Home Is Not A Place

by eyeus

Summary

*Asgard is not a place, it is a people,* Thor had said of their lost home, over the course of their voyage.

And when Loki, eyes red-rimmed and dark, haunted by shadows for far too long, said, “Home? Perhaps I never had one,” Thor can make only one assurance that soothes the tumult in his brother’s heart: *Home is not a place, but a person.*

*That person could be me.*

Notes

Post-Ragnarok AU. Ignores the appearance of Thanos’ ship at the end of Thor: Ragnarok, and the Infinity War storyline altogether. Inspired by this gifset [here](http://archiveofourown.org-work/13405758).

Thor’s words “Asgard is not a place, it is a people” reminded me of the above gifset from some years back, which said:

someone asked me to describe home
and i started talking about your hair, and the sound of your voice,
and how your skin feels, and the softness of your lips
until I realized
they had expected to hear a place.

And lo, this fic was born.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Homeward

Chapter Notes

- In this fic, the last scenes of Thor: Ragnarok are shifted to be in this order: 1) Thor takes his place at the ship’s bridge as king, 2) Loki and Thor stand looking out at the cosmos and discuss going to Earth, 3) the “I’m Here” scene (in Thor’s private chambers)

- The mid-credit scene is shifted to an observation deck instead of Thor’s room, so that Thor and Loki may move to a more intimate place later.

- The names of the ships in the Thor: Ragnarok artbook are listed as the Statesman for the giant Sakaaran vessel, and the Commodore for the Grandmaster’s pleasure craft, so those are the names I’m going with here.

- That’s it for now! Happy reading! :D

~

They are standing at the observation deck of the Sakaaran transport vessel—stolen, Thor calls it, commandeered, Loki insists—watching the stars drift by, when Loki first broaches the matter.

“Do you really think it’s a good idea, to bring me back to Earth?” Loki asks. This is after Thor has assured him that of course it is a good idea to return to Earth, for they love Thor on Midgard.

Probably not, thinks Thor. The last Loki had been there, he had managed to earn the wrath of each of the Avengers, caused a fury in Director Fury himself, and devastated New York City. It would be all they remembered of him, their anger having only abated slightly after discovering that Loki was dead.

What their reactions will be when they discover Loki is not, Thor does not look forward to finding out.

“Asgard’s new home will be there,” Thor says carefully, in the end. He pauses, letting his gaze linger on Loki, before deciding to keep his next thought unspoken. But it will not be home without you.

“Home,” Loki muses, the corners of his mouth turning up, wry. “Yes, for you. For them.” He flicks a glance to the decks below, where their people sleep in groups, huddled together for safety despite the chambers assigned them. Driven from Asgard by their rulers’ secrecy, folly, and lies.

“For all of us,” Thor insists. He wants very much to reach out, wanting to touch Loki, wanting affection in return—desiring a nameless something—but he holds himself back, for softness will not win him Loki’s heart. His innermost thoughts. Not yet.

He searches instead for the words to reassure Loki that he has a place with them, with Thor—for had he not titled his self-indulgent play The Tragedy of Loki of Asgard?—when Loki speaks again, a vein of laughter in his voice, self-deprecating, that makes Thor’s heart clench in his chest.

“I highly doubt,” Loki says, his head tilted, considering, “that I have a place to call home any
longer.” He glances behind them through the domed windows, and out to the cosmos where Asgard no longer stands, before gazing ahead in the direction of Midgard, the site of his ill attempts at subjugation gone wrong. “Perhaps I’ve…never really had one,” he sighs.

It is a sad thing, Thor thinks, for Loki to believe he has home neither behind nor ahead.

*Asgard is not a place, it is a people.* Thor had said to Heimdall, Valkyrie, and Loki, and the sentiment had carried itself to their people, all of whom had fled everything they once knew. Leaving so much of their lives behind. But to Loki, there is now a better assurance he can make, one that might soothe the tumult in his brother’s heart, for Thor cannot bear to see him so forlorn.

“Perhaps home is not a—” he manages, before Loki’s gaze fixes on Thor, his brow furrowed, and all courage flies from Thor’s heart at once.

The words are too sentimental, Thor tells himself. Too *much*, especially for Loki. He decides to keep them hidden for now. To keep them secret and safe, until opportunity presents itself.

“We will *make* a home,” Thor says instead. It dawns upon him now that he is no longer saying *come home*, but suggesting the wholly novel idea that they will create one—together. “You and I could…” He lets the rest go unspoken, knowing Loki will hearken back to his own words on Sakaar, with his suggestion of arranging an accident for the Grandmaster, whereupon the two of them would rule in his place.

*You, Loki* had motioned, *and I, could…*

For a moment, Thor considers flashing a thumbs-up as Loki had at the time, to finish off this thought, before thinking better of it. Lets his fingers reach out for Loki instead, cautious, heartened that when he brushes their fingers together, Loki does not draw away.

“We will *make* one,” Thor tries again, softer this time, “if you would be willing.” And perhaps it *is* too much sentiment, too soon, but Thor cannot hold back, as they have lost everything—their realm, their parents, the lives they had known—for he adds, openly honest, “I wish you *would* be, Loki. How I wish you *would* be.”


Loki only graces him with a ghost of a smile in return, letting Thor know exactly what he thinks of such empty platitude. Draws away, slow. It is a change, Thor thinks, from Loki jerking out of his grip, sudden, or slapping Thor away, but one so small that he cannot call this a victory.

“If you don’t mind, I have some reading I’d like to do before bed,” Loki says, his gaze sliding away to fix on a distant point past Thor.

“Oh—yes, by all means,” Thor says, inclining his head. He resists the urge to reach out, to tilt Loki’s chin until his gaze meets Thor’s, to force *some* acknowledgement of Thor’s offer from him. Resists the need to chase after the warmth of Loki’s touch, disappointment heavy in his heart when Loki’s fingers had left his.

He should have *known* softness would not win him Loki’s heart, or his affection, long missed.

Loki takes his leave of Thor then, the sound of his footsteps fading quickly, but at the sound of returning footsteps, Thor turns, elated, for perhaps Loki has reconsidered Thor’s words, has decided —
“Tough crowd tonight,” says Valkyrie, springing up behind Thor, sudden. She jabs him between the shoulder blades, sharp, and likely her version of playful.

Korg is rather more tactful, settling a heavy, jagged hand on Thor’s shoulder. “Hey, man,” he says, with a rough squeeze. “Don’t worry, he’ll come around.”

Thor had not even noticed their presence, so focused on Loki as he was, and a mortified heat surges to his cheeks, to know they both heard that entire exchange. Then he remembers that nearly nothing is sacred on this ship, considering their close quarters.

“Thank you, friends,” Thor nods, though he is only really thanking Korg for the hope he gives. Valkyrie seems to simply delight in rubbing salt in his wounds, at present.

“Besides,” beams Korg, always a font of pure optimism, “if he doesn’t, there’s always tomorrow. And the tomorrow after that. And the tomorrow after that.”

Thor stops listening after Korg loops around on his seventh and the tomorrow after that, but there is truth in the Kronan’s words; from where they are now to Midgard, there will be an abundance of tomorrows, and each one brings with it yet another chance to show Loki he cares, to say the words trapped in his heart.

With that encouraging thought, Thor takes his leave of his comrades, and returns to his chambers, resolving to reach Loki again soon.

Tomorrow, he thinks, fanning the tiny flame of hope in his heart, for they have that now.

Tomorrow.

~

Redemption, however, seems to come swifter than tomorrow.

No sooner has Thor begun pouring a nightcap for himself—for the Statesman’s time mechanisms say it is night, insofar as there can be, in deep space—than he finds Loki slipping into his room, silent, tentative. As if uncertain of his right to be here.

Still, it warms something in Thor’s heart, a return of the old where Thor goes, Loki follows; of late it had been more of Loki wreaking havoc somewhere, and Thor following in his wake to soothe ruffled feathers and make reparations for whatever Loki had done wrong.

Loki remains silent, however, hovering, waiting.

A multitude of words crowd to be spoken, Thor thinks, like thank you for what you did, or perhaps you’re not so bad after all, but they all seem inadequate in this moment between them.

“If you were actually here, I might give you a hug,” Thor decides, grinning, as he tosses the stopper of the open decanter at Loki.

He had wanted to, deeply, desperately, when Loki finished docking the Commodore on their transport vessel. Wanted to say you’re late, and rush toward him to crush Loki into his arms, for proof of his presence, his life, thankful he had just managed to escape Surtur’s wrath. But upon Loki’s disembarkment, Asgardians young and old had crowded around him, asking if he was safe, if their saviour was well, and Loki had blinked, stunned at this surfeit of attention. It was the adoration Loki had always wanted, and Thor thought to let him have it, let him revel in the moment, even as Loki’s eyes had met his across the hangar.
“I’m here,” Loki says now, catching the stopper in his palm, easy. But still he hangs back, as if unsure if Thor’s offer was made in sincerity or jest.

“Loki,” says Thor, gentling his voice. He does not command him to come here, only opens his arms, hoping it is invitation enough.

This time Loki comes willingly, a rarity, a treat; Thor had not dropped out of a lightning-shorn sky, torn him from a stranger’s flying contraption, then forcibly manhandled him and told him to come home. In retrospect that had been rather heavy-handed. Now, Loki approaches, hesitant, unsure, but he comes all the same. And when he finally steps into Thor’s arms, curling his arms beneath Thor’s shoulders so cautiously that Thor’s heart aches for him, Thor cannot help but slip his hand into the nape of Loki’s neck, gentle. Wind his other hand around his brother’s waist, tight, tugging him in, delighted to find him warm and solid and real.

The hug is all warmth and quiet affection, and Thor has missed this, missed holding his brother in his arms, missed Loki. He bunches Loki’s cloak in his hands, clinging, greedy, grabbing great handfuls of him as Loki allows. Lets Loki do the same in return, lets him bury his face in Thor’s neck, with a soft, hurt noise, as if the weight of the past days’ events has come crashing down on them all at once.

He cannot recall the last time they had shared this, a thought that strikes a chord of sadness in his heart doubly deep. And perhaps it is risking too much, but Thor cannot help himself, turning his head, minute, to press a kiss to Loki’s hair. A tiny, secret affection, an action so small it could be hidden. But Loki turns at the last moment—whether to say something, to breathe, Thor knows not—and Thor’s discreet kiss lands on his temple instead, lips hot against Loki’s skin.

Loki pulls away instantly, his expression unreadable, making their first hug in long years too brief and disappointing. Sweeps a hand over his back, as if he fears Thor has tagged him with another obedience disc, intending to shock him again. As if the kiss was meant as distraction, and not a genuine motion, secret and soft.

“Loki, I did not—” Thor tries with a sigh, silenced only when Loki shoots him a disdainful glare.

“You will forgive me for checking,” Loki says, waspish, “as the last time I thought we reconciled, you left me seizing on the floor of the Grandmaster’s hangar.”

“Reconciled?” Thor swallows a squawk, indignant. “You were going to turn me in to the Grandmaster, and claim the reward for my capture!”

But of what would happen after there was no question: Loki would have indeed set himself up nicely with the Grandmaster’s money, then arranged a special accident for the ruler, after which he would visit Thor in whatever prison he was locked in, lord it over him for a while, then pull him from perdition to rule Sakaar beside him.

That is, if Thor was not melted by the Melt Stick first.

Loki’s mouth opens and closes, as if ready to spout his own stream of indignations, but he swallows them all, through pure force of will. “Yet here we are,” he says finally. His voice is soft, regret already coloring his words.

Here they were; they had both done cruel things to each other, thoughtless and countless in number.

Thor remembers then, how Loki had arrived at the eleventh hour with the Sakaaran transport ship, the only way to save the remaining Asgardians, with the Bifrost shattered. How he had trusted only Loki to bring about the finishing touches to Ragnarok, knowing it was the biggest and boldest
gambit either of them had ever undertaken. Loki had *delivered*, time and time again, when it mattered most.

“Here we are,” Thor agrees, quiet.

He wonders how things went so wrong, so quickly; following a hug, he had hoped to invite Loki to bed, perhaps try his luck at rekindling the age-old intimacies between them. But there is a time and place for such things, and it is clearly not now.

“You should take some rest, brother,” Loki says, when the silence between them stretches infinite. “The night has been long, and the meeting for the course we must chart to Midgard tomorrow even longer.” Loki starts to take his leave of Thor, but Thor reaches out without thinking, circling Loki’s wrist with his fingers, warm.

“Loki, *wait*,” he says softly.

Wonder of all wonders, Loki *does*. But he does not turn to meet Thor’s gaze.

“You said,” Thor tries, his voice tight, “that perhaps you have never really had a home.” Loki stiffens, but does not speak. “Perhaps,” Thor ventures, summoning every ounce of his courage to say what he could not at the observation deck, “home is not a place, but a person.”

*Asgard is not a place, it is a people,* he had said, and perhaps the same rang true; one could make a home of it where their loved ones were, no matter where. His fingers tighten around Loki’s wrist, the compulsion to bridge the connection between them overwhelming, and Thor reaches out to clasp Loki’s other hand as well, for the touch would give him courage, to speak the words truly in his heart:

*Perhaps that person could be me.*

Loki’s turns then, his gaze too sharp, as if considering each angle, each meaning Thor’s words could have, the intensity of it stilling Thor’s next words in his throat. Thor drops his gaze first—a mistake, he discovers, as Loki shakes loose his grip, snatching his hand back as if Thor has struck him a searing wound. “A heartwarming sentiment,” Loki sneers, “from the man who has just cost an entire realm their homes.”

The insult lances pain through Thor’s chest, instant. It is truth Loki speaks, and it is Thor’s heart Loki has thrown back at him, unwanted. He has half a mind to fling Loki’s vitriol back in his face, acid words of *It was not I who set Hela loose, in a selfish desire to be king.* But to do so would be to cast the first stone, when neither of them are blameless in this, and they would be at each others’ throats again, for however many years it takes for Loki’s ire to settle.

He would not disturb this tentative peace between them for a moment’s victory.

Loki decides to take his leave of Thor then, stalking toward the door. But at the last moment he turns, inexplicably, and *lingers.* Thor thinks him readying himself to land a final blow, cruel and barbed, but Loki only *looks* at him, maddeningly silent, before letting the door slide shut behind him. Presumably to head to his own chambers next door, where Loki has made it all but clear Thor is unwelcome.

It seems, Thor decides, as he settles on his bed with a sigh, raking hands through his hair, that he will have to fall back on old hopes. *Tomorrow,* he repeats, a mantra, a prayer. Trust could not be completely rebuilt between them in a night, or even a fortnight, but Thor is hopeful that it *will* be, soon enough, leading to softer words. Gentler touches.
Still, some part of him cautions him against baring his heart to Loki again, and conflicted so, he spends long hours staring at the ceiling, hands joined behind his head. Wondering at his next plan of action.

Thor finds slumber eventually, but it is fitful and troubled and filled with terrible dreams—of hateful blades, black and sharp and spiteful, and flames sunk deep into the heart of a dying planet.

In the end, Thor decides to leave Loki to his own devices.

Back on Midgard, Thor had asked for Tony’s advice on the nature of such things, his questions vague and his answers evasive, until Tony had thrown his hands up, exasperated. “Look, I don’t know what else to tell you, big guy,” Tony had said. “If you love something, set it free. If it comes back to you, it’s yours; if it doesn’t, it never was.”

And had Loki not returned to him, time and time again? Except when Thor had thought Loki could be his, he would vanish again, leaving Thor to think that perhaps he never was.

Thor decides now that since he has tried gentle affection—with mixed results—the only choice left to him is affected indifference. Which is a fine and difficult line to walk when it comes to Loki.

His plan lasts precisely two hours the next morning, before Loki seeks him at the bridge, to share some inconsequential information on the ship’s status, and Thor, delighted at Loki’s presence, forgets all about the indifference he is affecting and reaches out to squeeze Loki’s fingers, beaming.

Whether it is the indifference that brings Loki to him now, or his words from the night before having struck home, Thor cannot bring himself to wonder; that Loki is here is proof enough that not all is lost between them. And when Loki only glances down at their joined fingers, a tiny hitch in his breath all the acknowledgment he makes, Thor takes it as a sign. That Loki is willing to receive small affections. His attention.

So Thor presses his advantage immediately.

“I shall have need of plates to lay out for the coming meal,” he says, his shoulder brushing against Loki’s as he passes him in the mess hall. It is the start of his regimen to verify Loki’s presence, not by throwing things at him, but by touching, small, and soft and subtle. And oftentimes, made to look accidental.

“I must have a closer look at this control panel,” Thor announces at the bridge. He stretches forth his hand for a switch that lies just past his reach—past Loki—elated when his fingers graze the soft leather of Loki’s sleeve.

“I am to search for a sack of flour,” Thor declares at the galley, where he knows Loki has just been sent to search for potatoes. He reaches for the flour, the sack steady in his arms, before turning and letting their elbows knock together. Accidentally, of course. It earns him a hiss, for Loki nearly drops his sack of potatoes, but with his purpose served, Thor continues merrily on his way.

If he finds it inordinately adorable how Loki huffs or clicks his tongue in annoyance at each such inadvertent contact, Thor keeps it to himself. Only allows the curve of his lips into a smile when he returns to his chambers, for if Loki suspects Thor has somehow gained a victory over him—and he has, thrice—he would not so easily overlook Thor’s actions, his clumsiness well-feigned or not.

When, for the fifth time, Thor discovers that Loki is very much real and there—Loki is becoming here more often, Thor finds—he dares a little more. Decides on the next occasion to walk boldly
right at Loki when inspecting the escape pods, unruffled when he bumps into his brother, the contact a secret pleasure instead.

“It is the eye,” Thor claims, immediate. He taps at the patch over his ruined eye, as Loki fixes him with the sternest glare. “I am still growing accustomed to its loss.”

There are sharp words on Loki’s tongue, Thor knows, as he opens his mouth to mock. Perhaps he will make a jibe at how the mighty have fallen, trundling along, ruthlessly bumping into things. But all Loki says, as he reaches out to steady Thor, with a hand at his elbow, is “It will come in time, brother.”

Of course, this ploy does not work every time. There is the one incident where Thor passes almost completely through one of Loki’s illusions, his weight along the banister overbalanced, before Loki is there, instant, bearing him up before Thor plummets to the deck below. “Norns,” Loki murmurs, his hands clutched tight around Thor’s shoulders. A fine tremor runs through them, one Thor can feel all the way down his arms. “Must I do everything for you?”

These are signs enough for Thor to determine that Loki is not completely averse to such touches, even going so far as to return them. And from there on, Thor aims beyond the accidental. Lets his touches grow bolder in their nature.

He first rests his hand on Loki’s shoulder, when looking over the adjusted course for Midgard that they chart with Heimdall and Valkyrie. Lets it linger, pleased at the warmth from Loki’s skin beneath leather. Loki flicks a glance at the touch, but does not speak of it otherwise.

“What say you to an early dinner?” Thor asks, after Loki has shown his brilliance regarding the issue of the gangway airlock not sealing properly. He curls his fingers around Loki’s wrist, warm, and when Loki simply shrugs his agreement, dares to thread their fingers together. Keeps Loki’s hand in his as they make their way to the mess hall.

The touches continue, Thor’s fingers navigating through the soft, curled ends of Loki’s hair. The lean space between his shoulder blades. The small of his back. Wrap deftly around Loki’s waist once, when they find themselves at the observation deck again, sharing their worries about the next refuelling stop.

And when Thor discovers that these touches seem welcome, he decides to, as Tony fondly terms it, up the ante—by adding little compliments to his repertoire of touches. To appeal to Loki’s ego now, in addition to his heart.

Loki is not the only one who can devise plans.

~

Thor’s first forays go as smoothly as can be expected; he meets Loki’s suggestion on how to improve the Statesman’s fuel efficiency with a nod and that is a good idea, and sets the ex-rebels from Sakaar to the task. Loki’s insistence at then healing the wounded forthwith and quickly establishing a garden within the ship is perplexing, but Thor does not question it too deeply, for they should become self-sustaining to some degree, especially if there is no opportunity to trade for fresh fruits and vegetables.

“That is a fine idea,” Thor nods as well, his hand cupped over Loki’s. Remembers to swallow the words actually a good idea or a good idea—for you, to avoid sounding condescending.

And when the wounded are seen to, as well as Loki’s oddly secret garden—to which he had barred Thor entry, for it was a private project between him and few others, he claimed—he follows Loki’s
sensible instruction to gather able-bodied Asgardians and Sakaarans. Sets off with them to take inventory of their supplies, including that of food, infirmary items, weapons, and miscellaneous cargo they found aboard.

“We must know exactly what we have, and how much of it,” Loki says. “So when we finally make a refuelling stop, we know how much we can afford to set aside for trade. And not waste that on negotiating for things we do not need,” he adds, when Thor mournfully eyes the dwindling pile of armaments, a quarter of it set aside for sale.

After they have exact counts for everything on the ship, Thor finds Loki gazing out the window of the observation deck, contemplative. Slides an arm around Loki’s waist, his fingers closing just over the jut of Loki’s hip, and waits for Loki to speak.

“Our father…” Loki tries, hesitant. And before Thor can gape at him in amazement—for Loki had said our sister, two sons of the crown, and now our father, all of which speak to his acceptance of his place in their family, sundered as it is—Loki adds, “We have not yet mourned his loss.”

“We have not yet had opportunity to.” Thor strokes his thumb along Loki’s side, gentle, as he mulls this over.

“No. That we have not. Nor have any of the people on this ship.” Loki pauses, thoughtful. “Perhaps we ought to set aside a day to do so. Commemorate those who fell, and let our people mourn their dead.”

Our people, Thor hears, a blossom of warmth unfurling bright in his chest. And Loki is right; there is time now, to grieve for their fallen, with the initial maintenance and day to day issues seen to.

“That is a sound suggestion,” Thor beams, with a satisfied pat of Loki’s side. “I only wish I had thought of it myself.” Finds himself pleased when he catches the tiny smile flitting to Loki’s mouth, secret and soft against the hard lines of his mouth.

They send out word of the coming arrangements, and by the next night, Loki transforms the communal atrium into a chamber worthy of honouring the fallen. Conjures warm, amber mage-lights in rows along the atrium ceiling, and lays a glamour on the ship’s walls to make it resemble the great Hall of Asgard, with golden beams and walls, and banners emblazoned with their realm’s common motifs. Ensures that their fallen rebel friends from Sakaar have the colors of their home planets represented also, in an arc of banners draping the small podium Loki has turned into a grand dais for tonight’s speech-making.

Thor surveys all those who have assembled, quiet. There are the widows and children of the loyal Einherjar who fell against Hela or her hound. Their parents, elderly, and far too many ailing. And there are comrades of those Thor had known on Sakaar, brave companions who had fallen fighting for a homeland that was not even theirs, a thought that saddens Thor’s heart.

When all of the people have gathered, Thor rises from his seat at the dais, Loki, Heimdall, and Valkyrie at his side. Finds himself heartened when all those before him rise as well.

“Tonight,” Thor begins, “we honour those who gave their lives, to defend Asgard to the last. Friends. Comrades. Fathers. Sons. All will be sorely missed. And all will be deeply remembered.” With that, he lifts the mug of ale in his hand, solemn, and takes the first drink. There is a murmured assent, a quiet ripple of hear, hear, as all those gathered follow suit.

“Not one for protracted speeches, are you, brother?” Loki says after. His tone is just short of teasing, as he slips into his seat beside Thor. He has a full mug in hand, and Thor looks into his own,
frowning when he discovers that he has drained his first drink far too quickly.

“I know you could have made a better one—” Thor starts, before Loki shakes his head.

“No, this honour was yours,” Loki says quietly. “I would not take that from you. From their king.” He offers the mug, before Thor can form an appropriate response. “To whom shall we drink this night?”

“To our father,” Thor says, lifting the proffered mug to his lips with both hands, then letting Loki do the same. The ale, casks of which were found in the Statesman’s cargo hold, is weak and watered down, to make drink enough for all on the ship. But it will do for their purposes.

“To our mother, whom we also had little time to mourn,” Loki replies, as they take another drink together.

The ale is bitter in his mouth then, and Thor swallows hard, past the knot of guilt forming tight in his throat. For Frigga had fallen, needless, against an enemy Thor brought to their realm. “To…to our fallen friends,” he says, after a moment to compose himself. “Volstagg. Fandral. Hogun.” Sif had not been seen among the dead, and for this one, small thing, Thor is grateful.

“They were your friends,” Loki scoffs. But when Thor places his hand over Loki’s on the table, letting Loki know he needs this, needs to know his brother is with him in this grief, Loki draws a long breath in, and drinks. “To absent family and friends,” he concedes, acknowledgement of all the people they mourn for this night. He turns his palm up to meet Thor’s, a gesture, however small, that warms Thor’s heart immensely.

Following the mourning period, after which everyone seems in better sprits, Loki arrives with new suggestions. First among them is the division of day to day responsibilities needed to keep the ship running.

“While the duties for basics such as navigation, fuelling, healing, and gardening are seen to, I speak now of cooking—” Loki snorts when Thor beams wholeheartedly, for they have been living off the ship’s shrink-wrapped meals until now, or the kindness of whoever was experimenting in the galley. “Yes, cooking. Cleaning. Teaching. Engineering. And data collection, among others.” He holds a tablet out to Thor, with a list of all the occupations that need filling. “Let the people sign up for the jobs they wish, or are familiar with. Although,” he adds, arching a brow, “I expect there to be a few surprises.”

“That is a brilliant idea,” Thor says, honest. “Though I do not see why you keep bringing these ideas to me, rather than implementing yourself.”

“Well,” Loki says, casting a withering look at Thor, “I am not their king.”

Thor frowns; it is an issue he has no solution for at present, though he resolves to work on one. For the time being, however, he continues to accept Loki’s suggestions gracefully, knowing his brother wants Thor to lend his voice to them, putting them into effect more quickly.

After the responsibilities have been assigned, the first data crews put to work monitoring the ship’s systems, and the first galley hands set upon creating actual food, Loki insists for a hot, thin soup to be made and distributed to all during the first meal of each week.

Thor does not question this strange request; only sends on the order to have two ladles of it set with each such meal, as Loki instructs. Besides, the soup is sweet and filling, and strangely reminiscent of home, though he cannot place the taste.
“This is delicious,” Thor declares, already on his last spoonful of the first trial serving. They are set to distribute it to the rest of the ship’s inhabitants the day after next. “We should have this at every meal.”

Loki only watches him, his head tilted. “How do you feel after drinking it?”

“I feel…sated?” Thor tries, fishing for the right answer. If there is one. “Full?”

“I see.” Loki sighs, a sound of deep disappointment, before stalking off, leaving Thor no more enlightened than he was before.

The suggestions keep coming, each carefully deliberated and crafted, each a blind spot in Thor’s ruling that he had not considered. Loki suggests, among other things, partitioning groups of yet undecided Asgardians to work with the more seasoned, freed prisoners from Sakaar to aid in the maintenance of their ship, preventing idle hands and thoughts. Sending a portion of that crew, who would be well-versed in the technical workings of the ship to service and maintain the Statesman’s escape pods, if there is need for a quick escape.

“A quick escape?” Thor says, furrowing his brow. He scrolls through the rest of Loki’s submission on a tablet, which includes notes about pre-programming the pods’ auto-pilot systems with Midgard’s coordinates. Scheduling practice drills to herd the ship’s inhabitants onto them, quickly and efficiently. “Who do you anticipate we may need to escape from?”

Loki blinks, his fingers drumming along a crest over one of the bridge’s control panels. “The Grandmaster may still send his soldiers after us, to reclaim his ships,” he says. “Of which we have commandeered two now.”

Thor thinks it unlikely, considering the Grandmaster’s prized gladiators have just revolted, but it is better to err on the side of caution. “It will be done,” he says of Loki’s suggestion, as he reaches out to squeeze Loki’s fingers. Delights in the rose-bright flush it brings to his brother’s cheeks.

Loki comes to Thor with the idea for rotating mealtimes in groups—so their entire population is not crowding into the mess hall at once—when it happens, destroying Thor’s plans utterly.

“A rotation?” Thor pauses while taking a new inventory of their armoury to turn the idea over in his mind, quickly. “I shall have that implemented at once,” he nods, before remembering to add, “for that is an excellent idea.” Loki must be given credit where it is due.

“Do you really think so?” Loki asks this time, instead of nodding smartly and turning to head elsewhere. It has taken more than ten separate occasions, of Thor meaning the words, genuine, before Loki seems to believe in Thor’s sincerity. Is that heat springing to his pale cheeks now, flushing them a faint pink? It is a becoming look on him, and Thor resolves to bring it to the surface more often.

“I really do,” Thor says, honest. Loki flushes even further, and he looks so sweetly adorable that Thor cannot resist the urge, leaning in and pressing a tiny kiss to Loki’s cheek, where the spot of color is brightest.

Loki does not turn away, but neither does he turn into the kiss, as Thor hoped. Only regards Thor with a stony silence, the rosy flush fading from his cheeks, immediate. One heartbeat passes, two.

“You left me,” Loki says, apropos of nothing.

Thor blinks. “What is it you speak of?” Is Loki speaking of the hangar at Sakaar again? Or of something farther back than recent memory?
“You left my body on Svartalfheim.” Loki’s eyes are narrowed, his gaze assessing.

_Ah._ “I thought you dead,” Thor says. But the words sound clumsy and strange in his mouth, inadequate for what Loki accuses him of.

“And so you left me,” says Loki. “In that godforsaken realm.” When Thor opens his mouth to speak again, Loki strikes, his words cobra-quick. “You _left_ me,” he says again, quiet, deadly. He does not shout, but his voice is venom and vitriol, and stings just as deep.

“What did you _want_ me to do, Loki?” Thor asks, exasperated. It seems there is no right answer, ever. “I cried for you. I _mourned_ for you.”

And in the time between, Thor had existed in a daze, crushed in his grief, fleeing to Midgard to take on increasingly dangerous missions with the Avengers, and searching the cosmos for mythical stones to keep his mind occupied—until his prophetic dreams led him to dare a near-suicidal visit to Muspelheim to deduce Surtur’s intentions.

All while Loki had been lazing about on Asgard, sitting in his bathrobe eating _grapes_, and watching plays about himself. This last bitterness almost spills out, but Thor just manages to hold his tongue.

“I thought you might—” Loki starts, scowling, before making a sharp motion in the air with his hand. “It hardly matters what I thought. It only matters what you _did_."

*This is not a competition for who has done the worst things, Loki,* Thor wants to shout, frustrated that there never seems to be a proper answer for him. He follows after Loki, hoping to catch his wrist, to make him see reason, but collides instead with the invisible wall Loki summoned, to prevent exactly that. It takes Thor mere seconds to leap to his feet again, and he raises a fist, ready to slam it into Loki’s barrier, but that will undoubtedly make matters worse.

He turns on his heel then and storms away, wordless. Perhaps he should have pretended indifference, a cool *If that is how you wish to see it, Loki, then so be it,* but Loki has a way of getting under his skin, always. Or perhaps indifference would have driven him further away.

Thor seats himself heavily on one of the shuttle bay’s benches, when he has put enough distance between him and Loki, ignoring the startled creak of the bench hinges as he does so. Rakes his hands through his hair, irritated. Nothing is _right_, nothing is _working_, and each bold attempt to appeal to Loki’s softer nature is thrown back in his face, unwanted, if not coupled with cruel words designed to hurt. Already Thor can feel the progress of the last few days, hard-fought for, hard-won—a surprised smile from Loki, a voluntary touch from him, each of them a precious moment Thor hoards in his heart—slipping away.

He had thought Loki more willing to accept his affections now, but even _that_ seems to be at his own whim and fancy.

Not for the first time, and rather uncharitably, he knows, Thor wonders if there is nothing left in Loki but bitterness and bile.

If the brother Thor once knew, quick-witted, lovely, and bright, is gone.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

There was a storm brewing then, Thor fumes later, after he has released the brunt of his rage against Bruce’s Hulk in the ship’s state-of-the-art sparring facilities. Those were likely for the Grandmaster’s potential gladiators, captives from other lands each having to show their strength to even be deemed worthy for the arena.

There was a storm brewing on Svartalfheim, and the Dark Elves had laid waste to Asgard, and their leader, armed with the Aether, was heading to Midgard to do the same. And—

And Thor could spend the entire afternoon justifying what he had done with one reason or another, but Loki was right. No matter the circumstances, Thor had left him.

It seems then, that this is the last shard of ice in Loki’s heart, the one that keeps his heart from Thor. Or perhaps it is still one of many. But if Thor does not try, does not attempt to melt each shard, one by one, there can be no future for them.

You will always be the God of Mischief, Thor had told Loki back on Sakaar, but you could be so much more. The words could easily be turned around to fit their circumstance, Thor thinks: We have always been at odds, but if I could just swallow my pride—we could grow together, change; and we could be so much more.

But Loki was still in the wrong, surely? He had escaped his prison eternal, dramatized his death, stripped their father of his seiðr and left him defenceless on Midgard, and—Thor breathes out, long and slow. The list of Loki’s wrongdoings truly feels infinite. But when all seemed lost, Thor had placed his trust in one person, and Loki had delivered, with nary a word of complaint. Thor continues to pace, turning these thoughts over in his mind, continuous, conflicted.

He paces the observation deck for the better part of the afternoon, wondering how best to approach Loki, what to even say when he does, when Valkyrie finds him, swaying tipsily from downing likely her seventh bottle of the ship’s strongest brew today. It remains an adjustment to think of her by that name, as opposed to Scrapper One Forty-Two, or simply One Forty-Two; when common consensus suggested that as she was the last of the Valkyries, she could assume that name in honour of her fallen sisters, she had shrugged and sauntered off. But she answers to it more often than One Forty-Two these days, which is well enough.

“So,” Valkyrie says, without preamble, “the Grandmaster wasn’t lying when he said you two were…complicated.”

Thor stops in his tracks. “You saw our exchange earlier?”

Valkyrie flaps a hand in his direction, lazy. “I heard. I saw. I came to meddle.”

Thor snorts a laugh, somewhere between agreement and amusement. “Yes, you have always been good at that,” he says, remembering well how she had single-handedly fought a mob of Sakaaran scavengers for a prize as mighty as a prince of Asgard—and won.

“Watch it,” she warns, seeming to take it as an insult. Jabs a finger into the chest of his armour.
Thor nods; Valkyrie’s moods are mercurial at best; she is just as likely to harm as to help, but the fact that she has approached Thor in an attempt to play peacemaker between him and Loki must mean something. In a few short minutes, he paints a picture of the circumstances leading up to Loki’s imprisonment, and what followed after, before explaining the source of Loki’s anger in this case—in which Thor, having thought Loki died of his wounds on Svartalfheim, had left him there.

Valkyrie takes in Thor’s story with a surprising amount of gravitas, before throwing her head back and laughing at the end, loud.

Thor frowns, for he does not find the circumstances surrounding Loki’s supposed death amusing in the least. He had truly thought Loki lost to him, and mourned bitterly for it. “What is it you find so —”

“You,” Valkyrie says, managing to hold in a peal of laughter long enough. “Back on Sakaar, you had the audacity to lecture me, about being a Valkyrie without honour, not fighting to protect the throne…when we died in droves, fighting your family’s petty squabbles for you.”

“You were fighting to protect Asgard—” Thor begins, before Valkyrie snorts, the sound bitter and hurt.

“We fought to fetter Odin’s rabid wolves for him,” she snaps, the truth of it stark and cold with her words. “And in the end it cost me everything.” Valkyrie’s voice quiets then. “My shield-sister. My lover.”

“Everything,” Thor breathes, in new understanding, for shield-sister and lover must have been one and the same. “And when the battle was over?”

Valkyrie spreads her hands. “I made a pyre and burned her body where she fell. Then I burned the rest together, for we had too many dead.” Her eyes grow dark at the words, as if reliving the pain from an old memory, the sting of which has never quite faded. After a moment’s composure, she fixes her gaze upon Thor again, solemn. “But you had the time and the means to bring your brother back, and you left him.” Valkyrie’s voice is hushed, but no less scornful than Loki’s, when he aims to hurt. “You left your brother.”

And your honour there that day, she does not say.

“Adopted,” Thor says, instinctive. Though he knows it is no excuse at all, for he and Loki were raised together, and played together—they were brothers, in all senses of the word. And while Loki had not been in danger of being torn apart by wild beasts, Thor had left his body to the elements, to be swathed in sand and silt of a long-forgotten realm, to become a forgotten relic himself.

“Shield-sister,” Valkyrie hisses in reply. She narrows her eyes, meaningful, before flapping a careless hand at Thor. “Look—adopted, complicated, it hardly matters.” And though she pauses for a beat, her next words are thoughtfully frank. “You would find me hard-pressed to agree with your brother, ever,” Valkyrie says, “but in this, I believe his anger is well-justified.”

She swans off then, having had the last word.

Thor stares after her, for he had not expected anyone to take Loki’s side in this, insofar as there are sides. He had thought—had expected her to see his view on things, perhaps even justify Thor’s anger, but she had done no such thing. Instead, she turned Thor’s thoughts on their head, and where others might be cowed before their king, had blithely informed him that he had done Loki a grievous wrong, no matter what the circumstances.
This is what Loki had always accused Thor of being incapable of experiencing: a paradigm shift. Thor can only remember laughing whenever Loki accused him of such, and said, half-teasing, that he had no need to shift paradigms if he could shift Mjölnir, which earned him eye-rolls or exasperated sighs in turn.

Fine, Thor decides now, determined, as he stalks toward the places Loki is most likely to be. His resolve is steeled, his thinking, in that if he wishes them to move past this, it is he who must make the first move. I will show you just how capable I am.

~

Thor starts his search for Loki in his chambers, then picks his way through the mess hall, the galley, the infirmary, and on a wild hope, his own chambers, but Loki is nowhere to be found.

Having turned up nothing upon a search of the lower decks, Thor turns to his friends for help. Bruce, down in engineering, reports that he has not seen Loki all day. Thor decides not to hunt Valkyrie down, as she has provided as much... help as she can for now, if it can even be called that. Which leaves Korg and Miek. And perhaps even Heimdall, but only as a last resort, since he has stationed himself at the bridge to keep an eye on the crew of Asgardians and ex-gladiators piloting this vessel to Midgard, and there will be too many eyes and ears about.

Miek is of no help at all.

“Have you seen—” Thor tries, but before he can say another word, Miek chitters at Thor and waves the bladed hands of his newly-remade robotic exoskeleton, menacing; he is either practicing his battle forms, or showing what he will do to Loki when he sees him. Thor would have thought that with six beaded eyes, Miek would have seen Loki somewhere, but perhaps his vision does not work this way, and neither is Thor skilled enough in the chitterings of Sakaaran natives to interpret. He turns to Korg, hoping for either help or interpretation, to compensate for this strange flaw in the Allspeak.

“You must be looking for Loki!” Korg nods brightly, sitting nearby and sharpening a blade.

“How did you—never mind that, yes. Have you seen him?” Thor asks.

“Well,” Korg says consideringly, “I think I saw him on the bridge earlier? And then again in the cargo bay? But I’m not sure if that was really him, you know? Because sometimes he’s there, but not there, and sometimes he’s everywhere.”

To anyone else, this statement might seem outright mystifying, but it makes perfect sense to Thor; Loki has long been in the habit of leaving illusions of himself at key vantage points to collect data, while he himself observes with a critical eye from afar.

Thor thanks Korg for his help, but it seems the Lokis at the bridge and the cargo bay are both illusions, having already been dispelled by some unwitting—and visibly startled—Asgardians by the time Thor reaches them.

Before Thor can admit defeat and ask Heimdall for help, he finds Loki on the observation deck of the ship. Loki’s appearance is perfect, pristine, with neither a hair out of place nor quickened breath, unlike Thor, who has traversed the ship at least three times over, searching for him.

“Loki, where have you been—” Thor starts, marching toward him, before slowing his steps, realization dawning: it is just like Loki to send him on a wild-goose chase, then suddenly appear where Thor first decided to search for him. Damn him.

“We should pass by the Antelion Nebula soon,” Loki says casually, his demeanour cool, as if they
had not exchanged heated words short hours ago. Thor spies his fingers, long and lean, worrying at
the palm of his other hand—an old habit—before Loki catches him watching the motion, and scowls.
Hides both hands behind his back, to conceal any tells he might give away. “If all goes well, we
should be able to reach the planet of Theia Prime in two days, and stop to refuel.”

Thor blinks, before recognizing that Loki is offering him a way out. To let the matter rest, and
pretend their exchange earlier had not happened. But their family, and Odin’s rule, had been built on
a precarious foundation of lies and secrecy for far too long. Had brought them only destruction in the
end.

No, to move forward, they must discuss this, and they must discuss it now.

“I am sorry,” Thor says, just as suddenly as Loki’s you left me. When Loki’s brow furrows in a what
for? Thor charges ahead. “You are right. I have no excuse—I did leave you there.” He spreads his
palms. “And for that…I am truly sorry.”

Perhaps there had not been the time or resources to build a pyre on Svartalfheim, but he could still
have taken the time to bring Loki’s body home. Seen to it properly, with grave offerings and a royal
cremation on Asgard, the place where they had been raised and spent so many happy years together
before things soured between them.

“And upon discovering that I was very much not dead,” Loki starts, clearly taking this as invitation
for the floodgates to open, “you flew into the palace atrium, with not a single word—not one—about
being happy to see that I was alive. Instead, you threatened me, demanding to know where Odin
was…”

You were a prisoner, Thor wants to say, scathing. You faked your own death, letting me mourn you
for years. And you called for the Bifrost that led Hela straight back to Asgard. But he holds his
tongue, deciding instead to let Loki finish his tirade, air his grievances, for it seems he has been
holding these hurts in his heart for far too long.

With any luck, Thor also hopes Loki will eventually wear himself out. Oh—now Loki’s tirade
stretches back far enough to snipe at Thor for telling him to come home, while in the same breath
demanding to know where the Tesseract was. Yes, Thor admits he could have been slightly more
tactful in that respect as well, though Loki is rather generous, for Thor recalls having demanded the
Tesseract’s location first and then Loki’s return.

These are all valid points, and for some of them, Thor feels more than a little ashamed.

“…and an ‘I’m glad you’re alive’ would have sufficed,” Loki says finally, stopping to take a breath.
“But as always, such words are too little, too late.” His breath comes in short, gasping pants now, as
if he has expended all his words and thoughts at long last.

Another multitude of shards revealed, then. It was a wonder that Loki had not been crushed by the
weight of each grudge he bore, slain by each sliver of ice he kept in his heart. “For all that you have
mentioned, I am sorry as well,” Thor says solemnly. “I am happy to see you well, Loki, whether you
believe it or no.”

Loki blinks, as if he had not expected this apology, freely offered. So many times before, they had
traded barbed words, poisonous ones that cut to the core. And when they were both flayed and raw,
bleeding from the wounds they had caused one another, Thor would beg for Loki to come home, or
swear to find a way to bring him back into the fold, and Loki would laugh in his face if not stab him,
set enemies upon him, or outright betray him.
Something must change, and if the onus is on Thor to take the first step, he will *take* it.

“You repent?” Loki says, his voice low. “Truly?” His eyes shine with a strange light. “Then *show* me,” he says, soft, sibilant, but no less commanding. “*Kneel* before me.”

It is a stranger punishment than Thor expected, but he recalls his mother’s words then, advice Loki had oft repeated: *give the people what they want, Thor.* A small action could yet go a long way, and he eases himself down to bended knee, as if pledging his allegiance—then the other, as one might do to plead for their life before the Allfather.

“How does it feel, for the mighty Thor, the king of Asgard, to be on his knees?” Loki says. His voice is oddly flat, however, making Thor wonder if he truly derives any joy from this.

“There is no mighty Thor here,” Thor says softly. “No king.” He reaches for the toe of Loki’s boot, intending to press his forehead to it. If this is what Loki wishes, he will give it, sincere, and more besides. “Only me, asking for your forgiveness, Loki.”

It was *luck* that had brought Loki back to him, time and time again; first, after his fall from the shattered Bifrost.

After what Thor had thought was his death on Svartalfheim, Loki’s own blade turned against him.

After Hela had thrown Loki’s knife back at him, the move quick, brutal and sharp, sending Loki careening through the fractured Bifrost into the deep space beyond; Thor had been ready to dive after him then, had he not been trying to fend Hela off from arriving in Asgard.

And when Surtur had driven his flaming sword deep into the heart of Asgard, with Loki still not returned, Thor had watched the destruction, waiting, hoping, his heart in his throat. A cold panic seizing his mind with each second that passed, the unspeakable thought that he had lost Loki *again.* That *he* had been the one to send Loki to certain doom this time. And when minutes ticked by without word—*minutes,* too long for Loki to stay away, unannounced—Thor had taken off in a dead sprint toward the shuttle bay, thinking to fly an escape pod back and wrench his brother from Asgard’s fiery ruins. Returned only when Heimdall called him back, saying Loki had just requested permission over the comms to dock the Commodore.

Thor had sunk to his knees then, murmuring *thank the Norns* over and over, his face buried in his hands to hide tears, for if Loki had perished, Thor would be well and truly alone.

He will not tempt fate again; now that he has Loki back, Thor will do what it takes to keep him. Whether it be bended knee or apologies sincere, he will do it.

Loki says nothing, as if struck into speechlessness, before he tugs hard on Thor’s outstretched hand. Hauls him to his feet, forceful. “Get up,” he says. “*Get up.* This is unsightly, you are lucky no one *saw* you—*get—up*.”

Thor blinks, startled, and stumbles to a standing position once more, only to see Loki stalking off without further explanation.

“You, *wait,*” Thor tries, but Loki flings a spark of seiðr, bright and gold and stinging hot at his face, stopping him in his tracks.

“*Do not follow me,*” Loki snarls, before he disappears around a corner. Leaves Thor gaping after him, wondering if his apology has reached Loki’s heart, or if it has been another fruitless exercise in trying to get through to his brother.
But ever has Loki had his own way of processing things, and Thor will learn the result of it soon enough. For now, he returns to his chambers, and takes a seat on the bed. Considers an alternate strategy to speak with Loki, if this does not prove successful.

After minutes crawl by, and no amount of kneading his temples or staring at the ceiling yields results, Thor decides to seek Heimdall’s counsel on the matter. For Heimdall sees all and may have particular insight, even if Thor considers him a last resort, for when things go badly awry. His decision made, Thor rises from his bed, determined, and waves his hand over the access panel controlling his door. As the door slides away, it reveals not the slate-grey door of the stateroom opposite, but Loki, his own hand hovering over the panel that requests entry.

*Requesting* entry, despite Loki’s penchant for slipping through doors unseen.

“Loki, I—” Thor manages, his grin broad, for if Loki is here, there is still a chance to—

Then Loki’s lips are on his, his arms winding tight around Thor’s neck as he crowds Thor back into his chambers. Walks Thor backward into the bed, until they are sprawled wild against it, a tangled mess of limbs and cloaks and armour that Thor does not mind in the least, for Loki’s mouth is sweet and warm against his. And when Thor dips his tongue in, cautious, the nectar brightness of apples they shared for breakfast bursts vivid upon his tongue, a taste he chases by licking into Loki’s mouth, bold. A motion Loki mirrors, for a kiss so blazingly hot, their mouths together a searing brand, that Thor nearly whimper, as this is everything he could have wished for, had hoped for, when he touched his lips to Loki’s cheek earlier.

Except he did not expect or even dream that the continuation of it would come this quickly, believing they were weeks, if not months off from Loki being receptive to such a thing. “Is this—” Loki tries, his tongue darting pink against his lips, nervous, quick, “—is this what you—”

Thor never hears the rest, for he surges forward then, desperate, wanting, his kisses open-mouthed, careless in his need, and what Loki does not speak is clear enough in his eyes. *Is this what you meant, wanted, desired?*

“Yes,” Thor breathes, between one kiss and another, his hand sliding into the nape of Loki’s neck, cupping it, warm. Urging him deeper into their kisses, to leave Loki no doubt of his desire. “Yes.”

It is messy and imperfect, but Thor cannot care less, for he has his brother in his arms again, soft and willing, a perfection in itself. Can only spare breath enough not for words, but for more kisses, pressed swiftly to cheeks and the corners of mouths, careful against eyelids and brow. And even when their mouths, meeting hot and hungry and hard, gentle into the softer kisses they shared as children, Thor cannot find it in himself to let go. Keeps his arms wound around Loki, to keep some part of them connected—a tether, however tenuous, he cannot bear to release.

They spend long moments like this, stretched out along Thor’s bed, breathing each other’s air, quiet. Revelling in each other’s warmth and space, a pleasure Thor thought they might never share again. “Loki,” he whispers, when Loki shifts against his chest, his eyes drifting shut. Thor lifts a lock of his hair, admiring the spill of silken night through his fingers. “*Loki.*” The word is as much absolution as it is a question.

Loki mumbles something incomprehensible, nestling more snugly against Thor’s chest. He is so warm and lovely and pliant that Thor almost relents, wanting to make this moment last, but he must know.
“Loki,” Thor insists, though he does not nudge his brother out of their embrace. “Are we well, then?” He presses a kiss to the top of Loki’s head, breathing in the scent of warm milk and honey. “Is all forgiven?”

“We are not,” snaps Loki, irritated, shifting just enough to meet Thor’s gaze. “And it is not.” His answer shatters all of Thor’s fragile hopes all at once. “But…” Loki adds, as if seeing Thor’s hopeful expression dashed hurts him in equal measure, “it is a start.” He lays his head back onto Thor’s shoulder, hesitant.

A start, Thor thinks giddily. He cups the back of Loki’s neck with his palm, before deciding to stroke Loki’s hair leisurely, the softness of it a pleasure immense. Laughs as Loki makes an irritated *nngh* noise, but burrows into his warmth all the same.

A start is all he can ask for.

But as Loki winds his arms around Thor in turn, his body tucked so perfectly against Thor’s as he had when they were children, Thor thinks Loki may have given them more than that.

Chapter End Notes

In an interview, Tessa Thompson (Valkyrie’s actress) says of Thor: Ragnarok: “There’s a great shot of me falling back from one of my sisters who’s just been slain. In my mind, that was my lover.” The idea of that particular shield-sister being Valkyrie's lover is borrowed from that.
Thor’s regimen of compliments and their complementary touches continues, and before the week is over, Loki starts slipping into Thor’s room every other night—to complain that the view from his own room is less scenic, that his sheets are too scratchy, that he can hear Bruce snoring far too loudly—all of which Thor accepts with a smile, seeing Loki’s fabrications for what they are.

Thor makes the ill-advised decision once to visit Loki’s room instead, lest Loki thinks himself alone in expending effort to make this work. Instead, he finds himself barred from entering by a forcefield of Loki’s making, even if the door slides a hand’s breadth aside in a show of allowing access. It makes an odd sort of sense, Thor supposes; it is Loki’s sanctuary, and thus is subject to Loki’s rules. He resigns himself to returning to his room, waiting for Loki to come to him, simply glad in the knowledge that they can share such simple intimacy again.

By the end of the next week, Loki gives up the pretense of finding faults with his room, and simply bullies his way into Thor’s bed, nudging his way into Thor’s arms. Speaks only when he wishes to, and disappears before the hours of dawn.

That becomes a nightly occurrence.

During the days, since they have suffered through several rocky refuelling stops, taken final stock of their inventory—separating what is needed from what can be traded—and distributed duties for the ship, from maintenance and navigation to cooking and laundry, Thor finally has time to walk amongst his people now. To see how they live, from day to day.

It is a welcome change from the early weeks of traversing the ship from bow to stern, ferrying supplies and food and other items to fulfill basic needs. And it is now that he sees how the Asgardians have been assuaged, none of them rising in revolt at their conditions, or questioning their course to Midgard too closely.

“Asgard is not a place,” Loki says, as he sits among the clusters of people gathered in the ship’s communal atrium. “It is a people.” The words were Odin’s first, then Thor’s, but it is Loki who weaves them into soft mantles of comfort to soothe the masses, from the elderly who weep for the home they lost to the young who never quite knew it.

And Thor watches him set about reminding them that they are its people, and thus remain its heart.

Loki starts with Volstagg’s widow, giving her a replica of the axe Volstagg once wielded, and trinkets that once filled their home to her children. A few of Hogun’s treasured blades to the parents he left behind. And when they accept the gifts, these mementos of lost loved ones, grateful, others follow suit, growing welcome of Loki’s gifts, his words, his small kindnesses.

There are the sweetmeats common in Asgard that Loki issues to all of their people, brightly coloured candies spun from sugar and syrup and nuts. The collections of recipes he distributes to the women who headed households, of age-old dishes, like onioned pot roasts and rummed puddings. And to their once-architects and engineers he offers scrolls of precious parchment, scrounged from a place Thor cannot imagine, for plans and diagrams of buildings they had erected in their lost homeland.
Loki continues this way, weaving a path through every rank and occupation of Asgardians, until they all have a piece of Asgard to remember it by, a reminder of what they once knew and loved—from seiðr-users sharing a rescued tome, to tailors and cobbler s regranted tools of their craft.

And as Thor watches the smiles return to their faces, expressions which had long been dour and pinched with hurt from the destruction of their home, he can only find himself glad Loki’s imprisonment had not been made public, or they might not be so quick to trust him now. Oddly enough, they had not seemed all that surprised when Loki revealed himself under duress back in Asgard—under the threat of Mjölnir caving his head in—and had let Loki herd them onto the Statesman without question, in the face of Hela’s wrath. Perhaps they had always known, or suspected who wore Odin’s image, which to Thor seemed an ill fit, and Loki had been slowly earning back their trust long before this.

Either way, Thor decides, the fact that Loki has their trust, regardless of when he won it, is a heartening thought in itself.

“The sweetmeats I understand,” Thor says later, as he watches them share the brightly wrapped morsels amongst each other, excitement bright in their eyes again. “But the recipes? The plans, the books, the tools? What good will those be?”

Loki casts him an exasperated glance, as if to say that although Thor has become king, he has yet to understand the hearts of his people.

“They are to remind our people that all is not lost,” Loki explains. His fingers drum against the banister of the balcony overlooking the atrium, thoughtful. “Not everyone can understand lofty abstracts like ‘home is not a place’. ” His mimic of Thor’s gruff voice is rather ungenerous, for Thor does not growl like that, but Loki grins, teasing, as he does it. “They need proof that what they knew can be remade. Rebuilt.”

Thor sighs, nettled by the way Loki has turned his words against him, but even he can see the wisdom of Loki’s ways. “I am glad I have you to think of these things, where I cannot,” Thor admits, grateful. And when Loki turns to him, surprised at such admission, Thor seizes the opportunity to kiss him on the cheek, a tiny touch of playful affection.

“Sentimental fool,” Loki snipes, though the smile curving his lips is fond.

“Your sentimental fool,” corrects Thor, and laughs.

Loki’s expression shifts, hovering somewhere between a scowl and the previous smile, before the smile wins out, curling the edges of his lips again. “Mine,” Loki affirms softly, wonderingly, letting Thor slip an arm around his waist.

Such permission warms Thor’s heart thoroughly, for it means Loki allows himself this happiness. Feels that he can have it.

Thinks himself deserving of it, when for so many long years, he had not.

~

The wonders Loki works are not limited to the adults of Asgard alone.

To the children, Loki distributes tiny trinkets he has made, from wood and stone and cloth, odds and ends acquired from each refuelling stop. Korg and Miek help Loki’s efforts along, from production to distribution; while Thor had not thought Korg capable of such nimble woodcraft, it seems Miek and his ‘masterful hands’ make up for the shortfall.
And when Thor brings his concerns to Loki, of harried parents afraid their children will get underfoot while they work, Loki picks a chamber on the ship that he designates as the Storytelling Chamber, used when there are no lessons in progress. Ushers them in at specific intervals, to entertain both babes and children alike, the ones who cry over the home they never quite knew, and the ones old enough to remember what they lost.

Several such storytelling sessions pass, before Thor wanders in, curious at what exactly Loki does. The first time he strides in, however, mid-tale, he receives several indignant Shhh’s! and one very cross Be quiet and sit down, king or not, all of them deeply absorbed in Loki’s stories. And Thor obeys, lest he be swarmed by an angry flock of Asgardian children. Listens quietly, content to watch Loki weave words into stories about far-off lands, of Elves and Dwarves and all the realms between, the same way he weaves seiðr into illustrations that bring his words to life.

Like a curtain of tiny mage-lights, spelled blue for majestic waterfalls.

A mantle of stars, twinkling bright among a sky of royal purple that rivals the one beyond their windows.

And ominous red flames, none of which really do harm, to show the depths of ancient Dwarven forges, where weapons of old were formed, Loki taking special care in his tale of Mjölnir’s creation.

Thor finds himself spellbound by such performances, and wonders why he spent a lifetime belittling Loki about these talents, when they were so beautiful and intricate. Perhaps it was because they were so, and not the brute, brusque things of war Thor had once coveted, though time and experience have shown him the error of such thoughts.

Before Thor knows it, he becomes a near-permanent fixture at Loki’s storytelling sessions, which is when he perceives the only drawback about such gatherings.

“Shall I tell a story as well, brother?” Thor says, after the heavily-censored tale Loki tells of their jaunt to Nidavellir, to commission a weapon that could match Mjölnir in strength. They had failed, of course, and been fleeced of their savings, though Loki had won it all back in the end. But Thor has noticed Loki’s voice growing hoarser in the telling, and he would give his brother a rest, if he could.

Loki shrugs. “If the children allow it,” he says, though he tilts a half-smile at Thor, grateful.

There is a ripple of dissent in the ranks, the children seemingly disgruntled that Thor is intruding, and Thor would cry indoctrination! if he was not afraid of earning Loki’s ire. And while it amuses him that Loki could influence a whole generation of Asgardians, winning their hearts through sweets and stories, their continued grumbling irks Thor, as he is their king, for Norns’ sake.

“‘We allow it,’” declares Gunnhild, Volstagg’s oldest, pushed forward as spokesperson, after the urgent and hushed conference the children hold. “But only if there are…” She sweeps her small hands in pirouetting motions, clumsy in her imitation, of the graceful gestures Loki makes for his magic. “If there are pictures.”

Thor beams; this is a compromise he can work with, and when Loki hides a smile, secret and soft, he can tell his brother agrees with it as well.

So Thor tells the story of how they encountered a dangerous centaur rampaging through the forests of Vanaheim, amused when Loki conjures the image of a dim-witted centaur prancing foolishly through a forest of emerald sparkles. A bumbling lizard with stubby wings when Thor tries to describe the great fire dragon from Muspelheim that gave chase after he robbed Surtur of his crown.
Loki is deliberately *sabotaging* Thor, the little imp.

But Loki seems to take such joy in it that Thor cannot bring himself to berate him; his brother looks beautiful like this, no longer the visage Thor remembers of cold beauty framed by snow and wind and ice, but rosy, pink-cheeked, and *happy*, his usual expression of stone and flint rounded into a new softness, unexpected.

On occasion, it is all Thor can do to keep his gaze off Loki and focus on the story at hand.

“…And there was the time Loki turned me into a frog, when I had to live on flies and the palace pond water for a *day,*” beams Thor this time, on his fifth storytelling session, pleased at the children’s easy acceptance. “But my favourite one is the time when Loki turned himself into a rabbit—”

“You are mistaken, brother,” Loki says immediately, his brow wrinkling. “That was not me.” Loki had no compunctions about Thor sharing the stories of Loki turning into a snake, lizard, or tree earlier, but he seems oddly adamant about this.

“Oh,” says Thor, the smile gracing his face in remembrance fading. The rabbit had *felt* like Loki, and the lovely, looping threads of Loki’s magic. It had *stayed*, soft and warm and docile in his arms for the better part of an afternoon, had let itself be stuffed unceremoniously into Thor’s satchel to take home, though it disappeared in the evening, before Thor could share the small bundle of warmth with his parents. With *Loki*, on the off chance that the rabbit had not been his brother. “I am mistaken, then,” he laughs, before launching into another trick of Loki’s that he had—perhaps purposefully, though he shall never admit it to Loki—fallen for.

There is to be an intermission between this storytime and the next, as this one was meant for the younger children, and Thor seeks Loki out, immediate. Corners him in a small alcove in the corridor.

“Those stories we told remind me that I have not yet had my revenge,” Thor says, feigning a scowl most menacing. And when he spies Loki quickly sweeping his back for yet another obedience disc, Thor lets his eyes gleam, dangerous. Lets a tiny flicker of lightning spark off Loki’s shoulder. “In *full.*”

“Really,” Loki says drily. “I would not have thought you one to turn to adult punishments for childish tricks. Petty revenge does not suit you,” Loki adds quickly, his words a panicked tumble when Thor crowds him further into the wall, his expression foreboding. “Thor, *what are you doing—*”

“Petty’ you may call it, but I call it ‘long overdue’,” growls Thor, his hands pressed to the wall on either side of Loki, boxing him in. He leans in to take his revenge, delighted when Loki allows it, for kissing Loki on the tip of the nose is not much of a revenge at all.

“You put the name of the *Revengers* to shame,” Loki scoffs, the nature of Thor’s punishment dawning on him. “What would people say if they knew its leader went about exacting revenge by *kissing* his enemies to death?”

Thor simply laughs, pressing another kiss to the corner of Loki’s mouth. “The first one was for turning me into a frog,” he says. “And the second for—shall we say—when you *stabbed* me after taking the form of a snake. Or when you lost your hold on the form, rather.”

“Do you intend to exact your revenge for *every* trick I have played on you since childhood?” Loki asks, far too innocent. “What I mean to say,” he adds, glancing both ways down the corridor, for the alcove they are secreted in is not all that hidden, “is that we could be here for a while.”
Thor hums and leans in to nudge his nose against Loki’s, pleased when Loki lets him nuzzle, playful.
“Yes,” he agrees. “That we *could* be.”

He is still deciding which of Loki’s tricks are deserving of a vengeful kiss, when Loki tilts his head and grins, coy. “No kiss for fooling you in the form of a rabbit?” he says, his eyes shining with a mischievous mirth.

“Greedy now, are we?” Thor muses, though he relents and touches a kiss to the corner of Loki’s jaw. “You just said that was not you.”

Loki sighs. “Of course it was me. Did you not wonder why you could find no sign of it, after charging through every chamber door, like a bull in heat, to find me?”

Thor chuckles, tangling fingers into Loki’s hair, and stroking, soft, like he had that rabbit so many years ago. “I thought it might be you,” he says. Though he remembers well how he had stomped from chamber to chamber, calling, *Loki, Loki! You will never guess what I found!* “Why did you say it was not, earlier?”

“I could not have you telling all the young of Asgard that I turned into something so small and soft,” Loki says, waspish. “The next thing you know, they shall ask me to turn into a roach, just to see if I can, then happily crush me underfoot.”

Something so small and *vulnerable*, Thor decides. How had he not noticed that having Loki in his arms felt the same as when that rabbit had nestled into his warmth? He winds his arms around Loki’s waist now, and hitches him closer, determined that he will never let Loki slip through his hands again. Searches his memories for another trick Loki had played on him that will let his next kisses wander into the column of his throat, when Loki curls a finger into Thor’s cloak, toying with the cloth. Twists it around his finger, uncertain.

“You…you *will* stay for the next session of stories?” Loki asks, not quite meeting his gaze. “The one for the older children?”

Of course Thor will; he can finally share the stories he knows best, the ones from his and Loki’s more recent past, for the older children demand bloodier tales, gritty accounts of hunts and battles, heartbreak and betrayal. The thought that Loki has come to enjoy his company during these sessions warms Thor’s heart as well.

But before he can speak, to say *I know exactly which story to tell today*, Valkyrie sashays into their line of sight.

“Oh, there you are, your Majesty,” she says, snorting as Thor takes a quick step backward. “Sorry to interrupt, but Korg and the others were saying there was an issue in the engine room. Something about there being smoke billowing out of it?”

Thor’s eyes widen. “I must see to—” he starts, regretful, but Loki already flaps a hand at him, dismissive.

“Go, go,” he says. “I shall be fine without you. In fact, I would be better off without your lumbering wit.”

“You mean my *sparkling* wit,” Thor teases. Loki has not let him forget that the Grandmaster had called him *Sparkles*, trotting it out every chance he gets, at most inopportune moments, but Thor takes a certain pleasure in trumping him at his own game.

“I mean your lack thereof,” Loki replies drily, though the smile that rises to his lips is fond.
Thor waits until Valkyrie has cleared the corridor, laughing as she goes—she had not been sorry to interrupt them at all, damn her—before touching a kiss to Loki’s cheek, apologetic. “I shall join you as soon as I can,” he says, before hurrying down to the engine room. That Loki had not offered to come with him to investigate the problem suggests that he trusts Thor enough to solve the issue on his own; it is a small thought that bolsters Thor’s spirits, as he sprints through the corridors.

As it turns out, a pipe had come loose in the engine room, and when Bruce attempted to fix it, his soldering attempt had gone horribly awry. It takes Thor, Korg and Bruce nearly half an hour to clear the room of its smoke and another half to actually fix the pipe, he and Korg hefting the heavy ends of it in turns, but at the end of it, Thor has just enough time to dash back to the story session, still annoyed that this fiasco had called him away.

He returns in time only to hear the tail-end of Loki’s story, and his heart twists in his chest at the words, for he knows instantly which experience Loki draws upon for this story.

“…And at that moment, I let go,” Loki says gravely.

He had probably censored the worst of it, gentled his version of events of how he ended up at the abyss’ edge. But while he had told the same story on Sakaar, the reception of it is completely different here; there he had been met with laughter, as if it was an old tale told to amuse. Here the children eye him with horror, the same that had seized Thor’s heart as he watched his brother being swallowed by the void.

The puppet Loki spells with his likeness, releasing Gungnir of his own volition and falling into a seiðr-illusioned well of shadows, does not help matters.

“What was it like,” asks one of the children, still clutching a tattered doll, “in the void beyond the Bifrost?” Thor is reminded then that none of these children have ever been to worlds besides Asgard, and know nothing of the realms beyond.

“It was dark,” Loki offers, after a moment’s consideration. “And endless. And—” Here, he is interrupted by another question.

“Did the king fall with you?” Gunnhild asks, wide-eyed.

Loki laughs, but there is no warmth in the sound; it seems he is not yet aware of Thor’s presence behind him. Perhaps he had even decided to tell this story only after knowing Thor would be absent. “I’m afraid not, little one. Kings or would-be kings cannot simply drop into the void for—”

“If my brother fell into the abyss, I would go in after him,” Gunnhild says, determined. “No matter what he did.” She squeezes her younger brother tight, who whines in her grasp, but is otherwise content to settle in the cradle of her arms. “I would not let him face it alone,” she adds stoutly. Her statement is affirmed by tiny nods and murmurs of Yes! and That’s right!, all those with siblings in the crowd clutching them a little tighter, while those without simply scowl at Thor.

“Is that so,” says Loki. He seems to be at a loss for words after that, one of the few times Thor has seen him so, and he considers it his cue to step in. Places his hand on Loki’s shoulder, stroking gently when Loki startles at the motion.

“I could have gone in after him,” Thor says. “I should have—I know that now. And to this day, I still regret that I did not.” He takes a seat beside Loki then, letting the hand at his shoulder slip around Loki’s waist, before brushing the fingers of his free hand against Loki’s. “But should such a thing ever happen again,” he adds, more to Loki than the children, “know that I would.” His voice falls to a whisper now, words meant only for Loki to hear. “I would not leave you to face the long dark
A vague murmur of approval ripples through their little audience, before the parents of the children come calling, hoping to ready them all before dinner in the mess hall starts.

“Loki,” Thor tries, when the children have gone, as Loki gathers the puppets he had brought to life with his seiðr. Places them into a box and secrets it away in a corner of the chamber. “What happened, after you—”

“I do not wish to speak of it,” Loki says tersely.

“What happened, after you let go? When I was not there to catch you?”

The questions war in Thor’s mind, begging to be asked, for they had not spoken of such things, not even after Loki’s return to Asgard, following the debacle in New York. Loki had been an angry, spiteful thing, and any attempts to speak of his trials after the fall had been met with hateful glares and wilful silence. It seems now, however, that opportunity has presented itself again, each time uncovering an older hurt than the last.

“Loki?” Thor tries once more, but when Loki rounds on him and simply hisses, Thor throws his hands up in surrender, immediate. “We do not have to speak of it tonight,” he says quickly. “Or any night. But I do have one request.” When Loki does not deign to reply, Thor reaches out slowly, to curl his fingers around Loki’s wrist. “Will you…will you stay by my side tonight?”

It is an oblique way of phrasing his actual request, of Will you let me stay by your side tonight? For Thor has the strongest feeling that Loki should not be alone this night, as much as he pushes Thor away; not after the story he has told, the revelations he has made.

To his surprise, Loki acquiesces, for once he has finished putting away the tools of his storytelling craft, he lets Thor lead him by the hand to the mess hall. Allows Thor to sit beside him, and throughout the dinner, stroke and soothe his back. And when Thor places his hand on Loki’s knee, to show him that he is here for him—no matter if Loki answers his questions or not—as he had not been back then, Loki only sighs, the sound tiny and soft as he leans into Thor’s touch.

“So, Thor, about that report on the soldering incident…” Bruce starts, ambling over from another table. These days, Thor finds him more relaxed, as they had discovered that Loki wearing Natasha’s guise was able to calm Hulk at will, allowing Bruce to preserve his scientist persona for longer. From Bruce’s angle, however, he must notice the position Thor and Loki are in, or the warning glance Thor sends him, for he does an about-turn, immediate. Calls over his shoulder, “Never mind, it can wait!”

The meal is a quiet affair, with everyone’s minds turned to the tasks they are assigned, and their duties for the next day. When it is finished, Thor leads Loki to his room, guiding him along with a hand to the small of his back.

It is nearly a chore to urge Loki into bed this time; Loki usually shows no compunction in sliding in beside him, complaining that Thor is too warm, or wrestling Thor’s sheets away from him, but this time Loki hovers, and waits, unsure of his welcome.

Thor considers wrestling Loki into the bed with him, but remembers all too well what a heavy-handed approach will earn him. Instead, he strips off his own cloak. His armour. Wiggles out of his trousers and underclothes, before stretching out along the bed, naked, vulnerable as Loki must be feeling at this moment.

“Loki,” Thor says softly. He stretches an arm out along the empty side of the bed as he catches
Loki’s gaze and keeps it, his invitation open, honest.

Loki does not follow suit in removing all his clothes, preferring to keep his leather trousers, but he takes Thor’s invitation for what it is, lying down, hesitant, in the perfect hollow Thor creates for him. Makes a startled *peep* when Thor rolls over, closing his other arm around Loki to form a lovely shelter of warmth, but is content to settle back against Thor’s chest, silent.

They speak of lighter things at first, when Loki finally decides to talk again; Loki worries that their tinned food stock is low. Insists they must obtain more soil for the gardens during their next refuelling stop. Sighs about how one of their staple crops is sickly, though he staunchly refuses Thor’s help, all while Thor nuzzles into Loki’s neck. Circles Loki’s waist with his arms. And when Loki’s chatter about the ship’s status finally tapers to a close, a telltale sign of him drifting off to sleep, Thor presses a kiss to the nape of his neck, gentle.

It is now, or never.

“Loki?” he whispers in the near-dark of the room. He receives a muzzy *mmhn* in reply, and decides to lumber onward. “What was it like, in the void beyond the Bifrost?” Thor hopes now for a truer answer than the one Loki gave during the childrens’ storytime.

Loki shivers in his arms, a palpable tremor Thor feels from his shoulders to his toes, and after a long moment, he speaks. “It was dark,” Loki says, distant, as if his mind is far away, reliving such a memory. “It was miserable. And for one of the few times in my life, I was afraid.” He pauses when Thor wraps Loki more tightly in his arms, as if he can protect Loki from the ills he had suffered then, for Thor should have been *there*. “But I did not know true fear until I met *him*."

“*Him*?” Thor prompts gently.

“Thanos,” says Loki, his shoulders tensing, visible. “They do not call him the Mad Titan for nothing.”

“Why do you fear him?” Thor asks. He kisses Loki’s tensed shoulders, first one side, then the other. Twines his legs around Loki’s, as if by embracing him fully, he can show Loki he is *here*, that Loki is *safe*, galaxies away from the monster he fears.

“Because I failed him,” Loki says simply. Thor knows there must be more to it than this, other details and plans of the Titan’s that Loki will not yet divulge, but he is sure Loki will share that in his own time. For now, he is grateful for what Loki *does* share. “He will find me. He will come for me. And he will *punish*—”

“If he comes for you, I will fight him,” Thor says, adamant. “With our friends from Midgard,” he adds, when Loki only snorts and says, *Alone?*

“*Your* friends,” Loki says coolly. “And what can they do against an Eternal, who has promised to bathe the starways in my blood?”

“They can be your friends too, Loki. If you let them.” Thor gives him a chiding squeeze. “And I will *not* let that happen.” He will fight to the death for Loki, if need be.

Loki remains silent for the next while, as if not wishing to persist with this point of contention. “I failed him,” Loki says again, a whisper this time. “In return for him sparing my life, he bid me bring him the Tesseract. I know now that he sought the Tesseract for the stone within it, but I could not even give him the *one*, and in fact, lost him another.”

Thor surmises that he speaks of the Mind Stone, extracted from Loki’s sceptre and now kept under
the Avengers’ watch. And while the Tesseract’s fate is yet unknown since Asgard’s destruction, Thor had heard murmurs in his travels that the Aether had come under the care of the Collector—leaving both stones either under stringent guard or in far-flung places, enough to keep Thanos away from Loki for the time being.

But although Thor could speak of this, he decides to provide comfort for Loki’s fear first. Strokes warmth into Loki’s belly and chest, before nudging a kiss to the softness behind his ear, soothing.

“I consulted the Water of Sights, once,” Thor admits, after a long moment. “It gifted me a vision, and told me of the role the stones had yet to play. Prompting me to search for them as well, for a time.” He pauses, thoughtful. “I did not fully succeed, but had I the stones, I would trade them all to Thanos for your life. Your freedom. Gladly.”

“You know not of what you speak,” Loki scoffs. “It would mean the destruction of all the realms, at his hands. Countless Asgards. Countless lives. All for—”

“The stones,” Thor murmurs into Loki’s ear, though it is the hardest decision he hopes he never has to make, “for your life.”

“Sentiment,” Loki says, his voice hard. But he presses a kiss to his fingers, and touches it to the place where had driven a knife into Thor’s side, the last time Loki had turned those words against him.

“Sentiment,” Thor agrees softly. It has always been his downfall, and always where Loki is concerned.

~

Their mutual revelations the night before seem to have soothed Loki’s fears and temper. As a result, Loki appears more receptive to joining Thor on the rounds he makes among their people, seeing to what they require, and ensuring they need for nothing, after they have finished their administrative duties for the morning.

And if Thor finds himself elated at how Loki is willing to stay with him, instead of marching off to his own supposed tasks, he says nothing; only smiles, welcoming it, and delighting in it secretly.

They are in the second hour of such rounds, with Loki seemingly content to trail behind Thor, inspecting the condition of people in the atrium, ensuring their galley is well-stocked, and helping set enough plates in the mess hall when Thor stops, sudden.

“Hmm,” says Thor, in deep deliberation, as he turns toward Loki. “This will not do. This will not do at all.”

“What will not do?” Loki tilts his chin up, defiant, though he takes a step back, as if ready to slink back into shadows at a moment’s notice.

Thor reaches out slowly to cradle Loki’s cheek with his palm, to show he means no harm, before taking a half-step forward. “I would have you know your place, brother,” he says softly, meaning the words, kind, and not as they had been spoken short years ago, belittling and harsh. “And your place is beside me.” He draws Loki forward, to join him at his side. “As it should always have been.”

“Oh.” Loki blinks, startled, before the tiniest smile curves his lips, and from then on, he remains at Thor’s side. Content to be gently reminded with a tug on his lips, or a hand at the small of his back if he falls behind, or old habits of following Thor emerge.

It is a privilege and pleasure to have Loki by his side again, Thor thinks, when they visit the atrium a
second time in the evening. Besides the flower arrangements Loki commissioned Asgard’s botanists for—which Thor secretly helps along the growth of, for thunder and lightning are not his only domains—and the skylight Loki spelled into the atrium roof, allowing them beauty and light to enjoy, Loki brings hope to their people, in a way Thor cannot.

He takes the time to answer questions, and visit with each group of people, including the former Sakaaran rebels, asking how the tools and implements he gave them are performing. Whether they need more or other equipment to ply their trade, only moving on when he is met with a nod or a smile.

Thor, for the most part, is content to let Loki handle such negotiations and questions. The last time he had been asked *When will we arrive at our new home?* Thor had been ready to answer *I am not sure—months, maybe?* when Loki intervened on his behalf.

“Magna,” Loki had said, for he had a way of remembering everyone’s names, “it depends on how safely our ship can navigate through the stars. And when we arrive, you shall be the first to know. But for now, why not enjoy what views the Norns have given us?”

The girl had gone away, placated, and Loki had only twitched a grin at Thor, having rescued him from putting his foot in his mouth.

To see Loki’s diplomacy at work tonight is a surprise and wonder both, Thor decides; he sees nothing of Loki’s old vanity, the brother who had returned to Asgard with elaborate fanfare, and the announcement of *Your saviour is here!* This Loki is more subdued, as if the responsibility that rests on his shoulders has finally sunk in, his every action showing how much Loki cares for their people too.

And perhaps every action has an equal and reciprocal reaction, for at the tail end of that evening’s rounds, a small cluster of families approaches Loki, quiet, when Thor’s back is turned. Though Thor had tried implementing rotated groups for the mess hall as Loki suggested, the Asgardians seem to take comfort in numbers, all of them crowding in the communal atrium together, and it seems now this effort of theirs is communal as well.

“This is for you, your Highness,” says a young girl, holding up a sack of cookies, small and over-browned, but well-meant. An older boy, dressed in plainer Asgardian garb holds out a box, shy, the woodcraft intricate in its design, and painstakingly carved. Behind them are others: a family sheltering a single yellow lily, the blossom precious and small; another carrying a humble embroidery, the gold and green threads sparse but woven together, heartfelt, to form Loki’s insignia, of two snakes circling one another.

Thor nearly makes the mistake of accepting them, before realizing the gifts are not for him. And though there is a flurry of embarrassment, the people offering gifts looking properly abashed and assuring Thor that of *course* they will have another set prepared for his Majesty, they are so extremely sorry, they are adamant that these are for Loki himself.

“Thank you,” Loki blinks, stunned, as he accepts these humble offerings, taking the time and care to appreciate each one. A far cry from how Thor might have treated such gifts once, stowing them away, careless, as if they were deserved but not cherished. “Thank you.”

He makes sure to thank them all by name—something Thor makes a note of to try himself, in the future—as Thor looks on with a smile, glad for the recognition Loki receives. For the efforts he has made for their people. It is a strange thing, to see them revere Thor as their king, but Loki as a saviour closer to them in spirit, though Thor cannot begrudge his brother this.
“I am happy for you, brother,” Thor beams later, as they drift toward the corridor of their rooms together. He strokes a hand along Loki’s back, gentle, letting it settle in the small of his back. Ever since he and Loki found their new understanding, Thor cannot help but keep touching, whether it is his fingers tangling fond in Loki’s hair, a hand set upon his shoulder, or—if Loki feels particularly generous—an arm around his waist. The only thing Thor finds more pleasing than to be allowed such liberties is when Loki turns into such touches, leaning in and nestling against him.

“Are you?” Loki only glances at him, suspicious. Secrets away the small, heartfelt gifts in his robes, as if at any moment, his gifters might return and say it was a mistake after all. Or Thor might snatch them from him, claiming them his by right. “You are not envious of such gifts, freely given?”

Perhaps Loki would be, if he were in Thor’s place.

“Not in the least,” Thor laughs. And before Loki can sour the meaning of his words, by saying Oh, I see, you do not believe these to be gifts of worth, Thor adds, “You deserve each and every one of these precious gifts, Loki. For what you have done. The hope and comfort you give them.” He pauses then, searching for the words from his heart. “You do so in a way that I cannot.”

Loki’s eyes widen at such admission; it is rare for Thor to admit that Loki’s talent exceeds his own in any respect. “I see.”

He disappears into his rooms shortly after—a disappointment, as Thor had hoped to lead them both to his. But it is not long before Loki reappears within Thor’s. Finds him standing at the window, his arms crossed, though when Thor spots Loki hanging back in the corner of his room, he holds out his hand in entreaty. Waits for Loki to join him by the window, content only when Loki does, placing his hand in Thor’s.

“When Surtur told me our father was not on Asgard, I thought…” Thor releases a shaky breath, before bringing Loki’s fingers to his mouth. Brushes a kiss across his knuckles, soft. “I hoped it would be you.” He grins against the back of Loki’s hand. “Imagine my surprise when I found out it was.”

An enormous surge of relief, hope and love snarled together had welled up in Thor’s chest then, before anger at what Loki had done won out. But that too, had faded quickly enough, just as it always had against Loki’s antics.

“Little more than the surprise of the people surrounding us when I was found out, I would think,” Loki says wryly.

“Far more,” Thor disagrees, though he hums, now that Loki has broached the matter on his own. “About the people of Asgard,” he muses, “our people. You work well with them.” As soon as the words are out, he could wince; he does not have Loki’s skill with words, but even this is far too frank. Still, Loki seems to hear the words in his heart, as the corner of his mouth twitches upward for a smile.

A long silence passes, during which Thor lets his hand wander down to curve around Loki’s waist, before Loki finally speaks. “You were not there.” As if by virtue of being the only ruler available to them at the time, Loki had worked the best with them. Such words make Thor’s heart ache in his chest, for Loki does not give himself enough credit. “You were not there, and I…”

Loki had been the one to rebuild Asgard from its ruins, to ensure his people were cared for and well, and it rends Thor’s heart anew to hear Loki hesitate so, as if he cannot think of a single good thing he accomplished during his rule.
All while Thor himself had left the realm in those ruins. Content to let Loki in Odin’s guise deal with the aftermath of the war Thor had brought to Asgard.

“I was a fool,” Thor says, bowing his head, speaking to more things than the one. And when Loki’s head snaps up in surprise at this admission, Thor continues, “A fool for bringing strife to our realm in the first place. For leaving it afterward, and leaving you alone. And you…”

Loki draws a tight breath, holding it as he waits, curious, patient.

Anxious too, Thor would bet, as he squeezes Loki’s side, reassuring.

“You accomplished great things on Asgard. You brought it back to an age of prosperity.” Thor artfully sidesteps mention of Loki’s overindulgence in the arts and negligence of Asgard’s peacekeeping responsibilities, for Loki had at least tried, which was more than what Thor had done. Loki had rebuilt Asgard after the destruction the Dark Elves left in their wake, piece by painstaking piece, until it was once more the place Thor had known in his youth, with its shining spires and lush greenery.

Loki folds his arms across his chest. “Only to have it set to ruins again by prophecy,” he says, bitter.

“We will rebuild,” Thor assures him. And this time, he means we; he would not leave Loki again to set everything to rights by himself. To shoulder the burden of such responsibility alone, as he had before, fleeing to Midgard to act as peacekeeper, or traversing the galaxy in a fruitless search for Infinity Stones. Perhaps what heroes do, as Thor had so adamantly claimed on Sakaar, did not entail only making daring escapes and grand gestures of saving a race of people, but also the smallest gesture of being present for, supporting one person—the one most important to them.

“We shall see,” Loki says, sounding unconvinced.

But he lets Thor draw him into his arms, and rest his head on Loki’s shoulder, a symbol that they stand together in this, a promise of that we, as they gaze out the window into the cosmos ahead.

Into the future they have before them.

Chapter End Notes

1) “…the flower arrangements Loki commissioned Asgard’s botanists for—which Thor secretly helps along the growth of…”: In Norse mythology, Thor is also known as a god of fertility, in addition to his mastery over thunder and lightning.

2) Art: Story Time - Art Commissioned from Mikitakamoto

I’m including these commissions on good faith, so please don’t spread them around Twitter, Instagram, or any other such social media. I’d really like to share the work of these amazingly talented artists, but if I find them appearing on such sites, I simply won’t post any more of them. Thanks for understanding!
Thor calls for the first council meeting shortly after.

The council, comprised of key advisors from the one previous and representatives from Asgard’s main occupations, meets at the infirmary, spacious and little-used, since all the injured have been treated. They bring with them a number of issues—those observed over the past few weeks, and some more recently appeared.

Relieved as Thor is that food, water, and major amenities are well seen to, he is now met with problems regarding leaks in the ship’s engine cooling systems. Obstructions in the waste extraction columns. And the improper closure of one deck’s stateroom doors, among other things. None are so dire that a quick redirection of resources cannot help, however, and Thor considers his job well done when most of the councillors beam, appeased.

It is the last issue that gives Thor pause.

“There is still the problem of our overcrowded quarters, your Majesty,” says the last councillor, Svend, “for which we have no solution at present.”

It makes a certain sort of sense; there had been women with child the day they fled Asgard, who were only now starting to give birth. And already several families had started to reside together, to give those with newborns their privacy.

“We can use my chambers,” Thor offers, immediate. “Surely there will be room enough for another few families.” He would not dare volunteer Loki’s, though by the way Loki narrows his eyes at Thor, he seems to say, Have you thought about the ramifications of this?

His solution seems to appease the councillor at present, along with the suggestion of clearing out their cargo bays for living space, transporting supplies in them to the quarters they are meant for. But when the meeting is adjourned and they all file out, Loki matches their pace, marching with them toward the door.

“Loki,” Thor calls after him, hoping to hear Loki’s thoughts on the result of this first assembly. He takes a step back, startled, when Loki turns. His brother looks furious, and Thor cannot understand why. “What is it that—”

“How dare you assume,” Loki snaps, his fists clenched at his side.

“What have I assumed?” asks Thor, baffled. “I only offered to—oh.” Oh. As in the past, he had spoken with his heart before his mind, and only now does he realize the consequence of his suggestion at the council: with a few choice words, Thor has left himself without quarters in which to spend his nights.

And Loki, being Loki, had assumed that Thor assumed he would have a place in Loki’s chambers instead.

“I…actually had not thought that far ahead,” Thor admits sheepishly, though the words do not seem
to help his case, as Loki sputters, incredulous. He is of a mind to ask why Loki had not simply *said* something, to deter this foolish suggestion, before it occurs to him that Loki was being considerate. That, or he could not be seen sowing dissent by openly opposing his king. “But,” Thor adds stubbornly, now that they have come upon it, “this arrangement gives us twice the advantage, does it not?”

“What *advantage* do you speak of?” Loki says coolly. From Loki’s perspective, he must only be thinking of the disadvantages: the loss of his privacy, his sanctuary, a refuge away from others and perhaps even Thor himself.

“Our people will have the quarters to house themselves,” Thor tries. “And we...”

He finds Loki’s scowl growing deeper, and leaves the rest unspoken, for if Loki does not wish it, it will not happen, no matter how Thor wheedles and cajoles. Swallows the maudlin words in his mouth, of *we could be together, always, without prying eyes. I could fall asleep each night with you by my side, and wake each morning to the sight of you, beautiful and soft in the dawn. And you would never wake alone, would never have reason again to doubt my love for you.*

“You are right,” Thor says instead. He curls his fingers into a fist, so he will not give in to the impulse to reach for Loki, to pull him into an embrace, for there are times Loki welcomes such a thing, and others that he scorns it. “I am sorry, I should not have assumed,” Thor adds, turning to go. “I shall speak with Bruce about sharing his—”

“All right,” Loki hisses through teeth. He closes his eyes and draws in a long, slow breath. “All right.”

Thor knows not whether it is the thought of him sharing quarters with Bruce that irks Loki, or the idea of him sharing with anyone *not* Loki, but he smiles all the same, relieved and grateful in equal parts. Lets his fingers inch close to Loki’s, catching the tips of his brother’s, warm. And upon discovery that the touch is grudgingly allowed, lets them curl fully into Loki’s hands as he brings their foreheads together.


Loki accepts this affection, then another to the corner of his eye. His brow. “I am not our father,” he says, his voice a near-whisper. “I will not cast you out.”

Thor blinks, wordless at the resurfacing of this old bitterness, but he lets the veiled barb slide. Waits the span of a heartbeat, then two, then *three*, letting Loki breathe out his frustrations, his anger, speaking only when the tension ebbs from Loki’s body. “I am most grateful for your generosity then, brother.”

It is a fight to hide the smile that tugs at Thor’s lips, but Loki seems to sense it anyway. “As well you should be,” he says, tilting his chin, in a manner meant to be haughty but Thor only finds endearing. Ah, *there* is the answering grin Loki cannot quite hide either, twitching just at the corner of his mouth, that Thor leans in to kiss, impulsive. “As well you *should* be.”

~

Thor has little in the way of personal effects besides his armour, a change of clothes, and the decanters of drink that came with his room. So it takes him nearly no time at all to clear out of his quarters and make his way to Loki’s.

It is an honour to be allowed into Loki’s room again, Thor decides; he had not visited Loki’s
chambers back in Asgard after Loki’s supposed death on Svartalfheim, wary of memories that might catch him unaware and drag him further into his grief. An old blanket, with edges unravelling, would remind him of the times he and Loki had pitched a tent with it and read stories late into the night, sharing sweets stolen from the kitchens. The rumpled bedspread would remind Thor of each instance Thor had dared the trek to Loki’s room and wriggled under the covers, his arms shifting to wrap around Loki, snug. For warmth, he would insist, when it was for nightmares that Loki would not admit to, and they would cuddle into each other, warm, each believing themselves safe in their lies.

This room is a fair sight smaller than Loki’s chambers in Asgard, but it is no less cozy and inviting. There are warm amber mage-lights set in a cluster on the night table, for easy reading. Tapestries that once adorned the walls of Loki’s room, remade with magic in such detailed precision, that if Thor did not look closely, he would think they were each the original.

Books with yellowed pages sit here and there, spread out along the vanity, their places marked with a length of ribbon. The older tomes are dog-eared within an inch of their lives, with Loki’s annotations, small and neat and orderly, written in the margins. Others still are stacked tidily beneath the vanity’s mirror, likely ordered by some system that only Loki knows.

Thor notes, with no small measure of satisfaction, that Loki has not bothered spelling the bed into two, leaving the double bed that came with his room intact. Perhaps he decided that they had managed years of sharing the same bed, whether it had been Loki creeping his way into Thor’s, or Thor bullying his way into Loki’s, and that their nights from now on will prove no exception.

“How should we proceed?” he wants to ask.

Until now, it has been Loki slipping into Thor’s room, whether to share a drink, to trade small, sleepy kisses, or to spend the night in each other’s arms—the latter only if Loki is amenable, of course—but this is the first Thor has been welcomed into Loki’s domain. And if there are rules to this new arrangement, he would know them. Instead of vaulting straight over them, and violating whatever unwritten rules Loki has, earning his ire.

To his surprise, Loki only snorts. “Do you mean to tell me,” he says, arching a brow, “that simply moving next door to my chambers renders you incapable of remembering how to prepare for bed?”

Thor takes that to mean that there are no special rules to this, and laughs in response. Takes care to remove his armour and set it neatly on a chair beside Loki’s, before continuing with his nightly ablutions, navigating around Loki, and he around Thor, as easily as they have always done.

When they are both finished, Thor wriggles out of his underclothes and slips into the bed first. There are no thick furs, as had adorned their beds in Asgard, but there are the standard spartan sheets, and a set of soft, plump pillows, which will do well enough for sleep.

Loki, for his part, does the same, then twitches his fingers, extinguishing the mage-lights that float above the night table, save one. Leaves the small ember glowing, light enough to make a path to the door, or to the bathroom, should need arise. Then he slips carefully into the bed beside Thor, his back to him, and with almost painstaking effort, does not touch him in the least.

“Loki?” Thor says softly, confused by this strange silence.

On previous nights, before drifting off to sleep, they would talk; Loki had revealed more of what passed after he fell into the void, sharing details of his capture by the Chitauri and torture at the hands
of the Other. The terrible, twisted things he had done at Thanos’ bidding. And when Thor had gathered Loki into his arms, to hold him tight, hoping such horrors would never befall Loki again, his brother would switch to lighter stories of Asgard after Thor had left, of the idiot antics of courtiers and the petty squabbles of those seeking an audience with the king.

However, Loki would leave each time, slipping back to his chambers before dawn, and Thor would wake alone, missing his brother’s warmth. He had held the secret hope that this arrangement would allow Loki to stay by his side in the morning. Delighted in the idea of being able to see Loki stir, soft and sleepy, and to wind fingers through the tangles of his night-dark hair, gentle, before kissing him to wakefulness with tiny presses of lips.

Which means this arrangement, with Loki’s back turned to him, cold, is not turning out as Thor expected at all.

Perhaps Loki had not laid down rules, but things were different after all; making his way to Thor’s room meant he was not baring any part of his soul, and none of his vulnerabilities were on display for Thor to see, save those he deigned to share himself. But with Thor here in his room now, all of Loki is exposed, and—Thor suspects Loki is no longer sure of his welcome in Thor’s arms, after all that he is has been laid bare.

Finally unable to stand the distance between them, this uncharacteristic silence, Thor reaches out and tugs Loki toward him. Shifting and nudging until Loki once again faces him, and threads fingers through his hair, to stroke gently, again and again. For a moment he thinks Loki will bat away his hand, turn from his embrace, for Loki delights in nothing more than being contrary, but Loki nearly melts into his arms, as he had on previous nights.

It seems that making the first move, to show Loki that of course he is loved and accepted, unconditionally, was necessary.

Thor winds his other arm around Loki’s waist, keeping Loki safe, keeping him close, but he does not expect the mutual touch in return, of Loki brushing feather-light fingers along Thor’s cheek. A precursor to the way he traces the outer borders of Thor’s ruined eye, his touch so soft, so gentle, that it hurts something in Thor’s heart.

“Loki,” he breathes, as Loki strokes his thumb along the edge of the patch covering his eye. Draws a short, shuddering breath when Loki lifts the patch away.

“You should not keep this on during the nights,” Loki murmurs, setting it on the night table beside them. “The skin beneath needs to breathe.”

Thor swallows down the words he meant to say at such a thing: that he kept it on only because he did not wish anyone to see the mess beneath the patch. The bloody ruin of his eye, the loss of it a reminder of his inability to beat Hela, reminder of a weakness. Of how he had fled from Hela, and given up Asgard in exchange, the guilt of which still weighs him down each day.

But if there is to be one who would see this vulnerability, this thing Thor considers a secret shame, he would have it be Loki. Loki, who had been his strength when things seemed most dire; Loki, the only one he could bear to show such weakness to.

The patch now removed, Loki strokes the bruised but healing skin around Thor’s eye with the pad of his thumb, still so careful and unbearably tender. Touches a tiny kiss to Thor’s eyelid, scarred, before returning to the motions from before.

Thor swallows tightly at this gentleness unexpected, but does not stay Loki’s hand. Only watches
Loki as his brother continues stroking, wondering, as if it is a miracle that Thor is here; as if he is a treasure rare, a prize, to be revered with the softest of touches. Takes in the sight of Loki in the dim light of their room, marvelling in his own way, at how much better Loki looks after the years he spent on Asgard in Odin’s guise. The weeks basking in favour on Sakaar. Thor cannot begrudge him that time, for Loki seems happy now, and healthy, a spark of old brightness returning to his eyes, unlike the gaunt, starved thing with sunken eyes and hollowed cheeks Thor found on Midgard, after Loki’s fall from the Bifrost.

Had he not spent a lifetime with Loki, memorizing the divots in his cheeks when he laughed, the shape of his smile, and the furrow of his brow in a frown, Thor might not have known his own brother.

They move gradually into a kiss, a meeting of lips soft and warm and pliant, and Thor cannot remember who moves first, but it hardly matters at this point. What matters is only that they have, and after another kiss, two, Loki’s mouth is so sweet and hot against his that Thor can do nothing but arch into him with a breathy moan, to goad Loki on for further, for more.

His hand alights on Loki’s chest then, and oh, Thor had not seen it when they lay in Thor’s room, or felt it when he held Loki, for Loki had always turned away, or, Thor suspects now, laid an enchantment over it to keep Thor from noticing.

But Loki has let the enchantment drop now. A vulnerability for a vulnerability.

The ruin of skin and bruises and scarring beneath Thor’s eyepatch, for the reveal of Loki’s own scar—a jagged line over his heart, from where the Dark Elf who killed their mother sank the blade within him into Loki as well.

It had not been an illusion then, Thor realizes. He had thought it simply another of Loki’s tricks, upon discovering his brother alive and well, but Loki had—Loki had truly been wounded. That the jagged flesh remains means he had not had magic enough left to heal himself fully; not with the amount he expended in their battle against Malekith.

And Thor had left him there. Abandoned him on the sand-swept plains of Svartalfheim, while Loki had clung to life by a thread, healing himself with what dying dregs of seiðr he could summon, until he could struggle his way back to Asgard by the secret paths he knew.

“Oh, Loki,” Thor whispers, swallowing tight. He gathers Loki into his arms, and kisses his brow twice, gentle. “I am sorry.” Draws a shivering breath before daring to press another to Loki’s lips. “I am so truly, deeply sorry.”

Loki’s eyes are wide in the remnant light of their night table’s mage orb, at his own confession made, wordless. Thor’s apology received, genuine.

And while Thor could spend the next hour, day—years—voicing regret, he only returns the favour now, his touch upon this scar as tender as Loki’s had been upon his. Traces fingers along the edges, his entire focus turned upon it as he dips his head to press one kiss to raised skin, then another. It is wholly healed by now, only the faint outlines of the scar showing, and though Thor’s heart aches that this happened at all, he vows to never let Loki suffer such hurts again.

“I love you,” Thor whispers, the words welling up from deep within his heart, begging to be spoken. He will hide them no longer, in the face of this proof that he had almost lost Loki. And though they are little-used and long-buried, they have remained first and foremost in Thor’s heart. “I love you.”

Loki snorts and looks away, as if unconvinced by the truth behind these words, that Thor could
mean such a thing from the bottom of his heart. And when Thor tips Loki’s chin toward him, to keep him in place, he ducks away again—this time as though so much affection, so open and honest, unsettles him.

“Loki,” Thor tries instead, kissing the corner of his jaw. The soft spot beneath it. The ridge of his cheekbone, until Loki looks his way again. “I mean it. I do.”

“Do you?” Loki says, arching a brow. His fingers catch the edge of Thor’s jaw, tilting his head up, toward the light. Searching Thor’s eyes for a lie, some sign that he is not entirely in earnest, or worse yet, mocking Loki. And when he finds no such evidence, he lays his head on Thor’s shoulder, careful, considering. “Show me, then,” Loki says softly. “Show me that you love me. Or is the thunderer simply all talk?” And when Thor blinks, wondering at what Loki means, he adds lazily, “Perhaps I should call you…the sparkler instead.”

Thor growls, stung by the memory of when the lightning had not yet been at his beck and call. To be compared to a child’s toy now, one that fizzes and sparks before ultimately fizzling out rouses his ire, and he sees now how Loki means for him to prove his mettle.

“You shall suffer my reckoning for that,” he says of Loki’s teasing, before nudging Loki off his shoulder and catching his mouth in a rougher kiss. Nipping Loki’s lower lip, before sucking it between teeth and nibbling his retaliation.

Loki only laughs, for this is not much suffering at all, and Thor can only swallow the sound of it in another kiss, thankful that despite whatever happens next, he had let Loki know the depth of his feelings, let him know he was loved, instead of having him mistake them for words said in the heat of passion.

“Thor?” Loki says, tentative, when Thor’s kisses drift away from his lips. Follow a path down the pale column of Loki’s neck, over the ridge of his collarbone, and down the cleft of his chest, each of them sucking and nipping, before being tempered with a lap of his tongue. “I did not say it had to be now, or even tonight—”

Thor leans up to silence Loki’s protests with a kiss, one that is so thorough and deep and wet that it leaves Loki gasping, breathless. Leaves him no room for doubt.

“I want this,” Thor breathes, touching smaller kisses still to the corners of Loki’s mouth. “I want this, I want you, and I would show you how much I love you.” He nuzzles Loki’s nose then, before pressing a tiny kiss to the tip of it. “But only if you want this too.”

When Loki nods, straining toward him with a matching and obvious desire, Thor breathes out a sigh of relief and smiles. They had shared such intimacies before, frequent yet furtive, but even these had lessened in the weeks leading up to Thor’s coronation, with Odin drawing Thor away for countless lessons on statecraft and ruling, leaving Loki to fester in his plots and schemes.

And after Thor’s coronation, his following banishment, nothing had been the same.

It takes only a kiss from Loki, however, small and hesitant, to remember that they are here now. That they are together. And although things are not the same, they can be better. With this assurance in mind, Thor continues his descent from where he left off, laving a wet circle around Loki’s nipple with his tongue, then sucking it into his mouth, bold. Pinching its twin between forefinger and thumb, kneading, rough.

And when he has drawn enough sweet, breathy cries from Loki, each a wonder to hear, a delight, Thor walks his fingers down the side of Loki’s belly, to wrap around his cock. Gives it a long,
preliminary stroke, revelling in the low whimper Loki makes at such a motion.

“Thor,” Loki whispers, his breath coming in short, panting gasps, his body trembling beneath Thor’s, tremors Thor can feel from his mouth on Loki’s nipple to his hand on Loki’s length. “Thor.”

This is encouragement enough for Thor to continue his trail of kisses down Loki’s ribs, alternating between left and right until he reaches the softness of Loki’s belly. Nuzzles into Loki’s navel, laughing when Loki grumbles at the sensation of Thor’s beard scraping against skin. Ensures that he wiggles his jaw along the skin from navel to groin, roughing out a trail of beard burn, playful, and snorting another laugh when Loki groans, “Thor, you utter ass——”

—making it all the more amusing when he interrupts Loki’s tirade by kissing the tip of Loki’s cock, savouring the surprised gasp he draws from his brother. Laves his tongue around the crown and along the slit, lapping at the pearl of fluid that wells out. And when Loki bucks his hips, sudden, a tiny cry escaping, Thor curls his arms beneath Loki’s legs, pinning his hips to the bed. Kisses the sac beneath his cock, sucking Loki’s balls into his mouth, one, then the other, before letting his tongue trace the seam of his sac, back up to his cock.

Vaults past any and all of Loki’s reservations about this by swallowing his cock down to the hilt, the way he knows Loki likes it. Catches Loki’s gaze and keeps it as he sucks, then hums around it.

“Norns,” Loki gasps, a near-sob, his hips shaking in Thor’s grasp. Another long, low moan as Thor continues sucking and licking and petting. Frees up one hand to stroke long and leisurely along Loki’s cock as he kisses the base of it, nuzzling into dark hair. And when Loki seizes in his grasp, gasping I can’t, I can’t, I’m too close, Thor kisses his way back up Loki’s belly, his chest, until he can meet Loki’s mouth again for a kiss, then another, sweet and soft and warm. Revels in the way Loki’s legs settle over his hips, his heels pressed gentle along the curve of Thor’s ass, as they always had, as if they have never been apart. And when Loki’s arms close around Thor’s waist, stroking the length of his back, Thor whimpers against Loki’s mouth, for his has missed this, missed Loki, and missed loving him so much.

“Loki,” Thor whispers, cupping the nape of Loki’s neck with a palm. Cradling his head with the other. A precious treasure, to keep safe. “Loki.”

They share more kisses then, to lips and cheeks and neck, each of them gentle and tender, and the touches that follow are hesitant but exploratory. A roving rediscovery of each other in all the ways there are, from touch to taste to sound. But then Thor cannot wait anymore and he grinds his hips against Loki’s, gasping at the slide of their cocks together, the friction of it familiar, exquisite, rough.

“Enough,” Loki murmurs, his own patience worn thin, as he arches to meet Thor’s motions. His expression is so endearingly forlorn that Thor could kiss him a thousand times more. “Enough teasing.”

“Have you anything to ease the way?” Thor breathes, nudging another kiss to Loki’s jaw, his neck, and shifting his hips for another leisurely slide of their cocks, not wishing to break the flow of the moment.

“In the drawer,” Loki manages, before Thor fumbles his way through their night table with a hand, his other still curled beneath Loki’s shoulder, not wanting to let go, to sunder the connection made between them. Keeps laying clumsy, off-centre kisses to Loki’s cheek, his nose, before Loki huffs impatiently, and summons the vial to hand, instant.

Thor furrows his brow, upon noticing half the vial’s content is gone. “Why do you have this?” he demands, more brusquely than he intends. A poor substitute for the question he means to ask, which
Loki only rolls his eyes, seeming to know his intent. “You speak as though unfamiliar with the concept of pleasuring oneself,” he says. The irony, of course, was that Loki knew just how familiar Thor was with such a thing, having stumbled upon him on occasion, his cock fist in hand and gasping Loki’s name into his pillow, when his brother had been away for far too long. At Thor’s puzzled expression, he adds, “I could hardly have climbed into your lap that first night on the ship, and…necessity compels, I suppose.”

Thor keeps silent the fact Loki could have, following their hug, that Thor would have let him, because he wanted Loki in return. But neither of them would have been closer to understanding one another, as they were now. For the moment, he simply nods, accepting Loki’s explanation for what it is, and dips his fingers into the vial’s oil. Coats them generously, from root to tip.

“Did you think of me, when you pleasured yourself?” Thor purrs, shifting until he can touch a finger to the tight pucker of Loki’s hole, relishing the tiny whimper he makes. “Did you remember the feeling of me taking you, filling you, when you pressed your fingers…” He slips one finger into Loki, followed swiftly by another, “…into here?”

“I…I may have done so,” Loki breathes tightly, his hand gripped tight around Thor’s other arm. “Once or twice.”

“Indeed?” Thor muses. He crooks his fingers, searching, deliberate, delighted when Loki gasps, his eyes flying open and his back nearly arching off the bed. “Was it once?” Thor says, punctuating the word once with an aimed curl of his fingers. “Or twice?”

“Perhaps more than that,” Loki says, drawing a quivering breath, as he trembles beneath Thor’s touch. “Thor. Thor, please.”

Thor frowns, feigning disappointment. “How many times was it then, Loki?” he says, moving to withdraw his fingers. At his mercy beneath him like this, Loki is far too adorable, and Thor cannot help but tease, to draw out the game between them until Loki is a trembling, pleading mess.

Loki snatches at Thor’s hand to keep it in place, the motion driving Thor’s fingers in deep, unwitting, and Loki cries out, startled. “All the time,” Loki sobs, his cheeks flushed pink from Thor’s exertions.

With a pleased hum, Thor slips his fingers deeper, pressing, searching, for the elusive spot that will have Loki whining and mewling beneath him. “You see?” he says, licking into Loki’s mouth, swallowing his breathy cries. “The truth suits you well.”

And when Loki’s eyes narrow, to let Thor know exactly how well he thinks truth suits him, Thor presses in a third finger, before Loki can even begin his tirade. Savours the shocked gasp he receives as he works Loki open, careful, for it has been far too long since they joined like this.

“Enough,” Loki breathes. His nails dig tight around Thor’s arm, when Thor shifts his fingers back just enough to add a fourth. “Take me, please—”

It seems Thor’s own patience has run thin as well, for the sight of Loki spread so open and wanting before him has Thor nearly panting, even as he withdraws his fingers, gentle. Slicks his cock with the oil, and nudges up against Loki, shifting their hips until he can find a better position, the best, before sinking inside him, slow. Savouring the slide into Loki’s tight, wet heat, pausing only when Loki winces, his body working to accommodate Thor’s girth.

“Loki,” Thor starts, worried, before Loki silences him with a kiss. Encourages him along with light
touches to his back. His hips.

Of course, he should have seen that once Loki adjusted, he would clamp his hands on Thor’s ass and pull him in, impatient, their moans matching as Loki drags him in with one swift motion, for harder, for deeper. In no time at all, Thor sinks the rest of the way in, until he is fully sheathed, and Loki stops pulling, stops tugging. Stops moving, entirely.

“Loki?” Thor whispers. There are tears at the corners of Loki’s eyes, he finds, and he kisses them away gently. “Am I hurting you? Are you in pain?”

Loki’s arms wind around Thor’s neck, stilling him, keeping him from withdrawing. “No, I… I simply did not think we would share such a thing again.” He breathes out, his exhale shaky and hot, and Thor cannot help but tilt Loki’s chin up, to meet his gaze.

“We are,” Thor assures him, touching a kiss to his lips. “We will. For as long as you wish it.” He rolls his hips forward, leisurely, pleased at the long moan he draws out from Loki at that. Nudges a kiss into Loki’s neck, then his jaw, a nibbling one to his ear, before finding that Loki is biting his lip, hard, to keep silent. “Well, we cannot have that,” Thor declares, grinning.

“Cannot have what—” Loki starts, before Thor seizes the opportunity to lick into his mouth, tease Loki open with his tongue. Waits for Loki’s surrender before delving in with his tongue entire, to map the inside of his mouth, bold.

“There are—there are other people on this ship,” Loki says after, his voice as tight as he is below, and Thor relishes the soft whimper he makes as Thor pushes forward again.

“Who, I am sure, are no strangers to the sounds of lovemaking.” Thor says, his smile reassuring. It is unavoidable, in such close quarters, and they have both heard such things within the walls, at one time or another. “So let me hear you, brother. Let me hear the sound of your pleasure.”

He drives his hips forward for a thrust that makes Loki cry out, the sound of it lovely and sweet. Draws a strangled gasp from a particularly rough push that has Loki clawing at his back, his nails raking heat into skin. They will leave marks in the morning, but Thor cannot find it in himself to care, lost in the sensation of having Loki, filling him, being one with him again, as they had not been in so long.

Loki seems himself lost in pleasure, forgetting to silence his cries, though he seems to recall he wants kisses, straining upward for one after each thrust, his lips meeting Thor’s hot and clumsy and wet. But Thor obliges him, spoiling him with kisses to lips and jaw and nose. Taking care to give him the glut of affection he wants, for he has not seen Loki so adorably greedy for Thor’s mouth, Thor’s kisses in so long a time. And when Loki begs please Thor, please, he presses his tongue into Loki’s mouth, hot, wet, and impossibly deep, to match the lunging thrust he makes he below. Seals their mouths together, swallowing the whimpering moan Loki makes, robbing the breath from his lungs.

“Thor,” Loki gasps, when they finally draw apart, struggling for a breath. “Thor.” He kisses Thor’s wrist where it rests beside his head. The inside of his elbow, tender. And when Thor twines their fingers together, another degree of connection between them, Loki presses his lips to their joined hands. The motion is so sweet that Thor must mirror the motion for their hands twined on Loki’s other side, before letting his lips rove onward to Loki’s shoulder. The dip of his collarbone. His brow.

His brother looks beautiful like this, with his lips swollen berry-red from kisses, his hair matted dark against his brow, and a lovely rose-blush rising high in his cheeks, one that spreads down his neck and into his chest. Thor cannot bear to look away from the sight of him, and it strikes him now that
they had almost *lost* this; lost it over jealousy and anger and a petty rivalry that all meant so little in the end.

He chokes back a sob then, and buries his face in Loki’s neck, cradling his brother’s shoulders, *holding* him, to ensure he is here, that this is not simply a dream, an illusion Thor wished into being from the depths of his heart. “Loki,” Thor whispers, soaking in the warmth from Loki’s skin, the sound of his moans, the feeling of Loki’s arms wound tight around his neck, proof of Loki’s presence. “Loki, Loki, Loki—”

“Hush,” Loki says, with not a single word of complaint, despite the vise Thor has wrapped him in. He soothes a hand down Thor’s back. Rubs small, soft circles into his sides. The small of his back. “We have this, Thor. We have this. We do.”

He presses a kiss to the tip of Thor’s ear, another to his temple, before stroking a hand through Thor’s hair and down his neck, Loki’s palm warm and soothing on skin, the reassurance reversed. And when Thor has had his fill of Loki’s reassurance, through words and warmth and touch, he swallows hard, lifting his head to meet Loki’s gaze. Sharing with him a soft, lingering kiss. “We do,” he murmurs into Loki’s mouth, heartened when Loki whispers it back against his. “We do.”

With such proof presented, Thor turns his mind back to the pleasure at hand. But learning to love Loki again is not unlike attempting to command an unfamiliar craft; Loki’s cries of *faster* do not make Thor’s thrusts more effective, nor *harder*, nor *pressing it gently*, until in a fit of frustration, Thor hikes Loki’s legs over his shoulders, changing the angle of his thrusts, resulting in a deep and rewarding moan from Loki, his hands clutched tight over Thor’s hips.

“More,” Loki begs, his eyes flying open, wide, “this, Thor, *more.*”

He writhes and twists so sweetly beneath Thor that Thor can do nothing but *give* him the more he requests. Bends him double at the waist, revelling at the sound of Loki’s breath stuttering in his chest with each thrust, angling each stroke to give the most pleasure that he can. Delighting when Loki tightens around him, a proper vise, a keening moan high in his throat.

Norns help him, Thor had meant to be gentle, to take their first time in years slowly, but always Loki has a way of goading him into more. Still, he remembers to kiss Loki’s ankle as he thrusts. His heel. The graceful arch of his foot. For Thor would have tenderness in this, even if their lovemaking grows rough and demanding in the process.

And rough it does, for he finds in short moments that his thrusts have strengthened in pace and force until Loki buries his face into their pillows, his cheeks coloured crimson, teeth bit deep into cloth to silence his cries.

The sound of Loki’s muffled moans only fuels the fire in Thor’s belly, and he pushes hard once, twice, a third drawing a deep-throated groan even the pillow cannot stifle, before gripping Loki’s legs from over his shoulders. Slides them down, letting them curve around his hips again. Meaning to roll them over, to let Loki straddle him, watch his brother move in his lap while he heaves Loki’s hips down against his own, a mirror of what Loki had done when he pulled Thor into him, deepening their connection, instant.

“No,” Loki breathes, shaking his head, his grip hard on Thor’s wrist. “I—I’m far too close—Thor, I *cannot—*”

A change of position now would only break their momentum, and Thor nods his understanding. Watches as Loki’s cock twitches hard against his belly, before Loki closes his fingers around it, his
teeth grit tight, the lines of his neck pulled taut. “Thor,” he gasps, “I—I’m—”

Thor closes his hand around Loki’s to parallel the motions of Loki’s fist, and it seems this is all that is needed to drive Loki over the precipice, for after one stroke, two, Loki cries out, shuddering as he spills over their joined fists, drops of it dotting his belly, his chest, even the corner of his jaw, which Thor licks away, greedy.

“Good?” Thor grins, lapping his way to Loki’s mouth, for a small, breathless kiss.

“G-good,” Loki concedes, before his brow furrows, realizing that Thor has not stopped moving. “Thor, wait—”

But pleased as he is that Loki has found release first, Thor needs find his own as well, and he rolls his hips forward, pushing, thrusting, faster, fucking Loki through his, even as he sobs I can’t—I can’t, Thor—it’s too much, I can’t. He does not know what Loki cannot; only knows that he can, he should, he will, until with one deep and brutal thrust, he spends within Loki, shaking, pleasure coursing swift through his spine as he fills Loki, floods him with his seed. Searches blindly for Loki’s mouth as stars burst bright behind his eyes, relieved when Loki guides their mouths together, to share a gasping, trembling kiss.

“Good?” Loki asks, his lips tilted in what Thor can only call a smirk, when their breaths have evened out and Thor has shifted them onto their sides, a more comfortable arrangement for them both.

Thor laughs against Loki’s mouth. “Exceptional,” he says. Presses a little kiss to Loki’s nose, adoring and fond.

They spend long moments this way, sharing more kisses, to the ridges of each other’s cheeks. The furrows of their brows. To the sweetness of their lips, each of them small and soft and safe. And if Thor cradles Loki’s neck gently as he does so, like he is a treasure precious and rare, and Loki cups Thor’s cheeks in return, neither of them speak on it aloud.

In time, their kisses drift off into the smaller, leisurely ones preceding sleep, just simple brushes of lips and the sharing of air and soft murmurs of affection. Thor eases his hips back slowly, to draw out in a way that does not hurt Loki, but Loki winds an arm around his waist, immediate.

“Stay,” Loki whispers. “Stay inside me.”

Stay connected with me, Loki says, through the rose blush that tinges the tips of his ears, fills his cheeks, and blooms lovely down the length of his neck.

And if, before they drift off to sleep, Loki brushes his lips feather-light along their knuckles, folds their joined hands against his heart, Thor remains silent on the matter. Only nestles deeper into Loki’s warmth, his slumber easier with the knowledge that Loki is here, Loki is safe, the beat of his heart against Thor’s fingers all the proof that he needs.

They had woken in the night and made love twice more; the second had been a mutual waking, when Thor shifted to find a better position and woke Loki doing it, and it had been slower, sweeter, the urgency past. The third, sweeter still, had been Thor waking Loki, selfish, to reaffirm that he was here, that they could have this, and Loki had only smiled sleepily, indulging him all the same.
At the end of that, Thor had left Loki shivering on his cock, his legs trembling, and when Loki had whispered *please, no more, I can’t*—whether he meant he could not take anymore, or spill anymore—that had made the decision for them, and Thor simply rolled them over in the bed to find slumber together.

“Ugh,” Loki says now, peeling them apart as he tries to roll away. He wrinkles his nose in distaste. “You are a mess.” When Thor refuses to budge, Loki places both hands on his chest and pushes at him. “Get off me.”

A quick glance at their chamber’s timepiece shows that it is nearly dawn, which is far too early to be doing anything. So Thor simply yawns and drops a kiss into Loki’s hair, warm and fond. “You made half that mess,” he smiles lazily.

Whether it is the truth of it, or the unruffled frankness with which Thor says it, it startles Loki into silence. Thor does not wait for recrimination in the form of sharp words, simply drags Loki closer and presses upon him another kiss, this time to the tip of his nose. Cracks his remaining eye open in time to watch heat rush into Loki’s cheeks, delighting at the sight. “Shall we make another?” he asks. Walks the fingers of his free hand up Loki’s hip, lazy, leisurely, inviting.

"We...we shall," declares Loki, letting Thor draw him close for another kiss, this one hungrier, harder, before pushing him away. “But later. Did you forget all the things we must see to on the ship?” Loki swats Thor’s reaching hand away, and swings his legs over the edge of the bed, ready to prepare himself for the day.

Thor tugs at the tips of Loki’s fingers again, undeterred. “Come back to bed, Loki. There is nothing urgent to see to. Nothing that cannot wait.”

They have spent weeks seeing to their people’s needs, along with those of the Sakaaran rebels, and ensuring everything is in working order; Thor is certain that they have earned this respite.

Perhaps the others do not acknowledge it, but Thor has seen Loki working hard behind the scenes, as is his habit, to ensure things go smoothly, and he would have Loki rest. Finds himself inordinately pleased when Loki sighs, and wiggles his way back into bed, tunnelling into the covers and Thor’s arms.

“But the…the generators,” Loki murmurs in half-protest, even if muzzy and warm in Thor’s embrace. “And the thrusters Korg mentioned we should—”

“Bruce will see to them,” Thor assures him, kissing the top of his head. Inwardly he sighs; he will have to find a way to repay Bruce later, for this respite he gives them, as Korg will no doubt seek Bruce’s help when they do not turn up for the inspection.

But as Loki settles into his side, fitting against him so perfectly like he was made for Thor, Thor decides that whatever he must give up in exchange, it will all be worth it.

Chapter End Notes

1) “…learning to love Loki again is not unlike attempting to command an unfamiliar craft; Loki’s cries of faster do not make Thor’s thrusts more effective, nor harder, nor pressing it gently…” : This is totally a reference to that scene in The Dark World where Thor tries to fly the Dark Elves’ ship, and Loki suggests ‘faster / pressing it gently’—
words that lend themselves wonderfully to being taken out of context. XD

2) "A vulnerability for a vulnerability." - The talented Risowator has drawn an illustration of this scene, which can be found here!
The nights pass easier now, with Loki by his side, and the dreams of fire and ash and wicked blades come far less often than before. Still, the one time they slipped through, Thor had woken to discover Loki stroking his back, inordinately gentle. Murmuring *all is well, brother, all is well*, and peppering his brow with soft, reassuring kisses, until Thor was able to find slumber in his arms again.

With his nights passing peacefully, and his days much the same, Thor’s only concerns now are the upkeep of the ship, the wellbeing of his people, and—though he will never admit it outright—the ongoing mending of his relationship with Loki. For though Loki had allowed Thor back into his life, his chambers, and his bed, that was no guarantee that he held Thor with the same regard in his heart as Thor did *him*.

A week slips by with Thor coming no closer to a solution for this, the same week spent drifting carefully past Ceyrilis, a planet just miles past the star system of Centauri II, to avoid detection by the Ceyrilians. Their strategy of stealth and adjustment of their course to avoid known aggressor races and planets has served them well so far; since the Statesman functions mainly as a cargo vessel, they have little in the way of firepower. No recourse if the ship is attacked. And though laser turrets are stationed at key locations on the upper deck of the Statesman, even with *those*, they cannot hope to outrun smaller, faster ships fitted with advanced weaponry. Perhaps such vessels as the Statesman usually had an escort of these smaller ships, but they were barely lucky enough to have taken this one, much less expect an escort.

“I have found our next refuelling stop,” Loki announces, when they have rounded Ceyrilis, and their way forward is clear again. At the bridge’s wide bay window, a smaller planet comes into view, courtesy of Loki’s coordinates. Tiny specks dot the space around it, all of them resolving into ships of varying design and size as the Statesman drifts closer.

A cheer rises from their navigation crew, of Asgardians and ex-rebels alike, for their last weeks have been a series of *constant* readjustments to the course. They are still months away from Midgard, and with the size of the ship and the lives depending on it, they cannot risk shortcuts through wormholes as they had with the Commodore, for fear of debris and meteorites tearing the ship apart. Asteroid fields are the other problem; several times they have had to backtrack to avoid these, searching for roundabout paths to navigate the ship through.

“Is it safe to land?” Thor asks, his hand gentle on Loki’s elbow. “Or shall we send the Commodore ahead first?”

Until now, they have been flying the smaller craft down to their rest stops, to negotiate for fuel, or determine terms for trade instead of docking the Statesman entire, for in the early days, they had found the natives of some planets were not willing to trade, or worse, were unexpectedly violent.

“This planet is known to have open city-ports for wayfaring ships,” says Loki. “And there are strict laws against aggression between visitors and the land’s inhabitants.”

Thor nods; this is information enough for him to approve the landing of the Statesman, and he does so, watching their descent from the safety of the bridge.
As their crew prepares the landing procedure, setting the Statesman to drift slowly into the port meant for larger vessels, Thor can only wonder at the familiar terrain of this land; its lofty mountains, thick forests and an unending blue sky remind him so much of Alfheim that Thor takes to calling it Alfheim-Beta in his mind. The words pale, of course, to the melodic many-syllabic word for the realm in its native language, which translates to ‘valley that is cloven’, but Thor thinks it a great deal better than Not-Alfheim, or Alfheim-Two, other placeholders he had sifted through before deciding on the last.

“We should have the ship inspected,” Loki says, after the Statesman has pulled into port, and attendants scurry to refuel their vessel. He crosses his arms over his chest, frowning at the condition of the Statesman from the base of the gangway. “While we have opportunity to do so.”

Thor tips him a nod to make the arrangements, and shortly after, a team of mechanics native to Alfheim-Beta arrives. In the span of an hour, they discover that the flaps shielding their engines from heat damage upon planetary entry are burnt up, needing replacement, and that one of the engines themselves has been leaking fuel at an alarming rate, among a host of other, smaller problems.

“You have confirmed each issue the mechanics raise?” Thor asks, after Loki returns to the bridge of the ship.

“I have.” Loki sighs then, his fingers grating anxious at the palm of his other hand, until Thor links their fingers together, reassuring. “It is as they say. The deterioration of the heat flaps is a natural result of constant use, but as for the faulty engine and the other issues…I suspect they are a consequence of the enormous blade Hela sent toward the ship before we left.”

Thor recalls the malicious blade that had surged from the sea beneath the Bifrost, spearing the hull of the Statesman, deep. Their engineers had made a temporary patch of the breach, but even so, it seems Hela had caused more damage than it appeared. “How like her,” Thor says wryly, “to leave us such a parting gift.”

“Yes, ‘damages to your ship, possibly costing thousands of lives, courtesy of your dear sister’,” Loki says, a mimic of Hela’s silky baritone. “They say we are truly fortunate to have made it this far,” he adds, his voice suddenly quiet, as if the gravity of Hela’s last major assault has just dawned on him. “The question now, is what we will do about it.”

“Approve them,” Thor says firmly. “Every repair they suggest, each part of the ship that needs mending. We will stay here until this vessel is made safe.” This ship holds the hopes and future of Asgard, and they cannot afford to make haste to Midgard without everything in working order.

It means, of course, that the ship will be grounded for longer than expected, their stop here no longer a simple resting and refuelling.

Thor informs the ship’s inhabitants via an announcement at the atrium of their extended stay, and the reason for it. While a few of them are understandably worried, they seem, for the most part, glad for the opportunity to be out from under their monarch’s thumb. Given free reign to disembark the Statesman and breathe fresh air once more, though they are given instructions not to wander too far from the ship, or to return nightly if the urge for exploration strikes them.

“They say the repairs will take three weeks, at the least,” says Valkyrie, joining Thor at the head of the gangway now, where he overlooks the proceedings of refuelling and repair.

Thor glances toward Loki as he negotiates with the mechanics on hand, and smiles, fond, wholly familiar with Loki’s brand of negotiation. Watches as the lead mechanic throws up his arms, exasperated at Loki’s terms, before grudgingly shaking on it. “Two, I think.”
“What do you intend to do during that time? You are welcome to join the rest of us on a hunt—provided that this land allows us one—while we are here.” Valkyrie nods behind her, toward Korg, Miek and Bruce, the members of her hunting party clearly drafted in advance.

Thor cannot find it in himself to be angry, at having been asked last; only pauses to draw a breath, taking in the sweeping vistas that Alfheim-Beta has to offer.

There are the waterfalls, coursing swift over the planes of each soaring mountain, and farther out from the ports, lush forests as far as the eye can see. And that is to say nothing of their architecture, the stonemasonry impressive with towering spires, each taller than the last, the highest of them all acting as a beacon for the land, of light and hope. The scene is strangely reminiscent, for Alfheim-Beta is stone where Asgard had been gold, and for a moment, a wave of homesickness rushes over Thor, memories of the Realm Eternal rising wretched to his mind. But it takes only a single glance at Loki, at the foot of the gangway, to remind Thor that he has brought his people, his brother, his home here with him, and the darkness recedes.

At the least, this planet is an improvement over the last; the planet prior had been an unnamed, seedy place, whose only uses seemed to be the refuelling of ships and provision of pleasure, as far too many stood in the streets, hawking watered down drinks or plying their trade, lips puckered into pouts and hips canted, seductive. Thor had drawn Loki closer to his side then, for if there was any seducing to be done, it would be from Thor—though the entire ordeal had planted the idea of a gentler form of seduction in his mind.

This, then, is as perfect a backdrop as Thor could hope for, for what he plans to do.

“In my youth, I courted war,” Thor says, thoughtful. “But the time has come now, I think, for a different kind of courtship.” Of course he had had Loki in his bed, but he would be remiss if he did not follow that up with a sincere and heartfelt courtship. And it would be a mistake to assume that Loki’s affections were wholly and completely his again just yet.

He does not glance at Loki immediately, preferring to let his gaze drift subtly toward his brother, but Valkyrie, astute as ever, follows his gaze.

“I thought you already…” Valkyrie starts, before pausing for a moment, reflective. “Well, I shall leave you to it, then.” She thumps a fist into Thor's chest. “Good luck, you'll have need of it,” she says, snorting a laugh, before ambling off the gangway, followed by her ragtag team of hunters.

Heimdall nods at them as they leave, having taken up his customary place at the head of the ship’s gangway. It is a welcome sight to see Heimdall standing guard for the Statesman, as he had at the Bifrost, his hands steady on the hilt of his sword. Observing all departures and arrivals to and from the ship with his all-seeing gaze.

“Well then, brother,” Loki says, as the mechanics set to work, and Thor descends the gangway to join him, “it appears we have a fortnight's time to ourselves, before the ship is fully repaired. What shall we do in that time?”

“Have you any suggestions?” Thor asks. A hunt with the others had seemed a fine idea, but he intends to spend this time with Loki, and he would hear what Loki wishes to do first.

“Perhaps we should seek out the rulers of this realm,” Loki suggests lazily. “Ingratiate ourselves to them, so that we may learn all there is of this land during the time we spend here. After all, our stay has just been unexpectedly extended.”

It is a sound suggestion, but Thor knows for certain that if they do, they will not have the chance to
be alone. And Thor would no longer have the circumstances to properly woo Loki, their time spent again in the stifling proceedings and dramas of the court.

“I…have another idea,” Thor declares, though he soothes a hand down Loki’s back, to show him that it is not Loki’s idea he takes issue with, but the consequence that comes from it.

“Have you, now?” Loki says, doubtful. “And what daring plan have you thought up instead? Enlighten me.”

The words give Thor pause, though his answer is not far off. “Come with me to the markets,” Thor says instead. “We have not had opportunity to replenish the ship’s supplies, and I should think that would make a far more exciting trip than”—he wrinkles his nose, “—visiting with the royals. After all,” Thor adds, slinging an arm around Loki’s shoulders, “have we not had years of that?”

“There is a profound difference between visiting the royals and being the royals,” Loki sniffs, though he is content to be led along by the hand, away from the gangway. “And how do you propose we go about finding such markets?”

A coin to grease the palm of the local clothier and a passing minstrel brings them news of two markets, and after a moment’s discussion, they decide to head toward the larger, east of where the Statesman made port. Come to an easy agreement that the first days will simply be to browse through the market, before buying supplies the ship needs, as their resources are limited.

The aromas of the market reach Thor before the market itself comes into view.

A mixture of spices, baked into savoury breads and sweet pies, floats toward them, warm on the air. So too does the smell of honey, molten-sweet, likely twirled onto sticks and hardened as candies for children, or dripped among nuts for a more decadent dessert. The earthy, deep scent of wines aging to perfection is more subtle, but Thor catches it all the same, making note to find their vendors upon a later visit.

As they near, the markets themselves are a sight to behold; streamers of every color are strung from the canvas awnings of each vendor, and each narrow thoroughfare bursts at the seams with tables laid out with tools and trinkets and bolts of brightly coloured cloth. Baskets heaped with mounds of sweets and dried fruits. Booths of vendors frying, roasting and grilling food, from thick sausages to skewers of golden-browned meat, the steam of which is enough to set Thor’s mouth watering.

“Welcome!” calls a voice to Thor’s left. “To the largest market in the valley!”

A man, tall but lithe and bearing remarkable resemblance to the Ljósálfar of Alfheim, from the fine prow of his nose to the tapering points of his ears, beckons to them. Such delicate features must be inherent to the native inhabitants of this realm, as Thor had seen more of their number than any other group, managing shops and laying out their wares.

“Come, come,” he gestures, when Thor simply blinks, leading the two of them deeper into the market. “Arvellon, at your service. Tell me, what is your pleasure?”

Thor can only assume Arvellon means to be a guide of sorts, for a market as large as this. “Weapons,” he says, immediate—for he finds himself curious at whether the skill of the weaponsmiths here could rival that of the dwarves of Nidavellir—at the same time Loki says, “Books.”

Arvellon’s smile falters for a fleeting moment, before he beams again, bright. “We have something for everyone,” he insists, as he leads them along the congested thoroughfares. Guides them through
passages of vendors selling bread, pastries, all of them fresh and warm and rich with the scent of butter, from which Thor buys two varied bags’ worth. Another lane, with trays upon trays of cubed candies, some with nuts and others with fruits, and assortments of wrapped chocolates and other confections brimming at the forefront.

“You might stop to determine if these are foods we can actually consume, before purchasing them with such wild abandon,” Loki says, arching a brow. A tiny smile twitches the corner of his mouth, fond, however; even he has not failed to notice that the small handfuls of each delicacy Thor snatches up are the ones Loki’s gaze had rested upon, his curiosity piqued.

The overwhelming heat and dazzling sparks of smiths at their forges is not long away, though when they arrive, Thor finds with a heavy heart that the weapons of Alfheim-Beta are no better than the ones on their ship. But his mood brightens considerably when Loki reaches out and strokes the small of his back, subtle, for he knows without words what Thor’s intention in visiting the smiths had been.

They reach the section of the market meant for books and finer trinkets shortly after. It lies deep within the core of the market, its natural canopies of arcing trees and protective tapestries hung overhead a far cry from the open, airy booths of the vendors farther out.

Loki murmurs for Thor to give Arvellon a coin for his assistance, without whose help they could not have found half the things they had been searching for. Upon receiving payment, their guide bows, makes a note to them of how to find their way out—follow the path of the blue lanterns overhead, turn right at the first red—and vanishes down one of the dimly-lit corridors.

“This is not quite what I expected,” Thor says, puzzled at the strange secrecy of this part of the market. Lanterns light each passageway here, despite the daylight overhead, and an odd quiet pervades the air, unlike the bustling noise of the outer parts of the market, from the excited hum of patrons to the cries of those hawking their wares.

Loki’s laugh is quiet. “I see that becoming king has not given you a greater appreciation for books, or the knowledge of how to care for them.” He nods toward the canopies of trees overhead, the tapestries laid just so to form a protective shield. “This section of the market is designed to protect the books from the suns of this planet, for too much light can discolor the paper. Make the fabric of the covers and bindings fade faster than they ought to.” Loki peers up at the swathes of open air interspersed through the trees and tapestries. “Though they are clever to leave openings enough that the books will not spoil from damp and rot.”

Thor nods, impressed at such assessment, for he had not given much thought to the storage of books at all. He supposes that the puzzling quiet, too, must be normal for a place of reflection and learning, for the great archives of Asgard had always been equally silent, though Thor had never spent much time there himself.

For the most part, while Loki searches for books on spellcraft and magic history, Thor is content to thumb through a few titles on warfare and weaponry, and browse the ornaments that line the tables here, each of them more delicate and refined than the ones being sold further out.

He also finds himself relieved that gold, in its many forms, serves as universal a currency as units here, perhaps a vestige of this land’s distrust of digital currency. But it is not long before Thor finds the coins in his purse running dangerously low. In fact, it takes only the purchase of one of Loki’s books, a leather-bound tome on defensive and protective runes, and a small bouquet of white heliotrope blooms that Loki had admired, the scent of them subtle and sweet, for Thor to realize he has nearly no coins left at all.
Of course, it is this exact moment that Thor spies Loki peering through an ornate glass display, curious—no, Thor knows that look, and it is not curiosity that burns in Loki’s heart, but longing.

“—is said to afford the wearer a certain amount of protection,” Thor hears, when he drifts close enough to hear the merchant’s pitch for the item. It is a cloak clasp, carved into the shape of a leaf, with tiny veins etched gold into emerald glass. The clasp is perfect for Loki, its colors an ideal match for Loki’s own, and Thor cannot think of a more suitable courting gift to start with than this.

Loki, for his part, makes a non-committal hmm, before drifting onward.

Thor remains behind, with an attempt to affect nonchalance as Loki had. “How much is this?” he tries, setting his elbow upon the glass, then finding that it leaves a print, sets it on the table beneath, and finding that too low, decides to clasp his arms behind his back instead. From a short distance away, he can hear Loki sigh, can almost hear Loki’s reprimand that already, Thor sounds far too eager.

“Three hundred gold pieces,” comes the reply.

“Ah,” Thor nods, heat springing to his cheeks, for the asking price is nearly a hundredfold the amount he has in his purse. Even a well-executed negotiation could not win him this prize now, and unless Thor thinks of something quickly, this is his courtship progression cut short.

Loki does not miss his chance to rub salt on Thor’s wound. “Surely the golden son of Asgard has pockets lined deep with—no?” Loki calls, feigning shock. “A pity.”

The heat that had sprung to Thor’s cheeks races down his throat and into his chest, for he well remembers that they had fled Asgard with little more than the clothes on their backs, and its people. Thor had thought that was enough, but is reminded now of what they left behind: millennia of Asgard’s history. Its age-old flora, some of which had been specially cultivated by Frigga herself. Its fauna, from the galloping goldhares to the scaly bilgesnipes. And that was to say nothing of the realm’s soaring architecture, art, and music, all vestiges of an entire culture left behind. The thought is a humbling one, but Thor reminds himself then that Asgard is a people, and as long as they have that, they can rebuild.

Still, he cannot abide by the crestfallen look Loki had shown, then carefully hidden the next moment, upon overhearing the brooch’s price.

“I shall trade you my vambraces for it,” Thor says, as Loki ambles further away.

Though he is loath to part with them, it takes only the recollection of Loki’s doleful expression to spur Thor into unbuckling his vambraces and pushing them forward. It is possible to make another pair, Thor resolves, until he can purchase one anew; he needs only to strip a tree of its bark and cut his boots down to harvest its leather. A small measure of shame tunnels through his belly at the thought, however—of being a king reduced to selling his armour piecemeal, using it to barter for his needs.

“Ha! I have no need of worn and dirty vambraces,” says the vendor, who in fact spreads a sheet over his goods, as if afraid of Thor dirtying them. “Take your tattered wares elsewhere.”

Thor gathers his vambraces quickly, and makes his way toward Loki, not sorry in the least to be far from that harrowing experience. But his predicament remains unsolved.

“What must one do to obtain the coin of this realm?” Thor wonders aloud, glancing at Loki, meaningful. And when Loki shrugs, deliberately unhelpful, Thor huffs, marching back to the vendor
he had purchased Loki’s book from. “You there!” he calls, startling the vendor from his repose, where he had been indulging in a long pipe, the smoke of it fragrant and sweet. “I shall purchase the rest of your books on runecrafting, shapeshifting, and—” Thor squints at a particularly thin bound volume, before lifting a brow at its title, “—gardening, if you tell me how best one can earn the currency of this realm.”

Those were other books Loki’s gaze settled on, that Thor had not been able to afford, and the vendor flicks a glance at the shelf they rest on, wary.

“I suppose you have need of a large sum?” he says, after a moment’s thought. “In a short amount of time? Because these books are not inexpensive, as I am sure you well know.”

Thor catches Loki’s gaze from across the market passageway, before turning back to the vendor. “Yes, I have need of a large sum, in a short amount of time,” he replies, urgent and hushed. And perhaps he could make a start, if this man would stop mincing his words, and tell Thor his idea already. If he even had one.

“It is a rare business,” the vendor says, considering, “but there are hunters who dare the pursuit of a valewulf.”

“A valewulf?” Thor says, furrowing his brow. From its name, he imagines it must be a kind of wolf, one that dwells in the largest valley of this land.

“Yes. They are dangerous beasts that attack people on sight, enormous creatures with razor-sharp teeth and jagged claws, though I have never seen one myself.” He pauses, thoughtful. “I would not wish to send you to your death, but if you have need of money, quickly, the sale of its pelt alone should be sufficient.”

“Just the pelt?” Thor demands. “How much would one fetch in the open market here?”

The number the bookseller names nearly makes Thor’s mouth drop open in surprise, but he manages to settle for a simple nod. It is not befitting of a king to be surprised into jaw-dropping at such numbers, after all.

“More,” the bookseller adds, “if you can fashion it into something other than a flea-bitten rug.”

Thor nods at this advice willingly given, then looks up to search for Loki, only to see that his brother has ceased browsing the market’s wares, instead taking up watch at a corner nearby. Watching the comings and goings of nobles, merchants, and peasants alike, seeming to take great interest in what they are wearing, buying, or trading for.

“Loki!” Thor calls, striding toward him to confer their plans in hushed whispers, which is actually less conferring and more of, “Loki, we are doing this.”

“I refuse,” Loki says, point-blank.

“You have not even heard what I—”

“Your voice carries,” Loki says dryly. “And besides, it is a terrible idea. The two of us, in an unfamiliar land? Hunting an unfamiliar beast?”

“It will be just like old times,” Thor beams, clapping Loki on the shoulder. Certainly it is a detour from his plan of courtship, but if one wanted to strengthen the feelings from their youth, what better way to do it than with a sport from their youth?
“If I might make a suggestion,” Loki tries, “I saw a gambling—”

“Loki, we have no money.” When he is met with silence, Thor sighs. So that meant Loki had money, but had not seen fit to spend it, either on Thor or himself, for he had not bought a single thing in the market, preferring instead to browse here and there, like a hummingbird flitting from flower to flower.

There are needs to be met, Thor supposes, with the money Loki has on hand, like food and clothing for their people. Fuel for the ship. And there are the repairs they must still pay for. Thor is met with a growing horror that he had not considered such things, having easily left them to Loki, and an inkling of just how Loki has been keeping this entire venture afloat occurs to him now.

“Loki, your winnings from Sakaar, from when you bet against me—” he starts, before Loki shakes his head.

“I managed to funnel half of it into a side account before the Grandmaster froze my assets,” Loki says. He seems surprised that Thor has finally thought on this matter, though the way he arches a brow, meaningful, suggests that said freezing was wholly due to Thor’s untimely escape. Still, the way he presses their elbows together gently shows that he does not hold that against Thor. Not entirely, anyway. “But even that will not last forever.”

Thor groans, his thumbs kneading frustrated at his temples; this is no longer simply the matter of earning enough money for Loki’s gifts, but to keep their people fed and clothed and alive. Norns, how had he not considered this? What kind of king was he, to have put his own needs above those of his people?

“We have enough for the repairs,” Loki says immediately, as if he has deduced the vein of Thor’s thoughts. His hand is warm on Thor’s arm, and it brings a faint smile to Thor’s face when Loki squeezes, reassuring. “Beyond that… I cannot say.”

“That decides the matter, then!” Thor declares. “We will hunt this valewulf.” When Loki furrows his brow, his dismay clear, Thor curls fingers around his elbow, warm. “It has been an age since we went on a hunt together, Loki. If we succeed, we will have enough money to purchase the things our people need. And your books. And more besides.” He does not mention what and more besides entails, however, for Loki would reprimand him if he knew Thor intended to spend a small portion of their earnings on courting gifts.

“The books, yes,” Loki says absently, though his gaze rests on the forest-green brooch across the way, a detail that does not escape Thor’s eye, as he winds his arm around Loki’s waist instead, tugging him in.

“And more besides,” Thor purrs into his ear, pleased when Loki sighs his surrender. It has always been about proper motivation, with Loki.

Loki shakes a finger in Thor’s face, however, and Thor steels himself for his conditions. “We will do this my way,” Loki says. “There will be no blindly charging into battle and hoping for the best.”

“Of course.” Thor keeps silent the fact that blindly charging in had been his intended strategy exactly. It had served him well enough in the past, but Loki lending his aid to their plans can only be an improvement.

They return to the Statesman briefly, to unload their wares from the morning, and obtain supplies enough to last them for a week-long hunt. Thor helps himself to a sword from the armoury, before seeing to their packs, in which he stows water, dried meats and fruit, hard cheese, and two loaves of
the bread they bought back at the market. When he looks up and catches Loki’s eye, however, Thor remembers to toss a pouch of sweetmeats into the leather bag; Loki has a horrid sweet tooth, and their days out in the wild will only be all the easier if Thor remembers to pack them now.

“Your priorities leave me speechless,” Loki says, arching a brow as he rifles through Thor’s bag, and happens upon the pouch of sweets. Shifts his supplies aside to make room for a cloak Thor had forgotten to pack, in case the nights grow cold.

“Priorities,” Thor agrees, darting through Loki’s defences for a kiss. The sweets are a major one, for a valewulf is not the only creature Thor intends to catch on this trip.

And when Loki only sighs, with an exasperated are we ready, then? Thor grins, sword at his hip and supplies enough to last them for days on his back. “I believe we are.”

It takes them an hour alone for Thor to find the first tracks.

For an animal of this size, it moves with a surprising amount of grace, leaving neither trampled leaves nor twigs in its wake. And though Loki hurries the process along with a spell of his own design, to follow its subsequent path through the trees, they remain a day or so behind it.

Still, even if they are not onto the valewulf’s immediate trail—and Thor had not expected them to be—it is a pleasure to be attuned with his brother again, as they had been in the old days. Walking easily by his side, their shoulders bumping now and then. Laughing at something small and inconsequential, and hearing Loki’s huff of annoyance, while catching the smile that crosses his face, creases the corners of Loki’s eyes when he thinks Thor is not looking.

They track the beast for another few hours, though soon enough, Loki suggests they should think of setting up camp, prior to sunset.

“That is a sound suggestion,” Thor nods. And with his help, Loki marks off the last tracks they found with a small beacon rune of his own design, undetectable to anyone else, before they set off to locate lodgings for the night.

They do not find any suitable dwellings in the first hour, but Thor is content to wander through the lovely scenery of Alfheim-Beta with Loki at his side, their hands wound together, loose. Delighting in the flowers that Loki points out to him, from the purple posy-like blooms to the white buds only starting to flower on frail branches. The way the sun, lower now in the sky, casts a bronze hue along the trees of the forest, giving the impression of a land spelled into eternal autumn. The smell of the earth, rich and lush and fertile, and the twittering of birdsong bright overhead.

In the distance is the vague clamour of a waterfall, the warm spray of it stippling Thor’s cheeks as they near, and he leads Loki to the base of it, winding their way past a shallow rock staircase. Marvels at the view, of the water pooling gold in the sunset light, into the basin below.

The awe and wonder of such a sight is too much to contain, and Thor turns to Loki, to say something, to find the words to share the beauty of this view with his brother, before discovering this moment does not need words at all. His arm winds naturally around Loki’s waist as Loki’s hands settle on his chest, and Thor nuzzles their noses together, savouring their closeness. Cups Loki’s cheek in his palm, to slant their mouths together, gentle—

Which is when Korg crashes through the brush nearby, with Miek and Bruce close behind, while Valkyrie brings up the rear, swaying tipsily on her feet.
“Oh!” Korg calls, waving as he spots them at the base of the waterfall. “Sorry man, didn’t know anyone else was here. Just looking to track one of them valewulves, supposed to be worth lots. You too?”

“Actually,” Loki says frostily, “we were looking to find a moment alone.” He regards them with a stony silence that actually has Korg taking a step back, daunted, nearly treading on Miek in the process. Miek leaps out of the way, for it is not the first occasion this has happened, before making a sharp snipping motion with his bladed hands, chittering something quick and annoyed.

Thor, for his part, has not released his hold on Loki the entire time. He is not ashamed; let them make what assumptions they will.

Korg has a moment to say, “But aren’t you two bro—” before Bruce is dragging him back through the brush, inasmuch as one can drag a massive Kronan, murmuring let’s go, let’s go, nothing to see here, let’s leave before there is.

“Why did you speak so?” Thor asks later, after they have shared the kiss they meant to, beneath the light shining through the falls. “You know they seek the same beast as we do.”

“If they knew we sought the same beast, I am sure they would wish to join forces, or as your precious mortals say, ‘team up’. And share what profit is made from the venture.” Loki narrows his eyes. “Filling your friends’ coffers would rather defeat the purpose of our trip—which is to fill Asgard’s coffers.”

Thor cannot say he minds the idea of their friends joining them in the hunt, or sharing the profit made from it, but he finds himself glad that they have gone their separate ways. It allows him to be alone with Loki, truly, which had been Thor’s purpose for this trip, an opportunity hardly afforded them when crowded into the Statesman with the others.

He says nothing of these thoughts, however; simply nods at Loki and threads their fingers together, to continue their journey onward. “I agree,” Thor says, beaming. “Such reasoning is sound.”

“Really?” Loki says, unconvinced, though he relents enough for Thor to lead him along by the hand. “Did you—did you just agree with me?” They had shared such a moment on Sakaar as well, when Loki showed utter disbelief at Thor agreeing to his staying on that scrapheap planet, though circumstances had been different at the time; Thor had wished for Loki to come with him, but following Tony’s advice—of letting something you love go—had said the opposite.

“I did,” Thor declares, touching a kiss to Loki’s cheek, playful. Loki does not need to know that Thor agrees with the spirit, if not the letter, of his reasoning.

They eventually find a small cave hewn from the rock of a cliffside, one that overlooks the valley, and decide to make camp there. Spend short moments building up a fire, to keep warm through the early hours of evening into the night, with Thor laying the wood, and Loki lighting it with a spark of his magic. Prepare their rations from the ship, Thor dividing the portions of meat and fruit, before offering Loki his share, who accepts it with a regal, outstretched hand, like the lazy little imp he has always been.

He polishes it off within minutes—then delves his fingers into Thor’s share, picking and choosing pieces of dried figs and jerky he enjoyed from his own.

“Greedy,” Thor admonishes, though he does not flick Loki’s wrist. He takes his revenge instead in the form of a kiss to Loki’s nose, sloppy and wet, as Loki groans. Laughs, a deep and genuine rumble, at the way he and Loki have fallen so naturally into their old patterns, from building the fire
to something as simple as eating.

The way they bed down for the night proves no exception either, with Loki arranging the spartan sheets they packed, and laying out their cloaks to form a bed just so: wide enough to accommodate Thor’s broad shoulders, with room enough for Loki’s longer legs. That is, if Thor winds his arms around Loki and cuddles up behind him, as they have always done.

As he lies down within their makeshift bed, Thor finds himself surprised but pleased that Loki has managed to recreate their old hunting cloaks, the fur a familiar comfort in this new land.

“I have missed this,” Thor sighs, content, as he stretches out along their layered cloaks. Props his head up on a hand, to gaze at Loki in the firelight.

The flicker of the flames casts Loki’s features into soft shadow, and Thor finds himself appreciating the curious dip of Loki’s left brow. His lashes, fanning dark above his cheeks, as he blinks back sleep. The pleasing pinkness of his rosebud mouth, from which Loki has just finished licking the last flecks of the chocolate they shared. It had been a game of slow seduction, one Loki started, though Thor bungled it early on, accidentally swallowing the chocolate whole, instead of using his tongue to press it skilfully, slyly back into Loki’s mouth, as Loki had done to him. Still, all was not lost: it had drawn a laugh from Loki, soft but true, and Thor was heartened to know that his foresight in packing such sweets had born fruit, making Loki more docile and far more amenable to tender affections.

“Have you?” Loki snorts now, though he shifts closer into Thor’s warmth. Grumbles as his elbow catches a jagged edge on the cave floor. They had agreed earlier on that tonight would be spent on sleep, for the rough, uneven surface of the cave was not conducive to more than simple caresses. That, and they needed their strength for the next day’s battle against the valewulf, if they came across it. “I cannot honestly say I have missed sleeping on uncomfortable cave floors, with the sound of wild beasts baying distant in the night.”

Thor ignores the jibe, choosing instead to reach out and thread his fingers through Loki’s hair, stroking, gentle. Delights in the soft hum of contentment Loki makes at the motion, as he turns into Thor’s touch. “Do you remember the time we travelled to Alfheim for a hunt?” he asks. “Just the two of us.”

They had been so painfully young then, untouched by the squabble over the throne, not yet pitted against each other. The two of them had wheedled and cajoled Heimdall into opening the Bifrost to them, for it was Alfheim, and surely nothing could go wrong.

“I do not,” Loki sniffs. As if the event in which their entire relationship had shifted on its axis was unworthy of remembrance. Then, after a long moment, during which Loki throws another golden spark on the fire to keep it alight, the edges of his mouth turn up, fond. “You were such a hot-headed fool,” he says softly. “Stubborn. Proud.”

“And you were the clever one,” Thor says, heartened that Loki does remember. “Always.”

“Not clever enough,” Loki replies, such admission a rarity on its own. “Not that day.”

Thor remembers how Loki had looked that day, as he clambered onto his horse, so carefree and unburdened. The laughter in his mouth and the mirth in his eyes had not been so rare a prize as they were now, and Thor resolves now to give Loki reason to smile like that for the rest of their days. But he recalls also how quickly that mirth had turned into tears, for their hunt had gone ill far too soon.

“The fault was mine,” Thor says, immediate. He would not have Loki continue carrying the weight of his guilt in this. “It was I who insisted that we make our quarry the great white stag I sighted,
when any other of Alfheim’s deer would have sufficed."

“It was a beautiful creature,” Loki murmurs, wistful.

It was, a prize so ethereal and divine that Thor had been adamant that no other deer would do. But his true intention had been to secure its pure, snow-white pelt as a gift for Loki, a fact he kept secret after their failure to bring it down.

Thor had not been as skilled with Mjölnir then, his strikes little more than glancing blows, dealing far too little damage. And Loki, having counted on Thor to injure it enough for entrapment, had been in the middle of weaving a trapping spell, eyes closed as he stood in a trance, vulnerable in the forest clearing—unaware of the stag charging toward him.

With Mjölnir’s help, Thor had leapt in front of Loki, taking the brunt of its attack, then crumpled at Loki’s feet as the stag galloped away, graceful, its antlers tipped with blood.

Loki had wept then, and half-towed, half-carried Thor to a cave much like this one, unable to call for Heimdall, for they were a half-day’s ride from the nearest Bifrost site, a journey Thor would not be able to make.

Lying on the cave floor, with Loki’s hand clutched tight in his, Thor believed he was dying, and Loki was convinced he was dying, all of which had culminated in Thor deciding to Hel with it and reaching up to caress Loki’s cheek with a blood-streaked palm. His thumb smearing a crimson stripe beneath Loki’s eye.

_I love you_, Thor had whispered, before leaning up to kiss Loki. The meeting of their mouths was soft, but no less earnest, and his lips had lingered on Loki’s, the intent of his kiss clear, for it was different than the small, innocent kisses of their childhood.

It had been the worth the wound, Thor thinks, to be able to voice such naked honesty for the first time. To see the wondering little smile it brought to Loki’s lips, before he wept anew. Loki had spent the night healing and keeping vigil over Thor, and only small, soft kisses from Thor scattered throughout could reassure Loki that he had not perished during the night.

Loki slips a hand over the scars now, gentle. Traces roughened skin in the shape of the stag’s twin-pronged attack. Even the apples of Iðunn could not heal such wounds, left improperly treated for so long, though Thor likes to believe the scars remain if their owner is against them being healed. Kept as a reminder to himself, that he would take any wound for Loki.

“I meant the words I said then.” Thor’s voice is quiet, as he watches Loki’s eyes grow hooded and dark, the memory of that day paining Loki even now. He presses a kiss to Loki’s lips, small and sweet and soft, then another, to lift Loki’s spirits. For there had been happiness that day, and he would have Loki remember it. Thor had not brought the memory to light again simply to bring Loki pain, forcing him to wrestle with an old guilt.

“Why, which words could you mean, dear brother?” The tiny uptilt of Loki’s lips is a relief, and as close to a smirk that Thor has seen in days. “Do you mean, ‘Loki, no’, or ‘Loki, you little——’”

“You know which words I mean,” Thor laughs, winding his arms around Loki, for a punishing but fond squeeze. The dry crackle of wood on the fire fills the silence between them, before Thor speaks again. “I should have told you a thousand times before that,” Thor says softly. “And a thousand times after.” Had he done so, he wonders if all that happened between them might have been avoided.
Give us a kiss, Loki had said, short hours before their bond was torn asunder.

Tell me you love me, he may well have meant.

“I suppose,” Loki says airily, “that you shall just have to atone for it, by telling me a thousand times from now.”

“That I shall do,” Thor promises, before murmuring into Loki’s ear, “and more besides.”

More besides will have to wait, considering the discomfort of the cave floor, but they reminisce about lighter things after that—Fandral’s penchant for charming more maidens than he could handle, Volstagg’s ability to eat anyone out of house and home, and Hogun’s fondness for hiding numerous weapons on his person, from his boot soles, to his belt, to—No? You did not know the jade ring in his hair was actually a hinged blade? Loki had mused—his hair.

Speaking with Loki of his lost friends is a comfort, his brother perhaps the only one now who remembers them as Thor did, as warriors and comrades both. That Thor has not heard from Sif, or of her, is worrying, but Thor decides that those are thoughts for another day, content to fit his body to Loki’s for now, safe, secure, and warm. Gathers Loki more snugly into his arms as the fire dies down, until they are slotted together, perfect, at knees and hips and toes.

“I love you,” he murmurs into Loki’s neck, finishing the sentiment with a kiss. He had meant those words on Alfheim, said in what he thought were the throes of death. And though time, duty, and the worst of misunderstandings had drawn them apart, Thor can only be thankful he can say such words to Loki again now. “I love you.”

He has only managed two times out of the thousand he promised, but they have time enough now for the rest. A lifetime even, if Loki allows it—though Thor dares not hope.

For now, Loki only replies with a satisfied hum, and by the way he sighs, nestling deeper into Thor’s arms, Thor knows that the words are at least heard, appreciated, received.

Chapter End Notes

1) If the description of Alfheim-Beta sounds like a particular locale from Lord of the Rings, it is most likely the one you are thinking of. Pictures of what I envision Alfheim-Beta to be like are also available here, here and here.

2) In legends, a white stag is symbolic of new adventures, or the pursuit of happiness. Though their original quarry got away, something more important was revealed in the process. So perhaps they achieved their target after all? You decide!

3) OST/Ambience Music: Wandering Through the Woods - The Council of Elrond
Thor wakes in the dawn's early light, thinking to nudge a kiss to Loki’s brow. His eyelids. Wake him with tiny presses of lips, to the tip of his nose, and the lobe of his ear—only to find that Loki has rolled several feet away, due to the slope of the cave floor. Taken half of the sheets with him in this unwitting journey.

Loki looks infinitely adorable, wrapped up like this; an imperfect chrysalis, with his hair spilling dark along the cave floor. With a huff of a laugh, Thor bunches the end of the sheet that has trailed away in Loki’s travels in his fist. Winds it in, a slow and careful respooling, until he can gather Loki in his arms again, then wraps them around him, warm.

Loki startles at the motion, though he allows Thor to fold him into his own sheets. Cocooning them both in a rumpled heap of body-warmed fabric, cloaks, and Thor’s arms.

“Good morning,” Thor rumbles, kissing Loki on the brow.

“Is it one?” Loki groans, burrowing into the dark warmth of the cocoon Thor has made, searching for the last dregs of night. His face presses cool against Thor’s chest, and Thor cannot help grinning at how Loki all but nuzzles against it.

Thor hums, before following Loki down into the darkness of their cozy sheet-shelter. “We can make it one,” he suggests, and he knows Loki can hear the grin in his voice when Loki sighs his surrender, letting Thor kiss and nuzzle and touch in return.

They share a long moment of soft, sleepy kisses, tiny touches of lips to nose and brow, both of them clumsy and blind in the darkness. Loki presses one into the hollow of his ear, and Thor thinks he kisses what must be Loki’s eyelid once, before Loki nudges him away, climbing upward, the first to emerge from their cocoon.

“Fool,” Loki says, though the smile that twitches his lips is fond. “We cannot afford to lie about like this all morning.” And before Thor can make his protest, that surely they can allow themselves a respite, now that they are away from the ship, Loki adds, “We will lose the valewulf’s trail if we do not hurry. Or your friends will find it first.”

Yes, there is that.

Thor dresses in a hurry, pleased to find that he has finished sooner than Loki, who yawns, even as he pulls on his boots. “Last one out is a bilgesnipe’s bottom!” he calls, sprinting for the cave mouth, though he does not much mind—had expected, even—the spell Loki strikes him with, trapping him in a web like a spider’s, before he reaches the entrance. Struggling against the silken strands only serves to trap Thor further, and he watches, helpless, as Loki sails breezily past him, out into the sunlight beyond.

“The bilgesnipe’s bottom is you, I believe,” Loki says smugly, leaning in to make his words heard. His nose is almost close enough to touch Thor’s, and Thor dares the shift forward to nuzzle at Loki, even in this precarious position.
Blinks, puzzled, when Loki simply laughs and walks off without undoing the spell.

“Loki? Where are you going?” Thor calls after him, still snared by the web. Only his head and hands remain free, as in the wooden stocks they kept in Asgard’s lower quarters. “Loki, come back!”

It takes them the better part of the morning and afternoon combined before they find the beast, tearing at the carcass of a fresh-killed fawn. Spittle hangs from its jaws in long, wet strings, and its muzzle is stained with blood, crimson-bright against the grey of its fur. Its fangs, each razor-sharp and larger than the span of Thor’s hand, tear ruthless into the meat of the poor creature beneath it.

“Remember our strategy,” Loki warns softly, his hand careful on Thor’s elbow.

Thor nods, determined; during the time they spent tracking the beast, Loki had outlined a plan, of using his illusions to bait it into attacking empty air, leaving it open to Thor’s strikes. He has all of a second to squeeze Loki’s hand on his arm, reassuring, before the crackle of a twig underfoot catches the valewulf’s attention, and it turns—turning on them, charging as it roars, deafening.

Loki flings a bolt of magic at its eyes, immediate, a sharp and sapphire blaze meant to sting. And when the valewulf howls, temporarily blinded, Thor seizes the moment to strike at its legs with his sword, their intent being to weaken it early. Barely manages to evade its attempts at trampling him.

But too soon does the spell upon its eyes fade, and the valewulf lunges, its jaws snapping shut too close to Thor’s arm for his liking, its breath hot and wet against skin.

True to his word, Loki spells the image of a bird toward it, leading it to turn its back on Thor, and he lands a blow, shallow and glancing, that slides off the valewulf’s thick pelt. Sends him tumbling to the ground, Thor righting himself only with the help of the sword. With a growl, Thor imbues the sword with his own power, lightning racing quick through the hilt and into the blade, and his second blow connects, pressing forcibly through the pelt into flesh, drawing a raging howl from the beast.

It flicks him off its back and onto the ground, as one might an irritable fly, and Thor curses as the valewulf’s tail sweeps along the ground, swift, tumbling Thor into the path of its waiting jaws. He manages to leap out of the way in the last moment, as the creature’s jaws close with a snap on empty air.

“I swear, this beast is bigger and more feral than our sister’s hound!” Thor calls, after two more attempts at striking the valewulf a fatal blow. “And tricksy as well!” It had darted toward one of Loki’s illusions, a larger one of a stag, as expected. But when Thor leapt at it, ready to drive his blade into the valewulf’s underbelly, he found it had doubled back instead, the beast’s gaping maw waiting for him, nearly taking off his head.

“Stop talking,” Loki hisses, “and strike where I tell you.”

Thor sighs, doing as told once more, before their manoeuvre nearly costs him his hand. “Loki, your illusions are working against us!” he shouts.

Loki switches tactics abruptly, throwing bolts of magic at its eyes again, as he had at the start, but this time in greater numbers. With the same ease as his own throwing knives.

For a moment, Thor wonders why Loki does not simply blind the creature, instead of wasting magic on temporary bursts of blindness. Then he realizes Loki probably wishes to keep its eyes intact; if Loki did not intend to keep them for himself, they were sure to fetch a hefty price at the markets. Keeping this in mind, Thor follows suit, throwing a bolt of his own power at its head, a peal of
thunder following the disorienting strike of lightning he sends it. And when the valewulf rears back, howling, its clawed forelegs raised to strike, to rend, Thor threads a loop of lightning through a nearby treetop, using the pivot as a grappling hook to launch himself straight at the valewulf, sword out and aimed. Drives it deep into the creature’s chest and splits it in one clean stroke to its belly.

The valewulf crashes to the forest floor, a thunderous impact that shakes leaves from trees, and startles birds from their nests, but the moment following is eerily silent.

Thor sets a hand on his knee, the rest of his weight sustained by his sword, the point driven deep into ground near the valewulf’s carcass. That, he means to say, his breath heaving as he turns to Loki, was harder than defeating a cursed bilgesnipe.

But the sight of Loki makes his breath catch in his throat, hard; a crimson streak of the valewulf’s blood smears one cheek, and scarlet flecks stipple the other, lending Loki’s cheeks color, the hue of it bright against pale skin. His hair is matted dark against his brow, and his eyes are wild, the green of them annexed by black.

And when Loki’s breath quickens in his chest, swallowing hard at the sight of Thor, Thor can only wonder if he appears equally appealing; blood smudges his own brow, lightning sparking bright at his fingertips, and surrounding them now is not the scent of the earth, nor the sickly tang of blood, but something darker, dangerous, primal—the smell of the land after an untamed storm.

The air between them crackles with a current unseen, with promise, and Thor stalks toward him, a predator having found new prey, stepping careless over the valewulf’s carcass on the ground. Leaves his sword driven into earth, toppling it in his haste as his vambrace catches the hilt. Grips Loki by the shoulders and slams him against a tree, pinning him to rough bark.

“Have you lost your mind?” Loki hisses. “There are wild beasts about, and this valewulf could have a mate—”

Thor silences him with a kiss, swift and hard and demanding, his intent to rob the breath from Loki’s lungs and leave him gasping for air, his face flushed for lack of it. And when he has, Thor grins, the sharpness of it too reminiscent of Loki’s. “I thought you liked danger,” Thor rumbles, low. “And an element of the unknown.”

Loki, breath heaving, scowls, though desire is writ clear in his features, from the color rising high in his cheeks to the pupils of his eyes, blown wide. “Only when I am not in danger of being eaten,” he snipes. But he swivels his hand then, fingers forming invisible runes in the air, before his seiðr settles around them, unseen.

Thor can only perceive it as a trick of the light, a ripple of the air, but Loki manages to breathe, “A barrier, to alert us of—” before Thor is upon him again, having heard explanation enough. Kisses his way down Loki’s neck, pale, delectable, darkly pleased when each mark of his affection leaves a rose bloom along skin. Upends Loki’s armour over his head in quick, jerking pulls, to suck darker ones still along the line of Loki’s collarbone. Down the cleft of his chest. And when Thor is near enough, he dips his head to mouth at one of Loki’s nipples, pebbled and hard in the crisp air, nipping and biting and sucking until Loki releases the sweetest moan, one that has Thor’s length hardening instant in his trousers.

“Thor,” Loki whispers, his voice a near-sob. “Please.”

Thor makes quick work of undoing the laces of their trousers, freeing Loki’s length with both hands, greedy, before crowding Loki back into the tree. Lets his own length slide against Loki’s for a friction perfect and rough and hot. And when Loki fumbles to take them both in hand, to
synchronize their pleasure, Thor marvels at the idea, closing his fist around Loki’s, their motions sure and steady, familiar from intimacies shared between them long ago.

“Faster,” Loki pleads. His voice is hoarse, raw, desperate in his throat. “Faster.”

And Thor gives him faster, obliging in all the ways Loki wants. Revels in the sound of Loki’s moans, wanton and wet, the heightened volume of them when Thor squeezes, just the right amount of rough. But a glance at the lightning sparking through the treetops, remnants of their fight with the valewulf, gives Thor ideas, and he grins, all sharpness and teeth.

It is Loki’s only warning before he strokes a bolt of lightning, electric-blue and bright through their joined hands. Lets it course through their cocks, swift and unforgiving, a shuddering sting that shocks Loki into spilling, his eyes flying wide, his breath hitched tight in his throat, as he gasps against Thor’s mouth.

Loki manages a hazy what just—and another series of sweet, breathy cries as Thor strokes him through it, coaxing another surge of his seed over their fingers, then another, until Loki slumps against the tree, dazed, blinking in bewilderment.

“Thor, what—” Loki tries, his breath shuddering in his chest. “Did you just—”

“I did,” Thor says, letting Loki draw his own conclusions for one second, two, before surging forward for a kiss, leaving him no room to protest, to think. Drives his tongue deep into Loki’s throat, licking, sucking, hitching Loki’s leg over his arm as he does so.


Loki is—Loki is still something. Thor registers, sifting through the words sensitive, coming, and perhaps guiltily, not ready, but then Loki’s gaze falls between them and he murmurs a tiny, breathy oh, recognition that though he has found his pleasure, Thor has not found his. Nods, the motion willing, as he banishes his trousers with a whispered spell, the soft leather reappearing near Thor’s sword. Widens his hips, letting Thor hitch his leg higher.

They had both left the vial of oil that eased their way back on the ship, a fact Thor discovered while rummaging through their packs for a midday meal. But needs must, and Thor presses his fingers into the mess they have made on Loki’s belly, a mixture of Thor’s precome and Loki’s seed combined.

“Crude,” Loki huffs, curling his lip, at the thought of using their essence for joining. But Thor hushes his protests with another kiss, and when his fingers nudge into Loki, searching, aimed, Loki gasps, leaving no breath for protests whatsoever. His hands scrabble at Thor’s shoulders, before deciding to wind around his neck for traction. “Thor,” Loki whimpers, at the insistent dig of Thor’s fingers. Jolts, sudden, when they meet their mark, stroking, masterful.

And when Loki writhes in Thor’s grasp, a whine building low in his throat, the words please, please falling from his lips, Thor reclains his fingers, slicking his cock with Loki’s essence. Presses the head to the tight cleft of Loki’s ass, before pushing into Loki, a swift and effortless upstroke that buries him to the hilt. Delights in Loki’s startled gasp as he does so, the shuddering oh as Thor buries teeth into Loki’s neck the same.

His thrusts are rough and uneven, each a punishing, pounding stroke that forces the breath from Loki’s lungs, drives a cry from his throat, raw and ragged and wet. The sounds alone are enough to spur Thor into pushing harder, deeper, taking Loki’s mouth as he does so, claiming it in a messy, bruising kiss.
But it is not enough, for Thor wants more, faster, harder, to be pressed so deep within Loki that his brother cannot cry out, cannot breathe, and he hikes Loki’s other leg into the crook of his arm. Uses the tree to gain more traction, to push that much further, before surging forward, brutal, fucking him so forcefully the tree jolts with each push, shaking leaves from branches, each withdrawal lifting Loki’s hips off the tree before Thor’s hips slam him back down.

“Norns,” Loki sobs, hoarse, his arms clenched tight around Thor’s neck. “We have never—this has never been so—” His voice gives out as he gasps good, and it seems it is all he can do now to hold on, to wait until Thor finds release.

Thor’s pace is relentless and rough, each thrust so feral that Loki can only whimper and gasp, his breath caught in rigid little shivers in his chest. But soon enough the familiar prickle of Thor’s peak builds tight in his spine, each thrust bringing him closer, closer, until with one deep and lunging push, Thor sinks teeth into Loki’s neck, his cock buried within twitching hard, before spilling thick and hot and wet.

They stay this way for a moment, with Thor lapping at the bruises he has left on Loki’s neck, his cock shuddering within Loki with each aching burst of seed. Finding himself oddly irritated when a rivulet escapes, trickling treacherous down Loki’s thigh, and lets one of Loki’s legs down so he can gather the offending trickle with the head of his cock. Presses back in, leaving Loki aching, stretched, and undeniably filled, relishing the full-throated moan Loki makes upon re-entry—though Thor enjoys swallowing it down even more, devouring the sound with a kiss that is gentler this time, sweeter, the fog of lust following their battle now fading.

“All right?” Thor whispers, his breath shaky against Loki’s mouth. He knows Loki can take such force as Thor can give, but it does not mean he had not hurt his brother in his haste. The kisses he presses to Loki’s lips and brow now are softer, smaller and apologetic.

“Ngh,” Loki says, clearly at the height of his eloquence. He seems more than content to simply trade kisses and licks, sloppy and off-centre in their haze.

Thor nods in response, heartened that Loki does not hold their moment of frenzied post-battle lust against him. Seems to have revelled in it, even, if the fevered flush of his cheeks and his gasping breaths are any indication. And though Thor slips free a moment later, his length softening, he winds his arms around Loki’s waist to keep him upright, for Loki’s legs have just given out beneath him.

“Mmhn,” Thor murmurs, licking back into Loki’s mouth to taste the sweetness of his lips and tongue. Hitches Loki against him, safe. And when Loki nips his lower lip with teeth, his only reproach for such reckless coupling, “Hngh.”

These are the only words they exchange for the next while, the two of them satisfied with sharing the remaining moments of their intimacy in silence.

~

The valewulf’s carcass is heavy, as they realize, when they finally untangle themselves from one another. Thor suggests dressing their kill immediately, before its meat and pelt can spoil, and together, they work quickly, Thor dressing the valewulf, and Loki preserving its organs in a liquid suspension of his own making.

Whether Loki intends to keep these organs for spellcraft or for sale, Thor knows not, but he says nothing of it. Only hefts the valewulf over his shoulders, its weight now lessened, and with Loki’s help, carries it back to their cave campsite to sling it over a tree. Lets it drain into bottles of Loki’s design, meant to preserve its blood in the freshest state.
They wait for the carcass to finish draining before Thor takes a knife to it, skinning the beast for its pelt, the process of which takes another hour. The rest he leaves to Loki, from the cleaning of the pelt to the cleanup, but when Thor returns from a quick wash in the nearby stream, he finds Loki cutting into the pelt he prepared.

“Loki, what are you doing?” Thor gapes, for it is known that pelts retain higher value when kept whole.

Loki flaps his hand, lazy. “Rest assured, Thor, I have only taken small sections of it to make other items. No one will notice the absence of a few slivers here and there.” Already the clever threads of Loki’s seiðr wind swiftly through the pelt, closing the ragged seams, and Thor breathes out a sigh, relieved.

“What are you making, then?” Thor asks, sitting cross-legged beside Loki, wondering at the small pile of goods Loki has finished crafting in his absence.

It seems Loki had taken to heart the bookseller’s advice, of fashioning the pelt into other items besides a flea-bitten rug, for there are fur-lined gloves in the pile, a scarf, and small coin purses with fashionable tufts of fur patterned on the outside, materials for which he must have transmuted from leaf and stone. But the item Loki works on now is far larger, and draws the lion’s share of Thor’s curiosity.

Loki is silent for a moment longer, his brow furrowed in concentration as he lays the finishing touches, and when he attaches a silver clasp, intricate, beneath the fur, Thor can see what it is that takes form in his hands.

“A cloak!” Thor exclaims, astonished.

“How fortunate I am,” Loki mutters, “that you have not gone completely blind in the eye left to you.” But when Thor bites his lip, stung at this venom unexpected, Loki gentles his voice, holding out the garment, the look of it soft in Loki’s arms. “Would you…would you like to hold it?” he amends.

Thor nods, grateful to have the chance to hold his brother’s work in his arms, for anything of Loki’s design has always been of superior quality. The cloak is warm in his hands, with just the right amount of weight, and the fabric circled by the fur collar is a deep and pleasing crimson, the shade of strawberries in Asgard’s summers.

“This feels just like mother’s weaving,” Thor marvels, as he caresses the fine cloth between his fingers. The weave and softness of it is reminiscent of the garments and tapestries that came from Frigga’s loom. Then Thor shakes his head, when he realizes just what about this cloak differs from those of Frigga’s make. “No, it is better.”

They had both taken in the skills and lessons their parents gave them, and made them better somehow. Thor, stronger, and Loki—

“Of course,” Loki says airily. “Where do you think I was, when you were busy bashing in the heads of every able warrior in Asgard, down at the barracks?”

Thor keeps silent the fact that half that time, Loki would be secreted in a dark corner of the barracks, watching Thor match his strength—‘bashing heads’, as Loki put it—with the other warriors. “It is beautiful,” he offers simply, his arms outstretched as he holds it out, meaning to return it to Loki.

“I have not yet given you a gift proper to mark your kingship,” Loki says. He flaps a hand to decline its return. “Consider this to be my gift to you.”
“Thank you,” Thor says, startled. It is a kingly gift, and while it would be far too easy to accept it by swirling it around his own shoulders, a bulwark against the wind, something tells Thor he should do otherwise. He draws a breath, for courage, for a boldness he does not feel, and shifts into Loki’s space. Drapes the cloak around Loki’s shoulders instead. “I would see you in my colors,” he says, his voice low, the desire coiling tight in his belly, like a serpent. “The sight of it would make a far greater gift.”

Loki blinks, stunned at the gesture for all of a moment. “If you insist,” Loki sniffs, as if it is he who does Thor the greater favour, though he draws it tighter about his shoulders, greedy, possessive, and every kind of pleased.

“You look—well, in my colors,” says Thor. Then he winces internally, at the clumsy stumble of his words; he might have chosen beautiful, lovely, delectable, and the only one that had fumbled its way from his mouth was well. Thor could spend hours under Heimdall’s tutelage of wordcraft and still not have half of Loki’s skill with words.

Fortunately, Loki seems not to have noticed. “You think so, brother?” he says coyly, holding out an arm, long and lithe, to admire himself in the sunlight. The sight makes Thor swallow, tight. “Perhaps I should fashion one for you in return. Drape you in my colors. What say you?”

Thor nearly salivates at the thought of such a visible display, of being claimed so indubitably as Loki’s, and a shiver of delight thrills up his spine. “Yes,” he breathes. “I would be honoured to wear your colors, Loki.”

A quick gleam of pleasure and surprise both crosses Loki’s face, though it is mere seconds before Loki’s features smooth out into casual indifference. With a small nod, Loki’s hands begin moving in quick, practiced motions, nothing like the magic he had cast for the children’s stories, with brightly twinkling lights, but no less deft, his fingers twisting and circling in the air, as if threading an invisible loom.

It is a wonder to watch Loki work, to see the cloak take form in his hands, slowly but surely, and Thor finds himself so awestruck that he nearly misses when Loki asks him to pass a piece of the valewulf’s pelt to him, to fashion a collar for the cloak.

“Here you are,” Loki says softly, after he finishes the final touches. As if even he is surprised by his own handiwork, as he sets the cloak in Thor’s arms.

It must be Thor’s imagination that this one is even softer and warmer than the last, as if Loki has poured every ounce of his care and affection into creating it, but when Loki catches his gaze, expectant, Thor knows better than to speak of this. Simply swirls the cloak around his shoulders, and closes the silver clasp set within it, twin to the clasp on Loki’s, snug. Marvels at the shade of it, of deepest midnight-green, appearing nearly black when tilted away from the sun just so.

They are each other’s now, and there is no greater, palpable proof of it than this.

“Thank you,” Thor whispers. The cloak is indeed a gift against the cool air setting in as evening falls, and he would have Loki know how grateful he is. “Thank you.”

He draws Loki into his arms, and presses a kiss to the edge of Loki’s brow, in case the words are not enough, are not demonstrative enough—though by the way a smile twitches at Loki’s mouth, even as he grumbles Thor, no, you overeager puppy, stop, it seems that they are.
Loki fashions more cloaks following that, one for each of the myriad colors found in the Bifrost, though never again in the same vibrant shade of crimson, or hue of deepest green.

Their own cloaks of these brilliant shades they have folded and packed away, as the next morning, the wind had died down and the sun shone bright and even across the valley, leaving the weather far too warm for them. Besides, Thor would not have them mistaken as being items for sale, for Loki had woven them with the utmost care and attention, and in his heart of hearts Thor thinks them a keepsake of their trip here. A memento of the time they spent together, tracking and hunting and playing, if Thor dares say it, as they had in the days of old.

They arrive at the next market day early, when the vendors have only begun furling back canvas awnings and setting out their wares. Waste no time in returning to the bookseller, whose brows jump into his hairline at their reappearance.

“You have a pelt then, I presume?” he asks warily.

“A pelt, yes,” Thor says. “Among other things. But we have need of a place to sell them, and will not tarry long enough in this land to acquire a permit.”

The bookseller strokes his short, greying beard, considering. “And what else have you to sell besides the valewulf’s pelt?”

Loki conjures the sight of all that he made the night previous, from the gloves and coin purses to the scarves and boots, and a knowing smile tugs his lips when the bookseller’s eyes widen at the sight of the last items revealed: the fur-collared cloaks, from royal yellow and midnight blue to the hue of sage-flower purple.

“For the purple cloak, you can sell your wares from my booth,” the bookseller breathes in wonderment. “On any day you wish. For I have wished such a thing to keep me warm during the night hours of the market.”

Thor looks toward Loki, who hems and haws, pretending to deliberate the terms when they both know that this is a worthy offer. By the end of it, they wrench a week’s worth of sale days and half of the books Loki wished for from the bookseller, in exchange for the cloak and a small portion of their earnings.

Upon receiving his new cloak, the bookseller sweeps it around his shoulders, the garment resplendent in the light, and keeps it on, despite the heat. It is a feeling Thor knows well, for who would not wish to display such a fine cloak? And while Thor had resigned himself to be the crier for their wares, it turns out that the bookseller’s display of his cloak is promotion enough, drawing others to the booth, all of them curious at the source of his new garment.

In short succession, the yellow and blue cloaks are sold, as are the violet and the spring-green. Even the lurid pink is promptly snatched up by a lady who can only be one of the nobles of Alfheim-Beta. Their last, a foppish orange, one Thor could have sworn would not sell, is bought by an older gentleman.

“For my daughter,” he claims, “to match the hue of her hair.” The pouch of gold scarcely leaves his hand before he secrets the garment beneath his robes, and stalks away in a hurry.

Loki only nods, and when Thor’s brow crinkles, confused, as they watch the man leave, Loki’s breath is warm against his ear. “It is for his younger lover,” Loki murmurs, laughter light in his voice, “who is most definitely not a lady.”
“Ah,” Thor beams in understanding, for the purpose of his presence here is to earn coin to purchase gifts for his lover. And if he can make the happiness of other couples while doing so, then so much the better.

Loki makes quick work of unloading the rest of their stock of valewulf goods, peddling gloves and scarves to the women that venture close, curious, while Thor hawks boots and belts to the men. And when even those commodities are gone, they turn to the sale of the entrails, the blood, to those who wish them for spellcraft, or other darker purposes, people Thor is more than content to let Loki deal with.

On the bookseller’s recommendation, they submit the pelt itself to the market’s auction, and the bidding for it is so furious that even the auctioneer’s rapid-fire prattle cannot keep up. By the end of the night, they gather the earnings from their sales and the pelt’s winning bidder, their gold filling sacks enough that they must borrow a wheelbarrow to cart it all back to the ship. Loki spells the sacks to appear as bags of old, sprouting potatoes, and themselves as common labourers so they are not beset by thieves on their way back to the Statesman.

Heimdall, not fooled by their disguises in the least, gives them a knowing nod upon their return, as Thor heaves and pushes the wheelbarrow up the gangway.

“Come,” Loki says, beckoning, when they return to their room. Their glamours have faded by now, for they no longer have need of them. “We will store our earnings here.” He presses the tips of his fingers together, before shifting them in a graceful rotation, revealing a small, shimmering chamber.

Thor steps inside, hefting their sacks of gold in with him, though he can see other treasures taking up space on the neat, orderly shelves. There are other gold coins, a handful of jewels, and little silver trinkets, all partitioned into piles, their supply clearly dwindling. Loki had likely used them to barter for their needs, in places that did not accept units as currency. A black velvet bag sits to one side, secured with a worn gold cord, but Loki does not deign to mention what lies within, and in fact sweeps it quickly out of sight, nudging it further into the shadows of this spelled chamber.

“It is nothing of import,” Loki says, as Thor tracks the motion with his eye, curious. Which means that it very much is.

Thor sighs, but decides not to pry, for Loki will reveal its contents when he chooses.

“Loki, are those—” he tries instead. He thinks he had seen a flash of their mother’s second favourite pair of earrings in the farthest pile. Their father’s signet ring, engraved with his insignia of three triangles interlocking, the valknut. Items of sentimental nature, to be traded for their value and spent at the last, no doubt.

“A tidy sum,” Loki interrupts, nodding at the sack heavy in Thor’s hands, “for Asgard’s coffers.”

Thor draws a sharp breath then; this sum is indeed enough to keep their people fed and clothed for the next few years, if not more. But until their stop on Alfheim-Beta, he had not even thought of the state of their coffers, too occupied with the day to day issues that crept up. And while Thor had been busy stamping out all the little fires, Loki had been playing the long game, steadily supporting him from the shadows, without mention. It occurs to him then to learn from his brother’s example, for it seems every action of Loki’s, from an innocuous outing at the markets to a simple hunt, even if first suggested by Thor, can be adapted to have meaning and purpose.

"Loki,” he says, considering, "did you know this would happen? You planned for this?” As soon as the words leave his mouth, he regrets them. Of course Loki had. Loki had a multitude of plans. Even his plans had plans.
"After bringing about Ragnarok, I hardly had time to stop by the royal coffers," says Loki dryly. But Thor knows the handful of jewels, coins, and family heirlooms are what Loki must have secreted away over the years, to make a nest egg of his own. Finds his heart warmed by the knowledge that Loki has been delving into his own supply of resources, drawing upon what must have been dear, to help their people.

It seems Thor is not the only one to know sacrifice for the sake of their people.

“Oh, Loki,” Thor says, his voice soft, his heart so full he can barely contain it.

Loki blinks at this unexpected tenderness, before charging onward. “Congratulations,” he says, as if wilfully ignoring the fact that his own sense of sentiment has deeply touched Thor’s heart. “You have single-handedly refilled Asgard’s—”

“Not single-handedly,” Thor insists, setting the sack down and slipping a hand around Loki’s neck to draw him close. Lets his other hand wind around Loki’s waist, as he nudges their foreheads together, warm, before thinking better of it and brushing a kiss to Loki’s brow instead. His mouth. “I could not have done this without you.”

“I had a better plan,” Loki sniffs, between another kiss to his mouth, then to his nose, “but I suppose this will do.”

“Why, what would you have done?” Thor asks, curious, pausing mid-kiss.

“I would have cleaned out all their gambling dens,” says Loki, “as I was going to suggest earlier. But I suppose that would leave us unwelcome in their lands for the next, oh, decade.”

Thor laughs, for he can see this all too easily. “Most unwelcome,” he agrees, “though I do not see why we cannot visit one or two such dens to amass a little more for our coffers.” He knows the idea will appeal to Loki’s sense of mischief, and Loki had acquiesced to his request for a hunt. “Besides, we have enough to make a decent starting wager now.”

“Do we?” Loki says, arching a brow. He reaches slowly into the farthest treasure pile, his fingers curling around familiar heirlooms, the tilt of his smile far too impish.

“You are not wagering mother’s earrings,” Thor starts, before catching a glint of gold curled tight in Loki’s palm. “And come back here with father’s ring,” he calls, as Loki dances out of reach. “Loki, no—”

Chapter End Notes

Now that Thor has some pocket money again, what follows is a proper courtship! :D
They spend long enough in the main city-port of Alfheim-Beta for Loki to clear out two of their gambling dens, to sate his desire for mischief and supplement their valewulf ware earnings. And in the hours it takes Loki to cheat, deceive, and swindle his way into the dens’ upper echelons of winners, Thor has time enough to purchase the items he intends as courtship gifts for Loki—one to be presented for each day of their remaining stay here.

Upon his return from the market, Thor spies Loki secreting away his winnings, and setting out for a third gambling den, before he redirects Loki’s path abruptly, an arm slung easy around his shoulders.

“We should see what else this land has to offer,” Thor declares quickly. He ushers Loki into a busy thoroughfare, where they can shake Loki’s pursuers. Likely those who had lost their money swiftly and sorely, for Loki had a tendency to be brutally efficient when he set his mind to it.

No fool himself, Loki has seen what Thor escorts him away from, and sidles closer to Thor’s side, his smile far too smug for their circumstance. “I agree,” he says silkily, slipping his own arm around Thor’s waist, bold. “After all, we have less than a week left before we must leave.”

It is a regretful reminder that their time here is drawing to a close, and Thor intends to make the most of it. And after a quick stop at the ship to unburden Loki of his winnings and resupply for another week-long excursion, Thor guides Loki toward the mountain forests they had explored on their first foray into this land.

“Quickly now, before the sun sets,” Thor urges, when they have returned to the cave they occupied previously, to set aside supplies.

Loki lifts his gaze from the empty bottles he deposits in an alcove. “What for?” he asks, his tone dry and unimpressed. “Another hunt?”

“Of course not,” Thor huffs. “While you were swindling the fools at—I mean, safeguarding Asgard’s assets,” he amends hastily, when Loki narrows his eyes, “I made inquiries of what other sights we might see here, what herbs and wild plants we might search for, to replenish the stores you lost on Asgard.” Thor had not been idle, even after procuring Loki’s gifts.

“I see,” Loki says casually, though by the way he stands straighter, and his lips twitch at the corners, Thor can tell he is intrigued. “In addition to inquiries on what other game might be found here, no doubt.” And at Thor’s tiny admission of yes, all right, that too, Loki sighs. “I should have known.”

Still, he follows Thor from the cave willingly. As if by virtue of Thor’s thoughtfulness regarding the sights and spellcraft materials Alfheim-Beta has to offer, he is forgiven for asking after further game to be found.

They spend the rest of the evening and the next few days traipsing carefree through the forests. Foraging for herbs and plants that Loki—despite Thor’s inquiries—must point out, for there are evidently minute differences from one hue of white to another, or in the shape of leaves on a stem that could mean the difference between life and death. Drinking from clear mountain streams in between each short trek, before continuing onward.
And when the small trips for herbs grow tiresome, Thor tows Loki with him on hunts for simple game. They cannot hunt indiscriminately, but Thor chooses their targets wisely, ones that give them meat enough for food, along with rare scales or feathers to assuage Loki’s grumbling. For Alfheim-Beta is a veritable mine of spell ingredients, whether it is the offal from its beasts or the vegetation that grows wild along its forest floors and cliff crags.

Thor saves the bestowing of gifts for the night, in the hour before they bed down, when Loki is at his softest and sleepiest and most receptive to such things. On the first night, however, Loki is anything but.

“I have said time and time again that this plant can be found elsewhere,” Loki says, cross. He dabs at the gash torn open beside Thor’s brow, while beyond the cave mouth, the sun slips low behind the mountains.

They had been in the middle of a climb along one of Alfheim-Beta’s craggy mountains, since Thor had heard tell of the fierbelle—a hardy red flower that grew between cracks of even the most stubborn stone, effective for restoring stamina. And during their climb, in Thor’s struggle for a handhold on the steep face, his hand had alighted on a grouse-like bird’s home, nestled within one of the mountain’s many crevices. Startled from its nest, the bird clawed him with its talons on his blind side, and Thor had lost his grip, saved only from plummeting to his death by a desperate blast of Loki’s magic, leaving him suspended only three feet from certain doom.

Loki had followed in a more controlled descent shortly after, his face far too pale and his hand trembling in Thor’s as he dragged Thor back to their cave, cutting their outing short.

“It is not found elsewhere, and you know it,” says Thor. His fingers rise to prod at his wound, cautious. Loki had cast a small healing spell with the reserve of magic he had left, but when the bleeding did not cease, they had had to resort to crude stitches to seal the gash.

“Be still,” Loki hisses, catching Thor’s fingers mid-air with his free hand, as he dabs away the blood crusted at Thor’s brow with the other. “And be that as it may, the fierbelle is not worth your life.”

While Loki’s reprimand continues, along the vein of how Thor should have a care with his life, for Asgard would cease to function without its bullheaded king, Thor pats the pouch where he tossed his collected herbs. Draws forth his first gift to inspect it, thankful it had not been shattered in his fall. He had brought it with him for the day, searching for the most opportune moment to present it, and though it had not come up, now seems as good a time as any.

“Loki,” Thor tries, in the middle of Loki’s diatribe—something about how he would refuse to return to the ship if Thor was fool enough to get himself killed, for Loki would not be accused of fratricide and regicide both—and when his interruption bears no fruit, Thor clears his throat, purposeful. “Loki, I have a gift for you.”

“Oh,” Loki blinks, quieting immediately. And again, when Thor reaches for his hand, turning it upward and pressing the leaf clasp into his palm. “Oh.” His eyes are wide as he marvels at the glasswork, of deepest forest-green, twined with gold filigree for the leaf’s veins. Traces the delicate vasculature with a finger, gentle, following each artful loop and twist of the tiny golden wires. “Where did you—even the booth we visited had not such fine craftsmanship as this.”

“I visited several other booths nearby,” Thor beams. While he had returned to the first for comparison’s sake, another vendor further down had sold a piece curiously similar—a trait common to large markets—though with finer craftsmanship, and Thor had happily purchased it there, after a successful attempt at haggling. “Do you like it?”
“I…” Loki swallows, as he gazes at the clasp in his palm. “I suppose it will suffice. Now I need only find a cloak to match its quality.” He secrets the clasp away in a pouch of his own, a pleased little smile curving his lips.

Thor huffs, the sound caught between a sigh and a laugh, for though Loki had murmured it will suffice, the way he held it, like it was something fragile and precious, and traced it lovingly with his fingertips had given away his clear adoration. Still, he leans in, hopeful for a rewarding kiss when Loki reaches out with both hands toward his cheeks.

Only for Loki to grab him firmly by the ears and twist.

“Do not think I have forgotten what happened today,” he hisses. “If you think you can ply me with gifts, to compensate for your own carelessness—”

“I had this beforehand!” Thor cries. He does not struggle to free himself from Loki’s grip, however, for though what happened at the cliff was an accident, he is glad to know Loki is simply worried for him.

Only the promise that he will have a care for his life, offered with a watery smile seems to temper Loki’s wrath, and soon enough, Loki foregoes his hold on Thor’s ears. Reaches for Thor’s cheeks instead, sighing when Thor flinches away, before shuffling forward to close the distance between them. Clasps Thor’s face in his hands.

“Loki?” Thor says, hesitant.

Loki does not deign to reply; only touches a tiny, soothing kiss to each reddened ear, and a third to Thor’s mouth, small and soft and sweet. “Thank you,” he says finally. The tips of his own ears are reddened for a different reason entirely, and Thor darts forward now, assured of Loki’s intention and affection, to return a kiss of his own to each.

By the time they have finished a light dinner and bedded down for the night, with Loki nestled safe in his arms, Thor cannot call the day—and his gift-giving, despite all that happened earlier—anything other than a success.

~

The second night passes peacefully, without injury or ear-twisting, though Thor finds he must still actively search for opportunity to present his gift. For after dinner—a plump pheasant they hunted earlier in the day, and a bottle of wine shared between them, their meal lit by Loki’s twinkling mage-lights—Loki had yawned, drowsy. Curled into their cloaks, his face nestled in the soft fur, and left only space enough for Thor to slip in behind him.

At least, until Thor nudged him awake, and slid a stack of books in his direction.

“What is this?” Loki says, lifting his head and squinting at the titles of the books. “Another gift?”

The hair on the side he had lain on is adorably sleep-mussed and Thor reaches out to smooth it back behind Loki’s ear, gentle. Lets his fingers linger to toy with the curl that refuses to be combed back, and springs up again, stubborn.

“They are the rest of the books you seemed intrigued by,” Thor nods, “that we could not barter for from the sale of the cloak.”

And while Loki had seemed content enough with the arcane books on magic history and spellcraft gained from the stall the first time, his eyes are positively aglow at these new ones. He scrambles closer to the fire to read the first book in hand, dragging the tangle of cloaks and sheets with him until
it forms a nest around him, leaving Thor the last threadbare sheet they laid on the cave floor.

Which simply will not do.

“Thor, what are you—” Loki starts, as Thor burrows his way into the nest and settles against Loki, snug. “There is not enough room for you to—”

Thor simply hums and rests his head on Loki's shoulder. Closes his eyes, for he has no book of his own, and cannot make heads or tails of any of Loki’s texts.

Loki sighs, a familiar and long-suffering sound, though he does not turn Thor out, and Thor drifts off to the sound of the crackling fire, the sporadic turn of a page, cozy in their conglomerate of sheets and cloaks, with only their heads and hands poking out.

By the third night, Thor has learned his lesson well; before Loki finds slumber, or bundles himself away in a self-made nest of cloaks and sheets again, absorbed in his books, Thor shifts into Loki’s space, determined.

“I have something for you,” Thor announces, “that is just the thing for a night such as this.”

“Do you now?” Loki muses, his appetite sated as he reclines along the cave wall, arms resting lazy behind his head. His gaze flicks toward the pouch where he keeps safe his ornate clasp and the stack of books he continues to peruse at his leisure. At Thor’s continued silence, he sits up, curious. “What is it?”

Now that he has Loki’s full attention, Thor hastens toward the gift he has kept hidden behind an old sheet, further into the cave. Their previous visits to the market had sparked the idea, for in addition to the sights and aromas, Thor had heard a merrymaking through tin horns, simple woodwinds, and goatskin drums. The raucous, cheerful noise had not escaped Loki’s notice either, as Loki had nodded subtly along, when first their guide led them deep into the markets.

“A lyre?” Loki says softly, wondering, as Thor presses the instrument into his arms. He holds it to the light of the fire, the better with which to see it. Turns the lyre over in his hands, admiring the woodwork, before caressing it with long fingers, from crossbar to bridge. “It is beautiful,” he murmurs.

“Yes,” Thor agrees, though his gaze does not stray from Loki.

Back on Asgard, Loki had owned one of its like, and though smaller and crudely carved, meant for a child’s hands, he played it often enough for Thor when they were young. As they grew older, however, Thor had seen the instrument drift farther and farther back into Loki’s room, until it disappeared into the piles of books and scrolls Loki spent most nights combing through, studious.

Loki lets his fingers glide along the strings now, gentle, experimental. Hums a bar of a song to himself, recreating it on the lyre, frowning when a note rings sour. But the rest of the song comes easily once Loki grows accustomed to the instrument, and soon enough his dissonant plucking resolves into a simple melody, a lullaby their mother had often sung to lull them to sleep.

The words are lost to them now, Thor laments, but he is more than grateful that Loki remembers the tune, a precious fragment of their mother to remember her by.

For the rest of the night, Thor is content to gaze at Loki as he plays, eyes half-lidded and a smile at his lips, for he has not seen Loki take such pleasure in so simple a thing in long years. And when the
fire they built begins to burn low, Thor curls into their cloaks and sheets, forming a nest of his own. Folds Loki into it as well, generous, careful, in a way that he does not disturb Loki’s new enthrallment with his lyre.

The light and pleasing notes continue, though they grow softer as Thor lays his head on Loki’s shoulder, wishing to be nearer to Loki before he falls fully asleep. And just as Thor’s eyes drift shut, something brushes against his lips, quick and warm and soft.

Thor has a moment to wonder if it had been a moth, drawn by the light of their small fire, before catching the sight of Loki ducking away, subtle, the tips of his ears again a telltale crimson. Ah. So it had not been a moth, but Loki, darting toward him for a tiny kiss, then turning away as if nothing happened, continuing to strum softly.

He touches fingers to his lips, the smile that curves them one radiating from Thor’s heart, and presses a kiss of his own to Loki’s shoulder. The pale column of his neck that his collar leaves exposed. The soft space beneath his ear, delighting in the faltering notes that follow, the shiver of breath, before Loki turns into him more fully, the notes ceasing completely as he sets the lyre aside.

“Thank you,” Loki murmurs, his breath fanning warm against Thor’s hair. “For thinking of me.”

“I have always thought of you,” says Thor, his voice thicker, lower, on the cusp of sleep. “Always, Loki.”

Loki remains silent for a long moment after that.

Between that moment and the next, Loki slips an arm around Thor’s shoulders, tugging him in close. Cradles Thor’s head with his other arm, gentle, before pressing a kiss to his brow, so small and soft and achingly sweet Thor could weep. And though Loki denies all knowledge of such a thing in the morning, attributing the tiny presses of lips Thor felt on brow and eyelids and cheeks after to the myriad moths in the cave—all mysteriously absent come sunrise—Thor can see that his affections, his gifts, his attention, have continued to thaw Loki’s heart.

Sparking a secret happiness within his own.

~

Thor carries this happiness with him into the fourth day, and finds that this time, he cannot wait until the hours of night approach to present his gift. In their pursuit of the elusive seregonia flower, Loki had chosen a path through the woods that wound through swathes of wispy white blossoms. Led them beneath canopies of trees bent with age, as sunlight filtered gold through the leaves, and branches above twined with blooms of paled pink and regal purple.

“Loki,” Thor says, his hand rising to curl around Loki’s arm, light, steps slowing to a stop. “I have something I wish to give you.” Perhaps they had stumbled upon such scenic surroundings, but Thor can find no better backdrop than this to offer Loki the next prize he prepared.

“Oh?” Loki’s steps slow to match Thor’s, as he turns to Thor, intrigued. “I was wondering when your impatience would get the better of you. Very well—what have you for me this time?” He holds out both arms, the gesture immensely endearing, for Loki had done the same when he was small, whether he was demanding for Thor to carry him, read him a book, or surrender his share of the spoils from the palace kitchen, and a smile rises to Thor’s lips, unbidden.

He has half a mind to withhold this gift until night time, solely to tease Loki about who is truly the impatient one of them both. But Loki looks so sweetly imploring that Thor sighs, resigned, and
draws forth the canvas-wrapped package from the pack slung across his back.

“When I saw these, I thought they might you suit you,” Thor says, as Loki undoes the twine on the wrapping, eager. “To replace the ones you lost on Asgard.”

Loki unrolls the canvas to reveal a set of throwing knives, the hilt of each wound with black leather cord, the blades sharpened to cold precision. “I shall have use of them,” Loki nods, though he skims fingers along the hilt of each, reverent. Runs his thumb along the flat of the blades, careful.

While Thor had purchased this set to replace the ones Loki lost—Loki had not had time to extract his knives from those he killed, after all, with Hela’s overwhelming offensive, and Thor’s request for him to set off Ragnarok, of all things—it is clear from Loki’s admiration of the blades that he considers the gift far more than simple replacement.

“You can say you are happy, you know,” Thor blurts out, impulsive. “No one would begrudge you such a thing.” For while Loki had said such words as it will suffice, or I shall have use of them, it was plain that these gifts delighted him, and Thor can only wonder if Loki refuses to show joy, for fear that it will be taken from him. Stolen away and never returned. That he must hide his happiness makes something deep within Thor’s chest ache, and he reaches out to clasp Loki’s shoulders. “Loki, there is no shame in—”

“Happy?” Loki scoffs, as if such sentiment is beneath him. His fingers tighten over the hilt of one knife. “What makes you say such a thing?”

“Your—” Thor starts, his brow wrinkling in the effort, before he decides to soldier on, stubborn. “Your spells have been more stable of late, more effective. And they do not tax you as sorely as they did before.” In the past, casting several simple spells in quick succession would leave Loki ornery and exhausted, but Thor has noticed that his casting time has quickened now, the execution of complex spells more casual and effortless. “Your…your sleep has been less troubled.” Thor could claim his share of nightmares, but Loki himself had often woken him, tossing and turning about, and on one occasion, crying out, terrified, before Thor held him close, stroked his hair, and soothed him with murmured nothings until Loki returned to slumber. “And—”

“Enough!” Loki snaps, before Thor can add I have you seen you smile more, at our people, our friends, and at me. “I…enough.” Color rises sharp to his cheeks, a pink more vibrant than the blooms overhead. And after a moment’s reflection, Loki breathes out, long and slow. ‘Perhaps I am,” he says finally, grudging. “Though I do not believe I am alone in this happiness.”

Thor tilts his head, puzzled, breath catching in his throat when Loki packs away the knives and steps into his space. A tiny smile tugs at the corner of Loki’s mouth, amusement in the fact that he knows something Thor does not.

“Has it escaped your notice that the flowers on the trees and in the fields we traversed are blooming out of season?” Loki says. “Ones we have not seen before? When first we passed through here, the blooms were small and white, struggling to grow even beneath the trees’ shadow.”

A quick glance now, from the forest floor to the opened buds on the trees above, shows majestic blooms twining through the white, from sprays of lace-pink flowers to those lilac-bright against the leaves, all of them lush and healthy, and greater in number than their first passage through these lands.

“Oh,” Thor blinks. His heart quickens in his chest at the implication, and heat surges to his own cheeks, to match the hue of the blossoms above.
“You did not realize this was your doing?” The earlier twitch of Loki’s grin widens into a smile, full and genuine.

“I…I did not think that I could…” Thor tries, before a gentle breeze brings a petal from such a flourishing bloom to land in his hair, quelling his protests. Deepening his flush, this tangible proof of Thor’s happiness, for he had not considered such a thing possible, or at least, thought he hid it well enough.

Loki laughs then, the sound of a wind-woken chime as he reaches up with forefinger and thumb to pick it out of Thor’s hair. Contemplates the petal in his fingers, before letting it drift to the ground in a slow pirouette.

“Loki?” Thor says, hesitant, as Loki reaches out to cup Thor’s face. Traces the crow’s feet gathered at the corners of his eyes, most evident when Thor smiles, as he does now. As if he is simply content to gaze upon Thor, framed by the beauty of the woodland scene around them. “What are you—”

Loki only hushes him with a soft noise, his eyes hooded as he keeps Thor’s gaze. And before Thor can speak another word, Loki draws him forward, arms winding gentle around Thor’s neck, a pleased hum escaping his throat as Thor’s arms close around his waist, instinctive. Tilts his mouth up to meet Thor’s, the press of his lips warm and light and dry. And when Loki flicks his tongue gentle against Thor’s lips, seeking entry, Thor grants it willingly, wholeheartedly, reveling in the velvet slide of Loki’s tongue against his own, letting them brush together, teasing, warm.

They while away long minutes like this, with only the sound of the wind between them, the soft chirrup of birds overhead, and the rustle of leaves underfoot, their reprieve broken only when Loki draws away for a breath—before Thor tugs him in again, instant, catching Loki’s lower lip between teeth to draw out the pleasure of their kiss.

It is a novel experience, Thor thinks, to have this kind of adoration turned upon him; as if Loki had gazed upon Thor and found himself unable to help pressing their mouths together, soft. As though the sight of Thor’s joy had spurred one of equal measure in Loki, or doubled what was already there. And when next they draw apart for a breath in the same moment, Thor catches a fleeting glimpse of the affection filling Loki’s face, plain and undisguised, proof of his suspicion. An expression he has so often turned upon Loki, one so ardent and devoted it fills Thor’s own heart with affection to be the subject of it, until it aches fit to burst.

He hoards the image away, a treasure for safekeeping, even as Loki leans in for another kiss, hiding such open fondness from him.

When they have traded kisses enough among the sunlit blooms and the petals floating peaceful on the breeze, Loki sighs, a soft, shivering sound, his breath feather-light against Thor’s ear.

“You see,” he whispers, “in making my happiness, you have made yours.” Loki pauses, reflective. “Perhaps there is truth in the words that joy shared is doubled.”

“And that sorrow shared is halved,” Thor nods, closing the circle of those words, for this was wisdom their mother had oft told them to keep close to heart. He draws back the shortest distance, only to nudge his way back into Loki’s space, his brow pressed against Loki’s, their noses nuzzled together, warm. “I only wish that you would share such joys and sorrows with me from now on.”

Loki’s lips tilt in a half-smile. “I suppose I could do that,” he says, thoughtful. But before Thor can assure him that should he do so, Thor will ensure his joys are many and his sorrows few, Loki purrs, “When it suits me.”
Thor laughs, a rumble of honest amusement, and lifts Loki off his feet, catching his mouth in another kiss, then another through his startled squawk, for Loki will be Loki, and Thor would not change that for the world.

~

Following the break of their fast the next day, Thor rummages through his pack, eager to present his last gift to Loki, only to discover a dire dilemma—that he has no gift left at all. A second and more thorough search reveals a hole in the corner of his pack, the canvas worn from use, and his fingers poke through, doleful, instead of grasping the velvet-lined box Thor had taken great pains to hide.

It is a sore loss, for Thor had combed the market for this gift, a set of gold cufflinks with emeralds set bold in the centre, along with a matching tie pin. He had long decided that if Loki wished to dress in the fashion of Midgard’s witches, black-suited and sombre, he could do so with a touch of elegance. That Thor also decided it could serve as a small but unmistakable stamp of possession—Loki adorned with Thor’s gifts, Thor’s jewellery, however subtle—was something he kept to himself.

“Why the long face?” Loki asks, suddenly far too close for Thor’s liking. His hand rests gentle on Thor’s neck, a barely-there brush of fingers, fond.

“It is nothing.” Thor stows the supplies he had upended in his search back into his pack, his motions short and sharp. It would do him no good to regret that he had not gone with the leopard-print scarf he had considered instead of the cufflinks, or reflect that a scarf would not have fallen through a hole, too small to be found again.

Loki hmms, though he says nothing otherwise. “Come along, then,” he calls over his shoulder, when Thor makes no motion to join him, sitting cross-legged with a sigh instead. “We have much ground to cover before we leave this place, and I have no intention of spending our last days here moping.”

“I do not mope,” Thor says, though he rises to his feet. Loki’s barbs have always been effective in spurring him to action.

He follows Loki to a sheltered grove they passed several days past, dutifully storing away the roots Loki digs up—used to treat burns, Loki murmurs—then another, for white bell-shaped flowers, the purpose of which Thor hears but does not remember, as he tromps along, dejected.

By the time they reach the third place, a mess of brambles from which Loki picks perfect, tiny clusters of purple berries, Loki seems to have sensed Thor’s deeper melancholy, if not deduced the reason for it already. For he stands short minutes later, from where he was crouched amid the brambles, the basket he spelled for gathering only half-filled.

“I believe,” Loki says, sealing his harvest away in his pack, “that we have gathered enough of the materials I need for the day.”

“Oh,” nods Thor, unseeing. While Loki had been busy plucking at and examining each herb he required, Thor had continually considered returning to the market, before backtracking from the thought just as quickly; there was daylight enough to make the journey to the market, but he would return far beyond the hour of dusk. Travelling at that time through an unfamiliar forest, surrounded by unfamiliar beasts—alone—would be a fool’s errand.

The continual contemplation had left Thor exactly where he started: with no gift in hand, and no way to procure one.

“Oh, for the love of—” Loki waves at Thor’s face, and when he receives no response, he catches
Thor’s hand in his and tows him downhill. “I did not wish to speak of this earlier,” Loki says, threading their fingers together, tight, “but I happened across something on our way here.”

Thor blinks, startled into motion. “Where are we—”

Loki only quickens his pace, guiding Thor along with tugs and nudges, his evasive silence only serving to build the mystery of their destination. Thor can only assume that wherever they are going, they must make haste to make use of what Loki had found. His questions are answered when Loki stops, sudden, and points to several subtle clumps of broken twigs and crushed leaves. “There,” he declares.

It was too foolish to hope that Loki had happened across the lost cufflinks and tie pin, for there is nothing of the like in the clearing they have stopped in. But as Thor strains to see what it is that Loki points to, another idea strikes him entirely.

“Are those—” Thor tries, his mind racing quick to the next step. Yes, that would do, that would do very well, indeed—

“They are,” Loki says, “and I, for one, would prefer to spend our last nights in Alfheim-Beta—as you so inventively named this planet—in comfort. Something I doubt the gift you lost would provide.” When Thor’s mouth drops open in surprise, Loki simply snorts. “You are not so talented an actor as you think, brother.”

Thor sighs, resigned; he had been a fool to think he could hide the loss from Loki for long. But Loki has just offered him a chance to secure a gift greater, one better appreciated, for Loki had often bleated about how hard the cave floor was on his back, despite their layers of sheets and cloaks. And though Thor had gone to great lengths to make his rest comfortable, including surrendering the bulk of their fabrics, rolling Loki against him to cushion him from the cave’s craggy surfaces, or lying belly-down on their bedding to let Loki sprawl over him, lazy, he had not thought of this solution at all.

That it doubles as a hunt cheers Thor immensely, and he beams at Loki, its radiance shining straight from his heart.

“I thought this might lift your spirits,” Loki says, a twitch of a smile tugging his own lips. “Though you shall have to hurry if you wish to fell it.”

Thor only nods, eager, and sets to following the trail Loki has pointed out, for he is infinitely familiar with tracking a valewulf’s route.

They track it late into the afternoon, finding the beast stalking prey of its own, a white-tailed Doe that gallops away, spooked, when Thor draws the valewulf’s attention. The valewulf growls, anger at having lost its prize, before lunging toward Thor, smaller and weaker than the first one they fought, but no less feral.

Familiar with a valewulf’s weak points and patterns of attack now, Thor aims short bursts of lightning at its eyes to blind and disorientate. Hobbles it at the knees when it lunges. And when it rears back for a killing strike, Thor aims his sword, purposeful, to pierce through its hide first and carve it open end to end.

All while Loki, damn him, settles comfortably on a nearby cliff to watch.

It only adds insult to injury when Thor later finds him reading, scribbling a few notes in the margins here and there, as if he had lost interest halfway through the battle and turned to a book instead.
“You could have helped,” Thor says frankly, dragging the valewulf’s carcass behind him. He tosses it at Loki’s feet with a grunt, a weary offering, before taking a seat beside him.

“If I helped, it would not be a gift, would it? Besides, you seemed like you had the battle well in hand.” Loki turns a page in his book, nonchalant. As if the tome holds his interest far more than the prize Thor has just laid at his feet.

And of course, Thor is more than capable of felling the beast by himself without issue, as he has just proven. But together, they could have done it faster, with less mess. Thor could have spent the remaining time conversing with his brother, on their itinerary, spells that interested him, or the subject of their next hunt—and if Loki was amenable, cuddling—instead of being showered by blood and ichor and filth from the battle.

He cannot begrudge Loki watching him, however, for it brings to mind the times in the barracks of Asgard, or even as recently as his first fight against the Avengers, when Thor had fought harder, fiercer, knowing his brother was watching. Displaying his strength and the might with which he could wield Mjölnir, unabashed.

“Yes, all right,” Loki offers, when Thor grumbles, the sound an old blend of irritation and amusement. “I admit it was a fine show of your powers.” The edge of his mouth twitches up in a grin, smug, as if he senses the vein of Thor’s thoughts. “As always.”

“And a fine show deserves a fine reward,” Thor replies, straining toward Loki for a kiss. It is the best reward he can think of at present, though he cannot help the moue of disappointment when Loki scuttles backward in the grass, his hand flung out to forestall Thor.

“Perhaps so, but right now, you are filthy,” snorts Loki. “Bathe first, and then we shall see about your…reward.”

It is on the tip of Thor’s tongue to recall that this had not mattered to Loki last time, when he was more than willing to let Thor take him against a tree. But they had both been filthy from battle then, and Thor supposes there is sense in Loki wanting to remain clean this time, untouched by combat as he is.

With a sigh, he settles in for the process of dressing the valewulf. Sets it to drain afterward, into bottles of Loki’s design. And when Thor has finished skinning the valewulf, the bulk of the unpleasant work done, Loki tosses a spell at it to speed the drying of the pelt—this one to keep for themselves—before joining Thor at the nearby river. Finds a boulder and lounges in its shade as he scratches notes into his book.

“Loki?” Thor calls, by now having rid himself of the filth and ichor from his battle in the river. The sun overhead glows warm, and the water he bathes in is not chilled, but comfortably cool, the river itself shallow and the current slow.

Every condition for his bath is perfect, save one—that his brother has not joined him in the water.

A whole river to himself is far too lonely, Thor decides, and he leans back against the bank, elbows sprawled lazy along the grass. “Loki,” he tries again, when Loki does not deign to reply. “Something about this water feels…strange.”

“Strange?” Loki says lazily, turning another page. “How so?” At Thor’s silence, he lifts a brow, though he does not move from the perfect hollow he has found against the rock. “Thor.”

“Ah—I suppose the water simply feels…different.” Thor winces inwardly, at such clumsy excuse.
Before Loki can suggest for him to simply leave the river, Thor adds, “If you could confirm my thoughts with a small spell, I would appreciate it.” He pauses then, his thoughts quicker, and this time, calculating. “You know my skill at seiðr has never been as good as yours.”

“That implies you had any skill in the first place,” Loki says archly, but by the pink rising quick to his cheeks, Thor can tell that his compliment has struck home. Still, he makes a dramatic production of marking his place in the book. Setting it down carefully beside the rock, before shifting forward cautiously on his knees.

Thor could cast his eyes skyward, impatient, for if something had truly been amiss with the water, he could have perished twice over by now. “Over here!” he nods, pointing to a swirling section of the river when Loki nears. The water foams white where he points, though Thor suspects it is a natural vortex like any other. “It appears as if—”

“Hush,” Loki says, quiet. He furrows his brow in concentration, and touches his fingertip to the water, gentle.

Thor watches as a series of blue, concentric circles ripples across the surface of the river, the glow of them ethereal along the water, as Loki’s seiðr searches, explores, and reveals…absolutely nothing at all.

Loki frowns. “I do not sense—”

“Yes, here!” Thor exclaims, suddenly recalling his purpose in this deception, for he had been far too distracted watching Loki. Too captivated by the wonder of his magic. He splashes about theatrically, and when Loki leans further in, puzzled at what his spell revealed, Thor lunges out of the water and drags Loki in with him, laughing, delighted.

“Lout!” Loki cries, flailing against him, though he ceases struggling within moments. Settles into Thor’s arms, resigned. “My only change of clothes is soaked through now, you—”

“Did you not bring another?” says Thor. Loki’s lethal glare is answer enough. “If you strip your garments off now, they shall dry quickly in the sun.”

“One would think that your sole purpose was to unclothe me,” Loki says testily, though he undresses without issue—Thor helping the process along, eager—flinging sodden trousers and robe onto the riverbank to dry.

Loki has barely slipped back into the water when Thor circles Loki’s waist with his arms. Nudges his length against Loki’s belly, playful.

“Buffoon,” Loki murmurs, though he winds his arms around Thor’s neck and lets him swim them toward a shallower part of the river. “Have you only ever one pursuit in your thoughts?”

“If you mean my pursuit of you, then yes.” Thor grins, unable to help the stream of sentiment coloring his words. If he had already revealed his happiness from the untamed blooms among the forest floor and trees, he sees no reason to hide it from Loki now.

Loki rolls his eyes, the motion coupled with a scoffing huff, but Thor does not miss the tiny smile that tugs at his lips. Presses forward to kiss the beginnings of that smile, delighted when it widens to match Thor’s own.

Before long, he finds a seat of rock within the water, a natural outcropping that allows Thor to sprawl leisurely against the river bank, his delight increased tenfold when Loki settles into his lap, pleased. A small barricade of stones forms a partial lagoon nearby, and together, they watch as water
burbles past. Share lazy kisses to tips of noses and corners of mouths, each of their kisses met with smiles or huffed laughter during the clumsy, off-centre nudes they decide to call kisses anyway.

And when Thor deems the number of them insufficient, he draws Loki closer, arms around his waist, to press more into the pale skin of Loki’s neck. The crest of his collarbone. And one, tender and light and lingering, against his heart, Thor’s lips curving into a grin against skin when Loki sighs, “Sentiment,” the word shivering and soft.

The water is not warm enough for lovemaking, but Thor is content for now to keep Loki in his arms, nuzzling his face into Loki’s neck. His chest. Mouth a teasing kiss now and then to Loki’s nipples, pebbled from the cold.

Loki has just curled his legs around Thor’s waist, his heel stroking clever along Thor’s spine, while rubbing lazily against him from the front, when a low rumble of thunder sounds in the distance.

Thor frowns, immediate; he had hoped to move their activities to the river’s edge after, claim some part of his reward, as Loki had promised. If there existed one better than kisses.

“Thor,” Loki says, as if echoing Thor’s thoughts, warning clear in his tone. He draws back mid-kiss for a look of deep disappointment, as if Thor is responsible for ruining their recreation, after the efforts Loki made to brighten his day.

“This storm is not my doing,” says Thor, eyeing the ragged, wispy clouds rolling in quick overhead. For why would he willingly interrupt a restful moment like this, in which he could take in all that Loki was, in broad daylight? “Besides,” Thor adds, tilting his head back to catch the first drops of rain on his tongue, cool and fresh and sweet, “when has a little rain ever stopped us?”

The skies seem to take such words as challenge, however, for the patter of harmless raindrops soon turns into a cascade of stinging, pelting sheets. By then, neither of them wish to brave the downpour any longer, and after scrambling out of the water to throw on their armour, they hasten toward their cave, with half-dried pelt, organ preserves and bottled blood in hand.

And though Thor is loath to leave the water’s edge—he had Loki where he wanted him, before this untimely storm—the grin Loki tilts at him, mischievous and sharp, shows he remembers his promise, and that he shall soon deliver.

In full.

Chapter End Notes

1) Had a favourite gift / moment in this chapter? Let me know in the comments!

2) I am all about positive-feedback loops, where Loki’s happiness makes Thor’s… which feeds Loki’s in turn. :3

3) OST/Ambience Music: Loki, Playing His Lyre / Frigga’s Lullaby: Derek Fiechter – Healing Elves

Also, thank you all for following this fic so far! I’ll be on a temporary hiatus from May-June, due to approaching exams, but I should be back in July with more of this fic and Thorki fluff for you to enjoy! Hopefully we’ll all survive Infinity War, but if not, there’s
always this fic to fall back on. :’)

In the meantime, thanks for your patience and understanding. I’ll see you all again soon!
Hello, and welcome back! Thanks for your patience in waiting for this chapter. Hope you enjoy! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The torrential rain dogs their steps all the way back to the cave, though they hurry inside just as the storm takes a turn for the worse.

Loki conjures a barrier, immediate, to prevent more water from seeping in, then sets about drying what parts of the cave floor have soaked through. Thor, in the meantime, hangs their newly-prepared pelt along the wall, far from the clusters of herbs Loki has hung to dry, and gathers the wood they have left for a fire, shivering as he does so. Chafes warmth into skin with his hands, for the spell Loki had cast to keep them dry did little to keep them warm.

As Loki is far too busy ensuring their abode is safe from the storm, Thor tries to light what wood they have with a spark of his lightning—resulting in a sharp crack, a wisp of smoke curling acrid from the split, charred logs.

“Thor,” Loki says in warning, from the cave mouth. He throws Thor a dark look over his shoulder, arms still upraised in the casting of his drying spell.

Thor flaps a hand at him, reassuring. “I have this in hand, Loki—do not trouble yourself.” Perhaps his first spark had been too strong, Thor decides, and he tries again, this time sending a weaker one to ignite the wood. Succeeds in making it hiss, flicker joyous for all of a moment, and fizzle out.

Loki sighs from beside him now, having finished his spellcasting, and Thor glances at him, woeful, expecting to hear what a pathetic attempt or what good are you as the god of lightning, if you cannot even light a fire? But all Loki does is press a hand to the small of Thor’s back, soothing, as he murmurs, “Allow me.”

He whispers a word, akin to a small and subtle hum, and a spark of his familiar seiðr darts toward the wood pile, setting it alight. With the fire seen to, Loki finally pauses to shake stray droplets from his hair, and Thor hurries to gather a change of dry clothes for them both, grateful.

“About my reward,” Thor starts hopefully, when they have stripped off sodden boots, changed out of damp clothes and bundled themselves into the sheets and cloaks available. Roasted several skewers of meat from their hunt today and eaten their fill. “When will we—”

“Hmm, yes, about your reward,” Loki cuts in. “I have been thinking on it.”

Thor crinkles his brow; when Loki is given to thinking, it could either be a very good thing, or very bad. “And what conclusion have you come to?”

“That we should make a game of it,” Loki says, his eyes gleaming, bright.
“A game?” Thor frowns. “I am not in a gaming mood.” He lets the menace of a growl slip into his voice, for he has waited far too long, but Loki only inspects his fingernails, undeterred.

“No? Not even for the promise of an even greater reward? Wherein you receive double,” Loki adds, pausing for dramatic effect, “or nothing.”

Thor casts his eyes toward the cave’s roof. “Double of what, Loki?” They had already shared kisses, so that could only mean—

“Well,” Loki says airily, “I suppose I was only going to use my hand to pleasure you…” Here, he lets his fingers creep teasing up Thor’s thigh. “Or my mouth…” He presses tiny, feather-light kisses along Thor’s throat, his grin far too sharp at the tiny shiver they elicit. “But perhaps we may find a use for our new pelt. After all, what good is a gift, if it cannot be used?” He flicks a glance toward their newly acquired pelt, before meeting Thor’s gaze again, his brow arched, suggestive.

“I see,” Thor says, struggling to maintain some semblance of reluctance, though in his heart, he has already leapt to the challenge, eager. “And what are your terms?”

Loki leans back along the cave wall, his fingers steepled together, pleased, knowing he has Thor trapped. That he looks, for all the world, like an infant mastermind, swaddled in blankets as he is, Thor keeps to himself, for he is far too adorable like this. “I was hoping you would ask that.”

Thor snorts; it is more likely Loki had hoped he would not ask, and could thereby lead him through one foolish challenge after another, with no hope of reward at the end. But it seems Loki has fair play in mind this time, as three small, identical wood chip piles appear before Thor when he flicks his fingers.

“Your task,” Loki says, “is to light the two piles on the outside with your power, while leaving the middle one intact.”

This is a strange game Loki proposes, though a glance at the cave mouth shows that the storm continues, and there is little else to do except wait it out here. “What will this accomplish?” Thor asks, wrinkling his brow at the piles, puzzled.

Loki draws forth the book he perused earlier from his pack. Rifles through the pages until he settles on one, the writing cramped and neat, and perfectly undecipherable. To Thor’s eye, at least.

“Perhaps it has escaped your notice,” Loki starts dryly, “but it has not escaped mine, and my suspicions were confirmed during your battle with the valewulf today. You,” he elaborates, “waste far too much energy when you fight, needless. Your innate seiðr, to be precise.”

“Innate…yes, of course,” Thor tries, though he does not quite see Loki’s point.

Loki continues on, as if he had not heard Thor’s clumsy act of understanding. “I know you depended on Mjölnir for long years to channel your power. But with that conduit gone, you must learn and practice finer control of your powers.” Something in Thor’s expression must give away his disbelief, of what need have I for finer control? for Loki’s eyes narrow, dangerous. “Your well of seiðr is not infinite,” he warns. “To use it recklessly—as you have until now—would exhaust you long before a battle is over.”

Thor turns the thought over in his mind; there is sense in what Loki says, and it is only now that Thor recognizes he has been rather careless with his power, throwing wild blasts of it at enemies, with little thought toward aiming or focusing its use. And he had, as Loki noted, tired rather quickly.

“This is a marvellous idea,” Thor says, the words genuine, as understanding dawns upon him, quick.
He should have known Loki had other motives for watching his fight with the valewulf than to simply admire Thor’s display of power. But in short moments, Loki has used the knowledge gained from it to create a game to keep them entertained, and make Thor practice the use of his powers, all with the promise of reward at the end, the benefits of this scenario threefold. He beams at Loki, pleased at this ingenuity, reaching toward him to press a rewarding kiss to his—

Loki draws away, instant. “As an added incentive,” he amends, “you may not touch me before accomplishing this task. Think of it as a whetting of your appetite for that reward.” He grins then, the curve of his mouth impish and sharp.

Thor does not think it fair, but if these are the terms Loki sets, he will abide by them.

“This will take no time at all,” Thor declares, rubbing his hands together, ready for the challenge set before him.

In an hour, he grows to regret those words.

At first, he cannot manage to light any of the wood piles. This is followed swiftly by a mishap in which one of the piles explodes, flames leaping everywhere, wild, extinguished only by way of Loki’s quick reflexes, his equal skill in protective spells keeping Thor from being badly burned.

It takes Thor several more hours, of cursing, bellowing, and whimpering when he singes his hair, to grow familiar with focusing the seiðr within him, reining in the amount he puts forth, and directing the flow of it—all while Loki reads, and lazily resets the wood chip piles for him by magic.

More than once, Thor had snuck tiny, envious glances at Loki, curled cosily in his nest of cloaks—theirs, in fact, for Thor had lent him his own as well—and Thor would tunnel into that warmth, join him in their cloak nest, ‘finer control of his powers’ be damned. But Loki has assured him a greater reward awaits him at the end of this, so he grits his teeth and continues his attempts, one after another.

Meanwhile, the storm outside rages on. Thor can only wonder if the use of his powers feeds the deluge beyond their cave, as it seems oddly lengthy for a sky scarce filled with clouds not several hours past. For now, however, he decides to focus on the task at hand.

“Loki, look!” Thor announces proudly, some thirty tries later, having finally mustered the right amount of seiðr to light all three of the wood chip piles.

Loki snorts, his fingers drawing a lazy loop in the air. “No,” he says simply, extinguishing the piles and resetting them to their original state. “Again.”

Thor loses count of how many pitiful piles of charred ash he leaves behind him, as Loki simply resets his progress—or lack thereof—each time. Subsequent tries see him lighting all three at once again. Or two in the corner. Or only the middle one, when finally—

“Brother, look!” Thor says, delighted. “I have done it!” Sure enough, the outer piles are lit, a small flame flickering within for a tempered, controlled fire, just as Loki specified, while the middle pile stays untouched.

Loki does not look up from his book. “Again,” he sighs, exasperated, extinguishing the piles, instant. Thor matches his sigh with a cry of outrage. “I have done it, Loki!” And he promptly demonstrates it again, this time with Loki watching.

“Oh,” Loki says blinking, “I believe there was something in my eye—” He makes a show of rubbing
his eye, and a spark of seiðr darts out, resetting the piles, immediate. “You shall have to show me again.”

Thor stifles the snarl building in his chest, and—after ensuring that Loki is watching, and not rubbing at something in his eye, or chasing a page of his book that fluttered away, or any other means of prevarication Loki can dream up—lights the wood chip piles on the outer edges, deliberate, controlled.

“Ah,” Loki says finally. “Excellent. I had to check that it was not a stroke of luck that gave you such result.” And when Thor mouths stroke of luck, indignant, Loki only smiles, beatific. “Well done.” With another easy flick of his fingers, he clears the cave floor of ash and wood chips, and summons the pelt from where it hangs in the cave, fully dried and softened by Loki’s magic. Shifts his way onto it, with cloaks and sheets still gathered around him. “It is high time for your reward, I think—though you kept me waiting long enough.”

“Oh, I kept you waiting?” Thor growls, incredulous. But the mischievous smile Loki turns upon him draws an answering one from himself, and he tackles Loki against the pelt, impatient. Tugs Loki’s head back by the hair, baring the pale column of his throat, which Thor bites kisses into, ravenous. His nipping, bruising kisses follow the line of Loki’s neck down to his collarbone, Thor laving his tongue over the ridge of it, greedy, tasting salt and rainwater and Loki. But there is not enough skin, not enough of his brother on display, and Thor tears through Loki’s clothing, feral, the soft leather giving way beneath his fingers, like so much gossamer weave. Keeps on pulling, flinging trousers and robe to the side, uncovering one layer after another, the sound of sundered cloth a pleasure, a delight, revealing more of Loki as he goes.

It is not unlike unwrapping a present, Thor thinks, and it strikes him then that Valkyrie had not been so far off the mark when she offered Loki as a peace offering on Sakaar. Nor had the Avengers, trussed up in chains and a gag as Loki had been, the gesture one of goodwill all the same. Each time returning Loki to him, his very presence a gift in itself. Thor keeps the sentiment to himself, however; Loki would just as likely strike him for it, should he reveal it.

Before long, Loki lies fully unclothed before him, and Thor lets his gaze rove over Loki, appreciative. Follows suit himself, tearing his cloak from its pauldron and struggling with the leather cuirass, before upending it over his head and throwing it to the side, impatient. Tangles a leg in his trousers in his haste to strip them off.

Loki sighs, as he eyes the tattered remnants of their clothing, shredded beyond recognition. “You realize I shall have to repair those later—” he starts, before Thor silences him with a kiss, greedy and sucking and rough, for Loki makes too lovely a sight, delicious and naked and all his for the taking. His tongue has moved to Loki’s chest, lapping at tiny beads of sweat gathered in the cleft, his fingers pressed insistent against Loki’s hole, when Thor suddenly remembers. “The oil, Loki,” Thor breathes. “Where have you—”

Loki blinks, dazed, his breath hitched tight in his chest, before he gathers himself enough to answer. “You prioritized sweets and gifts in your preparation for this trip, and I prioritized warmth and comfort.” Loki pats the cloaks beneath them, by way of explanation. “So I suppose neither of us thought to bring the oil from our quarters. Again,” he says pointedly.

Thor makes a note of purchasing another vial in the future, for moments or excursions such as these. But for now, he casts his gaze about the cave, desperate.
“Perhaps we could use…” Thor glances at the bottles Loki spelled into existence, storing quarts of the valewulf’s blood they collected. Two they will sell in the city, as delicacy and spelling agent both, though Loki intends to keep the rest for himself.

“You cannot use blood as slick,” Loki says, his eyes wide, lip curled in revulsion.

“Was there not a spell that could conjure something of the like?” says Thor, exasperated. He vaguely recalls Loki doing such a thing, ages ago; it was something he had forgotten their first night on the ship, in his haste to be one with Loki again.

“I find the oil we use less viscous than the slick from spells,” Loki shrugs, practical as always. “And you know what they say about knowledge little used.” When Thor only tilts his head, puzzled, Loki admits regretfully, “I…may have forgotten the gestures. Or the incantation.”

This was easily understood; trivial bits of knowledge often fell by the wayside when Loki favoured the learning of spells greater in scope and power. Still, Thor bites Loki once, both teasing and vindictive, where his shoulder meets his neck.

“An oversight, I assure you,” Loki hisses, at teeth sunk into skin. “I will look through my books for the spell when we return to the ship. But for now—”

“For now, I shall simply have to use other methods,” Thor laughs, shaking his head. He nudges Loki’s legs to the side, a cue for what he intends. “On your front. Now.”

He loves the sight of Loki rolling onto his belly, and the way he spreads his legs wide along the pelt, teasing, inviting. By the wiggle of Loki’s hips as he glances back at Thor, biting his lower lip, coy, he knows it.

Loki has scarcely lifted his hips off the pelt, to treat Thor to a more enticing view of his rear, before Thor is on him again, laying kisses to the blades of his shoulders. The tiny junction between shoulder and neck. Sweeping aside Loki’s hair to nibble the lobe of his ear, sucking it into his mouth, hot, as his fingers roam warm over Loki’s chest, his nipples, plucking just the right amount of rough. Scrape lightly over his stomach, Thor’s nails a tease against skin, ceasing only when Loki whines and twists beneath him.

“Thor,” Loki breathes, nudging his hips toward Thor, hopeful.

“Not yet,” Thor replies, his kisses wandering their way downward, tongue circling the tiny freckle at the base of Loki’s neck. He bites back the laugh at their desperation in claiming this ‘reward’ now reversed, with Loki panting and gasping, his back arched needy beneath Thor. Takes his time mouthing kisses to each knob of Loki’s spine. The lovely curve of his ass. Presses one wet, smacking kiss to each dimpled cheek, laughing as Loki huffs, and wiggles in Thor’s grip.

“Well?” says Loki, attempting to pitch his voice low, seductive. “Get on with it, thunderer.”

Thor hums, unprovoked, choosing instead to ease one of their old hunting cloaks from beneath Loki’s belly. Rolls it up and sets it beneath Loki’s hips, for this will prove a better angle for what Thor intends to do next.

He spares a moment to revel in the rose plumpness of Loki’s sac, the sight of it spread so sweetly on the cloak. His cock flushed pink against pale skin, like a peach, ripe and ready for the tasting. The view is so tempting that Thor cannot help but reach out and take Loki’s cock into hand, his fingers wrapping deft around the shaft as he leans in and licks, laving a wet stripe from crown to base, delighting in the absolute shiver that runs through Loki at that. Laps and sucks what he can fit of
Loki into his mouth, before focusing on Loki’s sac instead, rolling each globe along his tongue, revelling in the utterly long and low moan he draws forth.

“Thor,” Loki whispers, his thighs trembling, “please. Please.” When Thor makes no move to concede, Loki snarls, “Norns, make me wait any longer, and I swear I shall—”

“Shhh,” Thor says, quiet. He cups a cheek of Loki’s ass in each palm then, round and pale and perfect, and digs fingers deep into skin, spreading him open, wide. Kisses his way up the seam of Loki’s balls, into the cleft of his ass.

“Are you sure you—” Loki tries, before Thor presses a kiss to his hip. The dimple of his buttocks. Each press of lips soothing and reassuring, and an answer that he very much is.

And when Loki relaxes against him, the taut lines of his body gone slack, Thor licks his way up and in, tongue delving into Loki’s heat, hot and wet and tight. Tastes the tang of salt and sweat, before spreading him open wider, pressing in deeper, taking pleasure in the lovely keening whine Loki makes at the motion.

“Loki, are you—” Thor tries, when Loki falls near-silent, his moans tapering to soft, panting gasps.

“I am fine.” Loki’s answer is harsh in his throat, as he tilts his hips up further, the angle now ideal, and as he whispers more, Thor obliges, pressing a finger inside him, two. Strokes within him, testing, searching, until Loki arches in his grasp, before laving his tongue along the rim of Loki’s hole, his fingers still pressed deep. “Thor,” Loki breathes now, “I need—”

“Yes?” Thor teases. “What is it that you need?” He hears Loki hiss damn you beneath his breath, and bites back a laugh. Raises the stakes in their game, by tugging Loki’s cock gentle between his thighs again, sucking it down, as the fingers of his other hand keep stroking, each motion aimed and precise, drawing an agitated little shiver with each pass.

“You—need, please.” Loki gasps, and Thor finally concedes, for the answer is close enough, drawing his fingers away, slow. Slides his cock between Loki’s thighs, to tease and coat himself in precome both, before nudging against Loki’s hole.

Then he lets it slide past, following the seam of Loki’s balls, pressing against the underside of Loki’s cock instead. Let that whet his appetite, Thor decides, grinning to himself. His grin grows broader when Loki shifts and squirms beneath him, his intent clear, but Thor’s firm hold on his hips warrants that he cannot push back against Thor, to have his way.

“Even the storm outside carries more potential and power than you,” Loki snaps, frustration plain in his voice. He pulls away from Thor’s grip, reaching for the tatters of his clothing, upset at having the tables turned on him in his own game. But Thor’s hand darts out, quick. Catches him by the ankle and drags him back, until his grip is back on Loki’s hips, iron-tight and strong.

“If a storm is what you wish for, then a storm I shall give,” Thor rumbles, like the peal of thunder rolling deep outside the cave, his own patience vanished. And with that, he presses against Loki’s hole. Delights in how his lovely little whimper of anticipation shifts into a long, shivering groan as Thor finally pushes home.

In no time at all, they find an easy rhythm between them, Loki angling his hips as Thor pushes forward, each thrust drawing forth a mutual groan, and—Norns—Thor cannot describe the sensation as anything other than right. Strokes the skin from hole to balls, an extra pleasure for Loki, revelling in the keening cry it drags from his brother, the scrabbling of his fingers against cloth and fur and Thor.
“Too much?” Thor worries, when the moans torn deep from Loki’s throat soften to small and gasping cries. He had tilted Loki’s hips just so, to meet his rough and pounding thrusts, fingers pressed bruising into pale skin. But he eases back on his pace now, anxious.

“Not enough,” Loki rasps, a wicked nudge of his hips goading Thor on for harder, for more.

Thor grins at their matched intent, even if Loki cannot see, and gives Loki the harder he demands, the more. Nudges the cheeks of Loki’s ass apart with his thumbs, to push in further, deeper, to be closer to Loki, for Loki is not the only one who hungers for more of his brother.

But even this is not enough, of skin and warmth and heat, and he slides his palms along the length of Loki’s back, hands kneading broad, massaging strokes from waist to shoulder, marvelling at the way Loki arches beneath him, sinuous, lovely. Lays a path of kisses along the same route, each nipping, bruising and rough.

Drapes himself across Loki’s back until they move as one creature, one being, just short of sharing the same soul.

“Oh—Norns,” Loki whispers, ragged, breath hitched tight in his chest, “I can’t, Thor, I can’t—” His knees buckle as he sobs, his legs giving out, but Thor follows him down, pounding him into the pelt, for he has not heard stop or no. Only muffled cries as Loki bites into Thor’s cloak, laid atop the pelt, his fists bunching the cloth tight, red and angry and hot.

“You are mine,” Thor declares, the sight of Loki folded in his colors stirring something dark and possessive within him. “For the time past—for now—forever.” Each pause punctuated with a thrust, each sparking the words mine, mine, mine hot in his chest.

“Of that—there is—no doubt,” Loki gasps, breath catching between words, his voice raw and hoarse in his throat.

This affirmation, this vow, deserves a kiss—to seal it, to bind Loki to it when he says forever—and Thor draws back, tugging Loki with him. Winds a fistful of Loki’s hair through his fingers, urging him back onto hands and knees, before tipping Loki’s chin up, for a kiss sloppy and clumsy and wet.

Loki’s tongue is so hot against his, curling clever along the roof of Thor’s mouth, and Thor splays his fingers steady along Loki’s throat, to deepen their kiss, to prolong it, unabashed at the full-bodied moan he makes, the sound of it a reflection of the absolute pleasure this brings. Lets his fingers trail down to Loki’s cock, to stroke and press, to return the pleasure twofold, before Loki catches his hand, stilling it.

“Please,” Loki breathes between kisses, “want you—want to—”

And Thor knows what he wishes, for he has wished it too. Presses a final kiss to Loki’s lips before drawing away, darkly delighted at how red and swollen and wet the rim of Loki’s hole is from their coupling. Lets Loki turn, and settle in his lap, a low whine issued from his throat as Thor presses within him again.

It is a pleasure to see Loki’s face now, to drink in his expression, his eyes hooded and dark, his cheeks flushed with exertion, and Thor takes the moment to press kisses to nose and cheeks. Shifts careful along the cave wall, until Loki can wind his arms easy around Thor’s neck. Curl legs tight about Thor’s waist. Re-establishing their rhythm takes a moment longer, but they find it soon enough, each stroke a stab of sinful pleasure, if Loki’s gasps are any indication.

“Like this?” Thor asks, timing his thrusts with Loki’s breaths. Circles Loki’s waist with his arms,
pulling him in as he thrusts his hips up.

“Yes,” Loki hisses, his voice hot and wet and tight, “yes, yes—yes.” His affirmations cease when he meets a thrust especially sharp and deep, Loki smothering his startled moan by burying his face in Thor’s neck.

Perhaps this had started as a reward for Thor, but it seems now that it is a mutual reward, from the way Loki arches and gasps against him. And he would give his brother an extra pleasure if he could, for gratefulness at this game, these skills Loki had forced him to hone, wondering just what element he can add to their activity, when the idea strikes him, sudden—why not put the lesson he had just learned to good use?

He lets his nails rake light along the sides of Loki’s spine, scoring trails of crimson heat into skin—a test, a preliminary for what is to come—then follows the same path again, scraping lightning into Loki’s back. Delights in the way Loki shivers against him, his breath quickening to tiny, shaking gasps as sparks dance bright across his skin.

“Thor,” Loki murmurs, breath hot against Thor’s neck, “are you sure this is—” He draws back to meet Thor’s gaze, and oh, the telltale signs of Loki spilling soon are there, from the glaze of his eyes, his pupils blown wide, to his hands clenched tight against Thor’s neck, his body arched so taut against Thor’s. “Are you sure this is safe?”

“Safe? Yes—of course,” Thor assures him. Swallows his gasps with one kiss, then another. And when thunder rolls deep near the cave, so near, Thor thrusts hard and deep, arms locking Loki into place as he sends a flare of lightning up his cock, sly.

Loki clenches around him with a jolt, so impossibly, suddenly tight, his issue wet on Thor’s belly—before his eyes roll into his head and he falls forward, limp in Thor’s arms.

“Loki?” Thor tries, tentative. He grips Loki by the shoulders, shaking him, gentle. “Loki.” His brother had spoken of finer control of his power, and Thor had—Thor had shown him the exact antithesis of it. Norns, just when he had gotten Loki back, he had killed him by accident with what was meant to be an act of love. Another shake, harder this time. “Loki, no—”

“Stop shaking me, you oaf,” Loki snaps, sudden, his eyes flying open.

Thor cannot help but crush Loki to his chest, relieved, murmuring Loki, Loki, until his brother pushes at his shoulders, scrabbles at his arms, batting away this glut of unexpected affection.

“Did you forget my lessons on control?” Loki adds, sharp, as if he had not been stunned into an eerie stillness moments ago. “Small, short bursts, not just a blast with reckless abandon. There will be moments in battle when you need that control, and with the way you are carrying on, you will not have it.”

Thor nuzzles a kiss into Loki’s neck, then another to his mouth, small and soft, a hope to quell Loki’s tirade. “I am sorry,” he murmurs. “ Truly. I did not mean for that to happen.” It must have been luck that nothing averse occurred the first time he used this power on Loki, after their first valewulf hunt.

“Just because you managed to a light a particular wood pile on fire does not mean that the same power is granted safe passage through the—”

Thor kisses him before those lips can spill a vulgarity, for it would ruin the mood. “If…” Thor tries, hesitant, “if I may…try again, I promise I shall make it worth your while.”

“I am still recovering from your first try,” Loki says, skeptical. But Thor must look doggedly
hopeful, for he sighs, and winds his arms around Thor’s neck, indicative of forgiveness and another attempt granted. “Very well,” says Loki. “But start with a gentle current. And work your way up from there.”

“Gentle,” Thor nods, eager, only too happy to know that Loki has not barred him from using his powers for bedplay. “Gentle.”

It takes a second try, then a third, and Loki’s rapidly waning patience for Thor to grow familiar with the amount of current his brother can take. To different places on his body, from the rose peaks of his nipples and the flushed peach-ripeness of his cock, to his backside when Thor is sheathed deep within him.

But when, on the fourth try, Loki seizes in his grip, gasping, breathless, his hands clawed tight into Thor’s shoulders, as he spills harder and further than any time before, Thor believes their patience in this has finally paid off.

~

“That was an impressive storm,” Loki says after, as they sit at the mouth of the cave, watching the rain fade to a gentle patter among the trees and stone and earth. Breathe the sharp tang of ozone in the air, with Loki’s barrier now removed. “Though nothing compared to what you could do, I am sure,” he adds slyly.

Thor huffs a laugh as he tears off a strip of meat they roasted earlier. The ship’s rations could only last them so long, after all. “I am sure this storm’s intent was to simply return life to the land, not drown the vegetation and crops and earn the ire of this land’s inhabitants.” Though both land and people could benefit from the storm, Thor reflects; while the nights of Alfheim-Beta remained cool, its days were uncommonly warm, compared to Asgard, courtesy of the planet’s two suns.

He keeps the part his own powers had played in this storm a secret for now; it would not do for Loki to know his control over his powers is rather mercurial, and still easily swayed by his emotions. Especially those of a more carnal nature. Finds himself relieved when Loki only snorts and accepts the strip of meat Thor hands him, eating quietly as rain continues to stipple the landscape, before finally ceasing.

Night falls soon enough, for the rain had stolen their hours away, but as the two moons of this planet rise, one followed by the other, lending a silver sheen to the orchid-dark sky, Thor cannot bring himself to mind. Because Loki looks beautiful like this, swathed in pale moonlight, the fabric of his clothing reflecting the light above, seeming to cloak him in a mantle of stars.

The chill seeping into Thor’s skin reminds him of how cold it is after a storm, however, and Thor departs briefly into the cave. Sweeps the cloak Loki gifted him over his shoulders, and returns with Loki’s own furred cloak in his hands.

“The cold does not bother me,” says Loki, as Thor makes to drape the cloak around Loki’s shoulders, though he accepts the garment, regardless. “You forget my true heritage,” he adds frostily, when Thor tilts his head, confused. “I was not born of the same golden halls as you, but a land of ice and snow.”

“I know,” Thor says softly. At last, they had come to the crux of one of the largest slivers Loki held in his heart. Loki retains his Aesir form at present, but Thor more than suspects he will save his Jötunn reveal for a moment Thor least expects it, to shock him, surprise him, frighten him into revoking his affections for Loki. Takes pre-emptive action this time instead. “But I love you in all the ways that you are. In every form you might take.”
Loki looks taken aback at Thor’s nonchalance; perhaps he had expected disgust, revulsion, a long pause in which Thor struggled to grow accustomed to the idea of his brother, his lover, as one of a race the Aesir had reviled for long years.

*Let him be surprised,* Thor thinks grimly. *He will not find revulsion here; nay, the very opposite.*

“Every form?” Loki echoes. “Even one such as this?” In an instant, he lets drop his pretence of being Aesir, the glamour fading until his pale skin has darkened into the deep blue of a river in winter, and lines rise from it, following intricate patterns and whorls. Until his eyes, once so vividly green, fill the darkest hue of blood-red.

“Every form,” Thor nods, unsurprised by Loki’s transformation, for Loki has grown predictable in his need to surprise, to stun. “Whether it be a frog or tree, rabbit or snake…Jötunn or Aesir;” he adds softly.

Thor does have to resist the immediate urge to layer his own cloak around Loki’s shoulders, reminding himself that the frost-blue pallor does not mean Loki is cold, but is simply finding repose in his natural skin. Besides that, however, Loki is Loki, no matter which form he takes, and Thor would have him know it. He starts by kissing the raised ridges on one of Loki’s hands, from the tips of his fingers to his wrist. Lets his kisses inch further, until he has made his way to Loki’s elbow. His shoulder. The lines upon his forehead, and his cheeks, appreciating the way they taper to a fine point near his jaw, lovely, intricate.

And Thor will never reveal it, not even on pain of death, but he finds Loki’s scowl in his Jötunn form infinitely more adorable, for the compression of the intricate ridges and lines of his face gives him resemblance to Midgard’s pug puppies.

“It was not so long ago that you proclaimed you would hunt the Jötunns down, and slay them all,” Loki says coolly, as Thor sweeps aside the hair at the nape of his neck to touch a kiss to it, gentle. “The monsters that—"

“I have changed,” Thor says, ungoaded. His hold on Loki does not waver, as he lets his lips wander back across Loki’s shoulder blade. Touches a corresponding kiss to each part of his collarbone that his back was graced with, until he reaches the base of Loki’s throat. Marks that off with a smacking kiss, a temporary place-marker for where he has left off, to speak. “And you are no monster.”

Thor had thought to prove his devotion by pressing lips against Loki’s shifted skin, to every inch he can reach, even at the risk of injury. But seeing that he is unhurt, Loki must have laid an enchantment on himself, or the debilitating burn of a Jötunn’s skin was something that could be deactivated at will—all of it proving how much the opposite of a monster he is.

“What am I, then?” Loki asks, after a long moment’s thought. His voice is so soft, so much smaller than it should be, when he whispers, “What am I to you?”

“You are my brother. My lover. Everything,” breathes Thor. He cups Loki’s cheeks in his palms then, touching a kiss to his brow. His cheeks. His jaw. And when Loki does not seem averse to such affections, Thor grins, impish. “*You* are the man who has melted this brash fool’s heart.”

Loki laughs then, genuine, a sound dearly cherished and sorely missed, at the line lifted nearly verbatim from *The Tragedy of Loki of Asgard.*

His laughter is a welcome sound, making Thor’s spirits soar, and he wonders briefly if Loki might deem his life a comedy from now on, instead of a tragedy. No, a comedy was too much, especially for Loki—perhaps a romance?
Yes, Thor decides, liking the sound of that far too much. Perhaps the play Loki next penned could be titled *Romance of the Asgardian Kingdom*.

It is a moment more before Loki lets his Aesir façade reassert itself, seeing that he cannot get a rise out of Thor this way, his shifted skin earning him only more kisses and affection. And when he notices Thor following the path of receding blue with his fingers, memorizing the sight and marvelling at the process of warmth seeping back into Loki’s skin, he manages, “You—you are an impossible, *maudlin*—” before Thor hushes him with a kiss to the mouth proper. Another to Loki’s nose. His eyelids, where beneath lie either eyes of lovely emerald or ruby red, he cares not, as long as they are Loki’s eyes—brilliant, clever, and only ever fixed on Thor.

“But I am your brand of impossible and maudlin. Is that not enough?” Thor grins.

Loki clicks his tongue, irritated, and murmurs the addition of *sentimental* and *soft* to his collection of Thor’s descriptors. But there is no ice behind his words, and judging by the way he draws Thor toward him, their feet tangling together as they sprawl along the pelt, lazy, Thor’s brand of impossible and maudlin must be enough indeed.

**Chapter End Notes**

1) The test Loki sets to Thor, of lighting two specific wood chip piles from three, is inspired by one from the anime *Ao No Exorcist*—in which the protagonist must light candles under similar circumstances.

2) It slipped my mind to include this earlier, but the cloaks Thor and Loki wear are based on the one Loki wears in [this deleted scene](#) from *Thor: The Dark World*.

3) The title *Romance of the Asgardian Kingdom* for Loki’s next possible play is drawn from the actual novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

4) "*Every Form*" - Art commissioned from Xearo0.

5) OST / Ambience Music: [Thunderstorm & Rain Sounds](#)
They return to the markets the next morning, selling what remains of their wares, and with the money they have on hand, take their time browsing various booths. Make what purchases they must, to resupply the ship with food, fresh produce, clothing, and other items to fulfill basic needs.

Loki leaves Thor to helm the negotiations—it is good practice, he claims—while flitting here and there to browse the rest of the market’s wares, drifting back only on occasion to offer suggestions.

“I could barter away the whole ship, and you would not even know it,” Thor growls, after a particularly harrowing negotiation, during which Loki was nowhere to be seen. And it would be Thor who had to wheel those bushels of carrots and onions back to the ship as well, even if Loki had spelled their wheelbarrow to carry larger loads. Loki had developed a tendency to vanish when physical or taxing labour, besides bedplay, was involved.

“Would you?” Loki asks, his eyes comically wide. He draws his fur-collared cloak tighter about his shoulders, for they had taken to wearing their matching cloaks against the cooler weather brought with the rain. “You would turn all of Asgard out into the cold?”

Thor does not deign to answer, only curls an arm about Loki’s waist, forcibly guiding him to the next vendor they intend to visit.

They are in the middle of driving a hard bargain for a heap of overripe root vegetables, when one of the past pageboys from the palace runs toward them. Weaves his way through the crowds, frantic, before panting out fragments of a summons neither of them can understand, between his ragged breaths.

“Take a moment to collect yourself,” Loki encourages, his hand gentle on the boy’s shoulder. “There is no news that cannot wait.” For this, he receives a nod and a grateful smile in return.

After another moment, his throat working frantic to gulp air, the boy tries again. “The mechanics report that repairs to the ship are nearly done now. They ask that you return to inspect their work, before continuing onward.”

Thor nods his acknowledgement, and upon their return, they find the mechanics waiting just outside the Statesman, ready to guide them through the progress of the repairs. Loki sets a number of the Asgardians to transport the produce, food and fabrics he and Thor procured into the ship, before joining Thor at the inspection of the engines. The refitted casings, and the replaced flaps.

It is not long before Loki nods, satisfied with the repairs at present, and ushers the mechanics back out of immediate sight of the ship. Gifts them each a bushel of the produce he and Thor obtained at the market, watching as they beam and depart, to return in several hours’ time to continue the external repairs and explain the ones internal.

“Did we not need that produce?” Thor asks, puzzled, when the mechanics have scurried out of sight. He had remained silent when Loki kept back several bushels’ worth of their bargained vegetables from being carried onto the ship, but their people needed those—
Loki’s hand rises to cup Thor’s elbow, gentle. “Rest assured,” he says, “that we have more than we need for another month. Perhaps two. And this way, our mechanics will see to it that the repairs are done properly, the materials they use of finer quality. The last thing we need is slipshod work, with thousands of lives in the balance.”

“Do you mean to say,” Thor starts, “that you have given them bribes—”

“Incentives,” Loki huffs, “though I do not expect you to understand.”

Thor only laughs then, the sound echoing through the ports, bright. “I understand perfectly,” he says. “I understand that you are wise and resourceful in all the ways I am not.” The words that had risen to mind were shrewd and crafty, but Thor had swallowed them down, quick, knowing now how Loki abhors words suggesting he obtained what he wanted by underhanded means.

Loki, for his part, flushes a becoming rose-pink, and allows Thor to stroke a hand down the length of his back, warm. Settle in the small of his back, as they make their way to the Statesman.

Valkyrie and Bruce await them at the gangway of the ship upon their return, along with Heimdall. While Bruce simply nods, his arms laden with Alfheim-Beta’s wares—gaudy trinkets and jugs of drink Thor suspects are Valkyrie’s—Valkyrie waves them back onboard, the motion quick and exasperated. A mixture between hurry up and you’re blocking the way.

Thor throws a quick glance behind him, to see whose way they impede, and finds Valkyrie having recruited several boys to haul yet more jugs of drink up the gangway.

Yes, Thor sees now the wisdom of Loki’s quip about filling Asgard’s coffers, rather than their friends’.

Heimdall himself stands in his customary position, his sword before him and his hands wrapped secure around the hilt. He blinks when he spots Thor and Loki, the slightest expression of surprise crossing his face as his gaze falls to the cloaks sitting snug upon their shoulders—Thor adorned in Loki’s usual colors, and Loki in Thor’s.

“What is it, Heimdall?” Loki asks, waspish. He pulls his crimson cloak tighter about his shoulders, oddly defensive. “Are the garments of your king and his brother not to your taste? The colors, perhaps?”

From behind Heimdall, Thor can see Valkyrie cast her eyes skyward, likely thinking Loki is having a fit of melodramatics again. But he strokes the small of Loki’s back, comforting, making no move to shrug his own cloak from his shoulders. A certain pride fills his heart in wearing the night-green mantle, and he would not have Loki thinking him ashamed to display it so.

Heimdall only stares unblinkingly at Loki now. “I was simply surprised,” he says, quiet. “Although…I suppose I should not be.” His gaze seems all-knowing, though what he has seen in their future, he is sworn not to reveal.

Thor finds himself curious at the meaning behind Heimdall’s cryptic words, but Loki seems ruffled by the same, his mouth set in a firm line, his face far too pale. “Come, Loki,” Thor says instead, for his brother must come first, “let us put away our spoils and prepare for the evening meal.” He herds Loki toward their room, away from the gangway, and from Heimdall’s eerie gaze.

“What do you suppose he meant by that?” Loki asks, as they near their room. His voice is a whisper, however, as if he fears Heimdall’s hearing is as omniscient as his sight.

Thor shakes his head, baffled. “You know he has always spoken in riddles, and his vision can be
imprecise.” He slips a hand to the nape of Loki’s neck, and draws him in for a kiss, reassuring, as soon as they enter their room. “I would not worry about it for now.”

It takes three more such kisses, each softer, sweeter, and lingering longer than the last to bring color back to Loki’s cheeks, chasing away the unnatural pallor of his fear. To calm the trembling of his hands. And knowing that it is these cloaks that bring him such unease, garments Loki had woven with every ounce of his care and affection, it is with a heavy heart that Thor suggests they pack them away, careful. “To be worn for special occasions,” he claims, when Loki’s eyes narrow, suspicious.

“Are you ashamed of—” Loki starts.

“I am not,” Thor says, adamant, punctuating the word with a tiny kiss. “I wish only to cherish this gift you have given me, and to wear it at all times would leave it threadbare and worn.” He nods toward his own cloak, layered beneath the one Loki gifted him, its edges already frayed and torn from his time on Sakaar. His battles against the valewulves had done him no favours either.

“I suppose you have a point,” sighs Loki, after a moment’s thought. “After all, it is not every day that we happen upon a valewulf and I have the patience to craft cloaks of its pelt.” He sweeps his cloak from his shoulders, and lays it gentle upon the bed, before holding his arms out for Thor’s. Presumably to layer them together, and preserve them in a spelled chest of Loki’s making.

“Ah—” Thor says, hesitant, the crimson fabric pooled soft against their bed sparking an idea in him, bringing heat enough to his cheeks to match the hue of Loki’s cloak. “There is one thing I would like to do. Before we place them into safekeeping.”

“How?” The corner of Loki’s mouth turns up, a sign that Thor’s sense of mischief aligns with his. “Lead on, then.”

And lead on Thor does, drawing his cloak from his shoulders before pressing Loki to the bed, the sight of Loki being taken against it, fingers twisted tight into fabric—the deep blood of crimson, possessive and keen, the mellowed shadow of forest-dark green, their colors, their temperaments a perfect meld—as he cries out, being one for the ages.

The repairs take little time after that, and after Loki’s thorough inspection, the Statesman is ready for flight again by afternoon the next day.

Thor, having been in charge of harrying people back on the ship, making sure all those who left for exploration are accounted for and returned, has just herded the last straggling Asgardian onto the ship, when the head of their navigation crew appears.

“Your Majesty,” he says, hesitant, “we have been priming for takeoff for the past half hour, but a small vessel has just arrived, blocking our exit from the ports. They hope to speak with a delegate from our ship.”

Thor shares a troubled glance with Loki, who had been in charge of securing open exits and hatches. “What do you suggest we do?” he asks. His own solution would be to push forward, and bear down on the tiny ship until it gives way. But they are in a foreign land, in territory not their own. To force their way past a ship that clearly has purpose here would be courting disaster.

“We shall see what they wish from us, be it counsel or company, and then we shall be on our way,” Loki says grimly. Perhaps his and Thor’s strategy of being on their way did not differ so much after all.
Thor gives the signal to lower the gangway, while Loki sends a transmission over the comms that the delegate will disembark, as requested. And as the smaller vessel affirms receipt of their message, navigating its way to their gangway, Thor and Loki descend to the foot of it, Heimdall standing guard at the head, ready to assist, either in quick escape or combat.

The smaller craft’s door slides open with a pneumatic hiss, and two men step forward, tall, graceful, their features fair, in striking harmony with their dark hair. Both are clad in the same dusken armour, beneath cloaks of shining silver, their likeness so startling that they must be brothers, if not twins.

“Hail, travelers!” one says, beaming. “Allow us to introduce ourselves. We are Elric and Elan, sons of Ellam, and together we rule this realm.”

Thor inclines his head in acknowledgement. “We are Thor and Loki, sons of Odin,” he replies, stroking a hand down Loki’s back, fond. Letting it settle in the small of his back. “Together, we are the rulers of Asgard.” He finds himself vaguely jealous of their hosts’ resemblance to each other, and in truth, set beside these two beings so like the Ljósálfar, with his dark hair and pale skin, Loki looks more a relation of theirs than Thor’s. “Loki is my brother,” he adds mulishly. Winds his arm around Loki’s waist instead, and tugs Loki toward him, feeling oddly possessive.

And while Loki huffs at this strange declaration, the motion does not go unnoticed, Elan and Elric sharing a quick, meaningful glance.

“Sons of Odin!” Elric exclaims, sudden, in recognition—or is it Elan? They are so similar in voice and likeness, that it is difficult to tell them apart. His grey eyes widen, elated. “The same Odin who protected the Nine, and brought peace to the realms linked by Yggdrasil? For we have heard of his feats, even within this star system.”

“The very same,” Thor beams. Knowing what he does now, Thor would have different words about his father’s feats, for conquests and bloodshed would be more apt. But he smiles, however forced, following Loki’s lead all the same; that their impression of Odin and his legacy was so favourable could be turned to his and Loki’s advantage, as his brother might say.

“Then that makes you Thor, bringer of storms, and a fighter of unparalleled power!” says Elan. “And Loki, the walker of worlds, sorcerer of shapeshifting and other illusory magics!”

Surprise and pleasure flit quick through Loki’s eyes. And as Loki confirms their assertions, the hard lines of his mouth soften, minute. One might even dare to call that a smile, Thor thinks, taking an equal pleasure in the brothers’ recognition of Loki’s talents.

“Well met, then, friends!” Elric smiles. “It is a pleasure to make the acquaintance of such heroes of renown.” He shares another glance with his brother, before adding, quiet, “We are glad also to meet another pair that shares the same bond as we do.”

Thor blinks, intending to ask just what bond Elric means, but lets the matter rest when Loki’s knuckles brush gentle against his, purposeful. Ah.

“In any case,” Elan explains, “we had only recently returned from a diplomatic mission ourselves, when word reached us that an enormous vessel had stopped in our lands—with numerous passengers, Asgardians chief among them. It is our luck then, that both of you, their rulers, happened to be on board.”

It was less luck than necessity, Thor thinks sourly, as all of Asgard had been driven from their homes. But his smile does not dim in the least, a vestige from Loki’s lessons and demonstrations in diplomacy. “We are only passing through,” he says instead, reassuring. “We stopped only for fuel
and repairs, and intend to depart forthwith.”

“Regardless, what manner of hosts would we be, if we did not extend an invitation to you?” Elric says, earnest. “The hour in which it comes is late, and for that, we apologize. But please, rest a while in our halls. See what this land has to offer. And in the meantime, our men shall see to it that your ship and your people receive any supplies you may need.”

“That is a most thoughtful invitation,” Loki begins, catching the tiny shake of Thor’s head, subtle, “but I am afraid we must—”

“Please,” Elan chimes in, his eyes bright. “You would find all your heart could desire in our halls, whether it be food or drink, a tour of our armoury, or our archives.”

Mention of an armoury piques Thor’s interest, though the promise of such a tour cannot sway him from their purpose. But by the way Loki’s eyes glimmer at archives, Thor knows the battle is lost. They share a glance then, Thor brushing fingers light against Loki’s, for the approval he knows Loki wishes, and a tiny flicker of seiðr sparks between them at the contact.

_I suppose it would be unwise_, Loki says, speaking into Thor’s mind, _for us to make enemies of the rulers of this realm. Especially when it is their realm’s resources that made the continuation of our journey possible. Shall I accept for us, then?_

_It would_, Thor nods back. He catches Loki’s fingers and squeezes for good measure, strengthening the connection between them. _And you shall._

Whether it is this motion, proof of the bond between them, or Loki’s acceptance of the hasty invitation with a nod, Elric and Elan meet their response with a smile. “Excellent,” Elric says, beaming. “Then we shall wait here until you are ready.”

Thor makes quick work of announcing to all those on the ship that while there is no need for worry, their departure from Alfheim-Beta will be briefly delayed, to resolve an issue with this realm’s rulers. Meanwhile, Loki draws up a list for Heimdall—a record of the supplies he is to ensure they receive from Elric and Elan’s men, who are due to arrive soon after.

“The delay in our departure will not be for nothing,” Loki says, determined, when he and Thor reconvene, a sentiment with which Thor agrees wholeheartedly.

While Elric and Elan had invited them aboard their sleek and subtle vessel—the _Círaglar_, Elan called it, fond, stroking a gentle hand along the hull—Thor and Loki decide to follow them to their destination in the Commodore instead. It is best to have their own transport to and from the palace, in case their visit goes ill, Thor reasons.

The flight to the palace takes no more than a quarter of an hour, though upon their arrival, Loki urges Thor to land their craft a small distance away. Shrouds their ship with a spell of invisibility, before pressing the coordinates of it into Thor’s palm, creating a map of its location in his mind. “To ensure no one tampers with our ship in the time we are away,” Loki explains. “And if there is need for quick escape, only we will know the route to it.”

Thor nods, seeing the logic behind such precautions; it was how they had survived inhabitants of less amiable planets, or the schemes of those manning the rest stops, in the early days of their voyage.

With such precautions in place, they venture toward the palace where their hosts await them, marvelling at the mountainous waterfalls that border it, the intricacies of the stone architecture. Ascend the staircase to the main entrance, where two immense statues stand guard, gatekeepers of
this ethereal realm.

“Welcome,” Elric declares, spreading his palms, “to our home.”

~

True to their word, Elric and Elan lead them on a tour of their halls, from the stables and barracks, to the armoury and archives. Though their stable of horses is healthy and varied, there are few soldiers training in the barracks and a small contingent of guards scattered throughout—leading Thor to believe that their army is not vast. That, or they have no need of one in peacetime. The armoury itself is less impressive than the one Asgard once boasted, with substantial emphasis on bows and spears, but even Thor must admit that the aesthetics of each building far surpass that of their old home; each chamber is airy and spacious, the roofs and eaves of each decorated with fine-carven filigree, the sturdy columns bearing the chambers’ weight each displaying what must be the royal crest of their hosts.

And that is to say nothing of the spiralling stairways, wide, daring arches, and sprawling balconies from which one can view the scenic vista outside.

Each such impressive element is found to the utmost degree in the archives, and Loki has barely crossed into the foyer of the first floor, when he stops, his eyes wide with wonder. “You say this is the largest repository of knowledge you have in these lands?” he asks, eyes darting from one shelf to another, each towering structure carved from deep and polished oak, and all of them brimming with books.

“It is unparalleled,” Elan nods, after sharing a quick look with Elric. “You would find the history of our lands here, along with tomes on advancements in magic and science and medicine, among other things.”

“And there are no pressing obligations we must see to?” Loki says, with a glance toward Thor. “You do not take issue with me staying here for the remainder of the day?” When both their hosts shake their heads, to indicate the absence of either obligation or issue, Loki grins, sharp. “Excellent. Then this is where I shall be, until you have need of me.”

With that, he strides toward a settee tucked partway into a cozy alcove. Unfurls his cloak along the length of it, demonstrating his claim on the seat, and makes his way toward the shelves, seeming to find a path of his own without need for direction or guidance. And when he appears to uncover what he wants, a happy murmur escapes his lips, his fingers settling over the spines of each book on the case, gentle, reverent.

Thor knows there will be no persuading Loki to leave now, especially when he has decided to all but make camp in the library.

“While your brother finds his amusement here,” says Elric, “shall we find that of our own? In the form of a hunt, perhaps?” He tilts his head, a knowing smile playing about his lips.

“That is a fine suggestion!” Thor laughs, for it seems the novelty of the written word does not extend to either him or Elric. “But I think I shall stay with my brother for today. Perhaps tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow,” Elric agrees easily, though Thor does not fail to catch the near-imperceptible nod he shares with Elan. And after a quick word on where they can find nourishment, should they need it in the interim, and an invitation to a modest supper in their pavilion five hours hence, their hosts seem content to leave Thor and Loki to their own activities.
Thor browses the shelves near at hand, plucking *History of Warfare: The Third Age* and *Principles of Advanced Weapons Combat* from an ordered stack, the title and contents translating themselves, instant—courtesy of the same mental faculties that process the Allspeak. Ambles over to the corner where Loki is seated, and nudges him over.

“There is only room enough for one,” Loki says testily, though he shifts his toes a scant inch in surrender. Evidently, when it comes to his books and manuscripts, space is a premium commodity over Thor’s company.

“There is room enough for two,” Thor replies, stubborn, bumping at Loki’s knees with his hip.

In the end, it is a snug fit, but there is room for them both to stretch out along it lengthwise, each of them reclined along one arm of the settee. The only price for Loki’s acquiescence is that he uses Thor’s knees as a second stand for his books—a small price to pay for the privilege of staying in Loki’s presence.

And immeasurably adorable.

Thor soldiers through several pages of *History of Warfare*, including a passage on an egregious tactical error in a major battle, where a legion of archers inexplicably leapt over the shield wall meant to protect them, and were promptly felled by the enemy—the obvious conclusion for such foolish manoeuvre, Thor thinks—before giving up on the book altogether. Only maintains the pretence of reading, while glancing at Loki over the top of his book, subtle.

It is a pleasure to see Loki so at ease and relaxed, a smile playing about his lips as he murmurs a fragment of incantation here, a disapproving hum at spellcasting ingredients there.

Had Thor known a library existed here, he might have taken Loki here forthwith, as Loki suggested when they first arrived in these lands. But they would have had little time to themselves, to talk, and laugh, and *play*. Besides, he had plied Loki with books of his own choosing, earned through their own efforts instead of the goodwill of others, and Loki had seemed satisfied, which is well enough.

“You could join their hunting party, you know,” Loki says without looking up, when nearly an hour has passed this way. “I heard Elric’s earnest invitation earlier, and you may find that more riveting than boring a hole in my skull with your gaze.”

“I would rather be with you,” Thor says, far too honest. Moreover, in an unfamiliar place, he would not be parted from Loki so soon, and this makes for a quiet repose, after their chaotic morning of departure preparations. “Unless…” He swallows, before making to rise from his seat. “Unless I am in your way—”

“You are not,” Loki says, catching Thor’s ankle in his grip, quick. “I only—I did not wish to keep you, in case an afternoon spent in dusty archives was not what you wanted.”

“In that case,” grins Thor, settling deeper into his seat, with permission to stay so willingly given, “you may keep me, for as long as you wish.”

Loki only meets this sentiment with a roll of his eyes as he returns to his book, but Thor does not miss the way his lips turn up at the corners, small and secret and soft. The way his legs slot more snugly against Thor’s on the settee, or how his hand rests gentle on Thor’s knee on occasion, stroking an idle pattern, warm, into fabric.

And since Loki has caught him out, informing him his glances are not as subtle as he thinks, Thor gives up on this subtlety altogether, admiring Loki openly instead. Only pauses every now and then
to thumb through a few pages on Alfheim-Beta’s war histories, before finding his gaze drawn back to his brother, first limned by the soft hues of late afternoon sun, then the fiery bronzes of sunset, the hours whiled away easily this way.

Before they know it, the hour for supper arrives, and they make their way to the pavilion where the meal is to be served. It is a quick and simple affair, being what food was available on short notice, but the portions of lamb and greens and hot buttered rolls are both generous and delicious—a fact Thor commends their hosts for, when they finish.

“There will be better fare tomorrow,” Elric says, still apologetic, before his expression brightens. “Perhaps we might even hunt for it then!”

Perhaps,” Thor nods. But conversation about such pursuits is the least of his priorities at present; already he has caught Loki nodding off on several occasions throughout, his eyelids flitting, anxious, poor attempts at staying awake. A similar weariness rests heavy in Thor’s bones, his frame, his very being, for they had spent the night before and the better part of today preparing for the Statesman’s departure, and a quiet afternoon in the archives did not reverse such fatigue.

“You must be weary, after such a long journey,” says Elan, better at reading such situations than Elric, for which Thor is thankful. He rises from his seat, and gestures for one of their female attendants to come forward. “A guest chamber has been prepared for you in the east tower, and Geliel will show you to it now.” He glances toward Loki, a twitch of a smile curving his own lips as Loki’s head lolls onto Thor’s shoulder. “Restore your bodies and spirits tonight, and we shall reconvene on the morrow.”

“Thank you,” Thor manages, his eyelids threatening to droop themselves, “for the hospitality you have shown us.” He nudges Loki awake long enough for them to traverse the path past the stables and forges to their chamber, though when they arrive, Loki collapses on the bed face-first and fully-clothed, with only a quiet mmhn of contentment.

The bedchamber itself is as ornate as all others in this palace, the walls adorned with sprawling mural paintings, and intricate carvings vining up each column to the high ceilings. But Thor is of little mind to enjoy such surroundings, exhausted as he is. He spares a moment to strip off his cloak and armour, and with a long-suffering sigh, pulls Loki’s boots off as well. Tugs Loki’s cloak from his pauldrons and upends Loki’s armour over his head, before dragging his trousers off, Loki himself patently unhelpful, remaining limp as a rag doll.

“Lazy imp,” Thor yawns, as he crawls into bed. Sweeps the sheets over Loki so he does not catch cold during the night, out of habit. “Turn over, or you shall suffocate in your sleep.”

Loki’s only response is a sleepy hum, and an ineffectual roll of his shoulders that leaves him face-down on the pillow still.

Thor sighs, and with the help of the bedsheet beneath, tugs him onto his side, gathering Loki into his arms. Snorts a laugh as Loki draws in a surprised gulp of air. “For the record,” Thor says, “I do this only so I am not accused of fratricide, if I return to the ship without you.”

“How generous,” Loki murmurs, smiling, though his eyes remain closed. He cuddles closer and presses a kiss to—perhaps he meant to aim for the mouth, but he catches the corner of Thor’s jaw instead. A rewarding kiss, Thor supposes, though one so sweet and clumsy he is forced to return it, proper.

When they have shared enough small, sleepy kisses, when Loki raises a palm to fend off further ones and Thor kisses his palm instead, Loki finally huffs, “Sleep. We shall have need of rest, in order to
contend with our hosts’ schemes tomorrow. It is not an intricate game they play, but the terms remain yet unrevealed, which troubles me.” His eyes flutter open then, glimpsing Thor’s worried expression. “We can do nothing about that at present,” Loki adds, massaging the tiny furrow formed between Thor’s brows. “So for now, sleep.”

And Thor does, drifting toward slumber beneath gauzy sheets, in an unfamiliar room, in an unfamiliar land. But with Loki nestled against him, his hair a soothing honeyed scent, and Loki’s arms wrapped safe around him, Thor has all the familiarity that he needs.

~

By the second day of their stay, Thor has exhausted the archive’s collection on weapons and warcraft, of which there were few in the first place. It is plain to him now that Alfheim-Beta’s main inhabitants are not a warmongering race, for the majority of their tomes speak of the land’s lore in the days of old, music and poetry through the ages, and magic. And it is through a thick, dusty stack of the last subject Loki peruses now, leisurely, with an approving hum here, a furrow of his brow there.

As much of a joy as it is to watch Loki take genuine pleasure in these books, Thor cannot help the restlessness taking residence in his heart, the impatient twitch thrumming through fingers and skin to be doing something, to be—

“It is not too late,” Loki says, drawing Thor from his thoughts. He tilts his head in the direction of the main gate of the palace. “I saw Elric saddling the horses earlier—and for what purpose, other than the hunt he hopes you join him on?” Elric had extended the invitation again, shortly after breakfast, though Thor had declined. “If you hurry, you may catch him still.”

Thor huffs, needled by the thought that both Loki and Elric had foreseen Thor’s patience in the library growing thin. But a hunt is as good a pursuit as any to shake the languor from his bones, and he rises to his feet—though not before leaning in for a kiss, hungry, hard, as he nips Loki’s lip, petulant. “Then on the hunt I shall go,” he declares, beaming at such opportunity, “though I shall be back soon enough.”

Loki hides the twitch of a smile behind his book. “Yes, this I know.” But when Thor turns on his heel, his stride ready to carry him from the library and into the hall beyond, Loki’s hand darts out, reeling him quick by the wrist.

“Thor,” he murmurs, low, “remember to be on your guard. An invitation to the House of Ellam is not to be taken lightly, as I heard from my travails in the market.” And when Thor nods in understanding at this caution, Loki adds, “There is purpose to our visit here, and that they mean to separate us suggests they shall speak to it before long.”

“You could come with—” Thor starts, before Loki scoffs and settles back on the settee.

“I have had quite enough of hunting, thank you,” says Loki. “Besides, the sooner they tell us what they wish from us, the sooner we can leave, and they will do so if and only if they believe they have divided and conquered.”

Thor nods, troubled, though there is logic to Loki’s decision. “You should remain on your guard as well, then.”

“I intend to,” Loki says, a knowing gleam in his eyes. But as Thor turns to leave, Loki catches his wrist again, this time reeling him in not for further warning, but for a kiss, softer, sweeter than the last. “A…token, before you depart,” he murmurs, his cheeks flushed pink. Whether from pleasure or shyness, Thor knows not, but he smiles, pressing a kiss of his own to each cheek in return, for Loki
being freer with his affections can only be a blessing.

It is this kiss Thor takes with him, even as he leaves for the clearing where Elric has prepared horses for a hunt, this happiness it brings him—though he does not forget Loki’s warning.

“Thor!” Elan calls, beaming as Thor approaches. “You decided to join the hunt after all?”

“My brother suggested that a breath of fresh air from the archives would not go amiss,” Thor says, returning the smile. But there are only two horses saddled in the clearing, to Thor’s surprise. “Where is Elan? Will he not be joining us today?” The strategy for a party of three hunters differed from that of two, after all.

Elric only meets that with an easy laugh. “My brother enjoys a hunt as well as any other, but his pursuits run more toward the scholarly.” With a nod in the direction Thor came in, he adds, “Perhaps he and Loki will have a rousing discussion of their own in the archives today!”

Divide and conquer, Thor recalls warily, though he does not let his suspicions show. Mounts the horse Elric provides, a graceful chestnut mare, as they ride west toward the forests Elric suggests.

The wind rushing wild through his hair as they ride is indeed a reprieve from the still air and tombed silence of the library, Thor decides. But it is not long before he finds that despite the storm not long ago, already the heat from this land’s suns has settled in again, stifling the air around them, transforming the wind into a rush of heat and humid warmth.

They dismount at the edge of the forest and proceed on foot, careful to keep their steps quiet in their search for tracks for a suitable quarry. Thor keeps his hand near the hilt of the sword at his hip, ready to draw at a moment’s notice.

“By the way you carry yourself, I see you are no stranger to a hunt,” Elric nods, approving, his own bow at the ready. “Have you had opportunity to hunt game in these lands before this?”

“Loki and I felled a valewulf,” Thor says, before realizing he should not have admitted this so boldly. “But it was only out of necessity to fund our journey, of course.” The meat they had stored aboard, to be smoked and salted and cured; the rest they had sold piecemeal in the markets for a hefty sum—enough to keep the Statesman and all aboard it in comfortable condition for months to come.

“You bested a valewulf in combat?” Elric exclaims, impressed. “With only a hunting party of two? That is no small feat, friend!”

Thor keeps silent the fact that they had bested two; were Loki here, he would claim it prudent not to mention that they had been helping themselves to both herbs and wildlife to earn a quick coin. “It was a battle hard-fought,” Thor says instead, humble, before beaming in Elric’s direction. “Perhaps our luck with that battle will hold for today’s hunt as well.”

“I have no doubt that it will!” Elric laughs, as they continue their search for tracks.

They find and bring down a boar together, Thor harrying it with his power, and Elric felling it with his bow. But even as the thrill of the hunt sings through Thor’s veins, it is not the same without Loki at his side. It strikes him then that he misses having Loki on this hunt—misses Loki—and Thor would hurry to return to him, wherever he is.

Drawing upon both their experiences with a hunt, they lash branches and canvas together, forming a stretcher to haul the boar back to the palace, where it will be prepared and served for tonight’s meal. A meal Elric insists shall be a feast, as they hitch the stretcher to the horses, even when Thor says that simple fare is enough for him and Loki.
The remainder of the ride back is easy and leisurely, their conversation falling to the history of this land, the similar customs of their people, and the many trials and tribulations of ruling they found in common. Had he and Loki not intended to leave so soon, Thor thinks he and Elric might have become firm friends, and perhaps the same might be said of Loki and Elan.

Thor has just finished regaling Elric with a tale of his and Loki’s exploits against a dragon, in exchange for Elric’s tale about his and Elan’s triumph against a wyvern in lands east of here, when Elric falls into a momentary silence.

“If you do not mind my asking,” Elric says, thoughtful, “what journey is it that you make, that brings you, your brother, and such a large number of your people so far from home? So far from the revels and feats you speak of?” He pauses then, his next words cautious, careful. “Thor…this is no diplomatic mission you embark on, is it?”

Home, Thor remembers, an ache of longing panging deep in his heart, for what will never be again. “Asgard is lost to us,” Thor says, deeming such an admission safe to reveal. “It was destroyed by demons bent on vengeance. And they found it, in the end—as well as their doom.”

Elric remains silent for a long moment. “Perhaps we could be of assistance to each other,” he says at last. “My brother and I found upon our return that a storm had occurred not long before, bringing forth blooms and rousing the growth of crops that have always struggled in the heat of our two suns. We suspected it may have been the deed of someone from the great Asgardian vessel, though we did not know who. But it was your doing, was it not?”

“It may have been,” is all Thor admits to.

Elric smiles at Thor’s guarded answer, undaunted. “Despite our advanced waterways and irrigation systems, droughts still occur from time to time, due to the heat of this land’s suns. The occasional rain would prove helpful, for crops and vegetation, and the livelihood of the people here.” And when Thor only tilts his head askance, Elric adds, “What I mean to say is, you are welcome to stay in these lands. You and your people.”

It was likely Elric already suspected the reason for the exodus from Asgard, and waited only for Thor to confirm it, before making such an offer. Still, Thor breathes a sigh of relief, for Loki’s warnings and cautions had him believing that their hosts intended to detain them, for some reason or another.

“That is a most generous offer,” Thor nods, grateful, for taking in this many people, with their own existing rulers, is no easy task. “But this is something I would speak with my brother of first.”

“I understand.” Elric nods, solemn. “It is only proper that you discuss such a major decision with your mate.”

“My ma—no, we are not like that,” Thor says immediately. “Loki is my brother.”

“Yes, just as Elan is my brother,” Elric says, confused.

“No, we are not—” Thor tries to elaborate, before it occurs to him that they very much are. Was Loki not his equal in every way? His confidante? The one he trusted to make decisions in his absence, and looked to, in times of trouble or need?

And the most damning proof of all: had he not called Loki his everything? What was recognizing Loki as his mate, in the face of all that?

But as with all surprising revelations, Thor needs time to reflect upon the idea. And he would speak
with Loki on the matter as well, though he fears that giving a name to what they are, bringing what they have between them to light, will make Loki turn tail and run. Perhaps Loki accepted the occasional kiss or the hand at the small of his back in the view of others, but to dare more, this early in their fragile happiness, might shatter it.

Still, the possibility of more, and of being more is a temptation indeed.

For now, Thor focuses on the conversation at hand, and mitigating the unease from the nature of their exchange. “We are not...that,” he finishes lamely. Not yet, Thor thinks, the thought of this unsettling him more than what Elric suggests.

“Forgive me. My brother and I presumed that…” Elric pauses, before shaking his head. “We presumed too much. Forgive us for this misconception.”

Thor only laughs, and claps a hand to Elric’s shoulder, easy. “There is nothing to forgive,” he says. There is indeed nothing to forgive, and everything to thank him for; though this placation was offered to assuage his host, the conversation itself had been most enlightening, for Thor knows now that the idea of mated brothers is not unheard of, that it is possible—living proof of such a pair standing before him. Following their example, perhaps he and Loki could…

When the time was right, they might…

But Thor decides those thoughts do not bear thinking about for now. It is far too soon, and he would not risk hastening the nature of their relationship, when his dearest wish is simply for Loki to stay.

Upon their return to the palace, it takes little enough time for him and Elric to unload the boar at the kitchens, but for Thor, it is far too long already. And when they have seen to dismantling the stretcher and stabling the horses, Thor takes his leave of Elric, making his way swiftly to the library, where he is sure Loki remains.

“Loki?” Thor calls, striding quick across stone flooring, shielding his eyes against the setting sun. The light of it spills bright through the high windows, painting the wooden shelves and paneling a burnished bronze, bathing the floors in liquid gold.

“In here,” Loki calls back, the sound of his voice soothing the sting of longing in Thor’s heart.

“What mischief have you made, in the time I was away?” Thor asks, as he strolls further into the library with a smile. Finds Loki reclined against the same settee, a tome propped open against his knees, and another stack beside him on the floor, either waiting to be read, or a collection of those he had finished. He leans partway over the settee, his hands settled on the arm of it, as he gives Loki a kiss—then another, to compensate for their time apart. “Did you find any books to your liking?”

Loki wrinkles his nose at the affection, the motion entirely endearing. But when Thor draws away too soon, Loki tugs him forward to meet his mouth again, and to Thor’s delight, cups the nape of his neck, deepening their kiss, to show him their affection is not yet finished. It is only when they have traded kisses enough amid the gold-swathed books and illuminated scrolls that Loki deigns to answer his questions.

“Mischief?” Loki says airily, after a brief pondering. “Why, none that I can think of. And I suppose several of the books were intriguing, though for the most part, they are nothing I have not seen already.”

“Hmm,” says Thor, unconvinced. His gaze wanders to the pack Loki had brought with him, and if it appears heavier, bulkier, filled with possibly purloined books, Thor decides wisely not to pass
comment. “Nothing you have not seen already. I see.”

“Besides,” Loki adds hastily, tugging Thor in by the collar to distract him from the pack with another kiss—a distraction Thor does not mind in the least—“there was little chance to make mischief, with Elan hovering at my side for most of the day.”

Thor laughs, trying to imagine the sight of Elan vying for Loki’s attention, which Loki could be miserly with, when he chose to. “What did he wish to speak of with you?” asks Thor. “Assuming there was purpose to his hovering.” He presses a tiny, jealous kiss to the corner of Loki’s mouth, making his own bold bid for attention.

Loki allows it, the kissed corner of his mouth turning up, fond. “Purpose, yes, as I expected. Though I shall speak of it after the feast.” His eyes flick toward the high windows and shadowed corners of the library, the message implicit in the motion that there could be prying eyes and ears at present.

Thor hides another nod in a kiss, suspecting Loki’s conversation with Elan runs along the same vein as his and Elric’s. For now, however, he helps Loki in gathering the other books he scattered along the floor—for research, Loki sniffs haughtily—and tidying up, before they make their way to the baths. Ready themselves for the supposed feast to come, one held in their honour, regardless of what their decision is, Elric had assured.

This meal is more boisterous than the one the night previous, even if it remains the four of them in the pavilion, with various attendants darting in to refill their glasses, or bring more refreshment when requested. Elric regales them all with the skill with which Thor helped fell the boar they partake of now. Elan, in turn, reveals the heated debate he and Loki shared regarding combination of earth and fire magics to augment fertility of farming soil—during which both Thor and Elric nod politely, in attempts to look supportive.

And when they have finished their meal, spent the remaining hours of sunlight strolling leisurely through the surrounding gardens, night has fallen by the time they return to their bedchamber.

“That was a good meal,” says Thor, as they prepare for bed. He fiddles with the buttons of the nightshirts lent them, before deciding to forego his completely, heartened to see Loki do the same. “Better than we have had, in…” He closes his eyes and draws a breath, sifting through his memories. How many days had flown since their escape from Asgard? They seem countless in number now, in the face of such pleasures and leisures presented to them. “In a long time,” Thor sighs, wistful.

The succulent roast boar, fresh-baked rolls, and ripened fruit pies had been a welcome change from the salted meats, oft-hard bread, and stale ale that were common fare on the ship.

Loki is quiet, even as Thor shifts closer beneath the thin sheets to fold Loki into his arms—too quiet.

“We could eat like this every day,” Loki says, sudden. “Live like this, for the rest of our lives.” A faint tremor creeps into his voice at the suggestion, and his fingers scrape light against Thor’s chest in lieu of his palm, but it remains Loki’s nervous quirk all the same.

“Loki,” Thor says softly, suspecting where this conversation is headed, now that they are ensconced in the safety and secrecy of their room. Tugs Loki’s hand in for a kiss, to soothe his anxious grating.

“Elan says this realm would benefit from having a learned sorcerer in these lands,” Loki hurries on. “And if we settled here, we could ally with their kingdom. There are lands to the south, largely uninhabited, but with fertile ground for farming. This realm,” Loki says, his eyes shining, “has resources enough to accommodate all of us.”
They had come to the matter at last, and it is as Thor guessed; both rulers of this realm had extended an invitation to him and Loki, separately. Appealing to each of their different natures, Elric with bold tales of hunts and opportunities for renown to be found, and Elan with stories of needing a learned sorcerer and promises of alliance. Certainly they were both gifted in diplomacy, perhaps as skilled in wordsmithing as Loki himself. For all of Loki’s cautions, it was the greatest irony that it was he who was swayed most easily by their hosts.

“We could dwell here for a time, if you wish,” Loki says softly, tentative, when met with Thor’s silence. “Make an experimental effort. Asgard could thrive here, and you know it.”

“It is a tempting offer,” Thor says, considering, as he cards fingers through Loki’s hair, gentle. For Loki has the right of it—Asgard could thrive here. Already the land has proven itself well-suited to their needs, and they have made both happy memories and friends here. And key among this realm’s advantage, is that they would be welcome. But as much as he despises disappointing Loki, there are other elements to consider. “It is a tempting offer,” Thor says again, after further reflection, “though there are reasons we should not.”

“Indeed?” Loki says, unconvinced. “Enlighten me.”

“During my conversation with Elric,” Thor begins, “he spoke of the wyverns he and his brother bested, to the east.” He watches Loki’s eyes widen at the mention of such beasts, but continues with his observations. “Based on what I have seen of their armoury, and what few soldiers they retain, they are ill-equipped to provide protection, should Asgard need it. And our people are not equipped to handle wyverns themselves.” They were farmers, tailors, and architects among them, not hardened warriors, whom Hela had seen to the utter destruction of.

Loki nods his agreement, however reluctant. “Perhaps in our prime, with our population yet undecimated, Asgard could have defended against such creatures. Even now, perhaps we might. But the slightest misstep could cause our entire settlement to be devastated.” He breathes out a sullen sigh, shaking his head as he mouths wyverns. “Elan did not mention those. Not an insurmountable challenge, but go on.”

“We have friends on Midgard,” Thor says simply. And at Loki’s soured expression, he pushes on, “Yes, the Avengers—people who have seen us at our worst and still provided their aid. Here, our new acquaintances speak of alliances, but we have no proof they will come to our aid, should we need it. But on Midgard? They have been battle-tested. They have proven their loyalties.”

“They have proven their loyalties to you,” Loki says dryly. “I doubt they will extend the same courtesy to me.”

“They will,” Thor says. “I will make sure of it.” The Avengers are not unreasonable; they will see that Loki has changed his ways—at least, for the good of Asgard, for now. And if they do not give Loki opportunity to prove such a thing, Thor will make one for him.

Loki only hmms, doubtful, though he does not poke holes in Thor’s conviction. Burrows deeper into Thor’s warmth as he says, “There is a third reason that hastens your flight from here. What is it?” When Thor remains silent, knowing not if he should share such reasoning, Loki nudges their noses together, in a way that Thor may not hide, cannot. “I can hear it in your breaths,” Loki murmurs. “Sense it in the way you hold yourself.” He soothes a hand along Thor’s arm, the muscle of which has gone taut with tension. “Out with it.”

“The last reason…” Thor pauses, swallowing tight at the words. “The last reason is rather sentimental in nature.”
Loki blinks, puzzled, for all of a moment, before his expression softens. “Oh, Thor,” he says quiet.

And perhaps it is too little, too late to honour their father’s last wishes, if it had even been that. But as Odin had rested between Thor and Loki on that grass-lush field, the three of them gazing out at the sea, his words had resonated with Thor.

*Remember this place,* Odin had said, in the last of his moments. *This could be Asgard.* Words that Thor took to mean *This could be our home.*

Even if Odin had not spoken such words, it was the place all three of them had last been together—not in strife, but in kinship. Creating a final bond, however tenuous, between them. And when he finally lifts his gaze to meet Loki’s, Thor can see the same recollection in Loki’s eyes as well.

“Home,” Loki says for him, his voice soft. It is plain to him now where Thor desires to create Asgard anew.

“Home,” Thor echoes in agreement. “And so…if I could ask you to indulge in this one selfishness…”

Loki gives him a moment to gather words, but when none are forthcoming, he sighs. “I have indulged in a great many of them,” Loki says, considering, “but this? This is not selfishness. Your reasons are pragmatic and realistic, qualities I would not have thought you capable of, short years ago. And if a shade of sentiment colors your decisions,” he adds, nuzzling at Thor’s nose, fond, “who could blame you for that?”

“I shall take that as a compliment,” Thor growls, feigning annoyance, though the grin that twitches the corners of his mouth gives him away. He tugs Loki in for a kiss, grateful for his acquiescence and understanding. Still, one thing still niggles at him, a thought that will not leave him alone. “Is your hesitance to leave due to the library they have here?” Thor ventures, curious.

Loki grumbles and grouses, until Thor tightens his hold around Loki, squeezing him into admission. “That may have been part of the reason I—Thor, I cannot breathe,” Loki huffs.

“We will return here,” Thor promises, “when our people are settled, and we have made a life of our own on Midgard. And if it happens that we have not the time or resources to return, then I shall have a library built for you—one that rivals this one, in size and scope and content.”

“You should not promise things you cannot deliver,” Loki murmurs. His eyelids grow heavy with sleep, exhaustion from the day’s burdens bearing down on him. But Thor can see by the way Loki curls closer, his breaths soft and steady against Thor’s chest, that Loki is assuaged, the chief hindrance to his departure resolved.

And because Thor decides they have made enough decisions this day—the biggest—he leaves Loki to his slumber. Only presses a kiss to Loki’s brow, small and soft and sincere. “I will deliver,” he whispers, whether Loki hears his oath or not. “Without question.”

~

Their parting the next day is short and concise, for Thor had decided that the longer they lingered, the less they would wish to leave.

“Thank you, friends,” Thor says, when Elric and Elan rise to meet them in the morning, “for your hospitality. Your offer is a generous one, and most welcome in a time like this.”

With regret he does not have to feign, Loki adds, “But we have other friends, who have extended a
similar invitation to us before this, and it would be disrespectful not to continue our journey there, when we have already accepted.”

It is a lie, of course; they have not had the means to contact the Avengers, their communications systems far out of range from even Tony’s best and farthest-reaching devices. And of the Avengers, only Bruce knows of their impending arrival, which is not much help at all. But they have their reasons for leaving, and to linger here would be to do their hosts a disservice, providing them with false hope.

Elric nods, as though he had expected such a thing. “We are sorry to see you go,” he admits. “But I know that you are men of your word, and a promise made cannot be broken.”

Guilt curls low in Thor’s belly at that, though a brush of Loki’s fingers against his gives him courage to speak. “We would not be averse to returning here to visit when our people have settled,” Thor says, honest. “Or the idea of trade and alliances, when we have established ourselves.” He and Loki would find a way to repay the kindness they received, even if they could not at the present.

“That is well news, indeed!” Elan beams, both brothers seeming relieved at the prospect of future relations.

Things progress quickly after that: Elric prepares extra provisions for them to take on their journey, generous, while pressing fresh bread and fruit upon them, to break their fasts; Elan keys the coordinates of Alfheim-Beta into a wayfinding device he gifts to Loki, one that doubles as a communicator, should need for sooner contact arise.

In no time at all, Thor and Loki find themselves back at the entranceway to the palace, laden with gifts and packs for their journey, ready to depart.

“Farewell, friends,” says Elric, clapping a hand to Thor’s shoulder, easy. “May your journey be fair, and fortune favour your travels!”

Elan clasps Loki’s forearm, in a similar gesture of camaraderie. “And may you and your people find peace, and prosperity, wherever you make your home,” he adds, quiet.

“Thank you for your well wishes,” Thor says, smiling broadly, though the words wherever you make your home prompt him to glance at Loki, instinctive. For Loki has long been his home, no matter where their journey ends.

And if he spies their hosts sharing a smile between them at the motion, one knowing and amused, Thor simply pretends not to see.

Chapter End Notes

1) Just as Alfheim-Beta draws strongly upon a particular locale in Lord of the Rings, the characters of Elric and Elan are inspired by two characters who dwell in that place. (An illustration of them can be found here.) Elan’s name is also drawn from the character of Allan A Dale from Robin Hood, the minstrel of his Merry Men.

2) The name of Elric and Elan’s ship, the Ciraglar, means ‘renewed glory’ in Sindarin, a language J.R.R. Tolkien devised for Elves in Lord of the Rings.
The days pass quickly enough after their departure from Alfheim-Beta; there is always something to see to, whether it is the maintenance of the ship, or the health and wellness of the people, and Thor finds his days full. And though he thought ruling would be entirely draining, it is not, as Loki is there to bear him up, whether with his counsel, quiet strength, or sly wit.

Thor’s habit of acquiring small trinkets, books, and magic ingredients for Loki wherever they land continues, with a ridged dragon horn here, a pouch of golden sand from the dunes of Espera there, until their chamber is *brimming* with Thor’s gifts. In short weeks, they even have to move the bed aside, to make room for Loki’s collection of books anew. Loki had said nothing when Thor returned with shelves, hauled in with Korg’s help, to house his books instead of being haphazardly stacked, but he made his appreciation known that night, through skilful fingers, and a cleverer mouth.

Besides the more obvious gift-giving, Thor has determined other, subtler ways to win Loki’s favour, each within reason, and each drawing a surprised but genuine smile from Loki that Thor delights in seeing; he requests Loki’s company when the Commodore must be sent ahead of their main vessel, to negotiate for fuel or exchange trade goods—especially if the need for diplomacy or dealing with danger is high. Names Loki regent in his absence—Thor’s best solution at present for the issue of Loki not being king—as Loki’s voice should be heard, not merely diluted into Thor’s.

And while Thor keeps Gungnir in his grasp at official council meetings or when announcements must be made to all on the ship, he is content for the most part to let Loki be seen with it, and wield it, as Thor had found using Gungnir in his battle against Hela most ungainly. Loki had presented him the weapon, miraculous, shortly before the second council meeting, though of the circumstances in which he retrieved it, he has not yet spoken.

However, despite all these actions Thor has sanctioned, and *publicly*, perhaps he is overly optimistic about the situation.

Either the length of their space voyage and the close quarters makes their people restless, or there are those who cannot be won over by Loki’s charms, sweetmeats, and gifts of token reminders of Asgard. Whichever it is, a pocket of dissidence seems to have sprung up, one plotting in secret against Loki. Challenging his right to rule in Thor’s absence—a fact Thor discovers only when he returns from his recent negotiations.

“What is *this*?” Thor demands.

He had returned to the bridge of the ship, flush with victory at having negotiated with the peaceful Kyraxians for another month’s worth of supplies—only to find Loki nursing a split lip and Miek licking at the gash above Loki’s brow. Apparently, his spittle had coagulatory properties, which was part of how he and Korg had survived so long in the bowels of the Grandmaster’s arena.

“How did this happen?” Thor thunders again, when no one answers. He plucks Miek from his perch on Loki’s shoulder, ignoring his angry chitter at interrupting the healing process, and drops him into Korg’s waiting arms. Loki could well have healed these injuries himself; it was more likely that he preferred the theatrics of Thor walking in on an alien being lapping at his face.

“Calm yourself, brother,” says Loki. “Nothing happened.”
“Nothing happened,” nods Valkyrie, arms folded over her chest. “We simply had a little rebellion on our hands.”

“Well, which we quashed promptly,” Loki says, glaring at Valkyrie with something akin to betrayal. Clearly, he had not wished to trouble Thor on the matter, or had been ready to spin a different yarn to explain the circumstances.

“A rebellion?” Thor says, incredulous. “Against whom? Why?”

Everyone chooses this moment to be inordinately busy, staring out the wide window, deeply contemplative of the mysteries of the universe.

“It seems,” Loki offers finally, as Thor tips his chin up, gentle, to inspect the damage, “that my rule is not so iron as you think.”

“Our people know to follow your guidance in my absence,” says Thor. “I have made it clear, time and time again that—”

“You can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make it drink,” Loki says sourly. He shifts away, minute, when Thor curves his palm around Loki’s cheek, stroking, relieved that his injury was minor, but Thor follows the motion, intent on providing comfort. Smoothes a wisp of hair from his brow, before his thumb returns to caressing the ridge of Loki’s cheek. With a put-upon sigh, Loki relents, content to be subtly fussied over for the time being.

“I never once thought I would say this,” Heimdall declares, stepping forward, “but perhaps it is not enough for Loki to be named regent in your absence.” This is indeed a bold statement for Heimdall. For Loki had once banished him as traitor to the throne, while still disguised as Odin—even if he and Heimdall had been mending their bridges in recent weeks.

“What would you have me do, then?” asks Thor. “Shall I have all those opposed to him arrested and led off this ship? Jettisoned into deep space as punishment?”

Something gleams in Loki’s eyes at that, quick and sharp, as if he is delighted Thor would go this far for him. Thor shoots him a chiding look and Loki casts his eyes skyward, an exchange that spans seconds, before Loki offers a more sensible answer, in the presence of the others. “That is a terrible idea,” Loki says aloud, though that gleam had spoken otherwise. “You would have few Asgardians left.”

Thor thinks this untrue; Loki does not give himself enough credit, as Thor has seen for himself how Loki won the hearts of their people. Things cannot be dire as he makes them sound. Later, he intends to enlist the help of his friends, to investigate what actually occurred, but for now he simply listens, considering the information at hand.

Valkyrie only snorts and draws a long, leisurely draught from her bottle, then pulls off with a satisfied grunt, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand. “You,” she declares, “would have a lot of Jettisoned Space-gardians.”


No one responds to that; they have found that the best way to avoid hurting Korg’s feelings is to simply not acknowledge his jokes, especially when they fall flat. Miek, however, wiggles and clicks his mandibles together, which Korg seems to take as laughter, and beams at.

Loki mutters that jettisoned space refuse is more apt. “They would be guardians of nothing,” he says,
rolling his eyes. “In fact, they would all suffocate, then freeze to death in a matter of minutes. Besides, Thor’s first actions as king should not be to leave a trail of bodies in his wake.”

Thor remembers having done much of that already, on Jotunheim, Svartalfheim, and in recent memory, even Muspelheim, and makes ready to speak so, when Loki sends him a piercing look. “Of your own people,” he clarifies.

They all fall to silence again.

“If you’ll pardon my saying so,” Korg offers, “since it might sound a bit crude and all, on my home planet, we just take care of this with marriage. See, you’ve got the power, Loki needs the power—boom.” He knocks his large fists together, sending a sliver of perishable rock skittering to the floor. “Problem solved.”

Clearly, either Bruce or Valkyrie has enlightened Korg on the nature of Thor and Loki’s relationship, for him to suggest such a thing so readily.

“Marriage?” Thor all but squawks, ungraceful. Odin would never approve, would never give his blessing—then Thor remembers that he is king now. That there are certain liberties a monarch may take that are not afforded a king-in-waiting, for fear of being struck from succession: that of choosing his own consort.

In a word, Thor can do anything he wants. And as he meets Loki’s gaze, he knows what he very much does want. What he should have given voice to, long ago.

Thor clears his throat, finding his words again. “Marriage, yes,” he says again, surer this time. Yes, that is a splendid idea, in fact. Others around them had hinted at it, from Heimdall, with his cryptic remark at the gangway, to the rulers of Alfheim-Beta, and perhaps now is as good a time as any to—

“Thor, you cannot seriously be considering this,” says Loki. “By the Norns, you—” he sputters, catching Thor’s expression, which is every kind of serious, then that of the others, which varies between surprise and thinly-veiled confusion—with the exception of Valkyrie, who seems strangely delighted. Possibly at the opportunity of indulging in more drink. “This is ridiculous,” Loki snaps, jabbing the air in front of him with a finger. “This is ridiculous, and I will have no part in it.” With that, he turns on his heel and stalks off.

“Well, it was just an idea,” Korg shrugs, when utter silence follows. “Wasn’t like we was asking him to make babies or anything, were we, bruv?” He nods as Miek chitters his agreement.

“Is that even possible?” Valkyrie wonders aloud.

“It’s Loki,” says Bruce. “Anything is possible.”

Thor decides not to wonder at other possibilities for now, especially when the possibility of Loki even letting Thor have his hand in marriage looks remote. He takes his leave of his friends then, and heads in the direction of their chambers, where he is sure he will find Loki brooding.

To no one’s surprise, he finds Loki in their chambers—with his arms crossed over his chest, and a scowl to rival Odin’s at his worst—brooding. Thor had been nothing but honest when he told Loki he had grown predictable, though he finds it oddly sweet, in a way.

“Loki?” he says softly, taking a seat beside Loki on their bed. “What is it that troubles your mind? Is it this arrangement—”

“Arrangement?” Loki scoffs, immediate. “You mean farce. And one that is hardly necessary.”
Thor keeps his voice gentle, slipping his arm around Loki’s waist. Rubs a soothing circle into his side. “No one has said this will be a farce, Loki. If we are to be wed, it will be a true wedding, in the fashion of Asgard, lawful and binding.”

Loki shakes his head. “Thor, it is one thing to—to be clandestine lovers—”

“Which Valkyrie says we do a terrible job of keeping secret, by the way,” Thor interrupts, amused. “What? The walls are thin here, Loki.”

Loki closes his eyes and draws an exasperated breath. “—but it is another to be wed.”

Thor falls into silence then; he would not have guessed in long years that Loki would be the impediment to this union, for every fibre of his being had strained for Thor’s attention, his affection, his love, and he thought Loki would leap at this chance, for a culmination of all that they are to each other. An opportunity to bring their love to light, before the people of Asgard.

Perhaps Loki was frightened of baring his heart and saying so, giving name to such a want.

“Thor, you must think this through carefully,” says Loki, cutting through the silence.

“I am thinking it through,” Thor says. He finds himself irritated that Loki thinks him incapable of treating the matter seriously, when he has given it every consideration. And what Thor has decided, is that the idea is brilliant.

Korg is brilliant, in fact. As were all the others, who had hinted at, or already assumed such a thing. Why Loki had not mentioned this solution before—as he outshines all others in brilliance, in Thor’s opinion—is beyond Thor.

Ever perceptive, Loki seems to read the direction of his thoughts. “I did not mention it because you would be bound to me,” snaps Loki. “And I, to you!”

“Would that be so bad?” Thor challenges.

“It would be—” Loki seems to catch himself in time, though Thor wonders what he had been about to say. Had expected words like unbearable. Intolerable. Absurd. “You wish for this?” Loki says suddenly, his voice too quiet by half, and just the slightest amount of vulnerable. “Truly? With me?”

“I do not wish for us to skulk about in the shadows, for the rest of our days,” says Thor. When Loki turns away, with a sniff, as if this is no answer at all, Thor reaches out, twining the fingers of his free hand with Loki’s. “Yes, I wish this,” he amends, remembering that Loki must hear the words, instead of being left to draw his own conclusions, which are more often than not, erroneous. Brings their joined hands to rest above his heart, the rapid hummingbird-flutter of it in Thor’s chest proof enough of his desire. “With all my heart.”

He has made it plain that this is not simply so that Asgard’s people will not rise against Loki in Thor’s absence, or an empty agreement to safeguard Asgard’s throne, but that Thor wants this. Wants Loki.

Loki remains silent still, unmoving.

Thor draws in a tight breath, exasperated. What is it that I am missing? What is that keeps Loki’s heart from me? Is it—

Ah.
The answer comes to him like a stroke of lightning, sudden and illuminating: Thor is assuming Loki will blindly agree to the marriage, regardless of the circumstances. Assuming it is a foregone conclusion that Loki will be his.

Perhaps Loki simply needs to be asked, and properly, at that.

“Loki,” Thor says softly, slipping his arms around Loki’s waist, “I love you, and you lo—well, your affection for me varies from moment to moment—”

“Of course I love you, you fool,” Loki snaps, then frowns as if he had not meant to divulge that so quickly and honestly, or in such circumstances.

Thor cannot help but beam, delighted, for Loki had once said never doubt that I love you, though the events following had thrown serious doubt into Thor’s heart, and the return of that sentiment warms his heart thoroughly. “—and if that is the case,” he charges on, “if you would do me the greatest honour of becoming my husband, you would make me the happiest man in all the Realms.”

He is careful to frame his proposal in a way that makes it sound as if Loki would be the one to do him the honour, to make Thor’s happiness, for on this long voyage, Heimdall had sat him down and taught him the finer art of wordcraft and negotiation needed to be king. And if Heimdall had very pointedly stressed the importance of diplomacy, not only with one’s people, but those around them as well, Loki did not need to know.

The words seem to give Loki pause. “All the Realms?” he says, swallowing, the apple of his throat shifting, visible.

“All the Realms,” Thor nods, beaming once more. He lets his fingers slide gentle to the nape of Loki’s neck, cupping it, warm. Drops a kiss to Loki’s hair, sincere. He does not have ring in hand or bended knee to plight his troth, but these are the words truest and honest, from the deepest part of his heart.

“Well,” says Loki, after the span of one heartbeat, two, during which Thor genuinely fears Loki will say no simply to spite him, “I can hardly refuse when you put it that way.”

Thor’s smile broadens then, joy shining radiant from his heart at the words. Loki returns the sentiment, smaller, softer, but no less bright, and before Thor knows it, they are stretched along the bed, Thor’s weight pressed gentle against Loki’s as they share small, breathy kisses, to lips and cheeks and noses. Others, touched feather-light to eyelids and brow.

“Do you not…” Loki tries between kisses, before stilling Thor with a hand to his chest. “Do you not need to return to your friends, to share with them the happy news?”

It is true that Thor had left them waiting at the bridge, though he doubts they remain simply to hear word of his and Loki’s engagement.

“They can wait,” Thor says, nudging a tiny kiss to the softness behind Loki’s ear, before lifting his gaze. Framing Loki’s face with his hands. “Right now, I wish only to share this moment with you.”

The shift in Loki’s expression is subtle, but as he draws Thor in for another kiss, each hotter and harder than the last, every twist of his hips beneath Thor’s proof of his desire increased tenfold, Thor can sense his words have moved Loki’s heart.

In mere moments, Loki spells away their armour, the convoluted mess of cloaks and clasps and belts reappearing in the chair nearby. It is a fact for which Thor is grateful, for it seems neither of them can wait any longer, and Loki has saved them from the tedious task of undoing layers upon layers of...
armour, tearing through snaps and unbuckling belts, along with the worst travesty of all—pulling off mud-encrusted boots, which in their younger days, dampened the flame of ardour considerably.

And when the ivory-paleness of Loki’s skin is revealed, Thor falls upon him, instant, laying kisses to every inch of Loki he can reach. Worshipping every part of him with soft presses of lips, from the crest of his collarbone to the tender arch of his foot.

“Thor,” Loki whispers, whining beneath Thor’s touch. Widening his hips, so open and inviting, a clear display of his willingness. “Please.”

“Wait, the—the oil,” Thor gasps, breaking away from a kiss. He fumbles through the drawer of their nighttable, before Loki catches his wrist, and with a surprising deftness, rolls Thor onto his back.

“Never mind the oil,” says Loki. And before Thor can think to argue, to question—had they even any left?—Loki enveloping him, tight and hot and so incredibly wet drives all such thought away. “The spell,” he breathes, by way of explanation. “I—you asked me to recall—”

Thor leans up to hush him with a kiss, pleased Loki had taken his request to heart. Lets his hands roam toward Loki’s waist, fingers closing over the jut of his hips, steadying Loki as he lowers himself, slow. His descent is steady and effortless, Thor finds, relieved; perhaps their morning lovemaking—all sleepy kisses and warmth—had left him slick and ready for whatever came after, and his spell only hurries things along.

“Good,” Thor gasps, as Loki sinks down further—deeper—his tight wet heat so lovely around Thor’s cock. “So good, Loki—oh.”

The pleasure brought next is indescribable, as Loki braces his hands on Thor’s chest, the rise and fall of his hips rhythmic against Thor’s, and he can only watch the heave of Loki’s chest with each breath, the gorgeous flush racing dark down his neck, before his senses return, and he seizes his own opportunity to touch, to taste, to suck. Reaches greedy hands to pinch Loki’s nipples, until they match the wine-flush of his chest. Lunges upward to suck them a bruised and cherry red, before letting those nipping, biting kisses wander into the column of Loki’s neck, blazing a trail of possession as Thor goes.

Loki allows it—allows it—for all of short moments, before it is enough for him, too much, and he pushes Thor against the bed, showing that he is in control of this, his hands bearing down on Thor’s chest. Thinks better of it and pins Thor’s wrists to the bed instead, his fingers iron-tight shackles Thor cannot escape.

Thor obeys, for this display of might, of power, of control is all for Loki, letting him move as he wishes, and rock as he wants. But all too soon, it feels far too one-sided, and Thor brushes thumbs across Loki’s knuckles, light. Seeking permission to join the game. Loki’s tiny nod is all he needs, and Thor springs free from his shackles, fingers twining tight through each of Loki’s hands, proper leverage for the shift of his hips, sinuous, spirited, brisk.

But even that is not enough, of warm skin and contact, and Thor drags him forward, pulling him off balance, pressing kisses to Loki’s mouth, his lips kiss-swollen and red, to his chest, his heart, his throat. Cups the back of Loki’s neck to deepen their kiss, for he cannot get enough of him, in touch and taste and sound.

“More,” Loki pleads, when an acutely rough thrust has him gasping into Thor’s mouth. “More, harder, please—”

Thor lets the hands clasped snug around Loki’s neck, his waist, slip down to his ass. Cups both
cheeks, greedy, pushing them down with each upthrust, spreading Loki for him, spreading him open and wide, to press more deeply within, until he is as one with Loki as he can be.

Loki cries out, his back arching sudden, and Thor urges him forward, encouraging the motion, revelling in it—trapping Loki’s cock against his belly, for friction perfect and hot and rough. Each rock of Loki’s hips grinding his cock along Thor’s belly, in concert with his thrusts, the dual pleasure too much for Loki, too much, for Loki trembles in his arms, fingers clawed into Thor’s shoulder’s, tight.

“Thor—Thor, please,” Loki gasps. The pitch of his cries means he is so very close, and Thor nods, closing his arms around the small of Loki’s back. Traps him in place as he heaves deep within him, a thrust so brutal and aimed and rough Loki howls, uninhibited, unrestrained.

There is no sweeter, more rewarding sound than this, of Loki crying out at his peak, and he spills across Thor’s belly, forceful, aching, wet, seed streaking a blazing path from navel to chest.

Thor wicks it away with fingers, playful. Laves his tongue down the length of them, hungry for the taste of his brother, his essence, his life. Presses the same fingers to Loki’s mouth, watching his tongue lap at remnant droplets, before Loki sucks them into his mouth, mirroring how he takes Thor in below.

The sight of it, the sensation is too much, and Thor draws his fingers away, away from Loki’s sinful tongue, his reddened lips, and cinches them at Loki’s ass. Grips him and locks him in place, for one upthrust, two—but Thor is not deep enough, not far enough, his craving for Loki unsated, and he wrenches them over in the bed instead. Revels in the startled cry Loki makes, as he gathers Loki in, arms circling his head as Loki winds arms around his neck. Their arms so entwined form a private dome around themselves, and Thor takes his mouth as he pushes in deep, his pace rough and uneven, but it is not until Loki frees his hands, raking hot embers down Thor’s back, that he spills, sudden, unexpected, hips driving into Loki, abrupt.

“Loki,” Thor gasps, breath caught in his throat, the quiver of a hummingbird’s wing. “Loki.”

They share a shivering, shuddering kiss, their breaths harsh and shallow in their chests. But with Loki’s hands stroking soothing down his back, and Thor’s tiny, nuzzling kisses to his neck, their breaths soon slow, their heartbeats evening out for a rhythm steady, strong, perfectly synchronized with each other’s.

Mine, Thor decides after, palm cradling Loki’s cheek, for Loki has as good as promised such a thing. Cards fingers, careful, through the tangles of his hair. All mine.

Loki, for his part, seems content to roll into these touches like a spoiled cat. To engage in mutually languid, leisurely kisses, to cheeks and nose and brow, the urgency now passed. And when their mouths tire of kisses, they resort to soft, lazy petting, from the curves of shoulders and arms, to the solid planes of hips and thighs.

Thor’s fingers stroke gentle along the cleft of Loki’s chest, swiping teasing at the sweat pooled within, when a thought occurs to him, sudden. Laughter bubbling out quick, before he can quell it.

Loki reaches out idly, pinching him in the side, a grin tilting his mouth when Thor yelps, startled. “What is it you find so amusing?”

“We have…” Thor tries, trying to fight the smile that rises again to his lips. “We have consummated our marriage before the actual ceremony.” Though in truth, they have consummated it numerous times, and Loki most soundly before now.
“And that surprises you?” Loki scoffs, stretching out beneath him, leisurely. “Since when have we ever done things the normal way around?” His expression turns grave, however, after Thor kisses his agreement into Loki’s cheeks, his nose, the swollen redness of his lips. “Though I do not think this is what Odin had in mind, when he brought us together.”

“Perhaps not,” Thor agrees slowly, “but I think it is time we live our lives for ourselves, not for Father.” With Thor’s heartfelt prayer, bidding Odin to take his place in the halls of Valhalla, their father would hopefully have joined the brave warriors of old now, and it is no longer his approval they must seek, but their own happiness. “Besides, do you not remember how he would not speak to his purpose of waiting for us on Midgard, until both his sons were beside him?”

Loki sighs, a soft huff of breath that says he does remember.

“It means that whatever he wished us to do, he intended for us to do it together,” says Thor.

“Perhaps so,” Loki muses, seeming to agree with the sentiment before grinning, sly. “Though I am certain I can think of other things we may do together, for the time being.” He draws Thor forward then, meeting his mouth again, and from then on, all of Thor’s thoughts are turned to how hot Loki’s mouth is against his, how sweet his kisses are, and the elated hope that he will share a lifetime of such moments with Loki, his dearest, his heart.

~

When Thor finally deigns to leave their chambers, he finds his friends still gathered at the Statesman’s bridge, conversing in hushed whispers.

“So, I take it Loki said ‘yes’?” hazards Bruce, as all of them observe Thor’s mussed hair, the multitude of love bites Loki has presumably left, and the million-watt smile on Thor’s face.

“He said ‘yes’!” Thor confirms, beaming, as he pumps his arms in the air. Then he remembers that this is not a conquest or victory, and Loki would be more than cross to discover Thor flaunting this so jubilantly. Lets his arms fall to his sides, mortified.

Still, there is a collective answering cheer from his friends. “Drinks!” Valkyrie shouts immediately, waving her half-finished bottle in the air.

“Drinks!” Bruce agrees, happy for any excuse for celebration.

And while Korg beams, Miek, set back into his robotic exoskeleton by now, clicks his mandibles together, rapid, and waves his bladed hands.

Heimdall seems impassive at the news, before he allows the minutest of smiles to grace his lips. “Congratulations,” Heimdall nods. “Though I saw this coming.”

Thor sighs. Of course he had. Since the day he and Loki had returned to the ship, and encountered Heimdall on the gangway, dressed in each other’s colors, no doubt.

Perhaps even before then.

In retrospect, Thor should have seen it sooner as well, when Loki had sighed I am not their king. When a ruler of Alfheim-Beta had blinked at him in puzzlement as Thor said he and Loki were not like that, when it was clear that they were, in everything but name.

And when the lass who gifted Loki her cookies later called him the king when asking Thor after him, corrected gently by her mother with a no, Loki was their prince, since only one of them could be
king. The child had looked up at Thor and said, so sweetly confused, “I do not see why you cannot both be king, with the way you—"

Her mother had ushered her away instantly, offering profuse apologies. *Please forgive her, your Majesty. She is but a child, and knows not what she speaks.*

Except she *had* known, hadn’t she? And it only took the voices of others joined with hers to make Thor see it.

The six of them make their way to the mess hall, and it is not long before Valkyrie sets out several jugs of Sakaaran-brewed mead from her own stash on a table, generous. Heimdall, Korg and Miek are more than happy to partake of this rare generosity. Bruce, on the other hand, helps himself to something sweet and fizzy and decidedly *not* alcoholic, for fear of the Hulk breaking loose.

Thor had stopped by their chambers to inform Loki of this impromptu celebration held in their honour, and happened upon Loki in the shower—an attempt to make himself *presentable*, Loki said—and while he had been tempted to strip off his armour and join Loki, his brother had barred him entry, instant.

“If you step foot into this shower, *neither* of us will make it to this so-called celebration, and your friends will take insult.” Loki’s words had been far too innocent for the daring motions his fingers made. Tipping Thor’s jaw up. Trailing them along Thor’s throat, dangerously tempting. “Is that what you wish?”

Thor had growled and grudgingly left Loki to his shower. Nurses his own stein of mead now, content to nod and laugh at his friends’ conversations, though he wishes Loki was at his side in this.

No sooner has he thought this than Loki saunters up to their table, his eyes gleaming, his hair freshly washed, smelling even more delectable than when he had first stepped into the shower. Is that a hint of *honey*? Or is it *pear*—

“Your Highness,” Heimdall says, bowing his head. “How kind of you to join us.”

Loki nods his own acknowledgement, as he searches for a seat among them.

A strange flicker of pride ignites in Thor’s belly, at seeing the way Loki presses a hand to his aching back, subtle. The slight limp he retains from being so thoroughly *taken*, as he makes his way toward the seat beside Thor. The rose-pink patch bright on Loki’s neck from where Thor’s beard had rubbed him raw, reminding him of the matching patches on the inside of Loki’s thighs, from where Thor had licked, sucked, and stroked him to completion.

He reaches out beneath the table, placing his palm along one such patch and squeezing, but when Loki swats him away, hissing, “We are among your *friends,*” Thor only laughs, undaunted, and slings an arm around Loki’s shoulders instead. Leans in subtly to breathe in the scent of Loki’s hair, wondering at the aroma layered beneath the honey.

“It is pear,” Loki murmurs. “Your senses have not failed you yet.” And when Thor nods, satisfied, but does not draw away, content to revel in Loki’s scent, he adds, “Thor, you must stop.” Jabs Thor’s leg beneath the table when Thor does not comply. “Stop *sniffing* at me—”

Heimdall clears his throat then, and they look up to find everyone—except Korg, who only beams, unfailingly kind—staring at them in silence. It appears their exchange had not gone unheard.

“A toast!” Valkyrie announces quickly, to break the silence. “To…to your marriage,” she nods at Thor and Loki. “And to the happiness of our king.” She pauses, glancing at Loki, questioning.
“Kings?”

Loki shares a glance with Thor, his eyebrows raised, a question in his own eyes.

“Kings,” Thor declares, his cheeks growing warm with drink, his head light. Loki would not simply be a consort, but a king. He finds himself delighted when a matching rosiness springs to Loki’s cheeks at such declaration.

“Kings,” Valkyrie echoes, tossing her own drink back, and watching as the others follow suit, before they break off into quiet clapping and cheering.

The mead burns Thor’s throat as he swallows, but it hardly registers, for the fact that his friends share in his joy matters far more. It had taken them time—in varying degrees—to come around to the idea of him and Loki being together, and their acceptance now, however uneasy, is all he can ask for, a small boon to ease his and Loki’s path in the future.

But as Loki reaches out to press his hand to Thor’s knee, careful, confirming for himself that this is happening, that they can have this, a genuine smile finally gracing his face, Thor finds the greatest pleasure in this moment is that Loki shares in his joy.

~

Before long, their party of seven makes its way through Valkyrie’s supply of drinks, and they are forced to draw straws to see who must leave to replenish their supply.

Thor draws the short straw.

“I will go with you,” Loki says, rising to accompany him to the galley, before Thor smiles and shakes his head.

“Stay and enjoy yourself for a while,” he says. “I shall be back soon enough.” With that, he kisses the corner of Loki’s mouth, quick, taking note of the pleasured flush it brings to his cheeks.

The meaning of it does not escape either of them; it is the first Thor has been so openly free with this affection in front of their friends, and the first Loki has accepted it. And if this is part of what their marriage will bring, then Thor simply cannot wait to—

But that brings to the forefront the thoughts that have been niggling at the back of his mind, and Thor strides out, silent and troubled.

It takes Thor no time at all to locate the jugs Valkyrie has hidden behind a sack of sprouted potatoes, and he hefts two into his hands to bring back. On his way past the observation deck, however, he slows, contemplative. Sets the jugs down carefully at his feet.

With only the stars for company, silent and impartial, this place has always been Thor’s favourite to mull things over, and this time is no exception.

Is this a mistake? Thor wonders. Are we hurrying into this far too soon?

He had hoped to court Loki for longer, to let him grow accustomed to the idea of being and staying at Thor’s side. And when the time was right, Thor might eventually have planned to suggest such a union, instead of forcing Loki’s hand, as Thor felt he had done today.

But circumstances have hastened his plans, and though Loki had agreed to his proposal, Thor cannot shake the feeling that Loki’s answer might be different had their situation been changed. A
fortnight’s courtship and gifts thereafter did not a marriage make, after all.

Still, perhaps they have been circling this for far longer than a fortnight. Perhaps, Thor reflects, this is something they have been building up to for their whole lives.

“You appear to have much on your mind, your Majesty.” Even Heimdall’s voice sounds all-knowing, a deep and pleasing rumble, but when Thor startles, Heimdall only adds, “You were so long in returning with drink that Valkyrie sent me after you.” He falls silent then, waiting for Thor to speak.

Thor sifts through his worries, of will Loki stay, are we ready for this, or will Loki consider this marriage a prison, before deciding to voice the safest one. “I only worry that it is too soon for such nuptials.”

Heimdall’s expression clouds for a mere instant, enough for Thor to discern that he means to say the only issue here is why this took so long, but ever has Heimdall reined in his thoughts when speaking to royalty. “All this time, you and Prince Loki have worked toward our people’s happiness,” he says finally. “Perhaps it is time the two of you looked toward your own.”

Happiness, Thor ponders, even as Heimdall takes his leave, carrying the jugs Thor brought with him. Yes, the thought of wedding Loki gives him this in such great measure that he finds himself banishing thoughts of waiting for the perfect time to be wedded. The perfect moment they will both be ready for this. For, as anyone knows, to strive for absolute perfection is madness.

Thor finally has a chance to create his own small piece of happiness with Loki, and this, more than anything, will be perfection enough.

“Having second thoughts, brother?” Loki asks, when Thor returns to the revelry at last. His expression twists then, a facsimile of a grin, so different from the genuine one earlier that it wounds Thor’s heart. “Worry not—we can attribute your proposal to the consumption of too much mead, and by morning, all will be forgotten.”

“I have had second thoughts,” Thor says. And when Loki turns away, hiding his hurt, instant, Thor slips an arm around his waist, stilling him. “I have had second thoughts, and thirds, and fourths, all of them the same—that I love you and wish to be with you, for the rest of your days, and mine.”

Loki swallows hard, the shift of his throat visible. “The rest of our days,” he murmurs wonderingly, his hand finding Thor’s free one beneath the table. And by the strength of his grip on Thor’s hand, Thor knows they are ready, that Loki wants this, all of this confirmed when Loki whispers, “As do I.”
After the dishes from the next morning’s meal are cleared away, Thor wastes no time in announcing his intention to wed, from a small dais in the ship’s atrium. And though he would have preferred to share such happy news with Loki at his side, Loki had been called away to see to a matter down in engineering. Left Thor permission to make the declaration on his own, with the caveat that he was not to announce whom he intended to wed, a condition Thor found puzzling, but acquiesced to all the same.

Of course, questions flood in shortly thereafter.

“Is this to be an official coronation?” calls a voice from the crowd gathered before him. “In addition to your wedding?”

Heimdall had suggested this very thing the night before, when they had all spoken of the logistics of the upcoming ceremony, and Thor beams, answering with a resounding, “Yes!”

“Will there be a feast?” calls another voice. Ah, that was Ronja, one of the cooks in the ship’s galley.

“There shall be a feast!” Thor declares. “But a modest one, based on the resources we have at hand.” Theirs would not be an extravagant wedding, he and Loki had decided, for there were far greater causes to put their resources toward than a single day’s celebration.

The next few questions are easy enough to answer; where will it be held Thor answers with the assurance that it will be in the ship’s atrium, for they will not put their voyage to Midgard on hold for it, by touching down on a planet. Is there a date is simple enough as well; he had discussed this with Loki, and they determined it would be in a week’s time from now—ample time to prepare for it after his announcement today. They had chosen also to hold it on the day of the week named for Frigga, to honour their mother and be wed on an auspicious day both.

Thankfully, no one raises the question of why Thor has decided to marry. He can only assume they believe it is the way of things, for their king to find one to stand by his side.

But the question he dreads most is bound to appear, and it does, by way of a sweet, chubby-cheeked child at the front of the crowd, no higher than her father’s knee. “Who is your betrothed, your Majesty?”

The question is echoed and murmured in a thousand different ways throughout the crowd, and all those gathered in the atrium press closer to hear his answer.

“Ah,” Thor says, his prevarication at its finest. “I—that is, it could be said that I—”

“Do you not have a betrothed?” someone asks, incredulous, and at that, the crowd surges forward.

“I have a daughter!” cries the wife of one of the nobles Thor recognizes, ushering her reluctant daughter to the forefront. “Of marriageable age!”

To his horror, when Thor politely declines the offer, and several others in the same vein besides, one
man cries, “Younger? Does your Majesty prefer them younger?”

Another voice calls from the back, frantic, “Sons! We must offer our sons!” The swell of voices rises then, families no longer submitting those who are eligible and of marriageable age, but any and all.

“Enough!” Thor bellows, overwhelmed, his frustration displayed in a sudden blast of thunder. It resonates deep and foreboding through the atrium, quieting the frenzied crowd. And though a few still flock toward him, urging their daughters—and one son—to the front of the crowd, in a hopeful bid for Thor’s hand, he glares them down.

There are whispers among the crowd then, of how perhaps Thor hesitates to announce his intended because he has found his betrothed within his Sakaaran comrades. Those comrades present, standing at the back of the crowd, curious, back away instantly. Shake their heads in a denial most vigorous, lest the ire of the Asgardian throng be turned against them.

Thor puts those rumours to rest without hesitation. “I have a betrothed,” he says testily, still unsettled by how willing all before him were to offer their offspring for marriage—some of whom were still children. He raises a hand to forestall their questions, and with a silent apology to Loki, he declares, “My intended is known to you all as Prince Loki, of Asgard.”

A hush descends upon the gathered throng.

Several shocked gasps follow, along with more than a few knowing ah’s, and even Thor finds himself surprised at the number of nods that meet him, oddly accepting. He hears Loki’s name repeated several more several times, in the same rippling murmur that sounds suspiciously like keeping it in the family, which apparently makes sense to the people gathered, and quiets their rumblings all at once.

Perhaps they are also content to hear that Thor’s intended is well-known to them, all of them having been subject to Loki’s kindnesses, in one way or another, or they are pleased that Loki is Asgardian.

Regardless of what has finally settled the rabble, Thor is heartened by their smiles and offers of congratulations, accepting their wishes for wedded joy with a broad grin of his own. For he had not expected his bold declaration of taking Loki as his mate to be met with such easy acceptance.

It seems that Loki, with his myriad gifts of books and tools and sweets, and the hope he offered their people in the certainty of re-establishing Asgard, has paved the way for his own road to happiness—a thought that both bolsters and amuses Thor, for Loki has played a very long game indeed.

Strange things begin happening in the following days.

The smallest of children take pleasure in dogging Thor’s heels—and Loki’s, Thor discovers later—to offer him humble crowns, each woven by tiny hands from the flowers adorning the ship’s rungs and railings.

The girls, those not yet of age, giggle in groups, scribbling drawings on parchment or typing furiously on the tablets the ship provides, though they scatter like mayflies when Thor inquires to see, curious. The old fishwives cluster similarly, with toothy grins, nodding respectfully as Thor passes, only to fall to hushed whispers and laughter again.

The men are—well, some of the men are disgruntled at Thor’s announcement. But enough of them seem to maintain that Loki had not led them a strangely when he sat on Asgard’s throne, and that Thor himself is trustworthy enough, so they have little opinion about this wedding either way, as long as
their bellies are full and that fighting with hostile forces is kept to a minimum.

With the help of his friends, Thor had since discovered that those who planned the short-lived rebellion were mercenaries from other realms, trapped on Asgard when Loki restricted use of the Bifrost. They had stowed away on the Statesman, waiting to seize the ship for their own use, under the guise of challenging Loki’s leadership. Threatening the lives of Asgardians’ wives and children to help them with their plot. And when the leaders of this rebellion had been rooted out and brought before him, struggling, snarling, Thor had promptly imprisoned them in the holding cells of the Statesman. Set them to be transferred into detainment at the next nearest planet—all of this done without Loki’s knowledge, for Thor would not have them near Loki again, if he has his say in the matter.

None would be left free to cross Loki’s path ever again, Thor had vowed, grim.

“It is truly a pity,” Loki says one evening, clearly free from these worries. Finding Thor as he sits at the vanity in their chambers, preparing a draft of a census form.

“What is?” Thor asks, gracing Loki with a smile before turning back to his draft. He needs only a moment more to put the finishing touches to it, and then he can give Loki his undivided attention. The forms are to be distributed to each family unit on the morrow, and while Loki had made the suggestion, to record the pertinent information of all those on the ship, he had, as always, left Thor to do the actual work behind it. Thor hardly minds, however, for such tasks fill his days and give meaning to his role as king.

“I was hoping to sow rumour and mischief,” Loki says lazily, “regarding your ‘bride’. Perhaps pit maidens against each other, to see who might win your hand, and take bets on who the victor would be. Only to find myself thwarted,” he adds with a huff, “by you having boldly announced your mate to all and sundry.”

Thor sighs, though another smile twitches at his lips. Only Loki would make a game of his own wedding. “Lo-ki,” he says, chiding.

He does not have to turn around to know Loki has his arms crossed, his mouth forming a most endearing pout. “With your usual frankness, you have spoiled my opportunity at foolery.”

Having finished his draft by now, Thor sets down the quill and turns in his chair to face Loki, his arms open for an embrace that Loki steps into, naturally. Closes his arms around Loki’s waist, his face pressed into the space above Loki’s belly. “What would you have had me do, Loki?” he asks softly. “Would you rather I had kept it quiet, like some shameful secret, to reveal you only on the day of our wedding?”

Loki is silent for a long moment. “I could have shifted my shape into that of a woman for the ceremony, to fool them all. Perhaps even kept that form for a time.” He lets out a slow breath, thoughtful. “Then I could shift back later, and though they would know they had been tricked, by then we could have said, ‘Oh, apologies—the marriage was a binding one, and your protests come too late’.”

Thor buries his face into Loki’s belly, searching for his warmth. “No,” he says, adamant. “Fooling them would suggest you had fooled me, and I would not have our people thinking you tricked me into this.” He gazes up at Loki then, and Loki’s breath catches in his throat, at the intensity with which Thor’s eye burns. “Take whichever form you wish to after, but on that day, you will marry me as you are.”

Loki’s fingers are gentle as they card through Thor’s hair, stroking, wondering and soft, as if Thor’s
words have struck a chord in his heart. “As you wish, then,” he says, the sound of his hard swallow audible in the silence between them. “As you wish.”

~

News of the impending marriage keeps everyone in high spirits, despite the earlier betrothal debacle. And it is with a lightened heart that Thor sees everyone on the ship participate in the preparations, eager.

The children create paper chains to hang from the atrium ceiling, from simple linked loops to more intricately joined hearts or flowers. A group of women from the galley begins experimenting for dishes to be deemed worthy for the feast, while another from engineering trials more varied and complex flower arrangements, to be hung from each beam and rafter, alongside banners with Thor’s and Loki’s insignias, of the triquetra and twined snakes, respectively. Meanwhile, the seiðr-users, from the novices to the masters, practice their glamouring skills on the atrium where the ceremony is to be held, spelling bare patches of wall into gold, or recreating banners where no one can reach.

Their enthusiasm is heartening, though Thor suspects that most are simply happy enough to have something to celebrate. Many have not seen a royal wedding in long years, if at all, and since this is to be coronation and wedding both, their doubled excitement is understandable; it is an event unlikely to be repeated, to see kings crowned at the same time they are wedded.

“It is the custom on Midgard,” Thor says, on the last night before their wedding, “for those who shall be married in the morn to have one last night of revelry and merrymaking.”

“I have heard of such a thing,” Loki nods, the two of them standing at the window of their room, contemplative. “But have we not celebrated the coming nuptials with your friends already?” He raises his eyebrows, meaningful.

Thor catches his meaning, and they share a shudder then, for they both remember how rowdy that celebration had become. Valkyrie had begun singing bawdy songs on the table in the mess hall, using her mug as instrumental accompaniment, before dragging Bruce onto the table to join her. Then Korg had joined in the raucous singing, his voice soft but remarkably off-key, and Miek had let his hands *whirr* and *snip* and spin to participate in the merriment, all while Heimdall sat still as stone, perhaps in attempt to close off his exceptional hearing to the noisy din.

Thor and Loki had excused themselves early that night, but it is unlikely they could repeat such a timely escape.

“On second thought,” says Thor, the hope of a night of revelry fading away, quick, “there is no reason to follow such a custom.”

“None,” Loki agrees easily, his smile seeming to grow wider the more Thor’s frown deepens. “Though I would not be averse to a merrymaking of our own.” And when Thor’s eyes widen, as he breathes, *yes, Loki, yes*, Loki adds, “It is why I have taken it upon myself to secure food and drink enough for us both. Come.” He winds his fingers through Thor’s, leading him from the hall of their room.

How Loki had anticipated such a request is beyond Thor—perhaps Loki had wished for a small celebration of this sort himself—but Thor does not question it, only follows Loki to a little-used lounge aboard the Statesman. Stares in wonderment at the victuals laid out along one of the tables, including a cherry liquor, various bottles of wine, and plates of savoury roast meats and warm bread.

“It is not much,” Loki admits, “for the drink consists mostly of gifts, or samples from the places we
have stopped at. And the food is only what I could gather from the galley after hours, reheated with magic—"

“Loki,” Thor interrupts, “it is *perfect.*”

He had resigned himself to rummaging through Valkyrie’s supply of drink, deciding to pay for the consequences later himself, and bribing one of the galley cooks to prepare something for him and Loki to share. So *this*—this is more than what Thor had hoped for, and he presses a kiss to Loki’s cheek in appreciation. Decides it insufficient, and lets his lips inch their way down Loki’s shoulder, the inside of his elbow, his hand.

“Oh shall we start our celebration, or do you intend to spend the night entire kissing me?” Loki inquires. He raises a brow, though by the rose-flush of his cheeks, Thor can see he does not mind the attention.

“I would gladly do both,” Thor declares, delighting in the deepening of color in Loki’s cheeks. But it would not do to waste his brother’s efforts, and together, they move toward the table, drawing out glasses for drink and plates for food.

Thor finds himself pleased that neither of them are in the mood for a wild night, preferring to spend their time in quiet conversation. Reminiscing, in the place of others who knew them, and as customary at such a gathering, on the more amusing points of their lives until now.

“I still cannot believe the time you shifted into the form of a maiden, and tried to charm Fandral, of all people,” Thor says, lifting his glass to his lips with a smile.

“It was purely out of mischief,” says Loki, casting his eyes skyward. “And an excellent guise, you must admit, for no one could see through it.”

No one had seen through it; Volstagg had shifted in his seat at the tavern, uncomfortably attracted, Sif had gaped openly at the sight of such a beauty, Hogun had simply stared, and Fandral had taken the initiative for them all, by inviting Loki to their table.

No one had seen through it, except Thor, who knew how the threads of Loki’s magic felt—that time a low electric hum against skin—no matter which guise he took. He managed to keep silent through Loki’s coy eyelash-batting and lip-licking. But when Fandral slipped an arm around Loki’s waist, suggesting that they move their dialogue elsewhere, Thor had promptly herded Loki away, declaring *she is too fair a maiden for the likes of a rascal like you!* And for the next month, it was the talk of the court that Thor had stolen one of Fandral’s conquests out from under him.

“I had no intention of *actually* warming his bed,” Loki sniffs, circling the wine in his glass. “It was simply to test if he, or anyone else, could see through my guise. I intended to reveal myself at the last moment and send him running nude and shrieking from his room, so he would be the talk of the court.”

Thor laughs, for he knows who had become the talk of the court in Fandral’s stead.

“I would have succeeded too,” Loki adds, sullen, “had you not dragged me away, like some possessive lover.”

Thor does not reveal that Fandral would not have been so discerning about *who* warmed his bed at such a point, so Thor stepping in had *indeed* been necessary. “Like some possessive lover?” he says instead. “No.” Thor shakes his head, resisting the smile that threatens to curve his lips. Loses the battle moments later, the grin curving his mouth, wide. “Like your possessive lover,” he corrects,
letting his fingers trail warm over the line of Loki’s hip.

For they both know whose bed Loki had actually warmed that night.

“Remind me again,” Loki says dryly, “why this is only about the foolish things I have done? What of that incident with the giant Thrym—”

“We do not speak of Thrym,” says Thor, his expression darkening, instant. His fingers dig into Loki’s thigh, his affectionate touch turned into warning.

“All right, all right,” Loki says, holding his hands up, placating. “Then what of that time in Vanaheim, when those cultists captured us?”

There are a multitude of memories between them, but this one always brings a smile to their faces upon recounting it.

“You mean the ones hiding deep in the heart of Vanaheim’s forests, which we were forbidden to explore anyway?” Thor says.

A band of cultists, having happened upon Thor and Loki in the deepest recesses of the forest, had attempted to seize Mjölnir for themselves. When that failed—they were forced to leave it behind, for none among them could lift it—they had seized the two princes as their prize instead. Left them shackled and bound, after an immense struggle, by seiðr-forged chains, while they argued amongst themselves. Deliberating how soon to send a missive to Odin, and how much of a ransom to demand.

Fools, Loki had laughed, blood trickling wet from his temple, stirring a guilty pang in Thor’s heart, for it was he who had wished to explore further. The longer you speak, the further you fall into the spell of my own making—that which nullifies all magic in the vicinity.

Why, that would make you invincible! cried one of the cultists. He was clearly the youngest of their captors, as the others had simply eyed Loki, incredulous.

What use is such a spell, if it renders the caster’s own magics ineffective? the largest of their captors had laughed, his amusement doubled when Loki lacked a proper riposte.

I was hoping you would not realize that, Loki had said finally, shoulders slumping in feigned defeat, though he glanced meaningfully at Thor.

You forget, Thor declared, that there is yet another mage in this room.

His declaration was met with a snort, unimpressed. It is well known among us, that Thor, of Asgard, has no seiðr of his own.

No? Then behold my most fearsome magical attack: the mighty power of—my fists, Thor shouted, the way he might once have bellowed, behold the mighty power of Mjölnir! And with his freed legs, he promptly felled one captor with a kick to the face, then another.

Their physical shackles had fallen away easily after that, since none were left to recast the spell that bound them. And as they brushed away debris and ash from their escape, fleeing toward Mjölnir to recover it before hastening back to Asgard, Loki had said dryly, “That was a kick.” His smug expression spelled that Thor had read his intentions exactly, however; Vanaheim’s seiðr-users, even an offshoot group such as this, were so assured of their magical might that they underestimated the physical threat Thor posed.
Well, that is the part that makes it magical, Thor had declared haughtily, his hands on his hips.

“We were such fools then,” Thor chuckles, his mood lifted by the turn in their conversation, his tongue loosened with wine.

“We?” Loki lifts a brow and jabs a finger into Thor’s chest. “Had it not been for my clever spell, we would be reduced to ashes on Vanaheim now. Or worse. Perhaps carved up piecemeal, until Odin decided that—”

“Clever, yes,” interrupts Thor. “Brilliant. From the finest intellect in all the Realms.” Hides the broadening of his smile as each compliment deepens the wine-flush on Loki’s cheeks. “Though one would think you brought up that story to highlight my foolery. Are there not stories that implicate us both? Ones that speak of our foolishness and mischief together?”


“Your favourite,” Thor insists.

Loki hums, pretending to deliberate upon this, though by the gleam in his eye, Thor can tell he has a memory in mind already. “Do you recall the time Mother was asked to officiate a wedding, in the lower quarters of Asgard?”

Thor nods, knowing immediately which memory Loki draws upon. “She called for us both to assist her, as two of her handmaidens were away visiting family. And assist we did.” He grins then, far too familiar with what transpired.

Loki had happened upon the site for the feast to take place after, sampling a bite of the roast goose before returning to the ceremony preparations to fetch Thor. Together, they had crept into the pavilion, and gorged themselves on the feast early, the only assistance they provided being to eat and answer each others’ questions of Do you think this bread pairs better with the berry syrup, or the butter? and Quail’s eggs, or duck’s?

They had been caught, by no less than the bride herself, and Frigga had been notified in short order of this transgression.

“I thought she would send us to bed without supper that night, as punishment,” Thor admits. It was Odin’s preferred method of punishment, after all.

“But Mother always did have a sense of humour,” Loki says, his smile growing broader.

Frigga had decided that the most fitting penalty was to dress Thor and Loki appropriately for the roles they filled, an expert flick of her fingers changing their armour and cloaks into the breezy linen dresses of her handmaidens, and laying simple jewels about their necks, before continuing on with the preparations.

It had been an embarrassment, to be sure, but as Thor watched the wedding take place in the grove, wondering at his own one day, he could see no other beside him at the altar than Loki. Even so, he had known better than to voice such a desire. Had kept it secret, hidden, burying it deep, until that fateful day on Alfheim, when words and thought had come tumbling out, bringing a measure of his feelings to light.

“I never told you,” Loki says now, his voice whisper-quiet, “but that day, as I watched some witless maiden wed, all I could think of was that when it came time for me to be wed…I would do so with none other than you.”
“Oh,” says Thor. Words fail him as his heart leaps to his throat, the secret he carried for long years revealed to be a match of Loki’s, all this time. “Oh, Loki.” He settles for stroking fingers through Loki’s hair and touching kisses to his cheeks, in lieu of words.

Loki swallows then, his voice tight, his next revelation shaking Thor to the core. “The dream of such a thing, however impossible, was what weathered me through the darkest of moments.”

The thought that Loki held fast to such a small and faraway hope, through times of peril and the years they fought, is a humbling one indeed. “I, too, wished for such a thing,” Thor says, when he has kissed enough, touched enough, found words to give his oldest, most secret want a voice.

“And now here we are,” says Loki, content to lean into Thor’s touch, and soak in this surfeit of affection. “On the eve of our own wedding.”

“Here we are,” Thor agrees, beaming, their circumstance now a reversal of when they spoke these words to one another, that first night on the ship. Uneasy olive branches offered only after words of bitterness and spite. Thor finds himself so grateful for such reversal that he cannot help but tug Loki in closer, to touch a kiss to the corner of his mouth. The tip of his nose. The tiny furrow in Loki’s brow that formed when Thor’s enthusiasm had nearly upended Loki’s wine glass on them both.

That they can realize their dream together now of being wedded is yet another blessing Thor remains immensely thankful for. But his kisses have inched their way into Loki’s neck before something strikes him as odd about Loki’s secret revealed. It is a moment more before he realizes that this wedding had nearly not occurred; as in the case of Thor’s near-death confession on Alfheim, his proposal, his request for this revelry before their big day, had Thor not taken the initiative and spoken first, Loki might never have revealed his own equal and matching desire. Would have kept those wants bottled up, stoppered and suppressed, letting them gnaw and fester, until—knowing Loki—they ate him alive from the inside.

“Loki,” Thor says, sudden, tipsiness driving him to be more forthright than usual, “if we are to be wed—”

“Imposing caveats on our marriage already, are you?” Loki’s smile is soft, but Thor can hear the hard knife-edge of his voice.

“If we are to be wed,” Thor continues, stubborn, “you must tell me when there are things that you wish for.” He sifts through his thoughts for the right word. “That you desire. Want.” Thor gentles his voice, as well his touch upon the nape of Loki’s neck. “I shall not deny you.”

Surprise flickers through Loki’s eyes, instant, though his reply is long in coming. When finally Loki speaks, Thor must strain forward to hear, for the words Loki breathes are soft, as if speaking too loudly would allow the words to be whisked away, his wishes never to come true.

“I want you to be mine,” Loki whispers, his breath hot against the shell of Thor’s ear. “In every way.” He lets his voice slip an octave lower then, sending a shivering thrill down Thor’s spine. “In every manner that there is to want.”

Of course I shall be yours, Thor is ready to say, the answer rising quick to the tip of his tongue. I have always been. But he cannot be seen agreeing too readily, or he would risk seeming insincere. He waits the span of two heartbeats, three, appearing to give Loki’s conditions due thought, before nodding. “In every way, Loki,” Thor promises, solemn. “I swear it.”

Loki only snorts, the laugh that follows a sweet and genuine chime in the chamber they occupy.
Reaches out, his intent likely to press fingers to Thor’s lips to hush him, though they alight on Thor’s cheek instead, the result of too much drink.

“You do not know what it is you promise,” Loki says, his gaze fixed on Thor. He brings his glass to his lips for a taste, his tongue catching the stray droplet that falls, a motion Thor cannot help tracking with his eye. “But you will.”

They are both of them deep in their cups now, their cheeks ruddy with drink—this can be the only reason for why Loki has not thrown Thor off him for the drunken pawing Thor hopes passes as caresses—and as Thor brings his glass to his lips for another sip, Loki stills his hand, gentle.

“We should turn in for the night soon,” Loki murmurs, “for the day ahead of us is long.” There is sense in his words, for there are the preparatory rituals they must observe before the wedding, the ceremony itself, and the following feast. At the way Thor’s expression falls, however, Loki smiles, passing a hand deftly over their glasses. “But first, a toast.”

Thor frowns into his glass, upon discovering that Loki has exchanged the wine in their glasses for water. “Since when did water become a drink meant for toasting?”

“Since your betrothed decided it would be shameful for Asgard’s rulers to appear at the altar staggering drunk,” Loki says dryly.

“Betrothed.” Thor muses, grinning far too wide at the word. Enjoying the sound it makes as it rolls off his tongue. And because his betrothed is of course, brilliant, he accepts the idea easily. “The honour of making the first toast should be yours, then,” he adds, for Loki was the one to propose them in the first place. Besides, of the two of them, it is Loki who is the wordsmith, and Thor waits with bated breath for what his brother has to say.

Loki studies the water, thoughtful, swirling it before raising his glass. “To us,” he says, before pausing, considering. “And to our future.”

His toast is terse and precise, and he wastes no time waxing poetic, Thor thinks, but it does not encompass all that Thor wishes to carry with them into the years ahead. Perhaps Loki still dares not speak on what he wishes at length, in case that future is stolen from him. But Thor has no such compunction.

“To another thousand years,” Thor says, raising his glass alongside Loki’s, “of foolery, brilliance, and above all, happiness. With you.” He cradles Loki’s cheek with his palm, his thumb stroking the crest of it, gentle. “Only ever with you.”

Something flits quick through Loki’s eyes, unreadable, dark, at the word thousand. But it clears the next moment, as he turns his cheek into Thor's touch, his hand rising to cup Thor’s hand in turn. Presses a tiny kiss to Thor’s palm, the motion tender and soft. “Only ever with you,” he echoes, the words a promise. A vow.

With that, they down their drinks as one, the liquid cold and fresh and sweet. Find slumber on the lounge’s divan, nestled together, two halves of a long-anticipated whole.

~

As lovely and enjoyable as the evening prior had been, Thor is treated to a rude awakening—that of Loki’s elbow, jabbing him sharp in the ribs.

“Thor. Wake up. We cannot be late for the wedding,” Loki hisses. “We have overslept enough as it is.”
The wedding, yes,” Thor parrots, bolting upright from the divan they are slumped upon. His head spins from the motion, forcing him to sink back down with a groan. “Whose?”

Loki looks near livid, eyes narrowed to slits and mouth dropping open in a pinched and disbelieving o. “Ours, you dim-witted, absent-minded fool of a—”

“Only teasing,” Thor grins, tugging Loki in for a kiss, soft and light. “I would not forget such a thing for the world.” A wild joy suffuses his heart, his soul, his very being, at the thought of what is to come. And he cannot help but share a measure of this happiness with Loki, in the form of kisses, pressed to nose and cheeks and mouth. Everything seems all the brighter and lovelier for it—especially Loki.

Loki allows it for one breathless moment, then another, before pulling away, reluctant, flushed. “Enough,” he murmurs, setting his hair and clothes to rights with a flick of his hand, before turning toward the exit. “Or we shall be here all morning.”

Thor reaches out, quick, catching his wrist easily. “Where are you heading, with such haste?”

“To the baths,” Loki says, sighing, his vitriol diminished now with the flurry of morning kisses. “I cannot arrive at my own wedding reeking of wine and herbed meat sauce. If you had any sense, you would do the same.”

And before Thor can hum his agreement, or curl into Loki’s warmth for a moment longer—for Loki allows such dallying in the mornings, on occasion—Loki hurries off, presumably to the baths he speaks of, to prepare himself for the ceremony. Leaves Thor cold, bereft, and alone.

He does not see Loki for the remainder of the morning, though after a quick stop at their chambers to shed his clothes from the evening before, and change into the robe meant for the preparatory baths, he makes his way there also. Delights in the discovery that the water is already heated, and scented with the soothing aroma of chamomile. Infused with a scattering of rose petals. All of it baking away the aches and exhaustion of weeks previous, as he sinks in neck-deep.

Thor can only assume that Loki is doing the same, enjoying a leisurely bath in equally fragrant water. For Loki had insisted they bathe separately, to Thor’s dismay, though he had seen the logic in Loki’s decision; if they were to bathe together, as Thor hoped, they would likely accomplish nothing at all the entire morning.

With mind and body cleansed, relaxed, and rejuvenated, Thor dries himself with a towel laid nearby in advance; he had declined the attendants meant to help him bathe and dress for the ceremony, all of them voluntary, for they all had other duties to attend to, and these were tasks he could perform himself. Makes his way to the anteroom of the baths, where his clothes for the wedding have been laid out—the last garment, at Thor’s request.

It is the work of a brief moment to drape himself in the night-green cloak Loki fashioned for him, framed bold by the valewulf’s fur, and Thor finds himself pleased he has occasion to wear this again. Instead of locking it away, like a secret, hidden and shameful. Both he and Loki had deemed this event worthy of such attire, and Thor would wear it proudly, this symbol of Loki’s love and affection for him.

Since Loki must be finished at the baths by now, Thor searches for him at the second chamber, only to discover Loki is long gone. Circles back to their room, for it is the only other place Loki could be, and finds upon arrival, that he is barred entry—no matter how many times he fiddles with the access panel.
“Do not open that door,” Loki hisses finally, from within the room. “Your very life depends on it.”

Thor sighs; it is just like Loki to have a fit of dramatics while dressing himself for their wedding. “All right,” he says hastily, when the sound of bolts locking and pins twisting—ones that had not existed before—wrenches worryingly along the door. An extra precaution against Thor’s entry. “But should you need anything, simply call for me.”

After making three rounds of the ship, however, from bow to stern, pacing anxious all the while, Thor decides that it has been time enough. Marches straight to their room to determine what exactly is keeping Loki.

“Loki?” Thor calls, and when he receives no reply, bullies his way into their chambers, Loki’s modesty be damned. Upon entering, he finds Loki standing before their vanity, still fussing at a clasp, and Thor’s throat goes dry, instant, his heart beating double time in his chest.

Loki had clearly not declined the voluntary attendants, for his hair is not only combed and swept neatly away from his face, but nearly lustrous, his milk-pale skin given a healthy glow. That he has draped himself in the crimson cloak, framed by the valewulf’s fur, only completes the mirage—of a prince, lovely, refined, and regal in bearing, stepping straight out from the storybooks of their childhood.

“You…you look stunning,” says Thor. Already the words sound inadequate, to describe Loki’s radiance.

The corner of Loki’s mouth twitches in a smile, before he lifts a disapproving brow. “Do they not say it brings bad luck, to see a bride before the wedding?” Loki says archly.

“Loki,” Thor laughs, “we are neither of us blushing brides.” Though at his words, a rose blush blooms in Loki’s cheeks, and he tugs at the collar of his cloak, worrying the fur between fingers, nervous.

Thor closes the distance between them with one easy stride, then two, and stills Loki’s hands. Neatly nudges at the corner of the fur collar that has ridden up Loki’s shoulder, until it sits even on both sides.

“Look at you,” Thor breathes, marvelling at Loki’s reflection in the mirror. He circles Loki’s waist with his arms, resting his head in the hollow above Loki’s shoulder, perfect. “It suits you.” Had they not a wedding to attend, Thor would sneak a kiss to Loki’s neck, the pale column of it a delectable contrast against the fur. Perhaps the tip of his ear, where the rose-blush has risen, so sweetly endearing. As it is, he simply allows himself to breathe in the scent of Loki, the familiar warmth of vanilla brushing gentle across his senses.

Loki’s answering smile is fleeting and quick, and when his hands rise to fuss at his collar again, nervous, Thor catches them mid-air. Twines their hands together, and winds them back around Loki’s waist. Loki’s brow crinkles in turn, anxious, his tongue peeking out between lips. “How…”

Loki starts, swallowing hard, enough to see the shift of his throat. “How do I look?”

The words you look well or you look beautiful rise to Thor’s tongue, but it strikes him then what Loki asks, and he spares a moment to thank the Norns that he hears the words in Loki’s heart, just as Loki often hears his. Turns Loki to face him, hands steady on his shoulders, to keep the connection between them unbroken.

“Like a king,” Thor declares, beaming. “And in short moments, you will be one.”
“I never wanted the throne,” Loki whispers. His gaze slips to the floor, his fingers worrying the clasp of his cloak. “I only ever wanted to be your equal.”

“Loki,” Thor says, tipping his chin up, that he may meet Thor’s gaze, before the contact is not enough and he cups Loki’s cheeks in his palms instead. “You are my equal. I see it. Our friends see it. And I would have our people see it as well.”

Hope fills Loki’s upturned face at the words, so naked and vulnerable it twinges a chord in Thor’s heart. “Thor,” he murmurs, quiet, his hands rising to cover Thor’s on his cheeks, so careful, unbelieving.

Thor waits the span of a heartbeat, two, before grinning, the tilt of his mouth every kind of maudlin. “Now give us a kiss,” Thor says, teasing. He waits with bated breath, for Loki could easily deny him, as Thor had denied him, short years ago.

Loki blinks at this strange reversal, the two of them knowing well how the tables have turned. Then he slips into Thor’s space, his arms winding easy around Thor’s neck, as he slants their mouths together, unhurried.

The meeting of their mouths is gentle, as if this kiss is sacred somehow, precious, and Thor finds himself reluctant to pull away, wanting to keep his eye closed, to savour the softness of Loki’s lips against his. The cherry tartness of the liquor gifted Loki upon his tongue. The warmth of his breath, his exhale shaky and low, against Thor’s cheeks. It is the kind of kiss he wishes he had given Loki, should have, on his coronation day, years ago.

But these regrets no longer matter, Thor decides, for they shall have many more like this from now on—beyond measure, if Thor has his say on the matter. And he leans in for another such kiss, immediate, thwarted only by Loki’s hand on his chest.

“We will have more such kisses,” Loki assures him, amusement light in his voice at the way Thor strains against his hand. “But first we have a wedding to attend.”

Yes, Thor remembers then, the thought having flown his mind, instant, at the sight of Loki’s kiss-reddened lips. His rose-bright cheeks. A wedding.

And swift on the heels of that, is the notion Thor has scarcely dared believe in until now; one that brings a smile to his face, broad and genuine:

Our wedding.

They had settled on a compromise, of quick pecks to each other’s lips, small and soft and light. But then Thor had pulled Loki back for another—the last one—deeper, fuller, one Loki outright moaned into, which led to a filthier kiss, then a second, until Loki, with remarkable self-restraint, shoved Thor away, his own hair dishevelled and his cloak askew.

“We cannot,” Loki had gasped, his cheeks flushed pink with arousal. “There is an entire atrium of people waiting for our arrival.” With that, he had turned on his heel and marched away, a magic barrier clearly in place to keep Thor from approaching.

At least, until Thor had nudged up against it, hopeful, and promised to keep his hands to himself. A promise he had promptly broken the moment Loki dropped the barrier, by winding their fingers together, warm.
“Nearly late,” Valkyrie hisses out the corner of her mouth, still maintaining the façade of a smile, when the two of them hurry into the atrium, their clothes set to rights by Loki’s quick spellwork.

“Or exceptionally prompt,” Loki murmurs, equally—falsely—genial, earning him a twitch of a smile from Thor.

Heimdall manages a look of grave disapproval, from the dais where he and Valkyrie both stand. And while Thor nudges Loki into joining him in looking properly apologetic, Thor cannot be sorry for the reason they were delayed, though he does feel a measure of shame at the thought of disappointing the people gathered here today, to celebrate his and Loki’s union. With the exception of those manning the ship—who shall have a chance to attend the feast following—all the Asgardians and their friends from Sakaar have assembled in the atrium, and a low murmur of happiness ripples through the crowd now, at the sight of their royal couple arrived.

Thor has a moment to marvel at the walls spelled gold, courtesy of their seiðr-practitioners, and the myriad flowers wound gentle through every beam and banister of the atrium, before Heimdall speaks. His voice resonates deep through the atrium, like a low peal of thunder; whether this is Loki’s doing, with an amplifying charm, or Heimdall’s, one cannot deny that their gatekeeper has presence.


Loki Friggason? Thor thinks, surprised and confused both at this announcement.

He turns to Loki for explanation, but Loki smiles so lovely at the sound of it, that Thor cannot begrudge him the fact that Loki wants no part of Odin in his name. Belated, he also realizes it would sound passing strange if Heimdall announced both sons of Odin were wedding each other.

What a brilliant and beautiful way around it, thinks Thor. Just like the man himself.

Thor’s heart had ached when Loki spat I am Loki Laufeyson, of Jotunheim at the enemy in Svartalfheim, for it had not been a lie, but it was not who Loki was. He can only wonder now what it had cost Loki, to declare such a thing. How deeply it must have wounded him.

And despite his surprise at Loki renouncing Odin’s name, it should have been no surprise at all; if Thor had been Odin’s favourite, then Loki was Frigga’s, and it is only fitting that he should claim her name on this day. Not for the first time, Thor wishes their mother was here, to give them her blessing, but he reminds himself that perhaps she smiles down on them from Valhalla, glad in the knowledge that both her sons are safe and happy.

Heimdall addresses the crowd then, his voice carrying resonant through the atrium, as he welcomes all who have gathered here. Declares that he and Valkyrie will officiate this day, a day in which Asgard will see its kings crowned, then wedded. Speaks of Thor and Loki’s feats and triumphs, careful to turn his oration away from misdeeds of their past. And when he has done so, he turns to them again, his expression solemn, both he and Valkyrie a step higher on the dais, perhaps the only occasion in which they will ever be so. Sweeps back his cloak for this ceremony, golden, shining, much as his armour of old had been, the weave and beadwork intricate, as all garments of Loki’s make.

“In the matters of the state,” says Heimdall, “do you swear to guard the lives of your people, and defend those under your protection?”

It is a far cry from Odin’s ambition, that of guarding the Nine Realms, but more pragmatic, considering their circumstances. Thor remains thankful also that Heimdall had suggested them
crowned first, before being wedded, so that they could marry as equals—a minor detail, but one encouraging all the same.

Neither of them have an ancestral weapon to swear upon, as per tradition, and Mjölnir is but a memory. Gungnir, however, stands before them, tall, proud, the last vestige of Odin’s legacy. Loki reaches out, tentative, before his fingers close firmly around the haft. And Thor, rather than choosing another place on Gungnir’s haft, closes his hand around Loki’s, beaming at his brother, broad.

A comforting thrum resonates through their palms from within the cool metal, encouragement to continue, and Thor catches Loki’s gaze, an imperceptible nod exchanged between them.

“We swear,” Thor and Loki declare in tandem.

They share a glance then, and a smile, Thor’s heart gladdened as Loki speaks the words alongside him—palpable evidence that Loki is with him in this. He squeezes Loki’s hand then, whether to search for courage from Loki, or to instil some in his brother, he knows not, but he feels immensely heartened when Loki squeezes back, brow lifted.

Perhaps they are both afraid, in the face of this occasion’s significance, but they give each other courage.

“Do you swear,” Heimdall continues, “to preserve the peace among your subjects, and those that shall come under your rule?”

“We swear,” Thor says, his confidence bolstered now, as Loki speaks the words beside him.

“And do you swear,” Heimdall says finally, “to cast aside all selfish ambition, to pledge yourself only to the good of your people, and of Asgard?” He raises a brow in Loki’s direction, subtle, and Thor flicks a glance of his own at his brother.

Loki only grins, sly, but swears with Thor all the same.

“Then on this day, I, Heimdall, Guardian of the Bifrost and Gatekeeper of Asgard, proclaim you kings, both, of Asgard and its people.”

A raucous cheer rises from the crowd, though they fall to silence soon enough when Valkyrie steps forward upon the dais, confident, commanding, in her silver battle regalia.

She addresses the crowd much as Heimdall had done, speaking of mutual devotion, the acceptance of another in their entirety, and the sharing of hopes, dreams, and responsibilities.

As she speaks, it affords Thor opportunity to reflect, upon his circumstances now, and the life and love bestowed upon him. Had he been asked a thousand years ago, where his wedding might take place, a stolen transport vessel from a scrap heap planet—in space—would be the last of his imaginings.

It is not in the golden, bold-banneled halls of the Asgard of old, Odin does not proudly announce Thor’s succession as king, and there are no sumptuous feasts waiting at which his friends can gorge themselves. But he is here now, with his friends new and old, his people, and his…he cannot think of the best, the most fitting word to describe Loki, so Thor fondly titles him his Loki. Being surrounded so, by the most important people in his life, for a union with the one he loves, is more than he has any right to ask for, and he would not have it any other way.

Valkyrie turns to them now, beaming. “In the matters of love and matrimony, do you pledge to be each other’s strengths, and to guard each other’s weaknesses? To honour and care for one another,
standing together through hardships and triumphs, in the years to come?”

“We do,” Loki says, bolstered by Thor’s squeeze of his hand, as Thor echoes the words beside him.

“And do you pledge to trust, respect, and encourage one another, while giving each other the same happiness, as you move forth through the years?”

The same happiness. Thor finds himself smiling at the words, before catching Loki in an equal and dazzling smile, for they are growing well-versed in this, as the previous weeks have proven, and they can only improve with time. “We do.”

Valkyrie acknowledges their responses with a nod, before continuing. “Have you any vows of your own to exchange?” she asks. “For the time to make them is now.”

Thor had not prepared a written speech or a deliberate oratory for this moment, preferring instead to speak from the heart. And though he worries if he can find the right words, the most fitting, when he meets Loki’s eyes, he discovers the words are not so hard to find after all.

“I, Thor Odinson, take Loki Friggason to be my husband from this day forward,” Thor declares, proud. “To share his joys, and his sorrows. His fortunes and misfortunes. And I vow to protect, cherish and love him, for all the days of my life.” It is a momentous vow, to be sure; perhaps burdensome, to those who know them well. But as Thor catches Loki’s gaze across the way, he knows it will be no burden at all.

Loki swallows, tight, his throat shifting visible. Looks away from Thor’s heated gaze, as if the weight of such vows is too heavy to bear. But when Thor squeezes his hand around Loki’s on Gungnir, for courage, for strength, to show him that he will not bear such weight alone, Loki seems to find resolve within himself. Turns a smile upon Thor, so beautiful, so bright, Thor can only wonder what Loki’s vows will be in return—when a frisson of Loki’s magic sparks between them, warm and soft and light.

I could not have said it any better myself, Loki says, speaking directly into Thor’s mind. And to Thor’s astonishment, he repeats Thor’s vows, word for word, keeping Thor’s gaze as he says them.

Thor’s heart could fly from his chest this moment, the way it fills with fierce and vibrant joy, and he knows, as he holds Loki’s gaze, there is none other than Loki he would trust with its keeping.

With their vows now made, Valkyrie signals for Korg and Miek to bring forth the rings, a pair crafted by the finest smiths on board. Thor had commissioned them after discussing with Loki which designs he liked best, and they are brought forward now—silver bands, both, with the triquetra wound throughout them, a symbol of their unending affection, commitment and dedication to each other.

That this pattern is a match of the one on the now-absent Mjölnir, Loki claimed was entirely coincidence. But Thor understood the meaning behind his choice, and had spent an afternoon pressing short and happy kisses to Loki’s cheeks whenever he could corner him.

Gungnir stays steadily in place now as Thor lifts Loki’s ring from its pillow. Raises Loki’s hand with his. “This ring is a symbol of our union,” Thor says, the words soft, meant only for Loki to hear. “Remember this day, when you look upon it, and my unending love and faith in you.” With that, he slips the ring onto Loki’s finger, delighting in the rose-deep blush that springs instant to Loki’s cheeks.
Loki’s words are equally quiet, a mirror of Thor’s, as he pledges all of himself, and all that he will be. But as he slips his ring on Thor’s finger, Thor cannot help thinking it is he who is utterly, completely owned—a feeling he wholly revels in.

They declare their exchange complete when both rings sit proud upon their fingers, Thor still holding fast to Loki’s hands, and Valkyrie bows her head in acknowledgement.

“That on this day, I, Brunnhilde of the Valkyrior, elite warriors of Asgard, proclaim you wed, devoted partners, both in love and in life.” She shoots them a subtle glance, deadly, one that spells she will murder them in their bed, should either of them try to call her Brunnhilde henceforth—before beaming, at them and then the crowd. Nudges Bruce, who stands off to the side on the dais.

Bruce jolts, startled to attention. “Oh!” he says, clearing his throat, for Thor had made sure all their friends had a role in this wedding, “yes, you may kiss the—”

Thor cannot wait for the words, sweeping Loki into his arms instead, immediate. Pulls him in for a kiss that is warm and soft and sweet, the meeting of their lips chaste before the crowd, but no less passionate.

Cheers erupt from every corner of the atrium, and seiðr-novices send sprays of flower petals into the air, along with fragments of dazzling paper. And even if the flowers are odd colors, from phosphorescent blues to lurid pinks, and the confetti flies in strange directions, a result of the ship’s artificial gravity fields, to Thor, it is nothing but perfect.

As confetti flutters all around them, their people clapping and cheering them on both, Thor clasps Loki’s hands, earnest. Brings them to his lips, pressing a tiny kiss to the back of each. “With this,” Thor beams broadly, “you shall no longer have to—how did you put it?—’go it alone’, as you have always done.” He leans in to press their foreheads together, gentle. “I shall be with you now, in all things.”

The smile Loki graces him with in return is so beautiful, so radiant, that Thor cannot help but let Loki’s fingers slide from his, reaching out instead to cup Loki’s cheeks in his palms and kiss him again.

It had not felt right, that first night, when all of Asgard bowed to him in obeisance as Thor took his throne at the ship’s prow, until Loki joined Thor at his side. Thor can only be thankful that Loki is truly by his side now—in this, as well as all things.

“They had chosen to hold the wedding on the day of the week named for Frigga, to

Chapter End Notes

1) Had a favorite part? The fluff was too much for your heart? Let me know in the comments!

2) “They had chosen to hold the wedding on the day of the week named for Frigga, to
honour their mother and be wed on an auspicious day both…": Frigga’s Day (i.e. Friday) is considered to be the day for weddings in Scandinavian cultures, as she is the goddess of marriage.

3) “The girls giggle in groups, scribbling drawings on parchment or typing furiously on the tablets the ship provides … The old fishwives cluster similarly…”: You know the Asgardians have their very own Thorki fanclub, complete with circulating fiction and fanart. Perhaps Loki has even written his own, under a penname, and released them for public consumption.

4) “We do not speak of Thrym.”: Out of respect for Thor, we do not speak of Thrym. (But Loki will gladly tell you of the time Thor was forced to dress as a bride, to claim Mjölnir back from the giant, Thrym, who stole it.)

5) The part about Loki’s spell rendering all magics in an area ineffective, followed by Thor’s own supposed magic (i.e. showing the mighty power of his fists by kicking their captors in the face) was inspired by the anime Rokudenashi Majutsu Koushi to Akashic Records, in which a similar scene had me laughing for ages.

6) I debated for a while whether to go with handfasting or a ring exchange for their ceremony, since either would be appropriate. Ultimately, I decided on the rings, since they would then have a more permanent reminder of their bond. In this story, Thor and Loki’s rings are based on the one shown here.

7) “A Royal Wedding” – Art Commissioned from Squaffle

I’m including these commissions on good faith, so please don’t spread them around Tumblr, or Instagram, or any other such social media. I’d really like to share the work of these amazingly talented artists, but if I find them appearing on Tumblr or the likes, I simply won’t post any more of them. Thanks for understanding!
The Revels After

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

~

The feast is set to begin shortly after the ceremony, Thor and Loki leading the procession to the mess hall, where cool fluorescents have been spelled into warm torchlight, and the metallic walls into the muted golds worthy of a feasting hall of Asgard.

This arrangement, complete with placement of tables and chairs prepared long in advance, had been made on Loki’s suggestion, as the atrium was nowhere near large enough to accommodate all those on the ship, especially with food and drink in the offing. There is, however, one order of business Thor must see to first, before the cooks are allowed to bring forth dishes prepared for the feast.

“Really, Thor, is this necessary?” Loki asks, as they settle at their table, watchful. The other tables soon fill with Asgardians and ex-Sakaarans for the modest feast that awaits them.

“It is.” Thor winds his arm tighter about Loki’s waist, resolute. “I will not have another uprising while I am away, and I would not see you hurt.” He pauses, thoughtful. “Hence my suggestion: I shall have them swear allegiance to you, in the view of all who are gathered.”

The gleam in Loki’s eyes shows he is not averse to the idea—of the men of Asgard and those who wish to swearing an oath of fealty to him. But he folds his arms over his chest, doubtful. “With what ritual do you intend to seal such oaths?”

“I thought—perhaps the scoring of a knife across their palms, the spilling of…” Thor’s voice falters as Loki sighs his disapproval. This was why Thor had kept the idea to himself until now.

“Fond as I am of the idea of blood being spilt in my honour—” Loki starts, and here Thor frowns, for though this was his intention, Loki did not have to spell it so frankly—“a barbaric show of oath-taking may prove less effective than a moving oration about honour and loyalty. Besides,” Loki sniffs, “I would like to think that we, as a people, have moved past such things.”

“Something must be done,” Thor insists. “A ritual following the oaths sworn, to ensure their loyalty. Both to you and to me.” He would not risk a repeat occurrence of the mercenary-led uprising on their ship. The pocket of dissidence against Loki had been simply that—a bold few, mercenaries who were loyal to none, threatening others to join their cause. And the resulting rebellion had been easily quelled, for the hearts of those threatened had not been in it.

But Thor has no intention of waiting until the next wave of discontent; he means to crush the seed, the very idea of another rebellion this day. Had prepared a speech for this exact purpose.

Loki taps a finger along the inside of his elbow, contemplative. “Speak as you intend,” he says, having lent his assistance to Thor’s speech several nights prior, if only to hasten him to bed. “And I shall see to the rest.”

Thor nods, placing his trust in Loki before rising to speak, the guests for the feast having gathered by now. “Thank you,” Thor begins, in the hush that falls upon the crowd as he stands, “to those of you who have come, who have made the time to celebrate this joy and occasion with us both. And thank you also, to those of you who have toiled for this day, throughout the ship, from food and drink to decorations and other preparations besides.”
A happy hum passes through the crowd, appreciation of their efforts acknowledged.

“But there is one thing I would have made clear before the revels continue.” He glances at Loki now, who stands at his side, heartened by the tiny nod he is graced with. “Loki’s word is law when I am not on this ship,” Thor declares, for all assembled to hear. “He will be your king, as well as I. And you are in his service, as you are in mine.”

Thor would have it known that Loki’s station equals his, if any think to downplay Loki’s position as mere consort.

“As a token of your respect for him, your loyalty, I would have you swear your allegiance, here and now,” Thor finishes. Catches the gaze of those from whom he expects an oath sworn. “To both of us.”

He looks to Heimdall for assistance then, to make the first oath, for it is he who is known as the king’s most loyal vassal, and it is his oath that carries the most weight, the forerunner of those to follow.

To his credit, Heimdall does not sigh at having been called to duty once more; only rises from his seat beside Thor, head bowed slight, both his voice and vow ringing sonorous through the hall.

“Here do I swear my fealty and service to Asgard, and all the realms it may occupy,” he begins. “My faith and loyalty to the rulers of this realm, King Thor and King Loki, and to their heirs, with the promise to never bear arms against them. To come and to go, in need or plenty, in peace or war, in living or dying, from this hour henceforth, until my kings release me, or death take me.”

Thor blinks, for Heimdall’s oath is surprisingly thorough, and he nods his acknowledgement before turning to Loki, expectant. Perhaps it is rather distasteful, to have blood spilt at their wedding, and he waits now to see what ritual Loki intends, to make such oaths binding.

Equally startled at Heimdall’s attention to detail, Loki recovers quickly, a pleased smile flitting quick across his lips. And with a flourish of his hand, a drinking horn appears between his fingers, dove-white and ornate, the edge rimmed with silver, the vessel itself filled with golden mead.

Ah. So Loki intended for all those who swore to drink from the bragarfull, rendering the oaths of those who drank from it utterly and thoroughly binding. It had not been common practice in Odin’s court, their father having preferred oaths and vows bound with blood. But Thor and Loki intend to build their kingdom anew, and there is no better way to begin than with a ritual that does not call for injury, unneeded. By the relieved sighs Thor hears from the crowd, it seems many share this thought.

Heimdall drinks from the proffered horn without hesitation, before passing it to Valkyrie.

“So do I swear,” Valkyrie says, using Heimdall’s existing oath as her own. Her eyeroll is subtle, as if she remains unimpressed by the pomp and circumstance of the situation, but she drinks from the bragarfull all the same.

Korg and Miek follow suit, and soon after, the horn is passed from hand to hand, all those whom Thor intends to extract oaths from murmuring So do I swear, drinking from the horn before passing it along. And courtesy of Loki’s magic, the bragarfull never runs dry, the mead of the horn self-refilling—to the disappointment of the men near the end, those hesitant, or hoping they would not have to drink.

“So do I swear.” Heimdall says, as the passage of the horn slows, “I shall see those of you who do not drink.” His reminder is a more effective incentive than what Thor had intended, which was to simply
growl swear it, and foist the horn upon those who had not.

Soon after, when the last of those who must swear have done so and the horn is returned to Loki’s hand, Loki sweeps it from existence with a graceful arc of his wrist. Nods his acknowledgement of all who have sworn their loyalty to him this day. “Your words have been heard,” he says, solemn, “your oaths remembered, by Thor and Loki, sons of Odin, kings of Asgard.”

“And we will not forget them,” Thor continues, Loki’s hip nudged against his a gentle prompt, “nor fail to reward that which is given: fealty with love, valour with honour…and oath-breaking with vengeance.” Thor lets a rumble of thunder roll low through the hall at that, menacing, the warning in his words clear; if there were those who still dared to make an attempt on Loki’s life, Thor would not hesitate to find out who, and punish them accordingly.

A murmured assent pulses through the crowd then; for the most part, it seems the people are content to have a royal wedding to celebrate and kings crowned, and the swearing of loyalty is a minor price for the stability and hope they receive in return.

With that, Thor gives the signal for food and drink to be brought forth, and the true celebration begins at last.

~

The cooks waste little time in presenting the fruits of their labour, bearing tray upon steaming tray into the mess hall. Each is piled high with everything from roasted meats and vegetables, to cakes and puddings and pies, all prepared from stores of food had on hand, and such as their supplies allowed.

The meat, most of it scavenged from the valewulves, had been plentiful, and would feed those on the ship for weeks to come, not only for this feast. Through the skillwork of the cooks, the gaminess is sure to have disappeared, and it is presented now in all forms—roasted, smoked, or sausaged—and served with a rich and creamy sauce, formed from the succulent drippings of the meat itself. Surrounding the trays of valewulf steaks is a surprising variety of pheasant, quail and venison, from the more enterprising hunters among the Asgardians, all of whom had also wished to do their part for Asgard’s survival.

Other platters frame the main course, including fresh-baked breads paired with warm golden butter, pots of fragrant stew brimming with onions and potatoes, and dishes heaped with sweet peas and buttered corn—all of it circled by honeyed fruits and root vegetables, remnants of what Thor and Loki procured at Alfheim-Beta’s markets.

And as a small indulgence for this occasion, a portion of the provisions from their hosts in Alfheim-Beta are made available for all to enjoy, from casks of honeyed mead and aged wines to spiced cheeses and cakes.

It is simple fare, on the whole, but Thor is thankful that they and their people can celebrate such occasion at all.

Seated with Loki and their friends at the longest table, Thor helps himself to a generous portion of thin-sliced quail, tearing his bread in half to mop up the gravy that dripped to the plate. Savours the rich flavour of it, the silken texture—chuckling when he spies Loki’s fingers wandering toward his plate, out of habit. Flicks Loki’s fingers away this time, teasing, sensing opportunity for a game.

“Had I known I was marrying a tyrant,” Loki sniffs, shrinking his fingers back, stung, “I might have reconsidered.” He has all of a moment to pick sullenly at his peas before Thor tugs him back in,
“That was not my intent,” says Thor, for he had only meant to tease, not upset Loki. “You are welcome to anything you wish from my plate, but on one condition.” And when Loki arches a disbelieving brow, Thor raises his own, mischievous. “That I am the one who feeds it to you.”

“Is that so,” Loki muses, the corner of his mouth turning up, sly, his interest piqued anew. He tilts his head, catching the way Thor’s eyes gleam bright—for it is Thor who sets the terms of this new game between them—and grins. “Well, two can play at that game.”

For the remainder of the meal, Thor is content to continue eating, delighted to pause now and then for Loki to nibble at a morsel of cheese from his fingers. A sliver of smoked meat Thor had carved for this purpose. And a fragment of honeyed fig, Thor’s plate heaped with them, more for Loki’s benefit than his own, his cheeks flushing dark when Loki licks at Thor’s fingers themselves.

Loki repays the favour in kind each time, when Thor dips his head, in a request for a salted quail egg. A spoonful of jellied berries. And a bite of pared apple, his eye catching and keeping Loki’s gaze as he follows the last dreg of the fruit’s sweetness onto Loki’s fingers, sucking the tips of them, daring, until Loki is the one to pull away, his cheeks crimson-bright in the hall’s amber torchlight.

It is a welcome change, Thor decides, as he indulges in feeding Loki another scrap of honeyed fig—the tiny curl of his tongue when chasing the last drop of sweetness entirely endearing, an attempt to outdo Thor’s last boldness, perhaps—to be able to show such simple affection so openly. And when they have finished with their meal, he dares more, keeping his fingers wound through Loki’s on the table now, instead of the subtle handholds beneath they resorted to before. Lets his fingers thread gentle through the tips of Loki’s hair, stroking, soft, rather than the hand pressed quiet to the small of his back.

And once, when Korg stops by, to announce that he and Miek will start off the musical merriment for the evening, when Loki rises on instinct to free himself from Thor’s hold, Thor simply tugs Loki back into his seat, his arm wound snug around Loki’s waist.

“So this is your purpose, is it?” Loki says, trying to suppress the beginnings of a smile—and failing. “To flaunt what we now share?”

“To flaunt?” Thor laughs. “No.” He touches a tiny kiss to Loki’s nose, delighting in the flush that springs forth from there, spreading quick to Loki’s cheeks. “To give you the affections you deserve? Yes.”

For once, Loki has no argument, stunned into a surprised silence. And upon finding that Loki is not opposed to such affections, Thor nudges a kiss to the corner of his jaw. The column of his throat. The rounded jut of his shoulder. He manages to restrain himself for all of a moment, before reeling Loki in closer, intending a kiss to the mouth—only to be caught off-guard when Loki catches him mid-journey, his lips meeting Thor’s first, the motion small and shy.

“I love you,” Thor says, the words startled out of him, though the well of devotion they spring from is no surprise at all.

“Mmhn,” Loki hums, non-committal. But the pitch of his hum is the purr of a content cat, and the corners of his mouth twitch ever wider.

And since Loki’s happiness nurtures his own, Thor’s kisses wander down over Loki’s arm, to his elbow, to his fingers, all of them small and soft, but no less fond, for he cannot help himself, cannot hold back. Because with one simple gesture, Loki has made his wellspring of joy spill over, a deluge,
flooding his heart with a plain and simple bliss.

He scatters these tiny but bold affections throughout the performances of the evening, through stories told, and song and dance, pressing a kiss to Loki’s hand after select poems the children read aloud. Another to the lobe of his ear, as they listen to the creation of Asgard set to song, the pleasant thrum of harpstrings and flute melodious in the air. And one to his mouth—*for good luck*, Thor insists—before Loki is set to perform, having been invited to sing a ballad of his own.

Loki’s song, one of his own compositions, speaks to peace and healing and warmth, and the rebuilding of hearths and home. All in the hall are spellbound, as his fingers strum clever along the lyre Thor gifted him, a quiet happiness descended among them even after Loki’s sweet, silvery tones have faded. Thor would not be surprised if Loki had woven magic into his words, to grace them all with a sense of subtle contentment, and ease their minds this night.

An intermission of sorts follows Loki’s performance, and as Loki returns to his seat at Thor’s side, Thor turns to him, curious. To ask the question that has sat puzzling in the back of his mind, since their wedding, for which he has found no answer.

“That was a lovely performance,” Thor starts, the words genuine. And when Loki’s cheeks have flushed scarlet, when he has accepted two—no, *three*—of Thor’s congratulatory kisses, and murmured that his performance could only be as lovely as the instrument he was gifted, Thor weaves their hands together, gentle. Squeezes, encouraging, before nodding toward Gungnir behind them, as preface.

“I have long meant to ask you this,” says Thor, his palm safe on Loki’s, “but the question rose to the forefront of my mind today, after its role in our wedding.” When Loki nods for him to continue, Thor draws a breath, deep and even. “How came you by Gungnir? In my battle against Hela, I dropped it at the base of Hliðskjálf, and thought it lost when Asgard fell.”

“Ah,” says Loki, as if he has not given this matter thought in some time. He reaches out to curl fingers over the spear’s haft, affectionate. “I did not see you with it after you struck Hela with, as you say, the ‘biggest lighting blast in the history of lightning’. So on my way to the vault to join Surtur’s crown to the Flame, I called for it.”

“And she answered?” Thor asks, unable to hide his amazement.

Loki blinks. “*She?* I suppose you could say that. Yes, I called for her and she answered,” he says, a tiny smile flitting to his lips.

“Like Mjölnir,” Thor breathes, in wonder.

And perhaps Gungnir did not have the same enchantments at Mjölnir, one to determine the worthiness of its wielder, but Thor believes it must *know*, on some innate level, whether a person is worthy of it. It explains why, at their wedding, even when he had wrapped his fingers around the haft to swear loyalty to his people, and declare his love for Loki, the spear had felt wholly *Loki’s*. And though he had it present during council meetings, or used it to make weighty pronouncements, the base of it ringing resonant through the room as it had in Odin’s day, Thor could not cast spells with it, nor summon the right seiðr of his own to wield it to its full potential.

Loki, however, had wielded it for a time, when he took their father’s place on Asgard’s throne, and it seems now that Gungnir has chosen its master, just as Mjölnir had.

“Do you find yourself jealous?” Loki asks, as he takes in Thor’s wavering expression, his grin turning sly.
“I…” Thor starts. Guilt curls deep in his belly from the *yes* springing quick to his tongue. Wars with the joy filling his heart, at the thought that Gungnir has deemed Loki worthy—for Loki very much *is*. “I think I know how you felt now, those long years I had Mjölnir,” he admits finally. “But I *am* happy for you, brother.” He squeezes Loki’s hand, warm and reassuring. “Truly.”

“Hmm.” Loki lifts a brow, unconvinced.

“All right, I *am* jealous—but only a *little*.” Thor concedes with a laugh, for he does not wish to keep secrets from Loki. Besides, his brother’s love is a treasure greater than that of any weapon. If a kernel of jealousy had indeed found a home in his heart, it was not so much that Thor coveted Gungnir’s loyalty itself, but more that the spear had found a place by Loki’s side.

“You have no need to be,” says Loki, seeming to see into Thor’s thoughts, as he—when had he freed his hand from Thor’s?—slips his hand beneath Thor’s jerkin. Palms the bulge of Thor’s trousers, mischievous, before stroking in shameless invitation. “The one dearest to my heart is you.”

“Loki.” Thor bites back a groan, stilling Loki’s hand with his. “*Later.*” Though none at the feast can see Loki’s ministrations from beneath the table, it would not do for Loki to leave him in a state of arousal from which Thor could not leave the table afterward.

Loki huffs, his mischief thwarted. Pats the bulge in Thor’s trousers instead, grinning as he draws another muffled moan. “Of course, dear brother,” he acquiesces easily. “*Later.* After all, it would not do to have you spilling *here*, would it,” he muses, lips hot against Thor’s ear, “particularly when you could be spilling inside *me*—”

“Loki,” Thor hisses this time, for it takes every ounce of his self-restraint not to drag his brother to their chambers now and *have* him. It would be so easy, Thor thinks; he would need only to reach out and catch Loki’s wrist, wind an arm swift around his waist as he herded Loki to their rooms, taking their leave with the excuse that it had been a long day, that they had had far too much drink—

Only for Loki to dance out of reach, his laughter a golden chime, after a parting *squeeze* that is every kind of unfair. “*Later,*” Loki grins, a devious tilt to his lips. And the words silent that he mouths, that Thor has no trouble interpreting: *Patience, Thor.*

Before Thor can growl his displeasure, for patience has never been his strong suit, Korg calls for them both to make a toast, his timing *most* coincidental. Forcing them to make their way to the center table, as they drink to the health of their people, the lives they intend to rebuild, and the flourishing future of Asgard.

The rest of the feast continues without incident, for which Thor is thankful, as he would have his brother, his friends, and his people enjoy themselves for a night, before they return to their daily routines.

Loki himself soaks in the attention showered upon him, revelling in each and every moment, his smile wide as their people bow to him in deference, with murmurs of *your Majesty*. But he is not condescending, taking the time to kiss babies, and clasp the hands of all who reach for him. The same trusting people Loki helped herd onto the Sakaaran vessel, when all else seemed lost.

Thor should have known Loki would not be able to resist a *little* raillery before the night was through, however, for Loki is Loki, no matter how much adoration and attention he receives.

Both he and Loki are seated at their table, draining the last of their drink, when Loki turns to Heimdall, his face the very picture of innocence. “*Did you hear?*” Loki purrs, his cheeks flushed the hue of his wine, his words blurred together, minute. “*You are sworn to obey me now. Me.*”
Heimdall only blinks. "Yes, your Majesty," he says, his expressionless stare unnerving, before he drinks a draught from his own mug, composed as always.

Thor nudges his brother in the ribs, gentle. "Loki," he says, all fond exasperation.

Loki frowns, though it could more accurately be called a pout, and drifts onward to the next person, since he cannot get a rise out of Heimdall.

By the time they have drunk their fill and Loki has informed near everyone at the tables they are sworn to obey him—including a confused Korg and Miek, who drank of the bragarfull voluntarily, despite Thor’s assurance that they and the Sakaaran rebels were exempt—Thor decides it time for them to call it a night, whether Loki’s tipsiness is feigned or no. And when Loki’s head begins to droop, Thor nudges into place quickly, so that Loki’s head lolls onto his shoulder, instead of striking a hard beam. Thinks better of it, and gathers Loki in his arms instead, to carry him to their room.

“I thank you all, for joining us in our wedding celebrations this night,” Thor announces, to those still left in the mess hall. “But the hour grows late, and we must take our leave of you now.” He hefts Loki higher in his arms, his meaning clear, for in his current state, Loki is fit neither to continue drinking nor performing.

A murmur of disappointment ripples through those still gathered, but most seem to be of the mind that it is only right for their royal couple to retire for the night, especially after the day they have had.

Valkyrie, having migrated to the table over, stands suddenly, raising a bottle, and Thor braces himself, either for well-wishes or drunken disapproval at his announcement. “To your marriage bed!” she hoots, unexpected, clearly deep in her cups herself, forgoing modesty for blunt honesty.

Thor stills, startled by such bold announcement, for their destination and activities after are no business of any in this hall. But from within his arms, Loki stirs, his smile soft and sleepy, the rose hue of his cheeks sweetly endearing.

“To our marriage bed,” he echoes, winding his arms around Thor’s neck, decisive. And before Thor can make protest—a token one, at best—Loki purrs, “Take me to bed, brotherrrr.”

A slow-burning heat pools dark in his groin at the words. And though Thor flushes bright enough to match the hue of Loki’s cheeks, his stride is bold as he carries Loki off, for he has been issued a command, from his brother, his lover, his king, and he can do naught now but obey.

Chapter End Notes

1) Parts of Heimdall’s oath speech and Thor/Loki’s acknowledgement of it are paraphrased/borrowed from the book The Return of the King (Lord of the Rings), wherein Pippin swears his own oath of fealty to Denethor.

2) Bragarfull: also known as the "promise-cup” in Norse culture, it is the drinking from a cup or drinking horn on ceremonial occasions, often involving the swearing of oaths when the cup or horn was passed around and drunk by those assembled.

3) While polishing the upcoming sections and making scene breaks, I realized this fic will surpass the originally expected 16 chapters. So I’m adjusting the number of chapters this has, in order to keep from dropping huge 15-18k word chapters on you guys.
Thanks again for your patience!
The Greatest Treasure

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

~

It takes little time for Thor to make his way to their chambers with Loki nestled safe in his arms, for he would have Loki rest after the day’s festivities. Lays Loki down on the bed, gentle, before turning to strip off his armour.

To his surprise, Loki makes quick work of kicking off his boots, and tossing his cloak over the nearest chair, all signs of past inebriation vanished. Crooks a finger at Thor, motioning for Thor to join him on the bed, scowling when he simply stares at Loki in amazement.

“Well?” Loki says finally, interrupting Thor’s thoughts of When did this performance begin? and Was this Loki’s purpose all along? To take our leave early and hurry the journey to our marriage bed? His speech is unslurred, and he sits up without issue, with none of the bumbling clumsiness he exhibited before. “Do you intend to spend all night staring, or will you join me in bed?”

Thor only laughs, and hastens the removal of his armour, to show how willing he is to join Loki in bed. Laments the fact that Loki’s tipsiness had only been feigned, for his flushed cheeks and liquor-induced fuzziness had been truly endearing. “I take it you have looked forward to this moment as long as I have.”

“Of course,” Loki scoffs, wasting no time in divesting himself of the rest of his armour. Spreads himself along the sheets and their hunted furs, a vision, a delight—the very picture of wanton indulgence. “It is our wedding night, after all.” His arms open then, beckoning, inviting.

A part of Thor wishes to fall upon Loki right then, to claim him, immediate, rend the sheets in a reckless coupling. But this is their wedding night; he would not hurry their union for the sake of a quick and fumbling release. It would start slow, and sweet, and leisurely—and whatever came after that was fair game. With that thought in mind, he kicks his trousers off at the foot of the bed and slips into Loki’s arms, revelling in the warmth of his skin, the subtle sweetness of his hair.

Their kisses start out slow, meandering, an easy and unhurried exploration of each others’ bodies. One pressed quiet to the bridge of a nose here. The fullness of lips there. And while Thor’s kisses brush light against Loki’s eyelids, his cheeks, and the sharp line of his jaw, Loki’s are just as soft against the scarred skin of Thor’s eye. His brow. The tiny cut in his lip, where Loki had nipped it, the night before.

Loki’s mouth has wandered into the column of Thor’s neck, and over the crest of his collarbone, each a wisp of tickling contact, before Thor presses him to the bed, his patience growing thin. Nudges his knees apart, to settle between his hips, when Loki knocks his elbow out from the inside. Rolls on top of him, gaining the upper hand.

It is a surprise, but not an unfamiliar manoeuvre, and Thor simply returns the kisses Loki presses to his lips, each soft and small and fluttering, as delicate as a butterfly’s wing. When next he attempts to prepare Loki, however, trailing spit-slick fingers down Loki’s hip, to touch them to his hole, Loki stills Thor’s hand, thoughtful. Brings Thor’s palm to his cheek instead, caressing it, cradling it. Closes his eyes, before pressing a kiss to Thor’s palm, the brush of his lips gentle along skin.
“Loki?” Thor whispers, worried, stroking warmth into Loki’s back with his free hand. Was something wrong? Did Loki not wish to engage in lovemaking this night?

Loki’s only answer is a quiet, shivering sigh, as he lays the length of his body along Thor’s. Draws one calming breath, then another, and after a long moment’s silence, finally speaks.

“Let me have you,” Loki breathes, his voice soft in Thor’s ear. He presses a kiss to the tip of Thor’s ear, gentle. Nuzzles the lobe of it with his nose. “Let me have you, brother.”

_I want you to be mine_, Thor remembers then, words shared when they were both deep in their cups, the night before their wedding. _In every manner that there is to want._

Perhaps this was one of the ways Loki had meant.

They had not spoken of this before, Loki seeming content to let Thor lead, and Thor can only wonder at why Loki had not asked. Perhaps he had waited, and watched, wanting to know his position with Thor was secure before mentioning such a thing. But it strikes a chord of sorrow in Thor’s heart, that Loki thinks he must _request_ this.

And perhaps Thor could have offered, should have—but they have lived centuries of their lives on _could have’s_ and _should have’s_, and the time to act is _now_. With this in mind, Thor draws Loki in for a kiss, soft and sweet, his hand cupped warm at the nape of Loki’s neck.

“Yes,” whispers Thor, regretting only that they have taken so long to share such a pleasure. He widens the cradle of his hips in open invitation, letting his brother settle between them, easy. “Have me, Loki. Take me in our marriage bed. Make me yours.” Thor winds his arms around Loki’s neck, to draw him down for another kiss, his tongue darting quick against Loki’s lips, tempting, goading him. “Show me whom I belong to.”

The words seem to stoke a fire in Loki, as he surges forward, delving his tongue into Thor’s mouth, hot and messy and wet. Seals their lips together in a kiss so urgent and desperate it robs the breath from Thor’s lungs, leaving him wordless, breathless, gasping.

And when he has pressed greedy, ravenous kisses enough to Thor’s lips, Loki’s exploration continues onward, into the space beneath Thor’s jaw. Sucks at soft skin along it, Loki grinning sharp when Thor shivers, uncontrollable, at the sensation, pleased at having found such vulnerability. Keeps mouthing kisses along that span of skin, drawing out tiny moans and gasps Thor cannot hold back.


The kisses continue, into the column of his neck, over the ridge of his collarbone, and down the cleft of his chest, all of them hot and hard, seeming everywhere at once. It is a pleasure immense to be so well cared for, _so loved_, with Loki’s tongue along his neck, lapping at beaded sweat. Loki’s fingers rubbing soothing along his shoulders, his arms, rolling a nipple between them, graceful, before taking it into his mouth. And when Loki couples this motion with a hand stroking clever along Thor’s cock, Thor could shake _apart_ at such pleasure, such care, and he stills Loki’s hand, instant.

“I—I will not _last_,” Thor manages, between one shaky breath and another. “Loki, _please_—”

Loki nods then, ceasing this delectable torture. And in short moments, there is the easy _click_ of their new bottle of oil, the subtle sweetness of almond and honey fragrant in the air.

“Are you sure we need so much?” Thor asks, as Loki spreads the oil liberally along his fingers, the
length of his cock. He frowns at the shameless drip of it among the sheets. The laundresses on the ship would have their heads for this; already he had heard vague murmurings that stains from the spilling of seed were a nuisance to remove.

Loki hushes him with a kiss. “Yes. I will not have you hurt for the sake of this…this…”

“Pleasure?” Thor offers, smiling up at Loki, hazy. It is worth it, to see the surprise it brings to Loki’s face, before Loki’s expression settles into something fierce and determined.

“Yes,” says Loki, his kisses this time swift and hard, as he nudges Thor into position. “Pleasure. Which I intend to give to you in full.” The press of his fingers is cool along skin, sending a tiny shiver thrilling down Thor’s spine. In full, Loki promises, and when he does, he delivers.

Loki’s hands slide higher along Thor’s thighs, until they settle just beneath his knees, spreading him open, wide. A slight measure of shame threads through Thor’s heart at being spread so open and wanting, but Loki kisses him so deep, so thoroughly, that Thor cannot bring himself to mind. Hardly notices when Loki’s finger slips into the cleft of his ass—until Loki curls that finger within him, grazing a certain spot inside.

“Oh,” Thor breathes, eyes flying wide as he jolts sudden against Loki, uncontrolled.

“Good?” Loki chuckles, his voice warm in Thor’s ear. Curls his finger again, just so, his fingertip drawing sparks of pleasure as he goes, eliciting another tiny moan.

“G-good,” Thor gasps, his breath shaky and hot as Loki strokes inside him. Grits his teeth to bite back a deeper, louder moan, when Loki withdraws his finger and presses back in with two. And when Loki has worked his way up to three, Thor all but groans, rutting against Loki’s thigh. “Please, Loki, I am ready—”

Loki only frowns as he slips his fingers out, gentle. Nudges at Thor’s knees and hips, to turn him over. “You should be on your front for this,” Loki advises. “It will be easier on you.”

Thor shakes his head, resisting Loki’s efforts. “I do not want easy.” He would keep Loki’s gaze as they made love, watch the pleasure that taking Thor brings him. Drink in his expression as he reaches his peak, and burn the image of Loki spilling deep, deep within him into memory.

Something flits through Loki’s eyes at that, but the moment is subtle and fleeting. “As you wish,” he nods.

He guides Thor’s hips apart then, Thor widening the cradle of them on his own in anticipation, invitation, Loki settling within it, perfect. His cock is a heated brand against Thor’s thigh, a precursor of what is to come—and then he is pressing inside Thor, stretching him open, full and thick and wide.

Thor whimpers at the motion; he had not known he could make such a noise until now. But when Loki stills his descent at the noise, Thor shakes his head. Urges him on with a hand to his back, silent encouragement to keep going.

So Loki does, pressing in slowly until his hips are flush with Thor’s. Touches small, soft kisses to Thor’s mouth when he has sunk home, his eyelids, his brow. Twines their fingers together, and kisses their joined hands, each press of lips feather-light and gentle and so unbearably sweet.

And Thor wishes he could enjoy these kisses, take pleasure in such tender affections, but as he shifts and squirms, to find a more comfortable position to return such devotion, it seems there is none to be found. A tiny whine of distress escapes his throat, unbIDDEN, and the sound shames him so, his only
solace being that there are none here to hear it but Loki.

“Thor,” Loki says, bracketing Thor’s hips with his hands, “stop moving.” Strokes his hands up Thor’s hips to his waist, his shoulders, warm, rubbing soft, soothing circles into skin. “Just breathe.”

He continues this way for long moments, simply caressing Thor’s shoulders. Stroking his face. Pressing tiny, comforting kisses to lips and cheeks and brow. “So beautiful,” Loki murmurs, encouraging, carding fingers through Thor’s hair. “So lovely.” Each kiss and caress and compliment calming Thor in turn, loosening the tension that knotted his muscles, tight. And when Loki has kissed enough, adored enough that Thor thinks himself ready to resume, he lets Loki know with a pat to his hip. A scrape of fingers, light along his back.

Loki acknowledges this permission with a nod and starts with small, rocking thrusts, each sparking a delicious jolt of pleasure-pain. But when pain outweighs pleasure—perhaps it is still too soon, too much—Thor grips Loki’s shoulders, instant.

“Wait, Loki,” Thor whispers. “Wait.” Despite Loki’s patience, and as gentle as he has been, his length pressed so deep within Thor still hurts. He would have another moment of distraction from the pain, if he could. “Is this…” Thor breathes, trying for levity. “Is this the kind of stabbing you have wanted to do, all along?”

Loki furrows his brow, the very picture of endearing confusion, when suddenly, Thor’s meaning takes hold, and he hides his face in Thor’s shoulder. Breathes out a sound suspiciously like a laugh. “You mean,” Loki says, his lips curving into a clear smile against Thor’s shoulder, “instead of stabbing you with a dagger, or a shiv, when you saw through my disguises? Or failed to, as was the case most of the time?”

Thor hums his easy agreement. Better to let Loki think Thor had failed to, rather than just folding Loki into his arms in whatever guise he chose, simply to hold his brother close.

“Or,” Loki adds, softer still, “each time you assured me we could work together, to stop a madness greater than our own?”

Thor shudders, instinctive, at the memory of how Loki had wounded him then, during the Chitauri’s invasion of New York. Their play-act against Malekith. Loki had not driven his blade deep in either case, had not twisted it to cause further harm; both times, it had been the tangle of hurt, malice, and anger Thor saw in Loki’s eyes that injured far more.

Loki slips his arms beneath Thor’s shoulders, until his hands curl gentle over his collarbone. Bracketing Thor’s body to soothe away his shivering, before turning to touch a kiss to Thor’s neck. “Perhaps,” Loki muses, after a long moment of silence. His voice is quiet, thoughtful. “Mother always said I was perceptive about everything—except myself.”

That talent of Loki’s had come from Frigga as well; their mother had always known things, seen them. And she had always seen into Thor’s heart, though she laughed and said it was because he wore his heart on his sleeve.

Perhaps she always knew he would wear it in his vambraces, as well, after Loki fell from the Bifrost. In his hair, a precious lock of Loki’s twined into his own when Thor thought him truly lost, after witnessing his death on Svartalfheim. As if every part of him had been shaped, carved, forged by Loki somehow.

It is only fitting that he be speared by Loki in such a way as well, a thought that has Thor huffing an equal laugh into Loki’s neck.
“What is it that amuses you so?” Loki asks, lifting his gaze to Thor’s.

“Nothing,” Thor smiles, straining forward for a kiss, hissing as the motion shifts Loki within him. “Save that I much prefer this kind of stabbing instead.”

The grin, tiny and tentative that curls Loki’s lips at that is worth it. “I shall remember that for next time,” he says softly, following it with an unhurried roll of his hips. “Ah—too much?”

“N-no,” says Thor, his voice tight, biting down on a moan, lest Loki think he is hurting Thor. “No, just—just right.” Next time, Thor thinks, heartened, relieved to hear he has not driven Loki from this leisure, with his inability to be quickly and easily bedded. Encouraged by the thought that they shall have more chances to try again.

That Loki waits when Thor wishes and asks after his wellbeing, seeing to Thor’s pleasure before his own, is something Thor appreciates, for he had not expected Loki to be this considerate.

Loki continues with his slow, leisurely thrusts, his patience in this unending, giving Thor time to adjust to his length. And when Thor nods, signalling he is ready for more, Loki withdraws nearly to the tip. Pushes back in, grazing against the familiar something in Thor as he goes.

“There,” Thor gasps. This must be what Thor had brushed against when Loki cried out, arching against him in nights prior. “Loki, there.” He angles himself purposefully, fingers scrabbling at the sheets, hoping to recapture the moment. A shuddering sigh escaping when Loki presses against that spot again. “Right there, please, more—”

To Thor’s frustration, Loki stops—then lifts Thor’s hips, pressing a pillow beneath him. Shifting him until he is tilted at the perfect angle, Loki’s next stroke impacting it directly, each thrust a burst of vivid pleasure that sparks through Thor’s body, races quick through his veins, a frisson of lightning nova-bright.

“Loki,” Thor rasps, “Loki, Loki, Loki,” his cries keening, tight, as if he has lost all words, save that of his brother’s name. He claws at the furs for purchase, before deciding it would suit him better to claw at Loki instead. Rakes nails into Loki’s ass to bring him further, deeper, more.

Loki hisses at the contact, the scrape of nails across his back, his hips, for Thor is not gentle in his demands. But he obliges fully, completely, his thrusts growing harder, deeper, until Thor cries out with each rough and pounding stroke. Scrabbles for purchase at Loki’s shoulders, knees pinned tight to Loki’s waist, his moans growing hoarser, shallower, until he cannot breathe, cannot think, Loki curved hot and thick within him, Loki’s tongue pressed blazing against his.

His cheeks must flush too dark, his breaths too shallow, a desperate panting as he cannot get enough air, for Loki slows his thrusts and draws away. The burning passion and depth of his kisses gentling to lighter, sweeter nips. “Breathe, Thor,” he murmurs, nuzzling into Thor’s neck. “Breathe.”

Smaller kisses follow, to give Thor the space he needs, though Loki is not remiss in his affections; his palm sweeps careful along Thor’s brow, carding gentle through his hair. Caresses the crest of his cheek, before cupping the nape of Thor’s neck, warm. And when Thor has regained breath enough to press shaky, gasping kisses to Loki’s mouth, Loki smiles, his expression soft and indulgent.

“What is it that amuses you so?” Loki asks.

Still breathless and flushed and hardly able to find words, Thor responds with a disapproving hum; it would involve moving, and he likes where he is, unless Loki moves them both to the position he wishes. It must sound enough like no for Loki to interpret his meaning, as he laughs, a soft, lilting
sound that Thor would trap and bottle, that he might hear it all the days of his life.

“Let it not be said that I am the lazy one in bed,” Loki muses. With that, he shifts them both in the bed, with tugs and nudges, each touch fond and careful, and—Thor notices, through the hazy fog of his pleasure—designed not to hurt him. Fits his body to Thor’s from behind, his chest flush against Thor’s back. Hitches Thor’s leg over his own, leaving the way clear for his hand to snake around Thor’s cock, stroking, skillful. “Acceptable?” he asks, of the change in their position.

“Mmhn,” Thor nods, approving, before tilting his head back, catching Loki’s mouth in a kiss. Moans into his mouth when Loki’s thrusts begin again in earnest, each sparking a glimmer of pleasure that glows brighter with every pass. And then it is all Thor can do, to clutch at the hand Loki braces him with, as he lays kisses to Thor’s ear, the nape of his neck. Strokes in counterpoint to his thrusts, leaving no time to recover, Thor snatching at tiny pockets of breath between the kisses he tries to return, off-centre, clumsy and sweet.

“More,” gasps Thor, no longer mindful of the sounds he makes, all greedy and wanting and hoarse. His voice breaks on the crest of another moan. “More, Loki, more—”

Loki indulges him, in this, in every whim, tugging Thor’s leg back, straightening it, and Norns, Loki is suddenly so deep within him, so good, the new angle divine, and Thor cannot speak, cannot breathe—only cries out, long and low, a primal, guttural sound. Clings to Loki’s arm around his chest, holding him in, holding him close, content to have Loki take command.

But each thrust brings him closer to the brink, and Thor would—Thor would see Loki’s face as he spills. Would catch the surprise and wonder of Loki’s expression when he finds release. He whines low in his throat, urgent, needy, pawing at Loki’s hip, clumsy. “Loki,” Thor tries, “want to—want to face you.” It is all he manages before another moan overtakes him, but Loki must have heard his request, for he shifts Thor’s leg in one smooth and effortless motion, until he lies above Thor once more.

“What is this?” Loki says, amused. Thor would lean up, would kiss that smirk off his face if he could move, could breathe, just slip a word in edgewise. “You do not trust me enough to have your back to me, while being taken?”

And there it is, a vein of old hurt coursing just beneath the laughter. Of course Loki would resort to barbed words when wounded, even if the brambled wall he built around himself had lessened the sting of such things over time.

Too late Thor recalls Loki’s first suggestion of taking Thor on his belly, to ease the way, while Thor insisted I do not want easy. Loki had only pursed his lips, and acquiesced without question, but by then the damage was already done. And Thor had twisted the knife, when he called a halt to Loki taking him from behind, misunderstanding driving a wedge between them.

There is only way to dispel this hurt, and Thor searches his heart for the words, honest and true. “I,” Thor tries, between one gasping breath and another, “I only wish to see your face when we spill. To—” oh, Loki had pressed in particularly deep at that, Thor making no effort to quell the moan it draws forth, “—to hear the sound you make when we reach our peak together. I want to know,” Thor breathes, his palm closed warm along the nape of Loki’s neck, that he cannot look away, cannot hide, “who it is that makes me come undone.”

Surprise sparks bright through Loki’s eyes, the simple words moving his heart. And it is not possible for this to feel even better all of a sudden, it is not—but it is, because Loki’s hand is so good on Thor’s cock, his fingers working the shaft, circling the crown of it with his thumb as he fucks in, each of his thrusts harder, deeper than they have ever been, that Thor cannot find breath to cry out.

“Loki,” Thor whispers, a shuddering breath, a shiver. He is so close now, so close, it would take but one thing to bring him over the edge. And when the peak of pleasure nears, a hair’s breadth out of reach, Thor begs, “Brother, please,”—knowing not if he spills from Loki’s thumb pressed wicked to the crown of his cock, or the aimed thrust against that spot, perfect, precise—just knows pleasure rushes through him, sudden, a raging river, a flood from a broken dam, wave upon wave breaking against the shore, each higher and stronger than the last, Loki helping him along, stroking his cock in time with each undulation of his body.

“Loki,” Thor gasps, shaking, hands clawed tight into Loki’s shoulders as he shudders on Loki’s cock still. He leans up for a kiss, wanting Loki’s tongue deep within him, the way his cock is deep within Thor, delighting in how Loki swallows the sound of his moans, devours them, as if they are for him and him alone—which they are. Revels in the fact that his belly is soaked with his seed, and the knowledge that it was Loki who made him this way, who brought him to such heights of pleasure.

This is what it must have been like, when the Realms came into being, Thor thinks, hazy, even as the stars that burst bright behind his eyes start to fade. And as quick as Thor’s release had come upon him, it seems Loki approaches his as well, for after another thrust, two, Loki’s breath hitches, the sound of it sweet against Thor’s mouth.


“Inside me,” says Thor, his ankles cinched tight around Loki’s back, preventing his escape. “Spill inside me, Loki, please.” He would have Loki mark Thor as his, would have Loki make him feel so deeply and thoroughly owned, leave him no doubt that he belongs to Loki, and Loki alone.

Loki has no time to reply, to whisper Thor’s name or shout it; only seizes, gasping into Thor’s mouth, body clenching tight as he spills. Thor helps him along, with kisses and touches and encouragement, the way Loki had him, and the resultant force is so fierce, so hot and wet and deep, that for minutes after, Thor can still feel the hard twitch of Loki’s cock within him. The satisfying wetness of Loki’s seed deep inside, proof of his claim over Thor.

For a time, neither can manage words, having breath enough for only shaky, reassuring kisses. Small, safe nuzzling, of necks and cheeks and noses, both still trembling from the aftershocks of such bliss.

Thor strokes hands along Loki’s back, to calm his shuddering, which continues for longer than Thor’s. Massages away each knot of tension formed when Loki arched so quickly and suddenly, chafing warmth into skin as he goes. And when their breaths begin to slow, when Loki starts to draw away, so slowly, so careful, Thor traps him with his legs, immediate. Cups Loki’s cheeks with his palms, and tugs him in for a kiss, soft and sweet and earnest.

“Stay,” Thor murmurs, a mirror of Loki’s words when they first made love on this ship. He knows now what Loki had meant, had felt, when he urged Thor to stay within him, for the deep and immense connection forged between them is too precious to give up. “Please, Loki.” He nuzzles a kiss into the softness of Loki’s throat. The corner of his jaw. Presses another to his mouth, for Thor is not above bribery in the form of sweet affections. “Please.”

Loki obliges, not shifting from place. Only curls his arms beneath Thor’s shoulders, his fingers closing over the jut of Thor’s collarbone. And as his breathing slows further, steady, rhythmic against Thor’s neck, Thor slips fingers into the soft ends of Loki’s hair, stroking, gentle. Revels in the simple and easy sound of their breathing, perfect, in counterpoint, the shaky draw of Thor’s being the quiet exhale of Loki’s.
They stay like this, in the silence of the night, until their breathing evens out, and with a hitch in Loki’s here, a huff of a laugh in Thor’s, their breaths fall into the same rhythm, like the beat of Loki’s heart against Thor’s. And when Thor feels he can think again, and be again—for the momentary burst of pleasure had made all such processes seem impossible—he nudges a kiss to Loki’s neck. The lobe of his ear. Strokes his hands along Loki’s back, fingers wandering over each divot and crest, a roving exploration meant to soothe Loki the same.

“I love you,” Loki says softly, perhaps deciding the silence between them is too much to bear. He lifts his gaze to meet Thor’s, the green of his eyes oddly bright. “I have always loved you. Even if there were times I hated you in equal measure.” His lips thin then, and he turns away, quick, as if he had not meant to divulge a truth so decidedly unaffectionate.

“I never doubted it,” Thor whispers, cupping Loki’s cheek, to guide Loki’s gaze to his again. He strains toward Loki for a kiss, one Loki grants, then another, and another, each one sweeter and softer, lingering longer than the last. “Even when we were at odds,” Thor adds, swallowing hard.

In truth, each such moment had thrown doubt into his heart, the knife twisted ever deeper when Loki wounded him, time and time again. But always a vein of hope ran true in Thor’s heart, with the belief that there was love left in Loki’s heart for him somewhere.

Thor’s admission seems to shatter the dam keeping Loki’s emotions—his sentiments at bay—for Loki nuzzles kisses into the hollow of Thor’s throat, the tenderness of his jaw, the shell of his ear, all of them countless in number, as he whispers words secret and soft.

“I love you more dearly,” Loki says, “than the treasures in all the Realms combined.” He punctuates each treasure he names with a kiss, small and warm and sweet. “More than any weapon of renown, smithed in the depths of Nidavellir. The dew-kissed grass of Alfheim beneath my feet, on a spring’s morning. The summer sun upon my back, during a swim in Vanahlm’s oceans. And the turning of the leaves in Midgard’s autumn.” Loki pauses, to consider if he has named each significant realm. “More than jewels forged from the liquid fires of Muspelheim and the frost-rimed falls of Jotunheim.”

“All the Realms,” Thor whispers, breath hitched tight in his throat in awe. For he had accused Loki once, of not being one for sentiment, only to discover that he is, and to such degree—for Thor.

From this, he knows that Loki’s love is all-encompassing, everlasting, absolute. But Thor is thankful also, that this moment gives him insight into the simple yet lovely things Loki considers treasures.

Reveals the fundamental truth, that Loki deems Thor the greatest treasure of all.

“What of your books?” Thor asks with a grin, nodding toward the precious stack Loki keeps safe on the vanity. “And the cozy nook of our room where you read them. Does your love for me surpass those as well?”

He motions toward the corner where Loki has nestled the most prominent books, within blankets and pillows, and bedding with the texture of fluff. On nights Loki would not come to bed, too preoccupied with his reading, Thor would carry a blanket to this nook, and snuggle into the space behind Loki. Weave his arms about Loki’s waist, legs splayed out on either side of him, and fall asleep, head pillowed against Loki’s shoulder as his brother continued to read.

Loki makes a show of pondering this deeply. “I suppose,” he says airily, “such things would not be the same without your company.”

“How fickle your love is,” teases Thor, “for you to rank me just above weapons and grass and
leaves, as well as ocean warmth and brimstone gems—but not above that of your books. Your reading nook.”

Loki mumbles something about *priorities*, as he nestles drowsily into Thor’s warmth.

“What of…” Thor starts, contemplative, as he toys with a curl of Loki’s hair, the night-dark strands twisting loose around his finger. “What of life itself?” He pauses when Loki stiffens against him, but decides to press on, regardless. “Do you love me more than life itself?”

He should not push for it, he *knows* it, for this is the first Loki has admitted to such affections aloud, barring the time Thor’s proposal had startled it from him. But to hear this from Loki would be a comfort, a relief, even if it is nothing but a lie.

“Oh, now that is simply not *fair,*” Loki says, feigning outrage, as he jabs Thor in the shoulder. “I value my life greatly. And yours is well beneath mine.” He closes his declaration with a haughty little sniff.

“Mmhn,” smiles Thor, not deterred in the least. He nudges his hips into Loki’s, to show him how well *beneath* Loki he is, delighted when he startles a laugh from his brother.

“All *right,*” Loki concedes, trying and failing to suppress the smile that surfaces, time and time again. The kiss that follows, pressed gentle to Thor’s lips, is so sweet, so sincere, it makes Thor’s heart *ache.* For he knows Loki is being nothing but honest, as he whispers, “More than life itself.”

“Good,” Thor declares, before rolling Loki into the sheets, careful not to sunder the connection between them. Shifting them onto their sides for slumber. “As do *I.*”

Surprise fills Loki’s eyes at that, a quick and fleeting thing, but Thor takes a keen pleasure in it, for Loki should know the depth of Thor’s affections in return; at the same time, this moment, this declaration is *Loki’s,* and Thor would not take that from him.

They find slumber this way, curled together amid the soft furs and sheets, and nestled so, with his brother, his husband, his *life* at his side, Thor feels that all is right with the world.

~

The flutter of fingers, feather-light upon his skin, is what wakes Thor the next morning.

There is little light in the darkness of space, and Loki’s conjured mage-lights have long since burnt out. But as the Statesman drifts past the smallest sun of yet another passing planet, the brightness of it provides them with a false dawn. The name of the planet they coast past now, and even the star system they traverse elude Thor, however, for all that matters at present is Loki warm and happy and sated in their bed.

And sated he must be, for Thor finds Loki tracing the curve of his brow with his fingers, fond. Brushing them light along Thor’s lashes, which Loki had always termed *cornsilk blond* in the sun, before touching a kiss to the ridged skin of his scar.

It is all Thor can do to continue feigning sleep, for every fibre of his being strains to return such gentle affections. But Loki has always claimed that patience is a virtue, and Thor remains still, careful to see where Loki’s exploration takes him next.

Loki’s finger continues over the bridge of Thor’s nose, a soft giggle escaping his throat when he reaches the end and pokes the tip, teasing; it nearly draws a smile from Thor, who must *fight* not to give up the game now. Lets his fingertips wander over the peaks and valleys of Thor’s lips. His jaw.
The rough scrape of his beard. And when it seems he has exhausted his exploration of Thor’s face, Loki simply watches him sleep, carding fingers through his hair, again and again, the motion tender and soft, like he can scarcely believe this is real. Keeps his breaths quiet and hushed, to prevent from waking him.

The hair Loki threads fingers through, so fond and affectionate, will be long enough to braid soon—and Thor would have it done so again. Would have a lock of Loki’s twined into his once more, to keep a token of his brother with him, wherever he goes.

Soon enough, the desire to card fingers through Loki’s hair in turn proves too strong, and Thor cracks his eye open a slit, thus giving up the game. Has all of a moment to note Loki’s own adorably sleep-rumpled hair and cheeks rosy with color, before Loki’s eyes widen at the sight of Thor awake, and he snatches his hand back, sudden. As if caught doing something criminal.

Thor catches him by the wrist, this hand that has done supposed wrong, and presses a kiss to the back of it. Brushes another across Loki’s knuckles, light and adoring, before reeling him in for a kiss to the mouth proper.

“Good morning,” Loki says finally, when Thor has left his lips reddened and swollen with kisses. “It...it is one, is it not?” His voice is too small, too vulnerable by half, his eyes downcast, and Thor is driven to wonder what part of their leisures last night brings him such shame. Then it strikes him, that it is not shame that drives Loki’s wariness, but worry—that perhaps Thor harbours misgivings about the night they shared prior.

And though every part of Thor aches, a sore and pleasing pain thrumming through his back and hips, to his knees and toes, the only misgiving he has is that they had not partaken of this pleasure earlier. He tips Loki’s chin up, to meet his gaze, to keep it, and with his other hand, cards fingers through Loki’s hair, a mirror of Loki’s motions a moment earlier.

“Loki,” Thor says gently, “as long as I wake up beside you, every morning is a good one. No matter what the day brings.” He waggles his brows, mischievous. “Or the night.”

“Oh,” says Loki, startled into silence at such a simple truth. Then he smiles, the spread of it slow, like a swathe of melting honey, like sunlight, the very antithesis of the shadow he thinks he is. “Just so,” he murmurs. Winds his arms around Thor’s waist in turn, affection allowed, welcomed, desired. “Just so.”

Chapter End Notes

“…the treasures in all the Realms…”: It’s true Loki didn’t name Niflheim or Svartalfheim in his confession, but realms of death and decay don’t exactly make for the most moving of love confessions. XD
A Deserved Reprieve

Chapter Notes

I have no excuse; this is their honeymoon chapter. Mini-honeymoon? Mini-\textit{moon}. :3

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

~

Following their wedding, Thor and Loki arrange for several days in which they are free from responsibilities, with Heimdall and Valkyrie overlooking essential operations, and Korg, Miek and Bruce seeing to the technical side of things. And barring one mandatory council meeting, that could not be put off, they manage to accomplish exactly that.

The meeting had not been \textit{all} bad, Thor reflects; before the two of them entered the council chamber, Loki had swatted Thor’s ass—still tender from lovemaking the night prior—teasing, \textit{bold}, biting back a laugh as Thor yelped at the pressure. And Thor, unsure if Loki meant that as an invitation of sorts, had decided to turn it into one himself. Nudged his backside against Loki’s front, purposeful, delighting in Loki’s sharp intake of breath as he murmured, \textit{If you want it, come and claim it}—then walked promptly into the council, grinning. Knowing that he left Loki fuming through the whole meeting, consumed by a mixture of lust and irritation.

Loki had exacted vengeance swiftly after, bending him over in their room, impatient, hungry, and taking him \textit{apart}, claiming Thor so thoroughly that Loki had to bring dinner back, for Thor could not make it several steps—much less the mess hall—without his legs giving out beneath him.

But besides that one meeting, the general populace of the ship had left them to their own amusements, time afforded them in lieu of a honeymoon, which Thor and Loki decided to depart on only when everyone was settled in Midgard. Time they had dedicated to eating, drinking, and—

“You are \textit{insatiable},” Loki huffs, startling Thor from his thoughts. His fingers curl around the shaft of Thor’s cock, stroking, clever, before he licks a wet stripe down Thor’s length, his tongue a velvet scrape of pleasure from crown to base.

It is the fourth time they have engaged in such things today; earlier Thor had nudged him awake for lovemaking, soft and slow, with sleepy kisses scattered throughout, recapturing the immense feeling of \textit{connection} as he pressed deep within Loki. Taking pleasure in their shared closeness. And after a hurried lunch, Loki had taken him from behind, rough and hot and hard, each thrust knocking the headboard into the wall, until even Valkyrie matched each \textit{thump} with an irritated strike of her own from the other side, shouting \textit{do you mind}, as she slept off an excess of drink. Loki had thrown up a barrier, instant, to prevent sound from escaping their room, just in time to contain Thor’s shout as he spilled, courtesy of Loki’s last bruising and punishing stroke. One that left him trembling and panting, his seed soaking the sheets beneath them.

After that, they had partaken of quieter activities, rubbing lazily against each other, nuzzling kisses into each others’ necks, and sharing soft brushes of lips to mouths until they spilled, their release muffled by the kiss Thor began and Loki deepened, his tongue pressed hot and sweet against Thor’s.

“No more insatiable than \textit{you},” Thor smiles now, serene, even if Loki cannot see it. For surely there
is no greater happiness than being allowed to indulge in food and drink and lovemaking for days.

He grips Loki’s thighs above him, spreading them wider, before tilting his head back, pressing his own tongue against Loki’s cock. Delights in the muffled gasp Loki makes at the contact, and licks up the perfect pearl of precome beading at the tip, savouring the taste, of salt and sweetness—then he swallows Loki down, sucking his cock in, deep. Humming around it, revelling in the way Loki’s hips twitch, the deep-throated moan he makes at that.

“Thor,” Loki gasps, his own ministrations forgotten. Hands clawed tight into Thor’s hips, as if it is all he can do, to hang on. It had been a competition, to see who could make the other spill first, and Loki had been the clear victor, with the way he lapped and sucked at Thor’s cock, his fingers circling the base of it, an extra tease, a further pleasure—until now. “That is—oh.”

Thor does not relent, wringing the tiny gasps from Loki that he can, the sounds of his pleasure, the signs of him coming undone, before letting Loki’s cock slip from his mouth. Licks his way up the cleft of Loki’s ass, delving his tongue into the tight, furled muscle, his hole so pink and sweet and perfectly exposed. The whine that escapes Loki at that is pitched so lovely and high Thor can only wonder why he had not done this earlier in their game. Buries his face deep into Loki’s cheeks, spreading Loki open and wide with his fingers, curling his tongue up and in, for surely this will be enough for Loki to surrender.

He has worked his way up to short, stabbing thrusts with his tongue when Loki seems to suddenly recover, his mouth wrapping hot around Thor’s cock, tongue circling the edge of the crown. But this is not enough to make Thor yield, this pleasure revisited—

Then Loki presses two spit-slick fingers against Thor’s hole, nudging them inward. And finding their mark, they push, once, then twice, a third bringing Thor’s hips bucking upward, involuntary.

“Stop!” Thor cries, his cock surging into Loki’s waiting mouth. He grips Loki’s hips to still him. “Loki, stop.”

“Do you yield?” says Loki, immediate, once he has drawn away. Thor can hear the smug and satisfied smile in his voice, damn him.

“I yield, I yield,” Thor laughs, breathless, even as he presses a smacking kiss to the cheek of Loki’s ass. Pats Loki’s hip, fond. “I am far too close to spilling and I…” He nuzzles the back of Loki’s thigh, before marking his place with another kiss. “I would rather spill inside you.”

Loki draws a sharp breath at such declaration, of surprise, of wonder, and all but scrambles to hands and knees to right himself again. Wastes no time rolling onto his back, pulling Thor against him, widening his hips for Thor, the cradle of them a perfect fit. They are both so wet from their earlier efforts that they do not stop to fumble for the bottle of oil from their night table, and Thor presses right in, a hot, slick slide, a mutual moan shared between them when he has pushed all the way in.

“Oh, Norns,” Loki sobs, his chest heaving against Thor’s, breaths shallow and quick. “So good, Thor, so good—” His voice breaks off into a moan, as Thor curls arms beneath Loki’s shoulders and thrusts, each deep and even and rough, spurred on by the heel dug into his back, Loki making his desires and wishes known.

“Like this?” Thor punctuates his words with a thrust. Corrects their angle with a nudge of his hips, and gives another push, harder, deeper than before. “Like this?”

“Yes,” Loki gasps. “yes, yes, yes—” his litany of affirmatives broken only by kisses, Thor taking his mouth as he takes Loki below, his tongue driven deep into Loki’s throat. But it is not enough, not
enough, and he snarls fingers into Loki’s hair, tugging his head back, baring the pale column of his throat. Sets teeth to skin, sucking, nipping, biting bruises into pale flesh that leave no question of whom Loki belongs to. “Thor.” Loki’s voice borders a whine, a keening, needy noise, growing higher in pitch with each burning, bruising kiss. “Thor.” His hands clutch tight at Thor’s shoulders, bracing himself for each rough and pounding thrust. “I will not last, I cannot—”

Nor I, Thor has time to think, for their earlier exertions had brought them near to the precipice, and now they need only fall together, together—

He has a moment to drink in the sight of Loki, spread lovely upon their sheets, the picture of perfection, of beauty, lips reddened with kisses, hair a gorgeous, messy tangle—a vision from Valhalla, or the heaven their friends speak of—before Loki cries out, clenching tight around Thor. A shivering, hot vise that spurs Thor’s own release, has him lunging in deep, holding Loki in his arms as he spills.

“Loki,” he gasps, shaking, shuddering with each rushing surge of seed, filling Loki, a torrent, a flood. “Loki.”

Loki trembles beneath him, breath torn between sobs and hitched gasps, words failing him, far beyond him. Foregoes words to draw Thor down for a kiss instead, one scorching, messy, fierce, thieving what little air there is between them. His mouth is so sweet, so hot, apple wine from their meal lingering warm on Thor’s tongue as Loki pulls him in, pulls him down, a heady rush of love and affection rolled into one.

They stay like this for long moments, mouths meeting in heated, fiery kisses, then smaller, shallower ones as their breaths slow, before they taper off into gentler nuzzles, neither of them willing to break the connection first.

Then Loki pushes at his chest, ineffectual, grumbling off and heavy, despite the smile twitching at his mouth, and Thor obliges, willing. Rolls off him, slow, savouring the outright moan Loki makes as Thor’s cock slips out.

“Feeling empty already?” Thor grins, a little dizzy, a little bold from such vigorous bedplay. He walks his fingers along Loki’s hip, the line of it narrow and sharp and lovely. “No matter, I shall be back there soon enough.” Thor busses Loki on the cheek, playful, before dropping his voice an octave lower, bordering a growl. “And I shall fill you as you wish—”

“I need filling of a different sort,” Loki scoffs, slapping his hand away. He busies himself with the platter of rolls and fruit that had been brought to their door earlier, food Loki had swept into their room, graceful, lithe—and entirely nude, giving poor Miek a scare. “Lovemaking is hungry work.”

“Suit yourself,” laughs Thor, tangling his fingers into one of the bowls of fruit given them. Receives a cluster of grapes for his efforts, red and round and perfect. Each is cool and crisp, juice bursting sweet on Thor’s tongue with each bite, a pleasure so simple yet gratifying, that moments pass before Thor observes Loki staring at him, hungry, a wolf in a sheep’s pasture.

His tongue has just darted out to pluck another perfect globe from the bunch, the cluster of grapes poised precisely above his mouth, when he spies Loki watching the motion, greedy. As if witnessing a scene entirely too decadent unfold before him.

“See something you like, brother?” Thor teases, propping himself up on an elbow. Making sure Loki receives a considerable eyeful, from the long line of his neck to his thighs. Cants his hip just so, as he arches his brow, suggestive. Sakaar’s ruler had not called him criminally seductive for naught.
“Must you call me that?” Loki says, his mood darkening, instant.

Perhaps he found no issue in teasing Thor with the word, while drifting in the light-headed happiness following their wedding. But he had not called Thor brother after their wedding night, when he had feigned drunkenness and had Thor carry him to their room. When he had whispered the word, hope fragile in his voice, requesting reversal in their lovemaking. Shows now the same resistance Thor had found troubling, in the days before this.

“What shall I call you, then?” Thor says, setting the grapes down and shifting closer to him on the bed. “My Loki. My light. My life.” He stops just short of love of my life, for Loki may find that too maudlin and jab him in the ribs for his efforts. Still, their lazy days abed have made Thor soft and sentimental, and he knows it, though he is not afraid to exploit it, for he does so love the blush he brings to Loki’s cheeks at each term of endearment. Winds his arms around Loki from behind.

“Stop,” Loki says, though there is little heat in his words.

“Husband?” Thor tries, serious this time, relieved as the tension in Loki’s body recedes. But the word brother raises his hackles again, and Loki turns to glare at him.

“We are wedded, Thor,” Loki says, impatient. “To call me brother now would be—”

“Why can you not be both?” Thor says. “You were my brother first, and now you are my husband. You are still mine. And I am not ashamed of you. I am not ashamed of us.”

The words seem to mollify Loki, as the tension bleeds out of his shoulders considerably, and Thor ensures he presses a kiss to the nape of Loki’s neck, reassuring.

“I suppose we may settle on…brother-husband,” says Loki, finally.

Perhaps it will take him time to reacquaint himself with calling Thor brother, but knowing Loki, that should not take long at all. After all, they have been brothers far longer than they have been husbands. For now, Thor is content to settle on the word Loki has chosen, and he scrambles to the other side of the bed, where the grapes lie still, to continue their game.

“Well, brother-husband?” Thor says, grinning, coy, as he suspends the cluster of grapes above his mouth. He cants his hip again, the angle far more seductive this time. A sheet has tangled around Thor’s leg in his haste, but Thor draws the edge of it over his thigh, purposeful, leisurely, to resemble the hedonistic paintings that once decorated the high ceilings of Odin’s treasure vault. “See something you like?”

“Yes,” Loki breathes, this time without hesitation, his tongue darting pink between his lips. And though Loki had been stalking steadily toward him as he spoke, a predator hunting its prey, Thor must make too delectable a sight, for Loki closes the distance between them in an instant. “I see you.”

Thor has a moment to wonder whether Loki means he sees all that Thor is, and all that he might become, or if he simply enjoys the sight of Thor at this time, before Loki’s mouth meets his for a kiss, hot, hungry, hard, and all such thoughts fly from his mind.

“Loki,” Thor whispers, between one kiss and another. The word is worshipful, reverent, as Loki tugs Thor’s arm into their embrace, his hip; lets his palm slide to cover the nape of Thor’s neck, as if he holds Thor’s very being in his hands, holds all of him. “Loki.”

“Look at you,” Loki purrs, letting his kisses roam over Thor’s jaw, down into the column of his neck. His fingers swipe teasing at the precome pooled waiting on Thor’s belly. “So wet for me,” he
murmurs, his very voice a liquid seduction. “So ready.”

“So ready,” echoes Thor, his breath shaky and shallow as Loki presses fingers into him, searching, curling, aimed. “So ready, Loki, please.”

But Loki does not move swiftly enough for Thor’s liking, taking his time to work him open, slow. To lay kisses to Thor’s cheeks and nose and mouth, the last of them greedy, hot, his tongue a cherry sweetness against Thor’s. And since patience has never been Thor’s strong suit, he grips Loki’s shoulders and rolls him onto his back, pinning him to the bed, insistent.

“Thor, wait—” Loki manages, but his caution falls on deaf ears as Thor lines their hips up, and lowers himself onto Loki, eager. Wincses immediately at the prickle of pain, punishment for such haste. “Did I not say—”

“You said, you said,” Thor concedes with a growl, uncapping their vial of honeyed almond oil. Slicking Loki’s cock in hurried strokes before a second attempt, and—oh, that is better, Loki sliding in effortless, easy, a sweet and satisfying pressure as he fills Thor, gradual.

Loki sighs, though he does not stop Thor’s eager efforts. Only braces Thor’s hips, gentle, bracketing them with his hands to slow Thor’s descent, that he may take Loki in safely. “Impatient ass,” Loki murmurs, a smile twitching his lips when Thor grins and laughs, shaky.

And when Loki has pressed in all the way, Thor lifts his hips, cautious. Rolls them forward before lifting them again, the way he remembers Loki having ridden him astride. It is a different angle from those they have tried before, but no less pleasurable, and before long, he finds an easy rhythm in their motions. Rocks against Loki, panting, breathless, his hands braced steady on Loki’s chest.

“Yes, like that,” Loki urges, guiding the motion of Thor’s hips, gentle. “Move your hips like that.” Waits until Thor has decided on the cadence that works best between them, before reaching up, kneading Thor’s nipples between fingers, rough. Nudges slick fingers in after his cock.

Thor sucks a breath in, shivering, sharp, at this last jolt of pleasure-pain. “Loki,” he tries, unsure of this. “I—I do not—” The words I do not like this dry in his throat as Loki circles Thor’s hole with his fingers, stroking, pressing, with just the right amount of force.

“Shall I stop, then?” Loki purrs. He receives a no in response, panted, ragged, harsh, but to Thor’s frustration, stops. Guides Thor’s hands from where they are braced on Loki’s chest to cup the cheeks of his own ass. “Spread yourself for me,” he says instead. His voice is low, soft, and every ounce hypnotic, leaving Thor helpless but to obey.

“Like this?” Thor asks, holding his cheeks apart, as bidden. Heat warms his face at the thought of spreading himself for Loki like this. Giving all of himself, in the name of such wanton desire.

“Exactly like this,” Loki says. The grin that curves his mouth is all the warning Thor has, before Loki’s hands wrap tight about Thor’s hips. Push him backward, shoving Thor back against his cock, hard, Thor’s balls grinding rough against Loki’s belly.

“Oh,” Thor gasps, the word punched from his chest, at such dual pleasure unexpected. Loki is so hot and hard within him, his belly a rasping, delicious friction, and Norns, even their wedding night had not been so fiery, so passionate. “Loki—” Another thrust, bruising, fierce, has Thor crying out, wanting to gasp Loki, Loki, so good, please, more but he only manages to moan and shiver, breath shuddering trapped in his chest.

Loki graces him with another set of heaving thrusts, two, before slowing his motions, gradual.
“Enough,” he murmurs, soothing, drawing Thor down for a kiss, his palm warm on the nape of Thor’s neck. “Enough now.”

But though Thor is grateful for such reprieve, the kisses they share are no less ardent, each hungry, ravenous, open-mouthed in their need. “Oh, Loki,” he gasps, hardly able to draw breath. “Loki.” He cares not that sweat soaks his hair, matting it wet on his brow, or of the picture he must make, his cheeks flushed with heat, his breaths rapid, shallow—only knows that he needs this, needs Loki, wants all the pleasure Loki will give him.

The new angle between them is divine, a welcome change from the strike of Loki’s cock when Thor rode him upright. And as Loki brushes against that spot, perfect, purposeful, Thor cannot hold back the moan that wells out from deep within him.

“Liked that, did you?” Loki muses, the grin curving his mouth wider now, mischievous, and Thor has a moment to gasp—yes, good, before Loki urges Thor’s knees forward. Curls his hands around the junctions between hip and thigh, and lifts, his cock slipping out partway.

“No—Loki, please, no,” Thor begs, for it would be just like Loki to tease him this way. To determine what action brought Thor such pleasure—before ceasing it, sudden.

But Loki seems to have their mutual contentment in mind, for he only holds Thor in place, steady, his grip snug—then thrusts upward, brutal. Not allowing Thor to sink down, to let himself be filled, but driving his hips upward and onward, driving from Thor moans the epitome of absolute bliss. And just when Thor thinks they have reached the peak—he could spill this way, Loki’s cock pressed perfect inside him, striking true with each thrust—Loki rolls them over, sudden. Draws forth another moan, at a pitch even Thor had not known he could reach, at the motion.

“Want you,” Loki murmurs, pressing kisses to Thor’s throat, his teeth a hungry scrape against skin. “Want all of you.”

Thor cannot form words, the sensation of Loki in him, on him, around him overwhelming, but he opens his arms, folding them over Loki’s neck. Tugs him in, safe, and returns each kiss Loki gives him with one of his own, a silent statement of Have me, then. Have all of me, as you wish. Clasps Loki’s face in his hands, the stroke of his thumbs over cheekbones, the nuzzle of their noses together, a declaration: Take from me, until nothing remains, for this body, this life is yours.

Loki seizes the silent invitation, spearing him open with each thrust. His hair, fallen over his brow now, is messy, wild, as if taking Thor apart so thoroughly, so completely, is the one thing that can shake him from pristine perfection—a visage Thor can only marvel at the sight of, reveling in it, delighting in it, crafting plans to induce it more often.

And when they have shared enough blazing, burning kisses between them, Thor’s peak growing closer with each thrust, Thor reaches toward his cock, to take it in hand, stroke in counterpoint to Loki’s thrusts. Only for Loki to growl, immediate, and pin his wrist to the bed.

“You will spill from the pleasure of my length within you,” Loki hisses, rolling his hips forward, deep, drawing forth a cry, “or not at all.”

The denial is too much, too much, and Thor could weep in frustration. “Loki,” Thor whispers, “Loki, please. Let me—make me—”

Pleasure arises then, a sweet tingle that starts in his spine, spiking higher each time Loki strikes, building, rising, a wave reaching its crest—then lancing through his body, a bright spear of lightning, sharp. Thor arches hard on Loki’s cock, uncontrolled, unrestrained, his back a bowstring drawn so
taut and tight it aches. For a moment he fears Loki will slip out, and his fingers scrabble at Loki’s shoulders, his neck, wanting to keep Loki inside him, to remember who gifted him such pleasure—then Loki’s hands are there, so firm and strong, his grip on Thor’s hips so tight, keeping them tethered, together.

“Loki,” Thor cries, “oh Norns, Loki, please—”

“Thor?” Loki slows for fractions of a second, wondering if he has hurt Thor—kind Loki, noble Loki—but not what Thor wishes this instant.

“Keep going,” Thor sobs, “keep—” he has no thought for propriety, “—keep fucking me.” Urges his hips against Loki’s, needing, wanting, the more that he demands.

Loki does him a favour greater, throwing Thor’s legs over his shoulders, deepening the angle as he bends Thor double at the waist. Fucks him through it as he wishes, each thrust deep and rough and delicious, each driving a jet of seed onto his belly, then another, until it is spooled wild along skin, like gossamer thread, like silk.


His release must trigger Loki’s, the clench of him a sweet pressure around Loki’s cock, for Loki lunges forward seconds later. Buries his face in Thor’s neck, himself deep in Thor’s heat, and spends, an aching burst of liquid wet fire, Thor shaking from its force, even as he tightens around Loki to urge him along.

And if Loki forgets himself, gasping brother as he spills, his cheeks a wine-dark hue, hair fallen reckless, unruly over his brow, the sight of him so thoroughly undone utterly lovely, Thor says nothing of it at all.

“That was...” Thor pants after, when he can catch his breath again. That was.” The pleasure Loki brought him was indescribable, and Thor is left fumbling for words in the dark.


Even after dragging in several shuddering breaths, Thor cannot find the words to describe what they shared, and the best his mind had dredged up was breathtaking. “Yes,” he agrees, his laugh shaky, for it is the easiest answer. “Yes, to all of that.” They share more kisses, gentler now, to cheeks and lips and noses, before Thor dares to add, “Could we—could we do that again in the future?”

It is still a novel sensation, to feel so thoroughly claimed and taken, Loki’s seed spilled so deep within him. And though every part of him aches from their efforts, and it will be difficult to disguise the limp in his gait after this, Thor would experience it again. To learn a measure of what they had done today, so he may return the favour to Loki, and love him as thoroughly as he had been this day.

“Of course,” Loki nods. “As many times as you wish.” He lifts Thor’s hand then, brushing a tiny kiss across knuckles, lips pausing meaningful on the finger where Thor’s ring sits, the twin to Loki’s.

“For we are wedded now, are we not?”

Thor nods, for they are, though there are days when he can scarcely dare to believe that his brother, his lover, is his now, in all the ways that there are.

When they have finished licking each other clean, and Loki has spelled away the rest of their mess, Thor snuggles into Loki’s warmth, determined. Cards fingers through Loki’s hair, the motions soft and affectionate. There are no moons to light their sky at present, and the endless darkness of space
means it is eternal night, but a quick look at their chamber's time piece shows they have spent yet another entire day abed.

“I love you,” Thor murmurs, sleepy, sated.

“I know this,” Loki says testily, though his words lack heat, “as you take care to inform me of it every single day.” He lets his fingers splay along the length of Thor’s back, touching, stroking, a mirror of Thor’s hand in his hair.

“I would tell you, so you may know that you are loved,” says Thor. “So that you never have reason to doubt.” Of course he had promised, back on Alfheim-Beta, to share such words a thousand times from then, but in truth, Thor has not been keeping count; there can be no measure to the words Loki needs hear, to know how cherished he is, how dear.

And when Loki simply huffs his dissent at such a thing, Thor only hums and shifts deeper into Loki’s space. Thinks better of it and tugs Loki atop him, fingers stroking gentle through his hair, lifting strands of silken darkness to his nose. Breathes in the smell of Loki, of faded vanilla and the faint scent of sex that stirs something warm in Thor’s belly.

Then he smiles, drawing upon words from an old memory. “Fear not, for you are loved.”

Loki draws away, frowning. “Did you—you stole that from the Grandmaster’s speech on Sakaar,” he says, as if affronted by a reminder of that place, so soon after their shared intimacy. “I did not think you would be one to take a page from his book.”

Thor mirrors Loki’s frown, confused. “I might have done, but I thought the word they used was ‘found’.”

Loki flaps a hand then, as if uninterested in arguing the semantics of this, but Thor cannot help but puzzle it over, turning the words over in his mind. Wondering why they had resonated with something within him, spurring him to speak them again. The words Thor heard in what he now terms the Indoctrination Corridor had not sounded like the Grandmaster’s; that man’s speech patterns were closer to the informal way Thor’s friends on Midgard spoke.

No, they had sounded like—

“You wrote that speech,” Thor says, sitting up suddenly.

“What nonsense do you speak of now?” Loki asks, though Thor can see the presence of a nervous tic at his eye. “You cannot say I had a hand in…”

Thor stops listening to Loki’s denials temporarily, deciding instead to focus on recalling the words he had heard.

Fear not, for you are found.

…the collection point for all lost and unloved things—like you.

It is a wonder that Thor had not seen it before; had not seen how much Loki had put of himself into that speech.

“No, I know you,” Thor says, adamant, cutting through Loki’s attempts at denial. “Those are your words. Your thoughts.” He pulls Loki into his arms then, a tight knot of hurt settling in his chest. How little had Loki thought of himself, to put such thoughts to pen and paper for another’s grand introductory speech? He had wanted to be found, thought himself lost and unloved—
“You have the wrong of it,” Loki laughs, as he turns away, but there is a current of tension in it, nervousness, the timbre of it foreign and strange.

His denial rings so hollow that it throws a switch in Thor’s mind, a revelation so illuminating, Thor can only regret he has not realized it before: that Loki simply wishes to be wanted, to be special, and not lost and unloved as the refuse commonly found on Sakaar. Thor feels a measure of shame then, at having told Loki this place is perfect for you, recognizing only now how condemning such words were.

But words have power, as Loki can attest to, and Thor has happened upon the perfect way to turn his thoughtless cruelty around. It takes him a moment to remember the exact words he had heard in that oddly-lit corridor, but when he places them, he leans in, turning the words to his own advantage.

“You are significant to me,” Thor whispers into Loki’s ear, kissing the space behind it. “You are invaluable to me.” Another kiss, to the nape of Loki’s neck. “With me, you are loved.” He pauses, the next words his own, pure and heartfelt. “And if it takes the rest of my life to prove it to you, I shall do so.”

Loki turns in his arms then. “Yes, all right,” he admits finally, in a small voice. “That speech written was part of how I gained favour with the Grandmaster. To soothe the mass of fighters passing through to his arena.”

Thor carefully avoids mention of how he did not exactly find it soothing, and nor had the other warriors, considering their eagerness to revolt. Decides instead to let Loki revel in the moment, and presses another kiss, this time to Loki’s brow. The tip of his nose. The corners of his mouth, soft and reassuring, before touching one to his mouth proper. Gathers Loki in his arms more fully, as though a full-body embrace, warm and encompassing, can show Loki just how significant, valued, and dearly loved he is.

Loki allows these affections for all of a moment, before he tilts his head up to meet Thor’s gaze, his expression so hopeful and vulnerable that Thor’s heart cannot help but ache for him. “Do you mean that?” he whispers. “Do you really mean to—”

Thor cannot tell if Loki means whether he meant the words, or the proving of Loki’s worth to him thereof, but he touches their foreheads together, keeping Loki’s gaze as he does so. “Yes,” he says simply. “Yes.”

It is all the answer Loki needs, as he tugs Thor in for a kiss of his own volition, urgent, demanding, yet so endearingly sweet.

~

Of course, Thor should have known such happiness would not last.

Chapter End Notes

Thor’s “If you want it, come and claim it” expression can be seen in this gif here.
The next days cannot be described as anything other than bliss, for once Thor had made it clear how significant, valued, and dearly loved Loki was, his brother had seemed less snappish, less prone to sly barbs, and far less inclined to tricks. This only boded well for those around him, especially Valkyrie and Bruce; Korg himself had long decided to treat all of Loki’s tricks as happy discoveries that Loki meant to happen, and Loki had left him alone after that.

He was also far more receptive to Thor’s affections, whether in the presence of others, or without, which sparked a secret happiness in Thor’s heart, for there were times Loki still pushed him away, or vanished, when he sensed the presence of another. Even a light footfall a hall away could have Loki drawing away from Thor’s embrace, skittish, which left Thor cold and bereft, and in the earlier days, wondering if he had done something wrong. So this new and consistent devotion from Loki can only be a boon.

But as per the unspoken laws of the universe, such idyllic bliss could not last—a fact Thor had forgotten in the haze of happiness he and Loki dwelled within, in the week past.

“Your Majesty!” cries Halvor, one of their technicians. He hastens toward Thor, who had been categorizing what weapons they had left and pondering the installation of a gunnery bay. It would not do to have the Statesman entirely defenceless, should they be attacked. “There is—” he pauses to catch a breath, “—there is an issue with one of the engines.”

“What is it?” Thor asks, instantly worried.

“Please, come with me to the bridge, and I shall explain along the way,” says Halvor. On their way to the bridge, where Halvor assures him the others are already discussing the issue, he outlines that one of the starboard engines has been growing less efficient over the last two days, drinking more fuel than it should, but they have just noticed in the last hour that it has been sputtering, slow. “We may not have long before it stops functioning completely,” Halvor finishes, solemn.

“I see,” Thor says, as they arrive at the bridge, where Heimdall, Valkyrie, Bruce and Loki have already gathered. Another technician is already at Loki’s side, to inform him that Korg and Miek will join them shortly, before hurrying away. Thor drifts over to where Loki is standing, by the main console, and though his arms are crossed, his brow furrowed, Loki frees an arm to take Thor’s hand when he spots him. Brushes his thumb along the ridge of Thor’s, a constant, reassuring contact.

“We must make a stop at Xylion,” Valkyrie says, frowning. “A planet known for its inhabitants’ brutality against its own kind,” she adds, when Thor simply blinks at her, confused. “A slaver colony,” she elaborates finally, her eyes narrowed, incredulous.

Thor has been remiss in his studies of other worlds; the entirety of this voyage, and especially this moment, have taught him that now. He glances toward Loki, seeking help.

“‘Kind’ is rather a misnomer,” Loki explains with a sigh. “There are, in fact, two major groups—races, though the word is inaccurate here—that inhabit this planet. Slavers, a set of creatures unto themselves, and their prey.” Before Thor can open his mouth to ask who are the slaves, then? Loki
adds, “The prey are the slaves: those who were captured from other planets, or abandoned there, much like the prisoners on Sakaar. And if they grow old, or slow, or tired…it only spells death for them.”

“The Slavers eat them,” Valkyrie cuts in. “Earning them the name they are known throughout the galaxy as: Slayers.”

Thor’s fingers tighten around Loki’s, a prickle of fear threading through his heart. Thus far, they had managed to avoid major known aggressors, with careful planning and navigation, but for this to happen now is ill-timing indeed. “Can we not cease power to the engines, and drift until we arrive at the next planet?” he asks. “Surely our fuel reserves and the other engines will last us until then.”

Loki’s palm is clammy against Thor’s, his own fear evident. “We have no choice but to land,” he says. “The last three planets were inhabitable. If we do not stop here, we run the risk of running out of fuel mid-space.”

Thor knows he speaks true; one planet had been a dead wasteworld of volcanic ash and lava lakes, throwing up noxious fumes that nearly melted the Statesman’s rudders off and the landing gear with them after a failed attempt to touch down. Another had been miles of frozen wilderness, reminiscent of Jotunheim, with few, if any inhabitants. And the last planet they encountered was not even spaceworthy, and therefore had none of the resources they needed to maintain their ship.

They are ill-equipped to engage a hostile force of any kind, but running out of fuel mid-space would be a bigger catastrophe, and Thor swallows, anxious, his decision made.

“We will land,” he declares. “But all those disembarking must work in groups of five or more. No one travels alone.” Sending the Commodore ahead of the Statesman to negotiate for fuel and reparation of the faulty engine would be unsafe at this point, and the Statesman did not have enough fuel itself to hover above Xylion, in concealment. With enough luck, and the help of their stealth shields, perhaps they could land quickly, quietly, and do what was needed before being noticed by the planet’s aggressors.

Just as Korg and Miek enter the bridge, Korg manages, “Hey man, heard we had a problem with the —” before the entire ship lurches, the Statesman’s lights flickering twice before they stay off, and the screens showing the ship’s flight status flash red, each of them with a warning about the faulty starboard engine. A cascade of red letters reporting ENGINE FAILURE, ENGINE FAILURE, ENGINE FAILURE.

“Halvor, what does this mean for us?” Thor calls, over the blare of alarms and continued juddering of the ship, the sound of it growing louder as every second passes. He has Loki grip a secure railing first, before finding one of his own, near enough that he can shield Loki with his body at a moment’s notice. Above them, the ship’s emergency lights flick on, an eerie and unsettling red glow.

“—starboard quarter engine—ceased functioning!” Halvor calls back, through the tremors. “Losing altitude, fast—may have to—”

Another quake shudders through the ship, before one of their navigation crew—Thor cannot see who, in the dim light—shouts, “We shall have to make a crash landing! Secure yourselves, now!”

Without a second thought, Thor shoves Loki into the nearest empty seat on the bridge, secures him into it with shoulder and lap belt, ignoring Loki’s livid protest of Thor, no, before the ship’s next tremor sends him skittering across the floor, like a loose marble.

On the overhead, he can hear one of the engineers making an attempt to calm the people, none of
whom know what transpires, with a simple message: we are currently experiencing flight difficulties. Please return to your chambers for your own safety, and await further instructions.

“Thor!” Loki cries, when the ship judders again, this time throwing Thor in the direction of the bridge’s wide bay window. Loki’s hand scrabbles for Thor’s, desperate, catches it for all of a heartbeat, before the momentum shakes them apart again.

Thor has just enough time to see Loki safe, to see Bruce drawing upon the Hulk to curl around Heimdall and Valkyrie, protective, before the back of his head cracks against something, shattering it, and all goes suddenly, painfully dark.

~

“—up, Thor, get up. This is no time for you to be a comatose lump.”

That is Loki’s voice, urgent, hushed, and if Thor is not mistaken, fearful.

“Loki?” Thor reaches out blindly, heartened when Loki twines their fingers together, immediate. Blinks awake as Loki guides him into a sitting position, and tilts Thor’s head to check the extent of the damage.

Loki seems relieved, as he huffs out a breath. “The safeguard spell I cast on you, in the little time I had, took the worst of the damage. But it was still incomplete.” Thor’s fingers alight on a bump on his head from where he had slammed against what Loki tells him was the captain’s chair, but there is no blood, fortunately.

“Thank you,” says Thor, making an attempt to stand, before sinking to the floor again, dizzy. Smiles, grateful, when Loki bears his weight and guides him over to a chair.

“There is no need to thank me,” Loki hisses. “The next time you choose to be a self-sacrificing fool, allow me to murder you first and save you the hassle.”

Thor opens his mouth, searching for the proper response, when Loki cuts off his protest with a bruising, punishing kiss. “Loki—” Thor tries, breathless, between this kiss and another, each of them growing softer and gentler in the process, “I am simply glad you are—”

“Do not try that again,” Loki says, waspish, though his fingers still tremble in Thor’s.

Thor nods his acquiescence, though he knows that if it comes to it, he will see to Loki’s safety, his life, first—each and every time. For now, he brushes a kiss over their joined hands, reassuring Loki, before breathing deep to regain his bearings. “What is the status of the ship?”

“We were forced to make an emergency landing on Xylion,” says Loki, “after the starboard quarter engine gave out. Our piloting team managed to make a safe landing with the remaining five engines, and the ship is otherwise unharmed, but…” He shakes his head then and sighs. “What hope we had in concealing ourselves is now gone.”

Valkyrie, checking the terrain scanner a few feet away, nods at Thor. “Good to see you up and about again, your Majesty,” she says, before calling, “Multiple life forms showing up in the landing area! At least a hundred!” She squints at the screen again. “Wait, no—maybe twice that!”

Even Thor can see the multitude of blurry yellow spots dotting the landscape of their scanner. Cold-blooded creatures, then. And most likely the Slayers that Loki had spoken of. “We will go out to meet them,” Thor declares.
“For negotiations?” Loki says, unconvinced, in the face of Slayers gathered in such numbers, far more than needed for any peaceful delegation. “Or for battle?”

“We will try for the former,” Thor says, “but be prepared for the latter.”

He and Loki spare a minute to ready their armour properly in their chamber, when Loki speaks, hesitant. “Thor, perhaps you should stay on the ship. Just this once.” His eyes are wide, and if Thor dares say it, worried.

“Loki, I am fine,” says Thor. He finishes looping the straps of his vambraces in place, before closing the short distance between them. Slips his palm around the nape of Loki’s neck, cupping it, warm and reassuring.

“You are not fine, you have just taken a chair to the head,” Loki reminds him. “Short moments ago, you could not even stand by yourself without falling down.”

“I am standing now,” Thor says, stubborn. “And walking. And talking. All without difficulty.”

Loki scowls, for he is the first to recognize Thor’s stubbornness, having lived through years of it. When Thor shrugs, undaunted, Loki shifts closer, laying his hands on Thor’s chest, grudging. “If you insist on fighting,” Loki murmurs, his forehead pressing against Thor’s, warm, “then stay close to me.”

“That I can do,” Thor nods solemnly, pressing a quick kiss to Loki’s brow.

They rejoin Valkyrie and Hulk at the bridge, along with other Sakaaran warriors that Korg and Miek lead; together, they form the vanguard that will explore their surroundings and decide what action to take with the Slayers gathered. Heimdall himself stands guard on the gangway, which they intend to extend only partway, to prevent hostile forces from leaping aboard.

Xylion, Thor decides, as Heimdall lowers the gangway, is an arid wasteland not unlike Muspelheim, the heat overwhelming him, instant, like a wave of solid force. It is the only thought he has time for before Korg hops off the gangway, raising his arm in a congenial salute toward the gathered Slayers. Each of them growl and undulate in place, their spines ridged with spikes, their teeth razor-sharp, and all of them armed with wicked, curved blades.

“Hello, good day,” Korg beams, “allow me to introduce myself—” He does not get so far as my name is Korg, before one of the Slayers darts forward, striking lightning-quick, its blade jabbed sharp into Korg’s shoulder. “Hey, hey, hey,” Korg admonishes, as irritated as Thor has ever seen him, “that’s perishable rock, it is!”

Valkyrie casts her eyes skyward and leaps off the gangway after Korg, decapitating the Slayer that injured Korg with one mighty, arcing swing of Dragonfang.

“I suppose that concludes negotiations,” Loki says dryly, as he follows Thor off the gangway.

In short moments, the rest of the Slayers surge forward, their blades sharp and cruel as they swarm toward Thor and his vanguard, the nine of them wildly outnumbered. Loki, armed with Gungnir—for he wields it more skilfully than Thor, too used to fighting with Mjölnir—casts a shield around them, quick, before the Slayers can close in. And Thor had not seen it until now, as the last time Loki had used Gungnir truly had been against him, but with it Loki does not weave tricks or illusions—there is no time for them now—only the darkest and most brutal of offensive spells, ones that won Odin power over other realms long ago.

He strikes Gungnir into the ground, summoning a deluge of fireballs from the sky, each of them
crushing Slayers where they fall, leaving a massive, smoking crater. Melting flesh and drawing screams as they plummet into parched earth.

Valkyrie’s sword flashes through the air, again and again, cutting down outliers that were not felled by fire, and Hulk pounds his fists into other errant Slayers that seek to sneak through the shield and do Loki harm.

Thor himself tosses out flashes of lightning from his hands, shocking those that are farther away, and seizing those that venture too close, flinging them away or pummelling them into the ground, as he would with the chained whips he had trained with on occasion. And once, when a Slayer raises a blade to strike *Loki*, Thor bends all his being into forming something akin to a sword with the lightning, blocking the hit and striking the Slayer a deep and scorching wound across its chest.

It is—it is far too easy, Thor thinks, revelling in this new power, that he has not had occasion to use in full force since their battle with Hela. Before long, the gathered Slayers litter the field surrounding the Statesman. “That was not as bad as I thought it would be,” says Thor. They would make quick work of finding the supposed slaves, and negotiate with them for fuel and repairs, and be off this planet soon enough.

“That is—” Loki says, his breath heaving as he leans heavy against Gungnir, worryingly so, “—not the last of them.”

Another horde crests the nearby hill, seeming to swarm out of the land itself and the broken columns of this landscape, their forms darting out of dark shadows along the ground. Creeping, crawling, until their vanguard is met with another slithering swarm of the Slayers.

“Loki, wait here,” says Thor. He claps a hand to Loki’s shoulder, for his brother seems to need reprieve from his strenuous spellcasting. “I have this in hand.” Distantly he hears Loki call *Thor*, wait, let me cast a… But Loki’s words are lost to him as he rushes ahead into the throng.

He laughs, delighted, at how easily he overpowers them, tossing and flinging them as rag dolls. Striking at those who dare to venture close with enormous bursts of lightning that leave them singed and convulsing on the ground. His practice over the control of his power back in the caves of Alfheim-Beta has done him well, and he forces his way through the throng, relishing the opportunity to use the power inherent to him.

Too late does Thor remember that raw power does not make up for the blind spot he has, one obvious and glaring he has not yet had time to adapt to in battle.

Of all things, it is not a blade that proves his undoing, or a spear, as this new swarm favours, but a *rock*, heavy, arcing from his blind side and slamming into his right temple. Sets his head ringing, sparking an explosion of pain, residual from his earlier knock against the ship’s chair.

Thor stumbles forward, dazed, and though he continues to lash out with lightning, his blows are badly aimed, his gait clumsy. The Slayers, sensing weakness, surge against him then, their weapons a mass of dangerous pinpricks against skin before Thor throws up a desperate blast of power, flinging them away. Picks his way back across the battlefield, for he knows he needs to regroup, needs to find *Loki*, as the others are too far and he will not reach them in time—when he suffers another blow, unexpected, from his blind side again, sending him stumbling.

“Thor!” Loki calls, though his voice sounds so very distant.

Thor turns in the direction of his voice, relief blooming wild in his chest, when a Slayer drives its blade through Thor’s shoulder. Another plunges its spear through Thor’s back from behind, brutal
and rough, and a third sinks its sword into Thor’s chest, a three-pronged attack that Thor had not seen, had not—

“Thor!” Loki cries this time, and Thor nearly trembles at the sound, for he has never heard such fury and terror both in Loki’s voice before.

The Slayers reclaim their weapons the next moment, causing another massive burst of near-blinding pain, as Thor slides to the ground, helpless. One Slayer raises its sword, to strike the final blow, but then Loki is there, or his innate magic is, spears of ice surging deep from the ground, skewering the three Slayers, instant.

Magic that Loki rarely uses, that Thor knows he feels ashamed of revealing, until the hour of utmost need.

“Thor,” Loki says, voice breaking like frailest glass, a sound that rends Thor’s own heart to hear it. He kneels at Thor’s side and cradles Thor’s shoulders, in the lull he created when he arrived. “You—you fool, you didn’t listen. I told you to stay close to me.” A warm strand of Loki’s seiðr threads through Thor’s chest, an attempt to knit tissue, to heal the worst of the damage, though with the way his life’s blood ebbs away, Thor can tell it is far too late.

“I know,” Thor coughs. At the sight of Loki’s eyes widening, frightened, he knows there must be blood welling to his lips, the same that fills his chest with each breath he draws. “I was a fool.” It occurs to him now that their words too eerily mirror their exchange on Svartalfheim, and Thor’s deepest regret is that he will put Loki through the same pain he had felt. “I—I am sorry,” he gasps. An apology for not taking Loki’s counsel. For the same grief Loki will suffer.

Loki hushes him, gentle, and drives another thread of seiðr into him, more forcefully this time. Glances over his shoulder at the oncoming horde, whose thunderous footsteps they can both sense along the ground. There are too many, too many, and they no longer have the advantage of a quick Bifrost escape.

Thor pushes weakly at Loki’s hand, to make him stop this farce, an order to leave, if he could just draw breath enough, but Loki only hisses be still, his brow furrowed, sweat beading at his temple from the immense focus he turns on Thor.

Loki looks far too worried, too sad, too something, and Thor would—Thor would see him smile again before he passes. He cannot recall anything at this moment that would draw a smile from Loki, instant, a fact Thor wishes he had time left to remedy.

Oh, but there is one thing.

“Get help,” Thor rasps, raising a hand to cup Loki’s cheek. An opportunity at last to reverse their age-old ploy for escaping from enemies. Get help, my brother is dying.

The words are not ideal, as Loki’s method seems to be not to bother with words, or cry for help, but to cut enemies down by the dozen and force his way through to reach Thor, much as Mjölnir always had. Still, blood bubbles to Thor’s lips as he struggles for a laugh, hoping Loki sees his meaning. Perhaps things are given a new perspective when you are dying, he thinks.

Then he remembers he should have saved his last breath for words of love, and not for something as frivolous as get help. That Loki would know he was loved, and cherished, even if their time together was cut short, which might have better drawn a smile from him. Hindsight was twenty-twenty, though perhaps Thor could claim he had only half that, as he was missing an eye.
“Fool,” Loki snarls. His expression is positively murderous. “I am the help. And you are not dying.”

The next swarm, seeming to spawn from the barren hills themselves is nearly upon them, and Loki angles himself in front of Thor, instant. Turns the blades that spring from his hands upon those closest, dispatching them with cold efficiency, before flinging throwing knives to throats upon those farther, each finding their mark. And when he has cleared the immediate area, Gungnir materializes in Loki’s hand, and he taps it on the ground, gentle.

Thor watches, stunned, as a dome—a shield—appears around them, this one a perfect miniature of the one that had shielded Asgard in times of peril. But the golden threads of Gungnir’s seiðr innate are twined with red and green, the glowing strands twisting and turning to form a protective mesh within the golden plates themselves.

If Thor were a poet, he might say it was a manifestation of Loki’s love for him, that his seiðr had taken on such a color, even while wielding Gungnir. But in the next instant, Gungnir is gone, replaced by—is that the Casket of Ancient Winters? —and the rest of the swarm is upon them, leaving Thor no time to wonder at the maudlin nature of Loki’s seiðr, or the reappearance of one of Odin’s greatest treasures.

From within the dome, Thor feels nothing but protected and safe, though he cannot say the same for those caught on the outside; Loki stands at the edge of the dome, the Casket gripped tight in both hands as he turns the full might of its winter fury upon them, freezing those closest in place, slowing those in the distance. He allows more to crest the hill, their cries frenzied, their footfalls a barbaric drum beat upon the land as they raise their spears—and turns another blast of the Casket upon them as well, then another, until no more of the savage creatures appear.

Then Gungnir returns to Loki’s hand, gleaming, golden in the hazy light, and he slams the base of the spear into the ground, the earth before him shaking with a deafening rumble, before rupturing, deep, a great chasm devouring the land and swallowing the enemy in its maw. Shattering those it does not where they stand, leaving them no more than broken shards.

A blissful silence follows, before Loki is hefting Thor into his arms again, his hand gentle upon Thor’s brow.

Save your strength, Thor means to say, as threads of warm, golden seiðr seep into his body through Loki’s fingers, where his wounds run the deepest. Save yourself. Loki has used far too much magic, too quickly, and his profligate use of both the Casket and Gungnir have more than likely drained him. He would have Loki escape this place, if he could. Loki would find another planet, another place to call home, even if it was without—

“Thor,” Loki whispers, urgent, his voice the only comfort in this moment. And as Thor closes his eye to remember the timbre of it, the lovely cadence of Loki’s voice, Loki grips his shoulder, where one of the blades had gone through, purposeful. Pain lances through Thor, shocking and immediate. “You must hold on.”

Of course I shall, Thor thinks, as Loki raises Thor’s fingers to his lips. Brushes a kiss to them, so soft and small and hopeful, that Thor wishes he had the strength to cup Loki’s cheek, to reassure him that he will try—but he does not have the strength, cannot.

“You must hold on,” Loki urges again, as another surge of his healing magic courses into Thor, desperate. “Please, Thor. For me.”

And oh, for Loki, Thor would travel to the cruellest depths of Helheim and back, would set aflame the very roots of Yggdrasil, but his body, flesh and bone that it is, rebels against it. The last thing he
knows is Loki’s voice, lovely and soft, Loki’s eyes, faded back to a tear-filled green, and Loki’s touch, unbearably gentle, before darkness takes him, swift and sudden and unforgiving.

Chapter End Notes

1) The concept of the Slayers is based on the unused designs of Hela’s own army (originally named her ‘Butchers’) before they were turned into an army of draugar for the movie *Thor: Ragnarok*. Their design can be found [here](#).  

2) Valkyrie’s beheading of a Slayer and Loki’s subsequent quip of “I suppose that concludes negotiations” is borrowed from a scene in *Lord of the Rings: Return of the King*, when, after the character Aragorn beheads an evil creature that intends to negotiate with them, Gimli makes the same dry observation.
Reassemble

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

~

Thor regains wakefulness one moment at a time.

First, the familiar, stippled ceiling of his room upon the Statesman floats into view. Then there is the sensation of familiar hands, gentle, dabbing at his wounds with a warm towel.

“Loki?” Thor rasps, blinking.

“I am here, brother,” says Loki, his voice as gentle as the hands upon him. One such hand threads itself through Thor’s fingers. “I am here. There is nothing to fear.” He does not giggle and run away as those girls who saw to Thor’s wounds on Sakaar had; only watches Thor, his expression unreadable. Brushes a wisp of hair from Thor’s brow.

“Loki,” Thor sighs, every kind of relieved, as he squeezes their joined hands. A closer look shows Loki sitting at his side with a basin and bandages. Loki’s hand is shaking, and only then does Thor notice that there is too much red in the basin’s water. He brings Loki’s fingers to his lips, brushing a kiss across knuckles, reassuring. “How did we—” Thor tries, attempting to sit up, before a low ache tears through his chest, and he sinks back down with a groan. “The fuel, Loki? The ship?”

Loki raises a brow, as if this is not the conversation they should first be having after Thor has woken. But he relents when Thor squeezes his fingers, insistent. Urges a small vial of golden liquid into Thor’s mouth, for the pain. “After we fought off the Slayers that came after us, the charges under their yoke brought us the fuel we needed, and fixed the faulty engine.” His hand slides out of Thor’s to point toward the window, where Thor can see the stars again, instead of the planet they had landed on, arid and barren.

So they were spaceworthy again, Thor thinks, with another sigh of relief. Their people had yet another chance to live.

With this in thought in mind, he reaches out for Loki’s fingers again, and once in possession of them, presses them to his forehead. His lips. Takes pleasure in the sensation of Loki’s palm against his cheek, simply revelling in the fact that they had not met their end so far from their would-be home.

But there is a price for drawing comfort from Loki, it seems, and Thor braces himself for the reprimand sure to come.

“You said,” Loki snipes, even if he lets Thor keep his hand this time, “that you thought we would fight side by side forever. And here I find evidence of you doing the very opposite.” When Thor only blinks, Loki sighs. “I speak of how you rushed ahead into the throng of Slayers by yourself. Even with your newfound powers, you are not invincible.”

It was true; the reminder of his mortality had been a bitter pill to swallow. And though he made it out of the ordeal alive, Thor had always thought that if he were to die, it would be for something meaningful—a just cause, or protecting Loki—and not because he was delighting in his new power like an overconfident fool. While his initial intent had been to protect Loki, to lessen his burden against the enemy, Thor had turned from that purpose soon enough, making Loki’s sharp words well-deserved.
“I am sorry,” says Thor, turning his cheek further into Loki’s palm. “I overestimated myself.”

“I should have expected such a thing,” Loki snorts. “Perhaps instead of the thunderer, they should call you the blunderer. Blindly charging into situations you cannot—”

“Thank you,” Thor says quickly, before the idea of him being called blunderer can take root too firmly in Loki’s mind, “for saving me.”

“I saved Asgard’s king,” Loki says flatly. “As is my duty.”

“Mmmh,” Thor murmurs. “Your sense of duty is much to be admired, then. As Asgard’s other king.” Even now, Thor knows he cannot pass up an opportunity to stroke Loki’s ego. He reaches for the fingers of Loki’s other hand and curls his own around them, tight.

“I suppose,” Loki says grudgingly, “that I may have made a move to save my brother as well. And my lover. And my—” He glances toward the hand Thor first kept captive, to soothe warm circles into, where his ring sits. It is one of two silver bands Thor had insisted on having crafted for them, a pattern of Asgardian knots twined within to show their love, faith and loyalty to one another. “My husband.”

“It would be inconvenient for you to mourn the loss of all those people,” says Thor, smiling, lazy. Rolls into Loki’s palm, all heat and warmth and affection. Whatever Loki has given him for the pain, it is slow, but works wonders.

“Despite them being all one and the same?” says Loki. “The one and same fool who would not wait for his comrades and charged ahead by himself? What next?” Loki adds, scathing. “Perhaps you wish to lose your remaining eye next time? Or some entrails? The next time you volunteer to become a skewered feast hog, I will leave you there.”

It is a testament to Loki’s anger and worry, that his words pierce sharper than the blades that had wounded Thor.

Thor tries to look properly chastised, skimming a kiss over the back of Loki’s fingers in apology. “I am a fool,” Thor admits, “for having worried you. And for that, I am truly sorry.” His kisses inch from Loki’s fingers to the back of his wrist. To his elbow. Creep up his arm until Thor can slowly sit up enough to press lips to his shoulder. “But this fool is deeply appreciative of you saving him. Perhaps you would allow a demonstration of such appreciation?”

“Perhaps when you are recovered,” Loki says, jabbing Thor in the side, earning him a hiss of pain. “But,” he adds, relenting, tracing a vein along Thor’s arm, where skin is yet unbroken and unmarred by bruises, “I would not be opposed to a light dress rehearsal.”

Light, thinks Thor, means small, safe kisses, and if Loki is amenable, perhaps a cuddle after. “That I can do,” he smiles, tugging Loki down to the bed as soon as Loki has finished dressing his wounds. Lets his brother nestle against him, careful, like a newborn kitten, mindful of Thor’s injuries.

They while away hours like this, in the false-night of space, sharing soft, quiet kisses. Tiny brushes of lips, against cheeks and mouth and jaw. Delicate and feather-light against eyelids and brow. Thor tastes salt at the corner of Loki’s eyes, trails of it dry upon his cheeks, and only winds his arms around his brother tighter, for the thought that Loki had wept for him rends his heart anew.

Their kisses shift eventually into safe, affectionate touches, of fingers stroking gentle along skin. Every brush of Loki’s fingers, along Thor’s cheek, the bruised edges of his wounds, and the breadth of his chest is so tender and achingly sweet Thor could whimper, for though Loki’s words were
sharp, there is nothing but love in his caresses, each of them saying I am glad you are well, you are safe, you are here.

Thor reciprocates this affection, so raw and honest, with caresses of his own.

I am well, he kisses into Loki’s hair.

I am safe, I am here, he says, cupping the nape of Loki’s neck in his palm. Brings their foreheads together, his own a heated brand against Loki’s, proof of his life.

And it is all because of you, he assures finally, twining both his hands with Loki’s, two enduring tethers of the bond between them.

“Promise me,” Loki whispers, first to break the silence. His fingers, threaded tightly through Thor’s, tremble, and Thor leans in to brush a kiss over them, comforting. “That you will never again rush into battle like that, foolhardy and blind. Promise me,” he hisses, wresting from Thor a vow, when Thor hesitates to speak.

“I promise,” breathes Thor. Resists the tiny smile that threatens to break free of its cage. “Though I know not what I can do about rushing in blindly, since I am missing an eye, after all.”

“You—” Loki scowls, before flinging Thor’s hands from him in disgust. “I try to caution you against such foolishness—and you, you make light of this matter—”

Thor reels Loki in before he can rise from the bed and storm off. Kisses his apologies into Loki’s hair and cheeks, soothing his temper. “Perhaps,” Thor ventures, hopeful, “you could…?” He touches his eyepatch to Loki’s knuckles where he has tangled their fingers together again, his meaning clear. “Then there would be no more of this rushing into battle blindly.”

“I cannot reconstruct an entire eye, Thor,” Loki says, disapproving. “If I could, do you not think I would have done this for Odin, in order to gain his favour?”

Thor ignores the jibe, and continues playing with Loki’s fingers, stroking them, gentle, with his thumbs. Tracing each hill and valley of Loki’s knuckles with the pad of his thumb, careful. “If anyone could do it,” says Thor, “it would be you.” His belief in Loki’s ability burns bright in his chest, and a measure of it must be conveyed through their bond, for Loki draws a sharp breath—surprise at this utter conviction.

Loki remains silent for the span of three breaths, four, and when the silence stretches on, Thor simply keeps petting Loki’s fingers, light. Touching a kiss to each knuckle. He does this as long as Loki will let him, for there are times when he simply pushes Thor away, irritated, his mood capricious. Loki will let him know if it is too much.

“I shall look into it,” Loki says finally, with a sigh. “There are books on healing magic I can consult. And after we arrive in Midgard, I will speak with Stark.” When Thor mouths Tony? his brow crinkled in puzzlement, Loki continues, “Under another’s guise, I spoke with him regarding your feats when you were away from Asgard. Chief among them was that you brought a life into being.”

He arches a brow, disapproving, and loosens a hand to pinch Thor in the arm.

“I—that was with Mjölnir!” Thor sputters, his indignance winning out over his ire at the thought that Loki used his secret paths to spy on Midgard on occasion. He would not have Loki thinking that his time away from Asgard was spent sowing wild oats and fathering children out of wedlock.

“The matter still stands,” Loki sniffs. “Mjölnir’s magic and Stark’s technology brought you the being known as Vision. Perhaps with my seiðr and his technology, we could create vision of a different...
Thor turns the idea over in his mind, of an eye powered by both entities—perhaps a bionic eye. That is well within the realm of possibility indeed, and he pulls Loki close, elated at such a hope. Perhaps even more than mere hope, for when all of Loki’s being is bent toward one purpose, there is nothing he cannot accomplish. Not for the first time, Thor is more than happy to have Loki on his side in this.

When next Thor speaks, however, he cannot hide his amusement. “Did you just make a jest about eyes and vision?”

And when Loki huffs his annoyance, rolling away from Thor’s embrace, Thor simply follows the motion. Rolls with him and traps him in another embrace, one Loki allows, albeit grudgingly.

“An eye, then,” says Loki, decisive. And after a moment’s thought, “A hammer as well.”

“A hammer?” Thor breathes, his heart leaping into his throat, hardly daring to hope. He keeps silent the thought that Loki had teased him for long years, saying that Mjölnir had been a crutch, one he relied on far too often. And he has missed being able to fly, to feel the wind rush cool upon his face and card invisible fingers through his hair, teasing.

“Yes,” Loki declares, determined now. “When there is time for it, I shall have Mjölnir remade.” He pauses, his head tilted, considering, the expression so endearing that Thor cannot help but nuzzle in for a kiss, more than delighted that he has caught Loki off-guard. Bites back the smile that forms when Loki wrinkles his nose at the motion. “They shall be…my wedding gifts to you.”

“Wedding gifts?” Thor had not even considered such things, for his part, and perhaps had unintentionally held the selfish notion that wedding Loki would be gift enough. “But I have not given you—”

Loki makes a simple flourish with his hand toward their shelves, as if to showcase the myriad gifts and souvenirs and spell ingredients Thor procured for Loki, over the months previous. They range from the common—shining tail feathers from the carnivorous winged horses of Oblon and tiny salt grains from the Erotean Seas—to the immensely rare, like shavings of the horns of Arborenath’s silver stags. Some had even come at great risk to his own life, like a tiny jar of bellflowers that had to be harvested from a windy Liliwan cliffside beneath the full moon. Each such item forms a part of the vast collection of Thor’s courting gifts to him, and this is to say nothing of the cabinetry Thor commissioned for Loki, with miniature drawers, one for each herb and root collected from their stops.

Thor finds himself wordless now at this reminder, for he knows Loki hates to be indebted, and that he does not do things in halves. No, of course Loki would return such small gestures, built up over time, with grand and sweeping ones.

“Loki,” he manages, his voice tight, as he brushes his thumb along Loki’s cheek. Savouring the softness of Loki’s skin. He had nearly lost this tenderness, lost his brother to the dwarves that made Mjölnir, who would have had Loki’s head for it. The prize for the bet Loki had made with them, that they could never craft anything more beautiful than Gungnrir itself. “There is no need to—”

“I will have it remade,” Loki whispers, his hands finding their way to Thor’s cheeks in return, cupping them as if Thor is something precious and rare. “As much as your power has grown…” He pauses, lips thinned, as if it rankles him still to admit such a thing, growth leaps and bounds beyond Loki’s own. “…It would not do to have you punching things with your bare hands, or scavenging for weapons on the battlefield. All of which leave you vulnerable. And do not think,” Loki adds, his eyes narrowed when Thor opens his mouth to speak, “that I have not seen what happens to the sort.”
Thor ducks his head with a small measure of shame. There is nothing he can hide from Loki, least of all the fact that the Statesman’s weapons have a tendency to shatter if Thor is even the slightest bit remiss in the amount of lightning he imbues them with. And Loki speaks true—there is weakness in Thor’s offence when he uses his fists in place of a weapon, or is forced to scrounge for a weapon from the fallen.

“Thank you,” says Thor, touching a wisp of another kiss to Loki’s nose. “For thinking of me.”

It seems Loki’s thoughtfulness is not yet ended, for after another quiet moment, Loki breathes another promise, light, soft, but no less sincere. “I will put protective runes on it. Every spell you can think of to aid you in battle, to give you strength, to lessen the damage you take, I will—”

“Loki,” Thor admonishes, “Mjölnir had protective runes. And our sister still shattered it like the finest glass.”

“Like us?” Thor muses, stroking Loki’s hair, the silken texture of it soft against his fingers. Perhaps the words strike too close to home, as Loki falls silent once more.

“Like us,” Loki says finally, tracing a line of corded muscle in Thor’s arm, thoughtful, before deciding to cuddle into Thor instead. “Remade. Better.”

Thor decides that when they have time for it, when their people are settled on Midgard, he will accompany his brother for this deed to remake his hammer, for he will not let Loki set forth on such a dangerous venture on his own. But he keeps these thoughts silent as well for now. Only winds the arms he has slipped around Loki’s waist more snugly, and presses a kiss to Loki’s hair.


But in his heart of hearts, he knows the first Mjölnir in his life—Loki, who would stop at nothing and no one to fight his way to Thor when sensing he was in peril, and always found a way to return to Thor—is right here.

~

Thor recovers in record time, helped along by a bubbling potion Loki prepares for him, a sweet and golden concoction that seals his wounds and leaves barely a scar behind. It is the worst time, their being so close to their destination, for one of their kings to look vulnerable, and for Loki’s assistance in his healing, Thor is grateful.

Their voyage continues without any major misfortunes, thankfully, and it is no more than a week later when Loki announces that they are soon to enter Midgard’s atmosphere.

“Sorry, I have to do what?” Bruce says, when Thor makes his request, in advance of their landing.

“My brother asks that you establish a connection with one of your contacts on Earth,” Loki says dryly. “Or as you might say, he wishes for you to ‘call ahead’.”

Bruce rakes his hands through his hair. “Right, yeah, I know what he’s asking. I just don’t see how.”

Thor waves a hand vaguely. “Perhaps you can use one of your seven Ph.D’s,” he says, before
resting his palm on Bruce’s shoulder and squeezing. “I have every confidence in you.” He grins then, using the words of Tony, the one Bruce has been tasked to call, as encouragement. “Make it happen.”

“But none of my Ph.D’s are in extraterrestrial communications systems!” Bruce calls after them, incredulous, as Loki leads Thor away from the ship’s bridge. Loki is convinced that Bruce will find a way to do what is requested of him, given time and silence enough for concentration.

True to Loki’s prediction, Bruce bursts into the shuttle bay where they are, not half an hour after.

“O-kay,” he says, doing an about-turn after having burst in on Thor’s tongue down Loki’s throat in a compromising manner, and speaking to the door instead. “I’ve jury-rigged a connection based on the radio waves the ship uses, alternating it so that it works on the same frequency as the—”

Thor clears his throat as Loki sets their clothes to rights with a quick, wordless spell. “You have made a connection?” he asks, not needing to know the particulars.

Bruce pauses, huffing out a breath, perhaps exasperation at his intellect going unrecognized. “Yes,” he says finally. “It’s unstable, and finicky, but we should be able to talk to Tony through the ship’s communications system. I’ve given him some of the basic information, including what on earth we’re doing up here, but you should fill him in on the details.”

“Thank you,” Thor says warmly, setting a hand on Bruce’s shoulder. “I knew my confidence in you was not misplaced.” Then he remembers where his hands have been and quickly withdraws his touch, a motion that does not go unnoticed by Bruce. To his credit, Bruce does not comment on this; only thins his lips into a line and turns to go.

The three of them make their way out to the bridge of the ship, Bruce giving them a wide berth, staying at least ten paces ahead, lest Thor or Loki try to thank him—or touch him—again. Thor takes advantage of this wary distance to wind a hand around Loki’s waist, and press a kiss to his cheek as recompense for the interruption. Another to the corner of his mouth, before Loki swats him away, irritated, and mouths focus on the task at hand.

“Thor!” Tony calls out from the ship’s onboard screen, when they arrive. Loki had pulled away earlier, leaving only Thor in view to field this call through the static-ridden connection. “I haven’t seen you in—what is it now, three years?”

“Has it really been that long?” Thor asks, wonderingly.

“Yeah, it has,” Tony says, “and the last time I saw you, you skipped off to parts unknown to search for some funky space stones. No one’s heard from you since. Want to tell me the whole story of why you’re hovering like a creeper above Earth now? With, oh, the entirety of your people crammed onto one ship?”

Thor quickly outlines the events leading to the destruction of Asgard, the purpose of their presence here now, and what they intend to do next.

“That’s…wow. Sorry about your planet,” Tony says, when Thor has finished speaking. “And your dad. And your hammer.” He pauses to swipe at a screen aside from the tablet he’s speaking into. “All right, pity party’s over—I’m going to need coordinates for that place Odin said to settle down on, and numbers on how many people you’ve got.” Tony nods as Bruce sends him the information via the ship’s keyed interface. “Got it,” he says as he pulls up the numbers on his own screen. “I think you should be good to land, but—”
“But?” Thor says immediately, wondering what other hardship they must weather now, when they are so close.

“But I’m not sure the world is ready for an actual District Nine,” says Tony, “so you better come in quickly and quietly. Invisibly too, if you can manage it. They might stall you if you’re in the air but once you’ve landed, they can’t do a damned thing.”

“District Nine?” Thor echoes, confused, before Loki jabs him in the ribs to get on with it, and not waste time trying to understand Tony’s pop-culture references. “We…” Thor swallows the have just figured out how to and charges on with, “…will activate the ship’s cloaking mechanism.”

“Great, that should keep you off S.H.I.E.L.D’s radar for a while. Anything else I should know, before you guys land?”

Thor does not deign to share that they have plans to build an underground chamber for the ships, keeping them for any trips that must be made to procure resources off-planet. Nor does he mention that Loki has already hand-picked seiðr-masters from their remaining population to ready incantations for a barrier of invisibility on-site, to make the settlement undetectable to most, until fully finished. Set aside seiðr-novices under his instruction to lay a special enchantment, such that one must be invited in, permission explicitly given, to enter the settlement, or would otherwise find themselves retracing their paths repeatedly, unable to find it.

Loki has always played his cards close to his chest, and when dealing with a ship filled with all that is left of Asgard, Thor has learned to take a page from Loki’s book as well. Especially when Midgard’s own S.H.I.E.L.D organization has a tendency to prod, poke, and disassemble anything from Asgard for weapon research and development, the Tesseract being proof enough of that.

He does share that they have taken a census of every Asgardian citizen and Sakaaran refugee on the ship, to facilitate any processing or documentation that may happen once they land.

“Wow, okay,” says Tony, “that’s…actually not a bad idea. It’ll definitely speed things up.”

Thor smiles over the unstable connection Bruce has established for them. “The idea was Loki’s,” he says, and he hardly has to try to let fondness color his words, as he sneaks a glance in Loki’s direction.

Loki, for his part, casts his eyes skyward, impatience at this conversation’s inefficiency, but a tinge of pink colors his cheeks, one Thor makes note of to press kisses to later. As soon as this conversation is finished.

“Loki?” Tony says, his smile uncertain, and no longer quite as bright as Thor’s. “You mean your brother’s alive?”

Loki, who had been standing off to the side, considers it his cue for revelation, and crowds into the screen beside Thor. “Hello, Stark,” Loki grins, wolfish, sharp.

Tony squawks and drops his tablet. “Jesus,” Tony swears. There is shuffling and scrambling, a few static crackles and pops, then the sound of the tablet scraping along a floor before Tony manages to right it in his hands again. “Is that a thing?” he demands, when their connection is re-established, pointing out of the screen in Loki’s direction. “Like, you Asguardians just come back from death, just like that? Or did you have to charm some Lord of the Underworld with songs about undying love and sacrifice, to let you bring Loki back?”

Loki remains patently unhelpful, choosing instead to let Tony make his own assumptions, and only
grins instead, amused. When Thor throws him an exasperated look, Loki deigns to mention, “Of the two of us, Thor has never been the one gifted with melody and song.”

“It…was a difficult time for us,” Thor offers vaguely, and to his ears, clumsily. “But Loki helped save us all,” he adds, hoping Tony will not ask for details. He does not know how well Tony will accept the news that Loki did not actually perish from his wounds, and went on to take a partial role in Asgard’s destruction—though if forced to admit it, Thor will claim his own share of blame in bringing about Ragnarok as well.

“No kidding?” says Tony, seeming to have recovered from his initial fright. “Loki helped you, huh? How about that.” He raises a brow, disbelieving, but then someone calls him off-screen and Thor hears him shout, “On my way!” before glancing at his watch, quick. “Okay, so listen, I’m going to be tied up in meetings all day today, but I’ll be by tomorrow to help out. We’ll talk then. In the meantime, I’m sending you a little manpower. Woman-power. Whatever. Stuff needed to get you off the ground. Or on it, rather.” He grins, amused at his own little joke.

Loki narrows his eyes, suspicious. “Woman-power?” The connection to Tony’s tablet chooses to be lost at that exact moment, however, and Loki tilts his head at Thor, questioning.

Thor can only shrug, as lost as Loki is. “Perhaps he means to send the Lady Pepper?”

Tony does not send the Lady Pepper.

In fact, Thor suspects that the person he sends is meant as a playful retaliation of sorts, for the scare Tony received at Loki’s hands during their conversation.

Not long after they have landed the Sakaaran ship safely, Stark planes start arriving, each unloading crates upon crates of supplies. After obtaining Thor and Loki’s permission, booths are set up quickly and efficiently, for family registries, land plot distribution, and the allocation of basic care packages, for provisions like food and clothing.

“That,” Loki says, eyeing the proceedings taking place on the once-empty field, “is half our work as kings done for us already.” He sounds admittedly impressed by Stark’s efficiency, a relief for Thor. Loki cranes his head toward the planes then, looking to see who else disembarks. “I see no woman here,” he says offhandedly.

No sooner has he spoken than a familiar face descends the plane, eyeing the now-filling field, curious.

“Sif!” Thor calls. He keeps a gentle grip on Loki’s wrist, lest he disappear into an illusion, to avoid Thor’s friends. Waves with his other hand, emphatic. “Sif!”

Upon hearing her name, Sif turns, searching for the source, and when she sees Thor, she nearly flies off the gangway, leaping over the handrail and sailing into Thor’s arms. “Where have you been?” she asks, her smile radiant. “I have heard neither from you, nor—”

At that moment she spies Loki, who stands a step behind Thor, to the side. A spell clearly in place to make himself inconspicuous as possible, sending a pang of hurt through Thor’s heart, at the thought that Loki decided he must hide.

“You,” Sif snarls, sudden, her hand flying to her sword, the draw of it stayed only by Thor’s presence. “You are alive? We thought you dead.”
Thor swallows then, his heart aching all the deeper for Loki, for Sif cannot bring herself to say that either she or others they had known had mourned for him. By then, it was possible that only Thor mourned the loss of him. He shifts his hand to the small of Loki’s back, the motion small and subtle and reassuring, heartened when Loki glances back, grateful, for he had noticed the absence of such words as well.

“Well,” Loki says finally. He seems at a loss for words at Sif’s unexpected appearance, his gaze resting careful on her hand at her sword hilt. “Surprise?”

“There were extraordinary circumstances,” Thor offers, before Loki can elaborate on how he came to be here, for he suspects it likely to sting, knowing Loki’s tendency to strike a wound for a wound. He also knows Sif’s temper is legendary, and Thor would very much prefer to keep his brother-husband alive. “How have you fared, in the meantime?”

Sif stands straight, her hand thankfully sliding off her sword, making Thor breathe out a relieved sigh, for he had not brought Loki across the universe only to be struck down here. “I have been on Midgard all this time,” she says. “Looking into the Pym Particle discs at the Allfather’s behest.”

Thor catches the tiny curl of a smile at Loki’s lips then. For Sif had been milling about on Midgard at Loki’s behest, but better she be here than felled by Hela back on Asgard, needless. He makes a note of asking Loki later about these discs he wanted investigated, but for now, he is content to hear of Sif’s adventures in the time they have been apart.

“Upon sending my findings to the Allfather,” Sif adds, “I have since been helping out several of my contacts—agents, at S.H.I.E.L.D.” She frowns, then. “I called for the Bifrost numerous times, but Heimdall did not answer.”

“Because he could not,” says Thor, shaking his head. “Asgard is lost to us.”

“What do you mean?” Sif furrows her brow, confused. “Is the Bifrost—”

“No,” Thor sighs. If only it were as simple as the Bifrost being shattered again. “Asgard itself is lost.”

Sif’s hand flies to her sword and draws it this time, her eyes narrowed at Loki. “You,” she all but snarls, horror layered beneath her bluster, “what have you done?”

Thor, who had flung an arm in front of Loki, immediate, protective, stopping Sif’s blade just short of Loki’s throat, deflects it with a roll of his shoulder. “I shall speak of the details later, but Loki has no part in this.”

From within his arms, Loki stiffens at Thor’s choice of words—for he has had a hand in this, for good or ill—but there will be time to explain later, when Sif’s hand is not on her sword hilt, with murder in her eyes.

“Loki was…instrumental in saving our people,” Thor amends, a balm to soothe Loki’s ego. “He is blameless in this.”

To say so is the furthest stretch of the truth Thor has ever made; Loki had, of course, hastened Ragnarok by stripping Odin of his seiðr and exiling him to Midgard, but even he had not known of a sister, the very embodiment of death, waiting in the wings with the ambition to conquer all the realms. Only Thor knows the extent of Loki’s treachery now, and he would not have Loki continue to bear this burden, letting it seep into the well of his future, poisoning what connections he might yet make.
Sif hesitates for long moments, before finally sheathing her sword. Thor can hear Loki’s soft breath of relief as she does so, though he does not doubt Loki had an illusion ready in case things went ill.

“Asgard is truly lost, then?” she asks. “What of our friends? Volstagg? Fandral? Hogun?”

“They were the first to fall,” Thor says, from what he has pieced together of the survivors’ accounts. And the most bitterly mourned, Thor thinks, when he remembers the days at the start of their voyage they had all spent accounting for and mourning their dead.

Sif sinks to her knees then, a sob tearing through her, ugly, ungainly, the sound of her heart rent in two, from friends she will never see again, a home she can never return to.

Thor knows the feeling well enough, but hopes that in time, Sif will find a way to make her home here on Midgard. That she will find one to make her home here with, as Thor will, with Loki. For now, he joins her on the ground, grass brushing gentle at their knees as he wraps his arms around her for comfort. Beckons Loki to join them, for he would not have Loki misunderstand the gesture, folding him into their clumsy embrace when Loki relents.

“You—” Sif starts, glaring as she struggles out of Loki’s grip. But Thor reels him back in, for Loki comes part and parcel with Thor now, and he would have Sif know it. She eventually stops struggling and partakes of their comfort, the only sound she makes a soft, hiccupping gasp, the sound of her sobs tapering to a close.

As strong as Sif is and as quickly as she wishes to join the effort to settle the Asgardians, even she needs a moment alone to grieve. At Loki’s suggestion, they settle her in a chair, draw a blanket around her shoulders and press a mug of sweet, hot cider into her hands, along with a gentle suggestion to assist at Clothing Distribution when she has gathered herself.

Being given purpose has always served Sif well, and Thor decides that there is no reason things should be different now.

“You said I was blameless in this,” Loki muses later, as they make their rounds to inspect the different booths Tony’s men have set up. Determining which need more help and resources, and which do well enough for now. “A blatant lie, is it not?”

“Loki,” Thor starts. The events that had brought about Ragnarok could not be attributed to one person; they had all played their part in the catastrophe—he and Loki, and the ones who came before.

“I only joined Surtur’s crown to the Eternal Flame to bring about Ragnarok,” Loki says, his gaze sweeping over Asgardians young and old, wrangled into pitiful lines, at the mercy of strangers for the basest of needs. “Only destroyed the home of so many.” Only, the word bitter and wrathful in his mouth.

“And you did so at my request,” Thor says grimly. “It…it was the only way.” He remembers the desperation that had seized his heart then, in not being able to best Hela in battle. The futility, as she had cut down soldier after soldier, good men in the service of the throne, alongside friends from other realms. She had taken, consumed, devoured of Asgard until there was nothing left, and still her ambition did not stop there.

He watches Loki, his brother’s gaze vacant, distant. “I never…” Loki tries, his voice whisper-quiet and far too soft. “I never meant for such a thing to…”

“I know,” Thor says, slipping an arm around Loki’s waist, gentle, and touching a kiss to Loki’s
temple. “I know. But if there is blame to be laid here, weight of the guilt to be borne, then let us bear it together.”

“Together,” Loki murmurs, seeming to let himself lean into Thor’s warmth, partake of his strength. “Yes.”

He draws Loki closer to him then, and squeezes, encouraging. Leads him to the greenest part of the field, beneath the bluest part of the sky, as if to say For now, we are here. Our people are safe. Let the past haunt us no longer.

Yes, the ache for the realm they hailed from and their fallen friends will always be present, but here, there is a chance for a new start, a life, especially with Loki, and for that Thor is thankful. He glances at their matching rings then, the reminder of such promise, and a tiny smile flits to his mouth. Any wider, and Loki will accuse him of being a sentimental fool.

“And what will you tell Sif of our...” Loki starts, following Thor’s gaze. By now, both rings possess the gamut of Loki’s protection spells, practice for the runes and spellwork he will weave into Mjölnir remade. “She will find out, sooner or later.”

“Of our marriage?” says Thor. He finds Loki twisting the ring on his own finger, anxious, and takes Loki’s hand in his to stop his wringing. Brushes a kiss over knuckles, reassuring. “The truth.”

“I was going to ask when, but it seems the choice is no longer yours to make,” Loki says dryly, tugging his hand from Thor’s, instant.

Before Thor can protest the loss of Loki’s warmth, he spies Sif marching over, having seemed to have shaken off her fugue.

“They tell me you are wedded!” Sif says, nodding toward a group of old fishwives, clustered near the booth for clothes distribution, where Sif had begun assisting. “Why did you not inform me of such happy occasion? And whom have you married yourself off to this time?”

Thor sighs and glances at the fishwives, always delighted to share gossip, who simply grin back, broad. Troublemakers, all of them. And he is of a mind to protest that the time with the giant Thrym had not counted; that had only been to reclaim Mjölnir, stolen, embarrassing as dressing up as the giant’s bride had been, though Sif seems determined not to let him forget.

“I thought news of our home world might take precedence,” Thor says instead, solemn. There was also the fact that Sif’s hand had leapt to her sword upon seeing Loki. “As for whom I have married...” Thor pauses, searching for the right, the truest words he had assured Loki he would find. “I needed someone to rule by my side,” he says simply. “And for that, I wanted no other than the one who has been by my side, all this time.”

Sif eyes him askance, until Thor takes Loki’s hand, bold, threading his fingers through the spaces between.

“Loki?” Sif gasps, instant, as she notices the matching ring on Loki’s hand. “Thor, he has ensorcelled you. He has snared your mind.” Her voice is urgent and pained, but she does not gentle her words, despite the fact that Loki is standing right there, his hand joined with Thor’s.

Thor laughs, deep and even, as he rubs a thumb against Loki’s wrist, a circle of warmth and reassurance. “I can assure you, he has not.”

“For the record,” Loki says lazily, “I was the unwilling party. It was Thor who was the adamant one.” The strength with which he grips Thor’s hand in return belies his anxiety, however.
Sif looks between them, uncertain, emotion warring over her face, confusion, surprise and puzzlement chief among them. “It is a union of love though?” she says uneasily. “Not necessity?”

“It is indeed,” Thor assures her. “I know you and Loki have had your differences—”

“Enough!” Sif says, flinging a hand up to forestall him. Either she means to prevent Thor from waxing poetic on reconciliation between one of his oldest friends and his lover, or her temper is temporarily appeased. “I…it is enough for me to know that you are happy,” she says grudgingly.

Thor beams, genuine, for he is, and he thanks the Norns for each hour, each day of happiness he is allowed with Loki, after so many years of aching and pain apart.

“But,” Sif adds, turning to Loki, her eyes narrowed, “if you hurt Thor—” here, she draws a tight breath through her nose and casts her eyes skyward, “—again, Norns help me, I shall not hesitate.” She lays her hand on the pommel of her sword then, her meaning clear.

“Sif,” Thor admonishes, horrified. He fights to restrain himself from the urge to wrap himself around Loki, a one-man shield against all that might harm him, as that is just as likely to earn Loki’s wrath.

Already, Sif flaps a hand as she turns away, wishing them something like wedded bliss, saying it could not have been easy to find, on a ship with at least a thousand other people. Thor beams after her, for it was true that thin walls and a thousand shipmates did not make the finding of wedded bliss easy.

Loki watches her go, before flicking his fingers, quick, and from a distance, Thor can see Valkyrie blink, set down the bottle of drink she works on and head toward the clothing distribution table as well. Together, Thor and Loki watch as Valkyrie accidentally sways her way into Sif’s path, and the expression of happy surprise Sif makes at the motion. Watch the two hardened warriors smile at each other, and attempt to navigate around each other, clumsy, before shrugging and falling into step with one another toward the table.

“Was that—” Thor starts, before swallowing his words. Of course it was deliberate; nothing Loki did was without purpose.

“I doubt Sif will be so quick to judgement or sword, if she finds bliss of her own,” Loki says slyly.

That night, with the Sakaaran ship emptied of some of its citizens, they take Sif’s advice to heart, deciding to find wedded bliss of their own. Thor whispers words of love and affection, pressing kisses to flushed skin, lapping at the sweat that beads at Loki’s pale throat. He is beautiful, and Thor does not hesitate to tell him so; he has had enough of keeping his thoughts secret and silent, and he would have Loki know how loved, how cherished he is.

“Perhaps I have ensorcelled you,” Loki breathes, when Thor murmurs such thoughts in his ear, nipping at the lobe of it. His fingers dig deep into Thor’s thigh, possessive, tight. “Have ensnared your mind. To have you spouting such sentiment as would make a maiden blush.”

Perhaps he still does not believe he can have this, can have Thor, and thinks the life they share now is an illusion.

Thor presses a hand against the flat of Loki’s belly in answer, knowing well how it makes Loki feel his thrusts more deeply, more intensely. Tugs him in until Loki’s back is flush against his chest, and rolls Loki’s nipple between the fingers of his free hand, pinching and rough. “Have you never thought,” Thor says, after biting love-bruises into Loki’s skin, from shoulder to neck, snapping his hips up sharp and delighting in how Loki cries out, unexpected, “that perhaps it is I who has
ensnared you?”

Loki shivers then, from pleasure and the thought both, that perhaps this is a mutual ensnarement.

Thor does not allow him breath to voice his misgivings, his doubts from then on, even after driving Loki to the precipice; only kisses and whispers and wrings forth pleasure, evidence of such entrapment’s advantage.

But still, Loki must have the last word, as is his wont, and as he nestles into Thor’s arms that night, warm and sated and pliant, Thor hears him murmur, “Well played, then, brother. Well played.”

~

The next day brings more of Thor’s friends; Tony arrives in a sleek, white jet, and in short order makes his greetings, has Thor sign some papers—with Loki’s approval on the terms—and sends at least a hundred of his employees scampering to step up the speed of their operations.

“And you are sure we have permission to settle here?” Thor asks, doubtful. He had not spoken to any of Midgard’s representatives, or looked into the laws of their land, and surely things cannot be as simple as Tony claims. A shared glance with Loki shows that his brother has some reservations about this as well.

“Yep, all taken care of,” Tony nods, clapping Thor on the back, and after a moment’s hesitation, Loki as well. And as Loki blinks at the gesture, startled, Tony adds, “This land’s been bought up—quickly and covertly, mind you—with all the proper licenses for a commercial district and private housing. I mean, you’ll have to deal with the actual zoning later yourselves, but I’ve dealt with the nitty gritty of it.”

When Thor blinks at him, mouthing Commercial districts? Zoning?, Tony says, “Look, you guys are going to have shops, right? Restaurants? All I ask in return for—for all of this,” Tony nods, sweeping his arms behind him, indicating the expanse that is this land and everything on it, “—is that I get to be first in line when the first Asgardian cuisine eatery opens.”

“For you, my friend?” Thor laughs. “You shall have a permanent reservation, any time you like.”

Loki still seems to be picking apart Tony’s rapid-fire prattle, and tilts his head, considering. “You said this land has been bought up—by whom, exactly? And for how much?”

Tony’s smile falters a touch. “Oh, well, I had to pull a few strings, and maybe reappropriate a few resources from Stark Industries, but it was possibly in the neighbourhood of…” He names a number that leaves Thor blinking again, dazed.

“No,” says Loki, color draining from his face at the amount. He vanishes from beneath Thor’s stroking palm in an instant, reappearing a short moment later, panting. “Here,” he says, thrusting a sack of what Thor can hear are gold coins at Tony’s chest, “this should compensate you for your troubles.” When Tony makes no move to accept the money, Loki narrows his eyes. “Handsomely.”

It is Tony’s turn to blink at the two of them, uncomprehending. “Look,” he says finally, backing away from the sack, as if at any moment it will turn into a frost beast of Jotunheim and bite him, “that’s a really nice thought and all, but I can’t take that.”

“What do you mean, you cannot—” Loki stills at another of Thor’s soft, stroking touches to the small of his back, Thor hiding a smile at how such small touches temper his displeasure. It is a weapon he decides he should use more often. “We will not be beholden to you—you mortals,” Loki manages to finish, his vitriol significantly reduced.
If Tony observes this strange exchange between Thor and Loki in the background, he says nothing of it. “ Seriously? Didn’t you hear what I just—look,” Tony says, repeating the key points for Loki, “Asgardian restaurant. Me. First in line.” Tony fixes his gaze on Loki. “Make it your treat.”

“One day,” vows Loki, for Thor knows how he hates to be indebted to others, and even he knows a simple meal at their first established restaurant cannot be enough for what Tony has done for them, “when you least expect it, I shall—”

“You’re going to what,” laughs Tony, “trick me into accepting it? Jump out from behind a tree and yell ‘You’ve been Loki’d’!? I don’t think so. Tell you what—how about dinner for…all of the Avengers. That’ll even it out, right Thor?”

It is clearly not an even trade, not by half, but Thor nods anyway, hoping to end the argument and later confer with Loki how else they can repay such kindness. Before Loki can open his mouth to argue, Tony says, “Speaking of the Avengers, Clint and Natasha couldn’t make it today.” He drops his voice to a dramatic whisper. “They’re supposed to be deep undercover, in who knows what hellhole this time. Even with Clint being semi-retired and all. But I managed to dig this guy up—guy’s so gung-ho he hasn’t even said hello to you guys, can you believe him—hey, Cap, heads up!”

Steve looks up from where he has jumped into the fray, of helping direct refugees from the ship into different lines as per their most urgent needs, and jogs toward them.

“Look, our very own fossil!” Tony announces, nudging a wide-eyed and confused Steve forward. Presumably, he had arrived on Tony’s jet, and immediately started helping out where he thought people needed it the most. “Icicle,” Tony amends, at the look Steve gives him. “Iceberg. Same thing.”

Thor senses an undertone of unease between the two of them, but decides this is a story they may only wish to share in their own time. Perhaps one day, they will find an understanding, as he and Loki have; for now, he is glad to see his friends again, after all these years away, and he reaches out to clasp Steve’s forearm warmly.

“Uh,” Steve manages, when Thor steps away and he spies Loki standing just behind. Clearly he is the only one surprised to see Loki alive, as Tony was told of it in advance, and Bruce has known all along. Thor thought Tony would have told him on the plane ride here, but it seems Tony can be as fond of unpleasant surprises as Loki at times.

“He is changed,” Thor says quickly, when Steve simply gapes at Loki, mouth trying to form words as he takes a step back, hesitant. “And for the better.”

When Steve still looks unconvinced, Thor takes a step back of his own and sets his hand on Loki’s shoulder. “Did you not once say, that your nation was founded on the principle that you stand up for what you believe, no matter the odds or the consequences? And that it did not matter what the mobs or politicians or the country said, about something wrong being right?” He sees Steve’s gape grow even wider, at the use of his own words to persuade him, and charges onward. “You spoke then, that when such mobs and the world tell you to move, that your job is to plant yourself like a tree beside the river of truth and tell the world, ‘no, you move’.”

Thor shares a glance with Loki, who himself looks startled by such moving words, then levels his gaze with Steve’s. “I am that tree,” Thor says simply. “And Loki is my truth.”

He would stand up for Loki, and his changed nature, no matter the odds or the consequences; no matter if his friends, this nation, or the world entire were against him.
“I…” Steve tries, blinking, his breath shaky, as if he had not anticipated the power behind his own words, finding himself won over by such simple analogy. “All right.” He tips Thor a nod and squares his shoulders then, stepping toward Loki, cautious. While Steve still seems wary, it warms Thor’s heart that he makes an attempt to at least try being civil to Loki, for Thor’s sake. “Loki,” he says, nodding shortly. He pauses, seeming to search for the right words, ones not meant to give offense, but to forge a connection, however tenuous. “I…I know Thor was pretty shaken up when you…” Steve clears his throat, and holds out a hand, hesitant. “Well, I’m glad you’re back now.”

“So righteous,” Loki purrs, more so to Thor than to Steve. “So honourable.” He likely means it to mock, but at Thor’s disapproving glance, he sighs, and accepts Steve’s hand for a reluctant handshake. Draws back to Thor’s side, baffled, when Steve has the audacity to smile at him.

Thor returns the smile in Loki’s stead, heartened that his friends seem genuinely happy for him; the Avengers had comforted him upon learning of Loki’s death, unlike Selvig, whose thank god upon the revelation of Loki’s death had struck Thor a vicious wound from which he never quite recovered.

“So,” Tony says later, sidling up to Thor, but keeping Loki in his line of vision. This is after he has meted out further instructions and is satisfied with the pace at which home and building infrastructure is being established. “That, um, advice you asked me about.”

“Oh, yes,” says Thor, beaming. “It was excellent advice, and worked well, thank you.” In the time that he thought Loki lost to him, he had gone to Tony to seek answers. Wondering how he might have been better, done better, that what happened between him and Loki could have been avoided. Of course, he had not spoken his brother’s name once during their conversation, but Thor had the distinct feeling that Tony knew exactly whom he had been asking in reference to.

“Glad to hear it,” Tony nods, clapping a hand to Thor’s shoulder. “Wait, I know who you meant to try this on, but how—”

“You, gave Thor advice?” Steve interrupts, curious. “About what?”

Tony shrugs. “Oh, just a little ancient wisdom from the annals of my experience and the Bible. The more you try to hold onto something, the more it struggles to get away.”

“That’s…not from the Bible,” says Steve, disapproving, sighing when Tony shrugs again and mumbles color me surprised and can’t take a joke. “Though I think I have heard a saying like that. Something like, ‘if you love something, let it go. If it comes back, it’s yours. If it doesn’t, it was never really yours anyway.’” He pauses. “But why would Thor…oh.” A double blink, rapid. “Oh.”

“Don’t all look at once now,” Tony says immediately, but by some strange magnetism, they all turn and look in Loki’s direction. It is probably no mystery, to anyone by now, whom Thor had sought this advice for.

“Anyway—you said it worked well?” Tony adds, raising his eyebrows. Likely to keep the conversation going, so it does not seem like the four of them are gaping at Loki in utter silence. Loki, for his part, seems not to have noticed the eerie stares focused on him, preferring instead to demonstrate to novice seiðr practitioners how to transmute stone into the wood needed for building.

“Quite,” beams Thor, his gaze having never left Loki after they all turned in his direction. He is more than happy to stare, unabashed, at his brother demonstrating his prowess in sorcery. “After all, it won me Loki’s hand in marriage.”

It is not quite that simple; he had made use of it back on Sakaar to first lure Loki back into his orbit, and again at key points during their voyage, but it will do well enough for his explanation to Tony.
“Did I just—did I just hear that right?” Tony says, turning to Bruce on his other side. “Our resident Norse gods are married? To each other?”

“You heard right,” Bruce says nonchalantly, having been one of the overseers of the proceedings themselves. He busies himself with inspecting one of the tightly wrapped crates of supplies, peering inside to ascertain what it holds.

To be fair, this news is months-old to Bruce, and he has had the time to make peace with it, while the other Avengers have not.

Steve just stares wordlessly at Thor at the news, but Tony seems determined not to let the subject drop. Trails after Bruce and points a stylus in his face, accusatory. “You didn’t mention this in the phone call,” he says with a flourish of the stylus, as if using it to punctuate specific words. “Space call. Sky-pee? Space-pee.”

“Get that thing out of my face,” says Bruce, furrowing a brow.

“It's not in your face, it's in my hand,” Tony says, with another little jabbing flourish of the stylus, as if he has delivered a proper riposte.

“Get what’s in your hand out of my face, then.” A vein of green bulges dangerously at Bruce’s temple, and Thor steps in, ready to intercede with some strange babble about the sun going down or getting real low, or some iteration of the sun slipping beyond the horizon, ineffective as the words had been back on Sakaar.

Thankfully, Tony finally backs away, having caught evidence of Hulk making a possible reappearance, though not without the world’s most legendary pout.


Thor blinks. There had not been days of feasting, as befitting a royal wedding of Asgard, but there had been a modest meal for all those in the ship, consisting of larger rations of the ship’s provisions, meat of the beasts from his and Loki’s hunts, and a strange, sweet brew of Korg’s making that Korg said had psychedelic properties on his home planet. As for presents, having arrived safely on Midgard with all his people, friends—and Loki, the biggest miracle of all—intact had been present enough. And there had not been fireworks, not really—unless one counted the It's My Birthday fireworks courtesy of the Grandmaster’s hijacked pleasure craft, the Commodore, that Loki had set off remotely.

To explain this in a sentence or less seems too much of a task, however, and he looks toward Bruce for help.

Bruce sighs and takes off his glasses, now remade, before speaking to Tony slowly, as he would a child. “I didn’t mention it,” Bruce says, “because I thought a ship full of refugees sort of took priority over who their royal couple was.” It is the most candid statement he has made regarding the situation, and Thor could not have said it any better himself.

Tony is silent for a heartbeat longer than usual. “Fair point,” he says finally.

The quiet that results from this is only broken by Steve, who seems to have found his words at last. “Thor,” he says, tentative, “Loki didn’t force you into this marriage, did he?”

The silence resulting from that could rival that of the darkest depths of Niflheim, Thor thinks.
Chapter End Notes

1) “I’m not sure the world is ready for an actual District Nine...”: District 9 is a 2009 sci-fi film, in which a large alien spacecraft arrives on Earth, and hovers over a city, causing unrest below.

2) “…your job is to plant yourself like a tree beside the river of truth and tell the world, ‘no, you move’”: Captain America gives this speech to Spider-Man in Amazing Spider-Man #537, by J. Michael Straczynski. You may have also seen this referenced in Captain America: Civil War (2016).

3) "Get that thing out of my face.” / “It's not in your face, it's in my hand.”: This moment is borrowed from Robert Downey Jr.’s Sherlock Holmes, in which Holmes pokes his violin bow into Watson’s space.

4) “Space call. Sky-pee? Space-pee.”: The number of people I know who pronounce ‘Skype’ as ‘sky-pee’ is astounding. So calls made from space must be via Space-pee!

5) As much as I wanted to include the entire Avengers ensemble (e.g. Sam, Wanda, Vision, etc) the story started getting unwieldy, so I’ve condensed which Avengers are here. Also, my first love is Avengers (2012), and I wanted to keep some version of the original Avengers here together.
Negotiation

After multiple assurances that no, Loki had not forced him into this marriage, and yes, it had been Thor who proposed, Steve and Tony finally let him rejoin Loki’s side. Letting the two of them tour the inside of the Sakaaran ship had not hurt either, though the thought that Tony will cease defending Thor’s virtue for the sake of alien technology is a disturbing one.

“Excellent timing,” Loki says, when Thor finally picks his way back through the crowds of refugees and Stark’s employees. He holds a hand out to Thor, who steps into the touch, eager, thinking there is a kiss in it for him, or more, if Loki has felt his absence most keenly. Except there is not; instead, as Loki has exhausted his well of seiðr, he has decided to spend the next moments overseeing —lounging, Thor calls it, though they both know it is avoiding, the multitudes of seiðr-novices and Tony’s employees who wish to consult Loki—the proceedings in the smallest, least magic-consuming form he can. From Thor’s shoulder.

Which means, of course, that Tony chooses this exact moment to march up to Thor with a tablet in hand, his brow knit in irritation.

“So, Thor,” he begins, before squinting even further as he looks up, then breaking into a smile, sudden. “Wow, okay, I didn’t know you were into keeping lizards.” Tony nods at the one perched on Thor’s shoulder, sunning itself lazily in the midday heat. “Can I hold it?”

Thor blinks at the lizard; the lizard blinks back, considering. Then it arches its back in a leisurely stretch, and with a haughty flick of its tail, clambers onto Tony’s outstretched hands. Thor finds its behaviour strangely compliant, but says nothing; only watches as Tony marvels at the lizard’s coloring, a deep royal green with gold flecks along the crest of its head. He draws the line, however, when Tony noses at the creature’s snout, and coos, “Who’s a pretty lizard? You are!”

“He does not like that,” Thor says finally, breaking his silence. Thor does not like that either, as he is the only one allowed to nuzzle so intimately.

“How would you know what it—” Tony starts, and Thor turns away before the inevitable mmhblergh, it’s me! in time to avoid Tony screaming in his ear.

Tony is lucky that Loki is no longer inclined toward stabbing people after his reveals, though Thor cannot help but wonder if this is Loki’s vengeance for Sif’s unexpected arrival. Which Tony facilitated.

“Okay,” says Tony, finally composed, after he has made everyone within a mile’s radius promise not to reveal that Tony shrieks like a maiden when Loki surprises him. The promise had involved a document he calls a non-disclosure agreement, one that everyone, without exception, will be required to sign. “As I was going to tell you earlier, before…all that.” Tony motions at Thor’s shoulder where Loki had been perched. “Thor, we’ve got a problem.”

“No problem is too large for us to overcome together,” laughs Thor, pleased at the progress already underway. He claps Tony on the back. “What is it?”

“Well, greenbacks—that’s like, Earth money—and lots of it, can only make things go so quickly,” Tony says. He swipes through a few spreadsheets on his tablet that Thor cannot make heads or tails of. “We’ve still got a few issues with actually getting some stuff sent here. Transported. Earliest we
can get everything up and running is….” Tony pauses, scrolling through a few more screens before settling on a simple bar diagram. “Five months.”

“Ah,” Thor nods solemnly, less flippant this time. “That is a problem.”

“Fortunately, I have a solution,” says Loki, rematerializing at Thor’s side, sudden. It is a habit of his now, to give the Avengers a scare, though Bruce is unaffected, having been subject to Loki’s antics for months. Thor, for his part, takes the opportunity to reach out and brush their fingers together, heartened that he will not have to muddle through this problem alone. “I seem to recall Midgard has its own second-rate sorcerers—”

“Second to whom?” Tony challenges, before pausing. “Wait, we’ve got sorcerers?”

“Why, to Asgard, of course,” Loki says silkily, as if the answer is evident. “And I believe he does not call himself a sorcerer first, but a doctor.”

“A doctor—Strange?” Tony squawks, cottoning on to Loki’s suggestion. “Are you serious about asking him for help? That pompous bast—”

“No more pompous than yourself, I would think,” says Loki, with a grin.

Thor does not know how Strange has wronged Tony on a previous occasion, and perhaps that is a story for another time, but Loki only shrugs at Tony’s sputtering as if their private squabble has little bearing on his proposal.

“You are welcome to come with us, if you wish,” Loki says, deliberate, noticing Tony’s discomfort.

Thor throws a glare at Loki, for this would be courting outright disaster, but Tony shakes his head.

“Uh, no, got some bigger fish to fry here,” Tony says. “You know, shipments to sign for, things to order. Let me know how it goes, though!” he calls, back-pedalling away until Thor is left alone with Loki again.

“Well,” says Loki, not bothered in the least, “while he is off frying his all-important fish, shall we see what we can catch?”

~

The flight to Strange’s residence in New York is long, and the fact that one child starts bawling, setting off the howls and cries of others on the plane, in a mystical chain reaction, does not help Loki’s mood. He had, at first, been ready to flick his fingers for what Thor presumes was a barrier of silence, before Thor caught his fingers mid-air.

“You cannot, Loki,” he had said, urgent. “What if your spell interferes with the plane’s instruments?”

Loki had not argued it; only remained tense and jittery, muttering curses with his arms crossed, until Thor requested a pair of earplugs from the plane’s stewardess, and gathered Loki in his arms to let him rest. After all, spellcasting of Loki’s magnitude and volume is tiring work, and Loki had spent all morning doing demonstrations and leaving instructions for the seiðr-users to follow during his absence.

Despite travelling halfway around the world, they arrive in time to enjoy morning again in New York City. Loki had cast a glamour on them both upon their arrival in New York, and they amble along now, free from the fear that they will be detected by S.H.I.E.L.D.
“The Sanctum Sanctorum is not far from here,” says Loki. He peers up at the street signs near where they disembarked from their taxi. “Perhaps we should take a moment to enjoy the city’s sights this time, unlike during our previous visit, when I was so rudely summoned.”

Thor is about to say that their last trip here had not been for leisure, with their father’s whereabouts still unknown, when something about Loki’s words strikes him as amusing. “You mean you wish to—to be a tourist?”

“Well,” Loki says, his expression flickering between distaste for the word and a smile, honest and shy, “yes. I admit the time I was here before last I did not make the greatest impression, but—”

“It is a wonderful idea,” Thor interrupts, before Loki can fall into a well of regret and unhappiness at memories of the Chitauri invasion, years behind them now. “In fact, I know a place not far from here, that Tony swears has the best—” Thor pitches his voice low, and every ounce seductive, “—chocolate cake.” The offer is sure to appeal to Loki’s sweet tooth, and by the way Loki’s eyes widen, unwitting, Thor can tell his suggestion has struck home.

“Indeed?” says Loki, arching a brow. “Lead the way then, cake connoisseur.”

Thor smiles and threads his fingers between Loki’s, folding their joined hands into his pocket as he does just that.

They make their way to the coffee shop called Gritty Grounds, a name Loki is less than impressed by, but by the time Thor has settled him into a patio table with a tea of his choice, and a large slice of moist chocolate cake, Loki’s protests have quieted to a minimum.

Your boyfriend has excellent taste in tea, the girl brewing their drinks had said, beaming. She was a study in patience, especially after Loki had reeled off the type of milk he preferred used, the amount of sweetener, and other options Thor had not even known were options.

Thor had blinked, puzzled, despite the rose-flush that sprang to Loki’s cheeks, and said, He is not my boyfriend. By the time he realized how that sounded, it was too late to recall the words, and Loki was twisting away from his grasp, his expression unreadable, their attempt at tourism cut short, until —

Ah! Then he is your husband? she said instead, and Thor had heaved a sigh of relief, their situation saved, as he caught Loki’s wrist, quick. Brought Loki’s fingers to his lips for a tiny kiss to his ring, the obvious mate of Thor’s, as he said, Five weeks to the day, though we have been together for far longer. Delighting in the deepening of his flush, Loki twisting away again, this time from embarrassment, rather than hurt.

The enormous cake slice—given to them with couple-themed forks, the girl declared, winking—had done wonders for soothing Loki’s ruffled feathers as well.

As he sips his own bitter brew now, darkest coffee with neither cream nor sugar to keep himself awake, Thor watches the peaceful scene before him, of people traversing the streets, carefree. Not running from the Chitauri, or aliens bent on destruction, but simply carrying on with their lives. It makes him wonder, as they bask here in the sun and warmth, if one day he and Loki can be like them. Making their own life here on Midgard.

And when he tires of the view before him, his gaze returns to Loki—for has his gaze not always been drawn to his brother, in one way or another?—watching him plough through the majority of the
cake Thor had bought them to share. Wicks a smudge of frosting from Loki’s cheek and brings it to his thumb to taste, before thinking better of it, and darting his tongue out to taste instead.

“Thor,” Loki says, quiet.

Thor decides not to answer, for Loki likely has sharp words about such affection displayed so publicly, and he would prefer their mood to remain unruined. Presses a kiss instead to Loki’s cheek where he has just licked away the icing, tiny, teasing. Later, he will take Loki to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, then the more boisterous Times Square, and dine him at the—

“Thor,” Loki hisses this time, and Thor stops his woolgathering for just long enough to spot the fiery circle forming at Loki’s feet, throwing off sparks as it widens. The glamour Loki cast had not fooled Strange, or had only delayed his summoning, it seems.

Without a moment’s thought, Thor drops the coffee in his other hand and winds his arms around Loki, instant, for if Strange wants to play this game again, he will get the two of them together, or not at all. Curses under his breath as they fall, for he should have remembered that Strange does not consider propriety—things are done only on the doctor’s schedule, if he deigns to do them at all.

In the next instant, he lands ungracefully in the same plush leather wingback he had been seated in before, with Loki settled beside him, breathless, startled, but none the worse for wear. There is a ringing in Thor’s ears, a strange vertigo from their sudden drop, though Loki seems less affected by their change in locale, and rather seems to enjoy it. Thor would not be surprised if Loki was puzzling out the mechanics of how they had been transported, and he can only be thankful that Strange had not sent Loki falling through a portal infinite as he had the last time.

“Tea?” offers Strange, settling comfortably into his own seat, though his gaze remains suspicious.

“Earl Grey,” Loki replies before Thor can answer, equally assessing; it had been the type of tea Loki was enjoying before they were again, so rudely summoned. At Thor’s chiding look, he rolls his eyes and murmurs the addendum, “Please.”

“Excellent,” says Strange, conjuring an earthen cup for Loki, likely a self-filling one as Thor had held before. As soon as he has thought it, a mug of dark ale appears in Thor’s hand as well. He drains the whole mug within seconds, delighted when the mug fills itself again, though Loki stops him before he can take another drink; the light touch to his elbow is a reminder that they cannot begin negotiations with Strange if Thor is halfway to inebriation.

“Well,” Strange says, in the silence stretching between them, “you know who I am, so there’s no need for introductions.” He regards them over his steepled fingers. “What I’d like to know is why you’re both here.”

“We have come bearing gifts,” says Thor, inclining his head. As Loki nods, he draws a small pouch of gold from his knapsack. “A token,” Thor explains, “of our appreciation from the last time. For finding our father.” He pauses to draw forth a second pouch of gold, and places it beside the first on the burnished oak table between them. “And another, as reparation for damages caused by my…umbrella during our last visit.”

Strange blinks at the pouches, with a nonchalant hmm, as if deeply unimpressed.

Thor thins his lips, almost indignant, as, barring Loki’s gift, it is the best of what they have to offer. At one time, he might have leapt to his feet, instant, and upended Strange’s table in his face,
thundering, *You dare look down upon a gift from the kings of Asgard?* But those days are behind him now, and he holds his tongue. “The last token,” he says instead, “is what you might call a ‘peace offering’ of sorts. For any future liaisons we may have.”

He turns to Loki then and nods. Loki had specified that the first two gifts must be inferior to the third, to draw Strange’s attention, and with a flourish of his hand now, a book materializes upon the table, heavy and leather-bound, its copper clasp fading, its pages yellowed with age.

“A tome on the mystic arts,” Loki elaborates, with another flourish of his hand. “For a…*master,* such as yourself.”

“I’ve plenty of those,” Strange says, inclining his head at the *multitudes* of books surrounding them. Still, Thor notices the small twitch of a self-satisfied smile at Strange’s mouth. It seems Loki’s silver tongue—when given opportunity to do so—works the same wonders on residents of Midgard, masters of the mystic arts or no.

“From Asgard?” Loki presses, lazily. “A realm now lost to us?” Loki mentioned he had spirited the tome away quickly, just after awakening Surtur, making Thor wonder what else Loki has secreted away from their home planet. Other mementos, perhaps. Trinkets, books. All the vestiges of the lives they lived before. He wonders how much it pains Loki to give this up, yet another piece of their heritage bartered away to pave the way for their future.

Once again, Thor is reminded that he is not the only one to know sacrifice for the sake of their people.

“Ah,” says Strange shortly, eyeing the book with interest this time. Perhaps the lure of acquiring a tome from a lost planet *is* as strong as Loki suggested it would be, for Strange leans forward now, curiosity flickering in his eyes. “Future liaisons, you say?” Strange considers, raising a brow. “I can only assume that’s why you’re here now, since I recall explaining to you my policy regarding problem people…” He makes no secret of letting his gaze settle coolly on Loki at that. “…Previously,” he finishes, eyes narrowed, as if annoyed at unintended alliteration.

This is as good an opening as ever, Thor decides, and he presses his advantage to explain their visit’s true purpose. “Due to the passing of our father, Odin, and certain circumstances in our realm, I am king now, of a landless people.”

Thor lets his knee bump gentle against Loki’s at those words, for the truth would have been *We are kings now,* but the deception is necessary to win Strange’s assistance. He *does* catch Loki’s snort at the way Thor had spoken around the catastrophic events that sent them and their people to Midgard in the first place—only Ragnarok foretold, and the destruction entire of the Realm Eternal—and flicks a glare at him for that.

“Yes, I heard about that. I’m…sorry for your loss?” says Strange, as though searching for the right words for condolence. Perhaps he does not offer them often, or have need to, but he does not sound sorry at all. It was not *his* planet that had been laid waste to by a fire demon and a goddess of death, after all.

Thor accepts his clumsy condolence with a nod. “We intend to settle in the little-used land near the cliffside that our father bid us to,” he continues. “The place you sent us last. But for that, we shall have need of your help.”

From there, he outlines how exactly they hope for Strange to help: with his assistance, they would open portals from the locations of building materials Tony has outlined, and move all materials to a remote location, whereupon they would be rerouted to the new settlement. This is to prevent the
untimely detection of the settlement, for they hope to have it completed before Asgard’s seiðr-masters must drop the invisibility barrier. Thor pauses then, to gauge Strange’s reaction.

“Mmhn,” says Strange, noncommittally. “You still haven’t told me your…brother’s role in all of this.” He flicks a glance in Loki’s direction.

Thor shares a quick glance of his own with Loki. But Loki waves a hand, careless, giving Thor permission to speak on his behalf, preferring instead to inspect the books on the shelves, the artefacts displayed, curious. “We have come here together, to ask for your assistance?” Thor says, haltingly, unsure of what the doctor asks.

Strange settles back in his chair then, the tips of his fingers pressed to each together again in contemplation. “Hmm, yes,” he says. “You mentioned that already. That you want my help, transporting things. People. Whichever.” He looks dismayed at being asked to assist with such a thing, before huffing, “Can’t be helped, I suppose. But why Loki?”

Loki looks almost startled, to be addressed by his name, and Thor wishes it was not so. Too long had people called him liar or liesmith or brother of Thor, and he feels a vague sense of relief that it is not the practice here.

“Loki is my brother,” Thor says finally, having decided to interpret Strange’s question as why did you bring Loki here, despite the doctor’s clear mistrust of him. “And my partner. In every sense of the word. He is bestowed the right to rule, and thus in all decisions, has equal—”

“Sorry, bestowed the right? By what power?” Strange asks dryly.

Thor sighs; he had hoped it would not come to this, and Tony had assured him that bulldozing through with a haughty Loki is my partner, in every sense of the word would help avoid graceless inquiries.

“Inheritance,” Thor says simply. Noticing the unconvinced furrow between the doctor’s eyes, for right to rule by inheritance would obviously pass to Thor, he adds quickly, “And marriage.” He takes Loki’s hand, lacing their fingers together, bold.

Loki blinks, surprised at the motion.

Strange’s glance flicks between Thor and Loki, then their joined hands, a trifecta of puzzled assessment. “O…kay,” he says slowly. “I see now. Far be it from me to question a loveless marriage —

“Loveless?” Loki spouts, indignant. He nearly leaps to his feet, save for Thor’s hand tugging him back down.

“Political, coercive—”

“Of which they were neither,” Thor cuts in, a fiery anger burning in his heart. If this continues, he is considering retracting his request for Strange’s help, for an insult to Loki is an insult to himself. But he reminds himself that weeks with Strange’s assistance, as opposed to the five months Tony has projected, will make all the difference for Asgard’s people, and he swallows his pride. Swallows the barbed words that rise quick to his tongue. From Loki’s scowl, Thor can tell he is trying his best to do the same.

“—but all right, as I understand it, you want my help to transport things over long distances, in a covert manner.” Strange seems to have leapt the light-year journey from suspicious contempt to neutral pragmatism in mere seconds, and hums now, as if ticking through quick mental calculations.
Nods, decisive, at the end of them. “Three days.”

“Three days?” Thor echoes, confused by this about-turn in the conversation. It is to be expected, he supposes, as the doctor changes locales in conversation as abruptly as he does the flow of conversations themselves, but even this is too quick a transition for him to follow.

Not for Loki, evidently. “Excellent,” he says, his mood considerably lightened, despite his initial outrage. He steeps his fingers as well, a mirror of Strange’s pose, and his grin is sharp as he settles back in his chair. “Though with the use of my magic, two should suffice.”

“Even better,” Strange says, returning Loki’s grin.

They have reached some invisible accord, it seems, and Strange appears equally pleased at having been so quickly understood.

“I am sorry—three days? Two?” says Thor. He could wait until they were returning to Norway to ask Loki to elaborate, but as one of Asgard’s kings, he must know what they are agreeing to, instead of blindly waiting for Loki’s explanations after the fact.

Strange closes his eyes, as if in exasperation, and sighs, before turning a disdainful look on Thor. He hears Strange murmur something like small words, Stephen, use small words. “You’ll have your supplies and machinery moved to the location of your choice—all of it—within three days. That’s all I can spare. Two, with your brother’s help.”

“Ah,” says Thor, beaming in understanding. “Thank you, doctor, for your assistance.” He reaches out a hand to secure this agreement, and Strange squeezes it with his gloved one, quick and cool and impersonal.

When Loki follows suit, however, Thor notices him hanging on for a second longer than Thor had, before bringing his other hand up to clasp Strange’s as well, heartfelt.

“A pleasure,” Loki says, “to speak to someone of intelligence, for once.” He pauses, coy. “… Doctor.”

“Indeed,” says Strange. Is that the tiniest quirk of a smile on the doctor’s lips in return? “Please, call me Stephen.”

Thor stares at both of them, incredulous. There is an unseen exchange occurring here, and both have made it clear that Thor is not privy to it.

However, the moment ends soon enough, and Strange rises from his seat. As Thor and Loki follow suit, the chairs they sit on disappear of their own will, and they find themselves standing back on the field in Norway they had set out from the previous evening.

“Well,” says Thor. “I suppose that went well.” He cannot help but feel disgruntled at being so quickly and forcibly ejected from Strange’s New York sanctum, though he is grateful Strange spared them the long, gruelling flight home.

“Well enough,” Loki shrugs, brushing the remnants of the sanctum’s years-old dust from his shoulders. “We have the promise of his assistance now, and I am sure his order can quickly procure any supplies we have outstanding. And I was not subject to falling through an infinite portal for thirty minutes again.” He snorts. “Oddly impressive as that feat was, I have no desire to repeat it.”

Yes, Thor had indeed noticed the marked difference in the doctor’s treatment of Loki, between this time and the last, and a tendril of jealousy coils tight in his chest, like a snake ready to strike. “It
behooves me to remind you that I am your husband,” Thor says sourly, the genial *please, call me Stephen* still fresh in his mind. “Not this...strange doctor.” He slips an arm around Loki’s waist, then the other, tugging Loki toward him until his brother is flush against his chest.

“Oh?” Loki says airily. “You would begrudge me a little Midgardian tryst of my own?”

“Lo-ki,” Thor says, exasperated. It had not been a tryst, in Thor’s case, but a matter of mistaken intention, though nothing he says seems to convince Loki of the latter. Perhaps in time, with generous displays of affection, he can show Loki where his heart has been all along.

Loki sighs, as if he cannot believe it is *Thor* who requires affirmation of Loki’s love this time. “I have chosen whom my affections belong to,” says Loki, turning in Thor’s arms. Twines his arms around Thor’s neck then, and draws him down for a kiss, soft and small and reassuring. “There will be no other.”

“No other?” The clench of jealousy in Thor’s heart is not yet appeased. “Then show me,” he says, turning the words Loki so often uses against him. “*Show me that I am the one.*” He nips Loki’s lower lip, turning the kiss biting, bruising, a messy clash of teeth and lips and tongue. “The only.”

His temper is assuaged only when Loki threads his fingers through Thor’s, possessive, tight, and leads him toward the quarters they keep on the Sakaaran ship, to prove exactly that.
True to his word, Strange arrives at the work site soon after, diligently opening portals where the present Avengers direct him.

The transport of materials seems to run smoothly after that, and faster still, when Loki tilts a carefully calculated smile in Strange’s direction. Strikes up casual conversations regarding the supposed ‘gateways’ that Strange specializes in, a thing Loki insists is called *comparing notes*.

Thor, already unsettled at how else Loki might have won the Grandmaster’s favour—though assured it was simply Loki’s winning personality—finds reasons to bully his way into their conversations. To break up their cozy little tête-à-têtes.

“Loki, I believe the novices under your tutelage wished for you to check their work on the invisibility barrier?” Thor says, circling by while Loki and Strange are mid-conversation.

“Oh yes, I *see* how the energy for your spells comes about,” Thor interrupts, while eavesdropping on Strange outlining to Loki the nature of such entities as *Agamotto*, *Ikonn*, or *Watoomb*.

It is harder and harder each time to think of more viable excuses that give him reason to speak with Loki. Thor is saved, however, from having to do so any longer after the fifth such interruption, when Loki hisses, “Thor, can you not see that I am *working*?”

Loki demonstrating the creation of a flickering, blue flame in his palm does not look like *work*, but Thor holds his tongue. “So am I,” he says mulishly.

He hefts a heavy load nearby onto his shoulder in front of Loki, making sure to position his arms just so, pleased when he catches the shameless hunger in Loki’s eyes. The sliver of pink as his tongue darts out to lick his lips.

Norns help him, Thor never thought *he* would be the one vying for Loki’s attention, the tables now turned. Was this how Loki felt all those years ago, hoping Thor would look his way again, back on Asgard, after they began their slow drift apart? And even later on, in Midgard?

He lets an hour pass, then two, and when he finds his courage again, he circles toward Loki and Strange’s location—only to find himself on the other side of the work site, tumbling out of one of Strange’s portals. When Thor marches toward them again, this time incensed that he has been so casually dismissed, Strange repeats the motion, as if shooing away a repellent bug.

It seems it is not only Loki’s patience that has run thin.

Thor is nothing if not stubborn, however, and by the fourth time he stalks toward them, hands clenched into fists at his sides, Loki strides forward to meet him.

“*Enough!*” Loki bellows this time, flinging a hand up to forestall Thor’s own protest. He turns to Strange, his teeth grit tight behind his smile. “Please, excuse me for a moment.” And without waiting for permission to take his leave, he marches forward, bodily *dragging* Thor behind the half-built communal event hall. Kisses him so thoroughly that it leaves no question whom his affections belong
to, his tongue so hot and sweet against Thor’s that Thor can only moan into Loki’s mouth, his hands coming to rest above Loki’s hips, helpless.

“You must stop this,” Loki hisses, breaking away mid-kiss. Evidently, he deems five kisses enough to soothe Thor’s temper, which they are not. “We need Strange’s help. And it seems a well-placed compliment makes the man sing like a lark about his powers and abilities, knowledge that would suit us well. So you must let me work, you bullheaded—”

“Work?” Thor exclaims, still breathless from the passion in Loki’s kisses. “You call the way he undresses you with his gaze work?” Perhaps Strange had not truly been doing that, but there were moments he had stared at Loki far too intently for Thor’s liking.

“Not all work involves the use of brute force,” Loki says testily. “And I am simply…leveraging his interest in my sorcery to our advantage. No more than that.”

“You mean his interest in you,” mutters Thor, though Loki’s assurances have doused the flame of jealousy burning bright in his chest, leaving only embers now in its wake. Already he can hear the others searching for Loki, calling his name, wondering where he has wandered off to, for they have need of his magic to sustain the portal Strange created for long amounts of time.

“Thor,” Loki says, cupping Thor’s cheeks in his palms, “there will be more of this later. For now, you must trust me.” He draws Thor in for a kiss, softer this time, lingering, and every kind of sweet, presumably one to tide him over for the next hours, before he turns to go.

“Later,” Thor growls, dragging Loki back for another kiss, hotter, harder, then biting a mark into the base of his throat for good measure. Finds himself darkly pleased at the wine-red bruise it leaves, a livid mark of ownership for all to see. He will hold Loki to his promise of later, and that will serve as reminder enough.

“You—you are impossible,” snaps Loki, marching away, though there is little heat to his words, and Thor notices he does not tug his collar over the mark to hide it.

Even with such a promise made between them, Thor does not wander far, preferring instead to hover just out of Loki’s sight. He is of half a mind to stalk over to Sif’s and bemoan the situation, for it is unlike him to moon after his brother like a maiden, doe-eyed and forlorn. But at present, she and Valkyrie have their heads bent together, discussing something that seems to be of great import, and Thor knows better than to interrupt, lest he receive a blade to the throat. Knowing them, it is likely some plan to create a training regimen for the girls of Asgard, in the art of hand-to-hand combat and weaponry. A group of young girls has recently been trailing behind them, calling themselves Valkyrie’s Army, though Thor doubts this so-called army will be in service of the throne.

He is mulling over this feeling, of happiness for another, that Sif has found a friend of her own—she and Valkyrie had discovered they had friends in common in the past, and things had only improved from there—when Tony appears at Thor’s side, sudden.

“Thor! Just the guy I was looking for,” Tony says, reaching out to squeeze Thor’s bicep, subtle, as if checking that he is the right man for this job. “Need you to help lift a few beams to the house we’ve started up over there, and fortify the foundation.”

Thor is unsure if this chance intervention is Loki’s doing, but he discovers, as he helps lay down beams and hammer them in, that it feels wonderful to have a hammer in his hand again, no matter that it is small and utilitarian and of Midgard’s make. It does not sing in his hand, and does not connect with Thor in the same innate way as Mjölnir had, but he remembers then that Loki will have her remade, and the thought lifts his spirits, making him swing harder, work faster, until he and the
other workmen have completed yet another house.

Too soon his work is done, and as he and Tony await the transport of more materials with which to build, Thor glances across the field to where Loki stands with Strange, his smile perfectly calculated, his lips tilted just so. It is not the fond, soft smile that Loki reserves only for Thor, but he cannot help the pit of jealousy that curls tight in his belly at the sight.

“I do not like this Strange,” says Thor, eyeing them from across the field. He is sorely tempted to send a shock of lightning Strange’s way, or blast him into the wall with a well-timed strike, and would—were he not afraid of being dropped into an infinite portal, as Loki had.

Tony’s flicks a glance in the direction of Loki and Strange, the two of them engaged in some animated discussion. Strange nods, then demonstrates, with an elegant rotation of his hands, the movement of a distant object. “Right.” Tony’s nose crinkles, before he catches Thor’s own thunderous expression. “Right. Okay. Thor—what was that thing we talked about, again?”

“The…” Thor furrows his brow, puzzled. “Er…the materials for the…?”

“If you love something, let it go?” Tony prompts, folding his arms over his chest.

“But I have only just—”

“No buts.”

“—gotten Loki back.”

“And you won’t keep him for long if you smother him, right? Besides,” Tony adds, as if something has just occurred to him, “how do you know Loki isn’t just using Strange, to make you jealous?”

“If he is, it is working,” Thor growls, though he must admit Tony has a point. It is not beyond Loki to make such mischief, and his actions have sparked dark thoughts in Thor of how best to show Loki who he belongs to—including one vivid image of chaining him to the bed and taking him within it, forceful, until either Loki or the headboard breaks.

Still, it nettles and amuses him both that he has let himself be goaded by Loki’s behaviour.

He lets Tony guide him away from Strange’s supply-transport portals and is set to work on laying stone and concrete for the foundations of more houses, a job that keeps him busy for the rest of the day. And when Loki returns to their chambers in the night, he allows Thor to smother him with affection, spoil him with kisses, and—there are no chains, but Loki fashions a set of silken sashes, letting Thor tie him to the bed. Lets Thor have his way with Loki, in every way, until Loki is left shaking and gasping in Thor’s arms, sweat-soaked and lovely and wet with Thor’s issue, all of which Loki delights in, and all of which lend truth to Tony’s theory.

“Strange has granted me access to the books in his sanctum,” Loki says after, when he has spelled away their mess. The motion draws a frown of dismay from Thor; he had rather liked the idea of marking Loki with his issue, taking care to paint Loki’s belly with it. The insides of his thighs. A decisive, broad stroke along his chest, before touching his fingers to Loki’s mouth, vindictive pleasure coiling in his belly at the way Loki licked them clean. Taking Thor’s essence into him in all the ways that he could.

“Has he now?” Thor murmurs, absent. His fingers trace small, lazy circles over the cheeks of Loki’s ass. Stroke leisurely over the curve of it, petting, soft.

Loki hums, the sound of his contentment endearing, and nestles deeper into Thor’s arms. The corners
of his mouth curl up, pleased. “Those books will be most helpful in my research,” he says, with a sated purr. “My research into rebuilding the Bifrost. Or,” he adds, hesitant, “something like it.”

The words give Thor pause in his drowsy petting. “You mean to combine the knowledge of what books you rescued from Asgard and Strange’s tomes on mystic arts for such a thing?”

He receives Loki’s long-suffering sigh in response. “Asgard’s might in all the realms did not come simply from its inhabitants’ ability to smite foes with a hammer. Or blast enemies with a spear,” Loki sniffs. “If my work in this successful, it will give us swift access to all that the Nine Realms have to offer again.” He pauses then, his voice oddly soft. “Eight, now, I suppose.”

“That is a wonderful idea,” says Thor. He nudges a kiss into the space beneath Loki’s jaw, before Loki’s spirits sink about the loss of their realm. Then he remembers that Strange is not so generous as to confer such privilege without expecting equal favour in return. “And in exchange?” Thor demands, his arms tightening around Loki. “He would have you join him in his bed?”

There are other ways, Thor decides, other sorcerers or books they can consult. Loki does not have to —

“The fallacious leaps you make in logic astound me,” Loki scoffs. He presses his fingers into the bruises Thor has left along his throat, deepening the possessive marks, a reassurance of sorts. “In exchange, I would show him a measure of the seiðr learned in Asgard. Only tricks and illusions, brother. Nothing more substantial than that, and nothing he will be able to replicate.”

“But—the book you gave him,” Thor says, confused. “You claimed it was Asgardian!”

“Oh, that?” Loki says coolly. “I lifted that from the archives of the planet you call ‘Alfheim-Beta’. It contains only elementary spells like summoning toadspawn or hastening the growth of plants and the like.” He pauses, a twitch of a smile curling his lips at Thor’s reproachful expression, at Loki having tricked a supposed ally. “I did say it was a book of spells; I did not say how complex the spells were.” When Thor does not look completely mollified at this fact, Loki laughs. “You did not think I would give away our secrets, did you?” He tips Thor’s chin up with a finger, sly. “To someone not worthy?”

A shudder creeps through Thor’s spine then, at memories of the searing fire orbs Loki had called from the sky on Xylion, melting flesh and wrenching screams from those they struck. He finds himself relieved that Loki does not intend to impart such knowledge to others, and pleasure the same in that Loki has made himself a…friend of sorts, however Loki belittles Strange.

Thor cannot begrudge Loki friends, knowing how important they are. Having lost three of his closest companions in the battle against Hela. He can only be grateful that Loki had sent Sif on an errand in Midgard, that she had not remained to be slain by Hela, needless.

“Strange has also extended me a provisional invitation to join his order,” says Loki, drawing Thor from his reminiscence. When Thor stares back blankly, Loki sighs. “It is an order of sorcerers that protects the world from mystic threats,” he explains. “As your Avengers protect the world from physical ones.”

“Oh,” says Thor, hoping he hides his disappointment well. He had hoped, when their people had been settled and their needs seen to, that he could speak with Loki about joining him on the Avengers team, for fighting alongside Loki again, against Midgard’s enemies, is something Thor wishes dearly. But sorcery has ever been Loki’s forte, and it is well that his brother has found a place where his talents would be greatly revered at last. He cannot begrudge Loki this either. “That sounds like it would be perfect for you, brother,” Thor manages. He brushes a kiss to Loki’s temple. “I am
happy for you.”

Loki blinks, before smiling, sly. “I have heard your friends Stark and Banner making noises about how a sorcerer would be beneficial to your Avengers team, however. Vital, in fact.” He studies Thor’s expression, amused. “Very insistent noises.”

Thor nods slowly, having an inkling of where this leads, but he waits for Loki to confirm it, all the same.

“I might be persuaded to join the Avengers instead,” Loki says lazily, “if there was but one voice that lent itself to that rabble—”

Thor hushes him with a kiss then, fervent, joyful, his heart buoyant with happiness, then another for good measure, and another.

“In that case,” Thor says, when they finally draw apart for air, his smile so wide it very nearly hurts, “consider my voice the loudest and most insistent of all, in that rabble.”

There are other things they must worry about, including speaking to Director Fury about Loki joining them, and the remaining fear of S.H.I.E.L.D. discovering their newly-built settlement. But as Loki draws him in for another kiss, his pleasure at Thor’s enthusiasm apparent, Thor decides that those are issues that can wait another day.

~

It takes a week of hard work, each day long, demanding and gruelling.

But at the end of it, with the help of Tony, Steve, various seiðr-practitioners, and the hastening of everything with Tony’s know-how, finances, and overworked underlings, they have a building for communal events. Enough housing for everyone. And the beginnings of an area for markets and shops, schools and craft guilds. With all the materials they need in place now, they should be finished rebuilding the settlement in a month’s time.

“So, Thor,” Tony says, when the last nail on the most recent craft guild building has been hammered in. “I’ve been thinking—and Cap and Bruce are with me on this too—that we should have a little celebration. You know, since most of the buildings are almost good to go, and whatever’s left to build, we’ve brought all the supplies for here.”

Thor pauses to wipe a streak of sweat from his face; outright filth has always kept Loki away, but strategic grime seems to stoke a strange fire of desire in his brother, and he had seen Loki pass nearby not long ago. For now, however, he focuses on Tony’s request. “Should we not wait until everything is in place, and wholly built?”

He also objects to the idea of having such festivities while the shadow of S.H.I.E.L.D. discovering their plans looms above them. Loki has managed to stay off their radar, but it is only a matter of time before someone from their group is seen, or makes a mistake, or—

Tony clears his throat and glances at the other Avengers present. “A little help here, guys?” he says, when none of them pick up on his subtle prompting.

“I think a celebration sounds great,” Steve nods, as Bruce throws a consenting murmur into the mix. “I mean, it’s terrific and all that we’ve gotten so much done, but it wouldn’t hurt to take a break.”

“Plus,” Tony adds, beaming, “I’m sure your people would appreciate it too.”
When Tony puts it that way, surely Thor cannot refuse, for it is an opportunity to bring joy to the Asgardians and their Sakaaran friends. Though by the looks of things, they are not the only ones who seem to be ready for a reprieve; the contractors and builders and those under Tony’s employ look worse for wear as well, under such accelerated construction conditions.

“I shall let Loki know of this celebration,” Thor nods. “Have you a date in mind? A time?”

“Oh, Loki already—I mean, you do that,” Tony says. “And we were thinking, maybe a dinner, three days from now? That should be plenty of time to get things ready, get all the food and drinks together, maybe little decorations and stuff like that.” He pauses and claps Thor on the back. “Don’t worry about it, I’ve got it all taken care of.”

Thor blinks, wondering if Loki is included in that we, and finds himself puzzled also that they need three days to prepare for what should be an informal, simple meal. But for now, he simply nods and smiles, heartened at Tony’s suggestion. “Three days hence.”

It does not keep him from sharing his apprehension about such an event with Loki later, however.

“I think,” Loki says after a moment’s thought, “that it is still a good idea. What better way to inspire morale, than to hold a dinner celebrating the achievements of all those here?” The only distaste that seems to curl his lip at the idea is that he had not thought of it himself.

“But what of S.H.I.E.L.D.?” Thor asks. “We have not thought of any measures to take, should they discover us.” They had spent their days on Midgard thus far thinking only of the welfare of their people, and building the foundation upon which their new lives would be shaped.

Loki reaches out to twine their fingers together then, stilling Thor’s anxious habit of picking at a callus on his palm. “I would not worry about that for now,” he says. “Enjoy the celebrations for what they are, Thor.” And when Thor opens his mouth to speak—for does Loki not see the gravity of such a concern?—Loki only presses an index finger to his lips, gentle. “I shall think of something, brother.” A quick, light kiss in place of his finger. “Leave it to me.”

There is sense in Tony’s suggestion, as in the next days, morale is high, everyone cheerful and more diligent in their efforts, in anticipation of this celebratory dinner.

Strange declines their invitation outright. “I’ve been away from the New York Sanctum long enough,” he says, sweeping away promptly after the last building supplies are delivered. He had far exceeded his estimate of three days, due to logistics issues on the supply end, but consented to stay once his contact at the Sanctum, Wong, assured him all remained well.

Before his departure, however, he shares a quick and quiet council with Loki. And when Loki only shakes his head and smiles after catching Thor’s eye, Strange claps Loki on the shoulder, regardless. Presumably to remind him of his welcome at the Sanctum as a fellow sorcerer, whether he joins Strange’s order or not—though Thor cannot say he is sorry to see Strange finally leave.

All others involved in this industrious resettlement accept Tony’s invitations, however, and preparations are quickly underway, the Asgardians most enthusiastic of all. The children cluster in groups back on the ship, painting long rolls of parchment or cutting elaborate paper chains. The women bake and cook in the galley, and though the lovely aroma of stewed meat and simmered fruits pervades the entire ship, the cooks bar all those not involved in the catering from entering. Those senior among the Asgardians stir vats of special brews, and despite the honeyed sweetness emanating from them, none are allowed to taste—not even our kings, Thor had been told by the
flustered brewers, when he had trundled past, curious.

Before long, the day of the dinner arrives, and as the hour draws near, Thor sets his tools down, making his way to their grand feasting hall, newly-built. His muscles ache after such long hours of work, and for once, he is grateful for Tony’s idea of such reprieve.

To his surprise, he finds himself barred entry—by Steve, of all people.

“Uh, right,” Steve tries, surprisingly well-dressed himself, with dark, pressed slacks and an ensemble Thor knows is called a suit on Midgard. “So Tony told me—to tell you—that you need to get cleaned up before you come in tonight. Oh, and to wear your best clothes.”

Thor furrows his brow, confused. Perhaps he should wash himself after a long day of work, he reflects, as he looks down at his hands and arms, where sweat and grime have built up an insistent layer. But surely that would not be grounds to bar him from a celebratory dinner meant to be open to all?

“Don’t look at me,” Steve says quickly, his hands up in surrender. “I’m just the messenger.”

With a sigh, Thor makes his way back to the Statesman, to the chambers he and Loki keep. Finds Loki has already seized the shower for his own use.

“You could join me, if you wish,” Loki says, a lilt of laughter in his voice. His smile is coy as he eases the door open a scant inch, a sliver of his wet and naked torso visible through the steam. Crooks a finger at Thor, beckoning in brazen invitation when Thor simply stares at the delectable sight of him.

Thor does not need telling twice, and he strips off his armour in record time, to slip behind Loki in the shower. Works up a lather with their soap, before winding his arms together over the jut of Loki’s hips. Resting his head on Loki’s shoulder. “Have you any idea what all this subterfuge is about?” he asks, without preamble. “I was barred entry from a meal meant to celebrate the resettlement of our people.”

“And the price of entry was to make yourself presentable, with clean clothing?” Loki says. Thor can hear the laugh in his voice as he adds, “Who does not love a king with dirty hair and sweaty armour? Their conditions are not so lofty as you think, Thor.”

There is sense in Loki’s words, though Thor does not have to admit it, and he satisfies himself by pressing a nipping, reproving kiss to the back of Loki’s neck. Another to his shoulder. When he moves to bite a matching one into Loki’s left shoulder, Loki startles him by turning in his arms and repaying the favour, his teeth nipping at Thor’s lower lip. Winds his arms around Thor’s neck and pulls him in to deepen the kiss, interrupted only when Thor nudges fingers into the cleft of his ass, hooking up and in.

“We have not the time for this,” Loki murmurs, though his protest lacks heat.

And while Thor thought he would be content to nudge his soap-slick cock between Loki’s thighs, to bring Loki to completion with his hand, one kiss leads to another, and before he knows it, he has Loki backed against the tile, legs hooked into Thor’s arms as he fucks into Loki, brutal and rough and relentless. Their mouths meet messy and wet beneath the spray, and the only thing Thor enjoys more is the sound Loki makes with each punishing stroke, cries so ragged and raw that they only goad Thor further, deeper, until Loki is left gasping, wordless, breathless.

“This shower,” Thor says, his breath heaving after, his lashes wet against his cheeks. He drinks in
the droplets of water, warm against his tongue. Nudges his half-hard length against Loki’s thigh, meaningful. “I like it.”

“You mean you liked the company,” Loki laughs shakily, his own breath wet, his voice hoarse from his cries.

“That too,” Thor nods. He traps Loki against the slick tile, his hands on either side of Loki’s head. Slants their mouths together for a kiss, deep and wet and forceful, making Loki whine low in his throat. “Another,” Thor demands.

He does not mean the shower.

~

After they are both set to rights, and dressed in their finest, Tony meets them at the gangway of the Statesman, wearing a formal suit of his own.

“Nice threads,” Tony says. He nods his approval as he looks over their attire—the cloaks Loki had fashioned for them from the soft fur of the valewulf, and saved for special occasions—bringing a twitching smile to Loki’s lips. But when he notices Loki’s hand in Thor’s upturned one—the way Odin might once have led Frigga down a dais to begin a formal dance at the palace, Tony wholly beams. “Good, yes, hold that pose,” he demands, barring their way forward. Motions for a man to capture their image instantly, leaving Thor blinking away spots of light, startled.

Before he has time to recover, however, Loki tugs him along by their joined hands, to the sound of Tony’s follow me. They wind their way past half-built structures, the beginnings of the markets, and take a sharp turn by the smiths’ guild, before Tony comes to a halt at the communal feasting hall.

“We’re here,” Tony breathes. He pauses at the immense double doors, carved, ornate, before making a little flourish with his hand. “Welcome, your Majesties—I mean, you’re not really my kings, but let’s not argue over—”

“Stark,” Loki hisses, raising a brow.

“All right, I’m just trying to say, ‘welcome, your Majesties’.” With another flourish of his hand, Tony eases back the doors.

All at once, the reason for Tony’s theatrics—and the strange secrecy of his plans—are made plain.

There are banners, hand-painted in painstaking English from the children that say “ThAnK YoU FOR aLL YoUR HaLP”, along with illustrations of flowers and people holding hands. Actual flowers adorning each beam and rafter, and lamps lit with a warm, amber glow to illuminate the hall. But none of this is as damning as the dais Tony leads them to, specially decorated with an ornate arch of red and white flowers, and the banner affixed to the wall across from it.

“The couple of honor sits here,” Tony says, directing them to the table on the dais that overlooks all these festivities. Thor takes a seat with Loki at the table, still stunned, blinking at the banner across from them in the hall. It is nowhere near as elaborate as the adornment of flowers wound along the beams, but the message from the children behind it is so heartfelt and pure, Thor cannot help the smile that rises to his lips.

It is a wish for the happiness of a wedded couple.

And though the runes for Thor and Loki’s name are painted too close together, a strange mesh of ThorLoki, he finds it oddly sweet.
"Best clothes, Tony had said. Three days. Food, drinks, decorations."

"Tony," Thor rumbles, in a way that sounds appreciative and reproving both, just as Tony tiptoes away.

"Okay, yeah, you caught me," Tony says, turning. He flings his hands up in surrender and raises his eyebrows. "Guilty as charged. But I heard about your little wedding ceremony and meal in space—not to say it wasn’t good, I’m sure it was very nice—” he adds quickly, when Thor narrows his eyes, in case Tony means to invalidate the efforts of all those involved, “—and all I’m saying is…” Here, he draws himself up to his full height, puffs out his chest, and clears his throat dramatically. "Roast Beast doth not a wedding feast make."

And so, he had taken it upon himself to ensure that his friends received the wedding feast they deserved, one to rival the kind they might have held back on Asgard.

"Thank you," Thor says sincerely, clasping Tony’s forearm. Though the purpose of this gathering surprised Thor, a quick survey of the hall shows that the people who helped them are being appreciated, with food and drink and song, and the Asgardians themselves finally have a feast to remember.

Tony blinks, unsure of how to reciprocate the gesture, and settles for patting Thor’s arm with his free hand. It seems Thor has a penchant for ill-matched gestures of camaraderie, as his last attempt at a high-five resulted in Bruce touching his fist to Thor’s palm. "You are most welcome,” Tony beams, continuing his strange attempt at an Asgardian accent, before he claps Loki and Thor on the backs. "But seriously, enjoy yourselves—there’s plenty of food and drink to go around.”

Tony may regret that statement later, as a famished Asgardian can eat their weight in food, but for now, he and Loki follow Tony’s advice, and drift over to the warming trays, where the aromas of spiced bread and slow-roasted meats prove too delicious to ignore.

Though the food is clearly prepared with Midgard’s ingredients, their industrious cooks have made every effort to replicate the fare that might be served in a feast of Asgard. Thor finds himself delighted to discover all his old favourites as he peers into each tray, from herbed potatoes and pork roasted in sweet, honeyed sauce, to golden crepes with custard and jellied fruit. Loki’s favourites as well, in the spiced wine cakes and glazed apple tarts.

It is all so familiar and reminiscent of the realm Thor knew, that if he did not know it, he would think they had never left Asgard.

The rest of the night holds few surprises; Thor is content to partake of Tony’s generosity and his own people’s efforts, in food and drink. Make rounds among their people and Thor’s comrades in the Sakaaran arena, with Loki at his side, his brother’s presence ever warm and solid and calming. Suffer Tony’s photographer several more times, though Loki insists there is a purpose to the tiny, balding man’s madness.

But it seems there is yet one surprise unrevealed, and that is the arrival of Director Fury, wild-eyed and perfectly baffled.

It starts with Tony narrowing his eyes and peering up at the roof, as if he can see past the great beams and through the ceiling above. “Hey, do you—is that a Quinjet I hear?” he says.

Korg volunteers himself to inspect the source of the sound, and is halfway to the wide double doors when Fury throws them open, stalking in alone and looking bewildered as he takes in the sight around him.
“I didn’t invite him,” Tony says, immediate. He nudges Steve, who just shakes his head, eyes wide.

Did you? Steve mouths at Bruce, who simply looks confused, because when has he ever been on the invitation committee of anything?

“Nobody invited me,” Fury says, cutting through all the nudges and clumsy hand signals of oh my god, who was it then? “Did you really think you could land a whole spaceship full of people on Earth and not have S.H.I.E.L.D. find out about it?”

Thor is thankful that Fury is not flanked by a dozen S.H.I.E.L.D. agents; the last thing he wants is conflict at what should be one of his happiest moments, with his brother-husband and his friends. But how Fury came to be here is still a mystery; Tony had managed to be discreet, taking care not to fly around flamboyantly in his suit, using it only for moving things, building and welding. And S.H.I.E.L.D. could not track Stark Industries’ finances, so how had they been discovered?

He looks toward Loki, who probably has many ideas of how S.H.I.E.L.D. had discovered them. Except Loki looks patently unsurprised at Fury’s arrival, when Thor glances at him, which can only mean—

“What tipped you off?” Tony asks, unabashed. “I mean, if we’re busted, we might as well learn something from all of this.” He shrugs, when the other Avengers turn to stare at him, and Bruce murmurs something about adding fuel to a fire.

“You know, I can’t tell if that’s a serious question or not,” Fury says, incredulous. When utter silence meets him from the guests, making it clear that it is, indeed, a serious question, he sighs. “More than half of the Avengers gathered in one place? Strange creating an immense number of portals, resulting in massive spikes in energy readings from certain building material sites that somehow reroute here? And that’s not even counting the fact that our radars detected an unusually dense and massive heat signature in airspace, before it simply blinked out of existence.”

Thor shifts uncomfortably in his seat, as the fault for the last slip is his; he had been late in activating their heat and cloaking shields upon arrival, despite the fact that Loki had needled him to learn how beforehand, to lighten the responsibilities of their navigational crew. And while he counted it a victory that they barely escaped being burnt to a crisp in Midgard’s atmosphere, he had given little thought to masking their presence, until far too late.

“Well,” Loki says coolly, in the face of such mounting evidence, “someone was bound to piece it all together. It is no surprise that it was you.”

Fury seems only now to have noticed Loki nestled between the Avengers among the throngs of people, caught up as he was in displaying his cleverness, or S.H.I.E.L.D.’s. “You—” he starts, his one eye bulging out of its socket, and his hand flying to his hip for his handgun, before Thor stands, abrupt, angling himself between Loki and Fury.

“Loki has—redeemed himself,” Thor says shortly. He had nearly said Loki has done penance back on Asgard for his crimes, but swallowed the words instantly. Loki would almost certainly misunderstand, thinking his past wrongdoings still stood between them. “None here bear him ill will.”

Beside Loki, Sif stands as well, though she is a beat behind Thor, with only the slightest amount of hesitance. “I… I can attest to that,” she says, catching Loki’s gaze, then Thor’s. The fact that Loki had saved her from being crushed by an ill-balanced pallet short days ago does not hurt matters, but Thor smiles, grateful for the gesture all the same.
Either Thor’s work with the Avengers and Sif’s work with S.H.I.E.L.D have won them enough of Fury’s trust, or he has taken in the sight of the Avengers flanking Loki—especially Thor, who has settled an arm around Loki’s shoulders from where he stands, protective—for he holds up his hands, placating.

“Look,” says Fury, “I’m not here to fight. I just want to take a look around. See this…establishment that seems to have sprung up overnight.”

It only seems to have sprung up overnight, considering how long Loki and his seiðr-masters have kept it cloaked, but settling an entire ship full of people in a week’s time is an achievement indeed, and Thor feels a measure of pride at having helped in this effort. However, as always, Loki appears to need to have the last word.

“What is the hurry?” Loki says lazily, from where he sits. “You will see our secret settlement. But while you are here, why not enjoy a little Asgardian hospitality? In fact,” Loki adds, after Fury has relayed a quick message through the communications device on his wrist, and started to seat himself at the end table, “why not have a seat beside Thor? For I am sure you have much in common these days.”

He makes a subtle gesture for Sif and Valkyrie to shift over a seat for now, and receives twin eyerolls in return, but they comply, effectively foiling any plans Fury may have had for making a quick exit.

Thor blinks, wondering what exactly he and Fury have in common. Then he realizes Loki means the fact that they are both missing an eye, and throws him a glare for his troubles.

Loki only smiles back, beatific, though Thor knows a smirk when he sees one. He would charge forward, would kiss that smirk off Loki’s face, but that would lead to other things, and Thor needs all his wits about him if he is to take part in this strange game Loki has laid out the pieces for. As for the game itself, Loki has not told him the rules, but ever has Loki only told him what he needs to understand, and Thor knows from experience that none ever know the whole plan but Loki.

It is hard to make small talk with Fury, Thor decides, for when he tries, all he manages to do is reveal, under the near-duress of Fury’s pointed questions, that the settlement is for his people, all of them refugees, having fled from enemy forces they knew not how to conquer.

“But,” Loki chimes in, smoothing the jagged edges of all of Thor’s blunt affirmations, “there is no chance of that enemy following us here. And we are most grateful for the help and hope your most trusted agents have given us.” He nudges a plate laden with gently-seared salmon and buttered squash, among the best food they have to offer, in Fury’s direction.

Fury stares coolly at Loki, unmoved. “Thanks, but no thanks,” he replies.

“Well, I shall have it!” Thor announces quickly, shifting the plate to himself and stroking Loki’s knee from beneath the table, calming, to keep Loki from rising and smiting Fury with Gungnir where he sits.

It seems that Fury is determined not to enjoy himself, as he continues to staunchly decline food and drink, preferring instead to cross his arms and inspect his surroundings. But then Miek trundles over, and stands at his place at the table, holding up a platter to him so imploringly and not moving an inch from place, that Thor suspects Fury accepts one hor d’oeuvre from Miek, to make him go away.

Then Korg presses a glass of something sparkling and sweet upon Fury, and from there it is a slippery slope; Sif suggests a slice of the wine-marinated lamb, Tony swears the cranberry brie is to die for, and before Fury knows it, his plate is piled high with everything from butter-sauce peas to
slow-cooked pork roast with generous ladles of gravy.

Fury is onto his third plate, a mixture of Asgardian appetizers, fruit, and dainty desserts, when Loki winds his arms around Thor’s neck, slow, seductive, taking care to make sure he does it within Fury’s sight. Leans in to press a kiss to Thor’s lips, slow and deep and full, drawing it out with a teasing lick in between, a playful nip. It is the kind of kiss that leads to other things, and Thor could weep in frustration when Loki draws away, his lips hot against the shell of Thor’s ear.

“You will wait for my signal,” Loki whispers, urgent. To all others, it might seem he is whispering naughty nothings into Thor’s ear, but he shares his instructions now, precise and succinct. “Follow after me then, and lead Fury along the markers I have placed. And in the meantime, ply him with drink.”

A hurt sound escapes Thor’s throat when Loki takes his leave, his warmth instantly missed. But Thor would be the last to ruin Loki’s plans, and he takes to heart the instructions, watching and waiting for Loki’s signal, as he plucks a stein of ale from a server’s platter moving by.

“So, you and Loki…” Fury tries, looking extremely uncomfortable now, loosening the collar of his coat. The shirt beneath.

“Yes,” says Thor simply, knowing Fury has not failed to take in the colourful hand-drawn banners from Asgard’s children, ones that make known the purpose of this event. “We are wed.” He quells the conversation there, for Fury is not a friend, and he does not wish to discuss the matter any further. He does, however, press the stein of ale into Fury’s hand, and Fury downs it with gusto.

Perhaps he is still growing accustomed to the idea of one his Avengers being married to his brother, or he hopes enough drink will help him forget.

Fury accepts another drink from Korg, whose genial, “Hey man, I’m thinking of mixing this ale and that fruit with a dash of nutmeg—you wanna try?” could charm anyone into sampling his strange brews, and by the time he has drained three full steins of Korg’s spiced brew, his words starting to run together the slightest bit, Thor deems him ready to see the settlement. A triple tap of a crow’s beak at the far window, and the bird’s glare fixed on Thor confirms his thoughts, and Thor rises from the table, grateful for Loki’s timely signal.

“Come along, Director,” says Thor. “I shall show you the settlement we have built here.”

“Yeah, about that,” Fury says. “I’m not actually the director of S.H.I.E.L.D anymore. Though I’m starting to get a pretty good idea of why I’m here instead.”

Thor nods, puzzled at this revelation, though they continue moving toward the hall’s wide doors. And though Steve and Tony raise their eyebrows, a meaningful should we come too? Thor shakes his head, minute. He and Loki have this in hand, and too much company could spoil Loki’s plans.

As they exit the doors, Thor spots the same fine-feathered crow settled on a post outside; it follows them at a distance, perching on high beams or veiling itself among shadows cast by low planks, and Thor hides a smile, heartened that he will not have to do this alone.

“You have seen our communal event hall,” says Thor, motioning to the building they have just left, “but to our right here, are some of the row houses we have built.” He frowns; in the low light of the night, the houses look less impressive than when he had helped build them. Then he spots the faintly glowing green rune painted onto the post nearby, Loki’s insignia, charmed so that only Thor can see. Another, painted a stone’s throw away. It is the trail Loki means for Thor to lead Fury along, and suddenly Thor realizes that Loki must have gone ahead to cast a massive glamour on all the buildings
along this trail. Leading Fury further along only strengthens his suspicions.

“This is where we intend to set up the markets,” Thor nods, gesturing to what looks like little more than sad, wilted stilts. “There will be room for small shops, eateries, and smiths for each craft.”

Fury nods at each structure Thor points out, from the schools to guilds and meeting halls, though Thor can tell he is not terribly impressed—and for good reason: the glamour Loki has cast makes them all appear as dismal, primitive dwellings, instead of the shining, sophisticated buildings, many of them powered by Tony’s own repulsor technology, that they have constructed. Thor can only be grateful that Loki had the foresight to do this so that S.H.I.E.L.D. will not sweep in and start confiscating things in the name of ‘research’, as they tend to do. The illusion the glamour creates is also likely more effective, now that Fury has consumed his weight in alcohol, as he does not look too closely, content to nod and follow along.

“You have questions,” Thor says, when he has completed his informal tour, for Fury seems to have been steeling himself to ask something since the start, the signs clear in the language of his body. Thor decides to pre-empt such an inquiry, saying solemnly, “Many things were lost when Asgard fell.”

Judging by how Fury’s expression twists then, Thor can tell his guess was correct; Fury had been meaning to ask of the Tesseract’s whereabouts. “That’s too bad,” Fury sighs. “We could’ve done great things with the Tesseract, if your brother hadn’t—” Fury pauses then, seeming to remember whom he speaks to. “I’m just sorry for the loss of it,” Fury says, though when Thor turns a look on him that is every kind of unimpressed, he amends, “nothing compared to losing your planet, though.”

Thor has had his own theories on where the Tesseract might be, ever since the reveal of the Casket of Ancient Winters, whose use he had seen back on Xylion. And Loki had been the last to be present in Odin’s treasure vault, to spark the beginnings of Ragnarok. But he does not speak on that for now. “I am the one who is sorry,” Thor says gravely. “Had we the Tesseract, we might have bartered it to S.H.I.E.L.D. to sanction our stay here.”

It is unlikely Loki would have allowed it, but even Thor knows it must be said, to assuage Fury’s temper.

Fury crosses his arms over his chest. “Well, you can thank your friend Stark for already buying up the land and protecting it with airtight contracts. And it’s not like we can uproot an entire refugee civilization that has proper papers and documentation. So your stay here is sanctioned, even if not by S.H.I.E.L.D.”

Thor takes a moment to be thankful that Tony spared neither expense nor thought in keeping Asgardians on this land, though he remains unsure if relieved by this last statement or not; it is not exactly the warm welcome he had hoped for, and he is prepared to fight for it, for his people, for a life here with Loki, if he must.

Fury must see the way Thor’s fist clenches at his side, anxious, for he sighs. “Look, all I’m trying to say, Thor, is…welcome to Earth.”

Unclenching his fist, relieved, Thor nods. Perhaps he and Fury do have something in common, as Loki suggests: a shared clumsiness with words. Then again, everyone pales in comparison to Loki, Thor thinks fondly. “Thank you,” he says to Fury, sincere.

Fury takes his leave soon after, citing that he has more important things to do at S.H.I.E.L.D. than obstruct people trying to re-establish their lives, though when Thor sees him out to the Quinjet, he finds five other S.H.I.E.L.D. agents crowded at its entrance, staring at Thor, startled. As if he and
Fury have simply appeared from thin air.

Thor finds himself disgruntled to know Fury had brought agents with him, wondering why they did not accompany him in, though he is thankful for it. And while he had hoped to broach the matter of Loki joining the Avengers team, he decides it can wait until another day; it is enough for now, to know that Fury will not interfere with their people’s settlement here.

Alternatively, he could always do as Tony suggested, and bring Loki with him to a battle unannounced, on the wild hope that Fury would be so impressed with Loki’s skill he would be forced to let Loki join the Avengers. Bruce had seconded the opinion, his lips loosened by fine food, saying that Loki was actually ‘a blast and a half’ when he was not actively trying to kill them, to which Loki had graciously responded, “Why, thank you Bruce. I’m honoured.”

It is not long before the Quinjet disappears into the night, its lights winking out of sight, and as it does so, Thor holds out his arm, a makeshift perch for his companion crow. Watches it flutter over and land on his arm, tiny claws scraping into skin, before stroking the crow’s feathers, soft and silky in his palm, so like the hair he has carded fingers through each morning, warm and well-loved. No sooner has he thought this than his fingers sift through that same hair, and Thor tugs Loki into his arms, immediate.

“Are you well?” Thor whispers, pressing his brow to Loki’s, gentle. It had been far too reckless of Loki, to expend such immense amounts of his magic in so short a time, from the massive glamour on their makeshift settlement to the form he had followed Thor in.

“I am fine,” Loki says, ever unwilling to confess to weakness, though his breaths come in sharp, ragged gasps, and he had all but stumbled into Thor’s arms after shedding his guise.

Thor says nothing in response; only keeps Loki in his arms, his brother’s eyes closed and his head pillowed safely against Thor’s shoulder, until his breath slows and the beat of his heart is no longer the rapid bird-flutter Thor can feel against his own chest.

When Loki seems to have recovered to some degree, Thor leads him to a bench nearby, wooden and rough, but a seat all the same. Slips an arm around his waist, stroking, soft.

“Was it you who let Fury in, Loki?” Thor asks. He knows there are better words, better ways he could have asked that would have at least half of Loki’s tact. But between the two of them, he is not the diplomat.

“It was not,” Loki says, immediate, defensive. At the way Thor rubs a palm along his side, soothing, suggesting there is no blame here, he sighs. “I may have had an invitation sent with simply coordinates and a time for Fury to arrive alone,” Loki admits finally. “And had the wards lightened for his presence only.”

“But what good would that be?” Thor asks. “He revealed to me that he is no longer the director of —”

“I am well aware he is no longer the director of S.H.I.E.L.D.,” Loki says frostily. “Did you think me idle in the years I sat upon Hliōskjálfa, while you were away? I called Fury here instead, for I am sure he will pass word onto the current director. Whom you knew as Agent Coulson,” Loki adds, raising a brow when Thor only blinks, perplexed.

Ah. There is sense in that, Thor supposes. Coulson would likely turn a deaf ear on their plight, considering Loki had made an attempt on his life. For now, however, he decides to steer the conversation back to the topic at hand. “So you sent coordinates and a time for Fury to come, forcing
him to arrive at a time and place of our choosing,” Thor muses, at the unveiling of Loki’s plan.
“What then?”

“Well, then he could sate his curiosity, led around by the ever-earnest god of thunder, who is only trying to find a place for his people,” Loki sighs in falsetto. “We would avert a war, have Fury’s blessing, however forced, and everyone would return home happy. More or less.” Loki pauses, as if there is still a missing stroke from his master painting. “Also, he is much less likely to draw arms at a feast where he has been invited to sit at the high table, and so generously plied with food and drink. Especially a wedding feast.”

Little wonder Loki had made such a production of kissing Thor at the feasting table, Thor thinks, a grin curving his mouth. However, something in Loki’s words does not sit well with him. “What do you mean, we would have ‘averted a war’?”

“You cannot honestly tell me,” Loki snipes, “that S.H.I.E.L.D. would not send military might against a heavily shielded area they knew nothing about, following an unknown heat signature in airspace? Letting Fury in was essential to the plan, and now that he has seen—”

“You are brilliant,” Thor laughs, sweeping Loki forward for a kiss deep and full and earnest. Although he wishes Loki would have trusted him with the specifics of his plan ahead of time, the way Loki handled this situation is truly astounding, and Thor would have him know it. “What would I do without you?”

“You seem to have managed well enough without me, for those years in between,” Loki says sourly, though he does not draw away from Thor’s embrace.

There is no question of which years he means, but Thor remembers them as painful and empty, without Loki by his side.

“Managing is not the same as living,” Thor says softly. “And I…I would live out the rest of my days here with you, Loki. If you allow it.” They have spent more than enough years on strife and mutual loneliness, and Thor would have them spend what time they have now together, finding mutual happiness.

“If I allow it?” Loki scoffs, before he sees the gravity of Thor’s request, and pauses to draw a breath, long and slow in the deep silence of the night. “I allow it,” he says simply. “In fact, I desire it.”

“Then we are in accord,” Thor breathes, his heart beating double-time in his chest, for though he had bound Loki to him through marriage, had promised a home for him here, a life, this is the first Loki has spoken of being willing to stay.

He reels his brother in for a kiss then, his smile too bright, his heart radiant with joy, for he is secure in the knowledge that he will not be without Loki again, and the only thing that surpasses this happiness, fills his chest with affection fit to burst, is the answering smile he tastes on Loki’s lips.

Chapter End Notes

The elements of S.H.I.E.L.D. being a much smaller, less public organization, now run by Agent Coulson instead of Nick Fury, are borrowed in part from the show Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. and what fragments the MCU movies have revealed. These are changes Thor wouldn’t have been aware of, having been away from Midgard for such a long
time, but that Loki would have no issue seeing from Asgard’s throne.
They return to the feast later, a heavy burden lifted from their shoulders now that Fury has left, and has as good as given them his blessing for their settlement here.

“Where’ve you guys been?” Tony says, when he spots them entering the wide double doors. “I swear I heard the Quinjet leave, like, half an hour ago.” Then his eyes light on the fresh love bites on Loki’s throat. The way Thor’s cloak sits oddly on his shoulder, as if it has been all but torn from its place. “Uh, never mind, I don’t even need to be Sherlock Holmes to solve that mystery.”

Steve tilts his head, curious, but Tony only mouths a pithy, I’ll explain when you’re older.

“So anyway,” Tony starts, after Thor and Loki have joined their friends for several drinks each, and Tony has assured them a bound book with pictures of this night to remember it by will be available soon, “a few of us got together. And we started talking.”

Thor furrows his brow; it is never a good thing when the others convene and converse. The last time they had done this, a simple, celebratory meal for everyone’s hard work had turned into the grand wedding feast Tony thinks he and Loki should have had. “What is it you spoke of?” he asks finally, hesitant.

Tony fires another question at him in response: “You know the cliff that overlooks this field? Where we built your little town and all?”

Thor has not given it much thought, too concerned with resettling the Asgardians. “What of it?”

“Well,” says Tony, in the tone that means he has yet another grand scheme up his sleeve, “I was thinking it would make a great place for a palace. In fact,” he adds, tablet in hand as he pulls up a schematic, projecting the image before them with a flick of his finger, “I’ve already drawn out some blueprints. But I could really use your help. To make it all, you know, Asgardian and stuff.”

“Ah,” says Loki, tilting his head. “You mean to help us build a small but modest palace within the cliff.” He turns to Thor, considering. “It does make a good vantage point.”

Thor shakes his head, ready to gently decline this offer and suggest the redirection of such resources toward helping their people instead, when Tony raises a hand to stop him.

“Modest, sure, that can be arranged; small—that’s debatable. But, hear me out, this is going to be—” here Tony places a hand over his heart, sincere, “my wedding gift. To you.”

“Tony,” Thor starts, wordless. Was tonight’s celebration not gift enough? “We cannot accept such generosity—”

“Well,” Tony adds, vaulting over Thor’s protests, “it’s because your planet pretty much blew up. Got destroyed by a fire demon. Emo goth sister. Whatever—just let me give you this, okay? Because, let’s be real, what’s a king without his palace?”

“If you will not claim it, I will,” Loki says lazily. He reaches past Thor for a late helping of Tony’s
magnum opus for the night, a multi-tiered wedding cake complete with miniatures of Thor and Loki pressed into the top layer, which their guests thankfully left intact. Treats Thor to a flattering view of his behind, perfectly contoured in the leather trousers of his choice. Thor has forgotten how brazen Loki’s seduction can be when he has a few drinks in him, and it takes all his self-restraint not to reach out and squeeze. “I have need of a place to house all the useless trinkets you buy me.”

“The wyvern’s claws from Deva Omega were useless?” Thor says, incredulous. “And the books from Ohn? What of the twin-pronged throwing knives I had made for you on Laztar?” Loki had delighted especially in this last gift, with their tendency to snap slivers off in the enemy, cruel, and had not been shy in letting his pleasure be known. Thor’s gifts to Loki now take up nearly a quarter of the chambers they prefer to keep on the Statesman, in bookshelves and ornamental trinket cases both. And the weapons Thor borrows from the armoury, many of which remain conveniently unreturned, take up another. Soon they will only have room enough for the vanity table and the bed.

Yes, Thor decides, the larger chambers Tony offers are tempting indeed.

Loki straightens then, a sliver of cake in his fingers, thwarting Thor’s wandering hand, though he catches the motion from the corner of his eye and casts his eyes skyward. “To house most of the useless trinkets you buy me.”

“See? Even Loki agrees with me,” says Tony, his eyes wide, as he jabs a finger in Loki’s direction. “You’re getting a palace. It’s happening.”

“Though my brother does have a point,” Loki says, before Thor can voice indignation about Tony and Loki teaming up against him. “As much as it is appreciated, we cannot accept generosity on the scale you have offered.” He nods toward Thor. “We will do our part in the rebuilding of this settlement’s palace.”

Thor can only wonder what he means by that, but before he can ask, Tony claps his hands together, interrupting the thought.

“Right, yeah, that’s the other thing that we were all talking about,” says Tony. Thor’s expression must crumple in obvious confusion—how many other secret councils had the Avengers held without him and Loki?—because he adds quickly, “the last thing, I swear.” When Loki raises his eyebrows, as if to say go on, Tony says, “We can’t just keep calling this place ‘the settlement’. Or ‘the work site’. This place needs a name, and we figured, who better to christen—sorry, no, I guess you’re gods yourselves—who better to name this place, than the two who’ll be ruling it?” He spreads his hands, one palm out to Thor, the other to Loki.

Thor cycles through a few thoughts, quickly. There is…New Asgard, he supposes, but saying the name each time would dredge up painful memories of the realm they left behind. Then there is Not-Asgard, which is so blatantly terrible that Loki would have his hide for it.

“What of Asgard-Beta?” Thor suggests, hesitant. The name Alfheim-Beta had served them well enough, for the world they stopped at to earn money enough to continue their journey, and for Thor to accomplish his whirlwind-courtship.

Loki snorts, which shows his clear thoughts on the matter. “Appending ‘beta’ to a world might be appropriate for a place we only intend to stop at temporarily,” he says. “Not a place that is meant to be our new home.”

His brother cuts several more of his ideas down to size, including Asgard-Tveir and Asgard-Annarr, meaning Asgard Two and Asgard the Second respectively, without offering any of his own, before Thor glances subtly to Tony for help, desperate. Naming things has never been his forte; even the
goats that pulled his chariot back on Asgard, *Tanngrisnir* and *Tanngnjóstr*, he had named after the sounds they made—one a snarler, and one a tooth-grinder.

Tony throws Thor a look of pure commiseration. “I’ve got it!” he exclaims, drawing Loki’s scrutiny away from Thor, for which Thor breathes a tiny sigh of relief. “How about... *Asgardia*?” When Loki only blinks at him, he continues, “You know, they say here that when you live in the suburbs, the life you’re living is suburbia. And if you live in Asgard, with all the cultural and social aspects of Asgard, then it’s—”

“Then it is *Asgardia*,” Loki breathes, his eyes positively gleaming. “You *do* have some good ideas from time to time, Stark.” He ignores Tony’s indignant squawk of *what do you mean, from time to time*, and takes Thor’s hand. “Asgardia sounds wonderful, does it not?”

“Wonderful,” Thor beams, more in relief that they have a name for their home now, though he must agree that Tony’s idea is brilliant indeed; they could keep their identity as Asgardians, and have a name for their home that was not *second* or *lesser*, inferior in any way.

He makes a note of having a gift basket delivered to Tony with the first of their harvest and handmade foods when they have re-established farmland and shops, for Tony had not only funnelled his time and resources to their cause, but also planned out a palace and named the settlement for them.

After discussing the details of the palace schematics with them—and being surprisingly agreeable to Loki’s idea of casting immense statues into the palace’s rock face, spelled to break free of their posts and defend Asgardia in times of need—Tony wanders off to join Steve and Bruce. As a group, they make their way back to the Statesman, where Asgardians, Sakaaran rebels, and Midgard’s workers share quarters for now—at least, until the houses built are fully functional. Already a few of the older Asgardians totter up the gangway, unsteady, in various states of inebriation, Heimdall barely managing to rescue several from falling over the edge.

“I should have made another request,” Loki laments, as he watches Tony join the others, “while Stark was being so remarkably generous. Offering to help us rebuild the royal palace and its sentinels. Helping us pick a name for this place.”

“Hmm,” says Thor, a smile already tugging at his mouth, as he winds an arm around Loki’s waist. Herds him toward the Statesman to their quarters as well, for the night is drawing to a close. “What would you have asked for?”

“Oh, not much,” Loki says airily. “Just a monument of myself, cast in solid gold, to sit in front of the palace. Like the one I had on Asgard,” he adds, when Thor narrows his eyes, unsure if Loki is jesting or not.

Thor thinks that a monument for those who had fallen on Asgard would be more appropriate, and that the consideration of a number of other issues—the division of farming land between their people, the quality of water and soil here for their crops, and the issue of taxation for when their people have re-established themselves—should come first. But for now he sighs, and kisses the edge of Loki’s brow, tiny and fond.

“You will have your monument, you vain creature,” he murmurs, swallowing the laugh that threatens to bubble out when Loki smiles, pleased. He keeps silent the fact that it could be *years* from now. Perhaps he will tell Loki *later*, after he has bedded him, left him sated and sprawled loose on their bed.

The gangway is in clear sight now, even if a fair distance away, but Thor turns then, to survey all they have accomplished in these few short weeks. Have built, from homes and markets, to the starts
of crafting halls and schools, every structure the foundation for the life Thor hopes they will make here.

A subtle joy threads through his heart now, at the thought that this life—through the help of his friends—is becoming a reality. And perhaps it is asking too much of the Norns, if indeed they still watch over this tiny settlement, but Thor dares to wonder how many years he can have of this happiness. With this life remade, with his people, with *Loki*.

Then he remembers with a sudden horror that the apples of Æðunn are gone, her orchards set ablaze in the destruction of Asgard, before particulating into the void with all that was left of their realm.

They had lost so *much* in their flight from Asgard, from the wild array of animals to the plants and trees and flowers. But the loss of the apples means that he, Loki, and the rest of their people will age at the same rate as their friends on Midgard. The weight of this thought is one so burdensome Thor’s knees nearly give way beneath him, and he settles heavy on a nearby rock, to regain his composure.

It does not take long for Loki to settle beside him, quiet, joining him in his brooding. Stroking small, soothing circles into the small of Thor’s back. “What is it that troubles you, brother?”

Thor shares his worries regarding the apples, as Loki nods, contemplative. Even as he does so, however, Thor takes comfort now in the fact that he will not outlive his friends by centuries, until all those he had known have perished. Takes more comfort in the fact that he will be able to grow old, and sooner—a concept his Midgardian friends all seem to romanticize—with Loki, instead of seeing the rise and fall of another lengthy millennium.

“I suppose,” Loki says finally, when Thor has exhausted both word and thought on the matter, “that I should inform you I do have several apples secreted away.” And when Thor turns to him, surprised and heartened both, Loki adds, “How do you think you recovered so quickly, after the wounds you suffered on Xylion?”

Thor recalls then, the tiny vial of golden potion Loki had urged to his lips. *For the pain*, Loki had assured him—when it had been a restorative for Thor’s body entire.

“And how do you explain the absence of illness sweeping through the ship, with our people living in such close quarters?” Loki continues, raising a brow. “Or when we were forced to land on planets with colder climes?”

Thor had pondered this briefly, over the course of their journey, but was simply grateful that their luck had held. The discovery that this was *Loki’s* doing all along—his brother keeping everyone safe and alive, in his quiet, steady way—tilts his world on its axis. But after a moment’s thought, Thor decides that this should be no surprise at all.

“Then, the soup—” Thor tries, as one thought leads to another, realization dawning, sudden. “And that time you asked me how I felt after drinking it—”

“Yes, thankfully I had the foresight to choose several other test subjects beforehand,” Loki scoffs, “all of whom gave me more useful answers. Such as, ‘I feel more energetic. More wakeful. And far less fatigued.’ As opposed to your ‘I feel full’,” he finishes, his lip curled in distaste.

Thor laughs, a low and genuine rumble, as he slings an arm across Loki’s shoulders. “I am sorry,” he says. “Had I known what you intended, I could have given you a proper answer.”

Loki mumbles something scathing, about the purpose of *blinded studies* being lost on Thor, though he allows Thor to press tiny kisses to his cheeks, reward for this sliver of hope offered—for all is not
lost.

But other thoughts soon crowd out the notion of studies being blinded or sighted, in Thor’s mind; even if Loki claimed he had secured whole apples, how had he so many to feed the ship’s inhabitants? To do that, he would have had to rescue an entire orchard.

Perhaps an entire *swathe* of orchards.

And if Loki had salvaged whole swathes of orchards, then perhaps he could salvage whole buildings as well. Entire tracts of land. The very idea of it seems impossible, but Thor knows now that *nothing* is impossible, where Loki is concerned.

Fragments of other memories return to him then, pieces of conversation, events, *details* that Thor had overlooked, had not yet fastened together to form an overarching whole.

*We will do our part in the rebuilding of the palace,* Loki assured Tony. But with what materials did he hope to do such a thing? They had neither the plans for the original palace structures, nor the molds from which *Hliðskjálf* had been cast.

Then there were their hunting cloaks, revealed on Alfheim-Beta, the presence of which Thor had marvelled at, for he thought them recreated from their old ones in stunning detail. The tapestries that hung on Loki’s walls in the Statesman, each pattern and weave exact to the ones adorning Loki’s former chambers.

And last of all, as Thor reaches further, *further* back in his memory, to their earliest days on the ship, there was the generous manner in which Loki distributed mementos to their people shortly after Asgard’s destruction, from architectural plans of homes and tools of each craft, to recipes, tomes and trinkets. Such a thing was not possible, unless Loki had the entirety of Asgard’s archives or the contents of homes within reach.

Thor will return to the mystery of what became of Íðunn’s orchards and the fate of the apples Loki had secured in a moment, but finding solutions to these other mysteries takes precedence for now.

“Loki, the object you had Sif investigate…” Thor starts, urgent, quiet, his suspicions rising. “The…Pym disc? Particle disc?” He tries to draw the words from recent memory, before admitting defeat. “The *discs*, Loki.”

“Yes, what of them?” says Loki, sounding far too innocent.

“Not that I am not grateful that you sent Sif here to investigate them, but what purpose did you have, in doing such a thing?” Thor lets the arm he had slung around Loki’s shoulders drift toward his waist, tightening around him. A slow-sprung trap that Loki could still escape from, but with difficulty.

“Finally thought of that, have you?” Loki says dryly. “Perhaps it is your time spent as a king that has you making such connections so quickly.”

“Perhaps it is my time spent with *you,*” says Thor, squeezing Loki with the arm wound around him, “and my growing familiarity with your myriad machinations.”

Loki’s laugh is infectious, soft as it is, though no denial follows. “During your years away from Asgard, you were not the *only* one keeping an eye on developments in all the realms.”

“Hmm,” Thor hums, considering. He leans in to nuzzle Loki’s nose. “Enlighten me.”
“I may have had Sif charm the one they call ‘Ant Man’ on Midgard, then thieve the discs from him, for I had heard rumour of the things they could do. Your mortals think themselves clever and secretive, but a little alcohol can loosen the—”

“And once she sent them back to Asgard,” Thor interrupts, “it was only a matter of time before you were able to replicate its effects.” He would hear of Loki’s brilliance at present, and not his condescension, feigned or no.

“Time, yes,” Loki says shortly, perhaps his only admission that he had taken far more of it than expected, to unravel the mystery behind the discs. “You have heard of the discs’ power by now, have you not? The ability to reduce an object to a fraction of its size, or to enlarge it?”

Thor nods. There were spells that could easily emulate such an effect, for Loki had demonstrated them when he shrank packs and bedding for them on hunts, in the days before. But Loki had desired to study these discs for a reason.

“Well, I made something similar to it,” Loki declares finally. “I made something better.”

Thor’s breath catches in his throat then, for if the discs only worked on one object, then Loki would have found a way to extend its effect to large areas. Rooms, Buildings, even. Items or entities so large that Asgard’s simple spells could not hope to miniaturize them in an instant. Loki has always thought of things on a greater scale, and suddenly the contents of the velvet bag in their chamber safe, one Loki nudged into a shadowed corner to keep from Thor’s sight, are becoming clear.

“So you…used what you made to reduce the size of…certain portions of the palace,” Thor says slowly, wonderingly, at this hope that not all vestiges of their lives had been lost. “The ones that remained intact. And…the throne. For later expansion.”

“Mmhn,” Loki prevaricates, before Thor squeezes him into admitting a yes, for he does so hate to give up his secrets.

“And the archives,” Thor continues, recalling how Loki had spoken of books he could consult. Distributed lesser tomes among seiðr practitioners and rolls of schematics to their draftsmen. “Our rooms.” There was familiar clothing Thor had not questioned, tapestries on their walls he had not given second thought, believing that they were all a product of Loki’s magic. And if Loki had rescued random pieces of their heritage, a sampling of different households of Asgard, then he could pick and choose which items to reduce and enlarge at will. Which to distribute, stripped of all identifiers, to those starved for a piece of the home they once knew.

“Fine, yes, those as well,” Loki sighs, flapping a hand.

The reason Loki had taken so long to return to Thor on the Statesman is clear now, and Thor could —Thor could strike Loki for this foolishness. That he had tarried to salvage what he could of Asgard, instead of escaping with his life.

“You should have more care with your life, brother,” says Thor, pressing his forehead against Loki’s, hot, his hold around Loki’s waist too tight. Loki is clever in so many respects, but a fool in all the wrong ways.

“I…” Loki tries. “I do have some sense of self-preservation.” And when Thor simply blinks at him, uncomprehending, Loki adds, “The coffers in the palace were destroyed when Surtur rose, but I did not stop by the ones we kept off-site. Or else we would not have had to suffer that display of barbarism you call ‘hunting’. Twice.”
Thor laughs shakily at the finger Loki wags in his face. “You *liked* my display of barbarism. Admit it. *Admit it.*”

And by the way a blush rises to Loki’s cheeks, instant, he knows they both remember how such barbaric pursuits had led to more pleasurable things—in both instances. Spends a moment kissing each rose-hued cheek, playful, then his mouth, before remembering there is yet one topic unexplained, one Thor intends to return to now.

“Loki, the…” Thor tries, mid-kiss. He is driven near to distraction from a clever lick of Loki’s tongue at his lip, the playful dip of it into his mouth. “*Loki.*” Places a finger upon Loki’s lips, to deter him. “The apples. You said you had several secreted away. But how had you so many to last all this time?”

Loki had decreed that soup made from the apples was to be served at the first meal of each week, but their journey to Midgard had spanned *months*. And Thor clearly recalls that Loki’s efforts to replicate the apples, with magic alone, had failed when they were young. Unless Loki had found another way to—

“Those were not the same apples,” says Loki.

“No?” Thor wrinkles his brow, puzzled. “You did not save entire swathes of Iðunn’s orchards with your discs?”

Loki folds his arms over his chest, his brow creasing as he frowns, deep. “To use my version of the discs—more accurately described as *nets*—on living things remains…problematic,” he admits. “The apples in the swathe of orchards I managed to save, when restored to their original size, were shrivelled, blighted things—none of them fit for consumption.”

Thor nods; there is sense in Loki’s explanation. With inanimate objects, there was little chance of mishap, but even the best of magics could go awry when it came to living things.

“I tried, for a time, to replicate them in the garden started on the ship,” Loki continues, “from seeds of both the whole and the blighted apples. But neither magic nor an affinity for green and growing things bore fruit; the apples produced there were small, sickly things, hardly as potent as the original.” He pauses, before nodding toward Thor. “It was *those* that were used for the soup served on the ship.”

“I see,” says Thor. Sorrow fills his heart then, knowing that Loki’s worry in the early days had been due to the entirety of the apple crop failing. He finds himself lamenting that Loki had not come to him *earlier*, had not trusted him with this secret of his. Or perhaps it had been Loki’s stubbornness at play, an attempt to prove he could accomplish this without Thor’s help.

Loki sighs now, mournful. “Perhaps it is the water, the air, or the quality of soil that makes all the difference.”

*Or the amount of light,* Thor thinks, recalling how little natural light they had had in space. For all living things need the light to grow, and Asgard had had that in abundance. But he only nods for now, knowing well how Loki loves to demonstrate his intellect and persistence, priming himself to offer the praise Loki desires. “It was a clever idea, at least,” says Thor, stroking the small of Loki’s back, gentle. “And an earnest effort.”

By the wan smile Loki graces him with, however, he can tell Loki means to say *Not clever enough. And my earnestness means nothing, when I have naught to show for it.*
“I…” Loki tries, his gaze flicking toward Thor, hesitant. “There are yet a few small batches of new seedlings left, grown from the original, unaffected apples. We intend to replant them here on Midgard.” His fingers drum anxious against his elbow. “I do not know if they will take to the soils of Midgard readily, if at all. But although Íðunn, whom I have put in charge of the gardens, is at her wit’s end, she has not given up hope.”

*Nor should you,* Thor decides, for the waver in Loki’s voice makes it seem that he has. With the arm he has wound back around Loki’s waist, Thor squeezes, warm, to provide what encouragement he can. Takes the opening Loki has offered him for what it is. “If you like,” Thor says carefully, “I can have a look at the gardens for you.” Perhaps he could coax the seedlings to life, still. Give them roots and stems strong enough to survive the transport to Midgard’s soils.

Loki is silent for long moments, and Thor knows it must wound his pride, to accept Thor’s help for what had been a personal endeavour of his. “I,” Loki says finally, swallowing hard. “I think I would like that.”

Thor presses a kiss to Loki’s cheek, then another, elated that he can offer Loki a tiny seedling of hope in return, for all Loki has done. But though Loki allows these kisses, these affections, he remains expectedly pragmatic, as always.

“If the efforts to replant them here on Midgard fail,” Loki sighs, “then I intend to bring our work in that to a close, for there are other crops to focus on. With Íðunn’s help, I have set aside enough of the original apples for us to put Asgard—Asgardia’s affairs in order, but after that…” Loki’s voice trails off. “After that, it will be as you said.”

They would age at the same pace as their friends here on Midgard. See their people into a new future—a brighter, better one—before moving onward themselves.

“But what of the apples you grew within the ship’s garden?” asks Thor. “Did you not say that although they were not as potent as the originals, they still had uses of their own?”

“Uses such as reversing injury and fatigue, yes,” Loki confirms. “But I doubt they carry the same age-defying properties as the real ones. Which means that as the years pass, we will…” His lip curls in displeasure at the thought, Loki falling silent, as if he cannot bring himself to say the words.

“—we will grow old together,” Thor says, heartened, voicing the sentiment for them both. And while he is pleased enough that they have some measure of time still, for Loki had thought this far ahead, he cannot help but relish the fact that they can grow old together, even if it comes sooner than he thought. “I would not mind such a thing,” he adds softly, “if I could do so with you by my side.”

Loki sighs, the tiniest crinkle of distaste wrinkling his nose. “You have always been one for sentiment,” he says. But Thor spots the smile that wins out, secret and soft, that curls the edges of Loki’s lips—a sign that he shares this sentiment, in full.

“For you?” Thor says, returning the smile twofold, as Loki leans gentle into his warmth. “Always.”

Chapter End Notes

1) “I don’t even need to be Sherlock Holmes to solve that mystery.”: Another reference to Robert Downey Jr.’s *Sherlock Holmes*, haha. Still holding out for Sherlock Holmes 3!!!
2) The settlement being named *Asgardia* comes straight from the comics, in which Tony helps rebuild a fallen Asgard on Earth.

3) Regarding the functionality of the Pym discs, I wrote this chapter long before *Ant Man 2* came out, and didn't feel like retconning large parts of my fic just to accommodate Marvel’s ever-changing canon. If Pym’s technology can shrink a building down to the size of a luggage-tote, then Loki’s version can shrink one to the size of a *dime*.

4) **In the next chapter:** The epilogue that wraps up this adventure, along with a special small cameo! Also, although this fic generally updates every other week, the last chapter will be up on January 9th instead of the 2nd, due to the holiday season. Thanks for staying with this fic so far, and a happy holiday to all of you who celebrate it! See you all in the new year! :D
Hello, and welcome back! I hope you all had a happy new year! Thanks for your patience in waiting for this chapter, I hope you enjoy! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It takes time for Thor and Loki to see to the remaining construction of Asgardia, as all things worth doing do. But by the end of the month, they ensure that the crafting halls are complete and the major markets are ready to operate, with plans to start building less vital structures soon, such as small guild halls and bathhouses and eateries.

And during the first month of their stay, they had discovered a boon most valuable: that the people of Norway still have belief enough in their old gods to welcome them. When Loki had questioned the inexplicable generosity of their neighbours, Tony summarized the situation most succinctly for them: “Turns out, they think it’s like the second coming of their gods or something. Or third. Or fourth. Whatever. However many times you guys have descended upon them, long enough for them to build altars in your name and worship at them.”

“So even if you had not paved the way with your enormous treasury,” Loki began slowly, “and Fury had not given us his blessing to—”

“Yeah. They’d probably fight to keep you guys around anyway,” Tony had beamed. “Like stalker fans with rock stars or something.”

Thor does not understand this analogy about stars hewn from rocks, but the thought that anyone would want them, would want to keep them here in Midgard, is a heartening thought indeed.

Every place they visited, from Oslo and Drammen, to the smaller villages inland, is proof of such a thing, the citizens of each one eager to answer their questions. Ready to provide resources to aid in Asgardia’s restoration, and instruct them in the unfamiliar. They are taught about aqueducts and their numerous uses, and tidal turbines, for their location by the cliffs grants them a natural energy source. Loki had studied these structures, and established them in Asgardia forthwith, the process helped along with magic. Delighted in both ideas, for the aqueducts would bring water to the settlement and their farms, and the turbines would provide power if Tony’s repulsor technology failed.

They are sold the finest horses for riding and ploughing as well, in addition to poultry and livestock to begin a future in farming. Given seeds for basic grains and vegetables, along with a healthy store of consumable food, to get their people through the first year.

In return, Thor ensures the fields of those who helped them have adequate rainfall, and that their crops are healthy and thriving. Loki, for his part, casts spells to keep the crops free from blight and resistant to unwanted pests.

They have just returned from one such visit, regarding the care and feeding of their newly purchased horses, optimization of planting times, and field usage, and are making a quick round of the
settlement when Loki’s phone rings. From the back pocket of his freshly-pressed black trousers, in which Loki cuts a fine figure.

“It is not my phone that rings,” Thor says airily, when Loki turns to shoot him a look. One that spells answer it already, you oaf.

Tony had gifted them both Stark phones—top of the line, not even released to the public yet, Tony beamed—but Thor is content to use his as a paperweight for the countless documents and files he and Loki must process as kings. Only Loki deigns to use or even answer his, and everyone reached a consensus that the best way to reach them both was to call Loki, for he and Thor were together often enough anyway.

“Judging from the ringtone,” Loki says, frowning at the sound of screeching vocals and distinct guitar riffs, pre-programmed into the phone, “it is your friend, Stark.”

“Our friend,” Thor corrects. His arm is wound easy around Loki’s waist, and he squeezes, fond, for the others have come to see Loki as their friend, from the assistance he has given them, and his oddly sage advice.

“Our friend,” Loki amends, grudgingly. Perhaps because Tony had not only arranged land ownership for them and essentially funded Asgardia’s construction, but had also acquiesced to a sizable number of Loki’s requests in the restoration of their palace. Thor had assured Tony there was no need to do so much, whereupon Tony had wagged a finger in his face, hushing him, and said, Happy wife, happy life, Thor.

“Well?” says Thor, his hand sliding from Loki’s waist to his rear to retrieve the phone. Takes the opportunity to squeeze a cheek of Loki’s ass at the same time, teasing. “Find out what he wishes, then.” It earns him an eyeroll and a put-upon sigh, as Loki swipes the screen to answer the call.

“Yes? What is it, friend Stark?” Loki says, his smile smug, as he catches Thor’s gaze. This time it is Thor’s turn to sigh and cast his eyes skyward.

Tony is nonplussed by the greeting, for it is an improvement from Bankroller Stark, or Investor Stark, names Loki had taken to calling him at first. “Hey, listen, are you guys in the neighbourhood?” He thumbs at a non-descript backdrop behind him, the details of which are difficult to make out from the screen. “Got something here at the new facility I want to show you.”

“We are not, Thor intends to answer over Loki’s shoulder, for they are an entire ocean’s distance away, but Loki’s answer is quicker, surer: “We can be there within minutes.” He tilts a grin over his shoulder toward Thor, mischief in every inch of it, which Thor pecks a hard, vengeful kiss to.

“Well?” says Thor, his hand sliding from Loki’s waist to his rear to retrieve the phone. Takes the opportunity to squeeze a cheek of Loki’s ass at the same time, teasing. “Find out what he wishes, then.” It earns him an eyeroll and a put-upon sigh, as Loki swipes the screen to answer the call.

“Yes? What is it, friend Stark?” Loki says, his smile smug, as he catches Thor’s gaze. This time it is Thor’s turn to sigh and cast his eyes skyward.

Tony is nonplussed by the greeting, for it is an improvement from Bankroller Stark, or Investor Stark, names Loki had taken to calling him at first. “Hey, listen, are you guys in the neighbourhood?” He thumbs at a non-descript backdrop behind him, the details of which are difficult to make out from the screen. “Got something here at the new facility I want to show you.”

“We are not, Thor intends to answer over Loki’s shoulder, for they are an entire ocean’s distance away, but Loki’s answer is quicker, surer: “We can be there within minutes.” He tilts a grin over his shoulder toward Thor, mischief in every inch of it, which Thor pecks a hard, vengeful kiss to.

“Ugh, newlyweds,” Tony mutters, rolling his eyes, subtle, the gagging noise that follows less so. Then he laughs, good-natured. “Fantastic, see you in a few then. We’ve finished furnishing your guys’ rooms here, and you should come check out your new digs. I’ll show you around. Give you the royal tour.” He snorts another laugh then. “Literally.”

Before Thor can decline such invitation, Tony ends the call, abrupt, as if he sensed the perhaps another time that had been building in Thor’s throat.

Thor stares at the phone, displaying now a wallpaper of him and Loki from their second wedding celebration, courtesy of Tony’s photographer. “We are nowhere near New York, Loki.” Thor furrows his brow in dismay. “Much less ‘a few minutes away’. What shall we do now? Especially since Tony expects us in—”
“Fear not,” Loki says, raising a hand to forestall Thor’s protests. “We shall use the spell I have been working on, for just such a purpose.”

Loki had found a way to replicate Strange’s power—that of opening portals at will—for the transport of both people and products, a talent they maintain the secrecy of at present. However, Loki’s spell took time to initiate, unlike Strange’s deftly-made gateways, and was rather unstable; in a previous attempt, a quick jaunt from Asgardia to a neighbouring village, Thor had suffered singed hair, and discovered parts of his cloak rearranged upon exit, as if the particles had reassembled themselves out of order at their destination. A fact that left him horrified, as the rearrangement could have happened to them, rather than their clothes, though Loki assured him he would resolve the flaws.

“Do you not recall the Strangefrost?” Loki elaborates, with a flourish of his hand, when Thor simply stares, incredulous at the thought that Loki intends to use it again. Especially after their faulty jaunt the first time.

“You mean the Transport Tunnel,” Thor insists.

The Strangefrost was Loki’s cheeky attribution of credit for this transport system to Strange, the odd coloring of the tunnel spawned from Loki’s portals, and a play on their earliest method of travel, the Bifrost. But if anything disturbs Thor more than the use of this spell, it is the name Loki decided on. For Tony had since informed him that people of Midgard—much like the young of Asgard, Thor finds—were fond of creating their own fictions and art for Loki, who was inexplicably popular, and paired off with everyone, with such couple names as Thunderfrost, the only coupling Thor approves of, Ironfrost, with Tony himself, and Gammafrost, with Bruce.

Thor would be damned if they henceforth referred to this method of transport by a name that sounded as though Loki had lustful liaisons with Strange.

“Yes, all right, the Transport Tunnel,” Loki sighs, and when Thor grudgingly agrees to use it—they cannot disappoint their friends, after all—leads them further afield before readying the spell.

The motion of Loki’s hands is different from Strange’s; he first sweeps a vertical line where he chooses to open a portal, before drawing a graceful arc, one starting from a point below his knees and spreading to the sides. Then, with a quick rotation of his wrists, Loki closes the circle above his head. With those steps complete, Loki’s eyes flutter shut, and he murmurs an incantation, his words soft, his voice a pleasure to hear, a rasp of velvet against silken cloth.

And though Thor knows better than to disrupt Loki’s spellcasting, still he wishes to reach out, to wind arms around Loki’s waist, struck by the sudden desire to kiss him, for the sight of Loki’s efforts bent toward creation, his mind focused on one thing entirely, is immeasurably lovely.

The tunnel that forms from his efforts is no exception, and while blue sparks border the entrance, similar to Strange’s portals, the heart of it shines with an iridescent light, tiny shards of every color in the spectrum twinkling, bright. Even Heimdall had stared into it, when they had shown him for the first time, transfixed by Loki’s recreation of the Bifrost.

Beautiful, he had murmured, drawing a genuine smile from Loki, for they both knew Heimdall did not give praise lightly.

The magnitude of Loki’s brilliance is not lost on Thor either; Loki had not only manipulated his magic and mastered the mechanics behind such travel to form these gateways, but he had done it without the assistance of the Tesseract. Perhaps Thanos could track the Tesseract’s use, or its activation would alert him of their location, but whatever the reason, Loki had not resorted to drawing upon the Tesseract’s power—for Thor cannot sense a magic or power within the tunnel that
is anything but Loki’s—and developed this method all on his own.

The fact that only Loki can create such a portal, at will and without need for a constant guard, the entrants of which he can admit or refuse as he wishes, Thor chooses not to comment on; if Loki wishes to keep this for himself, he can have it. For Loki deserves to have his secrets and keep them too. And if he deigns to share them with Thor one day, so much the better.

That Loki brings Thor with him on these spatial treks—flaws of the system not withstanding—is another privilege entirely, one reminiscent of the flights Thor would take Loki on, Mjölnir arcing high in one arm, and Loki wound snug in the other. To see far-off places and people and sights. And though the reversal of their roles now is bittersweet, Loki being the one to take him to other places and sights, Thor can only reflect that with his brother beside him now, always, life is infinitely more the sweet than the bitter.

“Ready?” Loki says, his voice shaking Thor from his thoughts. From where he had been gazing into the tunnel and its glimmering light, mesmerized. Loki laces his fingers through Thor’s, and squeezes, encouraging—lending him bravery, even in the face of possible particle rearrangement.

Perhaps a chunk of his hair will be found written into the knee of his jeans this time, Thor surmises, resigned, or a patch of his jacket woven into his wrist. But more than the courage Loki offers him is something innate, a quality strengthened between them, in the last few months especially. Trust.

Thor gives their joined hands a squeeze. “Ready,” he says, his smile broad, heartened by the one Loki graces him with in return.

And together, they step into the light.

~

The moment they step out of the portal, into the forest surrounding the new Avengers facility, Thor decides there is no harm in confirmation, and immediately checks all limbs and extremities, giving them a perfunctory wiggle. Ten fingers, ten toes, with feeling to all of them. Excellent.

He makes another quick check of his clothes, to ensure nothing is rearranged and everything is in its proper place, delighted to find that the buttons of his jacket are still bolted firmly in front, and the holes of his jeans are still intact—as intact as ragged holes in clothing can be.

His trust in Loki is well-placed; Loki had indeed resolved the more worrying flaws in this method of transport. As a quick afterthought, however, Thor pats the front of his jeans, careful. No oddities noted. Perfect. At the sound of a tiny huff of laughter escaping, he looks up, only to find Loki hiding a smile behind his hand.

“You can rest easy, Thor,” says Loki. “The Mjölnir in your pants should still be intact and unaltered.”

“That matters little if my mind has been altered,” Thor frowns, doing several quick sums in his head. Drawing up a mental checklist, including Loki’s favourite books and foods and Midgardian films, pleased that he can name and tick off each item, for it means his mind remains intact as well. Later, he must do a deeper probe, to confirm he recalls the details of older memories, such as their first kiss. Their first dance. But this will do well enough for now.

“If it has, it could only be an improvement,” Loki snipes. Tries and fails to hide the smile growing wider behind his fingers, shining through with mischief and sweetness both.

“Rascal,” rumbles Thor, feigning outrage, “do you truly think so little of me?” Laughs at the yelp
Loki makes when Thor lands a playful smack on his ass in retribution, which had sheathed said Mjölnir the night previous. Quite vigorously. “If you wish to continue receiving Mjölnir,” he adds, letting a growl slip into his voice, low, menacing, and just the slightest bit seductive, “you had better ensure that my mind stays intact.”

Loki only huffs, and pinches Thor’s bottom in return. “You have little need of it, if you continue to receive mine.”

Heat surges to Thor’s cheeks, instant, at Loki’s brazen suggestion, delivered with the same nonchalance as when he discusses the weather. “You—you—” Thor sputters. “I—I—Loki,” is all he manages, words fleeing him at the thought of only Loki taking him, henceforth, and not the reverse. It would not be unbearable—far from it—but he prefers that they both have a chance to lead. Variety was the spice of life, after all.

The same thought seems to have crossed Loki’s mind, as his mouth tilts upward, sly. “I suppose we could make a compromise,” he concedes, “to keep both your mind and Mjölnir intact.” He tilts Thor’s chin up with the tip of his finger, baring his throat. Mouths a kiss into it, a scrape of teeth and tongue that has Thor shivering, subtle, but only makes Loki all the bolder, nipping deeper into soft skin. Sucking a bruise into flesh, a rose-bright mark neither beard nor a high collar will hide.

“Yes,” Thor tries, swallowing, tight, Loki’s lips shifting with the motion. “That would be… preferable. Especially for mutual pleasure.”

“Mutual,” Loki purrs, slanting his mouth against Thor’s for a kiss, his lips, his voice, his very body angled for temptation. It is not fair, for Loki to have turned the tables on Thor’s seduction, and Thor pulls him in, gripping Loki by the hips and pulling him off balance. Delighting in his cry of surprise as he falls against Thor, hands braced on Thor’s chest, dazed—before Loki recovers, immediate. Winds an arm around Thor’s neck, while the other slips daring between them.

“Oh,” Thor gasps, caught off guard again, as Loki palms the bulge in his jeans. Stroking, clever, in shameless invitation. Leaving little question of what activities he intends for them tonight. Mutual, Loki mouths again, along Thor’s lips, and Thor has no doubt it will be so.

A nearby speaker crackles to life, and with a little pop of static, Tony’s voice rings out overhead. “Hey, guys? Not to sound, uh, awkward or anything, but we can totally see you on the security feed.”

Likely those hidden in the bird’s eyes, Thor supposes. Tony converses with someone else as an aside, his voice directed away from the microphone he speaks into, his tone near-scandalized. “Cover your eyes, kid.”

“But Mr. Stark, they were only kissing!” another voice pipes up, earnest, earning Tony’s mutter of sure, only kissing, let’s go with that.
Thor clears his throat, and releases his hold on Loki’s backside, reluctant, while Loki draws his hand away from Thor’s jeans. There is a marked difference between being caught sensually caressing your brother in the halls of Asgardia, by a friend, or subject, one grown used to such happenings, and being sighted doing so in unfamiliar territory. By a mechanical bird. Being watched by who knows how many people, children among them.

“We will continue this later,” Loki murmurs, his breath warm against Thor’s lips, hand lingering at Thor’s neck. “And I will wring such pleasure from you, that you—”

“We can hear what you’re saying too,” Tony interrupts. “So if you come in first, and save your …wringing for the privacy of your own rooms—which, by the way, is what I called you here to show you—I think that’d be preferable. For all of us.” A chorus of relieved sighs echoes around him, followed by one deeply disappointed awww.

“Duly noted,” Loki says dryly. He taps his finger against his suit, instantly straightening out the wrinkles made when Thor had tugged Loki against him. Sighs, irritable, which means he is considering either changing the exit point of their portal, or demanding that they control themselves the next time they arrive. “We shall be there within the minute.”

And if they hear of the mechanized bird bursting into spontaneous flame later, long after they have left the new facility, causing chaos in the security room, Thor only chuckles inwardly, keeping the identity of the culprit to himself.

~

“All right,” says Tony, meeting them at the glass doors. “Glad you could make it.” He claps a hand to each of their backs, ushering them in with great haste, as if he fears they will start caressing each other again if left unsupervised.

Thor only grins, and threads his fingers through Loki’s, amused by the way Tony’s brows jump into his hairline, though Tony says nothing more on the matter.

“This is a far cry from the structure you had before,” Loki says dryly, observing the high windows and echoing atrium that make up the lobby. It is the first he has been to the New Avengers facility, and for Thor, the first time in years. “Have you run out of nice, shiny towers to transform into Avengers’ headquarters?”

“Lo-ki,” Thor chides, squeezing his hand, reproachful. From the twitch at Tony’s eye, he can tell Tony fights the urge to mention Loki’s hand in the tower’s destruction short years ago. “What he means to say is that our headquarters remains distant from…everything.” The building is situated upstate from the original Avengers tower, far from amenities of any sort and the casual eateries Thor had indulged in from time to time. And while he had entertained half a hope that they would move back to the tower eventually, it seems this was not to be.

“Yeah, okay, the location’s not ideal,” Tony admits, sheepish. “But we’ve added a lot of new faces to our roster, and I figured, why fight for prime real estate in central New York, when we already have a perfectly serviceable set of warehouses? Besides, there’s a ton of room here, and we’re not constantly stepping on each others’ toes anymore. And we have dedicated training rooms now, instead of those improvised chambers we had before.”

Thor nods his approval, for mishaps had abounded in previous attempts to practice their skills and team coordination in areas not meant for such things. Loki, however, looks patently unconvinced, for this is to be their home away from home, and opens his mouth to speak, when Tony interrupts, preemptive.
“And—this is a very big and—we’ve got a cafeteria going around the clock here, to cater to whatever needs you have, along with an in-house chef at peak mealtimes. You name it, they’ll make it.”

Loki’s eyes widen at the mention of every culinary desire being fulfilled. *Cake?* he glances at Thor, hopeful.

*Cake*, Thor squeezes back, affirming.

“Anyway,” says Tony, oddly silent during this exchange, “let me show you around, and then we’ll hit up your new rooms, and you can let me know what you think of them. Pete?” he calls, sudden. “You can come out now. No, you’re not as sneaky as you think you are.” A shadow that has been trailing after them since the entrance detaches from the wall and appears before them. “Guys, this is Pe—”

“Peter Parker!” says the child that emerges, beaming, as Tony sets a hand on his shoulder, proud. He looks as though he has seen no more than twenty summers, and while Thor did not know Tony had a son or ward, making a note to inquire about their dynamics later, all such thoughts vanish in the face of Peter’s enthusiasm. He takes the hand Thor offers and shakes it, excited, then grabs Loki’s as well, even though Loki had not offered. “I’ve only ever seen you on TV, I can’t believe I’m finally meeting you guys in person, oh man, Mr. Thor, Mr. Loki, you have no idea what an honour this—”

“Hey, hey,” Tony says, immediate, snapping his fingers. “We talked about this, remember? If you want to meet our resident gods and follow us on the tour, then you need to…?”

“Then I need to…” Peter pauses, gulping a breath, before nodding studiously. “Need to keep quiet, and keep the fanboying to a minimum. Right, yeah, absolutely, Mr. Stark.” He pantomimes zipping his mouth shut and tails them silently, and thus satisfied, Tony begins his tour of the facilities.

In short order, Tony shows them to the cafeteria and kitchens first—an excellent idea, Thor thinks, to appeal to Loki’s love of fine food—then the training and meeting rooms, followed by the tech development labs, to meet their consultants and support crew, before leading them to the chambers Tony had remodelled for them.

Peter, meanwhile, had broken his vow of silence almost immediately after they left the kitchens, asking questions all the while, each prefaced with such words as Mr. Thor, is it true that you…? Mr. Loki, did you really…? And with each answer he receives in the affirmative, his eyes shine all the brighter.

Thor answers what he can, though he has Loki field the majority of the questions, for his brother does so love a chance to preen and shine, and ready adoration surges from Peter in spades. Loki, for his part, answers truthfully and with a heartwarming patience Thor had seen in his interactions with Asgard’s children, though not without a touch of his prideful ego, to Thor’s amusement.

Yes, I did *take part in the Battle of New York short years ago, an action I have always regretted*, Loki had nodded, solemn. *No, had I been there during Ultron’s offensive, the battle would have been won much quicker, the victory more decisive, and the number of casualties far fewer in number.*

Once or twice, Thor thinks to interject, to share his version of events. But in the end, he is content to simply listen, to hear Loki’s replies. To learn things he would not have thought to ask Loki, or consider alternate viewpoints of happenings he had taken for granted. That the child calls them Mr. Thor and Mr. Loki is oddly endearing as well; perhaps he does not know which of them to call Mr. Odinsson, since they are both so named by familial ties and by marriage, but Thor does not interrupt
Peter’s earnest prattle to correct him either.

Peter has moved on to questioning Loki about Asgard’s technology, when Tony, having long given up on trying to curb Peter’s enthusiasm, clears his throat, sudden. “O-kay,” he says, with a flourish of his hands, “we’re here.”

“We’re here!” Peter echoes, beaming, with a similar flourish of his hands. A tiny mirror of Tony’s in every way, as he stands opposite Tony to ease back the double doors.

After Loki’s induction into the Avengers had been put to a vote a fortnight earlier—Thor was not allowed a vote, for Tony said he would be biased in favour of his brother-husband-whatever, though with Tony, Steve, and Bruce vouching for Loki, it was hardly a vote at all—Tony announced he would refurbish Thor’s quarters, to accommodate Loki’s addition to their team. And he has been true to his word, for the modest, cramped room has been transformed into an elaborate chamber, one that could rival their rooms back in Asgardia.

“I had to empty out the room next to yours,” Tony says to Thor as he guides them in, “and knock down the wall in between, but there you have it.” He gestures at the sprawling tapestries along the walls, the weapons display racks mounted bold between them. The ornate settees ideal for reading, and carved bookshelves fit for filling on one side, and an elegant bed with matching vanity and dresser on the other. All of it lit by a wide window that looks out onto the deep forests surrounding the Avengers facility. “As much your home away from home as I could make it.”

“Tony, this is—” Thor tries, thinking to say this is more than either of us could have hoped for, before Tony interjects with “Oh, and I installed additional soundproofing in your walls. For reasons,” he adds cryptically, when Peter’s ears perk up, curious, though he does not elaborate, his meaning clear to both Thor and Loki.

Thor nods, grateful, as he catches his brother’s gaze. As understanding as their friends were, there had been occasional nights when Loki forgot to soundproof their walls with a spell, caught up in pleasure as he was. And it would be Heimdall, Sif, or Valkyrie knocking at their door early the next morning, eyes circled dark with too little sleep, requesting please, please keep the noise down.

“And where is your room, little one?” says Loki, when Peter fails to notice Tony’s cues to shoo him out of the room.

“Oh, mine? I don’t have a room here yet.” Peter says brightly, “since I’m just here to work with Mr. Stark. But maybe someday soon!” He launches into a new deluge of questions about Asgardia, since Tony had mentioned it earlier in passing, but Loki gently informs him they will meet again, and he can ask his questions then. Meanwhile, Tony catches Peter by the shoulder and with an about-turn, marches him back into the corridor, Thor trying his best for a kindly smile before easing the door shut.

To his horror, Peter can be heard scratching at the door, eager. “But I still have so many questions!”

“Come on, kid—you don’t want to get in the way of two amorous gods,” says Tony, clearly leading him away. “Hey, tell me about that project of yours again. The one where…”

Their voices have hardly trailed off before Thor finds himself pinned to the door, Loki’s mouth meeting his for a breathless, gasping kiss, one decidedly more pleasurable, and all the more so because it remains uninterrupted.

“For earlier,” Loki explains, his smile smug, though Thor had not wished to question such a thing, only too glad to partake. To wind his arms over Loki’s hips and draw him in, deepening that
Soon enough, they move to unpacking the belongings Tony had boxed up for them in the move, arranging furniture and ornaments as they like and setting out trinkets and books Loki had sent along a week earlier. A small part of Thor still longs for the floor he occupied at the Avengers tower, but he is more than pleased to find that all his things have made the journey here unscathed. Among them is his belt, Megingjörð, a relic that doubles his strength when worn, which should prove useful in the days to come for Thor’s assistance on Asgardia’s farms, or, going by the gleam in Loki’s eye as he spots it, bedplay.

There are other treasures too, kept less for utility and more for the memories Thor is thankful he brought here, for they might otherwise have been lost back on Asgard: a crystalline frog with beaded eyes, one Loki had gifted him, teasing, to remind him of the day he spent as a frog on the palace grounds. A miniature of Mjölnir wrought from silver and wire, when Loki had been practicing spells in Transfiguration. A wooden chest, with Yggdrasil carved intricate along the lid, and a pattern of runes and ravens along the sides their mother had given him long ago.

Within that he kept the precious few trinkets he had purloined from Loki’s old chambers, including a battered gold ring, with a peridot gem set in the centre. A set of silver cufflinks Loki had been fond of adorning his Midgardian attire with. And perhaps the prize of his collection—a small, round jewellery box, the lid handle a silver snake with emerald eyes, poised to strike.

“I thought I had lost this,” Loki says softly, joining Thor at the vanity, where he has set out their treasures and stands sifting through the remaining contents of the chest. Reaches out and strokes the snake’s head with a fingertip, gentle, wondering.

“I took it,” Thor admits, “to keep as a memento of you when I thought you fell from the Bifrost. Even after you returned to Asgard. And after the events of Svartalfheim, when I thought you had truly perished…” Thor swallows then, emotion knotted thick in his throat. “I could no longer bear to return it.”

Loki’s smile is small, sorrowful. “I see. Even when we were apart, you still thought of me.”

“How could I not? Thor thinks. *When your very absence left a gaping wound in my heart?* But all he does is draw Loki into his arms and meet his mouth for a kiss, thankful they are no longer separated by misery and misunderstanding. “I thought of you, always,” Thor says after, their noses a hair’s breadth apart, Thor revelling in the shared warmth of their breath. Loki’s arms wound snug around his neck. “I dreamt of you. But neither thoughts nor dreams compare to having you beside me, in the flesh.”

Loki’s only reply is to tug him in for another kiss, softer, sweeter, their lips lingering upon each others’ even as they draw apart for air. It leads to another kiss, then *another*, each longer than the last. And though Thor had hoped for reassurance for his revelation, such as *I shall not leave your side again*, perhaps this is as much reassurance as Loki can give, and Thor has made peace with that.

“Enough,” Loki says eventually. He draws away, his hands braced against Thor’s chest, even if the rose flush of his cheeks and the cherry brightness of his lips speak to the opposite. “*Enough,*” he repeats firmly, when Thor strains forward, sneaking a kiss to the tip of his nose, “or we shall be here all day, and we have appointments to keep back in Asgardia.”

“Point taken,” Thor laughs, for they shall receive an earful both from friends and subjects, if they do not remain responsible with their duties as kings. He winds an arm around Loki’s waist in lieu of more kisses, and together, they search for Tony to inform him of their departure. Find him in the main conference room, swiping through a holographic display and making adjustments, before he
catches sight of them.

“Hey!” calls Tony, gesturing for them to enter, Thor closing the door behind them when they have.

“Had a chance to check out your new rooms? Try out the bed?” He waggles his eyebrows, suggestive, before spreading his palms. “What’d you guys think?”

Thor laughs in response, for the bed here will have to wait, though knowing the frequency with which the Avengers face threats, it will not be long. “The chambers you gave us are magnificent,” he says, as he would not mind staying in them for the time they are away from Asgardia—at the same time Loki sniffs They are adequate.

Tony nods, seeming to take both their responses as high praise. “Great, well, nice seeing you again. If there’s nothing else, you look like you’re heading out, and I have to make a conference call in a few minutes, so—"

“As actually,” Thor says quickly, “there is something else.” The shadow of this thought has grown ever larger in his mind, the only thing looming dark over the happiness he has found. And he would speak it, so they could take action or devise measures against it, at least. “After the events of Ultron, before I took to the stars, I spoke of the timely appearance of the Infinity Stones. And the idea that someone had been playing an intricate game, making pawns of all of us.”

Beneath his palm, Loki stills, knowing where this conversation is headed.

“Yeah.” Tony drums his fingers against the table, before leaning back in his chair. “Yeah, I remember that. Go on.” His brow furrows, as predicted, Thor’s words having struck home, for he knows how much Tony detests being taken for a fool.

“In my years away, and the travels I made, I have heard rumour of who that being is. And whispers of what his objective with the stones will be. Thanos,” Thor says, “is gathering the stones. He will come for the one in our possession.” At this, Thor nods in the direction of Vision’s room. “And when he does, we must be ready.”

Though Loki has not made mention of the Tesseract’s whereabouts, Thor keeps his secret for now. If Loki’s possession of the Tesseract should be discovered, Thor could claim plausible deniability, for all who knew Loki knew him capable of such master deception, but underestimated it in Thor—Loki included.

Loki throws him a sidelong glance now, clearly wondering how much Thor knows of the Tesseract, but Thor gives no indication of his awareness; the stone that resides above Vision’s brow is threat enough. What they need now is safeguards against the Titan’s arrival, or a plan of attack, not accusations of who has hidden what and where.

“Thanos,” Tony echoes, raising a brow. “That’s a name I should know?”

Thor looks to Loki, for permission in revealing how they are acquainted with the Titan. And with it given, through a tiny nod, Thor says, “He is the being who found my brother in the void beyond Asgard. Tortured him into leading the Chitauri army against New York.” The sharp breath Tony draws is all Thor needs, to know their friend sees the gravity of this situation.

Loki’s voice carries a vague tremor, the only hint of his dread as he confirms Thor’s words, the first he has spoken in this conversation about his captor. “He will stop at nothing to obtain what he wants,” Loki adds. “Torture and murder are the least of it; Thanos has razed whole worlds, on nothing more than a whim.”
Thor nods his agreement, thankful they had not run afoul of the Titan before this. Had they encountered Thanos before arriving in Midgard, in the deep dark of space, they would have been vulnerable—defenceless even—against his attack, their only protection the shell of an aging cargo vessel. He chooses not to voice such dark thoughts, however, for they had not come to pass. Turns his thoughts to the hope given them instead, in the form of a new home, old friends, and one fact that could well turn the tide in their favour, in this war.

“Loki is more familiar with Thanos, and his methods than most,” Thor reveals at the last. He strokes a circle of warmth, soothing, into Loki’s side, to show him this will be an asset in the coming conflict, and not something that will be held against him.

Loki’s smile is wan. “I am familiar with his madness.”

“I knew it!” Tony exclaims, with a clap of his hands. And though Loki stiffens beneath Thor’s palm, his anxiety is assuaged near immediately when Tony beams at Loki, saying, “I knew it would be good to bring you on board.” From the table’s surface, he draws out what appears to be a digital planner, a month at a glance, and makes a few keystrokes, the date in question glowing green upon confirmation. “Let’s add that to the agenda—say, a week from now? Same time? I’ll send out the memo, call everyone in for a meeting. And you can meet some of the new faces we’ve recruited since you’ve been away.” He rises from his seat at the table, and claps a hand each to Thor and Loki’s shoulders, to show that he takes the threat they disclosed to him seriously. “We’ll make this happen.”

It will take time, of course, to bring the other Avengers in; Bruce had returned to his labs in Manhattan, and Steve had disappeared to parts unknown to visit a friend named ‘Bucky’ with only a vague promise to return if things went ill. Meanwhile, the others remain in far-flung places on missions, or in training. Still, Thor is relieved to know they have set the first cog in the wheel in motion, to devise a plan against Thanos and keep Midgard safe—even if in his heart, his first purpose is to keep Loki safe.

“Thank you, Tony,” says Thor. It is a sentiment Loki echoes, so genuinely it surprises even Tony, though his widened eyes cannot compare to his utter astonishment when Loki pats the hand Tony has clapped to his shoulder, small and quick. Acknowledgement of the reassurance Tony offers.

“Wow,” Tony says in awe, his voice faint. He stares at the hand Loki patted, then at Loki himself. “Did we just have a moment? I feel like we did, just now.”

Thor clears his throat, immediate. “We must return to Asgardia now,” he says, insistent. As proud as he is of Loki making progress with their friends, he tugs Loki away, before such a ‘moment’ can develop into anything further. “But should you need anything, do not hesitate to call us.”

“Will do!” Tony waves them off, already rushing toward his seat again, presumably to answer this ‘conference call’, which has rung for a fair half minute already. And with that, Thor and Loki take their leave of him, to return to the place they both truly call home.

The jaunt back to Asgardia through Loki’s transport tunnel is without incident, just as their departure was, but Thor remains appreciative that no part of them was rearranged during the journey. Finds himself grateful too, that Loki’s return portal had bypassed the guard tower where Heimdall stations himself, for he still questions all comings and goings out of habit.

It is exhausting to be pulled in two directions, by their people and their friends, but such diversity lends excitement to their lives, Thor thinks. For now, however, Thor has had excitement enough, and
is thankful they finally have a moment to themselves. Takes a seat with Loki upon the rock where they had once rested with Odin. And though they have often taken repose here, to view the progress of their settlement, today they forego that view in favour of the sea beyond.

They watch the tide come in together, each wave foam-capped and lovely, lapping gentle at the rocks below. Listen to the susurrus of the waves, the quiet harmony they make with the gull-cries above. Revel in the companionable silence that settles between them, filled by the soft rustle of wind through grass.

Thor winds his arm warm around Loki’s waist, and squeezes, gentle. And perhaps there is truth to the old adage that sitting by the water’s edge gives rise to revealing one’s truest thoughts, for Thor finally speaks of what they have yet refused to acknowledge. “We did it, Loki,” he says softly, knowing he needs no further words to convey to Loki what he means. The sun overhead shines soothing through the clouds, as if a testament to the triumph Thor refers to. “We did it.”

“Yes, well done, we settled our people where Father wanted,” Loki snorts. “Perhaps his next wishes will come from beyond the grave. Shall we see if there is cell phone reception in Valhalla?”

“Where we wanted,” corrects Thor, though he does not bother to stifle the laughter rising deep from his throat, at Loki’s cheek.

It is a mood echoed in the home they have made here, for the sound of laughter rings out, bright, from the edges of their settlement, where the children have come out to play. The happy buzz of commerce and trade. The hustle and bustle of a people recovering from a conflict they had not asked for.

Asgardia rises tall now, with the major buildings seen to, and their people settling comfortably into the homes built for them. The landscape is reformed to suit Asgardia’s needs, both Thor and Loki helping to plant trees Tony had brought in, while clearing out land for agriculture, swathes of it charted out for grazing or numerous crops. Loki had saved the seeds of those unique to Asgard, from its golden corn and succulent tomatoes to every berry that once bloomed beneath Asgard’s skies, and when they are sown, Thor guides their growth, as directed. The beginnings of Iðunn’s orchard remade, on the other hand, sit closer to the palace. And though the trees remain but tiny seedlings, coaxed to life by Thor’s touch, their progress has shown that they should bear fruit in several years’ time.

Thor had been adamant that they needed to be nurtured with love and care and patience, for their growth could not be hastened with seiðr, useful as it is and as Loki’s experiments could attest to—a metaphor he had drawn from his own relationship with Loki, Thor supposes.

The palace itself is rebuilt, though it hardly took long, since Loki had miniaturized it with most of its structure intact, and Hliðskjálf moved back into its place of honour within the throne room, its ability to view the deeds of all the realms thankfully unharmed. Thor has sat upon it often, searching for sign of Hela’s reappearance, for it could not hurt to be vigilant. And though it has shown naught of their sister so far, Thor reflects this is a fear that may remain with him his whole life, still haunted by his decision to barter their realm for their people. Loki says nothing of this fear; only joins Thor on the seat of Hliðskjálf, his arm wound warm, soothing, around Thor’s waist, as they search the realms together.

When they cannot, they remain secure in the knowledge that Heimdall keeps watch for her whereabouts as well. His attention is diverted on occasion by Strange’s request, for in his failure to recruit Loki to his order, Strange had soon turned his efforts upon Heimdall instead, and they share now a system for monitoring Midgard for potential threats. But Heimdall has assured them that his first duty is always to Asgardia.
At the thought of Heimdall, Thor recalls his words during their voyage to Midgard, about happiness and the making of it thereof: *All this time, you have both worked toward our people’s happiness. Perhaps it is time the two of you looked toward your own.* And while it was true that they had laboured and toiled, striving to ensure their people were blissfully settled and needed for nothing, Thor remembers now that there is one whose happiness matters to him most.

“Loki,” Thor trying, his thumb tracing a circle against Loki’s side, small and warm but anxious still. “Are you…are you happy?”

Loki raises a brow at such clumsy questioning. “Happy?” he echoes, as if the word is foreign to him. Tilts his head, considering, before glancing toward the structures that rise high behind them. The secret chambers tunnelled deep beneath the earth, away from the sea.

Despite the fact that Loki had found a way for them to return to Alfheim-Beta, Thor had decided to move forward on his promise to have their archives rebuilt, larger and grander in scale than before. Watched Loki stroke fingers along each beam and column, reverent, before he set out to fill the shelves, first with books rescued from Asgard, others stolen from Alfheim-Beta, and finally a selection from those Thor had bought for him, from every stop along the way. Placed orders through Tony for more books in relevant subjects to be brought in, to fill the wings that would be open to Asgardia’s public.

And not far from the archives, carved deep into the earth, are chambers set aside for research, for aspiring young Asgardians to study a range of issues, from how to gain better crop yields, to the utility of Midgard’s technology, primitive as it is. Loki himself helms multiple projects, tolerating Tony’s occasional visits to comment on prototypes or marvel at products resulting from a marriage of Asgardia’s seiðr and Midgard’s crude machinery. Encourages the testing of said products in the immense hangar Thor helped tunnel out underground, home now to the Statesman and the Commodore, for Loki determined it would not do for S.H.I.E.L.D. to notice trials in technology far beyond their own, or the possession of spaceworthy ships, should compulsion for a surprise visit strike them.

The ships themselves are kept in good repair, mainly for the transport of large volumes of goods or people, especially if Loki is too exhausted to make a transport tunnel portal, or keep it open for long, for the further the destination is, the greater the toll it takes on him. Already the Commodore has proven useful in the return of prisoners from Sakaar to their home planets, though most, like Korg and Miek, have decided to stay, for they have nothing to return to. And Thor and Loki have charted out their own course with the pleasure craft next month, when Asgardia’s construction is projected to be finished—a trip Bruce had dubbed *Honeymoon Among the Stars*, as they intend a journey to Alfheim-Beta, to return the kindness and gifts they received. Vanahlheim, to consult their healers and tomes on recomposing Thor’s eye, before resorting to Midgard’s technology. And Nidavellir, to revisit the forge from which Mjölnir was made, among other realms and star systems.

But those plans lie beyond the present, and for now Thor cannot help but feel the aching chasm where Odin had once sat between them. *My sons,* he had said. *This could be Asgard. For Asgard is where our people stand.*

And their people stand strong, Thor decides, a sense of pride threading its way through his heart. But what of themselves?

He finds Loki’s hand then, and weaves their fingers together, closing the already scant distance between them. Discovers, to his surprise, that Loki’s gaze is fixed only on him now, and not the archives Thor had had built anew, or the research labs he had blasted out from earth and stone, all in attempts to appease his brother.
“Are you content, Loki?” Thor ventures again, encouraged by Loki’s careful consideration of him. “With your life here?” With me? Thor wishes to add, but dares not—for what if the answer is no?

Loki does not deign to answer, only studies their joined hands, thoughtful. Squeezes Thor’s fingers, warm, amid the long silence that follows. “You are familiar with the saying on Midgard, ‘home is where the heart is’?” he says finally.

Thor blinks, puzzled by this non-sequitur, but he nods nonetheless. “Yes, what of it?” Steve had gifted them a wooden plaque short weeks ago, hand-carved, ornate, saying the same, and though Loki had placed it in their chambers, fond, he had not made further mention of it until now.

Loki simply hums in response. “You also told me once, that home is not a place…but a person.”

Thor takes a moment to place the memory, before chuckling. “I suppose I must have,” he says, though those words seem so long ago now; had they stayed with Loki all this time? Then he remembers Loki can hold grudges for years, so yes, of course they could. “Are you sure this wisdom was not yours?” he adds, teasing.

Loki scoffs at that, though a smile tugs the corner of his mouth. “I do give credit where it is due,” he says, before his expression softens, unexpected. “I suppose,” he adds slowly, after the longest pause, “that for me…that person would be you.” He breathes out, slow. “In that I would make my home here with you.”

“Oh, Loki,” Thor says, his heart in his throat. He takes Loki’s other hand into his. “I had hoped it would be me.” Draws a shaky breath, all his dreams given life by Loki’s simple words. “I wanted it to be me,” he adds, his voice thick with emotion.

But it seems Loki is not finished, for within the bond of their twined fingers, he speaks the words in his heart for Thor to hear, ones that bring his statements full circle and leave no doubt of his meaning. My heart and my home are here, says Loki, because you are here. As is the happiness you have brought me.

And though it is just like Loki to find the most roundabout way of answering his query, Thor could weep at such unbridled sentiment. Surges forward then, Loki slanting his mouth to meet his, the kiss they share ardent and honest and unguarded.

He had long determined that Loki was his heart and his home, but to hear that desire reciprocated is a wonder indeed, and Thor swallows hard, throwing himself entire into their kiss, for Loki is his home, and he is Loki’s, and nothing could make him happier in this moment than this.

Their shared intimacy lasts for all of an instant, until Leif, Volstagg’s youngest, comes running toward them, wide-eyed and out of breath.

“This quickly? Loki mouths, puzzled.

Thor lifts a shoulder, equally confused. They had returned only short minutes ago, not long enough to stop by their chambers, the healing halls, or the research labs Loki and Tony had established, to study the blend of magic and science. Word of their return could not have travelled this fast, and the only explanation remaining is that Eir had either seen their approach, or heard the sound of it.
While Loki’s new method of travel was not followed by a thunderclap of sound, or the searing of runes into the ground as the Bifrost had done, the portals he made still threw off wild sparks of light, with a sound not unlike Midgard’s power saws. Thor makes a note to remind Loki he must work on concealing their comings and goings more carefully—though by the frown marring Loki’s face, he must be considering this already.

“We shall be there in a moment,” Thor says finally, trying for his most reassuring smile. He watches as their newly instated pageboy runs off, before turning to Loki again. Presses a playful, smacking kiss to Loki’s lips, compensation for the interruption. “Now then,” he says, “the distribution of birthing gifts.”

After that, he knows there will be requests for blessings, for weddings or otherwise. Appeals for counsel in squabbles over farmland, and property rights. And after that…the responsibilities of kings seem endless these days, but Thor is more than happy to take them on, for such issues only mean that Asgard’s people have settled, have made a life here for themselves, as he has.

Still, Thor half-expects Loki to disappear, saying *Oh no, birthing gifts are your responsibility, naming days are mine,* as he had the first time. But they are a month into their duties now, and Loki simply stands, a long-suffering grin twitching at the corners of his lips.

“Well, then,” says Loki, giving their still-linked fingers a small but fond tug. “Shall we? Together?”

There will be countless naming days, or birthing gift days, or requests for the kings’ audience for some reason or another in the years to come. But Thor only beams, glad in the knowledge that Loki will be by his side, through all of it.

“We shall,” Thor says, heartened, as he lets Loki draw him to his feet. Sweeps him into a kiss, lingering and sweet, until Loki laughs bright against his mouth. “*Together.*”

[End]

Chapter End Notes

1) **Art:** *A Rest on the Rock* – Art Commissioned from Squaffle

2) **OST/Ambience Music:** *Asteria – A Place Where Life Begins*

3) **And a tiny extra:** *Rainy Date in New York* – Art Commissioned from Mikitakamoto (You can think of it as Thor finding Loki that pair of cufflinks and tie pin again, after all!)

4) I’ve since gone back and added art and music to previous chapters, so if you’d like an even more immersive experience, feel free to check those out. Otherwise, that’s a wrap for this fic! I hope you’ve enjoyed it as much as I did writing it! I have other ideas for Thorki fic I’m working on now, including an Infinity War fix-it (unlike this epic Ignore-It) that will begin posting later this month, so stay tuned for that!

In the meantime, thanks for your support for this story, from kudos and comments to likes, reblogs and fic recs! :'D <3333
See you all in the next fic!

End Notes

This entire fic is a labor of love, so if you’ve enjoyed it, or it moved you in some way, I’d love to hear from you!

I’m also eyeus on tumblr, and on Twitter if you want to chat about headcanons or just hang out in general!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!