Loki is sick (and tired) (and abandoned, and injured...)

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Summary

To celebrate my 100th fic here (counting both pseuds) I decided to do a whump extravaganza, featuring my most whumped guy: Loki.

Some eps will be longer, some shorter. Prompts are welcome, but no reader insert things or smut.


Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Loki didn't know who had put him here, it could be nearly anybody. Nobody had much love for him anymore. The very few people he had count on in the past were either gone or had shown him that they wanted nothing to do with him. He knew he had brought it on himself, but still hurt.

The fact he hadn't been able to make a single true friend in all his years, and in all the realms he had visited. Something that come so easy for most of the being in the universe, and yet, he was alone, always alone, and had to force people, put them under mind control if he wanted to be kept company. The people he'd shared years of his life with on Asgard bore no love for him, and were quick to find ways to get rid of him quick as lightning.

And his family... Funnily enough, he imagined that, like most adopted children, he had two families, the biological one and the adoptive one. And yet... Both his fathers were a lost cause: he had killed Laufey trying to please Odin and Odin had shown once and again how little he tolerated him. How glad he would be, he too, to never have to lay eyes on him ever again.

Frigga had still cared a bit when she died. And he couldn't say goodbye properly and she was taken from all of them. He couldn't make up for all the wrong things he'd done and said to her, and she no longer could look at him feeling something other than repulse. They'd lost each other, in a bitter way and Loki regretted and missed. (But she too had lied to him all of his life... whatever her motives, she must have known... she was a wise woman, why would she...) He couldn't even think about her without being overwhelmed by sorrow, and grief.

Losing Thor too (while it was a less permanent loss) had hurt even more. At least, when he told him he was going to kill him, that he was ready for his betrayal, he seemed to care, even if only slightly. Now there wasn't even that. Thor had shown him that he felt nothing for him anymore, that he was less than a stranger. Thor had forsaken him, his eternal companion, the one that had called himself his brother for all those years....And now, nothing.

So he couldn't on him to get him out, and if he couldn't count on Thor he couldn't count on anyone. He realised soon after he was thrown in that dark dungeon, that only his jailers would be able to change his fate. If they decided that he was to rot in that windowless cell for all eternity, then rot he would. Those who knew him would probably assume he was dead (finally) and celebrate his death in a way in which they never celebrated his life.

Again, it hurt.

Knowing how irreparably alone in the universe he was hurt more than all the tortures his nondescript
captors threw at him: more than the drowning and reviving, more than the scorching flames and the acid, more than the thread of metal on his lips to keep him quiet.

Also those did hurt, too. Loki thought he wouldn't be able to feel pain by now. In many aspects, the body got used to the treatment it received, the more one was in cold places, the less they felt it, because they'd grown accustomed to it. And there were a fair number of things Loki hardly registered anymore, but pain... He knew that he could withstand much more than any mortals and probably more than most Asgardians, but still there was a point in which he could nothing but scream and thrash and hope for the quick release of death.

He had lost track of time somewhere after seven or eight months had passed, but he knew those guards had been torturing him for a fairly long time. It started with fairly common things, the choking, the ripping off his nails, the bucket in which they intermittently drowned him. Then they saw that they were burning him like they wanted to and they started getting creative.

The fire was painful, but the acid was much more horrible. It crawled under his skin, and travelled through his body, like liquid agony. He could feel and see his limbs being eating away by it, he could smell it and he there was nothing he could do to escape it. They poured it everywhere, and then again, over his half healed wounds.

They broke many bones, too, and put him in a sort of target to be punched, kicked and thrown things. This was not as painful but it was horrendously humiliating. Having him paraded there, with his mouth shut so he couldn't even complain about it... That broke him as badly as the acid of the fire did. And it never end.

Days stretched over nights, until he almost longed for the sight of his captors. At least, that way, he would know that he was alive and wouldn't have to endure his own excruciating thoughts. He knew that he was alone, and he knew that it was his own doing, but the thing was that he didn't think he would have done anything differently given the chance. He was destined for that, for doom, for solitude, to end up and as one his enemy's plaything, living through indescribably pain of all types for the rest of his days.

There was no hope, not anymore.

At some point he stopped thinking altogether and just lay there, his senses becoming number and number with time, until he was only a shell of a person. Maybe now he would be able to die. Maybe now it would stop hurting.

Time passed and passed and passed, and Loki became a limp doll. Although their captors missed the
thrashing and screaming, the crying out and doubling over, they didn't mind inflicting their punishments on the Loki-doll. He could be useful in different ways.

At some point, he was forgotten, abandoned. Solitary confinement is what they would call it, if anyone cared to name Loki's situation. But he was forgotten in his cell, eyes unseeing, lips stitched up. Some of his wounds refused to heal, even though it had been long since he received them. He became a forgotten useless doll of a person. Not even that. A mere lifeless figure.

Time passed, and passed.

There was a beeping sound, but Loki took a long time to hear it and then to understand what it was. First he realised that he could hear again, and that was odd. He was so comfortable in his pleasant catatonia, why would his body choose to leave it? But there it was, that rhythmic beeping sound, on his ears, making its way to its brain. And not only that. Little by little he started hearing other things too, like footsteps and the faint sound of other people's voices in the background.

Which was very strange, Loki thought, as there had been no beeping in his cell. Why would his captors move him around? To someplace relative public, to boot, where people could be heard. This seemed too strange. Something was very off, and he didn't know what. Still, it wasn't enough for him to open his eyes, not yet. Whatever new hells awaited him, he was in no hurry to discover.

The next time he noticed something (woke up?) the situation seemed even stranger. The beeping was still there, but there was a warm feeling in hands and then arms. Water, he realised, warm water with something in it, and the hands of someone else. It took him a fairly long time to understand that someone was cleaning him. He braced himself for the reason they were doing this, the ulterior motive, but none came. The person cleaning him was careful, gentle, and went through all his body with care, replacing the water when it got cold, and carefully dried him.

And then they left, with a soft sigh, and there was no electricity, no chains, no burning or poisons. As he took more control of his body, he started realising that he was lying on something soft and that he was warm. The beeping continued, and he realised that all in all the temperature of the place was fairly good. Days must have passed since the first time he heard the beep, and yet, no one had come to punish him.

The only logical explanation seemed to be that he wasn't in his cell anymore, but how? He hadn't had the strength to get out himself and he had no one to rescue him. It was a mystery, and there was probably something dark behind it, but Loki decided that he would enjoy this peace while it lasted and went back to sleep.
When he awoke again, there were voices near him.

“So, you think he can hear us?” The first voice said.

“His brain shows more activity – he definitely not in that catatonic state anymore anymore, hasn’t for a couple weeks. But we don’t know how long it will take for him to actually be conscious again.” A second voice, and the voices sounded vaguely familiar. Not someone from Asgard, but not a strangers, either. A third one continued.

“There simply no precedent for this, so we going blind here. Any other living thing would have died long ago, so extrapolations we may do...”

“He’s waking up.” A female voice said behind them, and this one Loki didn’t know. “Won’t open his yet, though. Too tired, too... drained. He’s wondering why no one is hurting him, why no one has hurt him these last days.”

“Well, that’s awful.” A last voice said, a stranger, again.

And then the woman’s voice was in his head, careful. You are not imprisoned anymore, Loki. We are not your jailers. No one will hurt you. Loki didn’t quite believe her, but felt some tension dissolve around him. Maybe a twinge of hope, maybe a sense of calm. Not only was he out of that cell, but he was with people, someone who cared enough to address him, call him by his name.

Five days later he opened his eyes and immediately closed them at the sudden attack of whiteness.

“Stark! Dim the lights, will you?”

One of the voices from the other day said. The first one, the one wondering if he could hear them.

“You can open your eyes again, we’ve softened the light so it won’t hurt you.”

Loki did so, slowly and carefully, and saw the bright smiling face of the Captain of America in front of him.
“Hey, Loki. Do you remember me?”

Loki faintly nodded and looked at his surroundings. It was a luxurious room, with what he recognised as medical equipment and a big window behind him. Next to his bed was a long couch where the Captain, the man of iron and a young woman were sitting. Loki looked around, confused.

“This is one of my places” Stark said. “We took you here when Wanda and Steve found you.”

A million questions flooded his eyes. Why? How?

“Well, Wanda was looking for some way to bring her brother back, you see, and Thor mentioned something about how you died like a bunch of times but always came back, and so she wanted to find you.”

Wanda smiled and Loki recognised her, understood, she was the voice that had spoken to him before.

“But don't worry, talk of magic can wait, until you are fully recovered.” She said, and her voice was calm.

“And you can stay here until you are fully recovered. No matter how long it takes.” Steve said, something final about his words.

He remembered horrifically clearly the day he Wanda and Bucky had found him. Or it, because what they had found could hardly be called a person. He had been awake but somehow not awake, his body covered in a myriad of old wounds, half healed, his body consumed on itself. Bones were protruding everywhere, some of them where they shouldn't be, and he was bleeding still, after so long being left there.

But he could probably not feel it, not feel anything, if his eyes distant glazed eyed were anything to go by. And the mouth.... his mouth was still shut with those metal wirings, and Steve had to fight the urge to vomit right then and there. This had been a person, someone they knew, someone's brother and child, and he'd been tortured worse than any living thing could withstand. Bucky was frozen in place, trying to get a grip on himself. Trying not get taken away to a darker time.
Wanda knelt in front of the presence and looked him in the eye.

“He’s alive.” She said. “But not quite here anymore. It hurt too much.”

Some days later, Stark found out that the government had a hand in what had happened to Loki, which had been mostly a Special Ops prolonged assignment. To teach our agents to interrogate, and have them try out with someone disposable. Torturing was part of the training of the people that were supposing to protect the country.

Steve felt sick. Then he pained his shield black.

While Stark, Natasha and some other set out to make things right (expose the program, point fingers, create public outrage, make sure responsible people got jail time), Wanda and Steve became Loki's caretakers, and they had Bruce's and Scott Lang's help, occasionally. (There was, in fact, a get well soon card written by Cassie Lang, who only knew her daddy was helping a very very sick man).

It was a slow process. First, they needed to undo the malnutrition, and set the bones right. (And of course, release his mouth. Bruce had nightmares for days after that particular surgery). Then, it would be up to Loki, they were feeding him with IVs, nutrients, water, medicine and his body seemed to be responding (slowly, but little by little he was) but there was no telling if his mind would come back.

For a long time they stayed there, making sure he was getting what he needed, making sure his wounds were disappearing, that he was warm and clean. If he could do something to unmake the horrors he’d been put through, he would. Bucky was there sometimes too, but less often. It hurt too much, it was too painful a reminder of all those years of his life when he too, had lost himself. But he was glad that Steve was there for Loki too.

And there he was.

“Maybe you'r wondering who took you and did those things to you.” Steve said. “They were... some of our authorities sadly, but they'd taken care of.”

Loki still didn't know the answer to the most important question.

“He wants to know why we're helping him.” Wanda said, a proxy for his voiceless dry throat. “Only
to make amends for something you perceive as wrong? The wrong is undone, those people have had their comeuppance. Why endure my presence any longer and not throw me to a cell you can approve of?”

Wanda finished her tirade and looked at Loki with sorrow filled eyes. *If they don't take you, I will take you. You've been in a cell long enough.* She said in his mind, and Loki welcomed the presence of magic, however different from his it was.

“Cap doesn't want to.” Tony said, with his usual brand of smugness. “He's developed some sort of Nightingale syndrome but the other way round looking after you. And honestly, I'm not happy with the idea of throwing you to the wolves again, after all the shit that has been done to you. We've talked about it, and we want to give you a chance.”

Steve nodded, while Loki's eyes widened.

“While you heal, and after. Only if you don't go against or against our world, of course.” Steve said. “But Wanda also started in the other side, and giving her a chance has improved our team greatly. And maybe Stark's a bit right, and I want to get to know you.”

“Me too.” Wanda said, smiling.

A single thought ran through Loki's head, and Wanda caught on it.

“Yes, Loki, that's right. You wouldn't be alone anymore.”
“Oh, no no no no... This is bad, this is so bad...”

He hadn't seen it coming. Tony had been too preoccupied with the man in front of him and hadn't seen a series of one of those flesh piercing lasers coming at him, hadn't been quick enough. But Loki had shielded him for some reason, and he too hadn't been quick enough.

The gash in his gut, as bad as it was was bleeding, could be handled with. Both Thor and Loki had received many flesh wounds before, and they could recover pretty soon. He got hit in a leg and in his side, but that was not what was making Tony freak out.

That damned laser beam had also got Loki in his neck, and now he had fallen to the floor, and was gurgling, spitting out blood, looking like some red fountain. Loki's eyes were even crazier than usual, making Tony freak out even more. Fuck this was really really bad for Loki to be freaking out as well.

At least the damage didn't seem to be too bad, most other people would have died already and Loki was supposed to be a god, they healed quickly from what Tony knew and... He looked around, trying to see if there was anyone who could help around, but everyone was too busy or didn't seem to... And that was when Tony felt something tugging at one of armour covered arms.

He took off the face piece, suddenly overwhelmed, and saw that the thing was one of Loki's hands, covered in blood, demanding his attention while he choked on blood. Of course, he couldn't very much talk with his throat open in two. There was a demand in his eyes, and Tony couldn't make heads or tails of it.

“You wanna say something? You wanna say something! What it is it? That it hurts? I know it does, probably not that.”

Loki's eyes were bright and sad and Tony couldn't take it. There was so much blood He was going to slip in all of Loki's blood and the poor guy was trying to say something and couldn't and those eyes, looking at him, beseeching him, like emerald fucking streetlights, do something, Tony.

“Please, don't cry, Loki, I want to know what you're saying but really I should be focusing on fixing this and finding a way to close your throat... But it's so delicate, you know, most of my gadgets would probably kill you instantly because of the force and the speed of them, healing was never my
strong suit, you know? If Falcon were around, I think he knows...”

Loki was tugging at him again, more forcefully, his eyes brighter, his skin little by little getting paler and paler. There was so much blood, it was covering everything, half of Loki's face was covered in it and he was still coughing up more, his whole neck drenched, his black hair too, drenched in blood, and it kept coming, and god, how much more could he lose?... And, yes, Tony was losing it.

“I don't know what you want! I'm sorry! Is that it? Are you sorry, do you want us to forgive you? 'Cos I do it, I forgive you right this instant, for everything you've done and wanted to do, I forgive you Thor's name, in your father's name, if you help me... fix this without... killing you…”

Loki was fading at an alarming speed and Tony was just watching, watching impotently as it happened. Loki may be a god but Tony knew that his kind could die as well, like his and Thor's mum had. And it was happening again and Tony was afraid, afraid that if he did something he would kill the man and it would his fault, but if he didn't do anything he would also die and it would be his fault.

Loki hadn't been fighting with them for long, but he'd been a great ally when he had, and had convinced other doubtful semivillains to join too. He'd saved his and Cap's asses a couple of times (possibly just to spite Thanos, but who cared why, when the result was that they were alive?) and was great when it came to ironic remarks. And knew he was going to die because Tony had not been quick enough, and couldn't even find out what he was trying to say from his bloodied bit of floor.

“I'm sorry, Loki, I…”

The tugging on Tony's arm started to lose strength, and there was resignation on his face. Tony wanted to cry, the lump on his throat and the pain in his heart preventing him from thinking clearly...

“Mr Stark! There was a bazooka headed towards you! I stopped it, but you didn't know? You were just there, being a target…” A youthful voice commented and Tony's heart fell.

“Peter, don't come any closer. I don't want you to see this.”

“See wh...? Holy...!”
As a reflex action more than anything else, Peter threw a spider net bit aimed at Loki's throat. The blood stopped flowing, and Loki relaxed, drew a little relieved smile and passed out.

“Huh.” Tony said, looking at how well that had worked. “Spider net compression bandage. Why didn't I think of that?”

Peter smiled, despite the odd situation.

“.... You're welcome?”

Together, they brought the unconscious god to a safe place and placed him in one of the beds. He had lost a lot of blood, but these Asgardians were nothing if not resilient. And they healed quickly, very quickly. Loki's other minor gashes had already stopped bleeding, and his stomach one did too after Tony and Peter bandaged it carefully. To be fair, it was nice to have an excuse to get out of the battle, even if just for a while.

And it was even nicer that no one was dying, despite throats being cut. Loki may be a very recent addition to their team, but they didn't want to lose him. Thor still cared about him, no matter what he said and the others were starting to care too. Tony loved a good redemption story and he could always use having someone as unconventionally clever around.

He just hoped that all those wounds he received while with them weren't as painful as they looked like. Because they looked terrible.

“When do you think he'll wake up?” Peter asked. There was something strangely relatable about Loki: he was an alien god, but he was also the kid that was always picked on, and was always looking for praise and approval after so much name-calling. Peter could understand that.

“We can stay until he does, if you want to.” Tony said, finally getting a grip on himself.

“I'd like that.”

Loki only needed a few hours to recover his voice and he thanked both Peter and Tony, even if he was still very weak from all that blood loss. When asked about what he'd been trying to say, Peter guessed that he was trying to warn Tony about the hit on him, and Loki nodded. It was a good version as any.
(It wasn't the truth. The truth was that he saw Tony looking around and hadn't wanted him to go. He'd wanted him to stay, focused on him, so that he wouldn't have to die alone. But Stark didn't need to know about that bout of weakness. Maybe one day it would slip, if they were both very drunk)

There was something ironic about the whole thing, it had started with Loki putting his hand on Tony's throat trying to choke him, so long ago. Then it was Tony who couldn't put his hand on Loki's neck as he choked, for fear of hurting him.

Now if anyone tried to lay a finger on Loki's neck again, they would have to go through him.
Bridal carry

I.

The first time it happened, a lot of them weren't sure if they should take them with him or not, as they weren't sure where his loyalties lie, or if he would be any use to them. He was supposed to be on Thanos' side, even no one was really sure if he was playing Thanos too.

The thing was that one of the mad titan underlings had taken Spider man and put him on one of his cells and a small group consisting of Thor, Natasha and Iron Man went to get him. But when they did find him, Peter didn't want to leave right away.

“There is someone in the cell next to mine... We need to get him too, they've... been hurting him. I could hear it.” Peter said, his youthful features filled with horror. He couldn't get those screams out of his head, the lashing, the sound of bones breaking on the cell next to his.

And so, even they didn't have much time before they were discovered in there they went to see who was in the other cell, with the intention of rescuing them. But then they saw who it was and their resolution wavered. Loki, of course.

He looked very different than they'd last seen him, proud and whole menacing the world. Now he was clearly unconscious, dried blood on his face and neck, his luscious armour in shambles, showing even more injuries. One of his arms was bent in an odd way, as well as several fingers in his other hand. His left leg was a mess and there were ligature marks on his neck. Peter shivered, remembering the screams of pain he'd heard the short time he'd been here.

“It could be a trap.” Tony said. “He fakes some torture, makes us take pity on him and so we take him to our place, to our secrets, the centre of enemy headquarters. I wouldn't put it past him.”

Thor had learnt, with time, to always think the worst of his brother. Still, this time, he didn't think it was the case. When Loki used illusions it was to make him seem more grand, more whole. It would more in character for him to be hurting and put an illusion of being unscathed than the opposite. Still, Stark had his reasons to believe that and they needed to make sure.

“We shall test it, then.” Thor said. “Loki’s illusions cannot be touched and remain the same, they are only visual tricks. If I touch him and the wounds remain, then that would mean that he is truly hurt.”
“And that Thanos and him are not friendly, and that Loki may want retribution.” Natasha added. Could be interesting.

And so Thor went close to his fallen brother, conflicted. Part of him wanted this not to be a trick, wanted Loki to be against their enemy, because maybe that would that there was hope for him yet. That they would be able to fight in the same side again, that maybe there was still something beyond resentment and malice left in his brother. But another part of him wanted this to really be a trick, because the alternative would mean that his little brother was badly hurt, and that he had let that purple maniac break him.

When Thor did touch his brother, there was no glimmer, no disappearing of images, just Loki's too cold skin.

“Not a trick.” Peter said. “Now can we take him and leave? I really want to get out of here.”

“I still don't know if we should take him. Having him close, could be a breach of security, and we can't have those, not right now.” Tony said. They already had a kidnapping, and things were only getting started. Having Loki with them seemed an unneeded liability.

“We cannot leave him here!” Peter shouted. He understood why Mr. Stark said that, but it felt so cold.... Cruel even.

“I think he could give us good intel. I could try to convince him to work with us.” Natasha said.

“Thor?”

The god of thunder didn't know what to do. The warrior part of him told him that man of iron was right, and that Loki was probably trouble. That he would regret taking him in again, giving him another chance. That they should probably leave him and they would be better for it.

He had trained himself for this, to not care. He had trained himself not to feel anything for Loki anymore, no matter how deep in trouble he was, how hurt he seemed, how much he seemed to need his older brother. No, he couldn't give Loki any help, because Loki would only betray him again. He didn't care about his little brother anymore, because caring hurt too much.

Or at least that was what he told himself.
“Agent Romanoff is right. Loki could tell us a lot about how this mad man works. He's always been very perceptive and he could have seen things that us, or even Gamora and Nebula have missed. And we have defeated him before, we can do it again if we need to.”

Tony made a gesture of displeasure.

“All right, all right I guess. Let's hope he's worth it.”

And so Thor took him in his strong arms, while the others started going out, Peter's worried gaze on them. Seeing him so close, Thor could see better the damage his brother had endured, and it was getting harder and harder to stay impassible. The injuries on his brother were deep and painful looking and it was clear that whatever the Spider lad had heard had been no illusion.

Still, there was something even worse. Despite being the most fragile out of Thor's little gang (softer than Sif, as she liked to remind him), Loki had always been proud, never let anybody help him when he was hurt, always claimed that he could handle it alone. He never left anyone treat his injuries or treat him like as a sick person unless it was very bad.

For him to be carried like this, limp, offering no resistance, not having complained, not having said a single word of protest since they found him... It was unpleasant, it was wrong, and it put a weight on Thor's gut. His skinny brother was jumping along with his steps, dried blood all over him, several bones broken and there hadn't been a single “I can deal with this on my own”. As Loki went up and down with his steps, Thor hoped for a better future for the both of them.

One in which it didn't take a savage beating for him to allow himself to feel something for Loki again.

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II.

Mantis and Kraglin saw the Hulk coming at them and were a bit scared. Yes, technically the green beast was on their side, but he was also very changeable, some could even say irrational. No one could know when the beast was in one of his moods and decided that they were in the way and needed to be smashed. Normally he was friendly, protective even at times, but... How to know which Hulk greeted them?
As he was coming closer, Mantis and Kraglin saw the Hulk, for once, was being careful, gentle even. He was cradling something – no, someone, and moving softly so as not to jostle the figure in his arms. It was odd to see the Hulk be so... caring, tender almost, when he was normally the paragon of hostility and aggression. But the Hulk had a mission, and even his gamma ray-d anger mind could understand that it needed to be handled with care.

They had been fighting together when Loki got a very bad blow to the head, and couldn't perform properly after that. He seemed confused and even threw up a little. Hulk did his best to protect the sorcerer (he was his monster buddy, he was a smart companion to Bruce, and he never ever ever judged what the Hulk did, so yeah, HULK PROTECT) until eventually the god threw an unfocused green look his way and passed out in the midst of the fight.

So Hulk had taken in one arm while using the other to smash all the enemies that could stand in their way and looked for somebody that could help his hurt friend. There were some that would say that Loki didn't deserve Hulk's (and Bruce's) friendship, that he was too rotten, and deserved to be imprisoned forever or executed. But of course, there were some who thought the same of the Hulk, who'd done his share of regrettable actions.

The thing was, Hulk cared a great deal about having Loki around, to be someone with a bad past like him, despised by many like him (also Bruce liked playing chess with the guy) and so he made his mission, beyond anything else, to get Loki to safety, to find some place safe for him, and someone to take care of his injury, before it got worse.

And Mantis and Kraglin were there, and they were both really nice people as far as Bruce and the Hulk knew, so the green one approached them and with a care and gentleness unprecedented in him, deposited the unconscious Loki in front of them.

"LOKI HURT HEAD. YOU TAKE CARE."

“Sure, mate. You can coun' on us.” Kraglin said, with a terrified smile.

Then the Hulk left to find his friends again, but threw a couple of worried looks their way.

Loki seemed so angelic like that, eyes closed, expression relaxed. There was a big gash on his forehead, but other than that he was the handsome god they all knew. Even prettier without a grin in his head. He heard a man and a woman speaking and of course, his fogged mind concluded that it could be two people.
“Mother, father... I do not feel right....”

“Don't worry, child.” Mantis said, dissolving his worry with her gift. “We will make it all right. We have you.”

If Hulk would have been there, he would have smiled.

III.

It had taken a lot out of him, and while he pretended he was fine and kept telling them so, Steve knew Loki was far from fine. The god of lies was uncommonly pale, nearly green, he had trouble walking straight and Steve had caught him several times blinking hard, probably to stop the black spots swimming in front of his vision.

They had needed a lot of magical energy to break some civilians out of a compound, and even more when the of the women who ran the facility, a sorcerer also, had taken Bucky hostage. It had been tough fighting her- not only had Loki needed to particularly strong to fight this foe, but he had to be very very precise not to hurt their team mate. In the end, there had been some green vortex of doom that had gotten into the enemy lady, apparently sucking the magic out of her, and after Stark had flown her to a cell in his suit, the rest were running, hoping not to run into any more of their enemies.

But ever after creating that hurricane vortex thingy (Steve really wanted to learn better the semantics of magic, it was part of his job now, but who had time? He really ought to ask Loki for a quick class sometime), Loki had been wobbly, out of breath, unsteady. He insisted that he was fine, but they all could see that he wasn't, that the spell had drained him. Bucky was worried, Steve was worried and the civilians that they'd freed also looked quite worried, but they wanted to give Loki some... dignity? Some room to keep his pride but it was getting harder, he was getting slower, and they had no time for this, there was lives on stake.

So at one point, the god stopped and with very bright green yes told his companions to leave him, to run and save themselves without him. But obviously no one wanted to do that. Just as Loki's knees were giving out, Steve picked him up in his strong arms, ignoring Loki's confused expression.

“No one is abandoning you.” Steve said, and meant it.

And so they were running, with Bucky protecting both his friends. Loki had a bad past, like him,
many things he regretted, like him and Bucky suspected that there had actions in the God's past that hadn't completely his choice. Couldn't be sure, or give any specifics but Loki understood him and what he had gone through as the Winter Soldier too well not to have lived it himself. Whatever the case, Loki was their partner now, and he was ill, weakened after saving him and those people and they had to protect him.

Steve saw how Loki's head lolled from side to side, going in and out consciousness. He felt strangely proud of the god's development, of how he had gone to their side, but still kept his rebellious mischievous spirit. Loki was a rebel and always had been, and Steve could relate. He liked the spark in Loki's green eyes, much more now that he was using all that energy to help them. Yeah, maybe he'd done for it because he was lonely and wanted people's love than for the good of the world, but the thing was he was one of them.

Loki was holding on to Steve's neck softly and Steve liked the contact. So often Loki had been isolated, despised, alone. He wanted to be there for him, spiritually, practically, physically. He'd had so little of that, and Steve could provide. So he took the half conscious god around the most dangerous hallways until they found somewhere they could rest.

“No one is abandoning you.”

Loki had passed out already, but Steve hoped he was still listening. He held on to him tighter, making sure he didn't fall. He would take care of him today, and every day that he needed it.
They are planning in their secret hideout, and Nebula can tell something's wrong with Loki. Something has felt different for some days, but not it's more noticeable, more obvious.

“You are ill.” She announces, because she's just understood what was going on.

“I've noticed.” Loki says, with his usual mix of sarcasm and bitterness, and Nebula kicks herself for not having realised earlier.

It all makes sense now. Why he is even whiter than usual, why the shadows under his eyes are so pronounced, why he sometimes looks near green and needs to stop for a moment or two and breathe deeply. And she understands now that the sounds she heard this morning was him, probably retching. That's why he didn't eat with her, not because he was busy, but because he was too unwell to eat. Huh.

She stares at him. She's used to Loki being as functional as her, sharp, agile, quick in his movements. She didn't even know his kind could get infected by Terran diseases. She doesn't like that, not at all. It bothers her. Loki should be immune to everything and nothing should hurt him. Not even his enemies' blades.

Back when she was with Thanos, being sick was a sign of weakness, which meant more pain from the mad titan, so it was something to be ashamed, to hide. The last thing you wanted to be back then was weak, and being ill made you weak, less proficient in battle. She hadn't been sick often, and too many parts of her mechanical now to catch anything, but she remembers the shame and how bad it felt on top the symptoms to feel that she was a disappointment for Thanos. She doesn't want Loki to feel like that.

Loki is her friend, he is fierce and ambitious, he is smart in battle and out of it, he doesn't seem to mind her brutal and sometimes unkind demeanor. Most of all, Loki understands: he knows what it's like to be always second best, he knows what it's like to be like one's father, he knows what is like less liked than one's sibling by all the people who matter. He understand the need for retribution, the craving for love and companionship, he knows what it is like to feel like a monster while your sibling is the definition of beauty. Loki knows her, accepts her, doesn't judge her. Looks for her if there are team ups, has her back, asks for her opinion.

Nebula never had a friend before. And he mean a lot to her.
There is something strange as she looks at Loki's pale frame... A feeling she doesn't quite identify.

“Not to worry, dear Nebula.” he says, with a soft smile. “I can work just as well being sick.”

But Nebula doesn't need to Loki to work, isn't worried about that. No, as she sees him rub his eyes tiredly and get even paler and run to the bathroom, she realises that she wants to make it better. She wants to fix Loki and stop him from feeling bad. She wants to help him, diminish his unease.... comfort him, somehow.

This is an alien feeling for her, and she doesn't know what one does when one wants to comfort a friend. She has never comforted anybody, her usual line of action being fighting people or glaring at them. If she wanted to, she knew over two hundred ways in which she could kill Loki, but comforting him... She doesn't even know what she is to say.

But some time later Loki is thrown on their couch looking miserable and she knows that he is feeling too cold, despite an elevated temperature she can read with her bionic eye, and Nebula decides that she has to do something. So she leaves, thinking about which of the people she knows form this planet she finds more tolerable and can be willing to help. Of the heroics team they have met here, she likes the ones with criminal backgrounds best, but Romanoff reminds her too much of Gamora. She will go to Lang. He has been in jail and has less problems associating with herself and Loki, but was not as excellent in crime as the deadly Black Widow.

“I require your assistance.”

Scott's eyebrows shoot up to the sky. Nebula is not a person that needs anything, except maybe revenge and weapons.

“Oh?”

“I have a friend who is sick. It does not look life threatening, but he is...not well.”

“You were bunking up with Loki, right? I didn't even know gods could get sick.”

“Me neither, it is upsetting.” For a moment Nebula looks genuinely distressed, and Scott thinks that is cute that she is worried for her friend. And he never thought the scary blue lady would do anything that could be called cute. “I wish to help him, but I do not know how.”
“No bedside manners in outer space, huh? Sure, I can tell you. What does he have?”

“He is uncommonly warm and pale. He has not eaten in the last two days and has been vomiting and nauseous, I think.”

“Seems like a common intestinal virus.”

“Is there medication for it?”

“Not for viruses, generally, specially not for mild ones. What we normally do is make the person comfortable, diminish the symptoms while it passes.”

“Do go on.”

“Well, whatever it is you guys are doing, tell him to take a day off, to rest. A couch, a blanket, some pillows, you know, get him comfortable. Chamomille tea is good for upset stomachs, and water if he's been puking. A cold compress on the forehead for the fever, to relieve the heat, that's good too. And you know, just company is nice.”

Nebula takes note of everything the Terran says. Seems good advice.

“How could I procure some of that Chamomille you spoke of?”

“Let me get you some.” Scott says, with a faint smile. Psychopathic space warriors, he thinks to himself, can be just like us. It is nice to see that there is a heart behind all the resentment and violence of Nebula. It is nice that they are not alone, despite their conflictive relationship with their family. Now he's thought of Nebula as nice. This is a surprising day.

Loki is feeling really, really bad. He has been throwing up and dry heaving in the toilet of the hideout he shares with Nebula for what feels like an eternity and is now feeling dirty, weak, tired, just plain wrong. His head feels heavy and his stomach won't stop still. The whole room seems to be circling around him, and he hates it and wants it to end. His hands are shaking and he finally manages to get away from the toilet and get his back on the cool tile wall behind him. The bathroom spins around him and his stomach....
“Loki.”

It's just Nebula, carrying some gadgets.

“I'm sorry.” he says “I couldn't finish the...”

“No.” She interrupts. “You will not work until you are recovered. Let me take you to some place more comfortable.”

Ten minutes later, Loki is in the couch covered by a blanket, with a cold compress on his forehead and a chamomile tea flask next to him. He is looking at at her with confusion, but with a marked gentleness.

“I will stay with you until you are feeling better.” She says, and knows that she is too harsh, but can't help it, it's the only way she knows how to be. Loki signs for her to come closer.

“Sit next to me, tell me something terrible about this planet.”

And Nebula does, pleased, because there are always things to complain about in Terra, and Loki thinks, for once since his mother died, that he doesn't quite mind so much being sick, if it with a friend. Scott Lang sends a get well soon card.

Suddenly the pain doesn't hurt quite so much.
She was thrown to the side, with inhuman force, and landed on the floor, in a perfect spot to watch that enormous metal beam fall on top of the person that had pushed away from harm.

“Loki!”

But it's too late for Loki, too late for anything, for moving away, for magicking himself away, for making the beam disappear or transporting it some place. Now Natasha could see as the heavy metal fell across Loki's chest, only a tinge of instinctive magic keeping it from sinking down further and cutting the man in half. Still, it had made a decent dent on his rib cage, and Loki was suffering, and all Natasha could do was watch.

For a split second, she was frozen, trying to process what had happened. A moment ago, she was canvassing an old warehouse with Loki, making sure that there were no bad guys in it, joking (as they did) about their team mates and their lack of patience at being tricked. Nothing had been wrong and nothing should have been wrong and would have been wrong if it wasn't for mother's nature making things difficult for them.

They had known that this was an area with a lot of seismic activity, but no tremors had been warned. Of course, a lot of unexpected things had happened lately, so maybe they should have been prepared. But they weren't and then the earth started shaking, and as they were trying to find a safe place to wait out the earthquake a whole ton of metal had fallen in her partner's chest.

Loki, who a mere seconds ago had been his well groomed, well presented self, a look of confidence in his features, was now covered in dust from the quake, bits of wood and debris on his hair, and oh, good, he was coughing up blood. Probably a punctured lung, if it wasn't collapsed all the way. The confident look was now replaced with fear and pain and something.... beseeching. A cry for help.

And Natasha felt horrible, because despite her varied set of skills, she was helpless to move that bean and stop it from crushing Loki's chest. Steve maybe would have been able to do it, and Stark most probably with his suit, or maybe Bucky with his metal arm. Even that Spider kid had super strength, but her, for all her abilities and skills to get out of a bad situation, could do nothing.

She also felt horrible because she knew how it felt. She'd also been pinned down, helpless to move and knowing that the more time she spent there, the lower her chances at a happy ending would be. You had to add the horrible physical pain weighing down on you and the crushing force of gravity to
the frustration of trying to get yourself out and not being able to. And getting weaker every second and knowing that you were getting weaker and not being able to do anything....

Natasha tried all her comms and all her super secret distress signals, and hoped that somebody had seen something, that somebody was coming. They had a lot of allies, surely somebody must have known that they were there, when the quake happened. Now it was a waiting game, but Natasha really didn't know how much time they had. She could see the beam getting lower, however slightly, every second that passed. It was only Loki's willpower and magic that was keeping him alive and keeping that beam from slicing him in two, and they both knew that the moment Loki passed out he would be done for.

A silent tear fell into the floor from Loki's eye, creating a spot in the debris. The abject fear from before was gone from Loki's eyes, and had been replaced by something far more... final. A look of resignation. Natasha, who had holding herself together so far, broke a tiny little bit upon seeing that. If he thought he was dying.... what hope could there be?

“La...lady Romanoff.” Came a very low, rapsy wheeze of a voice. “You have to tell...”

“No. We are not doing deathly wishes Loki, I will not tell your brother that you love him, I will not tell anyone to forgive you. You will tell them yourself if you want to.”

And so she took one of Loki's pale hands, so terribly white under all the rubble, squeezed it tightly and went closer to say something important.

“Help is coming. They will arrive on time.”

Loki managed a sad smile, but she could tell he didn't believe her. Damn it. She had lost partners before, she had seen people she cared about die... But one could never get used to it, specially when they had such expressive eyes. She hadn't thought Loki would ever qualify as someone she cared about, but he had wormed his way into her heart, little by little.

She tricked him first, and he tricked her back, some time later. Then it became a kind of competition, seeing the other's limits, figuring out what was the lie, what a carefully put piece of truth so that a bit of manipulation could work. They both shared some strategies, despite their differences. Letting people underestimate them. Using their good looks with nefarious intentions. Making people talk themselves into trouble, speak their best kept secrets without realising it. They were things they enjoyed.
And besides, Natasha had also started in the opposite side, and she knew how it was. When no one trusted you and looked down on you for what you used to be. The dirty looks, the fear in some people who were supposed to be with you. It could be rough, and Loki was a more sensitive soul than she had been, so she knew it hurt him, all the bad comments and mean messages from other agents and operatives. Idiots.

Loki was a great asset, and bullying him would only move he god further away from them. And also... Loki could be a nice guy, in his own strange self-involved bitter way. He was great with ironies (one of the few who could shut up and outdo Stark) and he was strangely loyal to those he considered underdogs, people he considered hadn't been sufficiently appreciated, like him. Like Nebula. Like Wanda. Younger siblings all, never the face of any group. But important, and powerful.

“Help is coming.” Natasha repeated, like a mantra. She kept looking at the doors, hoping for a saviour.

But she too, was starting to lose faith. They would find them, and she'd be okay, but Loki's strength was fading, running out. The area around the beam was covered in blood now, as it had broken the skin. Natasha squeezed Loki's hand tighter, willing him to fight. For himself, for her, for anything.

“You can't leave me.” His eyes were losing focus... “Look at me! Loki, I need you! You have to hold on.”

Natasha focused on the green of Loki's eyes, as if there was nothing else in the world. The blood had made its way down Loki's leather and was now falling to the floor, slowly, silently. The god was blinking rapidly and coughed up even more blood. There wasn't much time left, and they had only themselves and their misery.

No, it couldn't end like this. Natasha went into her headfiles (what she had collected in her head) of the guy and thought of something to comfort him in those (hopefully not) last moments. What did Loki want more than anything? To be loved, to be appreciated and liked like Thor was. To be the name people cheered.

“You need to hold on, you hear me? You're too great to go like this. A god of magic and chaos, one of the most powerful people I have ever met, you know you can do this, and I know it too. And I know that when you get out of here you will continue to dazzle us with all feats of... greatness and strength and power and everyone will see, like I do, how imponent Loki is.”

Through his tears and the blood covering half his face, Loki smiled, a small smile, but genuine.
He mouthed a deaf thank you in her direction and grimaced. He couldn't hold on any longer, the pain was too much, the force on him was too much and his strength was gone. At least his last moment had been pleasant, despite the agony from the beam in his chest. He would perish with the Widow's kind words in his ears, and a soft smile in his lips.

“Loki, no! Don't you dare close your eyes!”

And then, a tiny little miracle. An ant sized man who became man sized, and then giant sized to be able to pick up and throw away the beam in a second.

“Lang! I have never been so glad to see you!” Natasha breathed, when the size changer became normal again.

“I just hope I was here in time.” Lang breathed, a bit woozy from so many changes. They both knelt down next to the now unconscious Loki, looking for any signs of life.

His breathing sounded horrible, but it was there, and so was his heartbeat, irregular and slow, but there. Natasha smiled, breathed, and nearly hugged Lang. It had been a very close call, and had made her realise that she appreciated Loki more than she made herself believe. Lang picked up Loki in his arms, and they left for some much needed medical care.

Loki was left with a scar from where the beam had cut the flesh and sometimes he had breathing difficulties. Natasha had many scars of her own, so this made her feel, in a way, closer to Loki. She became weirdly protective, too, and even though Loki was more powerful than her, he let her. It was sweet, and Loki had lacked that for a lot of his life. They looked out for each other after that incident.

Sometimes, when Loki was having a low moment, he would remember Natasha's words. I'm imponent, he would think, I'm all greatness. They both were.

And the were very damn hard to kill.
Poisoned arrow

He was so impossibly, incredibly tired and he simply couldn't rest. They were always at the edge of a new discovery, being chased by some intergalactic foes that he didn't quite understand why were they after him, too. Loki understood why they would go against those Guardians guys, but him... He'd just been sharing bitter stories with Nebula about times when they were sidelined in favour of their older siblings and suddenly he'd became a Guardian by association, at least in the eyes of their enemies.

And after some ups and downs and escapes and difficult almost fatal situations, he'd ended up only with Peter Quill, the man who called himself Star Lord, on some unfamiliar underground corridors, trying to find some gadgets that maybe would help them find some peace with those creatures, or at least negotiate with them. He was oh-so-tired and he would rather be alone, or with anyone else. His first choice would've been Nebula, of course. She was bitter and hostile like him, with an awkwardness linked to brutality he found almost endearing. Mantis was nice with him, too, which was always welcome, after the hatred, condescension and coldness he was used to (she was nice with everyone, but still). Gamora... was too much like Thor. He couldn't help but to side with Nebula in everything.

This Peter Quill... well, Loki hadn't really made an effort to get to know him and the man hadn't reached out to him back. There was something a bit off putting about the man, how well liked he was, how much all his band respected him, how everyone thought so highly of him. Loki had lived all his life being mocked and in spite of being a prince, he'd always felt.... Less.

While they were walking through those underground corridors, his overtired mind was too slow noticing the trigger, the trap for intruders and so he didn't see what was coming directly into him until it was too late. What a lovely day to continue his day.

And suddenly there was an arrow in Loki's chest, because apparently they had triggered some sort of alarm mechanism and Loki's eyes were wide, almost as much as Peter's. For a second they were frozen there, trying to understand what had happened.

“Dude!” Peter uttered, alarmed. “Shit, dude, sorry, How I did I not see that? How did neither of us see it? Oh my... I...”

Loki was stuck for a moment, which was fairly unusual since Loki was normally all over the place, never stopping, always dodging every blow. But now he was clearly not in control, which made Peter freak out even more. But something needed to be done, whichever way it was.

“What do I do? Do I take it out? Try to? Or do I leave it in so that you don't bleed out?”

That would have been a nice option, letting the arrow block the injury. Painful, yes, but preferable to what actually needed to be done. Loki could feel the tissue around the arrow being infected, feeling as though it was burning, even if it wasn't. That could only mean one thing.

“Poison” Loki mumbled. “Out.”

Which meant several things, all of them bad. That Loki was speaking like that, soft and with short words, meant he couldn't talk any other way. Poison meant that the arrow needed to get out, and apparently Loki couldn't do it himself which meant Peter would have to. While being extremely careful and quick and you know, not killing the guy or making him bleed out.
Shit. Peter had been in his fair amount of bad situations and knew his way around a seemingly hopeless one, but they didn't usually include poisoned arrows in the chest and Norse gods. But he had to act, and he had to act quickly, and if possible doing the least amount of damage possible.

So he decided that the best strategy was to simply not think and get the arrow as swiftly as possible. Bad thing was that the thing was deeply embedded in the chest (magic maybe?), so it fought him, and wasn't as quick as he had hoped. Loki didn't cry out in pain, but he did bit his lower lip until it bled and squeezed his eyes shut. And there was blood, so much blood, and Peter put pressure, which only hurt Loki even more, so much that a single tear fell from his eye.

“I'm sorry, man, I wish... If I had seen this...”

“More pressure”

Peter didn't want to, because it would only hurt the other man even more, but knew that he had to, there was blood drenching his hands, to avoid anyone bleeding out, and avoided looking into Loki's ridiculously bright and pain-filled green eyes. Then he ripped part of his shirt to do a makeshift pressure bandage of sorts, by using all his considerable force but trying not to break anything. Surely Loki could heal himself, doing a god of magic or whatever, but he'd been poisoned, with something that looked like it would be deadly for a normal person. Better not to push it.

The poison seemed to be beginning to affect Loki, who was now breathing loudly and trying to keep his eyes open while the world swam around him. He didn't like being this vulnerable, specially not in front of a mortal who was practically a stranger, but he was starting to get short of breath and dizzy and some moments he forgot where he was scared. And felt scared. Scared that he was back at the void, or back in the hands of someone who wanted to play with him. Peter saw it, but said nothing.

If he was honest with himself, Peter hadn't thought Loki could be capable of so much emotion. He'd always been confident around him, doing some magic and pretending it took no effort to save their asses when they were in trouble. Impossible to hurt, invulnerable. One of those impossible things that could bend reality and like time and dimensions... More a concept than a person.

Also his relationship with those kinds of beings was kind of...conflicted after what had happened with Ego. Technically he was part god, too, but he preferred not to think about that. Maybe he had been avoiding both Loki and Thor the short time they had been together... or together-ish. But now there was no way to avoid the man god whatever he was. Although Loki was kind of offering one.

“You get out” He said, swaying and blinking too much. “Continue with this. I can not... Continue. Cannot walk.”

Like hell he was going to do that.

“I'm not leaving you here with a hole in your chest! I'm gonna call Gamora, who will probably expecting me fuck up and for her to need to save my ass anyway, and she'll save our asses and find someone else to do this. Ugh. Probably Rocket who then will bug me about how he did what I couldn't... Ugh...”

“Then do. I can manage.”

Peter laughed under his breath. That's the kind of thing he would say if he couldn't manage at all. He sat on the floor with his back to the wall, and motioned Loki to do the same. It had been a long day, they had walked a lot, and they both could use some rest. Loki thought about it for a moment, but then his knees started bending, and he decided that sitting by his own volition was more dignified than falling and sat, all long legs and pale limbs, next to Quill.
Peter managed to get a hold of Gamora and ask her to bring a medic, too. He smiled to himself when Gamora concernedly asked if he was hurt and then told her that no, but to hurry. Loki was looking worse and worse by the moment.

“Stop trying to look whole, man. You're clearly exhausted, you have a hole in a lung and poison all in you, you don't need to pretend with me. Just... rest. C'mon, put your head here.” He said, motioning to his shoulder.

And so Loki did, mostly because he was too tired and sick to do otherwise.

“I don't... understand. You hardly know me.” Loki said, although he did welcome the warm pillow Quill's neck provided.

“That's my own fault, man, not yours.” And Peter continued talking, partly because he was get this dealt with and because he was afraid that if he stopped speaking Loki would close his eyes and then they would have trouble getting them open again. “I just... you guys... are kinda gods, right? Well, my... biological father, he was too. And long story short.. I killed him.”

“I killed my biological father, too. But he wasn't a god, just a monster.”

“Yeah, mine too. He wanted to use me to take over the universe and he killed my mom and broke my walkman. It's... a Terran music machine. I loved that thing.”

Loki continued speaking, comfortable in Quill's warm shoulder, forgetting for a bit his own pain, and just letting himself be himself.

“My father, the not biological one, wanted to use me to bring an alliance between two enemy realms, but in the...... in the end decided he would rather lie to me my whole life, and condition me against the race.... I was unknowingly part of.”

“And you didn't kill that one? Well, kudos to you. I don't even know why they call you a villain.”

Loki smiled softly but his breathing was getting slower and his eyes had more trouble staying open. The piercing pain from before had become an overpowering force asking him to sleep. But Quill couldn't have that. If Loki died under his watch Nebula would never forgive him. (And he wouldn't either, he'd seen too much death already, his mum, Groot, Yondu...).

“So what is it like, being a prince?” Peter had grown pretty poor, often daydreaming about being an space prince who was invited to feasts and could do all the things he wanted to, but couldn't because there was no means, no time, no cash.

“There are good things. Amazing access to libraries... trips to other realms and cities... all the knowledge you get....Really good apples... But all I remember is the... the disappointment of everyone. When you're royal, you're supposed to be... this ideal citizen... Like Thor. I never was... I was looked down on, even though they were my subjects. I... sometimes I wish I wasn't that bitter, you know. Asgard has given me good things, too.”

“Yeah, man, I know what you mean. I spent my whole life hating this guy that took me in after my mum died, and tried to get away from him... I spent so much time being bitter that by the time I realised that that dude had actually raised me, it was too late.”

Apparently, Peter had more in common with this deranged God than he thought. A god that had closed his eyes and was looking whiter than.... something very white. He needed him with him, no one was dying today. Even though Loki was more slumped than ever, putting all his wight on Peter and this couldn't be a good thing, like the red lines that were coming up from Loki's bandages.
“What about the magic?”

“They hated me because of that, too. Wasn't manly enough..... not true warrior.” Loki mumbled, but his voice was soft and low. He was going to lose the battle with consciousness. Peter heard Gamora calling his name in the background and let out a sigh of relief.

“Well, I think it's pretty cool.”

“I am... cool?”

“You're cool.”

He smiled. And then he was out.

- 

Loki spent near a month in something that resembled an induced coma after that. As the poison lingered and it would be too dangerous for him to be awake. In that state, they could control it, prevent it from spreading to dangerous places like his brain. They were looking for a cure (a very angry Nebula along with Kraglin and some Avenger ladies) and in the meantime Thor was on the bedside, more often than not. Peter visited, too. In that one day he had gotten to know more of Loki than in all the previous months.

And he kind of liked him.

When Loki woke up, there were apples in his bedside. Probably not as good as yours, Peter said, but decent. When Peter woke up the next time after getting hurt, there was a brightly green and yellow walkman with a cassette that read “rebel demigods”.

Maybe they kind of liked each other.

Maybe they had a new shoulder to lean on.
Unconscious

Scott had been thrown in a little cell, taken by a Rogue team of all-american vigilantes that were rooting for the “cleansing” of the heroes, and the forces of law enforcement, and so they had stopped Scott Lang, known ex-con and thrown him without his suit in a cell where they kept him and sometimes took him away, to “teach him lessons”. He had known he'd get in trouble for being with the Avengers after his past, but hadn't realised, it could get this bad. All his injuries hurt, and they were all over.

For that whole first week, Scott had hoped that they would throw someone else there with him, to help him get out, to have someone to talk to, maybe someone that would have it easier than him to get out and get some help, find a way out. Two heads always thought better than one, and the absence of two people would be more obvious than just his. Those men could have forged a pic of him on holiday and sent it to everyone, and nobody would look. But two people going away at the same time... It would have to be suspicious.

Some time later, Scott got his wish, as some of his tormentors brought in a bloodied figure dressed only in torn and old black pants and an old cotton green shirt. They were limping, one of the legs bent at a strange angle, their hands bandaged, their neck a bloody mess with ligature marks. And there were a lot of cuts all around in the arms, in the legs, in what he could see of the face. At first he thought it was a woman, because of the long black hair. But no. Those green eyes were difficult to confuse, even if one of them was swollen shut.

“...Loki”

The men threw him violently and Loki fell on the floor, not far from where Scott was, her face an angry mask.

“We will not let you break the Avengers apart!” One of those men screamed.

Loki threw a venomous look at him.

“I'm the reason they got together in the first place, you idiot! Without me, you wouldn't have any precious Avengers.”

The guard, apparently lost for words, simply got in the cell and tasered Loki, who just bit back his scream as the electricity coursed through him.

And then they were alone.

Scott helped Loki into a more comfortable position, and checked for any wounds that may need looking after. There was nothing bleeding, at least, even if Loki was still squirming painfully after the electricity.

“Hey.” Scott said, awkward.

“You too, huh?” Loki said, eyes closed.

“Yeah. They threw me here without my suit or any access to anything, 'bout two weeks ago. And they... they've been having fun. What about you? Oh my god, you never left for Asgard, did you?”

Scott said, remembering a cryptic message they got, where it said that Loki had some business in Asgard and would be unavailable for the foreseeable future. And that had been about a month ago.
Oh my god, poor man. They had had him for all that time, no wonder he looked so bad.

“That's the story they told? Pathetic. They should have used the Void, Asgard is easily reachable and their alibi would be undone.” Scott frowned.

“Why would you want to go back to the void?”

“Good point.”

When they stopped talking, Scott had time to take in Loki's terrible state. There wasn't a part that was free from the clear abuse of those men. He'd been cut, he'd been beaten, and he had bones broken. He was hiding his face with his hair, but apart from the eye there was a split lip and a big cut that crossed his face diagonally, like one of those Star Wars scars. And the hands... somehow Scott knew that it had been bad.

“What did they do to your hands?”

“Acid. One of those guys works for Stark, they had access to all my files. They know I need my hands for most of my tricks and that acid burned through a big chunk of its tissue.”

“Ouch.”

“Indeed. And now my residual magic is all busy trying to heal that and my leg, and I can't do anything else. Not even send Thor a silly dream warning. I feel useless.”

“Yeah, man me too. Damn, if I'd known you were in trouble I would've done something, god. Thor said you liked to travel and that we shouldn't worry. But it felt off, I knew it felt off, you would have said goodbye, maybe not to me, but to Stark, or Wanda... You would have said good bye to her.”

Loki opened his good eye and looked directly at Scott.

“That's all right, Lang. I know you would have come for me, had you known. That's enough.”

Maybe Loki wasn't the most useful companion, but Scott was kind of happy that it was him he was going to share his cell with. They were.... well, kind of friendly. Maybe because when Loki was wreaking havoc he'd still been in jail and lived none of it, maybe because he was a bit of an underdog like him, maybe because he had a bad past, like him, maybe because he had a sense of humour he enjoyed, he wasn't exactly sure, but he liked Loki, and all those things others disliked about him, he didn't care.

Scott could see that Loki's arrogance was mostly an act for looking as cool as Thor, as godly, but that deep inside, he was a generally insecure guy, like him, like Banner. Also like them, he was a really smart guy, and not as flamboyant with his intellect as Stark. Maybe because in Asgard wits were not as valued as strength, and he only flaunted after big victories. But Scott liked to talk to Loki about science and magic, about feeling that maybe you're not good enough for your family, about being given a second chance and how hard redemption and staying nice could be. About how relative everything was.

But now Loki was hurt, and badly, and Scott wanted to do something about it, but he didn't know how. They stayed a couple of days in that cell, getting hardly no food at all, and talking life, about families, about being alone and making mistakes and fixing them, but not regretting everything completely. About friends. About enemies, and people who hurt them mercilessly. About people who were unfairly given choices they deserved.

About always ending up in terrible situations.
“Do you know why they put us together? Did they bring someone else?” Scott asked, on the third day. He'd noticed that instead of healing, Loki's injuries were only getting worse. His eye was still closed, his leg hadn't moved. They had to get out, the sooner the better.

“I think so.” Loki said.”Oh, I dearly hope it's Romanoff.”

“She will kick their asses and save ours.”

“Exactly.”

“But in case it isn't her, do we have any other exit strategies? You said most of your tricks need you hands... so which are the ones that don’t?”

“Mind charms, mostly. Projections and such.”

“Could you send Thor that message if I, like... shared some of my energy with you?”

Loki thought about it for a moment.

“We could do something like that... But since you are the one who is the most... whole of the two of us, it would be you who sent it. Not to Thor, clearly, it works best if it's someone you have a deep connection with... You think about them and hold my hands.” He said, offering the bandages, bony hands.

“You need them, your hands? Won't it hurt them more?” Scott said, concerned. Loki already looked like a scarecrow that had been stepped on, an this sounded like something that could hurt. He was beginning to regret having suggested it.

“Everything hurts right now, dear friend. I would rather have pain and hope that it will end than only pain and hopelessness.”

“Why aren't you healing?”

“I am not as young I used to” (and boy, could Scott relate to that) “It takes longer to heal, because I have been hurt many times... maybe too long. This is our best chance.”

He was right, and Scott knew he was right, but still he didn't like it. But he wanted out, too, for both of them, and so he did as instructed, thought of Hope and of a clear message with all the info he had of where they might be and who their captors were so that she would come, as quickly as possible, because things were bad. So Scott closed his eyes, he took Loki's bandaged hands and thought of it, thought of it intensely, thought of it once and again and again. At first, there was nothing, but then he started feeling some... connection, a force. Something clicked, and he knew Hope had the message.

And something fell on him. Scott opened his eyes and found Loki's head on top of him, that blood stained tangled hair on his chest.

“Loki?”

But Loki was out cold, and had gone like five shades paler. Shit.

“Come on man, don' check out on me! Hey!”

He softly slapped the other man's cheek, but there was no reaction.

“Wake up, man, don't leave me here alone! Loki, Loki, man, I'm sorry.”
He shouldn't have suggested anything, not when Loki was this bad. He looked at him, all white skin marred with scars, old and new, and all bones and angles after not having been fed practically in the last month. Poor dude. They beat him up far worse than they did him, and still he had used his last bit of energy to get a message out. Scott knew that it was more self preservation and heroics, but still it was brave of the guy.

"Hey, please, wake up. You need to get better for when they come to rescue us, ok? You need to be awake for when we kick those bastard's asses."

There could be many things said about Loki, but the guy was brave, even if it was only to get into bad stuff. And sometimes you needed to bad things to get your life moving, needed to visit many bad places to finally get into a good one. Make bad choices and take the best of them, the best of all the wrong things in their lives. And then you forge yourself anew, and help others, and help yourself.

Like they had.

Loki was so still, Scott had to check that he was still breathing every like three minutes. He wished he had something to clean him with, the guy had always been so put together, so... elegant. Such a good looking guy, and now he was all broken, lying there with his eyes closed, all limp. Like some victim of torture, which he was. It was sad. Scott wanted to fix it, but couldn't. Loki continued to be there, and even if could look like he was peacefully asleep, he wasn't and it was concerning.

Every few hours Scott would try to wake him again “come on, man, come back, you had your rest already”, sometimes faking an emergency “Wake up, the cell is on fire!” or even with childish bait “Oh my god, Loki the best? The Avengers and the Asgardians are throwing you a surprise party!” but none of it worked, and Loki remained stubbornly unconscious.

And time passed and there was no rescue mission. Scott talked to Loki anyways, even though the god continued painfully unresponsive. About Cassie and what a great woman she'd grow to be. About Hope and the fears he had with her. About Luis and his van and the good times they had together. About the Avengers and the incident in Berlin. About anything. And then, at the end, emotions got the best of him.

“Why don't you come back? I'm sorry I suggested that, I wish... I've seen you, you know, doing all those cool things but being so alone... 'cos Thor has all this other cool friends, and you don't fit with anyone cos you were their enemy... But you're not enemy, and you're a nice guy, -well, maybe not nice, but interesting, you know, and I wish I had reached out to you, instead of seeing you all lonesome and brokenhearted and... I didn't, 'cos I'm not as brave, I try to be, but sometimes... And now you're all comatose, and maybe it's because I did something wrong, maybe I thought too hard...Please come back.... you made everything more....easy to handle. You're not just criminal who's with the Avengers. You matter, man, more than you know.... Please come back.”

Loki was unconscious.

He continued to be and Scott tried not to cry.

But the next day, when Scott woke up, a green eye met his.

“They are coming.” Loki said, in a voice that was little more than a whisper.

And surely, in under ten minutes, Hope, Falcon and a wide eyed Luis were there, and opened their cell in no time. Scott and the others were going to handle the men that had taken them, but first Scott had a very special mission for Luis.
“You have medical with you when you came, right? It is very important to me that Loki stays awake until he gets there, so I will need you to talk to him all the way, and not let him pass out. Can you do that?”

“Yes, I can brother.”

And so Luis was taking a weakened but awake god of mischief through a secret passage Hope had found and trying to find the right words.

“Wow, I mean, what do you say to a god, like what do you talk about with someone of your... I don’t know what is word, calibre? Stature? Like I have never talked to a god before, I mean, you do talk to god, to ask him for things and such, but he’s far away and not answering and you know....” Luis was interrupted by a soft voice.

“Tell me about the smoothie machines.”

When Scott came back, Loki was laughing softly, and wide awake. He hugged him for no reason.

(However much they wanted it to be a private thing, Luis told that story, “the superhug” in a thousand different ways. Did I tell you about that one me and my Avenger buds saved an Ant and a viking? It's got everything, action, actual proper magic, and yours truly being awesome. It all started when......)
Falling

Chapter Notes

Some Ragnarok spoilers ahead! Don't read if you haven't watched!

SPOILERS!! You've been warned!

He is falling, falling forever, no floor on sight, there aren't even stars and he fears he's stuck in the Void again, trapped between realms with no way to call for help, to get out, to finally stop falling... It hurts his body, it blurs his mind and it frightens him in ways he cannot completely understand. He's falling and falling, becoming faster and faster, and knows, in some twisted way that no one will be there for him when he finally crashes.

He is falling, falling forever, trapped in an unspeakable neverending horror that consumes him whole.

Tony had seen Loki sleeping on the couch of his main living room, and hadn't been all that surprised. Loki did have a room now that he was with them, not too far from Thor's but not too close either, to avoid conflict. Thor normally did stay in his room and slept mostly when it was dark, but Loki was... erratic.

He seemed to be awake at all hours, and somehow all around the building. He would build things, practice magic, look for patterns, watch videos on youtube, cook at 3am, read, drink copious quantities of alcohol, buy fruit online, eat fruit, shatter something valuable and then immediately put it back together... Erratic indeed.

Some other times you would find him asleep in the unlikeliest of places, like a balcony, or a broom's closet. He never seemed to sleep for long, or to be sleeping deeply, but it was... pleasant, seeing him like that. A more human side to the ex-criminal alien god. So Tony didn't think too much about it when he saw Loki sprawled there and just put a blanket on him.

No one had been too happy when Thor had appeared with Loki an told them that Loki was with them now, that he was "good". Natasha had thought it was a good addition, but was still suspicious that Loki may be playing a long con. Clint didn't want to hear anything about it. Hulk didn't mind at all that much, Steve was cautious but hopeful, and Tony... well, he was warming up to the guy.

He was smart, he loved irony, and was as much as a diva as he was. (Had been? Pepper had softened him a bit, but still...) it was 4 am, Tony was trying to do something that would help him sleep or make use of that useless night and so he was pouring himself a drink, careful not to make any noise that would wake Loki up.

In fact, the only noises were coming from the god himself, breathing in all kinds of weird ways that didn't sound healthy. What did Tony know? The guy was a different species. He wasn't even the species he was supposed to be, Thor's godly one, but some other ice planet creature that permanently shape shifted to make himself look like an Asgardian. How was he supposed to know what was normal in the physiology of a guy like that?

And then just as he was considering closing the bottle after pouring himself a generous quantity of
liquor, there was a loud deep, fear filled gasp that filled the room and Loki eyes were open wide. Then he coughed and just continued breathing heavily for some minutes.

"You okay?" Tony asked, careful, low, not wanting to scare they guy any further.

Loki looked at Tony with wild eyes, snatched his drink and unsteadily left without saying a word. Tony noticed the pronounced shadows under his eyes even though he had just woken up, and understood. Not being able to sleep was so shitty. He wanted to help somehow, there were many things of Loki he enjoyed, he understood his need of validation and was getting little appreciation from the Avengers. So, yeah, he wanted to help. But it would be easier if he knew a bit more about his nightmares.

He has fallen many times, and bits from his previous falls take part in his nightmares. When he was little, and Thor's bully buddies liked to threw him off his balance, and onto the floor, chanting weakling prince as they walked away. The times he thought he might be able to fly with magic, and fell, once and again, and again, unable to lift himself. (He could make an illusion of him flying...but the real him always crashed).

That portal on Midgard where he fell and fell and fell, had no way of getting out, lost sight of Thor, lost sight of everything, just fell, and fell and fell, and his bones aches, and his head hurt, and he had been a king only minutes before and now he was back in hell, falling, forever falling, and demons were coming back, oh they were going to get him, why? Why had Thor abandoned him so quick? How had he known that this trap was what his worst fears were made of?

But the fall that was the most prominent both in his dreams and his waking hours is the one when he fell off the Bifrost. He could feel the disappointment, the bitterness, the loathing thrown at him, at what he was and what he had done, and he knew that the fall would be near eternal and he knew of the horrors that awaited him when it ended. He remembered falling after being rejected, he remembered wanting to die desperately, but the fall never ended, and instead of death he had only pain.

He just wanted to stop falling.

Tony made a bit of research and found some of patterns, some specifics of Loki's sleeping (and non-sleeping) habits, and some specifics and made him formulate a theory. He was a scientist, and he had some idea of what things in this world and others was nightmare-producing, first hand. So, like any others god scientist would, he decided to test his theory.

“Hey Cap,” Tony started, one day that it was just him, Steve and Loki in the living room, having some takeout dinner, each one with their own gadget or book, sistracted. “I had a horrible dream about when I fell through that worm hole in New York. You ever have dreams about when you fell on the ice?”
Loki tensed up at the subject, and threw a quick sideways look. This subject interested him, but also made him uncomfortable, tense. This gave Tony the information he needed.

“Too often, yes. Never good dreams. I actually thought of asking you for some pills, but you never know when the dream is going to be one of those, so I usually just try to tire myself out. I’m sorry you have them too, that feeling is awful. And even after the dreams, the sensation lingers for a while, doesn’t it? Your whole is tilting, and no armour or super strength can take you out of the fall.”

Loki was trying to keep a straight face, but the lack of sleep and stress of his new living quarters had made him less proficient at hiding emotions. There was pain in his eyes, remembered fear, shared horror, exhaustion. But he was not saying a word, so Tony adressed him directly.

“Lokes, you fell to Earth, didn't you? That give you nightmares too?”

The god is looking at his mug of tea, trying to not to shiver, trying not to let tears come to his eyes. He's so tired, so excruciatingly tired, and now these mortals at poking fingers at his bleeing wound.

“I have fallen many more times than that one, for much longer. A life of thousands of years gives you a lot of material for bad dreams.”

Steve is quicker to catch on than Tony thought he would be. Maybe he hadn't been the only one to notice their resident Chaos god's sleep disturbances.

“Sometimes it helps to share, you know? I thought I could manage perfectly not telling anybody about my issues with my fall, and losing Bucky and Peggy and... but the truth was, once you tell it, especially to people who understand you, it... it haunts you less. It doesn't go away, obviously, but it does help a bit.”

Loki looked up from his mug, and Steve an uncertain smile his way. He didn't know Loki all that well, but he could see that the other man was hurting and knew he could help. So he tried, and hoped Loki would listen, before he hurt himself even further.

“I thought I could manage too.” Tony added. “I couldn't, really. That fall hurt in more ways I could, and I got something called post traumatic stress disorder. It wasn’t pretty. But I found ways to cope, sharing like Cap said, facing my problem. And with pills, too, but those don't generally solve the problem.”
“But they help you have a dreamless night?” Loki asked, and there was something kind of sad about the hope in his voice.

“Yeah. If you want one, you're free to take one.”

“You can also come with me to run, if you want. I mean, it probably takes a lot more than what it takes for me to get tired, but I find that I often sleep better after a workout.

“...You are being kind to me.” The sentence was almost a question, tainted with a clear disbelief.

Steve's smile was more confident this time. A grounding, calming expression.

“You're one of us now. You helped Thor, you helped Hulk, you helped your people. You deserve a good night's sleep.”

_He is falling, falling forever._

_He may be dreaming about falling for the rest of his days. Maybe those falls will forever be a part of him._

_But something is different now. When he falls, there are hands reaching out._

_Someone there to catch him._

_Breaking his fall._
Hela smiled as he entered the chamber.

“Odin's lesser son, Asgard's little jotun secret. Well, well, well. Skurge has told me about you, and if I'm honest... You don't seem all bad. Even if your attempts at conquest were all terrible failures, at least you tried. If you wanted to, maybe I would let you be my new executioner.”

Loki smiled, sensing a possible exit strategy opening.

“Make the deal a bit sweeter, and I could consider it.”

But Hela wasn't so easily fooled.

“You think you can lie to me, boy? I was conquering the universe before you were even born. You cannot outsmart me, Loki of Asgard.”

We'll see about that, Loki thought, but knew that his chance of getting the upper hand was very slim. She had seen too much, done too much. The fact that the only way to stop her was to cause the end of their planet was a clear indicator.

The only thing that mattered now was that he completed his mission, and that Surtur came back and destroyed the planet that was Hela's power source. He had told the Asgardians that he was their saviour, and for once, he didn't want to be lying. He wanted them to be proud of him, to think of him fondly. With Hela gone he would irrevocably and indubitably the saviour of Asgard.

But the price to pay was going to be high.


Asgard was coming undone, engulfed in fire, but its people were safe, watching everything burn in the ship that had appeared through the mist to save them. But their saviour wasn't currently with them and Thor felt his heart stop beating, a shiver run through the whole of his body. Where was Loki? Was he safe?

He was a survivor, surely he had found a ship in which he could escape and was right now looking for a place to crash and create chaos. A place ignorant of his exploits, a place that could marvel at his tricks. Maybe he even was finding his way back to them, wanting to bask a little in people's gratitude for coming back for them. But he needed to be sure.

“Heimdall, can you see Loki?”

“I can” But Heimdall didn't seem happy about what he was seeing.

“Is he safe?”
"I am sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but Hela has beaten him, and he is under the rubble of the chamber of treasures. She left him there to die."

No, no no.

“And is he? Dead?”

“Miraculously no... But he unconscious, and won't be able to make it out before the remainder of the palace collapses into flame.”

No, no, no no!

Thor became some unseeing unhearing machine fueled by determination and rage. He was not going to lose his brother again after finally getting him back for good, after he'd seen that he did belong with him and his friends, after Loki had risked everything but got none of good parts of his excellently timed redemption.

Hell, Thor hadn't even had a chance to say thank you for bringing them this ship that saved them from a certain doom, for not staying in a place where he could thrive and instead getting beaten on the behalf of their people, their home. This couldn't be the end, Thor refused to live through another heroic death.

He'd got his brother. Loki was making up for past mistakes and he would be able to continue on this great path. This Thor bowed. He went there on a little pod, avoided flames and Surtur's claws and through the smoke and ash managed to locate his brother's unresponsive body, and take him back to the pod, and to safety.

He hadn't let him die. It had been a very risky move, and 90% of that rescue's success had been thinking and just using will power, but it had worked. Loki was there with him, bruised, mangled, bleeding and unconscious, but alive. Breathing.

Asgard collapsed behind him, but Thor had no time to grieve, not when his brother's life could be on the line. Yes, Loki was alive, but Hela's beating had been severe, and Loki had already been near death before, who knew how his body handled the abuse now, Maybe it was too tired.

“Please!” Thor bellowed as he entered the ship and got out of the ship, carrying his brother in his arms, staining himself with his blood. “I need healers! Prince Loki is badly injured! Get help!”

Suddenly the words were bitter in his mouth. So many he had found it humorous, that trick of pretending that Loki was dying, as if I were a laughable matter, when it was anything but. And Loki hated doing get help, hated all of it, and Thor's eyes were suddenly wet, I'm sorry I made you do it, brother, I know you dislike it so, I just.... Now Loki was truly dying and each of his previous laughs hurt like a wound.

Thankfully, Eir and a couple of her apprentices were among the survivors, and came running to Loki's side with what little supplies they could find. All the Asgardians were looking at their prince with eyes full of sorrow, hoping something could be done for their valiant prince.

Thor wanted to scream. He had lost his father, nearly all the friends he had in Asgard, his lost his home, he lost his eye.... He couldn't lose Loki, too, not him too. Loki wasn't just his brother and his friend, he had helped shape who he was, he had accompanied him in nearly all his adventures... They were meant to have adventures together always.

Loki was part of his soul.
“Loki all right?” Hulk's deep voice startled Thor, as they were taking Loki to a makeshift infirmary.

“He will be.” Thor said, mostly trying to convince himself.”He has to be”.

But Thor knew that there was a real chance that Loki would really die from his wounds this time. That Hela had been too big a foe, and Loki had receive too many blows in his life to bounce back like he used to. He had so many scars now, even if he hid them with illusions and glamours.

But still, Thor willed his brother to fight, to keep holding on. Many of his bones had been broken, and his lungs had been damaged by the fire, but both Thor and the Asgardians refused to let him go, and tried everything. They gave what little medicine they'd been able to save as they ran to them, they tried salves and even some spells and chanting. Anything.

Thor stood by his brother’s side, Loki’s cold hand on his rough one, and hoped, and waited.

The sight of Loki so badly hurt, burned in places and struggling to draw breath was almost too painful to bear, but he remained there, and there he would remain until Loki was well again.

Some times Thor lost his courage, and wished he could join the Valkyrie's old habits of drinking herself into a stupor to forget the pain. But no, he couldn't leave Loki's side. Even if it took him years to wake up, he would stay there.

Days passed.

Weeks passed.

Loki injuries got better, but he never woke up.

Until one morning, when Thor woke up to a family pair of eyes watching.

“Brother! You're awake! You're back, you came back to me!”

There was a half smile and a rough.

“Yes, Thor... I am here.”
Suicide

Chapter Notes

Self-harm trigger warning in this ep!

Also spoilers through Ragnarok. Enjoy!

Loki had always had suicidal tendencies, although he hadn't often acted on them. Not consciously, at least. Maybe he was more reckless than usual, maybe he provoked someone that he shouldn't have, maybe he tried an especially risky spell. Unbeknownst to him, there had been an ingredient of self-loathing and self-destruction in all of those actions.

After he discovered his true origin, it got much worse. He had always felt different, wrong somehow, but at least back then he'd been an Asgardian royal. When he found out that he was actually a Jotun cast out, his self-loathing skyrocketed, to levels that were very difficult to control.

And then he threw himself into a void, hoping that death would solve everything. In death he wouldn't have to hate himself, in death he wouldn't have to curse himself for his wrong decisions, all the relationship he had destroyed, all the worlds that never liked him or cared about him like they did his whole family. In death, he would finally be free from himself.

But he didn't die, and everything got worse. He constantly needed distractions, missions, people and worlds and conquest that would quiet the voices telling him that he should try again, that he was a monster that deserved only agony and death. And so he did, and distracted himself nicely in Midgard, trying his best to forget what happened before and after he fell. Everyone said he was crazy, no one looked into the why or the how.

The cell was a bad moment for him. Frigga's death was even worse, telling him that maybe she wouldn't have died if he had properly killed himself before. Guilt threatened to eat him whole when Thor came, and offered another distraction and his “death” in Svartalfheim offered a little moment of closure. By almost dying, he felt he was atoning, even if only a little for his mother, and somehow fixing things with Thor.

Then the good times came. When his people applauded him, and they were sad when they saw his death on that play. When he felt free, and unburdened from himself, because he was actually being someone else. It helped him build up confidence, and recover from darker times. When Thor and they inevitable got involved on an adventure, he wanted to stay alive until the end of it.
And then he went back to Midgard, and things became... worse. He had to deal with the threat of Thanos (*he will make you long for something as sweet as pain*), the hatred of the people of Midgard, the mistrust of his brother's allies. He had to be smart, like he always was, but part of him didn't want to disappoint Thor after making up with him, and their enemies were so powerful, and there were so many of those heroes who wanted him dead....

He fought, and he fought on Thor's side, and gained some smiles, some pats on the back. But no one really liked him, and no one really trusted him, and he was tired, and in a place he didn't belong, and things started going downhill again. The voices were back, telling him that maybe it would be better to leave things here, before he disappointed Thor again, before some of those anti-Loki grous got the better of Stark's technology.

In death, no one would have to fight over if he was supposed to be given asylum or jailtime. He wouldn't have to constantly prove himself to all of the worlds, he wouldn't have to hear insults, he wouldn't have to mistrust every compliment. No one would remind him of the horrors he'd done in the past, nobody would be wary of him again, or make a disgusted face. He would be fixing problems, helping people.

And maybe, just maybe he could finally be at peace.

Thor was frozen in place when they found Loki nearly bled out in his room in Avengers HQ.

Bruce and Natasha were quick to act, trying to stop the bleeding, seeing how much blood he'd lost, seeing if he was responsive. He wasn't. And there was so much blood everywhere, and Loki was so pale, but it was all off, because he seemed... almost happy. Like an angel sleeping after a very long day. Neither of them thought too much about the situation as they took him to the medbay Tony had instructed.

Tony was busy calling the doctors in the world, in all of the worlds, and telling them that his was a life or death situation and to hurry the hell up. He was feeling horribly guilty – he had seen how sad Loki was lately, and had only offered alcohol and a friendly ear. He should have done something more to stop those anti-Loki protests, made more pro-Loki propaganda, given him more validation. Something that would have prevented this. Now they could lose an incredible ally, and someone who had become a friend. It was bullshit.

“Thor?”
Steve appeared behind the god of thunder, trying to get him to react. But he understood Thor. Just looking at Loki's bloodied bedroom was difficult and painful for Steve, and he hadn't grown up with the guy. But he liked Loki, and how complex and dramatic and impossible he was, and it was disheartening losing him to... this. Something that shouldn't have hurt him so much, something that could have had a solution. Steve knew many things about dealing with trauma after Bucky, if he had known... he would have helped Loki, gladly. Now maybe it was too late.

Bruce understood the feeling. He'd been there too. He only hoped Loki would make it, and that things would get better with time. He didn't wish that hell on anyone. Self loathing could be worse than a million alien robots, monsters and gods. More destructive.

Wanda and Peter Parker had been informed, too, and asked what they could do, but the answer was nothing. They held a vigil anyways, told the world that Loki, one of their heroes in the fight against Thanos was now fighting for his own life, and in a critical situation. There were flowers and prayers for him that night. Wanda and Peter hoped that wherever he was, and whatever happened, this would bring him some comfort. He needed to know that they cared, very much so, and that they really didn't want him to go.

Those amazing doctors Stark had summoned told Thor that they had done all they could, that his brother was now in a comatose state and that they didn't know when or if he would wake up again. Thor looked at the ghost of his brother in that bed, pale, quiet and it broke his heart in one million different ways. He knew that Loki had a tendency to melancholy but he hadn't thought....

He took his brother's cold hand on his, planted a soft kiss, willing Loki to live. He had so much to do yet, so many people to astonish, so many feats of bravery and wonder. And they were supposed to do them together, side by side, as brothers. He hadn't been there for him, hadn't seen the signs. Thor had been a fool and he could be losing the most precious thing he had. And there so many things left unsaid, so many promises, so many thanks he hadn't given. Thor tried not to cry, as he sat by his brother's bedside, listening to the beeping of the machines.

It hurt to think that Loki hated himself enough to do something like this. That he had been in so much pain, so much sorrow. And that they hadn't been there to see it.

Back in Loki's old room, there was bloodied note, handwritten by the god of mischief: *This will fix everything.*

But instead, it had broken everything.
Whipped

They had been taken for information, and now Loki, Bucky and Sam Wilson had their hands chained to a metal pipe above their heads, and their feet dangled in some underground filthy hideout. Oh, yeah, and they shirtless because the man that had taken them had decided that the best way to make them talk was to use a whip and lash them, repeatedly, until they spoke. For some reason (maybe because he talked way too much) Loki was taking the brunt of those fiends' aggression.

“Come on, man, you must know that this plan cannot work.” He said, even while they were lashing him. Truth was, he was the best of all of them at biting back screams. “If we talk, then you will not need us so you'll kill us, so we won't speak and so you don't get the information, we don't get out, and nobody advances here.”

The masked man with the whip just looked angrily at him.

“Oh, you will talk.”

“Will we? Barnes has only information of nearly a hundred years ago, as he has spent most of this present time frozen or brainwashed. He will be no good. And Wilson doesn't know any strategic or logistic specifics, do you, Wilson?” Sam shook his head. “He was just there to help his good friend Captain America, did as he was told.”

And there was another lash. That morning, the man had been whipping Loki for what seemed like an eternity but was probably only about forty minutes, and as his wounds from the previous day hadn't healed yet, it was been especially painful. But he had a plan, and he couldn't let his pain cloud his judgement, not when their survival (probably) depended on him. He wanted this to end, but he needed to play it cool. Make it seem like he was unaffected.

“Really, the only shot you have is with me, and I could last here for weeks, even with that whip and any tortures you can conjure up. I'm a god, you know, my resistance is... out of this world.”

Another lash. Loki closed his eyes and breathed deeply.

“What are you saying?”

“I'm saying that you let them go and cut me out from here. The only way you are getting any
information is if you and me come to some sort of arrangement.”

“I don't like it.”

“Do you like ruining my back and your arm with all that whipping for nothing? Do you like having taken useless hostages? They've barely have been involved in anything, I have been in everything, and in both sides.”

There was another lash, angrier, deeper, and Loki nearly screamed this time. It was taking all of his will power not to do so, to appear strong, to seem to have the upper hand. But it was getting more and more difficult. The blood was wet with his blood, making it slippery. Black dots danced in front of his eyes, threatening to get bigger and eventually mean he was blacking out. But he still had it, and so he looked, proud and confident, into his captor's eyes.

The man left, with loud steps, and Loki's composure was undone. He breathed deeply and let his head fall.

“Good try, man.” Sam said. “Although it don't seem like it's going to work, it was nice, letting us out and you free...”

“It could still work.” Loki said, with a small voice. He was tired and in a lot of pain, he didn't have the strength to make himself be heard, not for chit chat. “Give it time.”

“If it doesn't, you should let us... I mean, he's been real hard on you the whole time, and trying to appear like you when he's around... You can't do it forever. You should let one of us take the heat”

It sounded pleasant, to not be in constant pain and with his back reopened several times every day, but Loki knew he couldn't let that happen.

“No. If we have a chance to get out, I need you to be whole, to be strong enough to over power him. I cannot do anything because he's taken my knives and blocked my magic, but as long you're relatively unscathed, we can still have hope.”

Sam was trying something with the chains, finding weak links to try and get out of them and use them as a weapon the next time their captor came, to knock him out and then free Barnes and Loki. He had to admit, he hadn't super happy when he saw who was the other prisoner, but Loki was not
nearly as bad as he thought. The whole time he'd been there, he had been giving ideas to get out and making it so that they wouldn't be hurt, probably not out of selflessness but as part of a scheme, but hey. It was good.

Bucky also thought more highly of Loki now. He hadn't been awake for all his mayhem, so didn't have as many reasons to hate him s the others, and in these last days he'd been a reasonable, resourceful person to talk to. He could play this guy much better than he could, and wasn't hiding way his abilities to get less lashings, he put himself out there to let them advance in their plan to get out. He could read them too, him and Sam, and offer some uplifting words when they were losing heart, some comfort when they were in pain.

Guy certainly knew how to speak.

But it couldn't go on like that forever, and Loki's act and not caring and being able to last for weeks was on its last legs. They needed something to get them out, and they needed it quick, or else one of them was going to end very badly. And this was a terrible way to go, after everything they'd been through, after all the adventures. It was just too sad, and Sam went against the chains with renewed strength. Him breaking them off was a long shot, but he had to try.

And then the man and some of his masked associates were there again, and they injected Sam with something that put him out.

“I accept your bargain, Asgardian.” The man said, and they took Sam out.

As they were coming towards, he bit out.

“We'll come back for you!”

Loki threw him a sad smile.

When they did come back, with Thor and Steve with them, there was only blood and the masked man the one chained to the pipe and blindfolded and gagged.

They found Loki half a mile to the south, still shirtless, and passed out in the scorching sun. He hadn't given those guys whoever they were any info, and had managed to get the upper hand, but collapsed just before being able to get somewhere safe. They would take care of him, it was no
problem. Thor took his brother and transported the both of them to one's of Stark's places, where they could fix his back. The state of it made thunder sound in the cloudless sky. He was angry.

The next time that teams had to be picked though, Bucky and Sam had something clear, something they didn’t think before, not at all. But as they, you live and you learn. And they had learnt that having Loki wasn't such a bad idea.

“We want Loki. Steve, tell them that we want Loki.”

Steve smiled, and nodded, because yes, they did.

“We want Loki.”
They didn't think *that* would be a problem with Loki.

They imagined they would have troubles with trust, with him being too violent and untrustworthy, they thought there maybe would be pranks that bordered of violent crimes, those kinds of things. They there maybe would be creative insults, and there were more some insults, but most of them weren't said by Loki, but instead directed at Loki.

Since he helped saved the Earth last time and hurt himself quite badly while doing so, he earned some status of political refugee, as long as he was under the control of the Avengers. So he'd been living with Wanda and Vision, and with the Black Widow and the man who called himself Ant man also on occasion.

He did magic tricks, read ridiculous amounts of literature and occasionally helped with the strategy of the attack plan for whatever threat reared its head. He was there, making off handed comments about other sorcerers (he did like Wanda but he had a visceral hate for Strange) and commenting books with Steve. It was a nice peaceful life, even though something seemed to be off with the man.

He was too tame, too quiet. Thor noticed first, and then Bruce. The man knew that Loki could be a decen, useful guy and that he was really smart, so had less problems than the others to engage socially with the god. Most of the time they played chess, or talked about quantum physics and its effect on matter, things like that. It was nice having someone that understood all the points he was making. Loki had been a really smart guy even by Asgardian standards, and those standards were much higher that Earth's.

But yes, something was definitely wrong. Two months into their stay, Bruce noticed that Loki's face seemed more sunken than usual, the cheekbones standing out even more than usual. I mean, he had never been fat, or bulky like his brother, but lately he was looking positively scrawny. He also looked very pale and kind of apathetic. Maybe it was all connected, but it was difficult to tell with a being like him.

But Bruce decided to try and see if he could see him eating, and didn't like what he saw. In two weeks, he only saw Loki drink tea and on one occasion eat some thin mints from a box. Nothing that could sustain a man as terribly tall as Loki was. He asked around to the others that spent time with him, and the conclusion was that he was never around when the others ate, and that he was rarely seen eating.

But maybe he simply ate when he was out, or at odd hours (he seemed to have the most unlikely
schedule ever). It was impossible to know and it was such a sensitive topic to ask about... But it was only getting worse, and Bruce knew it.

Loki was getting more and more thin, and the others were noticing as well. Wanda came to him and asked him if he could do a check-up on him, because he was looking a bit “gaunt” (she definitely had looked that word up in a dictionary) and she was worried about him. Steve tried to convince him to go to a doctor, because “maybe he had something serious” and Tony tried to sneak some body scans on him (but like with the security cameras, Loki always knew how to intercept them).

Bruce found him getting clearly getting dizzy and blinking way too many times when they played chess together, and knew he had to say something, however insensitive it may be. He may have ignored the others, but Loki listened to him.

“One of these days, I'm going to win.”

“Keep dreaming, friend Bruce.” Loki said, with one of his trademark sly grins.

Why do you keep pretending everything’s okay when it's clearly not?

“If you keep starving yourself like this you're going to lose cognitive function, you know? Hence, me winning at chess.” Bruce said almost casually, and moved a piece.

Loki's eyes met Bruce, and there was something quite hard to place there. Disbelief? Confusion? Defiance? Anger?

“I do not know what you heard, but I am not starving myself. I require less sustenance than mortals, that's all.”

Yeah, Bruce was not falling for that.

“Funny. You lived most of your life in Asgard, and Thor eats even more than us mortals. And you're much more... what was the word that Wanda used... gaunt.”

Loki seemed a bit unnerved at his insistence.
“It's not your concern, Doctor.”

“It is. I am concerned, and the others are as well. You're one of us now, and we look after each other. I have to ask, is this something you're doing on purpose or not? Because if it isn't, it could be the symptom of....”

“No.” Loki said simply, and Bruce had no idea of what he was talking about.

And so he left, and the problem remained unsolved, only now Loki was avoiding Bruce altogether.

So he decided to talk with Steve, Thor and Tony, to see if they could find a solution. If Loki kept this up, he could really end up badly god or no-god. But it was just a difficult topic to approach.

“Did this ever happen in Asgard? Do you know what may have caused it?”

Thor made a face. He probably should have paid more attention to his brother's health when they were kids. He only knew that when Loki was sick he couldn't play, which was a bummer, because none of his other friends were as wild and weird as Loki was when inventing games.

“He was often sick, but I don't know if it was ever of his own volition.”

That didn't help much, but they all knew about the incident in the Bifrost, so they knew he had at least some self-harming tendencies... It was going to be bad, this was for sure.

But they talked with an expert, researched some things online and were ready for a full on intervention about eating disorders and getting to root of the problem and trying to find a healthier approach to eating and food and about the damages of not eating enough. There they were, Thor, Steve, Bruce and Wanda (Tony had made himself an excuse by being in another part of the country) all set to make Loki eat again.

And so they started and Loki just laughed.
“You did all of this... for me? Because you thought I was starving myself... I am touched, really.”

“But you are starving yourself.”

“Not because I hate myself, I just... I just accidentally ate something with liquorice a couple of months ago.”

Thor made a sound of understanding.

“Liquorice is very bad for Loki, makes him sick for months, even years if he eats too much.”

“I didn't say anything because I did not want to appear weak, vanquished for weeks by a ridiculous piece of food.”

He certainly didn't expect half of the Avengers to come to him with an intervention about the importance of eating.

“You really should have said something, we were really worried.” Steve said.

“I didn’t... think anyone would be. Not so much, certainly.”

“Maybe they weren't back on your home, or when you were younger. But now you are one of us, and we'll always worry.” Wanda said, with a small smile.

“And maybe we could have something to fix your... liquorice problem. If you let me run some tests...” Bruce started, kind of relieved that they didn't have to do the full intervention, and that it hadn't been anything serious.

In the end, there wasn't anything they could do do, simply wait out the effects of the liquorice. But everybody got more vigilant after that, like a concerned mother making sure that her kids are eating properly.

Loki didn't mind. He hadn't had real friends for a big part of his life and was enjoying the novelty,
and all the concern. It was different. It was warm.

It was better.
He's eating him away again, corrupting his head, unmaking all of him.

Loki thinks he's doing all of this because he wants to, because it is what survivors do, because his brother and others are simply doomed and this is the logical choice. Of course he has a million good reason to be doing this, of course it is the only possible course of action....

*You do not want to do this.*

*He's making you.*

Loki is just saving his skin like he's done so many times in the past. He has loyalty to no one, he's a god of mischief and will get in the good graces of whoever he needs to be on the winning side, get the upper hand, get as power and love of others as he can get.

And Thanos has simply too many people, and he did threaten him to torture him forever if he didn't hand over the Tesseract, there is nothing wrong with doing so, and allying himself with the man. This is how he has survived all that he has lived through, the Biforst, his attempted conquest, Svartalfheim, Hela. He's a survivor and he's doing only that, surviving.

*You're his puppet.*

*Wake up and fight, Loki.*

No, he cannot heed those voices, no matter if his gut tells him that they are right and that his whole internal speech is the one that is corrupted. But he cannot do anything, every time he thinks of moving away, of not doing what Thanos has ordered him... he simply can't. He has to.

Maybe is the power of the Tesseract who has messed up his head. There is a lot of power in that cube, and prolonged exposure surely caused problems. Not even Thanos himself handles them directly choosing to work them through a glove. So that voice is probably only that, a simple side effect of being around the Tesseract too much. He's doing the right choice.
You never had any options.

He always gave you the illusion of choosing.

He doesn't sleep anymore, and he has forgotten when was the last time he ate. He seems to have forgotten all the music and theatre he used to go back to in bleak times, and everything has been replaced with missions and strategies and plans to wipe out the Avengers. There's something wrong with that.

He got to your head.

There's almost nothing of you left in what you are doing.

You can tell just by looking at him that there's something wrong. He isn't simply sickly pale and bony, his skin is wrong, with uneven darker patches. He gets scratched and cut much more easily, and those injuries, however minor, never seem to heal. There's something external in him, that is interfering with all that he is, with his healing abilities, with his appetite, with the entirety of his being.

Why are you doing this?

He'll end up killing you anyways.

Loki is so incredibly tired, he's beyond exhausted and he doesn't have a moment to rest. Every little moment he's in tension, and he's constant fighting himself, as well as the others. He simply wants everything to end, for better or worse. There is a tear in his eye, as he unconsciously makes himself a very easy target for those Avengers. There is a shot and he's out.

When he wakes up, the voices are gone. The cube is too far and he is too far. But he is not yet free. Maybe he will never be free again. And all of this people, this whole world... They think him a mere lackey of Thanos'.

This was never what he wanted. This was the opposite of what he wanted.
His eyes are tearing up.

He is tied to some sort of metal chair, and the some members of the Avengers are in front of him, with angry expressions.

“Tell us everything that you know about Thanos' plans.”

“I can't.” Loki says, in a whisper.

*I'll make sure you don't talk.*

*I'll make sure you can't ever betray me, little liesmith.*

“Come again?”

There is an arrow between his eyes, but it doesn't change anything.

“Even if I wanted to, even if... I can't, I... he won't allow me. I really can't.”

And there's a feminine voice.

“He went in your head, didn't he?” It's Nebula. “Good. It's means he didn't trust you, which means you're not a brainless lackey.”

There's an intensity to her eyes that Loki likes. Maybe she can make the voices stop. Maybe she can fix him.

“Miss Maximoff can undo the... compulsion he's put on you. And then we can talk revenge... Revenge against him.”

Loki likes that.
He likes that very much.
Bucky was trapped in some sort of maze-like abandoned building, and had a suspicion that his leg was about to break, because of the bad fall from when whoever it was had thrown him in there. He felt he needed to keep moving, because he had to get out of there, he needed to find some help, know if Steve and Sam and the others were okay or if they'd been taken too...Maybe they were hurt too, maybe even worse than him.

Priority number one was finding out where he was and then getting out. He'd been in bad situations before, although he didn't remember feeling so light headed in any of them. When he was about to fall he felt somebody come behind him, and suddenly he was leaning on somebody, and the world didn't weigh so much.

It was someone with long-ish dark hair, not too different from his own, although they leaner, and had something of magical in their presence... Almost majestic.

“Loki.”

It was good to see a friendly face. Loki may not be the oldest or most trustworthy Avenger, but neither was he, and together they could talk about how much they didn't understand that reference or how excessive loud this place and time could be.

And fruit. Loki was Bucky's to-go guy to get good fruit: where and when to get it, how to prepare it, nice dishes with fruit. He had a suspicion that some of the others (specially Stark and Peter Quill) wanted to make fun of their love for fruit, where we a bit scared of them to do so. Good.

Loki was also a very resourceful person, which was a good quality when you are trapped in what seemed like an inescapable maze.

“I know a way out. Allow me to help you.”

Loki always delivered.

“How... what is this place?”

“Magically warded maze. Very convoluted, changes every day. I don't know who is behind it, but they are powerful.”

“And why... why are we here?”

“Apparently to atone for past crimes. There is a voice that is broadcast every two or three days that says we are criminals who were not punished properly for our crimes and this is our comeuppance.” Loki said, mimicking the tone of the voice in the recording perfectly.

“Which is stupid, because Mr. Barnes here is not a criminal, he was a victim of true masters of crime.
It is them you should be punishing, Mr Recording, the people who programmed him to do those things, not the man himself. Stupid, really.”

And then there was the message again, completely ignoring what he'd said.

He had been there so long, he knew it by heart. He could recall every little detail of the recording, every turn of the voice, every word that it was said. For many days, that recording was his only company.

“Is there anyone else?” Bucky asked.

“Not today, no.”

“Not today? But other days there have been more people.”

“Yes, there have. I actually found the exit with the Lady Romanoff. Stark has also been here, because of the arms business, we assume, and there was another fellow whose name I never got, but who was quite friendly, too.”

“Why haven't you left with any of them if you know where the exit is?” There was something wrong about this. Maybe it was Loki the cause of everything, to make himself look heroic.

“I would if I could. They magically warder the place, which means that nobody with magic can leave. Your Avenging friends had no issue, but I am stuck in here.”

“Can't you turn off your magic?”

“I don't know, Barnes, can you turn off your blood?” Loki said with his usual venom. Bucky half smiled, happy to see something of the old Loki he knew even in this situation. When Loki was behaving “good” normally it meant that shit was serious and that there was no time for jokes. He didn't like those times.

“So... why hasn't anybody come for you?”

Because nobody cares enough, Loki figured. Because maybe they thought that he belonged there, perpetually being reminded of his wrongs and in a maze he could never escape, but everybody else could. Because he was “different”. Not too Asgardian, barely Jotun, not at all human, way too magical. Just plain wrong. This was a classy to get rid of him without having to kill him, just letting him die on his own.

Somebody that was probably not far, taking into account how poorly he felt. It wasn't just the fact that he hadn't eaten in days, probably weeks, or that he could hardly sleep. Not the fact that when he fell to the floor he broke something he shouldn't have and now his bruises wouldn't clear up, he felt faint and dizzy and nauseated and generally weak. Oh, and there was something else.

“Dude, you're.... yellow.”

Bucky had practically forgotten his own boo-boos just by looking at Loki and how terrible he looked. I mean, the guy had always been thin but now he looked simply emaciated. There were bruised patches of skin of what wasn't covered in his suit and the whole of him had a... yellowish tinge. And he knew this was not a magicky thing, this was a symptom of something bad, Bucky remembered from his time that babies going yellow was a very bad sign.

“You know why you're yellow?”
“No, I do not. If I did I would have tried to stop it, although I don’t know with what – not a lot of things here... to fix oneself. “

Loki continued walking towards the exit and talking with Barnes about this place, their crimes or not-crimes and trying to atone for a dark past. Barnes didn't judge a lot, both he and Rogers and himself had done plenty of sketchy stuff, in two different centuries. It was nice to have a chat, and nice of Barnes to be concerned and ask about him (Natasha had been all strategy, all getting out, we’ll figure the details later. She also said that she would be back for him. Loki was trying not to be bitter about that).

“And here we are. You go through that ventilation shaft, two lefts one right, and then it's freedom – some street somewhere. I can look but not get out. Now, good luck to you, friend Barnes.”

And part of him really wanted to get out of that place. He'd only been there about an hour and his leg still hurt, and it felt as if the air had gotten thinner and scarce, the walls oppressing them, everything getting smaller. He couldn't shake off why, but it felt as if the building was trying to eat him somehow, devour him.

“It's the air.” Loki said, seemingly reading his mind. “There are some things in it that make you feel... off.... But of course, you can not stop breathing...”

Loki wanted to Barnes to stay, because he liked having people to talk to, but he also wanted him to leave, because he was tired of pretending he was okay. Or as relatively okay as he could look like with that odd skin. But the truth was that the whole building was circling around him, his hands were trembling slightly and he had trouble keeping his eyes open. Everything hurt, and he was beyond exhausted just from walking and helping Barnes to the exit. He wanted to go back to throwing himself in a tiny corner and using his cape as a blanket while he complained about how poorly he felt and how everyone had left him there to rot.

“You will feel better in the vents, you'll see, and afterwards. Well, it was nice seeing you, but I fear this is good bye.”

“No! I'm not leaving you here!”

That went against everything he believed in! Bucky may not have known Loki for a very long time and he knew that he had done some very bad stuff, but he liked the guy. They were always written off as sidekicks of some sort to Thor and Steve, but those who knew them knew that they were the real danger of the team, often the planners of strategies.

They had been disliked, deeply, and there were probably one or two Avengers that would never forgive them for their pasts... But they were tolerated, because they appreciated their blonder counterparts too much. Bucky remembered the days when he was better liked than Steve, and bigger. It felt like a million years ago. And he could talk about anything with Loki and he always had tricks and ways to make everything easier, without the moral doubts Steve sometimes had, or the technological convolutedness of some of the others.

There was no way he was leaving him there, in that maze that ate you and told you mean things about how you needed to be punished further.

“You must leave me.”

“No! What if those magical wards erase your memory and that's why nobody has come back! My memory is already pretty shitty, I would forget it instantly. And you would be trapped here for who knows how long, without food, whitout anybody but that voice... I can not do that to you!”
“But you must.”

“I need to write myself a note, so that I know to come back...”

“There nothing to writ it with, and nothing to write it on. And we don't even know if there really is a memory wipe in the wards.”

Bucky broke a piece of Loki’s cloth, to the Asgardian's utmost indignation.

“I will be back sooner than you think.”

Bucky said, determined. He had an idea to write the message, but he'd do it alone in the vents. It was a bit...strange.

But it would work. He would get Loki out of there.

-

Everyone was really glad to have him back, concerned about an ant-crime extremist group that had been threatening them. His leg was fixed in no time with some Stark gadget and everyone was simply happy that nothing serious seemed to have happened.

Bucky was glad too, although losing the memory of an entire day was not pleasant, specially when he thought those days were finally over. What if he had done something terribly during that day? What if he had ruined everything?

“What's that?”

There was a piece of bright green clothing on the pocket of his jeans. Something like silk but softer, with words written in... was that blood? Oh my god, had he killed somebody? And then he saw that there was a cut on his hand... Maybe.

“Go back for Loki.” Steve read. “This ringing any bells?”

“No... I haven't seen Loki in a while. Why would I write myself that?”

It made no sense, although he did feel like he was forgetting something major.

“Oh, wait Bucky, there's another word here. Yellow.”

And suddenly it all came back to him. A half smile supporting his bad self, a sarcastic remark telling him if he could turn off his blood, and yellowish skin, even yellow eye sockets.

“I remember”

With some work, Bucky managed to make Natasha and Stark remember, and the three of them put together what they knew and set out to get Loki back. It was a couple of days of almost no sleep and a lot of frustration, but they managed to find the maze that was trying to eat you, that turned out to be an abandoned lab the hate group was using for a “lesson”. They turned off the wards and looked for the sole inhabitant of the maze.

Loki was even yellower, and at some place in the middle of consciousness and oblivion. Later they
would find out that the yellowness (jaundice was the actual word) came from something called hemolytic anemia, that was messing with all his blood cells and consequently all the organs that blood went to. According to Bruce, it was nothing short of a miracle that he'd stayed awake all that time.

But in that moment, they knew nothing, only that they were reunited.

“I came back for you.”

“Bucky...” Loki half smiled through the fog in his eyes. “you remembered.”
Cassie Lang was afraid, and in the middle of what seemed to be an unending war. She had been taken prisoner by some men who put her, alone, in a dirty cell and she didn't know why, she just knew that it had something to do with her dad. She could hear explosions outside, and she was scared, very scared, crying in a corner hoping that somebody would come for her. Nobody did, but one of the explosions tore down the outer wall of her cell (she had screamed so much when it happened) and she'd been able to get out.

Only she was getting out into a war zone. There were mechanical soldiers, there was fire, and there was scary people with different coloured skin she imagined were from outer space. She didn't want any of those people to notice her, but every time something fell, or there was a big hit, she couldn't help but let out a small yelp. After one of those, an alien soldier with a mean face caught sight of her, and direct his... space gun? at her face. Cassie closed her eyes, putting her arms in front of her face, but no harm came to her.

When she opened her eyes, she saw that the soldier's blast had been stopped by some sort of green light, that surrounded the alien's head and made him fall boneless to the floor. The green light had come from a tall man in front of him, who seemed to be wearing some... medieval armour? Like the knights from the cartoons. He had longest hair she'd seen on a boy and half of a helmet with horns (only one horn anymore).

Cassie looked at him with huge eyes.

"What are you doing here, child?" He said, and Cassie cowered a little.

"Don't worry, I will not hurt you." At least, he had a nice voice. "What's your name?"

"Cassie. Cassie Lang." She said, in a small voice. Surely if he was one of the bad guys he wouldn't have stopped the soldier aiming a gun at her, right?

"You're Scott Lang's daughter?"

"You know my dad?"

"I do, he's a good man."

The man knelt in front of Cassie, just a blast of energy was directed towards them. Cassie's saviour deflected it with a movement of his hand.

"I AM TALKING" He said, angrily, and then wavered a little.

He blinked many times and then directed his magic hand towards her. There was some sort of glow
that was warm and was covering all of her.

"Just a shield, no reason to worry."

The man knelt in front of her and looked at her in the eye.

"All right, priority number one... Do you know what is a priority, Cassandra?"

Cassie shook her head.

"It is the most important thing of all. Priority number one is getting you somewhere save. Priority number two is getting a hold of your father so he can... decide what to do with you. Priority number three..."

"You're bleeding." Cassie noted. All the side of his head was covered in blood, that went down to his shoulder. There were also bleeding wounds in his stomach and legs and one of his hands was covered in blood. It was a bit scary.

"I am. But I can still get you somewhere safe. Priority number one, ok? We must focus on that."

And so the man got up and started looking around, maybe a way in which they could get somewhere safe and not get blown by bits in the process. Well, she had the glowy shield (so cool, like wearing glitter all around her but without the stickyness. She looked awesome, like some outer space princess. Her saviour, on the other hand, looked terrible.

"Why don't you have a shield?"

"I'm too big. It would require too much energy."

Oh. That was sad, that he could help her, but not help himself.

"What's your name?"

"Loki. Now, Cassandra, can you run, or shall I take you in my arms?"

"I can run!"

"You must run faster than you've ever done it before, ok? As fast as the wind, until that Bus stop."

"Ok!"

"And I fall you pay no attention, all right? What is priority number one, the most important thing?"

"Getting somewhere safe!"

"Now, Cassandra, run"

And so Cassie run, forgetting the world, forgetting all the shooting and the men and women fighting around. The most important thing was getting to that bus stop, and she was going to show Loki that she was a big girl and that she could run faster than the wind. And so she did, but when she got there and shouted "I did it!" she was alone.

Loki was still trying to get there, but fighting someone. He was bleeding even more now, and looked bad. Cassie wanted to do something to help, but also didn't want to move. The most important thing was that she was there, and she didn't know how could she help anyways. So she watched the fight with fearful eyes, hoping for the best.
In the end, Loki did win, and went to the bus stop where she was, although he was wobbling a bit, as if he was dizzy.

"Are you sick?" Was the first thing she asked when he got there. But there was no answer, just more blinking and some loud breaths. "Loki?"

"I am not sick. I just need a moment."

"You are lying. You are too white, my mum says that is called being pale and it means that something’s wrong inside of you."

Loki laughed a little.

"I am from another planet, Cassandra. Your human rules don't apply to me."

Cassie forgot al her fears from minutes ago to make him realise that she wasn't a baby.

"I don't believe you. Aliens are ugly, like those ones. You're pretty."

Loki smiled her way. This only made him prettier, further cementing her argument. He couldn't be alien, he was speaking English!

"Let's focus, this is still not a good place."

Loki wavered again, and closed his eyes for a while. He was still bleeding, and there was nothing there to make it stop. When she of her friends got hurt there was always someone there to make it stop, and tell them that it would be okay. But no one was there to clean Loki's blood.

"All right, let's got back to priority number one. Cassandra, do you that building next to the green one?"

"The supermarket?"

"It's big and empty, and I could probably lock it easily, get you some food. Maybe they will even have a phone we can use. That is where we're going ok?"

Cassie nodded.

"But there's too many ups and downs, too much open ground, I will have to carry you this time." Cassie wanted to say something, but was stopped. "I know you can run, it's just too dangerous. And remember, if I am hit, you go to the building, look for a cellar or something."

There was another explosion next to them, and Cassie just nodded and let Loki take her. She was really looking forward to getting to that place.

Loki smelt nice, like mint ice cream mixed with blood. They ran and there were some blasts thrown their way, but Cassie felt nothing thanks to her shield. Loki was determined, and they arrived to the supermarket and locked the doors fairly quickly.

Loki left her on the floor and stumbled behind a cash register, where he threw up for a while. Cassie knew she probably wasn't supposed to look but she did, anyway. She had known that he was sick, but the priority thing was more important. She went to look for some tissues or napkins on the supermarket. It was the nice thing to offer, she guessed.

"Here." Cassie said, giving Loki, who was still on the floor, the box on tissues.
"Thank you, Cassandra."

"I think... I think priority number three should be calling the doctor. You're sick."

Loki half smiled.

"That is sweet of you to say, Cassandra, but I can take care of myself. You need not worry. Now, let's see if we can find your father, shall we? It is priority number two, after all."

Loki got up, slowly and using one of the shelves for balance, and still, he moved slowly and carefully. There was blood and vomit where he'd been. It was unpleasant, her mom would throw a fit, but still Cassie liked Loki. She had helped her and trusted her to complete the priorities, their mission. He was cool.

"You're cool." She said. "Why there isn't a toy of you like of my dad and his friends?"

They all had them and played with them in recess. She had an Ant man figurine (clearly) and a Captain America and Black Widow. Her best friend had an Iron Man and a Hulk. But she'd never seen anyone with a toy that looked like him.

"I did some bad things... in the past. Your father's friend aren't too fond of me, and neither are the toy companies, it would seem. But there is a toy of my brother. Thor, the one with the hammer?"

"I KNOW WHO YOU SAY! All the girls from middle school say he is the most handsome. But you are prettier, I think."

They went to a small office, and Loki told her to get up on the wheelie chair and mark the number of his dad's number. He had asked to memorise it with a song in case there was an emergency and she needed to contact him. Fortunately, after some rings, he picked up.

"He says somebody is tracking the signal and not to move, that he's coming."

"Well, that's good news." Loki said from where he was sitting on the floor, eye closed, his hands over his eyes.

Cassie sat next to him.

There was another explosion and she screamed a little.

"Not to worry, little Cassandra. We're safe. Nothing will happen to you while you're with me."

"Thank you."

"Hey, since we're in a place with food, why don't you choose something delicious, so that we can eat it here, huh?"

"Ok!"

Distracted by the prospect of food (she hadn't had a proper meal in so long, Cassie forgot her fear and chose the most delicious things of the supermarket (chocolate cookies, half melted ice cream, bread and peanut butter...) and then went back to the Loki were Loki was slumped. She was afraid that he'd gone to sleep, but he smiled at her when she came.

They talked about the food and about their friends (it turned out that Loki didn't have many friends, which was sad, so she decided that she would be his friend) and about school and things like that.
"And what job did you have?"

"I was... I was a prince."

"REALLY?"

Loki nodded again. He was getting even whiter, which was not good, but surely the cookies would help.

"Thor was the other. It's not as great as it sounds."

"Do you think I could be a princess?"

"Oh, Cassandra, you would be a queen."

Her dad got like twenty minutes later.

"Daddy!"

And she jumped into his arms, where they embraced for a while.

"Cassie, are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm eating cookies in an office with my new friend, he got me here. Come!"

Scott was a bit overwhelmed. After nearly ten days without knowing anything about Cassie except for threats and people telling him that she was going to killed, suddenly out of nowhere she called him, told him she was in a supermarket. And she seemed unscathed, too, which was nothing short of a miracle taking into account the war situation they had out there.

Whoever this friend of Cassie's was, he owed them his life for taking care of his little girl like that. Probably Wilson, or Barton maybe....

"Ah, Lang. Good to see you."

Loki. Cassie's new friend was Loki, and he looked like shit.

"Loki! On my, I didn't expect... Anyways, thank you for this, man, I owe you big time."

"Do you have a safehouse? Some way to transport her?" Loki said, slightly slurring his words. He was all covered in blood and so pale he seemed like a halloween ghost costume. He seemed to be fairly badly injured, and that blow to the head had probably caused a concussion, seeing how unfocused his eyes were, and how he was slumped.

"Yeah, don't worry."

"You take her."

"But you come with us too, right? Daddy, he has to come with us, he's sick! Priority number three!" Cassie said. They couldn't leave him there, he was sick! And she didn't want to say goodbye so soon.

"I can manage."

"No! You have to come with us!"
"There's enough space for you, and Cassie really wants you to come." Scott said. He didn't know if Loki would be able to simply walk all the way, but he needed to come with them and get some medical attention. Soon.

Scott offered a hand, and Loki shakily got up and they started making their way.

"You know, dad, that Loki is a prince? And he says that I could be a queen and he calls me Cassandra."

"Queen Cassandra."

They got Cassie in Stark's car and Loki passed out just right after, but Scott and Natasha where there to pick him.

He had indeed a concussion, apart from some internal bleeding and a dislocated shoulder. But even like that, he took the time to take Cassie out of danger, and make sure he was safe. Loki had never been much of a child-loving person, but he'd seen how afraid she had been and knew he had to do something, that the girl couldn't fend for herself in the middle of a war zone.

When he woke up, a whole two days later in Stark's medbay, there was a a lovely get well soon card, with a handwritten message:

"Prioretee n 4: Get better soon

  your friend always,

  CASSANDRA"
Drown

Loki had fallen into the water and he was not getting out.

Hulk looked around, and no one seemed was going into the water, no one was taking him out of the water. Which was bad. Loki was one of them now, and Hulk...maybe they weren't friends-friends, but they were something close to that.

And so Hulk threw himself into the water, making a huge splash and looking for the man(god) that he knew was around there, somewhere. He had to be. All of the Hulk's great frame moved in the water (he really didn't like the water) towards the place where he knew Loki had fallen, and there was a shadow, sinking, that he caught easily in one of his big green hands.

Now the important thing was NOT to smash. He had to be careful with his team mate, because even before being drowned Loki had been hurt in the fight, and although the Hulk knew that Loki was able to withstand the full Hulk treatment, this time he didn't want to stop him, or hurt him. No, this time the Hulk wanted to help, although it wasn't his specialty. He was more used to helping by destroying things.

Hulk put Loki on the floor, and realised that he was unconscious – drowned already. He was even white than usual, and very cold to the touch, not moving. Completely wet, the black hair making him look almost like a mermaid. Hulk gave the god a nudge, hoping for a practical joke.

“NOT FUNNY.”

Hulk said, but got no response.

Then he roared on Loki’s face, but got no response again.

Hulk was panicking a little. Loki needed help, and his hands were too strong and big to actually help without breaking something in Loki's ribcage. His head lolled a bit. Hulk looked around, but all the others were too busy. He roared loudly, but nobody came to him and Loki's aid. So he needed to fix things himself.

He remembered when he disliked Loki, and for a while everyone else also did. But everyone else hadn't seen how Loki had come back for them when they needed him in Asgard, hadn't seen him fighting alongside Thor and Valkyrie. Strangely enough, it felt way more natural, that, than the speeches he gave when he first came to earth. It felt fitting that he would be their saviour, and that he would finally stop Hela causing the end of all things.

Chaos as a force for good. That was what Loki was now, and Hulk wasn't letting him die, so easily. But shaking him wouldn't work, he knew, he would only cause more damage. He needed some else, he needed... Banner.

As soon as Bruce was back on his not-green skin, he put his head to Loki's chest, to see if there was any breathing. No such luck.

And so he started CPR, absolutely wet and near naked, but not caring at all. Not only Loki had been a great ally these last times, he was someone Bruce had come to appreciate. He understood what was to hit rock bottom and want it all to end, understood what was to another skin that you struggled to accept. He was witty, and smart and never judged, not even with self loathing self harming thoughts that would deeply alarm everyone else.
Loki was also atoning for past mistakes, for the wrong things he did, and Bruce was trying to do that with the Hulk as well. There were some people, and most of the authorities that would only see them as the horrible things from their past and some days it was bad, but they were doing their best, and they had each other. Well, and Nebula. Although she was different world from both of them. It kind of made Loki seem tame.

To be honest, a lot of the things they'd seen and done in the last couple of years made Loki seem tame. And knowing what he did in Asgard and that he helped save Jane from some space dark elves made Bruce wonder if Loki could qualify as villain anymore. But now was not the time to think about why he wanted to save the guy, but to actually do it.

CPR was hell. He wanted to be careful, because Loki was a fairly thin uy who seemed a bit fragile, but he also knew that he had to put some strength into it if it was going to have any effect. He did the compression and heard for breathing, but nothing. So he continued, one, two, three....

On the back of his mind, Bruce thought about it would affect them if Loki didn't make it. How would it affect Thor, would had lost his brother too many times, and only had Loki left of his whole family; how it would affect Nebula, after a whole life being a lonely assassin with a grudge against her family had finally made a friend; how it would affect him, not being able to save his monster buddy (Loki was the monster parents told their children about; Hulk the beserker that broke Harlem).

“Come on, man.”

Bruce suddenly noticed that there were now other people next to them, hoping, fear in their eyes. Steve, Wanda, Rocket. All in a circle, looking at Loki’s still frame, hoping for a happy ending.


Maybe it was useless, maybe he'd been too late, maybe...

And suddenly, there was something, a noise, small, but there.

Bruce put Loki on his side, to help him breathe properly and helped him as he coughed.

Everyone breathed, relieved, and smiled at him, told him it was good to see him, and Banner very carefully helped him up. Loki wiped his face, pretending all that wetness was from the water, and not from some unavoidable tears.

It was the first time that he died and so many people cared.

So many friends.
Asphyxia

Loki was choking.

Thanos was holding him by the throat and wouldn't let go, just watched gleefully as Loki got less and less air. He thought he could play the Mad Titan, but he had been caught and was paying dearly for his betrayal.

It was slow and painful, and all the while Loki flailed, moved around, tried to conjure up some spell, a dagger, something that would liberate him from this prison of not being able to breathe. The seconds passed and he was only getting weaker and weaker, his chances to free himself from that torment reducing drastically.

His neck hurt, badly. He was starting to feel light-headed, black spots blurring his vision. Was this really how he was going to go? After everything – he was letting some foe of the Avengers kill him? He should have been smarter, more careful... But he'd been hungry for glory, and for the acceptance not only of his brother's team, but also of the people of that planet he had once tried to conquer...

He'd found that admiration was much more satisfying that fear or hatred, and had planned to earn the love of this mortals by going after this terrible enemy himself and thus sparing the lives of their beloved Avengers. They would have to love him if he saved them all, wouldn't they?

But he'd been sloppy and he had been found out and beaten around. The proud god, made a bruised and abused wretch of a figure at the complete mercy of that who he had tried to defeat. A joke of a foe, never an Avenger, never really a true villain either. One little mistake, and everything had gone wrong. He had thought himself too good, too sly, and had been none of that.

He could hardly see anything by now, everything was dark and blurry. He couldn't feel his limbs properly, and could only hear Thanos laughing in the background. It angered him. It should be companions of his brother whose names he hadn't care to learn who were dying, not him. He was a survivor and he only appeared when it was convenient for him.

This was not convenient. This was painful.

Then his thoughts started becoming blurry, the words in his head made an unintelligible jumble. Thanos pushed harder, and Loki made a strangled sound. He couldn't breathe. Couldn't breathe.

He was going under.

And there was a shock, and Thanos was frozen in place, paralyzed by some electric current.

Loki fell to the floor and tried to catch his breath, after coughing harshly and for long.

There was a hand that was being offered to him.

“Come on, we don't have a lot of time.”

His savior.

“Let's go.”

Loki looked up, took the hand and started moving.

“Agent... Hill.” He rasped, wanting to convey his gratitude. Sadly, his throat wasn't co-operating.
“Don’t call me that. I had specifically told not to come here, not to do this.”

They quickly and efficiently got out of Thanos’ hideout, and retrieved some inconspicuous clothing that Maria had left for this purpose. They even held hands, to pass as a regular couple, just strolling through the streets of New York, trying to forget the horrors of those fights they were seen in on the TV.

Loki liked Miss Hill’s style. Nobody thought of her, of the danger she could be while posing the obedient and effective Agent. Little more than a bureaucrat, some people would think. Surely Thanos didn’t think that some SHIELD operative could affect his power, his mission. And Maria Hill had shut all of them up with her abilities, with her know-how, without any special power, and while keeping a low profile. Admirable, indeed.

Hill also appreciated Loki and his style. Nobody could play a double agent as well as he, who had in fact gotten much closer to Thanos than any of them ever could. He had a lot of understated strategical value, he was clearly a smart planner, and he had knowledge of the enemy that was invaluable. He was smart enough to make choices that would help him know more, and because he wasn’t attached to any organization or team, he could do what he wanted. He would be a great asset to have, a god was always a good addition to their side.

A god who also had a badly bruised neck. And seemed to be running on survival instinct only. She knew how that felt, and she knew that the more they continued, the worse the crash would be. Maria “always business” Hill, decided they should take a moment. A breather.

There was an empty bench in one of the deserted parks, dressed like some tourist, Maria told Loki to next to her. He looked at her, confused.

“Just thought we could take a moment to... catch our breath.”

Ah, wordplay. Loki smiled at this near stranger who had saved his life, and sat. It wasn't long before exhaustion took over and he fell asleep, his head in Hill's shoulder.

Two of the universes most adept strategists, and there they were, in a bench, hearing the echo of battle, resting from everything for a moment.

Just.... breathing.
"Interrogated"

Chapter Notes

Slight crossover, this time the object of my whump are Loki and Apocalypse!Nightcrawler :)

Steve was calmly having some cereal on his living room when there was a blue poof, and a familiar lanky figure appeared out of nowhere, making him nearly drop his bowl.

It was a wide eyed bloodied Loki, carrying an unconscious blue skinned figure in his arms. There was something desperate in the god's eyes, a beseeching expression Steve had never seen in his face. He was imploring him, the lowly very not godly Steve Rogers, and he was barely standing.

“Help us.” He whispered in a low voice, and promptly collapsed into the floor, making Steve's living room full of long limbs, dried and fresh blood and closed eyes.

There was something about Loki's expression that made Steve think he probably had come to him because he didn't have anyone else, or that going to everyone else would be too dangerous, so he decided not to call anyone, just in case. He'd never had any trouble with fugitives, he had been one himself for a fairly and so had Bucky. And he knew that Loki was mostly on their side now, and that kid he had brought with him seemed nice enough as well.

And so he started trying to fix them up, with as much care as possible, gentle, soft. Perhaps he should have been less trusting and placed Loki and the stranger in cell-like place while he didn't know why they were there and why they needed help, but Steve had never been known for being overly cautious. He would rather be attacked by a stranger than put somebody innocent in a cell, this time and every time.

Both Loki and the stranger looked pretty bad, so Steve put them both in his bed, hoping that being in a bed would be helpful. Loki had a decent blow on the head covered by dried blood and ligature marks on his necks, apart from extensive bruising on his chest, stomach and something that looked like chemical burns in his arms. It would take a while to go through all of that, but Steve was not in a hurry. His left shoulder seemed dislocated too, so that would have to be set. Steve sighed.

The boy seemed to have a broken arm and when Steve took away the torn shirt, he found that there were a lot of gashes in his stomach and chest, some older, some newer, most of them pretty deep. It was unsettling, to say the least. He also had a black eye, a split lip and seemed to have trouble breathing. A lot of work there too.

So, Steve put some music on, took out his first aid kit and started working. He put some cream in Loki's burns, cleaned his head and bandaged the worst of the bruising, carefully, slowly. Then he went to the boy and cleaned and disinfected all his gashes, and then bandaged nearly all his midsection. Then he remembered that Bucky had been paranoid and said that they needed something in case Steve's asthma came back, and “got” some supplies from a hospital, including and oxygen mask with a small tank, and decided to put it on the boy, to help his breathing.

He decided to leave setting Loki's shoulder for last, as he imagined that would probably wake the god up, and putting the burn cream and all those things probably hurt, and it was better to do them
while the god was unconscious. And Loki did indeed woke up when his bones where put in their
place, bright unfocused green eyes suddenly looking at him.

“Captain...? Why....?”

“You appeared out of nowhere with that boy and collapsed, asked me to help you. I was hoping you
could tell me why you're here.”

Loki frowned and slowly sat up and got up, taking Steve's helping hand. He was still a bit fuzzy on
how he had got there and why he had gone there, and then he saw the boy next to him and his
expression changed.

“Kurt....”

“I did the best for him, but maybe we should take him to a real hospital.”

“No, they would find us there... Please, Steve....”

For Loki to actually call him Steve this had to be serious. They were relatively friendly as they were
fairly good strategists the both of them, and enjoyed a good game of chess, but he was still Captain
or Rogers most of the time. For him to be pulling the first name thing this needed to be pretty serious.

“Don't worry, I haven't called anybody, and I won't, but you need to tell me who is he and what
happened to you guys.”

And so Loki began his tale.

He didn't remember exactly how they snatched him, but at some point he woke up in some sort of
communal cell with a bunch of other people. They were separated in two sides: the criminals and the
heroes who wanted nothing to do with them. Loki felt like he didn't belong anywhere, but there was
somebody else... Somebody who had been shunned “because they didn't know who he was and
couldn't be trusted”, they said, but it was probably because of his blue skin and tail.

Loki, who knew what it was to hate blue skin and be hated as well, went to the blue boy and they
became a sort of middle ground in that place. There was twelve of them, and to be honest, it was the
criminals who had the most ideas to get out. But it didn't matter. One by one, the inhabitants of the
cell were taken and “interrogated”. When they came back, they could hardly keep their eyes open.

Kurt tried to help, but people kept shying away from him. Just because he was blue. It was stupid, so
Loki stood by him. He hated them all for being afraid. The interrogation kept getting more and more
creative, blocking his magic, making him speak the truth... It was an absolute waking nightmare.

“And then we go out.” Loki said, voice low. “I managed to get some spells out of the magic blocks,
quite painfully at that, and managed to unplug the electrical field on the cell, and so Kurt was able to
get most of the people out... And then... we were going to...finally get back home, put ourselves back
together... One of our captors found us... And we were already too weak from so much
interrogation... I couldn't protect him...”

Steve passed him a glass of water, which Loki took gratefully.

“At some point, Kurt grabbed me and I thought of you, because I knew that wherever you were, it
would some place hidden from the authorities, because of you friend and your... complicated status. I
don't really know who it was that took us, but they were from your government, of that I'm sure.”

“They won't find you here.” Steve said, exercising all of his self control not to put a comforting hand
on the god's shoulder, comfort him in a more physical way, but they didn't know each other that well. Still, Loki looked terrible, with the bandage on his head, dried blood still in his hair and those red marks on his neck, not to mention how bloodshot his eyes were, and the look of exhaustion and hopelessness in them.

“Why don't I warm up some leftover pasta for you and we can go over what you remember to see if we can figure out who it was, stop them?” Steve tried to smile, and Loki just absent mindedly nodded, while looking at his glass of water, that was shaking slightly.

Steve sighed and went to the kitchen, wishing he could be more. He knew what Loki meant when he talked about interrogation. Agents has “interrogated” Bucky many times too, and it had made him full of scars. And it was always done in the name of the greater good, of safety. When Steve first joined the army he never thought he would end up being the go-to guy for fugitives of the security agencies.

When he returned with the food, Loki was looking at his injured friend, a sad look in his eye, and he seemed in another world.

“He'll be fine, don't worry.”

One of Loki's hand turned blue.

“This is what made approach him, you know, being blue, and feared. But he is so much better than me... So much better. But of course, he was too loyal to his team to say anything...”

Loki took the plate, and his hands were still shaking a bit.

“Is there anything that you can remember that can help us identify...”

Loki touched Steve's cheek, and suddenly Steve was seeing the interior of a cell, a torture room, screams and tears people vomiting blood, electric shocks, symbols, pleading eyes getting taken out of the cell, a pained scream as Loki managed to get the electric field down, symbols, numbers, glass doors, a blue teen getting everyone out, angry eyes with weapons closing in on a battered god and a boy who couldn't breathe...

“That's all I have.”

Steve wanted to scream.

He knew some of those people. And to think that he had once been in league with the bullies he so hated, with torturers....

“I will handle this. No, even better yet... I'll let Natasha handle them.”

Loki half smiled at the prospect. The thought of his captors getting taken down by the widow was rather a sweet one.

The next three Loki and Kurt were the recipient of all of Steve's hospitality and cooking. Kurt woke up the next day and seemed amazed to meet him (“Ze Captain of America! Vhat an honor!”) and Steve understood why Loki had taken him under his wing, he was so incredibly nice and enthusiastic, the most wide eyed kid he'd ever seen.

Natasha and some others took care of the interrogators and their whole structure. She sent Loki and only Loki a video, Steve and the others didn't need to know.
But as he was having some dinner in that small apartment, with Kurt badly bruised, one of his eyes swollen shut, but smiling despite everything, teaching the good Captain (Steve, please, call me Steve) some German expressions he liked, tail moving merrily behind him, his own wounds still half healed, still hurting, he smiled.

They could come for them, try to break them, do unspeakable things with them....

But they wouldn't break them.

And they wouldn't ever ever win.
April

“Hey, man, it's Peter Parker. I know you probably can't hear me, but…”

Peter really understood the situation. Loki was in a deep coma after some battle they won. He'd been no longer been breathing when they found him on the rubble after an explosion, and had the astounding amount of 46 broken bones. There was not much else they could do but wait.

Now the bones were healing, but he needed a ventilator to breathe and hadn't given any indications that he would wake up soon. Mr. Stark set up a state of the art hospital room just for him, after being saved by the god more than once, and kept hoping.

“We just managed to get Thor out of here, so he can sleep and eat and those things, but he didn't want you to be alone. I thought it would be a good place to study, you know. Quiet.”

Truth was, it was too quiet, too somber. Peter hadn't know Loki for a long time, but he'd been a chatty guy. A bit of a show off with his magic and he really enjoyed Peter's enthusiasm and energy, so he'd kept him around. It was cool to have a companion that could do actual magic, and because Peter hadn't fought they first time he was on Earth, he didn't mind Loki's presence so much.

“You look like crap, man.”

An awake would have never let himself look like that. He took pride in looking good, he was a prince for god's sakes. But now... No matter how good the care Tony had provided, he was still unmoving, pale as death, emaciated, and with that tube covering his face... It was almost scary how lifeless he looked.

“You know what, I can't study. Let me tell you about this teacher....”

May

“Hey, you know that classmate that I told you was about to figure me out? Well, it's been handled, but it was a really close call, and you know, too many people already know and that puts them in danger, it's bad, dude, it's really bad...”

There was no response from Loki, as per usual. He continued to look very really bad and offer no feedback on his problems. Peter had been rewatching videos from their previous fights, and it was heartbreaking. He had been so full of life, of jokes and spells and the most unimaginable things, and now...

“Maybe if you were awake you could tell me of any tricks or spells or something to make it easier for me to hide... Apparently you were pretty good at being someone else, right? Thor told me about when you were pretending to be your dad.”

There was only more silence.

“Wake up, man.”

Silence.

June
"Yo, summer holidays are upon us!"

You could tell that Loki hadn't eaten anything solid for months, his cheeks were more sunken, his arms had decreased, all the lines in his face more pronounced. Thor was finding it harder and harder to come and see his brother waste away in that bed, but Peter had no intention of stopping his visits.

"I'll be gone for a couple of weeks, but I've told my aunt to come by when she can, tell you about her life. They say that talking to people in comas is good for them, so you know, I'm gonna talk to you until I annoy you into waking up again."

Peter wished there was at least some change, that Loki would start breathing on his own, that a finger twitched like in the movies, something. He wanted the man back, he wanted to make up for all this time lost, for all the pain, for all he had to suffer, now and before. This couldn't be the end. Loki was too grandiose for that. He deserved better.

Peter told him about his holidays and smiled.

Maybe next time.

*July*

"Bad news, man. Some people of Stark industries are trying to get you unplugged and there's some people out there too, some civilians who are like protesting for it. They say that you are too expensive to keep alive, and that you deserve to be left to die. Tony says no, but I'm afraid he'll be tempted with those "dignity of death" arguments. So it would be a really, really good time for you to wake up."

Nothing, again, but silence. Loki was starting to look like a vampire, all pale and gaunt, and Thor had left to outer space to find a cure, so Peter felt that he had to compensate for his absence.

"Anyways, did you know that Wanda and Vision are together? Isn't it weird? Because he's not really human, which shouldn't be something to stop them, I guess, but...."

*August*

"So, Tony has written a document that says no one is allowed to unplug you, even after his death. And it's signed by like four lawyer and people like that, so you know it counts. Miss Potts would look after you if something happens, which we hope it won't, but you know. You're in safe hands, although it would be good to have you back... But you know, take as much time as you need."

Tony had stopped coming, everyone seemed to have more important things to do. But Peter didn't forget, and kept watching videos, hearing anecdotes from Thor. He wouldn't abandon him, not now, not ever.

*September*

"Hey, they've told me that your brain activity has improved. Well done, man! I'm sure that you will be back with us in no time, all rested up and ready to fight. Thor.... he's not been the same since this happened to you...And I miss you too, you were there for me, you were fun, you did amazing things... You showed us that we can have a second chance in a life, or a third, or a fourth."

But you really couldn't tell anything from the outside, Loki looked exactly the same, all bones and white-grey skin, that white machine still breathing for him.

"Remember that time you took me out of battle and we had ice cream? I miss that kind of thing,
having someone a bit less heroic with me. I really do. But, new year has started, and guess what? Three new girls, and Ned is totally crushing on one...."

October

Peter was crying on Loki's bedside, and he didn't exactly know why. Things were going well for him, he got a new suit, school was great and occasionally he still saved the world. But there was something quite not right about...everything, and he'd been reminded of his parents for some reason and... He knew Loki would hear him, or at least be there.

He hadn't woken up, even if they had been hopeful. Maybe he never would. Maybe he should pay attention to all the people that told him that he should stop visiting, that he was wasting time, depressing himself only.

But he couldn't. Talking to people in comas is good, he had to keep trying.

November

Some angry aliens were tearing down Stark tower and they were getting closer. Peter has said that they should move Loki out of there, put someplace remote where he wouldn't be found, but they had told him that it wasn't a priority, that they had some other more pressing business to tend to.

And now they were going to destroy Loki's room, with all of the machines that were keeping him alive, and there was only Peter to defend him, and some tech that he'd made. Not enough against those madmen who had already thrashed all the offices in the lower floors.

Peter fought them, to the edge of his strength, but there was too many of them and they had him by the neck, and he was choking....

There was an explosion of green light, and he was free and the aliens left.

Loki's heart monitor flatlined.

"Thanks, man." Peter said, hardly aware that he was, once again, crying. "I owe you."

December

After the attack, and Peter's theory that it had been Loki that had saved him, Tony and the other scientist had started paying more attention to Loki, looking more closely. On the 9th of december, he started breathing again. On the 12th, he opened his eyes. By Christmas, he was speaking again, and Peter wasn't crying anymore.

It would take still some time until he could walk, and fight, but at least, when he went to visit, he wasn't met with silence anymore. Loki thanked him for staying close, even did a bit of magic despite his weakened state.

“So, this new girl you were talking about....”

It had taken a long time, but all was well again. Peter smiled at Loki, and the god smiled back.
Shuri and T'Challa appear in this ep but I don't think there are any spoilers. Although, it's a bit of a mess of an ep, sorry. Hope you enjoy!!

“Shuri? Are you in the lab? We've got an incoming.”

T'Challa's voice came in her lab, above the music.


“Another broken man for you to fix.”

And this one was extra broken, as she saw when they came into the lab: her brother, the injured man, and the broken one's brother. She was going to need a lot of time to fix everything, it was clear. The man was tall, but folded on himself, moaning slightly, half of him covered in red-black burns, softly moaning and weakly spitting up blood.

“How is he even still awake?”

Her brother's voice spoke clearly next to her, although she hadn't seen him coming.

“This is a more complicated broken white man than usual, Shuri. He comes from another planet, he is... well, something similar to a god.”

“Are you kidding me right now?”

T'Challa shook his head.

“So some of your readings and data might not make sense for a human, because he isn't exactly human. Hence why regular hospitals wouldn't work and we needed your specific unparalleled magic touch.”

“Flatterer. Anything else I should know about?”

The brother's grave voice came from the entrance.

“Loki is from a frozen planet. He's specially sensitive to heat and intense light.”

“Shuri, this is Thor, King of Asgard.”

“Well, you sure are some premium white man, aren't you?”

T'Challa looked mortified, but Thor just smiled.

“I was hoping that you could fix my brother... he had a run in with some flame throwing waving maniacs and he's not been able to heal himself as usual. And he's in a lot of pain and...”

Loki tried to say something in the lines of “I can speak for myself” but all that came out was an
strangled moan and some more blood. So maybe he couldn't speak for himself.

“Poor man. I am gonna to give you bath of the most soothing cream known to existence, you'll see. Uhmmmmm....”

Her brother took the hint. It was years and years of knowing each other.

“Yeah, sorry, Thor, but Shuri generally works better alone. Maybe we could ask Okoye about locating the people who did this to him?”

Thor just nodded, solemn, and Shuri could see all the anger and the power that were only barely being controlled. This was a powerful out of this world creature, a king, and a god, and an Avenger, and she was responsible for fixing up his little brother. Yikes.

“Well, handsome, let's see what we have here.”

What she had there was something she hadn't seen before, vitals, organs and elements she had never seen in her life, right before her eyes. An honest to god being from another planet, right before her. But before she could satisfy all of her scientific curiosity with this man, first she had to look after his wounds, fix him as she was supposed to.

The burns covered most of the left side of his: his left cheek and the left of his neck, nearly all of his left arm (there maybe would be reconstruction work needed in that arm) and a good part of his lower abdomen. She was doing some scans and looking for the most suitable meds when she realised something.... There was some sort of defense mechanism that was draining nearly half of his energy, slowing down everything.

What if she gave him even more sedatives so that he'd let go of that too? Maybe she shouldn't have (this was a prince from a land of gods, not exactly an inconspicuous guinea pig for her experiments) but she did, and the result was something she would never have expected.

“This guy is blue!”

Dark blue skin stretched all over that really tall guy, with weird lines on it. It was hypnotic, it was... beautiful and very outer space-y. Between her advanced tech and his enhanced healing (the guy was beating all sorts of records for regeneration and speed of healing, even if some of it would probably scar, specially in the arm and stomach) he was awake again in only three hours.

Awake and freaking out, looking not at this strange lab or at how quickly his wounds seemed to be disappearing (knitting themselves in a speed visible to the naked eye!) but at his own hands, at his own self.

“What did you do?” He asked in a strangled voice to Shuri, and his eyes were red, and he was hyperventilating.

“You were wasting all your energy just to look white, I had to turn it off to help your burns!”

“Bring it back! Bring it back!!”

He was looking more and more panicked, and Shuri was at a loss of what to do.

And then there was the sound of thunder and the brother came back, and blue boy tripped and fell to the floor and just tried to hide himself.

“What is going on?” Shuri asked Thor, afraid that she had unleashed some curse or something
equally horrible. Afraid that she had hurt the guy while trying to help him.

“Loki is.... not used to his real skin. It's a shock for him, you see.”

“I was just trying to help him!”

Thor smiled, calmed her.

“It's not your fault that he's reacted like this, it's... a lengthy tale.”

“Well sum it up and tell me, because your brother is my patient and I pride myself on repairing them, not breaking them further so I'm going to need to fix him too.”

Thor sighed.

“Basically, Asgardians were told that Loki’s kind, the Jotun were monsters that should be killed. And Loki thought he was Asgardian because Father never told him that he was really jotun. Realising it... well, it broke Loki a bit, as you said, and also realising that he'd never been told because his father thought that the truth was too horrible.”

“That's messed up.”

“Yes... I thought he was handling things better after his time as King... but...it would seem that he was only hiding himself, as usual. Loki?”

But Loki was hiding behind a model of a building, in a corner of his own making and refused to get out until he was able to go back to his usual self.

“Why? Why is it so important that you’re white again? Your father was clearly a horrible person, no offense, and the people that matter from your family who matter don't care, right, Thunder?”

“Of course.”

“That's your brother and king saying it doesn't matter.”

Loki refused to look at her, not with those red eyes.

“You don't understand. The Ice Giants were monsters, savages.”

“Yeah, that sounds like one side of the story to me. We’ve been called savages too, by our enemies. They simply had to look beyond to see how much more we were... Probably, like you did with your Ice giant people.”

Loki closed his eyes and rested his head on the glass him. He had made a fool of himself in front of this Midgardian princess, seemed weak and childish and... It wasn't like he could pretend he wasn't Jotun now, he could only try and minimise the impact. Be better in other areas that weren't his outer appearance.

When he opened his eyes, there was a hand in front of him. He took it and got up, tried to compose himself, even if he had a hard time not jumping every time he saw his blue skin.

“I apologise for this, Princess Shuri.” (How had he gotten her name?) “I am not normally so...”

“It's okay, handsome. You're allowed to freak out after having half your body burned and then healed. But you shouldn't want to go back to white so much, I mean, I understand why, but really, this blue is so much more cooler. Pun absolutely intended.”
“Kind of you to say.”

“And...well... I did some readings on your blue skin and got some amazing data of the properties of this one and your temperature regulating system.”

Loki half smiled through his burned up face.

“A scholar princess? Just my kind of royal heir. Do tell me more about your findings.”

Shuri clapped in excitement.

“It's amazing, YOU'RE AMAZING, what you can do...”

Thor smiled in the background. Maybe something good had come out of all of this.
Wanda Maximoff was easily Loki’s favourite person in this planet they now called home. She was incredibly powerful, and yet nobody seemed to realise it, or trust her with those powers. And Wanda ignored them all, all those people saying she should be locked up or stripped of her powers, no, she knew that those powers, that magic that she was able to do was part of her now, and the world would have to learn to trust her with it.

He’d been teaching her some ways of controlling and maximizing or minimizing the effect of her telekinesis and other abilities, like manipulating people’s memories and getting into their head. She had a natural talent for those things, and had simply needed someone who knew a bit about spells and extra-worldly powers to guide her to excel at it. And excel she did, and had taken Loki as her guide, and he was proud of what they had achieved together.

Not only now she able to control her abilities more, she was able to focus them, stretch them, expand them or hide them, if it was needed. She had exercised her natural gift for magic like a muscle and now was in complete control of all of the many things she could do. And she was, apart from powerful, very grateful.

“I couldn’t have done this without you.”

She said a lot of things like those, and always thanked him for teaching her, for being patient with her, for trusting her with what she could do, and never look down on her because she was young, or a woman, or a foreigner. Loki treated her like an equal, which was something considering that he was a god and a prince from outer space who disliked most humans. But he’d used some of his precious time to teach her, and encourage and tell her that she was a goddess and that her magic was a gift, not a curse.

She made her feel at ease with what and who she was, in a world that was always trying to make her be less. And they had both started working against the Avengers and now were with them, and she knew that there would be people who would always suspect them and their witchy powers. But Loki had trusted Wanda and taken her under his wing, and Wanda tried to do the same.

Defended him in discussions, included him when somebody decided to keep him out of the loop, protected him when she could. She looked up to him, in a way nobody in Asgard ever had. It was really sweet of her (Loki had spent so long without a single friend, every little gesture mattered to him) and he wanted to do something for her, something special. What use is being friends with a god if you don't get godly advantages?

Besides, her birthday was coming up, and he had always loved big dramatic gestures. Although this one may be a teeny tiny bit more difficult than usual.

“Wanda, I know there's something you've always wanted, and I want to give it to you, as a thank you for being by my side, for all you've done for me, and with me. But it's.... it can be dangerous. I wanted to ask you before trying.”

She frowned.

“Something I want....? Does this have to do with Vision....?”

“Not with Vision, but with your brother.”

“Pietro.”
“I learned that his body was frozen, much like the Captain and Barnes were, kept in the ice.”

“What are you saying, Loki?”

“I've died before, Wanda, and came back. There are things that no Midgardian or Asgardian know that I do. I could try and bring him back.”

“You... you wouldn't joke about this.”

“No, joke, Wanda. If you want it, it will be your very own god-sized birthday present.”

Of course she wanted that! But it was too beautiful to be true.

“What's the catch? There's always a cost for these things.”

Loki sighed.

“The energy required for the process is.... a lot, really, enough to drain even the likes of me, much more a mere mortal like yourself. But together, and with your new-found ability to store large quantities of magical energy, we could pull it off, Wanda. You'd have your brother back.”

There was more than that, and Loki knew it. But he also knew that Pietro's absence haunted each and every of the days of his enthusiastic apprentice, and he knew he could help, even if things weren't going to be as pretty as he was painting them.

Wanda psyched, but afraid to get her hopes up. They needed to do this clandestinely and then pretend they didn't know what had happened, or else they would even more suspicious of Loki than they already were, or worse, using him to bring back whoever they wanted. No, this needed to be kept between them, if at all possible.

Loki had warned that she would be feel light headed after they finished, and very tried for many days. It didn't matter. If they got Pietro back... everything would be worth it. So they did it, they got his body and started the long magical operations they had been studying for a month to bring him back as he should be, as he was. Whole.

So that Wanda could be whole again.

It was overwhelming, the amount of magic and energy they conjured up, almost enough to lose one's head. But Wanda stayed focus, always remembering her goal. The stakes were high, she needed to deliver perfectly. So did Loki. He was glad to finally let his magic go rampant, build up and create something of epic proportions, without anyone telling him to stop, to control himself, that he was scaring people.

No, now Loki got the chance to use his magic at the maximum of its strength, and for a good reason. But it was pulling him, eating him – and it would take her too, if he wasn't careful. And all their work would be nothing and he would be the one that caused her her to be lost. No, he wouldn't let it happen. Not to her.

Suddenly, it was over, and Wanda saw in amazement how her brother opened his eyes and recognised her.

“Hey, little sister. How long have I been sleeping? It feels like a million years.”

And so Wanda hugged him, embraced him for all those days she couldn't, and she was crying, but it was ok, because her brother was back, and nothing else in the world was important. They talked a
bit, they hugged and then Wanda remembered that they weren’t alone in the room.

“Pietro, this is Loki, he allowed....No, no, no, no no!”

Loki was on the floor, paler than he’d ever seen him, blood coming out of his mouth and eyes. Unconscious.

“Loki!”

She went out to him, tried to wake him up, and so did Pietro. If this person was important to her sister he was important to him, too.

His breathing was too slow, his heart beat nearly non-existent. But he managed to open his eyes long enough to see that they had succeeded. Wanda had her brother back, all thanks to their combined magic. In his head, Loki had shut the mouth of every Asgardian who had called him weak for doing spells and enchantment. He felt the most powerful being alive, even if he had the energy level of a dying old man.

“Happy birthday.” He whispered in Wanda's direction, and passed out.

Pietro took him and in a matter of seconds (oh how good it was to have him back) Loki was in Tony Stark's med wing's expert care.

Loki was barely clinging to life, his blood sugar and breathing rates in the absolute minimum compatible with life. As it happened, Wanda realised that she wasn't feeling tired as she was supposed to, as she'd said she'd be. That idiot had been afraid for her, and had taken the brunt of the energetic cost of what they were doing, and it had nearly cost him his life.

That overdramatic fool.

It took a lot of medicine and some magic to stabilize Loki again, get some colour in him, some energy. He flatlined a couple of times, but was thankfully brought back with seemingly no permanent damage. Still, it would take some time for him to be back where he was, health wise. He'd never been the strongest guy, and almost dying so many times had taken its toll.

He stayed unconscious for a whole ten days, and Wanda had her birthday party in the room where he was recovering. She was kind of angry that he risked himself like that, but once she knew that he was out of danger, she was happy.

She wouldn't have been able to live with herself if Loki had died to bring Pietro back, but having them both....

She lay on Loki’s bed, next to him, watching his still pale and sickly form, watching him sleep.

“Now what the hell am I going to do for your birthday, huh?”
Pre-movies. In this chap Sif (and Thor) are the Asgardian equivalent of 15-16 and Loki is about 13-14. So teenage Asgardians! Hope you enjoy ;)


They had left her behind, again.

There was no response and Sif was officially lost in the mountains, alone. She thought about calling Heimdall to get her out of there, but she wanted to prove to the others that she find her way back again. She was continuously proving herself, and yet they kept leaving her behind. When would this men be properly impressed with her as they should be? When would she finally earn her respect? She was bored of this, of never being one of the gang even if she had earned her place a million times over.

The warriors three. And what was she? A decoration? Had she not proved time and time again that she was a warrior too? Why not the warriors four? Did it matter that much to include her for once in their name and their shenanigans? But noooo, names were for boys as was everything else that was exciting.

“Sif! Wait, Sif!”

Oh, great. Something even worse than being lost in the woods, being lost in the woods with tiny Loki. Sif wasn't really sure why she disliked him that much, because it wasn't something that you thought about. Everybody disliked Loki and everybody wished Thor wasn't his brother so they could teach a lesson or two to that prissy magic boy. That was just they way things were.

“What are you doing here?” She asked, sighing. She didn't have a lot of patience.

“Looking for Thor and the others and....”

There was some noise above them and the sky darkened. Sif understood too late that it was a landslide, and that they were about it to be buried.

She wasn't, though, she was magicked out of there somehow.

Loki.

Loki, who..... was nowhere in sight. When the dust settled, she called his name. A lot of times. But couldn't see him. This was bad.

“Help.” It was strangled, almost inaudible, but it gave her an idea of where he was. Under the rubble. Oh no, this was bad.

He'd only got to the edge of the falling rocks it would seem. Damn, she could see one of his legs.
“Oh, norns, don't worry, Loki, I'm getting you out!”

And so she started pulling those rocks away, wishing that she too could do some magic and get this done in a minute.

“Can't do some spell? This may take a while.”

“Can...not...breathe...”

Came the boy's strangled voice from under the rocks. Yeah, if he couldn't he probably wouldn't be able to do something as complicated as magic. And she needed to hurry. Loki may not be her favourite person in Asgard, but he was her favourite person's little brother, and he couldn't breathe. They all knew how fragile Loki was, and Thor would never forgive her if something bad happened to Loki while with her.

In the end, Loki was able to free himself, mostly, but he looked horrible. Most of his face was going to bruise and was badly cut up, his left arm was probably broken, and he was making a godawful noise every time he breathed, even if there were no more rocks on his chest.

“Thor's going to kill me” She couldn't help saying. She helped Loki up, and put his arm over her shoulders, seeing as he could hardly stand without help.

“Heimdall, bring us to the Bifrost.”

But nothing happened.

“Heimdall, this is urgent. The prince is hurt.”

And still nothing.

“What...?”

Loki was still wheezing horribly next to her, and she got angry.

“Can you stop? I'm trying to get us out of here!”

And then she looked at him, and really saw him, for once. Maybe for the first time.

He was bleeding all over, but still trying to walk, even if it was clearly painful. His face was full of scrapes and gashes and his eyes were looking at her, hurt. (Green eyes, where had he got those? Thor's eyes were a dead ringer for Odin's, Loki's... made no sense). He had been buried by a bunch of rocks and could hardly draw air and still she was being mean to him.

“You are injured, and I am not helping. I apologise.”

Loki half smiled, his long face seeming a bit nicer, if still a bit too bony and sharp. He was all angles that boy. Thor had grown up strong and broad, and Loki had grown up wiry, skinny, all cheekbones and dark hair. He's grown out his hair, maybe to look like his brother, but Thor's was fair like the sun and Loki's was black as midnight. It was that, wasn't it? Their problem with Loki was that he was different.

Sif felt bad. Loki was shunned for the very same reason she was: because their interests and build didn't go well with their perceived roles. She, as a woman, wasn't supposed to want to fight and go on adventures and, he, as a man, wasn't supposed to be interested in spells and healing. She was being mean to him for the same reason she didn't want others to be mean to her, and it was
ridiculous. They were defying expectations, both different from what they should be.

By all accounts, they should have been friends. But Sif had been too blinded by Thor to look at his bothersome little brother twice.

A little brother who seemed to be getting worse, those horrible wheezes sounding worse and being more far apart. She was getting real worried, now.

“Can't you heal yourself?”

Loki seemed to be in the verge of tears as he looked at her and continued to struggle to breathe.

“You would probably need to be able to breathe for that, I imagine. I just now nothing about magic, you know. Too dark and shady.”

Loki's eyes seemed even sadder now and Sif could have hit herself. The boy is in a world of pain and you insult his passion. Way to go, girl.

“Heimdall, please, Loki is injured and it's getting dark!”

“....Sif......”

The sound he was making was the most dry painful sounding thing she had ever heard, but still, he was trying to talk.

“...I can try.... get us....”

“Won't it hurt you more?”

Loki shrugged, as if saying “what other choice do we have?” and she nodded his way, really hoping this wouldn't kill him. She felt as is she was lifted up in the air and suddenly they were in the palace, Loki was falling bonelessly on top of her.

“You got us back! That was incredible!”

Loki made the loudest “I can't breathe” sound and his eyes rolled back in his head. She ran with him in his arms to Eir and left him in the woman’s expert care, worried. She was feeling horrible about all the times she’d been mean to him, or let other people's opinions of Loki cloud her judgement.

Loki was just a boy, a boy who used magic to help himself and other. A peculiar one, maybe, someone who didn't like that much as a prince as Thor but... He had got her out of the landslide, and back to the palace before dark.

Thor and the others were back, and they talked about wild beast that nearly tore them apart and spent way too long about how valiant they were (they could be a bit self-absorbed sometimes) before she could put in a word and say:

“I was in a landslide, and I am all right, but Thor, Loki was hurt – he couldn't breathe. I took him to Eir.....”

And he was gone. Running towards the infirmary, without another word.

The warriors three were ready to mock the little princeling for being so weak.

“So he got hurt, huh? What a surprise.”
“Not another word.” Sif said, serious. “He was hurt and still he got us back to safety, risking his own health. He was braver than I’ve ever seen three of you be, so stop your mocking.”

And she stormed out behind Thor, to get some updates. It turned out that one of Loki’s lungs had collapsed, and the other had been close to it. Now they had put him in a healing sleep, and were hoping to avoid any lasting damage.

She decided to be nice to Loki, from then on.

Her conviction lasted for about six weeks.

But many years later, when she was in a ship after losing her planet, she saw the heroes, and saw him there too. She remembered that boy with all the angles, who had just wanted to be part of their group, despite being a bit different. He wasn’t all that bad.

In fact, this was the second time he was her saviour.
“You're burning up”

The facts were these: Loki was sick, very much so, and had been for a while. In fact, he'd been fighting alongside them the whole day in a long and arduous battle, which had only worsened his condition. But he hadn't said anything, because he didn't want to seem weak in front of all those stoic, super strong near invulnerable warriors, and now that they'd left he was on the verge of collapsing, his “I'm fine” façade hanging by a very thin thread.

No one had noticed for the whole battle, and Loki was grateful, proud of himself for continuing to be the great actor he'd always been. But now almost everyone had left, and the transport had taken in a hurry with the injured, and Loki hadn't been able to get into any of them, hadn't been able to run. So now it was only him and her, and of course now she noticed.

“Aren't you Jotun? You're supposed to be colder than us, any of us. Dammit, Loki”

She said, and she did seem concerned, which was kind of nice. Loki liked it when other people cared if he lived or died, it was a personality flaw. And she did care.

Gamora had to admit that she had a bit of a soft spot when it came to Loki. He was very similar to Nebula in many ways: ruthless, changeable, emotionally unstable. Had always felt like he was second best, and had tried to step out of the shadows in unhealthy and extremely aggressive, but really, just wanted to feel loved. Deep inside, he was a good guy, but he was also terribly complicated, and sometimes, the likes of her and Thor had trouble keeping up such convoluted (but always interesting) minds.

But she saw more than her little sister in him: Loki often reminded her of Peter, as strange as it may sound. Unlike her sister, who was all ominous speeches and threats, Loki was wordy and sarcastic, and often used humour as a defence mechanism, much like her own Star Lord. And much like Peter, he was infectiously charismatic, and could make you fall in love with merely a smile and a look.

In short. Loki was like an amalgamation of the people she loved most, and she’d grown fond of him. She often felt that the Asgardian was very underappreciated in their groups, and that they could use with listening to him a bit more.

“Why didn't you say that you were ill?”

Loki lowered his glassy pale eyes, ashamed.

She understood. Thor was never sick, Thor was never injured, and he was, despite having proven his value countless times, still trying to live up to him. And there she was, being the unscathed shiny older sibling, berating him for being weaker not telling them.

She sighed. No. Fix this, Gamora.

“Let me help you back, all right?”

“I can manage on my own.”
Oh, honey, you can hardly walk. But that wasn't what she said.

“Of course you can, I never doubted that. But I want to show Mantis and the others and that I'm not as cold as they say I am, and you being feverish gives me a perfect excuse to showcase my... caring side, if you will, so they'll stop calling me iceblock and things like that. Do it for me?”

Loki could see right through her lie. Damn he was good, even half dead.

“There's no need. I'm all right.”

No, he wasn't. He was swaying as he walked, his whole body felt on fire and he felt incredibly nauseous, and was swallowing a hundred times a minute all that excess saliva, hoping that whatever he'd eaten the previous would stay in its place. He was also covered in a cold sweat, and had a hard time keeping his eyes open, or taking a single deep breath.

Sure, he was absolutely all right.

He tried to get ahead of Gamora, but felt extremely dizzy, and his knees started buckling. She caught him before he fell, and when he managed to come back to his senses properly, his eyes were cloudy, and sad. He was being pathetic in front of one of the most amazing warriors in the universe. He hated himself and his stupid sickly body.

Gamora kept trying to fix it, as they walked towards the way too far away place where the last transport was.

“I understand it, too. Always trying to be whole, the best of the best, and never being absolutely approved by your horrible kingly father. I was there too, you know.”

“You?”

“Yes, me. And I know that after a life trying to be that extremely strong presence it's hard to show weakness, to be vulnerable. It's hard for all of us – we all want to be the best, the strongest, the most resilient. But nobody is perfect – we all have flaws, and we all have limits. Myself included.”

Loki looked at her, as he unsteadily kept walking, with an ironic look that said “really?”

“And besides, the others are gone, and you don't need to prove yourself to me. You'll never be anything else than a amazing warrior in my eyes.”

Loki seemed he'd die of shock, and nearly choked on air, tripped on the floor.

She held him, while trying to stifle a laugh.

“Why so surprised? You're incredible with words, which a skill that could have saved me and my sister from many bad situations, you're somehow subtle and overdramatic at the same time, and you're incredibly resourceful. I mean, the things you do with magic alone, not to mention how you work with those knives...”

Loki was feeling floating, like on a dream. Maybe he was dreaming, because those words seemed too good to be be true. His legs failed him again, and the world was spinning. He barely noticed throwing up all that bile, or how his legs left the floor. He was at peace and the mighty Gamora thought he was “an amazing warrior”. Nothing was wrong.

For Gamora, on the other hand, things looked very wrong. Loki was barely conscious, he'd probably hurt his throat and maybe his lungs throwing up all that acid, and he could no longer walk. She'd
taken him in her arms, as despite his length he was surprisingly thin, and she didn't like the uncoordinated way his eyes opened and closed. And she'd put her hand on his forehead, and it was even hotter than before. She nearly burnt her hand.

They managed to get to the transporter, Gamora placed the sick man next to her, his head resting on her shoulder. Loki purred, content despite being extremely sick, and Shuri, the greatest meme-ist in their little group, held up a sign in her tablet, that simply read.

“This is the cutest shit I've ever seen.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm really sad about the (almost certain) sad fate of my faves in Infinity war. Cheer me up?

Anyways hope you liked it! Thanks for the support and do tell me what you thought)

(Btw, I know there are typos, I'll fix them when I get some timeeee)

Feedback is loveeeeee! You know you want to comment!
Loki woke up to an intense pain in his midsection, and hands stained with blood.

He was in what he thought was one of Stark's buildings, it was dark, and there were red lights, but no sirens blaring. He didn't understand. He tried to think, but all he could do was stare at his red hands in commotion.

What had he done? Why couldn't he remember it? What if he had hurt someone important, what if he had lost control, what if someone had used him for something horrible, what if...?

“Loki?” A soft voice called. He wasn't alone.

“One are you here?” The voice asked, and Loki couldn't answer. “We are in some sort of lockdown, nobody should be in, not me either, but... Loki? Are you with me?”

But it hard for Loki to be there, in that building with her. The crushing realisation that all he had worked so hard for might be gone, and he would go back to being hated, go back to all those horrible places, to the edge of the abyss... His head was swimming, foggy and his stomach was throbbing somehow and he felt that there was no air in the room.

He kept looking at his red-stained hands.

“Loki, what's wrong?”

Pepper had never seen Loki like that, and she'd seen him on some low moments. It had taken her a while to accept his presence, to accept him as one of their own after they way they met the first time, after what almost happened to Tony and to what did happen to Coulson (although she then learned about him coming back) but with time, she'd learned to appreciate having Loki around.

He was good at taking down their resident geniuses a few notches, and good at avoiding conflict, tricking people into surrendering or just doing some clever thinking to avoid battle. Like he'd done when he'd been king, like he'd done when he was a skinny kid that was easy prey for norse warrioristic bullies.

And he knew about good hair care products and he knew about having to handle many issues at once. Sometimes, if she wanted to complain, Pepper went to him to unwind, and he would listen, with a bottle of rose wine and a bunch scathing but not untrue remarks. He was an unusual and complicated guy, but she knew now to look beyond the evil villain routine.

There was so much more there.

Right now, a frightened man, looking at her with wide eyes, not all there.

“What happened?” She asked.

One of these days he would answer and stop looking a his hands as if they were the most horrifying thing in the world.

“I don't remember... I don't know why I'm here, or how I arrived, I don't remember what I did.”

Loki's eyes were glassy and full of sorrow, and Pepper's heart went out to him. He'd suffered enough, what with his being lied to his whole life, always feeling inferior, and nearly dying all those
“What's the last thing you remember? You know who I am, right.”

Loki nodded, but still a couple of tears ran down his cheeks. What had he done what had he done? What if he had hurt Thor, what if he'd used his magic for something he couldn't fix...?

“I remember... we were going to Boston.... On a plane, with Dr. Banner and Stark and Miss Romanoff.... I remember the plane... But not landing. What did I do? I... What did I...”

“Okay, that's a starting point. I'll see if the phones are working and call Tony, but we may not have any signal in the lockdown.”

Loki looked so broken, so full of despair, she wanted to fix it somehow. Herself of some years, maybe just some months ago would have been absolutely convinced that this was a trick, that he'd done something terrible and now was pretending not to remember. That was how he operated, right? He did horrible things and then lie to try and get away with them.

But no. That was who he used to be, and the Loki the media and so many others tried to sell them. But the real Loki had become something else, a different type of lying animal and trickster. He didn't want to hurt people anymore, and had realised that being for them instead was much more gratifying.

He wanted applause and admiration and he knew that he couldn't go back to his old ways if he wanted the love he so desperately seemed to need. And now... now he was genuinely afraid that he might lose it all.

“You know why we are all locked? Was it me?”

“What? Oh, no, honey, it's just a test to see that the systems are working and what not. You didn't do anything, although I don't know how you got in.”

He looked disheveled and pale and just plain wrong, and there was something there besides the not remembering.

“Are you hurt? That blood may be yours.”

Something told her that whatever had gone on in that time he couldn't remember was more something he'd endured than something he caused. She could see signs there, one doesn't end in a state like that for just doing bad things. Not physically, at least. And he was in shambles, and Loki wasn't an easy guy to break.

“No, I, I don't think....I...”

Loki's head was spinning and his whole body was shaking and he knew that something had happened and he just....

Pepper embraced him, let him cry, caressed the back of his head softly. Loki sobbed for a little while and then composed himself.

“Sorry. I didn't... Sorry.”

“Don't worry, it's all...”

Then she saw something weird, now that the lights were coming back on: a series of horizontal red lines on his neck, the lost themselves under the shirt.
“Take off your shirt.”

Loki protested a bit, but did it.

There were more of those red lines on his chest and abdomen, and they were bigger and looked angrier down there. More red, more painful. She touched one of them, and Loki closed his eyes and hissed. The pain was back.

“It wasn't what you did, honey, it's what was done to you. Somebody hurt you, and didn't want you to remember for some reason.”

“...the blood?”

“I'll have it tested if you want, but it's most likely yours. Look, look at your pant leg.”

There was a big blood stain on it, and it looked fresh.

“You must have been holding on it to stop the bleeding and you got your hands bloody. I can't be sure, but I don't think you should be worried. But we really should get you some medical attention, it looks pretty bad.”

“I didn't...”

“Here's Tony, let's ask him.”

The lockdown was finally over, and he'd got a million calls from Pepper and he was worried and...

“Loki!” His face turned into a smile. “Oh my god, we were so worried! There was someone and we still don't know who it was which was driving me crazy, but they kept sending videos of Natasha and Loki getting... well, let's say “hurt” and we managed to find Nat, but she couldn't remember where she'd been held, and we didn't know where he was...”

“I didn't.” Loki said, breathed, promptly collapsed on the floor.

Pepper was absentmindedly caressing one of Loki's hands as she sat next to his bed, while Tony filled her in on what had happened. How Natasha and Loki had been gassed and lost, how they started getting videos of them being forced to wear some metal “shirts” made of horizontal bars that got hot until they were burned and screaming, and how Natasha had suddenly reappeared some days later.

“They did something more to them, and I won't be happy until I know what and why.” Tony said, determined.

“I hope he'll be okay. He was so scared, Tony, so broken up that he'd done something he couldn't remember. Wondering what he'd done.”

“Endure like a champ, that's what he did. But he does have a tendency to think the worst of himself, no matter how confident and arrogant he appears to be.” Pepper made a face. “Yeah, yeah, I know pots and kettles. Stay with him while I look at some tests?”

Pepper sighed as she looked at Loki peacefully knocked out in that infirmary bed. She knew what it was to be experimented on, to have capacities you couldn't understand, to be afraid of what had been done to you. He knew that Loki wasn't the most... emotionally stable person ever, and hoped that everything would be resolved soon.
She watched some of the videos, not being able to help her curiosity. It was a nightmare, and she was almost grateful that Loki couldn't remember. She remembered being trapped by Mandarin, and Loki's frantic eyes asking what he'd done.

Then she called Tony.

“Keep me updated, and let me know when you find the guys who took them.”

They better run.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“And if you don’t give in to our demands, then they will pay the price.” The madman said to the camera. “Your former lover, who has nothing to do with your crimes, and your bothersome little brother here will pay the price.”

So that was it, Jane and Loki we're being held hostage to lure Thor into what was most surely a trap. But Thor was worlds away, and would probably not get the message, which meant that these people would continue to hold them hostage, maybe hurt them a bit to convince the thunderer to hurry. Which was bullshit.

They had their hands chained to the wall behind them and were on the floor of a white room (to make the videos better, Jane guessed. As time went by they became more and more terrible, and those people liked it. Liked having them looking emaciated and dirty and pleading. At some point they fed Loki something that gone off, and never cleaned the vomit off his shirt. It was a horrible situation.

The only consolations Jane had was that somebody must have been looking for her by now, and that Loki was still very much convinced that he would get them both out, that they would be able to escape. The first he almost did it a bunch of times, but these people had a “sorcerer” of their own, and he was very good at both undoing Loki’s magic, and doing things that hurt or weakened Thor’s brother, who’d already looked pretty bad when they’d been snatched.

Jane didn’t know what to think about Loki, how to feel about him, not at first at least. The thing was that the man was a terrorist, and a villain, and he attacked the earth with an army of aliens... but he also had saved her life, and got a grievously wound while trying to help them. (She asked about how he was even alive, and was merely shown a big scar and told, in a whisper, “I almost wasn’t”)

And apparently after his supposed death he’d helped Thor again, for good this time, and now they were friends, because Loki was good now. Still, that didn't make up for all he did, not in her mind. At least, not at first. Then she’d learned, after talking to Loki and reading between the lines, that the invasion hadn't been all his choice and there had been some threatening and some hostage-ing going on before that happened.

And then one day, when all seemed lost and Loki looked to be about to keel over, Jane managed to get her thing wrist out of the chain, and managed to get her other hand free, too. She freed her companion (no matter what Loki had done in the past she couldn't leave him there, it was inhumane) and he managed to open the door of the cell, but in the middle of their escape they were stopped by the “sorcerer”.

The fight was short. Jane managed to escape and Loki told her to run, that he'd be right behind when he got rid of that guy. He seemed to have the upper hand when he faced the sorcerer, but then....

“Remember”

And suddenly he was back there, falling in the void, being played with and tortured, suddenly they had him and he was defenseless, feeling like he’d been forgotten... All you will know is pain, and we won’t even let you die.
The man had his hand on Loki's forehead and Loki seemed to be in great pain, eyes rolled back in his head, a deaf scream in his throat.

“Remember when you fell, forever.” Loki screamed again. “Remember they took you, remember when you were under their mercy. Remember what they did.”

They were toying with his mind, toying with his body, using him, using him for their horrible ends, and he'd been falling for so long, and they were burning him, he really tried to fight back but couldn't, couldn't, why did no one come for him?

And Jane could have left, the man was distracted with Loki, there was an open door...

“Remember when you died. Remember that he will always be your master. Remember.”

Loki was there again. The pain was excruciating. He was young, and hurt and he had only meant to die. Why couldn't he have at least that.

Loki screamed again, the memories clearly hurting him, badly. Jane took one of her shoes and knocked out the sorcerer. He probably wouldn't stay down for long, but hopefully long enough for them to leave.

“Loki?”

Loki's eyes were unfocused and bloodshot.

“Please, don't...”

“I won't hurt you... It's me, Jane.”

“I'll do it... whatever you want...”

Just free me from this prison. Release me or kill me.

Loki clearly wasn't with her anymore, but lost in a memory.

And then there was people shooting at them, and Jane had to coerce Loki into running, outside with her. They grazed one of her legs, and Loki was shot in a shoulder, and was now barely conscious. This day was getting better and better. Jane was trying to get Loki functional again (his magic would be very welcome to get as far away from this place as possible, quick) but Loki was lost in memories, sometimes screaming, sometimes crying, sometimes begging, eyes still unfocused.

I am a puppet, a stupid plaything, idiot prince, you're only a tool, idiot prince, you've hurt everyone, idiot prince, you're our slave now.

Jane stopped a cab, asked the driver to leave her at Avenger HQ, hoping that somebody with money to pay for the ride would be there. And to pay for the damage done by the blood, too. Both of them were bleeding pretty badly and now Loki was apologising profusely, and Jane was trying calm him down and stop the bleeding... They were both too tired and too weak from captivity, nothing was coming out right.

And then suddenly they were there and she called for help, and Captain America and the red headed lady whose name she couldn't remember were there, and they would make everything okay.

Natasha (that was the lady's name) paid the cab, with some extra to keep it quiet, and the Captain took Loki in his arms, as he couldn't stay standing anymore.
Loki saw something blue in the eyes of his saviour and seemed appeased.

“Thor.... will you... will you stop them?”

“Loki, I...”

“Please... I can't.... they are so many, I can't.. I can't win.... Thor...”

“Don't worry. They won't hurt you anymore, I won't let them.”

Loki passed out. Jane was almost grateful.

The so-called intergalactic alliance, who had meant to dissect Thor to try and figure out how he could manipulate thunder and if they could make some sort of Mjolnir using his genetic information, were disbanded and some of them killed as the Avengers, led by Natasha did a flash operation to finish them.

Steve stayed behind, looking after both prisoners. Jane was glad to have somebody with whom she could talk about and Loki, who was in and out of consciousness and often still mistook the past for the present, was glad to have around a version of Thor who was forgiving, and caring.

Day by day they started to recover. They slept, they ate, Loki stopped having all those flashbacks, and apologised to the Captain profusely. Steve just smiled “I'm happy that I could be here for the times Thor wasn't”. It was... bittersweet.

Jane and Loki said goodbye one week later. It felt odd – they'd been practically each other's world in the time they were captive and now... they didn't even know if they would see each other again.

“Loki” Jane said, when the other was already walking away “I would have liked to have you as a brother in law, you know?”

“I think I would have liked to have you as queen.”

Well. Talk about compliments.

“Take care of yourself, okay, Loki?”

“For you, Doctor Foster, I'll do my best.”

Jane found herself hoping their paths crossed again... but under better circumstances. To put the bad memories aside, for once, maybe make some decent ones.

Chapter End Notes

Boy, do I like stories where delirious disoriented Loki confuses Steve for Thor and do I like Loki was tortured by the Chitauri theories.

Hope you liked, and if there's any character you want to see featured do tell me, I always tend to gravitate towards the same people (Steve, Nebula, Scott)

And I hope you're still enjoying the stories :)
The explosion had been brutal, and had thrown both Shuri and Peter (Parker) flying a good mile, yet, somehow they were unscathed, unharmed. Neither the force of the blast nor the fall had hurt them: there were no abrasions, no broken bones, not even broken skin. Something had protected the, something had shielded them so that they wouldn't be hurt.

"wAS.. WAS IT YOU?" Peter asked, his ears still ringing after the force of the explosion. It would take a while until his ears worked again.

Shuri shook her head. By the time she thought of engaging any protection mechanisms they were already in the air, being thrown at high speeds. So, she didn't have time to fix anything so it couldn't have been her and it clearly hadn't been Peter... And there was only another person in the room with them when it had happened.

"Loki!"

There was a blood trail and a green and black figure thrown on the floor some metres ahead of them, and he'd been the one closest to the blast.

Shuri and Peter, still a bit unsteady on their feet, clumsily ran towards the figure. It was so, so bad. Peter gasped and his hand went to his mouth. Shuri tried not to let emotions rule her, tried to think the best course of action, but even she was having trouble thinking rationally.

Loki was twitching, half of his face was covered in gashes and there was... there was a big gaping wound in his abdomen, you could practically see the organs underneath. God, that explosion had taken a big chunk out of him.

Loki was breathing in a loud, wheezy, irregular way, and blood kept pooling out under him, his eyes glassy and unfocused. He seemed to want to say something, but when he tried to speak only more blood came out.

"Oh my god, Shuri, what do we do, what do we do, what do we do?"

Peter's absolute freak out wasn't helping at all, but she understood the sentiment perfectly. Her mind, instead of finding clever solutions as she normally did, was now only drawing blanks, panicky on the inside, also thinking "what do I do?"

"We should probably stop the bleeding, right?" Shuri said, but she didn't know what to stop it with.

"Spider net?"

"I don't know... Those things are so... sticky... What if they get in the way of his body healing, become part of the problem too?"

Yes, that was a concern. Loki seemed to be half gone already, and he'd nearly died trying to save them. Both of them called everyone they knew, but there had been some cave ins because of the explosion and it was going to be difficult to get through to where they were, especially with most of the more technological people away on missions. And Loki didn't have a lot of time.

It was... painful to watch. Peter had known that joining the Avengers would have many bad things as
well as good, but didn't imagine he would have to see the innards of somebody he appreciated out in the open because he hadn't been quick enough to get away from an explosion and somebody else had to shield him. Peter liked Loki, he was his go-to guy for all things off the record and off the books, he was the one that encouraged him to do the craziest things and he couldn't, wouldn't just die because of a stupid explosion...

Shuri had had done some sort of tourniquet, had checked the vitals and given Loki the last of her "mega-energy" pills and was trying to get one her suits in a necklace things to work (at least the suit would keep him from bleeding out or getting too cold and as horrible as it sounded, keep all of him inside of him) but it had been damaged in the blast, and she could figure out how to undo the damage, sure, but it was so complicated what with the way her hands were shaking, and the water in Loki's eyes and Peter's wavering voice next to her...

Peter had put Loki's head on his side, so that he wouldn't choke on blood, and was trying to... hell, he was just talking, he didn't know exactly why.

"Loki? Loki, man, you with us? Is there any way to... kick off your magic... make it heal you? I've seen you do that, to people, there must be a way for you to heal yourself too, right?" Loki's green eyes were fondly looking at him, despite the pain and the horror of the situation."Don't! No finality, no speeches, Loki, we are not letting you die, ok? You've done that enough times. Come on, use your magic!

But Loki couldn't use his magic, not with all that pain fogging everything. He couldn't, but maybe.... Shuri watched, amazed, how green light passed from Loki to Peter, and how he passed out, finally.

"No!!" Peter screamed, shaking the wounded man, to no avail.

"Peter!" Shuri said, formulating a theory. It was maybe far fetched, but Peter had wanted Loki to use hi magic, and then that light... "Peter, you heal him."

"How?"

"With magic -look, look at yourself."

Peter's hands were glowing green, and he understood.

"But... I don't...."

Shuri kept her head calm, although she was fascinated with the working of this, and the implications of this. If magic was transferable, oh, the things she would do. But now there was a mission, Loki needed her and so did Peter, confused as hell with what he could suddenly do.

"You just put your hands softly in the wound, and visualize yourself healing him, imagine the tissues being remade, ok? Just think about it, concentrate on that."

Don't let the boy realise you have no idea of what you're saying, Shuri. This could still work.

Miraculously, it did. Sure, Peter was unsteady and stopped many times (even cried a little when he couldn't get it to work), but he managed to fix Loki up enough so that he could half walk - aka be carried by Shuri and Peter to some safer place.

When Loki woke up the next time, it was to lively voices.

"We wanted to thank you for shielding us." Shuri said.
"And I wanted to thank you for trusting me with your magic, even if only for a short while." Peter said, smiling.

"Can I try too?" Shuri said, hopeful. "Maybe some other time when you're not dying?"

"Mayhaps, princess. We shall see."

"Yes!!! Well, in the mean time we brought some games, and some books and some movies..."

Loki seemed confused. Peter clarified.

"There's no school until September. And we decided we were going to keep you company until you recover."

"Shield you from the horrors of boredom and not knowing what movie to choose while you recover."

Loki smiled.

Unexpectedly, he found himself happy at the idea of company. Once upon a time, he'd thought all midgardians low and dull. But now he knew better. And as they were watching vine compilations in an oversized medical bed, Loki was grateful.

Even to explosions.
The world was in absolute darkness and his eyes were on fire, and they hurt like hell.

Loki didn't know where he was, or how he got away, and what the hell had they done to his eyes, but he couldn't hear his captors any more, which was a good sign. But the rest of his thoughts was melting horror and barely held up scream at how much is eyes hurt. He couldn't see anything, they could be right behind and he wouldn't. He couldn't know anymore, where he was, what was around him... and the pain.

He'd try to think, to guess where he was because of the sounds or the feel of the place, but he couldn't think beyond his pains, and his red-blood eyes, consuming him. His magic wasn't working properly, too busy trying to fix his numerous wounds (the eyes were the worst, but there was so much more) and failing spectacularly, a self healing needed an amount of energy and concentration that was impossible for him in that moment.

But he couldn't... He couldn't just stay here, they would find him again, and do something worse. He thought it must have been acid, what they put in his eyes. He had felt it, slowly eating away the nerves, the soft tissue, everything. Breaking it down, corrupting. He was fairly convinced that he would not see again, and he would take that, if it meant the pain would stop. It had been hours, and his face was still on fire, his eyes were in the worst pain he'd ever felt (and boy, did he know pain) and it was near unbearable. Death was tempting.

But before he could give in to that temptation, somebody found him.

The city was on fire and nearly all of the members of their had been taken prisoner or worse, but Steve and Natasha still held out hope that they would find clues, that maybe some of them would get free. They were the Avengers, they had many resources.

It was in the middle of a broken down street, where they spotted a familiar figure, who was in a terrifying state.

“Loki?”

Loki nearly jumped, until he recognised the voice. The Captain... or was he?

Steve knelt next to Loki, trying to assess the damage. Whoever had done this to him was a monster of the worst kind. His face was a carnage, the eyes deep red looking at nowhere (all of them, completely red) and still leaking blood, both of lips split and raw, ligature marks on his neck and many other wounds that were still bleeding, in his stomach, in his leg, just below his neck.

Loki took a step back... he couldn't trust.... why would the captain be here? Just where he was, when he needed him the most. No, they knew that he couldn't see and were using a friendly voice to lure him back.

“No...” he muttered under his breath.

“It's me, Loki! It's Steve, Steve Rogers, you know me.”

“You're not him.” Loki whispered, although deep inside he knew if it was them he would probably
be already in chains and being taken back. But he didn't know. He couldn't see, the world wanted to hurt him and his eyes were on fire. It hurt too much to think.

“It is me! And Natasha, look!”

“Loki, can you see us?” Natasha asked, although she was pretty certain of what the answer was.

“I can't see anything.”

Steve sighed. Tried to control his sadness. Hadn't they been through enough?

“Loki” Natasha said “the people who did this to you…”

“They are still coming. They'll take me back. They said they weren't finished with me. I just... I couldn't endure it. But they'll come... they'll take me again.”

Natasha cocked her gun, ready to strike.

“I'll keep watch.”

“You hear that Loki, Nat's watching. You won't be taken.”

Steve got closer, trying to get a better look at Loki (they needed to stop all those bleeds before they tried to move him) but Loki shied away, his hand going to where he knew his knife should be.

“Loki, how can I make you.... wait.”

Steve carefully took Loki's shaking hand and guided it to his face.

“Touch me, feel my face. It really is me, Loki, and I am here to help you.”

And so Loki did, went around the Captain's face with his blood stained dirty hands. Steve never complained, just let him do, and hoped it would at least help calm Loki down a bit. Loki felt everything: the nose, the beard, his ridiculous eyelashes. It really seemed to be him.

“Ok?”

Loki faintly nodded. He was so tired, but still on edge. He couldn't rest with all that pain and horror overwhelming him.

“Now I am going to try and fix you up, all right? For us to move you someplace safe, we need to fix all these, or you'll bleed out.”

“...would that really be so terrible?”

“Hey! None of that with me, ok? I understand that you're in a world of pain and that not seeing anything can be scary, but you'll get better, ok? You can't give up.”

Just the uplifting words he needed. This was all a trap, it had to be.

Steve tried to move Loki's shirt remnants to see the biggest wound, but Loki shied away, blood red eyed wide with panic.

“Loki, you have to trust me.”

But the fire in his eyes hadn't stopped and his head was turning, and he couldn't goddamn see what
they were doing, or if they really were who they said they were...

“You're just here because I wanted somebody to help me. You're my imagination, dream up rescue. This can't be real.”

“We're your dream rescue team?” Natasha said, from the background. “Wow, I'm blushing.”

It was the kind of dry humour she liked, but still.

The Captain took a small knife and placed it on one of Loki's hands, then placed the armed hand on his chest.

“That's where my heart is. You could kill me if you wanted to, but I let you get your hand in there because I trust you with my life. Now I need you to trust me with yours.”

There was silence. Loki felt a heartbeat under his hand. Steve continued.

"Now, I know right now it may feel like it's not worth holding on, but that's just the pain talking. If you let me, we can you help get through this.”

After some silence, Loki's hand dropped, and he calmed a bit. Nobody but the Captain would do something as stupidly brave as that. What with their past, and who Loki was... Maybe he was truly safe.

“I'm sorry... I may have some trust issues. I am not a trustworthy person, and my parents, who I trusted the most, lied to me my whole my life...”

“Understandable. But I'm a trustworthy guy, aren't I, Natasha?”

“He is.”

Loki tried to breathe, to stop feeling like every touch would be a blow. He was so unused to this darkness, and his head so foggy from the pain, it was difficult.

“I will say everything I do, so that you don't get startled, ok? Now I'm going to open your shirt to look at your wound.” Steve said, careful, gentle.

They stayed like that for a while, with the Captain narrating what he was doing “now I'm going to bandage your arm”, “now I'm going to put pressure” and some occasional “sorry I'm hurting you” and “It'll be over soon”. And then they got to his eyes.

“I don't think there's much I can do, but just close them and I'll put this cloth to at least protect them from the smoke, yeah?”

It was just a piece of his shirt, that he tied with a knot on the back of Loki's head. There was something too sad about seeing him with that bandage in his eyes.

“I'm sure Tony or Shuri will find a way to help you, don't worry.”

Loki drew a sad smile.

“I'll miss the light. And the colours, most of all. I'll miss the colours.

Two tears fell down Steve's face and he was almost glad that Loki couldn't see them.

He held out his hand for the god, and helped him up.
Loki swayed but managed to start walking to the car, with Steve guiding him, being his eyes.

Loki was almost calm enough to finally sink into oblivion, pass out knowing that somebody would catch him. But there was a voice, talking to him.

“Thank you for trusting me, Loki.”

It should the other way around, Loki thought, but was too drained to mention. It was too...complicated.

“Thank you for caring enough to ask for it.”

His black world wasn't so dark now that he had a voice to guide him.

A friendly voice, in an unfriendly world.

Chapter End Notes

5N1CK3D00DL3 wanted something to do with eyes, and this came to my head. Hope y'all liked it! (Yes, Steve is a fave of mine, as your probably guessed)
There are different possible endings to this chap:
1. Loki recovers his eyesight, but needs sunglasses when it's sunny. He appreciates art and colour more. Both him and Steve learn braille, just in case.
2. Loki stays blind and becomes bbfs with Matt Murdock. He uses magic to "see" like Matt uses his other senses. They fight people in the dark.
3. Shuri gives him new cool bionic eyes.
4. Nicholas Sparks writes a novel about Steve and Loki.

(How will I cope when they are both gone from the MCU, how)

Thank you for your attention hope you enjoyed!
Anthrax

So, one of Tony's competitors had been angry and had dealt out some death threats. It was ok, he was used to it – he only started getting worried when this random anonymous competitor mentioned the “surprise white powder in his in his mail, he was sure he would enjoy”. That seemed too specific to be just a general threat, and although he hadn't seen a letter in years, he knew someone else opened the letters for him.

Fuck. Pepper?

“Do you open the mail? Did you open it today? What happens with my mail, Pep, it's extremely important that I know! The you-know, paper mail.” Tony said, panicked, in a jumble of words.

“I used to, but you told Loki he could do it. In your words, “since he's so nosy he could do something useful with it” don't you remember?”

He did remember. Now he was glad for Pepper but worried about Loki.

“Tony, what's going on?”

“I'll call you back! I need to check something.”

He used the computer to call Loki (he was living with them for a while, fulfilling a double purpose a) they made sure that he wasn't doing anything questionable and b) didn't allow him to feel lonely or unwanted, which was, as they learned, one of the reason for his former villainy) and to tell him to come quick.

And some excruciatingly long moments later, there he was, as tall and long as usual, wearing only a loose black sweater and some tracksuit bottoms. Odd. Loki had never favoured comfort over style.

“Lokes, tell me you didn't find anything strange in the mail?”

Loki shook his head. Tony released a breath he didn't know he'd been holding, and almost laughed. Bullet dodged.

“No death threats, then?”

“Oh, yes, but that's not strange. You get plenty of those, Stark. Lots of people hate you.”

Alarms were again blaring in Tony's head after that moment of calm. Did Loki look paler or was it his imagination?

“With some white powder?” Please say no. Please say no.

“Oh, yes, I remember! It kind of jumped on you, the powder, very clever mechanism.”

Well, we still weren't at code red. Loki was a whole different species, maybe anthrax didn't affect jotuns, maybe they were in the clear and could forget this whole ordeal.

“By the way, Anthony, could you lower the air? I have this... weight in my chest, and my throat feels quite sore. I'm sure it's nothing, but...”

Code red! Code very absolutely red!
Tony immediately called Bruce, Doctor Cho and every other half decent scientist he could think of, to assemble and very urgent, life-or-death save Loki team. They easily found out that the strain used was an unknown one, probably engineered by the aggressor, and that it was indeed affecting Loki. The man seemed to be enjoying the attention. That idiot.

But he went downhill fairly fast. Just the next day.

Loki lost all the energy, seemed to be exhausted at everything, and said that he would stay in bed because he wanted to catch up on sleep, but it was clear that he just couldn't get up. He looked even paler, and seemed to have difficulty to breathe. His temperature starting getting up, and it sky rocketed at night.

And at night, too, he started coughing up blood. Red little droplets, staining the bed he was laying on, and he looked worse and worse, too white, too... sick. He couldn't bring up how godly he was, could barely move. He just lay there, being consumed by something meant for Tony.

And Tony was going crazy, the guilt was eating him whole. He made a million phone calls and hired so many researchers and toxicologists he'd lost count, but no one could guarantee him that they'd find an answer before it was too late for Loki. Just the day before he'd been merrily eating ice cream with Peter, and now he was half dead. This strain was design to kill and to kill quick.

And it was his fault, like it was his fault all of what Ultron did, like it was his fault that Rhodey and Happy got hurt, that Pepper was experimented on. But unlike them, Loki wasn't going to last enough for his money and resources to help, fix things. He would die, only because he had living with him, and because he decided opening his own mail was beneath him. Stupid, arrogant Tony.

He went to Loki's room-turned-medbay, and saw, for hours, how his stats got worse, how his breathing got louder and more irregular as his oxygen levels dropped. Loki, always with a joke, Loki who smiled at death, Loki who could trick bad guys into surrender in the blink of an eye, a god, an ally, a friend....

Half dead because he had opened the wrong letter.

Tony cried some silent tears and whispered a very broken “I'm sorry” to the figure in the bed. Cleaned the blood of his mouth, changed the stained pillow. Sighed. Looked at some pictures of the two of them in battle, and then back at Loki now.

_You did this to him_, a voice told him. But that wouldn't help, wouldn't fix things. He drank three red bulls and set out to find who had sent that damned letter.

The next morning Loki's fever got so high that he became delirious, he started mumbling something in an unknown language (Norse? Asgardian?). And the cough got worse, drier more painful, and there was more blood.

The person responsible released a video of Loki in his sick bed coughing up with a message “this was just a warning. He'll be the first of many”. It was only available online for a few minutes, but it had a great impact. While Tony looked for clues that didn't seem to be very forthcoming (this person had clearly researched, his patterns of thought and his blind spot before doing the attack) the public was very helpful.

Even though it had taken a while for them to get used to Loki as a good guy after his villainous start, after some months with the Avengers people had started to appreciate him, some even admire him. How could they not? Loki was witty, dramatic and very easy on the eyes. The cameras loved him and he loved cameras. People empathised with him feeling second best after Thor, and liked his
mischievous winks and redemption story.

And now...

#SaveLoki became trending topic in seconds, and every known scientist or science aficionado was flooding Tony's inbox with suggestions and helpful hints. There was a lot of useless things, too, a lot of praying and spiritual mumbo jumbo.

If Loki would have been functional, he would have loved all that attention. Hell, there was even a vigil with candles, in the saveloki ranks, with some chanting and a speech about how Loki mattered, for everyone who had messed up but knew they could be better, for everyone who had felt “less” in life, but managed to do find the right path, even after stumbling. It was beautiful.

What was not beautiful was the man they were trying to save, burning up in fever, lain on his side so that he wouldn't choke on his blood, (they kept cleaning it, but more blood came out) hardly able to draw breath, going into shock nearly every hour, and barely being brought back each time. Time was really running out for Loki, looking more and more like a dead man than ever. Positive thought wasn't going to change his nearly assured death.

Unless....

Among all the junk he'd been sent (and read, all of it, because not reading got him here in the first place and because if there was one single thing that would help Loki then it would be worth it) when he saw something interesting... Not about healing anthrax (it probably wouldn't work in this strain anyway) but about slowing it down. Buying more time before things got worse, reducing the decline.

And it worked. Loki kept coughing up blood and having a dangerously high fever, but he was stable in his very grave condition.

So that when Tony located the woman who had targeted him and had Scott Lang steal the antidote she had made for herself in case of accident, Loki was alive. And when Lang came back Loki went into shock again, his heart nearly stopped, but he was alive.

They injected it, and Loki immediately calmed down, stopped coughing.

His fever decreased, and four hours later he opened his eyes, and was aware of his surroundings.

Aware of his blood stained pillow, and aware of one bloodshot-eyed Tony Stark, who hadn't slept in four days, smiling at him.

“We did it, buddy. We saved you.”
There were many people who didn't find Loki remarkable, how could they, when Thor was around? He was smaller and used tricks in battle, he was thin, too sneaky, too... dark, some would say, and they wouldn't be exactly wrong.

But there had been some people across the centuries who had found Loki's voice interesting, compelling, remarkable. While not as grave and strong as Thor's, it was a voice that had something. It was bittersweet, it was soft and melodious, and there was something about it, and about the words spoken in it that managed to always convince anyone about whatever his point was. No matter how far-fetched the points he was making were, Loki always won spoken battles, always had the verbal upper hand.

And he had managed to talk many people (like Thor, but others too) into ridiculous things, or out of others he didn't want to be a part of. Loki's voice was also one of his ways of doing magic, because sometimes spells were too complicated for non-verbal magic. Loki used his voice to get into and out of bad situations, and it was his voice that allowed him to escape death in more than one occasion.

His voice, and not his magic or any tool, was his biggest weapon.

These people understood it, and deprived him of it.

When he woke up, he was in a white room with no windows or openings, and his mouth had been stitched shut. He couldn't even let a scream of anguish out, he couldn't make a single sound and he couldn't, no matter how much he tried, free his mouth. He was stuck, and he was stuck in a place where nobody could see him, nobody could know that he was there. Nobody could hear him.

For some time he tried to escape. He banged on walls, hoping to be heard by someone other than his captors. He concentrated on non-verbal magic, to try to undo the stitches, teleport himself out, send Thor or any of the others a illusion of himself asking for help. Anything. There must be a way out of this, a way to freedom. He'd escaped places many times before, he could do it one more time.
But losing his voice was... huge. It felt like he had lost a great part of himself, as if without it, none of him worked. Every plan he came up with was not possible because he couldn't talk his way into some place, mutter a password, something and he had a suspicion that if he managed to find enough energy to shift the person he shifted into would also have their mouth sewn shut with those horrible metal wirings, and would give him away immediately.

It could never happen anyway. As he was unable to eat or drink, Loki was getting weaker each day, and could hardly concentrate on anything more complicated than conjuring an illusion of water to calm himself a bit. And then he couldn't do magic at all, depleted as he was. He was just sitting on that white cell that was slowly becoming grey, with his back on the wall, trying to breathe.

But even that was hard with his mouth full of metal.

As time passed, Loki began to question his very existence. Maybe he wasn't even there. Maybe he had no body, the same way he had no voice. Maybe he never did, and he had imagined himself going in all those adventures with Thor. Maybe he never was as smart and witty as he thought himself to be, maybe all that he had been was a prisoner, dreaming up water and adventures to let the times pass.

Sometimes, he cut his arms with his nails, to see the blood flowing, to remember that he was still a person, that there was some semblance of life under all those unconnected thoughts (he couldn't think properly anymore, he was so hungry, so weak).

He longed for his voice, for anyone's voice.

He longed for someone speaking his name, for him speaking theirs. He longed for the land of the living, or the land of the dead, but not his horrid, mute middle place.

He longed for the time when he was able to scream.

*

Okoye didn't understand, but she smelled blood, and there was nobody in that hallway that was bleeding. It was only herself and Agent Romanoff, sent to some criminal mastermind's HQ to retrieve M'Baku and Banner, and Okoye had felt it... something was wrong, something was off about that seemingly normal white wall. Why would it smell of blood? It made no sense.
Not expecting to find anything but hoping to get that strange sensation out of her, Okoye used one of Shuri's gadgets, that worked like a one way mirror that let you see on the other side of the wall. Probably another hallway but... No.

It wasn't a hallway but a small room, occupied by one single person. Someone who had been hurt, muted and abandoned in that hidden room nobody could know about, with hardly any way to make noise, draw attention to himself. He was cutting his arm with a fingernail, and looking at nowhere.

But there was something else about this poor soul... a way in which he held himself, even in that hell. An elegance to what he was doing to himself, something.... Okoye had been around royalty long enough to recognise it.

“Agent Romanoff” she called. “Who is this man?”

Natasha's eyes widened. And it took something big to surprise Agent Romanoff.

“It's Loki! Thor's little brother! Give me one of those bomb things!”

“Loki!”

His name, again, after so long. Someone was calling his name.

“I don't know if you can hear me, but this is Natasha Romanoff. Stay away from the door, we're coming to get you.”

He existed. Someone was calling him and he existed again.

There was an explosion and Natasha and some other lady were there, looking at him, acknowledging him.

“We thought you were dead.”
Loki revelled at the touch of the redhead helping him up, could hardly control how much he wanted an embrace, something.

“We'll make those men face a fitting punishment, your highness.” Okoye said, a dangerous look in her eye. This man was someone's son and brother, and no matter how little was left of Asgard, he was still a prince. “They will pay for taking away your voice.”

Loki half smiled before he fainted in Natasha's arms.

When he woke up, he was some medical bed and Thor was looking at him with bright eyes.

His mouth had been freed.

Although he would have nightmares for many years to come, he could once again exist. His voice was back – and so was he.
The first time he awoke, Loki felt wrong.

He couldn't move any part of his body and just keeping his eyes open felt too much effort. He felt... weightless, somehow, not at all there. He didn't understand how he could be awake in the first place, but his head couldn't handle complex thoughts.

Not yet.

He would get there.

There was a big smile in his field of vision, and pale eyes joyful after a long time of sorrow. Thor.

“Brother! Brother.”

Loki faintly registered that Thor was holding his hand, gave it a soft kiss.

“You're on the mend now, Loki. You'll mak.....”

*

The next time he woke up to angry voices outside his room.

Sunlight shone outside his heavily medically equipped room, and Loki was glad. He thought he wouldn't see the sun again. It was peaceful. He felt better.

The people outside were not feeling so magnanimous.

“.... No, no, no! He stays here! He stays here as long as he needs to, and you and all your agencies leave him alone.”

Loki realised that he knew this voice. Bruce Banner.

Somewhere in the back of his mind, Loki was glad that the man/Hulk was still in one piece.

“...criminal......prison....”

“Do you really want to make me angry?”

Loki went back to sleep, a small smile in his face. Some things didn't change.

*

Loki awoke feeling much worse the next time. He hardly noticed that he was somehow throwing up, and that someone was cleaning his brow, holding him up so that he wouldn't choke.

“Should we call someone? Maybe he's reacting bad to the medication or something....”

An unknown female voice said, as she cleaned him. She had long dark hair and green eyes, and was looking at Loki kindly. A humanoid with oddly soulful eyes was with her, and helped her to clean the sick man. There was something comforting about their presence.
“Thor said this was normal. I think we should just clean and let him go back to his rest.”

That sounded pleasant.

The couple was pleasant, too. Wanda and Vision, they said their names were. Loki hoped that the next time he woke up he would still remember them. He needed to thank them, at some point, when he retrieved his voice and the strength to use it. He was glad to meet them.

* 

The Captain of America was contently drawing something in the chair next to his bed, while humming a song. He sketched with pencils, softly and carefully, and Loki vaguely wondered what he might be drawing.

The song he was humming sounded outdated, but important. Heartfelt. It was the first piece of music Loki had heard in a very long time, and he revelled in the beauty of its sound. Little joys of life, a piece of music, the colour of the flowers in the vase in front of his bed. But the music, above all. How he had missed.

Loki finally felt the strength to move his hands coming back to him. It was odd, and tingly, but his hands were there, and he could finally feel them again. He could move them.

When the song ended, he clapped.

* 

There was someone talking quickly and excitedly the next time, with all the energy in the world, all the energy that Loki was trying to find again.

“... but I can speed up the healing process! His stats aren't good enough, and they are improving too slowly, and if I could implant...”

The youthful enthusiastic voice was interrupted by an older, calmer one.

“Let the man take his time, Shuri. He's been through enough.”

Loki agreed with the calmer voice.

He agreed a lot.

* 

Loki was with Thor and some mortal who called himself Bucky the first time he found his voice again.

He was sitting up now, propped against one million pillows, but there were less... gadgets on him, less needles. There was still the one in his arm, and the plastic contraption under his nose that was so surprisingly adept at helping him breathe, but he was... more whole. Less broken, little by little.

He thought about what he could say with his recovered voice. Something grandiose? A quote of some sort? Some scathing commentary?

No. Too tiring.

“Hello... again.” It was wrong, and low, and weak, but it was him. Back again.
The smiles of his companions could have lit up the whole room.

*

The lady Romanoff decided to have her birthday party in his room, and Loki felt so touched by the gesture that he nearly stopped breathing (again).

The party was ideal.

There was cake, and wine, and anecdotes of almost dying and heroics and how tough it could be. Peter Quill made the playlist. The Captain and Bucky were eating cake (they also cut a piece for Loki, who even though he had just started to eat solid again and wouldn't be able to eat even half, but it was the gesture that mattered). The Valkyrie and Bruce Banner were telling a funny story to the wide eyed children of the group, Shuri and Peter Parker. Kraglin was trying to get Nebula to dance, just like Scott Lang and Darcy Lewis were doing.

Loki didn't know exactly what had happened to him, and maybe he didn't want to fully know.

He also didn't know how long would it take for him to leave that bed, or if he would live with any long term effects of what had happened.

But in that moment... He was alive, he was not alone. He was happy.

And nobody would take that moment away from him.

Chapter End Notes

Some fluff before the sadness of Infinity War.

Hope you liked!
Resurrection

Chapter Notes

Takes place after infinity war. Not many spoilers except for, you know, the big one. Still, probably shouldn't be read unless you've seen the movie.

It hurts.

All Loki knows is that it hurts too much, and he can't get out of it.

He doesn't know where he is, he doesn't know what has happened and he can't open his eyes. Not yet. Not while all this agony is consuming him, eating him whole, making all of him hurt.

There's electricity coursing all through him, in some places it's soft, like a tickle, in others it's a burning electrical shock that knows no end. Maybe he's convulsing. Loki doesn't know, all he knows is pain, the excruciating pain of becoming whole again after so long being broken.

It's an indescribable experience.

It starts as a small tingling and then increases its intensity, little by little, until all of you is trembling. And then jerking. It shoots up his spine, it is sharp and merciless. The pain is almost too much – it drowns out everything else. He doesn't know why this is happening, he doesn't know how it is happening.

It's not natural, and all of his body fights it at the same time as it taken over. It is as it he is being remade whole again and every nerve that is mended, every drop of blood flowing again, it all is extremely difficult to find its place again, to learn how to work properly again.

He's not supposed to come back – and it hurts.

Loki is coughing up blood now. His throat is raw and bleeding and on fire, and there are a couple of tears going down his cheeks. His throat and neck are trying to repair themselves, and it is a pain like Loki never thought could possible.

And Loki knows pain, intimately, deeply, in all of its forms. He's been a constant companion in most of his exploits, so much that it's become part of him, so much that it has gotten really hard for him to even get hurt at all. But this... it doesn't end, and Loki doesn't think he can take it much longer.

He opens his eyes, but cannot see anything. His chest and stomach are throbbing, sending furious bolts of agony to his head and limbs. He wants to scream, but he can't. He wants to curl up in a ball, but his body is not responding.

It has been building up, all the time since woke up, little by little becoming worse, the burning, the cramping, become more and more intense until they reach its height and Loki lets out a deaf scream and back arches up, his unseeing eyes imploring for some rest.

Loki wonders why, wonders if he will forever be trapped in this pain. If this unrelenting agony is the punishment of the afterlife for his wrongdoings. Neverending pain, infinite horror, trapped forever in a body that keeps torturing him.
He's convulsing again.

He prays for a way out, and manages to find the strength to curl in on himself, like a little ball.

Eventually, the spasms slow down, he starts to see. The pain, the slowly but surely, gets softer, duller, until it is finally bearable.

There someone there, in his field of vision.

Someone is cleaning his tears and vomit, and spit and blood. Someone is hushing him, caressing his face, changing the sheets when they get dirty. Someone's eyes are kind, and don't judge the mess he's made of himself during this torturous trance.

He closes his eyes.

When he opens them again, he's there.

The pain has become a tingling, on his hands and throat, and his eyesight in focused once more. Loki can see him. Thor, with a small smile. He's talking, and Loki can hear him.

“Sorry I had to put you through that. Trust me, if there had been a kinder way we would have used it, but this was the only way. And I needed you back. I wanted you back.”

“We all did.”

Another voice says, and Loki thinks it's the Valkyrie.

He cannot talk, not yet, but he finds a way to communicate.

One shaking hand. A weak, flickering green light, made with magic.

“GL A D tO be B A c K”

The nightmare is over.

The dream has come true.
Prince Loki was... different.

After the battle of Wakanda the royal house of Wakanda offered Thor a place to stay, and a privileged place as counselor in all royal matters. When his brother came back, Thor asked asylum for the sorcerer and although there was some opposition and some voices against it, eventually and with some conditions, Loki too was granted sanctuary in the capital.

Okoye had made some effort to get close to the man, as she feared he could be a threat: to the country, to the royal family, to everyone. But, alas, despite his many intellectual gifts, in emotional matters he was pretty easy to read and to mold. Okoye suspected that he hadn't had many friends growing up, and he only required some praise (maybe a compliment on his magic, or a comment about his good mind for strategy) and then he became your best friend. If you somehow mentioned that you thought he was better than Thor at anything, then you assured his never ending appreciation.

His way of thinking was a bit over-the-top for Okoye, a bit excessive, but no one could deny that the guy was brilliant, in his own confusing and complicated way. He was one of the few people able to challenge Shuri (finally, she said when she met him, somebody who thinks at something similar to my speed! The rest of the genius people have been so disappointing) and he knew how to make things with the least amount of fight, of blood loss. So she actually didn't mind having him around, and often went to him for advice.

But now, she wished she was alone and not with him, because he would have been a good help in getting her out of this... situation.

Somebody was trying to get T'Challa's throne (again) and this person thought that maybe it was better to take the most dangerous people surrounding him away from the king, so that they wouldn't mess with him. First, it was Shuri who disappeared. As they were investigating what had happened to her, both Okoye and Loki were gassed and taken to a prison cell. They were dressed in cotton shirts and tracksuit bottoms, and had been stripped of all weapons, even the most secret ones.

Whoever had taken them had been smart, and careful and knew who they were taking. To have taken them both so easily... this was not going to be an easy foe to defeat.

When Loki woke up, his hands were wearing some sort of bracelets, that made him feel an electric shock every time he tried to do magic. This was bad, so bad, and even if he tried to ignore the pain from the electricity to get rid of the bracelets and manage to get them out of there, he couldn't, and was just getting weaker.

Nevertheless, he kept trying to get them out. He thought of a dozens schemes, tricks, ways of escaping. None of them worked (this person, whoever they were, were very smart), but both of them kept trying, kept testing the different parts of the cell, kept trying to convince the guards that came with food to help them, kept using any and every idea they may have to get out.

She didn't mind so much (she'd been held prisoner before, she could endure it) but she worried about Shuri and the king. Also, she was beginning to get worried about her cellmate. As a god, she figured he could weather anything, long time without eating, bad conditions... But the last day he'd been looking paler and weaker, refused food and held his midsection, as if in pain.

And as time went by, Loki only looked worse, until Okoye felt the need to mention it. She had never judged anyone on their looks, but the prince could be sick, which was a factor to be taken into
account when planning other escape attempts.

“Are you well? You look.... sick, if you don't mind me saying.”

Loki half smiled.

“Something's wrong inside of me. About to break.”

“What?” Okoye's eyes widened. How could he be talking about that so casually? She'd found, ever since she met the god, that he was too careless with his own life. She went next to him, put her hand on his forehead.

He was burning up.

“If I had any of my magic I would be able to heal myself... enough at least to keep going, but these damned contraptions... I'm sorry, General. I've failed you. All of you.”

Okoye just frowned, not understanding. Something had apparently broken inside of him and still he had hoped that he would get the best of what was clearly a technologically advanced mastermind. Someone not even her could figure out, or get close to, and that was saying something.

“If Thor was here... he probably would have done something... Someone would have come...”

Okoye didn't believe what she was hearing.

“Are you serious? You nearly got us out three times in four days. You're not failing anyone, Prince Loki.”

He shivered as a wave of pain coursed through him.

“Your princess also, she would have been...better... than me.... Anyone else....”

“Do you really think so little of yourself, prince? Do you really have such a distorted image of yourself?”

Loki's brow furrowed, confused. What was she talking about?

“You have more than once put yourself in danger to help your subjects and you are one of the most brilliant people I have ever met. And believe me, I know a lot of brilliant people. And yet you keep tearing yourself down, comparing yourself to Thor. Yes, you are different, but that it's not bad, you have strengths he lacks.”

Loki wanted to thank her, wanted to smile, but his stomach hurt too much. He was holding it tightly, wishing he could believe her words... He was better now than he had been when he found out about his true parentage, more accepting of himself, but still, there were days.... Days when he felt like he did when he was wrong, small, inappropriate, a failure of a second son, never quite living up to who he was supposed to be.

Like this day.

There was an intense pain in his abdomen and he felt terribly nauseous. Unbecoming for a prince to look like that, so ill, so broken...

“You let me handle this.” Okoye said, but she knew the situation was tough.

Loki most likely needed surgery and even if she had known what the hell to do, there was nothing
sharp in that cell to avoid their escape. They had needed to get out before too, but now there was a
clock ticking. Loki was in extreme pain, and every minute that he spent without his magic he was
only getting worse.

But what to do? All of her and Loki's schemes hadn't been able to help in any way. Deep inside,
Okoye knew that their best option was to wait for someone to come for them... But the idea of doing
nothing while Loki agonised didn't tempt her. Not at all.

She wanted to comfort him, but she didn't know how. She was a warrior, a soldier, not quite so adept
at being soft and emotional, at being... comforting. And Loki, he had always seemed fragile to her,
both emotionally and physically, very easy to hurt. She was good at punching doors, not at giving
help, not at giving hope.

Loki was hunched in on himself, trying to drown out the whimpers, and his face was a grimace, and
she had to do something. All her life she had protected royalty, all her life she had protected her
people, and that included Loki now.

“Just try to breathe through it, yes? Don't let it... Think of a good memory, huh? Think of how happy
Thor was when you came back! Think of when you beat Shuri at that game you guys invented and
she clapped and bowed to you....”

He tried to look at her, focus on her voice but then Loki's eyes closed and he cried out in pain.

Something had very literally broken inside of him, and the pieces were damaging the rest of him.

“No, no, no” Okoye was saying frantically. “Don't do this!”

It was twelve agonising minutes later that Loki lost consciousness.

Okoye shed one single tear over the prince's pain and her own impotence to help.

Three hours later they were rescued by Nakia and Thor, who took his brother in his strong arms and
flew him to some medical care. Shuri, who had been released some days ago, quickly started
working on him, assuring both Thor and Okoye that she would fix Loki in no time.

The next day, there she was, the fierce general sitting on a foreigner's bedside reading a book called
“Seven ways to help deal with low steem”. Maybe in the cell she hadn't been able to help him much,
but she would help the man, one way or another.

That she vowed.
“What good are you and your magic then?” Tony Stark said, venom in his words.

The truth was, none of them had wanted Loki around, and only agreed to let him live on Earth and out of prison because of Thor and all the arguments he'd used in favour of his little brother. But it was very clear that if there was no Thor, he would be in prison, or worse.

They had been living in the Avengers building with the lady Maximoff and Bruce Banner and Thor had insisted that if he helped the others when needed people would warm up to him, be nicer. But apart from Miss Maximoff and an occasional “good job” from Captain Rogers, Loki was still only receiving hostile looks and comments. Thor was busy remaking Asgard with the few survivors form the pods and should not be bothered by petty problems.

After so long, after so many things he'd done, he was back at the start, being Thor's unwanted little brother. A tainted shadow, not as good enough as any of his companions. Never good enough. It kind of hurt, no matter how much Loki tried to tell himself that the opinion of some lowly mortals didn't matter all that much.

It wasn't simply that they didn't trust him, which was something logical considering his personality, but the fact that all those people seemed to actively dislike him. That they were practically disgusted him, even after saving their asses, even after Thor's lengthy tale of how Loki left safety to help them out. And still, he was a stranger, somebody despised and looked down on, unwelcome and unforgiven.

It bothered him, because none of them were saints, and yet they treated him as if he was the only sinner. Barton and Romanoff were assassins, Stark had been an arms dealer in all but name. But it was that, wasn't it? It wasn't what he'd done, any of his crimes. It was the fact that he was Loki, it was his fate to live unloved and unlikely for the rest of his years.

Maybe he should be grateful to accept what he did have after everything (a bed, some food, a brother who still stood up for him) but he just... People's love and appreciation had been so important him, and had an enormous impact in his well being. Every angry look, every derogatory word, they were like daggers in his heart, and every day it was getting worse.

Until that fateful day in the streets of Seattle, when an intergalactic automaton nearly wiped all of them off the face of the earth. Half the team had been flown to medical facilities to try and save their lives when Loki and Stark found the nearly bled out body of one Peter Parker.

“Loki” Tony said urgently, as they were joined by the Captain. “do your thing!”

But Loki had been fighting for over twenty hours, had been bound and waterboarded, his leg was practically falling off him and he could hardly breathe properly... He barely had strength to keep his eyes open, he couldn't do something as complicated as healing magic on anyone else but himself.
“I... I can not....”

“Well then, what good is your magic?”

Loki was panting, looking at that poor boy with his windpipe practically crushed, wheezed desperately, one of his ears gone and one of his eyes bloody, a big gaping hole in his chest skin already greying out. Loki knew what it was, knew that they had no time and he knew how horrible it was to know yourself to be dying... again....

“What good are you?” Tony Stark was saying, and Loki, for a moment, doubted.

Maybe he was no good. Maybe all those voices saying that he should have been gone long enough had been right, maybe he really was a waste of space, a despicable person with nothing more to offer the world. He'd end up evil, or useless, or pathetic and mean. Maybe he was better off dead. No good anymore, no good when it counted.

Himself, his magic and all of his tricks amounted to nothing important.

What good are you?

No good. No good at all.

NO.

That was what others wanted him to believe, what others thought of him and wanted him to think. They wanted him useless, or evil, or dead. And he was so much more than that. Maybe he couldn't heal the boy in the traditional way, but he was Loki, and he was good at thinking and figuring out ways to turn situations around.

What good are you?

Loki looked at his team mate dead in the eye and said:

“Good enough.”

So he placed his hands on the boy's chest and started the process. It was going to be painful, he was barely better than the boy himself, and all his wounds looked grievous. But it didn't matter, none of it mattered anymore.

He would help this boy and shut all of their mouths. Just like he spent a good part of his life doing, trying to help those ungrateful people around. He barely held in the scream. It was almost over now.

The boy's eyes opened for a split moment, just as Loki's chest began bleeding profusely.

“Loki?”

Loki drew a soft smile. Then his eyes rolled back in his head.

Now sporting each and every wound the boy had received, Loki fell on the floor with a dead thud.
“Loki!!!”

There was a moment of silence, as Peter tried to understand what the hell had happened and the others tried to understand what Loki had done.

“He couldn't heal him... so he...oh no, Loki...” Steve was muttering, a bit horrified. Loki had practically given his life trying to help. This was so many kinds of wrong.

“Peter, are you ok?”

Of course he was ok, at least he was whole!

“What happened to him?” He asked looking at the unconscious and bleeding Loki.

“What happened to you, happened to him.” Steve said, sorrow in his eyes. “You were dying and he couldn't heal you, so he transferred all your wounds to himself.” And then, louder, to his comm. “No, Sam, it has to be here NOW! Loki may only have minutes to live!”

Peter wanted to cry, to throw something, to scream at the void.

“He did what?”

Tony was somber.

“He did what needed to be done. I still think you should be checked out....”

“No!”

Peter bent on top of Loki's bleeding frame, looking for a pulse. There was hardly no breathing, no heartbeat, not even with his heightened senses. He, the amazing spider man, was crying. He'd thought that Loki seemed interesting, but Mr' Stark had said he was dangerous, and to stay away. The rest of his friends shared that opinion, so he had stayed away. Believed everything they said about him.

And now....

Tony was getting eaten alive by guilt. If Loki died... it would be on him, and Thor would never forgive him, with good reason. All this time, he tried to convince himself and the others that Loki was the Big Bad, to somehow put some distance between them. Truth was, he saw too much of himself in Loki. Genius, emotionally unstable, lots of anxiety, too grandiloquent.

Loki's bad choices reminded him of his own bad choices (all the weapons, Ultron, so many bad calls with such terrible consequences) and he needed to separate himself from him. He's a madman and a murderer, a bad person, that's why he doesn't have friends. Always remember this. (The painful truth was this: Tony knew that if he'd been born in spaces, his story may not have too dissimilar from Loki's).

Steve waved at medical jet and sat next to Loki for the ride to Medbay HQ.

Peter was riding too, despite the other adults telling him not to go, that it was too gruesome. But he needed to be there, to see people healing Loki, helping him. He was like that because of him, for trying to help him. A guy who he had only like one conversation and a half with was dying to...

“Please, fix him. Please, please, please.”

Steve felt suddenly a hundred years older. He'd seen it happening, the disdain, the bad looks and
knew that his team mates were... overstepping his meanness a bit too much, but he hadn't said anything. He thought Loki could handle it, he thought at some point the others would start treating him nicely and everything would be forgotten.

He should have done something, helped Loki, told the others to tone it down... Something more, before the god decided to do something drastic, like this. Of course he was happy that Peter was still alive... but there should have been another way. With all the abilities and gadgets they had, there had to be something better than a life for a life.

It wasn't fair.

They put Loki in intensive care, told them that I could go either way, that emergency surgery would be required, that even taking into account his magic this was going to be, best case scenario, a very long recovery.

Peter's hands were stained with blood.

Tony was looking at the floor, nable to face the world, or worse, himself.

Steve sighed a long, deep, never ending sigh.

The same thought ran through all three men's heads:

*I'm sorry, Loki. I'm so sorry.*
For Penrose_Forgeries (thanks for all your comments!!!), who asked for some more Bucky. Not the greatest ep, but I hope you like it!! I love Bucky, and I think him and Loki are a great duo. Enjoy!

Bucky thought he would never hear that sound again, not in his life time, not after the serum.

“Steve?”

It was the asthmatic wheezing that meant that was someone was having trouble to breathe, that things were bad. It was not the horror of no sound, at least a wheeze meant that the person was still moving some air, but they could be getting close no breathing at all, which was the most horrible situation possible.

But it was not Steve, of course it wasn't Steve. Steve was healthier than any one of them now, Steve could weather even being frozen and still be okay. No, it was someone else who had a distressed look in the midst of the dust. Someone Bucky had got to know in this time and age, someone with a bad past like him.

“Loki? It's just me, man. You okay?”

Loki and Bucky had become fairly friendly. They were both in some sort of limbo – not technically an Avenger, but were called when help was needed. They both had exactly one (and only one) person that defended them and what they did in the past to the others, and told the world that they were better now.

Bucky didn't know if he was all that better now. He did think that whatever had been done in Wakanda had worked, but sometimes he felt himself slipping. Distant from his own self and from the image everyone had of him. Steve still thought he could go back to being who he was when they were young, and some SHIELD people kept expecting him to slip back into Winter Soldier mode. And he was neither of those things, not anymore.

Loki was more complicated, more... delicate than him and his opposing personalities. Instead of two, Loki had a million personalities. And everyone kept expecting him to betray them, try to take over the world. Bucky was convinced that part of why he didn't was to spite them. But there was a lot of expectations for him, too, and Bucky could always go to him to talk about how tired they were of the world and of existing.

They were nice breathers for each other, too. As much as Bucky loved Steve, sometimes he was too perfect, too shiny... and Bucky was always afraid of disappointing him. Loki understood that, he'd been there too. And Loki was never disappointed, just interested or not.

Now he was next to the man, who was pale and disheveled, looking at him with a confused and scared look, that may mean that this was the first time it was happening to him. Loki was coughing and wheezing, and his hand was on his chest.
“Can you breathe?” Loki coughed again, and wheezed even more loudly. Bucky took that as a no. “Was it the dust? We need to get you away from the dust.”

How many times had he been here before? It was the 1930s, and Steve had been around some smoke and was it finding it harder and harder to breathe. First step, take him away from the trigger, whatever had caused the attack. With Steve it normally took a while, but Loki... magic. He took Bucky's hand and suddenly they were out of the building.

Bad thing was, Loki could hardly move any air anymore, and his pale eyes, who had been so frantic only seconds ago, were terribly close to closing for good. Which would be bad, bad indeed, ’cos he needed Loki awake to fix whatever was wrong inside of him. Surely he would be okay, he had been through worse (so much worse, another reason why the had bonded was that they had been through so much shit, even some stuff that they couldn't tell Thor or Steve to avoid giving them nightmares) but still, Bucky wanted to have Loki as whole as possible as soon as possible. He'd suffered enough - they both had.

Bucky called some help on his comm and they said they were coming. But they were quite far, so it would take some time.

“Eyes on me, Loki.”

There wasn't any wheezing anymore, which was a bad sign. When he was young, Bucky used to always carry around one of those dry powder inhalers in case Steve was caught without it, and now he wished for it, badly. Loki's lips were turning blue and Bucky didn't know if it was because he was a blue alien, or because he couldn't breathe.

“Let's get you sitting...Sit here, that's it, with me. And try to take long breaths, ok? The longer the better. Help is coming, with all the meds you need in the world, but in the mean time try to be calm, take the longest breaths you can't. And if you can't, don't panic, all right? Help is coming, and I am here for whatever you need.”

Loki appreciated Barnes' soothing voice next to him, telling him it would be okay, instructing him not to worry. Loki knew that Barnes was not a man of many words, especially not after coming back from his own personal void. But he did talk to him, when many others didn't, and he listened. He was a good man, and Loki understood why Captain Rogers had kept him so close.

“What other thing... oh, yeah, caffeine can work as a quick relief, could you conjure up some coffee?”

As much as the technology from this time fascinated and marvelled Bucky, magic, like the one Loki and Wanda was even beyond that. The things technology did were great and surprised him, but in the end of the day he could more or less understand how and why they worked. But this... Other people were afraid of magic, Bucky just felt lucky to be able to winess it.

“You're amazing.” He said, as a cup of coffee appeared in his hands.

Amazing and blue, with some hints of red in his eyes. Even if he wasn't blue because of the lack of air, the fact that his not-an-alien disguise was falling apart was probably a bad sign, too. Bucky had learnt that Loki always wore it because of some deep trauma about his identity. Bucky wanted to help at some point. Having identity issues was just plain awful, he knew. Trying to hide from the monster you thought yourself.

He managed to get Loki to drink some of the coffee and then the wheezing was back. That was better, at least he was moving some air.
Loki’s eyes were bright, and his hands were shaking. But he didn't cry, held himself high. A true prince.

“You're doing great, champ.”

Bucky said, and Loki appreciated it. Thor wouldn't have said anything, wouldn't have smiled. Thor could be stoic in the worst moments to be, as taught by their dear old dad and all those Asgardian army leaders. Barnes had been in the army too, but he'd also been a prisoner in his own mind, and a fugitive of the law. Had died twice, had lost his arm twice. Those kinds of horrors had a tendency to change you, Loki knew.

The help came in one of those medical helicopters and the medics decided that he was past inhalers and put him on an oxygen machine with a plastic mask called a nebulizer. Bucky eyed it curiously, as he did with most machines. Loki was just glad he could breathe again.

*Thank you.*

Loki said in Bucky's mind with his magic, and Bucky welcomed it. The first time he did it he'd nearly freaked out (odd voices in his head, not acceptable) but now he was quite used to it. Sometimes it was even nicer being able to have a conversation without having to speak. Just thinking about it.

“Don't worry about it, man.”

Loki closed his eyes and Bucky was back in memory lane.

“You know, Steve had this illness when he was a kid, and I had memorised a whole book to help him. It was called “Labouring to breathe” and had terrible descriptions about people having attacks and all the things that could go wrong. You remind of him, sometimes.”

Loki coughed loudly under his mask, and his eyebrows nearly flew into the sky.

*I remind you of Captain America?*

“Not Captain America! Steve, the kid I knew that forged papers to be able to show everyone that he too could and should help, always proving that he was as brave as the rest, small guy with a big brain, never being taken into account as he should.”

That did sound more familiar.

“My kind of guy.” Barnes said, with that very rare smile of his.

A moment of calm as they were being flown back, of understanding, companionship.

Loki smiled back.

Sometimes, one could find solace in people who were as damaged as oneself, where you least expected to find peace, serenity.

The world feared them for who they once were, but deep inside, Bucky and Loki knew how to be soft, caring.

Some time after, Loki magicked Bucky and an illusion that made his arm look human, normal, told him to think about regrowing his own arm, with magic. Bucky said he'd think about it, but appreciated the offer.
From that day on, Bucky started to once again carry an inhaler around.

Because that's what friends are for.
“Everything hurts. Make it stop” Loki said, and Thor didn’t know what to do.

Their parents were away in some business in who knew where and Thor had decided to take his little brother on a hunting trip, see if he could toughen him up a little.

They were nearly of age, and Loki was still too frail, too small. And the others were soft on him, because he’d often been ill as a child and they were afraid some bad might happen. Thor thought it was nonsense: Loki needed to be treated more toughly if he was to become the fierce warrior he and his friends were. And if the others wouldn’t, then it was his duty as older brother.

But then something bad did happen and Thor regretted his choice, this trip and ever wanting to make his brother any different than what he was.

There had been some big beast, larger than a bear and furry, with big teeth, that surprised them while they were walking through the woods. Thor managed to kill it in the end, but before he did, it had already sunk its teeth on his brother’s side, leaving a red angry wound on his abdomen. It was only Loki’s magic that stopped the animal from biting down, as Thor had been for a moment paralyzed by shock and fear.

He was used to big beasts, and blood and fight and he was not used to Loki being in those situations. He was not used to Loki being the one bleeding, the one hurt. Loki was the one that stood there from afar tricking the beast with some clever illusion. This was wrong.

But he snapped out of it and killed the animal in seconds. Still, Loki had a big wound that looked extremely painful, and he need the healers.

“Heimdall, bring us back.”

Nothing happened.

“Heimdall, this is important, what are you waiting for.”

Nothing happened, again, and Loki was bleeding and looking at him with pain filled eyes, barely able to keep standing, his clothes torn and in pieces. It was going to get cold in not too long.

“Don’t worry brother, we’ll be back in the palace in no time.” Thor said, trying to sound reassuring. “Heimdall!”

But Heimdall wasn’t answering, and Thor was afraid that the smell of Loki’s blood would attract some more animals. They needed to find a safe place and he needed to do something about his brother’s wound.

Finding a cave was relatively easy, even if Loki was moving much slower than usual. But tending to Loki… Thor knew next to nothing about healing because it was a women’s things and besides, Loki
knew a lot about it and he always brought Loki along so…

But Loki was moaning softly and his eyes were opening and closing, he was in no condition to guide Thor.

This was so so bad.

He bandaged Loki’s wound with a piece of his cape and managed to get his brother awake enough to drink some water, but then Loki lost consciousness and Thor didn’t know what to do.

You’re too hot headed, too impulsive, people told him, and Thor hadn’t understood why that was a bad thing.

Because it has consequences, Loki had said, but Thor had dismissed him, like he often did. What did he know? He was a small, magicky boy and didn’t know the ways of the warriors, the ways of glory. Thor had been a teenage idiot thinking like that. Not heeding Loki’s words, when he had always been much more clever than him.

Loki had told him that he didn’t want to come hunting, and Thor had convinced him. Now they were trapped in some cave, Loki was badly injured and Thor had no idea of how to get back home.

He thought he could go out to find some healing flowers to make a salve or something, but once he was in the forest he realised he didn’t know if any of those healing herbs grew in this part of the woods. Then it took him too long to find the cave again, and he’d been scared to death that he wouldn’t find it, and that he would leave his brother to die on some cave.

Shortly after he found it, sleep claimed him. He would think better in the morning, Thor told himself. Things would be better in the morning.

They weren’t.

The next morning Loki was burning up with fever, and moaning and turning. Heimdall still didn’t answer.

“Make it stop, Thor. I’m burning, I can’t…”

“Loki, I…”

“It hurts, please.”

Loki’s wound was red and swollen and Thor knew he should have used the water to clean the wound the day before. He’d been reckless, hadn’t thought enough. As usual. And now Loki was suffering for it.

Thor’s eyes were bright as he looked at his brother.

“I’m sorry, Loki, I shouldn’t have brought you here. I don’t know how to get us back home, I don’t know how to fix you. I only know how to get you in danger.”

Loki’s eyes were focused on him. Thor was hopeful: Loki always had a way out of bad situations.

“Do you… do you know any way to get us back home? Please, Loki, anything.”

There was a whisper in Loki’s lips.

“Yes.”
He took Thor’s wrist and in a flash of green light they were back in the palace.

Loki fell on the floor, unconscious, his previous fever flush replaced with a horrifying pallor. He was taken to the healers immediately, while Thor felt like the worst brother in the world.

“I should never have tried to change you.” Thor told his brother the next day, as he awaited for Loki to wake up. “It was your talents that gout us out, and my stupidity that put us in danger in the first place. But you must promise never to live me, okay? Without you, things always go wrong.”

Without him, everything hurt.
Overdose

Chapter Notes

A response to a prompt sent by justwhumpythings in tumblr. Tw for self harm.

“Loki, you've got to see this.”

Val said, coming in without knocking, as she usually did. (In one or two occasions she even had to bring down the door, but there was something she really had to share, and Loki had a tendency to lock himself).

In this occasion, Loki couldn't see anything because he was thrown on the floor of his room, in a limbo between consciousness and oblivion, blue foam coming out out in uneven painful sounding gurgles, half his face stained from a profuse nosebleed. His limbs were twitching softly, slowly, as if they were too tired for a proper twitch. As if he was giving up already.

“Ah, shit.”

Val found some hyperthezyn laying on the floor, and wondered how the hell had Loki managed to find any in this shitty forgotten planet. But if there someone that could find a deep space drug while away from any supplier, that was Loki. He was... well, magic. Although he didn't look it right then, slowly choking on his own vomit and foamy saliva, eyes looking at nowhere closing and opening uncoordinated.

“Why do you do this to yourself?” Val said under her breath, before going to the floor to try and help him.

She moved his head to the side, cleared his airways and looked for some first aid supplies. Someone else would have surprised, horrified, panicked. If it had been Thor who found then everyone else in the building would have heard his pleas for help, noticed the thunder in the sky. The mortals would probably have been fairly scared, probably, specially any of the younger ones.

But she had seen too much in her lifetime, she knew that Loki... Well, he was unstable, to say the least. It was only a matter of time before something like this happened, as he especially had a penchant for getting himself killed. On purpose more than not, she suspected. So no, finding him OD'd wasn't that big a surprise for her.

So she cleaned his face, softly and slowly, and carried him to the bed. Loki tried to fight her, probably not aware of who she was, or what she was doing. As she prepared and milk and salt solution that was supposed to help detox, she could hear him letting out some sad noises, something between a sob and a moan. He probably was feeling like crap, but not aware enough to control his reaction to it.

Val wanted to be angry, to tell him that he deserved it for being so careless or so stupidly self-loathing. Wanted to hope that this would teach him a lesson, that he bought this pain and should be eating it. But... she was just saddened. She thought that things were better now, and that Loki had left his self harming ways in the past.
Giving the milk was hell. He couldn't very well swallow, and tried to fight her, so most of it ended up in his clothes and in the bed (and she had to clean him again, and goddamnit she was Valkyrie, not a cleaner), but he seemed to relax a bit afterwards, the twitching stopped and he fell asleep.

She waited by his side until he woke up, cancelling everything she was supposed to do. Maybe some other time she would have called Thor and let him deal with this... But not this time. Not after she had found him half dead. This time he was going to hear her.

When Loki opened his eyes many hours later the world was fuzzy and blurry and there was a familiar face with a sour expression looking at him.

“What.. happened?” His mouth was dry, his stomach was unsettled and his head seemed to want to kill him.

“You had so much hyperthrexyn you nearly died, that's what happened.”

“Did I?” He said, innocently, while painstakingly sitting up on his bed. (How did he get there?)

“Oh, I'm not supposed to believe this was an accident?”

“It would be easier for everyone involved if you did.” Loki said, but knew that ship had sailed.

“Maybe I didn't know which were my limits?”

Val raised an eyebrow.

“For years people came into Sakaar and were melted, or thrown in to the fight, and I watched them. You came in and knew exactly which buttons to touch to make the Grandmaster make you his favourite in days. So you're smart enough for that but you don't know your way around a simple drug? No, that's not it. It was on purpose”

Loki avoided her gaze, looked down on his bed.

“Why?”

Loki said something that was too low to hear.

“Come again?” Val asked, in a tone that left no room for disagreement.

“It's stupid.”

“I know it's stupid, it had to be, but I still want to hear it.”

Loki sighed, looked up to the ceiling.

“Nobody likes me here... nobody needs me. I just wanted to forget about everything, you know, forget myself.”

Val's expression screamed “Really?” without the need of any words. But she would have to tread carefully.

“First of all, people like you. That Spider kid likes you, the red witch respects you, Nebula loves to spend time with you. And Thor needs you, you'll the only thing he has left. And me too, in a way. So that's stupid. And there are other better ways to forget yourself and you know it.”

“Like you and your drinks?”
“I do drink a lot, but I don't outdo myself and you know it.”

There was a tense silence, and Loki wanted the world to swallow him.

“I understand, okay, I understand that sometimes you don't even need a reason to want to drink yourself to death, or put yourself in the line of fire. Sometimes you just want to go, stop feeling, stop having to handle all the... bullshit this life has. But you need to find another way, something safer... or some control mechanisms to you know, stop you from doing something stupid like this.”

“Sometimes I want to be stupid. Sometimes I want to hurt myself.”

“Well, you don't. Even if you want to, okay? You come to me, you go to Nebula, you stab some inanimate object. You go to the mortal called Luis that always know how to lift your spirits. But you have to stop this.”

Loki's eyes were bright as Val kept speaking. Someone else would tell her that this was too much, and to let him recover before continuing. But she had no intention of stopping.

“You, me, Thor, we've lost too much already. I lost all my sisters, you lost your identity, and we all lost our planet. Now, the only home I have left is you two. Don't take that away from me. From your brother. From yourself.”

Loki was crying, but still smiled.

“Who knew you had a heart?”

“If you tell anyone about this conversation I'll cut you into little pieces. If you are thinking any of this.... shit, picture my face say NO, and just don't, ok? Find another way.”

Loki nodded, smiled at her.

And so she left, leaving him to rest and maybe make some decisions about his self care. A better one, or else.

“Don't let me down, Lackey.”

“I'm not planning to.”

For that moment, it was good enough.
Aunt May was on a month long holiday with some old college friends and Peter was sort of living with Mr. Stark (it's been long enough, kid, you can call me Tony, he would say, but old habits die hard) and he was enjoying himself a lot.

Maybe if it had been just the two of them it would have been a bit awkward, but there was also Miss Potts most of the time around, who was a great conversationalist, and there was also quite often Mr Rhodes, an occasional Guardian of the Galaxy passing through and almost always Loki.

If Mr. Stark was a sort of dad for him (although nobody wanted to admit it, and they'd be caught dead before saying it in so many words), Loki was something like his favourite uncle (which would make him and Mr Stark brothers and that would be an awesomely screwed up family), he wasn't probably the best role model and he wasn't the nicest guy, but he was interesting. All the lines that normal people had, simply didn't apply to Loki. It was awesome.

He always had an opinion on things, always had a way out of even the worst situations, and he enjoyed teaching Peter little tricks and not-quite-lies that were very useful. And he loved learning all these things, and hearing stories about Asgard (Thor was always so busy, but Loki enjoyed staying at home, being the centre of attention) and he had an astounding amount of sarcastic comebacks that never seemed to run out.

But he wasn't somebody that you went to when you were sad, or sick. Loki seemed to be many things (mischievous, smart, ambivalent...) but caring was not one of these things. Still, the facts were these: Peter had a shitty flu with fever, a horrible cough, some pain in his chest and all snot... He went to the living room to see if there was somebody who would take pity on him and give him a painkiller or something.

But Mr Stark and Lady Potts were out and none of the Guardians were staying with them in that moment, which meant that it was just him and Loki. The god was looking at some undefined point in the horizon while looking great all dressed in black. He was nursing a green cocktail in one of his hands and his hair looked wet as it fell on his shoulders. He looked like a movie star while Peter's face was all red and puffy and terrible and he was wearing pyjamas with little boats in them (it was the comfiest thing he had, okay?)

Peter coughed and Loki finally noticed him.

“Ah, hello.”

Peter tried to smile, to it came out as more of a grimace, so he just waved.

“It would seem that you are feeling rather poorly, yes?”

Loki had such great English, on top of everything else. It wasn't fair.

“Yeah, I got the flu.”
“Could I offer my assistance?”

Peter was suspicious. Normally, when Loki did something it was for his own benefit, or because he had some hidden agenda. But what could he possibly gain by helping him that day? There was no one else around, so he wasn't doing it for applause either.

“Why?”

“To showcase some of my extraordinary healing skills, of course.”

That kind of sounded like him.

“Ok. But no magic!”

His fear of getting eggs in his brain had decreased, but there was still some fear there that was never gone. And Loki had used mind control magic in the past, and he didn't want second guess himself thinking somebody else was making magically making him do whatever.

“As you wish. Let us go to your quarters, then.

Uh-oh.

Peter's “quarters” were an absolute mess, food lying around, books and papers everywhere, clothes thrown every which way... But Loki didn't comment on that, didn't even made one of those disapproving gestures other adults were so fond of.

“Have the bed sheets been changed recently?”

Peter shrugged.

“You don't mind magic for this, do you?”

“No, sure, do it.”

And so in a blink of an eye the bedsheets were changed, the air smelled fresher and there were more supplies. Peter uttered a small, breathless wow, sneezed four times and apologized.

“No need. Lie down, will you?”

Peter did lie down in his newly made bed, with new pale green sheets and smelling of the air from the top of a mountain. His nose his still clogged (it has been for so long) but the smell is stronger. It gets into you. Breathing when lying down is complicated and is throat still hurts. Having the flu was the absolute worst and Peter sure hoped Loki will be able to help him.

And Loki seemed to know what he was doing, which was a relief. He instructed Peter to open his pyjama top and put some salve made of herbs and who knew what else on his chest. He spread it slowly, humming something like a song. It was peaceful, and nice and the gentle repetitive movements were making Peter doze off.

When he was already half asleep, he was helped up and there was a drink in his lips that tasted like mint and honey and eucalyptus and it improved his breathing nearly instantly. He fell asleep to Loki's sing song rhythm, and slept nearly eleven hours.

When he woke up, there was small silent fan, clearing the air. Although he still felt a weight in his chest and he was still sneezing, he felt much better. There were two unknown mysterious blankets on top of his bed, made from the softest fabric he had ever felt.
There was an amazing breakfast prepared for him, too, with a lot of orange juice and grapes and good things. Peter had something to eat and then sat on the sofa, covered completely in one of those supersoft blankets.

Loki came back some hours later, told him that Mr. Stark was held back with the Lady Potts at some stand down, saving the city or some other nonsense, and that it would be just them for a couple of days. Peter didn't mind.

They spent most of the day on the couch, watched some Agatha Christie murder mysteries on TV and Peter fell asleep with his head on Loki's legs. He felt a bit embarrassed but then saw that Loki was asleep too, and smiled. He'd never seen the guy sleeping, and it was... nice.

By the end of the second day Peter's was absolutely gone, and he felt ready for the world again. He thanked Loki for his services about one million times, got some celebratory selfies with guy (#godtricksterandbesthealerever this guy is the TOP) and told everyone how he'd got over the flu in a couple of days thanks to a god.

Loki should have been happy about the whole thing.

But something.... was wrong.

Peter didn't see much of Loki for the next day, and when he did he was always leaving. And Peter sought him out, because he wanted to do something to thank the guy and because he felt that guy already spent too much time alone, but it was difficult.

He managed to track him down some days later, when Loki was brooding in the balcony.

“Hey, man, I've been looking for you, I...”

And then he noticed. Loki's eyes were red and puffy, he had a handkerchief with him and his breathing sounded wheezy.

“Dude, did I get you sick?”

Loki half smiled.

“Do not concern yourself. It's nothing I can't handle.”

“Yeah, I'm sure, but I feel like I owe you, man, after what you did for me. I mean, you missed a hell of a fight to stay with poor sickly me, I'd like to return the favor.”

“No need.” Loki said, and started leaving.

“Yes need! No, man, stop! Are you mad at me for getting you sick?”

Loki coughed and looked back with bright bloodshot eyes.

“Of course not.”

Loki sneezed and and his head was pounding. This was most undignified.

“Then why are you leaving? Are you avoiding us? You should be resting, like I was. I don't.. I don't get it.”

Loki looked over the balcony, to the horizon.
“You are the one of the few people left who still... admire me. I wanted to keep it that way. I wanted you to look at me and feel awe.”

That was... unexpected. But Peter understood, it was difficult, among all these incredible people with their incredible looks and incredible abilities to find some... encouragement. And Loki already had less because of his past, and because he was the brother of Thor, who was always the best looking most muscly and grave voiced person no matter where he went... Loki had wanted to preserve the wow effect he had. It was understabable, but unnecessary.

“You think I admire you less because you got sick? Dude, this is like... It’s like if you took a bullet for me or something, but this is better, because there’s no glory or anything, no Valhalla, you risked you health to help out somebody who wasn’t even dying, like... If anything, I admire you more!”

Loki coughed, and his eyes softened.

“Thank you, child. It really does mean a lot.”

Peter grinned.

“Now, let’s get you out of here, before you catch you death. I’mma make a killer orange juice and we are going to watch so much good stuff. Where do you keep those awesome blankets? Because I am sure....”

Loki just heard him absent mindedly, feeling, despite his physical discomorts, truly blessed.

Thank you for being such a good friend, child.

It was enough to melt his ancient broken and frozen heart.
He was fascinating. The way his body worked, what he could endure... The science team had been convinced that subject 9Z27, alternatively called “the asset” could be the key to find the cure of numerous diseases, as well as provide the necessary information to create an armour that was the closest thing to invulnerable.

The team had known about the existence of Asgardians and some other aliens, but hadn't known a single thing about Jotuns, didn't know that such a thing existed. The fact that one of them was available to them was an unmissable opportunity. Loki was a fascinating mystery to them, an oddity, a conundrum inside a glass cage. Nothing else. An unexpected help in their research, an object with medical/military applications.

It was a pity that despite his blue skin the asset looked so human like, had such an expressive face and bright eyes, because when he thrashed and cried out in pain it was quite uncomfortable to watch. When his (no, not his, its, the asset is just a thing) its red eyes pleaded at the science team, they looked... queasy to say the least. But the voice of reason told them that this was just a monster, one that should be glad to be helpful. Their goal was too important to get distracted with useless sympathy, anyway.

Loki (he'd repeated his name a million times but nobody seemed to listen to him, they kept calling him a number, a case file) knew how the people torturing him thought, and made his despair increase exponentially. When somebody was doing something criminal, he could convince them to try to change their minds, redeem them, or at least try to join them. But if these people thought they were doing humanity a favour by torturing him...

They had already done their best to dehumanize him, forget that there was someone with a soul and a mind under those tissues they were running their tests on. They had reduced him from living being to asset, to decrease their guilt, and it was working. He was nothing else. The tests they were running on him would be considered torture if a human was subjected to them. But he was not a human. He was a thing, and what they were doing was technically legal.

The test were different every day, and they were monitored carefully. They had burnt him to see how fast and in which way he healed, broken his bones, shot at him, all the name of science and medical research. We have gathered valuable data today, the leader said cheerfully, and no one looked at Loki's battered face, covered in blood and saliva, begging to be let out from that glass cage of horrors.

The worst were the injections. They would infect him with all types of viruses and inject him poisons, to see its progress. He recovered from meningitis relatively quickly, but nearly died from typhoid fever some time later. The effect of the poisons varied, but the last of them had left him with yellow lines on his skin and shortness of breath.

Other time they threw him into a wall to see how his bones would break. Or they stabbed him, or
tested his limits with extreme heat.

And every day when he woke up he had no idea what they would do to him that day. Freeze him? Burn him? Inject him with one of those terrible chemicals? It broke him not knowing, having to wait to see how they were going to make him suffer, to take pieces of him, to record his pain.

And he saw no end to it. Only more and more days of indescribable torture.

Maybe he should stop trying to hold on to himself (he had cried and cried “I am Loki! I am the brother of Thor! I am an Avenger!” Please!” to no use) and let himself go. Maybe he shouldn't continue trying to... recover. Maybe he should let them do as they pleased. Maybe he really was nothing more than an asset. 9Z27. Many applications.

Interesting test subject.

- When they found him Loki had been in the middle of an experiment with aerosol acids and Loki had been convulsed in his glass cage. Seeing him like that, all broken and bruised while he seized and the people around him just watched and took notes... The Hulk tore that lab to pieces, and then carefully took out the mangled body of his abused friend as gently as possible. Tony had to get out to throw up. Natasha let out a couple of silent tears.

They took him to their medi-chopper, wondering what this prolonged abuse may have done to Loki’s already fragile psyche. Nobody could get out unscathed after such an ordeal, and Loki had already a nice long list of traumatic experiences. And this one seemed particularly... harrowing. Tony had recovered some footage from the science team, and his blood boiled. Those people were the true monsters.

Loki spent five weeks sleeping and healing. His skin went back to its usual colour after three weeks, but there were many new marks and cars marring it. Then the night terrors started: Loki would scream in his sleep, thrash trying to free himself from invisible bonds, begging for mercy.

When he did wake up, he was awfully calm.

Tony was off-put, hastily asked how he was was feeling, if he needed anything.

“Anthony” he said, his voice merely a whisper “could you please say my name?”

Tony understood nothing, his mind still a bit fried from tension and anxiety, but complied.

“Loki.”

“You know what I am. Tell me what I am, Anthony.”

“What? I know who you are, Loki. You're the god of mischief and chaos. You're one of us, you're an ally, a friend, you're...”

“I'm someone?”

“Of course you are, Loki. You are someone. And never let anyone tell you different.”

And in that moment, it was enough.
In this chap, Thor is about 17, Loki about 13. Enjoy!

Loki had been misbehaving as he usually did (but more now, that he'd stopped being a child, and was beginning to be a young man) and Thor couldn't find him anywhere. He'd expected to find him eager to know all about his adventures with the Warriors three, as they'd been away for over two weeks, but his little brother was nowhere to be seen. Odd. Loki had really wanted to come with them, but Odin had decided that he ought to be punished for his last misdeed, and hadn't allowed him to go with his brother and his friends.

But then where was he? Not there to question them and pester Thor with a million questions? Unlike him. Thor looked for him in all of his other usual spots: the main, the hall, his room, even the kitchens where he went sometimes (the cooks were very fond of him), but he was in none of those places. He asked around and nobody knew where Loki was.

Thor was starting to wonder if the punishment Odin was just staying home while the others left or if it was something more. His mother was somewhere in Vanaheim visiting people, so after showering and having a nice meal, Thor went to see his father, and ask him directly where Loki was.

But Odin kept changing the subject back to Thor, and seemed very cold anytime his youngest son was mentioned. Odin only said that “he had to be taught a lesson” and that “he was being punished” but never specified his whereabouts, even Thor asked him in those words, and Odin declined to say anything. “It's better if you don't know”.

And this concerned Thor a lot. What if his father had taken advantage from the fact that both Frigga and Thor were gone to do something they would never allow? What kind of punishment was this that Thor couldn't even see his little brother? It was no secret that Loki was Odin's least favourite child, and often he had tried to school the boy it too-harsh ways. It had been Frigga who had stopped the king, but with her gone...

So Thor took the next logical step and went to Heimdall. He was probably supposed to keep the secret of Loki's location, but Thor knew that if Heimdall felt that an injustice was being done, he would help him and disregard whatever obligation he had with the crown.

“Heimdall, where is my brother?”

“In a very dark place.”

“Can you not tell me where? Please, I am becoming very concerned.”

“I have been ordered not to tell.”

“But you would tell me if he needed me, right?”

“He needs you. You're or anyone else.”

Well, if Thor had been worried before, now he was practically panicking.
“Heimdall...”

“He is in a place you’ve been before, but bowed to never go back. It's wet and dripping and there is no easy way in or out. Overlooking. This is all I can tell you.”

“I will figure it out. You have my gratitude, Heimdall.”

“Go after him, Thor. He's been there for too long, and is beginning to wonder if anyone will ever come for him.”

Thor was anxiously trying to understand Heimdall's riddles. He needed to be with Loki, rescue him, and the sooner the better, but it was hard to think with all that pressure. He looked in maps, he looked in books and suddenly it dawned on him. The cave of the bats, how he told his friends that he wouldn't ever in his whole life set foot in that place. It was wet, it was dark, and it was very high up. Overlooking.

But if Loki was there, why hadn't he left? He liked it even less than Thor, and was perfectly capable of making his way down, especially with all the magic he'd been learning. What if he wasn't leaving because he couldn't leave? What if something was preventing him and that was why Heimdall said that he needed someone?

Thor's head was going a mile a minute as he quickly made his way to the cave on a horse. All that he knew was Loki had been punished in a horrible place and in a way that even Heimdall had felt the need to warn him, told him to do something quick. Despite all the scenarios he had cooked up in his head, nothing prepared him for what he found when he reached the cave of bats.

There was a high rock in the centre of a small small pool of water in one of the passageways. And in that rock, precariously sitting and about to fall three meters into an inch of water and a lot of hard rock was his little brother. Loki had his hands tied behind his back, his feet were tied too, there was a metal collar on his neck that was there to prevent him from doing magic and he was blindfolded. Alone and abandoned, not being able to move because he would fall, not being see where the rock ended, all alone listening to the sound of the cave, afraid he would fall....

How long had he been there while Thor and his mom had been away? How many days without eating, probably not sleeping, how many days afraid, on the top of the cave where he swore he would never go back? How long had Loki spent learning a lesson?

Thor tried to swallow the lump in his throat (he could feel bad plenty when Loki was safely back in his bedroom) and started thinking. First he needed to get Loki, but he was afraid that if he startled him too much he would fall.

“Loki?” He called out softly. “It's me, Thor.”

“Thor?” Loki's voice was raspy and hoarse, from too much screaming for help. “Is it really you or is this just part of the lesson?”

“It's me, brother, I've come back. I'm going to let you out.”

It was going to be difficult, but Thor was a good hunter and liked hiking, so he had some rope and other objects to help Loki. He threw the rope at the rock and guided Loki, until he was back on safer land, and Thor unmade his bindings and took off his blindfold. Loki's eyes were red, his skin dry and broken at places. He embraced Thor with a force unprecedented in him.

“Brother... Loki, are you injured?”
Loki just kept holding on to him, strong, never letting go. He had started crying on Thor's chest, muttering something about “no one coming”, and falling to his death, and being there forever, while the insects ate him. There were a lot of bite marks on his neck and arms most of all, and it was evident that he had lost weight. Thor put his hands on his brother's back, rubbing circles, trying to stop himself from crying as well.

“If I had known I would have come sooner, Loki. Please, you need to know, that I would have come sooner.”

After a little while Loki calmed down, and Thor smiled at him, and simply asked.

“Who did this to you?”

Please don't say father, please don't say father, please...

“Father. But it was my fault, I know. I cannot... I can never be a good son and prince like you. I brought this on myself.” Loki said, with a small voice that made his tear covered face look even younger.

Thor's blood was boiling. He couldn't believe that one of the persons he loved and admired most in the world could have been so cruel. So heartless.

That night, he left a sleeping Loki in his bedroom, under Eir's care. He went to confront his father, thunder sounding in the distance, his wrath increasing as he reached the throne.... And promptly forgot why he was angry.

It was the magic that Odin knew best: it was how he made everyone forget about Hela, how he made them not remember a thing about the carnage she and their own king had perpetrated in the name of Asgard. A memory charm, simple but powerful, that would lead Thor to believe that his brother had simply been sick in his absence, sickly boy that he was. Loki's memory would be fuzzy too, although he'd have a sense of not doing again what he'd done.

Sometimes, Loki had nightmares about falling from a rock and getting eaten by bats. Thor at his friends just laughed at his weakness, so Loki tried to forget... But something of it stayed with him.

Every time that he heard the phrase “teach you a lesson” a involuntary shiver coursed through him and he felt a phantom pain in his wrist. Just another of the little cracks that made Loki become who he did.

Another hidden, blocked, layer of pain. And there oh so many.

Too many.
Deaf

The explosion was quite literally deafening.

Loki stood there, in the middle of the field, covered in his own blood, hardly able to see, and terribly distracted by an awfully loud ringing in his ears. It was the only thing he could hear, the only thing he knew. He put his hands over his ears but the ringing didn't stop, didn't lower, didn't change at all. Because it wasn't coming from outside, but from him. This was bad, so bad.

He wouldn't be able to hear anyone coming his way, wouldn't be able to hear himself to see if he was saying the spells right, wouldn't be able to.... concentrate with that ringing. His hand were shaking from the aftershock of the explosion, and he was extremely disoriented, not remembering where he was or how he'd got there. Not the ideal situation to lose one of you senses.

Thankfully for Loki, someone with nice intentions was coming his way. Kraglin had been distant enough from the explosion to be only slightly stunned, and was looking for survivors. That's when he found him, one of those elegant Asgard people, all covered in blood and with frantic eyes.

“Wait... you're Nebula's friend, aren't you?”

But the dude (Nebula's friend) hadn't even noticed that Kraglin was there, because he simply couldn't hear anything. He was still shaking and didn't know where he was really, or how to get to some sort of transportation, how to get back to the others. And he couldn't hear, which made everything so much more difficult. He would have simply collapsed on the floor and let himself go for a bit, if he hadn't been so tense from the explosion.

And then someone touched him, and he nearly jumped.

It was someone he didn't he knew, but who looked familiar. It was hard to keep track, with all the Avengers and Guardians and all of their adjacent people... each one of them had families and/or friends, and Loki hadn't cared enough to learn the names or faces or all of them.

The man was saying something, but Loki couldn't hear over the awful ringing in his ears. Oh, it was splitting his head in two, the ringing, and how he still felt as if the world were shaking.

“What?”

The man repeated the sentence, and Loki motioned for him to repeat. He couldn't hear him, not at all, but maybe he could infer what he was saying by the movement of his lips. Loki figured that if he hadn't attacked by now, he was probably not a foe.

Kraglin repeated his sentence for the third time and Loki's mind thought he caught something.

“Nebula? You know Nebula?” Loki screamed, because unable to hear himself he was having difficulty finding a volume in which he knew he would be heard.

Kraglin flinched, but smiled. This was most definitely the guy he'd seen with Nebula and he was most definitely deaf and still shaking from being to close to the explosion. Still, there had to be a more efficient way of communicating that him mouthing everything a lot and Loki screaming at him. There was.... there was a walkie talkie.

Kraglin pointed at it, and Loki nodded, still a bit out of it.
“Try to contact my companions, if you don't mind.” Loki screamed.”I wouldn't be able to listen to them anyhow.”

And so he did.

“Yes?”

“Quill?”

“Kraglin? I... Are you all right? We heard there was an explosion. But how come you have this comm?”

“I'm here with Nebula's friend.”

Peter was surprised.

“Nebula doesn't have any friends.”

Gamora glared at him with the force of a thousand knives, and Peter grimaced.

“I mean,” he continued, backtracking and regretting instantly, “technically we're all friends of Nebula, but....”

And then Loki's unmoderated voice came from the comm.

“Who is it? Is my brother around?”

“Loki!” Valkyrie said, surprised.

“Loki is kind of Nebula's friend...” Gamora noted.

“The thing is” Kraglin continued, trying to get his message across. “This Loki was too close to the explosion and can't hear anything now.”

“Is Thor there? Tell him to get some root of Efflinden if there's any, or just some Rownez potion.”

“I know where to get that.” Valkyrie said, and took the comm. “We'll have to find the Grandmaster, but he owes me a couple of favours. We'll go for you when we get these things, and anything he might have for deafness. You, buddy, look after Loki properly while we get there... or else a Valkyrie will come for you. We've lost him enough times.”

Well, now Kraglin was terrified. There was some Valkyrie woman who knew he was supposed to be looking after this friend of Nebula's who had taken the brunt of a terrible explosion and was supposed to be a god of chaos or something like that. Oh, joy.

“Wait, lady! How do I communicate with him?”

“You don't have anything to write on? Just tell him to use his magic to write on air, or you know, take his palm and write with your finger on it. Just make sure he doesn't hurt himself further, ok?”

Tall order. Still, the Valkyrie lady had some good ideas, even if Kraglin knew it wasn't going to be enough.

“Will do. I'll look after him.”

The dude (Loki was apparently his name) had dried blood from a gash in his temple all covering one
side of his face, and one of thighs had a big bleeding wound too, and as well as both his hands. His eyes were bloodshot, irritated and unfocused, while his breathing was loud and irregular. They needed to find a safe place and minimize the damage. Because a) he didn't want to experience that Valkyrie's wrath and b) maybe looking after her buddy may make him win points with Nebula.

“Hey! Loki!” Kraglin waved his hands and himself in general in front of Loki to get his attention, and then said, vocalizing nearly every letter, and pointing: “Give me your hand.”

Loki did so hesitantly and reluctantly, and Kraglin carefully started writing in his hand with his finger, and Loki very surprisingly giggled at the contact.

“It tickles.” He screamed.

This was not the concept Kraglin had of royalty, or of anyone that could be considered Nebula's friend. Condescending, vicious, dangerous: yes. Ticklish: not in his wildest dreams. He slowly and carefully wrote the words magic, write and air and Loki's eyes widened, lit up.

“Of course!” Loki screamed, even louder. “Why didn't I think of that!”

And suddenly one of his fingers was glowing green and he wrote in clear elegant writing in the space between them.

*What did my companions say? Was Thor with them?*

He touched Kraglin's hand suddenly his hands were glowing too. He grinned. Kraglin had always loved magic.

*No Thor, but a Valkyrie was there, said she could get what you need, and to look after you while they get it and come back here.*

Loki nodded. This was good – the Valkyrie wouldn't let them down.

Kraglin wrote again.

*We should find somewhere safer, and maybe I could bandage some of those wounds of yours.*

*Of course, Loki replied, lead the way. Excuse me, may I have your name?*

*Kraglin.*

*Oooh, Nebula's told me about you. She finds your company rather pleasing.*

That put Kraglin in a good mood for the rest of the evening.

They found a nice cave not far, and decided to rest there. Kraglin bandaged Loki's wounds and kept Loki awake writing with his finger and vividly re-enacting stories he'd lived while with the Ravagers. Loki decided that he liked the Ravagers and respected their ways. May he would have thrived in an environment of relatively honest criminals like that.

He stopped hearing that high pitched noise, but his hearing didn't return in the next two days. True to his word, Kraglin looked after the injured god, changed the dressings of his wounds, found some water and found, made sure he wasn't getting worse. He'd been the unofficial nurse of Yondu and Quill more than once, and he knew his way around an injury.

When Valkyrie and the others arrived, Loki was napping peacefully in the cave using his own torn cape as blanket and Kraglin was using his glowing finger to sketch himself a nice outer spacey
wedding.

After so many horrors they had lived, it was nice to see such a pleasant scene, and she stayed in silence for a bit, enjoying the peace, the sweetness of the whole thing.

Tragedy was part of their lives, but companionship and hope were too. Solidarity.

Not all was bad.
Broken neck

Chapter Notes

Semi-prompted by Adriana Banner. I took the broken neck thingy and went somewhoere else, hope y'all like :) Set after Infinity war.

Loki didn't know where he was, he didn't even know if he was. The last thing he remembered before waking up was Thanos holding him and crushing his neck. And after that, nothing. The unending void of death, that had taking him once and for all. Or so he thought.

He couldn't breathe properly, only a small sliver of air passing through his mangled airways. It was the bare minimum needed for him to stay awake, but not enough for him to have a clear mind. All he knew was pain. He couldn't move his head or his arms without his neck exploding in white hot pain, his eyes filling themselves with tears.

If he was dead why did it still hurt so much? If he wasn't, why? He seemed to be some sort of white room, no windows, no doors, no furniture. Maybe this was hell, the punishment for all that he'd done, for all his wrongdoings. Now he would have to spend eternity trapped between for white walls, with a broken neck, receiving almost no air and slowly losing his mind. Seemed like a fair punishment.

For so long, Loki wished he had stayed dead. Oblivion was much preferable to this unending agony. He thought of Thor, but knew he probably would never see him again. Even if he truly was alive, he was supposed to be dead, so nobody would look for him, nobody was going to come to rescue him. They'd figure his body got lost in space and hold a memorial, and move on. Someone may even be happy that he was finally dead for real.

Inside his white cell, he couldn't do much. Besides his neck, most of the rest of his body was still asleep, heavy, dead. It was getting better with time (unlike his neck, which was a constant source of agony) and at some point he even managed to put his back against one of the walls, get into a sitting position. It was... relatively better, having something to hold his head even if he still struggled.

Opening his eyes was a struggle, but so was keeping them closed, with that pain wakening him constantly, never letting him rest. Sometimes it was hard not choke in his own saliva, it was hard not to cry. He wanted to scream, but only pitiful whines came out. He hated his body, he hated his cell, he hated his cell. The white was eating up everything, everything he was, everything he had been, any and all hope he could have for the future.

He just wished for the pain to stop, but all hope seemed too far-fecthed, too impossible. He couldn't move, couldn't get out and no one else was going to get him out. He was doomed to an eternity of pain, solitude and sorrow. The fact that he probably deserved this didn ease his torment.

Thanos had taken away his voice, his body, his everything, and left him in hell to rot.

Loki wished he'd never been born, and cursed his neck a thousand million times. The pain was so overwhelming, never letting up, never letting him rest, only breaking him more and more as time passed.
Time passed slowly, painfully slowly... but it never ended.

The only sound in that cruel white cell was his sobbing.

He was in hell, forever.

And his neck hurt. It hurt oh so much.

----

People were happier as everyone who had died in the snap (plus Gamora) had been retrieved from the soul stone, undoing the effects of Thanos' terrible snapping his fingers. Of course, there had been some losses – all the Wakandan soldiers that died before the snap, all the civil victims from Thanos' and his lackeys... including Vision, Heimdall and Loki.

So now the Avengers' task was try to undo the damage Thanos had done as much as possible. Redo buildings, release prisoners, find any and every way in which they could help to try and get things working again, to move on from the trauma as best as possible. It wasn't an easy job, and it meant still being focused on all the horrors that had happened, not just in the world but to them as well, but that's what heroes are for, right?

Hulk and Bucky were looking into some facilities that Proxima Midnight and some of the other of piece of evidence they could use to construct better defense mechanisms against this kind of alien. Most of the places were fairly empty, they left some gadgets behind but nothing else, but one....

“PEOPLE INSIDE!” Hulk said, even if the place where they were seemed empty.

“There's no one here, big guy.”

“DOWN”

Hulk said, and smashed the floor. A younger Bucky would have been surprised, at least taken aback. But 100-year-old Bucky you had decided to go with the flow.

Under them there was some odd white place, filled with rooms with no windows, and in each of them there was someone... special. Someone that was supposed to be dead, someone that had in fact been dead, sometimes buried even... This was Thanos' room of last-resort secret weapons. People he had killed but brought back when things started going south, to use against the Avengers with some help from the mind stone... But he had no time to use them, and they had lain forgotten in those white rooms.

But because of the means he had used to bring them back none of them had died.

Heimdall was there, and so was the boy called Quicksilver, who were both very glad to see someone else, to be able to get out of that white hell.

Some of the other cells were empty, or had strange looking objects they would send back to Stark's. And in the last cell...

Someone was looking at them through red rimmed eyes, someone with dark eyes and a blackened violet neck and delicate features.
“LOKI!” Hulk roared.

Bucky tried to remember what he knew.

“Loki is bad, right? The reason the Av-

“LOKI GOOD NOW! LOKI REVENGER LIKE HULK.”

“No problem. I was bad once upon a time too, I get it.”

Hulk took the still half dead looking Loki in his arms and outside of that cell, Loki managed to finally rest, sleep.

Thor was so excited, it took a lot of Avengers to stop him from enveloping his still-in-critical-condition brother in a bone crashing hug.

“What's that thing... in his neck?” He asked, once the euphoria passed.

Dr. Cho explained to him that his body had been too busy getting all his limbs and insides coming back from necrosis to fix his main injury, the neck, and the neck brace he was wearing was supposed to help speed the healing, minimize the pain and avoid him hurting himself any further. It was a horrid contraption, full of plastic and making Loki look like some sort of robot... but who cared, if this meant he had his brother back.

They also got him on some industrial-power painkillers and some IVs to replenish everything he had lost since that fateful in the Asgardian ship when they faced Thanos. And now he got to wake up in a universe without the Titan's poisonous influence, in a world that was being rebuilt – and he got to wake up as a hero that gave his life trying to do something good, who faced an enormous threat and made a right choice.

He got to wake up in a world where he had place among the heroes, and that wasn't in the verge of collapse anymore. A better world.

When Loki did wake up, there was no more white, and something was supporting his mangled neck. The pain was only a shadow of what it had been, a hum in the background instead of the constant scream it had been.

“Who...? How...?”

“You're free, brother. And you will be healed in no time, rest assured.”

Loki's eyes welled up, but this time it was tears of joy. He thought he was done for, he thought he would be left alone in hell forever, and now he was given a new chance to breathe, to see, to live.

An unknown soldier looking blue-eyed man looked at him fondly.

“You can breathe now, soldier. We are back here again, against all odds. Alive.”
“Is everyone okay?” Natasha shouted at the group after the shootout with some armed aliens. She was with an odd group that consisted of some half the guardians, Loki and herself. There were outer spacey bad guys that the guardians had been following, and Loki was there…. She had no idea. She was a bit fuzzy on how she had got there, but decided not to think too much about it.

Nebula and Drax were okay (weren’t they always?), and Loki was helping Mantis up, but they both seemed good. It felt a bit impossible that with all that shooting nobody had been hit, but they were being lucky today. It was about time. Still, better to make sure.

“No one got shot?”

“He got shot.” Mantis said, pointing at Loki, who just rolled his eyes.

“I can handle it.” The god said, giving no indication whatsoever of having received a major injury.

“Only because you are very accustomed to pain. That doesn't mean that your injury is not severe, or that you are not in great pain.”

Loki didn't like this Mantis character. All his careful thought out layers, all his personas and all of his acting didn't work on her. Someone who can know all your true feelings is not a good fit a god of lies.


“I am here and whatever Mantis is saying, she is right and you know it.” Nebula said, with a little smile that looked very odd in her.

“Traitor.”

Nebula smirked more.

Natasha decided to check out Loki's gunshot wound, since no one else seemed to be doing anything about it - anything other than sly remarks, of course. It was a shot on his stomach that was bleeding fairly steadily. And all Loki had done was raise an eyebrow. Amazing. Sadly, it wasn't a through and through.

“We'll have to get that bullet out. I know you can still walk and anything else, Loki, but the bullet could be laced with something, they did tell us that these people often dipped their weapon in poison just in case, right? So better not to risk it.”

The spy did have a point, and the others could use the “procedure” to rest up a bit. Nebula had offered herself volunteer (I'll do it. I don't trust any of you to do it properly, she said simply and decided that that was that) and Natasha was glad that she didn't have to do it, but slightly concerned. Nebula took out a space switchblade that she spat on and his worry grew.

“Nebula if you can, don't be too... brutal.”

Nebula didn't seem to understand what he was saying.

“He can handle it.”

Loki, sitting on the floor undoing some bits of his armour so that Nebula could reach better agreed
absentmindedly.

“Sure he can, but if you're softer, it will hurt less. Wouldn't you have preferred to be hurt less and have people be soft when they all those things they did to you?”

Nebula seemed puzzled, and just thought about it. Maybe she could try to be softer, maybe she could try to cause less pain. Subtlety and tenderness had never been strong points of hers, but she lost nothing for trying.

“All right.”

Loki had his head held up high, his shoulders squared a distant air to his eyes. Sure, that bullet in his gut hurt like hell but that wouldn't cause him to lose composure. He was a god and a king, and he' been impaled, hulk smashed, even killed. He could deal with the pain no matter how much it hurt, and pretend it didn’t bother him.

What would anybody gain from his whining? Even after all this time he still felt that he had to prove to everyone that he could be as tough as Thor, as strong as Thor, as stoic as Thor. Maybe he would never feeling the need of standing up to his brother... maybe that would never go away. He threw one sideways glance to Mantis, trying to tell her to please not blow his tough guy façade.

Mantis smiled and gave him a nod, feeling as if she were part of some clever ruse.

Nebula's work was quick and efficient, but she definitely lacked the finesse Loki remembered from Eir and the other healers. She dug the bullet out with her switchblade and bandaged the wound tightly, using a piece of somebody's cape for it and putting in it the bandaging the strength of a thousand gods. Loki had to really control himself not to let out a cry when she bandaged the wound. She didn't pull back, that woman. And this was her being “soft”.

Still, she was better than many people he'd had the misfortune of encountering, and even if his loins were on fire (that was probably the poison) and all his midsection was screaming at him not to move, to scream out in pain, his gaze never wavered.

“Thank you, Nebula. You are extremely resourceful, as always.”

How was he going to stand up now? How was he going to continue pretending when even breathing had become difficult? But he had to find a way, he couldn't show weakness now, or that shirtless colourful man (Drax, was he called?) would make fun of his predicament and maybe even give him a demeaning nickname (Loki hated being with such honest people – lies were the base of decency, of diplomacy, of...him,. in general). Still, it was going to be complicated. He was feeling slightly light headed and knew that he was blinking way too much.

Nebula got in on it, and decided to distract the others to let him compose himself. It was hard to live up to seemingly-unbreakable super cool super good looking siblings. She related to that. Because Gamora was “all that” she kept trying make everyone see her as this killing machine, fierce, driven, unbreakable. Sometimes it was hard.. but that was who they were.

Mantis was suddenly sat next to him, and Loki eyed her suspiciously.

Suddenly all his worries about looking whole and strong vanished. Suddenly there was no inferiority, no anxiety, no fear and no torment. Suddenly and for once, there was only peace in his head, all his being being overwhelmed by a sense of perfect calm. His head fell softly in Mantis shoulder, who smiled.

“Sleep well, prince of lies. I'll keep your secrets safe.”
Childbirth

Chapter Notes

HUGE ASS WARNING FOR MPREG. DON'T LIKE, DON'T READ. Some people requested this in the comments of chap 40, and what can I say, I do enjoy the occasional mpreg, especially with Loki. BUT IF IT GROSSES YOU OUT, DON'T READ. CLICK NEXT CHAPTER YOU HAVE A NICE NON-GROSS HEATSTROKE CHAPTER FOR YOU. HEED MY WARNING, READER. If on the contrary, this is your cup of tea, please enjoy my humble offering :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A single scream of pain sounded in Avengers tower just as Tony arrived.

Odd, because it was supposed to be empty. Tony had taken every single precaution known to man so that the building would be absolutely completely safe. Some of the enemies wreaking havoc out there fed on electricity, so he'd turned all of it off. Lights, computers, everything except for the things that kept him safely locked in there, mostly mechanical instruments that had made Avengers tower a bunker.

Because it was not his problem anymore. There was a new generation of Avengers, and it was theor concern. He and Rogers and the others had retired, and he had just come back to New York from Austria with Pepper in case things got too absolutely horrible and he decided to use some drones to help his new Avenger friends. But he wasn't going back in the battle, he was only tech support. He had promised he wouldn't go back.

Some minutes later, there was another scream, more agonised, more desperate. Someone was in a whole world of pain, and the voice sounded familiar. In fact, it sounded like someone Tony cared about. Three floors and there he found him, all sweaty and disheveled, blood under his legs, his face a mask of pain.

“Loki?”

It was indeed Loki, but he was different. Rounder, bigger. In fact, his usually flat stomach had increased about twenty times its size. And Loki was holding it, with a pained expression and... oh gods, was Loki about to give birth? But there was clearly no time for being shell shocked at such developments, Loki was in fairly bad shape and had probably been alone all this time while doubling over in pain.

“Hey buddy, it's me.”

Loki’s bright pale eyes focused on him.

“Anthony... sorry about... the mess. Just thought this building... would be a safe place... to....” the words died out in Loki's mouth. He closed his eyes. He was so extremely tired.

“Just so we’re clear, what's going on here, is that you're in labour, right? We're expecting a kid to appear shortly.”
Loki nodded with his head, not having the strength to even open his eyes.

“And how shortly?” Tony asked, and tried to think of every medical drama, every health class, every gross webpage and every baby conversation he'd ever heard. “Are the contractions far apart?”

“... yes. I think.”

“You think?”

“I thought I was gaining weight, Stark. I know as much as you about what is happening.”

Shit, he did remember Loki asking Pepper some tips about workouts, because he was feeling kind of swollen. And he remembered making jokes, like ha ha, god of pies instead of lies. And all that time Loki had been pregnant. It was... odd.

“When did you realise it wasn't that?”

“When it started...kicking.” Wow.

Did labour include the level of pallor and exhaustion Tony could see in Loki? It really looked bad.

“So you don't know if all this blood is normal, right?”

Loki shook his head, breathing loudly. He looked awful.

“You don't need to... stay with me. I now this... is... not a pleasant.... situation.” Loki said. He'd meant to give birth alone – no need to burden anyone else with such a ghastly experience.

“No way, buddy. I'm not leaving until I'm sure that both you and that kid are a-ok.”

He planted a soft kiss in Loki's forehead to prove his point further. After many Avenging shenanigans, some chess and lots of magic-tecnological experiments, Loki had become one of his closest friends. They really understood each other, in their highs and their lows. There was absolutely no way he'd leave him alone when he was in such a tight spot.

“Let's get you to the infirmary, ok? At least, there's a bed, you'll be way more comfy.”

Tony helped Loki up and realised that apart from being drenched in sweat and blood, Loki was shaking like a leaf. How long had it been before he had arrived? And Loki had been completely alone, going through all those terrible contractions, hearing the fight outside... No. Better distract him from the pain while they got to the medbay.

“So, who's the other dad?”

Just then, another contraction hit Loki, who doubled over, hands clutching his enormous stomach, and let out an ever louder scream. That... looked painful. They waited for a few moments before Loki could walk again.

“I don't... know. If you... remember.... nine months ago.... there were a lot of celebrations....”

It was true. Roughly nine months before they had officially retired, prompting many farewell parties. Loki had slept with just about every Avenger and Guardian willing. Including....

“Shit! It could be mine too! That threeway with Pepper!”

“It could be yours.... but that's just one... possibility.”
They reached the medbay and Loki had another contraction. They were getting closer, but that was a normal thing, right? They were supposed to do that. Still, Loki looked like death (usually so clean and well groomed, not a hair out of its place, and now he was pale and clumsy, he had dark shadows under his eyes and his long black hair was plastered to his head and neck with sweat) and Tony kept trying to distract him from the pain and the blood.

“Think about the combinations. I mean, a kid from the two of us would probably be one of the most intelligent beings in the universe, which sounds awesome, but a kid with your power and Steve’s moral compass? That could be the greatest Earth's defender in history.”

But Loki wasn't distracted by Tony's nonsense anymore. There was sadness in his eyes, a kind of quiet desperation beyond the pain.

“Something is wrong, Tony.”

“Hey, hey, none of that, okay? You're fine, your kid will be fine. Give me your hand, ok? And when it hurts, you squeeze it hard. You can do this, Lokes, I know you can.”

Loki's eyes were bright with unshed tears, but he took Tony's hand and nodded.

“Do you... do you want this baby?” It was a legitimate question. Loki had only found out a few months ago, and he could be voluble. But he'd been calmer lately, had found a place with Thor's friends, had found people that cared for him. And now that they were off the fights... it was a good moment.

“....yes.” Loki whispered, despite himself. “But I fear... it will not...want me.”

Tony's heart broke for the millionth time.

“Hush. You're going to be an awesome mum, I'm sure.”

And then there was another contraction and Loki’s scream came out almost like a sob and god, why did it hurt so much? Why?

Then there was more blood and Loki's eyes closed, too tired, too... drained. He couldn't keep it up any longer.

“Loki? Hey Loki! Don't you dare pass out! Loki!” Tony frantically tapped Loki's cheeks, but nothing. His head moved from side to side listlessly. No, no, no! This was so bad, so so bad. He needed Loki awake to push, to deliver that baby!

After a couple minutes of full-on panic, Tony decided that he wasn't going to let a half Loki-half other Avenger kid die before it was even born, and much less take one of his closest friends with them. He found some 0 negative and managed to put Loki in it, hoping Asgardian/Jotun blood and human were compatible. Nothing happened.

Well, desperate situations called for desperate measures. He sank an adrenaline syringe in Loki's chest. Loki's eyes opened, and he breathed.

“You're back, buddy. And I got you some blood, so you should be okay. I'm so glad to see you, really.”

Another scream. Loki's face was a mask of pain – now the contractions were all the time.

“You're almost there. Can you open your legs so I can see?”
Loki sank his head on the pillow, took a deep breath and complied.

“Ok, I see it. You push when you feel you need to, ok?”

Loki pushed through the next contraction, his back arching, all of his body working to deliver the child, but nothing was happening. The little energy from the adrenaline was running out, and there were black spots in his vision.

“Loki you're almost there, come on!”

And so Loki weathered the next contractions and pushed, and suddenly his body exploded in white hot pain. He felt the life slide out of him as Tony in the background told him to push one more time.

And suddenly...

Tony held in his hands a perfect baby boy, with snow white skin and wisps of black hair. He cried for a bit and then opened a pair of bright blue eyes (odd, right? He'd heard babies didn't open their eyes until later). In that moment, Tony decided he would protect this kid for the rest of his life.

“Loki!”

Loki's eyes were closed.

“Loki!!!”

Fortunately, the baby's cries woke Loki. Tony breathed relieved.

“Meet your son.”

Loki took the baby in his arms and sighed, content. It had been worth it, all of it.

“Have you thought of names?”

“I wanted to see his face. Now that I have...He will be called Ragnar.”

“Strong name.”

“Ragnar Anthony Lokason.”

“Ah, Lokes, I'm honored.”

“He probably wouldn't have survived without your help. Thank you, Anthony.”

“Yeah, I'll lecture you about that when you're better, I mean giving birth on your own? Stop endangering yourself like that, buddy, my heart can't take it.”

There were smiles. Loki looked at his baby and glad to be alive to meet him.

Celebrations could be heard outside, as the last of the enemies had been defeated.

A new day.

A new life.
I could write a whole thing on Ragnar Anthony (if you'd like a oneshot, tell me in the comments), I like him so much. I left the other dad blank you could fill it the other half of your Loki OTP :) . If you liked, please do tell, I know this subject is... controversial, but I hope I did okay.
Heatstroke

It was so hot, it was hard to think.

Loki had never liked the hot. While the rest of Asgardians basked in it, and loved to take every ray, to get a healthy golden tan, Loki had shied away from the and the heat of summers. He didn't feel invigorated after being in the sun, he didn't enjoy it. The heat made his head hurt, and if he was too long in the sun he got sick. The other Asgardians had laughed at him, called him odd, different.

It made sense now, why he was so bad at heat, and yet had such high tolerance for the cold so many others despised. It was the cold that invigorated him, that made him feel stronger, revitalised. And the heat... the heat just sucked the life out of him, made him dizzy and weak, his whole being burned when it was a sweet embrace for others. Because how do you kill a frost giant? Well, with fire, obviously.

Fire would have been a mercy compared what he was being subject to. Being slow roasted in the sun, like a sad blue chicken. Oh, his head hurt so much he couldn't even come up with an elegant analogy. That was how bad it was.

Some anti Avengers group had caught him and decided to chain him to the roof of skyscraper, in the middle of July. He had been there for hours, unable to free himself after being dosed with some sort of paralytic, just getting hotter and hotter under the sun. It was about two thirty, and he still had a lot of hours of sun. And it was just so hot... His head was starting to not work properly.

Sometimes he forgot where he was, or the fact that he couldn't leave. He would try to tug at his chains, wondering why the hell am I here when it's so sunny? A couple of times he tried to call for his mom, because he was feeling a bit wrong. Must be the heat. He had closed his eyes a long time ago to prevent more damage, but he kept opening them, forgetting where he was. He felt nauseated, but there was to throw up. It was puzzling and continuously horrifying situation, and it seemed to have no end. The heat was unrelenting, and his limbs were dying a slow painful death.

Yes, to make it more horrible, those guys had changed him into a tank top and some shorts, so that there was more white skin to burn in the sun. It was terrible, but at least he wasn't wearing all his layers of black leather – those bad guys had helped him without noticing. If he'd been wearing his usual getup he'd been dead from hyperthermia a long time ago. Or maybe the meant to do it: like this, his agony was longer.

He'd stopped sweating a long time ago, and skin looked red in the sun. That was probably bad. A normal Loki would have freaking out and thinking of any and every possible way in which he could get out of this awful situation, but too-long-in-the-sun Loki was too light-headed for such complicated thoughts. All he knew was that he wanted his brother, and some ice cream, and maybe a nice dip in a cold pool.

He felt so light-headed, so out of it... He was breathing rapidly, not realising what was going on. Not realising that if he didn't get out of sun in the next minutes the damage done by it may be too much too reverse. May be it was for the best, Loki thought as he closed his eyes. At least, that way, he wouldn't be so hot anymore.

**
This was bad, so so bad.

Some of the other Avengers had asked Rhodey to retrieve Loki, as he'd been taken (like some others) by an Anti Avengers group. Get him in that adress, untie him from wherever he was and try to fix whatever tortures they had prepared for the guy. If he was honest, Rhodey expected to find Loki surrounded by the bodies of those who had tried to hurt him, with a malevolent smile on his face. That was how he usually pictured Loki: malevolent, scheming, vicious.

The other seemed to have forgiven him for his past, and some of them were even very friendly with the guy, but Rhodey always pictured him like the first time he came to Earth, grandiloquent, imposing, evil. What if this was just a long con? There was something shifty about that guy, and they had plenty of shifty. No need to add more.

What he found was nothing like what he'd pictured.

Loki was chained to the roof of a skyscraper, and seemed to having been left there some time ago, as he looked red and terrible. Shit, didn't Tony say that Loki was actually from some ice planet? He started undoing the chains, before anything else. Seeing chained up people hurt his heart.

“Who... who is...?” Loki tried to say, the effects of the paralytic having disappeared, but those of the heat stroke fully hitting him.

“This is Rhodes, Loki, Sam and the others sent me here for you.”

Loki moaned. There was something important he needed to say, but he lacked the strength to say, so many words. No, he couldn't give up just yet.

“There is... tracker... in my... in my... neck. If I move.... they come. Drones and attack teams... too many.”

“But if we take the tracker out and leave it here it will seem that you haven't moved. Thanks for telling me, Loki, I know I'd rather not get swarmed by enemies while the nearest backup is half an hour away.”

So, first things first, he located the scar from where they had put in the tracker (and god, was his skin burning up, this was so not good) and took it out using some his suit's features, trying to be as gentle as possible. Loki was on the verge of unconsciousness, and Rhodey knew that heat stroke could lead to coma. No, thank you.

After he did so, he assessed the situation. His skin looked fairly bad, his heartbeat was too fast, his breathing shallow. This was a code red situation and so he asked for assistance.

“Heimdall, get me home.”

But Rhodey wasn't Heimdall. (He whished he was Heimdall, that man tall and handsome, had a great voice and could see the whole universe.) He added confusion to list of things wrong with Loki. It was a fairly bad heatstroke, bad enough that they couldn't wait for the others in the sun.

Rhodey had been deployed in places where heatstroke was a very constant and present threat, and he knew how to deal with it. They needed ice, some fan, and preferably some showers to bring Loki’s
temperature down, so he took Loki in his arms and flew him into one of the offices of the skyscraper. The a/c was good, but not good enough.

“Oh my god, Avengers!” A lady in one of the cubicles exclaimed “What have you done to poor Loki? He's my daughter's favourite.”

Rhodey smiled despite the situation.

“It was some bad guys. Now, ma'am, do you know if there are any showers in this building? It's an emergency.”

Another woman from a nearby cubicle took her head and answered.

“There's a gym three floors down, I figure they'll have showers. Oh gods, poor Loki indeed, he looked like a tomato, the poor soul. My favourite's the Captain though, please tell him Maura says hi. I mean, that man is dreamy.”

Rhodey left the ladies to their gossip and flew to the gym, breaking in without any second thought. Loki hadn't opened his eyes in too long. Thankfully, the showers were easy to find, and the gym goers left them some space. The super new war machine suit disappeared (well, that wasn't the word, but Rhodey couldn't care to remember. Retracted? Compacted?) and so he was able to open the shower and put maneuver Loki under it. Soft and slow water at first, more afterwards.

The redness would take a while receded completely, but skin wasn't burning so much. Good.

Loki sluggishly opened his eyes again, awakened by the blessed feeling of cool water on him.

“Loki? Can you recognise me?”

Please don't let there be any brain damage, please!

“I do, Colonel Rhodes. Thank you for taking me out of the heat. I really hate it.”

Emergency neutralised.

It was three days later that Rhodey and Loki were playing some computer games on Stark tower (he had misjudged the guy, I mean the guy told him about the tracker even when he was half dead from heatstroke so that he wouldn't be caught unawares in an attack, and remembered his rank, which was something a lot of more official Avengers didn't) when they saw a couple of familiar faces in video chat.

“Hello! We were redirected here by...someone. It's Sylvia and Maura from Dreegar incorporated, you flew in some days ago.” The ladies from the cubicles from the other day. “We just called to check in how Loki was doing?”

“I am much improved, thank you for your concern.”

“Well, that's good to hear, dear. You keep yourself cool, have a popsicle if you need to.”

Loki couldn't help smiling.

“And could you say hello to my daughter? She's a great a fan of yours, and she was very worried when I told her that you flew in all sunburnt and passed out. To the camera, we're recording this, aren't we, Maura? Her name is Kaylynn.”

“Hello, then, Kaylynn, Loki here. As you can see I am totally recovered, and very touched for your
concern. I thank you for your support and wish you the very best in any endavours. And again thank you for your appreciation, you have no idea of how much that means to me.” And a smile.

“Oh goodness, that was perfect!”

“She's going to freak OUT!”

Sometimes, being an Avenger was terrible. People paralysed you and left of on the merciless sun, burning like a sad blue chicken. But other times...

Other times it was the best thing in the world.
Stranded in space

Chapter Notes

Takes place after THAT scene in infinity war. You know the one. Hope you enjoy!

In the absolute middle of nowhere at all, Loki woke up. This was impossible, he knew, and yet it was exactly what was happening. He had been dead, his very body had lain for an unspecified amount of time, and now he was awake, again. His neck had been crushed, his windpipe had been shattered and he had felt the life go out of him. He'd known that he was dying and then he'd died. It had been simple, it should had remained that way.

So why was it that now, who knows how long later his eyes were opening again? As if he'd just been sleeping, as if his heart had never stopped beating. He could feel himself again, his limbs, his blood, the heartbeat, his whole body, back in the game. Maybe Thor had done something to bring him back, wherever he was. Maybe he simply was cursed with non-permanent death, which was so much more worse than immortality, because you died and always hoped it would stay that way this time... it never did.

He could only see open space all around him: stars, debris, satellites – the deeper space, haunting him again, eating him whole. He could glimpse what he thought were the bodies of other Asgardians in the distance, but that was it. There was nothing to hold on to, nothing to anchor himself in that vast infinity. He was stranded, stuck in in an undefined point of space. He wanted to scream, but had no voice. The void had taken it.

Loki couldn't move. He could blink, more or less, maybe flex the tips of his fingers, but that was it. His body was there, but not responding. He couldn't move in one direction, he couldn't even make a ball of himself. The gravitational forces of the galaxy weighed on him, and somehow got him paralysed. He was stuck there, forever. Again.

His time after he threw himself that first back kept coming to him, his lowest point, the days when he had suffered the most in his very eventful life. And now he was bound to repeat what was the worst time of his life, maybe forever. He felt like he did back then: small, hurt, insignificant, and utterly desperate. Loki hurt so much, so bad.

Outer space was pinning him there and he could do nothing but watch, being painfully aware of how slowly time passed, if there was such a thing as time in a place like that. He couldn't do anything to fix the situation, though, whatever leftover magic too weak against the forces of the vast space. He was but a dot in an infinite streams of stars, planets, but most of all, nothingness, the very backbone of space. Dark matter didn't find him pleasing – the feeling was mutual.

He wished he hadn't woken up, wished he had stayed dead for once. It would be preferable to this never ending hell. He been in the right place when he'd been needed, he had redeemed himself and then got himself killed before Thanos could use and abuse him again. It hadn't been a great end, not at all the glorious demise he'd pictured, but it had been an end, one that prevented him from having to withstand further horrors. But not even that little luxury he was allowed.

Now he was supposed to weather an eternity of waking solitude in space, alone, abandoned, forgotten, unable to move, unable to help himself, unable to die. He couldn't do anything to end this
torture, and no one else would rescue him. There was no reason for anyone to come for him – he was dead, long gone. Even if someone did eventually pass through where he was, they may mistake him for another dead body. His fate was sealed, and it was worse than any of his many nightmares.

Hadn't he suffered enough? Hadn't one time stuck in an endless void to be followed by the most gruesome tortures been enough? Were his sins really that terrible that he had to hurt, constantly, until his demise, and then some more? Space hurt him, and yet, space was the only company he had, now and forever.

Loki tried to concentrate on something to distract himself. Focus on the pain in his neck, on his back, on his lungs. He thought maybe... pain was temporary, at least it would give him some relief, remind him that some things started and ended...It didn't. The pain never wavered, it was like a constant, a scream in his head that never lower.

He wasn't just frozen in space, he was frozen physically too, frozen in that waking moment where he realised that he couldn't speak, that his head was hanging limply, devoid of even a proper neck to anchor his head.

In his mind, he called his parents, he called his sister, he called on Heimdall and all the gods he knew to help him, to please don't let him stay there forever. But his luck had run out, it would seem. No mercy for Loki. Time and time passed and he was still there, getting further and further away from the wreckage of the ship that once had contained the few Asgardians spared from Hela's massacre, getting further from anything that could give him any sort of comfort.

Loki closed his eyes, forcefully, trying to imagine that this was not happening, trying to imagine that this was simply an obscenely vivid nightmare. But every time he opened them again, space slapped him in the face, laughed at his predicament. He closed his eyes more forcefully this time, with all of the force he could muster.

Silver crystal tears shone through that corner of the galaxy.

At least he could still cry.

+ +

“I think he's waking up!” Valkyrie said, calling on her shipmates. She'd found Sif in a small pod that was about to run out of fuel, and invited her into the one she'd stolen from the Grandmaster. Valkyrie had been there when Thanos had... raided them and escaped with as many women as she could, and then set out find Thor, maybe find a home for all this refugees. They had also rescued a couple of people form the wreckage, miraculously alive, and that was when they found what they thought it was Loki's body.

Val had watched him die, and had to admit, despite them not having been the best friends, it made her sad. Loki had been interesting, fun and someone who knew how to survive in dire circumstances, much like herself. He was also a Revenger, however short lived their little band of....could they call themselves heroes? She was a drunk, Loki a trickster, Hulk a brutal fighter... Well, he'd been part of the gang. She would miss him.

“Are you sure he's dead?” Sif wondered. Loki had been dead before, and it never lasted too long. He always had a trick up his sleeve, and in this case, it may not be a bad thing. If this Thanos was as
formidable as the Valkyrie made him out to be, they could use Loki and his magic to fight him. They had been training the survivors as warriors, but all help was appreciated. Also Thor would be beside himself with joy if Loki came back again.

Sif heard for a breathing, a heartbeat. Something was making a small sound in Loki's chest, fluttery, weak, but there. The breathing was a more complicated business, but one of the girls there had been an apprentice of Eir's, and managed to construct a neck brace using spare parts she found lying around in the ship. They were repairing him- he hadn't been completely lost.

Some days later, his eyes opened. The apprentice, Sif and Valkyrie had been there to meet him, hoping that poor Loki hadn't completely lost his mind out there in space.

Loki's pale eyes opened again, and they were not met by the horrible space, no, but by familiar faces. Somebody had found him, somebody had given him shelter, somebody had taken him away from his boundless prison. The joy of having being found, of not being alone anymore, or being been healed and cared for, looked after when he'd given up on seeing anyone again, on feeling warmth... His happiness shone in his eyes, and was mirrored by that of the women that rescued him.

“Glad to see you again too, Loki.” Sif said. “Glad to have you back.”
Electrocuted

This was one of the favourite tortures of Thanos'. He would put a nice metal clamp in one of Loki's fingers and another one in the opposite foot – and then turn the electricity on. With higher and higher voltages each time, so that he could never get used to it. So that every time would hurt more and more, so that every he would dread it and fear it more and more.

“I'm only making you stronger.” The madman said, “one day, you'll thank me for my help.”

The truth was, Loki was at Thanos' mercy. When he'd arrived in his company he'd been shattered, both mentally and physically. aAfter discovering the truth about himself, trying to fix it and then being rejected by his father as he hung on the edge of an abyss and then deciding to end it all his mind had decided that it reached its limit, its tipping point and couldn't take any longer. All his defenses were destroyed, all his masks and personas. He just had no strength to face anything else.

And physically... well, by the time he'd made it to Thanos' place he'd already been falling and falling and falling throughout the cold vast universe for days and days, no food, no water, no rest, just an ending fall that broke all he was, burned him, hurt his eyes and airways. He'd been so easy to take, and even then he'd been defiant. I work alone, he would say, I don't take anyone's orders – if you need something from Midgard you take it yourself.

And that was when it started, when he started “teaching him lessons”, “making him stronger”. The methods varied, but Thanos found out that while ice and cold nearly had no effect on him, electricity did wonders to bend that little Asgardian's will. Oh, the fun he had watching him squirm and plead not to do it, Thanos hadn't enjoyed himself this much since the times when he used to Gamora and Nebula against each other.

And Loki didn't know what to do, how to escape. His mind was still in pieces after everything that had happened, and all that electricity, all that pain coursing through clouded his head even more. It was difficult to think, it was difficult to breathe, it was difficult to do anything other than scream, and scream, and scream. And he could hardly stand, which made any attempt to escape exceedingly difficult.

But he had no allies, no one he could convince into helping him. Apart from Thanos there was only occasionally the other, who would help him in the end, Loki was sure, but needed to think he was not helping – getting him away from Thanos was too obvious, he needed something more subtle. But Loki was beginning to think that there was no time for subtleties. That this was it.

He didn't mind all that much. Sure, he would have preferred to die by his own hand, by his own choice and not due to the tortures of a madman, but at least he would stop hurting. There would be no more shocks, no more burnt skin and flesh on his hands and wrists and feet. He wouldn't have to endure any more speeches, any more of Thanos' big words for anything. So Loki just the man do his worst, and hoped that his end would come soon.

Thanos' kept at it. He would change the voltage of the electricity mid-shock, so that the body couldn't get used to anything. So that Loki would think that the day's session was ending, when it still had so much more to go on. Loki hardly even screamed anymore, trading his cries for smaller whimpers and silent tears. He had given up.

Thanos didn't like that, and tried varying his punishments to get a better reaction, but nothing. Loki just took it, and Thanos hated that. He didn't want that complacency, he wanted suffering and horror and pleading eyes telling him to stop, that he would do anything for it to stop. That was why he did
all of this.

So the madman left to think about some new better, improved punishment and Loki had time to
gather his thoughts, despite the smell of burned flesh (his own flesh) assaulting his senses. There was
a chance.... If he played his cards.... He could go to Midgard, and pretend he was doing what Thanos
was doing. Hell, he could try and take it for himself, if it was so mighty. And then... when he
eventually lost (he really hadn't the motivation enough to win this, and he knew it)... maybe they
would take him to Asgard for trial.

He would see his mother... She may have lied to him his whole life, but was still a better sight than...
this. And he didn't know how much longer he had to live, but he knew that this was not the last thing
he wanted to see. A purple man with airs of grandeur, no, he deserved better than this. He deserved
to go home once before dying, he deserved, seeing his brother again, a small chance of making
things right. And he could get it, if he went to Midgard and lost.

And lose he would.

When Thanos came back with some electrified chains, Loki put together his broken down hands and
started the charade. Please, no more electricity, I'll go, I'll obey you, I'll be your spy on Midgard, I'll
never tell on you, I'll do anything. He was glad he was such a good actor. In fact, he decided that the
story he would tell on Asgard would be that he chose to go to Midgard, maybe as a revenge against
Thor? Yes, that was a good story, better than the actual one.

And so he went to Midgard, and lost, and tried to forget.

All the memories came rushing down when Thor put one of those disks on him on Sakaar. He was
suddenly frozen in the spot, dread eating him whole, even if the disks were smaller, even if the
potency was a tiny part of what Thanos had put him through. But the horror of finding himself
trapped in there, again, in the mercy of those damned electrical currents...

Luckily, it didn't last long. When Korg and his associates helped him up Loki felt.... much better.
This time he was able to defeat the electricity without begging, this time his mind was whole enough
to convince this guys to help him, and help Asgard too. This time...

This time he won. And no one could take that victory away from him.
Loki is there when Steve decides it's been long enough looking up at the ceiling in his bed and decides to go the kitchen.

There's always somebody up in the apartment where Steve is living. No matter what time it is, there's always somebody who can't sleep. He himself, very often. Bucky sometimes too, Wanda when she is visiting, an occasional Natasha.

Now it's 3:30 in the morning and Steve has gone to the kitchen/living room of the place, and has found Loki there, melancholically looking out of the window. Loki never seems to sleep. Steve though that it was god-alien thing, but apparently, it isn't. According to Jane Foster, Thor sleeps a million hours. Sure, then he can go on more time than us mere mortals, but he has to sleep and sleep and lot. Still, Loki is “adopted” not the same species as Thor, so....

But it isn't that, and Loki admits it one night, when they are trying to play chess (it can be hard, with your head all muddled from not having slept) and they keep tying and normally Loki had already won by now, but he has a stupid migraine and he says so.

“Ugh, I really need to sleep if I can't even beat a tiny mortal at chess.”

“I thought you guys slept less.”

“We are supposed to sleep more, actually. Not as often, but many hours.” Loki admits, rubbing his eyes.

Thor used to sleep so good, the perfect golden child even at that. Not Loki. His sleeping habits have always been terrible, no routine, no constancy. He would spends night reading and then be sleepy the next. Or try to go to bed the same time as Thor, as spend hours in bed overthinking things. Wishing something as simple as sleeping wouldn't be so hard.

He really wishes he could sleep. It's been so long... and his head hurts so much. It pulsates, it throbs. And it never ends. He spends his days yawning and dragging his exhausted body around and when the time to sleep finally arrives he's twitchy, nervous, and even when he forces his eyes closed he knows, deep inside, that he's not going to get any rest. He will toss and turn, throw away the covers, get some more covers, have some water, go to the toilet to relieve himself, maybe have a shower, look at the clock, stop looking at everything, close the blinds better, adjust his eye mask, decided that the eye mask is too hot.... And nothing will work.

Time will pass too slowly (dragging those infernal nights in which he doesn't want do anything but sleep and frustration will keep growing forever) or too quickly (he will realise how much time he's passed of the night trying to fall asleep without achieving anything, and how soon the next day will come), and it all will continue to be a waking hell. He's hardly had a dozen good nights of sleep ever since came back from... you, know, being dead. At least, this time, he's not alone.

Thor has gone away to look for Sif and any other survivors, but Loki is still a bit delicate to go on adventures, so his brother has dumped him on Rogers' place.

“Steven, I trust you will not let my brother get himself killed again.”

“Tall order.”

“That's why I'm asking you, it is an extraordinary mission, but you are an extraordinary man.”
Steve thought that Loki would be more trouble, but the truth is he's been mostly harmless. He does
some magic tricks, reads, outsmarts whomever is visiting, has Thanos flashbacks, laughs at cartoons.
And at night, he doesn't sleep.

When Steve finds out, that yes, Loki's supposed to sleep same as him, he decides to try and find a
solution. Sleeping pills never worked for him because of the serum, but they do work for Bucky
most days, so they give it a try. They decrease Loki's migraine a bit, but that's it. He remains there,
on the bed, with his eyes scrunched closed but painfully aware of how not sleep he is.

“It was worth a shot.” Steve says, genuine sadness in his eyes. He knows how awful it is not being
able to sleep first hand, and he doesn't wish it on anyone. He hates that he can't anything more for
Loki, or for himself.

They try hypnotherapy (just the two of them, Bucky can't stand the idea of someone meddling in his
mind anymore) and it goes as well as expected. You can't hypnotise people with personalities as
strong as theirs. You can't hypnotise people who question every step of the way, can't do anything
for people who decide that it won't work. Even when they were severely sleep deprived, their minds
were too sharp.

“Yay us.” Loki says with double portion of sarcasm.

Steve tiredly smiled. Now he did everything tiredly.

He doesn't know when he everything got so wrong – he used to be able to sleep, not a lot, and not
often, but enough. Maybe it was Bucky dying on him again, maybe it was seeing all those people
disappear, maybe it was the unending horror of war, again, clouding his head, telling him that if he
slept something terrible would happen. Ugh.

He's so tired, sometimes he even misses the ice.

“Don't talk to me about ice.” Loki says, a shiver coursing through him.

Steve knows about the Jotun debacle. And about falling to the void, and about Sakaar. Steve knows
a lot about Loki now, because in those unending hours, they've told each other a lot of stuff. Their
guards aren't that up with their heads so scrambled from sleep deprivation, and it is something that
distracts them from the shittiness of not sleeping, which includes: not being to think or concentrate
properly on anything, getting oddly jumpy and thinking the world is out to get you, even more
anxiety than usual, a horrible sense of balance, and sometimes even an occasional visual
hallucination. All joy.

One day Loki manages to sleep two hours, but then he wakes up screaming and nearly throws
himself off the window because he thinks he's a prisoner again, and needs to escape. Another day
Steve manages to sleep something... but wakes up completely disoriented, not knowing where he is,
or more importantly, when he is.

It was tough.

Banner is supposedly working on a drug designed especially for each of them, and they try some
breathing techniques without much success. In the meantime they have each other (misery does love
company, doesn't it?) and netflix. They watch all Game of Thrones (Loki likes littlefinger, though he
wishes they wouldn't focus so much on the creeper angle; Steve's favourite is Brienne) and a bunch
of sitcoms (Loki enjoys the good place; Steve's favourite is, oddly enough, a little show called Happy
Endings about very regular folks). They both really enjoy “don't trust the bitch in apartment 23”.
Reminds me of themselves.
Surely one day they will find some way to go to sleep and finally find some sleep. Maybe the next time they'll turn to booze, or pot. For now, they are awake. And even if they're tired, and their thoughts are messy...

At least, there's someone else awake with them, who understands...

“What is this, a raccoon eyes party?”

Someone who will also launch himself crazily at Stark for mocking their pain.
Friendly fire

It was only a split second, but everything went to hell.

“Loki!” Tony screamed regretting his entire existence for a moment, as Loki fell on the floor, knocked down by one of his blasters, make an awful sound.

He hadn't meant to hit him, of course he hadn't! Despite their very rocky beginnings, Loki had become one of his best friends, and he would never hurt him on purpose. The bad thing about Loki was that he was awfully sneaky and sometimes he appeared out of nowhere, materialised out of thin air and it scared Tony, especially if he had a bad day, or a bad dream, or if he was too caught up in his work... Sometimes his instincts took over and he fired before asking questions.

This was bad. Tony could already see a pool of blood forming under Loki, and the big red circular red angry injury in his chest from where the blaster had hit. Oh, god, did it have to be the chest? The chest was full of vital important organs! Getting hurt there was never good news. Tony knew this from personal experience. It was a deep and serious injury, and he'd been the one to cause it.

“Oh, shit! Loki, I'm so sorry! And that was your bad lung too, wasn't it?” (Of the course of time, they'd all become familiar with Loki's may medical issues, in this case a lung he hurt while he was younger) “I'm so sorry, oh god, I'm calling.... I'm calling help, don't worry...”

This was a welcome novelty for Loki. Not the getting hurt part – that he was very used to, as it happened more often than not. He'd been hurt much and often, in many different ways, and more than once by the members of his own group (Thor's friends when they were young, Volstagg and Sif most of all, followed by “you shouldn't have come with us”, once or twice Thor himself). No, what was new was the apologizing.

Normally, when Loki got hurt it was because somebody wanted him to be hurt. An alarming number of people from different realms enjoyed toying with him and seeing him injured, enjoyed inflicting pain on him, and as much as possible. A lot of them had looked down on when he got hurt, eyed him with disgust and superiority for being so weak and fragile. Sometimes his companion got angry at him because his injury meant they had to stop what they were doing, or were simply appalled at his state. But not apologetic.

People were never sorry for hurting him. But Tony was. He was so, so sorry. He felt fifty shades of awful- Loki had been hurt a lot of times, by enemies from every side possible. Very often it was them him and his team mates, and it had always been on purpose. Loki was already very much one of those self doubting people who didn't really believe he belonged in the team, and having one of its members blast you in the chest... What if this put in jeopardy everything that they'd built? What if because of his careless action Loki went back to not trusting them and being evil?

This could be a tipping point for the worst and Tony felt that no apology would or could be meough for the hole in Loki's chest. Saying sorry was easy but it didn't fix the damage... Tony groaned. He'd screwed up, badly, like he always did. But this time it was worse because he'd screwed up with somebody he shouldn't have – Loki was very sensitive, and didn't forget anything that was done to him. Shit, shit, shit.

And besides, the guy had been hurt more times than they could count, he'd been murdered, he killed himself, he'd been blown up and electrocuted and one million other things... It wasn't fair that he'd get hurt by those that were supposed t be watching his back too. And god or not he had to have his limits, and what if this injury left him with sequels? What if he never recovered? It would be on him,
and Tony didn't think he could handle that again.

Trying not to think about it too much, he took the injured god in his arms and flew him to the medical floor on his tower. He left Loki in the care of his incredibly overqualified medical personnel, with orders of informing him with any change, any development.

There was blood on his hands and armour, and Tony wanted to break down. But he also wanted to be whole for Loki, make sure that he knew he was there trying to fix what he caused and so that the moment his life wasn't in danger and he was awake and conscious he could tell him how much he didn't mean to do that, and how terribly sorry he was.

He received a notification from one of the nurses that Loki had been rushed to surgery for an emergency reconstruction of his lung, and Tony's eyes welled up with tears.

“What's going on?” Nebula asked, appearing out of nowhere as she often did. “What happened to you?”

Oh shit. Nebula was going to kill him.

“I... we were on battle... I accidentally hit Loki in the chest... He's in surgery right now.”

Nebula approached in the most threatening way known to man with a stern and dangerous look on her face.

“But it was an accident, right? You are sure you did not want to hit him.”

“I swear, Nebula! I am so sorry and I am so worried that he'll think I did on purpose, that some part wanted to hurt him for our past... You know how he is...”

“I do. Just be there when he wakes up. Maybe make some sort of grand gesture to compensate? You know how dramatic he is.”

So, while he kept being updated on Loki's condition (now he's hooked to a ventilator – now there's some repairs being done on the affected area with some high end quick-scar products – now we're just waiting for for him to go back to breathing on his own) Tony started thinking about what the hell he could do to compensate.


Loki didn't remember much when he woke up. He knew that there had been a blast, he knew that his chest had been hurt... He knew that he'd stopped breathing at some point, and that he was better now. Some Midgardian medical facility... and three pairs of eyes looking at him intently.

Thor, Nebula and Tony Stark.

“Hey, good to have you back. How are you feeling?”

Then it came back to him, the mistake, all that apologising, the blast in his chest. Had he done something to provoke the guy...? Probably. Loki's mind was still a bit fuzzy after the trauma of such a major injury, but everything was coming back, gradually.

And then he saw it. A huge I'm sorry banner, all that candy, a bunch of Loki figurines around, his favourite ice cream.
“I didn't know how to really say sorry so I made you a little...play.”

And there in the hospital bed's tv there was the recording of a play that depicted Loki's greatest hits with the Avengers, and where he was praised to no end, accompanied by a small appearance at the end by Stark himself (and not the actor who played him) reiterating his apologies. It was... incredible. Unexpected. Perfect.

Getting hurt, especially this bad, was never pleasant, but when you got to wake up to something like that...

Even in that hospital bed, still hooked to all those machines, he couldn't help but smile.
Haunted

Chapter Notes

Very short (belated) Halloween chapter. Hope you like!

Sometimes, he sees them. All the people he has killed, on purpose or by accident comes back from their ghostly plane, to taunt him, to mock him, to hurt him. To remind him of everything that he's done, to remind that he will never be free of the man he used to be. To remind him that there is forgiveness he can never get, things that he can't make up for. Redemption doesn't resurrect the dead.

He sees Laufey, laughing at him calling him a runt, unworthy, a painful mistake. *I should have made sure that you were properly dead when I abandoned you*, Laufey's ghost says and Loki's eyes get bright with unshed tears. Laufey's ghost is very cruel, reminds him that he is unworthy even of a race of monsters, asks him if he thinks himself better than any other Jotun. *Little ice monster, not good enough of being a prince. I did well in leaving you kinslayer and kingslayer. You're unworthy of anything you've ever gotten, unworthy of life.*

But the ghosts change, although Laufey is one that appear very often, there are others that hurt more. Like the ghost of his mother, reminding him how he without knowing it sent her killers to where she was. *After all I did for you, Loki, after all that I loved, all that I taught you, and this is how you repay me? I looked after you your whole life, and the last thing you ever told me was that I was not really your mother....*

Loki's head hurts, and his chest hurts, and his throat hurts and he closes his eyes and put his hands on his ears, but he can still hear her voice, so painfully clear. And it hurts him, even though it's a voice that used to give him so much comfort now it hurts him because he knows that those things she's saying are true and he hates it. He hates that he did this to her, he hates that he's hurt all the family he's ever had.

The Chitauri come often too. They ask him why he led them to extinction, why he got them all killed, when he'd done nothing to them. *You promised us glory and power if we followed you, and we were obliterated. We weren't the ones who hurt you, and yet, you got us all killed. You lived and we died. For what? For nothing, for a failed crusade that went nowhere. And you killed us all. Aren't us monsters your kin? If you hate yourself so much why can't you kill yourself properly?*

All of those ghosts want him dead, and Loki figures it's logical. They are dead because of him, and he still lives. Granted, he's died a few times, but while he's always come back they are dead, forever and ever and it's not fair, it's never fair. These ghosts come at him when he is at his lowest, and whisper in his ear all those horrors about himself he knows to be so terribly true. And he thinks that maybe he should pay attention to those voices and end it all.

He's done enough damage, hasn't he? He's gotten so many people killed, he's destroyed so many placed. Jotunheim was destroyed. Asgard is nothing but ashes. Midgard was ravaged by Thanos. Maybe he's the problem, maybe if he dies, he'll become a ghost himself, unable to hurt anymore and able only to haunt.... Maybe that is the solution.

He is just so tired. So tired of not being able to anything for these ghosts, he is tired of being haunted by what he was and what he still is. All that he's decided to do with himself is wrong, and has had
awful consequences. He should have stayed dead, where every day was night and where voices and visions couldn't hurt him any more. And so he tries, but every time he tries there's someone there to stop him. Not ghosts, but flesh and blood people.

Bruce Banner tells him about meditation. Steve Rogers tells him about the benefits of outrunning your ghosts, or smashing them to oblivion in a punching bag. Peter Quill tells him about music has kept him going. Gamora tells him about ways to forget and bury your past. Natasha Romanoff about hypnotic tricks. They are all there, to chase the ghosts away.

When he closes his eyes not to see the ghosts, they make them disappear, so when Loki opens his eyes again there's only a living person, telling him that it will be okay. They replace the voices hurting him with kind words, so that the ghosts will appear less and less often.

These people haunt his ghosts, so that he can sleep, and eat, and live.

And maybe he would never be completely free of these presences, but he wouldn't join them either.

Not while he is an Avenger.
Chapter Notes

AU for the end of Avengers 1

Being Hulk smashed is not something one could easily recover from, not even being a god.

Loki made the most pitiful noises as he lay there, on the crater shaped like him. He felt broken in a way that felt new to him, unable to explain, impossible. As if he had the organs in the wrong place as if all his blood was in his airways and all the air was where it shouldn't be, and all the acids and fluids were just flowing rampant and destroying everything on the outside.

Loki doubted he would ever able to movie again.

He'd been thrown around and used as a rag doll – he impacted against the floor in a way that broke it, he broke the solid floor with his own body, limbs and head. It was... painful, and he wished for the sweet relief of unconsciousness, but couldn't get it. He felt like he'd oned out for some minutes, but the pain kept bring him back. It was sharp sometimes, sometimes it traveled, sometimes it got worse. And trying to move... well, that was the ultimate nightmare.

And he knew nobody would come and help him, so he would have to suffer in that crater for a long time. His brother and his associates were out there finishing off the Chitauri, and possibly after that there would be some sort of victory celebration. It would be a long time before anyone found him, and he just wanted to cry. It just hurt so much.

He was so mangled in so many different places, in so many different ways, it was different to even remember anything of who he was or where he was beyond the pain. All the grandiloquence and and the arrogance from before were long forgotten, his whole plan a distant bitter memory. He wished he hadn't done any of this, but it had like a clever way of getting away from Thanos and getting something in return. But he had failed, he had failed spectacularly and now he was paying for it.

He thought himself so much better... if not better, at least smarter than the rest of them. Smarter than Thor, than Thanos, and than any Midgardian that would come his way. Of course, he hadn't been counting on a green beast or such advanced iron armours, but still... It was horrifying to see how incredibly they had bested. He wasn't better than Thor, than any of them. He wasn't better than simple Midgardians, he was just a bloody mess of a god that did nothing but hurt and hurt even more.

“Enough with the charades, Loki. Get up and face your punishment. The games are over.”

But Loki couldn't move, much less sit up or stand up. That was out of question and he said so, even if he knew Thor would think he was lying.

“I cannot.”

“Cease your pretense, Loki. We have had enough of your lies.”

And what could Loki say to make his brother believe him? Nothing. At his his own fault, too, he'd
been so dishonest in the past that now he couldn't get anyone to believe him when he was being honest. He just looked at Thor with bloodshot eyes, trying to communicate how much he couldn't move. He weakly coughed up some blood, and it only angered Thor even more.

“I will not be fooled by you again, brother! You've gone too far and I will let you escape because of pity or compassion won me over. You will be chained and face fair trial.”

If I last that long, Loki thought.

“You will have to carry me.” Loki said in what was little more than whisper. “I have no strength to move.”

Thor complied, but angrily.

“I wish you would stop playing and face up to what you have done, but if you insist then I will carry you. Just do not ask me to be gentle.”

Thor did pick him up from the floor and all that sudden movement threw Loki's severely damaged body for a loop. Thor saw that under his brother there was some skin, hair and blood on the floor, marking the places where he'd hit it the hardest. Hum. That was...something. Generally to draw the blood of someone such as he or his brother, something extremely powerful was needed, something of Mjolnir-level of power. This begun to convince Thor that maybe Loki wasn't lying. (Thor wasn't all that hard to convince, because in the end of the day he always wanted Loki to be telling the truth).

His next clue was the uncoordinated odd way in which Loki's unfocused eyes opened and closed, as if he really was the rag doll if he'd felt while being plunged into the floor. He was short circuited, and he couldn't speak anymore – an odd, small noise he didn't realise he was making, like a little whine. There was blood coming from his mouth... and from many other places and Thor understood that this was serious.

And Thor got angry.

Natasha Romanoff, Steve Rogers and Bruce Banner appeared in the door of the room, wondering what was taking so long.

“YOU BROKE MY BROTHER!!”

Bruce cringed and took a couple steps back and put his hands up defensively.

“In my defense, it was the Hulk, not me. I can't control what he does.”

“Are we sure this is not a ruse?”

“LOOK AT HIM!”

One look at Loki's half-open eyes and all the blood that kept dripping were enough to convince, at the very least, Steve.

“All right.” He said “We will get your brother some medical help, but he'll have to have some armed guards and... all the measures we can think of so he doesn't escape. But we aren't letting him die, all right?”

“I would... I would have him transferred back to Asgard but I fear the trip might kill him, in the state he's in.” Thor said. Why had he wasted time not believing Loki? He was a good actor, but not this good.
Getting Loki some medical help was... complicated. First, there was the fact that he wasn't even human, and a lot his readings didn't make sense to any doctor from Earth, and they didn't know what was normal for him and they didn't know how to help, or what substances could be harmful or toxic.

Then there was the fact that he was a terrorist who had just an alien invasion New York... There was a lot of medical personnel who flat out refused to treat him, and some people who even protested against him getting any help at all. The few people who accepted also had to deal with the fact that if they screwed up the actual god of thunder would get very angry at them.

Complicated was putting in it mildly.

After about fifteen hours of work, Loki was more or less stable. Fifteen breaks had been set and plastered, he had undergone seven surgeries to try and fix the internal damage and was gone in an induced coma, to try and give him some time to heal all that had been wrong.

Bruce was heartbroken. No matter what Loki had done, this was not the way go about making things right. He'd asked the doctors to tell him, and the amount of damage that the Hulk had done...

“Thor, I'm just... I'm so sorry...”

“Stop, Banner. I... I understand it wasn't your doing. And it is Loki's fault first and foremost, for doing this dreadful things... He hurts himself with every choice he makes. And for such a long time, I was blind to all this self-hatred... to all this pain. If I had known, if I had validated him more, maybe it wouldn't have come to this. Or if he would just talk to somebody before doing horrible things and throwing himself into voids!”

Thor sighed.

“There's still good in him, and a lot of it, but he's just... very troubled. And I know that is no excuse for all he's done, but... he's done a lot of good too, with me and my friends, in Asgard. Caused trouble but then saved us from it. Been diplomatic when the allfather was too blunt, fixed my words when I slighted a foreigner. I wished you would get to see that side of him too.”

“I do too, Thor. And again, I am terribly sorry that things ended up like this.”

On the bed in front of them, Loki was in that artificial sleep, timeless, weightless, and fortunately, free of pain.

But the people watching him... they hurt. All of what Loki had done and all what he'd been through too had left an scar. On him, on Thor, on Bruce, on New York. Things would never be the same. Perhaps it was best if he slept forever.

End Notes

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