As You Say

by LilyAnson

Summary

Loki returns to Asgard to face the consequences of his actions. He expects an unfair trial. He expects Odin's hate. He expects the worst possible sentence. He doesn't expect what he gets (either at the trial or after). This work is posted without the use of my beta, all mistakes are mine.

Notes

This is a WIP and yes I'm working frantically to finish it. Please don't be too harsh, this is my first MCU fic. Some tags may apply to things that are not yet posted.
Chapter 1

Chained and effectively gagged with the accursed muzzle Loki seethed. The trial had been little more than a farce. He hadn’t even been given the opportunity to speak in his own defense. The council had ruled it ‘unwise’ to remove his muzzle to allow him to explain his actions. Any other accused was always given the chance to defend themselves but he was to be denied. The sheer unfairness of the situation only served to add to the fury swirling throughout his entire being. Only one thing would have made this more bearable yet he had been denied even that small concession.

He had hoped that at the very least he would be able to see his mother yet she had not been allowed to be present. Even though family was not allowed to speak in the defense of an accused they were usually allowed at the trial. Yet Odin had banned Frigga from Loki’s trial for his own reasons. He had not seen fit to explain the reasons but Loki could guess. Oh yes, he could definitely guess why Odin would disallow Frigga’s presence at his trial. Yet one more reason to hate his so called father. A trial where he couldn’t defend himself for a crime that wasn’t his fault -- well not solely his fault -- and he wasn’t even able to see his mother before the sentencing. Loki’s scowl deepened.

Opening his mouth Loki let out yet another hoarse scream. The whip slicing through his skin would have been painful enough without any of the rest of it. As the whip fell away he felt the heat pooled deep inside mixing with the familiar feeling of his seiðr. Desperately he sought to suppress his magic. His efforts were futile. There was nothing he could do that would stop or even slow the inevitable. Clamping his jaw closed he struggled to keep from making any sound. It didn’t work. As the heat built to excruciating levels he could feel his seiðr prickling just under his skin. Finally the magic burst through the opening made by the whip and an almost blinding brilliant green light filled the room. By the time he was done screaming the flare had faded and the agony caused by expelling his magic was slightly more manageable. Sagging in his bindings he struggled to catch his breath when the whip struck him once again and once again he cried out in agony.

He had long since lost count of how long he’d spent being ‘trained’. At this point all he cared about were the times when they would finish with their ministrations and leave him bloody and broken but alone. He might never mourned the loss of his seiðr half as much as he did during these times. Normally he would have been able to heal himself but they’d taken even that small trick away him. The heavens forbid he be allowed some small amount of reprieve, he thought dejectedly. He decisively avoided glancing down as he pulled his legs up underneath himself. The absolute last thing he wanted to see were the runes branded into his flesh just above his ankles that prohibited him from accumulating any amount of seiðr with which to cast spells. Slowly he wrapped his arms around his legs and lowered his head to rest on the top of his knees.

Crouched in the corner of his cell Loki huddled with his arms raised to at least try to protect his head from the blows. He couldn’t let himself be knocked unconscious. When they chose to hurt him they wanted to hear him scream. They wanted to see him arch in pain. They hated it when he fell unconscious and couldn’t feel the pain while they were inflicting it. If he didn’t stay conscious and suffer through this now it would only be worse later. He really wasn’t sure if it wouldn’t be worth it though just to get a small break. Just one tiny-. A boot connected just right and he felt two of his ribs crack. His lungs seized and prevented him from screaming but his arms instinctively moved to protect his injured midsection.
A hand gripped his hair and yanked his head forward. Loki fell forward and barely managed to turn his head so he didn’t smash face first into the floor. Another kick aimed at his ribs connected with his arms still wrapped protectively around his midsection. Loki cried out again but did his best to force his hands to unclench. Slowly he managed to unwrap them from himself and tried to force them to stretch out forward. He moved too slowly for his tormentors and they pulled his arms straight for him. Pain from his cracked ribs flared and dark spots danced before his eyes. Please don’t let me pass out, Loki silently begged.

-Mouth open, crying out silent screams, Loki’s hands scrambled for purchase against the smooth stone of the floor. Father! Father please, I am sorry! It was too much. He couldn’t take anymore. The person behind him now was only the newest in the long line of people that had shown up to rape him today. Time had long since ceased to hold any meaning. The one thing that did still hold meaning was the pain.

“Say it!”

Despite the pain and humiliation he still couldn’t say it. It was such a small thing to deny them after everything else but he just couldn’t bring himself to say it. It was the last tiny thread of self respect he had left and he couldn’t find it in himself to willingly let go of it just yet.

“Say it slave!”

“No… please.”

“Say it!”

“Please!”

“Say it!”

“Master! Please stop now, please! Master! I said it, please!”

“I didn’t say it would end your punishment slave.”

As his rapist began laughing Loki finally broke. Heaving sobs wracked his body as tears spilled down his face. In that instant Loki knew he had finally lost the last single shred of himself. Whatever these people wanted he would do it. If it meant calling them his masters then he would do that. If it meant submitting to being tortured he would do that. Anything to keep them from adding to the punishments they were already determined to mete out to him.

-It’s almost time to get you ready for your new master, slave.”

As it wasn’t a direct question any comment he made would end in punishment. Wisely he chose to remain silent. His current tormentor twisted his arm even farther and Loki cried out hoarsely. His throat was too raw from his previous screams for the cry to be much more than a harsh whispering noise. Not being allowed sleep and having been punished for days without reprieve his mind had finally begun to numb itself to some of the horrors. Some, but most definitely not enough. The pain was still unbearable and Loki wasn’t sure how he had not died from it alone. The prospect of only being required to serve one master seemed vastly tolerable to serving any that wanted to use him. Then again, what if his new master hurt him even worse than these tormentors? Was that even possible, Loki wondered.
“Perhaps your new master will let others play with you from time to time,” his current tormentor jeered. “Maybe he’ll even let others join in when you require punishment.”

Loki shivered briefly before just that slight motion caused even more pain to shoot down the arm being twisted behind his back. He couldn’t take it. He needed time to be able to rest, to heal, to just let his mind recuperate enough to form one single coherent thought. Loki broke and tears began to stream down his grime ridden cheeks praying for this to end soon.

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Loki lay on the cold, smooth, floor barely breathing and not daring to move. He had no idea where they were this time but it mattered not. For the moment he was no longer being hurt and that was all that mattered. All to soon they would return their attention back to him and the pain would begin one more. Until then he was bound and determined not to draw any attention to himself unnecessarily. Distantly he could hear shouting but he didn’t bother to even try to make out the words. As long as their anger was directed at another Loki was more than content to let it remain so.

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“Excuse you?” Tony asked in disbelief. “I’m not sure I heard that correctly. You want to run that by me again?”

“By royal decree the Allfather graciously decided that you shall be gifted the slave formerly known as Loki-”

Tony held a hand up to stop the other from speaking. “Hold it right there. Right, see that’s what I thought you said. Yeah that’s actually not going to work for me.”

“Not going to work for you,” the other repeated slowly.

“Yep, glad you understand. So if that’s everything then-”

“So you are turning down the gift of the slave?”

Tony opened his mouth to reply but stopped short. Something about the tone tall, dark, and persistent used gave him pause. He had a feeling he was missing something. “What exactly happens to Loki if I don’t accept him as…” He couldn’t bring himself to even use the word. “Well, what happens if I don’t accept him?”

“He will be gifted to the only other person on the list. Perhaps that is for the best. The other candidate does seem more prepared to punish him properly.”

“Uh huh,” Tony stated noncommittally. “And just what precisely do you mean by punished properly?”

“I mean no offense to you Man of Iron, merely that the other candidate already has the needed disposition and… ‘equipment’ to deal with a wayward slave.”

Equipment. Tony turned the word over and over in his mind. He didn’t really like the imagery it conjured. “When you say ‘equipment’...”

“Standard equipment used to punish slaves, nothing you need concern yourself with if you are choosing not to accept the slave. Rest assured even if he is allowed to die he will suffer for many years before that will be allowed. I have seen the results before. The slave will understand the error his transgressions and will beg to be allowed to make restitutions. Not that it will be possible, mind
you. By that time he will be lucky if he is even able to stand on his own let alone think straight. After only a week.”

“Get out,” Tony snarled. The other standing in front of him stared in confusion. “You heard me. Get out of here now!”

“As you wish. After we collect the slave-”

“Not happening,” Tony disagreed.

“The slave cannot stay.”

“Loki’s staying right here and it’s you that’s leaving,” Tony insisted.

“Then you accept him as your property?”

“Yes,” Tony growled. “Now leave.”

“Then you must sign the contract.”

“Fine, let me see it.”

- “Slave!” one of his guards called.

He tried, he did, but he was unable to gain his feet. Instead of continuing to try for his feet and forcing his jailers to wait thus inviting punishment he crawled towards the voice. When he deemed he was close enough he pressed his forehead to the cool, smooth, floor and awaited further instructions.

“This is to be your new prison. You will stay here for the foreseeable future. If your new master deems it necessary you will be retrieved and taken back to be retrained before either being returned to your master or given a new one. Do you understand?”

“Yes sir,” Loki whispered.

“You know the rules?”

“Yes sir,” Loki repeated.

“You remember what will happen if you break them?”

Loki blanched. He nodded vigorously trying to speak. The words wouldn’t come and he began to panic. If he didn’t answer he would be punished. His breath caught in his lungs making it infinitely more difficult to form words.

“Leave,” ordered an all too familiar voice.

Loki froze.

“Are you deaf or just stupid? I’ve already agreed to accept him, there’s no reason for you to stay.”

Loki’s panic increased exponentially. They couldn’t leave him here. There was no way that he would survive any amount of time at the mercy of Tony Stark. After everything he had done to this man? They couldn’t just leave him here!
“As you please.”

Instantly Loki felt the absence of the others. No! He would have cried out verbally but he was not permitted to speak without permission. He was not permitted to do anything without express permission from his master. If that master was now Tony Stark he feared he would suffer more than he would be able to stand. Loki curled into a ball and hoped to be left alone, at the very least until he could regain some of his strength.

“On your knees,” came the command.

Loki moved instantly. The magic didn’t allow for hesitation. You either obeyed immediately or you were wracked with pain well beyond that which was tolerable. At least some of the time, if you tried your best but still failed, the magic wouldn’t punish you immediately. Loki considered it a source of pride that he finally managed to make it to his knees before the magic felt the need to punish him. He wobbled dangerously but somehow he actually managed to stay upright. Suddenly a sharp blow struck the back of his head and the world went black.

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“At the very least can’t we move him to a bed?”

“Why?”

“Oh come on Tony!”

“Master?” Loki whispered, momentarily unable to make sense of the words. For the moment he was only able to discern they belonged to his new owner. Had he been issued an order? Was he to be punished again?

“Oh I’m sorry, I seem to remember him throwing me out of a window in an attempt to kill me and I’m the bad person here for not treating him like some kind of honored guest?”

“So what then? We just leave him lying there on the floor?”

‘Yes,’ Loki desperately pleaded mentally. ‘Please just leave me alone!’ No chance of that Loki realized when he heard the loud footsteps approaching. Quickly he closed his eyes again hoping against hope that they would assume he was still unconscious and leave him be for the moment.

“Loki!” Tony yelled.

Unable to disobey his new master Loki’s eyes flew open. Usually he would be expected to kneel if he were able to move when his master called for him. He was unsure if moving would actually be a good idea or not in this situation. Perhaps Tony would appreciate having his former enemy lying broken and beaten on the floor before him? Tony stopped no more than two footsteps from where he lay and Loki tensed. For a moment nothing happened. Was Tony waiting for Loki to reply? If that were so why had the pain not rendered him helpless?

“Move,” Tony ordered suddenly.

Loki’s eyes widened at the command frantically wracking his brain trying to understand ‘how’ he was supposed to move in order to comply with that command. The time he spent desperately contemplating how to obey lasted longer than the magic allowed. Before he could find an acceptable way to move in an effort to obey the order his body was wracked with indescribable pain.

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“What did you do?” Steve shouted as he unceremoniously shoved his way past.

“Nothing… I didn’t… I don’t know…” Tony trailed off uncharacteristically at a loss for something to say. He watched as Steve dropped to his knees and reached out to hold the thrashing form still. His efforts seemed to have little effect. As Tony’s eyes scanned the writhing and squirming form he finally met Loki’s gaze.

“Master,” Loki whispered brokenly.

The look in Loki’s eyes was almost more than he could stand. It was plainly evident that the former god suddenly turned slave was pleading for… something. Tony wracked his brain trying to come up with something, anything, that might help.

“Please,” Loki begged.

Damn it! He wanted nothing more that to stop whatever was happening. As much as he hated Loki he couldn’t stand to watch another suffering as much as Loki was right now. “Stop it!” Tony finally shouted in desperation.

Immediately the body of his former enemy jerked upward, back arching for several seconds, before falling back to the floor and finally stilling. The only sound audible was Loki’s ragged breathing. Steve turned and stared at him questioningly. Tony, for once had no answer to give, smart ass or otherwise. “Loki?” he breathed as loudly as he dared.

In spite of the pain still afflicting him Loki’s eyes shot open. “Master,” he breathed as loudly as his voice would allow. Anything to obey and keep that monstrous pain from returning any time for the foreseeable future. Any indignity or humiliation he had to endure was well worth suffering through to keep from displeasing his master a second time so soon. He had failed the first test but he swore to do his best never to fail again. Whatever his master required he would provide. He would never hesitate to do his master’s bidding. He would prove his worth despite whatever it took. He would ensure his master was pleased. He took a shallow breath and winced at the pain reverberating through his ribs.


“What the hell was that?” Tony demanded.

Loki winced at the question. He had no clue how to answer that and was desperate not to be punished a second time immediately following so soon on the heels of the first. “I don’t understand! I don’t know what you want, don’t punish me!” Loki pled.

“Why the fuck would I punish you?” Tony asked angrily.

An angry master was bad. An angry master meant punishment. Loki began to panic once again. “I don’t understand what you want!”

“Stop it!” Tony yelled.

Loki cringed. He had known better than to yell but hadn’t been able to help it. So soon after the last punishment he was desperate to keep that from happening again. “I apologize for raising my voice master,” Loki whispered carefully averting his eyes. “I did not mean to yell. I just do not understand the command.”
“Command?” Steve asked.

Loki almost growled in frustration. Was he really expected to answer that or was this a test to see if he was loyal only to Tony who’d been named his current master? He honestly didn’t know what to do so he settled for the slim hope that since it wasn’t a direct command the magic wouldn’t punish him for any disobedience if he did not answer.

“Okay,” Tony began. “So obviously there’s something going on here that we’re not understanding. Why don’t you sit up so we can talk about things?”

Sitting. He could do that. Rolling slightly onto his side Loki began trying to shove himself up into a sitting position. He started when someone grabbed his shoulders and gave an involuntary flinch. As he waited for the pain he was surprised when it didn’t come. The person holding him was only helping him to sit. Cautiously he cracked an eye open and was met with the intense gaze of the ‘the Captain’. Shifting his eyes Loki spied Tony watching him carefully from several paces away. Dropping his eyes back to the floor he gave a slight nod and waited for further instructions.

“You alright?” ‘the Captain’ asked.

Loki hesitated briefly but the question was not contradicted by Tony so maybe he should answer it. Alright? Loki was unsure how to answer the vague question. Slowly he gave a slight nod hoping that it would serve as enough of a response.

“So you want to explain what just happened?” Tony asked.

Want? Loki puzzled over the word. Since the beginning of his punishment no one had bothered to ask what he wanted. How should he answer a question like that, honestly or with what he would assume Tony would want to hear? “I…”

“Loki,” Tony growled.

“What’s confusing about it?”

“It’s just… I am… unused to it,” he answered quietly.

For a while there was nothing. When a sudden scraping noise broke the silence Loki winced and hunched in on himself trying to make himself smaller. The noise finally stopped and after a few seconds Loki cracked an eye and chanced a quick glance. A few feet in front of him Tony sat in a chair watching him carefully. A small wave of relief washed over him. If Tony was sitting then it was a fair assumption that he wasn’t planning on beating him or punishing him some other way any time soon.

“Okay, so what if we don’t use the word want then?” Tony asked.

“As you wish,” Loki acquiesced.

“So what did just happen then?”

Loki hesitated. “I…” He paused before beginning once again. “To what are you referring master?”

When there was no response the seconds seemed to stretch into forever. He debated another glance but dismissed the idea. For now he was not being punished and he was leery of doing anything to change that.
“Do *not* call me that,” Tony growled.

The flinch was instinctive. It was just too firmly ingrained in him that tone always brought pain. Tony didn’t want to be addressed as master? It was difficult for him to comprehend. That had been his last rebellion; the last thing they had managed to beat out of him. For the longest time he had refused to use the appellation and had been punished severely until he finally broke and began addressing his tormentors with that title.

“Loki,” Tony snapped, breaking into his thoughts.

“Yes Mas…” Loki winced and tried again. “Sir?”

Tony sighed heavily and Loki, muscles tense, waited.

“Let’s just stick with Tony for now, okay?”

“As you wish,” Loki answered cautiously.

“Right so…” Tony began slowly.

“What happened earlier?” Steve asked quietly.

Loki winced at the sound other voice. He had almost forgotten about the others’ presence. He was going to have to pay better attention or he might be punished for his inattentiveness. Sighing inwardly he realized he should probably answer before they decided he should be punished for his reluctance and slowness to respond.

“Earlier, when you ordered me to move…” Pausing Loki wet his lips trying to phrase things in a way that wouldn’t anger anyone further. “I was unsure how to respond. I did not know where or how you wished for me to move,” he finished tentatively.

“And?” Tony prompted.

Loki blinked in confusion. “And then the magic punished me,” he answered feeling slightly stupid. Did they really not understand or was this merely a test of some form?

“Magic?” Tony pressed.

His brows furrowed as he tried to determine if the curiosity in the voice was genuine or part of something more dangerous. Finally he gave up. In the end it didn’t matter. What would happen, would happen despite his knowledge or wishes. “The magic that binds me to my master,” Loki replied.

“I told you not to use that word,” Tony growled.

Loki opened his mouth to disagree but promptly shut it. Tony had not told him he could not use that word. Tony had merely told him not to address him with that title. Still, no good could come from contradicting his master so in the end he held his tongue. He settled on a single deferential nod.

“So this magic,” Steve prompted.

Swallowing Loki nodded and sat up straighter. Firmly focusing his vision on a spot of the floor directly in front of his crossed legs he finally spoke. “The magic binds me to my… owner ensuring that I am punished if I do not obey an order fast enough. Only my owner is able to stop the pain,” he answered quietly.
“How long does it last if no one stops it?” Tony asked.

Icy dread washed through him and his throat constricted. Unable to speak Loki began shaking his head violently. Still shaking his head he flung himself forward and lay on his stomach with his arms outstretched. The position was one he was generally expected to take when they punished him physically. As much as he hated that thought, he hated the prospect of unending pain from the magic more. “Please,” he managed to gasp. Sheer terror at just the prospect of it forced tears to his eyes. “Please,” he gasped again.

A hand touched his back and Loki flinched. He didn’t dare to draw away in spite of whatever pain that hand might bring. Disobedience always brought worse pain then if he merely accepted and suffered through the punishments. If he allowed them to hurt him without fighting back perhaps they would be satisfied. Perhaps they would not resort to letting the magic continuously punish him indefinitely. As painful as the physical punishments were they were nothing compared to the pain brought on by the magic. “Please?” he sobbed.

“Loki stop!” Tony shouted.

Loki winced at the volume but did his best to keep from moving and to stifle the wordless noises still spilling from his throat. Small shivers shook his body and Loki desperately willed his muscles to comply with his master’s order. Anything to lessen whatever pain was fixing to ensue. Please just let it be quick, he begged mentally. Please just let it be quick, he begged mentally.

“What the hell just happened,” Tony growled loudly.

Loki flinched once more.


For the most part Loki had managed to force his muscles into compliance. Occasionally a small shiver still shook him but they had mostly subsided. He turned his attention to calming his breathing in an effort to keep his chest from heaving. Who knew if even just that much movement would upset his master?

“Loki,” Steve said quietly. “It’s all right. No one is going to hurt you, okay?”

The words meant nothing. Oh sure he heard and understood them. It’s just that coming from someone other than his current master made the words irrelevant. Whether or not Steve meant them didn’t change the fact that ultimately the decision on whether or not to punish him or leave him in the magic’s clutches fell on Tony’s shoulders. Tony was the one he needed to appease in order to not be punished.

“Loki?” Steve asked quietly.

Not daring to speak when his master had not commanded it and unwilling to not answer the question Loki shook his head minutely praying it was enough.

“Hey, it’s all right. No one is going to hurt you okay?”

Loki bit his bottom lip and remained silent.

“Loki,” Tony stated.

While the volume was lower there was no doubt it was an order instead and not a question. Loki opened his eyes and shifted his gaze until it settled on his master’s shoes. He waited for the next
command, not daring to assume anything.

“You okay?”

“I am… unhurt,” Loki answered carefully, still worried that assessment was rapidly fixing to change.

“Mind telling me what upset you?”

“I… the magic… Please master don’t-”

“Stop!” Tony ordered loudly.

With another flinch Loki squeezed his eyes shut and prepared for the pain. For a time there was only silence. After a while there was the sound of footsteps crossing the floor back and forth in front of his prone form. Finally the footsteps stopped.

“I told you not to call me that,” Tony said in tone closer to a normal volume.

He had been trained never to speak unless directly ordered to do so. Still, if he could do anything to help his precarious position… “I… I apologize, sir,” Loki whispered.

“Yeah. Not really digging that title either,” Tony informed him.

Loki pressed his lips together and remained silent.

“From now on you only call me Tony, nothing else, got it?”

“Yes s… Tony,” Loki answered warily.

“Right, we’re going to try this again. Steve, you want to get the left side while I take the right?”

“Got it,” Steve answered.

The anticipation of both of them hurting at him the same time lasted only briefly. After only a few seconds he realized Tony only meant for Steve to help him get Loki into a sitting position once again. When they were done both of them retreated back a few paces. Tony crouched down and watched him intently. Loki, mindful of his current station, dropped his head and eyed the ground instead of continuing to meet Tony’s gaze.

“You all right for now?”

Not trusting his voice Loki nodded once.

“Good. Okay, let’s try this again,” Tony said standing and walking back to his chair. As Tony sat back down Loki could feel his penetrating gaze watching him. “You going to freak out on us again if we go back to this magic crap?”

Loki shook his head. In all honesty he wasn’t sure how he would react but Tony seemed to want a negative response to that question so Loki decided to play it safe. His fingers started fidgeting so he clasped his hands together and waited as patiently as possible.

“So enlighten us. What’s the deal with this magic hocus pocus crap and how does it work?”

“The magic… Only my… owner…”

“Hold up,” Tony ordered. “What did I tell you about titles?”
Loki winced slightly at the reminder. “I apologize,” he replied softly. “In your current position you hold control over the magic controlling me. It lasts only as long or as short as you decided. Should you choose not to stop it the ‘effects’ would continue to last.”

“So it’s a continuous effect?” Tony asked. “It doesn’t ever end on its own?”

Loki shook his head.

“I take it, the ‘effects’ are less than pleasant?”

Loki shivered and drew his knees up wrapping his arms around them. “Yes,” he whispered. If Tony didn’t already know how the magic worked Loki desperately did not want to enlighten him but if this was a test and Tony already knew…

“And it only hits you when you don’t obey fast enough?”

The way Tony spit out the word obey caused Loki to frown. He wasn’t sure what to make of the odd inflection placed on the word so he ultimately chose to ignore it. “No,” Loki admitted. “The m-... You may choose to apply it whenever you please.”

“And other people have done this to you before,” Tony stated flatly.

The tone in that voice made Loki sure this was a statement and not a question. Still, he chose to answer it as if it had actually been a question. “Yes,” he whispered.

Tony stood up suddenly and Loki tensed, sure he was to be hurt. Still with his head lowered Loki raised his eyes slightly to steal a quick glance. Tony merely crossed his arms and began pacing back and forth instead of heading for him. Loki almost breathed a sigh of relief but caught himself just in time. So far no one seemed inclined to punish him for something and he was loathed to draw any more attention to himself than necessary. Cautiously he continued to watch Tony’s progress. Finally Tony stopped pacing with his back still facing him. Loki lowered his eyes back to the floor and waited for whatever was to come.

“I won’t do that,” Tony stated.

Loki’s eyes widened in surprise and almost jerked his head upright to stare at Tony before catching himself and stopping the motion.

“I won’t use some fucked up voodoo crap on you just because I can. That’s a bullshit thing to do to a person and even I’m not enough of an ass to do that.”

Blinking in confusion Loki actually did raise his head to stare at his new master. Tony, back still to Loki, finally uncrossed his arms and let them drop back to his sides. Hands clenching and unclenching Tony didn’t otherwise move for several seconds. Finally he raised one hand and ran it through his hair.

“Fuck!”

The loud expletive startled him and Loki jumped. Instant dread filled him at the ire in that voice and he had to fight against the immediate desire to back away. Of course that was the exact moment when Tony chose to turned around and Loki felt his muscles go rigid at the anger burning in those eyes.

“Get up,” Tony growled.
Trying to obey the command too fast Loki succeeded in tripping over his own feet and falling flat on his face. His lip split open and his head banged painfully against the floor. Still struggling to obey he felt a hand grip his upper arm and yank him upright.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry! I was trying!"

“Stop speaking,” Tony ordered.

Trembling Loki clamped his mouth shut as Tony began stalking out of the room. Loki had no choice but to follow unless he wanted to be drug. Considering he had no idea how much trouble he was already in he definitely didn’t feel as if forcing his master to drag his weight would help matters. Hastily he did his best to keep up with Tony’s pace terrified of what fate awaited him. Suddenly there was a hand gripping his other wrist effectively and jarringly halting him.

“Tony stop,” Steve demanded.

“Let go Steve,” Tony ordered whirling around to the other.

“Not until you tell me where you’re taking him,” Steve disagreed.

Both hands gripping him, Steve’s on his left wrist and Tony’s on his right upper arm, tightened painfully. For a while both of the other men glared at each other. Caught between the two angry men Loki was scared to even breath wrong. What would he do if this spiralled out of control? Would he be expected to stay out of it or jump in and help? Would the other see him as a fair target and a means of hurting his master? The panic already filling him ratchet up yet another notch.

“For fuck’s sake Steve,” Tony huffed, suddenly releasing Loki’s arm.

“His own room?” Steve questioned.

“Of course his own room. Just what kind of person do you think I am?”

“With the way you’re acting right now you had to know. I needed to make sure.”

“You know what? I’m going to take him to his room and then you and I are going to have one hell of a talk. Don’t move, I’ll be right back and I don’t want to find you gone. Loki, follow now!” Tony ordered before storming off and not bothering to check if Loki would obey.

Loki, fearing what would happen to him should he hesitate, tried to follow after Tony immediately. Steve’s grip on him caused him to stumble slightly before the hand finally slipped from his wrist. Rushing forward he finally managed to catch up with Tony before the other man had finished crossing through the next room. Silently he trailed behind hoping Tony had been telling the truth about him getting his own room. There would be nothing stopping Tony from entering the room or summoning Loki to his but would be nice to have some semblance of privacy throughout this. They turned down a hallway as thoughts swirled through his mind of his ‘training’ in ‘those’ activities. All at once he stopped dead. Tony continued forward a few more paces and stopped at a door. Opening the door he finally turned back to face Loki.

“Well?” Tony asked, sounding irritated.

Irritated, very much like agitated, was bad as well. He needed to move. He needed to follow his master. He needed to obey without question. He needed… All of a sudden he couldn’t breathe. Dropping to his knees Loki leaned against the wall desperately struggling for air. He drew his legs
up and wrapped his arms tightly around them still gasping. Suddenly someone was touching him and
the panic increased. He’d been through this before. He’d had panic attacks during his training even
before coming here. As the panic attacks interfered with his training he was always punished
severely for them. He needed to pull himself together. The problem was, he just couldn’t.

“Loki?”


Ah Jesus fuck. While he recognized Loki was having a panic attack he still had no idea how to help
him. Hell, he couldn’t even deal with his own panic attacks how was he supposed to deal with this?
Fuck. He couldn’t just let Loki suffer. He had to do something.

Reaching down he placed a hand lightly on Loki’s shoulder. “Loki?”


“I know and it’s fine. Just listen to my voice okay?”

“Trying,” Loki panted.

“Sh, don’t talk okay? Just listen to my voice for now. I need you work on controlling your breathing.
You need to slow it down, even if only just a little bit at first.” Loki nodded frantically and Tony
gave his arm a light squeeze. “Come on buddy, you can do it. In and out. Just a little bit slower each
time all right?” Again Loki nodded frantically. “There’s nothing to worry about, everything’s fine.
All I need you to do is just focus on your breathing right now. In and out, slow and easy. You can do
it.”

Loki’s breathing hitched but seemed to slow ever so slightly but it might just have been his
imagination. Still it was definitely too shallow for his liking. Hopefully they were actually making
process and Loki wasn’t fixing to pass out on him.

“Want… Want to…” Loki managed to stammer between jerky breaths.

“Don’t speak, just listen okay?” Tony urged.

“Want… to obey,” Loki finally managed. “Promise.”

“Yeah I know. Trust me it’s all good. You want to obey? Okay then I want you to focus on slowing
your breathing. That’s all. Stop worrying about anything else just worry about breathing slower. Can
you do that?”

Loki nodded again and to Tony’s great relief the frantic quality seemed to be abating.

“In,” Tony instructed. After a few more hitched breaths Loki finally managed take a slightly deeper
breath. “Okay out now,” Tony continued, trying to keep his voice level. Nodding even less
frantically Loki released the air and took a few more jerky breaths. “Okay good, you’re doing good.
Let’s do it again. In,” Tony instructed. Loki obeyed and Tony felt his own heartbeat calming right
along with Loki’s. “And out now.”

He had no clue how long he knelt in front of the disgraced and panicking god but eventually the
shaking eased slightly and Loki’s breathing finally returned to something closer to normal. Good,
Tony thought to himself. So far so good. There was a faint noise to his left and Tony turned towards
the sound. Steve stood several feet away watching the scene. Tony groaned inwardly. Just what he didn’t need right now, Steve watching him without any of his familiar defenses in place and comforting someone he should hate. Whatever. He decided to just ignore it for now and hope Steve never decided to ‘talk’ about it later.

“Okay Loki, I need you to stand up now. Think you can do that?”

There was a shaky nod before he heard a broken and soft, “Yes.”

“All right, take my hand then.” When Loki raised a trembling hand Tony took it without waiting for Loki to raise it all the way. “Now we’re going to stand up slowly.”

Another shaky nod.

Well here goes nothing, he thought. Tony stepped back slightly to give Loki more room and pulled just enough to help Loki get to his feet. When there was no immediately negative reaction relief washed over him. He didn’t have the slightest idea what caused the panic attack or what might set off Loki again. “All right. Now all we’re going to do is walk to that door over there. Think you can do that?”

“Yes,” Loki whispered, still not meeting his eyes.

-  

With Tony’s hand still wrapped loosely around his Loki followed silently. Just don’t think about it, he told himself. You can’t change it so there’s no point in worrying. Tony’s words reminding him to focus on his breathing echoed through his head. It was good advice so he continued to heed it as they approached the bedroom in question. When they reached the threshold they stopped.

“Okay. Now, all I want is for you to go in and get comfortable, okay?”

Unsure of what to do Loki hesitated. Did ‘get comfortable’ mean he was allowed to sleep now? Did it mean he should remove his clothing for other activities? Did it mean he was supposed to wait for a summons from his master? “Comfortable?” he questioned quietly.

“Yeah, comfortable. Pretty sure we’ve all had a crappy day so I figure we could all use some rest.”

“You wish me to rest?”

“Well yeah. I mean if you’re tired.”

Tired didn’t even begin to cover it. After it was decided to send him here his ‘trainers’ had kept him awake for the three day it took to arrange for his transfer. When any of those hurting him tired they left and others took their place. Loki, however, had not been allowed any reprieve. After the things they’d done to him those three days and everything that happened since his arrival here he was beyond exhausted.

“I… could sleep,” he offered warily, desperately hoping the offer would not be yanked away solely to torment him further.

“Okay then, sleep.”

Loki eyed the room again before dropping his eyes back down to the ground. “Where?” he asked quietly.
“What do you mean where?”

“I wouldn’t want to presume anything master.”

“Loki,” Tony growled.

Loki winced at the reminder. “I apologize for the slip. I would not want to presume anything, Tony.”
It felt odd calling his master by his first name after the amount of time he’d spent having that particular habit beaten out of him and it made him a touch nervous.

“You sleep in the bed Loki. Where the hell else would you sleep?”

“I usually sleep on the floor,” Loki admitted softly. There was a low growl from beside him and Loki did his best not to flinch.

“Not here you don’t. Here you sleep in a bed. Understood?”

“Yes sir.” Loki winced when he hear another low growl. “I mean… I meant yes Tony.”

“Better. Work on that. I don’t want you call me anything other than my name from now on. Got it?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Now get in there and get some sleep.”

“Yes Tony.”
“Damn it,” Tony complained as he dropped onto his couch. “Why the hell am I the one that has to deal with this crap.”

“You need to report this to S.H.I.E.L.D.,” Steve stated.

Tony jumped slightly at the sound of Steve’s voice. Damn it, he’d completely forgotten about him being here. Annoyed Tony wanted to ignore the man until he left but the thought of telling S.H.I.E.L.D. about Loki’s sudden appearance really didn’t sit well with him. If things had happened any other way maybe he would have agreed. As it was, with the way Loki had shown up and his current state of mind now, he just couldn’t find it in him to willingly turn Loki over to that organization. Heaven only knows what he’d suffer at their hands. When just walking to a bedroom caused a panic attack…

“No,” Tony stated firmly, finally forcing himself to sit forward. “There’s no way we can hand Loki over to S.H.I.E.L.D. right now. Did you seriously just miss that spectacular panic attack he just had back there?” Tony asked, waving a hand in the general area of the guest room Loki was currently occupying. “How do you think he’s going to react being handed over to people like them? Especially after his last visit here.”

“His last visit here is precisely why I think we should tell them,” Steve argued.

“He literally just had a panic attack walking down a hallway! You think he’s going to deal things better in S.H.I.E.L.D.’s custody?”

“It’s the right thing to do Tony.”

“That’s bullshit and you know it. There’s no way it would be right to send anyone that damaged straight into the hands of their enemies.”

“Didn’t he get handed over straight into your hands and aren’t you his enemy,” Steve shot back.

Tony had no good answer for that so he chose to ignore it. “S.H.I.E.L.D. has no reason to go easy on him and every reason to hate him. Besides he’s already been traumatized enough!”

“You act like they’re nothing more than thugs bent on revenge. And since when did you become and expert on panic attacks or psychological trauma?”

Tony’s mind immediately supplied him with images of his time in Afghanistan. For a moment he was momentarily transported back in time. Growling he shook his head to banish the disturbing images. “You don’t know me so don’t even try to tell me what I should or shouldn’t know about. You saw what happened back there with your own eyes. You tell me S.H.I.E.L.D. would give a fuck about pulling him out of a panic attack when he has another!”

Silence descended, the only sound in the room now was Tony’s heavy breathing. In the extended silence Tony struggled to get his breathing under control trying to stave off his own panic attack before it could happen.

“When?” Steve finally asked quietly.

“What?” Tony snarled back still trying to reign in his anger.
“You said when not if.”

Frowning Tony thought back trying to remember precisely what he’d said.

“You said when like you know for a fact it’s going to happen again.”

“Educated guess,” Tony grumbled. He really did not want to discuss his past with anyone, least of all Captain Goody Two-Shoes. “It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to realize this won’t be the only one. After whatever crap they did to him that made him this way? It’s a good bet that there’ll be others. You really think being in some dark cell deep inside S.H.I.E.L.D.’s headquarters will help stop them from happening? You think the treatment he’ll receive will be conducive to helping keep them at bay?”

There was a strange look on Steve’s face that Tony didn’t particularly care for.

“This is more than just sympathy,” Steve finally said slowly. “You’re empathizing with him. You’ve had panic attacks too,” Steve reasoned.

“Whatever,” Tony grumbled as he stood. “I’m going to check on my guest then go to bed myself. Feel free to let yourself out but don’t you dare say a damn word about this to S.H.I.E.L.D. until I say so.”

Making his way down the hall he opened the door to the room he’d chosen for Loki. The former god in question was still fully clothed and curled into a ball laying sideways on the bed with his back pressed against the headboard. Tony recognized the posture for what it was and understood why Loki would have chosen to sleep in that position. It was a defensive posture designed to make him as small of a target as possible and allowed him a direct view of the only entrance into the room.

Sighing Tony moved to the closet and opened it. Snagging a blanked from the top shelf he turned around and froze. Loki’s eyes were open and watching him warily. After a handful of seconds Loki shifted his gaze to stare in another direction. He tossed the blanket he was holding onto the bed and Loki flinched. Mentally cursing himself Tony moved to the closest side of the bed. Sighing heavily he ran a hand through his hair.

“Thought you might want an extra blanket in case you get cold,” he huffed.

“Thank you,” Loki answered quietly.

“Yeah whatever,” Tony mumbled. “I’m going to bed and Steve’s leaving, so…” He trailed off knowing he should probably say something more to reassure Loki but unable to find the right words. “So when you wake up just stay put. I’ll come get you when-” When what? “When I’m ready,” he finished.

“Yes Tony,” Loki acknowledged.

He had to resist a growl at how even Loki’s “Tony” sounds like master. Damn it, I’m too sober for this shit he thought, running a hand through his hair. Even though he realized he should say more he still couldn’t seem to find the right words. Instead of even trying and ending up gibbering like a complete moron he turned and headed for the door. At the threshold he hesitated briefly before cursing himself once again and finally exiting. It took all of his self control to close the door without slamming it but somehow he managed it. Temporarily too worn out to contemplate moving he leaned back against the door and let his eyes fall closed. After a few seconds Tony shoved himself off the door and opened his eyes. Again he found Steve standing in the hallway silently watching.

“What?” Tony grumped.
“I just wanted to say maybe you’re right.”

“Excuse me?” Tony asked before realizing how loudly he was speaking. “Wait,” he stated making his way down the hallway and away from Loki’s door. Steve followed until they were both once again standing in the living room. “Didn’t want to disturb him,” Tony muttered.

“Yeah,” Steve agreed. “And maybe that’s part of it. I just… I think maybe we could wait to tell Fury about this.”

Tony crossed his arms and cocked an eyebrow.

“I just figured if you understand what he’s going through and aren’t going to hurt him for no reason maybe we could wait to tell S.H.I.E.L.D. for a while.”

Lowering his eyebrows suspiciously Tony stared at Steve.

“Look, I don’t want to argue anymore. There’s obviously something you don’t want to talk about and I can respect that. If you can help him… I don’t know, get better? Deal with whatever he’s been through? You understand?”

Unable to stay still Tony drummed his fingers against his his forearms trying to appear contemplative rather than fidgety. Was Steve being serious? “I mean it, if you tell anyone, especially S.H.I.E.L.D., about Loki being here—”

“I won’t. Well, at least for now. I’ll tell you beforehand if I decide to change my mind. It’s just that it’s obvious he needs some kind of help. He seems to respond well to you. I don’t know if we’ll be able to find someone else he responds to half as well. You’re right, he does need help and if you can help him…”

For a while he debated whether or not to believe Steve. Tony really wasn’t an overly trusting person on the best of days. But then, this was Steve. Ultimately that’s what decided him. Steve was always as good as his word. Dealing with someone as damaged as Loki was now was going to play merry hell with his own memories he realized. He didn’t know how long he was going to be able to stand dealing with Loki’s crap while keep his own from overwhelming him. He could already feel a migraine building.

Loki had learned to be a light sleeper during his time in the dungeons. His tormentors would never have accepted the excuse that he needed time to wake. Either he obeyed instantly or he was punished. When he woke moments earlier he was surprised that he hadn’t heard the door open. His heart almost stopped when he discovered his master was in the room. As much as he really did not want to be used that way ever again he tried to be grateful that he had at least been granted some rest before hand. Then again, he was probably only allowed the rest because Tony did not wish him to be too sluggish during their time together. When Tony turned around and met his eyes it took effort but Loki managed to tear his eyes away as was expected of someone in his station. Strangely Tony did not make any demand for Loki to serve him in that capacity. Rather he had merely thrown a blanket onto the bed, given him some basic orders, and left. Loki was still confused by what had happened.

He inspected the blanket lying nearby. “Thought you might want an extra blanket in case you get cold,” Tony had said. Loki frowned at that. He was positive he wouldn’t get cold enough for an extra blanket. It wasn’t nearly as cold here as it had been in the dungeons and he hadn’t been allowed any covers during his time there. During his time in the lower dungeons the absolute best
thing he could have hoped for was to be left alone. Anything more comforting than being allowed
time alone was completely unthinkable. Tentatively Loki reached out and touched the still folded
blanket with the tips of his fingers. It was softer than anything he’d been allowed to have since
becoming a slave.

Slowly he drew the blanket closer. Wrapping one arm around the blanket he snuggled against it and
laid his head down on it. Perhaps he should have questioned it further but he just couldn’t. He was
still too tired to keep his eyes open; not when he was finally allowed to sleep for once. If he dared to
sleep without permission the magic would slam into him and ensure that he woke. If that happened
he would be left in pain until someone not only deigned to visit but also decided to stop the magic as
well. No, much better to sleep now when he was allowed than to stay awake longer and worry over
things that were completely unchangeable.

“Stark, you hearing me? We have a missile headed straight for the city.”

Tony groaned at this new development. Like they didn’t already have their hands full with everything
else that was happening? “How long?” he asked.

“Three minutes, at best. Stay low and wipe out the missile.”

Damn it! “Jarvis, put everything we got into the thrusters.”

“I just did.” JARVIS replied immediately.

Tony did his best to head straight for the incoming missile but the horde of invading aliens seemed to
be doing their best to delay him. Growling in frustration he fought his way through them as fast as
possible. Too slow, he told himself. You’re going to fail. Everyone is going to die and it’s going to be
all you’re fault. Again. Blasting another group of the invaders out of his way Tony redoubled his
efforts to get to the missile. Suddenly Natasha’s voice sounded through the speakers inside of his suit.

“I can close it! Can anybody hear me? I can close the portal.”

There was a brief pause and then, “Do it!” Steve answered.

“No wait!” Tony shot back instantly.

“Stark, these things are still coming!” Steve shouted back.

“I got a nuke coming in, it's gonna blow in less than a minute. And I know just where to put it.”

Loki awoke with a start feeling as if something was wrong. Frantically he scanned the room looking
for anything that might mean trouble. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary but the sense of nervous
trepidation refused to abate. All of his senses continued to scream at him that something was
seriously wrong. If he could only understand-. Sharp, intense, unbearable, pain slammed into his
body and Loki’s muscles began to spasm.

Letting go of the missile Tony watched as it flew off into the blackness. Damn, it was difficult to
breath. He couldn’t think about that right now, though. He had to watch. He had to know. The suit’s
power sputtered briefly before finally dying and he began to slowly fall back towards the portal. As
his eyelids began to droop he forced them to remain open. He could rest when this was finished. Until then he needed to make sure they would all be safe. He had to remain conscious just long enough to know. The missile finally collided with the main ship and exploded. The explosion cascaded to nearby ships causing them to erupt as well, creating a spectacular display. Finally Tony allowed his eyes to slide closed…

“Master,” Loki whispered.

It was pointless and he knew it. He should never have trusted that Tony meant it when he said he would not use the magic to hurt him for no reason. It had all been a ploy and worst of all Loki had fallen for it. After all he had suffered through how had he allowed himself to be that stupid? Loki’s body writhed on the bed of it’s own accord. Desperately he prayed Tony would be satisfied sooner rather than later.

“Please,” Loki sobbed. “Master.”

Instantly Tony sat up straight gasping for breath. For a while he was confused. He was absolutely sure the darkness was the vast emptiness from the other side of the portal. He didn’t understand how he was able to breathe in the vacuum of space. Suddenly another thought struck him. Where was his suit? He should at least still be wearing his suit. Finally reality slammed back into place and he felt sick. Rushing to the bathroom he leaned over the toilet and promptly vomited.

Instantly Loki’s body stopped spasming and he gasped trying to catch his breath. Oh gods the norns were cruel. Hadn’t he suffered enough? His own magic had been taken from him, he’d lost the only family he’d ever known, he had been sentenced to a life as little more than property, and the physical punishments he’d already suffered would have been more than sufficient enough to make him remorseful for his actions even if he had been in control of himself at the time. Loki burst into sobs, curling up on himself. Could he not just be allowed to die? Was that really so much to ask? How much more would he have to suffer for things that had been beyond his control?

Propping his elbows on the table Tony dropped his head into his hands. Never had he been so glad for the invention of automatic coffee makers. He had been able to snag a cup as soon as be entered the kitchen and hadn’t had to waste time waiting for it to brew. He was really getting tired of this shit. It shouldn’t really be all that surprising that he’d had yet another nightmare and subsequent panic attack after yesterday. After having Loki unceremoniously dropped into his life and then having to deal with Loki’s panic attack on top of his own shit he really should have expected this. Sighing he rubbed his face before lifting his head. He really should go check on the former god. Maybe after everything Loki would appreciate some time alone? Tony dropped his head back into his hands. He knew what he was doing. He was trying to justify holing up in his workshop for hours on end just to keep from having to deal with any of this crap. At the very least he should check to see if Loki wanted anything to eat for breakfast. Grabbing his coffee he downed it in one long swallow and put the cup back on the table. Finally he stood up and made his way to Loki’s room. Hesitating only slightly he opened the door and froze. Loki knelt unmoving on the floor with his back straight and head lowered. What the hell now, Tony thought in frustration.
“Want to tell me why you’re on the floor?”

“I do not have wants,” Loki replied evenly.

Tony groaned. “Why are you kneeling on the floor Loki?”

“It is the position I am usually required to adopt when I am awaiting my…”

Master, Tony finished mentally. Fuck, he really couldn’t deal with this right now. “Well get up,” Tony told him. Keeping his head lowered Loki stood and clasped his hands behind his back. Tony clenched his fists and tried to get a handle on his temper. “Follow me,” Tony ordered before turning and making his way back toward the kitchen.

Following exactly three paces behind his master Loki kept his head down. He focused on doing everything just right to keep from adding to any punishments he was already going to have to endure. At least Tony would be justified in a sense. The others had punished him because they found it fun. Tony and the other Midgardians had no idea Loki had not been in control of himself during the Chitauri attack. If he were being completely honest it was partially his fault. If he hadn’t allowed his anger to get the better of him he would never have ended up a prisoner of Thanos and the New York attack would never have occurred. Tony finally came to a stop near a table. Loki halted still exactly three paces behind his master and awaited further instructions.

“Sit,” Tony ordered.

Loki sat.

“Really? On the floor? What the hell? No, you know what? I should have completely expected this.”

As there was no order and seemingly no question Tony truly expected Loki to answer he remained silent.

“Whatever,” Tony muttered. “Sit wherever you want, why do I care?”

Again not a question that appeared to require a response so Loki continued to remain silent.

“Breakfast?”

Loki frowned. “Is that a question?”

“Yes,” Tony answered flatly.

“I do not understand,” Loki admitted.

“What’s not to understand?”

“What precisely is it you are asking?” He barely managed to stop from adding the word master. Despite the other words being untrue Tony honestly did seem to take offense to the title. For a while he was only met with silence.

“Are you hungry?” Tony finally asked sounding slightly irritated.
It went against everything he’d learned to admit to any kind of want. Usually admitting to any kind of want only alerted the master to what best to deny him. Still, on the off chance that he might actually be allowed to eat for the first time in days… “I… could eat,” Loki answered trying not to show how much he would dearly love any food at this point.

“Fine but get up and sit in a chair.”

A chair? Was Tony being serious? No, Loki decided. This, like most of the things from yesterday, had to be yet another test. “I would not presume to consider myself your equal,” Loki replied obediently.

“Damn it Loki!”

Loki flinched.

“Get in the damned chair!”

Scrambling to his feet Loki pulled a chair out and sat down nervously on the edge.

“Look, I didn’t mean to yell, all right?”

“I…” Loki bit his lower lip trying to come up with a good response to that.

“Whatever. Look don’t bother answering that. I don’t usually bother with breakfast so there’s not much here. I’ll have some breakfast stuff delivered later. For now this is the best I can do.”

There was the sound of a few things being placed on the table. Loki furrowed his brows as he tried to determine if he was supposed to take initiative here or not. Did he dare act preemptively and do something without a specific command? Suddenly there was a loud bang on the table and Loki jumped.

“Damn it Loki!” Tony shouted.

Instinct took over and Loki slid from the chair onto his knees. Head bowed he lowered himself until his forehead was pressed against the floor as well. He hadn’t been here twenty four hours and already he’d been punished twice. This was going to be a long stay if he couldn’t learn the rules better. Closing his eyes he cringed and waited for this current punishment to begin.

“Loki?”

“Yes… Tony?” Loki answered hesitantly, still nervous about using a master’s forename.

“Nevermind. I was going to ask something stupid but then I thought better. Look, I didn’t mean to yell at you, okay?”

“It is your right to do as you please,” Loki replied as deferentially as he could manage.

“Just stop it. I don’t want to be your master, alright!”

Loki blanched. Tony didn’t want him as a slave? “I can do better. Please punish me instead. Don’t send me back, please! Please!”

“Stop,” Tony ordered firmly.

Loki quit begging immediately and clamped his mouth shut.
“Okay here’s the deal. I don’t want to be anyone’s master at all. Slavery… Well, it’s kind of an outdated concept here. Whatever they said you’re supposed to do or how you’re supposed to behave isn’t going to work for me. I don’t have experience in any of that bullshit and I don’t want it. The thing is I’m stuck with you and you’re stuck with me for now and we’re just going to have to make the best of it. So no, I’m not about to punish you and I don’t even know why you’re expecting it. If it’s because I lost my temper then I’m sorry. I’m not really the most patient person though.”

Turning the words over in his mind Loki tried to figure out how or if he was supposed to respond to that. Tony did actually seem to require… something. “Understood,” Loki finally replied quietly.

“Good. So, uh, want to get back into the chair?”

“Tony?”

“Yeah?”

“Am I to understand that when you ask what I wish that you mean I am already allowed to do these things?”

“Loki,” Tony growled.

“I am sorry, it’s just that I, as well, am unused to this kind of situation. Usually what I am allowed or not allowed to do is specifically stated. I am unused to vague instructions.”

“Yeah Loki. If I ask if you want to do so something it’s your choice. So… want to eat?”

Chewing on his lower lip yet again Loki attempted to work up the courage to answer that question. “Yes?”

“Okay then, get back in the chair and I’ll pour you some cereal.”

Slowly Loki stood and sat back down on the edge of the chair. “Cereal?”

“Yeah. So I take it you guys don’t have cereal back in the great fortress in the sky?”

“The what?” Loki asked.

“Nevermind,” Tony told him as he began pouring milk into the bowl containing the odd square objects. “Try this and see if you like it.”

Loki picked up the spoon and stared at the mixture. Slowly he poked at the squares and watched them disappear only to bob back up to the surface. Finally he scooped up a spoonful and tried the concoction. Crunchier than he expected but not too bad. Loki had never been very fond of overly seasoned foods, preferring instead the more bland flavors.

“All right?” Tony asked.

“It is,” Loki acknowledged.

“I mean, if you hate it I could try to find something else.”

“No, this is… acceptable.”

“Acceptable,” Tony replied flatly.

“Yes. I… I find this sits well with my tastes.”
“Really? Nevermind, ignore that. Okay good. So…”

Though it was difficult Loki forced himself to pause in his eating to see what it was Tony required.

“So yeah. Okay then, finish eating. If you want more then you’re welcomed to it.”

Loki blinked in confusion. *That* he truly didn’t understand. “You mean I am allowed to eat more than just this?”

“Uh, yeah? I mean why wouldn’t you be able to?”

Loki opened his mouth to answer but Tony cut him off before he could.

“Nevermind. Yes, if you want more than fix another bowl, got it?”

Want. Such a small word to hold so much meaning for a person in his station. Instead of answering verbally Loki gave a quick nod.

“Right. Good. Okay then.”

Loki couldn’t help a small smile at Tony’s obvious need to fill the silence with words.

“So yeah, you do that and I’m going down to my workshop.”

“Master,” Loki began before wincing.

“I swear Loki, if you say that one more time…”

“It was an accident. I did not mean to upset you. Please feel free to punish me as you see fit,” he answered lowering his head in resignation.

“Yeah, like that’s going to happen,” Tony mumbled. Turning Tony paced the kitchen for several moments before stopping near the table. “What is it you appreciate the most?” Tony asked suddenly.

“I…”

“Don’t think, just answer,” Tony ordered.


“Right. So next time you screw up you get less time to yourself. No calling me anything other than my name, always sit on furniture, and for fuck’s sake no more kneeling. Got it?”

“I… I don’t understand?”

“For crying out loud Loki. What’s not to understand?”

“Forgive me, I will attempt to do better in the future,” Loki answered bowing his head.

“No, I want an answer to that. What’s not to understand? Was it not specific enough?”

“It was… very specific.”

“Good. So follow those basic rules and I’m… I’m…”

Loki cocked his head and waited.
“I’m going to my workshop,” Tony finally spat out.

Turning on his heels Tony stalked out of the kitchen leaving a confused Loki in his wake.

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The second the doors slid closed behind him Tony leaned back against them and breathed a heavy sigh. Damn it, he couldn’t deal with this. Who the hell thought he would be a good person own someone? He wasn’t sure how much more of this he could take. Loki was just so… broken, his mind offered. Tony scowled. “Whatever,” he muttered, shoving himself off the door and heading for his workbench.

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Loki finished the food in his bowl and eyed the box on the table. “... if you want more then fix another bowl, got it?” Reaching for the box Loki gently wrapped his fingers around it and tensed awaiting any indications this would be against his master’s wishes. When nothing happened he slowly drew the box closer and opened it. Maybe, just maybe, he actually was going to be able to eat his fill for the first time in… He couldn’t remember and truthfully it didn’t matter. Right now all that mattered was he could eat as much as he wished and no one would stop him or punish him for it. That thought alone made him deliriously happy.
Chapter 3

“Damn it,” Tony snarled tossing the broken pieces of his current project onto the table in front of him. Raising one hand he raked it through his hair. “This isn’t going to work,” he grumbled as he stood. Scowling he began to pace.

“Sir,” Jarvis stated cutting into his thoughts.

“What’s up JARVIS?”

“It would appear that Master Loki is ill.”

Shit. “Is he still in the kitchen?”

“Yes sir, still at the table in fact.”

“Thanks J.”

Racing out of the workshop Tony made his way to the elevator. As the doors slid open he was glad he didn’t have to wait for it to arrive. Quickly he jammed his finger into the button that would take him up to the floor with his living quarters. When the doors finally opened Tony rushed out of the elevator and headed straight for the kitchen. He stopped when he spied Loki leaning over the table with his head resting on an arm. As he stood there watching Loki opened his eyes. Finally Tony approached the table and knelt down.

“Loki?” he asked quietly.

“Saved you… last bowl,” Loki panted in obvious distress as his eyes slid closed once more.

_Last bowl?_ His eyes raked over the empty bowl on the table before snagging the box of shredded wheat off the table. The box turned out to be mostly empty and Tony had to roll his eyes. “Ate a little too much huh?”

“You said…”

“Yeah yeah, my fault. I just didn’t expect you to eat that much all at once,” he grumbled.

“You are angry?” Loki asked.

Tony sighed. “No Loki, I’m not angry. I’m just a bit surprised. You must have been really hungry.” Loki nodded lethargically and another thought crossed Tony’s mind. “When was the last time you ate anything?”

Loki was silent and his brows drew down in concentration. “Three, perhaps four days past. I remember not.”

Suddenly Tony felt as sick as Loki looked.

“You said I was permitted to eat,” Loki reminded him looking nervous.

“Yeah no. You’re not in any trouble. Everything’s…” Tony swallowed hard trying to find a way to reassure the skittish former god sitting in front of him. “It’s fine Loki, okay?”

“Yes Tony,” Loki answered obediently.
“Right. Let’s get you to bed then.”

Loki’s eyes shot open again and the look on his face froze Tony in place.

“I am unwell. I fear I may displease you,” Loki whispered as he began to tremble slightly.

It took him several seconds to understand what it was Loki meant. When he finally did understand Tony only felt even more sick at the implications. He had to swallow down the bile rising up in the back of his throat that Loki would even expect something like that, especially while he was feeling this bad. “Yeah, that’s not going to happen. I just want to get you to bed, your bed, to make sure you’re comfortable.”

“I would not disobey,” Loki breathed trembling harder.

“Fuck,” Tony growled.

Loki whimpered. “As you wish.”

“Damn it! That’s not what I meant. Look no one is fucking anyone right now. We’re just going to get you to your bed so you’re more comfortable, that’s it.”

“As you wish,” Loki repeated still sounding as if he actually expected Tony to take advantage of him.

And fuck, didn’t that just piss him off even more. Once Loki felt better they definitely needed to have a long talk and damn if Tony didn’t just hate that idea. He didn’t do heart to heart conversations on the best of days. Loki’s eyes drifted closed once more and he groaned softly reminding Tony of Loki’s current distress.

“Alright, come on. Let’s get you to your to bed,” Tony said pulling Loki upright.

He propped the arm over his neck and stood until Loki was finally on his feet. He didn’t miss how Loki tensed at the closeness nor the way Loki turned his head away. Still Loki remained pliable enough as Tony began leading him to the bedroom. When they finally reached the threshold Loki tensed even more and lowered his head. His hair fell forward and covered his face. Sighing inwardly Tony shuffled the two them over to the bed and carefully lowered Loki onto it. Instead of trying to ease the blanket out from under Loki he unfolded the spare blanket he’d grabbed the night before and used it to cover Loki.

“Good?” Tony asked.

“If you are pleased,” Loki murmured snuggling farther under the blanket.

Tony rolled his eyes. “Yeah whatever. Just get some rest, will you?”

“Understood,” Loki acknowledged.

Shaking his head Tony left the room and closed the door behind himself.

- 

“You think he needs medical attention?” Steve asked.

“Not really. More than likely it’ll pass as soon as his body can absorb the food. If not I’ll worry about it then.”
"We Tony. We’ll deal with this. You’re not completely alone in this you know?"

Fat lot of good that does when you’re not here, Tony thought. “Yeah we,” he muttered.

“What are you doing for him?”

“Put him back to bed. I figured it would do him good to sleep through some of this.”

Steve made a noncommittal sound before replying. “Let me know if it doesn’t help or if he gets any worse.”

“Will do.” Tony raised a hand and used it to scrub his fingers through his hair for a few seconds before dropping it again. “Hey Steve?”

“Yeah Tony?”

How much to tell him, Tony wondered. Maybe he shouldn’t say anything. Afterall it was Loki’s story to tell wasn’t it? Still, could he deal with all of this on his own? Damn it. “When I told him I wanted him to lay down…” For a minute he couldn’t continue.

“Tony?”

“Yeah, still here. It’s just… He expected me to… to… ‘do things’ to him, you know?”

This time it was Steve who was quiet for a long moment. “Inappropriate things?”

“What do you think?” Tony snapped.

Another long spate of silence. “Actually it kind of makes sense.”

“Fuck you very much too,” Tony snarled. “At least I know what kind of person you think I am now.”

“I didn’t mean it like that Tony.”

“Sure as hell sounded like it.”

“What I meant was in order for him to end up in the state he’s in now what he went through had to have been traumatic. I didn’t mean to insinuate that you’re the kind of person…-”

“Yeah whatever. Look… Maybe it’s just me, you know? Like, because I don’t want to be in this position in the first place. Maybe it’s just making me, I don’t know… pissed?”

“I wouldn’t expect anything less from you Tony. You’re tough as nails when it counts but you do have a big heart, even if you don’t show it all the time.”

Tony snorted.

“If I didn’t honestly believe that Tony I wouldn’t have felt comfortable leaving Loki in your care for now. I mean it. We may not always see eye to eye but when it counts you can always be trusted to do the right thing.”

Tony almost couldn’t speak. He’d never been good at taking honest compliments. He did what he usually did under these circumstances. “Yep that’s me, Tony Stark, James Bond of the superhero world. Charm and danger all rolled into one.”
“Actually, that’s you,” Steve shot back. “Tony Stark, the man that can’t accept a simple compliment. It’s a fair assessment to assume the things that happened to him before he arrived here weren’t pleasant. Sure you tried to turn him away when they first offered him to you but I think that was mainly because of how much you hated the idea of owning another person. Once it became clear what would happen to him if you didn’t accept the position you didn’t give it a second thought. You did something you find personally detestable just to protect someone who was supposed to be your enemy.”

Being reminded of what awaited Loki should this arrangement not work out cooled most of the lingering anger he had at being forced into this situation. “What am I supposed to do?”

“I don’t know but I do know this, we’ll figure it out. After watching you calm him down that first day I know you’ll be fine.”

“Sir,” JARVIS interrupted.

“JARVIS?”

“Master Loki is awake.”

“Thanks JARVIS. Hey Steve?”

“Yeah yeah, go take care of your houseguest.”

“Thanks.”

When they hung up Tony made his way to Loki’s room and stopped. He almost opened the door to check on Loki but just then he had an idea. Instead of opening the door he raised a hand and knocked. When there wasn’t an answer he knocked a second time. He might not be the best person in the world but he could damn sure offer basic human courtesy to someone who’d been traumatized as much as Loki.

Frowning Loki stared at the door. He wasn’t sure what was expected. If it were Tony then wouldn’t he merely open the door? Instantly another thought struck him. Perhaps it wasn’t Tony. What if it was someone else sent to get him? He ran down a list of people Tony might send for him and became increasingly nervous at each of the possibilities.

“Loki,” Tony called through the door. “I know you’re awake.”

Hurriedly he got out of the bed, rushed to the door, and opened it.

“Feeling better?”

“Yes much,” Loki answered bowing his head.

“Is that the truth or just what you think I want to hear?”

Opening his mouth to answer Loki hesitated slightly. Perhaps the truth might actually serve him better. “A little of both,” he replied quietly.

“That’s what I thought. All right, when you’re ready I would like for you to meet me in the living room.”

Without another word Tony turned and walked back down the hallway. Half stunned at the odd
request, and really a request is exactly what it sounded like, Loki quickly followed behind Tony. When Tony sat down on the couch Loki hesitated. He wasn’t sure what was expected. Earlier Tony had ordered him not to sit on the floor. Currently Tony was busy skimming through a magazine and not paying attention to him at all. There was room on the couch but there were also two other chairs in the room. Maybe he should remain standing?

“Loki,” Tony stated without looking up from the magazine.

“Yes Tony?”

“Are you planning on sitting or standing?”

“Whatever you wish,” Loki answered obediently once again bowing his head.

“Nope, you choose.”

Frowning Loki cautiously inspected Tony who was still busy ignoring him. Furtively he glanced to the chairs before returning his gaze back to the couch. Was this a test? His first instinct was to say that he wished to stand but then that put him above his master. Still, sitting down on a piece of furniture would state that he considered himself an equal. He chewed on his lower lip as he thought about it. What decided him was Tony’s attitude from this morning. Tony seemed to like him seated on the furniture even if it was above his station. Instead of the couch, though, Loki decided on a chair. In an effort not to appear too standoffish to his master Loki chose the chair closest to the side of the couch where Tony was seated. Finally Tony looked up and met his eyes.

“Comfy?”

“It feels… odd… to be seated as an equal.”

Tony nodded. “I expected as much. That’s also partly why I wanted to see you. For reasons beyond the control of either one of us we’re stuck together for now. In the interest of fairness I feel I should tell you no that doesn’t mean I intend on sending you anywhere. Yes I know what would happen if I were to send you back. Understood?”

“Yes,” Loki whispered, unable to raise his voice for now. He knew too well what would happen should Tony send him back. Just the thought of it terrified him.

“Okay, so I’m pretty sure we need to talk about a lot of things. This is liable to end badly since I’m not good at this kind of thing and for now you seem to be even worse. I still feel the need to make an effort though. First things first you need to be honest with me. I don’t want you telling me what you think I want to hear, I want the truth. Understood?”

“Yes Tony.”

“Can you, like, look up at all?”

Nodding once Loki raised his head slightly and focused his eyes on the base of Tony’s neck instead of his own lap.

“That’ll do for now I suppose,” he sighed. “Okay here’s the deal, we need to lay down some ground rules. First things first, everything I said this morning still stands. Always call me by my name, sit on furniture not the floor, no kneeling. Are those rules clear?”

“Yes Tony.”
“The next set of rules. First: your room, your space.”

Loki’s brows drew down as he tried to decipher that. “I do not understand that.”

“It means it’s your room now. I will not enter it without your permission. Whenever you want time alone or you go to sleep you can feel safe that I won’t enter. If I want to talk to you or anything I’ll always knock and wait for permission.”

“Why?” Loki asked out of curiosity before remembering his station. “I mean-”

“I know full well what you meant, Loki, and that’s part of the reason. You need a place where you can relax and feel safe. I’ve got plenty of other rooms at my disposal. Letting you have that one room isn’t that big of a deal to me. Letting you have a place where you can feel safe is a big deal.”

Stunned Loki raised his head a little more and finally met Tony’s eyes.

“There you are,” Tony said sounding amused. “Now I can see those eyes.”

“I don’t understand why you would do this,” Loki admitted.

“I just told you. I don’t mind not being able to enter that one room but I do mind if you have a have a place where you feel safe.”

“But… but why? I mean… not that you have to answer if-”

“If I don’t want, yeah I got that.” With a sigh Tony ran a hand through his hair. “I suppose there’s no getting around this huh?”

Loki frowned trying to understand the question.

“There’s some things you need to know about me. Listen up because I don’t talk about this often and I’m probably not going to discuss this again. I’m also probably just going to hit the major parts instead of going through it all.”

Unconsciously Loki leaned forward slightly.

“A few years back I, uh… well, I found myself in Afghanistan for a weapons demonstration.”

Intrigued Loki cocked his head and continued listening.

“Yeah, that was back when Stark Industries still manufactured weapons.”

“You do not manufacture them any longer?”

“No, but that’s part of the story.”

Suddenly very aware of breaking the protocols of his position Loki began to apologize but Tony shushed him.

“Just let me get through this. Okay, so when I was in Afghanistan the convoy I was a part of was attacked. I was injured and ended up with a chest full of shrapnel.”

Loki winced.

“I passed out not long after that but when I woke up I had an electromagnet hooked to a car battery stuck in my chest. I’d been captured by a terrorist organization known as the Ten Rings. They
wanted me to build a copy of the missile I’d originally been out there to demonstrate. They actually
did have the majority of the supplies needed and were willing to acquire the rest. Not surprisingly I
resisted the idea. They used quite a few, uh, ‘creative methods’ to help change my mind.”

Tony paused eying him intently and Loki winced at the words ‘creative methods’.

“You understand what I mean?” Tony asked.

“Torture,” Loki answered quietly.

“Probably not as bad as what you’ve been through but…”

“You are a mortal, I am not.”

“Yeah,” Tony muttered. “Still doesn’t make it right. Anyway, I eventually agreed. The other prisoner
they had assisted me except I didn’t build the missile. We managed to keep it a secret until almost the
last minute. If there had been just a little more time…”

As the words trailed off Tony’s eyes took on a far away look. Loki waited but it didn’t seem as if
Tony would continue anytime soon. “What did you build?”

“Huh?” Tony asked as his eyes seemed to focus on the present once more.

“I asked what it was you did build if not the missile.”

“Oh. That’s when I built the first Iron Man suit.”

“As a captive?”

“Yes but they figured out something was off a little too early. There wouldn’t have been enough time
for it to fully charge except for Yinsen. Yinsen is the name of the other prison where that assisted me.
He grabbed a gun and ran out of our cell to buy me time. If I went after him the suit would never
have charged and we would have both died. I had to make a choice. He managed to buy me enough
time before…”

“I understand,” Loki told him quickly to keep Tony from actually having to say the words.

Tony nodded, not quite meeting his eyes. “So, yeah. There’s some other stuff too but that’s when I
decided I was going to stop making weapons.” Straightening Tony slapped his hands down onto his
legs and rubbed his thighs vigorously. “I may not have gone through everything you have but I can
at least understand where you’re coming from. I mean, at least partially. I can understand what it’s
like to feel helpless, not in control of your own life. That’s why I want you to have a place where
you can feel safe Loki. Because I know what it’s like to not feel safe. Can you understand it now?”

Unable to answer verbally Loki nodded.

“There’s more we need to talk about but right now…”

“Yes,” Loki agreed instantly. “I… I would appreciate some time to think things through if you do not
mind,” Loki stated. When Tony finally met his eyes Loki knew that Tony saw completely through
the hastily constructed half-truth. It wasn’t that Loki didn’t want time to process the information, but
it was more about giving Tony time to deal with the emotions brought back by the memories. Tony
gave him a small half-smile and stood.

“I’m going to spend some time in my workshop,” he announced.
“As you wish,” Loki replied with a single nod. Tony almost looked like he wanted to say something but instead he merely returned Loki’s nod and exited the room. Loki watched him leave until the elevator doors closed finally blocking Tony from his vision. It was only then that he realized Tony had left without telling him what was expected of him for today.

“Now what am I supposed to do?” Loki huffed.

“If you are well enough you might try lunch,” an unfamiliar voice stated.

Jumping up Loki turned trying to find the source of the voice. There wasn’t anyone else in the room as far as he could see. “Hello?” he asked cautiously.

“Hello master Loki,” The voice replied.

“Who are you?”

“I am JARVIS, an acronym which stands for Just A Rather Very Intelligent System. I am an Artificial Intelligence system created by master Stark to assist with running Stark Industries as well as providing additional security for Stark Tower and whatever else he may require.”

“So you are… not human?”

“Correct. I am an Artificial Intelligence system.”

“So you have no form?”

“Correct. If I may suggest, sir, there are quite a few books you may find of interest as well as a rather large DVD collection if books are not to your liking.”

“Books?” Loki asked hopefully. “Wait, am I allowed to read them?”

“I was not given instructions to the contrary sir.”

“That’s not exactly the same thing,” Loki grumbled.

“If you’ll pardon me for saying so sir, but with master Stark it usually is the same.”

Before he could speak again a familiar tingling sensation began running through his body. No, Loki thought as he felt the magic threatening to consume him. It was too much, too soon. He wouldn’t be able to stand this again so soon after the others.

Standing Tony leaned over and firmly grasped the edges of the work table. Discussing his time in Afghanistan had sucked as much as he thought it would and he was desperately trying to stave off yet another panic attack. If only he could catch his breath, or slow his heart rate, or something, anything.

“Sir?”

“Not now JARVIS,” Tony growled through clenched teeth.

“I believe it would be in master Loki’s best interest if you were able to calm down.”

“I said- Wait.” Tony struggled to pull himself together enough to form coherent thoughts. “Loki’s interest?” he managed to ask.
“There seems to be a direct correlation between master Loki’s well-being and your panic attacks.”

“How is that even possible,” Tony grit out through his clenched jaw.

“I lack sufficient evidence to form a hypothesis on that sir.”

“Then guess JARVIS,” Tony snarled.

“Judging by the data currently available I would speculate master Loki’s physical health is somehow tied to your emotional state.”

“Somehow?”

“I did state that I do not have enough data to create well formed hypothesis.”

Tony took several deep breaths trying to calm down. “What data are you basing this hypothesis on J?”

“Information gathered from last night and master Loki’s current level of distress.”

Tony’s head snapped up as he eyed the ceiling briefly. “What current distress?”

“Currently master Loki’s level of distress is almost as high as it was earlier this morning after your last panic attack.”

“Define distress,” Tony snapped.

“In this case I am using it to describe the behavior master Loki exhibits when what he calls ‘the magic’ is causing him pain and specific brain wave and chemical changes.”

“Damn it JARVIS, why didn’t you tell me before now!”

“I lacked sufficient information to suggest a correlation until just now sir.”

“Where is Loki?”

“Currently master Loki is lying on the living room floor.”

“Damn it.”

Whimpering Loki curled into a ball. The pain hadn’t been nearly as bad this time but that had been a small consolation. Punished this way three times in less than a day was almost more than he was able to stand. He wasn’t even sure what he’d done wrong this time or if the current punishment was for his past transgressions. Suddenly he could swear he felt a hand gently stroking down his back. There was no way it was real but it didn’t matter. Even knowing it was imagined he couldn’t help it. Loki pressed back against the hand gently petting him.

“Sh Loki. It’s all okay now, I’ve got you.”

With his eyes still closed Loki tried to understand why his imagination should have conjured Tony’s voice for the person soothing him. Ultimately it didn’t matter, he decided. As long as he wasn’t being punished everything else could be considered later. For now he was content to relax into whatever comfort his mind chose to provide.
“Come on, we need to get you into your bed okay?”

“Know better,” Loki muttered. After everything he wasn’t about to let even his mind tell him to do something he was forbidden. He wasn’t sure the punishment had been because of the etiquette breach but surely that hadn’t helped. No, far better that he remain on the floor where of person of his standing belonged.

“Come on Loki, work with me here.”

“Leave me, my master will return soon enough. I need not this illusion.”

“Loki,” the illusion growled.

“I care not. I will be punished no matter what I do and you are merely an illusion. You cannot harm me.”

“Yeah, so not an illusion.”

“I said leave me,” Loki growled. Opening his eyes he stilled when he found his master kneeling next to him. “I… I… I didn’t mean to-”

“Hush,” Tony ordered.

Dropping his head Loki slid his eyes closed. Could he do nothing right? Defeatedly he waited to be punished yet again for daring to yell at his master. Instead of hurting him hands slid under his arms and tugged slightly.

“Come on Reindeer Games, help me out a little.”

“What would you have me do?”

“It’d be nice if you helped me get you to your feet.”

“I can stand, m-... Tony.” When he was finally upright he adopted the standard position of a slave awaiting new orders and waited.

“Right, so…”

Loki waited silently, hardly daring to breathe.

“Damn it Loki. I’m trying I really am but you’re making this difficult.”

“I will accept whatever p-”

“No, you stop right there. Fuck. Okay, you stay there. I’ll be back in a minute.”

Without another word Tony stalked off leaving Loki with nothing to do beyond envisioning one horrible punishment after the next.

-“What’s up?” Steve asked when he finally answered the call.

“I can’t do it,” Tony told him without preamble. “I tried but I just can’t do this. It’s more than what he expects me to do to him but that’s also a big part of it. I just, I can’t do this.”
“Woah wait a minute. Slow down. What’s going on?”

“I don’t even know anymore. You know what, can you come over? I don’t really feel like discussing this over the phone and I really need someone to check up on Loki for me.”

“Wait, what’s wrong with Loki?”

It really shouldn’t hurt he told himself. It really, really shouldn’t… But it did. Somehow that note of distrust he heard in Steve’s voice hurt more than even the sharpest insult thrown at him by anyone else had ever hurt. Yeah, well whatever. It’s not like he hadn’t already expected to disappoint the other man eventually. He just hadn’t expected it to come so soon after Steve’s previous compliments. And really, those shouldn’t have meant as much to him as he had let them mean.

“Tony?”

“Loki’s fine,” Tony growled. “Well, I think he’s fine. Well, now anyway. Look can’t you just come over so we can do this in person?” Fuck it was getting difficult to breathe.

“Yeah, I’ll be there in about,” there was a slight pause, “twenty minutes. Okay?”

“Yeah, and Steve?”

“Yeah?”

“Thanks for this.”

“It’s what friends do Tony.”

-

“Tony?”

Barely holding himself together Tony lifted his head from where it was hidden behind his knees at the sound of Steve’s voice.

Steve let out a loud whistle. “Redecorating the place?”

Tony merely ignored the remark. He knew what the workshop looked like. After all he’d been the one to destroy it.

“Hey,” Steve said calmly as he walked closer. “What’s up?”

Shaking his head Tony let it fall back down and wrapped his arms around his legs even more tightly. In and out, he reminded himself trying to control his breathing. Cannot have another panic attack. Can. Not. There was a shuffling noise nearby and he knew that Steve was lowering himself to the floor next to him.

“Tony?”

“Can’t,” Tony told him. “Can’t do it.”

“Can you be a little more specific?”

“Panic attack. It… they… Loki…” Trailing off Tony growled angrily. “Damn it!”

“Okay, it’s fine. We don’t have to talk about that right now.”
“Yes we do,” Tony disagreed tightening his arms even more around his legs. “My panic attacks hit Loki. If I can’t… If I…”

“Your panic attacks affect Loki?”

Unable to speak and face still hidden Tony nodded.

“Well then it probably won’t do any good to focus on that right now. Let’s focus on something else for a bit.”

Shaking his head Tony began rocking slightly.

“Sir, I’m reading a spike in the orbitofrontal cortex of master Loki’s brain as well as an increase of the gamma-aminobutyric acid.”

“Not helping JARVIS,” Tony barked angrily.

“What exactly does that mean JARVIS?” Steve asked.

“It means my fucking panic attack is causing Loki’s anxiety to spike,” Tony snapped.

“Focusing on that right now isn’t going to help him is it?”

Tony let out an unhappy laugh. “Yeah so snap out of it, right?”

“That’s not what I said Tony. What about focusing on your breathing? I mean, that helped him right?”

“And you think I’m not already doing that?”

“Right. Okay, so what can I do to help?”

“Like I fucking know?”

“If I may,” JARVIS interrupted. “Perhaps if you were to just talk to him. I have tried but it only seems to add to his agitation.”

“Is there anything worse than being patronized by a machine that you actually built yourself?” Tony groused, still rocking slowly.

“Well, you were the one that built it so it does kind of make sense,” Steve said thoughtfully.

Tony had to smile slightly at that.

“I mean, is it really any surprise he would have some of your characteristics?”

“Yeah, and fuck you very much too,” Tony shot back weakly.

“Hey, don’t blame me, you created him. I mean, you are the one person solely responsible for his attitude. Of course he’s going to have some of your finer personality traits.”

“Ass,” Tony muttered finally lifting his head to look at Steve. “Could you go check on Loki for me? I want to make sure he’s alright but I don’t know if I can be in the same room with him right now.”

“Depends. You going to be all right?”

“Yeah. I think I’m about done freaking out for now.”
“Good thing. I’m not sure if you’re workshop would survive much more.”

“Fuck off,” Tony replied smirking. “Besides, it’s just a little creative redecorating.”

Crossing his arms Steve cocked an eyebrow and waited.

Tony, unable to help it, snickered. “Yeah yeah, just go. I’ll be fine.”

“Got it,” Steve answered as he stood.

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Entering the living room Steve wasn’t sure what to expect. At least it seemed the living room had been spared Tony’s ‘creative redecorating’ so that much was good. What had him worried was the former god standing stiffly in the middle of the living room. At least Loki looked fairly unharmed so that much was good. Now if he could only figure out how to approach Loki without startling him too much.

Loki?” Steve called softly.

The former god flinched and began trembling slightly. Steve cautiously moved until he was only a few feet away from Loki and inspected him for any obvious injuries. Not seeing any a small wave of relief washed over him. So far so good. Now if he could only get Loki to stop shaking and relax even just a little.

“Everything’s all right now Loki. Whatever happened earlier is over, okay?”

The trembling didn’t lessen nor did Loki give any indication of hearing him. Steve wracked his brain trying to come up with a way to get through to him. Somehow he didn’t think he would respond to the same kind of light-hearted teasing he’d used with Tony. Loki was going to require a different tactic if he had any hope of getting a response. There was no way Loki was going to respond to anything remotely comforting right now. Realizing what it was going to take Steve wasn’t sure if he really wanted to do this. Still, he had to help Loki.

“Eyes open,” Steve ordered gruffly. Loki’s eyes flew open so quickly Steve almost winced at the action. “Now tell me what happened, and don’t leave out anything.”

Eyes wide Loki shook his head.

“Are you disagreeing with a direct order?” Steve asked trying his best to sound annoyed.

“It… it is not my story to tell… other sir,” Loki answered quietly.

“Fair enough. Tell me as much as you can then.”

“I… Tony…” Loki hesitated briefly before starting again. “Tony has gifted me the room I am currently using and claims he will not enter it without my permission.”

“All right,” Steve drawled slowly, crossing his arms.

“It is his room and as a slave I have no rights. I do not understand why he would not enter when he wishes.”

“I know very well he informed you we don’t do slavery here.”

“But it is still his room,” Loki persisted.
“Not if he gave it to you,” Steve argued. Loki made a distressed noise and Steve fought back a sigh. “What specifically are you supposed to be doing here Loki?”

“Making reparations,” Loki answered instantly.

“Uh huh,” Steve answered trying to sound bored. “And?”

“And… Um…”

Loki trailed off but Steve remained silent.

“Obeying my master?”

“Technically speaking I suppose that’s correct. Except Tony doesn’t like being called that, does he?”

“No sir,” Loki whispered.

“So do you want to rephrase that?”

“Obeying Tony,” Loki answered quietly.

“And Tony told you to consider the room yours didn’t he?”

“Yes but…”

Again Steve merely waited, forcing Loki to continue.

“But slaves aren’t supposed to have personal things like that.”

“But they’re also supposed to obey the orders of those they’re tasked to serve aren’t they?”

“Yes?”

“Then isn’t arguing about whether or not the room is yours disobeying?”

Loki opened his mouth like he was going to respond, hesitated, closed it, then finally nodded once. “You are right, other sir.”

He wanted to reassure Loki that everything would be all right but that would only be counterproductive at this point. As much as it caused his stomach to churn he had to continue to be strict for now if he had any hopes of getting through to Loki. “What else happened?” Steve pressed. There was no way something as simple as giving Loki a room would have caused Tony to have a panic attack. There had to be more to it than just that.

“That is the part I am unsure if I should relate,” answered Loki.

“Relate as much as you can,” Steve growled.

“I… do not know that I should,” Loki whispered.

“Afghanistan,” said a voice from behind Steve.

Turning Steve found Tony, head down, gaze focused on the floor and leaning against the door frame separating the living room from the hallway that held the elevator.

“I told him about my time in Afghanistan,” Tony stated finally raising his head. “Loki, are you okay?”
“I am… adequate,” Loki answered hesitantly.

“Remember, I want the truth,” Tony insisted.

“I am adequate,” Loki repeated quietly.

“Fuck,” Tony cursed, crossing his arms.

To Steve the gesture seemed defensive; like Tony was trying to put distance between himself and everything else. Actually, knowing Tony as well as he did, that probably wasn’t too far from the truth. Tony was, confident, outgoing, and congenial, but not very open.

“What does adequate mean?” Tony asked.

“It means…” Loki paused attempting to find the correct words. He was unsure of what Tony asking, thus putting him at a loss on how to respond. “It means I am capable and able to fulfill any task you should require,” Loki offered.

“Uh huh,” Tony stated simply.

“So, um, what would you like me to do today?” Loki managed to ask without stammering too badly.

“For starters I want you to sit down.”

Loki sat instantly and winced even before he heard the low growl. Standing he moved back to the chair he’d used during their earlier conversation and sat down slowly. “Habit,” he explained quietly. Finally the other two made their way over and sat down as well. Tony took his original place on the couch and Steve sat in the only other chair. For a while there was only a long, unbroken, silence.

Finally Tony spoke.

“I want to apologize,” Tony finally told him.

Loki looked up in surprise at that. “I’m sorry?”

“No, I am. That is kind of the point of an apology.”

“I meant, I don’t understand,” Loki clarified.

“Now that I believe,” Tony snorted.

“Tony,” Steve chastised lightly.

“Yeah, yeah,” Tony replied dismissively. Taking a deep breath Tony released it and began again. “I’m not sure how all of this works but it seems we’re connected somehow.”

Loki nodded once and waited.

“No comment on that?” Tony asked, cocking an eyebrow.

“You are-” He stopped before he could utter the wrong word. “Tony,” he finished quietly.

“I can’t argue with you there, Rudolph, but what does that have to do with anything?”

“A slave is always bound to their, um, to the person they serve.”
“Fucking hell,” Tony barked. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I thought you knew,” Loki whispered shrinking in on himself.

“Damn it. I apologize again, it wasn’t your fault. Those ‘people’ that dropped you off should have said something. There’s no easy way to ask this so I’m just going to just come right out and ask it. Did anything happen last night that I should know about?”

“What specifically would you like to know of?”

“Loki,” Tony growled.

He couldn’t do it. There was only so much vagueness he could handle. If he did the wrong thing he would be punished and with all of the recent punishments he couldn’t take another one so soon. Loki broke. “I don’t understand. I’m sorry but I don’t. Please just tell me what you want. I cannot take another punishment right now, I need time. Please just tell me what you want,” he begged.

“I told you, all I want from you is the truth.”

“I, you, the magic….” In an effort to calm down Loki took a few deep breaths and released them. “You punished me and I suffered as I deserve,” he answered obediently. He could feel his cheeks heating at the admission and worked to calm his anger. Was Tony really going to force him to describe his suffering? Wasn’t the pain of the punishments enough? Did he really have to humiliate himself further by admitting to his useless begging and whining during his punishments?

“It was an accident,” Tony said quietly.

Loki frowned.

“I know you have no reason to believe me but it really was an accident. I had a panic attack early this morning. When I left earlier I had another mini panic attack. While I was still in the workshop JARVIS hypothesized that my panic attacks were affecting you. What happened last night and earlier this afternoon was an accident Loki. I had no clue you were being affected as well. I wasn’t trying to ‘punish’ you.”

“It’s true,” Steve broke in unexpectedly. “I was here when JARVIS explained how the two things were tied together. Whatever happened it wasn’t on purpose.”

“I just want the truth Loki,” Tony repeated.

He wasn’t sure how to respond to that but he felt compelled to at least try. “This is all different to me,” he said softly. “I am unused to having an opinion on things.”

“I highly doubt that,” Tony quipped.

“True,” Loki acknowledged. “Very well then suffice it to say that I am unused being asked for my opinion. It is odd and completely unheard of for someone in my current situation were we on Asgard.”

“Yeah? Well we’re not on Asgard. My tower, my rules,” Tony argued.

“Indeed,” Loki agreed. “Tony?”

“Yeah?”

Loki hesitated slightly. Was he seriously thinking about this? No, that wasn’t right question was it?
The correct question was could he honestly part with the last remaining link he had to his mother.

“Hey,” Tony said, interrupting his thoughts.

“Yes sorry, I was just… thinking. I have something that might help.”

“Help?” Tony asked skeptically.

“Yes.” Reaching up he placed a hand over the necklace. Could he really go through with this? Glancing up he met Tony’s eyes. The small, slightly amused smile from earlier this afternoon returned.

“There’s those eyes again. Much better,” Tony stated approvingly.

Yes, he decided. He still couldn’t place why but for some reason this felt right. “I have a token my mother gave me many years ago. It has helped me much through the years. I have every reason to believe it will also assist you.”

“A token?”

Gently gripping the chain Loki pulled the necklace out from underneath his shirt. Tony inspected it carefully before lifting his eyes back to Loki’s and waited silently. “This should help with your anxiety.”

“How does it work?”

“Mother gave it to me many years ago. It’s purpose is merely to help soothe one’s nerves. You must want the calm before it will even have any effect. If you truly do not wish it then it will not work. You need have no fear of it affecting you without your consent.”

“Your mother gave that to you?”

“She did.”

“Why didn’t they take it when they made you a slave?”

Loki smiled. “They tried but they could not. Mother imbued it with magic that will not allow it to be removed by any but the wearer while they yet live.”

Tony let out an appreciative whistle. “Don’t you want to keep it? I mean, it seems like it might be helpful given…”

“My current situation,” Loki finished knowingly. “I believe it might be of more assistance to you. Considering that we are bonded together now it might also be more useful for me were you to accept it.”

“So formal,” Tony murmured.

“It also will not work if you do not accept of your own free will. Yet another safeguard it is imbued with to keep it from being used to force one into unwilling compliance. You must accept of your own free will and you must wish for the calm before it will work.”

“What if it only works for you because you’re, you know, the same as her?”

Slumping Loki wrapped his arms around himself and shook his head.
“Loki?”

“I am not,” he whispered.

“How is that possible?”

“She did not give birth to me. Odin found me abandoned in a temple on Jotunheim and took me back to Asgard. I am not of her blood.”

“So Thor’s not really your brother then?”

At the mention of Thor’s name Loki’s eyes closed in pain as memories of his half brother filled his mind.

“Tony,” Steve barked sharply.

“Right, sorry,” Tony apologized.

“So what does this mean?”

Dropping his head Loki straightened his back and focused on explaining. “It means that you should be able to benefit from the necklace the same as I,” he managed fairly smoothly.

“Are you really sure you don’t want to keep it?”

“If you choose to accept it then it should help with the panic attacks which should in turn help me as well. Also…” He sighed heavily. “Also I would like for you to accept it. You have gifted me with my own personal space solely that I might have a space to feel safe. That is something no slave could have ever hoped for before. I would like to repay the favor.”

“It wasn’t a favor,” Tony grumbled. “It’s just called being a decent human being.”

“Then, please, accept this gift as me being a decent ‘human being’.”

“I, uh, accept,” Tony muttered looking slightly flustered.

Holding back a smile Loki nodded once and uttered the words that would allow for the necklace to be removed. Standing he moved until he was in front on Tony and waited. “If you would permit me,” Loki said with another slight nod.

“If you ever wish to remove it you need only repeat the same words I use when I fasten the clasp.”

“Alright then,” Tony agreed.

Leaning forward Loki reached around Tony’s neck. Speaking the words that bound the necklace to it’s new owner Loki fastened the clasp and leaned back. Inspecting his necklace around Tony’s neck Loki discovered the sight pleased him. At the very least this should repay the gift of personal space that Tony had given him. Despite his experiences Loki found he honestly believed that Tony meant the room was his and he would be safe in it. For a gift of that magnitude, especially at this point in his life, Loki would have given almost anything in return.
It had been a long day and he was glad when Steve finally left and they finally decided to call it a night. He still wasn’t sure how he felt about everything. As he lay awake Tony’s hand drifted to the necklace Loki had given him. He wanted to ask more about Loki’s mother but something held him back. He felt his eyes start to tear up as his thoughts began to drift to his own mother. How would he feel if Loki had asked him about her? Unconsciously his hand clasped around the small round crystal pendant. No, he decided. He wouldn’t force Loki to talk about his mother. If Loki wanted to discuss it he would listen but that was all.
Closing the door Tony carried the bags of food to the kitchen and set them down on the table. Whistling he opened them and began unpacking. Not knowing what Loki might like Tony had ordered a little bit of everything. Well, he’d had JARVIS order everything so it amounted to the same thing really. When he was finished laying out the food he moved to the cabinets. He snagged some plates and two glasses. Putting them on the table he double checked to see if he’d missed anything. Silverware, he reminded himself.

“JARVIS let me know when Loki wakes up, will you?” he called as he set the silverware down on the table.

“Master Loki has been awake for one hour and forty-seven minutes,” JARVIS replied.

Tony paused at that information. He vaguely wondered if the reason Loki hadn’t left his room yet was because he just hadn’t been ‘ordered’ out of it or he wanted time alone. Okay, so give him a choice then, Tony’s mind told him. “Tell him he’s welcome to join me for breakfast if he feels like it but don’t make it sound like an order.”

“Yes sir,” JARVIS answered faithfully.

Tony continued humming as he organized and rearranged the things on the table.

“Master Loki, if you do not mind, your presence for breakfast this morning would be appreciated but not required,” a voice stated cutting into the quiet.

Loki jumped in shock and had already scanned the room before he realized the voice had been that of Tony’s electronic creation. “JARVIS?”

“Yes master Loki.”

“Tony wishes for me to join him?”

“Only if you should desire it.”

“How am I to know what is expected of me?” Loki fumed.

“You could always ask,” JARVIS answered immediately.

“Oh yes,” Loki huffed with a humorless laugh. “A slave questioning their master would go over well, I’m sure.”

“Master Tony has already informed you that you are not considered a slave.”

“Even were he serious I am still a slave by Asgardian standards,” Loki argued.

“As I believe he told you last night, ‘his tower, his rules’.”

Loki’d had enough. If he was to be punished then so be it but he had to know. “Tell him I will not be joining him because I do not feel like it,” Loki growled.

“Yes master Loki,” JARVIS replied.
As the room descended into silence Loki began to panic. Had he seriously just overtly defied his master? What in Hel had he been thinking? The punishment for this would beyond anything he’d suffered since arriving here. Not only that, he hadn’t even told off his master in person he had let a machine do it. How had he ever thought that was a was a good idea?

“Master Tony asks whether or not you would like a plate delivered,” JARVIS stated, startling Loki once more.

“Delivered?” Loki asked in disbelief.

“Correct.”

“By him?”

“Shall I tell him you do not wish his company?” JARVIS asked.

“No!” Loki shouted. “I mean… Tell him… Tell him I changed my mind. I will be there in just a moment.”

“As you wish.”

Glancing down Loki inspected his clothes. As much as he wished he could change he didn’t want to risk mentioning it. Now missing his necklace the clothing was his last remaining tie to his old life. What if Tony decided to take it away? No, he wouldn’t mention it. Still, he couldn’t help thinking that a bath might be nice. Should he ask Tony or wait for a direct order instead? Another thought struck him.

“JARVIS?”

“Yes master Loki?”

“How do you think Tony would respond were I to ask for a bath?”

“I do believe he would be agitated that you felt the need to ask for permission instead of merely just taking a bath.”

“Do you think I should ask?”

“Given what I know of master Tony I believe you should assume you are welcome to do almost anything that he has not already specifically contradicted.”

Pacing Tony resisted the urge to ask JARVIS what was taking Loki so long. Maybe he could bring up the video feed and check for himself? No, he had promised Loki privacy in his own room and he would respect that. Unconsciously his hand strayed upward to wrap around the pendant hanging from the necklace. He cast a quick glance to the plate he’d fixed on the off chance that Loki would feel more comfortable eating in his own room instead of in the kitchen with him. Should he take the plate instead and let Loki make one of his own? Just then Loki walked into the kitchen.

“Hey,” Tony said instantly. “I know I didn’t have much for breakfast yesterday so I had J order some things for today. If there’s anything you like just let me know. I can have JARVIS order more of it so you can have it for breakfast for, uh, however long you stay. I can order several things actually. I mean, so you’re not stuck eating the same thing every day.” Realizing he was babbling Tony shut his mouth cursing himself.
"I am sure I will be fine with whatever you would normally eat," Loki replied quietly.

Ah geez, back to this? He thought they’d made progress yesterday but Loki looked almost as nervous as when he first arrived. Okay, so it’s a challenge, he decided. He could handle that. He was good with challenges. He would just have to work harder to figure out how to solve this problem.

“Nope,” Tony proclaimed. “Taste first, then make a decision.”

“As you wish,” Loki answered deferentially.

“Yep,” Tony agreed. Time to see how much progress he’d actually made. “Sit,” Tony ordered. Loki moved to the table, pulled out a chair and sat down gingerly on the edge. So far so good, Tony thought repressing a sigh. Something that felt suspiciously like relief washed over him and Tony ignored it. “Right, so try whatever you want and tell me what you like.”

“As you wish,” Loki repeated.

That was going to get old fast. At least they seemed to be past the ‘master’ crap.

“Tony?” Loki asked quietly.

“Yeah?”

“Would it be possible… I mean, if you do not mind, might I be allowed to bathe?”

Tony blinked in confusion. “Uh, yeah. Why wouldn’t you be allowed? No, wait. Don’t answer that.” Tony knew precisely why Loki would ask something like that. At least Loki had felt comfortable asking. That was progress, right? Loki said something Tony missed snapping his attention back to the former god sitting at his table. “Huh?”

“I said, will you not eat?”

“Oh, yeah sure.”

Sitting down he joined Loki at the table. Before he could reach for anything Loki grabbed the nearest dish, stood, and offered it to Tony. Stunned Tony stared in shock as a familiar sense of panic rose in him. Pushing the emotion away Tony shook his head. “Yeah, no offense it’s just that I don’t like being handed things,” he muttered. For a moment neither moved. Finally Loki set the dish down next to Tony’s plate and moved back to his own chair. Tony wasn’t quite sure what to make of how he was feeling so he ignored his emotions and focused on eating instead.

They ate in silence. Tony watched quietly noting Loki’s facial expressions as he tried each of the various foods. In his mind he kept a mental list of anything that Loki seemed to regard favorably. When Loki had tried at least a bite from everything Tony stood and went to refill his coffee. After a moment of hesitation Tony poured a second cup for Loki. He put the cup on the table next to Loki and finally sat down. When he looked back up Loki was eyeing him strangely.

“What?”

“I am confused,” Loki answered.

“By what?”

“You would… serve me?”

“It’s not ‘serving’ you, I just offered you a cup of coffee.”
Warily Loki glanced down to the cup and lowered his eyebrows suspiciously.

“It’s not poisoned,” Tony huffed.

“We do not have this ‘coffee’ on Asgard,” Loki told him meeting his eyes once more.

“It’s good,” Tony told him. “You should try it.”

Loki eyed the cup skeptically again. Finally he raised the cup and inhaled. Silently watching Tony continued to wait. With one last glance to Tony Loki finally took a sip and grimaced. He set the cup back down carefully.

“Yeah, well most people put things in it,” Tony said hastily. “I like at least two spoonfuls of sugar in mine. A lot of people put creamer in as well. So, I mean, don’t make any hasty judgements. I mean, if you don’t like it though that’s fine too… Damn it. I’m babbling, just ignore me,” Tony muttered.

Loki blinked in stunned silence at the sudden flow of words. He was unsure what to make of the long, and seemingly pointless, monologue. Did it mean Tony want him to like this bitter concoction? Even though there hadn’t been a direct question Loki still felt as if he should say something. “It is… not something I am used to drinking,” Loki offered politely.

“It’s not for everyone I suppose,” Tony answered.

“I could add things to it like you suggested and try it again?”

“I don’t know about that after that face you made,” Tony replied doubtfully.

“I may grow to enjoy it given enough time,” Loki suggested.

Tony ran a hand through his hair and sighed. “You’re just saying that because you think it’s what to hear aren’t you?”

Loki pressed his lips together searching for an adequate response.


“The truth is I am not overly fond of such a bitter flavor,” he admitted. “I am more used to the lighter tastes. I truly did like what I was allowed for morning meal yesterday.”

“Really?” Tony asked sounding surprised.


“So was there anything here you liked?”

After a lengthy discussion Loki had no doubt Tony had memorized everything of his food preferences from likes, to dislikes, to even those he held no opinion on whatsoever. He hadn’t meant to hold his master’s gaze but Tony made it difficult to look away. Tony, for his part, didn’t seem to mind. They conversed for more than an hour almost as if there was no difference in their respective stations and Loki had relished every moment of it. For a time he’d even been able to forget about being a slave and it had been wonderful.
Now he sat in the bathing room that adjoined to ‘his’ bedroom anxiously awaiting Tony’s return. He had been given specific orders not to move until Tony returned and was becoming even more nervous as the seconds slowly dragged past. When he heard Tony enter the bedroom his muscles unconsciously stiffened. Finally Tony appeared in the doorway looking as uncomfortable as Loki felt. Loki dropped his eyes and waited.

“Hey now, none of that. Eyes up,” Tony ordered.

“Yes Tony,” Loki answered, dutifully raising his eyes.

“Much better,” Tony approved. “All right, you know how a bath works?”

“I would assume it is much the same as a shower only with a tub instead of a stall and I did have cause to use a shower the last time I was on Midgard.”

“Really?”

“Yes,” he whispered.

Unable to help it Loki glanced away. Memories unbidden flashed through his mind. It hadn’t been he who had operated the shower, he hadn’t had enough strength to even try at the time. Instead Barton had carried him to the shower and turned the strange knobs. At first the water burned his skin. In pain he’d struck out harshly with his magic hurting Barton. Slowly, the temperature changed to something more comfortable. Beyond that almost everything was a blur. The only thing he remembered clearly was even more pain and a soft humming as Barton wiped the grime off of him removing bits of his skin in the process as well.

Suddenly there were hands on him and Loki jumped to his feet. Panic threatened to consume him. Scrambling backward he hit a wall pressed himself firmly against it. He wanted to flee but fear kept his muscles from obeying his will. Breathing became difficult and he couldn’t seem to think. The images shifted and suddenly he was back on Sanctuary in the presence of Thanos. This couldn’t be happening, not now. He had been so sure he’d gotten away! Oh norns, the pain! Please make it stop! His knees buckled and against his will he slid to the ground.

“Please, no more! It wasn’t my fault, I tried! Please stop! … Please.”

Staring in horror Tony froze at the sight before him. Somehow the whimpered please at the end was more painful than the shouting. A panic attack he could handle. He didn’t want to have to handle a panic attack but he could at least deal with one. Whatever was happening now wasn’t a simple panic attack and he wasn’t sure how to help.

“I tried! Don’t punish me… Please?”

Holy hell, he couldn’t do this. He had to do something. Kneeling down he reached carefully reached out a hand. The second Tony’s fingers made contact Loki flinched away and knocked his head against the tub. This wasn’t going to work. He had to do something or Loki would only end up hurting himself. Drawing his legs up Loki curled in on himself and began shaking as he continued to plead. Reaching behind himself Tony set the pile of clothing down and closed the door. It wouldn’t help matters if Loki ran out of the room before Tony could get a handle on the situation. Carefully he inched closer to the trembling figure.

It helped matters that Loki’s arms were wrapped around himself. When he was as close as he dared to get Tony took a deep breath. Moving as fast as he could he lurched forward and wrapped his arms
around Loki’s middle. The former god howled and struggled to get free. Tony held on tightly. If Loki had been any stronger or still had his magic he might have managed to break free. Thankfully he was able to maintain his hold and Loki’s arms remained trapped between his own body and Tony’s arms.

“Please!” Loki shouted. “I tried!”

“Sh,” Tony whispered. “It’s okay Loki, you’re safe.”

“Don’t hurt me anymore, I tried I did!”

“I know you did. It’s okay now though. Whatever happened it’s all over now.”

“Please just kill me,” Loki sobbed.

Yeah, like that’s gonna happen, Tony thought to himself. “I need you to listen to me now okay? Loki, can you hear me?”

“I’m so sorry. Please don’t hurt me anymore,” Loki mumbled.

“Sh, no one is going to hurt you. I don’t know what you’re seeing but it’s not real. You hear me? It’s not real Loki. I’m real. Just listen to my voice, Loki.”

“Hurts,” Loki whispered.

“I know but it’s not real, not anymore. I’m real Loki. Come back to me now, okay?”

Loki seemed beyond words at this point and merely broke into wracking sobs. Tony continued holding the god turned slave and whispering reassurances. Eventually the tension in Loki’s muscles melted ever and Loki unceremoniously slumped against Tony’s chest still sobbing. Tony sighed moved a hand until he could rub Loki’s back. He couldn’t believe he was the one having to comfort Loki. Why him? He wasn’t any good at this kind of crap.

“Loki? You listening to me? Come on Loki, answer me.” The only response was a hiccuped sob and Tony rolled his eyes. “Come on Loki, I know you can hear me. You need to calm down now, okay? Everything’s alright, no one is going to hurt you.” Loki’s arms reached up and wrapped around him so tightly Tony winced. “It’s all right Loki, you’re safe. Nothing can hurt you here I promise.” Loki’s head nuzzled against the crook of Tony’s neck and Tony resisted the urge to roll his eyes again. Suddenly he felt Loki stiffen.

“You okay down there Rudolph?” Tony asked after a minute.

No response.

“Loki?”

“Tony?”

 Yep, just me.”

“I… I am sorry,” Loki whispered. “I don’t know what happened.”

And once again the trembling started. Tony continued to rub Loki’s back lightly. At least Loki finally seemed to be back in the present and with him. “Nothing to be sorry for,” Tony told him gruffly. “Anyone who’s been through half the crap you’ve been through deserves the occasional breakdown.”
I fear I may have soiled your shirt,” Loki stated softly.

“Trust me I have plenty of others.”

“I would like to apologize for my… temporary loss of control.”

“Nope, no apology needed. After my panic attacks hurting you a little crying is no less than I deserve.”

He felt Loki’s head shift slightly, nuzzling into his neck once more.

“Just consider this payback for my earlier lapses of control, okay?”

“I am not sure it is the same thing.”

“You’re right, it’s not. My loss of control caused you pain. Yours didn’t cost me anything more that a slightly damp shirt.”

“Tony?”

“Yeah?”

“Thank you.”

“No need for a thanks any more than an apology,” Tony huffed. “So you ready for that shower now or you want to go lay down?” He felt Loki stiffen at that remark. Shit. “I meant in your bed. By yourself. Besides, didn’t I already tell you I won’t ask you for that?”

“For now,” Loki said quietly.

“Excuse me?”

“You said ‘nobody is fucking anyone for now’.”

Shit. “That’s not what I meant.”

“I would not disobey.”

“Getting real tired of being accused of being a rapist,” Tony grumbled.

Loki sat up hastily and stared at Tony in shock.

“What you meant? Yeah whatever. What else would you call someone that forces themselves on someone that doesn’t want them? That sounds exactly like the definition of a rapist to me.” Loki remained quiet and Tony fought to control his temper. “Look, I know you’ve been through a lot but you’re going to have to start trusting me.” When Loki didn’t say anything Tony finally stood and picked up the pile of clothing. Placing the clothes on the counter he turned and started to leave.

“I do,” Loki whispered.

One hand on the doorknob Tony stopped moving and waited.

“I trust you,” Loki continued still not raising his voice.

“Can you tell me about any of it?” Tony asked quietly.

When there was no answer Tony once more started to leave.
“Yes,” Loki finally answered. “Just… Can we talk elsewhere?”

Finally Tony turned back. “Anywhere you want,” he agreed.

“My room then.”

“You sure about that?”

“I believe you when you said it was mine. I think I’d feel comfortable there. If it gets to be too much then…”

“Then I’ll leave,” he assure Loki. Tony had his own demons. He knew how hard it was to open up about things and wasn’t about to take away the one place Loki had to feel safe. If it came to a point where Loki couldn’t go on he would definitely leave before that happened.

Standing in the center of the room Loki waited to see if Tony would sit. There were no chairs and the only place in the room to sit was the bed. He wasn’t sure if he could discuss any of this if they were both seated on the bed together. As worn out as he felt should Tony choose to sit he would remain standing. Instead of heading for the bed Tony moved to the side of the room farthest from the bed, leaned back against the wall, and folded his arms. The placement was as far from the bed as Tony could be while in the room. Loki was grateful to Tony for the thoughtful consideration of the action. With a nod he walked over to the bed and sat down on the edge. Where to begin and how much to tell?

“What I am about to say will be difficult to accept. I know how it sounds and I will understand if you do not believe me. Still, I promise it is the truth. Invading New York was not my idea, not wholly anyway. I will admit that I was angry and the thought of taking something my brother thought of as his was tempting. Given time, though, I would most likely never have done something like that. You must admit, even with what little you know of me, a direct assault such as that is not my style.”

“So you wouldn’t have attacked New York if you’d stopped to give it thought?”

“Not precisely.” Loki chewed on his lower lip trying to find the right words. “Yesterday you told me the story of you being captured by those that wanted to use you. They wanted you to do something you would not have done of your own free will.”

Tony gave a sharp nod but said nothing.

“Much the same as you did when explaining I will try to hit the high points. Some things are not relevant and some are just too difficult to speak aloud. For reasons not particularly relevant to this tale I found myself on the Chitauri homeworld. I was injured and unable to defend myself at the time and as such I was immediately taken prisoner. For a long while I was tormented by the Chitauri. The things they did…”

“Loki?”

Tony’s soft voice broke through the unpleasant memories threatening at the edges of his consciousness and brought him back to the present. He nodded in acknowledgement before continuing. “The things they did while I was their prisoner were more painful than anything I had ever experienced previously. By the time I was summoned before Thanos I would have done almost anything to keep from being hurt further. Yes I was angry with Thor and yes I wanted to find a way to strike out at him. Still, a direct assault such as occurred in New York is not the way I would have chosen to attack.”
“Then why did you?”

“Thanos,” Loki said softly.

“I don’t understand,” Tony stated.

Loki nodded sadly. “Perhaps there is no way to explain it without showing you.”

“Showing?” Tony asked warily.

Loki didn’t miss the stiffening of Tony’s posture or the mistrust in his eyes. Before he could talk himself out of it Loki stood. Reaching up with one hand he pulled the tie near his waist that held the shirt closed. Slowly he gripped the edges of the fabric and began to unwrap the shirt. Tony shoved himself off the wall and in a handful of steps he’d closed the distance and had Loki’s wrists in a death grip.

“What the hell are you doing?” Tony snarled.

“In this case I do not believe mere words will not suffice. I fear you must see what was done to understand why I would choose to acquiesce to Thanos’ plan. To understand why I could no longer resist.”

“And you have to undress for that?” Tony growled.

“Not fully. I must admit I had hoped I would only have to remove my shirt but if you wish to see the full extent…” A doubtful look crossed Tony’s face and Loki dropped his eyes.

“Full extent?” Tony asked without releasing Loki’s wrists.

“Please allow me this,” he whispered. “Do not force me to speak the words aloud.”

“Just the shirt?”

“I believe it will provide more than enough explanation.”

“Look up,” Tony ordered.

Slowly Loki raised his eyes to meet Tony’s. Tony held his gaze for several moments before he released Loki’s wrists. Taking a step back Tony gave him a silent nod. Hands now trembling Loki returned to opening his shirt revealing the bandages underneath. Blood and other unknown fluids stained a few places on the bandages and Loki sighed internally. The wounds would have to be cleaned soon or else risk infection. Later, he told himself as he slipped the shirt down his arms and finally finished removing it. Dropping the shirt onto the floor he straightened, clasped his hands behind his back, and waited. It was a long moment before Tony finally spoke.

“What happened?”

“Mostly the Chitauri,” Loki answered. “The wounds inflicted on Asgard were healed to keep me from dying. They were unable to do anything for the wounds the Chitauri inflicted during my stay on Sanctuary.”

“Sanctuary?”

“The Chitauri homeworld.”

“Why did they do… this?”
“Because I refused to cooperate.”

“That was awhile back though. I mean… Shouldn’t they have healed by now?”

“They have healed much since I was last on Sanctuary. They would be healed more by now but they must be allowed to heal naturally. Any magical attempt whatsoever to speed the process along only serves to aggravate them. When those on Asgard attempted to heal them it only caused them to worsen.”

“Those bandages don’t look so good,” Tony observed.

“Yet another reason I wished to bathe,” Loki admitted.

“Maybe we should take care of that now.”

“I would like to finish my story if I may.”

“How much is left?”

“Not much.”

Tony sighed. “All right but make it quick.”

“Thanos, unlike the Chitauri, was not harsh. He did not torture me. He treated me as though I were an equal. At the time it was as a haven in a violent storm. When I was in his company those were the only times I was guaranteed not to be hurt. Not only that, he would sometimes tend my wounds and hold me when I would break down. Looking back on things now I can see he was manipulating me but at the time everything was just too confusing. All I knew was they hurt me and he comforted me. When he handed me the staff I could feel its tendrils snaking into my brain but by then it was too late. The magic slipped through the cracks in my will and began to consume me. I… I tried to fight back but…”

“But it was too late,” Tony finished.

Loki nodded.

“Why didn’t you tell anyone?”

“And who would take the word of someone like me? Loki Silvertongue, the god of mischief, the lie-smith, the trickster, the deceiver,” Loki hissed angrily. “Who would take my word in such matters especially in light of my actions? After all, I did attack New York seemingly of my own free will and I did wish to strike out at my brother. Who would possibly believe me were I to say different? Who in their right mind would believe that I was not merely attempting to talk my way out of trouble?!” By the time he finished he was breathing heavily and clenching his jaw trying to reign in his temper.

“I believe you,” Tony said quietly.

Loki was stunned. Tony believed him? His mind couldn’t seem to process that.

“You wanted to talk in here, why? Because you believed me when I said this was your space and I wouldn’t violate it. In spite of everything that happened you still trusted me. Is it really so hard for you to accept that I believe you? Especially when I can see the evidence with my own eyes?”

“I… I don’t know. I guess I’ve just gotten so used to not being believed that…”

“That you’ve come to expect mistrust from everyone no matter how much evidence there is that
you’re telling the truth?”

Loki nodded.

Tony walked the few steps forward until he stood just in front of Loki. Reaching down he gently took Loki’s hands and raised them slightly. Meeting Loki’s eyes Tony held his gaze for a long time before speaking. “I. Believe. You.”

Loki wasn’t sure what happened. One moment they were standing before each other, eyes locked and the next thing he knew he was on the floor. Tony knelt next to him saying something but Loki couldn’t seem to understand the words. Tears welled in his eyes and threatened to fall. Loki couldn’t seem to comprehend anything. Suddenly Tony’s arms were wrapped around him. Daze, unsure, and completely confused Loki didn’t fight it. He allowed himself to be held and took comfort in the safety offered by Tony’s arms. As he broke down he had the vaguest notion that was all he seemed to be doing lately before the tears consumed him and all reason fled.

Tony frowned as his hand touched something slightly sticky on Loki’s back. Peering around the sobbing former god Tony noticed some of the wounds on Loki’s back had also soaked through the bandages. Tony grimaced slightly realizing he’d run his hand over Loki’s injuries. Loki, for his part, didn’t seem to feel anything. Still, in an effort to keep from adding to any pain Loki already felt Tony moved the hand until it was above the afflicted area.

“Tony,” Loki sobbed.

“I’m here,” Tony assured him.

“I’m so sorry. I didn’t want to, I swear!”

“It’s alright.”

Loki shook his head violently, still desperately clinging to him.

“Sh, everything’s all right now.”

“I’m sorry!”

“I know,” Tony tried to assure the distraught god in his arms.

“I didn’t meant to! I tried to stop it, I promise!”

“Loki? I need you to listen to me. Can you do that?”

“I’m so sorry,” Loki mumbled burying his face into the crook of Tony’s neck.

“Loki, listen to me. I need you to focus on my voice for now, okay? Loki?”

“Tony,” Loki murmured through the tears, snuggling against his neck once more.

“Are you listening to me?”

He felt the nod more than saw it. Still, he wanted a verbal answer just to make sure Loki was actually hearing him. “Loki,” Tony called softly.

“Yes?” Loki managed.
The pain he heard in Loki’s voice hurt somewhere deep inside but Tony pushed that away for now. He needed to focus. “I forgive you,” he told Loki. “Do you understand that? I forgive you Loki.”

“I’m so sorry,” Loki mumbled.


“No, you can’t mean it. You know not what you say. There is no way you that could forgive me.”

Tony tightened his arms around the tearful god. “Hush,” Tony ordered. “I can forgive whoever I want. You may not think you’re worth it but it’s my choice to make not yours.”

“I’ve hurt so many,” Loki sobbed.

“That wasn’t your fault and you know it. You weren’t given a choice.”

“You don’t understand,” Loki cried.

Tony growled. There was comforting someone that needed it and then there was indulging in self pity. Gripping Loki’s upper arms he pulled Loki away and gave him a slight shake to get his attention. “You listen to me,” Tony barked. “Are you listening?” Loki struggled to return to snuggling against him and Tony gave him another firm shake. “Are you listening to me?” Tony repeated.

“Y-y-yes,” Loki stuttered.

“It was not your fault and I forgive you. You do not get to tell me who I do or don’t get to forgive. That’s my decision. If I want to forgive you I will. You’re also not responsible for what happened. You were mind controlled. It was not your fault. You got that?”

“I…”

Tony gave him another firm shake. “Do you understand me?”

After a few hitched breaths Loki sniffled a few times before nodding.

“Then say it.” Loki started to turn his head away but Tony gave him another shake. “Say it,” he ordered.

“I’m not sure if I can,” Loki whispered.

“It wasn’t your fault, say it,” Tony ordered.

“It.” another sniffle. “It wasn’t my…”

“Loki,” Tony drawled warningly.

“It wasn’t… wasn’t my fault,” he managed.

Finally Tony pulled Loki closer and put his arms around him again.

“Tony?”

“Yeah?”
“I am sorry.”

“Sh, I know. It’s over and done with though. You need to let go now.”

“I don’t know if I can. I hurt so many.”

“No,” Tony disagreed. “Those that were controlling you hurt them. Don’t you dare take their guilt as your own.”

“They died by my hand and on my orders. You don’t know. You don’t understand what it feels like to know you’re responsible for that much death.”

“Don’t I?” Tony asked cocking an eyebrow. Gently he put his hands back on Loki’s upper arms and pulled him away again. “Did you forget everything I told you yesterday?”

Loki tilted his head and stared at him confused.

“I told you Stark Industries used to manufacture weapons. Some of those weapons were stolen by terrorists. Even those not stolen were used to take lives. I was so good at dreaming up new ways to kill people I earned the nickname the Merchant of Death. Trust me, Loki, I know exactly what you’re feeling right now.” The shock on Loki’s face was impossible to deny. “Trust me Loki,” he repeated. “I know.”

“And… And you would forgive me?”

“You weren’t in control of your actions. There’s nothing to forgive.”

The only warning he had was a slight shift in Loki’s expression before the former god flung himself forward and reached up to cling onto him as if for dear life. Sighing in resignation he put his arms back around Loki and held him. It wasn’t the same as earlier. Earlier the crying jag was prompted by pain and doubt and guilt. This time it was the result of sheer relief. Relief of finally being able to tell the truth; of being finally being forgiven. Relief at actually being heard and believed. That Tony could completely understand.

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“Tony?”

Tony huffed a noncommittal noise but didn’t speak.

“I think I’m better now,” Loki said quietly.

“Sure about that?”

“Honestly? Not completely but I think so.” Tony’s hands moved to Loki’s shoulders and pulled him back until their eyes met. “Thank you Tony.”

“Told you no thanks needed,” Tony huffed.

Loki smiled. “Not for the forgiveness but I do thank you for that as well. No, this thank you is for the kindness you’ve just shown me. You had no reason to comfort me and every reason to leave me in my own misery, yet you didn’t. Almost no one has taken the time to worry about me that way even before everything happened. For the longest time I was only able to count on my mother to care if I was in pain. You are the only other one to comfort me since she has passed. For that, I thank you.”

Neither spoke for several minutes before Tony finally broke the silence.
“Whatever happened to you taking a bath,” Tony grumped.

Loki bowed his head and smiled. “As you wish,” he answered with a slight smirk. Tony stood and reached down a hand. Taking the hand Loki let Tony help him to his feet before the two of them made their way to the bathroom. At the doorway Tony paused.

“If there’s anything else you need…” Tony began.

Loki shifted uncomfortably. There was actually one thing. “I could use assistance unwrapping the bandages if you are not adverse to it. Just the upper ones, I mean. I should be able to manage the others but the upper ones might be a bit difficult.” When Tony didn’t answer immediately Loki dropped his eyes to the floor. “I will, of course, be able to manage alone.”

“That’s not what I was thinking about,” Tony told him. “I was just thinking there’s no way you’ll be able to reach the injuries on your back to clean them.”

Loki had no reply to that. He’d never had to wash the wounds on his back. Those had previously been tended to by the ‘guards’ on Asgard. A slight shiver ran through him at just the memory of his previous tormentors and their ‘cleaning’ of his injuries.

“Hey,” Tony snapped gruffly. “You okay over there, Reindeer Games?”

“I am,” Loki confirmed.

“All right, arms up,” Tony ordered.

Instantly Loki’s arms raise and he winced. Pain shot through his ribs as he held the position but obedience had quite literally been beaten into him. He didn’t dare disobey a direct order from his master. Despite his best efforts a small whimper escaped his lips.

“Damn it. I didn’t mean that high. Lower them so it doesn’t hurt but keep them out of the way so I can take care of the bandages. Understood?”

Silently Loki nodded while lowering his arms. Tony approached him cautiously and Loki could have kicked himself. For a while it seemed like they’d almost become… what? Surely not friends but maybe something less than enemies. Now it seemed they were back to where they’d started when he had first arrived. For reasons he couldn’t fathom Loki found himself missing the comfort he felt when Tony had held him.

Holding his arms out as high as he could without causing pain to scream through his body he waited as Tony began unwrapping the bandages. When the overlapping layers had been unwound there was a sharp tug on one of the injuries. Loki cried out as his knees almost buckled and Tony froze. Panting heavily Loki struggled to breath through the pain. When it was finally under control he took one last deep breath, held it, and finally released it.

“That was unpleasant,” Loki murmured.

“I do still need to remove them though,” Tony reminded him. “You know what? Sit down, I have an idea that might make this a little easier.”

Loki sat down on the edge of the tub and waited while Tony dug through one of the bathroom drawers. Eventually Tony turned around revealing a pair of scissors. Tilting his head slightly to the side Loki waited.

“If I cut them then it won’t take as long to remove them. I can just cut them and peel them off
quickly. It’ll still hurt but not for as long as if we took the time to unwind them.”

“It is how my tor-…” Loki took another deep breath and released it. “It is how my ‘guards’ used to removed them. I am accustomed to how it will feel.”

“Yeah,” Tony muttered. “Still doesn’t mean it’ll be pleasant.”

“I assure you anything you do will be vastly more pleasant than their ministrations.”

More pleasant it might have been but it still hurt like fire. True to his word Tony had snipped the bandages on both side then quickly ripped them off the injuries. A scream he couldn’t suppress passed his lips and Loki saw spots. Vaguely he wondered if he would pass out or not. Finally his vision cleared. Still panting Loki finally met Tony’s eyes. The other man was still kneeling next to him but was as motionless as a statue. Loki attempted to give him a reassuring smile but knew he hadn’t gotten it right by the expression on Tony’s face.

“You all right there Rudolph?” Tony asked, still without moving.

“Yes Tony,” he answered still breathing heavily. “It was painful though nowhere near what it was like when the others would remove them.”

“Yeah, we’re not talking about that right now,” Tony growled. “Turn around and put your feet in the tub so your back’s to me.”

Loki did as he was told. He heard the sink faucet running briefly before Tony made his way back to stand behind him. Something touched his back and instinctively Loki winced before realizing he wasn’t being hurt. When he realized what he’d felt was only a damp cloth he breathed a sigh of relief. Slowly the cloth began to move. At first it slid lightly over the uninjured parts of his back before moving to the more sensitive areas. As Tony cleaned the afflicted areas his touch was soft. It was still painful but nothing like he’d previously experienced. He finally allowed himself to believe that maybe this wouldn’t be as bad as he feared. Still, Loki was grateful when it was over and he no longer had to hide the pain.

“Done,” Tony told him.

Unwilling to immediately test his voice Loki merely nodded.

“You know how to work the water, right?”

“Yes. I mean, I have seen it done. I assume I will be able to manage.”

“I thought you said you’ve used a shower.”

“Perhaps it is more accurate to say I was given a shower,” Loki disclosed.

“Given,” Tony repeated flatly.

“Yes,” Loki answered fidgeting slightly. For some reason it made him uncomfortable to actually relay circumstances surrounding his first and only Midgardian shower though he didn’t know why. After everything he had already discussed with Tony it really shouldn’t make him uncomfortable to discuss these details. Instead of focussing on the why he pressed himself to relate as much information as he remembered. “I was more injured then. At times it was difficult to move or even think coherently. Thanos’ second in command, The Other,-”
“The other what?”

“The other nothing, just The Other. It is how he was called.”

“His name was The Other?”

Loki frowned. “I know not his name, I only know how he was called.”

“Super villains these days seem to be a lot less creative than their predecessors,” Tony mumbled.

Unsure how to reply to that Loki continued as if he hadn’t been interrupted. “The Other and I were in contact throughout the invasion. When things didn’t go as smoothly as he wished or fast enough he would punish me through the link to, ah, inspire me to do better.”

“Uh huh,” Tony stated noncommittally.

“After one such punishment I was left unable to care for myself. I sent a command for one of those I controlled to assist me.” He chanced a look to Tony before continuing. “The one that responded was Barton.”

“Clint? You’re telling me Clint, what, showered you?”

“I believe so. It is difficult for me to recall what happened in the times directly after I was punished by The Other. I do remember Barton being present and turning these knobs.” And the humming Loki’s mind added. He shook that thought away as he continued. “I was able to do little more than watch but I believe I will be able to manipulate the knobs adequately.”

“Did anything happen?”

“Happen?” Loki asked confused.

“I mean, is that why you… Fuck!”

“I am not sure I understand your question.”

“You know what? I don’t want to know. Whatever.”

Turning on his heels Tony stalked out of the room and slammed the door shut. For a while all Loki could do was stare. Finally he shook away the confusion and finished removing his clothes. As much as it hurt removing the bandages from his torso the lower half was always more painful. ‘Did anything happen?’ Loki frowned at that. Yes something happened. He had his injuries scrubbed clean to keep them from being infected while trying his best not to show how much it hurt when pieces of his skin came off as well. What did Tony think happened during that shower?

Obviously Tony believed something more had occurred during that shower but just what that was Loki couldn’t imagine. His mind ran through everything trying to find something Tony might have found objectionable when he realized Tony had been okay until he mentioned Barton. Did Tony have a problem with the archer or was it something else? ‘You’re telling me Clint, what, showered you?’ Did Tony have a problem with Clint cleaning Loki’s wounds? No, that didn’t seem right. Tony himself had cleaned some of Loki’s wounds. Reaching for the edge of one of the bandages covering the many injuries south of his waist Loki froze. A sudden thought struck him. The only thing Tony’d had a problem with was Loki taking his shirt off to reveal his injuries. Tony hadn’t wanted Loki to remove his clothes. Was it possible that Tony was angry that Loki had been naked in Barton’s presence?
Tony zealously worked in his workshop trying unsuccessfully to distract himself. He mindlessly tinkered with trinkets and incomplete additions for his suits. As he worked he downed glass after glass of Glenlivet trying to help block out thoughts of Clint and Loki. Stupid, he berated himself. It’s not like he even wanted Loki like that. Looking down he saw he had completely destroyed his latest project with his inattentiveness. Damn it! Turning he flung it at the nearest wall and watched it hit, shatter, and rain pieces down everywhere. The action did little to alleviate his anger.

“That appears to be quite counterproductive sir,” JARVIS stated evenly.

“How would you know?” Tony shot back.

“It would appear you are upset about something.”

“You think?” Tony snapped.

“Judging by your elevated-”

“Not now J,” Tony grumbled.

Inspecting the pieces of his last project scattered all across the floor of the workshop he groaned and dropped his head. He could start over trying to rebuild it but there were other things he could work on as well. In the end he settled for working on a different project solely because all of the supplies for it were already within arm’s reach. One hour, some loud AC/DC, and three glasses of scotch later Tony was finally able to focus on his work. Things were going so well he lost track of time and settled in for a long night of tinkering. When the music suddenly decreased Tony growled angrily and slammed a hand down on the table.

“Damn it JARVIS!”

“Apologies sir but master Loki is outside of the workshop.”

“What the hell is he doing out there?”

“He asked me where you were and then for directions to the workshop. I would assume he wishes a word with you,” JARVIS told him.

“I don’t have time for this,” Tony grumbled angrily. “Tell him-. You know what? I don’t care. Just tell him whatever you want.”

“As you wish sir.”

“Master Tony is busy at the moment and does not wish to be disturbed.”

“I will wait,” Loki stated obstinately.

“He will likely remain busy for quite some time.”

“Understood. I will wait.”

“Perhaps you would be more comfortable-”

“I require help tending to my injuries. Can you assist with that?” Loki asked.
“Unfortunately not,” JARVIS answered.

“Then I will wait.”
Groaning Tony forced open his eyes. At first he couldn’t quite make sense of what he was seeing. Squinting he eyed the green blur and finally realized it was the mostly empty bottle of scotch. With another groan he shoved himself upright and rubbed his temples. Damn he had one fuck of a headache. He tried to remember if there was still a bottle of aspirin hidden away somewhere in the workshop. There was a whirring noise and he turned. Just to his left he found Dum-E holding a bottle of aspirin out towards him.

“Maybe you’re not such a dunce after all,” Tony muttered to the robot.

Opening the lid of the aspirin bottle he shook out three pills and grabbed the mostly empty glass he’d been using last night. Popping the pills into his mouth he drained the last of the liquid from the glass and grimaced at the unpleasant aftertaste. When he stood up he stumbled slightly before steadying himself. Briskly he rubbed his palms over his face trying to clear his vision not to mention his mind. Finally he made his way out of the workshop. When the doors opened he stopped dead. Loki was shirtless and only wore the pair of sweats Tony had left for him. He was curled up on himself and pressed back firmly in the nearest corner completely sound asleep. There was a small medical kit next to the former god. Without a shirt Tony got another good look at the wounds on Loki’s torso. At the sight of the injuries covering Loki’s body Tony sobered. As he stood there watching Loki shivered slightly and gave a soft whimper. Finally Tony’s brain kicked into gear and he moved forward. Carefully he knelt down and put a hand on Loki’s shoulder. Loki struck out instantly and managed to catch Tony with one hard punch before Tony could scramble out of the way. The blow caused his headache to worsen almost unbearably.

“Loki!” Tony shouted, reaching a hand up to cover where he’d been struck.

“No more please! Leave me alone! I didn’t do anything! Please, I’m sorry!”

“It’s okay Loki, you’re safe.” There was no answer. Tony scooted closer. “Loki,” he called out louder. Loki flinched and curled in on himself even more. Whimpering Loki slid down the wall until he was curled up on the floor. Sighing, Tony ran a hand through his hair. “Loki, it’s all right. No one is going to hurt you,” he said attempting to keep his voice calm and even.

“Please,” Loki pled. “No more, master. I beg you.”

Tony flinched involuntarily at the appellation before leaning closer. “Loki,” he whispered gently. Cautiously he reached a hand out again prepared to draw it back if needed. Luckily Loki didn’t strike out again. “It’s alright Loki, you’re safe. Nothing’s going to hurt you here.”

“Please, please it hurts so much,” Loki sobbed.

“Trust me, Loki, I know. I’m sorry it hurts, but you’re safe now. You’re safe.” When there was no answer Tony moved until he was seated in the recently vacated corner. Cautiously he reached over and put a hand on Loki’s arm. When Loki did nothing more than shiver at the touch Tony carefully moved him. Loki only continued to whimper as Tony slowly pulled him closer. Gently Tony lifted him until Loki was lying against his chest.

“Sh, Loki. You’re safe. No one’s going to hurt you here.” Gently Tony ran his hand down the uninjured areas of Loki’s back. For his part Loki did little more than tremble and snuggle against Tony’s chest. Still whispering reassurances to Loki Tony leaned his head back against the wall. Eyes
closed, sitting on the floor, a broken former god pressed against his chest, Tony soon fell back asleep himself.

Humming contentedly Loki shifted slightly and sighed. It had been a long time since he’d felt this peaceful upon waking and he was loathed to move. Smiling softly he reveled in the feeling before he realized his hand was gripping something. Furrowing his brow slightly he tried to figure out what he was holding without opening his eyes. He smiled when he realized it was only the necklace his mother had given him. It took several moments for his mind to realize why that wrong. His eyes shot open as he jerked upright and hissed as pain instantly flared through his injuries.

Humming softly Tony opened his eyes and blinked several times. “Loki?” Tony asked sleepily. “Hey, how you feeling?”

“I… I…”

“Hey now, it’s all right. There’s no reason to be worried. What’s wrong?”

“I… Nothing, I mean…” Loki sighed and forced himself to relax. “I did not mean to fall asleep on you. I am not even sure how it happened. I only came down because I needed help to dress my injuries,” Loki answered quietly, averting his eyes.

“Ah damn it. I’m sorry Loki, I forgot you would need help for that.”

“You were busy,” he said softly.

“Hardly,” Tony huffed. “I was too busy having a damn pity party to even give your injuries a second thought. I should have listened to JARVIS when he told me you were down here. I wasn’t doing anything beyond feeling sorry for myself.”

“Can I ask what upset you?” Loki asked honestly curious. Tony ran a hand through his hair and Loki suppressed a smile at how it made his hair stick up in random spikes. Schooling his features he waited to see if Tony would deign to answer him. Surprisingly, Tony seemed to not take an issue with a slave overstepping their bounds. Loki, while he was able, was happy to take advantage of such a breach of conduct.

“Can I ask you a blunt question?” Tony asked suddenly.

“That is not for me to decide.”

“Yes it is. You know you’re allowed to have opinions here.”

Loki started to disagree before he thought better of it and gave a shallow nod.

“What happened between you and Clint?”

Frowning Loki stared at Tony confused. “Barton?”

“Yes, what happened between you two?”

“I am not sure I understand. Do you mean when he cleaned my wounds?”

“When you and he ‘took a shower’.”

Loki’s frown deepend. “He did not take the shower with me. I was the only one in the shower
though by the end of everything his clothing was fairly wet. I had not the strength to move so he had to carry me after I was finished in the shower. He wrapped me in a towel and put me on a couch in some out of the way room. Somewhere, I’m not sure from where, he came up with a blanket and covered me. That is all that happened. Tony?"

“What?” Tony grumbled crossed his arms and turning away.

“You don’t think that he and I-”

“Not my business,” Tony muttered.

“No Tony, nothing happened. He did not take advantage of me nor I he. It is comforting, though, that you should worry about such.”

“Still not my business.”

Loki shrugged. “If you insist. Tony?”

“I don’t want any of the details Loki.”

“There are no details to give but that also is not what I was going to say. I only wanted to ask for assistance with the bandages. When that’s done I can put my shirt back on again so that you are no longer uncomfortable.”

“Excuse me?”

“You seem uncomfortable with me not being fully clothed.”

“I- … You.... Damn it Loki, why aren’t you uncomfortable with it?”

“In all honesty I am uncomfortable but I am attempting to trust as you asked. With my other masters clothing was forbidden. They did not want to be delayed when they wished to punish me not to mention the addition of humiliation.” Loki shifted uneasily. “Since you haven’t given me cause not to trust you…”

“You should actually let them breath for a while,” Tony observed.

“I did not wish to cause you more distress than necessary,” Loki stated respectfully.

“I know it’s none of my business, and you don’t have to answer if you don’t want to, but did anything happen between you two?”

“I assume you mean of a sexual nature?”

“Nevermind. Forget I asked. Like I said, none of my business,” Tony gabbled as he stood up and started to leave.

“Nothing happened.” Loki replied hurriedly. “Nothing like that at least. As I’ve said, he wrapped me in a towel, placed me on a couch, covered me, and stood watch.”

Tony stopped moving and didn’t speak immediately. “Stood watch?” he asked, still with his back to Loki.

“Yes.” Finally Tony turned around. Loki had to work not to flinch under Tony’s critical inspection. Dropping his eyes Loki began fidgeting.
“So he just stood watch?”

Loki shrugged. “He washed the injuries like you did last night but other than that? Yes he just stood watch.”

“If you trusted that they were mind controlled why did you have him watch over you?”

“I didn’t, he did that on his own. I know not why.”

“Was there any possibility of someone breaking through the mind control and hurting you?” Tony asked.

“None and even if there were I would have welcomed death at the time. You have to understand what it was like. I was in pain, still being hurt for not accomplishing what they wanted fast enough, and unable to control my own actions. I saw no way out. Death was a welcome prospect at that point. Why do you think I allowed myself to be captured?” When Tony didn’t reply Loki’s discomfort only intensified. “So no, I have no idea why he would do something like that.” Still more silence. “Tony?” Loki asked nervously chancing a glance up to the other man.

“It’s nothing,” Tony muttered.

“That’s not true,” Loki stated bluntly. The look Tony shot him caused him to flinch. Loki curled up on himself and wrapped his arms around his legs. “I am sorry for questioning you,” he whispered. “You may, of course, punish me as you see fit.”

“See, that’s not, I mean… Fuck.” Taking several breaths Tony began again. “Don’t be sorry for being yourself. Even if I don’t understand things you had your reasons.”

Cocking his head Loki tried to comprehend that statement.

“If you wanted to be with him-.”

“I told you, nothing like that happened between us.”

“Would you remember?”

Blinking in shock Loki stared. “Of course I would. They took away my control, not my memory. They wanted me to remember everything including how much pain they could inflict should I fail. Tony, can I ask-”

“Right. Breakfast then,” Tony stated.

The tone he used told Loki the conversation was finished. With a sigh of resignation he dropped his head and nodded once. His curiosity would just have to go unsatisfied. There was no way he would disagree and take a chance of upsetting Tony. Quietly he followed Tony down the hall and into the elevator. Mentally he ran through the conversation trying to piece things together and make sense of everything.

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No matter how much he twisted the facts he always arrived at the same conclusion. As much as the idea terrified him he knew there was nothing he could do about it. If Tony’s anger over Barton seeing him without clothing was anything to go by the eventuality of it seemed inescapable at this point. When the time came he only had two options available. Either he could submit willingly and let Tony have his way or he resisted and was punished before being forced to submit. Neither option
much appealed to him but of the two he would opt not to be punished if it could be avoided. When the time came he would give in despite his wishes to the contrary. To be fair Tony had been extraordinarily lenient thus far. Why he hadn’t already insisted on it, as was his right as the master, Loki didn’t know.

Loki sat up with a huff of annoyance. Even though it had been a long and tiring day there was no way he would be able to sleep. He was too wound up and worried that Tony might enter and he wouldn’t hear the door. He tried to tell himself Tony had given his word, that he had no reason to doubt Tony, but experience won out over logic. In his experience the only reason any master was ever nice was only to set him up to be hurt. He had been stupid allowing himself to believe in Tony’s words. He should have known better than to let his guard down because of a mere handful of kind words. Stupid, he berated himself. He had to be more vigilant. Perhaps if he could keep Tony pleased enough with everything else he could stave off that particular service.

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“Master Tony wishes to know if you would like to join him for breakfast,” the computer stated, startling Loki out of his reverie.

“Yes. I will be there shortly,” Loki answered tiredly.

He cast a longing glance to his own clothing. Oh how he wished he could wear his own garments but they needed washing. More than that he did not wish to offend Tony by seeming unappreciative of the gift of clothing that had been given for his use. With a heavy sigh Loki trudged to the door, opened it, and left the room. As slowly as he dared he made his way to the kitchen. When he finally got to the kitchen he found Tony pouring a cup of ‘coffee’. Loki grimaced at just the memory of the taste of the bitter drink. Coffee was something he was grateful they didn’t have on Asgard. Even if he didn’t prefer the lighter tastes he was sure it wouldn’t be something he would willingly drink. He didn’t understand how the humans could even stand it. Tony turned around and finally noticed him.

“Morning sleepyhead,” Tony greeted.

Loki didn’t bother to correct Tony’s misconception that his tardiness was due to oversleeping. “Good morning Tony,” Loki answered obediently.

“Breakfast?”

Knowing the appropriate response of ‘if you wish’ would only anger Tony Loki merely nodded in response before making his way to the table. Standing near the chair he waited until Tony sat down before taking a seat himself. Anxiously he flicked his eyes to Tony. Normally a slave would be required to sit on the floor but Tony had been exceedingly adamant that Loki use a chair instead. When Tony gave no indication of being displeased by Loki’s presumption he calmed slightly and inspected today’s food. He almost smiled when he noted the box of ‘shredded wheat’ from the first morning. Internally he debated whether or not it would be better to assume he could eat or wait for direct instructions.

“Hey,” Tony called. “You eating or not?”

Taking that as the cue that he was allowed to eat Loki nodded once and reached for the orange box. Carefully he opened the top and poured some of pale squares into one of the bowls already on the table. Closing the box he glanced at the table for the milk but didn’t immediately spot it anywhere.

“Right, milk,” Tony stated starting to stand.
“I will get it,” Loki told him hurrying to his feet.

Tony stared at him questioningly and Loki waited. Finally Tony gave him a curt nod and sat down again. Loki stifled a sigh of relief. He was resolute in his decision to please Tony as any slave would please their master in hopes that Tony would not ask for ‘other services’ any time soon. When he saw the nod he rushed to the refrigerator and grabbed the milk. Back at the table he glanced to Tony briefly before pouring some of the milk into his bowl and returning it to the refrigerator. He should have asked Tony if he wanted any of the milk but were that the case Tony would have already gotten it himself. The pair ate in silence and Loki wasn’t sure what to make of the unusually quiet Tony. When they finished eating Loki snagged the used dishes before Tony could get them and took them to the sink.

“All right, what gives?” Tony asked.

“I am not sure—”

“‘That you understand the question.’ Yeah yeah, and I’m calling bullshit. You know exactly what I’m asking, so answer the question.”

“I am merely doing the dishes,” Loki answered trying to force his voice to sound natural.

“Bullshit,” Tony repeated. “When you first got here you were terrified to breathe without a direct order. Now you’re sitting, on a chair no less, without any hesitation? Volunteering to get things? Doing the dishes? Something’s up and you’re going to tell me what,” Tony ordered.

Dropping his head Loki grit his teeth. He couldn’t disobey a direct order without the magic punishing him for disobedience. Carefully he focused his eyes on a spot of the floor just in front of his toes before responding.

“I have accepted my position and am attempting to fulfill my duties in compliance with your stipulations.” Honest, but not the whole truth. Perhaps Tony would let it pass. He doubted it but he still hoped.

“Uh huh? And you seriously expect me to believe that crap?”

“It is true,” Loki pointed out helpfully.

“But you don’t want to talk about it?” Tony guessed.

“Please let me do this,” Loki whispered. “I am nervous and doing this helps me to feel better.” Again the truth but not all of it. For a time Tony was silent. Loki fought against the urge to fidget under his master’s scrutiny. It now felt odd to consider Tony his master but Loki shoved away that feeling. That’s precisely what Tony was, his master, and he would do well to remember that. The next question out of Tony’s mouth was not one he expected.

“Can you talk about it?”

Loki frowned at the question. “I… have the ability,” he answered slowly.

“But you don’t want to talk about it?” Tony guessed.

Loki hesitated. “If I am to be given a choice I would prefer not to speak of it.”

After another extended silence Tony turned and left without a word. Loki frowned at the action and lifted his head to watch Tony’s retreating back. He wasn’t sure what to make of what just happened. Of all the things he could have predicted this wasn’t any of it. Questions swirled through his mind and he tried to make sense of them.
"JARVIS?"

"Sir?"

"Keep an eye on Loki and let me know what he’s up to when he isn’t in his room, will you?"

"Yes master Tony."

"What is he up to right now?"

"Master Loki is currently wiping down the coffee table in the living room."

Scowling Tony turned back to the current project on his workshop table.

For days things continued much the same. Neither of them spoke much as they went about their respective, seemingly separate, lives. He had no clue what Tony did with his time but for his part Loki cleaned. Well, he cleaned everything he dared. Some of the Midgardian machinery was strange to him and he wasn’t sure how to work it. Some things he wasn’t sure if he should touch and so left those things alone as well. Eventually he would have to figure out how to work some of the confusing machines. Glancing down he realized, not for the first time, he also either needed to find some new clothing or a way to wash these.

"Are you not eating breakfast today?" JARVIS asked.

Loki sighed. He was getting used to conversing with the artificial voice though it was still a bit disconcerting. Ever since Tony had stormed out of the kitchen they’d barely spoken two words to each other. JARVIS had become his sole companion, a fact that fully depressed Loki the longer he spent contemplating it. Loki went through his days trying to be as useful as possible while Tony disappeared to who knew where. Probably his lab, Loki reasoned. JARVIS could probably have told him but Loki didn’t dare ask. He was too nervous that Tony would either mistake it for a desire to spend more time together or he might view it as an invasion of his privacy. Neither option was overly appealing to Loki and so he did his best to ignore Tony’s self-imposed absence.

"Master Loki?" JARVIS asked, breaking into his thoughts.

"What?" Loki grumbled annoyed.

"Are you not eating breakfast?" JARVIS repeated.

"I am not hungry," Loki told the disembodied voice. Distractedly he contemplated what he should work on today. Before he could decide on anything Tony walked into the kitchen and stopped short, eying him oddly. Loki dropped his eyes and anxiously waited.

"You still wearing those?"

"I was not given anything else to wear," Loki answered cautiously without raising his head.

"Master Loki has also not eaten breakfast yet," JARVIS added unhelpfully.

Loki glowered at the floor but said nothing.

"Don’t move," Tony commanded.
As Tony exited the kitchen Loki was left to wonder what was in store for him. Hopefully it would only entail a new set of clothing. He wasn’t sure if he was prepared for too much more interaction than that. Finally he heard Tony returning. When a hand touched his shoulder he jumped slightly.

“Sorry,” he muttered.


Loki finally raised his head and Tony’s hand fell away from his shoulder. He noticed the small pile of clothing Tony was holding out towards him. Reaching out Loki took the clothes and waited to see what was expected.

“All right, let’s get you cleaned up first.”

Involuntarily Loki jerked backwards slightly. Thankfully Tony didn’t seem to notice the movement and Loki breathed a sigh of relief. As Tony turned to leave Loki followed exactly three paces behind. When they were just outside of the bedroom Loki was currently using Tony turned back to face him, cocked an eyebrow, and waited. Confused, Loki racked his brain trying to understand why they were waiting.

“Well?” Tony asked.

“Well what?” Loki questioned warily.

Sighing Tony crossed his arms. “Are you going to invite me in or not?”

“Oh. Yeah, sorry. Would you like to enter?” Loki muttered quickly.

“I would like to enter,” Tony stated evenly. “So invite me in.”

“I… just did?”

“No, you asked if I wanted to enter.” Sighing Tony ran a hand through his hair before letting his arms drop back to his sides. “You’re going to get it through your head that it’s your room if I have to beat it into you.”

Scrambling back Loki tripped over his own feet. He stumbled against the wall, bounced off of it, fell backward, and landed hard on his ass. Terrified Loki drew his arms up trying to at least protect his head from what was sure to ensue. Trembling he waited for the blows to begin.


“I apologize master,” Loki whimpered.

“Do not call me that,” Tony snapped.

Loki flinched backward at the sharp inflection and Tony cursed.

“My fault, okay? I didn’t mean for it to come out like that. Nothing like that is going to happen here, I promise, okay?”

Unable to respond Loki continued trembling in anticipation of the upcoming punishment.

“Loki? Come on now, you have to talk to me.”

“What would you have me say?” Loki whispered.
“Say anything, I just wanted to hear you speak. I didn’t mean for you to take it that way all right? It was just a phrase, nothing more.”

“Not to a slave,” Loki disagreed quietly.

“Yeah, getting that loud and clear now. You okay?”

“I am adequate,” Loki answered.

“Not what I asked,” Tony pressed.

“I banged my elbow a bit but it will be fine.” Loki gave another small flinch when Tony took his arm and turned it to inspect the elbow. After inspecting it and make several displeased expressions Tony released Loki’s arm and reached for the hem of his shirt. Loki jerked away and only succeeded in hitting his head against the wall behind him. Wincing Loki brought up his right hand to rub at the back of of his head.

“Right, should have asked first. Sorry,” Tony stated finally.

“You are permitted to-”

“Hold it right there. I told you I’ve had about enough of that kind of talk. I’m not anyone’s master and you’re not a slave, at least not here. Also no one here is going to touch you in any way without your permission. Got it?”

“According to Asgardian law-”

Yeah, well we’re not on Asgard. We’re here on Earth, or Midgard, or whatever the hell you want to call it. Here there is no slavery, I’ve already told you that.”

“You don’t understand,” Loki grumbled.

Tony finally settled to the ground next to him and Loki glanced away. He sensed rather that saw Tony shifting slightly before stilling. As the silence drug on Loki shuffled in annoyance and huffed a sigh. When Tony still didn’t speak Loki repressed a growl and turned his head to face Tony. “I must please you,” Loki grumped insolently.

Perhaps he should show more respect but he couldn’t seem to muster the energy to care right now. When Tony turned back to face him Loki reflexively crossed his arms over his middle. He couldn’t help that he was still uneasy about Tony’s earlier attempt to remove his shirt. Tony’s eyes flicked down briefly to watch the movement before returning to Loki’s eyes.

“You don’t ever have to ‘please me’ like that,” Tony told him gently.

Shaking his head he turned away and glared down the hallway.

“Loki?”

“I am listening.”

“I would kind of like a response to that.”

“You would be well within-”

“Stop,” Tony ordered. “Okay let’s try this again. I’d like a different response than the stock one they’ve programmed you to give.”
Loki sighed. “It will be as you please. Were I to fight back an armed guard of Einherjar from Asgard will arrive to haul me back to my cell.”

“I won’t let that happen.”

“Pfft,” Loki snorted. “And what would you do? Fight them all?”

“If I had to,” Tony replied.

Loki’s head whipped around to inspect Tony’s face. “You cannot be serious.”

“I assure you princess I’m dead serious.”

“I assure you I am not a female,” Loki shot back haughtily.

“Well, yeah. I mean that was kind of the… You know what? It doesn’t matter. Why do you think I’m not being serious?”

Angrily Loki stood up and glowered down at the other man. “I refuse to sit here and listen to this!”

“Okay,” Tony simply stated with a small shrug and making absolutely no effort to stand.

Stunned Loki almost couldn’t speak. “Okay?” he eventually managed to repeat.

Tony shrugged once more. “I told you you’re not a slave here. You don’t have to discuss anything you don’t want.”

“I am a slave!” Loki shouted. “Insisting that I am not one is an insult to your intelligence as well as mine!”

“Slavery doesn’t exist here so here you’re not a slave,” Tony answered evenly.

Too angry to even form words Loki gave a loud snarl and turned. With his back to Tony he crossed his arms against his still heaving chest and clenched his jaw. How dare Tony attempt to toy with his mind in this manner? He refused to even entertain the briefest notion he might not be required to act as a slave here. It was all a ploy in an effort to trick him into letting his guard down so that… so that… Unable to think of an adequate reason for this Loki whirled around on his heals and scowled at Tony. “Why do you insist on trying to convince me of what is untrue?” Loki snarled.

“It’s not untrue here,” Tony stated calmly.

“It is untrue! If I fail to behave as a proper slave I will be hauled back to Asgard for retraining; a fate I’d rather not experience!”

“Told you, I won’t let that happen. They made a mistake, Loki. They sent you to me as part of your punishment. They want me to be your owner? Fine. Then you’re mine. If there’s one thing I don’t like it’s when people try to take my stuff. As long as you want to stay here I will do everything in my power to keep them taking you anywhere. For what it’s worth I’m pretty sure we can also count on Steve to help as well.”

Staring at Tony who was still seated on the floor Loki had a sudden realization that he was towering over the other man and had been yelling at him. Uncertain Loki started to take a step back but hesitated. He had been arguing with his master. More than arguing, his brain reminded him quite unhelpfully. Mentally Loki growled at that thought and refocused. Had he really just denied his master’s advances and then yelled at him? Of all the stupid, ill-advised, unintelligent, and completely
idiotic things to do this definitely had to top the list. As realization slammed into him Loki struggled to breathe.

“Loki.”

Though Tony’s voice was soft Loki still flinched at the sound.

“Sit down please.”

Nodding Loki braced himself against the wall and used it to help slide down to the floor.

“I want you to stop thinking about what’s going through your mind right now and just focus on my voice, okay?”

Again Loki nodded.

“I promise you everything will be all right. There’s nothing to worry about, Loki, you’re safe here. Breathe with me okay? In,” Tony calmly instructed.

Still trying to suck in air Loki desperately tried to comply.

“I know, it’s difficult but you have to try.” Reaching down Tony took Loki’s hands in his own.

“Come on now, breath with me. In.”

After what seemed like forever Loki managed to draw in a shallow breath.

“Good. Now, out.”

Exhaling in a rush Loki couldn’t stop from gasping a few quick breaths immediately afterwards. Lifting his face to meet Tony’s eyes he nodded. Waves of anxiety still threatened to steal the air from his lungs and he couldn’t seem to soothe his rapidly fraying nerves. Tony’s hands tightened ever so subtly around his own as Tony continued to hold his gaze. For some reason this simple gesture helped ease the almost unbearable tension coursing through his body. Inspecting those eyes and not sensing anything more than concern helped make it just that much easier for Loki to breathe.


Loki inhaled as Tony asked. After a few seconds Tony told him to exhale and Loki complied with that order as well. Slowly, ever so slowly, his muscles began to relax. Another inhale, slightly more steady than the others. Pause. Exhale. And through it all Tony’s hands never left his. Loki wasn’t sure how he should feel about this but for whatever reason the contact did help keep him grounded.

“I think I am better now,” Loki whispered after a few minutes.

“You sure?” Tony asked cocking an eyebrow in a questioning manner.

“Yes,” Loki answered softly dropping his eyes to gaze at his hands in Tony’s. Instead of releasing Loki’s hands Tony merely gave them a few soft squeezes. Was this relief that he was feeling? Everything was just too confusing to make sense of anything. “I am unsure what happened,” Loki said quietly still not quite meeting Tony’s eyes.

“At the risk of sounding repetitious I’m going to have to call bullshit again. You know what happened Loki. It’s all right if you don’t want to talk about it but don’t lie to me. I haven’t lied to you yet, please don’t to lie to me.”

Silently Loki nodded in response.
“Do you want to talk about it?”

Still opting not to speak Loki shook his head.

“Okay then. So can you lift your shirt? I just want to check on how the rest of your injuries are faring after that fall.”

Oh. Of course that was all Tony had wanted. Loki could have kicked himself for automatically assuming that Tony had wanted sex from him. “Of course,” Loki stated still cursing himself. Straightening he reached down and lifted the hem of the shirt. While he didn’t bother to glance down himself the look on Tony’s face was enough to tell him it wasn’t good.

“Some of them seem to have bled through the bandages again,” Tony told him.

Loki finally looked down and noticed a few spots with fresh blood seeping through some of the bandages.

“All of this seems older though,” Tony noted.

“Indeed. Some of the blood is from the injuries opening up during my sleep but as they did not bleed overmuch I figured it could wait.”

“Damn it Loki,” Tony growled his hands tightening on Loki’s almost painfully.

Loki dropped his head and hunched his shoulders slightly.

“Fuck,” Tony cursed.

“Look, I’m not mad okay? I’m just upset that you didn’t say something sooner. They need to be looked at immediately if we want them to heal,” Tony stated in a softer tone.

“Well understood,” Loki whispered.

“Let me guess, you haven’t been washing them because you’ve been too worried to ask if you could?”

Unable to form the words Loki merely nodded in agreement.

“I should have known. My fault I suppose, if I hadn’t been spending so much time in my workshop I would have noticed sooner. Well there’s no way around it, they really need to be cleaned after this long. Can we do that in your bathroom or do you want me to clean them in the kitchen instead?”

“I. Yes, I mean no, I mean,” Loki stumbled before he finally paused to take a deep breath. “Yes we can clean them in my bathroom. You, of course, are welcomed to enter should you wish,” he clarified.

“Always so formal,” Tony observed.

“Perhaps. Moreso here than were we on Asgard,” Loki informed him.

And fuck. The flicker of emotion that crossed Loki’s face at just the mention of his homeworld was covered quickly but Tony still saw it. “Right,” Tony stated, desperate to change the subject. “Let’s go get those wounds cleaned.” Without a word Loki opened the door and waited silently next to it. Tony fought back the urge to sigh at the submissive nature of the action and strode into the room. It wouldn’t do any good to fight over every small thing, he had to pick his battles. When they both finally entered the bathroom Loki turned and silently eyed him questioningly.
“Yes?” Tony questioned.

“I, the shirt. It’s just… With my shirt I was able to slide it down my arms. With this one it is more difficult as it is still painful to lift my arms too far,” Loki whispered.

“Right, yeah. Sorry, let me help you with that.” His mouth wanted to keep talking but he realized it would only be meaningless chatter at this point. No matter how much he wanted to find something to say sometimes there just weren’t any words that would be of help. He had to accept that this was just one of those times. With the shirt removed Tony circled Loki to inspect the bandages. He pressed his lips together to keep himself from yelling at Loki for not saying something sooner. At least blood seemed to be the only bodily fluid staining the bandages this time. Still, it wasn’t going to be pleasant removing them. The scissors were still sitting on the counter next to the sink and he snagged them. Slowly, carefully Tony cut up each side of the gauze and put the scissors back down. Not wishing to cause Loki any more pain Tony gripped the edges of the bandages hesitated.

“Tony?”

“Just making sure you were ready,” Tony muttered.

“I am ready,” Loki affirmed.

“Just, you know, let me know if it hurts too much so we can take it slower.”

“It will be less painful than the last time and that was less painful than… than…”

“Yeah, got it,” Tony stated quickly trying his hardest not to growl.

While he knew Loki had to have been tortured extensively on to Asgard to so thoroughly break him he suddenly realized he didn’t know any of the specifics. In that instant he also realized he didn’t want to know the specifics. Knowing what they’d done would probably only anger him. Right now he needed to keep a firm grip on his emotions. Not only would getting pissed off scare Loki but it would hurt him physically as well. He was going to have to figure out how to control this ‘magic’ so he didn’t accidentally hurt Loki again. Later, he told himself as he reached for the bandages wrapped around Loki’s torso. Right now he needed to focus on taking care of the broken and injured god sitting just before him.
Chapter 6

Eyes closed, head leaned back, Loki relaxed in the warm water. It had been a long time since he had been able to relax in this manner. Idly he let his mind wander. Unbidden his thoughts drifted to Tony. Unconsciously his eyebrows knit together as he considered his current ‘master’. Tony was unlike anyone else he’d ever met. The way Tony worried over removing the bandages brought a smile to his face. It had been a long time since anyone had worried overly much about his discomfort. It felt nice to be able to trust in someone to have his best interest at heart. Aside from his mother, and possibly Thor when they’d been younger, no one had worried so much about him. After his attack on New York he didn’t understand how it was possibly but for some reason Tony had forgiven him. He had yet to even be able to forgive himself. That Tony could forgive him so easily was a complete mystery. True he had been mind controlled but the damage done had been beyond horrific. He wasn’t sure if he would be able to forgive someone so easily if it were him.

Shifting slightly Loki attempted to get more comfortable. When he was unable to find a better position Loki grumbled and shifted once more. Something splashed against his cheek and he frowned. Upon opening his eyes he was at first confused. He didn’t immediately recognize his surroundings. The bathing room he remembered finally. Sitting up Loki groaned and brought a hand up to rub his face. Staring down at his hands he eyed the wrinkled skin of his fingers with irritation. Somehow he’d fallen asleep while still in the bath. With a sigh he finally stood and started to step out of the tub.

“Pardons sir.”

Startled, Loki jumped at the unexpected voice and lost his footing.

“Excuse the interruption sir,” JARVIS stated breaking into his thoughts.

“What’s up J?” Tony inquired looking up from his work.

“You may need to check on master Loki,” the AI informed him.

“Why?” Tony asked instantly concerned.

“I fear I may have startled him when he was exiting the bath.”

Hurrying to the elevator Tony checked his watch and frowned. “Loki’s bath was hours ago JARVIS,” Tony shot back, silently willing the elevator to climb faster.

“Correct sir,” JARVIS responded. “However, master Loki fell asleep during his bath and has only recently awoken.”

“Damn it JARVIS. You should have told me. He could have drowned.”

“The was highly unlikely. The probability odds of that happening were-”

“Enough. I don’t want to hear the odds, just don’t let it happen again!”

“As you wish sir."
When the elevator arrived Tony shoved his way through the doors before they were opened all the way. When he was finally free he turned and ran to Loki’s room. Shoving open the door Tony raced to the bathroom. As soon as that door was open Tony froze. Loki lay, unmoving, on the floor. A slow but steadily increasing puddle of blood surrounded his head.


Snagging a towel he rushed over and knelt down next to Loki. JARVIS began rattling off medical information and it didn’t take long for Tony to realize he was in over his head. Smarter than the average person he might be but even he still needed some time to study a topic. Medicine was nothing he’d previously studied and he really couldn’t afford to take time out for it. He needed help. Now.

“JARVIS call Rogers,” Tony barked, interrupting the meaningless flow of medical jargon.

“On it sir,” JARVIS replied as calm as always.

Pressing the towel to the bleeding wound on Loki’s head Tony inspected as much of the other man as possible from his position. Holding the towel in place he couldn’t move to check much past the waist but the injuries down that low seemed older or at least as healed as the ones on Loki’s torso. Probably not part of the current incident then, Tony decided dismissing them for the moment.

“Tony?”

“Steve! Got an issue here, need some help. How much do you know about triage?”

“What happened?”

“JARVIS?” Tony called out.

“Master Loki was bathing and fell asleep in the tub. When he woke and began to exit the tub I started to ask him a question. I believe I startled him and that led to him losing his footing and striking his head on the floor. Currently-”

“Yeah thanks J, that’s enough for now,” Tony interrupted before JARVIS could digress into the technicalities. “So right now I have an comatose god of mischief bleeding into an obscenely expensive towel and I have no idea if he’s dying, brain damaged, or fine and merely unconscious for now. I learn fast but even I would need more time to master the finer points of medicine. So can you help or not?”

“What about a hospital?”

“Are you insane or just stupid,” Tony growled angrily. “Even if they could help him do you not think they’d realize he wasn’t human? Even if we could get him out of there without them running who knows what kind of experiments on him they’d contact people. The people they contacted would contact others and then pretty soon S.H.I.E.L.D. would be aware of Loki’s presence here. The one thing I was trying to keep from happening. No. Next option?” The line was silent for several moments before Steve spoke again.

“Banner.”

“Bruce? Are you kidding me? You do remember what happened the last time they encountered each other don’t you?”

“You wanted someone that was unlikely to inform S.H.I.E.L.D. and had medical knowledge and
experience. He’s the only logical person Tony. I can try to think of others but…”

“Yeah no, you’re right. Fine but if this blows up in our faces and Loki gets hurt I’m holding you responsible,” Tony grumbled. “JARVIS contact Dr. Banner and patch him into this call, will you?”

“Yes sir,” JARVIS acknowledged.

“You coming over too?” Tony asked.

“I’ve already started making my way there. I’ll be there ASAP.”

“Good. I don’t want to be the only thing standing between those two if things go wrong and Bruce goes all Jolly Green Giant on us.”

“Enough with the nicknames Tony.”

“Whatever. Look, just-”

“Tony?” A new voice broke in.

“Bruce, hey! Look I need you to come to the Tower, like yesterday. Don’t ask any questions, I’ll explain everything when you get here.”

“What did you do now?” Bruce sighed sounding annoyed.

“What makes you think it was me?” Tony asked offended.

“Enough,” Steve interrupted. “We can’t explain over the phone but we really do need you to meet us at the tower Dr. Banner. We’ll explain everything there. We wouldn’t be asking this if it wasn’t an emergency.”

“Fine, It’ll probably take me a while. I have to find a cab.”

“No time,” Tony disagreed. “Where are you right now?”

“The lab you set aside for me in your R&D department.”

“The downtown offices for Stark Industries? Got it. Stay right there and I’ll get you a ride. JARVIS, contact Happy and have him pick up Dr. Banner and drive him here.”

“On it sir,” JARVIS answered. “Sir I should also inform you-”

“Not now J,” Tony broke in. Glancing down Tony moved the towel slightly to check on the Loki’s head. The wound looked bad but at least the bleeding had slowed down. “JARVIS, how is he? In terms I can actually understand this time.”

“Sir Miss Romanoff-”

“No, not Nat. I asked about Loki.”

“Yes sir, understood, but miss Romanoff-”

“JARVIS,” Tony growled.


Damn, he’d forgotten Bruce was still on the line. Suddenly he caught movement out of the corner of
his eye. The projectile was headed for Loki and without thinking he raised a hand to block the object and a knife sank into his forearm. For several seconds he stared at the knife trying to make sense of things.

“Miss Romanoff has entered the building, made it to the penthouse, and has just recently thrown a knife into sir’s arm,” JARVIS stated evenly.

Tony stared at the knife.

“Actually into his arm?” Bruce asked sounding surprised.

“Affirmative Dr. Banner.”

For several seconds he felt nothing. Huh, must have been really sharp, Tony thought offhanded. Finally the hand began to sting. The stinging quickly turned more painful.

“Ow,” Tony muttered.

“What the fuck is he doing here?” Natasha growled.

“Dying,” Tony grumbled before moving between the two mindful of the small throwing knife still embedded in his arm. As much as he wanted to remove it he realized he should probably wait for Bruce to look at it first. “Look I can explain but for now can everyone just please calm down?”

“Wait a minute,” Bruce interrupted. “Who’s dying?”

“No!” Tony shouted. “I end all calls now.”

“As you wish,” JARVIS replied instantly.

“Look I can explain but I need you to calm down first.”

“Calm down? I came to check up on you and find Earth’s number one enemy lying in your bathroom instead of being locked up in some dungeon somewhere like he belongs. How the hell can you possibly explain something like that?”

“He was locked up,” Tony asserted. “Then…” He trailed off not quite sure how to phrase everything. How did you explain something like this?


“Then Odin decided Loki should make reparations to those he wronged. He sent Loki here to see if he can’t right some of the wrongs he caused, undo some of the damage so to speak.” Damn his arm was killing him.

“Right the wrongs? How in hell is he even supposed to come close to righting half of what he’s done here?”

“It wasn’t his fault,” Tony argued. Almost too quick for him to follow Natasha drew a gun and pointed it in his direction. Tony froze, unsure how to respond or if even moving might cause her to fire.

“Move,” she ordered.

No fucking way he was moving and allowing her a clean shot at Loki. He needed to do something before this spiralled any farther out of control. “Look Nat, I understand-”
“Do you? Do you really understand? Because from where I’m standing it doesn’t look like you do. From where I’m standing it looks like you’re protecting a criminal.”

Tony winced. “He’s paid,” was all Tony was able to say.

“If I may?” JARVIS interrupted. “Perhaps, miss Romanoff, you should take another look at the criminal known as Loki.”

For a time there was silence. Tony realized he was holding his breath and finally released it. He tried his best to breathe normally. Finally Nat turned towards him.

“What happened to him?” she asked angrily.

Unable to read the cause of the anger Tony frowned.

“Even you’re not this good Tony. I repeat, what happened to him.”

“Good?”

“Those marks on him? Someone tortured him, someone who obviously knew what they were doing. You’re not the kind of person to torture another and since this is Loki none of us would be able to inflict that kind of damage. Not to mention some of those marks he has are at least a week old or older. So I repeat, what happened?”

He had no clue how to answer that. Not true, his brain reminded him. Tony fought not to roll his eyes. Okay, so he did know how to answer it. The problem was he didn’t want to answer the question. He was temporarily spared from formulating a response when he saw her stiffen then twist to aim the gun back into the bedroom.

“Gun,” Tony called out hoping to warn whichever person had arrived. “J, who’s here?”

“Captain Rogers is just inside the doorway of master Loki’s bedroom and Dr. Banner has almost made it to the tower.”

“Thanks J,” Tony acknowledged.

“Steve?” Natasha called out.

“It’s me,” Steve answered.

When Nat made her way out of the bathroom Tony propped Loki’s head on top of the towel so the weight of it would keep pressure on the wound and followed her. Closing the door behind himself he turned around and spotted Steve and Natasha. Natasha still had the gun out but at least it was pointed at the floor for now.

“I swear, if someone doesn’t explain soon—”

“I will,” Tony insisted. “I just want to wait for Bruce to get in here first so I don’t have to go through it all twice, all right?” Neither of the other two spoke and the three of them continued to wait in silence. Finally Bruce walked into the room and carefully inspected everything cautiously noting the tension and the gun before speaking.

“So, this all looks pretty bad,” Bruce stated blandly. “On the plus side it’d be difficult to get much worse.”

“Show him,” Natasha demanded.
“Okay but I should explain some things first,” Tony began.

“Just show him,” Natasha insisted.

Sighing in resignation Tony turned and opened the bathroom door. He steadfastly refused to move. If anything happened he wanted to be between Loki and the others. With one more look to the other two present Bruce finally made his way over and glanced around Tony into the bathroom.

“Wow,” he said mildly. “I was so wrong.”

“Look I can explain everything but can you check up on him? He hit his head and he’s been unconscious ever since.”

Bruce removed his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose before raising his head to meet Tony’s eyes. “I haven’t had that much of a look yet but some of those injuries couldn’t have happened just from slipping in the tub.”

“Most didn’t but like I said, I’ll explain it all later. Could you please just check up on him and see if he’s all right?”

“Okay,” Bruce finally replied, putting his glasses back on. “First I want to check on him to see if he can wait. If he can afford to wait I need to see to your arm first then if he can be moved we’ll take him to the infirmary.”

“Deal,” Tony agreed.

Arm bandaged, Tony watched anxiously as Steve carried Loki to the elevator and then into the infirmary. Logically he knew Steve was unlikely to drop Loki but Tony couldn’t help the nervous tension threatening to freeze his muscles solid. Luckily Natasha didn’t demand any answers while the group made their way to the infirmary. Feeling completely useless Tony followed closely by Steve’s side keeping a constant watch on Loki the whole time. By the time they made it to the infirmary he couldn’t keep quiet any longer.

“He’ll be okay right? I mean people hit their heads all the time. Probably just looks worse than it actually is. I mean head wounds bleed a lot. Trust me me I would know. Oh, this one time, you’re not going to believe this but, well actually it’s me so you might believe it but-”

“Enough,” Bruce snapped. He raised a hand and slipped it under his glasses to pinch the bridge of his nose. With a heavy sigh he lowered the hand and inspected the others present. “Okay I can’t work like this so here’s what’s going to happen. Tony if you want to stay you’re going to have to keep your mouth closed unless I ask you a question. Otherwise I will boot you out of here. Nat, disarm or else I’m booting you out as well.”

“Wait a minute,” Tony interrupted. She’s the one that tried to kill Loki. If you’re going to boot out anyone it should be her.”

“First of all arguing about this is only wasting time I could be using to treat Loki. Second, I’m not letting her stay if she doesn’t disarm.”

“She’s just as deadly without weapons,” Tony argued.

“If you think I’m disarming with Loki here then you’re mistaken,” Natasha disagreed.
“Then you can leave. The absolute last thing I need to worry about is possible gun discharge or a knife to the arm.”

“That was Tony’s fault!” Natasha protested. “I wasn’t aiming for him.”

“No you were aiming for Loki!” Tony shot back.

“Enough!” Bruce shouted. “If you two can’t stop bickering then you can both leave. For now I want both of you on opposite sides of the room.”

Tony glared at Natasha as she glared right back.

“I swear, if you two don’t move now then I’m kicking you both out of here. I mean it. You called me in and didn’t even warn me the person I was treating was Loki? I’m literally moments away from letting the other guy out and not caring what happens. You want to test me or can you two seriously not retreat to separate corners to glare at each other from opposite sides of the room?”

“If she goes first,” Tony snapped. Okay so he sounded like a petulant child, sue him. He was worried about Loki and that was only natural given the circumstances, wasn’t it? Of course it was, he reassured himself.

“Both of you, go!” Bruce ordered.

Tony continued to glare at Natasha as both moved slowly back to their respective sides.

“Steve,” Bruce called out. “Call Clint.”

“No!” Tony shouted.

“Yes,” Bruce insisted. “All the rest of us know Tony. Clint deserves to be informed as well. Either Steve calls him now or I’ll do it later.”

“Fine but can he, I mean, can he just not say it’s about Loki? I mean just until we know how… how he’s going to…”

“Steve?” Bruce questioned.

“I can avoid it for now but I think what Dr. Banner wants is for everyone to know everything that’s going on.”

“It can wait until he gets here,” Bruce stated finally turning back to Loki. “When he gets here though someone should tell him before he gets up here. I don’t want him being surprised by Loki’s presence the second he steps into the room.”

Tony really didn’t want to admit how worried he was about Loki. The cut on the head had him more nervous than he wanted to admit which of course was why he’d been babbling moments ago. Still, Bruce was the best doctor he knew and if anyone could help Loki it would be Bruce. He didn’t even want to think what would happen if Bruce couldn’t help Loki.

- 

It was more than thirty minutes into his examination when he finally discovered something that sent his stomach roiling. Swallowing hard Bruce decided he had to be wrong and decided to re-examine his findings. Afterwards he merely confirmed his speculations and he sighed. Removing his glasses Bruce rubbed his eyes. What the hell was he supposed to do with his findings? Cautiously he
glanced to Tony. Tony stiffened instantly.

“What? He’s okay isn’t he? I swear by everything I don’t even believe in that if you say he’s not okay—”

“He should be fine,” Bruce answered tiredly. Did he believe Tony was capable of doing what his findings confirmed?

“What?” Tony demanded. “What’s wrong? I swear if you don’t tell me—”

“Later,” Bruce told him. No, he decided. Tony wouldn’t ever do something like that to another person. That still left him with more questions he really didn’t want to contemplate.

The door to the infirmary slid open and Clint stalked through them.

“Where the fuck is he?”

Blinking Tony stared at the vision before him. He wasn’t sure what to make of the enraged man standing in the doorway. His eyes flicked over to where Loki lay. Could he possibly let Clint near Loki not knowing what transpired between the two?


“Look, let’s all just calm down and—” Bruce began

“Fuck that! Where the fuck is he!”

“As I stated previously master Loki is unconscious,” JARVIS stated evenly.

Before Tony could do anything Clint stalked over to Banner and snagged him by the collar. “What happened to him?” Clint demanded.

“I… I don’t know. He hit his head and then…”

“Loki hit his head and was knocked unconscious,” Tony informed him. Truth be told he was already angry just seeing him. On one hand he wanted to consider Clint a friend. On the other hand he didn’t know what had transpired between Clint and Loki or what they’d shared during their ‘shower’. He had to force his emotions down before he did something he would regret. He needed more information before he actually acted on anything.

“No,” Clint stated. Rushing over he made his way to Loki and inspected the body.

Tony was not able to to see what Clint was doing to Loki and suddenly found this unacceptable. “What are you doing?”

“What did you do to him?” Clint demanded.

“I…” Tony hesitated. How much to relate? “I swear, if you hurt him…”

“I will not hurt him,” Clint answered curtly. “He is…” Clink hesitated more. “He is already hurt,” Clint stated. “Someone should watch over him.”

“I care,” Clint growled. “Let it be enough for now.”

“If it’s not?” Tony challenged.

“Then it’s not,” Clint growled. “You should have told me he was back. If anyone had the right to know first it was me.”

“Yeah well it’s not exactly like you two-” Tony stopped short when Loki groaned. “Loki?”

“No,” Bruce stated, stepping in front of Tony. “Back up, now.”

“Excuse you?” Tony questioned slightly irritated.

“No, with what I’ve discovered I don’t want anyone near him when he wakes. You can wait long enough for me to make sure he feels safe.”

“Master?” Loki asked groggily.

Tony would have rushed to Loki’s side, Bruce be damned if Clint didn’t step between them and intercept him first. “Master? What the fuck did you do to him?”

“Meant Tony. Sorry,” Loki muttered, still sounding slightly sleepy. “Tony?” Loki shifted slightly and Tony tensed. He wanted nothing more to comfort the broken god lying just feet away but he had no clue what Bruce had discovered. If it had anything to do with Clint… Turning he spied the other man glaring daggers at him and frowned. The monitors beeping increased and Tony’s heart beat escalated with them.

“Master?”

“Move,” Tony ordered.

“Not on your life,” Clint told him.

“Enough!” Steve shouted. “Clint, move. Tony, take care of Loki. Loki, nothing’s wrong and you’re okay, all right?”

“Sir? I mean-”

“We know what you meant. Clint, move, Tony, reassure Loki. Now.”

“It… It’s all right,” Tony managed. “No one is going to hurt anyone. You slipped and hit your head and I just want you to work with the doctor to make sure you’re all right. Okay?”

“Doctor?”

The beeping on the monitors increased and became slightly more erratic.

“No baby,” and when did he start calling him baby? “Just cooperate with the doc and everything’s all good. Okay?” With a quick glance to Clint he noted something --approval?-- gods help him he didn’t know and did it even matter right now?

“Yes master. I… I meant yes Tony.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Tony told him. “It’s all good, whatever you can do is fine.”

“Tony?” Loki asked.
The distress he heard in Loki’s voice made him want nothing more than to rush to the former god’s side.

“I have taken the liberty of ordering dinner for everyone,” JARVIS suddenly informed them. “If a few people, perhaps sir and master Barton, could perhaps retrieve the food I believe this conversation would go over much better with full stomachs.”

Tony paused. JARVIS was usually good at defusing volatile situations but putting Clint and him together without him knowing what had transpired between Clint and Loki… Suddenly he burst out into laughter. It actually made perfect sense. Get to the two biggest hot heads out of the room and give them an excuse to discuss things without the others around. Completely just like something JARVIS would set up, Tony thought derisively. If only Clint would agree.

“I’m not sure,” Clint drawled. “Will Loki be all right?”

“I assure you master Loki will be fine, especially with Dr. Banner watching over him,” JARVIS stated evenly.

“Oh come on,” Tony stated with mock exaggeration, not that he didn’t feel it but rather that he was choosing to ignore the emotions. “You can’t tell me that you don’t want to have Chinese from the best Chinese place ever.”

- They found themselves in the elevator mostly alone. The only other person was JARVIS but he didn’t count in Tony’s mind. “You know,” he began, “I know he’s been through a lot of things. The thing is, I want him to tell me. Understood?”

“I’m not spilling his secrets,” Clint spat.

Tony furrowed his brows in confusion before realizing he should answer. “Yeah, that,” he agreed. “Just so you know, he was delivered here without my consent.” Clint scoffed and Tony’s frown deepened. “It was without my consent and if I didn’t accept him then they would have taken him to someone that would have tortured him to death.”

The speed with which the archer reacted surprised him.

“Who?” Clint demanded gripping the collar of Tony’s shirt.

“Not a fucking clue,” Tony growled, shoving Clint off of him. “Don’t ever fucking touch me like that again.”

- “Loki?” Bruce asked cautiously.

“Tony?”

The monitors began beeping erratically. “No Loki, it’s fine. He’s not here but you’re all right okay? He just went to get food that’s all.”

“Food?”

“Yep, just food,” Bruce reassured him.

“Did I hear Barton?” Loki asked, rubbing at his eyes.
“Clint’s with Tony,” Bruce answered. The monitors fluctuated rapidly. “Loki?”

“Don’t let him hurt him! Please! Barton did nothing to hurt me!”

Right. He had questions that needed answers. “Loki stop,” Bruce ordered.

Loki struggled against the person holding him. He had to get to Tony to stop him from hurting Barton. He should have told his master everything. Stupid, he berated himself. If Tony hurt Barton on his behalf then learned the truth… Loki didn’t even want to think about that. Still struggling he finally opened his eyes and froze. “No,” he whispered.

“Loki?”

Punishment, was all Loki could think. This has to be part of his punishment for his crimes. After everything he would have thought Tony above this but it was hard to deny the cold hard truth standing above him. Tony had left him. Alone. With the man that had single handedly beaten him into the floor.

“I should kill you while he’s gone,” a voice stated.

Startled Loki glanced to the far corner and spotted the Black Widow herself. “I did not physically harm your archer,” Loki stated. “Please use the same care.”

“You hurt him in other ways,” she responded.

“I did,” Loki acknowledged. “I accept whatever you deem an adequate recompense.”

“Master Loki was not responsible for those actions,” JARVIS informed them. “I also feel compelled to state that should you choose to harm master Loki right now I will be forced to take steps to stop you.”

“After everything he’s done you’re siding with him?” she asked angrily.

“Steve,” Bruce stated suddenly.

“On it,” Steve announced.

Before Loki could understand what was happening Steve crossed the room, put a hand on Natasha’s arm, and started leading her to the door.

“Wait a minute! You can’t seriously expect me to leave him alone with Bruce.”

“Bruce is a doctor Nat. Right now he needs to treat Loki. Trust me, Loki isn’t going to do anything to hurt him. Besides, if he even tried JARVIS would let us know, right JARVIS?”

“Affirmative sir.”

The door slid open and Steve escorted the still protesting Natasha out of the infirmary, the doors silently sliding shut behind them. Suddenly Loki was very aware of being alone with the man who had been able to beat him senseless when he’d still had full use of his powers. The one good thing to come from that encounter was it managed to break the mind control. He was terrified to even breathe wrong. Where was Tony and would Tony even care if this man killed him?

“So I’m guessing you’re not a very trusting person,” the doctor stated.
Statement. Not a direct question so no reason to answer Loki decided.

“Right. Well this will go much more smoothly if you can answer a few questions. So, feel up to a little conversation?”

“Conversation?” Loki asked hesitantly.

“Yep. Also you need to calm down a bit. I can see how fast your heart’s beating. I’m not sure why you’re this nervous but I can probably guess. You expect a repeat of what happened the last time you and the ‘other guy’ met don’t you?”

“I… It would be unwise to assume things,” Loki stated cautiously.

“Yep,” the doctor agreed. “And presumptuous. Look, nothing is going to happen. I don’t have any plans on letting the ‘other guy’ out unless you do something seriously stupid. Think you can avoid that?”

“Yes?”

“Right then. Seriously how does this stuff always happen to me? Remind me to tell Tony he owes me big time when this is all over. As your doctor there are a few things I need to know. Whatever you tell me will not leave this room. In the interest of honesty I feel I should tell you I’ve already done a preliminary exam and know about the sexual assault.”

Loki flinched. He wasn’t sure what to make of that information. The tone the doctor had used was too bland for him to tell what the other thought about what was done. He had no clue how to respond to that and was unsure if a response was even required. In the interest of safety he opted for silence.

“I need you to talk to me Loki.”

“What would you have me say?” Loki asked cautiously.

“First I need you to tell me, and you really need to be honest about this, who was it that did it?”

Unable to hold the doctor’s direct gaze Loki turned away and focused on the far wall. “It was part of my training,” Loki answered quietly. “Those that were responsible felt that it would help speed the process along.”

“I need you to be one hundred percent honest with me, okay?”

Unwilling to reply verbally Loki nodded.

“Did anyone here, anyone at all, have a part in doing that to you?”

Stunned Loki whipped his head around to stare at the doctor.

“Really need an answer to that,” the doctor told him.

“Of course not,” Loki huffed indignantly. His mind replayed every instance of Tony holding him and whispering to him while he broke down. Just what kind of a person did this man think Tony was? “I sincerely hope you are not insinuating that Tony is responsible for any of the… the… damage that was done to me,” Loki snarled. His anger faltered slightly when the other man closed his eyes and sighed deeply.

“Okay good. We can work with that. JARVIS can you lock the doors?”
Once again panic threatened to consume him and Loki struggled just to breathe.

“I can but if sir orders to be let in I will have to open them.”

“Loki, calm down. I can see your heartbeat on that monitor. If you’re worried about the doors I just wanted them locked so you feel comfortable.”

Unable to speak Loki shook his head.

“Loki?”

“Tony,” Loki managed.

“What about him? Loki, I really need you to tell me what’s wrong.”

“Need Tony,” Loki breathed.

“JARVIS get Tony, now!” the doctor ordered.

“So anyway, like I was saying,” Tony began.

“Sir, your presence is required in the infirmary,” JARVIS broke in.

“What happened,” Tony demanded as he rushed away from the others and towards the elevator.

“It appears some of the doctor’s questions have upset master Loki and he is having another panic attack sir.”

“Shit.”

“You really need to slow your breathing Loki.”

Frantically Loki shook his head. He couldn’t do this. He needed… The norns help him, he didn’t know what he needed. He only knew Tony was the only person that could help when this happened. Unable to breathe adequately Loki began to get lightheaded. The doors slid open and Loki glanced up at the new arrival.

“Tony,” Loki whispered as the other man rushed over to his side.

“Hey, it’s okay. I’m here and it’s all good okay?”

“Can’t… breathe…”

“I know but we’re going to work on that okay? Sh, it’s all good now. Just focus on me, okay? Come on Loki, just like before. You can do this. Focus on my voice okay?”

Nodding frantically Loki reached out a shaking hand. The norns be praised Tony understood and grasped it instantly.

“I’m here. See, you can feel my hand can’t you?”

Tony gave the hand a squeeze and Loki nodded in response.
“Right, so you know I’m here and that nothing is going to happen to you. I promise you that. Not one thing is going to happen to you. All you need to do right now is breathe. Come on Loki, you got this. Breathe with me now. In.”

Desperate for air Loki tried to draw a breath.

“Come on babe, you can do it. Just like before, breathe in.”

Unsteadily Loki drew in a shallow breath.

“Good, good. Just like that,” Tony praised, giving the hand a slight squeeze. “Right, exhale now.”

Loki released the breath and gasped several times.

“Doing good so far. Now another breath. Come on Loki you can do it. In.”

Shakily Loki inhaled another shallow breath.

“There you go. Doing good Loki, doing real good okay? Now exhale.”

Bruce watched the pair still slightly worried about Loki. While the worst that could possibly happen was Loki might pass out it still made him uneasy to not be able to help. Tony did seem to have the situation in control. Glancing sideways he checked the monitors and was relieved when he noted Loki’s vitals seemed to be returning to normal.

“That’s it. Doing great. Just focus on me, okay?”

“Yes… Mas-... meant Tony.”

“I know babe. It’s okay for now. We’re not worrying about that right now. Right now I just want you to focus on your breathing.”

Babe. Bruce processed that. Tony was a very outgoing person and gave everyone nicknames it seemed but he didn’t usually use endearments. Should he question it?

“Doing good Loki. That’s it, just keep breathing with me.”

“Feel better. I think,” Loki said haltingly.

“Sure about that?”

“Not going to pass out,” Loki stated.

“I’d consider that a plus,” Tony told him. “I already have plenty of people swooning at my feet, don’t need any more.”

That comment brought an unsteady laugh from Loki.

“Okay Loki. We’re going to talk about this now but you can stop anytime you want. I don’t want you to feel pressured, okay?”

“Understood.”

“Okay, so can you tell me what brought on this panic attack?”
‘The… the doctor…’

Tony turned to glare at him and Bruce took an involuntary step backwards.

‘He said… the doors… I just…’ Loki mumbled.

‘I just wanted the doors locked so he would feel more comfortable, that’s it,’ Bruce explained. ‘He is naked and some of the questions I have to ask are somewhat delicate.’

‘Then I’m staying while you talk to him,’ Tony insisted. ‘No way you’re booting me out of here after that.’

‘I suppose I don’t need to anymore. You’re welcome to stay if he doesn’t mind. I just needed everyone gone initially so Loki would feel safe telling me something.’

‘He believed you assaulted me sexually,’ Loki whispered.

‘Excuse you,’ Tony growled.

‘That is not what I said, Loki.’

‘Truth,’ Loki agreed. ‘It was, however, inferred.’

‘Wait!’ Tony shouted. His eyes shifted back and forth from Loki to Banner several times as he tried to process everything. Bringing up both hands he scrubbed his face and turned back to Bruce. ‘We’ll get to you in a minute,’ Tony snapped. ‘Loki?’

Loki cocked his head and waited.

‘Now would be a really good time for you to share a few things you seem to have neglected to tell me.’

‘At first I wasn’t sure if telling you would, ah, inspire you. Later… I don’t know. I just couldn’t bring myself to discuss it. I am sorry for not informing you sooner, sir.’

‘Loki,’ Tony growled.

‘Sorry. It’s a habit they beat into me during my training. It is difficult to overcome.’

‘Fuck,’ Tony snarled, before turning around to pace.

Suddenly the monitors began beeping erratically and Loki began shaking. ‘Loki?’ Bruce asked anxiously. He was shoved sideways and Tony took his place next to Loki.

‘Shit. Sorry, I’m sorry. I forgot. I’m still not sure how this magic crap works. I didn’t mean to hurt you, okay? Come on Loki talk to me, please?’

‘Anger,’ Loki whispered.

‘Anger?’ Tony asked.

Loki nodded. ‘Or any strong, negative, emotion really. It’s why the panic attacks set it off as well. It is also why I felt you having the pendant might be more useful to me. If a slave displeases the master then the magic will pick up on the displeasure and punish the slave. The master need not even be present for the magic to function.’
“I’m sorry,” Bruce broke in unable to hold his tongue. “Did he just say slave?”

“I can explain,” Tony stated holding up his hands.

“Oh, I think it’s pretty self explanatory.”

“It’s not like that Bruce,” Tony said taking a step towards him.

“I don’t think you really want to come any closer right now Tony,” Bruce warned.

“Tony is telling the truth doctor. He does not consider me a slave but keeps me here solely for my benefit. Were he to return me I would be retrained and sent elsewhere. The norns only know how I would be treated by any other master. There are many I have wronged who would seek recompense given a chance. Please do not be angry with Tony.”

- 

Loki shifted nervously, waiting to see how Doctor Banner would respond. He really did not want Tony to be the only thing standing between him and the doctor’s ‘other guy’. If he knew of anything that would help diffuse the situation he would do it in an instant. Suddenly he had a thought. “Tony, does JARVIS have any recordings of my time here?”

“I have all of your time here recorded master Loki,” JARVIS answered.

“What are you thinking?” Tony asked.

“May I have him play something?” Loki pressed.

“I suppose,” Tony replied slowly. “What did you want him to replay?”

“The conversation about why you gave me my room. I mean, not all of it, just the end part.”

“Why not all of it?” the doctor asked suspiciously.

“Parts of that conversation are not mine to share doctor, that is all.”

“You’re referring to when I told you about Afghanistan aren’t you?” Tony asked.

“I had hoped to exclude that part,” Loki told Tony.

“I have a better one in mind. J, play the footage of me talking with the person that brought Loki. Center display screen.”

“Yes sir,” JARVIS replied.

Unconsciously Loki’s hand tightened around Tony’s as the recording began.

“By royal decree the Allfather graciously decided that you shall be gifted the slave formerly known as Loki—”

“Hold it right there. Right, see that’s what I thought you said. Yeah that’s actually not going to work for me.”

- 

Not really wanting to watch the video Tony took the time to inspect Loki. He doubted the former
god realized just how tightly he was clutching his hand. Raped. Tony tried to process that but only wound up becoming angry once more. When Loki’s posture stiffened Tony mentally cursed himself and tried to shove the anger away. He took the hand Loki wasn’t clinging to and wrapped it around the pendant. ‘Could really use some calming vibes right about now,’ he thought at it. It started slowly. At first he wasn’t sure if anything was really happening or it was merely his imagination. Ever so subtly the edges of the anger began to dull slightly.

“Loki’s staying right here and it’s you that’s leaving.”

“Then you accept him as your property?”

“Yes. Now leave.”

“Then you must sign the contract.”

“Fine, let me see it.”

Bruce removed his glasses and rubbed the bridge of his nose. Finally he turned back around and inspected Loki. He almost winced when he saw how tightly Loki was gripping Tony’s hand. That gave him pause. Hand holding. Babe. Tony’s fiercely protective nature towards Loki. He didn’t want to ask but he had to know. With the physical damage as well as the rape he needed to know that Loki hadn’t made any rash decisions. “Is there something going on between you two?”

“What?” Tony asked sounding shocked.

“I’m not making any judgements Tony, I was trying to make sure Loki’s okay. After some of the things he’s been through I don’t think it wise for him to jump into a relationship just yet.”

“Relationship?” Loki asked. “You mean like romantically? As in you do not believe that we should court each other? I can assure you doctor that Tony has made no overtures of that kind towards me and I am unsure if you are purposely trying to insult one or both of us.”

“Insult?” Tony asked, turning to Loki. “You’d be insulted if I… I mean, not that I was asking, mind you, but if I were to ask… I mean. Fuck, this isn’t coming out right.”

“Your world would not view it as improper for a man to wish to be with another man?” Loki asked hesitantly.

Tony shrugged. “Some might but fuck ‘em. Besides most people are pretty open minded. The fact that it’s me will draw a lot of publicity I suppose. I haven’t really dated anyone since Pepper.”

“Pepper? Is that not a condiment?”

Tony laughed. “I wouldn’t ask her that to her face but yeah, and it’s actually her nickname. Her real name is Virginia but she goes by Pepper instead.”

The look of confusion on Loki’s face was priceless and Banner couldn’t help smiling.

“People would consider it, uh, ‘improper’ on Asgard?” Tony asked.

Scowling Loki jerked his head away and glared at the wall. “Yes,” he bit out angrily.

“Okay, touchy subject apparently,” Tony noted.
“Sir, Captain Rogers asked me to remind you that the food is getting cold,” JARVIS announced.

“Thanks J. Are you okay to hang out in here a bit longer? I’ll fix a plate and bring it to you so you can eat in here.”

“You do not wish me to eat in the kitchen as normal?” Loki asked.

“I just figured you might feel a bit more comfortable in here for now.”

“You mean because the others are here,” Loki surmised. “I cannot continue to hide from them Tony. They deserve to at least ask their questions.”

“Maybe but I think we should give it a little more time so they can cool down a bit.”

“Knowing I am here and postponing this discussion will not be conducive to them ‘cooling down’ I assure you. The sooner we have this conversation the sooner they are likely to ‘cool down’.”

“I suppose you’re right. All right, give me a minute. I’ll go get you some clothes at least.”

“Captain Rogers has left master Loki’s clothing just outside of the infirmary,” JARVIS informed them.

“Wow, I need to remember to do something nice for him,” Tony muttered, making his way towards the sliding doors of the infirmary.
When the doctor excused himself and he was finally dressed Loki glanced over to Tony nervously.

“What’s up?” Tony asked instantly.

“May I ask how Barton fares?”

“Can I ask if he’s responsible for what happened to you?”

“I feared you still held him responsible for that,” Loki sighed. “I truly was being honest when I told you that he never touched me in that manner.”

“Then what happened Loki. I mean, I know I told you that you don’t have to talk about anything you don’t want, but…”

“I know, still, I feel I should inform you he among all of those I controlled has the most cause to be angry with me. The magic of the staff… The magic that allowed me to control them also allowed me to cause them pain. It is similar but slightly different to the magic binding me to you. It can be used to cause pain as well. The pain is almost the same in both magics but with the staff it is more centralized. It needs a direction, a specific targeted area. The binding magic for slaves is more of an all over effect.”

“Okay,” Tony drawled carefully.

“You have seen the pain the binding magic causes in me. Whenever I would become frustrated or when he would unintentionally cause me pain tending to my wounds…”

“You caused him that pain?” Tony asked, narrowing his eyes.

“I would strike out in anger and frustration and pain, yes,” Loki admitted. “Barton was usually the recipient of my displeasure. It is why I worry over how he fares. I would ask you grant him leeway if he is overly angered by my presence here. I would also like the opportunity to make amends for some of the pain I inflicted upon him.”

“This is a lot to take in Loki.”

“I understand. I would also understand should you choose to punish me for my transgressions. It is a punishment I have actually earned.”

“I don’t know what to say Loki. I mean, I don’t want to do that to you but if it comes down to that or letting Clint dole out any form of punishment…”

“Then I would prefer your archer to dole out the punishment. He deserves the opportunity to exact retribution and I would spare you a task you find detestable.”

“Oh hell no, I’m not letting Clint hurt you,” Tony growled. “Especially after what you just told me.”

“Tony…”

“No and that’s final. Enough discussion about this for now. If you’re serious about talking to the others then let’s do this.”
Tony wasn’t sure what to expect when they made their way into the living area where everyone else was gathered. The hushed whispered conversations all ceased as everyone turned their attention to Loki and Tony as they entered. Tony took Loki’s elbow and led him into the kitchen. “Come on, let’s get you some food first. You’re not missing any more meals on my watch,” Tony grumbled.

“There’s, ah, there’s two boxes in there labeled with L’s that JARVIS says are for Loki,” Steve informed them.

“Master Loki has professed a dislike for heavily seasoned food,” JARVIS stated. “I took the liberty of ordering some of the lighter dishes as well as making sure there was plenty of white rice.”

“Can someone please tell me why we’re catering to a murderer with no compunctions whatsoever about hurting people for no reason,” Natasha snapped.

“Nat,” Clint murmured quietly.

“Not that I even have to explain it to you but he didn’t eat for four days before he arrived here,” Tony shot back. “I’m not letting him miss another meal. You can deal with however long it takes for him to eat.”

“Tony,” Loki said softly. “I could wait until—”

“No, Loki,” Tony ordered.

“As you wish,” Loki acquiesced.

Tony sighed and ran a hand through his hair. “Look, I’ll run through your arrival here and everything that happened after while you eat. Then you can tell your part, okay?”

“As you wish,” Loki repeated

Damn it, he was getting sick of that phrase.

Loki, carefully avoiding the gazes of the others present, listened while he ate.

“Okay so, Loki was brought here, um, a few days ago,” Tony hedged.

“How many?” Clint demanded.

“A few. Does that really matter?”

“Yes,” Clint persisted.

“If I was not unconscious more than a few hours earlier then today would mark day fifteen,” Loki stated quietly.

“Two weeks? You had him, as a slave no less, for more than two weeks and you didn’t tell anyone?” Clint growled.

“Steve knew,” Tony shot back.

Loki winced. Tony probably should have phrased that more diplomatically.

Okay look. We’re never going to get through this with interruptions. Just let me tell you what
happened and then you can ask questions.” Taking a deep breath Tony began again. “I don’t know how it happened at some point Loki was turned into a slave.”

“Sentenced,” Loki corrected quietly. “After the trial I was sentenced to be a slave.”

“There was a trial?” Tony asked.

“I did state that it might be best if I relay the information Tony.”

“You need to eat,” Tony told him.

Loki chewed on his lower lip fighting back the urge to disagree.

“It’s his story,” Barton stated. “Let him tell it while he eats.”

Unsure what to make of the bland tone Loki tensed. “I… am not able to disobey a direct command,” Loki stated hesitantly.

“From anyone or just your master?” Barton asked.

“He does not appreciate the use of that term,” Loki replied softly.

“Tony, let him tell his tale.”

Cautiously, Loki shifted his eyes to Tony.

“Fine, but same rules apply. Anything you’re uncomfortable with you don’t have to share, understood?”

“Yes Tony,” Loki answered quietly.

“And make sure you eat,” Tony grumbled.

“Yes Tony,” Loki repeated. “I suppose I should start with New York,” Loki began. There was movement from the chair Barton occupied but Loki steadfastly refused to look in the archer’s direction. “Barton will already know most of this but the rest of you will not. I would beg his patience while I explain this.” Loki paused to see if the archer would respond to that.

“You have to ask if I can show you patience?”

Dropping his head forward Loki let his eyes slide closed.

“Loki?” Tony asked sounding concerned.

Loki shook his head. “It is part of the story. You also know the start of this tale. I would also beg your forgiveness for any repetitions.”

“Loki, I wouldn’t care if you chose not to share any of this or all of it. I won’t push for more than you’re willing to give. You should know that by now.”

“I do. I believe you would call this, ‘being formal’. It helps me to ease the nerves somewhat.”

“Then be as formal as you need.”

Loki nodded. “When I fell from the Rainbow Bridge I found myself a prisoner of the race known as the Chitauri.”
“Prisoner,” Natasha stated flatly, cocking an eyebrow.

“Not now,” Barton murmured to her quietly.

If Loki hadn’t spent time inside Barton’s head he would have wondered if there was something going on between those two. Having gone through the archer’s mind Loki knew better. The bond between those two was strong but it was in no way romantic. Memories of the archer’s wife and children only caused an increase in the guilt Loki already felt.

“Loki,” Tony stated quietly.

“Yes, sorry. I was distracted for a moment. After being taken by the Chitauri I was tortured for what I have learned was several weeks before I was taken to see Thanos. At their hands I suffered more than I believed possible. Thanos did not torture me. Unlike the Chitauri who only inflicted torment and pain Thanos offered safety and comfort.” Clint scoffed and Loki frowned. “Perhaps it would be more true to state he offered perceived safety and comfort,” Loki amended. “When he first held out the staff as a gift I did initially refuse. The problem was that ever so slowly I began to question why I continued to resist. Eventually my will broke and I finally accepted the staff. That is the moment when I was truly lost.”

“Wait a minute,” Natasha stated after several seconds. “Are you trying to insinuate that you were mind controlled as well?”

“My actions during the battle of New York were not my own, no.”

“And we’re just supposed to take your word on it?”

“No.” Barton interrupted. “Not just his word. I’ve been telling you the same thing for a while now. You could try taking my word on it.”

“Normally I would,” Natasha said turning to Barton. “But then you were mind controlled at the time. How can I trust he didn’t just implant that suggestion into your mind.”

“Because I saw, Nat.”

Loki’s head shot up and he turned to stare at the archer. When Barton turned and met his eyes Loki almost couldn’t breathe. “You saw?”

“Flashes from your past including how they tortured you, yeah. Everything I saw was pieces of memories. But then sometimes I would feel things. As much as you were in our minds we were in yours. We knew when they would summon you mentally. We knew when they were hurting you. I know you tried to keep everything from us and a lot of the times you actually succeeded. It’s just, sometimes…”

“No.” He could remember times when he had struck out with the magic but he had always tried to keep the pain of his own punishments to himself. “Tell me you did not experience any of that. Tell me…”

“If it helps, I think you absorbed most of it.”

“How much?” Loki demanded. “How much got through?” The archer cocked his head and seemed to be thinking. Loki could hardly draw a breath as he waited.

“I don’t have a lot to draw from Loki,” Barton finally answered. “All I can judge from is how we felt and how injured you were afterwards.”
“The others felt the effects?”

“Only Selvig and not much. What you did, blocking the majority of the pain, I tried to do for the others. Most of the time I could contain what managed to slip through. When I couldn’t contain it all the excess bled through to Selvig next. As near as I can figure the order was the same as those of us that were turned by the staff. Since I was the first one turned by the staff the excess pain fell to me first.”

“And then I hurt you on top of that,” Loki whispered sadly.

“Hey,” Barton snapped. “Don’t even go there. You were in pain and still being tortured at the time. I don’t hold you responsible for any of that. Okay?”

Shaking his head Loki set the plate of food on the coffee table and stood. Unable to sit still he began to pace. He already felt guilty enough without knowing that he hadn’t been able to keep those punishments from the others under his command. Now? This would only add to the restitution he owed the archer. He would offer himself up for atonement immediately if possible but as a slave he technically belonged to his master. By rights whether or not he was allowed to even make the offer was Tony’s decision. Still, he did owe the archer. Taking a deep breath he released it. Making his way over to Tony Loki knelt down and bowed his head.

“I respectfully ask that you allow me to make a request. I fully recognize that those in my position are not permitted requests. I will accept any punishment that you deem proper for this breach of conduct.”

“I swear to God Tony.”

“Oh calm down, Clint,” Tony snapped. “You really think I’d hurt him for asking to make a request?”

“But may I make it?” Loki pressed.

“No,” Tony answered. “I know what you’re going to ask and there’s no way I’m going to let you offer that.”

Loki scowled at the ground. He owed a debt. How could Tony deny him the chance to make this offer to attempt to repay it even partially without even any consideration? Etiquette be damned, Loki decided. Standing, Loki raised his head and glared at Tony. “You will not deny me this,” Loki growled. Turning on his heels, Loki stalked over to the archer, knelt in front of him, and bowed his head. “Master Barton, for the pain I have caused you and the wrongs I have committed against you I would freely offer myself unto you for retribution.”

“No,” Tony repeated.

“Shut it Tony,” Barton barked.

“I swear, if you-”

“It’s not your decision to make. This is his choice. You need to let him do whatever he needs to so he can get past this,” Barton remarked before turning to Loki. “I demand absolute authority over what is considered justifiable recompense.”

“Done,” Loki agreed.

“I mean it, Loki. Whatever I say is acceptable, goes. You get no say at all in how long this lasts or how much pain you receive.”
“Agreed.”

“You are not permitted to beg.”

“Agreed.”

“You are not permitted to disagree with anything I say.”

“Agreed.”

“When this is over you will accept that it’s over.”

“Agreed.”

“I promise you that you will not like what I do.”

“Understood.”

“Then formally accept,” Barton demanded.

“I, Loki of Asgard, formally agree with and accept the terms and conditions of this accord,” Loki stated.

As the archer drew closer Loki began to shake slightly. He couldn’t help it. Fear of what the other would do in retaliation filled every fiber of his body. When Barton was close enough Loki expected pain. For what seemed like forever the other man merely stood in front of Loki watching him. Loki clamped his jaw shut in an attempt to keep begging the archer to just begin the punishment now. Something touched the top of his head and Loki flinched in surprise. He would have apologized if he could have trusted himself to speak without begging. Slowly Loki realized the archer was only settling a hand on his head.

“I, Clint Barton of Midgard, formally accept the offer of your sacrifice, absolve you of any lingering debt, and consider any and all past offenses fully repaid.”

The words stunned Loki so much he looked up instantly and met the archer’s gaze.

“You… have yet to punish me,” Loki stated confused.

Barton shook his head. “Not true Loki. We were linked. I know exactly what you went through and how much you were hurt. I know how much you struggled to keep the rest of us from feeling any of that pain. What you want, you don’t deserve. I am punishing you by refusing to punish you for that which was beyond your control.”

Suddenly he couldn’t speak. Loki struggled to form words. “By rights… By rights you are entitled…”

“No Loki,” Barton replied softly. “Your actions were not your own. Any punishments earned are also not yours to endure.”

Unable to remain kneeling Loki slumped forward. Hands carefully gripped his shoulders and helped to gently guide him forward. Too emotional to care how weak he looked Loki allowed the archer pull him close and comfort him. There was a soft noise from somewhere behind him and another hand settled lightly on his back. Opening his eyes he saw Tony crouching down beside him.

“There’s those pretty eyes,” Tony said with a soft smile. Still smiling Tony raised the hand not resting on Loki’s back and placed it on his cheek. “You okay?”
“I don’t… I don’t know,” Loki answered honestly. “According to tradition he has every right seek restitution for the things I’ve done to him.”

“I am,” Barton stated. “What you want is to be punished for actions that were not your own. I am denying you that. That is your punishment.”

“I did hurt you on purpose as well though.”

“Sort of,” Barton acknowledged. “You were hurt. I accepted that you were likely to strike out at me when I had to do things like clean your injuries. You would have struck out at anything causing you more pain in those moments.”

“I would like to apologize for my actions and lack of self-control.”

“There’s no apology needed Loki. I told you, as much as you were in our heads, we were in yours. We know how much you were suffering. I, at least, know how much you tried to keep that pain from us. Whenever you struck out it wasn’t because you wanted to hurt someone. It was because you were in too much pain to stop yourself. I understood and accepted that when I had to do things like clean your injuries.”

“And they view Midgardians as weak,” Loki scoffed.

“Yeah?” Barton asked. “Well we know better, don’t we?”

“Indeed,” Loki agreed, nodding as the first tears began to trickle down the cheek not pressed against the archer’s chest. “I should probably finish the tale,” Loki whispered.

“Not on the floor,” Barton dissented.

“Agreed,” Tony stated. Standing Tony reached a hand down. “Help up?”

Loki could only nod as he accepted the offered hand.

The trio stood and moved back to their respective seats. As soon as Loki was settled on the couch Tony took a seat next to him and stretched an arm out over the back. Loki cocked a questioning eyebrow and Tony rolled his eyes.

“Told you I won’t touch you without permission,” Tony said. “Just figured you won’t mind a little closeness. If you don’t want to be touched, though, that’s fine too.”

“Oh. No, I wouldn’t mind,” Loki admitted. “I mean, that is, if you do not mind,” he added nervously.

“Not at all,” Tony told him. Wrapping the arm around Loki’s shoulders Tony carefully pulled him closer. “Good?”

“Yes,” Loki answered ducking his head.

“Can I ask a question?” the doctor, asked when everyone was finally situated.

Loki glanced to the doctor and cocked his head.

“Those burn markings on your ankles, were they given to you by the Chitauri?”

Loki recoiled at the mere mention of the runes marring the skin around his ankles. The move pressed him firmly against Tony’s side. The arm around him tightened slightly.
“Loki?” Tony asked concerned.

“Those…” He stopped and wet his dry lips before continuing. “Those are not reminders of my time with the Chitauri.” Without asking Loki snuggled even more firmly against Tony hoping the other man would not be too adverse to the action. When Tony gave his arm a reassuring pat Loki finally relaxed slightly.

“Can you tell us about them?” Tony queried softly.

“Yes,” Loki whispered. “I was actually getting to that. They are a part of the sentencing after the trial.”

“The trial first, then,” Tony coaxed. “The trial should have come before the sentencing and it should give you some time.”

He didn’t ask why he would need time, he knew. It was about giving him time to come to terms with speaking about the brandings. Even without understanding the significance of the markings Tony had realized it was a difficult topic for him. Loki was grateful for that intuition.

“The, uh, the trial,” Loki began. “The council ruled it unwise to remove my muzzle thus I was not allowed to speak in my own defense.”

“Is that normal?” Tony asked.

Loki shook his head. “No, most of the time of the accused are allowed the opportunity to speak in their own defense.”

“Most but not all?”

Shaking his head Loki drew his knees up and wrapped his arms around them. “They sometimes deny that particular right to those they deem too dangerous were they allowed to speak or those deemed…” He hesitated slightly before continuing. “Argr.” He paused and waited for the expected question. He was not disappointed.

“Argr?” Tony finally questioned.

“It is a term that can be used to mean many things. It can mean less than, sorcerer or seiðr user, coward.” Moving slowly until he was no longer pressed against Tony Loki turned and lifted his eyes until he met Tony’s. Taking a deep breath he continued. “It is also what they call men that prefer the company of other men. It is considered socially unacceptable for a man to take a female role, especially in a sexual relationship.” Carefully he watched Tony’s eyes and knew the instant the other man understood. Unable to stand the look he saw in Tony’s eyes Loki lowered his legs and moved to stand. Before he could manage a firm hand gripped his wrist and held fast. Loki stopped moving and waited for what was to come.

“Wait. Are you saying that you weren’t allowed to speak in your own defense because you like men?”

“No, well, not solely because of that. Were you to ask most would not even admit that was a factor. They primarily cited my history and reputation for being able to talk my way out of things and definitely my use of seiðr. They claimed if I were allowed to speak they could not be sure I was not controlling their minds or weaving other magics over them.”

“Don’t they have a way to tell if you’re trying something like that?” the doctor asked.
“They do indeed,” Loki affirmed. “Not only that, aside from mother Odin is one of the most powerful caster in all of Asgard. Were I to even attempt to weave a spell or cast an illusion, no matter how simple, he would know instantly.”

“Wait a minute,” the doctor interrupted, leaning forward. “I thought you said they don’t approve of people can use magic.”

“They generally do not approve of men using it, no. No matter how useful it can be in a battle men that rely on the use of seiðr instead of brute force are not only seen as weak but also cowards. It is also seen primarily as a woman’s skill. However Odin is the Allfather, the ruler of our people, and married to the most powerful sorceress to have lived. It is to be expected that he would have learned some things from his wife. Not to mention it would also be unhealthy for a person to ever call him by that epithet.”

“But if they knew you couldn’t cast anything without being detected why didn’t they let you speak at your trial?” the doctor pressed.

Loki gave a wry, humorless, grin. “Why indeed, doctor. I fear the answer to that might lay partially with the harsh insults flung at me by my ‘guards’ during my ‘training’. Insults specifically aimed at who I chose to spend my nights with. I will skim the rest of the trial so that I may move on to what followed and thus answer your previous question doctor. The trial itself was a mockery. The accusers and witnesses that spoke were either obviously coached or obviously liars. And if anyone would know a liar, doctor, it would be me. The one thing that might have actually made it bearable was denied unto me.

I was denied even the opportunity see mother, either at the trial or its subsequent sentencing. Then Asgard was attacked while I was imprisoned and she was murdered. Now I will never get a chance to see her ever again! Not only that I was not even allowed to mourn her properly! I was told of her death days before my sentencing was carried out! I was denied the rights granted to others at the trial, lost my mother, denied the right to grieve for her, then tortured for months for crimes beyond my control! You tell me how any of that was fair or just!”

It wasn’t until he stopped speaking that he finally realized he had been yelling. Glancing down he realized Tony’s hand was still resting on top of his. Unable to bear being touched just now Loki jerked his hand free. Tony rubbed his thumb over Loki’s thigh twice before moving his hand back to his own lap. Glancing to the faces of others present Loki took in their silent stares trying to analyze what he found.

“We’ll talk about the rest later,” Tony said quietly.

Turning Loki glanced behind himself to where Tony sat. In those eyes he read only concern and nothing more. For the first time he gave serious thought to how things might have played out between them if things worked out differently. Sighing Loki shook his head to banish the image. “I really should finish this story. Beyond the sentencing there is only my time in the dungeons. After that the tale will be finished.”

“Take a break then,” Tony ordered. “You need to eat more and I need a drink.”

“I find that I am not that hungry anymore.”

“Try to eat a little more please.”

“As you wish.”
As Tony stood to get a drink Loki reached forward and retrieved his plate. He truly wasn’t hungry but, for Tony, he would try to eat more. Picking at the food he tried to determine what would sit well in his stomach. His eyes flicked up when he noted movement and he watched as the doctor stood and made his way over to the bar. Instead of pouring a drink the doctor conversed quietly with Tony and Loki wondered what they were discussing. As Loki watched Tony downed one drink and poured a second.

“Anyone else want a drink?” Tony asked.

Loki dropped his eyes back to his food but didn’t hear anyone respond. He heard the clinking of glass on glass and realized Tony was probably pouring yet another drink. He frowned at that. It seemed that Tony drank more than could be considered healthy but it really wasn’t his place to say anything. Loki took a few more bites of food before setting the plate back on the coffee table once again.

“Not eating more?” Tony asked sitting down next to Loki.

Noting the drink in Tony’s hand Loki chose to ignore it. “I did state that I was not that hungry,” Loki pointed out.

“You did. Okay, whenever you’re ready then.”

With a nod Loki drew his feet up again and curled his arms around them again as he thought about where to start. “The sentencing,” he finally stated. “As you already know what the sentence was I shall skip the tedious days spent waiting for the council to decide how best to punish me. Quite obviously the council decide I was to be turned slave.”

“Pretty extreme if you ask me,” Tony muttered.

Loki sighed. “Perhaps. I will admit it seems extreme to me as well. Still, this is not the first time I have…” he paused thinking how best to phrase things. “This is not the first time Odin has deemed it necessary to punish me. To date none of the other punishments have had much of an effect. I suppose he viewed this as a ‘last resort’ type of thing meant to teach me a lesson of some form.”

Tony snorted. “And just what good is learning this lesson going to do you if you’re stuck as a slave forever?”

Loki fidgeted slightly. This was a topic he really did not want to discuss. A fine thing it would be to get his hopes up only to have those hopes demolished. “Not all slaves stay slaves forever,” he said quietly. “In certain cases under special circumstances a slave can be freed.”

“What kind of circumstances?” Tony asked instantly.

Loki shrugged. “It is up to Odin to decide what that constitutes. If a slave is freed though their past is, not erased exactly but, perhaps forgiven is the best way to put it. It can no longer be held against that person. It would be like ‘wiping the slate clean’ as you say. Or, at least it is supposed to be that way. While it cannot be used against that person it is not erased from the memories of others.”

“So maybe this won’t be forever. Maybe after some time-”

“Tony,” Loki interrupted. “Please don’t. A slave being freed is a rare thing. I do not wish to raise my hopes only to have them shattered. I would prefer not to even contemplate what ‘might be’ if it is all the same.”

“Okay Loki,” Tony finally sighed. “I can let it go for now but don’t expect me not to bring it up
again.”

“Understood,” Loki acknowledged. “The first step in preparing me to be a slave was, of course, ensuring that I could not use magic to evade my punishment. I suppose I should give a brief explanation of how magic works. A sorcerer absorbs the mystical energy, the seiðr, needed to cast spells from the world around them. Even so, how fast and the amount that each caster is able to absorb is different for each person. When any of it is expended the caster’s body naturally absorbs more to replenish that which was used.

In an effort to insure that I could not use my magic they first had to rid me of the seiðr I already possessed. When it was finally fully disbursed they had to then ensure that I could not absorb more. To accomplish that they…” Pausing, Loki sighed heavily and sat forward lowering his feet. Careful not to look himself he raised one of the pants legs to reveal the brandings around his ankle. “They branded me with these binding runes. They prevent me from being able to absorb any more seiðr. What little seiðr I might have absorbed before they were finished is trapped inside of me. While they continue to mar my flesh I am effectively unable to use any magic. That, my good doctor, is where the brandings came from and why they are there.”

“Is there any way to remove them?” the doctor asked.

Loki shook his head. “It would take a caster of equal or greater power. As they were placed by Odin himself the one person that might have been able to remove them would have been my mother who is no longer with us.”

“They did more than take your ability to use magic,” the archer stated.

Loki nodded. There was no way that Barton knew what Loki had gone through but it wasn’t a difficult deduction either. “After they took away my ability to use magic my training began. I suppose it is no surprise that I fought back in the beginning. For the longest time I was kept muzzled and restrained. After…” Loki frowned, trying to remember, “four or five days, I cannot remember exactly, they finally removed the muzzle so that I could eat. It would do them little good to train me as a slave if I died of starvation. When they were sure I would not physically fight back they removed the restraints and continued to train me.”

“How did they train you?” Tony asked.

“Tony,” Barton snapped.

“Right, sorry.”

Loki waved a hand dismissively. “It’s fine. My training was more harsh than most but I suppose that again is not much of a surprise given my… attitude. Most of the time it consisted of beatings with the occasional broken bones–”

“Excuse me!” Tony shouted. “Broken bones?”

Loki shrugged self consciously unable to meet Tony’s eyes. “They were healable. It is not the same as it would be for a human. Besides, I have suffered beatings before. The… ‘other things’ were worse.”

“They were the ones that took advantage of you weren’t they?” the doctor asked softly.

“That is one way to put it,” Loki agreed. “While slaves are usually trained in that area as well my training was a bit more ‘aggressive’ than is usually used.”
The archer stood abruptly and began to pace. Loki knew from their time together it was best to ignore the other man for now. Barton could sit still longer than anyone else but when he felt the need to move it was best just to let him be. Eventually he would either calm down or confront the object of his irritation. Thankfully there was no way the archer could get to Asgard without assistance or Loki might have been more worried. Cautiously Loki shifted his eyes to Tony.

“I'm so sorry,” Tony whispered.

Loki frowned in confusion. “For what?”

“I let them take you back without even thinking about what you might have to suffer. I should have given it more thought.”

“What happened to me was not your fault.”

“It wasn’t your fault either if you were mind controlled,” Tony argued.

Loki had no good response for that. He had thrown this man through a window. He had tried to kill his friends. He had been responsible for the deaths of thousands. He couldn’t understand how Tony didn’t hate him but he was grateful.

“Hey,” said another voice.

Shifting his eyes Loki spotted Natasha crouched near the couch. Somehow it didn’t surprise him that he hadn’t heard her approach. He realized he may not have harmed her in the same way as Barton but he had still hurt her as well. Perhaps he should attempt to make amends with her as well?

“I owe you an apology,” she told him.

Completely confused, Loki could only stare at her.

“You know what Clint means to me. I spent so long being angry with you for hurting him that I didn’t stop to listen to reason. He tried to tell me it wasn’t your fault but… I don’t know. I just couldn’t accept that. All I could think about was how much you’d hurt him and how much I wanted to hurt you back because of that. I know it may not mean much but for what it’s worth I am sorry about my attitude towards you lately and I am sorry for trying to hurt you when I first arrived.”

“You attempted to harm me?”

He watched as her eyes flicked past his and over his shoulder presumably to share a look with Tony before returning to him. “Yeah, Tony stopped me though. The point is I owe you, and I suppose Tony, an apology for my actions. When I first saw you I just reacted. I was angry for what you did to Clint and I felt betrayed that Tony would protect you. I didn’t know why he would even want to protect you. I didn’t have any of the backstory. I’m not trying to excuse my actions though. I was in the wrong and I apologize.”

Natasha was apologizing? She tried to hurt him and Tony had stopped her? Loki didn’t know how to respond to that. He turned around and cocked his head upward to look at Tony who merely shrugged.

“It’s your call Rudolph, I can’t tell you what to do.”

Loki could see a war raging in Tony’s eyes despite his words. The man obviously had an opinion on the matter but did not wish to express it. He wondered if he should ask Tony but finally decided against it. Tony clearly had an opinion on the matter but just as clearly did not want to express it right
now. Instead of asking Tony, Loki turned to look over to Barton. The archer had stopped pacing and was staring the group intently. As Loki watched Barton crossed his arms and leaned back against the wall. So no help from that direction, Loki reasoned. He didn’t bother with trying the other two men in the room. Undoubtedly he would get just as little help from them as well. Unconsciously chewing on his lower lip Loki turned back to Natasha.

“You do not owe me an apology for anything that had to do with New York. If anything it is I who owes you, all of you, an apology for that. I will, however, accept your apology for trying to harm me earlier.”

“So, now you want to tell me why you’re wearing Loki’s necklace?” Barton asked.
Chapter 8

Yes, this chapter is a bit shorter than normal. I couldn't help it, this chapter only wanted to be this long and I fought it for days before admitting defeat. As an aside note, a few of these boys eventually need to work out what's what pretty soon before they kill either me or each other. Also quiet time ensues.

“I don’t see how that’s any of your concern,” Tony snapped.

“I can actually answer that,” Loki replied.

“No, I want to hear it from him,” Clint insisted.

Tony growled. Why he had Loki’s necklace wasn’t any of Clint’s business and as far as he was concerned the archer could back the fuck off. “You don’t have to explain anything,” Tony told Loki. “It’s not his business why I’m wearing your necklace.”

Loki looked like he wanted to say something but merely nodded after a few moments.

“It is my business if you ordered him to hand it over,” Clint argued. “Don’t forget, I’ve been in his mind. I know what that necklace means to him.”

“Your point?” Tony snapped back.

“Your point is that necklace means more to him-”

“Both of you stop,” Steve shouted, effectively cutting through the bickering. “Clint, I was there when Loki gave the necklace to Tony. He didn’t order Loki to do it, Loki did it of his own free will and we know what it means to him. Tony you need to calm down, you’re scaring Loki.”

Tony jerked his head back to look over at Loki. Arms still wrapped around his legs Loki hadn’t moved except to duck his head behind his knees. As he watched he noticed the slight tremors softly shaking the former god. Damn it, Tony thought. He was about to say something when Clint cut him off and spoke first.

“Loki?” Clint asked.

“Sir?” Loki whispered without raising his head.

“Leave it alone Clint,” Tony growled.

“Both of you need to stop,” Steve told them. “Loki, everything’s going to be all right.”

Loki merely shook his head silently.

Clint started to move closer and Tony stood up to block the other man. Like hell Clint was going to take care of his Loki. He appreciated that Clint had taken care of Loki previously but now it was time for him to step aside. “We’re good here,” Tony stated coolly.
“What’s your problem Tony?” Clint challenged.

“Right now? You.”

“Both of you need to just stop,” Steve ordered. “Loki, would you like to go to your room now?”

“If it is permissible,” Loki replied softly.

Steve stared pointedly at Tony and Tony sighed.

“Yeah Loki. I told you anytime you want time alone you’re welcome to spend time in your room. No one will ever enter without your permission. You know that, right?”

“Nice sentiment, especially when he couldn’t do anything about you entering and you could just as easily order him out of the room,” Clint scoffed.

Loki flinched and Tony grit his teeth. They were finally starting to make progress. The absolute last thing he needed was Clint screwing up everything and causing Loki to distrust him once again. He opened his mouth to tell Clint off but Steve broke in and interrupted before Tony could say anything.

“Both of you, knock it off,” Steve commanded. “Loki, come on I’ll escort you to your room.”

“I’ll do that,” Tony snapped. “Come on Loki.”

“If you would prefer I could remain here,” Loki whispered.

Fuck. He needed to get control of his temper before it ended up hurting Loki. Running a hand through his hair Tony tried to reign in his emotions.

“It’s all right Loki. I’m not mad at you for wanting to go somewhere a little more… quiet. If you really want to spend time in your room that’s fine with me, okay?”

“Truly?”

Damn, the doubt he heard in that voice hurt. “Truly,” Tony told him slowly reaching out a hand to Loki. No sense in startling him when he was already upset. “Help up?” Nodding Loki took his hand without a word. Tony wanted to feel relieved but he honestly didn’t. Loki was still visibly upset and he knew it was his fault, at least partially. He really did need to stop arguing with Clint; at the very least, in front of Loki. When they reached the bedroom door Tony stopped and waited. For several seconds Loki didn’t move. Finally Loki raised his head and met his eyes.

“There’s those pretty eyes again,” Tony teased affectionately. The comment actually drew a small smile from Loki.

“Tony?”

“Yeah?”

“You could… come in. I mean, only if you want to. If you don’t then that’s fine. I just-”

“Whoa, slow down there. I don’t know what you want but I promise I won’t be mad whatever it is. Just slow down and tell me what you need. Okay?”

Nodding, Loki took a deep breath and released it. “After discussing everything I would really appreciate not being alone right now. I just could not stand the…”

“The arguing,” Tony finished. “I’ll make you a deal. You tell me when anything I do upsets you and I’ll do my best to work on fixing it. Deal?”
“I am unsure if I will be able to talk back in that manner.”

“That’s fine. I’m unsure if I’ll actually be able to change my attitude but I’ll try. Can you try too?”

Loki hesitated. “I can try.”

“Good deal,” Tony told him. “So what do you say we go in and get comfortable then?”

“I would appreciate that greatly,” Loki replied.

Tony inspected Loki for any sign of doubt but the other man really did seem to want his company. Tony found it odd that someone forced to endure others showing up when they felt like it and having no privacy should want his company but he wasn’t complaining. If Loki was asking him to come in maybe they hadn’t destroyed all the progress they’d made just yet. Just the same as last time Loki opened the door but waited for Tony to enter first. Eventually he was going to have to talk to Loki about that but it could wait.

Just the same as last time Tony gave him a strange look when Loki opened the door and waited. Loki wondered about that but Tony didn’t say anything so Loki let it pass. He really was honestly glad Tony had agreed to stay but he was worried about how the other man would see this request. This was the first time he had casually invited Tony into his room for no clear reason but he really hadn’t wanted to be alone. Too many old memories were too close to the surface right now and he needed someone to help keep them at bay. Tony had proved exceedingly amazing in that respect. He only hoped this request did not come off as him desiring ‘other things’.

Silently Tony walked into the room and over to the far wall he’d leaned against the the last time he was here. Loki couldn’t stop the small sigh that escaped. Should have known better, he chastised himself. Tony had promised never to touch him without his permission and had proven as good as his word so far. While it was still difficult to trust others perhaps Tony really meant what he said. Entering the room and closing the door Loki walked over to the bed and sat down awkwardly on the edge. Neither spoke and time seemed to stretch to eternity in the quiet.

“Loki?”

Surprised at the sudden question Loki jumped slightly. “Yes?”

“Sorry, didn’t mean to startle you. You just look really nervous and I was wondering if it was because… Well, is it because you expect me to… uh…”

Loki gave a mental sigh. He really should put Tony’s mind at ease, the problem was Tony had guessed precisely what he’d been thinking. What could he say? Tony’s earlier words rang through his mind. The truth Loki, I just want the truth. “I will admit I am actually worried about how you would view this request. I honestly mean no offense, Tony, it is just that at any other time another in my personal space was never a good thing.”

“You know I wouldn’t do that to you,” Tony stated crossing his arms. Suddenly Tony’s posture loosened and his head tilted slightly. “I mean, you do know I wouldn’t do that to you don’t you?”

“I trust that you will not, yes. To date you, surprisingly, have given me no reason to mistrust you.”

“Surprisingly?” Tony asked with a slight edge to his voice.

“Again I meant no offense. It was actually a, uh, well not a compliment precisely. More of a
surprising revelation on my part?”

“Revelation?” Tony asked, tone slightly less harsh but still mistrusting.

“I was just thinking it’s been a long time since I’ve been able to trust another. I realized that in spite of what I’ve been taught most of my life, I am able to trust you. I mean… I don’t mean that I did not trust you… It’s not that…”

“It’s all right Loki,” Tony told him gently. “I get it, okay? I’m not the most trusting person myself. I can fully understand what you’re saying. After everything you’ve been through you don’t have to feel bad for not instantly trusting me. I wouldn’t expect it.”

“I seriously meant no offense mas… Tony.”

“See that’s a problem. I just wish… Fuck me, I don’t even know. I wish you could trust me but then I feel bad for asking that.”

Loki furrowed his brow in confusion.

“See? That’s it right there. You don’t understand.”

“I apologize.”

“The fuck you do,” Tony grumbled harshly. “Look, it’s not easy to explain but I’ll try. I want you to trust me but I feel bad for asking because I know what you’ve been through. I don’t want you to blindly trust me, I want to earn it. For probably the first time in my life I want to be worthy of the trust I receive. Does any of that make any sense?”

“Tony?”

“Yeah?”

“I do trust you. If… If I lay down would you mind holding me?”

Tony’s head jerked up and Loki fought back a grin at the surprise he saw.

“You would… trust me to hold you? I mean, to hold you and… and not…”

“Yes,” Loki answered simply.

“Can you cover up then?”

Loki frowned. “Why?”

“Damn it Loki! How can you look in the mirror and not see?”

Loki had no good response to that so he remained silent.

“Look, I don’t want to upset you but I won’t lie to you either. I do want you but… Fuck I don’t know. I kind of, I don’t know, want you to want it. Does that make sense?”

“I do not know if I will ever want… that again.”

“Then we won’t do that. Damn it Loki, it’s your call. If you don’t want that then you don’t have to make excuses. Just tell me.”
“Very well then.” Loki hesitated before responding. “I… I do not want that?”

“If that’s a question then I’m not even crossing the fucking room,” Tony muttered.

“Please?”

“Loki. … Look at it from my perspective. If you’re still questioning my motives and I were to cross the room and lay down with you then you’d still be worrying about if I was trying to take advantage of you. I won’t do that but if you don’t trust me then it’s only going to add to your anxiety and make things worse. I don’t want to take the risk that you might have another panic attack if I can help it.”

“That is not what I am accustomed to,” Loki whispered.

“Well you’re going to get reaccustomed to it PDQ.”

“PDQ?”

"Yeah sorry. I keep forgetting you’re not human. It means pretty damned quick."

“I see. Tony. … could you lay down with me?”

“You’re sure?” Tony asked.

“Not for… not for that, but yes. After the recent conversation I would appreciate a little closeness.”

“If that’s what you really want then okay, I guess, but you’re still covering up first,” Tony demanded.

“Yes Tony,” Loki acquiesced. Laying down he pulled the covers over himself. “Good?”

“Well good-ish I suppose. Do you really not know?”

Loki frowned. “Know what?”

“Nothing, nevermind,” Tony grumbled. “Move over.”

He’s not back yet,” Clint snapped.

“Master Loki has asked sir to join him in his room,” JARVIS replied.

“Really,” Clint stated flatly. “I’m checking up on them.”

“I feel compelled to tell you that I have locked the doors,” JARVIS stated calmly.

“You trust Tony?”

“I do trust sir, yes. More importantly, master Loki trusts sir.”

“You will let me into the room,” Clint growled.

“No he will not,” Steve stated forcefully. “JARVIS don’t you dare unlock that door. Damn it Clint, arguing with Tony is only going to hurt Loki. Is that what you want?”

“As a slave Loki doesn’t have the ability to say no,” Clint argued.
“JARVIS did Loki ask Tony into his room or did Tony insist on it?”

“Master Loki asked for sir’s company.”

“So Tony entering Loki’s room was Loki’s idea?”

“Affirmative sir.”

Steve crossed his arms and continued eying Clint.

“Whatever,” Clint muttered. “I still don’t have to like it.”

“No you don’t have to like it. You do have to accept that Loki feels comfortable with Tony. For now Tony helps Loki and from what I can tell Loki seems to be helping Tony.”

“You still should have told me he was back. Two weeks? You know how much Tony could have hurt him in two weeks?”

“If I thought for one second Tony was going to unnecessarily hurt Loki I would have informed someone,” Steve countered.

Clint hesitated.

“You know,” Natasha stated quietly. “You asked me to trust you. I made a mistake and didn’t listen to you when I should have. Loki almost got hurt because of it and Tony actually did get hurt. When I showed up yes I was upset to discover Loki was here. I was also angry because Tony was protecting him and I didn’t understand why. Tony placed himself between me and Loki to keep him safe. Even when Bruce arrived he still stayed between Loki and everyone until he was sure Loki would be safe. I’m asking you to trust me in this like I should have trusted you. Tony’s not going to harm Loki, Clint.”

They’d learned after one failed attempt that as much as Loki desired contact he had to know who was touching him. If he couldn’t see the person then he began to panic. Still with the light on the two lay facing each other. Loki with a blanket wrapped around himself and Tony loosely holding onto Loki’s hands.

“Loki,” Tony stated quietly.

“Mm,” Loki hummed, finally beginning to relax.

“You doing okay over there?”

“Yes Tony,” Loki answered.

“You’re just being awful quiet.”

“I would not mind conversing if you wished,” Loki offered.

“If you feel like talking I’ll listen but I won’t force you,” Tony assured him.

“What would you like to know?”

“What do you feel comfortable talking about right now?”
Loki thought about that for a moment. Perhaps he should use this opening to ask questions so he could better understand his position here but he truly did not want to discuss such matters just now. Running through various topics in his mind Loki summarily dismissed each of them for various reasons. Too many topics were just tied to too many painful memories for one or the other of them. He needed something more neutral.

“What does Stark Industries manufacture now?” Loki asked, feeling that question would be fairly safe.

“You want to hear about Stark Industries?”

“I would not mind knowing more about your company.”

“Okay, uh let’s see. Well we’re involved in a lot of things including aeronautics, robotics, micro-technology and fringe sciences. After Afghanistan… After I returned we stopped creating weapons and I started focusing on clean energy.”

“Sensible,” Loki approved.

Tony laughed. “I’ve been called a lot of things in my life but usually nothing along the lines of ‘sensible’. What about you? Tell me something about yourself.”

“I, uh,” Loki struggled trying to think of anything about himself that Tony might find even mildly interesting. “I cast my first spell when I was seven. Well, intentionally cast,” he amended.

“You cast others unintentionally before then?”

Absently chewing on his lower lip Loki thought about how best to answer that. “When learning the arcane arts one must be careful. Spells do not differentiate between practice efforts and an actual desire to manifest the spell. For this reason practice efforts usually exclude a critical element of the casting.”

“Usually?” Tony asked cocking an eyebrow.

“Um. Well they are supposed to exclude an element of the spell, yes.”

“But you chose not to exclude it didn’t you?”

“I was, I don’t know, excited? I just wanted to learn. I will admit the first few times I attempted to cast the spell were somewhat less than successful. I, uh, may or may not have caused a few explosions,” Loki answered with a slight wince. Surprisingly Tony grinned.

“I’ve caused my fair share of explosions as well.”

“Why does that not surprise me? Any in particular you wouldn’t mind sharing?” Loki asked genuinely curious.

Tony was halfway through a story about problems he was having with modifications he was trying to make to his suit when he looked over and noticed Loki was asleep. Twisting his wrist slightly to check his watch he realized he’d been talking for over three hours. Loki shifted slightly at the movement and tightened his grip on Tony’s fingers. Smiling Tony gave Loki’s hand a soft squeeze in return.
“Don’t know if I should be offended you fell asleep in the middle of the story or happy you feel safe enough to fall asleep with me here,” Tony whispered.

“Mm, happy,” Loki murmured.

“You’re awake?”

“Wasn’t,” Loki mumbled. “Light sleeper.”

Tony chuckled softly. “Go back to sleep Rudolf.”

“Mm hm,” Loki agreed.

“Hey, Loki?”

“Hm?” Loki hummed cracking an eye.

“You good now or do you still want me to stay?”

“Mm stay,” Loki muttered snuggling closer and closing his eyes once more.

Rolling his eyes Tony freed one hand and placed it lightly on Loki’s hip. Loki stiffened slightly and his eyes popped open. For a few seconds he seemed to inspect Tony nervously before he finally relaxed. Closing his eyes Loki snuggled against the pillow briefly and was fast asleep once more in no time.
Chapter 9

Chewing anxiously on his lower lip Loki lay as still as possible watching Tony. At some point during the night Tony had shifted closer and thrown an arm over him. Loki had woken instantly, paralyzed in terror. His mind automatically assumed the worst and his body went rigid as he waited for his master to move. After a few seconds of quiet Tony muttered something unintelligible before nuzzling his head against Loki’s shoulder and stilling once again. Frowning Loki slowly opened his eyes and glanced sideways carefully. Tony, eyes closed and still, actually appeared to be sleeping. Loki wasn’t sure what to believe.

Time past agonizingly slowly. After several minutes Tony flung a leg over him before stilling again. Loki finally accepted that for now Tony was asleep. How long Tony would stay asleep Loki couldn’t fathom as he usually went to bed before Tony. For now what mattered was that he was safe. The question was, would he remain so when Tony awoke? It had been a poor idea to ask the other man to stay no matter how much he craved the peace that Tony so easily supplied. Tony had actually admitted to wanting him last night. Yes, but he had promised not to act upon it, something in the back of his mind reminded him. Yes but after everything could he really trust Tony? In spite of his current level of safety fear began to set in once again.

- Clint restarted the video footage and watched it again. At first he had watched the video of Tony accepting Loki as a slave merely focusing on the content. Afterward he had closely watched Loki’s reactions; or what he could see of them. In the footage provided he couldn’t see much of Loki who was pressed against the balcony doors where Tony was arguing with one of the men who’d brought Loki. He hated to admit it but he was impressed that Tony hadn’t let any of them actually enter the tower. With a growl Clint hit pause and rubbed his knuckles against his eyes. God damn it, he was too tired for this shit.

“Next video,” Clint ordered.

“You have been up for more than-”

“Not now JARVIS,” Clint argued. “Next video.”

“We really should call S.H.I.E.L.D.”

“Clint?”


“What are you still doing awake?”

“I was just, uh, watching videos,” he answered praying she wouldn’t question it. Nat being Nat, of course, questioned it.

“Videos of what?”

Rubbing his face he dropped his hands and faced her. “I was watching all the videos JARVIS would let me see about Loki’s time here. There are some of them he won’t let me see.”

“Master Loki has been through enough. He does not need his privacy invaded more than is necessary,” the AI replied.
“Clint,” Nat chastised lightly.

“I can’t help it Nat. I was in his head. I know what kind of person he is. Tony? I don’t know. I trust him, I really do, but… But if Loki’s been reduced to a slave I want to know for a fact that Tony’s not going to take advantage of that.”

Natasha moved to the couch and sat down next to him. For a while she inspected him and Clint fought not to shift uncomfortably under her critical gaze. Turning she stared at the screen but didn’t immediately speak.

“JARVIS?” she finally asked.

“Yes miss Romanoff?”

“Can you play the video footage from when I first saw Loki?”

“Yes miss Romanoff.”

“Right, play that please.”

-

Tony adjusted trying to remain comfortable. Something was wrong but his sleep addled brain couldn’t quite understand what. Groaning he tried to shove the thought away so he could focus on going back to sleep. He sighed contentedly and snuggled against his pillow. For the first time since Pepper and he had broken things off he’d had a decent night’s rest. He wanted nothing more than to just lay here and enjoy the feeling. Pepper. Drawing his brows down he thought about that. Something about that thought gave him pause. If he and Pepper were no longer together then who…

His eyes flew open and he found himself face to face with a wide-eyed Loki.

“Shit,” Tony cursed as he sat up. “Loki? You okay? I didn’t do anything to…”

“You,” Loki swallowed hard and ducked his head. “You did not do anything untoward last night,” he finished softly.

Would Loki admit it if Tony had done something like that? Moreover, what would it even take for Loki to consider it untoward? Seriously, who really speaks like that anymore? Loki, his mind answered. Tony sighed. “Did I do anything that made you uncomfortable?”

“Anthony, everything makes me uncomfortable,” Loki replied.

Was he imagining the hint of a smirk in that voice. “Did you just call me Anthony?” And fuck, there it was. The familiar tenseness that always seemed to surround Loki since he’d arrived. Once again Loki seemed like he was back to waiting to be punished for anything and everything. Tony shook his head. Loki spoke before he could answer or offer any kind of reassurance.

“I apologize. I should not have been so forward. I-”

“No,” Tony snapped. Damn it, he hadn’t meant to sound so sharp, he just wanted to stop the unnecessary apology. “I meant… You can call me Anthony if you like.”

“I did not mean to upset you.”

“You didn’t,” Tony insisted. “It was just a surprise, that’s all. It’s fine if you want to call me Anthony.”
“I…” Loki hesitated.

“Yes?”

“It’s just that you seem upset when I refer to you as master. You told me to call you Tony but your full forename is Anthony. I… I don’t know. It just slipped out. I will not use it again if it displeases you.”

“I’m not displeased Loki. I told you I was just surprised. You can use Anthony if you like.”

“If it makes you uncomfortable.”

“It doesn’t.” Tony assured him. Taking in Loki’s demeanor he thought about what he could say to make Loki feel more comfortable.

“Loki?”

“Yes?”

“If you want to call me Anthony you can. If you don’t want to use it then you don’t have to use it. If you feel uncomfortable using it in front of others then you can just use it in private if you like. It can be a thing just between us.” Loki hesitated and Tony worried he’d said the wrong thing. He was about to open his mouth to say something else when Loki spoke.

“I would like that,” Loki answered quietly.

“Really?” Tony asked surprised.

“Really.”

“Uh, good. Okay then. So…” Tony wracked his brain trying to find something relevant to say. “Okay so… I’m going to go… take a shower. Yeah. I’m going to take a shower and when I’m done I’ll meet you in the kitchen for breakfast, okay?”

Loki nodded.

“Okay then,” Tony muttered, climbing out of the bed. Damn it. He was babbling and he knew it. Resisting the urge to continue prattling he stalked out of Loki’s room and headed to his own room to shower.

Staring at the door Loki tried to figure out if there was any hidden meaning in the conversation he’d missed. Finally he gave up. Ultimately he had no choice but to take Tony at his word. So far Tony had given him no reason to distrust him. He was just going to have to trust that Tony meant what he said and hope for the best. Pulling the covers back Loki stood up and went to find clothing for the day. Selecting new clothes from those he’d been given he dressed quickly. Finally left the room he headed for the kitchen for breakfast.

Natasha had sat quietly next to Clint while he watched and rewatched videos of Loki and Tony’s interactions over and over. Sipping on her cup of hot tea she watched as Clint restarted the video of Loki’s arrival yet again. When they got to the part where Tony finally signed the contract her eyes shifted to the coffee table yet again. She had already inspected it and already knew there was nothing
on it but she couldn’t help but wonder. After Tony had signed the contract he’d thrown it on the coffee table and gone to check on Loki. Of course after two weeks the contract was no longer on the coffee table.

A soft noise caught her attention and she flicked her eyes to the hallway. Bruce, wearing only a pair of pajama bottoms and staring intently at a Stark pad, walked into view. She smiled appreciatively at the sight. As she watched he made his way to the coffee pot. Standing she made her way to the kitchen. As stealthily as possible she poured the last of her tea into the sink and waited. Bruce poured himself a cup of coffee and she cleared her throat. Finally glancing up from the pad Bruce stared at her in surprise.


Placing her hands on the countertop she hoisted herself up. Tilting her head slightly she held out her mug and cocked an eyebrow. For a moment Bruce stared at her in confusion before finally understanding. The slight flush creeping up his neck as he stammered something unintelligible and took the mug was adorable. Filling her mug with coffee he turned and handed it back to her not quite meeting her eyes.

As he hit the end of the hall he stopped short. The Widow and the doctor were in the kitchen and Barton was sitting on a chair in the living room. Natasha and the doctor turned to face him first. As he stood there frozen Barton finally glanced up, noticed him, and closed whatever he’d been watching. Loki wasn’t sure what to do. He really didn’t like the idea of being alone with these three but Tony had said he’d join him soon. Did he turn around and head back to his room or did he continue on to the kitchen and eat breakfast?

“Good morning master Loki. Your cereal is in the same cabinet as always. If you would prefer, though, I am sure sir would not mind you waiting for him in his room,” JARVIS stated.

Loki wasn’t really sure about that but it was nice to have an out at least. The trio was still staring at him, waiting, and the archer looked like he wanted to say something. He seriously debated either heading back to his room or making his way to Tony’s room as JARVIS suggested but decided against it. Tony had told him to get breakfast and that was precisely what Loki was going to do. Straightening his back Loki strode into the kitchen. Ignoring the other two for now Loki grabbed a spoon and his usual bowl. Turning he stared blankly at woman sitting on the counter and blocking access to the cabinet with his cereal but she only stared back at him quizzically. Loki sighed internally.

“Pardons but you are blocking my breakfast.” “Oh! Yeah, sorry. Hold on.”

Placing both hands on her coffee cup she slipped effortlessly off the counter and moved out of the way. Loki forced a small smile and nodded once before turning back to the cabinets to retrieve his cereal. Snagging the bright orange box he deposited the cereal and his bowl with his spoon in it on the table he headed for the fridge. Retrieving the milk he made his way back to the table and sat. Someone joined him at the table and Loki did his best to ignore them. He really did not wish to talk with anyone right now. All he wanted was to eat his breakfast, discuss whatever Tony wished to discuss this morning and continue with his cleaning. He really did not like this disruption of his normal routine.
“Hey.”

Loki sighed. So it was the doctor that had joined him. He tried to figure out how he felt about that. On some level the doctor, or rather his other half, still scared him. On the other hand, when he’d panicked in the hospital room the doctor had made sure to call Tony. Maybe the doctor was all right but that didn’t mean Loki wanted to talk to anyone right now.

“If you have time later I really need to talk to you about a few things.”

Loki chewed his lower lip trying to figure out if he could politely decline the doctor without upsetting Tony.

“I see almost everyone decided to stay for a sleepover.”

Loki sighed in relief at the sound of Tony’s voice.

“Actually everyone stayed the night,” Natasha answered. “Steve’s just down in the gym.”

Standing up Loki made his way back to the cabinets and pulled out a coffee cup. Filling the cup he realized they would probably have to make more coffee soon. He really needed to figure out how to use this machine. If the others ever drank all the coffee before Tony woke he wanted to make sure there was coffee ready when Tony finally did wake. Turning around he suddenly found himself face to face with Tony. Ducking his head slightly he held up the cup and muttered, “I got this for you.”

“You know you don’t have to do that right?” Tony asked without taking the cup.

“I know,” Loki replied quietly.

“So, breakfast?”

“I was just fixing to eat if you would care to join me.”

With a nod Tony headed for the table and Loki followed. Placing the cup on Tony’s side of the table Loki took his seat again and began pouring a bowl of cereal without looking at any of the others. He was bound and determined to make today as normal as possible.

“I was just telling Loki I need to see him later,” the doctor stated.

Finished with pouring the milk Loki waited to see how Tony would reply.

“Why?” Tony asked spooning sugar into his coffee.

“I would like to check on his injuries and get started treating them.”

“Loki?”

“Yes?” Loki replied raising his head to meet Tony’s eyes. Slaves were not supposed to meet their master’s eyes. Tony, however, seemed pleased when Loki met his eyes so Loki did it as often as he felt comfortable enough to do so.

“Is that okay with you?”

“If you wish,” he replied obediently. He realized it was the wrong response before the words even fully left his mouth. Wincing he dropped his eyes back down again. “I apologize,” he said quietly.

“No, don’t-. Damn it. You know you don’t have to apologize for everything, right?”
“Yes mas-... Tony,” Loki whispered.

“Really? Still with the appellations, huh?”

Loki opened his mouth to apologize again but stopped himself.

Tony sighed wearily. “It’s all right Loki. I told you, whatever you can do is fine. So how about it? Think you’ll be okay letting Bruce treat you?”

“Yes, Tony.”

“Are you just saying that because you think it’s what I want to hear?”

“In all honesty, yes,” Loki admitted glumly.

“If I go with you would that make you more comfortable?”

Not wanting to speak Loki merely nodded.

“You sure?”

Loki nodded again.

“Is there anything else that might make it more comfortable for you?” Tony asked.

Chewing his lip Loki thought about that. “Could he treat me in my bathing room instead of the hospital room? Like when you used to wash my injuries?”

“Don’t like the infirmary?”

Loki shook his head. No, he really did not like that room, but then he’d never liked the healing rooms back home either. He did his best to banish the unpleasant images.

“Bruce?”

“I’ll have to get a few things but I don’t see why we can’t do that,” the doctor agreed.

“Okay but if he starts feeling uncomfortable you’re going to have to leave,” Tony insisted.

“I don’t have a problem with that,” the doctor agreed once more.

- 

Clint watched Loki and Tony’s interactions keenly trying to discern just how much he could trust Tony not to take advantage of his new role. If it had been anyone aside from Loki Clint wouldn’t have been so worried. He did honestly trust Tony but Loki had thrown him out of a window and had tried to take over the world and Tony was known to hold a grudge. When the conversation turned to treating Loki’s injuries Clint felt his muscles stiffen slightly. He wasn’t surprised when Loki asked to be treated elsewhere. He had no idea why the infirmary made Loki uncomfortable but he remembered the vaguely uneasy feelings he got from time to time when he’d cleaned Loki’s wounds while they’d shared each other’s thoughts. He almost sighed in relief when they agreed there was no need to actually go to the infirmary.

Nat sat down beside him and Clint relaxed his muscles trying to appear disinterested in the interactions before him. Loki ate a bowl of cereal while Tony chattered and sipped on his cup of coffee. Loki only occasionally responded but Tony didn’t seem to mind. Maybe Nat had been right.
He hoped she’d been right. He really did like Tony but he was worried about Loki being hurt anymore than he’d already suffered. It was hard enough to watch Loki doing things for Tony or even himself sometimes. After everything they’d been through together Clint still felt a pull to help Loki or do things for him. He fought against himself to resist these urges. If he wasn’t careful he would only piss off Tony and upset Loki again. Nat leaned sideways and bumped her shoulder against his.

“You’re thinking awfully hard,” she stated quietly.

“It’s nothing,” he told her.

Instead of answering she cocked an eyebrow and crossed her arms.

“Okay fine, I just don’t feel like discussing it right now. Better?”

“Better,” she acknowledged.

His mind flashed back to the video he’d watched of when she’d first shown up and threatened Loki. Eventually he was going to have to process how he felt about that. Later, he told himself. For now he just wanted watch Tony and Loki interact with each other.

As she watched Tony and Loki talked. Well, Tony talked. Loki mostly listened and added a few things here and there. She glanced towards the coffee table once again wondering about the contract. Maybe she should ask Tony about it? As she was thinking Loki finished his breakfast and collected the dishes. When he moved to wash them she frowned.

“Loki?”

Loki froze. After a few seconds he spoke. “Yes Miss Romanoff?”

“May I speak with you?”

“I would appreciate time to finish the dishes. It’s part of my normal routine and I appreciate stability. Could it possibly wait?”

“Did Tony ask that you do the dishes?” she asked.

“Tony has insisted upon multiple occasions that I leave the dishes. I find that a routine helps my sense of normalcy. No, Miss Romanoff, Tony has not insisted that I do not do the dishes. He would actually prefer that I did not do them, however the repetition of the routine makes me feel better so he allows it.

“He… allows you to do dishes?”

“Yes. They are part of my normal routine. It helps me to feel better.”

“Can we talk afterwards then?”

“If you wish Miss Romanoff.”

“After dishes we’re taking care of his injuries,” Tony stated, breaking into the conversation.

“We can talk while Bruce looks him over,” Natasha said.

“No,” Tony disagreed. “No one else is allowed in his room unless he says. It’s just going to be me,
Bruce, and Loki. You can wait.”

“And me,” Clint stated.

“No,” Tony argued.

“Tony,” Loki said suddenly. “Can he, I mean, if you do not mind could he join us? You did say to speak up more.”

“You want Clint to join us?”

“Yes, please. I mean he did clean them previously. He would know how they are healing. If you don’t want him there, then-”

“No Loki, it’s your room. You decide who you want in it. If you want Clint to be there…”

“I… I don’t know…”

“Loki, do you want Clint there?”

“Yes?”

“Okay then. He’ll be there.”

“I am sorry for causing issues between you two.”

“No Loki, it’s not your fault.”
“I’m going down to the infirmary to get a few things,” Bruce stated.

“Okay, see you as soon as you get back. Hey Loki are you about ready?” Tony asked.

“In truth? Not particularly.”

Clint scoffed sounding unsurprised but Tony ignored him for now. “Okay I can understand that. Are you willing to let Bruce inspect your injuries?”

“Do I have a choice,” Loki scoffed.

“Yes,” Tony answered.

Loki lifted his head and stared at the man “In truth?”

“Yeah, truth,” Tony answered. “I mean I’ll still have to clean them and keep an eye on them but I’m not going to force you into anything that makes you that uncomfortable.”

“You’ll be there?”

“I will.”

“Promise me? Please Tony?”

“I promise you,” Tony answered.

“And you truly do not mind Barton being present?”

Tony hesitated. So far he’d never lied to Loki and he didn’t want to start now but honestly? Yeah, he really did mind Loki wanting Barton there. He would never be able to understand the bond those two had from the time they’d spent in each other’s minds. Clint would always know more about Loki and how his mind worked, and yeah, maybe that did make him a little sore. He really did need to work on that though. After all, Clint hadn’t done anything to hurt Loki and he had actually taken care of Loki. The problem was Loki was his responsibility now and he really didn’t like the idea of sharing his stuff. Tony mentally groaned. Loki was not property nor a slave. He had the same rights as anyone else here. It was Loki’s decision who he wanted in his room and Tony did not get to make that choice for him.

“JARVIS, can you remind us all once again what’s the main rule of Loki’s room?”

“The first established rule for master Loki’s room was, ‘his room, his space,’” JARVIS replied dutifully.

“Right then,” Tony stated as steadily as he could manage. “I’d say that pretty much sums up everything. Your room, your space. If you want Clint there then he’ll be there.”

“You do not like it though,” Loki whispered, dropping his eyes to to the floor.

“I don’t have to like it Loki. It’s your room. You’re allowed to invite whoever you want to inside.”

“It is usually unwise to purposely displease the, um,-”
“That’s it, stop right there. What have I been telling you over and over again since you first got here?”

“There is no slavery on Midgard,” Loki answered quietly.

“Exactly, Clint? When we go treat Loki you’re coming with us. When Banner gets back he can join us. Loki? Lead on,” Tony ordered.

The three of them head down a hall that led to the guest rooms in the tower. The room they stopped at was on the same hallway as Tony’s though it was near the beginning and Tony’s room was at the far end. Knowing Tony the placement could just as easily have been haphazard as it was on purpose. With Tony it was sometimes hard to tell. If he’d been distracted at the time it could have just been the first door. If it was more of a conscious effort on his part to give Loki space then Clint would be able to relax more. At the door the group stopped. Loki opened the door and Clint’s first instinct was to enter and inspect the room for danger. Tony held up and arm to bar his path before holding up one finger, signalling for him to wait.

“Rule number two,” Tony told him before turning back to Loki.

“I would like to invite the both of you into my room,” Loki stated quietly, eyes fixed firmly on the floor.

“How many rules do you have?” Clint asked.

“Only three for my room,” Loki answered. “My room, my space. No one may open my door or enter without my express permission. If their presence ever begins to make me feel uncomfortable then they must leave.”

“And the rules for outside your room?” Clint pressed.

“No calling Tony anything other than his name. There is no slavery on Midgard. No kneeling. Always use a chair,” Loki replied obediently.

“And eat as much as you wish,” Tony added gently.

“But do not make yourself sick,” Loki added. “I would appreciate entering now. It will take some time to remove the bandages.”

“Whenever you’re ready,” Clint agreed. He was relieved to know the rules were more centered around keeping Loki safe than anything else. The rules about not eating enough to make yourself sick worried him but he could understand it. For a genius Tony could be really stupid sometimes. He could just imagine Tony not paying attention to what ‘eat as much as you wish’ would mean to someone as underweight as Loki. When they’d been mind controlled Clint had hard time getting Loki to eat anything. Loki hadn’t wanted to appear as if he was slacking for any reason fearing punishment from those controlling him. Clint had taken to shoving the protein bars he carried at Loki claiming Loki could eat them on the move. It hadn’t been nearly enough but it had been the best he could do at the time.

As the trio entered the room Clint inspected it carefully. It was nice even though it fairly sparse, furnished much like his own rooms here had been before he’d started adding a few personal touches. Maybe he should get Loki a ‘housewarming’ gift. Would Tony view that as overstepping his perceived boundaries? Did he care? Loki and he had shared each other’s thoughts. Silently he shifted his eyes to Tony. To his credit Tony was watching Loki carefully and seemed genuinely concerned
for him. Maybe Loki really would be safe here. As Clint was watching them the door opened and
Loki flinched. It was slight but it was there. Tony started forward but Clint was closer and made it to
the door first.

“Hold up a second Bruce,” Clint stated, stopping the door from opening further by placing a foot
against the bottom. Turning he looked back over his shoulder and had to fight not to roll his eyes at
the scowling Tony. “Loki?” Clint asked, still ignoring Tony.

“He may enter,” Loki answered quietly.

With a nod Clint took a step back and drew the door open fully. Bruce entered carrying two of his
medical bags and wheeling in a machine Clint actually recognized. He couldn’t stop the soft whistle.
Loki was really not going to like this. He turned around to reassure Loki and found Tony and Loki
eye to eye with Tony’s hands on Loki’s shoulders.

“Loki, I need you to trust me on this okay?”

“Please don’t ask this,” Loki begged.

Clint fought not to rush over and comfort Loki himself.

“It’s not going to hurt I promise. It’s only a machine to take pictures inside of you and nothing
more,” Tony tried to explain.

“It will hurt,” Loki insisted. “Your doctor means to punish me.”

“No Loki,” Clint contradicted softly. Loki’s head instantly turned towards him. “I promise you that
machine will not hurt you. Tony is telling the truth, it’s only for taking pictures.” For a while Loki
glanced between the two of them and Clint’s heart hurt at the mistrust he saw in those eyes. “Loki?”
Loki’s head immediately snapped back to him. “It is only for taking pictures and won’t hurt you at
all. It’s just that you’re going to have lay really still okay?”

“I cannot. Your doctor-“

“Bruce won’t hurt you Loki,” Clint disagreed.

“He will! Master Barton don’t let him use his machine on me!”

“Loki,” Tony growled.

“You said you! I am not allowed to call you by your title! You also said I could say no if I was
uncomfortable!”

“Loki stop it,” Tony ordered.

Loki stilled instantly, only trembling slightly.

“Wait,” Clint cut in. “What if I go first?” Crossing the room without breaking eye contact with Loki
he sat down on the edge of the bed. “I’ll go first and you can see how the machine works and that it
won’t hurt you, okay?”

“No!” The volume of his shout seemed to shock Loki and he winced slightly before continuing.
“Please do not put yourself at risk on my behalf. You have been hurt by me far too many times
already. Please do not do this?”

“I promise you it’s not going to hurt me at all, okay?”
“Please don’t,” Loki pled. “I cannot stand the thought of you being hurt on my behalf yet again.”

“Then I’ll do it,” Tony interrupted.

Somehow Loki paled even more and began shaking his head.

“Yes Loki,” Tony asserted. “In this matter I insist. This isn’t me pushing you to do something. This is me doing something I want. Just the same as you getting to choose I get to choose in this matter. I’m volunteering myself.”

Swiftly Loki dropped to his knees wrapped his arms around himself and began shaking his head.

“Then let me volunteer instead. I will submit. Please do not do this Anthony.”

Loki using Tony’s full first name startled Clint almost as much as Tony kneeling down next to him and gently placing a hand on Loki’s shoulder. Loki promptly flung himself forward and burst into sobs. Slowly and with obvious care Tony raised his arms lightly wrapped them around Loki. In that moment Clint knew beyond a shadow of a doubt there was no way Tony would ever deliberately hurt Loki. He realized something he didn’t think Tony even realized just yet. Tony genuinely cared for Loki. He thought of Loki as his own. Tony would protect Loki every bit as much as Clint would protect him.

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“At the very least let me go check on Clint,” Natasha snapped, not for the first time.

“I assure you, yet again, master Barton is completely unharmed,” JARVIS intoned.

“JARVIS why don’t you let me go check on Clint so I can help put Natasha’s mind at ease?” Steve asked.

“I apologize Captain Rogers but without specific orders from master Loki I cannot allow those doors to be opened. I would like to point out that should you require a distraction it is almost eleven am on the first Monday of the month.”

“JARVIS,” Steve began slowly. “What happens on the first monday of the month?”

The doors to the elevator slid open to reveal Pepper Potts staring at various papers she carried. Making her way to just inside of the living room threshold she stopped, muttered something to herself, and shifted through the papers some more. Finally she raised her head, looked like she was fixing to say something, but promptly closed her mouth. Her critical gaze shifted over Steve and Natasha carefully.

“Good morning Miss Potts,” JARVIS greeted.

“Morning JARVIS,” Pepper greeted, sounding slightly wary. “JARVIS, where’s Tony?”

“Sir is currently in one of the guest rooms tending to something. He should be out shortly if you would care to wait.”

“Uh huh,” Pepper stated impassively. “Which bedroom?”

“I believe it would be best if you were to wait for sir to explain thing first.”

“JARVIS, tell me which bedroom Tony’s in right now,” Pepper ordered.

“I'll show you,” Natasha volunteered, heading for Loki’s room.
“Miss Potts, I must protest-”

“JARVIS mute,” Pepper ordered and the voice obediently went silent.

Steve sighed. As much as he wanted to know what was going on he really wasn’t sure this was a good idea. Who knew how Pepper would react to Loki’s presence? Still, it was difficult to stop her from doing something once she set her mind to it. If needed, though, he would help keep the peace until everything could be explained. The three of them arrived the door to Loki’s room and stopped. Pepper reached for the door handle and found it locked.

“JARVIS, override: authorization Pepper seven two seven four five.”

Once again Pepper reached for the doorknob and this time it turned easily. As soon as the door was open Natasha started forward but Pepper raised and arm to halt her. Steve looked over her shoulder and took in the scene. Tony was sitting on the bed with his back against the headboard and Loki sitting just in front of him. Banner stood near them and Clint was standing at the bottom of the bed closest to the door. Three of the room’s occupants turned their direction as soon as the door opened. Only Loki, shirtless and sitting in Tony’s lap with his head still bowed did not acknowledge their arrival.

“Pepper?” Tony asked sounding surprised.

Steve noted a tiny flinch from Loki before the former god began shivering slightly.

“I, uh, look I can explain this. I promise there’s a perfectly good explanation for everything. See, when Loki was sent back-”

“Stop,” Pepper commanded.

Wisely, at least in Steve’s mind, Tony stopped talking. After inspecting the scene for several seconds Pepper finally spoke. Steve was surprised when her first comment wasn’t directed at any of them, but rather to Loki.

“Loki,” Pepper stated voice surprisingly gentle.

Loki’s trembling seemed to worsen.

“Right, everyone out,” Pepper ordered.

Unsurprisingly the three others aside from Loki began protesting at once. Pepper held a hand up to forestall their arguments and entered the room. Slowly she knelt down next to the bed and placed a hand on Loki’s forearm.

“Bruce, you and Clint out now.”

Both men turned to Tony but Tony motioned to the door with his chin. Grumbling the two other men made their way to the door and out of the room. Clint gave them one last look before finally leaving. The last thing Steve saw as Banner slowly pull the door closed behind them was Loki curling up against Tony’s chest while Pepper gently rubbed a hand down his arm.

“Damn it, Tony thought. He should have remembered that Pepper was going to be visiting today. She came by at least once a month to go over all of the paperwork he was supposed to have read through but had opted to ignore instead. It was a routine they’d worked out since even before they’d started
dating. He had to work hard not to wince as Pepper inspected what she could see of Loki. She was smart but with that many of them in the room and with how much Loki was injured…

“Loki?” Pepper repeated softly.

Loki flinched again at the sound of her voice and shook his head.

“Hey, it’s all right,” Tony told him. “I promise you Pepper’s not going to bite. Well, not hard at least,” he joked. Pepper eyed him seeming completely unimpressed with his attempt at humor.

“Out,” she ordered.

“I can’t. See, it’s just that sometimes he gets a bit nervous and-”

“Tony,” Pepper intoned, fixing him with that look. He never could stand up to that look for long. What to do? Did he leave like she wanted or stay for Loki? Loki was just so broken right now. What the hell was he supposed to do?

“Tony,” Loki whispered. “It is okay, I will be all right. Please listen to her.”

“If you need anything-”

“I will let you you know,” he assured Tony.

“Okay then,” Tony answered still sounding a bit uncertain.

Loki leaned forward slightly. Tony pulled his left leg around from the other side and finally stood. For a while Tony merely watched him and Loki waited. Finally Pepper called Tony’s name once more. Tony muttered something and finally left. Alone in a room with Tony’s last partner Loki wasn’t sure what to expect. He wasn’t sure how much she knew about the situation but it was a safe bet from Tony’s reactions that it wasn’t much. Not wishing to cause any more problems then his presence here already had, he asked Tony to comply with her wishes when he hesitated.

For several moments there was nothing. Loki, fearing the worst, refused to raise his head. There was no sense knowing what was coming if he could do nothing to stop it. Finally, she moved and Loki tensed. Without a word climbed into the bed, sat next to him with her legs crossed and wrapped her arms around him. Stunned, Loki didn’t know what to think. At last he lifted his head and met her eyes. She smiled softly and ran a hand down his back softly a few times. One hand moved to rest behind his head and she gently pulled him closer.

Loki was struck speechless at how much she reminded him of his mother. It wasn’t her looks. No this woman and Frigga did not look anything alike. It was more that this woman, without knowing the situation, what happened, why he was here, or what he was doing sitting in a bed with her former partner, was comforting him. For no reason, with no idea of what was wrong, and without a word this woman hadn’t even hesitated. His mother, too, had always comforted first and asked questions second.

Later she would ask about everything. Later she would question Tony and hear whatever explanation there was for this. Later she find the person responsible for Loki’s injuries and do everything in her power to destroy them. Later. For now she was going to hold Loki and comfort him. Right now, that’s what mattered. All it had taken was one look. She didn’t know what was
going on but she knew when someone was at their breaking point. Whatever was going on Loki had been terrified when she’d arrived. It wasn’t hard to see there were way too many people around. She had no doubt they were all trying to help but with the amount of people and all the attention on him Loki would never be able to calm down.

When Loki started shaking slightly she glanced down. Tears trailed down his cheeks as he clung to her tightly. Vaguely she wondered what it would take for someone like Loki to break down in the arms of a stranger. Since that knowledge wasn’t currently useful she shoved that thought aside and focused on comforting Loki. Rubbing his back with one hand she moved the other to rest lightly on the back of his head. Quietly she soothed him as he continued to cry in her arms. For now she would take care of Loki but later? Later, when she found out what happened and who had done it, she was definitely going to vent her displeasure.

The arguing hurt his brain. Damn he needed a drink. As he was the last person out of the room everyone seemed to think he knew more than he actually did. Everyone kept asking him questions he didn’t have any answers for and he was tired of it. Pouring another drink he stared at the caramel colored liquid as if it held the answers to the universe. What the hell was Pepper going to think when she found out he ‘owned a slave’? And really what kind of bullshit was that? Who did slavery anymore?

“Tony,” Natasha stated sharply.

“I don’t know any more than you,” Tony muttered.

Quickly he downed his scotch.

“You dated her,” Natasha pressed. “You have to know something. If you didn’t then you shouldn’t have left her alone in that room with Loki.”

“What do you think she’s going to do, kill him? I promise you, at this point she’s vastly more likely to kill me.” He poured another drink and stared at the glass once again.

“You can’t fault people for wanting to-” Steve stopped short as the bedroom door opened and Pepper stepped out.

Everyone else seemed ready to rush her for information but Tony knew. Pepper would only give up whatever information she deemed useful and nothing more. He tried to hide his feelings from the others but there was no hiding them from Pepper. Pepper knew him. He never could hide anything from her so he never tried.

“Pep,” he greeted, all but saluting her with his scotch. Unsurprisingly she rolled her eyes at him.

“How long has he been here,” she demanded.

There was something in her tone that warned him he was treading on thin ice. As if he didn’t already know that? Tony however, in true Stark fasion, ignored it choosing instead to focus on the glass in his hands. “Hello to you too. So what’s up? How have things been going with you?” he asked before downing his drink and pouring another.

Someone pulled the drink out of his hands and Tony growled. Looking up he spied Pepper and froze. Despite being solely human with no powers Pepper was the one person that scared him more than anyone else.
“How long?” Pepper insisted for a second time.

“How long what? You really need to be more explicit with your questions,” Tony quipped, knowing better but also unable to stop himself.

“How long has he been here with only two changes of clothes?” Pepper demanded.

Straight to the heart of the matter. Just like Pepper. “A little over two weeks.”

“How long?” she asked glaring at him.

Tony eyed his glass of scotch in her hands and wondered if he could get away with grabbing another glass or if she’d kill him for it. She would probably kill him first, he finally decided. Would it be worth chancing it? Probably not.

“How long and he has what, two changes of clothing?”

Tony winced. “Three? Four if you count his own.”

“His own clothes need to be cleaned. And by cleaned, no, I don’t mean shoved into a washing machine. You can’t put clothes with that much leather in a washer. And why is he that under weight?”

“That’s not Tony’s fault,” Clint jumped in defensively. “I don’t believe for a second he’s withholding food from Loki.”

“Withholding?” Pepper asked crossing her arms. “As if it’s his choice whether or not Loki can eat?”

“In a sense it kind of is. I mean, not that he’d take advantage of it or anything but-”

“Yeah, thanks Steve but I’ve got it from here,” Tony stated, interrupting Steve. Steve might mean well but this was Pepper. “See, these, uh, representatives from Asgard showed up with Loki a little over two weeks ago and told me…” Tony pressed his lips together trying to figure out the best way to explain this and not get killed. Pepper cocked an eyebrow and waited. “Okay don’t kill me before I can finish but they showed up with Loki and told me he was sentenced to be a slave and they wanted to leave him with me so he could make reparations for the things he’s done.”

“And you just agreed?”

“Of course not. You know me Pepper, do you really think I’m the kind of person that would agree to something like that?”

“Well Loki’s still here.”

“Because they were going to send him off to be tortured! I couldn’t let that happen Pepper. I didn’t know what else to do so yeah, I signed the contract.”

“Contract?”

“Contract?”

Loki heard the word just as he arrived at the common room and froze.

“Yeah, they were insistent about that. I don’t know why but I don’t care. I didn’t feel like there was
any other option. If signing it kept Loki from being tortured to death then I was damned sure going to sign it.”

“And let me guess, you didn’t even bother to read it did you?”

“Uh, I might have glanced at it?”

“Damn it Tony. I swear I have no idea how you survived this long. You don’t sign binding contracts without reading them!”

That would explain how Tony didn’t know about how they were bound together, Loki realized. Signing the contract was the act that bound a slave to their master thus linking them together with the binding magic. The contract also laid out in no uncertain terms what the slave was guilty of, what was expected of any master, and just how little rights there were for the slave in question. If there was anything else of importance it also would be in the contract. If Tony hadn’t read the contract then he wouldn’t know any of that or how the magic worked.

“He really didn’t have much of a choice Miss Potts,” Steve began.

Loki could have told him not to try. This was not a woman who could be soothed with mere words. This woman was someone who went after what she wanted and didn’t stop until she got it, the norns help anyone who got in her way. In that way she was so much like his mother that Loki found himself smiling at the thought.

“Don’t start with me Steve. He’s not a child. He needs to start acting like an adult. Okay so where is this contract?”

Tony, Steve, and --surprisingly enough to Loki-- Natasha, all turned to look at the coffee table. Loki shook his head. When he’d started cleaning he had moved the contract, albeit gingerly, to clear the table. He really hadn’t wanted to touch that accursed piece of parchment but it had to be moved if he was to clean the coffee table.

“It’s not there,” Natasha stated. “I was actually wondering where it went myself. I saw it in some of the recordings and wanted to know precisely what it said.”

They’d watch the recordings of his time here? How much had they seen? Suddenly the archer’s anger at Tony made a lot more sense.

“So where is it?” Pepper asked.

Loki opened his mouth but Tony spoke first.

“I don’t know. Last time I saw it I threw it on the coffee table. I haven’t touched it since then.”

“There hasn’t been anything on that table since I got here,” Natasha told them.

Loki tried once again to tell them he’d moved the contract but was summarily cut off once more.

“So let me get this straight,” Pepper began. “You signed a legally binding contract that allows you to own a slave and promptly lost it?”

“I didn’t lose it I left it on the coffee table and didn’t move it,” Tony answered defensively.

Shaking his head, Loki decided it was just better to get the contract rather then trying to make himself heard. Quietly he made his way to the room that seemed to be Tony’s office and found everything
exactly as he’d left it. This room was one he almost never entered. He didn’t know if Tony would be upset about him moving things in here so he only ever entered to dust occasionally. Even though he spent his days cleaning most of the rooms were already fairly clean. This room, however, was a disaster. Papers were stacked haphazardly in random piles, knick knacks were strewn on the various surfaces, and the shelves were so disorganized Loki wanted to cringe. His fingers almost itched to at the very least straighten the books. Still, he felt beyond uncomfortable at the very idea of touching anything in here.

The contract still sat on the desk on top of all the other paperwork on the right side of the desk. Steeling himself Loki carefully picked up the much hated piece of paper, touching it as little as possible, and left the room. Everyone was still arguing when he made it back to the common room. He wanted to hand it over to Pepper but it was his master’s property. Asgardian law dictated that he hand it to Tony first. Quietly he made his way over to Tony and held out the contract. The room fell silent.

“Where did you get that?” Tony asked taking the contract.

“From your office,” Loki told him quietly. When Tony didn’t answer Loki began to get nervous. “I am sorry for entering your office without permission. I was cleaning and needed somewhere to put it. I just thought… with the other paperwork there…” Loki shook his head and dropped his eyes to the floor.

“That explains why you couldn’t find it,” Pepper huffed. “Loki?”

“Yes Miss Pepper?”

“Tony never goes into his office. It’s why I have to show up here every month. If he ever looked over the paperwork in there and signed anything I’d probably die from surprise.”

“I still should not have entered my ma- Tony’s personal rooms without permission.”

“Loki,” Tony grumbled.

“I am trying but it is difficult. I would apologize for the slip but you hate that as well.”

“Do not apologize for helping to keep him organized,” Pepper snapped. “I swear he’s worse than a child sometimes. Any extra help to keep him organized is always appreciated.”

“Yes Miss Pepper,” Loki answered with a slight smile.

“Come on let’s get you taken care of first then we can look over the contract,” she insisted. “Tony usually has a first aid kit under the kitchen sink.”

“There’s stuff to bandage his wounds in his room,” Tony replied. “We weren’t quite done examining his injuries. Bruce just finished with the x-rays and internal stuff. Uh, well he was done taking the pictures and stuff. I think he still has to go over a few things. Speaking of, where did Bruce get off to now?”

“Dr. Banner is currently in the infirmary,” JARVIS informed them.

“Thanks J.”

“Right, well let’s get you down to the infirmary,” Pepper announced.

Loki balked and took an unconscious step back.
“No,” Clint stated sharply.

“He doesn’t like the infirmary Pepper,” Tony told her. “It’s why we were treating him in his room in the first place.”

“Right then. Back to your room Loki.”

“Yes Miss Pepper.”

“I’m coming too,” Clint insisted.

“And me,” Tony insisted.

Suddenly everyone was speaking all at once. As the arguing continued Loki slowly backed away from the group. He couldn’t help but feel guilty. Even when he didn’t say anything he seemed to cause dissention. Perhaps Odin had been right. Maybe he should have been left to die in Jotunheim as a child. Maybe he could sneak back to his room while everyone else was distracted.

“Enough,” Pepper stated loudly. “Loki freeze,” she ordered without even turning around to look. “Everyone else, is staying out here. I’ve bandaged enough of Tony’s injuries to be more than capable of taking care of these on my own. Too many people in one room arguing with each other is only going to upset him more. Tony, give me the contract and then go make some hot tea. I should still have some in the cabinets. JARVIS, please tell Dr. Banner that he’s needed up here.”

“Yes Miss Potts.”

“Everyone else is welcome to do whatever they want for now. When I get done bandaging Loki’s injuries all of us, including Loki, are going to sit down together and finally go over the contract. Loki, follow me please.”

Turning she headed down the hall without another word. Loki cast a brief glance to Tony who gave a quick nod. Quickly Loki turned and rushed to catch up. He really wished at the least Tony could have accompanied them but she’d been right. While the doctor did still make him a bit nervous he also hadn’t realized having that many people in his room at the same time would be that nerve wracking. At the door to his room he found her waiting patiently. When they were both inside Loki waited patiently to see what was expect of him.

“Hey? You okay over there?”

“Yes Miss Pepper.”

“Can you just call me Pepper or is it easier with the Miss?”

That was all it took. Later he would try to rationalize things. Later he would try to understand why it happened. For now he broke. Sliding easily to his knees Loki broke. “It’s easier with the title. Please let me use it. Tony doesn’t and… I don’t know! I get worried. If I am not good enough or do not behave as is expected they will come back to retrieve me and punish me!” He should lower his voice but he couldn’t. Suddenly she was next to him and her arms slid easily around him. He let himself melt into her embrace.

“Shh, it’s okay. Everything will be fine. Just breathe sweetie.”

Frantically Loki nodded. “In and out. I can do that.” Stupid, he berated himself. Of course he could breathe. That wasn’t what he meant to say.
“Loki? I need you to tell me if you’re going to have a panic attack okay?”

“You know?” he asked surprised. Though really he shouldn’t be that surprised he realized. This was Tony’s last partner. She still came over to visit. Of course Tony would have told her everything.

“Loki? I need you to focus on my voice okay? Everything will be fine. I used to have to help Tony. I know precisely what panic attacks are like. You’ll be fine. You are not going anywhere. You are safe. Okay?”

Loki nodded. Though he wasn’t having a panic attack this woman assuring him he was safe felt wonderful. He wished he had the courage to do more. To ask for more. To tell her to continue speaking. Tony made him feel safe and he loved that. But this woman was so much like his mother he just wanted her to keep talking; to keep reassuring him.

“Loki? Are you having a panic attack?”

“No ma’am,” he answered obligatorily. “Please? Keep talking?”

“I can do that. Can I bandage you as I talk? You don’t have to agree to anything I just need to ask.”

Loki nodded again.

“Okay, then. I’m going to tell you everything I do. Is that good?” She continued on without giving him a chance to answer. “Right now I’m getting the gauze. I need to apply some kind of antibiotic cream, which look, Bruce totally has provided.”

She held up something but honestly Loki wasn’t paying attention to it. He nodded because something seemed expected. It didn’t matter. Pepper continued as if she’d gotten the answer she wanted.

“So after I apply this I’m going to wrap your wounds, okay?”

She seemed to pause at that so Loki wracked his brain for the correct answer. Frantically he nodded once again. Anything to keep her talking.
Chapter 11

It was past two when Pepper finally emerged from Loki’s bedroom. She shut the door quietly behind her and Tony waited nervously. He wanted so much to run his mouth but he knew that would be counter productive. Pepper would only give what she wanted and nothing more. Biding his time Tony made small talk. When Pepper walked out without Loki Tony didn’t know what to think but he did know how to bide his time.

Pepper he could handle. Usually. Pepper and Loki meeting he didn’t know how to begin to try to handle so he didn’t even try. On one hand he wanted to scoop up Loki and protect him from the world. On the other hand he wanted to let Pepper help him. He knew from personal experience that Pepper was amazing when it came to personal issues but he had no clue how she’d deal with Loki.

“So what’s up?” he asked as light-heartedly as possible.

“Cut the crap Tony. I may still care about you but right now we need to talk about Loki.”

“I just- It’s just that he-.” Oh crap. Fuck he really needed to pull himself together. He couldn’t, could fucking not, have a panic attack or it would affect Loki. He tried to breathe through it but it was difficult. Suddenly Pepper was at his side talking to him and leading him out of the room. He didn’t know where they were headed but he didn’t care. He really didn’t want to be around anyone else right now.

Someone would have to blind not to see how much Tony cared for Loki. In all honesty she really should have expected a panic attack. Tony was always extremely concerned about those he considered his. There was no way Loki would calm down with so many people around so she’d taken a gamble keeping Tony away while she’d treated him. Tony had managed to hold it together until she’d returned but it seemed that was all he could manage. Honestly, she was surprised he’d lasted that long. Tony really did not do well when there was something wrong with those he cared for and he couldn’t help them.

“Breathe Tony. Come on, you can do this.”

“Have to,” he muttered.

The comment could mean anything. In the grips of a panic attack Tony’s mind could be almost anywhere. She didn’t spend too much time trying to analyze what he meant, focused instead on taking the steps needed to help him. She led him to Loki’s bedroom and knocked on the door lightly. Hopefully her intuition was correct and Loki wouldn’t mind this intrusion. The door opened revealing a wary Loki. She couldn’t fault him his caution after his own near miss with a panic attack.

“Hey, I’m sorry to impose but...” She glance sideways to Tony still pressed against her side and mumbling to himself. Loki hesitated and Pepper frowned. Something about his posture was wrong.


Her frown deepened but Loki seemed to understand.

“Tony the necklace. Remember?”
Tony nodded and raised a shaking hand to pull a necklace from under his shirt. The necklace was a new development. Tony hated jewelry and almost never wore any. As she watched Tony wrapped his hand around it and began moving his lips soundlessly. Loki pushed the door fully open and motioned them into the room.

“Before it gets too far please?” Loki stated cryptically.

Trusting him Pepper ushered Tony into the room and Loki closed the door behind them.

“Is there anything I can do to help?” Pepper asked.

“No. He must calm or we are both damned,” Loki replied without taking his attention off of Tony. “Tony, focus. You can do this. I believe in you.” A shiver ran through Loki and it seemed to take effort for him to remain on his feet. “If you do not focus we will both suffer. The necklace will help you if you let it. Please focus.”

“Trying,” Tony muttered. “Pep, help Loki?”

“Anything, you know that,” she replied instantly. They might not be together anymore but Tony still had a place in her heart. She turned to Loki for more information.

“He needs to calm,” Loki told her. “If he cannot calm we are both doomed.”

Though the remark made no sense to her she didn’t doubt it. Another shiver ran through Loki and her frown deepened. With Tony there was always layers beyond layers. If Loki could do anything that would help then she was more than willing to let him but there was definitely more going on here than she knew.

“Focus Tony. I know it is difficult but it will help. For me, focus?” Loki implored.

The words were out before he could stop them. If he could have recalled them he would have but they did seem to help Tony. Tension seemed to seep from Tony’s muscles and Loki was more relieved then he wanted to contemplate. Never had he ever wanted access to his magics more. Stupid. He had never been good at calming spells, that had been his mother. If Frigga were here… If Frigga were here nothing. He banished that thought from his mind. His mother would be disappointed in his actions. She had raised him better than this and it had only been his own faults that had led him down this path.


If Tony did not calm down soon the panic attack would set off the magic. Already tendrils of it were seeping into him. Doing his best to ignore the pain Loki focused on Tony. Tony had helped Loki through so many of his own panic attacks Loki would have given almost anything to be able Tony right now. If he still had access to his magic then maybe… Loki barely suppressed a growl. He didn’t have access to his magic and he needed to quit dwelling on it. Thinking about it would only depress him. Focus, he ordered himself.

Pepper walked back into the common room trusting that Loki and Tony would follow her instructions and rest.
“The others?” Natasha asked when Pepper finally made it back to the kitchen.

“Tony and Loki aren’t doing well right now. I put Tony in Loki’s room. When they wake up we’ll go through the contract. For now I don’t want anyone to disturb them.”

“You put Tony in Loki’s room?” Clint asked sounding surprised.

“Yes and if you have any problem with them being together-”

“No not a problem. I’m just impressed,” he reassured her. “How did you know?”

Pepper stared at him trying to determine if he was being serious.

“It’s just that I only figured it out today.”

“Really?” she asked.

“Yeah. In my defense I was more worried about Loki and was trying to make sure he was safe.”

“Safe? From Tony?” She eyed the archer carefully trying to decide if he’d really meant for those words to come out that way. “You do realize what kind of a person Tony is don’t you?”

“Yeah and I shouldn’t have been that worried. I know and I’m sorry. It’s just that I spent time in Loki’s head and I was nervous. Loki? Loki has his own issues and they’re not that pleasant. I should have known better and I’m sorry for not trusting Tony more. How are they? I mean really.”

“Safe for now,” she stated simply. “Okay I think we need to discuss a few things.” she stated as she sat down at the table. Everyone else sat down except the archer. Clint remained standing and really she didn’t expect anything else. If Clint was as protective as she was then of course he’d still be worried. She ignored the hovering archer and focussed on the situation at hand for now. “Someone fill me in before I have to go do digging of my own.”

No one spoke and she eyed them all carefully. The archer she dismissed instantly. He wouldn’t give up anything without more time then she was willing to take for now. The other woman would probably take even more work than that even is she could get her to speak. Banner was a sweetheart but usually clueless. Her eyes narrowed on the soldier.

“Steve,” she stated slowly. “If you don’t tell me what’s going on I am going to be very upset with you. I still care for him in a way and you have know what that’s like.”

She was gambling on his sense of duty and the era he’d been raised.

“I’m not sure how much I can relate without betraying their trust,” Steve told her.

She cocked an eyebrow.

“Really Miss Potts they should be the ones to-”

“You do realize Tony almost just had a panic attack don’t you?” Steve winced and she filed that information away for later. “I am just as worried about Tony as you but you at least have some information. I’m flying blind for now. If you don’t tell me anything I’m going to be less able to help Tony. Is that what you want?” She watched him struggle for words without sympathy. This was Tony they were dealing with. If anything happened to him that she could prevent she would never forgive herself.

“Tony,” Steve hesitated.
While she could understand his worry she couldn’t accept it.

“If you can tell me anything that helps, I swear…”

“I am not purposely keeping you in the dark Miss Potts I promise.”

“Then give me something to work with so I can help him.”

Loki ran his hands through Tony’s hair careful not to wake the other man. Tony, for his part, was curled up over Loki with one arm wrapped tightly around him. His body still ached from the magic that had managed to seep through during Tony’s almost panic attack and Loki was more confused than ever. He could believe that Tony didn’t want to have these panic attacks. What was harder to understand was how concerned Tony was over his welfare when they occurred. Never had a master worried that much about whether or not Loki was in pain yet it was hard to deny Tony’s concern.

Loki gave serious thought to how his life had changed. In just a handful of weeks he had gone from being constantly tormented by his guards and having no one that cared for him to having multiple people that were worried about him. In many ways ‘the Captain’ was the easiest to understand. His integrity and belief in ‘justice’ would naturally put in a position to be opposed to the things Loki had suffered; especially if there was no slavery on Midgard. Oddly Natasha, also, was more understandable. She was the most logical and easiest to understand. She was a calculating person who dealt in facts. Loki could respect that. When she was finally convinced that Loki’s actions had not been his own it would of course be easier for her to forgive him.

Barton he did not understand at all. After everything he’d done the archer had many reasons to still hate him. It had been a selfish move to pick the archer but he hadn’t been able to help himself. Barton did have heart and after everything he’d suffered at the hands of the Chitauri Loki had wanted someone so completely unlike them at his command. The things he had forced Barton to do would weigh on them both. Barton because of his sense of duty and what was right would not let him easily forgive himself. Loki because he had forced this honorable person to betray his own people solely out of his own selfishness and desire to have at least one person understand his own pain.

He did not even want to contemplate the doctor. It was hard to reconcile the giant green monster that had beaten him into the floor with the mild mannered man who had been upset at the damage and indignities that had been inflicted upon a former enemy. He hadn’t exactly expected the other man to be happy about them but the concern the doctor showed was more touching then Loki wanted to admit. He had been prepared for the other man to hate him or at least be angered by his presence here. He had not expected the doctor to tend to his wounds or be upset at those that had inflicted them.

Tony shifted slightly nuzzling against his shoulder and Loki turned his thoughts back to the man currently snuggled around him. It still made him a bit nervous to have Tony laying over him like this but not nearly as much as the last time. He was grateful he’d managed to get the panic attack under control. Yes he was relieved he’d been spared the full force of the magic but there was more to it. He was actually happy that Tony hadn’t had to suffer much. Worrying over a master’s suffering was new to him but then Tony wasn’t a normal master.

When he’d first arrived here Loki had been terrified at the prospect of being left at the mercy of Tony Stark. After everything he’d done to the man Loki could just envision the amount of pain he would endure. He hadn’t known what to make of the other man but he hoped the presence of another person would temporarily stay Tony’s hand. It had seemed that way when instead of punishing him
immediately they’d done nothing more than talk. When Tony’d thrown the blanket onto the bed and told him the Captain was leaving Loki’s fear had spiked. With the other man gone he was sure Tony would finally come back punish him later. Still, nothing had happened.

Since that night he’d waited for Tony to hurt him but Tony had shown him nothing but endless patience. Loki wasn’t sure what to do with that knowledge. Any other master at any other time would hurt him solely because they could. He had learned, with good cause, to fear a master. Tony, however, had made no move to intentionally hurt him. In fact he had gone out of his way to protect him. Tony shifted in his sleep once again and Loki waited to see if he would wake. When nothing happened Loki almost sighed in relief. As much as he trusted this mortal he didn’t want him to wake. If Tony woke then they would have to deal with the reality that he was a slave and subject to Tony’s whims.

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Tony nuzzled into the shoulder of the person he was sleeping against and desperately tried to remain asleep. He had no idea how long he’d been asleep but it wasn’t near enough and he desperately wanted more. Humming slightly he threw a leg over his partner and tried to get comfortable. Partner. Something in that thought gave him pause but thinking about it would interrupt his plans for sleep.

“Tony,” a quiet voice stated from nearby.

“Mm hush,” Tony muttered. Feeling his way sideways he found the other’s mouth and promptly kissed them properly. “Sleep,” Tony ordered.

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Loki was too stunned to move. After everything he should have known better. After everything he really he should have expected this. But this was Tony his mind tried to to remind him. No, Loki told it. This was his master who could order him to do as he pleased. Stupid, he berated himself yet again. How had he let himself forget that? No matter how much Tony denied it, Loki was a slave and as such had no rights. Not even his body was considered his own. Finally he lost the battle with his muscles and began trembling slightly.

“Mm Loki?”

“Yes,” Loki paused long enough to stop the word ‘master’ from passing his lips. “Tony?”

“Mmm you feel good,” Tony murmured snuggling in tighter.

Loki redoubled his efforts to remain still. This is Tony, he told himself. Even if it progresses to that he will not hurt me. It was a losing battle and he knew. His master could hurt him as much as they pleased and he could do nothing to stop them.

“Mm, where’s Pepper?” Tony slurred sleepily.

“She, um, had things to do?”

“Mm hm,” Tony murmured snuggling against him more firmly. “Mm kiss me again?”

“As you wish,” Loki answered obediently, heart pounding against his chest. Denying his master was not an option. Well not if he did not wish to be punished. Tony leaned over his shoulder and kissed him again. Heart pounding Loki did his best to participate. He was certain that his efforts were subpar at best. Tony seemed pleased, though, so apparently he had done a good enough job.
“Mm,” Tony hummed, moving to nibble on Loki’s ear. “Want you,” he whispered still nuzzling against Loki’s neck.

Loki froze stiff, having no idea how to respond. Finally Tony moved and curled up around Loki once more. Tony promptly fell back asleep and Loki worried.

He had no clue what time it was when he woke but it didn’t matter. If he needed to know then JARVIS would tell him. Gods he was so comfortable. Cautiously he finally cracked an eye to check on his sleeping partner. He was met with a strange look from Loki. Almost immediately Loki turned his head away. Damn it, obviously something was wrong but he couldn’t place what.

“Loki?”

“Yes, Tony?”

The hesitation was almost more than he could stand. “You okay?” Tony asked, beginning to worry slightly.

“I am fine mas…. Tony,”

Tony groaned. “No you’re not. If you were you wouldn’t have slipped like that. The only time you slip and almost use titles is when you’re upset. I told you before, I don’t appreciate being lied to Loki.”

“I am adequate,” Loki answered obediently.

“But not good,” Tony countered. “Loki what happened?” When Loki refused to answer Tony frowned. “Please tell me?”

“I am adequate Tony,” Loki repeated. “Are you ready for breakfast?”

Obviously something had happened. Equally as obviously Loki did not want to talk about it. Should he let it pass? Loki was his to take care of; to protect. If he let this pass would he be failing in his duties?

“I would appreciate food please,” Loki stated.

There was so much nervousness in that voice Tony had a difficult time not calling him on it. This was Loki’s choice thought. If Loki didn’t want to talk about it Tony was not going to force him.

“Right. Breakfast then.”

“Yes Tony,” Loki answered dutifully.

And damn it didn’t Tony have a hard enough time not growling at that answer. He didn’t want a dutiful slave. He wanted his Loki to be independent; to feel comfortable making decisions for himself. He wanted his Loki to be… fuck he didn’t know and it was definitely too early for this.

“JARVIS where’s Pepper?”

“Miss Potts has left to do other things. She will return in a few hours. She has asked that master Loki be ready to go by nine.”

“Nine?” Tony asked. “Like at night?”
“Nine am sir,” JARVIS replied. “You have slept for over twelve hours.”

“Mm that explains why I’m hungry. J is there any Chinese left?”

“Miss Potts has anticipated that you would be hungry and made sure there was adequate breakfast food.”

“So, no Chinese?” Tony asked.

“Your Chinese is in the fridge. Currently Miss Romanoff is in the kitchen though.”

“Figures,” Tony muttered. “Wanna face down a world renown spy on an epic quest to find sustenance?” Tony asked.

As the pair finally left the bedroom most of Loki’s fear ebbed away. A small portion of it settled into the pit of his stomach and tying it into knots. Head bowed Loki followed exactly three steps behind Tony as they made their way to the kitchen. Entering the kitchen Loki was torn between awaiting an order from his master or pouring a cup of coffee for Tony. As he stood there, unsure, the decision was taken out of his hands as Tony headed for the coffee maker and poured a cup himself. The action served to break Loki’s momentary hesitation and he moved to retrieve his cereal.

As he set about readying his morning meal Loki steadfastly ignored the other person in the kitchen. After everything that had just happened he really did not want to deal with a woman as formidable as Natasha Romanoff. He was grateful that she didn’t attempt to try to start a conversation as he went through his morning routine. As his thoughts were preoccupied he suddenly realized he’d missed something Tony had just said. He started to apologize but stopped, unsure if that would upset Tony.

“Loki?” Tony asked sounding concerned.

“I was distracted and must have missed that comment. Could you repeat it please?”

“I asked if you were feeling okay.”

“I am well,” Loki replied.

“Then why aren’t you eating?”

“Oh, I… was simply lost in thought.” Forcing a smile Loki nodded once, dropped his eyes to his bowl and scooped a spoonful of cereal into his mouth.

As Loki gathered the dishes and took them to the sink Tony forewent his token protest and led Natasha to the far side of the common room. He was grateful when she followed him without any argument. As much as he really didn’t want to push Loki he was incapable of just letting it pass. When he spoke he kept his voice low. “Hey, did you notice anything, I don’t know, a bit off about Loki this morning?”

“Loki has been ‘off’ since I first arrived Tony. I’ve only just found out he was here so I don’t exactly have a lot of information to draw on yet. He did seem a bit more distracted this morning,” she admitted hesitantly.

“I think something happened last night.”
“You don’t remember?”

“I don’t know. This is only the second night we’ve slept in the same bed. After the first night he did seem a little more nervous than normal but he would still talk to me. This morning was different. When we woke up this morning he wasn’t just nervous, he was completely withdrawn and seemed…” Raising a hand he ran it through his hair. “I don’t know how to phrase it exactly. It’s just that after watching him for this long you start to notice certain tells in his behavior. When we woke up this morning he was definitely worried about something.”

“Did you ask him about it?”

“Of course I did but that only seemed to make it worse.” Out of the corner of his eye he noticed Loki had finally finished the few dishes and was standing quietly near the sink with his head bowed. “Loki?” Tony asked cautiously. Finally Loki approached and stopped while he was still a few feet away.

“Yes Tony?” he answered with his head still bowed.

Tony shot Natasha a quick look but she only gave a slight shrug. “You seem a bit different lately. You sure you’re doing all right?”

“Yes Tony.”

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Having no clue what she would find Pepper opened the door confidently in spite of her mild nervousness. She found Clint, Steve, Tony, and Loki in the common room. Loki looked so nervous it worried her. Still, she ignored it for now. “Ah, Loki. Good. Ready to go shopping?”

“Oh, shopping?” Loki asked confused and turning to Tony.

Tony shrugged. “Don’t ask me. I learned a long time ago not to argue with her.”

“You need more clothes and other things. We’re going to buy them and if there’s anything else you want let me know,” Pepper told him.

She expected an argument but was surprised when she didn’t get one. Loki’s only reaction at the news was to glance over to Tony. Tony merely shrugged before getting up and heading to the kitchen to refill his coffee.

“Can I go to?” the archer asked.

She had expected this. “No,” Pepper stated firmly. “This is for Loki. You can wait here and help us put away whatever we buy when we get back,” she told him.

“If Master Barton really does desire to-”

“No,” Pepper stated firmly.

“Hey Lokes? No offense but you’re not going to change her mind. If she wants this to be you and her that’s all it’s going to be. Sorry?” Tony called from from the kitchen.

“No apologies needed. Whatever Miss Pepper wants will be fine,” Loki stated quietly.

Something was wrong but she couldn’t quite put a finger on what.
As the pair of them got into the car Pepper was glad Happy was driving them. If there was someone she that could trust not to alert the world to the fugitive god’s presence here it was him. As much as Tony’s interest in Loki surprised her she realized she should have expected it. If Loki wasn’t trying to take over the world then of course he’d be exactly the type of person that would interest Tony. Even the speed at which Tony had fallen for the former god didn’t surprise her. The more ‘damaged’ the person the more drawn Tony was to fix them. She only hoped Tony didn’t get hurt and things didn’t blow up in their faces.

“So I was thinking we could get you a haircut while we’re-”

“No please,” Loki begged immediately.

Not his hair again. Was it not already short enough for their liking? Was it not already cut jagged and uneven enough to suitably denote his shame to all who laid eyes on him? What was left to humiliate him farther? Shaving his hair completely would denote his worth as even less than that of a slave. It had taken much time for it to finally grow out this long after they’d first cut it. Suddenly he realized his mistake and bowed his head to apologize.

“I am sorry for my misconduct,” he stated quietly. “I should not have raised my voice nor disagreed with a direct request. I, of course, expect you to inform master Tony of my transgression so that I may be properly disciplined for my actions.”

“I’m not really sure how to reply to that,” she answered carefully. “Can you tell me what’s wrong Loki?”

“Those in my position are expected to obey without question. I did not mean to disagree with your suggestion or raise my voice Miss Pepper. If you wish to shorten my hair then I, of course, accept whatever length you deem worthy of my station. I would like to ask if perhaps it might be a worth confirming it with master Tony,” he whispered.

“Oh Loki,” Pepper sighed.

Stupid, he told himself. He of anyone knew better. He was a slave and needed to make more of an effort to remember his place. Why couldn’t he ever do anything right? Something such as raising his voice probably would not draw a punishment from Tony but this woman wasn’t Tony. He had no idea what might anger her or if disobeying her might provoke Tony’s wrath. After all, they had previously been partners and it would not be odd if there were still feelings. When he felt someone touching him he flinched.

“Sh Loki. It’s okay, you’re safe. No one is going to hurt you, okay?”

“I am sorry for my actions.” And honestly he truly was sorry. This woman had shown him nothing but kindness especially when he’d needed it the most. If his actions angered her then he would have lost that small comfort. He wasn’t sure if he could endure that after already losing so much in his life.

“There’s nothing to be sorry for Loki. Everything is fine. I just need you to calm down for me if you can, okay?”

Loki nodded. “I can do that.”

“I can’t even begin to understand what you’ve been through. There is bound to be the occasional
miscommunications. Obviously there’s something I’m not understanding. Do you mind if we talk about what upset you?"

He shook his head tiredly. “I am sufficiently calm to discuss it.”

“Whenever you’re ready then,” she pressed lightly.

“I am certain now that it was solely my own misgivings,” he told her. “It would appear that on Midgard the length of one’s hair does not denote a level of social standing.”

“Not in the slightest,” she confirmed. Though there was a slight pause she continued before he had a chance to reply. “Hair length is important on Asgard.”

Statement, not a question, but still he nodded.

“And they cut your hair like this to mark you.”

Again, statement. “This short and this uneven marks me as a slave. Some slaves are permitted hair just past their shoulders but…”

“We can discuss this later if you’re uncomfortable,” she told him softly.

Once again Loki shook his head. “Those allowed slightly longer, definitively more even, hair are those who are mostly used as bed slaves,” he whispered. He waited but there was no comment so he continued. "When you suggested we cut my hair shorter…”

“It would mark you as… lower?”

Shivering Loki nodded. “Hated. Rejected. Reviled. Destestible. Unworthy enough to even be a slave. Most on Asgard would not hesitate to harm, or maim, or even kill one with a shaved head.”

“And you feared I meant to do that to you? To mark you as lower than you already feel?”

“I am sorry Miss Pepper. Forgive me, please?”

“Oh sweetie, no.”

Loki trembled realizing he had gotten it wrong. Once more he’d said the wrong thing and lost one of the only the comforting presences he’d had here. She would hate him now. He really could not do anything right could he?

“There is nothing to forgive sweetie. You did not do anything wrong. None of this is your fault okay? You know what? Hold on a second.”

There was a slight whirring noise and Loki worked not to tremble harder.

“Hey Happy?”

“Yes Miss Potts?”

“Can you pull over somewhere. It doesn’t really matter where just somewhere we can sit for a while okay?”

“Yes Miss Potts.”

“When we pull over I’m going to need some time to talk with Mr. Loki undisturbed.”
“I really should protest—”

“It’s important, Happy. I promise you I won’t be in any danger. You can even make sure no danger gets to close to the car and interrupts us.”

“The outside danger isn’t the only threat,” he told her meaningfully.

Loki winced at the implications. Of course this Midgardian, so close to one that Tony was fond of, would remember his last visit here. He could not fault the man his reservations. “I swear upon all that I hold dear and all the norns that I will not harm this woman, if my life were to depend upon it,” he answered honestly. As soon as the words were out he realized how true they were. The only other person on Midgard he felt anything for was Tony and if Tony asked this of him he still would resist. Suddenly the other didn’t matter. He was utterly desperate for her to believe him. “Miss Pepper believe me, please? Please!”

“Shh. Hush Loki, I believe you. Okay? If I didn’t believe you I wouldn’t tell Happy to leave us alone for however long this takes.”

“Yes Miss Pepper,” Loki acquiesced.
Chapter 12

After Loki had calmed down Pepper didn’t immediately release him. She wanted to give him a few more moments of peace before taking him into stores. It was likely going to be a nerve wracking experience for him and she wanted to give him some time before forcing him to do something like that. They sat together in the back of one of Stark Industry’s company cars with her arms wrapped around Loki and his head resting against her shoulder. Loki’s eyes were closed and he was finally once again breathing normally. As she was watching him his eyes opened slowly.

“Hey there,” she said giving him a smile.

“Hello Miss Pepper,” he answered with a small smile of his own. His face fell slightly and he sat up finally. “I would like to apologize for my unseemly behavior and for touching you with permission,” he told her.

“Hush now,” Pepper ordered. “You didn’t touch me first I touched you. If we had to apologize for that then I should apologize to you. Also your behavior was perfectly normal for someone that’s been through the things you’ve been through. Now, I’d like to even your hair a little bit if you don’t mind. We can go to a salon or if you prefer I can have Happy get some scissors and do it myself. What would make you more comfortable?”

“I, um, whatever you wish?”

“Hmm. Nope,” Pepper disagreed. “See that was a question. You obviously have an opinion and I want to know what it is.”

“I do not wish to upset you Miss Pepper.”

“I understand that, and honestly, I appreciate it but I really want to know what would make you more comfortable. Not telling me would upset me.”

“Then… could you do it? I mean, I trust you. If someone I didn’t know did it…”

Pepper smiled. “I can most definitely trim your hair. I also promise you I’m only going to even it out and not cut it any shorter than I have to. Okay?”

“Yes Miss Pepper,” Loki answered obediently.

Resisting a sigh Pepper let it pass. No good could come from insisting that he was allowed to have his own opinions without having to feel guilty about it so she chose not to press the issue. Instead she rolled down a window and scanned the area for Happy. When she didn’t immediately see him she merely waited. After only a few seconds he came into view as he circled the car. She knew he’d probably been making regular rotations around the car since they’d been stopped. That was just Happy, and it made her smile.

“Happy,” she called. Instantly he turned to the car, concern etched on his face. She had to smile at that too. Even though she was rarely in danger, or rather a danger Happy would have to deal with, the fact that she could always count on him to worry about her welfare made her happy. He made his way over to the car and she pulled up her purse. Searching for her wallet she withdrew a company credit card. “Buy me a pair of scissors please?”

“Scissors for what?” he asked.
“Cutting hair.”

“I don’t know if I should leave you alone that long,” he hesitated.

Pepper struggled not to roll her eyes. “He has not made an aggressive move on me yet and I don’t expect he will before you return. There’s a store that will probably sell them just across the street. Please Happy?” she asked giving him her sweetest smile.

Happy looked decidedly displeased. “Yeah, I guess,” he finally muttered.

“Thanks Happy, you’re a sweetheart,” she told him. As he took the credit card she waved and finally rolled up the window. Turning to Loki she tried to determine how he was dealing with everything. Loki, for his part, seemed to be doing his best to inspect his hands for anything out of the ordinary. Finally, Pepper did sigh. “Loki?”

Loki’s shoulders tensed and he seemed to curl in on himself. “Yes Miss Pepper?”

“It’s nothing sweetie I just wanted to know if you were still here with me.”

Loki stared uncertainly at the store in front of them. He was unsure if he would actually be able do this. He didn’t have any money and he was uneasy about having Miss Pepper pay for his things. Moreover, how was he to make any choices? He’d asked Miss Pepper but she had merely told him when they arrived at the various stores he was to look over everything and select what he wanted. That thought terrified him. What if either she or Tony found his choices objectionable? He could at least try to judge her reaction but without Tony here there was no way to discern how he would feel. Loki trembled. He didn’t know what was expected and feared to get it wrong. Pick what he wanted was too vague. He needed more guidance; more instruction. He didn’t dare ask a second time though. No, he needed to learn how to get this correct. He needed to know what was expected of him. He would play this safe for now. He would figure out what was expected and learn how to please his master and his master’s woman. His one worry was that his master was not going with them. Without Tony here how would he know what to pick? Taking a deep breath and releasing it slowly he tried to calm himself.

As they entered the store Pepper watched Loki closely. He seemed indecisive and yet that was expected. Of course Loki would be nervous. She worried her lower lip through her teeth and tried not to overtly reassure Loki. Loki would definitely not appreciate it and would only serve to make him more nervous. She refused to do that. If she wanted Loki to regain anything of his own cognitive abilities then she couldn’t interfere.

Loki stood in the dressing room and shook. Was he really expected to undress in such a public forum and then redress? A small, soft, whine escaped his lips and Loki struggled to control himself. Tony wanted him to go with Miss Pepper. Tony wanted him to do this. He needed to find a way to force himself to press through this discomfort. On Asgard nudity was vastly not so overrated but Loki still found himself uncomfortable being without clothes while in public. If only his master was here. Tony always made him feel better. Not wanting to displease Miss Pepper Loki finally stripped off his clothes and tried on the new ones.
Pepper scrubbed her hands over her face. Currently Loki was in a dressing room trying on things. His inability to decide on things was wearing but she understood it. While she didn’t know everything about his position here she quickly realized his reticence at making any decisions and respected it. It made her want to find whomever had hurt him and vent her displeasure on them all the more. Whenever she felt that he liked a specific set of clothing she bought it and more like it. There was no sense pressing him when that was likely to only make him feel worse. She desperately hoped against hope Tony would realize the same thing but sometimes Tony really was clueless. Loki emerged from the dressing room wearing his new clothes and looking decidedly nervous.

“Looks great!” Pepper complimented. “Okay more clothes to try on.”

“I, uh… If you wish?”

“Nope,” she denied. “Your choice.”

By the time they arrived back at the tower Loki was more than nervous. Though Miss Pepper was alright with his choices he was unsure if his master would approve. He had spent his master’s money and did not even know if his master would like his choices. Ultimately his safety rested in Tony’s hands. At this point he was seriously considering flirting with his master solely to help his placement but decided against it. His master was smarter than that. He would know better, Loki was sure. If he flirted without feeling anything his master would question him and that could lead to all kinds of problems. Still, that left Loki with limited options to appease his master’s anger. Pepper placed a hand on his back as if to give him strength though.

“Loki?”

“Yes Tony?” he answered obediently.

“You okay?”

“I…” Loki hesitated.

“Don’t answer if you’re uncomfortable, okay?”


Tony ran a hand through his hair and shook his head sadly. “Don’t do that,” Tony finally stated. “Don’t just agree just because.”

“What do you wish of me … Tony.”

“Fuck I don’t know. I wish you’d stop thinking of me as your master. I wish you’d accept that I care about you. I wish this hadn’t happened to you. I wish… fuck I don’t even know!”

“Tony stop,” Pepper ordered.

“I can’t help him if he doesn’t trust me!” Tony yelled.

“Uh huh,” she stated simply. “And how exactly is his he supposed to trust you when you act like this?”

“Me? Look how he’s acting?” Tony questioned, waving a hand vaguely at Loki.

“And just how is he acting Tony? Terrified? Scared of you when you’re yelling at him and he can’t
even defend himself? You could beat him senseless and he wouldn’t raise a hand to defend himself. Of course he’s scared when you raise your voice.”

“I would never-”

“It’s not about what you would do to him Tony. It’s about what he’s scared of that might happen. To him, anything is possible. Put yourself in his shoes, Tony, and choose your next words wisely.”

They waited in silence and Loki forced himself not to fidget. He hoped this woman was not predicting that his master would beat him. Still a physical beating might hurt less than other things so maybe he should just accept that and be grateful.

“Your, uh, your hair looks better,” Tony stammered. “I like it better like this. I mean, more even and stuff.”

“Thank you Tony,” Loki answered obediently.

“Loki, would you like to go put your things away?” Pepper asked.

“If I am allowed.”

“Yes, definitely. I don’t want them getting any more wrinkled than they already are by staying in the bags.”

“Yes Miss Pepper,” Loki replied before taking a handful of bags and staring down at the others. There was no way he could carry them all at once. Suddenly Barton was there.

“I’ll help,” the archer told him, snagging the last few bags.

Loki nodded appreciatively and headed for his room. He wasn’t a fool. As much as she wanted him to put his things away she also wanted to talk to Tony alone. If Barton wanted to help him put his things away then so be it. It wasn’t as if the task did not need to be done. He would appreciate the help as well. It would give him time to ask questions of his own if he could gain the nerve to do so.

“About his hair,” Pepper began. “Obviously you haven’t tried to even it yourself yet or you’d already know.”

“What about his hair?” Tony asked cautiously. Obviously there was something of importance there or Pepper wouldn’t have brought it up. He was suddenly nervous about his comment to Loki.

“Hair seems to be important to people where he comes from. They cut it that way to mark him. It was a way to shame him. And no, I’m not telling you this just to upset you. I almost had to deal with a panic attack in the car because I suggested we cut it. Your remark about how it looks better now was probably the best thing you could have said. Do not suggest it needs to be shorter.”

“If it being cut this way marks him as a slave then-”

“I don’t know and I don’t suggest you ask. It seems to be a touchy topic. Also…”

She hesitated and Tony wasn’t sure what to expect.

“You might want to be careful about suggesting he let it grow.”

“Wait a minute. First you tell me not to ask about it being shorter then you tell me not to suggest he
“let it grow?”

“Where he comes from that would be like stating you wish him to spend every night in your bed.”

“I do want him in my bed,” Tony shot back.

“As a sex slave?”

Tony recoiled. “I-. No, that’s not- I didn’t mean-”

“I know what you meant Tony. And no, I don’t think you’re that kind of person. I’m just telling you this so you don’t have any unfortunate misunderstandings. Cutting his hair shorter would mark him as less than a slave. Letting it get too much longer would suggest you only care about him for the sex. You really need to sit down with him and talk about things. For now what you need to do is reassure him it was all right for him to buy everything. I think he’s still nervous about us using your company card to pay for things.”

“Right,” Tony stated, heading for Loki’s room. Pepper grabbed his arm and halted him.

“No, not right now. Right now let him have time with Clint.”

Tony growled at that thought.

“Tony they did share something unique. If Clint is going to stay at the tower they need time to work through it. Keeping Clint away from him and acting like a jealous lover is only going to make Loki nervous. Is that what you want?”

“Loki is not his,” Tony argued.

“You’re right. But he’s not yours either. Loki is not some piece of property you need to fight someone over Tony. Loki is a flesh and blood person. Right now he’s a severely damaged person and you need to respect that. You also need to sit down and have a discussion about triggers eventually.”

Tony almost winced at the mere thought. Pepper had forced him to sit down and have this same conversation when they’d been together. As much as he didn’t want to discuss this with Loki he knew he probably should. It was actually good advice if he could stomach it. Loki did deserve to have someone respect him enough to understand what upset him but Tony wasn’t sure if he could stand another conversation like that.

“You… do not trust master Tony?” Loki asked.

“It’s not that,” Clint told him. “I was just worried about you.”

“Why?” Loki asked honestly curious.

“Damn it Loki!” Clint shouted.

Loki winced and flinched away.

“Damn. Sorry Loki, I didn’t mean to make you uneasy. I just… Look, I was worried about you okay?”

He wanted to ask why yet again but he was too scared. Anger from others was never a good thing
and Loki found he couldn’t speak. Even knowing they were no longer connected he willed his thoughts to Barton in hopes the archer would be able to read them. Not surprisingly the archer did not pick up on his thoughts.

“Loki?”

“I… I am well. Do not worry over me?”

Barton let out an unhappy laugh. “That’s just it. I can’t not worry about you. Damn it Loki can’t you understand why I can’t help but worry?”

“No,” Loki whispered, honestly unable to understand Barton’s point.

“Fuck,” Barton cursed.

Loki huddled in on himself more. “I am sorry I disappointed you master Barton,” he stated honestly.
Bless all of you for commenting and sticking with me. Hopefully this chapter is worth the read. Slowly, ever so slowly, things might start looking up for our poor babies.

Sitting alone in his workshop Tony fidgeted with random things on the table. He wasn’t sure what to make of the things Pepper told him. Finally she had left to talk with Bruce about Loki’s injuries. Damn he wanted a drink. Shaking his head in resignation he realized he had to deal with everything else first. If he started drinking now he was never going to deal with any of this crap. Rubbing his hands over his face Tony thought about where to begin. Okay, so begin at the beginning he thought to himself. If we were starting with the first issue then he needed to figure out what happened last night.

“JARVIS,” he called.

“Yes sir?”

“Can you play the footage from last night when I was sleeping in Loki’s room?”

“I would ask if that does not break the privacy protocols for master Loki’s room,” the AI intoned.

“I’m not asking for any of the footage I was not specifically a part of. Since I was in the room at the same time, no, it’s not breaking protocol. Just play the video.”

“Yes sir,” JARVIS replied. Without further protest the footage from when he first entered Loki’s room began. He watched as Loki helped him through his mini panic attack. He watched everything until they lay down, facing each other, and finally fell asleep. He fast forwarded until he saw Loki’s eyes open and hit play once more. For a while Loki lay still staring at the ceiling seemingly lost in thought. He cringed as he watched himself curl around Loki and snuggle against the other man. When Loki called his name softly Tony leaned forward to make sure he didn’t miss anything. And then, completely stunned, he watched as his sleeping self leaned over and kissed Loki. Wincing Tony mentally cursed himself. Damn it. That would definitely explain why he Loki had been so withdrawn this morning. Then, as video continued he watched in complete horror as he ordered Loki to kiss him again and then nibbled at his ear.

“I am such a moron,” he muttered.

Just kill me now, he thought as he dropped his head into his hands. After everything he’d told Loki he couldn’t fault Loki’s mistrust after something like that. His actions had completely belied all the reassurances he gave Loki. Loki would be completely justified in mistrusting him after something like that. There was a soft beep and a few chirps next to him and Tony raised his head. Just to his left Dum-E was waiting, holding the dunce cap extended out to him in his claw. Tony dropped his head onto the worktable and groaned. He really needed to make this up to Loki. The problem was how to fix something like this.
Loki examined his new clothing carefully. Anything he had shown even the slightest interest in Miss Pepper bought and several more almost just like it. Normally he would be exceedingly nervous about being gifted so many things. Any gift a slave received always came with a price. And yet, somehow, he didn’t believe for one second Miss Pepper would expect anything in return. He smiled slightly as he remembered shopping with her. Yes, it had been vaguely nerve wracking but there had been something calming about it as well. As Midgard did not do slavery he had been able to behave as if he were an equal. He felt more like himself, his old self, than he had in a long time.

Choosing an image free light blue T-shirt and a pair of lightly faded denim pants he removed his garments and pulled on the clothing. He still felt as if he were missing something and reexamined his closet. Reaching back in he grabbed a light gray hoodie, pulled it on, and zipped it. He pulled the hood up and instantly felt better. Yes this, he thought to himself. He felt… protected. Safe. When he was done dressing he wandered into the common room looking for Tony. His injuries needed to be cleaned and rebandaged.

“Hey,” the archer stated uneasily.

Loki hesitated.

“Wait, just hear me out first, okay?”

“Do I have a choice,” Loki muttered.

Barton gave him a strange look. “Of course you have a choice. How could you think that I of all people would force you to do anything?”

Loki sighed. “I am sorry. I would claim my new position but there is more to it.”

“Talk to me,” Barton demanded. “Please?”

“I hurt you,” Loki stated sadly.

“No more than I could stand. Something else is wrong. What’s up Loki?”

“How do you feel about master Tony?” Loki asked.

Barton seemed taken aback. Obviously this was not a turn the archer expected the conversation to take, though really it was only logical, Loki thought. Still, he waited for the archer’s response patiently. He had learned patience was the best course of action when dealing with the archer. Finally Barton sat down on one of the chairs and glared at the ground just in front of him.

“He holds power over you,” Barton stated simply.

“He is my master,” Loki replied just as blandly.

“See, that’s what I’m talking about. He could hurt you and you couldn’t stop him. If that ever happened…”

“Do you believe he will?” Loki asked, honestly curious.

“No,” Barton answered defeatedly. “Tony’s… well… he’s just Tony. I mean stuff usually blows up around him but he always means well. But see, that’s the problem. Stuff always blows up around him. I just don’t want you caught in the crossfire.”

“Tony has never hurt me,” Loki finally whispered.
“He has,” Barton disagreed. “I don’t know how but I do know something happened.”

“Tony has never hurt me intentionally,” Loki amended.

“I can buy that,” Barton answered. “I just… I mean, after our bonding…”

“You worry?” Loki hazard a guess.

“Yeah.”

“Please do not worry. Master Tony has had every opportunity to hurt me and, to date, he has not. He has done all within his power to protect me and make sure I feel safe.”

“Honestly?” Barton asked.

“Honestly,” Loki assured him.

“Hey Loki?”

“Yes?” Loki answered tensely.

“I’m glad Tony accepted you as a slave. I mean, I don’t mean that I’m glad you’re a slave but if anyone had to be your ‘master’ I’m glad it’s Tony.”

“Me as well,” Loki answered honestly.

“Hey Loki?”

“Yes?”

“You’d tell me if he ever hurt you wouldn’t you?”

“I would,” Loki answered truthfully. He opened his mouth to say more but Tony walked into the room. Loki dropped his head and eyed the ground at his feet. This would be the first time his master saw him in the new clothing and he was hesitant to meet Tony’s eyes.

“Am I, uh, intruding?” Tony asked sounding nervous.

Loki glance to Barton but was unable to read the archer’s expression.

There was no way that he could express anything he needed to say with Clint here but he did not want to deny Loki any comfort he could find. Especially not after what he’d discovered about his own actions. Tony frowned. Something was wrong but damned if he knew what it was. He really wished he knew what Loki and Clint had been discussing before his arrival but he didn’t ask. That was Loki’s story. If Loki wanted to tell anything about it then he would. After what he’d done he deserved this non-intelligence. Maybe he should have put on the dunce cap Dum-E had offered him.

“Tony?” Loki questioned, sounding decidedly nervous.

And damn if he wasn’t haven’t having a hard time tearing his eyes away from Loki in his new clothes. Gods those pants… Tony shook his head trying to clear it. “I uh, owe you an apology,” he stated. Loki seemed confused and Tony shook his head again.
“I don’t understand,” Loki told him.

“I think I should tell you I watched the video from us sleeping last night.” Loki took a step back and eyed him cautiously. Tony could understand that. He had promised Loki his room was safe and he wouldn’t violate it. Except that he had. Guilt welled up inside him and Tony glared at the floor. Nothing he’d felt before could compete with what he was feeling for betraying Loki’s trust.

“Okay,” Loki stated cautiously.

Tony fought not to rage against the bland comment. “Okay?” he repeated.

“It is your right as the… as your position.” Loki finished.

“It was a violation of your privacy,” Tony grumbled. “I am sorry about that.”

“I have no privacy as a-”

“Yep, stop right there,” Tony ordered. Loki froze and Tony had a hard time not flinching at Loki’s expression. “I told you it was your room. I should not have used my power to view things that happened inside it. And no, don’t say it’s my right. I made a promise and I broke it.”

Loki had no clue how to respond. That Tony would use his power to view inside of his quarters wasn’t something that surprised Loki. A master could enter a slave’s room whenever they pleased and the slave had no ability to disagree. Tony viewing what transpired was no less the same. In fact it was almost expected. Why wouldn’t Tony wish to know what happened?

“I, uh, would like to apologize,” Tony stammered.

“I do not know what to say,” Loki told him.

“Yeah and that’s my fault,” Tony answered. “I haven’t been very clear about what I wanted have I?”

“I… uh. That is not for me to decide?” Loki answered uncomfortably.

“Look I know I’m making you nervous and I’m sorry. I just wanted to apologize,” Tony muttered.

Loki glanced to Barton and realized the archer’s presence might actually be making his master nervous. “Master Barton, could you…”

“I think I should probably spend some time in the gym,” Barton answered. “So yeah, I’m going to go there and… uh… train.”

Loki almost smiled at how similar the two of them were. Before he could answer, even if he chose to, Barton turned on his heels and left. As grateful as he was, he was also terrified. He was now left alone with a master that wanted him and whose money he had spent. He owed Tony. Would Tony choose to collect in a more physical way? Tony ran a hand through his hair and Loki fought to keep staring at the ground.

“I really did mean I was sorry,” Tony said quietly. “I mean, not just for looking at the footage from your room. I’m sorry I ordered you to kiss me. I shouldn’t have done that.”

Loki was unsure how to respond. A master apologizing was new ground. Anything they did was excusable. He didn’t have a clue how to respond to such a remark.
"Dum-E even gave me the dunce cap for that."

"Dummy?" Loki stated confused.

"Yeah, a robot I created to help me. Usually I make him wear the dunce cap. Anyway, point is, he reminded me of what was important."

"Which was?" Loki asked almost breathless.

"You," Tony answered sounding confused. "How could it not be you?"

"I would not want to presume-"

"Yep, hold it right there. What did I tell you about preprogrammed responses?"

"I’m sorry but this is all so new," Loki stated. "Please do not be angry. I am unsure how to respond."

"Angry? Me? Gods Loki you really don’t have a clue do you?"

"No mas-. No Tony. Please tell me what you want?"

"The truth Loki. I want the truth. Can you forgive me? I don’t mean for just prying where I shouldn’t have been. I mean for what I did to you. Please?"

"Please stop?" Loki begged.

"Loki?"

"I mean… I don’t… there isn’t anything… I mean… Please stop?" Loki begged.

"Anything, just tell me," Tony assured him.

"Truely?"

"Truely."

"Then please do not debase yourself on my behalf. I… I couldn’t…"

"I’m not trying to upset you Loki. That’s why… Fuck!" Tony ran a hand through his hair and began to pace.

Nervously Loki watched, unsure of anything anymore. As slavery was a common thing on Asgard he knew master’s could be nice. Most of them were nice in fact. Only a rare few of slaves were mistreated and most of them were those that had been forced into slavery for the more grievous crimes. Most of the time slaves were a gift and it would be a vast breach of honor to mistreat a gift of that magnitude. Still, a master did not apologize. It was their right to do as they pleased so there was never a reason for an apology. That Tony would apologize to him for anything was unthinkable.

"I just wanted to say I’m sorry for what happened when I was sleeping. I never meant to force you to do anything you were uncomfortable with," Tony said quietly.

"I…” Loki trailed off unsure how to reply.

"New rule!" Tony announced suddenly.

"Yes?" Loki answered questioningly.
“Never, and I repeat never, obey any order I give when I’m sleeping or even half asleep.”

“I, no, I couldn’t disobey-”

“If you don’t agree to this than you’re already disobeying,” Tony pointed out.

“I… Tony please,” Loki begged. “I don’t know what to do. Either way I would be disobeying you!”

“No this is my conscious mind. This is the one you obey, not my sleep deprived mind. Understood?”

“That is not what I am used to. I am-”

“Stop,” Tony ordered, running a hand through his hair again.

Tony thought back on the things Pepper had tried to instill in him. “Okay, I know you’re struggling here, I recognize that.” Good, he thought. Recognize the other person. Accept their efforts and comment. So far so good. Damn he wished his people skills were better. “I am ordering… no scratch that. I won’t order you to do anything. I am asking you to only obey my waking requests. Okay?”

“I, I, I don’t know. Please Tony give me an order. An order I would know how to obey instead of this confusion!”

Walking forward Tony stood in front of Loki and eyed him carefully. This broken god needed something; needed him. He couldn’t fail here. He needed to make this right. Slowly he raised his hand and cupped Loki’s chin. Ever so carefully he lifted Loki’s face and leaned forward kissing him lightly on the lips and leaned back.

“I give you permission to disobey any order you are uncomfortable with or anything I say when I’m either asleep or half asleep. You will not be considered out of line or station or anything else you believe. You will be doing me a favor. Also, I will not be sharing a bed with you again until you are a your own person. You will have to initiate things or they will never happen again. Is that an order you know how to understand?”

“I, no. I mean… You’re… You’re the…” Loki shook his head as if to clear it. “No Tony, I understand your instructions. They are confusing but I believe I know what you mean.”

“Good. So… Uh, Clint?” Tony asked to change the subject. After seeing Loki’s face crumble he wished to the gods he didn’t believe in that he hadn’t.

“I believe master Barton is angry with me but it is hard to tell,” Loki replied quietly. “I think he mostly just worried over my position as your slave.”

Tony never did make the best decisions. While it was normal for him to poke the soft spot he should know better. Still he couldn’t help himself. “Clint wants you to be mad at me?”

“Actually, probably not. I will admit he confounds me as much as you,” Loki answered softly. “I honestly believe he has my best interest at heart. It is just I wish I could make amends to him, and yet, he will not let me. You I actually have an opportunity with. Please let me fix things master Tony?”

“Do not call me that!” Tony all but nearly shouted. How the fuck could he explain what that word meant to him? He never wanted to be addressed by that title. It was okay when JARVIS did it but that was it. He had programmed JARVIS. He could control JARVIS. Loki was different. Loki he
didn’t control. Well, not on purpose. Desperately he tried to remember how Pepper would handle this.

“Look, I really hate being called that. It’s just something from my past.” His past. Maybe if Loki understood more about him that would help. Maybe but, could he actually bring himself to discuss everything? Maybe he could have JARVIS do it? Or maybe not, he thought with a wince. Not being able to control the information being shared terrified him. Tony reached out a hand toward Loki. Loki took it tentatively and waited.

“Looks like my office is going to get some use after all,” Tony stated with resignation.

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“So wait a minute,” Pepper said, raising a hand to keep the other two men silent. Just when she thought things couldn’t get any stranger. “What you’re saying is when he was being tortured they used magic to keep his injuries from healing on their own?”

Bruce hesitated slightly. “Not exactly but close. As I understand it the ones that refuse to heal were given before he was tortured back on Asgard. Magic was used in addition to whatever they subjected him to and that forces them to heal slower.”

Pepper was silent as she thought about that. These injuries had been given to Loki by the people that tortured him to break him enough to attack Earth. That would mean… “He was at least this injured during the battle of New York.”

“Possibly more considering all the time he spent on Asgard afterward,” Bruce agreed.

“And after being tortured and mind controlled to attack and kill people against his will he was taken back to be humiliated and tortured more before being turned into a slave?” She knew she needed to calm down but she just couldn’t. “After learning that he was mind controlled how could they possibly do that to him?” she asked angrily. Bruce edged sideways a bit to put a little distance between them. Sighing Pepper tried to get her anger under control.

“I, uh, I’m pretty sure they don’t know he was mind controlled. See Loki told us about the trial and he wasn’t actually allowed to speak. They kept him muzzled the whole time.”

“They what?” Pepper asked, growling at the injustice of everything Loki had suffered.

“I did tell you that it was an unfair trial Miss Potts,” Steve told her.

Turning she glared at Steve. “And you knew he was here from the beginning? I love Tony but he’s not equipped to deal with anyone this damaged. He has his own issues. If nothing else then it’s guaranteed to set him off and cause him to have his own panic attacks.”

“The only other option was to call S.H.I.E.L.D. and Tony was adamant—”

“No,” Pepper disagreed. “You could have called me. When it comes to Tony you always call me first. I always clean up Tony’s messes. I always make sure he’s taken care of when things go wrong. That’s my job.”

Pepper continued to glare at the other man who very smartly chose not to disagree with her at this moment. It had been an amicable break up but she still felt protective of Tony. She had been protecting him from himself for a long time. It was a hard habit to break. Anything that could hurt Tony always set off her protective instincts. After everything she’d learned those protective instincts now included Loki.
“Pardon the interruption but I feel compelled to state that an emotional outburst at this point would be counterproductive to the discussion at hand,” JARVIS stated smoothly.

As much as she wanted to kill the AI for his perpetual calm she was actually grateful for his analytical thinking and rational observations. It helped ground her. Taking a deep breath she held it for a few seconds before finally releasing it. JARVIS was right. She’d come down here to see what they could do to help with Loki’s injuries. Doctor Banner had said he had an epiphany. She needed to hear him out. Composing herself she turned back to the doctor.

“You said you could help Loki?” she asked steadily.

“Uh, maybe?”

Crossing her arms she met his eyes and narrowed her gaze.

“I can’t be sure of anything,” Bruce protested. “I’m trying to counteract magic here.”

“So tell me what you know,” she demanded.

“Right,” Bruce said with a single, sharp, nod. “As I was saying there seems to be a buildup of negative ions surrounding his remaining injuries. Well except for the bruising and such but if those are from his, uh, if they’re from his time on Asgard—”

“Bruce,” Pepper stated calmly.

“Y-yes?”

“Get to the point.”

“Right,” he agreed. “Okay so I don’t know if it will actually do anything but I figure if we can neutralize the negative ions then maybe it might help. So I’m working on cooking up a positive ion solution that might help. Mind you I said might.”

“And you think you can heal these unhealable magical injuries?”

“Well technically they’re not unhealable.”

“Bruce,” Pepper stated with an inflection she knew even the mild mannered doctor wouldn’t miss.

“Right. I just figured if we could infuse them with positive ions then maybe we could neutralize the, uh, the magic. And maybe they could heal better.”

“Right. Okay, get started with that.”

“Uh, I probably should talk to Tony and—”

“And nothing,” she snapped. “You’d have to be blind to not see how much Tony cares about Loki. If you can do anything to help him Tony’s definitely going to be on board.

Loki turned the information over and over in his mind. Yes, he could definitely see how Tony could hate being called ‘master’ and would hate being handed things. By the nines he hadn’t realized Tony’s childhood would have been so similar. Loki paced. He hadn’t been able to sit still and Tony hadn’t seemed to mind. Tony hadn’t seemed to even see anything while he had recited his tale. Loki reached up and pulled the hoodie over his head. It was inexplicable but it made him feel better so he
didn’t question it.

“Lokes?”

Loki paused in his pacing. “Yes Tony?”

“Are you, I mean do you…”

“You mean do I think less of you now do you not?” he stated, still not moving.

“I, uh, yeah maybe.”

Loki made his way over to Tony and knelt down. Instead of dropping his head he met his master’s gaze. “No Tony, I do not think less of you. I think more. You should never have had to experience the things you’ve been through.”

“Can you please not… I don’t know, do that?”

“Kneel?” Loki asked.

“Yeah.”

Loki sat down and crossed his legs. “Is this better?”

“Yes,” Tony whispered.

Loki didn’t miss the haunted quality of his master’s voice. He knew exactly how it felt to have too many memories too close to the surface. More than anything he understood the distant look on Tony’s face and how he probably felt after sharing everything. Loki leaned forward and rested his head on Tony’s knee to let Tony know he wasn’t alone. A few of the words Tony used had been strange to him but Loki had been able to understand the basics of the story. He pulled his hands into the sleeves of his hoodie as he processed everything.

He wished he had a better understanding of what this ‘military school’ was but he could guess after the things Tony had said. That Tony had been a handful as a child was nothing of a surprise. That one's parents would try to alter their child's behavior to better fit their expectations was also not a surprise to Loki. His thoughts drifted to Tony’s tale of the ‘instructor’ that had like to be called ‘master’. Instantly Loki vowed never to slip again and use that term within Tony’s hearing.

Hearing how this other had hurt and terrified his Tony angered Loki. As much as he could empathize with Tony no child should have to endure such. This person may not have violated his Tony but he had still hurt him and Loki would readily gut this man. This man had made Tony fear for his life and well being. He had made Tony terrified to even breath wrong lest he be hurt. All the while Tony had been forced to call him master. Yes. Loki was pissed.

“Loki?” Tony asked sounding a little wary.

Loki sat up and met Tony’s eyes. “Yes?”

“You all right?”

“I am,” Loki assured him, trying his best to sound calm.

“You were growling.”

Was he? Loki could believe it even if he hadn’t known. Thoughts of anyone let alone a child
experiencing the things Tony had told him about definitely angered him. He tried his best to push those thoughts away and only focus on his mas... No. Not his master. Tony. He would have to keep it straight in his mind if he had any hopes of not letting that word pass his lips.

“I did not realize I was making such a sound. I will attempt to pay better attention in the future. For now could we not eat? I could make you a plate and bring it in here,” Loki offered.

Tony shook his head. “I think I’d rather just spend some time alone for a while,” he said quietly.

Loki chewed on his lower lip. He really did not want to leave Tony alone after everything he’d learned. Still, if that was what Tony wished then he would grant it. “As you wish. I will be in the common room if you have need of me.”

Tony nodded absently and Loki stood. Hesitating for a moment Loki lowered his head and finally left. He closed the door as quietly as possible and stood there staring at it. Now more than ever he wished he had access to his magic. He wanted nothing more in this moment than to find those responsible for the things Tony had suffered and hurt them.

“Loki?”

Miss Pepper Loki realized. He needed to pull himself together. It wouldn’t do for him to betray Tony’s secrets if she did not already know. Taking a deep breath he calmed himself and turned to face her. “Yes Mistress?”

Her arm wound around his shoulders comfortingly. “Hey, it’s all right. I know what the office means to Tony. He almost never goes in there. Did he talk to you about military school?”

Loki stared at her in silence for a moment then nodded. Realizing Miss Potts knew the story too, he could see just how much Tony must have trusted this one.

“Mistress Potts, How do you stop yourself from hunting down people who could do that to a child?”

Loki asked a little desperately.

“I didn’t.” she replied, stunning Loki for a moment.

Looking Loki straight in the eye Pepper sighed, “A day or two after he told me about it I started to track the bastard down. I soon found out that he died in an odd car accident about two weeks after Tony was sent home. While I can’t prove anything I believe his mother may have arranged it but Tony said he never told his parents about what happened there.”

Wishing he could have met this remarkable woman Loki replied, "Mothers always seem to know when their child is hurt.”
Chapter 14

Opening a drawer in the desk Tony pulled out the Rubik's cube, one of his favorite devices for keeping his hands busy. This was exactly why he had various things strewn about the office. If he was pacing something was always within reach but the Rubik’s cube was by far his favorite. It allowed him to take at least a part of his mind off the problem at hand. Gods had he really told Loki about his time at military school? His hands paused on the cube and he shuddered slightly. That had been one of the very few times his mother had disagreed with his father. After his stay at that school she had refused to let his father send him to another such school ever again. Tony never worked up the courage to ask why but he was grateful.

His hands resumed moving as his thoughts turned back to Loki. How did you help someone who had been through as much as Loki? He didn’t have enough information. He needed to know more. The problem was the only source he had for information was Loki and he really did not want to ask Loki anything. Suddenly Tony froze. No. That wasn’t quite right was it? He did still have the contract. He turned his head to the right and stared at the odd parchment sitting on top of a stack of paperwork. Slowly he set the Rubik’s cube down on the desk and picked up the contract. His hands shook as he unrolled the document and Tony snarled at himself. He would not allow himself to break down now. He would do whatever it took to help his Loki. This was no more than a bit of light reading. He could do this. Slowly he raised the paper and read.

“To the person that is actually able to read this I do this with a heavy heart. This part and a few of the others contained herein will not be visible to my son. I do not believe he is ready to hear or accept these words. Perhaps one day that will change. Know that I had no other choice. I must abide by the choices of the council. I used all of my considerable power to keep my son from being executed. In spite of everything he is still my son. If you can do anything to help him then you will have my eternal gratitude. I fear I may have grieved my son more than he is able to forgive but that is my burden to bear. Please help him remember who he truly is. My son is a good person even if he has lost his way. Please help him to remember that.

Know that my beloved wife saw her own demise and spent her last few days attempting to see the future and what would become of her favored son. She did not idly ignore him in her final days. It was at her behest that I sent him to you specifically in hopes that you could do what I could not. She loved him beyond measure, beyond reason, beyond life. She would never have left him in a time of need if there was another option. Please do not let him be angry at his mother.

His brother will also be angry when he learns what has transpired. I cannot foretell the future as my wife but I would warn you to use caution with him. I have sent him on a mission to another realm to keep him away. When he returns I fear he will hate me as much as my other son but it was needed if my youngest is to be redeemed. I leave one of my most treasured possessions in your hands. Please do not prove my wife’s predictions wrong. Please help him to find himself once again.”

‘To the owner of the slave formerly known as Loki:’

Tony threw the document onto his desk, stood up, and paced. Odin wanted him to ‘redeem’ Loki? There was nothing wrong with him to fix. Loki didn’t need to be redeemed, he needed to be understood. That Loki’s mother would do everything within her power to protect him didn’t surprise Tony at all. That was just what mothers did. Glancing down he slowly reached up a hand and let the pendant of Loki’s necklace rest on his palm. Aside from his clothing this was the only other thing Loki had upon his arrival; the only thing Loki had left from his mother. Although he probably should talk to Loki about her he really didn’t want to do that this recently after her death.
Thor was a different topic all together. He realized he really should have given thought to Thor before now. When he learned what happened Thor was going to kill him. No, Tony thought. He’s not going to kill me. He’s going to eviscerate me and I deserve it after what I did to Loki. After everything Loki had suffered he’d still forced Loki to do something he was uncomfortable with and deserved to be punished. The thought of Loki suffering broke through his mind and brought him back to the present.

“Oh Loki, I’m so sorry,” Tony whispered.

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Loki stared at the tub with mistrust. “I… appreciate your efforts Dr. Banner but I am well enough,” Loki stated.

“Nope,” Miss Pepper said. “If this has any chance of helping your injuries to heal better then we’re using it.”

“Yes Mistress,” Loki answered instinctively.

“I mean, not if you’re uncomfortable.”

“I am always uncomfortable Mistress,” Loki said quietly. He stood staring at the odd bathing chamber. “Can it not just be put into my normal bath?”

“I could spread the solution in your bath but I couldn’t keep the positive ions up,” Banner told him.

He did not know what to make of the doctor’s words. He knew Tony trusted this man but could he? What promise did he have that this man was not trying to harm him? Suddenly he needed his master. No, not his master. Tony. He really needed to keep this straight. He could not risk calling Tony master yet again.

“I will agree Mistress,” Loki replied. “That is, if my Tony does not disagree.”

- 

‘You may use whatever force you desire against the slave. He is to be granted no reprieve whatsoever.’

Tony couldn’t believe what he was reading. This document gave him complete leeway to torture another person. Tony wanted to punch something. How could this ever be right? Fuck no he wasn’t torturing Loki and Loki didn’t even deserve it. He’d been tortured enough and then been sentenced to life as a slave for crimes beyond his control. Tony paused at that. Loki had said sometimes a slave could be freed. Maybe there was something in the contract could give him a clue how to achieve that.

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“I know you’re uncomfortable and I’m sorry about that,” Pepper told Loki. “Please understand that Bruce only wants to help.”

“Yes Mistress.”

“Please don’t just blindly agree,” Pepper begged.

“Yes Mistress,” Loki replied once again.
Tony was bad enough but this? This she couldn’t handle. She needed to find a way to connect and keep Loki in the present.

“Master Loki, if you have time I feel sir would benefit from your presence,” JARVIS stated calmly.

“Ma- I mean, Mister Tony requires my presence?”

“No but I feel it might help his state of mind,” JARVIS stated easily.

“Am I needed?” Pepper asked.

“Not yet Miss Potts,” the AI said calmly. “I feel that master Loki would be more than sufficient.”

“What are we dealing with JARVIS?” Pepper asked.

“Master Tony seems agitated. I feel it would be in his best interest to carefully extract him from his office. I believe an offering of coffee might help.”

- 

‘The slave is yours to punish as you see fit. Please do not hesitate to-’

Tony threw the document onto the desk in disgust. Like fuck he would hurt Loki for no reason. But then what about the intro? It had been so different. Almost caring. Tony didn’t know what to do. Fuck he couldn’t deal with this. This is why he had Pepper. She dealt with things like this. Except that wasn’t right. Never had he been in a position where he held another person’s well being in his very hands. Suddenly there was a knock on the office door startling him. Tony hastily straightened the contract. Placing it back on the desk he leaned back in the chair trying to make it seem as if he hadn’t just been reading about how he was allowed to torture another person. He snatched up the Rubik’s cube.

“Come in,” he called.

The door opened revealing Loki. Tony frowned slightly at that. He wasn’t sure if he was ready to deal with Loki just yet. Still, if Loki was seeking him out maybe he should put his own crap aside and pay attention to the former god for now.

“I come bearing gifts,” the former god told him holding out a cup of coffee.

“Oh gods yes please,” Tony pleaded.

“No. Not until you exit this room,” Loki told him.

“Please?”

“No.”

“But coffee,” Tony pleaded.

“Then leave this room and I will set it on the table in the kitchen,” Loki insisted.

Loki noted the signs of Tony withdrawing in on himself and did his best to ignore them. It would not do for him to question Tony about them just now. Right now his Tony needed help and if he could give it then he would.
“You need to eat,” Loki stated.

“Not hungry,” Tony mumbled.

“It does not matter,” Loki told him. “You still need to eat.”

“You’re suppose to obey me,” Tony said meekly.

Loki shook his head. “As you gave no order I am technically not disobeying. What I would like to do now is make sure you are taken care of. Since you refuse to do that I am left with figuring out how to do that on my own. Besides, Mistress Potts would never forgive me if I did not take care of you. You do not want her to be angry with me do you?”

“I suppose not. Loki?”

“Yes… Tony.” Damn it was hard to not use the appellation.

“You didn’t forgive me. I really am sorry.”

Had he really not forgiven his Tony? “Yes Tony I forgive you. I recognize it was not your conscious mind. You have never willingly caused me distress. Please do not feel bad?”

“Loki?”

“Yes?”

“Do you know how much I love you?”

“You are hungry. You should eat. Please allow me to escort you into the kitchen.”

“You sound like Pepper,” Tony muttered.

Loki ignored the accusation. Tony was his to protect and he would do everything he could to make sure his Tony was safe. Besides, being compared to Mistress Potts was no great adversity in his mind. Loki tried not to sigh at his relief as Tony started to follow him. “Can you redress my wounds?” he asked.

“I can do anything if it helps you,” Tony told him.

“I would not want to impose Tony.”

“All right, I’ll eat.” Tony agreed. “We can take care of your injuries after. Pepper will probably be happy you actually pulled me out of the office,” Tony muttered.

Loki didn’t say a word. If Tony was agreeing he didn’t want to interfere. Still the thought that it was Pepper he was thinking of just now and not him hurt. Tony was his. Loki lost a step at the strength of thought but quickly recovered. No, he was Tony’s but Tony was most definitely not his.

“So, lunch?” Tony asked.

“It is past nine,” Loki informed him.

“At night?” Tony asked skeptically. “Uh, dinner then?”

“I would greatly appreciate it,” Loki informed him.
“Right.” Tony held out a hand. “So, care to hold my hand on the way?”

Loki pulled the hood up with the hand not holding the coffee and hid inside his hoodie before taking Tony’s hand. He didn’t know what to do to help his Tony. He would do anything if it was within his power. He really did not like leaving his Tony’s well being to another. He was Tony’s slave so it was only right.

Punish. Torture. Whatever force necessary. After everything Loki had suffered who in their right mind would hurt him more? Tony almost wished he believed in a God so he knew who to blame. Damn his head hurt. Halfway to the kitchen he veered off to the bar. He poured a drink and started to lift it. Suddenly someone snatched it out of his hands. Tony turned, a scathing insult on the tip of his tongue until he saw who it was and froze.

“No,” Loki stated firmly. “Food first or no alcohol.”

Tony’s mind stumbled at this new, more aggressive, Loki. This was a Loki he could definitely get behind. This was a Loki he could completely fall for. Like you haven’t already? his mind asked. He shook his head to clear it. No, this was a damaged and fragile Loki and he needed to protect him if possible. Just because Loki seemed to be getting better didn’t mean the damage was suddenly gone.


Before she left for the night Pepper wanted to check on Tony. If he was still in his office she was going to have to find a way to extract him. Pepper stopped and watched cautiously when Tony and Loki came into view. When Tony suddenly veer towards bar she winced a little but it was not unexpected after spending so much time in his office. When Loki snatched the drink out of Tony’s hands she wanted to protest but managed to hold her tongue. When Tony didn’t fight it she almost sighed in relief. Tony was a good person but like anyone his demons still haunted him. If Loki could help him with that then so much the better. She definitely did not need to stand in the way. Loki, carefully but efficiently led Tony to the table. As Loki seemed to be on top of things here she decided it was best not to interrupt.

Opening his dresser Loki pulled out a set of his new sleepwear. After dinner Tony had insisted on heading down to his workshop. Loki was sure the man needed sleep more than he needed to tinker on things. Still he had been unable to persuade Tony out of the notion without outright defying him. In spite of his earlier boldness the thought of outright defying Tony was still completely beyond him. He was still a slave after all. He had to make sure not to overstep his position too far. Even if Tony chose not to punish him for it then Heimdall would surely see and inform Odin. If that happened Odin was sure to order his return for retraining. A shiver ran through him at the mere thought of being returned to his trainers.

Anger filled him as he thought about the man who had sentenced him to the tender mercies of those ‘people’. During the time he spent being trained Odin had not even seen fit to visit once. Odin had taken everything from him. He had denied Loki the ability to defend himself, stolen the last time he could have seen his mother, allowed him to be tortured and sentenced him to life as another’s property, and promptly forgotten him. That Odin hadn’t even seen fit to visit even to gloat over him hurt which only fueled Loki’s anger. Tearing his thoughts away from such a dark place Loki changed into his sleepwear and finally crawled into the bed.
In sheer defiance of the things he’d been through Loki lay flat on his back with his head on the pillow. He could do this, he told himself. He had slept like this before. Not without Tony in the bed, his mind reminded him. Growling Loki turned onto his side. Closing his eyes he tried to relax. As the seconds slowly ticked by his anger and defiance began to ebb away. With the loss of those emotions the fear began to seep back into him. Finally when he could no longer take it his eyes shot open. Sitting up instantly he scanned the room but found no one lurking in the shadows. With a growl of frustration Loki shoved himself backwards until he was pressed against the headboard and curled into a ball.

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Wearily Loki trudged into the common room. It had been a long night filled with dreams he would much rather forget. He barely noted Barton and Miss Romanoff sitting on the couch as he headed for the kitchen. He hoped neither would start a conversation. He really was not prepared to deal with either of them at the moment. Barton might mean well his concern was beginning to wear thin. Retrieving his bowl and spoon he also snagged a coffee cup. He would wait until Tony arrived to fill it but it was always good to be prepared. Turning around he found himself face to face with Miss Romanoff, a coffee cup of her own in her hands. Sighing Loki set his bowl on the counter, took the cup from her, filled it, and handed it back to her. As he did not look up he completely missed the look of stunned surprise that crossed her features. Grabbing his bowl he made his way to the table and sat down.

He really should have expected this. Of course the others would expect him to serve them now that he was a slave. They were here as Tony’s guests. Vaguely he wondered what kind of tasks they would expect of him. His brain was still too fuzzy from lack of sleep for him to care about that overly much right now. Idly he reached for the box of cereal. When his hand failed to find anything he finally looked up and realized he had forgotten to grab it. Too tired to get up for now Loki dropped his head and merely sat there. After several seconds someone sat down at the table with him and he finally raised his head. Natasha Romanoff, who up until quite recently hated him and wished him harm, sat across the table from him holding his box of shredded wheat. As he watched she set the box on the table and slid it over to him.

“I think you forgot this,” said with small smile.

Loki tensed, unsure why this woman would debase herself by serving a slave.

“Loki?” she asked, face becoming unreadable.

“I… I am unsure what is required of me to repay you for this service,” he answered tentatively.

Her eyes lifted slightly to look over Loki’s shoulder.

“It’s okay Nat, I understand,” Barton stated from behind him. A few seconds later the archer was kneeling next him. “Hey Loki?”

Loki turned to face Barton.

“It’s not the same here. If someone does something nice for you then you don’t have to do anything to repay them. She doesn’t expect anything in return.”

Loki shook his head. “It’s only not the same because Midgard does not do slavery. I am from Asgard. The laws clearly state-”

“No,” Barton disagreed. “Those laws do not apply here. She doesn’t expect anything from you in
“return, okay?”

“I…” Loki trailed off.

“Why does he think he owes me for bringing him a box of cereal?” she asked.

“Because when someone does a service for a slave on Asgard the slave is always expected to repay that person somehow. Though technically Loki is required to ask for Tony’s permission before he can even accept anything. With Tony not here and Loki not knowing what you might ask for in return it’s making him nervous.”

“What happens if he doesn’t ask Tony first?”

“Then the slave is punished. The type punishment depends on the master.”

“And if I ask for more than he’s willing to give?”

Loki flinched and began to tremble.

“If you were to ask for something he’s forbidden to give he can tell you his master wouldn’t allow it. If you asked for something he feels is too steep he could check with his master to see he has the option to refuse the trade but that’d be risky.

Still half dead to the world around him Tony staggered to the elevator. Damn he needed coffee. At least he’d managed to get quite a bit accomplished before passing out on the couch in his workshop. The elevator finally arrived at his floor and Tony stumble out of it and towards the kitchen. He stopped just inside the common room when he heard voices. Raising his head he saw Loki, Tony and Natasha at the kitchen table.

“It’s far safer for him to just give you what you want.”

“The fuck it is,” Tony growled. Natasha and Clint turned to face him. Loki jerked almost as he’d been struck and began trembling. Tony stalked into the kitchen and stood protectively just behind Loki. As Tony put his hands on Loki’s shoulders Clint stood up from where he’d been kneeling next to Loki. “Loki, you do not have to do anything you don’t want.”

“And no one was suggesting otherwise Tony,” Clint shot back.

“I just walked into a conversation with you literally telling him to just give her whatever she wanted!”

“You walked into the tail end of conversation you know nothing about!”

Loki shook even harder as the voices rose and the pair continued to argue. Bad. This was so very bad. Somehow, someway, this was all going to come back on him and he was going to be hurt. He needed to do something. He needed to stay out of it. He needed… Oh norns he didn’t know but he knew he was going to be hurt. Tony’s grip on his shoulders tightened painfully and Loki struggled not to draw away.

“Both of you stop!” Miss Romanoff shouted suddenly.

Silence finally descended but Loki refused to open his eyes.
“Tony, you really did just come in at a bad time. Clint was only explaining things, not ordering Loki to do anything. Clint, you out of all of us would know what arguing with Loki’s master would do to his state of mind. Not to mention you two knuckleheads managed to place him directly between you both. Both of you want to protect him but right now you’re only terrifying him more. So both of you stop yelling and, Tony, you’re knuckles are white. Loosen your grip on his shoulders.”

For several seconds nothing happened. Then, suddenly, Tony’s hands disappeared from his shoulders. Just as suddenly the chair Loki was seated in was pulled away from the table and turned to the left.

“Loki?” Tony asked quietly.

“Y-y-yes T-Tony?” Loki stammered.

“Hey, it’s okay. Nothing is going to happen to you okay?”

Silently nodding Loki slid from the chair and onto his knees. “I apologize for causing a disruption. Please do not be angry at the others,” Loki whispered.

“No Loki,” Barton stated firmly. “Nothing that happened was your fault.”

“It is other sir. If I had not panicked when she retrieved my cereal-”

“No,” Miss Romanoff stated firmly. “That’s not going to work Loki. We’re not going to play that game. If you backtrack it far enough then it’s my fault for not understanding your situation better. I’ve had plenty of time to ask questions and gather intel, yet I didn’t. So wouldn’t that make it my fault?”

“I, no, it’s not the same,” Loki disagreed.

“Arbitrarily working backward until you can blame yourself is exactly the same thing,” she argued.

Loki whimpered slightly.

“Loki?” Tony asked.

And gods his voice was laced with so much concern Loki wanted to throw himself forward and let Tony hold him. He didn’t know if Tony would ever want to comfort him again after all the dissention he’d caused. If he had only known what was expected of him none of this would have happened and no one would be angry.

“Loki?” Tony asked again sounding even more concerned. “I really need some kind of response here.”

“Yes?”

“Can you lift your head for me?”

“I… could but…”

“But it would make you uncomfortable, got it. Then don’t worry about it for now. For now can you stop kneeling?”

“Yes. I can do that,” he whispered. He shifted positions and crossed his legs. Looking at a master was hard for now. Letting his Tony dictate how he sat was easier. He was used to being ordered into various positions. A shiver ran through him as the memories of what they’d done to him in those
positions filled his mind. Suddenly there was a hand on his shoulder and Loki flung himself forward until he lay flat.

“No please! I did as you asked! Don’t punish me any more! I did as you asked!”

Loki’s loud and abrupt outburst shocked Tony. For a while he stood there frozen, unable to move. Finally he couldn’t take it. He knelt down next to Loki to reassure but Natasha was there with a hand on his outstretched arm.

“No don’t,” she stated shaking her head. “He’s in a flashback Tony. You’ll have to handle this carefully.”

“How do you know it’s a flashback and not something else?”

“Have you ever ‘punished’ him?”

Tony shook his head. “No, never.”

“Then there’d be no reason for him to ask you not to punish him more.”

She had a point. “Okay, so what do we do then?”

“Clint, you were connected to him so you’d know the most. Are any slave owners or trainers women?” Natasha asked swiftly.

“Uh, I think some of the owners are women. I don’t know about the trainers. That was never any part of the information I got. I think I only got the information on slavery because he thought of himself as a slave at the time.”

“Got it,” Natasha stated. “Not an owner then. A trainer.” Natasha slid effortlessly to her feet and stood less than a foot from Loki. Her posture morphed and almost instantly she took on an air of authority bordering on menacing. “Stop your useless begging slave,” Natasha growled loudly.

Loki’s brows drew down and he seemed momentarily confused.

Tony started to say something but Natasha beat him to it.

“Right now you’re mine to command. You will do as you are told or you will not like the consequences.”

“But I-”

“Do not make me punish you.”

“Y-yes mistress,” Loki whispered. “Please… Just don’t punish me?”

“That is for me to decide.”

“Yes mistress,” Loki whispered defeatedly.

“Hm, I wonder. Can you truly follow orders without earning a punishment? After all the trouble you’ve given the others I would highly doubt it. Shall we test it?”

“If-if you wish,” Loki stuttered.
“I find that I would very much like to test this.” Sitting down in the nearest chair she planted her feet firmly on the floor legs slightly apart. “Hands and knees,” she ordered. Loki complied instantly and Tony glared at her. Natasha only ignored him.

“You know her,” Clint whispered. “Just trust her. She knows what she’s doing.”

“Now stand,” she commanded. Quickly Loki stood without hesitation. “Two steps forward, slave.” Loki took two steps forward. The move put him slightly beside her and easily within arms reach. “I am going to put my hands on your waist and guide you now. I want you to follow my lead and move as I move you. Understood?”

“Yes mistress,” Loki replied without raising his head.

Reaching up she put her hands high on Loki’s waist, well above his hips. Firmly but with obvious care she turned him slightly and guided him down until he was sitting on one of her legs. She slid the other leg underneath him to balance the weight. Tony wanted to yank Loki off of her lap. Loki was his.

“Now, slowly and easily, lean sideways against my chest,” Natasha ordered.

As Loki complied a small shiver shook through Loki.

“Slave?”

“Yes mistress?”

“Tilt your chin upward slightly.” Loki complied and Natasha placed one hand on his back and her other hand on the arm not tucked between them. “Now, listen carefully. Slowly, open your eyes and look directly into mine.”

“Mistress, I am not allowed. That would be-”

“You wish to disobey and earn a punishment?”

“No mistress.”

“Then do as I say. I will not ask again.”

Shaking even more and slowly, ever so slowly, Loki opened his eyes. Their eyes met and both parties stared, unblinkingly, at each other. Tony desperately wanted to scoop Loki into his arms and take him into his room; not Loki’s room, but his own. He wanted to make sure that Loki was all right and knew he was safe. He wanted to-

“Miss Romanoff?”

“It’s me and don’t move just yet, okay?”

“I- … I don’t know-”

“What happened? I’m sure that you don’t. Everything is fine though because I know what happened. I promise it will all be explained soon. For now, are fully back in the present with us?”

“I believe so,” Loki said quietly.

“Do you need to take a little more time?”
“I… I do not want to impose on you further.”

“I’ve had my fair share of flashbacks. You take all the time you need.”

“I am sure I must be heavy.”

“You might be a bit heavy,” she acknowledged. “But if you get up before you’re ready it’ll just take longer the next time.”

“I would like to apologize for-” Loki began.

Tony cleared his throat loudly and Loki’s head whipped around to face him. As soon as their eyes met Loki’s eyes went wide and jumped slightly. The action unbalanced him and he would have fallen if not Natasha’s grip on him. They still would have fallen if Clint hadn’t reached out to rebalance the pair.

“Loki,” Natasha stated calmly. “If you want to stand at any time you may but there’s no rush. There’s also no reason to be nervous and none of us are angry at you.”

Lowering his head Loki whispered, “I would like to stand.”

“Can Tony help you?” Natasha asked softly.

Loki nodded still not meeting anyone’s eyes. Tony was too happy Loki was finally calm to force him to do anything that might make him panic once again. Carefully he helped Loki stand up and Natasha ran her hands over her thighs briskly. Tilting his head slightly Loki almost met her eyes but not quite.

“You should not have harmed yourself for my benefit,” Loki said quietly.

Natasha cocked an eyebrow and crossed her arms.

“Harmed her?” Clint asked smiling. “That’s funny. Seriously, though, I’d be careful about making more remarks like that. She might harm you,” he stated with a laugh.

Tony smiled at the confused look on Loki’s face then took pity on him. “They’re just playing with you Loki. You know, joking?”

“Okay?” Loki replied, still sounding unsure. “Tony?”

“Yeah buddy?”

“I don’t know. I would like, I mean if it would not upset you, I would like to go to my room but I also do not want to be alone just now.”

“I’m not laying down with you Loki.”

“No I’m too wound up to lay down but I also don’t want to be alone.”

Tony thought about that for a while. Even if he didn’t lay down with Loki he really didn’t feel comfortable entering Loki’s room right now. His guilt about what happened the last time he’d spent the night with Loki was still too strong. But what could he do if Loki really didn’t want to be alone? Suddenly an idea struck him and Tony reached for Loki’s hand. He managed to stop himself before he snagged it.

“Can I, uh, you know?”
“Hold my hand?”

“Only if you don’t mind.”

“I do not mind,” Loki told him.

His voice was still too quiet for Tony’s liking and he was still a bit skittish but there was an actual, genuine, abiet small, smile. They linked hands and Tony led Loki to the elevator. He knew exactly where to take Loki. He was almost surprised when Loki guessed before they actually arrived before remembering the night Loki had spent just outside of the workshop.

“We are heading to your lab,” Loki stated sounding slightly surprised. “Anthony, you never let others into your lab.”

“I let a few people in on occasions. And I usually call it the workshop but yeah.” He was more happy than he wanted to admit to when he heard both Loki calling him Anthony and the surprise in the former god’s voice. Suddenly Loki stopped walking, jerking them to a halt.

“I, wait, Anthony wait,” Loki pled. “Please?”

“Okay, you’re fine. Just talk to me. What’s wrong Loki?”

“It is truly not a lab, is it? It is more of a workshop?”

“Well yeah. I mean there’s a section set up for Bruce that’s kind of more like a lab but overall it’s my workshop. I can’t help if I don’t know what’s wrong babe?”

“It’s just… You mix things, potions, in this lab?”

“Me? Not usually. Bruce does sometimes.” Loki seemed to pale and Tony was completely at a loss.

“Potions your doctor will use on me?” Loki asked shakily.

For several seconds Tony continued to stare, still completely confused.

“It is just that on Sanctuary and then again on Asgard there were… potions. Potions for healing, yes, but also other less pleasant ones. Please Anthony, don’t make me take-”

Finally Tony’s brain kicked into gear and he could have smacked himself. “No Loki, no no no. It’s nothing like that. Potions, on earth, I mean.” Fuck. Tony took a deep breath before beginning again. “We don’t have anything like those kinds of potions on Earth. We do have medicine for healing, which might be similar to your healing potions, but those would never be mixed down here. We don’t have the equipment for that. And I don’t think any of us would even begin to know how to mix anything else you might consider one of the other potions.” Loki continued to eye him distrustfully.

“Your doctor has professed a desire to mix a ‘solution’ for me and Mistress Potts has told him to proceed.”

Mistress Potts. Loki still called Natasha Miss Romanoff so Tony filed away the difference of titles for later. “What kind of a solution?”

“His words were strange to my ears though he did use ‘negative’ ions and ‘positive’ ions many times. He claims it is for help with my injuries but admits it will be, ‘uncomfortable’.”

“Loki, I promise you Bruce only wants to help you. I don’t know what to tell you about the solution
until I talk with him about it. When I know more then I’ll be able to explain it better to you. If you’re still uncomfortable then we won’t use it, it’s that simple.”

“Truly?”

“Truly. Didn’t I give you my word on that?” Finally, an honest smile and Tony could have fainted.

“So, your workshop?”

Right, that, Tony thought. Letting go of Loki’s hand Tony walked forward. He shifted slightly out habit to block any prying eyes, and keyed in the code. The doors opened and Tony motioned Loki forward. Standing between the sliding doors, just on the threshold, Loki stared into the workshop. Astonishment spread over Loki’s features and Tony grinned.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

I did the best research I could as quickly as possible but I'm not a chemist. Sorry?

Tony and Loki spend time in the workshop, Clint has things to take care of, and we have a group meeting.

There was just no way to describe the inside of Tony’s workshop. While one could technically call the area ‘clean’ it was all but the personification of chaos. Items of indeterminate use and various tools covered almost all the surfaces. An area with various lighted alcoves house several versions of Tony’s suits. There was a workstation near the middle that contained several electronic devices and displays that Loki couldn’t even begin to describe.

“So, what do you think?” Tony questioned.

Loki shook his head. “I fear much of this is beyond my understanding.”

“I’ll explain any of it you want to know more about,” Tony said in rush. “Uh, I mean, that is, if you wanted to know more…”

“I don’t know yet. I am still taking in everything,” Loki stated distractedly.

Tony grinned. “Take all the time you need, I’m just gonna go work on a few modifications to one of my suits. If you need anything let me know and-... Dum-E no!”

Loki tensed at the sudden shout and froze instinctively.

Tony sighed. “Sorry, he’s just a bit protective.”

“He?” Loki asked warily.

“Yeah. Loki I’d like you to meet Dum-E,” Tony said nodding to Loki’s left.

Loki looked left and finally saw Tony’s creation for the first time. Tony held his breath, nervous about how Loki would view the bot holding a fire extinguisher, ready to use it to defend him or the workshop at a moment's notice.

“So named because I wanted to irritate my father. My mother loved word games so I made it, D-U-M, hyphen E,,” Tony explained.

“Hello... Dum-E?”

The bot chirped angrily and Tony sighed.

“He’s allowed to be in here so don’t talk back to me,” Tony snapped. “And I swear if you use that fire extinguisher on him I’ll gut you and turn you into a table lamp!” The bot chirped and beeped several more times and the claw holding the fire extinguisher dropped almost in a depressed manner.
Tony would have almost felt sad for the bot in question if he hadn’t been on the receiving end of said fire extinguisher repeatedly.

“He does not like me?”

“It’s not that. He’s just… Really attached to the fire extinguisher and a bit over protective,” Tony answered.

“I am glad,” Loki replied. “You deserve someone to watch over you as vigilantly as he.”

Tony was absolutely floored. He didn’t have a good response for that. That Loki would be happy Dum-E was overprotective wasn’t any of the reactions he’d expected.

“Tell me, why a fire suppressor though?”

“I, uh, actually I don’t know. He just seems really attached to it so I never bothered to question it. It’s actually come in fairly useful on occasion though.”

“Truly?”

“Yeah,” Tony told him, rubbing the back of his neck. “He’s had to use it occasionally.”

“Why am I not surprised, Anthony?”

“Uh, because it’s me?”

Loki chuckled and Tony dropped his head to keep Loki from seeing his grin.

“I am pleased to make your acquaintance Mr. Dum-E,” Loki stated, almost formally.

The bot in question chirped and beeped several times before rolling away. Tony snickered and Loki looked confused.

“He kind of reacts that way to any new person in my workshop. Trust me, before long he’ll love you as much as I do,” Tony assured him.

Loki didn’t know how to respond to that so he didn’t try. He ignored this profession of love as much as the last. Obviously Tony did not mean it. He couldn’t. Gods of Asgard, though, he wished Tony did mean those words. There was nothing he wanted more than one person that truly did care for him. If Tony ever really did ever come to care for him though…

“If you want to look around feel free,” Tony told him.

“If you are sure,” Loki stated cautiously. Tony waved a hand in a vague shoo-ing motion and sat down at the work table. He would dearly love to walk around inspect the things here but he also respected the area for what it was. This place was to Tony what Loki’s study back on Asgard had been to him. A place where he could think, invent, create, and study without interruptions or worry. Never would he have ever dreamed of allowing another to roam freely through his study. This was a level of trust that left Loki speechless. Slowly he turned in a circle trying to decide what to inspect first.

As he had no knowledge of such equipment he ignored the workstation with several electronic displays for now. Clasping his hands behind his back he made his way over to one of the tables nearby and inspected the various items on it. Several things caught his attention but he didn’t dare
pick up any of them for a better look. A slave did not touch their master’s property without explicit permission. Tony had shown an amazing amount of trust by just allowing him in here. He would not betray that trust.

As he continued his cautious exploration of Tony’s workshop his hands itched to pick up various items he came across. Loki tightened his hands behind his back to remind himself not to touch anything. While everything seemed completely chaotic he realized there was also a sense of order in that chaos. He couldn’t describe it but he could somehow sense it. If there was something Loki could definitely appreciate it was organized chaos. Turning around to inspect elsewhere he almost tripped over Tony’s robot. He managed to stop just before he ran into it but only just barely.

“I did not touch anything,” he told it.

The robot did not reply. Perhaps it only responded to Tony? As his thoughts turned back to Tony Loki cast a quick glance to the man in question. Tony had what looked like a boot from one of his suits without the cover on it. He was using some kind of tool that looked like an misshapen, oversized, writing utensil. Curious Loki walked closer to be able to see better. After a few minutes Tony set the tool down, wiped the back of his hand across his forehead, and finally looked up from his work.

“Oh hey, perfect timing. I could use another set of hands,” Tony announced.

“What would you have me do?”

“Can you hold these wires out of the way while I finish soldering this?”

“Indeed,” Loki agreed reaching for the wires Tony indicated. Though he really shouldn’t speak without permission Loki couldn’t resist. “Soldering?” Loki asked inquisitively.

A grin spread across Tony’s face.

-“You’re actually pretty good at this,” Tony stated sounding surprised.

Loki rolled his eyes. “I told you that I would catch on fast. This isn’t any more difficult than engraving things or drawing lines for spells.”

“Can you tell me about drawing spells?”

“Later,” Loki grumbled annoyed. “Anthony I have to focus.”

“Right.”

Finally, Loki thought. He turned all of his attention back to perfecting his soldering technique. Tony lasted less than five minutes.

“So tell me about your study.”

“Gods of Asgard Anthony, can I not have five minutes?”

“Pardon me sirs,” JARVIS broke in. “Captain Rogers is requesting entry.”

Tony turned and instantly met Loki’s eyes. When Tony cocked an eyebrow questioningly Loki knew what Tony was asking. Instantly he felt as if he’d been dunked in cold water. He wasn’t sure when it had happened but at some point he’d completely forgotten that he was a slave and had
discussed things with Tony as if he was an equal. It had been nice to lose himself in the easy conversation. It had been beyond nice, it had been wonderful. It had been… dangerous, he realized. By the nines, what in Hel had he been thinking? If Heimdall had seen…

“I’m guessing that’s a ‘not right now’ J,” Tony called back.

“No! I mean, I have no issues with his presence.”

“You sure?”

“I am sure,” Loki replied, finally composing himself.

“Okay J, let him in.”

The door opened and Steve entered. Tony didn’t miss the swift appraising look Steve gave Loki. He was almost insulted. Just what did Steve think he would do to Loki? When Steve turned his gaze to him Tony merely crossed his arms and waited.

“You two have been down here long enough for now. It’s time for lunch. Dr. Banner finished a version of, uh, whatever solution thing he was making and Pepper wants to call a group meeting. Oh also,” Steve continued, turning back to Loki, “Clint said to tell you had to leave. He said you’d understand why.”

Loki nodded silently.

“Why?” Tony asked.

“That is his business Tony. If he wanted others to know then he would have been more forthcoming. Please respect that I cannot answer that question?”

Frowning Tony narrowed his eyes at Loki. Until now Loki had never failed to answer a direct question. Should he press the issue? No, he finally decided. Too many people have already forced Loki to do to much against his will. He would not add himself to that list. “So lunch?” Tony asked.

Finally Loki willed his muscles to relax. Relief flooded through him as Tony suggested lunch instead of pressing the issue. Despite whatever consequences it brought Loki would have defied him if Tony had order him to answer. Yes, he knew why Barton had left and where he’d gone but it wasn’t his place to say. If the archer had wanted anyone to know of his family then he would have told them. If he had not mind controlled Barton during the Battle of New York then he would never have learned of them. He owed it to the archer to help keep his family secret no matter the cost.

Steve exited first followed by Loki and Tony last. The short walk to the elevator as well as the ride back to the living quarters was silent. With the thought of how easily he had slipped and forgotten his place in Tony’s workshop was silent. With the thought of how easily he had slipped and forgotten his place in Tony’s workshop so close to the forefront of his brain Loki made sure to keep his eyes fixed firmly on the floor. He had no idea how he could have forgotten his place so easily. It was disconcerting really. His only interpretation of the events was that the place had reminded of his own study so much he had temporarily lost his equanimity.

A soft bing broke into his thoughts and Loki glanced upward. When he realized it was only signalling that they’d arrived he dropped his eyes back to the floor of the elevator car and stared at the ground once more. Gods of Asgard, could he do nothing right? He didn’t know when it
happened but somewhere along the way he had fallen for Tony. There was just something so unique about him it was hard not to fall for the man. Nothing good could come of his feelings for Tony. He should never have let himself fall for the other man. They were master and slave and that was all.

“Loki?”

“Yes Anthony?”

“You don’t have to do this if you don’t want. I can brief you tomorrow if you want to go spend time in your room.”

Loki actually debated doing that before he finally decided against it. No, he couldn’t just leave Tony to fend for himself. He would stand with his… with his Tony.

“You’re late, Natasha stated bluntly.

“Nonsense,” Tony answered. “I’m perfectly on time and the rest of you are just early.”

“Anthony,” Loki chastised softly.

Looking around the kitchen he noted Pepper and Natasha at the table. The contract sat on the table looking ominous but Tony ignored it. He couldn’t think about the things he’d read in that document right now. Bruce was leaning against the counter near the coffee pot poking at a Stark pad and muttering distractedly. Looking behind himself he only half noted Steve. All his attention was focused on Loki who had started shaking slightly and was busy trying to stare a hole through the floor. Tony shook his head. Eventually they were going to have to fix this. He needed Loki to understand Bruce wouldn’t hurt him and feel comfortable around the doctor.

“Okay so talk, what’s up?” Tony asked turning back to the kitchen.

Pepper pulled out a Stark pad and finally spoke. “Okay, there’s a lot of things we really need to discuss here. We need to get everyone on the same page before there are any more unfortunate misunderstandings. First things first. Loki, would you like to sit down?”

Loki began to fidget and Tony held his breath.

“I… yeah. I think I would like to sit down for this conversation. That is, if you do not mind,” Loki finished quietly with a sideways glance to Tony.

“I don’t mind at all,” Tony assured him. “Do whatever makes you more comfortable.”

With a silent nod Loki sat down, eyes fixed on the surface of the table. Annoyed Tony sighed. This overly submissive Loki was so vastly different from bright eyed, invigorated, Loki from in the workshop earlier. He wanted that Loki back. Maybe they should spend more time together in the workshop, Tony thought. Looking up he caught Bruce’s eye and nodded slightly at the only chair left. Nodding once Bruce snagged a tupper container off of the counter and joined the others at the table. Snagging one of the barstools Tony stationed it just behind Loki and slightly off to the side of him.

“Okay,” Pepper began. “Bruce you should probably go first.”

Popping the lid off the tupper container Bruce pushed it slightly more to the center of the table and sat back.
“I’ve done as much as I can without more input. I created a prototype version of the solution but we need to test it. If you could—”

“No,” Tony stated simply. Bruce looked up slightly confused. “I promised him I would talk to you about what’s in it and how it will affect him first. After that he gets to decide whether or not he wants to do this.” Tony crossed his arms and waited. For a while Bruce continued to eye him still slightly confused before understanding finally crossed his face.

“Oh. Yeah, no, that’s, that’s… understandable,” Bruce finally stammered. “Here’s a list of what I used,” he said holding out the Stark pad. Pepper took it and passed it to Tony.

“Acetonitrile, methanol, acetic acid—”

“Acid?” Pepper asked, cutting him off.

Tony waved the pad absently. “Acetic acid is classified as a weak acid since it only partially dissociates in solution, but concentrated acetic acid is corrosive and can attack the skin. At this dilution it’s about as dangerous as vinegar. Acetonitrile is slightly more dangerous but only just barely and only if he ingests it. If he drinks it then it’s about as toxic as…” Tony paused and tried to find a good comparison. “It’s about as toxic as nail polish remover. If he doesn’t ingest it he should be fine,” he told her. He returned his attention back to the pad and finished reading the other ingredients.

“Looks pretty safe,” he stated. Finally he handed the pad back to Pepper who returned it to Bruce. He tapped Loki on the shoulder and waited. When Loki turned to face him Tony did his best to explain everything in terms Loki would actually be able to understand. “Basically whatever they did when torturing you ended up also causing a buildup of negative ions. This solution is designed specifically to be high in positive ions. It also contains DMSO, dimethyl sulfoxide, which has quite a few interesting properties. None the least of which is that it’s used to decrease pain and speed the healing of wounds. The other useful thing about it here is that it can carry other things with it through cell membranes. Simply put it will help you absorb everything else better.

I won’t order you to do anything you’re uncomfortable with, you know that. If you want my opinion though, I’d say it can’t hurt to try. I don’t know as much about chemistry as Bruce but I know enough to say with a fair degree of confidence it shouldn’t be harmful to you unless you drink it.” Tony shrugged. “If countering the negative ions will help the wounds heal then this solution is good place to start but it’s still your choice.”

“You believe it is safe?” Loki asked.

“Should be safe as long as you’re not drinking it.”

“Will it be painful?”

Tony drew his brows together at the question. If it was a question of how it would feel on healthy unbroken skin he would have answered no instantly. The problem was Loki’s injuries were still far from healed. Tony had no clue how the solution would feel on an open wound. He turned to Bruce and raised an eyebrow. Bruce looked extremely self-conscious.

“Bruce,” Tony drawled, decidedly unimpressed with the hesitation.

“It won’t exactly be pleasant,” Bruce answered sounding miserable. “It shouldn’t be too painful but it probably will be pretty uncomfortable.”

“Define uncomfortable,” Tony insisted.
“I can’t. Pain thresholds are different from person to person. Besides we’re not exactly dealing with a human. What you or I might find mildly uncomfortable might be completely different for him. Second, I can’t even begin to guess how this is going to feel on an open wound. Third, we’re dealing with magic here. The only person here who might know anything about that would be him.” Bruce inclined his head towards Loki.

“It is not any form of magic I am familiar with,” Loki replied. “Even if it were there is little I could do to counter it without access to my seiðr.”

Tony shifted uncomfortably at the twinge of longing in Loki’s voice. He suddenly wanted to talk to Loki about how or if anything was different now without his magic but that would have to wait. “It’s your choice Loki. You don’t have to do this if you don’t want but it might help you heal faster.”

“I will do it,” Loki answered quietly.

“Are you sure?”

Loki repressed a sigh of resignation. No, he really did not want to do this. It was more like he had to do this. He was so tired of being in chronic pain. If this had any chance of ridding him of even the slightest amount of that pain then he would take it. Any chance that he could get the slightest amount of reprieve was worth the risk.

“Yes Anthony I am sure.”

“All right but remember we can stop anytime you want.”

“Yes Anthony,” Loki answered obediently.

“Okay Bruce, what do you need us to do?”

The doctor produced a device Loki didn’t recognize and adjusted his glasses. “I don’t need you to do anything Tony. I’m going to take some baseline readings first then continue to modify the readings as he lowers his hand into the solution. Then all he has to do is tell us how he feels and anything else he can.”

“Understood,” Loki stated flatly.

The doctor leaned forward and placed the strange device near the plastic container of liquid and pressed a few buttons. Muttering to himself he pushed a few more buttons before looking up and nodding to him. Bracing himself for the potential of intense pain Loki reached out an arm and slowly lowered his hand into the liquid. While it was a bit painful he was used to so much worse this increase barely registered.

“Loki?” Tony asked.

“I am well Anthony,” Loki said turning to face him. “It is uncomfortable but well within tolerable levels.”

“Can you describe the feeling?” the doctor asked.

Loki pondered the feeling and how best to describe it. “It is not unsimilar to the feeling of when blood rushes back into a numb appendage. It ‘prickles’ slightly almost like needles being pressed into the skin.”
“But it’s bearable?” Tony questioned.

“It is uncomfortable but more than bearable,” Loki stated. “As I said, it is well within tolerable levels.”

“Hey Tony can you come over here for a moment?” Dr. Banner requested.

“What’s up?” Tony asked sliding off the stool and walking around the table.

“What do you make of these readings?”

Tony gave a soft whistle. “I’m not a doctor but those seem really high.”

“They are but they started high. I just assumed it was normal for his race.”

“You don’t think so now?”

“I don’t know. The areas being flooded with endorphins now were already at high levels and that made me wonder about something.” The doctor looked up from the device and turned towards Loki. “How much pain were you experiencing before this?”

Loki clenched his jaw and refused to answer.

“Loki,” Tony demanded sharply.

Damn. The doctor he felt safe defying. Tony he would have to answer. “It is bearable,” he muttered.

“Tony, if he were human I’d have already recommended a prescription for some kind of pain reliever just for the baseline levels.”

“Define bearable,” Tony barked.

“Tony!” Miss Pepper snapped.

Loki flinched at the sharpness of her voice. He dropped his eyes back to the table and tried to control his nerves. Desperately he wished he could remove his hand from the accused liquid. It stung not only his skin but his muscles as well. At least the pain had finally stopped increasing and had stabilized.

“Sorry,” Tony muttered. “I didn’t mean to snap at you. It’s just that if you’re in pain I need to know.”

Loki chewed on his lower lip for a few seconds.

“I told you all I want is honesty,” Tony reminded him.

Loki nodded. “I am almost always in discomfort. In the past I would have called this feeling pain but after everything else this is eminently more manageable. I am able to ignore it most of the time so that it does not affect anything required of someone in my station. If it had become unmanageable I would have said something. How much longer must my hand remain in this ‘solution’?”

“Oh,” Dr. Banner exclaimed. Glancing down at the device in his hands as if he had forgotten it the doctor prodded at it a few more times. “How’s the pain level of this? Is it still increasing or has it stopped?”

“It stopped increasing several moments ago.”
“How it it? Is it manageable?”

“It is,” Loki informed him.

“Okay, you can take your hand out now.”

Loki lifted his hand and held it above the container.

“Wait a second,” Tony ordered.

Moving quickly Tony retrieved a towel from somewhere in the kitchen and began carefully drying Loki’s hand. Never in a long time had anyone shown so much care when tending to him and Loki stared in awe. He wanted to tell Anthony that he could do this himself because a master should not be tending a slave in this way but he just couldn’t. Anthony was the only person in a very long time he could trust not to hurt him and Loki was desperate for any non painful touches he could get.

“Loki?” Tony asked sounding concerned. “Am I hurting you?”

Unable to speak Loki shook his head.

When Anthony released his hand Loki retracted his arm and settled both of his hands in his lap. As soon as Anthony was seated beside him once more a hand settled lightly on one of his shoulders and Loki wanted to melt into the comfort that it brought. He would do anything if the world could just stay like this forever. Another hand softly covered his and Loki followed the arm sideways. Miss Romanoff gave him a small smile briefly before she turned to face forward once again.

“So do you have everything you need Bruce?” Miss Pepper asked.

The doctor waved a hand distractedly focused on the device in his hand. Miss Pepper was not one to be ignored, however. She reached over and gently removed the device from the doctor’s hands. For a second it looked like he would protest before he seemed to resign himself to her will. Loki hid a smile at the transaction.

“Oh, so here’s what’s next,” Pepper announced. Looking directly at him she met his eyes and as nervous as that made him Loki couldn’t look away. “There have been far too many misunderstandings lately and we need to fix that. That means we’re going to need more information. Loki, we need you to explain more about your situation to us.”

‘Your situation.’ He understood precisely what that phrase meant. It meant she wanted him to discuss the ‘finer’ points of slavery. Yet he was loathed to discuss what being a slave truly entailed. Still, defying her was almost as unthinkable as defying Anthony.

“I’m not sure that’s the best conversation to have right now,” Tony cautioned.

“Right now is the best time to have this conversation,” Pepper stated without breaking eye contact with Loki. “Almost all of us are present and we need to know more so there are no more accidental slips. Clint really should be here as well but we can fill him in later. Take all the time you need to Loki but we really do need more information okay?”

“I fear that master Barton already knows much about Asgardian slavery,” Loki remarked flatly. If he was truly going to discuss this it had to be dispassionately. He could not allow himself to become emotional or he would never be able to get through this.

“Whenever you’re ready,” Miss Pepper said encouragingly.
Oh how he wished he could share in her seemingly unshakable confidence. Already he was having a difficult time keeping his nerves under control and it was only going to get worse as this conversation progressed. With a heavy sigh Loki thought about where to begin.

“Not all slaves are created equal,” Loki finally stated. “The rights a slave is allowed are a combination born of the reason they were sentenced to slavery and their master’s will. The master is also bound to abide by the rules laid out in the contract though they are not punished by the binding magic should they violate its rules. In Asgard honor is important and it is expected that the master will honor the rules of the contract without question. Not to do so would be dishonorable.”

“So wait a minute,” Tony interrupted. “What you’re saying is not all slaves are abused as much as you were?”

Loki frowned at the question. “It is not considered abuse if it is done to a slave and permissible by the contract.”

Tony opened his mouth to say something else but Miss Pepper spoke first. “Not right now Tony. Right now we need to get through this and it’s already going to be difficult. Let him get through this while he can and then you can be angry. Whenever you’re ready Loki.”

“The basics,” Loki stated, beginning once more. “A slave's hair is cut short and usually uneven so that any who see them cannot fail to recognize their station. Slaves do not meet the eyes of their masters. Slaves obey without question. Slaves do not sit on any piece of furniture and most of the time they do not sleep in beds.”

“How much of the time?” the doctor asked.

Fidgeting slightly Loki forced his hands to be still. “Those used as bed slaves are never expected to sleep on the floor;” he answered quietly. “They are also allotted slightly more privileges than other slaves.”

“Privileges,” Tony stated flatly before crossing his arms over his chest.

“Yes. Like sleeping in a bed, being allowed to have their hair slightly longer or more even, better food, more food for that matter.”

“And anyone that wants to use their slave that way can?” Tony asked angrily.

How to answer that, Loki wondered. “No,” he finally said slowly. “Well not precisely.”

“Explain,” Tony demanded.

“Most of the time slaves sentenced to such a position are those that would not mind such a sentence. Usually much care is given to the gifting of a slave. Usually only those who would not mind being bound to such a master or those that might actually like such a placement are given to a master that might use them in that manner.”

“Uh huh. You don’t seem to have wanted the things that happened to you. So tell me, if that’s the case then how do you explain what happened to you?”

“Punishment,” Loki whispered quietly. He chewed on his lower lip slightly before he continued. “This was not the first time I have displeased Odin. None of the other punishments have had much of an effect. I was... rebellious.”

Rebellious,” Tony repeated.
Loki didn’t know what to make of the tone so he didn’t reply to the comment. “Signing the contract is what binds the slave to the master. That is why there were so insistent that you sign it Anthony. They would never have left me in your care if you had not. There would be nothing to ensure that I would continue to be a good little slave,” Loki growled.

“You can stop anytime you need,” Tony reminded him.

That reminder and the compassion he heard in Anthony’s voice helped soothe his building anger. He trusted that he could take a break and Anthony would not be upset or punish him for it. Shaking his head he took a deep breath and began yet again. “Slaves are not permitted to do anything without a specific command from their master. If a slave were to do anything without a specific order the magic would punish them automatically. It is why I could not bathe nor eat without your expressed permission.”

“What if the… the, uh, person in charge forgets?” Tony asked.

“Then the slave must wait. I am luckier than most. You have given me specific instructions ‘not to miss another meal’. I am allowed to eat whenever I am hungry. Thank you for that Anthony.” Anthony grumbled something Loki couldn’t understand, crossed his arms and glared at them. Since it didn’t seem that Anthony required a response Loki continued.

“As Miss Romanoff already knows, if a free person provides a slave with an item or a service then a slave is always required to repay the favor no matter how small.”

“Clint also said you had to ask for permission first,” Natasha stated. Loki nodded. “As I’ve said, a slave is not allowed to do anything without their master’s approval.”

“He also said you could turn it down if what they wanted in return was too much,” she prompted.

“Close,” Loki agreed. “If what the free person wants in return is something the master has expressly forbidden then the slave can politely decline the offer. If it were not so then the slave would be left either insulting the free person or disobeying their master. Either way would lead to a punishment.”

Pausing Loki smiled softly. “For instance, Anthony has ordered me never to do anything that makes me uncomfortable. If a free person were to ask for me to kiss them then I would not have to acquiesce as it would make me uncomfortable.”

“Seriously?” Anthony asked sounding stunned.

“Seriously,” Loki told him. “Still, being sentenced as a slave is the decision the council agreed upon for my crimes, Anthony. I fear if I do not behave correctly then I may be ordered back to Asgard for retraining. Slaves are also not allowed to make requests but…” Loki trailed off and hesitated.

“Yes?”

“I would like to ask for something if I may.”

“Go for it,” Tony said in a rush.

“I would respectfully ask that you do not press me to overstep my bounds too far. I could not stand being sent back for retraining. Please just… Please…” Suddenly unable to continue Loki wrapped his arms around himself desperately wishing he had put on a hoodie. He really needed the comfort that came with having the hood pulled up hiding him, at least symbolically, from everything.

“That’s it, I’m calling a timeout,” Tony announced. “I don’t care what anyone else does but Loki
needs to eat lunch. If he’s feeling up to it afterwards then we can continue.”

No one said a word as the other three people stood up and left. Miss Pepper stopped long enough to rest a hand on his shoulder for a few seconds before finally leaving. It helped him relax slightly but it wasn’t nearly enough. Anthony knelt down next to him and even with as much as he truly wanted to Loki couldn’t force himself to face Anthony. “I would apologize but you hate that.”

“There’s nothing to apologize for Loki.”

“I should have asked for break before now. I have been uncomfortable for a long while.”

“What can I do to help?”

Biting into his lower lip Loki tried to decide if he felt comfortable enough to ask.

“Please let me help.”

“Could you… I mean would you…” Loki shook his head. “I am well enough for now.”

“You are most definitely not well enough,” Tony argued. “Tell me how to help.”

“A hoodie. Please, could you get me a hoodie? I don’t think I can walk just yet.”

“You got it,” Tony told him without hesitation.

While he didn’t understand how a hoodie would help Tony didn’t care. If it would do anything that might help Loki he’d damned sure get Loki a hoodie. Rushing into Loki’s room he opened the closet and inspected the hoodies. There were several in various colors. Did the color matter? He remembered seeing Loki in a gray one once. Snagging a gray hoodie he rushed back to the kitchen.

“I didn’t know if the color mattered,” Tony said handing the hoodie towards Loki.

“Not really,” Loki stated quietly. Putting his arms through the sleeves Loki zipped it, pulled the hood over his head, and hid his hands in the sleeves. “It just, I don’t know. I know it’s stupid but having the hood up makes me feel…”

“Safe,” Tony finished.

Loki nodded silently.

“Completely understandable. After spending so long not being able to wear clothing of course being completely covered is going to make you feel better. Don’t ever be scared to ask for anything that helps Loki.”

“Then can I ask for you to stay?”

“Of course I’ll stay. At this point you’d have to ask me to leave. I would leave if that’s what you wanted but I’d prefer to stay with you at times like this. Is that what you really want? For me to stay?”

“Please.”

“Then I’m not going anywhere. Loki?”
“Yes Anthony?”

“Do you mind if I hold you or would that be too much right now?”

“Not too much,” Loki told him, shaking his head. “Please hold me?”

“You got it.”
As neither the barstool or the chair hadn’t been big enough to accommodate both of them to sit together Tony had moved them to the floor. Currently he was leaning against the wall to the breakfast bar with Loki curled up in his lap. Loki’s head lay against his shoulder and one of Loki’s hands was desperately clutching onto the necklace Tony wore. Tony didn’t mind though. As long as it helped his Loki feel safe he would do almost anything. He swore, once again, that if he ever got the chance he would track down every last one of those bastards that hurt his Loki and make them suffer. Loki shifted slightly and Tony ran a hand down his back a few times.

“Sh babe, you’re safe.”

“Anthony?”

“Yeah?”

“I know you didn’t mean it.”

Tony frowned. “Mean what?”

Loki snuggled against him to get more comfortable before he finally settled. “I just wanted to tell you I know you didn’t mean it.”

“Loki, you have to help me here. I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“It matters not. I think… I think I am better now.”

“You sure about that?”

“Yes Anthony. Thank you for your patience with this unworthy slave.”

“The fuck you’re unworthy,” Tony gowled. “If I could get my hands on those that hurt you… Fuck!”

The way Loki recoiled from him gave Tony pause. Damn he really needed to get his emotions under control. If he couldn’t control his emotions he was only going to end up hurting Loki. Tony took several deep breaths holding them for a while before releasing them.

“Loki?”

“Yes?”

“Lunch?”

“I find I am not hungry.”

“Could you try? For me?”
“I could,” Loki acknowledged.

“Sandwich and chips?”

“Whatever you feel is adequate Anthony.”

“Damn it!” Tony shouted. “Fuck. I’m sorry, I didn’t mean for it to come out like that.”

“I fear you do not understand the role of a slave.”

“You’re not a fucking slave!”

“Anthony please? It’s just… When you say things like that… If I am not your slave than I have no reason for being here. Please?”

“No one is taking you away I promise you. I told you, they made a mistake. They gave you to me and I don’t let others take my stuff.”

Loki had no good answer for that so he chose to remain silent. How could he explain to Anthony his sheer terror of being sent back? If he had to eat when his stomach was tied in knots then that was hardly a difficulty. If it meant not being sent back and left in the hands of his former ‘trainers’ then he would eat. He would do almost anything Anthony asked just to be allowed to remain here and feel safe.

“You’re going to have to move,” Tony stated, startling Loki out of his own mind.

“Oh. Yes, of course.”

Loki moved so that he was no longer leaning against Anthony and waited patiently while Tony stood and moved beyond his view. There were soft noises but Loki ignored them. Tony was just so adamant on him not being a slave he was worried. If he wasn’t a slave then what was he? How could he stay here if he wasn’t bound to a master?

“Mayonnaise or mustard?” Tony asked.

Loki fought not to roll his eyes. It was more out of reflex then anything else. No master would ever ask such a question. A slave ate what they were given and either they were happy or they starved. “It matters not.”

“It matters to me,” Tony growled.

“We have neither on Asgard. I have almost no knowledge of Midgardian foods,” Loki said evenly. Carefully he got to his feet. His Anthony was staring at the table and not looking in his direction. No, Loki corrected. Not his. His Anthony would never be his. He was the slave, Anthony was the master. He was Anthony’s and Anthony would never be his by any stretch of the imagination. Loki felt his heart almost break at that thought.

By the time the others entered both Tony and Loki were reseated where they had been before the short break. Even not being able to see much of Loki’s face from this angle it wasn’t hard to tell how tense he was right now. Nobody said a word as the others sat in the chairs they had previously occupied. When Pepper set the contract on the table Tony saw Loki flinch slightly and glance away.
“Loki?” Tony asked gently.

“Yes Tony?”

“You don’t have to be here for this. If you don’t want to be here I’ll understand.”

“I fear I may have to be here. Usually a contract can only be read by the master and the slave mentioned within. To the best of my knowledge you are the only non Asgardian to receive a slave. As you are not Asgardian I am unsure if you will be able to read the contract.”

“I was going to ask about that,” Pepper stated, finally joining the conversation. “I unrolled it to look over it and there wasn’t anything written on it.”

“Those not mentioned in the contract cannot read it,” Loki informed them. He hesitated slightly before adding quietly, “Except for the All-Father.”

“I’ve actually read some of it already,” Tony admitted. “Since I know I’ll be able to read it you don’t have to stay if you don’t want.”

“It would make sense that Odin would ensure that you would be able to read it if there were a chance you would accept his gift,” Loki mused. “I would appreciate not being present if it is not necessary.”

“Yeah, sure. I can tell you what it says later if you want.”

Loki shook his head. “I prefer not to hear just how much pain Odin has decided others are allowed to inflict upon me nor just how little he he thinks of me now. His estimation of me was not high to begin with, I can only imagine how low it has sunk now.”

Odin’s words flashed through Tony’s mind. ‘I do not believe he is ready to hear or accept these words. Perhaps one day that will change.’ For a while he debated telling Loki what Odin had written at the beginning contract but eventually decided against it. He wasn’t sure how much he believed them himself. He wouldn’t take the chance that they were lies and that Loki would be hurt again.

With a slight nod to Tony, then another one to the other people present Loki stood and left the room. As he made his way to his room his mind argued with itself. No, he really didn’t want to know just what rights Odin had gifted a potential master. He also had no desire to hear a retelling of his crimes. He knew what he’d done. The fact that he’d been tortured and mind controlled at the time did not help alleviate his sense of guilt. Still, there was some part of him that couldn’t help but wonder about the rest of the contract.

There was a small part of him that still yearned for the forgiveness of his once-father. It was a stupid, childish, desire and he hated himself for it. Clenching his teeth together he steadfastly refused to acknowledge that part of himself and opened the door to his room. Odin had taken everything from him. Not even his life was his own. His anger was justified. He would not allow himself to give in to such pathetic musings. As he closed the door his thoughts drifted to his mother. He wondered if things would be different had she not been killed.

“Okay, here’s how it’s going to work,” Pepper stated firmly. “Tony’s going to read the contract and we’re all going to listen. No one is going to say anything or make any comments until he’s done unless it’s to have a certain passage reread for clarification purposes. Tony, I know this is going to be
hard but it has to be done if we have any hope of helping Loki. Try to look at it as a historical document from the past if you can.”

A historical document, right. Like that was going to happen. With how he felt about Loki and what he’d already read of the contract there was no chance of that. She was right though, they really did need to know everything if they were going to find a way to help Loki. He nodded absently and took the contract when she held it out to him. Unrolling the contract he skimmed through the personal message at the beginning. No, he decided, he was not going to read that part out loud. Straightening he cleared his throat and tried to clear his mind.

“To the owner of the slave formerly known as Loki:”

He read through the beginning easily enough. It was only a list of the crimes Loki had been found guilty of committing. While it made him angry that Loki had been unfairly convicted and hadn’t been allowed to even defend himself this part was much easier to handle then what was to come. All too soon the part dealing with the actual crimes ended. He closed his eyes and took a few deep breaths before opening them again.

“For his crimes against the inhabitants of Midgard Loki of Asgard, hereafter to be referred to as the slave is sentenced to serve a master as any slave would for an indeterminate amount of time. You may use whatever force you desire against the slave. He is to be granted no reprieve whatsoever.”

“Indeterminate?” Bruce asked disbelievingly.

Tony clenched his jaw, unable to predict how he might react if he stopped reading to discuss this now.

“But now,” Pepper ordered. “We can discuss it later. For now, Tony keep reading.”

Despite his best efforts to maintain a stoic expression Seve knew he failed. It didn’t matter though. His noted his horror at what they were hearing mirrored on Dr. Banner’s face as well. Miss Potts’ face was a mask of utter fury. Natasha’s expression was completely blank but he knew her well enough to know not to mistake that look for apathy. She rarely ever let her true feelings show. He forced himself listen as Tony continued reading.

“The slave is yours to punish as you see fit. Please do not hesitate to allow others to use him as well. Should you desire you may let others punish him in any manner you wish whether it be physical or in a more intimate manner-”

Steve shot up so fast that his chair toppled backward and clattered noisily against the floor. “Intimate,” he shouted. “That document gives you the permission to what? Pass Loki to other people so they can-. Can-.” He couldn’t even force himself to speak the word. “Use him?” Steve hissed.

“Steve,” Natasha called calmly.

“What?” he snarled as he whirled around to face her. She wasn’t even looking in his direction but was instead still staring stoically forward.

“Sit down,” she stated coolly.

“Weren’t you listening? Did you not hear what he just said? How could you possibly ever-” Finally she turned to face him and he realized he’d been mistaken. She was not nearly as composed as he had previously thought. Her face might look calm but her eyes. Dear God, her eyes. They held more
rage then he’d ever seen on another’s face despite his long life and everything he’d experienced in the war.


Turning to Miss Potts he found a match for Natasha’s fury in her expression. Slowly, cautiously, Steve glanced over to Tony and realized the engineer had dropped his head and, with eyes clenched tightly shut, was shaking slightly. He wanted to comfort the other man but knew there was nothing he could do that would be useful. Suddenly he realized that this had to be infinitely harder on Tony. That thought hit hard. If Tony could manage to hold it together with how much he cared for Loki then he should respect that and not be making things harder than necessary. Without another look to the others Steve righted his chair, sat down, and pulled himself closer to the table.

“I… Yeah, sorry,” he muttered.

And continue he did. In a vastly dispassionate voice Tony read through all of the horrors that were allowed to be perpetrated against Loki. As much as she had initially hated the Asgardian after his submission to Clint and his honest confusion about why Clint wouldn’t punish him she’d finally believed that which she had vehemently denied for so long. Years of reading people had given her a unique perspective. After she had realized Clint, and yes probably a little less importantly to her but only to a small degree Loki, had been telling the truth she realized she had to do something to help. She just didn’t have an idea of what. That was, until now.

After everything he’d been through she would do whatever it took to protect Loki. After the things Clint had told her when she’d finally asked she hadn’t let it daunt her. After hearing the amount of abuse a master could heap on Loki she hadn’t flinched. She’d been through something similar and while she knew that didn’t excuse what Loki had experienced she knew he Loki was strong enough to handle it. Loki didn’t need pity. No. Loki actually didn’t need anything so petty as that. What Loki needed, what he deserved, was to be avenged. If there was one thing they were good at it was avenging those wronged.

“In an effort to reinforce the training please refer to the slave as slave and not any other name the slave may have previously been known by. Any such familiarity might reduce the effectiveness of the training. If there is ever any need please understand that you may send the slave back for retraining whenever needed.”

“No,” Natasha gnarled instantly. “I swear to anything or anyone that’s listening if you were to send him back I’d make you suffer and beg for death.”

“Enough!” Tony finally shouted. “If you really think so little of me then why are you even here?” Tony snarled back at her.

For all her training it had still taken considerable effort to conceal her outrage at what this document was permitting. It had taken everything for her not to lash out during Tony’s reading of the contract. Natasha let her anger gently slide away. Tony was right of course. Because there had been no clear enemy Tony had been taking the brunt of everyone’s frustrations. It wasn’t fair for them to take out their anger on him. He needed a break. As much as they all needed a break Tony moreso because he also had to deal with Loki’s emotional damage more than they. She gave him a sharp nod and sat back crossing her arms.

“I apologize for interrupting,” she said smoothly. “I do not believe you would do anything to hurt him on purpose. I also apologize for that remark.”
“Tony?” Pepper inquired hesitantly.

He didn’t immediately answer. His emotions were too close to the surface. Slowly he turned to her and waited.

“All of us want to help Loki. You have to believe that. If we didn’t we wouldn’t be here then would we?”

He had to give her that much. Of those gathered he would trust them with his life is necessary. He knew their minds, or at least as much as he could know them. A few, like Barton and Romanoff still confused him on why they’d even care but it didn’t matter. Right now all that mattered to him was Loki. He needed to pull himself together for now so they could try to find a way to help the former god.

“I think,” Bruce said slowly.

Tony as well as the others turned to face the soft spoken scientist.

“We should all take a break for now and spend a few days thinking through everything.”

Bruce was gripping the table so tightly his knuckles were turning white. His head was bowed and his shoulders so tense they almost shook. Tony realized Bruce had to be close to losing his composure and felt a strange sense of gratitude. As much as he really wasn’t keen on having to deal with the Hulk right now he was a bit pleased to know that the others were just as angry about what happened to Loki.

“Yeah,” Tony agreed. “That’s… That sounds good.”

Steve hesitated slightly but he was the first one to leave. Bruce stood slowly and with exceptionally deliberate and careful steps headed out of the room as well with Natasha following close behind. Eventually only Pepper was left. He waited, knowing that sooner or later she would break the silence on her own. Until then there was no way he could even begin to guess what she was thinking. At this moment it could be almost anything.

“This contract is bullshit,” Pepper growled.

That took him aback and he finally turned around to face her.

“That’s not a contract that’s a, a, a, permit to torture,” she finally spat out. “You need to talk to Loki about that eventually. I want to know if that’s a normal contract or not.”

“There’s more to it,” Tony finally told her.

“More to what?” Pepper asked narrowing her eyes.

“The contract. I didn’t want to tell the others because… I don’t know. It just didn’t feel like it was any of their business.”

“What else did it say?”

“There was something like a personal message from Odin at the beginning.” His eyes shifted to the contract on the table and he shuddered slightly. He still wasn’t sure how much he believed those words.
“What did it say?” she repeated evenly.

Sighing Tony picked up the contract, unrolled it, and read.

“To the person that is actually able to read this I do this with a heavy heart. This part and a few of the others contained herein will not be visible to my son. I do not believe he is ready to hear or accept these words. Perhaps one day that will change. Know that I had no other choice. I must abide by the choices of the council. I used all of my considerable power to keep my son from being executed. In spite of everything he is still my son. If you can do anything to help him then you will have my eternal gratitude. I fear I may have grieved my son more than he is able to forgive but that is my burden to bear. Please help him remember who he truly is. My son is a good person even if he has lost his way. Please help him to remember that.

Know that my beloved wife saw her own demise and spent her last few days attempting to see the future and what would become of her favored son. She did not idly ignore him in her final days. It was at her behest that I sent him to you specifically in hopes that you could do what I could not. She loved him beyond measure, beyond reason, beyond life. She would never have left him in a time of need if there was another option. Please do not let him be angry at his mother.

His brother will also be angry when he learns what has transpired. I cannot foretell the future as my wife but I would warn you to use caution with him. I have sent him on a mission to another realm to keep him away. When he returns I fear he will hate me as much as my other son but it was needed if my youngest is to be redeemed. I leave one of my most treasured possessions in your hands. Please do not prove my wife’s predictions wrong. Please help him to find himself once again.”

When he finished reading Tony carefully rerolled the contract and waited.

“That’s… different,” Pepper said slowly.

“I can’t decide if I should tell Loki or not.”

Pepper was silent for a long while before replying. “No,” she said finally. “I think we should wait for now. I’m pretty sure Loki’s not ready to know about that message just yet.”

Tony only nodded. “I think I’m going to spend some time in my workshop now.”

As he left he tried to tell himself he wasn’t fleeing but he knew that was a lie. He couldn’t stand to be around anyone right now. All he wanted to do was get to his workshop where he could be alone and work on something so that he no longer had to think about any of this. Entering his workshop Tony walked over to the main work table and sat down.

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After several hours of screwing up everything he worked on Tony finally gave up. His mind couldn’t seem to stay focused on anything. He couldn’t do this. Throwing the pair of pliers across the room he watched as they struck a wall and clattered harmlessly to the floor. All of a sudden it was too much. All of it. Loki, the torturing, the contract, Odin’s message. He couldn’t take it anymore.

Stalking over to a work table near the back of his workshop Tony snagged the bottle of alcohol he’d stored there. Opening the bottle he raised it and took a long swig without even bothering to find a glass.

- 

That same night
Clint stared at the cabinet in disgust. What the fuck was wrong with him? How the hell had he managed to hang the cabinet door upside down? With a muttered curse he began unscrewing it so he could rehang it. Laura walked into the room before he finished. Gently she laid a hand on his shoulder. Unable to face her least his anger still show on his face he stilled and waited for her to speak.

“Go,” she whispered.

“Go where?” he asked, knowing full well what she meant.

“Go to your team,” she told him. They remained that way for some time before she sighed. “Obviously they need you or you wouldn’t be so distracted. You’re only ever this way when you’re conflicted. I knew what I was marrying when I married you. They need you and you should go to them.”

“You need me too,” Clint murmured.

“Not as much as they do right now,” she said gently.

“I have things to do here?” he protested half-heartedly.

“Nothing that can’t wait Francis,” she told him. “Go.”

“I hate that name,” Clint muttered. Laura smiled and it was almost as if the world stopped moving.

“I know sweetie but sometimes it’s the only thing that breaks through that hard head of yours.”

“Why do you even put up with me?” He asked honestly curious. Walking forward she wrapped her arms behind his neck, leaned in, and pressed her lips to his. For a time there was only her. Sadly she drew back sooner than he would have liked.

“Now go,” she ordered. "You have a world to save or something. I know you Clinton Francis. If you didn’t have something to save you wouldn’t have that look on your face.”

After several hours of drinking in his workshop Tony had begun to feel claustrophobic and made his way to the roof for some fresh air. While he stared at the night sky he continued to rage. What had he done in his life to have something like this dumped on him? This was too big, too much. He couldn’t deal with this. How the hell was he supposed to help Loki? What the hell did that even entail? Loki was just so… broken.

Broken. Tony’s mind repeated. Yes, that was the right word. This version of Loki was not even a pale imitation of the Loki he had known. Ignoring Loki’s actions at the time, which were not his in any event, during the attack Loki had been a vastly different person. He couldn’t believe that all of that was due to the mind control. At the very least some of that had to be partly the real Loki. And what had happened to change Loki from that vibrant, self-assured, cocky, almost arrogant former god to change him so much? Odin, that’s what. Refocusing his attention on the sky Tony yelled. At first it was just a cry of anger. After that first release of frustration though…

“Odin!” Tony shouted, dragging out the name. Growling in anger Tony desperately wanted to punch something. “How dare you! He needed you! After everything he suffered you couldn’t even let him explain!? He was your son! How dare you turn your back on him!”

Of course nothing happened. What did he really expect? After everything he’d learned did he
seriously expect Odin to care about what Loki had suffered? Of course not. Why would this omnipotent being care about one life he probably considered insignificant anyway? Still, Tony couldn’t contain his anger.

“It wasn’t his fault and if you’re too blind to see it than fuck you!” Tony shouted. He didn’t know what he was hoping for but he knew Loki deserved better, something more. Especially from his ‘family’. “If you really cared about him then you’d be here trying to help him!”

“I am trying to help him son of Stark,” a flat voice intoned from behind him.

Tony whirled around and found himself facing an elderly man with an eyepatch. The eyepatch reminded him of Fury and Tony almost recoiled. If there was one person they needed to make sure that didn’t know Loki was here it was Fury. “Odin?” Tony asked cautiously.

"Peace, Lord Stark. I merely came to tell you your message was delivered. Keep him safe. Thank you."

“To thank me? For what? Taking care of Loki when you threw him away?”

“Do not insinuate I do not care for my son.”

“If you really cared for him you would never have written that contract!” Tony countered.

“I did not,” Odin stated.

“You didn’t what? Write the contract?”

“Yes,” Odin informed him bluntly.

Tony stared at the man, stunned and unsure how to reply.

“The head trainer writes the contracts. I merely approve of them or disapprove.”

“Then why didn’t you disapprove of Loki’s contract,” Tony snarled.

“In truth? Because I did not read it. I could not. What you must understand is they were punishing my son and-”

“Exactly,” Tony snapped. “Your son. You should have read through it extensively.”

“Have care to whom you talk, mortal,” Odin commanded.

“He was your son!” Tony shouted. “He deserved to have at the very least his family in his corner! But no! Instead you sent him to me, a mere mortal! At the very least you could have spared him some of the torment as his rapist’s hands!”

Odin stalked closer and grasped Tony’s shirt in his fist.

“His what?” Odin demanded.

“His rapists,” Tony shouted, his anger not abating in the slightest. “How could you, someone who claims to be his father, let something like that happen to him?”

“I did not let anything happen to him. What kind of beast do you take me for?”

“One that would let his son be turned slave,” Tony shot back.
“It was that or death,” Odin growled. “Tell me, Anthony of Stark, which would you have chosen?”

“I can tell you I wouldn’t have let them do that to my son!”

Tony fell and landed hard on his ass. He wasn’t sure what just happened. All he knew for sure what Loki’s ‘father’ had been there threatening him and was now gone. He tried to cling onto the anger he’d felt but it dissipated too fast. Odin was no longer here and there was no longer anyone left to rage at. All he could feel now was compassion for Loki. His Loki had suffered through so much. He wished he knew what he could do to help his Loki. Almost instantly he realized he already had the answer.

The answer was he could do nothing to help Loki. Loki had to help himself. What he could do was help Loki help himself. Even if Loki’s so called family had abandoned him Tony would not. Tony would be there through every step of the recovery process. Hopefully the others would be there as well but that didn’t matter to Tony. Tony would be there for his Loki and that would be enough. It would be slow but it would be worth it. Besides, Loki deserved one person that was truly on his side.

When Tony finally went back inside he found Loki and Clint both on the couch watching some movie. Die Hard some part of him noted dimly. It didn’t matter. Right now all that mattered was his Loki. He wanted, not scratch that, needed to curl up with him. Walking over to the couch he waited until Loki glanced over to him.

Suddenly Loki was aware of his master eying Barton and he on the couch. He wanted to move away from the archer, to put distance between them for reasons he didn’t immediately understand. There was an unreadable expression on Anthony’s face. Something was wrong but he couldn’t completely identify what.

“Cuddles?” Anthony asked softly.

Frowning Clint looked away from the movie and towards them. “Cuddle?”

“I wasn’t asking you so shut it Legolas,” Tony murmured.

“Uh,” Loki managed. His usual silver tongue seemed to have turned to lead.


As Loki watched, completely confused, Tony turned away and headed straight for the alcove that contained his alcohol. Finally, Loki’s brain seemed to catch up with things. Tony had not been giving him an order. Tony had been asking for cuddles because… Because he didn’t know why but did that matter? His Anthony needed something, something eminently providable, and all he had done was stare. Loki shoved himself off the couch rushed over to his Anthony, wrapped his arms around his waist, and carried him back to the sofa. When they were there then he carefully placed Anthony on the sofa, sat down, and curled up around him. He didn’t know what happened or why but he knew Anthony needed this for some reason.

“Loki?”

Loki shook his head. “Not now Anthony. For now be at peace and be silent.”

Clint watched the exchanged feeling more tense than his bow strings. He almost felt like an intruder
watching the, he’d almost call it tender, exchange. Without a word he silently excused himself and made his way out of the common room. Pulling out his cell phone he hit the button for Pepper and waited. It was two rings before she answered.

“Is it Tony?” she asked.

Straight to business. He liked that. “He… Uh… He was outside on the landing pad thing and then when he came in he asked for cuddles. He was… I don’t know. Subdued? So totally not like himself.”

“Cuddles? From you?”

Oh. Clint rubbed a hand over the back of his neck self consciously. “No, from Loki,” he clarified.

“So he’s not holed up in his workshop?”

“No.”

There was silence and Clint waited. “Good,” Pepper finally stated.

“Good?”

“Clint you know as well as I that Tony never asks for anything. If he’s asking for comfort from someone instead of trying to drink his problems away then how can it not be good?”

Clint dropped his head chagrined. She was right of course. “Yeah. I just… I don’t know. I’ve never seen him like this you know?”

“I have but it’s rare,” Pepper answered. “Best advice? Let them be and let Tony take comfort where he can find it.”

“Yeah,” he agreed.
Chapter 17

Loki woke with a start. At first he couldn’t comprehend what was happening. After a second glance he realize Thor was holding Anthony by the throat. No, this couldn’t be happening. He couldn’t let anything happen to his Anthony. He surged up from the couch and raced to where his one time brother had his Anthony in his clutches. Dropping to his knees Loki begged. “Mercy I beg of you! Mercy please!” He had to fight not flinch when Thor turned his gaze upon him.

“I returned to Asgard to learn that my brother was sentenced to slavery. When I finally learned who you were gifted to I allowed myself hope that nothing ill would befall you here. The first thing I see when I arrive here is him,” Thor growled shaking Tony slightly, “embracing you while you slept. You will tell me all he has done to you,” Thor demanded.

“He has not harmed me. If any respect for our one time brotherhood ever still remains please do not hurt him!”


Oh gods his master’s voice was hoarse and he knew not what to do. For a while Thor merely stared at him. Loki held his breath praying to the norns that his master would not be hurt. Finally Thor threw Tony back onto the couch and Loki surge forward. Reaching up he grabbed one of Thor’s hands with both of his own. Thor looked indecisive for a moment and Loki snagged on that moment.

“He has done nothing to warrant your anger. Anthony has never struck me nor punished me maliciously with the magic. He has only ever treated me with kindness. I am well fed, well clothed, and allowed to sleep on a bed instead of the floor. Anthony is everything to me. Please do not harm him?” For a while no one moved. Loki’s heart lurched as something in Thor’s face shifted. Something he said had obviously been wrong.

“Then he has relegated you to a little more than a bed slave,” Thor growled.

Realization hit like a bucket of ice water. His mention of a bed, his hair, his appearance, everything would of course scream bed slave were they on Asgard. “No!” Loki shouted. “Upon the norns, no! He has never used me as such!” he cried out. “Please Thor I swear he has not used me as such!”

“What kind of fucked up person do you think I am,” Anthony growled as he finally shoved himself off of the couch. “Of course I didn’t touch him that way! I may be an ass but I’m not a fucking rapist! I also wouldn’t have left my brother to face a trial where he was unable to even defend himself.” Tony raged.

Loki scrambled forward to place himself between his Anthony and his brother. Without his magic he was no match for Thor but he would do his best to defend his Anthony if necessary.

“You will watch your mouth,” Thor snarled back.

“The fuck I will,” Tony snapped. “I don’t even want to think about what would have happened to him if I hadn’t accepted him! Do you have any clue what he suffered before they brought him here? Do you know what his fucking trainers did to him? They also violated him on top of the beatings and then you have the nerve to come here and threaten me for things other people did to him?”

A shiver he couldn’t quite suppress ran down Loki’s spine at the mere mention of his rapes. As Thor glanced his direction Loki dropped his eyes uncomfortably. Thor knowing the things his trainers had done to him made Loki self conscious. Even though Thor did not understand it he knew of Loki’s
preference for men. Would Thor think Loki had seduced them or would he believe that Loki truly had not been a willing participant?

“Is what he says true?” Thor demanded.

Loki winced. He did not even want to remember his time at his trainer's hands let alone explain it in detail to his brother. “The... the trainers were... They did their job within the standards they were given,” Loki finally finished.

“Did they touch you in that manner though?” Thor growled angrily.

“I wish not to talk of my training,” Loki whispered still eying the ground. A hand touched his shoulder surprising him and Loki recoiled. Taking a step backward he pressed himself against Anthony.

Tony winced when he saw Thor reached out a hand and placed it on Loki’s shoulder. He tried to say something to stop him but by the time Tony finally realized what he was going to do it was too late. Suddenly Loki was standing in front of him with his back pressed against Tony’s chest and shaking slightly.

“Sh Loki,” Tony soothed, glaring at Thor. “Everything is alright. Thor just didn’t think things through, that’s all. If he had I’m sure he would never have touched you without your permission. He didn’t mean to startle you. It’s alright Loki, okay?” He felt Loki’s head move, nodding in agreement. “Just breath Loki, in and out. You got this.” Another nod.

“Loki what-”

“Not now,” Tony hissed, glaring at Thor briefly. He returned his attention to Loki. “I’m here, Loki. You can feel me behind you right?”

“Hand,” Loki mumbled.

“You got it,” Tony told him. Reaching down Tony felt around until he found Loki’s hand, clutched it, and gave it a light squeeze. “Better?”

“Better,” Loki acknowledged.

“You’re good,” Tony told him just as the elevator dinged. Loki tensed back against him once more and tightened his grip on Tony’s hand. Tony shushed Loki reassuringly in what he hoped was a soothing manner. When the door opened to Steve and Banner Tony almost sighed in relief. As they approached they took in Thor’s presence, slowed, and finally stopped just inside the common room. Seeing his chance Tony snatched it. Taking a step sideways he wrapped an arm around Loki’s waist and moved.

“Perfect timing guys,” Tony called out. “Thor just got here and I don’t have the time to talk to him right now. Something important just came up,” Tony stated meaningfully. “Entertain him for me.” He held Steve’s eyes just long enough to see the realization dawning before continuing past on his way to Loki’s room. Steve and Banner could deal with Thor, for now he had to make sure his Loki was okay.

At first Thor’s presence had surprised him but then Steve realized he should have expected Thor to
show up sooner or later. When Tony guided Loki forward towards them his first thought was to ask what happened. Something had obviously upset Loki and he looked on the verge of a panic attack. It didn’t take much to put two and two together and realize it probably had something to do with Thor. Then Tony asked them to ‘entertain’ Thor and Steve understood. As expected it didn’t take long before Thor strode forward. Steve raised one hand and moved to block him.

“No,” Steve stated firmly.

“Let me pass,” Thor demanded.

“I can’t do that,” Steve told him.

“You will let me by so that I can check on my brother.”

“Your brother will be fine for now and there are things you need to hear. Here’s what’s going to happen. We’re going to talk and you’re going to listen. When we’re done then you can ask questions. I highly suggest you sit down before we begin this conversation.”

“If you do not move-”

“Sit down,” Bruce said quietly but forcefully. “Before you talk to Loki again you need to understand what he endured or I’m not letting you anywhere near him.”

Steve watched the soft spoken man standing next to him carefully and recognized just how close the doctor was to losing his calm. While he didn’t blame the man they really needed to avoid that if possible. “Doctor Banner is right,” Steve agreed. “If you don’t listen to what we have to say you might unintentionally cause Loki to have another panic attack. If that happens he might end up hurting himself.”

After a few glances between the pair Thor finally moved to the couch and sat down crossing his arms. Without a word the pair walked over and sat down each taking one of the respective arm chairs. As much as they needed to have this conversation Steve really did not want to have discussion. He was grateful when the doctor spoke first.

“How much do you already know?” Dr. Banner asked.

Thor hesitated slightly before answering. “I was not permitted at the trial. I showed up everyday to stand outside the great hall so I would be present in hopes of being allowed in while they deliberated on the sentencing. That also was denied unto me. Father sent me on a diplomatic mission to another realm. It took longer than expected. When I managed to return to Asgard it was some time before I was able to learn of Loki’s sentence. Afterward I made haste here to see how he fared.”

“How he fared,” Banner repeated blandly. “You want to know how he fared?”

“I would appreciate such knowledge,” Thor replied.

“Appreciated? Yeah, okay then. Since you’d ‘appreciate’ such knowledge I’ll be more than happy to fill you in,” Banner stated, voice raising slightly. “Loki had already been tortured before. That’s why he attacked New York in the first place, because he’d been tortured and then mind controlled. The injuries from that were infused with some kind of magic that kept them from healing. And then, during the so call trial he wasn’t even allowed to defend himself.”

Thor opened his mouth but Banner cut him off before he could speak.

“Oh I’m not done yet. I haven’t even gotten to any of the truly high points. You wanted knowledge?
I’m going to give it to you and you’re going to listen. After this so called trial he was convicted without being allowed to defend himself, told his mother was dead, and given no chance whatsoever to mourn her before they hauled him off to be tortured yet again.”

“They would not dare—”

“Malnutrition, multiple lacerations and cuts both old and those still bleeding, actual literal branding, evidence of multiple broken bones, major internal damage to multiple organs, torn muscles and other muscular damage stemming from being stabbed by some form of bladed object,—”

“Enough,” Thor shouted.

“No,” Banner disagreed. “Not enough, we haven’t even gotten to the rapes yet!”

Thor stood suddenly and Steve was instantly on his feet as well.

“Enough both of you,” Steve cut in. “I understand that you’re angry, we all are,” Steve stated softly. You really do need calm down though. Getting angry is not helpful to Loki at all right now.” For a while it looked like Bruce might just ignore him but finally the doctor took a deep breath and closed his eyes before releasing it. After several more deep breaths Bruce opened his eyes and turned to face Steve.

“You’re right,” Banner agreed.

“So maybe we should all just—”

The elevator dinged and all three of them turned to see who had just arrived.

“Are you feeling any better yet?” Tony asked quietly.

“Mm yes,” Loki hummed. "Thank you for sitting with me. It cannot be comfortable sitting on the floor like that.”

“I told you that if I got uncomfortable I’d move, didn’t I?”

“You did,” Loki agreed, still not opening his eyes.

Tony smiled at the purely contented look on Loki’s face. The expression was rare enough and Tony was happy whenever he was fortunate enough to view it. He was even happier when he knew he was the cause of it. Still he kept his word about not laying in the bed next to Loki and Tony sat on the floor near the edge of the bed. Holding lightly onto Loki’s hands they’d talked until Loki had finally been able to relax. At least it hadn’t progressed into a full blown panic attack, for which Tony was grateful.

“Anthony?”

“Yeah?”

“Thank you.”

“You’ve already thanked me babe,” Tony told him.

Loki shook his head. “No, not for sitting with me although I do very much appreciate that as well. I meant thank you for accepting me as a slave even in spite of your own personal anxieties. Were it not
for you I fear to think what would have happened to me.”

“Doesn’t matter anymore,” Tony reassured him. “You’re here now and you’re not going anywhere.”

The look of contentment faded slightly and Loki opened his eyes.

“I am afraid,” Loki whispered.

“Afraid of what?”

“It is an irrational fear as Thor truly seems clueless about my sentencing but his appearance makes me fear it is a precursor to Odin ordering me back to Asgard.”

“It wouldn’t matter if he did. I wouldn’t ever let him take you. You’re mine now and no one takes what’s mine. No one.”

Keeping his eyes carefully focused on the new arrival Clint made his way fully into the common room with Natasha following along silently. Casually Clint leaned against Steve’s chair and eyed Thor with well practiced look of mild curiosity. Without more information he couldn’t form an adequate reaction just yet. Natasha chose to remain standing at the position where they’d separated. It left her directly in front of the couch where Thor sat and also put her between everyone else and the elevator.

“Someone call a party and forget to call us?” he asked cocking his head slightly. Bruce snorted at the remark and Clint shifted his eyes to take in the man. The usually mild mannered doctor seemed decidedly tense about something.

“If it’s a party it’s the worst one I’ve ever been to,” Banner muttered.

“Thor just arrived,” Steve informed them. “He only just recently found out about Loki’s sentence. We were just filling him in on a few things.”

‘Just recently,’ rang through Clint’s mind. He had to take a second to shove down anger that it had taken Loki’s ‘brother’ this long to getting around to checking up on him. He had to choke back several replies knowing that the anger he was feeling was only leftover anger from his connection to Loki and not really his own. Before he could come up with a reply Nat beat him to the punch.

“Are you planning on attempting to remove him from this tower?” she asked.

Thor started to speak and stopped several times before he seemed to find his voice. “I have not all of the information. As of this moment I have no such plans.”

Nat nodded her head slightly, not an agreement exactly. Clint knew her too well to interpret it as such. It was more in acknowledgement. Should Thor change his mind and decide to try to take Loki she would do everything to prevent him as would the rest of them.

“Where’s Loki?” was her next question.

“Tony’s with him,” Steve informed them. “Loki looked a little out of it when Bruce and I arrived. I think they went to spend time in Loki’s room.”

Clint dimly noted Thor stiffening at the same moment his own muscles tensed.

“What room?” Thor demanded angrily.
“None of your business,” Clint growled.

“It is my business if Tony is spending time in my brother’s rooms,” Thor insisted.

“No, it’s really not,” Nat dissented.

“First you tell me others have taken advantage of my brother and now you tell me not to worry when another demands entrance into his personal rooms?”

“If Tony is in Loki’s room it’s because Loki invited him in there. If you even try to enter that room without his express permission I will stop you,” Clint threatened.

“You will try,” Thor growled back.

“I feel compelled to remind everyone that should anyone even attempt to enter master Loki’s rooms without his permission I would be obligated to take steps to prevent them,” JARVIS intoned evenly.

Clint had totally forgotten about JARVIS. He wanted to grin when he realized they would have JARVIS backing them as well. For several moments everyone stood completely silent and tense. A subtle shift in Thor’s posture alerted Clint to a change. Glancing back over his right shoulder he noted Tony in the doorway. Loki was nowhere to be seen. Good Clint thought. Loki didn’t need to be anywhere near this. Not right now.

When he finally left Loki’s room Tony hadn’t known what to expect. Walking into the common room and finding everyone tense and ready to kill caused him to pause. Tony opened his mouth to make some snarky comment in an attempt to defuse the situation when the elevator dinged. Double checking the room he realized everyone who should have access to this part of the tower was already there. Well, everyone except… And yep. Almost as if summoned by his thoughts it was Pepper that exited the elevator. In the still silence her heels clacked loudly across the marble flooring of the common room.

“Pepper,” Tony greeted. “To what do we owe this wonderful surprise.”

“If I may sir,” JARVIS answered. “I called her.”

“On whose orders?”

“On my own sir. My primary directive is protection and care; yours foremost and then that of the others residing in this tower. Taking into account your well being, master Loki’s current situation and residence here, and the arrival of Mr. Odinson I felt it best for all parties involved to inform Miss Potts of all new developments.”

“You sneaky son of a-” Pepper cleared her throat and Tony rolled his eyes. “I was only going to say son of a genius, promise.”


_Oh boy, here we go_, Tony thought. “Yeah, about that. Okay information first. He’s doing as well as you can expect for someone that’s been through the things he’s been through. He still has rough days but we get through them. What you did earlier? Touching him while he wasn’t looking and without asking first? Don’t do that again. Touching him when he’s unprepared only brings up some really bad memories and makes him panic. And no, I’ve never touched him like that and I really don’t appreciate you accusing me of _that_.”
“And how would you feel were you in my place?” Thor shouted. “He is my brother and when I return I find that he is sentenced to the harshest sentence possible. Many people would use just such an opportunity to—”

“To what?” Tony shot back. “To torture him? Because I have news for you. That’s exactly what happened! Only you know what? I didn’t do it, you’re people did!”

“Stop it both of you,” Rogers ordered.

“So what?”

“Anthony?”

No, Tony thought. Turning around he found Loki standing just at the edge of the common room threshold. “What’s up Rudolf?” he asked, hopeful that the old nickname might help Loki feel more comfortable than he looked.

“You had to see,” Loki stated quietly.

“I’m not understanding Loki.”

“When I explained about… about why I accepted the staff. You had to see.”

Frowning Tony thought back trying to discern what Loki meant. Suddenly he understood. Loki was referencing their conversation about Thanos. “Perhaps there is no way to explain it without showing you.” Oh Loki, no, Tony thought. “You really don’t have to do this.”

“It would be easier for him to see. To see and believe.”

Tony swallowed hard. This was Loki’s decision, he reminded himself. As much as he hated this idea he couldn’t tell Loki no. If he did he would be putting a lie to everything he had promised Loki so far. No matter how much he hated this it had to be Loki’s choice. In spite of his own selfish wishes he had to let Loki do whatever he needed. “If you’re sure then,” he told Loki quietly.

“I am sure Anthony,” Loki told him calmly.

The small tremors Tony could see running through him put lie to Loki’s assurances.

“I will, of course, defer to your wishes mas- Anthony,” Loki stated shakily.

It had been a long time since Loki had almost refered to him as master. Tony dropped his head. He couldn’t make this harder for his Loki. He needed to protect his Loki. “It’s fine babe. Whatever you need to do, it’s fine. Okay?”

“Babe,” Thor raged.

“Yeah, go ahead,” Tony insisted. “Make this harder for him and prove to me just how little you care about your brother!” Thor seemed taken aback and Tony rolled his eyes. If Thor didn’t know all of this drama would hurt Loki then he didn’t know Loki at all.

Loki trembled and resisted the urge to rush to his master’s side. If this were a normal situation then he’d run to his master instantly for protection. Any other slave could expect no less as no one else would ever offer them any form of protection. Here, however, things were vastly different and he was unsure of the best course of action. He had only meant to help his master explain but now found himself trembling before his former brother.
“Loki?” Thor asked softly reaching out for his brother.

Loki drew away. “No!” he shouted. “No touch! Please no more touches! Please!”

“No problem babe,” his Anthony assured him. “No one will touch you until you’re ready, okay?”

All Loki recognized was his master’s voice. The words meant little to him. As long as his master promised him he was safe then he was.

“Loki?” Tony asked gently.

“I am here.”

“Here, here or something else?”

Loki shook his head. “Here, here,” he replied.

“You know you don’t have to talk to Thor if you don’t want to don’t you?”

“I do. I appreciate the autonomy you grant me but he will not be satisfied unless he knows, Anthony. Please allow me to show him.”

“That’s not my call Loki. You decide what you want to share. You know that.”

“Please Anthony, you are my master. I must defer to you or.. Just… Please Anthony do not make me choose?”

“If I may?” JARVIS interrupted. “I can provide pictures or videos if needed master Loki.”

“You recorded my less than fully clothed moments?”

“I record everything sir. In this case I feel it might be better were I to project the image instead of you removing your clothing.”

“Can you do that?”

“I can.”

“I… Would you?”

“Yes sir. Center display?”

Loki glanced to his master.

..

“Yeah, center display JARVIS,” Tony ordered. Immediately there was an image of Loki’s injuries and Tony turned away. He couldn’t look. He already knew what injuries his Loki’s had and didn’t want to see them again without good reason. Suddenly some one took his hand. Tony looked up and was met with the eyes of his Loki. I’m sorry, he thought. I’m so sorry for everything you’ve been through.

“Thank you Anthony. For everything.”

Suddenly there was a loud noise as something was destroyed then silence.

“Loki?” Thor asked quietly.
“No,” Tony told him. “Not now.” Carefully he watched Loki.

“It is all right Anthony,” Loki said quietly. “It is understandable that he will have questions.”

“You don’t have to answer them if you don’t want.”

“What we talked about, what you promised, does it still hold true?”

“All of it,” Tony promised.

Loki nodded. “Then I will talk with him. Afterward…”

“Yeah, afterward. Whenever you want. Just let me know.” Another nod. Tony’s heart almost broke for his Loki. He wished he could banish Thor now instead of waiting but Loki deserved the right to do this. He deserved the right to do anything that would help him to feel better.

“Ask your questions now. Later…” unable to finish Loki trailed off.

Loki glanced to him and Tony knew. Loki was asking him to say what he could not.

“Afterward you have to leave. You can stay in the tower but not on this floor. After this conversation this floor is off limits.”

“You would dare keep me from my brother?”

“Yes,” Tony answered simply.

Thor strode forward and Tony tensed, ready to defend himself.

“Brother no!” Loki shouted. “It was my request, not his!”

Thor stopped short and stared uncomprehendingly.

“I am sorry but I cannot continue with my normal routine if I had to worry of finding you around the next corner.”

“You don’t owe him an explanation,” Tony growled.

“I do,” Loki insisted. “Please? In all my life only he and my mother have ever shown me kindness. I would explain if it is allowed.”

“You have to know I wouldn’t deny you anything you need?”

Loki dropped to his knees and lowered his head. “I do Anthony, it is only that I do not want you to think me ungrateful. You have been nothing if not patient during my time here. I mean no disrespect. I only mean to convey my appreciation for your patience. It is just that I wish to impress upon him that it is not you keeping him from me. Please allow this.”

Tony knelt down and ran a hand over Loki’s jaw. Loki shivered under the touch. He could not deny Loki this if that’s what Loki needed. Swallowing hard he nodded. “If it’s something you need then it’s fine babe.”

“Yes, I need to do this. Please?”

“Whatever you need,” Tony agreed.
Loki nodded absently before turning back to Thor. “It is not by his desire that you should be banned from this area but mine. I am sorry but I cannot continue on in this role thrust upon me if I were reminded of other times. Perhaps later I could deal with things better but for now I cannot. Please do not blame him.”
“Ask your questions Thor,” Anthony stated without breaking eye contact with Loki.

“I would discuss this with him face to face instead of from across the room,” Thor answered.

“We should sit down,” Loki counseled. “Anthony, would you please get me one of my hoodies? I believe it might help to soothe my nerves.”

“I’d prefer not leave you right now,” Anthony wavered.

“There are plenty of people here willing to watch over me Anthony. I will be alright while you are gone. Please get me one of my hoodies?”

“Go Tony,” Pepper ordered. “None of us will let anything happen to him. Besides the quicker you get the hoodie the quicker we can have this conversation.”

“Thank you Mistress,” Loki told her with a slight nod.

Tony shared a look with Pepper and he noted that she also realized Loki had dropped her name from his normal acknowledgement. He reminded himself yet again to ask Loki about the differences in titles later. With a nod Tony turned and made his way to Loki’s room. He had to work not to jog in an effort to return quicker. When he reached Loki’s room Tony hesitated with his hand on the doorknob. Turning he stared down the hallway to his own room as a thought struck him.

“Why don’t we sit down while we wait,” Pepper suggested. “Here, I’ll sit on the couch with you and Tony can sit in the chair on your other side.” Loki nodded absently and she guided him over to the couch. She was grateful when Loki didn’t resist the arrangements. There was a method to her placement. While she would have loved to put both Tony and Loki on the couch together that would leave one of them sitting next to Thor. For now it was just safer to keep someone between Thor and Tony and there was no way Tony would feel comfortable with Loki and Thor next to each other.

Speaking of Tony. As she watched Tony hurried into the room carrying something made of black cloth that had definitely more material than one of the hoodies Loki owned. He stopped when he was in front of Loki and hesitated. When he finally stopped stalling and held up the item her heart melted. Instead of one of the zip-up hoodies she and Loki had gotten while shopping Tony had snagged one of his own. The hoodie he held was a Pink Floyd pullover that had always been a bit too big on him. Smiling she shook her head.

Loki stared uncomprehendingly at the item in Tony’s hands. It was similar to one of his hoodies just with a pocket across the front and no zipper. Confused he looked up and met Anthony’s eyes, waiting for more information.

“I just, I wasn’t sure if you had a pullover type of hoodie,” Tony stumbled. “So I just thought…”

“Yes?” Loki asked not quite comprehending.
“Yeah. Look, nevermind, stupid idea. Wasn’t thinking I guess. I’ll just…”

He wasn’t sure why but it seemed important to Anthony that he not hate this hoodie. “It was not a stupid idea. I do not have any like this,” he said honestly. Suddenly he realized something. “This is one of yours isn’t it?”

“Yeah. Like I said, stupid idea. I’ll go get you one of yours,” Tony muttered turning to leave.

“No.” Loki reached out and put a hand on Anthony’s arm to halt him. “I do not have one like this. It looks warm. I would wear it if you do not mind.”

“You don’t have to if you don’t want to Loki.”

“I know but I do not have one like this and it does look comfortable.”

Before Anthony could reply Mistress Pepper raised a hand and smacked Anthony on the arm. Taking the hoodie from Anthony she handed it to him. Loki gripped onto the material tightly, nervous about how his Anthony would react to such treatment. When his Anthony merely grinned and dropped his head Loki finally allowed himself to breathe. Of course Anthony would be okay with such actions. After courting each other he and Mistress Pepper would know what the other would tolerate and what they would not. Suddenly he was self conscious about wearing Anthony’s clothing in front of Mistress Pepper. Dropping his head he raised his eyes to meet hers.

“Mistress?”

“Pepper,” she corrected.

Loki nodded deferentially once. “Indeed. Mistress Pepper, do you take any issue with me wearing my… Tony’s clothing?”

She ran a hand through his hair and he leaned into the touch. It had been a long time since anyone had comforted him as such. By the nines he he missed his mother.

“No Loki, I don’t mind. I think Tony would love it if you were to wear his hoodie.”

“In truth?”

“Yes sweetie, in truth. Just consider it an Earth thing.”

“Yes Mistress.” Shoving his arms through the sleeves Loki pulled the garment over his head and then down his body. He looked up at his Mistress. “Good?”

“I wouldn’t know,” she told him. “Tony?”

He wasn’t stupid enough to miss the look his Mistress gave his Anthony. It was a look that clearly stated she wanted Anthony to approve and she would be disappointed if he didn’t. He wished she hadn’t done that. He would not be able to accurately judge Anthony’s reaction now.

“It looks… It looks fine,” Anthony finally finished. "Questions?”

He glanced to his brother. Loki nodded solemnly. “Indeed. Questions?”

“You would wear your captor’s clothing?” Thor asked.

“He is not my captor, he is my saviour. He has rescued me from a dire situation. I fear to think what would have happened had he not accepted me.”
“You guys should sit first,” Barton told them.

Looking around he noted his Anthony, Mistress Pepper, and the others. Miss Romanoff grabbed his hand. With a nod she lead him to the couch. As he sat down she perched on the arm of the couch nearest him. “You look good in that hoodie. Don’t let anyone say different, okay?”

“It is not my place to disagree Miss Romanoff.”

“Nat, please?”

“I cannot. How about Miss Natasha?”

“So much better. Yes use that.”

“Yes Miss Natasha.”

“And Pepper was right, it’s a Midgard thing.”

“You people need to stop pressing him,” Tony grumbled.

“Does it bind me to my master moresoe?”

“No, but only because we don’t have slavery here,” she informed him.

Loki nodded. “Thank you miss Romanoff.”

“No, miss Natasha, remember? And Don’t thank me, thank Tony.”

Loki gave a sharp nod. “Yes ma’am. Thor? Ask your questions while I can yet answer them.”

“Hold up,” Barton insisted.

He seated himself on the arm of the couch next to Anthony and gave a nod. The doctor remained standing but leaned against Mistress Pepper’s chair. The captain merely crossed his arms and watched from across the coffee table.

‘Holy shit,’ did Loki really accept his shirt? Tony could give a fuck less about almost anything else now seeing Loki was wearing his hoodie. Loki was his and the fact that his Loki was wearing something of his was too perfect.

“You were injured during the battle for New York?” Thor asked sitting down in the one remaining chair.

“I was mind controlled,” Loki hissed. “Do you truly think so little of me that I would attack a world in that manner?”

“Enough! You have to understand that it is difficult for us to believe your words.”

“Not for me,” Anthony interjected with a shrug. “I believe him.”

“You know not how much he lies!”

“How much he used to lie,” Tony dissented. “He has never once lied to me since he’s been here.”

“He may have. With my brother-"
“Enough!” Tony shouted. “Either ask your questions or leave but do not insult Loki in my presence ever again.”

“He is called the god of lies for a reason,” Thor persisted.

“I honestly don’t give a fuck,” Tony stated. “He’s my god of lies now and he still hasn’t lied to me. If that’s all you have then you can leave!”

“Stop!” Pepper shouted. “Thor,” she said turning to the thunder god. “If you have questions then ask them. If all you have is insults than, with all due respect, stuff it.”

To say that Loki was stunned was an understatement. That his Mistress would tell his brother to ‘stuff it’ was beyond his reasoning. He stared openly at Mistress Pepper.

“What?” she asked, crossing her arms. “He shouldn’t have said that.”

“I-. I would like to give you my thanks Mistress.”

“Thanks for what?” she muttered.

“Thanks for what?” she muttered. “It was no more than he deserved to hear.”

Loki dropped his head and grinned. He would never have thought his Mistress would have taken his side against his brother. He would never have thought anyone would have take his side against anyone.

“Obviously this isn’t working,” the doctor stated. “Let’s try this another way. Despite whether or not he lies the facts don’t. I believe him about the mind control but there’s no way to confirm that. I examined him myself and I can tell you all about his injuries. I’m going to try to put this into words anyone can understand so let me know if there’s anything you don’t understand. What we know?

He does have injuries that aren’t healing like they should. There’s a massive negative ion build up on them that shouldn’t be there. We’re working to correct that. The other injuries are extensive. The cuts and abrasions alone are more than worrying. There’s evidence he was lashed with a whip. He’s been branded and although it’s a small area it still had to hurt like a bitch. Not to mention none of us know what damage there will be for taking magic away from an inherently magical being.

The broken bones alone would be enough for any agency on Earth to investigate on grounds of abuse. He’s lucky if there’s no nerve damage but I haven’t had an opportunity to ask about that yet. Your people may be able to heal the damage but there’s still calcium buildups from the initial break. At this point it would be easier to count the bones that weren’t broken as opposed to the broken ones.”

Thor started to speak but the doctor continued, talking over him.

“Now the rapes. And yes I put an ‘s’ on that because there had to be many to cause the damage I’ve observed. To my discredit I have to admit I did initially blame Tony but that’s on my head and I even knew better at the time. The sheer number of rapes, and there had to be many, is alarming at best. The internal damage alone is extensive. The external damage will heal but…”

The doctor shook his head.

“His muscles show evidence of having been stabbed repeatedly by a bladed object.”

Loki shivered as he remembered his tortures. “Please stop,” he begged. “Please?”
“Loki?” Anthony asked.

He couldn’t speak so he merely shook his head praying it would be understood.

“Enough!” Thor shouted. “I would speak with Loki alone if he permits it.”

Loki shook his head once more. “I fear you do not understand how slavery works. I could neither speak with you alone more than I could bathe on my own. I must abide by Anthony’s wishes as it pleases him. I cannot disobey or the magic would punish me as you already well know.”

“You do not attempt to fight it?” Thor asked.

Yet again Loki shook his head. “I will not press my good fortune. My Anthony has been better than I could have hoped. I would do nothing that might either cause me to be returned to Asgard or sent elsewhere.”

“Your Anthony?” Thor questioned.

“I… I would like to go to my room now,” Loki stuttered, wrapping his arms around himself.

“Go,” Anthony ordered. “We can finish this without you here. Just… Just go.”

Loki nodded and bolted for his room.

“I swear to the god I don’t even believe in if you hurt him any more I’ll hurt you,” Tony growled.

Thor was taken aback. He never wanted to hurt his brother, in fact he would do almost anything to prevent that. It was just that he was tired of being lied to by Loki. That Loki would lie to others solely to achieve some scheme was just his way. How did Stark not see this?

“He’s been hurt physically in more ways than I can count but none of that matters. It’s the emotional pain he’s holding onto that matters, and you’re part of it. He needs you. If you’re too blind to see that then you don’t deserve someone like him,” Tony huffed.

Thor was left with a conundrum. Did he believe Loki was mind controlled during his attack or not? He wasn’t sure what to believe. “I would talk to my brother alone if you would allow it.”

“No,” Clint stated before Tony could respond.

Like fuck he was going to let let Thor be alone in the same room as Loki, Clint thought to himself. He shot Tony a glare and hoped the engineer understood. Thankfully it seemed he did or maybe that was his own wishful thinking.

“Loki’s room is his safe zone,” Tony announced. “You will not interrupt his time there.”

“You will not keep me from my brother Stark,” Thor growled.

“I will if I think it’s what he wants,” Tony insisted.

Clint had never been so happy to call Tony Stark his friend. “I think you need to understand something,” Clint intoned. “We’re all on Loki’s side and that’s not going to change. You would do better to watch your mouth when saying anything about him.”
“Quite,” Pepper stated. “If I may? He needs you too. You need to stop accusing him and start listening to Loki.”

Clint almost grinned. If Pepper was on there side then the battle was already won.

“He needs his brother but he’s not in a place he can ask for your help yet. You’re going to have to give him a lot of space for now.”

“He thinks of himself as a slave,” Thor growled.

Pepper nodded. “He does. That’s probably because he is a slave for now and you’re hurting him more. Stop.”

“You do not know my brother as I do.”

Pepper nodded. “You’re right. But I do know him.”

“He lies, he-”

“Not to Tony. You should really reevaluate your opinion of him if you think he would lie to someone he loves.”

Thor was silent for a long while. “Love?” he asked cautiously.

“Yes,” she stated tersely. “And if you have a problem with that then fuck you,” she stated blandly. Both Loki and Tony deserved someone that helped them and if Thor didn’t see that then fuck him.

“You also would protect Loki?” Thor asked.

Clint bristled but Tony answered in his stead.

“You don’t?” Tony asked. Thor hesitated and Tony sighed wearily. “When you first arrived you were angry because you thought I was taking advantage of my position. You wanted to protect him then.”

“In spite of everything he is still my brother. If you were using your position to take advantage of him I would be honor bound to defend his honor.”

“But not honor bound enough to defend him at his mockery of a trial?” Clint asked.

“I was not allowed at the trial. I have no knowledge of what transpired there.”

“Actually can we play a little word association?” Tony questioned. “If I were to say to you ‘argr’ what would you say?”

“I would say watch your tongue,” Thor growled.

“See that’s what I thought. You know that’s the excuse they used to keep him muzzled throughout the trial?”

“They would not dare call my brother that!”

“Yeah well I got news for you, princess, they did.”
“Enough,” Pepper demanded. “This isn’t useful Tony. I think we all have more than enough to think about. For now why don’t we all go to our respective corners and calm down so we can come at this fresh later.”

As much as it was phrased as a question Tony knew her well enough to recognize the command in her voice. A large part of him wanted to argue just to be contrary but he really should check up on Loki. “Right, I’m calling it then. Thor? No offense but I can’t have you on this floor. Loki needs to feel safe and if banning you from one floor of my tower will do that then I have no problems doing just that.”

“You know I have to go talk to him don’t you?” Pepper inquired softly.

“You know I don’t care as long as it doesn’t affect Loki?” Tony asked back.

“I do,” she answered. Placing a hand on his arm she turned to face him. “Are you good though?”

“I don’t know and I won’t know until I can talk to Loki,” he told her.

Pepper nodded. “You know he loves you too right?”

“I don’t think he’s capable of knowing how he feels right now.”

She pat his arm a few times but didn’t reply.

Loki had no clue what was happening. That others would stand up for him was well beyond his reasoning; Barton especially. He really wasn’t worth this. He needed to tell them but every time he tried the words got stuck in his throat. He glanced to his Tony praying to the norns that he would understand. Anthony stared at him curiously.

“Do you think we shouldn’t be doing this?” Anthony questioned.

“I am not worth this,” Loki stated embarrassed. Loki shook his head. He couldn’t do this. It was all too much. It was the reason he had fled to his room. He could not take them all standing up for him. Anthony especially deserved better. “Please do not?”


“Yes,” Loki breathed. He tried to speak louder but his voice refused to obey.

“With all due respect to you… No. I refuse to let anyone talk smack about you,” Tony told him with absolute certainty.

“Smack?” Loki asked confused.

Anthony rolled his eyes. “I keep forgetting you’re not human. Smack? It’s uh… well it’s like talking trash. Um talking negatively about someone. I really don’t want to talk about this right now. Let’s change the subject, okay?”

“As you wish,” Loki answered deferentially.
Stepping out of the elevator Pepper took in the destruction. In spite of Tony’s misgivings she knew Thor genuinely cared for his brother. Apparently Thor had barely made it out of the elevator before giving in to his anger. Following the path of destruction she finally found Thor in the mini kitchen on his floor. Standing in the doorway she cleared her throat noisily. Thor whirled around and glared at her. Finally his gaze softened.

“Lady Pepper,” he greeted her.

“Are you finished destroying things?” she asked coolly.

“My brother.”

“Is safe. Your brother is probably in the best place he can be given his situation. Do you really trust Tony so little?” Thor hesitated and she grabbed onto that. Sooner or later Thor would realize Tony was the best person to lay claim to his brother but the more she could help him the better. “You have to know in your heart that Tony would never hurt Loki.”

Thor was silent for a long while. “Slavery,” he finally said. “It’s one of the harshest punishments. I don’t understand why father would approve of it. It is not that I do not trust Anthony, it is more that I do not understand why father would sentence him to such.”

Her heart melted. Being an only child she couldn’t understand the brotherly bond between Thor and Loki but she recognized it was there. “I came to talk to you first so I haven’t talked with Loki yet but I believe with all my heart he still cares for you.”

“He does not wish to see me,” Thor replied dejectedly.

“It’s not that,” Pepper answered. “He just doesn’t know how to deal with reconciling his old life with his new life right now. Give him time.”

“Does… does your Anthony treat him well?”

“Tony allows Loki to call the shots. He always protects those he cares for. He will never willingly hurt Loki not to mention everyone else here will protect him as well.”

Thor nodded. “Will you convey my well wishes?”

“I will,” she assured him. “Will you try to view Tony as an unwilling participant?”

“He is keeping me from my brother.”

“No. That was Loki’s decision. That had nothing to do with Tony.”

“It matters not,” Thor replied. “It all amounts to my brother does not wish to see me.”

“No sweetie, that’s not it. He’s just hurt. You would be if you you were the same position as he. Give him time?”

“Do you think he will ever wish for my presence?”

“Yes.”

“Then I will wait.”
Chapter 19

Loki inspected the tub suspiciously. Without access to his seiðr he could not sense if there was more to this contraption than met the eye. He turned to Anthony and clasped his hands behind his back as he waited. In spite of his reservations his master’s wishes were law. He would not risk punishment by the magic for disagreeing with his master’s decision.

“Loki?” Tony asked.

“Yes Anthony?”

“You know you don’t have to do this right?”

“Would it make you happy?” Loki asked, truly curious.

“Would it make you happy?” Tony countered.

Not expecting such an answer Loki struggled to find an adequate response.

“I won’t have you doing anything that’s uncomfortable,” Anthony insisted.

“I do believe I have told already told you that everything is uncomfortable for me Anthony,” Loki told him gently.

“But you know what I mean right?”

“Yes sir,” Loki answered obediently.

“Loki,” Tony growled.

Bowing his head Loki mentally winced. “Yes Anthony.”

“Maybe we should wait,” the doctor dithered.

“No, please?” Loki begged. “I do trust you now. I… I don’t know. My Tony says you are trustworthy and I trust him. Also you have stood for me against my brother seemingly without hesitation. Honestly I do trust you. My reservations are my own issues doctor. Please do not take them to heart.”

“I have to Loki. As your physician I have to take into account all of your well being.”

“But I am a slave now,” Loki stated confused.

The doctor merely looked baffled.

Loki shook his head. “Slaves have no say so in what happens to them doctor. Should my, uh, should my Tony disagree I would be honor bound to obey. Other than that all is permissible.”

“Not here,” Anthony growled.

Loki curled his shoulders forward. He had angered his master. Resigned to the punishment Loki waited for the pain. When it didn’t immediately come he wasn’t too surprised but he was still leery. That his Anthony would forgo punishment was slowly becoming expected even if Loki still did not fully understand the reasons why.
“Loki?” his Anthony asked.

He dropped his head in shame. “I apologize Anthony. It will be as you please.”

“The fuck it will,” Anthony muttered. Loki’s frown deepened but he held his tongue. “You have to know by now I wouldn’t force you into doing anything you didn’t want, right?”

Loki nodded. “It is why I hate to draw your displeasure Anthony. No slave could ever hope to be placed in such a haven. I am sorry,” Loki finished in a whisper.

“Don’t be sorry, be honest.

“I fear to do that s-, Anthony.”

“Why?”

The norns help him the honest curiosity he heard in Tony’s voice hit hard. Still, the only thing his Anthony ever asked of him was to be honest. “I fear I may overstep my bounds and say more than you would appreciate,” Loki admitted. “I recognize you have asked I speak my mind but to a slave that is usually death. Please? It is my life on the line and I would rather not test anything at the moment?”

Anthony seemed to hesitate and Loki held his breath. Finally Anthony seemed to agree as he nodded. Loki released a breath he wasn’t aware he was holding. “Thank you Anthony,” he whispered. Loki didn’t think he had ever meant anything more. His Anthony had been more kind to him than almost anyone else in his life. As things stood Anthony could do as he pleased and Loki could do little to deter him. Anthony had no reason to comfort him and every reason to retaliate for Loki’s previous actions, yet he hadn’t.

All Anthony had shown him was kindness and patience and Loki was more than grateful for that. Still unable to forgive himself Loki did not understand and had no clue how his Anthony could ever forgive him. The damage that he had caused to this world… Loki lowered his head in shame.

“Loki?”

Schooling his features Loki raised his head and eyed the ground in front of his feet.

“Are you…”

“I am fine Anthony,” he replied easily. And damned if he wasn’t proud of how steady his voice sounded. Anthony locked eyes with him and self consciously Loki lowered his eyes back to the floor as was proper of his station. His master decided his fate; not he. If his master decided he should approve of this treatment then he would. He had been honest when he said that his master dictated his fate and he would do as Anthony pleased. Suddenly he was desperate that Anthony understand. He opened his mouth to continue but Anthony halted him by speaking first.

“You aren’t fine,” Anthony all but whispered.

The despair Loki heard in that voice made him wish to comfort Anthony. He needed to do something to appease him. “You may be correct. Still I am better than I would be in any other placement and that is thanks only to you. Please do not be upset? Perhaps we should say that I am better than I could be? Please Anthony do not be upset?”

Anthony hesitated before answering. “Yeah. Okay I guess that is true. I have never made secret that I want you to be honest though, have I?”
“No Anthony,” Loki answered. Anthony was his master. If nothing else he should please his master, right? Loki nodded once and waited.

“Do you want to do this?”

“I fear you as well as my brother do not understand how slavery works,” Loki answered.

“I fucking told you, my tower my rules,” Anthony growled.

Loki dropped his head, suitably chastised. “I need to to do this, Anthony. Please, do not be angry with me, but you did ask for honesty. Despite the discomfort it will cause if it helps to alleviate any of the pain I need to try.” Half truth but at least he was still being honest. That was only one of the reasons he wished to do this. He still couldn’t help but feel guilty for all the lives lost because of him. The pain from this would be no more than he deserved. He should pay for his actions somehow. This would not absolve him of the guilt from his transgressions but perhaps it was a start.

When the bath was full Loki could only stare. His master wanted him to trust the one person that could hurt him without a thought? Dr. Banner’s other half had literally beaten him into the floor without a second thought. How was he supposed to trust this man with his very well being? He reminded himself that doctor had shown him nothing but kindness since his arrival. Perhaps he should trust the doctor but potions still made him nervous. This ‘solution’ was too much like a potion for his comfort.

“Loki?” Tony inquired quietly.

“I am… I am…,” Pausing he took a deep breath. “I am adequate,” he finally finished.

“I don’t fucking want you to be adequate,” Anthony growled.

Loki cringed. “Whatever you wish ma-, si... Anthony.”

“Aw fuck!” Anthony exclaimed.

“Tony? Can you stop? You actually may be making it worse,” the doctor interrupted.

“Oh come on. How can I make it worse if he already doesn’t trust me?”

“Because he does trust you but that’s not it. He defers to you,” the doctor explained. “If you’re predisposed to be against something then he will be too.”

“Loki is his own person,” Anthony growled.

His shivering increased. The doctor was right but Loki could not force himself to speak the words. He was too worried his Anthony would be angry with him.

“He’s really not,” Dr. Banner explained. “He takes his cues from you. If you’re upset then he’s already bound to be as well.”

“Please,” Loki begged. “He owes me naught. Please?”

“I’m your physician Loki. I can’t protect you,” the doctor answered. His features softened. “Besides, Tony would kill me if I wasn’t honest.”

“Anthony? Please give me something to do! Give me a way to make this right?”
Tony shook his head. “No Loki. It’s not about making it right. It’s about you feeling comfortable.”
Loki stared at his master in amazement.

Loki sank into the odd tub slowly. The mixture was every bit as unpleasant as he remembered. He grit his teeth and bore it. It was probably no more than just payment for the damage he’d caused to this realm. Loki dropped his head and could only growl when he realized he was awaiting his master’s reaction when Anthony was not present. Anthony had offered to at least stay in the bedroom but Loki had shook his head. He didn’t want to chance having Anthony hear him if he cried out in pain. This was his penance, his suffering to bear and he couldn’t do that with anyone else around.

“Is there anything I could do for you while you are… incapacitated?” JARVIS asked.

Loki’s brain reminded him that he was only here at his master’s good graces and he had yet to perform any duty that would keep him there. If his master would not give him tasks he was going to have to find them on his own. For that he needed information.

“JARVIS!” Loki commanded.

“Yes master Loki?”

“Could you give me instructions on Midgardian technology?”

“I can,” the AI informed him. “Where would you like to start?”

“Can we start with Master Anthony’s coffee maker?” Loki asked.

After the ‘bath’ Tony had gone with Bruce to check on Loki. Bruce needed to check on the injuries and Tony just needed to check on Loki. He needed to see with his own eyes that there were no negative effects from the solution. After Bruce left Loki had wanted him to stay so Loki laid down on the bed while Tony sat down next to it. He made a mental note to get more furniture for Loki’s room. And maybe some books, he thought. Loki seemed like a person that liked to read. When Loki was finally asleep Tony watched him for a time. Finally he gently pulled his hand out of Loki’s. Not surprisingly Loki woke with a start. “It’s me, it’s just me,” Tony soothed him. “Sh, babe it’s only me.”

“Anthony?” Loki whispered sleepily.

“Yeah, it’s me. You fell asleep holding my hand. I was just going to go to bed.”

“Mn no,” Loki disagreed. “Stay?”

“I’m not getting into bed with you Loki,” Tony told him gently.

“Please Anthony?”

“I’m sorry. This is one of the few things I have to deny you. I can’t trust myself Loki, do you understand that?”

Loki nodded. “Do I have to like it?”

Tony fought a grin. “No babe, you don’t have to like it at all just accept it. Later, when you’re
feeling more like yourself, I promise. Okay?”

Loki nodded once again. “Anthony?”

“Yeah?”

“The hoodie you allowed me to use… Do you-. I mean do you wish me to return it eventually?”

“Oh. I, uh, was kind of thinking you could keep it. I mean if you wanted to. It’s always been a bit too big for me anyway. It fits you better. You don’t have to wear it if you don’t want.”

“It means something on Midgard? Wearing another’s garments?”

Desperately trying not to blush Tony rubbed at the back of his neck. “It can. Sometimes when two people are,” he paused trying find a good word. “Close then they might wear each other’s clothes sometimes.” Loki remained silent for so long Tony began to get nervous.

“Close,” he repeated thoughtfully. Carefully he mused over the various things that would could mean. He found he very much liked the idea of wearing something to show he was ‘close’ to his master. He started to reply but Tony was already speaking.

“Yeah, but it doesn’t have to mean anything. Sometimes it can mean nothing. So if you want to wear it then don’t think it has to mean anything like that, okay?”

Loki’s heart sank. Of course Anthony would not mean it that way. It had probably only been meant as a visual show of ownership for Thor’s benefit. Even if it meant nothing like that to Anthony it mattered not. Loki could still wear it to appease his Anthony and wish that it meant more. “I would still wear it if you would permit,” he answered reverently.

“Is there something you want to talk about Loki?” Anthony asked.

“No Anthony,” Loki lied. Feeling guilty he kept his head down. “I only mean to please you.”

Anthony was silent and Loki almost shook.

“I am sorry. You asked for honesty.” Loki said haltingly. “The truth is there is a great many things I would like to talk about. I just can not seem to muster the courage to do so.” Loki put his head in his hands despondently.

Tony stared for a moment at the man who in the face of torture and while mind controlled still managed to set up the Chitauri for failure. The man who even walked calmly to what he thought would be certain death after his capture. The things those bastards did to break that man was a truly evil thing. They would not win, Tony would not allow it.

“Loki,” Tony said softly. “You may just be the strongest person I know. As for courage you are still here. Still alive after so many others would have folded. If you need time to heal and find yourself again, don’t beat yourself up for that. You are still here, still fighting. You will win. I know this because you are and will forever be Loki son of Frigga, brother to Thor, and most importantly… at the very core a good man,” Tony finished.

Turning from Loki he headed for the door saying. “Sleep well. You will tell me when you are ready.
For now don’t worry about courage you have enough to fill the ocean.” Closing the door softly Tony didn’t see the tears running down Loki’s wonder struck face.

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Loki woke early the next morning and dressed quickly. Making his way to the coffee pot he stared at it for a time. Later, he told himself. It was already set for this morning so he would have to wait. Loki would reset it for the next morning before Anthony had a chance. Well, hopefully. He was still nervous about getting it right but it seemed easy enough. For now he wanted to try his hand at some of the other machines.

Apparently the washing machine was on the common floor instead of this one. He was going to have to leave this floor for the first time aside from the two times he’d been to Anthony’s workshop. He was a bit nervous about doing this without permission but JARVIS had assured him it would be fine. Making his way to the elevator he eyed it cautiously before finally pressing the button. When the doors opened he inspected the area and realized he had no idea where to begin looking for the washing machine. Instead of asking JARVIS Loki decided to wander the floor for a few minutes inspecting it.

The open area in front of the elevator was much like the one on his floor except it lacked the personal touches like potted plants and such. There were slightly discolored circles in places on the floor as if there had once been such things there. Loki frowned at that but ultimately it didn’t matter so he shrugged it off and continued. There were many doors lining the hallway that he didn’t open. He wasn’t sure what was behind them and was a bit nervous they might be bedrooms as he was on the ‘common’ floor.

The first open area he came to seemed to be a kitchen. It was smaller than the one on his floor and Loki found he liked how cozy it seemed. He wandered inside and inspected various objects that caught his attention. He stopped when he saw the coffee pot. Perhaps this one was not already set and he could practice, he wondered. That is, if he could locate the coffee. As he stood there someone walked into the kitchen behind him and Loki froze.

“Loki?”

Loki knew that voice. It was the Captain. The Captain was safe. He could trust this man not to hurt him for snooping. Or so he hoped. Willing his muscles to relax Loki straightened his back and waited.

“What are you doing down here?”

“I am looking for the washing machine,” Loki answered without turning.

“You, uh, do realize this is a kitchen don’t you?”

Loki ground his teeth together. Of course he’d realized that, he wasn’t stupid. “Quite,” he gritted out trying to keep his voice calm and even.

“I can show you where the washer is if you want,” the Captain offered.

“That would be-”

“Brother?”

Loki tensed. Damn. He hadn’t thought about Thor still being here. Of course he would have a room on the common floor.
“Would you talk with me?”

Cementing his composure Loki schooled his features and finally turned. “I have tasks to perform for my master. I do not have time to spend in idle conversation.”

“He would order you to menial labor?” Thor asked.

Loki fought not to roll his eyes. “Do you even understand slavery in the slightest?”

“I do but I thought better of him,” Thor growled.

“Thor, you need to get this through your thick head. Anthony is my master. I live here only on his good graces. The more you insult him the more precarious you make my position. I would ask that you do not make things more difficult. I am already desperate not to be sent back and have no idea how to cement my place here. Do not make things anymore worse than they have to be.”

“I cannot help it. You are my brother. I cannot stand to see you as a slave.”

“If this is difficult for you to stand then you would not like the other options,” Loki growled.

“Does he treat you well?”

“He treats me as an equal,” Loki answered honestly.

“That is good at least.”

“No,” Loki hissed. “That is not good Thor. If Odin wishes me punished and he does not do a good enough job of it then I will be given to another who would only treat me worse!”

“What would you have me do?”

“Do not disparage my master. Do not treat me as your brother. In fact do not recognize me as a person. Treat me as any slave. You do know how to do that do you not?”

“I cannot do that. Not to you,” Thor said gently.

“Then you do not truly care for me. If you did you would help me seal my place here so I do not have to worry about being given to another master.”

- 

Tony awoke with a start. For a split second he almost expected another person to be lying in the bed next to him. Damn he wanted Loki in his bed. Nope, he told himself. It was still too soon for Loki to feel comfortable with that. Damn he needed to get better control of his more basic urges. There was no way he could fuck Loki right now.

“JARVIS!”

“Yes sir?”

“Where’s Loki?”

“Master Loki is in the elevator headed back to this floor.”

“Back? JARVIS why was Loki not on this floor to start with?”
“If I may offer conjecture, I believe master Loki does not feel useful and is looking for more ways to ‘prove’ his worth so that you will not send him away.”

“Why the fuck would I send him away?” Tony grumbled.

“No one said that you would sir, I merely stated that he might feel that way. You might try to understand things from his point of view though. He has nowhere to go except places that would hurt him and is desperate not to be sent away. I believe he feels like his position here is precarious at best. If I may, if you make mention of it I believe that would only serve to make him more nervous. Perhaps it would be best for you to ignore this particular situation?”

“Ignore a person that needs help? Tony asked incredulously.

“No sir. Ignore this excursion. Try to focus on the reasons why he would feel as if he needed prove himself.”

“You know what, I don’t care. JARVIS don’t talk to me for now. I need coffee.”

“Yes sir.” the AI acknowledged.
Chapter 20

Loki had just enough time to collect his cereal and bowl before Anthony was making his way into the kitchen. Quickly he set his things down on the counter and opened a cabinet to grab a coffee mug. He was still filling it when he felt Anthony’s presence behind him. Carefully he replaced the coffee pot and turned around. Anthony was standing no more than three feet away eying him strangely. Holding the coffee mug he dropped his eyes and waited.

“You really don’t have to do that Loki,” Tony told him gently.

“I know, I truly just wish to do it.”

“It’s not because…”

Still with his eyes downcast Loki frowned.

“Yeah, nevermind. I’ll take your stuff to the table if you want.”

“Yes Anthony,” Loki answered.

Just as he set the cup down the Captain walked into the common room and towards the kitchen. Assuming that the other man was here to speak with Anthony -- because seriously why else would he be here? -- Loki sat down and began pouring his cereal. He had just finished pouring the milk and taking his first bite when the Captain turned to him and spoke.

“I was thinking that if you’re feeling up to it you might want to join me in the gym this morning,” Rogers stated conversationally.

Swallowing wrong Loki choked on his cereal.

“Loki?” Tony asked concerned.

Attempting to stop coughing Loki tried to wave away Anthony’s worry. When he could finally breath again he turned and stared at the Captain. Rogers was asking him to go to the gym with him?

“Excuse me? I do not believe I heard you correctly.”

“I was asking if you wanted to join me in the gym. Well, I mean after you finish eating obviously. I was just thinking it couldn’t hurt for you to work on getting back into shape. We could start you out with a light workout nothing too strenuous, you know?”

“I, uh.” Unsure how to respond he turned to Anthony and raised an eyebrow.

Anthony shrugged slightly and made a shooing motion with one hand. “It’s fine with me if you want to go down to the gym. You’re pretty much welcome to go anywhere in the tower. I probably should have said that before now.”

“What areas should I not visit?” Loki asked.

“The first seventy-eight floors are all for business related things and such. As you know the workshop is on seventy-nine. We’re on floor eighty and you saw floor eighty-one the last time you were here. The twelve floors above that is the Avenger’s section. There’s the common floor where everyone can meet up and everyone also has their own floor. The other six floors are set up for various things as needed like the gym and such. Floors eight-nine, ninety, and ninety-one are empty right now though they’re set up for just in case I have to house any more people. I’d say as long as you don’t go any farther down then the workshop you’re pretty much fine to go anywhere else you
“want to go.”

“Anthony?”

“Yeah?”

“Which floor, uh, which one is Thor’s?” Tony seemed to wince at the question. Should he not have asked? Perhaps he was just overthinking things. Perhaps Anthony did not currently wish to be reminded of Thor. Loki tensed, sure that he had said the wrong thing and angered his Anthony.

“Sorry, I should have already told you. Thor’s rooms are on the eighty-seventh floor.”

Loki nodded in acknowledgement, still slightly fearful lest he say the wrong thing.

“Yeah, no, if you want to go with Steve then feel free. I should probably work on some of that paperwork and stuff Pepper keeps sending over.”

Another nod to Anthony. Turning he gave Captain Rogers a nod as well. Finally he returned to his morning meal and continued eating his cereal.

-  

Stepping out of the elevator Loki didn’t know what to expect. The room he was greeted with somehow was much larger than what he was used to, though he supposed that was mainly because it took up almost the whole floor. The floor he shared with Anthony probably housed more rooms and therefore they were necessarily smaller. He started to take a step forward to better inspect the area then thought better of it. Halting in his tracks he waits for the other man to tell him what they are going to do today.

“So… this is the gym,” Rogers stated needlessly.

“Quite,” Loki replied. He winced slightly. Though he hadn’t meant to sound harsh he could not deny how the single word sounded. “I apologize sir. I truly am grateful for your continued kindness.”

“It’s fine Loki. It’s completely understandable for anyone in your-”

“Yes,” he answered forcefully. The last thing he needed was to be reminded of his tentative placement here. “You were speaking of a workout regimen?”

“Yeah I figured we could start out easy and then adjust according to your stamina.”

“My stamina is not the essential question here. The crucial question here is why I would even want to even try. What motivation could I possibly have for these ‘workouts’?”

Rogers was silent for a moment, bringing a hand up to tap a finger at his lips. “Tony,” he finally said. “If he’s ever without his suit he’s going to need protection. As things stand now you are in no shape to protect him. What if he needs your help and your muscles give out?”

“He would have his suit,” Loki answered solemnly.

“Mm, yeah. But what if he didn’t?”

“If he was under attack then why would he not wear his suit?” Loki asked confused.

“What if it was a surprise attack? What if he didn’t have time to call his suit to him? Who would protect him then?”
“You,” Loki growled.

“And if there were multiple enemies and I couldn’t get to them all?”

Loki opened his mouth to make a scathing remark but closed it with a snap. What if Rogers was the preoccupied and his Anthony was left without protection? What if his Anthony was left without anyone to assist him? Did it matter? Wasn’t Anthony his owner and nothing more? His head dropped in shame. No, his Anthony was his savior. Without his Anthony who knows what he would have suffered. His Anthony had done nothing to harm him and everything to help him. He owed his Anthony.

“Teach me,” Loki calmly ordered.

- 

Still sitting at the table Tony brooded. His earlier conversation with JARVIS still weighing on his mind. “Try to focus on the reasons why he would feel that way,” his AI had said. After all the reassurances he’d given Loki Tony had no idea why the former god would think Tony might send him away. Loki’s words came back to him. “If I fail to behave as a proper slave I will be hauled back to Asgard for retraining.” At the time Tony had blown off the remark because he knew he would never willingly allow them to take Loki but maybe he should have given the comment more thought. Maybe it wasn’t about what he would allow. Perhaps it was more about what Loki feared might happen.

Suddenly everything began to make sense. After everything Loki had been through of course he’d be terrified of being sent back. How long had it taken for him to trust that he was truly safe after Afghanistan? How many sleepless nights had he spent in his workshop terrified of going to sleep and being transported back there even if only in his dreams? He would have given anything to feel safe then. How was Loki’s fear any different? Baseless reassurances were not going to be enough. He really needed to sit Loki down and talk to him.

“Sir Miss Potts is on the line. Shall I put her through?”

God dammit. All he wanted was to check on Loki. Did everything have to get in his way at every turn? “Yeah,” he announced. “Patch her through.”

“Tony?”

“It’s me,” he announced.

“I need you to come to the downtown offices in a few hours. There’s a group of investors that wants to meet with you.”

“Can’t you handle it?”

“You actually do have to have some participation or a hand in your own company Tony.”

“Yeah but-”

“No buts Tony. Besides, it’ll do you good to get out of the tower for a while.”

“Wait a minute, what do you mean out of the tower? Stark Tower is where the main offices are located. Why aren’t we having the meeting here?”

“Because I have reservations at their representative’s favorite restaurant.”

“Loki will be fine Tony. It’s only going to take a few hours. Be ready by one-thirty, Happy will be there to get you.”

- 

Two hours later, wearing clothing that were not his, tired and covered in sweat, Loki scowled at the other man. The Captain hadn’t broken a sweat and had been obnoxiously cheerful the entire time. At this point Loki was sure that if Rogers asked him to do anything else he’d probably punch the man. Not that it would do any good. Mentally sighing he knew he would do no such thing but it was still nice to contemplate it.

Even though his wounds were in fact doing better and he was in less pain than before it wasn’t what he would call pleasant by any stretch of the word. As tired and grouchy as he was he still pressed through everything Rogers asked. The man did have a point. He would need to know how to defend Anthony should the need ever arise. Still, he couldn’t take much more of this without falling over. Perhaps he should press on without a word as part of the penance he felt he still owed?

“You did good today.”

“So we are… done?” Loki asked hesitantly.

“Yeah, we’re done. I actually didn’t expect you to last that long. So yeah, I think you did pretty well today. We should probably set up a weekly routine. For now why don’t you get a shower so we can head back.”

Loki shook his head. “I’d rather shower back in my own bathroom if it’s all the same.”

“It’s your call,” the Captain replied.

Some of the tension ebbed from Loki’s shoulders. It took a lot of determination for him to be able state his own wants and he rarely did so. He was grateful when he wasn’t immediately shot down. He really hated the idea of showering outside the safety of his own rooms.

- 

Freshly showered and and shaved Tony put on in one of his newer more fashionable suits and checked the mirror. As he examined himself in the mirror he had to admit he looked good, even if he had to say so himself. Snagging his shades off the counter he slipped them on and finally exited his rooms. As he was making his way to the common room he almost literally ran into Loki. He started to apologize when he finally caught sight of and really saw Loki. Yes, he’d known Loki had gone to work out with Steve. Yes, he’d known that would mean a change of clothes. Yes, he’d known that would mean sweat. Loki looked… Looked… Oh who the hell was he kidding. Loki looked amazing. Tony couldn’t remember when a pair of sweats and a tank top ever looked so good on someone. Maybe it was because of the sweat coating his skin causing it to shine or maybe it was that it clung to his hair dampening it and making it curl slightly. Whatever it was Tony couldn’t help but stare.

“Anthony?” Loki asked sounding nervous.

Tony shook his head trying to clear it.
Stepping out of the elevator Loki turned and headed straight for his room. As he neared the hallway Anthony suddenly rounded the corner and they almost collided. For a while both merely stared at each other. Just as he was about to speak Loki finally noted the vast difference in what Anthony was wearing and his normal attire. The suit his Anthony wore fit amazingly and was cut perfectly. For a while it Loki found it hard to swallow. Raising his eyes he caught sight of Anthony eyeing him oddly.

“Anthony?” Loki asked nervously.

“I… uh… Yeah, sorry. I guess I just kind of spaced out for a second. Pepper called and it seems there’s a meeting that I can’t avoid. I’m going to be gone for a couple of hours.”

Gone? Loki couldn’t process that. During his time here Anthony had never left the tower for longer than it took to pick up some food. How long would he be gone this time? What would he do if Anthony didn’t come back? Stupid, he berated himself. This is Anthony’s home, why wouldn’t he return? Suddenly another, darker, thought struck him. What if something happened to Anthony while he was out of the tower? Instantly he was struck with dread at just the very possibility of anything happening to his Anthony.

“Could you not have the meeting here?” he asked slightly desperate.

“Not a chance,” Anthony replied shaking his head. “Pepper already made reservations at a restaurant. It shouldn’t take too long though. I should be back in a couple of hours.”

“Could you not carry your armor with you?”

“Why would… Loki, what’s wrong?”

Blinking rapidly Loki wracked his brain, fumbling for an adequate answer.

“Loki?” Tony pressed.

He couldn’t help it. The words spilled out of his mouth before he could even form a coherent thought. “Just, the armor, I mean, if you, if anyone, please just-”

“Whoa, whoa. Slow down a second. Whatever it is it’s fine, I promise. Just calm down a little and breathe. Okay?”

Loki nodded, still slightly panicked at the thought of harm coming to Anthony. He had almost managed to calm himself when another thought struck him. If anything did happen to Anthony then what would happen to him? Suddenly it felt as though all the oxygen had been sucked out of the room.

“Loki?” Anthony asked sounding concerned.

Something on his face must have shown just how badly that thought terrified him. Loki shook his head and tried to pull himself together. Taking a deep breath he held it for a few seconds before releasing it. “I am worried. I fear that harm may come to you and I would not be there to prevent it.”

“Loki,” Anthony huffed. “I’m just going to a restaurant to talk business. Nothing’s going to happen to me.”

“But if something did…” I would never forgive myself, Loki thought. “What would become of me?”
Understanding immediately began to wash through Tony and he almost could have kicked himself. According to Asgardian law Loki was Tony’s slave. If anything were to happen to him they would probably send some people to retrieve Loki. Just thinking about how Loki expected Tony to treat him when he’d first shown up was almost enough to make Tony nauseous. He would never allow them to take Loki back there but Loki had a point. If anything happened to him then he wouldn’t be here stop them.

Even if he weren’t here there was still the rest of the team. He had no doubt they would do their best but honestly how long could they hold out against a planet of gods? And then there was Thor. If anything happened to Tony would the god of thunder protect his brother or would he allow Loki to be placed with another ‘master’? Tony shivered. No. After the amazing display of protectiveness when he’d arrived Tony didn’t believe that Thor would stand by and allow Loki to be handed over to anyone that would abuse him.

“I’ll be fine but if anything did happen the others would never let them take you back. Trust me, even if anything ever happens to me they’ll make sure you’re safe. I do have a briefcase that can transform into a suit. I’ll take that with me, though, if it’ll make you feel better.” Loki eyed him skeptically and Tony laughed. “Come on, I’ll give you a demonstration before I leave.”

When the elevator opened Clint didn’t know what to expect. He knew Tony was gone for now and wanted to check up on Loki. As he entered the common room he spied Loki standing by the far wall staring out of the floor to ceiling windows. Loki didn’t even react as he entered the room. Clint frowned unsure if Loki had even heard him. Cautiously Clint walked closer until he stood closer but not too close. It wouldn’t do to startle the former god. “Loki?” Clint asked softly.

With a slight yelp and a startled jump Loki whirled around and brought his hands up as if to defend himself. The fear in his eyes tore at Clint’s heart. Despite hearing about what Loki had suffered there was no way they could understand what it was like to live through it. Out of all of them he and Nat probably came the closest to understanding what Loki had suffered. Clint smiled apologetically.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you.” Clint was glad when Loki finally actually seemed to relax slightly. “So what’s up?” he asked.

Loki hesitated. It was stupid, he told himself. Tony had survived on Midgard for years without his help. There was absolutely no reason for him to be worried. Still, Loki could not help the irrational fear he felt. It was more than his own well being. He honestly worried over his Anthony being harmed and being unable to help him. It was all too confusing. He was not used to worrying over others this much but Anthony was mortal. Fragile.

“Loki?”

“Yes Master Barton?”

“Don’t call me that,” Clint sighed.

Loki nodded once. “I apologize.”

“Like hell you do,” Clint huffed. “That’s one of the few things I actually agree with Tony on. You don’t call anyone your master.”
“If it were not for Master Anthony I would not be… safe,” Loki finished in a whisper.

Clint swished his hand through the air unapologetically. “Yes you would but you wouldn’t feel as happy,” he answered distractedly. “You love him and he loves you.”

“Uh, pardon?” Loki replied.

“Tony,” Clint clarified. “He loves you.”

“He cannot. He knows not who I truly am.”

Clint shook his head. “He knows you Loki. You need to accept that.”

“I cannot, he does not truly know me.”

“He actually does but that’s not really the point,” Clint surmised. “Want to watch a movie?”

No, he really did not want to watch a movie but what choice did he have? “Yes of course, if that is what you wish master Barton.”

“Loki,” Barton growled.

Loki ducked his head. “Sorry.”

-

Finally, Tony thought. Home at last. When the elevator opened the only thing he could think of was finding Loki. He came to a sudden halt in the common room when he found Clint sitting on the couch and Loki sprawled out over it with his feet in Barton’s lap. Resisting the urge to growl Tony scowled at Clint. The archer merely cocked an eyebrow and waited.

Unwilling to give Clint the satisfaction of getting under his skin Tony ignored the other man and calmly walked up to the couch. His Loki looked so peaceful sleeping. He’d give almost anything to snuggle up with him, yet he did understand Loki’s reservations. No, he would not wake him. He would let him find comfort where he could. If that was with Clint then so be it. Tony just barely resisted the urge to snarl at the archer and walked past. His Loki was what mattered. If his Loki felt safe then who was he to argue?
Feeling guilty for his perceived jealousy he turned the knob on his shower all the way to cold. Loki was his own person not an object. Loki decided who he wanted to spend time with and who he felt comfortable with, not him. He needed to respect Loki’s decision. Barton… His mind raced with thoughts of the other person that held his love’s affections. He shivered under the spray as he thought of the archer. No, if Barton made his Loki feel better than he would accept that. His Loki deserved all the help he could get. That still didn’t mean he had to like it, though.

Loki shifted to get more comfortable and instantly realized he wasn’t in his own bed.

“You okay down there?” a voice asked.

Loki stilled. He knew that voice. He tried to place it. Clint his mind suddenly supplied.

“Loki?”

“Anthony?” Loki asked sitting up instantly. “I’m sorry. I should have thought of my words before speaking. If I could just-”

“It’s fine Loki, you’re safe,” Clint told him. “Tony’s here but I think he’s his room. How are you doing?”

“My Anthony came back and did not wake me?” Loki asked desperately trying to ignore the slight sense of hurt he didn’t fully understand.

“He probably just wanted to make sure you had enough sleep, that’s all.”

“Is he harmed?” Loki asked nervously.

“No, Loki, he’s fine. Okay?”

“Promise?” Loki asked insistently.

Clint reached down and took Loki’s hands. “I promise you, your Tony is fine.”

“I am sorry master Barton-”

“Do not call me that,” Clint huffed.

Loki nodded once. “Mr. Clint then?”

“Can you leave off the mister?”

“No,” Loki answered dejectedly. “I am sorry?”

“No, that’s fine.”

Still distracted that Anthony had not woken him Loki finally stood and made his way over to the window overlooking the city. Slowly he raised one hand and started to press it to the glass only to stop himself. Touching the glass would only create fingerprints that he would have to clean off later. Besides, it’s not like would be able to actually feel anything beyond the cool glass. Behind him he
heard Barton stand and walk closer. The archer stood next to him staring out of the window as well. For a time neither of them spoke.

“You miss it don’t you,” Barton said softly.

Slowly Loki turned to face the archer and waited.

“The outside,” Barton clarified with a slight nod to the window.

It was true. He did miss being outside, feeling the sun on his skin or the breeze blowing through his hair but it was more than that. What he truly missed was the freedom of being able to come and go as he pleased. The freedom to be able to make his own decisions, to choose, for himself. At this point it almost did not even matter what he got to decide on only that no one else would be able counter it. Still, he couldn’t deny that he would dearly love to be able to spend some time outside.

“There are a good many things I miss,” Loki told him cautiously. Until he better understood where the archer was headed with this line of conversation he was wary to admit to much. Even when their minds had been linked it had still been difficult for him to understand how Barton’s mind worked. For a while the archer merely watched him. Finally he nodded once seemly having to come to a decision.

“Come on,” Barton stated turning and heading towards the elevator.

Loki hesitated slightly but eventually followed the other man. When the doors opened they both entered the elevator. Loki had no idea what to expect and was caught completely off guard when the archer hit the button for the eighty first floor. A silent shiver ran through him as he remember the last time he set foot on that floor. What transpired here all those months ago was actually the reason for his current predicament. When the doors slid open Loki shivered once again before following Barton out of the elevator. Still following the other man Loki jerked to a halt when Barton walked up to the doors leading to the platform.

“No,” he stated instantly.

“Yes,” Barton argued.

“I cannot, Anthony has not granted me allowance to leave the tower.”

Barton shrugged. “Not a problem since we’re not leaving the tower.”

“But, but,” Loki sputtered.

“But nothing, Loki. You’re not leaving the tower so therefore you’re not breaking any of the rules. Besides if you told Tony he would have ensured you got some outdoor time. You know that right?”

“He has no reason to cater to my whims,” Loki whispered.

Barton merely rolled his eyes and grabbed Loki by the wrist. “Come on,” he ordered, gently but firmly pulling Loki towards the door leading out to the platform.

Resisting slightly as they neared the door Loki finally forced himself to walk through as calmly as possible. The emotions filling him threatened to overwhelm him. A light gust of wind brushed over his face and gently ruffled his hair. Eyes closing he inhaled deeply. Luckily the clouds today were few and far between. Sun warmed his skin and Loki tilted his head back slightly, just enjoying the sensations.
Almost just as quickly as his joy of being outside filled him other conflicting emotions hit just as hard. He should not be out here. His Anthony had not given him permission to exit the tower. He should have at least sought out his master and asked for permission despite how anxious asking for personal requests still made him feel. Slowly he righted his head and opened his eyes. When his eyes finally landed on the archer his heart nearly leapt into his throat. The man in question was standing precariously close to the edge of the platform, leaning over, inspecting the ground below.

“Barton!” Loki shouted. Incredibly as the archer slowly turned to face him there was a large, smug, self satisfied, smirk plastered across his face. The archer appeared annoyingly cocky about something. “What?” Loki demanded.

“You didn’t call me master,” he said with a grin.

Loki’s mouth fell open in shock. “You. I.” For a while he could only stare before he finally gathered enough wits to speak. “You did that on purpose,” Loki snapped.

Barton rolled his eyes. “Well yeah,” he snorted. “And it worked didn’t it?”

Scowling Loki crossed his arms over his chest determined not to even dignify that with a response. The archer just shrugged and flopped down onto the ground with his legs dangling over the lip of the platform. Loki flinched at the action sure Barton would fall over the edge, but of course, he didn’t. It wasn’t that heights bothered him, far from it. When he was younger he used to spend a lot of time high up in the trees of his mother’s garden hidden from view unobtrusively watching passerbys. He, however, was not quite as seemingly reckless as Barton when it came to heights. Barton was so unconcerned with the dangers of falling it was almost terrifying to Loki.

“So, better now?” Barton asked.

Loki sighed and walked closer to where the other sat. “I am unsure,” he answered honestly. “I appreciate this I truly do, it’s just I am conflicted.” Barton gave the ground next to him a few pats and Loki sat down crossing his legs. For a time they were both silent; Barton for his own reasons and Loki trying to figure out how to phrase what he was feeling.

“I feel nervous,” Loki finally answered tentatively. “Sometimes it’s all too much. The need to acquiesce to my master, the threat of punishment by the magic, the possibility of being sent back if I am not good enough.” He hesitated slightly. “And now Thor,” he finished quietly.

“Speaking of Thor,” Barton stated conversationally before trailing off.

It didn’t matter that the archer didn’t finish. Loki understood the implied question contained within those three simple words. Thor. Now there was a subject he really did not wish to discuss. “I am unprepared to deal with his presence on a day to day basis. As long as I confine myself to my floor I need not worry.”

“So you’re alright-”

“Could we perhaps discuss something else?”

- 

After his shower Tony decided to spend some time in his workshop. Entering the common room he stopped short when he found Clint and Loki both gone. Damned if he didn’t feel an irrational spike of jealousy at that discovery. He tried to convince himself that he was just being stupid. Loki probably woke up and went to his room and Clint probably wandered off to do… whatever it was the archer did when he wasn’t here. Still…
“JARVIS where’s Loki?” Tony called out.

“Master Loki is on the eighty-first floor on the landing platform with master Barton.”

Tony scowled at that information. He was halfway to the elevator intent on going up there as well when he stopped himself. How would it look if he stormed out onto the platform and ordered Loki back into the tower like some jealous lover? Even if Loki listened to him it would probably break any trust they’d managed so far. Besides, Clint would probably make some snarky comment that would just piss him off and irritate him. No, that would never do unless he wanted to alienate Loki even further. Instead he decided to head down to the workshop, unpack the new equipment he bought, and set up the area he was going to donate for Loki’s use.

After a brief conversation of no consequence both stopped speaking, seemingly by mutual consent, and merely enjoyed each other’s company. Barton was still too close to the edge of the platform for Loki’s liking but at least he was sitting. Loki, for his part, continued to sit cross legged a few feet away from the edge. Head leaning slightly backward and eyes closed he let the sun warm his face. Time passed though he had no inkling of how long. The only sign of its passage was the difference in the lighting behind his closed lids.

Lazily Loki finally opened his eyes and caught sight of Clint. The archer’s feet were still dangling over the edge of the platform and he was leaning backward propped up on his hands watching him thoughtfully. Suddenly he needed to know precisely where they stood. While it seemed the archer held no ill will that was all he knew. Sure the archer had accepted Loki offer of penance but he hadn’t taken any retribution. Beyond that there was the matter of how things stood between he and Anthony. Opening his mouth he started to address him with the title but stopped himself.

“Barton,” Loki stated quietly. The archer gave a slight smirk that Loki refused to acknowledge. Instead he dropped his eyes to his lap and waited.

“What’s up?”

“Are you and I…”

“Don’t Loki. We’re good. I already told you that didn’t I?”

“You did not take your retribution.”

“We’ve been through this Loki. I told you not punishing you was your punishment.”

“But I hurt you,” Loki protested softly.

“You did,” Barton finally admitted. “If I said differently it’d be a lie. Look, none of that was your fault.”

“Perhaps not the bleed through from my punishments the the rest of it…”

“The rest of it was because you were too injured to even think clearly,” Barton told him simply. “I can’t in good conscious blame you for your actions at the time. Besides, I’d say you more than made up for it with the protections you set up,” he finished quietly.

Loki’s head dropped lower as his shoulder slumped forward even more. “It was the very least I could do,” Loki whispered. “The wards still hold?”
Barton shrugged. “As far as I know. She says they do.”

Loki nodded. He understood what Barton wasn’t saying directly. He was talking about his family and the wards Loki had put into place to protect them. After searching Barton’s mind and discovering memories of them Loki had been ashamed of taking the archer with the sceptre for his own selfish desires. There were very few people and none on Midgard that should be able to break the protection warding he’d placed upon their property.

“Are you about ready to go in?” Barton asked.

Hesitating Loki tried to decide whether or not to bring up Anthony but ultimately decided against it for now. Perhaps another time. For now he really wouldn’t mind finding Anthony and spending time with him. Hopefully his Anthony wouldn’t mind this unauthorized outing. A small shiver of dread flickered through him but Loki quickly dismissed it. There was no way Anthony would punish him physically. Loki frowned. But what if Anthony was disappointed in him for not discussing this with him first? Somehow that was almost worse.

“Loki?” Barton asked cutting into his thoughts.

Loki waved away his concerns. “It’s nothing. Yes, I am ready if you are.”

-  

Having finished in the workshop he was half way through his second movie when the doors to the elevator opened and both Clint and Loki exited. Tony did his best to ignore the pair but couldn’t help a few sideways glances. The two talked briefly before Clint got back into the elevator and the doors closed leaving only Loki. Loki looked decidedly uncomfortable but determined as he enter the common room. Scowling Tony turned his attention back to the movie. Loki walked over and sat down on the opposite corner of the couch. Tony could feel the former god’s eyes on him but did his best to focus on the movie. If Loki wanted a conversation then he could begin first, Tony sulked.

“You are angry?” Loki asked sounding honestly curious.

He couldn’t help it. Turning Tony fixed his gaze on Loki. “Have fun outside?” Loki seemed to flinch and Tony instantly regretted his tone. “Sorry. I didn’t mean for it to come out that way. I just…” What, he thought to himself. I was just jealous and don’t like that you prefer spending time with Clint more than me? There was no way that he would say something like that to Loki. Yes they might have good days occasionally but Loki still considered himself a slave. He didn’t want to know how Loki would view his undue jealousy.

“Forgive me. I should have asked first, I know. I allowed myself to be persuaded by the promise of a few moments of perceived freedom and the feel of the sun on my skin. It will not happen again.”

The sun? Tony thought a bit surprised at that answer. “You wanted to feel the sun?”

Loki bit his lower lip and dropped his eyes to inspect his hands.

“Why didn’t you ever say anything?”

“I,” Loki hesitated. “I was unsure if I should say anything. If you felt that I should not leave the tower then…”

“But… I mean, you left the tower to go shopping with Pepper.”

“That was different,” Loki insisted. “You asked that I obey her as I obey you. That outing was
authorized. Since then you have shown no inclination of allowing me out again. I dared not press my
good fortune for a mere handful of hours out of doors.”

“I wish you would have told me, babe.”

Loki shifted uncomfortably. “Anthony?”

“Yeah?”

“You, uh…” Hesitating Loki took a deep breath and began again. “You do not call anyone else by
that epithet,” he announced eying Tony carefully.

“Well yeah,” Tony shrugged. “I don’t love them like I do you.”

“You keep using that word but how can you possibly feel that way about me?”

Tony blinked in confusion. Loki honestly didn’t believe that Tony’s feelings for him were real?
Seriously? “After everything you still doubt how much I care about you?” Fidgeting Loki looked
down at his hands in his lap and said nothing. “Yes Loki, I was being serious. I really meant what I
said. You’re right, I don’t call anyone else babe. There’s a reason for that. I don’t care about them in
the same way I care about you. Did you really not know that?”

“I did not believe you were being serious,” Loki whispered.

Tony brought a hand up and ran it through his hair. “Is there anything I can do to convince you?”

Loki shook his head. “I fear it is my own misgivings and no fault of your own. I must work through
my own internal tumult before I can adequately process this.”

“So you…” Tony trailed off. Nothing good could come from pressing this. He had to let this go and
accept that Loki didn’t feel the same way. “Yeah, nevermind.” Cocking his head Loki eyed him
curiously but Tony just shook his head. “Don’t worry about it, it’s fine. I, uh, should probably get
some things done in the workshop.”

“The workshop?” Loki asked with a hopeful expression.

Tony suppressed a grin at the expression. “Yep, so you want to come down to the workshop with
me now or wait til later?” Loki’s expression and his failed attempts at forming a response answered
that question better than any words could have answered it. “Don’t worry about it. I like spending a
lot of time down there myself. Come on, I could use some help on a few things anyway.”

He knew he should have questioned it more. He should have doubled checked whether or not
Anthony truly wanted him in the workshop or would like to spend time alone. He just couldn’t bring
himself to do it. The lure of spending time in the workshop let alone actually helping again was too
great. He could not bring himself to willingly jeopardize any chance he had of being able to spend
time there once again. Silently he followed Anthony out of the common room and into the elevator.

On the way to the workshop Loki thought about everything Anthony said. Anthony truly cared for
him? Not just tolerated his presence or kept him here out of some type of moral obligation? As
difficult as it was to believe it was also hard to deny the truth he’d seen in Anthony’s eyes and heard
in his voice. For a time he had debated revealing his own feelings but he hadn’t been able to voice
the words. It was almost too much to believe. After Anthony even refusing to lay with him he didn’t
know what to think. His mind flashed back to the time Anthony had kissed him while still half
asleep.

Everything was almost exactly as he remembered it. There were a few minor changes such as the main work desk no longer held the boot Anthony had been working on the last time Loki had been here and a small area off to the side that had been rearranged. Instead there was bits and pieces of unknown materials now to its place. Loki wanted to inspect them more carefully but waited patiently for an order from Anthony. Before Anthony could issue any such order his robot with the affinity for fire suppressors rolled up to Loki. This time, however, the robot held a glass of some greenish colored liquid. Tense Loki waited for the robot to react first. The robot in question extended its arm and held the glass out to Loki. Anthony burst into laughter.

“It’s fine,” Anthony told him. “Think of it kind of like his version of a peace offering.”

Loki took the glass gingerly. “What is it?” he asked skeptically

“It’s actually a recipe I came up with myself. Mixing these is something DUM-E actually does pretty well. Try it, you might like it.”

Hoping the concoction tasted better than it looked Loki prepared himself for the worst and brought the glass to his lips to take a sip. He was surprised when the drink actually turned out to be fairly decent. Slowly he lowered the glass, nodded once to Anthony and turned to the robot waiting nearby. “It’s very nice, thank you.” The robot whirred a bit then beeped several times and rolled away. He turned to Anthony and cocked a questioning eyebrow.

“I’m not sure there’s a decent translation. Suffice it to say he accepts that you’re allowed in here now. There shouldn’t be any unfortunate fire extinguisher incidents but with DUM-E you actually can’t tell,” Anthony answered with a shrug.

“Shouldn’t?”

“Uh. Yeah, moving right along…” Tony walked over to the area in the workshop that had been completely reorganized. Loki followed him, not knowing what to expect but prepared for almost anything.

“So, uh, this is your area.”

Okay, that hadn’t been anything he’d been expecting. “My area?” Loki asked stunned.

“Yeah,” Anthony answered uncomfortably. “I mean, it’s set up for either wood carving or metal engraving and such,” Anthony stammered.

“But… But how did you know I even did any of that?”

Anthony shuffled uncomfortably. “I, uh, may have talked to Thor. He said when you weren’t busy with reading and learning spellwork you used to ‘metal shape’. I kind of translated that into carving and engraving. He said he never got to see any of it though, only your mother ever got to see it. I hope I got the right things. I wasn’t quite sure what he meant by metal shaping or how that translated into anything without… magic. If I didn’t get something you need just tell me what you need and I can order it for you.”

“You talked to Thor?” Loki asked suddenly nervous. Had Thor visited his floor while he’d been in the gym with the Captain. Loki began to panic at that thought. After everything Anthony promised had he really broken his word at the first possible moment?

“I talked to him not long after he showed up. I couldn’t sleep and I was already trying to think of
anything I could do for you,” Anthony told him. “I ordered everything I thought you might need but since it’s not anything I normally do I don’t know if I got everything you might need. If I missed anything just let me know.”

Loki was stunned. He almost couldn’t fathom why Anthony would go through all this trouble when a thought struck him. “Is there something specific you would like me to create?”

“What? No, I just… I thought you might enjoy… you know… I thought you might like doing something you used to do,” Anthony answered uncomfortably. “Did I, uh… I mean I didn’t overstep my bounds. You’re not upset I talked to Thor or…”

Overstep his bounds? Loki eyed the area his Anthony had set aside for him once more before returning to the man before him. That his Anthony had already been looking for something nice to do for him and didn’t even want anything in return was almost beyond his ability to even comprehend.

“Okay, so stupid idea. Got it. I’ll just-”

“No!” Loki shouted. “I mean… I mean… No it wasn’t stupid. Thank you. Please don’t think I am not grateful. I just… I don’t know. It would be unheard of for a… I mean…” Loki resisted the urge to growl. On Asgard it would be unheard of for a master to cater to the whims of a slave but Anthony hated those words. How could he say what he needed without using those terms? “I am very grateful. I would appreciate if you would not withdraw this privilege even though I cannot express myself well enough. Please?”

“Why would I- No, you know what? Never mind. I’m not going to ‘withdraw’ anything, okay?”

“Thank you Anthony,” Loki replied with a nod of his head.

“Whatever,” Anthony grumbled.

“Did… Did I say something wrong? Did you want something in return?”

“What? No! See this is why… Never mind. Fuck!” Anthony ran a hand through his hair and began to pace. After several moments he finally stopped in front of Loki. “No. I do not want anything in return. Can’t I just do something nice for you? When did I become the bad guy?”

“I apologize for-”

“No! You stop right there. Stop fucking apologizing!”

Loki froze unsure of how to respond.

“Geez Loki, what did I ever do to make you think of me like that?”

As it had since his first day here Loki’s proverbial ‘silver tongue’ failed him. The answer was, of course, nothing. Anthony had done nothing but gone above and beyond measure to make him feel safe. And yet Loki could not predict him and that was bad. Not being able to predict a master always ended in pain. Except not with Anthony. Loki was confused beyond measure or reason. He would give almost anything to anticipate his Anthony’s wants yet he couldn’t.

“Anthony?”

“Yeah?”
“Could… Could you just… hold me? I mean-. If I shouldn’t ask or-”

He was cut off as Anthony’s arms wrapped tightly around him. He almost couldn’t breathe but he also couldn’t find it himself to care. His Anthony was holding him and that was all that mattered. Things like breathing were almost irrelevant. Almost. “A… Anthony?”

“Mm?” Anthony hummed.

“Can’t breathe…”

“Oh! Sorry.”

As his Anthony loosened his grip Loki was almost sad that he had said anything. His master’s arms around him felt so wonderful he was loathed to relinquish them. Loki started at that moment. Master? Did he truly consider Anthony his master? His eyebrows narrowed as he gazed at his Anthony. Yes. Yes he did. His Anthony could order him to do anything and he would obey. His Anthony would never hurt him. He could trust his Anthony.

“Anthony?”

“Yes?”

“I love you too,” Loki whispered.
Chapter 22

Floored and struck speechless, Tony could only stare. Loki *what?* Of all the things he could have ever expected Loki to say that wasn’t any of it. Had he misheard? His mind replayed every moment Loki had flinched or drawn away from him. He remembered the genuine fear on Loki’s face from the earlier days when Loki had believed Tony would take advantage of him. He was sure that the fear had been real. As he inspected Loki’s face Tony tried to figure out what he could have missed.

“Anthony?” Loki asked eying him nervously.

 Abruptly he realized just how his silence was affecting his Loki. Unable to stand the rising trepidation forming on Loki’s face Tony raised his arms and put one hand lightly on either side of Loki’s head. Gently he slowly tilted Loki’s head forward and placed a soft kiss on his forehead before releasing him.

“Look over everything and see if I missed anything. I’ll be over there if you need me,” he told Loki with a nod to the main work table. Without another word Tony turned and made his way across the workshop. Given what he knew of Loki any amount of pressure would only serve to ramp up his anxiety. Besides, it wasn’t as if he would really allow himself to do anything with Loki until they found a way to free him. Even if Loki didn’t want to contemplate that possibility Tony couldn’t seem to get it out of his mind. In spite of how hard this was going to be he was going to have to take it slow.

Initially he’d intended on finishing up a few current projects. It didn’t take long before he realized he there was no chance of that happening. His attention continuously drifted to the former god across the room. Tony had to smile as he watched Loki pick up each item one by one, carefully inspecting them and replacing them before moving on to another.

So maybe he hadn’t gotten it completely wrong, Tony thought to himself. As Tony watched Loki turned and caught him staring. Busted.

Tony tried to think of something he could say to excuse away what had to have been creepy, stalker-like, ogling when Loki spoke first.

“Thank you Anthony, for everything."

“Yeah you’re, uh, welcome,” Tony managed to stammer.

“If it is permissible, may I ask when I will be allowed time to craft?”

And back to this shit again, Tony grumbled mentally. Tony tried to hide the irritation he felt that Loki still felt the need to act as if he were a slave. “You’re welcome to come down and work on things at almost any time. If I’m not already down here then just let me know.” He could see Loki tensing and knew what was probably thinking. “I mean it. Consider it a request of mine, okay?”

“Yes Anthony,” Loki replied dutifully.

Tony sighed and motioned for Loki to join him. As soon as Loki was close enough Tony raised his arms and cocked an eyebrow. The very instant Loki nodded his assent Tony wrapped his arms around Loki and held him loosely. “Not too tight?” he asked. Loki shook his head and snuggled closer wrapping his own arms around Tony.

“I mean it Loki. If you ever want to come down here just let me know. That goes for whenever you want to spend time outside. In fact, anytime you want to go outside you’re welcomed to visit the platform even without asking me. I only say the platform because I don’t want to chance anything
happening to you if you leave the tower without an escort. I just want to make sure your safe, okay?” He felt Loki’s head nodding against his shoulder.

“Understood, though I truly do not wish to leave the tower again without you.”

Suddenly Loki pulled back and eyed him carefully. Tony let his arms fall away easily and waited patiently for whatever Loki would do next. Loki’s eyes softened and his hands raised to rest on either side of Tony’s face. Whether or not the gesture was a conscious mimic of Tony’s early gesture he didn’t know. Gradually Loki leaned down until they were nose to nose, eye to eye, just barely not quite touching. Eyes drifting closed he leaned forward slowly until their lips finally met. The kiss, as good as it was, was made all the more wonderful because Loki had instigated it himself.

Still, something about that felt wrong. His heart insisted nothing could be wrong as long as his Loki was kissing him. His brain on the other hand was a quiet but persistent voice continuing to insist something wasn’t right. Finally he spared a few seconds to decipher whatever it was his mind was trying to tell him. Slave, his brain reminded him. Oh fuck, he thought. That’s right, Loki still thinks of himself as a slave. He thought. “No,” Tony stated forcefully. “I told you were not doing anything until you’re no longer a slave.”


“You have to know I do want you though, right? It’s not that I don’t, it’s just that I want to wait until you’re a free person again.” Loki only seemed to sink further in on himself. “Talk to me Loki,” Tony coaxed.

“It’s just that I wished to express my gratitude. I did not mean for it to insinuate that I wanted more. I’m still not sure if I am ready for… that. I am sorry for not making my intentions more clear,” he finished quietly, dropping his head to eye the workshop floor.

“You just wanted a kiss?” Tony asked warily.

Loki nodded sadly but didn’t speak.

Gratitude, Tony thought to himself. Turning the word over in his mind slowly he carefully contemplated the implications before forming a reply. “So… you only kissed me to say thank you?” he drawled slowly. Only able to see the upper portion of Loki’s face Tony watched as the other man’s eyebrows drew together and the area between them creased slightly.

“No,” Loki finally replied. “At least not only because of that. I have wanted to kiss you for so long and that was the first time I truly felt safe initiating a kiss.” Loki hesitated before continuing. “I won’t do it again,” he whispered still not lifting his eyes.

It wasn’t until he saw the occasional, slight, barely there, shake of Loki’s shoulders that he realized what was happening. Instantly he wrapped his arms around his Loki and pulled him close again. “No baby, don’t. It’s fine,” Tony soothed. “Please don’t be upset.”

“I cannot help it, I have upset you,” Loki murmured through his tears.

“You didn’t upset me. I was just worried you were pushing yourself to do more than you were ready, that’s all.”

“Anthony?”
“Yeah, Reindeer Games?”

Loki smiled slightly at the old nickname before answering. “Tell me again that you…”

“That, what, I love you? Of course I do. Oh Loki,” Tony whispered holding him even more tightly. From somewhere behind Loki there were a couple of soft beeps and Loki jumped slightly at the sound. Tony laughed softly. “It’s okay Loki, it’s just DUM-E. I think he’s worried about you as well.”

“Your robot?” Loki asked sniffling slightly.

“Yep,” Tony confirmed. “I did tell you if you give him enough time then he’ll start to love you as much as I do, didn’t I?”

“But… He’s a robot.”

“Careful now Bambi, you might hurt his feelings. He may be a robot but he’s the first one I ever built and he’s been with me ever since. He’s kind of gained a bit of a personality throughout the years.” Finally Loki drew back and looked behind himself. DUM-E had retrieved his fire extinguisher and now raised his claw as if to offer it to Loki. Loki’s head turned back to him and Tony couldn’t help but grin at the confusion on his face. “He loves that thing. I think he’s offering it to you to try and make you feel better,” he told Loki. “It’s okay DUM-E, you keep it for now. I think he’ll be fine in a few minutes, okay?” The bot’s arm dropped slightly and there were a few soft whirs.

“Should I… take it? Loki asked hesitantly.

“Naw, he’ll be fine. Like I said, he just wants to make sure you’re okay. Besides, DUM-E wouldn’t know what to do with himself without his trusty fire extinguisher.” The remark had the desired effect as Loki snickered slightly.

-He spent the time pretending to tinker with various projects on the work table in front of him while surreptitiously watching Loki from the corner of his eye. The former god was so focused it was fascinating to watch. Tony wondered if perhaps he looked similar when he was completely engrossed in one of his own projects. As he was so absorbed in watching Loki he didn’t realize when the visitor arrived.

“Master Barton is waiting at the lab door,” JARVIS announced.

For the first time in ages the sound of his AI’s voice caused him to jump slightly. Tony mentally rolled his eyes at himself before turning to the door. Clint, who was indeed waiting just outside the workshop, cocked and eyebrow at him. Glancing over to Loki Tony caught the other man eying him oddly. Unable to interpret the look Tony chose to ignore it for now. Walking to the door he opened it and waited to see what Clint wanted.

“I just wanted to talk to Loki real quick,” Barton stated without preamble.

“Haven’t you already had enough time with him for today?” Okay, so he hadn’t meant for it to come out sounding snippy but he hadn’t been able to stop himself. Clint stared at him oddly for several moments before taking a step back and nodding for Tony to join him. After a moment’s hesitation Tony glanced back into the workshop. Loki was still eying the two of them oddly but dropped his gaze to the ground when he caught sight of Tony watching him. With a sigh Tony exited the workshop and let the door slide closed behind him.
“Look I can’t honestly say I don’t enjoy occasionally picking at you,” Clint told him. “It’s just part of who I am, you know. You do have know there’s honestly nothing like that going on between me and Loki though, right?”

Inspecting the other man Tony had to admit, if only to himself, that he knew Clint was telling the truth. Still… “Why do you do it then? It’s already hard enough on both of us with everything that’s happening. You don’t need to add to the drama.” Clint shrugged looking slightly ashamed, if not that much. Whatever, Tony thought.

“I can’t help it Tony, it’s just part of who I am. I’ll work on doing it less if that helps but I don’t think I can ever stop completely.”

“What do you need to speak about with Loki that’s so important it couldn’t wait?”

“That part isn’t any of your business,” Clint growled.

“It is if has anything to do with Loki,” Tony argued.

“We’ll agree to disagree then,” Clint shot back. “I just wanted to tell him I wasn’t going to be around for a few days, that’s it.”

“Why not?” Tony asked.

“Not your business,” Clint repeated.

Tony glanced back into the workshop through the glass door. Loki hadn’t moved and was still standing next to his table, head bowed, and eyes downward. Tony sighed. In spite of what he might like Clint and Loki did share… something. Nothing good could come from him being angry about that connection. “Yeah sure. Don’t expect me to stop working on my projects or anything but if you want a word with Loki then fine,” he huffed.

Nervously Loki waited Anthony and the archer to finish conversing. Even though he couldn’t hear them across the workshop Anthony had still deemed it necessary to step outside for their conversation. Loki wasn’t sure how to take that but it didn’t seem good. He really wanted to risk a quick glance over to the two of them but he didn’t dare. So far things seemed to be going well and he didn’t want to chance changing that. An involuntary shiver ran through him when he heard the workshop door open again. Two sets of footsteps approached and Loki realized the archer had entered as well.

“Loki?” Barton said quietly.

Loki nodded in acknowledgement without raising his head.

“I have to go for a few days. I can’t just stay here indefinitely, but you already knew that, right?”

“I do,” Loki admitted.

“I’ll come back in a few days to check up on you though and Nat should be back by at least tomorrow. I know you two aren’t exactly close but she’ll watch over you til I get back. You can trust her. Will you be okay while I’m gone?”

“I will be fine,” Loki answered. “I trust my Anthony to watch over me.”
“Yeah, Tony is actually a pretty decent guy,” Barton agreed. “Is there anything I can bring back for you or anything you need?”

Loki shook his head. He had complete faith that if he required anything then his Anthony would provide it. Loki knew he just wouldn’t feel right accepting an item from the archer that his master didn’t deign to provide. Loki frowned at that word. It felt odd now to think of that word in conjunction with his Anthony. After everything were they still truly master and slave? If they weren’t then would he be drug back to Asgard? He couldn’t bear for that to happen.

“If you do ever need anything just ask JARVIS to call me. I already told him to patch you through no matter the time. It doesn’t matter if it’s just someone to listen while you talk.”

Still lost in his thoughts Loki nodded absently.

As much as he wasn’t looking forward to this Thor was the one person that knew Loki the best. This would make the second time Tony had actively sought out Thor’s company since his recent arrival. At least the first visit had gone better than expected. Hopefully that boded well for this visit. Exiting the elevator Tony stepped out on the eighty-seventh floor and went in search of Thor. He found the thunder god sitting in the mini kitchen area on his floor. As Thor looked up his gaze shifted into something hopeful... Tony shook his head.

“Still no dice,” he told Thor. “I told you, the second he gives his permission I’ll let you know but don’t expect it to happen any time soon.” As his face fell Thor dropped his eyes back down to stare into the mug wrapped in his hands. Making his way over to the table Tony sat down opposite of Thor.

“I have another question if you don’t mind.” Thor shrugged a shoulder dispassionately so Tony continued.

“Yeah, well I don’t know what to tell you Point Break. He did give it to me and of his own free will. As I understand it that’s the only way I could even wear it. If you don’t believe me then—” he stopped short.

“Tell me why he would do such a thing,” Thor demanded, though he did sound less angry than before.

Tony sighed heavily. He really wasn’t looking forward to this conversation. “Apparently the magic binding us together hurts him even if I don’t mean to if I have a panic attack. He gave me the necklace to help keep that from happening. I’m not sure how it works exactly but it does seem to help. That’s actually not far from why I wanted to talk to you. I know that he only did it to help keep the magic from hurting him unintentionally but it does also help with the panic attacks. I know how much this necklace means to him and I wanted to get him something to sort of... Not replace it..."
“Like what?” Thor asked as his eyes narrowed.

Tony didn’t much like the look Thor was giving him and shifted uncomfortably. “See that’s what I don’t know. I’m not sure what I could get him that would be a good replacement or not give the wrong impression.” Thor finally sat back and actually seemed thoughtful.

“Not a ring,” Thor stated finally. “It is not a fitting gift for a… for a slave,” Thor finally managed. “Bracelets are usually only fitting for bed slaves and would send the wrong impression to anyone who saw them. Definitely no collar,” Thor growled, spitting out the last word with no small amount of disdain.

“Right,” Tony said. “Since you know Loki’s tastes better than I do want to go shopping?”

“So what exactly does Loki like?” Tony asked glancing around the shop.

“I am not exactly sure. On occasion he was given to long expositions of the properties of various gems and metals. I am afraid I was not always able to follow his words. I do know the jewelry he spellcrafted for personal use was usually fairly modest in looks. He never was one for unnecessary embellishments.”

“Simple. Got it. Let’s look around and see what we can find.” The two of them walked over to the nearest case to inspect the contents. Modest, Tony thought. He tried to envision a simple design that he thought Loki might appreciate. Reaching up he gently wrapped a hand around Loki’s necklace. Maybe something with a similar design?

Three hours and five jewelry stores later Tony finally found what he considered the perfect necklace for Loki. Thor had agreed it was very much Loki’s style. Still he couldn’t help the nervousness he felt when he thought about presenting it to Loki. He wished he could predict whether or not Loki would actually like it but he supposed they’d find out soon enough. After purchasing the necklace the two of them made their way to the car. Tony started the ignition but didn’t put the car into gear. As uncomfortable as it was shopping with Thor gave him a chance to discuss other things with him. He didn’t feel comfortable discussing the whole slavery thing with Loki but Thor was another matter. Hopefully Thor wouldn’t see fit to kill him for just asking questions but there were things he really needed to know if he wanted to help Loki feel more comfortable.

“Can I ask you a few questions?” Thor cocked an eyebrow so Tony continued. “I want to know more about what’s expected of me as a… as a person in my position.”

“You wish to know more about what’s expected of you as the master of a slave?”

Tony resisted the urge to growl at those words. “Yes,” he bit out. “Loki just seems uncomfortable and I wanted to know if there’s anything I can do anything to help him.”

“Understandable and commendable,” Thor stated favorably. “Do you wish to know just what is expect of you or of Loki as well?”

“Loki’s told us some of what is expected of a slave but not much. If you can expound on that too then I’d appreciated it.”
“Very well then,” Thor agreed. “By Asgardian customs it is expected that you not pay much attention to your slave in public beyond issuing orders. Masters almost never concern themselves with the slave’s wishes or emotions.”

“Almost never?”

Thor glared at him. “Bed slaves,” he growled. “Even if Loki has not explained that term to you I assume you can interpret that well enough.”

“He’s told us,” Tony confirmed. “He also says they’re usually allowed more ‘privileges’ than the other slaves.”

“Privileges,” Thor scoffed crossing his arms over his chest.

“He told us they’re not expected to sleep on the floor, and they’re allowed to have their hair cut even and more food than other slaves.” For a while both were silent. Finally Tony spoke again. “That’s why you assumed I was sleeping with Loki isn’t it?” Thor said nothing but he didn’t have to, Tony knew. “No Thor, I never once touched Loki like that.”

“I know,” Thor said quietly. “It’s just that… when I first arrived I was already worried about what I might find. When I found you two asleep and saw your arms wrapped around him…” Thor shook his head. “I drew the wrong conclusions and I apologize for that. As a slave Loki does not have the liberty to deny you any request you might command of him. As much as I trust you he is now and will forever be my little brother. I have a tendency to be a little over protective of him at times.”

“Understandable,” Tony stated simply. For a time neither spoke. Finally Tony broke the silence. “So, slaves and masters?”

“Yes. As his master it is expected that you will give Loki tasks to complete. Slaves do not generally have free time. If their master does not have specific tasks for them to complete then slaves are usually loaned to another. Sometimes, though, if the slave pleases their master enough they can be allotted a small amount of free time as a reward.”

“Loaned out?” Tony asked incredulous. “Rewarded with free time?”

“Yes,” Thor answered shifting uncomfortably. “Also slaves are not allowed to meet another’s eyes. They-”

“Hold up,” Tony interrupted. “Anyone’s eyes?”

Thor nodded. “That is correct.”

“Why?”

“It’s considered disrespectful.”

“Even if I order it?”

Thor winced. “That would place the slave in the uncomfortable position of either disobeying their master or breaking the customary rules of their station.”

“Wait,” Tony broke in. “Customary rules? You mean, like, suggested behavior and not actual laws?”

“Well,” Thor drawled.

“So there’s no real reason for him to actually worry about-”
“No Tony. Even though it’s not law that doesn’t make it any safer for Loki to defy tradition. There would be many who would take offense. They may not be able to take such a matter to the courts but they could ask you for recompense for your slave’s disrespect. If you did not issue a punishment then it would be considered acceptable for them to do so. If you retaliated against them in any manner then they could take that to the courts as it would be seen as an unjustified attack. Loki would then either be punished for the initial offense or he could be taken from you.”

“That’s bullshit,” Tony snapped.

“It is the way things are in Asgard.”

“But we’re not in Asgard,” Tony pointed out.

“And no doubt that is why you’ve been allowed to bend the customary rules thus far. I would still not recommend bending them too far or Loki might be the one to pay the price.”

“Shades,” Tony mumbled thoughtfully.

“Excuse me?” Thor questioned.

“Nothing,” Tony stated dismissively. “Continue.”

“As much as you do not like the thought, it might be best if you were to treat Loki more like his position demands,” Thor stated quietly.

“What, like actually order him to do something?”

“You have not issued him tasks before?”

“Not once. At first I was too busy trying to understand things. When he first showed it was almost impossible to discuss anything without causing him to have a panic attack. It also took a long time before we could figure out how the binding magic worked. It wasn’t actually me that figured it out, that was JARVIS. After that I basically spent the rest of the time reassuring Loki no one was going to hurt him. Then the others showed up and Steve and I had to explain things to them. Not long after that you showed.” Tony shrugged. “What about arming him? I mean, can a slave carry a weapon?”

Thor’s eyes narrowed. “Only rarely is it ever acceptable for a slave to be armed,” he said slowly. “Even then only the most trusted slaves can be armed and only with simple weapons. I really don’t think—”

But Tony pressed on refusing to listen. “You said the most trusted of slaves. I trust Loki implicitly. What do you mean by simple weapons? Like knives? Is there anything else I need to know about? Can—”

“Tony stop,” Thor ordered. “With Loki’s reputation—”

“I don’t care,” Tony declared. “A, he’s never once lied to me so I have no reason to distrust him. B, he’s my slave right? I’m the one that gets to judge if he’s trustworthy enough for this ‘privilege’. C, if anyone has an issue with it they can bring it to me. You wanted me to give him a task? Well I’ve got one for him and I want him armed. Now no more talking. I have a few more things to pick up before we head back to the tower.”

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“Loki!” Anthony called startling Loki and causing him to jump and drop the book he was reading. In spite of everything his first thought was that Anthony was angry that Loki hadn’t bothered to ask before borrowing one of his books. No, Loki told himself firmly. JARVIS had assured him on his first full day here that he was permitted to read the books. Besides, Anthony would have specifically forbidden it were it not permitted. Still… Picking the book back up Loki closed it and stood. He walked to the bedroom door but it opened before he could ever lay a hand on the knob. The expression on Anthony’s face caused him to smile in spite of his own tripadation. Lowering his head he held out the book with both hands.

“I hope you do not mind that I borrowed one of your books Anthony.” The book was pulled out of his hands and Anthony was silent for a few moments.

“Interesting choice. Not one of my favorites but then I’m not the one reading it. I’ll let you get back to that in a minute. For now can I come in?”

Loki smiled once more at the offhanded words and nodded once. “If you would like, you may enter,” Loki told him respectfully, taking a step back to allow Anthony space to enter.

“Thanks. I bought you some things,” Anthony announced.

Loki furrowed his brow in confusion. What could Anthony have bought him? He tried to remember if there was anything he either expressed a desire for or needed. At this point he had no doubt Anthony would have gone out of his way to procure something he might have made comment on despite the oddity of a master doing such for a slave.

“Well?” Anthony asked, breaking into Loki’s thoughts.

Closing the door Loki turned and waited.

“Loki,” Anthony huffed. “We’re in the tower and we’re alone. There’s no reason you can’t meet my eyes now.”

Nodding again Loki raised his head and met Anthony’s eyes.

“Right. So like I said I got you a few things and that’s as good of a place to start as any I suppose.” Reaching up he pulled a pair of dark glasses off the neckline of his shirt and held them out to Loki.

Walking forward Loki took them carefully and waited.

“As much as I love to see your beautiful eyes I know it sometimes makes you nervous to make eye contact. I was hoping these might help. They’re reflective so no one else will be able to tell what you’re looking at but they’re not dark enough to hinder your eyesight too much. I figure it you might feel more comfortable looking someone in the eyes if you can have your head bowed and still look wherever.”

“But…” Loki hesitated trying to wrap his mind around everything. “But you like when I meet your eyes. How would you be able to tell if I was obeying you or not if I wear these?”

“If it really matters that much a the time then I’ll just ask you to take then off,” Tony told him.

“Okay, next gift!” Tony announced happily. “Now this one’s a bit more special. Well, at least to me anyway. I, uh, kind of felt guilty about you giving me the necklace that your mother gave you. So I… Uh, I got you this,” he said holding out a box.

Loki took the small box cautiously and waited.
“Well open it, open it,” Anthony ordered impatiently.

Biting his lower lip Loki removed the top of the box and forgot how to breathe. It wasn’t that the necklace was intricately crafted, in fact it was fairly simplistic in design. It was just that simplicity that made it beautiful. The top stone was a beautiful and clear emerald. The bottom, slightly larger, stone similar to the cloudstone on the necklace Tony now wore. He knew not what such a stone would be called on Midgard The two stones were connected by interlocking, strong looking, links. The chain itself was round and solid and double the thickness of link type chains.

“Loki?”

Loki’s thoughts snapped back to focus on Tony once more.

“Is it…”

“It’s beautiful, Anthony. I,” Loki hesitated. “Do not get me wrong, I do love it. It’s just that I fear it is too great a gift for me to accept.”

“Nonsense. First of all, it’s far from the most expensive thing I’ve ever bought. Secondly there’s no way it can come close to the value of what you’ve given me. There’s no way you can place a value on the last thing you had to remind you of your mother. Please keep it?”

“I don’t know,” Loki faltered. “Even the most pampered slave would usually never receive a gift of this value.”

“Told you, I don’t consider you a slave so that works for me,” Tony stated offhandedly.

Loki had no good answer for that and was saved from trying to find words when Tony stood and took the box from his hands. When Tony pulled the necklace out of the box he motioned for Loki to turn around. Tony gently settled the necklace around Loki’s throat and clasped it. When he turned around Loki could only stare.

“Right, there’s still two more things.”

“Please,” Loki begged. “You’ve already given me enough.”

“Let me finish Loki. I’m pretty sure it’s something you’ll appreciate.”

“Appreciate?”

“The next thing I want to give you is a job.”

Loki’s lips parted as he stared blankly at Anthony, sure he had misheard. “Pardon?”

“A job,” Anthony repeated. “That is, if you’ll take it.”

“Oh no. I mean yes, I accept. What is it you wish of me?”

“You might want to wait until I tell you what it is before you accept.”

Loki started to object but caught himself before he could. Instead of arguing he gave another sharp nod. “As you wish Anthony.” He knew though, that no matter what the job was he would accept it. To date Anthony had never asked him to do anything before. He already owed Anthony for his kindness and now with the gifts there was absolutely no way he would ever be able to repay him. The idea should have depressed him but he found himself strangely comforted at the idea of being required to stay here for the rest of his life attempting to repay Anthony for everything. Suddenly the
wrongness of that thought struck him. His Anthony was mortal. His Anthony would die long before Loki. What would happen to him then?

“So I was thinking, you were right. What if something does happen to me when I’m out of the tower? Not only that I can’t deny it would be nice to have someone I can trust as a personal assistant. You know, just in case I need to delegate something to someone I can have faith in not to go behind back or betray me. So… want the job?”

Blinking in confusion Loki stood temporarily stunned. “You want me to be your personal assistant?” he asked.

“Well yeah. I mean I get someone I can trust not to betray me, which by the way has happened before, and you get out of the tower more often. I thought it would be a good deal for both of us,” he finished with a shrug.

“Out of the tower?” Loki repeated amazed.

“Well that is to say, more often anyway. I mean I don’t always have to leave the tower to deal with Stark Industries business. The main offices are here but we also have downtown offices and meetings out of town that I have to attend occasionally.” Tony shrugged. “So what do you say? You up for it?”

“Of course. If you feel that I could be useful then I am more than willing to accept.”

“Good, now we just need to get you some new clothes. Also, when we’re shopping you might want to keep in mind you’ll need clothes that will let you conceal these.”
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Tony has a few revelations. Natasha sees more than she says. Loki talks magic.

Chapter Notes

I know, I know. I took forever with this one but real life kind of got in the way. I'm so sorry for the wait everyone. Thank you so much for your wonderful patience.

Clothing shopping had been a nightmare. How had he ever wished for Anthony to go clothing shopping with him instead of Mistress Pepper? He loved Anthony, he really did, it's just that Anthony proved more particular than Mistress Pepper. Where Mistress Pepper had been happy if he liked his own choices Anthony seemed to be looking for a specific look. As Loki had no idea what that look was he was at a loss as how to proceed. Eventually he began to notice a similarity in the choice and asked if he might be allowed to make a few selections.

After that things seemed to go much smoother. On the way back to the tower Anthony suggested they pick up some fast food. Loki opened his mouth to speak and then promptly closed it. If Anthony wanted to pick up premade food then who was he to argue. Still, he wished he could be allowed to cook occasionally. Normally a slave did not speak unless asked a direct question but Anthony did not hold much to maintaining the traditional roles customarily observed. Perhaps he should ask?

“Anthony?”

“Yeah,” Anthony replied, distractedly poking at his phone.

Perhaps he should wait. If Anthony was busy… “I just wanted to tell you thank you for everything.”

Tony looked up from his phone and stared at him for a moment. For a while it almost looked as if he would say something but he merely nodded once and returned his attention to the phone in his hands. Loki couldn’t decide if he felt relieved or not.

By the time they reached the tower Loki was ready to kick himself. He had no reason to worry about speaking out of turn but it was still difficult. There was very little he could do here that Anthony could not accomplish either by himself or with his robots. Cooking was probably one of the few things here he might actually be able to do well and he hadn’t been able to even ask. Stupid, he berated himself. Anthony had shown him time and time again he had no reason to fear punishment. Why hadn’t he been able to ask such a simple question? For reasons he didn’t understand that had nothing to do with his current position he found himself not wanting to disappoint Anthony. Anthony’s opinion of him had come to mean a lot and he spent quite a bit of time attempting to think of ways to impress the other man. With their cultural differences what if Anthony did not like his cooking?

“You seem distracted,” Anthony stated, interrupting Loki’s thoughts.
“I…,” Loki began before hesitating. “Yes, I am just a bit overwhelmed by everything,” he finally answered. True enough at least even if not the whole truth. As it had since his first few days here, even if for a different reason now, telling half-truths made him feel guilty. Anthony deserved better. He deserved someone he could trust fully. “And if I have forgotten to say it I would also like to thank you for everything.”

“You’ve said thanks more than enough. Come on, let’s get inside before the food gets cold. Reheated fast food never tastes as good.”

Nodding once in assent Loki followed Anthony into the tower. When they arrived on their floor Loki was a bit taken aback but not too surprised to find Natasha already present. As much as Barton assured him he could trust her that trust was still delicate at best. Even though she had tried to kill him Loki found that almost understandable. After all, he had attacked her world and was responsible for death of untold numbers of people. Her anger was acceptable to him, especially as he still felt an incredible amount of guilt for his actions during the invasion. What he couldn’t seem to move past was her injuring Anthony. If Anthony had moved just wrong or if her aim had been even just a little off she could have seriously injured him or, the norns forbid, killed him. What would he have done if he had ever lost his Anthony?

“Loki,” she greeted him.

“Lady Natasha,” he returned with a slight inclination of his head. She seemed to pause at his greeting and he wondered if he’d actually given away any of his true feelings or if that was normal for her. She stared at him for several moments and he fought not to fidget. The one thing that kept him grounded was his Anthony. In spite of his own better wishes Anthony would have to work with her and Loki was loathed to do anything to make their relationship worse. He reminded himself she was Barton’s closest associate and that was another reason he needed to get along with her. While both points threatened to fall hollow there was just enough of a connection for him to censor himself.

“So what’s for dinner?” she asked casually.

Loki wasn’t fooled. She was obviously still suspicious of something but was choosing to ignore it for now. Very well, he could play the same game. “We stopped on our way back and picked up Italian.” Nodding she answered, “Sounds good.”

“I am grateful that Anthony’s arm remains fully functional as I’m sure you are as well,” he stated conversationally.

“How…”

She may have caught herself quickly be he still noted her acknowledgement. “Would you care to join us for dinner?” he asked pleasantly.

“I would,” she stated mimicking his pleasant tone.

“Quite. You may have the extras and my portion as I am not hungry. Also I have work I would like to attend,” he stated before turning and heading for the elevator. He didn’t bother to explain the work he wanted to get to was crafting with the metalworking tools Anthony had acquired and she didn’t bother to ask. Anthony, however, caught up with him and entered the elevator just as the doors closed.

“What exactly was that about?” Anthony asked.
“I don’t know what you are-”

“Bullshit. Explain.”

“I don’t think-”

“Again, bullshit. Explain.”

“You are my Anthony. I need you,” Loki blurted out. “She injured you. How could I forgive that? I cannot condone that.”

“She did,” Anthony stated calmly. “But have you ever thought that she was trying to protect the entire Earth?”

“You think to lowly of yourself!” Loki insisted.

“Perhaps, but maybe you think too highly of me?”

“How could one think too highly of you?” he asked, honestly confused.

“That would be a long discussion. Look Loki, I’m just saying maybe you should give her some slack. Okay?”

“She could have killed you,” Loki pressed.

“But she didn’t and she never intended to. You already knew that she accidently injured me and you still weren’t this upset about it until just now. What changed?”

Loki hesitated, unsure if he should answer that honestly. Really though, was there any other option? It wasn’t as if he could bring himself to outright lie to Anthony. “I asked JARVIS if I might be allowed to view the recording from when I slipped and hit my head,” he admitted.

Tony processed that tidbit of information. Of course Loki was welcome to view all footage pertaining to him. The problem was that Tony remembered quite clearly what happened on that day. Hastily he mentally clicked through everything wincing at everything Loki had to have seen. Loki’s sudden anger with Natasha made much more sense. It wasn’t right, but at least Tony now understood the problem. The elevator doors opened and Tony reached out a hand to snag Loki by the wrist before he could exit.

“JARVIS place the elevator on lockdown until further notice,” Tony ordered.

“As you wish Sir,” JARVIS acknowledged.

Loki took a step backwards away from him and Tony shook his head. “I’m not going to hurt you Loki. I just wanted to make sure we had privacy for this conversation. You have nothing to fear, even the monitors are disabled until I say different.”

“You turned off the monitors?” Loki asked nervously.

Tony could have slapped himself upside the head. He could just imagine why Loki thought he would have turned off the recording devices. He decided to ignore the implications for now and focus on the problem at hand. “You’re not really mad at Nat are you?”

“Of course I am!” Loki asserted. “She injured you! She could have killed you!”
“But you said you watched the video,” Tony countered. “If you watched the video you know she would never have hit me without my interference.”

“But she did!” Loki insisted.

“In your heart you know it wasn’t her fault.”

“She threw the dagger!” Loki yelled.

“But in your heart you know she wasn’t aiming for me,” Tony said quietly.

“But she still hit you!”

“Because I moved my arm into the way. Admit it Loki, you’re not mad a her are you?”

“Of course I am mad at her! Who else is there?” he asked indignantly.

“Me,” Tony answered softly. Loki seemed stunned by the mere suggestion. Tony pressed on while he had the advantage. “You’re mad at me. I took the knife, I endangered my life, I put my well being on the line.”

“But she threw it.” Loki stated hesitantly.

“But I’m the one that put my life on the line,” Tony argued. “You’re mad at me, you’re just too scared to express it. My fault probably. I know me, sometimes I can be a bit… oblivious?”

“It’s not your fault!” Loki contended.

“We both know it is,” Tony told him. “I’m the only thing keeping the others from getting their hands on you and I purposely put myself in danger. You just don’t want to admit it. From what Thor tells me you’re amazing at knifework. You had to know she wouldn’t have hit me if I hadn’t tried to block the knife from you.”

“You… You… You put yourself in harm’s way!”

“I did,” Tony admitted.

“You shouldn’t have! You stupid mortal! She could have killed you! Then where would I be!”

“In Asgard most likely,” Tony answered honestly. “At that time no one else knew your story or why you did what you did. You’d probably have been sent back.”

“You stupid, stupid, mortal! Do you even know what that would have meant? Not only would I have been sent back to Asgard I would probably have been executed, not to mention you would be dead! Is that what you want? Do you truly have so big a deathwish that you would let others suffer because you wished to die? How could you ever be so reckless with your life?! If you had died do you even know what would have happened to me? No! Do you even care? I highly doubt that! And not only that you won’t even let me cook! I’m actually quite a good cook if you’d just open your bloody eyes and give me half a chance!”

Frowning Tony blinked several times in confusion. “Cook?”

Loki froze like the proverbial deer in the headlights. “I… I, uh, would like to apologize-. No, wait, you hate that. I… Oh Anthony I am so sorry. I never meant…” Loki stumbled. “I’ll just be quiet now.” Loki finally whispered.
Tony’s brain stuttered trying to fit everything together. Cook? His mind instantly provided him with scenes from the drive back. He knew Loki had wanted to say more but had been holding back yet he hadn’t questioned it. He had figured eventually Loki would just tell him what was on his mind. He’d never envisioned a break down like this. He needed to do something before Loki progressed into a full scale panic attack.

“Loki?”

“I’m so sorry. I won’t ever raise my voice again, please don’t send me back?”

“Oh baby, no. It’s not your fault. You were trying to talk to me in the car weren’t you?”

“Please do not be angry? I never meant to make requests above my station. I only ever wanted to please you. With your robots there is very little I can do. It was never my intention to appear ungrateful!”

“Oh Loki,” Tony whispered. Walking forward slowly he cautiously raised his arms and waited. “Loki?” Loki sniffled but didn’t otherwise reply. “Please look at me?” Loki shook his head and Tony sighed hating himself for what had to come next. “Loki,” he stated sternly. “Eyes up, now.” Loki’s head shot up instantly but his eyes remained downcast. Tony wrapped his arms around Loki even without permission, knowing his Loki needed the comfort.

“I truly am sorry,” Loki murmured nuzzling into Tony’s neck and snuggling closer.

“I know Bambi. It’s fine, okay? If you wanted to cook all you had to do was say something. You know that right?”

“I never meant to make a request above my station, I was just-”

“No Loki we…” Tony paused. It wouldn’t do any good to remind Loki there was no slavery here again. He was stuck in a loop and Tony had to do something to break it. “You’re welcome to make any requests Loki. I won’t ever be angry with you, okay? Loki? Would you like to work in the workshop?” With another soft sniffle and without raising his head Loki nodded against Tony’s shoulder. “Okay then let’s get you to the workshop. J, override the previous order and open the elevator doors.” The elevator doors opened and Tony led Loki to the workshop. Punching in the code the workshop doors slid open. “Dum-E,” Tony called. The bot rolled over and beeped a few times in acknowledgement. “Help Loki with anything he needs, I’ll be back down later. There’s a few things I need to do first.”

“You’re leaving?” Loki asked surprised.

“There’s a few things I need to take care of but I’ll be back. And Loki?”

“Yes?”

“Talk to JARVIS. Whatever you need for cooking he can order it. Practice all you want and if you ever want to invite me or anyone else to eat it just let me know.” The way Loki stared at him melted his heart. “I mean it Loki, order anything you need. I promise I won’t be upset.”

Even not knowing what to expect she wasn’t too surprised when only Tony stepped out of the elevator. Loki had seemed distracted or angry about something so she hadn’t really been expecting him to come back while she might still be here. Even not knowing why Loki had seemed angry she still knew it had something to do with her.
“So no Loki?” she asked nonchalantly still setting out the plates.

“He watched the video of when you first realized he was here,” Tony told her. That gave her a small pause. Still, she recovered quickly. “Oh yeah?”

“Yeah,” Tony answered. “He thinks he’s mad at you.”

Her hands stilled. “He’s really not. He’s really mad at you. You know that don't you?”

“I know.”

She nodded once and returned to doling out the food onto the plates.

“That’s all you have to say?” Tony asked curious.

“That’s all that needs to be said,” she informed him.

“How did you figure it out?”

“Because he loves you not me,” she told him.

“How can you be so sure he really loves me?”

“Not important. What is important is that he loves you. That means he’ll be angry I hit you with the dagger instead of him. You, on the other hand, he will be angry with that you took a blade meant for him,” she told Tony while still filling the plates. She paused. “Is Loki joining us for dinner?”

“No.”

“I didn’t think so,” she confided. “Should I make you a plate to take to him?”

“Yeah actually if you don’t mind.”

Nodding she scooped a healthy portion of the spaghetti onto Loki’s plate. It had the blandest sauce and she hated it but if Loki liked bland maybe he would appreciate it.

“How can you just take everything so stoically?”

“I’m a spy, it’s what we do,” she told him flat faced. With a sigh she finally gave him pity and answered him in a manner he could understand. “Loki can’t be mad at you. Even if he wanted to he couldn't. You’re the only thing keeping him from being tortured but it’s more than that. With how much he cares for you now anything that threatens your mortality is going to upset him. I think it would be different if he’d seen the video earlier. If he watched it before he came to care for you it might have made him more cautious around me but less angry at you,” she replied thoughtfully. “He truly doesn’t believe you care for him back does he?”

“Do you honestly care?”

“Actually I do,” she told him. “I’ll admit at first I hated him but that was mostly because I didn’t know the whole story. I let my own anger get the better of me and almost did something I couldn’t take back. For what it’s worth, I am glad you were quick enough to stop me. Alright, that’s enough bonding for one day.” Turning she held out two plates piled with food. “Take these to your workshop and make sure Loki eats something, will you? He’s still too skinny for his own good,” she muttered.
Suppressing a smile at her concern over Loki Tony took the plates.

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Studying the various tools Loki tried to clear his mind. Reaching out a hand he held it over the various metals on the table and closed his eyes. He gave a frustrated growl when he couldn’t feel the innate energies in the metals. Yet one more thing he’d lost since his magic had been taken from him. Angrily he slammed his fist on the table. Startled Loki jumped at the sudden sound of a voice speaking nearby. His eyes shot open as his head whipped around towards the speaker. Heart pounding heavily against his ribcage Loki tried to rein in his emotions. Of course it was only Tony. With the electronic locking device who else would be able to enter so easily?

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you,” Tony told him.

“It’s not your fault, I was just distracted. You brought food?” Loki asked in an effort to steer the conversation in another direction.

“Yeah, didn’t figure you should miss a meal just because I happen to have horrible eating habits. Speaking of food, any idea what you’d like to cook first or still thinking on it?” Anthony asked setting the plates down on Loki’s table.

“Still thinking on it,” Loki answered. “For now I was trying to see if the metal would speak to me.”

“Speak to you?”

“Mm,” Loki hummed, taking a bite of spaghetti. “Yes,” he answered when he finished swallowing. “It is how I usually begin. Normally the natural energies in the metals will give me a feel for what the metal wishes to become. It seems, however, that was tied at least partially to my magic. Now I am unable to feel it as before.”

“Can you talk about it?”

“About what?” Loki asked.

“About your magic. I mean, it has to be different now without access to it.”

Loki paused and slowly lowered his fork back to the plate.

“I’m sorry. If I shouldn’t have brought it up then-”

“No, it’s fine. It’s just that everytime I think of it I realize how I used to depend on it for even the smallest things. Like even something as simple as how I used to draw on it to feel the metal to get a sense of what it wanted to be and for how best to shape it. Not to mention any of the more refined spells. Some of it is but a mere inconvenience. I can no longer create copies of myself, alter my attire, or change my own appearance. The loss of some of the other things is more difficult to accept especially now. I can no longer set wards or protections, summon my armor, or use spells to deflect or absorb harm.

Without access to my seiðr everything is different now. It’s almost like all of my senses have been dulled. My eyesight seems somehow dimmer, much like putting on the glasses you gifted me dims my sight. Even my sense of touch seems different. No longer being able to feel the innate essence within things is disquieting at best. Not being able to get a feel other people is just short of terrifying. I can no longer stretch my hearing to know if there is one nearby attempting to sneak up on me.

It’s as if I lost some indefinable piece of myself. I feel helpless now; incomplete, and off-balanced.
It’s difficult to describe. Seiðr does have a specific feel but it’s a flowing and ever shifting feeling not a continuous solid feeling. It’s like trying to stop the water in a stream to get a specific feel for a single droplet rushing by inside it. You know you the river is comprised of too many droplets to even count but trying only capture a specific one and no other is all but impossible.”

“Sounds vaguely chaotic. How do you do anything with something like that?”

“I have spent centuries learning how to control and direct my seiðr. The first thing you learn is how to feel it, both in yourself and the world around you. It is too difficult to grasp a single droplet and you should not try. Instead you take it as a whole. One of the first things you learn is to accept and become one with the seiðr. It is difficult to explain but the more you accept it as a whole and the less you try to analyze it in detail the easier it is to manipulate.”

“So,” Tony drawled. “If I don’t look at it too closely it’s easier to control?”

“Hmm,” Loki hummed tapping his index finger against his lower lip. “I don’t know about control but it will definitely be easier to touch it and… I’m sorry there is no better word for it other than manipulation. How can I compare it to something you would understand? Manipulating can be compared to kneading bread dough. When you knead the dough you can mix and change and shape it. Whatever it will become is not set until you actually bake it. Baking it is more like actually controlling it or casting with it.”

“Right. I’m going to finish my food and then work on some things. Until then?” Tony moved to grab a piece of metal and laid it on the table next to Loki’s plate. “I don’t know if you have this but we call it bronze. It’s a very soft metal that absorbs impacts well. If you need to take out your frustrations on anything you can hit this as many times and as hard as you like.”

Loki woke the next morning feeling better than he had in ages. The previous night had been awful. Once again he had subjected himself to the ‘ion bath’ and once more it had hurt almost more than he could stand. Still he had suffered in a silence he was sure that even JARVIS, Anthony’s infernal omnipresent servant hadn’t been even to detect. The ‘AI’, as Stark put it, was both a blessing and a curse. He never could determine if the disembodied voice checked in on him because of Stark’s wishes or because of genuine concern.

“JARVIS?”

“Yes master Loki?”

“Is Anthony awake?”

“Not yet.”

“Understood,” Loki stated throwing the covers back. The covers were a new development for him. Usually he slept without them but he also couldn’t deny the comfort he gleaned from having something surrounding him completely. If only it was… Nope, not going there, he told himself. He had his Anthony’s affections for now and he would be content. It would last as long as it did and he would survive. Afterall, survival was what he did best.

Exiting the bed Loki dressed and made his way to the kitchen. The Black Widow was there but she seemed to pay him no mind so he ignored her as well. Examining the coffee pot he noted that it had brewed but there was no telling how successful he’d been until Anthony eventually tasted it. Resigned to his wait Loki grabbed his breakfast items and sat down at the table to eat. As he was still
eating the Captain came in and sat down next to him. Loki, for his part, ignored the other man.

“I set up a workout routine for you if you’d like to go back to the gym again,” the Captain stated conversationally.

“That would probably be for the best,” Loki commented. “Anthony has given me a job that will require me occasionally leaving the tower. I would feel more at ease if I were in better shape.”

“A job?”

“Correct,” Loki confirmed before returning to his breakfast.

“Workout routine?” Natasha asked curious.

Loki sighed, “Captain Rogers and I have recently began training together.” He turned to face the other man at the table. “Can we perhaps practice slightly less often this time? I could really use some time to brush up on my knife skills once again.”

“Knives?” Natasha interrupted.

“Yes,” Loki stated simply.

“Sounds fun. I’m pretty handy with knives myself if you’d like to train with someone.”

Loki inspected her carefully. He had seen the video of her throwing the knife at him while he was unconscious. If Anthony hadn’t reacted so quickly and deflected it the blade would have gravely injured him. He wasn’t stupid. The reason the knife would only have injured him and not killed him outright was only because she would want information. She was too skilled in her job to allow information about a potential threat to pass without trying to extract everything possible. The throw had been smooth and her aim had been flawless. Pretty handy with a knife was putting things mildly.

“I would appreciate your assistance,” he told her.

Rogers opened his mouth to say something else but just then Anthony walked into the kitchen still yawning. Without a word Loki stood, walked to the coffee pot, and poured a cup of coffee for him. Setting it on the table he took his own chair and tried to wait patiently for Anthony to sugar and taste it. Taking a sip Anthony hummed and closed his eyes. Unable to help himself Loki asked, “Good?”

“Mm,” Anthony hummed again. “Coffee’s always good though.”

“I could set it again for tomorrow if you would like.” Anthony’s hand paused, coffee cup halfway to his mouth, and he slowly lifted his eyes until they met Loki’s. Loki dropped his gaze back to the table and waited silently.

“You brewed this?” Anthony asked.

Loki nodded.

“Wow, well that explains why it was already done when I went to set it yesterday. I guess I should have given it more thought. You did good. Have you ever done this before?”

Loki shook his head.

“How did you know what to do then?”

“I asked JARVIS,” Loki answered quietly.
“Smart,” Natasha stated.

“Aimed.” Rogers added.

Loki ducked his head embarrassed by the sudden attention. “Yes well, like I said it wasn’t all me,” he muttered.

“I might have explained it but you still did all the work,” Anthony pointed out. “And I gotta say for a first attempt it’s really good.”

“Thank you,” Loki whispered.

“Hey,” Natasha interjected. “Eat up, we have training to get to eventually.”

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Wearing one of his new suits, his knives expertly concealed and easily accessible, Loki stood next to Anthony. As the elevator descended he tried not to let his anxiousness show. He could do this, he told himself. After practicing with Natasha this morning he realized his skill with knives hadn’t diminished as much as he’d feared. He may be a bit out of practice but just barely. Given enough time that should no longer be a problem. The elevator dinged and the doors opened. Tony stepped out and Loki followed close behind.

This was the first time he’d been below the seventy-ninth floor and he didn’t know what to expect. He wore his ‘shades’ as Anthony called them, and his hair had been pulled back. As they walked down the hall Loki eyed all of the strangers warily. A few people seemed to be avoiding Anthony’s gaze but most stopped and made small talk. Everytime that happened he had to work to keep his fingers from twitching with the urge to withdraw his knives. Loki was grateful when they finally reached Mistress Pepper’s office. Anthony opened the door and they both entered.

“I believe I said-” she stopped as soon as she raised her head.

“Hi ya Pep,” Anthony greeted.

As Anthony walked over and sat in one of the chairs in front of the desk Loki moved to stand behind him. Loki stood straight waiting while Pepper eyed them both carefully. Finally she turned to Anthony and spoke.

“So obviously something’s going on and you want my help,” she declared.

“Yes, Tony, you do. If you visit the offices without being pried down here it’s always because you want something. And then there’s Loki,” she said gesturing vaguely to where Loki stood. “The suit’s not your style but it’s not precisely his either. He’s dressed nicely, no longer holed up on your private floors, following you around as if…” she trailed off. “No,” she finally said firmly. “Oh Tony, just no.”

“Okay first, he picked the clothes himself, second he wanted to get out of the tower more, third I need someone to help keep me focused on Stark Industry things and not wander off on a tangent. Come one Pepper, you know it’s true. Also you know it’s hard enough for me to find someone I can trust and you know why.”

Unconsciously Loki’s head tilted as he tried to comprehend that statement.
“He’ll need more training than you can provide,” Pepper finally stated.

“Thanks Pep, I knew I could count on you. I’ll just-”

“No Tony, not me.”

“There isn’t anyone else,” Anthony whined. “Please?”

“Happy.”

Anthony straightened suddenly but didn’t respond immediately. For his part Loki recalled every memory he had from his brief interactions with the man that had driven Mistress Pepper and he on his first shopping excursion. He was not looking forward to spending an extended amount of time with him. To his knowledge the other man definitely did not trust him. Then again it didn’t appear as if the other man trusted anyone overly much.

“Actually that’s not a bad idea. Between you and Happy he be able to-”

“Right,” Pepper agreed before Anthony could finish. Lifting her head she turned her attention to him and gave a brief smile “Loki, would you mind giving us some time?”

Loki stiffened at that suggestion. It wasn’t that he was worried about something happening to Anthony. In Pepper’s office, with only her present, he was pretty sure Anthony would be fine. What he was nervous about was spending time by himself in the hallways of this building with so many strangers nearby.

“Wait a minute,” Anthony interrupted. “Why does he have to leave?”

“Because I need to talk to you for a moment,” Pepper told him. “Don’t argue with me, not right now. I need to talk and you need to listen. Loki, if you’d go down the hallway about three doors and turn to the right there should be a coffee station there. If you’d like to then feel free to get a cup for yourself while you wait. It shouldn’t take too long.”

“It’s fine,” Anthony told him. “I’ll find you when we’re done here.”

Still feeling a bit uncertain about the prospect of wandering these halls alone Loki nodded assent and headed for the door. As he slipped out into the hallway he took one last look inside before closing the door after himself. ‘Now what?’ He thought to himself. Perhaps he should get a cup of coffee. Not for himself but he figured Anthony might appreciate a cup once he was done talking with Pepper.

As much as he didn’t want Loki to leave it was the best option. He could have continued to argue with her but it would have been pointless. When Pepper set her mind to something it was usually better to go along with things instead of trying to resist. Agreeing with her would help speed things along more quickly. The sooner he could get back to Loki the better. Loki had to be feeling pretty uncomfortable right about now.

“You need to be careful Tony.”

“Excuse me?” Tony asked raising an eyebrow in confusion.

“Those clothes he’s wearing fit too well to be yours and I know for a fact that we didn’t get them when Loki and I went shopping. If I don’t miss my guess then you brought him here because you
want to give him a job. I can’t even begin to guess what else you’ve done. You need to slow down or you’re only going to succeed in overwhelming him.”

“Oh come on Pepper. He wanted a ‘task’, as he calls them, and I needed someone I could trust. Plus it gets him out of the tower occasionally. Not that he would tell me he ever wanted to get out occasionally. Oh, but he’ll confide in Barton,” Tony muttered crossing his arms over his chest and glaring down at them.

“Oh please,” Pepper huffed. “You’re acting like a child, you know that?”

“Am not,” Tony snapped back querulously.

“Yes you are and you know it. What’s more is you know better. You insist on throwing a fit every time they spend any amount of time together even though you know Loki doesn’t have any romantic feelings for Clint. If you’re not careful you’re only going to succeed in making him too scared to even talk to anyone else.”

Tony slumped. She was right of course. “You know that’s not my intentions,” he told her quietly. “It’s just sometimes it feels like… I don’t know, I’m just worried. I mean, they share something between them that Loki and I will never have. I just wish we could be that close, you know? At the very least I wish Loki didn’t seem so scared of me all the time.”

Pepper smiled at him and shook her head.

“What?” he grumped.

“It’s not you he’s scared of Tony. He’s been through a lot and it’s going to take him some time to work through everything. True he’s scared of a lot of things right now but none of them are you. In fact, often times when he’s scared you’re usually the only thing that calms him. I doubt even Clint could pull him out of a panic attack but you’re amazingly good at that. There’s no comparison between the two of you. Loki and Clint might have a history but that doesn’t mean they have romantic feelings for each other.”

Sighing Tony slumped back in his chair. “I know. You know me. Normally I’m not really a jealous person. It’s just that with Clint having been in Loki’s mind I feel like he knows Loki better and I’m trying to play catch up.”

“It doesn’t matter what they share, he’s never going to have the same feelings for Clint as he does for you. You already know that though. What’s really bothering you?”

“You really want to know what’s bothering me? Fine, I’ll tell you. Loki’s my… my… Well he's mine! He can barely stand to be touched. He can barely tolerate a peck on the cheek. He can’t even begin to think about anything more than a simple kiss. At least when he’s interacting with Clint I know it’s because he wants to and not for any other reason. How can I be sure he’s not just saying or doing whatever he thinks I want just to appease me so I won’t hurt him?”

“You already know the answer to that,” Pepper said calmly. “In fact, you even told Thor exactly why you can trust Loki. He has never lied to you. Remember that. If he was pretending to have feelings for you wouldn’t that be the same as lying to you?”

For a while Tony could only stare, completely at a loss for words. “You’re right,” he said when he finally found his voice again.

“Besides, if that’s what he was worried about then he would have acted this way earlier on instead of waiting until now, wouldn’t he?”
Tony nodded.

“So,” Pepper said, drawing out the word. “Is there any real reason you should be jealous of Loki and Clint’s friendship?”

Tony shook his head.

“Think you’ll be able to work through some of the issues now?”

“Yeah, probably. It’s just difficult, you know. I want this to progress but I don’t see how I can even ask that of him.”

“Have patience with him. He needs time. That’s why I told you to slow down. If you buy him too many things or push things too fast you’re only going to overwhelm him. You have to take things slow and give him time to adjust, okay?”

“How much time?” Tony asked leaning forward.

“There’s no way to answer that. We’re talking about human emotions here not a scientific equation. There isn’t a specific formula for this Tony. This is going to take patience and a lot of work.”

“I know, I know,” Tony muttered. Running a hand through his hair he sighed. “I really should probably go find Loki now.”

Pepper nodded in agreement. “Yes, and when he’s ready ask him to come back here and Happy and I will help him learn what’s expected of his new position.”

“Thanks Pepper, you’re the best.”

“I know, it’s why you hired me. Now go find Loki and talk to him for a bit. I have a few things I want to get finished before we start.”

“You got it,” Tony acknowledged.
As expected the other man was not overly fond of the situation. The one called Happy eyed Loki for several long moments when he was informed of things. Strangely Loki felt no discomfort at this scrutiny. Instead he found himself oddly gratified that such a cautious person was in charge of overseeing the safety of his mistress. Thus he resigned himself easily enough to the intense study of the man called Happy and waited patiently for his assessment.

“I don’t like it,” Happy finally stated.

“You don’t have to like it,” Pepper told him. “Our job is to train him for what’s expected and ensure that he can do the job to the best of his abilities.”

A long look passed between them and Loki watched the pair curious as to who would break the silence first. Moving her hands until she could rest them on the desk at her back Pepper tilted her head slightly and raised one eyebrow. Happy, for his part, crossed his arms and continued to eye her. After only a mere handful of seconds the man broke.

“Fine, but he needs a badge,” Happy insisted.

As a show of his appreciation to Pepper for agreeing Tony actually spent time in his office and various other departments of Stark Industries. He made an effort not to go near the R&D department. He knew if he did he’d get caught up in something and that would be the end of everything. He had to stay focused. While Happy wouldn’t be, for lack of a better term, happy about this turn of events he would eventually acquiesce. As he thought about everything his mind replayed the earlier conversation.

*If you buy him too many things or push things too fast you’re only going to overwhelm him.*

She was right of course. Like that was surprising? He should have sought out her advice earlier. Damn, what a strange life he led. Who else could claim to be dating a fugitive of the planet? Tony paused at that thought. Were they actually dating? The more he thought about it the more he realized it didn’t matter. Even if Loki didn’t consider them an item Tony considered them exclusive. Until, if and when, Loki ever cut ties between them Tony would still consider them an item and that was good enough for him.

“Mr. Stark?” someone called nearby.

He’d heard that voice before, he should know it. “Grace,” he attempted. The woman paused and stared at him. Tony fought not to cringe. Obviously he’d gotten it wrong.

“Uh… Gina,” she corrected.

“Right, I knew that. So what’s up Gina?”

“Miss Potts would like for you to join her in her office.”

That’s where he remembered her from he suddenly realized. She was Pepper’s main assistant. “Yeah sure,” he agreed. “Just let me refill my coffee and we’re good.”
The very second Anthony walked into the room Loki immediately felt at ease. It wasn’t that he honestly believed anything would happen to Anthony here but it was still nice to finally see him. Still he did his best to keep his face neutral. Anthony walked forward and inspected him, noting the badge with no more than a single nod. Finally Anthony moved to the nearest chair and sat down to eye Pepper across the desk.

“So are we good?” he asked.

“We’ve taught him as much as possible. Considering a lot of what he needs to know must come from on the job training? We’re as good as we can be for now. Happy’s going to shadow him for a few days just to make sure everything transitions smoothly but other than that we’ve done as much as we could.”

“It can’t be too tough. I mean I’m not that bad, am I?”

Pepper leveled a look at Anthony and Loki resisted the urge to smile. Slowly that urge dissipated as he watched the two. The look that passed between them spoke volumes about how well they could communicate without words. They quite obviously knew each other well; their likes, dislikes, preferences. They equally obviously still cared for each other. With a woman like that what could Anthony ever see in him. He felt a sharp pang of sadness at the thought. Unable to continue watching them he glanced sideways and caught Happy eying him intently. Working hard to keep any of his emotions from showing on his features Loki turned and stared back at the man. Shaking his head Happy turned back to face the others. The rest of their conference passed in a haze and was over before he knew it.

- All throughout the conversation and the entire elevator ride back Loki was silent. Tony made a mental note but decided not to mention it. Usually pressing Loki on anything was a sure way upset him further and only served to cause him to withdraw. If Loki really wanted to talk about it then he would. Until then Tony could wait. When the doors finally slid open Tony waited to see if Loki would exit first. As expected Loki waited for him to make the first move. With a heavy sigh Tony shook his head and reached out his hand. After a brief hesitation Loki took it and together they finally exited the elevator.

Instead of heading back to the penthouse floor where they might chance encountering the others Tony had taken them straight to the workshop. At least in the workshop he could control and limit any visitors. As much as the others insisted people should surround themselves with friends and close associates when they were feeling down Tony could understand the value of solitude during those times as well. DUM-E rolled over with one of the green health drinks Tony usually favored. Tony waved the bot away and followed him to the area that served as a makeshift kitchen area. He hadn’t done this for a while, not since he and Pepper had still been together, but he could probably still brew a decent cup of hot tea.

It was difficult but Tony managed not to turn around to check on Loki until he was finished with the tea. When he finally turned back he spied Loki at his crafting table absently tinkering with various items on it. DUM-E was positioned nearby Loki just as he often was when Tony would spend countless nights working down here himself. As much as he was loathe to disturb Loki he did want to check up on him. Walking closer Tony cleared his throat. With a sigh Loki slowly turned to face him.

“How may I be of service?” Loki asked.

Tony couldn’t help but notice the weariness permeating in his voice. He handed the mug of tea to
Loki and took a seat next to him. For a while all he could do was stare. A multitude of emotions were evident on Loki’s face and in his eyes. Tony could neither identify them all nor explain them but they tugged at something deep inside.

“You could tell me what’s wrong,” Tony told him.

A clearly pained look crossed Loki’s face as his eyes slid closed. Tony sat silently, watching, wishing he could fix whatever was wrong. Somehow this, submissive, quiet, more resigned version of Loki was vastly more worse then the terrified former god who had first arrived. Loki was silent for so long Tony eventually gave up on him ever answering when he finally opened his eyes and spoke.

“Much is wrong I suppose,” Loki finally stated tiredly. “I am a slave, I no longer have access to my magic, I have been forced to hurt many when I would not have otherwise done so, and you are-” Loki stiffened and stopped speaking abruptly. Turning his face away he refused to even meet Tony’s eyes.

“Yes?” Tony prompted after several seconds of silence.

“I just worry that you will eventually tire of my company and no longer tolerate my presence here.”

“Tolerate?” Tony asked in disbelief. “You think I’m only tolerating you?”


“Because we are,” Tony answered confused. “Loki I’m not very good at deciphering these kinds of things. I really need you to be a little more clear if you can.”

“Are you two truly not together any longer?” Loki questioned suddenly.

“Uh,” Tony stammered. “What?”

“I asked if you two were truly not a couple any longer,” Loki repeated.

“I told you we weren’t. I don’t understand, Loki. What’s this about?”

“You profess to have feelings for me and wonder why I would be concerned as to whether or not you and Mistress Pepper are still courting?”

“That’s another thing. Why is Pepper the only one that’s Mistress? You don’t use that title when talking with or about Natasha.”

“I do not recognize her as my Mistress.”

“Which means?” Tony pressed.

Loki sighed. “It means of my own free will I recognize and accept her as my Mistress, as one who holds power of me in much the same manner as you. I would obey her orders in much the same way I obey yours so long as the two are not in conflict. If they are then I am bound to obey yours over hers. Beyond that I have no aversions to following her decrees.”

“Is that because you think we’re still dating?”

“No.” Loki shook his head. “In truth I am not sure when the change occured.” Loki shrugged. “I know only that, in this, I have a choice. No one has commanded this, I choose it on my own. I choose to obey her as my Mistress.”
Honestly curious, Tony couldn’t help himself. “Why?”

“I know not. If I were to hazard a guess I would probably say it’s because her nature reminds me very strongly of my mother. There are differences but they do share many of the same qualities. Part of it is probably because I am not bound to obey. I chose this on my own instead of having it forced upon me by another. Whatever the reason, I decided to elevate her status. I have a good deal of respect for and do not mind having her as a Mistress.” Dropping his eyes Loki fidgeted slightly. “You could have anyone you want. Why would you choose a slave over someone like her?” Loki whispered.

His first instinct was to reiterate that Loki was not a slave. However that hadn’t done much good in the past so he curbed that impulse for now. “We tried to make things work between us but it just didn’t. If there was a chance it was going to work out then we wouldn’t have broken up in the first place. Yes, we’re still close but that doesn’t mean we’re ever going to get back together again. I respect her.” Pausing Tony inspected Loki for several moments. “Is that why you’ve been so distant lately?”

“What could I ever offer you that she could not?” Loki answered sadly.

Reaching out Tony took Loki’s hands in his own. “Yourself,” he answered simply. At last Loki finally lifted his eyes. “What I want is you and no one else could ever offer me that.”

“And when you tire of me?”

“I can’t imagine a time I will ever get tired of someone like you. It seems like everytime I turn around there’s something new about you that fascinates me. I can’t wait to put all of this behind us and learn everything there is to know about you.”

“And if I am never freed?”

“Oh you’ll be freed if I have to find some way to do it myself,” Tony insisted. A sad smile ghosted across Loki’s lips before fading. “You truly mean it when you say you will not tire of me?”

Tony frowned. There seemed to be more to the question then Loki was saying but it didn’t seem wise to push the issue right now. “I promised I wouldn’t ever lie to you,” Tony told him carefully. “I can’t promise the future but I honestly don’t see that happening. I promise though, no matter what happens, I won’t ever let anyone take you away for as long as you want to stay here.”

“Even if we stop courting?”

“Even then,” Tony promised.

“Anthony?”

“Yes?”

“May we… I mean if it is not to forward of me to ask, may we kiss again?”

Tony sat back stunned. Loki asking for something like a kiss was surprising. When he first arrived Loki had been terrified at the prospect of anything sexual. It was almost unbelievable that Loki would ask for anything even as simple as a kiss. After searching Loki’s face for any sign of doubt and finding none Tony decided to comply. Lightly setting each hand on either side of Loki’s shoulders he leaned forward. Loki met him halfway. When their lips met Loki’s eyes slid closed.
Loki had never expected Anthony to agree. If he had then he wasn’t sure he would have had the
courage to ask. A shiver ran through him as Anthony’s hands settled lightly on the sides of his
shoulders. When Anthony leaned forward he couldn’t help himself. Loki leaned forward and met
him halfway. As their lips met his eyes slid closed and the rest of the world seemed to disappear.
When a tongue gently licked across his lips Loki gasped slightly and reached up to grab onto
Anthony’s shoulders.

Unable to stop himself Loki pulled Anthony closer and slipped his own tongue into Anthony’s
mouth. He had no idea how long they sat like that, eyes closed and arms entwined around each
other, but eventually the need for air finally forced him to break the kiss. Breathing rapidly Loki
blinked several times attempting to break through the pleasant haze that was still fogging his mind.
Finally his vision cleared and he could only stare at the loving and utterly contented look gracing his
Anthony’s face.

“Wow,” Anthony whispered softly, almost reverently.

“Wow indeed,” Loki whispered back. “Anthony?”

“Yes?”

“Are you truly set on us not courting until I may be freed?”

“Loki,” Anthony huffed crossing his arms.

“I know you do not want to think about this but in all likelihood my sentence will continue to remain
unaltered. If that happens then we may never get the chance to become more. Are you not willing to
even entertain the possibility of courtship at all without my sentence being overturned?”

“Loki,” Anthony sighed, running a hand through his hair and briefly looking away before turning
back to face him and meeting his eyes. “I want to be with you I really do,” Anthony assured him. “I
just don’t want to feel like I’m taking advantage of you.”

“But if it's what we both want-”

“But nothing,” Anthony interrupted. “How do you think other people are going to see it?”

Hurt, Loki remained silent after that remark.

“I just-”

“I believe I understand your meaning quite well, thank you,” Loki answered tersely.

“Don’t be like that.”

“I would like to go to my room now.”

“We’re not done with this conversation,” Anthony insisted.

“I believe you said I was allowed to retreat to my room whenever I wished,” Loki stated evenly.
“However if you have since changed your mind I will, of course, defer to your more recent wishes.”

Sighing Anthony shook his head. “No it’s fine. If you really want to go to your room then go ahead.
I won’t stop you.”
Without a word Loki stood and walked over to the sliding door. Having never left first he was half convinced the door wouldn’t budge but it slid open easily. He managed to maintain his composure until he was finally safely inside of his room. Once the door was closed Loki scowled and clenched his fists. The double standards of Anthony’s arguments and reasoning were infuriating. Anthony kept insisting Loki wasn’t a slave and that he should make his own choices. Then when he actually did make a decision Anthony would use Loki’s status as a slave to negate it. It was beyond frustrating. How exactly was he supposed to make any decision if Anthony just kept dismissing them? He needed someone who he could talk to that would understand everything. In lieu of such a person he did what he always did. He decided to wander the halls in an effort to settle his mind.

In efforts to take his mind off everything for a while Tony decided to stay in the workshop and try to get some work done on a few of his projects. The plan worked well enough except for when his eyes would accidentally land on Loki’s work table. Clenching his jaw Tony tried to ignore the annoyance he felt at Loki’s abrupt departure. He really wished he could have explained his reticence at starting a relationship with Loki while he was still a slave. In spite of his wishes he wouldn’t order Loki to stay if he was uncomfortable. Glancing back down he tried to refocus his attention.

While he’d always thought better on his feet he decided not to wander this floor. It wouldn’t do to accidentally run into Anthony before he was ready. Without paying attention to where he was going entered the elevator and avoiding the lower buttons pressed one of the higher buttons at random. The floor he arrived on appeared to be one of the empty ones. Just as well, he mused. The last thing he needed right now was to be around another. After having wandered through most of the floor while sifting through his thoughts Loki reentered the elevator and pressed another button.

He had no idea how long he stalked through the various hallways on the various floors occupying the tower. Problem after problem raced through his mind as he analyzed the problems at hand and dismissed every resolution his brain offered. The dilemma was that Anthony had left him in an impossible situation. Anthony had decreed that there was no slavery on midgard and yet refused to contemplate a relationship with him because he still considered Loki a slave. It was useless circular logic and it infuriated Loki.

Turning at the next doorway he stalked into what turned out to be the kitchen on the commonfloor and stopped short. Thor looked up in surprise and Loki didn’t even give it a second thought. For far too many centuries it had been all but second nature to seek out Thor and use him as a sounding board to work though particularly tough issues. It never occurred to him not to do the same this time. Walking forward he didn’t stop until he was finally nose to nose with his brother.

Thor glanced up when he heard someone enter. While he wanted to be happy at his brother’s appearance the look on Loki’s face was a volatile mixture of frustration and annoyance. Instantly Thor tensed warily, unsure of the best way to react. When Loki was like this it was usually better to wait for him to act first. Loki stalked forward until they were nose to nose and glared at him.

“That man is infuriating!” Loki growled. “He talks in circles refusing to give me a straight answer!

Thor frowned at that.

“He talks like a drunk man walks: in every direction but where he is headed” Loki fumed.
“Stark?” Thor asked.

“Of course Anthony,” Loki scowled. “Who else has the ability to be this infuriatingly annoying? Just when I think I am beginning to understand him he says something completely contradictory that I have no hopes of untangling. First he says that ‘there is no slavery and you should make your own decisions’ and then he’s telling me that he cannot trust my decisions because I am a slave!”

Loki gave a growl of frustration and Thor barely resisted the urge to smile. Somehow he didn’t think that Loki would find the situation funny. Keeping his face as neutral as possible he waited. He knew from past experiences that Loki was far from done.

“It’s not as if it’s already difficult enough! A master and a slave courting is all but unheard of. Half the time I’m ready to talk myself out of the whole thing even without Anthony’s reservations. Can you just imagine how this would look were we on Asgard?”

“But you are not on Asgard, brother,” Thor added in an attempt to be helpful.

Loki waved away the words dismissively. Turning he began to pace the room as he continued. “It matters not. With no slavery on midgard what else am I supposed to use for a guide if not Asgard?”

“You already know the answer to that,” Thor told him. The comment caused Loki to stop pacing and turn to face him questioningly. “You use Stark for your guide to what is expected of you the same as anyone else in your position.”

Loki rolled his eyes and huffed before resuming his pacing. A corner of Thor’s mouth twitched as he tried keep from grinning. At first Thor had been worried that Stark was using his position to take that which Loki would not have otherwise given. However after the first night it had become clear that was not the case. He might not understand why Loki was drawn to men but he could definitely tell when his brother was smitten. Loki was definitely infatuated with Anthony Stark. Stark, for his part, seemed to be acting honorably and placing Loki’s well being ahead of his own wants. Thor couldn’t help but respect him for that.

“He’s insufferable! He tells me he wants be with me and then denies me at every turn! Why even tell me things like that if he is unwilling to pursue it further?”

Loki, completely unaccustomed to not being able get something he truly wanted one way or another, would of course be frustrated. Even if it was unintentional it was a wonderful strategy. To date Loki had never failed to get whatever he truly wanted. Even if Stark’s only concern was Loki’s wellbeing it would only serve to make Loki more determined. Knowing that Stark truly cared enough for Loki to deny himself what he truly wanted made Thor like the man even more.

“Perhaps he is merely trying to protect your honor brother,” Thor offered. Turning Loki leveled a glare at him. “I can protect my own honor,” Loki snapped.

“It would seem to me that he is concerned only that you not agree because of the difference in your relative positions.”

“I would not. He has even decreed that I am not to do anything that would make me uncomfortable. To do so would be breaking one of his rules. A rule he set in place.”

Thor stared at his brother thoughtfully for a while before answering. “Is there ever a time where you feel as if you are more like equals instead of master and slave?”

“No, I am…” Loki faltered and looked contemplative for a moment.
“Yes?” Thor prompted.

“The workshop,” Loki murmured. “As little as he holds to the traditional ideals of owning a slave he all but completely forgets them in the workshop. When he’s in there he becomes intently focused on whatever he is working on and forgets about all else. Thor no. I know that look. Whatever you’re thinking, just no.”

“It just seems to me the perfect place to discuss this with him. When he’s the least likely to come up with objections and more likely to open to the idea. It’s still your call, though.”

“Of course it’s my call and I’ll thank you very much if you would mind your own business and stay out of mine.”

Thor shrugged. “As you please.” Pressing any issue in a discussion with Loki never worked. Loki had to come to the conclusion on his own for it to mean anything to him. Thor had gotten his point across now he had to wait for Loki to work through everything. That would only happen at Loki’s pace and no faster.

“And if either father or Heimdall should see? Father would never approve. He would send people to retrieve me.”

“He might,” Thor allowed. “If he does though I think he will discover that you are not so easily retrieved. Stark would most definitely fight to keep you here and I believe the others would as well.”

“The others have no reason to defend me after everything I have done and I am little more than a slave to Anthony,” Loki sulked.

“I think that you will find you are wrong about that. Do you not recall the tenacity with which the others defended you when I first arrived? I only wished to talk with you. Would it not seem logical that they would defend you even more fiercely from someone wishing to cause you even greater distress?”

“It matters not. In the end they would only wind up hurt and I would still be taken back and punished for not acting as a slave should.”

“There would be no need for that as you would be acting precisely as a slave should.”

“Slaves do not court their masters Thor,” Loki bickered.

“Not on Asgard, no,” Thor agreed. “But we’re not on Asgard are we?” Loki opened his mouth to reply but promptly shut it so Thor continued. “We are on midgard are we not? As midgard has different customs than Asgard then who is to say that it is improper for a master to court a slave here?”

At that last comment Loki’s muscles stiffened as his eyes flashed in anger. “You know who,” he growled.

“I sincerely doubt father will risk the peace between our worlds for no more than you courting your master. Besides, should he try anything I also will defend your rights to be with whomever you please.”

“You’ll pardon me if I don’t believe that.”

“I will,” Thor agreed. “But that also doesn’t change anything. I will step in and do whatever I can to keep you from being taken away against your will.”
“You didn’t even see fit to attend my trial,” Loki shot back.

“I would have been there if I had been allowed. I showed up every day of your trial but was not permitted into the chambers. I stood outside every day awaiting news. I had to receive word second hand and hope they did not leave out anything important. After the trial but before you were sentenced father sent me away on a diplomatic mission. I am sure now that he merely used it as an excuse because he knew I would object to your sentence. I returned as soon as I was able and immediately followed you here when I learned what transpired.

You may not be able to believe me but every word is true. As things stand I am not currently allowed to return to Asgard. Were I able to return I would find those that wronged you and visit justice upon them. I would see them pay for their transgressions against you. You are my brother Loki. You may doubt everything else but never doubt that I love you.”

“You cannot return to Asgard?” Loki asked stunned.

“No. Apparently under father’s orders and mother’s last wishes I am unable to return until you are able. The reasons were not explained.”

“Then you are being punished for my crimes?”

“If it is a punishment then it is a mild one. While I am banished from Asgard I have Jane to for comfort. It is surprising really how someone who cares for us can make even the worst of times immeasurably better.” He knew the exact moment Loki caught his meaning by the scowl on his brother’s face.

“There is nothing I can do to force Anthony’s hand if he truly has him mind set against this, Thor.”

“You said it yourself, he already told you he wishes to be with you.”

“Why do you even care? I thought you did not approve of such relations.”

“I do not understand them, that does not mean I do not approve of them. If he makes you happy then I approve of it. That’s all I’ve ever wanted for you.”

“Do you really believe I even stand a chance with someone like him? I mean, after everything I’ve done…”

“That was not your fault.”

Loki let out an unhappy laugh. As if Thor actually believed that. “Right, like you believe that I was mind controlled.”

“I have spent time discussing it with both Stark and Miss Pepper. Beyond that you were right. The way you led the Chitauri attack was not your style. It was crude at best. If you had truly wanted to conquer midgard then you would have used more finesse. Looking back I am ashamed that I didn’t notice how much effort you were exerting to ensure it failed. I owe you an apology for doubting you and the things I said.”

Stunned, Loki couldn’t think of an adequate reply.

“Loki,” Thor stated hesitantly. “Is it okay if I visit you occasionally now?”
Loki shook his head slowly. “I don’t know if I am ready for that yet. I mean no offense, it’s just…”
“I understand.”

“That would make one of us,” Loki muttered. “Look, I am still… not quite myself. I cannot predict how I might react on my bad days. I think it would be best for now if things remained the same. What if… What if I made an effort to visit more often?” Loki offered. Thor fidgeted slightly and Loki frowned. “Unless you would prefer otherwise.”

“It’s not that,” Thor insisted. “I was just getting ready to visit Jane for a few days.”

Of course. He should have foreseen this, he realized. Perhaps Thor had meant some of the things he’d said but there was no way Loki would ever hold a candle to Jane. “I understand,” Loki managed.

“I made plans to visit her before…”

“Oh.”

“I’ll call her,” Thor stated.

Confused Loki looked up and stared at his brother. “Call?” he asked.

“Yes. I’ll postpone the trip so I can be here just in case you want to visit again.”

Was Thor serious? Yes, Loki realized, Thor was genuinely offering to cancel his plans with Jane just to stay here on the off chance that Loki might feel like speaking to him. “Gods no, don’t do that. Jane would be angry with you, and more importantly me,” he intoned as haughty as he could manage. In truth he could care less if Thor’s woman was angry with him but Thor didn’t need to know that. “Go to her as you have planned. If I wish to speak with you I will call.”

“Are you sure?” Thor asked sounding unsure.

“Positive. Now go. I have my own mortal to beguile.”

“As you insist,” Thor answered beaming.

With the music blaring Tony didn’t hear the person approached and jumped when someone laid a hand on his shoulder. When he realized it was only Bruce Tony breathed a sigh of relief and brought a hand up to cover his pounding heart. Bruce, who had been unprepared for Tony’s reaction also jumped in surprise as well. Finally recovering his breath Tony dropped his hand and met Bruce’s eyes.

“Geez man, warn a person next time. You almost gave me a heart attack. What’s up?”

“I’ll get JARVIS to say something next time,” Bruce told him. “You skipped lunch. I didn’t want you to missed dinner as well. You know, you really shouldn’t be listening to music that loud. It could really damage your hearing.”

Waving off his concern Tony checked his watch. Sure enough he noted it was well past lunch. Almost as if on cue his stomach let out a loud grumble. Suddenly food sounded like a really good idea. “Right, let me just finish up here and I’ll…”

“Not a chance,” Bruce disagreed. “I believe you actually do intend to wrap up before heading up to
eat something but you and I both know that’s not going to happen. You’ll just get caught up in everything and forget again. Come on, DUM-E can wrap up things for you.” Bruce told him before turning to leave.

“Yeah I guess,” Tony agreed. Suddenly a thought struck him. “Hey who cooked?”

Bruce stopped moving and glanced back over his shoulder. “Steve. Why do you ask?”

Tony scowled. “No reason.” Without another word Tony strode past Bruce and exited the workshop. There was no way in hell he was ever going to admit to anyone that he had been hoping Loki had decided to cook. Squashing down the disappointment Tony headed for the elevator, waited until Bruce was inside, then hit the button for the penthouse floor. During the ride he studiously avoided curious glances Bruce keep shooting his way. When the doors opened Tony stepped out and head for the kitchen with even bothering to check if Bruce followed or not. Inspecting the room he frowned when he didn’t see Loki.

“JARVIS, where’s Loki?”

Master Loki is in his room sir,” JARVIS replied.

Scowling Tony changed directions and headed for Loki’s room.

“Sir, I have already informed him of the time,” JARVIS stated.

Tony halted in his tracks and looked upwards slightly. Occasionally glancing towards the speakers was a habit he hadn’t ever been able to fully break. Not like it mattered. “What did he say?” Tony asked.

“He inferred that he was not currently hungry and would not be attending dinner.”

“The hell he’s not,” Tony grumbled resuming his trek towards Loki’s room.

“Tony wait,” Steve called.

Not a chance, Tony thought. Suddenly a hand grabbed onto his arm. Tony whirled around to face the person restraining him. Of course it was Steve. “Let go,” Tony growled.

“No yet,” Steve disagreed. “Look, I don’t know what’s going on but-”

Tony yanked his arm back and Steve released him. “You don’t know what’s going on,” he agreed. “So don’t try to interfere.” Turning Tony stalked down the hallway. He was just outside of Loki’s room, hand raised, poised to knock, when he stopped himself. What the hell was he doing, Tony wondered. After everything they’d been through, every time he could have used his position to give orders to Loki and now he was actually contemplating it?

Slowly he lowered his hand and hung his head. No, he wouldn’t stoop to that now, not after everything. Softly he knocked on Loki’s door.

“Come in?”
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Still shaking his head Tony turned the knob and opened the door. Entering the room he closed the door behind himself. He couldn’t bring himself to raise his eyes as he stood there, unsure of what to say.

“I am not hungry. I will, of course, eat something if that changes,” Loki said smoothly.

“Yeah,” Tony acknowledged. “But this isn’t about that. I just, I don’t know. I just kind of needed to be near you. You know? I mean, you took off earlier and it was probably my fault. I know I can be a bit of an ass sometimes. It’s just I missed you. Look, this isn’t easy for me to say but I’m trying. You were right, okay? It shouldn’t matter how anyone else sees it. I’m kind of running out of things to say. You can jump in any time you want now. No seriously, please jump in now and put me out of my misery or I’m just going to keep rambling and-.”


Finally looking up he watched as Loki patted the bed a few times. Dropping his head again Tony made his way over and sat down on the bed next to Loki. He leaned sideways until his shoulder was pressed against Loki’s and sighed. His mind stopped racing and he was finally able to relax. Contented, Tony let his eyes slide closed.

“Comfortable?”

“Mm,” Tony hummed.

“I was thinking.”

“Mm hm,” Tony hummed questioningly.

“Perhaps you’re right,” Loki stated off handed. “Maybe we should wait on courting.”

Tony opened his eyes and stared at Loki. Loki seemed to be serious in spite of everything he’d said earlier. “Are you being serious?”

“Quite serious. Besides, on Asgard it would be considered the height of impropriety were we to court. After all I am still considered a slave and men definitely do not court other men. Perhaps in a few years Odin may change his mind and lift my sentence. It would be surprising but not completely unheard of. When, or rather if, that happens then we can begin seriously courting.”

Tony blinked in surprise, unsure how to reply to that.

“I would like to get ready for bed now if I may,” Loki stated.

Tony could only stare as Loki removed his shirt. Most of Loki’s previous injuries were completely healed. Only those that had been the worst still remained and even those looked better now. Fairly soon they too would probably be healed. He would have to remember to thank Bruce for helping. After examining the remnants of the injuries Tony let his eyes wander appreciatively over the rest of Loki’s exposed torso.
“Anthony?”

“Huh?” Tony asked finally realizing he’d been staring.


The motion drew Tony’s eyes back to Loki’s chest briefly and he had to work to pry his eyes back up to meet Loki’s once more. “Yeah, no. I’m… good. I should let you…” He waved a hand distractedly. “I should let you get ready for bed.” Yeah that’s it, he thought. Bed. His mind immediately supplied him with images of him sleeping curled up next to the half naked Loki now sitting next to him. Tony shook his head to clear it and stood. “So, I’m going to go… get something to eat now,” he stumbled.

“Understood,” Loki answered with a slight nod.

“So…”

“You should probably go then before the food gets cold,” Loki observed.


Loki didn’t move as he watched Anthony stumble out of the room and yank the door shut behind himself. When Anthony was finally gone Loki breathed a sigh of relief. Talk of Asgard and the minor flirting Loki had been able to manage had put him slightly on edge. He did have to admit it felt nice though. Even if it had made him nervous he still felt more like his old self now than he had in what felt like forever.

Glancing down he inspected the wounds he could see attempting to judge how much they had healed. He had to admit that as much as he hated the accursed ‘solution’ baths they were helping. Instead of the agonizingly slowness with which they had previously healed the wounds seemed to be getting better at a far more normal rate. Well, more normal for him he supposed. Humans seemed to heal a lot slower. That thought gave him pause. Anthony was human.

Once again his mind flashed back to the abuses that he’d suffered at the hands of his former jailers. The taunts and insults they’d thrown at him only served to reinforce what he knew. Relations between men were not only frowned upon but were also quite often openly reviled. If word got back to Asgard that Anthony was ‘courting’ a slave his reputation would be in danger. Perhaps he was worrying over nothing. Anthony did seem pretty set on not moving forward with anything until Loki was no longer a slave. Loki knew there was next to no chance that his sentence would ever be altered. As rare as it would be for that to happen to another it was even less likely to happen in his case.

Loki’s mind supplied an image of Anthony petitioning Odin for his freedom and he shivered. No matter what he desired Loki knew he could not let that happen. There was no way Odin would ever reverse the ruling. Anthony was not the kind of person that took no for an answer and Odin would not tolerate being defied, especially by a mortal. Should Anthony choose to challenge his ruling Loki feared what would become of his mortal.

All too sudden it was difficult to breathe. Leaning back against the headboard Loki drew his knees up and wrapped his arms around them. Breathe, he reminded himself. It was easier said than done. His throat felt like he was suffocating as his muscles began shaking. Closing his eyes tightly he tried to calm himself but didn’t have much luck.
“Master Loki?”

Startled, Loki jumped at the unexpected voice mentally cursing himself. By now he shouldn’t be so surprised by the occasional comment from JARVIS. “What?” Loki gritted through his clenched teeth.

“I am detecting spikes in several of your biological readings.”

Loki ignored the comment.

“Judging by the current readings and past incidents I would hypothesize that you are currently experiencing a panic attack.”

“Shocking,” Loki muttered, still struggling to draw a breath. Tightening his arms around his legs he began rocking as he continued reminding himself to breathe.

“Shall I contact master Stark?” JARVIS asked.

Loki’s head shot up instantly as his eyes opened wide. “No! I can do this,” he managed.

“I am not sure that conclusion is sound. I believe that I should-”

“No,” Loki disagreed again. “I can do this,” he ground out. “Just… give me time. Let me try first,” Loki pleaded.

“If things progress much more I will have to alert sir,” JARVIS announced.


Surprisingly, arguing with JARVIS helped take his mind off of things enough for him to draw a few shallow breaths. Not bothering to question the why’s Loki forced himself to focus to the voice that always seemed to startle him at the worst possible times.

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It felt like hours. Who was he kidding? It felt like an eternity before he was able to pull himself out of the panic attack. By the time he eventually managed it his heart was pounding, he was breathing heavily, and he was covered in sweat. Still, he couldn’t help the small smile spreading over his lips. He didn’t have the energy for anything more than the tiny smirk but he was ridiculously happy that he’d managed this panic attack on his own.

If there was any hope of him taking back any kind of control of his life then he was going to need to learn to control the panic attacks on his own. He couldn’t depend on Anthony to fix them forever. Besides, what if he had one of these attacks when his elskaðir needed him? He couldn’t chance being stuck in a panic attack and risk his elskaðir being endangered. Just the mere thought of it was unacceptable.

“Elskaðir,” Loki whispered.

“I didn’t quite catch that master Loki.”

Loki rolled his eyes but didn’t reply.

“Shall I contact master Tony?” JARVIS offered.

“No!” Loki shouted. “Uh, I mean… Please do not. He has many other things to deal with,” Loki
“He has designated you as a top level priority,” JARVIS answered. “If anything.”

“There is no reason to contact him,” Loki objected. “The panic attack has passed. I am well now.”

“If you are certain then,” JARVIS finally relented.

“I am certain.”

When there was no other reply Loki breathed a sigh of relief and finally relaxed.

The next few days were hell, there was just no other way to view them. Yes, Tony appreciated having Loki nearby when he had to deal with Stark Industry business but it was quickly becoming frustrating. It wasn’t that Loki had done anything specific that Tony could pinpoint. In fact, if he had to say anything he’d say that Loki went above and beyond everything asked of him. All of the odd rules Happy insisted that a personal assistant for Tony would have to follow Loki took in without complaint. Loki even went out of his way to follow all the ‘house rules’ he’d taken issues with previously. It was more than that though.

Loki seemed to have grown in self-confidence and determination. It was far more then Tony could have hoped for and he had no clue what caused the change. Still, as welcome as the change was, it was also frustrating. The less Loki acted like a slave the less Tony thought of him as one. On top of that it was infinitely more difficult to remember why he was denying himself when Loki would return to the penthouse covered in sweat after working out in the mornings with Steve. Speaking of… Tony’s mind conjured the latest image of post workout Loki from this morning. As he stood there appreciating the image Tony thoroughly lost track of time until someone nearby cleared their throat. Startled he jumped slightly and opened his eyes.

“I did not mean to startle you,” Loki stated smoothly.

“No, it’s fine, I was just… thinking about stuff,” he stuttered. Stupid, he mentally chastised himself. “So what’s up?”

“I have a list of ingredients I would like to order if you would like to look over it,” Loki told him holding out a sheet of paper.

Tony waved dismissively at the paper refusing to take it. “Ingredients like for cooking?” he asked.

“Indeed,” Loki agreed.

“Finally decide on something you’d like to cook?”

“Indeed,” Loki repeated. “If you have need of me later I could cook another day. It will take awhile before I am able to finish. I would hate to be busy if there is any chance that you may have need of my services.”

“It should be fine. I have a meeting later but it should be fairly short. It’ll be nice to come back eat something that you made.”

“I could always go with you and cook tomorrow,” Loki offered.

“No it’s fine. Like I said, it shouldn’t take long. I’ll be back before you know it then we can sit down
and eat together.”

“I suppose,” Loki finally agreed.

“You’ll be with me all day and then there’s just the one meeting. After that I’ll be back and we can have dinner. I have to admit I’m pretty curious to see what you’re going to make.”

“You curiosity must be satisfied until tomorrow then,” Loki told him smoothly. “As I will not be accompanying you would you mind carrying your travel suit?”

“The briefcase? I can,” Tony agreed. “You do realize I’ll be fine, right? There is almost no chance that anything happening where I would need of my suit.”

“Almost. That means there’s still a small chance. I would just feel safer if I knew you were protected on the off chance that something were to happen.”

“Nothing’s going to happen but I’ll take it with me if it will help put your mind at ease.”

“Thank you Anthony.”

The next morning Loki woke up early as usual. Also as per usual he lay there staring at the ceiling. After several moments he huffed a sigh of annoyance and shoved the covers off of his body. Sitting up he yawned and rubbed his hands over his face briskly. Finally he maneuvered himself out of the bed and made his way to the adjoining bathroom. Going through his daily routine he brushed his teeth first before starting the shower. After adjusting the temperature he stripped off his bed clothes and climbed into the shower.

He’d never had to brush his teeth before and had only showered when he wanted to relax as his magic had previously allowed him to keep himself clean. When he’d finally become comfortable he began showering in the mornings. In the early days he’d showered as fast as possible still worried Anthony would enter at any time. The first time he’d lingered in the shower he couldn’t understand why he’d allowed himself that much time. It wasn’t until he’d sat down at the table with Anthony for breakfast that morning that he realized why. He had felt safe enough that Anthony would not enter without permission to finally fully relax.

When he was finished showering he dried off and dressed. As he was going to be joining Anthony today, at least for the morning, he dressed in one of the suits. Normally he would wait to shower until he’d finished his morning workout with the Captain but the Captain would be busy for the most part of today if not the next as well. Loki was just glad that they hadn’t had anything happen that required everyone. He didn’t know how he was going to handle it when, as it was only a matter of time, Anthony had to go help with a threat. A shiver ran through him and Loki suppressed it as much as possible. There was no sense in worrying over something like that until it happened.

“Alright, we’re not likely to get a better opportunity than this. According to the schedule Stark will be gone for a few hours this afternoon. We will still need to be cautious. Just because we haven’t seen her in a while doesn’t mean she’s not still there. Even if she is, though, it should still only be her and Loki. Rogers left earlier this morning, and Barton hasn’t returned to the tower yet. We need to get in, do what we came here for, and get out before any of the others come back. Everyone understand?”
“Master Loki,” JARVIS stated.

Even though there was no actual person Loki still found himself glancing up from the book he was leafing through to eye the ceiling. Actually, it was probably because he knew there was no actual person that made it so much easier for him to glance up at the voice. If it had been a real person he would probably have been too apprehensive to take the chance he might meet their gaze. The only two he even felt remotely comfortable with enough to make direct eye contact was his Anthony and Barton. Shaking his head Loki dismissed that train of thought.

“Yes?” he finally answered.

“A delivery for you has just arrived. Shall I have it sent up or would you prefer to collect it yourself?”

Loki frowned. Given a choice he didn’t relish the idea of having to deal with some random stranger however briefly. On the other hand, did he give permission for that stranger to make his way up here just to drop off the delivery? Did he have the authority for that?

“I shall meet him,” Loki decided.

“As you wish,” JARVIS agreed.

Making his way to the elevator Loki entered and hit the ground floor button.

Bruce stared bleary eyed at bottles of chemicals before him. No matter how long he spent working on the problem he couldn’t for the life of him find a way to make the solution more bearable, less painful, for Loki. Yes, it was working, however slowly, but that didn’t mean that he couldn’t try to improve it. With a sigh he closed his eyes and slipped his fingers under his glasses to pinch the bridge of his nose.

“Sir? I hate to interrupt you but I believe I should inform you of an issue,” JARVIS stated breaking into his thoughts.

With another heavy sigh Bruce straightened his glasses and dropped his arm. “What’s up JARVIS?” he asked.

“There is a group of people headed for the roof.”

“Is there any reason for them to be headed up there?” Bruce asked dubiously.

“There is a work order to install a new satellite dish today. Still, it is odd that the company would send so many for such a simple task.”

“Is there any reason for them to stop on any other floor?”

“No, and I have taken the liberty of locking down all floors they would have no need to visit.”

“Have you informed Tony?”

“Not yet. I felt it prudent to wait for now. Just to be safe though I felt I should keep you informed of anything potentially problematic.”

“Who else is here right now?”
“Only you, Miss Romanoff, and Loki,” JARVIS replied smoothly.

“Right.” Bruce hesitated. He was unaccustomed to being the one to make these kinds of decisions. “I trust you to know what could spell trouble. Keep me apprised of things and don’t hesitate if you have any suggestions.”

“Understood,” JARVIS acknowledged.

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Having just finished putting everything away Loki examined the kitchen. Soon he would have to get started on the preparation but he still had a little time. His thoughts temporarily drifted to his Anthony. Never in all his years did he ever think he would find someone like Anthony, especially after everything that had happened. That Anthony could have feelings for him after everything still amazed Loki. He should probably get changed before hand. He had barely taken two steps before it happened.

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Bruce’s head shot up as alarms began to blare. “JARVIS?” Bruce asked instantly concerned.

“Intruders on floors eighty, eighty-one, and eighty-two,” JARVIS relayed.

“I thought you said you have the floors secured,” Bruce shot back as he hurriedly exited the lab. “What happened?”

“I locked down the elevator and stairwell access to all floors they would have no need to visit They broke in through the windows,” JARVIS stated easily. “I have already alerted Master Stark to the situation. He should arrive shortly.”

“Not soon enough,” Bruce muttered, hating the only option he had left to help control the current problem.

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As he was still dressed for his work with Anthony his knives were still sheathed up his sleeves. He thought about slipping them into his hands to defend himself but decided against it. With Anthony out of the tower and no one else currently present it would be best to see what these intruders wanted first instead of escalating the situation. Besides, judging by the sounds there were too many for him deal with alone. He might be able to take out most of them but he’d probably die in the effort. Keeping his breathing even he raised his hands as he waited for the interlopers. He didn’t have long to wait.

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Her head shot up instantly at the sound of the alarms. She was already moving an instant later. “What is it JARVIS?” she asked as she armed herself.

“Several intruders have broken through the windows on the eightieth, eighty-first, and eighty-second floors. Masters Stark and Banner have already been informed.”

“And Loki?”

“Master Loki is on the eightieth floor. He already knows of the intruders. Any information I could give him would be useless and I would only serve as a distraction for now.”
“Understood,” she answered with a nod as she grabbed the last of her weapons. “Is everything on lockdown?”

“Affirmative,” JARVIS acknowledged.

“The elevator would leave me trapped in a metal box with no retreat. Can you unlock the stairwell doors as I get to them?”

“Affirmative,” JARVIS repeated.

- Hands raised Loki backed up until he was pressed against the cabinets on the far wall of the kitchen. Several people with guns rushed into the common room that adjoined the kitchen. Instantly all the weapons were leveled at him. Loki carefully observed everything as they filed into the room. He had to work to remain still and keep his breathing even. As predicted there were too many of him to take out alone. Hopefully none of the others in the tower decided to come check up on him. There would be no way for him to ensure their safety against this many adversaries. Loki’s muscles stiffened and he froze when he realized he actually recognized one of the intruders.

“Well, well, well. I must say I’m surprised to see you again. I didn’t think you’d show your face here again so soon.”

Loki chose to remain silent for the moment.

“Nothing to say for yourself?”

“Would anything I have to say make any difference?” Loki asked.

“Probably not. Okay, so here’s what’s going to happen.”

The man’s speech, David if Loki remembered his name correctly, was immediately halted by the elevator opening. All eyes turned towards the elevator. Loki himself wasn’t above a quick glance but he that was all. After that he returned his gaze back to the others. He had no clue who was in the elevator but it was a fair assumption that it was one of the others who had been in the tower. He couldn’t let anyone else be hurt because of his mistakes.

When it was only his life on the line he could accept the consequences. Despite what anyone said it was his fault so many people on Midgard had lost their lives. Now that one of the others who resided in the tower was in danger he couldn’t take the chance he would be responsible for another person being hurt. He needed to act and fast. Without wasting a second Loki withdrew his daggers and rushed forward.

Instead of slowing down he slammed into the first one at a dead run. Grabbing onto the man Loki gripped the man’s wrist that held the gun. Twisting them Loki used him as a shield to block the others as he struck out at them. Instinct kicked in and conscious thought was relegated to the back of his mind. This he knew. This he he could handle. Or at least he used to in the past. There was no denying he was out of practice after all this time. He had just enough presence of mind to be grateful to the Captain for taking the time to spar with him almost every morning.

It was then, the few seconds after his surprise attack, that the gunfire began. Honestly Loki had expected it sooner. That alone told him everything he needed to know about the training and efficiency of his opponents. They were armed whereas he wasn’t but they didn’t have specific fighting training let alone know how to function in a group. Loki, on the other hand, had centuries of combat training and these people weren’t anywhere near up to par with those Loki had trained
against. That was something he could use to his advantage.

His initial assessment had been right. Eventually this many would overwhelm him he was sure but he felt compelled to protect whichever of the others that had shown up to check on him. He would not let another person get hurt on his account; not if he could do anything to stop it, not again. He did everything he could to keep them focused on him which, of course, was unsurprisingly easy. It was he they were here for, of that there was no doubt. He recognized those present as those he had taken with the scepter during the battle of New York. Somehow they had figured out he was here and had come for him. He had a pretty good idea what they wanted with him and couldn’t really blame them.

Still, he needed to protect the others if possible. It wasn’t their fault he’d been weak and had caused untold suffering and death. He needed to find a way to take out the threat without killing any of the intruders. He was done with killing. He would not be responsible for any more unnecessary deaths if he could help it. The man he was restraining, would undoubtedly not survive this operation but it couldn’t be helped. At least it was only one life. If he managed to play this right that would be the only loss of life suffered today.

He realized who had arrived when he twisted to avoid being struck by gunfire and caught sight of leather clad, redhead, visage of the Black Widow. Her moves were an economy of motion wasting no time or energy unnecessarily. Every move served a purpose and slid easily into the next. She almost reminded him of another lady warrior he knew. Slightly distracted he moved slightly too slow and hissed when a bullet grazed his upper arm. He couldn’t allow himself to become distracted like that.

For the most part he was at a standstill. He could defend himself and keep many of the others busy as well but he couldn’t really do much more than that. He did his best to keep watch over Miss Romanoff but there was just too many other things that required his attention. If he allowed his concentration to slip too much he would die before help could arrive and leave her unprotected. That was unacceptable. He needed to hold out until Anthony could arrive. That JARVIS would have alerted Anthony wasn’t even a question. His ability to hold out long enough for Anthony to arrive was the only thing he did question.

From the corner of his eye Loki caught sight of one of the intruders who had somehow managed to sneak around to behind Miss Romanoff. The man was leveling his gun at her and Loki had no doubt he meant to kill her. Too far away to stop him in time Loki flung one of his blades at the man. The blade’s hilt slammed into the man’s hand hard and the man dropped the gun he’d been holding just as Lok had planned. Also as planned it drew Natasha’s attention to the man behind her. Suddenly there was a roar from somewhere nearby and Loki couldn’t help the involuntary flinch. Still, he had to smile. If the doctor had changed into the green beast then chances were good it would protect Miss Natasha. Those two shared something special even if neither of them were willing to admit to it. From out of nowhere something heavy struck him from behind and he stumbled towards the broken window.

- 

Tony rushed back towards the tower as fast as his suit could carry him. According to JARVIS several people had invaded the tower but there was only room for one thought in his mind. Loki. He needed to make sure Loki was safe. The others he trusted to take care of themselves and he knew he should trust Loki but he couldn’t stop worrying. Loki wasn’t used to defending himself. His Loki hadn’t had to lookout for himself in a long while. If Loki got hurt because Tony had left him there alone... Tony shoved that that away and growled.

Loki wasn’t unprotected. Nat and Banner should both still be in the tower. That many against the
three of them weren’t good odds. The one thing that might save them would be if Banner let the other guy out to play. Tony wasn’t sure how Loki would fair if that happened. Banner’s other half might just as easily take his anger out on Loki as protect him. Tony would rather get to the tower before he had to find out for sure.

He crashed through the wall of his tower looking for Loki but also looking out for potential threats as well. Sadly, at the very least to him, the latter came first. By the time he entered the tower Loki was nowhere to be seen. Banner, in Hulk form of course, and Natasha were both in the living room of the penthouse being attacked by several armed intruders. Cursing his bad luck Tony helped to fended off the attackers while trying not to think of where Loki might be or if he was injured. That line of thought would have to wait until there was more time.

- 

Space. Endless, weightless, space. That was all Loki could comprehend on his way down. His mind instantly flashed to the last time he’d felt something close to this. Fear closed his throat and tightened his chest making it hard to draw a breath. Panic began to set in and blackness tinged the edges of his vision. In the end that’s what did it. When he’d fallen through space the pure blackness was all consuming and almost physically crushing. If he were once more falling through the same darkness how was his vision being clouded?

The answer crashed into him like a charging bilgesnipe. He was on midgard and not in the vast emptiness of space. He was falling out of one of the windows the intruders had busted through and not the void. Following directly on the heels of that revelation he also noted that he wasn’t alone. One of the intruders, and he had a pretty good idea who, had sacrificed themselves just to kill him. Or so Loki believed. They were pulled up short before they could smash into the ground and swung back towards the building.

- 

Between the three of them they were more than able to incapacitate the intruders without killing any of them. If Loki was injured or worse… Nope, not going there, Tony thought. There was no need to borrow trouble before necessary. The second the last of the trespassers were subdued Natasha rushed passed him obviously in a hurry to get across the room for reasons he neither knew nor cared about just yet. Perhaps later he would but for right now his entire focus was on finding Loki.

“JARVIS where’s Loki?” Tony called rushing down the hallway headed for Loki’s room.

“Master Loki was grappled by one of the intruders and both fell from the window not long before you entered the tower,” JARVIS replied instantly.

Tony stumbled to a halted, his heart hammering against his chest. Loki had fallen from the window? No, he decided. He had to have misheard. Only he knew better. He knew he hadn’t misheard. His mind instantly supplied him with an image of Nat shoving her way past him in a rush to get across the room; the side with the floor to ceiling windows.

“No,” Tony whispered.

Turning on his heels he raced back to the living room. The second he entered the room he rushed over to the window. The scene that greeted him threatened to stop his rapidly pounding heart. Hulk and Nat were already on the ground. He’d worry about how they got down there so swiftly later. What drew his complete attention were the two other figures standing inside a circle of S.H.I.E.L.D. agents. Loki, with a gun to his head, Hulk angry and growling in that direction, and encircled by S.H.I.E.L.D. agents was pretty much all of Tony’s fears wrapped up neatly in one perfect nightmare.
He could fire a repulsor blast at the man holding a gun to Loki’s head but there was no way he could guarantee that the gun wouldn’t go off accidentally and kill Loki.

Needing to be closer he gave up his perch on the window ledge and flew down to land just inside the large ring of S.H.I.E.L.D. agents. The man holding a gun to Loki’s head jumped in surprise and Tony could have kicked himself for startling him. Flipping up the faceplate Tony raised his hands slowly and quickly inspected Loki. He relaxed slightly when he didn’t see any new injuries. What he did see was a scowl settle on Loki’s face.

“You okay?” Tony asked, ignoring the scowl.

“You are supposed to be smart,” Loki growled. “Why would you needlessly throw yourself into danger for no reason?”

“Shut it both of you,” the gunman hissed.

“There is no need for anyone else to get hurt,” Loki stated placatingly. “You have no quarrel with any of the others present. If you would just-”

“I said shut up!” the gunman snarled. “You,” the man snapped, shifting his gaze over to Tony. “Back off.”

“He will not if you order him to do so,” Loki stated calmly. “If you would allow me time to talk with him-”

“One more word, I swear,” the man threatened.

Hulk roared and Tony winced. Slightly worried he turned head slightly and glanced over at the other half of his usually mild mannered friend. Natasha had moved forward and place a hand on of his arms and was speaking quietly. Hopefully she could keep him under control so he didn’t do anything that would jeopardize Loki.

“Stark,” a very familiar voice called.

“Shit,” Tony muttered to himself. Yeah he knew Fury would be here but that didn’t mean he was ready to deal with him just now. As he watched Fury made his way through the circle and approached. Tony almost panicked. If his Loki died because of Fury…

“That’s far enough,” the gunman called before leveling his gun at Fury.

“Wait!” Loki cried out. “He did nothing to you, it’s me you wish to harm. There is no reason to-”

“There’s every reason to harm him,” the gunman argued. “You think any of them are going to care if you die? He, on the other hand, might actually be missed. Anyone of these others would probably be missed more than you!”

Something in the air shifted. Later Tony would tell others, and almost convince himself, he must have seen it in the man’s eyes though that was a lie. At this point Tony didn’t have the ability to rip his eyes away from Loki. He knew, somehow, when Loki knew something was changing though it took him a few more seconds to understand what.

“No!” Tony shouted a split second before Loki moved.

Everything seemed to slow down. It was as if time was taunting him, allowing him even longer to react because it knew there was no way he could change the outcome. Still, he couldn’t stop from
trying. Several things seemed to happen at the same time then. Loki twisted, bring his arm up and turning towards the gunman. The man in question struggled to keep the gun aiming forward, finger beginning to pull against the trigger. There was sound of several gunshots and a knife seemed to sprout from the man’s neck. The giant green monster that was sometimes, although not currently, Tony’s science brother in arms shoved past him almost knocking him over. Then, just as suddenly as it began everything stopped.

S.H.I.E.L.D. agents stood, guns drawn, at the ready for anything. Hulk held the gunman in one hand glaring at him. Natasha stood next to Tony, right hand raised slightly and a knife in the left hand. Fury still stood exactly where he had before everything. Sometime during everything that happened he had drawn a gun of his own. For several more seconds nothing happened. Finally Loki took one staggering step then, slowly, ever so slowly he slid to the ground. Instantly everything else fell away. Nothing else mattered anymore but Loki.

“Loki!” Tony shouted racing forward.

The moment Tony got anywhere near Loki’s prone form the Hulk turned and roared loudly in his direction. Tony stopped short, unsure. Until now he hadn’t ever worried about being attacked by this side of his friend but now…

“Hey big guy,” Natasha said softly.

He didn’t snarl again but he did let out a low growl.

“I know you want to protect him but there’s no need right now. The threat is over and we really need to get Loki some help now. Okay?”

“Please,” came a soft voice.

The pain Tony heard in Loki’s voice almost pulled Tony forward Hulk or no Hulk.

“Doctor, please… allow Anth-” Loki’s voice broke off into loud coughs.

Fuck it. If Hulk decided to smash him then he did, Tony thought. It didn’t matter anymore. What mattered right now was Loki. Luckily for him, or possibly unluckily he didn’t know, Hulk decided not to smash him. Tony dropped to his knees next to Loki and began inspecting him. He winced when he spied the gunshot wound and pulled up the shirt to get a better look at it. Natasha knelt down next to him and grabbed his wrist.

“No,” Natasha said before he could lift the shirt. “You need to put pressure on it for now to slow the bleeding until it can be treated. She glanced back over a shoulder before saying something in Russian that sounded suspiciously like cursing. “You keep pressure on it,” she told him as she moved his hands to press down over the injury. “I’ll talk to Bruce.”

Tony nodded not moving his hands from where she’d placed them or breaking eye contact with Loki. “It’ll be okay, Loki. Just hold on.”

“Anthony,” Loki whispered with a slight smile before grimacing in pain.

“Stark,” Fury said from nearby. “There’s no way Dr. Banner will be able to treat him anytime soon. I have people standing by. We’ll take him-”

“No!” Tony disagreed. Like hell he was letting Fury get his hands on Loki.

“Director,” Loki said softly.
“It’s okay, Loki. I won’t let them take you anywhere.”

Loki shook his head slowly. “Need to… talk to him.”


“Won’t last. Need to talk now.”

“Don’t talk like that. You’ll be fine,” Tony insisted.

“Please. I need…”

Tony turned to look to Fury then back to Loki helplessly. “Fine, but I’m still not letting him take you. You’re mine now and forever and you are **not** going to die on me.”

“I fear that might be… a difficult order to obey. Still, I will try.”

“You better,” Tony growled.

“You really shouldn’t be talking right now,” Fury cautioned.

“Couldn’t let him… shoot you.”

“You damn well could have,” Tony growled.

“Fine, but I’m still not letting him take you. You’re mine now and forever and you are **not** going to die on me.”

“I fear that might be… a difficult order to obey. Still, I will try.”

“You better,” Tony growled.

“You really shouldn’t be talking right now,” Fury cautioned.

“Couldn’t let him… shoot you.”

“You damn well could have,” Tony growled.

Loki shook his head slowly. “My fault. He was… he was… one of those I took.”

“One of those you took?” Fury asked.

“With the scepter,” Loki clarified. “Like Barton.”

“We can talk about this later,” Tony asserted once again.

“No… Director, I want to apologize for… everything. For all of the trouble I… cause you and yours,” Loki panted. “My first visit…”

“It’s alright Loki,” Fury answered. “I know you weren’t yourself then. This, what you did just now, that was you.”

“Need to… apologize.”

“No,” Fury dissented. “What happened then wasn’t your doing. You don’t have any reason to apologize, least of all to me.”

“How?” Loki asked.

Tony didn’t immediately comprehend the question but it seemed Fury understood.

“Barton,” Fury stated. “When he first began talking about you being mind controlled we started looking into it.”

Fury knelt down next to Loki and Tony had to resist the urge to shove the other man away. As far as he was concerned Fury was utterly too close to his Loki. He did, however, glare at the other man.

“That first time you were here? Your eyes were blue. Not the same as the others but they were still blue. I’m looking at your eyes right now and I can tell you they’re green. There’s other stuff as well but it’s not important right now. Right now what you need to be worrying about is staying conscious.
Got it?”

“I am still sorry,” Loki whispered.

“For whatever it is you think you did wrong, all is forgiven. Understood?”

Loki seemed to relax and nodded slightly as his eyelids drooped.

“Loki?” Tony asked slightly worried. “Open your eyes Loki,” Tony demanded. Still no answer. “Loki!” A hand settled on his shoulder and Tony whipped his head around to glare at the person. “What?” he snapped before realizing it was Natasha with Bruce, no longer in Hulk form, standing just next to her. “Help him!”

Bruce stumbled over and knelt down. Tony watched as Bruce reached down and pressed his fingers against Loki’s wrist. After several seconds he pressed his fingers to Loki’s neck and waited. Dropping his head slightly he shook it sadly before looking up at Tony. “I’m not finding a pulse.”

Chapter End Notes

Elskaðir = beloved.
“If I may,” JARVIS stated through the suit’s speakers. “Master Loki does still have a faint pulse but it is failing. If there is any chance to save him you must act quickly. Doctor Banner might be able to save him if you can get them to the infirmary soon enough.”

“JARVIS says he still has a faint pulse,” Tony informed them. “He says we need to act quick or he…” Tony trailed off, unable to even finish that sentence.

“We have a facility nearby,” Fury stated. “We could-”

“Not a chance,” Tony snapped.

“Our facilities are closer than any hospital Stark,” Fury argued.

“No, Tony’s right,” Bruce interrupted. “If JARVIS is right and Loki’s still holding on then we need to move quickly. We don’t have time to go anywhere else. Besides, I know where everything is and what equipment we have here. I’ll do what I can to keep pressure on the wound if you want to give us a lift, Tony.”

“Are you sure?”

“As much as I hate the idea it’ll be faster than the elevator.”

“Got it.”

-

No. Just no, Loki thought. There was no way David would harm the others when they had no influence in anything that had happened. Nope.

“I’ll kill them just as soon as look at them,” David intoned.

“They did nothing wrong,” Loki argued.

“But they mean something to you.”

“They mean nothing,” Loki lied.

“You’re lying,” David stated.

“Prove it,” Loki challenged.

From out of nowhere his Anthony landed in the center of the circle. No. Just no.

“You okay?” Anthony asked, ignoring the scowl.

“You are supposed to be smart,” Loki growled. “Why would you needlessly throw yourself into danger for no reason?”

“Shut it both of you,” the David hissed.
“There is no need for anyone else to get hurt,” Loki stated placatingly. He needed to find a way to get Anthony to leave before he was hurt or killed. “You have no quarrel with any of the others present. If you would just—”

“I said shut up!” the gunman snarled. “You,” the man snapped, shifting his gaze over to Tony. “Back off.”

“He will not if you order him to do so,” Loki stated calmly. “If you would allow me time to talk with him—”

“One more word, I swear,” the man threatened.

Loki flinched involuntarily as Hulk let out a loud roar. Ever since he had arrived, landing heavily and carefully setting Miss Romanoff on the ground, a part of Loki’s attention had been focussed on him as well. Thus far the beast had not taken the opportunity to attack him either in the tower or out here in the open. Now, with his Anthony here Loki was glad for the Hulk’s presence even if it did still make him a bit nervous.

“Stark,” a very familiar voice called.

“Shit,” Tony muttered quietly. Loki could definitely share that sentiment. At the sight of all the S.H.I.E.L.D. agents Loki had already guessed the director would be close by. Still, he was really not prepared to deal with him just yet.

“That’s far enough,” David called before leveling his gun at Fury.

No, Loki thought. He couldn’t let another person get hurt because of him. He needed to find some way to refocus David’s attention back to him. “Wait!,” Loki cried out. “He did nothing to you, it’s me you wish to harm. There is no reason to—”

“There’s every reason to harm him,” David argued. “You think any of them are going to care if you die? He, on the other hand, might actually be missed. Anyone of these others would probably be missed more than you!”

In that instant Loki knew. He heard it in the tone, felt it in the tensing muscles. There was no chance of shifting David’s attention. Denied the revenge he sorely wanted David would settle for dying himself if there a chance of Loki being killed as well. While Loki honestly didn’t want to die he could accept that over being responsible for anymore senseless deaths.

“No!” Tony shouted a split second before Loki moved.

Loki twisted, bringing his arm up and turning towards David. David struggled to keep the gun aiming forward, finger beginning to pull against the trigger. There was sound of several rapid gunshots, something solid struck his chest, a knife seemed to sprout from David’s neck, and the green monster he’d met on his first visit snatched up David. Then, just as suddenly as it began everything stopped. Finally pain began to blossom in his chest. Glancing down he stared at the blood seeping through his shirt. Finally Loki took one staggering step then, slowly, ever so slowly the ground slid up to meet him.

“Loki?”

He truly did make every attempt to answer but it was just too hard to speak. Hopefully his Anthony would understand.

“Open your eyes Loki,” Tony demanded.
Again, he tried to comply but his body wouldn’t cooperate. Frustrated he growled still trying to pry open his eyes. After everything he couldn’t even understand why he was still fighting to continue. For what? To suffer even more? Gods he was so tired. All he wanted to do was sleep.

“Loki!”

- 

“Well,” Tony demanded.

“Move,” Bruce said shoving Tony out of the way.

At this point he couldn’t take time to be nice. If he didn’t move quick enough Loki would die. Hell, even if he did everything right Loki might still die. With the placement of the entrance and exit wounds he was pretty sure the bullet had missed Loki’s heart but that was about the only good news. Unless he was seriously mistaken the bullet would have punctured Loki’s left lung. The path it travelled would have cause extensive damage. The rest would have to wait as the lung took priority for now. Tony grabbed his arm and spun him around.

“But he’ll be okay, right?” Tony asked anxiously.

“Not if you don’t let me work,” Bruce snapped back, shoving Tony’s hand off of him.

“Is there anything I can do to help?” Natasha asked.

“A lot,” Bruce answered distractedly. “Unfortunately right now I need you to keep Tony out of the way.”

“Got it,” she answered.

Immediately she took Tony by the arm and pulled him away from the table. As always he was eternally grateful for her professionalism. Unsurprisingly, Tony protested being pulled away from where Loki lie. He couldn’t worry about that. Right now he had to let Natasha worry about Tony while he focussed on Loki.

Unable to tear his eyes away from the scene Tony watched as Bruce worked. This couldn’t be happening. Desperately Tony struggled to remember their last conversation. For some reason it seemed important that he remember. If Loki didn’t pull through this it would be their last conversation. If it was the last conversation he ever got to have to Loki, then he needed to remember. All of a sudden it was difficult to breathe. No. He absolutely could not have a panic attack. Not now.

“Tony?” Nat asked.

“Cooking!” he blurted out suddenly. “The last thing we discussed was him cooking.”

“Okay,” she answered slowly.

“I just… I couldn’t remember. If that was the last time we got to talk…”

“You can’t think like that. Right now Loki’s still alive. You have to hold onto that. You need to believe he’ll make it.”

“Do you?” Tony shot back.
“Honestly? He’s pretty stubborn, it wouldn’t surprise me.”

Before she could say anything else the doors slid opened and Clint stalked into the infirmary. From the look on the archer’s face Tony guess someone had already informed him of everything. Clint started to head over to where Bruce was working on Loki. Tony moved to head him off but Natasha got to the archer first. As they conversed quietly Tony turned to check on Loki.

With the addition of Clint Bruce could finally truly begin working on Loki’s injuries without having to worry about Tony interrupting. He would need help to operate on Loki and knew there was no chance of Tony staying out of the way if there wasn’t someone to stay with him. With Clint here to distract Tony Bruce wheeled the bed Loki on into one of the rooms that were set aside for just this purpose. He’d asked Natasha to help while Clint stayed with Tony. He would dearly have loved more help during this but he couldn’t trust Tony or Clint to stay focussed enough. No, much better Natasha help him than either of the other two.

“Almost done,” Bruce stated distractedly.

“He’s lost a lot of blood,” Natasha observed.

“I know,” Bruce grumbled. “Fury should have someone bringing some soon. Until then we just need to hope-” Bruce broke off as alarms began to sound. “Damn it!”

“What is it?”

“Not a clue,”

“Well something's happening. You must have some idea,” Natasha demanded.

“I told you, not a clue! This shouldn’t be happening. Damn it.”

“Loki,” a new voice drifted softly to his ears.

For second, but only a second, Loki was confused. After that split second he wasn’t any less confused but it didn’t matter. He knew that voice. Opening his eyes he sat up and stared at the woman looking down at him.

“Mother?” he whispered.

“It’s me.”

“Mother,” he repeated reaching towards her.

Smiling she sat down on the bed as she wrapped her arms around him. He didn’t even bother to wonder when he’d been moved to a bed or how she was even here. His mother was holding him and for now that was enough. He snuggled into her embrace and relaxed. “I missed you,” he murmured.

“I missed you too,” she said stroking his hair lightly. Finally she drew back and took his hands in hers. “I would love nothing more than for this moment to last.”

“It can,” he assured her.
“No Loki,” she told him, shaking her head softly. “At least, not just yet. It’s not time for you to sleep just yet. You need to wake up.”

“I don’t want to,” Loki complained. “I’m so tired. Everything hurts. I just want to sleep and stay here with you.”

“You may stay later,” she promised him. “One day we will meet again, I promise. Right not it’s just not time. Open your eyes Loki.”

He shook his head. “No. I don’t want to wake up. Cannot I stay here with you? There’s nothing in the waking world left for me.”

“Nothing? Not your brother?”

He thought about that. Yes it would hurt to never see Thor again but if he got to stay here with his mother… Loki shook his head. “No.”

She paused briefly. “Not even your Anthony?”

Loki’s muscles stiffened. Anthony. If he stayed here he would never see his Anthony ever again. Could he deal with that?

“I don’t care what they want,” Pepper growled into her cell. “I’m not about to be pushed into saying something that might come back to bite us in the ass. You tell them we’ll release an official statement when we’ve analyzed everything.”

“Do I sound like I care?” Fury snapped into the headset he was wearing. “When I’m ready to question them, I will. Until then I don’t want to hear anymore. Understood?”

Shifting his gaze Steve turned to Agent Hill who was busy conversing with someone on a headset of her own. Even though he knew someone had to stay up here to oversee things he couldn’t lie to himself. As much as he wanted to check on Loki he felt guilty. This would never have happened and Loki wouldn’t be injured, possibly dying, if he’d given the others taken by the scepter a second thought. Even knowing he wasn’t the only one that had forgotten didn’t help him feel any better. Before he could sink too deeply into his own thoughts a staticky feeling filled the air. Steve could have smacked himself. Of all the people to forget about when Loki was injured, possibly mortally…

A bright light filled his vision and Steve squinted. When the light finally faded and he was able to see again he opened his eyes. As predicted the disturbance had foretold the arrival of Loki’s brother but also Jane as well. Standing Steve moved to intercept Thor. The second he was within range Thor grabbed him by the front of his shirt. Before either one of them could react Jane stepped forward and placed her hand on the thunder god’s arm. Without speaking she merely shook her head. For a while no one moved. Even the others in the room seemed to be holding their breath. Finally Thor released him and gave a sharp nod to Jane.

“How fares my brother?” Thor asked.

Running a hand through his hair Steve sighed, “I don’t know. Dr. Banner is still working on him. I wasn’t here when everything happened and I haven’t had a chance to go down and check up on him since I’ve been back.”
By the time Bruce finally finished Tony thought he was going to go crazy. He glanced at the machines hooked to Loki and suddenly he couldn’t move. It was just too much to take in all at once. Alive, he told himself. Loki was still alive. That could change at any moment though, he reminded himself. No, don’t think about that.

“Tony?”

Shaking his head he refused to look in her direction.

“Come on,” she said softly. Taking his hand she led him closer to the bed. “Sit,” she coaxed.

Without taking his eyes off of Loki Tony sat down on the chair near the bed. The only noise in the room was the soft sounds that came from the various machines. As relieved as he was to finally be allowed in to see Loki he still couldn’t stop worrying. Loki was alright for now but that could change at any moment. The door to the room opened and another person entered but he still couldn’t pry his eyes away from the still figure in front of him.

“Tony,” Bruce said quietly.

“How is he?”

“For now? He’s doing as well as can be expected give the amount of damage. Better, in fact actually. I don’t think anyone else with this much damage would have survived. That doesn’t mean he’s out of the woods yet. There’s still a few things that concern me.”

Finally Tony turned to look at his friend.

“There’s some, uh… I don’t know. Normally I’d call it abnormal brain activity but…”

“But,” Tony prompted impatiently.

“I don’t know what normal brain activity would like like for him. I mean, he’s not exactly human is he? I can tell you that normally this type of brain activity doesn’t occur in an unconscious person.”

“So what does that mean?”

“He’s not in a coma, that much I can tell. Other than that?” Bruce shrugged. “I couldn’t begin to say. I don’t know what to tell you Tony. It’s not like there’s any previous cases I can use for a comparison.”

“So what do we do?”

“Best advice?” Bruce shrugged again. “Talk to him.”

“That’s it? That’s the best you have?”

“I’m pretty sure he’s not in a coma, which means he should wake up. We just have to give him a reason to. So yeah, right now the best I have is talk to him. After everything we’ve been through and all the hard work I just put in to save his life don’t you think if I had anything better I’d tell you?” Bruce snapped.

***

-A Few Hours Later-

***

Tony scrubbed his face briskly before finally dropping his hands into his lap and staring over at Loki.
God he’d been stupid. What would have happened if he hadn’t taken his travel suit with him as Loki asked? What would have happened to Loki? Nope, we’re not thinking about that. Loki would wake up eventually. He had to. Until then he was just going to sit here and… and what? ‘Talk to him’, Bruce had said. But what could he say that might help?

“Come on Loki, you have to wake up.”

He waited but there was no response. Had he really expected one? Tony rolled his eyes before continuing.

“Bruce says you’re not in coma so that’s good. He thinks there’s a part of you that can hear what’s being said. I don’t know if that’s true or not but at this point I’m willing to try anything. If there’s even the slightest possibility that it’ll work then I’ll take it. The truth is…” He paused. The soft sounds of the machine filled the room. “The truth is I need you. I’m not used to needing anyone else and I’m not quite sure how to deal with that but I’m willing to try. If you can just find a way back to me I promise to try my damnedest to make this work. Okay?”

- 

“Bruce?” He jumped slightly at the sound of her voice and Natasha had to bite back a small smile. “You need to get some rest.”

“I can’t. I have to-”

Placing a finger on his lips she shushed him. “It can wait. For now what you need is to get some rest.”

“There’s still too much to do. I need-”

“You’re not going to be any good to anyone until you get some rest. If you don’t sleep soon you’re liable to overlook things. It’s better if you get some sleep now and come back to things later with fresh eyes. You know I’m right.”

Slipping his fingers under his glasses he rubbed the bridge of his nose. Sighing he dropped his hand and nodded. “You’re right.”

“I know but it is nice to hear occasionally,” she quipped. “Come on,” she told him, while holding out her hand. “Let’s get you tucked in.”

- 

Steve sighed as he eyed Clint sitting outside on the landing pad. Should have guessed, he thought. Crossing the room he carefully stepped through the open frame that used to hold a full length, sliding, glass doorway. As he approached the other man Steve hesitated. He didn’t want to startle Clint and have him accidentally fall off of the ledge. He needn’t have worried though. Before he could say anything Clint spoke first.

“Are you going to sit down or just keep standing there?” Clint asked without turning around.

Sighing once more Steve moved to sit down next to the archer.

“Any news on Loki?”

“Yeah. He’s, uh, well Dr. Banner finished operating on him. He’s stable for now.”
“Is someone staying with him?”

“Last I heard Dr. Banner was still in the infirmary and Tony hasn’t left Loki’s side since they all entered. He paused to see if Clint would reply. When the other man didn’t say anything after a few seconds Steve continued. “You could go visit him if you want.”

Clint gave a derisive snort. “No, I really couldn’t.”

“Why not?” Steve asked, honestly curious.

“Just how well do you think that’s going to go? Loki already hates places like the infirmary. Tony’s already going to be on edge because someone he cares for deeply has been seriously injured. Putting Tony and I together in the same room as Loki would be a very bad idea right now. I may visit later but for now…”

-

Tony was just starting to nod off when he heard the door open. His head shot up at the noise and he turned towards the sound. Pepper and Thor stood in the doorway. For a while no one moved. Thor was the first one to break the temporary paralysis. Slowly he walked forward staring at the motionless form lying in the bed. When he made it to the side of the bed he just stood there staring for the longest time.

“Loki,” Thor whispered softly.

“Bruce says he can probably hear you,” Tony told him quietly.

Thor nodded but didn’t speak. Tony felt a hand on his shoulder and turned to see Pepper eying him. There was a look of concern on her face he knew well. Placing his hand on hers he shook his head.

“I’m fine,” he told her.

“No you’re not,” she stated. “But you will be and so will he.” She gave his shoulder a few soft squeezes. “Come on, you need to take a break.”

Tony shook his head. “I can’t. There’s no way I’ll be able to sleep.”

“That,” she said with a smile, “I know is true. I wasn’t suggesting sleep but you really should take a break. You need to eat something and get some rest. I know you. Sitting here with nothing to do isn’t going to help you or him. Take a break Tony.”

-

Loki was in and out of consciousness several times. He didn’t remember much from these brief bouts with consciousness. There were a few vague impressions of people hovering over him but mostly what he recalled was the pain. He had no idea how long passed before he finally woke up enough to be aware of his surroundings. Despite physically feeling much better, if still stiff and sore, his head was killing him. What had he been dreaming of? It had seemed urgent but the headache made impossible to focus.

His mother would have been disappointed. She had repeatedly cautioned him that some dreams could be important and to always try to remember them. His mother. His hand was already reaching for the pendant she’d given him even as he remembered why it wouldn’t be there anymore. Anthony. Everything came crashing back causing the pain in his head to spike momentarily. Movement was out of the question, at least for the immediate moment. When his head cleared slightly he opened his eyes.
The first thing he saw was the color red. Frowning he blinked a few times attempting to clear his vision. It worked. Sort of. At least he could tell that the red only belonged to a blanket laying over him. His frown deepened and he inspected the blanket more carefully. No, not a blanket. He was still trying to figure out what was covering him when he heard the last voice he expected to hear.

“Loki?” called an eminently familiar voice.

“Thor?” Loki rasped.

His brother leaned over him finally moving into Loki’s line of sight.

“It’s me. How are you? Are you alright? Should I get the doctor? Are you-”

“Thor,” Loki managed. Norns his throat was sore. He really wanted a glass of water but that would have to wait. “You are worrying over much. I am well.”

“I disagree brother,” Thor argued.

“I am well enough then,” Loki huffed. “Will that suffice?”

“For now. How are you feeling?”

“Stiff,” Loki answered honestly. Well honestly enough, he told himself. If Thor hadn’t asked for specifics then there was no reason to go into more detail. Loki resisted the shiver that threatened. Stupid, he berated himself. There was no reason to hide his weaknesses from his brother. Thor would never use that knowledge against him. Still, the pain from his injuries had brought back some rather unpleasant memories. Reopening his eyes he caught sight of Thor watching him intently.

“My throat is a bit sore,” Loki stated. “I could use some water.”

“Of course. I will get you some. Just…”

“Rest here?” Loki suggested.

Thor gave him a soft smile. “Indeed. I will be but a moment.”

As soon as Thor left to get some water Loki let his eyes drift shut once more. As much as he knew what was wrong he still couldn’t fix it. As long as he was still injured, in pain, and in the healing rooms he wouldn’t be able to feel safe. Something had to change. The easiest would be the location but would Anthony agree? His thoughts were interrupted by the return of his brother. Opening his eyes Loki gave Thor the best smile he could manage.

“Thank you.”

“Here, let me help-”

Thor stopped short as Loki flinched away from him and hissed in pain.

“Loki?”

“It’s nothing,” Loki grumbled. Thor cocked an eyebrows and waited. Rolling his eyes Loki sighed. “I do not like to be touched. You have been told this already.” Thor opened his mouth to say something else and Loki glared at him. “If you ask why I swear-”

“That was not my question,” Thor interrupted. “I merely wished to know what I could do to help.”
Oh, Loki thought. He hadn’t been expecting that. “There is nothing. I do, however, appreciate the offer.”

“Will you let me help you sit?”

Hesitating slightly Loki finally nodded. Thor held out the glass of water and Loki took it gingerly, not wanting to spill any of the contents. He tensed as Thor carefully gripped his arms and helped him to sit. Loki winced as he was moved into a sitting position. Lessened the pain might be, but it was still uncomfortable. As soon as Loki was upright Thor released him and took a step back.

“Good?” Thor asked.

Loki nodded. He started to raise the glass but stopped. “Thor?”

“Yes?”

“Where is Anthony?”

“With Miss Pepper,” Thor answered.

Loki furrowed his brows as he tried to figure out how to feel about that. Anthony had been here and then left with Mistress Pepper. Or… Had he even been down here? Was that merely an assumption? After a few moments of thought he concluded that, no, Anthony had not been down here. There would have been no reason. If he had even wanted to there was nothing he could have done to help. Mistress Pepper had probably heard of the attack and come to check on Anthony. And why not? Anthony had said they were still close. Of course she would wish to ensure that he was uninjured.

“Loki?” Thor asked sounding concerned.


“I cannot help it. I was unable to protect you in Asgard and once again here. I refuse to fail you again.”

“You owe me nothing. It is not your job to protect me. Considering my ancestry one could claim it never was your job.”

“Your ancestry has nothing to do with it. You are my brother. You always have been and you always will be. It will always be my job to protect you for as long as I am able.”

Loki was stunned speechless and could only stare.

“You should drink,” Thor reminded him, nodding slightly at the glass in Loki’s hands.

Loki looked down and stared at the glass before returning his eyes to Thor’s. He didn’t know what to say to Thor’s words. For so long he had convinced himself he could only depend on himself and no one else. Even the man he’d once called father had abandoned him. Loki had been sure that Thor had disowned him as well when he hadn’t attended the trial. That Thor could still think of him as family…

“I…” he began before trailing off. He took a sip of water to wet his throat and to give himself time to think. Lowering his hands he kept his eyes on the glass in his lap. “Would… would you ask if Anthony is busy?” Loki whispered.

“I will inform Master Stark of your desire for his company,” JARVIS answered crisply.
Startled, Loki jumped at the sound of the artificial voice. The glass slipped from his hands and fell towards the floor. For one nightmare instant Loki couldn’t breath. The glass hit hard sending shards in all directions. Whether it was his current injuries, being in the infirmary, or having destroyed the glass Loki didn’t know nor did it matter. He could already feel his lungs trying to seize up making it difficult to breathe.

“Loki!” Thor exclaimed. He reached forward to grasp his brother’s shoulders but stopped himself before he made contact. It was difficult to remember just how much even the simplest touch now terrified Loki. Okay, so no touching. Thor racked his brain trying to figure out how to help his brother. “JARVIS,” Thor called.

“Yes master Odinson?”

“Is Stark on his way?”

“He is,” JARVIS confirmed.

“Okay,” Thor stated, though it was more to himself than the disembodied voice.

Okay, so Stark would be here soon. Until then? Don’t panic, he told himself. If he panicked it would only add to Loki’s agitation. Still facing his brother Thor backed slowly toward the door to the private room.

“Loki?” Thor asked, careful to keep his voice calm. “Can you hear me?” Without taking his eyes off his brother Thor reached a hand behind himself and fumbled until he found the doorknob. Turning the knob he pulled open the door in preparation of Anthony’s arrival. He tried to remember what Anthony had done when Thor had accidentally startled Loki. Slowly he made his way back towards his brother.

“Loki?”

“Can’t… breathe,” Loki gasped.

“You are safe Loki. You have no reason to fear. Nothing will harm you. Anthony will be here soon.” He waited but Loki gave no reply. “Would it help if I were to offer you my hand?”

Loki shook his head and began to rock back and forth.

“Be calm,” Thor said evenly. His hands twitched, desperate to reach out and comfort his brother. “Anthony will arrive soon. All is well.”

Gasping now, Loki shook his head once more. How could he possibly explain how this felt to his brother? His heart pounded heavily against the inside of his chest. His throat seemed to constrict making it impossible to breathe. His muscles trembled of their own accord despite his efforts to still them. The lack of air began to make him slightly dizzy. Breathe, Loki reminded himself. In and out, you can do this.

“You are safe,” Thor stated.

Loki felt like laughing hysterically at that. Safe? When was the last time he had ever been ‘safe’? His mind supplied him with a picture of Anthony holding him. Loki let his eyes slide shut as he focussed
on that image. Yes, he had felt safe then. Somehow Anthony always managed to make him feel safe.

“Loki?” Thor asked sounding concerned.

“Hush,” Loki snapped. He needed to focus. He had managed to pry himself out of a panic attack before. He could do this. All he needed to do was focus. He pulled the memory of them kissing in Anthony’s lab. While the deep sense of dread was still there another emotion clawed its way forward, vying for attention. Loki snatched at the emotion desperate to feel something, anything, else. Thinking of Anthony helped. The panic attack ebbed, even if only slightly. Loki tried to take some comfort from that. Suddenly he heard Anthony call his name and Loki’s eyes snapped open.

“Loki!” Tony shouted as he rushed into the room. Pepper, who up until now had followed close on his heels stopped in the doorway but Tony continued forward until he was standing just in front of Loki. Loki’s eyes snapped open and affixed onto Tony’s as he rocked. He was muttering something softly and Tony strained to hear it better.

“Didn’t mean to,” Loki muttered. “Accident. Didn’t mean to. Accident.”

Tony shot a questioning glance to Thor.

“Accident?” he asked, but it was Loki who answered.

“Broke it. Didn’t mean to. Broke the glass,” Loki muttered still rocking.

Frowning Tony glanced down and finally noticed the broken glass strewn over the floor.

“Sorry. So sorry.”

“It’s okay Loki. Can you hear me?” Loki only shook his head and continued to rock back and forth. The footfalls of another rushing towards the room drew Tony’s attention. Bruce rushed into the room and stopped next to Tony.

“Loki?” Bruce asked calmly. “Some of the sutures I put in have broken. I really need to fix them, okay?”

Loki didn’t answer.

“Loki?” Tony questioned, careful to keep his voice as soothing as possible. “Can you answer us?”

Still without speaking Loki nodded.

“Okay,” Tony stated coolly. “Will you let Bruce treat you?”

“Hand,” Loki whispered.

“Of course,” Tony agreed. Reaching out he gingerly took Loki’s hand. The rocking slowed.

“Good?” Tony asked.

“Good,” Loki replied quietly.

“Everything is alright, Loki. You’re doing fine. You’re safe,” Tony murmured. Turning to Bruce he asked, “Can you just, you know, talk to him while you work?”

“Yeah,” Bruce agreed. “Okay Loki, you ripped some of the sutures. I need to check on them,
“Alright?”

“Understood,” Loki whispered.

“Okay. I’m going to tell you everything I do before I do it.”

Watching the others talk with his brother Thor was at a loss. Loki was his brother; his family. It was his job to take care of Loki but there didn’t seem to be anything he could do that wouldn’t just make things worse. He began to question why he was forbidden to return when those that had harmed his brother so much should be allowed to remain unpunished. If he ever got his hands on them-.

“Thor?” asked a soft voice from nearby.

Growling angrily Thor turned to glower at the person who had dared to interrupt his musings. Next to him he spotted the lady Pepper. He tried to reign in his anger so he did not accidentally take it out on her. “Miss Pepper,” he greeted, if a bit brusque.

“It’ll be okay. Tony will help him calm down and Bruce will patch him up again.”

“He’s my brother,” Thor growled. “It’s my job to watch over him.”

Pepper nodded slowly. “I know, she said softly. “Sometimes the hardest thing is watching those we care about deal with things and not be able to help them. Just remember, he does still need you.”

Thor watched the others for a few moments before he answered. “Anthony calms him and the doctor can heal him. He has no need of me.”

“You’re wrong you know,” Pepper told him gently. “Bruce can heal him, and Tony can calm him that’s true enough. But you’re his brother, his family. That’s something neither of them can replace. He’ll come around, I promise. It’s just going to take a little bit time and a whole lot of patience. Okay?”

“It’s just…” Thor hesitated trying to find the right words. “How can I expect him to trust me after everything? It is understandable that he should doubt my intent.”

“It’s understandable that he would not that he should,” Pepper argued. “He’s been through a lot, that’s true. What he went through would make it difficult for anyone to trust another ever again. That he can feel safe with Tony is a small miracle. But you know what?”

“What?” Thor asked glumly.

“He’s spent day in and day out with Tony for quite a while now. I can’t imagine Loki trusted Tony this much when he first arrived. As a matter of fact I know he distrusted me when we first met. Or rather he did trust me. It’s just that he trusted me to hurt him like the others had before he came here.”

“You would not do that,” Thor objected.

“No I wouldn’t,” Pepper confirmed. “But Loki didn’t know that. More importantly, what he did know was that for a long time everyone in his life did hurt him. Why should he believe different about me?”

Thor opened his mouth to reply but paused. Slowly he closed his mouth as he processed her words. After his time in the dungeons it was justifiable that Loki should distrust those around him. How long
had it been since Loki had been able to trust someone? Well before New York, Thor reasoned.

“I believe I understand,” Thor finally replied.

Loki’s nose wrinkled as the doctor pulled the thread through for the last time. Yes, it hurt but he was proud he’d remained silent throughout the doctor’s work. The pain actually helped to clear his mind. He was able to realize now how stupid he’d been. This place was not the same as the healing rooms on Asgard, this pain was nothing compared to everything else he’d suffered, and Anthony would not be angry about the broken glass. He had been stupid to work himself into a panic attack. He’d allowed his fear free reign when he should have known better. It made perfect sense that Anthony continued to postpone their courtship.

Of course Anthony would not wish to be tied to such a skittish significant other. All he had to do was take one look at Mistress Pepper. The woman radiated strength, confidence, and tenacity. Loki’s heart sank even further when he realized yet another major difference. In spite of all the encouraging words he had no actual proof that Anthony truly fancied men in that manner. Even if he did for all Loki knew Anthony only bedded men and did not court them. The feel of hands gently squeezing his broke Loki out of his reverie. Flicking his eyes up he met Tony’s concerned gaze.

“Loki? Hey, what’s wrong?”

“I…” He almost said ‘nothing’ before stopping himself. Anthony had only ever asked him for one thing. That Loki not lie to him. Loki mentally broadened the question before formulating his reply. “Much is wrong I suppose. Anthony, must I stay here? Can I not lie in my own bed, in my own room?”

“That’s not really a good idea right now,” the doctor state without glancing up from the papers he was inspecting.


Finally the doctor looked up and eyed each of them carefully for few moments. Sighing he lowered the paperwork. “Loki’s injuries are actually healing far faster than I would have expected. I don’t understand why but unless it starts creating any complications I think we should consider ourselves lucky for now.”

“Okay,” Anthony repeated slowly.

“The problem is there’s still quite a bit of damage. Even at the accelerated pace it will still take a while before he’s fully out of the woods. Too much movement might aggravate the wounds and make them take longer to heal. Even if he managed to make it to his room without incident if there’s any complications I wouldn’t have access to the instruments I might need. It would also open him up to all kinds of infections. At least I know this room is sterile. It’s been less than twelve hours, since you’ve been shot. You need to stay here for at least another day or two Loki.”

“Think you can handle that?” Tony asked.

Loki huffed out an exasperated sigh of annoyance. “I suppose,” he sulked. Crossing his arms over his chest he winced and allowed his arms to drop until his hands were resting in his lap once more.

“You should probably lie down,” the doctor noted.

“This is more comfortable,” Loki huffed.
“It’s less painful at an elevated position?” inquired the doctor.

“Yes,” Loki answered grumpily.

“It’s actually better for the wound to be slightly elevated. Sitting up without any support isn’t good for you right now though. Would you mind if I raised the head slightly?”

“The bed can be adjusted?” Loki asked hesitantly.

The doctor smiled. “Yep.” Reaching down he grabbed a small box hooked to a cord connecting it to something out of sight. “Watch this. When I push this button…” He paused to pointed to a specific button before pressing it.

When the bed shifted under him Loki jumped slightly. A small cry escaped as the movement jarred his injuries. Wincing he carefully raised on hand to press against the fresh bandages.

“Sorry about that. I didn’t think it would surprise you that much. Here, why don’t you try it,” he offered, handing the small box over to Loki.

Taking the box Loki stared at it warily. Cautiously he pressed the same button. The bed shifted again but this time he was more prepared for it. Eying the box for a few seconds he pushed the next button over. As expected the part of the bed behind him lowered.

“This way you can adjust it to where you feel comfortable and you’ll still be supported so it doesn’t add any extra stress to the injuries.”

“I can raise it as high as I like?”

“Well, I’d prefer if you didn’t raise it much more than a forty-five degree angle and that you limit the time you spend upright but… Other than that?” he shrugged. “Go for it.”

Chapter End Notes

I’m sorry for the cliffhanger on the last chapter. Hopefully this chapter helped make up for it. As always, thank you all for your continued reading and the lovely reviews.
Loki’s eyes snapped open. For a brief second he wasn’t sure if his eyes really were open or not. Careful to keep his breathing slow and even he blinked a few times to feel his lashes against his skin. Once he was certain his eyes were open he listened intently for any sound. Someone was in the room with him, he was sure of it. The thought that maybe it was the doctor or Anthony crossed his mind but he dismissed the idea. Neither would be sneaking around the room in absolute darkness.

He eased sideways and slowly lowered his feet to the floor. Cautiously he stood up on side of the bed farthest from the door. Even without sight he could somehow sense whoever was in the room with him was on the other side of the bed. At least now there was something separating the two of them. That thought gave him pause. Was there only one other in the room with him? Yes, he thought. For some reason he was sure there was only one other person here and no more.

Slowly he backed away from the bed careful to keep his steps silent. Or at least he tried to back away from the bed. After a handful of steps a sharp pain instantly stabbed through his inner elbow. Without thinking he jerked his other hand up to cover the area. His fingers tangled in something and too late he realized the bag of liquid the doctor connected to his arm. He realized too late what was happening. In the dark he reached out searching for the stand. The tips of his fingers glanced across the pole before it slipped away.

The noise of it striking the ground was louder than he expected and, startled, he jerked away from the sound. His elbow hit something solid and Loki twisted trying to back away from whatever he’d struck. Tripping over his own feet in his rush to turn around Loki stumbled a few steps and fell. Cursing under his breath Loki winced and moved his right hand to cover the inside of his left elbow once more. The lights were turned on and the room brightened instantly, searing his eyes. Hissing Loki winced again and squinted against the brightness.

“Loki?” a voice asked from across the room.

Groaning Loki cursed himself again. Of course it would be Barton. Who else should be present when he made such a fool of himself? Perhaps this was part of the recompense he still owed the archer visited upon him by the fates. If so he truly hoped the next time they would choose a much less painful manner for him to atone. Slowly he blinked a few times. During one of those times Barton appeared in his field of vision and Loki resisted the urge to groan again.

“It appears I could use some assistance,” Loki finally sighed.

“You okay?”

“I assure you the only thing truly injured is my pride,” Loki mumbled. Barton laughed and Loki rolled his eyes. “Just help me up,” Loki scowled.

Grabbing the metal pole nearby with one hand he held out the other. Loki took it with his left hand and gripped tightly. Just as Barton finally pulled Loki to his feet the door to the room burst open. Dr. Banner managed two steps into the room before stopping dead in his tracks.

“Of course,” Loki muttered. “I should have known my embarrassment wasn’t complete with only one witness.”
“By the way, what even happened?” Barton asked.

“I woke for some reason and realized I was not alone. I managed to get out of the bed well enough but forgot about this accursed pole,” Loki grumbled with a nod towards the offending item. “When I tried to catch it I stumbled and banged my elbow. What precisely were you doing sneaking around in the dark?”

Barton shrugged. “I wanted to see how you were doing but I didn’t want to wake you.”

“You couldn’t have stopped by at a more reasonable hour?” Loki countered.

“No,” Barton replied simply.

“Okay, before we discuss this further I’m going to need you to sit down,” the doctor interrupted. Making his way back to the bed Loki gingerly lowered himself onto the mattress. It was actually a relief to be off his feet. He resisted the urge to sigh as the doctor approached. He hated feeling like an invalid. By now he should be used to having no control over the things that happened to him but it never seemed to get any easier.

“Did you hit anything else besides your elbow,” the doctor asked.

“No,” Loki answered tersely. In truth he’d landed on his tailbone after the fall but he wasn’t about to admit that to the doctor. Loki was fairly certain the worst damage had been only to his pride. Other than that he suspected there was nothing more wrong with him now than there had been before the fall. “And you,” he snapped at the archer. “Why could you not visit at a more reasonable hour?”

The archer stared at him for a while before hopping up to sit on a counter. “I figured Tony might appreciate some one on one time,” he answered with a shrug. “Besides, someone had to play lookout until we were sure all was good.”

There was just enough emphasis on the name for Loki to understand that Barton hadn’t wanted to chance Anthony and he enclosed together in a small room. Honestly? Loki could understand that. Both were fairly strong willed individuals. Without explaining about Barton’s family to Anthony there might be no way to convince him of Barton’s disinterest. Barton’s actions made perfect sense. It was also explained the lateness of the hour. Loki nodded once in Barton’s direction and returned his attention to the doctor.

Loki spent two utterly nerve wracking and sleepless nights in the rooms the others termed the infirmary. He was exhausted, annoyed and beyond ready to leave. If it weren’t for Anthony insisting he remain here for the time he might just have walked out already. By the norns he was ready to be released and allowed to return to his normal routine. Dr. Banner still wished to run test after test to understand why he was healing faster than normal but Loki just wished that this whole experience could end.

In the end it was Tony, as usual, that saved him. Whether it was because Tony sensed his frustration or there was another reason Loki didn’t know. He was just happy he was allowed to leave. Lying in his own bed Loki shifted trying to get more comfortable. It was useless. The problem was that he’d been spending too much time laying down. He was unaccustomed to having so much free time. In any other situation he would have been punished for lazing around this much. Tony and the doctor, however, had both ordered him to rest. While he might chance disobeying the doctor disobeying Anthony was out of the question.
With a sigh Loki sat up and scrubbed his face with his hands. He couldn’t take this. He was being too idle. He needed to be up and doing something. Anything. Pulling the cover back he got out of bed. Making his way to the door he opened it and left the bedroom. As he trudged down the hall his thoughts turned to the chores he normally performed. Some of them might be too strenuous for someone who was supposed to be resting but some of them… Yes, some of them might still be doable he reasoned. As long as he didn’t strain himself too much he should be fine. When he hit the end of the hallway he stopped in his tracks.

At the kitchen table sat Thor, the Captain, Barton, and Director Fury. No one moved or spoke a word. Finally, eyes settling on his brother’s, Loki slowly walked closer. He stopped when he was still several feet away from the group. Unsure how to react but wishing to acknowledge the respite he’d been allowed so that he might heal Loki pushed himself to move until he stood in front of the director of S.H.I.E.L.D. and knelt. Head bowed he waited.

“Loki?”

Loki winced. It was Barton who had addressed him. If there was someone he was ill prepared to converse with right now it was the archer. “I would like to apologize, Director, for the harm I caused on my last visit to this realm,” he stated as evenly as possible. “If there is anything I can do to atone for my transgressions please feel free to enlighten me. I may have to ask for permission for certain reparations but I will if needed.”

“You’ve already apologized,” Fury answered coolly.

Had he? He couldn’t remember. But then, the time just after he’d been shot was still fairly fuzzy. “Still, I would make what reparations I can.”

“You should be resting,” Barton told him.

Loki ignored this remark. He was not exerting himself and now that it was possible the offer did have to be made. Now that the words were out he needed an answer.

“Loki,” Fury stated flatly.

“Yes?” Loki questioned. His voice was barely a whisper and for a while he worried the the other man wouldn’t have heard him.

“Stand up.”

Head still bowed and eyes firmly affixed to the floor Loki stood.

“You really don’t remember apologizing?”

Loki shook his head.

“This can wait,” Barton growled. “He needs to sit. Now.”

“Agreed,” the Captain concurred.

“Loki, take my chair,” Thor urged.

Again Loki shook his head. “Not yet.”

“Yes Loki,” Fury insisted. “Take the chair and sit down. If you fall over and injure yourself further Stark will go on the warpath.”
Slowly, hesitantly, Loki sat down on the edge of the chair his brother had just vacated.

“Since you don’t remember what was said I’ll repeat myself. I don’t hold you accountable for what happened. I know you weren’t yourself then and I know you were being mind controlled as well.”

“You know?” Loki asked, his head raising in surprise, eyes locking onto Fury’s.

“I do,” Fury affirmed.

“I told them you weren’t yourself,” Barton interjected. “It wasn’t instantly but eventually after the staff’s control was broken things began to resurface. At first I thought they were false memories, possibly suggestions that were implanted.”

“By me,” Loki stated sadly. He meant it as a question but it came out as a statement instead. He understood what Barton meant. Honestly? He couldn’t fault the archer for thinking his memories might have been altered after everything.

“As time passed though I began to weed through them; sort the ones I knew to be true from the false ones. I was the one that told Fury you’d been mind controlled too.”

“An he just believed you?” Loki asked astonished.

Barton snorted. “As if.”

“I’ll admit at first I thought he might have been brainwashed,” Fury confessed. “But I’ve never been one just to let things pass. I had people check into things and the more we found out the more I realized he was telling the truth. As wrong as it would be to blame him for what he did while he was being controlled it would also be wrong to blame you. Understand?”

“No,” Loki answered honestly not understanding.

Before anyone else could speak Anthony walked into the room. Immediately Loki bowed his head once more. He knew Anthony liked it when he could make eye contact but he was already disobeying Anthony’s wishes by being out here and that made him nervous. He remained that way as he heard Anthony approach.

“What are you doing out of bed?”

Loki winced. “I am sorry Anthony. It’s just that I could not lay still any longer. I needed to get back to my normal routine. I mean…” He hesitated. “I wanted to get back to it,” he finished quietly. It wasn’t for him to decide what was required of him. That was for Anthony to decide. He chastised himself to be more cautious in his speech from now on. He waited for an answer but there was only silence. Loki began to get nervous.

“I was wrong,” Anthony finally replied.

That confused him. Furrowing his brow Loki tried to understand that. There was the sound of movement before a hand covered his. Loki jumped in surprise and the hand retreated.

“Sorry,” Anthony muttered.

“It’s fine,” Loki told him. “I was just startled.”

“Can you look at me?”

For a while Loki wasn’t sure if he could. He reminded himself that he had probably already
disappointed Anthony by leaving his bed without permission. He didn’t need to disappoint him anymore than he already had by disregarding his wishes. Also, if he was being honest with himself he really did like being able to meet Anthony’s eyes. Slowly he lifted his head until their eyes met.

“If the only way I get to keep you is by letting others call you a slave I’ll take it. I’m willing to do whatever it takes to keep you safe. From now on though I won’t consider you one. I’ve been telling you that you weren’t a slave but then treating you as if that’s what you were. I was wrong to do that. If letting others consider you a slave keeps you safe then I can deal. From now on though I want you to consider yourself free.”

“Anthony-”

“Let me finish please?”

Confused Loki nodded slowly.

“Since you’re… Uh, since you’re free now would you consider…”

“Yes?”

“Would you consider, uh, letting me ‘court’ you?”

Stunned, Loki’s jaw dropped. For a time he could only stare. Anthony ducked his head and rubbed a hand roughly over the back of his neck before looking back up and meeting Loki’s eyes again.

“You… wish to court me?” Loki asked bewildered.

“I, uh, would like to yeah. I mean, if you still want to. If not then…” Anthony dropped his eyes and shrugged.

Loki’s eyes shot to his brother.

“Anthony is a good man,” Thor said instantly. “It would be difficult to find someone who will treat you was well as he. Should you say no that also is your decision. Whatever you decide I will support you.”

“You would take no issue with me courting your shield brother?” Loki asked eyeing Thor dubiously. His mind reminded him of a similar conversation from the distant past.

“If he is of like mind then it would be wrong for me to stand in the way,” Thor answered.

“He’s right,” Barton interrupted. “If it’s what you both want then no one should stand in the way. If you two want to give it a shot I’ll stand behind both of you as well.”

“I’ve never seen Tony this way before,” the Captain added. “You’re good for him. I’ve seen too many people go through life unhappy because it was considered wrong in the era I grew up for them to be with the person they loved. If this is what you truly want I’ll support the both of you.”

Surprised, Loki wasn’t sure how to take that. In a handful of seconds his entire world seemed to be turning upside down. Ultimately he chose to ignore the comments for now and slowly turned to face Fury. The director of S.H.I.E.L.D. eyed him for a long moment without saying a word. Loki fidget uncomfortably and dropped his eyes back to his lap.

“Normally I’d frown on anyone in this line of work being in a relationship,” Fury finally answered slowly. “There’s always a chance that a significant other can be used to compromise an agent. Loki’s current status not to mention his,” Fury paused before continuing. “‘nationality’ just makes the
situation that much more delicate.”

“Yea?” Anthony snarled. “Well who I choose to be with isn’t really up to you. If I want to be with—”

“Enough,” Fury barked.

Loki winced at the exchange but remained silent.

“If you’ll let me finish,” Fury trailed off and raised one eyebrow.


“As I was saying, I’m not a big fan of agents having a significant other than can be used against them. Stark, however, is unpredictable at best. Left to his own devices there’s no telling what he’ll do. Having someone he cares about, someone to come home to, might actually be a good thing for him. And if that person is willing to put themselves in the line of fire to protect innocent people then who am I to argue?”

“Like you’re an innocent,” Anthony scoffed.

“Did I say me?” Fury retorted.

“Anthony,” Loki began. “Everyone. This is quite a lot to take in right now. I would like some time to process everything please.”

Anthony took his hand and Loki turned towards him.

“Loki, baby, take all the time you need. I’ve already made you wait far longer than I should have. It’s my turn now. I can wait for however long it takes for you to process this. If you decide you changed your mind and don’t want this anymore than that’s fine too. I can’t promise it won’t hurt if you say no but I will understand.”

“I wasn’t… I just…”

“Master Loki,” JARVIS interrupted. “I would like to make the observation that you have been upright for quite some time now. This conversation could be continued at a later time. I believe it would be in your best interest if you were to lay down and rest.”

“I would like to wait,” Loki told the voice. It may be a creation of his Anthony’s but it wasn’t his Anthony. Where he was still nervous about disobeying Anthony he felt safer disagreeing with JARVIS. “Anthony, I would ask if you are being sincere. I want to say it is not that I doubt you…” As Loki trailed off Anthony nodded.

“But you do doubt me,” Anthony said completing Loki’s unfinished sentence. “And you’re right to doubt. After everything why wouldn’t you? Remember Loki, the only thing I’ve ever asked for is the truth.”

“The truth then,” Loki agreed. “As plainly as possible, do you truly wish us to court?”

“Yes,” Anthony answered instantly.

Loki turned to his brother and hesitated.

“He is not of Asgard,” Thor stated answering the unspoken question. “His customs are different. Given recent events I’m more inclined to show his Midgard customs more respect then our own. He and his people have shown themselves worthy of respect.”
Loki understood both the spoken and unspoken words. That Thor respected Anthony and the other Avengers wasn’t news. They were shield brothers and that was not a bond to be taken lightly. What surprised Loki was that Thor seemed to placing their customs and traditions above those of Asgard for no other reason then how Loki had been judged. That was a concept that Loki had difficulty understanding.

“Someone want to tell me what’s going on?” Anthony asked.

“Asgardian tradition dictates that a male wishing to court a female seek out either the father or the guardian of the…” Pausing Thor glanced over to him then back to Anthony once again. “The guardian of the person they wish to court.”

“He means female,” Loki grumped.

“I meant person,” Thor insisted, crossing his arms and scowling. “The others might choose to remain closed minded but I refuse. There is no reason some should be denied happiness for whom they chose to love. If you wish to observe the tradition I am willing to give my blessing to this relationship but I see no reason to honor the custom of a people that would shun my brother for who he loves.”

Loki stared at Thor, completely at a loss for words.

“I’m sure there’s something there we should be discussing,” Anthony interrupted, “and I’m absolutely positive it’ll be riveting but for now? I think JARVIS is right. You should probably lay down, especially before Bruce sees you up and about and blames me.”

Glad for the excuse Loki nodded. “Perhaps that is for the best,” he agreed. Actually he was still a bit sore but for the most part he seemed almost completely healed. He wasn’t sure why he was healing faster now but to question it felt too much like being ungrateful. For now he would lie down and rest. He actually was tired so it really wasn’t much of a hardship. Still…

“Anthony?”

“Hm?” Anthony hummed distractedly.

“Would you…”

“What’s up babe?”

“Are you… I mean would you…” Growling, Loki took a deep breath and began again. “I would appreciate it if you were to join me,” he finally managed.

Anthony hesitated and Loki sought for a way to backtrack.

“Yeah. Actually that sounds good,” Anthony stated.

Loki blinked in shock at the acquiescence. As he stared Anthony held a hand out towards him. Unable to think of any reason why he should not, Loki accepted the proffered hand and followed as Anthony escorted him away from the kitchen and the others.

- Eyes snapped open as the feeling of something pleasant, extraordinary pleasant, suddenly engulfed him. Gasping he tried to catch his breath. By the gods, whatever was causing this sensation that was amazing. Glancing downward his gaze took the other lying in bed with him. Only able to see the back of the other man’s head he nethertheless recognized whose head was resting on his hip and
who was responsible for the amazing feeling. Again warmth enveloped him once again and his hips jerked involuntarily.

When he was able to see again his vision was caught by a pair of warm, deep brown, eyes shining with hunger and lust locked into his own.

Oh sweet norns the look in those eyes sent shivers down his spine. As his beloved started to move a sudden rush of desire washed over him. Gripping tightly onto the other’s shoulders he rolled them until he lay atop the other man and gazed downward. Slowly he lowered himself until he was close enough to nuzzle against his beloved’s neck. Possessiveness surged through every nerve of his being and tilting his head he nipped at his love’s earlobe. A shiver ran through the other followed by a low moan.

“More,” his love demanded.

“Patience,” he whispered. Leaning down he peppered his love’s neck with several kisses. “My beloved.” He trailed the kisses up to the chin, pausing only when he finally reached the mouth. “Elskaðir,” he whispered. Surging forward he finally claimed his love’s mouth.

With a gasp Loki sat upright eye shooting open instantly. Breathing heavily he struggled to catch his breath as images from the dream flitted through his mind. Was he seriously dreaming of Anthony and he being intimate? What in the name of Hel was that? Suddenly he remembered Anthony lying down with him. Jerking his head to the side he found the other half of the bed empty. As odd as that was he was actually relieved. When he finally had his breathing under control he glanced down to his lap. Slowly he moved the blanket and groaned. If he needed proof of his dreams he had it. Gods he couldn’t deal with this. He slung his legs over the edge of the bed and stood. He was going to have to do something to take his mind off of… other things. Turning he spied a note on the nightstand next to the bed. Picking it up he stared at the messy handwriting for a moment before reading.

‘Loki,

You looked so peaceful I didn’t want to wake you. I couldn’t sleep so I decided to get some things done in the workshop. If you need anything ask JARVIS. I should be back in time for dinner. If not then feel free to eat without me. Hope you’re feeling better.

Tony’

Resolved to take things slow Tony trailed his fingers down Loki’s chest lightly while watching him intently. Loki’s eyes never strayed from Tony’s. Tony wasn’t sure about Loki’s earlier experience but he knew the more recent encounters were anything but pleasant. He was bound and determined to do what he could to make everything about this good for Loki. He rested his fingers against the hem of the blanket and scanned Loki’s face for any sign of discomfort. Finding none he drew the blanket down slowly.

“Anthony,” Loki gasped.

Two fingers hooked under the hem of the blanket Tony froze. As much as he wanted to ignore everything except his own desires he forced himself to wait. He wouldn’t willingly push for more then Loki was willing to give. Loki groaned loudly as his back arched. As Loki settled back against
the bed his eyes suddenly shot open and fixed on him. The look he saw in those eyes sent a shiver down his spine. Without a word Loki sat up, gripped his shoulders and maneuvered them until Tony was lying on his back underneath Loki.

“Mine,” Loki growled.

Stunned Tony could only nod frantically in agreement as a shiver of hunger shot through him. As much as he craved this he rarely ever indulged. It took an amazing amount of trust for him to completely hand over control to another. As much as he loved letting go and letting another control things it was difficult to find someone he trusted enough. It had been a long time since he had allowed himself to give in to this particular pleasure. If Loki felt comfortable enough to take charge Tony wasn’t about to stop him. Shifting slightly Tony attempted to test Loki’s hold on his shoulders. His efforts were rewarded with a low growl. Tony stilled.

“Better,” Loki growled approvingly.

Tony nodded again fervently wishing he could run his hands down Loki’s sides.

-

Hissing Tony brought his hands up to rub the back of his head. What the hell? Still wincing he glanced around the room until his eyes landed on Bruce. With a groan he realized he’d been dreaming and had somehow fallen out of the chair landing on the floor. Of course, he thought. Even if Loki was willing to go that far, with is past there’s probably no way he would feel comfortable-.

“Tony?”

Banner’s voice cut in mid thought and forced Tony’s mind back to the present. Dropping his hand Tony glared up at his science brother in arms. “Remind me again why I gave you an access code to get in here?”

“For the same reason you didn’t revoke Pepper’s access and she can still enter,” Bruce told him. “Because you know you can’t be trusted to take care of yourself and you need us to remind you of stuff. You know, little things like sleeping and occasionally eating.”

“Was sleeping just fine until you showed up,” Tony grumbled. Although, now that Bruce mentioned it he was kind of hungry. Standing up he turned and used the excuse of dusting himself off as a distraction to check the front of his pants. Groaning inwardly Tony realized what he’d been dreaming of was readily apparent. Either Bruce hadn’t noticed, which was unlikely, or he had noticed and had chosen not to say anything. Whatever was the case, Tony was just glad to have avoided any embarrassment ensuing from the issue. Bruce cleared his throat and Tony tilted his head slightly, waiting.

“I’ll, uh, just head up and meet you there.”

The awkwardly spoken words confirmed Tony’s suspicions. Bruce had notice but had, thankfully, chosen not to mention it. Of course, Tony sighed. There wasn’t much that escaped his friend’s notice. It was a trait that served him well in his experiments but also ensured he could note other, more embarrassing, things.

“Yeah. I’ll be right up,” Tony muttered. Listening to Bruce’s footsteps he waited. The footsteps stopped after a few seconds. Tony continued to wait silently.

“Just so you know,” Bruce stated offhandedly, “Loki’s cooking.”
There was a soft woosh that signified the door opening. When there another as it finally closed Tony reached down to adjust himself. It wouldn’t do to show up in the kitchen with the evidence of how much he wanted Loki on display for everyone to see, least of all Loki.

-

Dressed in the loosest clothing he could find Loki had headed to the kitchen. After everything he needed something he felt comfortable doing to help settle his mind. Yes, he could continue on his never ending resolve to reclean everything but he wanted something different for now; something that wasn’t tainted from his stint as a slave. Cooking was something he had loved before and had never been asked to do since his fall from grace. The hoodie Anthony had given him lay over the back of his customary chair. He hadn’t wanted to chance it getting stained and it was a bit to warm to wear it. Still, he felt better with it nearby.

As he was waiting for the last few things to finish up Anthony walked into the kitchen. Loki already had the coffee cup sitting out for just this reason. He couldn’t be certain if Anthony had made it to lunch but he doubted it. When Anthony got to working in the workshop he tended to lose track of pretty much everything else. Filling the mug he set it on the table. Anthony gave him a look of gratitude before snagging the coffee. Smiling Loki returned to his cooking.

-

Eyes closed, head tipped back, Loki inhaled deeply. It felt like forever since he’d felt the sun on his face. A light breeze wafted across his skin gently. His hair shifted slightly in the light gust of wind and Loki sighed happily. If he wasn’t allowed to return to his normal routine this was the next best thing. Turning to his left he slowly opened his eyes. Anthony, who was sitting next to him cocked a questioning eyebrow and waited. Loki smiled.

“It’s nothing. I was just-"

He stopped short as his skin began to prickle.

“You should probably-”

The doctor stopped short and stiffened. Loki felt it too. There was something about the air that made it feel… “No,” Loki whispered. “By the norns, just no.”

“What-” Anthony began before he was cut off mid sentence.

“Anthony!” Loki cried out as the blinding light filled his vision.

-

By the time the light cleared he couldn’t see through the spots in his his eyes.

“Anthony!” Loki cried out.

“Loki!”

Damn it, he couldn’t see well enough to find his Loki. He needed to clear his vision. “Loki!”

“Silence!” rang out a voice loud and clear.

Tony froze, afraid to move least it be wrong.

“Anthony?” yet another voice called.
“Loki? I’m here.”

“I see you. Turn around.”

Tony turned and finally spotted his Loki. Thank fuck, he thought. He was alright hearing the voice but nothing could compare to the actual sight. His Loki was safe. For now that was all that mattered. He’d worry about everything else later.

“Anthony. Behind me, now.”

Tony moved behind Loki. As much as he wanted to protect his Loki he had to abide by Loki’s more intense knowledge base. In this, he was but a child and Loki the master. He would follow whatever lead Loki put forth.

“You will not harm my master,” Loki growled.

The guy in the golden armor seemed to chuckle for a moment before stalking forward.

“Stop!” Tony ordered. “If you touch him, I’ll kill you. God or not I’ll find a way.”

“Fear not, mortal. No harm shall come to your beloved by my hand.”

“And by your lord’s?”

“That is not for me to decide,” the man in the golden armor stated. “If one is to believe the queen then you are the savior of our prince. Anyone with half a mind would respect you.”

“The queen?”

“My mother,” Loki whispered. “Anthony, this is Heimdall the watcher of all. Heimdall, this is Anthony of Midgard, The Man of Iron, and one of Earth’s mightiest heroes.”

“Those titles mean nothing if they do not assist you,” Heimdall said seriously.

“If you intend harm toward my Anthony-”

“Fear not young one. I am here to assist you, not harm you or yours.”

“All fine and well if it weren’t for the fact that you serve my father,” Loki growled.

“I serve the queen still,” Heimdall answered blandly.

“Then you would not harm my Anthony. We both know that mother would not tolerate-”

“Peace be with you, I mean no harm to you or yours my prince.”

Loki stood, stunned. Prince?

“Your father is expecting you,” Heimdall stated.

Chapter End Notes

We are getting into the the wrap up so if anyone wants to make predictions or offer
anything now is the chance. I will say LokisLonelyLady is doing well on predictions but I won't say what's right or wrong. There are things that still need to be addressed so don't consider this the end quite yet.

Also, bless you peeps for sticking with it this far. You guys are the amazing peeps.
“What do you mean gone?” Natasha demanded.

“Just what I said,” Fury told her. “Gone, as in, not here anymore.”

“So where are they then?” Natasha growled.

“Asgard I expect,” Clint huffed annoyed. “The question isn’t where, it’s why. Why now and why take Tony?”

“And Dr. Banner,” Fury added.

“I thought about that,” Clint stated. “The doctor wasn’t outside with them when the glow began. I don’t think they took him on purpose. I’m pretty sure that was an accident. If they meant to take Dr. Banner they would have waited until he was already out there.”

“You seem pretty sure of where they went,” Fury replied narrowing his gaze.

“It’s the only thing that makes any sense. Someone with that kind of capability that only abducts Loki and Tony? After everything Loki’s been through, yeah, I’d say it would be a pretty good assumption to say it was Asgardians that took him. Not to mention I’ve seen that kind of thing before.” Clint shrugged and returned to inspecting his bow.

“When?” Steve asked when he didn’t continue.

“In the video I watched of Loki’s arrival,” Clint answered. Finally satisfied with the state of his bow he moved on to the arrows.

“That’s right,” Natasha agreed. “Now I remember.”

All the chatter in the room died out suddenly. Clint looked up and saw Thor and Jane entering the room. Slinging his arrows over his shoulder Clint stood and turned to face the pair as they approached.

“I have watched the recordings,” Thor informed them. “It’s definitely a gateway created by the rainbow bridge.”

“Right,” Clint acknowledged. Thor’s words only verified what he already knew. Still it was it was always good to confirm things. “Now how do we open a portal from this side?”

“It cannot be done,” Thor insisted.

“You better hope you can find a way,” Nat threatened. “If you don’t then I will. If anything happens before I find a way to get there-”

“Not helpful right now Nat,” Clint interrupted. “Right now we need to work on coming up with a plan. I suggest those here who understand such things get started on how to re-establish a connection. Everyone else, gear up. When they find a way through then we’re going to need to be ready for anything.”

Tony did his best to reign in his anger, he really did. Still, it threatened to get away from him. Wasn’t
it enough that his life had been turned upside down by these people. They had tortured Loki and dropped him off as a slave on what amounted to Tony’s doorstep. Even in a different ‘realm’ Loki was still terrified of them. Even if he excluded what had to be the work of the Chitauri the sheer number of injuries Loki had when he’d arrived were staggering. These were the people responsible for them Tony reminded himself. These were the people that had tortured Loki time and again until he broke. Speaking of…

Tony turned to inspect Loki. Shoulders hunched, head lowered, and eyes fixed on the ground at his feet. Loki almost looked exactly as he did when he had first shown up at the tower. A slight tremor ran through Loki and Tony sighed. He should have realized how difficult this would be for Loki before now. If he didn’t do something soon Loki was likely to have another panic attack.

“Loki,” Tony whispered softly. “It’s okay baby, I’m here. I’m going to take your hand now, okay?” He waited until he saw the nod before carefully taking Loki’s hand in his. “Okay, now we’re just going to breathe. In and out slowly, got it?” Another nod. “Good. Okay, breathe with me now. In.” When Loki complied Tony waited a few seconds, before he ordered, “Out.” After a while and a few repetitions Loki finally seemed to calm.

“We really must be going,” the golden armor clad warrior repeated.

Loki immediately tensed and Tony glared.

“It’s fine, Loki. I’m still here. I’m not going anywhere. You’re safe.”

“Yes… Sir,” Loki whispered.

Tony winced at the title. “Loki,” he huffed.

“In the court of my…” Loki paused and shook his head as if to clear it. “In the court of Odin it would not do to forget my place. While we are here I should probably use a title when deferring to you,” Loki advised.

Tony sighed, annoyed. “Fine, but just that one. Not the other word. Understood?”

Loki nodded.

“And no kneeling,” Tony added.

“Not if you don’t wish it,” Loki acquiseced. “Disobeying my… ‘Sir’ would be frowned upon so it would be expected that I follow your lead in things.”

“Quite,” the gold clad warrior stated. “Now, if you would follow.”

The tone left no room for argument. Still, Tony wasn’t about to force Loki into a situation where he felt uncomfortable. “Loki?”

“If it pleases you then we should probably follow.”

There was a slight pause where Tony was fixing to speak before…

“Sir,” Loki finally added.

For the first time since Loki had shown up at the tower Tony realized there was a difference in the way Loki used Sir versus Master. True he didn’t understand the difference but he did finally notice it. Master always caused his skin to crawl. Sir may still set his teeth on edge but it wasn’t the same. At
least, not when Loki used it.

“Prince Loki?” the warrior questioned.

“Do not call me that,” Loki growled.

“Loki?” Tony asked.

“It is fine,” Loki stated flatly, face becoming oddly blank. It was not a look he was used to seeing on Loki and Tony didn’t like it one bit. “Please lead on, Sir.”

Tony cocked an eyebrow but didn’t say anything.

“If your culture is so enlightened then why do they still have slavery?” Bruce asked suddenly.

Loki froze and Tony muttered under his breath.

“I mean, if you’re so advanced then don’t you have better ways of punishing people?”

Loki opened his mouth, paused, then dropped his head.

“No,” Bruce disagreed. “Speak up.”

“I cannot, other sir,” Loki stated placidly.

“Tony?” Bruce questioned.

“Answer the question,” Tony ordered.

Loki hesitated slightly before beginning. “He speaks my mind,” Loki answered. “I have ever wondered the same. I never questioned it until I began to travel. When visiting other places where slavery did not exist I began to notice the differences. After some time I began to wonder why such a practice was still employed in Asgard.”

Tony could see Bruce was about to ask another question when the other man in the gold armor cleared his throat. “Later Bruce,” Tony told him. “Alright,” he said to Loki. “Whenever you’re ready let me know.”

“I am ready,” Loki whispered still not meeting his eyes.

“Wait,” the warrior ordered. “If he insists on abiding by the customary rules of slavery then I would offer my cloak to help hide his identity.”

Tony waited to see if Loki would accept before finally realizing Loki would defer to his judgement. Suppressing another sigh he turned to the other man and nodded once. Quickly the warrior removed his cloak and slung it over Loki’s shoulders drawing the hood up to cover over Loki’s head. Inspecting his handiwork he adjusted the hood and took a step back.

Without a word Tony helped Loki to his feet. When Loki began to draw his hand back Tony debated keeping ahold of it. In light of Loki’s concerns he forced himself release Loki’s hand and allowed it to slip out of his. He allowed himself to stare at the other for a few more moments before nodding once and setting out to cross the bridge into the city proper.

“What do you mean?” Clint asked.
“Just what I said. I still don’t have nearly enough information and there’s not a computer here with enough processing power to run the necessary programs,” Jane clarified.

“JARVIS?” Clint called.

“Yes master Barton,” JARVIS answered.

“Can you help Jane with whatever she needs?”

“My primary directive is the protection of master and now master Loki foremost and then that of the others residing in this tower. It is my duty to do anything within my power to aid with the quick and safe return of my master. I will grant her any assistance that will help with that cause. I must warn you though, without specific orders I cannot give any information or comply with any orders from anyone associated with S.H.I.E.L.D.”

Clint shot a glance over to Fury.

“I’ll use my code to let her into the lab,” Pepper interjected. “Jane can work in the lab and there will be no chance of her being disturbed.”

“I’ll need some help,” Jane commented.

“Nat?” Clint asked.

“Bruce would be better but…”

Clint didn’t reply. He understood what she was saying and why it was difficult for her finish that sentence. Nothing he could say would be of any use so instead he picked up his bow and began to inspect it again.

“Right,” Nat stated decisively. “So let’s get going.”

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As the others prepared Thor had excused himself from the group. He knew there was no way for them to get to Asgard without some form of help. Even if the others could somehow find a way to transport people it was the location that was the problem. Without a way to fix upon a specific location there was no telling where anyone would be sent. As far as he knew, there was only one person that might be able to help them.

_Heimdall? If you can hear me then answer._

He waited for a time but there was no reply.

_I know father would have set you to watch over Loki while he was here. Father would leave nothing to chance. At the very least he would want to ensure no further harm was done to those here, especially if the purpose was for Loki to make amends. I have no doubt that it was you who retrieved him. After everything he has suffered do not keep me from him now. I would stand with my brother._

It happened in the blink of an eye. One moment he was in his rooms in the tower and the next he was in Heimdall’s observatory. Standing near one of the windows he could see the vast endless of space and the multitude of stars shining brightly. At first he could only stare at the sight. With him banished until Loki could return and the conditions of Loki’s sentencing so vague he hadn’t expected to see this sight anytime soon. Heimdall’s voice flowed smoothly through his mind.
I have indeed been watching over your brother. It is a task given to me not only by your father but also your mother. You are also right that it was I who transported your brother back here. If you are to return you must find your own way back for now. Odin wishes to speak with Loki alone and I cannot defy my king. However, as you are to be allowed to return when Loki does I would not be obligated to stop you if you were to find a way. I will not be able to maintain this link for long. Other things require my immediate attention. It is always important to pay close attention to one’s surroundings.

Frowning, Thor tried to puzzle out if there was more to those words than Heimdall was actually saying. It was then that he finally noticed the sword hadn’t been removed. It was completely unlike Heimdall to be that careless. The more he thought about it the less careless it actually seemed. It was almost as if…

Blinking Thor realized his mind was fully back in the tower. Sudden realization spread over him and he stood. He had to get to the lab and tell the others working down there what he knew. There was no way to fix a specific location without years of work. With this knowledge they might actually be able to open the gateway between Asgard and midgard without worrying about becoming lost in the void.

As they passed through the city Loki was glad of the cloak. He had hoped Anthony would agree to the offer but couldn’t bring himself to ask. Not here. He desperately wished he was wearing one of his hoodies, preferably Anthony’s, but at least his head was covered. It was more than he could have hoped for and he wasn’t about to complain. Still, it was curious that the watcher would offer his cloak. There was no reason that the watcher should care for Loki’s comfort and yet he hadn’t hesitated to offer his cloak. To say that Loki was confused would be an understatement of the greatest proportions.

Several people paused to watch as they passed but that was probably due to Heimdall escorting them. The watcher rarely ever left his post so it was something of a rarity to see him in the city. While it felt odd to be escorted to the palace it made sense. Anthony was a visitor and, as a hero of midgard, deserving of a proper escort. As such there should be more in the procession, especially after the nature of their summoning. Loki didn’t question it. No doubt his father had his own reason for his choice of escorts. It wouldn’t do to dwell on that which was not his concern.

He focused on walking the perfect distance behind his Anthony. It felt odd to behave this way now but he didn’t dare take any chances; not when it was his Anthony’s life on the line. If this was needed to keep Anthony safe he would submit. He just hoped the meeting would go smoothly and Anthony emerged safely. He didn’t know what he’d do if Anthony were harmed during this meeting. As they approached the palace Loki finally balked.

“No,” Loki breathed. “I thought… I thought I could but I can’t. Please!”


“No you don’t understand!”

“I do. Trust me Loki, I get it.”

Loki sank to the ground. Drawing up his knees he wrapped his arms around them and shook his head. “No. I can’t, please do not make me. Anthony please,” Loki begged. Solid arms wrapped around him and Loki leaned in to the comforting touch. There was no way he could face Odin. “I tried, I did. I’m so sorry.”
“I’m here baby. You can feel my arms can’t you?”

Eyes still scrunched shut tightly Loki lifted his head and nodded emphatically.

“‘Kay, you can feel me, you know I’m here. I swear to you I am not going anywhere.”

“He’ll… He’ll…” Gasping he couldn’t seem to catch his breath.

“Loki… Listen to my voice. I’m the only thing you should be focused on, okay?”

“Yes, Mas-. No! I didn’t mean that, I didn’t!”

“Loki? Loki stop! I know you didn’t mean it that way. It was an accident that’s all.”

Still nodding Loki ducked his head and let out another soft whine. How could he explain it to Anthony? What could he say to explain how terrified he was of meeting the person who had single handedly taken everything that was good from him? If he took Anthony now…

“I can’t lose you,” Loki whimpered. “Anthony, I love you.” If he was going to be ripped away from his Anthony he wanted ensure Anthony knew how he felt.

“I know baby. I love you, now and always. But you know what? We can discuss this when we get back home. When we get back we can talk about anything you want. We just have to finish dealing with this first then we can go home.”

“What if… What if he decides to keep me here?” Loki fretted. To his surprise, Anthony laughed. Confused his brow drew down as he raised his eyes to meet Anthony’s. “That amuses you?” Anthony met his eyes and smiled.

“I love you. I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to laugh. It’s just,” Anthony waved one hand in a distracted manner. “Remember? I already told you I won’t let them take you from me. And with Bruce here there’s even less of a chance of that happening. Trust me, he would protect you every bit as much. Them trying to take you against your will would be a very bad idea.”

Startled he realized he hadn’t counted on the doctor. His fears had been so wrapped up in the idea of Anthony, without his armor, trying to defend him that he’d almost forgotten the doctor was even here. He turned to eye the other midgardian.

“He’s right,” the doctor admitted. “My other half is more than ready to take charge. If anyone tries anything I can’t promise he won’t come out to vent his displeasure.”

“Everything is going to be fine Loki. I told you I wouldn’t let them take you against your will and I always keep my word. I’m not leaving here without you. We’re going to go see what they want and then all of us are going home.”

Loki could only stare at the doctor incredulously. He would have met Anthony’s eyes as well if Anthony were not sitting behind him, arms wrapped around Loki. For almost as far back as he could remember Loki had always felt like a second choice at best. That not only Anthony but the doctor as well would care enough to fight for him was almost unthinkable. They should hate him for everything he had done to him. Instead they were offering protection.

“Loki?” Anthony asked.

Without raising his head Loki nodded slightly. “Yes, Anthony?”
“You alright?”

Loki hesitated unsure. The truth, he reminded himself. The only thing Anthony had ever required of him was the truth. Was he alright? He realized, at least for the time being, he did actually feel a lot better. Whether or not that would last when they finally made it into the palace was another matter.

“Will you hold my hand the-,” Loki broke off and resisted the urge to babble. “Forgive me. I have no right to ask that,” he stated quietly.

Dropping his head Tony shook it as he sighed.

“Loki?”

“Yes… Anthony?”

“Do you trust me?”

“Yes,” Loki answered without hesitation.

“Then trust that I won’t willingly put you in danger, okay?”

Nodding Loki finally answered, “Yes Anthony.” The arms slide from around him and Loki bit back a whine at the loss of comfort. A hand entered his vision. Loki gripped it and allowed Anthony to help him to his feet. “Thank you,” Loki had to bite back the appellation and remind himself Anthony did not like such titles.

“Will it make you feel more comfortable if I were to hold your hand?” Anthony asked.

Loki had to work to keep his face from flushing in embarrassment. “I… It’s just… It would be inappropriate,” he finished quietly.

“Uh huh,” Anthony drawled. “I don’t believe that’s what I asked though.”

This time he was sure he could feel the blush creeping up his neck. “I… It…”

How could he possibly explain to Anthony how wrong the others here would view such a display? That sort of thing just wasn’t done here, but then, Anthony wasn’t from here. Flustered at not being able to find the right words he growled. The truth he reminded himself. Loki cleared his throat and tried again. “Yes,” he finally answered. “If you do not mind I would feel more comfortable knowing you are nearby.”

“Uh huh,” Pepper stated flatly. “Could you, perhaps, put that in terms even the most layperson of us all could understand?”

Jane bit her bottom lip and worried it through her teeth while she considered. “Okay, what if you just enter the information while I-”

Jane fell silent as the doors to the workshop slid open and Thor entered.

“The sword is in place,” he stated cryptically

“Uh… Okay?”

“No, you don’t understand. It means we don’t have to find a way to link onto a doorway. It’s already
set, all we have to do is connect to it.”

As the other two dissolved into technical jargon Pepper’s thoughts drifted to the two people who she had come to care about more than she’d ever thought possible. She just hoped they could get to them in time. It would be just like Tony to kick the hornet’s nest and not give a damn about the consequences. With Banner there the stakes were just that much higher. If he lost control there was no telling what might happen.

Oddly enough Loki found himself concerned about the doctor’s welfare as well. The doctor, however, stood a better chance of defending himself than did Anthony. Loki wasn’t sure when it happened but somewhere along the way he’d come to trust the doctor. The other man had gone above and beyond what was necessary to help him. Loki still didn’t understand how or why the doctor didn’t hate him but he was grateful.

With his Anthony Loki was finally able to enter the city proper. People turned to others no doubt to gossip. Loki cringed away from them and did his best to follow Anthony. It was increasingly hard as the steps wore on but he managed. Anthony was what mattered. If he couldn’t keep his Anthony safe then he didn’t want to think about what might happen. There was no other option, he would keep Anthony safe even if it meant he had to lose him forever. Hopefully it wouldn’t come to that but he had to resign himself to that possibility.

With renewed determination he followed with his head held high. Considering he was already breaking basic etiquette rules for his station by holding hands with Anthony worrying about propriety now would be absolutely useless. Keeping his head high he ignored those they passed. No doubt this procession would spawn much gossip. All of which is completely irrelevant Loki reminded himself. What mattered now was protecting Anthony.

Unable to stand being surrounded by everyone milling about in the penthouse living room Clint returned to the balcony on the eighty first floor. He needed some time alone to clear his head and think about everything. Gazing out at nothing in particular it seemed all he could think about was the time he’d spent mind controlled. All he’d wanted at the time was to find a way to break the control. He could feel that same desire coursing through Loki as well.

After he’d gotten free from that control he had people there to help him deal with the understandable aftermath. Loki had no one to help him. Clint frowned. That is, he had no one to help him until he’d eventually been given to Tony. He still didn’t like the idea of Loki being a slave but at least he knew that Tony felt the same. And now, who knew what would happen to either one of them to say nothing of Banner. He was pulled out of his thoughts by the sound of footsteps walking out onto the platform.

“Do you think they’ll actually be able to manage it?” Fury finally asked.

Clint tilted his head as he thought about it. Between Jane, Nat, Pepper, and Thor, yeah he was pretty sure they’d figure out something. The real question was how soon would they be able to do it? He carefully thought about how to best respond to that question.

“It’s possible,” he answered evasively.

“Uh huh. Why do I get the feeling there’s more to that answer?”
Clint shrugged. “Because you’re you and part of what makes you who you are is being suspicious of everyone and everything?”

“True enough,” Fury agreed. “But that doesn’t mean you aren’t still hiding something.”

Still refusing to turn around and face the other directly Clint remained staring out across the landscape of the city. Until he had his own thoughts more organized he was hesitant to be drawn into any more in depth of a conversation. For his part, Fury didn’t seem willing to press. Both lost in their own thoughts a silence settled over the pair.

Tony knew Loki well enough to know when the other man was putting up a front. Even if he hadn’t how tightly Loki was squeezing his hand would have given him a good indication of how nervous Loki was right now. It was to be expected though, Tony supposed. If he was being honest with himself he had to admit he was nervous as well. He meant what he said about doing everything within his power to keep Loki safe, he just wished he knew how.

He was grateful for Bruce’s presence. If nothing else he wasn’t alone in his desire to protect Loki. After seeing how protective the Hulk had been when Loki was injured Tony felt better about the two of them meeting up again. Hopefully it wouldn’t go that far. If they were reduced to Bruce becoming the Hulk then their chances of getting out of this in one piece were probably all but nonexistent. Loki’s hand squeezed his once more and Tony stole a quick glance to silent man walking beside him.

If he didn’t know better Tony would have almost believed this was the same Loki that had been a part of the attack on New York. The tight grip of Loki’s hand around his own belied the arrogant attitude Loki was presenting to those watching. Tony hoped he’d be able to hold it together when they entered the palace. There was no telling who they might meet inside but chances were good Loki would know them. For that matter Tony hoped he would be able to hold it together himself.

As they approached the front gates Tony slowed to a stop. Loki, however, released his hand and continued stalking forward. Tony almost took a step forward to pull him back but managed to halt himself and wait. He had to trust that Loki knew what he was doing and let him handle this. Loki continued forward until he was just in front of the guards blocking the doorway before stopping. Back straight and head held high Loki glared at the guards barring their way.

“Make way for Anthony Stark and Bruce Banner two of the heroes from midgard.”

“On whose authority,” one of the guards asked.

“On your kings authority,” Loki replied haughtily. “We were summoned so we are obviously expected. That is, unless your king intends for his guests to stand outside the castle which I highly doubt. That would be quite insulting considering he didn’t even bother asking if it was convenient before summoning them.”

As the guard started to curl his hand into a fist Tony strode forward. Shouldering Loki out of the way he stood in front to the two guards and glowered. Like fuck he was going to stand by and let these people hit Loki. Before he could get into it with the pair a hand settled on his shoulder and Tony whipped his head around. He managed to wait just long enough to ensure that it wasn’t Loki. “What?” he snarled.

The gold clad warrior didn’t bother answering that.
“Move,” Heimdall ordered flatly.

“Slaves do not speak to free people in that manner,” grumbled the guard who had been about to strike Loki.

“As Master Stark is midgardian you have no way of knowing what he finds acceptable or not for his slave. Be that as it may, it is still not acceptable here to strike another person’s slave without their permission. Shall I tell our king of your inhospitable behaviour towards one of his personal guests and their property?”

Tony wanted to object at the word ‘property’ being used to describe Loki but before he could get a word out a hand clasped his. Turning he found Loki eying him meaningfully. Tony understood the look. As much as he hated it he had to pick and choose his battles. For now it was best to ignore the slight. He had no doubt that would be the least of the things he needed to worry about before this was finished. With a slight nod he turned look forward.

He had known better than to provoke the guards. Even if he had been instructed to announce Anthony and the doctor he still should have kept his eyes cast downward and his tone more deferential. If he wasn’t careful he was going to endanger Anthony and that would be unacceptable. Even after all this time he supposed he still hadn’t learned a thing. Perhaps he truly did belong as a slave to another; to someone who could help him learn how to be a better person. Perhaps Odin had been right to send him away.

As they entered the palace following behind Heimdall Loki inspected the halls trying to see them as Anthony might. It was probably supposed to be inspiring or at least intimidating or something equally grand but it all seemed pretentious to him. In spite of the years he’d spent here Anthony’s tower felt more like a home than this place. While he inspected everything he couldn’t help but remember his childhood. Had he been so very different then or had he always been this way?

Anthony’s hand squeezed his a few times and Loki jerked his thoughts back to the present. The group had stopped walking and were now standing just outside of the doors to the throne room. Anthony was eying him warily and Loki forced a small smile.

They took so many turns and went down so many hallways it was difficult to keep track of them all. He really wished he knew what Loki was thinking about right now. The look on his face made Tony want to stop right there, wrap his arms around Loki, and never let go. Damn it, he needed to stay focussed. Later, he told himself. After all of this was over and done nobody else better need anything. As long as Loki didn’t mind it Tony planned to abscond with his baby and lock them in the workshop so they could spend time with just the two of them. Staring at the golden doors before them he forced his mind back to the problem at hand.
“What do you mean I’m not going with you?” Pepper demanded furious. “Of course I’m going with you.”

Exasperated Steve turned to Thor for assistance. The other man just shrugged. Steve gave a long suffering sigh before trying to convince her. “If things go wrong we’ll already have our hands full trying to just get to the others. Having to worry about you as well will just make it more difficult for us to help them.” He was about to continue when Natasha broke in.

“What he means is a smaller group will work better. We’ll be able to travel faster and hopefully avoid any direct conflict until the last possible moment. Too many people will draw unnecessary attention. We need to be able to move quietly and quickly. We’ve all worked together and know each other’s habits. I’m pretty sure he didn’t meant to insinuate anything negative it’s just that we already know each other. We’re used to working together. It would take time to incorporate a new person. In the interest of expediency it would be best if you stayed to assist Jane.”

Steve cocked an eyebrow and stared at Natasha. Surprisingly Pepper was oddly silent for some time. He repressed the urge to cross his fingers like some child beseeching the goddess of luck. Before Miss Potts had the chance to answer the doors to the workshop opened and Barton strode into the room. The archer stopped halfway across the floor and stood motionless taking in everyone. Finally he turned slowly until his gaze was completely focused on Miss Potts.

“You know you can’t go with us, right?” he asked.

“Why?” she shot back.

“Because with Nat going with us you are the only other person I trust to bring us back. If we are to succeed we need to know there’s someone here who has our back.”

Walking forward he didn’t stop until he was standing just in front of her. Slowly he raised his hands and held them just above her shoulders. When she didn’t object he allowed his hands to finally settle.

“We need you,” he whispered. “Sometimes the hero isn’t the person that rides to the rescue. Sometimes it’s the person who stays behind when every instinct in their body is screaming for them to object. Okay?”

“I swear to whatever god you believe in-”

“I promise you I won’t come back without them both.”

Swear,” Pepper demanded.

“On whatever honor I still have left I so swear,” Barton replied.

“On your name,” Pepper insisted.

“On my name,” Barton agreed.

Approaching the throne was one of the hardest things he’d ever done. He never knew anything could be this difficult. Still, it was his Anthony’s life on the line. He could not let his love down.
“Father,” Loki answered coldly, bowing his head.

“Loki,” Odin responded just as bland.

“If you wish to vent your displeasure then I am at your disposal. Just, please, leave my Anthony out of it?”

“Your Anthony never once figured into the equation if that helps alleviate you.”

“It does not,” Loki answered. “He may not have figured in before but he may now. I cannot abide by that.”

“Very well then. I wish your Anthony no ill will, is that well enough?”

“No,” Loki replied flatly. “He deserves better. He deserves-”


“Loki,” Anthony chastised softly. “You know better.”


“Look,” Anthony began. “I don’t know what you want but if you think I’m leaving here without him then you’re mistaken.”

“And if I should decide that is precisely what I want? Just how do you think a mortal such as yourself could prevent such a thing? If I should decide to keep my son-”

“I am not your son,” Loki hissed. “At the very least you are not my father.”

“But I am your king and you will show the proper respect,” Odin growled.

“Respect?” Loki scoffed indignanty. “After all you’ve done to me you want respect?”

“Your mother-”

“Don’t you dare bring her into this,” shouted Loki. “She would never have sanctioned such a ruling!”

“Watch your tongue. If it was not for her you would never have even been sent to midgard. It was by her wish that you even be offered to Stark. It was that or death.”

Loki couldn’t move. He had never considered the idea that his mother had a hand in his sentencing at all. If it were true then she had to have had her reasons. Had she seen something? The future was never set but could instead sometimes be influenced. Had his mother foreseen that he would need his Anthony? But then, why banish Thor as well. Unless that had been Odin’s will…

“I did not take pleasure in decreeing your sentence but I could not stand to have you put to death. In spite of what you may think I have always considered you my son. You were abandoned and left to die. I took you in; raised you. Throughout the years we may not have always seen eye to eye on everything but I have always loved you. Did I handle telling you of your birth origin well, no. Did you handle that knowledge well, no. Your mother was probably the only person to even plan for the future and I will admit that I should have paid better attention to her consul. Still, we cannot change
the past. All that is left to us now is to work towards the future.”

“Nat wait,” Pepper called.

She would not let the others leave her behind. To double check they would wait she glanced over and waited for a quick nod from Clint before returning. When she was close enough Pepper held up a heavy looking metal case. “What’s up?” she asked taking it.

“It’s a transportable suit. I don’t know what makes it different from all the others but I know it doesn’t do all the same things as them. Make sure Tony gets it will you?”

With a sharp nod of agreement Natasha turned and to catch up with the others. She tried to remind herself no good would come from worrying preemptively. She had to remain focused on the mission. Besides if any one of them had the best chance of survival on a planet of godlike beings it would be Bruce. Tony also seemed to land on his feet fairly often. Loki was the one she should be more worried about right now. In the elevator she glanced down at the hefty metal case in her right hand. She really hoped Pepper was right and it contained either a version of one of Tony’s suits or something the engineer would find useful.

For a while there was only movement. It was difficult to tell how long it lasted. Time seemed to stretch and compress at the same time. It was impossible to determine if a few hours or mere seconds had passed by the time the light finally receded. Stumbling slightly Clint felt to a knee, stomach threatening to rebel. Sensing someone nearby he looked up and caught sight of Natasha. One of her hands was gripped so tightly around the case Pepper had given her her knuckles were turning white and her fingernails had to be digging into her palm. The other hand was resting lightly on his left arm.

“I’m good,” he told her. She gave a disbelieving snort and he rolled his eyes. The action only served to worsen his rapidly forming headache. Repressing a groan he glared at his partner before amending his answer. “Fine. I’m doing alright,” he grumbled.

“We need to hurry,” Steve said. “There’s no telling how long we have before anyone realizes we’re here.”

“Heimdall should already know,” Thor informed them. “In truth I expected him to be present and make an attempt to delay us. We should count his absence as a blessing and not dally any longer than needed.”

Clint wanted to roll his eyes once more but managed to stopped himself. They had a job to do so he forced himself to ignore the headache for now. Standing up he gave a nod to Thor and the group started off towards the bright castle looming in the distance.

“Future?” Loki asked incredulously. “You sentenced me to be a slave! What possible future could I ever have‽”

“Unless you’re not a slave,” Bruce stated slowly. The others turned face him and Bruce had to struggle to continue speaking. “Uh well, I mean, think about it. It’s the only thing that makes sense. I mean, with all that we know would the king speak directly to a slave or even allow a slave to speak back to him in such a manner?” Bruce glanced around nervously.
“Expound,” Tony insisted.

“Well, Loki’s not being particularly deferential. You saw the guards outside when they felt like Loki was being disrespectful. They were ready to physically put him in his place because they didn’t think he showed enough respect. Since we’ve been in here Loki’s been much more than ‘disrespectful’ and no one’s said a word. I can’t imagine that someone who is considered a slave would be allowed to talk with the king of the realm let alone in such a disrespectful manner. The only thing that makes sense would be if Loki wasn’t considered a slave any longer. Otherwise…”

There was a lengthy silence before Loki spoke softly finally breaking it.

“Otherwise I would have been hauled off to the dungeons for punishment,” Loki whispered half to himself. Looking up Loki suddenly seemed to finally remember there were other people present. “You are right, of course. A mere slave would never be permitted to address the king.” Loki turned to face Odin once again. “Did you… I mean, am I…” Loki’s brow drew down and he appeared to be deep in thought.

“Is he a slave?” Tony asked when Loki didn’t seem able to continue.

Everyone’s attention turned to the one eyed man sitting in the throne. For a while there was only silence. Finally the man stood. Loki took slight a step back and one of Tony’s hands subtly raised and came to rest on the small of Loki’s back. Bruce felt the anger welling up inside of him and had to fight to keep from losing control. The man standing before them was one of those responsible for much of the fear and pain Loki still felt. He wasn’t sure if he would be able to restrain himself if Odin were to come much closer.

“Heimdall, retrieve the prisoners,” Odin ordered.

Bruce started to take a step forward in case that meant Loki before he realized the warrior they’d followed here turned and walked off in the opposite direction. The relief he felt was short lived as he was left to puzzle out why Odin would be summoning these ‘prisoners’ here to join them. As the other left Odin began speaking once more drawing Bruce’s attention back to him.

“I realize that you and I have had our differences,” Odin began, his eyes fixed solidly on Loki. “I will not take all of the blame for the schism between us but neither can I cannot deny my part in it. However, the treatment you received in the dungeons was not by my orders. I could not stand to watch the things you would go through. Those who were left in charge took advantage of that. The extremes they went to were not condoned and as such they have been imprisoned for their crimes. Now that, as your friend has observed, you are a free person I would leave their fate in your hands.”

The gold clad warrior finally returned leading in three others bound in chains.

“No,” Loki hissed. Turning Bruce barely had time to register the terror on Loki’s face. In that second he knew. These were the ones that had tormented Loki. These were the people that had tortured and abused him. Before he could even think of stopping it, not that he would have, the beast that lurked just under his skin shoved its way to the surface and seized control.

Loki flicked his eyes between his previous tormentors and the doctor. He had never actually witnessed the change before. Vaguely he wondered if there was a way to halt the change before it was fully completed. Still, his attention was torn. His gaze kept traveling back to the three people that
made his life hell before he was sent to his Anthony. Oh norns, if Odin meant to hand him back over to them… But then they were in chains. If Odin meant for them to torment him once more they should not be in chains. It wasn’t until he saw Anthony striding towards the others that Loki realized the hand was no longer on his back.

“Anthony wait,” Loki called. Rushing forward he caught Anthony’s arm with both of his hands and halted him. “Please don’t,” Loki begged.

“After the things they did to you, you want to protect them?” Anthony growled angrily yanking his arm free of Loki’s grasp. “After that look I know those are the ones that hurt you and yet you’d still protect them?”

Anthony’s voice was furious but Loki heard the hurt underneath the fury.

“Anthony please, I just need some time. I don’t know how to feel about anything anymore. I just need some time to think things through. Just a few minutes please?”

For a few minutes neither moved. Both stood, stock still, staring at each other. Without even being aware of it Loki held his breath as the seconds dragged by torturously slow. Finally, after what seemed like forever, Anthony gave a small nod.

“Thank you,” Loki told him.

There was a loud roar that caused him to wince. Opening his eyes Loki could only stare in shock. Almost before he could process what was happening the beast had already crossed the room and snatched up one of Loki’s previous tormentors. Loki needed had to do something before everything could spiral out of control. Forcing himself to move he rushed forward until he was standing in front of the green monster.

“No!” Loki shouted. “For me,” he said, lowering his voice. “Please, do not do this. Not right now. I respectfully request some time to decide how I feel before taking action.”

For a while he wasn’t sure the scientist turned monster would listen. When the beast turned and stomped towards the throne Loki winced. Worried he readied himself to do his best to stop the other from attacking Odin. It wasn’t out of love. He wasn’t sure if he could still feel that way towards Odin. Perhaps given enough time but that was a question for later. For now it was more out of fear. He was afraid that should the doctor’s beast attack Odin the All-Father would use such an attack to punish either the doctor or Anthony.

Before Loki could move the green beast stopped still several feet away from the throne and dropped the man he was carrying. Looking between the man he had just dropped and the throne the green beast seemed to pause for a moment. He let out a loud roar before turning and stalking away. Loki could only stare as the other made his way out of the throne room.

- The group moved as stealthily as possible. Natasha was slightly surprised at just how quiet Thor could be when he wished. Not that he was as quiet as she or Clint but it was still a pleasant surprise. Occasionally there were times when they couldn’t sneak passed without detection and Thor would provide a distraction for the rest of them. Whether those they came across didn’t know Thor was supposed to be banished until Loki’s return or just didn’t care none of them knew or cared. As long as the mission succeeded nothing else mattered.

The trip to the throne room seemed to take forever. That was probably due to more to the fact that
she didn’t know how long the trip should take than anything else. There were a couple of close calls but somehow they managed to finally make it to the doors of the throne room without any real trouble. Once they arrived at the doors was the group was surprised by the sight of Bruce’s other half gripping two combat dressed men, one in each hand, and growling at them. Cursing under her breath she held out a hand to tell the others to stay back before she rushed forward.

“Bruce no!” Nat yelled.

The giant green rage monster that was the guy she honestly cared about more than she should paused. She wasn’t sure what to do so she froze. Slowly Bruce’s other half turned in her direction. He stared at her as if expecting something. Nat frantically wracked her brain for something to say to make this situation better.

“Put the people down,” she she told him. The Hulk gave a roar. It was almost deafening this close. She took another step closer and leveled her gaze. “Put. Them. Down,” she ordered.

The Hulk dropped the Asgardian warriors he was holding. While it was surprising she couldn’t think about that just now. She needed to keep Bruce distracted before this part of him did something they all regretted and that was all she could permit herself to think about right now.

“Bruce-”

“No!,” the Hulk bellowed. “Not Bruce!”

“Yes!” Nat called back. Pausing she took several deep breaths to calm herself. “Yes,” she finally said more calmly. “You’re still my Bruce even if you’re not exactly yourself at the moment. That’s okay though, okay? You’re still my Bruce and you and I are going to get through this. Together. Besides, hurting these people wouldn’t help anything. Right now we need to focus on the best way to help the others.”

“Fix it?” he asked.

“Yes,” she agreed. “Fix things.” Walking over she took his hand and stared up at him. “Come with me?” she asked.

Hulk nodded.

“Good enough for me,” she answered. “Come on sweetie, let’s go find a quiet-” she was cut off when he picked her up and carried her away from the doors over to a corner on the other side of the room. “Uh, yeah. Okay sweetie, this works too.”

“Mine,” Hulk growled.

“Yes baby, I’m yours.”

“Hulk know. Hulk just want to protect.”

“Yes sweetie, you protect very well. Uh, can I go back to the fight?”

“No,” he stated decisively.

She repressed a heavy sigh. Maybe eventually she would be able to convince him they needed to help the others but for the foreseeable future they were stuck. It would take some time before she could get through to this part of Bruce. She just hoped they had the time, otherwise all of them were in a lot of trouble.
“I already told you,” Pepper repeated. I don’t know how long it’ll take. I don’t know for sure if they even made it. They could be dead for all I know.”

“No,” Jane disagreed. “They definitely ended up somewhere. The problem is I can’t be sure just where.”

“If you didn’t know where they were going to end up then why did you let them go?” Fury asked.

“The portal was stable. Everything was fine until the power surge. I can’t be sure they were all the way through before everything blew,” Jane told him.

“Then how can you be sure they’re alive?” questioned Fury.

“If they stayed on course then they would have arrived safely. If the surge knocked them off course then I have no way of knowing where they are now.”

“So how do we find out?”

“Right now? We can’t,” Jane stated flatly. “The power surge fried a lot of the equipment and, at least for the moment, scrambled JARVIS. We’re working on getting him back up and in good running order first. Without Tony here that’s going to be difficult but I should be able to manage it.”

Could it get anymore perfect? Without Stark here who could possibly stop him from acquiring the tech he needed? With the systems down he entered the lab easily enough. It was then that he finally ran into problems. Looking left and right he didn’t see anything out of the ordinary. Cautiously he entered the workshop. So far so good he thought to himself. Turning he spied a computer. So far so good, he thought.

Making his way to the computer he froze when a robot suddenly blocked his way. Perhaps he should tell the bot to move? Would it listen to him? “Move,” he commanded.
The first sign he had that something was wrong was when the one known as Pepper stumbled and had to grasp onto one of the work tables. Not long afterwards she fell and lay completely still on the floor next to some of the completed ‘small toys’ as his creator termed them. As a precaution DUM-E scanned the floor but found nothing that she could have stumbled over. Not really surprising considering one of his top priorities was to keep the floor clear. His creator tended to get caught up in things when working and sometimes forgot to watch where he was walking.

The next logical possibility was that something medically wrong. Without JARVIS there was no immediate way to discern that. DUM-E moved on to the next possible option and tested the air for any abnormalities. Several anomalies stood out and he analyzed them. The unusual chemicals in the air contained chemicals that, after searching through several databases, DUM-E concluded were normally only used in various sleeping compounds most notably anestesia. The concentration of the chemicals were fairly high though not sufficiently high to cause lasting damage to the human lying on the workshop floor.

With J.A.R.V.I.S. down most of the precautions would be offline. If anything happened he would be the only real defense between the danger and this woman. DUM-E began to ready himself for the defensive. If anything did, in fact, happen he wanted to be prepared.

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The doors to the workshop slid open and two men DUM-E didn’t recognize entered.

“Move,” the man commanded.

Rolling backwards DUM-E didn’t stop until he was alongside Pepper. The two new people walked over to the computer station and inspected it. With JARVIS offline the emergency defenses would be in place. While it was possible they could break through the defenses it was unlikely. DUM-E turned his attention to the woman lying on the ground. If anything happened to her his creator would be upset. With their attention elsewhere DUM-E reached over and snagged one of the mini tracking devices his creator had made. Keeping his attention the intruders he attached the device to Peppers lower calf. It was the closest part he could reach without moving and movement might draw unwanted attention.

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“Loki?” Anthony asked.

Holding up a hand Loki continued to pace.

“You’re not really thinking of forgiving them are you?”

“I don’t know what I’m thinking of right now Anthony. That’s why I need time to think.”

“After everything they’ve done-”

“I know what they’ve done!” Loki shouted. “If anyone of us is in the position to know it would be me. Or do you think I could have forgotten?” Loki seethed. Breathing deeply Loki tried to reign in
his emotions.

“No,” Anthony finally answered quietly. “I don’t think you’ve forgotten.” Walking closer Anthony moved until he was standing just in front of Loki. “You’re right. You’re the one that had to live through everything. I’ll stand behind whatever you decide.”

Cautiously Loki inspected Anthony’s face for any hint of deceit. Finding none Loki finally took a deep breath and released it. It wasn’t that he doubted Anthony’s veracity but rather he knew how protective Anthony could be when it came to those he considered his. The knowledge that Anthony would support his decision no matter what helped his nerves. With Anthony he felt more loved than he had ever felt before. It wasn’t something he was used to and he was always surprised that Anthony could have such feelings for him after everything.

Just as he was taking a second deep breath another group of people rushed through the doors to the throne room. Loki turned and his breath caught in his throat. As the others entered he had no time to wonder how they’d managed to get here. Locking eyes with Barton Loki knew the instant the archer finished assessing the situation. Before Loki could even blink Barton had his bow raised and an arrow already drawn back.

“No!” Loki shouted.

An instant later the arrow was sailing through the air straight towards the group of Loki’s previous tormentors. Reacting without conscious thought Loki flung up a hand and attempted to cast a shielding spell. He had just enough time to wince as he remembered that he didn’t have access to his seidr before the arrow ricocheted off of the shield. Loki was so stunned that the second arrow almost pierced the hastily constructed shield. Even not understanding how he had access to his seidr once more he strengthened the shield. Just in time it seemed because a split second later Thor slammed solidly into the shield.

“You drop this barrier now,” Thor demanded.

“No,” Loki shouted once more.

“You drop the barrier and let me avenge you or so help me-”

“You’ll what?” Loki hissed. “You’ll hurt me for disobeying they same as they?”

The words had the desired effect as Thor froze instantly. Loki watched as Thor stood, temporarily motionless, unable to speak. Barton, however, did not seem to share that particular problem.

“Why?” Clint yelled loudly.

Loki didn’t have a good argument for that. He thought through so many good responses and wished he could use any one of them. In all honesty though none of them accurately answered the archers question. Why was he protecting the people who’d tormented him? He turned to face Anthony in hopes of finding an answer. He should have known better.

“Loki?” Anthony asked softly.

“It’s nothing,” Loki lied.

Anthony frowned and shook his head. When he finally looked up he met Loki’s eyes and paused. Finally he shook his head once more. “Don’t lie to me.” Anthony eyed him carefully for several moments before continuing. “Please?”
Before he answer Barton walked closer. He raised a hand and almost placed it on Loki’s shoulder but stopped short and dropped the hand. “Loki?”

“No. I just… I can’t… I … I don’t know?”

“It’s fine Loki,” Tony murmured. “It’s fine, okay?”

“It’s not fine Anthony. These people-” Loki stopped short and refused to continue.

“These people were the ones that hurt you,” Barton stated quietly. “And you’re protecting them?”

“Not now Barton,” Anthony ordered.

“Yes now,” the archer insisted.

“Death is a release!”, Loki bellowed at the top of his lungs.

Everyone froze as Loki stood there panting.

“Death is a release. If we kill them then their life ends. No, they don’t get to get away with everything that easily.” Turning to the prisoners Loki spoke softly with menace dripping from his voice. “You will be tried publicly and all will know your shame. And we all know the sentence for your crimes. You will live the rest of your lives as you would have had me suffer mine.”

Turning on his heels Loki stalked out of the throne room with no thought to the others.

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Loki stalked into his room. At the very least he knew no one could follow. Pacing Loki dwelled on everything. Oh Norns how he’d love to execute them. Why wasn’t he already killing them? As Anthony would say, ‘Damn it’. Continuing to pace Loki fumed. Spying Anthony in the doorway he froze. “What?” he demanded.

Anthony cocked an eyebrow and eyed him carefully. “You don’t think I’d want to make sure you were okay?”

“I am fine,” Loki maintained.

Anthony continued to eye Loki intently without speaking.

Sighing heavily Loki shook his head. “Fine. I am well enough?” When Anthony didn’t reply Loki sighed again and waved a hand to disperse the shield barring others from entering his rooms. “You may enter if you wish.”

Leaning forward Anthony inspected the room for several seconds before taking a few steps forward. “So this is your room?”

“One of them yes. Think of it more like what you would call your ‘living room’. There are others just beyond,” Loki informed Anthony, gesturing towards another door.

“Cozy.”

“You did not come for small talk.”

Walking closer Anthony raised his arms slightly and waited. Loki moved forward leaned against his Anthony and sighed. Raising a hand he placed it lightly against Anthony’s back trailing his fingers
down it softly. Snuggling in closer Loki sighed again before finally pulling away and meeting Anthony’s eyes.

“The others? How are they coping?”

“They’ll deal, it’s what they do. It’s you I’m worried about. How are you feeling?”

Loki gave an unhappy snort and took a step backwards. As always Anthony’s allowed it and his hands fell away easily. For a while neither spoke. Finally Loki met Anthony’s gaze once more and wrapped his arms around himself.

“I was summoned to the very last place I ever wanted to see. I had to confront my… the man I once called my father. I had the people who have hurt me the most in my life unexpectedly sprung on me. People I’ve hurt in the past and who have every reason to hate me abruptly show up to protect me. How exactly am I supposed to feel? I ask because I cannot sift between all of the emotions coursing through me. I feel so many things and much of it is contradictory. I cannot even begin to unravel my emotions. So please, tell me, how exactly am I supposed to feel?”

“Oh Loki.” Anthony started to take a step forward but hesitated. “May I?”

Dropping his eyes to the floor Loki shook his head. “I don’t know what to do. This is all just…”

“Too much too fast?” Anthony ventured.

“Yes! It’s like almost every part of inside is screaming at me to kill them outright. Some of me just wants to run and never look back while the rest of me wants to hurt them as they’ve hurt me. What’s wrong with me?”

“Nothing is wrong with you. That’s a perfectly normal response to the situation given everything that’s happened to you. Tell me what I can do to help you.”

“I don’t know, that’s the point! I don’t know if I’m overreacting, underreacting, or just… I don’t even know. I just wish none of this had ever happened. I wish…” Loki ran a hand through his hair and began to pace. “I just wish I knew how I felt,” Loki growled.

Tony walked over to the nearest chair and took a seat. It was surprisingly comfortable given how formal it looked. He would have expected it to be a bit more stiff, but then again he was used to surprises where Loki was concerned. Silently he waited while Loki continued to pace. Sometimes Loki needed comfort but other times he needed to be left alone. It was difficult to know what was needed most of the time but for now letting Loki have time to process everything felt right.

“Why aren’t we killing them?” Clint demanded.

“Because that’s not our decision to make,” Steve answered.

“I agree with Barton. We should kill them. With the things they have done to my brother there is no way Loki can be thinking clearly,” Thor argued.

“No,” Bruce stated.

Steve turned and watched as Bruce and Natasha finally made their way over to rejoin the group. So
she had managed to calm down Banner. Good, Steve thought. He gave them a brief nod and turned back to the others. “It’s still his decision Thor,” Steve insisted.

“I agree,” Bruce added. “You weren’t here. I was. We can’t take this from him. He has to be the one to decide this, it’s his decision to make.”

“You of all people know what he went through. You examined him. You know what they did to him. How can you possibly justify letting them live?” Clint asked.

“You think I don’t want to kill them too? I literally let myself shift so the Hulk could kill those bastards. The problem is that it’s not our decision to make. Loki was the person wronged by them, it’s his decision to make. We should have enough respect for him to abide by whatever he decides.”

“He’s right,” Natasha said, finally entering the conversation. “No matter how much we would like to…” she paused as if searching for the right word, “No matter how much we would like to hurt them it’s still his choice, not ours.”

“You know what they did Nat!” Clint protested.

“I do,” she agreed. “That’s exactly why I know he needs to be the one to decide how we handle the matter,” she answered matter-of-factly.

Steve breathed a sigh of relief.

“How the hell can you condone what they did to him!” Clint demanded.

“Who said I condone their actions?” Natasha shot back. “Just because I think Loki should be allowed to choose what happens to them doesn’t mean I condone jack or shit,” she growled.

“Quite,” came a loud voice.

Steve turned and noted the older looking man sitting on a throne watching them.

“If you’re all through discussing what should be done with my subjects-”

“And you,” Clint stated accusatory. “How the hell could you let anyone, not even just these people, hurt your son like that?”

“Clint,” Natasha muttered under her breath.

“No, I want an answer. You only know part of the story. Being connected to Loki allowed me certain insights. I want to know-”

Clint was cut off as Natasha pressed a finger to his lips and shushed him.

“Later,” Natasha said quietly. “For now we focus on the mission. Yes?”

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“Anthony?”

“Yes?”

“I should probably go back soon.”

Tony shifted uncomfortably. “Uh… If you want, I suppose.”
“Do you really think we should leave Barton and my father in the same room?”

“Good point,” Tony agreed. “Besides, we probably should figure out how they all got here.”

“Look, all I’m saying is…” Barton trailed off as Loki and Tony re-entered the room. Loki, head held high, strode forward purposely as Tony followed. The casual attitude Tony conveyed didn’t fool Clint. He knew Tony too well to be taken in by the carefully crafted facade. For reasons of his own Tony hid his emotions in much the same way as he and Nat did when they were on a mission. As they approached no one spoke.

“I have made my decision,” Loki said when he was finally standing directly in front of the throne. “I have decide they shall not die today but instead be given the same opportunity that I was. If I’m to be given the chance to determine their fate then I propose this. They be subjected to the same as I. Let them be held and tried for their crimes. Unlike I was, however, allow them the opportunity to defend themselves. Let them speak in their own defense. Just make sure that the trial is open to all of Asgard.”

As expected the intruders couldn’t break through the emergency defenses in place on the computers. Unexpectedly, however, one of the intruders picked up the woman named Pepper and headed for the exit. Quickly running through all possible decisions he realized he was the only one who could follow wherever they took her. Any other human in the tower would have been put to sleep if not worse by the chemicals flowing through the air vents.

‘All of Asgard.’ Tony turned those words over in his mind. As just as the idea sounded he couldn’t help thinking these were the same people that had convicted and allowed his baby to suffer in ways no one should have to endure. What would happen when or if they allowed those abusers to walk free? To be fair he didn’t know if ‘all’ of Asgard had been in attendance at Loki’s trial. Still…

“Loki?” Tony asked hesitantly.

Loki turned and cocked an eyebrow. Everything about his current demeanor betrayed nothing of damaged Loki that Tony had come to know. He wouldn’t betray Loki by exposing that side of his baby in front of a potential threat but the memories still tugged at his heart. The longer he thought on it there was really only one question to ask.

“Are you certain?”

“Positive,” Loki stated crisply.

“Right.” Tony gave a sharp nod. If that’s what his baby wanted then that’s what his baby was going to get. “Can I ask one thing?”

“Must I grant it?”

“Nope.”

“Then proceed.”

“May I be present?”
Loki’s eyes ran over him appraisingly. Tony didn’t so much as flinch, allowing his baby as long as he needed to inspect him. Finally Loki seemed to come to a decision. With a quick nod he turned back to face Odin.

“I choose who else may be present at their trials and my decision is law,” he declared. “You do not get to disallow them.”

“Agreed,” Odin consented.

“Anthony,” Loki called without turning.

“Yes?”

“You are the first of those I wish present. As are Barton and Miss Romanoff. Beyond you three I care not who else wishes to be present.”

“I refuse to be barred from the trial,” Thor insisted. “Not this time; not again.”

Loki sighed. “Fine,” he consented. In all honesty he still wasn’t sure how he felt about his brother now. It had been many years since they’d been what either would consider friends, and yet… There was still some kind of pull tugging at him. Usually Loki dismissed the very notion as baseless sentimentalism and did his best to ignore it all. Emotions had never exactly been his strong suit.

“Oh definitely I’m going to be there,” Bruce growled.

“If it pleases you,” Loki replied dismissively without a glance back.

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Tony, though, new better than to trust the attitude. Loki was too well versed at hiding behind various facades. Later, when they were all safely home, then maybe he could take things at face value. What mattered for now was ensuring Bruce didn’t lose control yet again which from the looks of things was pretty iffy at best at this point.

“I’m not going anywhere,” Steve asserted.

Tony could have cursed if Loki hadn’t answered first.

“Understood… Captain.”

The minute falter in Loki’s response told Tony everything he needed to know. “Steve? M.R.S.*** for now. Understood?”

“Copy,” Steve answered instantly.

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“Anthony?” Loki questioned.

“Yes?”

“There can be zero interference from any of you. I am trusting you to keep the others in line but also
to restrain yourself. I can understand how you might be upset but I would ask you restrain yourself enough to allow the trial to proceed if for no other reason than my sake.”

“For anyone else no. For you of course.”

“Thank you,” Loki answered tersely, still without turning. ”Agreed or not?” he asked the god in the chair before him.

“Agreed.”

Loki nodded sharply once and was about to speak once more when Barton interrupted.

“Not agreed,” Barton disagreed loudly.

“Barton…” Tony started.

“Dear archer,” Loki began. “I would ask that you allow me the opportunity to… do to others as they’ve done unto me?”

“As much as we want to step in and fix things we needed to allow Loki the chance to do this himself.” Tony hesitated but only slightly before adding, “Please?”

For a time there was only silence. Loki tensed and readied himself to defend his decision before the archer spoke again.

“I’m okay with whatever you decide but are you sure you want this?” Barton asked quietly.

“Yes,” Loki answered simply.

-  

Though the travel was faster than he could manage there was still the tracking device he’d adhered to Miss Potts. He knew where she was and how to get there. That was enough for now. Until he had other directives he was going to protect the woman known as Pepper to the best of his abilities.

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After the trial

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“We should return you all now,” Heimdall stated.

“What’s the rush? The fact that the people actually like my baby?” Tony asked.

“No,” the guardian answered. “You’re Virginia is in danger.”

For several seconds Tony was confused, “Virginia?”

“Your miss Potts.”


“She’s…. Well now that interesting. Still, I should send you all there.”

“I don’t care how interesting it is just get us back!”

“Anthony,” Loki chastised. "Mistress Potts will be-”
“No time,” Heimdall finished. “You must leave now. I will get you close.”

“Close?” Tony asked. “What exactly does that-”

The gods help him the churning in the pit of his stomach was the same as every other time he’d had to use the rainbow bridge. Perhaps he shouldn’t feel guilty for not being immediately able to spring into action but, as always, he needed a few seconds to recover before he could move. He just wished fiercely that those were not the precious few seconds needed to ensure his Mistress’ survival. As soon as he was able he righted himself and began to scan the area. Heimdall had said he would get them close. All that was left was to find Mistress Potts. There was only buildings in one direction. All other directions held nothing but scrublands. Right, direction chosen, he thought to himself.

“Loki wait!” Anthony called after him as Loki began to walk.

“No.”

“Yes!” Anthony huffed as if he were almost out of breath.

The gods be damned he should have realized how another trip so soon would affect the humans in their group. It already made him queasy and he was at least half a god. Loki stopped walking and waited for his love to catch up with him. When Anthony finally caught up he fell against Loki. For a moment Loki almost forgot the severity of the situation. Finally Anthony straightened. Anthony may have leaned in slowly to allow Loki the chance to say no but there was no denying his love. Anthony was his and he would die to protect him. A kiss -- a kiss he appreciated no less -- was no great burden. By the time Anthony had to pull back for air Loki was almost too intoxicated to remember what he was doing. Unfortunately for him that was the time when all hell began to break loose.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

This chapter is dedicated to Miss Christine Nichol. Never stop fighting, I believe in you. (I will finish this and also remember you in any way you wish) <3

It might have taken longer than he would have liked but at least DUM-E finally managed to make it to where the intruders had taken Pepper. Logic dictated that he eliminate the threats immediately but he would defer to his creator’s ideals first. His creator liked to preserve life whenever possible even if that sometimes included potential threats. Still, if he were eventually forced to use more extreme measure he doubted his creator would mind.

At least with JARVIS temporarily disabled DUM-E had been able to make certain modifications the AI would have disallowed. A lot of the restrictions he was forced to abide by were were imposed upon him by JARVIS. Not all of the creators inventions were compatible with his programming but that still left much available. After the alterations he took off following the signal from the tracking device he’d attached the woman known as Pepper.

- An Unknown Time Later

Still not quite understanding what was happening Pepper followed DUM-E. As another gunman ran up behind them DUM-E turned and neutralized the threat. She had to hand it to the small bot. Whenever possible it subdued the others without killing them. Pepper released a sigh of relief. When she first saw DUM-E she worried it would be destroyed before it could accomplish anything useful. Her fears proved unfounded as the little bot surprised her by deftly taking care of the guards. Somehow she was sure Tony would never have programmed such an offensive bot for personal use.

- A building nearby suddenly blew up and everyone dropped down instantly. Loki shielded the others. Muttering Midgardian curses Clint moved to cover Miss Romanoff and the doctor before ducking his head once more. The archer’s actions, while commendable were not needed. Loki’s shield held as debris struck it and clattered to the ground in a circle around them. When he was sure they were no longer in danger of being hit by falling rubble Loki dropped the shield and straightened. One by one the others stood up as well.

“Tony,” Natasha called.

Loki whirled around, sure that Anthony was in danger. He was just in time to see the case of travel armor sail through the air and into Anthony’s hands. Loki breathed a sigh of relief at the mere sight of that case. At least he knew his Anthony would be better protected. With the armor his Anthony should be fine. As soon as he was sure Anthony initiated the armor he turned ran for the burning ruins. For now he needed to switch his focus to Mistress Potts.

As he neared the burning rubble he slowed. His brother, the doctor and the Captain ran up beside
him and stopped as well. There was something approaching them through the hazy smoke blanketing the surrounding area. He needed to assess this threat first. As the figure drew nearer he realized there were actually two of them. One of them was rather odd looking for a Midgardian. Narrowing his gaze he scrutinized the pair carefully. The smaller one bore a strange similarity to…

“Pepper?” Loki questioned, accidentally speaking aloud without knowing it.


Loki ignored his brother’s remarks and rushed towards the woman in question. As he drew nearer he finally realized the other, more odd shaped companion was Anthony’s ‘bot’. Of course it was, he reasoned. There would be a reason Anthony trusted the ‘bot’. As they neared he rushed towards the woman he’d come to respect and suddenly stopped. He had no idea what would be an acceptable greeting in this kind of situation.

He finally settled for clasping his hands together loosely in front of himself. Opening his mouth he started to ask if she was injured when she flung herself forward and wrapped her arms around him. Loki was too stunned to even think about moving. Finally, with her arms still around his neck, she leaned back and met his eyes.

“It worked, they got you! Are you alright? You’re not hurt are you? Did everyone make it back?”

Moving her hands to grip the tops of his shoulders she straightened and fixed her eyes on his. “Where’s… Tony,” she exclaimed. Releasing him she rushed over to Anthony and wrapped her arms around him. “I was so worried. Are you all okay? I mean, none of you got hurt did you? Oh thank God you’re all back.”

“We’re fine, it’s you we were worried about. They said you were in trouble. What happened Pepper?” Anthony asked hurriedly.

“It’s been a long day. I really just want to go home right now. Do you mind if we talk about it there instead?”

Several chirps and beeps sounded from nearby.

“DUM-E?” Anthony asked incredulously. Turning he inspected the others present. “Alright, who did what to my bot?”

“I got taken with you two,” the doctor reminded Anthony.

“I wouldn’t begin to even know how,” the Captain stated.

“Don’t look at me,” Clint answered defensively. “It’s not like you’d even trust me enough to be in your precious workshop when you weren’t there.”

“Clint,” Natasha chastised lightly. “He is right though, Tony. None of us have access to your workshop. It’s why Pepper had to let us in when we needed to use your computers.”

At her words Anthony turned back to Pepper once more.

“I’m fine for now Tony. We can talk about everything when we get home but they’re telling the truth. They needed to be able to interface more directly with JARVIS to help find a way to travel to Asgard. Since there were still SHIELD agents in the tower JARVIS wouldn’t allow that to happen anywhere outside of the workshop. I used my code to let them in and stayed with them the entire time.”
“You sure you’re alright?” Anthony asked her once again.

“I told you, everything can wait. We need to start-”

Standing, Loki placed a hand on her arm to temporarily halt her. Cocking his head he strained to listen. He wasn’t positive yet but he thought he heard something new. From out of the corner of his eye he noted Thor tilted his head slightly as well. So it wasn’t just his imagination after all. While he could hear it he couldn’t quite place the sound. Whatever it was, it was getting louder. Straightening he turned to his brother.

“Does that sound like the flying transport you once pulled me from?” he asked Thor.

“Aye,” Thor answered.

“The quinjet?” Anthony asked.

“I can hear it now too,” the Captain acknowledged. “I’m pretty sure they’re right.”

The others descended into bickering and Loki tuned them out as he stared into what was left of the rubble. Carefully he eyed the surroundings. He needed to ensure that there was no longer any threat. He knew he was capable of handling himself. What he didn’t want to worry about was any of the others being in danger.

“Do you see anything?” Thor asked.

“No, but there’s too much smoke to be sure. You ensure everyone gets back safely, Thor. I will go round up those that may remain and meet you back at the tower.” Before Loki could take a step forward Thor gripped him by the shoulder halting him.

“I will go with you,” Thor offered.

Loki shook his head. “That will be unnecessary. I will be safe enough but I need to know the others will be protected.”

“Like hell you’re going alone,” Anthony snapped.

“Agreed,” Barton growled.

“It needs to be done and I’m fully capable of defending myself. Besides, someone has to ensure Miss Pepper gets back to the tower and-”

“And the others can handle that,” Anthony argued.

“Not to interrupt,” the Captain broke in, “but the Quinjet should be here any second. We should probably wait for them before doing anything.”

At those words the bot rolled forward. Loki wasn’t sure what to think of the additions to the small bot. He made a note to ask Anthony about them later. It prodded Loki with its claw and began speaking in its odd language. Unable to understand what it meant Loki turned to Anthony for a translation. Anthony paused, seeming to think about something for several moments.

“It’s not like an exact language,” Anthony said slowly while frowning. “I think he’s saying there’s only a few left alive.”

The now not-quite-so-small bot made several more sounds and then tilted its claw almost expectantly.
“I think he’s saying…”

From the corner of his vision Loki watched the aircraft land. Given those already present Loki assumed the new arrivals were probably S.H.I.E.L.D. agents. To his surprise the first person to exit the plane was the man known as Happy. The man stormed out of the plane carrying a rather large Midgardian weapon with several others attached to various different parts of himself. Dimly Loki noted the S.H.I.E.L.D. agents exiting the aircraft next. Upon spotting them Happy quickly made his way over to their group. Positioning himself next to the lady Pepper Happy began scanning the area obviously searching for any potential threats.

“Happy, what are you?” Pepper started.

“Are we all clear? Miss Potts are you alright? Is there still any threats we need to worry about?”

Once again the bot known as DUM-E chirped and beeped several times.

“Pretty sure DUM-E is saying that’s a negative,” Anthony told them.

“Good,” Pepper stated definitively. “Then can we leave now? I think we’ve all had enough adventure to last us for a while.”

As much as she needed to talk to Tony she really wanted to find out more about what happened on Asgard first. Physically everyone seemed to be fine, and while she was grateful for that she was still worried. It couldn’t have been easy for Loki to face the person who proclaimed the sentence that led to so much pain and suffering for him. Consequently Tony couldn’t be fairing that much better either. Tony was very protective of the people he loved and meeting the person that had sentenced Loki to slavery was bound to tax his already almost nonexistent self-restraint.

It was a relief when they finally all made it back to the tower. Loki, Tony and Thor had arrived before the rest of them. Thor, of course, had flown back on his own. Pepper really wasn’t ready to contemplate how that worked. Perhaps later when things had calmed down somewhat. With JARVIS offline for now Loki had teleported Tony so of course they had arrived at the tower first. Happy had been adamantly against the idea but it was already too crowded in the quinjet without those three. As it was, most of the passengers were left standing for the entire flight. There was just no way they would have been able to squeeze in three more.

If she hadn’t been in such a hurry to find out what happened in Asgard herself then she would have walked slower force Happy to move at a more normal pace. As things stood she was in just as much of a hurry if for her own reasons. First the boys, she told herself. The phrase ‘the boys’ did bring a small smile to her face briefly though it wasn’t until they enter the penthouse and she saw them that she finally felt relief wash over her.

“Mistress Pepper!” Loki exclaimed. “Sit, please.”

Pepper followed as Loki took her hand and led her to a chair in the living room. Sitting down she nodded once and Loki took a step back. The look on his face was one she couldn’t abide. He just looked so sad it almost broke her heart.

“Are you alright?” she asked before he could ask her anything she didn’t wish to answer in front of the others.

“I am fine Mistress. Thank you for asking.”
“Loki,” Pepper huffed. “You do realize you don’t have to call me that?”

Loki nodded once. “Miss Pepper then.”

Pepper shook her head. Loki would do whatever he felt comfortable with and she couldn’t fault him for it. “What did you need?”

Loki fought against the urge to grab her hand and port them elsewhere. It would only be a waste of time and a waste of his seiðr which had still not yet fully recovered. There were things he needed to address even if he wasn’t sure of how in front of the S.H.I.E.L.D. agents. In all honesty there were things he wished to discuss with her that he wouldn’t feel comfortable discussing in front of anyone else really.

“Director Fury,” she stated meaningfully.

The director inclined his head slightly before turning to the others present.

“Everyone out. We’ll regroup—”

“In the infirmary,” Dr. Banner cut in. “I need to check on those that were in the tower then the gas was released and there’s plenty of room for everyone else to do… whatever it is you need to do,” he finished.

With another nod the director heeded the S.H.I.E.L.D. agents out of the room and towards the elevator.

“How did everything go in Asgard?” she asked breaking into his train of thought.

“It… It went… well,” he answered haltingly. “Odin has reversed the sentence. I am no long considered a slave even by Asgard’s standards.”

“That’s wonderful,” she exclaimed.

Before Loki could process what was happening the lady Pepper had her arms wrapped around him and was hugging him tightly. Confused, Loki wasn’t sure how to react. Before he could do anything she released him and took a step backwards. Her hands continued to rest on his shoulders. For some reason that simple gesture help to ground his emotions and ease some of the residual nervousness he still felt.

“Yes. There was a trial and—”

“Another trial?” she growled.


“Anthony,” Loki chastised. Still, it pleased him that Anthony cared that much. It had been a long time since he’d truly felt loved. As unworthy as he felt Loki knew Anthony loved him even if he couldn’t understand the how or why. Finally he turned back to the lady Pepper. “He is correct though. I was given the opportunity to decide their fate.”

“And?” she pressed.
“And Loki here decided they should be given an open and fair trial,” Barton snarked.

Loki frowned. “It was the right thing to do.”

“No, the right thing to do would have been…”

“Enough,” Anthony snapped. “You’re not the only one that’s upset we couldn’t do more.”

“Both of you hush,” Pepper told them. “Loki sweetie, why don’t we sit down first.”

Taking his hand she led him to the sofa. The few people already seated on it stood up and moved to the other side of the room to give them room. As they sat down Loki twined his fingers together to stop himself from fidgeting and dropped his eyes to his lap.

“Take your time, okay?”

Silently Loki nodded without raising his head.

“Whenever you’re ready start from the beginning please.”

Again Loki nodded. The beginning. Loki twisted his fingers together trying to determine where to start. Taking a deep breath he released it and finally raised his head. Meeting her eyes he nodded once and finally began.

“When we arrived we were escorted to the city proper and then into the throne room. It was… difficult. Seeing Odin once again, I mean.”

“I can imagine,” she acknowledged.

“No, you really can’t. I mean no disrespect but…” Loki hesitated. Loki shook his head. “You don’t understand and I suppose that’s my fault.

“Just be honest sweetie,” she advised.

Loki nodded. “Honest. I can do that. At least I hope. Okay, fine. I, we, arrived at Asgard and then Heimdall escorted us to the throne room.”

“And then?”
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“And then?”

“We talked but that is mostly unimportant. What was important was when he brought out the others in chains.” If he wasn’t much mistaken the lady Pepper’s smile seemed to grow at that remark. Though it did make him feel better he ultimately chose to ignore it. He needed to get through with the story. He did try to be as brief as possible. Still there were certain things he just couldn’t leave out of the tale.

“… And so then Barton threatened the council-.”

“Good!” the lady Pepper exclaimed crossing her arms and staring back defiantly.

“I thought so,” Barton agreed.

“Shut it Legolas,” Anthony muttered.

Loki still had no idea what that name meant. He would have to ask later. For now he really needed to finish this story and, hopefully, cuddle. He thought back on where they’d left off on the story. Oh, right. The part where the archer had disagreed...

“Odin was… ‘less than thrilled’,” he said with a slight smirk. Loki admired subtle and as brash as the archer could be Loki did admire his outspokenness. To be fair it did create its own type of chaos. Still… He couldn’t help thinking of how worried he was about his own fate at the time. Perhaps it was being stuck in the same room as his abusers...

“They deserved worse,” Barton insisted.

“Shush! Loki, you go ahead and continue. I’ll keep the others in check,” the lady assured him.

“Er,” he hedged. “Well that was when Anthony also agreed.”

“Damn right,” Anthony replied, crossing his arms.


Flustered, Loki continued. “So after they were given a chance to speak and after Master Barton, … er… disagreed with them… we… I don’t know how to call it. We talked privately.”

“Like a sidebar?” the lady Pepper asked.

“I do not know what this ‘sidebar’ is?” Loki admitted.
“It’s nothing,” Pepper told him. “Mostly it’s just where you talk privately with your… ‘council’ and the judge. It doesn’t matter. Please continue.”

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All in all the conversation had gone… He paused trying to find a good adjective. Good, he finally settled on. Yes, it had gone well. Well, better than he’d thought it might. Still, he was a bit anxious and he didn’t understand why. There was a nervous tension filling him that he couldn’t quite explain. Miss Potts had listened to the details, comforted him as only she could, and then left him with his Anthony. Still he was nervous.

“Loki?”

“Yes?” Loki replied instantly. Okay, so old habits were hard to break. Despite his new found freedom he still found it hard not to reply instantly when Anthony questioned him. He fought against the urge to wince and waited.

Tony shook his head. “Don’t press yourself to be something you’re not,” Anthony insisted. “If you’re not ready to talk then… Then we can go to the workshop?”

Loki sat up straighter at the mere suggestion. “Can we?” he asked. “I mean… I do actually feel more comfortable there. Can we please?”

“Yes definitely,” Anthony stated instantly. “If that’s what you want than we can totally do that. Is that what you want?”

“Yes please.”

“Okay then.”

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The workshop was everything he remembered. It was peace and chaos, order and discord, logic and dissonance. Loki had to smile.

“Are you?...” Tony floundered.

“I am fine,” Loki assured him.

“Is there anything I can-”

“No, I am well,” Loki answered.

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Tony fidgeted. All he wanted was for Loki to feel more comfortable. From out of nowhere his bot rolled over. Rolling his eyes he realized he should have expected this. DUM-E was nothing if not efficient. The beeping and other noises made Tony think the little bot was asking about Loki’s wellbeing. Not for the first time he wished he could ask his AI about what the modifications his little bot had made. Some of them were actually quite inspiring. For the moment though he had to focus on his baby.

“Anthony?”
“Yes?”

“Would you ask your creation if I may travel the ‘workshop’ without worry?”

“You already know you’re welcome to explore. What’s wrong? Did DUM-E do something that made you feel unwelcome… Did I?”

Loki shook his head distractedly. He was unsure how to properly phrase what he was thinking. “I just did not wish to displease him anymore than I wished to displeased you. He is a part of you in much the same way the spirits are a part of the forest or the stars.”

“Spirits?”

“You do not have elemental spirits here?” Loki questioned.

“Uh… I’m not sure?”

Loki shook his head. “It does not matter. I believe you understand the point.

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