together.

James was seriously considering asking JARVIS to get someone to bring him a StarkPad when Tony shifted ever so slightly on the bed. His lips opened and a soft groan escaped, followed by his eyes fluttering open. James stared, jaw slack, as Tony frowned and stared at the ceiling.

‘Loki?’ he whispered in the softest voice James had ever heard.

‘Tony!’ James exploded into action, almost falling over the bed as he made his way to Tony’s side. Tony had shifted at the sound of his own name and met James’ eyes with blurred focus. ‘Hey, man,’ James said.

‘Rhodey?’ Tony looked so confused and James laughed softly. He reached out to pat Tony on the arm.

‘Welcome back, Tone,’ he said. ‘What do you need?’

‘I… what?’ Tony was clearly confused, which was to be expected.

‘Here, lemme help you up,’ James said. Tony made soft sounds of pain as James carefully helped him up, his pillows quickly stuffed behind his back to keep him upright. ‘You want water?’ James asked. ‘Something to eat?’ Tony just started at him, head drooping and fingers clumsily pulling at the blanket.

‘I…’

‘You want Loki?’ was James’ next guess. Tony’s head snapped up at that, eyes suddenly focused with absolute clarity. Tony said nothing. ‘I’ll go get him,’ James said. ‘He’ll kill me if I don’t let him know you’re awake.’

He turned his back on Tony and hurriedly made his way to the door. Surely JARVIS had already informed him, but still, James didn’t wanna risk Loki’s anger. The guy had a short fuse on the best of days.
James grabbed the door handle and pulled-

-it didn’t budge. James frowned and tried again. And again. Still, no matter how hard he pulled, the door refused to open. It wasn’t locked- this was a guest room on Doctor Banner’s floor, it didn’t even have a lock- so what the hell?

It was like a bucket of ice had been poured over him. James suddenly became very aware of the heaviness of the room, the static suddenly licking across his skin. He shivered and turned, trying to find the source of whatever the hell was going on.

Tony was staring at him, eyes narrowed, a very faint purple glow to his skin.

‘Tony-’

‘You said Loki,’ Tony interrupted. His voice was hard, firm, no hint of the fact that he’d been unconscious for three days.

James wet his lips. ‘I did,’ he agreed.

‘How do you know about Loki?’ Tony asked.

Carefully, James let go of the door and took a slow step back. He raised his hands. ‘You need to calm down,’ James said. Because it made sense now. Tony was freaking out. He had no idea that James knew. He was confused, scared, and he was-

‘Where’s Loki?’ Tony asked, interrupting James’ racing thoughts.

‘Let me go get him,’ James said. He tried to keep his voice calm and even, tone soothing. ‘He can explain everything.’ Tony didn’t respond. ‘Just let me open the door, okay?’

Nothing. James swallowed and reached for the door.

‘No,’ Tony said softly. James was suddenly flung back. He hit the wall hard and all the breath was knocked from him, a wheeze escaping as he tried to flop forward only to be held up by Tony’s magic.

It had to be. It was the only thing that made sense. ‘Tony,’ he tried, ‘please.’

But Tony was clearly in no state to rationally talk things out. He just stared at James, eyes hard, the purple glow surrounding him getting brighter, his power thick in the air and catching in James’ lungs.

Calmly, Tony raised one hand in James’ direction. His chest began to glow, too, purple leaking from his arc reactor.

‘Tony,’ James said.

The door burst open and Strange stumbled in, hair in disarray, Cloak hovering above his head. Tony’s attention immediately snapped to him and he grit his teeth.

‘Sorry about this,’ Strange panted as he raised one hand. Green symbols began to spiral down his arm. Tony tilted his head at the sight. ‘You’ll thank me when you’re properly conscious,’ Strange added.

Orange sparks flared into life between Tony and Strange just in time. Tony had leapt forward, mouth pulled back in a snarl and the furniture around the room tossed aside in the wake of his
power. But he hit the shield Strange had put up and had no time to break through before Strange was on him. Strange slapped a glowing hand against Tony’s forehead and pushed him back onto the bed.

Tony went limp almost immediately, the green markings surrounding Strange’s hand seeping into him before retreating and disappearing all together. The force holding James up against the wall vanished and James dropped like a stone, hit the floor at an awkward angle and groaned as he lay in a heap.

‘Are you okay?’ James managed to drag himself up to see Doctor Strange holding a hand out to him.

‘Yeah,’ James said and let himself be pulled up, ‘thanks.’

‘No problem.’ Strange let go of his hand and turned to survey Tony. ‘I came as soon as Doctor Banner called.’

‘Yeah,’ James repeated. ‘He freaked out.’

‘Do you know why?’

‘I mentioned Loki,’ James said. Strange frowned at him. ‘Tony doesn’t know I’m on his side,’ James explained. ‘Last thing he remembers is being surrounded by people who wanna kill him. He just freaked out.’

‘Oh,’ Strange said. His frown deepened. ‘Where’s Loki?’

‘He said he was going to rest,’ James ‘Mr Laufeyson is currently unconscious,’ JARVIS piped in. ‘He awoke when Mr Stark did but was in too much pain to come to his aid.’

‘Ah.’ Strange sighed and scrubbed viciously at his face. ‘Great. He’s not gonna rest after this.’

‘It’s my fault,’ James said. ‘I shouldn’t have been left alone with Tony.’

Strange groaned and rolled his eyes. ‘You people need to stop blaming yourselves for everything. Jesus Christ.’ He sighed. ‘I need a drink.’

‘Doctor Strange,’ JARVIS began, but Strange cut him off.

‘After I check on Tony and Loki, yes, I know,’ Strange muttered.

‘Thank you,’ JARVIS responded. ‘I shall inform Doctor Banner of your intentions. He is currently seeing to Mr Laufeyson.’

‘At least one of you isn’t acting like a child,’ Strange muttered. He glanced at James. ‘Go sit down, take a breath. Tony’s magic is... something else.’

‘Yeah... yeah, okay,’ James agreed. It wasn’t like he could help, really. His skin was still buzzing, his heart thumping far too quickly in his chest. What he’d felt... the look on Tony’s face. ‘I think I need a drink, too.’

Strange smiled. ‘Pour me one,’ he said, ‘I’ll join you after I get this idiot comfortable.’
Tony had never felt this exhausted in his life. He wasn’t sure why, exactly, he felt like death itself, only that he did. He groaned and opened his eyes, blinked against the crustiness and blur to his vision. When he could finally focus, he was staring at a ceiling; it was white.

Well, that didn’t really help.

It took far too long for him to push back the blanket he was covered in. His limbs felt heavy and achy. His tongue was too thick, far too dry, and even his goddamn teeth hurt. What the fuck had happened?

‘Tony.’

His head snapped up at the voice- that voice, the one that had kept him going when dark thoughts had threatened to take over. The one thing he’d kept imagining was whispering to him when the lights went out and his tank was plunged into darkness.

His tank. The Helicarrier. Red, flashing lights, Romanov wrapping her thighs around his neck and squeezing, the ground rushing up to greet him far too quickly, a buzz under his skin and a galaxy in his chest-

‘Tony.’

He finally found it, the source of everything. He was at Tony’s side, face pale and deep purple bruises marring his otherwise startling green eyes. He smiled weakly and reached out to take Tony’s hand.

Tony felt his eyes watering and did nothing to hold back the tears.

‘Loki,’ he choked out. His heart was pounding, magic sang through his veins.

Loki smiled. ‘Welcome home,’ he said.
Chapter 78

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

“So, come on
I’ll take you on, take you on
Why don’t you come
Don’t you come a little closer
So, come on now
Strike a match, strike a match now
We’re a perfect match, perfect somehow
We were meant for one another
Come a little closer”
– Fire Meet Gasoline [Sia]

‘I’m sorry,’ Tony choked out and Loki was immediately on him. He crawled onto the bed and onto Tony’s lap, hands coming up to Tony’s face to hold it tenderly between large palms.

‘Hush,’ Loki said, ‘Tony, it’s okay; you’re home, you’re safe.’

Tony was crying; heavy, chest-heaving sobs that stung his eyes and made it difficult to breathe. Every single emotion he’d kept bottled up while held prisoner aboard the Helicarrier finally broke free. Staring into Loki’s bright eyes, Tony realised what he could have lost. If he’d gotten too cocky, too smart; if SHIELD had decided to be done with him and actually killed him.

He could have lost Loki.

Tony choked on his next sob, hiccupped when Loki hushed him again and tugged him forward. Tony’s face was pressed into a cool neck and he latched onto Loki’s chest and tugged him forward. Loki allowed it, and then wrapped his arms around Tony and just hugged him.

Loki held him tightly, too tightly, but it was exactly what Tony needed. He could feel Loki’s magic pressing against his skin, only held back by Loki’s expert control. Tony’s chest ached and he craved Loki so much it physically hurt. He coughed and spluttered into Loki’s neck, he choked out more tears and rubbed his aching face against Loki’s shirt. Loki began smoothing his hands down Tony’s own back, murmurs escaping every few seconds; ‘It’s okay… you’re safe… I missed you… shh…’

Tony cried until he physically couldn’t cry any more. All that escaped were more hiccups, little whimper. He carded
long fingers through Tony’s hair, oily from his stay aboard the Helicarrier. Tony choked back another sob.

‘Hush,’ Loki murmured. ‘Let it all out, Tony.’

‘I’m sorry,’ Tony whispered. His voice was hoarse, raw, throat sore and tongue thick in his mouth. He sniffed but his nose was blocked.

Loki hummed again. ‘You have nothing to apologise for.’

Tony pushed back to stare Loki in the eyes. Loki remained seated on Tony’s lap, one hand still in Tony’s hair. His other dropped to Tony’s chest; his large palm covered Tony’s arc reactor and Loki dug his fingers into Tony’s skin through his t-shirt.

‘I could have lost you,’ Loki said, and it was like a secret; one that was whispered, hushed, for Tony and Tony only. ‘Without you I was… I didn’t… I ached for you,’ Loki said. He sounded equal parts awed and terrified.

Fresh tears sprung into Tony’s eyes. He wanted to scrub them away; scrub away what he’d put Loki through. Nobody should put that kind of terror into Loki’s voice. And it had been Tony.

‘I’m so sorry,’ Tony choked out. ‘It was my fault.’

Loki was already shaking his head, but Tony wouldn’t let him brush this aside. He wouldn’t let Loki forget who was responsible for all of this.

‘I let them kidnap me!’ Tony snapped. It came out harsher than he’d intended. He had Loki’s full attention now, the Jötunn’s lips parted ever so slightly as he stared Tony down. ‘I did that, Loki! You were there! You were right there!’

‘And I should have saved you,’ Loki said.

‘I told you not to!’ Tony shouted. ‘I did this- me!’

Loki tugged him forward, Tony’s face pressed into his chest. ‘Stop,’ Loki ordered. There was strength behind the word, magic. Tony could feel it churning in Loki’s chest. ‘You did what you thought was best.’

‘I did it to stroke my own ego!’ Tony muttered. His voice was muffled by Loki’s shirt. ‘It’s the only reason. I wanted to taunt them; I wanted the media to stalk them. It wasn’t worth it, Loki. I let them lock me up like some fucking animal and they… they took…’

He squeezed his eyes shut, because he didn’t want to think about it. Not only did SHIELD now have his blood samples and whatever else they’d cut out of him, but they’d reduced Tony to nothing. They’d strapped him down, knocked him out, and taken whatever they’d wanted.

Tony hadn’t been in control. He’d been completely at SHIELD’s mercy. And he’d sworn to himself that it would never happen again. Not after Afghanistan.

And he’d let himself get caught.

‘Tony-’ Loki tried, but Tony wrenched himself back.

‘Don’t you forgive me for this,’ he growled, ‘not for this. Look at you!’

Because Loki looked like shit; there were no other words for it. He clearly hadn’t slept, had barely
eaten, since Tony was taken. Tony had yearned for Loki every second he was locked in that cage. Loki loved and hated with his entire being, all-consuming emotions that raged if not kept in check. What had Loki felt while Tony was stuck in that cell?

‘I’m fine,’ Loki tried, but when Tony huffed, he sighed. ‘I will be well, now that you are home.’ His eyes turned soft and he reached up to cup Tony’s cheek. He smoothed one thumb over Tony’s uneven stubble. ‘I missed you,’ he said, and now he was crying.

*I did that*, Tony thought.

‘I thought we could handle the separation,’ Loki continued, eyes continuing to water. ‘Every second you were gone I *ached* for you. I wanted nothing more than to teleport into that cell and bring you home.’

‘I told you not to,’ Tony gasped out, because he could see what was happening; what Loki was doing. ‘Don’t you… don’t you fucking *dare* blame yourself for any of this.’

Loki was shaking his head. ‘I should have-’

‘I TOLD YOU NOT TO!’ Tony shouted.

‘And when have I ever listened to anyone?’ Loki snapped back; his tone was sharp.

They both paused, staring each other down. It was Tony who broke first. He tipped forward and pressed his face back into Loki’s chest. ‘I love you,’ he whispered, ‘I love you so fucking much.’

Loki’s hands were back in his hair, on his back, smoothing over every inch of Tony he could reach. ‘Nothing,’ he said, ‘*nothing,*’ he repeated and pulled Tony’s head up, ‘*will ever* keep me from you again.’ With that he pressed his lips against Tony’s, and for the second time that night Tony broke.

He threw his arms around Loki and tugged him forward, even as Loki was wrenching him up, closer, *closer,* impossibly close so that there was no air between them, so that *nothing* could pull them apart. Their noses bumped, their teeth clacked, but Tony just kissed Loki harder and harder until he couldn’t breathe, his chest aching and his hands shaking where they gripped any part of Loki he could get.

They only broke apart when Tony was sure that he was going to pass out, chest heaving and face wet with tears and saliva. Loki was pressing soft kisses against his cheeks, his face, a final one on his lips before he pulled back.

‘I love you,’ Tony said.

Loki smiled softly. ‘I love you,’ he said, ‘more than anything.’

‘I know,’ Tony responded, because it needed to be said; Loki needed to hear it. ‘I know you do,’ he mumbled and hugged Loki again. ‘I fucking love you *so much.*’

They went quiet after that. They were still pressed together, Loki stroking Tony’s back and Tony clinging to Loki’s sides. Loki shifted after a few minutes and lifted himself up.

‘Lie down,’ he said. Tony did as he was told but didn’t let Loki go. He reached out and kept two fingers hooked under the sleeve of Loki’s shirt as Loki manoeuvred himself beneath the blanket.

And then Loki was beside him, entire body pressed up against Tony. Tony sighed happily when
Loki was settled against his back, one arm tucked under Tony’s head and the other curled possessively around Tony’s chest.

‘You need to rest,’ Loki murmured into Tony’s ear. Tony’s magic was finally settling, a warm, content glow in his chest. He could feel Loki’s power pressing in all around him…

But still restrained, even now. Because of course Loki wouldn’t lose control, even in a moment like this.

‘I love you,’ Tony mumbled. It was all he could think to say. They still needed to talk; Tony needed to get it through Loki’s head that there was no one to blame for this but himself.

But he was so tired. And Loki was a cool, calming presence behind him, humming in Tony’s ear and rubbing around his arc reactor.

‘Sleep, Tony,’ Loki whispered. ‘We will talk later.’

…

Tony didn’t realise he’d fallen asleep until he was awake again. He and Loki had moved while they slept; Loki was on his back and Tony had sprawled out on top of him, legs hooked around one of Loki’s, head on his chest, arms clinging to Loki and refusing to let go.

Tony huffed a small laugh and sniffed back a tear. Fuck, he still felt like bursting into hysterical tears every time he looked at Loki. There were dark, patchy bruises beneath his usually brilliant eyes. Even the green had dulled since Tony had last seen him. They were closed, now, which was good; Loki looked like he needed the sleep.

He moved ever so slightly, trying to sit up and not wake Loki at the same time. But Loki twitched at his side as soon as Tony was on all fours and his eyes flew open.

They locked with Tony’s immediately. Tony gave him a sheepish grin. ‘Sorry,’ he whispered, ‘didn’t mean to wake you.’

‘Do you need anything?’ Loki asked, already sitting.

Tony sighed. ‘No,’ he said, even though he was thirsty. His stomach rolled uncomfortably; he wasn’t sure if he was hungry or about to be sick. ‘I’m fine,’ Tony mumbled.

Loki sat properly and Tony joined him, both propped up against the headboard. Tony glanced around.

‘Is this a guest room?’

Loki nodded. ‘On Banner’s floor,’ he said.

‘Oh.’

‘We did not wish to move you,’ Loki said. When Tony glanced at him, Loki frowned. ‘You were badly injured.’

Tony only remembered bits and pieces. ‘I remember the cell I was in falling,’ he murmured. Loki’s
eyes snapped to him, narrowed sharply. ‘I was fighting Romanov,’ Tony continued, because it needed to be said. Loki needed to know how much Tony had fucked up. ‘I was terrified,’ Tony admitted, ‘and then I was so fucking angry. I couldn’t let myself die because of her. And then I…’

‘You what?’ Loki said when Tony had trailed off.

‘Teleported,’ Tony said, ‘I know I said I wouldn’t do it again, but I just-’

‘Tony,’ Loki interrupted. He took Tony’s hands in his own and squeezed gently. ‘I don’t care what you did,’ Loki said. ‘You’re safe. That’s all that matters.’

Tony took a shuddering breath. Fuck, he was gonna cry again. ‘I don’t… it’s blurry,’ he said. ‘I remember the Avengers being there, and Bruce was in a cell… I remember power.’ He looked at Loki. ‘It was like there was so… much inside me, and I could control it. It was all mine. I could barely contain it and it wasn’t like anything I’ve felt before. Like my magic and just… something else, something more, that was suddenly mine. And then…’

Loki was silent.

‘I don’t…’ Tony clenched his teeth in frustration. Loki rubbed circles on the back of his hands. ‘I can’t remember,’ he growled, ‘it’s all hazy. There was blood and screaming and Barton told me to run- I think?’ He shook his head roughly and reached up to scrub angrily at his face. Loki squeezed the hand he was still holding. ‘I can’t-’

‘It happens,’ Loki said. His tone was soothing. ‘When you have access to that much power, it can be difficult to process. You aren’t used to it; of course you were overwhelmed.’

‘But what was it?’ Tony said. ‘It felt like me but wasn’t. I was… so angry and scared.’

‘Tony,’ Loki said, and Tony turned to look at him. ‘It was me,’ Loki told him.

Tony jolted. ‘What?’

‘The power you felt,’ Loki said, ‘you took it from me.’

‘I… what?!”

‘You’ve done it before,’ Loki said. He touched his arm, covered by the sleeve of his shirt. ‘When I injured myself and you healed me; you took my experience. You have grown so much more since then. You’ve experienced my magic before.’

‘That… that was you?’ Tony demanded. Because all of that power. The sheer force of it had been enough to send Tony mad; to make the Avengers, Midgard’s strongest fighters, look like ants when compared to Tony. Tony had tried, so desperately, to harness it, and he knew he had, but only briefly. In the end he had lost and been consumed by it. After that… after that he woke up to Loki’s face.

‘Yes,’ was all Loki said.

‘But how?’ Tony said. ‘It’s not possible. You took my magic once, but we were together; I was in my mindscape.’

‘I know,’ Loki said, ‘it should not be possible, but you did it.’

Tony pushed himself closer to Loki, as though he could taste that power just by pressing himself up
against his partner. But right now, Loki was mostly calm; tired, hungry, stressed. But he didn’t feel like a supernova about to explode. ‘How’s it possible, then?’ he asked softly. ‘Loki, what I felt—’

‘Is what I feel every time I lose control,’ Loki interrupted. Tony glanced at him. Loki’s eyes were staring at something only he could see. ‘When Odin told me the truth of my birth… all I felt was rage. Betrayal. I was consumed by it. And my magic…’ He shook his head. ‘It was why I tried to destroy my birth realm,’ he said.

And Tony could picture it so clearly now. He would have ripped the Helicarrier apart. He would have slaughtered the Avengers, the SHIELD agents… he would have spilled the blood of every single person aboard the Helicarrier, regardless of who they were or what they’d done. He would have levelled an entire city just to escape and find Loki again.

While he still couldn’t fully understand how Loki had felt at that exact moment in his life, he finally knew why Loki was capable of destroying entire worlds. He didn’t just have the power; he also had the rage. To be consumed by all of that… nothing would escape that frenzy.

‘How do you deal with it?’ Tony asked, awe in his tone that he was unable to hide.

Loki smiled ever so slightly, and his eyes finally snapped back to now. ‘Not well,’ he said.

A giggle escaped before Tony could contain it. Loki’s smile softened.

‘I don’t know how you did it,’ Loki murmured. ‘We aren’t fully bonded yet. It is unlike anything I have read. The research available is sparse; bonded couples rarely divulge everything to even the most curious scholar.’

Yeah, Tony could see that. He didn’t exactly feel like discussing what he and Loki had with anyone.

‘All we can do is continue to search for answers,’ Loki said, ‘and train. I will ensure that you cannot do it again.’

‘Yeah,’ Tony agreed easily. Because while he couldn’t deny that he’d enjoyed the power rush, having that much magic at his fingertips… no, Tony couldn’t control it. He wasn’t like Loki. He didn’t know how the fuck Loki was able to contain all of that, and he knew without a doubt that he’d snap if he had access to it whenever he wanted. ‘We should do that as soon as possible.’

‘Yes,’ Loki said, ‘when you are healthy.’

When he was healthy. Tony felt drained; absolutely, completely fucking exhausted. His nap with Loki had been nice. Hell, just being with Loki was making everything okay. But he still felt uncomfortable in his own skin. There was an itch he couldn’t scratch, like dirt had imbedded itself beneath his skin and it shifted with every breath he took. His throat was dry and there was a pressure in his temples; not a headache, but a warning that he needed more rest.

‘Yeah,’ Tony repeated. He slid down against the headboard ever so slightly. ‘Trust me; I’m not in any shape to do anything.’

‘Do you want something to eat?’ Loki asked.

Tony shook his head. ‘Not right now, thank you. I want…’ He trailed off and just reached for Loki instead of asking. Loki went with him willingly, allowing Tony to manhandle him back down onto the mattress. Tony was the big spoon this time and he buried his face in Loki’s hair. It smelled like Loki, like the Tower, like sweat and home. ‘Thank you,’ he mumbled again. He wasn’t sure what,
exactly, he was thanking Loki for. Maybe for just being with Tony. For signing a contract with a
dumb ass mortal.

Loki didn’t answer. He just tangled his hands with Tony’s and squeezed gently.

…

Tony slept longer this time. He could feel it when he opened his eyes. There were crusty and sore,
and scrubbing at them did jack shit. He groaned and flopped back down.

Loki was still beside him and Tony got all up in that, rubbing his face between Loki’s shoulder
blades and snaking a hand up his shirt.

Loki chuckled. ‘It’s good to see you more like yourself.’

‘I’m getting there,’ Tony mumbled. At least he didn’t feel like crying. He didn’t think his eyes
could handle it. ‘I just wanna snuggle,’ he said and did just that, pushing his body further against
Loki’s.

Loki allowed him a few minutes of respite before saying, ‘We still have much to discuss.’

‘Yeah,’ Tony said. He knew they did. They had to get it all out in the open. He didn’t want Loki
fucking blaming himself for Tony’s mistakes. They had to talk about SHIELD, about what Tony
had missed, about their plans and Bruce and-

Tony jerked upright, eyes wide and heart stuttering in his chest. Loki flipped over. ‘Tony?’

‘Bruce?’ Tony said.

Loki heaved out a sigh of relief. ‘Safe,’ he said and pushed Tony down. ‘I teleported to the
Helicarrier, but you had already escaped. I removed Bruce from his cell and brought him back to
the Tower.’

‘You did?’

Loki nodded. ‘I couldn’t leave him there,’ he said, like it was obvious; like Loki would never even
consider leaving Bruce behind.

‘What?’ Tony said. ‘Since when do you care about Bruce?’

‘He is your friend,’ Loki said, frowned. ‘And… he is not my friend, but he is not just an ally. He
is…’ Loki huffed in frustration, clearly unable to label Bruce.

It was… kind of adorable. ‘You’ve made a friend,’ Tony said.

Loki was still frowning. ‘I just said-’

Tony cut him off with a hug. He pressed kisses to Loki’s cheek, his chin when Loki moved
beneath him. ‘Thank you,’ he said. ‘I wanted to save him, but-’ Flashes of memory startled Tony.
He could clearly see Bruce in his cell, an understanding smile on his face. The word run looped
through Tony’s head. ‘I didn’t wanna leave him,’ Tony said.
‘I know,’ Loki said. ‘Banner told us what happened. And JARVIS downloaded everything before wiping it from SHIELD’s servers.’

Tony smiled. ‘Love you, J.’

‘I love you too, Mr Stark,’ JARVIS responded from above them. There was so much emotion in his computerised voice- no, not computerised. Not anymore. Tony laughed. ‘And may I say, welcome back, Mr Stark.’

‘Good to be back, JARVIS,’ Tony said. ‘Did you take care of Loki while I was gone?’

JARVIS was ominously silent. Tony sat up quickly.

‘JARVIS?’

‘I tried, Mr Stark,’ JARVIS said, hesitation in his voice.

‘What does that mean?’ Tony demanded. When JARVIS didn’t answer, he rounded on Loki. ‘What does he mean?’

Loki deflated. It was like he’d been holding himself up, being strong for Tony, and suddenly couldn’t do it anymore.

And it fucking terrified Tony. ‘Loki?’ His voice shook and Loki sat up quickly, put distance between them. ‘Loki, you’re scaring me. What happened?’

‘Many things,’ Loki said, voice near toneless. Tony reached for him, but Loki jerked back. The hurt that cascaded through Tony’s body must have shown on his face, because Loki started to panic. ‘It’s not your fault- I did it, it was me,’ he said in a rush, face suddenly in Tony’s, hands on his cheeks. ‘You must believe me.’

‘Loki-’

‘I would never do it,’ Loki gasped. He was crying, a sob escaping before Tony could utter a word. ‘I would never, but I thought… for a second-’

‘LOKI!’ Tony shouted and shook Loki by the shoulders. Loki shut up immediately, eyes wide and mouth gasping for breath. ‘What happened, what-’

‘I thought about running.’

The bottom of Tony’s entire fucking world dropped. Everything was white noise and the room pressed in on him. His magic leapt out of him and crashed into the ceiling, the walls, flung the dresser across the room and cracked every picture nailed to the walls. Tony’s chest was too tight, and his heart was going to rip straight through his arc reactor. His chest ached and Tony felt hot and cold, felt fire and ice pour over him and burn him from the inside, freeze his skin and shatter it off of him, he-

Loki gasped in pain and dropped. His hands went to his head and he whimpered, choked out a whine full of pain when Tony’s gaze snapped to him.

‘Loki?’ he croaked. The world shifted again, and everything clicked back into place. Tony’s entire body sagged, suddenly completely spent. Loki stopped whining. ‘L-Loki…” Tony mumbled. He clawed at Loki’s thigh, then his stomach, got a hand on Loki’s smooth stomach-
They were together suddenly, dropped into a world of swirling galaxies. The sky was a mess of stars and gases, bright purples and blues and orange all melded together.

Tony shivered against the sudden bone-chilling wind that whipped against his skin. The ground beneath him was a thick, smooth sheet of ice. There were jagged blue spires in the distance, curling up and striking the sky as far as Tony could see.

It was too bright, yet the sky was dark above them. In the distance a snowstorm beat against the world, but it didn’t touch them.

Loki was standing before him. He slumped when he caught Tony’s eyes and Tony went with him.

‘Loki?’ he questioned.

‘I’m sorry,’ Loki said. He wasn’t crying here, but his voice was still wet. ‘I would never run; you must believe me.’

‘Loki-’

Loki cut him off. He surged forward to grab at Tony’s hips, his face turned upwards as though seeking forgiveness. ‘It was just for a second,’ he said, ‘and I felt sick. The thought of not being with you; not listening to you talk about your suits; not eating with you or sleeping by your side. Not watching as you make me tea, buy me books, doing… everything.’ Loki sobbed and squeezed his eyes shut. ‘The thought of never seeing you again made me sick.’

Tony dropped to his knees and tugged Loki into a hug. ‘I’m sorry,’ Loki gasped, ‘I’m so sorry.’

‘Don’t be,’ Tony whispered. Because he could picture it so easily. Loki trapped in the Tower, in pain and far removed from Tony; not wanting to be but separated because of Tony. Loki had always talked about the poisonous voices that whispered to him; his own mind, that darkness that Tony was so attracted to. It wasn’t always a good thing. When it got to be too much Loki always retreated. He ran because he was so used to getting hurt. And he’d seen what happened when he stayed.

When he stayed, Loki tried to destroy worlds.

‘It’s okay,’ Tony said, ‘Loki, I promise, it’s okay.’

‘But it’s not,’ Loki cried. He sounded so broken that Tony’s own chest tightened. ‘I wanted to leave.’

‘For one fucking second,’ Tony fought back. ‘We all think like that, Loki. I know you won’t leave. I know you. You won’t leave me.’

‘I won’t,’ Loki promised.

‘I know,’ Tony repeated. He rubbed Loki’s back and hugged him tighter. ‘It doesn’t matter what you think, Loki. You’re here. You’re with me, where you belong. Nothing is taking you away from me, do you understand?’

It was a promise and a threat. Because Tony would destroy everything if it meant he got to keep Loki. He didn’t care who or what got on his way. If anybody even thought about taking Loki away, Tony wouldn’t hesitate to take the entire fucking Nine Realms down with him.

‘I love you,’ Tony said, ‘and you love me. I know, okay? I know, Loki.’
The wind bit at Tony’s skin, harsher, faster, and all at once it pulled. Tony opened his eyes. He was on the bed in one of his guest rooms, Loki crying in his arms.

‘I know,’ he repeated and hugged Loki tighter, so tight that his arms shook with the effort. ‘I love you,’ Tony whispered. ‘Don’t ever think otherwise. Nothing will take you away, not even you.’ His voice was dark, and it met the same within Loki.

Because Loki drew back to look at him, and in that moment, Tony felt more connected to Loki then he ever had before. Everything within him met with everything within Loki; mind, magic, and whatever soul either of them might have left.

‘Do you promise?’ Loki asked. His voice was full of venom, of that same poison that so often tried to destroy him.

Tony kissed Loki then, because he had never been surer of anything in his life. Loki was it.

He was everything.

‘I promise,’ he said against Loki’s lips. The kiss Loki gave him in return was dark and needy, filled with love and passion and a dangerous obsession.

Tony welcomed it with everything he was.

**Author's Note:** My neighbours are partying, it's 3 in the morning, and I have work later today. But I sat down an hour ago to have a crack at this chapter because Tony and Loki are in my head.

Hopefully you enjoyed! I'ma go sleep now. Any mistakes will be fixed tomorrow, I promise.

Dreamer
Chapter 79

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Let’s not fight, I’m tired, can’t we just sleep tonight?

Don’t turn away, it’s just there’s nothing left here to say

Turn around, I know we’re lost but soon we’ll be found”

– Soon We’ll Be Found [Sia]

Tony didn’t know how long they laid there for. He had his head pressed into Loki’s chest; one of Loki’s hands had settled on his ass, the other threaded through his hair.

Tony shifted ever so slightly and let out a sigh.

‘Do you require anything?’ Loki murmured.

‘No,’ Tony said, then paused to actually think about it. ‘Um… maybe a shower?’ he said. ‘In a minute,’ he added when Loki sat up slightly. ‘I’m liking this.’

Loki settled back down, and Tony inhaled deeply. Gods, it was good to be home.

‘So, uh…’ He snaked his hand up Loki’s shirt, just to feel the warm skin of Loki’s belly, then his chest. A part of him needed the reassurance that Loki was here. ‘We’re good, yeah?’

Loki huffed out a laugh. ‘Tony, I have never been better.’

‘You sure?’ Tony frowned slightly. ‘You believe me, right? I don’t care what you think-’

‘Tony,’ Loki interrupted before Tony could say the words. The fingers in Tony’s hair dug into his scalp. ‘I… don’t believe that I will ever truly stop thinking those things. But you… you complete me. And nothing will take you away from me. Nothing.’

That venom had entered his voice again; that tone of voice that promised pain and destruction if Loki’s words weren’t headed.

Tony let out a shuddering breath. ‘We’re fucking insane.’

‘Yes,’ Loki agreed easily.

A smirk spread across Tony’s face. ‘Wouldn’t change it for the world.’

Loki hummed before saying, ‘Nor would I.’

‘We’re not bonded, are we?’ Tony asked. The thought had entered his mind when he and Loki had been on that ice sheet… whatever the fuck that had been.

‘No,’ Loki said. He shook his head and pressed a kiss into Tony’s hair. ‘Believe me, Tony; you would know if we had bonded.’
'Oh.'

'I have read that it is an all-consuming thing,' Loki murmured. ‘That your life stops and starts again. To join with someone on that level…’ He shivered. ‘I cannot imagine feeling more for you than what I currently do. But there is still a hole within me; a place that yearns to connect to you.’

Tony’s heart skipped a beat at just the thought of it. ‘Why haven’t we bonded, then?’ he asked.

Loki drew back at that and Tony looked up at him. Loki’s eyes were brighter than they’d been before; still bruised, still blood-shot, but so bright.

‘Do you desire to bond?’ Loki asked.

Tony held back the eye roll. ‘Duh.’

Loki snorted. ‘If it is what you wish.’

‘Is it what you want?’ Tony asked. He ignored the little ache in his chest. His magic wanted to bond; Tony wanted to bond… if Loki didn’t-

‘Of course,’ Loki said, cutting into Tony’s thoughts. He reached out to cup Tony’s cheek in one hand. ‘Tony,’ he breathed, voice reverent, ‘nothing would make me happier. I want little else.’

‘Then why-’

‘We would be incapacitated for a number of days,’ Loki explained. ‘You would experience everything I am; I would be lost within you.’ He sighed. His hand dropped. ‘We don’t know what SHIELD currently have planned. You still need rest. We must plan.’

‘Oh. Oh.’ Well, that was okay, then. ‘So, you do want to bond. Good.’

Loki smiled at Tony’s rambling and leaned forward to kiss him. ‘We will bond,’ he murmured against Tony’s lips, ‘once we have the time.’

‘Yeah,’ Tony agreed. He sighed and gave Loki a dopey grin. ‘Yeah,’ he repeated.

They stared at each other for a beat, into each other, before Loki drew back. ‘You need a shower,’ he stated.

Tony smiled. ‘Is that your way of saying I smell?’

Loki didn’t answer. He got out of a bed and stretched, ran his fingers through his messy hair. He turned back to the bed and held a hand out.

Tony took it and Loki eased him out of the bed. Tony wobbled once he was upright, but Loki was there, an arm wrapped around his waist and one hand secured to Tony’s hip.

‘Thank you,’ Tony murmured.

Loki just kissed him and helped him hobble into the bathroom.

It took so much goddamn effort to get his clothes off. Tony had to lean against the sink as JARVIS started the shower.

He stared at his reflection in the ceiling-length mirrors. His fingers went to his arc reactor.
‘Stephen couldn’t fix it,’ Loki murmured. He stepped up to Tony’s side.

Tony frowned as he touched the centre of his chest. His reactor was glowing purple.

‘What happened?’ Loki asked.

‘It was taking too long to break the cuffs,’ Tony said. ‘I went into my mindscape to see if I could get my magic to do it faster. I… grabbed the element that powered the arc reactor and used that instead.’

Loki’s eyebrows flew up at that. ‘What?’

‘I used the element,’ Tony repeated. He tapped a nail along the reactor. ‘My magic replaced it.’

Loki just stared at him, brows now furrowed. Tony met his eyes in the mirror.

‘Energy manipulation,’ Loki mused.

‘What?’

‘It is not something you should be able to do,’ Loki said.

Tony stared at himself in the mirror. Something he shouldn’t be able to do… ‘Another thing to add to the list, huh?’ Loki felt calm by his side, so Tony figured it wasn’t anything to freak out over. Not yet, anyway.

‘Indeed,’ Loki agreed. He wrapped an arm around Tony’s waist.

‘I can fix it; I have back up reactors,’ Tony said. He shook his head. ‘Later,’ he muttered.

Loki steered him into the shower. The water pelted him from every angle, just the right pressure, just the right temperature. Loki stripped and joined him quickly. He pressed up against Tony’s back and Tony sighed.

‘Fuck that’s nice.’

He reached back to draw Loki closer, hummed when Loki was snug against his back.

‘Really?’ he asked when Loki’s hips met his ass.

‘What?’ Loki said.

Tony frowned. ‘Nothing?’ Loki was completely soft behind him, not even a twitch.

Loki sighed. ‘I am tired, Tony,’ he said. He reached around Tony for the soap, and Tony watched him squirt a generous amount into one hand. ‘I have been without you for near two weeks.’ He put the bottle back on the shelf and rubbed his hands together. ‘It is the last thing on my mind.’

‘Huh.’ Tony closed his eyes as Loki slowly lathered him up. He got into every nook and cranny, held Tony’s hands tenderly between his own as he cleaned them. It was like he was trying to scrub every inch of SHIELD from Tony’s skin. Tony didn’t mind one bit.

‘Huh.’ Tony closed his eyes as Loki slowly lathered him up. He got into every nook and cranny, held Tony’s hands tenderly between his own as he cleaned them. It was like he was trying to scrub every inch of SHIELD from Tony’s skin. Tony didn’t mind one bit.

‘Well,’ Loki mused as Tony swayed ever so slightly on his feet, head tipped back and resting on Loki’s shoulder, ‘it seems that it isn’t the last thing on your mind.’

Tony jolted when Loki’s fingers fluttered over his cock. He was half-hard and twitched when
Loki’s fingers wrapped around him. ‘Uh…’ Tony blinked rapidly against the spray of water. ‘Well, there’s either something really wrong with you-’ He pressed his ass back against Loki’s crotch, ‘- or something really wrong with me.’

Loki chuckled, breath hot against Tony’s ear. ‘Do you want me to?’ he questioned.

It took Tony half a second to figure out what Loki was talking about. Christ, he was tried.

‘No,’ he mumbled and sagged slightly against his partner. ‘As much as I want to, I think I might pass out.’

‘Very well,’ Loki said. He gave Tony another stroke before letting him go.

Tony lost himself in the feeling of Loki cleaning him. His hands rubbed up and down his arms, his legs, directed the water to wash all the soap away. Tony was yawning by the end of it, half asleep, only propped up by Loki’s arms.

‘Come along, Tony,’ Loki murmured.

He was sure that he fell asleep while Loki dried him, because next thing he knew he was back in bed, Loki kissing him softly.

‘Lo?’ Tony mumbled.

‘I’m here,’ Loki said.

Tony got an arm around his waist and buried his face in Loki’s chest. ‘Stay,’ he said.

‘I’m not going anywhere,’ Loki promised.

Tony smiled. ‘Good.’

…

Clint knew who’d entered the room without looking up. His chest didn’t tighten, and his head was beginning to calm; there was only one person Clint felt comfortable with these days. Clint’s heart ached a bit at the thought. He’d kill for Natasha. He’d die for her. But he no longer felt comfortable with her. He couldn’t have a normal conversation with her. Hell, this was the longest he’d spent in her company in weeks, and she was unconscious.

‘How is she?’

Clint sighed and let his head thump back against the wall. ‘A concussion,’ he muttered. ‘Doctors are just waiting for her to wake up.’

‘That is fortunate.’

Clint glanced at him then. Thor looked troubled, brow furrowed, and usual bright aura dimmed. He hadn’t been smiling much lately. ‘What are you doing here?’

Thor closed his eyes before taking a deep breath. ‘There are things I must discuss with you.’
‘Okay.’ Clint drew his knees up against his chest and wrapped his arms around them. ‘Shoot,’ he said.

‘Not here,’ Thor said. Clint looked up. Thor was staring at him, a frown marring his face. ‘These words are not for SHIELD’s ears.’ He paused and glanced up, searching for a camera that not even Clint could see. ‘Not yet,’ Thor added, voice a low rumble.

Clint said nothing, and soon Thor was staring at him again, eyes troubled and fingers twitching.

‘You okay?’ Clint asked. Thor rarely got this morose. Sure, he’d been in a shitty mood since Stark’s relationship with Loki had been revealed, but still… Clint wasn’t sure he’d ever seen Thor this serious.

Thor shook his head. ‘No,’ he said, ‘I am not. Will you come with me?’ He held his hand out then, fingers stretched towards Clint.

Clint sighed. ‘I’ve got nothing better to do,’ he said. He took the offered hand and allowed Thor to pull him from the floor. He wasn’t sure why the gesture felt important… maybe because Coulson was sure to be watching. Maybe this would be seen as Clint siding with Thor. Because Thor sure as hell wasn’t on SHIELD’s side. Not anymore. ‘Where are we going?’

He followed Thor up and outside. It was dark and raining; a fierce storm was beginning to brew, bringing flashes of lightening and a wind that ripped at Clint’s clothes. He had to wonder if it was natural, or if Thor was seriously distraught.

Thor crouched down and it took Clint a second to realise that he was supposed to climb onto Thor’s back. It felt weird. Clint had ridden Air Thor before, but usually they were racing through the sky towards a bad guy. There was no quinjet following them, no Iron Man looping through the sky only to blast past them, a growl ripping itself from Thor’s throat because Stark was somehow faster.

No, both were silent as Thor spun Mjölnir and shot them through the air. They travelled for half an hour at least until Thor dropped them atop a skyscraper. Clint slid from the god’s back and almost snorted when his eyes took in the skyline; Stark Tower was a beacon before them, the letters of Stark’s name a bright, shiny blue.

‘I come here a lot,’ Thor commented. He strapped Mjölnir to his belt and walked to the edge of the building. He sat on the edge, feet dangling over and hands in his lap. ‘It helps clear my head.’

‘What, staring at the enemy?’ Clint said. He joined Thor, though, and ignored the pained noise Thor made at the reminder. His eyes flicked from Stark Tower to the other buildings, to the street below and the traffic still clogging the roads despite the late hour.

‘Your world amazes me sometimes,’ Thor said after a few minutes. Clint glanced at him; Thor’s eyes were tracking what Clint’s were. ‘There are so many of you, and the things you have made astound me.’

Clint watched him as he spoke.

‘In some ways Midgard is like Asgard,’ Thor continued. ‘The markets, the politics… and then there are the differences. Most of you cannot ever hope to match a god in strength, yet your police officers face Loki time and time again; SHIELD’s agents stand up to him.’

‘And look where that got them,’ Clint muttered. He leaned forward, elbows on his knees. ‘SHIELD isn’t gonna beat Loki, Thor. They should give up while there’s still some agents breathing.’
Thor tilted his head in Clint’s direction. ‘Is that what you are doing?’ he questioned.

‘What?’

‘Have you given up, Clint?’

‘I… no, I- Thor, no.’

Thor hummed. His eyes found Stark Tower once more. ‘I wish I could give up,’ he admitted. His words were hushed, a secret; now Clint knew why they’d left the Helicarrier. ‘For all that Loki has done… he is a monster, but he is still my brother. If I could, I would turn my back on him.’

‘So why don’t you?’ Clint asked.

‘I am the Crown Prince of Asgard,’ Thor said. ‘I swore to protect Midgard the day I was crowned the All-Father’s Heir. And Loki has killed so many innocents. Even if he stopped now, the blood of all of those he has slayed is on my hands. I could not live with myself if I walked away now.’

Clint stared at him, heart thudding in his chest, leg jiggling. His head was beginning to thump, a staccato beating in his right temple.

Thor finally looked at him, eyes soft and face understanding. ‘Would you walk away, if given the chance?’ the god asked.

‘Yes,’ Clint said. There was no hesitation, because Clint knew. Clint had no doubts, not anymore. Not since seeing what Stark was truly capable of. ‘Yeah, Thor,’ he continued, ‘if I could I’d be fucking gone. I’d disappear; let Stark wipe out SHIELD, let him rule the world. I don’t care anymore.’

‘I see,’ Thor said, ‘can you tell me why?’

Clint sighed. ‘We’ve talked about this,’ he muttered. ‘You had a hand in making Loki? Look no further to see one of Stark’s creators.’

‘You cannot fault yourself for everything he’s done.’

‘And I don’t,’ Clint said, ‘but I get it. That’s the worse fucking part.’ He stood up then, unable to just sit and stare at Stark’s fucking Tower any longer. He wondered if Stark was there right now. He wondered if Stark knew that Clint and Thor were so close.

‘Clint,’ Thor said.

Clint ignored him and started pacing across the roof. He wanted to lash out; kick at the air conditioning unit, at the concrete beneath him, at anything. Everything that’d been churning within him over the past few weeks finally exploded.

‘Don’t you get it, Thor?’ he demanded. Thor just watched him, on his feet now and arms folded over his broad chest. ‘I understand why Stark’s doing this. SHIELD betrayed him. We tried to steal from him. Fury never gave a fuck about him, even before Loki dropped outta the Tesseract! I don’t blame Stark for wanting revenge!’

Clint sagged suddenly, the fight leaving him as quickly as it’d flickered into life.

‘The worse part,’ he said, ‘is that I’d do the same thing.’ He smiled brokenly and his eyes felt hot. *Fuck.* ‘I’m a professional killer, Thor, and I’ve killed for less. If I was betrayed like that?’ He
shook his head and raised his hands, feeling completely fucking helpless. ‘I’d probably turn into a maniac, too.’

Silence followed his words. He fisted his hands and pressed them against his eyes, pushed until he could see stars. A hand on his shoulder startled him out of it.

‘I don’t blame you,’ Thor said. He gave Clint a weak smile.

‘Thor—’

‘You are my friend, Clint,’ Thor said, ‘of that I have no doubt. You are not Stark.’

‘But—’

‘You,’ Thor repeated, fingers digging harshly into Clint’s shoulder, ‘are not Stark. I have killed many, Clint. More have been felled by hammer than by your bow. You do not have it in you to kill the way Stark does. Destroying those who deserve it? Yes. But not innocents. Never innocents.’

A sob broke out of Clint’s chest then, and he choked down the one that followed. Thor was silent as he composed himself, eyes never judging, hand never wavering from his shoulder.

When Clint felt more in control, he scrubbed at his face and said, ‘You didn’t bring me here to talk about me.’

Thor frowned at that. ‘Well,’ he said and let go of Clint’s shoulder, ‘not just about you, no.’

Clint… blinked. ‘What?’

Sighing, Thor said, ‘Do you remember what Loki called Stark?’

‘No,’ Clint said. He’d been too preoccupied trying to save Hill’s life.

‘He used the word mate,’ Thor said, like that was supposed to mean something. Clint’s blank face must have tipped him off, because he explained; ‘A mate bond is sacred, Clint. The entire Nine Realms recognises it as a gift from the Fates; nobody would dare come between a mated pair. There are laws on every Realm protecting such a couple.’

‘Okay…’ Clint said, ‘so you think Loki and Stark have this bond thing?’

‘Aye,’ Thor said and nodded. He looked far more serious than he had before, his words dripping with weight. ‘Loki would not call Stark his mate if he did not mean it.’

‘Okay,’ Clint repeated. ‘What does it mean?’

‘It means that they are far more dangerous than we thought,’ Thor said. ‘They are connected mind, body, magic and spirit. What you saw Stark do aboard the Helicarrier is only the tip of what bonded pairs are capable of.’

What Stark did aboard the Helicarrier… Clint shivered at just the memory. He had never seen that look on Stark’s face. They tossed the word around liberally, but in those moments, Stark truly had been a monster.

And Clint had been terrified.

‘You saw what Stark did to escape,’ Thor continued, ‘and what Loki did to rescue him. What do you think they would do if they lost the other?’
Clint didn’t want to imagine it, but the words escaped; ‘What would they do?’

Thor’s face was grim. ‘The Fates foretold Ragnarök; the beginning of the end.’

‘Ragnarök?’

‘A time when Loki will destroy the Nine Realms; Midgard, Asgard, all of it, will fall to his power. Nothing will stop him, and Loki will destroy himself. But he will destroy Yggdrasil in the process.’ He paused, wet his lips. ‘Loki was willing to destroy his birth Realm because Odin lied to him about his heritage. What do you think he will do if SHIELD kill his mate?’

Clint exhaled sharply at that. Images of Stark tossing them around like toys ran through his head, was quickly replaced by Loki slaughtering SHIELD agents; by the pair of them bringing down an entire SHIELD base without breaking a sweat.

‘Kill one-’ Clint began.

Thor finished for him; ‘And the other will destroy everything.’

Silence followed his words. They settled on the pair heavily. It seeped into Clint’s bones; the knowledge of what Stark had become; what SHIELD had truly created.

‘And Asgard can’t stop them?’ Clint asked.

‘We can try,’ Thor said. ‘Loki faced execution or life imprisonment for his actions. Now that he is bonded with Stark, he cannot be executed.’

‘Because Stark will destroy the worlds?’ Clint asked.

But Thor shook his head. ‘Not just that,’ he said. ‘Stark is Æsir by status; he became a citizen of Asgard when Loki made him a god. But he is Midgardian by birth. And no Midgardian may be executed throughout the Nine Realms.’

‘But on Earth we execute people all the time,’ Clint argued.

‘You do not execute bond mates,’ Thor said. ‘The Nine Realms will not allow it.’

It truly hit Clint then, what Thor was trying to say. If SHIELD killed Stark or Loki, the other would wipe out the entire fucking galaxy. They couldn’t kill Loki because of the King of Asgard’s orders. They couldn’t execute Stark because he was bonded with Loki.

‘You cannot execute one half of a mated pair,’ Thor said.

‘Son of a bitch,’ Clint muttered. ‘Fury wants to kill them both.’

‘And I must stop him,’ Thor said. ‘The ramifications are too great, Clint. Even Midgard is not immune to these laws. I cannot save you if the Nine Realms finds you guilty.’

‘And you want my help,’ Clint realised. Thor said nothing. ‘It’s why you told me first, right? You want me to help you stop SHIELD from killing Stark and Loki.’

Thor was silent for a beat, clearly choosing his words carefully. ‘There is more,’ he said.

‘What more could there possibly be?’ Clint demanded.

‘Your headaches,’ Thor said, ‘I know what is causing them.’ Clint frowned. ‘It is not Loki, at least
not anymore. You have been given a gift, Clint… though it may also be a curse.’

Clint was beginning to get scared. Because Thor looked so goddamn sorry, like he’d done something to Clint, like it was his fault, whatever it was he was about to tell Clint.

‘Thor, what is it?’

‘You can sense magic, Clint,’ Thor said.

The words echoed hollowly within Clint’s mind. They didn’t sink in, didn’t stick to his skin; they couldn’t, because he didn’t understand…

‘The Tesseract has changed you,’ Thor said, ‘the headaches are your mind trying to tell you that magic is near. It senses me, Loki, Stark, everything and everyone that contains magic.’

‘Thor…’

‘I am so sorry,’ Thor said. ‘It is not a gift that any Midgardian can handle. When I first discovered it, I thought that I could teach you. But what I can sense now…’

Clint met his eyes; Thor’s were sad. ‘What are you saying?’

Thor pursed his lips. ‘It may be killing you.’

The words clicked, then. Everything snapped into place.

Clint closed his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: I’ve been listening to a lot of Sia lately... also, the world is kinda fucked up at the moment, yeah? Yeah. Stay safe, everyone! Tony and Loki will be here to distract you during these troubling times.

Also, all the feels. ALL. OF. THEM.

Dreamer
Getting up was a struggle on the best of days. Tony’s head hurt and his body ached in weird ways. His magic felt more sluggish than usual and Tony frowned as he prodded at it. It practically rolled over and flashed its belly, unable to do anything else. That probably wasn’t good.

‘You’re awake.’

Tony looked up. Bruce was sitting in an armchair by the bed, a cup of tea on the table between them.

‘Bruce,’ Tony said.

‘Welcome home,’ Bruce replied.

Tony felt his eyes well up. Fuck. *Fuck.*

‘Tony?’

‘I’m sorry,’ Tony said. It came out a whisper, Tony’s voice shaky. ‘Fuck, Bruce, I’m *so sorry.*’

Bruce didn’t say anything, but he clearly knew what Tony was talking about; his eyes were understanding, and Tony *hated it.*

‘It’s all my fault,’ Tony said.

‘Not everything,’ Bruce retorted. ‘I don’t blame you for global warming.’

Tony laughed slightly and then sniffed. ‘You were in there for two weeks.’

Bruce sobered ever so slightly. ‘Yeah,’ he agreed, ‘I was.’

‘It was my fault,’ Tony repeated. Bruce said nothing this time. ‘I was so caught up in myself… I know I’m a narcissist, but *fuck.*’ He didn’t know how to apologise properly; didn’t know what he could say or do to make up for Bruce being caged like a damn *animal* for two weeks.
No, longer then that. He was in there for two weeks before Tony was caught. And fuck, how long had Tony been in there?

Bruce just remained silent, eyes on Tony and lips pursed.

‘I’ve been a real shitty friend,’ Tony said.

‘Yeah, you have.’ Tony blinked rapidly at the words and Bruce smiled. ‘I’m not gonna pretend I wasn’t… hurt, by you forgetting I existed. But I don’t hate you, Tony.’

‘You should,’ Tony said, ‘you all should.’

‘All of us?’

Tony nodded. ‘I mean fuck, Bruce, just look at Loki!’ Bruce grimaced; he’d clearly seen Loki’s sorry state while Tony was unconscious. ‘I did that. I abandoned you and Loki and for what?’

‘To stroke your own ego,’ Bruce said.

Tony laughed and it sounded too wet to his ears. He felt a hand on his arm and jolted. Behind him Loki mumbled in his sleep.

‘I don’t hate you, Tony,’ Bruce reiterated, squeezing his arm, ‘and I know you’ll make it up to me. Right now, I want you to get better.’

‘I will,’ Tony promised, ‘and then I’ll buy you whatever the fuck you want, okay? You’re family, and-’

‘Oh,’ Bruce said. His eyes had widened, and Tony frowned.

‘What?’

Lips twitching up ever so slightly, Bruce leaned back. ‘Family, huh?’

Tony ran through his words again. Oh. Well then. ‘Yeah,’ he said. ‘Family.’ He glared at Bruce. ‘Don’t try to deny it, alright? I’ll adopt you if I have to.’

Bruce snorted a laugh and pressed a hand to his mouth to try and smother it. ‘I’m… older than… you,’ he got out between the giggles.

Tony grinned. ‘Don’t make me adopt you, Bruce.’

‘I’m glad that you two have made up,’ Loki drawled from behind Tony, ‘but I have no wish to be a father, and I’m currently trying to sleep.’ His voice was hoarse, and Tony wanted to turn around and press kisses all over his face.

But despite his words Loki was sitting up, clearly awake and just a bit amused.

‘How are you feeling?’ he asked.

Tony melted at the soft tone he used. ‘Yeah,’ he mumbled, ‘m’good.’

‘Hungry?’ Loki asked.

Tony wasn’t, but Bruce cleared his throat and stood. ‘You both need to eat something. I made stew.’
Loki was already on his feet, leaving a Loki-shaped hole in the bed behind Tony. Tony missed him immediately and made grabby hands as Loki rounded the bed. His hands were already cool, but Tony wrapped his fingers around them and gave Loki’s knuckles a kiss.

Tony stumbled as soon as he was standing, feet unable to hold up his own weight. But Loki was there, catching Tony easily and letting Tony lean against him. And Bruce was there too, giving Tony a pat on the shoulder before going to open the door.

Tony kissed Loki’s chest. ‘Love you,’ he murmured.

‘And I adore you,’ Loki responded.

…

Clint’s fingers curled into fists. He wasn’t sure if he should scream or laugh. The rain had calmed, so that was something, he supposed. Clint reached up to wipe his face down. A fine mist spread out around him and Thor, and clouds still hung thick and heavy above them. The sign on Stark’s Tower was beginning to look eerie in the haze.

‘I can sense magic,’ Clint muttered. He sounded incredulous to his own ears.

‘Aye,’ Thor said.

Clint nodded. ‘Right. Of course, I can. Why not?’

‘It is not usual,’ Thor tried, as though that would make Clint feel better.

Clint stared at him. ‘You fucking think?’

‘Let me explain,’ Thor said, and did so when Clint waved a hand at him, head still trying to process what Thor had told him. ‘The mind stone connected you to Loki and to the Tesseract,’ Thor said. ‘I am not sure which stone has changed you, only that a change has occurred.’

‘What change?’ Clint asked. ‘What the hell… humans can’t sense magic.’

‘Can’t they?’ Thor countered. ‘Doctor Strange said he was capable of it.’

Clint’s eyes narrowed. ‘I’m not a fucking sorcerer, Thor!’ he snapped. ‘I’m just… I’m a fucking archer! I’m a marksman! I was hired to shoot things, not sense fucking magic.’

‘I am sorry-’

‘STOP APOLOGISING!’ Clint shouted.

Thor pursed his lips at that, hands curling into fists and eyes wandering over Clint’s face. Clint shook his head and scrubbed at his face again. His skin felt cool to the touch, but his head was beginning to hurt.

‘Your head aches because you can sense magic,’ Thor interrupted his thoughts. Clint sighed and gave up resisting; he reached up to massage his temples. ‘Your mind can sense magic but doesn’t understand what it is. Your mind trying to process what you can now sense is what ails you.’
‘Well that’s just great,’ Clint mumbled.

Thor ignored the comment. He crossed the distance between them and reached out to gently grip Clint’s shoulder. ‘I am sorry,’ he murmured. ‘No Midgardian should be subjected to this. Your body is not equipped for this kind of talent. All it’s doing is hurting you.’

‘Can you make it stop?’ Clint asked. His voice was a whisper, the words sounding weak and childlike. Clint swallowed against the well of emotion trying to break out.

‘I can try,’ Thor said. ‘I will teach you everything I know, and we can hope that it is enough to shield you from the side effects. But I am not talented in magic, Clint. I am unsure if what I can teach you will help at all. I do not know if there will be more side effects as your ability to sense magic grows stronger.’

Clint just nodded, not trusting his voice. He was sure that he’d break down if he had to actually address Thor properly. Thankfully, Thor let him be. The demigod turned his back on Clint, let the agent compose himself to the best of his ability.

When Clint felt like he’d patched himself together, he crossed the roof to stand at Thor’s side. Thor was staring at Stark Tower, eyes troubled and hands limp at his sides.

‘What’s stopping you from storming in there and taking them?’ Clint asked.

Thor huffed a laugh; his face was clouded. ‘Loki and Stark will be weak, that is true,’ he admitted. ‘But I cannot take them both on by myself. And they have Banner; Rhodes; Strange.’ Thor shook his head. ‘Stark broke the cuffs my father gave me for Loki. I will have to visit Asgard to retrieve more.’

‘And they don’t work on Stark,’ Clint commented.

‘They do not,’ Thor agreed. ‘Loki will teach Stark how to more effectively break them, I am sure. A new set will need to be crafted for Stark. And…’

He trailed off and Clint looked up at him. Thor’s brow was furrowed, thoughts racing behind his blue eyes. It was a look that was becoming common place on Thor’s once carefree face. What a team they made, Clint thought with a snort; the depressed so-called heroes.

‘My father must be informed of Loki and Stark’s status as bond-mates,’ Thor finally finished. ‘It changes everything.’

‘And you have to tell Fury,’ Clint said. Thor’s large shoulders drooped that little bit more. Clint nudged him ever so slightly. ‘Don’t worry, big guy,’ he muttered, ‘I’m not worth much but I’m on your side.’

The smile Thor gave him was blinding. Clint blinked against it. ‘Thank you, my friend,’ Thor said. ‘And I will do everything within my power to help you.’

Right. Because Clint’s brain could sense magic. Fucking great.
Tony struggled down the stairs and froze mid-step halfway across the living room. He turned to survey the floor-to-ceiling windows, stared through the glass at the black clouds that hung heavy in the sky. Bruce’s view of the New York City skyline was hampered somewhat by the helipad overhead, but it was still quite a view. There was a niggle at the back of Tony’s head, an itch he couldn’t scratch.

‘Tony?’

Tony snapped out of it and turned to smile at Loki. ‘I’m fine,’ he said, ‘just missed the view.’

Loki didn’t look completely convinced but let it go. Tony continued his pathetic shuffle into the kitchen. He firmly told himself to cut the crap and get his act together; he was gonna eat, he was gonna get better, and he was gonna slaughter every SHIELD agent for even daring to live on the same planet as him.

That resolve crumbled as soon as he stepped into the kitchen. His knees weakened but Loki caught him before he could fall flat on his face.

‘Rhodey?’

The colonel was leaning against the counter, a mug of dark liquid held firmly between his hands. He shot up at their entrance and grinned widely. ‘Hey, Tony.’

Loki sat Tony at the table. ‘Banner, I know you’re dying to scold me and my eating habits,’ Loki said.

‘Uh…’ was Bruce’s helpful contribution. Tony was mildly aware of Loki grabbing Bruce and dragging him from the room; how, he didn’t know. They were behind him, and Tony’s magic was a pathetic little thing, so how the fuck-

‘How you feeling?’

Right. Rhodes. Here, in Bruce’s kitchen.

‘Fine,’ Tony said. Rhodes could clearly tell that Tony was bullshitting but didn’t call him on it. He sat in the seat opposite Tony and smiled at him.

‘It’s good to see you up,’ Rhodes said, ‘you scared the hell outta all of us, man.’

He did? Tony frowned. He… honestly had no idea what the fuck was going on. He felt something in his chest burn ever so slightly. His magic pulsed.

Rhodes glanced around the room, a frown on his face.

‘How are you here?’ Tony asked. Rhodes’ attention snapped back to him. ‘Loki’s here,’ Tony added.

‘I’m aware,’ Rhodes said. ‘I know everything, Tony.’

‘How?’

‘Pepper,’ Rhodes said.

Tony closed his eyes. That burn was a fire, now, and his magic seemed to have expanded as well.

‘She told me SHIELD had caught you. You were working with Loki, you were killing SHIELD
agents; you know, all your dirty little secrets.’ He was smiling when Tony opened his eyes.

‘And you believed her?’ Tony said.

Rhodes tilted his head slightly, a frown forming. ‘I didn’t not believe her,’ he tried. He sighed and leaned forward; hands clasped over the table. ‘You’ve changed, Tone; anyone can see that. I knew there was something up with Logan.’

Tony jolted at that.

‘Yeah,’ Rhodes said at his reaction, ‘I didn’t know what was wrong with him, but I knew it was something. I’ve spent enough time in your orbit to know when people are bullshitting me. Every word outta Logan’s mouth was bullshit. Well, except when he talked about how much he liked you.’ He paused for a beat, fingers tapping against each other. ‘So yeah, when Pepper called me, I gave it thought. Real thought. And then I came over to the Tower and found you gone and Logan looking like shit. I pulled a gun-’

Tony was on his feet in a second, a weight suddenly making the room feel too small. ‘You shot him?!’

Rhodes tossed his hands up. ‘The safety was on,’ he said, ‘and Loki kicked the crap outta me!’

The pressure disappeared and Tony sagged back into his seat, chest suddenly aching and mind spinning. ‘Okay… okay.’

‘He told me everything,’ Rhodes continued, ‘and I told him to shut his mouth and let me help.’

Tony’s head jerked up.

‘You’re my best friend, Tony,’ Rhodes said.

‘What?’ was all Tony could come up with.

‘You think I was gonna leave you with SHIELD?’

‘I… what?!’ None of this made sense. Rhodes couldn’t be here; he couldn’t be sitting here, cool as a cucumber, apparently completely okay with what Tony was doing… with what Tony had become.

Tony’s gaze flicked back up and he surveyed Rhodes carefully.

Rhodes shifted in his seat. ‘Guess I gotta get used to that,’ he said. Tony cocked his head. ‘That look,’ Rhodes muttered, ‘like I said; you’ve changed.’

‘I’m well aware of that,’ Tony said, ‘which makes me wonder why you’re here.’

Rhodes frowned. ‘You’re my best friend,’ he repeated.

‘I’m a monster,’ Tony retorted, ‘don’t delude yourself into thinking I’m anything else, James.’

Rhodes swallowed at the use of his first name, Adam’s apple bobbing and jaw twitching. ‘There’s a million ways I coulda gone about getting revenge on SHIELD.’

Nodding slowly, Rhodes asked, ‘So why didn’t you? Why decide to kill them all?’

Tony leaned back slowly. His chest was uncomfortably tight, but he was beginning to realise what it was. His own magic wasn’t currently capable of reacting; Tony didn’t have the strength to do
anything with his magic.

But Loki? Loki had plenty of magic. Tony could practically taste it, even without Loki by his side. Tony had to get a hold of himself or he was going to snap and destroy something.

An image of Rhodes pressed up against a wall by the sheer force of Tony’s will slipped into Tony’s mind. Tony shook it free.

‘Tone?’

‘I was gonna drag their asses through every court in this country,’ Tony said, ‘that was the original plan; drag SHIELD through the mud and rip their entire fucking organisation apart. Then maybe I’d go after the Avengers; make sure none of them had anything left for retirement. I was gonna make sure the world hated them.

‘It was all gonna be legal,’ Tony continued, a laugh in his voice, ‘I still thought I was a good guy, you know? Thought I’d be happy just legally killing SHIELD. But… I just kept getting angrier.’

Rhodes cleared his throat.

‘I was so fucking… furious,’ Tony growled. He felt a new heat sweep through him; it made his skin prickle and his skin feel too tight. ‘How dare they steal from me,’ he said, ‘how dare they think they can touch my stuff. You know better than anyone, Rhodes; nobody wants Tony. They want the genius. The money. The technology. Not me.’

Rhodes nodded; there was understanding in his eyes.

‘And SHIELD’s the same; Romanov, Rogers, Fury.’ Tony spat each of their names. Beneath his hand the table vibrated. ‘They think they’re better me. They think they have any right to my stuff. Every day I woke up from dreams of their blood on my hands. I tried to ignore it; pretended I wasn’t a second away from fucking snapping… but then Loki turned up.’

Rhodes was silent, eyes on Tony as he spoke.

‘Loki does… whatever the fuck he wants,’ Tony said with a smile. ‘Have you ever actually watched him, Rhodes?’ He paused, waiting for a response.

Rhodes blinked rapidly. ‘Uh…’ He cleared his throat. ‘Yeah,’ he finally said, ‘we’ve studied him-

‘Not studied,’ Tony interrupted, ‘have you ever just sat and watched Loki fight?’ When Rhodes shook his head, Tony grinned. ‘He’s fucking amazing. Pure, utter chaos, but controlled chaos. Loki does whatever the hell he wants.’ Tony shrugged a shoulder and started tracing patterns on the tabletop. ‘I wanted to do that,’ he murmured. ‘It slipped into my waking thoughts during that fight. What if I just… killed SHIELD?’

He remembered it like it was yesterday; the first thought slipping in, taboo and against everything Tony had strived so hard to pretend to be. Heroes didn’t think about killing people. They didn’t feel a shiver of pleasure go down their spines at just the thought of killing a former comrade. They didn’t dream of blood and death and flesh giving way beneath their hands.

‘I couldn’t stop it,’ Tony whispered. ‘Once I thought about it, it was all I could think about it. I went out of my way to watch old footage of Loki killing people. He was good at covering his tracks, you know? But we have footage and-

Tony stopped, breath catching in his throat. He grinned and knew it was dark, knew that it was
unsettling because Rhodes was shifting, clearly uncomfortable.

‘Good guys don’t get off on that,’ Tony said. He stared Rhodes down, eyes bright. ‘And I really get off on it.’

‘I see,’ Rhodes managed to say.

Tony’s grin sharpened. He pressed his palm flat against the table and it went still beneath his skin. ‘It was downhill from there,’ he said. ‘It wasn’t enough to destroy SHIELD. I had to kill them.’

‘All of them?’

‘Every. Single. One,’ Tony said, each word punctuated. ‘Every guard, every agent, every fucking techie sitting in some base somewhere. I will kill each one of them before I go after Fury.’

‘Why?’ Rhodes asked. ‘I get that you want revenge, Tony. But why all of them?’

‘It’s not about the agents, Rhodes,’ Tony said, ‘it’s about what they represent. How can I set an example if I let some of them go?’

Rhodes gulped. ‘No one will mess with you after this, huh? Is that it?’ Tony just smiled. ‘And you’re showing Fury and his bosses what you’re capable of,’ Rhodes continued. ‘Showing them exactly what you’re going to do to them.’

‘Exactly,’ Tony said. ‘It’s not enough to cut the head off the empire; you have to pull it down brick by brick.’ He stopped to shrug a shoulder. ‘Besides, I’m having fun. Running around, hunting them down, it’s just so damn entertaining. And what do they matter? At the end of the day, Rhodes; I just don’t care.’

‘Yeah,’ Rhodes said. He looked sad. ‘I got that.’

‘You still my friend?’ Tony asked, head cocked. ‘Still my best buddy, huh?’

Rhodes snorted. ‘You think I’m gonna run now?’

Tony paused at that. It didn’t sound like Rhodes was lying. But the Avengers had proven that Tony wasn’t the best judge of character when it came to the people closest to him.

‘You want me to believe that you’re okay with this?’ Tony demanded. ‘I’m a monster, Rhodes.’

‘You always have been,’ Rhodes said, his tone simple. Like it was a fact. ‘You think I didn’t see this coming, Tony? You’ve always been like this. You were just lying to yourself.’

Tony blinked. ‘You said I’ve changed.’

‘You’re not hiding who you are,’ Rhodes retorted. ‘You’re not trying to hold back anymore. You’re not pretending to be Captain America.’

‘But—’

‘You never cared,’ Rhodes cut in. ‘You didn’t build Iron Man to make up for all the people your weapons killed, Tony. You did it to punish the people who stole from you. I’ve always known what you are. You’re not the kind of monster to go out and slaughter every person on the street. But you’re not a hero.’

‘I flew a nuke into a worm hole to save this fucking city,’ Tony growled. He didn’t know why he
was arguing; why he wanted Rhodes to get up and leave. So he could be proven right? So he could know without a doubt that those closest to him didn’t really love him?

‘Cause it’s your city,’ Rhodes said, ‘and how dare anyone else think they can take it away from you.’

Tony stared at him. His heart thudded heavily in his chest and his fingertips tingled with stolen power.

Rhodes smiled. ‘You lied to yourself, Tony,’ he said, ‘but you can’t lie to me. I know who you are. I remember you drinking yourself into a near coma when you were fifteen. I put you to bed and promised myself I’d have your back. You’re family. That doesn’t change because you’re taking over the world.’

‘Thought you were gonna kick my ass if I did?’ Tony said.

Rhodes burst into laughter at that. ‘Shit, I forgot about that,’ he said. ‘Damn, Romanov never hid her true feelings, huh?’

‘Not when it came to me, no,’ Tony said. ‘So…’

‘Family,’ Rhodes reiterated. ‘Nothing’s changing that, Tony.’

‘You can’t be okay with this,’ Tony argued.

‘I’m not,’ Rhodes said. His tone was absolutely honest. ‘I don’t approve of any of this. But I don’t have to like it to have your back, Tony. I won’t kill anyone for you, but you’d better believe that I’ll manipulate the media for you. You’re not going to prison on my watch.’

Tony breathed out heavily. ‘This isn’t happening,’ he muttered.

Rhodes shrugged a shoulder. ‘Believe what you want,’ he said, ‘but you’re family, Tony. Family.’

Tony just started at him ‘Might take me a while to believe it,’ he admitted.

Rhodey smiled. ‘I’ve got the time,’ he said.

Chapter End Notes

Author’s Note: The world is all kinds of fucked up, am I right? Like, did someone piss off some ancient gods that we no longer worship?

I’m finally updating, huzzah! I like posting on my birthday, and thankfully I managed to get this chapter written just in time! I do apologise for the wait on this chapter; I hate when it takes me this long to get something out. But the world, as mentioned, is crazy at the moment, and my shoulder will never be the same. Unfortunately, I’ve found that I can’t sit and type for more than twenty minutes. But hopefully that changes in the future.

I can only hope that the next chapter doesn’t take me ten years to get out.

Cheers,
Dreamer.

Works inspired by this one: 

*Deal with the Devil - Fancomic* by Apollyon (DarklingFyre)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!